

Articles

Blessed life without philosophy:

Plato and Hesiod on prehistory of man and worldⁱ

Eliška Luhanová

Motto:

“Understanding myth is not believing in it, and if all myths are true, it is in so far as they can be set in a phenomenology of mind which shows their function in arriving at awareness, and which ultimately bases their own significance on the significance they have for the philosopher. In the same way, though it is indeed from the dreamer that I was last night that I require an account of the dream, the dreamer himself offers no account, and the person who does so is awake.”ⁱⁱ

i First version of this paper was presented at an international conference “Myth and Literature in Ancient Philosophy” hosted by the Faculty of Classics at the University of Cambridge on April 15–16, 2011.

ii Merleau-Ponty, M., *Phenomenology of perception*, translation C. Smith, Routledge 2002, p. 341.

Introduction

The questions of human prehistory and about the origins of humanity – which would be nowadays classified as anthropological ones – were present in Greek thinking from its very beginnings. Although a physical anthropology, i.e. how the first humans were born or created, played a rather marginal role in Greek myth (contrary to another mythical traditions, such as the Mesopotamian one), the more a cultural anthropology was significant: the myths explaining how the cultural human sphere was established in its specificity were of major importance.ⁱ Two mythical narratives about human prehistory played a crucial role: the myth of golden age and the Promethean myth. Summed up schematically, the first one is predominantly primitivistic, taking human prehistory as an ideal which the humanity in its history recedes from, while the second one, talking about the divine origins of cultural skills, is predominantly progressivist, taking human history as a process of development of human nature and life-style. Boeotian poet Hesiod (8th–7th century BC) is our oldest source for both myths.

Taking into account his poems *Theogony* and *Works and Days* (with some help of presumably an Aeschylus' play *Prometheus Bound*) we will try to show how the descriptions of a pre-historical, paradisaical golden-age life, free of all toil and suffering, have found their counterpart in the stories expressing the role of “cultural gods” (such as Prometheus) which emphasise different aspects of human prehistory: the absence of technical skills and arts (*technai*), the lack of an appropriate knowledge

i Heath, J., *The Talking Greeks: Speech, Animals and Other in Homer, Aeschylus and Plato*, Cambridge 2005, s. 28.

and as a result a rather bestial lifestyle missing essential signs of humanity. Thus the conception of a continuing decline of human character is counterbalanced by the idea of gradual cultural progress, and these two views are not simply juxtaposed, but essentially ambiguous, forming the appropriate view on human history and nature together. As a result, the original myth of golden age can be by no means reduced to a simple regressive scheme – the golden-age is not purely positively valued and the history is not simply a continual fading of the ideal. And *vice versa*, the oldest Promethean myths do not represent simply the stories about a necessary progress – the profits of the cultural development are potentially dangerous, drawing apart men and the divine world-order and possibly causing the degeneration of human nature. We will then move our attention to Plato and his dialogue *Statesman* (in context with *Protagoras* and *Symposion*) to show that the old anthropological questions together with some of the traditional ambiguous responses played a crucial role also in later philosophical discourse, because they constituted a ground from which the later philosophical reflection organically evolved. In elaborating this particular theme we thus hope to be able to show, among others, a principal unity of so called pre-philosophical and philosophical thinking.

I. Hesiod on the origins of world-order and prehistory of humankind

We will start our enquiry about the origins of the cosmos and prehistory of the human race with Cronus: a god who gained his specific

importance in the texts of Hesiodⁱ and who is represented there as an essentially ambiguous character. In *Theogony* he represents a major adversary of Zeus: a primordial, cruel god, who turns against his own father by a terrible action of castration and then swallows his own children, while as a true tyrant being totally unable and unwilling to share his superior power with anybody else. Consequently he must be defeated so that the justice (δίκη) of Zeus' world-order, which would also incorporate other divine powers into world-rule, could be established. On the other hand, in *Works and Days* Cronus creates the first race of mortals, who were living blessed, god-like lives during the "Golden Age" of Cronus' government.ⁱⁱ

In the first part of this section, we will deal with this ambiguity. As for Cronus, his role is crucial for the transition from the primordial proto-cosmical phase of Ouranos to a fully developed Zeus' world-order. Taking his transitional role into account, he represents on the one hand a progressive force tending to cosmos (compared to Ouranos), on the other hand a primordial god of the phase when cosmos wasn't yet fully established (compared to Zeus). As for the way of life Cronus guarantees for mortals living in the world, we will try to show that not even the golden-age life-style is single-valued as it shares some characteristics not only with the divine life, but with the subhuman, animal life, too.

i Cronus represents just a marginal character in Homer: father of Zeus, arrested in the Underworld (*Il.* VIII, 478–481).

ii But does a discrepancy really exist between the tyrant as a cruel and enslaving autocrat and tyrant as a populist ensuring a blessed life for his people? We can find a brief but illuminating remark in (pseudo)Aristotelian *Constitution of Athenians* (16,7): the tyrannid of Peisistratus (second half of 6th century BC) was commonly labelled as "the golden age of Cronus" in the classical period.

1. Ambiguity of Cronus

1.1 Ouranos – head of the pre-cosmic family

In the *Theogony*, the cosmogonic process starts with three divine powers coming into being: Chaos, Gaia and Eros (*Theog.* 116 ff.)ⁱ. Chaos represents a counterpart of Gaia: it is a yawning chasm without any limits and restrictions, an absolute indeterminateness.ⁱⁱ The line of his descendants (divine powers like Night and Day, Erebus and Aither, Dreams, Fates, etc., *Theog.* 123–124, 211ff.) remains strictly unrelated to the genealogical line beginning with Gaia, we will leave it aside in our analysisⁱⁱⁱ. Gaia or the Earth represents solidity and fortress; she provides an unshaken seat for everything else to come into existence, eminently for other divine powers and deities. It is Gaia who gave birth, directly or indirectly, to the most important cosmological constituents and whose line established the physical world in its known form. The whole of the

i Abbreviations of sources referred to correspond to abbreviations used in Liddell's and Scott's Greek-English lexicon (Liddell, H. G., Scott, R., *A Greek-English Lexicon, with a revised supplement*, Oxford 19969). All translations will be my own.

ii This interpretation of Chaos is based also on close etymological and factual relations between *chaos* and *chasma* (West, M. L., viz Hesiod, *Theogony*, ed. Martin Litchfield West, Oxford 1966, s. 192–193) and on Hesiod's description of *chasma* in the passage of so called "topography of Tartaros" (*Theog.* 736–744).

iii The descendants of Chaos represent specific interpretative problems. It is doubtful even in the case of Zeus' rule whether or how these powers are subordinated to his world-rule. In some cases, it seems that they are liminal components of the cosmos which they help to establish negatively, as articulations of its limits. In this case the absolute generational independence of Chaos' line could represent its substantial resistance to ordering supreme cosmic power and this liminal character.

cosmos as we know it came to being by a constitutional process of generation and here comes the role of Eros. Eros is an active force of generation, a desire and a power to procreate, to give birth to a new being. The first primordial cosmic power is therefore a procreative one: in the first cosmic phase divine power means power to generate.

An important moment in the development of this power came when Gaia gave birth to Ouranos, the Sky. This descendant is special as he is equal to his mother (*Theog.* 126): he is not only the son of Earth, but he will also become her husband and the father of her children. Since then all elementary relations of procreative power are set: parental relations between progenitors and their descendants, marital relations between two beings who procreate in sexual conjunction. But in fact, Ouranos does not take up with the equality between him and his wife and he starts to act as the head of the rudimentary cosmic family.¹ From his parental and marital position he oppresses violently his wife and their children (Titans, Cyclops and *Hekatoncheiroi*): he doesn't allow the children to be born and keeps them inside the body of their mother Earth, who thus suffers (*Theog.* 154–158). There is no intention, no purpose of his violent behaviour – he just finds the children repulsive and enjoys the evil deed he is able to perpetrate against his wife. Ouranos was therefore exercising his procreative power as an instrument of self-confirmation in his role of husband and father. Here comes Cronus who will expand the nature of the cosmic power and use it as an instrument to govern the world.

i In Hesiod's poem, Ouranos is not once called a king or a ruler, not even in an allusion. The role of Ouranos as a father of cosmic family elaborates for example Vernant, J.-P., *L'Univers, les Dieux, les Hommes*, Paris 1999, p. 19–22. Much detailed analysis of this theme can be found in: Vernant, J.-P., *Théogonie et mythes de souveraineté en Grèce*, in: *Dictionnaire des mythologies*, II, ed. Yves Bonnefoy, Paris 1981, p. 491–495.

1.2 Cronus – first sovereign of the world

Cronus is not just the youngest of Gaia's children, but also the most terrible (δεινότατος παίδων, *Theog.* 138). What makes him so specific? Maybe we could find the answer in the epithet expressing the ambiguity of this divine figure: Cronus is ἀγκυλομήτης (*Theog.* 137), that is cunning and tricky, but also clever and crafty. He has μῆτις – prudence, i.e. the ability to consider, deliberate, think thoroughly, but his prudence is ἀγκύλος – biased, twisted, not pure and accurate. It is the capacity of μῆτις which enabled Cronus to make steps bellow to Ouranos and become Zeus' precursor. The story begins with an appeal from Gaia to their children, an appeal to change the unjust oppressive conditions, which Cronus is the only one able to respond to – it proves his capability to understand the present situation, to evaluate it and to realize the need and necessity for change. Furthermore, he had proven an ability to intrigue, to plan and schedule his future actions when he admitted and accepted as his own the intrigue (δόλος, *Theog.* 175) which Gaia had prepared.ⁱ Last but not least, he proved himself capable to fulfil the plans, to act according to what was planned, so that his behaviour was entirely intentional. None of these characteristics can be found in the case of Ouranos. It is significant that the castration, i.e. definitive deprivation of procreative power, is sufficient to get Ouranos out of the way – when he has lost his procreative

ⁱ Gaia acts against Ouranos and is capable of gaining some predominance over him because she is not just his wife, but also his mother – she still holds a privileged position of primordial divinity with supreme procreative power. This priority is also confirmed by the fact that Gaia generated some entities (the Mountains and the Sea) after Ouranos had already been born (*Theog.* 126–132).

power, he has lost all his power and a place for Cronus was open.

