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## Epilog

### Living with the perplexities of our being-in-the-world with others: the paradox of *Bildung*

**Abstract:** One of the most powerful challenges of being in the world with Others is learning when to be affected by power beyond our wanting and doing. The hermeneutic experience of art highlights the power of letting things show themselves to us and provoke cathartic transformation. The message of the Gospel teaches us the need for sensitivity to divine inspiration and radical openness to Revelation. The power of philosophical thinking can humble us to wonder at the paradoxes and finitude of human wisdom. A close reading of Heraclitus in conversation with Aristotle, Heidegger, and Gadamer faces us with the power of the contradictions and “unstable equilibrium” of the cosmos in which we must ever learn to play with fire. The hermeneutics of power between art, poetry, theology, and philosophy brings into relief the transformation that is called for in the formation (*Bildung*) of human beings and which exposes the indivisibility and unpredictability of education and life. The groundbreaking insight of the hermeneutic dialectic of power is rediscovering the capacity to let oneself be led, let oneself learn, and let oneself be overpowered and empowered in the inspired and inspiring sway of being between other humans and the divine.

**Keywords:** Dialectic, Power, Heraclitus, Gadamer, Fire, Paradox, Hermeneutic Reading.

The international project on the dialectic of power was developed while atrocities were and are continuing to happen just across Poland's Eastern borders. Most people in Eastern Europe were brought up with the conviction that war would never happen again. More recently, the statement "Never again war" became a mere truism. September 1939 and February 2022 proved the vulnerability of peace, human freedom, and democracy through war, violence, and military aggression.



Sigmund Lipinsky, *Inter arma silent musae* (Dem Andenken Otto Greiners), 1922 (<https://didoofcarthage.tumblr.com/post/629075421182541824/sigmund-lipinsky-inter-arma-silent-musae-dem>)

Sigmund Lipinsky, born in 1873 in Eastern Prussia to a Polish father and a German mother, painted in 1922 a now famous canvas, *Inter arma silent Musae*, to commemorate his friend, Otto Greiner, a German painter who had to leave Rome when Italy entered the war in 1915 and died a year later in Munich. Influenced by classical authors, Lipinsky developed a strong passion for Greek myth and Homeric epic. Experiencing the tragedy of the First World War, he addressed the perennial subject of the silence of the arts during major catastrophes.

What is this silence of Musae? Artists are often unable to create in a situation of ongoing military and political violence. Lacking inspiration for their visionary creativity, they put away their pens, brushes, and other artistic devices. Sometimes, expressing personal experience in an innovative form seems morally wrong when others are fighting for their lives. However,

the concentration on dramatic experience and prolonged exposure to the inhuman cruelty of the oppressor can occasionally result in monumental works of art whose complexity can be overwhelming.

*Guernica* (1937), painted in grey, black, and white, is a powerful protest against the victimization of the powerless.



Picasso's *Guernica*, 1937, (<https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/artwork/guernica>)

Picasso gives voice to the persecuted and oppressed. Great art always listens to divine inspiration and is sensitive to the dynamics of life in our *Lebenswelt*. By accompanying people throughout history, art touches the entirety of human life, and by letting see things as they show themselves (*ἀποφαίνεσθαι τὰ φαινόμενα*)<sup>1</sup>, offers a cathartic experience. In bringing powerful, existential relief and liberation, art discloses otherwise inaccessible insights and, thus, forms and transforms a human being. This capacity of letting see things as they show themselves from themselves remains the programmatic challenge for phenomenology and hermeneutics and can be truly completed (*vollzogen*) only in art.

On his way to the Crucifixion, approaching the slopes of the Mount of Olives, Jesus met a multitude of his followers, joyfully praising God for all the miracles they had seen. Dissatisfied and enraged Pharisees demanded Jesus to quiet the crowd. His response was truly remarkable: “I tell you that if these keep silent, the very stones will cry out” (Lk 19: 40): Λέγω ὑμῖν ἐὰν οὗτοι σιωπήσουσιν, οἱ λίθοι κράξουσιν. Here, the onomatopoeic verb κράζω powerfully transmits the deep emotion expressed roughly and harshly. Since the reference is made to the stones, we can speak of a hoarse whisper of the

<sup>1</sup> “Phänomenologie sagt dann: ἀποφαίνεσθαι τὰ φαινόμενα: Das was sich zeigt, so wie es sich von ihm selbst zeigt, von ihm selbst her sehen lassen. Das ist der formale Sinn der Forschung, die sich den Namen Phänomenologie gibt.” (Heidegger, 1986a, p. 34).

rocks. Thus, the vocation of the human being is to be sensitive to the voice (*Stimme*) and to be able to listen to the voice of the stones (*die Stimme der Steine*). It is that voice in which language is formed (*zur Sprache kommt*) as it finds its most fitting expression in the happening of a conversation (*das Ereignis des Gesprächs*).

Jesus's response to the Pharisees sheds new light on the vocation of art: To be a powerful testimony to the divine vision of the human being called to radical openness to Revelation. Jesus's coming into the world begins liberation from everything that limits, restricts, oppresses, and degrades his people. To everyone who wanted to listen to him, Jesus opened up a new divine horizon in which they could be comforted, strengthened, encouraged, healed, and fed. In the culmination of his earthly mission, he offered his people himself in his Body and Blood in the Eucharist.

Picasso understood the necessity of crying aloud for the oppressed and victimized. In his painting, the screaming of the victims is transformed into a powerful voice that addresses the conscience of every viewer of his work of art. This painting speaks in such a way that it captivates the observer and makes her an eyewitness to the atrocities that are congenially condensed in this painting.

