

Logos As Will And Cosmodicy

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Abstract

Recent scholarship has seen a burgeoning interest in the young Nietzsche's relationship towards the ancient Greeks with the aim of catching a glimpse into the beginnings of his philosophical development. With this in mind, I set out to gain an understanding of what I believe is a critical aspect in the beginning stages of Nietzsche's thought: what he had learned not only from the pre-Platonic philosophers in general, but also from Heraclitus of Ephesus in particular, and how he had synthesized and internalized what he learned from him, and made use of for his own philosophical agenda. Throughout this paper, I argue that his earliest conception of the Will is directly influenced by, and may perhaps even be considered the same concept as, Heraclitus' Logos. And I attempt to reveal this strong association through a careful textual analysis and interpretation of his Basel lectures on Heraclitus that discuss these notions.

Contemporary scholarship has recently seen publication of the notebook entries and early lectures Nietzsche produced while a professor at the University of Basel. One of the recent works published in English is Greg Whitlock's, *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*. According to Whitlock, the beginnings of Nietzsche's most fundamental philosophical ideas can be traced back to these early lectures. He more specifically claims that the doctrines of "The Will to Power" and "The Eternal Recurrence of the Same" as well as others can be found there:

In principle, it is impossible to say whether Nietzsche discovered these doctrines in the Greeks or projected them onto early Greek science. What we do have here is the self-development of Nietzsche [...] (Whitlock 157)

Much scholarship in the past has concluded that the unpublished works, otherwise known as Nietzsche's "Nachlass", are not to be taken seriously as significant philosophical treatises in their own right. At best, these works are nothing more than curiosities, and if one is interested in gaining a thorough understanding of Nietzsche's philosophical activity, one is instructed to investigate his published works written during the middle and late 1880s. This position is expressly summed up by R.J. Hollingdale who argued in his book, *Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy*, that the notes and the lectures in the "Nachlass" were never incorporated into the published works, and were therefore ideas Nietzsche had rejected; and for this reason, we should too (Hollingdale 172). Recently, however, this attitude has been challenged, and there has been a growing interest in the notebooks and lectures Nietzsche produced throughout his early career as a Philology professor. I believe Whitlock is correct in arguing that Nietzsche's lectures on the pre-Platonic philosophers are the fertile workshop for his budding philosophical activity. And to this end, I will try to make a case study whereby one can gain insight into his early philosophical development by a close analysis of Nietzsche's discussion of Heraclitus of Ephesus as presented in these Basel lectures. The more specific aim of this paper is to examine Nietzsche's conception of the Will (*Wille*) and its relation to Heraclitus' Logos (λόγος), and a closely related theme called cosmodycy. This investigation is to be carried out by an analysis of Nietzsche's pre-Platonic lectures on Heraclitus of Ephesus.

As we turn our attention to those fragments that specifically discuss the Logos, Nietzsche gives the following remarks about the opening lines of the proem:

Heraclitus, who found himself in solitude and who recognized the unified lawfulness [Logos] of the world [cosmos], was accordingly exclusive to all other human beings: their follies lie in this, that they live in the middle of lawfulness [Logos] and yet do not notice — indeed, that they know nothing at all thereof, even when it is remarked [upon]. (*PPP* 10, 58)

After giving some discursive comments on the idea of the “wise Man” in ancient Greek philosophy, he next begins a reading of one of the most significant fragments of the Heraclitean corpus, fragment 1:

Although this account [Logos] holds forever, men ever fail to comprehend, both before hearing it and once they have heard. (Heraclitus fragment. 1, 29)

Nietzsche approaches the opening line of the proem not much differently than many other German- or English-speaking classicists have done in the past; for he says Heraclitus believed that he alone had reached rational intuitive insight into the absolute lawfulness of the cosmos through the Logos which itself is an intelligence or gnômê. According to Lidell and Scott, gnome means: “mind,” “thought” or “intelligence”: but it could also mean “Will,” as mentioned in Aeschylus (*LSJ* 166). It should additionally be pointed out that while Nietzsche was lecturing on the pre-Platonic Philosophers, he was also delivering lectures on the Greek tragedian

Aeschylus; more precisely, one of the trilogies of the *Oresteia* called *The Libation Bearers (Choephoroi)* (Malcolm). Now if the Logos signifies the absolute lawfulness of the cosmos, and it is also thought to be an intelligence, then Nietzsche must have connected the Logos with the Will. Indeed, it is possible there are other connections Nietzsche made between the pre-Platonic philosophers lectures, especially his remarks on Heraclitus, and his lectures on Aeschylus; since the works of Aeschylus had been known to have a strong moral and religious emphasis, focusing on man's position in the cosmos, his relation to the gods, and the divine law.

