

PLATO'S MYTH OF THE STATESMAN, THE AMBIGUITIES OF THE GOLDEN AGE AND OF HISTORY*

To A. Andrewes

And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.
Samuel Coleridge, *Kubla Khan*

IN the treatise *de Abstinencia* that the neoplatonist Porphyry devoted to justifying abstention from foods of animal origin, there is a long quotation from *Life in Greece* (*βίος τῆς Ἑλλάδος*) by the Peripatetic, Dicaearchus (end of the fourth century B.C.), who was a direct disciple of Aristotle.¹ This book is known to represent a sort of cultural history of Greek humanity from the very earliest times.

In its essentials, this text tells us that the Golden Age, or age of Cronos, referred to by the poets, principally by Hesiod, in his *Works and Days* (from which Dicaearchus quotes verses 116–19: 'And they had all good things, the grain-bearing earth, ζείδωρος ἄρουρα, itself produced an abundant and generous harvest, and they lived off their fields in peace and joy, amidst countless boons . . .'), that this marvellous epoch was perhaps a historical reality:

'If it is to be considered as having actually existed (εἰ δεῖ λαμβάνειν μὲν αὐτὸν ὡς γεγονότα) and not as idle fiction, (καὶ μὴ μάτην ἐπιπεφημισμένον), if all that is exaggeratedly fabulous (τὸ δὲ λίαν μυθικόν) in this tradition' has been eliminated 'in order that it might be reduced, by means of reasoning, to a natural meaning'.

This would mean reconciling what is apparently unreconcilable, that is to say, a basically pessimistic view of the history of humanity with all that the historical-sociological investigations of the fifth century (Democritus, Protagoras, Thucydides) taught Greek thinkers about the hardships and afflictions of the first human beings, and which would hardly correspond to the vision of a Golden Age.² It would also mean taking into account the contribution, in the fourth century, of the new medical thinking, which was particularly centred on a scrupulous system of dietetics.³ In actual fact, according to Dicaearchus, the Golden Age coincided with the origins of human life, and by Golden Age must be understood a time when neither property nor its corollaries, social conflict and war, existed. This Golden Age is marked, however, not by infinite abundance, but by frugality, simple living and simple eating. The excellence of dietary habits that are perfectly consistent with the most advanced teachings of medical science is explained by scarcity (*σπάνις*) of the earth's natural products. Such simplicity is referred to in a proverb quoted by Dicaearchus (and many others) as symbolizing the simple life: ἄλις δρυός. Let's have done with the oak, it says, i.e., with the acorns on which primitive humanity fed. This break with the traditional diet will be successively expressed in the invention of pastoral living (accompanied by war and hunting), then of an agricultural society (accompanied by all the political régimes known to the men of the fourth century). A text of this kind in itself would deserve a lengthy analysis, one that could and should include confrontation of this passage with a contemporary document, the *περὶ εὐσεβείας* (*On Piety*) by Theophrastus, which we also know essentially through Porphyry's

* This essay was published in French in the volume entitled *Langue, discours, société. Pour Emile Benveniste* (Paris 1975) 374–91. It has been translated in collaboration with Maria Jolas, and I have taken this opportunity to revise it and make a few slight changes.

I want to thank those who have been so kind as to read it, especially: V. Goldschmidt, G. E. R. Lloyd, C. Gill, and Nicole Loraux.

¹ Porphyry *De Abstinencia* iv 2, pp. 228–31 Nauck; the Dicaearchus text forms no. 49 of the collection of the fragments by F. Wehrli (see also *frr.* 47, 48, 50 and 51,

which are from the same source but are not direct quotations). Our text is also reproduced (with translation) in the very useful collection by A. O. Lovejoy and G. Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (repr. New York 1965) 94–6.

² Here I shall simply refer readers to T. Cole's fundamental book, *Democritus and the Sources of Greek Anthropology* (APA philol. monog. 25, Middletown Conn. 1967).

³ Here I have in mind especially the things we have learned from J. Bertier, in her edition of the Mnesitheus and Dieuches fragments (Leyden 1972).

de Abstinencia. It would be worthwhile too to prolong the analysis to include the utopias and historical constructions of the Hellenistic period: Iambulus' philosophical tale,⁴ or Polybius's sixth book. Here however my intention is a more modest one, and I shall use the Dicaearchus text not to look forward but, on the contrary, to look backward, in an attempt to see what he has acquired and what he conceals.

Let me note immediately that this Cronos, the father of Zeus, under whose patronage Dicaearchus, following numerous others before him, places the felicitous—if simple—beginnings of humanity, is an extremely ambiguous divine personage.⁵ Indeed Theophrastus who, in *On Piety*, outlines a history of the religious practices of humanity, also places the first human eras in a period of vegetable consumption and non-vegetable sacrifice. But the Cronos he tells about is also a terrible, apparently cannibalistic god; the god to whom the Carthaginians offer children in sacrifice.⁶ Actually, Theophrastus's entire account, in his references to primitive humanity, closely mixes vegetarian, idyllic features with sanguinary references to anthropophagy and cannibalism. Human sacrifice immediately 'succeeds' vegetable sacrifice. Animal sacrifice only appears at the following 'stage', as a substitute for human sacrifice: ἐντεῦθεν οὖν μεταβαίνοντες ὑπάλλαγμα πρὸς τὰς θυσίας τῶν ἰδίων ἐποιοῦντο σωμάτων τὰ τῶν λοιπῶν ζώων σώματα.⁷ Needless to say, in studying these texts, we have every right to read in palimpsest logical opposition for historical succession, nor is it very hard to demonstrate that Dicaearchus and Theophrastus have historicised myths that are older in time than they are. But can we consider as negligible the fact that these philosophers should have deliberately situated the fables they tell us in the human era? Dicaearchus and Theophrastus see humanity's advance since the time of the oak and the acorn which, for Dicaearchus too is also the time of Cronos, as a continual, historical evolution towards the age of cities and empires, the empire of Athens or of Alexander. The fourth-century historian, Ephorus, proceeded in the same manner, except for the fact that, in his works, vegetarianism and anthropophagy did not succeed each other in time, but were contiguous in space. Protesting against the historians who, 'because they know that the terrible and the marvellous are startling', attribute ferocity to the entire Scythian and Sarmatian communities, he demonstrated that these peoples have quite dissimilar customs: 'for whereas some are so cruel that they even eat human beings, others abstain from eating any living creature (καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ζώων), and he added, 'one should also tell the opposite facts (δεῖν δὲ τὰναντία καὶ λέγειν) and describe their patterns of conduct'.⁸

