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Georgina Quafe

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HPPH7010

Student ID number:

2211639

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late
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Georgina Quake 2211639

KRR, ass 2

How (if at all) is knowledge possible in the light of the Heraclitean doctrine of flux?

For Heraclitus, the entire world is in flux and nothing is at rest.¹ There are "no solid bodies" at all. Fire is the foundation of our world, but "none of the fragments implies that fire persists through the changes".² Heraclitus was attracted to fire as first principle precisely because of this state of constant becoming. It also acted as a helpful symbolic representation of how the eternally-shifting world functions, united by this restless process. Heraclitus tells us that "it is wise to admit that all things are one".³ Where no individual thing is self-reliant or lasting, the sense of things is provided by ascription to this larger unity of things tied in their restless nature. Change presupposes all natural objects. But it is not the case that Heraclitean flux, or indeed any theory of a world characterised by change, poses a serious issue for knowledge of things, however much they may change. The suggestion to the contrary was popularised by Plato, and has remained troublesome since, but any apparent issue is easily solved with reference to the linguistic world--in particular, the process of naming. *What does this mean? do you think?*

Heraclitus himself expressed no worry about knowledge of his world on the basis of change, and even entered into discussion about the reliability of the senses in revealing truths about the world to us: "The things of which there is sight, hearing, experience, I prefer" (B55), and "The eyes are more accurate witnesses than the ears" (B101a).⁴ Sensory experience of the world, perceived primarily as a changing world or otherwise, has been a philosophical trouble since its conceptions, perhaps most famously in the *Meditations* of Descartes. We will not focus on sensory knowledge here, as it is a separate epistemological question not related directly to the process of change within the world. Although Heraclitus was not explicitly concerned (as far as we know) with the problem of knowledge in the context of change, worries about how we can know one particular object to be the same object despite great change, have remained. I hope to put worries in relation to the naming of things to one side, which should help significantly in showing that the issues perceived with knowledge of the changing object are lesser problems than they may appear to be. *Existing? word missing here?*

Let us begin by recognising that in order to proceed, certain things need be accepted as true. Thankfully, the items we'll need to accept are largely unaffected by change and as such lie outside of the problem at hand. For example, we will want to accept the truth of logic, particularly in the realm of truth-values. Even the fact that change exists and is pervasive needs accepting for us to proceed here, and if we are accepting that change exists in the world around us, we are also accepting that the world itself exists. So we can proceed with the acceptance of the truth of logic, the existence of the world, and the fact of change within the world. We will also have to trust that memory accurately reflects how an object *used* to be, and, as we're trusting sensory knowledge, we can also assume that we are accurately interpreting how objects are *now*. There may be other small things we need to accept about our existence within the world which I have missed, but essentially I ask that we proceed with trust--this is not a Cartesian project of absolute doubt. *On the contrary, it is relevant & important*

So, objects change within the world, and they will either:

- ❖ change to the degree that they become something else, e.g. a chest of drawers being remodelled by a carpenter into a coffee table.
- ❖ remain the same object, e.g. a leather sofa being worn down over the years and changing appearance, though ultimately remaining the same sofa.

It could be objected that, since the "stuff" (wood) of the chest/table remains demonstrably the same stuff (the basic structure of the wood, from one tree, planed into planks, remains the same), the coffee table is ultimately the same object as the chest of drawers. This is unnecessary and untrue. While it may hold the same descriptor of being "a wooden object", it is now a different wooden object in every meaningful sense: The table has a different function to the chest of drawers; it would be *issues of identity here - could you expand? Perhaps relate to the original for me too.*

¹ ~~P. 16~~ Karl R. Popper, "Back to the Presocratics", in Popper's *The World of Parmenides*: Essays on the Presocratic Enlightenment, p. 16

² ~~P. 16~~ Catherine Osborne, "Heraclitus", *Routledge History of Philosophy Volume 1: From the Beginning to Plato*, Routledge, ed. Taylor, 2005, p. 91

³ Charles H. Kahn, *Art and Thought of Heraclitus: A New Arrangement and Translation of the Fragments with Literary and Philosophical Commentary*, C.U.P., 2008.

