

The Rule for the Best: The End of Anthropology

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Resumo: Como ocorre a tradução de ideias e conceitos do pensamento religioso em concepções antropológicas e políticas? Se a emergência do monoteísmo cristão no mundo ocidental compreendeu a unidade do humano através da singularidade da concepção de Deus, agora qualquer pluralidade da expressão religiosa pode ser apreendida ao compreender essa pluralidade através da unidade da concepção (sem conteúdo) do ser humano. Este artigo rastreia alguns modos seminais destas traduções do religioso para o laico nas suas articulações de Kant e Hegel a Marx e Heidegger, passando pela poesia de Píndaro.

Palavras-Chave: Píndaro; Homero; Tradução.

Abstract: How can ideas and concepts of religious thought be translated into anthropological and political conceptions? Whereas in the emergence of 'Christian monotheism' in the West the unity of humanity was once grasped through the singularity of the conception of God, now any plurality of religious expression is able to be countenanced by grasping that plurality through the unity of the (contentless) conception of the human being. This article follows a few seminal modes of such translations in their articulations from Kant and Hegel to Marx and Heidegger, with an excursion to Pindar's poetry.

Key-words: Pindar; Homer; Translation.

The modern understanding of humanity: humanity is above all the *productive* and *creative* species. Every contemporary course in education, every advance of human life, every advertisement for human consumption, promises to enhance our, your, *their*, productivity and creativity, or is related to this promise in some way.

In the thought of Karl Marx, so dependent on the dialectical thought of Hegel, 'man' is that one who at one and the same time is utterly the production and creation of history, and the one who produces and creates the historical conditions for his succession. Marx is explicit in this when he says: "History is nothing but the succession of the separate generations, of which each exploits materials, capital

funds, forces of production, handed down to it by all preceding generations, hence, on the one hand, continuing the traditional activity in completely changed circumstances and, on the other, modifies the old circumstances with a completely changed activity”.¹

The thought that Marx expresses here lies at the very basis, not only of Marxism, but every contemporary form of the understanding of society. Above all contemporary capitalism, let alone the dried-out husk of the twentieth century’s terrifying experiments with communism and fascism, measures its success or failure (a success or failure much in the balance at this present time), on the basis of its ability to create or destroy value. It is not accidental that Marx takes up the terminology of religion in the working-out of his thinking, especially when he expresses his estimation of the ‘idea’ as ‘lord’, and in doing so characterises the creativity that hitherto was said to belong to the God of the Book of Genesis, to describe the activity of the production of value (capital) as such.²

From the outset the posing of the question of the ‘they’, of humanity as a multitude and ‘as a whole’ (‘man’, humanity, ‘the human person’, etc.), poses a *political* question. Every theory of political life that confronts us in the present age is grounded in an anthropology, that is to say, who ‘man’ is in general, what ‘he’ is to become, what the ground and possibility for his freedom is, and where he is to go. ‘He’ (for which you must also read ‘she’), has, or ought to have, a vote. In the

¹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Der deutsche Ideologie: Kritik der neusten deutschen Philosophie in ihren Repräsentanten Feuerbach, B. Bauer und Stirner, und des deutschen Sozialismus in seinen verschiedenen Propheten* (1932 [1845–46]) in *Marx Engels Werke*, Berlin, Dietz Verlag, 1990 (1958), vol. 3, p. 45. “Die Geschichte ist nichts als die Aufeinanderfolge der einzelnen Generationen, von denen Jede die ihr von allen vorhergegangenen übermachten Materiale, Kapitalien, Produktionskräfte exploitiert, daher also einerseits unter ganz veränderten Umständen die überkommene Tätigkeit fortsetzt und andererseits mit einer ganz veränderten Tätigkeit die alten Umstände modifiziert.” The original German is more in note form: my translation has been modified for the sake of flow, without alteration of the underlying sense.

² Karl Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie in Marx Engels Werke* (MEW), Berlin, Dietz Verlag, 2005 (1983, 1939–1941), vol. 42: p. 97. “Die Individuen nun von *Abstraktionen* beherrscht werden, während sie früher voneinander abhingen. Die Abstraktion oder Idee ist aber nichts als das theoretische Ausdruck jener materiellen Verhältnisse, die Herr über sie sind.” (“Individuals are now ruled by *abstractions*, whereas earlier they depended on one another. The abstraction or idea is, however, nothing other than the theoretical expression of those material relations which rule over them.”); p. 243. “Und die Vermehrung der Werte kann nur dadurch stattfinden, daß ein Wert über das Äquivalent hinaus erhalten, also *geschaffen* wird” (“the increase of values can therefore take place, only if a value over the equivalent is obtained, thus is *created*”). (Marx’s italics)

exercise of the democratic vote is secured the identity of every man, or woman, with every other. More than anything else, democratic politics already presupposes a distinct and very specific anthropology, for whom the question of God and the gods, of ‘religion’, and its freedom, is a constant antagonism.

