advanced

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Ελληνικά

Mr Parada, please give us some details about you and your work during these years.

I started working on the Greek myths during the second half of the 1980s, storing an old-style database in cardboard folders, and drawing charts with pencil and eraser. I was motivated by the creative and inspiring features of the myths, and therefore interested in acquiring a general view of them, that is, in determining how the tales, characters and places fit together. As we know, a modern reader cannot acquire a general view of the mythological body just by perusing the ancient poets and mythographers separately. This is of course a very basic realization. Homer, for example, represents approximately 8% of the mythological data. Naturally, we have manuals and dictionaries—from Roscher's ten-volume *Lexikon* to Grimal's smaller but excellent compilation—but most dictionaries, being intended for occasional consultation, rarely provide the reader with a general view of the myths. So when in 1990, having Magazine Diipetés (issue 71, 2010). bought a computer, I started writing Genealogical Guide to Greek Mythology, I saw to cross-reference it in ways which would make that general view more



accessible to the reader. For example, I distributed the characters into categories, numbered

characters were living at the same time. During this period I received academic guidance from Jerker Blomqvist, Professor of Greek language and literature (ret.) at the Department of Classics, Lund University, Sweden. Later, Prof. Blomqvist also put me in touch with the publisher, Prof. Paul Aström. The book appeared in 1993, published by Astrom Editions with the support of the Swedish Council for Research in the Humanities and the Social Sciences. Later on, in 1997, I started developing the *Greek Mythology Link*, a web site which represents an expansion of my previous work. Is your work with the myths just an academic work, or does your interest go beyond that? In other words, what inspired you to work on your project? The academic work consisted, broadly, in knowing the sources, identifying the tales, characters and places, and learning how they relate to each other. This resulted in much filing, collating,

those characters bearing identical names, and established a mythical chronology, showing what

understanding of the human condition. I thought I could reasonably entertain that hope because I recognized that the myths had inspired, directly or indirectly, the art of centuries. It is known to us that Greek mythology is understood in different ways and that different

and numbering, but I felt that the myths would improve my view of the world and my

schools interpret it differently. What explanation or approach best fits your point of view? Interpretations arose when some authors started perceiving meanings in the myths which they supposed to be different from what the tales themselves state. They obviously found the narrative too extravagant to be taken literally, and yet too meaningful to be discarded altogether. They also found that no one in their time was able to show how the myths had

originated. So already in the 4th century BC, and even before that date, we find authors like Palaephatus or Euhemerus, who attempted to explicate the origin and meaning of the myths. Such attempts continued throughout history in fields of research such as philology, anthropology, sociology, comparative mythology, or psychoanalysis, producing a large number of

theories dealing with various aspects of the myths such as allegories, symbols, rational

meanings, historical roots, ritual connections, moral implications, magical hints, natural

representations, structural patterns, etc. Although the universal theories of interpretation have provided interesting insights, no satisfactory answer to the two fundamental questions on the origin and meaning of the myths was ever supplied. That, despite the intellectual efforts of generations covering 2500 years, I may add. To be sure, if all theories of interpretation—both ancient and modern—were put on top of each other, we might find ourselves standing in front of a very high tower. The many theories and interpretations also reveal the significant discrepancies which arose among the highest authorities, as well as the diversity of their points of departure. For example, some authorities regarded the myths as metaphors of the mind, whereas others saw them as reflections of social structures or customs. Depending on the authority one is reading, the myths were created either by highly intelligent minds or else by utterly primitive ones. In the view of some authorities, the myths are accurate representations of the world—truthful symbols of the mind, or wise doctrines hidden behind a clever disguise—whereas others described them as products of naive imagination, or primitive forms of apprehension and expression. There has never been agreement on these matters, and therefore it is difficult to subscribe to any of the universal theories of interpretation, though one may occasionally sympathize with specific observations or opinions. One may wish to notice as well that the theories of interpretation—whether we sympathize with their conclusions or not—are invariably the result of an analytical approach. Analysis, we have learned, looses up the constituent parts of a whole with the hope that the proper identification of the released basic elements will provide new insights. For example, we are less analytical when we listen to music without preconceived ideas, but more so if we occupy ourselves in measuring the sound waves of a song, or in determining its structure, defining its genre, etc. Analytical methods are valuable in certain fields or on certain occasions, but in the case of the myths the disadvantage of this approach lies in that the disposition or psychology of the analytical mind may be assumed to be diametrically opposed to the mindset prevailing in the

