

HERMENEUTICS OF HERACLITUS

Allowing Concept Flux

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*Conjoinings: wholes and not wholes, converging and diverging, harmonious
dissonant; and out of all things one, and out of one all things.*¹

–Heraclitus

A thought exercise by which to consider the meaning of the above fragment might leave one feeling that there is more unsaid than said, or wondering what Heraclitus is speaking *in reference to*. A reader might try to fill in the blanks, considering what Heraclitus's words would mean in the context of their own experience. But Heraclitus is best known for leaving the reader hanging. A forgotten poet said that Heraclitus "is called 'Obscure' because he wrote very obscurely on nature," and Aristotle complained that Heraclitus omitted punctuation so that the same fragment could be read as meaning two different things.² While his difficult style was a cause for criticism by his early readers, it remains a defining characteristic of Heraclitus's fragments. And whether it is despite or because of their ambiguity, the valuable philosophical potential of his words is evident in his profound influence on Philo of Alexandria and Plato and his presence in historical and contemporary philosophy.³ Heraclitus and his troublesome words continue to feature in philosophy

1 Laks, André, and Glen W. Most, *Early Greek Philosophy: Early Ionian Thinkers Part 2* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 161 (D47).

2 Laks and Most, 209.

3 A. V. Halapsis, "Man and Logos: Heraclitus's Secret," *Anthropological Measurements of Philosophical Research* 0, no. 17 (2020): 127.; Charles H. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus: An Edition of the Fragments with Translation and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 88.

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This essay leans into Heraclitus's enigmatic style while exploring the space between philosophy as critical interpretive scholarship and *doing* philosophy or engaging authentically with concepts about the nature of things. To read Heraclitus, in the sense of trying to understand what he means by what he says, presents difficulty. Most philosophical literature about Heraclitus tries to add some insight or perspective about what he means – to explicate more clearly what his original idea or intended meaning could be.⁴ Such literature is good philosophical scholarship, and authors concerned with Heraclitus give compelling reasons for their interpretations. However, no amount of incisive scholarship will ever allow us to fully determine Heraclitus's intended meaning.⁵ Reasons for this include first, Heraclitus's own riddlesome style of expression,⁶ and second, the space between Heraclitus and ourselves – the double barrier of having to read Heraclitus through all his past exegetes as well as our own historical, philosophical, cultural and linguistic conditioning, which inevitably and inadvertently color our interpretive efforts.⁷ On the worst end of this problem, interpretations are sometimes regarded as more or less authoritative based on philosophical attitudes that are preferred at a given time.⁸ Yet, Heraclitus's historical and philosophical significance makes the project of interpreting his riddles worthwhile despite these hermeneutical barriers.⁹ Moreover, I think the philosophical value of Heraclitus's expressions inspires new philosophical development. One case of this is an essay by William Desmond, in which he utilizes what he calls a "companioning approach" as a hermeneutical tool to explore Heraclitus's expressions of flux and whether flux is intelligible.¹⁰ Desmond's companioning seems to be a good tool both for interpreting Heraclitus, and for moving beyond interpretation to *doing* philosophy and developing Heraclitean concepts.

In this essay, I support and show the merit of Desmond's companioning approach both as a hermeneutical tool, and as a means for Desmond to go beyond interpretation and to philosophize with Heraclitus.

To support Desmond's companioning approach, I first depend on Charles Kahn, a prominent Heraclitus scholar, to define the hermeneutical problem. Second, I explain