The essence of the contemporary anthropology is atheistic, exactly what Marx names in seeking to take over the language of religion for the sake of explaining the existence of the human production of history and society itself. Nowhere is this more manifest than in contemporary liberal democracy. If we take one of the foremost exponents of the theory of the state in relation to religion, Martha Nussbaum, we find her saying from the outset “all modern democracies are currently in a state of fear, and growing religious diversity is one of the things that most keenly inspires fear”.³ Nussbaum’s thesis is that “liberty of conscience is incompatible with any type of religious establishment”. Is this true of the situation in the United States? Nussbaum is concerned that the (Federal, American) state itself be free to guarantee liberty of conscience, a pattern for liberty of religious belief anywhere else (a pattern of liberal religious freedom). This freedom necessitates that the state already be freed from any religious involvement of its own. Let me answer my initial question (‘is this true of the situation . . . ?’) by summarising her basic thesis with a quote: “North America is the land of religiosity par excellence . . . the state emancipates itself from religion by emancipating itself from the *state religion* . . . therefore the *state* can have emancipated itself from religion even if the *overwhelming majority still considered themselves obliged to fulfil their religious duties* . . . Therefore the *state* can have emancipated itself from religion even if the *overwhelming majority* is still religious. And the overwhelming majority does not cease to be religious by being religious *in private*.” This is a good summary of Nussbaum’s thesis developed in several places on this question, applicable above all to the American situation. Yet I quote not her, but a text written in 1843 and published the following year, by, in fact, Karl Marx.⁴ Marx repeats (self-consciously) an essential position of Hegel, but one which was imposed in anything but theoretical ways on every part of the Europe

³ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Liberty of Conscience: The Attack on Equal Respect in Journal of Human Development*, vol. 8 (2007), p. 339. The ideas Nussbaum advances here are essentially a summary of her book Martha C. Nussbaum, *Liberty of Conscience: In Defense of America’s Tradition of Religious Equality*, Philadelphia, Basic Books, 2008.

which had been occupied by, and whose future constitution was in some part at least conditioned by, Napoleon. At the same time what this quote encapsulates lies at the basis of the Constitution of the United States of America. This understanding, that religion is to be practised in private and so has no place in the public sphere, formed the essence of Napoleon's enforced 'concordat' with Pope Pius VI of 1801, which ushered in the religious settlement of modern, 'democratic' Europe.⁵ In this (religious) sense Europe merely caught up to where the revolution of 1776 had begun.

An anthropology, which describes the essence of the being of being human, what each man or women *is* with respect to themselves, and so which assumes the essential equality of all men and women before the law and within the state, necessarily produces, and is secured on the basis of, a very specific politics. At the same time that politics shows how, concealed in the essence of every anthropology, there is an attempt to reserve an understanding of the human being to a place *apart* from the determinations and effects of any understanding of divinity. Even for the religious anthropologist (who, if he has one, fulfils his religion in private), anthropology is essentially atheistic. And here I might just disappoint you. I am not proposing an 'alternative'; I do not have 'the solution'; I am not going to introduce you to a 'better anthropology'; – all these are the temptations of the modern instrumentalising mind (a vice to which academics are especially given). Above all, this argument is not really about religious freedom (or even religion) at all, even as it begins there. I merely want to draw your attention to an inherent danger in every transition from *its* to *they*.

What is the ordinary procedure of anthropology? Anthropology speaks initially of a unity, 'man', 'the human person', such that the nature of being itself is to know and to be known through an original unity. On the other hand, man's nature

⁴ Karl Marx, *Zur Judenfrage* (1843) in *Marx Engels Werke* (MEW), Berlin, Dietz Verlag, 2006 (1981, 1927), vol. 1, p. 352–353. "Dennoch ist Nordamerika vorzugsweise das Land der Religiosität . . . als Staat emanzipiert sich der Staat von der Religion, indem er sich von der *Staatsreligion* emanzipiert . . . Der Staat kann sich also von der Religion emanzipiert haben, sogar wenn die *überwiegende Mehrzahl* noch religiös ist. Und die überwiegende Mehrzahl hört dadurch nicht auf, religiös zu sein, daß sie *privatim religiös* ist.