Very little is known about this period, and therefore it is called "the Dark Age." When this

epoch ends, the Greek myths and pantheon are already in place. Homer and Hesiod, who are the

times when the myths arose.

first poets of our own culture may be seen as the last poets of that age, which probably was "a poetic age" with a turn of mind very different from our own "analytic age." The mythical mind (or poetic mind) of that remote past was obviously more creative than analytic. To be sure, most theories attribute the creation of the myths to that mythical mind. The poets, we are told, were "myth makers." Of course the poets themselves claim something else: in their own perception they received the myths from above, that is, from the gods or from the Muses. This ancient idea still persists today, being traditionally associated with the notion of inspiration. In any case, the man of that remote age appears to have "lived in the myth," as Kerényi put it once. That is, he didn't regard the myths—both the tales and the pantheon—as an external object of study, but as something permeating both his external and internal life. By contrast, both historical reasons and our own mindset have induced us to adopt an external posture vis-àvis the myths. Whereas the mythical mind "lived the myths," we merely know things about them. We are reviewers or critics in the sense that we can only comment on them. We haven't created those myths and can hardly create lasting myths of our own. Taken as paradigms, the mythical man cannot think analytically, nor can the analytic man think mythically. The mindsets are different. The man who "lived in the myths" was unlike the one who studied them. That difference is difficult to determine, but it could perhaps be illustrated as follows: Many among us are aware that language, meter, literary history, literary analysis or literary criticism may teach us many lessons. Yet, that knowledge, valuable as it may be, also has the power to preclude deeper experiences by leading the mind along certain paths while closing others. The same may be said of music, as I noted before, or of a painting, a play, or a movie. So how we think about the myths could be more decisive than what we think about them. Reading the sources, that is, learning to discern, without preconceived ideas, the implications or consequences of what an ancient text says, is certainly more important than subscribing to one or another theory of interpretation. What in the Greek myths is particularly impressing to anyone starting the study of the myths or simply coming in touch with them for the first time?

which interested our grandparents or our grand grandparents. Rather, our own time prefers to learn whether something really happened, and whether we might be able to find material evidence of it, which often means archaeological evidence. This is a rather extreme view which preferably investigates the heroic myths, since it cannot expect to find material evidence of the divine myths other than what is classified under the heading "beliefs." That extreme "hard

There are many individual variations, but, not surprisingly, most of us are influenced by the

preferences of our own time. During the 18th and 19th centuries many expected to draw moral

lessons from the myths. Schliemann may be regarded as an exception to that mainstream

posture, or else as inaugurating a new epoch. In the 20th century, after Freud claimed to have

discovered the Unconscious, we acquired the habit of associating the myths to it and to the

realm of dreams more often than before. There were still some moral aspects surfing the

Freudian wave, which included other authors, such as Carl Jung or Paul Diel. But the questions

I've received over the years suggest that we have gradually become more fact-oriented in our

stance, more "archaeological" or "historical." We are less concerned with the moral lessons

proof" push generates its opposite, and so waves of speculation having no basis in facts nor foundation in the myths may pop up unexpectedly, like, for example, the theories about the Baltic, or else the African, origins of the Greek myths. Apart from this, many continue arriving to the myths through the gateways of literature and the visual arts, or rather through the needs posed by the *history* of those arts, since once may also note, for example, that the visual arts of the 20th and the first decade of the 21st century rely much less on the myths than the art of previous centuries. From the beginning of the 1900s, or even before, mythological motifs became less frequent in the visual arts, and contemporary artists are obviously much less interested in the myths than their colleagues of one or two hundred years ago. Among these approaches, there are also those which care about the religion of the ancients, either individually or gathering in groups and organizations across the globe. They seem to be reconstructing the traditional religions. Do you think that there can be any quality in these movements? Do you find these efforts serious, or are they opportunists who will soon fade out? I was not aware of the existence of these groups and organizations before the arrival of the Internet, but I wasn't too surprised. After all, for our remote ancestors the myths were not fiction, in the sense that a novel is. I know too little about these movements to comment on them, but I may try to outline certain obstacles associated with the religious approach: We have learned that our remote ancestors found the wisdom of the world in the words of the

poet. The tales and the pantheon were sacred to them in the sense that both nurtured those

feelings which we usually define as religious experience. Yet the poet was not a preacher, as we

know already. Preaching was probably not necessary then. This was, we are told, an oral

tradition. Later on, with the arrival of the literate era, some of those poems were compiled,

and we got books such as the *Iliad*. The written narrative remained sacred, but it did not

contain specific doctrines to be followed or obeyed, except that the polis soon learned to use