In order to be convinced of the very marked difference between this type of historical or geographical portrayal and the schemas of the archaic epoch, we need only to return briefly to this epoch, that is, to Homer and Hesiod. Here there is no question of describing either succession or contiguity. It is undoubtedly important to note that Hesiod's text is presented in narrative form, but as J.-P. Vernant has ably shown, Hesiod's myth of 'races' does not define a 'history of the decadence of humanity, but a series of statuses that is founded on the opposition between *dike* and *hybris*, the golden "race" being the supreme accomplishment of *dike*.⁹ The very fact that the 'races' disappear entirely once their time has run its course, shows that for Hesiod there is no continuity between the Golden Age and our own, in which *hybris* and *dike* are mingled. Properly speaking, we are not descended from the men of the age of Cronos.

It may be added, however, that Homer and Hesiod define this status of humanity now implicitly, now explicitly, as being intermediate between the world of the Gods, which was touched by the Golden Age, and the world of bestiality characterized by anthropophagy. 'This', says Hesiod,¹⁰ 'is the law prescribed for men by the teachings of the son of Cronos, namely, that fishes and beasts and winged fowls devour one another, for right (*dike*) is not in them.' Consequently, the very one who, according to Hesiod and later tradition, was at the origin of the status of social man, Prometheus, who furnished fire for cooking and introduced sacrifice, was

⁴ Diodorus ii 55–60.

⁵ I have briefly explained this elsewhere, cf. my article 'Valeurs religieuses de la terre et du sacrifice dans l'Odyssee' in *Annales ESC* xxv (1970) 1278–97; republished in M. I. Finley (éd.), *Problèmes de la terre en Grèce ancienne* (Paris 1973) 269–92 (see 272–8).

⁶ *De Abstinencia* ii 27, p. 156, corresponds to fr. 13, p.

174 of the W. Pötscher edition (Leyden 1964).

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *FGH* 70 F42, from Strabo, vii 3.9 (trans. H. L. Jones).

⁹ Cf. J.-P. Vernant, *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs*³ (Paris 1971) i 13–79.

¹⁰ *Op.* 276–8.

also responsible for the break with the Gods, and with wild beasts. As Marcel Detienne recently wrote: 'In one case, by the invention of sacrifice, Prometheus ensures the transition from the commensalism of the Golden Age to meat-eating; in the other, by the contribution of fire and the invention of various techniques, Prometheus wrested humanity from its savage estate and diverted it from bestiality'.¹¹ But it is not enough to pose this question in terms of binary logic. What we shall have to discuss is ambiguity. Not, of course, 'primitive' ambiguity such as the ambiguity that Freud situated at the 'origins' of language, when contradiction was non-existent. Emile Benveniste made short shrift of this myth and recalled that 'if we assume the existence of a language in which *large* and *small* are identically expressed, it will be a language in which the distinction between *large* and *small* has literally no meaning and the dimensional category is non-existent, not a language that permits a contradictory expression of dimension'.¹² But, as Benveniste further points out, 'what Freud asked in vain of *historical* language, he could have asked of the myth, to a certain extent . . .',¹³ and in reality, it is evident that in archaic times, the Golden Age of Cronos is also an age of bestiality; witness Homer's Cyclops, to whom the earth furnishes everything with the generosity described by Hesiod, but who remains nevertheless the cannibal with whom we are all familiar.¹⁴

Greek thought, which was an offspring of the city-state, was to contest this ambiguity and try to mitigate its importance—'Greek thought', or at least an entire current of it. The *Prometheus* of Protagoras, in the myth told by Plato, and which may well hark back to the thought of the great Sophist,¹⁵ does not separate men from Gods. Better still, from the moment when man has at his disposal the *techne* stolen from Athena and Hephaestus, he possesses his 'share of the divine lot',¹⁶ a share that is moreover insufficient for the requirements of urban life, which is only made possible when Zeus and Hermes confer upon humanity the gifts of *aidos* and *dike*. This introduction to the strictly civic and political dimension summarizes, in its way, the mutation that had taken place since the time of Homer and Hesiod. For the archaic poets, the human status that they defined with the help of the oppositions that I pointed out earlier, was a technical and social status; the political dimension, although not lacking,¹⁷ is only one aspect of this status. For the thinkers of the classical epoch, a separate place had to be reserved for that greatest of all inventions, which is the mark of civilized life: the triumphant *polis*.

But let us return to the fourth century, which we left in the middle of a discussion about Dicaearchus and Theophrastus. As is well known, this was a period of crises, political and social change, subversive activity and re-examination of values. The question of the Golden Age, therefore, is not only a theoretical problem that one tries to integrate into the historical discourse. The age of Cronos, 'life in the time of Cronos', as it is called, is a slogan for philosophical and religious sects that are not satisfied, or are no longer satisfied, with the existing civic order. In this domain, to be sure, the transgression goes much further back than the fourth century, but it was at this epoch that, in the dual religious and philosophic context that characterized it at the time, this transgression was systematically organized.¹⁸

As Detienne has clearly shown,¹⁹ transcendence of the civic order can be oriented in two opposed directions: 'upwards' or 'downwards'. If 'upwards', an attempt is made to implant in 'our' world the virtues of the Golden Age. Beginning with the archaic epoch, this tendency was expressed by the Orphics and the Pythagoreans. If 'downwards', on the contrary, an effort to enter into contact with bestiality is given expression through practice and even more by means of

¹¹ 'Entre bêtes et Dieux' in *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse* vi (autumn 1972) 230–46 (see p. 236).

