CHAPTER 3

In the Beginning:
Hesiod’s Creation Story

KEY TOPICS/THEMES

In ancient Greek thought, the universe was a cosmos—a harmonious world order that evolved from Chaos, the primal Chaos or Abys. Chaos and Gaia (Gaia; the earth) are the sources of all that exists, including seas, mountains, monsters, and gods. Celebrating the rise of Zeus to cosmic rulership, Hesiod’s Theogony traces the gods’ descent from Gaia and her son, Uranus (the sky), who mate to produce the Titans, a race of giant deities led by Cronus. On Gaia’s advice, Cronus emasculates his father. Uranus, separating sky from earth, and seizes control of the cosmos. Cronus, in turn, is overthrown by his youngest son, Zeus, who defeats the Titans in battle, imprisons them in Tartarus, and establishes his Olympian sovereignty.

Some Greek scientists such as Aristarchus of Samos (c. 320 B.C.) correctly postulated that the earth is a globe, suspended in space, that orbits around the sun. Long before classical astronomers produced theories based on mathematical calculations, however, Greek poets such as Hesiod (c. 675 B.C.) promoted a mythic conception of the universe, based partly on ancient Near Eastern models and partly on commonsensical observations of their physical environment. The world structure reflected in Hesiod’s Theogony, the Greeks’ oldest and most influential creation account, is that which a careful observer might infer after taking a look around. When viewed from a hilltop affording a 360-degree panorama of the surrounding terrain, the earth’s surface appears to extend an equal distance in all directions, forming a generally circular boundary. From this perspective, the sky resembles a huge bowl or dome that, from its highest point overhead, seems to curve evenly downward to the distant horizon.
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Hebrews 1:1-2

Greek myth thus postulates a vertically structured three-story universe (Figure 3-3). The top level, infinitely beyond human reach, is an invisible heaven inhabited exclusively by gods untouched by human woes. The Olympian gods carefree existence contrasts sharply with the harshness of life in the middle story—earth—where Fate assigns mortals an unequal mixture of joy and pain that inevitably ends in death. Conceived as a relatively flat disk, except where high mountains like Olympus seem to support the sky, the earth’s circular surface is surrounded by Ocean. Rather than an open sea like the Atlantic, Ocean is an immovable river coiled around the central landmass. Far beneath earth is a cosmic basement, the kingdom of Hades [HAY-deez], Zeus’s brother who rules over the Underworld. A dank subterranean cavern, Hades’ realm permanently houses all the dead, who, according to Homer, exist only as disembodied shades flitting aimlessly in eternal darkness. Pitiless Hades allows no one, except for a few heroes, to escape from his gloomy dominion, effectively banishing all hope from the afterlife (see Chapter 9).

Lying beneath Hades’ realm is Tartarus, a kind of cosmic subbasement, in which the Titans are confined. In Hesiod, Tartarus is a geographical space, a fathomless abyss, and an elemental entity with whom Gaia mates to produce the monster Typhoeus (see following section).
Egyptian cosmology (a philosophical view of the universe's nature and purpose), even after creation the primal waters continued to surround the world, separated from it by the vault of sky (Nun) and confined to subterranean regions by the overlying earth (Geb). The Egyptian notion of waters gathered above the atmosphere and below the earth is essentially that presented in Genesis 1, where Elohim (God) "divided the waters above the vault [sky, or firmament] from the waters under the vault" (Gen. 1:6–7). When God brings the flood, he simply releases the primal waters stored above the vault by activating the "windows of heaven" (openings in the sky's broad dome) and causing "the springs of the great deep" (water-filled abyss beneath the earth) to break through to the surface (Gen. 7:11–12). (See also Exodus 20:4, which refers to "the waters beneath the earth," the underground remnant of primeval sea on which the dry land is precariously balanced.) Interestingly, the Egyptians had no tradition of a global deluge, perhaps because they received very little rain and anticipated the annual inundations of the Nile as a natural blessing that ensured the fertilization of their fields.

Another Egyptian account, devised by the priests of Pth at Memphis during the thirteenth century B.C., offers a prototype of creation by divine thought and speech, a concept found not only in Genesis 1 but also in the New Testament Gospel of John. Pth, after whom the nation of Egypt (the "Temple of Pth") is named, was promoted by the Memphis priests as superior to all other deities, including Atum, the sun. According to a late version of the myth, inscribed on stone by order of Pharaoh Shabaka about 700 B.C., Pth gave birth to all things, including the gods, by his "heart" and "tongue." Because many ancient languages, including biblical Hebrew, which has few abstract terms, used the word for "heart" to designate "mind" or "consciousness," Pth created the universe by thinking it into existence, fashioning it by the power of his word. When Pth conceived an idea of something, he then pronounced its name (identity), causing it to be—a process that God also follows in Genesis 1.

that no single account was generally accepted as fully authoritative. Hesiod's narrative, however, is the one most widely quoted by later authors, and, as indicated in Chapter 1, it forms the basis for the creation story in the Library of Apollodorus.

Etiological myths—narrating the cause or source of the world as we experience it today—are common all over the globe. Virtually every known culture, from Africa to Asia to Mesoamerica, has produced stories explaining the origins of heaven, earth, and human life. Like the Theogony, most creation accounts are largely religious, crediting divine beings with fashioning the cosmos, but they typically also have social and political functions. In Hesiod's case, the triumph of Zeus over his divine predecessors and his defeat of chaotic monsters are but the prelude to the establishment of the sociopolitical system that prevailed in the poet's own day. Although Hesiod begins his epic with the etiology of the gods, he concludes it with genealogies of heroes descended from the gods' couplings with mortal women. This
section provides not only a transition from the realm of the divine to that of the human but also a validation of the aristocratic families who justified their rule of the Greek city-states by claiming divine descent. The *Theogony*’s final lines (not included in the excerpts that follow) originally formed a connection to a now-lost section of the poem called the *Catalogue of Women*, which recounted the births of heroes who reputedly became the ancestors of then-reigning dynasties. Thus, in addition to being a theological work, Hesiod’s creation epic served as a charter supporting military and political leaders of the Archaic period—an elite class that likely formed the most influential part of his audience.

The cosmos Hesiod describes is essentially a Greek world: its long evolution from the primordial Chaos (chaos) inevitably culminates in the births of familiar Greek gods and heroes who uphold distinctively Greek social practices and institutions. In portraying this characteristically Greek universe, however, Hesiod not only incorporated a variety of Greek traditions but also borrowed and transformed seminal traditions inherited from the pre-Greek cultures of the ancient Near East, particularly Egypt and Mesopotamia.

The closest parallels to Hesiod’s poem are found in the creation stories of Mesopotamia, where a people known as the Sumerians developed the first large urban centers almost three millennia before Hesiod’s time. Known to the Greeks as “the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers,” Mesopotamia is a flat, swampy region at the head of the Persian Gulf in what is now southwestern Iraq (Figure 3-4). Shortly after 3500 B.C.E., the Sumerians founded the earliest cities, such as Ur, the native city of the biblical patriarch Abraham, and Uruk, home to Gilgamesh, the first hero of Western myth (see the box on Gilgamesh in Chapter 10). A remarkably innovative group, the Sumerians produced a series of inventions ranging from the wheel, to the first law codes, to the art of writing. Some Sumerian literary texts and those of the Akkadians (Old Babylonians), a Semitic people who invaded Mesopotamia about 2000 B.C.E., contain the oldest surviving narratives about the origin of the gods, the creation of the universe, and a prehistoric flood that allegedly drowned most of earth’s population. One version of Mesopotamian myth about the world’s beginnings, transformed by Israelite monotheism, appears in the biblical book of Genesis: another form of Sumerian-Akkadian lore, reshaped by Greek storytellers, appears in Hesiod, whose poetry integrates both Indo-European and Near Eastern motifs.

