

◆ CHAPTER 8 ◆

PANDORA

BEAUTIFUL, ARTIFICIAL, EVIL

TO PUNISH MORTALS for accepting fire stolen from the gods, Zeus commanded Hephaestus to make a “snare” (*dolos*) in the form of a desirable young woman called Pandora. This archaic myth was first written down in two separate poems penned in the eighth or seventh century BC, the *Theogony* and *Works and Days* attributed to Hesiod of Boeotia. It is no surprise to find that humanity’s defender Prometheus and his thoughtless brother are both involved in this myth of Zeus’s retribution via *biotechne*.

When we last encountered the two Titans, they were making the original humans and animals and doling out natural capabilities, as requested by Zeus (chapter 4). In this mythic cycle of Zeus’s revenge on humankind, Prometheus has been freed at last by the hero Heracles from the rock where he was chained. Prometheus and Epimetheus are now the allies and associates of earthlings. Armed with foresight (and rational paranoia), Prometheus tells his impulsive brother to reject any gifts from Zeus. True to his name, “Mr. Afterthought” forgets the warning.¹

To recap the basic story: Zeus, fuming over the theft of fire, contrives a way to deliver an eternal curse disguised as a gift for humans—a *kalon kakon*, “beautiful evil”—with the help of the smith god Hephaestus. Hephaestus creates an artificial female, a simulacrum or effigy of a woman. Athena and the other gods contribute to her composition, hence her name Pandora, “All Gifts” (the name can mean either “giver” or “recipient”). Dispatched to earth with more nefarious “gifts,” a swarm of evil spirits sealed inside a jar, Pandora is the source of all the misfortunes and sorrows suffered by mortals.²

As in the Old Testament story of Eve and the serpent, the Pandora myth blames a woman as the agent of mankind's woes. The similarity has elicited much religious and moral soul-searching about patriarchy and the relationship of the sexes in both ancient and modern cultures. Both stories pose profound philosophical questions about theodicy, the existence of evil, divine omniscience and entrapment and human autonomy, temptation, and free will.³ Yet there are significant differences in the traditions. In the Genesis tale, Eve was an afterthought, created to be a helpmeet for the lonely first man, Adam. The Creator willed Eve to life from Adam's rib and forbade the couple to eat a certain fruit, thus setting in motion a chain of events leading to mortals' original sin. In the Greek myth recounted by Hesiod and others, Pandora is a beguiling artifice deliberately designed by Zeus with gleeful malice toward the human race.

A crucial difference between Eve and Pandora is that Pandora was not summoned into existence but constructed, by the god of craftsmanship—the same god, Hephaestus, who built other ingenious automata, such as the bronze robot Talos, the self-moving tripods, and a staff of female helpers made of gold (chapter 7). Indeed, Pandora's "manufactured" nature is prominent in all versions of the Greek story, as many classical commentators have pointed out. Pandora's fabrication and her artificiality are also the focus of ancient artistic representations.⁴



FIG. 8.1. Hephaestus creating Pandora, a modern neoclassical gem commissioned by Prince Stanislas Poniatowski (1754–1833) to interpret the Pandora myth as described by Hesiod. Beazley Collection, photo courtesy of Claudia Wagner.

In the brief version in Hesiod's *Theogony* (507–616), Hephaestus, following Zeus's orders, molds the image of a nubile girl. He places on her

head a splendiferous crown of gold decorated with *daedala*, intricately worked miniature sea and land monsters so lifelike they seem to writhe and roar. The special crown is reminiscent of the Daedalic sound and light display that Hephaestus crafted on Achilles's marvelous shield, and the vivid artistic images that terrified Odysseus in the Underworld (chapters 7 and 5).⁵ Next, Athena dresses this unnamed maiden in a shimmering robe and veil and tucks spring flowers in her hair. Zeus's plot depends on the artificial girl's ethereal physical beauty and her luxurious adornments to "trick" mortals. When Zeus displays the completed Pandora to a gathering of gods and men, everyone is filled with awe (*thauma*). Their reaction—"seized with amazement"—parallels other ancient descriptions of the uncanny emotions evoked by encounters with miraculously realistic statues (chapter 5).⁶

The "manufactured maiden, gift of Zeus," is accepted by "foolish" Epimetheus, who eagerly welcomes her to his home. There is no mention of the jar filled with disasters, and Pandora is not named or called the first woman in the *Theogony*. Hesiod piles on heavy-handed misogyny. Pandora is presented as the prototype of idle, greedy women parasitic on men's labor and economic wealth, like queen bees sponging up nectar stored up by worker bees. Hesiod ends with a jeremiad on "the deadly race of females who live with mortal men" and bring them never-ending misery.

