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Richard Hunter

Excerpt

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CHAPTER I

READING HESIOD

Hesiod and the Hesiodic

One of the Platonising ethical dialogues of Dio Chrysostom (later first to early second century AD) is devoted to the subject of envy (φθόνος).¹ The starting-point for the examination conducted by Dio, here playing a familiar ‘Socrates-role’ with a nameless interlocutor in front of (apparently) a listening crowd,² is an investigation of the wisdom (σοφία) of Hesiod through an examination of the truth and implications of *Works and Days* 25:

ἢ τε καὶ ἀπάλαμόν περ ὅμως ἐπὶ ἔργον ἐγείρεν.
 εἰς ἕτερον γάρ τις τε ἶδεν ἔργοιο χατίζων
 πλούσιον, ὃς σπεύδει μὲν ἀρόμεναι ἡδὲ φυτεύειν
 οἶκόν τ' εὖ θέσθαι, ζηλοῖ δέ τε γείτονα γείτων
 εἰς ἄφενος σπεύδοντ' ἀγαθὴ δ' Ἔρις ἦδε βροτοῖσιν.
 καὶ κεραμεὺς κεραμεῖ κοτέει καὶ τέκτονι τέκτων,
 καὶ πτωχὸς πτωχῷ φθονέει καὶ αἰοιδὸς αἰοιδῷ.
 (Hesiod, *Works and Days* 20–6)

[One Strife] rouses even the shiftless no less to work. For the man without work sees another, a rich man, hastening to plough and plant and to set his household in good order; neighbour feels envy of neighbour as he hastens towards wealth. Potter is angry with potter and carpenter with carpenter, and beggar is jealous of beggar and bard of bard.

While perhaps hinting that more than one interpretation of v. 25 (and v. 26) was current, Dio argues that the only possible reason why Hesiod could have said that someone in one trade would be jealous of or feel malice towards a fellow tradesman

¹ *Oration* 77/78 in the now standard numeration; the double numeration arises from the fact that Photius (168a, III p. 114.4–5 Henry) lists two works of Dio περὶ φθόνου and some manuscripts mark a break after chapter 14. For convenience I shall refer to it as *Oration* 77.

² Cf. Von Arnim 1898: 288–9.

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is that the fewer tradesmen of one type there are in any location, the more money the few will obviously make (chap. 3); the economics of competition for monetary gain operative in Dio's analysis is an updating to a different economic situation of the competitiveness for strictly limited resources which modern scholars have identified in the community which Hesiod describes in the *Works and Days*.³ Dio then proceeds to demonstrate that, while this situation of malicious jealousy may be true for some trades, including disgraceful ones such as running a brothel, it cannot be true, for example, for steersmen of ships or for doctors, and in general for the ethically virtuous. It is these latter upon whom Dio's interest comes to focus, that is men with no interest in the pursuit of wealth, political honour and reputation, and the final section of the work is a description of the ἀνδρεῖος καὶ μεγάλόφρων whose free-speaking cares for the souls of his fellow men; this is of course Dio's self-portrait, built upon the Platonic portrait of Socrates.

In widening the investigation beyond the two trades mentioned in *Works and Days* 25, Dio is following the practice of his Socratic model, but the justification of his method of examining the Hesiodic utterance is of particular interest:

In other matters too it is Hesiod's custom to discuss a whole subject in one or two particulars. For example, when he says that one would not even lose an ox were it not for the wickedness of one's neighbour [cf. *Works and Days* 348], he is presumably not saying that a wicked neighbour would destroy an ox or allow others to do so, but would not steal a sheep, if he could get away with it, nor one of the splendid goats which produce much milk and bear twins. It is clear that he is speaking to the audience of his poetry as intelligent people. (Dio Chrysostom 77.5)

This argument, which we might call an argument for 'extendability' or 'extrapolation', and the particular example of *Works and Days* 348 are both elsewhere associated with the Stoic Chrysippus (third century BC),⁴ who apparently argued that

³ Cf. esp. Millett 1984; Millett does not mention Dio 77, but that essay in fact supports Millett's case.

