mind the gaps: fragments
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nine tokens of heraclitus
the words are true
but most know
no

more on hearing
them for the first time
than on not hearing them

at all. it is
as I say

but they
have never been

experienced as I
have. they

no more know
what they
do when they
are awake
than when they
are asleep.

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the words are common property, but many live as though wisdom were their private domain.

many pass by without taking notice. and if they do, they do not understand. but they believe they do

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expect nothing
you will discover
nothing
unexpected

it leaves no tracks.

5

travel every path
you will not
cross
mind’s boundary.

6

listen
not to me
but to the words

7

all life is
a child playing
a child’s game,
the dominion of a child

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the way
up and the way
down are the same

god is
day night
winter summer
war peace
gain loss we
measure our pain

changing gods
like fire mingling
with spices we burn
as incense. we

call gods
what we
taste

burning.

6 | mind the gaps: fragments
Εἰ δ' ἄγ' ἐγὼν ἐρέω, κόμισαι δὲ σὺ μοῦθον ἀκούσας, ἀἵπερ ὁδὸι μοῦναι διζήσιος εἰσι νοῆσαι· ἢ μὲν ὀπως ἔστιν τε καὶ ὡς οὐκ ἔστι μὴ εἶναι, Πειθοῦς ἔστι κέλευθος – Ἄληθείη γὰρ ὀπηδεῖ, ἢ δ' ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν τε καὶ ὡς χρεών ἔστι μὴ εἶναι, τὴν όμως τοι φράζω παναπευθέα ἐμμεν ἀταρπόν· οὔτε γὰρ ἄν γνοῖς τὸ γε μὴ ἔδω - οὔ γὰρ ἄνυστον – οὔτε φράσαις.
calm and steady heart of truth
what seems to be
but may be

nothing of the kind, all
on the way.
listen.

either it is and it must not
not be, or it is and it
must not be.

but you cannot know
what is not. no
one can tell.

one can never tell, but listen to me:
what can be thought can be.
and what is distant can be

present to mind. where I begin is
neither here nor there. it is all
the same to me

because I will be there again.
I think one must say
being is because
it is. but nothing is not. 
think about it. 
don’t think

about nothing. 
dazed and confused, 
mortals of two minds are

carried away. 
to be or not to be, 
that is not the question.

it will never be proven that what is not is. 
don’t even think about it. It is 
what it is, what it is 
it never was, never 
will be, for it is 
now, whole.

it must be all or not at all. 
it is what it is. 
that is all.

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Ο]ι μὲν ἰππήων στρατον οί δὲ πέσδων
οί δὲ νάων φαῖσ’ ἐπ[ι] γὰν μέλαι[ν]αν
ἐ]μεναι κάλλιστον ἤγω δὲ κῆν’ ὀτ-
tw τίς ἔραται.

] μεν ο’ δύνατον γένεσθαι
] . ν’ ἀνθρώπ[ . .
π]εδέχην δ’ ἀραστηαι

τ’ ἐξ ἄδοκη[τω.]
silver
a fragment of Sappho

splendid stars that ring the moon
won’t show their faces when
she waxes full, showers
earth with silver
sleep
a fragment of Sappho

beside cold water
wind whispers through apple
branches, deep sleep falls
from quivering leaves
most simple

two fragments from a fragment of Sappho

1

what is
most beautiful is
most simple to explain:
it is nothing more than what

we desire

2

what can not
come to be
cannot
be

but we
pray

to share what comes
of what is not
to be

expected.
up in smoke

a bit of Sappho, based on two ancient sources (incomplete)...

...a gift

famous indeed[
]beautiful and noble, your friends. you distress me
dishonored

swollen . overrun . [
stuffed. for my mind
is not so [
]ordered,

not even[ dry, understanding
] . misery
]while
]unyielding with[
mind well[
]bled[sed up in smoke

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meditation on some fragments of empedocles

στεινωποί μὲν γὰρ παλάμαι κατὰ
gυῖα κέχυνται· πολλὰ δὲ δείλ' ἐμπαία, τὰ τ' ἀμβλύνουσι μερίμνας.
pαύρον δὲ ζωῆς ἰδίου μέρος
ἀθρήσαντες ὡκύμοροι καπνοῖο δίκην
ἀρθέντες ἀπέπταν αὐτὸ μόνον
περικόλος. Ὠρῶς συγκεῖσθαι
ἐκαστὸς πάντοσ' ἐλαινόμενοι, τὸ δ' ὅλον [πᾶς] εὔχεται εὑρεῖν· οὕτως
οὗτ' ἐπιδερκτὰ τάδ' ἄνδράσιν οὐδ' ἐπακουστὰ οὐτε νόωι περιληπτά. σὺ δ' οὖν, ἐπεὶ ὥδ' ἐλιάσθης, πεύσεαι
οὐ πλέον ἥ ἄροτει ἀφῇς ῥωρεῖν.
Listen. There are four roots of everything: bright Zeus, life-bearing Hera, Hades, Nestis, whose tears soften the mortal stream

