

Comprehending and accepting the working of the universe for Self Salvation

According to Heraclitus

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"අපි එක ම ගඟකට බසිමු. අපි නොබසිමු.

අපි අප ය. අප නොවේ අපි."

ලොව ස්වභාවය එයයි. ස්ඵර කියා කිසිවක් නැත. ක්‍රි.පූ. හයවන ශතවර්ෂයේ විසූ ග්‍රීක දාර්ශනික හෙරක්ලයිටස් ලෝක ධර්මය දැවුණේ ඒ ආකාරයටයි. පංචේන්ද්‍රියට හසුවන ස්ථාවරභාවය මායාවක් වශයෙනි ඔහු පැහැදිලි කළේ. ඔහු ලෝ ස්වභාවය දැල්වෙන පහනක දැල්ලකට උපමා කළේ ය. තව ද ඔහුට අනුව ලොවෙහි පැවැත්ම රඳා පවතිනුයේ අරගල හා විරුද්ධ අන්තයන් අතර ඇති සටන මත ය. මේ සියල්ල ඇසුරින් ජීවත් වන මිනිසාගේ මතු බලාපොරොත්තු කෙලෙස විය හැකි ද? විමුක්තිය ඇත්තේ මැටි පිළිම වන්දනයෙන් හෝ වෙන අන් වතාවත් මත ද? නො එසේ නම් තමා සතුව ම ද? මෙම ලිපියෙහි අරමුණ වන්නේ හෙරක්ලයිටස් මෙවන් පරිසරයක් තුළ මිනිසාට ධනාත්මක බලාපොරොත්තුවක් හෙළි කර ඇති ආකාරය විමසීමට ලක් කිරීම යි. අනුගමනය කර ඇති ක්‍රමය වන්නේ ඔහු ඉදිරිපත් කර ඇති විවිධ න්‍යායයන් වෙත වෙනමත් සාමූහික පද්ධතියක් වශයෙන් සුපරීක්ෂාකාරී විමසීමට ලක් කිරීම යි.

Heracleitus reached his prime in 504-501 BC, Heracleitus was born in Ephesus in Asia Minor. He was a contemporary of Parmenides. He was an aristocrat and claimed to be an intellectual. He looked down scornfully on others who were not 'wise'. For example, he thinks that Homer should be whipped, most probably for teaching the populace wrong concepts. He was a philosopher who stressed the mental aspect. He did it to such an extent that he himself proclaimed that his intention was not to write for fools. He was accused of intentional obscurity and nicknamed 'The Dark' or 'The Obscure'. The reason for this attitude of his was that he strongly believed that the truth behind phenomena could not be understood unless one exercised one's intellectual capacity to the full.¹ The main points he presents in his philosophy are,

1. Fire was the original substance - Becoming and fading away being simultaneous and continuous.
2. Theory of flux. That even relative permanence could not be possible. Everything at every moment was in a process of change.
3. Harmony of the opposites and the tensions between the extremes were for the existence of the world. There was an underlying unity among these pairs of opposites.
4. The Word or the Logos

¹ G.S. Kirk and J.E. Raven, o.c.,184

The Logos is the most important element in his philosophy. The other theories can be included in a discussion of the nature of the Logos. The Logos is the world governing principle of the universe - the unifying formula underlying all things. Being the order of all things, it is the divine law of measure and proportion which is common to all. Some of Heracleitus's fragments reveal the nature of the Logos.

All things come to pass in accordance with this word (Logos)²

The Logos is common.³

Kirk and Raven⁴ comment that the Logos was the

'Underlying coherence' or 'the proportionate method of arrangement of things, what might almost be termed the structural plan of things, both individual and in sum.'

Statement like:

One thing, the only truly wise, does not and does consent to be called by the name of Zeus,⁵ enable us to understand to some extent the nature of the Logos. Zeus was the mythological anthropomorphic father god in the Olympian religion. The above statement shows that in some qualities it was similar and in some aspects it was different from Zeus. This leaves us to speculate on the possibility that it was similar to Zeus by the fact that it governed all things and was considered the most superior. It was not mythological or anthropomorphic; it was not similar to the Olympian Zeus. It was more like a governing force, a law or an order.

