

COSMIC SCIENCE AND WISDOM IN CLASSIC PHILOSOPHY

Can our present-day anxieties be stated in terms of the ancient world? Can this be done without risking the accusation of self-deception or pedantry? That is the question.

Hellenism in *en vogue*; there is satisfaction in defining in ever more exact terms a new aspect, long underestimated, of Greek grandeur. A certain 'modernism' cannot be denied to Greek thought: a tendency that existed then as it does now. Two millennia and more have trimmed down what was pretensions: tricks and scandals of innovation become less important; the essence of contributions becomes apparent, distilled by the labour of preceding centuries. It remains sure that the Greeks faced new human circumstances with the vigour of youth and with intelligence, and launched themselves freely upon the path of world discovery. This is truly modern: modern for us as it was for the Greeks of the third century B.C. A comparison between such experiences may be worth while.

With one reservation, however: Greek thought in no way aims at the evaluation of objective science; rather it is a systematic view of the contradictory problems facing man during a time of progress and scientific

demands. Who, at any time, would expect a world view to possess universality and permanent validity? But the influence of a 'scientific' vision on man and his reaction to its hold on him, these are permanent and universal factors, if measured by the yardstick of history, at least, and prescinding from the infinitely slow progress of biological evolution. Permanence in human matters is an unreasonable demand.

Our subject is 'wisdom'. This, at the moment, is not in too good repute. It smacks of mediocrity, of middle-class mentality, of self-constraint in spite of events. But all this is not said aloud. As a matter of fact, centuries of French civilisation have endowed the word wisdom (*sagesse*) with complex power, both ethical and social, which have made it untranslatable, even into those tongues whence it derived its first qualities and its form. But the essential philosophic relations implicit in the notion were indeed the same in ancient times and in our own day.

The problem of wisdom is connected with those of happiness and of knowledge.

Perhaps for the Greeks, the happiness of wisdom consisted above all in the activity of the mind in its search for knowledge (*σοφία*) and, as we shall see, remained unchanged for them. When, however, Aristotle endowed with philosophic significance the word which vaguely meant 'the favour of the gods' (*εὐδαιμονία*), he thereby understood simultaneously the 'good living' and the 'good doing'; in other words, physical and moral well-being under the aegis of wisdom. If the word retained some, however little, of its religious aspect, no Greek would have been surprised; 'untaught' wisdom had been proclaimed by Euripides as superior to the voluntary acquisition of virtue.¹ As for the Romans, in defining the idea by the terms *sapientia* and *prudentia*, they meant either a 'native inclination' which resembled that 'moral intuition' leading to the good (just as the other senses spontaneously arrive at corporal well-being), or a kind of 'foresight' which implies experience and aids action: knowledge, accordingly, but such as produces security and (we must believe it) the embellishment of life. When they wrote the Greek word *philosophia* the intellectual component not only became markedly more abstract, but it was weighted down with the tremendous heritage of Greek thought. At any rate, philosophic happiness and wisdom were inconceivable without knowledge.

But knowledge of what? Of the universe, of Man, or of the gods? It is common knowledge that the ancient Ionic philosophers had tried to arrive

¹ Euripides, *Hippolytus*, 78–81.

at an understanding of the physical universe only—had reconstructed it imaginatively from known facts of tradition or from simple mechanical experiences. The force and the intellectual clearness of these attempts are admirable; they are projections of a human vitality healthy enough to forget its real problems in the attempt to possess itself of the external world. Pythagoras and Empedocles progressed in their thinking along different paths, from theurgy to medicine, to biological speculation. Anaxagoras and the Sophists were interested in the various modes of thought and of expression. Man continued to see himself at closer and closer range, though, it is true, from the most generic viewpoints. The Socratic revolution had to arrive before Man himself could become the chief object of philosophic inquiry, taking the place of the cosmos. It is true that the Delphic ‘Know Thyself’ could not prevent Socrates from speculation on the cosmos: Aristophanes’² allusions in *The Clouds* certainly had some meaning. Posterity, however, did not err concerning the essential novelty of Socrates’ message. Man’s knowledge and the structure of his moral equilibrium—‘wisdom’ and the condition of personal happiness—viewed less from the physical or physiological than from the psychological angle, were both proclaimed to be the results of a rational analysis aimed solely at the investigation of the truth; the guilty or the unhappy man, being merely ignorant, could still aspire to virtue or to happiness.

Nevertheless, a number of the philosophical heirs of Socrates—and not the least legitimate ones—pushed on towards the cynicism and the hedonism of the Cyrenaics who despised speculative inquiry and aimed at the individual man’s wisdom through effort or pleasure. The problem of the over-all ultimate good is thus set outside and placed beyond all cosmic science. For Pyrrho (365–275 B.C.) it becomes perfect calm reached by indifference, submission to the necessities of existence, but without taking part in the universe, and so far removed from any doctrine that the Sage is forced to be silent. The contrast with the position taken by the Ionians is complete: To the systems dealing with the universe there is opposed the rehabilitation of the individual, not as a microcosm as he will appear later, but autonomous in the affirmation of his demands.

Such an attitude, however, could not prevail at a time when scientific curiosity tended to become more and more exacting: the astronomical system had been reconstituted by Eudoxus of Cnidos; the conquests of Alexander the Great were about to enlarge at one bound the outlook on

²Cf. Otto Weinreich, *Einfuehrung zu Aristophanes*, I, Zuerich, 1952, pp. LXXXVIII *et seq.*

all forms of knowledge for the Greeks of Hellas. Perhaps the chief merit of Aristotle (385–322 B.C.) was that all this did not serve to turn his head. Aspiring to complete knowledge, he knew how to organise encyclopaedic research from all points of view. It cannot be said, however, that his philosophy suggests any substantial coherence between cosmic science and wisdom. Far from it. His world system, digressive as it was, did not establish any intimate connexion between Being, in so far as it is being; eternal infinite time, and the first Heaven, perfect motion; the supra-lunar spheres; the sub-lunar mixed bodies, where rational man occupied the highest rank. Nor was there any connexion between this picture of the universe and his Ethics, which is empiric and entirely eclectic. This conscious way of life, depending as it does upon the fortuitous, aiming at what is desirable and pleasurable, though with the exercise of prudence, measure, self-mastery, joining good will and reasonableness: this may well represent a mixture of wisdom and of the pursuit of happiness; though without any particular stress or justification and without the slightest allusion to the general order of the universe. The small allowance that Aristotle made for the problems of the future which might trouble men's minds is best revealed by that all too timely positivism of some of his political or sociological opinions. He is always envisaging the city-state, at a time when empires are in the offing. He regards the slave as a 'living tool' at a time when the Cynics had already proposed that Man be recognised as a being beyond all social conventions and factors.

For it was the political drama that brought about the moral crisis. During the last three decades of the fourth century, the Greeks saw themselves thrust from an accomplished and finished way of life into an uncertain mode of existence in the midst of disorder. Hardly had the hope been formulated of a domination of the world in its infinite variety by Macedonian arms and Greek thought, when the death of Alexander and the raging ambitions of the Diadochi made real all the appearances of chaos, of a chaos often 'bestial'. The annihilation of the cities could be foreseen, even though the most famous of them, Athens, Sparta, Argos, or Corinth, still figured as the stakes of battles. The time of the empires had come, extensive and varied and under monarchical rule. But their gestation was troubled and carried on in the midst of prodigious upheavals. Sieges, famines, and foreign occupation repeatedly were the ordeals of the Athens where Epicurus elaborated his teachings. No citizen was ever sure that on the following day he would not find himself ruined,

separated from his kinfolk, carried off into slavery. The issues which divided the Greek sovereigns were so large that the common man, unable to measure their implications, scarcely remembered anything of them except the catastrophes of which he was the victim. Two ideas were dominant: that of Chance and that of Fate; the worship of Tyche (goddess of Fortune), of the fortuitous, gains adherents everywhere; Tyche of the individuals, of the cities, of the states. Happiness may come from her, but all you are sure of is the unexpected.

