

INFANT AS A SYMBOLISM OF GOODNESS AND INNOCENSE IN LAO-ZI'S *DAO DE JING* AND HERACLITUS' FRAGMENTS

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Introduction

Is the history of humanity a history of good versus evil? Is it not that man has been trying to conquer the absolute throughout history? In each and every place and era rules and laws have been set in order for the society to evolve towards a better future until the extinction of evil. Nonetheless evil seems to have its way and always manages to intrude like a stowaway perhaps. Thus it comes as no surprise that evil has risen simultaneously with the beginning of philosophical thinking and has been dealt with by every philosophical tradition. The question though remains: is it a matter of subjectivity or is evil a universally recognized situation? In other words is it possible for an evildoer not to be aware of his actions?²

Unlike good evil's ontological identity and self-existence may be put in doubt. Throughout human history it is evil that has been identified in relation to good, not vice-versa. Therefore good is not to be questioned regarding its ontological existence, nor is it to be identified as the alter-ego of evil. In a way this enforces the opinion that man tends to be of good quality (Mencius)³ and that he is lead to evil owing to lack knowledge (Socrates). On the other hand good and evil seen within the context of flux and Becoming may be considered as the alteration of one to the other in

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2 Excluding the cases of a mentally unstable person and impotent of realizing their actions and the results of those actions.

3 The sperm of goodness lies within man ready to be cultivated.

every given moment. Within this context we shall attempt to explore the ethical aspects of Lao-Zi and Heraclitus.

As far as Lao-Zi is concerned the basic question is whether the *Dao De Jing*⁴ is a morality-centered text. In other words are we allowed to consider it as a means of ethical development designed by Lao-Zi for the people of his time and for the generations to come? And as for Heraclitus what was the aim of his fragments? Did he attempt an imposition of an ethical code for the Ephesians or was it nothing but a taunt for the Ephesians' tragic mistakes that lead to a morally destructed society?

Lao-Zi and Heraclitus within the history of philosophy

The case of a comparative study between ancient Greek and ancient Chinese philosophy is needless to say problematic for a series of reasons. All other issues put aside, the term philosophy itself confuses things given its Greek origin and its uniqueness. It has been canonised as a term and established throughout nearly every European language.⁵ Its meaning as love for wisdom, in other words, the tendency towards wisdom almost reveals man's need to surpass the cosmic and the human in order to reach and unify with the beautiful and the pure. Wisdom itself works as a medium between the imperfect human nature and the perfection of the world and thus philosophy, as tendency towards wisdom, is the guaranty for this unification. While Greek thinking was and remains the basis on which philosophy is to be developed, China on the other hand has also developed philosophical thought *ex nihilo*.⁶ However the term philosophy is not found in the Chinese language⁷ with the same meaning, but as the learning of thought (*zhe*, thought & *xue*, to learn – *zhexue* means philosophy, 哲学). Nevertheless even this technical term was not introduced until the late 1800's or early 1900's⁸ from the Japanese word for philosophy *tetsugaku*, which used the same Chinese ideograms and

4 From this point onwards DDJ.

5 It is an established term for Indo-European languages and for the rest of the languages spoken in Europe with the exception of Icelandic (*heimspeki*), Welsh (*athroniaeth*) and Irish (*fealsúnacht*).

6 India has also developed *ex nihilo* philosophical thought, but will not concern us in this article.

7 I refer to modern standard Mandarin Chinese or the *Putonghua* (普通话).

8 Chen Lai, *Studying Chinese Philosophy; Turn-of-the century challenges*, *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, v.2 (2005), Bruxelles, p. 181-198.

which the Chinese transferred into Chinese and retranslated.⁹ The lack of a term throughout the over two and a half millennia of philosophical tradition in China allows us to assume that such a term was not at all needed in a sense that the Chinese probably voluntarily mixed the philosophical thinking with religion and rules of social behavior.