The Classical Age found in its own prosperity and growth reasons to be proud of its own

heritage. In Pericles' opinion, both remote and less remote ancestors deserved praise for the

magnificent empire he and his contemporaries were enjoying. Yet this flourishing period, which

so many have associated with the high point of Hellas, had merely inherited, not generated, the

cultural impulse that made its glory possible. In that perspective, the Parthenon, for example, is

the result of a cultural tradition, not the other way round. That famous building rests on

immaterial columns, so to speak. When one thinks about it, that seems quite obvious, but we

the pantheon for its own purposes. We can have a look at that.

and that of prose was increasingly adopted. An eloquent transition.

transcendent feeling, opposing chaotic disintegration.

the movements you mention is difficult to predict.

tend to forget it. We tend to forget that the achievements of a civilization, and indeed its very existence, rest on culture, and that culture itself ultimately derives from myths describing a Götterwelt, or realm of gods. In classical times, there were the tragic poets, of enormous importance to us. But the archetypical poet had already moved behind the scenes. In an erstwhile age, poetry had expressed wisdom, and there had been no other wisdom than that expressed by the poet. Now, as the poet left the stage, wisdom started to be detected in practically every field of human activity. In this interesting development, the poet became known for "telling lies," and so, rather than versification, we started getting diversification, numerous wisdoms. Sages, statesmen, philosophers, historians, and even scientists entered the stage, replacing the poet in the quest for wisdom, and inaugurating what we could call "the prosaic age." Here I'm using the term prosaic simply in the sense that the style or diction of poetry was generally abandoned,

The sages and statesmen represent the change affecting communal life which evolves from rural

to urban, from dispersion to centralization. The villagers are somehow confiscated, annexed,

and their culture is appropriated by a federalist *polis* which curtails freedom, produces models

for the visual arts, institutionalizes religion, enacts laws, and so on. Sages, statesmen,

historians, and scientists are generally concerned with physical realities whereas philosophers

and those interested in religious matters may be assumed to embrace a metaphysical vocation,

but both discourses were derived from the myths. The sage is sometimes supposed to have

somehow preserved the wisdom of the poet while uniting in his own heart both philosophical

and political ambitions. Yet a closer look to this intermediate character reveals that the sages

rather were "shrewd men with a turn for legislation," as Dicaerchus—a disciple of Aristotle described them. From what we have learned from the myths, religion in Hellas was based on a certain sense of the sacredness of the world, derived from a qualitative perception of the cosmos, which was seen as both beautiful and meaningful. In other words, that perception included both aesthetic and ethic dimensions. The intensity and depth of the feelings associated with that perception must naturally vary through the ages, and we have seen both intensity and depth decreasing as time went by. Institutionalized religion—the construction of costly monuments, the adoption of an elaborate theology, a liturgy, a creed and a set of rules, etc.—does not represent an increase in religiosity. Rather, the appearance of such grand developments indicates a decline of the religious feeling, or spirituality. A gap has opened in the heart which institutionalized religion feels it must fill, having perceived that frightening emptiness of the heart as conducive to the desacralization of the world and the fragmentation of the mind, that is, to chaos. On a pessimistic estimate, institutionalized religion could preclude the spontaneous growth of an

authentic religious feeling. On an optimistic one, institutionalized religion may be seen as

contributing to the preservation of what is left of that feeling in times of decline. In such times,

institutionalized religion may perceive itself as the zealous guardian of the faint memory of a

