

The Heraclitus Anecdote: *De Partibus Animalium* i 5.645a17-23

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Chapter 5 of the first book of Aristotle's *De Partibus Animalium* contains a short self-contained treatise (644b22-645a36) which has been characterised as a 'protreptic to the study of animals' (Peck in Aristotle 1937, 97). Such a characterisation of the treatise may be misleading, because Aristotle does not seem to have composed it in order to motivate his audience to go out in the field and study animals, but rather to kindle their interest in the scientific account of animals which he is about to provide. It is reasonable to suppose that Aristotle's audience, eager to learn something valuable and dignified, needed an explanation of why they should like to hear, amongst other animals, about sponges, snails, grubs, and other humble creatures which are displeasing even to look at, not to mention witnessing the dissections that might have accompanied Aristotle's lectures on animals (cf. Bonitz 1870, 104a4-17; Lloyd 1978). Aristotle explains why such ignoble animals deserve a place in a scientific account of animals and he illustrates that with an anecdote about Heraclitus.

So one must not be childishly repelled by the examination of the humbler animals. For in all things of nature there is something wonderful. And just as Heraclitus is said to have spoken to the visitors who wanted to meet him and who stopped as they were approaching when they saw him warming himself by the oven (εἶδον αὐτὸν θερόμενον πρὸς τῷ ἰπνῷ)—he urged them to come in without fear (ἐκέλευε γὰρ αὐτοὺς εἰσιέναι θαρροῦντας), for there were gods there too (εἶναι γὰρ καὶ ἐνταῦθα θεοῦς)—so one must approach the inquiry about each animal without aversion, since in all of them there is something natural and beautiful. (*PA* i 5.645a15-23 [645a17-23 = Heraclitus DK 22A9])

It is clear at first glance that the visitors' hesitation in the anecdote is analogous to the attitude towards the humbler animals that Aristotle assumes in his hearers, and that Heraclitus' dictum expresses a sentiment which is analogous to Aristotle's view about such animals. It is also clear that the dictum by which Heraclitus encourages his visitors to enter without fear plays an analogous role to Aristotle's short treatise in which he exhorts persons of philosophical inclinations to get rid of their prejudice about animals and learn as much about them as possible. However, there is a great deal of opacity in the detail of the anecdote. For instance,

where was Heraclitus located when the visitors came to see him? Why did the visitors need encouragement to come in and join Heraclitus there? When Heraclitus said that there were gods there too, what did he have in mind? Where exactly is 'there', and in contrast to what place were gods said to be there *too*?

A satisfactory interpretation must give plausible answers to the following two questions. First, why did the visitors stop when they saw Heraclitus warming himself by the oven? The answer to this question should concentrate on the expression 'to warm oneself by the oven' and explain why that should cause hesitation in the visitors. Second, how was Heraclitus' dictum supposed to rid the visitors of hesitation and encourage them to come in? The answer to this question should focus on the meaning of Heraclitus' dictum that there were gods there too. Many extant interpretations of this passage either fail to address these two questions altogether, or they answer one but not the other.

I aim to provide an interpretation which convincingly answers both questions and shows precisely how the Heraclitus anecdote is meant to illustrate the point Aristotle wants to make about the humbler animals as a subject worthy of systematic study. Hence, such an interpretation must be sensitive to the context of Aristotle's little treatise, in particular to the role it plays in Aristotle's argument. Of course, a satisfactory interpretation does not need to assume that the anecdote is authentic. However, it is advantageous if an interpretation is neutral on the question of authenticity, in other words if it works equally well whether the anecdote is authentic or not. I shall proceed by reviewing major extant interpretations, some of which are not unlikely to escape the attention of English-speaking students of ancient philosophy working within the analytic tradition.¹

There are four noteworthy interpretations of the anecdote which give an answer to the first question: those proposed by Heidegger, Robertson, Wheelwright and Robert. I shall briefly present and criticise each one of these four interpretations.

