



HESIOD

*Theogony,  
Works and Days,  
Shield*

Translation, Introduction, and Notes  
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SECOND EDITION

The Johns Hopkins University Press : Baltimore and London

# The *Works and Days*

The *Works and Days* is a fairly long didactic poem composed in dactylic hexameter, the meter of the Homeric epics. However, its subject matter is such that to call it an epic is to apply to it a misnomer that may force upon the poem wholly inappropriate standards for gauging its merits. It should also be said that putting into verse material that hardly lends itself to poetry was dictated by the absence of an alternative. Greek prose had not been developed yet, and, besides, verse could be committed to memory much more easily. Therefore, it would be wrong to charge Hesiod with ineptitude even if long stretches of the *Works and Days* fail to reward the reader with that quintessential elation that is expected of good poetry.

When contemplating a literary composition of the antiquity of the *Works and Days*, one is confronted with the baffling problem of sources. The only thing that can be said with some certainty is that what Hesiod himself did not invent must have come to him from other oral poets and from the traditional wisdom lore of his native Boeotia. With the exception of the myth of the five ages, analogues from Near Eastern literature are at best instructive and furnish no secure evidence for direct borrowing. Even where similarities exist, they are by no means proof of borrowing. I find striking similarities between the *Hávamál*, a poem of the Poetic Edda, and portions of the *Works and Days*. Yet, the poet or poets of the *Hávamál* owe nothing to Hesiod. In this case, however, a cautious attribution of similarities to inherited Indo-European elements is, at least *prima facie*, justified.

Other didactic poems, such as the *Great Works*, the *Precepts of Chiron*, and the *Astronomy*, were attributed to Hesiod. We know too little about these works to decide whether they were Hesiodic. Chances are that they were no more Hesiodic than the Homeric Hymns are Homeric. We can be sure that, much like Homer, as a composer of didactic poems Hesiod stands at the apex and not at the beginning of the development of this genre. Of those who fol-

lowed after him, Phocylides and, to a greater extent, Theognis deserve mention, but they were concerned only with morals and not with practical matters. The combination of practical and moral aspects of human life on a rather ambitious, if not comprehensive, scale makes the *Works and Days* a sort of prototype without a successful rival in Greek literature.

We know very little about conditions in eighth- and seventh-century Boeotia. It seems that Hesiod's compatriots at this time were mostly farmers ruled by a wealthy class of landed nobility, the so-called kings. Trade was practiced on a modest scale, but craftsmen, such as the potter or the blacksmith, probably did not do more than supply local needs. I think we can safely assume that class struggle and social injustice of the kind that later led to the Solonian reforms in Attica were no strangers to Hesiod. Yet Hesiod is in no sense a political revolutionary. He is not against "kings" but against kings who "devour" gifts.

With his *Theogony* Hesiod set out to instruct his fellow Greeks on how the world and the gods came to be and on how Zeus established the supremacy of his rule. Although this constitutes a departure from the main concern of the singer of heroic epic, men's glorious deeds, the theme of the *Theogony* is so grand and the clashes that it portrays so kindred in language and spirit to the Homeric epic that one has the feeling that Hesiod keeps close to that elevated tenor that is so characteristic of heroic epic. But in the *Works and Days*, the break with the values of the heroic epic is complete. This is a manual of instruction in verse, which addresses itself principally to the tiller of the soil.

Hesiod had an indolent and wayward brother, Perses, who after the division of the patrimony tried to take more than his fair share by suborning the local kings, who had juridical power over the matter. Hesiod does not give us details about the dispute and its outcome because they are not relevant to his purpose. We also have no such thing in the poem as a character drawing of Perses. He remains a shadowy figure. Many scholars have dismissed him as a mere literary convention. Nothing in the poem forces this assumption on us. Yet, it is one thing to say that Perses did not exist and quite another to maintain that he did not become part of a literary device. We can easily believe in the existence of a greedy Perses and in the reality of a quarrel between the two brothers without having to believe that the *Works and Days* was written solely for the benefit of Perses. Even if Hesiod once wrote admonitory verses to his brother, the poem as we have it is addressed not only to the Boeotian farmer but to all men who care to improve their lot through righteousness and industry.

For Hesiod, the wretchedness of the human predicament is the result of the gradual deterioration of moral values. This is illustrated by the myth of the five ages. The contrast between the men of the age of gold and the men

of the iron age is startling. We are not told why the men of the golden age perished, but violence was what destroyed all the other successive races. The iron age, Hesiod's own, is the worst of all and it, too, will come to an end. It is an age of injustice and shameless violation of all moral standards. It is also an age of want and harsh toil. But the presence of suffering among men is not altogether of their own making. Men have been punished by Zeus for the deviousness of Prometheus, who cheated Zeus at a famous sacrifice, and also stole fire from heaven and gave it to man. The punishment was twofold: the means to livelihood were "hidden," and woman was created as the bearer of all the evils that she eventually unleashed on man. Hesiod does not try to place this punishment chronologically within his scheme of five ages, but it seems that it took place after the golden age. In attempting to explain the origin of man's plight and moral decadence, Hesiod set before himself a difficult problem to which he did not give an entirely satisfactory explanation. As has already been mentioned, we are not told why the golden race came to an end. Once violence and injustice became part of human life, deterioration followed its inevitable course. But for all his lack of belief in the basic goodness of man, Hesiod cannot bring himself to accept that the evils that beset man existed from the very beginning:

Earlier, human tribes lived on this earth  
without suffering and toilsome hardship  
and without painful illnesses that bring death to men—  
(91-93)

Hesiod accepts the new and inferior lot of man as the reality with which man must contend. There is no hint at a possibility of return to a condition free of suffering and toil. If Hesiod thought that man could in no way improve himself and his lot, the message of the *Works and Days* would be pointless. He must then consider improvement possible but certainly subject to the limits imposed by the two punitive actions of Zeus. This is perhaps what lies behind the allegory that has Hope imprisoned within Pandora's jar.

The first virtue Perses, and therefore every man, must be taught is justice. In his long sermon on the subject (213-85), Hesiod presents justice as a *sine qua non* for peace and prosperity, and looks upon it as a moral force of a higher order. This is why justice personified is the daughter of Zeus and why wrongdoers bring the wrath of Zeus upon themselves. By making justice into a personified abstraction of divine origin, Hesiod elevated it above the body of established customs that have the force of law. Here then we have for the first time an attempt to distinguish between concrete manifestations of justice and justice itself. Hesiod is not concerned with the effects of disobe-

dience to justice only on the individual but also on the city; that is, on civilized society. Justice is, above all, a civic virtue and the shibboleth by which a civilized man is distinguished from a savage or a wild beast:

This is the law Zeus laid down for men,  
but fish and wild beasts and winged birds  
know not of justice and so eat one another.

(276–78)

The second cardinal virtue is work. Before coming to the practical aspects of farm work, Hesiod embarks on a second sermon, this time on the value of honest labor. This section of the poem (298–382) is replete with proverbial wisdom and ethical maxims that are aimed at teaching prudent and decent conduct with regard to both management of resources and conduct toward relatives, friends, neighbors, and people in general. The structure is loose, and the poet, knowing this, begins and ends the section with an impassioned exhortation for work. If the unjust are faced with the anger of Zeus, the indolent have an equally dread prospect, hunger. But a man must avoid hunger not through deception and robbery but through the sweat of his own brow: “not stolen wealth, god-given is much better” (320). Poverty is neither glorified nor considered conducive to moral improvement. A man must strive to attain wealth, “because glory and excellence follow riches” (313).

After Hesiod has preached on the moral and practical value of work, he comes to the main body of the poem, the long section (383–617) on the proper way for the performance of major agricultural tasks. A farmer must know when to plow, to sow, to prune and hoe his vines, to reap, and to thresh. He also must know how to make a plow and a wagon, and how to choose his team of oxen. The advice he gives is sketchy and not adequate for someone who has no skill and no experience. He tells the farmer what sort of lumber to choose for each part of the plow, but not how to fit the pieces together. If one wants to make a wagon, he may profit from the information Hesiod gives, but he certainly cannot make the wagon if he does not already know how to make one. There is far more emphasis on doing things at the right time, chiefly through the observation of the rising and setting of certain stars and the return of migratory birds. Even this section—the most technical in the poem—is interspersed with moral exhortations. Hesiod cannot have been unaware of the dryness of the subject matter, for it is here that, more so than anywhere else, he cleverly deploys quaint turns of expression, playfully enigmatic names for animals, and other whimsical stylistic devices to counterbalance the inherently prosaic nature of his topic. It is also here that he deploys, almost like tactical weapons, what he, too, must have considered the

two most forceful passages of the poem: the long description of the grimness of winter and the delightful lines on how to find refreshment in the scorching summer heat.

Lines 618–93 constitute a lengthy excursus on sailing. Again Hesiod tells us much about the right time for sailing and very little about sailing itself. He talks about the size of the cargo and the perils of the sea, and he knows of the significance of the Etesian winds, but he is all too self-conscious about his meager knowledge of ships and the sea:

This is all I know about well-riveted ships  
but even so I can speak the mind of aegis-bearing Zeus,  
for the Muses taught me to sing and never weary.

(660–62)

But if Hesiod knows so little about navigation, why does he venture into the subject at all? He may have wished to give some useful information to farmers who became sea traders for a brief part of the year. He may have also wished to pay tribute to his father by recording for the benefit of others some rudiments on sailing he had learned from him. Be that as it may, the most remarkable feature of this portion of the poem is the precious autobiographical information: how and why his father came to Askra and how he himself crossed over to Chalkis to become the victor at a poetic contest. If all else had perished and only these autobiographical lines had survived, we would have enough material to declare Hesiod the first known exponent of the surge of individualism in the Greek world.

Thus far Hesiod has dwelt on the subject of the right time of the year for the undertaking of various types of work. But what of the right days of the month? He now comes to that, but not before he devotes lines 695–759 to more practical, moral, and religious matters. This section is as coherent as the diversity of the subject matter allows. It is a mixture of *savoir-vivre* and *savoir-faire* given with an eye not to gentility but to survival in a world where poverty and injustice, on the one hand, and the displeasure of numinous powers and gods, on the other, threaten man's existence. But in this part of the poem, even when Hesiod is dealing with arcane religious prescripts, we are not altogether at a loss for explanations that make some sort of sense. However, in the final section of the poem (765–828), which is devoted to a catalogue of days favorable or unfavorable for certain tasks and events, it seems that reason and religious sentiment yield to pure superstition. In the notes to this section of the poem, I have suggested that there is some evidence that originally there may have been a more or less obvious connection between religious beliefs and taboos associated with a particular day. Indeed,

lines 771 and 802–3 offer some evidence to that effect. But all that has been said about how untypically “irrational” for Hesiod the conclusion of the *Works and Days* is fails to take into account that such inconsistency as he is charged with is common even in our days. One of the tasks of a didactic poet in Hesiod’s days was to record for posterity not simply what he believed in but also the accumulated wisdom of his race.

The *Works and Days* is the first work in Greek literature that offers us a glimpse into the life of the common people, and especially of the farmers. Admittedly, it depicts conditions as they were in Boeotia of the late eighth century, but we can be fairly sure that the situation was not very different in other parts of mainland Greece. Life was hard—a perennial struggle with the earth for survival—and it left little room for the pursuit of anything that was less than useful or practical. The small farmer had to protect himself against the whim of the elements and the greed of privileged aristocracy. But more interestingly, the poem gives us a wealth of information on the religious, social, and moral beliefs of the common man. Since the poet sets out to teach not only his brother but humanity as well justice and propriety, there is much the reader learns about the inception of certain fundamental concepts of justice, both legal and ethical.

It is obvious that the *Works and Days* can be rather easily divided into sections. It is also obvious that by its very nature it must have invited interpolation. Yet, I feel that there is an underlying unity to the poem, a unity Hesiod secures not only by his well-placed references to his brother, Perses, but much more by his all-pervasive fervor to instruct humanity on justice and work. Close scrutiny of the poem shows that Hesiod moves with calculated leisure and that his digressions never lead him too far from his goal.

Whether we want it or not, the shadow of Homer is cast over Hesiod. There is such magic attached to the Homeric epics that poetry written in the same language and meter cannot escape comparison. But the difference between the *Works and Days* and the Homeric epics is such that comparison is hardly appropriate. Homer’s subject is man in his pride. But in the *Works and Days*, Hesiod proposes to make the life of the humble farmer his theme. Thus, quite naturally, Homeric splendor and grandness give way to the stark realities of the workaday experience of the Boeotian peasant. Therefore, we cannot expect the *Works and Days* to be even like the *Theogony*, much less like the Homeric epics. Where Hesiod gives his fancy free rein, as in the description of winter and summer, he becomes a poet of great power. The rest of the time, he instructs in the only medium he knows, verse. The *Works and Days* may not be a great poem, but it is an invaluable document and a moving testimony to the moral ardor of a great teacher and civilizer.

## WORKS AND DAYS

Pierian Muses, your songs bring fame and glory.

Come! Let us hear from you the praises of your father,  
great Zeus, through whose will men  
are exalted by the speech of others or remain unknown.

5 With ease he grants power, with ease he crushes the mighty,  
and with ease he lowers the noble and raises the lowly.  
Yes, Zeus who thunders from his lofty dwelling  
with ease straightens the crooked and shrivels the insolent.  
Hear and see, O Zeus! Let your decrees be straight and fair!

10 And I will speak to Perses the naked truth:  
there was never one kind of Strife. Indeed on this earth  
two kinds exist. The one is praised by her friends,  
the other found blameworthy. These two are not of one mind.  
The one—so harsh—fosters evil war and the fray of battle.

15 No man loves this oppressive Strife, but compulsion  
and divine will grant her a share of honor.  
The other one is black Night’s elder daughter;  
the son of Kronos, who dwells on ethereal heights,  
planted her in the roots of the earth and among men.

20 She is much better, and she stirs even the shiftless on to work.  
A man will long for work when he sees a man of wealth  
who rushes with zeal to plow and plant  
and husband his homestead. One neighbor envies another  
who hastens to his riches. This Strife is good for mortals.

25 Then potters eye one another’s success and craftsmen, too;  
the beggar’s envy is a beggar, the singer’s a singer.  
Perses, treasure this thought deep down in your heart,  
and do not let malicious Strife curb your zeal for work  
so you can see and hear the brawls of the marketplace.

30 Not much can be spared for gatherings and brawls  
 by the man in whose house the season's plentiful harvest,  
 Demeter's grain, fruit of the earth, has not been stored.  
 Have plenty of this and then incite brawls and strife  
 over another man's possessions. Lose no time! Seize  
 35 your only chance to let straight justice  
 —Zeus's fairest—settle this quarrel.  
 Our inheritance was divided; but there is so much  
 you grabbed and carried away as a fat bribe  
 for gift-devouring kings, fools who want to be judges  
 40 in this trial; they know neither how the half is greater  
 than the whole, nor how asphodel and mallow nurture.  
 The gods keep livelihood hidden from men.  
 Otherwise a day's labor could bring a man enough  
 to last a whole year with no more work.  
 45 Then you could hang your oar over the smoke of your fireplace  
 without a thought for the work of oxen and hardy mules.  
 But Zeus was angered in his heart and hid the means to life  
 because Prometheus with his crooked schemes had cheated him.  
 This is why Zeus devised sorrows and troubles for men.  
 50 He hid fire. But Prometheus, noble son of Iapetos,  
 stole it back for man's sake from Zeus, whose counsels are many.  
 In the hollow of a fennel stalk he slipped it away,  
 unnoticed by Zeus, who delights in thunder.  
 So the cloud-gatherer in anger said to him:  
 55 "Son of Iapetos, craftiest of all,  
 you rejoice at tricking my wits and stealing the fire  
 which will be a curse to you and to the generations that follow.  
 The price for the stolen fire will be a gift of evil  
 to charm the hearts of all men as they hug their own doom."  
 60 This said, the father of gods and men roared with laughter.  
 Then he ordered widely acclaimed Hephaistos to mix earth with water  
 with all haste and place in them human voice  
 and strength. His orders were to make a face  
 such as goddesses have and the shape of a lovely maiden;  
 65 Athena was to teach her skills and intricate weaving,  
 and golden Aphrodite should pour grace round her head,  
 and stinging desire and limb-gnawing passion.  
 Then he ordered Hermes the pathbreaker and slayer of Argos  
 to put in her the mind of a bitch and a thievish nature.