Light, life, unseen, a young girl’s tears, her story goes without saying

and let me tell you another thing: you will encounter nothing in nature that is mortal,

nothing that is lost to death in the end, rather there is only mixing and exchanging of what has been mixed,

and nature is what human beings say it is
Unnamed, a young girl sacrificed
does not die. Her tears thaw
the ice of her father’s
cold promise.

Everybody knows.

Having considered the tiny portion of their own lives,
they die quickly, flying away like wisps of smoke,
believing only what each happens upon
but boasting a vision of the whole.

Having seen so little,
they say so much.
I’ll say two things: at one time these two grew into one from many, at another separated into many out of one. There is a dual creation of mortal beings and a dual decline;

the union of all things causes the birth and death of the one, while the other is nurtured by their separation.

And these never stop alternating, sometimes coming together under the influence of love so everything becomes one, sometimes flying apart under the hostile influence of strife.

In that they have the power to become one out of many and to become many when the one is separated, they come into being and have no stable life, but in that they never cease their back and forth, they are unmoved as they continue in the cycle.
nothing changes everything
things fall apart, things
fall together, one way
or the other

but listen to my story...
as I was saying...

I’ll say two things: once it grew to be
one out of many, once it grew to many
out of one, fire and water and earth and air,

boundless, strife apart from these,
of equal weight in all directions,
and love among them, equal
in length and breadth...

that is that, and, flowing
through one another, they
become different at different
times, and are for all time the same
nothing changes everything
changes. it goes
without saying, everybody knows.
sea again

αἴθήρ μακρῆισι κατὰ χθόνα δύετο βίζαις.
γῆς ἱδρῶτα θάλασσαν.
ἄλς ἐπάγη ρίπῆις ἐωσμένος ἠελίοι.

three fragments of Empedocles

air sinks roots deep in earth
earth sweats sea
sun plaits sea salt crystal

tears some χόρη, nameless,
cries soften crystal
till it rises with sun, falls

as rain to earth’s salt
sweet kiss, sea
again
ταῦτα εἰπόντες ἐβαδῖζομεν, καὶ
nατελάβομεν τὸν Ἀντιφῶντα
οἶκοι, χαλινὸν τινα χαλκεῖ
ἐκδιδόντα σκευάσαι: ἔπειδῆ δὲ
ἐκείνου ἀπηλλάγη οἱ τε ἀδελφοὶ
ἐλεγον αὐτῷ ὡν ἑνεκα παρεῖμεν,
ἀνεγνώρισέν το με αὐτὴν
προτέρας επιονίμαι καὶ με
ἡσπάζετο, καὶ δεομένων ἡμῶν
dιελθεῖν τοὺς λόγους, τὸ μὲν
πρῶτον ὕκνει—πολὺ γὰρ ἕφη
ἔργον εἶναι— ἐπείτα μέντοι
dιηγεῖτο.

e pluribus unum:
the new Parmenides
cicadas

so thrilled with pleasure... they went on singing, and quite forgot to eat and drink until they actually died without noticing it.

Plato, Phaedrus

If music be the food of love, they thought, no reason for any other.

Love, drunk on their song, turned them to endless singers of sleep in summer sun. Once human, they never stopped living in the sound of their own voices.
We drove straight through from Wyoming, Minnesota to New Orleans on Highway 61 – not to avoid the Interstate but because we had it in our heads that one turn after another on a slow road pausing for every signal in every small town was the only way to get to Mardi Gras.

We made our way the way the river does, rising through blue, leaving some (not all) of our shit behind. Right through the middle of the crossroad where Robert Johnson sold his soul. If that doesn’t get you ready for Lent nothing will.

But we’re getting ahead of ourselves.

Must have been around Louisiana, Missouri, before we got to Troy – six hours or so from Memphis – that we picked up a hitchhiker, scruffy kid with a guitar. He said his name was Bob. Later, after the Irish whiskey he was sipping from a flask kicked in like Pentecost, he said he was Plato’s little brother and took to speaking in tongues, mumbling about some guy named Abe and running the other way when you see god coming.
(Yes. That Plato.)

