

HOMER AND HESIOD AND THE CRADLE OF WESTERN METAPHYSICS: A HISTORICO-THEMATIC DISCOURSE

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Abstract

The perennial impression that has been passed down and also written in most texts in the western tradition of philosophy is that while Thales is the first philosopher, Parmenides remains the first metaphysician in history of western metaphysics. This impression has been so strong that it has blinded the expected critical disposition of many scholars. However, a cursory look and a further study of the materials and disposition of Homer and Hesiod states otherwise. It is based on this that this paper employing the critical-analytic model examined and interrogated the gamut of the works of Homer and Hesiod. The fruit of this research endeavour made it palpable that indeed the writing of Homer and Hesiod smacks of raw, evergreen, fundamental and foundational metaphysics. And it was even blatant that the metaphysical theories and positions of the acclaimed fathers of western philosophy and metaphysics stemmed from the submissions of the duo. With this, this paper then posited that Homer and Hesiod were basically the precursors of not just western metaphysics but philosophy as well.

Keywords: Homer, Hesiod, Metaphysics, Western, Mythology

Introduction

The story of western philosophy in ancient Greece basically began with poetry. The poets had a central position in ancient Greek culture, they did not only tell tales instead they developed, preserved and conveyed the religious, economic and social truths and assumptions of the time. This is because their accounts of the past, gave explanations of how the world came to be which is mainly religious, cosmological and metaphysical. Among the ancient Greeks, a certain prominence was given to those who attempted to answer cosmological questions by speaking about the origins, structure, and workings of the universe. The physical environment of Greece, the deepest background of the social, material, and even political history of ancient Greece lies in the physical environment and its effects on the opportunities and the constraints of life in this part of the Mediterranean

region of Ionia and Miletus. The homeland of the ancient Greeks was located in the regions surrounding the Aegean Sea and in its many islands; this section of the Mediterranean Sea is flanked on the west by the Balkan peninsula (today the territory of the modern nation of Greece) and on the east by the coast of Anatolia (modern Turkey). The structure of the Greek environment generally talks about the culture of the Greeks how they influenced their environment, what changes they made to human thought and how their disposition to nature also sharpened their resolve, ideas and spurred wonder in their search for self-awareness and understanding of the universe. These whole endeavours were championed primarily by two well celebrated poets, Homer and Hesiod. These two poets employed the existing oral poetry and folklore as their metaphysics to organize the existing mass of deities into what is known as the Olympian Pantheon.

Homer is thought to have lived about 850 BC although some sources suggest he lived later and reflects the civilisation of Bronze Age Greece to 8th century BC. Hesiod on the other hand is thought to have lived around the same time or just after, reflecting both 8th and early 7th BC, when the map of classical Greece was emerging.¹ Though there are other misgivings about their real existence and mode of existence but it is not within the scope of this essay. Obviously, of the two poets, Homer is revered as the greatest of the ancient Greek poets. He is credited with composing the works *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, but as oral poems which were not committed to writing until centuries later. Hesiod, another Greek oral poet thought to be a contemporary of Homer (BC 750 and 650 BC), was the author of *Theogony*, which describes the cosmogony of the Greek gods.² To the Greeks, these works were much more important than mere literary devises. They are credited with establishing Greek religious doctrines and customs and the way in which the gods were portrayed both in later Greek religion and modern times.³ Through the collective works of Homer and Hesiod, although not working together whatsoever, they established a more orderly pantheon out of the existing mass of deities and heroes, creating the genealogy or 'divine' family that we now know today, such as Zeus, Posioden and Hades.

Sophia Sackville-West, states that 'it was Homer and Hesiod who gave them their distinct character and appearances' and 'it was Homer and Hesiod in

¹ I. Morris, "The Use and Abuse of Homer," *Classical Antiquity*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1986, 81.

² J. Richard, *Homer, Hesiod and the Hymns: Diachronic Development in Epic Diction*, Cambridge, CUP, 1982, 322.

³ A. Antony, *Greek Society* London, Pelican Books 1971, 254.

