

Hesiod, *Works and Days*

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- didactic poem (*didasko* = teach) – 1st person speaker
- a practical guide to living and prospering in the Ancient Greek world
- morality and the practice of morality

Works and Days

- Works -> instruction on agricultural tasks
- Days -> instruction on days of the month that are favourable or unfavourable for different purposes.
- But much more to it than that. “Wisdom of Hesiod”

The Structure of WD

- Extensive moral preamble

1–10 Invocation of the Muses

11–46 The dispute with Perses: strife

47–89 Prometheus and Pandora [first aition]

90–201 The Races of Men [second aition]

. . . including the hawk and nightingale fable

202–85 The Kings, Perses, Justice (Dike) and Force (Bia)

286–380 Advice to Perses (work, property, thrift)

- Moral presuppositions reappear throughout the rest of the poem

381–617 The works (tasks [and seasons])

618–94 Sailing

694–764 Domestic advice (wife, sanitation, house, etc.)

765–end The days (of the month)

The Big Bad Strife in *Theogony*

Hateful Strife bore painful Toil, Neglect, Starvation, and
tearful Pain, Battles, Combats, Bloodshed and Slaughter,
Quarrels, Lies, Pretences, and Arguments, Disorder,
Disaster—neighbours to each other— and Oath, who most
harms men on earth, when someone knowingly swears
false

Theogony 226–32

The Two Strifes in *Works and Days*

I see there is not only one Strife-brood on earth, there are **two**. One would be commended when perceived, the other is reprehensible, and their tempers are distinct. **The one promotes ugly fighting and conflict, the brute: no mortal is fond of her**, but they are forced by the gods' designs to do homage to Strife the burdensome. But the other was elder born of gloomy Night, **and the son of Kronos**, the high-seated one who dwells in heaven, **set her in the earth's roots, much the better for men**. She rouses even the shiftless to work. For when someone whose work falls short looks towards another, towards a rich man who hastens to plough and plant and manage the household well, then neighbour vies with neighbour as he hastens to wealth: **this Strife is good for mortals**.

WD 11–24

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WD 11–24

- Another side of Greek theological poetry?
- Gods as symbols of *things as they are (Theogony)* and *things as they could be (Works and Days)*.

Perses, lay this down in your heart, and may the Strife who exults in misfortune not keep your heart from work, a spectator of disputes, a listener at the debate. Little business has a man with disputes and debates who has not food for the year laid up at home in his ripeness, produce of the earth, Demeter's grain. When you have got an abundance of that you can promote disputes and conflict over other men's property. But you will not be able to behave so another time. Instead without more trouble, let us settle our dispute with straight judgements, the best that Zeus sends. **For we divided our estate before, and you kept grabbing and taking much more, praying great tribute to the lords, those bribe swallows, who see fit to make this their judgement. The infants**, they do not know how much more the half is than the whole, nor how much good there is in mallow and asphodel.

WD 27-41.

- The poem plays off the highly individualized speaker against the highly generalized content
- Homeric vs. Hesiodic values

Why do men toil to make a living?

- It's all *her* fault! cf. expulsion from the garden of Eden



Prometheus and Pandora – 1st aition

Works and Days

Zeus hid fire because Prometheus had cheated him (48-50).

Prometheus stole it back.

Zeus, furious, promised man some evil in return, an evil they will cherish (57-9).

Zeus had Hephaistos make a woman. All the gods gave some gift to this creation - hence her name Pandora (60-82). Epimetheus accepted her in spite of Prometheus' earlier warnings about Zeus' gifts (83-9).

Before there was no evil, no labour, no disease. But she took the top off the jar and released all of these, trapping only hope inside. Now the world is full of evils (90-104).

There is no way to avoid what Zeus plans (105).

Theogony

(account of Prometheus' scheme and initiation of sacrifice missing from *WD*)

Zeus, enraged against Prometheus withheld fire from mankind, but Prometheus stole some fire and delivered it to man (562-70).

In revenge, Zeus and Hephaistos created a woman. Athena clothed her and Hephaistos made her beautiful jewellery (571-84). Both men and women were amazed at her charm (585-9).

From her was born the cursed race of women, who live by the labour of men (571-602).

Zeus cannot be tricked (614-6).