¹² 'Remarques sur la fonction du langage dans la découverte freudienne' in *La Psychanalyse I* (1956) and *Problèmes de linguistique générale* (Paris 1956) 75–87 (see p. 82).

¹³ *Loc. cit.* 83.

¹⁴ Cf. P. Vidal-Naquet, *loc. cit.* 278–80.

¹⁵ Cf. for instance, what Ed. Will says on the subject, *Le Monde Grec et l'Orient*. (Paris 1972) 482. A detailed demonstration is presented in the as yet unpublished thesis by R. Winton, Cambridge.

¹⁶ *Protagoras* 322 a.

¹⁷ Here I recall the famous lines from the *Odyssey* (ix 112–15) on the lack of deliberative institutions among the Cyclops.

¹⁸ Aristotle has provided testimony that is probably valid for his own epoch when he states that the tyranny exercised by Pisistratus seemed like the age of Cronos, in the tradition of the Athenian peasants (*Ath. Pol.* xvi 7).

¹⁹ In his article quoted above (n. 11), the entire analysis may be considered as a commentary on Aristotle's formula: 'he who by nature and not by accident, is without a city, is a being who is either base (*φάυλος*) or more powerful than a man is' (*Pol.* i 1253 a 4).

the Dionysiacal phantasm of *omophagia*, or through consumption of raw food that could lead finally to cannibalism. However—and this is what makes the problem so interesting—these two forms of transgression are always liable to interfere with each other; certain works of tragedy, in fact, throw particular light on this interference.²⁰ Thus, at the very end of the fifth century, the tragedy of the *Bacchae* shows the women companions of Dionysos living in a paradisiacal world which the messenger described to Pentheus as follows: 'On their heads they put garlands of ivy and oak and flowering bryony. One grasped a thyrsus and struck it into a rock from which a dewy stream of water leapt out; another struck her rod on the ground and for her the god sent up a spring of wine; and those who had a desire for the white drink scraped the ground with their fingertips and had jets of milk; and from out of the ivied thyrsi, sweet streams of honey dripped.'²¹ In opposition to this idyllic scene, in the same account given by the messenger, there is the description of the *Bacchae* leaving the mountain for the plain of Demeter, carrying off children and lacerating cattle, as prelude to the final murder, which was to be the incestuous and as it seems cannibalistic murder of Pentheus by his mother. What unifies these two contradictory states is however quite clear: in the first as well as in the second, there is no separation of human beings from animals, or this separation has ceased. The *Bacchae* of the Golden Age, instead of suckling their own children, which they abandoned,²² gave suck to fawns and wolf-cubs. The bestiality of the mad *Bacchae* was such that precise details do not even need recalling.

Our epoch, which is not lacking in propaganda and advertising for both 'natural water' and 'pure' foods (which the Orphics recommended), which abounds as well in neo-naturist sects, is particularly well-placed to understand, it seems to me, what the eruption upon the scene of those who demanded a Golden Age here and now meant for the fourth century. Among so many sects in confrontation, there was one, however, that made its choice, and which, in absolute seriousness, decided in favour of a return to a state of savagery. I refer of course to the Cynics. True enough, no one would argue today, as C. W. Goettling did in the last century,²³ that the thought of the Cynics is the philosophy of the Greek proletariat—in itself an absurd expression—but there is no disputing the fact that cynicism marvellously expresses one aspect of crisis in the classical city. Indeed, it is characteristic that the founder of the sect, Antisthenes, should have been, not a full-fledged Athenian, but of bastard birth, the son of an Athenian and a woman of Thrace, one of the group that met in the Cynosarges gymnasium, reserved for *nothoi* (bastards);²⁴ as we would say today, a 'marginal' figure. The life-style that the Cynics were supposed to adopt was based on deliberate transgression of all interdictions, especially those of a dietary or sexual nature, upon which society is founded: hence the defence of raw versus cooked, of masturbation and incest versus a regulated sexuality, and in fact, of cannibalism. We are not surprised to learn that Antisthenes had written two treatises on the Cyclops, and Diogenes a tragedy on Thyestes.²⁵ The enemy of the Cynics was the civilizing hero of Aeschylus and of Protagoras, Prometheus.²⁶ In short, to borrow from Plutarch,²⁷ the intention was 'to brutalize our lives': *τὸν βίον ἀποθηριώσαι*. We should not be surprised, therefore, that the Cynics should have adopted as their own the slogan: *ἐλευθερία ἢ ἐπὶ Κρόνου*, 'freedom as in the time of Cronos'²⁸ which they situated in an age of 'primitive' savagery, not one of vegetarianism and orphic foods. The Golden Age is the age of Polyphemus and the 'cyclopic life', praise of which may be found, for instance, in Plutarch's *Gryllos*, which allows the victims of Circe to speak, in order to proclaim their happiness. This is a theme of Cynic origin.

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At the crossroads of these fourth-century crises, concerning which subversiveness on the part of the Cynics bears such eloquent witness, Plato's philosophy appears at once like a document

²⁰ Cf. N. Loraux, 'L'interférence tragique' in *Critique* 317 (1973) 908–25.

²¹ *Bacchae* 702–11 trans. G. S. Kirk (1970).

²² *Ibid.* 701–2.

²³ 'Eine Schule, welche recht für die Proletarier Athens gerechnet war': 'Das Gymnasium Kynosarges in Athen' in *Gesammelte Abh. aus dem Kl. Altertume* ii (Munich 1863) 156–95, see p. 169.