Lao-Zi still remains lost somewhere between myth and reality. It is impossible to say whether his astonishing DDJ made him the legendary figure he is today or whether it was his personality that gave the DDJ the prestige it carries until today. It is not even certain whether Lao-Zi (if at all existed) was the actual author or whether he was the one who collected verses, old songs and poems into one 5,000 ideogram poem now known as the DDJ.¹⁰ In any case Lao-Zi is considered to have lived during the 6th century b. C. and is also considered the initiator of philosophical Daoism, although others suggest that Daoism arose from Confucianism,¹¹ which later came to be a religious practice around the 4th century b. C. Change is the main pattern of the poem and since the idea of change derives from the observation of nature¹² it is not difficult to attribute the Daoist philosophy to human curiosity and observation of nature. The main feature of the DDJ is that unlike other philosophical poems, it is not based on previous knowledge, but rather introduces a brand new one.¹³ Moreover the DDJ is not conceived on the basis of rationalism contrary to philosophy in the West.¹⁴

Not very much unlike Lao-Zi, Heraclitus himself was an obscure personality. Contrary to the Chinese thinker though, Heraclitus undoubtedly existed. Native of Ephesus, Ionia in Asia Minor has been one of the pioneers of Greek thought and precursor of all later schools of philosophy in antiquity. Even modern and contemporary philosophers have admitted their influence directly from Heraclitus.¹⁵ Since his philosophy is limited to scattered fragments, it is not easy to come to a specific conclusion for

9 *Ibid.*

10 W. Chan. & B. Watson, *Sources of Chinese tradition*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1960, p. 51.

11 M. P. Fisher, *Living Religions: An Encyclopaedia of the World's Faiths*, I.B.Tauris, 1997, p. 167.

12 For instance see J. Y. Lee, *Embracing change. Postmodern interpretations of the I-Ching from a Christian perspective*, Associated University Press, USA, 1994, p. 43.

13 A. C. Graham, *Disputers of the DAO, Philosophical argument in ancient China*, Open Court ed., La Salle, IL, 1989, p. 218. As a paradigm of a philosophical poem based on previous knowledge, the author of the book mentions Lucretius' *De natura rerum*.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 218.

15 For instance Plato, the Stoics, Hegel, Marx or Nietzsche to name a few.

the total of his ideas. In some cases though, his observation of natural phenomena leading to statements concerning cosmology becomes quite obvious. Apart from cosmology and cosmogony,¹⁶ which have been the main trends in pre-Socratic philosophy, some of Heraclitus' fragments go into moral and political philosophy. In addition, the stories concerning his life give us an important piece of information in our attempt to complete the puzzle of his philosophy.

By and large it can be stated that in the case of Heraclitus rationalism has played a very significant role in the development of his philosophical ideas. By rationalism I mean a specific and solid line of argumentation in spite of those arguments being set upon metaphysical, vague notions concerning the nature of the being, man or the universe.

The symbolism of the infant in Lao-Zi

Infant as a symbol makes its appearance in the tenth chapter.¹⁷ In the second verse we read: "can you concentrate the vital energy, keep the breath and achieve gentleness like an infant without any desires"? The infant here acts as the principle of *wu-wei*, the non-action as action. Through the state of being as pure and kind as an infant, one can achieve his goals. And the ultimate goal must always remain the conquest of the Dao. The notion of *wu-wei* may have a lot of meanings; however the basic principle is the idea of acting through not acting. Therefore how is it that man can conquer the Dao? It is exactly by not trying to conquer, that he will come one step closer to the Dao.

Another version of the leading dialectic couple of action through non-action (*wu-wei*) is the result of knowing through not knowing. The experience of the world is taunted by Lao-Zi as something imperfect and rather destructive and he considers it an obstacle for one to know the only thing that he must ever know; the true nature of the Dao. "Without going out of the door, one can know things under Heaven. Without looking through the window, one can see the Dao¹⁸ to Heaven".¹⁹ Thus true knowledge is limited by the experience of the world and the more you know, the less

16 An attempt to explain the world and an attempt to conclude regarding how the world came into being, if at all, respectively.

17 *A Daoist Classic – The Book of Lao-Zi*, Foreign Languages Press, Beijing (translated by Ren Jiyu e. p. Beijing, 1993,), 10,2.

18 In this verse the Dao is also meant by its literal and at the same time metaphorical notion as way, road.

19 DDJ 47,1 – 47,2.

you conceive the essence of the being. The quality distinction seems to be located at the sensorial element of knowledge obtained by experience. Although Daoism never denied the existence of the world, what you see around you, is of a lower quality level, however real. The disadvantage of the sensorial knowledge is that it prevents us from knowing the Dao, in which perfection lies.