Science, on the other hand, organised the universe more and more; it calculated the movement of the celestial phenomena, tried to explain those of life, classified the living species, and learned better to know and to describe the earth. And where the Greeks had always prized the pleasure afforded by the activity of the mind, they now tasted the joy of personal contentment granted by the pursuit of scientific research, of pure erudition.

In these circumstances, the man of the time may be pictured as simultaneously under constraint and free: Freed from the narrow commands of the city (although Aristotle still was accused of lack of piety, and Epicurus punctiliously paid homage to the gods of Athens); freed from many social prejudices, even from many civic duties. But he was under the constraint of a universe, whose evidence more and more passed beyond human terms. He was without responsibility (except towards the family) and without protection against unforeseen accidents. If his mind could enrich itself by objective knowledge and psychological experiences, if it was less dependent on caste, on political party, on the narrow nationalism of the city, it was nonetheless troubled, and anxious for absolute relations, and confronted by the question of what was possible and what impossible in the field of ethics.

This clearly points to the risk of confusion, the need for new teachings adapted to a world and a mentality both changed in equal measure. The Greek of that epoch was waiting for a lucid experience and systematic account of the relations between rational knowledge and individual morality. Was it possible for the mind to make such an effort? After twenty-three hundred years it still seems marvellous that two coherent yet different solutions—one by Epicureanism, the other by Stoicism—were propounded to put a prompt end to this anxiety.

Epicurus arrived at Athens from Samos about 307–306 B.C.; Zeno from Citium about 300 B.C. The difference in their ages is five years. They are

in the full bloom of youth, in their thirties or a little more. In the atmosphere of the great seat of learning, they will formulate the two doctrines most fitting to combine the emotional and the intellectual aspirations of man. But in opposing directions and, as it were, in contradictory terms.

It is no less idle to criticise the physics of Epicurus as childish (the Ancients did so immediately), than it is to extol that science as a preview of modern atomic theory (a matter of propaganda rather than science). With the postulate of the three infinitudes—the infinite number of indestructible atoms, infinite time and infinite void—the doctrine both gives rise to and destroys cosmic pluralism. Leucippus and Democritus, during the age of Anaxagoras and of Socrates, had created this forceful system. According to them, the wild scattering in every direction, causing the shocks, the clinging together and the whirlwinds of invisible atoms, had its origin in the very existence of the void where these impenetrable bodies had to move about since it provided no resistance to movement. Epicurus distorted this conception in two directions in order to find a more inevitable cause for the grouping of the atoms; weighty, as he conceived them, he had them fall eternally in the bottomless void. And as the vertical movement of their fall at constant speed would have prevented any contact between them, he imagined that at some unforeseen moment of their fall, each one of them swerved, no matter in how small a degree, from its prescribed path (παρέγκλισις or in Latin: *clinamen*). Shocks and contacts followed each other of necessity. And the origin of beings and of worlds, perpetually becoming and all of them fated for destruction (which frees the primary elements for new adventures and new combinations), was thus the result of a simple interplay of chance happenings in infinite number in eternal time.

This cosmology accordingly rested on a combination of chance and of necessity; it was, as it were, a response to the double nightmare of the period in which it took shape. 'Good sense' opposed to this vision the concept of an order in the world; but this difficulty was resolved by the very modern doctrine of the law of large quantities: The 'laws of nature' (*foedera naturae* of Lucretius) were not denied. They were the results of balance, analogous to the permanence of living species which persisted long enough to appear indestructible to ephemeral observers. Thus, while he postulated a universe of fragmentation—the perpetual atomic motion, permanent uncertainty—the Epicurean gave an account of the world (the one he inhabited and experienced) which was as rigorously organised as if he had been the most convinced determinist. For that very reason

abnormalities were excluded from this world.³ Man, both body and soul, was made up of atoms in hierarchic order, just as the animal was. The doctrine purported—without any further postulate and based on the same principles—to give an account of man's conscience and of the serene life of the gods who, corporeal but without passion, lived between the worlds⁴ (*intermundi*) in their dwelling places.

In contrast to this infinite universe, whose apparent organisation (always partial, imperfect and on the verge of being extinguished) was the result of an indefinite succession of chance encounters, stands the closed and rational world of the Stoics.

The methodology of the ancient physicist of Ionia seems to have influenced their choice of a dominating element: Fire, as proposed already by the famous Heraclitus. Surrounding the world, fire, in its supreme sublimation, that is to say, endowed with intelligence and the sense of beauty, both penetrates and sustains the world. It shines brilliantly in the divine stars; it is found more or less hidden, more or less degraded, in the most obscure material forms, in earth, in water.⁵ It takes but a spark of it to animate the human being. But what does this 'intelligence and artistry' signify? Doubtless, it simply means that, since the order and the movement of the stars are both beautiful and mathematically determined, whatever one imagines to exist beyond them and of which they are the emanation (for our senses can perceive nothing higher than they) ought to possess these qualities to the highest degree.

Also of astral origin is the rigorous determinism which in this physical system connects all causes and justifies thereby divine premonitions, for such premonitions only manifest a deep sense of world order, in which each moment contains and determines the future; and which imposes fate and fatality on men no less than on things. The astronomic cycles have helped to give a picture of the periodic recurrences of the universe itself: fire, the creator, alternating between distension (by condensation) and tension (by effusion or expansion), shapes the world and destroys it in conflagration (*ἐκπύρωσις*) so that it may be reborn. But chance is banished from this new cycle of events, just as it is banished from the course of the stars; the same individuals, the same events as in former cycles will reappear in the same order until the time of the next conflagration.⁶

³ Lucretius, *De natura rerum*, II, 700–729; V, 837–924.

⁴ *Ibid.* II, 646–651 (ethical formula); III, 18–24 (Homeric vision); V, 146–199 (general theories on physical organisation); V, 1161–1240 (superstition: false conception of the gods).

⁵ Cicero, *De natura deorum*, II, 23–28.

⁶ Cf. L. Robin, *La pensée grecque et l'origine de l'esprit scientifique* (Paris, 1923), p. 418.

We have here a compromise between the becoming and the eternal within a severely mechanistic framework, a strange history of repetition in which every incident has an existence both constant and momentary . . . But we cannot deny the genius of a pantheism which puts Reason into the world as an agent of a providential order, both as the regulating element and material diffusion at every degree of existence. Nor can we negate the value of a physical picture of the cosmos which, though not new, was sufficiently coherent to assure itself a long future and was able to explain even the unexpected by the succession of causes.

These two systems of philosophy are monistic and materialistic. They are opposed to Platonic dualism and far removed from the hybrid combination offered by the Aristotelian system. They are therefore exposed to two dangers: they diminish Man and they make the Divine uncertain.

Is it possible for a concept of man to abstract from man? That would certainly be a worth-while attempt: With all 'humanism' erased from the cosmos, we would only be able to submit to its contingencies or to its necessity. But what good, then, would be our knowledge of it? Would it force us to resign ourselves? Probably.

The theological insufficiency thus becomes apparent. The inert gods of Epicureanism are no more necessary to the universe than they are to man; the contingency of their birth just misses perfection; their duration and their plurality are without any bearing. The divine fire of Stoicism may be indispensable to the texture of the material world as it simultaneously governs its origin and its cycles. But if it fulfills this function without any intention, why call it God? If, on the other hand, it has an intention, how is it possible to overlook or fail to recognise the strange difference between it and the astral deities?

These two dangers and their interdependence are described in one of Alain's *Definitions*: 'If God were as certain as a fact, goodwill would be lowered to mechanical necessity and there would be no good and no evil.' Epicureanism has this further defect that its gods are but a useless postulate—at least, apparently so.

However, actually both these doctrines are concerned with the human problem such as it appeared so tragically in the historic epoch in which they took form.

