

## DOCILITY AND CIVILIZATION IN ANCIENT GREECE

At a time when there is general speculation about civilization, or civilizations, as well as on what the relationships are between Western and other civilizations, it is logical to try to define precisely what the men of ancient Greece thought about the question, since Western civilization owes so much to them.

It may be that they did not think about it at all, or at least they thought nothing that could be expressed in modern terms. The fact is that ancient Greece did not have a word for civilization; the French and English words come from Latin, not from Greek, while the first examples given in French and English dictionaries are the privileged example of Greece, "the civilization of Greece." Did the Greeks use a paraphrase? Or a different word? If we consult an English-Greek dictionary we are surprised to see that the word given for "civilized" is *hèmeros*, that is, "docile," "tamed."

Having recently published a volume entitled *La Douceur dans la pensée grecque* (Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1979) the author of this paper may be less surprised than others at the importance attached to the idea of docility, but may also feel some regret at

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not having examined this privileged meaning of the word. The reflections that follow are in part intended to fill this lacuna.

Obviously, the proposed assimilation between docility and civilization must neither be taken literally nor pass for a definition, which it is not.

The Greeks were not at all unaware of the importance of civilization in the material sense of the term. In the 5th and 6th centuries B. C. we find a series of authors referring to the sequence of inventions that liberated man from a "bestial" life. As examples we may mention Aeschylus in *Prometheus*; Sophocles in the famous chorus on man in *Antigone*; and Euripides in *The Suppliants*. There were also the philosophers, who reflected on the early life of man, and Protagoras, in the dialogue of Plato that bears his name. Plato himself, in the second book of *The Republic* and in the third book of *The Laws*, writes on the subject as does the author that inspired Diodorus of Sicily's description and appears to be Democritus.

The list of these inventions varies somewhat from author to author, but it always includes houses and clothing, navigation and cultivation of land, along with less concrete inventions such as divination and language. The main purpose is invariably to show how man came to survive and overcome in spite of his physical inferiority with regard to the lower animals.

Nevertheless, even in these lists, the most original and effective characteristic of man is that he was able to organize so as to live in society. Sophocles mentions this in speaking of the "aspirations from which cities are born." Plato's Protagoras set this ability apart as decisive, showing that in spite of fire and technical achievement men would have gone to their ruin if they had not received the gift of humility and justice, permitting them to associate with each other. Isocrates takes the matter up again and associates it with language, that makes it possible for men to come to agreements. Like material inventions, this characteristic opposes humans to animals, but like material inventions it has many possible degrees that separate civilized man from uncivilized man, or rather, open up the possibility of a progression toward higher civilization.

This aptitude for living in a society that, according to Pythagoras, rests on justice and "decency" (in other words respect for

one's fellow man), implies two areas that seem at first sight to be quite different from each other but are so only in appearance; namely, justice as defined by law, and respect for the person, independent of all rules and all politics.

These two ideas are two aspects of *hèmeros*, two aspects of the rejection of violence and savagery.

This is the way the Greeks understood it, and we can understand why. Any peaceful way of solving differences is opposed to violence and despotism. Reciprocal persuasion and law produce this result, and Greek texts often draw a parallel between them. At the end of Aeschylus' *Eumenides* the sequence of murders and vengeance finally ceases, thanks to the institution of a tribunal by Areopagus and to the persuasive insistence of Athena, who transforms the Erinyes into Eumenides and exercises "the holy persuasion that gives to (her) word its magic clemency." Likewise, in the following century the text of Isocrates referred to above praises the power of speech, saying that through it "we have received the ability to mutually convince each other (...) we have united to build cities, establish the law." Justice, defined by law, corresponds to the desire to avoid violence. Demosthenes reminds us that in fact the protection of the law eliminates violence in the streets: Plato writes, in passing, that "justice has domesticated, softened (rendered *hèmera*) all human things" (*Laws*). Here we have the adjective *hèmeros* in its sense of civilized.

This association of respect for the law and amicable relations between men should, in the long run, be obvious to everyone. If we have ever had to be reminded, it is because once the law is established men may want to be more indulgent than the law. The Athenians were acquainted with this propensity, and they used a special word, *épieikeia*, to designate this indulgent clemency that was against too strict a punishment. They thus knew cases in which *épieikeia* conflicted with raw justice, and from this came a veritable crisis that in the 4th century provoked a reaction because it led to what we today would call laxity. However, this opposition, due to the very progress of the idea of "docility", should not allow us to forget that the law was, in fact, a first step toward docility for the Greeks also. The reaction it aroused also reminds us that inside the cities the law was the first and permanent condition for any progress in this direction.

