

Hesiod: Man, Law and Cosmos

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Abstract

In his two chief works, the *Theogony* and *Works and Days*, Hesiod treats the possibility of providence. In the former poem, he considers what sort of god could claim to give human beings guidance. After arriving at Zeus as the only consistent possibility, Hesiod presents Zeus' rule as both cosmic and legalistic. In the latter poem, however, Hesiod shows that so long as Zeus is legalistic, his rule is limited cosmically to the human being. Ultimately, Zeus' rule emerges as more human than cosmic, and thus unable to fulfil the cosmic demands of piety. Hesiod's presentation thus begs, without thematically posing, the question of how human beings ought to live. Accordingly, Hesiod's theological analysis, and not his theogony (or, implicit cosmogony or cosmology), sets the stage for the inquiries of the early Greek philosophers, and so political philosophy as a whole.

Keywords

Hesiod – providence – law

1 Introduction (*Theogony* 1-115)

Hesiod begins the *Theogony* with a justification of his ability to speak on matters from long ago, from a time without men, indeed from that time when the gods first came to be. More precisely, he begins from the Muses and lists the gods of whom they sing, and, with the end of that list, remarks that the Muses taught him, Hesiod, a lowly shepherd, to sing of such exalted events. The necessity of his justification emerges reasonably from the distance Hesiod's audience must notice between their particular existence and the singular,

universal moment of which he is to sing. But his audience is unaware that Mount Helikon, home of the Muses, is also a haunt of Hesiod and his flock, and that there the Muses gave Hesiod not just his song, but the very staff he holds before them. Whatever force this relic may have in persuading Hesiod's audience of his ability to sing, they are warned against excessive trust in his song by what Hesiod tells us the Muses said:

Rural herders, bad and reproachable ones, but bellies,
 we know how to speak many falsehoods like what are (ἐτύμοισιν),
 and we know, whenever we want, how to sing true things. (26-8)¹

And yet Hesiod's justification is not thereby deflated, for even if the following should contain falsehoods, they nevertheless remain divine falsehoods. At least at the outset, then, Hesiod asks his listeners to exercise a cautious piety, and thus, if not to discern as far as possible which of the two the Muses have elected to do, then at the very least to absorb what they teach with their character in mind. Now, we are informed that the Muses will

sing the race of gods in celebratory song, first,
 from the beginning, those born of Gaia and Ouranos,
 and the gods, givers of goods, who came to be from these,
 and, second, in turn, Zeus, father of gods and men. (44-7)

1 All citations are to the work of Hesiod indicated in the section heading, unless otherwise noted. For the text, I have used F. Solmsen, *Hesiodi Theogonia, Opera et Dies, Scutum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), but have also consulted the more exhaustive collection of fragments in R. Merkelbach and M.L. West, *Fragmenta Hesiodica* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967). For my translations, I am greatly indebted to the following commentaries and translation: R. Hamilton, *Hesiod's Works and Days* (Bryn Mawr: Bryn Mawr Commentaries, 1988); Hamilton, *Hesiod's Theogony* (Bryn Mawr: Bryn Mawr Commentaries, 1990); R. Lattimore (trans.), *The Works and Days, Theogony, The Shield of Herakles* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991); W.J. Verdenius, 'Hesiod, "Theogony" 507-616: Some Comments on a Commentary', *Mnemosyne*, 24 (1971), pp. 1-10; Verdenius, 'Notes on the Proem of Hesiod's "Theogony"', *Mnemosyne*, 25 (1972), pp. 225-60; Verdenius, *A Commentary on Hesiod Works and Days, vv. 1-382* (Leiden: Brill, 1985); West, *Hesiod: Theogony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966); West, *Hesiod: Works and Days* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); West, *The Hesiodic Catalogue of Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985). I also owe a debt of gratitude to Prof. Jane Carter of Tulane University for allowing me to attend her course on the *Theogony* and *Works and Days*.

The two songs are the two poems that follow: the first gives us the generations of the gods (cf. 104-115); the second, a hymn to Zeus (cf. *Works and Days* 1-10). In the following discussion, our guiding question will be how these lies in particular could be like what are real, i.e. why the generation of the gods and providence of Zeus could be false, but still like what is. My contention is that in the *Theogony* Hesiod cycles through the respective rules of Ouranos, Kronos, and Zeus in order to arrive at the sort of god that could satisfy the demands of human piety, and that in the *Works and Days* he shows why those demands render Zeus' rule impossible. In short, I will argue that Hesiod outlines the best possible case for providence, only to show, in the end, its impossibility.

2 Motion, Rest, and Rule (*Theogony* 116-506)

The Muses begin not with Gaia and Ouranos, as Hesiod twice anticipated (45, 106), but rather an unannounced god, Chaos. He is one of the four original gods, the other three being Gaia, Tartaros, and Eros. Gaia's birth is accompanied by a reference to the eventual order of which she is the secure seat, while Tartaros is put in the plural as Tartara, and labelled simply 'murky'. Chaos, in turn, means 'gap', while Eros' beauty induces the self-forgetting to be expected of the regard of another, so characteristic of love. With the first four gods, the Muses give us order and disorder, along with conjunction and disjunction. The four thus prove necessary to one another and, in being both disjoined as many and conjoined into one, self-referential. The necessity of each for the others is problematic, however, for Hesiod has them come into being separately: if Chaos cannot be what it is without the others, then how can the Muses begin 'first Chaos came to be, then thereafter' (116)? Before the Muses can even get to the γένεσις of the gods *qua* birth or generation, they present us with a riddle about the γένεσις of the gods *qua* coming-into-being.² The Muses' song necessitates this problem: they must sing to human beings how the world as it is came to be, speaking of each part *outside of* its present context, while still understanding it *in light of* its present context.³ To do otherwise would be to sing

2 For an illuminating account of this difficulty, see M. Miller, 'The Implicit Logic of Hesiod's Cosmogony: An Examination of *Theogony*, 116-133', *Independent Journal of Philosophy*, 4 (1982), pp. 131-42.

3 For a discussion of the difference between giving an account of something in terms of how it came to be and in terms of what it is, see S. Benardete, *Encounters and Reflections* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 154-5. He refers to these two accounts as genetic and eidetic, respectively, and discusses, albeit briefly, how they are related.

truths like falsehoods. Accordingly, Hesiod's account will, as we will see, have the mark of the human being on it from start to finish.⁴ At present, we see that even Hesiod's monsters are monstrous in human terms: the Cyclopes Brontes, Steropes, and Arges paradoxically have *μόνους ὀφθαλμὸς ἐν μέσσω μετώπῳ*, while Kottos, Briareos, and Gyges are great in form because they have fifty heads and a hundred hands. From the beginning of the Muses' song, we are confronted with the difficulty of putting together motion and rest: how can we describe the past in terms of the present, the strange in terms of the familiar? That is, can a static understanding of something adequately account for phenomena prior to those phenomena on which that static understanding is based? As the *Theogony* progresses, the Muses will present various attempts to reconcile motion and rest through the rule of this or that god, ultimately demonstrating that such a resolution is possible only through the rule of a god like Zeus. In the present section of the paper, we will see that Hesiod argues that Zeus is such a sort of god. Only thereafter will we turn to how the character of Zeus' rule directly addresses, though not to say makes good on, the demands of piety.

The rule of Ouranos is the first attempt at such a reconciliation, in particular through a simple denial of change and generation. The appeal of such a reconciliation lies in 'starry' (*ἀστερόεις*) Ouranos' serving as a trustworthy guide throughout the year, with the various constellations signaling when we should do what with the earth; absurdly, however, such a reconciliation would deny the generative process by which the variety seen in Ouranos, which guides our work, and found on Gaia, on whom we work, came to be, and which must have come to be *after* Gaia and Ouranos. Accordingly, Ouranos maintains his rule by using his phallus to block Gaia's birth canal, i.e. by employing his organ of generation against generation, which is both his cause, as offspring of Gaia, and effect, as mate of Gaia and father of her children (cf. 126-7). Gaia must therefore solicit her children to depose their father, and only Kronos, 'Time', steps forward. Kronos usurps his father's rule by means of a farmer's sickle, which Gaia readies for him from a race (*γένος*) of metal that she makes. If the appeal of the rule of Ouranos was in the guidance of the stars, the appeal of Kronos' rule is in the guidance of the sickle, by which the farmer, in his work, appropriates the fruits of the earth. The farmer's activity of fashioning implements and reaping fruits thus attains the level of a divine principle, with the realm of human action identical to the ascendancy of Kronos, inasmuch as both stand for the corrective promotion of reproduction: Gaia's activity blurs *γένεσις*, 'generation', and *ποίησις*, 'making' (161: *ποίησασα γένος*). And yet Kronos' correction of Ouranos is preceded by Gaia's self-correction, her blurring of *γένεσις*

4 Cf. n. 34.

and ποιήσις in the making of the race of metal corrected by her fashioning of the metal into a sickle. Likewise, Aphrodite, born from the severed genitals of Ouranos, is not fertility simply, but the persistence of fertility in spite of the reaping of fruits. That is, in Gaia's self-correction and Aphrodite's birth from Ouranos' apparently neutered genitals, we already see the grounds for questioning the rule of Kronos: human making, as corrective, is corrective of generation, which persists not because of making, but rather in spite of it. Motion and rest still remain in tension.

