

A Critical Appraisal of the Notion of Arete in Heraclitus' philosophy

Abstract

This paper presents a critical appraisal of the notion of arete in the philosophy of Heraclitus. The aim is to show the originality of the notion of arete as excellence invoked in the moral and political life of the ancient Greeks. The dominance of the Socratic philosophers in the ancient period almost occluded the presocratic philosophers in the scene. Thus, little was known about Heraclitus as a presocratic philosopher. Explicitly, only his flux dictum was popular. Therefore, a critical appraisal of the notion of arete in Heraclitus will speak more of him and situate him in his well-deserved place as a moral philosopher. This paper will expose the multidimensionality of the wealth of wisdom in Heraclitus as well as his rich literal style. This paper is easy to read for students of philosophy and the public who may be interested in the ancient Greek wisdom. However, any inconsistencies and loopholes many offer a trajectory to further research.

1. Introduction

Heraclitus is the most popular of the presocratic philosophers. His multidimensional doctrines and aphorisms together with his rich style of authorship are testimonies to this though he is said to have authored only a single treatise of three works in physics, politics and theology. His thought is encyclopaedic as attested for by the variety of his doctrines. As early as the 5th Century BC, Heraclitus from the wealth of the ancient Greek culture created a system of thought that affected later generations of great philosophers: ancient, medieval, modern and contemporary. Among his doctrines are the universality and centrality of the Logos, the unity and harmony of the opposites, the centrality of relativity and the idea of the flux as the principle of the natural law. Furthermore, his teaching on the human soul, the notion of Sophos, the 'dialectic' of natural elements and existential principles all captured in his philosophy. Besides, it is attested and acclaimed that his philosophy shows high sense of originality. Despite this multidimensionality this paper is not focused on any of these but the notion of arete.

Arete is an ancient Greek term which translates excellence, though the concept has undergone some mutations during the passage of time. Some authors claim that the sense of arete 'flowed' in the blood stream of the ancient Greeks like blood in the human body. Arete is the notion of excellence from which Heraclitus adapted the principle 'be the best and be the first' always. Heraclitean Arete is composed of two sides, the word (*logos*) and work (*ergon*). Heraclitus claims that an individual of excellence must be one that is versatile with the two components. Concerning the word, he must be good at speech as a person of good oratory. For, he likens the training of good speech to those of athletes and military. Similarly, work (*ergon*) must be expressed in the success of good planning of an activity.

This paper argues for the originality of the notion of arete in Heraclitus. Though the notion was already in the life of the ancient Greeks as moral cum political attitude, it was nevertheless formulated as a moral philosophical theme. With Heraclitus, the notion of arete gained popularity which subsequent generations have adapted in various ethical and existential theories and values. However, the originality is attributed to Heraclitus.

This paper is presented as follows: The second section presents a brief biographical note, his early life among his contemporaries and consequently, how he ventured into philosophy. The aim is to show his early beginning, motivation and how he excelled. The third section briefly explores some of the popular doctrines in the philosophy of Heraclitus such as his conception of the Logos, the unity of the opposites and relativity and flux. This is to show the multidimensionality of his thought, besides arete. The fourth section brings us to the notion of *arete* (excellence) which is the threshold of the paper. From the study, the notion of arete crosscuts morality, politics and existentialism. It is, however, derived from moral life of the ancient Greeks. The fifth section makes a critical appraisal of the philosophy of Heraclitus focusing on the arete notion.

2. Early life

Heraclitus of Ephesus is said to have been born circa 535-475 B.C. in Ephesus, the Ionian coast of the modern-day Turkey. According to history, the certainty of this date is disputed as some authors put it at 500 B.C. Heraclitus is said to have flourished in the 69th Olympiad which took place about 504 -501 B.C. Heraclitus was certainly born into aristocratic family. His father's name was Bloson or Herackon, a powerful and influential man. Unfortunately, nothing is known of his mother. Rather, history has it that Heraclitus abdicated his supposed royal inheritance to his brother as well as declining politics and power (Heraclitus By Ind. Phil.).