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- 4 Halapsis, 119-129.; C. D. C. Reeve, "Ekpurōsis and the Priority of Fire in Heraclitus," *Phronesis* 27, no. 3 (1982): 299-305.; Laura Rosella Schluderer, "Speaking and Acting the Truth: The Ethics of Heraclitus," *Méthexis* 29, no. 1 (2017): 1-19.; Magdalena Wdowiak, "Heraclitus's Sense of Logos in the Context of Greek Root 'Leg-' in Epic Poets," *Classica Cracoviensia* 18, (2015): 459-73.; Robin Reames, "The Logos Paradox: Heraclitus, Material Language, and Rhetoric," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 46, no. 3 (2013): 328-50.
- 5 Halapsis, "Man and Logos: Heraclitus's Secret," 120.
- 6 Halapsis, 119-20.; Laks and Most, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 205-15 (R5-R15).
- 7 Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 87.
- 8 Kahn, 88.; Ed. L. Miller, "The Logos of Heraclitus: Updating the Report," *The Harvard Theological Review* 74, no. 2 (1981): 167-68. Miller gives an instance of this problem where presocratic philosophers are characterized as modern positivists of scientism/empiricism.
- 9 Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 88.
- 10 Desmond, William, "Flux-Gibberish: For and Against Heraclitus," *The Review of Metaphysics*, 70, no. 3 (2017): 473-75.

what is useful about Desmond's companioning approach and position it relative to the hermeneutical problem. Third, I draw on Pierre Hadot's insights about perennial hermeneutical problems in the history of philosophy to argue that there is a need to go beyond interpretation to engage concepts themselves, as we best understand them. Fourth, I argue for the legitimacy of companioning with or thinking philosophically with Heraclitus, given that this could be the kind of activity he hoped to effect in others. To support this view, I engage Alex Halapsis' thesis that Heraclitus's obscure style was essential to his philosophical commitments and was intended to allow active philosophical thinking. The third and fourth sections which bring in Hadot and Halapsis suffice as context to show the merit of companioning as a viable approach to the problem of reading Heraclitus and as a worthy philosophical activity for itself.

THE PROBLEM WITH INTERPRETING HERACLITUS

Charles Kahn saw critical interpretation of Heraclitus as a worthy and limited endeavor. Through his book he sought to better consider what the "literary artistry" of Heraclitus's fragments could lend to our interpretation of them, specifically qualities of expression which he called "linguistic density" and "resonance." His resulting analysis remained open to plural meanings or "readings" existing together in Heraclitus's statements – an approach which differed from the precedent of limiting Heraclitus to one explicitly intended meaning.¹¹ However, Kahn was realistic about the limitations and potential pitfalls of any interpretive effort. He notes how Heraclitus's vague quality of expression makes his ideas especially susceptible to rash misappropriation or "the free play of interpretation," so that "every age and philosophical perspective... projected its own meaning and preoccupations onto the text of Heraclitus."¹² Kahn explained that any interpretation will inevitably be conditioned by the unique and unchosen perspective of the interpreter, but that there is no perfect way of engaging with Heraclitus. Kahn presents the problem as the difference between the "object-language" of the extant Greek text and commentary or explications of it as "hermeneutical metalanguage," which is our means of trying to access the object-language. There is no alternative way of receiving Heraclitus than to make or choose a metalanguage for ourselves – a metalanguage which will more or less closely approximate what Heraclitus really meant. Kahn calls this problem "the hermeneutical circle." The best referee that we have for the metalanguage we develop is the text itself. To read Heraclitus at all, we must risk some degree of misunderstanding, but we ought to be as responsible as we can.¹³ For Kahn this is to consider how the qualities of linguistic density and resonance bear on Heraclitus's meaning.

¹¹ Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 89, 91-92.

¹² Kahn, 87.

¹³ Kahn, 87-88.

COMPANIONING AS A HERMENEUTICAL TOOL

This problem of interpretation was also acknowledged by William Desmond in his paper about Heraclitus's idea of flux and implications for the intelligibility of nature that is in flux.¹⁴ Desmond's paper is an instance of creative philosophical thinking. He presented this interpretive problem in terms of a "ventriloquizing" vs. a "companioning approach." For Desmond, ventriloquizing is what happens when someone misappropriates Heraclitus so that one would "find in Heraclitus what one brings to him." Desmond explains that in ventriloquizing, "the words we have of Heraclitus function like... rorschach blobs or indeterminate pictures onto which we project ourselves." Much like a more sophisticated philosophical plagiarism, the problem with ventriloquizing isn't the way that concepts are used per se, but the lack of definition around the creative philosophical exchange that is happening in the hermeneutical circle. Desmond doesn't exempt Heidegger, Hegel, or Nietzsche from the charge of ventriloquizing to some extent with Heraclitus.¹⁵