²⁴ Diogenes Laertes, vi 1.13; *Lexic. Rhet.* Bekker p. 274.

Cf. S. C. Humphreys, 'The Nothoi of Kynosarges' in *JHS* xciv (1974) 88–95.

²⁵ Diogenes, vi 17, 18, 73, 80.

²⁶ Cf. Plutarch, *Aquane an ignis sit utilior* 956b; Dio Chrysostom, vi 25, 29–30. The anti-Prometheus is Heracles.

²⁷ *De esu carniū* 995c–d.

²⁸ Cf. [Diogenes] *Ep.* p. 32; Lucian, *Drapetai* 17, and T. Cole, *op. cit.* (n. 2) 151, n. 12.

about the crisis and an effort to solve it, at least theoretically. To the extent that the Golden Age was actually at the heart of contemporary discussion, it is through this discussion that we must study what becomes of this theme in Plato's hands, as for instance in the *Statesman* myth (268d–274e). But first let us recall briefly the location of the dialogue in which the myth appears. The discussion taking place between Socrates the younger and the stranger from Elea, a discussion that had been conducted by means of successive dichotomies, had reached an impasse: the definition of the Statesman as shepherd of the human flock. The myth, which occupied here the 'role of criterion',²⁹ contains a warning against 'angelism',³⁰ which could lead us to confuse divine with human statesmen, the Golden Age with the cycle of Zeus; not that the identification of King and shepherd is an erroneous one, but it may be applied to too many different personages for it to be usable.

The myth is introduced by a preamble (268e–269c) which appears to have been curiously neglected by commentators. Actually, Plato regroups three 'stories from the old days' before combining them into a single narrative. The first tells of the strange phenomenon that marked the quarrel between Atreus and Thyestes, an episode that is mentioned in very numerous sources.³¹ The two brothers are in dispute as to which will occupy the throne. A supernatural event occurs in support of the claims made by Atreus, when a lamb with golden fleece is born in his flock. But Thyestes, who is the lover of Atreus's wife, with her complicity, steals the miraculous lamb. At this point, Zeus intervenes with an even more prodigious event, which is decisive: he reverses the course of the sun and the Pleiades. This, at any rate, is the most widespread version; there is another one, which was known to the Latin poets and perhaps to Sophocles, but to which Plato makes no direct allusion, which is, that out of horror at the criminal feast organized in honour of Thyestes, the divine ruler changed the sun's course.³² Let us note right away why the use of *this* legend is a bit strange. In order to shift from one solar cycle to the other, Plato did not have to mention those strange 'shepherds', Atreus and Thyestes, nor was he obliged to recall the miracle that had taken place in favour of the organizer of a cannibalistic feast. Herodotus knew that the sun had 'changed its dwelling-place four times, twice by rising where it now sets, and twice by setting where it now rises',³³ and he had used this legend to enhance another myth, which concerned the perenniality of Egypt. In the *Timaeus* and elsewhere, Plato was wisely to remember this lesson.³⁴

The second tradition used by Plato was the one concerning the men said to have been born from the earth (the *γηγενείς*) before the appearance of sexually differentiated reproduction. Without enumerating here the many instances in Greek warrior mythology in which this type of birth is utilized to represent brute force,³⁵ I shall merely recall that the 'sons of the earth' appear on two more occasions in the work of Plato: first, in the *Republic*, where they are the heroes of the famous 'Phoenician story' about the 'fine lie' that was told to persuade the citizens of the 'ideal city' that they were all children of the same mother, the earth, but that some were of gold, others of silver and the remainder of bronze.³⁶ And again, in the *Sophist*, in which the *γηγενείς* are the people defined as *σπαρτοί τε καὶ αὐτόχθονες*, that is, sown in the earth and sprung from it,³⁷ the 'materialists', whom Plato contrasts with the 'friends of Forms' in this dialogue, which is exactly contemporary with the *Statesman*.

The third 'tradition' is the one that treats of the time of Cronos.

Plato returns to this question of royalty, which is identified with the Golden Age, in the *Laws*, written when he was a very old man.³⁸ We shall simply note here the mention he made of it in a

²⁹ V. Goldschmidt, *Les Dialogues de Platon* (Paris 1947) 259. On the role of the myth that treats of the search for a human *eidos*, see S. Bernardete, 'Eidos and diaeresis in Plato's *Statesman*' in *Philologus* cvii (1963) 193–226, esp. 198.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 260.

³¹ They have been collected by J. G. Frazer in his edition of the Pseudo-Apollodorean *Library*, ii 164–6; the most important texts, dating from before Plato, are Euripides, *El.* 699–730; *Or.* 996–1012.

³² Cf. A. C. Pearson, *The Fragments of Sophocles*, i p. 93.

³³ ii 142; cf. Ch. Froidefond, *Le mirage égyptien* (Paris

1971) 143.

³⁴ Cf. Ch. Froidefond, *op. cit.* 267–342.

³⁵ See for instance, F. Vian, *Les origines de Thèbes: Cadmos et les Spartes* (Paris 1963) and, by the same author, 'La fonction guerrière dans la mythologie grecque', in J.-P. Vernant (éd.) *Problèmes de la guerre en Grèce ancienne* (Paris 1968) 53–68, concerning which, however, I do not accept the historicity of the interpretation.

³⁶ 414c ff., 468e f.

³⁷ 248c, cf. also *Laws* 727e: οὐδὲν γὰρ γηγενές Ὀλυμπίων ἐντιμότερον . . .

