Heraclitus: The River Fragments

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https://orb.binghamton.edu/sagp/253
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Heraclitus¹ was known in antiquity for the obscurity and the ambiguity of his expression, and there can be little doubt that he purposely made use of ambiguity to emphasize the paradoxical character of some of his doctrines. For us who so many centuries later wish to understand his thought, these characteristics are increased and magnified by the very way his thought has been transmitted: citations and paraphrases by others whose interests were in most cases alien to his. Yet many ancient authors cited him to find authority and corroboration for their views in such an archaic thinker. Other writers, among whom the Christian apologists are prominent, saw in him the ultimate origin of opinions they set out to confute.

Of Heraclitus' fragments, those concerned with the changing rivers are among the most interesting, but also among the most difficult. It is therefore important to avoid discussing everything at the same time. And so I shall begin by making certain assumptions, though I shall discuss the related issues later on. There are three river fragments: B 91, B 12, and B 49a. One (or more of them) makes use of the image of changing rivers --the waters are never the same-- in relation to Heraclitus' general doctrine of change: He believed that no individual thing in this universe has stability and permanence, for it will eventually be destroyed and changed into something else. Heraclitus doubtless included men as composites of soul and body among the things that are perishable, but the question for us is this: did he use the image of the changing rivers to refer directly or primarily to our changing frames or, if not that, to our changing souls, or did he not? I believe he did not, and that the evidence points to his employing the image of the changing rivers for other, more general purposes. The issue will come up especially
in connection with fragments B 12 and B 49a. In considering this question, we
should not be unduly influenced by the fact that many writers and poets,
beginning with the Stoics as early as the 3rd century B.C., interpreted one or
more of the river fragments as referring to our changing frames or to our
changing souls. For even stronger reasons, we should not be influenced, in
interpreting Heraclitus, by the use of his river image taken anthropolo-
geically as a symbol or simile of our life on earth.

Heraclitus meant to assert the universality of change. Yet the evidence
also points to the fact that he emphasized the identity of certain patterns of
change, so much so that his doctrine may be summarized as that of identity in
difference. I do not mean to say that Heraclitus himself faced the implications
of his doctrine of change and that he tried to set limits to it. Rather, I
believe that he did not take into account the difference between the perishable
individual things that make up the universe and the imperishable patterns of
change. If carried to an extreme --as by Cratylus and others -- his doctrine
would amount to a denial of the law of contradiction. But in all probability
he himself did not carry his doctrine of the universality of change to that
extreme. There is evidence for this interpretation of Heraclitus' doctrine of
change in two passages of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.2 To be sure, Aristotle goes
further, and says that one could probably get Heraclitus to admit that contra-
dictories cannot be true of the same subject. We cannot know what Heraclitus
would have said if faced with the question of the law of contradiction. Yet
the evidence shows that Aristotle, who was acquainted with Heraclitus' book,
was aware that Heraclitus did not carry the doctrine of universal change to
the extreme position taken by Cratylus and other Heracliteans. Thus, despite
his doctrine of universal change, it was possible for Heraclitus to speak of
the changing rivers in relation to an observer. He probably did not realize
that, if both the object and the subject are constantly changing, it would not
make sense to say "upon those who step into the same rivers different and
different waters flow," unless one could account for a stable element in the
rivers, and in those who step into them.

* * *

Before beginning the discussion, it will be advantageous to give the text of
the three river fragments. In the case of two of them, I shall give the text
of more than one version, so as to facilitate later reference. For the time
being, I call them all fragments. I do not mean by this to prejudge the question
of the authenticity of one or more of them.

a) B 91: It is impossible to step twice into the same river.

1) Plutarch De Ἕρ. 392 B
   οὐκ ἔστιν ἐμβηναι δις τῷ αὐτῷ.

ii) Plato, Cratylus 402 A 8-10
   λέγει ποι Ἰρακλείτος ὁτι πάντα χωρεῖ καὶ οὐδέν μένει, καὶ ποταμῷ βοη
   ἀπεικάζων τα όντα λέγει δις δις ὡς τόν αὐτόν ποταμὸν οὐκ ὀν ἐμβαίνεις.

iii) Aristotle, Metaphysics 1010 A 12-15
   Κρατύλος..., ος το τελευταίον οὑθεν θετο θεῖν λέγειν άλλα τόν δάκτυλον
   ἐχίνει μόνον, καί 'Ιρακλείτῳ ἐπιτίμα εἰπόντι ὡς δις τῷ αὐτῷ ποταμῷ οὐκ
   ἔστιν ἐμβηναι' αὐτὸς γὰρ θεῖο οὐδ' ἐπανείπει.

b) B 12: Upon those who step into the same rivers different and different
   waters flow.