⁴ Cf. Plutarch, *How to study poetry* 34b, Hunter–Russell 2011: 192. *WD* 348 seems to have been put to a rather different use by Aristotle, if an extract from Heracleides Lembos (2nd cent. BC), *On Constitutions*, goes back to him, as seems all but certain

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one should extrapolate 'useful' (χρήσιμον) information by extending the range of wise poetic utterances to 'similar things' (τὰ ὁμοειδῆ). Dio appears here to be in Chrysippus' debt, but behind him also stands the earliest extant citation of (a version of) *Works and Days* 25–6 in Plato's *Lysis*, in the course of the discussion concerning the nature of φιλία, 'friendship';⁵ Dio's investigation of the value of a Hesiodic utterance is thus a creative *mimesis*, very typical of its time, of a classical form. It is as though Plato himself was once again putting Hesiod under the microscope:

I [i.e. Socrates] once heard someone saying – and I've just remembered – that like is most hostile to like, as are good men to good men. He brought forward Hesiod as a witness, citing 'Potter is angry with potter and bard with bard and beggar with beggar', and he said that it was inevitable that this was the situation in all other cases, that the things which are most alike are filled with jealousy and contentiousness and enmity towards each other, whereas things which are most unlike are filled with friendship. (Plato, *Lysis* 215c4–d4)

It is not improbable that Plato himself is responsible for the alleged 'source' of this use of the Hesiodic verses ('I once heard someone say, and I've just now remembered . . .'),⁶ but it is also likely enough that Plato was not the first to discuss them in the service of a wider argument.⁷

These passages of Plato and Dio illustrate several features of the ancient reception and discussion of Hesiod's *Works and Days*. First, there is simply the vast time span of this interest in the poet from Ascrea: this book will consider examples covering more than a thousand years, starting not many decades after the composition of the poem itself through to the commentary of the neo-Platonist Proclus in the fifth century AD. If

(Titel 143, I, 11.38 Gigon = fr. 611.38 Rose). There we read that at Cyme (in Aeolia) neighbours helped protect each others' property, as neighbours would have to make a contribution if a theft should occur; Hesiod, whose father came from Cyme, was adduced as evidence of this custom.

⁵ There are, I think, no very clear echoes of the *Lysis* in Dio 77, but I note (for what it is worth) 214a2 λέγουσι δὲ δήπου οὐ φαύλως ἀποφαινόμενοι περὶ τῶν φίλων and ἀπεφήνατο . . . φαῦλον in Dio 77.2, and the repeated use of ἐντυγχάνειν at *Lysis* 214b1–3 and τούς ἐντυγχάνοντας at Dio 77.5.

⁶ Cf. Penner–Rowe 2005: 95–6.

⁷ On this passage of the *Lysis* cf. further below pp. 11–14.

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Hesiod cannot quite compete with the interest shown in Homer and the tragedians (notably Euripides), particularly in the later centuries of antiquity, he always occupied, as we shall see, a special place in the idea of 'ancient wisdom'. Secondly, there is the familiar fact of Hesiod's 'quotability', the fact that the *Works and Days* is replete with memorable one-liners and what were or were to become proverbial or semi-proverbial utterances; vv. 25 and 26 of the *Works and Days* are prime examples of this phenomenon, and in an important recent study Hugo Koning has traced some of the effect of this quotability within the history of Hesiodic reception.⁸ One effect of this quotability, of course, is that, as with any very quotable poet, verses may be cited out of, or even against, the original context, and this has certainly happened elsewhere with *WD* 25–6. The current case is in fact particularly illuminating. The pursuit of wealth, which Dio puts at the heart of his analysis, is indeed central to the broader context of *WD* 25, as it is the sight of a 'rich' (πλούσιος) neighbour, active in the pursuit of wealth (ἄφενος), which stirs the shiftless to work (vv. 21–4).⁹ The nature of the 'wealth' involved in these verses, namely abundant crops, differs from that in Dio's analysis, but then the rivalries of vv. 25–6 do indeed differ from those of vv. 21–4; whereas vv. 21–4 concern the necessity of agricultural work, presumably to secure the prosperity of one's own family, vv. 25–6 concern rivalries, probably both 'commercial' and artistic, between those who seek to perform services for others or to rely on others' generosity ('beggars', πτωχοί); Dio's analysis of vv. 25–6 hardly seems far from what we might think of as the 'natural' one.

Despite this shift within the sense of the passage, on the face of it vv. 25–6 illustrate the spirit of competition (ἐρις) which is good for mortals and function as an amplification of v. 23 'neighbour competes with (ζηλοῖ) neighbour'. Dio, however, like the Platonic Socrates before him (cf. *Lysis* 215d cited above), interprets the emotions involved in vv. 25–6 in a negative light, and in this he seems to stand within the

⁸ Koning 2010; see also Ford 2010.

⁹ On the syntactical problems in these verses cf. the notes of West and Verdenius ad loc.