³⁸ Cf. *infra* p. 140.

much earlier dialogue, the *Gorgias*. In the myth that ends this dialogue, referring to the way in which the judgements of men were arrived at in the time of Cronos and the very beginnings of Zeus's reign, that is, to the legal instrument that determined whether one had or did not have the right to enter into the sphere of the Happy islands, Socrates cites an observation to the effect that it had been an era of injustice, since the living judged one another at the end of their lives. Zeus decides to put an end to these errors and Prometheus is charged with depriving men of their former knowledge concerning the moment of their death. From now on, it is men's souls that will be judged, and the souls of Minos, Rhadamanthus and Aeacus will pronounce the judgements.³⁹ This amounts to saying that Prometheus helps men to assume their mortal status, and that the age of Zeus is opposed to the age of Cronos in the same way that the age of just judges is opposed to the age of arbitrary judges. Plato's Cronos is not a simple personage, and there exists at least one other example of this rather ambiguous nature of Cronos. In *Republic* II (378a) the Cronos myth is presented as a typical example of the kind of story that should not be told to children.

We are warned in advance, as it were, that a certain ambiguity will appear in the myth itself. Let us recall briefly how the myth functions; I use the word 'functions' because as has already been demonstrated by Schuhl,⁴⁰ Plato had in mind a mechanical model to which the text makes implicit reference. He supposed that the cosmos is actuated by 'two circular movements that are deployed successively in opposite directions, and which engender both worlds: in opposition to our era, the divine age, and, carried forward by its own momentum, the actual course of things.'⁴¹ These two consecutive states of the world are separated by a reverse movement, *μεταβολή*, characterized now by divine control of the course of the world, which then runs entirely independently, the way the circle of the Same does in the *Timaeus*; now by relinquishment of divine control—the world has turned in the opposite direction and is sailing towards 'the endless ocean of dissimilarity' (*εἰς τὸν τῆς ἀνομοιότητος ἄπειρον ὄντα πόντον*). As J. Bollack very aptly says: 'What Plato's myth develops in opposite directions, in order to examine them, is both aspects of the same world, which actually coexist, and not the stages of a cyclic evolution.' One might ask how the two worlds oppose each other inside the myth. One of these worlds is undoubtedly the age of Cronos, with the features that, since Hesiod, have been attributed to it: infinite fertility of the earth, a harmonious relationship between men and animals, absence of anthropophagy (271e). That the humanity of the time of Cronos was not a political humanity, is also in accord with the earliest accounts, although Plato lays special emphasis on this aspect of the myth in favour of his own argumentation, according to which God made humanity in the same way that today humanity breeds animals, 'but there was no constitution and no possession of either women or children' (271e–272a). In passing, it might be noted that only male humans are born from the earth, women and families being necessarily part of organized life. In the last analysis, this implies the city. In this respect, the picture of life in the time of Cronos, contrary to what has been frequently argued,⁴² is radically different from that of the *city-state* which is situated far back in history, the ideal Athens of the *Critias*. To this general view, Plato adds features that are his own: the human beings of the time of Cronos led their lives in reverse; men were born from the earth, and they were born old. The bodies that come out of the earth remember nothing (272a) and have white hair,⁴³ just as the men who, according to Hesiod, will

³⁹ *Gorgias* 523b–e; on the negative aspects of Cronos, see also *Rep.* 378a.

⁴⁰ P. M. Schuhl, 'Sur le mythe du politique' in *Rev. de Métaphysique et de Morale* xxxvii (1932) 47f; republished in *La Fabulation platonicienne* (Paris 1947) 89–104.

⁴¹ J. Bollack, *Empédocle, 1, Introduction à l'ancienne physique* (Paris 1965) 133; I also recommend the excellent analysis in p. 135, n. 1; cf. preceding this, V. Goldschmidt, *Platonisme et pensée contemporaine* (Paris 1970) 104. It has occasionally been argued that instead of two cosmic cycles, there were three stages: the age of Cronos, the age of the world in reverse, the age of our world, which is a mixed one. This interpretation is endorsed by A. Lovejoy and G. Boas, *op. cit.* 158, and independently, by L. Brisson

in *Le Même et l'Autre dans la structure ontologique du Timée de Platon* (Paris 1974) 478–96. This hypothesis can be supported by such texts as *Statesman* 269d, in which 'our' world is described as a mixed world in terms that *Timaeus* himself would not disclaim (see *infra* pp. 138–9) but the description is quite incompatible with a close reading of the myth.

⁴² Among others, by G. Rodier, 'Note sur la politique d'Antisthène: le mythe du Politique', *Année philosophique* (1911) 1–7, republished in *Etudes de Philosophie grecque* (Paris 1926) 30–6.

⁴³ Which is how we should understand an expression in the *Statesman*, 273e: *Τὰ δ' ἐκ γῆς νεογενῆ σώματα πολὺὰ φύντα*. On this point the translation made by A. Diès

be born at the end of our age,⁴⁴ will also have white hair. The cycle of their lives, like the White Queen's in *Through the Looking Glass*, is the opposite of ours. These men in reverse are therefore not citizens, but do they live according to philosophy? Plato asks this question, but he only replies to it indirectly. 'If they were so busy gorging themselves with food and drink that they only exchanged with one another and with animals such fables as are now told about them, in that case . . . the question would be easily solved' (272c–d). Fables? The fables of Hesiod, no doubt, but also those that Plato himself referred to in the preamble to the myth in which, here again, we find a remarkable discordance inside the beautifully symmetrical whole. It is certainly not enough to say, as P. Friedländer does, that here Plato is commenting ironically on the little confidence to be placed in all human descriptions of the Golden Age.⁴⁵ The Paradise of the Golden Age was quite definitely an animal Paradise. Humanity, including the humanity of the philosophers, is on the other slope of the mountain, on the side of the cycle of Zeus. The pastoral vocabulary⁴⁶ that was used to describe the time of Cronos, was followed, during the Zeus cycle, by a political vocabulary. The world that God had abandoned,⁴⁷ had *κράτος* over itself (273a), it is *αὐτοκράτωρ* (274a).⁴⁸ Our humanity, therefore, is the humanity that must brave the necessity and even the savagery that immediately followed the catastrophe created by God's departure (274c). It was given fire by Prometheus, and all the arts by Athena and Hephaestus (274c). In short, it is the humanity of the Protagorean myth, except for one point, which is important: nothing was stolen. The gifts of the Gods and those of Prometheus are considered of equal value.