According to Heidegger, Heraclitus was visited by a common crowd hoping to derive some amusement and material for gossip from the sight of a thinker sitting in a lofty pose and thinking profound thoughts. Instead, they found Heraclitus in such an unremarkably everyday and trivial place as a baking oven, humbled by the cold and seeking refuge by the fire. The visitors were baffled and disappointed by what they saw, so they wanted to turn around and leave. Having read their disappointment, however, Heraclitus invited the visitors to come in, saying that there were gods there too. With these words Heraclitus partly intended to indulge his entertainment-seeking visitors and recapture their interest, since,

¹ I have considered the following commentaries on this passage: Michael of Ephesus 1904, 22.28-33; Gigon 1935, 126; Robertson 1938, 10; Le Blond 1945, 53, 70, 185n144; Burnet 1945, 50n3; Jaeger 1947, 22, 199n12; Kirk 1954, 3, 18; Louis 1956, 173; Wheelwright 1959, 73-74; Torraca 1961, 246n4; Robert 1965-66; Marcovich 1965, 255; Marcovich 1967, 397; Ramnoux 1968, 240; Mondolfo and Tarán 1972, 105-106; Balme 1972, 123; Heidegger 1979, 6-9, 22-24 (a shorter version in Heidegger 1967, 185-187, translated in Heidegger 1998, 269-270); Kahn 1979, 287; Merkelbach 1980, 91-92; Conche 1986, 249n1; Mouraviev 1990, 43-44.

according to Heidegger, the plain sense of the dictum immediately understandable to common people suggests the prospect of encountering something supernatural and hence exciting. As for the deeper sense of the dictum, it seems to have been left to be fathomed by Heidegger himself.

Although the large number of surviving anecdotes about ancient philosophers undoubtedly testifies to the popularity they enjoyed, Heidegger's claim that the visitors went to Heraclitus solely to see a reputed thinker immersed in thought and thus derive some amusement and material for gossip is a piece of speculation without any positive evidence. It seems more plausible to suppose that the visitors were a small group of individuals, possibly potential followers, interested not only in glimpsing Heraclitus or meeting him in person, but actually in having an exchange with him.

Heidegger suggests that the visitors hesitated to come in because they were disappointed with what they saw. There are two things which speak against this suggestion. First, Heraclitus encourages the visitors by saying that they should come in without fear (θαρροῦντας). The verb θαρρεῖν is typically used to reassure a person inspired with fear or diffidence, which implies that the visitors hesitated to come in because they were restrained by some apprehension or scruple, not because they were disappointed or disinterested. Second, the attitude of the visitors towards entering Heraclitus' place in the anecdote seems to be analogous to the attitude towards the humbler animals that Aristotle assumes in his audience, and that is repulsion and distaste, not disappointment and the thwarted expectation of experiencing something exciting.

Furthermore, Heidegger claims that Heraclitus was warming himself up *in* a baking oven for baking bread.² Here Heidegger seems to follow Michael of Ephesus who says that Heraclitus was sitting inside an ἰπνός, which he interprets to be a small shed in which bread is baked (Michael of Ephesus 1904, 22.28-31). To my knowledge, there is no archaeological or other evidence for the existence of such constructions in the fifth and the fourth centuries BC. It was customary for each household to bake its own bread in ovens which were mostly portable, and this rendered rooms or sheds specially designed for the purpose of baking bread superfluous. Besides, there is no reason to suppose that a place with an oven would strike an ancient Greek as any more everyday and trivial than any other part of the house. Admittedly, the ancients conceived of the house in general as the sphere of privacy and necessity—as has been argued for instance by Hannah Arendt, one of Heidegger's most famous pupils—so there could scarcely be any need for surprise at finding Heraclitus in the room with an oven.