When Epicurus wrote an enormous *Physics* in thirty-five books, when he made *Abstracts* of this and returned to the same subject in his *Letters to Pythocles* and to *Herodotus*, he did not approach his subject in the manner of the old Ionian *physiologi*. Even though he seems to take the world for

his subject, the end he has in view is man; the intention is to do away with all the passions which torment him and in this way to create a spiritual peace (ἀταραξία) which will permit him to pass calmly through all the vicissitudes of life without fear of death or afterlife. This is clearly discernible in the *Physics* of Lucretius, who, too much of a poet, too tormented himself, too embroiled (in spite of himself, perhaps) in a society torn by political passions, could not conceal that beyond the certainties of the natural sciences, his interest was man—man, the incurable, both pitiful and exasperating—bent on refusing the health-giving draught, which (Lucretius was sure) would have cured him.

For the Stoics, no less, 'the commerce of men with the gods' is as fundamental a part of doctrine as the reality of the cosmic God. What an inspiring formula it was, which gathered up whatever had remained of the ideology of the former city-state and at the same time transcended the geopolitical confusion consequent upon the formation of the empires, offering to man the goal of spiritual unity in a universal ἀπάθεια, in other words, total diminution of passions, and of suffering! Is this not a divine attitude? And does not man share in this divinity which has communicated to him a minute portion of its fire?

Can it not therefore be said, in all fairness, that these two materialistic systems are in reality 'anthropocosmologies'—descriptions of the world in terms of man's functions? Are they so consciously, or not? When Epicurus, after having established and put into motion all the elements of a universe where chance (τύχη) is the ruler, commits himself to a *de facto* causality which, in this universe, permits him to demonstrate as necessary mechanisms the ills of ambition and of love as well as the faults of the senses, the phases of the moon, the pseudomiracles of infernal spirits (*les avernes*) or the magnet, earthquakes and epidemics—he pursues the fatal path of the most generic type of human reasoning.⁷ It might be said that beyond the analysis of the facts there is as a decorative background the vision of the eternal rain of the atoms in infinite void. But, in truth, there is no such thing. For, where Epicureanism returns in its physics to human rationalism, Stoicism in its physical system has returned to the emotional factors; it explains the condensation from which the world was born by love and the generative *élan* of the primordial fire, and it sees the universe transfigured by a divine Providence, without which the rigorous structure

⁷Lucretius, *op. cit.*, III, 41 *et seq.*; IV, 1037 *et seq.*; IV, 379 *et seq.* (illusions of sight); V, 706 *et seq.* (phases of the moon); and the whole of Book VI (beginning at V, 43, on the physical *mirabilia*).

guaranteed by the fire would never arrive at the point of creating a philosophy.

And yet how ardently they both protested against being considered anthropocentric! What a mockery is made of human design by 'the laws of chance', the plurality of worlds, the very intoxication of physical destruction and the vanishing of planets! What an annihilation of human vanities lies in the rigorous determinism of the Stoics and in these cyclical recurrences whose automatic action denies man even the satisfaction which he commonly might expect from a 'renewal'!

All these powerful creations of the mind contain the essence of a dramatic struggle. Coming after Socrates, they cannot conceive of a world outside of man; yet the context of the psychological atmosphere demands at the same time that cosmic knowledge be set in order and that these doctrines bring comfort to lost souls. But if they were to yield to these two-fold demands, could they escape a new kind of anthropomorphism, more dangerously subtle than that which had peopled Greece with beautiful human shapes bedecked with the names of gods: one which endowed the universe with the reason and the sensibility of mortal men? Surely, this was not Wisdom!

Wisdom presupposes a choice—in other words, liberty. Yet in the case of Epicureanism and Stoicism we are confronted by two aspects of cosmic constraint: Chance and Fatality. This is the issue of the dramatic conflict.

Epicurus cut the knot with heroic rashness. It was his wish to save liberty; and the polemic against his Stoic adversaries had strongly reinforced this wish. But he could not place his liberty in a world where he had released the hazards of the three infinities (time, the void, and the number of atoms)—hazards, moreover, which had no beginning. He allowed each atom a kind of biological somersault—a single one!—which at some indefinite moment, made it swerve from its vertical fall, thus making possible contacts, shocks, repercussions, and aggregations which gave birth to the worlds. An elementary form of freedom thus was at the roots of the universe—contradicting the rigorous determinism of Democritus, but being the great laughing-stock for the mechanistic physicists and the logicians. Indeed, could anything be more arbitrary? Nothing, perhaps but to substitute for the notion of 'life-element' that of 'matter-element', or to postulate that of 'matter-life' . . .

But even if he had gone that far, Epicurus would not have solved the

problems of moral freedom more readily.⁸ Lucretius depicts him as contemplating the misery of the human soul: ‘. . . he understood that the vessel itself was the cause of his misfortune, that by his own fault (*vitio*) all was corrupted within which had been brought thereto from outside, no matter how advantageous it might be: it was, he saw it well, a flowing vessel, with holes, that would never be filled, no matter how great the effort; or one so dreadfully infected that it poisoned everything that was poured into it’ (VI, 17–23). Was this original sin? One might say that it was. And yet Lucretius, like Epicurus, has confidence in learning, believes in the healing of those ‘anguished’ hearts, or of those that ‘are carried away by their maddening griefs’ through the mere knowledge of the ‘teaching of truth’.⁹ What feeble and yet sublime inconsistencies these are! Besides, Epicurus himself, facing physical ills and death, had given an example of heroic serenity, had overcome the feelings of pain by reviving by his will his memories of friendships and the task accomplished. But is such action not equivalent to surpassing by far the possible consequences of the ‘free accident’ which the atom in its flight is capable of? The pessimistic experience of life¹⁰ does not correspond to the ‘primordial freedom’ which is contained within the atom; nor does the high measure of sainthood which the Master achieved by his own effort correspond to the complications of the many accidents from which, according to this doctrine, each organism arises.

Notwithstanding, Epicureanism excels in having maintained in its system of physics this atomic germ of liberty. Stoicism had to admit it grudgingly. It argues with itself at length in order to persuade itself that man, no matter how much his life is determined by the concatenation of causes, is none the less free. The treatise of Cicero, *On Fate (De Fato)*, shows the efforts of Chrysippus to escape simultaneously from the logical doctrine of Necessity of the Megarian Diodorus and from the psychological pragmatism of Carneades who asserts that Man has ‘some power’; this ‘second founder’ of the Stoa wanted to establish himself as the arbiter between necessity and liberty, to distinguish between ‘perfect and principal’ causes and ‘auxiliary and immediate’ ones in order to preserve

⁸He does not do it. The ‘liberty’ of the atom precedes the birth of life: Lucretius, *op. cit.*, II, 865–901, and above all, 902–930. See also: *Ibid.*, 963–990.

⁹Lucretius, *op. cit.*, III, 307–322.

¹⁰On this fatalistic pessimism, see Lucretius, *op. cit.*, V, 1233–1235 (*Usque ades res humanas jus abdita quaedam obterit et pulchros fascis saevasque securis proculcare ac ludibrio sibi habere videtur*).

at least the responsibility of human consent. Laborious quibbles, these—very often serving good intentions. On the moral plane, it must be admitted, Stoicism does not hesitate to assert that there are things ‘which depend on us’ and that in the middle region of ‘seemliness’ (τὰ καθήκοντα) we can aspire to the ‘natural and not-necessary good’. But the position, nevertheless, remains a troubled one; the solution is incomplete, perhaps too formal. It palliates rather than convinces.

Cicero prefers, however, the viewpoint of Chrysippus to the Epicurean artifice of the *clinamen*. Perhaps he does this because of the two ethical postulates, liberty and activity, he unconsciously prefers the latter. In this respect he finds that Stoicism gives him more security. Nevertheless, Epicureanism, too, has laboured to retain activity—that indispensable basis of Wisdom. To do this was valuable. For in matters of ethics we should fear the fatalism of indifference even more than the amoralism of an absolute causality; such fatalism had led Pyrrho to total quietism and almost, as it were, to the threshold of the Indian Nirvana.