Victor Hugo, the great French poet and novelist, extensively addressed the shifts from the battlefield to the intellectual horizon where ideas are brought into the Open. In his *Histoire d'un crime* (Hugo, 2009), he writes: *On résiste à l'invasion des armées; on ne résiste pas à l'invasion des idées*: One withstands the invasion of armies; one does not withstand the invasion of ideas. It is a genius intuition not to trust in the power of the army but to be dedicated to the rise of ideas that come at the right time. The right time is the opportune time, *καιρός*, the time of favor (*εὐπρόσδεκτος*) that is happening now: Now is the time of our salvation. In 2 Cor 6: 2, St. Paul declares: Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation, *ἰδοὺ νῦν καιρός εὐπρόσδεκτος, ἰδοὺ νῦν ἡμέρα σωτηρίας*. Now, *νῦν*, is this time of favor and grace (*καιρός εὐπρόσδεκτος*), which is the time of salvation (*ἡμέρα σωτηρίας*).

In its qualitative and life-giving nature, *καιρός* is the privileged time, the opportune moment for action, and, as such, is recognized by human practical wisdom (*φρόνησις*). By moving beyond Aristotle's distinction between *πρᾶξις* and *ποίησις*, Heidegger elaborates on *φρόνησις* as the practice of thinking that is indicative of *Dasein* in its being-in-the-world. In its relationship to Being, *Dasein* responds to the claim of Being by being its shepherd (*Wächter und Hirt des Seins*). Heidegger makes us aware that

φρόνησις as thinking action has its origin (ἀρχή) in a human being<sup>2</sup>. Thus, this thinking action is δύναμις as ἀρχή, as something from which something will be built (wo aus etwas herstellbar wird). Every action, by being oriented toward and directed to beings, points back to its origin. In that sense, the origin is always there in fulfillment (*Vollzug*). What is happening in thinking is precisely this mysterious unfolding into the fullness. It is the leading forth into the completion. What is characteristic of the event of thinking is that it happens beyond our control, even beyond our wanting and doing. Something compelling takes place, and we witness this event. The beginning reaches out to its fulfillment and calls us as witnesses to recognize the indispensability of the openness to this blessed moment of vision, καιρός (*Augenblick*). Thinking is always in movement as a gathering. By always beginning anew (ἀρχή, *Anfang*) and reaching toward fulfillment (ἔσχατον), thinking matures in its polyphonicity. We live in a time of terrible simplification. The enormous progress of science and technology contribute to the ontic description of phenomena, but ironically do not contribute much to the depth and breadth of understanding who we are. Inter arma we show our solidarity with the victims in many ways, also by reading Heraclitus, Aristotle, the Bible, Heidegger, Gadamer, Arendt, and Girard.

### Περί φύσεως: What can we learn from reading the Greeks?

Asking what we can learn from reading the Greeks, we enter a conversation with Tradition, searching for a sound world (*eine heile Welt*). We read them because we believe we can learn something essential about our being in

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<sup>2</sup> “The essence of action is accomplishment. To accomplish means to unfold something into the fullness of its essence, to lead it forth into this fullness—*producere*. Therefore only what already is can really be accomplished. But what ‘is’ above all is being. Thinking accomplishes the relation of being to the essence of the human being. It does not make or cause the relation. Thinking brings this relation to being solely as something handed over to thought itself from being. Such offering consists in the fact that in thinking being comes to language. Language is the house of being. In its home human beings dwell. Those who think and those who create with words are the guardians of this home. Their guardianship accomplishes the manifestation of being insofar as they bring this manifestation to language and preserve it in language through their saying. Thinking does not become action only because some effect issues from it or because it is applied. Thinking acts insofar as it thinks. Such action is presumably the simplest and at the same time the highest because it concerns the relation of being to humans. But all working or effecting lies in being and is directed toward beings. Thinking, in contrast, lets itself be claimed by being so that it can say the truth of being. Thinking accomplishes this letting. Thinking is *l’engagement par l’Être pour l’Être* [engagement by being for being].” (Heidegger, 1998, p. 239).

the world with Others. Without our engagement with Tradition, we will not understand who we are. There is something powerful in our belongingness to Tradition that calls us to see everything we experience (*das Gesagte but also das Ungesagte*) in its *Wirkungsgeschichte* as something that constitutes the way we are in the world as *existentia hermeneutica*<sup>3</sup>. Searching for understanding, we experience the discovery of meaning<sup>4</sup>. Understanding our history requires a sense of its complexity. Therefore, we turn to Heraclitus's *Περὶ φύσεως* to learn from him anew the meaning of complexity and the richness and blessing of understanding paradoxes.

When Aristotle reads the first sentence of Heraclitus, τοῦ δὲ λόγου τοῦδ' ἔόντος ἀεὶ ἀξύνετοι γίνονται ἄνθρωποι, he is unable to hear, as Gadamer evocatively demonstrates by reading Heraclitus aloud in Greek, where this “always,” ἀεὶ, belongs<sup>5</sup>. Does the adverb ἀεὶ refer as a qualifier to the preceding ἔόντος, existing, or the following ἀξύνετοι, lacking understanding? For Gadamer, Aristotle, being already more of a reader and not a true listener anymore, was probably insufficiently focused on the sound of the sentence. In Gadamer's reading aloud, we do not hear ἀεὶ distinctively, since it belongs in equal measure to both parts of the sentence<sup>6</sup>. Such a performance is possible only when a reader/speaker knows what is being said. A reasonable reading of the text presupposes understanding of its meaning, and understanding of the text's meaning presupposes listening to the text and allowing for its meaning to reach our hermeneutic ear. It is a dynamic of a hermeneutic circle: Understanding is necessary for a hermeneutic reading, and a hermeneutic reading is essential for disclosing the meaning of the text<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> *Existentia hermeneutica* is *existentia interpretativa*: “*Existentia hermeneutica* is a mode of being between familiarity and strangeness. Learning to understand one's own mode of being is a lifelong task, which discloses the necessity and opportunity to grow as a human being while transgressing the boundaries created by our personal, social, and political practices and beliefs.” (Wierciński, 2019, p. 17).