70 So he spoke, and they obeyed lord Zeus, son of Kronos.  
 Without delay the renowned lame god fashioned from earth,  
 through Zeus's will, the likeness of a shy maiden,  
 and Athena, the gray-eyed goddess, clothed her and decked her out.  
 Then the divine graces and queenly Persuasion  
 75 gave her golden necklaces to wear, and the lovely-haired Seasons  
 stood round her and crowned her with spring flowers.  
 Pallas Athena adorned her body with every kind of jewel,  
 and the Slayer of Argos—Hermes the guide—through the will  
 of Zeus whose thunder roars placed in her breast  
 80 lies, coaxing words, and a thievish nature.  
 The gods' herald then gave her voice and called this woman  
 Pandora because all the gods who dwell on Olympos  
 gave her as a gift—a scourge for toiling men.  
 Now when the Father finished his grand and wily scheme  
 85 he sent the glorious Slayer of Argos and swift messenger  
 to bring the gift of the gods to Epimetheus,  
 who did not heed Prometheus's warning never to accept  
 a gift from Olympian Zeus, but send it back,  
 for fear that some evil might befall mortals.  
 90 First he accepted it and then saw the evil in it.  
 Earlier, human tribes lived on this earth  
 without suffering and toilsome hardship  
 and without painful illnesses that bring death to men—  
 a wretched life ages men before their time—  
 95 but the woman with her hands removed the great lid of the jar  
 and scattered its contents, bringing grief and cares to men.  
 Only Hope stayed under the rim of the jar  
 and did not fly away from her secure stronghold,  
 for in compliance with the wishes of cloud-gathering Zeus  
 100 Pandora put the lid on the jar before she could come out.  
 The rest wander among men as numberless sorrows,  
 since earth and sea teem with miseries.  
 Some diseases come upon men during the day, and some  
 roam about and bring pains to men in the silence of night  
 105 because Zeus the counselor made them mute.  
 So there is no way to escape the designs of Zeus.  
 I will give you the pith of another story—if you wish—  
 with consummate skill. Treasure this thought in your heart:  
 men and gods have a common descent.

110 At first the immortals who dwell on Olympos  
 created a golden race of mortal men.  
 That was when Kronos was king of the sky,  
 and they lived like gods, carefree in their hearts,  
 shielded from pain and misery. Helpless old age  
 115 did not exist, and with limbs of unsagging vigor  
 they enjoyed the delights of feasts, out of evil's reach.  
 A sleeplike death subdued them, and every good thing was theirs;  
 the barley-giving earth asked for no toil to bring forth  
 a rich and plentiful harvest. They knew no constraint  
 120 and lived in peace and abundance as lords of their lands,  
 rich in flocks and dear to the blessed gods.  
 But the earth covered this race,  
 and they became holy spirits that haunt it,  
 benign protectors of mortals that drive harm away  
 125 and keep a watchful eye over lawsuits and wicked deeds,  
 swathed in misty veils as they wander over the earth.  
 They are givers of wealth by kingly prerogative.  
 The gods of Olympos made a second race  
 —a much worse one—this time of silver,  
 130 unlike the golden one in thought or looks.  
 For a hundred years they were nurtured by their prudent mothers  
 as playful children—each a big baby in his house—  
 but when they grew up and reached adolescence  
 they lived only for a short while, plagued by the pains  
 135 of foolishness. They could not refrain from reckless violence  
 against one another and did not want to worship the gods  
 and on holy altars perform sacrifices for them,  
 as custom differing from place to place dictates.  
 In time Zeus, son of Kronos, was angered and buried them  
 140 because they denied the blessed Olympians their due honors.  
 The earth covered this race, too;  
 they dwell under the ground and are called blessed mortals—  
 they are second but, still, greatly honored.  
 Zeus the father made a third race of mortals,  
 145 this time of bronze, not at all like the silver one.  
 Fashioned from ash trees, they were dreadful and mighty  
 and bent on the harsh deeds of war and violence;  
 they ate no bread and their hearts were tough as steel.  
 No one could come near them, for their strength was great

150 and mighty arms grew from the shoulders of their sturdy bodies.  
 Bronze were their weapons, bronze their homes,  
 and bronze was what they worked—there was no black iron then.  
 With their hands they worked one another's destruction  
 and they reached the dank home of cold Hades  
 155 nameless. Black death claimed them for all their fierceness,  
 and they left the bright sunlight behind them.  
 But when the earth covered this race, too,  
 Zeus, son of Kronos, made upon the nourishing land  
 yet another race—the fourth one—better and more just.  
 160 They were the divine race of heroes, who are called  
 demigods; they preceded us on this boundless earth.  
 Evil war and dreadful battle wiped them all out,  
 some fighting over the flocks of Oidipous  
 at seven-gated Thebes, in the land of Kadmos,  
 165 others over the great gulf of the sea in ships  
 that had sailed to Troy for the sake of lovely-haired Helen;  
 there death threw his dark mantle over them.  
 Yet others of them father Zeus, son of Kronos, settled at earth's ends,  
 apart from men, and gave them shelter and food.  
 170 They live there with hearts unburdened by cares  
 in the islands of the blessed, near stormy Okeanos,  
 these blissful heroes for whom three times a year  
 the barley-giving land brings forth full grain sweet as honey.  
 I wish I were not counted among the fifth race of men,  
 175 but rather had died before, or been born after it.  
 This is the race of iron. Neither day nor night  
 will give them rest as they waste away with toil  
 and pain. Growing cares will be given them by the gods,  
 and their lot will be a blend of good and bad.  
 180 Zeus will destroy this race of mortals  
 when children are born gray at the temples.  
 Children will not resemble their fathers,  
 and there will be no affection between guest and host  
 and no love between friends or brothers as in the past.  
 185 Sons and daughters will be quick to offend their aging parents  
 and rebuke them and speak to them with rudeness  
 and cruelty, not knowing about divine retribution;  
 they will not even repay their parents for their keep—  
 these law-breakers—and they will sack one another's city.

190 The man who keeps his oath, or is just and good,  
 will not be favored, but the evildoers and scoundrels  
 will be honored, for might will make right and shame will vanish.  
 Base men will harm their betters with words  
 that are crooked and then swear they are fair.  
 195 And all toiling humanity will be blighted by envy,  
 grim and strident envy that takes its joy in the ruin of others.  
 Then Shame and Retribution will cover their fair bodies  
 with white cloaks and, leaving men behind,  
 will go to Olympos from the broad-pathed earth  
 200 to be among the race of the immortals, while grief and pain  
 will linger among men, whom harm will find defenseless.  
 Though kings are wise, I will tell them a fable:  
 this is what a hawk said to a nightingale with a many-hued neck  
 that he snatched with his claws and carried high up in the clouds.  
 205 As his hooked talons skewered her she raised a pitiful cry,  
 and he spoke to her these lordly words:  
 "Lady, why all the screaming? You are your better's captive;  
 you have to follow me, though you are a great singer,  
 I can have you for dinner, or let you go, if I wish,  
 210 for only fools oppose their betters in strength  
 to suffer the pain of defeat topped with shame."  
 So spoke the hawk, that fast, long-winged bird.  
 Perses, obey justice and restrain reckless wrongdoing,  
 for such wrongdoing harms the poor, and even the noble  
 215 find it an unwelcome burden that weighs them down  
 and brings them ruin. The road to fair dealings  
 is the better one. Justice is the winner in the race  
 against insolent crime. Only fools need suffer to learn.  
 The Oath Demon follows the trail of crooked decrees;  
 220 Justice howls when she is dragged about by bribe-devouring men  
 whose verdicts are crooked when they sit in judgment.  
 Weeping and clothed in mist, she follows through the cities  
 and dwellings of men, and visits ruin on those  
 who twist her straight ways and drive her out.  
 225 But those who give straight verdicts and follow justice,  
 both when fellow citizens and strangers are on trial,  
 live in a city that blossoms, a city that prospers.  
 Then youth-nurturing peace comes over the land, and Zeus  
 who sees afar does not decree for them the pains of war.

230 Men whose justice is straight know neither hunger nor ruin,  
 but amid feasts enjoy the yield of their labors.  
 For them the earth brings forth a rich harvest; and for them  
 the top of an oak teems with acorns and the middle with bees.  
 Fleecy sheep are weighed down with wool,  
 235 and women bear children who resemble their fathers.  
 There is an abundance of blessings and the grainland  
 grants such harvests that no one has to sail on the sea.  
 But far-seeing Zeus, son of Kronos, is the judge  
 of wanton wrongdoers who plot deeds of harshness.  
 240 Many times one man's wickedness ruins a whole city,  
 if such a man breaks the law and turns his mind to recklessness.  
 Then the son of Kronos sends a great bane from the sky,  
 hunger and plague, and the people waste away.  
 Women bear no children, and families dwindle  
 245 through the counsels of Zeus the Olympian,  
 the son of Kronos, who punishes wrong by wiping out  
 large armies, walls, and ships at sea.  
 Kings, give this verdict no little thought,  
 for the immortals are ever present among men,  
 250 and they see those who with crooked verdicts  
 spurn divine retribution and grind down one another's life.  
 Upon this earth that nurtures many Zeus can levy  
 thirty thousand deathless guardians of mortal men,  
 who keep a watchful eye over verdicts and cruel acts  
 255 as they rove the whole earth, clothed in mist.  
 Justice is a maiden and a daughter of Zeus;  
 the gods of Olympos respect her noble title,  
 and whenever men mistreat her through false charges  
 she rushes to sit at the feet of Zeus Kronion  
 260 and she denounces the designs of men who are not just,  
 so that the people pay for the reckless deeds and evil plans  
 of kings whose slanted words twist her straight path.  
 Keep her commands, O gift-devouring kings, and let  
 verdicts be straight; yes, lay your crooked ways aside!  
 265 He that wrongs another man wrongs, above all, himself,  
 and evil schemes bring more harm on those who plot them.  
 The eye of Zeus sees all and perceives all;  
 it sees all this, too, if it wishes, and knows exactly  
 what sort of justice the walls of this city contain.



270 As matters stand, may neither I nor my son  
 be just men in this world, because it is a bad thing  
 to be just if wrongdoers win the court decisions.  
 But I do not believe yet that Zeus's wisdom will allow this.  
 Perses, put all this deep in your mind,  
 275 obey the voice of justice and always refrain from violence.  
 This is the law Zeus laid down for men,  
 but fish and wild beasts and winged birds  
 know not of justice and so eat one another.  
 Justice, the best thing there is, he gave to men;  
 280 Zeus who sees far grants good fortune  
 to the man who knows justice and also proclaims it.  
 If a man as a witness knowingly swears a false oath  
 and lies, and so in his incurable folly tramples on justice,  
 his offspring will sink and slowly vanish,  
 285 while the seed of him whose oath is true will prosper.  
 I will speak to you, Perses, you great fool, for your own good;  
 you can choose to have evil, and heaps of it, too,  
 for its house lies near and the path to it is smooth.  
 But the immortals decreed that man must sweat  
 290 to attain virtue; the road to it is steep and long  
 and rough at first, but even so the journey  
 gets easy once you set foot on the peak.  
 Best is the man who thinks for himself  
 and sees how things will turn out at the end.  
 295 Noble, too, is the man who listens to good advice.  
 But useless is the man who has no brains of his own  
 and, worse yet, pays no heed to the words of others.  
 But you, well-born Perses, never forget my command:  
 Work! Work, and then Hunger will not be your companion,  
 300 while fair-wreathed and sublime Demeter  
 will favor you and fill your barn with her blessings.  
 Hunger and the idling man are bosom friends.  
 Both gods and mortals resent the lazy man,  
 a man no more ambitious than the stingless drones  
 305 that feed on the bees' labor in wasteful sloth.  
 Let there be order and measure in your own work  
 until your barns are filled with the season's harvest.  
 Riches and flocks of sheep go to those who work.  
 If you work, you will be dearer to immortals

310 and mortals; they both loathe the indolent.  
 No shame in work but plenty of it in sloth.  
 If your work brings you wealth, you will be envied by the slothful,  
 because glory and excellence follow riches.  
 Whatever your lot, nothing will be as good as work,  
 if you take my advice and turn your foolish mind  
 315 away from the possessions of your fellow men  
 to labor in the service of what is your own.  
 Shame of the useless kind attends the poor,  
 and shame can either harm or profit men;  
 shame brings poverty while boldness leads to riches  
 320 —not stolen wealth, god-given is much better.  
 If a man by might of hand seizes great wealth,  
 or robs with clever words—and such things do happen  
 when men's minds are tricked by the greed for profit,  
 and regard for man loses the race to shamelessness—  
 325 then easily the gods blot out such a man and reduce  
 his house. Yes, such fortunes do not last long.  
 It is equally bad to mistreat suppliants and strangers,  
 or to sleep with your brother's wife,  
 flouting decency in the secrecy of her bedroom,  
 330 or through foolishness to wrong someone's orphaned children,  
 or to fling cruel words at aging parents  
 as they stand before the threshold of old age.  
 Such acts of injustice anger Zeus himself,  
 who rewards them harshly upon their completion.  
 335 But do restrain your foolish mind from such deeds.  
 In proportion to your means offer the gods sacrifices  
 that are pure and unblemished, and burn choice thighs for them.  
 At other times seek their favor with burnings and libations  
 when you go to sleep and when the holy light looms on the horizon,  
 340 so that you win their favor for your affairs,  
 not having to sell your land, but buying more from others.  
 Invite your friends to dinner and leave your enemies out  
 and remember that neighbors come first.  
 If misfortune strikes your house, neighbors will come  
 345 in their bedclothes; kinsmen will dress up.  
 Bad neighbors are pests, good ones a great blessing.  
 A good neighbor is a boon to him who has one.  
 If your neighbor is honest, your ox is safe.  
 Neighbors should measure well, and you must give back

350 no less than you take, and even more if you can,  
 that you may find enough when you are in need again.  
 Ruin trails dishonest profit; keep away from it.  
 Love those who love you, and help those who help you.  
 Give to those who give to you, never to those who do not.  
 355 Gifts go to givers, the stingy go away empty-handed.  
 Giving is good, robbing bad—it courts death.  
 The man who gives from the heart, even if his gift is great,  
 takes pleasure in it and is rewarded with inner delight.  
 But even a small thing grabbed by the shameless man  
 360 may chill his heart like a coat of hoar frost.  
 If you pile one little thing on top of another,  
 and do this often, you will soon have a heap.  
 The man who adds to what he has fends off hunger that glazes the eyes.  
 One does not worry about what lies stored in his home.  
 365 Home is safer; what lies out of doors is harmed.  
 To take from what one has is good, but grief comes  
 with longing for what one lacks. Do think of all this.  
 Drink all you want when your jar is full or almost empty;  
 sparing is good at midpoint and useless when the bottom shows.  
 370 Wages promised to friends should always be paid,  
 and even with your brother smile and get a witness,  
 for blind faith is as dangerous as excessive trust.  
 Do not be deceived by a woman who wags her tail  
 as she chatters sweetly with a greedy eye on your possessions.  
 375 You trust a thief when you trust a woman.  
 Wealth will increase inside your house,  
 if you beget an only son to nurture it.  
 And may you die old leaving another son behind.  
 Zeus can grant his bounty just as easily to many;  
 380 more children mean more cares, but more income too.  
 If your heart is set on becoming wealthy,  
 do as I say and put more work on top of work.  
 Start reaping when the Pleiades rise, daughters of Atlas,  
 and begin to plow when they set.  
 385 For forty days and forty nights they lie hidden,  
 but as the year moves on in its cycle  
 they can be seen again when you first sharpen your iron.  
 Nature has laid down this law for all whether they live on the plain,  
 or dwell by the sea, or whether far from the stormy deep

390 they farm a rich piece of land in the hollow woodlands:  
 "Strip down when you sow, and strip down again when you plow  
 or reap, if you want to bring home for storage  
 each of Demeter's gifts in the right season."  
 This way each thing will grow in season, and need will not  
 395 compel you to knock on doors in vain as a beggar.  
 This is how you came to me but I have given enough  
 and shall give no more. Work, foolish Perses!  
 The gods have decreed work for men!  
 Your heart will be sad when you will drag your wife and children along  
 400 to beg support from neighbors deaf to your pleas.  
 You will be successful once or twice but, if you annoy them further,  
 you will be wasting your many words;  
 your skill with speech will not succeed. But I bid you  
 find ways to pay your debts and escape hunger.  
 405 First build a house and get an ox for the plow, and a woman  
 for a price—no formal wedding—to follow your oxen,  
 and keep everything in readiness at home,  
 because it will break your heart to ask and not receive,  
 while the time passes and you suffer a loss.  
 410 Do not postpone for tomorrow or the day after tomorrow;  
 barns are not filled by those who postpone  
 and waste time in aimlessness. Work prospers with care;  
 he who postpones wrestles with ruin.  
 When the sun's fierce swelter abates  
 415 with the coming of Zeus's rains in autumn,  
 a man's body feels much lighter  
 because the dog star, now night's lover  
 much longer, stands only a brief part of the day  
 over the heads of men, death's fattened victims;  
 420 then wood cut with the ax from trees that shed their leaves  
 and stop sprouting is too tough to be eaten by worms.<sup>8</sup>  
 Remember! That is the right time for lumbering.  
 Cut a three-foot log for your mortar and a three-cubit pestle.  
 A seven-foot axle makes for a perfect fit,  
 425 and an eight-foot piece will give you a mallet as well.  
 For ten-palm wagons cut fellies no longer than three spans;  
 for this you need many curved pieces. Bring a plow beam home,  
 and try to look for one of holm oak in some hill or flatland;  
 it is the sturdiest kind for your oxen when they plow

