



Zarathushtra and Heraclitus

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ART. XXIX.—*Zarathushtra and Heraclitus.* By Professor
LAWRENCE MILLS.

BEFORE the Lógos of Heraclitus, as is usual in the cases of all originators, the thing ‘originated’ was already present in its germ for his use in the half-formed surmises of his predecessors.

For it was none other than Hesiod who used a word and expressed an idea¹ which, together with the hints of other schemes, led up to the early concept. The first Greek naturalists believed, indeed, in an original substance of the universe, out of which everything arose and in which everything consisted; they also attributed to it life and motion, and gave it different names. One thought it was ‘water.’ Another called it the infinite (*sic*),² as undefined substance matter. At other times they thought it was ‘air.’

Parmenides³ had spoken of trusting only the Lógos, that is to say, ‘reason,’ while distrusting the senses, imagination, etc. But this does not seem in itself to possess much speculative importance. He reduced everything to one in his philosophy, and denied development. He did not like the idea of motion,⁴ and had no conception of the consciousness of the Lógos; nor had Heraclitus this latter, for the matter of that. Parmenides’ natural philosophy was so bad that he believed in the ‘stationary character of all things’; and he earned the name of ‘no-naturalist,’ ἀφύσικος, from Aristotle. We have no analogy with either Asha or Vohumanah here.

¹ Op. 692, μέτρα φυλάσσεσθαι, 718: “the abundant loveliness of the tongue that moves in rhythmic order.”

² Cf. the Avesta conception of infinite time.

³ Flourished in the 69th Olympiade, 504–500 B.C.

⁴ See Heinze, p. 59, and Zeller, pt. i, pp. 553–584.

It was the keen discriminator of Ephesus¹ who first saw a certain something imperative, not to say imperious, in the rhythm of nature, of its motions, and of its developments. I say of this great generalizer; for we must concede him that title however much we may differ from his ultimate conclusions.

Heraclitus did not indeed definitely resolve those secrets which the labours of all these centuries have only just succeeded in discovering, or rediscovering, but he came so near to this that we may fairly say that if he had possessed one fraction of the data which we now have, he would have surpassed most of us of these latter days in the depth of his intuition and in the keenness of his discrimination, for he seems to have surmised what we now know to be the true definition of heat, ‘an everliving fire,’ ‘kindling with regularity, burning out with regularity’; cf. the *μέτρα φυλάσσεσθαι* of Hesiod.

“The sun shall never pass his measure, for did he do so, the night goddesses, aid of justice, would find him out” (cf. Plut. de exil., ii, 604, B.). We do not distinctly gather that he held to any unchangeable underlying substance of phenomena. All is ‘becoming’ with him. But surely one would think he must have seen that an eternal substance was necessary, the everlasting changing of the forms of which constitute perhaps existence, certainly ‘creation’ and ‘events.’ The one underlying substance which exists according to his ideas was what he called ‘fire.’ We should call it ‘heat,’ the eternal perpetual motion, that is to say, its mode. Nature moves in so far as it is subjected to, or better, in so far as it possesses ‘caloric’ (*sic*), from the slowly dissolving ice to the electricity of the atmosphere; and the march of nature is rhythmic; it has reason; for all

¹ Died about 470-478 B.C. For his fragments see Bywater’s masterly edition quoted by Zeller, etc. (Clarendon Press, Oxford). Bernays, “Gesammelte Abhandl.,” i, 1-108. Bernays, “Heraklitischen Briefe,” 1869. Lassalle, “Die Philosophie des Herakleitos des Dukeln,” 1858. Gladisch, “Herakleitos und Zoroaster” (1859, antiquated). Schuster, “H. von Ephesus,” 1873. Teichmüller, “Neue Stud. z. Gesch. d. Begriffe,” i, 1876. E. Pfeiderer, “Die Philosophie des Heraklit,” 1886. Patrick, “Heraklitus,” Baltimore, 1889, etc.