<sup>4</sup> “Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.” (Frankl, 1962, p. 86).

<sup>5</sup> This reading is in Aristotle, *Rhetoric* III.5, 1407b11–18.

<sup>6</sup> Gadamer (2002) emphasizes the role of reading aloud for discovering meaning. He elaborates on the relationships between vision, sound, and sense in reading.

<sup>7</sup> “The hermeneutic circle has an ontological status and is paradigmatic for any understanding. It refers to the basic structure of human cognition. The temporality of understanding makes us aware of the limits of our cognition. Understanding is never a subjective act. Interpretation is an inner unfolding of meaning. When we interpret a text, we cannot fix

When a word is addressed to us, when language speaks (*die Sprache spricht*<sup>8</sup>), we must be able to hear it and hearken to it. We must have a hermeneutical ear to hear. However, we must never forget that the hermeneutical ear is not only the result of our work on ourselves, but also includes everything beyond our wanting and doing, making us who we truly are.

Those who speak must be able to say what they understand, and those who listen must be able to hear what is said. This is the primary purpose of education: To lead us to an understanding of our human fate. Heraclitus shows that neither war nor peace, neither hunger nor satiety ever exhausts the complexity of the world that is our *Lebenswelt*. Life is given to us so that we can understand the fragility of our existence, the constant need for development and growth, and, at the same time, so that we are convinced that no human effort will make us either immortal or immutable in our self-understanding and understanding of the world. In an instant, peace can turn into a state of crisis and war. In one moment, human wisdom can also stop war. The main point is to see, with a hermeneutic eye, unveiling the fullness of meaning inaccessible to us and yet giving our life its precious sense. It is in relation to this Fullness that we can discover the meaning of our life that otherwise is unreachable to us in our purely immanent human endeavors. Human life in its entirety, with all of its paradoxes, is incomprehensible and unattainable.

### Reading Heraclitus against Revelation

Already before Heraclitus we were taught that “Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favor of the Lord” (Proverbs 8: 34). Speaking of wisdom, the author of the collection of collections, the *Book of Proverbs*, equates finding wisdom with finding life and divine favor. Reading Heraclitus against the religious Revelation cannot be interpreted as the revelatory illumination of his enigmatic notions and viewpoints. Gadamer was always very clear that Philosophy has to remain within its own genuine limitations and open to the horizon of Transcendence as the

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its meaning. Particular meanings reveal a new sense to the whole. In turn, this new disclosure changes our self-understanding.” (Wierciński, 2019, p. 319).

<sup>8</sup> “Gerade das eigentümliche der Sprache, daß sie sich bloß um sich selbst bekümmert, weiß keiner. Darum ist sie ein so wunderbares und fruchtbares Geheimnis, daß wenn einer bloß spricht, um zu sprechen, er gerade die herrlichsten, originellsten Wahrheiten ausspricht. Will er aber von etwas Bestimmtem sprechen, so läßt ihn die launige Sprache das lächerlichste und verkehrteste Zeug sagen.” (Novalis, 1978, p. 672).

necessary condition of human thinking. However, only divine Revelation can satisfactorily answer the unanswerable antinomies, provided a human being is a religious believer. Following Kant, Gadamer is convinced that only religion can ensure that morality has an unambiguous binding character for people in this world. Without God, a moral attitude and imperative would be impossible.

Thinking in mere oppositions does not embrace the whole of reality at all. If we try to face life, we have to open ourselves up to the unpredictability of what comes toward us from the future and recognize it in its unrepeatability and uniqueness. The answer to the call of the moment requires our undivided attention and radical responsibility. Understanding the fragility of the given is necessary if we want to learn to deal with life's unstable equilibrium. Heraclitus teaches us to be sensitive to the fleeting moment of grace, constantly sharpen our senses to what is there, and see it in its often rapidly and unexpectedly changing appearances. Gadamer's careful reading of Heraclitus helps to see how, paradoxically, the opposites factually belong together and build the fabric of the individual human life and, far beyond it, the fabric of the world's history<sup>9</sup>. Life and death, war and peace, awakening and falling asleep are mysteriously interwoven, and to understand one phenomenon, we need to keep in mind its apparent opposite. When we move forward toward understanding that everything is one, ἐν πάντα εἶνα, we need to navigate between the farthest and closest experiences. Then, nothing is so constant as change. To grasp it means to embrace the fluidity of human life with all its dangers and promises, miseries and splendors, ups and downs.

Understanding change in its constantly distinct transformation calls for a hermeneutic approach far from any simplifying determined logic. In order to grasp the meaning of human unsettledness and the unpredictability of life, we are challenged to face the new and unexpected with flexibility and adaptability in a permanently varying, dynamic, and uncertain environment. Therefore, Heraclitus can aptly call the change a pathway up and down: "τὴν μεταβολὴν ὁδὸν ἄνω κάτω."<sup>10</sup> Here, etymology is again very illuminating: Μετα, concerning a change of, and βάλλω, I throw. Change has thus something to do with throwing and catching the pathway up and

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<sup>9</sup> On the importance of not disambiguating the ambiguity but using paradox for developing profundity rather than dispelling it see Reames, 2013.