In addition, we understand that this replacing of force by law was one of the great prides of the Greeks. All texts that compare the Greeks to the barbarians mention it. The Greeks of Herodotus are proud to obey the law rather than submit to the orders of the man with a whip. Jason reminds Medea: "First, the land of Greece was your home instead of a barbarian country. You have learned justice, and you know how to live according to the law and not at the whim of force." The Greek law was opposed to force, violence and despotism.

It is also clear that Greek law was not alone in its opposition: beyond the law, the Greeks praised all forms of rules and regulations that filled the same function. From the time of Homer, before the organization of cities and before the existence of written laws (which presupposes that of writing), we find moral laws connected with the gods and imposing respect for others. We see this in the case of the savage Cyclops in Canto 9 of the *Odyssey*. The Cyclops know neither navigation nor cultivation of the land, but most important, they know no rules, human or divine. These rules would have imposed sociable relationships on them, first of all hospitality. On his arrival, Ulysses wants to know if they are "bandits without justice, a race of savages, or hospitable people who respect the gods." The Cyclops that he encounters lives alone, "visiting no one, always in solitude and interested only in crime." Solitude means unsociableness, and the fact is that the Cyclops does not respect the gods, does not spare his guests and practices cannibalism. If solitude means unsociableness, unsociableness means cruelty. For contrast, Homer gives the description of the generous and hospitable courtesy of the Phaeacians, to whom Ulysses is recounting his adventure. There, respect, liberality and discretion combine with the luxury of a prosperous and harmonious collectivity. The cruel Cyclops is on the outside of civilization; the Phaeacians represent the ideal limits of it.

There are thus civilized virtues beyond the written law. They may also be found in areas in which the written law does not exist, such as in relations between cities. Even here the Greeks sought recourse through persuasion and arbitration, in a reasonable and mild manner. Just as obedience to the law is in opposition to violence in the city, recourse to arbitration is constantly

opposed to recourse to force, and the moral condemnation attached to those who refuse arbitration merited sanctions. This is seen, for example, in the reproach made to the Lacedaemonians at the beginning of the Peloponnesian war, a reproach that they must never have forgotten (Thucydides, or Euripides in the laments of Adraste in *Suppliants*). There was an attempt to make persuasion and justice preferable to force, in other words, to introduce more amicable relations into society in the broad sense of the word.

If, however, there was recourse to force, that is, to war, there were still rules or unwritten laws that forbade certain excesses. The respect for the supplicants and surrendering warriors; that for the messengers, sanctuaries, truces; that for the dead that had to be buried, all are obligations entering into unwritten laws. They are often mentioned—each time that they are violated—by Herodotus, Euripides, Thucydides and later Polybius or Diodorus. It seems that, without being always respected in action, they were very dear to the Greek conscience.

It is always the same desire to soften the way of life: Plato, when he recommends respect for the rules in the case of a war between the Greeks, and in anticipation of a future reconciliation (*Republic*), comments that this sentiment belongs to men who are more *hèmeroï* than others. The use of the word is no longer surprising.

This other mark of “docility” is apparently accompanied by the same Greek pride as in the existence of laws. Euripides and Thucydides, among others, call these rules the “common law of the Greek.” There are also numerous texts that show the disapproval of the Greeks for barbarian cruelties in war. When Pausanias is advised to nail the head of the Persian Mardonios to a stake, in reprisal for the treatment given the Spartan Leonidas, Pausanias refuses: “Such behavior is more appropriate to the barbarians than it is to the Greeks, and we Greeks reproach them for it” (Herodotus). Thucydides himself, who hardly paints the Greeks as moderate or decent, loses some of his reserve when he describes the way the Thracians rush into the little town of Mycalessos, pillaging sanctuaries and houses, killing indiscriminately and going so far as to massacre children in school. The historian gives as explanation: “The Thracians, when

they believe they have nothing to fear, are as avid for blood as the most bloodthirsty barbarians.”