Heracleitus postulated fire as the original substance.

This world order did none of the gods or men make, but it always was and is and shall be; an ever living fire, kindling in measures and going out in measures.⁶

All things are an equal exchange for fire and fire for all things, as goods are for gold and gold for goods.⁷

No anthropomorphic god had any bearing on the origin of the cosmos. it was the ever permanent immortal substance fire that caused all things to be. On the other hand the world forming activity seems to be occurring in a systematic and an economic order. Could Heracleitus have thought that it was sustained and manipulated by an intelligent force? Certainly there seems to be the germ of such a concept. A reference to Zeus the Olympian is given in a fragment from Heraclitus

'Thunderbolt steers all things'⁸

² Heracleitus Fr, 50, 1

³ Heracleitus Fr, 2; Sextus adv., math, VIII 133.

⁴ G.S. Kirk and J.E. Raven, o.c.,187 ff.

⁵ Heracleitus Fr, 32

⁶ Fr, 30, Clement Storm, Vo. 104, 1

⁷ Fr., 90, Plutarch de E 8, 388D

The thunderbolt was the weapon of Zeus he was also the god of thunder. The association with thunder and fire is interesting. Heraclitus was most probably referring to fire as the instrument of change which the Logos employs in the world-forming dynamic process. As Zeus 'steers all' by the thunderbolt, the Logos brought about change through the principle substance fire. It is interesting to note that in the earlier philosophical theories the first principle was regarded as having divine qualities. But in this instance, Heraclitus seems to make a distinction between the original substance and the power that activated it. However this is not too clear, though Heraclitus seems to be working on such an assumption.

Due to the extremely dynamic nature of the process, Heraclitus declared that all things were in a perpetual state of flux. That everything was continually changing and even a relative permanence does not seem possible. The stability seen around us is only an illusion. Some of Heraclitus' fragments regarding this point:

Upon those that step into the same rivers different and different waters flow. It scatters and gathers.. it comes together and flows away.. approaches and departs..⁹

Heraclitus somewhere says that all things are in process and nothing stays still, and likening existing things to the stream of a river he says that you would not step twice into the same river.¹⁰

And some say not that some existing things are moving, and not others, but that all things are in motion all the time, but that this escapes our perception.¹¹

All things were transient to Heraclitus. Thus the nickname the 'weeping philosopher'.¹²

Appearance had to be interpenetrated in order to reach the reality beneath it. Heraclitus's theory of opposites is an example. We may again refer to the fragments of Heraclitus,

God is day night, winter summer, war peace, satiety hunger.¹³

The meaning of this text is that God is in every pair of opposites. Opposites were essential for the existence of the world. They existed, therefore, according to the divine law of the Logos which was supreme. Furthermore, Heraclitus believed that all things were one.¹⁴ There was a hidden relationship between the opposites. The following fragments from Heraclitus give evidence to this fact.

⁸ Fr. 64, Hippolytus, Ref., IX 10, 6.

⁹ Fr., 12, Arius Didymus ap. Eusebium P.E. XV 20, FR, 91, Plutarch de E 8, 388D

¹⁰ Plato, Cratylus, 402

¹¹ Aristotle Physics, 03, 25369

¹² W.K.C. Guthrie, o.c., p. 30

¹³ Fr, 67, Hippolytus Ref, IX 10, 8

¹⁴ Fr, 50, Hippolytus Ref, IX 9, 1

An unapparent connection is stronger than an apparent one.¹⁵

The real constitution of things is accustomed to hide itself.¹⁶

There is a back stretched connection as in the bow and the lyre.¹⁷

The bow exists because there is a struggle or stress and tension between the opposite ends. If by chance the struggle is terminated, the bow will cease to be. Further, the tension between the extremes is not an apparent one. To god or to the Logos, therefore, both extremes are of equal value. To quote Heraclitus again:

To god all things are beautiful and good and just, but men supposed some things to be unjust, others just.¹⁸

It is necessary to know that war is common and right is strife and that all things happen by strife and necessity.¹⁹

War is father of all and king of all.²⁰

Tension is a positive element. Strife is referred to by the epithet used to describe the Olympian Zeus, the traditional father of gods and men.