The *Theogony* fittingly presents the rule of Kronos as a long series of generations: the rule of Kronos, 'Time', restores what the rule of Ouranos forbade, generation. Kronos' rule begins with the generations of Nux, whose eventual offspring include Pseudea, 'Falsity', and her ilk, and ends with Zeus' birth through the deception of Kronos. Gaia's substitution of a swaddled rock for Zeus becomes thematic in Zeus' rule, which is characterized by a series of deceptions.⁵ At present, the defect of Kronos' rule that the ascendancy of Zeus is meant to correct seems to lie in its inability to comprehend falsehood, despite the fact that his rule emerges as a correction, i.e. as truer to life than that of Ouranos. Reading on, we first notice the earlier hint at a flaw in Kronos' rule when, just after the birth of the Gorgons, we are told Perseus beheaded Medousa, from whose neck Chrusaor and Pegasos leapt out. The first human action since the Muses began their song echoes Kronos' emasculation of Ouranos and the birth of Aphrodite. The tension within Kronos' rule – in his interruption of generation for the sake of generation – is translated into a tension between the interruption of generation through human action, on the one hand, and Kronos' rule as the priority of generation and time, on the other: Gaia's sickle is put back in human hands where it belongs. This tension becomes thematic as the generations continue: just after Chrusaor and Kallirhoe bear Geryon, we learn that Heracleian power stripped Geryon down, along with Orthos and Eurytion; only after this episode do we learn that Kallirhoe bore Echidna, who with Typhaon, they say (φασι), bore Orthos (Geryon's dog), Kerberos, and Hydra; we then learn that Hera, angry with Heracleian power, armed Hydra, whom Heracles nevertheless killed, by the will of Athena; no sooner is Chimaira born than we learn that Pegasus and Bellerophon killed

5 Paraphrasing J.-P. Vernant, 'At Man's Table: Hesiod's Foundation Myth of Sacrifice', in M. Detienne and Vernant (eds.), *The Cuisine of Sacrifice Among the Greeks* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 21-86, J. Clay, *Hesiod's Cosmos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 101-2 provides a helpful outline of the repeated narrative elements. We must add, however, that the series of deceptions begins with Hesiod's suggestion that the entirety of his song may be ψεύδεα ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοία (27).

her; and, finally, the Nemean lion, sent by Hera, succumbs to Heraclean power. The rule of Kronos, i.e. the primacy of generation, appears to mean that there is an immortal source of miseries that come and go, against which human beings contend and over which they hope to prove victorious. When and from where our miseries arise remains uncertain, and this much is Kronian. Yet whatever god will relieve us must disrupt the Kronian stream of generation, must possess a rule different from that of Kronos. The uncertainty in our fate, in the success of our efforts to bring about the wanted outcomes, will be accounted for only through the rule of Zeus.

The rule of Ouranos had its appeal for the farmer in the guidance of the stars and its absurdity in its denial of the process of generation by which that variety comes to be. The rule of Kronos corrected that of Ouranos, but only by producing a correlative difficulty: the very variety that makes starry Ouranos a trusty guide also makes our fate uncertain. After listing the Okeanids at length, Hesiod says it would be vexing to go through all of them, though the locals know their names.⁶ Yet in the sequel he quickly accounts for the celestial bodies and the winds that guide human life. Around us we find ineffable contingency, above us formal consistency. We look upwards to the latter for guidance only because we are confronted with the unpredictability of the former: while a man's miseries are not likely to be from something as grand as the Nemean lion, something as small as an underfed dog on a poor farm can lead to ruin (cf. *Works and Days* 604-5). Accordingly, we pray to the gods for help, and a god could only answer our prayers if he *interrupted* the unpredictable flux and guarded us against the evils it brings. Hesiod thus rewards Hekate, the goddess through whom our prayers are fulfilled, with a hymn, and quite abruptly.⁷

6 Cf. West, *Hesiod: Theogony*, p. 260: 'Their importance as individuals is very unequal. Most of them have none, and may have been invented *ad hoc*; some may have been the names of actual springs, though we miss those most famous in myth... A few... reflect properties of their father... Others have no essential connexion with water at all, but are names appropriate to fairy godmothers... [W]e find dropped apparently at random in the list such significant but not eminently fontane goddesses as Peitho, Metis, Tyche – names which Hesiod can hardly have hit upon by chance, unaware of their meaning for others. He must have worked them in deliberately, but preferred not to interrupt the flow of names by annotations on individuals.'

7 The movement of the song from the heroes, to Hekate, to the deception of Kronos, and to Prometheus vs. Zeus necessitates the displacement of the generation of Iapetonians from their chronologically proper place to their thematically proper place. That is, to place them in the order of generation would be to ignore their proper place in the understanding (cf. n. 3). This approach seems to guide all of Hesiod's famously problematic chronologies

Because Hekate is honoured with having a lot of earth, sea, and sky, mortals pray to her to favour them with her power (416-20: δύναμις γε πάρεστιν). Her pervasive, indeed *cosmic* power means our good and bad fortune is entirely dependent on her will, on what she should wish (ἐθέλω: 429, 430, 432, 439, 443, 446; cf. 28). Hekate thus stands as the goddess that mediates between our will and the cosmos, her will effectively determining the extent of conformity between the two.⁸ Hesiod notes that Zeus' ascendancy to the throne did not diminish her power, so that his rule is apparently entirely in conformity with her will. Zeus is not for this reason superfluous, however, for if Hekate seems wilful or even capricious, Zeus rules both justly and through mind (cf. *Works and Days* 105, 276-85). Zeus' rule is thus predicated on the assurance that Hekate's will conforms with justice, that the outcomes of contests, even wars, are governed by justice and mind, even when these outcomes do not accord with our will.⁹ Whether or not Zeus' assurance can be fulfilled is the question that Hesiod will eventually have to face and, in the *Works and Days*, will finally answer.

The centrality of will bodes ill for Kronos, whose rule now comes to an end. The deception of Kronos, which allows for Zeus' birth, is much more complicated than Kronos' emasculation of Ouranos. This is because Gaia and Ouranos have informed Kronos that his son will eventually usurp him, so that Kronos hatches a plan of his own. As Rhea births each child, Kronos waits between her knees, eating each as it leaves her birth canal. His plan initially appears in line with his rule, essentially imitating the continuous coming into being and subsequent passing away characteristic of the primacy of generation and time. Absurdly, however, Kronos' rule negates the very coming into being it seeks to affirm, inasmuch as it is meant to prevent the birth of his son. Ouranos' attempt to affirm rest employed his means of generation, while Kronos' attempt to affirm generation negates the generation of any form of

in the *Theogony*. As Benardete quips, 'the maker does not have to proceed in order in order for the whole to be in order' in 'The First Crisis in First Philosophy', in Benardete (author) and R. Burger and M. Davis (eds.), *The Argument of the Action* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 3-14, p. 5. Cf. Clay, *Hesiod's Cosmos*, p. 14.

8 As others have noted, the name Ἐκάτη seems to be a pun on ἔκρητι. Cf. Benardete, 'First Crisis', p. 14 n. 1; Clay, *Hesiod's Cosmos*, pp. 135-6.

9 The threefold allotment of Hekate – of earth, sea, and sky – has its political counterpart in the first three sons of Rhea – Hades, Poseidon, and Zeus – with Zeus having general domain over all three (cf. 453-8). During the Titanomachy and the battle with Typhoeus, Zeus will prove the reach of his power through these three realms, while nevertheless dividing them among his brothers.

rest. Making the inverse mistake of his father, Kronos forms a half-baked plan that simply rushes straight from birth to perishing, so as to maintain or render static the *status quo*. As Kronos' example shows, forethought is the attempt to alter the stream of generation so as to avoid a change for the worse or to bring about a change for the better, and is thus premised on the desirability, though not to say feasibility, of an entirely good state. Resting in such a state would seem to be the ultimate *desideratum*. Forethought thus posits a separate course of γένεσις in place of its present course, in accordance with this desire for a final, resting, good state. Kronos' forethought is so weak that the separate course he effects differs only in duration. He cannot even look past his nose to the swaddled rock in place of his son. Kronos must cede power to Zeus, who blends motion and rest into an order that persists through time. Ruling through will and mind, Zeus is the first god of the *Theogony* that appears to fit the human being's attempt to harness the advantages and avert the disadvantages of becoming by means of access to a persisting order. Hesiod must, in turn, detail the character of the specific mode of access chosen, namely piety, in the remainder of the *Theogony*, before examining the possibility of its satisfaction in the *Works and Days*.

