

Dark Womb and Gender War: Rethinking Social Formation and Social Order in Hesiod's Cosmogony*

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This paper offers a detailed study of the issue of social formation and social order in Hesiod's cosmogony. I argue that, according to Hesiod's genesis theory, order in a society cannot be established organically through social formation. The main difficulty lies in the nature of society itself where the dualistic opposition in the male-female sexual relationship leads to endless conflicts between the two sexes and, further, between generations. To deal with the sexual relationship properly is the key to maintaining a stable social order. In the poem, the mother's 'dark womb' is presented as a prominent image at every crucial moment of social formation and social (dis)ordering in both the divine and the human worlds. Taking this image as a clue, we can see that the issue of sexuality has a profound impact on social order, and also serves as a key to understanding divinity and humanity in Hesiod's cosmogony.

Keywords: Hesiod, *Theogony*, *Works and Days*, social order, cosmogony, sexuality, gender, Womb, Pandora, Gaia

Introduction

In his fundamental works, *Theogony* and *Works and Days*, Hesiod presents a comprehensive view of cosmogony, of how the cosmos came into being, as well as how the orders of the divine world and of the human world were established. In this mythic imagination, the formation of the physical world is thought to develop through procreation, where traces of genealogy can be clearly seen. Along with such development, not only does the entire world space expand, but also, the interpersonal relationships between parents and children and between husband and wife are naturally produced by the reproductive cycle, and thus, these relationships all together lay the most basic foundation for social construction in the cosmic world.

It seems rather natural when considering the relationship between social formation and social order, that social formation and social order should develop at the same time simultaneously. The reason for this can be natural: during the process of social construction, there has already been an organic pattern of social relationships that frame every individual into an organised network: the mother-father-child structure. Since the

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child is born from its parents, is it not natural that the offspring should follow its progenitor? Surprisingly, however, in Hesiod's narrative, this assumption is problematized, making the direct link between social formation and social order not natural but questionable. In the well-known myth of succession in the *Theogony*, we are told that, from Uranos to Kronos, then to Zeus, it was not until the third generation of the gods that the divine world finally stabilised. Similarly, right at the start of the *Works and Days*, we are also told that the normal state of human society is *eris*, dispute, not order. Why, in the process of reproduction, cannot the order of a society just be set up naturally?

Regarding the inconsistency between social formation and social order, most studies have paid attention to the generational tension between father and son in Hesiod's aetiological writing, especially in his myth of succession,¹ but another pair of relationships is often overlooked, or at least, underestimated, which is: the sexual conflict between the male and the female. In fact, in Hesiod's account, although it is the child who overthrows the father's rule, the mother always plays a crucial role in those events. We may even say that without the mother, the child can hardly succeed.

This paper attempts to shed light on the significance of the role of the mother (the female) in Hesiod's account of cosmogony and to illuminate the relationship between social formation and social order from the point view of sex and sexuality.² I shall suggest that, in Hesiod's writing, the main difficulty in establishing social order lies in the very nature of sexual society itself where the opposition in the male-female relationship leads to endless conflicts between the two sexes and, further, between generations. To deal with the sexual relationship properly is thus not only a precondition for the establishment of order in a society but also the very key to maintaining social stability. In the narrative of the poet, the mother's 'dark womb' is notably shown to be anchored in every crucial moment of social formation and social (dis)ordering in both the divine and the human worlds. Taking this image as a clue, we can see that, in the holistic picture of Hesiod's cosmogony, the issue of female not only has a profound impact on the order of a society but also serves as a key to understanding the nature of divinity and humanity in Hesiod's cosmic world.

Social Disordering: The Womb as a Battlefield

In the *Theogony*, the Succession story begins with the fathers' discomfort with the birth of their children. Both Uranos and Kronos felt the threat that some terrible mighty offspring (δεινότατοι παίδων, 155; παῖδες μεγάλοι <τε> καὶ ὄβριμοι, 148) would subvert the kingship of the father (ἵνα μή τις ἀγαυῶν Οὐρανιαίων ἄλλος

¹ For a discussion of generational conflicts, see J. S. Clay, *Hesiod's Cosmos*, (Cambridge, 2003), 7; E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, (Berkeley, 1951), 61, esp. n. 103. The collection by S. Bertman, (Ed.), *The Conflict of Generations in Ancient Greece and Rome*, (John Benjamins Publishing, 1Gk976) shows the impact of this idea on a later period of Greek antiquity.

² It should be pointed out that, in Hesiod, the pattern of procreation in the divine world is certainly not restricted to bisexual reproduction—there are many cases of parthenogenesis as well, which is a crucial feature that distinguishes divinity from humanity. However, in terms of the central concern of the genesis myth in terms of the political significance of the reproductive history of gods, sexual reproduction is still more crucial than parthenogenesis because first, in the *Theogony*, sexual reproduction is certainly the predominant method of reproduction, especially of the principal gods and in those events of great significance; secondly, in Hesiod's account, parthenogenesis exists among the female gods only (Chaos, Gaea, Night, Strife, and Hera) and no male god/king has an analogous reproductive ability. That is why almost all the turbulence and subversion of the existing order is caused by sexual reproduction, not by parthenogenesis; thirdly, if the divine world can be compared with the human world, (which I will analyse in the fourth part of this paper) it is also sexual reproduction that serves as a ground for comparison, not the alternative. Therefore, while I am fully aware of the existence of parthenogenesis in the poet's narrative, for the purpose of this paper, my analysis of the political society will still focus mainly on sexual reproduction. On parthenogenesis in Hesiod, see A. Park, 'Parthenogenesis in Hesiod's *Theogony*', *Preternature*, 3:2 (2014), 261-283.

ἐν ἀθανάτοισιν ἔχοι βασιλιίδα τιμήν, 462). It is understandable that, as soon as a new power is produced, society cannot stay the same, and thus change—whether good or bad—will necessarily come about. In Hesiod's account, however, the parent-child structure is shown to be naturally destructive: the birth of the new baby causes the original social formation to be considered interrupted and the established order is constantly threatened with change or even subversion. This leads to the fathers' instinctive hostility towards their sons, and social formation and social order appear from the very beginning to be inconsistent.