8th century BC who imposed order upon the mass of gods and beliefs.’⁴ In his work *Histories*, Herodotus supports this claim saying ‘I think that Homer and Hesiod were older than I by 400 years and no more, and they are the ones who created the divine genealogy for Greeks, gave epithets to the gods, distributed their offices and their crafts and marked outward appearances.’⁵ Ordinarily, some philosophers who are not metaphysicians would wonder why and how these two poets can be seen as metaphysicians. However, if what has been stated above as coming from them and their mode and model of operation as even accounted and reviewed by others are not highly metaphysics, one wonders then what metaphysics is and how rich that all-important branch of philosophy can be. Invariably, Homer and Hesiod were even first metaphysicians before the likes of Parmenides and Heraclitus came to join the fray. This submission above precipitated the necessity of this paper which is to highlight and interrogate the metaphysical positions of Homer and Hesiod as that will further explicate the point that indeed they are the forerunners of the all-important branch of philosophy- metaphysics. It is also pertinent to state here that the discourse of their metaphysical standing clearly also shows where some of the other notable metaphysicians like Plato, Aristotle, Parmenides, and the likes got their orientation and root from. The first to be examined is the metaphysical submissions of Homer and that of Hesiod will follow.

The Metaphysics of Homer and Hesiod

Consequent on the premise that one of the primary medium that they use to develop and convey their metaphysics is mythology, it is would be academic to talk about mythology as part of the themes in the discussion of their metaphysics.

Mythology

The myths were formed out of the first creation of the human mind, and they were formed out of the need to provide an allegorical explanation for all the phenomena of life. The Greeks were among the earliest people to create myth.⁶ The fear of human beings when faced with the mysteries of life and their weakness by comparison with vastness of nature created in them a need to

⁴ S. Sackville-West, *Life in Ancient Greece*, London, Reader's Digest Association Publishers, 1997, 213.

⁵ J. Boardman, *The Oxford History of the Classical World*, London: Oxford University Press, 1986, 26.

⁶ M. Marrock, *Greek Mythology and Religion*, Athens: Haitalis Publishing Company, 2000, 145.

communicate with the divine, with the superior powers which they believed regulated the universe and determined their own fates. The soothsayers and oracles of the time interpreted natural events or omens, they practiced divination and magic, lastly the poets transmitted these to the common man in a sense so captivatingly true to the imagination of the Greeks except for the learned called sages, who were called wise men because they were always in search of wisdom. Mythology affected everything about Greek culture, it was the primary factor influencing the religious beliefs of the Greeks, and the Greeks as we know were notoriously religious which is why it was not easy for philosophy to thrive at first in Greece. There are many myths about the gods, creation, myths and legends of heroes, myths of Attica, myths of Arigold, Athenian myths of adventures and myths of love. These myths had influenced Greek traditions and cultures. It is also instructive to state here that it is these myths that midwifed the advent of philosophy as the Milesians sought to interrogate and relate with the myths and mythological presentations and suppositions of Homer and Hesiod.

The Ontology of the Greek gods

Polytheism was one of the principal features of ancient Greek religion. For ancient Greeks, the gods taken as a whole represented a single concept: nature, in all its manifestations and each god was associated with one or more of the powers of nature. The role of the gods was not that of creating the world as of maintaining order and harmony in it. To the Greek minds, the gods were immortal, omnipotent and magnificent, they could control every mortal being in every sphere of their lives, determining their fortunes, their relationships and when they came into the world and left.⁷ Yet the gods were not inaccessible, a man could approach them easily, seeing them, touching them, hearing them, and to their contradictory and mutually complementary nature. They constituted the incarnation of the perfect human which was clearly what the Greeks wanted to attain because the gods could not suffer pain, or death, could fall in love, could experience anger without suppressing his feelings and could get drunk and carouse, thus there wasn't much difference between the creator and creation. The ancient Greeks assigned to their gods all the properties that they themselves would have liked to possess but their human nature prevented them from obtaining, this is distinctly what the anthropodiscists⁸ like Karl Marx, Jean Paul

⁷ M. Marrock, *Greek Mythology and Religion*, 20.