A cardinal feature of the myths is divine presence. This is the foundation of the myths. The gods

are naturally present both in the outer and inner worlds. One could meet a god, albeit

disguised, in the physical world. And a man of those remote times didn't feel cut off from

outside influences. He was permeable to the forces animating him, and perceived them as

psychical powers, entering him just as wind enters the lungs, heat the skin, sound the ear, or

light the eye. It doesn't help much to argue that this was merely a psychological reality since we

cannot know what the creators of such advanced realm of gods had experienced. Even Nietzsche

is perfectly aware of this when he writes, in his Human, All Too Human, "... even in dreams, we do not experience what earlier peoples saw when awake." Now the feeling of divine presence has nothing to do with theological arguments, interpretations, doctrines, or speculations about the gods. It probably has nothing to do with faith or belief either. Hearing about "reconstructing" the ancient religion, however, one inevitably remembers Julian and Sallustius, whose attempts were, for the most part, theoretical and interpretative. Both the emperor and his friend were children of a new era, already far removed from that poetic age whose meaning I was trying to outline a moment ago. The term reconstructing also suggests that something has been previously constructed. But were the myths ever constructed, put together piece by piece? Or did the myths grew naturally, like our organs and limbs, or like speech, our sense of rhythm and other faculties of the mind? Schelling, the German philosopher, suggested that a mythology cannot be artificially created by a rational process. How is it created then, if not piece by piece? For if Schelling were right, we might have to admit having lost those unique poetic faculties which made the myths possible in the past. For some, that would be a painful realization—almost like losing sight or hearing. I have outlined the subjective difficulties a reconstructivist view might meet, namely our own mindset, which is surely different from that of our remote ancestors: less poetic, more analytic, less unified, more scattered, etc. But the main issues, those that should be addressed by our

spiritual faculties, remain unsolved: Man has not yet learned to deal with himself, with other

human beings, and with the powers informing the world. That ignorance reveals a gap in the

human heart rather than in the human head, and we cannot expect physical science to fill it.

Rather, science and technology have encouraged man's worship of himself, and made of him a

"sorcerer's apprentice," whose chef d'œuvre is the atomic bomb. The churches were indeed

supposed to fill that gap, but the state of culture and civilization suggests they have failed.

Secularists increasingly dismiss them as outright frauds, and many religious minds perceive them

as unworthy of the faiths they profess. The gap in the heart remains. Whether it will be filled by

Do you find, in this "analytic age," any room left for Philosophy? Or is it a "luxury of the

mind" which cannot provide solutions? Let me also point out, that the very meaning of the

term "philosophy" seems to have broken down, or been put at the service of economic

"Analytic age" or "poetic age" are expressions describing states of mind, or mental

architectures. We may associate them with historical realities—since these are marked by states

of mind—but they are not historical ages in a literal sense. Philosophical questions usually call

models. We hear people talking of "the philosophy of our company," to give an example.

for analytical answers, so we cannot assume a contradiction between philosophy and analysis. Compared with experience, analysis is a fictitious process, but in certain circumstances it may improve our understanding. When meeting poetry or other arts, however, we may wish to receive them with as little deliberation as possible. We may wish to be as intuitive as the creators were when they conceived their works. That's how we may benefit from them. Homer didn't create his poetry so that we could put it under the heading "epic poems." No poet has such things in mind. To be sure, Homer himself (if there ever was such a man) could not have imagined that we would someday call his poetic realm "Homeric epics" and be content with it. Such terms represent analytical fictions, useful for certain purposes, but unnecessary in other connections. We have learned that philosophy is "the love of wisdom." By that phrase we understand that the vocation of a philosopher consists in going in pursuit of wisdom, that is, he desires to acquire wisdom, perhaps swallow it up just like Zeus did to Metis. We've been also told that yet another character—the sage—dominated the stage before the philosopher appeared on it. Unlike the philosopher, the sage didn't need to go in pursuit of wisdom. He was already wise, or so his title indicates. Hellas, we have learned, knew only seven such sages. Seven, here, is a way of speaking, or a magic number, for there were at least eleven "Seven Sages." Plutarch tells us

that almost all of them got the reputation of wisdom for being "excellent statesmen."

