Hesiod Notes
PHIL301
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Last Time
- In our first meeting, we introduced the concepts of chaos, cosmos, and *logos*. These concepts enable us to express a fundamental feature of human thought and behavior, namely, our propensity for seeking and constructing a logical account of the world around us. See the notes on Basic Terminology and Chaos, Cosmos, and *Logos* for further details.

Epistemological Concerns
- Note that there is an ambiguity in the notion of a logical account of the world. The question concerns whether and to what extent the logic of the account penetrates to the nature of the world. It could be, that is, that human logic is only "local", in the same way that any living being's organization of the world extends only as far as the being has power over things around it. This would make our logic purely *creative*. Or, it could be that humans in fact *discover* the logic of the world – that the principles of being that we identify exist in things independently of us and our activity. Which of these possibilities is correct constitutes a deep philosophical issue, one which we will continue to confront throughout the course.
- In other words, it could be that the power of human logic to organize and reliably predict our universe stems from the fact that our universe is, in fact, logical itself. This way of thinking is an instance of "inference to the best explanation." I.e., the best explanation for the success of human logic is that the world itself is logical – as opposed, say, to the view that the world is fundamentally plastic, so that any form of organization, logical or otherwise, could exist and continue. (One might object to this latter proposition that a logically inconsistent form of being could not exist or continue to exist. A response to such an objection might be that if our logic is not in fact characteristic of the external world, then talk of "inconsistent being" is empty.)
- In any case, one question that we shall face in this course is how to evaluate the various systems of thought that we encounter. Since logic seems fundamental to human thought, it would seem that we must accept it as one criterion of acceptability. At a minimum, evaluating systems of thought in these terms will tell us a good deal about ourselves and the world that we experience, if not more.

Significance
- What is the significance of Ancient Greek Philosophy? This is the primary question of our course. Why do we study the Ancient Greeks? The reasons are relatively strong and clear: Ancient Greece represents the primary intellectual birth-place of western civilization. This means that our primary ways of thinking

about the world, and thus our primary ways of acting, our institutions, our culture, our religions, etc., inherit from Ancient Greece much of their overall form or substance.
- While this proposition is plain enough, the student will benefit from attempting to express this fact for him/herself. Such broad and important matters are not easily expressed, if the requisite detail and nuance are to be included. Nor even is the general point easily made, without some skill in articulating large-scale, significant facts. Thus the central technical exercises of the course will focus on doing just these things, both orally and in writing.
- Identifying the significance of Ancient Greek Philosophy may involve two processes. First, we must *analyze* and *evaluate* Greek thought in its own terms. The *analysis* of Greek thought consists simply in identifying what, exactly, is being said by the given writer. We are then in a position to *evaluate* that body of thought, which in most cases will be to determine its success with respect to its stated goals. For the most part, the goal of Ancient Greek philosophy is to provide a true, rational account of reality, especially as it includes us and our interests. A further, if not primary goal is practical – to identify the best means of living well, a goal in the service of which the true account of reality may be pursued.
- The goals of the Ancient Greeks, then, are not different from our own philosophical interests. So, the second process that we may undertake in considering the significance of Ancient Greek philosophy is a consideration of what, if anything, the Ancient Greeks tell us about ourselves, as we exist now in the 21st Century. Whether the Greeks succeed in identifying either theoretical or practical truth, given their special position in our intellectual history, their efforts may well facilitate our own pursuits of truth and the good life.
- More specific terms of identifying the significance of Ancient Greek thought will emerge as the course advances.

Further Intellectual Tools: Logic and Arbitrariness
- (See also my discussion of Rationalism, in Basic Terminology notes.)
- One measure of the logic of an intellectual system is its degree of conceptual interconnectedness. The nature of conceptual connection is, like everything else in philosophy, a subject of ongoing debate. However, for our purposes, we can say that two concepts are connected insofar as they share a conceptual part. Consider, for example, the relationship between our concept of *material body* on the one hand and our concept of *gravitational force* on the other. These concepts, we may say, are intimately connected, inasmuch as they both include the concept of *mass*, as ordinarily defined. That is, if we *analyze* (break apart) the concept of *material body*, we find that it involves the concept of mass. And the concept of mass is intrinsic to the definition of gravitational force (as per Newton and other physicists, that is). Thus, a theory in which material bodies are associated with the force of gravity would to this extent be counted *logical* – the two concepts are logically (conceptually) connected.
- By contrast, we may define il-logic or *arbitrariness* as the lack of any such connection. Examples of the lack of a logical (or conceptual) connection are easy

to construct. Pick any two ideas at random. Chances are that they will not be closely related. E.g., *shingle* and *marmalade*. These two concepts don't appear to have much in common. Of course, both are material things, so they are not completely foreign to each other. Indeed, it may be a challenge to find two human concepts that lack any relationship – if only because they derive from us. Consequently, the measure of the logic of a set of concepts (or of a system of ideas) may be a matter of degree.