The next mention of Logos is in connection with the notion of Being in Parmenides' philosophy. According to the tradition, Heraclitus rejects the position put forward by Parmenides — the first principle designated as Being taken as absolute persistence. The motto of Heraclitus is “Πάντα ῥεῖ,” or “All Things Flow”: he only knows Becoming, since he considers that which persists as leading to error and falsehood. Nietzsche depicts the doctrine of Becoming in his lectures by saying whatever “[...] Becomes is one thing in internal transformation, and the Law [Logos] of this eternal transformation, [...] is precisely this One, Fire. The one overall Becoming is itself Law; *that* it Becomes and *how* it Becomes is its work” (PPP 10, 63). Thus, Nietzsche interprets the Law and Fire to be equivocal terms. In fact, many classicists have interpreted the first principle in the Heraclitean philosophy in this same manner — i.e.

the first principle of all things coming into existence and perishing is the ever living Fire whose Law is the Logos.

In his lectures on the pre-Platonic philosophers, Nietzsche placed much emphasis on Anaximander; this is reflected not only in the way he represents him in the succession of the philosophers, but also the extended discussion Nietzsche gives of him. Anaximander reasoned that the first principle was the Unlimited; and from the Unlimited, all things come into being. All Becoming is not true Being; rather, it is a derivative of the Unlimited depending upon it by borrowing its existence from it. Therefore, everything that comes to be and exists does so on borrowed time. All Becoming owes its *temporary* existence or “borrowed time” to the Unlimited. Furthermore, the debt incurred from borrowing time for *temporary* existence implies a guilt that must be paid back or atoned for through passing away. As Nietzsche had said: “Anaximander taught, ‘everything with qualities arises and perishes mistakenly: thus there must be a quality-less Being.’ Becoming is an injustice and is to be atoned for with Passing Away” (*PPP* 10, 63).

Anaximander had reasoned that whatever possesses qualities is subject to Becoming and Passing Away; and because of this, there must be some quality-less Unlimited Being. On behalf of Heraclitus, Nietzsche raises the questions as to “[...] how [...] that which is encumbered by qualities, Becoming, arises from the quality-less? And

how might a world of such eternal lawfulness in its *entirety* be a world full of injustice?" These profound and enigmatic questions led to a contradiction: for how could something (imbued with qualities, Becoming), arise from nothing (the quality-less, Unlimited Being)? And for what reason is Becoming an injustice by its severance from the quality-less Being, and that whatever has qualities must pay its penance by Passing Away? Nietzsche answers Anaximander on behalf of Heraclitus by saying:

[...] if Becoming and Passing Away are the effects of a justice, then there is no such dualism between a world of the Unlimited and the qualities, because qualities are tools of Arising and Passing Away, thus tools of justice. (*PPP* 10, 63)

In contrast to Anaximander, Heraclitus reasoned that if Becoming and Passing Away are themselves the consequences of justice, then there must not be a dualism between the Unlimited and the qualities, since the qualities themselves are tools of Becoming and Passing Away, and are therefore tools of justice. Heraclitus additionally maintained that the principle must likewise be "rightful" in its qualities, and must also have *all* predicates or *all* qualities, since "all witnesses swear by justice." Furthermore, he places the entire world of qualities around the principle in that it manifests itself in all of them. And therefore, Becoming and Passing Away are part and parcel of the principle, and are therefore not a punishment as originally conceived by Anaximander. Rather, it is more accurate to characterize this process as the

“Innocence of Becoming”, whereby there is no guilt or moral implications attributed to Coming-To-Be and Passing Away — and, contrary to Hegelian, Marxian and Judeo-Christian doctrines of “*world-historical processes*”, the “Innocence of Becoming” has no goal or end (*telos*) in its sight. Furthermore, it is in this way that Heraclitus presents a cosmodycy or a justification of the cosmos down to its most intricate details over his forerunner; since he presents a vindication of the absolute goodness of the cosmos based upon the “Innocence of Becoming” when confronted with the existence of evil (*PPP* 10, 63).