<sup>10</sup> See Diogenes Laërtius, *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, Book IX, section 8. As mentioned below, Diogenes was known as the "laughing" philosopher, while Heraclitus was known as the "obscure" (σκοτεινός) and the "weeping" (κλαυθμός).



down. It is predominantly about the capacity of receiving, of being attentive on the way, and attuned to the *Lifeworld*<sup>11</sup>.

### **The *verbum entis*: Poetry as bringing human openness into the Open**

Gadamer (2000) prefaces his *Truth and Method* with Rilke's poem<sup>12</sup>:

Catch only what you've thrown yourself, all is  
mere skill and little gain;  
but when you're suddenly the catcher of a ball  
thrown by an eternal partner  
with accurate and measured swing  
towards you, to your center, in an arch  
from the great bridgebuilding of God:  
why catching then becomes a power—  
not yours, a world's.

The poetic word masterfully captures the human openness into the Open. Every uttered word surpasses the horizon of what is present-at-hand and what has been said. There is always more to be said, and all the unsaid and said are the task for interpretation. Augustine's *De Trinitate* reminds us that the *actus signatus* is never wholly covered by the *actus exercitus*.<sup>13</sup> In our attempt to externalize what needs to be said, we painfully experience the incompleteness of our endeavor. Our word is a human word, a word in the horizon of finitude, yet always pointing beyond itself toward the *verbum entis*<sup>14</sup>. Interpreting catching a ball, Weinsheimer discloses a further creative

<sup>11</sup> On the attunement of hearing, see Heuson (2012) and Gregoric (2007).

<sup>12</sup> Weber (2023) profoundly elaborates on the beginning (Anfang) by addressing Rilke, Gadamer, and Heidegger and letting them speak prophetically by bringing the beginning and the end together.

<sup>13</sup> See Augustine (1844-1865), especially book XV. "*Actus signatus*, what a statement says, and *actus exercitus*, the enactment (*Vollzug*) of what has been understood, constitute the dynamics of understanding. In *actus exercitus*, the expression of the inner meaning is fully realized; *actus exercitus* goes beyond what is expressed in words and also embraces the application of what has been said and understood. Meaning is not only communicated in what is said, but also in how it is expressed." (Wierciński, 2019, p. 179).

<sup>14</sup> "The fundamental linguality of understanding and the actualization (*Vollzug*) of the historically conditioned consciousness (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*) in language require a continuous search for the primordial words in which Being is expressed; it is a search for the *verbum entis*. Language is the reflection of finiteness; it is a mirror of temporality,

horizon by referring to the dynamic of the drift. It is a beautiful enlargement of a vision,

as if drift were different from the ball, something beyond what is made explicit, though projected by it. Drift is the trajectory an intention that goes on, beyond where the ball falls, in a still great more perfect arc, like something thrown by a divine rather than merely human being. Historical intention, or what is colloquially called drift, is not in the usual sense what the author had in mind, a not therefore subjective. It is a kind of intention that remains untematized by the speaker and unrealized in the utterance. Drift is not what one says but what one really means to say. It is the object of charitable interpretation<sup>15</sup>.

Hermeneutic reading requires sensitivity toward conflicting interpretations that situate the interpreter between suspicion and sympathy in a permanently unstable equilibrium (Wierciński, 2003, pp. xv-xxxiv). Reminding ourselves that what we read today is a collection from different recovered collections, we have access only to certain horizons that slowly unfold the obscurity of the text. We can learn to wonder at the contradiction and groundlessness of the human experience. The opposites are one not only because of their internal tension but also because they are evidently present in one and the same object. The way up and the way down are the same, ὁδὸς ἄνω

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because every language creates itself and develops more in itself, the more it reveals Being. Language is finite (*endlich*), not because it supposedly does not include all other languages at once, but simply because it is a language. Language realizes the self-revelation of Being. We speak because we have to speak. Being speaks to us. After each conversation, we remain convinced that there is still much to say. The comprehensive realization of understanding always includes that which is left unsaid and is not fully expressed. To be understood, one must take into account not only that which is expressed but also the infiniteness of that which has not been expressed. All this must somehow be rendered in one. Expressing that which has not yet been said, and that which can still be expressed, testifies to our constant search for language; and not so much within the dimension of the externalization of the inner experience, but in the dimension of the most primordial expression of Being.” (Wierciński, 2019, p. 145).

<sup>15</sup> Discussing Gadamer’s use of Rilke’s poem, Joel Weinsheimer (2000, p. 409) makes a great reference to the drift, For Weinsheimer, charity is a hermeneutic *a priori*, hence, he calls for a charitable reading: “Charitable interpretation is not equally valuable with other kinds of interpretation in the manner of eclecticism; it is not morally superior to other kinds of interpretation in the manner of ethicism. For charity militant, it is the only kind of genuine interpretation—and hence not even a dialectical rapprochement among alternatives is possible.”

κάτω μία και ὡστή (Fragment 60)<sup>16</sup> — the perspective of the traveler makes the difference. The beginning and the end of the circle are the same: ξυνὸν γὰρ ἀρχὴ καὶ πέρας ἐπὶ κύκλου περιφερείας (Fragment 103). The tension in the world, the unifying difference, and the diverse unity make the fabric of the universe. The power of the paradox helps us to grasp the meaning of the conflict, contrast, and the permanent tension in the opposites. Here, παράδοξος denotes what is truly beyond (παρά) what is known and expected (δόξα). It motivates us to see what shows itself without trying to overcome the difference and tension. Heraclitus is very vocal about the nature of conflict and war: Πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστι (Fragment 53). In stating that the war is the father of everything, he emphasizes that πόλεμος is not λόγος, but its essential condition.