things adapt themselves each to the other and fall into their places ; and out of the clash of seeming discord life, with all its developments, mental, emotional, and moral, arises ; there was reason in it, if not a ' reasoner.' He called that reason ' *lógos*' (here in this application), meaning more ' a sentence ' than ' mere speech.' And for this discovery or recognition a great Church father reckoned him among the fold of Christians before Christ ; "they who live according to, or 'with' the *lógos*, are," said Justin, "Christians, even if they were thought atheists ; and such were Socrates, Heraclitus, and the like and among the Greeks."¹

An incongruous grouping indeed, we should say, but one which perhaps shows the power of the *Lógos* all the more. The moral order of the life of Heraclitus was thought of, but it was his theory which was the occasion of the remark. The idea of reason as inherent in nature dominated his philosophy. That philosophy indeed impresses us with its 'one' arising from two opposites, while the opposites become knowable only after the splitting of the unit into two.

It was hardly, however, as some think,² the march of motion by the sublated negation which Fichte and Hegel most prominently revived and elaborated.³ It was, moreover, wholly materialistic, let it be noted well. Although, as in the case of every similar supposition, we may always understand 'materialism' in a certain deeper and sublimer sense.⁴ For matter must have been regarded by Heraclitus as a thing which contains within its potentiality all that we know of mind or morals. The *Lógos* of Heraclitus is the eternal law of motion in the strife of contending elements ; that is to say, in the embrace of opposites, 'splitting all things,' but putting the split together, and again the split,

¹ See Justin Martyr, *Apol.*, i, 85.

² See Lassalle.

³ Recall Hegel's remark to the effect "that there is no sentence of Heraclitus which he had not embodied in his *Logik*" ; see Patrick upon this.

⁴ The word naturally grates upon our ears and upon our feelings. But, after all, not a single item in the myriad experiences of sentiment is denied by any of the so-called materialists. All must concede that if everything is material, then material also is everything, honour, mercy, devotion, everything arises from it, and intellect the first of all.

τὰ μὲν δλα διαιρέοντες τὰ δὲ διηρημένα συντιθέντες (see Philo qu. rer. div. her., 1,505 f.). “By strife alone life becomes possible, disease makes health good and pleasant. There is no harmony without the height and the depth (*sic*) (the ‘flat and the sharp’), and no peace without war.”

And this creative, all-moving ‘war’ in nature was again the ‘Lógos’ under a different name and from another point of view. The Lógos is also ‘fate,’ not a blind fate by any manner of means. Fate as the Lógos was the Creator (*sic*) of all things, from the running together or conflict of opposites.

Justice is also war, and war is universal, everything takes place with strife. The just, or more properly the exact, is the cause and result of fire (i.e. heat) which is immanent; that is to say, permanently dwelling in the universe of nature; for this ‘heat’ has its law according to which it unfolds and again folds up the world; that law is its rhythmic reason, or Lógos. It is conceived of as material, as I have said, and the fire filled with spirit is another representation of the same Lógos. This Lógos is one and the same world-forming element as fire (i.e. heat), but viewed from different sides. The Lógos is as little immaterial as fire. It is material; but then, as before said, matter must have been conceived of in a sense which has made it all inclusive, the sum-total, of universal subjective experience. And he called this comprehensive concept ‘Lógos,’ this being the first extended use of the term in this sense by a philosophical teacher in the history of Greek literature. Sextus Empiricus, in his work *Adversus math.*, vii, 2, ff. 5, 397 ff., quoted by Zeller and Heinze, speaks of this Lógos as the ‘divine lógos’ (see H., p. 44), but he hardly meant to report the expression as having been used by Heraclitus; the θεῖος and θεῖον are probably due solely to Sextus himself. And with all of this his Lógos was ‘unconscious.’ Such was most probably his opinion; and possibly Von Hartmann started from some such hint.

