



Birth of Athena. Attic black-figure lip cup, by Phrynos, c 550-530 BC.

Greek Gods, Human Lives:

*What We Can Learn from
Myths*

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CHAPTER 1 Origins

The ancient Greeks did not have a sacred text like the Bible. No one decided what versions of the myths were authoritative. Authors were free to tell the stories as they chose, with their own emphasis, provided they preserved the principal characters and basic plots. The Greeks learned about the gods from poetry written in the eighth and seventh centuries B.C, the most important and influential of which, Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days*, and the great epics attributed to Homer, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, still survive. Hesiod's poem *Theogony* offers an account of the beginnings of the world and a genealogy of the gods, detailing their names and how they are related to one another. At the same time, it explains why, in a world with so many different gods, the lives of humankind are dominated by a particular family of gods on Mount Olympus, the head of which is Zeus. Hesiod describes how Zeus came to be the most important god and shows why it is better for the world as a whole that Zeus (rather than his predecessors) is in charge. Hesiod's *Works and Days* tells myths that explain why Zeus has made life hard for humans and why they must work to survive while the gods live at their ease, free from cares.

Hesiod wrote his epic poems in roughly the same era as Homer, probably in the eighth-seventh centuries B.C, although no one knows exactly when, or even whether he came before or after Homer. But unlike Homer, Hesiod does tell us something about himself in the course of his two poems, as the information becomes relevant to his theme. He says in the *Works and Days* that his father came from Cyme in Asia Minor, "fleeing from cruel poverty, which Zeus gives to men, and he settled near Mount Helicon in a miserable village, Ascra, cruel in winter, harsh in summer, no good at any time" (*Works and Days* 638-40). But even though Zeus made his father's life hard and drove him away from his home, Hesiod tells us in the *Theogony* how Zeus's daughters the Muses gave him the gift of song. The gods give both bad and good, and no mortal can accomplish anything extraordinary without the help of the gods.

Zeus became the most important god because he used intelligence as well as power, and he used his intelligence to ensure that he would not be replaced by an even stronger successor. He cared about justice, and he gave the other gods rights and privileges in return for their allegiance to him. But even though Zeus, a male god, is the ruler, he works in conjunction with other gods, including many goddesses, who encourage, discourage, and even direct the actions of the male gods. Sexual attraction allows females to get their way without force, by a deception so potent that Zeus can use it as a means of punishing humankind. In *Works and Days*, Hesiod explains how Zeus took the "means of life" away from mortals, but another god, Zeus's cousin Prometheus, stole fire from the gods to help humans. In reprisal Zeus ordered the god Hephaestus to create the first woman, who was sent to punish men, not, like Eve in Genesis, to be a helper and a comfort. So Zeus has made life hard, like God in Genesis after Adam and Eve disobeyed him. But, as Hesiod shows in other myths, mortals have made it even harder for themselves by refusing to honor justice.

ZEUS AND HIS ANCESTORS

Hesiod's *Theogony* begins with an invocation to the Muses of Mount Helicon. He describes how the nine Muses, the daughters of Zeus, wash in one of the nearby springs and then go to dance on the peaks of the mountain. From there, wrapped in thick mist, they walk at night singing of Zeus and Hera of Argos, Athena, Apollo, Artemis, Poseidon, Themis, Aphrodite, Hebe, Dione, Dawn, the Sun, the Moon, Leto, Iapetus, Cronus, Earth, Oceanus, Night, and all the other immortal gods. After mentioning the names of all these gods Hesiod relates what the Muses once said to him:

They once taught Hesiod beautiful song, as he was pasturing his lambs beneath holy Helicon. First the goddesses, the Muses of Mount Olympus, the daughters of aegis-bearing Zeus, addressed this speech to me: "Shepherds of the wilderness, evil disgraces, mere bellies, we know how to tell many lies that are like the truth, and we know, when we wish, to speak the truth." So spoke the daughters of great Zeus, ready of speech, and they gave me a staff, a branch of live laurel to pluck, a wonderful thing, and they breathed divine song into me, so that I might sing of what will be and what was before, and they told me to sing of the race of blessed ones that live forever, but always to sing first and last of themselves. (*Theogony* 22- 34)

These lines tell us that Hesiod has learned his song from the Muses, but when they gave him the staff that marked him as a poet, they offered him a sharp reminder of the difference between themselves and mortals like himself. He is a miserable creature, a slave to his stomach who lives in ignorance of what is really true and what is not. The Muses know the difference, because they are gods. The branch of laurel wood marks him as someone to whom they have given a precious gift, but it means that his duty as a singer is to praise the gods, beginning and ending with themselves.