A different tone suffuses the longer, more dramatic episode in Hesiod's *Works and Days* (53–105). Again, Zeus is portrayed as a vindictive tyrant taking malicious pleasure in his plot to make humankind pay forever for the secret of fire. He laughs out loud as he orders Hephaestus to create an android in the form of a seductive virgin that will bring ruin to men even as her charms arouse lust and love. Hephaestus molds clay into the shape of a young woman with the unearthly splendor of an immortal goddess. Like Pygmalion's ivory virgin, "the manufactured Pandora" surpasses the beauty of any mortal woman ever born. Hesiod's descriptions make it clear that Pandora is not a real woman but a "constructed thing."⁷

Zeus instructs Hephaestus to give this bewitching female facsimile the power to move on its own, as well as humanlike strength and voice. Next, the Olympian divinities come forward to bestow unique gifts, capabilities, and personality traits, as commanded by Zeus. Athena teaches Pandora crafts and dresses her in dazzling clothing; the Graces

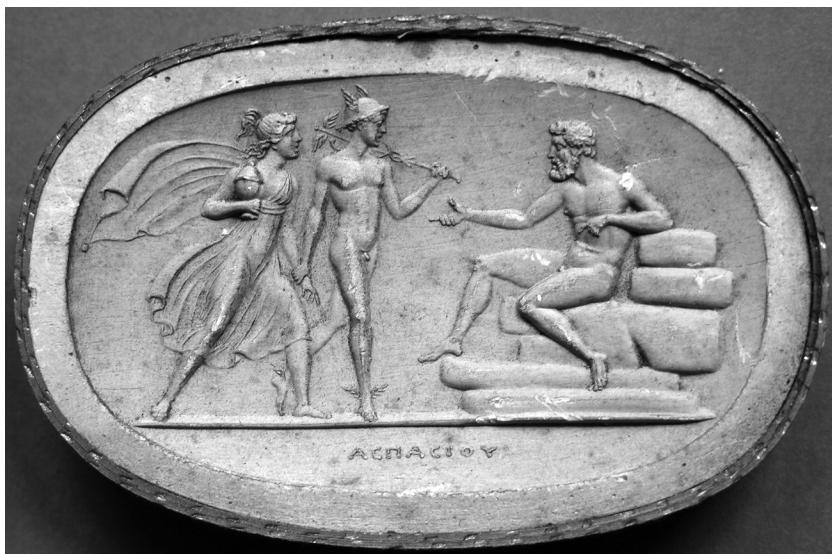


FIG. 8.2. Hermes presents Pandora to Epimetheus, a cast of a modern neoclassical gem commissioned by Prince Stanislas Poniatowski (1754–1833) to interpret the Pandora myth as described by Hesiod. Beazley Collection, photo courtesy of Claudia Wagner.

and Peitho give her charm and the power of persuasion, while Aphrodite fills her with irresistible sex appeal (Pandora arouses *pothos*, “painful desire and yearning”). Hermes, the trickster-messenger god of thieves and transgressions, gives Pandora a shameless, devious nature and deceitful words. It is Hermes who names her “Pandora, for all the gifts the gods had given her for the ruination of mankind.”⁸ The “trap is now complete,” writes Hesiod, and “the Father of Men and Gods sends Hermes to present the gift to Epimetheus.”

Epimetheus assumes Pandora is a real woman. Pandora calls to mind another myth about a cunning artifice that was a dangerous gift—the Trojan Horse. Some versions of the story of the Trojan Horse, built by the Greeks and presented to the Trojans as a ruse of war, suggest that it was sometimes imagined as an animated statue with articulated joints and eyes that moved realistically. It is striking that some tales also recounted ways to determine whether the magnificent horse was real or an artifice. The tests involved piercing its hide to see if it would bleed. But there was no clever riddle or mythic version of the Turing test to help mortals recognize “Artificial Intelligence” in antiquity.⁹ Heedless

of his brother's warning, writes Hesiod, Epimetheus "took the gift and understood too late."

As a being that was *made, not born*, Pandora is unnatural. A replicant with no past, Pandora is unaware of her origins and her purpose on earth. As a "marvelously animated statue" she exists outside the "natural cycles" of birth, "maturation, and decay." Even the gods, although ageless and undying, were born; they possess memory and have offspring. Like the perfect maiden Galatea molded by Pygmalion and the instantly adult replicants of the *Blade Runner* films, Pandora has no parents, no childhood, no history, no memories, no emotional depth, and no self-identity or soul. Though sometimes thought of as the "first woman," Pandora does not reproduce, age, or die.¹⁰

In terms of traditional creation beliefs, of course, "all mortals are Pandoras, that is, products of divine artifice."¹¹ But in the Greek mythic imagination, Pandora was visualized as different from a biological woman; she was a replica of a woman, "a lovely maiden-shape" of clay, made with the same substance and process that craftsmen used to make statues and other objects. Impersonating an adorable, accomplished girl of marriageable age, Pandora is endowed with a low sort of intelligence (Hermes gives her the "mind of a female dog" according to Hesiod, *Works and Days* 67). It is unclear whether Pandora has the ability to learn, choose, or act autonomously. Her only mission is to open the jar of all human misfortune.

