

YOUNG SOCRATES: That is something we must certainly avoid doing at all costs.

VISITOR: Then we must travel some other route, starting from another point.

YOUNG SOCRATES: What route is that?

VISITOR: By mixing in, as one might put it, an element of play: we must bring in a large part of a great story, and as for the rest, we must then—  
e as in what went before—take away part from part in each case and so arrive at the furthest point of the object of our search. So should we do it?

YOUNG SOCRATES: Absolutely.

VISITOR: In that case, pay complete attention to my story, as children do; you certainly haven't left childish games behind for more than a few years.

YOUNG SOCRATES: Please go ahead.

VISITOR: Then I'll begin. There have occurred in the past, and will occur in the future, many of the things that have been told through the ages; one is the portent relating to the quarrel between Atreus and Thyestes. I imagine you remember hearing what people say happened then.<sup>27</sup>

YOUNG SOCRATES: You're referring, perhaps, to the sign of the golden lamb.

269 VISITOR: Not at all; rather to that of the changing of the setting and rising of the sun and the other stars—it's said that they actually began setting in the region from which they now rise, and rising from the opposite region, and that then after having given witness in favor of Atreus the god changed everything to its present configuration.

YOUNG SOCRATES: Yes indeed, they do say this as well.

VISITOR: And what's more, we've also heard from many about the kingship exercised by Cronus.<sup>28</sup>

b YOUNG SOCRATES: Yes, from a great many.

VISITOR: And what of the report that earlier men were born from the earth and were not reproduced from each other?

YOUNG SOCRATES: This too is one of the things that have been told through the ages.

VISITOR: Well, all these things together are consequences of the same state of affairs, and besides these thousands of others still more astonishing than they; but through the great lapse of time since then some have been obliterated, while others have been reported in a scattered way, each  
c separate from one another. But as for the state of affairs that is responsible for all of these things, no one has related it, and we should relate it now; for once it has been described, it will be a fitting contribution towards our exposition of the king.

YOUNG SOCRATES: I very much like what you say; go on, and leave nothing out.

27 Cf. Euripides, *Orestes* 986 ff.

28. A 'golden age' (cf. Hesiod, *Works and Days* 111–22), when everything necessary for the survival of human beings was provided without their having to work for it.

VISITOR: Listen then. This universe the god himself sometimes accompanies, guiding it on its way and helping it move in a circle, while at other times he lets it go, when its circuits have completed the measure of the time allotted to it; then it revolves back in the opposite direction, of its own accord, being a living creature and having had intelligence assigned to it by the one who fitted it together in the beginning. This backward movement is inborn in it from necessity, for the following reason.

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YOUNG SOCRATES: What reason, exactly?

VISITOR: Remaining permanently in the same state and condition, and being permanently the same, belongs only to the most divine things of all, and by its nature body is not of this order. Now the thing to which we have given the name of 'heavens' and 'cosmos'<sup>29</sup> certainly has a portion of many blessed things from its progenitor, but on the other hand it also has its share of *body*. In consequence it is impossible for it to be altogether exempt from change, although as far as is possible, given its capacities, it moves in the same place, in the same way, with a single motion; and this is why it has reverse rotation as its lot, which is the smallest possible variation of its movement. To turn itself by itself forever is, I dare say, impossible for anything except the one who guides all the things which, unlike him, are in movement; and for him to cause movement now in one way, now in the opposite way is not permitted. From all of these considerations, it follows that one must neither say that the cosmos is always itself responsible for its own turning, nor say at all<sup>30</sup> that it is turned by god in a pair of opposed revolutions, nor again that it is turned by some pair of gods whose thoughts are opposed to each other; it is rather what was said just now, which is the sole remaining possibility, that at times it is helped by the guidance of another, divine, cause, acquiring life once more and receiving a restored immortality from its craftsman, while at other times, when it is let go, it goes on its own way under its own power, having been let go at such a time as to travel backwards for many tens of thousands of revolutions because of the very fact that its movement combines the effects of its huge size, perfect balance, and its resting on the smallest of bases.

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YOUNG SOCRATES: It certainly seems that everything you have gone through is very reasonable.

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VISITOR: Then drawing on what's just been said, let's reflect on the state of affairs we said was responsible for all those astonishing things. In fact it's just this very thing.

YOUNG SOCRATES: What's that?

VISITOR: That the movement of the universe is now in the direction of its present rotation, now in the opposite direction.

YOUNG SOCRATES: How do you mean?

29. Alternatively, 'world-order'; the idea of order is central to the Greek term.

30. Reading *mēth' holon* at e9.

c VISITOR: We must suppose that this change is, of the turnings that occur in the heavens, the greatest and the most complete turning of all.

YOUNG SOCRATES: Yes, it certainly seems so.