Finally—and this is essentially Heidegger's answer to the second question—he argues that Heraclitus' dictum was partly meant to address the visitors' expectation of finding some entertainment. Heidegger seems to presuppose that an ordi-

² Heidegger says that Heraclitus is 'im Backofen' (1979, 6, 7, and 8) and makes much of the fact that 'wird hier das Brot gebacken' (7), for a man cannot live properly, he says, 'ohne die Gabe des Brotes' (8).

nary Greek of the fifth or the fourth century BC would consider the prospect of being in the presence of gods an opportunity to encounter the supernatural and thus experience something exciting. However, I wonder whether that would be the obvious reaction of an average ancient Greek, given what we know about his religion. The world of ancient Greeks was populated by gods and divinities whose presence was believed to be manifest in the affairs of individuals and whole communities. One was continuously in contact with gods and divinities through private rituals and public festivals, inside one's own house as well as outside in public places. In such a culture, saying that there are gods at some place in a house is unlikely to impress one as indicating an opportunity to experience something exciting or entertaining.

These points should suffice to indicate that Heidegger's interpretation of the anecdote is based on unsubstantiated speculation. Heidegger does not pay sufficient attention to the cultural peculiarities and material facts involved in the event described in the anecdote, and he does not take into account the context of Aristotle's passage in which the anecdote occurs. Let us now turn to the interpretation proposed by Robertson.³

Robertson maintains that the expression 'to warm oneself by the oven' is a polite euphemism for visiting the lavatory, which, if true, indeed explains why the visitors hesitated to come in. However, it is rather improbable that a Greek gentleman would pay a call of nature in a place within his house which is in view of other members of the household, let alone casual visitors. And even if we assume that the anecdote describes such an improbable incident, it is very difficult to believe that Heraclitus would still insist that the visitors should come in, and that anything he might have said could actually persuade them to do so.

But perhaps the intention of Heraclitus' remark was not really to encourage the visitors to come in, but rather to make 'a hit at the superstitions encouraged in such matters by two detested predecessors, Hesiod and Pythagoras', as Robertson suggests (Robertson 1938, 10; cf. Heraclitus DK22B40, B57, B129). Although Heraclitus certainly disdained Hesiod and Pythagoras, it is questionable whether we should assume that he was so obsessed with them as to make scathing remarks about them to any random person he met. Moreover, Aristotle and his audience would presumably be aware of the proposed meaning of the expression 'warming oneself by the oven' and of the humorous intention of Heraclitus' remark that there were gods there too, in which case I doubt Aristotle would bring up the anecdote to illustrate his point. In other words, the introduction of the anecdote as interpreted by Robertson would probably make the study of the humbler animals appear even more ridiculous to Aristotle's audience, and thus seriously undermine his effort. Finally, the anecdote as interpreted by Robertson would severely disrupt the elevated style of Aristotle's carefully written little treatise. These are all *prima facie* objections to Robertson's interpreta-

³ Robertson's interpretation was accepted by Balme. Mouraviev follows the same line of interpretation, but makes no reference to Robertson or anyone else.

tion.

There are also objections to the arguments on which Robertson builds his interpretation. These arguments are highly conjectural, and they rely on the doubtful equation of ἰπνός with κοπρών. Robertson appeals to the authority of two late lexicographers, Pollux and Hesychius, that Aristophanes used the word ἰπνός in the sense of κοπρών.⁴ It may be the case that in the lost play *Cocalus*, as Hesychius specifies, Aristophanes used the word ἰπνός in the sense of κοπρών, or perhaps just made a pun to that effect, but that is neither the standard sense of the word ἰπνός, nor is such a use attested in Aristophanes' extant works or in any other author before the Hellenistic age.⁵

The primary and most common meaning of the word ἰπνός is 'oven' (LSJ s.v. ἰπνός i; LSJ Rev. Suppl. s.v. ἰπνός 1). This meaning is found in the earliest extant occurrence of the word, in a fragment of Semonides who castigates the kind of woman who refuses to sit by the oven with the excuse that she cannot stand smoke, which implies that attending the oven is part of the domestic work of a virtuous woman (Semonides fr. 7.61 [West]). In all literary sources from the fifth and fourth centuries except Aristophanes, the word ἰπνός still means 'oven'. The oven was one of the main domestic utensils of ancient Greeks. It was used for baking bread and preparing other kinds of food, as well as for heating the house and boiling the water for the bath.⁶ Ovens were placed in rooms equipped with windows, openings on the roof, or connected to special chambers designed for smoke exhaust. There is considerable archaeological evidence for the existence of relatively small rooms, usually forming a larger complex with a living room and a bathroom, which can be identified as kitchens by traces of fire and pottery.⁷ Some such room seems to have been intended by the word ἰπνός in Aristophanes. Three out of six times in the extant works of Aristophanes the word designates not 'oven', but 'place where the oven is', i.e., 'kitchen'.⁸