It, the Lógos, was a reasonable force which inheres in the substance-matter of the world. There is nothing material without it. It has no pre-existence, except as all things pre-exist in their predecessors, of which they really form

a continuous part. It rules all things, and domineers over the realm of intellection and morality, eliminating all independence from each of them. Such was, in a few words, the scheme, perhaps a little too much portrayed in the sense of Hegel by Zeller, and too much in the sense of mere 'nature' by the other extremists.¹

On the fascinating depths of it, with all its errors or its truth, we may not dwell, and in fact I make the above remarks (only) with reserve. But to one habituated to such investigation the gist of the matter is clear at once. We have an astonishing and a pregnant scheme, strangely deep, yet strangely material. And this is the Lógos which is supposed by some to have been the ancestor of Vohumanah or of Asha. We need hardly have waited for a full discussion of it before we decided whether such a Lógos was likely to have been their progenitor or not. In some respects, indeed, both Asha and Vohumanah might have been proud of the connection; but that is not our point just here. A radical historical connection of the nature of that between cause and effect is here not to be thought of.

It is in the sphere of purely mental and, as we may also say, of moral action that, strange as it may appear, we find one delicate item of analogy, though I fear my readers will term it rather too far-fetched. Yet I present it for what it may be worth. As we find in the fragments of Heraclitus the first statement of a self-moving reasonable or reasoning force, so it is in the Avesta that we have, of all possible lores, the first record of the soul's moral self-motion, if I might be permitted to make use of such a form of words,—a pulse of spiritual progress in the thought, in the word, and in the deed, from their inception in the first consciousness of a living subject to their consequences, felicitous or calamitous, first in the future of the present life, and then in a scene beyond it. For these states of moral habit seem actually to be continued on of themselves, not merely as the

¹ Surely the progress of development by the supercession of ideas through their opposites applies to natural phenomena as well as to ideas. In so far Hegel most certainly was right in speaking of Heraclitus as he did.

occasions, but also as the constitutive elements of their own rewards or punishments in the present and in the future state. In Y. 30, 4, ‘the worst mind’ seems really to be put into the place of the ‘worst fate’; while the ‘best mind’ is ‘heaven,’ the passage having been beyond a doubt one of the sources, and perhaps the oldest surviving one, of the use of the word ‘best’ (*vahisht*) among the Persians for ‘heaven.’ And distinct departments in the future spiritual home-life had the very words ‘good thought,’ ‘good word,’ and ‘good deed’ for their names.¹ It is the sinner’s own conscience which shrieks at him on the Judgment Bridge (see Y. 46); and it is his own good thoughts, words, and deeds which meet him and conduct him to his final happy destiny. Whether our full modern idea was really intended—I mean, of course, the idea that “virtue is its own reward”—we may indeed doubt.

Zarathushtra would possibly have thought it too extreme a conception to be at all practicable or indeed safe; regarding it as dangerously refined and calculated to suspend all wholesome fear in inferior minds; but that it occurred to him, dimly at least and as if only to be instantly rejected, seems clear. At all events we have here a *positively certain case where ideas, like events, cast their shadows before.* These remarkable suggestions were the first of their kind, so far as I am aware, in the entire history of speculation, the incipient glimmering of the noblest idea that has ever emerged from the consciousness of man. And the analogy which I would draw is this; and I confess it is an exceedingly subtle one, and only thrown in for a *very esoteric circle.*

As Heraclitus was the first to formulate for us the idea of self-motion in the universe of nature physical, but as including more dimly the intellectual and moral world, so Zarathushtra gave us the first hint to our common, but so beautiful modern proverb, the idea of a sort of self-motion of moral economics or in the forces which control them. This, however, is the mere phantom of an analogy, striking though

¹ See Yt. 22, Westergaard.

it be so far as it extends. It is indeed a likeness ‘in the air’; and it is mentioned as an interlude and as if in a parenthesis alone.

But aside from anything like this, to those who study the history of the idea of the Zarathushtrian asha, a certain general analogy with the Lógos of Heraclitus, when also more closely understood, becomes perceptible. The idea, like its Indian counterpart *ritá*, arose from the observed regularity of natural phenomena—the rising, course, decline, and disappearance of the sun and other heavenly bodies, the succession of the seasons, etc. These became imitated in the ceremonies of religious worship, and the priestly officials were termed the *rta-van* and the *ashavan*¹; and there, indeed, we have what reminds us of the Lógos of Heraclitus in so far as it is likewise a ‘rhythm.’