Thus the role of the infant in this verse (DDJ 10,2) is to create a flawless path leading man towards knowledge, only to be fulfilled in the next verse: “can you cleanse and purify your profound insight without any flecks?”²⁰ Man is obliged to conquer Dao and the only way to do so is to keep away from any shallow and full of flecks insight; on the contrary he must seek the profound insight, which can only be found through a procedure of purification and clearance. This very purification is to be understood by the symbol of the infant, which leads man one step closer to the Dao. It is, however, impossible to fully conquer the Dao as it is always ahead of us. The beginning of the poem is also its end; “the Dao that can be spoken of is not the eternal Dao”.²¹ Thus the full conquest of the Dao might never come, but in terms of the social organization of the state, the conquest of the Dao implies the ability of the leader to rule in a just and fair manner.

The innocence of the infant in the DDJ is also associated to the notion of desire, which in turn is strictly related to that of knowledge. It is due to knowledge that man is driven to desire. On the contrary an infant is free from desire, precisely because it lacks knowledge about things, which brings it one step closer to the Dao. An infant is always after the pursuit of the Dao, rather than the pursuit of learning, if we take into account the first two verses of the 48th chapter.²² However, concerning the power given to the infant, the question that comes as natural is this: Does the infant reach the sage, the wise man? It is the last verse of the very next chapter that only implies an affirmative answer. A sage, like a leader, treats people under Heaven²³ like infants, like people who have been set free from their desires.²⁴ Thus one may assume that a sage is to be in the hierarchically highest position. A sage is needless to say a notion rather impossible to fully comprehend, especially within the context of such a runny and broad

20 DDJ 10,3.

21 DDJ 1,1.

22 *The pursuit of learning is to increase (knowledge) day after day. The pursuit of Dao is to decrease (knowledge) day after day*, (DDJ 48,1 & 48,2).

23 *People under heaven*; i.e. all people.

24 DDJ 49,11.

philosophical poem, such as the DDJ. Nonetheless a rough idea might have already been given in the chapter 33.

“He who knows others can be called wise.
 He who knows himself is enlightened.
 ...
 ...
 ...
 He who dies physically, but preserves Dao, will enjoy a long life.”
 (DDJ 33).

Therefore it may be argued that Lao-Zi distinguishes two types of knowledge. A more general and obviously of lesser quality notion of knowledge of the others on the one hand and the specific, yet possibly much harder to acquire, self-knowledge on the other. Even though the notion of self-knowledge is still a type of knowledge and thus we must ask ourselves whether it remains a gap between man and the Dao.

Possibly the reason for this distinction between general knowledge and self-knowledge is the self-knowledge being closer to ignorance. As it has been highlighted by Nadeau it is precisely the human and therefore limited type of knowledge that prevents us from embracing Dao.²⁵ Therefore, Nadeau continues, the return to the state of an infant is what brings ignorance.²⁶ Unlike a general notion of negativity the word possibly carries, its philosophical meaning requires an end to desire, which can only be obtained through the end to knowledge. And this end is the new beginning within the state of an infant.²⁷

Lastly it can be indicated that ignorance seems to include all positive notions; purity, truth, power, universality and innocence. In other words all notions that constitute *De*,²⁸ which can be seen as virtue in Daoism. The

25 R. L. Nadeau, *Introduction to the World's major Religions – Confucianism & Daoism* (v.2), Greenwood Press, London, 2006, p. 54.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 54.

27 Although the idea of man being set free from his desires resembles the Hindu and the Buddhist philosophy to a degree and despite Daoism at some point having been influenced by Buddhists, who came to China from India, the DDJ is the origin of Daoism and thus we have no reason to relate the two. However, it is worth a short comparison with the origins of Buddhism. It has been argued that we cannot see things clearly, other than under a cloak of our own desire. This “emptiness of mind” constitutes the rupture of desire and the enlightenment of Prince Siddhartha Gautama. (K. Armstrong *Buddha*, Phoenix, 2002, p. 67).