Indeed, the Greeks were not angels, far from it, but their aspiration toward a less violent world was always manifest, and when the Greek world became involved with the barbarian world, wars produced greater massacres, tortures and cruelties than before. Diodorus mentions them with horror.

The evolution of the word *barbaros* well illustrates this sentiment. Originally meaning one who spoke a different, incomprehensible language, later someone who was not Greek; after the wars with the Medes it came to mean someone who was “savage” or “cruel,” a meaning it has kept in English and French. It may be someone who has only let himself be carried away by passion, whether rage, as with Medea; sorrow, as with Polymestor in *Hecuba*; or terror, as with the Phrygian slave in *Orestes*. But it is more often the absence of social rules, and cruelty. When in *Hecuba* Agamemnon speaks to the Thracian king who has assassinated Hecuba’s son, he says: “Among you, to kill a guest is perhaps without importance, but for us Greeks it is a shameful act.” Likewise, when Hermione wishes to insult Andromache, she says to her: “That is the way it is with all barbarian people: the father unites with his daughter, the son with his mother and the sister with her brother. The nearest of kin kill each other without any law forbidding it.” The word “barbarous” is so near in meaning to “cruel” that it can be applied to the Greeks. When in Euripides’ *Heraclides* a messenger wants to seize a group of supplicants by force, the king of Athens remarks: “He has the dress and bearing of a Greek, but his behavior is that of a barbarian;” and when Andromache, in her turn, laments of the cruelty of the Greeks (in *The Trojans*) who want to sacrifice her child, she cries: “Oh Greeks, who invent barbarian crimes...”

Those who do not respect the rules of decency proper to civilized life are barbarians, or resemble them. Of course, they do not go as far in their cruelty as the Cyclops, but they are still savages as far as the Greek norms are concerned.

Finally, within the Greek group itself, there are varying degrees in the expansion of decency. In this case, it is not a matter of Greek pride with respect to the barbarians but of an Athenian pride with respect to the Spartans. This pride consists of consider-

ing oneself more civilized, since, for the Greek, Athens is a “living lesson,” as Thucydides says. Its rule of life is docility, an agreeable comfort and tolerance toward others. There are no constraints nor scowling faces: this is what is said in the Funeral Oration attributed to Pericles by Thucydides and repeated many times by Demosthenes. All at once we find within the city no longer just the mere observance of the law, but also of personal qualities in human relations—goodwill, courtesy, *philanthrôpia*. All Athenian writers will exalt these virtues, improving upon the Funeral Oration. At the same time all the activities devoted to the embellishment of life or to the spiritual enrichment of the individual appear; art, festivals and the search for wisdom crown this art of living whose end is no longer force—even that of the city—nor wealth, even that of the Great King. For the Athenians, cultivation of the mind and intellect is found in the very perspective of docility and decency.

Yet, did not Homer’s Cyclops also lack the benefits of the mind? In a play on words in the *Odyssey*, Ulysses, declaring himself to be called No One, dupes and ridicules the Cyclops. And Giraudoux in *Elpenor* improved on this conceit, inventing a Ulysses who bewilders the Cyclops by teaching him poems, rhymes, epigrams and all the tricks of philosophy with its invisible space, finishing by treating him as an “imbecile mass” and telling him that his stupidity is as unlimited as his ugliness.

Homer did not go that far, nor did the Athenians. However, they were still in line with Greek tradition when they were conscious, in disengaging these values of benevolence and culture, of having invented something they believed to be civilization.

One of the Athenian writers who is most disposed to precisely stating this pride is Isocrates. He is constant in that when he wishes to speak of civilization he speaks of docility. In the *Panegyric* he recalls what Athens did for Greece. Its first beneficial act was to have spread the cultivation of wheat, thus ending man’s “living like the beasts.” Then came laws, that Athens was the first to establish and that permitted men to use “words instead of violence” to solve their differences. Finally, intellectual culture, or *philosophia*, over which Athens presided, tamed their relationships and brought other blessings. In the same way, when Isocrates describes the civilizing action that

could be exercised throughout Greece he includes these values of culture and docility. When, in *Evagoras*, he praises the Greek prince who reigned from Salamina in Cyprus over a country that was only partially Greek, he dwells upon this Greek docility: "Not only did he add to the importance of his city, he led all the surrounding territory to a benign and moderate life. Before Evagoras came to power, the inhabitants were so unapproachable and severe that they considered those chiefs the best who showed the greatest cruelty toward the Greeks." Under Evagoras those same inhabitants loved the Greeks, took pleasure in Greek customs, and "people conversant in the cult of the Muses and other forms of culture (*paideusin*) are more numerous in these countries than among the people among whom these qualities used to be found." As Isocrates repeats further on, all of the above defines this gentility of manner that is civilization: "He had found a country completely asocial and savage in all respects: he rendered it docile and comfortable."

