

## Chapter 2

### Hesiod, the “Theologians,” and the “Seven Sages”

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#### 1. Hesiod and his Poems

Greek “philosophical” literature begins with serious reflection upon the myths; and that begins — as far as we can tell — with Hesiod. Hesiod was (perhaps!) a poet born in Boeotia somewhere around 750 BCE. But, in the main, the name (like that of “Homer”) stands for a school of folk-poetry. The poems ascribed to “Hesiod” tell us that his father came to mainland Greece from Cyme (on the coast of Asia Minor, near Smyrna). According to the *Works and Days* this nameless “father” was escaping from dire poverty; but he prospered enough in the region of Mount Helicon, for his two sons, Hesiod and Perses, to quarrel about their inheritance. Perses got the best of the quarrel by bribing the judges. But he must have wasted too much on the bribes, because he later came to his brother begging; and in spite of their quarrel, Hesiod addresses the *Works and Days* — a sermon about the evils of quarreling, and the virtues of justice, hard work and thrift — to Perses. One cannot escape the feeling that the story of the quarrel is mainly a fiction that the poem needs, not a life-record of the poet; but the facts about the father were hardly necessary for that.<sup>i</sup>

The *Theogony* needs a fiction of a different kind. There, Hesiod was a shepherd on Mount Helicon, when the Muses appeared to him and taught him the art of singing verses. “We know how to tell many believable lies/ But also, when we want to, how to speak the plain truth” (*Theogony* 22-34)<sup>ii</sup> they said; and this problem about the Muses, runs all the way through our philosophical

pilgrimage. The shepherd-turned-poet sailed to Euboia, where he won a great song-contest; and he dedicated his tripod-prize to the Muses of his home-mountain.<sup>iii</sup> There is, finally, a story that Hesiod was killed in Locris by hosts who suspected him of seducing their sister. But that is even more certainly a poetic fiction than the autobiography in the poems.

A number of other poems were associated with the two that we shall consider here; for the most part only small fragments of these remain to us. We have just one long piece, the “Shield of Heracles”; and that is probably much later than the *Works and Days* and the *Theogony*.

The *Works and Days* and the *Theogony* are important to us for two reasons. First, they contain the earliest (and most influential) collection of the traditional myths about the Gods, and about human origins; and secondly, we can recognize in the *Theogony*, a desire to trace in Greek mythology an evolutionary history both of nature, and of Greek religious culture. This same concern is recognizable in the historical thinkers with whom we shall be concerned; so the *Theogony* can fairly be considered as the primitive shape of Greek philosophical speculation.

## **2.    *The Works and Days***

This mistitled poem is probably the oldest Hesiodic composition. It is a piece of “wisdom” literature, which teaches moral lessons through fables and direct exhortations. We begin with a little homily about the two kinds of Strife: murderous warfare, and productive rivalry in all peaceful pursuits. Then we have the story of how Zeus ordered Hephaistos to create the beautiful Pandora, so that humans — who had hitherto lived simply — would be tormented by envy, and the good kind of competition would turn bad. This was the revenge of Zeus upon Prometheus, who really made us human, and stole the fire of Zeus to help us (*Works and Days* 47-58).<sup>iv</sup>

In the story of the Five Ages, which follows, it was the Gods themselves who created the Golden race of mortals, who lived their simple, happy life under King Kronos. After that, the

Olympians made a Silver race who fought one another and would not serve the Gods; so Zeus, son of Kronos, destroyed them. But he replaced them only with a race of Bronze, who were rough giants, and worked their own destruction. After them came the Heroes, who fought and died bravely (at Thebes, at Homer's Troy, and elsewhere). The Heroes went to the Isles of the Blest on the shores of Ocean. Then finally came the Iron Age, and the mortals who were our direct forefathers; and Zeus will destroy us, too, if we don't learn to avoid war, and practise peaceful competition.

We must cultivate Justice and not trust in brute force. Then the golden age will come again. Thirty thousand *daimones* are watching over us, as aides to Zeus.<sup>v</sup> Zeus sees all, and his daughter *Dike* tells him all our sins. It is not true, alas, that in our world honesty is the best policy; but Hesiod continues to urge it upon us, and to insist that the world *ought* to be a place where justice is profitable. To be happy we must work hard; there is no real happiness in idleness.

We should help our neighbors, and avoid those who harm us; repay kindnesses, work hard, stay home, and *save*. Have only one son, and leave all that we have managed to accumulate to him.

After this comes the section about the farming year, from which the poem got its title. The urging of hard work and thrift continues; but one must pray to the Gods faithfully — Zeus under the Earth, Demeter, the Mother Goddess, and Zeus, the Weather God. Even in the winter, there is plenty to do, and we should keep busy.

Father came across the sea from Cyme, but it is best not to think of seafaring; and if you are going to be a trader use the *big* ships. (Hesiod knows the best time for sailing; and the Muses can make all wisdom available — 660-2.)<sup>vi</sup>

What women can learn by themselves is deceitful and dangerous. (This was the meaning of the story of Pandora which Hesiod has already given us.) But a neighbor's daughter, still virgin but full grown, will make a good wife; and a good wife is the greatest of blessings. The husband should be older, and should educate his wife properly (695-705).<sup>vii</sup>

Now comes a motley string of prohibitions beginning: “Don’t make a friend equal to a brother” (supposedly addressed to a brother who has behaved very badly). Some of the advice is of the folk-magical kind that we shall encounter in the sayings of Pythagoras: “Don’t urinate facing the Sun”; “don’t beget a child when you come home from an ill-omened burial”; “don’t cut your nails at a divine festival” and (strangest of all) “don’t wash in the water a woman has washed in, for there is a bitter penalty upon it for a while” (707-64).<sup>viii</sup>

The poet gives us finally quite a long list of the good and bad days of the month (with an account of what they are good for, or why they are evil). On the twentieth in full daylight, we may notice, “an inquiring mortal, well-endowed with *nous*” should be born (792-3).<sup>ix</sup>

### **3. The *Theogony***

The *Theogony* has a long prologue about the Muses — who had a regular festival on Mount Helicon. They chant the names of the Gods, and they teach Hesiod first to sing the story of their own birth — nine daughters that Memory bore to Father Zeus. Calliope is the most important of them, for she is the Muse of the king when he gives true judgment. The Muses’ poets sing the deeds of the heroes; but through Hesiod they will sing the story of the Gods.

