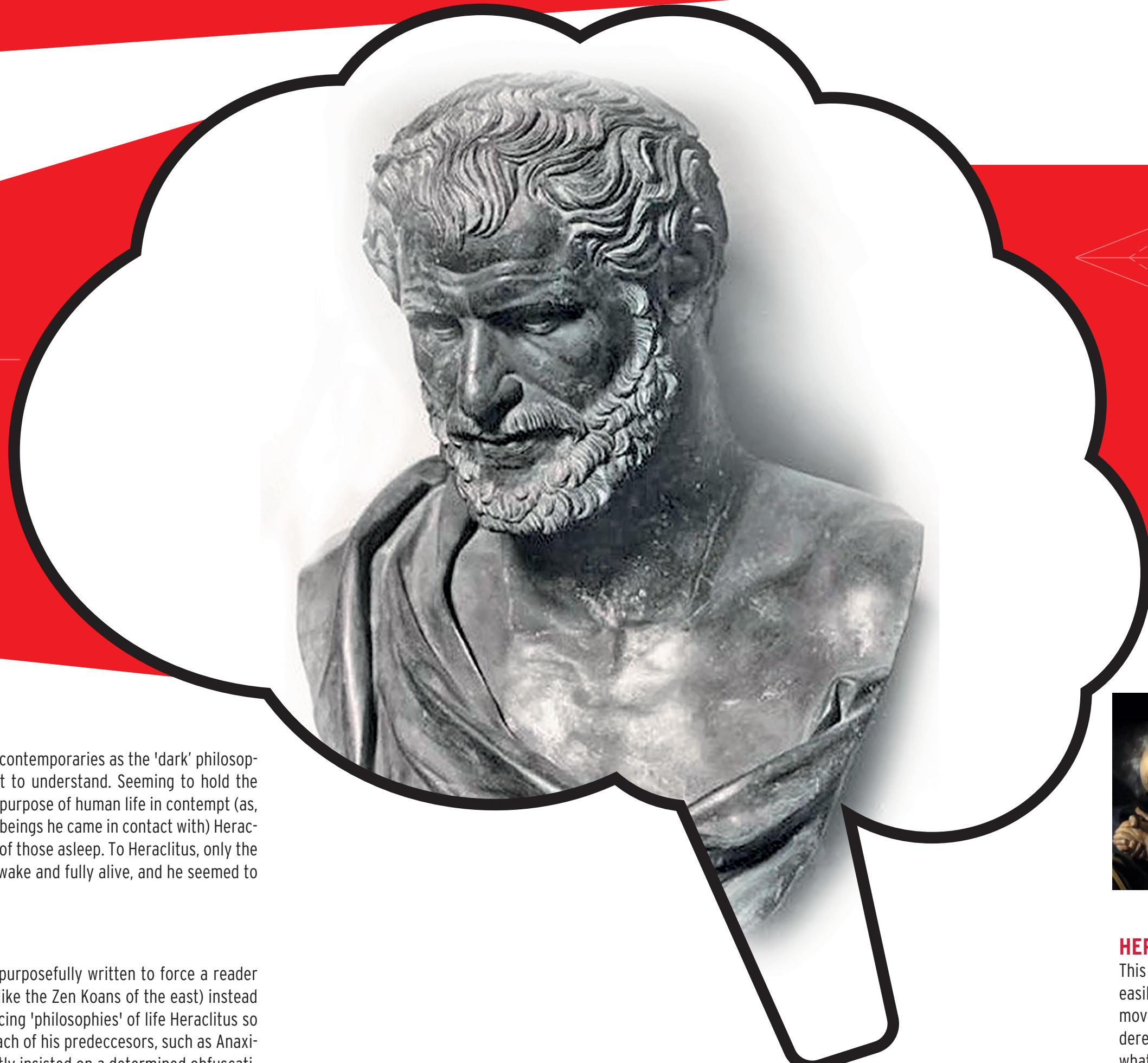




ANATOLIA "THE LAND WHERE SCIENCE WAS BORN AND FLOURISHED"



Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 BCE) was known to his contemporaries as the 'dark' philosopher, so-called because his writings were so difficult to understand. Seeming to hold the common understanding of the nature of life and the purpose of human life in contempt (as, in fact, he seemed to hold most, if not all, the human beings he came in contact with) Heraclitus compared most people's understanding to that of those asleep. To Heraclitus, only the philosopher, the one who pursued Truth, was fully awake and fully alive, and he seemed to consider himself the only philosopher of his time.