Isocrates is not alone in expressing such ideas: in 125 B.C. an amphictryonic decree (that is, one from the Greek council in charge of the sanctuary in Delphi) congratulated the Athenians on having "torn men away from a savage life in order to lead them to a civilized one," or literally, to have "tamed" them. The word is the one we mentioned at the beginning of this paper, *hèmerotès*; it is developed in the text that follows as the idea of trustful and peaceable relationships.

From the Cyclops to the Athenians, civilization becomes perfected and enriched, always in the direction of a growing docility in human relations, and we begin to understand the strangeness of a vocabulary that gives *hèmerotès* as the equivalent of civilization.

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However, there were many words to designate docility. The fact is that a study of the vocabulary shows a growing vogue for these words and, consequently, for the values they represent. This is what the volume mentioned above (*La Douceur dans la pensée grecque*) attempted to make clear. In the fifth century B.C. this is merely hinted at; in the fourth century the words were being used by all authors. Under the Roman Empire, they served to praise individual virtue, in politics as well as in

private life, in moralists' treatises as well as in inscriptions that translated the concepts received. These words vary, from *praos* to the old *èpios*, translated as "docile," to *philanthròpos*, a word designating good intentions and beneficence, by way of *eumenès* or *ilèds* ("benevolent"), *koinos* or *koinònikos* ("mindful of the community"), *euprosègoros* or *prosènès* "easy," "amiable"), not to mention the fine paraphrases such as "not deprived of humanity" (*ouk apanthròpos*). All these words are like a bouquet of various nuances designating the qualities of a civilized man. However, the word *hèmeros* all by itself designates *par excellence* this condition.

That is surprising. A cultivated field or a domesticated animal are apt to have an unpleasant connotation for the modern ear, since they suggest constraint and conformity, yet the Greeks do not seem to have felt any embarrassment whatever of this type. Isocrates and Plato are proof of it.

Isocrates does not hesitate to compare education to animal training. He is against those who see "in regard to horses, dogs and most animals, people having methods that give more courage to some, more docility to others and to still others more intelligence" and does not believe that the education of men can be as efficacious. Animals, he continues, acquire more mildness (*praotès*) through training; humans progress in the direction of a reciprocal indulgence (*èpieikeia*) thanks to education. It is thus quite true that education "tames" them.

Plato also accepts this comparison. He uses it in *The Republic* and in the *Laws*, referring to cultivated plants and domesticated animals, using the same word *hèmeros* indiscriminately for plants, animals and humans. In the *Laws*, recognizing that man is normally a "tamed" being, he specifies that for this reason education is necessary: "If with a good education and a fortunate nature he usually becomes the most divine and the most docile (*hèmeros*) of creatures, lacking a sufficient and well-conducted education he is the most savage of all creatures the earth produces."

The explicit or implicit comparison was therefore not at all surprising, and there are two reasons why. First, it definitely suggested the idea of solicitude rather than of constraint and, second, of perfecting rather than obedience. On the other hand,

even though this perfecting can never be anarchic, its objective is not only the adaptation of each individual to a collectivity at that time considered essential, but also the ordering of each mind, held in check through reason. It is certainly in this sense that Plato says on numerous occasions that one of the duties of education must be to render man *hèmeros* (*The Republic*). Music contributes to this result (*Protagoras*): by making man more *hèmeros*, says the text, it trains him for words and action. We therefore understand that in becoming *hèmeros* we prepare ourselves for all kinds of virtues: "If we are well in order, without cupidity, baseness, vanity or cowardice, is it possible to have difficult or unjust relationships? It is impossible." Thus, to discern a philosophical person it is well to assure ourselves that he is "just and *hèmeros*, not asocial and savage." In fact, this "tamed" man greatly resembles the model extolled by Thucydides, for whom reason prevails over blind impulse; or to the one Plato gives, where reason commands through the intermediary of *thumos*, in the part of the mind that feeds desires.