<u>Hesiod</u>

Poem and Poet
- It is important to recognize that Hesiod's *Theogony* originates in an ancient, religious/poetic tradition. The *Theogony* derives from a religious cult tradition itself part of the broad, polytheistic religion of the Ancient Greeks. In some respects, our knowledge of the period in which the *Theogony* was laid down in writing – somewhere around 800-600BCE – is extensive; in others, it is fragmentary and limited.
- We do know that the narrator of the poem refers to a homeland located in western Boeotia, near Mt. Helikon. We do not know, however, whether there was an historical figure, Hesiod, who first placed the poem in writing. Given the oral tradition that must have preceded its writing, it seems unlikely that any single person should be regarded as the original author of the poem. On the other hand, the distinctive references to Hesiod's family in *Works and Days*, suggest some connection to an actual, historical individual.
- We do know that there was an important nearby cult devoted to worship of the Muses, and it is reasonable to suppose that the Hesiodic poems were an important part of their ritual practices. Indeed, it would seem no coincidence that such a cult should be home to the poem in which the identity of "poet", as self-conscious individual, first makes its appearance in western history.
- We do know, too, that the cult practices of the ancient Greeks varied considerably from one village or *polis* to another. Each had its patron (or matron) gods; each had its particular version of the myths associated with these gods, particularly as they involved the location and its inhabitants. And we know that despite such local variety, the general mythology of the Greeks was shared, and that the several general accounts were frequently at odds with each other as to the particular acts and relationships of the gods.
- A useful general expression of the nature of ancient Greek religion is offered by Walter Burkert:
    > Ritual and myth are the two forms in which Greek religion presents itself to the historian of religion. There are no founding figures and no documents of revelation, no organizations of priests and no monastic orders. The religion finds legitimation as tradition by proving itself a formative force of continuity from generation to generation. Ritual, in its outward aspect, is a programme of demonstrative acts to be performed in a set sequence and often at a set place and time – sacred insofar as every omission or deviation arouses deep anxiety and calls forth sanctions. As communication and social imprinting, ritual establishes and secures the solidarity of the closed group; in this function it has doubtless

accompanied the forms of human community since the earliest of times. Sacred ritual involves the invocation of invisible powers which are addressed as a personal opposite: they are called gods, *theoi*, as soon as we have texts. Myth, a complex of traditional tales, has more to say of these gods, but among the Greeks these tales are always taken with a pinch of salt: the truth of a myth is never guaranteed and does not have to be believed. But quite apart from the fact that mythology is at first the sole explicit form of intellectual activity and the sole mode of coming to terms with reality, the importance of the myths of the gods lies in their connection with the sacred rituals for which they frequently provide a reason, an aetiology, which is often playfully elaborated. The art of poetry then gave individual myths a fixed and memorable form, and the recitation of this poetry became in turn an essential part of every festival. Greek myth, complex in essence and actuality, therefore eludes all one-dimensional classifications and analyses.
    – Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Blackwell Publishing, 1985), pp. 8-9
- Also useful are Burkert's definitions of *myth* and *ritual*:
    Ritual: an action divorced from its primary practical context and become symbolic, usually of a non-human other by means of which human being and social unity are defined (55).
    Myth: a complex of traditional tales elevating significant human situations to the fantastic to create a system of symbols revealing reality (120).

As We have Seen:
- Humans employ *logoi* to replace chaos with cosmos.
- To the extent that *logoi* are primary, broad, higher-order descriptors, we may call them *archia* (pl. of *arche*) or principles.
- So, what *archia* dominate the Hesiodic cosmos? What general mechanisms or forces exist to bring about change? What basic categories of being are identified in his account?

Anthropomorphism
- Anthropomorphism is representing a (presumably) non-human entity or phenomenon in human form or terms.
    o From Gk. *anthropos*, meaning "man" and *morphos*, meaning "shape" or "form"
- Hesiod's primary explanatory principles are anthropomorphic. Most change is a product of human-like process (reproductive; deliberative, voluntary action) and inspired by human-like motivations (emotional, practical, etc.). Similarly, the very being of the natural world is anthropomorphized: earth is a woman; heaven a man; etc.
- Anthropomorphism brings the advantage of a known or knowable commodity: we can bring intellectual order to our universe by representing its contents in human terms. In one sense, this makes Hesiod's universe in principle knowable by us (but see below).
- Technologically, however, the merits of anthropomorphism are slim to non-existent: there is little or no evidence that we can control the environment by representing it in human terms. (E.g., sacrifices to appease the gods don't seem to