430 after a craftsman fastens it to the share  
 and drives pegs through it to attach it to the pole.  
 Take the trouble to keep two plows at home,  
 one of a single stock, the other of pieces fitted together.  
 This is best, for if you break the one, you yoke the oxen to the other.  
 435 Poles of elm or laurel are the most immune to worms.  
 Make your share of oak and your beam of holm oak.  
 Own a pair of nine-year-old oxen; in their prime,  
 their strength endures and they are best for work.  
 They will not kick and butt over the furrow  
 440 and so break the plow and leave the work undone.  
 A forty-year-old farmhand should follow your oxen  
 —he needs a loaf of bread that breaks into four and then into eight—  
 he will tend to his labor and drive a straight furrow;  
 too old to look about for companions, he will keep his mind  
 445 on the job. Younger men than he cannot scatter  
 the seed better and avoid waste.  
 Younger men are too anxious to join their companions.  
 When the crane flies high above in the clouds  
 each year, pay heed to her cry.  
 450 This signal that winter's rains are about to come  
 knifes the heart of the man who has no oxen.  
 Then you must feed well the curved-horned oxen you keep in your barn.  
 You can easily say "Give me a pair of oxen and a wagon"  
 and just as easily hear "Sorry, my oxen have work to do."  
 455 Fanciful men build wagons only in their minds;  
 fools do not go even so far; yet, a hundred pieces of wood  
 for making a wagon must be at home in ready supply.  
 As soon as time for plowing comes  
 you and your slaves must rush to the task  
 460 the season dictates and plow both wet and dry land;  
 early risers harvest fields laden with grain.  
 Plow in the spring. Fallow land plowed in the summer will produce.  
 Sow fallow land when the soil is still loose;  
 such land will spare you curses and the clamor of hungry children.  
 465 Pray to Zeus of the earth and holy Demeter  
 to make Demeter's holy grain ripen to fullness.  
 Pray when you start plowing just as your hand grasps  
 the handle and the whip comes down hard  
 on the backs of your oxen as they tug at the strap pins;

470 and let a young slave follow you with a mattock  
 to make the birds toil hard for the seed he hides.  
 For mortals order is best, disorder is worst.  
 This way grain-heavy ears will bend over the ground,  
 if the lord of Olympos himself grants success in the end,  
 475 and you will wipe your pots clean of cobwebs.  
 Yes, joy will be yours when you draw on your stored supplies,  
 and, well-stocked, reach spring as it blossoms white,  
 not casting begging glances at others—others will need you.  
 If you plow the good earth at the winter solstice  
 480 you will reap tiny handfuls, squatting in the dust  
 to cross-bind them with little thrill in your heart;  
 few will admire what you bring home in a basket.  
 Aegis-bearing Zeus has a design for each occasion,  
 and mortals find this hard to comprehend.  
 485 But here is some consolation for the man who plows late;  
 when the cuckoo's song is first heard among the oak leaves  
 to the delight of mortals throughout the wide earth,  
 then may Zeus send rain three days later,  
 just enough to fill an ox's hoofprint.  
 490 This way the late plower will be a match for him who plows early.  
 Treasure all this in your heart and always mark  
 the coming of spring with its white blossoms and of rain in season.  
 Walk past the smithy and its crowded lounge  
 in winter when cold keeps men away from work  
 495 —even then an industrious man can increase his fortune—  
 so that in the grip of an evil winter's needy impasse  
 you are not forced to rub your swollen feet with a scrawny hand.  
 The lazy man trusts in empty hope and is left  
 without means; so his mind is turned to wrongdoing.  
 500 It is the wrong kind of hope that courts the poor,  
 who do not have enough and yet gossip in idleness.  
 Before midsummer has passed tell your slaves:  
 "Build barns! It will not be summer forever."  
 In the month of Lenaion the days are bad;  
 505 they skin oxen alive. Beware of this month and its frosts  
 that grip the earth when the gusty north wind  
 stirs the broad sea and blows through Thrace  
 —that nurturer of horses—as land and forest bellow.  
 Up in the mountain woodlands it blows against

510 many high-crested oaks and sturdy firs  
 and fells them to the rich earth as the vast forest groans.  
 Wild beasts shiver then and curl their tails under their bellies—  
 chilly wind pierces the shag that coats the breasts  
 even of animals whose skin is covered with deep fur;  
 515 it will go through the hide of an ox  
 and through a goat's long hair, but fleecy sheep  
 are safe from the blast of the north wind.  
 It sends an old man scurrying for protection,  
 but does not blow through to a maiden's tender skin,  
 520 for she stays indoors with her dear mother,  
 still unaware of golden Aphrodite's deeds;  
 she bathes her soft skin well and rubs it down  
 to sleekness with oil and then lies down, hidden away in her bedroom.  
 So it is in the winter when Mr. Boneless chews his foot  
 525 in the gloomy haunts, where his fireless house lies;  
 for the sun does not show him the way to the feeding grounds  
 but circles over those who dwell in the lands  
 of black men and is slow to shine on all the Greeks.  
 Then horned and hornless lodgers of the forest,  
 530 teeth chattering wretchedly, flee throughout the woodlands  
 and there is only one thought in their hearts:  
 they long to find shelter in windproof lairs  
 inside some hollow rock. Then mortals have three legs;  
 their backs are bent and their heads sweep the ground—  
 535 they are walking tripods fleeing the white snow.  
 Then you must clothe your body well  
 with a fringed tunic and a soft cloak over it.  
 Weave cloth in which there is much weft for little warp  
 and wear it, so that your hair does not stand on end  
 540 and bristle all over your body.  
 From the skin of a slaughtered ox make sandals  
 lined with felt and bind them snugly about your feet.  
 When the cold season comes stitch together skins  
 of firstling kids with an ox sinew and wrap your back  
 545 with them to keep the rain off; and on your head  
 wear a tight-fitting cap to keep your ears dry.  
 Mornings are cold when the north wind blows  
 and damp fog descends from the starry sky  
 and hovers like a chilly veil over men's wheat patches.

550 This is a mist drawn up from ever-flowing rivers  
 and then raised by stormy winds high above the earth;  
 sometimes it comes as evening rain and often as wind  
 when Thracian gusts whip thick clouds to frenzy.  
 Run faster than this wind; finish work and head for home,  
 555 wary of a dark cloud that swoops from the sky to envelop you  
 and soak your body and clothes until you are dripping wet.  
 Take precautions. This is a wintry and stormy month,  
 cruel for men and cruel for sheep.  
 Give oxen half rations and men more than their usual share  
 560 because the kindly nights are now too long.  
 Heed this advice until the end of the year,  
 when nights and days are no longer unequal  
 and until the earth, mother of all, gives her many fruits.  
 When—Zeus willing—counting from the winter solstice  
 565 sixty days have passed, then the star Arcturus  
 leaves the sacred stream of Okeanos  
 and first rises brilliant at eventide,  
 then the swallow, shrill-voiced daughter of Pandion,  
 flies up into the light when the new spring begins;  
 570 it is best to prune your vines before her arrival.  
 But when the house-carrier from the ground climbs on plants,  
 fleeing the Pleiades, then no longer hoe your vines  
 but sharpen your sickles and wake up the slaves.  
 Do not dawdle on shady benches and do not sleep past dawn,  
 575 when it is time to reap and the sun shrivels the skin.  
 At that time rise before the crack of dawn  
 and bring the grain home to secure abundance of good.  
 The dawn claims the third portion of a day's work,  
 the dawn gives a headstart for journeys and jobs,  
 580 the dawn's arrival sends many men on their way  
 and puts the yoke on the necks of many oxen.  
 When the thistle blooms and the chirping cicada  
 sits on trees and pours down shrill song  
 from frenziedly quivering wings in the toilsome summer,  
 585 then goats are fatter than ever and wine is at its best;  
 women's lust knows no bounds and men are all dried up,  
 because the dog star parches their heads and knees  
 and the heat sears their skin. Then, ah then,  
 I wish you a shady ledge and your choice wine,

590 bread baked in the dusk and mid-August's goat milk  
 and meat from a free-roving heifer that has never calved—  
 and from firstling kids. Drink sparkling wine,  
 sitting in the shade with your appetite sated,  
 and face Zephyr's breeze as it blows from mountain peaks.  
 595 Pour three measures of water fetched from a clear spring,  
 one that flows unchecked, and a fourth one of wine.  
 As soon as mighty Orion rises above the horizon  
 exhort your slaves to thresh Demeter's holy grain  
 in a windy, well-rounded threshing floor.  
 600 Measure it first and then store it in bins.  
 But when your grain is tightly stored inside the house  
 then hire an unmarried worker and look for a female servant  
 with no children—nursing women are a burden.  
 Keep a dog with sharp teeth and feed it well,  
 605 wary of the day-sleepers who might rob you.  
 Bring in a lasting supply of hay and fodder  
 for your oxen and mules. Once this is done let your slaves  
 rest their weary knees and unyoke the oxen.  
 When Orion and the dog star rise to the middle of the sky  
 610 and rosy-fingered Dawn looks upon Arcturus,  
 then, Perses, gather your grapes and bring them home  
 and leave them in the sun for ten days and nights,  
 in the shade for five, and on the sixth day  
 draw the gift of joyous Dionysos into your vats.  
 615 When the Pleiades, the Hyades, and mighty Orion set,  
 remember the time has come to plow again—  
 and may the earth nurse for you a full year's supply.  
 And if longing seizes you for sailing the stormy seas,  
 when the Pleiades flee mighty Orion  
 620 and plunge into the misty deep  
 and all the gusty winds are raging,  
 then do not keep your ship on the wine-dark sea  
 but, as I bid you, remember to work the land.  
 Haul your ship onto land and secure it to the ground  
 625 with stones on all sides to stay the blast of rain and wind,  
 and pull out the plug to avoid rotting caused by rain water.  
 Store up the tackle compactly inside your house  
 and neatly fold the sails, the wings of a seafaring ship.  
 Hang your rudder above the fireplace

630 and wait until the time to sail comes again.  
 Then drag your swift ship to sea and load on it  
 a tight cargo—one that will send you home with profit.  
 This is how our father, Perses, you precious fool,  
 sailed on ships, pressed by the need for a better life.  
 635 He once left Aeolian Kyme and on his black ship  
 came to this place, after a long bout with the sea,  
 and he was not fleeing from great riches and comforts  
 but from grim poverty that Zeus gives to men.  
 He built his house near Helikon in the worthless village  
 640 of Askra, a place bad in winter, worse in the summer, never good.  
 But, Perses, do remember that each kind of work has its season  
 and, above all, navigation.  
 Praise a small ship, but load your cargo on a big one.  
 The bigger the cargo the greater the profit heaped on profit,  
 645 if the winds keep nasty gales in check.  
 Whenever you want to turn your foolish mind to trade  
 to escape your debts and the hunger that plagues you,  
 I will teach you the rules that govern the sea,  
 though I am no expert on navigation and ships,  
 650 since I never sailed the open seas on a boat,  
 except when I went to Euboea from Aulis, where once  
 the Achaeans weathered a grim storm and then with a great host  
 from holy Greece sailed over to Troy, land of fair women.  
 There I crossed over to Chalkis for the prizes  
 655 in honor of wise Amphidamas, the many prizes proclaimed in advance  
 by his magnanimous sons. And I claim that there  
 I was the victor in a song contest and won an eared tripod,  
 which I dedicated to the Helikonian Muses,  
 where they first taught me mastery of flowing song.  
 660 This is all I know about well-riveted ships,  
 but even so I can speak the mind of aegis-bearing Zeus,  
 for the Muses taught me to sing and never weary.  
 For fifty days, past the summer solstice  
 and past the end of summer's toilsome part,  
 665 men can sail with safety, for then a ship  
 will not be shattered, and the sea will not wipe out the crew,  
 unless this is the will of Poseidon who shakes the earth,  
 or Zeus, king of the gods, wants you destroyed;  
 both have power over good fortune as well as misfortune.

670 Then the winds have clear directions and the sea is safe.  
 Then, free of care, trust the winds  
 and draw your swift ship to sea and load it full.  
 But rush home as soon as you can;  
 come back before the new wine and the fall rains,  
 675 well ahead of winter and the violent gales of the south wind.  
 This wind trails the great fall rains sent by Zeus  
 and makes the sea stormy and too rough for sailing.  
 The second season for sailing comes in the spring:  
 when a man sees on the topmost shoot of a fig tree  
 680 leaves as large as a crow's footprint,  
 then he may sail across the sea.  
 This is the time for spring sailing. I myself do not have  
 one good word for it—it does not fill my heart with glee.  
 The whim of chance rules it, and disaster is hard to escape  
 685 but men take it up because their minds are foolish.  
 Man is witless, and his soul is in his purse.  
 The death of those who die among the waves is harsh,  
 and I ask you not to let my advice go unheeded.  
 Do not load all your goods on hollow ships;  
 690 your cargo should be less than what you leave behind.  
 The disaster you chance upon at sea is dreadful,  
 and dreadful the outcome if you overload your wagon  
 and thus break the axle and see your load destroyed.  
 Observe due limit and timeliness in all your actions.  
 695 The right time to bring a wife to your home  
 is when you are only a few years younger than thirty,  
 or just a few years older. This is the time for marriage.  
 Five years past puberty makes a woman a suitable bride.  
 Marry a virgin so you can teach her right from wrong.  
 700 Choose from among the girls who live near you and check  
 every detail, so that your bride will not be the neighborhood joke.  
 Nothing is better for man than a good wife,  
 and no horror matches a bad one, a glutton  
 who reclines to eat and needs no fire to roast  
 705 even a stalwart man and age him before his time.  
 Heed the vengeance of the blessed immortals  
 and do not make a friend your brother's equal.  
 If you do so, do not be the first to do wrong  
 and to lie for the sake of lying.

710 And if a friend is first to displease you by word or deed,  
 remember to pay him back doubly in kind. But again  
 if he offers his friendship and wants to make amends,  
 be gracious. Only scoundrels change their friends.  
 Your face should mirror what is in your mind.  
 715 Do not be called a host of too many or of none,  
 and neither befriend the lowly nor quarrel with the noble.  
 Do not allow yourself to mock baneful poverty  
 that wears men's hearts away; it, too, comes from the gods.  
 A man owns no better treasure than a prudent tongue;  
 720 there is no small delight in it, if it moves with grace.  
 Bad words flung at others bounce back with double strength.  
 Let your manners be gentle at feasts attended by many.  
 When all share the cost the expense is little and the joy great.  
 Never pour a libation to Zeus after dawn,  
 725 or to the other immortals, if you have not washed your hands.  
 They will not hear your prayers but will spit them back at you.  
 Do not piss as you stand and face the sun,  
 but do it after the sun sets and before it rises,  
 and even then do not be naked, for nights belong to the gods.  
 730 Do not piss either off or on the road while you walk.  
 The devout and wise man squats for this act,  
 or does it against the sturdy wall of some yard.  
 And in your house do not sit by the hearth  
 with your genitals exposed and bespattered with semen.  
 735 Sire your children when you return from a feast of the gods,  
 not when you return from an ill-omened burial. Never piss into springs.  
 Never cross the fair waters of ever-flowing rivers  
 before you wash your hands with lovely and limpid water  
 and pray as you look upon the stream before you cross.  
 740 If a man crosses a river with unwashed hands and impure heart,  
 the gods bear a grudge and bring pains upon him later.  
 At a joyous feast for the gods never with gleaming iron  
 cut off the dry from the green of your five-branch.  
 Let those who drink never place the serving cup  
 745 over the mixing bowl; bad luck comes with this, too.  
 And on the house you build carve a luck-bringing sign  
 so that no crows will perch on it and caw.  
 When you eat and bathe do not use vessels  
 unhallowed by sacrifice; otherwise you may be harmed.