⁵ The Concordat said, not (as the pope had demanded) that 'Catholicism is the religion of France', but rather, 'Catholicism is the religion of the majority of Frenchmen'. In other words, an entirely private matter, which for the individual could a matter of choice.

is absolute openness for all being, ‘being as a whole’, ‘in its essence’, or, to put it in one (idealist) word, man is as much *Geist* as he is matter. This is the very ground of a metaphysical anthropology.

I am interested in nothing other than the order of *procedure* here. Anthropology proceeds from the establishment of the *essence* or being of man *as such*, to being in general. This is how anthropology proceeds, in order to establish its universal ‘humanity’. The entanglement with religious freedom that I have already drawn attention to merely indicates an unfolding and a transformation in the way in which this whole is grasped. For whereas in the emergence of ‘Christian monotheism’ in the West the unity of humanity was once grasped *through* the singularity of the conception of God (which had political consequences), *now* any plurality of religious expression is able to be countenanced by grasping that plurality *through* the unity of the conception of the human being. Conception means merely ‘that thought which goes in advance of every thought’: at one time the singularity of the subjectivity of that which underpins (the ‘sub-iectum’) all things – ‘God’: now ‘humanity’, ‘man’.⁶ In this sense Anthropology is entirely consistent with its Kantian origins, Kant who says (in entire conformity with Descartes’ argument *cogito, ergo sum*), “the: ‘I think’ must be able to accompany all my representations”.⁷ The unity of the self, and its *prior* existence, is pre-positd in every subsequent thought of anything else I think. This is the strict basis for any anthropology at all. Before this prior identity and unity is secured, nothing like an anthropology existed thematically in thought, either theological or philosophical. Which is why we have to *read back into* Augustine, Aristotle, Plato, and every pre-Enlightenment thinker the

⁶ It is in *precisely* this sense that Marx grasps the very radicality of Hegel’s politics, when he says that from henceforth “the critique of heaven transforms itself into the critique of the earth, the *critique of religion* into the *critique of right*, the *critique of theology* into the *critique of politics*.” Karl Marx, *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie* (MEW1), p. 379. “Die Kritik des Himmels verwandelt sich damit in die Kritik der Erde, die *Kritik der Religion* in die *Kritik des Rechts*, die *Kritik der Theologie* in die *Kritik der Politik*.” (Marx’s emphases) Martin Heidegger noted repeatedly how, after the Enlightenment, and particularly in the modern period, all theology, no matter how ‘orthodox’ had become anthropology, on this very basis. It is unsurprising then, that the unimpeachably Catholic and Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner sets out his theological enterprise on the basis of an anthropological formulation. Karl Rahner, *Hörer des Wortes: Zur Grundlegung einer Religionsphilosophie*, Munich, Kösel-Pustet, 1941, pp. 24–25, 59 ff.

⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1974 (1787), p. 136, B 131. “Das: Ich Denke, muß alle meine Vorstellungen begleiten können.”

anthropology that we argue is implicit in them, even if they never actually secured it for themselves.

And yet this unity of the thinking self, given in advance of, and as the basis of, every thought, indicates the very basis of contemporary politics. For the *subject* as the ‘nature’ or essence of man in general, is contentless; this subjectivity (as pure, mere, possibility) is secured *in advance* of every thought: it is the persistent presence of self-presence to self. As this, it is how the essence, the being, of man as such is secured through a kind of constant re-presenting, constant presence. But this subjectivity is the constantly-secured, as an ‘in advance’, *each time a thought is had*. Thus every particular thought, every ‘experience’ is secured in advance by the ‘essence’ of man as a contentless ‘I think’ that goes constantly in advance of the world, and has had the world explicitly wiped off it (this is what the method of doubt has secured for us, and so ‘is’), and yet guarantees how world, being itself, is to be thought. Being-in-general is secured by means of this-being, which is the contentless identity of every being (man or woman) with every other. Identity, as sameness. This contentless subject that *is* in advance of everything else that *is*, even world as such, is metaphysically equal to every other subject: every difference, and so difference as such, is a super-addition, something that is added on after the fact: be it place, time, ethnicity, colour, religion, education, class, history, occupation, condition, pathology; whatever ‘category’ you work in anthropologically. This is even the basis for so-called gender-realignment surgery, since even the sex of a subject is, strictly speaking, a super-addition to the nature of it *as* subject. This is the metaphysical equality of the possession of the right to vote. In the vote, in democracies at least, every difference is levelled-off to a metaphysical sameness and identity at the point of the ballot-box.

