

Life of heraclitus research paper example

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Introduction

The doctrine of Heraclitus is not only one of the earliest specimens of Greek materialism, but also a wonderful example of Greek dialectics. He was a contemporary of the failed uprising of the Greek cities conquered by the Persians against the conquerors.

Heraclitus's contemporaries often considered him brash, arrogant man, who did not bother to explain his ideas, puzzles, mind-ciphers to others. Greeks called him the Dark. It remains unclear whether he was called the Dark, because he wrote in a poetic, is not very clear language, or because he was prone to aphorisms, sounding paradoxical, sometimes defiant. Maybe it was because he used to ask his readers and listeners some puzzles, not offering clues, following his conviction that the nature loves to hide. Or it was because he loved the game of words.

The purpose of this essay is to review the biographical data of Heraclitus of Ephesus and to study the basic teachings of the ancient Greek philosopher. According to the purpose of the work, there were defined the following objectives: a) review the biography of Heraclitus of Ephesus; b) see the doctrine of the philosopher's dialectics; c) analyze the Logos doctrine of Heraclitus of Ephesus.

The life of Heraclitus, who was born in the polis of Ephesus nearby Miletus, is virtually unknown to us. The time period of his life was the middle of the VI – the beginning of the V century BC (Muller-Merbach, 2006). On the basis of the evidence that we have, he was from a noble royal-priestly family. But instead of living life of luxury, he refused from his privileges and rights and gave them to his brother. He was leading a pretty vicious, and even a

solitary life, spending the last years of his life in a cave.

It seems that Heraclitus was very self-confident, believing that he was the only one to reveal the divine knowledge about life, to understand the true meaning of the universe, society and human. It is proven by his general criticism of contemporary and earlier to Heraclitus Greek wise men – Homer, Hesiod, Pythagoras, Xenophanes, Archilochus. In his view, they were not worthy of the sage title because they did not comprehend what he saw. In general, Heraclitus believed that he acted as an oracle, whose mouth speaks wisdom, and who has the right to criticize thinkers generally accepted in the Hellenic world, as well as ordinary Greeks who care only about their daily bread, never thinking about the need for initiation to the higher knowledge. His famous aphorism should be interpreted in this sense: " The best people renounce all for one goal, the eternal fame of mortals; but most people stuff themselves like cattle." In this way, Heraclitus symbolizes the Greek understanding of philosophers – detached from earthly mortal problems, engaged only in the search for truth.

Tradition keeps the image of Heraclitus as the wise man, despising people (and those who were famous as the wise men), for failing to understand what they say and do. Interpreting the doctrine of Heraclitus as the conventional wisdom of the world mourning over the transience of life and everything in the world, popular philosophy saw in him the prototype of " the wise man crying," just as Democritus was a type of " wise man laughing." Wisdom of Heraclitus, detached from the know-all ignorance of people and existing in a neighborhood with a simple wisdom is perfectly manifested in a typical scene: some strangers who wanted to look at the famous sage, stop at the

threshold of wretched house, confused by the view of unprepossessing man who is sitting by the fire. "

Heraclitus expressed himself so succinctly and ambiguously that he kept the nickname of the Dark. His sayings are often similar to those folk sayings and riddles of the oracle, which, according to Heraclitus, " neither say, nor conceals, but give signs." Some people believe that by writing his essay " Muse" (" On Nature") in a deliberately dark manner and by letting it to be deposited in the temple of Artemis at Ephesus, Heraclitus wanted to protect it from an ignorant mob. Others see it as clearly expressed darkness and mystery of the subject itself.

Aristotle explains the dark sayings of Heraclitus by their syntactic ambiguity, so that they can be read in different ways. The sayings of Heraclitus indeed possess thoughtful structure, special poetry. They contain a lot of alliteration, word play, and are intrinsically linked by chiasmata, inversions, asyndetic syntax or parataxis characteristic structure of inner speech, i. e. speech addressed not so much to others as to yourself. Diogenes Laertius said that Heraclitus retired and went to live in the mountains, eating herbs, because he hated people. He also wrote that the philosopher in his self-imposed exile was attended by a disciple Parmenides Meliss, who introduced him to the people of Ephesus, who did not want to know him.

Biographers point out that Heraclitus was not anyone's disciple. He apparently was acquainted with the views of philosophers, the Milesian school, Pythagoras, Xenophanes. He also did not have any special disciples, but his intellectual influence on subsequent generations of ancient thinkers was significant. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle were aware of the writing of

Heraclitus, and his follower Cratylus became the hero of the Platonic dialogue.