That explains why Plato can well use the word *hèmeros* while, as a rule, he is one of the least willing of the Greeks to number docility among the virtues. The *hèmeros* man not only is gentle in his outward behavior, he has his spirit under control. The unruly horse, in the harnessing of his spirit, has been subdued: he obeys reason.

We easily understand how the alteration of meaning occurred, because it is a fact that in Greek the temptation to which man is most susceptible, the one that blinds him most completely, is anger. The word *orgè* defines all outbursts of the spirit in general and in this meaning is used in the plural, but in current usage designates pure and simple anger. The man who masters his anger because his spirit has been "tamed" will also be able to have all the more "docile" relationships, those of a civilized man.

Plato, who does not admire docility, who prefers justice, at least recognizes an area in which this mildness of manner is good and in which he gives it as a model: it is in the teaching and mildness of the sage. Men of the fifth century declared that wise men are patient, saying that they understand better and are thus less severe. In that, they were in line with the

Greek vocabulary, in which *suggnômè* or “comprehension” is also “pardon.” Plato himself drew the portrait of a wise man more patient than any other. He tolerated everything, trials, death, wine and derision, but he especially tolerated the ignorance of others and wanted to remedy it. Others were sometimes rude and furious: Socrates, never. In *Phaedra* he imagines Sophocles or Euripides speaking to a man who wrongly believed himself to be a tragic poet, while knowing nothing whatever about the tragic art. They were not going to resort to invective “like rustics”; on the contrary, they would reproach all objections that were too strong and speak “with mildness” precisely because they knew more on the subject than others did.

Docility, under the form of *hèmeros*, is not in conflict with justice: it tends to bring about a harmony in man just as the ideal city brings it about between men. But—the example of Socrates proves it—there is an easy passage from one form of docility to another. Provided that they are not in opposition to justice, all of them are good in that they make man master of himself, serene, patient and benevolent. He is then “cultivated,” not in the restricted meaning of modern language, but in the full sense that implies the optimal use of all his faculties.

Plutarch also admirably illustrated this idea. He also made use of the comparison with plant culture. In his treatise on anger he speaks of the docility of a man who knows how to dominate his outbursts of fury, and he adds: “This docility has nothing to do with laziness or slackness. Like cultivated soil, it offers a friable surface and depth, qualities auspicious for action, instead of the outbursts and bitterness of yore.” He also speaks of a “treatment carried out by wise words.”

At that time, it was not just a matter of a practical morality, recommending a somewhat imprecise docility among people, but of a true ethic aiming at a more perfect fulfillment of man and therefore his greater happiness. As Plutarch writes at the end of the same treatise, “this affability, this docility, this humanity, are not more favorable, friendly and free from worry for the people around them than they are for the ones who possess them.”

The fact is that if our modern customs do not readily admit the idea of “taming,” they most certainly do not forbid speaking with fervor of “culture.”

What seems to be lost in the modern vocabulary is rather the concept itself of docility, but we must be careful not to be too certain about this. The study of words is very revealing on this point, as it is on many others.

These revelations already existed in Greek. At a first level, it is already clear that civilization, with its refinements, was accomplished by the cities. The man with little or no civilization was designated by the word *agrios*, “of the fields”: the meaning of “savage” quickly became so precise that a parallel word had to be created (*agreios*) for the country man. In the same way, *agroikos* was “rustic” and more often “crude,” while *asteios*, which should have designated “a man of the city” always designated “a refined man.” More generally, however, we see words designating political or moral values sooner or later changing toward docility. Words such as *dèmotikos* (“friend of the people”) and *politikos* (“mindful of the city”) became charged with values close to docility. In Polybius and Plutarch we find them associated with words designating mildness and humanity; Polybius uses *politikos* in the sense of “courteous,” “amiable”. It is still more interesting to note that the names for virtues evolve in the same direction. Thus *chrèstos*, which means “of value,” “of quality,” is sometimes charged with a social value to designate “good people”. It does not take long to find it indicating goodness and courtesy; Plutarch sometimes associates *hèmeros* and *chrèstos* in a group that was translated as “docile and good”: the kindly values slowly gained.