750 It is not good for boys twelve days or twelve years old  
to sit on that which is motionless,  
for such an act unmans even a man in his prime.  
A man should not sleek his body with a woman's bath water,  
for in time even this is cruelly punished.

755 And if a man chances on victims burning in sacrifice,  
let him not mock the unknown and thus anger some god.  
Never piss where rivers pour into the sea  
or into springs, but always avoid this.  
It is just as bad to relieve yourself in such places.

760 Do as I say, and remember how destructive gossip is;  
it is easy to get a bad reputation  
but hard to live with it and harder to shed it.  
What is said of you does not vanish,  
if many say it; such talk is a kind of god.

765 Zeus sends the days; observe them in due measure  
and explain to your slaves that the thirtieth is best  
for overseeing work and giving men their rations.  
Here are the days that come from Zeus the counselor,  
if people judge their true nature and live by it:

770 the chief sacred days are the first, the fourth, and the seventh;  
Leto bore Apollon of the golden sword on the seventh.  
The eighth and the ninth of the waxing month  
are outstanding days for men to engage in work.  
The eleventh and the twelfth are both good days

775 for shearing sheep and reaping a fine harvest.  
The twelfth is much better than the eleventh;  
spiders hover in the air and spin their yarn  
at this day's fullness, and the wise one piles up his harvest.  
On this day let a woman set up her loom and weave.

780 Do not start your sowing on the thirteenth day  
of the waxing month; this day is best for nurturing plants.  
The sixth day of midmonth does not favor plants  
but is good for the birth of boys; it does not favor  
either the birth or the marriage of girls.

785 The sixth day of the month's first part is not proper  
for the birth of girls, but gelding of kids and lambs  
hurts less then, and pens built for your flocks will be better.  
It favors the birth of boys who are sharp-tongued  
and who lie and coax and are fond of secret whispers.

790 On the eighth of the month geld your boar and bellowing bull  
and on the twelfth do the same to your hardy mules.  
Men born in the fullness of the great twentieth day  
are wise, and their minds are never slack.  
The tenth is good for the birth of a boy and the fourth

795 of midmonth for the birth of a girl. On this day stroke your sheep,  
your shambling curved-horned oxen, your sharp-toothed dog,  
and your hardy mules. And keep in your mind  
the ills of the fourth day when the month waxes and wanes;  
guard against this day, which can break your heart.

800 Bring a wife to your home on the fourth of the month,  
but first watch for the bird signs best for this venture.  
Be on your guard on all fifth days; they are harsh and dread.  
They say that on the fifth the Furies assisted  
at the birth of Oath, whom Strife bore as a scourge to perjurers.

805 On the seventh of midmonth look about with care  
and then pour down Demeter's holy grain on a threshing floor  
that is well-rounded. On this day the lumberman should cut  
beams for the house and tight-fitting timbers for ships.  
On the fourth day start building your trim boats.

810 The ninth of midmonth is better toward evening,  
and the least harm for men is found in the first ninth;  
this is a good day for men and women both to plant offspring  
and to be born themselves. Yes, this day is never all bad.  
Few know that the twenty-seventh is the best day

815 for opening a cask or placing the yoke on the necks  
of oxen, mules, and fleet-footed horses,  
and for dragging to the wine-dark sea a ship  
of many row locks. Few men call this day by its true name.  
Open wine jars on the fifth. The fourth of midmonth is holiest.

820 Again, few men know that after the twentieth of the month  
the fourth is best at dawn and not as good toward evening.  
The people of this earth profit greatly from these days.  
The other days are meaningless, untouched by fortune.  
Men have days they favor, but few really know.

825 The same day can be a mother now, a stepmother later.  
Happy and blessed is the man who knows all this  
and does his work without offending the immortals,  
ever watching birds of omen, ever shunning transgression.

# Notes

1–10. Lines 1–10 constitute the proem, which usually contains the invocation of a divinity and the main theme of the song that is to follow. In the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, this is achieved swiftly in the first line of the proem. Hesiod very cleverly includes the Muses by asking them to “hymn” Zeus, their father, and then goes on to appeal to him as the highest authority from which straight justice comes. This is a very deft stroke. As an *aoidos*, a singer, he cannot and does not want to bypass the source of his inspiration and memory, but he needs the aid of the supreme judge to help him in a case in which human justice is subject to bribery and corruption. In the *Theogony*, Hesiod invokes the Muses of Helikon, but here he calls upon the Muses of Pieria, a mountain far to the north of his native Boeotia. This may have offended local patriotism and even led to excision of the whole proem. Indeed, Pausanias reports that the Boeotians of Helikon showed him a lead sheet that contained the *Works and Days* without lines 1–10 (9.31). Even the great Alexandrian scholar Aristarchos considered these lines a later accretion to the text, but neither language nor content sustains this suspicion, which has not been entirely laid to rest. The proem seems both genuine and essential to a large portion of the poem.

If we consider Homer as the norm for epic poetry, the invocation of the Muses rather than of one Muse or “Goddess” is an innovation. It is entirely possible that the Muse or Goddess of the Homeric poems is none other than Mnemosyne (Memory), mother of the Muses,

whose assistance is urgently needed by both oral poet and reciter. Interestingly enough, in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* 4.429–30, the god sings to his lyre and first pays tribute to Mnemosyne. For the Muses in general, see notes on *Theogony* 53–115. Perses of line 10 is Hesiod’s unfair brother.

11–26. In these lines, we are told that there are two different kinds of Strife, good and bad. The good Strife is noble and fair emulation; the bad one is malicious and invidious contention. It should be remembered that both were born of Dark Night. That the good Strife is planted in the roots of the earth may imply a belief that she plays a role in the growth of all living things, a growth that seems governed by principles of regularity and benevolence. That Night should give birth to a benevolent Strife is not so strange. In the Bible, God creates light out of darkness, and in *Theogony* 123–24 Night is the mother of Ether and Day. Hesiod is careful to tell us that “No man loves this oppressive Strife, but compulsion / and divine will grant her a share of honor” (15–16). Necessity or compulsion is connected with Night elsewhere. Thus in *Iliad* 14.259, Night is called “tamer of the gods.” In a sense, the bad Strife is a necessary evil born of the same mother who has given birth to luminous forces. It is more than likely that Empedocles was influenced by *Theogony* 116–22, which makes Eros (Love) one of the first elements of creation and by Hesiod’s division of Strife into good and bad. It will be remembered that Empedocles taught that Love and Strife are the primary creative

forces in the never-ending cosmic cycle. In Empedocles, Love unites and Strife separates (see Kirk and Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, Cambridge, 1966, 326–32; Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers*, Oxford, 1947, 12–16).

It should be pointed out that Hesiod tells us in the *Theogony* that Night gave birth to Love and Strife (224–25). Thus, his division of Strife in the *Works and Days* represents either a correction of earlier doctrine that made Philotes (Love) a child of a mother who otherwise bore noxious offspring, or an elaboration of the concept of Strife, or perhaps both. Of course, Philotes of *Theogony* 224 should not be confused with Eros of *Theogony* 120, even though we inadequately translate both as “Love.”

27–41. In these lines, Hesiod exhorts his brother to work rather than spend his time listening to brawls and bringing an unfair lawsuit against him. The corrupt “kings” of line 39 are probably no more than local nobles with political as well as juridical authority. The proverbs of lines 40–41 reinforce each other and mean essentially the same thing: virtuous poverty is better than corrupt wealth. (Cf. Psalm 37:16 with the first proverb. For the plants mentioned in the second one, see Horace *Odes* 1.31.16; Theophrastus *Hist. Plant.* 7.12.1; Pliny *N.H.* 21.108[68]).

42–57. With these lines, Hesiod starts to probe the problem of the necessity to make a living through hard toil and the problem of the presence of the many evils that make man’s life difficult. It goes without saying that in Hesiod’s account of the “fall” or degeneration of man, which preoccupies him up to line 201, analogies from the Bible and in general from myths that attempt to explain the wretched lot of mankind ought to be considered for both similarity and difference. Men forfeited their once carefree existence because the Titan Prometheus cheated Zeus by not giving him his rightful portion of meat at the banquet of Mekone (for a full account of the story, see *Theogony* 535–616). The angered god hid men’s livelihood inside the earth and took fire away. Prometheus did nothing about the hidden livelihood,

but he stole the fire back (for the account of this celebrated theft, see *Theogony* 535–70). Iapetos, father of Prometheus, was a Titan and a child of Heaven and Earth (*Theogony* 132–36). Prometheus was the offspring of the union of Iapetos with Klymene, incestuous child of the Titans Okeanos and Tethys (cf. *Theogony* 506–16). The question is: why should men be punished for the fraudulent act of a Titan? The account according to which Prometheus as master craftsman created man from clay (Paus. 10.4.3) does offer an explanation, but of course we do not know how old this tradition is. According to the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* 3.334–36, men and even gods are descended from the Titans. Orphic belief had it that man was created from the ashes of the Titans whom Zeus burned with his thunderbolt for having torn to pieces and devoured his son Dionysos (cf. *Orphic Hymn* 37.4). It should be remembered that the Titans, who were very old gods, stood in opposition to the reign of Zeus and his progeny. It seems then that Zeus punished men for a very fundamental and perhaps derivative relationship to the Titans and especially to Prometheus, who eventually championed their cause. Prometheus himself was punished for cheating Zeus of his sacrificial portion (*Theogony* 535ff. and especially lines 613–16; Aeschylus, however, in *Prometheus Bound* 7–11, gives the theft of fire as the main reason for his punishment).

60–105. Zeus has already taken two punitive actions against man. He has hidden livelihood inside the earth and taken fire away. The effects of the second action are cancelled by Prometheus, who steals the fire back. It is in place of this cancelled punitive action that Zeus decides to visit a fresh suffering upon men by creating an irresistibly charming but basically wicked woman who unleashes evil on mankind. In the account of the same event in *Theogony* 570–616, it is woman herself, not a jar filled with evils, who constitutes the bane sent by Zeus. Here, however, the woman is named Pandora, and the evils she unleashes are greater than those peculiar to her nature and do not originate



with her. It is fairly certain that Pandora, "The Giver of All," was originally an earth-goddess, whose name Hesiod borrowed and, using folk etymology, interpreted as "she to whom all (the gods) gave a gift." For Pandora as earth-goddess, see Farnell, *The Cults of the Greek States*, Oxford, 1886–1909, 1:290; A. H. Smith, "The Making of Pandora," *JHS* 11 (1981): 278–83; also, in the same journal, J. E. Harrison, 19 (1899): 205 and 20 (1900) 99. As such, Pandora would be another of the myriad names under which mother earth has been worshiped. If Hesiod knew this connection, he certainly did not dwell on it but merely borrowed the name and, as it were, twisted its meaning. Yet, even the borrowing of the name from such an ancient goddess might be significant. Hesiod might indeed wish to connect woman more with the earth. Both the manner of her creation and her baneful dowry are more chthonic than celestial. The more fundamental problem, however, is: why does woman have to be the instrument that brings suffering to man? And here, I am afraid, one has to appeal to more than Hesiod's obvious misogyny in order to account for a pattern that is truly archetypal. It should be noted that some scholars understand lines 82–83 (81–82 in the Oxford Classical Text) to mean "all the gods who dwell on Olympus gave her a gift—a scourge for toiling men." I am inclined to take this interpretation as less probable. Hope (97–99) was left inside the jar because this was the wish of Zeus. The question is: why is Hope singled out and kept within the jar? People try to improve their lot because they have hope. Could Hesiod mean that it is hopeless to hope, that man cannot improve his lot? I think this is highly unlikely, unless one understands the withholding of Hope as signifying man's inability to transcend his limits, to escape from the human predicament. Hesiod's moral sermons to his brother imply that, if he becomes a just man and if he works, he can improve his lot. Hesiod is also certainly aware that there is no human effort that does not involve hope. Now if Hope is entirely bad, she should have been released

together with all the other ills that plague man. On the other hand, if Hope is entirely good, she should have no place in Pandora's jar. Perhaps she is treated differently because she can be both good and bad. Lines 500–501, "It is the wrong kind of hope that courts the poor / who do not have enough and yet gossip in idleness," seem to indicate that in Hesiod's mind Hope, much like Eris (Strife), could be good in one set of circumstances and bad in another. In this sense, Hope could not be unleashed with all the evils, because she can be bad but she can also be good. In this connection, it is interesting to point out that the evils are not specified, whereas Hope is. If Hesiod faced a logical dilemma, he solved it in a manner that shows that he was probably inclined to consider Hope more of a positive than a negative factor in human affairs.

106–201. *The Myth of the Five Ages*: The idea that humankind is gradually degenerating and headed for destruction is both extremely old and extremely modern. This idea is so common to many cultures and so old that we can be absolutely sure that it did not originate with Hesiod. Hesiod himself says, "I will give you the pith of another story" (107), thereby meaning the main points of a myth that is not his personal creation.

Homer has nothing like the myth of the five successive ages. This does not mean that the myth was unknown to him. It simply means that since his theme was the glory of extraordinary men, the heroes, there was little reason for him to dwell on the theme of degeneration. But in the *Works and Days*, it is the common man, the toiling farmer, who is the poet's concern. His lot is so wretched that there is good reason to account for it and to describe it as the lowest point on a descending scale. The closest we come to a mild version of the theme of degeneration in Homer is when in the first book of the *Iliad* (244–84) Nestor takes it upon himself to mediate between Achilles and Agamemnon. He tells them that in his youth he was honored by the company of legendary heroes of great stature and physical strength.

These men, says Nestor, were such that "no man of this generation could fight against them" (271–72). The clear implication is that those men of old were far superior to heroes such as Achilles and Agamemnon. But there is no elaboration in Nestor's speech and no attempt to provide some sort of genealogical pyramid. Such hints at the existence in olden days of a race of heroic giants are found elsewhere in Homer (*Iliad* 5.636–46; *Odyssey* 8.223–33 and 11.308–20).

To readers of the Bible, the theme is familiar from the statue of which Nebuchadnezzar dreams (*Daniel* 2:31–35). The feet of this statue are of iron and clay, the legs of iron, the thighs and the belly of brass. The upper part is made of nobler metals: the breast and arms of silver, and the head of gold. Daniel explains to Nebuchadnezzar that the golden head represents his kingdom, which is to be succeeded by four inferior kingdoms. Among the Sumerians and the Babylonians, as one can see from their king lists, there was a belief that men, kings at any rate, once could live for several thousand years and that these incredible lifespans became progressively shortened as evil increased in this world. In Indian literature, there is a more fully developed theory of four major world ages. There is no metal symbolism, but these ages are named after the four throws of the die. As time goes on, evil and disease proliferate and lifespans decrease to the point that men beget children at ten and age with the arrival of the sixteenth year. A more striking parallel to the Hesiodic myth is to be found in the Zoroastrian belief that Zoroastrianism is to last for four successive ages corresponding to the four branches—one of gold, one of silver, one of steel, and one of iron alloy—of the tree revealed to Zoroaster by Ahura Mazdāh in a vision.

The oriental sources that speak of four ages associated with the symbolism of noble and inferior metals are later than Hesiod. This might lead us to believe that it is some early Hellenic myth that is the progenitor of the oriental models. Yet, the more standard Hellenic

belief was in a mythic age of heroes. This belief is somewhat modified and introduced by Hesiod into what seems to be a more formalistic and structured concept. It is then probable that we are dealing with an importation from the East. The specific point of origin cannot be fixed with any certainty, but the trend of gradual deterioration and the absence of a similar doctrine in the Homeric corpus argue for oriental provenance.

Whatever vestigial beliefs in the concept of deterioration exist in modern Greece are more like the general Homeric idea and have no connection with the Hesiodic account. This, too, is an argument, albeit not a strong one, for looking upon Hesiod's scheme as a literary importation that never took roots in folk belief. For Homer, the heroes were much stronger than his own contemporaries (cf. *Iliad* 5.302–4; 12.447–49, and so forth). In many parts of modern Greece, people still believe in the existence of a race of Hellenes, men of gigantic size and superhuman strength. They point to massive ruins as their work and attribute to them feats that require extraordinary power. At other times, they speak of the *pallioi*, "the men of old," who were much stronger, healthier, and handsomer than themselves.

109. This line seems misplaced here, and its position in the poem cannot be justified by the argument that it really means that once men lived like gods.