Companioning, on the other hand, happens when "the thinker who occasions the reflection is less an object of scholarly research and more one who brings forth connatural thinking in us, as we try to understand him *and the matters that engage him*."¹⁶ Companioning as a hermeneutical approach would free one from making a claim regarding Heraclitus's intended philosophical meaning – allowing there to be a distance between what Heraclitus may have meant and what his fragments bring to mind for the contemporary reader. Desmond regards Heraclitus as an exemplary philosophical companion. "Heraclitus offers us striking thoughts that strike one into thought - thought that opens up philosophical porosity to the deepest perplexities."¹⁷ What Desmond seems to describe here is a more receptive, cooperative, and uninhibited disposition for engaging with a thinker. Desmond's companioning approach is his articulation of the practice of letting a piece of text *move us* into philosophizing. As a hermeneutical tool, companioning has the benefit of defining this activity and distinguishing it from critical interpretive scholarship.

HISTORY OF HERMENEUTICAL PROBLEMS

To communicate ideas or concepts across language, space, time, culture and between persons with incongruent life experience is an inhibited project. As Kahn put it, "there is the more fundamental problem that we, good classical scholars that we are, are also historical beings with a certain perspective, who can only see what is visible from where we happen to be standing."¹⁸ It seems impossible that an idea or concept could exist the same way for me, when I read a translation of Heraclitus,

¹⁴ William Desmond, "Flux-Gibberish: For and Against Heraclitus," *Review of Metaphysics* 70, no. 3 (2017): 474.

¹⁵ Desmond, 473-74.

¹⁶ Desmond, 473 (emphasis added).

¹⁷ See note 12 above.

¹⁸ Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 87.

as it did for him when he wrote it in his own language. I might think about the words I am reading and reference my experiences of things to lead me to a concept approximating what Heraclitus intended to communicate.

We may do our best, through reading critical interpretive studies, to understand Heraclitus's intended meaning, but what then? Ought one to preserve these concepts as perfectly Heraclitean as possible? This seems impractical when we consider that ideas, however Heraclitean they may be, relate to a very different collection of conceptual data for someone in the 21st century than they did for Heraclitus. For example, Desmond's work with Heraclitus's flux doctrine was a unique philosophical project because Desmond was also relating Heraclitus's flux (or Desmond's version of Heraclitus's flux) to Nietzsche, Hegel, and Heidegger who came long after Heraclitus. It would seem that concepts are not static, especially when they are shared between persons. We could use Play-Doh to think about this process of receiving, playing with and understanding concepts: My friend Rachel gave me a Play-Doh sculpture of a bird. To understand the shape of the bird, I had to squish the Play-Doh and make my own bird. My bird was a bit different because I have seen different birds than Rachel, but I had a more real concept of the shape of a bird after I made my own bird with the Play-Doh. This is like the give and take of ideas or concepts.

To show the merit of Desmond's companioning in this context I look to Pierre Hadot who understood this problem of the flux of ideas in ancient Greek philosophy and the history of philosophy. His nuanced writings are a great source for learning the subtleties of ancient thought. Hadot achieved depth and breadth through steeping himself in original texts.¹⁹ Hence he can provide insight into the way philosophy was done, as well as what philosophy was thought to be. In both of these ways, ancient Greek philosophy facilitated philosophical freedom or innovation much more than contemporary historical study. We will look at the method or mode of ancient Greek thought first, and then what philosophy was thought to be.