To pursue this point further it will become necessary to ask all over again, what do we mean by this word, anthropology? From whence does it come? Anthropology: that which speaks of the ἄνθρωπος of man as such, or, if we are more careful with our language, ‘the human being’: as such, in general. Anthropology speaks of what is common to every human being: that it is, as what it is. The sixth century BC Greek Lyric poet, of all the lyricists, perhaps the greatest,

Pindar, ends his eighth Pythian Ode with six of the most beautiful lines of his genre.

They read:

ἐπάμεροι· τίδέ τις τίδ' οὐ τις σκιάς ὄναρ
 ἄνθρωπος ἄλλ' ὅταν αἴγλαδιόσδοτος ἔλθῃ,
 λαμπρὸν φέγγος ἔπεστιν ἀνδρῶν καὶ μελίχρος αἰών.
 Αἴγινα φίλα μᾶτερ ἐλευθέρα· στόλῳ
 πόλιν τάνδε κόμιζε· Διὶ καὶ κρέοντι σὺν Αἰακῶ
 Πηλεΐ τε καὶ γαθῶ Τελαμῶνι σὺν τ' Ἀχιλλεΐ.⁸

The Eighth Pythian Ode is one of the epinician, or victory, odes, those that celebrate the victories of the games, said to have been composed in Pindar's seventy-sixth year.⁹ These lines are among the best known in Pindar, celebrating the victory of Aristomenes at the Pythian games at Delphi, and Aristomenes' homecoming to Aegina. Aristomenes' name means (roughly) 'Best in Courage (on the field of trial)'. The ode meditates in alternate strophes on how fame and ignominy befalls mortals, and how even the fame of mortals is fleeting – the suggestion is, especially after death. A commonly offered translation runs:

Creatures of a day! What is a man? What is he not? A
 dream of a shadow
 is man. But whenever Zeus-given brightness comes,
 a shining light rests upon men, and a gentle life.
 Dear mother Aegina, on its voyage of freedom
 safeguard this city, together with Zeus and king Aiakōs,
 Peleus and noble Telamon, and with Achilles.¹⁰

⁸ Pindar, *Pythian* 8, l. 95–100.

⁹ The date generally accepted for this Ode is 446. See R. W. B. Burton, *Pindar's Pythian Odes*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1962, p. 174.

¹⁰ Pindar, ed. and trans. William H. Race, *Pindar: Olympian Odes; Pythian Odes*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press (Loeb Classical Library), 1997, p. 333, incl. note 3.

The strophe begins with a plural: ἑπτάμεροι literally, οἱ ones with respect to, given over to, the ἡμέρα the day. The Greeks know nothing of men as a creation. The notion of the day here is not, as we seek to hear it, ephemera, men and women as the marginalia of events, but rather the opposite is at issue. Ἐπ' ἡμέρα with respect to – concerning – the day, is that in which something is to be decided, namely the day as such: the day, we might say, of reckoning, the day which sets the measure of all other days. The plural says: for each of you, the day decides and there is a decisive day! The day in question in the ode is the day of Aristomenes' victory in the wrestling. We might say, each of us has and will have his or her day. What kind of a day? For a day is the counterpoint to a life: *in* the day, in its vicissitudes, is how we live out the life that we have. To be in the day, and to be decided *by* the day, is what is most common to each of us, and marks us out from the gods, who have no day as such, but are ἀεί Ἀεί does not only mean 'ever', it can also mean 'now', the moment: but the word brings to the fore the *presencing* moment, that which presents itself and is, in a sense, present as a demand. We experience this demand as a constancy, as persisting, as what will never leave us and so persists unchanged: we see at once how the contemporary understanding of subjectivity of the subject, of self as constant-presence, usurps the time of the gods (sending them into flight) and destroys the relation to the day. This word, ἑπτάμεροι says: 'mortals'; ones who must arise through a birth; who live out our days by living *in* them, and speak out from the day, and die. We are those ones whom the day befalls (the proper meaning of the prefix, ἐπί), and are shaped and apportioned by the day *as* it falls upon us.¹¹ Mortals are at the mercy of the day that befalls them. And it is only if we read the opening in this way that we can understand what is at issue in the enigmatic phrase

τίδέ τις τίδ' οὐ τις

¹¹ See Hermann Fränkel, *Man's 'Ephemeris': Nature According to Pindar and Others in Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, vol. 77 (1946), p. 133. Fränkel notes (p. 133) "And the other element, ἐπί indicates that 'day' is 'upon' us. Just as, for instance, ἐπίφθορος is 'exposed and subject to envy', so ἐφήμερος is 'exposed and subject to every actuality as it arises', and the term implies that man is moulded and remoulded by changing events and circumstances. For, according to this remarkable view, it is not merely our external condition that is liable to abrupt vicissitudes: we are ἐφήμεροὶ ourselves; our thoughts and feelings, our attitude and behaviour, our ways and actions – in short, our entire personality is shifting and at the mercy of the day."