109–26. Hesiod does not mean that the gods used gold to fashion men, but rather that his first race had the positive properties that are associated with gold. Gold is precious, pure, incorruptible. Gold does not become oxidized; that is, it does not age with time, but it can be destroyed by other means. So, too, these men were left unchanged by the passage of time but they were doomed to die.

The statement that the golden race lived when Kronos was king of the sky (112) probably means no more than that these mythic men lived in the beginning of time. They lived in a veritable utopia, free of care and not cursed with the blight of old age. It will be remem-

bered that in the *Theogony* Hesiod made Old Age a child of Night (223–25). In the same passage (211–25), Hesiod tells us that Death and Sleep are brothers and also children of Night. The men of the golden age are not immortal, but they are subdued by the kindlier of the two brothers. They do not experience the agony of death because first they fall into a deep coma. The idea that the golden race enjoyed the fruits of the earth without toil is consistent with the idea expressed in lines 40–47. According to these lines, livelihood was hidden from men by Zeus as a punishment for the treachery of Prometheus. The men of the age of gold die only to the extent that their bodies decompose inside the earth. But they were not destroyed altogether, since they live on as benevolent guardian spirits. The hero cults of the ancient Greeks also mirror a similar idea and so does the so-called demonification of Oedipus in the *Oedipus Coloneus* of Sophocles. This belief has doubtless survived in the modern Greek veneration of the saints as potential benefactors.

128–43. Much as silver is inferior to gold, so too the silver race is inferior to the golden race. This is all the comparison seems to indicate. Except for the long childhood lived in the bliss of ignorance, there is nothing conferred on the men of the silver age that could be looked upon as a blessing. Once they come of age, they foolishly refuse to worship the gods and offer them the proper sacrifices. They also perpetrate acts of violence against one another. The transition from the age of gold to the age of silver is quite abrupt in terms of the qualities of the two races. This creates a problem that is somewhat mitigated by the fact that their crime against the gods is one of omission and not of commission. Lines 142–43 add to the problem because, although Zeus destroyed them, Hesiod tells us that they are called “blessed mortals” and are honored. It will not do, I think, to try to remove the difficulty by weakening the meaning of “blessed” to mean no more than our “of blessed memory” or than the modern Greek *makarites*, “blessed,” which has become a byword for dead. Nor will it do

to construe the phrase “they are . . . honored” as meaning honored in the way all the dead are generally honored. By calling them men of the silver age, Hesiod may have implied no more than that they were a trifle better than the more violent men of the bronze age, but the difficulty remains and it should perhaps be attributed to Hesiod’s inability at this point to draw a sharper distinction between all the inferior races and the truly outstanding race of the age of gold.

144–56. Here Hesiod faces a dilemma. His scheme is one of gradual deterioration. The third age is bound to be worse than the preceding one, which is bad enough. Yet, he is keenly aware of the heroic age. This age—quite correctly—is the age that precedes the iron age, and historically, especially in light of the Homeric epics, he could have characterized the age of the heroes as the age of bronze. But this would violate the progression from good to bad to worse. So he links the inferior metal with an inferior race and then inserts the race of the heroes in a way that interrupts the pattern of degeneration.

The men of the bronze age are fashioned from ash trees. The word for ash tree is *melîē* and in Homer it also means “spear,” since its hard wood was used for making spear shafts. This is doubtless a race of violent warriors. These are men of the spear (cf. the “bronze-tongued ash” of *Iliad* 22.225). Their violence and mighty bodies make them somewhat resemble the Giants, who, according to the *Theogony*, were born of the Earth before the Meliai, the Ash Tree Nymphs. The implication of the phrase “they ate no bread” (148) is that in their savage state they were strangers to the civilized art of agriculture, much like the anthropophagous Kyklopes and Laistrygones of the *Odyssey*.

157–73. Hesiod is perfectly aware of the Theban and Trojan sagas and that the heroes of these sagas were the semidivine men who belonged to the age preceding the iron age. The epics about these bronze-gearred warriors were also known to him. Therefore, it is all the more

remarkable that he did not link the age of heroes with its proper metal, bronze. Such a linkage would accord well both with tradition and with reality, but it did not fit into the symbolism that he chose for the myth of the five ages. On the other hand, Hesiod does not tell us anything about their weapons. He only tells us that they destroyed one another in war. Here Hesiod deliberately suppresses what must have been common knowledge in his day, but he does so by omission. This way, he could adhere to his symbolism and at the same time not leave himself completely defenseless against criticism. He could agree that he only said that bronze was the metal of the age of the men of bronze, who used it for everything, and that he did not say that the race of heroes did not use it. It is obvious that Hesiod could not omit the age of heroes, probably the only age with which his listeners contrasted their own. Chronologically, he introduced it at the right point, just before the iron age. Still, the resulting awkwardness forced him to resort to cleverness. The Isles of the Blest to which some heroes go are obviously identical with the Elysian Field that is described in *Odyssey* 4.561–69. It is a place that knows neither rain nor snow but only Zephyr’s gentle breezes. There favored heroes live in bliss and dine with the gods when the latter choose to visit them. It should be noted that the more standard Greek belief was that heroes went to Hades and that Menelaos went to the Elysian Field because he was Helen’s husband and hence a son-in-law to Zeus.

174–201. The age of iron is Hesiod’s own age, and it is so terrible that Hesiod wishes he were not part of it. Hesiod does not consider himself as living at the apex of the iron age, when evil and misery reach their calamitous peak. Part of what he says about it is in the form of a prophecy of doom. There will be signs of imminent destruction when children are born gray at the temples. Further portents of doom will be a total breakdown of those virtues that hold family and society together: conjugal fidelity, guest-host ties, filial piety, respect for law, and

regard for honor and shame. The lowest point of deterioration will be reached when Shame and Retribution (*Aidos* and *Nemesis*) seek refuge among the gods. *Aidos* is the shame one feels when contemplating an improper or wicked act, or the strong sense of embarrassment that follows such an act. *Nemesis* is the retribution that comes from public censure (cf. *Iliad* 3.156–60; 13.121–24). The meaning is that when people do not feel constrained by either of these, society will break down and Zeus will put an end to it. But if Hesiod places himself at some point before the end, he also seems to hint that the end is near. Lines 193–94

Base men will harm their betters with words  
that are crooked and then swear they are fair

describe the very predicament in which he finds himself vis-à-vis his crooked and mendacious brother, who has lost the feeling of love that brother felt for brother in the good old days. As all good readers of the Hebrew prophets will surely remember, this sentiment is part of the stock-in-trade of all prophets of doom, but Hesiod here could exploit a motif that was bound to appeal to his listeners and at the same time serve as fair warning to his brother, whose behavior not only wrongs Hesiod but portends the destruction of the whole society. Although there is a hint in line 175 that somehow life will not be as bad after the fifth generation, there is no prophecy that Zeus will make a better race to take the place of this one. To offer strong hope at this point would be uncharacteristic of a poet who assigned Hope inside the jar in which Pandora carried the evils that plague mankind.

202–12. The fable of the hawk and the nightingale creates certain difficulties. The genre is best known to most readers through Aesop, and parallels can be found in Hebrew, Sumerian, and other Eastern literatures. The genre was so well-developed in the East that many scholars consider the Greek fable derivative, but this need not be so. After all, there is hardly a peo-

ple living close to the soil without animal tales illustrating ethical principles and human foibles. But anyone familiar with the use of fables in literature is bound to be puzzled by this one. It is addressed to the kings and to Hesiod's brother, Perses. The kings, of course, are the local powerful nobles who have sided with Perses in the dispute over the patrimony. Both they and Perses are greedy. Perses robs his brother and bribes the kings with gifts in order to secure their support. We are dealing with an allegory in which the rapacious hawk stands for the kings and for Perses. Hesiod the poet is the captive nightingale whose protestations are dismissed as useless and ineffectual because the captor is stronger. What is missing in the fable is the punishment of the hawk's hybris. The moral, too, is given by the offender and amounts to the proverbial might makes right. Hesiod's admonition to Perses is "obey justice and restrain reckless wrongdoing." There is a chance that the fable ended with the punishment of the hawk and that Hesiod left the end out because it was too well-known. From the lines that follow the fable, it is obvious that Hesiod feels that the hawk is an ignorant fool. This is clear from the epigrammatic "only fools need suffer to learn" (218).

213–85. In these lines, Hesiod embarks on a sermon on the theme of justice and the evils that follow its violation. In part of this sermon, he personifies the concept and refers to Justice, daughter of Zeus. In the *Theogony*, Hesiod has given Justice a very high place. She is Zeus's daughter by Themis (Established Custom) and a sister of Peace and Good Law (Eirene and Eunomia). Thus, Justice (Dike) is an important force in the civilized order that is concomitant with the rule of Zeus. She and her two sisters "watch over the works of mortal men" (*Theogony* 903). Crooked verdicts and perjury violate Justice inasmuch as "The Oath Demon follows the trail of crooked decrees" (219). The Oath Demon "more than any other brings pains to mortals / who of their own accord swear false oaths" (*Theogony* 231–32). But the perjurer and the wrongdoer harm not only

themselves. They are public menaces because their misdeeds can destroy whole cities. Actions against Justice can bring about infertility of crops and of women, thus causing death through famine and dwindling of population through sterility. Indeed, Zeus is so angered by offenses against his beloved daughter that he visits havoc on whole armies and fleets. An act of injustice is thus made to be like a crack in the very foundation of civilized society with serious consequences. Zeus's eye sees everything, and he has no less than thirty thousand guardians of his order on earth, who constitute a sort of invisible police force that watches out for violations. The rule of Justice is so essential to civilization that nothing else distinguishes with equal sharpness the societies of man from the savage beasts that devour one another. One of the worst forms of injustice is perjury, and Zeus not only punishes the perjurer himself but his descendants as well. The lies of which Perses is guilty will be avenged not only on the community of Askra but also specifically on the progeny of Perses and thereby on Hesiod's next of kin.

This is a very impassioned appeal to Perses to mend his ways before it is too late. The present situation in which the noble suffer injustices is so bad that Hesiod finds it impossible to be a just man surrounded by people who violate Zeus's most fundamental law for man. But Hesiod wants to be a just man, and he is sure that Zeus will make this possible for him by not allowing injustice to triumph. His sense of responsibility and his concern are not only personal but civic as well. The evil perpetrated on him must be rectified before it spreads to the rest of his community, since "many times one man's wickedness ruins a whole city" (240).

216–18. The imagery in these lines is compound. First we have the idea of two roads, one leading to fair dealings and the other leading to unfair ones. Then we have the idea of a race between Justice and its enemy, Injustice or, more accurately, Hybris. But the meaning is clear: Hybris always seems to have a headstart but at the end Justice is always the winner.

219. Horkos, the Oath Demon, is grandson of Night and son of Strife (Eris); he is born after Lawlessness and Ruin, and his siblings constitute an evil brood that plagues humanity (*Theogony* 226–32). Horkos himself is not evil inasmuch as he pursues those who swear false oaths. Originally, the Oath Demon may have been a personification of the imprecation whereby a man called death upon himself, should he swear a false oath. The Roman god of the Underworld, Orcus, may have evolved from this concept and he may owe his name to the Greek Oath Demon. Later on (lines 802–4), Hesiod cautions

Be on your guard all fifth days; they are harsh and dread.

They say that on the fifth the Furies assisted at the birth of Oath, whom Strife bore as a plague to perjurers.

The presence of the Furies at the birth of Oath clearly shows that he is connected with punishment and specifically with revenge.

220–29. Justice is portrayed as an innocent maiden overcome by cruel and unjust men. Under mistreatment she becomes a vengeful spirit that brings ruin on those who are bent on driving her out of the city. But she is essentially a benevolent and beneficent spirit that brings prosperity and peace to the cities of just men. Here Hesiod is working very much along lines that he establishes in the *Theogony* when he gives the genealogy of Justice (Dike) and makes her the sister of Peace and Lawfulness (literally, Good Law) in line 902.

230–31. It should be remembered that Thalia (Festivity) is one of the three Graces—the other two are Splendor (Aglia) and Joy (Euphrosyne)—and a daughter of Wide Law (Eunomie). These lines are then a continuation of the same theme. In other words, Justice finds herself surrounded here by states of prosperity and happiness that correspond to the divinities with which Hesiod surrounds her when he gives her genealogy in the *Theogony* (901–11).

233–34. Scholars have connected the image of the

acorn-laden oak with the practice of eating the acorns. But it should be noted that the men to whom Hesiod alludes here are men who live in a civilized settlement and who are not strangers to agriculture. It is more probable that what Hesiod means is that the cultivated land gives them a plentiful harvest for themselves, and the uncultivated forest a rich yield for their animals. An oak whose middle teems with bees is also a blessing. The bees do not swarm on the acorn-laden branches but on the middle of the oak. By "middle of the oak," Hesiod means a hollow in the middle or even the top of the trunk, thereby counting the leafy part of the tree as the upper half.

234–35. This is a picture of abundance, but abundance in which hallowed custom is respected. This city in which children resemble their fathers is unlike the city that Hesiod has prophesied for the last stage in the deterioration of his own age, the age of iron (182). Hesiod's Askra must have been not so very different from today's Greek village, in which deviation from the "family look" is guaranteed to bring the unfortunate mother's reputation into suspicion and to give cause for wild speculation. Ordinarily, to tell a Greek boy that he is the "sitting image" of his father is to pay him a cherished compliment. Mention of resemblance to the mother is not received with equal enthusiasm.

236–37. Sailing on the sea was considered a peril which one took only under the constraint of dire need.

240–43. The sentiment is common in Greek thought. Thus in the *Iliad*, for the offense Agamemnon has committed against Chryses, Apollo brings pestilence upon the entire Achaean host. The whole land of Thebes is struck by a blight because of the presence among the people of Oedipus, a parricide who has married his own mother.

252–55. The idea of invisible divine watchers is found both in the *Avesta* and in the *Vedas*, and must be of Indo-European origin. In *Odyssey* 17.485–87, we are told that the gods wander through the cities of men in the likeness of

strangers in order to spy on violations of law and order.

259. In *Orphic Hymn* 62, we are told that Justice (Dike)

Sits upon the sacred throne of Lord Zeus looking down on the lives of the many human

racers and crushing the unjust with just retribution.

For this idea, cf. also *Oedipus Coloneus* 1382; and Kern, *Orphicorum Fragmenta* 23.

267. In the *Iliad*, Agamemnon prays thus: "Father Zeus, ruling from Ida, most glorious and greatest / and you all-hearing and all-seeing Sun" (3.276–77). Also in *Odyssey* 11.109 and 12.323, we are told that the sun sees all and hears all. Omniscience cast in similar terms is attributed to certain gods in Indian and Iranian literature. We are doubtless dealing with a common Indo-European tradition for which the Greek lines quoted above preserve some valuable evidence. It is the sun that courses the heavens and sees, and therefore knows, all, and it is a rather small step to transport this attribute of the sun to the ruling sky-god. Yet, as we know from the *Iliad*, Zeus is not, strictly speaking, omniscient.

275–78. What these lines say amounts to a seminal concept of natural law. It is unnatural for men to contravene Justice through brute force and natural for beasts to devour one another. But what is natural in human society coincides with the order imposed by Zeus. The idea seems to be that, since Justice and for that matter Good Law (*Eunomia*) come from Zeus, such "laws" as govern proper conduct also come from Zeus.

286–319. In the preceding sections of the poem, Hesiod admonishes his brother to be just and law-abiding. Here he proceeds to counsel him to be industrious as well. Perses has a choice. He can choose either the evil or the virtuous path. He can also choose sloth over work. But he must not. In both cases, he must make a positive choice. The evil path is easy. It seems to be thought of as a road that leads downhill, but the virtuous path is long and rough like an

arduous climb. Hesiod is conscious that his moral sermon may fall on deaf ears. Perses may wish to think for himself. Hesiod does not deny him this right but tells him that, whereas it is best when a man thinks for himself, it is also noble to listen to good advice. The idle man is like a drone and therefore a potential thief of the labor of others. Hunger is his companion because riches go to those who work. The industrious man is envied only by the indolent, who are also indigent, but he is loved by both gods and men. The work that Hesiod has in mind is manual work, and Perses, bearing in mind the examples of the idle men who belong to the nobility and who probably set the pace in the latest fashion, may prefer to avoid honest labor and to attach shame to it. But this is the wrong kind of shame and it harms man. The right kind of shame is a positive force, much like the right kind of strife, but in any case shame cannot be associated with industry. The moral imperative is unequivocal: "No shame in work but plenty of it in sloth" (311).

320–26. Of course, this is addressed to all, but it is interesting that Hesiod begins the long section of moral imperatives with advice that is especially pertinent to his brother, Perses.