So Hesiod stops talking about himself and begins to speak of the Muses, "who with their singing gladden the great mind of Zeus on Olympus, telling of what is and what will be and what was before, each taking up the song" (36-39). The Muses sing and dance, so that the peaks of Olympus resound with their song. They sing of Earth and Heaven and their children, and then of Zeus, the greatest of the gods, and finally of men and of the giants. Then the poet tells the story of the Muses' birth, how Zeus lay with their mother, Memory, for nine nights, and how they now live a short distance from Olympus, with the Graces and Desire. They go to Olympus, singing of how their father overcame his father Cronus, and how he assigned the gods each a place and awarded them honors.

Once he has described the Muses' song, Hesiod gives all their names: Clio, Euterpe, Thalia, Melpomene, Terpsichore, Erato, Polyrnna, Urania, and Calliope. Each has powers of her own, but Calliope is the head of them all, because she accompanies kings. A king whom the Muses love can speak sweetly, and his people can see that he rules justly and is able to stop quarrels; they honor him as if he were a god, and he stands out from the others in the assembly: "Such is the sacred gift of the Muses to humankind" (93).

Song is not only a means of conveying information: it gives pleasure and takes away pain (96-103). In that way it is an even greater gift for mortals than it is for the gods, who have no real sorrows to forget, since death and disease cannot affect them. Hesiod now asks the Muses to help him sing about the genealogy of the gods (104-5). He requests that they sing of the gods who were born from Earth and Heaven, and Night, and the children of the Sea, and their children, who divided the wealth and distributed the honors among them, and who first occupied Mount Olympus: "Tell me all this, Muses who dwell in Olympus, from the beginning, and tell me who were the first among the gods" (114-15). Even before Hesiod begins his main narrative he indicates that a central theme of his poem will be the division of power and the distribution of honors among the gods, and that Zeus and his family, the dwellers on Mount Olympus, are the most important gods.

From the Void (Chaos) was born the goddess Earth, "who is the seat, fixed forever, of the gods who hold the peaks of Mount Olympus" (117-18); other gods came from the Void as well, and Earth gave birth to Heaven, who became her husband, "equal to herself [in size], so that he might form a complete boundary for her, and that he might be a seat for the blessed gods, fixed forever" (127-28). Then she bore the Mountains, the Nymphs, and the Sea. With Heaven as father, she gave birth to more children, including Oceanus, Hyperion, Iapetus, Theia, Rhea, Themis, Mnemosyne, Phoebe, Tethys, and Cronus the crooked-minded, who hated his father, and the one-eyed Cyclopes, who later gave Zeus the thunderbolt and made the lightning for him. Heaven hated all his children, and he put them back again inside their mother so they could not come into the light. "Heaven was pleased with his evil

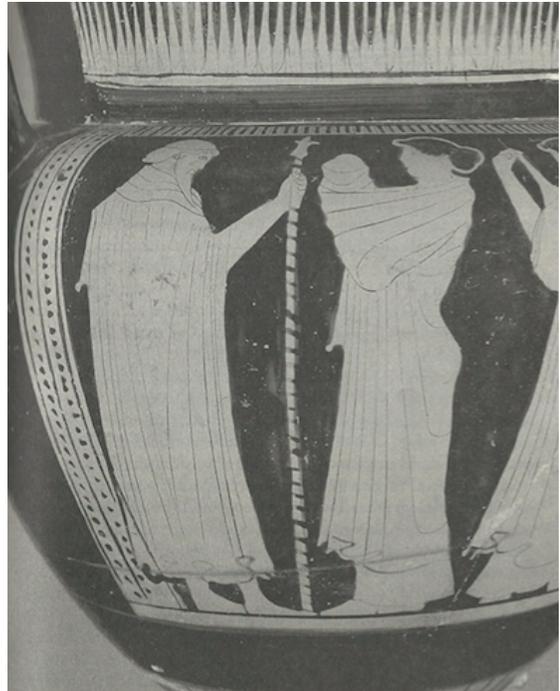
work, but great Earth moaned as she was constrained within, and she thought of a deceitful plan" (158-60).

