Plato, the Prophet

Summary

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In Plato`s dialogues a prophetic voice is to be heard repeatedly. This voice is particularly strong in the Statesman at the moment of the mythical tale of the reign of Cronus and in the Republic at its very end formed by the Pamphylian Myth. With both myths a `prophecy is expressed: Contrary to earlier times, humans no longer can rely on the "God of care" (epimeloumenos theos) who guides them and assists them in running their lives and their affairs. For the God has withdrawn his care. Now - in the times ahead - humans must take care of themselves and direct their own lives. They must govern themselves.

But how? What should they do? At first, they should listen to the `prophetic voice`: To hear why the tale of the reign of Cronus was told: Theirs is now a condition of great need (megale aporia). For their world obeying solely to its own impulses and desires degenerates necessarily. The power of evil in this mortal world can never be abolished, precisely because it is mortal. In the Theaitetos Plato draws this essential difference: Since the evils cannot dwell among the immortals they swarm around mortal nature.

What then, in their great need, should humans do? A prophet (prophetes) tells it - in the Pymphilian myth - when souls are assembled before Lachesis, the daughter of Necessity, to choose their fate for the next period of life. To make the right choice - for a life under the rule of wisdom and, in particular, temperance, self-control, self-restraint (sophrosyne), - this is the prophet`s message. For "the daemon will not be allotted to you, but you shall select the daemon". Humans bring their fate upon themselves: "The guilt is the chooser`s". And the prophet answers beforehand to anyone who, having made the wrong, a fatal choice, might be tempted to shed his responsibility for having failed in the governing of his (her) life: "God is guiltless (theos anaitios)".

Throughout his dialogues Plato has developed a vision of `prophetic politics. Good statesmen are inspired by God like prophets (cf. Menon), the great teacher - Socrates - is asked to be a prophetic spokesman (genesthai prophetes, cf. Philebos), to guide themselves well humans ought to open themselves towards divine, `prophetic inspiration (cf. Timaios, Charmides.)
Yet a strong emphasis has to be made: The prophetic voice in Plato’s dialogues is described throughout as a voice in congruence with the rule of *sophrosyne*. For we must know how to distinguish between true and false prophecy: *Sophrosyne* is the judge (cf. *Charmides, Timaios*).