An outstanding feature of Hesiod's poems is the similarity between Pandora's creation by Hephaestus and Homer's description of the self-moving, thinking, and talking female androids devised by Hephaestus in the *Iliad*, written around the same time as *Works and Days*. Inner workings or mechanics are not described in either case. But it is striking that Hesiod's language makes Pandora "essentially indistinguishable" from the golden automata described by Homer. Pandora "begins as inert matter—in this case not gold but clay"—and she becomes a "humanoid machine" endowed with mind, speech, and strength, knowledge of crafts from the gods, and the ability to initiate action.¹²



Ancient artistic illustrations of the Pandora myth center on her fabrication by Hephaestus and her attributes given by the gods. One example

is a Campanian amphora, attributed to the Owl Pillar Group, a circle of Etruscan artists who made clumsy but charming copies of Attic vases in the fifth century BC. On one side of the vase Zeus stands looking at Pandora's jar (fig. 8.11) while on the other side, Hephaestus leans on his hammer next to the half-complete Pandora.¹³

The Athenian vase in figure 8.3 (plate 12; about 450 BC) shows a bearded man labeled "Epimetheus" gazing in wonder at Pandora, who flirtatiously tosses her head back and holds up her arms. She is dressed in a bride's finery, but her demeanor is not that of a modest maiden. Their eyes meet and a small winged Eros (sexual desire) flies toward Epimetheus, reinforcing the sexual electricity between them. Behind them, two other figures lock eyes. Hermes—who gave Pandora all of her wicked qualities—turns to look back at Zeus. The two gods seem to be on the verge of smiling as they exchange a conspiratorial glance, reminding the viewer of the chain of trickery about to be played on the hapless Epimetheus and all humankind.¹⁴

A detail on this vase is puzzling: why does Epimetheus carry a hammer, the signature attribute of Hephaestus? Another vase, attributed to



FIG. 8.3 (PLATE 12). Epimetheus and Pandora, right; on left, Zeus and Hermes exchange a conspiratorial smile. AN1896-1908 G.275 attributed to the Group of Polygnotos, Attic red-figure pottery volute-krater, about 475–425 BC. Image © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.

the Polygnotus Group, shows the upper half of a female, apparently Pandora, flanked by satyrs with hammers. A similar scene appears on a fifth-century BC vase by the Penthesilea Painter, showing dancing satyr and Pan figures around the upper body of a maiden thought to be Pandora. A frieze of dancing satyrs also decorates the majestic vase illustrating Pandora's myth by the Niobid Painter, discussed below. Why the satyrs? Scholars suggest that these images might illustrate a lost satyr play titled *Pandora or The Hammerers* by Sophocles. Known only from fragments, the Athenian comedy featured a workshop scene in which a chorus of hammer-wielding satyrs assist Hephaestus in the making of Pandora.¹⁵

Another notable aspect of the two vases described above is that Pandora's body seems to be emerging from the ground. But Pandora is not a goddess of the Underworld or a chthonic (earthborn) figure. Instead, as some scholars conclude, the image of the upper half of Pandora is intended to indicate that she was molded from earth by Hephaestus's craft.¹⁶ This interpretation could be supported by similar imagery on the Etruscan gems in chapter 6, in which Prometheus is in the process of forming the first human from clay. The gem artists depict the first human as an upper body with a raised arm.



Other vase painters emphasize the rigid statue-like or doll-like appearance of Pandora, attended by active gods and goddesses. In these images, Pandora is in the process of being made and imbued with human attributes, but she is not yet animated or set in motion. A black-figure amphora attributed to the Diosphos Painter (525–475 BC) appears to be the most ancient representation of Pandora. This interpretation was proposed by Theodor Panofka in 1832, upon the first publication of the vase.

In figure 8.4 (plate 13), we see Zeus, standing with a small doll-like woman in his hands. He appears to be admiring Hephaestus's handiwork, while a goddess holds out wreaths to adorn her and Hermes steps to the right. The Diosphos Painter is known for his unusual iconography and the two inscriptions are nonsense words, which complicates the identification of the figures. Adolf Furtwangler proposed in 1885 that the small stiff figure could be Athena, who was born fully armed with helmet, spear, and shield from Zeus's head. But unlike other vase paintings of the birth



FIG. 8.4 (PLATE 13). Zeus holding Pandora, with goddess (Athena?) and Hermes. Attic black-figure amphora, Diosphos Painter, about 525–475 BC, F 1837. Bpk Bildagentur / Photo by Johannes Laurentius / Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen, Berlin / Art Resource, NY.

of Athena, this scene includes no helmet or weapons. The goddess presenting wreaths to the figurine appears to be Athena adorning Pandora, as in other vase paintings (see figs. 8.5 and 8.6). The presence of Hermes, Pandora's escort, is also significant. It seems likely that the vase depicts Pandora, as suggested by Panofka.¹⁷

Pandora's completion is clearly represented inside a large shallow bowl (about twelve inches across) by the Tarquinia Painter (470–465 BC, fig. 8.5), probably made for display as a temple dedication to Athena. Pandora's inscription, *Anesidora*, gives her alternative name, "She who releases gifts." Unfortunately, the black, brown, and purple painting on white ground is damaged, but one can see how Pandora stands passively like "an inanimate, created object" between the taller active gods, Athena and Hephaestus, who are putting the finishing touches on their creation.¹⁸ Posed as a "lifeless" mannequin with feet together and hands "hanging limply at her sides," Pandora head is turned toward Athena.¹⁹ Athena is



FIG. 8.5. Hephaestus (right) and Athena (left) placing finishing touches on Pandora (center), red-figure Attic cup from Nola, about 470–460 BC, Tarquinia Painter, inv. 1881,0528.1. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

fastening the shoulder of Pandora's gown and Hephaestus is placing a crown on her head (his trusty hammer is in his left hand). The scene replicates the way statues were offered gifts, dressed in finery, and adorned with jewelry in antiquity.²⁰