Cronus is not just a father and a husband, he is the king (βασιλεύς, *Theog.* 476) of the world and the imperial honour (βασιληϊς τιμή, *Theog.* 462) belongs to him. His power is not a primordial procreative power of the head of a family, but real political power of the world sovereign. Cronus didn't take up the position which belonged to Ouranos: he didn't marry Gaia. Purely genealogically speaking, Cronus will remind subordinated to divinities that he in fact (because of his act) dominates. Cronus' domination is a domination of ruler over his tributaries, the new hierarchy of power is independent on generational relations. Nevertheless, the older type of power is not completely annulled by the more advanced one. The primordial procreative power and generational relations didn't vanish, nor could they be totally suppressed. They still represent an important engine of the events to come and Cronus' inability to deal with these older forms of cosmic power will show how his μῆτις is twisted or inaccurate.

Although Cronus was warned that it meant a threat to his rule, he gave birth to offspring. He was trying to apply his prudence (φρονεῖν, *Theog.* 461) to avert this known risk, but at this precise moment his prudence showed its weakness, its deficiency. Firstly, he prevents his children from being born by swallowing them and didn't see that he was just repeating Ouranos' injustice (though on higher level, because contrary to Ouranos, Cronus' behaviour was conducted by a precise intention – to remain a king). Then he wasn't able to anticipate future risks and uncover intrigues against himself, so that he was deceived by his mother and wife and swallowed a stone instead of the youngest child, Zeus. Finally, Cronus lost the power of a sovereign because his understanding wasn't enough for such a post: he did not catch what was

going on by his twisted reason (οὐδ' ἐνόησε μετὰ φρεσίν, *Theog.* 488) and he was relieved by his hidden son.

Therefore there seem to be two major levels of Cronus' deficiency: first, he is not capable of distributing the power – for Cronus, the power of the sovereign fully coincides with the one person holding it. Zeus will be the first one able to construct the power differently, in a distributive manner, when he will include also other deities, his offspring included, in the government of the world.ⁱ Second, Cronus' prudence is not sufficient to grasp the future properly – it will be once more Zeus who will demonstrate intelligence oriented adequately to the future, to potential future risks and ruses and to their effective prevention.

1.3 Zeus – righteous king

As Cronus is not just an oppressive father, but a world-sovereign, a simple castration would not be enough to cast him out. The processes of establishing a new ruler and new world-order will be much longer and more complex. To accomplish this task, Zeus must confront Cronus' twisted prudence (once more he is named as ἀγκυλομήτης, *Theog.* 495) not only with force (βίη, *Theog.* 496), but also with new means and arts

ⁱ We can add another, closely related task of the world sovereign which Cronus failed at: to find a way to incorporate the primordial divinities and their powers in a more advanced cosmic order toward which they represent a permanent latent threat. Just as Cronus wasn't capable to settle adequately with his own children, as he wasn't capable of dealing properly with ancient deities and with the injustices of the past – he left his siblings, Cyclops and *Hekatoncheiroi*, hidden inside the Earth, waiting there for Zeus to liberate them and to assign to them a proper place in the world order.

(τέχναι, *Theog.* 496).

At first, Zeus applied a political providence unknown to Cronus when he liberated *Hekatoncheiroi* from their old prison and gave them a proper share on full divinity (the donation of ambrosia and nectar, *Theog.* 640). In return, he gained valuable help from them: their brutal force decided the fight against the Titans in favour of the Olympians and then their gift of thunderbolt would help Zeus to exert his supreme power of the sovereign. Zeus thus proved that he was able to acquire allies, to incorporate primordial divinities into his new order and to use their power for the benefit of his own world-order. This could also explain an apparently paradoxical fact that the poet uses exactly these old monsters to express the capacities by which Zeus surpasses the Titans and by which it is possible to win the battle against them: because Zeus' intelligent, ingenious mind (πραπίδες, νόημα, *Theog.* 656) liberated them from their prison, they will fight for Zeus "with all efforts of intellect and with sobriety in their hearts" (τῷ ἀτενεῖ τε νόῳ καὶ πρόφρονι θυμῷ, *Theog.* 661). Also during the Typhon incident Zeus proved that he was capable of coping with primordial forces, this time with Gaia who gave birth to a threatening monster. Without Zeus' focused attention and his immediate intervention, this monster would one day become a new ruler of the world (*Theog.* 836–837). It was not only Zeus' battle force, but also his "prompt comprehension" (ὀξὺ νοεῖν, *Theog.* 838) of this threat which saved the day.

i In *Theog.* 501–506, we are told that the thunderbolt was a gift from Cronus' brothers enchained by their father. There is an agreement among the commentators that *Hekatoncheiroi* are meant (see Hesiod, *Theogony*, ed. Martin Litchfield West, Oxford 1966, s. 303–304).

But the decisive moment comes for Zeus after all these battles. How to avoid Cronus' fate and establish new world-order forever? A decisive step is made by Zeus' first marriage with the goddess Metis who is "the most understanding of all gods and mortals" (πλεῖστα θεῶν εἰδυῖαν ἰδὲ θνητῶν ἀνθρώπων, *Theog.* 887). It is once more repeated that the ability of μῆτις, prudence, represents the crucial challenge for the world-sovereign: it was prophesied that it would be Metis who would give birth to a son who would become a new world sovereign. But Zeus found a way how to deal with this challenge: when the goddess became pregnant with him, he swallowed her, internalised her completely. And he did it by use of convincing, effectual discourses (αἰμυλίοισι λόγοισιν, *Theog.* 890) which overbalanced sheer wisdom (φρένες, *Theog.* 889) of the goddess. Contrary to Cronus' twisted prudence, Zeus has thus gained prudence in its pure form: from now he can understand and clearly distinguish what is good and what is bad (*Theog.* 900). And as a result, significantly from Zeus' head Athena was born, a goddess with the same strength and same intelligent deliberation as her father (ἴσον ἔχουσιν πατρὶ μένος καὶ ἐπίφρονα βουλήν, *Theog.* 896). So through *logos* Zeus enriched the craftiness of older divine generations with clear, long-sighted intellect – it is this combination the new world-order will be based on.

Finally, the nature of Zeus' rule remains to be discussed briefly. Zeus was invited to rule by other gods (*Theog.* 883) and then he ordered the inherent laws for the gods and distributed to all of them their spheres of activity (ἀθανάτοις διέταξε νόμους καὶ ἐπέφραδε τιμάς, *Theog.* 74; very similarly also *Theog.* 885). Everyone who deserved it obtained his proper place in the power structure of the world and gained an appropriate honour and position (τιμή), that is the law (θέμις) of Zeus's government (*Theog.* 390–396). So the unitary power of one world sovereign is

distributed by Zeus among many other divinities which have become to him co-executors of the divine order in the world and this order is till now not granted by a singular person, but based on a complex network of divine relations governed from a functional centre, represented by Zeus. Thus the world-order as a whole is much more stable, because it doesn't represent an unchangeable unitary monolith, but a flexible, variable structure which can seat also new divinities, to embrace them as new supports for the present order.

2. Ambiguity of human prehistory: myth of golden age and Promethean story

We will now look closer at the hesiodic poem *Works and Days*, and to some important aspects of the myth of races (*Op.* 110–201), which represents an extant account of five successive ages of mankind and where we find – articulated for the first time – the idea that at the very beginning, there was a golden race of mortals living god-like lives. As West remarks in his commentary to *Works and Days*,ⁱ Hesiod himself (unlike the subsequent tradition) does not speak of a golden *age* of human prehistory but of specific a golden *race* of mortals. However, the chronological aspect is none the less present and already important in Hesiod's account, because the chronological order of the races constitutes a narrative backbone of the story of five mortal generations. The golden race is historically the most distant from our present, iron race of mortals and it can thus represent its counterpart in many aspects. With this in

i Hesiod, *Works and Days*, ed. Martin Litchfield West, Oxford 1978.

mind, we will talk about “the golden age” as in the case of Hesiod, although he himself didn’t use that term.ⁱ

2.1 Human prehistory as a golden age: myth of the races

The so called myth of the races is told in Hesiod’s poem *Works and Days* (*Op.* 110–201) where it represents successive processes of establishing the fully human state. This interpretation (proposed by J.-P. Vernant)ⁱⁱ supposes that the variation of races does not represent five different, isolated states, but rather it stands for one whole mythical narrative with an integral meaning. The core of this meaning would be that the actual human situation with all its complexity could not be established by a single act, but a long and complex process is needed for its constitution.

The first, golden race of mortals (*Op.* 111–126) was living during Cronus age and these first mortals lived like gods (ὥστε θεοὶ ἔζωνον, *Op.* 112): they were insulated from all evils (κακῶν ἔκτοσθεν ἀπάντων, *Op.* 115), they knew no aging and illnesses (their life should represent god-

i When using the term “golden age”, the subsequent tradition didn’t invent an interpretation entirely foreign to Hesiod, but was rather suppressing one specifically hesiodic aspect of the story, that is the discontinuity of the processes of variation of races and the original hesiodic emphasis on the fact that the mortals of golden race were not just “humans living differently”, but essentially different mortal beings.

ii Basic theses of this structuralistic interpretation can be found in three of Vernant’s articles which became classical: Vernant, J.-P., *Le mythe hésiodique des races. Essai d’analyse structurale*, Vernant, J.-P., *Le mythe hésiodique des races. Sur un essai de mise au point*, and Vernant, J.-P., *Méthode structurale et mythe des races*. All three articles are aggregated in: Vernant, J.-P., Vidal-Naquet, P., *La Grèce ancienne, I: Du mythe à la raison*, Paris 1990, p. 13–110.

like ageless youth) and the earth provided them all nurture herself “automatically” (καρπὸν δ’ ἔφερε ζείδωρος ἄρουρα αὐτομάτῃ πολλόν τε καὶ ἄφθονον, *Op.* 117–118). Being nurtured by the “life-giving” (ζείδωρος) Earth, these mortals, as the story was traditionally understood, were not only vegetarian, but moreover were born not one from another, but directly from the Earth. As a consequence, the golden-age mortals didn’t need family (there is no mention of women or children among them) as they didn’t need to work, so there were no sexual relations and no social life among them. Their death and fate after death confirms their proximity to divinity: they were dying as if falling asleep and then they became above-ground daemons which are repeatedly denominated as “immortals” (*Op.* 122, 250, 253). We can conclude that the golden-age lifestyle represents pure existence: no need of human activity, no motivation for it. Golden mortals were so god-like that any problems and values connected with the pursuit of a better life (both in material and moral sense) didn’t yet exist for them – nature provided all that was needed and there is no trace of culture, neither material nor spiritual, among them.