Besides inheriting the concept of a vertically ordered cosmos, Hesiod also reflects a Mesopotamian belief in a divine pantheon in which most of the gods were associated with either the sky and weather or the Underworld and fertility. In addition, Hesiod follows a tradition in the *Enuma Elish*, a Babylonian creation account, in which the chief sky god came to power only after battling and defeating older generations of gods. In the *Enuma Elish* (c. 1300 B.C.E.), the Babylonian deity Marduk earns his cosmic supremacy after overthrowing Tiamat, a personification of the sterile salt sea who is also the primordial dragon of precreation chaos. After slaying Tiamat, Marduk cuts her body in two, using one half to mold the earth and the other to form the vault of heaven; he then creates humanity from the blood of Tiamat’s vanquished consort, Kingu. Similarly, in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, Zeus—whom the Greeks identified with Marduk—battles the monster Typhoeus, like Tiamat a

reptilian embodiment of chaotic violence. Only after eliminating such threats to cosmic order can Marduk and Zeus begin their successful reigns (Figure 3-17).

In both the Mesopotamian and Hesiodic traditions, violent conflict characterizes the creative process: sky and earth, once conjoined, are wrenched apart; the gods are fatally divided by intergenerational rivalry; the present harmonious universe is made possible only by the victory of a young sky god over older deities who are in the process of destroying their own children. Both Marduk and Zeus assume the right to govern the world through their superior strength and martial skill, and both gods are able to retain power by advancing shrewd policies. After conquering their opponents, they wisely assign spheres of influence to other gods, establishing an orderly administration based on cooperation and the judicious delegation of authority.

Besides parallels to the *Enuma Elish*, the *Theogony* contains motifs from other ancient Near Eastern sources, such as the Hurrian-Hittite *Kingship in Heaven* and *Song of Ulitrammi*. The account in which the usurping god Kumatiri bites off and
Mythical Attempts to Scale the Heavens

In the ancient world, temples or other shrines were typically viewed as sacred places where a divinity was perceived as present, where unseen spiritual forces interacted with material reality. In Mesopotamian cities, the most distinctive sacred structure was the ziggurat [ZIG-oo-rat], a massive, multi-tiered edifice of glazed brick, crowned by a small chapel at the top, that was believed to house the individual deity, such as Marduk, to whom the building was dedicated. With broad staircases connecting its several levels, the ziggurat was, like the spire of a Christian cathedral, a visible symbol, linking humans on earth with invisible powers inhabiting the sky (Figure 3.3).

Both biblical and Greek traditions echo aspects of the ziggurat's mythic function. In the Tower of Babel story in Genesis, ambitious humans impiously erect a tower high enough to reach heaven, only to have God throw it down. In the Greek version of this myth, the giants Ephialtes and Otus try to invade the divine realm by piling one huge mountain on top of another—Pelion on Ossa and Ossa on Olympus—until Zeus destroys them. In another Genesis narrative, the patriarch Jacob dreams of a colossal "ladder" or ramp by which supernatural figures ascend to or descend from heaven. Historians believe that Jacob's dream more accurately reflects the ziggurat's purpose: rather than a means for humans to trespass into the gods' territory, the ziggurat served as an artificial mountain on which divine beings could visit earth and human beings could rise partway to meet them. A hole at each earth and heaven, mortals and gods, could commune with each other, the ziggurat filled a role resembling that of the Greek holy mountain of Parnassus, a sanctuary where Apollo reveals the gods' will to human questioners (see Chapter 7). The ziggurat, whose foundations lie beneath the earth's surface and whose pyramidal shape points toward heaven, is also a paradigm of the vertically structured universe. Although the Greeks did not erect comparable towers, their temples also enclosed sacred space in which a god was invisibly housed. For many Greeks, the gods' ultimate home was Mount Olympus; like the ziggurat, Olympus served as an earthly pedestal to which divine beings could descend.

The Poet and His Inspiration

Intergenerational conflict among the gods is one of Hesiod's main themes, but he also wishes to show that conflict permeates every level of the cosmos, especially family and economic life on earth. Introducing an autobiographical subtheme, Hesiod states that his father, unable to prosper as a sea trader in Ionia, migrated west to Boeotia on the Greek mainland (Figure 3-6), where Hesiod was born to a life of poverty and hard work. Hesiod's poetry bristles with complaints about the slights and injustices he and other small landholders had to endure. According to Hesiod,
his difficulties were compounded by the dishonesty and greed of his brother Perses, whom he accuses of bribing corrupt magistrates to award him an unfairly large portion of their father's modest estate. Much of Hesiod's second major poem, *Works and Days*, is aimed at correcting Perses' misbehavior, which allegedly stripped his portion of his rightful heritage and means of livelihood. (For a discussion of Hesiod's difficulty, with its account of humanity's decline from an original Golden Age, see Chapter 4.)

**The Muses**

The most intriguing of Hesiod's allusions to his personal experience is that describer of the origin of his poetic inspiration, which he claims derived from an encounter on Mount Helicon with the Muses (Figure 3-7). The nine daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne (nee-MAHS-in-nee), a personification of memory. Hailed as the

source of artistic and intellectual creativity, the Muses become Hesiod's unseen companions, a spiritual link to Zeus and the divine authority that validates his work. In typically blunt style, Hesiod has the Muses contrast the ignorance of his backwater environment with their divine omniscience:

"Hillbillies and bellies, poor excuses for shepherds; We know how to tell many believable lies, But also, when we want to, how to speak the plain truth." So spoke the daughters of great Zeus, mincing their words. And they gave me a staff, a branch of good sappy laurel; Plucking it off, spectacular. And they breathed into me A voice divine, so I might celebrate past and future. And they told me to hymn the generation of the eternal gods, But always to sing of themselves, the Muses, first and last.

Hesiod receives the laurel branch, sacred to Apollo, patron of the Muses, to authenticate his revelation of the gods' origins. (We presume that the Muses are prepared to "speak the plain truth" in this case.) Although little more than a thousand lines long, one-fifteenth the length of the Iliad, Hesiod's *Theogony* is an enormously ambitious effort: an attempt to trace the history of the universe from its inception to the poet's own day. Honoring the goddesses' request, Hesiod begins each major segment of the poem with an invocation of the Muse, asking Mnemosyne's daughters to inspire him with creative success. Note that it is the Muses in their Olympian guise (lines 561-63) who inspire the poet to sing of the highest gods, transforming his song into a hymn exalting Zeus.

**FIGURE 3-7** The Nine Muses. Each of the nine daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne (memory) eventually became associated with a particular field of creativity, but Hesiod emphasizes only Calliope (Kalliopē), inspirer of epic poetry. The manual crafts, such as metallurgy, were under the direction of Hephaestus; Athena was the patron of weavers, spinners, and potters. This bas-relief was discovered near Ostia, Italy. (Capitoline Museum, Rome)
The Nine Daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne

The source of all poetic, artistic, and intellectual inspiration, the Muses embody the Greek conviction that music—the most sublime expression of cosmic harmony—is a primary and integral part of the universe. Although Hesiod names the nine daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, it was only later that each Muse acquired a particular creative function. Their distinctive spheres of activity are:
1. Calliope—epic poetry
2. Clio—history
3. Polyhymnia—mime
4. Melpomene—tragedy
5. Thalia—comedy
6. Erato—lyric choral poetry
7. Euterpe—the flute
8. Terpsichore—light verse and dance
9. Urania—astronomy

The Origins of the Gods

Readers familiar with the biblical story of creation may find Hesiod’s version of how all things began somewhat alien. Unlike the Genesis account, which describes a single deity fashioning heaven and earth out of a primordial watery chaos by the power of his word alone, the Theogony presents a polytheistic world spontaneously evolving from primal emptiness to a universe teeming with life.

Hesiod’s starting point is Chaos, literally the yawning Chasm, Abyss, or “gaping Void” that early on somehow came into being—it did not necessarily exist throughout eternity. Hesiod’s understanding of Chaos contrasts with that of Ovid in Metamorphoses, where it is defined as a anarchic dark matter that preceded the formation of the cosmos (see Chapter 20). For Hesiod, Gaia (JEE-uh) (Gaea), who is both the earth and the primordial mother, is also a primal entity. Gaia springs independently into existence, along with Tartarus (TAHR-uh-tur-uh), the subterranean force of procreative love. Although Chaos and Gaia, as well as some male deities, occasionally give birth without a mate, Eros’s presence ensures that life will multiply chiefly through sexual reproduction. Like later Greek scientists and philosophers, Hesiod was keenly interested in organizing and classifying medical, in this poem delineating the genealogies and familial relationships of three generations of gods.