From the preceding, we can clearly recognize just how Nietzsche connects Heraclitus’ doctrine of Becoming with justice. Now during the course of his lectures, he cites three Heraclitean fragments which he believes are indicative for gaining immediate intuitive insight into the paradoxical heart of Heraclitus’ philosophy: fragment 23: “If it were not for these things, they would not have known the name of justice”; fragment 94: “The sun will not transgress his measures. If he does, the Furies, ministers of justice, will find him out and punish him”; and finally, one of the best known fragments: 30d: “The ordering (cosmos), the same for all, no god nor man has made, but it ever was and is and will be: everliving fire, kindled in measures, and in measures going out” (Heraclitus fragments 23, 94, 30d, 61, 49, 45). What we can infer from Nietzsche’s ordering and interpretation of these fragments is that he connects justice, law or Logos, and fire as equivocal terms in the Heraclitean philosophy. Of

course, the interchangeable use of these terms allows for the rich multiplicities and variegations of the interpretations of the fragments themselves — not to mention the fact that all of these terms simultaneously resonate amongst each other — and furthermore point in the same figurative direction, and that is the one principle of Heraclitus' philosophy — the Logos. Along with the above-mentioned terms, Nietzsche discusses two others known to be at the dialectical heart of the Heraclitean corpus: war and fate. According to his reading, the universal law or fate is defined as the opposition of all things in the cosmos in a constant state of tension or war — which paradoxically produces the harmony of the cosmos as well. Fragment 80 excellently sums up Heraclitus' position:

It should be understood that war is the common condition and that strife is justice, and that all things come to pass through the compulsion of strife. (Heraclitus fragment 80, 67)

Heraclitus views the cosmos as existing in a constant state of tension of opposing forces, and he uses war as a trope for this common condition. Thus, according to the reading above, “Strife” or “battle” (LSJ 314) *is* justice — it is the *way* of the cosmos to always exist in a state of tension of dialectical forces. The Ephesian adds the further principle that all things coming into existence must do so by means of force or strife. Contrary to Anaximander who attached moral implications to the Coming Into Being and Passing Away of all things, Heraclitus does not do so; for him, Becoming has no

moral implications since “*strife is justice*”. And it is for this reason that Heraclitus presents a cosmodycy over his forerunner.

That the common condition of the cosmos in a constant state of tension of dialectical forces guided by a “unified, lawful, reasonable justice” is an idea that can be traced all the way back to the original conception of the Greek’s notion of Being; for it is Hesiod’s “good strife” transformed into a universal principle:

Contests [...] distinguished the Greeks. Every individual competes as if [he] alone is justified, yet an infinitely definite standard of just judgment decides who is linked to victory. From the gymnasium, musical competitions, and political life Heraclitus became familiar with the paradigm of such strife. The idea of war-justice is the first specifically Hellenic idea in philosophy – which is to say that it qualifies not as universal, but rather as national. (*PPP*, 64)

The Greeks were deeply imbued throughout their Hellenic Will when it came to their high regard for competition and the sublime ecstasy of victory. Heraclitus became familiar with the idea of competition through the rigorous standards of the Greek gymnasium, by means of his participation in musical competitions, and lastly, through his observation of Greek politics. Perhaps what is more striking is Nietzsche’s emphasis of the notion of war-justice — which is not only the “*first specifically Hellenic idea in philosophy*” — but is also the driving force behind cosmodycy.

The idea of cosmodycy resurfaces once again in the Basel lectures when Nietzsche discusses the Greek's notion of competition in light of Heraclitus' doctrine of opposites and its relation to what he describes as "Eternal Becoming". He paraphrases a passage from Plato's *Phaedo* (70e-72e) and Heraclitus' fragment 88 as examples for describing the Will as a play of forces permeated throughout the cosmos: "Well, Heraclitus perceived that contrary predicates imply each other, something like what Plato says about the pleasant and the unpleasant in the *Phaedo*; [for] they are intertwined like a knot[:]"

The entrance of life and death, and of waking and sleeping, is only predominance becoming visible that one force has won over its opposite and momentarily begins to lose again to it. Both forces are continuously efficacious at the same time, since their eternal strife allows neither victory nor domination over time.

