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Philosophers**

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Conversing Diversity Today with Ancient Greek Philosophers

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Abstract

The paper attempts to explore the stature of ancient Greek philosophers from the lens of diversity. It approaches the ancient Greek philosophers from rhetoric perspective - the focus is on what is said not what is done. JCR papers and narrative of ancient Greek philosophers were used for the dimension of diversity; books also contributed in the narrative. Pre Socrates era was focused on diverse ontological issues of 'being' and after that Socrates and Plato provided the platform to discuss the issues of human diversity and a few of them had contributed in the philosophical foundation of diversity.

Keywords: Diversity, ancient Greek philosophers, Greek philosophers' stature, philosophical history

Introduction

In this conceptual paper, an exploration of the diversity has been discussed from the perspective of ancient Greek philosophers (Thales to Plotinus). It is difficult to determine the society values and acts with all the dimensions of social, political, and economic prevailing at that point in time. It seems to be unreasonable to compare today's society with the society of Greece which was thousands of years old because we are now far more developed and conscious about ourselves. Therefore, the aim of the paper is to focus only what is said (the rhetoric) not what is done (the praxis). Hence, we don't attempt to compare the societies but comparisons of thoughts and values can be made as of it today with respect to that time. Therefore premise of the argument is to compare and contrast the diversity with reference to what they believe (Ancient Greek Philosophers) and what we believe as of today.

The examination of the diversity from the perspective of ancient Greek philosophers also involves different time and space, which is totally different even not comparable with our times – the thoughts, ideas are affected by geo-social-political-economic conditions. Therefore, it is very critical to decide what is relevant and what is not? Anglophone philosophy insists on a separation between the history of philosophy and the history of ideas or intellectual history which creates a fundamental tension between those who think that philosophy of the past should be studied on its own terms, in relation to its immediate context without reference to the present, and those who hold that the philosophy's past as a source of ideas and arguments of interest to the present. We studied the Greek philosophers as a source of ideas and arguments of interest to the present and adopted the 'conversation' method which is presented by Hutton (2014) where he argued that "We can think of philosophical 'conversation' in different ways—literally as actual dialogue, and metaphorically as implied discussion through the themes that are treated and arguments which are employed." The paper uses the metaphorically methodological approach.

The one more challenge is to determine that what period can be labeled as 'ancient Greek scholars'. There is common agreement that period is from Thales 624-546 BCE to Plotinus 204-270 BCE (Benn, 1882; Minnameier, 2005; Moss-Kanter, 1983; O'Mahoney, 2013; Sun, 2008; C. Taylor, 1999). The paper examines the history of four hundred and twenty years of total period with the current time and standards. The paper only examined the Greek philosophers because they have shaped the values, culture, society, and political thought and they were present before the intervention of any Christianity, Islam or another structured-programed-documented religion.

There exist many definitions of diversity, but the most authentic and referred definition is made by Esty (1995) as "acknowledging, understanding, accepting, valuing, and celebrating differences among people with respect to age, class, ethnicity, gender, physical and mental ability, race, sexual orientation, spiritual practice, and public assistance status". Whereas United Nations (UN) talks about cultural diversity, which also has been acknowledged a decade ago (Unesco, 2002). Then in 2011, UNESCO has celebrated the annual World Day for Cultural Diversity.

Research Question

It is easy to say that the ancient Greeks laid the foundations of Western civilization, capitalisms and eventually the new world order (Burnyeat, 2012) but it is not a simple matter to discover, in detail, how much of we know about diversity today is owed to them. **Now the question is, do we owe the concept of diversity to the ancient Greeks?**

Methodology

The dimensions of diversity were extracted from the 10 papers published in JCR in last 10 years see Appendix 1. To control for selection bias, an expert on diversity was asked to do the same and then common themes/dimensions were extracted. There are eight common dimensions of diversity; age, gender, social class, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, culture, education, law & religion. Metaphorically methodological approach was employed while describing the narrative. The narrative of Greek philosophers about the indicators of diversity was searched in JCR papers and books and internet articles. Further, the content was verified and validated by experts of the area.

Diversity Narrative of Ancient Greek Philosophers

Thales (624-546 BCE) was focused on theological issues of nature and subject of existence and his focus was not the society but the ontological existence of being. There are no narratives found in which Thales was discussing the society or any other element of it (Frederick, 1962). Though, his greatest contribution was the principle of “unity underlying diversity” which has become the essence of today’s diversity. Later on Anaximander (610-546 BCE), the student of Thales continued his legacy and worked upon existence of being (the actual beginning of everything) Introduced the *apeiron* (infinite element). Formulated a theory of origin and evolution of life, according to which life originated in the sea from the *moist element* which evaporated from the sun (*On Nature*). He was the first to model the Earth according to scientific principles. According to Anaximander, the Earth was a cylinder, suspended freely in space, and the stars were attached to a sphere that rotated around Earth (Couprie, Hahn, & Naddaf, 2012). None of his work speaks about the diversity of humans and their role in the society. Anaximenes (585-528 BCE) work was also revolved around on existence of world. He suggested air (or what

