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Scepticism as a Path towards Heracliteanism

Aenesidemus (mid-first cent. BC) is a key figure in Greek Scepticism. He challenged all claims concerning the truth of things (Greek 'dogmata': hence Aenesidemus characterised his opponents as 'dogmatic'), and also founded a new philosophical school which professed uncompromising doubt.

However, Aenesidemus is a very paradoxical figure. In spite of his well-established strict Scepticism, there does seem to be a 'dogmatic' streak in his thought, in that he defined Scepticism as a 'path' towards the philosophy of Heraclitus, a Presocratic philosopher who made several claims on how things are. The precise meaning of Aenesidemus' thesis is controversial, but it seems to imply at least a certain fondness for Heraclitus, something which one would not expect to find in a leading Sceptic thinker. This raises a problem, identified by one eminent scholar as 'the most difficult of all problems raised by ancient Scepticism', the solution of which is bound to affect our evaluation of Aenesidemus' actual place in the history of Scepticism.

Establishing exactly what Aenesidemus meant by defining Scepticism as a 'path' towards the philosophy of Heraclitus is crucial and preliminary to any further discussion. But the speculative way in which the question has usually been addressed has so far frustrated all hopes of an agreed solution. My contention is that examining other occurrences of the path-metaphor in ancient philosophical literature may give a clue as to its meaning. I shall discuss what this meaning might be, and outline how the findings of this research affect the current *status quaestionis* of Aenesidemus' so-called Heracliteanism.