28 De: the Chinese ideogram for virtue, 德.

positive elements of virtue, described in chapter 54,²⁹ are set towards the direction of the very essence of virtue, the deepness of the 德, as identified earlier in the last verse of chapter 51: *These are called the profound De.*³⁰ Nevertheless it needs to be clarified that Virtue (德), even the profound one, does not abrogate Dao; on the contrary it works simultaneously with Dao, fostering all beings,³¹ in a manner seen as the incarnation of Dao.³²

As a first conclusion regarding the symbolism of the infant in the DDJ, what needs to be pointed out is the never-ending effort towards the conquest of Dao through the state of the infant. Given the imperceptible and unknowable character of Dao the role of the infant is rather a function, which brings man one step closer to Dao, only to be revealed that Dao surpasses human perception and cannot be either seen, heard, or touched.³³ It is without a start, it is endless and it is boundless. Dao beholds the transcendence. It means the Way, thus it is something that leads; but towards where or where from we do not know. Man can only walk within the formless and imageless, but is unable to sense it through his concrete senses. Even the knower of Dao, the subtle, profound and generous,³⁴ is not to be considered as the ultimate holder of the Dao or the profound De. He is called the *shi*, the knower and resembles the nature of the water,³⁵ as he is in a constant state of change. His knowledge goes beyond the common level, but even he does not conquer Dao; and if he does, it is not the eternal Dao, according to the first verse of the poem.

The symbolism of the child in Heraclitus

As mentioned in the introductory section Heraclitus' philosophy is extracted by scattered quotes and short stories about his life and points of view. Indeed he makes use of the pattern of the child as a symbolism in order to indicate the way he sees the world or humans. However it must be clarified that not every fragment indicates a positive image of the child, as in a particular case the child has a negative meaning resembling

29 DDJ 54, 4 – 54,8.

30 DDJ 51,12.

31 DDJ 51,2.

32 M. Benetatou, *Beyond Orientalism. A Comparison between Chinese and Greek Philosophy*, Konidari Athens, 2007, p. 258.

33 DDJ 14,1 – 14,6.

34 DDJ 15, 1 – 15,2.

35 DDJ 15,4.

a man of lower quality.³⁶ The word used is *παῖς*³⁷ and is translated either as “child” or as “adolescent”.

A particular case in which children are compared with adults is that in fragment DK 121 together with fragment DK 125a. I give the ancient Greek text followed by translation:

ἄξιον Ἐφεσίοις ἠβηδὸν ἀπάγξασθαι πᾶσι καὶ τοῖς ἀνήβοις τὴν πόλιν καταλιπεῖν, οἵτινες Ἑρμόδωρον ἄνδρα ἐωυτῶν ὀνήιστον ἐξέβαλον φάντες· ἡμέων μὴδὲ εἷς ὀνήιστος ἔστω, εἰ δὲ μή, ἄλλη τε καὶ μετ’ ἄλλων. DK 121

Ephesians should hang themselves and leave the city to the boys; it is them (Ephesians) who dismissed Hermodorus, the best of men, saying: no one to be better than us or, if so, let him be in other land with other people.

μὴ ἐπλίπτοι ὑμᾶς πλοῦτος, <ἔφη,> Ἐφέσιοι, ἴν’ ἐξελέγχοισθε πονηρευόμενοι. DK 125a

(He said) I wish you Ephesians that you have all the wealth you desire so that (everyone) understands how sneaky you are.

It is quite obvious that Heraclitus loathes his fellow-citizens possibly for the fact that they decided to dismiss a man whom Heraclitus respected. Judging by a series of fragments in which he shows a great deal of disrespect to philosophers and poets of his time (or a little earlier),³⁸ it strikes as a very important fact that he indeed respected someone at such an extent that he would desire the rest of Ephesians to die for what they did. The historical/political facts regarding the relationship between Heraclitus and Hermodorus are of less importance at this point, as our interest will focus on the use of the word *ἀνήβοις* (third person plural dative from the adjective *ἀνηβος*, i.e. very young). The word literally means the child

36 DK 79. It will be examined later. Fragments are indicated by the letters DK meaning Diels Kranz, the last names of the German philologists who collected those fragments, followed by the number. All fragments are indicated as either A (witness) or B (saying). The fragments used here are all B.

37 NB Ancient Greek language uses cases, as does Modern Greek. Thus in some circumstances the word *παῖς* may take others forms if in other cases, e.g. *παιδός* (gen).