In the beginning there was Chaos — the great dark gulf that was there before the world order came to be.<sup>x</sup> The Earth comes to be above Chaos on its own account — and Tartaros on the lower side. (Tartaros is distinct from Chaos itself, because it has a floor.) The story of Sky is complicated. We cannot tell just how Hesiod imagined Chaos, except that it was the source of all darkness. Mother Earth is surrounded by two kinds of darkness: Night above, and Erebus below. It is these two dark powers who generate the Aether (a bright and airy kind of fire) and Daylight. Earth herself gives birth to the starry Heaven (and it is Night and the Aether, perhaps, who provide her with the means?). “Love” is there from the beginning (and one wonders whether Chaos is not just a sexual symbol for the birthing power). Earth bears Pontos — the open sea — without Love (and one can

understand why). But she lies lovingly with Heaven in order to conceive the great circling river Ocean.

Ocean is one of the Titans. After him come a string of others, among whom we only need to notice Memory, Themis (the sacred source of law), and Iapetos (because he was the father of Prometheus and Epimetheus). The spiritual creators of humanity are second generation Titans.

Youngest of Earth's properly divine children is Kronos. His name means "Crooked"; but it is a reasonable guess that Hesiod already identified him with Chronos (Time). For Heaven (Ouranos) used to stuff all his children back into Mother Earth. He would not allow them to be born. History — even the divine history of the Gods — begins with the revenge of Kronos upon his father for this. Mother Earth gave Kronos a sickle; and he crept out in the night, and castrated Ouranos while he was sexually preoccupied. Falling on earth, the blood of Ouranos produced the Furies and the Giants; but in the sea the foaming of the genitals brought Aphrodite to birth.<sup>xi</sup> (Eros is not really her son; for he is much older than she. But in the Olympian settlement he becomes her adopted son, and takes on the significance of finite organic — primarily human — Desire, instead of being the great cosmic force that unifies all "opposites.")

Night gives birth to the three Fates, and to a whole string of evils ending with (evil) Strife (*Eris*). Oddly enough, Friendship (*Philotes*) is born between Deceit and Strife. As we might expect (in the light of the *Works and Days*), Strife brings forth a whole brood of evils in its turn.

Pontos (the Sea) brings forth first the Old Man, Nereus (who is gentle and just). We need not pause for the many other offspring of the Sea (who mattered only to the poets, with Goethe at the tail of the procession). The list continues until we reach some of the monsters that Herakles had to deal with. Then came the Rivers, borne by Tethys to their father Ocean. (Tethys was the last child of Mother Earth before Kronos.)<sup>xii</sup>

Helios (the Sun), Selene (the Moon) and Eos (the Dawn) were the progeny of Hyperion and Theia, two of the other Titan children of Mother Earth (371-82).<sup>xiii</sup> The Winds (and the Stars, especially the Morning Star) were the children of Dawn.

Styx, the great river of the Underworld, has children whom she brings to the aid of Zeus in his battle with her Titan kin (383-405).<sup>xiv</sup> Then Hesiod comes to the Moon (Selene) who has an awkward plurality of divine identities. “Phoibos” is simply a name of Apollo Helios. But the Titan Phoibe here becomes the mother of Hecate; and neither of them is directly identified with the Moon. Hecate is said to have a “share” of both Earth and Sea, and “honor” in Heaven. Styx and Hecate are the Titans accepted into Hesiod’s Olympian order. It is not clear *why* Hecate is important to him; but the fact is evident enough.<sup>xv</sup>

The Olympians are the children of Kronos, who rapes his sister Rheia. The eldest of them are Hestia (the Hearth) and Demeter (later the Grain-Mother of Eleusis). But Kronos follows his father’s example in a mirror-reversal. *He* swallows his children, until Rheia manages to hide Zeus, the youngest, in a cave in Crete. She gives Kronos a stone in his place. How Zeus takes over from Kronos is not explained; but Mother Earth persuaded Kronos to vomit up the elder Olympians, and the stone was deposited at Delphi. (In the world of Ouranos, there is no time; and Kronos remains the lord over time; only with Zeus does historic time properly begin.)

After the Olympian take-over, the emergence of humanity is a kind of “revenge of the Titans.” Iapetos fathered Prometheus and Epimetheus. We are not told initially about the theft of fire, but here again — as in the *Works and Days* — Prometheus is the cunning friend of man. The story of his punishment comes first — he is bound to a rock with an eagle gnawing his liver. But Zeus lets Herakles kill the eagle and release Prometheus. His crime (as described in the *Theogony*) was the deceitful establishment of a sacrifice ritual in which the Gods appeared to receive the largest share of the victim, but only the useless and inedible parts of the victim were actually burned on the altar. Thus the reconciliation of Zeus and Prometheus through Herakles represents the beginning of peaceful civilization (and justice) in an acceptable relation between humanity and the Gods. The

theft of fire is here treated as an *earlier* trick which Zeus has not forgotten. It is the last thing that we hear of; but it was the first thing that happened. What Prometheus appears to be punished for in this version was actually the end of *our* sufferings through the establishment of the Olympian religion.<sup>xvi</sup>

The revenge of Zeus upon humanity (which is what is symbolized by the punishment of Prometheus) is now told over again; the story of Pandora is repeated from the *Works and Days*. Hephaistos makes a beautiful woman of baked clay; then Athena adorns her, and endows her with all the evil arts of womanhood (570-616).<sup>xvii</sup> Thus Pandora plays exactly the part of Eve in Greek mythology. All of man's hunger for riches and luxury stems from the fact that "the woman tempted me, and I did eat."