Excellent, of course, is a way of speaking too: some of them were also called tyrants. In any

case, these sages grew ripe at once, like fruits of the same season, and soon disappeared from

the face of the earth. Besides their legislation, they left behind a collection of anecdotes and

Now, where does this idea of being wise, or else going in pursuit of wisdom, come from? The

answer is: from the poet. Or more precisely: from the perception that the world had of the

poet. The poet was held to be wise. Why? Well, not for his wealth, but surely because his poetry

uncovered patterns of the universe, images of the cosmos which seemed significant. He brought

forth questions such as: What is the nature of the world we live in? How did it come about? How

are we to interpret it? How do the world and the mind relate to each other? These questions

were interwoven with tales and visions which the audience interpreted in ways that resulted in

what later became known as Hellenic culture, a remarkable development that bespeaks the

power of the poet's vision. Now, if we admit the poet was wise, what shall we then say of his

audience? Why would the audience of a "dark age" let itself be amazed by his visions? What kind

of darkness was that? Certainly not the darkness of a primitive mind, for such a mind hardly

finds any sense in wisdom. Rather, we must suppose that the pre-archaic audience was more

perceptive than many contemporary audiences. This idea is difficult to grasp only if we believe

audiences are continually evolving. But this needs not be the case. In the fifth century, the

Athenian audience was enjoying the intellectually demanding drama that the tragic poets had

created. By Imperial times, however, it became possible to satisfy the lowest instincts of an

dicta, that is, a compendium of wisdom which also includes the Delphic maxims.

audience with the futility and cruelty of the Roman amphitheater. Now the poet had created an ideal realm where the mind could rest, detach itself from the confusion of the actual world, and thus renew its vitality. Ideal doesn't mean unreal: the poet's realm inevitably served as model to the actual world. Moreover, the world of the poet was not perceived as an artificial construction, but as an organic realm. Who came before him? Who instructed the poet? No one has answered that, except the poet himself: Autodidaktos d'eimi. "Self-taught am I, and the god has planted in my heart all manner of songs ..." We find that strong answer in the *Odyssey*. In any case, the poet enhanced the life and experience of the mind, and through it the world itself, for mind and world mirror each other. In his realm there were no doctrines, though. For all we know, the poet never preached or taught wisdom. Never gave advice. Never told anyone, "Know thyself." To be sure, the poet never went in pursuit of wisdom either. Nevertheless, it is through the form and content of his poetry that he got the fame of being wise. As late as in the 19th century, George Meredith could still declare: "As we to the brutes, poets are to us," indicating that wisdom requires a higher sort of humanity, almost another species. The old saying, "A poet is born, not made," intimates that wisdom cannot be acquired piece by piece, cannot be "made." Rather, wisdom partakes in creation, illustrated, in that saying, by procreation. It grows like a child in the womb, or else like memory or other faculties of the mind. Knowledge, however, is "made," constructed, or increased by gradation. From the characteristics of both, it should follow that knowledge constructs, and wisdom creates. Of course, also *creativity* is today a buzzword. As you point out, the meaning of words suffer erosion. Myth came to mean lie or misrepresentation, and philosophy often represents an elementary guiding rule which may be applied to anything, and as much and as often as desired. It's long since the professor of philosophy first appeared on the stage to play the role of the ghost of the philosopher, and long since philosophy was reduced to fine particles, dust on the stage. Here too, we have spread our mind thin across the universe. As we visualize those episodes of the saga of wisdom, we may notice that going in pursuit of it wishing to be wise—is equivalent to wanting to share in the poet's vision completely. In other words, what the philosopher ultimately desired by wishing to be wise, was to become like the poet. The philosopher knew no other specimen of incarnated wisdom. This benign form of envy, which we usually call admiration, is discernible, among others, in Schelling-the German philosopher—when he happily declares: "Not only the poet but also the philosopher has his ecstasies," thereby admitting, with a thinly veiled undertone, that rational thinking rarely produces the insights, let alone the realms, which the intuitive mindset of the poet creates. There has been, since antiquity, an opposition between the language of the philosopher (logos, aiming at intellectual clarity and rigor), and that of the poet (muthos) which the philosophers

perceived as too obscure or indirect. Logos and muthos correspond to different mental

architectures, or ages of the mind. They are different modes. But whatever we think of it we

cannot sufficiently acknowledge our debt to the philosophers. To Plato, for showing that we are

not wise. To Aristotle, for reminding us that wisdom is not knowledge but a form of goodness.

To Epictetus for his lessons on liberty and necessity. And to many others, both ancient and

It would be a gross error to regard poetry or philosophy as "luxuries of the mind." Both enhance

our experience of the world. And that enhancement, far from being a luxury, is a vital human

need. It is indispensable for building up our humanity and reducing our bestiality. To be sure,

not even the animals live by bread alone. Bread is a necessity, yes, and so is breath. Our

mechanized age, however, gradually turns both into luxuries. It denies bread to some and

breath ("luxuries of the mind") to others. And it shamefully proclaims that hard- and software,

rather than humankind, should decide on vital issues. Yet human solutions are very different

from mechanical ones. A mechanical mindset is what we used to define as "bestial,"

"primitive," or "barbaric," as opposed to cultured, civilized, or human.

modern.

expose her seductive power.