The mortals of the second, silver race (*Op.* 127–142) were unlike the golden ones “in stature as in mind” (οὔτε φῆνιν ἐναλίγκιον οὔτε νόημα, 129) and they bear some new characteristics which made them dissimilar to gods and more like the later humans. First, these mortals are no longer nurtured directly by the Earth herself and consequently there is a basic social organisation that is the family (children are nurtured by their mother at parental house). The importance of this aspect is emphasized by the fact that childhood is extremely long. Second, moral deficiency already exists among these mortals: “they weren’t able to

refrain themselves from mutual arrogance and recklessness” (ὑβριν ἀτάσθαλον οὐκ ἐδύναντο ἀλλήλων ἀπέχειν, *Op.* 134–135). This formulation clearly implies an imperative to refrain from these wrongdoings, an imperative to live well was posed to mortals. This imperative doesn’t concern only horizontal relations of humans, but also vertical relations of mortals and gods. The mortals are no longer close to the gods simply by their nature, they had to constitute a proper relation to divinity by their own activity: they should honour the gods properly and sacrifice to them. The nature and origin of sacrifice will be described later in context of the Promethean myth, but it should be noted here that the sacrifice detaches human sphere from the divine one (mortals are no longer close to the gods simply by their nature, they had to constitute on their own a proper relation to divinity) as from the animal realm (the sacrifice finished the period of vegetarianism and animal flesh became a nurture; men are then differentiated from the animals by a specifically human imperative of *allofagia*). The inability of the silver mortals to satisfy new cultural and moral tasks was then a cause for Zeus to destroy the whole race. This means that somewhere between the golden and the silver age the world order changed: Cronus was replaced by Zeus. The unitary posthumous fate of these mortals (they have become underground daemons) confirms on one hand their proximity to the golden age mortals, on the other it is already closer to the posthumous fate of actual humans in the Underworld.

Zeus then became father of the third, bronze race of ash giants (*Op.* 143–155), which pushed to the extreme some of the characteristics which already existed in the silver age and distinguishing mortals from gods. The first sign of this extremity is their monstrous physical

appearance. Furthermore there is also their way of life which shows their state of mind: they knew only arrogance, violence and hardness of heart. They were fighting with themselves all the time and there is no sign of any relationship to divinity. Their whole life is subordinated to permanent warfare (which is stressed by the fact that they are always surrounded by bronze in diverse forms) and their distance not only from gods, but also from the fully developed cultural state of humanity, is expressed by the fact that they do not eat bread, and as a result didn't practise agriculture. Their death and posthumous fate confirms all that: they weren't destroyed by gods, but by themselves and then they vanished into the Underworld forever, completely anonymous without any memory and any glory.

In such an extreme state the process of establishing the distance of mortals from gods reached its farthest and some kind of *epistrophe*, a “turn-back”, started with the next race. The race of heroes (*Op.* 156–173) is a noble, literally divine, race (θεῖον γένος, 159) which is already “more just and better” (δικαιότερον καὶ ἄρειον, *Op.* 158) than its predecessors. These mortals are therefore denominated as demigods (καλέονται ἡμίθεοι, *Op.* 159–160). All this makes evident that the process of establishing humanity turned back to the gods. But this turn doesn't mean a simple return – it is not directed to simply re-establishing the pre-cultural golden age on earth, but is oriented to a fully cultural state of humanity with all its (moral and other) ambiguities, risks and hopes.

The lives and fates of heroes being well-known, Hesiod refers to them a little elliptically when he mentions the heroes known from the famous battles over Thebes and Troy. It was not necessary to stress that during this heroic past the social organisation existed and that the questions of justice and good life played a crucial role, as well as the imperative of

establishing an adequate connection with the gods by sacrifices and other divine honours. Hesiod immediately concentrates on the posthumous fate of heroes, which represents a crucial difference between them and all the preceding races. Unlike all their predecessors, heroes do not have a unitary, individually undifferentiated fate, but their afterlife depends on their own acts during life. These heroes who died in an undignified hassle for Oedipus' heritage followed the fate of ash giants and vanished into the Underworld, while those who were fighting for the honour of Greeks and for Zeus' justice in front of Troy are living a golden-age posthumous life: governed by Cronus they are living a blessed life on a land which yields without toil three times a year. As a consequence, the existential situation of these mortals isn't granted from the beginning by their nature but becomes variable, dependant on human activity. What was non-problematically established for the preceding races must now be obtained by the mortals themselves. The heroes and their fates make apparent that there are two extreme possibilities for humans: to live a good life, to die honourably and thus to approximate oneself to the gods (the memory of heroes preserved after their death is also a way how to transgress the limits of human mortality), or to fail in this task and to die and vanish completely in the anonymity of the Underworld. By this differentiation the moral imperative to live a good life finds an unprecedented motivation: when mortality does not mean unique fatality, humans live in permanent tension between the golden-age ideal of divine proximity as a limit of their efforts and the ash-giants' risk of keeping fighting for nothing, of not finding the appropriate way of living and of the abolishment.

The last iron race of humans (*Op.* 174–201) is the actual one (νῦν γὰρ γένος ἐστὶ σιδήρεον, *Op.* 176) and it represents a continual sequel to the race of heroes. Despite all the toil and suffering which fulfil our lives, the good isn't totally absent from us (μεμείξεται ἐσθλὰ κακοῖσιν, *Op.* 179), but it is present as something mortals have to struggle for: to arrange properly and on their own the social sphere, to establish adequately a relationship with the divine sphere and to constitute for oneself an individual fate by approximating oneself to divinity, i.e. by the effort of living a fully human good life. The whole myth of the races culminates in a series of expressive warnings in future tense: the risks of failure are important and it depends on us how we are able to cope with them. Whether the epistrophic movement which started with heroes will be accomplished or not is something essentially open, there is no “happy ending” which could be taken for granted. The moral of the story (in the context of the whole poem) consists in an appeal to live well and thus it is implicitly based on the assumption that such a possibility is in our powers – this represents an important counterpart to a certain pessimism presented by the poet at the end of the story.

To clarify what a fully human good life consists of and what is the nature of risks which it has to overcome, we will now turn to Promethean myth which represents an important Hesiod theme (*Theog.* 521–616; *Op.* 42–105) and which can be read as a counterpart to the myth of the golden age, articulating the question of human prehistory in a different, sometimes even opposite manner.

a. Human prehistory as animal life: Promethean myth

In the *Theogony* (*Theog.* 521–616), the Promethean myth is set into his cosmological context and plays an important role of elucidating the transition from Cronus’ to Zeus’ world order on an anthropological level. The whole story is presented as a conflict between Prometheus and Zeus, which is summed up as a contest in deliberation (ἐρίζετο [sc. Προμηθεύς] βουλὰς ὑπερμενέι Κρονίῳνι, *Theog.* 534) and the story of Prometheus trying to fool Zeus’ mind and of Zeus outsmarting Prometheus is the leading theme of the narrative. Prometheus’ titanic craftiness, resulting in so many evils for humans whom he intended to help, is constantly contrasted with Zeus’ prudence and providence and Prometheus is even called tricky or sly (ἀγκυλομήτης, *Theog.* 546), exactly as Cronus himself.ⁱ

In *Works and Days*, the Promethean myth constitutes a cohesive unity with the myth of the distant golden age. Also, the episodes of Promethean story can be interpreted as a successive process of establishing a fully human, social, cultural and moral sphere. In the traditional point of view, Prometheus is a “cultural hero” who has brought the mortals out of animality,ⁱⁱ yet his role is more ambiguous in Hesiod’s account. Before Prometheus’ intervention, the mortals lived without any evils, without toil, labour and illnesses (*Op.* 90–92) – such a description

ⁱ Also the other epithets denoting Prometheus’ cleverness are ambiguous, cf. ποικίλος αἰολόμητις (*Theog.* 511), ποικιλόβουλος (*Theog.* 521).

ⁱⁱ Vidal-Naquet, P., *Le myth platonicien du Politique, les ambiguïtés de l’âge d’or et de l’histoires*, in: *Le chasseur noir*, Paris 1981, p. 361–380, Mattéi, J.-F., *Platon et le miroir du mythe. De l’âge d’or à l’Atlantide*, Paris 1996.

reminds us immediately of the life-style of the golden age mortals.ⁱ But then Zeus has hidden away their daily bread which could otherwise be easily obtained without any toil (*Op.* 42–47) and the necessity of labour together with many evils affecting humans emerged. The change of the primordial blessed life is presented explicitly as a consequence of Prometheus' interference with Zeus' intentions.

The first episode of the story was written in Mecone when “mortal humans and gods were quarrelling” (ἐκρίνοντο θεοὶ θνητοὶ τ' ἄνθρωποι, *Theog.* 535). We know nothing about the causes or nature of this dispute, but in its literal sense this phrase means “mortals and gods were separating” and that is an accurate description of what had actually happened. The possibility of dispute originating and subsisting between mortals and immortals clearly presupposes some kind of original community between them, but this mutual relation changed with the intervention of Prometheus and his unequal division of sacrificial meat.

The sacrifice represents not only a means to transcend the distance separating humans from gods (a way to overcome the deficiency originated in dissolution of the primordial likeness of mortals and immortals), but also how to preserve it. The very necessity to sacrifice for the relationship with the gods could be established articulates and keeps the separation of human and divine sphere. Furthermore, the sacrifice represents a confirmation that mortals eat not only vesture, but also meat, so it is not just the Earth which provides them the nurture. This fact articulates also a distinction between the human and animal sphere: while

ⁱ In the narrative line of the poem the Promethean myth precedes the myth of five races, so strictly speaking the golden-age myth develops and backs up some of remarks and hints made previously in the Promethean myth.

it is common and natural among animals to eat individuals of the same species, this is forbidden in the case of humans, who can eat only animal flesh. It is a basic law of humanity established by Zeus (τόνδε ἀνθρώποισι νόμον διέταξε Κρονίων, *Op.* 276) and based on the fact that contrary to human sphere, “there is no justice among animals” (οὐ δίκη ἐστὶ μετ’ αὐτοῖς [sc. ἰχθύσι καὶ θηρσὶ καὶ οἰωνοῖς], *Op.* 278). This expression is crucial, because justice, laws and supposedly sociability are represented as essential marks of humanity. And we can conclude that sacrifice separates humans both from gods on the one hand and from animals on the other.