Hadot highlighted an incongruence between how we engage with philosophical ideas and how ancient Greek philosophers did. Hadot notes that the mode of philosophical activity in the "pre-Cartesian period"²⁰ was exegesis – a process which involved elaborating or explicating latent meaning in texts. This process resulted in a plethora of what, from our contemporary philosophical attitude, would be considered inexcusable conceptual errors – ventriloquizing, to use Desmond's word. Hadot was no more a fan of ventriloquizing than Desmond; however, he acknowledged how exegesis allowed ideas to develop:

19 Michael Chase, Translator's Note to *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), vi.; Arnold I. Davidson, *Introduction to Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 1-2.

20 Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, trans. Michael Chase, ed. Arnold I. Davidson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 73.

The fact that authentic texts raise questions is not due to any inherent defect. On the contrary: their obscurity, it was thought, was only the result of a technique used by a master, who wished to hint at a great many things at once, and therefore enclosed the “truth” in his formulations. Any potential meaning, as long as it was coherent with what was considered to be the master’s doctrine, was consequently held to be true.²¹

It isn’t difficult to see how this activity could result in a plethora of meanings and conceptual scaffolding not conceived of by the author of the text in question. Hadot explained that those engaged in exegetical analysis would formalize texts into new conceptual systems. Other times, conflicting or unrelated concepts would be awkwardly stuck together, resulting in a philosophical Frankenstein of sorts.²² However rash this might have been, Hadot acknowledged the opportunity for philosophical creativity that this practice afforded.

The modern historian may be somewhat disconcerted on coming across such modes of thought, so far removed from his usual manner of reasoning. He is, however, forced to admit one fact: very often, mistakes and misunderstandings have brought about important evolutions in the history of philosophy. In particular, they have caused new ideas to appear.²³

Less concern with interpretive accuracy and more interest in engaging with the concepts for themselves created the conditions of what was simultaneously philosophical innovation and philosophical distortion. Hadot seems to favor the conceptual freedom of exegesis, but not the ventriloquizing it involved. The philosophical creativity that was afforded by exegesis helped to blaze new conceptual territory, however it came at the expense of interpretive clarity.

Hadot makes a couple of odd notes about this problem that are important. One is that this exegetical phenomenon has happened especially with notions of being. The other is that he faults a strange philosophical fetish with systematizing ideas for causing exegetical distortion. Hadot explained that one exegetic offense against the philosopher being explicated was to impose a system onto their ideas. He stated: “systematization amalgamates the most disparate notions which had originated in different or even contradictory doctrines.” And “philosophical thought utilized a methodology which condemned it to accept incoherences and far-fetched association, precisely to the extent that it wanted to be systematic.”²⁴ However Hadot clarifies that this exegetical systematization is different from modern notions of system and that

21 See note 18 above.

22 Hadot, 74-75.

23 Hadot, 75.

24 Hadot, 75-76.

modern idealist efforts to replace exegesis with pure reason also failed and relapsed back into exegesis.²⁵

Hadot is correct when he says that now, “historians seem to consider all exegetical thought as the result of mistakes or misunderstandings.”²⁶ This complaint has been made by and about interpreters of Heraclitus. For scholars like Kahn, concerned only with discerning Heraclitus’s original intended meaning, “the various levels of exegesis and distortion,” has made this task more difficult.²⁷ Though Hadot values the free engagement with ideas afforded by exegesis, he does not see interpretive mistakes as a good thing. Rather, he faults contemporary exegesis for “the same violence used by ancient practitioners of allegory.”²⁸ This, shall we call it a curate’s egg phenomenon, I think speaks to the need for allowing old philosophical texts to catalyze new philosophical developments. However, there should perhaps be a way for this to be done without ascribing new variants of an idea to the author of its original form. Blame for conceptual innovation need not always be thrown back to whoever’s work inspired it – an exegete can take philosophical responsibility. I think this is what companionship allows.