Epicurus would not have been able to avoid this by his fine analysis of elementary psycho-physiological life; functions essential to satisfy needs, and the satisfaction of needs for the sake of pleasure (the most necessary and the truest goal). The verification of that which is would lead man only to a life without the passions of the animals. This is not exercising moral activity, and it is known that it did not satisfy Epicurus. Was this against the logic of his system? Perhaps. Did he, on the basis of his principles, pose the essential question concerning conscience? Surely not. It is none the less true that at least in two essential respects he grants to man the possibility of free, i.e., moral, action: he recognises in him the will and the ability to act on what his senses present to him.

It is in fact the scientific experience of human liberty which forces Epicurus to imagine the deviation of atoms (it is easier to estimate the real importance of this innovation when one sees how the philosopher, embarrassed at having proposed it, has tried to reduce its physical aspect). Lucretius affirms it, and the forcefulness of his development of the doctrine¹¹ does not permit any doubt: Volition is here described before nolition, and its course, which is then established, shows the primacy and rapidity of thought compared with the relative slowness of physical activity; as, for example, in the body of race horses ready to start off. It is true that elsewhere *voluntas* is said to be preceded, even guided by *voluptas*,

¹¹Lucretius, *op. cit.*, II, 251–293.

or, at an even more elementary stage, by *libido*¹² which reduces the fulness of free will. In the same way, nolition urged on the young men about to succumb to love's passions arises from knowledge¹³ as the system has it, which has its origin in the senses.¹⁴ It even happens that such a passage, describing the physical phenomenon of will, signifies a clear denial in the mechanistic sense.¹⁵

It is equally clear that Epicurus, if he had not postulated liberty of choice and activity of the will, could not have proposed as the goal of life a purgation of the passions which was to lead to the 'absence of pain' (*ἀπονία*) and a balanced calm 'without disturbance' (*ἀταραξία*), preferring rather the 'natural and necessary' good to that which is 'natural without being necessary'. It will not be surprising, therefore, that he endowed men with some power over their senses, which were, according to him, the source of all knowledge. From an elementary point of view, for instance, attention may be said to be the origin of vision,¹⁶ just as distracted attention would dissipate the impressions aroused all too forcefully by the person too well beloved. And the loss of memory, which the poet describes as nearly resembling death,¹⁷ is it not for him, in fact and somewhat too summarily, the loss of consciousness? Is not man master of that as well to a considerable degree? Epicurus suffered the martyrdom of the pains of a kidney stone, and feeling that his last day was come without any hope of a life after death, nevertheless called that day 'a happy one' because he had arrived within himself at the 'contentment of calm' in directing his soul to the memories of past pleasures.

In the midst of all the difficulties which his system forced on him, the attempt of Epicurus to preserve free will *in practical life* (how much easier it was to establish the truth of liberty in man and to establish its principles in the atom!) is somewhat awkward and pathetic. The Stoics, no matter how determinist they might be, were more at ease in this

¹²Lucretius, *op. cit.*, 257–258: *Unde est haec, inquam, fatis avulsa voluntas/ per quam progredimur quo ducit quemque voluptas.* Text as re-established by Lambin (by transposition of *voluntas* and *voluptas* which the manuscript gives in inverse order) and adopted by Cyril Bailey (Oxford, 1947) as against Lachmann and A. Ernout. Cf., with reference to this, Lucretius, *op. cit.*, IV, 1045–1048: *Irritata tument loca semine fitque voluntas/ licere id quo se contendit dira libido, / idque petit corpus mens unde est saucia amore.* The relation between *voluntas* and *libido* is defined more clearly by verse 1057: *Namque voluptatem praesagit muta cupido.*

¹³Lucretius, *op. cit.*, IV, 1063 *et seq.*; 1149 *et seq.*; 1198 *et seq.*

¹⁴Cf. Lucretius, *op. cit.*, IV, 881–885: on the impressions on sight which are the creators of the will.

¹⁵Lucretius, *op. cit.*, IV, 886–905.

¹⁶See Lucretius, *op. cit.*, IV, 779–798 and 802–817.

¹⁷Lucretius, *op. cit.*, III, 674–676.

respect. From cosmic tension, the path led directly to energetic man. Was not the spirit of each individual an emanation of the creative and ordaining fire? Nevertheless, they placed the emphasis on two contradictory aspects—at least, so it appeared—of the ethical efficacy of the will: on the one hand, an ascetic renunciation in accordance with the maxim ‘Submit and forbear’—which is not so far removed from Phyrionism and from certain forms of Epicureanism; on the other hand, they preached a total effort towards God thus, achieving in their actions rational and moral rectitude (τὰ κατορθώματα). Here are two absolutes. It is well known how rigorously the Stoa rejected all middle-of-the-road ways, and in its condemnation declared all errors to be equal. Its enemies ridiculed this; what a rare thing Wisdom would be! And could the theft of an apple and the murder of one’s father be measured with the same yardstick? In practice Stoicism admits that there is a constant effort towards ‘preferable’ things of various degrees, even down to ‘indifferent matters’, even to the mediocre degree of ‘seemliness’ (τὰ καθήκοντα). Though the attitude in favour of liberty gave a moral advantage to Epicureanism which was clear and well-considered in this respect, no one could deny that life according to Stoic principles beckoned Man to a permanent effort of will.

Thus, in different ways and with much trouble, often contradicting their materialistic conception of the world, these two philosophies, nevertheless, applied their zeal to rescue the principles indispensable for the advance towards Wisdom.

Was it an advance towards Wisdom, or towards two aspects of Wisdom, distinct and opposed to one another? For is there not a chasm between the pleasure of the individual towards which the Epicurean strives, and the divine order sought by the Stoic?

A common methodology sustains their efforts towards analogous ideals of personal peace. The words defining this goal are negative only in appearance: For the annihilation of agitation (ἀταραξία) or of the passions (ἀπάθεια), actually are tasks which involve liberty of action.

According to good Hellenistic tradition, this effort passes from knowledge to implementation. The two opposing philosophies address themselves to the manner of reasoning (logical) before passing to the comprehension of the cosmos (physical), and finally to the activity of the will, in trying to find a truly human balance in the total equilibrium of the world. But there is a divergence between their epistemologies and the relations between knowledge and action are viewed quite differently.

Fundamental to Epicurean knowledge is the recourse to the senses and the confidence in what they provide: a confidence which is controlled. Here we already have the freedom of man and of his will. For without this primary autonomy, how could he escape the 'illusions' of his senses (*de facto*; in theory the accumulation of images is sufficient)—how will he see in prismatic form the tower which at first glance he 'saw' as round?¹⁸ The exercise of intelligence is demanded of the 'faithful' Epicurean as much as is his submission to the teachings of the master, which is equally a recourse to his personal intelligence. Is this a false materialism? At all events, it is a materialism which runs the risk of being distorted when applied. For in these exchanges of freely exercised judgments it is not impossible that he who professes stoical indifferences might—when facing a spoiled and rebellious disciple—give way to expressions of disgust and violence, both of which he argues against. Violent proselytising, which in Lucretius so dramatically contrasts the impatience of the man and the serenity of the doctrine, is indeed a flaring-up of that liberty which Epicurus (imprudently, if you like) had implanted as a seed in each atom: just as the knowledge of the universe will create Wisdom, albeit through anger and rejection, and this Wisdom will in its methods conform to the knowledge gained in physics. The destruction of the chimeras of the beyond—those of death, of hell, of the gods—is brought about (on a higher level) by the same means as those which cause a child, who has just left off dancing a round, to understand that the walls around him have remained stationary.

