

## Heraclitus and ‘Knowing Yourself’ (116 DK)

If Stobaeus provides an accurate record, Heraclitus makes the earliest literal reference to the sage and (eventually) Delphic charge “know yourself”:

All people have a share in knowing themselves and being sound-minded (ἄνθρωποισι πᾶσι μέτεστι γινώσκειν ἑωυτοῦς καὶ σωφρονεῖν, fr. 116 DK = Stob. *Flor.* 3.5.6).

Many scholars have assumed, however, that Stobaeus does not provide an accurate record of Heraclitus’ words. Among these athetizers or skeptics we may include both 19<sup>th</sup>-century philologists (Schleiermacher 1839, Bernays 1850, Lassalle 1858, Schuster 1872, Bywater 1877) and 20<sup>th</sup>-century philosophers and classicists (e.g., Heidel 1913, Gigon 1935, Walzer 1939, Kirk 1962, Guthrie 1962, Marcovich 1967, Dilcher 1995, Pradeau 2002). No manuscript difficulties support these dismissals, only attempts at a holistic interpretation of Heraclitus. Some scholars have assumed that an early doxographer retrojected Socratic democratic optimism onto Heraclitus’ epistemic pessimism; others read fr. 116 as an anachronistic paraphrase of Heraclitus’ cosmological or psychological remarks.

But these assumptions are baseless. Fr. 116 is no more epistemically optimistic than Heraclitus’ other remarks, in part because *metesti* does not mean that everybody already has complete self-knowledge. Nor is the language or conception of the fragment anachronistic: we may find parallels across Heraclitus’ work. In fact, we might even expect Heraclitus to say something like this. He speaks regularly of the trials of recognition, of self-discovery, of *sôphrosunê*, of Delphic and sage wisdom, and of human ideals that few have already attained.

Revisiting fr. 116 helps establish a key moment in the history of philosophy: the earliest explicit reflection on self-knowledge, a topic of admittedly decisive importance from the Socratic period on down. It might even show that Socrates’ supposedly radical interpretation of

the *gnôthi sauton* was presaged by Heraclitus', or at least by the intellectual culture shared by the earliest writers to mention self-knowledge (with Heraclitus we may include Ion of Chios and the author of *Prometheus Bound*). Such revisiting also contributes to recent recoveries of Heraclitus' sophisticated thinking on epistemology, rationality, and selfhood.

In the brief version of this paper, I first summarize, in §1, the arguments against Heraclitean authorship of fr. 116 and show their incorrect assumptions. Admittedly, some scholars have accepted the fragment, usually because of its similarities to fr. 101 ("I searched out myself") and fr. 112 ("*sôphrosunê* is the greatest virtue and wisdom..."), but as I show in §2, they either give too little weight to the remark, or interpret it impressionistically, without adequate philological evidence. In particular, many in this small group make dubious inferences from the supposedly Apolline imprimatur of the *gnôthi sauton*. In the main body of the paper, §3, I study Heraclitus' use of all the words in this fragment, especially *ginôskein* and the reflexive pronoun. In §4, I suggest a gloss of the fragment, paying attention to Heraclitus' use of irony and ambivalence, and show its coherence with several other of his universally-accepted fragments concerned with self-knowledge. In the conclusion, §5, I make some remarks about Heraclitus' use of popular precepts in his philosophy.

#### Bibliography

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