The timeline was impossible, but anyone who’s ever driven straight through from Minnesota to Mardi Gras knows what it means to be out of time, surprised by nothing, even if the odds are against knowing what it means to get happy.

He could spin a tale. And that kept us awake, a better reason to pick up a hitchhiker on a dark road than some vague idea you have that something you can do with a machine you own or a machine you think you own on loan from a bank that owns you can get a lost soul closer to wherever it is they think they’re going.

I’m telling you now, it’s hard enough to know where you’re going without worrying about some stranger, especially when you find yourself in a dark place where two roads cross in the middle of nowhere on the map with no sign you can see, wondering if Ike had the right idea after all.

The best you can do is keep on keeping on, keep your eyes on the road, and do whatever comes to mind to keep yourself awake.
Bob strummed his guitar off and on all the way to New Orleans. He’d break into a little Woody we knew now and again and then we’d sing along. It rained hard – hard rain – for a while, and while the windshield wipers were keeping time, I thought of Janis and her Mercedes, of nothing left to lose.

But she never came up, and no one was holding Bobby’s hand this time.

Bob spit out names again and again, like they left a bad taste in his mouth that the whiskey couldn’t hide:


Nearing Memphis, he grew suddenly lucid:

That’s why I left, you know. Tired of being Nobody. Headed west. I ran into this old cat who said he used to be in politics. He said he got fed up with the bullshit and headed west, like me. Turns out he was tired of not being Nobody, not like me.

He comes to a border crossing and while he’s fumbling for his passport, guard says I know who you are. Old cat says you and everybody else. Get in line. Guard says I’ll make
you a deal. Write down everything you know about politics, and I’ll let you be on your way. Old cat says You’re putting me on. But he pulls out a notebook and jots down poems he’s been making in his head to pass time on his long march west. Nothing to do with politics. But no doubt the guard will find the politics he’s looking for written in ink and nothing to do with politics between the lines on the pages torn from that notebook.

Sure enough. Guard says that’ll do and waves the old cat through. Right then and there, that old cat decides to keep walking until he comes to a place where he can pass without a word about nothing he’s learned in politics.

I met him in Chicago, many crossings later, in a bar. Sign said Woodlawn Tap, but the locals call it Jimmy’s.

In Chicago, nothing says politics like nobody nobody knows. Coming out of nowhere as the old cat did, he found a disciple waiting where he never would have thought to look, a smart grad student who’d visited every crossing and gathered all the poems the old cat made into a system soon to be a dissertation. He was waiting for us at a table in the middle with a pitcher of Guinness. The old cat did his best to get us to do the talking. But, true to form, the disciple and the gathering crowd insisted.

Another border, another crossing – solitary, singing in the west...

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There was an assistant professor at the next table (I’d know one anywhere and so would you) who’d read all the poems and been alerted that this old cat was passing through Chicago.

He was part of the crowd.

He had published a treatise on the poems, a little masterpiece of erudition, in a respected academic journal nobody read, and he laid it out for the circle of drinkers, who raised their glasses and cheered. The grad student, who had not found time to read it, made a note to cite it.

But, dazzled though they were, they still wanted to hear it from the horse’s mouth. We all did.

Someone brought two more pitchers of Guinness while the crowd pulled the tables together.

Another border, another crossing – solitary, singing in the west...

If there were a one, the one would not be many. Not many, the one would not have parts.

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Not having parts, the one
would not be whole.
A part is

a part of a whole, one
missing no part.

One whole having parts would be
many. One that is one is not
whole. One that is one

has no parts. No
parts no beginning
no middle no end no

limit no shape
nowhere

neither in
another nor in
itself uncontained

uncontaining. One
contained would be one
contained and one containing: two.

Move and you are you
here and you there, not one.
Be in the same place and the place is another: two, you and the place you are in.

One cannot be in the same place. Not being in the same place, one cannot be still.

Not still not in motion not other than any other. One cannot be other than itself or another, cannot be the same as itself, as another. Neither here nor there, never here now then there. Not younger than itself not older not the same never in time.

Nothing doing nothing to do. This one can not be can not not be. That cannot be.

Begin again.

5

If a one is, it cannot be and not have being. So there will be one and the being that one has. One is, not one is one. Being, one has being. If one has being, the whole is one and the being one has: two.

