

JUHA SIHVOLA, *Decay, Progress, the Good Life? Hesiod and Protagoras on the Development of Culture*. "Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum", 89 (1989) pp. 174, 8°.

Although this book of J. Sihvola was published several years ago, we are presenting it in the belief that for an interesting book it is never late to be recommended.

The purpose of investigations here assumed is to find ways of understanding Greek conceptions of culture and its development, which can avoid some usual anachronisms characteristic for many modern interpretations. The author do that by attempting to reconstruct the specific historical context of the discours of two influential Greek models of the human way of life, its origins, nature and development, often considered to be typical representatives of the two rival conceptions.

The first is conception of history as decay from the original Golden Age, as represented by Hesiod, and the second is conception of history as progress from primitive beginnings, as represented by Protagoras.

It was Hesiod who presented the classical versions of the two myths, the Prometheus myth and the myth of the five species of men, which are often considered to have been based on the conception of human history as decline of the human way of life from the Gold Age to the present miserable condition. Protagoras, from the other side, can be regarded as a typical representative of the fifth-century optimistic conception of human culture, as we find it in two dialogues of Plato, *Protagoras* and *Theaetetus*. The choice of the Protagorean theory of culture as second topic (opposit) of discussion is defended by the fact that he, too, utilized the Prometheus myth in the articulation of his theory, but in an entirely different way from Hesiod.

By puting both interpretations in one wide frame of typical feature of Greek thought and Greek culture on the whole, the author prepares an authentic approach to the subject mentioned above. Following the essential ideas of R. G. Collingwood, Karl Löwith and some others, that Greeks of archaic and classical periods were more interesting in seeking the eternal laws of human nature and the universe than in historical change as such, Sihvola suggests that cyclical interpretation of change seems to be founded on the same habit of thinking as the endeavour to go beyond the present and temporality. What is of interest is not the individual, the historical or the changeable, but rather that which stays the same in spite of change. Thus, to speak of structurally unchanging historical cycles is also one way of constructing something permanent in a world experienced as temporary and uncertain.

Now, if one compares Hesiodic and Protagorean conceptions of human culture, he can see that the similarities between them are far more striking than the differences. Sihvola thinks that it is even misleading to emphasize their opposition as the representatives of two competing patterns of the development of culture, the decay model and the progressive model. It is possible Protagoras' theory of nature of human way of life to be interpreted as containing a vision of some cultural progress, but the decay of culture is not a central theme in Hesiod's *Works and Days*.

After an detailed and exact analysis of the first part of mentioned poem of Hesiod, author concludes that the main theme here is to characterize the human condition and the prerequisites for the best attainable human life in the contemporary world. Hesiod first states his central thesis in the doctrine of the two Erides: in order to get a success in life, human beings need strife and competition, but they should to use only appropriate means and to work hard. The Prometheus myth illustrates the imperfect character of the present world and the means of life available for humankind. The myth of the five species characterizes the social order according to the justice of Zeus, and gives a warning of the fatal consequences of not obeying this order.

Protagoras, as well as Hesiod, takes advantage of the same well-known historical and genealogical myths. But, in the interpretations of both, these myths and theories and the quasihistorical stages of human life depicted in them should not be understood as literal historical accounts of the gradual development of the human way of life, but rather as analytical means of illustrating different aspects of human nature and presenting a general theory of the essential human characteristics.

Protagoras and Hesiod are aware that myths should be understood metaphorically, and both thinkers consciously intend their historical-genealogical myths to be interpreted primarily in a synchronic sense, whereas the diachronic aspect of their meaning is much less important.

In the end, we should point out that for the book of J. Sihvola on the whole is characteristic a wide informativity, exactness in the argumentation and bravery in drawing new conclusions.

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