38 DK 42, DK 81, DK 105. In those fragments Heraclitus taunts Archilochus and Homer, the great poets of the 8th century as well as Pythagoras, the philosopher to whom humanity probably owes the word/term “philosophy”.

that has not even reached his/her youth.³⁹ This is how Heraclitus wanted to show the antithesis between the adults' arrogance and the children's power over this arrogance through their purity. As mentioned above the fragmental disposal of the Heraclitian philosophy does not allow any further conclusion regarding his views other than speculation. However clear the dissimilarity between the arrogance and the purity might be, it is not at all clear in which way this purity is meant and why it seems to be a privilege of the young. Is it due to lack of a sort of knowledge that keeps man away from knowing as in Lao-Zi? Or is it because of lack of desire? The only thing that can be stated with a relatively great degree of certainty is that since children are not after wealth (that is they are not ruled by materialistic desire) they are more likely to keep a solid, dry soul, which is the requested outcome in the life of a person. The dry soul is wise and perfect, according to fragment DK 118 and thus a person who has kept his soul away from pollution and moisture will be capable of conceiving the ultimate truth of the universe, that the One rules everything and that no distinction is to be made among things as all is one.⁴⁰

Thus a child must be seen as a leader, as someone who shows the way to perfection. Under this prism we can interpret the meaning of the fragment DK 117:

άνηρ όκόταν μεθυσθῆ, ἄγεται ὑπό παιδός άνήβου σφαλλόμενος, οὐκ
επαίων όκη βαίνει, ὑγρή τήν ψυχήν ἔχων.

*When a man gets drunks, he is lead by a young boy, without knowing
where he is going, owing to his soul being moist.*

In this fragment we must notice that the άνηβος of the previous fragment has been replaced by παιδός άνήβου. As stated already άνηβος means "very young child",⁴¹ whereas παις means adolescent (usually boy).⁴² This could mean an evolution from the level of the entirely pure very young child to the adolescent who balances between boyhood and

39 From the privative -a + the word ήβη, the Greek work for youth.

40 Εἶναι γάρ ἐν τὸ σοφόν, ἐπίστασθαι γνώμην, ότέη εκυβέρνησε πάντα διά πάντων, DK 41.

41 To be exact άνηβος is a child under the age suitable for reproduction.

42 In ancient Attic Greek παις has been associated with boys as it is masculine, although depending on the context it is not necessarily limited to the masculine gender. However we need to take into account that women, let alone girls, in ancient Greece would normally stay at home, unless a religious festival would take place and thus the word would mainly refer to boys.

adulthood. In any case the meaning of the fragment is twofold; on the one hand it preaches the significance of the dry soul with a paradigm from everyday life. That is because Heraclitus' protagonist natural element was fire (πύρ),⁴³ which results in dryness. The analogy is obvious: any liquid could spoil the function fire is set to conduct. On the other hand it is a taunt for those who under the influence of alcohol are unstable and end up making fun of themselves.

To sum up the role of the child is rather that of the antithesis to man who is unable to find his way. The child, pure and stable enough, has to lead the way. After all morality for Heraclitus can be confined within the statement according to which “*we must remember him, who forgets to where the road leads*”⁴⁴ and the child seems as the only salvation for those who forget.

In addition, apart from the fragments there is also the testimony according to which Heraclitus gibes the Ephesians in a sarcastic and ironic manner, when they dared to ask for his assistance in order to decree laws. It was only after they realized his wisdom, but it was too late; the “obscure” philosopher withdrew and found shelter in the temple of Artemis⁴⁵ allowing only the children to come close. Such an action implies a preference to the unpolluted and pure soul of the children. However the notion of the child is rather ambiguous in Heraclitus and this brings us to the fundamental principle of his philosophy: the Becoming (γίγνεσθαι). In spite of the honor he demonstrated to wisdom and self-knowledge, although in Heraclitus self-knowledge remains a constant self-awareness,⁴⁶ a never-ending procedure of discovering the self rather than the knowledge of it, as well as the honor to the continuous flux of things and the harmony of the opposites, Heraclitus inherits the cosmic power to a boy, who throws the dice, like as if the fortune of the universe is a game. Indeed time is nothing but a boy who throws the dice and thanks to them he rules the world (Eternity is a boy

43 The main Heraclitian idea was the never-born and never-ending world and thus fire does not play a cosmogonic role, as water would for Thales, infinity (άπειρον) for Anaximander or air for Anaximenes and needless to say it does not share the same features as fire in the philosophy of Zarathustra.