Hadot also provides insight into what philosophy was thought to be in antiquity. He helps us understand that philosophy was not a project of defined concepts logically related in deductive argument. Rather, it was somewhat fluid since it was meant to be deeply transformative and relevant to life. Hadot’s presentation of this kind of thinking is philosophy as “spiritual exercises.”²⁹

Hadot unpacks spiritual exercises in a descriptive way, highlighting their presence as a point of unity in the thought of diverse groups and figures including Plato, Socrates, the Stoics, Epicureans and Neoplatonists.³⁰ Spiritual exercises were activities done intentionally to affect some inner improvement within the person. They were *spiritual* because of the “level” at which they worked in the person. Hadot explained that “these exercises are the result, not merely of thought, but of the individual’s entire psychism” and “the philosophical act is not situated merely on the cognitive level, but on that of the self and of being. It... causes us to *be* more fully, and makes us better.”³¹ Hadot presents ancient thought as operating on more dimensions than merely the cognitive – one might say they cause ontological and moral augmentation within a person. Further, they are exercises because they are activities done intentionally, which in a manner analogous to “physical exercises,” have the power of causing this deep spiritual (ontological, moral, cognitive) improvement.³²

25 Hadot, 76.

26 Hadot, 74.

27 Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 87.

28 Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 76.

29 Hadot, 83, 81.

30 Hadot, 101-02, 81-109.

31 Hadot, 82-83.

32 Hadot, 102.

Understanding philosophy as somewhat of a self-improvement project provides another account for why less emphasis had been placed on the integrity of concepts as communicated and received. Philosophy was not to be understood for its own sake, but for the sake of affecting human change to which the constancy of ideas took secondary importance. It is as though the concepts had to adopt the fluid quality of the ontological change they were meant to affect.

To read Heraclitus in light of Hadot's insights about the nature and methods of antique thought would require us to exchange the relative importance we give to getting Heraclitus right for the value of concepts we derive from his riddlesome expressions as catalysts for helping us think about the nature of things and of ourselves. This is Desmond's companioning approach, in which Heraclitus "brings forth connatural thinking in us, as we try to understand him and the matters that engage him."³³ Some have even gone as far as to claim that Heraclitus *intended* to make us think for ourselves.

HERACLITUS AS A COMPANION

Alex V. Halapsis claimed this as part of his thesis that the center of Heraclitus's program was a philosophical anthropology³⁴ – a theory that the soul's self-consciousness after death depended on its wisdom or how intellectually awake it had made itself during life. Halapsis accounted for what Heraclitean notions of being awake and of having a dry or fiery vs wet soul mean as expressions of the relative immortality of the soul. According to Halapsis, Heraclitus would have understood the soul as immortal by nature, but only immortal in the sense of achieving "self-awareness" if it made itself so during life. For Heraclitus, this meant to actualize its *Logos* which is what it meant to be awake, dry, fiery, wise etc. And this sort of ontological transformation could happen only through "active participation in the cognitive process."³⁵

Halapsis thought that Heraclitus remained obscure to force us to awaken. Our salvation, which is our enlightenment, depends on us to actively and effortfully inquire for ourselves into the nature of things – a process which stops as soon as someone saves us the trouble by telling us explicitly. Hence, Heraclitus refused to be explicit. Halapsis contrasts Heraclitus with Pythagoras for whom wisdom consisted of a dogmatist program of truths spoon-fed to naïve minds. "But the fact is that comprehending *other people's* doctrines is certainly the wrong way. Wisdom cannot be "borrowed" from others; it cannot be 'copied' into one's head. Knowing ten wise doctrines will not make anyone a 'tenfold' sage." In Halapsis's view, Heraclitus wanted rather to inspire the movement to wisdom. Hence, "I searched (for) myself,"³⁶

³³ Desmond, "Flux-Gibberish," 473.

³⁴ Halapsis, "Man and Logos: Heraclitus's Secret," 120.

³⁵ Halapsis, 125, 125-27.

³⁶ Halapsis, 124.; Laks and Most, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 155.

This is the part of Halapsis's thesis that supports the general disposition behind Desmond's companioning approach – of relaxing efforts to pin down what Heraclitus is saying about the way things are. This is because, in Halapsis's account, Heraclitus didn't make explicit statements about things lest someone too quickly assent, precluding their own searching and awakening. If Desmond's companioning approach means something like allowing a philosopher's expression to make us think for ourselves, then Halapsis's account would be that Heraclitus intended to be companioned with – accompanied shall we say in his obscurity.

