

**NOTES ON THE GREEK EXPRESSIONS IN
‘FRAGILITIES OF ANALYSIS’¹**

Barry O’Donnell

ἐπιμέλεια ἑαυτοῦ (*epimeleia heautou*)

This phrase was brought to prominence in the work of Michel Foucault and is usually translated into English as ‘care of/for the self’. This translation is, arguably, misleading in an age of enthusiasm for predominantly narcissistic practices of ‘self-care’. **ἐπιμέλεια** (*epimeleia*) translates as ‘care bestowed upon a thing’ or ‘attention paid to something; it has a sense of ‘attending with diligence’, of ‘employment upon a matter’. **ἑαυτοῦ** (*heautou*) is a third person reflexive pronoun and is therefore literally ‘of himself, or itself’. A possible translation of the phrase *epimeleia heautou* can be ‘care of what is of oneself’ or ‘care for what is one’s own’. The Hiberno-English ‘it’s himself’ comes to mind. In light of the discussion in Jean Allouch’s paper of *das Ding* and the Freudian thing the translation ‘attending to one’s thing’ suggests itself. Foucault translated the Greek with *soucie pour le soi* and argued that it referred to practices whereby the subject is engaged in his or her own question vis-à-vis the Other. He represents it as a development in Plato – a ‘fairly profound reorganisation’ of earlier practices concerned with the self. Foucault finds the phrase in Plato’s *Alcibiades*, 127e. He proposes that involved in any use of the term are two questions:

‘... what is this thing, this object, this self to which one must attend? Secondly, there is the care in “care of the self”. What form should this care take, in what must it consist, given that what is at stake in the dialogue is that I

¹ The two principal sources for these notes have been the *Greek-English Lexicon*, Liddel, Scott, Jones, Oxford University Press, 1968 (hereafter LSJ) and a very cursory gleaning of remarks on these Greek terms from Michel Foucault’s *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, edited by Frédéric Gros, Picador, 2005 (Foucault 2005).

Two other important and relevant texts referred to by Jean Allouch are Foucault’s *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Oneself and Others II, Lectures at the Collège de France 1983 – 1984*, edited by Frédéric Gros, Picador, 2011 and Martin Heidegger’s and Eugen Fink’s Seminar on Heraclitus in 1966 – 1967 published as *Heraclitus Seminar*, translated by C.H. Seibert, in ‘*Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy*’, Northwestern University Press. 1993.

At this point I have not had the opportunity to consult these two documents of teaching years.

must be concerned about myself so as to be able to govern others and the city-state?’²

Foucault argues that these questions address the problem of a practice of living, a *τεχνη* (*techné*), a word in the phrase *τεχνη του βιου* (*techné tou biou*) which provided the practice of philosophy with ‘its definition, its centre of gravity ... its objective’ from the fourth century BCE onwards.³ It cannot but remind us of Freud’s phrase *die Technik der Lebensführung* (the technique for the conduct of life).⁴ *epimeleia heautou*, therefore, refers to a practice concerned with the soul as subject in so far as the soul is identified as the agency that handles the body, the sense of self, the relation to others; not ‘an instrumental relationship of the souls to the rest of the world or to the body, but rather the subject’s singular, transcendent position, as it were, with regard to what surrounds him, to the objects available to him, but also to other people with whom he has a relationship, to his body itself, and finally to himself.’ Foucault also distinguishes the practitioner of the care of the soul, of *epimeleia heautou*, from ‘the activities of the doctor, the head of the household, and the lover.’⁵

παρρησία (*parrhēsia*)⁶

παρρησία (*parrhēsia*) is formed from *πάς* (*pas*) all and *ῥήσις* (*rhēsis*) saying or speech. It is translated by LSJ⁷ as ‘outspokenness, frankness, freedom of speech’ with the comment that this last was ‘claimed by the Athenians as their privilege’; it could have a slightly pejorative sense of *licence of tongue*. The Latin equivalent is *libertas*. *παρρησιαστής* (*parrhēsiastēs*) is translated by LSJ as ‘outspoken person’. Foucault traces the sense of *παρρησία* (*parrhēsia*) in the Hellenistic philosophical schools. His first account of it refers to its sense for the Epicureans as it was applied to the practice of spiritual direction: ‘*Parrhēsia* is opening the heart, the need for the two partners to conceal nothing of what they think from each other and to speak to each other frankly.’⁸ Foucault later develops this in line with his focus on the idea of *τεχνη* (*tech-*

² Foucault, M. *The Hermeneutics of the Subject, Lectures at the Collège de France 1981 – 1982*, edited by Frédéric Gros, Picador, 2005. p. 51.