The image of Pandora is even more striking on a superb, oversized krater, more than a foot tall, by the Niobid Painter (about 460 BC, figs. 8.6 and 8.7, plate 14). Pandora's stiff posture and facial expression reinforce her artificial status and her fatal attraction. She stands within a V created by spears, and the V shape is repeated in the decorative top border of the vase. That border has a rare motif pattern that resembles a set of craftsman's tools, tongs like those used by Hephaestus and blacksmiths in other vase paintings (see figs 7.4 and 7.5). This uniquely appropriate

detail reinforces the idea that Pandora was *made, not born*. The same tool motif also appears prominently in the border around the top of the great vase of about 440 BC that depicts the death of the bronze robot Talos—who was also crafted by Hephaestus (see fig 1.3).²¹

In the Niobid Painter's vase scene, Pandora stands like a motionless wooden *xoanon* idol or a marble statue with her arms at her sides, looking straight ahead. The vase scholar H. A. Shapiro likens her to a “wind-up doll” waiting to be wound up. There is a flurry of activity around Pandora. Athena approaches from one side holding out a wreath, with Poseidon, Zeus, and Iris lined up behind her. On Pandora’s other side we see Ares, Hermes, and Hera (or Aphrodite). The lineup includes some gods not



FIG. 8.6. Pandora admired by gods and goddesses, on the magnificent red-figure calyx krater, by the Niobid Painter, about 460 BC, inv. 1856,1213.1. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

mentioned by Hesiod as contributors to Pandora's manufacture. Moreover, the gods appear to be talking among themselves and reacting to Pandora, instead of presenting endowments. The scene probably illustrates the later passage in Hesiod, "when Zeus shows off his new plaything to the Olympian gods before inflicting her on mankind."²²

Pandora stares straight ahead. In conventional vase painting iconography, the faces of gods, people, and animals are almost always shown in profile or three-quarter views; views of human faces from the front are very rare. In Greek art, a full-frontal face indicates a kind of mindlessness, used for dead or nonliving figures and especially for masks and statues. Frontal views can also suggest a mesmerizing gaze. Notably, the Niobid Painter, known for his elegantly simple classical style, employs frontal faces for dead and dying figures in two of his other famous vases, the Geta Krater, showing Greeks killing Amazons, and his name vase, showing the massacre of Niobe's children.²³ In the arresting frieze illustrating the Pandora myth, both effects—a blank mind and a compelling stare—seem to be intended by Pandora's forward-facing stance.

The scene holds yet another remarkable element. Facial expressions showing emotion, such as grimaces, frowns, or smiles, are also very rare in Greek vase paintings. People's faces in vase paintings are usually impassive, with emotions indicated by gestures or posture.²⁴ But this exceptional Pandora not only faces forward, gazing out at the beholder; she is smiling. What message does her smile send? A broad smile strikes one as inappropriate for a virginal bride—but recall that Hesiod described Pandora as a shameless and seductive animated statue. Pandora's unexpected expression could remind ancient observers of the face of a *kore*, a life-size painted marble statue of a young, draped maiden typical of the archaic period (600–480 BC). The lips of a *kore* statue (and those of her counterpart, a nude male *kouros*) invariably curve up in a curiously mirthless smile.

The same incongruous smile appears on the implacable faces of archaic marble statues depicted in scenes of violence.²⁵ The preternaturally serene—some would say vacuous—expression on archaic statues is known by art historians as “the archaic smile.” With her statue-like stance and that faintly creepy smile, the Niobid Painter underscores Pandora's manufactured origin and portrays her as an automaton at the moment of her animation.