Given that the word ἰπνός in its primary use designates an item which was probably a staple of every Greek house and a means of heating, the most natural way to read the expression θέρεσθαι πρὸς τῷ ἰπνῷ is 'to warm oneself by the

⁴ Pollux, *Onomasticon* 5.91; Hesychius, *Lexicon*, i.774 (Latte). Cf. LSJ s.v. ἰπνός iv. In the *Revised Supplement* to the LSJ it is suggested that the identification of ἰπνός with κοπρών might be a misunderstanding, LSJ Rev. Suppl. s.v. ἰπνός 4.

⁵ There is a note in the *Schol. in Aristoph. Vesp.* 837 saying that Callimachus used the word ἰπνός in the sense of animal dung, and this refers to Callimachus' *Hecale*, fr. 295 (Pfeiffer). However, such a reading is not unanimously accepted, see Schneider 1873, ii 461, and Hollis 1990, 299-300.

⁶ Herod. *Hist.* v 92; Hipp. *De diaeta* 42.13, 80.6; *Epidem.* iv 1.20; Democritus DK68A28; Antiphanes fr. 176.3-4 (Kock), *Omph.* fr. 1.3 (Meineke); Timocles fr. 33 (Kock); Archestratus of Gela fr. 177.4 (Lloyd-Jones), Triphon of Alexandria ap. Ath. *Deipn.* 3.74. Cf. Sparkes 1962, and Deighton 1995, 66-70.

⁷ Svoronos-Hadjimichalis 1956, 496; Jameson 1990, 98; cf. Hoepfner and Schwandner 1994, 82-92, 100-102, 208-216.

⁸ Aristoph. *Birds* 436; *Wasps* 139 and 837; cf. *Schol. in Aristoph.* ad loc.; LSJ s.v. ἰπνός ii; LSJ Rev. Suppl. s.v. ἰπνός 2. The other three times, in *Peace* 841 (twice) and *Plut.* 815, it means 'lantern', cf. *Schol. in Aristoph.* ad loc.

oven', whereas Robertson, without any precedent in the extant literature, wants to read it as a euphemism for visiting the lavatory. In general, it seems far-fetched to insist on an exceptional and meagrely attested use of a word in interpreting a sentence which can perfectly well be interpreted by adhering to the primary and most widely attested use. I believe that Robertson's interpretation is shown to be improbable and insensitive to the larger context of Aristotle's passage.

The other interpretation which explains why the visitors stopped when they saw Heraclitus warming himself by the oven was proposed by Wheelwright. In observing that the kitchen 'was not a place where a Greek gentleman would normally have been found', Wheelwright 1959, 74 suggests that the visitors stopped because they were surprised to see Heraclitus in a room in which it was inappropriate for a respectable man to be found. Having noticed their surprise, Wheelwright maintains, Heraclitus thought he owed them an explanation, and the explanation was that there were gods there too.

I am sympathetic to Wheelwright's assumptions that the visitors found Heraclitus in the kitchen, and that the kitchen was not a place a respectable Greek gentleman would normally frequent. It was the domain of the housewife and her servants, and hence it might conventionally have been thought as disgraceful for a householder to be found there. However, Wheelwright fails to take into account what is really at issue in the anecdote. It is not that it was inappropriate for a respectable Greek *householder* to be found in what was conventionally seen as a women's quarter, but rather that it was inappropriate for a respectful *visitor* to encroach upon such quarters. And the dictum that there were gods there too was not intended as Heraclitus' excuse for being in the kitchen of his house, as Wheelwright seems to suggest, but rather as a supplement to Heraclitus' invitation to the visitors to enter the kitchen. The Greek of Aristotle's passage is unambiguous: the sentence 'for there were gods there too' does not explain why Heraclitus was in the kitchen, but why the visitors should feel free to step inside and join him there.