The same evolution is found in more modern languages. At a first level, we say that in French “*urbanité*” has, as in Latin, passed from its meaning of urban to that of urbane. As for the French “*vilain*” which came to mean all sorts of maliciousness, it is from the Latin *villanus*, that is, “the man from the country”. The French “*sauvage*” is a “man of the woods.” On the other hand, going beyond simple civility, one who frequents the court will practice that more refined politeness that is “courtesy.” More generally, we see words turning more and more towards gentleness. The French “*gentilhomme*” and the English “gentleman” are only men of the *gens*, that is, Romans, but the word on which these terms are built has changed direction, taking on the value of “*gentil*,” gentle: once more, docile. For us, civility is politeness; it is bound to the Latin citizen, *civis*, as the *politikos* of Polybius

was bound to the Greek citizen, *politès*. The fact is all the more important since “civilization” and “civility” are closely related. Who can say what subtle exchanges have allied the French idea of a “*policée*” (law abiding) life (from the Greek *politeia*) to that of a “*polie*” life, that is, both “smooth” and, as some dictionaries say, “gentled by culture.”

These echos hidden within words evoke a common tradition. Before we ask ourselves to what degree it may be universal, it would be wise to consider what the Greeks themselves thought about the matter.

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Was the ideal of docility and civilization that has just been described presented as being by nature proper to the Greeks? Was it conceived as something that could be extended to all? Was it accompanied by other aspirations, partially or totally different but no less defensible?

The answer to the first question must be absolutely negative. The Greeks did not consider the civilization of docility as linked to their race. They thought of themselves only as the pioneers. In this regard, the texts quoted above could be erroneous; they treat the barbarians with scorn. However, it must be made clear at the beginning that these are all texts from the 5th century B.C. In fact, it seems likely that the idea of a serious opposition of Greek and barbarian cultures was developed only to serve during the wars with the Medes. Homer, as we know, makes no distinction between Greeks and non-Greeks (nor does he use the word “barbarian” except in the compound term *barbarophônos*, referring to the language), and Herodotus, who is so curious about different peoples and their customs, who traveled outside the Greek world, certainly sees no difference in the human qualities among people. His barbarians are just as concerned with pity, pardon and humanity as his Greeks are. Sometimes more so. On the other hand if, in the fourth century, men like Isocrates sought to awaken a Pan-Hellenic sentiment in politics, voices were also raised to claim that there is no difference between Greeks and barbarians.

Such voices were raised as early as the fifth century. Texts on the barbarians that have been quoted here are almost all from

Euripides. In fact, they represent the opinion of one or the other of his characters, often quite suspect. The faithless Jason, being arrogant to Medea, is not the spokesman for the author any more than the jealous Hermione is when she unjustifiably tries to insult Andromache. Instead, texts such as these are protests against a too-narrow Greek nationalism. In practice, also, we must distinguish between the barbarian peoples envisaged. The admiration for Egypt and the mirage of its far-off customs somewhat corrects the testimonies given above. They are important only to report the aspects Greek pride took, rightly or wrongly, when it expressed itself.

Finally, and most important, no Greek text ever suggests that the differences between the Greeks and the barbarians were absolute or definitive. In any case, from the characteristics that seem to us to define an ideal of civilization in the Greek texts, it appears that, on the contrary, all—Greeks and barbarians alike—can attempt to achieve it, with more or with less success.

To be certain, we can take two of the themes linked to Greek pride: namely, unwritten laws and the general use of cruelty.

Euripides and Thucydides present the unwritten law as the common law of the Greeks (four instances for both); much later Diodorus of Sicily, in one out of three cases; and Plutarch, in the *Life of Pericles*. In all these cases, however, wars between Greeks are involved. All other examples speak of the “common law of men.” Polybius cites seven examples, but it was already true with Herodotus on an occasion in which it is Xerxes who respects the unwritten law relative to messengers, whereas Sparta has transgressed it. The unwritten law can be particularly imperative in the case of related peoples such as the various Greek peoples, but they were not felt to be an exclusive privilege, and the Greeks were not held to be their inventors. Consequently, the laws defined not *their* civilization but civilization *itself*.