Recourse to reason for the Stoics is simultaneously the basis of knowledge and of life. Their method is to find within themselves natural reason, to subject their acts to it and to express it, everyone for himself, in conformity with universal reason. In such a system passion is a form of ignorance, as is evil according to the Socratic doctrine. But passions are not factual ignorances (which is the position of Epicureanism); rather they are mistakes in the conduct of reason. Zeno called them perversions of the moving spring which comes from God. In the stricter elaboration of the doctrine by Chrysippus, they represent errors of judgment due to the insufficient tension of the 'guiding principle' (τὸ ἡγεμονικόν). The underlying materialism seems to be better safeguarded in this case than in Epicureanism. Here, however, the emphasis is placed, as one might expect, less on liberty than on action. And Fire, supreme and universal, is regarded

¹⁸ Cf. Lucretius, *op. cit.*, IV, 379–461, numerous examples of illusions of sight.

as having introduced action into the cosmos by its rhythm of condensation and tension. Actually, the vicious circle is as apparent in this case as it was in the former one. As far as ethical structure is concerned, universal reason, an extrapolation from individual reason (which is then referred back to it), has no more claim to primacy than the sense experience controlled by the other senses—or by some other person. But in one system as well as in the other, it is fine and striking to see the uniformity of method which makes ethics the product of knowledge.

Once we have emerged from these arbitrary theories we find ourselves confronted by the practical problem of the regulation of the passions. Both systems regard the natural operation of the passions as evil. But resolved as they are to oppose one another and each being determined to arrive at a perfect co-ordination of psychological facts by means of his leading principles (which are rigorously opposed to those of the rival doctrine), do they give us an equally realistic solution for these problems?

They do, indeed. This is all the more surprising since the solutions which they propose are so very different.

It is true that the description of the passions is alike in the two philosophies, and moreover agrees with the ideas current in the Greece of that time. The passions are suffered by man, whether they do or do not come from the gods—thereby imperiling his liberty. They annul his free will, or at least, enfeeble it. Thus they are opposed to the very principles of the ethical law which, as we have noted, Stoicism and Epicureanism have wished to safeguard even at the risk of distorting their underlying cosmic systems.

It is known how carefully Stoicism enumerated and graded the passions. Eighty-one of them were named as so many moral illnesses. There were four major ones grouped by twos, under the headings 'expectation' and 'achievement': hope and the urge for pleasure on the one hand; on the other, fear and sorrow. The very essence of the doctrine was a response to the latter: the knowledge of the world and the certainty that this order was providential. But as a protection against the former, it was hoped that psychological substitutes might provide help. Will was supposed to overwhelm the weaknesses of ravaging desire; and uncertainties of pleasure were to yield to the joy of stability. All this could be accomplished normally by the knowledge of a rational and reassuring cosmos and by beneficently directed action, and might be considered effective if it conformed to the principles of that philosophy.

Epicurus, in making pleasure his goal, recognises that the body aims at

an infinitude of pleasure. But experience shows that to yield to this trend does not increase either the quantity or the quality of pleasure. A man who is hungry or thirsty is at the apex of pleasure when he receives a bit of bread or a cup of water, even dirty; if one offered him food and drink of the most sumptuous kind, nothing would add to the intensity of his first delight, and the extension of that 'which is unnecessary' would only lessen the impression. It follows therefrom that 'measure' and 'prudence' will restrict, for the very sake of pleasure, the absurd impulse toward pleasure beyond natural limits.

These two contrasting attitudes, systematic as they may appear, cannot be blamed for lacking realism, considering the historical moment in which they took shape: it was a time in Greece when the growth of material wealth and the intoxication of all kinds of new experiences were accompanied by 'lessons of Fortune', the accidents and catastrophes which cross the lives of the avidly ambitious. It is left to us to ascertain what practical means these philosophies devised for the use of those who wished to organise their life above these passions.

It was 'good living' assured by personal effort: that appears to be the common conclusion of the preceding development. But if we tighten up these notions to mean 'asceticism' and 'pleasure', shall we not destroy the tenuous accord between them?

Stoicism does not present itself as a system tending toward happiness. And in spite of its title, *The Happiness of Life (De vita beata)*, Seneca's treatise repeats all the formulas with which Cicero contended against Epicureanism in the name of Stoicism: *virtus* is opposed to *voluptas*; the confusion of *honestum* and *jucundum* is an untenable paralogism; pleasure, *voluptas*, is only a corollary (*accessio*) to virtue, which is an end in itself and the supreme good.¹⁹ This does not prevent the fact that this supreme good is called *beate vivere*. Action shapes this supreme good, and even among the chief 'passions' desire ranks above fear²⁰ because, surely, desire can—and should—arouse the will of the 'soul, first healthy . . . and then strong and vigorous'.²¹ For such is the essential condition of the Sage: as the very opposite of the *stultus* who stagnates in his laziness, he is constantly exercising the activity of his mind. And surely Epicureanism, as well, recommends intellectual activity as the way to happiness. Except that for the

¹⁹ Seneca, *De Vita Beata*, 7; 6; 9.

²⁰ Seneca, *op. cit.*, *Quidquid timui* (thus speaks the aspirant to wisdom) *di boni, quanto levius fuit quam quod concupivi?*

²¹ Seneca, *Ibid.*, 3 (*Sana mens, . . . deinde fortis re vehemens*).

Stoics the question is not merely one of the harmonious practice of a vital function, but an effort (ἀσκησις) which aims at perfection (ἀρετή) in order to maintain the hierarchically ordered arrangement of the world (σύστασις). And this effort is true asceticism, the labour of the soul upon itself, a soul, both self-confident and at the same time torturing itself to attain truth.²² The life of Heracles is its heroic symbol, including the pyre, which unites him with the gods. Thus man makes himself 'the artisan of his life'; the means he employs thereto are firmness of purpose, knowledge, confidence (*constantia, scientia, fiducia*). When he has at last reached 'peace and harmony of the soul', he has attained the supreme good, having become *compositus ordinatusque vir*²³ freed from the confused tumult of the passions.

Corresponding to this militant asceticism aiming at a peace both personal and transcendent we have, paradoxically, an Epicurean asceticism aiming at pleasure: ascetic restraint, no less courageous in spite of its negative appearance. It assumes as its first tenet, not a logical discrimination of concepts as do the Stoics, but the very experience of pleasure itself, such as we have briefly described it. The result of this is an invaluable improvement over the former hedonistic doctrines; now 'enduring pleasure' is preferred to 'transient pleasure', 'pleasure in movement'; and, in consequence, the advice of the doctrine is not to prolong any 'movement' which is about to be realised, and which may seem delight, but which is not the goal. The limits induced by control replace the boundless urge of the passions. This could not happen without the will to be frugal; a calculated device to restrict man to natural and necessary pleasures. Bodily pleasures which the *libido* demands are reduced to the sole satisfaction (in the most rigorous meaning of the term) of all the elementary instincts. But, at least as far as man is concerned, this is to be done by a free and deliberate act. In the same way physical suffering is to be counteracted only by spiritual means: the voluntary recourse to the memory of the past and the anticipation of the future. Is this an illusion or a realistic approach? It is in the name of realism that a Stoic like Seneca criticises this reliance on the power of imagination and the instability and the frailty of physical pleasures.²⁴ But we see that actually the Epicurean co-ordinates

²² We are only regrouping the formulas of Seneca, *De Vita Beata*, 2 and 8: *O quam sibi ipse verum, tortus a se fatebitur . . . Animi bonum animus inveniat . . . Incorruptus vir sit externis et insuperabilis, miratorque tantum sui . . . : fidens animi atque in utrumque paratus, artifex vitae.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 3 and 8.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 6 and 7. But, as far as the second point is concerned, keeping on a very vulgar level.

his being against the sway of the passions for the sake of his delight, just as the Stoic does.

If we intend to find some weakness in the background of these two differing forms of asceticism, we may look for it not in their lack of realism, but in the systematic exclusiveness of the two doctrines, each one of which has idealised only one of the tendencies of the era in which it was elaborated. The moral effort of the Stoics corresponds to the creative dynamism of the organic States. The ethical reserve of the Epicureans has its counterpart in the withdrawal of the mind's forces and a turning towards a comprehension of individual happiness free from political contingencies. A distortion, possibly, on the part of both systems.