we think of as gas) was the fundamental material of all things (Nightingale, 2009). This was the first attempt to explain the diversity of the world with qualitative differences in terms of quantitative differences and again we found no narratives about human diversity. Pythagoras (570-495 BCE) is more famous as a mathematician than philosopher. He believed that everything can be presented in numbers. His work was on medicine, music, cosmology, astronomy, and especially mathematics. He was the first Greek Philosopher who attributed personalities to numbers, such as masculine and feminine, perfect and incomplete, even and odd. He recognized and evaluated the work and personalities according to gender. He believed that Women were given equal opportunity and learned practical domestic skills in addition to philosophy Women were held to be different from men (Glenn, 1997). Later on Parmenides (early 500's BCE) came; he was the founder of Eleatic school. He believed that everything has already been existed and nothing ever really changes. He claimed that his conclusion was correct because our senses are unreliable. His work only talk about the existence of truth and searching for a creator and no discussion was found about the diversity issues. He believed that there exists only 'one' reality and diversity is because of our illusory perception; diversity of beings is established based upon differences in these existential characteristics otherwise we are all 'one' (Burnyeat, 2012). Parmenides never specifically discussed age, gender, ethnicity, race etc. but he acknowledged that we are different because of these factors.

Later Heraclitus (535-475 BCE) disagreed with Thales, Anaximander, and Pythagoras about the nature of the ultimate substance and claimed instead that everything is derived from the Greek classical element fire, rather than from air, water, or earth. The fundamental uniform fact in nature is constant change; everything both is and is not at the same time. He thus arrives at the principle of Relativity; harmony and unity consist in diversity and multiplicity. Again it was the verification of creation and being but no discussion was found on the dimensions of human diversity. Then Zeno of Elea (490-430 BCE) a student of Parmenides, Zeno is most famous for his paradoxes, known as paradoxes of space and motion "Achilles and the tortoise". Again we found nothing about the human diversity dimensions in the writings of Zeno of Elea. Empedocles (490-430 BCE), philosophy is known for being the origin of the Cosmo-genic theory of the four classical elements. He maintained that all matter is made up of four elements: water, earth, air, and fire. He discussed the equality among these four powerful elements also

encourages that equality should be prevailed in the society. He was a popular politician and speaker on democracy and equality. Anaxagoras (500-428 BCE), he was the one who bring philosophy to Athens where Socrates, Plato and Aristotle flourished it. He gave the concept of mind and split-level universe. He also hypothesized the conception of human baby that how man and woman sperm contributed the birth process but no discussion was found on the issues of human diversity. Protagoras (490-420 BCE) was famous because of his saying "Man is the measure of all things", interpreted that there is no absolute truth, but that which individuals deem to be the truth; that ultimately supported the relativism. Protagoras worked on the classification and proper use of grammatical gender (Zalta & Abramsky, 2003). On other diversity dimensions, nothing was said. Democritus (460-370 BCE) is recognized by developing the idea of atomism, 'everything around us is made of indivisible elements called atoms'. His theory is consistent with the concept of Parmenides' concept of nothing changing because atoms themselves do not change. He says that "Equality is everywhere noble" but he was not inclusive enough to include slaves or women in this idea. For him, poverty in a democracy is better than prosperity under tyrants, for the same reason one is to prefer liberty over slavery. He was a proponent of equality even then he was not in favor of giving rights to women and slaves.

Socrates (469-399 BCE) never wrote anything. What we know of him today is from the writings of his students. Socrates questioned the Gods about the powers and relationship but he mainly cited on 'non-religious' philosophical issues. He also talked about gender identity(Maxwell, 2009). Socrates argues that women are as capable as men in pursuit of their endeavors, and he puts these observations into consideration in *The Republic*, Book V. He was in favor of that the men and women are both to be taught the same thing, but with class distinctions. Moreover, Socrates was against the social class based on age and maturity. Plato (428-327 BCE) recognize the oppression and differences on women and slaves and he was proponent of equal education of women but partially in favor of slavery (Silva & Yrjönsuuri, 2014). As it is depicted from one of his narratives "I thank God that I was born Greek and not barbarian, free and not slave, male and not female, but above all that I was born in the age of Socrates" (Patterson, 2007). Plato proposed that women should be given the same education as men, the same access to the law courts, the same rights to own and inherit property, to hold public office, to compete in athletics and to live and work. Plato also derived the complete social class structure (Gold, Silver,