Robert agrees that the visitors found Heraclitus in the kitchen, but fails to take notice of the fact that the kitchen was a part of the house which was generally inaccessible to visitors. Robert maintains that the visitors came into Heraclitus' house reckoning that they would find him in the main room of the house; instead they found him in the kitchen. The reason why they stopped when they saw Heraclitus in the kitchen, according to Robert, is that they expected Heraclitus to meet them and take them to the main room where guests are usually received.⁹ So Robert seems to suggest that the visitors' hesitation upon seeing Heraclitus in the kitchen derives from their thwarted expectations of finding Heraclitus in the

⁹ Robert 1965-66, 68, 69-70. Robert's interpretation is followed by Conche and Merkelbach. From the fact that the visitors were surprised not to find Heraclitus in the main room where receptions usually took place, Conche concludes that the visitors must have been guests invited by Heraclitus. However, we shall presently see that it was a custom to take all visitors, invited as well as uninvited (e.g., suppliants), to the main room.

main room and, given that he was actually in the kitchen, of being shown to the main room. However, in that case there would be no obvious need for Heraclitus' emphatic 'have no fear' (θαρρεῖν). Indeed, why would Heraclitus encourage the visitors 'not to be disconcerted and to dare to come to him (...) in the kitchen', if they were merely surprised to find Heraclitus there, and that they were not shown to the main room (Robert 1965-66, 70)? Besides, the visitors' hesitation to enter the kitchen is said to be analogous to the attitude towards the humbler animals that Aristotle assumes in his audience. Since the attitude in question is repulsion and distaste, it is better to suppose that the visitors' hesitation derives from some powerful scruple, rather than from some thwarted expectation.

In response to the first question, then, I propose the following interpretation. Heraclitus was warming himself by the oven, which was located in the kitchen. Due to its relatively small size, the kitchen was the warmest room in the Greek house and hence an obvious refuge from the cold.¹⁰ Having entered the courtyard of Heraclitus' house, the visitors saw him warming himself by the oven in the kitchen. They stopped and hesitated to go any further because the kitchen was commonly seen as part of the women's quarters of a house and a strictly private space to which visitors had no admittance. However, appreciating the warmth of the kitchen and not being bound by petty conventions, Heraclitus encouraged his visitors to come inside, saying that there were gods there too. And this brings us to the second question: how is this supposed to persuade the visitors to come in?

It is both impossible and unnecessary to review all existent interpretations of Heraclitus' dictum in this article. It will suffice to note that the oldest and most popular line of interpretation takes Heraclitus' dictum to reflect a doctrine of the omnipresence of divine beings.¹¹ According to this interpretation, Heraclitus was essentially saying to his visitors that they should come into the kitchen because it is as sacred, or hospitable, as any other place, for there are gods everywhere. This is no doubt very plausible. The idea of the omnipresence of gods would not be new with Heraclitus and it seems consistent with the surviving fragments of Heraclitus. Also, thus interpreted, the dictum seems to make satisfactory sense in the context of Aristotle's passage: just as Heraclitus was telling his visitors to come

¹⁰ Robert 1965-66, 69 is too quick to conclude that the event of the anecdote took place in December or January, the two coldest months in Ionia. Presumably, the event described in the anecdote took place when Heraclitus was quite old, as I explain in n16 below. Since the elderly are generally quite susceptible to the cold, the anecdote might have taken place at almost any time of the year.