The stage is now set for the battle of the Olympians with the Titans (which we can recognize as the mythical transition of humanity from the state of nature to the socially cultured condition). It is some peculiar "Hundred-Handed" Titans, imprisoned in a cave within the Earth, who are released by Zeus, and enlisted as soldiers in his cause.<sup>xviii</sup> The war lasts for the proper epic ten years; and the released Titans feed on nectar and ambrosia, the civilizing diet of the Olympian Gods. They have many heads and many hands, because they are social symbols — images of the strength of the united *polis* against pre-political tribal barbarism. The lightning bolts of Zeus turn the tide of battle in favor of the Hundredhanders.<sup>xix</sup>

The defeated Titans of the older tribal world, are cast into Tartaros — which is as far below us as Heaven is above. Hesiod has a picturesque measure for the distance — a bronze anvil falling from heaven would hit the Earth on the tenth day; and it would fall for ten days into Tartaros likewise. Tartaros has a brazen floor; and its roof is the flat Earth-disc (which carries Pontos and Ocean). The helpful Titans are down in Tartaros too — but they are not in cruel bonds. They become the *warders* of primitive barbarism.

Between us and the high region where the Gods really are, Atlas (a brother of Prometheus) holds up the Sky.<sup>xx</sup> He stands in front of the “house of Night.” Night greets Day as she comes out of her house and Day retires to it. (The house really belongs to both of them, but they are never in it together.) Sleep and his brother Death are Night’s children; the Sun never gets to see either of them.

In front of the House of Night and her children is the house of Hades himself.<sup>xxi</sup> Hades is King there; and Persephone is his queen. The Dog that Sokrates swore by welcomes newcomers into Hades, but lets no one out again. Styx has her palace there, and when there is strife among the Gods Zeus sends Iris (the Rainbow) to fetch the water of Styx for the oath of peace. An immortal who breaks this oath must lie in a coma for one “year,” and then spend nine “years” as a wanderer in exile (793-806).<sup>xxii</sup>

The last episode in the story of Mother Earth and her Titan offspring is the birth of Typhoios. Thanks to Aphrodite, Earth became pregnant by Tartaros; and she brings forth her last child after the great War. She has been a loyal ally of Zeus; and she releases this last Titanic enemy in order to enable Zeus to demonstrate to everyone (especially his elder brothers) that he is the rightful overlord of the new Olympian order of things. Typhoios is a monster with *one hundred* heads; and it is quite clear that he is the immortal spirit of aggressive human warfare between Cities.<sup>xxiii</sup> In the story of his begetting — which was actually much earlier<sup>xxiv</sup> — Aphrodite stands in now for her human counterpart Pandora. Typhoios could have become king over all (as he will do in the thought of Herakleitos). All of the other Olympians are terrified; but Father Zeus is ready for this terrible adversary. There is a contest of fire — the lightning bolts against the Dragon’s flaming heads. The sea boils, and even Hades has good reason to be alarmed. Like Herakles with the Lernaean Hydra later on, Zeus burns off the monster’s heads. Down in Tartaros, Typhoios still causes the worst of the storms on sea and land: the storms which “destroy the lovely works of clod-born humans, filling them with dust and cruel uproar” (879-80).<sup>xxv</sup>

Now, at last, Zeus is King by the will of a universal assembly. He takes Metis (“cunning”) as his first wife, swallows her pregnant, and gives birth to Athena by himself — “equal to her father in



strength and wise counsel” (896). Zeus is now in a position to prevent any births he does not want. So Metis can never bring forth the son who will overthrow him (as she might otherwise do). Ouranos made the mother retain her children; Kronos had to swallow his own children; Zeus finally swallows the birth-power — which makes him a very good symbol of “patriarchy” for feminist thought. To Hesiod it is more important that Zeus is the master of all cunning — both for good and for evil.

Next, however, Zeus marries Themis — the principle of sacred lawfulness. Her he does not swallow; and she brings forth the natural order of Justice that we shall recognize again in Anaximander: the Seasons of Good Custom, Justice and Peace<sup>xxvi</sup> — and the Fates. The Fates (*Moirae*) have been born once already — as children of Night.<sup>xxvii</sup> But then they were called also “dooms” (*Keres*). Now they are part of the divine-human natural-social order; they are products of the wisdom of Zeus, and they operate within the bounds of Themis. No longer are they harsh death-dealing necessities that come out of the darkness of the unforeseeable and unexpected. We can say if we wish that Zeus becomes their second father by adoption; but this is only half of the truth, because they are quite different as part of the human order from what they were in the order of nature.

Themis was one of the earliest Titans — a daughter of Heaven and Earth. The next wife, Eurynome, is a daughter of Ocean (but not a river). She gives birth to the Graces. The beauties of life come only after the achievement of the political and social necessities (907-11).<sup>xxviii</sup>

After Eurynome a new cycle begins; for we must take Demeter and agriculture to be the material foundation of the Olympian order. It was for Demeter’s sake that the marriage with Themis (and even the swallowing of Metis) was necessary. Memory and the Muses follow Demeter and Persephone (just as Eurynome and the Graces followed Themis; and the sequence of temporary unions for Zeus comes full circle with Leto.<sup>xxix</sup> Leto is the daughter of Phoibe — whose name points to the Titanic Moon (and Sun); her children, Apollo and Artemis, bring those luminaries into

the sphere of Olympian justice. (Leto is thus the *sister* of Hecate; and Phoibe is the grandmother both of the Olympian Moon Goddess and of the Sun God.)

The last marriage of Zeus is the permanent one. Hera is Queen of Heaven. She is the Goddess of youthful vigor (Hebe) and of birth-pangs (Eileithyia); and she is Mother of the War-God, Ares — for here we should remember the human role of Pandora! Hera has to have been the official wife of Zeus (in the order of *time*) from the first, since she was jealous about the birth of Athena, and bore Hephaistos by herself (924-32).<sup>xxx</sup>

The extra-marital amours of Zeus continued without ceasing. But now Hesiod turns briefly to some other Olympians. Poseidon has a child (Triton) by Amphitrite (who is a daughter of Nereus); and Aphrodite goes to bed with Ares to produce Fear and Terror on one side — and Harmonia on the other. Hesiod seems to know nothing of the official marriage of Aphrodite with Hephaistos — though it provides her with a *peaceful* role of which he would approve. His Aphrodite, we must remember, is not a proper Olympian. She was born of the genitals of Ouranos in the sea foam. Even in the primitive natural order she was the principle of *Beauty* (as an object of sexual desire).<sup>xxxii</sup> Her union with Ares is an indication that she can never be perfectly integrated into the order of Themis; but in Hesiod's account Hephaistos marries one of the Graces — so that is where sea-born Aphrodite properly belongs in the world at peace.