This is why the barbarians possibly had access to them and the Greeks, on the contrary, fell away from them. We will have noticed that in certain cases Greeks were accused of barbarian cruelty: one can become “barbarized” as well as “civilized.” In *Orestes*, Euripides has Tindarus bitterly condemn his son-in-law Menelaus for wanting to save the parricide Orestes. He says: “Your life among the barbarians has made a barbarian out of

you.” It is obviously only a figure of speech, but the texts also show us barbarians becoming civilized, or better, becoming, in their turn, civilizers in their relations with each other. Herodotus reports that Egyptian fugitives went to settle in Ethiopia, and he observes: “They contributed to making the Ethiopians civilized (*hèmeroi*) by acquainting them with Egyptian customs.”

These few indications presuppose the idea that different cultures existed that aspired to civilization itself, civilization being conceived of as a universal value. The Greeks would not therefore have had the appanage of this civilization; they were only the promoters.

This interpretation agrees with the way in which Thucydides describes the beginnings of Greek life and of which he remarks, apropos of their clothing: “In fact, many other features would show that the ancient Greek world lived in a way analogous to the present barbarian world.” It also agrees with the way in which, going to the other extreme, Isocrates brings up the spreading of Athenian culture: “Our city has gone so far beyond other men in thought and speech that her students have become the masters of others. She has caused the word “Greek” to be used no longer to describe the race but the culture, and those who participate in our education are termed Greek more than those whose origin is the same as ours.”

The end of the history of the word “barbarian” confirms this underlying idea, because we see that before long it could be applied when opposition to the Greeks no longer existed. In fact, the Romans took up the relay. It is known that the word *barbarus*, which at first meant Latin as opposed to Greek, came to signify cruel peoples who were neither Roman nor Greek. Cicero, in the *Republic*, speculates as to whether Romulus reigned over barbarians, and he writes: “If, as the Greeks say, all men are either Greeks or barbarians, I am afraid Romulus did reign over barbarians, but if the word barbarous is applied not to language but to customs, I think the Romans are as far from barbarian as the Greeks are.”

We must accept the evidence: the Romans were now also civilized, “tamed.” They were in debt to Greek culture for that. Plutarch says, for example, that they behaved, in religious matters, in a “Greek and docile” way, and he explains that Marcellus

owed his humanity to Greek letters. He had a real respect for culture as such: a recent article by M. Gros in the *Revue des études latines* (1979) stresses this point. In any case, Plutarch does not hesitate to show the surprise of the Greeks, who had known the Romans as formidable soldiers but thought "they would never have given an example of kindness, humanity and, in general, political virtue. Marcellus was the first to show the Greeks that the Romans were more just than they thought." All the accounts confirm the relationship existing between justice, docility and civilization. They mention with fervor the ancient Greek pride, but they open the door to newly-civilized peoples. They make the Romans, and all civilized peoples, honorary citizens of Greece.

Still, this Greek pride, open and generous as it was, or, if you prefer, this Greek pretention to openness, may be surprising. We must not overlook, however, that in the ancient Mediterranean world the originality of the Greeks was precisely their need for openness, their refusal of esoterism, their desire to pool knowledge. We must also not forget that their type of religion helped them become champions of a certain humanity.

The Greek gods were protectors of the cities. Thus religion was not a thing apart: it gave to institutions and political activities the support of its security. In spite of that, it was not a national religion: the gods were the same from city to city. No doubt, each city had its titular deities to which the sanctuaries were consecrated. However, they all recognized the same gods and honored them in a very similar fashion. This combination of particularism and universalism well qualified the gods as guarantors of a certain international morality. Moreover, this flexibility made assimilation with neighboring cults easy, and new cults were welcomed without difficulty. There was also no problem in admitting identifications from the outside: Herodotus recognized Egyptian origins for Greek divinities, and Aeschylus found it normal to present his Persians in a most Oriental light while showing them concerned only with Zeus and Poseidon. In addition, the Lydian Croesus and many others consulted the oracle at Delphi. This flexibility facilitated the spirit of universalism, which was also helped by the almost complete absence of all professional clergy and dogma. A mythology is almost always

felt as fictitious, contrary to any revealed faith. This excluded, at the very start, the possibility of fanaticism.

Thus everything predisposed the Greeks to feeling like champions, privileged partakers of a life without violence.

However, the history of ideas cannot grant them the privilege of docility nor take away such an ideal from the moving forms of chronological and geographical diversity. Even within the Greek world, it is clear that the ideal varied and that it was modified by contacts from the outside.

The heroic world knew values in which docility held a minor place and did not resemble that of the classical period nor that of the Roman period. Likewise Greek words designating docility knew diverse avatars through contact with neighboring cultures.