Cleanthes, and Arius, and Eusebius, P.E. XV 20. 2
   ποταμοὶ τοῖς αὐτοῖς ἐμβαίνουσιν ἄτερα καὶ ἄτερα ἔδατα ἐπιρρέει.
Upon the same rivers we step and we do not step, we are and we are not (sc. in the same rivers).

1) Heraclitus, Quaest. Homer. 24. 5

\[\text{ποταμοίς τοῖς οὕτως ἐμβαίνομεν τε καὶ οὐκ ἐμβαίνομεν, εἴμεν τε καὶ οὐκ εἴμεν.}\]

2) Seneca, Epist. 58, 22

\[\text{in idem flumen bis descendimus et non descendimus.}\]

One may leave aside for the time being two questions: which version of one or another of these fragments must be accepted, and what is the extent and the exact wording of the quotation. The main disagreement has been as to how many river fragments are likely to go back to Heraclitus himself. Thus, some scholars believe that all three fragments are authentically Heraclitean, others accept two of them only, while still others think that only one of them is an original saying. The possible authenticity of these fragments must therefore be discussed first, while the treatment of the general context of one or more of them must be left for later consideration.

I

Fragment B 91 (in any of its versions) is the most famous saying ascribed to Heraclitus both in ancient and in modern times. Yet several critics, among whom one may mention Reinhardt, Gigon, Kirk, and Marcovich, have argued that B 91 does not go back to Heraclitus but was ultimately derived from B 12. Consequently, it has been maintained that the version containing the δίς goes ultimately back to Cratylus. According to Aristotle (cf. a, iii supra), Cratylus criticized Heraclitus for saying that it is impossible to step twice
into the same river, for he, Cratylus, thought that it is not possible to do so even once. In short, according to this interpretation, Cratylus knew B 12 and took ἐμβαίνουσιν as an iterative present: "upon those who repeatedly step into the same rivers different and different waters flow." From this he allegedly inferred that Heraclitus' point was that, since the waters are constantly changing, the rivers are never the same. And from this it was inferred that Heraclitus really meant to say that it is impossible to step twice into the same rivers.

Let us suppose, for the sake of the argument, that B 12 could plausibly be interpreted as implying the impossibility of stepping twice into the same rivers. Is it likely that from "upon those who repeatedly step into the same rivers..." Cratylus inferred that it is impossible to step twice into the same rivers, and that he did so only in order to put forward his rejoinder that it is impossible to step even once? I believe it would be improbable for Cratylus to have done so. It is much more likely that he was acquainted with a saying of Heraclitus where the telling δίς was actually used.

As a matter of fact, however, it is totally unwarranted and even highly improbable that the saying containing the δίς could reasonably be derived from B 12. For even if Cratylus had taken the participle ἐμβαίνουσιν as an iterative present he could not cogently have inferred from B 12 that Heraclitus meant that one cannot step twice (or more times) into the same rivers. After all Heraclitus would actually be saying "upon those who repeatedly step into the same rivers." This is the conditional part of his sentence, the necessary supposition leading to the paradox that, since the waters are constantly changing, the rivers are not really the same. In other words, in the interpretation that Marcovich ascribes to Cratylus, the rivers at different times are the same and yet not the same for
for those who repeatedly step into them. From such an interpretation of B 12, it would have been absurd for Cratylus to infer that Heraclitus was simply denying the possibility of stepping twice into the same rivers. In this and in any other interpretation of B 12, the rivers must be "the same and not the same." Rather, if Heraclitus' B 12 had been the only river statement known to Cratylus, one would have expected him to attack Heraclitus' "same." For Aristotle's testimony shows that Cratylus subscribed to a radical version of the doctrine of the flux of all things. Moreover, Cratylus' retort to Heraclitus that it is impossible to step into the same river even once, shows that he meant to deny identity. Consequently, his point, not even once, would have been perfectly intelligible as a retort to Heraclitus' assumption that, in a sense, the rivers are the same.