3 Zeus and the Human Condition (*Theogony* 507-616)

A mixture of rest and motion pervades Zeus' rule from the beginning. Right after Atlas, Menoitios, Prometheus, and Epimetheus are born, we are told of how Zeus changed their fates. Atlas and Menoitios' stories are dispatched quickly enough, and Epimetheus', taken on its own, no less. But Prometheus' fate prompts a long discussion, for Zeus is the agent of both his punishment and his subsequent release. Zeus' reversal of a punishment as harsh as the one he gave Prometheus is explained in the passing statement that, 'even though he was angry, he ceased from the anger he earlier had' (533).¹⁰ Zeus' anger runs the risk of seeming either capricious, and hence unjust, or entirely subordinated to his mind. Paradoxical as the latter sounds, this seems to be the case, for Zeus, well aware that Prometheus intends to deceive him, still grows angry upon allowing the deception to occur. Taking a digression from his chronicling of Zeus' ascendancy to power, Hesiod spends the next hundred

10 The Greek here is especially intriguing: *καί περ χωόμενος παύθη χόλου ὄν πρὶν ἔχασκεν*. Zeus goes from being angry to possessing anger. While certainly unaware of anything like the term ontology, Hesiod seems nevertheless to have put his finger on the ontological assumptions of Zeus' rational anger.

or so lines detailing the paradoxical relationship of Zeus' mind to his anger. The digression is not, however, merely a sideshow, but rather proves essential to demonstrating that Zeus is, in fact, a god that addresses the demands of piety. That is, his paradoxical mixture of anger and mind is, as we will see, a function of his particular mixture of motion and rest.

The crime for which Zeus punishes Prometheus is a deception, in which the Iapetonian places the choicest parts of an ox – the meat and innards, rich in fat – in the bland and unappetizing hide and stomach, while placing the useless, white bones – white, presumably, because stripped of meat and fat – in an attractive layer of shining fat. Zeus knowingly chooses the deceptive bundle, and decides, in his anger, not to give man fire. Prometheus, in turn, smuggles all-useful fire in a benign fennel stalk, and so provokes Zeus not simply to withhold a good from man, but to provide him an evil. The first story explains the human practice of supplicating the gods, specifically as regards the practice of burning bones to them, the second the origin of the almost superhumanly powerful arts in the theft of divine fire. The two stories would seem to find their best expression in Hesiod's dual exhortations to his brother to obey Zeus by being just and to work in *Works and Days* 202-341. Where a means to the good beyond that of just work proves necessary, Zeus' anger dissuades us from the route of injustice, while his divine forethought assures us of the route of piety. A just man looks outside himself and seeks in Zeus the cosmic correction of his condition. The burning of bones is not just a sign of piety, then, but an expression of the frustration of man's will that the fiery arts cannot make sustenance of hard and heavy bone.¹¹ Man's will extends beyond himself and *requires* that Zeus be the cosmic punisher and provider, a combination of anger and the furthest forethought. Lest his moments of apparent vacillation, as with Prometheus, reduce his justice to mere caprice, and so reduce him to Hekate, Zeus' mind must not only be comprehensive, but incomprehensible, and his anger entirely subordinate: 'he grew angry around [his] mind, and anger came to his heart' (554; cf. 613). Paradoxically, Zeus' anger overcomes him, and yet doesn't overcome him, since he can start or stop it as is reasonable. But paradoxical as Zeus' rational anger may be, only thus can he satisfy the demands

11 The crimes of offering bones and stealing fire are not just those of Prometheus, 'Forethought', but of all forethought, including that serving man's exercise of his will. Zeus was just, then, to punish man for Prometheus' crimes.

of human piety.¹² His rational anger appears all-too-human in the question it purports to answer.¹³

Zeus' punishment for the theft of fire illuminates the extent to which the burning of bones constitutes an extension of technical mastery from the cosmos itself to the immortal gods who govern that cosmos. Zeus sends the beautiful evil (καλὸν κακόν) of woman to man. Hesiod diligently catalogues just why woman is evil, using the famous, or infamous, image of a beehive. Just as hard-working honeybees work all day in the sun to supply honey to feed the drones, who laze about in the hive, so too do women reap the fruits of men's labour while remaining at home.¹⁴ Hesiod explains what good the beauty of such a wife might promise over the evil of her parasitic behaviour in the sequel, where he discusses the apparent evil that awaits those who select the good of permanent bachelorhood. The apparent evil awaiting the bachelor is twofold: that of having no caretaker for one's old age and that of having distant inheritors divide up one's livelihood. Both are owed to a lack of children. Why the second evil is an evil is difficult to understand, since one is by that time already dead. And since a man of sufficient means could presumably hire someone as a caretaker, the first evil seems to be that it is a living reminder of the second, namely that upon death one's livelihood is scattered. The evil can only be said

12 Vernant proposes the following interpretation of this passage: 'if we must state that Zeus foresaw everything, we must immediately add that according to this foresight, Prometheus would take the initiative to compete with him, that he would succeed in tricking him, that the king of the gods would be furious about it, and that he would bring about men's unhappiness, not directly but by means of the very advantages that their defender would have gained against him' (Vernant, 'At Man's Table', p. 225 n. 6). Pointing out that Hesiod says that events before Zeus' birth will unfold through Zeus' will, Vernant concludes 'events will unfold according to the plans of Zeus . . . even before Zeus . . . could have thought of these plans' (Vernant, 'At Man's Table', p. 225 n. 6). Vernant's interpretation seems to me an elegant statement of the consequences of the paradox of Zeus' rational anger: as rational, Zeus is predictive; as angry, he is reactive.

13 'Before Styx, we are in the realm of desire; after Styx and up to and through the Titanomachy and the defeat of Typhos, we are in the realm of the will; and after Zeus is completely in charge, there is the realm of the mind. It does not have to be stressed how curiously similar this is to the soul-structure of Plato's *Republic*; but it may be as deceptive as Plato's scheme' (Benardete, 'First Crisis', p. 12). Cf. R. Burger, 'The Thumotic and Erotic Soul: Seth Benardete on Platonic Psychology', *Interpretation*, 32 (2004), pp. 57-76.

14 The accusation of misogyny against Hesiod appears to me poorly founded. Hesiod uses the same image and language with respect to men in *Works and Days* 303-6. Hesiod's point is that human vice manifests itself differently in men and women, consistent with their different roles as provider of sustenance and bearer of children. Cf. μελιγδέα in *Works and Days* 172.

to visit one in death because life is spent accruing a livelihood, which persists beyond death. Conversely, the good that Zeus' beautiful evil promises is some measure of life after death, in the persistence of 'oneself' inasmuch as one's livelihood remains with one's offspring.¹⁵ The evil of woman, in turn, is that she cannot work and yet must consume that livelihood (cf. *Works and Days* 405-6).¹⁶ Man's sole means for overcoming his mortality, to the extent that it is possible, is also an impediment. Such is the depth of Zeus' mind, that

wonder (θαῦμα) held both the immortal gods and mortal human beings, as they looked upon the high deceit, unmanageable for human beings. (588-9)

The deceit speaks to a desire in man to overcome his mortality as far as possible, a desire whose most complete satisfaction would be found in apotheosis. Seeing in the theft of the fiery arts and the burning of the bones a desire to become a god, Zeus tempts man with woman, with the promise of the faint glimmer of immortality that can be gleaned from bequeathing one's substance to one's offspring.¹⁷

Because the sole apparent means to immortality is also a threat to the same, it cannot be received but as a punishment. The good of overcoming one's mortality is had only through obedience to the justice of the beautiful evil Zeus sent to man. Born mortal into scarcity, man finds himself caught in a complex interchange of just and beautiful evils that promise him his good in due time. Zeus the punisher and the provider, whose rule extends to every corner of the cosmos, is the sort of god whose rule addresses the problematic entanglement of ends – of beautiful evils, just evils, and the good – in which man finds himself. Zeus' blend of motion and rest requires that his withholding be a punishment, and thus stem from anger, but also that it be rational, for the static order

15 Cf. Genesis 15:5, 28:13-14, 22:17, Exodus 32:13-14.

16 Hesiod has this same thought in mind when he remarks, 'a singly-born son would be nurturing for the fatherly household' (*Works and Days* 376-7).