Noteworthy is how closely Halapsis's thesis of Heraclitus's philosophical anthropology aligns with Hadot's presentation of spiritual exercises. Both are a deep (perhaps ontological) growth affected within the person through some intentional activity – active inquiry in the case of Heraclitus. I would argue that Halapsis' Heraclitus would fit comfortably among Hadot's examples of the spiritual exercises of antiquity, however Hadot had reasons for framing spiritual exercises “from Socrates to Foulcault,” and a defense for including Heraclitus would require a separate essay.

DESMOND'S COMPANIONING WITH HERACLITUS

It is worthwhile here to approach Desmond's thesis about “flux-gibberish” in as much as it helps us get a better sense of his companioning with Heraclitus. In his paper, Desmond proposes that Heraclitus's expressions, despite seeming ambiguous and illogical, have metaphysical significance because they indicate a form of being which more definite or lucid statements fail to capture. He thinks that Heraclitus, in his obsession with the constancy of the *Logos* and the flux of opposites and becoming, can be read as expressing the “overdeterminacy” of being, and that this overdeterminacy is spoken through expressions that have a “saturated equivocality.”³⁷

What does Desmond mean by saturated equivocality? He explains that with both Heraclitus's flux doctrine and the *Logos* that is a principle of constancy, he is working between “the constancy of form” and “the fluency of flux” so that expressions of the two are “synchronically superposed.”³⁸ They are expressed simultaneously and together to get at an overdeterminacy of being that doesn't come through in univocal language. “What I am calling the saturated equivocality of Heraclitus's discourse is his entry into the space of the overdeterminate, and out of that space his effort to speak the superposition of seeming opposites that calls for utterance there. There is a oneness to it.”³⁹ Desmond explains that the equivocal opposites that are saturated and superposed are one in this overdeterminacy. He describes overdeterminacy as a “too-muchness,” found in art for example, in which “there is an abiding inexhaustibility, a source enabling of infinite astonishment, an origin out of

37 Desmond, “Flux-Gibberish,” 480, 496.

38 Desmond, 484, 486.

39 Desmond, 496.

which finite articulations emerge but which itself exceeds all finite articulations.”⁴⁰ Desmond thinks that Heraclitus’s expressions capture the overdeterminacy, rather than making it determinate, which is why they *seem* indeterminate and don’t make sense. “There is an overload of significance that can look idiotic; when (st)uttered the overdeterminacy looks idiotic.”⁴¹ To use Desmond’s descriptor, there is too much for Heraclitus to express, so his expressions are also too much for our univocal minds to process without Desmond helping us understand their doubleness or equivocity.

How do we understand this reading of Heraclitus by Desmond as companionship rather than the ventriloquizing of which he accuses Heraclitus’s modern readers? Believing that Heraclitus’s modern exegetes didn’t sound the full depth of Heraclitus’s sense of the overdeterminacy of being as expressed through saturated equivocal language, Desmond appears only to be offering an alternative interpretation. But perhaps Desmond receives this insight through companionship with Heraclitus. He explained that a reader who is committed to univocal intelligibility will mistake Heraclitus’s equivocity for logical contradictions, thus ventriloquizing with him. “We quickly construct more coherent theories, or perhaps ventriloquize a meaning through selected sayings of Heraclitus, a meaning less insolent to our more univocal measures of determinate argumentation.”⁴² This attempt to nail down Heraclitus, to massage away the incoherencies or to get rid of the parts that don’t fit as we think they should – this seems to be ventriloquizing. We could consider this in light of the violent exegetical tendency towards systematization highlighted by Hadot. Ventriloquizing seems to be an instance of this phenomenon – also remarkably happening with the notion of being. But is even Desmond ventriloquizing? He claims to be companionship but admits that “it may be impossible to avoid ventriloquizing entirely.”⁴³

