

NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

DOES NATURE LOVE TO HIDE? HERACLITUS B123 DK

φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ. (B123)

This three-word fragment of Heraclitus is regularly translated in a straightforward manner like that used by Charles Kahn: "Nature loves to hide."¹ B87 has a similar construction:

βλάξ ἄνθρωπος ἐπὶ παντὶ λόγῳ ἐπτοῖσθαι φιλεῖ.

Kahn translates correspondingly, "A fool loves to get excited on any account." In the first case, the translation suggests a feeling or attitude that goes with the act of hiding and results in a personification of nature. In the second case, it suggests a kind of joy that accompanies the excitement. Kahn has rightly pointed to the verbal complexity in Heraclitus' expression, and a personification of nature would be no more startling than many striking images he uses.² The literal translation of the verb as "loves" or the like has been popular among translators. English-language translators who use it include Burnet, Freeman, Guthrie, Wheelwright, Robinson, Barnes, McKirahan, Osborne, and Hussey.³ This kind of translation is by no means unique to English-language translators; Diels-Kranz translates, "Die Natur (das Wesen) liebt es sich zu verbergen."⁴ Despite its popularity, this reading of the fragment is, I shall argue, mistaken. I shall be concerned mainly with the use of the verb φιλεῖν in the sentences,⁵ and I shall focus on B123, but what I say will apply, mutatis mutandis, to B87 as well.

Heraclitus wrote, of course, in the Ionic dialect. To understand Heraclitus' language, we must be sensitive to the nuances of Ionic, as Kahn points out:

1. C. H. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus* (Cambridge, 1979).

2. Kahn, *Art and Thought* (n. 1 above), 89–95. Kahn particularly identifies "linguistic density," plurality of meanings of a single word or phrase, and "resonance," the allusion of one statement or image to others.

3. J. Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*⁴ (London, 1930), 133; K. Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), 33; W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1962), 441; P. Wheelwright, *The Presocratics* (New York, 1966), 70; J. M. Robinson, *An Introduction to Early Greek Philosophy* (New York, 1968), 96; J. Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy* (London, 1987), 123; R. D. McKirahan, Jr., *Philosophy before Socrates* (Indianapolis, 1994), 120; C. Osborne, "Heraclitus," in *Routledge History of Philosophy*, vol. 1, ed. C. C. W. Taylor (London, 1997), p. 122, n. 86; E. Hussey, "Heraclitus," in *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy*, ed. A. A. Long (Cambridge, 1999), 91.

4. H. Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*⁶, ed. W. Kranz (Berlin, 1951). Curiously, the *Wortindex* (vol. 3) of Diels-Kranz, s.v. φιλεῖν, gives *pfelegen* ("be wont to") as the definition under which it classifies both B87 and B123. B87 is translated accordingly: "Ein blöder Mensch pflegt bei jedem Wort erschreckt dazustehen."

5. The term φύσις is worthy of comment as the first philosophical use of the term. But I take it as fairly well established now that it refers to the individual nature of a thing rather than Nature as a whole. See, e.g., G. S. Kirk, *Heraclitus: The Cosmic Fragments* (Cambridge, 1954), 227–31; F. Heinimann, *Nomos und Physis* (Basel, 1945), 89–109.

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In establishing the primary reading [of Heraclitus' text] it will be important to know . . . the normal usage of the words in Ionic prose, their "ordinary" meaning for Heraclitus' original audience. To this end our best guide will be the usage of Herodotus, where the evidence is abundant, of relatively early date, and beautifully analyzed in Powell's *Lexicon to Herodotus*.⁶

As Kahn subsequently observes, the only significant body of Ionic prose that is earlier than Herodotus is the corpus of Heraclitus himself. If, then, we turn to Powell's lexicon⁷ under the entry φιλέω, we read the following:

2. (12) w. inf. *be accustomed to in general laws* . . .

The numeral 12 marks the number of occurrences. As the first example of the usage, Powell offers Herodotus 2.27, of which I give the whole sentence:

τῆς αὔρης δὲ πέρι, ὅτι οὐκ ἀποπνέει, τήνδε ἔχω γνώμην, ὥς κάρτα ἀπὸ θερμῶν χωρέων οὐκ οἰκός ἐστι οὐδὲν ἀποπνέειν, αὔρη δὲ ἀπὸ ψυχροῦ τινὸς φιλέει πνέειν.

Concerning the reason the breeze does not blow off [the Nile], I give as my opinion that it is not likely that it should blow at all from hot countries, but the breeze generally blows from a cold place.