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masinstream of ancient tradition. The scholia on these verses, which go back to Proclus' commentary on the *Works and Days* (fr. 25 Marzillo),¹⁰ observe that they should 'rather' (μᾶλλον) be referred back to Hesiod's 'bad strife' (vv. 13–16) because anger and envy are bad things and are not appropriate to the 'good strife'. How far back in antiquity such an observation goes is unknown, but it all but certainly does not originate with Proclus; Plutarch's commentary on the *Works and Days* was a principal source for Proclus,¹¹ and it is overwhelmingly likely that Plutarch discussed vv. 25–6 in some detail.¹²

The apparent traces of an ancient debate about these verses lead us to another common pattern in the history of the reception of the *Works and Days*. Some ancient readers at least seem to have been troubled by the apparent gap between the usually negative emotions to which these verses refer and Hesiod's apparent inclusion of them under the umbrella of the 'good strife'. Where ancient readers led, modern ones have followed; time and again in the course of this book we shall see a similar continuity between focuses of ancient and modern puzzlement over the Hesiodic text. The current case in fact offers a rather good snapshot of some of the most influential modern approaches to the *Works and Days*, at the level both of detail and in terms of overall approach. Modern commentators roughly divide into those who see the lines as problematic and those who do not. Of the former, those who want to impose upon the text as tight a coherence, as that term is now understood, as possible have gone so far as to argue that the verses should be deleted as an early interpolation, thus giving – so it is argued – a much neater run of sense directly from v. 24 to v. 27.¹³ The author of the most important and influential

¹⁰ Cf. below p. 7. ¹¹ Cf. Chapter 4 below.

¹² Plutarch's brief essay 'On envy and hatred' survives (*Moralia* 536e–8e). At *Moralia* 473a–b *WD* 25 is adduced within an argument that we must not envy or be angry with those who are different and/or better off than ourselves, and – perhaps more interestingly in view of the Proclan scholium – at *Mor.* 92a–b the whole of vv. 23–6 are rejected as giving bad advice, because it is towards our enemies, not our friends and those like us, that we should feel envy.

¹³ For the arguments and the doxography (deletion was proposed by more than one earlier scholar) cf. Bona Quaglia 1973: 41–2, Blümer 2001: II 42–50.

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modern commentary on the poem, Martin West, on the other hand, goes some way towards the view of the scholia in describing anger and envy as 'not in the spirit of the good Eris', but rather than adopting the solution of the scholia or deleting the verses (West does not even mention that deletion has been proposed),¹⁴ he suggests that these 'not altogether apt verses' were 'presumably proverbs that already existed' and 'came into [Hesiod's] mind' through association with v. 23, ζῆλοϊ δέ τε γείτονα γείτων; the verses thus illustrate 'mental association' as 'an important factor in the sequence of [Hesiod's] ideas'.¹⁵ Here then we are offered a kind of poem which operates with a very different 'logic' than is often supposed to characterise argumentative attempts at persuasion, such as the *Works and Days* appears to be. Defenders of the appropriateness of the verses, on the other hand, have in general looked to the nature of Greek competitiveness: Wilamowitz saw a progression from ζῆλος to κότος and finally φθόνος,¹⁶ and Verdenius too argues that 'good *eris*' need not exclude 'malevolence', given the fierce intensity of Greek rivalries.¹⁷ If it is in fact the case that part of the difficulty for us and for the ancients arises here because, after Hesiod, some Hesiodic language bears greater ethical and moral import than that with which his own verses seem to be freighted, then this case would find many parallels in the

¹⁴ Nor does Solmsen in the Oxford Classical Text.

¹⁵ The quotations are from West 1978a: 47 and 147. In his commentary Ercolani 2010 broadly follows West's approach, but spells out his view that the alliteration and assonance of vv. 25–6 may suggest that Hesiod here gave priority to 'la dimensione sonora' over meaning.

¹⁶ 'Erst möchte man es auch so haben, dann ärgert man sich, dass es der andere hat, schliesslich wirft man seinen bösen Blick darauf, missgönnt es ihm' (n. on v. 23).

¹⁷ For such an approach to the verses cf. also Walcot 1970: 87–93 and 1978: *passim*; the central social role of competitiveness, envy and downright hostility is a leitmotif of, e.g., Campbell 1964, a study of a very different kind of Greek community, the Sarakatsanoi (transhumant shepherds). Rosen 1990: 106–7 rightly brings out some of the links between 'beggars' and 'poets', but does not discuss the implications of the verb: φθονέει is more than 'vying with'. I am unpersuaded by Hamilton 1989: 50–1 (and cf. 59) that, when we have read further in the poem, we realise that the situation is in fact of a beggar (Perses) arguing with a poet (Hesiod), a situation which is 'ultimately resolved in the picture of poet (Hesiod) competing with other poets', i.e. in vv. 654–9.