⁴ Taken from <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/heraclitus/>>, accessed 23/12/2022

recognised and named as "table" by any onlooker, and not as a "chest of drawers". If we are to subscribe to the realm of ideas, the table would not be associated with the idea of a chest of drawers. It would, however, be associated with the less specific name of "furniture". The onlooker, too, would happily call it "furniture". We can see the process of naming becoming relevant. The sofa is an example of the type of object which has changed, but which we still consider to be the same object. The distinction looks murky--in all likelihood, the sofa has changed less intentionally, less noticeably, and at a slower rate than the chest of drawers, but something of its original nature has been lost. Physically, it's presumably had some leather eroded, perhaps even one of its legs has fallen off, and it has likely sagged into a different shape. These changes are reflected in the linguistic: If I were to present this sofa to you in its first year of existence, I would likely use words like "new", "brown", "bouncy" to describe it. Fifty years later, I probably describe it as "old", "faded", "squishy". The sofa has physically changed, and the way we perceive it has changed. But, unlike the chest of drawers, we still call it the same sofa. The change is founded in referential language.

There are two Heraclitean fragments which come to mind as especially relevant to the nature of change in the world:

- ❖ "The sun is new every day."⁵
- ❖ "We step and do not step into the same rivers, we are and we are not."⁶

We will focus on the latter, a more helpful example of something which changes noticeably. We are not aware of the sun being different today than it was yesterday--we cannot really even look at the sun to notice its change. The river however, changes a) before our eyes in a noticeable fashion and b) quickly. With a) we accept that the physical river before us still correlates to the word we use to denote it, even specifically as "that river", or by proper name e.g. "River Cherwell". Its water flows downstream, and we may wait for the water to be visually replaced before we jump into it, or drink from it--if, for example, we could see that the water was temporarily unclean by a contaminant from upstream. With b) something particularly interesting happens. As humans, we typically don't pay too much attention to the things changing around us because the natural world largely changes slowly. When something changes quickly, we notice, and it can be incredibly surprising. The flower blooming overnight, perhaps, or the branch of an oak tree suddenly falling loose. These are important moments in which our attention is unusually drawn to change in the natural world. And we do not appreciate sudden--or frequent--change in one another. Relationships become untenable when people's personalities, priorities, or beliefs are too quickly or frequently changing. A river is certainly frequently changing: Jump in a river once, climb out to jump back in but find yourself confronted by an entirely new body of water. And yet we are not mired in existential doubt every time we notice a river's flow. It seems that some change is contained within the nature of the river, and the name "river", or proper name "River Cherwell" can adequately account for this. We need to find to the grounding in the name "river", tying it to both the object and idea of the river, non-reliant on its fleeting contents. Frege attempted something of the sort. He was concerned in particular with problems that arise in substitution of names of things. Prior to Frege names had largely been seen simply as a referent to an object. For many, this was found in an innate idea of the thing, as for Kant or Descartes,⁷ or in the essence or notion, as for Hegel. Heraclitus himself relied on *logos*, as measure or proportion.⁸ Logos gives "coherence" to a world of change. Heraclitus is also looking externally to the realm of ideas, rather than into substance as many other presocratics did for the unifying quality of existence (*apeiron*, cloud, fire, being the choice selections of many of his contemporaries). Though attractive, it is not necessary to ascribe an external *a priori* innateness to the things in the world around us in order for them to maintain sense for knowledge-of and communication-about in the face of change. When the object is no longer linked to its conceptual referent, it seems there is no reason for the name we give the thing: A chair seems to be linked conceptually to the idea of "sitting". If we call x "chair," but never sit on x and instead spend ten years using x to smack each other with, it seems

Issues to perception important here.

Good: Sense & reference.

⁵ Charles H. Kahn, *Art and Thought of Heraclitus: A New Arrangement and Translation of the Fragments with Literary and Philosophical Commentary*, C.U.P., 2008.

⁶ taken from: <<https://moodle.uwtsd.ac.uk/mod/resource/view.php?id=226118>>, accessed 23/12/2022.