I say 'our humanity', and I must immediately correct myself. For one of the great difficulties that the myth poses is that of deciding how the status of 'our' world should be defined. When Plato says: *νῦν* (in 272b and 271e), what exactly is he designating? The world of the myth, the world dominated by innate desire, the *σύμφυτος ἐπιθυμία* (271e), the world 'framed in the prodigality of nature', as Shakespeare would have put it, the world evolving logically towards dissimilarity and dissolution? Or is he speaking of a mixed world, the world of the *Timaeus*, the world that is founded on the collaboration of reason with necessity? One is tempted, for instance, to give this interpretation to the passage in which Plato defines the world as a mixed one:

'Now what we know by the name of Heaven and World has indeed been endowed by the author of its being with many blessed conditions; none the less it partakes of body also, whence 'tis impossible it should be internally exempt from change, though 'tis true that, so far as it may, it moves in one place with a uniform and single Motion' (Taylor's translation of 269d–e).

And Plato adds, as I understand (with L. Robin), that the world has received a share of the circular movement (*ἀνακύκλιση*) which, 'of all movements is the least possible alteration of the original movement'.⁴⁹ Here, it is true that what follows clarifies Plato's meaning, namely, that whereas in the *Timaeus* the circle of the Same and the circle of the Other function together, one in one direction, one in the other; one incarnated in the fixed astral bodies, the other in the planets,⁵⁰ here the world's movement is now forwards, now backwards. But this logical solution does not

creates a misinterpretation that had been avoided by L. Campbell, in his edition with comments (Oxford 1867).

⁴⁴ *Op.* 181.

⁴⁵ *Plato* i, trans. H. Meyerhoff (N.Y. 1958) 206.

⁴⁶ Cf. the use of the verbs *νέμειν*, *νομύειν*, and of the noun *νομή* in 271d–272a, 274b; see E. Laroche, *Histoire de la racine 'nem' en grec ancien* (Paris 1949) 115–29, and briefly, E. Benveniste, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes* (Paris 1969) i 84–6. The 'pastoral' value did not enjoy priority, but at the time of Plato, it was very clearly sensed.

⁴⁷ The proximity of these two expressions, 'abandoned by God' and 'cycle of Zeus', underlines once more the brilliant ambiguity of Plato's text. Both are supported, naturally, by precise passages (272b, e, etc.). It is nevertheless true that Plato underlines the fact that the reign of Zeus was merely a *λόγος*, here, 'hearsay' (272b), and that while the God abandoned direct administration of the

world, he continued to occupy an observation post (272e).

⁴⁸ The pre-history of the word *κράτος* in the Homeric epoch has been studied by E. Benveniste, *op. cit.* (n. 46) ii 57–83. The author makes a statement of essential importance to us, which is: '*Kratos* is used exclusively for gods and men' (p. 78).

⁴⁹ On this point, I am correcting the interpretation of A. Diès and of many other scholars who understand *ἀνακύκλιση* as 'reversal of revolution' (Taylor), cf. the note by L. Robin, *Platon*, *Pléiade* edn. ii 1456, n. 46. The usual translation is incompatible with the text that follows, which sees the world turning *now* in one direction, *now* in the other.

⁵⁰ The essential text is *Timaeus*, 36b–d; for details, I shall simply recall the above-mentioned thesis by L. Brisson.

remove all the ambiguities; it fails to take into account the fact that one of the states of the cosmos, the one placed under God's immediate direction, is an anti-world, a world in reverse, and that this reverse state corresponds exactly to an obverse right state, to a world in which the temporal order is the one we know. It will no doubt be objected that philosophy is just that: 'the world in reverse', that to read reality philosophically is to see in it the contrary of what it appears to be. The lesson is certainly Platonist, but it would still be necessary to explain the following curious fact: the divine gifts, those made by Prometheus, Athena and Hephaestus, were granted humanity⁵¹ at the very time in the cycle when God was supposed to have withdrawn entirely from the world. We are therefore obliged to admit that the ambiguity of the text is not a matter of chance, but is located at its very centre. However, it is also true that in Plato's reference to the difficulties encountered by humanity when left to its own devices, we find no arguments to prove that our philosopher was merely a man who worshipped the past, for whom the Golden Age was situated at the beginning of history. On this point, we must disagree with those commentators who, with K. R. Popper and E. Havelock, have represented Plato as the theoretician *par excellence* of decadence.⁵² We can never insist enough upon the following important fact: in the *Statesman*, the Golden Age is radically severed from the city. And Plato does undoubtedly tell us that the world was most mindful of the teachings 'of its maker and father' (273a–b) at the beginning of the Zeus cycle. Cosmology does not follow the same rhythm as anthropology. Protagorean progress, that is, the progress that wrested men from dependence and from the war that animals waged against them, advanced in the opposite direction to that of the evolution of the Cosmos;⁵³ but Plato did not so easily rid himself of Protagoras as one might think. For philosophy, science and the city⁵⁴ are, implicitly, also situated in the Zeus cycle. Certain interpreters have undertaken to go further than I do here. E. Zeller, in a passage of his *History of Ancient Philosophy*,⁵⁵ understood the description of the men of the Golden Age as an ironic criticism of Antisthenes's naturalist philosophy. G. Rodier refuted this interpretation,⁵⁶ and his arguments have been generally accepted. However, if one agrees that there is a kind of shadow over the Platonist Golden Age, one is inclined to think that Zeller's intuition was not entirely absurd. At the time when Plato wrote the *Statesman*—the date is not known, but it evidently precedes the 'resignation' revealed in the *Laws*⁵⁷—he was not trying to escape from the city, either by means of the Golden Age, or, needless to say, by means of a return to savagery.