But as to what the rhythm of material nature actually was, the systems were poles apart. As Zeller himself admits, Heraclitus must have been somewhat aware of the nature of the widespread mazda-worship with which his successors were so familiar. For the Persian forces which looked to Auramazda for victory and hated Angra Mainyu as the author of defeat, surged for years up to the very gates of Ephesus when Heraclitus was in his prime. If he was even invited, as was believed by some, to the Court of Darius, then the false letters are the graphic echoes of the fact. It is therefore very probable indeed, that the stories of the two originally antagonistic divinities of the Persian creed assisted those early impulses which impelled this man of genius as he proceeded to improve still more upon the simple downright statements of the Zoroastrian oracle; but this is only possible.

The Zoroastrian dualism, only by a very wide inference, bears any marked likeness to its successor; while on the other hand, no one of the known Greek ancients, so far as I am aware, had any conceivably immediate influence upon the plain though grander theory of Zarathushtra.

¹ Properly, as I would suggest, *arshavan*.

With Zarathushtra opposition and war were indeed in the nature of things, for there were ‘two original spirits’; this was the foundation of his views. But we find no emphatic suggestion with him that this was in any sense ordained for good.¹ According to some passages the “evil are to lie forever in hell.” If this, however, is to be modified by Yasna 30, 12, “Upon this shall there be salvation” (*ushtā*,² the beatific state), then we have indeed a happy result; but there is no statement anywhere to the effect that the strife in nature was conducive to better things even when regarded as an educator. Nor, in fact, is there any precise statements as to physical nature which are so conspicuous with the Ephesian.

Undoubtedly antithesis is the keynote of Zarathushtrianism. Even in the Gāthas we have conspicuously the beginning of the pairing. Opposite Ahura Mazda stands Angra Mainyu, the most formidable devil ever developed, actually the maker of one of the two opposing worlds. Opposite Asha, the regularity and truth, we have the Druj, the falsehood in the foe; opposite *vohu manah* we have *aka manah*; opposite *vahista manah*, *achishta manah*; opposite Khshathra, the dush-khshathra; opposite Aramaiti, taramaiti; opposite Haurvatat and Ameretatāt we have descriptions of woe, as Garodman, heaven, is in the face of the Drujodman, hell; while the eternal antipathetic antagonism between these forces is well expressed in the mutual repudiations of Yasna 45, 2. In the later Avesta and in the later Persian they become still more completely paired, and in the Gāthas this conflict seems to have become accentuated by the miseries of warfare, that is to say, if ‘the woes of the Kine’ were the echo of those of the people. If opposition of powers were the only points at issue, then the two systems were indeed related, and the dualism of Zarathushtra was only repeated in the ‘war’ of Heraclitus.

¹ Hero Zeller is correct, though his source of information was at that time naturally so imperfect and now completely antiquated.

² Really in form adverbial.

Beyond this point, however, Heraclitus must have made great strides in a definitive philosophical sense. It is profoundly to be regretted that we possess such scanty remains of what he wrote or said. They do not occupy much more space than one of the longer Gāthas, and not as much as some two of them together. Heraclitus made this opposition, which Zarathushtrianism also so fully delineates, to be the constitutive law out of which all existing things alone arise, while Zarathushtra only does this by inference, if at all. Here, however, we are not concerned with inferences.

Zarathushtra showed the grouping faculty in a remarkable degree, and that compact hard reason which recognized even an horrific fact and an horrific being. He went no half way with his Satan. Heraclitus, however, went even beyond these views, and claimed the terrific in life to be not only its reality, but the source of its vitality. Zarathushtra worked out a clear polarization of all the good and evil elements in preceding systems, if systems they could in any sense be called.

