

## INTRODUCTORY NOTE TO THE BEGINNING FRAGMENTS

We should think about the wise words of the first philosophers. For they contain the seeds of wisdom. And the importance of a seed should be judged, not by its size, but by that to which it gives rise. Moreover, the one who considers something from its beginning is apt to get the best understanding of it. If, then, we consider carefully the fragments we have from the first philosophers, we shall better understand philosophy.

The “Seven Wise Men of Greece” lived in the latter half of the seventh and the first part of the sixth centuries B.C. Four of the seven were universally agreed upon: Thales of Miletus, Pittacus of Mytilene, Bias of Priene, and Solon of Athens. Thales of Miletus is generally regarded as the *first* philosopher. Pittacus of Mytilene is quoted in the *Protagoras* as having said that *it is difficult to be good*. And Bias of Priene said that *few men are good while most are bad*. Solon of Athens is so famous a lawgiver that even today we call a legislator by antonomasia a *Solon*. The earliest list, given by Plato in the *Protagoras*,<sup>1</sup> adds Cleobulus of Lindus, Myson of Chen and Chilon of Sparta.

Tradition or legend says that the Seven Wise Men put up at the Oracle of Delphi (which men came to consult from all over Greece) the following words for all to see:

Know Thyself

Nothing too much

Is there a reason why these two exhortations should be joined? We need to consider first the first exhortation and then consider why the second may be joined to it.

A fragment of Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 B. C.) points to a connection of the two:

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<sup>1</sup> 343A

All men are able to know themselves and be moderate.<sup>2</sup>

And there is the description of the wise duke in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*:

One that, above all other strifes, contended especially to know himself...a gentleman of all temperance.<sup>3</sup>

After a discourse on *Know Thyself*, we shall consider *Nothing Too Much*, both in itself and in connection with *Know Thyself*.

What has been called *The Royal Fragment* of Heraclitus can be considered next for it is continuous with the two exhortations of the Seven Wise Men. I say *continuous* because the first part of The Royal Fragment says that *Moderation is the greatest virtue* and this emphasizes the matter of the second exhortation *Nothing too much*.

The second and chief part of The Royal Fragment states that *wisdom is to speak the truth, and to act, in accord with nature, giving ear thereto*.

Hence, after a consideration of the two exhortations of the Seven Wise Men, we should consider The Royal Fragment which states the necessity of following nature in order to be wise in our thinking and doing.

Since the natural is *common* to all, a discourse on The Royal Fragment is reasonably followed next by the fragments of Heraclitus speaking of the necessity of following what is common.

After these, we should give and consider the fragments about the beginnings of philosophy in desire (in the will mainly, but perhaps also in the emotions). And then we need to consider the fragments on the beginnings of philosophy in our reason or in general in our knowing powers. These are the fragments on the roads and on the first statement.

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<sup>2</sup> Heraclitus, DK 116

<sup>3</sup> Act II, Sc. 2