Heraclitus is renowned as a self-made personality that stands out among his contemporaries. He has a history of youthful intellectual prodigious life. He taught himself everything he knows by means of self-interrogation, questioning and answering. This method of self-tutoring has strong affinity with Socrates midwifery that was directed to teaching another. Nevertheless, some historians have it that Heraclitus was taught by Xenophanes (570-480 B.C.) (Heraclitus by Ind. Phil.). The personal life of Heraclitus is described as strange by many authors. Some describe him with psychological disposition of melancholy; but with a nice and virtuous personality such as honesty, gentleness, broadmindedness, strength and magnanimity (Baloyannis).

Heraclitus was an outstanding figure among his contemporaries. Whereas many interesting things are attributed to his person, some unpleasant remarks were also made. For example, his contemporaries know him as the dark philosopher. Why? Among his associates, Heraclitus' work is said to have been difficult to understand (Heraclitus By Ind. Phil.). Others observe that he used words that have more than one meaning and hence, aggravating the difficulty of understanding. The difficulty experienced in his work is said to be deliberate as well as the unclearness of his teachings. "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 are competent" (Heraclitus By Ind. Phil.). He was also known as the weeping philosopher and this psychological disposition was connected to the melancholia and his depressed disposition. This disposition could be said to have had some negative impacts on his person and his academic accomplishment. A case in point is that some authors are of the view that this psychological anomaly hindered his intellectual success. Particularly, it is assumed that melancholia militated against the completion of some of his works. As a result of this, only one work is said to have been completed by him. Similarly, due to his melancholic disposition, Heraclitus has no record of travels even to the nearby city of Miletus, although he is said to have had some ideas of the philosophy of the Milesian school (Heraclitus By Ind. Phil.).

A loner and a misanthrope are further negative but controversial aspect of his person. Heraclitus' melancholy and lack of association with people made him to be described as a loner and one who dislikes and avoids humankind. As an aristocrat he is said to have exhibited disdain to those excluded in his class. In what follows, he favored aristocracy as a form of government. Perhaps, a reason why he abdicated his patrimonial throne and showed no interest in political powers and offices (Kahn 2).

The forgone personal intellectual attitude of Heraclitus may be viewed as a prolegomenon to his philosophy. For Heraclitus, belonging to the intelligentsia class did not seem to have much sympathy for those of the exclusive class or intend that those of low understanding remain in their current intellectual status quo. He is said

to be comparing people of low understanding to those in deep sleep. Furthermore, as if to propose existentialism, he believed that only the philosophers that have truth as the aim of their pursuit are those fully awake and fully alive. By this earliest idea, Heraclitus could be said to have propounded existentialism. Thus, judging himself in this light, he considered himself as the sole among his contemporary people (Kahn 2).

3. Historical overview of Heraclitean philosophy

Heraclitus is acclaimed as the most important and the most popular of the presocratic philosophers. His influence on the philosophers after him are enormous. The political climate of his time was stable though he had no interest in politics. This accounts for the reason why he is said to have relinquished and abdicated his royal patrimony to his younger brother. Thus, it was in the same city that he flourished in his wisdom amidst other currents of the time. Later there was a political unrest that was caused by power rivalry among three surrounding cities:

It was in this opulent city, in the days of rivalry between Ephesus, Samos, and Miletus, under Persian control but before the unsuccessful Ionian revolt, that Heraclitus grew up as the eldest son of the noblest family in the city. (The presence of the Persians in and around Ephesus may be reflected in a scornful reference to *magoi* in D. 14. See below on CXV.) We have no information on the struggles between the poor and the rich, the pro-Persian and the anti-Persian parties that must have dominated the civic life of Ephesus at this time (Kahn 2).

It was at this time that Heraclitus began to flourish. Although there are no records to show any political struggles between the poor and the wealthy, but Heraclitus is acclaimed for standing to the course of right and justice in the civic life of the people. His human value of justice certainly informed his notion of arete which is the focus of this essay. For Heraclitus, one just person in the society counts and worth more than hundred. Perhaps, one could think that this is the reason why he propagated and

championed the course of virtuous life among his people. The notion of virtue is original to him and perhaps the foremost in the presocratic era.

The originality of Heraclitus' philosophy is renowned among earliest historians. Heraclitus is said to have shown originality in his thought, style of writing in what could be described as dialectic etc. Kahn upholds that,

The Hippocratic treatise *On Regimen*, probably from the same period, shows a more systematic attempt to imitate the enigmatic, antithetical style of Heraclitus' prose. There is enough evidence for widespread interest in Heraclitus among the intellectuals who represent what is called the Enlightenment of the late fifth century B.C. to establish the plausibility, if not the literal truth, of the story that it was the tragedian Euripides himself who gave the book to Socrates and asked for his opinion of it (4).