If it is illegitimate to infer B 91 from B 12, there is even less reason to suppose that Cratylus simply made up a saying of Heraclitus containing δίς in order to refute it. The only reasonable conclusion is that there was an original saying by Heraclitus to the effect that "it is impossible (or, in Plato's version, "you cannot") step twice into the same river." Whatever the exact wording of this fragment, it must have contained the crucial word "twice," and in this form it must have been known not only to Cratylus, but at least to Plato and to Aristotle as well. In short, B 91 is a different fragment from B 12.

For reasons similar to those given above, it would be unwarranted to think that B 91 could have been derived from B 49a, "into the same rivers we repeatedly step and do not step." And no interpretation different from that of the iterative present tense would make a derivation of B 91 from either B 12 or B 49a more likely. Further discussion of B 91 will be undertaken only after the question of the authenticity of B 12 and B 49a is settled.
Though many authoritative critics have accepted the Heraclitean authorship of both B 12 and B 49a, I agree with several recent scholars who believe that we cannot keep both fragments. For, as Vlastos says, "though Heraclitus may well have used the river-image more than once, he is highly unlikely to have done so without significant variation in thought and expression." He, however, unlike most critics, keeps B 49a and rejects B 12, whereas I accept the latter and reject the former. Since many scholars would keep both B 12 and B 49a, and since the issue depends partly on the extent of B 12 and on its interpretation, it is well to begin by examining B 12 within its context:


Περὶ δὲ ψυχῆς κλεάνθης μὲν τὰ Ζήνωνος δόγματα παρατιθέμενος πρὸς σύγκρισιν τὴν πρὸς τοὺς ἄλλους φυσικοὺς φησιν ὅτι Ζήνων τὴν ψυχήν λέγει αἰσθητικὴν ἁναθυμίασιν καθάπερ ἢρακλείτος. Βουλόμενος γὰρ ἐμφανίσαι ὅτι αἱ ψυχαὶ ἁναθυμίμεναι νεαραὶ ἄλλοι γίνονται εἰκὸς τοῖς ποταμοῖς λέγων οὕτως·

5 Ἑμίσηοις τοῖς αὑτοῖς ἐμβαίνοντες τὸτε καὶ ἐτερα ἕδατα ἐπιρρέονται καὶ ψυχαὶ δὲ ἀπὸ τῶν ὑγρῶν ἁναθυμιῶνται. Ἅναθυμίασιν μὲν οὖν ὅμοιος τῷ ἢρακλείτῳ τὴν ψυχὴν ἀποφαίνει Ζήνων, αἰσθητικὴν δὲ αὐτὴν εἶναι διὰ τοῦτο λέγεται ὅτι τυποῦσθαι κτλ.

1 αἰσθητικὴν Wellmann (apud Diels); αἰσθησιν ἢ MSS // 2 νεαραὶ Meerwaldt, Mnemosyne 4 Ser. IV (1951), pp. 53-54; νεαραί MSS; ἐτεραί Diels

This fragment comes from Arius Didymus, who lived approximately in the second half of the 1st century B.C. and was the philosophical tutor of the Emperor
Augustus. According to him, Cleanthes, in citing Zeno's doctrine of the soul in comparison with that of the materialists (φυσικοί), said that Zeno called the soul a percipient exhalation (αἰσθητικὴ ἀναθυμίασις), just as Heraclitus did. It ought to be clear that the comparison with Heraclitus was made not by Zeno but by Cleanthes. What in fact we have here, then, is a citation of a certain statement or statements of Heraclitus' (or a paraphrase of them) by Cleanthes, who wanted to prove from them that Heraclitus had a doctrine of soul similar to that of Zeno. It is noteworthy that Cleanthes begins by interpreting what he is about to cite, assuming that Heraclitus' reference to rivers is a metaphor for "souls":

Now it is obvious that in what immediately follows these words, Cleanthes intended to give a quotation from Heraclitus; the question is how far does the quotation extend. With very few exceptions, scholars have accepted the words ποτμοῖς...ἐπιρρέω as a direct quotation from Heraclitus, and this interpretation will be supported in what follows. There has been, however, disagreement as to whether or not the sentence καὶ ψυχαὶ δὲ τῶν ὑγρῶν ἀναθυμίωσι is also comes from Heraclitus and, if it does, whether it is a direct quotation or merely a paraphrase. In either case, there has been disagreement also as to whether the two sentences, namely ποτμοῖς...ἐπιρρέω and καὶ ψυχαὶ...ἀναθυμίωσι come from the same context or not.