In order to prevent potential turmoil from happening, the two fathers tried hard to tackle the problem. As we see in the story, once the children were produced, Uranos attempted to hide them (πάντας ἀποκρύπτασκε, καὶ ἐς φάος οὐκ ἀνίεσκε, Γαίης ἐν κευθμῶνι, 157-8), and Kronos swallowed them (καὶ τοὺς μὲν κατέπινε μέγας Κρόνος, 459). In terms of emergency birth control, both of the gods seem initially to have acted quite effectively. By concealing his children in the Earth, Uranos sent the begotten ones back to the mother's womb, pretending that the birth had never happened. By gulping down the newborn children into his own belly, Kronos takes even better control of his offspring by supervising the sons on his own. But perhaps, to our surprise, Uranos and Kronos still failed in their plans. We all know the result: Uranos was castrated directly by Kronos (178-182) and Kronos was eventually subverted by Zeus (492-506), therefore, social order was not maintained but remained broken.

Judging from the stratagem that the fathers adopt against their sons, Uranos and Kronos seem to have nothing one can find fault with. We see clearly that they are considerably aware of the power of the womb/belly in procreation. In making great use of its feature as a barrier between what is within and what is without, they hid their sons in this closed space so that the sons' existence was not only symbolically, but also substantially negated. In this way, the potential threat was suppressed in darkness. It seems that this scheme was a very smart solution in that it kept the sons under their fathers' strict control. In this case, the obvious failure of Uranos and Kronos makes us wonder even more where precisely these attempts have gone wrong.

In reading Hesiod's narrative, I would like to suggest that one fatal mistake made by the fathers is that they entirely misunderstood the essential nature of the sexual relationship. When Uranos and Kronos were absorbed in taking measures against the children they had begotten, they thought that the mothers who are weaker than they and who produce the next generation with them should naturally be their allies and followers, so each of them failed to realise that his partner was, in effect, an independent 'Other' who would possibly stand in opposition to them.³ As is shown in the story, after having already attacked their sons, the fathers still ardently desired to have sex with their partners and remained very productive (132-8, 147-9, 453-8). The immoderate sex of Uranos even made Gaia groan (στοναχίζετο Γαῖα, 159) and Rhea was also forcibly bedded

³ Sussman in L. S. Sussman, 'The Birth of the Gods: Sexuality, Conflict and Cosmic Structure in Hesiod's Theogony', *Ramus*, 7:1 (1978), 61 proposes that the process of creation is equal to the interactions of sexual beings. Although there are sexual conflicts during procreation, procreation 'enhances and expands the creative potential of sexuality by ensuring that the end product of sexual interaction, a new being, will be able to act upon the world.' I can hardly agree with her opinion that sexual conflicts promote the establishment of order. Instead, as we see in the text, sexual conflicts impede the ordering process and only when the sexual conflict is suppressed is order established.

by Kronos (δηθηεῖσα, 453).⁴ And by sending the child back to the mother's womb or by directly imitating the pregnant mother, the fathers also show their self-confidence in aligning with their partners and using the power which ought to be the mothers' privilege. But when the mothers no longer withstood the fathers' violence, we see that they revolted against them right away (159, 453). They acted all too suddenly and thus the ignorant fathers were decisively defeated.

It is notable that in their revolt against their partners, the mothers, like the fathers, also played a game with the womb. We are told that in Uranos's subversion, it was in her womb that Gaia hid Kronos and told her son secretly how to take revenge on his father (174-5). And in the next generation, Rhea again took over the role of Gaia and played another trick by concealing a stone in the belly of Kronos to replace Zeus. This youngest son was further hidden back in Gaia's womb until he became strong enough to stage a revolt (477-500, esp. 494).⁵ The womb, of which the father made exclusive use now becomes the centre of the two antagonistic forces. This is a symbolic moment, when the mother uses her independent and equal power against the father. Now, the two sexes are not a synergetic reproductive pair, nor is the female a passive follower and receiver of the male, but they are antagonistic at opposite poles in the realm of sexuality.

Then a question arises: When both take the womb as the battlefield, why is the male defeated while the female is able to win?

This question touches on the core of the social theory in Hesiod's cosmogony, and I would like to argue that although both the father and the mother took the womb in the same way as a closed dark space in which to keep things hidden, there is one fundamental difference between them which ultimately leads to different results. That is: no matter how well the fathers hide the children *after* their birth in an *imitation* womb, they are at any rate incapable of intervening or even knowing any process inside the mother's *protogenetic* womb *before* the parturition, and thereby the mother can take advantage of this primordial quality of her reproduction to make the womb an originally independent space in which to breed secrets, tricks and clandestine plots and also to insure that those tricks are formed before her opponent is able to find out about them. Using her children's natural attachment to her body, the mother then can easily help her offspring to overthrow the one who fathered them.

In this way, 'concealment and tricks' becomes a significant stratagem only effective for the mother's revolutionary actions (174-5, 482-4) and the father, facing such a challenge, is at his wits' end. The result is that no matter how hard and how well the father tackles the problems that have come to the world, he is always one step behind the mother and thereby has no means to address the root causes that are beyond his capacity to change. Once in the sexual relationship, unless the father can take hold of the mother's womb, unless he can know what is going on inside this mysterious space, or unless he can just stop the situation of 'the mother giving birth', the father can never free himself of the unexpected challenges made by this absolute Other. We see that the very nature and mechanism of female reproduction lie at the heart of the issue.

⁴ This is another example of the significance of sexual reproduction compared to parthenogenesis. Eros is obviously the major force of cosmic origin and social formation because after Eros comes into being, almost all the major gods are born through sexual procreation. Terms such as φιλότης, εὐνάω and μίγνυμι appear all over the place. See for example: lines 177, 206, 238, 306, 333, 375, 380, 383, 404, 405, 625, 634, 651, 822. And here in the succession myth, both Uranos and Kronos are depicted as male gods with strong carnal desires who produced lots of children.

