

ESSAY

SECRET NUMBER

3087

LANGUAGE

ENGLISH

TOPIC

I

1111111111 Don't write your name, country, or any other form of identification!
N'écrivez pas votre nom, votre pays ou toute autre forme d'identification!

Schreiben Sie nicht Ihren Namen, Ihr Land oder andere Formen der Identifikation!
¡No escriba su nombre, país o cualquier otra forma de identificación!

DO NOT CHANGE THE TEXT FORMATTING. NE MODIFIEZ PAS LA MISE EN FORME DU TEXTE. ÄNDERN SIE NICHT DIE TEXTFORMATIERUNG. NO CAMBIE EL FORMATO DEL TEXTO.

Signifying everything!

“Although the logos is common, most people live as though they had their own thought”

Heraclitus

Write your essay here / Rédigez votre essai ici / Schreiben Sie hier Ihren Aufsatz / Escriba su ensayo aquí:

Heracritus, in his quotation, gives us an example of how most of humanity ignores the “common logos” – this universal and overarching basis and culmination of all knowledge – and “act as though they had their own thought.” If viewed from the perspective from a world in which one is certain that there is such a thing as absolute knowledge transcending the individual, such a claim might seem believable ... if not relatable. Surely, from day to day, one encounters events in which one *knows* one is right, yet meet and encounter countless of people who *believe* differently. In this case, I feel as if I am experiencing some transcendental interaction with the common logos – I am functioning as its medium, the logic of the world is speaking through me. On the other hand, the Other is acting out a repressive fantasy in which “they act as if they had their own thought.” They *believe* wrong, I think for myself, but I *know* I’m right.

It goes without saying that if all arguments, dialogues and debates in and of themselves were a conflict between two individuals, one of which were objectively right and the other objectively wrong, such a utopia of truth would surely have been preferable to this one. For the world in which we live in today is a world of many truths – just under eight billion to be exact. No matter how vehement my volition and conviction of my own truthfulness may be, it does not change the fact that the assurance of truthfulness found in the other might be just as strong, and objectively justified, as my own. An argument, as we shall see, is not the clear conflict between truth and fallacy, fiction and fact, lucidity and stupidity – although it is almost always perceived as so, from each of the contestants respective viewpoint. Rather it is the clash of multiple subjectivities, both of them clinging desperately to the belief of their own common logos to the degree that their intention is to expanding the domain of their worldview, by forcing it upon the other.

Let us go more into depth on such a claim as this. Heraclitus' quotation presents an aspect of human existence so absolutely fundamental, that throughout history, and throughout life, this aspect has often found itself ignored, suppressed and most of all forgotten. This aspect is the absolute knowledge, as well as the absolute fact, of the *self*. I am me, and everything else exists in a twofold plane of being between my relation to it and its relation to

me. The acuity and strength of all life and all thought, is found upon this very fundament of existence itself.

At first gaze such a claim might seem like stating the obvious. But I assure you, it is not – let us discover why. For as Heraclitus' quotation shows, philosophy has carried with it the intention of disproving and refuting subjectivity – the individual experience of the world, it has often said, is nothing but limitation. The totality of truth and knowledge can be compared to a globe, embracing its own spherical shape, and the curse of human existence is our own embodied perspective – we cannot see and fathom the entire globe at once. With our eyes, we can only see half of it. No matter how much I were to turn the globe, change my perspective on it, the parts of it just perceived would glide away behind its horizon. In this case, my sense of sight *limits* me. But it is not as if the parts of the globe which hides on the far side of its horizon glides over into non-existence, simply because I cannot see it. I can place a mirror behind it, or I can enfold it in my hands at sense its spherical form tacitly, or I can have another person look at it from a perspective opposite to mine and confirm that the far side of the globe is still present. But all of these ways are ways to escape my own limited perception – it is cheating, so to speak. My experience of the globe, from an embodied perspective, cannot be total. Merleau-Ponty, when discussing this problem of perception, refers to Leibniz' solution. Using a house as an example, a three-dimensional objects with millions ways of seeing it from (from above, from below, from a vantage point in the neighborhood, from inside or seventeen and a half meters to the left of the entrance door), Leibniz says that house exists in its truest form when it is perceived from no particular perspective at all. A Gordian solution to the problem of perception, to say the least.