PROVOCATION & OBSCURITY

His writings, which so confounded the many, seem purposefully written to force a reader toward independent thought and realization (much like the Zen Koans of the east) instead of providing them with more of the same sleep-inducing 'philosophies' of life Heraclitus so despised. Scorning the fairly straight forward approach of his predecessors, such as Anaximander, Anaximenes, and Xenophanes, he consistently insisted on a determined obfuscation of his meaning. While this is generally understood as an attempt to enlighten his readers it could as easily be interpreted as simply a reflection of his individual character as it is reported by ancient writers that he brought about his own death by speaking to the doctors in this same willfully confusing manner.

LIFE IS FLUX

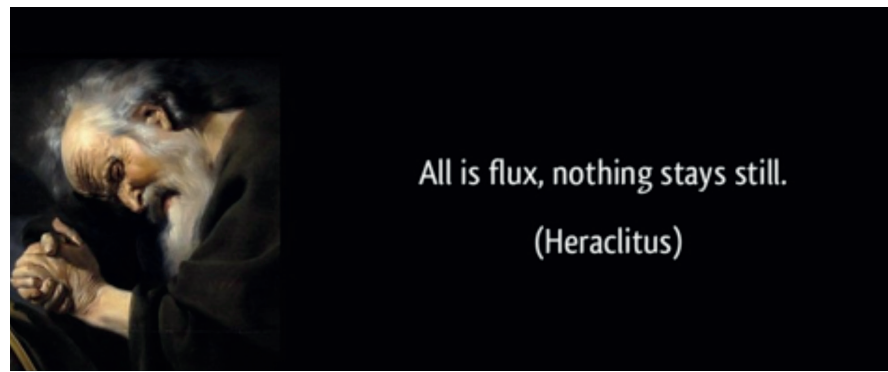
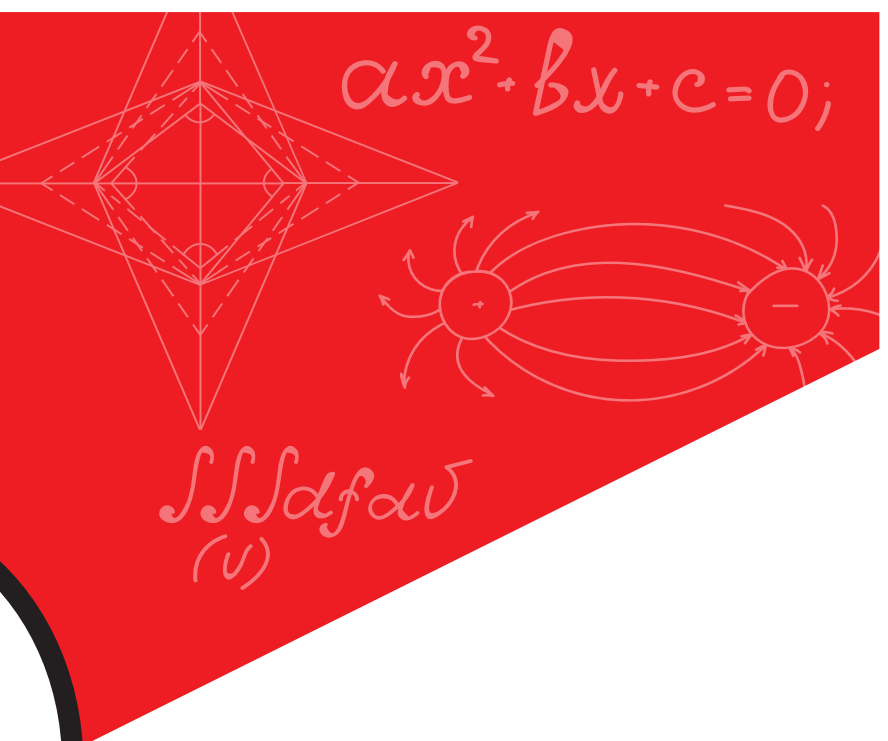
Following in the traditions of the earlier Pre-Socratic philosophers, Heraclitus expounded a physical theory of matter and the physical world much along the lines of Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes, but took the ideas further in his famous assertion that "Life is Flux" (Panta Rhei in Greek, meaning everything or all things change). If one understands that change is the only constant in life then one will more easily recognize what Heraclitus is saying in his 'obscure' writings when he claims such things as, "The way up and the way down are one and the same. Living and dead, waking and sleeping, young and old, are the same." These things are the 'same' in that they are all subject to change, arise from one change to vanish into another and all things, constantly, are in flux and are, in that regard, the same.