Earth got Heaven to stop hiding his children inside her by taking the moral initiative against the injustice. She asks her children to avenge the "evil outrage of your father, for he was the first to plan disgraceful deeds" (165-66). All the others are afraid, but Cronus the crooked-minded agrees to help her, echoing her words, "I do not care about our accursed father, for he was the first to plan disgraceful deeds" (171-72). Earth hides Cronus in ambush, then creates and gives him a great sharp sickle of gray stone. When Heaven comes to make love to Earth, Cronus uses the sickle to cut off his father's genitals. The avenging deities called Erinyes are born from the drops of blood, and Aphrodite, the goddess of love and desire, grows out of the genitals themselves, which Cronus throws into the sea. Heaven in his anger calls his children Titans, a name that reflects what has happened: his children "had strained [*titainontas*] in deception to punish him, for which in time there would be vengeance" (209-10).

Only after cataloguing the children of the other Titan gods, such as the monsters and rivers of the world, does Hesiod relate the story of the Titans Cronus and Rhea, who are the parents of Zeus and his brothers and sisters Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades, and Poseidon. Cronus swallows Zeus's five siblings as soon as they are born, because he had learned from his parents that it was fated for him, strong as he was, to be overcome by his son (461-65). Rhea, like her mother Earth before her, takes the initiative against her husband to save her children. Before Zeus is born, Rhea asks her parents, Earth and Heaven, to think of a plan to save him and to make Cronus pay for the crime he committed against his father. They tell her to go to Crete when the child is about to be born, so she brings him there at night and hides him in a deep cave, where Earth takes care of him. Rhea then wraps a great stone in swaddling clothes and gives it to Cronus: "He picked it up and put it into his stomach, the wretch; he did not realize in his heart that thereafter instead of the stone his son remained invincible and untroubled; he soon would conquer him and drive him by force from his power and would rule among the immortals" (487-91). Hesiod emphasizes the unthinking and violent behavior of Cronus, which contrasts with how Zeus later uses his intelligence to see to it that he will not be replaced by a successor.

Zeus grows up rapidly, as only a god can. A year after swallowing them, Cronus vomits up his children, tricked by Earth and overpowered by his son Zeus; the stone ends up in Delphi, later a principal shrine of Zeus's son Apollo. Zeus's first act is to release Heaven's sons the Cyclopes, and in gratitude they give him thunder, lightning, and the thunderbolt: "Trusting in these he rules over mortals and immortals" (506). Then he reckons with the Titan gods who have not been loyal to him, first confronting the children of his uncle Iapetus: Atlas, Menoetius, Prometheus, and Epimetheus. Zeus subdues Menoetius with a thunderbolt and sends him into the darkness; he compels Atlas to stand at the ends of the earth holding up the broad sky with his head and hands. He binds Prometheus to a rock and sends an eagle to feed every day on his immortal liver, which always grows back again.

The reason Prometheus must be punished is because he tried to outwit Zeus. The story of Prometheus, curiously, involves mortals, although Hesiod makes no attempt in this poem to explain why they were created or by whom. Mortals and immortals had gathered for a feast at Mekone (later known as Sicyon), in the northern Peloponnesus, many years earlier. Prometheus sacrificed an ox, and after the meat was cooked he tricked Zeus by wrapping the bones in fat so that they, rather than the meat, would appear to be the more appetizing portion. Zeus saw what Prometheus had



Rhea gives a stone wrapped in swaddling clothes to Cronus.
(Red-figure column krater, 500-450 B.C.)



Atlas holds up the world, while Zeus's eagle tears out Prometheus's liver. Laconian cup, 565-550 B.C.

done, but he took the bones anyway, and since that time people have offered the gods the bones of the animals they sacrifice and kept the meat for themselves. This trick with the bones made Zeus angry, so in requital he took fire away from the mortals; Prometheus then deceived Zeus by stealing fire in a hollow reed and giving it back to them.