As we see in these particular examples, both Leibniz and Heraclitus represent a custom of philosophy in which the individual perspective posits a limit on the world and nothing else. For Heraclitus the escape from the theatrical pretension of thinking for oneself is when one mediates the reason of the absolute logos – which is common *across* the limiting, individual experience of the world. Leibniz simply removes the individual as if it were an annoying fly, and rather speculates in an absolute, inhuman perception of the world. Throughout the history of philosophy one finds similar examples – Plato's world of ideas goes far beyond the measly shadows the individual sees fleeting across the wall of the cave, Descartes ignored empirical perception in favor of rational understanding and used newfound his sense of self, the cogito, to legitimize the belief in the absoluteness of God. The motivation behind this doing-away-with of the individual, might be found exactly in these examples of the globe and the house. Holding a rubber ball in my hand, I myself cannot view all of it at once without either help or some instrument, such as a camera or a mirror at which point I'm not experiencing the ball but simply a representation of its far side, be it a reflection of light or the light-play of pixels. However, I *know* the ball to be there. I know because I can feel it in my hand ... my index finger is touching that part I cannot observe. And through my schematic of the world, through learning and reflection of all my past experiences and interactions with it, I have conceptualized the fact that sense and touch correlates in cases such as this – that the senses, combined, gives a coherent and functioning constitution of the world. I turn the rubber ball around, and naturally, I see that the other part is "still there". The fact that I could not see its far side had no implication on its existence whatsoever. Reason puts forward the idea of the rubber ball as an object, and perception only touches it and informs me of its physical qualities. The rubber ball doesn't "need" me. Everything else supports this conclusion: the mirror, the camera and the other observer who sees the other side of the rubber ball and reports it back to me. Heraclitus and Leibniz rejoice! In the example of the rubber ball we find proof of that weakness of individual perception, and the common reason's triumph.

Especially in the example of my friend who also sees the rubber ball, the idea of the common logos begins to form. I, as an embodied individual, cannot view the rubber ball in its entirety. But with the help of another, we can relate our perception of it, and discover that

both of us are only able to see half of it at once, despite it clearly being an object in and of itself. The individual perspective on the world is beginning to waver, it loses its foundation. I cannot be trusted, we tell ourselves. I don't see the world as it really is. I see only a fragment of it, a fragment so miniscule that it's basically false. It is reason that offers a helping hand out of the desperation. It brings ideas of objects independent of perception, and common logos. The individual experience of the world, is quite literally "acting as if they had their own thought" such a thing would be misrepresentation. And it is this mentality that leads philosophy to define humanity as a bearer of truth of which individual human experience is a handicap, a drawback, a frustration which must be overcome.

But as we made clear in the beginning, such a view upon the world is built upon clay feet. For in the case of a human truth transcending the individual, on which ground can one speak of it? *I am* myself, and no matter how I change, where I am, when it is, that is the case, and will always be the case. My actual and lived past is a part of me, and so is my potential for the future. No metaphors that can be used to clarify, because what makes me the person I am cannot be "removed" from the person I am - they are one and the same. Everything must be filtered through my understanding of the world - an understanding which has accumulated in an almost unnoticed way since my birth. Everything must be processed and posited through the conceptualizing powers of an individual being - a *human* being, inherently granted identity and a sense of self, and in every case that sense of self is experienced as "I". The word "We" has sense only if the person speaking or writing identify themselves as within in the group. The word "you" has sense if there is an *I* saying it, and referring to another. Individual experience is something absolute. My sense of self is something I *know* - that is its pure definition. One can theorize of the world as a digital simulation, shadows in a cave or the sensual falsifications of a mean-spirited demon, but it is impossible to rob me of my sense of self. Even if I were stripped of all freedom, indoctrinated and damaged, the sense of self would perhaps be weakened, but there would still be *someone* experiencing all of this unpleasantness. All pain and pleasure are subjective exactly because of this - it is entirely isolated within the subject and its experience and interaction with the world. Pain and pleasure are not things. They can only be correlated to physical phenomena: the stubbing of the toe into a table when you're walking barefoot at home, for example, *relates* to the sensation of pain. Good food, warmth and other activities relate to pleasure. But from the perspective of others my sensations cannot be publicly observed in any other way than behavior: a scream, a sigh, the readings on a brain scan. Pain and pleasure are *felt*, and they are felt by someone, even if that someone has been enslaved, broken or brainwashed. The self prevails.

There is, in other words, some basic, irrefutable fundament in this world of many truths. But it is not the idea of common logos, as Heraclitus conceives, and neither the world of perfect objects devoid of human perception. Rather, it is the human being. *I am* - no amount of sophistry or theoretical conjectures can convince me otherwise - because they would still have to convince *me* that "you are not", which itself is a performative contradiction. If we go beyond the philosophical fascination with the transcendence of the individual through our reason's positing of objects, we will arrive back at where philosophy begun: life. Everyday experiences, the monotony of routine, our experiences with beauty, our joys, our boredoms and so on. This, the lived life, is the basis of thought. There is no philosophy without humans to act it out - to formulate, write it, conceive of it, reflect upon it. And humanity cannot, and must not, be abstracted into some intellectualized idea, a *worth*. Life - existence as a human being is inherently personal and individual. What is the fundament of that phenomenon found stretched between a birth and death? Not a lifetime, not a human life, not even life itself, but the *I*. I am I. All the options self-consciousness then grants us, the innumerable things, personages and roles we can identify ourselves as, comes afterwards. It is pointless, if not dangerous, for me to ignore *my* life, its catastrophes and triumphs, the sorrows and the elations, the euphoria and the ennui, the excitement and the dullness, and its meaning and