¹¹ In his commentary to the quoted passage of Aristotle, Michael of Ephesus 1904, 22.32-33 briefly explains that the statement 'everything is full of gods' was Heraclitean doctrine, although Aristotle expressly attributes this particular statement to Thales in *De Anima* i 5.411a8. This prompts Marcovich 1965, 255.54-55 to suggest that perhaps in this passage Aristotle confused Heraclitus with Thales. However, it is much more likely that, if there was any confusion here, it was on Michael's part, probably because he relied on Diogenes Laertius who reports that Heraclitus thought that 'everything is full of souls and divinities' (*Vitae* ix 7). Anyway, Michael's suggestion that the dictum assumes a doctrine of the omnipresence of gods has been accepted by the majority of authors, including Burnet, Gigon, Louis, Torraca, Marcovich, Mondolfo and Tarán, Wheelwright, Kirk and Mouraviev. Guthrie 1962, 65-66 is sceptical, but offers no alternative interpretation.

into the kitchen because there are gods everywhere, hence also in such strictly private quarters as the kitchen, Aristotle is telling his audience that one should approach the study of animals without revulsion because in all things of nature there is something wonderful, hence also in those humbler animals.

However, interpreting the dictum in the light of a doctrine of the omnipresence of divine beings fails to do justice to the rich imagery of the anecdote. If we take into account the main character and the setting of the event described in the anecdote, we see immediately that Heraclitus' dictum is less likely to be an indeterminate reference to the place in which Heraclitus was located. Rather, it is a determinate reference to the object which marks that place, namely the oven, or more precisely, the fire burning in the oven. We should remember that ancient Greeks customarily associated gods and divinities with fire. As Burkert 1985, 61 writes: 'Fire with its multiple fascinations is present in almost every cult act of the Greeks. Sacrifices without fire are rare, conscious exceptions, and conversely there is rarely a fire without sacrifice.'

So it would be only natural for an ancient Greek to connect Heraclitus' mention of gods with the fire of the oven. More specifically, given Heraclitus' well-known doctrine of fire as the cosmic principle and all-pervading substance, he would have a particularly good reason to hint at the fire in the oven when he said that there were gods there too. I believe that any person, ancient or modern, sufficiently alert to Heraclitus' doctrine of fire as well as to the significance ancient Greeks generally attached to fire, could hardly interpret the dictum other than with reference to the fire in the oven by which Heraclitus was warming himself.¹²

Hence, when Heraclitus said that there were gods there too, we should not think that he was referring unqualifiedly to the kitchen, implying that gods are everywhere and hence also in the kitchen. Rather, we should take him to be referring to the fire in the oven. However, Heraclitus says that there are gods there *too*, and this 'too' implies a contrast between the oven and some other place. Robert suggests that this place is Hestia's hearth.¹³

The hearth (ἑστία) was an open fixed fireplace in the main room of a house, usually occupying a central spot on the floor. It was the pivotal place in life of the household. It may have been used for cooking food and heating water for baths, and it served as a means of heating and as a source of light. In addition to being a place with multiple practical functions, the hearth was also the place of major religious significance. It was the seat of the household gods (θεοὶ ἐφ' ἑστιαί) to whom members of the household directed pleas and before whom oaths were taken. In Homer it is Zeus who attends to the prayers made by the hearth (Hom. *Od.* xiv 158-159, xvii 156-157, xix 303-304, xx 230-231). According to Hesiod, Hestia is the daughter of Kronos and Rhea and Zeus' elder sister, she was the

¹² So Jaeger 1947, 22; Kirk 1954, 18; Robert 1965-66, 70-71; Mondolfo and Tarán 1972, 106; Balme 1972, 123; Heidegger 1979, 9; Merkelbach 1980, 91-92.