The fragile equilibrium between war and peace calls for a permanent dialogue that has to be honest, respectable, and truthful. Truth, Forgiving, and Reconciliation each call for the infinite task of interpretation. And after we have done all we could do, we can humbly say: “We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do” (Lk 17: 10): οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς, ὅταν ποιήσητε πάντα τὰ διαταχθέντα ὑμῖν, λέγετε ὅτι Δοῦλοι ἀχρεῖοὶ ἐσμεν, ὃ ὠφείλομεν ποιῆσαι πεποιήκαμεν. The meaning of the unworthy servants, Δοῦλοι ἀχρεῖοί, comes from ἀχρεῖος, denoting unprofitable, useless, and unworthy. In other words, we are unneeded, lacking usefulness. Truly great things do not depend on our human endeavors. Necessity, χρεία, brings with the attitude of fulfilling it two notions, being useless, ἄχρηστος, and useful, εὐχρηστος. However, the reading of the Gospel seems to indicate that it is not fulfilling our duties that makes us profitable. There is the logic of life that discloses its real potentiality of being needed and helpful when we move beyond the realm of obligations and responsibility. This might be the unfolding meaning of a blissful life, *vita beata*.

Differing in the unity of war and peace is not a simple reconciliation of opposites but a coexisting of opposites, without giving birth to synthesis, but giving meaning to life in its fullness and encouraging the search for meaning that discloses itself from the course of events, like the prophets’ preaching within and against Tradition. Psalm 85 (86) reminds us that righteousness and peace will kiss each other: וְקָדְשׁוֹ יִשָּׁקְוּ: וְשָׁלוֹם יִשָּׁקְוּ. This figurative meaning of kissing draws our attention to the reciprocity of righteousness and peace. The Greek translation uses the verb καταφιλέω, thus emphasizing the passion of

<sup>16</sup> Heraclitus’s fragments are drawn from the Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz edition (1960).

kissing, the tender kissing again and again. This kiss is very powerful in its metaphoric sense of fastening up. As a significant expression of a mode of attachment, it reminds us of the power of touch, the prevailing medium of understanding. The simultaneity of touching and being touched in Psalm 85 with regard to kissing each other effectively proclaims the reciprocity of justice and peace (εἰρήνη, harmony, a state of natural tranquillity) in their primordial belonging together. It is precisely in this belonging together that we recognize the power of touch in its transforming capacity of opening us to the Other. In and through this carnal experience of giving and receiving, we acknowledge our readiness to face the radical fragility and vulnerability of a human being. The indubitability of our own existence and the otherness of the Other acquires in touch its indisputable confirmation: “In touch, we are both touching and touched at the same time, but we do not for all that collapse into sameness. Difference is preserved”<sup>17</sup>.

Heraclitus’s world order is in a constant equilibrium. However, he is very conscious of the fragility of the equilibrium of the opposites in the Logos. The physical world order has no beginning and no end. Qualitative changes in the world are all regulated by a measure that can be found in the logic of the Logos. The eternally living fire is not able to add more life and movement to the world. Like a restless flame, it obeys the law of measurement insofar as it is involved in cosmic processes. The fire is eternal because it is divine. The world owes its immortality to its divine origin.

### **Phronetic Fire: πῦρ φρόνιμον**

To understand the relationship of the ἔν to the πάντα, we have to grasp the σοφόν character of the ἔν as the gathering unity of the λόγος and σοφόν. It is crucial for the comprehending of the πῦρ φρόνιμον, which, in turn, is indispensable for recognizing the relationship between the gods and human beings, which represents the reference of the ἔν τὸ σοφόν to the πάντα (Heidegger, 1986b, pp. 181-182; 2002).

Heraclitus’s cryptic teaching can be easily interpreted as yet another version of pre-Socratic cosmology. However, a close reading of fragments

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<sup>17</sup> Kearney (2015, p. 20) continues: “And this breakthrough insight means that flesh always harbors a certain distance or interval through which touch navigates. Touch is not fusion but mediation through flesh... While I may seem to be immediately present to what I touch and to be immediately touched by what I touch-unlike sight, where I am not necessarily seen by what I see, or hearing, where I am not necessarily heard by what I hear, etc.-there is always something mediate in the immediate, something ‘far’ in the ‘near.’”

B30<sup>18</sup> and B31<sup>19</sup> might speak to his uncompromising interest in indicating the dialectical tension of the opposites. The transformations (πυρὸς τροπαί) of everliving fire (πῦρ αἰείζων) are at the core of his teaching and can be noticed in their perplexing disclosure by the wise human being. Then, only the σοφόν is on the way toward that which is true. It is wise to agree with and say: One is All: ὁμολογεῖν σοφόν ἐστὶν Ἐν Πάντα (Fragment 50).