To discuss these problems it is necessary to go back to the question of Cleanthes' motivation in citing Heraclitus at all. Cleanthes thought that Zeno's conception of the soul as a percipient exhalation (αἰσθητικὴ ἀναθυμίασις) was similar to that of Heraclitus. Though the MSS of Eusebius read αἰσθησιν ἡ Wellmann's emendation αἰσθητικὴν is necessary and is guaranteed by the word αἰσθητικὴν in line 7. However, the context and the last three lines of the
Arius fragment cited above show that Cleanthes meant to ascribe to Heraclitus the doctrine of soul as ἀναθυμίασις but not that of ἀλογενίχη ἀναθυμίασις. Moreover, it is clear from the context that Cleanthes did not even try to find in Heraclitus' statement (or statements) any reference to the "intelligence" of souls but only to the notion that soul is an exhalation (ἀναθυμίασις). Consequently, the MSS' νορμαί cannot be right and must in all probability be a scribal mistake for νεαραί, as Meerwaldt has suggested. Thus, it becomes intelligible what was Cleanthes' point in interpreting the rivers as a metaphor for "souls": he thought that in πορομοίσι...ἐμπροφί Heraclitus meant to show that "souls" in being exhaled are always becoming new, i.e. are constantly being "replenished": that is to say, for Cleanthes πορομοίσι...ἐμπροφί is the evidence he finds in Heraclitus that "souls" are fed by new exhalations.

Now the conception of soul as an exhalation is almost certainly Heraclitean and is attested also by Aristotle many years before Cleanthes. One must note, however, that in πορομοίσι...ἐμπροφί there is no explicit or implicit reference to "souls". An additional and much more important point is this: Cleanthes could hardly have thought that souls for Heraclitus are fed only by the waters of the changing rivers. He therefore needed a more general statement to the effect that souls are simply exhalations. It follows from this that Cleanthes must have ascribed the content of the statement καὶ πυχὴ ὑπὸ ἀεὶ τῶν ὕγρων ἀναθυμιῶνται to Heraclitus himself.

However, this does not necessarily imply that the statement in question is a verbatim quotation from Heraclitus, or even that Cleanthes himself thought that it was. To begin with the latter point, it is possible that Cleanthes himself found this statement in a doxographical source (the ascription to Heraclitus of soul as ἀναθυμίασις is already in Aristotle, as we saw), or that he himself made a summary statement based on Heraclitean evidence: we must keep in mind that
Cleanthes himself is said to have written four books of commentaries on Heraclitus. Hence, in all likelihood, he must have had access to a considerable body of genuinely Heraclitean materials and must himself have made paraphrastic statements of Heraclitus' doctrines, as commentators generally do. Be that as it may, the sentence καὶ ψυχαὶ...ἀναβυμίωνται can hardly be a verbatim quotation from Heraclitus, though its contents are Heraclitean.

In any case, even if καὶ ψυχαὶ...ἀναβυμίωνται were a verbatim quotation from Heraclitus, it is highly improbable that in the Heraclitean original there was any connection between this sentence and ποταμοίσι...ἐμπρετ. Not only are the two statements of a completely different nature from a linguistic and stylistic point of view, but the contents are radically different, since in ποταμοίσι...ἐμπρετ there is nothing whatsoever about "souls". Moreover, it would be absurd to think that Heraclitus made the statement "upon those who step into the same rivers different and different waters flow" simply in order to say that "souls" are constantly being fed by new exhalations. Furthermore, if Heraclitus had meant to say what Cleanthes interprets him to be saying, why would he have used the expression "the same rivers"? The bare "rivers" would be appropriate whereas "the same" is worse than irrelevant to Cleanthes' reading of this fragment. For the point would be that souls are nourished by exhalations when one steps into a river, any river: why then say "upon those who step into the same rivers"? In fact, even apart from the other difficulties of placing ποταμοίσι...ἐμπρετ within a psychological context, the very word "same" would explode any such exegesis. For, whatever the correct interpretation of that statement may be, the clue --or at least an essential part of the statement's meaning-- surely must lie in the contrast between "the same rivers and the different waters", and this has nothing primarily to do with the soul.