The poet and the philosopher have moved behind the scenes, but the play is not over yet: they might return. Or else some new characters, with mental architectures unknown to us, may enter the stage. They might then have to overcome the faulty thinking, the fundamental misconception that made a mechanized age at all possible. Do you think that future movements (environmental, social, political, or any other capable of changing the course of history) could find in ancient knowledge, studies and culture a major theoretical resource strengthening the basis on which they stand? If by ancient culture we mean the wisdom of the world, then the answer must be "yes." But that has little to do with changing history or taking a new, better course. The poet Charles Péguy wrote: "Homer is new, this morning, and nothing is perhaps as old as today's newspaper." Notice that Péguy had that thought this morning, that is, in a timeless moment. Next morning will also be this morning. Those two words clearly express what Péguy felt, reading Homer. The unchanging nature of the world. If the myths had described the surface of things, they would have been forgotten long ago. A judge may change his point of view, but Dike never does. Underneath her makeup, Eris remains the same. And despite their metamorphoses, Eros, Ananke, Thanatos or Ate, are true to themselves. Recent Research finds new truths every day, but as the classicist Johann Voß says in an epigram: "Your garrulous book teaches many things new and true. If only the true were new, if only the new were true!" So when thinking about changing the course of History, we may as well have a look at that lady's

curriculum vitae: What are her qualifications? Has her performance been to satisfaction so far?

Has she, for example, ever brought Justice? Or Peace? What are our previous experiences of her?

Then we may also ask: Can humans govern her, gave her instructions as to what course she

We must hope, for hope has been given to us in a jar. However, Lady History is not amenable.

Not our obedient servant. A mistress, rather. Some kind of dominatrix wielding a long whip.

Much like Virgil's version of Tisiphone, the bloodstained Erinys guarding the entrance to

Tartarus. The visual arts have often depicted History as a studious woman, who sits holding

some very thick volume in her hands. That would rather be an allegory of the study of History, if

it weren't because she is sometimes seen writing the volume herself. But even more faithful

seems to me a sketch by Fabio Canal, an eighteenth century Italian artist. In the picture, History

—a winged fair lady—is seen putting a heavy burden on the back of an already overwhelmed

man. No doubt her angelic beauty contrasts with her deed, but the artist surely wished to

As we learn from Hesiod, significant events are ruled by cycles. Events take place within the

setting of a given Age. Briefly put: large events cannot be evil in the Golden Age, nor can they

should take? Or does she rules them instead, catching them by surprise time after time?

be good in the Age of Iron. The myths hold a cyclic worldview: "Of the portents recorded in ancient tales," the stranger says in Plato's Statesman, "many did happen and will happen again." Perhaps this morning already. Mr Parada, how do you imagine the Globe, and in particular Europe, after three or four decades? Do you think it could be a world in which we may at last learn to live wisely, respecting the differences between nations, ideologies, and religions, or the differences of sexual preferences, etc.? Do you think such a world would ever be possible? Or is it our Fate (Moira - Pepromeno, in Greek) that we can't escape our primitive state and the conflicts which have opposed man to man throughout the ages, despite the shining era of antiquity, when we, at least for a short while, reached high levels in our study of Philosophy, Science and Theology? Certain notions have had their reputation tarnished. Fate (if it ever had a good name) is one of

them. Modern man wishes to feel he himself is in charge. He moves at high speed along a

straight expressway, coming always closer to a light he makes out on the horizon. That light is

the reason of his journey, but like the horizon it recedes as he advances. This is a long highway.