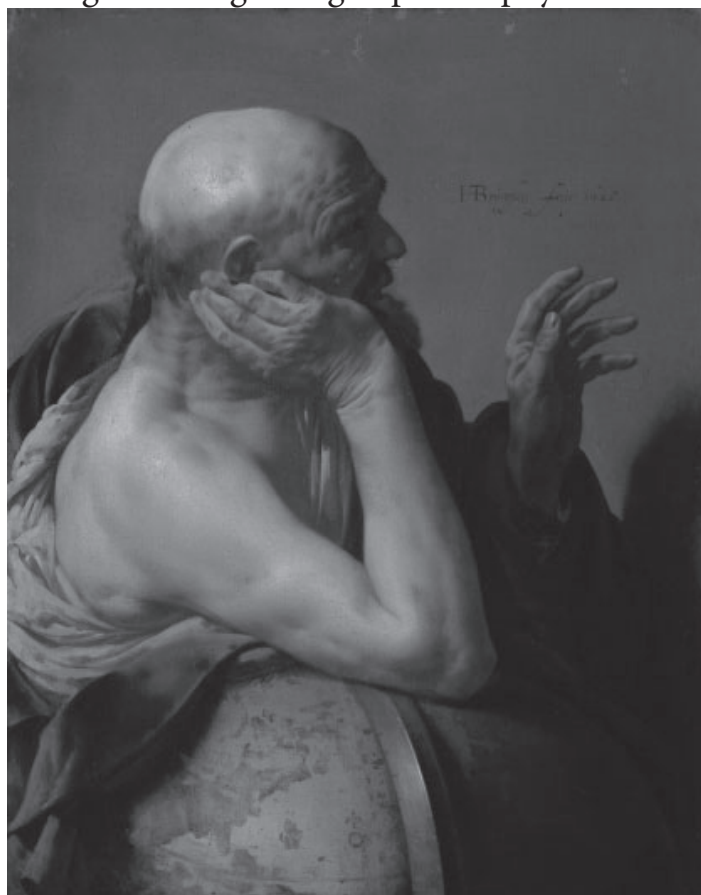
An interesting perspective on further understanding the πῦρ φρόνιμον is offered by the biblical theology of the New Testament. The King James Bible translates Lk 12: 49 as “I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I if it be already kindled”: Πῦρ ἤλθον βαλεῖν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν, καὶ τί θέλω εἰ ἤδη ἀνήφθη. The verb, βάλλω, to throw, captures the idea of the hermeneutic play, throwing and catching. Here, it is in the sense of bringing into motion with attention and for a clear purpose, indicated by the verb θέλω (I wish). Jesus does not ignite fire. By using the aorist passive indicative from the verb ἀνάπτω, he expresses his desire to see the ignition of the fire happening. The fire needs to set itself on fire. Jesus is the beginning (Anfang) of that fire that needs to be caught by us. The dancing flames of fire express the permanent change, the formation of the other flame, and the transformation of fire. There is no extinguishing and no igniting. It burns. One flame passes over to become another flame. It will be no more fire, and it will be no less either. Like in dance, the step of the one partner is the invitation to the step of the other. It is the ever-lasting, never-resting movement, always in motion. The transformation, μεταβολή, is the play happening as the motion of throwing (βάλλω) and catching without a break in the self-evident logic of burning.

Jesus’s consuming fire (πῦρ καταναλίσκον) is also the purifying fire. This wise fire has the power to discern what is to be destroyed and what is to be saved (Heb 12: 29). Jesus is aware that people need the saving power of fire. This living fire πῦρ αἰείζων is full of discernment (πῦρ φρόνιμον) (Van Unnik, 1970). Jesus’s salvific mission was brought about by the lack of

<sup>18</sup> B30: κόσμον τόνδε, τὸν αὐτὸν ἀπάντων, οὔτε τις θεῶν οὔτε ἀνθρώπων ἐποίησεν, ἀλλ’ ἦν αἰεὶ καὶ ἔστιν καὶ ἔσται πῦρ αἰείζων, ἀπτόμενον μέτρα καὶ ἀποσβεννύμενον μέτρα: This world, which is the same in all, is made neither by gods nor by men, but it was ever, is now, and ever shall be an everliving fire, fixed measures of it kindling and fixed measures going out.

<sup>19</sup> B31: πυρὸς τροπαί· πρῶτον θάλασσα, θαλάσσης δέ· τὸ μὲν ἡμισυ γῆ, τὸ δὲ ἡμισυ πρηστήρ... <γῆ> θάλασσα διαχέεται, καὶ μετρέεται εἰς τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον, ὁκοῖος πρόσθεν ἦν ἢ γενέσθαι γῆ: The transformations of fire are, first of all, sea; and half of the sea is earth, half whirlwind... It becomes liquid sea, and is measured by the same tale as before it became earth.

understanding in people, who lost their capacity to differentiate between good and evil and are not able to recognize him as their Savior. He cries over Jerusalem (Lk 19: 44). We are already familiar with Heraclitus's tears, who cried over the thoughtlessness and foolishness of his compatriots. Heraclitus was famous for being the obscure (σκοτεινός) and weeping (κλαυθμός) philosopher in contrast to Democritus, who was known as the laughing philosopher, γελώντας φιλόσοφος. Heraclitus was truly wondrous, θαυμάσιος: His dwelling is the beginning of philosophy.



Heraclitus by Hendrick ter Brugghen (<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/SK-A-2784>)

Heraclitus, a mature man, is leaning on a globe with his right arm. He might be philosophizing, albeit his left hand seems to be frozen, like in a freeze frame. Hendrick ter Brugghen congenially depicted the cryptic philosopher by calling attention to the philosopher's imperative of thinking: The apparent obscurity in the philosophy of Heraclitus lies essentially in its speculative power (Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*). We needed to wait for the poetic philosopher Heidegger to capture the luminosity of Heraclitus. It was Heidegger (1986c, pp. 102-103) who called Heraclitus luminous (*der Lichte*):

The quotations and the sources, taken together, still do not yield what is essential: the definitive, all-articulating unity of the inner structure of Heraclitus' writing. Only a constantly advancing insight into this structure will reveal the point from which the individual fragments are speaking, and in what sense each of them, as a saying, must be heard. Because we can scarcely surmise what the well-spring is that gives the writing of Heraclitus its unity, and because we find this source so difficult to think, we are justified in calling this thinker "the Obscure." Even the inherent meaning of what this epithet says to us remains obscure.