If, then, ποταμοίσι...ἐμπρετ had originally nothing to do with souls in particular, then the fact that Cleanthes cites it in support of his interpretation...
of Heraclitus' doctrine of soul is in itself an indication or proof of its
genuinely Heraclitean character. Another important consequence of the preceding
analysis --and one that has not been sufficiently stressed in the literature
about B 12-- is that we really do not know the original context of the statement
ποταμοίσι...διπροσ'. The significance of this will become apparent when we come
to discuss the interpretation of B 12 in itself. At present we must turn to B 49a
and to the question of its genuineness.

III
Before discussing the authenticity of B 49a, it is necessary to decide what was the
original form of this fragment. For a glance at c, i and ii above shows that there
are some significant differences between the version of Heraclitus, the author of
the Homeric Questions, and that of Seneca. In the first place, the former has the
plural "upon the same rivers," while Seneca has the singular. Secondly, Seneca has
nothing corresponding to the Greek version's εἴμεν τι καὶ οὐκ εἴμεν. Finally,
Seneca has "bis", but the allegorizing Greek author does not. Now the datives
together with ἐμβαίνομεν τι καὶ οὐκ ἐμβαίνομεν and its Latin translation descendimus
et non descendimus show that both versions go back to a common Greek original.

Some scholars have suggested that in the Greek version we should insert δίς
on the basis of Seneca's testimony. It appears, however, that the "twice" is most
probably the result of Seneca's conflating B 49a with some version of B 91, the
fragment containing the δίς. If this is so, then it follows that the original of
B 49a did not contain δίς at all. This interpretation is supported by the following
considerations: Seneca has the singular "in idem flumen", which is characteristic of
B 91 (cf. section V infra), whereas the Greek version of B 49a has the plural ποταμοῖς
τοῖς αὐτοῖς. The latter is supported by B 12, which is either the same fragment as
B 49a (cf. section IV infra) or, if not that, belongs to the same general context as
B 49a. Moreover, no matter how we interpret the present tense of the verb ἐμβαίνομεν,
"we step and do not step into the same rivers" yields a reasonable sense in itself
and is in the manner of Heraclitus. Such is not the case, however, with "we step
and we do not step twice into the same rivers." In fact, when Heraclitus uses the "yes-and-no" formula, that formula occurs without any adverbs or any qualifying expressions. And this is intelligible, since the "yes-and-no" formulae are primarily and directly a way for Heraclitus to assert simultaneously identity and difference, that is to say, identity-in-difference or vice versa. In short, "we step and we do not step into the same rivers" belongs to a different context from that of the "twice" of 391. Finally, it is noteworthy that the context itself in Seneca suggests that there is conflation of 349a with 391: for at the beginning of the introductory passage to 349a, Seneca refers to Plato's denial of true being to sensible existence, on the grounds that sensibles are always in flux. This alludes to a Platonic doctrine embodied, among other works, in the Cratylus, where a version of 391 occurs in connection with it. It is likely, then, that Seneca conflated 349a with 391 because he connected also the former fragment with Heraclitus' doctrine of universal change. In any case, we may infer that the original source of 349a did not have δίς and that δίς should not be added to the Greek version of this saying.

There still remains the question of the Greek version's εἴμιν ταύτα καὶ οὐκ εἴμιν, which does not occur in Seneca. In all probability Seneca did not find these words in his Greek source. For, given his emphasis on our own changing selves, he would not have failed to cite a part of the text that could be construed as referring to that very topic: we exist and we do not exist, because permanent and unchanging being is denied to us, since at any moment we are changing. This is in fact one of the possible interpretations of εἴμιν ταύτα καὶ οὐκ εἴμιν, if these words are really part of the original text of this fragment. Another related interpretation, suggested by Zeller, is to understand ὁι δοκεί, that is, "we are and we are not the same." But this interpretation is syntactically difficult, as the predicate is not normally omitted with copulative εἴμιν. In addition, it introduces a rather violent shift from the changing rivers, which are the same and not the same (this is implied by
"we step and we do not step into the same rivers"), to our changing selves. To avoid both difficulties, Vlastos suggests that some words may have been omitted, words which would explain the shift and which would avoid the syntactic difficulty as well. Of such an omission there is no evidence, and the words in question can be better explained by another interpretation suggested by Zeller, which Mondolfo supports at length: "We are and we are not, sc. in the same rivers." Here there is no shift at all from the rivers to our own individual selves. Moreover, the interpretation is grammatically possible, since, pace Kirk, in "we are and we are not in the same rivers" the verb to be (either in Greek or in English) is existential and not copulative. There remains of course the awkwardness of having to supply ἐν τοῖς ποταμοῖς from the preceding τοῖς ποταμοῖς. I submit that unless the text is corrupt this last interpretation is what the allegorizing Greek author must have meant with cἰμύν τῇ καὶ οὐκ cἰμύν. Of course this does not mean that these words were part of the original text of this fragment. Given their absence from Seneca's version, the likelihood that they are authentic is not greater than that they are not. However that may be, it seems that for settling the question of the authenticity of B 49a the status of cἰμύν τῇ καὶ οὐκ cἰμύν will make no difference.