So Zeus retaliated against men for the theft of fire. He had his son Hephaestus create a maiden from earth and give her a golden diadem, and caused his daughter Athena to dress her. "When he had made this beautiful evil in return for good, Zeus took her where the other gods and men were" (585-86). Both gods and men were amazed when they saw this "headlong deception, which men cannot manage; from her come generations of women, a great pain for mortal men on earth; women are no help in times of cruel poverty, but only in times of plenty" (589-93). Hesiod compares women to the drones in a hive whom the other bees must work hard to feed; "so Zeus who thunders on high made women as an evil for mortals, companions in harsh suffering" (600-602). In addition, Zeus gave another evil in recompense for good: if a man should escape marriage, he will have no children to look after him when he is old or to inherit his property. A man is fortunate if he gets a sensible wife; "for him bad fights against good throughout his life" (609-10). But a man who gets an evil wife has unending sorrow. "So it is not possible to deceive or evade the mind of Zeus" (613).

The cunning and intelligence of Zeus are made to stand out in this telling of the story, but Hesiod does not explain why Zeus should punish men for the deception Prometheus practiced on him, or why Prometheus is willing to run the risk of incurring the wrath of Zeus by stealing fire back again. Hesiod's audience must have understood that there was some special connection between Prometheus and humanity; according to a later story, it was Prometheus who created man, possibly in the hope of having allies in the struggle against Zeus. In any event, men are punished for the trickery of Prometheus, not for their own transgressions, as was Adam in the Hebrew Bible. God made Eve as a helper and companion for Adam, but Zeus sends woman to increase man's suffering. The best women can offer their husbands only a mixture of good and evil, and the worst can bring only sorrow. Zeus did not create humankind, and he is not primarily concerned with their welfare. (The story appears again in Hesiod's *Works and Days*, where he calls the woman Pandora and places specific emphasis on the folly of Epimetheus, brother of Prometheus, and the diseases and trouble the woman brings to mankind. Here again the story brings out the great discrepancy between human ignorance and the wisdom of Zeus, concentrating on how he outwits Prometheus with even more clever forms of deception.)

Hesiod now returns to the story of how Zeus established his hegemony over the other gods. He fights against the Titans for ten years, but then Earth advises him to release Heaven's sons Obriareus, Cottus, and Gyges from their fetters and bring them back from the ends of the earth; each of them has fifty heads and a hundred arms. With their help, and by using his own weapons of thunder and lightning, Zeus and his allies are able to confine the Titan gods to Tartarus: in a war where the combatants cannot be killed, victory can be achieved only when one side is imprisoned or somehow repressed by the other. Tartarus is as far below earth as heaven is above it, and a bronze barrier covers it. It is guarded by the monsters Obriareus, Cottus, and Gyges—known as the Hundred-handers—and Atlas stands there as well. Next to it Night and Day have their house, as do Night's sons Sleep and Death. The house of Hades, guarded by the terrifying fifty-headed dog Cerberus, is nearby, and so is the home of the goddess Styx, by whom the gods swear their most solemn oath.

After conquering the Titans, Zeus must face one more enemy, the monster Typhoeus (or Typhon), son of Earth and Tartarus (821-22). With his great strength and his hundred snake-heads, breathing fire and uttering terrible sounds, Typhoeus would have become king of the gods "if the father of gods and men had not thought keenly" (838). Zeus thunders until the whole world is shaken: Olympus, the earth, the sea, Hades, and the Titans in Tartarus. He leaps from Olympus with the thunder and lightning and strikes Typhoeus down; the earth burns and melts, and Zeus throws the monster into Tartarus. Even so, Typhoeus still causes trouble: he is the source of the sudden storm winds, or typhoons, that attack sailors and destroy the work of farmers. The gods, following the advice of Earth, urge Zeus to be their king and ruler, "and he divided their privileges among them" (883-85). Unlike his predecessors, Zeus takes special care to give the gods who have sided with him rewards and privileges.

At this point Zeus has conquered his last enemy and become king of all the gods, so it seems likely that Hesiod's epic poem in its original form would have ended at this point, although he might also have added a final formal reference to the Muses, since they told him "to sing first and last of themselves." As the poem has come down to us, however, it continues with a catalogue of Zeus's consorts and the children who were born from these unions. Marriage, coupling, and childbirth are critically important matters, because so much depends on the question of succession.