Here, obviously, the wind does not "love to" blow from a cold place, and it is not personified. As Powell indicates in his definition, Herodotus is trying to advance a general truth.

In Book 7 we meet another instance of the phrase. Mardonius seeks to clinch his advice to Xerxes (7.9γ):

αὐτόματον γὰρ οὐδέν, ἀλλ' ἀπὸ πείρης πάντα ἀνθρώποισι φιλέει γίνεσθαι.

Nothing happens by itself, but everything comes to men from their ventures.

Mardonius' sentence is an aphorism about success in human affairs: nothing ventured, nothing gained. The neuter plural subject is not personified. We can see the gnomic character of the idiom again in the penultimate sentence of the *Histories* (9.122.3):

φιλέειν γὰρ ἐκ τῶν μαλακῶν χώρων μαλακοὺς ἄνδρας γίνεσθαι.

Soft men come from soft countries.

In this sentence from the mouth of Cyrus (in indirect discourse), we have a personal subject that could reasonably represent a psychological subject of emotions. But to say that soft men *love* to come from soft countries misses the point completely, namely, that because of their upbringing, they cannot help being soft, whatever their personal preferences. Similarly, I would assert, to understand Heraclitus as saying in B87 that a fool *loves* to get excited is to miss the point. Powell further notices two impersonal uses, of which one is as follows (6.27.1):⁸

φιλέει δέ κως προσημαίνειν, εὖτ' ἂν μέλλῃ μεγάλα κακὰ ἢ πόλις ἢ ἔθνεϊ ἔσεσθαι.

There is usually a sign, when some great catastrophe is about to befall a city or a nation.

6. Kahn, *Art and Thought*, 92.

7. J. E. Powell, *A Lexicon to Herodotus* (Cambridge, 1938; reprint Hildesheim, 1966).

8. LSJ, s.v. φιλέω, II.3, gives ὁ θεός as subject, but still designates it as impersonal. Powell's other example, τὸν δὲ βληθέντα περιέδραμε ὄμιλος, οἷα φιλέει γίνεσθαι ἐν πολέμῳ, "A crowd ran to the wounded man, as often happens in war" (8.128.2), could be read as having οἷα as subject.

The impersonal construction shows how impersonal the idiom itself was felt to be. The verb can operate perfectly well with no subject at all.

That the expression is not idiosyncratic to Herodotus may be seen from another prolific author famous for his Ionic prose, the philosopher Democritus.⁹ Perhaps a generation younger than Herodotus, Democritus flourished in the late fifth century, writing as much as a century after Heraclitus. But he still uses φιλεῖν in the same way as Herodotus. In his almanac, certainly no place for personifications and flowery language, there is ample opportunity to talk of regular occurrences (B14.3):

[In the sign of Scorpius:] ἐν δὲ τῇ δ' ἡμέραι Δημοκρίτῳ Πλειάδες δύνουσιν ἅμα ἥοι· ἄνεμοι χειμέριοι ὥς τὰ πολλὰ καὶ ψύχη ἤδη καὶ πάχνη ἐπιπνεῖν φιλεῖ . . .

According to Democritus on the fourth day the Pleiades set at dawn; there are usually winter winds, and now cold winds regularly blow carrying frost.

Ἀετὸς ἐπιτέλλει ἅμα ἡλίῳ· καὶ ἐπισημαίνειν φιλεῖ βροντῇ καὶ ἀστραπῇ . . .

Aquila rises at dawn, and it is usually signaled by thunder and lightning. . . .

Although these passages are not necessarily verbatim quotations, the Ionic phraseology suggests that some of the words go back to Democritus.¹⁰ The idiom occurs also in his ethical works:

μή πονεῖν παῖδες ἀνιέντες οὔτε γράμματα· ἂν μάθοιεν οὔτε μουσικὴν οὔτε ἀγωνίην οὐδ' ὅπερ μάλιστα τὴν ἀρετὴν συνέχει, τὸ αἰδεῖσθαι· μάλα γὰρ ἐκ τούτων φιλεῖ γίγνεσθαι ἡ αἰδώς.¹¹

If they fail to work hard, children will not learn their letters, music, athletics, nor that which especially instills virtue: modesty. For modesty inevitably arises just from these things. (B179)

τὰ δ' ἐλλείποντα καὶ ὑπερβάλλοντα μεταπίπτειν τε φιλεῖ καὶ μεγάλας κινήσιας ἐμποιεῖν τῇ ψυχῇ.