⁸ The anthropodiscists are not comfortable with the existence of God neither are they aligned to any of the arguments that have been put forward. They prefer to rather describe

Sartre, Ludwig Feuerbach, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud and others attempted to buttress in their theory on the ontology God.

The first written record of Greece is the *Iliad*, with the coming forward of Greece, mankind became the center of the universe, the most important thing in it, human beings counted for little heretofore in history. The Greeks made their gods in their own image that had not entered the mind of man before. Until then, the gods had no semblance of living things. For example, in Egypt the gods were monstrous, the very few that looked human were made inhuman deliberately.⁹

Ethiopians believe in gods that are dark and snub-nosed, while the gods worshipped by the Thracians have red hair and blue eyes.¹⁰ They believed that the invisible should be understood by the visible. However, this conception of the divine was attacked by the first philosopher of religion, Xenophanes. Xenophanes savaged Homeric theology in satirical verses of which only fragments remain. Homer's stories, he complained attributed to the gods theft, adultery, deception, and everything that among humans would be considered a shame and a reproach. But even if Homer's gods had behaved honourably, they would still resemble humans too much to be credible. Men fashion gods in their own image: 'If cows and horses or lions had hands and could draw, then horses would draw the forms of gods like horses, cows like cows, making their bodies similar in shape to their own.'¹¹ Each of the Greek cities had their own pantheon; however the whole of Greece shared the same divine figures which had been created of the common needs of members of the same race. The first written references to the ancient Greek gods date from the Mycenaean period.

The names of Zeus, Poseidon, Ares, Hermes and Dionysius were recorded and these gods resided on Mount Olympus. This was when the official location for the worship of gods appeared. The Olympian pantheon took its final shape in tenth or ninth century BC (the geometric period) through the epics of Homer, which were tremendously popular throughout antiquity. The religious system of ancient Greece reached its completion in 6th to 5th century BC which is the time the Greek civilization was at its zenith. Invariably, the future of the ancient Greeks was just tied up with their cult practices. And it should be stated then

the idea of the being of God as laughable, unreasonable and irrelevant based on the reasons they put forward

⁹ E. Hamilton, *Mythology*, Boston, Little Brown and Company, 1946, 7.

¹⁰ Kenny, *A New History*, 312.

¹¹ Kenny, *A New History*, 313.

albeit rightly, that the religious belief and the mythological traditions of the Greeks that told of the operations of the gods would have meant nothing without the cult customs practiced by each individual city state. So, it was not a surprise that the center of worship in ancient Greece was the sanctuaries and these were clearly marked as areas on the acropolis or the agora of the city. These sanctuaries housed the temple, their cult statutes, altars where ceremonies were held in honour of these divinities, votive offerings, and smaller buildings called treasuries where offerings were kept.¹² There is no doubt that religion gave the first Ionian thinkers and to later philosophers some symbolic schemes in order to facilitate a reconsideration of the universe' origin (the problem of one and the many).

However, the Hellenic religion does not offer a unified nucleus of beliefs in general, the Homeric, Olympian, and Orphic religions were distinguished from each other, the first can be defined as an Aristocratic aesthetic naturalism, in that the divinity is but a mythical divination of natural forces through symbols of superior human beings. The cult of the twelve divinities with Zeus as the head, national sanctuaries (Delphi to Apollo, at Athens to Athena, and at Asclepius to Epidaurus). The Orphic religion attributed to mythical Thracian singer Orpheus was based on the myth of the god Zagreause or Bacchus, who was probably from the east was born and died for humanity, later to be born in every circle of nature. The Olympian religion was transferred in the Hellenic world through the poem of Homer *Iliad*. Their religions had no dogmas, nor were they in codified canonical books, nor did it include a sacerdotal hierarchy and was hence exposed to contamination and evolution."¹³ However, Homer's *Illiad* had a major impact on ancient Greek culture. The powerful tale of the Trojan war intertwined the lives of humans with the whims of Olympian gods and provided a mythical ideal of the hero.