Thus we see Heraclitus uniting all his important philosophical theories under the term 'God'. And all the realities that he put forth were essential ingredients of the Logos or the world governing force. Heraclitus calls the Logos the common'.²¹ What is common is intelligence or insight. And as a person who always emphasized the intellect it is not surprising that he thought that 'intelligence' was the most superior thing that existed. This leads us to wonder whether his philosophy proposed a world governing intellect.

Heraclitus was unable to conceive of a force without a material embodiment. The Logos was a force, part material, part spiritual, which makes for rational order.²² This is clearly seen in his concept of the soul and the rationality of a human. Our senses were primary channels of communication with the logos outside.²³ By the senses we draw in the Logos in a literal physical sense. It is when we make this contact that we obtain the power of thought. In sleep all these channels are closed except the means of respiration. This is sufficient to live but not for rational thought. That is why it is said we retire into a world of our own in sleep. Furthermore, the universal has a fiery nature. When a soul is in full contact with the universal, it too becomes dry and fiery. So a dry soul is the wisest and the best, because in that condition, it had taken upon itself the nature of the universe. The soul had to understand the truth or the reality

¹⁵ Fr, 54, Hippolytus Ref, IX 9, 5

¹⁶ Fr, 123, Themistius, 5, p69D

¹⁷ Fr, 51, Hippolytus Ref, IX 9, 1

¹⁸ Fr, 102, Porphyrius in Iliadem, 4, 4

¹⁹ Fr, 80, Origen c, Celsum, VI 42

²⁰ Fr, 53, Hippolytus Ref, IX 9, 4

²¹ Fr, 2, Sextus, adv, math, VII 133

²² W.K.C. Guthrie, o.c., p. 430 ff

²³ Sextus, adv, math, VIII 129, (D.K. 22A 16)

behind the illusions to become fiery. To become identical with the divine one should understand it first. Since our senses tend to mislead us, prominence is given to intelligence. On this Heraclitus's fragments state:

Evil witnesses are eyes and ears of men, if they have souls that do not understand their language.²⁴

A person had to obtain knowledge for himself. Heraclitus says:

I searched out myself.²⁵

Wisdom consists in understanding the way the world works, in understanding the Logos. So the wise and the virtuous souls which are of a fiery nature survive after the death of the body to join the cosmic fire. Here it is to be understood that the wise souls are essentially virtuous. Wisdom and intellect affects the behaviour patterns of the subject concerned. Therefore Heraclitus concludes that

Man's character is his daimon.²⁶

the cultivation of the rational element and virtue uplifts the quality of the soul and ultimately enables it to join the universal, - the everlasting positive potent substance from which all things come from.

A thought provoking argument arises at this juncture. Heraclitus has presented fire as the original substance of the universe - the substance which steered all things. Although it was clearly a necessary and important ingredient in the pattern or the process the Logos presents, it is not the Logos. the Logos itself is the force which covers everything. If this is so, there is a clear distinction between the theory of Pythagoras where the soul joins 'the divine harmony' and Heraclitus's theory. In Heraclitus's theory the soul joins the 'fire' and not the Logos. the latter was the initiating force or intelligence.

Heraclitus's stand on the destiny of the soul of the virtuous people at death is seen in his statement that 'Ether received their souls, earth their bodies'.²⁷ And the souls of the people who failed to improve their souls joined the water.²⁸ The souls of the good went up to join fire and the souls of the bad joined the water down in the earth. (The up-down theory is interesting). For both there was no life after death, in the sense of reincarnation. Heraclitus considered bodily pleasures as leading to a moistening that is a weakening of the soul. Heraclitus says:

The best choose one thing in place of all else, everlasting glory among mortals; but the majority are gluttons like cattle.²⁹

It is pleasure to souls to become moist.³⁰

²⁴ Fr, 107, Sextus, adv, math, VIII 126

²⁵ Fr, 101, Plutarch, adv. Colot, 20, 11 8c.