work. Thinking of famine or drought as a punishment doesn't help us to avoid either.)
- Moreover, such a worldview faces these *epistemological concerns:*
    o First, it is difficult to obtain any evidence of the truth of this worldview.
        ▪ This is not necessarily a *principled* objection: we might not be able to know in advance that such a worldview fails to admit of evidence.
        ▪ But it does so happen that we are unable to find clear evidence of any principal feature of the anthropomorphic worldview. These include the following:
            • Natural phenomena have mental states like ours (e.g., desire, discursive thought);
            • Natural phenomena have personalities (e.g., bellicose; wise);
            • Natural phenomena are explainable by reference to human-like motivations (e.g., anger, jealousy);
            • Natural phenomena have a form or state similar to the physical form or state of humans (e.g., male or female genitalia).
    o Second, the absence of such evidence is good reason to think that these features in fact fail to obtain.
        ▪ All that we regard as human or human-like is discovered by us in either of two ways: by introspection, and by sense observation.
        ▪ This suggests that human phenomena as such are of a kind open either to introspection or sense observation.
        ▪ Consequently, if nature did in fact have any of the above human-like qualities, these qualities should be evident to us in either introspection or sense observation.
        ▪ But we can detect no such qualities by either means.
        ▪ So, probably, there are none.
    o Third, a more likely interpretation of the Hesiodic worldview is that such accounts describe only ourselves, not the natural world-order.
        ▪ The *Theogony* provides a rich representation of humanity as driven by powerful urges and emotions, even while attempting to bring rational order to its sphere.
        ▪ One important criterion of correct interpretation is *fruitfulness:* if an interpretation yields its intended result, then we have reason to believe it correct or accurate; if it stubbornly fails to yield its intended result, we have reason to think it wrong-headed or mistaken, somehow.
            • In this case, interpreting Hesiod's worldview as an explanatory description of the natural world fails to produce one of its intended outcomes: technological power.
            • By contrast, interpreting Hesiod's worldview as descriptive of humanity yields an intended outcome of such a theory: a

valuable portrait of human being. (See esp. the progeny problem.)

Supernaturalism
- Supernaturalism involves reference to, belief in, or especially explanation of natural phenomena in terms of non- or extra-natural beings, powers, or phenomena.
- The natural and the supernatural differ:
  o The natural order includes objects or phenomena located in space and/or time. The supernatural are not necessarily spatiotemporal. Some deities, e.g., may not (always) be located in space; some may be a-temporal.
  o The natural order is preëminently a material order (though this leaves open the question of the status of the mental). The supernatural is not necessarily material.
  o Natural order objects are subject to physical law. The supernatural are not – their activities supersede such laws as gravitation, etc.
  o In general, natural order objects are open to sense observation. But in most cases, the supernatural is not.
  o The natural order includes rivers, lakes, trees, humans, dogs, the sun, etc. The supernatural includes deities, nymphs, spirits, souls, etc.
- Epistemological concerns:
  o It is difficult or impossible to verify the existence of a supernatural being or power. In principle, the designation 'supernatural' places a thing beyond the normal human capacity of observation. Consequently, belief in the supernatural likely requires suspending a central tenet of rationalism: that belief in existence should be supported by evidence.
  o In addition, if the behavior of the supernatural outstrips the natural and its usual laws of behavior, then we confront the possibility that the supernatural in principle be beyond human understanding. I.e., we may not hope to understand or predict its behavior because it is not "logical". This would require accepting an a-rational worldview.

Logic and Chaos
- To what extent is Hesiod's world (like that of Homer) "logical" and to what extent is it arbitrary, a cosmos vs. a chaos? To what extent is Hesiod's a *rationalistic* world view?
- To some extent, Hesiod's world is logical, a cosmos, insofar as we can put a word to the given phenomenon, owing primarily to anthropomorphism. The winds blow and rain falls because of Zeus; the earth shakes because of Poseidon. The descent of Persephone into the underworld leads to fall and winter; her emergence, to spring. In other words, insofar as the world is describable in terms of human-like activity, we have a word to put to its various phenomena, making the world to that extent "logical".
- On the other hand, Hesiod's world is also rife with arbitrariness. How doe Gaia, Tartaros, Eros, Erebos, and Night emerge from Chaos? There can be no explanation for *ex nihilo* creation, it would seem. Why does Gaia bear twelve

Titan young? Why not eleven, or twenty? Any fact that lacks an explanation, such as the number of offspring, in this case, constitutes a lack of order, chaos.