IV

We must ask, then, whether both B 12 and B 49a are likely to be authentic; and, if that is not the case, which one of them is the Heraclitean original. It will be useful to place the texts side by side:

B 12  

τοῖς τοῖς σὐτοῖς συμβαίνομεν ἐκεῖ καὶ ἐκεῖ ὑδάτα ἐπιρρέει.  

The fact that the plurals and the verb συμβαίνω are the same in both versions suggests that B 12 and B 49a are really the same fragment. Moreover, the meaning of the two fragments is the same; that is to say, any interpretation of B 12 is also valid for B 49a and vice versa.

That in B 12 we have the Ionic dative forms whereas in B 49a we do not, is
irrelevant to the question of the authenticity, for such Ionicisms could easily have 
been introduced by an imitator. Similarly, even if ἐμβαίνωμεν τε καὶ σὺ ἐμβαίνωμεν 
sounds Heraclitean (cf. B 10 and B 32), this by itself is not an indication of 
authenticity: it is not at all difficult to imitate this form of expression.

The following seem to be decisive reasons for thinking that B 49a was derived 
from B 12: It is unlikely that "upon those who step into the same rivers different 
and different waters flow" is merely a paraphrase of B 49a. It is a more roundabout 
way of expressing the first part of B 49a, while a paraphrast or an imitator normally 
chooses a simpler and more direct expression than the original. Rather, it is 
intelligible that, acquainted with fragments of Heraclitus where the "yes-and-no" 
form of expression is used (B 10 and B 32), someone rendered the meaning of the more 
obscure B 12 in a simpler but still Heraclitean style. Moreover, the source common to 
Seneca (4/5 B.C. - 65 A.D.) and to the allegorizing Heraclitus (ca. 1st cent. A.D.) 
need not be much earlier than them. On the other hand, B 12 is cited by Cleanthes, who lived in the 3rd century B.C., and who must have had a rather extensive knowledge 
of Heraclitus' sayings. As argued above (section II), Cleanthes is unlikely to have 
made up B 12, for B 12 does not really support the interpretation he gives to it. 
Hence, if B 12 is not authentic, then it must go back to a source earlier than 
Cleanthes. This is a more unlikely possibility than for a spurious B 49a to go 
back to the ultimate source common to Seneca and to the allegorizing Heraclitus.

V

The probability, then, is that there are extant two river statements by Heraclitus, 
B 91 and B 12. Several points remain to be discussed in connection with them.

To begin with B 91, we should look at the three texts cited under c, i-iii, 
i.e. Plutarch, Plato, and Aristotle. It is clear that they, and Cratylus as well, 
were quoting the same Heraclitean saying. In all of them the expression for river 
is in the singular. The only apparent exception to that seems to be another text of 
Plutarch, Quaest. Phys. 912 A, where he says: ποταμοῖς ἀν οἱ ό ποις αὐτός σύν ἂν
εμβαίης, ὡς φησίν Ἡράκλειτος, άνα τρα γαρ έπιππην οὐδαμα. I have said that this is an apparent exception, because it is clear that Plutarch has here conflated B 91 with B 12, just as Seneca conflated B 91 with B 49a. The plural rivers here belong to B 12, not to B 91. On the other hand the δίς οὖν ἡμβαίης belongs to B 91. In short, then, we may infer that the original fragment B 91 read "into the same river" and not the plural as B 12 does.

While Cratylus, Aristotle, and Plutarch in two places have "it is not possible to enter," Plato and Plutarch in the Quaest. Phys. have the second person singular optative. In addition, Plato has ἐς with accusative instead of the dative case. I believe that Plato is more likely to have preserved the Heraclitean wording. The second person singular optative occurs also in Plutarch's Quaest. Phys., and the context, Plutarch's access to a collection of Heraclitean sayings from which he cites several fragments, plus the fact that Plutarch is also citing B 12, suggest that he is not here dependent on Plato for his knowledge of B 91. Be that as it may, fragment B 45 (οὖν ἡμβαίης) shows that the second person optative is possible for Heraclitus.