VISITOR: We must suppose, then, that at that time the greatest changes also occur for us who live within the universe?

YOUNG SOCRATES: That too seems likely.

VISITOR: And don't we recognize that living creatures by their nature have difficulty in tolerating changes that are at once large, great in number, and of all different sorts?

YOUNG SOCRATES: Certainly we do.

d VISITOR: Necessarily, then, there occur at that time cases of destruction of other living creatures on a very large scale, and humankind itself survives only in small numbers. Many new and astonishing things happen to them, but the greatest is the one I shall describe, one that is in accordance with the retrogradation of the universe, at the time when its turning becomes the opposite of the one that now obtains.

YOUNG SOCRATES: What kind of thing do you mean?

e VISITOR: First, the visible age of each and every creature, whatever it was, stopped increasing, and everything that was mortal ceased moving in the direction of looking older; instead it changed back in the opposite direction, and grew as it were younger, more tender. The white hairs of the older men became black, and in turn the cheeks of those who had their beards became smooth again, returning each to his past bloom; the bodies of those in their puberty, becoming smoother and smaller each day and night, went back to the form of new-born children, which they came to resemble both in mind and in body, and from then on they proceeded to waste away until they simply disappeared altogether. As for those who  
271 died a violent death at that time, the body of the dead person underwent the same effects and quickly dissolved to nothing in a few days.

YOUNG SOCRATES: But, visitor, how did living creatures come into being in that time? And in what way were they produced from each other?

b VISITOR: Clearly, Socrates, reproduction from one another was not part of the nature of things then. It was the earth-born race, the one said to have existed once, that existed then, returning to life again from the earth; it was remembered by our first ancestors, who lived in the succeeding  
time but bordered on the ending of the previous period, growing up at the beginning of this one. They became our messengers for the accounts of the earth-born, which are nowadays wrongly disbelieved by many people. For I think we must reflect on what is implied by what we have said. If old men went back to being children, it follows that people should be put together again from the dead, there in the earth, and come back to life; they would be following the reversal of things, with coming-into-being turning round with it to the opposite direction, and since they would  
c according to this argument necessarily come into existence as earth-born, they would thus acquire that name and have that account given of them—all those of them, that is, whom god did not take off to another destiny.

YOUNG SOCRATES: Yes, quite; this does seem to follow on what went before. But as for the life which you say there was in the time of Cronus' power—was it in that period of rotation or in this one? For it clearly turns out that the change affecting the stars and the sun occurs in each period.<sup>31</sup>

VISITOR: You have been keeping up with the argument well. As for what you asked, about everything's springing up of its own accord for human beings, it belongs least to the period that now obtains; it too belonged to the one before. For then the god began to rule and take care of the rotation itself as a whole, and as for<sup>32</sup> the regions, in their turn, it was just the same, the parts of the world-order having everywhere<sup>33</sup> been divided up by gods ruling over them. As for living things, divine spirits had divided them between themselves, like herdsmen, by kind and by herd, each by himself providing independently for all the needs of those he tended, so that none of them was savage, nor did they eat each other, and there was no war or internal dissent at all; and as for all the other things that belong as consequences to such an arrangement, there would be tens of thousands of them to report. But to return to what we have been told about a human life without toil, the origin of the report is something like this. A god tended them, taking charge of them himself, just as now human beings, themselves living creatures, but different and more divine, pasture other kinds of living creatures more lowly than themselves; and given his tendance, they had no political constitutions,

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31. Alternatively: "at each of the two turnings." (The word tr. 'period' in the text is elsewhere tr. 'turning,' i.e., reversal of the direction of rotation.) The translation in the text is based on the assumption that in the myth as a whole the Visitor envisages two eras during *both* of which the cosmos rotates, as it now does, from east to west (one era when it is under god's control, one under its own inherent power), separated by a relatively brief period of rotation in the reverse direction (so that then the sun rises in the west and sets in the east). This reverse rotation begins immediately after the god releases control, i.e., at the outset of the time when the cosmos rules itself, and it ends when the cosmos gains sufficient self-possession to return to rotating in the normal, east-to-west direction. On this interpretation, the Visitor has just been describing the 'earth-born' people as existing during the relatively brief period of reverse-rotation, and Young Socrates now asks whether the golden age of Cronus also occurred during that time, or instead in the era that preceded it. The alternative translation fits with a different interpretation of the myth, which is that of most scholars. According to this prevailing interpretation the Visitor envisages, more simply, two alternating eras, one of west-to-east rotation (under god's control) and one of the east-to-west rotation we are familiar with: this latter, for us normal, direction of rotation occupies the *whole* of the time when the cosmos is under self-rule. On this interpretation there is no intervening, brief period of reverse-rotation, so the Visitor's description of the 'earth-born' people has placed them in the era of god's control. Accordingly, Young Socrates is now asking whether the golden age of Cronus existed in that same era, or instead during the era we now live in.