327. Zeus was protector of both suppliants and strangers (cf. *Odyssey* 9.270). In Homer, however, the position of a stranger is weaker, and strangers occasionally take certain steps that are necessary to identify them as suppliants. Thus, once in the palace of Alkinoos, Odysseus sits on the floor near the hearth (*Odyssey* 7.153–54).

328–29. Adultery with a brother's wife was, and still is, a hideous crime in Greece. It is one of the commonest causes of fratricide. For the harsh lot that might await an orphan, cf. Andromache's fears about the future of Astyanax in *Iliad* 22.490–501.

353. A modern Greek analogue commends: "Be good to those who are good and bad to those who are bad."

354–58. Cf. *Hávamál* 48: "He who gives gladly leads a good life and is seldom plagued by sorrow." Cf. also *Hávamál* 39, 42, 52.

359–60. This is a further elaboration of line 320: "—not stolen wealth, god-given is much better." In the lines that follow 320, Hesiod dwells on the punishment that the gods inflict on a man who robs another man's wealth. Here the emphasis is on the psychological effects that stealing has on the thief. The sense of guilt chills the man's heart and settles on it like "a coat of hoar frost."

368–69. Hesiod's concern is not with the quality of the wine that the jar contains but clearly with thrift. When the jar is full, one may drink all one wants because there will still be enough left for him to drink again. Likewise, when the bottom shows, one does not have to exercise any restraint because it is too late. This should not be taken to mean that Hesiod thinks that lack of restraint is a virtue at any point. Rather, he is saying that there can be a departure from thrifty habits only when there is abundance and that thrift is useless when one has exhausted his supplies.

370–73. These lines are most likely a result of interpolation. The strongest argument for interpolation stems not from the idea that they represent a break in the train of thought in this passage—after all, many lines here and elsewhere in Hesiod are digressive—but rather from the fact that they are not found in the oldest manuscripts.

373–75. These lines imply that certain thievish women would enter a man's house and then proceed to use their feminine charms in order to divert his attention and steal something valuable. Some scholars have assumed that the woman Hesiod has in mind was one who wagged her tail, as it were, in order to seduce a man of substance into matrimony, but this may be reading too much into the text. Distrust of women is characteristic of all patriarchal societies, and in those parts of Greece where traditional Greek values are still strong the caveat "never trust a woman" is passed on from father to son as a piece of hallowed wisdom. In the strictly pastoral sections of the country, the explanation given for the supposed wickedness of women is that "they are like

goats; they have the devil in them!" Along similar lines, cf. *Hávamál* 84:

No man should trust the words of a maiden, nor what a woman says, because on whirling wheel their hearts were made and fickleness was placed in them.

376–80. These lines are problematic if, as the weight of ancient tradition dictates, in line 378 we read "and may you die old leaving another son behind" rather than "and may he die old leaving another son behind," which may have its roots in ancient emendation. If we go along with the latter reading, the sense is simple and straightforward: each man is advised to beget an only son and leave him behind as his sole heir. This would be quite sensible, since it would involve no division of patrimony and would prevent the sort of strife that arose between Hesiod and his own brother. With the former and more traditional reading, we are left with what, at least to us, appears to be a contradiction. Indeed, lines 377 and 378 do seem to stand in contradiction, but this contradiction is mitigated considerably by the afterthought of lines 379–80, which express the idea that Zeus may provide for more sons than one and that more children mean more working hands and, therefore, more income. But this only mitigates the contradiction; it does not remove it. That daughters are not mentioned at all comes as little surprise to anyone familiar with attitudes among the rural folk of modern Greece. If pressed, a peasant will admit that a daughter is a child too (*paidi*), but it is still not uncommon to hear a man say that he has, for example, "*tria paidia kai éna koritsi*," that is, "three children (sons!) and one girl!" But in rural modern Greece, even when a man is poor, ordinarily having an only son or just two sons is almost never preferable to having many sons. By contrast, having an only daughter is considered ideal, since it means having to give away only one dowry, which rarely consists of land even if there is only one son in the family.

Hesiod may have compressed within these lines more than we are able to extract from them. He does not advise a man to have many sons most likely because he is addressing farmers, and many sons would entail the division of the father's land into lots that could not support them. But the phrase "may you die old leaving another son behind" shows that his wish is made with the parent's welfare in mind. If a man marries when he is thirty and begets a son, this son may in turn marry when the father is approaching sixty and then have a family of his own to look after. By this time, a late-born son, perhaps one born when the father is forty or even fifty, will grow into manhood just about when a man who lives into ripe old age begins to be plagued by the infirmities of old age. Thus, if we paraphrase Hesiod, he seems to be saying: "As far as property is concerned, one son is ideal, but if you live to be old—and I hope you do so—may you leave a second, late-born son behind." It is interesting that in rural modern Greece, parents usually move in with the family of the youngest son and frequently refer to him affectionately as their *psimddi*, their "late-born" or "youngling." It is with the idea of care for the parents in their old age and the raising of memorial cairns that the poet of *Hávamál* counsels:

It is better to have a son, even one born late,  
after the father's death. Seldom do cairns stand  
by the roadside except such as kinsman  
raises over  
kinsman. (72)

With line 380, the moralizing part of the poem, so replete with maxims of popular wisdom, is essentially over. Lines 381 to 617 constitute a distinct unit on the farmer's year, filled with agricultural advice.

383–87. It is not clear at all why the seven Pleiades are identified with the seven daughters of Atlas, whose names are Alkyone, Gelaino, Elektra, Maia, Merope, Sterope, and Taygete. The ris-

ing Hesiod has in mind is the "heliacal" rising. The Pleiades, in other words, rise over the horizon before sunrise and thereby become visible. The heliacal rising of the Pleiades in Askra for the year 700 B.C. fell on 11 May, a somewhat early date for reaping. When Hesiod says "for forty days and forty nights they lie hidden" (385), he means the forty days that precede their heliacal rising. During this period, the Pleiades rise after sunrise and set before sunset, and are, therefore, invisible. Now, the Greeks and the Romans considered their heliacal rising as the beginning of the summer. As the summer goes on, they rise earlier and earlier until there comes a time when they are seen setting before sunrise. The time of their setting, hence plowing time, in Hesiod's day was close to the end of October. With the coming of the winter, the Pleiades rise earlier and set earlier. Thus by the beginning of April, they rise so early that they set before night. Then comes the period of forty days when "they lie hidden," and the cycle repeats itself. Line 387 refers to the late October date when they are visible as they set and when the farmer sharpens his plowshare. Fall plowing in the area of Askra nowadays begins with the first part of September and ends usually somewhat before the end of October. Sowing usually takes place in November.

The Pleiades have a secure place on the physical as well as on the poetic firmament of Greece. Their antiquity and importance from earliest times is guaranteed by their prominent position at the center of the Shield of Achilles (*Iliad* 18.486). In Modern Greek folk song, they are referred collectively by the word *poulia* (fem. sing.) and, because of the greater visibility of one of the seven stars of the cluster, they have come to be felt as one star. In folk song, they are frequently found in the company of the dawn star. Not long from now, even in Greece, the Pleiades will be known only to astronomers. In my own village (Astrochori, Arta, Epirus), the last man who predicted the weather from the way the Pleiades set on 4 December has been dead for many years. The old songs that mention the Pleiades

so very affectionately are known only by a couple of men well into their nineties, and none of the younger people know the rare lines "Poulia leads six stars / it is a chorus of seven maidens"—the boring weather report dispenses with the need for memory and observation.

388–93. No religious or ritualistic significance is necessarily implied in the advice to sow, to plow, and to reap stripped down. Hesiod most likely means that the farmer should perform these tasks as unencumbered as possible by clothing. Greek farmers frequently strip down to their underwear in order to perform these very same tasks.

405–9. The priorities for the farmer are a house, a woman, and a plowing ox (this is the order in the Greek text of line 405). Since work on the land is men's work (441–47, 459, 470, 502, and so forth) and we have no specific mention of slave women in the rest of the poem, line 406 has caused much discussion. The line may well be interpolated. However this may be, the woman of line 406 is to follow the oxen, presumably scattering the seed. In those parts of modern Greece where plowing is not done by tractor, it is not uncommon to see the plowman followed by his wife scattering the seed. This task is traditionally women's work.

415–19. The heliacal rising of the dog star in Hesiod's day took place on 19 July. From this date on, the star was in the sky all day with the sun, but by the third week of September the dog star rose four hours earlier and thus was "night's consort much longer." The ancients believed that the dog star brought heat, diseases, and sunstroke. The belief clearly arose because its long presence in the sky coincided with July and August, the two hottest months in the Mediterranean. Indeed, "July's heat and August's sun-scorching" is an almost proverbial expression in Greek. The first rains, *protovráchia*, arrive in Greece about the middle of September.

420–22. This is sound advice. Woodcutting is best done in the fall or even the winter, when the sap is less active. Hesiod may be suggesting

early fall because this way the wood will be allowed to lie and dry up for a longer period. 423. The Hesiodic foot is roughly twelve inches long. The log for the mortar should be a thick one that would stand three feet high so that it could be used by a man in a standing position. The cubit was one-and-one-half feet, and this measure makes the pestle four-and-one-half feet long. The suggested length for the pestle seems a bit short. This may indicate that the average man was then shorter or, most likely, that the grinding or, more accurately, the crushing of corn by means of pestle and mortar was ordinarily a task given to women.

424–25. The seven-foot axle is meant to be used for a cart. If we assume that the entire seven-foot axle was between the two wheels, we have an unusually broad cart. Evidence from classical times suggests that the distance between the two wheels was closer to five feet. It is entirely possible that in the more primitive Hesiodic cart the axle projected roughly by one foot at each end. The one-foot piece left for a mallet, if a man should cut an eight-foot piece, being too short for the handle, must be intended for the head of the mallet. On the other hand, since wood cut for an axle piece would not be very thick, the extra foot might be used for the handle of a short mallet.

426–27. It is not easy to decide exactly what sort of wagon Hesiod has in mind here. Is the wagon four-wheeled or two-wheeled? Does the measure of ten palms refer to the height of the wagon, to its breadth, or to the length of the vehicle from front to back? When Hesiod uses the word that I translate as "felly," does he mean a whole wheel, a sort of block wheel, or a quarter-felly? Then there is the question whether the wheel had spokes. The ancient scholiasts took the felly to be a quarter-felly and the measure of ten palms to refer to the diameter of the wheel. A three-span felly would be roughly twenty-four inches long, and this would give us a ninety-six-inch circumference for the wheel. A ten-palm diameter would be forty fingers long and therefore roughly again thirty-one to thirty-two inches

long. If we assume the presence of spokes formed by two crossed sticks, we may well imagine the two sticks crossing at rectangular angles and dividing the wheel into four equal fellys of twenty-four inches in length. The two crossed sticks would be equal in length, and each would be equal to a diameter of thirty-two inches. Now, the ratio of circumference to diameter,  $96:32 = 3$ , is inexact, but we should remember that measures given in spans and palms cannot be expected to produce constant measures and perfect ratios. This solution is based on the assumption that wagons were classified by the diameter of the wheel. Such an assumption cannot be proved, but it is not unreasonable. That by felly here Hesiod means a quarter-felly and not the whole felly is an even safer assumption. A wheel whose entire felly was c. twenty-four inches, if one goes by the imperfect ratio of three for the ratio of the circumference to diameter, would have a diameter of eight inches, and this would make for a miniscule wheel, indeed one that would be small even for a wheelbarrow.

427–36. Hesiod is referring to two types of plows in this passage. The more primitive type is the single-stocked plow, in which beam and share are of one piece. The main pieces of the more advanced type of plow in which the various pieces are fitted together by wooden pegs are: (1) the long handle (curved at the upper end) fitted into the back part of the share; (2) the share itself to which the iron share referred to by Hesiod in line 387 is attached; (3) the beam that is fastened roughly into the middle of the wooden share (the word used for this piece, *gyes*, suggests that at some appropriate point it curved toward the yoke); (4) the pole, which at one end was fastened by pegs (431) to the beam at the one end and by one peg to the middle of the yoke; (5) the yoke, which sits on the necks of the oxen and is kept from slipping away by a pair of (6) *zeuglai* for each ox. These are curved wooden pieces that are driven through the yoke and form a sort of collar round the neck of the animal. At the lower end, they are fastened together by thongs. Hesiod does not

mention the *zeuglai*. He recommends oak for the share and holm oak (M.Gr. *pournári*) for the beam, which has to bear the stress of constant traction. Unlike the beam, the pole is straight, and traction alone will not break it. Hesiod recommends elm or laurel for this piece. Both trees yield wood less tough than oak and were probably in readier supply than oak. Farmers from the village of Panagia (recently renamed Askre), which lies very close to ancient Askra, told me that wooden plows were used in the area until 1935 or so. They agreed that oak was best for the share and holm oak for the beam. The pole, they said, could be made of laurel, of elm, or even of plane tree.

437–40. I have been told by Greek farmers that, although they start using oxen for plowing usually when the animals are three years old, a nine-year-old ox is more mature and disciplined, and still in the peak of its strength. However, the recommended age here may also be dictated by the tendency of epic convention to give formulaic ages.

441–47. Hesiod's recommendation that the helping man who follows the oxen should be forty years old should be taken somewhat more literally than his recommendation that the team of oxen should be nine years old. He tells the farmer to choose a mature man and not a scatterbrained youth. But is the task of this man to plow or to scatter the seed? Line 443 seems to suggest that he is a plowman; lines 445–46 clearly imply that he scatters the seed. This is a contradiction. Plowing takes a great deal of experience, and it is not likely that a poor farmer will entrust his precious plow and his oxen to a hired hand. The difficulty remains, if we read the Greek of 443 to mean "drive a straight furrow," but in my opinion the forty-year-old man in question is one whose task is to scatter the seed. Cf. lines 467–68, in which the farmer himself clearly is the plowman.

448–49. It is clear from the lines that follow that Hesiod advises the farmer to take the flight of cranes on their southward migration as another sign for plowing. The other more

dependable sign, the setting of the Pleiades, was mentioned in line 384.

456. The number 100 need not be taken literally. It is Hesiod's way of saying "many."

462–64. I was told in modern-day Askre (Panagia) that fallow land should be plowed first in the spring between the middle of April and the end of May, and then again in July or August. The second plowing is called *dibólisma* and may be followed by sowing after the first fall rains.

465–66. I translate "Zeus Chthonios" as "Zeus of the earth" and take this god to be Zeus and not Hades or Plouton, who is called "Chthonic Zeus" in *Orphic Hymn* 18 (line 3). Although it is Hades who is more frequently associated with Demeter, it is clear from line 474 that Hesiod means Zeus. For this epithet applied to Zeus, see *Oedipus Coloneus* 1606.

467. Prayer to the god on whom all depends is natural and necessary at the beginning of such an important task. Modern Greek plowmen frequently cross themselves as they begin plowing and then, if the plow hits a stone or the oxen are unruly, proceed to shower scores of saints with blasphemies. The idea, if there is any idea at all in this contradictory behavior, seems to be that it is as natural to ask heaven for help as it is to curse it and hold its powers responsible for adversities.

479–90. Hesiod advises against plowing late at the time of the winter solstice. Although the winter solstice is fixed with precision, by "plowing at winter solstice" Hesiod means plowing that is done late in December rather than at the recommended time in October. Hesiod says that late plowing is bad, but early and gentle spring rains have such a beneficial effect that the harvest of the late plow can be as good as that of the farmer who plows at the right time.

The meaning of line 481 is not entirely clear. A poor crop may consist of short-stalked wheat or barley, but cross-binding the sheaves will not remedy the situation. There is some merit to the suggestion that Hesiod's recommendation is intended to deceive the eyes of malevolent neighbors. A cross-bound sheaf may be made to look somewhat longer and fuller at both

ends. Boeotian farmers in the area of Askra told me that they cross-bind sheaves at all times because this makes for a tighter and securer sheaf and for one that is better balanced and therefore easier to carry.

The song of the cuckoo heralds the advent of spring, and for this reason this bird is greatly loved by the Greeks and figures prominently in their folk songs. The expression "We will not hear the cuckoo this year" is equivalent to "We will not survive the winter this year." In folk songs, the expression "the cuckoo will not sing this year" means that the year will be a year of sorrow and mourning.

493–94. It was the warmth of the smithy that made it a favorite place for idle men to gather.

497. This is Hesiod's way of saying, "lest you come close to death because of starvation." The hand is scrawny because of weight loss. Prolonged hunger causes swelling of the lower extremities.