Some scholars interpret dark and contradictory legends about the circumstances of the Heraclitus death as evidence that the philosopher was buried by the Zoroastrian customs. Traces of Zoroastrian influence are found in some fragments of Heraclitus. He was one of the founders of the dialectics.

Dialectics in the Philosophy of Heraclitus

Heraclitus is famous not only for his interesting and profound reflections about the arche. He is famous as the great Greek dialectician (the word "dialectic" is used here in the sense given to it by more recent philosophers. Aristotle uses the word "dynamics", referring to the philosophers, beginning with Zeno. But it seems justified to use it in relation to arguments of earlier authors, and especially Heraclitus). Those dialectical thoughts and ideas that lie in the core of the arche concept of the first Greek philosophers get a clearer articulation and further development in Heraclitus doctrine.

According to Heraclitus and his predecessors, dialectics is first of all statement and record of world changes eternity. The idea of the changes that is characteristic of the earliest Greek philosophers takes the form of a universal idea, that is, philosophical one. Everything changes, and changes constantly, there is no limit to changes, and they always have place. They are everywhere and in everything – that's what is compressed into a short well-known formula, attributed to Heraclitus: “You cannot step into the same river twice” (Meyera, 2007).

No matter how simple and commonplace this formula may seem today, it

looked like unusual, innovative and wise then, when it presented for the first time in the capacious, generalized form the results of thousands of years of observation and thinking by a man about the world and people's own lives. The transition is very thin. For example, observations of the river can easily sway the thinking person to the idea of change. The same is true for Heraclitus – the river is no more than a symbol, through which the general idea is stated in the manner approved by people. The same role is characteristic of the other symbols of Heraclitus – fire, war (hostility), etc. Connection between the thought of Heraclitus with symbols, images is a specific feature of his philosophy, and of all the Greek wisdom. This dialectic of change is in images and symbols. Although the idea of change now and then acquires the fragments attributed to Heraclitus – the general, abstract nature – it is properly combined with memorable images that make the philosophical wisdom vivid and easy to understand. For example, Heraclitus describes the sun as new every day, but always and constantly new. In another case, Heraclitus said: " No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man."

The specificity of the Heraclitus' dialectics lies in the fact that even that the idea of change is combined here with the idea of unity and struggle of opposites. The predecessor of this approach was Anaximander. Heraclitus only draws from the depths of the inner logic of arche principles the glimmering idea of unity and struggle of opposites. Then, he develops it philosophically. The idea of the Unity – and, therefore, bringing to the Unity – exists side by side with the idea of splitting the Unity into its opposites. Heraclitus argues not only about the existence of opposites, but also about

their inescapability and universality. Opposites exist everywhere. Heraclitus realizes this idea in some cosmic, as well as ethical and aesthetic forms. He states that the existence of opposites is the foundation of existence and harmony in the world. The contradictions pull together, which is the Heraclitean paradox (Russell & Konstan, 2005).

Another idea of the dialectics is the struggle, feud of the opposites. Heraclitus was the inventor of the idea of the opposites' struggle as a constructive philosophical beginning. According to Heraclitus, struggle, strife, war have a deep relation to the birth, emergence, flowering, i. e., to the life itself. He said that it was necessary to know that the war was generally accepted, that the feud was the usual order of things. Everything originates from feud. In this regard, Heraclitus once again entered into polemics with Homer: after all, he prayed that the enmity between the gods and people vanished, and, without knowing, he cursed the birth of all beings, because they were born due to the confrontation and opposition.

Three fundamental dialectical ideas that have been isolated from the set of Heraclitean fragments are internally connected with each other, flowing from one into another, in which dialectics is already manifested – in its image of philosophical ideas dialectics. Once we accept the idea of change together with Heraclitus, it will be a logical conclusion to say in a slightly different form that a man cannot walk into and out of the same river twice, we exist and do not exist. One state gives way to another, cold heats, warm cools, moist dries, dry irrigates.

So, the idea of the general variability turns its face to us – it flows into the thesis of the unity of opposites. According to Heraclitus, amendment is the

combination of opposites – first of all, existence and nonexistence, but also destruction and creation. Destruction of one is the emergence of another. Opposites are united, inseparable from one another. Heraclitus is trying to explain this unity on difficult, obscure, and simple examples. He tells us about ordinary people: " They do not realize how hostile realities are in agreement with each other: inverted connection (harmony), as in the bow and the lyre." There are a lot of interpretations of these Heraclitean images. Probably, under the " inverted connection (harmony) of the bow and the lyre," he meant that the bow and the lyre are the opposites: enmity and the unity of destruction, death and beauty, divisive war, understood in its broadest sense – as a feud , dissension, and the unifying beauty, symbolized by the lyre image. However, each of these things (bow and lyre) are symbols of the unity of the two visibly interconnected ends. Music, harmony is born precisely because lyre connects the strings of the lyre. Bow is curved stick two ends of which are connected. In other words, only when the two opposing sides are joined together, can something exist. Using these visual images, Heraclitus makes visible the idea of splitting the unity and interaction of opposites. There are more specific interpretations of the lyre image. For example, Plato said that this image of harmony symbolizes the possibility of high and low sounds, which, though opposed, can be brought into harmonious agreement in the melody. In the fragments of Heraclitus there can be found images related to technology or science, symbolizing the same idea.