Zeus's father and grandfather were both overcome by their sons. How will Zeus avoid begetting a son who is even

more powerful and clever than he is? His wife, Metis (Intelligence), one of the daughters of Oceanus, is said to be "the wisest of gods and of men," and Earth and Heaven warn that from her "very wise children would be born" (887, 894). The first of these children who were to be born to Zeus was Athena, "whose courage and wisdom were equal to her father's"; after Athena, Metis was fated to bear a son with a mighty heart who would be king of gods and men (896-98). So Zeus, in his wisdom, heeds the warning of Earth and Heaven by swallowing Metis before she can give birth to Athena. Athena is then born by springing from his head; in this way Zeus ensures that she will be closer to him than to her mother, and she will perhaps even become the most important and powerful of all his children. He also makes it impossible for Metis ever to conceive the son who could replace him. And he is able to keep her within himself, "so that the goddess might give him advice about what was good and bad" (900). After his triumph over the Titan gods, no relative of Metis dares come to her defense because they know that Zeus has the thunder and lightning.

Metis is followed by numerous other consorts of Zeus. His second wife is Themis (Divine Justice), and she gives birth to Eunomia (Orderly Government), Dikē (Justice), Peace, and the Seasons, all of whom bring order to the lives of humans. Themis is also the mother of Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos, the three Fates who control mortals' fortunes and the length of their lives. Zeus has still other wives after Themis: Eurynome, mother of the Graces; Demeter, mother of Persephone; Leto, mother of Apollo and Artemis; and finally Hera, mother of Hebe, Ares, and the birth goddess Eileithyia. After he has enumerated the wives of Zeus, Hesiod provides a list of other marriages made by the Olympian gods. This is followed by a catalogue of unions between goddesses and mortal men, and the names of the children so produced who become great heroes, like Thetis's son Achilles and Aphrodite's son Aeneas. The poem as we have it ends with this account of goddesses and their children without much description of their characters or actions.

The treatment of goddesses in these concluding lines differs strikingly from the main narrative of the *Theogony*, where goddesses play a more active role. Earth and Rhea take the initiative in seeing that justice is done, and Earth advises Zeus on a course of action that ensures his domination. Although the mother goddesses do not have physical powers equal to those of the male gods, they do not hesitate to speak out and to use persuasion and deception whenever necessary. Motherhood, too, gives them singular influence over their children, who owe them special respect for having given them life and nurturing them. Particular goddesses acquire distinctive authority because of their relation to Zeus, as do his daughters the Muses and Athena. Others are rewarded because they sided with him against the Titans, and these favorites include Styx, daughter of Oceanus, was first to go to Zeus, and "he honored her, and gave her great gifts; he determined that she would be the great oath of the gods, and that her children would live near him always" (399-401).

Hecate, the granddaughter of Cronus's sister Phoebe, also receives particular honor from Zeus (411-15, 423-25). Hecate's cult had special meaning for Hesiod's family, which may be why he devoted a good deal of space to her; Hecate was worshiped in Asia Minor, where his father came from, and Hecate's father is called Perses, which was also the name of Hesiod's brother (*Works and Days* 10). But the main reason why Hesiod singles her out for special praise is because of the honors Zeus bestows on her. Hecate's privileges include wide influence over almost every important aspect of human life; she is the goddess humankind should call on in matters of government, war, athletics, horsemanship, sailing, hunting, animal husbandry, and the nurturing of children. Hesiod makes it clear, however, that one can never count on her support but must always strive to deserve and encourage it; he repeatedly says that Hecate can help if she chooses to do so (*Theogony* 439, for example).

Mortals make only a brief appearance in the *Theogony*. There are the shepherds, "evil disgraces, mere bellies," like Hesiod himself, who graze their flocks on Mount Helicon and worship the Muses. There are the men Zeus punished for the deception of Prometheus with the destructive gift of women, and the mortals who may be helped by Hecate "if she is so inclined" (443). Only a few exceptional men and women have intercourse with gods and produce sons who become heroes. On balance, the gods take only a sporadic interest in mortals, more often to harm than to help them.