504. The month of Lenaion roughly coincides with part of January and part of February for us and is therefore in the very heart of the winter. The name is not Boeotian but was used in Ionian states other than Athens. The Athenians called the same month Gamelion.

524–25. These lines constitute a kenning. "Mr. Boneless" is most likely the octopus. The ancient belief that the octopus occasionally ate his "foot"—one of his tentacles, that is—seems based on freakish biological fact—a rare one to be sure—rather than on pure fancy. Such riddle names for animals and people are used by Hesiod playfully, very much as in riddles or folk tales: thus "house-carrier" for the snail (571), "five-branch" for the fland (743), "the wise one" for the ant (778), and so forth. In Epirus, there is a kind of spider that is called "the sunless one." The Cypriots call the viper "the deaf one." As this example indicates, such names are frequently applied to dangerous creatures as a sort of code name that is calculated to leave them unaware that they have been mentioned. Lurking behind this practice is the naïve fear that mention of such a creature by its true name will bring about its appearance.



However, when Hesiod uses such words as *boneless* and *house-carrier*, it is clear that he does so for artistic effect.

527–28. The Greeks believed that in winter the sun spent much of its time over Africa (cf. also *Odyssey* 22–25).

533–35. The walking tripod of these lines is a hunched-over man who walks with the aid of a stick.

538. The cloth Hesiod suggests here for winter wear is a heavy “weft-backed” cloth in which the weft is double and the warp is single. Interestingly enough, a woven cloth called *dimito(n)* by Greek weavers is produced by doubling the warp and is considered more durable and more resistant to cold.

541–42. Such sandals, sometimes also made of pig, horse, or cow skin, were worn by Greek mountaineers in northern Greece as late as 1945. They are called *sgaronia* and are not like ordinary sandals since they cover the whole foot snugly. It must be some such footwear that Hesiod is suggesting and not the ordinary sandal, which is poor protection in cold and rainy weather.

543–45. It is difficult to understand why the hides of firstling kids are recommended for stitching together in order to make a coat. Like firstling lambs, firstling kids were a token of exceptional piety in sacrifices (*Iliad* 4.102). Since animals were almost exclusively slaughtered on religious occasions—much as in modern Greece until very recently—if the farmer follows Hesiod’s advice, he can combine virtue with necessity without departing from thrifty habits.

550–53. Hesiod seems to know that mist and rain come from moisture that rises from the earth and not from some body of water in the celestial region. That he does not mention the sea as a source of moisture that turns to mist and rain is remarkable but understandable. Despite his excursus on navigation, the sea is not part of his experience.

559–60. Hesiod recommends a drastic reduction in the rations given to oxen and some increase in the rations given to men. Oxen are idle in

their stalls in the heart of winter, but men still work, making wagons, plows, and other implements, and are exposed to cold when they tend their flocks of goats and sheep.

561–63. Strictly speaking, the end of the year for Hesiod would be marked by the summer solstice in June, which also marked the beginning of the new year. Yet, here he seems to have the vernal equinox in mind—roughly 21 March—since he speaks of nights and days as no longer unequal. But he does not use the technical expression for the vernal equinox. Since threshing starts roughly on the summer solstice when Orion rises (597–98) and therefore well into the third week of June, the advice given here seems hardly useful or appropriate.

Thrifty habits can be dispensed with only after the new crop has been harvested and threshed. It is possible that by “end of the year” in 561 Hesiod means the summer solstice and that textual corruption in 562 has left us with a line that now means “when nights and days are no longer unequal” but that in its original form must have meant something like “until the days are more than a match for the nights.” M. L. West’s translation, “balance the nights and days” (by allowing more food as the nights grow shorter), is probably right on the mark, but the text as we have it betrays that something is either missing or grammatically distorted.

564–70. Sixty days after the winter solstice would take us to 17 or 18 February. Hesiod has in mind the acronychal and not the heliacal rising of the constellation of Boötes, of which Arcturus is the brightest star. Arcturus is visible on the eastern horizon in the evening for several days toward the end of February and the beginning of March.

The Athenian king Pandion had two daughters, Procne and Philomela. Procne was married to the Thracian king Tereus, who pretended that his wife died and asked that Philomela be sent to him. When she arrived, Tereus raped her and cut her tongue off to prevent her from revealing his hideous act to anyone. Philomela wove her story into a piece of

embroidery and sent it to Procne. Procne took revenge on her husband by killing their son, Itys, and serving his flesh to him. The two sisters were pursued by Tereus, but the gods mercifully put an end to the tragedy by turning all three into birds. Tereus became a hoopoe, Procne a nightingale, and Philomela a swallow. Much like the cuckoo, the swallow is a beloved harbinger of spring in Greece.

Having given the farmer an arithmetic formula and two sure tokens of the imminence of spring’s arrival, namely, the acronychal rising of Arcturus and the return of the swallow, Hesiod proceeds to tell him to make sure to prune his vines before the coming of spring. Pruning and hoeing are done at about the same time. Greeks prune their vines in January or February. The area of Askra is still rich in well-tended vineyards. A line of didactic poetry that was passed on to me at the village of Panagia—recently renamed Askre—counsels: “Prune your vines in January and pay the moon no heed.” However, I was told that, despite this admonition, pruning is frequently done in February. I was also told that “pay the moon no heed” means “pay no attention to whether the moon is waxing or waning.”

Hesiod and the farmers for whom he sang his compositions must have cared a great deal about their vines. The poet tells them when it is best to prune their vines (570) and gather their grapes (611). One wonders why olive trees are not mentioned and why olive oil is so conspicuously absent in Hesiod’s poems. Disciplines other than philology may provide us with answers about this especially intriguing omission. This question is most important in view of the wider, Panhellenic compass of the *Works and Days*.

571–77. The “house-carrier” is the snail. By referring to the sharpening of sickles for reaping, Hesiod makes a rather spectacular jump. The heliacal rise of the Pleiades is, roughly speaking, in the middle of May, when the heat is so intense that snails seek refuge from it by climbing on plants. His advice is “prune and hoe your vines before Arcturus rises and spring is

about to arrive; sharpen your sickles and wake up the slaves for reaping when the Pleiades rise” (see notes on 587–98).

582–89. This is a famous passage that found eager imitators in Greek antiquity. The thistle in question is the golden thistle, which is popularly referred to by Greek peasants as “ass’s thorn.” No one who has spent even one summer day in the Greek countryside is likely to forget the sound of the cicadas, which comes to a deafening crescendo at high noon. Hesiod seems to think that the cicada “chirps” or “stridulates” by vibrating its wings. He is actually not far from the truth since the stridulation comes from a vibration of a membrane in the thorax of the insect.

It is not clear why wine should be at its best in the heart of the summer, but goats are fat at this time. Even though men may be parched by the sun and dried up by the heat, Hesiod would probably be nearer the truth if he had said that the summer heat is conducive to increasing the sexual urge in both men and women. His choosing to attribute to women an insatiable sexual appetite in the summer may be a playful, if unfair, way of overdramatizing the plight of men, whose energies are overtaxed both day and night. Yet, the more probable view is that these lines express deep-seated beliefs. R. B. Onians notes that for the Greeks of the archaic period the head was “the seat and source of ‘life’ and the life fluid” and that much of a man’s strength and his seed in the form of fluid resided in his knees (see Onians, *Origins*, 174ff., and especially 177, 187). In a serious sense, therefore, men whose vital life fluid and seed fluid was drained by excessive heat would be a poor match for libidinous women.

The thistle and the chirping cicadas of August may be privy to forgotten ancient secrets. Few people in northwestern Greece now remember that women were advised to bite into the very tart fruit of the cornel tree in order to dull the hurt of their libidinous urges. In Greece, the fruit of the cornel tree ripens in August, and it is extremely tart even when it is at its ripest.

589–96. For wine, Hesiod recommends *Biblinos Oinos*, “wine from Biblos.” This may have been a district in Thrace, but, be that as it may, the meaning is “your choice wine,” “only the best wine,” or something of the sort. There is equal uncertainty as to whether “bread baked in the dusk” may refer to the immediately preceding evening or to the dusk preceding the dawn of the working day—therefore, a very fresh bread. However, what Hesiod means by “milk from goats just as their milk is about to stop” is clear to goatherds who believe that the thick milk goats produce before they stop altogether producing milk is very nutritional and makes men unusually strong. This sort of milk is called *sterphógalá* in modern Greek, and it comes in late August when the goats start mating. Meat is richer and tastier when it comes from an animal that has been allowed to graze in open pastures and woodlands where the animal, in addition to grass, also eats small plants, shrubs, and low-lying branches of certain trees. Young kids, especially when roasted on a spit, are a prized delicacy in Greece. Even though the Greeks mixed their wine with water, three measures of water and one of wine would produce a very mildly alcoholic beverage, more suitable for refreshment than for intoxication. This recipe is fitting in a passage that recommends relaxation and fending off the effects of intense heat.

Sheep are very important to the Hesiodic economy. Flocks of sheep are equivalent to wealth: “riches and flocks of sheep go to those who work” (308). Sheep wool was highly valued (516–17). It is rather surprising that Hesiod does not mention cheese anywhere. Homer refers to cheese in *Iliad* 10.638 and *Odyssey* 11.234.

597–98. Hesiod refers to the morning or heliacal rising of Betelgeuse, the brightest star of the constellation of Orion. This rising in Hesiod’s time would more or less coincide with the summer solstice. Thus, it is the last third of June and probably the beginning of July that Hesiod recommends as the right time for threshing. That the dates he gives are rough approximations intended as advice the farmer

should use in taking into account the condition of his crops is certain. In 383, Hesiod commands “start reaping when the Pleiades, daughters of Atlas, rise.” Now, as has already been said, the heliacal rise of the Pleiades in Hesiod’s day took place in mid-May. The time he recommends for threshing in 597–98 would be more than a month later. Although in the plains of Eleusis and Thebes reaping takes place earlier—sometimes in May—in the area of Askra barley is reaped at the end of May and wheat usually between 20 June and 10 July. Threshing may wait as long as a whole month. Although the climate of Askra may have been somewhat different in Hesiod’s day, it is entirely possible that his recommendations for reaping and threshing may—even in his own day—have been more applicable to the plains of Boeotia and Attica than to his own village. It is interesting that it is June and not May that is called *Theristés*, “reaper,” in modern Greece.

598. The threshing floor must be well-rounded because the yoked oxen that were driven on the sheaves of wheat strewn on it could perform their task easier and more efficiently if they could run in more or less perfect concentric circles. The threshing floor must be in a windy place because winnowing follows threshing.  
602–3. Literally, Hesiod says “hire a homeless worker.” By this, he means a man without *oikos*, a “household,” and therefore a man free of pressing obligations. A childless woman is also ideal as a servant because she is unencumbered and because the master will not have extra mouths to feed.

604. Hesiod’s exhortation to keep one’s sharp-toothed dog well fed seems to fit the needs of a settled farmer whose animals, including his dog, are domesticated. Cretan and Epirotan shepherds keep their dogs lean and feed them small portions every second or third day. This way, their dogs are alert and dangerous to intruders.

605. The “day-sleeper” is the burglar who sleeps during the day and prowls at night.

609–14. The time indicated here is mid-September. Line 610 is a poetic way of describing the morning rising of Arcturus. September

in modern Greek is properly called *Trygetés*, vintage month. Vintage time in the area of Askra nowadays usually begins 25 September and ends 15 October.

“The gift of joyous Dionysos” is, of course, wine.

615–17. For the setting of the Pleiades, see notes on 383–87. The constellation of Orion partly sets at the same time as the Pleiades. The Hyades set in the beginning of November.

619–20. The setting of the Pleiades before Orion is here described in terms of flight and pursuit. For the setting of the Pleiades, cf. notes on 383–87.

635. Aeolian Kyme then is the place of origin for Hesiod’s family. The city was situated on the coast of Asia Minor, not too far from the river Hermos and, very roughly speaking, across from the islands of Lesbos and Chios.

639–40. Askra lay to the northwest of Thespiiai and to the south of Lake Kopais. It was destroyed by the Thespians, probably at the end of the fifth century. The Askreans who survived the destruction were taken to Orchomenos. When Pausanias visited the site, the only structure he found standing was a solitary tower; no doubt the same tower that still stands on top of the hill Pyrgaki. The Acropolis of Askra must have been located on top of this hill, but the Askreans most likely lived at the foot of the hill and cultivated the fields that lie between it and the foot of Helikon. I visited this area in April 1979 and found it so lovely that I cannot but attribute Hesiod’s unflattering comment on Askra to a deep-rooted personal grudge. The modern village nearest the site is that of Panagia. Its inhabitants recently renamed it Askre and are eagerly collecting money to erect a statue of Hesiod.

651–52. Some scholars understand these lines to mean that the Achaeans “waited through a long winter” before they sailed to Troy. We cannot be sure about the details of the version familiar to Hesiod, but “storm” rather than “winter” is a very definite possibility. Unfortunately, Homer offers no help for the solution of the problem (cf. *Iliad* 2.303).

654–59. Even though there is no independent tes-

timony either for Amphidamas or for the event to which Hesiod refers here, there is no reason to think that we are dealing with fiction. This Amphidamas was most likely a nobleman from Chalkis who fell in a battle against the Eretrians during the long feud over the Lelantine plain. Proclus gives an alternative version for line 657: “I was victor in a song contest with divine Homer.” We can be certain that this line should be ascribed to an interpolator who was eager to adduce proof for the historicity of the *Contest of Homer and Hesiod*. Pausanias tells us that when he visited Helikon he was told that the most ancient of the tripods dedicated at Helikon was the one won by Hesiod at Chalkis (9.31.3).

663–77. Prima facie, Hesiod seems to be suggesting that the best time to sail is the period of fifty days that follows the summer solstice; that is, from about 20 June to 10 August. But there are problems with this passage. Line 663 could be translated either “fifty days past the summer solstice” or “for fifty days past the summer solstice.” If we take the line to mean that sailing should start fifty days after the summer solstice, we end up with a sailing season that starts very late and does not take advantage of the major part of the summer. If, on the other hand, we understand the meaning of the line to be “for fifty days after the summer solstice,” we have a sailing season that ends too soon. In addition to these problems, we also have to come to terms with line 664, which literally says “when the toilsome summer season comes to an end.” The summer season does not come to an end either at the end of June or at the beginning of August. Perhaps consideration of some other factors might help us reach a tentative solution. If the dependable winds to which Hesiod refers in line 670 are the Etesian winds, commonly known as *meltemia* in modern Greece, it should be borne in mind that these winds start roughly around 20 July, when Sirius rises, and continue roughly until the end of August or the beginning of September. But the beginning of the Etesian winds does not come at the end of the summer season. How-



ever, we should remember that for Hesiod the summer started with the heliacal rise of the Pleiades (11 May or so in his day). This rise signaled the beginning of the busy season of summer work. Reaping started then (see notes on 383–84). Threshing started around the summer solstice and the concomitant rise of Orion (see notes on 597–98). Threshing, winnowing, storing, transportation by land, and loading of surplus wheat on boats could well occupy the last week of June and the first two weeks of July. It is, therefore, possible that when Hesiod speaks of the end of the toilsome summer season he may refer to the period from mid-May to mid-July and mean something tantamount to “when the toilsome part of the summer comes to an end.” The key to understanding the passage lies in realizing that Hesiod wants to count the fifty days starting not only after the summer solstice but also after the busy agricultural work more or less comes to an end, and, most likely, after the Etesian winds start to blow. If we count from 20 July, we have a sailing season whose height lasts until 10 September or so. Now, one could venture to sail for a longer period, but Hesiod advises sailors to come home “before the new wine and the fall rains” (674). The time of the new wine and of the fall rains is certainly much closer to the end of the specified fifty-day sailing season, if we count the beginning of this season from 20 July rather than from 20 June.

678–82. The time to which Hesiod alludes here in this quaint way should be the second half of April.

690–93. Hesiod advises the merchant to overload neither wagon nor ship, but probably for different reasons. In the case of the wagon, the load should not be excessive because it might overtax the strength of the axle, and the merchant might end up with a broken-down wagon and a wasted load of grain and other goods. But in the case of a ship’s cargo, Hesiod advises taking to the ship less than what is left behind because the sea is so fickle and perilous and the sea trader should risk no more at sea than he could do without back home.

695–97. This is still considered an ideal age for a Greek man to marry.

698. If we consider the thirteenth year as the year in which girls reach puberty, then Hesiod is suggesting that a girl should marry when she reaches eighteen. His advice seems very sensible but probably does not mirror the practice of his time. Indeed, evidence from various parts of the Greek world suggests that not infrequently girls were given in marriage at much younger ages.