But if we look beyond this apparent conflict we shall see that on the level of the comprehension of the Cosmos, as well as on that of methodology, the lessons of Wisdom of the two systems do approach one another and almost coincide.

To comprehend and to accept the world: therein lies the Sage's liberty. This is not the formal liberty that every ethics demands, but the liberty which is the foundation and the happiness of the individual.

'To conform to nature', 'to live according to nature': if we were to stop at these dominant formulas, Epicureanism and Stoicism would appear to be much alike. However, only a few lines of Lucretius or of Seneca will suffice to re-establish the difference between the instinctual demands and the appeal of reason.²⁵ This does not prevent the Stoic himself from noting emphatically 'the graft' of reason on the experience of the senses, and the personal quality (the implied egoism) of natural happiness.²⁶ Just as the Epicurean might do, for his part. In fact, since the major precept is the same—for the Epicurean to 'accept the world order' (since it depends on chance), for the Stoic to assent to it²⁷ (since there is a cosmic community between god and men)—the ethical end-result is also absolutely analogous. It is a balance of the mind which can have its being in opposing, yet equally valid, qualities deriving from effort or from ease:²⁸ non-reliance on chance, not in the vain hope of annulling it, but in

²⁵ For example: Lucretius, *op. cit.*, I, 15–22 (*Nonne videre / nil aliud sibi naturam latrare, nisi ut qui / corpore seiunctus dolor absit, mente fruatur / jucundo sensu cura semota metuque? / Ergo corpoream ad naturam pauca videmus / esse opus omnino, quae demant atque dolorem, / delicias quoque uti multas substernere possint*) and Seneca, *op. cit.*, 8 (*Natura duce utendam est: hanc ratio observat, hanc consulit. Idem est ergo beate vivere et secundum naturam*).

²⁶ *Erit vera ratio sensibus insita* (Seneca, *op. cit.*, 8); *Beata est ergo vita conveniens naturae suae* (*ibid.*, 3).

²⁷ Seneca, *op. cit.*, 3: *Rerum naturae assentior*.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

order to destroy one's own restlessness, to free the spirit, to train it in stability 'beyond fear, beyond desire' . . . As his understanding increases man may thus progress from calm to serenity.

For indeed, this wisdom is fundamentally of an intellectual kind. Maxims such as 'They alone are happy (*felices*) who understand their happiness intellectually', or 'No one arrives at happiness (*beatus*) outside of the Truth', which Seneca forged as weapons against the Epicureans, could easily with little change be used by them against him. And again, this other maxim from the same source is perhaps more Epicurean than Stoic in tone: 'From the knowledge of truth are born great constant joy, human kindness (*comitas*) and a generous outpouring (*effusio*) of the spirit.'²⁹ Lucretius, with his brilliant style and constant, transparent clearness glorifies Epicurus: 'He has rescued the life of man from the endless vague shadows and has placed him in the infinitude of calm and of clear light.' He compares men still in the state of ignorance to children who tremble in the dark without cause³⁰ and concludes: 'This terror, these obscurities of the spirit, they must be dispersed, but not by the sun's rays, nor the brilliant shafts of the light of day, but by letting him see and understand nature (*sed naturae species ratioque*).'³¹ And furthermore: that 'moral reserve' with which Epicureanism seems to surround pleasure in its purest form appears to be based on the most objective observation of the physical world which surveys the immensity of the universe only to obtain the evidence of its limitations, and glorifies death as the assured end of weariness and illusions.³² Thus wisdom is linked to knowledge, whether it be physical or biological, or physical and rational, whether it rise on the background of divine indifference, or aspire to the co-operation with the determined will of the gods. According to both these systems, however opposed they may appear, philosophy is an activity of the mind which will obtain a happy life; since the activity of the mind is at the same time an assurance of a healthy being and an outstripping of the bondage to which it is subject.

It is also apparent how definitely these intellectual attitudes serve the

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁰ Lucretius, *op. cit.*, V, 10–12; VI, 35–38.

³¹ *Ibid.*, VI, 39–41 = I, 146–148. Cyril Bailey (Lucretius, I, Oxford, 1947) translates these last words: . . . 'but by the outer view and the inner law of nature'.

³² Cf. Lucretius, *op. cit.*, I, 72–77 (. . . *unde refert nobis juctor quid possi oriri, | quid nequeat, finita potestas denique cuique | quanam sit ratione atque alte terminus haerens*); 107–109 (*Nam si certam finem esse viderent | aerumnarum homines . . .*).

needs of the epoch in which they arise. Liberation from civic restraints—a false liberation since all political initiative was annulled by haphazard events and tyranny—had given rise to a boundless desire for personal happiness. The coercion and the confusion of events had forced those Greeks to pose the problem of freedom in different terms and to look for it in a realm whence it could not be banished. On these two points, Epicureanism and Stoicism propose analogous solutions: To search quietly for an uninterrupted calm, to be free without letting oneself be troubled by what cannot be avoided: that is to say, in the last analysis, to place our liberty and our happiness within ourselves, in the autonomy of the mind and the reassurance given by our insights.

Are these solutions limited? Doubtless. The Stoic who ‘advances towards the summit’ is not yet free, though his chain is lengthened; he ‘knows that his fatherland is the world and the gods rule over it’. And this, his desire, his will, his exertion towards the good is an ‘advance towards the gods’.³³ This is his liberty. But what about his happiness when the inevitable casts him down? ‘We are born under single rule’, writes Seneca: ‘to obey God, that is liberty’; and thereafter: ‘Realise within thyself an image of God’ (*Deum effingas*) in attaining perfect virtue; for then: ‘What sense of accomplishment there is, nay, better still, what overabundance!’³⁴ Doubtless, it is hackneyed to celebrate Stoicism for having projected its triple ethical ideal—will, virtue, and happiness—into the Sage’s imitation of a God who is providence and reason. But perhaps it has not been sufficiently noted that for the Epicurean, as well, the inactive gods in the *intermundi* are the patterns of cosmic wisdom towards which he, too, aspires.³⁵ The scorching images of the false religion which Lucretius has left us have let us forget that he honours his master for having stated in all of his cosmology ‘above all the divine lessons about the immortal gods’, and that he has unequivocally described the moral condition of these gods as that complete calm towards which we ought to strive.³⁶ He did this so well, that if his poem had been completed it would have ended—as he formally promised³⁷—with an exposition of the true religion, making explicit the ‘venerian’ prologue, and would have

³³ Seneca, *op. cit.*, 16; 20; 21.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 15–16.

³⁵ See G. Festugière, *Epicure et ses dieux* (Paris, 1946), Chapter IV: he represents the Epicurean god as a ‘projection’ of the sage. See further on.

³⁶ Lucretius, *op. cit.*, V, 52–54; II, 646–651.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, V, 153–155.

opposed to the evils of 'superstition' the supreme good of a cosmic theology: pacifying and serene.³⁸

Even where they touch upon 'legitimate suicide', the two forms of wisdom correspond. The Stoic who feels that he can no longer advance towards the divine order has the right to kill himself; and the Epicurean Diodorus also takes refuge in suicide when he has arrived at the apex of serenity.³⁹ Once God has been realised on earth as far as human power can extend, and happiness reached as much as is permitted to mortal man, the Sage has nothing left but to merge voluntarily with the Cosmos. This is the supreme proof of his freedom.

Granted that, starting out from such different premises, the two systems arrive at conceptions of happiness so closely related, there still remain three moral problems to be solved: the relation of this happiness to the individual himself, to other persons, and to the cosmos. For a cosmic doctrine, though it may be (as knowledge) the foundation of morality, does not thereby define the total moral aspiration.