Hesiod devotes considerable space to recounting the origins of almost innumerable deities who, in surviving myths, play relatively small roles, such as the children do not obscure his main purpose, however, which is to trace the divine succession that culminates in Zeus, whose reign is the ultimate goal of cosmic evolution.

The Rise of Zeus

Zeus is the grandson of the primal couple Gaia and her firstborn son, Uranus [OOR-a-uh-thuh] (Ouranos), a personification of the “starry sky,” whom she produced

Two Different Accounts of Creation in Genesis

Greek myth’s tolerance of diverse, even contradictory, traditions about what happened in the remote past was characteristic of most cultures in the ancient world. Like Hesiod and his counterparts in other ancient societies, biblical editors and compilers accepted differing versions of prehistoric events as equally venerable and worth preserving. In the opening chapters of Genesis, the first book of the Judeo-Christian Bible, editors combined two previously independent stories about the universe’s beginnings. Scholars assign the first account (Gen. 1:1–2:4) to a priestly author writing in Mesopotamia during the sixth century B.C., when many upper-class Israelites were held captive in Babylon. This priestly narrative, which calls God Elohim, a generic term for “divine being,” opens with a precreation chaos of undifferentiated waters similar to that in the Babylonian creation story, the Enuma Elish. Unlike the Babylonian tale, which features violent conflict between different generations of gods, however, the biblical narrative reshapes older myths of a primordial watery chaos to fit a monotheistic concept. In Genesis 1, a single deity—Elohim—transforms chaos into cosmos by his word alone, creating the world by a six-step process of separation, division, and differentiation.

In the priestly account, humanity—both male and female—are fashioned at the same time and both in “the image of God.” Following the formation of dry land, plants, and animals, humanity’s appearance in the divine image is the climax of creation. In its second tale of origins (Gen. 2:5–25), it is not Elohim but Yahweh (the personal name of the biblical God) who creates, and he does so in an entirely different environment and in a different order. Instead of beginning with a watery chaos as the priestly author does in Genesis 1, the Yahwist writer (so called because he or she consistently identifies God as Yahweh) creates humanity in an arid desert that has to be irrigated. Instead of making humanity’s appearance the final event, the Yahwist states that, after Adam (whom the name means “humankind”) is formed from dust, the animals are fashioned and brought to Adam to name. Only when Yahweh discovers that no animal provides a suitable mate for his human creature does the Deity decide to create a woman. (For a comparison of Pandora, Adam, Eve, and humanity’s alienation from its creator, see the box in Chapter 4.)

GENESIS*

THE ORIGIN OF THE WORLD AND OF MANKIND

The First Account of the Creation:
(1:1–2:4)

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was a formless void, there was darkness over the deep, and God’s spirit hovered over the water.


The Second Account of the Creation:
(1:26–2:3)

1 At the time when Yahweh God made the earth and heaven there was as yet no wild bush on the earth nor had any wild plant yet sprung up, for Yahweh God had not sent rain on the earth nor was there any

(continued)
Two Different Accounts of Creation in Genesis (continued)

God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that light was good, and God divided light from darkness. God called light "day," and darkness he called "night." Evening came and morning came: the first day.

God said, "Let there be a vault in the waters to divide the waters from one another." And so it was. God made the vault, and it divided the waters above the vault from the waters under the vault. God called the vault "heaven." Evening came and morning came: the second day.

God said, "Let the waters under heaven come together into a single mass, and let dry land appear." And so it was. God called the dry land "earth" and the mass of waters "seas," and God saw that it was good.

God said, "Let the earth produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and fruit trees bearing fruit with their seed inside, on the earth." And so it was. The earth produced vegetation: plants bearing seed in their several kinds, and trees bearing fruit with their seed inside in their several kinds. God saw that it was good. Evening came and morning came: the third day.

God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of heaven to divide day from night, and let them be lights in the vault of heaven to shine on the earth." And so it was. God made the two great lights: the greater light to govern the day, the smaller light to govern the night, and the stars.

God set them in the vault of heavens to shine on the earth, to govern the day and the night and to divide light from darkness. God saw that it was good. Evening came and morning came: the fourth day.

God said, "Let the waters teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth within the vault of heaven." And so it was. God created great sea beasts and every kind of living creature with which the waters teem, and every kind of winged creature, God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the waters of the seas and let the birds multiply upon the earth." Evening came and morning came: the fifth day.

God said, "Let the earth produce every kind of living creature: cattle, reptiles, and every kind of wild beast." And so it was. God made every kind of wild beast, every kind of cattle, and every kind of land reptile. God saw that it was good.

God said, "Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves, and let them be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven, the cattle, all the wild beasts and all the reptiles that crawl upon the earth."

God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.

God blessed them, saying to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and conquer it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all living animals on the earth." God said, "See, I give you all the seed-bearing plants that are upon the whole earth, and all the trees with seed-bearing fruit; this shall be your food. To all wild beasts, all birds of heaven and all living reptiles on the earth I give all the foliage of plants for food." And so it was, God saw all he had made, and indeed it was very good. Evening came and morning came: the sixth day.

Thus heaven and earth were completed with all their array. On the seventh day God completed the work he had been doing. He rested on the seventh day after all the work he had been doing. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on that day he had rested after all his work of creating. Such were the origins of heavens and earth when they were created.
into his account. Aphrodite [af-roh-DYE-tee], the embodiment of love, beauty, and sexual desire, is the result of a grotesquely violent act—the castration of Uranus by his Titan son Cronus. Gaea, who deeply resents Uranus for his refusal to allow her the relief of giving birth to the many children painfully confined in her subterranean womb, initiates the events leading to her husband's dethronement and Aphrodite's miraculous appearance. Following his mother's instructions and using the adamantine sickle she fashioned for the purpose, Cronus, the "arch-deceiver," ambushes his parents during copulation and severs his father's genitals, which he throws into the sea.

This act, which permanently separates earth and sky, has a strangely paradoxical effect: drops of phallic blood touching the earth generate both giants and the Furies (Erinyes), dreaded female spirits who punish criminals guilty of slaying their kin. The sea foam that collects around Uranus's severed phallus is transformed into "golden" Aphrodite, the most beguilingly feminine of all goddesses, yet born without a female parent (Figure 3-9 and Color Plate 1). In the Theogony, Aphrodite's origin clearly testifies to her function as patron of masculine sexual pleasure. Ultimately, however, Aphrodite derives from two ancient Mesopotamian divinities—the Sumerian Inanna and the Babylonian Ishtar, powerful goddesses of love and war, and expressions of natural fertility, human sexual attraction, and violent aggression. (Homer more conventionally makes her the daughter of Zeus and Dione, daughter of Gaia and Uranus.)

FIGURE 3-9 Aphrodite Rising from the Sea. In Hesiod's version of her origin, the love goddess has no mother and is born from the sea foam surrounding the severed genitals of Uranus, the primal sky god. She rises from a watery element as if to demonstrate that a conscious awareness of human sexuality as a divine force is born from the universal unconscious. (National Museum of Tokyo, Japan)
Although Hesiod’s Theogony does not include an account of humanity’s creation, it emphasizes the crucial role of Eros (Lover), the divine power that expresses itself through human sexual desire. In Hesiod’s view, Eros is the procreative force responsible for populating the universe, generating both gods and heroes. About three and a half centuries after Hesiod’s day, the Athenian philosopher Plato (427-347 B.C.E.) made Eros the subject of one of his most important dialogues, the Symposium (Figure 3.10). The fictional re-creation of a drinking party attended by some of Athens’ most famous citizens, including Socrates, Agathon, Alcibiades, and the comic playwright Aristophanes, the Symposium contains numerous references to different myths about Eros’s origin and purpose. Aristophanes, a comic character whom Plato bases on the historical author of erotic comedies, offers an etiological myth to explain both the universality of sexual attraction and the reason for its diverse manifestations.

In the beginning, Aristophanes states, there were not merely two sexes—male and female—but three, the third being androgynous, composed of both male and female characteristics. The male sex derived from the sun, the female from the earth, and the androgyous from the moon, which the ancients believed to partake of both sun and earth. Originally, humans were twice the person they are now: round in shape, each had two heads, facing in opposite directions, as well as two sets of arms and legs. These double creatures could go either forward or backward without turning around. They could also use their eight limbs to turn cartwheels, rolling along at high speeds wherever they wished to go.