We must pay close attention to Plato's wording in Cratylus 402 A 8-10. According to him, Heraclitus somehow says (λέγει οὖν ) that all things are in flux (πάντα χωρεῖ). But after stating that Heraclitus likened τὰ ὀνείρα to the flow of a river, he repeats the verb λέγει (with no softening οὖν now) and gives the saying as δίς ἐς τὸν αὐτόν ποταμὸν οὖν ἡμβαίης. The shift to the second person singular is unnecessary to Plato's purpose, and the conclusion is inescapable that he meant these words to be taken as a quotation from Heraclitus. As for Cratylus' testimony, he is cited by Aristotle, who is not making a point of citing verbatim. In fact, to say "it is impossible to step twice into the same river" is a generalizing and more abstract form of expression than "you could not step twice into the same river." It also stands to reason that other philosophically minded authors should prefer Aristotle's form of expression to Plato's even if Plato's more nearly reproduces the Heraclitean original. Finally, if I am right in thinking that B 91 and B 12 belonged to different contexts in Heraclitus (cf. below), then Plato's ἐς with accusative yields a better
sense than the simple dative, as we shall see.

It is also Plato who tells us what the context of B 91 was: Heraclitus cited the impossibility of stepping twice into the same river as a simile for his doctrine of universal change. As was argued above, Heraclitus' conception of universal change is not the same as that of Cratylus or other radical Heracliteans. But there is evidence that for him every individual thing in the universe will eventually be destroyed and that the only lasting reality is that of change or process. And so Plato's ascription to him of the doctrine of universal flux is justified, though to be sure Plato carries it to a logical conclusion that Heraclitus did not envisage.

One interpretation of B 12 has already been given in section I of this paper: it is that which Marcovich ascribes to Cratylus. There is no evidence as to how Cratylus interpreted B 12, but taking the participle έμβαίνουσίν as an iterative present is a possible interpretation. The fragment would then mean that, to people who repeatedly step into the same rivers, the rivers are the same and yet not the same. If so interpreted, pace Kirk, there would be no direct reference here to the Heraclitean doctrine of the measures of change. Nor is it likely that B 12 belongs to the same general context as B 91. B 12 would assert that to those who repeatedly step into the same rivers, the rivers are and are not the same, whereas B 91 flatly denies that one could step twice into the same river. It would be equally unlikely for B 12 to belong to the same context as B 91, if one adopts the interpretation of Marcovich. He takes έμβαίνουσίν as a "progressive" present, "upon those who are in the process of stepping into the same rivers...". However, this reading of B 12 does not seem to fit the wording. Moreover, in either interpretation of this fragment (or in any similar one), B 12 would amount to nothing beyond the assertion of the unity of contraries; or, in this case, more precisely, of difference in identity. To be sure, this is a Heraclitean thought; but the question is whether Heraclitus would have used such a complicated and indirect expression, especially if he had also said that it is impossible to step twice into the same river.

For these reasons, and also because it yields a better sense, I should like to
develop an interpretation advanced by the late Harold Cherniss. To begin with, it is well to stress that we do not know what the original context of B 12 was (cf. section II). Secondly, as Cherniss has suggested, the plural ἐμβαίνουσιν may have been meant literally as a plural. The meaning would be: If several people enter the same river (or rivers), different waters flow over each of these different people, i.e. though in a sense two people are in the same river, the river water in which each is, is different. As for B 49a, it is an interpretation or loose quotation of this saying: "we enter and we do not enter the same rivers (as others do, i.e. the rivers are the same for all of us but the waters are different for each)." B 12, then, would mean: The same rivers to different people in them are different, for each person in the same river is bathed by different waters of the same river. The context would be related to something like fragments B 2 and B 89: the cosmos is one to men who are really awake (i.e. who are wise), but most people like sleepers treat their own environments each as a separate and private cosmos.

If this interpretation is approximately correct, it follows that B 91 is not part of the same saying as B 12 but that they belong to different contexts. Moreover, the probably different wording of the two fragments would make better sense: in B 12 (verb plus dative) the people are envisaged as in the river; in B 91, ἐς with accusative, what is declared impossible i.e. the very act of "stepping into" the same river more than once.