⁵ Hide (κρύπτω) and hole (ἄντρον), see 482-3: κρύψεν δέ ἐ χειρὶ λαβοῦσα/ ἄντρον ἐν ἠλιβάτω (She hid him in a cave). The strategy that Rhea adopted is very similar to Gaia's because both of them play the game of concealment. See line 485: Rhea wrapped a huge stone.

Taking the womb as a battlefield, Gaia and Rhea beat the fathers at their own game. The relationship between the two sexes is reversed: the male's violent control over the female has been lost and the male is otherwise put in an unfavourable position, where he is totally incapable of pinning down the actions of his opponent. The womb, being originally a safe place for the fathers, now becomes an extremely dangerous and unknown location. It symbolises the greatest uncertainty.

The dominator is now the dominated. This is of course a trick—and a very cunning trick, which helps the weaker overthrow the stronger. From the perspective of the male's rule, such a trick must be painful and is a great threat to the social order. But in the pattern of sexual reproduction, owing to the nature of the mother's womb, this trick has been found to be very effective. At this moment she is independent of her partner and entirely out of his control. Therefore, as long as sexual reproduction takes place, as long as the womb functions, the female is able to play her tricks independently—she is an Other who is unseen and uncontrolled by the male. In this sense, it is very hard for the father to act to stop procreation, stop growth, and stop change, and potential social disorder can never be removed. How can the male not hate the female?

In Hesiod's depiction of sexual procreation, we see the real problem in establishing social order: it is the female. If we trace the entire cause and effect back to its roots, from the perspective of the male ruler—if it is the growth of society, the birth of children and the act of sexual procreation that inexorably lead to social instability, social change and even social disorder, then it is in essence the existence of the female and the need for sexual union *per se* that make all these things happen. In other words, it is the need for social formation and social development itself that fundamentally frustrates the aim of social order. This leads to a very tragic world view: nature *per se* does not bring order to the world. If social order is to be established, it is necessarily a construction—be it artificial or cultural.

Order Constructed: From Dualistic Opposition to Monistic Order

Hesiod states that, in the third generation, Zeus was born, as Uranos and Kronos before him, paradoxically to contribute to both social formation and social disorder. Like his predecessors, Zeus subverted his father's regime, and immediately after he came to power he was faced with the same threat of being subverted by his own child (894-8). But we all know from the following myth that Zeus did not let the generational conflict happen again; instead, he managed to establish a stable rule. As we can see, even though Zeus also had sex with goddesses and produced children, his rule was never decisively overthrown, unlike that of his predecessors. On the contrary, he was acknowledged by all the gods on Olympus to be the sovereign king of divine society. In this way, Zeus established a stable order and brought a new beginning to the world.

If, as we have seen in Hesiod's previous narrative, the establishment of social order cannot be a natural process, how did Zeus succeed in his attempt and become a prototype of the founder of order in Greek mythical thinking?

We must now have a look at Zeus's story and investigate how, for Hesiod, he managed to resolve the paradoxical contrast between the pattern of sexual reproduction and the aim for social order.

In this section, we will see that in the establishment of order in his rule Zeus specifically dealt with the issue of reproduction and tried very hard to resolve the problems it caused. Since social formation, as an original force for social development and even cosmic expansion, was at any rate irresistible, we will see that

Zeus did not attempt to eradicate it but made a great effort to deal with the matters *after* the sexual union and focused especially on the female—this absolute Other to the male—who is the key to the procreation process. We will see that it is precisely his different treatment of the female in sexual relationships that directly leads to a result different from that of the previous two generations.

Here is what Zeus did to his sexual partner Metis: just before Metis was going to deliver her child, Zeus swallowed the whole pregnant mother into his belly.⁶ At this moment, Athena was born directly from his head (886-900). The child who was predicted to subvert her father now becomes his follower and defender.⁷ As we can see here, what differentiates Zeus from his predecessors is that, unlike the previous rulers who still kept sexual procreation working normally, Zeus attempted by force to dissociate this dual-sexed procreation pattern from sex. By absorbing the mother into his body after he had satisfied his carnal desire, the father got total control of the entire situation.

Now the procreation pattern has been decisively changed: it transforms from 'birth from the two' to 'birth from the one'. The father took over the mother's work, her life, and furthermore, her existence. The mother lost her intimate attachment to the baby, her womb lost the ability to function as a hidden place for cunning plans, and most importantly, she lost her independence as an absolute other, uncontrollable by the father. The dualistic opposition is in this way removed. Through a forced construction, Zeus violently established a monistic order that had been long desired by Uranos and Kronos. Without the block of the womb, those secrets, uncertainties, and unknown challenges 'in the womb' were completely eliminated.⁸ Gone as well is the threat caused by sexual union. Zeus becomes the only controller of the female's procreation. This is a complete conquest by the male of the female—a thorough *deprivation for the female of her ontological essence*.

As Zeus's symbolic trophy, Athena the daughter immediately confirms such a triumph. She is born to be a virgin—and is destined to be a virgin: she is supposed to be not erotically alluring, cannot have sex, nor can she give birth to children. All of these points effectively eradicate the potential threat to Zeus from the existing womb as well as the threat from a greater son. Being deprived of the chance of having sex and children, this female, the daughter and the defender of Zeus's rule, is completely under her father's control and becomes the best manifestation of Zeus's new order.

⁶ My reading of Zeus's swallowing Metis focuses on the sexual conflict between male and female. For the discussion about the intelligence of Metis, see J.-P. Vernant and M. Detienne, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, J. S. Lloyd (Trans.), (Harvester, 1978), 107-26. See also F. I. Zeitlin, 'Signifying Difference: the Case of Hesiod's Pandora', in *Playing the Other: Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literature*, (Princeton, 1996), 72; Clay (n. 1) 28-29, M. B. Arthur, 'Cultural Strategies in Hesiod's Theogony: Law, Family, Society', *Arethusa*, 15:2 (1982), 77.