⁷ P.26, Anthony Kenny, "Cartesian Doubt", *Descartes: A study of his philosophy*, Bristol, Thoemmes Press, 1995, p. 26

⁸ P.88, p.91, Catherine Osborne, "Heraclitus", *Routledge History of Philosophy Volume 1: From the Beginning to Plato*, Routledge, ed. Taylor, 2005

p.88

that the name "chair" is corrupted, or incorrectly administered. Though the thing looks physically like a chair, its purpose and indeed much of its being is now defined by violence. So we can't look to the solely to the object's use for its coherence. And innate ideas (of what a chair is) do not prevail without hefty reliance on *names*. Perhaps a better example is something more dynamic, something *choosing* to behave in a particular way. If *P* is a person with all the qualifications required of a medical doctor and the appropriate letters after his name, it seems that an appropriate name for *P* is "doctor". But *P* behaves each day as a Honda mechanic, going to work in a Honda garage and fixing the cars there, and as far as we can tell never sees a patient, enters a clinic, or even picks up an anatomy book in the ten years we know him for. "Doctor" does not seem fitting a name for *P* from our understanding of who he is and what he does. Functionally, and with reference to the *idea* of what a doctor is, we have no reason to call *P* "doctor". Unbeknownst to us, however, *P* spends five hours every day after his work at the garage seeing patients online in the privacy of his own home, with the desire to not be known as a doctor to his local community. To his patients, "doctor" is an entirely appropriate name for *P*. It is not only something *innate* to *P* that makes our name work--the name is true in part thanks to *P*'s action in the world, and in part thanks to our knowledge of *P*. Once we discover that *P* practices secretly as a doctor, "doctor" again becomes an appropriate name for him because of what he *does*. The same goes for a river, a body of water known for bringing to us fresh water. The name "river" contains the idea of flow, and therefore of change. Change is not just contained within the idea of "river", but within the definition of its name. We use the word "river" with its change in mind, and, unless we are to accept that we have never had a coherent conversation about rivers, this name must hold within the language we use to discuss the world.

So to break this down, let's consider Frege's puzzle of substitutivity:

1. Hesperus is Phosphorus.
2. Hesperus is Hesperus.

Surely, if names are simple referents to the object we use them to denote, as had been considered prior to Frege, 1 and 2 should have the same value and meaning, since they "belong" to the same object, Venus. But they have different semantic meaning and "cognitive value": 2 is tautological and knowable in the *a priori* sense, while 1 is empirically discovered and has the potential "extend" our knowledge.⁹ They have different meanings, and this implies that the two names, referring to the same object cannot be substituted for one another. In other words, they must have different qualities other than the object they refer to. Consider further:

3. Peter believes he will see Phosphorus through his new telescope.
4. Peter believes he will see Hesperus through his new telescope.
5. Peter believes he will see Venus through his new telescope.

It is likely that if Peter does not realise that "Hesperus" and "Phosphorus" refer to the same planet, but believes Venus is known as "Phosphorus", which he *does* believe he will see through his new telescope, it appears that 3 is true and 4 is false. Peter seems to have no belief that he will see Hesperus. He will not have thought to himself "I believe today is the day I see Hesperus" with the same *meaning* as when he thinks to himself "I believe today is the day I see Phosphorus". He may even believe he will see both, considering them to be different objects to be viewed. Frege's solution to this is to rely on sense, where sense refers to the "mode of presentation" of the object.¹⁰ This is also described elsewhere as "way of thinking" about an object.¹¹ This solves the substitution issue quite neatly. "Hesperus" and "Phosphorus" are different ways of presenting an object, Venus. We think about object *a* in different ways, but we are all thinking about object *a*. "If a proper name like 'Hesperus' somehow 'contains' the evening-related 'mode of presentation', and 'Phosphorus' contains a morning-related mode of presentation, we may be able to account for the informative and non-trivial character of the claim that Hesperus is Phosphorus: the claim somehow links distinct modes of presentation, and it is not trivial or uninformative that this link obtains."¹² This seems to account also for the rational thinker Peter believing he will see Phosphorus and not Hesperus. He

⁹ P.1. Gottlob Frege, "On sense and reference", *Meaning and Reference*, ed. Moore, Oxford, O.U.P., 1993.

¹⁰ P.2. Gottlob Frege, "On sense and reference", *Meaning and Reference*, ed. Moore, Oxford, O.U.P., 1993.