Prometheus’ gift of fire could be interpreted as a logical continuation of the story: how could a sacrifice be made without fire? Nonetheless, there’s one problematic moment, which is Zeus’ unwillingness to give the fire to humans, or more precisely actively hiding it from them. The motives of hiding, theft and subsequently Zeus’ great anger are repeated expressively in both of Hesiod’s poems (*Theog.* 562 ff., *Op.* 50 ff.). Is Zeus just mean to humans, or does it mean that the fire could represent some sort of danger for them? It seems that fire, as other Promethean novelties (sacrifice, and women in Hesiod and *technai* in subsequent tradition), is a very ambiguous gift for humans – potentially very helpful, but dangerous at the same time. Promethean gifts help mortals live more easily, but by their efficacy they can facilitate their life far too much. Present humans have to struggle for their lives; this struggle makes them human and their lives good ones. To imitate the golden-age, effortlessness by using technical utilities can lead to the corruption of a fragile human nature, which is an inherent risk hidden in all cultural profits. To clarify further this statement, we will make a short excursion

to (presumably) Aeschylus' play *Prometheus Bound*.ⁱ

In this play, Prometheus himself asserts that the gift of fire represents a starting point of human cultural skills (ἀφ' οὗ γε πολλὰς ἐκμαθήσονται τέχνας, *Pr.* 254), many of which he will name later as his gifts for humans (*Pr.* 442–468, 478–506). These gifts of *technai* are essential for establishing the human sphere as cultural.ⁱⁱ Above all, Prometheus proclaims himself to be the one who made humans intelligent and gave them reason (ἔννοους ἔθηκα καὶ φρενῶν ἐπηβόλους [sc. βροτοῦς], *Pr.* 444). Then he taught them practical skills needed to build houses and a knowledge of the celestial phenomena enabling orientation in the cycles of nature. In addition, there came mathematics and written language, and then skills of using animals for work – clear signs that humans had become superior to them –, and in the end, the art of sailing. Later (*Pr.* 476–506), Prometheus' added medicine, prophecy and metalworking on the list and ended with the imperial conclusion: “All *technai* came to mortals from Prometheus.” (πᾶσαι τέχναι βροτοῖσιν ἐκ Προμηθέως, *Pr.* 506)

As magnificent as it seems to be in its effects, Prometheus' primary gift of fire to mortals is evaluated by the chore as a big mistake overseen by Prometheus (οὐχ ὀρθῶς ὅτι ἤμαρτες; *Pr.* 259–260). Nevertheless, Prometheus passionately agrees and even adds that he made

i Summary of (presently undecided) discussion about the authorship and the date of the play can be found in: Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, ed. A. J. Podlecki, Oxford 2005, Appendix I.

ii The same theme was elaborated later by Euripides in his *Suppliants*, where Theseus presents an encomium to a god who separated human life from disorder and bestiality first by implanting intelligence (ἡμῖν βίον ἐκ πεφυρμένου καὶ θηριώδους διεσταθμήσατο, πρῶτον μὲν ἐνθεῖς σύνεσιν, *Sup.*, 201–203) and subsequently by introducing different *technai*, many of them known already from Aeschylus' account (*Sup.*, 203–213).

this mistake deliberately (ἐκὼν ἐκὼν ἤμαρτον, οὐκ ἀρνήσομαι, *Pr.* 266), for he was convinced that by his gifts he has saved humans from sure destruction. His description of preceding, pre-historic human lifestyle (*Pr.* 442 ff.) reveals a bestial, pre-cultural life of men, which are compared to reasonless children, senseless dreamlike phantoms, or ants living directly in the earth, as were the ancestral humans inhabiting caves. So this is the Promethean point of view on the so called golden age when humans were living without labour and without the need of culture.

But it could be that this is just a partial view of a titanic god with a retorted mind.ⁱ As is the case in Hesiod's poems and also in Aeschylus play, Prometheus' acts are constantly opposed to Zeus providence and Prometheus is repeatedly exhorted to change his mind and to adapt it to new Olympian order.ⁱⁱ The prudence of Prometheus has its limits: he wants to help, but it ends problematically; he is not capable of anticipating adequately the future consequences of his present acts. That's what he professes himself, affirming that he made his mistake deliberately, but without anticipating the terrible nature of the punishment (*Pr.* 268–269).

It is then once more the chore who points out the nature of Prometheus' mistake, reproaching him the richness and efficiency of his gifts. Just after Prometheus had ended the long self-celebrating

i Many signs of this retortion were pointed out by A. J. Podlecki: Prometheus' extreme self-confidence, very inappropriate in his situation, his obstinacy, adverseness to all discussion, his harsh and arrogant dealings with Io and Hermes. Podlecki concludes: "It is as though the author of *Prometheus Bound* were deliberately trying to undo all the positive feelings that this amiable and familiar figure would have evoked in the audience." *op. cit.* p. 3.

ii E.g. *Pr.* 309 ff. (Okeanos), 472–474 (chore), 977 ff. (Hermes). And of course, it is highly suspicious that a Titan would really be able to definitively frustrate Zeus' plan.

enumeration of his gifts to humans, the chore appeals to him: “Don’t give to mortals benefits beyond measure.” (μή βροτοὺς ὠφέλει καιροῦ πέρα, *Pr.* 507) It seems that Prometheus had helped humans far too much for their own good. The chore refers to the principal problem with fire, *technai* and everything which facilitate human life: humans must work and strive for life on their own, because when they have their existence granted, arrogance and injustice inevitably follow. Toil and pains are necessary for humans, because they are the most effective means of learning how to live in accordance with the divine world order – that is the famous Aeschylus’ theme of πάθει μάθος, humans learning through suffering.ⁱ

Bearing this in mind, we can return to Hesiod’s story with a better understanding of its dynamics of harmonisation. Prometheus gave to humans animal flesh to eat, which Zeus counterbalanced by keeping the fire from them. Prometheus then stole the fire and gave to humans all the technical skills, which Zeus counterbalanced by the creation of woman, an essentially ambiguous gift for men, too. She was induced between humans as a response to Zeus trying to counterbalance this far too big advantage for humans and with her came many evils which torment the present human race (*Theog.* 590–601).ⁱⁱ The emergence of woman implies

i It is very well possible that this theme was presented also in the story of Prometheus himself, who could have changed his mind before being liberated in *Prometheus Unbound*. Such an interpretation of the remaining fragments of this play was elaborated by Eirik Vandvik, *The Prometheus of Hesiod and Aeschylus*, Oslo 1943, in: *Skrifter utgitt av Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo*, II. Historisk-filosofisk Klasse, 1942, No. 2, Oslo 1943.

ii When Pandora was created, Zeus was able to bring her at a place “where gods and humans were dwelling” (ἐξάγαγ’ ἔνθα περ ἄλλοι ἔσαν θεοὶ ἢδ’ ἄνθρωποι, *Theog.* 586), which corresponds with the situation at Mecone before the sacrifice.

many important and complex changes to the human situation. The first one is closely related to the sacrifice, eating meat and the fire: woman as a mother replaces the Earth in the role of the primordial nourisher – it is up to her to preserve the family hearth, in the pragmatic as in the symbolic sense. Furthermore, man-woman relationships represent an elementary source of sociability, because the creation of woman means the origin of the family. This opens entirely new problems in the human sphere – man doesn't work just for himself, he has to win bread also for his wife and descendants (*Theog.* 592–599). Procreation enables a prolongation and preservation of the profits gained during life even after death through children or the familial genealogical line. It could also be linked with the motif of memory, so important in the myth of the races: it is the role of offspring to preserve the memory of their ancestors, as it is only in the collective memory of society where the good and heroic men can survive in the form of poetical narrations, like the heroes from Troy.ⁱ As such, procreation represents an essential possibility for mortals to transcend the limits of their mortality, to prolong individual life after inevitable death.

This could be one of the notions of *hope* which is stressed in Hesiod's account as a force induced in the human world by woman (*Op.* 96–98). Also in *Prometheus bound*, Prometheus tells the chore he has liberated mortals from death by “blind hopes” which started to live

ⁱ This could be one of the notions of hope, which is stressed in Hesiod's account (*Op.* 96–98): the procreation. The theme of hope occurs in exactly the same context in *Prometheus bound*: Prometheus tells the chore he could liberat mortals from death by “blind hopes” which started to live together with man (*Pr.* 248–250). And the chore's reply is highly ambiguous, maybe ironic, maybe not: “What a great benefit you gave to mortals!” (*Pr.* 251).

together with man (*Pr.* 248–250). Chore’s reply is highly ambiguous, maybe ironic, maybe not: “What a great benefit you gave to mortals!” (*Pr.* 251) So even if woman has brought to men many evils, once women are here, to ignore them is not a solution (*Theog.* 602–612). A terrible death is waiting for a man free of family, there is no hope for him in such a choice: without a descendant he will simply vanish as never existed, his property and possession blasted apart, his lifelong efforts lost in vain, as in the case of the ash giants (*Theog.* 604–607). In fact, the ultimate evil consists not in a wife, but in bad offspring which would mean the end of all mortal hopes given to men by the procreation.

The creation of woman thus seems to be functionally analogous to the establishment of the sacrifice: at the same time it separates humans from gods and their original divine golden-age lifestyle and it opens a way of surpassing this distance without annulling it.

3. Conclusions

We have tried to show that the question of the prehistory of mankind couldn’t be reduced to a simple formula that the myth of the golden age expresses an entirely positive, ideal vision of human prehistory (and understands the development to the present state as a decline), while the Promethean myth a purely negative one (understanding the development as a progress). We were able to detect four main areas of ambiguities: Firstly, if labour, toil and effort function as a prevention of deterioration of human nature, then the golden-age way of life is in itself unstable and condemned to an early end and the means helping to facilitate mortal life and to overcome human deficiencies do not deserve a purely positive evaluation either. Secondly, if *technai* and cultural skills constitute human

sphere as different from nature and so represent truly human activity, then a golden-age life-style is lacking something essentially human and the Promethean myth can be read as a progression from animal to a fully human, cultural state. Both of these propositions point to a more general conclusion: life without activity motivated by a deficiency, without striving for good, is not fully human. Thirdly, the area of problems is structurally the same as the second: social relations and human sociality constitute together with *technai* human sphere as different from nature, they form an essential part of human life. The social life is hard and thus life without family can be seen as more simple, but not so unambiguously as to be better. And lastly, it is in this striving for good and in the complexity of different social relationships where human variety and individuality can be properly manifested by differentiating particular human fates. To be good means in a human context to become good personally, to overcome the deficiency of good by our specifically human means – it is this effort which the nature of justice, laid out as a distinctive sign of humanity, consists of.

While it is true that the pre-cultural, golden-age way of life represents many existentially as morally supreme values (close partnership between mortals and gods; nature instead of culture, which means a simple, harmonic life without excesses based on abundance), it is important to evaluate carefully the status of this “ideal”. Prehistory of humanity represents a god-like life in both aspects: a blessed life without deficiencies, but also a pre-cultural animal state. The life of humans in Zeus’ world order is thus stigmatized by many deficiencies, but also enriched by values originated in an effort to overcome them deliberately and actively. From the point of view of an actual human situation, both

aspects of prehistory are inhuman, because they lack essential signs of constituted humanity. The prehistory of humanity therefore represents a highly ambiguous ideal which does not represent a model for simple imitation, because imitating the pre-human way of life would be inappropriate in respect of what humanity actually means for us here and now. Nevertheless, this ideal can orientate our lives because it expresses by comparison some of the deficiencies we have to overcome using our own powers. And it is in this continual struggle for a better life that we are become what we are: humans.