Out of all the gods he grouped all the chief abstracts deified into one small company, even resolving seven of them into one, as Sabellius formed his Trinity. And he grouped all the evil into equally limited masses, and there he left them to fight out their battle in the awful encounters of human and superhuman existence ; but Heraclitus quarrelled even with Homer because he seemed to disapprove too much of strife.

There was one great question, however, in which they were happily agreed : nowhere do we see any indication that Zarathushtra ever supposed evil to inhere in matter, while Heraclitus went so far as to pronounce a materialistic pantheism. As to the fire of Heraclitus, when compared with that of Zarathushtra, it is indeed possible that the smoke of the altars in the Persian camps around his city which remained so loyal to the Persian cause, and the rumoured echoes of their Adar Yasht, or of its predecessors, may have attracted his attention ; and upon reflection this may well

have confirmed his own convictions as to the supreme position of the 'mode of motion' among the elements. If so, Zoroastrianism did another great service to the world, if only by an accident; but, of course, the sublime concept of Heraclitus went far beyond even the beautiful Zoroastrian worship of the holy thing, which was indeed far more with his successors than the mere altar fire, and should be fully recognized as 'heat,' not flame alone, for we have its varieties at least in the later but still genuine Avesta, as interpreted by the later Zoroastrianism; even the caloric seated in the plants was known as well as that in living creatures. But as to the two systems in their entirety, they were well-nigh contradictory opposites: Zoroaster's (that is, Zarathushtra's) was a harshly limited monotheism, if such a contradiction or confusion in terms can be permitted, to convey a popular idea. It had its good creation and creator in antithesis to its still more limited mono-demonism ('so' again) with its counter creation and Creator. That is to say, it offered 'two worlds' and two quasi-independent deities; its dualism in a certain sense anticipated the more philosophically stated one of Anaxagoras, of Plato, and then of Philo. But Heraclitus banished at once both God and devil. His gods were of a kin to men.¹ The Lógos of Heraclitus resembles the Asha of the Avesta, indeed, as the rhythm of law, and the latter became, let us not forget it, later actually a name for fire, though chiefly through the ritual, which was indeed an Asha by pre-eminence. But though the Fire-lógos of Heraclitus must have been to some degree at least also touched by the universal sanctity of fire upon the altars in India and Persia,² as even also, I must insist, in Greece, yet this Fire-lógos was in so far radically different from that of the Avesta that it was in no sense whatsoever a created thing. With Heraclitus there was no 'creation' with which to

¹ Recall his saying "that none of the gods or men had made the world."

² Recollect that Persia was on the way from India to Greece (on one way at least), and that the vast Indian philosophies and worship are actually parts of the identical lore reached by Persian sages. The Indians having positively once lived in the primeval Iran or near it, and formed one identical race with the authors of the pre-Gāthic Gāthas, if such a turn of speech may be allowed.

associate it, and no 'Creator,' while both Asha and Vohumanah at their second (logical) stage as concepts were both freely said to be 'created' by the great Good Being as whose attributes they first appeared; he made them as the hypostatization in personification of the great moral instincts of law and of goodness. While, therefore, this identification of the Lógos with the fire or heat should not disturb us much when 'heat' is understood to be merely the vital force, yet, on the other hand, a self-moved ever-living power which contains within itself the reason of all that 'becomes,' and has never had a beginning, is a thing presented in a very different light from the Asha of Ahura Mazda, even though it be by a figure (and only later) called 'His son.' The Asha of Heraclitus, to use some violence in language, was, together with his Fire-lógos, a reason-guided and guiding force which evolves all things out of—what? Out of itself—so it seems. But in the Avesta that fire was not at all originally identified with Asha, for the concepts in the Gáthas show no such connection. And the systems which at first sight look so closely related spread in their developments still further, worlds apart. So that aside from internal characteristics as a rhythm of motion, nothing could be so different from either Asha or Vohumanah, or any of the Amesha-spends, as the Lógos of the great Asiatic, magnificent though it may well be thought to be.

Yet this concept of the bitter misanthropic, so heterogeneous from Avesta, formed the beginning of the Greek idea of 'lógos,' and influenced all future thought up to the very days of Philo.