Heraclitus was not only a philosopher as we understand it today. He was a wise man because he was proficient in that art of his time that was renowned and acclaimed as wisdom. *Sophos* (wisdom) in the time of Heraclitus was associated to poetry more than in the later times in which it was referred philosophy. In this sense, Heraclitus was a philosopher per excellence having to his credit rich poetic prowess and styles. The originality of his thought is an added advantage of this eulogy. Thus, the discourses in his works show high sense of artistic design of this type can scarcely be demonstrated but is strongly suggested by clear evidence of artistry in every fragment where the original wording has been preserved. The entire composition of his work shows high index of originality and Kahn notes,

The impression that the original work was a kind of commonplace book, in which sentences, or paragraphs were jotted down as they occurred to the author, is largely due to the fact that Heraclitus makes use of the proverbial style of the Sages, just as he invokes the enigmatic tones of the Delphic oracle. But Heraclitus has many literary strings to his bow; he does not always speak in riddles or aphorisms. Among the quotations are four or five long passages of several connected sentences (7).

The attribution of 'philosopher' to him accent more of scholasticism than philosophical oratory. Furthermore, another index that shows the originality of Heraclitus reverberated in the following statement,

Neither the popular nor the scientific tradition is internally simple or uniform, and the radical difference between the two is much clearer to us than it was to Heraclitus himself. But the originality of Heraclitus can be fully appreciated only in the light of this distinction. For both his historical position and his role as a sage for the centuries are most clearly seen as a bridge between these two traditions (10).

The originality of the philosophy of Heraclitus is a testimony because not all thinkers come out with first-hand ideas in their system of thought. Thanks to history that has revealed Heraclitus beyond what he was narrowly known for. Nevertheless, the originality of Heraclitus does not guarantee an easy comprehension of his philosophy that has been widely acknowledged by many as intentionally obscure. Anthony Kenny notes that "we possess more substantial portion of his work than any previous philosopher, but that does not mean we find him easier to understand. His fragments take the form of pithy, crated prose aphorisms, which are often obscure and sometimes deliberately ambiguous" (16). The absence of the original work of Heraclitus and a total dependence on the commentaries of commentators aggravates the bias of the enigmatic style of his writing and the contents therein of his work. However, Kenny further notes that Heraclitus does not argue but merely pronounce. His is a Delphic style analogous of the oracle of Apollo which neither speaks nor conceals, but gestures (16). In what follows, we shall highlight some of doctrines prominent in his philosophy.

3.1 The Logos

From the Greek orthography, 'logos' translates the word. For Heraclitus and the Greeks, the Logos connotes 'the spoken word', 'the meaning'. It engender other connotations as proportion, order, reason, rational cause or rational principle (Johansen 33). The notion of the word had long been adopted by the Church Fathers to mean Jesus Christ who is the 'Word of God'. The theological account of the Gospel, John, in the first chapter mentions the word which was at the beginning and

was with God and was God himself. The notion of the Logos in the Heraclitean philosophy emphasizes something similar without the mention of the Christian God but with the same sense of universality. Heraclitus is himself the deliverer of the word, but this word is the principle of understanding and meaning. The logos is characterized by eternity and universality, the principle underlying the being of all things and the unity of all (Wheelwright). Logos governs all things, the visible, concrete and ideas. Logos must be maintained to ensure knowledge of all things and the principle of unity of all. It is the principle that everything has in common (Philo).

As the principle of unity, Heraclitus defends that logos unites all human legislations to the celestial. And that all human rules originate from the logos which is of celestial origin. Heraclitus asserts himself as the precursor of the Logos, being the only one among his contemporaries with the Sophos, "Heraclitus as a philosopher presents himself as the delivered of Logos word which holds forever and is accessible to thought" (Baloyannis). Heraclitus accepts the Logos as the fundamental principle of the cosmos and justifies that Sophos in the word deserves human attention. Therefore, he rejected cosmological and cosmogonical explanation of the universe in favour of the Logos. The universality and unity that characterize the logos may have informed the Heraclitean unity of the opposites.