II. Plato: philosophical reception of traditional ambiguities

The themes of the myth of golden-age and of Promethean gifts also played a crucial role in later philosophical reflections and anthropological questions. The above-mentioned ambiguities of history conceived as a decline and as a progress constitute an ever-present theme in the Greek tradition of thinking, which was taken over by the subsequent Latin traditionⁱ and which has never, I believe, completely disappeared from European philosophy and culture. There are innumerable different variations on the theme of a primordial “lost paradise” and its adversary, the story of a cultural progress from animality to humanity. As for Plato, he is not just one thinker among many others who have treated these subjects. He incorporates these traditional themes into broader context of his own cosmological, anthropological and

i For an exhaustive survey of relevant sources see Lovejoy, A. O., Boas, G., *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity*, Baltimore 1935.

political philosophy and in such a frame that the question concerning the status of “ideals” or “models” (such as the paradigmatic social organization depicted in *Republic*, the description of human prehistory in *Laws*,...) came out with unprecedented distinctness and persistence. For the purpose of the present paper, we will try show how he worked out the traditional anthropological subjects chiefly in a famous myth in dialogue *Statesman* (Plt. 268e–274e), with regard to other dialogues, namely *Symposion* and *Protagoras*. In this rich and complex platonic myth we will focus on the motives which are important to our own anthropological theme (so we leave aside the cosmological subjects, as the different movements of the world) and will try to propose an interpretation according to which Plato’s myth articulates anew the traditional, already hesiodic ambiguities.

Plato’s *Statesman* – cosmological myth

The proposed interpretation, as necessarily selective as it is, is based on the traditional reading of the platonic myth, distinguishing two different cosmic periods.ⁱ The guest from Elea differentiates two world-orders on a cosmological (and partially metaphysical) level. Moreover, he talks about two different types of divine cosmic government, which have specific consequences for the life of mortals in differently constituted

ⁱ Some modern scholars argued that there are three periods presented in the myth. For this interpretation see Brisson, L., *Interprétation du myth du Politique*, in: *Reading the Statesman. Proceedings of the III. Symposium Platonicum*, ed. Christopher Rowe, Sankt Augustin 1995, s. 349–363, and Rowe, C., *Plato, Statesman, Edited with an Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, Warminster 1995.

world. The actual human life is contrasted with the life of mortals at the time of Cronus holding the power (ἐπὶ τῆς Κρόνου δυνάμεως, *Plt.* 271c) and the relationship with ancient myths which deal with Cronus' reign as well (τὴν βασιλείαν ἣν ἤρξε Κρόνος, *Plt.* 269a) is explicitly expressed. This stress laid on the difference of governments and on the corresponding anthropological facts is not at all surprising, taking into account the theme of the dialogue and the contextual role of the myth itself (it is supposed to explain the role and nature of the human statesman). Furthermore, opening of the myth with the elements of older tradition seems to justify our efforts to find and elaborate possible relations between the hesiodic and platonic account.

1. Cronus' government

During Cronus' cosmical period, the world was completely and in all its details governed by one divine sovereign: the god himself controlled the whole rotation of the cosmos and in the same way at every particular place (τότε γὰρ αὐτῆς πρῶτον τῆς κυκλίσεως ἦρχεν ἐπιμελούμενος ὅλης ὁ θεός, ὥς δ' αὖ κατὰ τόπους ταὐτὸν τοῦτο, *Plt.* 271d). The existence of other divinities is also mentioned: these anonymous gods governed their places together with the supreme god (οἱ κατὰ τοὺς τόπους συνάρχοντες τῷ μεγίστῳ δαίμονι θεοί, *Plt.* 272e). These divine powers represent a strictly unified hierarchy where the particular elements have no autonomy on their own. Although we are told at first that particular daemons take care of particular species of living beings as shepherds (τὰ ζῷα κατὰ γένη καὶ ἀγέλας οἷον νομῆς θεοὶ διειλήφεσαν δαίμονες, *Plt.* 271d), it is just a way through which the god himself "shepherds" humans and stands near to them (θεὸς ἔνεμεν αὐτοὺς [sc.

ἀνθρώπους] αὐτὸς ἐπιστατῶν, *Plt.* 271e). In the end, it is the supreme god himself who is the one “divine shepherd” (ὁ θεῖος νομεύς, *Plt.* 275c) in the world. The same structure of complete subordination can be observed at the end of this cosmical period, when the divine power retires from the world: he retires completely and as a unitary whole (*Plt.* 272e). So it seems that the anonymous daemons represent almost “mechanical converters” of a single divine power to the plurality inherent to the world. The text refers to uniform and unidirectional instrumentality of one supreme power and it is thus not possible to find here a complex system of diverse divine powers known from the world governed by Olympians. All this reminds us of Cronus as he is represented by Hesiod: a unique and absolute ruler with undivided sovereignty power, who does not leave room for any conflicts or tensions between different divine powers and during whose reign the divine and human sphere stood in close proximity.

Also in the matter of human way of life under Cronus’ rule, the platonic myth embodies practically the same ambiguities we have been able to find in Hesiod.ⁱ The god himself taking care of mortals, it seems that they are very close to the divine sphere. But already the metaphor of shepherding chosen by Plato makes clear that in relation to this god, the humans seem rather like animals: “The god himself was shepherding humans and was standing near them, just as now the humans, other living

ⁱ This similarity was already pointed out by Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Valeurs religieuses et mythiques de la terre et du sacrifice dans l’Odyssée*, in: Vidal-Naquet, P., *Le chasseur noir*, Paris 1981, p. 39–68. Nevertheless Plato’s commentators are usually proposing interpretation according to which Cronus’ period is to represent simply the ideal of golden age as a lost paradise, exactly as it (supposedly) was the case with Hesiod. Ch. Rowe’s commentary represents a typical example of this approach, see Rowe, C., *Plato, Statesman, Edited with an Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, op. cit., p. 187.

beings but more divine, shepherd different kinds of animals inferior to them.” (θεὸς ἔνεμεν αὐτοὺς αὐτὸς ἐπιστατῶν, καθάπερ νῦν ἄνθρωποι, ζῷον ὃν ἕτερον θειότερον, ἄλλα γένη φαυλότερα αὐτῶν νομεύουσι, *Plt.* 271e).ⁱ As in the hesiodic account, everything what is needed is provided to mortals by itself, so to say “automatically” (πάντα αὐτόματα γίγνεσθαι τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, *Plt.* 271d). In the language of the platonic myth, the daemons are fully competent to cover by themselves all particular needs of their wards (αὐτάρκης εἰς πάντα ἕκαστος [sc. δαίμων] ἐκάστοις ὧν οἷς αὐτὸς ἔνεμεν, *Plt.* 271d–e). Later on, the abundant nurture for men is said to have been provided by Earth herself, once more “automatically”, without agriculture (καρποὺς δὲ ἀφθόνους εἶχον ἀπὸ τε δένδρων καὶ πολλῆς ὕλης ἄλλης, οὐχ ὑπὸ γεωργίας φρομένους, ἀλλ’ αὐτομάτης ἀναδιδούσης τῆς γῆς, *Plt.* 272a) and rather by pasture. It was thus a vegetarian way of life: no violence existed among different animal species and we are told that they didn’t eat each other (*Plt.* 271e). So in hesiodic terms, these humans were living in the period before sacrifice, before Zeus declared animals as a nurture for humans and thus separated them (on the base of justice which exists in human sphere) from purely animal state.

The following point represents the absence of procreation and social life during Cronus’ period. The guest tells us that the humans were born directly from the Earth and no generic relations existed among them

i P. Vidal-Naquet made an interesting observation: lexical means used by Plato coincide with the duality of Cronus’ pre-political and Zeus’ political period. While the first one is depicted with pastoral vocabulary, the second uses many political expressions: „Au vocabulaire pastoral utilisé pour décrire le temps de Cronos succède, pendant le cycle de Zeus, un vocabulaire politique.“ (Vidal-Naquet, P., *Le myth platonicien du Politique, les ambiguïtés de l’âge d’or et de l’histoire*, in: *Le chasseur noir*, Paris 1981, p. 373.)

(*Plt.* 271a). Subsequently, there were no women and children and therefore no families, no society, no political establishments (πολιτεΐαι, *Plt.* 271e). All these substantially human elements were absent in Cronus' period (τὰ μὲν τοιαῦτα ἀπῆν πάντα, *Plt.* 272a) and this entire lack of sociality is explicitly contrasted with the abundance of material resources (*Plt.* 272a). Compared to Hesiod, this contrasting represents an important step in making the mentioned ambiguities explicit. Furthermore, there is one more related element which was lacking during Cronus' government: being free of offspring, these mortals had no memory (ἐκ γῆς γὰρ ἀνεβιώσκοντο πάντες, οὐδὲν μεμνημένοι τῶν πρόσθεν, *Plt.* 272a). We are able to gain some knowledge about them and about the existence of the preceding cosmic period only thanks to later sequence of our own type of humanity, which is gifted with memory and which has found a way how to preserve this knowledge in the form of old myths, which are now often but wrongly disbelieved (ἀπεμνημονεύετο δὲ ὑπὸ τῶν ἡμετέρων προγόνων τῶν πρώτων [...], τούτων γὰρ οὗτοι κήρυκες ἐγένονθ' ἡμῖν τῶν λόγων, οἱ νῦν ὑπὸ πολλῶν οὐκ ὀρθῶς ἀπιστοῦνται, *Plt.* 271a–b). Letting aside that we find here a very high, and for Plato, an unusually explicit estimation of myths, it seems that this means a clear sign of a certain superiority of humans from Zeus' period.