There appear to be two questions here: each asks ‘what?’, Greek τί . We who live from philosophy live from out of this question ‘what?’. The founding question of Plato, of Aristotle, of the whole tradition and history of philosophy is: τί τὸ ὄν, ‘what is the (present, extant) being (in its being)?’; what is this *thing* which is the object of our enquiry? To find out the whatness in every *thing* is the discovery of its essence, what is at the same time essential to it and definitive for its being – what persists when everything else is stripped away. This τί, its whatness, drives in to the demand that presence is, to name it and find it out. Except that Pindar is no philosopher, and it is for precisely this reason that I make a thoughtful appeal to these lines of this ode. For he asks his question, if indeed it even *is* a question, before the philosophising of Aristotle and Plato. Counterpoint in Greek is ordinarily indicated by the parallel μέν . . . δέ ‘on the one hand, on the other’. Here, however, we have the succession, δέ δέ the essential thought is not ‘or’, but ‘and . . . and then’. The construction which we translated as ‘What is a man? What is he not?’ is not a contrast, but names the *same* in two forms: that it is (τί δέ τις; that it is not (τί δ’ οὐ τις. In Greek the τί is unclear: for it could say ‘what?’, or it could say ‘who?’. Τί δέ τις has the perfectly ordinary sense of ‘who indeed?’: indeed, what is said here *need not* be a question. We do not know: Greek gained its diacritics and punctuation only in the first century AD, in a form that only became common in the fourth: in other words, between near seven and a full ten centuries elapse before Pindar’s line is marked and punctuated, by which time its meaning is decided by many and various interpretations (setting aside the later complications of different punctuations and forms, that confuse the issue further). What is indicated here as the continuation of the *same*, both that he is (who indeed!) and that he indeed is not (τί δ’ οὐ τις, indicates not ‘what?’, but *when*. The day befalls a man when he indeed is, but *that day will also fall out (for him) when he is not.*¹²

¹² Charles Segal (*Pindar, Mimnermus, and the ‘Zeus-Given Gleam’: The End of Pythian 8 in Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica*, vol. 22 [1976], pp. 71–76) argues that there is a parallelism between this line of Pindar and the first line of Mimnermus’ Fragment 1: τίς δὲ βίος τί δὲ τερπνὸν ἄτερ χρυσέμεῖς Ἀφροδίτης (‘What of a life, what delight without golden Aphrodite?’). The parallel, even if there (and something of Mimnermus does sometimes haunt Pindar’s lines), seems shadowy, and if meant at all, should be understood as no more than a distant allusion.

Little can convey in English the sense both of assertion, ‘who indeed!’ and its dissipation ‘who, that he is not’ of the succession in this line, which is followed by the phrase, difficult to translate – σκιάς ὄναρ – a shadow, σκιάς of a dream. The word ὄναρ as many (but not all) commentators on this text have argued must be read as a subjective genitive; a shadow, literally, remembered or possessed of (by) a dream.¹³ Whose is the shadow in question? The word σκιά occurs in Homer, at the moment where Odysseus learns of his need to descend to the house of Hades, there where alone has Persephone been granted νόος the openness of understanding. The word Homer uses of each of those at Hades is ψυχή the word we ordinarily use for soul.¹⁴ Only Persephone has understanding and knowledge in Hades itself: every other soul of the dead is in an entirely different condition. With the exception of Persephone, Homer describes the souls in Hades thus: τὰ δὲ σκιά ἀίσσουσιω the others, these shades (who are also souls), flutter about, without understanding, unknowingly.¹⁵ To have understanding (νοῦς) means: to be ready for world and whatever befalls us through our being in the world and being worlded. Persephone, daughter of Demeter (mother of the earth) is that one who, belonging to Hades because she had been tricked into eating in his house, must return from the world to the underworld for a season of every year.¹⁶ To have openness for world, νοῦς is to be ordered to the day, to the change it brings, and so to be subject to what the day decides. This is the opposite of ‘constant-(unchanging)-presence (as presence-to-self)’, the state of mortals in death. To have νοῦς is to be able to open the mouth for speech, λόγος which means to be able to denote and know, and speak *of*, world. To be *without* openness for the world, understanding, νοῦς means: to be thrown back endlessly on myself, to become unchanging, the constant self-presence that is given only in the underworld, in death. To be thrown back endlessly means: to live only in

¹³ See L. Bieler, ΣΚΙΑΣ ΟΝΑΡ ΑΝΘΡΩΠΟΣ SKIAS in *Wiener Studien*, vol. 53, 1933, pp. 143–145; see also Peter Toohey, *Shades of Meaning in Pindar Pythian 8, 95–97* in *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica*, vol. 26 (1987), pp. 73–87, esp. p. 78. Toohey argues for (p. 78) “a dream ‘felt by’ a shadow”.