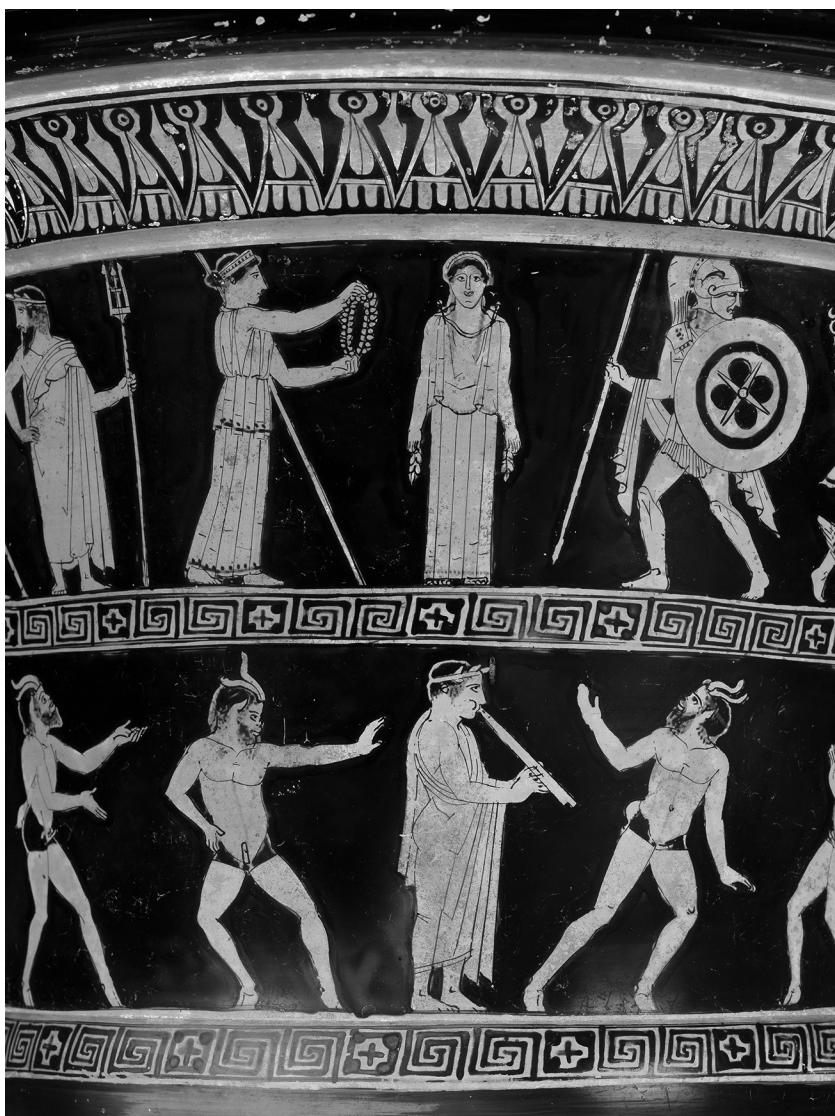


FIG. 8.7 (PLATE 14). Detail, Pandora admired by gods and goddesses, on the red-figure calyx krater by the Niobid Painter, about 460 BC, inv. 1856,1213.1. © The Trustees of the British Museum.



FIG. 8.8. Kore statue with enigmatic “archaic smiles.” Left, the Peplos Kore, painted marble, about 530 BC, Acropolis Museum, Athens, HIP / Art Resource, NY. Top right, head of the Peplos Kore, photo by Xuan Che, 2011. Bottom right, marble Kore head, sixth century BC, Musées Royaux d’Art et d’Histoire, Brussels. Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY.

The scene on this magnificent vase—with the unusual “special effect” of the artificial young woman staring fixedly out at the viewer wearing a disconcerting smile—must have had a strong impact on viewers more than twenty-four hundred years ago. The smiling automata would intensify an Uncanny Valley response.

This image of a leering Pandora resonates with a modern cinematic sister of Pandora, the evil, smirking automaton Maria in the brilliant silent film *Metropolis* of 1927. Widely recognized as one of the most influential science-fiction films in cinema history, the director Fritz Lang’s tour de force features grim expressionist cityscapes and special-effects technology staggering for the 1920s and still stunning today. *Metropolis* envisions a future dystopia ruled by the rich, who dominate the impoverished masses with demonic machines.²⁶ The publicity photos showing the robot Maria with her makers and the actress being prepared for her scene have startling similarities to the ancient vases depicting Pandora being groomed by the gods before her big scene on earth.

Filmed only seven years after the word *robot* entered the popular lexicon, *Metropolis* stars an erotic femme fatale robot deliberately created to wreak havoc in the world. The film, made as the pace of machine technology and industrialization was escalating in Europe and America, shows how swiftly the novel ideas of robots and the merging of humans and machines captured the popular imagination. Critics note that the film’s story line is riddled with illogical twists. But so is the ancient myth of Pandora. Yet, as with the other ancient tales of artificial life gathered in this book, the message is clear. With each new generation, the age-old opposition of human versus machine continues to exert an edgy push-pull response, trepidation commingled with fascination and awe.

In the Greek myth, Pandora’s deceptive appearance as a “tender maiden” is designed to delight and seduce men while bringing them endless suffering. In *Metropolis* a sweet young woman (Maria, played by a seventeen-year-old actress) is transformed into a sexualized robot-vamp designed to bring chaos and disaster. In a spectacularly filmed sequence of futuristic technology involving crypto-chemistry and pulsating rings of “electrical fluid,” the robot’s metallic form is animated by draining the life force of the innocent young woman encased inside. The “electrical fluid” recalls the ichor of Talos (chapter 1) and the electricity that animates Frankenstein’s monster (chapter 6).²⁷

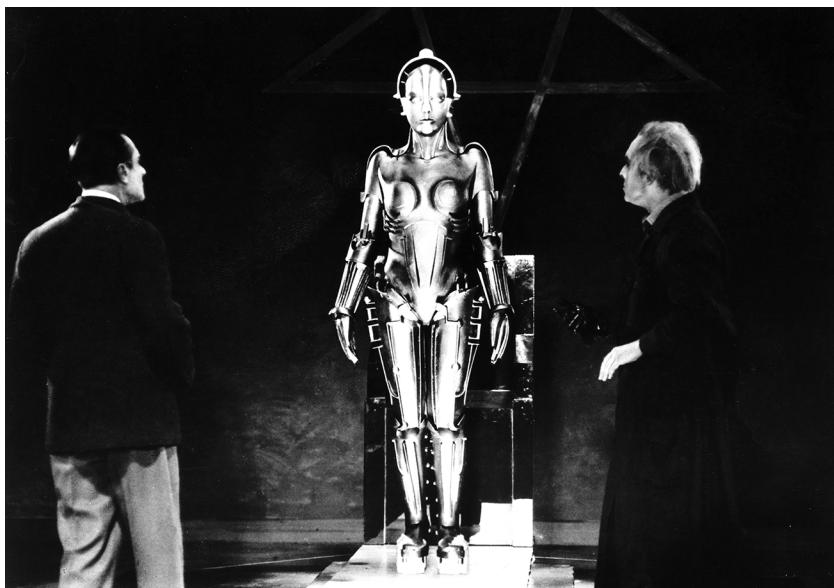


FIG. 8.9. The evil *Maschinenmensch* (machine-human) Maria with her makers, in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927). Production still courtesy of metropolis1927.com. Scene from *Metropolis* film, Adoc-photos / Art Resource, NY.