meaninglessness. Yet philosophy from time to time, attempts to do so nonetheless. The definition of philosophy as the philosopher's personal confession (the philosopher themselves, no matter how analytic or clear-headed, is still an individual living *their* life, shaped by *their* expectations, hopes and fears), a medium of the wisdom of life to help and improve the lives of others, is ignored. Rather it is, as we have seen in the examples further above, an attempt of overcoming the perceptual weakness of the individual embodiment through way of reason. Therefore the philosopher must naturally try to hide any trace of his or hers own individuality – if not their cover might be blown. They might be exposed, for all the world to see, to have introduced subjectivity into their testament of objective truth. But perhaps philosophy should begin to consider a change of focus – to not necessarily *always* focus on the truth. Philosophy can also help, advance and convalesce the minds of the individuals whose reading breathes lives into the words on the page – words which if left unread signify nothing.

Yet again, in Heraclitus' defense, some clarifications are certainly required. Returning to the example of the rubber ball, the undeniable sense of self which is what makes a life fulfill its function as a medium for the self, must not develop into some strange, perceptual solipsism. The rubber ball exists; it curves away from my gaze but its matter curves further nonetheless making its form spherical and complete. In such a situation, and in countless others, we need reason to complete and fulfill our worldview, and advance perception beyond itself so that it also can conceive that of which it does not perceive right now. And then, going back to the statement of Heraclitus, such a conception of the rubber ball might actually be understood as common logos. Everyone "knows" the rubber ball is round, because reason guarantees it so. A further point of fact inherent in common logos could be the existence of other people – although the self is that vantage point of which everything is given value, meaning and understanding from, "other selves" are difficult to comprehend, from a purely philosophical perspective. If I can call Mr. X a "self" I must deny the definition I have used, that the self is the sense of self. Then a self is something that, in some way or another, can be identified from an external perspective by another self – blurring and befuddling the constitution of myself in myself. But common logos can claim that it is a universal truth that others exist. It is simply something I must assume to the point where I know it to be true. To summarize, I may feel embarrassed, loved, lonely or popular, and I might be disdainful and frustrated on how my life is too short and my senses too small to experience all of the world at once ... but all of these experiences implicates that surely, no matter what thought experiments I might postulate or conceptual theories I play with, every waking moment of my life, in some way or another, consists of interactions with the world and other people. The world, and the people found within it, that is what reality is. But then again, despite this being common across humanity, it is not a common logos. It is not a reality isolated and distanced away from human understanding and "their own thoughts". Rather it is mine.

In this sense, I disagree with Heraclitus. There are "universal" truths – immediate, constant and absolute assumptions (such as the practical existence of the rubber ball in its entirety, the value and worth of other people). This is common logos, a deviation from which is difficult to formulate in an earnest way. But this common logos is given sense, meaning and purpose because of the humans that carry and act according to it – the common logos resides in "their own thought", something which Heraclitus compares to acting out. Philosophy, quite simply, is by and *for* humanity. It should not be, as it is often presumed to, for the abstract and undefinable "search for truth." What is truth without a human to value it and cherish it, to hold it in its hand like a little bird, to feed it, nurture it, watch it grow – *and let themselves grow with it?* Truth in itself is pointless. How many strands of hair were to be found on the head of Spinoza, at his thirty-seventh birthday? How many dandelions have blossomed, lived, withered and died, in the last twenty-two years? When a mother lets out a scream for the death of her child, how long the duration, how many seconds? How many letters in this or that epitaph? All of these are questions with clear answers, yet no one will ever bother to ask them,

let alone answer them. Their truths are meaningless and senseless – they are truths of no substance, lacking the human element. Philosophy cannot be reduced to the search and confirmation of a “common logos” – because the common logos become true only when applied, understood, and acted out. Philosophy’s task is not so much the search for truth, as it is for the search of the truths which matter. And the constitutor of what matters, as always, is the existing human being: the individual self.

There is beauty to be found in such a worldview. We are not “in” the world, surrounded by truth beyond our comprehension. Everything that can be known is within our comprehension. The answers to the big questions are not gliding around the world like the silhouettes of fish in the dark, undefinable waters, they are not be “caught” and “captured” and then integrated into some vault of knowledge, data, units of truths. No, the answers and truths are within us, they come into play in our constant interactions with everything all around us – it is our relation to the truths which must be formulated and made clear. Our time on earth is so small, so infinitely miniscule, yet we carry the heavy burden of everything that has ever mattered on our shoulders, shoulders shaking under the weight. Why bother with pretensions of a world and truths isolated from the individual existence and the individual life? We have so little time. Let us not waste it away counting the hairs on Spinoza’s head.