¹⁴ Homer, *Odyssey*, 10, 492.

¹⁵ Homer, *Odyssey*, 10, 495. Toohey also shows that the reference to σκιά has a parallel in Homer (although he attributes the possession of ‘wits’ in the underworld to Teiresias and not, more correctly, to Persephone). Toohey indicates other places where σκιά is used in this sense of ‘shade’. Cf. Aeschylus, *Seven Against Thebes*, 986–988.

¹⁶ This was the bargain (Olympian) Hermes made with (the underworld god) Hades.

my memories. This is, as Pindar says, to have only my dreams for company. The momentary day will decide the dream that is had for the stretch of eternity that is death.

The encounter between Odysseus and the fluttering σκιαί, the souls and shades of Hades, occupies much of Book 11 of the *Odyssey*. The figures of Hades both are, and really, they are not. Achilles, who figures greatly in these passages, refers to them as βροτῶν εἶδωλακαμόντων. How are we to understand this phrase? A κημός is a muzzle or cloth, used to bridle a horse, or to protect the mouth and nose from the heat of the oven in a bakery: it is, therefore, a limiting covering, or a veil, that inhibits the proper use of the mouth. The proper use of the mouth is not only, or even primarily, for eating, nor even for breathing (and the dead can neither eat nor breath), but before this and above all, the mouth is for speaking – λόγος διαλέγεσθαι. The organ of speech is properly both the mouth and νοῦς, what we now speak of as mind, or better put, openness of understanding. The βροτῶν εἶδωλα καμόντων of which Homer speaks are therefore the images, or semblances (εἶδωλα) of mortals, but mortals who are muffled, restrained at the mouth, and so with respect to what they can say (with respect to speaking, λόγος, whose power of knowing and denoting what they know is in evanescence. Not speechless entirely, but wreathed with only ghostly words, the vague and elusive language of dreams.

Pindar in these two lines names the whole of a life: the whole is that which had life in the world and could open world for itself and others, and the ‘life’ that follows in death, in the house of Hades, when mortals still are, and yet really are not. The proper word for this whole life is ψυχή, soul. Pindar names the measure of a whole life that is a soul, ψυχή. The last word that Pindar uses of a human life, however, is not ψυχή, but αἰών, the ‘sweetly-seeming life (μείλιχος αἰών)’ of which he speaks in the passage we have been considering, which is bright with a luminosity given by Zeus, and at the same time, itself Zeus-given (διόσδοτος, the best kind of life: the life in a full measure that Aristomenes’ victory at the games both makes possible (for himself) and merits.

In his *De Cælo*, Aristotle says that the word αἰών was a divinely inspired name for the soul, given by our predecessors: Aristotle, therefore, explicitly returns

us to the previous (poetic) tradition to understand what this word means. Aristotle says that “indeed the ‘all’ as the extremity of the time of each living being, which according to its nature cannot be exceeded, is the surrounding αἰών of each being”.¹⁷ He adds, “according to the same thought, the all of the heavens and all time and the unlimited final containment is αἰών, taking the name from ἀεί εἶναι (being ever), without death, and divine”.¹⁸ Aristotle provides us with an unwitting commentary on these lines of Pindar, for he tells us how to understand the term αἰών, and he tells us how to relate the being of the individual soul to the being of the cosmos as a whole: they are related in the measure of their time, αἰών. Even in death, ever-being-the-same. We glimpse from whence the doctrine of the ἀρετή the so-called virtues as the ‘perfecting’ of the ‘eternal’ soul, could stem. The excellences (‘virtues’) of life are to be attained for the sake of what they will allot to us in the shaded dream-world, the memories, that will constitute the focus of our days at Hades.