Strong and confident—their circular form indicating their completeness—these primordial humans were also intensely ambitious. Like the giants Ephialtes and Otus, sons of Poseidon who attempted to invade the heavens, early humans dared to challenge the gods with a direct attack. Zeus, who did not want to obliterate them with thunderbolts as he had the giants, decided instead to weaken humanity by splitting each person in two. As soon as Zeus bisected an individual, Apollo turned the creature’s head around to face the side that had been cut, drawing skin over it “like a pouch with drawstrings” and tying the skin together in a knot on the abdomen, thus giving humans a novel.

With their ambition punished and their power diminished, humans ceased rivaling the gods and began to devote their energies to seeking the half of their original self that had been lost. The androgyous, who had resembled the biblical Adam before the female Eve was separated from his body, sought their other half in members of the opposite sex, forming heterosexual combinations. Those who had been all male naturally endeavored to reunite with members of the same sex, while formerly all-female beings longed to restore their basic nature by coupling with other women.

Human sexual attraction, Aristophanes declares, is inspired by a profound need to recapture the wholeness of personality that existed before Zeus bifurcated us (Figure 3.11). The playwright then conjures up the spirit of Hephaestus, the ingenious god of metalcraft, who offers to fuse together those lovers who desire total union with their beloved, melding the artificially divided two into one. By thus uniting humanity’s fragmented nature, Eros enables lovers to regain the lost paradise of spiritual and physical completeness.
Aphrodite rising from the sea, accompanied by the figures of Eros and Desire—and the veneful Furies rising from blood-clotted earth—reveals the paradoxical aspects of Uranus's mutilation. Cronus's action leads the world another step closer to Zeus's inevitable reign of which the love goddess will be a radiant ornament (Figure 3-12); however, it is also a savage betrayal of a kinsman that brings the spirits of hatred and revenge into being. Resulting from an act that combines sexual passion and violence, Aphrodite's birth expresses a characteristic Greek ambivalence about sexual love; although promising beauty and joy, it can also inspire acts of brutal aggression. Aphrodite's appearance prior to the birth of Zeus or any other Olympians also suggests the love goddess's primacy, both in time and in universal significance.

Consistent with his treacherous brutality, Cronus attempts to avoid Uranus's fate by devouring his own children, all of Zeus's older brothers and sisters (Figure 3-13), thereby imitating his father's lie-denying policy and ensuring that any offspring who might escape his cannibalism—as Zeus does—will repeat his rebellion. With the exception of Prometheus, whose name means "forethought," the male Titans are not known for their intelligence.

The Separation of Earth and Sky

Cronus's overthrow of Uranus embodies several basic mythological themes. In many world traditions, an early stage of creation is the enforced separation of earth and sky, a division necessary to achieve an inhabitable cosmos. In Egyptian tradition, which reverses the sexes of the two primal entities, the goddess Nut (the sky) is separated from her brother Geb (the earth) because their original embrace was so tight that their divine children had no room in which to be born. Accordingly, their father, Shu, god of the air, parted the incestuous couple, elevating Nut so that she arched her body far above Geb, thereby allowing the gods Isia, Osiris, Nephthys, and Seth to emerge into the atmosphere. Another Egyptian theme appearing in Hesiod's account is that of parent devouring child; it was said that, not only did Nut swallow the sun every night, but each morning she ate her own offspring, the stars, which, of course, were reborn every evening after sunset.

Rather than serving as a model or justification for sons in primitive societies to seize power from their aged fathers, the Uranus–Cronus conflict echoes a convention of ancient cosmogony. The creative process demands that sky be removed from earth in order for life to develop. As in the Egyptian tale, Hesiod's account makes it clear that new gods cannot appear until their divine parents are permanently riven. As in the Egyptian tale, Hesiod's account makes it clear that new gods cannot appear until their divine parents are permanently riven.

The tale of a primal deity whose body, like that of Uranus, suffers mutilation and then is used as building material to form part of the physical universe is common to mythology around the world. In the Enuma Elish, Marduk bifurcates Tiamat's
corps to construct earth and sky. In Scandinavian myth, the Norse creator god

day Ymir, a huge frost giant, and make the earth from his body, the oceans from

his blood, and the dome of heaven from his skull. Chinese myth offers a parallel

account: a primordial deity, Pangu, exhausts himself performing the essential func-

tion of holding up the sky so that it will not fall and crush the earth, in effect sacri-

ficing his life so that the cosmos can exist. In death, Pangu offers his body as the

substance out of which the visible world is created.

The theme of primordial sacrifice, often taking the form of sparagmos [spar-

RA-RA-white—] the ritual tearing apart of a sacrificial victim, divine or human—

plays a significant role in Greek myth, not only in Hesiod's Theogony but also in

narratives about Dionysus and mortal heroes (see Chapter 17). These, and many

analogous creation stories from around the world, imply that the universe did not

come into being without pain and loss, including the sacrificial suffering of divine

beings. A god who, like Uranus, withdraws from the earthly scene or disappears

altogether after his creative function is completed is called a Zeus ousias. This shad-

owy figure, who can be defined as a god "at leisure" or "out of world," is familiar in

the mythology of Africa, Mesopotamia, and ancient Canaan.

Some feminist scholars see in the myths of Uranus' mutilation a remnant of

ancient marital rites in which the primal goddess's consort was ritually killed

(and perhaps eaten) to ensure fertility of stock and field, as well as that of the hu-

man community. Etymologically, the episode suggests the mysterious psychological

affinity between love and hate: explains the enforced division of masculine and

feminine principles in the cosmos, and offers a reason the "starry sky" (Uranus)

is so remote from and seemingly irrelevant to human affairs. The myth is also a classic

illustration of the Greek domestic psychodrama, a father-son rivalry in which

the mother sides with her ambitious male child to subvert the dominance of a tyr-

annical husband and father.

The Birth of Athene

After Zeus, again with Mother Gaia's help, has succeeded in conquering the Titans

and imprisoning most of them in Tartarus, he sets about populating the universe in

to his own image. Although Zeus sires a prodigious number of divine beings and mor-

to his immediate paternal line, Zeus is "father of gods and men" does not refer

protective and defender of the cosmic order.

The first of Zeus' seven successive wives is Metis [MEET-is], a personification of

the Greek word meaning "thought" or "cunning," a concept about which the Greeks

Uranus warn Zeus that he, too, may have a son strong enough to depose him. Zeus

swallows Metis, already pregnant with their child. Whereas Cronus could ingest but

reacts in a way that echoes Cronus' cannibalism but significantly differs from it: he

not absorb his children, Zeus successfully incorporates Metis into himself, concili-

tions. Zeus is able personally to give birth to his first child, Athene, a powerful manifesta-

tion of her father's creative intelligence (Figure 3-14; see also Figures 1-2 and 1-3; see

Chapter 2 for a discussion of theoretical interpretations of this myth).

FIGURE 3-14 The Birth of Athene. This crude but vigorous vase painting effectively

illustmates Hesiod's tradition of Athene's birth from the head of Zeus (compare a much later

version in Figure 1-2). Athene emerges from Zeus's skull thrashing a shield before her as

Hephaestus gazes in amazement at the result of his ex-blow. (British Museum, London)

Goddess of Victory The fact that Athene is born wearing a soldier's armor and

accompanied by the figure of Nike (Victory) (see Figure 1-3) suggests that Zeus

will use his intellect to defend his newly acquired power. Athene is not only the

epitome of wisdom, but also the goddess of victory in war, the ingenious strategist

who outmaneuvers all opponents. As defender of the Greek polis, she teaches the

rational arts of logical argument and persuasion, replacing civil strife with dis-

ciplined cooperation (see Chapter 15).

Zeus will need to co-opt all of Athene's qualities because, as the Prometheus

myth makes clear, only the acquisition of wisdom—and all the divine attributes

of the cosmic order—will assure the immortality of the gods. Thus, when Zeus

decides to create humans, he leads a group of the other gods to the island of Naiades

Hera and Hephaestus

Hera's rivalry with her husband, whose policies she regularly sabotages, appears at

the outset of their relationship and pervades virtually all of the myths about her. 