Pandora, the beautiful evil

Works and Days

- fair lovely form of a maiden (63), likeness of a modest maiden (71)
- painful yearning and consuming obsession (66)
- a bitch's mind and a knavish nature (67), lies and wily pretenses and knavish nature (78)
- a calamity for men who live by bread (82)

Theogony

- Likeness of a modest maiden (572), a wonder to behold (575)
- An affliction for mankind (570), a precipitous trap, more than mankind can manage (589)

Pandora and the race of women in *Theogony*

For from her is descended the female sex, a great affliction to mortals as they dwell with their husbands—no fit partners for accursed Poverty, but only for Plenty. **As the bees in their sheltered nests feed the drones**, those conspirators in badness, and while they busy themselves all day and every day till sundown making the honeycomb, the drones stay inside in the sheltered cells and pile the toil of others into their own bellies, **even so as a bane for mortal men has high-thundering Zeus created women**, conspirators in causing difficulty. [...] Thus, there is no way of deceiving or evading the mind of Zeus.

Theogony, 590-613

Semonides of Amorgos and the race of women

- Women likened to animals according to their characteristics (physical and moral)

pig = dirty

fox = cunning

dog = high maintenance and curious

donkey = stubborn

mare = overly proud

monkey = the worst, ugliest type

- Only the bee woman, who is dismissed as an impossible ideal is regarded as virtuous!

Semonides of Amorgos and the race of women

Another type is from a bee. Good luck in finding such a woman! Only she deserves to be exempt from stinging blame. The household that she manages will thrive; a loving wife beside her loving man, she'll grow old, having borne illustrious and handsome children; she herself shines bright among all women. Grace envelops her. She doesn't like to sit with other women discussing sex. Zeus gratifies mankind with these most excellent and thoughtful wives. But by the grim contrivances of Zeus all these other types are here to stay side by side with man forever. Yes, Zeus made this the greatest pain of all: Woman.

Pandora and the aetiology of scarcity in *Works and Days*

For **the gods keep men's food concealed** (*WD* 42)

But Zeus concealed it, angry because Prometheus' crooked cunning had tricked him. On that account he devised grim cares for mankind; he concealed fire. The noble son of Iapetos stole it back for men . . . (*WD* 47–51)

“To set against the fire I shall give them an affliction with which they will all delight as they embrace their own misfortunes”. So saying the father of gods and men laughed aloud...(*WD* 57–8)

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- Men must toil in order to sustain themselves.
- Human life is full of countless invisible and unpredictable evils because of the first woman.
- Both are the results of Zeus' intentions and are henceforth inescapable for mankind.

Woman and Hope – the ultimate “beautiful evil”

For formerly the tribes of men on earth lived remote from ills, without harsh toil and the grievous sicknesses that are deadly to men. **But the woman unstopped the jar and let it all out, and brought grim cares upon mankind. Only Hope remained there inside her secure dwelling, under the lip of the jar, and did not fly out, because the woman put the lid back in time by the providence of Zeus the cloud-gatherer who bears the aegis.** But for the rest, countless troubles roam the earth, and fill the sea. Sicknesses visit men by day, and others by night, uninvited, bringing ill to mortals, **silently, because Zeus the resourceful deprived them of voice.** Thus there is no way to evade the purpose of Zeus.

WD 90-105

Pandora, Hope and humanity

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- Hope as ambiguous as Pandora herself: she promises and seduces, but all too rarely delivers.

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- ⇒ mankind is permanently unable to escape its human condition, a **condition founded on the institutions of sacrifice, agriculture, and marriage, and predicated on Hope.**
- ⇒ No wonder Zeus laughs out loud!

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- In both versions, Zeus's ultimate weapon is the Woman, fabricated to render the human lot inescapable.
- Only from combining both perspectives does the full pathos of the human condition emerge.

The races of men – 2nd edition

- Golden
- Silver
- Bronze
- Heroes
- Race of iron (here and now)

Progressive deterioration (or cyclical movement?)