44 Μεμνήσθαι δὲ καὶ τοῦ ἐπιλανθανομένου ἧ ἢ ὁδοῦ ἄγει, DK 71.

45 Artemis was one of the twelve Olympians. Goddess of hunting and protector of forests, plants and animals (ironically enough). Her Latin name is Diana and was daughter of Zeus and Leto and twin sister of Apollo.

46 Loyal to his basic notion of constant motion Heraclitus cannot directly accept the Delphic dictum *know yourself* as knowledge implies something stable and motionless, something that has come to an end. His version of the self-knowledge idea is *I investigated myself* (ἐδιζήσάμην ἐμεωυτόν, DK 101).

who plays with the dice. Let the kingship be to the child).⁴⁷ Also it must be highlighted that the kingship of the child is not necessarily to be identified as a deed within the context of what man conceives as morally good, nor is it morally bad. Good and evil cannot be understood independently of the procedure of flux, which takes place without cessation in the universe. At this point it has to be pointed out that in Heraclitus morality and natural philosophy are combined for the first time.⁴⁸ Indeed eternity as a child is “the function of the allegoric representation of time”⁴⁹ and “together with the natural image of the river and the materiality of fire express the same polemic unity of the becoming of totality”⁵⁰ as far the natural constitution of the world is concerned.

As far as the matter of the problem of the Becoming in Heraclitus is concerned, despite its not being totally related to the role of the child, it needs to be pointed out a rather apparent, yet profound, problematic issue. Are we dealing with a Being that includes a Becoming (via which the world is in constant motion) or is the Being independent of the Becoming? The notion of a constantly moving universe, in which nothing stays stable, is in direct contradiction, *prima facie*, with the notion of the Becoming, since there has to be something that remains static; the fact that the world is always moving, otherwise the Being. However this problem does not actually has to be dealt with as it would not make sense for a Becoming to exist unless within the boundaries of a Being. This is what led Jacques Brun to include the Becoming into the Being, rather than consider it a Becoming of the Being.⁵¹

Such a matter, though, is not an obstacle for the deliverance of the kingship of the universe to the child, as the latter remains uninfluenced. It is, Heraclitus would like us to guess, precisely because of the child’s purity along with the superiority that he inherits the legacy of the world and that he (the child) is not part of the problem of the flux.

Unlike the previous fragments, in which there seems to be rather clear preferences to the children, the next one, fragment DK 79, does not share the same points of view regarding the position a child holds in Heraclitian

47 αἰὼν παῖς ἐστι παῖζων πεσσεύων· παιδὸς ἢ βασιληΐῃ, DK 52.

48 G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, M. Schofield, *The pre-Socratic philosophers*, Cambridge University Press Cambridge, U.K., 1987, e.p. 1957, p. 216.

49 S. Delivogiatzis, *Issues of dialectic*, Zitros, Thessaloniki, 2000, p. 110.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 109-110.

51 J. Brun, *Les Présocratiques*, Chatziniakoli (e.p. Presses Universitaires de France – PUF), Athens, 1999, e.p. 1982, p. 42-43.

philosophy. Here the boy is identified as νήπιο, seen from the perspective of an adult compare to the position man holds in front of the divine. ἀνήρ νήπιος ἤκουσε πρὸς δαίμονος ὅκωσπερ παῖς πρὸς ἀνδρός, DK 79.

I give the translation: “a man is called an infant by god, as the child by man”. By and large the word νήπιος initially means the infant, but gradually it acquired a metaphorical meaning, that of the unlearned, the not intelligent.⁵² So how does this fragment comply with the inheritance of the world to the child in fragment DK 48?

Possibly the two fragments are not to be set opposite one to the other as they serve entirely different meanings in the teaching of Heraclitus’ philosophy. The role of the child as a leader and as the one who inherits the kingship of the universe is beyond doubt; but here the point is to set a difference in level of quality between humans and gods. Thus humans are seen as children (i.e. undereducated, of lower capability of understanding and in general underprivileged) compare to god alone. Even children however pure and innocent they might be they are still humans and therefore of lesser quality in relation to the divine.

