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Hello, and welcome to this tutorial on Heraclitus of Ephesus and his doctrine of impermanence. Today, we'll be discussing Heraclitus's metaphysical views by examining his secularization of knowledge, his doctrine of the flux, and the unity of opposites. Finally, we will compare and contrast his views with those of Parmenides.

Let's start by discussing his views on appealing to the gods and our coming to know the world. Heraclitus of Ephesus did not have any particular affiliations with the various philosophical schools. But like Parmenides, he seemed to be deeply influenced by the program of rational theology defended by Xenophanes. You might recall that Xenophanes severely criticized the practice common at the time of turning the gods into fickle meddlers who miraculously interfered in human affairs in the world. Instead, Xenophanes thought that any action taken by the gods would be constant, such as their sustaining the laws of nature.

But Heraclitus goes even further than Xenophanes and his other predecessors, in that he places his philosophical emphasis entirely on human affairs. That is, his approach to reality was entirely secular, completely setting aside any consideration of whether the gods may or may not be doing anything. To do so, he envisioned one true account of reality, which he called the Logos, with a capital L.

If you are not familiar with this word, it is a Greek word best translated as account. And we use it all the time. For instance, biology comes from putting bios, or life, with logos. As such, the task of biology is to give an account of life. Early Greek Christians equated the eternal aspects of Jesus with the Logos, hence, in the beginning was the word, a surprisingly Heraclitean notion.

Given its broad and varied usage, we need to ask what, precisely, Heraclitus means by the Logos. The concept seems to mean that which governs and or organizes all things. But Heraclitus depicted it as independent of the gods. However, while it is not clear whether he intended the Logos as somehow distinct from reality, like a deity above, ruling the world, or as dispersed through everything that exists, what is clear is that all things in the cosmos are unified according to the Logos. The Logos is therefore something that belongs in the realm of metaphysics, because it is not of this world. It is instead something that underlies it.

You would be right to think that the Logos is not the simplest concept to understand. Nevertheless, Heraclitus maintains that mere humans, though not necessarily all humans, were capable of conceiving it. However the Logos is always true, whether anyone is aware of its truth or not. As such, it is independent of human knowledge, language, and tradition.

Now that we have the basics of the Logos, let's consider its two most important aspects, the unity of opposites and the Heraclitean flux. The first crucial aspect of the unity of opposites is the doctrine that the world is composed of

opposites. And these contraries have a system of connections. Consider a few examples to get things started. Start with some examples of how important opposites are to forming unities.

Heraclitus points out that we cannot have a mountain without a valley, or vice versa. The road up is also the road down. Further, things come from what they are not. You cannot awake if you are not already asleep, or vice versa. Death comes from life. And if we consider decomposition, we will see that life also comes from death. There is no shadow without light. But there are also many other kinds of opposites besides these types of unity and becoming. He also points out facts such as ocean water being toxic to us, but pure for fish, and fresh water being the opposite.

Pause the video and see if you can think of some more examples of unities of opposites. One that people often point to, especially in philosophy of religion, is the importance of good and evil. Does it make sense to talk about one without the other?

Heraclitus does more than out these simple facts, however. Instead, he believes these opposites are already contained within everything. He tells us that young and old, life and death are already inside of us. One becomes the other. A quality changes into its opposite. Young becomes old, full becomes hungry, healthy becomes ill, et cetera. Though this is true of everything, humans have a privileged position within Heraclitus's system. He indicates that our souls have a special connection to the Logos and that this connection is through language, a particularly human phenomenon.

Heraclitus's doctrine of the flux is closely related to this point about qualities becoming their opposites. It points out that all things change over time, or stronger, that all things are changing all the time. Everything is impermanent, because everything is in a constant state of change, going from what is to what is not. Think of your current process of young becoming old.

Heraclitus famously points out that you cannot step into the same river twice, as it is constantly flowing, and changing, and becoming something new. And later, Heracliteans pointed out that you cannot even step into the same river once. Everything is constantly changing. You are not the same person you were yesterday, nor is the world. Even DNA and species are constantly evolving. Pause the video and consider have you ever encountered anything in the world, rather than abstract objects such as numbers and such, that does not change?

Heraclitus holds that the fundamental nature of reality is this change. All is flux. However, in reading Heraclitus, we must be careful not to take certain cosmological sounding claims too literally. His doctrine of the flux is sometimes translated as claiming that all is fire. But this is best read as metaphorical in light of the rest of the text. Fire flickers and constantly changes, hence, to say that all this fire is to say that all is changing. Such double usages of words

like fire and change were very common in ancient Greece, as the language was extremely limited in its vocabulary. For instance, the technical philosophical term substance is most literally translated as wood.

Now that we have a better understanding of the central tenets of Heraclitus's metaphysics, let's start to see how it stacks up against the views of Parmenides. If you'll recall, Parmenides held that the ultimate nature of reality was that of a single, unchanging entity. And that all change was, in fact, an illusion. Unlike Parmenides, Heraclitus, instead, maintains that the ultimate nature of reality was the ever-flowing change.

As such, we may be tempted to see these two thinkers as polar opposites on some vast philosophical spectrum. But this would be to ignore some very significant points on which they agree. First, notice that both follow the tradition of Xenophanes, in that they turn away from religious answers and oracular knowledge to instead focus on the secular conception of reality. For both thinkers, this meant that the proper approach to philosophy was to examine what is universal and regular in nature and in the world, rather than what is sporadic and miraculous.

For both, then, this meant to turn to the field of metaphysics, to searching for the first universal principles that ground the ultimate nature of reality. Lastly, both recognized that the world of appearances, the reality we experience every day, is in constant flux. The world we encounter is one of impermanence.

But we can add another significant similarity, as well. Both defend something constant that lies underneath this realm of change. Parmenides advances the realm of being, the realm of what is. Whereas Heraclitus, as we just saw, advances a Logos that includes the universal principles of the doctrine of flux and the unity of opposites.

What then is their significant difference? The status of change. Parmenides has change as illusory. Whereas Heraclitus has change as not only genuine, but essential to reality. Given this important difference, let's pause and reflect on your own views. Are you more inclined to side with Heraclitus or Parmenides?

To help you answer that, start with a smaller question. What seems to be more fundamental to reality? What changes or what is permanent? If you find yourself going back and forth, if this question seems pesky and perennial, because you were inclined to think that reality is an essential combination of both, you will begin to see the metaphysical problem that Plato inherited and some of the motivation that underlines his own theory. We will encounter Plato and his solution in a separate tutorial.

OK, so let's recap. In this tutorial, we learned that Heraclitus, like Parmenides, was interested in metaphysics, a way of examining the genuine nature of reality without appealing to the gods. He advanced a Logos that governs all things and does so via the unity of opposites and the constancy of flux. As such, though his project is, in some ways, similar to that of Parmenides, they are ultimately at odds with the ultimate status of change, essential or illusory. Thanks for watching. And we'll see you next time.