For shortages and excesses often change and cause great disturbances in the soul. (B191)

These examples speak for themselves. It is perhaps significant how many times the complement of φιλεῖν is γί[γ]νεσθαι, indicating that the idiom was a favorite way of describing how phenomena arise.¹² And in every case the complement is a present infinitive, denoting repeated or general action. One final case leaves no doubt of the sense (B228):

. . . ἣν ἀμάρτωσι τοῦ πατρικοῦ τύπου τοῦ ἐπιμέλεος καὶ φειδωλοῦ, φιλέουσι διαφθεῖρεσθαι.

If [the children] fail to adopt their father's example of carefulness and thrift, they are inevitably ruined.

By no stretch of the imagination can we say the children love to be ruined.

These examples demonstrate that the idiom φιλεῖν + infinitive was common in Ionic prose long after Heraclitus. We should perhaps note a further fact that can be

9. Democritus was often cited by grammarians as a source of Ionic idiom, e.g., B19, B20, B29, B29a.

10. For a recent study of Democritus' meteorology, see D. Sider, "Democritus on the Weather," in *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie présocratique?* ed. A. Laks and C. Louguet (Lille, 2002), 287–302.

11. I omit the first word, which is corrupt.

12. Cf. LSJ, s.v. φιλέω, II.2.

gleaned from Powell's lexicography: the verb with infinitive never occurs in any *other* context in Herodotus than to convey a general truth. While it is plausible to suppose that the "loves to" idiom gave rise to the sense of "is wont to," "always . . .",¹³ Herodotus' usage indicates that the derivative meaning outlived the original. In any case, the parallels in Herodotus and Democritus show how a gnomic saying using φιλεῖν + infinitive would have fallen on the ear of an Ionic listener: as expressing a general truth. Indeed, when we take into account the occurrences in Ionic texts, together with occurrences in Attic canvassed in LSJ, it should strike us that there is an even stronger case against the translations "loves to": *there is not a single documented case in which φιλεῖν + infinitive means "loves to" in ancient Greek*. The sense "loves to" exists as a pure reconstruction to fill in a lexicographical gap, as a semantic missing link. In the absence of verifiable instances of the idiom, we are not justified in positing the idiom as even a secondary meaning for the Greek phrase.

Perhaps it might be argued that inasmuch as Heraclitus gives us the earliest instances of the idiom, he is more likely than anyone else to use it in the reconstructed sense. This may be true as a general assumption, but the burden of proof rests upon the interpreter to show that the meaning is required in a particular case. Unless there is some compelling reason to translate the verb as "loves to"—which there is not, in the absence of the original context—we should render it like all other instances. In English the sense of a repeated action or general truth may be conveyed merely by using the simple present instead of the progressive. Hence one terse way of rendering B123 is simply, "Nature hides."¹⁴ But given the fact that we have removed the emotive force of φιλεῖν, there is perhaps no strong reason to think of hiding as an action performed by a personified Nature.¹⁵ The passive reading of the infinitive gives "Nature is hidden," which seems to me, all things considered, the best. If we wish to make explicit the force of φιλεῖν, we can translate, "Nature is ever hidden." B87 will say, "A foolish man generally gets excited at every report."

In this, one of the first surviving philosophical uses of the word φύσις,¹⁶ nature is, so far as we can see, not personified. Heraclitus is saying that the nature of things

13. LSJ, s.v. φιλέω, II: "after Homer, c. inf., *love to do, be fond of doing, and so to be wont or used to do*," without citing any instances of the former idiom. Here are included a number of Attic uses of the construction (always in the latter sense), which seem to be descended from the Ionic idiom. The Platonic corpus gives a comparable body of Attic prose to compare with Herodotus; Ast lists 14 occurrences in the sense of the Latin *soleo*: *Lexicon Platonicum*, 3 vols. (Leipzig, 1935–38; reprint Darmstadt, 1956), s.v. φιλέω.

14. Guthrie translates, "Nature loves concealment" (*Greek Philosophy*, [n. 3 above], 441), and commends the accuracy of Kirk's rendering, "The real constitution of things is accustomed to hide itself" (Kirk, *Heraclitus* [n. 5 above], 227). But he goes on to complain, "It is, however, a real loss if we give up the pithy, Delphic style of Heraclitus' sayings, and the element of personification which was probably present" (p. 441, n. 1). Clearly, Heraclitus' tone is lost in Kirk's fastidious translation. And I agree that we should not over-translate; but the major danger of mistranslation comes with the rendering of the main verb. I would complain that even Kirk's reflexive "hide itself" brings in too much personification. Similar translations with a reflexive are found in M. Marcovich, *Heraclitus* (Merida, Venezuela, 1967), 33; T. M. Robinson, *Heraclitus* (Toronto, 1987), 71; R. Waterfield, *The First Philosophers* (Oxford, 2000), 40. To my ear the intransitive "hides" sounds less loaded than the reflexive "hides itself." Yet even this may be unnecessarily loaded.