At the end of the poem the story of the Gods flows over into that of the heroes. This is the subject-matter of the poets rather than the philosophers, so we shall pass over it. We need to notice only the birth of Hermes. He is the herald who enables Zeus to stay in control of us humans, living and dead; and his parentage (Zeus and Maia, a daughter of Atlas) is very appropriate for that function. Finally we must record the births of Dionysos and Herakles, who have mortal mothers — and in the case of Herakles a mortal career before his deification.

What the half-mortal origin of Dionysos betokens is too vague for any interpretation that could pass as commonsensical; but Herakles — with Kadmos, Memnon, Jason, Achilles, Aeneas,

Anchises and Odysseus — point us towards the properly human historical interpretation of the battle between the Titans and the Olympians.<sup>xxxii</sup>

#### **4. The Orphics**

“Homer” and “Hesiod” are the names of bardic traditions (though Hesiod may also be an individual poet). Orpheus, the father of all bards, is a myth plain and simple. We all know the story of the singer with the lyre, who could make the very rocks and trees attend to him; how his new bride Eurydice died of a snake bite, and he went to Hades to seek her. He got permission to bring her back, but failed because he looked back at her at the last moment — losing his perfect faith in the music that could draw trees, and rocks from the mountains to listen. Not all of us know the other story, according to which Orpheus died when a band of Thracian women cut his head off. (The head continued to sing.)

For the Greeks, these stories referred to one of the early heroes (who played an important part in the voyage of the Argonauts). At a fairly early period there were groups of believers whose faith centered upon *books* ascribed to “Orpheus.” The “books” were produced by the believers, and it is not clear how early anything “Orphic” was written down. It is highly probable that some of the Orphic writings were actually produced by “Pythagoreans”; but it is as good as certain that there were Orphic beliefs — and perhaps some Orphic writings — for Pythagoras himself to collect. He collected them — just as he collected Hesiodic chants and writing, and the book of Pherecydes to which we shall soon come — because they contained the revealed wisdom of ancient theological prophets, and Pythagoras saw himself as belonging to their succession.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Orpheus, who came from the Thracian North, probably represents the influence of a *shaman* tradition in that part of the world. It is typical of shamans, that they have “out of body” experiences, and they make great psychological journeys — even to the realm of the dead. Pythagoras attached himself to this tradition, quite consciously; and he set himself both to integrate it into the main body

of Greek religious beliefs, and to *rationalize* it. (It was probably Pythagoras who identified the murderous Thracian women as *Bacchantes*.)<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Orpheus had a no less legendary disciple Musaios who was associated, not with Thrace, but with Athens. The most important “Orphic” teaching concerned the reincarnation of the soul; it was from Orphism that Pythagoras got this cardinal tenet of his philosophical religion. The Orphics believed also that some human souls — at least the souls of inspired theological prophets, i.e. of the *shamans* — were divine powers who had fallen into this mortal world, as a kind of prison. These exiles must serve their sentence in order to return to their heavenly home.<sup>xxxv</sup>

Aristotle’s pupil, Eudemos, wrote a history of theology. From the reports based on it, we learn that in the Orphic cosmogony Night was the origin of our world. But the Orphic account of origins is very variable; the story was developed and transformed in later times. Perhaps Night originally gave birth to Time (Chronos identified with Hesiod’s Kronos); and Time produced Aether and Chaos, and the Cosmic Egg. Phanes, the Creator God, hatched out of the Egg (D.-K. 1B12).<sup>xxxvi</sup>

But there was also an early Orphic theogony in which Heaven (Ouranos) was the son of Night; *his* son Kronos cut off the penis of Ouranos; and Zeus the son of Kronos swallowed that. All the Gods and Goddesses, the Ocean, and all of the Rivers sprang from the Heavenly Phallos.<sup>xxxvii</sup> But perhaps again Water and Earth were primordial; and from them there came forth a great Snake called Time (Chronos), which produced Aether, Chaos, and Erebus (Darkness). In these regions the Snake laid its egg, which split in two, and thus formed Heaven and Earth.<sup>xxxviii</sup> We can only be sure that the

Orphics had a cosmogony of the Hesiodic type — or more than one — from the first (1B13).<sup>xxxix</sup>

The world-egg was in one well-known version, since Aristophanes makes fun of it in the *Birds* (693-703).<sup>xl</sup> But except for the future existence and eventual salvation of the soul, we cannot really tell what was in the Orphic stories that Pythagoras collected for meditative study by himself and his followers. By Plato’s time the official devotees of Orpheus and Musaeos were hypocritical purveyors of “salvation” for the superstitious (*Republic* 364b-365a, 366ab). Only through Pythagoras did the music of Orpheus become a symbol of the philosophical way of life.

## 5. Pherecydes of Syros

From a pure myth, we turn now to an actual prose-writer. Whether Pherecydes wrote the *first* book in prose (or whether that distinction belongs to Anaximander) we cannot be sure. The dates of Pherecydes are not very certain, but he may well have been twenty-five years younger than Anaximander. Apollodoros put his *acme* in 544/3 BCE (when Anaximander was 67). His home, Syros, is an island near Delos; but his father (Babys or Babis) certainly came from somewhere in the East.

He was (perhaps) about fifteen years older than Pythagoras, who certainly collected his book. But the story that Pythagoras regarded him as his teacher, and went to Delos to nurse and bury him at the end of his long life, is probably a fiction (even though Aristotle's students, Dicaearchos and Aristoxenos believed it — 7A1, A4).<sup>xli</sup>

Pherecydes began his book with the claim “Zas and Chronos [Time] always existed and Chthonie [Earth without her fertile surface]; and Chthonie came to have Earth as her name, because Zas gave her Earth [i.e. the fertile surface] as a present of honor” (7B1).<sup>xlii</sup> It is clear that Pherecydes is correcting Hesiod. He put Chronos in the place of Kronos because he realized — even if Hesiod did not? — that the Titan king could be interpreted in that way.<sup>xliii</sup> But only Earth undergoes temporal development. God is properly speaking out of time; and when God operates temporally in the development of Chthonie, he is at first called Chronos.