⁷ On rights over reproduction, see J. -P, Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, J. Lloyd (Trans.), (Zone Books, 1990) 170-1. Arthur is insightful in pointing out that 'in the more anthropomorphized and rationalized version of Chrysippos, Metis retains a separate identity, hidden within the entrails of Zeus and named "mother of Athena", while in our text Metis is transformed into the function of prophecy for Zeus (900), and when Athena is born she is already her father's child ... (896).' See Arthur (n. 7), 77.

⁸ Most scholars take Zeus's swallowing of Metis as a symbolic event that marks Zeus's success in combining strength (Zeus) and intelligence (Metis) into one. It is true that Zeus is both mighty and intelligent, but to think that Zeus is not intelligent enough before he swallows Metis can be too much, since Zeus is born to be smart and does not lack μῆτις at all, as is explicitly shown in his confrontation with Prometheus. For the mainstream interpretation of Metis, see Vernant and Detienne, (n. 7), 3, 39-46; J. Dolmage, 'Metis, Mâis, Mestiza, Medusa: Rhetorical Bodies across Rhetorical Traditions', *Rhetoric Review*, 28:1 (2009), 1-28. But Vernant and Detienne are right to point out that in this event it is *Metis* who is controlled and she is the figure of subversive power.

Beside the female's being deprived of her dominance in procreation, the conquest of the mother Metis (instead of any other goddess) is even more significant. As the name Metis suggests, this goddess represents cunning tricks, and is thus symbolic of the potential for secrets offered by the womb, and thereby representative of power for change, especially for when the weaker overcome the stronger. This is a feature that is inherent in all the female characters in the succession story and is also the decisive factor behind the revolutions. To destroy Metis means not only to destroy the female, but more precisely to destroy the womb, and the source of concealment that is beyond male control. The victory of Zeus in this sexual relationship thus indicates explicitly that the weak are no longer able to use *metis* to overthrow the strong. When Zeus dominates procreation, he has won his final triumph. After this point, procreation is no longer a threat: Zeus has armed himself with certainty and stability.

Of course, such a triumph does not mean that in Zeus's world conflict and sexual relationships cease to exist, but rather that sexual reproduction will no longer substantially subvert Zeus's rule. It is noticeable that after Metis, Zeus still desires sex with goddesses—he has six wives!—but none of them, nor any of their children, challenge Zeus's rule; on the contrary, they help to reaffirm Zeus's sovereign power while retaining their subordinate status (901-23).⁹

As we can see, the real point of Zeus's order is that even in a normal sexual society, even if desire, change, uncertainty and conflict exist, he can still maintain the most fundamental order and keep his rule stable. In this sense, we know that Zeus's swallowing of Metis and the birth of Athena are symbolically significant, showing the crucial moment of the establishment of his monistic ruling pattern. In these events, Zeus manifests to the world his great power and aptitude for the total destruction of the female, as a result of which he is no longer controlled by the pattern of sexual procreation but on the contrary takes control of it. Now the swallowing of Metis has far-reaching consequences. Not only 'with the closing of the cycle of succession, no one of his sons can offer a serious threat to Zeus's supremacy,'¹⁰ but more importantly, being permanently exposed to the danger of destruction, the female (and other male) gods no longer dare to contrive a rebellion against the king. This is why, although Zeus was still obsessed with sexual desire like his predecessors, none of his partners ever overthrew his authority.

Shall we say that the birth of Athena from Zeus is a form of parthenogenesis?¹¹ Hardly. I would like to suggest that it is still sexual reproduction but it has been transformed. The nature of this reproduction differs greatly from parthenogenesis, which simply means birth from one parent without a sexual partner. Since the birth of Athena is the result initially of sex between Zeus and Metis, and then of the god swallowing the goddess, the two sexes here are in effect still involved in the procreation process, and the combination of the two bodies into one is an explicit sign of the dual-sexed reproduction. But what makes this relationship really special is that, as we have discussed above, it changes the dualistic procreation pattern of 'birth from the *two*' to

⁹ Under Zeus's powerful rule, the females confirm the king's monistic order. It is notable that Zeus first married Themis, the goddess of justice and divine order. This is a significant moment when the female shows her submission to the male's rule and order. Sleeping with such a fecund god, Themis never says no, nor has she any intention of going against Zeus as Gaia did; instead, this goddess delivered five children consecutively, Hours, Order, Justice, Peace and Fate, all of whom are positive figures incarnating stability, regularity and continuity, which not only help to strengthen the rule of their father king but also justify his order as being universally good. See J.-P. Vernant and M. Detienne, 'La Mêtis d'Antiloque', *Revue des Etudes Grecques*, 80 (1967), 76.

¹⁰ Clay (n. 1) 29.

¹¹ On reading Zeus-Metis procreation as parthenogenesis, see A. Jacobs, 'The Life of Metis: Cunning Maternal Interventions', *Studies in the Maternal* 2:1(2010), 1-12; R. Mondì, 'The Ascension of Zeus and the Composition of Hesiod's "Theogony"', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*, 25:4 (1984), 325.

a monistic pattern of 'birth from the *one*'.¹² It is this transformation that removes the potential disorder that would be triggered by traditional sexual intercourse. It is this new system of sexual reproduction that successfully resolves the crux of the problem and thereby truly establishes a valid social order in the divine world. Therefore, the famous claim by Athena at a later time that she was born solely from her father carries much more significance than the literal meaning of the words: she was born from her father alone after her father had tamed her mother and thus she, as a virgin daughter, obeys her father's rule.¹³

Zeus's suppression of the female has proved to work well and the divine order seems to have been securely established. But this is not the king's entire stratagem. As readers might notice, there are at least two female figures who seem to be exceptional when it comes to suppression: they are not violently *suppressed* by Zeus; instead, they are exceptionally *honoured* by him and occupy high status in the divine community. The two goddesses are Gaia and Hekate. Their case is obviously different from that of other goddesses. If Zeus's order is already well maintained by his violent suppression of the female, why should he show these two goddesses great respect? In the following discussions, I will argue that this is a more cunning ruling scheme, which ultimately guarantees Zeus's sovereign order. From these two goddesses we can see another crucial aspect of Zeus's order: to encourage the female to submit *voluntarily* to the male's order.