The lack of memory goes (as it is the case in the hesiodic account) hand in hand with total absence of posthumous fate, characteristic for the mortals of Cronus' period. In fact, they were born old-aged from the Earth (*Plt.* 271b), then they were growing younger until they became newborns and finally they simply vanished (*Plt.* 270e). This strange motive of humans being born old-aged can be found also in the hesiodic myth of races. In its an alerting finale, the inherent risk of iron age is revealed as the end of humanity (*Op.* 180–181); the old-aged

newborns than represent one sign among others that the end is coming, accompanying by a total collapse of all social relations and morality. If Plato chooses this specific moment as an emblematic sign characterizing human prehistory, it seems that he deliberately tries to draw attention to its essential ambiguity, i. e. that it is marked by ^{the} proximity not only to the divine, but also to the animal sphere. Other aspects of human life during Cronus's government correspond with such an interpretation. Because humans don't need to work, they have no promethean cultural skills. Remaining naked, they are dwelling all the time on meadows without need of houses, chatting with animals *Plt.* 272a–c). Their capability to communicate with animals is ambiguous *par excellence*: is it supposed to imply that animals disposed of human language, or just the opposite, that human language was reduced to animal voices? But it may be that at this period, the difference between human *logos* and animal voice wasn't established yet and it was that indistinctness that made the communication possible.ⁱ

2. Zeus' world order

The subsequent cosmic period is called the period of Zeus' rule and its constitution and correspondent way of life are just briefly mentioned by the guest affirming that it is the state we all know because it

ⁱ R. Sorabji deals with the question of a *logos* shared between humans and animals, claiming that articulated speech expresses the internal speech of the soul and that in the platonic tradition, such an internal speech exists in animal soul, too. Even if animals didn't have *logistikon* (*Smp.* 207a–c, *Rep.* 441a–b, *Leg.* 963e), the highest, specifically human part of the soul, they surely participate in *doxa* (*Tim.* 77a–c), based on the conversation the soul holds with itself (*Theait.* 189e–190a). Sorabji, R., *Animal Minds and Human Morals*, Ithaca, New York 1993.

characterizes our present situation (τόνδε δ' ὃν λόγος ἐπὶ Διὶ εἶναι, τὸν νυνί, παρὼν αὐτὸς ἥσθησαι, *Plt.* 272b). It is thus evident that during this cosmic period we do not deal with a world without gods or with divinity standing apart from the world and completely absent from it.ⁱ Even this world, the world Plato was living in, has its own divine generation: the Olympians. But the relation in which these gods stand to the world differs substantially from the case of Cronus' period with its unitary, undivided and undistinguished divine power. Their role is not to be shepherds, but rather instructors or educators of the human race.

When the total care of Cronus the shepherd ended, humans were exposed to all consequences of their imperfect nature, as all other animals. Animals have in majority an aggressive nature and humans, being much weaker and more defenceless, were oppressed by them (*Plt.* 274b–c). They were barely living and dying quickly without any skills or arts, without any knowledge of how to take care of themselves – all this is due to their origin in Cronus' period, when they didn't learn anything of this sort, simply because they didn't need to (ἀμήχανοι καὶ ἄτεχνοι κατὰ τοὺς πρῶτους ἦσαν χρόνους [...], πορίζεσθαι δὲ οὐκ ἐπιστάμενοί πω διὰ

ⁱ Some commentators defend this interpretation of Zeus' period in the myth of *Statesman*, e.g. Rowe, C., *Plato, Statesman, Edited with an Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, op. cit., namely p. 193 and 197. This interpretation is based on the description of the end of Cronus' rule, when the supreme god and subsequently all lower daemons let the world loose from their shepherd's custody (*Plt.* 272e). All following remarks about gods during the second cosmic period are then put aside as purely literally motives without any philosophical relevance. Nevertheless, such an interpretation seems to be far too anachronistic. Plato criticised traditional religiosity because its many philosophically problematic aspects, but we cannot find anywhere in the dialogues a conception of the world devoid of divinity and standing on its own or a notion of totally transcendental divinity not at all present in the world we are living in.

τὸ μηδεμίαν αὐτοὺς χρεῖαν πρότερον ἀναγκάζειν, *Plt.* 274c). Because humans were in such trouble caused by their weakness, divine gifts were provided to them: fire from Prometheus, *technai* from Hephaestus and his fellow craftsman, presumably Athena (*Plt.* 274c–d). These gifts were obtained from the gods together with necessary teaching and education (μετ’ ἀναγκαίας διδαχῆς καὶ παιδεύσεως, *Plt.* 274c).

Also in a platonic myth from dialogue *Protagoras* (*Prt.* 320c–323a), humans are at first presented as the weakest of all the animals: naked, unarmed and without shelter (τὸν δὲ ἄνθρωπον γυμνόν τε καὶ ἀνυπόδητον καὶ ἄστροτον καὶ ἄοπλον, *Prt.* 321c). When Prometheus saw them in such a condition, he was wondering about how to preserve their life and found a solution in stealing from Hephaestus and Athena their practical wisdom of the arts and fire, because without fire no other skills could be acquired and properly used (κλέπτει Ἡφαίστου καὶ Ἀθηνᾶς τὴν ἔντεχνον σοφίαν σὺν πυρί – ἀμήχανον γὰρ ἦν ἄνευ πυρὸς αὐτὴν κτητὴν τῷ ἢ χρησίμῳ γενέσθαι, *Prt.* 321d). Through these gifts humans not only gained practical wisdom (ἢ περὶ τὸν βίον σοφία, *Prt.* 321d), but also started to share a divine portion (ὁ ἄνθρωπος θείας μετέσχε μοίρας, *Prt.* 322a), because the arts obtained were at first apportioned to gods only. This relationship with divine sphere separated humans from animals – humans, and humans only, started to worship gods (διὰ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ συγγένειαν ζῶων μόνον θεοὺς ἐνόμισεν, *Prt.* 322a). Later on, humans evolved and learnt many other *technai* and skills on their own, including articulated speech (322a). This is a crucial element: without direct divine control, humans have to acquire certain autonomy in practical skills and some capability to evolve further by use of their own powers. Instead of direct fulfilment of all human needs, gods now provide just an education and humans have to learn how to fulfil their needs on their own.

All these selected elements could be read as strong allusions to the older tradition represented by Hesiod or in *Prometheus Bound* where pre-historical, animal state of humanity precedes the cultural progress due to divine help. This progress is now explicitly related with prudence, wisdom and human language and is based on the necessity to fulfil our needs and to overcome autonomously our deficiencies. There remains one new moment to be clarified shortly, namely the role of the gods Hephaestus and Athena. It is in Homeric *Hymn on Hephaestus* where appears a brief sign of tradition described conventionally as a rival to the Promethean one.ⁱ In a short invocation, Hephaestus together with Athena are named as the gods who thought of “glorious crafts” (ἀγλαὰ ἔργα, *h.Vulc.* 2) for to men living previously like animals without houses in mountain caves (οἱ [sc. ἄνθρωποι] τὸ πάρος ἄντροις ναιετάασκον ἐν οὐρεσιν ἥντε θῆρες, *h.Vulc.* 3–4). The Pplatonic reception of this tradition found in the *Statesman* and in the *Protagoras* seems to indicate that this version could be understood as a complementary, not necessarily a rival to the Promethean one and, more importantly, that both versions could be understood as describing one and the same process, that is the establishment of the human sphere as a cultural and progressive (capable of self-evolution).

Cultural progress means also that a family, developed social order and political organisation arose in the human sphere. Such a development (implied in the *Statesman* by referring to our present experience) is

ⁱ This hymn is usually supposed to be one of the oldest in the collection and this would date it back to 7th century BC. On the supposed date of the text and on relations between Promethean and Hephaestean tradition, see *Homeric hymns, Homeric apocrypha, Lives of Homer*, ed. Martin L. West, Cambridge, London 2003.

recorded in more detail more in the *Protagoras*. After Prometheus gave practical skills to humans, they still weren't not strong enough strong to beand separated from animals who continued to be a threat for to them. Productive skills (ἡ δημιουργικὴ τέχνη, *Prt.* 322b) helped men to find their nurture, but with respect to fight against animals, they were yet substantially deficient (πρὸς δὲ τὸν τῶν θηρίων πόλεμον ἐνδεής, *Prt.* 322b). What these humans lacked was anthe ability to live together in cities, which goes hand in hand with an ability to defend themselves and their homes (πολιτικὴν γὰρ τέχνην οὐπω εἶχον, ἥς μέρος πολεμική, *Prt.* 322b). As humans were trying to live together to be safe from animals, they even started to found cities (ἐζήτουν δὴ ἀθροίζεσθαι καὶ σφύζεσθαι κτίζοντες πόλεις, *Prt.* 322b) Bbut they were wronging each other and were incapable of sociability, lacking necessary skills (ἡδίκουν ἀλλήλους ἅτε οὐκ ἔχοντες τὴν πολιτικὴν τέχνην, ὥστε πάλιν σκεδαννύμενοι διεφθείροντο, *Prt.* 322b). Thus Zeus, by the hand of Hermes, gave to humans two gifts enabling the development of social skills: a decency and a justice (ἄγοντα εἰς ἀνθρώπους αἰδῶ τε καὶ δίκην, *Prt.* 322c). Since they became shared by all men, the cities could be established (πάντες μετεχόντων· οὐ γὰρ ἂν γένοιτο πόλεις, εἰ ὀλίγοι αὐτῶν μετέχοιεν, *Prt.* 322d). From now on, to not being able to participate in these basic social values means an exclusion from human society, that is Zeus' law (τὸν μὴ δυνάμενον αἰδοῦς καὶ δίκης μετέχειν κτείνειν ὡς νόσον πόλεως, *Prt.* 322d).

We have also seen that also in the hesiodic account, that Zeus established an order of justice among gods (*Theog.* 74, 885) and than differentiated humans from animals on the basis of justice which exists only in human sphere (*Op.* 276–278). A crucial role of decency and justice is stressed by Hesiod also in the warning finale of the myth of the

racess: the threatening end of humanity in our iron age is characterized by the lack of precisely these two values (δίκη δ' ἐν χερσὶ καὶ αἰδῶς οὐκ ἔσται, *Op.* 192–193, cf. also 199–200). For Plato, it seems that a complex social and political constitution of the human sphere represents an essential part of human nature separated both from direct divine presence and control as from animality.