Hesiod asserts that, as soon as Hera sees Zeus giving birth to Athene, she counters,

without any male assistance, by producing a son who is entirely hers, Hephaestus.
Gaea and Typhoeus

Although Hesiod passionately supports a patriarchal society, in heaven as on earth, he seldom underestimates the crucial role of the feminine principle in cosmic history. Gaea, instrumental in every change in divine leadership, ultimately confirms Zeus's right to rule, but not before she has subjected him to a supreme test. Having contrived Uranus's downfall and tricked Cronus into vomiting up his children so that they can assist in Zeus's campaign against the Titans, she now presents Zeus with his most formidable opponent, the monster Typhoeus (ty-FEE-uhhs), a Greek version of the ancient Near Eastern dragon of chaos (Figure 3.16). Gaea's "last-born child," Typhoeus, in some traditions called Typhon, is deliberately created by his mother's mating with Tartarus, here presented as a primal entity rather than an abyss below Hades' domain. With his hundred reptilian heads, fiery breath, and fierce, predatory shrieks, Typhoeus, who aspires to rule both gods and men, represents a frightening alternative to Zeus's benevolent despotism.

Some commentators note that Typhoeus, whom Hesiod depicts as an incarnation of cosmic evil, may be a distorted picture of the guardian serpent that was once associated with the worship of a prehistoric goddess, before she was dethroned.
Greek and Anglicized Spelling of Characters' Names in the Theogony

Because different translators adopt differing transliterations of Greek names, the names of characters in Greek myth and literature are spelled in a variety of ways. Whereas this text uses an Anglicized spelling, the version of Hesiod's Theogony included here adopts a spelling approximating the pronunciation of the original Greek. The following list provides a brief sampling of both forms of the names. (For a more complete list of variant spellings of gods' names, see Chapter 6; a similar list of characters' names in the Iliad appears in Chapter 12.)

- Atropon (Atrobus)
- Carberus (Cerberus)
- Gaia (Gaia)
- Helikon (Helicon)
- Hephaisitos (Hephaestus)
- Herakles (Hercules, Heracles)
- Kloto (Clotho)
- Kronos (Cronus)
- Moirai (Moirae, the Fates)
- Oceanos (Oceanus)
- Olympos (Olympus)
- Ouranos (Uranus)
- Phebus Apollon (Phoebus Apollo)
- Pontos (Pontus)
- Rilea (Rhea)
- Tartaros (Tartarus)
- Typhoons (Typhoeus)

Erna, Europe's largest and most active volcano. This geological myth explains Erna's fiery outbursts as manifestations of Typhoeus's convulsive struggles to escape from his underground prison.

Hesiod's Worldview

In creating an orderly account that synthesizes ancient Near Eastern and native Greek traditions about the Greek gods' complex ancestry, functions, and kinships (a synthesis he probably inherited from earlier Greek poets), Hesiod portrays a universe that is inherently contradictory. The primal Chasm (Chaos) is the unlikely source of an exuberant proliferation of life that culminates in Zeus's joyous begetting of both mortal heroes and deathless gods, figures who will dominate the mythic environment. Each stage of cosmic development, however, is marked by acts of appalling violence—murder, cannibalism, treachery, war—illustrations of strife's power to trigger conflict on both the divine and human levels. Yet, even while celebrating the chief Olympian's ultimate triumph as the "bringer of good," Hesiod is deeply pessimistic about the human scene. He envisions a deteriorating world in which Zeus's reign inaugurates a progressive social and moral decline that imposes poverty and suffering on most of his human subjects (see Chapter 4).
THEOGONY*
Hesiod

INVOCATION TO THE MUSES

Begin our singing with the Hekatonian Muses,  
Who possess Mount Helikon, high and holy,  
And near its violet-stained spring on petal soft feet  
Dance circling the altar of almighty Kronion.

And having bathed their silken skin in Permessos  
Or in Horse Spring or the sacred creek Olmeinos,  
They begin their choral dance on Helikon's summit  
So lovely it pangs, and with power in their steps  
Ascend veiled and misted in palpable all  
Treading the night, and in a voice beyond beauty  
They chant:

Zeus Aegisholder and his lady Hera  
Of Argos, in gold sandals striding,  
And the Aegisholder's girl, owl-eyed Athene,  
And Phoebus Apollo and arrowy Artemis,  
Poseidon earth-holder, earth-shaking god,  
Moderate Themis and Aphrodite, eyelashes curling,  
And Hebe gold-crowned and lovely Dione,  
Leto and Lapetus and Kronos, his mind bent,  
Eos and Helios and glowing Selene,  
Gaia, Okeanos, and the black one, Night,

And the whole eerie brood of the eternal Immortals.

And they once taught Hesiod the art of singing verse,  
While he pastured his lambs on holy Helikon's slopes.  
And this was the very first thing they told me,  
The Olympian Muses, daughters of Zeus Aegisholder:

"Hills and wolds, hills, poor excuses for shepherds:  
We know how to tell many believable lies.  
But also, when we want to, how to speak the plain truth."  
So spoke the daughters of great Zeus, mixing their words.  
And they gave me a staff, a branch of good sappy laurel,  
Plucking it off, spectacular. And they breathed into me  
A voice divine, so I might celebrate past and future.  
And they told me to hymn the generation of the eternal gods,  
But always to sing of themselves, the Muses, first and last.

But why all this about oak tree or stone?

Start from the Muses: when they sing for Zeus Father  
They thrill the great mind deep in Olympos,  
Telling what is, what will be, and what has been,  
Blending their voices, and weariless the sound  
Flows sweet from their lips and spreads like lilies.  
And Zeus' thundering halls shine with laughter,  
And Olympos' snowy peaks and the halls of the gods  
Echo the strains as their immortal chanting  
Honors first the primordial generation of gods  
Whom in the beginning Earth and Sky bore  
And the divine benefactors born from them  
And, second, Zeus, the Father of gods and men,  
Mightiest of the gods and strongest by far  
And then the race of humans and of powerful Giants.  
And Zeus' mind in Olympos is thrilled by the song  
Of the Olympian Muses, the Storm King's daughters.

They were born on Pieria after our Father Kronion  
Mingled with Memory, who rules Eleutheria's hills.  
She bore them to be a forgetting of troubles,  
A pause in sorrow. For nine nights wise Zeus  
Mingled with her in love, ascending her sacred bed  
In isolation from the other Immortals.  
But when the time drew near, and the seasons turned,  
And the moons had waxed, and the many days were done,  
She bore nine daughters, all of one mind, with song  
In their breasts, with hearts that never failed,  
Near the topmost peak of snow-capped Olympos.

There are their polished dancing grounds, their fine halls,  
And the Graces and Desire have their houses close by.  
And all is in bloom, and they move in the dance, intoning  
The careful ways of the gods, celebrating the customs  
Of all the Immortals in a voice enchanting and sweet.  
Then they process to Olympos, a glory of pure  
Sound and dance, and the black earth shrivels with delight  
As they sing, and the drum of their footsteps rises like love  
As they go to their father. He is king in the sky,  
He holds the vajra thunder and flashing lightning,  
He defeated his father Kronos by force, and he ordained  
Laws for the gods and assigned them their rights.

Thus sing the Muses who have their homes on Olympos.

The nine daughters born of great Zeus,  
Klio, Euterpe, Thalia, Melpomene,  
Terpsichore, Erato, Polyhymnia, Ourania,  
And Kalliope, the most important of all.

*Translation by Stanley Lombardo.
From the Abyss were born Erebos and dark Night.
And Night, pregnant after sweet intercourse
With Erebos, gave birth to Aether and Day.

Earth’s first child was Ouranos, starry Heaven,
Just her size, a perfect fit on all sides.
And a firm foundation for the blessed gods.
And she bore the Mountains in long ranges, haunted
By the Nymphs who live in the deep mountain cliffs.
Then she gave birth to the barren, raging Sea
Without any sexual love. But later she slept with
Ouranos and bore Ocean with its deep currents.
And also: Koios, Krios, Hyperion, Iapetus.
Theia, Rheia, Themis, Mnemosyne.
Gold-crowned Phoebe and lovely Tethys.

THE CASTRATION OF OURANOS

After them she bore a most terrible child,
Kronos, her youngest, an arch-deceiver,
And this boy hated his lecherous father.