17 Hesiod alludes to the connection between the desire to reproduce and the desire for apotheosis when he counts among the benefits of the just city that 'women bear children like [their] forebears' (*Works and Days* 235). While we might initially take this only to mark the absence of adultery, it might also be a comment on the desire to see one's physical likeness in one's offspring, so that by leaving your livelihood to one who resembles you, you are under the impression that you have evaded death. Hesiod thus counts among the evils visiting the iron generation in its decline that 'neither [will] father [be] like [his] children, nor the children in any way [like their father]' (*Works and Days* 182). For Hesiod's audience, it is lamentable even if the child resembles his mother.

does not always give us what we want from the change in the world around us. Having arrived at a god that claims to meet the demands of human piety, Hesiod can continue his story of Zeus' ascent to power, and display thereby the character of his cosmic rule. In this way, Hesiod will complete the *Theogony's* top-down picture of human life and so be ready to continue on to the bottom-up picture of the *Works and Days*.

4 The Fundamental Character of Zeus' Rule (*Theogony* 617-880)

Hesiod continues with the Titanomachy, which he includes not for thoroughness, but to illustrate the character and prowess of Zeus' rule. Hesiod begins *in media res* with Zeus' freeing, on Gaia's suggestion, of the hundred-handers Briareos, Kottos, and Gyges to help him defeat the Titans. We learn why this is necessary after the fact: ten years of battle have led to no gain on either side, and with no resolution, either. Once freed, Zeus treats them to the gods' food of nectar and ambrosia, after which he requests their help, firmly (650: φαίνετε; cf. 689), though courteously. To persuade the brothers, Zeus cites his love and the plotting that brought them from their suffering bonds in the misty darkness up into the light. Kottos' reply indicates his reverence, if not awe, before Zeus' cunning, though he makes no mention of his love – ten years have gone by, after all (656, 658; cf. 655: δαίμονι[ε]). They seem, however, to underestimate the extent of Zeus' cunning. On the heels of this episode, the battle resumes, the din reaching deep into Tartaros. But Zeus – apparently restraining himself until now (687-9) – and his fire extend still further, and this, we are told, is what turns the battle (711). We wonder whether the hundred-handers were in fact necessary for victory. They are nevertheless granted the honour of defeating their earlier captors, and given the task of guarding them deep under the earth. That the newly released brothers are dispatched without any apparent incident back under the earth, from where they've just been released, is initially puzzling, until one notices that while Kottos bemoaned being kept beneath the earth, he made no mention of being brought into the light, as did both Zeus and Hesiod (cf. 626, 652, 669). By giving the hundred-handers the honour of defeating their captor brothers and showing everyone the reach of his fire, Zeus effectively prevents their later collusion, while keeping all of them out of sight, and thus out of mind. Such may have been the substance of Gaia's premonition, that with them is victory won. At the very least, such is the extent of Zeus' political skill. That is, the security of Zeus' rule turns on this brief episode in the ascendancy of Zeus: while Hesiod devotes nearly a hundred lines to the Titanomachy, he bypasses the Gigantomachy altogether;

again, though Hesiod discusses at length the importance and effect of freeing the hundred-handers, he speaks only briefly of the parallel freeing of the Cyclopes, through whom Zeus obtains his famous weapons (501-6). These textual cues indicate that in this particular battle and in this particular freeing is Zeus' political acumen most manifest. Nevertheless, the fundamental character of Zeus' rule emerges only after the three episodes related in the present passage: the Titanomachy, the description of Tartaros, and the birth and defeat of Typhoeus. In these passages, Hesiod will show how the demands of human piety determine the character of Zeus' rule.

The character of his rule begins to emerge once we recall, as the repetition of 150-2 at 671-3 invites, that the passage in which the hundred-handers were introduced illustrated how the human being understands the monstrous in human terms. Zeus now assimilates the monstrous through a process of reconciliation and delegation: Briareos and his brothers are immediately dispatched from where they came, but with an apparently higher station (815-9).¹⁸ Likewise, murky Tartara is ordered into Tartaros under Zeus' rule in the most articulate and vivid description in the entire *Theogony*. Save the flowing together of all waters into this source, Tartaros' articulation and role is at every point a product of Zeus' rule (cf. 729-30, 732-3, 746-7 with 517-20, 767-74, 775-806 with 383-403). Yet this does not mean that Tartaros is entirely tamed, for Hesiod's description reminds us of the unpredictability of the storms on the sea and of the ordered way in which sleep and death come to man. These features, along with the interchange of night and day here described, will play an integral role in Hesiod's more practical advice in the *Works and Days*. Our comment on his advice will touch upon this theme in due time. At present, however, let it suffice to indicate that the overt claim is that what is guided by Zeus' mind appears unpredictable to man because it is comprehensive, and hence incomprehensible. For the same reason that we are unable on our own to make our way predictably through the cosmos is Zeus' intention thoroughly beyond our access. Whether this claim can hold up under the actualization of Zeus' rule is the task of our discussion of *Works and Days* 342-764.

In the *Theogony*, however, the description of Tartaros prepares us for Zeus' battle with Typhoeus, whom Tartaros sires by Gaia. The battle with Typhoeus discloses the fundamental character of Zeus' rule, which in the Titanomachy Hesiod presented as assimilating the monstrous. Now, the silence about this

18 'The information that [Briareos, Kottos, and Gyges] have returned to the lower world is conveyed much more naturally and acceptably [in 815-9] than [in 734-5], where we come upon them with the surprise we might feel at the zoo if we passed the lions and then found their hunters in the next cage' (West, *Hesiod: Theogony*, p. 358).

battle, but not the Titanomachy, in the sequel, as well as the similarity of the former to the latter, has led some to suspect the present passage to be an interpolated imitation.¹⁹ Authors, however, often cast new themes in old contexts for the purpose of illustrating how the former is implicit in the latter. And such appears to be the case at present. Typhoeus arrives from and is dismissed to the same place, Gaia and Tartaros (cf. 820-2, 867-8). His description accords with his parentage, an earthly and thus ordered manifestation of a murky and thus indeterminate plurality. Aside from a brief note on Typhoeus' extremities, Hesiod spends the entirety of his description on the heads and voices of the monster in a highly repetitive passage that denotes less the limits of Hesiod's poetic abilities, as some have surmised,²⁰ but more the disordered variability necessary to an earthly manifestation of Typhoeus' father. Precisely these heads, with their fire and voices, must Zeus destroy with his fire to cripple the monster.²¹ In the Titanomachy, Zeus elicited the help of the monstrous in the defeat of the monstrous, uniting with the hundred-handers against the Titans. Ultimately, however, Zeus' power is what turned the battle, the monstrosity of that power concealed by his political subtlety.²² With Typhoeus, Zeus goes it alone and therefore cannot conceal his monstrosity.²³ Zeus cauterizes Typhoeus and Gaia, disorder and the earthly source of generation, to bring order and stability to the world, but can only do so by turning the power of fire against itself.²⁴ While one can fight fire with fire, Zeus paradoxically extinguishes fire with fire, achieves civility through brutality. Because Zeus rose to power, he had to impose order on the disorder, so as to nullify for once the unpredictable source of evils that plague human life. The will's expression in piety demands that the cosmos be just and regular, ruled by the mind of Zeus rather than the whim of Hekate. But can the disorder ultimately be kept

19 Cf. West, *Hesiod: Theogony*, pp. 381-3.

20 Cf. West, *Hesiod: Theogony*, pp. 381-3.

21 'As [Gaia's] last offspring, Typhoeus is *acosmia* incarnate, with his puppy-dog yelps, his bullish bellows, and his fire-breathing eyes, an embodiment of the total disorder that threatens to dismantle the articulated cosmos through universal conflagration' (Clay, *Hesiod's Cosmos*, p. 26).

22 Hesiod seems to be Zeus' henchman in this task, not only here, but elsewhere. Cf. Benardete, 'First Crisis', p. 6.

23 836-8 echo a theme found in other variations of the Typhoeus story, namely the equality of his power to that of Zeus. Cf. West, *Hesiod: Theogony*, p. 380, sources (b) and (c).

24 Hesiod uses two unique phrases to indicate the reach of Zeus' power into Tartaros, the first of which, *τάρταρα γαίης* (841), recalls the introduction of Tartaros, while the second of which, *Τιτῆνές θ' ὑποταρτάριοι* (851), recalls the culmination of the immediately preceding episode.

at bay? Can Zeus make good on his promise to reward the just with the good and punish the unjust with evil? Or is Zeus, the god of human piety, in fact all-too-human, and is his will no less limited than that of man in its cosmic efficacy? That with Typhoeus' defeat come the evil winds that make so much trouble for men, both at sea and on land, leads us to the provisional suspicion that there will indeed be a limit to Zeus' rule. As we move from the *Theogony* to the *Works and Days*, and thus from the most exalted of topics to the most mundane, Hesiod will examine whether we can detect Zeus' presence even in the apparently most insignificant of phenomena.