Another Scheme for Maintaining Order: The Cases of Gaia and Hekate

We will begin our investigation with Gaia. This goddess is undoubtedly a leading figure in the whole succession myth, as she participates in the revolutions of all three generations.¹⁴ During Zeus's reign, Gaia is special at a very critical moment. When Zeus is going to redistribute τιμή (885) among the Olympian gods, Gaia serves as the king's consultant, devising a scheme for the distribution of honours. The distribution of τιμή, for Zeus, is of course a historically significant event: it will not only shape the social formation of the divine world but will also set up a universal standard for value judgments in the new world order. Being Zeus's consultant at this point means that Gaia regulates Zeus's order—deciding what should be praised, valued and encouraged and what should not. But what is the point of getting Gaia involved in this whole process? To answer this question, I will argue that it is because Gaia, in Zeus's era, represents the ideal feminine type subject to his rule, and with this image she herself becomes an excellent model for other goddesses to follow.

Let us now look at the image of Gaia in more detail. What is most interesting about this goddess is that she underwent a dramatic change between the pre-Zeus era (the first two generations) and the post-Zeus era (the third generation) and, as we shall see, it is this transformation that is crucial for her and for Zeus. As mentioned above, in the pre-Zeus era, Gaia challenged male rule, not only contriving subversive plots but also carrying them out. But in the post-Zeus era, Gaia's standpoint unexpectedly changed. She was no longer opposed to the

¹² Another question is: 'Is the same born from the same or from the other?' These two questions come from C. Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, vol. 1, C. Jacobson and B. G. Schoepf (trans.) (Basic Books, 1958), 239, from whom a further question could be asked: 'How can men who are truly men and women who are truly women be born from a man and woman?' 'How can the same give birth to the different?' On the structuralist analysis, see Vernant (n. 7) 153-71. Cf. Loraux N. Loraux, *The Children of Athena: Athenian Ideas about Citizenship and the Division between the Sexes*, C. Levine (trans), (Princeton, 1993) 75-94.

¹³ Aeschylus. *Eumenides*. 736-40.

¹⁴ The first time: 173-87, Gaia suffered violence from Uranos and conceived a plan to hide Kronos; the second time: 468-80, Gaia conceived a plan to deceive Kronos and hide Zeus; the third time: 888-91, Gaia offered advice to Zeus on swallowing Metis.

males but, on the contrary, joined them, becoming a supporter and then an advisor of Zeus (886-91).¹⁵ This dramatic contrast before and after the rise of Zeus shows Gaia's uniqueness, as she changes from a feminine figure to an anti-feminine figure.¹⁶

We still remember that in the first two generations, Gaia's womb played a crucial role in helping the female to win the battle. In the third generation, however, it did not work as we might have expected. Gaia did not offer her womb to conceal anyone, although she still had the power to do so. Instead, the goddess eschewed this trick and chose not to help the female party. This is in essence a significant concession to the male. Furthermore, by suggesting that Zeus swallow Metis, Gaia not only gave up her female right to dominate the womb but thereby also helped the male completely destroy the female. In this way, these two actions together powerfully indicate double *self-repression* on the part of the female: first Gaia represses herself (by depriving herself of her power to conceal), and then she represses Metis (by depriving Metis of her reproductive ability). The threat of feminine power is removed by the female herself and now the female *willingly* subordinates herself to the male. This is a remarkable transference of power from the female to the male. In this sense, Gaia shows other goddesses what is right and good behaviour under Zeus's rule.

What are we to say about Hekate, the other distinctive goddess who specifically receives the king's honour? Hesiod describes Hekate very differently from the goddess familiar from later centuries. In the *Theogony*, there is an extensive encomium admiring her special kind of τιμή (honour), superimposed upon the formal scheme,¹⁷ which is quite unusual. The hymn to Hekate (404-52) is not only remarkably long but is also the only hymn in the *Theogony* dedicated to a single goddess. Unlike the other goddesses, she actually receives from Zeus a share in the distribution of τιμή (412-5), and is painted in a wholly positive light. The noble status that Hekate obtains seems to be even more distinct than Gaia's. If Gaia is respected for her invaluable contribution to Zeus's revolution, what makes Hekate unique? Why does Zeus give such extensive honour to this female figure, who is also from the pre-Zeus world, one generation older than the sovereign king?

The special role of Hekate is first shown in her function as a mediator.¹⁸ She is a representative of the old order projected into the new. The position of the hymn to the goddess in the poem deserves the readers' attention. This hymn is sung immediately after Zeus's successful revolution and it immediately reminds us of the tension between the old and the new generations. Having just revolted against his own father, Zeus must be principally concerned about the threat of a new cycle of subversion. It is at this sensitive moment that Hekate appears. By bridging the old cosmos to the new and confirming Zeus's division of honour,¹⁹ this goddess releases the tension.

¹⁵ Gaia makes the plan accompanied by her victim Uranos. Perhaps following the failed attempt to prevent revolution, Uranos has learned his lesson and he has now made a new alliance with his offender. See Vernant (1991) 62.

¹⁶ Vernant suggests that Gaia is not limited to pure femininity. See J.-P. Vernant, 'One... two... three: Eros', In F. I. Zeitlin et al (eds.), *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, (Princeton, 1990), 465-6. On the role of Gaia, see Zeitlin (n. 6) 79, Clay (n. 1) 17-18, Arthur (n. 7) 78; P. DuBois, 'Eros and the Woman-In Special Issue: Essays on Hesiod 1', *Ramus*, 21:1 (1992), 102.