She bore the Cyclopes too, with hearts of stone.
Brontes, Steropes, and pondeous Arges,
Who gave Zeus thunder and made the thunderbolts.
In every other respect they were just like gods,
But a lone eye lay in their foreheads’ middle.
They were nicknamed Cyclopes because they had
A single goggle eye in their foreheads’ middle.
Strong as the d richens, and they knew their craft.

And three other sons were born to Gaia and Ouranos,
Strong, hulking creatures that beggar description.
Kottos, Briareos, and Gyges, outrageous children.
A hundred hands stuck out of their shoulders,
Grottesque, and fifty heads grew on each stump y neck.
These monsters exuded irresistible strength.
They were Gaia’s most dreaded offspring.
And from the start their father feared and loathed them.
Ouranos used to stuff all of his children
Back into a hollow of Earth soon as they were born.
Keeping them from the light, an awful thing to do.
But Heaven did it, and was very pleased with himself.
Vast Earth groaned under the pressure inside.
And then she came up with a plan, a really wicked trick.
She created a new mineral, grey flint, and formed
A huge sickle from it and showed it to her dear boys.
And she railed them with this bitter speech:
"Listen to me, children, and we might yet get even
With your criminal father for what he has done to us.
After all, he started this whole ugly business."

They were tongue-tied with fear when they heard this.
But Kronos, whose mind worked in strange ways,
Got his puck up and found the words to answer her:

"I think I might be able to bring it off, Mother.
I can't stand Father; he doesn't even deserve the name.
And after all, he started this whole ugly business."

This response warmed the heart of vast Earth.
She hid young Kronos in an ambush and placed in his hands
The jagged sickle. Then she went over the whole plan with him.
And now on came great Ouranos, bringing Night with him.
And, longing for love, he settled himself all over Earth.
From his dark hiding-place, the son reached out
With his left hand, while with his right he swung
The fiendishly long and jagged sickle, pruning the genitals
Of his own father with one swoop and tossing them
Behind him, where they fell to no small effect.
Earth soaked up all the bloody drops that spurted out,
And as the seasons went by she gave birth to the Furies
And to great Giants gleaming in full armor, spears in hand,
And to the Meliai, as ash-tree nymphs are generally called.

THE BIRTH OF APHRODITE

The genitals themselves, freshly cut with flint, were thrown
Clear of the mainland into the restless, white-capped sea,
Where they floated a long time. A white foam from the god-flesh
Collected around them, and in that foam a maiden developed
And grew. Her first approach to land was near holy Kythera,
And from there she floated on to the island of Kypros.
There she came ashore, an awesome, beautiful divinity,
Tender grass sprouted up under her slender feet.

Aphrodite

Is her name in speech human and divine, since it was in foam
She was nourished. But she is also called Kytherea since
She reached Kythera, and Kyprogenes because she was born
On the surf-line of Kypros, and Philometides because she loves
The organs of sex, from which she made her epiphany,
Eros became her companion, and ravishing Desire waited on her
At her birth and when she made her debut among the Immortals.
From that moment on, among both gods and humans,
She has fulfilled the honored function that includes
Virginal sweet-talk, lovers' smiles and deceits
And all of the gentle pleasures of sex.

But great Ouranos used to call the sons he begot
Titans, a reproachful nickname, because he thought
They had over-reached themselves and done a monstrous deed
For which vengeance later would surely be exacted.

OTHER EARLY GODS

And Night bore hateful Doom and black Fate
And Death, and Sleep and the brood of Dreams.
And sleeping with no one. the ethereal goddess Night
Gave birth to Blame and agonizing Grief,
And to the Hesperides who guard the golden apples
And the fruit-bearing trees beyond glorious Ocean.
And she generated the Destinies and the merciless,
Avenging Fates, Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos,
Who give mortals at birth good and evil to have,
And prosecute transgressions of mortals and gods.
These goddesses never let up their dread anger
Until the sinner has paid a severe penalty.
And deadly Night bore Nemesis too, more misery
For mortals; and after her, Deception and Friendship
And ruinous Old Age, and hard-hearted Eris.
And hateful Eris bore agonizing Toil,
Forgetfulness, Famine, and tearful Pains,
Battles and Fights, Murders and Manslaughter,
Quarrels, Lying Words and Words Disputious,
Lawlessness and Recklessness, who share one nature,
And Oath, who most troubles men upon Earth
When anyone willfully swears a false oath.

And Pontos, the Sea, begot his eldest, Nereus,
True and no liar. And they call him Old Man
Because he is unerring and mild, remembers
What is right, and his mind is gentle and just.

THE BIRTH OF THE OLYMPIANS

Later, Kronos forced himself upon Rhea,
And she gave birth to a splendid brood:

Hestia and Demeter and gold-candled Hera,
Strong, pitiless Hades, the underworld lord,
The booming Earth-shaker, Poseidon, and finally
Zeus, a wise god, our Father in heaven
Under whose thunder the wide world trembles.

And Kronos swallowed them all down as soon as each
Issued from Rhea's holy womb onto her knees.
With the intent that only he among the proud Ouranians
Should hold the title of King among the Immortals.
For he had learned from Earth and starry Heaven
That it was fated for him, powerful though he was,
To be overthrown by his child, through the scheming of Zeus.
Well, Kronos wasn’t blind. He kept a sharp watch
And swallowed his children.

Rhea’s grief was unbearable.

When she was about to give birth to Zeus our Father
She petitioned her parents, Earth and starry Heaven,
To put together some plan so that the birth of her child
Might go unnoticed, and she would make devious Kronos
Pay the Avengers of her father and children.
They listened to their daughter and were moved by her words,
And the two of them told her all that was fated
For Kronos the King and his stout-hearted son.
They sent her to Lykos, to the rich land of Crete,
When she was ready to bear the youngest of her sons,
Mighty Zeus. Vase Earth received him when he was born
To be nursed and brought up in the wide land of Crete.
She came first to Lykos, travelling quickly by night,
And took the baby in her hands and hid him in a cave,
An eerie hollow in the woods of dark Mount Aigion.
Then she wrapped up a great stone in swaddling clothes
And gave it to Kronos, Oursanos’ son, the great lord and king
Of the earlier gods. He took it in his hands and rammed it
Down into his belly. The poor fool! He had no idea
That a stone had been substituted for his son, who,
Uncarved and content as a babe, would soon wrest
His honors from him by main force and rule the immortals.
It wasn’t long before the young lord was flexing
His glorious muscles. The seasons followed each other,
And great devious Kronos gulled by Earth’s
Clever suggestions, vomited up his offspring,
[Overcome by the wiles and power of his son]
The stone first, which he’d swallowed last.
Zeus took the stone and set it in the ground at Pytho
Under Parnassus’ hollows, a sign and wonder for men to come.
And he freed his uncle, other sons of Oursanos
Whom their father in a fit of idiocy had bound.
They remembered his charity and in gratitude
Gave him thunder and the flashing thunderbolt
And lightning, which enormous Earth had hidden before.

PROMETHEUS
Then Lapeos led away a daughter of Ocean,
Klymene, pretty ankles, and went to bed with her.
And she bore him a child, Atlas, stout heart.

And began ultraglorious Memitiros, and Prometheus,
Complex, his mind a shimmer, and wise Epimetheus,
Who was trouble from the start for enterprising men,
First to accept from Zeus the fabricated woman.
The Maiden. Outrageous Memitiros broadbrowed Zeus
Blasted into Ereboe with a sulphurous thunderbolt
On account of his foolishness and excessive violence.
Atlas, crimped hard, holds up the wide sky
At earth’s limits, in front of the shrill-voiced Hesperides,
Standing with indefatigable head and hands,
For this is the part wise Zeus assigned him.
And he bound Prometheus with intractable fetters,
Painful bonds, and drove a shaft through his middle,
And set a long-winged eagle on him that kept gnawing
His undying liver, but whatever the long-winged bird
Ate the whole day through, would all grow back by night.
That bird the mighty son of pretty-ankled Alkmene,
Herakles, killed, drove off the evil affliction
From Lapeos’ son and freed him from his misery—
Not without the will of Zeus, high lord of Olympus.
So that the glory of Theban-born Herakles
Might be greater than before on the plentiful earth.
He valued that and honored his celebrated son.
And he ceased from the anger that he had before
Because Prometheus matched wits with mighty Kronion.