Founded on liberty and the will, wisdom is an acquisition of the individual. That is understood. But not necessarily of a jealous and openly declared individualism. Yet we must agree that this is the case, both for Epicureanism and for Stoicism. Whether due to exaggeration or limitation—the philosopher of either sect cultivates for himself a *sacro egoismo*. 'I am not yet sufficiently friendly unto myself', says the candidate aspiring to the wisdom of the Stoa; for (is it not true?) 'all who surround me, are enemies or may become so.' He will, accordingly, look for 'an habitual good, the benefit of which he will feel without showing it', something 'unshakable, always in the right proportion and containing beauty in its most secret self'. It will be an intimate happiness, a solitary form of exaltation, far from the beaten tracks, far from the crowd, whose mere vicinity is corruption.⁴⁰ Doubtless, the egoism of the Epicurean is less strong. The first verses of the Second Book of Lucretius have been misused: the delight of the mortal drama, shipwreck or battle, which the spectator enjoys in his solitude, is only a foil for comparison, permitting him to imagine the higher pleasure of the Sage as his mind beholds

³⁸ This hypothesis of Munro seems to us very likely. Moreover, it corresponds to the stylistic technique of composition by involvement (*en amande*) that the Hellenistic age had succeeded in developing and which was also used by Catullus.

³⁹ Seneca, *op. cit.*, 19.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 1–3.

serenely the tumultuous universe.⁴¹ It would be better to go a little further in our reading, and stop at the evocation of the friends, reclining on the grass by the side of a running stream, on a spring day.⁴² 'Among them', it is true, the Epicurean cenobitism is a matter of choice. But it is well known, for instance, that friendship, by the tenets of the doctrine, is practised only for the sake of the benefits that the individual believes he may derive. Thus egoism, though somewhat less intent in appearance, is no less basic in Epicurean wisdom than it is in Stoicism.

This individualism, founded on knowledge and asceticism, cannot help but be aristocratic and full of pride. It will be enough to remember that it is the privilege of the sage to approach divinity. Is it purely a verbalism that Epicurus is worshipped as 'god'? More correctly we should call it a superior 'euhemerism', which replaces the useless pantheon of Olympus with the most sublime philosophers, with those who most nearly approach the ideal of the doctrine.⁴³ The word, nevertheless, is revealing.

What a difference between these sages and Socrates, 'who deems himself more man the more he is given the name of god'⁴⁴ (in spite of the fact that the tendency towards religious confusion was at the bottom of both these attitudes). One might say that Epicurus isolated himself far above the most distinguished of his followers. But the picture which Cicero draws for us of Piso, however caricatured it may be, assures us that also a 'disciple' easily rose to an attitude of disdainful pride in assuming that he possessed Epicurean detachment.⁴⁵ As for the Stoics, it is obvious that the dignity of virtue corresponds to an excessive conceit. Even on the mediocre level of generosity, the perfect Sage that Seneca describes, he who has abandoned not only the contaminating vulgar crowd, but also the modest group of the novices aspiring to philosophy, does not hesitate to exalt himself in vainglorious terms: 'Above all, thou shalt not permit thyself to pass judgment on him who is better than thou art; as for me, I may (and that is the mark of virtue) incur the disfavour of the wicked . . .'⁴⁶

⁴¹ Lucretius, *op. cit.*, II, 1–19. A similar passage, the conclusion of which deals feelingly with the misery and the blindness of men.

⁴² Lucretius, *op. cit.*, II, 29–35.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, V, 7–8 *et seq.*; 49–51. The prologue of Book VI (1–42) helps to define the word *deus*: a man who has risen so high on the road to truth that his (spiritual) advantages surpass all those (material ones) of the gods of the fable and that his moral serenity brings him nearer to the εὐδαιμονία of the true gods.

⁴⁴ Seneca, *op. cit.*, 25.

⁴⁵ Cicero, *In Pisonem*, 56–58.

⁴⁶ Seneca, *op. cit.*, 24, 4. It is known that the overbearing tone of assurance and of contempt for the *stulti* was parodied by Horace, *Sat.*, II, 3 and 7.

It must be said that after the long Christian experience, this aristocratic attitude with regard to knowledge and virtue has become quite unbearable for us.

From the social viewpoint, however, both Stoicism and Epicureanism have each stressed one of the essential concepts: solidarity and charity. The Stoics have done it in accordance with the totality of their doctrine; the Epicureans, on the other hand, in accordance with the rather personal emotional exuberance of their founder.

The Stoic picture of the world shows a total and real 'sympathy' or 'concurrence', extending not only to living beings but, theoretically, to all parts of the Cosmos. *De facto* there is no solidarity more complete than this. But it is both rational and hierarchic. The first of its characteristics, which establishes privileged intercourse between beings endowed with reason, is the foundation of a 'City of men and gods'. It is the concept of this City that confers such greatness on the First Book of Cicero's *De legibus*. But the Second Book provides an alibi to the exaggerations of the doctrine, when it raises the 'Sages' far above the mob of the 'obtuse' (*stulti*). The pride of absolute virtue, affirmed by intellectual tension and the force of a character grounded in 'saneness' surely brings the sage nearer to God, but it tends to produce a more or less conscious contempt for the less sublime members of the 'Community of gods and men'. This state of mind reveals itself even in remarks of a purely psychological kind, such as: 'From weakness there comes all brutality' (*feritas*) which debases the man that falters to the level of the beast (*fera*). At its best, this human solidarity (which appears to be so solidly based on physical nature itself) becomes for the Sage (himself too sure of having approached the state of a god-king) an overbearing paternalism, quite satisfied with itself: 'a grandeur tempered by kindness'.⁴⁷ To be sure, he will not infringe upon the liberty of anyone, 'but above all, not his own'; Nature orders him to be useful to men, though his 'generosity' is so called, 'not because it is due to free men but because it comes from a free soul'.⁴⁸

How much more generous and spontaneous is the 'charity' of Epicurus. True, the circle of friends, whose vernal contentment is idyllically pictured by Lucretius, also represents an aristocracy, but one without prideful tension. It has the character, rather, of a monastic community where the

⁴⁷ *Magnitudo cum mansuetudine* (Seneca, *op. cit.*, 3). The word *mansuetudo* is well applied to the animals that are tamed by man.

⁴⁸ Seneca, *op. cit.*, 20; 24.

ease of intercourse is all the greater since every member cultivates friendship for the sake of his personal pleasure. But Epicurus desired unequivocally to be a universal benefactor: he offered to all men an attainable happiness, peace and pleasures within the reach of everyone; and he wished to teach in the simplest language, without a technical vocabulary, without syllogistic juggling, risking thereby the accusation of intellectual poverty and silliness. His school, with its quasi-evangelistic simplicity, accordingly was open to the simple-minded, both men and women. And this simplicity is maintained even in the magnificence of the eulogies which the fervour of Lucretius lavishes on him.

Thus light is thrown, from different angles, on the bases of all social life. Only it is somewhat disconcerting that these bases appear dissociated by the opposition of the two systems.

And it is even more disconcerting that, from a practical point of view, and against the historic background of the time, these systems responded so poorly to the social demands of the era. For Epicurus leads his monastic life in the arrested and, as it were, declining framework of the city-state, accepting as a postulate forms of existence which his universalist philosophy repudiates *de facto*. As for Lucretius, he too lives a contradictory life in the confusion of an urban republic about to end; disheartened by the demoralisation of civil conflicts, yet he bases moral strength on the justice of man and on the dread of punitive sanctions.⁴⁹

Stoicism, on the other hand, seems to have been more definitely aware of political realities; but though its thought seems to have adapted itself well enough to the phenomenon of the Hellenistic empires, it stylises the picture dangerously in the formula 'city of men and of gods'. What a chasm between such an ideal and the monarchies where autocrats declared themselves divine, vaunted their merely external 'love of men', and organised around themselves that sumptuous wastefulness (*τροφή*) by means of which their prosperity was to be assured, and—as it was believed—made to bear fruit!

