

**Stony Brook University  
The Graduate School**

**Doctoral Defense Announcement**

**Abstract**

**Heraclitus on Meaning and Knowledge Legitimation**

**By**

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This dissertation offers a new account of the context in which Heraclitus develops his views on meaning and knowledge, a context potentially significant in helping us to understand the crisis of meaning in philosophy today. First I consider the phenomenological lens of "mythic thinking," the frame of reference most appropriate to Heraclitus's intellectual lifeworld. This mythic frame affords insight into important dimensions of Heraclitus's thought, particularly the simultaneous holism and fragmentation that characterized his philosophical metanarrative and grounded his epistemology. By drawing from Jean-François Lyotard's work on the production and transmission of narrative knowledge and its relation to the social bond, I suggest that Heraclitus' concept of the *xynos logos*, or shared thinking, captures the holistic-fragmented nature of the social bond perfectly. Because this *xynos logos* only happens where thought gathers, I show how four sites of this gathering—the *psyche*, the *polis*, the cosmos, and the Sacred—are intended in a number of pivotal fragments of Heraclitus. Each of these sites is determined to be continuous and interrelated, but a close reading suggests we should not take the continuity of these sites of thinking as passive or stable; instead, each site is only in so far as it arises out of conflict. Thus, we discover that the signature Heraclitean concept of the *agon* is present in the fragments that describe the four sites of the *xynos logos*. In a concluding discussion, I argue that Heraclitus's unique aphoristic style also captures this fragmentation within the whole, which allows (and has allowed) future interpreters continually and fruitfully to re-interpret his fragments. The fragments cannot be exhausted of meaning because they capture the very essence of meaning—the necessary fragmentation within it. Thus, philosophy should not wish away conflict and competition in its definitions of the world, but see conflict as the basis of any world it might hope to define.

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