3.2 Unity of opposites

Unity of the opposites is a popular aphorism in Heraclitus. This also is one of dialectical expressions replete in his philosophy. Heraclitus locates harmony in the strain of binding opposites. One could notice harmony in the following ideas of Heraclitus as quoted from the Fragments "the road up and down is one and the same road" and "in the circumference of a circle, the beginning and the end are the same". "Even good and ill are one" "Every day seems equal to the rest." "Cold things become warm and warm become cold" (Baloyannis). Heraclitus claims that the unity and the harmony in the opposites is the generating principle in everything. That the dead comes from the living, the old from the young, and the sick from the healthy is an expression of the unity in opposite situations. Furthermore, Johansen (32) in interpreting Heraclitus notes that the path is one, that is the path upwards is the same downwards and that the idea of polar of opposites can take up different forms

as opposite predicates for example that the sea is healthy for fish but harmful for humans.

There is unity of opposites cosmologically. In the natural elements, Heraclitus notes unity in the opposites. The death of fire is the birth of air whereas air's death is the birth for water. Death for earth is to become water and water's death is birth of air. The peak of Heraclitean unity of the opposites is his claims that immortals are mortals, mortals are immortals, living their deaths and dying their life. Thus, the human lifetime is enveloped in death, but life and death are a continuation and not an opposition (Baloyannis). It is evident in the thought of Heraclitus that some hidden connections in things unites things more harmoniously than the ones that is visible and known to us. He even asserts that 'nature loves to hide'. By this claim, it is obvious that Heraclitus could be viewed as a realist for, a realist believes the existence of a phenomena regardless of the human consciousness of its existence. The notion of unity of the opposites appear to contain some sense of relativity.

3.3 Relativity and flux

The most popular dictum of Heraclitus bothers on flux. On this, he claims that flux dominates everything as basically everything is in a state of flux. Based on flux, Heraclitus posited that "nobody can step twice into the same river" (Fragment). The idea behind this dictum is that since the river is constantly flowing it is impossible for anyone to step twice into the same spot of the direction of the flow.

The state of flux applies to the entire universe. Heraclitus thinks that flux also puts the cosmos in a state of constant equilibrium. He is opposed to the idea of permanence in the natural world since everything is in motion. Commenting on the Heraclitean relativity, Baloyannis notes that in reality stability does not exist in nature since everything is in motion, the universe, the cell and atoms are constantly in motion. This motion accomplishes transformation and alteration which affect balance of energy in the system. This leads to the conclusion that motion, flux is the universal law that permeates and dominates everything.

4. The notion of arete

There are two traditions identified with Heraclitus' intellectual heritage: firstly, "On the one hand there is the popular tradition of wisdom represented by the poets and by the sages of the early sixth century, including Solon and Bias. [And secondly,] there is the new technical or scientific culture which took shape in Miletus in this same century. Under circumstances which we can only dimly perceive, natural philosophy began as the work of a handful of men, the circle around Thales and Anaximander" (Kahn 9). The moral thought of Heraclitus is included in the popular tradition which is an outcome of the wisdom *Sophos* of the poet and poetry. Conversely, although Heraclitus had no personal interest in partisan politics does not negate the fact that he was a strong proponent and an advocate of an ordered society which could be achieved by law and morality (Kenny 19). Prominent among the moral thought is the concept of arete (human excellence) generally translated as virtue. This testifies that he was the first of the ancient philosophers to speak about divine law. By so doing he also advocated for human law (Kenny 19). The experience of human law is intrinsically connected to morality. Arete translated as excellence is an aspect of morality that Heraclitus justified. This of, course, was intrinsically part of his perspective on politics. In connection to this he conceives ethics in terms of asceticism where he regards the human soul as a mixture of fire and water. In this duality, fire is noble and water ignoble. The souls that has more fire is dry and a noble soul (Russell 42).

The notion of arete in Heraclitus is adapted from the poet, Homer. It is expressed in a sentence but captures the urge that one vies for excellence in one's actions and endeavors not only for oneself but also for one's kinsmen, society and nation. As quoted from the original fragment of the work of Heraclitus, it reads: "The Homeric conception of arete is strikingly expressed in a few familiar verses. *Aien aristeuein kai hypeirochon emmenai allon* is the advice which a heroic father gives to his son (Iliad VI.208), as Peleus to Achilles (XI.784): [and is translated] 'Always be first and best, and ahead of everyone else' (Kahn 12). The urge for excellence expressed here is analogous to athletic or other sorts of sporting competition which involves many athletes in view of the best competitor. Arete is akin to the kind of competition in

which one tries to show oneself preeminent or as *a primus inter pares* (first among equals) among one's peers. Similar arete in Greek antiquity that of which Hannah Arendt spoke *agonism*. In agonism according to Arendt, one distinguishes oneself in excellence as in fierce competition among one's equals with the explicit intention of showcasing one's own good qualities amidst family and acquaintances who cheer up the competitor to resounding success (Arendt 41). The similarity involved between Heraclitus' *arete* and Arendt's *agonism* could be said to be of same origin and similar purpose.