In the film, Maria's diabolical robotic doppelgänger is characterized by her hypnotic, "slow, irresistible movements" and an inhuman "basilisk motion of the head." Like the strangely grinning automaton Pandora on the vase by the Niobid Painter, the artificial Maria's "haunting loveliness" is accompanied by a "weird, incomprehensible smile."²⁸



Other paintings by the innovative Niobid Painter are believed to have been influenced by wall paintings in classical Athens. Was his scene of Pandora also based on a painting of similar composition in the city? That is unknown. But we do know that Pandora's creation by Hephaestus was of such importance in Athens that it was displayed in a key location on the Acropolis. A similar "lineup" of gods and goddesses on either side of Pandora appeared in relief on the massive pedestal of the colossal gold and ivory statue of Athena inside the Parthenon.²⁹ This masterpiece was the work of the famed sculptor Phidias in 447–430 BC. According



FIG. 8.10. Interesting coincidences in the ancient and modern portrayals of an evil female robot. Top left, Pandora as a stiff automaton being prepared by the gods for her mission on earth (Niobid Vase, fifth century BC) and the actress being groomed for her role as the robot Maria in the film *Metropolis* (1927). Right, Pandora and Maria robot. Bottom, the transformation of Maria into a robotic winking and smirking double. Last image, Hope/Elpis with crooked smile, sixth century BC. Photo collage by Michele Angel.

to Pliny (36.4), writing in the first century AD, the scene on the base depicted Pandora attended by twenty gods and goddesses, who would have been nearly life-size.

A century later Pausanias (1.24.5–7) also admired the imposing statue of Athena and the scene of Pandora's creation on the Acropolis. The original colossus and base are lost, but one can begin to visualize them based on a large marble copy of the base made in about 200 BC, found in 1880 in the ruins of Pergamon (Turkey). A small marble Roman replica of the statue and the base (first century AD) also came to light on the Athenian Acropolis in 1859. These artifacts make it “clear that Pandora was shown as a statue-like figure,” created and adorned by Hephaestus and Athena, who were venerated together in Athens as the patrons of arts and craft.³⁰

Further evidence of the scene's popularity in Athens was discovered in the Athenian Agora. Since 1986, fragments have been excavated there of another public image of the creation of Pandora attended by divinities on a marble relief. Among the figures found so far are Hephaestus and Zeus. The archaeologists have also unearthed the marble head of a woman. Who is she? One clue is her oddly disconcerting smile—but her identity, revealed below, is surprising.³¹



In the myth, Pandora was escorted to earth by Hermes and presented to Epimetheus as his bride. Zeus knew that Prometheus's brother lacked foresight and good judgment, making him the perfect patsy. Pandora's "dowry" was a sealed *pithos*, a large jar used for storage. Hesiod calls the *pithos* "unbreakable," an adjective usually applied to metal, so the jar was probably originally imagined as bronze. It seems that *pithos* was mistranslated as *pyxis* (box) in the sixteenth century, and since then the image of Pandora's box persists in the popular imagination. No ancient artworks show Pandora with the jar of troubles or actually opening the *pithos* and reeling back in horror, but those scenes are favored in more than a hundred medieval and modern retellings in poems, novels, operas, ballets, drawings, sculptures, paintings, and other artworks. The series of neoclassical sculpted reliefs and drawings by John Flaxman (1775–1826) illustrating vignettes from Hesiod's Pandora were immensely popular at the end of the eighteenth century, when the antiquarian carved gems in figs 8.1 and 8.2 were also created.³²

The contents of the forbidden *pithos*, all the misfortunes that afflict the mortal world, were unknown to Pandora. But Zeus was counting on her to open the jar, releasing disease, pestilence, endless labor, poverty, grief, old age, and other dire torments on humanity forever.³³ Pandora's jar of evils seems to be related to the passage in Homer's *Iliad* (24.527–28) describing two fateful jars kept by Zeus. One urn is filled with blessings, the other with misfortune, and the contents were randomly mingled and showered upon humans by Zeus. Presumably, it is Zeus's *pithos* of misery and evil that accompanies Pandora. She "serves as his agent for opening the jar."³⁴

In the myth recounted by Hesiod (*Works and Days* 90–99), once in Epimetheus's house, Pandora lifts the lid of the great *pithos*, and