Bronze), which has unequal rights and privileges. Plato expressed positive attitude toward elderly people but progression in society with respect to bifurcation of age was not fair (McKee & Barber, 2001). He was also in favor of any sexual orientation as in the Symposium, he argued for an army to be comprised of same-sex lovers (Rosen, 1987). On the contrary Finnis (1993), noticed that three of the greatest Greek philosophers, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle (384-322 BCE), regarded homosexual conduct as intrinsically shameful, immoral, and indeed depraved or depraving. That is to say, all three rejected the modern "gay" ideology and lifestyle. Whereas, Dover (1989) earlier said "Socrates is portrayed by Plato (and by Xenophon) as having strong homosexual (as well as heterosexual) inclinations or interest, and as promoting an ideal of homosexual romance between men and youths, but at the same time as utterly rejecting homosexual conduct." Hence, there are multiple narratives on homosexuality. However, as far as social class is concerned Aristotle discussed the poor and rich class approaches to politics and power but he did not discuss that equality rights should be given to both of the classes. He thought that men and women are not equal which is depicted by one of the narratives of Aristotle (350 B.C.E) book translated by Sir D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson "by comparison to man, he argued, woman is more mischievous, less simple, more impulsive ... more compassionate[,] ... more easily moved to tears[,] ... more jealous, more querulous, more apt to scold and to strike[,] ... more prone to despondency and less hopeful[,] ... more void of shame or self-respect, more false of speech, more deceptive, of more retentive memory [and] ... also more wakeful; more shrinking [and] more difficult to rouse to action" (*History of Animals*, 608b. 1-14). Moreover, he added that woman "requires a smaller quantity of nutriment" (*History of Animals*, 608b. 14). On the dimension of education, Aristotle has influenced our educational thinking on the issues of curriculum and methods of teaching but neither of his works spoke about equality of education among the society.

Aristippus (435-356 BCE) encouraged people to get as much pleasure as possible out of life which provides the arguments for Homosexual, and transgender and none about diversity dimensions. Diogenes (412-323 BCE) rejected the desire for wealth and encourages to lead a simple life. He suggested that men, women and children would be the common concern of all (the state) and it should be without prejudice or race. The philosophical roots of cosmopolitanism come from Diogenes. Once "Asked where he came from, he answered: 'I am a citizen of the

world". He believed in social justice and equity to all humans of the world (Laertius, 1942). Epicurus (341-270 BCE) contended to enjoy life by aiming for as much happiness and as little suffering as possible. His philosophy has benefited the self-fulfillment, consumption, homosexual, and transgender ideas but on nothing was found on other dimensions of diversity. Plotinus (204-270 BCE) emphasized how everything is really part of "the One" and that there really is no dualism (e.g. - darkness does not exist by itself; it is simply the absence of light). He was in favor of women education as many of his students were women (Taylor, 1821).

The discussion we have just made about ancient Greek philosophers has been summarized in Table 1 along with the dimensions of diversity. It can provide a quick view about their contribution in diversity.

Table 1: Greek philosophers and diversity dimensions

Diversity Dimensions	Age	Gender	Social Class	Ethnicity	Race	Sexual Orientation	Culture	Education	Equality	Religion
Greek Philosophers										
Thales (624-546 BCE)										
Anaximander (610-546 BCE)										
Anaximenes (585-528 BCE)										
Pythagoras (570-495 BCE)		X				X		X		
Parmenides (early 500's BCE)										
Heraclitus (535-475 BCE)										
Zeno of Elea (490-430 BCE)										
Empedocles (490-430 BCE)									X	
Anaxagoras (500-428 BCE)										
Protagoras (490-420 BCE)		X								
Democritus (460-370 BCE)										
Socrates (469-399 BCE)	X	X	X					X		
Plato (428-327 BCE)	O	X	O			X		X		
Aristotle (384-322 BCE)						O				
Aristippus (435-356 BCE)						X				
Diogenes (412-323 BCE)		X	X	X	X			X		X
Epicurus (341-270 BCE)						X				
Plotinus (204-270 BCE)		X						X		

X = completely discussed, O = partial discussed

Conclusion

For the early ancient Greek philosophers (Thales –Democritus) the scope of the philosophy was questions such as: do gods really exist, what is the source of creation and what are the ontology issues? They do have generated diverse discussions on ontological issues of ‘being’ but neither of them has discussed the human diversity issues except Pythagoras, who has given some attention to diversity dimensions of gender, sexual orientation and education. Hence human diversity issues were merely discussed in pre Socrates Era. After Socrates the philosophical discussion has come down from cosmos to human level and ground level problems were discussed, where Socrates and Plato set the grounds of social structures, and state roles. Then the

other ancient Greek philosophers set out to discuss the liberties of sex, education and age along with the acceptance of slavery. Very few of them have discussed the dimensions of diversity as shown in Table 1. We acknowledge that ancient Greek philosophers have played a pivotal role in determine where we are today. Their philosophical thoughts have contributed in education, democracy, liberty, sexual orientation, war and many others. Though, the stature of ancient Greek philosophers does not seem that high from the lens of diversity because a very few of them had recognized and spoke about the divisions of diversity.

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Appendix I

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