Heraclitus (active around 500 BCE)

All that survives of Heraclitus writings are around a hundred relatively short fragments, perhaps once parts of a single work, many of which are a rather cryptic - offering the opportunity for highly imaginative attempts to reconstruct his philosophy. He was already regarded as a very obscure writer in antiquity. His style of writing is that of a prophet who has a message to impart, a secret to reveal, but to whom most people are not prepared to listen. In Heraclitus fragments we find the view that:

(1) A true account of the world and of appropriate behaviour is available to humans. The world is governed by *logos*, which can be translated as reason, account, etc (see the lecture slides). Most people do not grasp this.

(2) Everywhere we look in the world we find **opposition** and **change**. Change is from one opposite to another, from darkness to light, heat to cold, day to night, and so on. Change is the manifestation of **tension** between opposites. The world according to Heraclitus is everywhere in ***flux***. His most famous aphorisms compares the world to a river which is always changing - **'it is impossible to step into the same river twice'**.

(3) Opposites are **unified** by the continual balancing and rebalancing of the tension between them - there is an order in the world, the logos, which holds the opposites in balance and so guarantees the regularity of the continually changing world. In physical terms the unifying principle is **fire**.

(4) The soul has the same character as fire, the physical manifestation of the *logos*.

Parmenides (active around 485BC)

The only work of Parmenides mentioned in antiquity is his poem in three parts. The first part is an introduction in highly dramatic terms in which Parmenides describes his journey to the truth. The second part, called '*The Way of Truth* is an account of the nature of reality, of what whatever it is that is ultimately real must be like. The *Introduction* and *The Way of Truth* are given in the the reading. In the third part of the poem, known as '*The Way of Opinio*n', Parmenides gave an account of the world as it appears to us. In this he describes how we perceive the world as involving opposition and change - ultimately the oppostion of fire and earth / light and darkness.

The Way Of Truth is an attempt to understand what it is to be real, or the nature of **being**, a **conceptual** rather than an **empirical** investigation so one which belongs to the discipline that we now call **metaphysics**.

Parmenides' Argument:

Parmenides' poem in contains an argument about the nature of ultimate reality which will be analysed in the lecture. Locating the various claims made in the argument will be very helpful in understanding how it is supposed to work, we use symbols, letters, and numbers to do this:

'One path only is left for us to speak of: that **(*)** it is. On this path there are a multitude of indications that what-is, being **(A)** ungenerated, is also **(B)** imperishable, **(C**) whole, **(D)** of a single kind, **(E)** immovable and **(F)** complete.'

Arguments for **(A)**, that what is is ungenerated (and **(B)** incorruptible):

[I] 'Nor **(1)** was it once, nor **(2)** will it be, since it is, now, **(3)** all together, **(4)** one and **(5)** continuous. For **(6)** what coming-to-be of it will you seek? **(7)** How and from where did it grow?**(8)** I shall not permit you to say or to think that it grew from what-is-not, for **(9)** it is not to be said or thought that it is not. **(10)** What necessity could have impelled it to grow later rather than sooner, if it began from nothing? Thus **(11)** it must either fully be, or **(12)** be not at all. Nor **(13)** will the force of conviction ever allow anything, from what-is, to come-to-be something apart from itself; wherefore **(14)** Justice does not loosen her shackles so as to allow it to come-to-be or to perish, but holds it fast.'

[II] The decision on these matters depends on this: either **(15)** it is or **(16)** it is not. But it has been decided, as is necessary, to let go the one as **(not:16)** unthinkable and unnameable (for **(17)** it is no true path), but to allow the other, so that **(15) = (*)** it is, and is true.

[III] (18) How could what-is be in the future? **(19)** How could it come-to-be? For if it **(19)** came-to-be, **(20)** it is not, nor is it if **(18)** at some time it is going to be.

Note on Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans.

Pythagoras was born on the island of Samos near Miletus the home of Ionian philosophy. In the middle of his life he moved to Italy and seems to have established a religious cult there. Nothing has survived which can be securely attributed to him but in the fifth century there was a school of Pythagoreans who, as we will see in reading the *Phaedo*, influenced Plato and whose doctrines were criticised by Aristotle.

Teaching.

(1) Transmigration of Souls:

'What he says about Pythagoras runs thus: "Once they say that he was passing by when a puppy was being whipped, and he took pity and said: 'Stop, do not beat it; for it is the soul of a friend that I recognized when I heard it giving tongue.'" [Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, VII, 36.]

(2) Numbers are the Ultimate Reality:

(a) 'Nature in the universe was harmonized from both unlimiteds and limiters - both the universe as a whole and everything in it.' [Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, VIII, 85]

(b) 'It is necessary for the things that exist to be all either limiters or unlimiteds or both limiters and unlimiteds. But they could not be only unlimiteds ... Since, then, they appear to have their existence neither from things that are all limiters nor from things that are all unlimiteds, it is clear thus that both the universe and the things in it were harmonized from both limiters and unlimiteds. And things as they are in fact also make this clear. For some

of them, coming from limiters, limit; others, coming from both limiters and unlimiteds, both limit and do not limit; and others, coming from unlimiteds, are evidently unlimited.' [Stobaeus *Anthology*, 1, 21, 7a]

(c) 'And indeed all the things that are known have number; for it is not possiblc for anything to be thought of or known without this.' [Stobaeus, *Anthology*, 1, 2 1, 7b]

(d) 'About nature and harmony this is the position. The being of the objects, being eternal, and nature itself admit of divine, not human, knowledge - except that it was not possible for any of the things that exist and are known by us to have come into being, without there existing the being of those things from which the universe was composed, the limiters and the unlimiteds. And since these principles existed, being neither alike nor of the same kind, it would have been impossible for them to be ordered into a universe if harmony had not supervencd - in whatever manner this came into being. Things that were alike and of the same kind had no need of harmony, but those that were unlike and not of the same kind and of unequal order - it was necessary for such things to have been locked together by harmony, if they are to be held together in an ordered universe.' [Stobaeus, *Anthology*, 1, 21, 7d]

(e) '<The Pythagoreans> were the first to advance this study <i.e. mathematics>, and having been brought up in it they thought the principles were the principles of all things. Since of these principles numbers are by nature the first, and in numbers they thought they saw many resemblances to the things that exist and come into being - more than in fire and earth and water (such and such a modification of numbers being justice, another being soul and intellect, another being opportunity and similarly almost all other things being numerically expressible); since, again, they saw that the attributes and the ratios of the attunements were expressible in numbers; since, then, all other things in the whole of nature seemed to be modelled after numbers, and numbers seemed to be the first things in the whole of nature, they supposed the elements of numbers to be the elements of all things, and the whole heaven to be an attunement and a number. And all the properties of numbers and attunements they could show to agree with the attributes and parts and the whole arrangement of the heavens, they collected and fitted into their scheme; and if there was a gap anywhere, they readily made additions so as to make their whole theory coherent. E.g. as the number 10 is thought to be perfect and 10 comprise the whole nature of numbers, they say that the bodies which move through the heavens are ten, but as the visible bodies are only nine, to meet this they invent a tenth - the "counter-earth". We have discussed these matters more exactly elsewhere ...' [Aristotle *Metaphysics*, A5, 985b23]

(3) Opposites:

'Other members of <the Pythagorean> school say there are ten principles, which they arrange in two columns of cognates (i) limit and unlimited, (ii) odd and even, (iii) one and plurality, (iv) right and left, (v) male and female, (vi)resting and moving, (vii) straight and curved, (viii) light and darkness, (ix) good and bad, (x) square and oblong.' [Aristotle *Metaphysics* A5, 986a22]