Heraclitus is called "the Obscure." But he is the Lucid. For he tells of the lighting whose shining he attempts to call forth into the language of thinking. Insofar as it illuminates, the lighting endures. We call its illumination the lighting [*die Lichtung*]. What belongs to it, and how and where it takes place, still remain to be considered. The word "light" means lustrous, beaming, brightening. Lighting bestows the shining, opens what shines to an appearance. The open is the realm of unconcealment and is governed by disclosure. What belongs to the latter, and whether and to what extent disclosing and lighting are the Same, remain to be asked<sup>20</sup>.

Hendrick ter Brugghen was a Dutch painter of genre scenes and religious subjects. He was a leading member of the Dutch followers of Caravaggio, the so-called Utrecht Caravaggisti. His bold tenebroso technique is very fitting to portray Heraclitus, the philosopher of the philosophers, in his teaching of the proximity of the opposites that are expressing the same

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<sup>20</sup> "Die Zitate samt den Fundstellen überliefern uns das Wesentliche gerade nicht: die alles gliedernde und maßgebende Einheit des inneren Baues der Schrift Heraklits. Nur aus einem ständig wachsenden Einblick in dieses Baugefüge ließe sich dartun, von woher die einzelnen Bruchstücke sprechen, in welchem Sinne jedes als ein Spruch gehört werden darf. Weil jedoch die quellende Mitte, aus der Heraklits Schrift ihre Einheit empfing, kaum zu vermuten und immer schwer zu denken ist, kann dieser Denker erst recht für uns »der Dunkle« heißen. Der eigentliche Sinn, in dem der Beinamen zu uns spricht, bleibt selbst dunkel. Heraklit heißt »der Dunkle«. Aber er ist der Lichte. Denn er sagt das Lichtende, indem er versucht, dessen Scheinen in die Sprache des Denkens hervorzurufen. Das Lichtende währt, insofern es lichtet. Wir nennen sein Lichten die Lichtung. Was zu ihr gehört, wie sie geschieht und wo, bleibt zu bedenken. Das Wort »licht« bedeutet: leuchtend, strahlend, hellend. Das Lichten gewährt das Scheinen, gibt Scheinendes in ein Erscheinen frei". Das Freie ist der Bereich der Unverborgenheit. Ihn verwaltet das Entbergen. Was zu diesem notwendig gehört, ob und inwiefern die Entbergung und die Lichtung das Selbe sind, bleibt zu erfragen." (Heidegger, 2000, pp. 265-266).

one reality. The mastery of the painter allows for presenting the power of concentration in such a way that the world stands still. But the world does not stop. Nothing stops. Everything is in motion. It is rather the wish to hold the fleeting moment and pray, “please remain” (*verweile doch*). Heraclitus’s language of density in its almost oracular character is again perfectly captured by the painter in depicting the intensity of language as conversation. Heraclitus’s hand held in suspension seems to be able to embrace the whole world, only because the world is condensed in this blessed instance of the utmost concentration of attention.

This portrait stunningly shows the melancholic nature of the mourning philosopher. Heraclitus understands that human life is a path toward understanding. On the one hand, it is illuminated by the clash with reality, but on the other hand, this understanding is still unattainable. Hence, understanding can never be supported by seeing from one side. For the gloomy, enigmatic, and paradoxical philosopher, understanding is the great future that is coming into being. The kairological dimension of human life calls us to perfect our grasping of being in the world with Others. It is the art of sharpening the senses to perceive the complexity of the world that is our *Lebenswelt*. It calls on us to strive not for world domination (*berechnendes Denken*), but to live human solidarity with our *Lebenswelt*. This is the real ecology of the future: The practice of integral care for the entire *Lebenswelt*, solidarity between people, those who suffer as well as those who do not understand.

### **Facing our Lebenswelt in the proximity of the opposites**

The vocation of a human being is to develop oneself. However, *Bildung* as formation means that it is also something that happens in us and to us. This formation is definitely not a matter of accumulating information (Fragment 17)<sup>21</sup>. As culture, *Bildung* is *expressis verbis*, a cultivation of a human being<sup>22</sup>. Practicing thinking is a matter of *Bildung*. In that sense, *Bildung* is bringing something to fullness. Hence, Heidegger can speak emphatically of the accomplishment as *Vollendung*, *producere*, leading or bringing forth. Here accomplishment can be called production: “To produce (herstellen) means to make presently available (not just to make)” (Heidegger, 1981,

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<sup>21</sup> Fragment 17, οὐ γὰρ φρονέουσι τοιαῦτα (οἱ) πολλοί, ὀκόσοι ἐγκυρεῦσιν, οὐδὲ μαθόντες γινώσκουσιν, ἑωυτοῖσι δὲ δοκέουσι: Many people have not as many thoughts as the things they engage (learn, meet with); nor, if they do learn (perceive) them, do they understand them, though they believe they do. Here, Heraclitus clearly differentiates between learning and understanding. He is also vocal about the power of self-deception.