On the other hand the role of the divine in Heraclitus is ambiguous. Indeed it is quite obvious the superiority of the god compare to human, given the fact that humans lack true knowledge (human being does not hold the real knowledge, whereas the divine does).⁵³ In addition god holds the element of ubiquity as he is everything; day and night, winter and summer, fullness and hunger, war and peace and most importantly he is all that at the very same time, although man can only realize god depending on the mixture the latter will take.⁵⁴

In general only assumptions can be made regarding the term *god* and the term *demon* both of which Heraclitus uses. Walter Burkert refers to the religion of the Indo-Europeans and observes substantial as well as etymological resemblances among gods of the Greeks, the Romans and the Indians starting with the noun *god* itself (cf. θεός – deus – devah).⁵⁵ Perhaps it would be adequate to adopt Burkert’s opinion that “the often

52 Cf. the word μωρός (adj) in ancient Greek means stupid, but in modern Greek it survived as noun and means baby (μωρό).

53 ἦθος γὰρ ἀνθρώπειον μὲν οὐκ ἔχει γνῶμας, θεῖον δὲ ἔχει, DK 78.

54 ὁ θεὸς ἡμέρη εὐφρόνη, χειμῶν θέρος, πόλεμος εἰρήνη, κόρος λιμός (τάναντία ἅπαντα: οὗτος ὁ νοῦς), ἀλλοιοῦται δὲ ὅκωσπερ (πῦρ), ὅπταν συμμιγῆ θνώμασιν, ὀνομάζεται καθ’ ἡδονὴν ἐκάστω, DK 67.

55 W. Burkert, *Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche*, Kardamitsa, Athens, 1993, e.p. 1977, p. 57.

undetermined and mysterious action, which has an immediate effect on human, may be called *demon*".⁵⁶ Otherwise we may conceive the nature of the demons as the intermediate between gods and humans, an entity as love presented by Diotima in Plato's *Symposium*⁵⁷ that act as interpreters.⁵⁸

In any case it may be concluded that the two fragments mentioned (DK 52 & DK 79) serve different goals and thus they do not oppose to each other. In the first case Heraclitus does inherit the kingdom of the universe to the child, whereas in the other the boy is considered *νήπιον* only as far as his comprehension ability is concerned and only in order to give the example of the inferiority of human compare to the divine. Given the above it comes as no surprise that preference is shown by Heraclitus to the unpolluted soul of the children, their lack of knowledge though (owing to their imperfect human nature) is not an obstacle for their deciding the destiny of the world in a game of dice.

Epilogue

As a last word it can be indicated that the substantial similarity of the two philosophers lies not upon the way they both attempt to reach morality or how morality enters the political theory, perhaps not even upon the use of common symbols, as the child, since the child has been and will always be the symbol of purity and innocence in all societies of the globe. Their resemblance resides within the relationship between ethics and continuity (Becoming). The enigmatic philosopher of Ephesus and the shocking for the human existence poem of Lao-Zi both include morality in the Becoming, the never-ending, provided that it lies within a sort of shelter allowed by Logos on the one hand and Dao on the other.

Should we consider the thought of Heraclitus and Lao-Zi humanistic and man-centered, then the issue of an ethical philosophy appears, unsurprisingly. Some times they seem to follow the same path, others a different one. In any case good over evil is the end of the road for them. Nonetheless the symbolism of the image of the infant is remarkable. Lao-Zi defined the infant as perfection owing to lack of knowledge and consequently lack of desire, whereas Heraclitus inherits the kingdom of the world to a boy who throws the dice. Lao-Zi approximates morality via

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 554-555.

⁵⁷ Plato, *Symposium*, 202e-203a.

⁵⁸ W. Burkert, *Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche*, Kardamitsa, Athens, 1993, e.p. 1977, p. 661.

negativity, expressed by lack of knowledge, lack of desire and thereafter non-action, which functions as action (*wu-wei*). Respectively his political views are infused with the principle of non-violence. To the extent that the DDJ can be recognized as a political text (and there is no reason why it should not) the essence of the DDJ gives out a type of pacifism and altruism. On the other hand Heraclitus' morality is set under a rather atomic/personal prism and more adjusted to the individual than to the state.⁵⁹ The one, if perfect, is worth as many as thousands;⁶⁰ and who is perfect? He who remembers his partner, when the latter misses the way.⁶¹ In the end perfection does not lie upon distinguishing good from evil, but upon the ability to choose the best; hidden harmony over obvious harmony.⁶²

We are reaching the end of an attempt to demonstrate how two philosophers, who never met and who lived thousands of miles away developed not as dissimilar opinions on matters such as ethics and politics, death and life, harmony and strife, Being and Becoming. However their differences are not fewer than their resemblances and in fact quite significant. If this is the case, then what is the common ground they share? It is an invincible thirst to take man from darkness to light, from the cave to the ideas, from shackles to freedom. Let the child hold the kingdom of heaven and earth; a child with dice in his hands. But he shall never reveal his kingship; he who knows speaks nothing; he who speaks knows not.