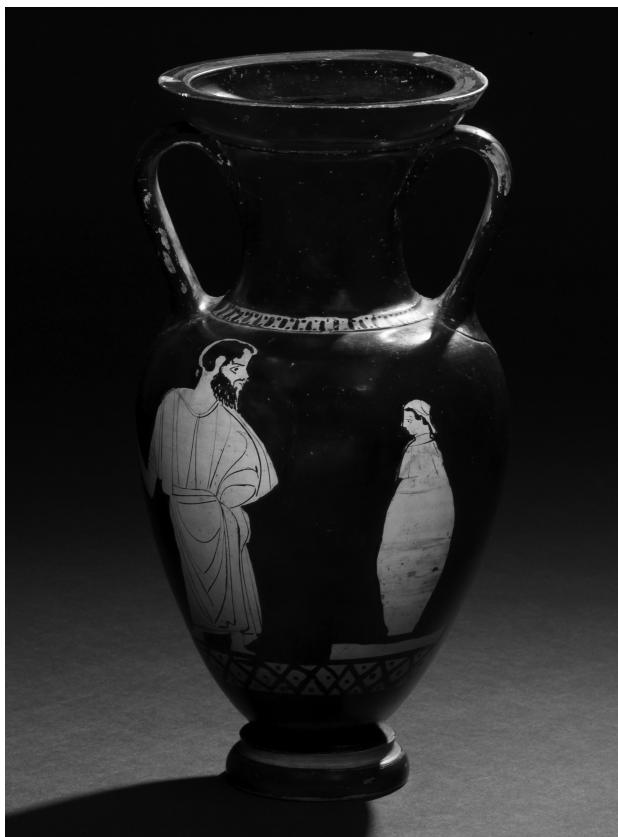


FIG. 8.11. Zeus contemplates Hope/Elpis peeping out of Pandora's jar. Red-figure amphora from Basilicata, fifth century BC, inv. 1865,0103. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

the evils swarm out. When the lid is slammed down—by Pandora's hand but by Zeus's design—one spirit is trapped inside. This is *Elpis*, "Hope." The meaning of this crucial detail has been intensely debated since antiquity.

In antiquity, Elpis/Hope was personified as a young woman. In "The Girl in the *Pithos*" (2005), classical archaeologist Jenifer Neils identifies three ancient artifacts that represent Elpis in Pandora's jar. The first was, until 2005, the only known image of Elpis. It appears on the Owl Pillar Etruscan amphora mentioned above, with one side depicting Hephaestus and the half-completed Pandora, the beginning of the myth. The other side of that vase illustrates how the story ends (fig. 8.11).



FIG. 8.12. Grinning Hope/Elpis peeking out of Pandora's jar. Aryballos (perfume flask), ceramic, sixth century BC, Thebes, Boeotia, Greece. Henry Lillie Pierce Fund, 01.8056. Photograph © 2018 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

A bearded Zeus contemplates a large *pithos* with a small girl peeping out of the jar. She is Elpis/Hope, confined in the *pithos* by Zeus's order. This intriguing vase surely copied a more sophisticated Attic vase now lost, notes Neils. The Etruscan artist "juxtaposes two analogous scenes." In each vignette, a male divinity "contemplates female evil."³⁵

The second artifact is a small terra-cotta *aryballos* (perfume flask) from Boeotia, a region north of Athens, made in about 625–600 BC. It is shaped like a *pithos* with the sculpted head of a young woman at the top as though popping up out of the jar (fig. 8.12). The opening of the flask is made to look like the lid of the jar. We can assume, with Neils,

that the potter was inspired by his fellow Boeotian Hesiod's description of Elpis/Hope in *Works and Days*, written some years earlier, in about 700 BC. The *aryballos* held perfume, remarks Neils, a substance, like Pandora's charms, that was considered a seductive snare for men, suggesting a humorous or ironic spin on the myth.³⁶

There is plenty of evidence that the sophisticated ancient Greeks appreciated both tragedy and comedy in Pandora's story. Sophocles's lost satyr play and the vases juxtaposing satyrs with Pandora are some examples of a lighthearted approach. Hesiod says Zeus laughed while devising his trick on man, and amusement is implied on the vase showing Zeus and Hermes enjoying the joke on Epimetheus (fig. 8.3, plate 12). The Niobid Painter's vase continues the sardonic theme with a broadly smiling Pandora (fig. 8.7, plate 14). Take a closer look at the young woman popping out of the little perfume jar in fig. 8.12. She wears an ironic lopsided grin, a sly smirk.³⁷

The third likely image of Elpis/Hope was found among the fragments of the fifth-century BC high-relief panel discovered in the Athenian Agora, mentioned earlier. Archaeologist Evelyn Harrison identified the frieze as an illustration of the Pandora myth. Along with the marble figures of Hephaestus and Zeus, archaeologists found a female head with a "strange, slightly wicked expression," an asymmetrical smile. But, to answer the question posed above, she is not Pandora—the disembodied head is larger than the heads of the figures of the gods and it is flat on top. Neils proposes that this head belonged to a figure of Elpis/Hope peeping out of a large *pithos*. "Facial expressions are extremely rare in Greek art," comments Neils, "but a smirk seems a particularly apt way to characterize the personification of false hope."³⁸



Was Elpis/Hope a blessing or an evil? The mythic traditions about Pandora are labyrinthine; several aspects of the story as it survives in ancient literature and art strain logic.³⁹ In particular, the vexing question of why Hope remained in the jar has bedeviled commentators ever since the myth was first told. The enigmatic smiles of Pandora and Elpis seem to mock attempts to untangle the puzzle.