Is this distortion surprising? As preludes to the religions of salvation, both Epicureanism and Stoicism have as their chief goal wisdom and individual happiness. The social element appears only as part of the cosmos: as a community of rational beings according to the Stoa, as phenomenal anthropology which, according to Lucretius, takes its place naturally after the science of the stars and the plants and before that dealing with

⁴⁹Lucretius, *op. cit.*, III, 40–93; 995–1002; 1014–1017.

exceptional phenomena, the allegedly or even really divine.⁵⁰ It is noticeable that in these teachings, wisdom itself is not really ethical, in the sense that Aristotle or Plato might have understood it. In so far as it is knowledge apprehended with the strength of faith, it is the complete acceptance of the Universe. Partially detached from Christianity as we are, this is an attitude which we can understand (as our writers note) not as an historical phenomenon, but as a present possibility. 'Disinterested love for the eternal order of things,' says Milhaud: is this not Stoic wisdom? And when the chorus concludes the *Pasiphaë* of Montherlant with the question, whether 'the absence of thought does not contribute to the great dignity of beasts, plants, and waves', does he not flirt with the supreme temptation of Epicureanism?

Is there then a meaning for us in these ancient cosmic philosophies?

Our lack of wisdom is clear. And equally clear is the resemblance between the problems which confront us and those which these ancient doctrines have tried to solve.

Our lack of wisdom is apparent in the intoxication brought on by our scientific discoveries: they either create for us the illusion of an ever-growing intellectual force, or that of never-ending technical *miracles*. Passing from mechanistic rationalism to an atomic doctrine establishing the law of great quantities, we are prepared to see in Stoic and Epicurean physics earlier and somewhat childish states of a science of which we believe ourselves masters: We do not wish to acknowledge that the most rigid dogmatism—that of the Stoa—was based on faith of a religious type; nor that Epicurus, whose thought was strongly scientific in the modern sense⁵¹ is so indifferent towards every form of dogmatism that he will accept the explanation of any phenomenon, provided that it excludes the idea of a miracle. This is the true wisdom of the scholar, if not of the seeker: for adapting itself to any advance of any hypothesis and not stopping at any one of them, such wisdom retains only that part of knowledge which is unequivocally and constantly true for man.

But what have we done with the 'traditional' humanism that was

⁵⁰Lucretius, *op. cit.*, V, 925–1457, an anthropology closely allied to the cosmology by the explanation it gives on the youth of the earth and of its creatures (V, 772–924); to the explanation of the *mirabilia*, by the strong contrast between the misery of man and the action of Epicurus leading to salvation (VI, 1–42). On the hypothesis of a 'theology' which might have concluded the work, see above, Note 38.

⁵¹Cf. Jean Bayet, 'Études lucretiennes', in *La Profondeur et le Rythm.* ('Cahiers du College Philosophique', Grenoble-Paris, 1948), pp. 57–138.

practised (if you will) by Socrates, by Montaigne? Instead of being wise enough to think of it in function of our cosmic systems, we have made of it a routine of life—and sometimes even of language. Its domain seems to shrink progressively as the sciences pertaining to man become historical or sociological and as human power boasts itself to be mathematical or technical. This is the very opposite of what was done by the Epicureans and the Stoics, who clung so effectively to the essential character of this humanism that they made it the goal of their teachings, in spite of their monism and materialism.

One aspiration, however, remains—perhaps for our salvation: the urgent wish to find a common ground between the liberty of the individual and social organisation. Shall we be able to give it shape and to implement it?

The solutions which have been proposed so far are, it is only too well known, both discordant and insufficient. And the ancient forms of wisdom—even if we do not mention their inadequacy for their own day, as we have noted briefly above—do not appear to give much help on this point. In the purging of the passions the psychoanalytic truthfulness of Epicureanism is obvious: the dissolving of what is imaginary by the return to pristine simplicity. But this doctrine puts an end to action, and its charity, however great it may be, lacks any social frame of reference. Stoicism has other virtues; above all, it engages every man in an effort towards an ideal, which, in principle, unites them all. But this is not a form of ‘socialism’, albeit monarchical: the world is not conceived of as made by and for man. If the ancient doctrine here appears to lack true social maturity, that of our contemporaries, on the other hand, sins by lack of cosmic perspective. We see man facing nature, man confronting the machine which modifies the world. Our notions must abandon the excessive historicity and the exclusively descriptive trends of the past century, which were so strongly apparent in the thought of Benedetto Croce: What replies can we expect to the questions pressing on us if ‘humanism’ is nothing but the balance between the good and the evil in us and if the evolution of each man is considered as resembling that of humanity throughout thousands upon thousands of centuries?

What we need, as did the contemporaries of Epicurus and Zeno, is an ‘anthropocosmology’. And, if we *must* think in modern terms, the experience of the ancient masters can serve us, if not as doctrine, at least as method.

Who would deny that they had a share in teaching us wisdom, in

imparting to us a *real* knowledge of the world? But the permanent lesson taught us by Epicurus—even where he was dogmatic—was, that we should consider this knowledge to be constantly asymptotical to its subject; and more important still, we should consider it as a function of our human condition, whatever the precautions (mentioned by Eddington) that may be taken to free physical measurements from the inaccuracies of the senses and to inscribe experience into a mathematical scheme. The progressive construction of the world (or its image—both being one and the same) will then appear only as one of the elements of the knowledge of man by man. The illusion that there exist two distinct objects will disappear, and ‘humanism’ will attain to primacy, on the theoretical level as well as on the practical. In this way the goal of the cosmic philosophers of ancient times—*beate vivere* (in spite of the awkwardness and the contradictions of their exposition) will find justification.

Hence Wisdom does not call for the adaptation of the machine to man (as technicians now are seeking to do, countering the cruel practice of making man fit the machine). It demands rather that man be readjusted to himself. An individual adjustment, at the beginning; by and for liberty as against that spiritual emptiness which the Germans call *Entseelung*, noting by the use of the prefix, *Ent*, that there was a process of loss, loss of soul. Let there now be a process of reintegrating these forces. Is leisure necessary to do this? Yes, and it must be leisure which is not regimented nor standardised. The Ancients had a word for it (*σχολή, otium*). Our possibilities in this direction are tremendous, because of technical progress. Both tremendous and dangerous—wherever organised leisure organised collectively is considered more social than an individual re-education which would teach each individual the need for an effort by himself on himself. The aristocratic attitude of Stoicism renews its appeal: The ancient slave Epictetus becomes simultaneously missionary and guarantor of the true autonomy, which lies in the field of the spiritual. Cosmic solidarity, the proof of which is not invalidated by the mistakes of the Stoics, and Epicurean charity, joyfully promoting fruitful communion of minds freed within themselves by the voluntary contemplation of the world, may join their teachings so that we may be helped to progress from individual happiness to social organisation.

The task is left for us to accomplish. But on the way let us take as our guide the first man who reconciled these two forms of wisdom: Seneca. He is misunderstood today, and sometimes he seems in need of justification! He may appear outmoded because his period was marked by a decline of

scientific research. But perhaps this very fact aided him to pass beyond the 'information' of the cosmic philosophies and to rely only on the spirit which animated them: that is to say, on the necessity, for individual wisdom to think in terms of the world: in order to give his consent, and to acquire by its contemplation an impassibility that transcends personal needs. Without optimism, or pessimism, for the relative nature itself of all our knowledge should forbid them both. And however great Jean Rostand's calm may be when he measures the biological decline of the earth, he is surely as mistaken as was Lucretius, when the latter indulged himself in picturing the end of the world. Acquiescing in the universe, man, as part of it, acquiesces in himself. But being free—as he replaces desire by the will to act (that too was taught by Croce), he achieves his own pacification, against all passions. And this is why Seneca won the day when he showed that, in practice, the maxims of Epicurus resemble those of the Stoa.

Apparently, then, it was by reason of their very wish to disagree that these two doctrines so deeply understood the nature of man and could lead him along the paths of wisdom, across all the hazards of political life, to meet the exigencies of an objective idea of the world.