Zas is one of several transformed names in Pherecydes' book; the other obvious case is Oge nos — whose place in the *kosmos* shows that he is “Oceanos” in Homer and Hesiod. Pherecydes was probably familiar with some Near Eastern cults; and he was trying to get back to the “true names” at the origin of the Greek and barbarian religious traditions.<sup>xliv</sup> (He believed in the “perennial wisdom.” The same divine power has revealed itself to all of the human nations.)

Reconstructing his cosmogony as well as we can from the few fragments, and the slightly more plentiful reports, it seems that Pherecydes connected Chthonie (the undeveloped Earth) with Hesiod's Chaos.<sup>xlv</sup> Chronos created Fire, Breath (i.e. Air) and Water from his own seed, and disposed them in five hollows or "nooks." A number of Gods were generated in the "five nook generation" (A8).<sup>xlvi</sup>

It is clear that these "nooks" are spatial locations in the *kosmos*. We may fairly suppose that the lowest one is Chaos (below Chthonie); and if the "seed" deposited there was mainly *watery*, we have an appropriate place for the birth of the Snake-Gods of whom we shall soon hear. On the immediate underside of Chthonie we can hypothetically locate "the house of Night" (as Hesiod called it). The main body of Chthonie herself provides the third "nook." On her top side we shall see reason to place the Aether (and its Gods); and above Chthonie altogether there is Heaven proper (with the ungenerated Gods and their generated offspring. (All of this is guesswork, and some developments will occur when Chthonie becomes Earth proper — but the unfolding of the story will show why this reconstruction is plausible.)

Once Chthonie has been made pregnant in her "nooks," Zas marries her and presents her with the embroidered robe of fertile growth that makes her into Earth proper (*Ge* — B2). Chaos will already have given birth to the great Snake Ophioneus from the Water Seed of Chronos, and Ophioneus breeds his children down there with his Snake-Wife Eurynome.<sup>xlvii</sup> The wedding of Zas and *Ge* authorizes the human institution of marriage; and the banqueting table is called "sacrificial meal." Thus, the religious rite of "sacrifice" (as the Greeks understood it) was established.<sup>xlviii</sup> After the wedding there is a great battle between Chronos and the Snake-children (Ophionidae); the Snake army is driven into Ogenos, the great river embroidered round the edge of Earth's new robe (B4).<sup>xlix</sup>

Aristotle says that Pherecydes "made the original generating agent the Best" (A7 — *Metaphysics* 1091b8). If we take Zas to be the Aristotelian "Final Cause," and refer this comment to Zas, it makes good sense. The "seed of Time" in Chthonie is the "efficient cause" responsible for Ophioneus and his children (and for much else in the other nooks). But it is Zas who makes the

wedding robe, and gives the Ophionidae their final place upon it (called “the mansions of Ogenos”); and Zas is just as primordial as Chronos, so Aristotle’s interpretation is valid. Also, in order to create the Wedding Robe Zas transformed himself into Love (*Erōs*) (B3).<sup>1</sup> So he is active like a “Final Cause” from the first.

There are two other late reports which tell us that the Robe was on a “winged Oak” (B2, A11). Unless this Tree was the loom structure upon which Zas wove the Robe, the Oak has to be identical (at least in part) with Chthonie. It seems to me that the hypothesis of M.L. West<sup>li</sup> is the best one here. The Oak tree is an image of the final state of the *kosmos* developed from its chthonic and chaotic beginning.<sup>lii</sup> The “roots” of the tree are in Tartaros, the trunk is our Earth surrounded by Ogenos, and the branches in blossom will be the “wings” in the heaven of Zas (where the Warrior Chronos lives in honorable semi-retirement).

Tartaros is the place of those gods who still do violence against the divine order now established; it is far below Hades. Pherecydes certainly believed that human souls are immortal, and that they pass from one embodiment to another; he seems to have taught that between embodiments the good souls go upwards and the evil souls downwards to their own place. We must assume that Pherecydes began with the “Homeric” conception of the disembodied soul as a “pithless Shade.” Those who went up to the “Isles of the Blest” would be sustained by the divine ambrosia all the time. The wretched Shades in Hades needed to drink some kind of natural life-energy from an “outflow” (Styx?) when the time for their next embodiment came (7B8, B7, B13a).

It seems therefore that the developed organization of the “five nooks” was as follows: (1) the “winged” Heaven of the Gods; (2) the heaven of Earth’s mortal children; (3) Earth’s Robe of mortal life; (4) Hades for mortal purgation; (5) Tartaros for the unjust Gods. (If we distinguish the primordial *Chthonie* from the time-matured *Ge*, we can regard *Ge* and *Ogenos* as two new “nooks” created by Zas. *Ogenos* is certainly a new “nook” with its own Gods. Probably Pherecydes spoke first of a “five-nook generation” and later of a “seven-nook generation” because the whole world of

Zas was newly-organized “for the best.” That explains why we find both expressions in our reports — see B5-8, A2.)<sup>liii</sup>

Pythagoras was certainly much impressed by all this; and thanks to the interest of his school, the doctrine, and probably the book itself, was long remembered and preserved.

## 6. The “Seven Sages”

Orpheus and the book of Pherecydes belonged to the spiritual elite. There are several other theological “prophets” whose names we know, but whose teachings and influence we cannot properly estimate. The name of Epimenides, the Cretan who said that all Cretans were liars, can stand in the memory of beginners for all of them. We can be sure that Pythagoras knew whatever could be learned about them; but not of much more than that.<sup>liv</sup>

The Seven Sages and their wise proverbs belonged (like Hesiod’s poems) to the masses. The Sages were firmly historical, but they belonged to the time of the poets, before there was any written prose wisdom at all. Everyone agreed that there were seven of them; but in every region (or in the account of every reporter) some local favorite would get into the list. So in the lists that came down to the Alexandrian scholars no fewer than twenty-three names (including Epimenides!) were to be found (10A1). The earliest list (given by “Sokrates” in the *Protagoras* 343a) can be regarded as canonical, except that Myson of Chen — who is not otherwise heard of — is substituted for Periander.<sup>lv</sup> Thus the proper list was: Thales, Pittakos, Bias, Solon, Cleoboulos, Periander, Chilon. Thales is known to us as a philosopher, and Solon as a poet. But the Sages were named for their practical wisdom — and in general for their reputation as *political* leaders in their own cities.