VI

In his De E (392 B), Plutarch says: "ποταμῷ γὰρ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐμβῆναι οἷς τῷ αὐτῷ καθ’ Ἡράκλειτον" ὑπὲρ θεντῆς οὐσίας δἰς ἱππωταὶ κατὰ ἡξίν, ἄλλ’ ἐξυπηρετεῖ καὶ τάχει μεταβολῆς σκίδνησι καὶ πάλιν συνάγει, μᾶλλον ὅ’ οὐδὲ πάλιν οὐδ’ ὑπερτερον ἄλλ’ ἀμα συνίσταται καὶ ἀπολύει καὶ πρόσεις καὶ ἀπειρίαν. Many scholars have thought that among the underlined pairs of verbs there is Heraclitean material, some accepting all three pairs, others two pairs, still others one pair only. I agree with Marcovich, who denies that any of these verbs goes back to Heraclitus. However, as I do not agree with some of
his arguments, I shall briefly state mine: a) There is really no reason to think that anything after ὑποθετεῖν 'Ὕποθετεῖν is by Heraclitus. Before and after the quotation of B 91, Plutarch is discussing the changeability of the "mortal nature or substance" within a Stoic context. Hence, though it is likely that none of the three pairs of verbs is by Plutarch, they need not be by Heraclitus either but probably belong to Plutarch's Stoic source or sources. b) Of the three pairs only the third is appropriate to a river. c) But, as the three pairs go together, if the first and second do not apply to a river, neither in all probability did the third in its original context. d) The second and the third pairs are introduced as correctives of the first pair, which makes it possible to think that the two former pairs belong either to Plutarch or to a source different from that of the first pair. e) Even in the unlikely case that these three pairs of verbs go back to Heraclitus, they must have belonged to a context different from that of the river fragments (cf. b and c above).

NOTES

1. The fragments of Heraclitus are cited according to Diels' edition in FVS. Due to space limitation, my annotation is minimal. To facilitate reference, I have listed in the bibliography the main editions and commentaries of Heraclitus' fragments. My references to ancient texts is also minimal, but I cite enough to make my treatment intelligible.


3. For a full collection of texts concerning the river fragments cf. those Marcovich cites under his frag. 40 = B 12.

4. E.g. Diels, Kranz, Mondolfo, Conche accept all three; Reinhardt accepts B 12 and B 49a, Vlastos B 91 and B 49a, Kahn B 91 and B 12; Kirk and Marcovich B 12 only.

5. Vlastos, p. 343.


10. So already Schleiermacher, who is followed by Walzer.

11. Cf. Seneca, Epist. 58, 22 (lines 11-13 [Reynolds]): Quaecumque videmus aut tangimus Plato in illis non numerat quae esse proprie putat; fluunt enim et in adsidua deminutione atque adiectione sunt.

13. Vlastos, p. 342. In p. 343 Vlastos states his belief that with or without intervening words Heraclitus passed from the "yes-and-no" of our relation to external objects to the "yes-and-no" of our own (changing) being.


15. Kirk, p. 373 is right in raising the difficulty about the omission of the predicate when the verb is copulative, as he does against supplying οί αὐτοί. But in the second interpretation suggested by Zeller, the verb to be is existential, not copulative.

16. Not only in De E 392 B but also in De Serp 559 C; in the latter passage, he gives κίς plus accusative instead of the dative.

17. For Plutarch's κίς with accusative cf. the previous note.


20. Marcovich, p. 148, defending his interpretation against the objection of Stokes, argues that if one is in the process of entering a river, the flow of the waters makes the same river different at t' from what it is at t", etc. This is true. But the bare "upon those who enter a river" would do as well. Why then use "the same rivers"? Marcovich's interpretation is possible but fails to do justice to Heraclitus' wording.

21. It is cited by Ramnoux, p. 453.

22. This interpretation can also account for the emphasis on "different and different waters." The waters are different to the different people in the rivers; but each individual receives different and different waters (temporal succession) and fails to see the underlying unity.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


Diels = cf. under FVS.


Kranz = cf. under FVS.

Marcovich² = M. Marcovich, Eracleito. Frammenti, etc. An Italian version of the above cited work, with some revisions (Firenze, 1978).


Nestle = Cf. under Zeller.


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