HERACLITUS MADE THE ASSERTION THAT "LIFE IS FLUX" (PANTA RHEI IN GREEK, MEANING EVERYTHING OR ALL THINGS CHANGE).

Heraclitus was famous among his contemporaries for his undisguised contempt for all of them and, equally, those who preceded them. Among the over 100 fragments we have of his work is this one which claims, "A knowledge of many things does not teach one to have intelligence; otherwise it would have taught Hesiod and Pythagoras or, again, Xenophanes and Hecataeus" (DK 22B40). Commenting on this, Professor J.M. Robinson writes, "To know many things - to know the causes of thunder and lightning and earthquakes - is good; but it is better to understand the one thing which underlies all of these - the thought that steers all things through all things. This is wisdom" (Robinson, 88). The underlying form of life, the 'wisdom' Heraclitus understood, is that the human condition is chiefly characterized by strife, by the coming together and pulling away of opposing forces. While people lament this strife, equating it with suffering, Heraclitus observed that this same process informed the natural world as well writing, "All things come into being through opposition and all are in flux like a river" (DK 22A1). There is no reason, then, to fear or try to avoid strife because conflict is the essential underlying force in life.

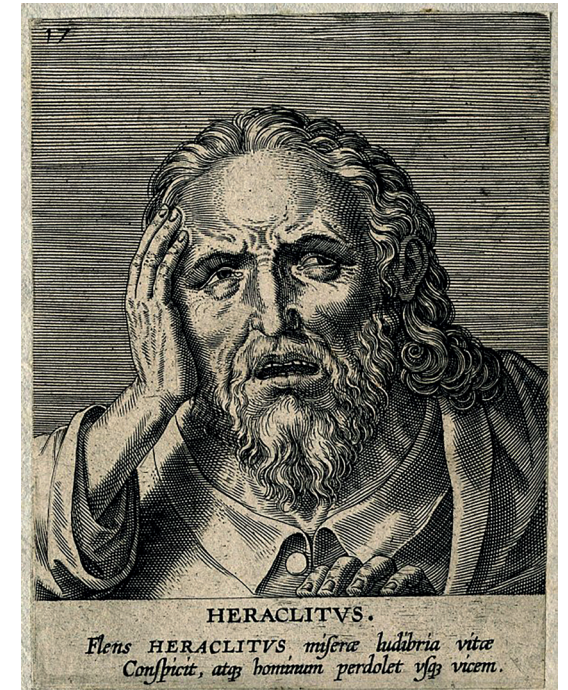
HERACLITUS

Born & Died: C 535 - C 475 BC
Main Interest: Metaphysics ,Epics,Cosmology
School: Ionian
Notable Ideas: Logos, Idios Cosmos



HERACLITUS' WORLD ORDER - LOGOS

This contending of forces, which Heraclitus characterized as fire, is easily observable in nature and yet human beings resist the natural movement of life and try to cling to what is known and what is considered safe. Heraclitus claimed that this 'clinging' is unnatural and is what causes people to suffer. He writes, "This world order, the same for all, no god made or any man, but it always was and is and will be an ever-living fire, kindling by measure and going out by measure" (DK22B30). The world order is continual change and resistance to this change is a kind of death in that the individual is refusing to participate in that which defines life. Though it seems he would never admit to it, Heraclitus appears to have developed the concepts of Xenophanes concerning a single, eternal 'God' who is behind all things and who set all in motion; he called this force the Logos.



In Greek, Logos means 'the word' but also means 'to speak' and can also refer to 'conveying thought' and the Logos of Heraclitus may most neatly fit the latter meaning. The Logos constantly 'conveys thought' to human beings but the message is missed because of the consistent refusal of people to recognize the natural order in their own lives. Heraclitus writes.

His contemporaries as the 'dark' philosopher, so-called because his writings were so difficult to understand

Heraclitus is the most well-known and the most adored philosopher in the history of philosophy

He was one of the rarest thinker who tried to identify his actions and ideas

Diogenes states that Heraclitus' work was "a continuous treatise **On Nature**, but was divided into three discourses, one on the universe, another on politics, and a third on theology