- To some extent, Hesiod's world is systematic. We find a limited number of basic explanatory principles – again, courtesy of the human-like nature of this world. Basic explanatory principles (*archia*) here include emotions such as fear and rage and drives such as the sexual urge. Further, we find logical relations among various divine affinities: Night bears doom, fate, grief, sleep, etc. Such causal likenesses represent connections among basic explanatory principles. On the other hand, however, there is no basic logic connecting our various emotions and drives. They happen to occur together within us, but we have no explanation for that fact; we simply find them together as we might find together two shells on a beach. Such system as there is, in Hesiod's world, is primarily a reflection of our own nature, which, itself, is not as systematic as it is simply familiar to us.
- And Hesiod's world cannot be said to be known or knowable by us by natural means. There is no sense by means of which we might come to know that Gaia is the earth or that Zeus mingled with Themis to produce Dike (justice). Nor can any application of reason realize such things. There is no knowing the supernatural, precisely because it is supernatural, and thus beyond the reach of our natural means of knowledge acquisition, sense and reason. Hesiod's world thus resists investigation by means of the critical method. We can accept it only as an exception to that means of studying the world.

Change in a Hesiodic world
- Further illustration of the logic or lack thereof in this form of thought is available as we think about how change is understood in it.
- Change falls into several kinds: generation, destruction (i.e., of whole beings); alteration (i.e., of existing beings). Some of the principles (*archia*) of change referred to by Hesiod are the following:
- Generation:
    o Sexual reproduction: e.g., Night + Erebos yields Aether and Day (ll. 124-5), Gaia + Ouranos produces the Titans (ll. 134-136), Rheia + Kronos produces the primary Olympic gods (ll. 456-463), etc.
    o Non-sexual reproduction, of several kinds:
        ▪ Parthenogenesis (asexual or spontaneous generation of a new creature): e.g., Gaia's production of Ouranos (heavens; l. 126), the mountains (l. 129), and Pontos (sea; l. 131); Night's production of Blame, Grief, etc. (ll. 213f).
        ▪ Sex-related generation: e.g., Ouranos' blood, falling on earth (Gaia), yields the Furies, Giants, and tree Nymphs (ll. 184-187); and his severed testes, falling into the sea, yields Aphrodite (ll. 188-192).
    o *Ex Nihilo* (from nothing) becoming: Gaia, Tartaros, Eros, Erobos, and Night come into existence (evidently) without cause or explanation (ll. 116-123).

- Destruction: it appears that all the gods are indestructible, immortal, as none is reported going out of existence in the *Theogony*, though many are variously buried, reduced, banished, etc.
- Alteration:
  o The general vehicle of change (alteration) in *Theogony* is human-like *action*, where *action* is *deliberative* and *voluntary*.[1]
  o The general motivation for change (alteration) in *Theogony* is human-like *emotion* or *interest*. These include the following:
    ▪ Lust (sexual desire): see the influence of Aphrodite (lns. 203f) and subsequent promiscuity of gods (211ff)
    ▪ Love (both amorous and maternal): Night and Erebos make "sweet intercourse" (124); Rheia grieves for her children (472)
    ▪ Fear/jealousy: Ouranos fears his children (155); Kronos wishes to rule alone (465); the Olympians are jealous of the Titans' power (Titanomachy)
    ▪ Hatred: Kronos hates his father, Ouranos (139)
    ▪ Disgust: Ouranos for the monsters (155)
    ▪ Anger/vengeance: Gaia plots to castrate Ouranos (161); Zeus punishes men for receiving fire from Prometheus – by creating women (Pandora).
  o Another apparent influence on change is *justice* or a sense of moral propriety or law. This sense is evident where anger arises due to a perceived injustice (as in Kronos against Ouranos, or in Zeus against Prometheus). See also the consequence of breaking an oath at 799f.
- *Eros*: More generally, note the introduction of Eros at the outset of the theogony (120). Eros is a broad concept, embracing any creative urge, including but by no means limited to the erotic impulse. One can extend this concept to include all human action, insofar as an action brings about a new thing, namely the act itself. Note Lombardo's identification of *eros* as a primary philosophical principle, included by Hesiod to explain subsequent erotic couplings and their issue (pp. 13-14).
- *Causal Likeness*: Another basic principle organizing change, in Hesiod, is *similarity* among *cause* and *effect*. Where beings or phenomena share some property or feature, we have a similarity; and where cause and effect share some feature, so that we may say that *like* causes *like*, we have *causal likeness*.
  o See, e.g., the offspring of Night, which include Doom, Death, Sleep, the three Fates, Grief, etc. (ll. 211-225).
  o Similarly, from Zeus's mating with Themis (custom, propriety) arise the ordered seasons, Justice (Dike), Peace (Eirene), and Good Laws (Eunomia) (ll. 906-908); Zeus is thus the God associated with wisdom and order.

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[1] An act is *deliberative* just in case it results from contemplation of different possible actions and a decision to pursue one of these; and an act is *voluntary* just in case it is undertaken "freely" – i.e., the agent could have chosen otherwise under the same circumstances.