3. Model and its imitation

During Zeus' period, it is imposed to mortals to imitate the cosmos and to conform ourselves theselves to its situation (ἀπομιμούμενα καὶ συνακολουθοῦντα τῷ τοῦ παντὸς παθήματι, *Plt.* 274a). There is a strong correspondence, stressed repeatedly by the elean guest, between the actual cosmic order and the constitution of our human sphere. As the cosmos is now without direct divine control, so are the humans, being born and living under their own guidance as far as they can (καθάπερ τῷ κόσμῳ προσετέτακτο αὐτοκράτορα εἶναι τῆς αὐτοῦ πορείας, οὕτω δὴ κατὰ ταῦτά καὶ τοῖς μέρεσιν αὐτοῖς δι' αὐτῶν, καθ' ὅσον οἶόν τ' ἦν, φύειν τε καὶ γεννᾶν καὶ τρέφειν προσετάττετο ὑπὸ τῆς ὁμοίας ἀγωγῆς, *Plt.* 274a). After Cronus had released the helm of the world, his absolute and unitary power was divided between many different and even conflicting divine powers of the Olympian generation and so the humans are left to establish their social and political organisation which has to incorporate many different and often conflicting needs, demands, desires and ideas of how the human society should function. Nevertheless, as we have seen, humans are not left without any relations with the divine sphere, they dispose of diverse “instructions” from the gods. With this education in mind, men can take care of themselves and direct themselves, exactly as it

is in the case of cosmos (δι' ἐαυτῶν τε ἔδει τήν τε διαγωγὴν καὶ τὴν ἐπιμέλειαν αὐτοῦς αὐτῶν ἔχειν καθάπερ ὅλος ὁ κόσμος, *Plt.* 274d).ⁱ Moreover, we have already remarked that actual humans remember how it was during the preceding cosmical period; this wouldn't be possible without the world itself remembering the preceding order of direct divine control and trying on his own and by his own forces to preserve this order, i.e. to follow the instructions of Cronus, its divine father (ἐπιμέλειαν καὶ κράτος ἔχων αὐτὸς τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ τε καὶ ἐαυτοῦ, τὴν τοῦ δημιουργοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἀπομνημονεύων διδασχὴν εἰς δύναμιν, *Plt.* 273a–b).

So as humans have their divine guide-lines from the gods of the Olympian generation, which helps them to conform their lives to a new cosmic condition, the cosmos as a whole has its instructions from the supreme god of the preceding phase characteristic by the direct divine control. This “cosmic memory” means that the cosmos preserves a vivid relation with its originⁱⁱ and Cronus' world-rule is presented as an ideal which the world is trying to imitate even in its changed actual situation. More distant the cosmos is from the previous cosmic period, more chaotic

i M. Miller proposed an interesting cosmological interpretation that the world is not just a living, but also a rational being – only as such he can actively imitate his preceding movement from Cronus' period. “Divine gifts” or “instructions” represent a rational compound of our actual world, which enables it to preserve a relation with his divine origin. See Miller, M., *The Philosopher in Plato's Statesman*, Hague, Boston, London 1980, p. 48–51.

ii The motive of “cosmic memory” could be found also in the hesiodic account, but it plays there a bit different role: the older gods have to be incorporated into the new world-order for they were not its threats, but supporters (the case of *Hekatoncheiroi*, *Theog.* 640 ff., Styx, *Theog.* 383–403 or Hecate, *Theog.* 411–428), or if impossible, they have to be minimized in their powers and be permanently guarded (the case of the defeated Titans, imprisoned in the Underworld, *Theog.* 726–735).

and less viable it becomes (*Plt.* 273b–d). Thus the plurality of divine powers in the world and their irreducibility to one single power, i.e. this indisputable contribution of Zeus in the hesiodic account, represents now for Plato also something inherently problematic. The diversified multiplicity of Zeus's world-order is capable of constituting the cosmos just as long as it can also maintain also a certain unity which originates in the absolute unity of Cronus' government.

In a way, the unity of Cronus' sovereign power represents an ideal point in the constitution of the human sphere as well, in a sense that the ideal of unity should guide the structuring of complex human relations.ⁱ The sovereign political power should aim to establish and to maintain a unity in the multiplicity and complexity of human community and thus Cronus' world-order, precisely in this respect of unity, can represent an ideal vanishing-point for human social and political efforts. Humans have to bear in mind the ideal or model of unity and struggle to approximate to it their actual situation. Nevertheless, it is this very struggling, and not the fulfilment of the ideal, which represents the core of humanity in new Zeus' new world-order. In this respect, Plato does not diverge from the *esprit* of the hesiodic account. In actual cosmic conditions, it would be neither possible nor desirable or adequate to establish in full the life-style known from human prehistory and conform not to the present one, but to the preceding cosmic period. The task for mortals is not a return to the pre-cultural state, in a way close to divinity

ⁱ The whole myth about the divine shepherd is supposed to throw light on a previously given account (*Plt.* 267a–c) of the human politician or king (βασιλεύς, πολιτικός, *Plt.* 274e). The described example of Cronus should enlighten weak points in this account and enable to see more distinctively clearly the human politician himself (*Plt.* 275b).

but at the same time comparing men to animals (such a primitivistic ideal guided for example the efforts of cynics). We should follow our specific human nature and develop corresponding cultural values: intelligence and knowledge, arts and technical skills, morality and sociability. Also our relationship to the divine sphere must be established adequately towards the new cosmic order, which means by our specifically human means of sacrifices and other divine honours practised in established cults.

4. Life in Cronus' and Zeus' period: which one is more blessed?

When we consider the above-mentioned aspects, it is not surprising that when it comes to a comparison of the golden-age life with the actual one, i. e. a question which one of them is more blessed (κρίναι δ' αὐτοῖν τὸν εὐδαιμονέστερον ἄρ' ἂν δύναί τε καὶ ἐθελήσειας; *Plt.* 272b), no simple and definitive answer can be found. Young Socrates, although following carefully the whole argument (*Plt.* 271c), is not able to respond (*Plt.* 272b) and even the guest himself decides to leave this question aside (*Plt.* 272d). Nevertheless, he articulated a criterion which could be used to judge properly the human prehistory: we should ask what kind of knowledge these people aspired to and which needs motivated their speech (ποτέρως οἱ τότε τὰς ἐπιθυμίας εἶχον περὶ τε ἐπιστημῶν καὶ τῆς τῶν λόγων χρείας, *Plt.* 272d). The guest then distinguished two main possibilities: either they were directed to food, drink and dubious stories (*Plt.* 272c–d),ⁱ or to gain wisdom and to

ⁱ We must admit with Rowe that it is hard to see precisely which stories (διελέγοντο [...]) μύθους οἷα δὴ καὶ τὰ νῦν περὶ αὐτῶν λέγονται, *Plt.* 272c–d) the guest is referring to. But it seems clear that they accompanied the indulgence in eating and drinking, so their content is supposed to be correspondingly un-philosophical. (See Rowe, C., *Plato, Statesman*, *Edited with an Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, op. cit., p. 194.)

philosophy (εἰς συναγυρμὸν φρονήσεως, ἐπὶ φιλοσοφίαν, *Plt.* 272c). It would be this second possibility that would grant them supreme blessedness or happiness (*Plt.* 272c).

In fact, it is not possible to choose between these two possibilities and to judge the quality of the golden-age life, simply because we don't have enough relevant information at our disposal (*Plt.* 272d). Plato formulating such a question and leaving it without an unambiguous response is referring, I believe, to the essentially ambiguous nature of human prehistory, where the distinctions between gods, men and animals were not as yet constituted and where it is thus impossible to decide whether the mortals were god-like or just animal. However, there are some clues as to a possible platonic response. We have seen that prudence, intelligence and reason come together with the necessity to overcome our mortal deficiencies on our own and of course, they are impossible without the existence of memory. If none of them existed during Cronus's period, it is difficult to claim the existence of philosophy. Further on, there is another indication that pre historical mortals represented men without philosophy: as they were born directly from the Earth, no erotic desire existed among them. Eros as a desire to surpass our mortality is substantially related with Zeus' world-order and if we take *Symposion* into account, it becomes clear that it is substantially related with the existence of philosophy, too.

Although Socrates' speech (repeating an account narrated to him by Diotima, *Smp.* 201d) is directed to Eros himself, a major part of the analysis is relevant for a desiring human, because Eros as a subject of love (τὸ ἐραστὸν, *Smp.* 204c) represents a model of all men in love (*Smp.* 204c). Now the one "who desires necessarily desires something he lacks

and reversely, if he doesn't lack it, he doesn't desire it" (τὸ ἐπιθυμοῦν ἐπιθυμεῖν οὐκ ἐνδεές ἐστιν, ἢ μὴ ἐπιθυμεῖν, ἐὰν μὴ ἐνδεές ᾖ, *Smp.* 200a–b). In the case he desires something he doesn't lack in present, he desires not to lack it in future (*Smp.* 200d). So because of the variability and instability of human life, surpassing our deficiencies represents a dynamic, open process: each actual saturation of our lack or need is temporal and endangered by possible future deprivation. To desire means to desire something which is not here, or which is not granted to be here for us forever. Socrates sums up this crucial thesis: "All who desire, desire something which is not provided or present, for something they have not, or are not, or lack. And these things are the ones which are desired for and which are loved." (πᾶς ὁ ἐπιθυμῶν τοῦ μὴ ἐτοίμου ἐπιθυμεῖ καὶ τοῦ μὴ παρόντος, καὶ ὃ μὴ ἔχει καὶ ὃ μὴ ἔστιν αὐτὸς καὶ οὐκ ἐνδεής ἐστι, τοιαῦτ' ἅπτα ἐστὶν ὧν ἡ ἐπιθυμία τε καὶ ὁ ἔρως ἐστίν, *Smp.* 200e, cf. *Smp.* 201d).

Eros' genealogy (*Smp.* 203b ff.) follows the same direction: Poros as ingenuity and resourcefulness is permanently counterbalanced by Penia, indigence and poverty, and a corresponding description of his nature pictures also the nature of humans, permanently striving to overcome their deficiencies and fulfil their desires: "According to his mother' nature, he dwells forever with deficiency, according to his father's nature, he plots against all that is beautiful and good. [...] Born neither mortal nor immortal, at the same day he flourishes and lives when he succeeds and he dies and is revived through his father's nature, and yet all he succeeds to gain is unceasingly leaking away." (τὴν τῆς μητρὸς φύσιν ἔχων, αἰεὶ ἐνδεία σύνοικος. κατὰ δὲ αὐτὸν τὸν πατέρα ἐπίβουλός ἐστι τοῖς καλοῖς καὶ τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς [...] ἀθάνατος πέφυκεν οὔτε ὡς θνητός, ἀλλὰ τοτὲ μὲν τῆς αὐτῆς ἡμέρας θάλλει τε καὶ ζῆ, ὅταν εὐπορήσῃ, τοτὲ δὲ

ἀποθνήσκει, πάλιν δὲ ἀναβιώσκειται διὰ τὴν τοῦ πατρὸς φύσιν, τὸ δὲ ποριζόμενον αἰεὶ ὑπεκρεῖ, *Smp.* 203d–e). Eros as a lover is thus presented as a mediate being, someone “between a mortal and an immortal” (μεταξὺ θνητοῦ καὶ ἀθανάτου, *Smp.* 202d) and also “between wisdom and ignorance” (σοφίας τε αὖ καὶ ἀμαθίας ἐν μέσῳ ἐστίν, *Smp.* 203e). He doesn’t belong to gods, because gods always participate in what is beautiful and good (*Smp.* 202c–d) and also in wisdom (*Smp.* 203e–204a), but neither is he simply an ignorant being separated from all good, wisdom and possibilities of immortality, as someone who doesn’t find himself deficient and thus has no desire for what he doesn’t find lacking (ἐπιθυμεῖ ὁ μὴ οἰόμενος ἐνδεὴς εἶναι οὐ ἂν μὴ οἴηται ἐπιδεῖσθαι, *Smp.* 204a).