Furthermore, Heraclitean arete, a strive for excellence involves two active components. The first of the components is speech act or word (*logos*). By this component, the individual must be fluent in speech, must be a good orator as in poetry. The words must have *Sophos* contents as in wise counsel and must lead to excellence in planning of events. For, good counselling and good planning of events are inseparable, and this ensures success as a mark *Sophos*. The second component is good deeds or work (*ergon*). This implies that one that distinguishes oneself in the excellence of arete must be one capable of good deeds. The type of the good deeds implied here are akin to those of military and athletics. They must be rigorous in view of success. In explicit terms,

striving for individual pre-eminence, in the spirit of an athletic competition or a contemporary race for the American presidency, is specified for the Homeric hero by two ranges of activity in which he may achieve distinction: 'to be a speaker of words and a doer of deeds'. The deeds are those of military and athletic prowess; the words are those of wise counsel and planning (Kahn 12).

The value and importance of oratory and poetry (public speech) in the Greek antiquity could better be understood in the quest for the professional services of the sophists of the later centuries, i.e., the post-Heraclitean era. Public speech requires strenuous training and Kahn draws affinity with the race for American presidency. Similarly, athletic and military training was not for the feeble but the strong - the physically and mentally fit. Therefore, the premium which Heraclitus places on these

two components of *arete* serve as the prolegomena to the notion of excellence it entails and the value for one's life and one's nation as a whole.

There is a duality among the people of Greek antiquity between speech and action. This duality is the nexus between individuals and the sense of achievement ascribed to them. Word and action were often the prerogative of and requirement for recognition in the public space and were usually displayed and expressed by heroes. Heraclitus is said to have opened his work with the two significant words, namely "word" and "work". Kahn citing from the fragments notes, "Heraclitus' opening reference to the 'words and works which I set forth' (in fragment I), as in the later Sophistic antithesis between 'in word' (*logos*) and 'in deed' (*ergon*)" (12). The duality was usually demonstrated in the public space and in public spectacles. Those that excelled in them always won the admiration of the people. Thus, they were treated as heroes (in our contemporary language, celebrities). Such heroes were exemplified in the Homeric epic in the persons of Achilles and Odysseus. For Achilles was the greatest warrior of the city of Troy whereas Odysseus was the wiliest and the most sagacious of all mortals (Kahn 12).

The figures referred here are recognized and renowned in connection with the two components of *arete*, *logos* and *ergon*. For the people of Greek antiquity and in particular, the contemporaries of Heraclitus, the above virtues were reckoned as excellence, not only for the individual's personal aggrandizement but also for the service of the one's nation. It must also be noted that there is an unbreakable connection between this excellence and *Sophos*. It is for this reason that a philosopher in Heraclitean construal must possess these qualities. Thus, the excellence of *arete* is the practical utilization of words guided by actions that ensures success as in the planning of events or activities. On this, one perceives in the Heraclitean conception of *arete*, the idea of pragmatism since the excellence is result oriented and teleological since it has an end in view. Juxtaposing it with contemporary ethical theories, it fulfils consequentialism because it is normative, teleological and most so the result is the basis of evaluating the moral rightness or worthiness.

On the flipside of successful actions are found failures. Failure is antithetical to arete because it demonstrates the absence of *Sophos*. This is evident in the dearth of intellectual and moral excellence that arete represents. The consequence of this, for Heraclitus, is a shameful failure. Kahn notes that there are instances of lack of recognition of intellectual or moral excellence that might be distinct in principle from the successful pursuit of whatever goals one has in view. One could say that as the heroic code stipulates, an action is judged wrong, shameful or foolish only if and because it will lead to failure or disaster for the agent himself (12). Success and failure in the Greek mindset was attributed to two conditions.