That happened when the gods and mortal men were negotiating
At Mekone. Prometheus cheerfully butchered a great ox
And served it up, trying to befuddle Zeus’ wits.
For Zeus he set out flesh and inwards rich with fat
Laid out on the oshide and covered with its paunch.
But for the others he set out the animal’s white bones
Artfully dressed out and covered with shining fat.
And then the Father of gods and men said to him:

“Son of Lapeos, my celebrated lord,
How unevenly you have divided the portions.”
Thus Zeus, steering with imperishable wisdom.
And Prometheus, whose mind was devious,
Smiled softly and remembered his trickery:

“Zeus most glorious, greatest of the everlasting gods,
Choose whichever of these your heart desires.”

This was Prometheus’ trick. But Zeus, eternally wise,
Recognized the fraud and began to rumble in his heart.
Trouble for mortals, and it would be fulfilled.
With both his hands he picked up the gleaming fat.
Anger seethed in his lungs and bile rose to his heart
When he saw the ox’s white bones artfully tricked out.
And that is why the tribes of men on earth
Burn white bones to the immortals upon smoking altars.
But cloudhanging Zeus was terribly put out, and said:

‘Tapetos’ boy, if you’re not the smartest of them all,
So you still haven’t forgotten your tricks, have you?”
Thus Zeus, angry, whose wisdom never wears out.
From then on he always remembered this trick
And wouldn’t give the power of weariless fire
To the ashwood mortals who fire on the earth.
But that fine son of Tapetos outran him
And stole the far-seen gleam of weariless fire.
In a hollow terebinth stalk, and so bit deeply the heart
Of Zeus, the high lord of thunder, who was angry
When he saw the distant gleam of fire among men,
And straight off he gave them trouble to pay for the fire.

PANDORA
The famous Lame God plastered up some clay
To look like a shy virgin, just like Zeus wanted,
And Athena, the Owl-Eyed Goddess,
Got her all dressed up in silvery clothes
And with her hands draped a veil from her head,
An intricate thing, wonderful to look at.
And Pallas Athena circled her head
With a wreath of luxuriant springtime flowers
And crowned her with a golden tiara.
That the famous Lame God had made himself;
Shaped it by hand to please father Zeus,
Intricately designed and a wonder to look at.
Sea monsters and other fabulous beasts
Crowded the surface, and it sighed with beauty,
And you could almost hear the animals’ voices.
He made this lovely evil to balance the good,
Then led her off to the other gods and men
Gorgeous in the finery of the owl-eyed daughter
Sired in power. And they were stunned,
Immortal gods and mortal men, when they saw
The sheer deception, irresistible to men.
From her is the race of female women,
The deadly race and population of women,
A great infestation among mortal men,
At home with Wealth but not with Poverty.
It’s the same as with bees in their overhung hives
Feeding the drones, evil conspirators.

THE BEES WORK EVERY DAY UNTIL THE SUN GOES DOWN,
Busy all day long making pale honeycombs,
While the drones stay inside, in the hollow hives,
Stuffing their stomachs with the work of others.
That’s just how Zeus, the high lord of thunder,
Made women as a curse for mortal men,
Evil conspirators. And he added another evil
To offset the good. Whoever escapes marriage
And women’s harm, comes to deadly old age
Without any son to support him. He has no lack
While he lives, but when he dies distant relatives
Divide up his estate. Then again, whoever marries
As fated, and gets a good wife, compatible,
Has a life that is balanced between evil and good,
A constant struggle. But if he marries the abusive kind,
He lives with pain in his heart all down the line,
Pain in spirit and mind, incurable evil.
There’s no way to get around the mind of Zeus.
Not even Prometheus, that fine son of Lapetus
Escaped his heavy anger. He knows many things,
But he is caught in the crimp of ineluctable bonds.

THE TITANOMACHY
When their father Ouranos first grew angry
With Obiriarcus, and with his brothers,
Kottos and Gyges, he clamped down on them hard.
Indignant because of their arrogant maleness,
Their looks and bulk, he made them live underground.
So there they lived in subterranean pain,
Settled at the outermost limits of earth,
Suffering long and hard, grief in their hearts.
But the Son of Kronos, and the other Immortals
Born of Rhea and Kronos, took Earth’s advice
And led them up back into the light, for she
Told them the whole story of how with their help
They would win glorious honor and victory.

For a long time they fought, hearts bitter with toil,
Going against each other in the shock of battle,
The Titans and the gods who were born from Kronos.
The proud Titans fought from towering Othrys,
And from Olympos the gods, the givers of good
Born of rich-haired Rhea after lying with Kronos.
They battled each other with pain in their hearts
Continuously for ten full years, never a truce.
No respite from the hostilities on either side,
The war’s outcome balanced between them.
Then Zeus gave those three all that they needed
Of ambrosia and nectar, food the gods themselves eat,
And the fighting spirit grew in their breasts
When they fed on the sweet ambrosia and nectar,
Then the father of gods and men addressed them:

“Hear me, glorious children of Earth and Heaven,
While I speak my mind. For a long time now
The Titans and those of us born from Kronos
Have been fighting daily for victory and dominance.
Show the Titans your strength, the invincible might
Of your hands, oppose them in this grisly conflict
Remembering our kindness. After suffering so much
You have come back to the light from your cruel dungeon,
Returned by my will from the molding gloom.”

Thus Zeus, and the blameless Kottos replied:

“Divine One, what a thing to say. We already realize
That your thoughts are supreme, your mind surpassing,
That you saved the Immortals from war’s cold light.
We have come from under the molding gloom
By your counsel, free at last from bonds none too gentle.
O Lord, Son of Kronos, and from suffering unlocked for,
Our minds are bent therefore, and our wills fixed
On preserving your power through the horror of war.
We will fight the Titans in the crush of battle.”

He spoke, and the gods who are givers of good
Heard him and cheered, and their hearts yearned for war
Even more than before. They joined grim battle again
That very day, all of them, male and female alike,
The Titans and the gods who were born from Kronos,
And the three Zeus sent from the underworld to light,
Dread and strong, and arrogant with might.
A hundred hands strack out of their shoulders,
Grotesque, and fifty heads grew on each stumply neck.
They stood against the Titans on the line of battle
Holding chunks of cliffs in their rugged hands.
Opposite them, the Titans tightened their ranks
Expectantly. Then both sides’ hands flashed with power.
And the unformidable sea shrieked eerily.

The earth clashed and rumbled, the vast sky groaned.
Under the Immortals’ onslaught. A deep tremor of feet
Reached misty Tartaros, and a high whistling noise
That groaned and whined in flight. And the sound

Of each side shouting rose to starry heaven,
As they collided with a magnificent battle cry.

And now Zeus no longer held back his strength.
His lungs seethed with anger and he revealed
All his power. He charged from the sky, hurling
Down from Olympos in a flurry of lightning.
Hurling thunderbolts one after another, right on target.
From his massive hand, a whirlwind of holy flame.
And the earth that bears life roared as it burned.
And the endless forests cracked in fire.
The continents melted and the Ocean streams boiled.
And the barren sea. The blast of heat enveloped
The chthonian Titans, and the flame reached
The bright stratosphere, and the incandescent rays
Of the thunderbolts and lightning flashes
Blinded their eyes, mighty as they were,
Heat so terrible it engulfed deep Chaos.

The sight of it all
And its sound to the ears was just as if broad Heaven
Had fallen on Earth: the noise of it crashing
And of Earth being crushed would be like the noise
That arose from the strife of the clashing gods.
Winds hissed through the earth, starting off temors
And swept dust and thunder and flashing bolts of lightning.
The weapons of Zeus, along with the shouting and din,
Into both sides. Reverberation from the terrible strife
Hung in the air, and sheer Power shot through it.

And the battle turned. Before they had fought
Shoulder to shoulder in the crush of battle,
But then Kottos, Briareos, and Gyges rallied.
Hungry for war, in the front lines of combat.
Firing three hundred stones one after the other
From their massive hands, and the stones they shot
Overshadowed the Titans, and they sent them under
The wide-pathed earth and bound them with cruel bonds—
Having beaten them down despite their daring—
As far under earth as the sky is above,
For it is that far from earth down to misty Tartaros.