Dialectics was part of the history of philosophy and culture, and then moved ahead through the arguments that have demonstrated the relativity of

human ideas about the world and himself, put the philosophers and interested people in front of philosophical, logical, mathematical paradoxes, puzzles, contradictions and difficulties. By the time of Heraclitus philosophy has already accumulated a lot of paradoxes and puzzles. Such forms of thought – along with the development of philosophy becoming more complex and changing forms – were not only the evidence of contradictions and difficulties accumulated in the philosophical explanation of the world, but also a kind of growth points of the dialectic. It is true of the paradoxes of Heraclitus, Zeno's aporia and antinomy of Kant.

If judged by the surviving fragments of Heraclitus' writings, he tried to make people ready for the knowledge of sudden, hidden, paradoxical and discouraging things. " Not waiting for sudden, you will not see the unsearchable and inaccessible," – Heraclitus said, according to Clement of Alexandria. Sudden could become something usual for Greeks – some general knowledge and concepts, according to which various qualitative conditions are incompatible with each other. Heraclitus finds it possible to connect them to the opposites. Is the clean water different from the dirty? Can one and the same water at the same time be clean and suitable for life and drinking, and dirty, useless for all this? Greek, is likely to confidently and clearly answer these questions negatively, but still would probably wonder why someone decides to ask such questions. Heraclitus had unexpected, paradoxical and positive response: the dirty and the clean is the same thing, as well as the fit and unfit for drinking is the same thing (Betegh, 2007). The sea has clean and dirty water for fish – it is suitable for drinking and survival, for people – it is not.

So, pushing everyday consciousness with philosophical paradoxes, Heraclitus again and again defended the idea of unity, the identity of opposites.

Aristotle believed that the Heraclitean dialectics had a huge influence on Plato. It is difficult not to believe Aristotle – he was a disciple of Plato. In the intellectual destiny of many subsequent philosophers, and such dissimilar, as Hegel and Nietzsche, we can find a profound impact of Heraclitean ideas and images. Thus, the intrinsic merit of Heraclitus lies in the fact that he was presenting the world of multiple, deadly things, the human world of mobile, changeable, fluid, divided by the opposition, while at the same time kept the idea of unity and regular order in the immeasurable, always inventing the puzzles and not fully known and unknowable cosmos.

The situation was different in the philosophy of the Eleatics – also great for its discoveries, intellectual innovations. It brought the ancient thought to one of the most ambitious ideas - philosophical idea of being. But it could not, having encountered difficulties in the deepest contradictions of thought, combine being and movement.

Heraclitus: The Idea of Logos

Philosopher Heraclitus presents logos as something, perception of which requires very special effort and involves changing the ordinary statements of consciousness. Logos - the "word", "speech" of the eternal nature. An important piece of Heraclitus ideas passed by Sextus Empiricus is dedicated to this idea: "This speech (logos) existing forever, people do not realize both before hearing it and after, for though all people are directly confronted with this Speech (Logos), they are ignorant of it, even though they get to know the exact words and things that I'm describing, sharing them as they are. As

for the rest of the people, they do not realize what they are doing in reality, just as they do not remember sleeping.

What becomes known from the Heraclitus' fragments first of all: Logos is hidden from most people. Most often they have never heard of the Logos. But if they find out about it, it is unlikely that they will immediately understand what it is. The paradox, however, is that Logos that people are constantly in contact with is managing all the things, but with what they communicate constantly, they are at war.

Logos, according to Heraclitus, that is inherent in everyone and everything, what manages all and through all (Iyer, 2005). Apparently, this is one of the first definitions, where the idea of the arche is linked with the vague idea of the universal law that controls things that just appeared in the philosophical horizon. Two ideas are still fused, undifferentiated, but split in the tendency form the idea of logos meaning. From the point of view of perspective, Heraclitian definition of logos is very important and interesting, especially its distinguishing from nature as a whole and the existing fire as a kind of original material elements.

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