¹³ I reached the conclusion that Heraclitus' dictum was alluding to Hestia's hearth independently of Robert. I am grateful to Mr. Myles Burnyeat who brought Robert's article to my attention while I was revising this piece for publication.

guardian deity of the interior of the house, and she was closely associated with the hearth (Hes. *Theog.* 453-454; cf. *Homeric Hymns* v 22-24, xxix 13-14; Pind. *Nem.* 11.1-2). The head of the family made offerings at the hearth with each meal, marriage ceremonies and rituals concerning children newly born to the household took place around it.¹⁴ What is most important for this interpretation is that the hearth was the place to which visitors were led and where they received tokens of hospitality.¹⁵ This is reflected by the very verb ἐστῖαν, which means to receive at one's hearth and accept at the table, usually applied to the visitor who is feasted in the house (LSJ s.v. ἐστῖάω; cf. Merkelbach 1980, 78; Vernant 1983, 141). Vernant 1983, 141-142 writes:

The stranger must be led to the hearth, received, and feasted there, for there can be neither contact nor exchange with those who have not first been integrated within the domestic space. Pindar wrote that at the ever-spread tables of sanctuaries where Hestia was the patron goddess, the justice of Zeus *Xenios* was respected. Relations with strangers, ξένος, are thus the province of Hestia as much when receiving a guest in the home as when returning to one's own house after a journey or an embassy abroad.

If we accept Robert's suggestion that Heraclitus' dictum alludes to Hestia's hearth, we come to the following interpretation. When Heraclitus noticed that the visitors hesitated to come into the kitchen because they did not want to violate the privacy of the innermost quarters of one's house, he invited them to come in without fear (θαρροῦντας). That is, Heraclitus told his visitors to feel confident about coming in and joining him in the kitchen 'for there were gods there too', i.e., there are gods in the fire of the kitchen oven as much as in the fire of Hestia's hearth. Thus Heraclitus effectively said to his visitors that they should freely step inside because they will be just as welcome and protected near the fire burning in the oven in the kitchen as they would be near the fire of the hearth in the main room. Hence, the adverbial καί ('too') in Heraclitus' dictum indicates the contrast between the fire in the kitchen oven and the fire in the hearth in the main room.

This interpretation is attractive, but there is one serious objection to it. Contrary to what one would expect from ancient Greek literature, excavations of Greek houses from the fifth and fourth centuries BC seldom show evidence of

¹⁴ More details about the location and function of Hestia's hearth in the Greek house can be found in Kluwe 1988. For more information on the cult of Hestia and its significance, see Farnell 1909, 345-373; Fustel de Coulanges 1980, 17-40; Merkelbach 1980; Vernant 1983; Burkert 1985, 170; Jameson 1990, 104-106.

¹⁵ Hom. *Od.* vi 304ff., vii 153ff.; Aesch. *Agam.* 1587ff.; Soph. *O.C.* 631ff.; Thuc. *Hist.* i 136. In an ancient Greek city there was also a common civic hearth to which embassies and honoured guests from other places would be taken. For more on the civic hearth see Merkelbach 1980, which is also interesting for the suggestion that Heraclitus' doctrine of fire was inspired by the cult of Hestia which was quite popular in Ephesus.

something that can be identified as the fixed hearth.¹⁶ Robert relies mainly on the evidence of domestic architecture in Olynthus, a city in north-west Greece where rooms with fixed hearths happen to be found slightly more often than elsewhere. However, this is still an exception. When traces of fire are detected at all in Greek houses, they are usually found in small rooms that can be identified as kitchens (Jameson 1990, 98; cf. Svoronos-Hadjimichalis 1956, 483). And not only are hearths in Greek houses of the classical period found rarely, there seems to be no archaeological record of a house with traces of fire in a larger room *and* in a smaller room. In other words, there seems to be no material evidence of a house with a hearth in the main room and an oven in the kitchen.

However, for the suggested interpretation it is not necessary to assume that Heraclitus' house actually had a hearth in addition to the oven in the kitchen, or that Aristotle and his audience assumed that Heraclitus' house was equipped with both. Suffice it to suppose that the archaic tradition, within which the hearth had the role described above, was alive in the age of Heraclitus, so that he could make an allusion to it and expect his visitors to spot it. Or otherwise, if we do not want to commit ourselves to the authenticity of the anecdote, that this tradition was alive at the age of Aristotle, so that he and his audience could spot the allusion to the hearth. And there can be no doubt that this tradition was very much alive among the Greeks for centuries before and after Aristotle,

We may say that the image and symbolism of the hearth were shaped in the formative years of Greek civilization and persisted in poetry and myth, to the exclusion of other architectural traditions, long after a different physical and social reality prevailed (Jameson 1990, 106).