5 Transition (*Theogony* 881-1022, *Catalogue of Women* Fragments)

At this point, the manuscripts begin to trail off into what appears to be the now lost *Catalogue of Women*, or at least an introduction to it. Rather than embark on so ambitious an endeavour as a reconstruction of the *Catalogue of Women* out of the tatters that remain, we do well to keep in mind the wide variety of styles at Hesiod's command, as well as his ability to surprise us with his subtlety of expression and novel narrative structures. Such an appraisal should temper our ambition to fill in the blanks of so sublime an author. Rather, let us exercise caution and lay out only those parts or features of the text of which we can be certain. From this we will at least see how the *Catalogue of Women* effects a transition from the *Theogony* to the *Works and Days*. First, the *Catalogue of Women* chronicles the generations of demigods, who at that time dwelled and dined with the gods, but whom Zeus eventually destroyed (fr. 1, 204.96-100). In this, we discern an echo of the *Theogony's* theme of Zeus' incomprehensible mind (fr. 204.96: μήδετο, 204.99: πρ[ό]φασιν; cf. *Cypria* fr. 1).²⁵ Second, we learn of those demigods, after whom the various cities and regions of Hesiod's audience are named.²⁶ Again, we recall from the *Theogony* Hesiod's connection between the local and the divine, the contingent and the universal. Third, we find the theme of marital exchange, in which female beauty is won with gifts from the suitor(s), culminating in the contest for Helen toward the

25 Hesiod also seems to indicate that the *Theogony* and *Works and Days* frame the Epic Cycle, his work thus travelling further back into the past and further forward into the present than that of Homer. Whereas Homer seems content to dwell in the past, with only occasional allusion to the beginning (e.g. *Iliad* 14.201) and to the present (e.g. *Iliad* 5.304), Hesiod ventures there out of some urgency, either on his part or on the part of his audience.

26 Cf. West, *The Hesiodic Catalogue*, ch. 3.

end of the *Catalogue of Women*.²⁷ We notice again a recapitulation, but on a much grander scale, of an element familiar from the *Theogony*, specifically in the story of the beautiful evil of woman that Zeus sent man: the exchange of livelihood for the sake of a wife. This theme especially appears to tie together the whole of the *Catalogue of Women*, which begins with Pandora and ends with Helen, the two exemplars of the 'beautiful evil' of woman (fr. 2, 5, 196 ff.). The *Catalogue of Women* thus turns from the universal ancestry of man, in the primordial generations related in the *Theogony*, to the more localized, yet still divine ancestry of the current tribes and cities in Greece.²⁸ Despite dwelling with the gods, the race of demigods was nevertheless mortal, and thus still exhibited the same yearning to overcome their mortality that we found driving the marriage dilemma in the *Theogony*. The *Catalogue of Women* thus ennobles Hesiod's audience, in locating in the names of the cities and regions they inhabit their divine ancestries, while humbling them, in showing the awesome, even monstrous, deeds of which their ancestors were capable, and against which Zeus voiced his disapproval by initiating their destruction through the Trojan War.²⁹ By simultaneously joining us to and separating us from our semi-divine ancestors, the *Catalogue of Women* prepares the way for the humble and local, as opposed to the heroic and universal, piety that is the secure seat of justice – and thus for the *Works and Days*.

27 Cf. R. Osborne, 'Ordering Women in Hesiod's *Catalogue*', in R. Hunter (ed.), *The Hesiodic Catalogue of Women: Constructions and Reconstructions* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2005), pp. 5-24, pp. 10-14, 17-18.

28 The importance of this shift must be stressed. Zeus withdraws. His providence is thus less manifest than in prior ages. The end of the age of heroes means the end of reproduction between gods and men, of the behaviour typical of the Homeric gods. In this way, Zeus' rule becomes less human and more cosmic in character. He moves closer to a divine, intelligent principle guiding the cosmos, and thus to the object of the first philosophers' inquiries. Cf. Heraclitus DK 57, 41, 32 with *Works and Days* 267-81.

29 Heracles' apotheosis would therefore constitute the exceptional bridging of the mortal and immortal. But the Heracles of the *Theogony*, of whose valorous victories over the monstrous we variably learn, is not that of the *Catalogue of Women*, where he justly earns the name 'sacker of cities' (fr. 25.23: Η[ρακλῆ]ῖ πτολιπό[ρ]θωι, 229.17: Η[ρ]ακλῆ]ῖ πτολι[πό]ρθωι; cf. fr. 26, 33-5, 43a [esp. 61-2 with 65]). In the Heracles of the *Catalogue of Women*, we seem to see how man's yearning to overcome his mortality is not simply a destruction of the monstrous in the realm of the human, but rather the monstrous destruction of the human. For an interesting analysis, to which I am indebted, see Haubold, 'Heracles in the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*', in Hunter (ed.), *The Hesiodic Catalogue*, pp. 85-98.

6 Three Myths (*Works and Days* 1-201)

In the *Works and Days*, the Muses will fulfill Hesiod's request, of which he now reminds them, to sing of Zeus (cf. *Theogony* 47). To sing of Zeus is to sing of his will, through which men are or are not renowned, inasmuch as it strengthens or weakens, makes conspicuous or invisible, straightens or withers them. Hesiod splits duties with Zeus by asking him to straighten the lawful things (θέμιστας), while he, in turn, relates what is (ἐτήτυμα μυθησαίμην) to his brother, Perses. Hesiod's task could very well conflict with Zeus', if the Muses' song of the ascendancy and rule of Zeus in the *Theogony* and *Works and Days* proves to be lies like what is (ψεύδεα . . . ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα). The potential conflict can be phrased in terms of Hesiod's revision or clarification of the *Theogony's* account of Eris, 'Strife'. The first Eris is associated with war, evil, and battle, while Zeus placed the second in the earth to rouse all equally to work by prompting each man to strive against the other justly. The outcomes of order and disorder distinguish the two Erides, with Zeus elevating the former (17-19; cf. 15-16). The potential conflict can thus be rephrased as follows: is there anywhere within Zeus' order that the disorderly Eris nevertheless persists, that Zeus is needful? When we come to Hesiod's description of the month of Lenaion, we will see in what sense Zeus' order is lacking, and therewith the substance of Hesiod's critique of providence.

Presently, Hesiod takes us through three myths: the already discussed Erides, the Prometheus and Pandora story, and the generations of man. Through these myths, Hesiod lays out the human condition and the possible reactions we may have to it. In this way, he will prepare his hymn to Zeus, where he attempts to remove the attraction of injustice and set his brother Perses and the gift-eating kings on the path of justice. Now, in accordance with his focus on providence, Hesiod continues his explication of the human condition with a discussion of why the gods have hidden the livelihood of men. He does so through a recapitulation of the Pandora and Prometheus stories. The *Theogony* treated the human condition only insofar as it proved necessary to its attempt to show that Zeus was, contrary to his predecessors, the sort of god that addresses the human condition, the god of human piety. Now that he is concerned with the actualization of Zeus' rule, Hesiod drops all talk of the splitting of the ox, and focuses instead on Prometheus' theft of fire and Zeus' consequent punishment of the gift of woman, now named Pandora. In the *Theogony*, the beautiful evil of woman consisted in the beautiful promise of overcoming one's mortality and the evil of being deprived of one's livelihood, such that the sole means of preserving one's livelihood after death, reproduction, was also an obstacle to its accumulation while alive. In the *Works and Days*, Hesiod elaborates on the

Theogony's account³⁰ by explaining that the beautiful evil released all the evils that plague man – the evils on earth, in the sea, and sicknesses – while keeping within itself Elpis, 'Hope'. Elpis can be attractive only in a world filled with evils. By grouping Elpis with all the world's evils, Hesiod suggests that she is just another evil. Nietzsche offers a similar interpretation, that Elpis is 'in truth the most evil of evils, since she prolongs the torment of men' (*Human, All-Too-Human I*, no. 71). Yet Hesiod seems to understand Elpis in a somewhat more insidious way than as a deterrent from suicide. Whereas the other evils impede our attempt to live and to gather our livelihood by spreading throughout the world, Elpis remains inside woman. That is, woman promises release from the other evils by containing within her the hope of persisting after death by means of reproduction.³¹ Elpis thus appeals not just to the desire to avoid evil, but also to the desire to be immortal. Zeus' high deception therefore consists in appropriating the desire that would destroy the initial distinction between gods and men decided in Mekone (*Theogony* 535-6).³² The taking of the ox's edible parts and the theft of fire constitute two attempts to raise the human closer to the divine, and thus two attempts to alleviate man of his deplorable condition and render Zeus' rule irrelevant. Elpis deters man from suicide by promising a more beautiful escape from death: becoming a god. Zeus uses the self-forgetting of ἔρωσ (cf. *Theogony* 120-2) to put man to rest, and thus give him, who would otherwise always endeavour to upset the order of things, a fixed place in the cosmos. Zeus usurps the desire to usurp Zeus.

