

4. 'Of the Logos which is as I describe it men always prove to be uncomprehending, both before they have heard it and when once they have heard it'. – What is the 'Logos' and why did Heraclitus think that it was so important?

Behind the complicated, objective, everyday reality we experience is a hidden unity – a single principle; an objective truth which is what Heraclitus is probably referring to when he uses the term Logos. The whole of our world, not just the physical realm, but everything, including ethics, politics, religion and souls is governed by this eternal Logos. In this way the Logos is fundamental to existence as we experience it.

The Logos can also be referred to as the word or an account, a message, a principle, a formula, a reckoning, a reasoning, an argument, or even a book, but the distinction made by Heraclitus between appearance and an underlying 'reality' is what defines his Logos as far as we can understand. By examining his description of everyday reality we might better discover where he is coming from with his Logos.

For Heraclitus, the world is made up of opposites – hot and cold, up and down, good and bad; only according to Heraclitus, they are essentially the same. While being as one, the opposites are in genuine, antagonistic conflict; one trying to overcome the other, and when they do: there is change – 'the death of one is the coming of another'. So the world as Heraclitus saw it was in constant flux: 'You cannot step into the same waters twice'. The only constant therefore being change, and for there to be change, there must be a natural order or a search for natural order; something that holds the seeming chaos together to maintain an overall harmony. Again, harmony and chaos might be viewed as coexistent, such is the relationship that Heraclitus wants us to acknowledge between opposites.

In keeping with other pre-Socratics philosophers, Heraclitus declared there to be a substance from which all things are made, and in his case, he saw fire as the elemental force. Heraclitus' choice of fire as the essence of all things works not only as metaphor but also in its appearance to the world. The constantly flickering flames displaying flux while its ephemeral qualities hide something from us; the action underlying the fire is not apparent. 'This world...is now, and ever shall be, an ever-living Fire, with measures kindling and measures going out.' Without change there can be no world for Heraclitus and so he believes War is a necessary part of the world: 'War is father of all and King of all.' Because, after all, you cannot have peace without war and so war is peace and peace, war. The divine Logos seeing to it that one does not dominate the other for ever.

The Logos is then not just important for Heraclitus but the fundamental principle of the universe; the framework controlling the processes of the universe; the ordering principle. It is no wonder men are uncomprehending of Heraclitus' description of the Logos, as they are enwrapped in the physical, objective world and so are unable to see the Logos hovering

behind. The people's language is confined by the very environment that traps them, so when they are exposed to Heraclitus' reason, they are confused, since they seek meaning in their language, which they will not find expressed in a paradox. To the everyday person: up is not down; cold is not hot; and death is not life. Paradoxically, Heraclitus can only show others the world beyond appearance by using paradoxes, metaphors and aphorisms. These linguistic riddles contradict everyday reality and by so doing suggest there is something beyond appearance and our description of it.

We are then, ever changing beings made up of seeming contradictions and struggles. It is often the case that we are conflicted and our perspectives can change regularly. We are indeed often turning over ideas in our mind to settle upon a right course of action. To Heraclitus, this a sign of a progressive mind that is able to recognise the differences held within it. Thinking one-dimensionally we might say; lacks the understanding of the whole that a third dimension gives.

'Seeing you are blind, only the blind can see'. 'You are not here but there.' 'I am not myself'. 'Truth is a falsehood'. – These paradoxes of my own continue to show the potential of a dialectical nature in the world.

Opposites are then together, unified by the Logos. The Logos is that unity. No thing can exist without the Logos: 'Couples are not wholes, what agrees disagrees, the concordant is discordant. From all things one, and from one all things'. To understand the world, even scientifically, we are trying to see 'behind' what appears to us. Scientific attempts to explain the natural world might be what people more easily understand the Logos to be today. Science is in search for the fundamental existence of the universe and all it contains. 'Nature is wont to hide herself'. Then it is our reasoning which connects us to the Logos. When we are looking for what is holding the world together; we are then looking for the Logos.

In offering a critical analysis of Heraclitus' ideas, I might suggest that he does not necessarily provide us with a clear definition and systematic explanation of the Logos. Is Logos fire? Why and how should the Logos order the cosmos? Does the Logos have an opposite itself? Does the unity have a disunity? Due to his incomplete 'account' and his obscure meanings, we cannot really be sure of the critical nature of the Logos. There is an undoubted appeal in his ideas of flux and relativism and that words being useful but enough to garner true meaning – these remain powerful ideas today. In making the Logos obscure, I am not sure his cause is helped in today's terms but then it might be suggested that 'the strength and weakness' of Heraclitus' position is that it must be interpreted.

In my interpretation of Heraclitus, the Logos could not be simple to discover from our perceptions of the world and so should you wish to discover it, you must search using reason. Fixed knowledge is not possible as the world constantly changes and we are relative

to it. So to know something is fleeting at best and impossible at worst but it is our destiny to try and see it. The truth can only be viewed through contradiction, or the truth is contradictory. It is not for us to follow Heraclitus' words and attain his understanding but to use his ideas to develop our own understanding, because we cannot sustain our own identity continuously without assuming that of another. We must glimpse the Logos from our own perspective; each finding the Logos by looking into themselves.