The Metaphysical Dualism of Homer

Homer's metaphysics is contained in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. For Homer, reality is dualistic, that is, the natural and the supernatural sphere. This division may also be understood in terms of the immanent and the transcendent.¹⁴

¹² M. Mavromataki, *Greek Mythology and Religion*, Athens, Haitalis Publishing Company, 136.

¹³ D. Composta, *History of Ancient Philosophy*, Bangalore, Theological Publications in India, 2013, 6 - 7.

¹⁴ M. Shaw, *Homer's Metaphysics: The Conception of Reality in the Iliad and Odyssey*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1979, ii.

The Natural Sphere: It was the candid impression of Homer that the natural order is a system bound by time, space, and materiality. It is also open, discontinuous and characterized ultimately by mystery and indefinableness through which it merges with the supernatural. Though, the supernatural does not consist of just abstract extension to the natural; the supernatural is in fact the hypostasis of the natural realm, this is based on the fact that the supernatural duly sustains and controls natural, this relation is represented by not just the authority but also the rule of the gods over natural phenomena.¹⁵ This supernatural or metaphysical dimension complements the natural order, and serves as its immediate context and active materials. This relation has a profound effect upon the conception and portrayal of reality in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

The Supernatural Sphere: In Homer's analysis, the supernatural realm is basically the hypostasis of the natural sphere. It is the perfect, absolute centre of reality in which the natural constitutes the dependent, imperfect, and physical crystallization. This supernatural order connects to the natural sphere through essence. Essence is the most characteristic and most real properties of every natural phenomenal and so it constitutes the absolute nature and that is why it cannot be defined.¹⁶ This answers the question why the identity of the natural phenomenon cannot be fixed; rather, it can only be outlined, implied or suggested. This indefinability of essence then leaves the natural system open to the ulterior metaphysical dimension.

This lucid position of Homer simply pre-empts or put in proper perspective the platonic world of forms and ideas, the world of essences and the real things as they are and not as they appear to us in the natural and physical world. The world where the much celebrated (by Plato and the scholastics) universals exists, the thingness of a thing. In fact, for Homer, the supernatural is conceived to be spiritual at its very essence. This explains why most of the supernatural entities that appear in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* possess spiritual qualities as their fundamental attributes.¹⁷ This spiritual reality occupies the very centre and core of the universe; it is the original, animating, governing reality behind all existent phenomena. Even natural phenomena emanate from it and revolve around it. Those of the Homeric era, recognize the absoluteness, sovereignty and supremacy of this spiritual reality in their personal and public

¹⁵ M. Shaw, *Homer's Metaphysics: The Conception of Reality in the Iliad and Odyssey*, 1.

¹⁶ M. Shaw, *Homer's Metaphysics: The Conception of Reality in the Iliad and Odyssey*, 3.

¹⁷ W. Malcolm, *A Commentary on Homer's Iliad*, London, Macmillan Publishers, 1970, xxviii.

religious rites, in their worship of the multitude of divinities both great and small that they perceive beyond the physical appearance of things.

Interestingly, these ancient Greeks even consider human life to be an ultimately spiritual phenomenon, this is flowing from the fact that they value such abstract entities such as glory, honour, and justice, and since they treat men, even in death as having supernatural worth, and they make this palpable in their elaborate burial rites and ceremonies. They do this and also look for the slightest opportunity to trace their ancestry back to the supernatural which they see as the origin of all things.¹⁸ Many of the heroes are considered to be *diogeneis* sprung from Zeus, while others ascribe their generation to lesser gods, such as the River Alpheios from which Diocles claim descent.¹⁹