³ *ibid.* p. 178-9.

⁴ Freud, S. *Civilisation and its Discontents* (1922). Standard Edition XXI, London, Hogarth Press. p.80, n.1.

⁵ Foucault, M. *op.cit.* p. 56 – 7.

⁶ *παρρησία* seems to be transliterated *parrēsia* in French but *parrhēsia* in English.

⁷ See footnote 22

⁸ Foucault, M. *op.cit.* p. 137.

né): ‘... the technique – *parrhēsia* is a technical term – which allows the master to make a proper use, from the true things he knows, of that which is useful or effective for his disciple’s work of transformation, change and improvement.’⁹ Later again he will argue that *parrhēsia* must be distinguished from other τεχναι (*technai*) such as those involved in rhetoric:

*Parrhēsia is basically what on the master’s side corresponds to the disciple’s obligation of silence. Just as the disciple must keep quiet in order to bring about the subjectivication of his discourse, so the master’s discourse must obey the principle of parrhēsia if, at the end of his action and guidance, he wants the truth of what he says to become the subjectivised true discourse of his disciple. ... (Parrhēsia) must be this other thing, which is both a technique and an ethics, an art and a morality. ... It must not be a discourse of seduction. It must be a discourse that the disciple’s subjectivity can appropriate and by which, by appropriating it, the disciple can reach his own objective, namely himself.*¹⁰

morosophes

This word is a combining of μωρία (*mōria*) *folly* and σοφός (*sophos*), *wise*. The *wise folly* or *wise fools* suggests itself as the sense of this creation attributed to Rabelais and Erasmus.

τὰ δὲ πάντα οἰακίζει κεραυνός (*ta de panta oiakizei keraunos*), Diels fragment 64

This is a fragment from the work of the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus (floruit 500 BCE; 540–480 BCE). τὰ δὲ πάντα οἰακίζει κεραυνός (*ta de panta oiakizei keraunos*) literally translates as: *lightning steers the all things*. Kirk, Raven and Schofield (hereafter KRS) give: *Thunderbolt steers all things*.¹¹ It is usually understood to be a statement to the effect that fire is the fundamental form of matter, the first principle and mover. Kahn writes that the verb οἰακίζει (*oiakizei*) derives from οἶαξ (*oiax*), the tiller on the rudder of a boat and that the phrasing evokes Zeus, associated with hurling thunder-

⁹ *ibid.* p. 242.

¹⁰ *ibid.* pp. 366 – 8; Foucault has a very extensive discussion of the term *parrhēsia* in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, to which these notes cannot do justice, but have, hopefully, captured his drift.

¹¹ Kirk, G.S., Raven, J.E. & Schofield, M. *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 2nd Edition, Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 197 – 8.

bolts and pilot of all things as well as being the wise one, τὸ σοφὸν (*to sophon*) mentioned in a fragment which Kahn argues should precede this one.¹²

τὰ πάντα (*ta panta*)

Literally: the all things. *everything* is a possible rendering. LSJ give: *all kinds of things*. The singular form of this neuter plural is τὸ πᾶν and LSJ give *the universe* as its translation. This supports the argument that τὰ πάντα (*ta panta*) refers to the diverse.

καιρός (*kairos*)

For **καιρός** (*kairos*) referring to time, LSJ give: *exact or critical time, season, opportunity*. Other senses include: *due measure, proportion, fitness*. Also: *advantage, profit*. Among the phrases used in LSJ to illustrate the senses of **καιρός** (*kairos*) we find from Pindar **καιρός** πρὸς ἀνθρώπων βραχὺ μέτρον ἔχει (*kairos pros anthrōpōn brachu metron echei*). The translation by C.M. Bowra is apt: ‘for very swift is the moment for a man.’¹³

πάντα ῥεῖ (*panta rhei*)

Literally: all things flow. This phrase is not extant in the fragments of Heraclitus of Ephesus (circa 540 – 480 BC) who composed one of the most influential philosophical texts in the ancient world. Nonetheless the phrase came to encapsulate Heraclitus’ position. Traditionally this position is characterised as explaining the universe as being in a state of constant movement, or flux. There is a dynamic tension between this flux and the unifying agency which is the Logos (ὁ Λόγος), the Word, which provides the basis for any reckoning of the stuff of the world. In other words, the Logos determines the arrangement of things in the world. Famously Heraclitus warns that men are always ‘uncomprehending’, ἀξύνετοι (*axunetoi*), of it. This flux which the Logos handles is represented by fire, as discussed in the note above, but also by the image of water flowing. The relationship between the Logos, fire and flux is obscure but essentially restless.¹⁴ πάντα ῥεῖ (*panta rhei*) arose in response to a saying attributed to Heraclitus: ‘you would not step into the same river twice.’ The phrase is reported in the commentary on Heraclitus in Plato’s

¹² Kahn, C. *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, Cambridge University Press, 1979. p. 271 ff.