As the Seven Sages they had their own mythology. The tale was told of how they had a conference at Delphi (or at Corinth); and of how a fisherman found a golden tripod in his net and was told by the Oracle to “give it to the wisest.” But the Seven sent it back to Delphi, because



Apollo himself is the wisest. The mottos inscribed at Delphi: “Know thyself” and “Nothing too much” were attributed to Chilon (the Spartan) and Solon (the Athenian). The sayings of the Seven were always brief and pithy; and there is no reliable evidence that they were really coined by definite individuals. Periander (tyrant of Corinth) is credited with “Democracy is better than tyranny.”<sup>lvi</sup> Other gems of wisdom (one each for the other four Sages) are: “One must honor one’s father” (Cleoboulos of Lindos); “Don’t get rich by evil” (Thales); “Know the right moment” (Pittakos of Mitylene); “Most men are bad” (Bias of Priene).

We need not spend any time studying this repository of ethical commonplaces. We only need to remember that any generally received opinion could be given a bit of extra authority through ascription to a recognized Sage. Only two of the Sages come into our story as individuals. The political career of Solon we have already noticed. He can be said to have made the emergence of tyranny at Athens more gradual; and in that way he helped the evolution of a more mature political democracy. Chilon was a Spartan Ephor, who was responsible for some important reforms. Pittakos (at Mitylene) and Periander (at Corinth) were themselves “tyrants.” Thales sought (in the end unsuccessfully) to prevent the imposition of a barbarian despotism on his own community. But Thales himself was the first of our recognized philosophers. To him therefore we shall turn at once in the next chapter.

## Notes

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- i. The poet names himself only at *Theogony* 22; the rest of the story is in *Works and Days* 34-41 and 395-6.
  - ii. Homer's Muse is a singular daughter of Zeus and Memory. Hesiod knows there are *nine* of them and has them firmly associated with Apollo. He can even tell us their names — *Theogony* 77-79, 95. Their association with particular forms of poetry and the cultural arts came later.
  - iii. The poet with a father from Aiolis who won a contest far from home, sounds to me like a real person emerging from his bardic background. M.L. West (1966, 40-48) takes the “biography” very seriously (and argues that the *Theogony* came *before* the *Works and Days*). He thinks these two poems were the first compositions to be actually written down. But some critical scholars think the contest in Euboia is an interpolation made because there was a festival-tripod on Mount Helicon that needed to be accounted for (see *Works and Days* 650-59).
  - iv. Hesiod never calls Prometheus our “creator,” but it is plain that Prometheus represents the “forethought” through which we humans have created our own world. Our physical origin is associated, for some reason, with the Ash Trees and their female spirits. See note 16 below.)
  - v. The Ages of the Four Metals follow one another in time. But the Golden Age will *come again* (cf. the poet's wish that he had been born earlier or later — line 175). Moreover, after

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their departure to the afterlife, the Gold and Silver races become our daimonic guardians here on Earth and in the Underworld (lines 123 and 141). Thus the Hesiodic time-cycle is also a structural analysis of how human life is all the time. It is the *heroes* (of Homer and other myths) who actually stand in the “golden” and “silver” relations to us; and we ourselves are both “bronze” and “iron” mortals. (For a more complex analysis, and a survey of other interpretations see J.P. Vernant, 1983, chapters 1 and 2. It seems clear — as M.L. West argues — that Hesiod has combined an Eastern myth about four metallic races with the Greek epic tradition of the heroes.)

- vi. It is not the Muses who have given Hesiod his weather-wisdom. They have given him only the power to communicate it memorably; and they can do that for any wisdom (in particular for the marine experience of which Hesiod himself has so little).
  
- vii. For “women’s wiles” see 373-5.
  
- viii. It is probably pollution by menstrual blood that is to be feared.
  
- ix. This is a piece of evidence for a *real* Hesiod, because he would have known his own birthday.
  
- x. The generally accepted view is that Chaos was the *gap* between Earth and Sky. But when we discover where Chaos still *is* in Hesiod’s world-picture, we shall see that it was originally the great gulf, or bottomless Abyss, from which everything (and in particular Mother Earth) somehow came to be. (My proposed interpretation assumes that the primacy of Chaos is really *logical*. It has always divided the Earth from Tartaros. At line 814 Tartaros is said to be “beyond Chaos.” The Earth — with its own dark Underworld — has always existed on

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this side of Chaos. But Hesiod cannot distinguish the logical “before” from the temporal “before.” See further note 19 below.)

- xi. Homer knows nothing of this Titanic birth of Aphrodite. For him she is the Olympian daughter of Zeus and Dione — who is identified by Hesiod as a daughter of Ocean. It seems likely that the Hesiodic story was the poet’s personal improvement of the bardic tradition.
- xii. In the Homeric tradition Oceanos and Tethys are the eldest of the Titans and the parents of all the Gods; and in Homer’s theogony it appears that Kronos swallows only his male children — for Oceanos and Tethys serve as foster-parents to Hera.
- xiii. Hyperion appears without a clear pedigree. Helios himself is not directly identified either with Hyperion or with Apollo, in any early sources; and Selene is not directly identified with Artemis.
- xiv. The children include Force and Violence; but first among them is Zelos, who seems to be the *good* kind of Strife mentioned at the start of the *Works and Days*. (In that work, the good Eris is the *elder* child of Night and Zeus — *Works and Days* 17-18). Styx becomes the supreme goddess of the oath. The Gods swear by her.
- xv. Hekate was perhaps revered first as the Goddess of mortal life generally; hence she has honor in earth, sea and sky, but not beneath the earth. When she became a Moon Goddess later, she was more particularly associated with the *human* menstrual cycle. Hesiod was concerned about that too (see note 8 above); but there is no sign that he associated it with Hekate.