The Natural-Supernatural Symmetry and the Theogony of Homer

Drawing strength from the rule of the supernatural hypostasis over the natural order, Homer contends that the supernatural order sustains and controls the natural order. He thinks that the interaction between the two worlds is made possible through essence as stated above. This was what he used to explain how the gods who are transcendent or supernatural, govern and interact with immanent reality or the natural sphere. Despite this supremacy of the supernatural over the natural world, Homer posits that even the gods are subjected to fate. That is why in Homer, fate is supreme over all.²⁰ This natural phenomenon is thus connected to the supernatural through its essence, the fundamental, the most characteristic and intrinsic part of its nature. Precisely at this point the phenomenon become irreducible and undefinable, and, hence, mysterious and “open” to metaphysical and spiritual dimension. This conception of natural beings profoundly affects the portrayal of reality in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. In this “essentiality”; precisely in the most essential, the most real, portions of their natures, they possess the unlimited depth and dimension, and beauty of the supernatural.²¹ As a result, the splendour and brilliance of the poet’s descriptions increase proportionately to his concentration upon and success in conveying the essential nature of natural phenomena rather than to his proficiency in refining or

¹⁸ W. Otto, *The Homeric Gods*, trans. Moses Hadas, London: Thames and Hudson Publishers, 1954, 236.

¹⁹ Homer, *The Iliad*. trans. Richmond Lattimore, Book V, 544-545, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1951.

²⁰ M. Shaw, *Homer’s Metaphysics: The Conception of Reality in the Iliad and Odyssey*, 15.

²¹ W. Otto, *The Homeric Gods*, 7.

avoiding them. The implication of this is that, the excellence of the art of the poet is predicated on realism rather than idealism.

The Metaphysics of Hesiod

The first ever cosmogonist in ancient western philosophy was Hesiod, he was basically the first thinker to speculate about the origins of the universe.²² His impressions and ideas grew and were further developed with the Ionian philosophers and it eventually reached their climax with Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Inasmuch as Hesiod is not really considered as the first philosopher, Hesiod can simply be considered as the first rudimentary metaphysician in the history of western philosophy. The reason for this strong impression is that Hesiod was the one who laid the metaphysical foundation of speculation that the later Ionian built upon. To corroborate this, even Aristotle posited that Hesiod was the first person to look for the efficient cause of things; that his *Theogony* laid the groundwork for further philosophical development.²³ When Hesiod talked about the earliest deities, he was in effect, positing a first or efficient cause of the universe.²⁴

Hesiod and his Impressions About Reality

Flowing from the statement of Aristotle about the identity and philosophical personality of Hesiod, it is stating the fact that the creative achievement of Hesiod cannot be overemphasized. As a matter of fact, for the first time in ancient Greek thought they found a scholar who succinctly gave a dynamic account of the entire order of being, this was largely accomplished in the *Theogony* and supplemented with the *Works and Days*, which takes up the origins of man and his orientation to or rebellion against the justice of Zeus in life in a cosmos which is straining against its compact self-containment.²⁵ This straining is evident in the revolutionary nature of the *Theogony* with its coming into being of Chaos, Gaia and Eros and its development in three generations of divinities in which the injustice of the reigns of Uranus and Cronos are replaced by the *dike* (justice) of

²² J. P. Barron, and P.E. Easterling, 'Hesiod', in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature: Greek Literature*, ed. P. E. Easterling and B. Knox, Cambridge: CUP, 1985, 92.

²³ Aristotle, *The Metaphysics* trans. Hugh Lawson, London, Penguin Books, 1998, vi.

²⁴ S. Friedrich, 'The Earliest Stages in the History of Hesiod's Text', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 86 (1982), 9.

²⁵ F. Cornford, *Greek Religious Thought from Homer to the Age of Alexander*, London: Dent and Son Publishers, 1923, 2.