Firstly, one's success was considered as a family fortune. What this means is that parents were obliged to school their children on arete. Again, close friends and associates were also considered an integral and dependent factor of success in one's endeavors. To this end, Heraclitus thinks that successful figures were often selfless in view of the influence and contributions of the other people in their success story. Secondly, the moral code that stipulates rewards and punishment ensures appropriate behavior. For, in accordance with one's behavior, one could be rewarded and encouraged or be punished or at least be despised. An instance of punishment cited from Heraclitus' fragments are the beating of Thersites in the *Iliad*, the killing of the suitors in the *Odyssey* (Kahn 13). These forms of punishments were justified for anyone that defiled the demands of *arete*. The ancient Greek society recognized two types of arete: "competitive" and the "quiet" or "cooperative". The competitive arete is one that was made public whereas the quiet was not open to public spectacles. However, heroic conception was attributed to the competitive.

Heroic conception of arete corresponds with the competitive version of it. The reason is that it is publicly displayed and those that achieve this excellence are selfless. And since individuals on the opposite side (vicious) are meant to face punishment or at least reprimand, one could think that the moral rectitude of the successful ones impacts positively on the society. In a nutshell, the heroic understanding of arete is synonymous with moral ideal. I think that Heraclitean arete is the first defined moral idealism in the philosophy of the presocratic epoch. Bearing this in mind, Heraclitus may be recognized as a presocratic moral idealist because he identifies morality with

the ideal of the set moral rules whereby the rules in question are in turn identified as moral ideals. The classical literature of the Seven Sages designates it as "*sophrosyne* (in its old form *saophrosyne*) has the literal meaning 'good sense' or 'soundness of mind', the opposite of folly" (Kahn 13). *Sophrosyne* implying good sense also make sense in thinking it in terms of capability for rational action for one's interest. Later use of the term connotes restraint in terms of speech, modesty that finds human and divine acceptance. This could also be understood in the light of prescription of human law for the ordering of the polis (Kenny 19).

Moderation was also an expression of Heraclitean excellence. For the Greeks of antiquity, moderation had strong connotation with 'good sense' and temperance. It also had strong implications for chastity in sexuality and modesty in eating and drinking. Therefore, they were accepted as concrete expression of *sophrosyne* and individuals that exhibited these were reckoned to be of good sense, temperance and modest. The importance of excellence and being of good sense in the ancient Greek society could be summarized as decency thus: "a decent sense of one's place within the social setting and one's limitations as a human being...'Know thyself, 'Nothing in excess', 'Measure is best'" (Kahn 13). This moral ideal agrees with the conception of arete as excellence.

There is a notable shift in the notion of excellence in Heraclitus. In examining the Heraclitean notion of excellence, one observes a shift from the foremost conception, arete (excellence) to *sophrosyne* (soundness of mind) to *saophrosyne* (in its old form but with similar meaning) which culminated in temperance and modesty and summed up in the Homeric aphorisms 'Nothing in excess' and 'Measure is best'. Connected to moderation is Heraclitean claim that a drunkard is dead because a dry soul with more fire is noble and alive. A drunk has more water in his soul, and this renders the soul ignoble and hence, dead (Russell 42). This view foreruns asceticism and advocates asceticism. However, the mutation in arete according to Kahn is accounted for by the fact that the contemporary Homeric epic prevalent in the literature of Hesiod was recorded and used as measure of wisdom by the sages of the sixth century. The shift is literary as the Homeric poems and those of the poets were mere ideals and not portraying a real and concrete human society or any

historical periods (14). They merely presented us with ideals and fictive imagery constructed over a period to formulate a tradition of achievement and individual glory. It is a typical epic and fiction.

Historically, the notion of arete in its two forms, the selfish and social was in the consciousness of the ancient Greeks. It impacted upon the values of self-restraint, self-assertion, and moral consciousness. Prior to the advent of philosophy, the notion of arete informed their consciousness of excellence, not only in understanding tragedy but it also guided them in their understanding of political career as selfless service to the state.

5. Appraisal

The presocratic era was characterized by myths and poetry. This means that there was yet no defined philosophical system. This, therefore, is to Heraclitus' credit that he was able to draw clear philosophical thought system out from myth and poetry that was replete at the time. This also agrees with his self-assertion of being wide awake for, for him, this is the foremost mark of a one that possess Sophos - a philosopher. In this sense of auto definition, Heraclitus is a not just a philosopher, but an excellent one. He has founded many ideas and philosophical schools of thoughts, existentialism being prominently one. Thus, he could be regarded as the foremost existentialist for making a divide between the existing individuals and the sleeping ones.