Each of the two is one that has being. No part is one. One being is a multitude, unlimited. Say one, say being, one being, a pair –

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then there are two of us —
do tell. Each is
one, two
together another: three.

If there are two, two times
must be, two times three
and three times
three and on
and on

if there is one
there must be number.

If there is number
there must be many.

If there are many,
every one of the many

must be one. And not
being one, the one is many.

6

The parts of the one
are parts of a whole, Being
a whole, the one takes shape.

A whole cannot be without beginning and middle and end and the middle can be nothing but what is the same distance from beginning and end and so the one having shape will be in itself and in another.

If the whole were nowhere, it would not be. Because it is not in itself, it must be in something else. As a whole, the one is in something else. As all the parts, it is in itself.

It is in itself and in another. Being in itself and in another, it is at rest and in motion.

Itself not itself, others not others.

If there is no one, there is nothing.

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Chicago was not the place.

I continued west with the old cat until we parted company somewhere in Iowa. When I left him, he was in deep discussion with a farmer who’d gone to Oxford thinking he’d pursue an academic career. But now all he really cared about was horses.

The last thing I heard the old cat say was a white horse is not a horse. It is a white horse.

Most true.

8

*Laissez les bons temps rouler.*
about time: fragments of a correspondence between Anne Viscountess Conway (1631-1679) and Isaac Newton (1643-1727)

Non est æternitas vel infinitas, sed æternus & infinitus; non est duratio vel spatium, sed durat & adest. Durat semper & adest ubique, & existendo semper & ubique durationem & spatium, æternitatem & infinitatem constituit. Cum unaquaque spatiis particula sit semper & unumquodque durationis indivisible Ita sentiebant veteres, momentum ubique; certe rerum omnium Fabricator ac Dominus non erit Aratus in Phænom: sub nunquam nusquam.
god is a word among words. 
in other words, 
god is 
a concept by which we – 
that is to say 
we say my 

god we 
say 

god of: but 

deitas is another 
matter. i’ll say it again 

god is a concept 
by which we 
measure. 
the thing is 
god is 

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god

of, god is
substantially

one. all things
are contained in

god and
move.

but god does not act
on them nor they on him. all

eye, all ear, all
brain, all arm, all
sense, all act, not at all

human. we
have no
idea.
(a fragment of a letter written by Anne Viscountess Conway to Isaac Newton shortly after his appointment as Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge University)

It is clear, sir, that you follow our esteemed teacher Henry More, to whom I defer in all matters of wit and understanding. But on this, I differ. For God's dwelling in space to take place, it is necessary that space make way; and it is the act of God's dwelling there then that moves it. Still, it moves.

3

(from Newton's response, possibly a draft, probably undelivered)

As I see it, sunlight is the same light as the light in a cooking fire, the same light as light reflected on earth and in the planets. To effects of the same kind the same cause should be attributed; and between the attribution of a cause and the observation of an effect we come to think we know what moves as well as what is moved. Still, we move.
there is no time in god, no change, no composition, no division, no shadow of turning. god (as you say) is one substantially. But I hold that god, distinct, is, still, not separate from creatures. god is present in every single one most intimately

there is no time in god, no change, no knowledge, no will, no passion. god knows nothing.
I say, again, god is a concept by which we measure, beginning and end, where we are, in time.

there is a word in god, in essence one and the same, the source of god’s knowing god and god’s knowing every other thing.
(from Conway’s journal, a reference to a letter she received from Newton via Henry More)

Speaking of word, Mr. Newton says he suspects one must look to Euclid’s *Elements* to hear it. A word of god, he writes, must, if it is nothing else, be measured.

(a fragment of a letter written by Anne Viscountess Conway to the Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge University)

god made creatures with whom to speak,
but they did not take to light, so
god, all light, diminished

light to make space
where creatures could dwell,

space like an empty circle, space for worlds,
an actual place, the soul of the word
that filled the space.

soul united with light
to make a subject –
speaker, spoken.

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(from Conway’s journal, a reference to a letter she received from Newton via Henry More)

Speaking of limits, Mr. Newton recalls that Euclid maintained epiphanies, bounded by lines, have length and width alone...

(a fragment of a letter written by Anne Viscountess Conway to the Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge University)

there is no time
so small that it cannot be divided into smaller times.

an infinite number of times,
a time that is infinitely divisible.
a being outside time

time is
nothing but
the motion of creatures.

no motion, no
time. no time, no

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creatures. the nature of every creature is to be in motion.