In the immediate sequel, Hesiod promises to explain 'how gods and mortal men came to be from the same' (108). The sense of ὁμόθεν is unclear, and is presumably borne out by what follows, Hesiod's enumeration of the five generations of man. The final two are familiar: the demigods from the *Catalogue of Women* and the age of iron from the present age. Hesiod felt no reason to discuss the prior three until now, though they extend back to the age of Kronos. The first two generations are pre-Zeus, while the latter three are fathered by Zeus. Of all the generations, the first, golden one seems most of

30 In 83, Hesiod repeats the formula δόλον αἰπὺν ἀμήχανον from *Theogony* 589, while in 105 he echoes the lesson of *Theogony* 613, thus emphasizing the continuity between the two passages, while expanding on the content of the prior passage.

31 An empty jar of clay that contains only hope, but has the face of an immortal goddess is a fitting image for woman's potential for pregnancy and our expectation that through reproduction we will obtain some measure of immortality. Consider, in contrast, Vernant's interpretation of woman as a fiery γαστήρ and Elpis as an 'ambiguous expectation both fearful and hopeful about an uncertain future' (Vernant, 'At Man's Table', pp. 62-8, 77-8, 81, 85-6).

32 Cf. Clay, *Hesiod's Cosmos*, p. 101; Vernant, 'At Man's Table', p. 226 n. 19.

all to approximate the sort of bliss men of the iron age would wish for, a life free of the pains of work and death. They are free of death because it overcomes them just like sleep; theirs is a bliss born of ignorance. How they remain unaware of death, so that it not bring them any pain, is puzzling, especially since others of their kind must die around them. In contrast, the silver generation approximates the golden generation's bliss through a century of nursing in their mothers' arms. Upon reaching manhood, however, their folly gives rise to woes, as their arrogance leads them, first, to destroy one another almost immediately and, second, not to attend to their sacrifices to the gods. The golden generation exaggerates the desires of mortals in order to demonstrate the impossibility of mortal bliss, since it would require ignorance of death, while the silver exaggerates the period of infancy to show the brutality and impiety of a man suddenly robbed of this blissful ignorance. Both the first two generations seem indifferent to the gods, the golden because they have no need of them, the silver because of the support of their mothers.³³ They pre-date Zeus' political rule because they represent the polar ends of the quest for livelihood: the private nursing of a child and the non-political bliss of complete self-sufficiency. Just as the respective rules of Ouranos and Kronos had some initial correspondence to, but ultimately did not make adequate sense of, the human condition, so too must Hesiod's portrait of the human condition make adequate sense of man's mortality. The gods and mortal men are 'from the same' for they must both fit the human condition as it is now:³⁴ a providential god indifferent to man's desires makes as little sense as a mortal man unaware of death.

The three generations of Zeus that follow depart from the two pre-Zeus generations by depicting man in his political setting, and thus closer to man as he is now. The bronze generation borrows from the silver its violent arrogance (134, 146: ὑβρις) and approximates the gold and silver inasmuch as they apparently need not labour in the fields to survive, if they ate at all. Characterized as so strong as to be unbending, their violence ends up destroying one another. They embody the bellicosity of the following generation of demigods, but without their justice. They thus go to Hades nameless or lacking renown (154: νόνημοι). The race of demigods is the only race whose names we learn, ones already familiar from the *Catalogue of Women*. Because they are 'just and therefore better'³⁵ than the bronze generation, they don't go nameless to Hades, but to

33 Cf. Benardete, 'First Crisis', pp. 12-13.

34 The human being as he is now would thus be the subject of both poems.

35 On the phrase δικαιότερον καὶ ἄρειον in 158, see Verdenius, *A Commentary on Hesiod Works and Days*, p. 99; West, *Hesiod: Works and Days*, p. 190.

the isles of the blessed, eating the honey-sweet (μελιηδέα) crops, and so earning what seems like the much sought-after drone life (cf. 303-6, *Theogony* 590-602). The generation of heroes is rewarded with what the bronze generation had no use for. The generation of heroes seems, therefore, to be what the generation of bronze would look like, if they had needed to eat daily or to labour for their food, and thus had a constant reminder of their mortality. Justice can only temper a warlike man if he is aware of his mortality. The present generation of iron, however, is so burdened with evils and woes that they tend away from the justice, through which the generation of heroes earned their place on the isles of the blessed, and toward the accelerated old age and impiety of the generation of silver. The four generations thus act as a reminder against the impossible reactions to death each represents: blissful ignorance (gold), violent anger upon loss of that bliss (silver), brutal indifference (bronze), and striving for fame and recognition from the gods (demigods) collectively point to the life of justice that increases one's livelihood so as to bequeath it to one's offspring (iron, present). The preceding three stories – the dual Erides, Pandora, and the generations of man – coalesce in the age of iron, wherein the ubiquity of evils forces us to choose which Eris to follow and thereby whether we tend toward the blessedly just heroes of the prior generation or toward the childlike fools of the silver generation (131: νήπιος; cf. 40, 286, 397, 633, as well as 218, 456). Accordingly, in order to dissuade his audience from following the Eris that 'rejoices in evil', Hesiod will have to demonstrate that justice is in fact better, a task that will require convincing both the 'gift-eating kings' and their subjects, Perses included, that they are fools for not accepting such initially backwards sounding propositions as 'half is more than all' and 'there is great benefit in mallow and asphodel' (40-1).³⁶

7 Hesiod's Twin Exhortations (*Works and Days* 202-341)

Hesiod continues with two exhortations: he exhorts his audience first to justice (202-85) and only after that to work (286-341), so that the former limits the latter. If one expects to find in the exhortation to justice a demonstration of its goodness, disappointment awaits, since much, though not all, of it reads as preaching to the choir. But such is to be expected, for the fool Perses, having attempted to make his gain through the evil Eris (27-41), comes now to Hesiod in need (396-8). 'Having suffered, a fool knows (ἔγνω)' (218; cf. 89). Yet

36 Cf. 694.

Hesiod performs the exhortation to justice through a dialogue, in which he addresses the kings and Perses back and forth, convincing each in turn that justice is more choiceworthy than injustice. Hesiod begins with the kings (202-12), then switches to Perses (213-47), goes back to the kings again (248-74), and ends finally back with Perses (274-85). The form of his exhortation implies that only when one party is convinced of certain points will the other be convinced of other points, and back again, through to the end of the demonstration. The proof that justice is more choiceworthy than injustice is no less communal than justice itself. Whether this proof amounts to a demonstration that justice is good will become clear only after Hesiod tests the providence of Zeus, discussed in the following section. Presently, however, Hesiod's reconciliation of the kings with Perses, and those like him, will bring to the fore Hesiod's 'sweet song', and thus raise the question, on which Hesiod touches only briefly, of the sort of knowledge he must have in order to sing as he does.

Hesiod begins by addressing the kings with the famous parable of the hawk and the nightingale. Gripping the nightingale in his claws, the hawk reproaches his captive for crying out in song even though a stronger one has him and can, accordingly, do what he wishes with his prey. 'Mindless is he who wishes to carry on against the stronger' (210). The parable seems only to embolden the kings. But it is not for this reason a failure, for it articulates beautifully to the corrupted kings their implicit justification for their actions. Hesiod uses the song to puff up the chests of the kings. The parable thus discounts the power of song in speech while raising it in deed. Having encouraged the kings, Hesiod turns to his brother and begins to preach to the choir. With his brother facing the choice between justice and arrogance, he paints a picture of what the city would look like when governed by each. In the just city, men follow justice and avoid ruin and hunger by obtaining their livelihood from the life-giving (*ζειδωρος*) crops of the earth (232, 237). In the arrogant city, even one evil man can be the cause of destruction, leading Zeus to make the women barren and to diminish the homes of its inhabitants. Hesiod's account thus directs Perses not only to act justly, but to demand the same of his city's fellow-inhabitants, including the corrupt and newly emboldened kings with whom Perses has previously had dealings. Hesiod's parable to the kings has only made the necessity of correcting them all the more apparent. Turning back to the kings, Hesiod warns them that Justice sings (*γῆρῦετ[ο]*; cf. *Theogony* 28) to Zeus, who in turn punishes the people (*δημος*) for the kings' wickedness. Perses cannot help but hear in this a call to punish, or at least straighten out, the corrupt kings, and the kings a warning of how much stronger the *δημος* is than them and of Hesiod's ability to awaken that strength with his song – an ability the kings must now

realize the singer just exercised on them.³⁷ The kings thus learn that justice is choiceworthy at least inasmuch as the δῆμος proves stronger than them.³⁸ Hesiod then ends the exhortation to justice by turning back to Perses and telling him to keep justice in mind,

for the Kronian ordained (διέταξε) this law (νόμον) for human beings,
while for fish and beasts and the winged birds,
to eat one another – since there is no justice with them,
but to human beings he gave justice. (276-9)