¹³ Pindar. *The Odes*, translated by Bowra, C.M. Penguin, 1969. p. 203.

¹⁴ The relationship between *Logos*, fire and water flowing is not clearly given in the fragments that survive from Heraclitus. KRS write of the Logos as ‘an expression’ of the ‘rule of measure in change which inheres in the world process’ (KRS, p. 199)

Cratylus named after the fifth Century Athenian Heraclitean identified by Aristotle as a teacher of Plato but it does not appear even there in the succinct version later circulating to represent Heraclitus, namely πάντα ῥεῖ (*panta rhei*).¹⁵ The *Cratylus* is a discussion of the study of language and its value.

Heraclitus’ work has attracted the attention of modern philosophers such as Martin Heidegger (cf. Heidegger, M., *Early Greek Thinking*, trans. D.F. Krell and F.A. Capuzzi, Harper & Row, 1984). Lacan translated Heidegger’s account of Heraclitus’ *Logos*.¹⁶ Charles Melman set his Seminar of 1994 – 1995 ‘under the aegis of’ the Heraclitean school, opening it with a discussion of a number of the fragments of Heraclitus.¹⁷

Jean Allouch refers to Lacan’s use of the phrase πάντα ῥεῖ [*panta rhei*] as a title of a poem, the only one Lacan ever published. Written in 1929, published in 1933 with the title *Hiatus irrationalis* and again in 1977 with the Heraclitean title, with alterations each iteration, the poem’s history seems to realise something of Heraclitean flux.

e-mail address: jbarry.odonnell@eircom.net

¹⁵ Socrates’ words at *Cratylus*, 402a are: λέγει που Ἡράκλειτος ὅτι ‘πάντα χωρεῖ καὶ οὐδὲν μένει,’ καὶ ποταμοῦ ῥοῆ ἀπεικάζων τὰ ὄντα λέγει ὡς ‘δις ἐς τὸν αὐτὸν ποταμὸν οὐκ ἂν ἐμβαίης.’ (Heraclitus says somewhere that ‘all things are in motion (χωρεῖ, [*chōrei*]; also has the sense of ‘gives way’) and nothing is fixed (μένει, [*meni*]),’ and comparing the things that are to the stream of a river he says that ‘you would not step into the same river twice.’

There is a debate in the scholarship which disputes whether even the phrasing ‘...one cannot step twice into the same river ...’ can be attributed to Heraclitus or not. Apart from its appearance in Plato’s text it also turns up in a quotation in the work of Plutarch (c. 46 – 120 AD) entitled *De E apud Delphos (On the E at Delphi)*. Kahn (1979) argues that it should be considered to come from Heraclitus himself (p. 168-9) and even if this cannot be proven the wording captures the Heraclitean position. The other notable references in Plato are to be found in *Cratylus* 439c-d, *Theaetetus* 182c and, allusively, *Sophist* 242d. *Cratylus* is reported by Aristotle to have taken his teacher Heraclitus’ position one step further (or back, if you like) with the formulation: ‘One cannot step into the same river once.’ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book 4 [δ], 1010a10-15. Thus *Cratylus*, in this one remark, subverts the notion of a reliable continuity or consistency through time not just for the flowing waters of the river but also for the one stepping in.

¹⁶ Lacan, J. ‘Traduction d’un texte de Martin Heidegger « Logos »’ in *La psychanalyse*, 1956 n° 1, pp. 59-79. For a discussion of Lacan’s interlocution with Heidegger see Richardson, W.J. ‘Heidegger and Psychoanalysis?’ in *Natureza humana* v.5 n.1 São Paulo jun. 2003 available at http://pepsic.bvsalud.org/scielo.php?pid=S1517-24302003000100001&script=sci_arttext

¹⁷ Melman, C. *Returning to Schreber; Seminar 1994 – 1995, Hôpital Henri-Rousselle*, translated by Cormac Gallagher, Editions de l’Association Freudienne Internationale, 1999.