ABSTRACT

In this article we shall try to explore the ethical aspects of the *Dao De Jing* and the fragments of the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus based on the symbolism of the infant that they both use. At first a very short introduction needs to be made concerning the basis of morality and the difference between China and Greece. Needless to say we must take into account the general ethical context in the civilizations of ancient China and ancient Greece and indicate (if

59 Although there are clearly elements of political thought about systems of government and the role of man in the society in the opinions of all of the pre-Socratics, the actual political thinking, which considers man firstly as civilian and undistinguishable from the state, will not appear until the golden 5th century in Athens with Socrates and later Plato and Aristotle.

60 Εἷς ἔμοι μύριοι, ἐὰν ἄριστος ᾦι. DK 49.

61 Μεμνήσθαι δὲ καὶ τοῦ ἐπιλανθανομένου ἧ ἢ ὁδοῦς ἄγει, DK 71.

62 ἄρμονιή ἀφανῆς φανερῆς κρείττων, DK 54.

possible) whether the DDJ is to be seen as a strictly ethical/political text as well as whether Heraclitus' fragments work as an ethical map for the people of his time and place.⁶³ I intent to structure this article in two chapters each one dedicated to each of the philosophers along with a short introduction in the beginning. As far as the main chapters are concerned the Lao-Zi's DDJ will be analyzed at first from the perspective of ethics in connection to the symbol of the infant not rarely used by Lao-Zi. Secondly I shall deal with the ethical thought of Heraclitus and his perspective of the infant found in some of his fragments. Let us keep in mind that apart from the fragments themselves, the witnesses (i.e. stories about his life) play a not less important role in our extracting his philosophical opinions.⁶⁴ Lastly we shall try to come to a conclusion concerning the similarities and dissimilarities between Lao-Zi and Heraclitus regarding their views on ethics and especially regarding the use of the infant as a symbol or a pattern.

Keywords: Heraclitus – Lao-Zi – Ethics – Symbolism – Infant – Cosmos

RESUMO

Neste artigo, tentaremos explorar os aspectos éticos do *Dao De Jing* e os fragmentos do filósofo pré-socrático Heraclito, com base no simbolismo da criança que ambos usam. Faremos uma introdução muito curta sobre a base da moralidade e a diferença entre a China e a Grécia. Escusado será dizer que devemos levar em conta o contexto ético geral nas civilizações da China antiga e da Grécia antiga e indicar (se possível) se o DDJ deve ser visto como um texto estritamente ético / político, bem como se os fragmentos de Heraclito funcionam como um mapa ético para as pessoas de seu tempo e lugar.

Procuo estruturar este artigo em dois capítulos, cada um dedicado a cada um dos filósofos, juntamente com uma breve introdução no começo. No que diz respeito aos capítulos principais, o DDJ do Lao Zi será analisado primeiro da perspectiva da ética em conexão com o símbolo da criança que raramente é usado por Lao Zi. Em segundo lugar, tratarei do pensamento ético de Heraclito e sua perspectiva do bebê encontrada em alguns de seus fragmentos. Lembremo-nos de que, além dos próprios fragmentos, os testemunhos (ou seja, histórias sobre a sua vida) desempenham um papel não menos importante para extrair as suas opiniões filosóficas. Por fim, tentaremos chegar a uma conclusão sobre as semelhanças

63 Heraclitus lived from 535 to 475 b. C. in Ephesus, Ionia in Asia Minor, then a cradle of spiritual osmosis and school of the so-called Ionian tradition in philosophy.

64 The fragments and the stories from the H. Diels & W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*.

e divergências entre Lao Zi e Heraclito a respeito de suas visões sobre ética e, especialmente, sobre o uso da criança como símbolo ou padrão.

Palavras-chave: Heraclito – Lao Zi – Ética – Simbolismo – Infantil – Cosmos

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