Material facts concerning Greek housing of the fifth and fourth centuries BC, therefore, do not present a threat to the suggested interpretation. What is crucial is whether Heraclitus could plausibly have made an allusion to the hearth and expected his visitors to pick it up, if one wants to entertain the idea that the anecdote is authentic; or otherwise, whether Aristotle and his audience could pick it up, if one is more realistic and does not assume that the anecdote is authentic. Given that the cultural tradition which emphasised the importance and function of the hearth was alive among the Greeks long after the social and physical reality ceased to reflect it, it can be supposed that an allusion to the hearth could easily have been made and understood by men both of Heraclitus' as well as of Aristotle's times.

I shall now put all the pieces together and set out in full the most plausible interpretation of the Heraclitus anecdote. When the visitors came into the courtyard of Heraclitus' house and saw him warming himself by the oven in the

¹⁶ The reason why we should look at the fifth and fourth centuries BC is to cover the period between the time when the event described in the anecdote is likely to have taken place and the time when Aristotle mentioned it. It is agreed that Heraclitus' latter years fell within the early fifth century BC, and the event took place most probably when Heraclitus was older and had already attained widespread renown.

kitchen, they stopped and hesitated to advance further because they thought it would be disrespectful (the householder would be offended), possibly even irreverent (gods protecting the household would be offended), to step into the part of another person's house to which strangers customarily have no access. Having noticed his visitors' hesitation elicited by their sense of courtesy and piety, Heraclitus urged them to come in without fear 'for there were gods there too'. I take it that Heraclitus was pointing at the fire in the oven when he said that there were gods there *too*, in contrast with the fire in Hestia's hearth by which the visitor in tradition finds shelter and feels welcome. Thus Heraclitus essentially said to his visitors that they should feel free to come inside because they would be as hospitably treated by the fire in the kitchen oven as strangers were said to be treated by the fire of the hearth. At the same time Heraclitus hints at his doctrine of fire as the primary substance whose power is as manifest in the ordinary fire of a kitchen oven used for the humble purposes of sustaining life, as in the consecrated fire of Hestia's hearth used for the dignified purposes of leading a pious life.

According to this interpretation, then, Heraclitus can be seen in the anecdote as inviting his visitors to join him in the kitchen by appealing to their common archaic heritage, and the way he does that provides a delightful illustration for the point Aristotle wants to make about the study of animals. Just as Heraclitus encouraged the visitors to waive their conventional scruples and join him in the kitchen by suggesting that the ordinary fire in the oven is as divine and hospitable as the consecrated fire of the hearth, Aristotle encourages his audience to overcome their puerile revulsion towards the examination of the humbler animals by saying that there is something wonderful in them as well as in other things of nature, including the better respected animals and, ultimately, the stars which are appreciated as divine and well worthy of study. The wonderful thing is, of course, the purposefulness which pervades the whole natural world and which is the counterpart of the beautiful (τὸ καλόν) in things of art. And because of that, Aristotle exhorts his audience to forget their distaste for certain kinds of animals and to open their minds to the systematic treatment of animals which he is about to supply.¹⁷

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¹⁷ I would like to thank Mr. Myles Burnyeat, Prof. Michael Frede, Dr. Marina Milicevic-Bradac, Dr. Hendrik Lorenz, Ms. Frisbee Sheffield, and Dr. Cecilia Trifogli for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article. My gratitude is also due to the Editor who brought Heidegger's interpretation of the anecdote to my attention, and to Mr. Michael Inwood who helped me locate it. I am indebted to the anonymous reviewer whose remarks I found very helpful. Finally, thanks to Mr. Stephan Leuenberger and Ms. Emma Cayley for their expertise in German and English respectively.

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