²⁶ Fr, 119, Stobaeus, Anth, IV 40, 23

²⁷ Inscriptions Graecae, 1, 945, 6

²⁸ Fr, 36, Clement Storm, VI 17, 2

²⁹ Fr, 29, Clement Storm, V 59, 5

A man when he is drunk is led by an unfledged boy, stumbling and not knowing where he goes, having his soul moist.³¹

To achieve the fiery nature of the soul, one has to learn to control one's desires - that is, to turn away from the body to the universal. The relative unimportance of the body in relation to the soul is stressed in his philosophy. Not only desire, but the other kinds of emotions too could be dangerous. This can be detected from the following fragments of Heraclitus.

It is hard of fight with anger; for what it wants, it buys at the price of soul.³²

Insolence is more to be extinguished than a conflagration.³³

It is interesting to observe the nature of the universal or the 'completely wise thing' as defined by Heraclitus. In the pure fire which is eternal, and tensions and oppositions disappear in their common ground.³⁴ This too he calls god. All oppositions were considered merely passing forms of one reality that transcends them both. Though Heraclitus speaks of 'God' in several instances he never used the plural form. In each case, he seems to be referring to the same thing (but may be to different characteristics of it, except where he refers to fire as the weapon of Zeus) as divine. He seems to be speaking of a one whole potent living force with a sense of order and intelligence.

Besides the elements of the philosophy of Heraclitus discussed above, it is interesting to note his views on contemporary religion. He is very critical of the conventional Olympian religion and its method of worship.

They purify themselves of blood guilt by defiling themselves with blood', as though one who had stepped into mud were to wash with mud.³⁵

They pray to the statues - as if one were to carry on a conversation with houses, not recognising the nature of the gods.³⁶

If it were not to Dionysus that they made the procession and sang the hymn to the shameful parts, the deed would be most shameless..³⁷

Furthermore, he explicitly states his disapproval of the irrationality practiced in connection with the order at Delphi.

Therefore, we see that for the first time in the history of Greek philosophy, Heraclitus had been bold enough to openly criticise,

(a) The traditional Religion

³⁰ Heraclitus, 118, 77, 36
³¹ Fr, 117, Stobaeus Anth, III 5, 7
³² Fr, 85, Plutarch Coriol, 22
³³ Fr, 43, Diogenes Laertius, IX 2
³⁴ Fr, 102, 58, 67
³⁵ Fr, 5, Aristocritus, Theosophra, 68
³⁶ Fr, 15, Clement, Protrepticus, 34
³⁷ Fr, 93, 92

(b) Religious images

(c) Symbols

(d) Modes of worship and

(e) Ritual

The ideas expressed in connection with sacrifice and purification reminds us of the Pythagorean theory of sympathy and equality. For Heracleitus seems to have considered the killing of animals for purification a new pollution brought about by ignorance. His criticism of the hymn sung in honour of the 'shameful parts' is a direct attack on religious symbolism: For the 'phallus' or the male sex organ was considered a symbol of fertility by the ancients. Clothing an abstract idea in a concrete tangible form in images and then, worshipping the image without understanding the idea behind it, is also ridiculed by him.

His developed intellect led him to criticise the contemporary religion. What he was interested in was to understand the positive cosmic force that he dealt with in his philosophy. In doing so, he too could become a part of that eternal power. To him, the truth, the working of the universe and god seems to be one and the same thing. On the other hand, Heracleitus provides mankind with an aim or something to look forward to. He offered hope for a better condition for man after death. It was a reward or something promising for the virtuous. The 'bad' seem to be punished by nature itself - by becoming moisture. The impact of man's action and his moral condition on his after-life is clearly indicated.

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