Zeus, the supreme god.²⁶ It also appears in the *Works and Days* in the myth of the five ages of man with its pessimistic pattern of degeneration caused by the rejection of the divine *dike* by mortals, causing a crisis of consciousness in which the poet, filled with the *pneuma* of the Muses, speaks prophetically to the princes and the people of the need to return to the measure of god.²⁷

Nonetheless, the break with the self-contained cosmos begins with Homer, who transforms Achaean myth of disorder into a part of his people: ‘The decisive step towards the creation of historical form had been taken by Homer when he transformed the Achaean fall into the past of Hellenic society.’²⁸ Hesiod continues the process by comprehending in a new and creative order the Homeric mythology in a meditation, becoming transparent for the great leap in being achieved by the insights of the Greek philosophers for whom Hesiod provides the incipit. For instance, in the *Theogony* Hesiod begins with a hymn to the Muses, the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, or Memory, who appear to Hesiod the lowly shepherd on Helicon. For Hesiod, Zeus is no god unless there is a divine reality beyond the gods. In these symbolism of Hesiod, we recognize the first intimations of the comprehending (*periechon*) beyond that ultimately becomes the *epiekeina* of Plato.²⁹ It can then be seen that the ideas of Hesiod about the order of being, is both indeterminate in its inception and precarious in its stability, both incentives to differentiating thinkers to come to more definitively established being and more clearly distinguish it from becoming and non-being.³⁰ Hence, Zeus in Hesiod represents the highest divine reality.

The Theogony of Hesiod

The *Theogony* is essentially a large-scale synthesis of a vast variety of local Greek traditions concerning the gods and the universe, organized as a narrative that tells about the creation of the world out of chaos and about the gods that shaped the cosmos.³¹ To some extent, it represents the Greek mythology equivalent of the book of Genesis in the Hebrew and Christian “Bible”, as it lists the early

²⁶ B. Sandwell, *Presocratic Philosophy*, New York: Routledge, 1996, 28.

²⁷ S. Kathryn ‘The Programmatic Message of the Kings and Singers Passage: Hesiod, ‘Theogony’, 80-103’, *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 133, no 1 (1974), 1.

²⁸ E. Sandoz, *The Voegelinian Revolution: A Biographical Introduction*, New Brunswick, Transaction Publishers, 2000, 137.

²⁹ D. Collins, ‘Hesiod and the Divine Voice of the Muses’, *Arethusa*, vol. 32, no. 3, 1999, 241.

³⁰ B. Sandwell, *Presocratic Philosophy*, 28.

³¹ B. Sandwell, *Presocratic Philosophy*, 28.

generations and genealogy of the gods, titans and heroes since the beginning of the universe. Interestingly, Hesiod claims in the work that he (a poet, and not some mighty king) had been given the authority and responsibility of disseminating these stories by the Muses directly, thus putting himself almost in the position of a prophet.

The Activities of the Gods

Zeus: The youngest child of Kronos and Rhea, Zeus would have been swallowed by his father had his mother not substituted for the new born baby a stone wrapped in swaddling. He grows up to challenge his father and overthrows the Titans. He becomes the king of the Olympian gods, known as the father of gods and men, the bearer of the aegis, and the patron of guests.³²

Gaia: Gaia personifies the earth, and is mother to her husband, Ouranos, to all the Titans, and to many other deities. Grieved and distressed when Ouranos buries their offspring, the Cyclopes and the hundred-handed monsters, within her, she asks her children to take revenge on their father. She devises a plan whereby Kronos castrates his father.

Ouranos: Ouranos is the personification of Heaven, the son and husband of Gaia, father to the Titans, and father to the Cyclopes and hundred-handed monsters whom he despises and buries deep within Gaia. His son Kronos castrates him when he is lying in love with Gaia, and his genitals, cast upon the sea, ultimately turn into the goddess Aphrodite. Drops of his blood that fall on the earth lead to the birth of the Giants and the Furies.³³

Kronos: Kronos is the last of the Titans to be born. When his mother, Gaia, asks who of her children will take revenge on their father, Ouranos, for burying within her the sons he despises, Kronos agrees to follow her plan. He castrates his father and then flings the genitals upon the sea. As king of the Titans he worries about a prophecy told to him by his mother and father that his son will overthrow him. So as his sister-wife Rhea bears children, he swallows each child to prevent his overthrow until he is tricked into swallowing a stone instead of the baby Zeus.³⁴

³² R. Hard, *Routledge Handbook of Greek Mythology*, 33.

³³ M. Lawrence, 'The Velletri Sarcophagus'. *American Journal of Archaeology*, vol. 69, no.3, 1965, 220.

