APPENDIX II
(LECTURE XI)

THE PHILOSOPHY OF TIME & CHANGE:
SOME HISTORICAL NOTIONS
A. Heraclitus and Plato

Heraclitus (c.540–c.475 B.C.E.) was the man who introduced the idea of “perpetual change” to Western philosophy. Disillusioned from the social system in which he lived (when the Greek tribal aristocracies were beginning to yield to the new force of democracy), he argued against the belief that the existing social order would remain forever. “Everything is in flux and nothing is at rest”, he declared; and added, “you cannot step twice into the same river”; even in the “stillest matter there is unseen flux and movement”.

This emphasis on time and change, and especially on change in social life, is an important characteristic not only of Heraclitus’ philosophy, and of Plato’s and Aristotle’s philosophies which followed it, but of modern historicism as well*. That individuals, nations, cultures, and civilizations, change, is a fact which needs to be impressed especially upon those minds who take their social and physical environments for granted.**

Heraclitus believes also that strife or war is the dynamic as well as the creative principle of all change. “War”, he says, “is the father of all and the king of all things”. “One must know that war is universal, and that justice-the lawsuit-is strife, and that all things develop through strife and by necessity”. Where there is no strife there is decay! But in this flux of change and struggle and selection, only one thing is constant, and that is the universal law of nature. “It always was, and is, and shall be”. Moreover, it is the same for all things.

He had, however, another doctrine on which he set even more store than on the perpetual flux; this was the doctrine of the identity of opposites. It was linked to his theory of change. A changing thing must give up some property and acquire the opposite property.

Heraclitus belief in strife is also connected with this doctrine, for in strife opposites combine to produce a motion which is a unification of the opposite states. There is a unity in the world, but it is a unity resulting from diversity:

“Couples are things whole and things not whole, what is drawn together and what is drawn asunder, the harmonious and the discordant. The one is made up of all things, and all things issue from the one”. “The opposites belong to each other, the best harmony results from discord, and everything develops by strife . . . .”

This doctrine contains the core of Hegel’s philosophy, which proceeds by a synthesizing of opposites.


** It may be of interest to compare Heraclitus’ and Plato’s views on change and decline (see below), with Buddha’s (ca. 563–483 B.C.E.) last words: “All composite things decay. Strive diligently.”