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- xvi. The earlier trick is first referred to at *Theogony* 560. See further *Works and Days* 42-58. The punishment of Prometheus is not mentioned there, because he has to be left free to help humanity deal with the Pandora revenge of Zeus upon humanity. His two tricks and the two punishments (for him and for his human creatures) are inwardly identical. As in Homer, the events described at the divine and the human level are really the same story seen in two ways. Prometheus is our true creator; but our physical genesis in Hesiod was apparently from the Meliads. (The Meliads are tree-nymphs generally, and in particular the spirits of the ash-trees. They were born from the dripping blood of Ouranos when Kronos castrated him. Compare *Theogony* 187 and 563.) At 563 the race of mortals is called “Melian.” In the Five Ages it was the Bronze Race that Zeus made *ek meliân* (from ash-tree — *Works and Days*, 145). The myths fit together nicely, if we assume that it was the work of Prometheus, which moved us from the “ash-tree” stage to our properly human status. But, in any case, we must assume that the theft of fire came *first* in the Prometheus story. Our reconciliation with the Olympian Gods is the climax of Prometheus’ work. He (and we) are still punished after that, because religion and civilization bring their own new evils. In this reading of Hesiod, it is the “bronze” proto-humans who are symbolically represented a bit later on as the helpful Titans. These helpful Titans have fifty heads and a hundred hands. They are *younger* than Kronos, because they represent the proto-human communities who *worshipped* Kronos and the Titans.
- xvii. The good and useful feminine arts of Athena are not mentioned here (as they were in the *Works and Days*, 63-64). But Protagoras rightly understood that this is because they were the gift of *Prometheus*. It is Epimetheus who is deceived by Pandora in Hesiod (*Works and Days* 83-89). Protagoras’ Myth (for which see Chapter 15 below) is a very insightful exposition of Hesiod; and in view of Protagoras’ known predilection for expounding the poets we can be sure that the interpretation was his originally. It was not the gift of Plato to him (though Plato must have agreed about his silent purging of Pandora from the story).

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- xviii. Whether this cave-imprisonment should be connected with the ash-tree origin of humanity (note 16 above) is not clear. But it is surely here — *Theogony* 617-28 — that the sequence of Cave Myths in Plato's *Republic* has its origin. The name of *Gyges* (who is one of the Hundred-Handers in 617-8) provides the linking clue. (If the ash-tree connection is allowed, then the trees should be interpreted as images of prehistoric human *tribal* community, just as the “hundred-handed” Titans are the primitive *poleis*.)
- xix. The thunderbolts reach down even into Chaos at the very bottom of things. Perhaps we should think of Chaos not as a spatial phenomenon at all, but as the bottomless Abyss that is at the true “bottom” (or *beginning* of things). The Chi-shape of it is a sexual symbol (compare *Theogony* 700). Earth, which provides the firm seat of all things (117) is certainly not a *child* of Chaos. She simply comes into being next after it. Its own children are the two forms of darkness.
- xx. Atlas is a giant. But his reach cannot be the distance of the anvil falling for a full nine days. So what he is holding up must be the *floor* of the heavenly region, which is as roomy as Tartaros below us. Hesiod says that he holds up “broad Heaven” (746); and “Heaven” here means the daylight Sky — which hides everything “heavenly” except the Sun. (On this view Atlas gets to rest when Night comes, and Day returns to its “House” — Heaven loses its “floor” and our “Cave” loses its “roof.”)
- xxi. Hesiod's world seems to become a physical impossibility at this point (it was difficult enough to imagine with Atlas “in front of” the House of Night). But actually the retirement of Atlas in company with Day makes the whole system work. It is the half-revealed world of Night that is the “house” of Death and Hades. What is called the “Underworld” is quite distinct from Tartaros — which really is far down beneath the disk of Earth. The realm of

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the human dead is our familiar world of darkness, when the living are under the lordship of Sleep. For those of us who are still awake in the night-time, when Atlas and his day sky is gone, the real Heaven becomes visible. (To go to the house of Hades is easy enough; but to *see* any of its furniture or denizens is a very special privilege — in sleep.)

- xxii. These “years” are long ages of the world. Styx is a very important part of Hesiod’s theological system; and his theory of the Oath and its penalties will become very important in Empedokles. But by the time Hesiod’s doctrine got to Empedokles, Pythagoras had built his own theory of *human* immortality onto it (together with some “Orphic” interpretations).
- xxiii. He has as many *heads* as *two* of the Hundred-Handers — but no *hands* at all, because he is a Dragon-Serpent.
- xxiv. We know this because he has already fathered a series of monster-children by Echidna (see *Theogony* 306-15). His *parentage* needs to be remembered at this point; but Mother Earth only *releases* him at this very convenient moment. We have to understand that she kept him out of the great battle of Gods and Titans.
- xxv. To some the prominence given to sea-storms may suggest that my anthropological reading of Typhoios — and perhaps of the Titans generally — is a mistake. To me it suggests rather that all of the sea-imagery deserves more careful study — instead of being passed over as it is here (but see further note 28 below). In the popular mind Typhoios was often thought to be under Mount Etna. (My general position is that the Titans have a *double* significance. They represent both natural and human psychological forces.)
- xxvi. The *Hera*i are also *natural* phenomena; but Hesiod deliberately gives prominence to their

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human social side. The authority of Zeus adds right judgment in disputes, to general good behavior — and so establishes peace in place of natural suspicion and hostility. (This humanized interpretation was what Prodikos had in mind when he called *his* book *The Seasons*.)

xxvii. For what follows here compare *Theogony* 211-25 and 901-5.

xxviii. There may be a clue here to one aspect of Hesiod's Oceanid symbolism. Eurynome is mentioned in the *Iliad* (18:398ff) as dwelling (with Thetis) in a mid-ocean cave. She was, perhaps, a great Sea-Snake — see note 47 below.

xxix. These “temporary” unions are all *logical* in their proper status. It is the union with Hera that is *permanent* in the order of time. She is the *historic* consort of Zeus. Much of the instability of history arises from the necessary stability of this foundation. (Zeus can have many more amours, but no more marriages.)

xxx. There is an interesting inversion here, because Athena — the motherless daughter of Zeus — was the mistress of spinning, weaving, and all female household skills; while Hephaistos — the fatherless son of Hera — is the master of all metalworking crafts. I take this complementary reconciliation of the sexes to be symbolic of the absolute supremacy of Peace.

xxxi. So her birth — *Theogony* 188-206 — is another clue to one line of interpretation for Hesiod's sea-stories.



