

## 2. runde i NM i filosofi 20.03.2014

Heraklit states that “true cognition is impossible, because the objects of sense impressions change constantly”. In other words, one can never truly know anything, because sense impressions are relative and in constant change. Heraklit’s understanding of true cognition relies on the belief that nothing is true unless it is true for the experiencing subjective. Although he states true knowledge is impossible, it is still implied that if true cognition was possible, it would be so because the subjective found it so. The reason why we cannot gain true cognition is because our subjective and internal minds cannot be trusted due to sense impressions always being in motion.

In order for cognition to be cognition, it has to be true and justified. If, as Heraklit states, true cognition is impossible, it seems as if absolute truth is impossible as well. If one can never know if anything around us is actual, one can never be sure of anything. Heraklit’s statement implies that we can rely on neither our senses, nor universal stated truths that are accepted by the majority. If the stated is true, then all knowledge we rely on on a daily basis is irrelevant.

It seems as if Heraklit thinks that true cognition is an independent object separated from our minds, something that the human mind cannot comprehend, nor grasp. At the same time, it seems as if he believes that *if* the human mind could grasp and “see” true knowledge, it would still differ from individual to individual because sense impressions are subjective. From an objective point of view, the statement in itself seems faulted. The reason being is that if truth was an independent object, it could not also be relative and subjective. Another reason is that it expounds absolute truth as one single object, as something that only one method can find.

What truth is, and how to obtain absolute truths, are much debated questions. In order for cognition to be true, truth would have to be definable. As of today, there is no *one* universal method for defining truth. One can either, as it seems Heraklit does, describe truth as something that is out of reach for human sense impressions, something that is beyond human linguistic definition. However, truth can also be seen as something completely relative. Because there are so many different types of truths, we can divide truth into different dimensions. Let us imagine that there are three main dimensions of truth – the

science-dimension, the social-dimension, and the internal-dimension (concerning feelings). One cannot obtain scientific truths the same way one obtains truths about the internal feelings.

When defining scientific truths, there has to be multiple different theories backing up the original theory in order for the original theory to be counted for as true. One cannot look at scientific knowledge and truth from the perspective Heraklit does, because it is not our subjective senses that decide whether scientific theories are true or not. The most effective method for obtaining scientific truth is through empiricism. One theory after another comes to confirm the original theory, and through multiple falsification attempts, the theory can be accounted for as true until it actually can be falsified. Whether the scientific theory is true or not, has nothing to do with subjective opinions or sense impressions. It has to do with completely objective, feeling-less observations and empiric theories. The fact that science is always evolving, cannot be ignored. The same way Heraklit states that true cognition is impossible because the objects of sense impressions change constantly, cognition about sciences can never be absolutely true, because there will always come a better, more efficient, and "truer" theory removing the former. However, until it can be falsified, one must account the theory as true, simply because it works. In medicine, for example, one has to rely on the established truths and knowledge. It does not matter if the internist subjectively believes he has true cognition or not, he has to take it for granted that it is true simply because it works. In this dimension of truth, Heraklit's opinions regarding true cognition are neither effective nor relevant.

Heraklit's statement is more accurate in the attempt of establishing truths concerning the society. However, there are two sides to it. Truths about the society, and ethical and moral rules in it, have to be valid both subjectively and objectively. As Heraklit states, our sense impressions are in constant change. Therefore, one cannot solely base a truth upon our subjective observations of a matter or situation. What seems true to one individual may be completely different for another individual. Discrimination is an example of this. If I am a white, wealthy man, I will base my truths about the society upon my perspective of the world. I can observe, sense and be convinced that I have more value than a poor, black woman. However, my subjective perception of reality would not correspond with the general and universal perception. Therefore, I would never be able to obtain true cognition

about a societal matter, such as discrimination. The reason being that what I accept as true is completely different from what the discriminated accepts as true. The issue is then concerning ethics. Establishing ethical truths are very difficult, precisely because they concern human value. One cannot measure value using scientific methods; they are solely defined by people *about* people. In one way, that would mean that ethical values are subjective, and that what I subjectively establish as true cognition would matter. However, ethics and morals have to be objective in order for them to be valid for all humans. If there is an objective, universal consensus about an ethical rule, it must be accounted for as true, simply because it cannot be up to the individual to define wrong and right. Heraklit's theory is then both valid, and invalid for the social-dimension of truth simply because it is impossible to establish true subjective cognition, but possible to establish true, objective cognition.

The third dimension of methods of establishing truths concern truths about the internal, such as emotions, impressions, opinions and values. To establish a universal truth and to obtain true, objective cognition about the internal is simply impossible. The reason being is that cognition and truth about the subjective cannot be defined objectively by others. I can never obtain true cognition about another individual's internal life – only that person can do so. However, Heraklit's theory does not correspond with this dimension although one cannot obtain objectively truth or knowledge. Saying that one can never obtain true cognition about one's own internal life, is like saying one can never truly know one self. If that was true, no one would ever be able to define their own feelings, values or opinions. If my emotions indicate that I am feeling happy, that emotion would have to be true solely because it is true for *me*. It is true, as Heraklit states, that sense impressions constantly change. However, that does not mean that what I feel in a certain moment is not true cognition. The emotions will change, the truth will change, but each emotion will be as true as the former. However, there are complications when establishing true cognition about impressions. One cannot solely rely on the subjective perception of impressions, because our senses could "trick" us. For example, if I walk by a group of people laughing, I may believe they are laughing at me. If I solely rely on my subjective perception of the situation, then yes, true cognition would be impossible. However, if I and the group objectively and

together can establish that they were in fact *not* laughing at me, then have we not obtained true cognition about the situation?

Heraklit's theory seems to not cover all types of truths that are. One method for establishing truth in one situation, or dimension, cannot be used for another. It seems as if Heraklit's definition of true cognition is very one-sided. Does he imply that true cognition can never be achieved, because it is out of reach for our minds because our minds change? It seems he does, which means that he believes that absolute true cognition is universal and apart from our possibility to grasp. True cognition would then be sort of a "goal" that exists at the "end of history" that we humans constantly strive to unmask. When he states that true cognition is impossible, he excludes all possibilities of humans actually being able to establish truths on their own, during their own lifetime. It could be so, that we constantly move closer to the "one" universal truth, or closer to achieving the true cognition about certain things. That science and technology are all just measures we use to get closer to finally discovering what the "real" truth is. However, does that mean that nothing is true because we are not able to actually understand, or grasp, it? When looking at the society we live in today, it would be both irrelevant and inefficient to doubt the established truths we have. We have to rely on what we know, even if we in a thousand years figure out it was all wrong. One does also have to take into account that there are different types of truths. There may be universal truths, such as ethical and moral rules. There may be nature-laws that will always be true independent of what our language can define. There may be cognition we can never know because our minds cannot reach it, but that does not mean that the established truths we have in our society today are untrue. Why? Simply because there are different types of truths, and one method, or theory, cannot be used to figuring out, or denying, them all.