The problem of flux is said to be a given fact to the Milesian thinkers. However, the problem was not how things changed or why they changed but the circumstance of the change was explained by unchangeability behind it. The unchangeability as the principle of the change was Heraclitus point of departure which led him to seeing things in new perspectives (Johansen 31).

It is noted that Heraclitus was not at home with democracy. This is evident in the fact that he was born into aristocracy and so preferred it to democratic rule. This also explained why he had no sympathy for people that lack wisdom. His fellow citizens were not disposed to wisdom or one that is better than the rest of them and so adopted for their motto 'nobody among us shall be better than anyone else'. It

could be said that it was against this mentality of complacency in mediocrity status quo that Heraclitus loathed democracy in preference to aristocracy and hence, his aphorism that 'one counts for me more than ten thousand' (Johansen 31). This means that one wise man (*Sophos*) aristocrat is better ten thousand fools (democrats). Clearly:

His thought of the crowd as a tyrant anticipates Plato's. But like Plato, Heraclitus did not get stuck in ordinary conservative protest. Instead, he found a truer world behind that which the crowd in its ignorance takes for reality. This may be interpreted as the aristocrat's recompense for political impotence, and Heraclitus participates in the older poets' search for absolute norms instead of a current justice that has turned out to be accidental and man-made (Johansen 31).

By rejecting democracy which he regarded as tyranny, he was anticipating an order to be injected in the system. And for him, the notion of *arete*, which means excellence that is acquired through word (*logos*) and work (*ergon*) was that anticipated order.

Heraclitus expanded the horizon the philosophy of the ancient Ionian school with his system of thought. The unity of the opposites is Heraclitean dialectics. The harmony between the opposites is for Heraclitus the true god: "The true Zeus, or the god, is precisely the harmony between opposites: god is day and night, winter and summer, war and peace, satiety and hunger" (Johansen 34). What Heraclitus calls harmony and strife are the two sides of the same issue. While strife divides, harmony unites. Zeus (god) is the principle of unity, of reason and of intelligence.

Heraclitus is an excellent philosopher and philosopher of human excellence. His thought are multidimensional and have created multidimensional systems as he delves into many intellectual themes. We find him in cosmology, politics, moral philosophy, science, literature, and poetry. Whether he is self-made or was taught by Xenophanes, he was a man of *Sophos* in the Greek antiquity. Consequently, he has impacted a lot of influence on philosophers of the later centuries. Baloyannis notes

that Heraclitus has influenced Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, Sextus Empiricus, Porphyrius to Holderlin. In the Modern era, he has influenced Nietzsche, Heidegger, Whitehead, Jung, Eliot and Kafka (The Phil. Of Heraclitus). Heraclitus, although has not authored many works, but he is reckoned as a great philosopher and writer because of the depth, encyclopaedic nature and the originality of his thought in the ancient period. And he is a great writer because of his style coloured with compactness, solemn and powerful with linguistic liveness. his work is replete with metaphors, aphorism and symbolism and opacity (The Phil. Of Heraclitus). With this record of influence on later generation, Heraclitus made great impact in western thought.

As early as he appeared on the philosophical scene, the achievements of Heraclitus are unparalleled. From the moral consciousness of his people, Heraclitus cleverly constructed the first notion of morality with a philosophical explanation. Clearly enshrined in the mainstream of his notion of arete is moral idealism – the notion that identifies morality with the ideal set of moral rules where this set of rules is also identified in turn of moral ideal. The universality of this moral rules is self-evident. Although, it is said to be moral ideal, it does not mean that it has nothing to do with concrete life. For, as Hannah Arendt who sees it as agonism, it is the blueprint and the metaphysical foundation of modern democracy as contestants must show their excellence during their political campaigns thereby testing themselves and their popularity. In this sense, Heraclitus, and Arendt; arete and agonism dialogue. Connected to arete and agonism is the strenuous physical training involve in preparing the mind and body fit for the onerous task. This in essence involves the two components: logos and ergon. Being the first to advance this formulation, Heraclitus forwards an original notion of moral excellence.