¹⁷ M. L. West, *Hesiod. Theogony*, (Oxford 1966), 277.

¹⁸ On Hekate as a mediator, see Clay (n. 1) 130-40; A. Priou, 'Hesiod: Man, Law and Cosmos', *Polis: The Journal for Ancient Greek Political Thought*, 31: 2 (2014), 238-9, Arthur (n. 7) 68-69; R. Lambertson, *Hesiod*, (Yale, 1988), 85-90.

¹⁹ Arthur (n. 7) 68; D. Boedeker, 'Hekate: A transfunctional Goddess in the Theogony?' *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 113 (1983), 82.

But the uniqueness of Hekate is more than that. What is more special is her identity. According to Hesiod, Hekate is praised twice as the only child of Asteria (426, 448). In reading these lines, Arthur points out a crucial feature of Hekate here: virginity. And it is the emphasis on this identity that really explains the uniqueness of the goddess: 'This is unquestionably linked to her special characterization as *μουνογενής ἐκ μητρός*. On the one hand, the matrilineal tracing of her descent and her lack of a male context isolate her in the patriarchal order. On the other hand, although she is like an *epiklêtos*, she does not marry Zeus, but becomes more like one of his *daughters*... and remains a *virgin* [my italics].'²⁰

Virginity again becomes the most prominent issue in Zeus's new order. It is of course important to the king, as we have already seen in Athena's case: to maintain the status of a virgin means to be permanently deprived of her sexuality and her feminine power. Hekate here becomes the second Athena. The image of Hekate as a virgin daughter implies no threat to the male: in a world of desire and reproduction, she lies outside this system, and thus everything about her is predictable and controllable. In this way, she further ensures the stability and certainty of Zeus's rule.

With the myths of both Metis and Gaia/Hekate, the picture of the divine order under the rule of Zeus is now comprehensively shown. What Zeus established is an order of dynamic equilibrium. On the one hand, if there should be a *threat* from a feminine power, the male would violently *suppress* the female to the greatest extent; on the other hand, however, if the female goddesses self-consciously restrict their own power and *yield* to the monistic order of patriarchy willingly, then they gain the respect of the male and are even *honoured* as proper members of society.

But it should never be forgotten that all of these principles could only work on the basis of the absolute supreme power of Zeus, who *has the ability* to swallow the female into his own belly, that is, to destroy it decisively and to expose the female permanently to the constant threat of extinction. Male confidence depends on the everlasting uncertainty of the female. The king knows that even though the females still live in the sexual world in fear of destruction, they would find that the best way to survive is to refrain from using their *metis* and their tricks of concealment.

What about the Human World?: A Tragic Version without Resolution

If the situation of the divine world helps to offer an aetiology and, further, a possible resolution of the inconsistency between social formation and social order, it is naturally imperative for us to ask: what about the human world in Hesiod's cosmos? How is the human world, which is also a sexual society formed by sexual reproduction, considered in the poet's mythical thinking? In investigating this issue, we will need to turn to Hesiod's *Works and Days*, which provides a panoramic view of human society. The central concern remains unchanged: how could—or could not—social order be established?

I wrote 'could not' as, right in the opening lines of the *Works and Days*, we are told that the fundamental feature of contemporary human society is disorder. The two *Erides* (11-25) are the first goddesses that the poet

²⁰ Arthur (n. 7) 69. He also suggests that Zeus's overvaluation of this goddess should be understood as compensation for her undervaluation in the patriarchal social order. Cf. Griffith (1983) 51-55, Boedeker (n. 20) 89-90. See also C. Segal, 'The Raw and the Cooked in Greek Literature: Structure, Values, Metaphor', *Classical Journal*, 69: 4 (1974), 293.

invokes,²¹ and the first event brought to our eyes is a dispute between the two brothers. In this description, the human world for the moment seems to be more like the divine world in the pre-Zeus era, which is an anti-type of Zeus's age. Such a narrative shows clearly that the social order of the human world is far from established. Here a crucial question arises: why cannot a stable social order be formed in the human world? Hesiod's thought on this question immediately turns again to the core issue of sexuality and gender order. The myth of Pandora (42-105) is where Hesiod begins his poem, and he explains to his brother and the audience that it is precisely because of the creation of Pandora that the human world is trapped in the condition of disorder.

According to Hesiod, Pandora is created as Zeus's revenge against Prometheus. The deliberate combination of the story of a god (Prometheus) and a human being (Pandora) strongly indicates that the disorder in the human world is closely related to the world of the gods. During Zeus's rise to power, Prometheus challenged Zeus twice, deceiving him into helping human beings (47-52). Zeus was naturally wrathful about the tricks, presumably owing to the potential threat posed to rulers when matters are concealed and kept secret from them, as we have seen repeatedly in the succession story. Therefore, in order to punish Prometheus and mankind, Zeus sent an 'evil thing' (κακόν, 57) to men in return for their cheating. At this moment, Pandora was created. The question whether Zeus was really cheated or not is beyond the scope of current discussion,²² but the entire story of Prometheus and Pandora at least indicates clearly that the creation of women was part of Zeus's larger plan to secure his ruling order,²³ and the formation of human society is the direct result of divine actions.

The narrative emphasis on Pandora's story invites a question here: Why does Zeus use Pandora alone as a weapon to punish the great challenge of Prometheus and mankind? What is special about her?

If we look closely at Hesiod's detailed portrayal of Pandora (61-69), we may discover some of the secrets of this weapon. The text focuses greatly on her alluring beauty and then on her shameless mind and deceitful character. The 'goddess-like appearance' (θεῆς εἰς ὅσα εἴσκειν, 63) is probably the highest praise that a mortal woman could receive, and Pandora is evidently such an aesthetically pleasing woman. This woman's beauty also serves to indicate her sexual desirability. She is endowed with desire (πόθον, 67) by Aphrodite, the goddess of erotic love, and is full of pleasure (χάριν, 66)—aspects which can lead to sexual pleasure. The more she gains in sexually attractive appearance and elegant decorations (69-82), the more Pandora becomes an object of desire itself: Athena girded and clothed her; Divine Graces and Persuasion put golden necklaces upon her; Hours crowned her with spring flowers.