And yet, does there exist in his last work the element that would be needed to explain, or at least to initiate, the historical treatment of the Golden Age that, at the end of the century, was to characterize the work of Dicaearchus? We shall try to pose this question.

The universe presented in the *Statesman* in fragmented form, with both cycles of the myth I have just discussed, in the *Laws* becomes one of the 'mixed' pieces, for which the *Timaeus*, the

⁵¹ True enough, one can hesitate as to the exact meaning of what Plato is saying in 274c: τὰ πάλαι λεχθέντα παρὰ θεῶν δῶρα, which are 'the gifts of the gods mentioned by tradition', a tradition that Plato does not necessarily assume as his own; but between the invention by men of the arts and *technai*, and their definition as divine gifts, both of which are 'traditional', Plato evidently chose the version that was the most opposed to humanism (cf. *Menex.* 238b, in which already this choice is given preference over the 'lay' tradition of the Athenian funeral oration).

⁵² E. A. Havelock, *The Liberal Temper in Greek Politics* (New Haven 1957) 40–51; K. R. Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, I, *The Spell of Plato* (London new ed. 1963) esp. 19–25 and 39 f. For a convenient summary of the discussions prompted by Popper's book, cf. the selection made by R. Bambrough, *Plato, Popper and Politics* (Cambridge 1968); also V. Goldschmidt, *op. cit.* (n. 41) 139–41.

⁵³ A similar opposition may be found in Epicurean philosophy; cf. the classical study by L. Robin, 'Sur la conception épicurienne du progrès' in *Rev. de Métaphysique*

et de Morale (1916) 69 f., republ. in *La pensée hellénique des origines à Epicure* (Paris 1942) 525–52.

⁵⁴ V. Goldschmidt is right to call attention to this point: 'The city, the material origins of which lie in needs, in the inability of individuals to achieve self-sufficiency, and in blind Necessity, seems to be of no use in the next world. There does not exist in Plato the equivalent of the "city of God"' (*op. cit.* [n. 41] 120). But although, in Plato's writings, science is by rights separable from civic institutions, it remains true, as we have seen, that the men of the Golden Age do not appear to have been scientifically active.

⁵⁵ *Die Philosophie der Griechen*, ii 1 (Leipzig 1889) 324, n. 5.

⁵⁶ *Loc. cit.* n. 42.

⁵⁷ It will be recalled that Wilamowitz had given this title to the chapter devoted to the *Laws* in his *Plato* (Berlin 1920) ii 654–704. The *Statesman* is generally dated to the period immediately following Plato's third visit to Sicily (361); hence, before the final crisis of the Athenian empire.

Philebus and the *Sophist* furnish the theory; the story that Plato outlined in Book III of his last work, is also a 'mixed' one. It would be vain to try to find in this story *one* single 'meaning', either positive or negative. Through a series of felicitous accidents and divine interventions, the story could just as well end with a successful mixture, such as the Spartan constitution,⁵⁸ as with the disaster that struck Argos and Messene.⁵⁹ This historical investigation ends, as we know, with the decision to found an ideal city-state which, in relation to the city in the *Republic*, would be *μία δευτέρως*, second in oneness.⁶⁰ In this ultimate effort, what is the position attributed to the age of Cronos? It is introduced at the exact moment when the Athenian, speaking to the imaginary colonists, is about to explain that 'God should be for us the measure of all things, absolutely supreme, and far superior, I think, to what man is said to be.' And in fact, in the *Laws*, the city-state, which is a theocracy 'in the etymological sense of the word',⁶¹ only has the appearance, although it is reproduced down to the minutest detail, of a classical city, that is to say, of a group based on the responsibility of each citizen. The traditional institutions and magistratures perform only more or less fictitious functions; sovereignty is elsewhere. The reference to the age of Cronos (713a–714b) has been presented as a mere 'extract' of the myth of the *Statesman*.⁶² Of course, considering the fact that we are in a period of re-composed time, Cronos is situated so far back in history (*ἔτι προτέρα τούτων πάμπολυ* 713b) that it is impossible to speak of a human time that began with the Golden Age. But as regards the myth of the *Statesman*, there are three essential differences. First of all, just underneath God's direct control, there is a government of demons, religious personages whose duties are limited by the *Statesman* to administering animals. In addition, the reign of Cronos, although characterized by the 'abundance without toil' that, since Hesiod, had been part of the tradition, possessed nevertheless political institutions and a political vocabulary. The age of Cronos included *poleis* (713d–e) and divine rulers (713d). There was not only material abundance but abundance of justice, *ἀφθονία δίκης* (713e), and the political régime was characterized by 'good legislation', *εὐνομία*. Plato even notes the existence of precautionary measures to prevent revolution (713e). Finally, the pastoral image which, in the *Statesman*, is objected to as being unsuitable, is taken up by the Plato of the *Laws*. After playing upon the different meanings of the root *nem*, then explaining that since oxen are not appointed to be the lords of oxen, men need not be the lords of men, he remarks that what we call the *law* is the *διανομή τοῦ νοῦ* (714a). It is therefore legitimate to say that the best ordered among existing city-states are copies of the forms of 'authority and administration that obtained in the time of Cronos', *ἀρχή τε καὶ οἴκησις . . . ἐπὶ Κρόνου* (713b).