More precisely: it has no end, and it belongs to Time. Now, this man trusts his forward

movement in time because he sees darkness and ignorance in the rearview mirror, and

illumination ahead. He continuously discovers new landscapes on his journey, and as a result of those discoveries everything improves. He imagines himself in harmony with some universal law of improvement, and he has learned that things naturally improve with time. At some point, everything is upgraded: the species of animals and plants, the temperament of Lady History, and of course Humankind. Every day he finds evidence of this infinite amelioration in each technological achievement, including his appliances at home. He's quite proud of them, and they fill him with a sense of superiority. He knows the ancients lacked the technologies he enjoys today. That they had no electricity, for example. So it's not surprising if he puts things this way: What can ancient tales or philosophy teach a man who has traveled to the moon? What can they teach a man who has already acquired the power to blow the whole world into pieces, if he needs to? To say the least, such a man has finally determined his own position in the cosmos: He's the manager! And he'll soon gather the clouds in the sky and do with them as he pleases. He's almost touching the beard of Zeus now. The very power he has acquired proves the advantage of speeding along this straight, unending highway. It is a highway leading to enlightenment, and therefore he describes it with appropriate terms: progress, evolution, development, growth. True: he's felt some concern lately. Maybe his powerful devices are doing bad things to the Earth, or to himself. Maybe, yes. But he'll fix it! For he's persuaded that the same methods which caused the trouble can provide the remedy as well. He's no longer the sorcerer's apprentice, mind you. No, he's a graduate. He's got his Master's Degree. He's the master sorcerer now. Never before has he accumulated so much knowledge. So he'll fix what he has marred, using the same knowledge and the same procedures, what else? Of course his own recent research keeps showing him, time after time, how wrong he was in his previous research. He can certainly notice that dark spot in his rearview mirror. But it only proves he's essentially right: everything gets more clear as he moves forward. So the quicker he moves the better. He sees darkness and ignorance traveling in the opposite direction: they live in the past. But the future is bright and enlightened. He's on his way. No doubt antiquity had another worldview. As I said, it was a cyclic one. There was no straight highway then, but a circular, recurrent path. As a result, nothing was really new. For the ancients, Olympus is always bright. Cerulean blue and gold suits perfectly the happy immortals. But what about the "wretched mortals"? Those who are "like the generations of leaves." Could they be painted using the same pigments, just

adjusting the mixture a little bit?

Magazine *Diipetés* (issue 72, 2010). mean something better than the Iron Age. Otherwise, why would he have desired to live in that future instead? To be able to say that, he must have been persuaded that Gold would come

race. But whereas the beginning and the end of the Bronze Age are identical (the Age of Bronze never changing or evolving), the Iron Age gets worse as time goes by. Thus Hesiod speaks in the future tense: "Might will be right ... the wicked will hurt the worthy ... men will praise the evildoer ..." And then, once Nemesis has left the world, "there will be no help against evil," he says. As we know, the gods forsake humankind. Astraea (Justice), for example, is said to have left the world at the beginning of the Age of Bronze. But Hesiod's own time is evil enough for him: he desires either to have died before it, or else to have been born afterwards. That word, afterwards, is important, though. By it, Hesiod must

Some scholars have called Hesiod "idiosyncratically negative,"

"pessimistic," and more. To understand what they mean, it is

enough to read Hesiod's description of the Iron Age (or race,

as he says). For Hesiod, it is not enough to decide that the Iron

Age is bad. After all, the Bronze race was also bad: a warlike

after Iron again. If we can find some optimism in his view, that would be it. The cyclic worldview is based on recurrence whereas the modern—whether secular or Abrahamic—holds a linear conception of time. Palingenesis—the idea of the regeneration of the ages—is also found, for example, in Virgil and Plato. Also Virgil has much to say against this age. He blames Zeus for the imperfections of the world and for having dethroned his father, the ruler of the Golden Age. Several ancient authors explain that toil increases through the introduction of new technologies. Among others, they mention navigation, mining, and of course the art of war which is the primary motivation for developing technology, along with "the love of gold." Trade and colonization are condemned as well. In the meantime, the spiritual qualities of man, they say, are bound to decrease. To our own standards, the outlook of the ancient world may appear pessimistic, if that is the term we must use. The ancient world didn't believe in progress, change or development. On the

contrary: it rejected every novelty. Probably because they understood that change must lead to

decay. Shall we then call those men *idiosyncratically negative*? Or shall we say they were able to tell daytime from nighttime? For after all, Hesiod, Plato or Virgil were also saying what Shelley later wrote in his *Hellas*: The world's great age begins anew,

The golden years return ... But being still nighttime, they lit a lamp. No point in stumbling over things in the dark.

Related sections

Sources

Abbreviations