This is the real trick that Zeus played. He knows from experience how desire can destroy order, that is, how desire for the female will lead to sexual union, powerful sons, and thus to revolution. In sending the archetypal desirable female to the human world, Zeus sends the most disastrous threat of disorder to human society. Once men are trapped in the sexual procreation system, their yearning for social order is necessarily interrupted. And on top of the sexual allure, we see that Zeus also endowed Pandora, this 'evil gift' (δῶσω κακόν, 57), with a deceitful mind and persuasive wiles (73). Now with such endowments, Pandora can be sent

²¹ For the double nature of *Erides*, see T. G. Rosenmeyer, 'Hesiod and Historiography', *Hermes*, 85: 3 (1957), 257-285; M. N. Nagler, 'Discourse and conflict in Hesiod: Eris and the Erides', *Ramus*, 21: 1 (1992), 79-96. and M. Gagarin, 'The Ambiguity of Eris in the *Works and Days*'. in M. Griffith and D. Mastrorade (eds.) *Cabinet of the Muses: Essays on Classical and Comparative Literature in Honor of Thomas G. Rosenmeyer*, (Atlanta 1990), 173-183.

²² On whether the supreme god was deceived, see Clay (n. 1) 60, 109. Scholars such as Solmsen suspect Hesiod's justification of the omniscience of Zeus. See F. Solmsen, *Hesiod and Aeschylus (Vol. 30)*, (Cornell, 1949), 49.

²³ The action of 'the woman' is most naturally understood as the result of Zeus's plan. See R. Hunter, *Hesiodic Voices: Studies in the Ancient Reception of Hesiod's Works and Days*, (Cambridge, 2014), 247-9.

down to trick mankind, and thereby the established rule of the stronger would be overthrown by the weaker through concealment, secrecy and uncertainty.²⁴

This is very much like the situation of the first two generations in the divine world. In the whole Pandora story, we can see a similar narrative pattern to that in the succession myth in the *Theogony*. In particular, this mortal woman is very much like the immortal goddess Gaia in the pre-Zeus era. As we can see, like Gaia who is both attractive and cruel in sexual relationships, Pandora is also a mixture of beauty and evil. And also like Gaia, who brought violent destruction to the male gods and thereby made them remorseful, Pandora sent misfortune to the human world and became the cause of men's greatest regret. It is very likely that Hesiod had Gaia in mind when he was composing Pandora: Pandora is even made of Gaia, the earth (γαῖαν ὕδει φύρειν, 61), and is precisely a mortal Γαῖα.

Sending Pandora to the human world is thus in effect sending a Gaia-like female creature to men. This is the most horrible punishment for human beings that Zeus could devise. During the successive revolutions, Zeus and his predecessors had learned thoroughly and painfully the power of the female. After generational fighting with the female, Zeus finally got rid of social disorder in the world of the gods. But now he summons a Gaia back and sends her to men as Pandora, doubtlessly projecting the previous divine pains into the human world. With the presence of Pandora, human beings now have no choice but to be yoked by the bondage of desire and sexuality, and thereby be constantly troubled with those potential threats from the female as well as—most importantly—with the dualistic opposition of the two sexes.

What is worse, unlike immortals who are able to take destructive action to eradicate the existence of the female and thus sexual procreation, mortal men, who can now rely only on sexual union to beget offspring, dare not eliminate the female at all. To remove the sexual conflict and establish a monistic order as Zeus did becomes an impossible mission for mankind. Once human beings are trapped by the sexual relationship, they can never escape from those unsolvable conflicts, combats and wars, and as a result, the human world falls into a circle of revolution, and *deteriorates* from an original ordered world that is similar to the world of Zeus to a chaotic society that embodies features of the pre-Zeus world.²⁵ As we see now, the creation of Pandora is fundamentally significant for both worlds: it fixes the tragic condition of the human world and thereby distinguishes the human world from the divine world.²⁶ In this way, the human world is subsumed within Zeus's paradigm.

Along with Pandora, what I term the 'dark womb', the battlefield in the pre-Zeus divine world, is also introduced into human society. Not only does Pandora herself, as a woman and an object of desire, naturally possess a womb, but she is also given a jar, a womb-like container, which strongly echoes all the negative features of the womb in pregnancy. We are told that this jar contains all the evils that will later be released on the human world. In addition, *elpis* alone (μοῦνη δ' αὐτόθι Ἐλπίς, 96), remained under the jar's rim and did not fly out. The retention of *elpis* is of course one crucial part of Zeus's plan, as, if we take Verdenius's translation,

²⁴ On the double nature of Pandora, see also P. Pucci, *Hesiod and the Language of Poetry*, (Johns Hopkins, 1977), 89-94.

²⁵ Sending Pandora is the key point for the final establishment of the cosmic order. Pandora is not simply a personal punishment of Zeus but a deed that is approved by the entire divine world, including both male and female gods. It is this event that permanently rips the divine and human worlds apart. The name παν-δόρα indicates the involvement of all gods: this gift is given by the party of gods to the party of human beings. On the name Pandora, see Clay (n. 1) 124, 160, Zeitlin (n. 7) 60. See also J. O'Brien, 'Nammu, Mami, Eve and Pandora: "What's in a Name?"', *The Classical Journal*, 79: 1(1983).

²⁶ Zeitlin (n. 7) 62 and 71.

when 'expectation'²⁷ is kept out of the reach of human beings, they are fixed to the Pre-Zeus world where uncertainty, instability and disorder shape the formation of society. The creation of woman was the central cause of such suffering; but it was only through *elpis* that the tragic uncertainty was extended to the entire human world. The nature of human life is thus made a struggle to survive in the face of uncertainty. It is this unpredictability that Zeus really wants to bring to men: to torment them with anxiety, fear and panic, just as his predecessors were tormented.