ZEUS AND HUMANKIND

In Hesiod's other epic poem, *Works and Days*, the gods' relationship to humans remains the same. The poet asks the Muses to sing of their father Zeus, and begins by describing the power Zeus has over mortals and asking for his assistance: "Through him mortals are famous or unknown, mentioned or unmentioned, on account of great Zeus. For easily he makes a man great, and easily strikes the great down, easily he makes the conspicuous man small and makes the inconspicuous grow, easily he straightens the crooked man and blasts the proud, Zeus who thunders on high, who lives in the highest dwelling. Now you listen, look and hear, and make your laws straight with justice!" (*Works and Days* 3-10). Zeus has complete control over human life, and accomplishes easily what mortals can do to one another only with considerable effort, if at all. Since Hesiod knows that Zeus cares about justice in human life, he calls on the god to intervene on his behalf in a dispute with his brother Perses. The brothers had earlier agreed on the division of their inherited property, but Perses bribed the officials and took away a larger share.

There are not one but two goddesses called Eris (Strife), Hesiod says, and this explains why human life is so hard. One causes war and arguments; mortals hate her, but they honor her because they must, since that is the will of the immortals. The other is the older daughter of Night. Zeus has placed her at the roots of the earth, and she is much better for humans because she gets lazy people to work and encourages competition. Hesiod urges his brother not to let the evil-hearted Eris keep him from working, suggesting in his way that everyone would be better advised to work for a living.

Why do human beings need to work? Because "the gods have hidden men's sustenance. Otherwise you might easily work for a day and have enough for a year even if you sat idle" (42-44). In other words, men would be like the gods who live at their ease. Hesiod now tells the same basic story he told in the *Theogony* about how Zeus gave woman to man as a punishment for the crimes of Prometheus (*Theogony* 570-612). But in *Works and Days* he gives it a different emphasis: woman is not only an evil in herself; she also brings diseases and suffering with her. In this version of the story Zeus hid men's sustenance because he was angry with Prometheus: "Zeus devised miserable sorrows for mankind; he hid fire" (*Works and Days* 49-50). (Again Hesiod does not explain why there is a connection between Prometheus and humankind.) When Prometheus then gave the fire back to them, Zeus became angry and said he would give "a huge burden" to Prometheus and men of the future (56). There is no need for Zeus to use his special weapons of lightning and thunder, or call up the Hundred-handers against them. Because human beings have only limited understanding and grow old and die, they are relatively easy to deceive and punish.

Zeus laughs with pleasure at the scheme he has devised for punishing mortal men. He tells Hephaestus to mix earth with water and create a maiden as beautiful as a goddess. Athena teaches her to weave, and Aphrodite, the goddess of love, pours grace around her head, as well as desire and longing. Zeus tells his son Hermes, who acts as his messenger, to give her a bitch's mind and a thieving nature. Athena dresses her; the Graces and Persuasion arrange her jewelry, and the Seasons bind flowers in her hair. Hermes, in keeping with Zeus's plan, gives her lies and deceptive speeches and a thief's character; he also gives her a voice, and he calls the woman Pandora, since all (*pantes*) of the gods have given her a gift (82). Zeus gets Hermes to take the woman not to man but to Epimetheus as a gift. Epimetheus (Afterthought) forgets that his brother Prometheus (Forethought) has warned him not to accept a gift from Zeus, but rather to send it back again, "so that nothing bad might happen to mortals; but he took it, and then understood only when he had the evil creature" (88-89).

Before that time, Hesiod explains, men had "lived without misery and hard suffering and cruel diseases, which give men over to the fates, for men grow old quickly in misery" (90-92). But the woman, plotting evil destruction for mankind, takes the lid off the storage jar she has been carrying and scatters the good things that were in it abroad, and they are all lost to men. Only hope remains in the jar, because the woman puts the lid back before it can escape, in keeping with the plans of Zeus. "But in addition thousands of sorrows wander about among men; the earth is full of evils and the sea is full. Diseases come upon men by day, and at night they travel about, uncontrolled, and bring suffering to mortals in silence, since wise Zeus took away their voices" (100-105). Unlike the Old Testament, in which God makes woman for man as a gift rather than a curse, and punishes Adam and Eve only after they have disobeyed his explicit orders not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, in Hesiod's world human beings are innocent victims of a quarrel between gods.