¹¹ P.9. R.M. Sainsbury, "A short history of theories of names", *Reference without referents*, online ed., Oxford Academic, 2005), accessed 23/12/2022.

¹² *Ibid.*

believes he will see Venus, yes, but in a particular mode of presentation. He believes he will see Venus in a particular sense of the word "Venus". This allows 5 to be true but 4 to remain false. In much the same way, I may wish to see the performance of *Romeo and Juliet* by a particular director/team, but not by another.

So the problem seems solved when we are referring to a stable object being referred to in different ways. But what about when we refer to an object undergoing, or having undergone, great change? This is the naming problem presented by Heraclitus' river statement. A more pressing example is: What makes building *b* still *b* at the point in time at which we've replaced every one of its bricks? This is Heraclitus' river problem compounded by the fact we cannot rely on a riverbed, or even function of the building to recognise the original object after it has changed. The idea of sense is not entirely comforting here, since the building may be occupied in different centuries by entirely different populations with a different *sense* or mode of presentation of the building, whether they call it by the same name or a different name. We need to appeal to something more concrete within language to account for the building remaining the same building.

Kneale's description theory of names can account for change in nature/sense. Kneales, and Geurts in his attempt to revive Kneales' theory, take a name *N* as synonymous with "The individual named *N*".¹³ This covers the building problem whether the different generations are using the same name or not, because the building is still "The building named *N*", though *N* may be exchanged for different names. We could also say the building is "The building previously named *N*". We can know the building, however much it has changed, as either "The building named *N*" or "The building previously named *N* and now named *B*". This holds for the river too.

So we have a theory accounting for both the river in its *sense*:

i. "The river flows."

And a theory accounting for the the river by its name:

ii. "The river is 'the thing named river'."

In i., we cannot conceive of a river standing still. Combining the sense of a river with the linguistic naming of a river accounts for both its changing nature and our changing perceptions of it. So we now know how we can name an object before and after its process of change. This helps us to understand how we can *know* that object in the same way--how I can continue to know that the river exists as the same river despite its contents changing and despite changes in its use, even in our recognition of it. But, if we only have "access" to our limited perspective in a world of unification in change, what can we know at all? We now have to make the move from being able to name something to being able to know it in the face of human perspectives. Let's appeal to Heraclitus' theory of opposites to do so. It seems that for Heraclitus even opposites are bound by a sense of change--either perspectively being meaningfully identified as one part of their whole ("This is an uphill slope") or in being *presented* to us as such. But Heraclitus misinterprets our understanding of the path on the hill. Surely, on a particular journey, we will say "We have to climb that hill to get there," or, "I'm going to get the bus to work today. I just can't handle going up that hill today." But in no meaningful sense do we "know" the path to be *just* an upwards-path. To know something to be the case, we at least need to a) believe it, b) have it be true, and c) be justified in believing it.¹⁴ Presented with the claim "That is an uphill slope", we are likely to answer in the affirmative, but for Heraclitus we are answering in the affirmative to "That is *just* an uphill slope." We do not believe such a claim; such a claim is not true even from in, our limited human understanding of paths, and we would be ridiculed for claiming that a path is *either* an upwards-going path or a downwards-going hill. Furthermore, we bring the truth to the path. The path does not *actively* go up and the path does not *actively* go down; we apply these senses to the path. We bring meaning to the path via language and therefore linguistically it swings between opposites (or rather, mutually exclusive "states" of being).

And this is where the answer lies. Day and night, apparent opposites, are different to us in a linguistically but are united as the "parts of a day-night cycle", as both the chest/table and the sofa were united as "furniture". So some things change entirely, as the chest became a table, and day

¹³ P.319, Bart Geurts, "Good News about the Description Theory of Names", *Journal of Semantics*, Oxford, OUP, 1997.

¹⁴ Gettier has questioned the reach of this, but absolutely these criteria can be accepted as a base minimum.

becomes night, but we know the fact of this change and account for it in our speech. Some objects, such as the river, hold a greater change within their very existence, and as we have seen continue to exist linguistically and in the *sense* we have of them. After all, we are responsible for the meaning of objects within our experience of them.

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