

Heraclitus' philosophical theories



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Have you ever had a thought that our life might be an illusion or whether if there was truly a God? Have you ever questioned the things that is happening around you? These types of questions have all been asked by philosophers in the past and some of these questions still do not have a true answer. Now, you may be asking what is a philosopher? Philosophers like to ask questions, and a lot of them. They ask questions about everyday concepts that people blindly just follow or believe due to religion, common knowledge, tradition or other factors, and they try to find the reasoning behind them. We all have heard of many philosophers trying to affect the way people thought or trying to get people to really question their beliefs. Some of the most famous philosophers in ancient times include Socrates, Plato, Zeno, Descartes, Thales but, in this article the philosopher I will be discussing is Heraclitus.

Heraclitus was a “ pre-Socratic Greek philosopher from Ephesus”. He lived in Ephesus during approximately 500 B. C and he believed in change, he believed that everything around us was changing and that people could notice the changes using their five sense. He was also “ known by his contemporaries as the dark philosopher since his writings were difficult to understand. An interesting thing Heraclitus used to do is that he “ compared most people’s understanding to that of those asleep”. He believed that “ only the philosopher, the one who pursued Truth, was fully awake and fully alive, and he seemed to consider himself the only philosopher of his time”. This could infer that he would compare people to those that were asleep because they weren’t pursuing truth and they would blindly follow their

culture or what their religion taught without questioning and seeking more information.

Heraclitus had such an effect on generations to come that it is said that “ many subsequent philosophers, from Plato to Aristotle, from the Stoics to the Church Fathers, from Georg Hegel to Alfred North Whitehead, have claimed to have been influenced by the ideas of Heraclitus”. Heraclitus is said to have only written one book throughout the course of his life, that book was called “ On Nature”, which is said to be divided into three parts: “ one on the universe, another on politics and a third on theology”. In his work, he used various rhetorical devices so that his sentences would mean more than what they seem and did it purposefully so that not just anyone would be able to understand it but only those who were ‘ competent’. He believed that change was basic to everything and that fire was the most basic since fire always changes things. Another belief of his was in a system of balanced exchanges. For example, “ one road carries some travelers out of a city, while it brings others back in; the way up is also the way down”, this would make people think that every action had an equal and opposite reaction that would make a unity.

Heraclitus has had many sayings that we refer to today but, of those sayings, the most famous two are “ everything is in a state of flux” and that “ You cannot step twice into the same river, for fresh waters are ever flowing in on you”. What we can infer from the first quote is that everything is changing around us, shifting, or becoming. Nothing is remaining the same as it was before. The second quote infers that the river may stay the same but the water within the river is constantly changing.

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If I was to truly think about the second quote, I would suggest that maybe it had a deeper meaning than what it may seem and I would think that it meant that life was constantly changing around us and it would be pointless to remain in the same spot, one may live their life as they please but, as one remains in the same spot or believes in what he was raised with and teaches those beliefs to generations to come, knowledge wouldn't progress. If every person followed what they were told since they were children and previous generations kept passing that information to the generations that came after them, wouldn't we still think that the earth was the center of the universe or that earth was flat? Heraclitus was different, he saw divinity in the world, and according to Heraclitus, "the world itself either is God, or is a manifestation of the activity of God, which is somehow to be identified with the underlying order of things". It has been reported that Heraclitus has said that having knowledge of many things doesn't make someone intelligent. Isn't this ironic? People nowadays call others intelligent based on their knowledge or how I like to call it book smart and not what they truly know but, then that leaves the question what does it mean to be intelligent? Professor J. M. Robinson is reported to have said "To know many things- to know the causes of thunder and lightning and earthquakes - is good; but is it better to understand the one thing which underlies all of these - the thought that steers all things through all things. This is wisdom". I believe that true wisdom cannot be taught but instead, it is gained through life experiences and conflict.

Verbal conflicts or disagreements allow people to learn the perspective of others and it tests your capability to defend your argument, that is where

true wisdom lies. I believe that Heraclitus had many things to offer us and opened the gateway to gaining knowledge and encouraged generations after him to question the truths that they have been told. He was different than others of his time, he was curious. Curiosity fuels us to strive for the truth and still today, many people follow what their parents had told them growing up or what their religion teaches regardless whether it makes sense or not because sometimes we begin to think who am I to question this when everyone else has been following it too. I believe that Heraclitus approached many things in a different sense than others. His wording of sentences was unique and would make people truly think of what he may have meant and that amazes me. I believe his quotes have wisdom that we could even use today and I believe that sometimes we should go back in time to appreciate the knowledge of the generations before us because they actually have a lot to teach us whether people would like to admit it or not. Most people believe they know everything or refuse to ask for help when they don't but, remembering how we started and who we came from to get to this world that we live in now, is something we should all participate in every once in a while

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