In contrast to contemporary philosophy, neither Aristotle nor Pindar need thematise ontology (being as such, *my* being) through being-as-a-whole (metaphysical anthropology) in a metaphysical understanding of ontological difference: the being that I am belongs to being by its being bound together not in a metaphysical unity (the concept), but in the measure of time, which is in each case the *same*. The αἰών is at the same time the ψυχή the soul, of every thing that lives, and the soul’s apportionment to eternity itself and within the whole of the cosmos. There is, in other words, also no attempt to define the essence of the creature with respect to itself, as every metaphysical anthropology does: rather the essence of the creature is both read off from, and *only* from, and understood within, and *only* within, the entirety of the heavens and the whole of time. There is no prior ‘subject’, no ‘essence of man’, to be found in Aristotle or Pindar.

It is from here that we can understand how to read these lines of Pindar. For they stretch beyond the heavens, and beyond the natural time of each living being, but in a particular and most definite way. These lines begin with the day that befalls

¹⁷ Aristotle, *De caelo*, 279 a 24 f. τὸ γὰρ τέλος περιέχων τῆς ἁσπουζῆς χρόνου μήτε ἔξω κατὰ φύσιαιῶν ἐκάστου κέκληται

¹⁸ Aristotle, *De caelo*, 279 a 25 f. κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν δὲ λόγον καὶ τὸ τῷ παντὸς οὐρανῷ τέλος καὶ τὸν πάντα χρόνον καὶ τὴν ἀπείραν περιέχον ἐλοφίων ἐστὶν ἀπὸ τῷ ἀεί εἶναι αἰληφῶς τὴν ἐπωνυμίαν ἀθάνατος καὶ θεός

us, and end with the entirety that both contains us and sets us forth. However the entirety is read right into eternity, into where we will spend almost all of the eternity which befalls us: the house of Hades itself. The day that makes me is the highest and most resplendent dream that my shade may have. How is this day to be? Is it the day of the character of Aristomenes, the best of days belonging to that one named best of courage, or is it the ignominious day of his defeated opponents? Here only the fates will decide, abetted by the gods – it is the fates, abetted by Zeus as the highest god and therefore that one from whom the greatest light would fall, who will decide the fate of the mortal's day. It is the *day* which decides how eternity will stand for me, and *not* the other way round. The day of a mortal, a day god-given, given in the light of a god, that will be an eternal consolation (should such a day be granted).

I do not here want to read any kind of theology into these lines of Pindar: quite the reverse. Zeus is not a figure of the Christian God (the Father). Rather, we must recall the presence of Achilles, as both that one whom Odysseus goes into the house of Hades to meet, and whose name is placed as the very last word of the ode. Achilles does not terminate the ode by any accident. Achilles is *that one* whose fate was promised as one of two possibilities: either he should have a short life, but to stand in memory as glorious for every following generation, or he should enjoy long life but ignominy thereafter. Should he chose long life he must withstand that he will be forgotten by future generations (his shade will persist at Hades, unknown to others who live). The whole of Pindar's Eighth Pythian recalls and repeats (without naming) this founding myth of the life and reputation among men of the hero Achilles. The young Achilles, when he goes out to avenge the death of his beloved Patroclus therefore both *knows* his fate and *must make for himself the fate that he knows is to be his*. Glorious in all subsequent generations of men, never to be forgotten, of highest fame, assured to him in the dream in death that is his evermore. Visited by Odysseus, now dead and here in Hades, so Homer tells us, the 'peerless' Achilles appears to Odysseus as one who weeps.¹⁹ Achilles is, in this ode and for Pindar, in every sense, Aristomenes: best of courageous men on the field of battle.

¹⁹ Cf. Homer, *Odyssey*, 11, 472. ἀμύμονα . . . ὀλοθύρομένη

Yet this is not a contentless knowledge. The dream of a shade is the *content* of the day, the making of the man. The peerless Achilles, best of men, knows who he is, and he is the greatest of men, and this will now never change in eternal death. Of all men, a glorious light attends him (λαμπὸν φέγγος ἔπεστιν ἀνδρῶν). And yet he weeps.