Zeus is responsible for the conditions of human life, and this is the point that Hesiod wants to emphasize. He now tells another story, which he says will explain "that gods and mortals came from the same source," although in fact the stories show only that the gods have allowed life to become progressively harder for men (108). First, during the reign of Cronus, the gods made a Golden Generation of men who "lived like gods with untroubled hearts, without

pain and sorrow, and no dreadful old age came upon them" (112-14). They spent their days in feasting, and when their time came they died in their sleep. The earth brought forth two harvests a year, and no farming was needed to produce it. They lived in peace with their many blessings. But after their deaths, "according to the will of great Zeus" they became good spirits who guard mankind; shrouded in mist, they travel over the earth to oversee judgments and crime, and bring wealth to mortals (122-26).

The Golden Generation eventually disappeared, however, although Hesiod does not explain why the gods allowed this to happen. Nor does he say why the gods replaced it with a second generation of men, the Silver Generation—far worse than the Gold, unlike them in both body and mind. Childhood for them lasted a hundred years, and when men did grow up they lived only a short time because of the misery brought on them by their folly: "They could not stop committing crimes against each other, and they did not serve the immortals or offer sacrifices on their altars, as is right for men in their dwelling places. Zeus became angry and hid them, because they did not give due honor to the blessed gods who hold Olympus" (134-39). These men are called "blessed mortals of the underworld" and still are honored. Hesiod seems to assume that it was sometime during this generation that Zeus overthrew Cronus as king of the gods, because he alone creates the next generations.

The first of these was the Bronze Generation, which Zeus made from ash trees. These men did not resemble the Silver Generation: they were fearful and threatening, and they cared about war and violence. Their limbs were powerful, although they ate no bread, and their armor, weapons, and houses were made of bronze. They perished because they slaughtered one another, and they died unmemorialized. After they were gone, Zeus made a fourth generation, "more just and more noble, a godlike race of heroes who are called demigods" (158-60). They too were involved in wars, which were fought over the flocks of Oedipus at Thebes and over Helen at Troy. Zeus settled this generation at the ends of the earth, "and they live with hearts free from care in the islands of the blessed beside deep-swirling Oceanus, happy heroes, for whom the life-giving fields bring forth a sweet harvest three times in a year" (170-73).

But Zeus replaced this hero generation as well, this time with the present generation, which appears to be worse than any of its predecessors: "I wish that I had never been in the Fifth Generation of men, but that I had died before or been born afterward. For this is now truly an Iron Generation: for by day they will not cease from struggle and at night from misery, for the gods will give them harsh cares; still even for them good will be mixed with evil" (174-79). Hesiod predicts that Zeus will destroy this generation also when its people become even more morally corrupt than they are at present. Children will be born with gray hair on their temples, fathers will not be like their children, hosts will not be like their guests, and comrades will not be like their comrades. A brother will not be a friend as in former times, and people will not honor their parents when they grow old. Might will be right, the evil and violent will be rewarded, and oaths will be foresworn (189-94). Perhaps Hesiod is thinking here of his own case, of his brother who is not a friend but who has treated him unjustly; he sees what happened to him as part of a general pattern and predicts that this behavior will lead to destruction. Zelos, the god of contention, will live among men; Shame and Vengeance, wrapped in their white robes, will leave the earth for Mount Olympus; and "miserable humans will be left with their cruel sorrows, and there will be no respite from evil" (200-201).

In spite of this bleak future, however, Zeus still offers the men of the Iron Age an opportunity to be prosperous and just, for they still have the ability to settle quarrels by means other than violence. The rules of the animal world do not apply to humans (276-79). If a hawk carries off a nightingale, the nightingale must go where the hawk takes her (207-11). Hesiod's brother Perses, like the hawk, now has power over him. But unlike the nightingale, Hesiod can appeal to Zeus and can use his power of speech to describe the benefits of heeding the goddess Justice (*Dikē*). If men who take bribes and make unfair decisions drag her away (as they appear to have done in Hesiod's case), Justice cries out and follows them wrapped in mist, bringing harm to them and their households. Zeus sends vengeance to the city of the unlawful; often he destroys the whole city because of one man, and sends suffering to them, and famine and plague, and the people waste away. The women do not bear children and their families decrease, "through the plans of Olympian Zeus; sometimes a whole army is lost or a wall or the son of Cronus takes vengeance on their ships in the sea" (245-47). But if men choose instead to make honest judgments, their cities flourish, and Peace protects their young: "Zeus of the broad brows does not allot to them the portion of war" (229). Famine and Ruin never come there, their crops thrive, and the women bear children who are like their fathers.