15. Perhaps the strongest motivation for a personification is found in W. A. Heidel, "Περὶ Φύσεως: A Study of the Conception of Nature among the Pre-Socratics," *Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 45 (1910): 81–133 (reprinted in W. A. Heidel, *Selected Papers*, ed. L. Tarán [New York, 1980]), at p. 107 and n. 116: "nature loves to play hide-and-seek," resonating with B52, life as a child playing draughts.

Manilius 5.869–70 = frag. 8(e) Marcovich imitates Heraclitus B123 in Latin without a helping verb (*conditur* . . . *natura*), but he does personify nature.

16. This and other occurrences in Heraclitus (B1, B106, B112) are the earliest recorded philosophical uses of the term.

is hidden from view, without necessarily making that nature an accomplice in its own concealment.¹⁷

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17. My thanks to an anonymous reader for this journal for helpful suggestions.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA ON SIGNET RINGS: READING AN IMAGE AT THE DAWN OF CHRISTIAN ART

Clement of Alexandria's *Paedagogos* 3.59.2 has long played a pivotal role in the history of early Christian art. In it, Clement discusses appropriate and inappropriate images for the signet rings of Christian men. Clement once served as a source for the now outmoded theory of early Christian anti- or aniconism,¹ and his writings continue to offer fundamental evidence for still vexing questions concerning the origins and interpretation of the earliest Christian art. Since Clement wrote at virtually the same time that the first identifiable works of Christian art appear, *Paedagogos* 3.59.2 has become a *locus classicus* for both art historians and theologians.² As such, it has suffered the fate of many an overused authority; its meaning and import have become presumed. It is time to take a fresh look at *Paedagogos* 3.59.2 both to clarify the reading of the text and to reassess its significance to the study of early Christian art.

Paedagogos 3.59.2 reads

Αἱ δὲ σφραγίδες ἡμῖν ἔστων πελειᾶς ἢ ἰχθὺς ἢ ναῦς οὐριοδρομοῦσα ἢ λύρα μουσικῆ,
ἢ κέχρηται Πολυκράτης, ἢ ἄγκυρα ναυτικῆ, ἢν Σέλευκος ἐνεχαράττετο τῇ γλυφῇ, κἄν

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1. Two often cited older works presenting early Christianity as an- or anti-iconic are G. Ladner, "The Concept of the Image in the Greek Fathers and the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy," *DOP* 7 (1953): 5, and E. Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images before Iconoclasm," *DOP* 8 (1954): 85, but see also the views of H. Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. E. Jephcott (Chicago, 1994), e.g., xxii: "The story of the iconic portrait opens when Christianity adopted the cult images of the pagans, in a complete reversal of its own original attitude, and adopted an image practice of its own," and 144: "... the Christian religion did not allow for any concession in its total rejection of the religious image. ..." The evidence Belting cites is dated, including Kitzinger's 1954 article mentioned above, and works by Koch in 1917, Ellinger in 1930, and Kollwitz from 1953 to 1957. The first definitive challenge to this view came from C. Murray, "Art and the Early Church," *JThS* 32 (1977): 303–45, and *Rebirth and Afterlife: A Study of the Transmutation of Some Pagan Imagery in Early Christian Funerary Art*, BAR International Series, 100 (Oxford, 1981), 13–36; and more recently from P. Finney, *The Invisible God: The Earliest Christians on Art* (Oxford, 1994), esp. 3–14. The discussions of Clement in Finney, 42–53 and 111–16, are also helpful. A fine treatment of the myth of aniconism generally and with regard to several cultures may be found in D. Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago, 1989), 54–81. A useful survey of developments from 1986 to 1996 can be found in L. Drewer, "Recent Approaches to Early Christian and Byzantine Iconography," *Studies in Iconography* 17 (1996): 1–65.

2. The *Paedagogos* was certainly written sometime between 185 and 215 c.e. Various arguments have been proffered to date it more precisely, but none has been universally accepted; see P. Finney, "Images on Finger Rings and Early Christian Art," *DOP* 41 (1987): 181 and n. 1. The earliest identifiable Christian images appear c. 200; see A. Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins* (Princeton, 1968), 7. Finney, *Invisible God* (n. 1 above), 100–101, offers the salutary reminder that the absence of extant identifiable Christian art, or any Christian material culture, from before 200 is not the same as proof that none ever existed.