One word we have left so far untranslated in Pindar's lines: ἄνθρωπος. The shade that dreams is named: ἄνθρωπος. In these three poetic words σκιάς ὄναρ ἄνθρωπος a sentence on its own, both shade and ἄνθρωπος are subjects, in the nominative case. Mortals are those bound to the day, to whom the day is their lot. It falls as glory or ignominy. In glory is a honey-sweet αἶών, which means, the whole of your time, both here and beyond the grave, will be decided in the day which is your measure. And yet the decision is yours: each man, each woman, each *mortal* must make of the day his and her respective fate. This is not anthropology *ex humani genere* but its very reverse: you, yourself, and only you, are both bound to the fate that befalls you, and this day must *be the making* of your fate. The word ἄνθρωπος is almost always translated in these lines as man; man as such: 'humanity'. It should and must be translated as *a man*, even as it also says *a woman*. The fates of men and women are always singular and particular, belonging to each of us: is always *mine*, and yet, as we can see so strongly implied in the commentary supplied by Aristotle, this singular destiny is *taken off* from beings as a whole, from the whole of the heavens, the οὐρανός. My fate befalls me as one among others, and so my fate unfolds before you, before them. My particularity, the essence that is mine, can never be taken off without cognisance of, nor without respect to, you, you in general, the rest of mortals. In Pindar, in Greek thought prior to the 'what' question of Plato and Aristotle, we do not look to define the 'essence' of humanity in terms of what is 'common' (κοινόν) to all, but rather the reverse: we ask 'who?': who is that *one*? The essence of a mortal being is his or her respective, absolute, specificity. The essence of a man is the man he *comes to be* (as final being-always in death) and so has *once* (in his day) been. He and she knows this only in death: this is his dream, when my life folds back on me but cannot change again. In death alone, and at Hades, I find myself in constant presence to myself. Unlike the constant presence of

subjectivity, which has no content but is a mere empty thought – ‘I am’, this constant presence contains in its memory and fixedness the fulness of my finished life.

Pindar indicates to us, prisoners of the Cartesian *cogito*, how the Greeks were able to speak of an ἄνθρωπος without an already-present ‘anthropology’. The essence, the being, of the ἄνθρωπος is *only* the finished, fulfilled βίος the life of this specific man, woman, before us in each case, in death. There is nothing antecedent, no pre-defined essence, that is not substantially derived from the world in which a man arises, and lives, and has his day. How then from this, the sharpest of all individuations, can this be a politics? The last three lines of the Eighth Pythian switch, from the ἄνθρωπος to the πόλις – the city, the tribe, the nation. Not the πόλις in general, ‘as such’, to which there is also no preexistent essence, but the πόλις of Aigina. Aristomenes, best of courageous men, the ἄνθρωπος in question, has his being in the πόλις as among its best: to whom also Zeus, King Aiakōs, Telamon, Peleus and Achilles bear their witness, in Zeus, best of gods, all best of men. Aristomenes’ triumph signifies that dear mother Aigina, κόμιζε which means (as an imperative) must take care and *is* taking care of the πόλις the city-life in question.²⁰ Already at line 70 we have learnt that the feast for Aristomenes has brought the goddess Order (Δίκη), the ordering-settling of δίκη ‘justice’ (if we accept this translation) to the city. The attainments of the best of men: Achilles; Aristomenes; set the city at peace with itself and in harmony, which, Pindar says in the concluding lines, sets the city “on a journey of being-set-free” (ἐλευθέρω στόλῳ). The attainments of the best of men opens the honeyed-sweet life of freedom, not for a man, but in fact, and preeminently, for the πόλις entire.

It may have concerned you, therefore, that there is in my words an implicit attack on democracy and the doctrine of the state. My concern and attack, however, is against the metaphysical doctrine of the state, as much to be found in Hegel as it is in Marx, Nussbaum and others, itself grounded in a metaphysical anthropology. Does Pindar shed light on this for us? That the presence in the πόλις of the best of men is not the government, or rule (from ἄρχω I rule), of excellent men, as a taking-

²⁰ For a discussion of Pindar’s use of the present imperative, κόμιζε and its significance in the political situation of Aegina in relation to Athens see Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer, *Pindar’s Eighth Pythian: The Relevance of the Historical Setting in Hermes*, vol. 123 (1995), pp. 156–165, see esp. 164 f.

power and taking-command of the desire for power and laying-hands on it (the modern business of ‘politics’), but rather, that the appearance of excellent men, and now women, in the πόλις sets it in harmony and lets it be well-ruled? Is therefore what is at issue ‘aristarchy’, not rule *of* and *by* the best (so that the minute a man or woman becomes the best he and she is pressed into service as leaders, when in fact it is for his and her sake that leadership should rise up to being exercised – something that admits both that politics is a dirty business and that it must be ever encouraged to strive for the overcoming of its faults), but rather rule ordered to, and *for the sake of* the best. Rule so that what – or rather who – are the best of men and women may properly appear, and set the πόλις in harmony with itself and with its worst. The rule for the best is the rule for the sake of the unity, of the whole, of the πόλις. And should we perhaps heed these words as the basis for life in the πόλις rather than any politics derived from a metaphysically conceived anthropology? And would this not better be our hope, the measure of our day?

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The Rule for the Best: The End of Anthropology

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