699. The emphasis on marrying a virgin here at least seems to have little to do with chastity. The important thing is that a future wife should be so innocent at the time of marriage that her husband could proceed to mold her character according to his own values, and her habits and manners also according to his own.

700–701. In a small community, a man must guard his reputation and must not risk marrying a girl he does not know because, if she turns out to be a bad wife, he may be ridiculed in the eyes of his neighbors.

702–5. One of the characteristics of a bad wife is that “she is a glutton who reclines to eat.” The idea is that it is bad enough for a woman to have a voracious appetite and even worse if she is so lazy and assumes such improper airs as to recline when she eats. Greek men liked to eat half-reclined, supporting the weight of the upper body on one of their elbows, but the women were expected to wait on them. In rural modern Greece until quite recently—and in some remote parts of the country even now—women first served the men and then ate, sometimes separately, especially if guests were present.

719–20. With these lines, compare *Hávamál* 29.

722. Cf. *Hávamál* 7.

724–26. For ritualistic hand-washing, cf. *Iliad* 1.449; 16.230.

727–32. The acts that involve the elimination of human waste are perforce unclean. The concern here is not with cleanliness but with ritualistic propriety. Urinating should preferably be done at night and even then in some manner

that does not offend the night, for the night is also divine. Urinating while facing the sun is tantamount to defiling and perhaps defying not only the source of light and warmth but a celestial body revered as a god. The advice to squat before urinating or to urinate against walls seems intended to ensure minimal exposure of the genitals. Temple inscriptions from ancient Greece occasionally contain prescripts against defecation and urination within the area of the temple. These lines are quite similar in spirit to the prescripts given in the *Laws of Manu* 4.45–50. They and lines 736, 757–59 remind me somewhat of a couplet that was recited to me in the Cypriot village of Choulou in the area of Paphos: “If a man farts in church or shits right on the road / or pisses into water, his sins are not forgiven.”

733–34. Hestia, the goddess connected with the hearth, was a virgin goddess and as such especially averse to the sight Hesiod describes here. Cf. also notes on *Theogony* 454.

736. The fear that obviously lurked behind this taboo was that contact with death was inauspicious for the procreative act. Death is the enemy of life, and the two must be kept as far apart as possible.

737–41. Rivers were personified and considered sacred. Therefore, a man should be ritually pure before crossing them.

742–43. The “five-branch” is the hand, and these lines are an injunction against cutting one’s nails at a sacrifice. Tradition ascribes a similar prescript to Pythagoras. The reason behind this curious taboo is obscure. In the area of Radovyzia, Epirus, formerly people set on taking blood revenge for murder would not cut their nails until they did so. When I asked people from the village of Panagia (Askre) about superstitions concerning nails, they told me that the only knowledge they had of such superstition came from the lines:

Cut not your nails on Wednesdays and Fridays,  
and bathe not on Sundays, if you want to do well.

744–45. None of the explanations suggested for this superstition is satisfactory.

746–47. Some scholars understand the word that I have translated “carve an auspicious sign” to mean “smooth out” or “polish the roof” and suggest that, if the roof is smooth, crows cannot perch on it. I think this suggestion is quite unlikely, since no roof could be so smooth that crows could not perch on it. I also think that Hesiod suggests the carving of an apotropaic sign or of some sort of figure that could serve as a “scarecrow.” Much like owls, crows are considered birds of ill omen in modern Greece.

750–52. “That which is motionless” is most likely a reference to tombs and the dead. We do not know why the number 12 is significant in this connection. That it should be boys and men, rather than girls and women, who can be harmed by sitting on tombs is perhaps easier to explain. The dead belong to the Underworld and, therefore, to powers that are perforce hostile to life and fertility, and it is the man who carries the seed and who is more easily subject to harmful influences. The earth “hides” seeds of all kinds much as it “hides” the dead.

753–54. It is a widespread belief among primitive peoples that contact with the “weaker sex” weakens men. This is the idea that lies behind taboos that forbid men to eat together even with their wives (see Crowley, *Mystic Rose*, London, 1902, 202–30).

These lines suggest the fear of contamination caused by the possible presence of a woman’s menstrual blood. In the Orthodox Jewish holy ritual of the mikvah, a woman immerses herself totally in water that is pure and at least partly coming from a natural source. The goal is renewal and reunification with God and with her husband. Relevant to our lines is the stipulation that the mikvah should take place at the end of seven spotless days and seven nights after the completion of the menses. Until a generation ago, Greek shepherds of the Argrapha mountain range did not sleep with their wives on the night preceding the making of cheese. Fear of possible contamination also lay behind this restriction.

755–56. The meaning of these lines most likely is that, if a man chances on a sacrifice that is either in honor of a god unknown to him or that is accompanied by rites unfamiliar to him, he should wisely refrain from criticism and disapproval lest he offend some god.

756–60. See notes on 727–32.

761–64. In small homogeneous societies, a man's reputation means everything. This is especially so in a society, such as the Greek, in which shame and social rebuke were and still are extremely powerful forces. Along these lines, a modern Greek proverb says: "It is better to have your eye gouged out than your name tarnished." We find the same feeling expressed in the Edda more powerfully than in the Hesiodic lines:

Cattle die, kinsmen die,  
Man himself dies.  
I know one thing that dies not,  
a good name for him who has it.  
Cattle die, kinsmen die,  
Man himself dies.  
I know one thing that dies not,  
the judgment on each man dead.  
(*Hávamál* 76, 77)

765–828. *The Days*: This section of the poem has been the subject of controversy among modern scholars, several of whom do not consider it Hesiodic. Whatever the merits of their objections, it should be said that they pit themselves against the weight of ancient tradition. The objections marshaled forth against Hesiodic authorship are: (1) in the "Works," Hesiod reckons time chiefly by means of solstices, equinoxes, risings of well-known bright stars, and the appearance and behavior of certain flora and fauna (the only reference to a month is in line 504); and (2) in the "Works," Hesiod's prescripts are those of a pious but rational and definitely practical man. In the "Days," there is no discernible rational principle, and pure superstition is allowed to run rampant. Other objections concentrate on linguistic and stylistic aberrations from what is considered typically Hesiodic and on certain inherent contradictions between recommendations given in

the "Works" for the performance of certain tasks and recommendations given in the "Days" for the performance of the same tasks.

In the "Days," Hesiod refers to the days of the month either by taking the month as a unit of twenty-nine or thirty days, or by dividing it into two halves, the first coinciding with the waxing moon, and the second with the waning moon, or by dividing it into three ten-day periods. These divisions must stem from three different but not incompatible ways of dividing the lunar month, and, allowing for local peculiarities, they are not basically at variance with general Greek practice.

Evidence from some classical sources shows that the ancient Greeks considered some days holy or auspicious and other days inauspicious, but Hesiod's scheme of days that are good or bad for certain tasks or events is unique for classical and preclassical Greece. Examples from Egypt and Mesopotamia are helpful only to the extent that they prove that such schemes existed in ancient times, but no correspondence has been established between them and the Hesiodic list of good and bad days. However, evidence from primitive cultures suggests that the belief in auspicious and inauspicious days is widespread.

One of the best critical assessments of this part of the poem was given by Friedrich Solmsen (Solmsen 1963). Solmsen examines some of the most significant views of earlier scholars and, at the same time, gives his own carefully weighed reflections on the incongruities inherent to the "Days." Solmsen considers the original "Days" to have consisted only of lines 770–79, which enumerate the seven auspicious days that come from Zeus; he treats the rest of this portion of the poem as substantial additions and almost haphazard accretions to be credited to rhapsodic elaboration. He condemns all of the "Days" as "a wild growth, proliferating without control and direction and reflecting the equally uncontrolled wild-fire-like spread of the superstition" (313–14). He also condemns lines 724–59 of the poem as rife with the same irrational superstition that characterizes the "Days" (317).

Before addressing these objections, I should like to draw attention to some pertinent details in the "Days." Of the twenty-nine-and-a-half days of the lunar month as well as of the thirty days of the lunisolar month—and Hesiod uses both (cf. line 766)—eleven days are dismissed as insignificant (line 823). The days enumerated in lines 770–79 are good days; for one of them, the seventh, a reason is given for its auspicious character. The good days are the first, the fourth, the seventh, the eighth, and the ninth "of the waxing month," and also the eleventh and the twelfth. Yet as the poem goes on, the reader discovers that Hesiod distinguishes this fourth day—presumably the first fourth of the waxing month—from the middle fourth (794–99), which can bring grief (although it is propitious for the birth of girls). His scheme also includes a third fourth; that is, the twenty-fourth of the month (820–21). The first fourth he calls a sacred or holy day and then, paradoxically, proceeds to call the middle fourth "the holiest" of all days (819) and the third fourth "best at dawn but not good toward evening"; I say paradoxically because lines 794–99 prove the middle fourth a day of very mixed blessings. In addition to this, lines 797–98 inform us that the fourth of the waxing and waning month is to be shunned as an inauspicious day. How can the middle fourth, which is at best good and bad, be the holiest of all days—holier also than the first fourth, which brings no ills? And what are we to make of the belief that the first fourth, an auspicious day, and the third fourth, which is very auspicious in the morning and only not so auspicious toward evening, are, according to lines 797–98, days to be shunned? Surely there are contradictions here, but it is as good as certain that line 798, which is bracketed as spurious by most editors, is indeed spurious, the result of a not too clever interpolation.

Despite these and other contradictions, not all is, by any means, chaotic in the "Days." Most of the auspicious days fall well within the waxing moon, and thus lunar growth is associated with growth and harvesting of crops and with marriage and birth, especially of male off-

spring. Of the eleven days Hesiod calls "meaningless, untouched by fortune" (823), seven fall after the twentieth of the month, within the phase of the waning moon. The only really bad day within the first half of the month is the fifth (802–3). Indeed, if the lines that refer to it are a non-Hesiodic accretion, then a scheme emerges whereby the first half of the month is preponderantly positive and auspicious, while the second part of the month, although by no means wholly bad, is fraught with more negative possibilities and, besides, contains eight of the eleven days that are insignificant.

The nineteenth is better toward evening, but the twenty-fourth excellent in the morning and not so good in the evening. I am in no position to judge whether this sort of division of a day may ultimately come from Egyptian or Babylonian sources, but I have found lingering traces of this belief in modern Greece. Thus in the summer of 1979, I was told in the village of Agia (Epirus) by an eighty-five-year-old man that "there is one really bad day in the week, Tuesday, and this day, bad from the start, is worse toward evening."

On the whole, the auspicious birth of boys and girls is assigned to separate days, with the exception of the ninth of the waxing moon, which is "a good day for men and women both to plant offspring / and to be born themselves" (812–13). In the sixth day of the waxing moon, we have a case of contrasting opposition, since this day is good for the birth of boys but bad for the birth of girls.

The Hesiodic calendar is neither comprehensive nor entirely consistent, and Hesiod himself is conscious of its inconsistencies and of the uncertainty that surrounds the whole matter:

Men have days they favor, but few really know.  
The same day can be a mother now, a stepmother later.

(824–25)

If one takes a conservative view on the matter of interpolated lines—and excises from the text those lines that create glaring contradic-

tions—I think it is unnecessary to go so far as to consider the whole section the result of rhapsodic extrapolation.

The arguments scholars have advanced against the authenticity of this portion of the poem are reasonable but not cogent. In the earlier and major part of the poem, Hesiod is concerned with the right season or the right time of the year for the performance of a task. Having dealt with this, he may indeed feel it necessary to concentrate on when things should or should not be done from day to day. As for the objection that reason rules “The Works” and superstition “The Days,” one can produce abundant evidence of basically contradictory attitudes in our own days. Avowed Marxists insist on having their children christened. Orthodox Jewish scientists may not so much as push the button to turn on the radio on the Sabbath. An otherwise rational nuclear physicist may be afraid to move into a hotel room on the thirteenth floor.

That the practice of attaching special significance not only to various days of the month but also to specific months and years was common in postclassical times is obvious from Paul’s injunction to the Galatians: “Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain” (Galatians 4:10). It is interesting to note the belief that the first of the month (*noumenia*) was, even in Byzantine times, looked upon as a day of special significance during which people would not give anyone fire, vinegar, or almost anything else. Some days were especially observed within the week rather than within the month. Thus, Joseph Bryennios (Orthodox missionary and teacher at the end of the fourteenth and at the first quarter of the fifteenth centuries) writes that evils befell the nation “because we observe Mondays [second days], Tuesdays [third days] and Thursdays [fifth days]” (*Causes of Grief* 3, 121).

The Hesiodic observation that “men have days they favor, but few really know” (824) is fully supported by modern Greek attitudes. Thus, the Kephallenians consider Saturday an

auspicious day, but the people of Gytheion will neither sow, nor reap, nor weave on a Saturday. Occasionally, the prejudice against a certain month seems to have a quasi-logical or folk-etymological association. Thus in Methone, February is not a good month for weddings because there is a fear that children born of parents married in this month will be lame, since February is not a complete month. In the village of Peta (district of Arta), weddings are avoided during the month of June, which is called *Theristés* (The Reaper), because the couple may be “reaped” by Death. (For a full discussion of details, see Koukoulas, *Life and Civilization of the Byzantines*, Athens, 1950, 2:150–55).

For modern Greeks, Tuesday is by far the worst day of the week. In the minds of most Greeks, this is connected with the fall of Constantinople to the Turks on a Tuesday, although there is evidence that Tuesdays were considered inauspicious before the year of this national catastrophe in 1453. Thursday was considered an inauspicious day as early as the times of Nikephoros I (patriarch of Constantinople for the years 806–815), who cautions that “you must not observe even Thursdays” (*Patrologia Graeca* 100, 851). Interestingly enough, in Skopelos of eastern Thrace the Greeks until very recently considered Thursday an inauspicious day “because the Lord died on this day.” Many Greeks still consider Wednesdays and Fridays inauspicious days. Wednesday is inauspicious because it was on a Wednesday that “the Jews held council,” and Friday because Jesus was crucified on a Friday. The Sarakatsani and other Greek shepherds refuse to shear their sheep or to give them salt on a Friday. Yet Wednesday is an auspicious day for the people of Upper Syros, and both Wednesdays and Fridays are auspicious in Sisanion (Macedonia). Elsewhere in the Greek countryside, Friday is not an inauspicious day but an especially sacred day for the women, who observe it by refraining from work, even from the evening of the Thursday that precedes it. The day, called *Paraskevè* in modern Greek, is personified and identified with St. Paraskevè,

who appears as a horrific old woman to those who violate the sanctity of her day (see Kyriakides, *Greek Folklore*, Athens, 1965, 201).

Very interesting is also the belief that people born on Saturdays are favored by the Fates; they are “light-shadowed” and possess the ability to exercise magic powers and to see invisible spirits and especially the *Nerides*, the capricious nymphlike fairies of springs and woodlands (*ibid.*, 195). There are echoes here of such Hesiodic beliefs as the sanctity of the seventh day because Apollon was born on it (771), or the inauspicious character of all fifth days because “on the fifth the Furies assisted / at the birth of Oath, whom Strife bore as a plague to perjurers” (803–4), or even of “the great twentieth” during which wise men are born (792–93).

There are instructive analogies here, analogies associated with significant religious events. But the analogies are limited and they do not suffice to explain Hesiod’s scheme, which is probably a mixture of religious and numerical superstition combined with irrational primitive fears and taboos, the reasons for which had sunk into oblivion even by Hesiod’s own time. Modern analogies show that frequently a reason is given for the inauspicious character of a day. When it is not given, one may fairly assume that it has been forgotten. The existence of contradictions does not seem

to discourage people from observing a day as inauspicious because it is considered auspicious in some other part of the country. Greek farmers who observe the twelve days of August (*hēmeromēnia*) as meteorologically significant for the weather of the twelve months of the year do not know the reason for this belief, and they are not bothered by the belief present in some other village that it is the first three or six days of August or of some other month that are significant. If a poet chose to put their beliefs into verse, it is very doubtful that he would change their beliefs so that they would be consistent for the whole country and free of contradictions. I do not believe for a moment that Hesiod constructed a calendar of lucky and unlucky days for his compatriots. I believe that he felt obliged to record as coherently and as faithfully as he could the traditional calendar lore of his birthplace, incorporating at the same time elements known to him from other places, whether they were entirely consistent or not. It should be remembered that Homer built his epics on the heroic legends as they existed, and that to this end he operated within the conventions of the heroic tradition and on his own system of reasoning, leaving his contradictions to scholars. The *Iliad* is a great poem, not a masterpiece of modern logic.

778. “The wise one who piles up his harvest” is the ant.