Desmond is expressing Heraclitus in his metaphysical lexicon. Indeed, he is, with the rest of us, condemned to the “hermeneutical circle”.⁴⁴ But I think that companionship is real, and that Desmond is doing it. And I think companionship is slightly more helpful as a hermeneutical tool because it is more form-fitting. It requires a more receptive and relaxed disposition, allowing the text of the author to distinguish itself. We could think back to Desmond’s statement: “Heraclitus offers us striking thoughts that strike us into thought.” In this expression of companionship, Heraclitus’s fragments take the position of agency, affecting the reader. This arrangement allows the words of Heraclitus to cause us to think and reflect with Heraclitus, perhaps even allowing our thought to pattern Heraclitus’s more closely. At the same time, it relieves

40 Desmond, 498.

41 Desmond, 502.

42 Desmond, 488.

43 Desmond, 474.

44 Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 88.

us of having to make sense of Heraclitus or risk proffering a definitive account of what Heraclitus himself meant.

CONCLUSIONS

Some remarks can be made about Desmond's place among our three reference points, Kahn, Hadot and Halapsis: Kahn thought that attending to qualities of Heraclitus's expressions such as resonance and density could add to our understanding of what his words *mean*. While Kahn's work has its merits, Desmond's project also attends to the poetic quality of Heraclitus's fragments. And because Desmond *companions* with Heraclitus and is *doing* philosophy rather than mere interpretive scholarship, he can suggest that Heraclitus's words have a saturated equivocality which expresses an overdeterminacy, with the result that their meaning comes by means of apparent contradictions.

Hadot shows that not only has something like Desmond's ventriloquizing been happening for the entire history of philosophy through systematization and creative misinterpretation, but that there is an extent to which this is inevitable and necessary. Scholars' honesty about the hermeneutical problems and pitfalls is already a huge step forward, but companioning could be the next step by legitimizing the tendency for a philosophical companion to "strike one into thought," – into *doing* philosophy, and distinguishing this project from strict interpretive scholarship.

What Desmond is doing in trying to identify the metaphysics behind Heraclitus's saturated expressions is, I would argue, something like what Halapsis claims that Heraclitus hoped others would do to awaken their logos and "connect" with *the* logos to make themselves immortal.⁴⁵ If Halapsis is correct that Heraclitus intended to be obscure for this reason, then companioning, or the general attitude of letting ourselves be *struck into thought*, would be an appropriate way of engaging with Heraclitus's fragments.

Companioning is an important hermeneutical activity, distinct from the critical interpretive work of Charles Kahn, yet equally important, especially for those who are perhaps more concerned than Kahn with the rich philosophical potential in Heraclitus's expressions. Kahn stresses that our being trapped in the hermeneutical circle does not mean "that interpretation is a game with no rules, which anyone can play and in which no mistakes are possible."⁴⁶ Kahn is right. However, companioning allows us to step outside the game of interpretation and to do philosophy; we are free from "rules," free to make mistakes and engage Heraclitus on philosophical rather than interpretive grounds. Companioning is a part of "the formulation of the thoughts that are dearest to one's own intellectual and spiritual concerns. [...]"

⁴⁵ Halapsis, "Man and Logos: Heraclitus's Secret," 125-26.

⁴⁶ See note 46 above.

One may be finding one's own voice, but into that voice the heard voice of the companion may have entered intimately."⁴⁷ A worthy activity might be to read Heraclitus fragments slowly and reflectively while letting the ideas, however they are received, react with one's internal milieu of other philosophical voices and personal experiences, considering possible implications for how to perceive the world and oneself.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ William Desmond, "Despoiling the Egyptians - Gently: Merold Westphal and Hegel," *Gazing Through a Prism Darkly: Reflections on Merold Westphal's Hermeneutical Epistemology*, ed. B. Keith Putt (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 23.

⁴⁸ Grateful recognition goes to professors Christopher Bobier, Patricia Calton and Joseph Tadie, as well as to the editorial board at *Dianoia* for critical reviews and helpful feedback during the writing process.

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