TARTAROS
A bronze anvil falling down from the sky
Would fall nine days and nights and on the tenth hit earth.
It is just as far from earth down to misty Tartaros.
A bronze anvil falling down from earth
Would fall nine days and nights and on the tenth hit Tartaros

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Hound stands guard, and he has a mean trick:
When someone comes in he fawns upon him
Wagging his tail and dropping his ears,
But he will not allow anyone to leave—
He runs down and eats anyone he catches
Leaving Persephone’s and Hades’ gates.

And there dwells a goddess loathed by the Immortals,
Awesome Styx, eldest daughter of back-flowing Ocean.
She lives in a glorious house apart from the gods,
Roofed in towering stone, surrounded on all sides
With silver columns that reach up to the sky.
Seldom does Iris, Thaumas’ swift-footed daughter,
Come bearing a message over the sea’s wide back.
Whenever discord and strife arise among the gods,
Or any who have homes on Olympus should lie,
Zeus sends Iris to bring the gods’ great oath
Back from afar in a golden pitcher, the celebrated water
That trickles down cold from precipitous stone.
Far underneath the wide-pathed earth it flows
From the holy river through midnight black.
A branch of Ocean, allotted a tenth of its waters.
Nine parts circle earth and the sea’s broad back.
In silvery currents returning to Ocean’s brine.
But one part flows from stone, woe to the gods.
If ever a god who lives on snowcapped Olympus
Pours a libation of this and breaks his oath,
He lies a full year without any breath.
Not a taste of ambrosia, nor a sip of nectar
Comes to his lips, but he lies breathless and speechless
On a blanketed bed, an evil coma upon him.
But when the long year brings this disease to its end,
Another more difficult trial is in store,
Nine years of exile from the everlasting gods,
No converse in council or at their feasts.
For nine full years. In the tenth year finally
He rejoins the Immortals in their homes on Olympus.
Upon this the gods swear, the primordial, imperishable
Water of Styx, and it issues from a forbidding place.

There dark Earth and misty Tartaros
And the barren Sea and the starry Sky
All have their sources and limits in a row,
Grim and dank, which even the gods abhor.
There are shining gates and a bronze threshold,
Deeply rooted and firmly fixed, a natural
Outgrowth. Beyond and far from all the gods
The Titans dwell, past the gloom of Chaos.
But the famous helpers of thunderous Zeus
Inhabit houses on Ocean’s deep foundations.
Kronos and Gyges. And Biares for his bravery
Deep-booming Poseidon made his son-in-law.
And gave him Kynopolis in marriage.

TYPHOIOS
When Zeus had driven the Titans from heaven,
Earth,
Pregnant by Tarratos thanks to golden Aphrodite,
Delivered her last-born child, Typhios,
A god whose hands were like engines of war,
Whose feet never gave out: from whose shoulders grew
The hundred heads of a frightful dragon
Flickering dusky tongues, and the hollow eye sockets
In the eerie heads sent out fiery rays,
And each head burned with flame as it glared.
And there were voices in each of these frightful heads,
A phantasmatogoria of unspeakable sound,
Sometimes sounds that the gods understood, sometimes
The sound of a spirited bull, bellowing and snorting,
Or the uninhibited, shameless roar of a lion,
Or just like puppies yapping, an uncanny noise,
Or a whistle hissing through long ridges and hills.

And that day would have been beyond hope of help,
And Typhios would have ruled over Immortals and men,
Had the father of both not been quick to notice.
He thundered hard, and the Earth all around
Rumbled horribly, and wide Heaven above,
The Sea, the Ocean, and underground Tarratos.
Great Olympus trembled under the deathless feet
Of the Lord as he rose, and Gaia groaned,
The heat generated by these two beings—
Scorching winds from Zeus’ lightning bolts
And the monster’s fire—enveloped the violet sea.
Earth, sea, and sky were a seething mass,
And long tidal waves from the immortals’ impact
Pounded the beaches, and a quaking arose that would not stop.
Hades, lord of the dead below, trembled,
And the Titans under Tarratos huddled around Kronos,
At the unquenchable clamor and fearsome strife.
When Zeus’ temper had peaked he seized his weapons,
Seizing bolts of thunder and lightning,
And as he leaped from Olympus, struck. He burned
All the eerie heads of the frightful monster,
And when he had beaten it down he whipped it until

It reeled off maimed, and vast Earth groaned.
And a firestorm from the thunderstricken lord
Spread through the dark rugged gles of the mountain.
And a blast of hot vapor melted the earth like tin
When smiths use bellows to heat it in crucibles,
Or like iron, the hardest substance there is.
When it is softened by fire in mountain gles
And melts in bright earth under Hephaistos’ hands.
So the earth melted in the incandescent flame.
And in anger Zeus hurled him into Tarratos’ pit.

And from Typhios come the damp monsoons,
But not Notos, Boreas, or silverwhite Zephyros.
These winds are godsent blessings to men.
But the others blow fitfully over the water,
Evil gusts falling on the sea’s misty face.
A great curse for mortals, raging this way and that,
Scattering ships and destroying sailors—no defense
Against those winds when men meet them at sea.
And others blow over endless, flowering earth
Ruining beautiful farmlands of sod-born humans,
Filling them with dust and howling rubble.

ZEUS IN POWER
So the blessed gods had done a hard piece of work.
Settled by force the question of rights with the Titans.
Then at Gaia’s suggestion they pressed broad-browed Zeus,
The Olympian, to be their king and rule the Immortals.
And so Zeus dealt out their privileges and rights.

Now king of the gods, Zeus made Metis his first wife,
Wiser than any other god, or any mortal man.
But when she was about to deliver the owl-eyed goddess
Athena, Zeus tricked her, gullied her with crafty words,
And stuffed her in his stomach, taking the advice
Of Earth and starry Heaven. They told him to do this
So that no one but Zeus would hold the title of King
Among the eternal gods, for it was predestined
That very wise children would be born from Metis,
First the grey-eyed girl, Tritogeneia,
Equal to her father in strength and wisdom.
But then a son with an arrogant heart
Who would one day be king of gods and men.
But Zeus stuffed the goddess into his stomach first
So she would devise with him good and evil both.

Next he married gleaming Themis, who bore the Seasons,
And Eunomia, Dike, and blooming Eirene.
Laughing Dionysos, a mortal woman
Giving birth to a god. But they are both divine now.

And Alkmene gave birth to the might of Herakles
After mingling in love with cloud-herding Zeus.

And Hephaistos the glorious Lame God married
Blossoming Aglaia, youngest of the Graces.

Gold-haired Dionysos made blond Ariadne,
Minos' daughter, his blossoming wife,
And Kronion made her deathless and ageless.

And Herakles, Alkmene's mighty son,
Finished with all his agonizing labors,
Made Hebe his bride on snowy Olympus.
Daughter of Zeus and gold-sandalled Hera.
Happy at last, his great work done, he lives
Agelessly and at ease among the Immortals.

Questions for Discussion and Review

1. Describe the structure of the mythic cosmos. Define cosmogony and cosmology.

2. At what point in cosmic history does Hesiod begin his account of world origins? Define the primordial entities of Chaos, Gaia, Eros, and Tartarus. What is Hesiod's major purpose in composing the Theogony? Why do you suppose he makes Zeus a third-generation god? What are the implications of a universe ruled by a god who is neither its creator nor eternal?

3. What role do the Muses play in the poetry of myth?

4. Discuss the unusual births of Aphrodite and Athene. What are the paradoxes involved in the love goddess's birth from an act of sexual mutilation and violence? How is Zeus able to give birth to Athene, and why does she issue from her father's head? Which theories of myth are useful in interpreting these births?

5. Discuss Zeus's battles with the Titans and with Typhon. What role does Gaia play in each change of divine administration? Why does she side with sons who overthrow their fathers? Why does she create Zeus's most formidable opponent?

6. Why does myth attribute at least seven principal wives to Zeus? What significance do you give to the fact that most of his early children are personifications of abstract qualities? Why does Zeus feel compelled to mate with so many females, both divine qualities? Why does he wait until he has defeated all his enemies before embarking on his amorous exploits?