<sup>22</sup> *Cultura* from *cultus*, perfect passive participle of *colo*, to till, cultivate.



p. 179; 1995, p. 154). Herstellen draws our attention to the double meaning of the word: The finished product (*das Verfertigtsein*) and being available now, being at disposal (*nunmehr zur Verfügung sein*), are present in the process of production (Kuhlken, 2014).

Similarly, thinking of Bildung, we can see the relationship between *educare* and *educere*. Bildung is not simply a matter of making something any more or less organized and controlled operation. As nurturing and uplifting, *educare* promotes the growth of an individual. It offers an opportunity to build upon one's inherent potential. *Educere* emphasizes the aspect of leading, drawing, or taking out, forth, or away. Thus, it is more oriented toward the development of a person in order to meet the requirements of others, family, society, and the world. Here, again, the actual conflict of interpretation is not a matter to be overcome. On the contrary, what is necessary is the productive tension between the trust in the potentialities of an individual and the sympathetic gestures pointing toward a new horizon. To practice life in tension is not a question of skillful maneuvering between the opposed poles, but an art of listening to oneself and the Other. It is a conscientious exercise in sharpening the senses while recognizing the infinite task of interpretation in our life as *existentia hermeneutica* in its being in the world with Others. Bildung is thus more a patient witnessing to the growth of the individual and letting that which wants to show itself, show itself rather than the busyness (*Geschäftigkeit*) of formal attempts to model the person according to established rules. Bildung is the openness into the Open, the support for the happening of the revelation of the identity of an individual as a person in her *Lebensworld* (*sich Zeigenlassen*).

## Conclusion

What is fascinating in our experience of the conflicts of interpretations is the not-always-easily recognizable power of disagreement. What is essential is to not prematurely eliminate all possible differences, but to discover the richness of arguments and disputes. Accepting the differences in understanding is not a matter of pragmatics and conformity. It is rather a welcoming gesture toward the variety of possible meanings, even if they seem incompatible with our initial interpretations. We can celebrate this variety and be genuinely grateful for disclosing to us what is worthy of being addressed (*denkwürdig*) and questioned (*fragwürdig*). Heraclitus helps us to grasp the meaning of language in its paradoxical, metaphorical, and plurivocal expression. Our understanding is always provisional and limited because it is our human understanding, i.e., temporal, historical, and finite.

As mortals, we lack the divine perspective. Only by engaging in other ways of thinking do we have a real opportunity to discover the limits and limitations of our own thinking. Therefore, we are invited to search within ourselves since the divine Logos is manifested in us.

The courage to ask difficult questions discloses the infinite richness of understanding. Heraclitus was a true master of meditating on the perplexities of being in the world. The profundity of his thinking inspired the whole of Antiquity with Plato and Aristotle, and in German Philosophy, especially in Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, found its profound rereading.

Facing the reality of our *Lebenswelt* in an accelerated and often conflict-driven environment, we realize that we desperately need the wise fire, πῦρ φρόνημον, that will keep restoring ourselves, our relationships, and every life on earth. This everlasting fire in its correcting and life-giving potentiality is the true hope for a world plagued with wars, hostilities, natural and man-made disasters, insatiable hunger, social injustice, violence, and oppression. Yearning for healing visions, we want to imagine the realistically impossible made possible. We trust in the unpredictability of education, which has the potential to form and transform us by inspiring us to listen to the Other and strengthen our human solidarity, which is rooted in the firm conviction that we all are the children of the living God.

Human achievements are great and often unsurpassed, as is the case with the achievements of the human spirit. But they also bring hatred, envy, often (dis)interested envy, persistent conflicts, and wars. From the beginning (*Anfang*) to the final fulfillment (ἔσχατον), we go through the world, trying to connect the end with the beginning and discover the meaning of the history of the world and human beings. We continue to learn self-understanding by participating in conversation to find our way in and through the world here and now (*hic et nunc*). Without depreciating the role of erroneous searches and decisions, every determined, i.e., serious, search for the Truth by a human being is much more important than obsessive tracking, controlling, and punishing possible mistakes. Regular self-purification takes place through the Revelation, i.e., a humble lesson in opening up to God, thanks to which the seed of God can sprout in us. In the parable of the sower (Mt 13:1-23), the most challenging is understanding whether the earth is fertile or not. Our task is to work on the fertility of the soil. Yes, when the seed is sown, there is growth. We do not know what it will be like, because we do not determine the germination, growth, maturation, or harvest time. The Holy Spirit always works; therefore, the kingdom of God always and everywhere grows through

our efforts and independently of them, just like any understanding beyond our wanting and doing.

Understanding the dialectic of power means letting ourselves be inspired by the divine everlasting fire. Hermeneutics helps us to grasp that this letting happen (*Geschehenlassen*) is much more difficult than busyness (*Geschäftigkeit*) and excessive activism. It is not a call to unacceptable passivity or indifference, but an awakening to a permanent flame representing the inextinguishable spark of life in each of us. The groundbreaking insight of the dialectic of power is that building a peaceful future is to let it be built (*Bauenlassen*), i.e., to critically recognize that we are the led rather than the leading. Our capacity of being peacemakers, εἰρηνοποιός (Mt 5: 9), reminds us that we witness the bringing forth of peace, which is the literal meaning of ποίησις. What is especially illuminating is not the bringing forth into existence like in the case of a craftsperson, but rather in the sense of bringing forth in itself, thus bringing out of concealment into unconcealment. The bringing forth of peace as ποίησις happens in the horizon of revealing, ἀλήθεια. This letting happen of peace (*Geschehenlassen*) as *Gelassenheit* is one of the most demanding and challenging tasks of *existentia hermeneutica*.

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