This closing statement on Zeus' νόμος corrects for the kings their beastly self-understanding.³⁹ Addressed to Perses and those who share in his experience, however, it is a succinct statement of their piety and the constraints it places on human action. More fundamentally, this statement shows how Zeus' law answers the cosmic demands the human will makes. Where man is unable to provide for himself from the earth with the fiery arts, he turns to burn inedible bones for assistance from the gods to fulfil his will.⁴⁰ Zeus' response is a νόμος that warns men against acting like beasts and rewards them for acting justly. The beasts have no νόμος. We must keep this point in mind when we examine

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- 37 Benardete argues that ἀποτίσει δῆμος ἀτασθαλίας βασιλέων should be translated as 'the people pay back the kings' wickedness' in Benardete, 'Hesiod's *Works and Days*: A First Reading', in Benardete (author) and R. Burger and M. Davis (eds.), *The Archaeology of the Soul* (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2012), pp. 7-24, p. 15 n. 16. Hesiod may, however, intend both senses, for each makes sense in the context of the drama. Hearing this phrase, Perses might understand Hesiod to say that *he* will be punished for the wickedness of the kings, while the kings might understand it to mean that the people will punish *them* for their wickedness. Exploiting the self-concern of each, Hesiod would be using the ambiguous phrase to instill anger in the δῆμος and fear in the kings, thus facilitating the communal proof of justice.
- 38 Hesiod will not address the kings again. 'The prayer with which the poem opened (9) is assumed fulfilled' (Clay, *Hesiod's Cosmos*, p. 41). It seems, then, that Hesiod would also no longer have any need for Zeus.
- 39 I owe the observation that this passage corrects the earlier parable, and thus resolves the problem indicated by West, *Hesiod: Works and Days*, pp. 204-5, to Prof. Jane Carter.
- 40 The burning of bones thus develops into a pious act from an act of frustration that the fiery arts cannot make sustenance of them. Vernant points out that 'sacrifice... takes on a mediating role between gods and men. It serves as an intermediary between the two races. But if sacrifice makes communication between them possible, it is by means of an allocation that sets them against each other. It unites them, not so they may be rejoined... but to confirm the necessary distance between them' (Vernant, 'At Man's Table', p. 35).

the actualization of Zeus' rule in the everyday life of a man like Perses, in our discussion of 342-764.

As regards Perses, his reward's full weight is felt in the final line of the exhortation to justice, where a man's keeping his oath is said to increase his race after him. Hesiod's song has pinned the blame for Perses' plight on the rampant injustice of him and his fellow citizens, with whose purging Hesiod claims 'the city flourishes and the people within blossom' (227). Such seems to be the communal proof that justice is more choiceworthy than injustice. His song thus shares with Zeus' deception the promise of some measure of immortality, by assuring man that the cosmos will bear out Zeus' law, the guarantee of his providence. Hesiod's 'pleasant singing' holds law and cosmos together through the beautiful promise that justice will not only preserve a man's life, but enlarge his livelihood and his race (cf. 235). Because the exhortation to work asks Perses to withhold from the apparently easy-going road of evils and to embrace the sweat and toil the gods have placed as obstacles on the path to virtue, Hesiod must state that promise with exceptional force, as he immediately does. Having warned his brother of the difficulty of the path to virtue, Hesiod urges him always to remember what he commands. He justifies this by telling him that, while he is best who is mindful of all things (πάντα νοήσει), the one who obeys or is persuaded by (πιθηται) this man when he speaks is better than him who neither is mindful of them for himself nor listens to another. Hesiod believes himself to be among those who are mindful of all things, presumably because he is the recipient of the Muses' song. Yet even he concedes that it is vexing for mortal men to be mindful (νοήσει) of the ever-altering mind (νόος) of Zeus (483-4). Evidently, 'all things' does not mean the same thing for Hesiod as it does for Zeus. Precisely what Perses and men of his kind are to learn is not immediately clear, nor is it of immediate concern to Hesiod. Having warned his brother of the difficulty of the task and reminded him of the necessity of obeying him, Hesiod again paints a twofold picture of Perses' choices, the life of work and the workless life. Zeus rewards the man who lives the life of work not just by warding off hunger, but with abundant livelihood and wealth. The road he takes thus leads to the promised virtue and renown that accompany wealth and make the workless man jealous. But when the workless man turns not to work the earth, but rather to unjust works (ἔργων... ἀδίκων), Zeus dims the man and diminishes his home. In both parts of his picture, Hesiod uses the fear of death and the desire for immortality to motivate Perses, who may either die anonymous or live up to his divine ancestry (299: δῖον γένος). Closing with a reminder to burn shining thigh bones to Zeus, Hesiod invokes the humble piety that girds the rustic virtue of the farmer, while reminding us of the parallel passage in the *Theogony* and, thereby, of the

vast, cosmic demands the human will makes of the god that would lay claim to satisfying that piety. Having secured the basis of this piety in his brother, Hesiod turns to articulate how he ought to live and so whether Zeus can meet those demands. Consequently, Hesiod will disclose what he means when he claims that he, Hesiod, is mindful of all things.

8 Providence (*Works and Days* 342-764)

Hesiod opens and closes his detailed instructions to Perses with sets of advice. The first is more closely bound to the exhortations to justice and work inasmuch as they focus on his treatment of others, namely how to deal with one's neighbours, the importance of gift-giving, general comments on how to gather and consume one's livelihood, and how to choose a wife and start one's family.⁴¹ The second picks up where the first left off, namely as regards family matters, but soon transitions into the prohibitions of piety. In this section, then, Hesiod seems to effect in full the transition in his brother to the humble piety that governs the farmer's life. Accordingly, in this passage we expect Hesiod to accomplish what he hoped to do at the outset of the *Works and Days*, to relate what is to his brother (10: ἐτήτυμα μυθησαίμην); we would thus also expect here, in what appears to be the most mundane of topics, to find an answer to our initial and more exalted question, of whether the Muses speak many lies like what are (ἐτύμοισιν), or whether they sing true things (*Theogony* 26-8); and, lastly, we hope thereby to find out in precisely what sense Hesiod claims 'to be mindful of all things'.

How the instructions might bolster Perses' piety is apparent from a cursory reading. Apart from the vivid, detailed instructions of how to do certain works, Hesiod provides the cosmic cues that will tell his brother when to do them: the position of the stars and constellations, the coming and going of solstices and equinoxes, and the behaviour of the birds and other animals. Although detailed, the instructions are not exhaustive (cf. 456-7).⁴² Yet they are nonetheless some

41 Hesiod initially, and with some frequency, interrupts his specific instructions to Perses with echoes of his earlier exhortations (cf. 394-404, 408-13, 453-7).

42 This is only to nuance, and not to oppose, Vernant's interpretation, according to which 'cereal food is eaten at the culmination of a regulated relation to the gods. The food creates a pious mode of communication between mortals and Immortals... For Hesiod the cultivation of wheat constitutes a truly cultic act that the peasant must perform for the divine powers. In his eyes work is a daily devotion; each task is assiduously executed at the proper moment out of respect for such sanctified acts' (Vernant, 'At Man's Table',

indication that man's works fit neatly within the cosmos, his tasks changing with the seasons and the earth responding in kind. And where disorder lurks, there Hesiod waits with advice, say, should one's plow-stem break or should one not know what sort of oxen to buy or man to hire to drive them. Zeus' rule does, therefore, seem to reconcile motion and rest in the everyday life of the farmer, keeping the evil Eris at bay by rewarding just work. The order appears to break down, however, when one learns how little things, like an under-fed dog, can allow a thief to ransack one's goods, but large things, like forgetting to plow on time, can be of no difference. The latter leads Hesiod, in the middle of his advice for him who plows late, to remark that the vacillation of Zeus' mind or intention (νόος) makes it hard for mortal men to discern (νοῆσαι). Yet this does not undermine the guarantee of Zeus' providence, since his plans needn't be comprehensible to man: counsellor or mindful Zeus (μητίετα) gives man, the mere belly, his law, and demands obedience to that law without knowledge of his intention. Nevertheless, Hesiod does give some indication that Zeus cannot fulfil this guarantee. His instructions soon turn to Lenaion, the sole month that he separates out by name. By marking off this month, he draws our attention to the poem's final passage, in which Hesiod details which days Zeus has determined to be good or bad for different tasks (cf. 822). Hesiod challenges us to see whether, during Lenaion's bad days (κάκ' ἡμέτα), any day is good for anything, and thus whether Zeus makes good on his providence during this month in particular. Furthermore, Boreas, mentioned in the *Theogony* twice – to note his birth and that he is one of the good winds apart from the bad ones born upon Typhoeus' death (*Theogony* 379, 869-70) – is mentioned in the *Works and Days* only during the month of Lenaion, and always negatively (506, 518, 547, 553; cf. fr. 204.124-6). Subtly but surely, Hesiod gives some indication that despite the apparently ironclad assertion of Zeus' providence, there are still grounds for doubt about the comprehensiveness of his rule, and that these grounds are to be found in his description of Lenaion.