Apocalypse

Soon they will cease to respect their ageing parents, and will rail at them with harsh words, the ruffians, in ignorance of the gods' punishment; nor are they likely to repay their ageing parents for their nurture. Fist-law men; one will sack another's town, and there will be no thanks for the man who abides by his oath or for the righteous or worthy man, but instead they will honour the miscreant and the criminal. Law and decency will be in fists. The villain will do his better down by telling crooked tales and will swear his oath upon it. Men in their misery will everywhere be dogged by the evil commotions of that Envy who exults in misfortune with a face full of hate. **And then Aidos and Nemesis, with their sweet forms wrapped in white robes, will go from the wide-pathed earth and forsake mankind to join the company of the deathless gods: and bitter sorrows will be left for mortal men, and there will be no help against evil.**

WD 185-201

The fable of the hawk and the nightingale

And now I will tell a fable for princes who themselves understand. Thus said the hawk to the nightingale with speckled neck, while he carried her high up among the clouds, gripped fast in his talons and she, pierced by his crooked talons, cried pitifully. To her he spoke disdainfully: **“Miserable thing, why do you cry out? One far stronger than you now holds you fast, and you must go wherever I take you,** songstress as you are. And if I please, I will make my meal of you, or let you go. **He is a fool who tries to withstand the stronger,** for he does not get the mastery and suffers pain besides his shame.” So said the swiftly flying hawk, the long-winged bird.

WD 202-12

Right is might?

- **But you, Perses, listen to right and do not foster violence;** for violence is bad for a poor man. Even the prosperous cannot easily bear its burden, but is weighed down under it when he has fallen into delusion. **The road on the other side gives better passage, to righteousness; for Right gets the upper hand over Violence in the end** (213-9).
- But for those who occupy themselves with violence and wickedness and brutal deeds, **Kronos' son, wide-seeing Zeus, marks out retribution** (236-7).
- And there is that maiden Right, daughter of Zeus, esteemed and respected by the gods in Olympus; and whenever someone does her down with crooked abuse, at once she sits by Zeus her father, Kronos' son, and reports the men's unrighteous mind, so that the people may pay for the crimes of their lords who balefully divert justice from its course by pronouncing it crooked. **Beware of this, lords, and keep your pronouncements straight,** you bribe-swallowers, and forget your crooked judgements altogether (256-64).

Justice as a human creation

But you, Perses, must take in what I say and hearken to Right, forgetting force altogether. For this was the rule for men that Kronos' son laid down: **whereas fish and beasts and flying birds would eat one another, because Right is not among them, to men he gave Right, which is much the best in practice.** For if a man is willing to say what he knows to be just, to him wide-seeing Zeus gives prosperity. *WD 274-81.*

- Natural world – things as they are – gratification of the desire of the powerful

VS

- Human universe – things as they could be – ruled by justice under the surveillance of Zeus

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=> the *Works and Days* offers a partnership between Hesiod and Zeus. Zeus is to watch and punish the unjust kings while Hesiod will instruct Perses in the ways of the world.

Introductory section

male,

work,

Zeus,

justice,

poetry,

the interests of the victims

female,

idleness,

the gods of traditional
theology,

crime,

the crooked language of
power

the interests of the
powerful

What follows is advice on how to live in this world

- Focus on the pair word/idleness
- Injunctions to Perses to focus his energies and ensure his survival
- Value of knowledge over experience
- Bard as mouthpiece for the traditional wisdom is asserting his power and establishing the validity of that power
- short, proverbial or gnomic utterances, often abrupt and primitive
- accurate account of the life of an agricultural community?
Hesiod's calendar corresponds to the realities of farming in pre-classical Greece

What follows is advice on how to live in this world

- advice on picking a wife (695-705):

Bring home a wife to your house when you are of the right age, while you are not far short of thirty years nor much above; this is the right age for marriage. Let your wife have been grown up four years, and marry her in the fifth. Marry a virgin, so that you can teach her careful ways, and especially marry one who lives near you, but look well about you and see that your marriage will not be a joke to your neighbors. For a man wins nothing better than a good wife, and, again, nothing worse than a bad one, a greedy soul who roasts her man without fire, strong though he may be, and brings him to a raw old age.

- friendship, savoir vivre, fertility and urination (!) (706-64)
- astrology: lucky and unlucky days (765-828)

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➤ **easier to live in a world that is shaped by this information:
possibility of adapting our actions to arbitrary fluctuations by
means of this privileged information**