11

(marginal note written by Isaac Newton in a text later attributed to Anne Viscountess Conway)

still, they move

12

(a fragment of a letter written by Anne Viscountess Conway to the Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge University)

god cannot act without reason. though a most free agent, god is also most necessary.

as there is an infinity of times there is an infinity of worlds.

there is an infinity of creatures, each containing an infinity in itself on and on and on...

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there are no spaces where god is not, and in any space where god is

there must be creatures because where god is, god does.

the action of god is one act, because there can be no succession in god.

if a creature were reduced to its least parts all motion and operation in creatures would cease and it would be

as though the creature thus divided were pure nothingness.

the division of things is never in terms of the smallest mathematical term but of the smallest physical term.

13

(marginal note written by Isaac Newton in a text later attributed to Anne Viscountess Conway)

A compilation of least things, ever closer approximation to the curve a moving body traces over time.
(a fragment of a letter written by Anne Viscountess Conway to the Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge University)

when matter is so divided
it disperses into physical monads,
such as it was in the first state of its formation,
then it is ready to resume its activity and become spirit.

a consideration of the infinite divisibility of everything into always smaller parts is not an inane or useless theory, but of the very greatest use for understanding the causes and reasons of things and for understanding how all creatures from the highest to the lowest are inseparably united one to another by their subtler mediating parts, which come between them and are emanations from one creature to another, through which they can act upon one another at the greatest distance. This is the basis of all sympathy and antipathy which occurs in creatures.

(from Conway’s journal, a reference to a letter she received from Newton via Henry More)

Speaking of action at a distance, Mr. Newton calls
everything a center, at once active and passive, acting on every other thing, as every other thing acts on it.

(a fragment of a letter written by Anne Viscountess Conway to the Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge University)

with respect to god, all things are made altogether with respect to creatures, all things are made one after the other, one at a time.

there is an intrinsic presence between god and creatures which transmits motion with no lapse of time.

god is a trinity of being, word, and will, whose will gives rise through word to creatures and to their activity,

creation depends on god's absolute absence and god's real presence at the same time.

time is being present to another.
there is no fragment of creation so small
that it cannot be divided into a smaller,
worlds within worlds within worlds.

reduce a creature to a point
beyond which it can not be divided
and it is nothing.

at bottom is nothing, but you
cannot get to the bottom
as long as you are in
the world.

17

(from Conway’s journal, a reference to a letter she received from
Newton via Henry More)

Shall we say, then, that god alone knows nothing?

18

(a fragment of a letter written by Anne Viscountess Conway to
the Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge
University)

the infinity of creatures means
all creatures emanate into one another.

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creatures are present not only to god
but also to each other.
every portion of matter is
a world of creatures containing
other worlds of creatures.

god is intimately present in all creatures.
god must always be fully present in every moment
to every moment

but creatures may be fully present only
across time: god is present.
creatures are present in time.

19

(from Conway’s journal, a reference to a letter she received from
Newton via Henry More)

god is out of time

20

(a fragment of a letter written by Anne Viscountess Conway to the Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge University)

As I read Mr. Leibniz, the world is an infinite curve; and his monads are internal to it. Predication is the execution
of travel but not the imposition of a world outside on an inside mind. To my mind, there is no outside. Space is an infinite envelopment of infinite worlds, an envelope around every perceiver. The body is not container. The mind is not contained. Mind is where bodies go. The point is to describe bodies going.

If God is wholly present in every instant, God goes nowhere and does not take place.

Still, we move – from all present in a point without dimensions to worlds in which all is present in every point. Every point an infinite set, all, still, nowhere present, no when. And, still, each is present across a set of points, with limits.

Bodies moving make space, make time. Where there are no bodies moving, there is no space, no time.

No bodies, nobody knows.

Divide a whole and wholes, not parts, remain.

Nothing is more basic than any other thing.

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about the author...

I am a poet and visual artist who has spent many years moonlighting as a philosophy professor – most often in interdisciplinary settings, most recently at the University of Chicago Graham School. I studied at the University of Chicago (where I received my Ph.D. in Ethics and Society) and Valparaiso University (where I received my B.A. in Psychology). I grew up on the High Plains in the Texas Panhandle, and that is where I first learned to take nothing seriously. Emptiness plays an important role in both my poetry and my painting: I often find myself spending as much time on what is not there as on what is. This usually means focusing on a single image and letting the whole composition spring up around it – not a narrative but an all at once that evokes a here and now that is, here, now, neither. A likely story is likely to grow out of this when readers and viewers encounter it, but I hope my art always invites more than it contains.

...more at stevenschroeder.org