It is one and the same thing to be living and dead, awake or asleep, young or old. (*PPP* 10, 65)

Following his discussion of those fragments connected with the doctrine of opposites, Nietzsche further deepens the notion of cosmodycy by citing Lucian's *Philosophies for Sale* where there is a character called "the Heraclitean" who speaks of the cosmos as filled with: "Joy and joylessness, wisdom and un-wisdom, great and small [...] circling about, up and down, and interchanging in the game of Eternity". Nietzsche similarly remarks upon section 14 of Lucian's *Philosophies for Sale* in an echo of Heraclitus' fragment 52 where an image of God is depicted as the boy-god Aeon

playing at times with sandcastles, and at other times with game pieces: “The Buyer [...] inquires, ‘And what is eternity?’ The Heraclitean answers, ‘A child playing a game, moving counters, in discord, in concord.’ In his world-creating capacity, Zeus is compared to a child who builds and destroys sand castles on the beach at the sea” (PPP 10, 65-66). Hence, the tropes of God depicted as an innocent child and the cosmos itself as nothing more than a creative force or Will, and where the child playing at the edge of the sea competes with himself by moving pieces of a game sometimes here and sometimes there and by randomly creating and destroying everything all in complete and utter innocence are all metaphors for the “Innocence of Becoming” as the Will of the cosmos which itself signifies the theme of cosmodycy. As part of his idea of cosmodycy, Nietzsche further explains that the cosmos can only be justified as an aesthetic phenomenon, since it has no moral calculations.

We find here a purely aesthetic view of the world. We must exclude even more any moralistic tendencies to think teleologically here, for the cosmic child (*Weltkind*) behaves with no regard to purposes but rather only according to an immanent justice: [he] can act only willfully and lawfully, but [he] does not *will* these ways. (PPP 10, 70)

Significant in this passage are the following points. First, Nietzsche connects his notion of cosmodycy with viewing the cosmos aesthetically; this is opposed to the Anaximandrian idea of attaching moral implications to the Coming Into Being and Passing Away of all things; hence, there is a dialectical tension at play between art and morality. Now the tension between art and morality will resurface throughout

Nietzsche's later works whereby its intensity will be deepened and its scope broadened. Secondly, the idea of a cosmic child (*Weltkind*) functions as a trope for God; this child, driven by necessity, wills the cosmos according to an immanent justice. And thirdly, Nietzsche makes a connection between the Will and the Logos. Hence, we could assume that the inspiration for his idea of the Will, and conceivably the notion of the Will-To-Power, may have had its earliest beginnings in these pre-Platonic lectures, and perhaps more specifically in his interpretation of the Logos. Anyway, in the concluding part of the lecture, Nietzsche once again depicts the notion of cosmodycy, and perhaps even identifies himself as being one and the same with Heraclitus, in opposition to the pessimistic philosopher, Schopenhauer, who also posited the Will as the fundamental nature of reality as well; for he says that the Ephesian:

[...] is [himself] the opposite of a pessimist because he does not deny away sorrows and irrationality: for him, war reveals itself as the eternal process of the world. Yet he contents himself with an eternal universal law and, because it oversees all things, calls it Logos, intelligence. (PPP 10, 74)

So as to summarize what has been learned throughout the course of this essay, we must assume that during the time he had delivered these Basel lectures on the pre-Platonic philosophers in general and Heraclitus of Ephesus in particular, Nietzsche had indeed melded together his earliest philosophical conception of the Will and his interpretation of the Logos as depicted in his reading of the fragments of Heraclitus.

Moreover, Nietzsche tried to tie his own understanding of the Will and the Logos to what he called a cosmodicy as a means to justify the true nature of the cosmos as nothing more than the exchange and play of the dialectical forces of nature itself that are in a state of perpetual war or strife with each other, but without the necessity of interpreting this phenomenon by means of the moral connotations of good and evil. Therefore, during the earliest stages of his budding philosophical development, Nietzsche considered the cosmos to be nothing more than the Innocence of Becoming; i.e., of everything coming into existence and passing away, and whereby all entities that do so had no greater significance other than the aesthetic appreciation we can gain from these entities parading themselves by means of this eternal process. Perhaps more significantly, it should lastly be mentioned that it is wholly not inconceivable that with his understanding of the Will devoid of any negative Schopenhauerian connotations as well as his idea of the Will's deep ties to both the Logos and cosmodicy, the mature Nietzsche of the 1880s will begin to develop and later refine what would later become known as a twofold interpretation of the fundamental nature of reality — the Will-To-Power and the Eternal Recurrence of the Same.

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