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- xxxii. Even Phaethon (*Theogony* 986-91) fits into this pattern in another way, because Hesiod associates him closely with Aphrodite. But here again, the human meaning is quite vague.
- xxxiii. We know of several other early “theologians” — Epimenides, for instance. Only Orpheus and Pherecydes are dealt with here (because of their influence on Pythagoras). The interested student will find a brief account of what we know about the others in K. Freeman (1952). (See also the account of Alkman in KRS 47-49; and for Epimenides see especially M.L. West, 1983, 45-53.)
- xxxiv. All that we can say for sure is that Aeschylus was already acquainted with a version of the Orpheus death-story as a revenge of Dionysos, because Orpheus devoted himself to the worship of Apollo. (This myth provided the plot of his lost play, *The Bassarai*.)
- xxxv. This is testified by Philolaos (44 B) and by the Platonic Sokrates (*Phaedo* , *Gorgias* ). Sokrates proclaims reincarnation as a general proposition about the soul. But it is a reasonable guess that what was originally a doctrine about the inspired prophet (and those who ‘hear’ him properly?) became a general theory about the destiny of the rational *philosophical* life. (Plato associates Musaios specifically with the Mysteries of Eleusis — in which a doctrine of reward and punishment was taught — *Republic* 363cd, *Phaedo* 69cd.)
- xxxvi. Both the Orphics and Epimenides had an “egg-cosmogony” — which was naturally much favored by the *Birds* in Aristophanes — see *Birds*, 693-703.
- xxxvii. See the Derveni papyrus — cited in KRS, pp. 31-32.

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- xxxviii. See 1B13. (For the simpler version preferred by Epimenides — and largely endorsed by the Aristophanic *Birds* — see 3B5. There is no Snake in their story.) The priority relations between Pherecydes and these “Orphic” cosmogonies is quite uncertain. But it is obviously likely that whichever came first influenced the other.
- xxxix. The muddle presented in KRS 22-25 has been sorted out very plausibly by M.L. West (1983). But we still cannot tell how much of it was there for Pythagoras to find.
- xl. Aristophanes clearly intends to point to a non-Hesiodic tradition. But Love “mixes all things together” — so Anaxagoras is also a target of the poet’s wit.
- xli. That Pythagoras knew and valued the book can probably be inferred safely from the testimony of Ion of Chios — 36B4.
- xlii. All of the testimonies about Pherecydes are printed, with translations, in H.S. Shibli 1990, Appendix 2.
- xliii. I have interpreted the poet of 700 BCE in that sense because the *Theogony* seems to me to be so consistently conceived. But of course we do not know what that (rather hypothetical) poet actually thought — and it does not matter to us because the earliest philosophers certainly thought about the poems in that allegorical mode.
- xliv. This is plausibly argued by M.L. West (1971, 50-52). Pherecydes called Kronos, “Chronos” and his wife Rheia, “Rhe” (7B9); and he believed that the Gods had their own language. He knew the divine name for a table (B12).

- xliv. Achilles Tattius (in 7B1a) indicates that Pherecydes spoke of Chaos; and in view of his known beginning sentence, this is the only way that he could have fitted it in. (Achilles says that like Thales he identified Chaos as “waters.” What we hear about the generation of water will not fit with the primordial ranking of Chaos; but as we have seen, Chaos was not quite primordial in the Orphic cosmogonies. For a hypothesis that would explain what Achilles says, see the next paragraph.)
- xlvi. We should assume that the “seed” itself was fiery, breathy and wet (cf. M.L. West, 1971, 14). (Differently proportioned seed was deposited in each of the “nooks”; and different types of Gods — or divine powers — were generated in each of them.)
- xlvii. See M.L. West, 1971, 21-22. (This is another contradiction of Hesiod — see text at note 28 above.)
- xlviii. This gives a plausible explanation for B12.
- xlix. In making the Robe, Zas has moved all the Water out of Tartaros and into Ogenos; the Battle is about who is to go into Ogenos.
- l. From Proclus. The rest of this report should be discounted as a NeoPlatonic rationalization.
- li. M.L. West, 1971, 27.

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- lii. Anaximander thought of the initial development of the cosmos in terms of a tree-bark metaphor (see p. 000 below). It is quite likely that one thinker influenced the other here — but we don't know which of them had the idea first.
  
  - liii. The Moon may have been the heavenly nook for the good mortal souls — compare 7B13a).
  
  - liv. See E. Rohde, 1966, II, 300-3, for a brief account of these so-called “shamans.” The remains of Epimenides are discussed by K. Freeman (1949, 26-31); he is himself nameless in the reference by St. Paul that has made him proverbial (*Titus*, 1:12).
  
  - lv. The reason for this variation is not far to seek. The Delphic Oracle once declared that Myson of Oeta was wiser than Chilon (see C.D.C. Reeve, 1989, 31). This Myson was quite unknown; and Plato either did not know his city, or (more probably) he understood that the Oracle meant “*any* contented peasant,” so he invented a Myson of his own. He left out Periander not because he was a tyrant — as K. Freeman, 1949, 44 suggests — but because, being a Corinthian, his was the “wisdom” of the money-lovers. (Plato, of all people, had nothing against *philosophical* tyrants!)
  
  - lvi. The sayings were collected by Demetrios of Phaleron, and listed under their authors by John of Stobi (10 A 3). The remark attributed to Periander is not quite as absurd as it sounds, because “tyrants” typically presented themselves as champions of the people. (Frederick the Great, we may remember, wrote a book against Machiavelli.)