The first word was familiar to the ancient Greeks: it concerned the benevolence of kings. In fact, in the fourth century B.C. when the monarchical idea began to make headway in Greece (where it had been dishonored before) Xenophon and Isocrates wrote on this theme, evoking the model of the benign king who was good to his subjects, the contrary of a tyrant. This idea was not a stranger to Greece: Ulysses, according to Homer, reigned in Ithaca with the benevolence of a father. In the same way, Herodotus pointed out the gentleness of Cyrus. Later, the theory of the good king remained Greek, in the sense that the philosophers of the Hellenistic age multiplied their treatises on royalty, taking up the ideas of Isocrates and Xenophon, varying them slightly and enriching them. However, the authentically Greek nature of the theory did not prevent the examples, models and precedents being looked for in the barbarians. Herodotus' statement about Cyrus quotes the opinion of the Persians about their own princes. The same Cyrus is the hero of Xenophon's *The Cyropaedia*, a barbarian model for Greek kings. Later, Diodorus of Sicily, whose Book I is devoted to Egypt (where he had traveled), is full of praise for the humanity, docility and moderation of the sovereigns of ancient Egypt. The Greeks had offered the world the civilization of the citizen: they were able to discern another virtue, another perfection and another form of docility in another regime.

Following the same idea, they probably never knew that the word they most frequently used to express docility (*praos*) was

used in Greek translations of the Old Testament to translate a Hebrew word whose first meaning was "humble." Greek docility was indulgent both toward equals, and more often, toward dependent peoples; passing into a *milieu* in which social inequalities were greater and material success more suspect, the word took on a new color: the docility of the humble is still docility, but it is no longer that of the Greek cities.

Finally, it is only too clear that the Christian docility, of which the docility of the humble is only a secondary aspect, is much more demanding and absolute than Greek docility, while being at the start less mindful of the practical world and daily realities. It was expressed with the same Greek words by the Greek church fathers and the pagan authors.

These differences suffice to show what the Greek docility of the classical age kept as specific. It concerned the life of citizens in a world in which they frequented each other as equals, and it remained limited to daily, concrete and practical life. This is why they identified it with civilization, but it is also why, in the final analysis, it defined a form of civilization rather than a universal one. Greek docility soon appeared as only one of the changing aspects of a common aspiration toward which each was going, but by different routes.

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Here we have only viewed the variations within this ideal that combined a form of docility, open to different interpretations, with an ideal state called civilization. The problem, then, would be to ascertain if, alongside the different forms of docility that involved different cultures, passing through the wise courtesy of the Chinese scholar and the unworldly serenity of the Hindu sage, there exist other forms of civilization that do not aspire to these values in whatever form they may take. Only a thorough history of ideas could solve this problem. It would have to be cautious, because just as happens with trains, one value can hide another one. For a long time the Greek insistence on justice caused the neglect of the place the gentle values held in Greece. Moreover, this research can only be conducted for cultures that have left written texts. Men have always practiced cruelty, with pleasure or with regret, the Greeks as well as others, and no sociological

finding can say in what spirit each practiced it. The originality of a culture, like that of a being, is defined much more by what its inclinations are than by its outward appearance. However, this vast undertaking is possible, and in a world in which the menace of violence is becoming ever greater, it is urgent. The brief remarks offered here had as objective the creation of such research elsewhere, hoping for, at least in this area, reassuring convergences and a mutual understanding serving to make us more *hèmeros*.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

On the place held by the idea of docility in Greek thought, indications will be found in our book, *La Douceur dans la pensée grecque*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1979, 347 pages. These include various Latin theses or recent studies on the use of the word *philanthrôpia* in general, as well as the principal articles dealing with docility in Plutarch's writings and in those of Hellenized Jewish or Christian authors.

Concerning the relations between Greeks and barbarians, reference may be made to Book VIII of *Entretiens de la Fondation Hardt*, entitled *Greco et barbares* (1962); *exposés* and discussions by Baldry, Dihle, Diller, Peremans, Reverdin and Schwabl. Also H. Bacon, *Barbarians in Greek Tragedy*, Yale University Press, 1961, and G. Freyburger, "Sens et évolution du mot *barbarus* dans l'oeuvre de Cicéron," *Mélanges Senghor*, 1977, pp. 141-152.