32. Reading *hōs d'au kata* at d4.

33. Reading *pantēi ta* at d5.

272 nor acquired wives and children, for all of them came back to life from the earth, remembering nothing of the past.<sup>34</sup> While they lacked things of this sort, they had an abundance of fruits from trees and many other plants, which grew not through cultivation but because the earth sent them up of its own accord. For the most part they would feed outdoors, naked and without bedding; for the blend of the seasons was without painful extremes, and they had soft beds from abundant grass that sprang from the earth. What you are hearing about, then, Socrates, is the life of those who lived in the time of Cronus; as for this one, which they say is in the time of Zeus, the present one, you are familiar with it from personal experience. Would you be able and willing to judge which of the two is the more fortunate?

YOUNG SOCRATES: Not at all.

VISITOR: Then do you want me to make some sort of decision for you?

YOUNG SOCRATES: Absolutely.

VISITOR: Well then, if, with so much leisure available to them, and so much opportunity to get together in conversation not only with human beings but also with animals—if the nurslings of Cronus used all these advantages to do philosophy, talking both with animals and with each other, and inquiring from all sorts of creatures whether any one of them had some capacity of its own that enabled it to see better in some way than the rest with respect to the gathering of wisdom, the judgment is easy, that those who lived then were far, far more fortunate than those who live now. But if they spent their time gorging themselves with food and drink and exchanging stories with each other and with the animals of the sort that<sup>35</sup> even now are told about them, this too, if I may reveal how it seems to me, at least, is a matter that is easily judged. But however that may be, let us leave it to one side, until such time as someone appears who is qualified to inform us in which of these two ways the desires of men of that time were directed in relation to the different varieties of knowledge and the need for talk; we must now state the point of our rousing our story into action, in order to move forward and bring what follows to its end. When the time of all these things had been completed and the hour for change had come, and in particular all the earth-born race had been used up, each soul having rendered its sum of births, falling to the earth as seed as many times as had been laid down for each, at that point the steersman of the universe, let go—as it were—of the bar of the steering-oars and retired to his observation-post; and as for the cosmos,

34. On the interpretation assumed in the translation (see n. 31 above) these must be a different kind of 'earth-born' people from the previous ones (perhaps they are to be considered as produced from the earth instead as babies: cf. 272e, 274a). On the prevalent interpretation this is a second reference to the same earth-born people as before: we now learn that being born from the earth full grown was characteristic of human life for the whole period of god's control of the cosmos.

35 Reading *muthous hoioi* at c7.

its allotted and innate desire turned it back again in the opposite direction. So all the gods who ruled over the regions together with the greatest divinity, seeing immediately what was happening, let go in their turn the parts of the cosmos that belonged to their charge; and as it turned about and came together with itself, impelled with opposing movements, both the one that was beginning and the one that was now ending, it produced a great tremor in itself, which in its turn brought about another destruction of all sorts of living things. After this, when sufficient time had elapsed, it began to cease from noise and confusion and attained calm from its tremors; it set itself in order, into the accustomed course that belongs to it, itself taking charge of and mastering both the things within it and itself, because it remembered so far as it could the teaching of its craftsman and father. At the beginning it fulfilled his teaching more accurately, but in the end less keenly; the cause of this was the bodily element in its mixture, its companion since its origins long in the past, because this element was marked by a great disorder before it entered into the present world-order. For from the one who put it together the world possesses all fine things; from its previous condition, on the other hand, it both has for itself from that source everything that is bad and unjust in the heavens, and produces it in its turn in living things. So while it reared living things in itself in company with the steersman, it created only slight evils, and great goods; but in separation from him, during all the time closest to the moment of his letting go, it manages everything very well, but as time moves on and forgetfulness increases in it, the condition of its original disharmony also takes greater control of it, and, as this time ends, comes to full flower. Then the goods it mixes in are slight, but the admixture it causes of the opposite is great, and it reaches the point where it is in danger of destroying both itself and the things in it. It is for this reason that now the god who ordered it, seeing it in difficulties, and concerned that it should not, storm-tossed as it is, be broken apart in confusion and sink into the boundless sea of unlikeness, takes his position again at its steering-oars, and having turned round what had become diseased and been broken apart in the previous rotation, when the world was left to itself, orders it and by setting it straight renders it immortal and ageless. What has been described, then, is the end-point of everything; as for what is relevant to our showing the nature of the king, it is sufficient if we take up the account from what went before. When the cosmos had been turned back again on the course that leads to the sort of coming-into-being which obtains now, the movement of the ages of living creatures once again stopped and produced new effects which were the opposite of what previously occurred. For those living creatures that were close to disappearing through smallness began to increase in size, while those bodies that had just been born from the earth already gray-haired began to die again and return into the earth. And everything else changed, imitating and following on the condition of the universe, and in particular, there was a change to the mode of conception, birth and rearing, which necessarily imitated and kept pace with the