After a brief introduction to Lenaion, Hesiod describes how it affects beasts and men, only afterwards giving his advice. The description's emphasis on beasts recalls the parable of the hawk and the nightingale and the subsequent articulation of Zeus' νόμος or 'law'. Hesiod devotes a sizeable portion of the description to 'the boneless one' (ἀνόστεος), i.e. the octopus, who is forced to eat his own foot to survive, for the sun displays no νομός or 'pasture', off which

p. 36). That is, because Hesiod's instructions are selective we must additionally consider why he emphasizes only certain tasks from among all these cultic acts.

he might feed.⁴³ Were it not for Zeus' νόμος, through which he inclines man away from injustice and toward just work and the consequent accumulation of livelihood, man, too, would lack a νομός and have no better a fate than the octopus (cf. 497). 'For this month's most difficult, winter – difficult for cattle and difficult for human beings' (557-8). The octopus, and surely many other beasts in addition, stands in need of νόμος no less than man. Beginning from the equally needy situations of men and beasts, the Bible asks God, 'What is man, that thou art mindful of him?' (Proverbs 8:4), while Hesiod appears to ask Zeus, 'What is the octopus, that you aren't mindful of him?' The octopus truly is the boneless one (ἀνόστεος) in a fireless home (ἀπύρρω οἴκω), for he is unable to propitiate a god to help him by burning white bones (ὀστέα) on his altars. Hesiod thus seems to imply that not only Zeus' law, but Zeus himself is circumscribed to the human realm. Such is the price we pay for having dismissed the cosmic gods Ouranos and Kronos in the search for a god like Zeus, who claims to meet the demands of human piety. Zeus is cosmic in speech, but human in deed.⁴⁴ This contradiction emerges as the inverse of the human being's frustrated will: unable to master the cosmos through the fiery arts, man demands a god do so, a god who must answer the human condition while governing the cosmos as a whole. As the premise of justice, Zeus is necessary to prevent human beings from destroying one another. Wherever there is justice, we find Zeus, and in this way he is like what is (ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοίον). But because his providence is contradictory, he is ultimately the lie of which the Muses sing.

Hesiod thus intimates that Zeus is necessary for us to make the best of a bad situation. He portrays his audience similarly to the octopus when he advises them to cut one foot off an eight-foot axle, putting the extra foot to another use (cf. 424-5). His advice for winter consists largely of what animal skins and furs to use as clothing so that one may even venture outside. Winter reveals that man is by nature alone, confined within. So too, his deepest hope (cf. 518-24). When Hesiod claims that he is mindful of all things, then, he does not mean that he understands how the cosmos functions. Rather, he seems to mean that he possesses knowledge of the human will and the recalcitrance of the cosmos to the demands of that will. In this respect, Hesiod anticipates Socrates' focus

43 The two meanings of νόμος differ in accordance with where the accent lies. Since there were no accents in Hesiod's Greek, the listener would know the sense of the word from the rhapsode's pronunciation, while the reader would discern the meaning from context.

44 Vernant, 'At Man's Table', pp. 57-61 rightly interprets the ox's stomach, filled with the edible parts, by which Prometheus attempts to deceive Zeus, as an image for man, but does not discuss how bones covered in a layer of attractive fat might be an image for the gods: externally beautiful, but internally unable to provide for us.

exclusively or primarily on the human things.⁴⁵ And he also shares with him his famous irony, for Hesiod bolsters his brother's piety despite his implicit, impious claim that the cosmos lacks divine governance. Turning lastly to sailing, Hesiod advises his brother against it, noting that the evil winds dominate the seas. Unlike during Lenaion, the distinction between good and bad winds holds true on the seas.⁴⁶ The seas appear to confirm the cosmic rule of Zeus, for he has given man the earth to till and man takes to the seas only to circumvent his work.⁴⁷ Likewise, Hesiod's tale of his single trip abroad. Altogether, Hesiod provides a fitting, though ironic, lead-in to the subsequent advice, which culminate in the prohibitions of piety, and the closing days of Zeus.⁴⁸

9 Conclusion (*Works and Days* 765-828)

In the days of Zeus, one hears echoes of many of the issues Hesiod has traversed, an appropriate culmination to the preceding poems. The *Theogony* gave us Zeus the god of human piety, the only god that could make sense of the back-and-forth of motion and rest through a static order that persists in spite of change. This is the Zeus who determines certain days as fitting or

45 Cf. n. 34, above. The shift from the cosmic gods Ouranos and Kronos to the political god Zeus seems to presage Socrates' turn away from natural science in Plato's *Phaedo*. And the critique of Zeus in the *Works and Days* would also presage Socrates' discovery of the distinction between divine and human wisdom, found in Plato's *Parmenides* and mythologized in his *Apology of Socrates*. Vernant shows that Hesiod quite consciously avoids giving an Ionian, elemental anthropogony and so reveals his implicit understanding of the word 'nature' in the phrase 'human nature': 'If Hesiod does not express man's "intermediate" condition via traditional images contrasting man, made of earth and water, with luminous and celestial beings such as the Olympian gods, or with beings made of earth and fire such as the autochthones, it is because in his view man's humanity does not reside either in a particular "nature" linked to the elements that form him or in an origin peculiar to him alone. Man's true nature arises from the position that he occupies in the midst of a whole, from his status in a hierarchy of functions, prerogatives, and honors' (Vernant, 'At Man's Table', p. 48).

46 Save during a reference to winter in 675.

47 An excellent representation of Hesiod's understanding of the uncertainty of the sea and the security of land is Pieter Bruegel the Elder's painting *Storm at Sea*. As the ships struggle in the swells, light shines only on the whales in the foreground, the birds in the sky, and the city in the distant background.

48 During the prohibitions, 'the focus narrows further to the human body, now truly viewed as a mere belly producing waste products and defilement' (Clay, *Hesiod's Cosmos*, p. 47). Cf. *Theogony* 26.

unfitting for this or that work, who seems to have delineated the proper context for every action. The *Works and Days*, however, gave us Zeus the all-too-human god, who seems absent some one-third of the days, and thus, for a large portion of the time, indifferent to the outcomes of our lives. Yet, as Hesiod informs us, men still debate which days are best for what, and the poem ends with us looking to the entrails of birds and taking care over the minutia of transgressions.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, Hesiod intimates that overall human life as a whole is better through justice, with the final reckoning appearing to tip in favour of the good days over and against the bad or indifferent days. But still, it is difficult to tell, since some days are a mixture of good and bad. Whatever the case, Hesiod's song of Zeus makes us aware of the presuppositions of our attachment to justice, either as that which we disregard even though we need it most or as that to which we are attentive but of whose true character we remain unaware. Hesiod does not treat the question of what we are to do, once we are aware of Zeus' contradictory character, about the entanglement of our ends he purported to reconcile; nor does he instruct us as to how we are to put together the process of becoming, in which we find ourselves, with our desire for a static understanding of the cosmos; and he certainly says nothing as to where we are to direct the now undirected erotic longing Zeus' high deceit of woman had occupied and how this relates to the cosmic Eros, from which he began. Although his psychology gives ample indication of the sort of inquiry of which his song has made use, nevertheless, as far as a thematic treatment is concerned, Hesiod seems to have left this question to the philosophers.⁵⁰

49 Commenting on the closing lines of the poem, Bartlett notes that 'within the limits of what can be said in the context, Hesiod reminds us of the true peak (*panta eidōs*), even as he urges Perses to defer to the entrails of birds' in R. Bartlett, 'An Introduction to Hesiod's "Works and Days"', *The Review of Politics*, 68 (2006), pp. 177-205, p. 204.

50 Cf. Vernant, 'At Man's Table', pp. 74-5.