

'Upon those that step into the same rivers different and different waters flow...they scatter and... gather...come together and flow away...approach and depart'. What did Heraclitus mean by his famous assertion that we never step into the same river twice?

The motion is Heraclitus's core idea. In his view, nothing is stable and nothing is real. Everything is in motion or a changing state all of the time. In Buddhism, this is similar to the idea called 'Anata'. Anata is a way to explain the nature of everything. We as humans come from nothing, after we die we will go back to nothing. Nothing is real or stable or exists forever. Motion is the root of everything for him.

It is the idea of contradiction. Something can be both P and not P the same time. The river still there and not there. The water in the river is always flowing or moving. When I step into it, the water that I step into flows away from the position that I first step in. If I step back from it and do it again, I cannot say that I step into the same river because the river or water has already flowed away and is replaced with a new stream of water or let us say, a new river. At the same time, this river can have a name. For example, the North river. It does not matter how many times I step into this river. I still step into the same river, the North river. It is still the North river every time I step into it. The idea is that the river can be changing and unchanging at the same time.

Heraclitus's idea shows us that he is a relativist. Everything is unreal and real at the same time, depending on how you look at it. The river is in motion or in a state of 'becoming'. At the same time, the river can be in a certain state or 'being'. It can be the same river that you step into or not depending on your perspective. Pigs may prefer mud over gold. The sea water may be drinkable for fish and very valuable for fish, but it is useless for humans. Heraclitus is a relativist in my opinion. Stealing is good or bad; Heraclitus will say 'It all depends'. Stealing can be bad in the eyes of the general population, but stealing can be good in the society of the thief. It depends, it is relativism.

To further emphasise Heraclitus's above statement, we should consider his idea about 'arche', the final substance or root of everything as Milesian legacy. The river analogy can express his idea of motion as the root of everything well enough. Everything is in motion, for example, when a child plays, they play by no rules and in an unpredictable way. They do not care about other things around them, the mother can confirm that. They can put the whole world into the sandbox and play. They can build or destroy the world and begin to build it again as they please. It is absolutely changing, chaotic and unpredictable. War in the same way, is absolutely chaotic and unpredictable. In war, everything is chaos and the results of war are never predictable. Fire is also always changing, chaotic and moving. I never saw a calming fire. It does not matter how small or big the fire is. The fire also dances or changes direction all the time. It is always unpredictable. We can see the commonality of ideas between all these examples and his changing river analogy. It is in motion.

In my opinion, Heraclitus has some conflicts in his idea. If everything is just in the becoming state, it seems to be in the being state because of our values or subjective views. How can we humans as the subjects value the other thing, if we are not in the being state? For example, if this world is a sink that is full of water and the water in the sink flows in a circle, then everything in the world flows as the water in the sink including us as humans. So everything in the sink keeps moving or flowing in a circle. Nothing remains still enough to

have a clear perception of the other things in the sink. It is like a car travelling at a very fast speed. We as the passengers cannot have a clear picture of the other things on the outside of the car's window. How can the human in the sink watch or consider other things in the sink and give a subjective value on it or identify it as being, since we are all moving or in a motion state?