It is obvious that the achievement of Heraclitus comes to the fore in articulating a view that shows the opposites can be seen together as a unity. This could in the Hegelian vocabulary be expressed as dialectic. It is also evident that since he highly influenced many of the later philosophers, that Hegel might have been influenced by Heraclitus. I think at this juncture, that since Heraclitus establishes unity in the opposites, therefore, for him there will be no conflict between the selfish and the

social conception of arete, as both shade light on how we could understand and interpret excellence. Furthermore, the two strands are flip sides they would be understood as a unity.

Heraclitus is reckoned as an excellent philosopher. I think the excellence of his thought is relative, that is makes sense in his epoch and among his contemporaries. Otherwise, how can we reconcile this: "Heraclitus—does as does the god at Delphi: he says nothing, he conceals nothing, but he gives a sign. This means that Heraclitus acts like the poet: he shows, but he does not prove" (Johansen 32).

Change is obvious in everything and not merely in the opposites. Heraclitus talks of change as if it occurs only in polar opposites. Not all changes take place in polar opposites and all contrasts do not arrange themselves in pair as Heraclitus purports. Against this position, Johansen notes that "Not all changes occur between polar opposites, nor do all contrasts arrange themselves in pairs. Yet Heraclitus generalized his law of constancy in changes. Everything is subject to change, not only when compared to other things, but in itself, and everywhere it holds true that A implies not-A." (34). As regards change, it thus, happens that not one of the polar end changes but everything changes every moment of time. The identity of everything is constantly updating including the river in Heraclitus' popular aphorism.

In thinking strife as the law of life with Heraclitus, he seemingly justifies the concept of necessity as an attack. This seems like a polemic against Anaximander. Heraclitus has seemingly forgotten about his constant use of some negative concept that could cause misrepresentation and misunderstanding of his well-intended propagation of his wisdom. Fire and war, if understood literally would engender negative outcomes.

Everything is in motion, and nothing stand still also implies that not even the same person could step into the same river. This flux I believe was inherited by Aristotle when he classified the types of change which Heraclitus could not at the time. For if Heraclitus had paid more attention to his concept of change, it would be seen to be directional change as it concerned the direction of the flow of the river and not the river changing in its entirety. Heraclitus meant to say the course of flow and not the water body.

Furthermore, Heraclitus declined associating with the democrats of his time because he judged them as uninformed and corrupt, yet he is presented as one who was wise and loved his society. Why couldn't he try an upheaval? An opinion is that rather preferring to playing with children than mingling with the politicians of his time, his love for his people and the quest for better experience of morality should have prevailed over his ego.

The literal translation and the entailment of arete as 'always be the first and best, and ahead of everyone else' in a perspective can attract negative implication. Although viewed as a positive statement of inspiration and encouragement, if taken to the extreme it could yield negative results. It may be justified from the viewpoint of the end justifies the means, thereby misleading one to use immoral and unethical means to a positive end. In its nature, arete is analogous to completion and in most competitions, competitors often seek the shortest way to the excellence in view. However, arete viewed in Heraclitean context is teleological since it is in view of excellence. Whereas Heraclitean arete has two sides (*logos* and *ergon*), Arendtian agonism has three (labour, work, action).

Lastly, attributing one's success on family fortune as arete defends seems lopsided. For apart from the family consciousness and influences on one's life, there are other influences that are stronger. Peers often wage stronger influences on an individual. Furthermore, the individual's will and disposition are not considered by arete.

6. Conclusion

Every philosophy has his point of departure. The ancient Greeks though, they could be credited with originality of thought were also influence a priori, that is with what was a given, namely their culture. Heraclitus, a presocratic philosopher is renowned with originality of thought and sagacious and prolific in writing. His philosophy is encyclopedic and multidimensional as he delved into many areas of scholarship. He has influenced so many later ancient, medieval, modern and contemporary philosophers and for this he is one of the renowned philosophical ancestors.

His conception of arete that translates excellence in terms of "always be the first and best, and ahead of everyone else" if understood and assimilated and espoused in the positive light after the progenitor, is in the words of Hanna Arendt, agonistic, that is, it brings to public spectacles, one's virtues and capacities viewed as achievement of excellence. The two components of logos and ergon makes arete a duality. In the conception, certain philosophical and ethical notions and theories such as pragmatism, teleology, norm, consequentialism, moral idealism and existentialism emanate. Heraclitus was an excellent philosopher and philosopher of excellence.

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