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change to everything; for it was no longer possible for a living creature to grow within the earth under the agency of others' putting it together, but just as the world-order had been instructed to be master of its own motion, so too in the same way its parts were instructed themselves to perform the functions of begetting, birth and rearing so far as possible by themselves, under the agency of a similar impulse. We are now at the point that our account has all along been designed to reach. To go through the changes that have occurred in relation to the other animals, and from what causes, would involve a description of considerable length; those that relate to human beings will be shorter to relate and more to the point. Since we had been deprived of the god who possessed and pastured us, and since for their part the majority of animals—all those who had an aggressive nature—had gone wild, human beings, by themselves weak and defenseless, were preyed on by them, and in those first times were still without resources and without expertise of any sort; their spontaneous supply of food was no longer available to them, and they did not yet know how to provide for themselves, having had no shortage to force them to do so before. As a result of all of this they were in great difficulties. This is why the gifts from the gods, of which we have ancient reports, have been given to us, along with an indispensable requirement for teaching and education: fire from Prometheus, crafts from Hephaestus and his fellow craftworker, seeds and plants from others. Everything that has helped to establish human life has come about from these things, once care from the gods, as has just been said, ceased to be available to human beings, and they had to live their lives through their own resources and take care for themselves, just like the cosmos as a whole, which we imitate and follow for all time, now living and growing in this way, now in the way we did then. As for the matter of our story, let it now be ended, and we shall put it to use in order to see how great our mistake was when we gave our account of the expert in kingship and statesmanship in our preceding argument.

YOUNG SOCRATES: So how do you say we made a mistake, and how great was it?

VISITOR: In one way it was lesser, in another it was very high-minded, and much greater and more extensive than in the other case.

YOUNG SOCRATES: How so?

275 VISITOR: In that when asked for the king and statesman from the period of the present mode of rotation and generation we replied with the shepherd from the opposite period, who cared for the human herd that existed then, and at that a god instead of a mortal—in that way we went very greatly astray. But in that we revealed him as ruling over the whole city together, without specifying in what manner he does so, in this way, by contrast, what we said was true, but incomplete and unclear, which is why our mistake was lesser than in the respect just mentioned.

YOUNG SOCRATES: True.

VISITOR: So we should define the manner of his rule over the city; it's in this way that we should expect our discussion of the statesman to reach its completion.

YOUNG SOCRATES: Right.

VISITOR: It was just for these reasons that we introduced our story, in order that it might demonstrate, in relation to herd-rearing, not only that as things now stand everyone disputes this function with the person we are looking for, but also in order that we might see more plainly that other person himself whom alone, in accordance with the example of shepherds and cowherds, because he has charge of human rearing, it is appropriate to think worthy of this name, and this name alone.<sup>36</sup>

YOUNG SOCRATES: Correct.

VISITOR: But in my view, Socrates, this figure of the divine herdsman is still greater than that of a king, and the statesmen who belong to our present era are much more like their subjects in their natures and have shared in an education and nurture closer to theirs.

YOUNG SOCRATES: I suppose you must be right.

VISITOR: Yet they will be neither less nor more worth looking for, whether their natures are of the latter or of the former sort.

YOUNG SOCRATES: Quite.

VISITOR: Then let's go back by the following route. The sort of expertise we said was 'self-directing' in the case of living creatures, but which took its care of them not as individuals but in groups, and which we then went on immediately to call herd-rearing—you remember?<sup>37</sup>

YOUNG SOCRATES: Yes.

VISITOR: Well, in a way we missed in our aim at this expertise; for we did not at all succeed in grasping the statesman along with the rest or name him, but he eluded us in our naming, and we did not notice.

YOUNG SOCRATES: How so?

VISITOR: All the other sorts of herdsmen, I think, share the feature of rearing their several herds, but although the statesman does not we still applied the name to him, when we should have applied to all of them one of the names that belongs in common to them.

YOUNG SOCRATES: What you say is true, if indeed there is such a name.

VISITOR: And how would—perhaps—'looking after' not have been common to them all, without any specification of it as 'rearing', or any other sort of activity? By calling it some sort of expertise in 'herd-keeping' or 'looking after', or 'caring for', as applying to them all, we could have covered the statesman too as well as the rest, given that this was the requirement our argument indicated.

36. Alternatively: "... whom alone, because only he has charge of human rearing in accordance with the example of shepherd and cowherd, it is appropriate to think worthy of this name."

37. See 261d.