

**Stony Brook University  
The Graduate School**

Doctoral Defense Announcement

**Abstract**

*Heraclitus and the Work of Awakening*

By

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Heraclitus is regarded as one of the foundational figures of western philosophy. As such, he is typically read as some species of rational thinker: empiricist, materialist, metaphysician, dialectician, phenomenologist, etc. This dissertation argues that all of these views of Heraclitus and his work are based upon profoundly mistaken assumptions. Instead, Heraclitus is shown to be a thoroughly and consistently mystical writer whose work is organized around the recurring theme of awakening. He is thus much more akin to figures such as Buddha, Lao Tzu, and Empedocles than to Aristotle or Hegel.

This dissertation is divided into three main sections. The first chapter takes on the related issues of Heraclitus' own discourse and the route to wisdom as he conceived it. What is the status of Heraclitus' famously obscure *logos*? What are the essential preconditions for understanding it? How does one live one's life so as to get wisdom? The second chapter deals with the fundamental realities of human existence that, according to Heraclitus, elude the understanding of most people. Firstly, human existence is seen as a kind of slumber in which the sleepers do not even realize that they are asleep. Secondly, there is a treatment of Heraclitus' use of the Greek esoteric understanding that this human existence—what most of us think of as life—is somehow, in reality and unbeknownst to us, lived out in the underworld. Finally, there is a substantial discussion of fragment 62 and its assertion that “mortals are immortals and immortals are mortals,” with comparison to Plato's *Phaedo* and the poetry of Empedocles. The final chapter discusses Heraclitus' theology as it relates to the issue of human spirituality. Special attention is given to the figures of Zeus and Apollo in the fragments. There is also a commentary on Heraclitus' suggestion that he and his work somehow parallel Apollo and his divine activity.

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**Dissertation Advisor:** Peter Manchester