The age of Cronos is paradigmatic in relation to the best of present-day cities, just as the city in the *Republic* is paradigmatic in relation to the city in the *Laws* (739e). But Plato makes no further mention of the ideal city, except to say that it is inhabited by gods, or the children of gods. Does it necessarily follow that, even in the *Laws*, Plato had rallied to the cause of 'soft primitivism', that is, to idealization of the early ages of humanity;⁶³ in short, that he believed, to quote K. R. Popper, that 'the "model", the *original*, of its stage of perfection can be found in the remotest past, in a Golden Age that existed at the dawn of history'?⁶⁴ True enough, when Plato tells us of the discovery of agricultural techniques, the gifts of Demeter and Kore, through the intermediary Triptolemus, he makes very specific allusions to orphic traditions: 'There was a time when we dared not eat even beef, when the sacrifices offered to the Gods were not living creatures, but cakes or fruit dipped in honey, and similar *pure* offerings, such as those that required us to abstain from meat, in the belief that it was blasphemous to eat meat, or to soil with blood the altars of the gods' (782c). Thus the models for the lives we call 'orphic' refer back to a distant past (*Ὀρφικοί λεγόμενοι . . . βίοι*). Nor is there any lack of 'historical' warrant for a life that was in opposition to

⁵⁸ A God creates the dual royalty, a 'human nature united to a divine nature' establishes the gerusia, a 'third saviour' invents the ephorate. 'And so, thanks to these proportions, the royalty of your country, a balanced mixture of the ingredients that were needed, saved itself and brought salvation to others' (*Laws* 691d–692a).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 690d–691b.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 739e. Here, as I was taught to do in the past by H. Margueritte, I have retained the text of manuscripts A and O, and rejected Apelt's uninspired conjecture *τιμία*

δευτέρως, 'next in honorability', which has been retained in the Des Places edition. Concerning the question of unity as the basic principle of Plato's *Republic*, cf. Aristotle *Pol.* ii 1263b 30 f.

⁶¹ V. Goldschmidt, *op. cit.* (n. 41) 113.

⁶² E. Des Places, edition of the *Laws* II, 61, n. 2.

⁶³ Literally speaking, this expression is unsuitable, since for Plato, humanity begins again, it does not begin.

⁶⁴ *Op. cit.* 25.

the orphic life. 'That men offer other men in sacrifice is illustrated by numerous examples that have survived until this day', τὸ δὲ μὴν θύειν ἀνθρώπους ἀλλήλους ἔτι καὶ νῦν παραμένον ὀρώμεν πολλοῖς (782c). Actually, before the invention of agriculture, living creatures,⁶⁵ as is still the case, devoured one another assiduously. Thus the most remote past presents a very different picture from that of only orphic life, which moreover can hardly be considered to be a model. The author of the *Epinomis*—whether it is or is not Plato—later returned, in fact, to this point, explaining that the interdiction of anthropophagy must be put in the same category as the invention of agriculture and *technai*, that is to say, in a secondary category (975a–b).

There remains to be examined, however, the famous passage in Book III of the *Laws*, which describes humanity's fresh beginnings after the catastrophe, and the patriarchal life that Plato describes, with the help of Homer's Cyclops, but without referring to cannibalism.⁶⁶ A savage life, as explicitly stated, but a just and a simple one. Plato confronts Protagoras once more by pointing out that the absence of art is not a decisive obstacle to human happiness. But when he compares these 'noble savages' with his own contemporaries, Plato observes that they showed greater simplicity (*εὐηθέστεροι*), were more courageous (*ἀνδρειότεροι*), more temperate (*σωφρονέστεροι*), more just (*δικαιότεροι*) than we are (679e). Justice, temperance, courage . . . the traditional virtues from which Plato made a theory of virtues in the *Republic*, are here, except for the greatest of them all, wisdom (*σοφία*), which is the virtue of the mind, the virtue of philosophers, of possessors of knowledge.⁶⁷ Wisdom replaced by simplicity, in the dual sense of this word, is a rather ambiguous compliment.⁶⁸

But Plato explains himself quite clearly on this subject: our world, which was born of historical evolution: 'cities, constitutions, arts and laws', is an 'abundance of vice, and also of virtue', πολλή μὲν πονηρία, πολλή δὲ καὶ ἀρετή.⁶⁹ Primitivism, so far from being a slogan, is merely a last resort, and the simplicity of patriarchal life is not viewed with any greater illusions as regards its basic features than the elementary city of the *Republic*, which is founded solely on necessity, and which Plato's brother Glaucon, in spite of the happiness supposed to obtain there, describes as a 'city of swine'.⁷⁰ There remains the fact that, although Plato resisted to the end the different mirages of the Golden Age that flourished again in the epoch that followed, there was no lack of tension—between happiness and science, between the city of men and the city ruled by God (as, shall we say, in the *Laws*, through the intermediary of the philosophers disguised as elders in the 'night council'), between history and intelligible Forms—tension which seems to end in a breach.⁷¹ It has been justly said that although the Platonist city itself represents the 'finest of all dramas',⁷² 'this drama that has been lived seems to be void of all dramatic elements: nothing that is irreparable can happen to the soul; the drama comprises neither tragic adventures nor even a *dénouement*, since it does not end in death'.⁷³ Actually, the real Platonist tragedy lies elsewhere: in the very place occupied by Platonism, in the ambiguity of history.

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⁶⁵ Τὰ ζῶα: this can hardly refer to animals exclusively, since they are not the only creatures concerned by the invention of agriculture.

⁶⁶ The quotation from *Od.* ix 112–15 is in the *Laws* 680b–c; cf. J. Labarbe, *L'Homère de Platon* (Liège 1949) 236–8.

⁶⁷ *Rep.* 428e–429a.

⁶⁸ The simplicity and naïveté of early legislation was also to become a theme for Aristotle; cf. *Pol.* ii 1268b 42. I

want to thank R. Weil for having reminded me of this text.

⁶⁹ *Laws* 678a.

⁷⁰ *Rep.* 372d.

⁷¹ This study begins with an attempt to show that the breach took place after Plato's time.

⁷² *Laws* 817b.

⁷³ V. Goldschmidt, *op. cit.* (n. 41) 98.