How does Zeus know about the wrong that men do on earth? He has thirty thousand immortal informants who live among the mortals on earth, wrapped in mist so no one can see them. They tell the goddess Justice about wrongdoers, and she tells Zeus "about the mind of unjust men, so that the people pay the penalty for the folly of their rulers who with evil intentions divert judgments from the right path and make crooked arguments" (249-62).

"The eye of Zeus sees all and knows all and if he is so inclined sees even this affair, and he does not forget what sort of justice our city contains within itself" (267-69). Hesiod would not want himself or his son to be righteous if he thought that the unjust man might triumph over the just; "but I do not suppose that wise Zeus is yet allowing that to happen" (273).

Hesiod explains to Perses how men can prosper even though the gods have hidden their sustenance under the earth. They must work for their living: "Work, Perses, descendant of Zeus, so that Hunger will hate you, and revered Demeter of the beautiful crown will love you, and fill your basket with sustenance" (299-301); "possessions should not be stolen; those given by the gods are much better" (320). If a man commits adultery or hurts orphan children or abuses his aged parents, Zeus will take vengeance on him. Perses should offer sacrifices to the gods and pray to them with burnt offerings, when he goes to bed and when he rises in the morning, "so that they may have a heart and mind friendly toward you, so that you may derive benefit from another man's portion, and another man not benefit from yours" (340-41).

The world as Hesiod describes it is full of gods, and every man must be vigilant and pious if he is to prosper. The gods can help the farmer innumerable ways. The rising and setting of the Pleiades, the daughters of Atlas, provides the framework of the growing season (383-84). A man should pray to Hades, the ruler of the lower world, and to Demeter, the goddess of grain, for the crop to come out of the earth and ripen (465-66); Zeus sends the autumn rain and also has the power to grant a successful harvest (415-16, 474). But it is never easy for mortals to ascertain what Zeus is planning, Hesiod warns: "The mind of aegis-bearing Zeus is different at different times, and it is hard for mortal men to know it" (483-84).

Because the Muses have taught him, the poet can give instructions about every aspect of human life. A man should not pour a libation to Zeus and the other gods in the morning with unwashed hands, "for they do not hear you, and spit out your prayers" (726). He should know which days of the month Zeus favors: the first, fourth, seventh, eighth, and ninth days are holy; the seventh was the day on which Zeus's son Apollo was born. It is important to know and to practice such specific pieties, because they help one to win the favor of the gods: "Fortunate and happy is the man who knows all of the days and works without wronging the gods, judging birds of omen, and avoiding transgression" (826-28).

Through his reflective and reiterative narratives, *Theogony* and *Works and Days*, Hesiod explains how the Olympian gods took control of the world and how they have affected the lives of humankind, a species that they did not create but nonetheless have continued to allow to exist. Zeus made life hard for men and sent them woman, but he gave them justice, which enables them to live in communities so long as they are prepared to observe it. Even though Zeus cannot be everywhere and watch everyone at all times, there are many other gods who observe what men do and report to him about their actions. The farmer's life, as he sees it, demands constant reverence for the gods and constant effort to learn the plan of Zeus, despite the difficulty involved. The responsibility for doing what is right rests with the human being, and humans are obliged to remember that their actions will affect the fate of others around them. Someone who commits injustice risks not only his own life but also the lives of others, since Zeus has no qualms about destroying the innocent along with the guilty. Justice is what enables all of them to live with their fellow men, since it requires people to think about the welfare of others.

This is the great lesson that humans can learn from Hesiod's tales. Hesiod begins the *Works and Days* by describing the justice of Zeus. Without it, humans would live like beasts, and the weak would be in the hands of the strong, like the nightingale clutched in the hawk's talons. But he refers to Zeus without the continual expressions of gratitude and affection that he has for a divinity who is prepared to be more compassionate and generous to humankind in general, like Hecate in the *Theogony*. Hesiod never forgets, and never lets his audience forget, that it is Zeus who has made it necessary for humans to work hard to survive, and that Zeus is the god who saw to it that men must live with the added burden of women. In both poems there is a clear message for mortals: Zeus did not create the world for them, but only tolerates them within it. Human beings must struggle to survive and to understand; only Zeus has abiding strength and knowledge, and the power to use it for good or for evil.

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