³⁴ See, Hesiod, *Theogony*, 154-166.

Culminating Reflections

No doubts, Homer and Hesiod are seen as the founding fathers of Greek epic poetry. Both of them flourished around 8th century B.C, and were of immense influence in the world of Greek philosophy. Hesiod focuses more on traditional origins of life for his stories and ensures that the creation of the world and its rulers are embodied in his works. He wrote about principles in battle, governance, counsel, sports, the home and life in general that the Greeks looked to in praise. While both of the authors were similar in writing style, they differ vastly in the messages of their poems. The main focus of Hesiod in the *Theogony* was to emphasize the ways the world was created by the gods and how the gods fought in order to maintain a peaceful universe. He even claimed to have written under divine inspiration. He highlighted the fact that the gods act based on morality rather than personal gain. When they fight for something, it is for the greater good and because it is 'just' in the eyes of Greek traditions. He composed his most famous poem *Theogony* around eighth century B.C, a story within a poem about the birth of the Greek gods. Looking at their similarities, the meter and language shared by the poems in question point to a common oral tradition.

Critically and existentially speaking, if Homer is to be perceived as the product rather than the producer of this tradition, it seems natural to apply the same reasoning to Hesiod.³⁵ And one of the other major differences between the Hesiodic and Homeric traditions deserve to be highlighted. It is the fact that the Homeric poems is in a world in which 'one man could lift a stone such that it takes two men to lift now.' In other words, the Homeric world was a world distinct and closed off from the contemporary world of Homer's audience, a quality which fascinates the poet, most particularly of the *Odyssey*. Conversely, the drive, interest and disposition of Hesiod are quite different. It is in the fact that they are completely in the present, the here and now. *The Works and Days* are all but combative in its use of the contemporary world as the world of the poem. The same, despite appearances, is true of the *Theogony*. Here the past becomes essentially 'pre-history,' the time before the current reign of Zeus. As such it is told, as 'pre-history' most commonly is, in order to illustrate the nature of the cosmos that has emerged from it.³⁶

One may ask, is the impression and view of Hesiod about the gods different or similar to that of Homer? The answer is that there are big differences between two ancient representatives of the Greek literature. If Homer is a legendary figure

³⁵ J. Foley, *A Companion to Ancient Epic*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 2005, 330.

³⁶ J. Foley, *A Companion to Ancient Epic*, 335.

from the beginning to the end, Hesiod is just a real person. Respect for the gods, love and respect for parents, homeland defense are the commandments of the Greeks, as reproduced in the Homeric poems. The appearance of the gods is portrayed contradictorily. Homeric gods are completely human (anthropomorphic), although some of them may become different animals.³⁷ Hesiod's gods lost their carelessness and the gaiety of the Homeric gods, became the moral forces, severe guardians of order and justice, born of Zeus.³⁸ The role of gods according to Hesiod belongs not only the Olympian gods with human form, like Zeus or Apollo, but the Earth, Sky, Star, Wind, Fight, Lies, Victory, Wisdom, Violence, etc. Zeus as for Hesiod is not just carrier of the power, as Uranus and Kronus, but also the embodiment of a long-awaited order, keeper and guardian of ethics. The desire to have a better life and a constant feeling of dissatisfaction are natural for people, and the gods tend, on the contrary, to complicate people's lives and create new difficulties. Thus, Hesiod's style of poetry is close to Homer's but because of the general didactic orientation, Hesiod's poetry is almost out of bright Homeric metaphors, similes and epithets.³⁹ That notwithstanding, Homeric epics are renowned for the shaping of the Greek culture. Homer was also delineated to be the Greece teacher. His works are said to be fifty percent speeches that furnished examples in influential speaking and writing that were completed during the ancient and medieval Greek worlds.