As a result, we obtain a tripartite structure: on one side, there is an extreme case of full divinity, on the other, an extreme case of deficiency which doesn’t know about itself and thus is an unsurpassable absence, and in between a sphere of desire, of surpassing deficiency and mortality. In her following account, Diotima will examine this mediate region as a scale oriented from animals through humans to divinity and will try to explain how and why this mediate region is linked to philosophy: the lover at his best is described as a being succeeding to fulfil its desires because of intelligence, so he is presented as a whole-life lover of wisdom, i.e. a philosopher (φρονήσεως ἐπιθυμητὴς καὶ πόριμος, φιλοσοφῶν διὰ παντὸς τοῦ βίου, *Smp.* 203d, cp. also *Smp.* 204b). With her account, Diotima will separate human sphere from animality and outline a specifically human relation to divinity (for following detailed analysis see Figure 1).

It is supposed as an axiom of subsequent argumentation that what

is loved is beautiful (ἔστι τὸ ἐραστὸν τὸ τῷ ὄντι καλόν, *Smp.* 204c) and Diotima immediately converts this to a desire for good (*Smp.* 204d–e). Then the above-mentioned desire oriented toward future is converted to a desire oriented toward eternity: love means a desire for a good to belong to us forever (τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἑαυτῷ εἶναι ἀεὶ ἔρως ἐστίν, *Smp.* 207a, cp. also 206a). Thus Diotima can conclude that humans’ desire not only for good, but also for immortality (ἀθανασίας δὲ ἀναγκαῖον ἐπιθυμεῖν μετὰ ἀγαθοῦ, *Smp.* 206e–207a). For mortals, a basic level of immortality can be gained by procreation, as “procreation is something eternal and immortal in our mortal life” (ἀειγενές ἐστι καὶ ἀθάνατον ὡς θνητῷ ἢ γέννησις, *Smp.* 206e) and as such it represents a divine element in a mortal being (ἔστι δὲ τοῦτο θεῖον τὸ πρᾶγμα, καὶ τοῦτο ἐν θνητῷ ὄντι τῷ ζῳῷ ἀθάνατον ἔνεστιν, ἢ κύησις καὶ ἢ γέννησις, *Smp.* 206c). Such a conception of procreation reminds us of the hesiodic account, where woman bring to man a hope for offspring, which means a possibility to surpass human mortality. Moreover, it is used by Diotima as a ground for the first distinction between mortal beings and gods (*Smp.* 207a–208b). Humans and animals share a variable immortality based on procreation, which differentiates from the gods, immortals in a sense of remaining eternally unchanged (*Smp.* 208a–b).

I. Duality of living beings (*Smp.* 207a–208b)

mortals differentiated from **immortals**
by the **type of immortality**:
preservation or foreverness

II. Difference of mortal beings (*Smp.* 207d–208a, 208e–209c)

animals differentiated from **humans**

a) by the **continuity of individuals**:

and higher parts of soul

body (and lower parts of soul)

b) by **possible offspring**:

procreation of children

and creation of thoughts

III. Difference in human sphere (*Smp.* 210a–212a)

scale of humans

differentiated intrinsically

by the **medium of creation**:

from beautiful bodies to beauty itself

Figure 1: Specificity of human sphere in the Symposium

Diotima will then differentiate further the region of mortals. Animals and humans differ at first on the level of continuity of each particular living being. The identity of a singular being is constituted through the continuity of the body as through the continuity of the soul. Whereas humans and animals share the bodily continuity (*Smp.* 207d–e) and maybe to a certain degree the continuity of such aspects as behaviour, character, wishes or pains (*Smp.* 207e), it could hardly be the case with the higher constituents of the soul, such as knowledge or intentional use of memory (*Smp.* 208a). On a second level, humans and animals differ by the type of procreation they are capable of and by the continuity of offspring: while bodily procreation, which gives birth to children (*Smp.* 208e), is common to all animals including humans (cf. also *Smp.* 207a–d), there is also a procreation of the soul, which gives birth to prudence and other virtues (φρόνησίν τε καὶ τὴν ἄλλην ἀρετήν, *Smp.* 209a), the offspring “more beautiful and more immortal” (καλλίωνων καὶ ἀθανατωτέρων παιδων κεκοινωνηκότες, *Smp.* 209c). Only humans are capable of this sort of procreation and here lies also the origin of “creators and all craftsmen named inventors” (οἱ ποιηταὶ πάντες γεννήτορες καὶ τῶν δημιουργῶν ὅσοι λέγονται εὐρετικοὶ εἶναι, *Smp.* 208e–209a).ⁱ But the most important and beautiful part of this procreation (πολὺ δὲ μεγίστη καὶ καλλίστη τῆς φρονήσεως, *Smp.* 209a) is described by Diotima as “ordering of cities and families, which has the name of sobriety and

i Creation in the broadest sense represents the cause of passing from not being into being (ἢ τοι ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος εἰς τὸ ὄν ἰόντι ὁτῶν αἰτία πᾶσά ἐστι ποίησις, *Smp.* 205b–c), so the works of all *technai* are creations and craftsmen are creators (αἱ ὑπὸ πᾶσαις ταῖς τέχναις ἐργασίαι ποιήσεις εἰσὶ καὶ οἱ τούτων δημιουργοὶ πάντες ποιηταί, *Smp.* 205c). Also in Agathon’s speech, there is a remarkable passage connecting all *technai* with to Eros (*Smp.* 197a–b).

justice” (ἡ περὶ τὰ τῶν πόλεων τε καὶ οἰκήσεων διακόσμησις, ἥ δὲ ὄνομά ἐστι σωφροσύνη τε καὶ δικαιοσύνη, *Smp.* 209a). Such a description of the human sphere, based on moral virtues, arts and social and political skills, variates the same traditional motives we have found in the Promethean myth in Hesiod as in the *Protagoras* and the *Statesman*.

The last part of Diotima’s account will analyse further this sphere of specifically human procreation connected with the soul.ⁱ Gradation of this “way of love” (*Smp.* 211c) is not based on a different type of offspring (these remain “beautiful thoughts”, *Smp.* 210a) but on the medium within which humans create these offspring. Diotima has already affirmed that procreation is always procreation in beautiful (τόκος ἐν καλῷ, *Smp.* 206b), because it is something divine and as such it couldn’t proceed in something inappropriate, in something without beauty (*Smp.* 206c–d). On this basis she will present her famous scale of beautiful things (*Smp.* 210a ff.) which starts with beautiful bodies, continues to beauty in souls (τὸ ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς κάλλος, *Smp.* 210b), then and in ways of life and laws (ἐν τοῖς ἐπιτηδεύμασι καὶ τοῖς νόμοις καλὸν, *Smp.* 210c) and then in different kinds of knowledge (ἐπιστημῶν κάλλος, *Smp.* 210c). Therefore, it is crucial to train oneself gradually in the ability to apprehend these kinds of beauty. Than if the lover is able to ascend to the level of beauty in knowledge, “he produces many beautiful and magnificent thoughts and intellections in philosophy free of envy”

ⁱ We should note that these three successive steps represent also three types of differences. The first one represents strict duality of gods and mortals. The second one leaves open a mediate space in between two terminals of animals and humans (what is essentially human is the possibility, not necessity, to surpass an animal state, and humanity means not to deny, but to sublimate animality). The third one represents then a continual scale.

(πολλοὺς καὶ καλοὺς λόγους καὶ μεγαλοπρεπεῖς τίκτη καὶ διανοήματα ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ ἀφθόνῳ, *Smp.* 210d). The possibility to become a philosopher represents an ultimate state that the desiring humans can achieve in surpassing their deficiencies (*Smp.* 210d–e). It is just this level which presents “the state of life whereof above all others a man finds it truly worthwhile to live” (ἐνταῦθα τοῦ βίου, [...] εἶπερ που ἄλλοθι, βιωτὸν ἄνθρωπῳ, *Smp.* 211d), because this way man is able to produce a true virtue (ἀρετὴ ἀληθής, *Smp.* 212a), to approximate himself to the gods (θεοφιλῆς, *Smp.* 212a) and to become eminently immortal (εἵπερ τῷ ἄλλῳ ἀνθρώπων ἀθανάτῳ καὶ ἐκείνῳ, *Smp.* 212a).

We can conclude that Socrates’ and Diotima’s account represents a specific conception of humanity separated from the animal sphere and related to gods and based on an essential deficiency which humans desire to surpass. The means of this surpassing form, a hierarchical structure and human aspiration is presented as a possible movement through this structure. It represents a sublimation of desire from its elementary forms, shared with animals, through specifically human values such as morality, art and sociability, to philosophy, which brings humans in proximity to gods. This process could be interpreted as a progress to higher levels of humanity, which culminates in a likeness to gods and specific human immortality based on philosophical activity. The very possibility of philosophy not only dwells in a substantial deficiency of human life represented by mortality, but also in opening the possibility to surpass this deficiency by use of our specifically human means.

If we now return to the *Statesman* and the question of the possibility of philosophy during the golden age, it seems that by then, the conditions of living were not very suitable for the rise of such a way of

life. Humans living without deficiencies, with all needs immediately fulfilled by the direct divine direction, have nothing to desire for. The substantively human (*Smp.* 205a) desire to have good forever, which goes hand in hand with the desire for immortality and which is the original motivation for the emergence of philosophy, have no place in such a world where humans can't surpass by their own means the limits of their mortality. From our present human situation, it seems possible to look up to the pre-cultural state of golden age as if it were our lost paradise, but without philosophy as an ultimate and essentially human possibility to transgress deliberately and by our proper efforts the limits of our mortal existence, such a life cannot be neither fully human, neither nor fully blessed.ⁱ

ⁱ Tento text byl podpořen v rámci projektu OP VK Výzkumné centrum pro teorii a dějiny vědy, reg. č. CZ.1.07/2.3.00/20.0138 spolufinancovaného z Evropského sociálního fondu a státního rozpočtu České republiky.