Can mortals at least achieve a certain degree of order? Hesiod tells his audience that the possibility does indeed exist, if they work hard according to the calendar and follow *dikē*. Both the time-schedule for farming and *dikē* (in law) are traces of order,²⁸ but note this: they are certainly not natural products but rather social constructs. That is, they need to be constructed with additional effort—rules of time need to be observed and *dikē* needs to be set up by men. Unsurprisingly, during this process of self-ordering, sexual relationships continue to be considered important. Within the sphere of ordinary life, in a city of *dikē*, the poet suggests that 'women should bear children who resemble their parents...they should thrive on all the good things life has to offer.' (236) Men live with women in a family and they together produce the next generation and so on *ad infinitum*. This seems to be an attempt to construct a new structure of sexual relationships, in the form of family, to achieve temporary harmony between men and women. Following Hesiod's narrative logic, this proposal is likely to indicate a metaphorical imitation of Zeus's monistic order—through uniting two sexes into one family, procreation is no longer a problem but becomes a boon: in a family governed by *dikē*, humans can have continuity of generations and inheritance. However, even so, Hesiod is well aware of the potential vulnerability presented by such an arrangement, and so overall he is pessimistic. There are always good wives *and* bad ones. Therefore, the achievement of social order is, regretfully, only a matter of luck (702-05).

Conclusion

This paper investigated Hesiod's mythic imagination concerning social formation and social order in his cosmogony. For Hesiod, social order cannot be formed naturally, but is a problematic concept from its very beginning. As is shown in his aetiological writing of the succession myth, in the first two generations, the main difficulty in establishing social order lies in the nature of sexual society itself where the *dualistic opposition* in the male-female relationship leads to endless conflicts between the two sexes and, further, between generations. In such a society, the pattern of sexual reproduction which, necessarily, leads to social change, contrasts

²⁷ Many traditional readings with the translation of 'hope', take *elpis* as the only good thing that Zeus sent to human beings, because without hope, life would have too much suffering to be tolerated. But a few scholars, such as W. J. Verdenius, 'A "Hopeless" Line in Hesiod "Works and Days" 96', *Mnemosyne*, 24: 3(1971), 230 and H. Van Noorden, *Playing Hesiod*, (Cambridge, 2014), 54 propose to read this word more ambiguously as 'expectation/supposition' or 'anticipation', as it may refer to something good or something bad, which is beyond human's expectation. I believe the latter explanation is more plausible, especially in the context of Pandora as a punishment by Zeus for Prometheus' tricks. Throughout the whole story, 'uncertainty' is always the central issue. Thus, to keep human beings from the expected certainty should be the most vicious idea of Zeus and the most crucial part of his plan.

²⁸ Zeus's sexual union with Themis (hour) and the birth of the seasons is important for the order of the world in the *Theogony*. Nelson and Grene observe: 'Within Hesiod's sense of the divine, Zeus himself has no particular sphere. Nor can he have, since it is he who is responsible for the order and permanence of the whole. This is why the seasons are so important. The seasons of the *Theogony* are Zeus's first children....' In so doing, 'Within the world of nature, they are the order of Zeus...Hesiod's particular association of Zeus with the seasons illuminates his ability to see simultaneously a multiplicity of gods, and a single divinity, Zeus, whose will inform the whole.' See S. A. Nelson and D. Grene, *God and the Land: the Metaphysics of Farming in Hesiod and Vergil*, (Oxford, 1998), 109.

strongly with the aim of establishing social order which, necessarily, requires stability. Therefore, without a proper treatment of sexuality, social order can hardly be achieved.

In the age of Zeus, Hesiod imagined a possible resolution of this problem. In his thought experiment, Zeus is considered to be successful in establishing and maintaining social order based upon his conclusive victory over the female: by violently suppressing the female or by making her submit voluntarily to the male, he has shifted the nature of sexual relationships in the divine world from a *dualistic opposition* to a *monistic unity*, thereby securing a stable social order for the divine community.

By contrast, however, the world of human beings is imagined to be insolubly disordered, experiencing a *reversal* of the process applied to divine society. In the myth of Prometheus-Pandora, we are told that the human world deteriorated from being an ordered community to becoming chaotic and this depressing condition of human society was also caused by the issue of sexuality. With the introduction of women, along with the resultant dualistic opposition and sexual conflict, the rule of the male is undermined and becomes subject to uncontrollable and unpredictable change. For mortals who could only produce offspring through sexual reproduction, women could never be removed from the equation or be conquered, as was possible for Zeus. Such a structural contrast not only leads to a dark, miserable, and disordered situation for human society, but also permanently prevents mankind from becoming divine.

As we have seen, from the divine world to the human world, the issue of social formation and social order is constantly intertwined with the issue of sexuality. In this context, the womb of the pregnant mother, this specific sexual organ in reproduction, is then proposed as an outstanding image to represent the dangerous power of the female against the male. Taking the womb as a battlefield, the female wins the gender war and subverts the male's regime. Only by taking absolute control of the womb, can the male recapture dominant power and maintain his rule. At a higher level, in establishing order between the divine world and the human world, the gods also make use of the womb as a weapon with which to conquer mankind. In all of the above cases the womb is a place of battle and is of strategic importance.

But going one step further, we should say that the womb in effect is not only a core symbol of the problem of sexuality but, more importantly, it is also indicative of the essential reason for the instability of society. In fact, the female in and of herself does not constitute an automatic threat to male rule; rather, it is the *uncertainty* caused by the female's ability to conceal truth that constantly troubles both the pre-Zeus world of the gods and the post-Pandora world of human beings. Therefore, whether the inconsistency between social formation and social order, or the imagery of the dangerous womb, or the presentation of the female as an absolute and uncontrollable other, the essential issue of the poem always lies with men's fear of uncertainty and instability. This issue is the central concern of Hesiod's cosmogony, and also the key to understanding Hesiod's thoughts on the nature of divinity and humanity.

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