Hesiod is ambiguous: Is Hope one of the troubles in the pack of evils dispersed in the world? Or is Hope humans' only solace now that their

world is so troubled? The modern fairy-tale version of the myth casts Hope as a merciful spirit that remained behind to comfort humans or a blessing bestowed by Zeus to compensate for the evils. But keep in mind that the ancient Greeks generally considered Hope to be negative or misleading, as is evident in the common epithet “blind hope.” Notably, Hesiod (*Works and Days* 498, 500) calls Elpis/Hope “empty” and “bad.” In the *Iliad* (2.227) Athena plants false hope in the mind of the doomed Trojan hero Hector before he is killed in the duel with Achilles. The fifth-century BC poet Pindar (frag. 214) says Elpis/Hope “rules man’s ever-changeable mind.” Aristotle is not much help: he defines *elpis* as the “future-directed counterpart of memory,” connoting the ability to anticipate good or evil consequences.⁴⁰

In the fifth-century BC Athenian tragedy *Prometheus Bound* (128–284), Prometheus confesses that he gave mortals another gift along with fire: he deprived them of the ability to “foresee their doom (*moros*)” by “causing blind hopes (*elpides*) to live in their hearts,” so that they will persevere. The play only intensifies the philosophical questions surrounding the existential meaning of hope. It seems that in the new, harsher world of the present, humans have come to resemble Prometheus’s brother Epimetheus, lacking the ability to see what lies ahead. Is such an illusion a boon or a curse?⁴¹

The ambiguity of Hope’s meaning in antiquity compounds the enigma of Pandora’s *pithos*. In the murk of the myth as it has come down to us, we can set out the following seemingly contradictory options: The contents of the jar are evil, and they are activated by being released to bring harm to humans. Hope is not let out: either it is an evil that harms humans like the other things in the jar, or it is unlike the evil things in the jar and is good for us. So hope is either activated, like the other evils, despite being kept in the jar, or hope is not activated because confined inside the jar.

Four possible scenarios can be posed: (1) Hope is *good*, despite being in the jar of evils, and *activated* by Zeus to offset evils; (2) Hope is *good* but is trapped inside the jar by Zeus, therefore further harming humans; (3) Hope is one of the *evils* in the jar and *activated*, despite being trapped in the jar, and is meant to torment humans with wishful thinking and illusion; (4) Hope is *evil* but *not activated*; it is trapped by Zeus in order to spare humans from false hopes.⁴²

The mystery of Elpis/Hope trapped in the jar of evils resists resolution. The best interpretation may be that Hope is neither all good or all bad, nor is she neutral. Hope is a uniquely human emotion. Like the artificial woman Pandora, Elpis/Hope represents a *kalon kakon*, beautiful evil, a seductive snare, beckoning irresistibly while hiding inherent and potential disasters.

This dilemma was devised more than two millennia ago in the context of artificial life created by an ingenious inventor with surpassingly superior biotechnology; its ambiguity could not be more pointed for our own era.⁴³ Who can resist opening Pandora's box of tantalizing "gifts," marvelous science and technology that promise to improve human life? Like Epimetheus, oblivious to the moral and social dangers lurking within, ignoring the warnings of the lone Promethean voices among us, we rush headlong into a future of humanoid robots, brain-computer interfaces, magnified powers, unnaturally enhanced life, animated thinking things, virtual reality, and Artificial Intelligence. We blunder on, hoping for the best.



Two millennia before Isaac Asimov conceived of the Laws of Robotics (1942), the ancient Greek mythologists imagined animated statues set in motion and imprinted with specific missions to help or harm. Asimov's original three laws specified that (1) *a robot may not injure a human being*; (2) *a robot must obey orders given by humans unless this would cause harm to a human*; and (3) *a robot must protect itself unless this conflicts with laws 1 and 2*. As we've seen, Hephaestus surrounded himself with benign automata and self-moving tripods to make his life easier, and he gave the world happy marvels such as the singing maiden statues at Delphi. But Hephaestus was capable of manufacturing harmful artifices too, beginning mildly with the throne that trapped his mother, Hera, and culminating in Pandora, his crowning and awful achievement commissioned by the all-powerful Zeus. In myth, Talos the bronze robot, the dragon-teeth army, the mechanical eagle, the fire-breathing bulls—all were deliberately intended to injure humans, breaking Asimov's first law.⁴⁴

Pandora certainly flouts rule number 1. But the scale of her devastation is so vast—the ruination of all humankind, as plotted by the tyrant

Zeus—that Asimov’s fourth law applies. Pandora breaks the so-called Zeroth Law, which Asimov added later: *a robot shall not harm humanity*. Pandora also violates law 23 of the 2017 Asilomar principles: *Artificial Intelligence should benefit all humanity* (chapter 7).

One cannot help noticing that all of the automata used to inflict pain and death in ancient mythology belonged to tyrannical rulers, from King Minos of Crete and King Aeetes of Colchis to Zeus, the Father of Gods and Men, who chuckles in anticipation of his cruel “trap” for humans. It is a striking fact that the autocratic fascination with animated statues designed to inflict torture and death was not confined to ancient myth. Malevolent machines existed in reality—in historical times—and were used by living tyrants of the ancient world. The next chapter surveys actual automata and self-moving devices—some designed to harm and others created for benign purposes—described in literature, history, legend, and art beginning as early as the fifth century BC.