When Homer suggests that there is a power that he calls "fate," a power to which even the gods are subject, he appears to be reaching for a way of describing a rigorous order in nature to which everyone and everything must be subordinate. But his poetic imagination is dominated so thoroughly by his thinking in human terms that his world is peopled everywhere with human types, and his conception of nature is that of capricious wills at work instead of the reign of physical natural laws. It was Hesiod who altered this concept of the gods and "fate" by removing from the gods all capriciousness, ascribing to them instead a moral consistency.⁴⁰ Although Hesiod retains the notion that the gods control nature; he balances this personal element in the nature of things with an emphasis upon the impersonal operation of the moral law of the universe. The moral order, in Hesiod's view, is still the product of Zeus' commands, but these commands are neither capricious nor calculated, as Homer thought, to gratify the gods, but

³⁷ T. Frederick J, 'The Argument of Hesiod's Works and Days', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1947, 45.

³⁸ T. Frederick J, 'The Argument of Hesiod's Works and Days', 46-47.

³⁹ R. Rosen, *Homer and Hesiod*, New York, Brill Publishers, 1997, 4.

⁴⁰ R. Rosen, *Homer and Hesiod*, 4.

are rather fashioned for the good of mankind. For Hesiod the universe is a moral order, and from this idea it is a short step to say, without any reference to the gods, that there is an impersonal force controlling the structure of the universe and regulating its process of changes.

An average metaphysician will not only appreciate the narratives above but will savour it for a long time as he or she even searches for more. The reasons are obvious, and they stem from the fact that most scholars don't consider Homer and Hesiod as even philosophers to say the least being metaphysicians. They are only seen as poets. Also, the very fact that the ancient origin of western philosophy started when Thales the acclaimed first western philosopher⁴¹ questioned some of the positions and activities of these poets further gives the impression that they are not philosophers but just one of the *sophos* in the form of poets. But this research has made it obvious that it is not even Parmenides that is the first metaphysician in the history of philosophy as it is mostly said and taught but it is rather Homer and most importantly Hesiod who was rather very academic and systematic about his positions, this explains why no less a scholar in the person of Aristotle⁴² stated in his most celebrated and respected work that Hesiod was the first person to look for the efficient cause of things; that his *Theogony* laid the groundwork for further philosophical development.⁴³ Now, Hesiod looking for the efficient cause of things is akin to asking about the question of being and ontology and this is the primary task of metaphysics which is the first philosophy and the most important branch in philosophy for obvious reasons.

To further buttress the points made immediately above, it is also apt to state here that it is on record that the first ever cosmogonist in ancient western philosophy was Hesiod, he was basically the first thinker to speculate about the origins of the universe. It is stating the obvious that his impressions and ideas grew and were further developed with the Ionian philosophers reaching its climax with and in the philosophical writings and postulations of the golden age scholars who were the harbingers of systematic and speculative philosophy. Little wonder, Hesiod is considered as the first rudimentary metaphysician in the history of western philosophy. The reason for this strong impression is that Hesiod was the one who laid the metaphysical foundation of speculation that the later Ionian

⁴¹ This has always been the narrative, but this research seems to suggest otherwise especially drawing strength from the strong and academic impressions of Aristotle about the academic identity and philosophic personality of Hesiod.

⁴² The greatest philosopher that ever lived.

⁴³ Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Lawson, London, Penguin Books, 1998, vi.

philosophers built upon. Not only the Ionians and Homer but it is on record that the *kpim* of the philosophy of Plato is his theory of forms and from this research, it is blatant that this theory of Plato has its roots in the dualism of Homer. And if that is the case, there is no reason not to refer to this duo as the precursors of ancient and also western metaphysics and philosophy.

These and other points too should make the reading of the philosophies of Homer and Hesiod an interesting and philosophically satisfying endeavour. This is without prejudice to some of the fallacies and inanities in their positions especially in their ontology, theodicy cosmology and cosmogony but the important point here is that these two scholars against the odds were able to milk out philosophy and metaphysics from the ordinary and usual schemes and themes of their days and with it, gave western philosophy a rich speculative tradition and this has marked and survived the western tradition of philosophy through the years. Hence, it can be stated that Homer and Hesiod are prominent Greek poets who contributed towards culture and its growth and when compared to one another.

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