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history of Hesiodic reception; the post-Hesiodic development in sense of Hesiod's ἀρετή (*WD* 289), which seems in Hesiod to contain at least an important element of '(agricultural) success, social standing', is probably the best known case.¹⁸ Moreover, it is presumably important for our understanding of the passage that Hesiod has the 'bad *eris*' operate through 'war and strife' (vv. 14–16), presumably between cities and population groups, whereas the 'good *eris*' is operative within communities and between individuals, thus making vv. 25–6 more appropriate to this latter case, despite the view of the Proclan scholia.¹⁹

The *Works and Days* is, of course, very far from the only ancient text where decisions of interpretation at the level of textual detail are intimately connected to views about the nature and origin of the work as a whole, but it is an unusually extreme case. Here, of course, is an area where ancient and modern discussion tends to part company. Put very broadly, ancient criticism is more interested in the interpretation and application of the individual verse or passage than of overall structure and 'meaning'. The reasons for this are well known: the physical difficulty of reading long works synoptically in antiquity and the rhetorical and educational framework in which 'literary criticism' developed, a framework in which the habit of selective anthologising flourished, are among the more prominent. On the other hand, the first half of the *Works and Days*, in particular, with its powerful episodes of Prometheus and Pandora, the Myth of Races and the diptych of the Just and Unjust Cities, provided a very rich canvas of story and moralising to which poets and writers returned hungrily throughout antiquity. What for later ages gave particular bite to the use of the *Works and Days* was the voice claiming authority with which the Hesiodic poem was invested and which seems from the very

¹⁸ To what extent Hesiodic ἀρετή already carries a moral-ethical charge is an important matter of scholarly disagreement, but the general nature of the point being made here does not depend upon a detailed discussion of the issue.

¹⁹ Hamilton 1989: 60 makes a somewhat similar point in terms of the bad *eris* causing 'external' effects, while the good *eris* produces only 'internal' ones.

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beginning to have been fundamental in shaping the ways in which the poem was exploited.²⁰

In *Oration 77*, for example, Dio's interrogation of a piece of Hesiodic 'wisdom' is set up as an examination of whether Hesiod deserved his reputation or not.²¹

Is it for these and such reasons that Hesiod was considered wise (σοφός) among the Greeks and in no way unworthy of that reputation, because he did not compose and sing his poems through human art, but because he had met the Muses and become their own pupil (μαθητής)? As a result of this, whatever occurred to him, all of it he uttered musically and wisely, with nothing lacking purpose ... (Dio Chrysostom 77.1)

It is perhaps hard not to detect an amused irony here. At one level, Dio is making use of the Platonic distinction between the poetry of τέχνη and the poetry of 'inspiration' to suggest that Hesiod belongs with those poets and performers who in fact 'know nothing', as was most famously set out in Plato's *Ion*. Hesiod himself has the Muses 'teaching' (διδάσκειν) him (*Theogony* 22, *WD* 662), but to make him their μαθητής is to express the relationship in more banal terms than the initiation scene of the *Theogony* might naturally suggest; such language is more usually found in contexts of literary or intellectual descent than of divine inspiration.²² So too, to describe the subject matter of his poetry as 'whatever occurred to him' (ὃ τι ἐπήγχετο αὐτῷ) might be thought at least unflattering. Why this matters is precisely a question of authority. Behind Dio stands a very long tradition of the examination of poetic wisdom, most notably of course that of Homer, and Plato is the principal figure who gave shape to that tradition: in Dio's constitution of the history of σοφία, Hesiod stands (with Homer)

²⁰ Cf. further below pp. 26–9.

²¹ This was of course a very common mode of citation and introduction to discussion, cf., e.g., Plato, *Laws* 4.718e, 'the many regard Hesiod as *sophos* for saying that the road to κακότης is smooth and can be travelled without sweat ...'.

²² Cf., e.g., Plutarch, *Mor.* 158b, Aesop the μαθητής of Hesiod. In *Oration 55* Dio seeks to demonstrate that Socrates was Homer's μαθητής, though he could never possibly have met him (cf. Hunter 2009a: 19); he notes there (55.1) that 'Hesiod says that, while looking after his flock on Helicon, he received the gift of poetry in a laurel-branch from the Muses, so that we would not have to take the trouble to enquire after his teacher'.

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at its beginning, then there was Socrates, then Plato, and now Dio. At need, 'Hesiod' could almost function metonymically for 'received opinion', whether real or constructed ad hoc for the purposes of an argument; 'Hesiod' thus acted as a wind-mill against which any would-be σοφός could try his lance. The present book may be seen as a description of various of these attempts over several centuries.

Dio returns to Hesiod in the latter part of the treatise (chapters 22–5), when the subject has somewhat shifted towards rejection of the pursuit of earthly pleasures and of admiration by the unthinking mob; what the wise man or the good artist wants, and this too is a very Platonic theme, is the approval of the intelligent and skilled few. Dio illustrates this truth first by an ancient version of the familiar joke that a camel is a horse designed by a committee. According to this anecdote, an excellent painter displayed a painting of a horse which was a 'marvellous and accurate' depiction, and then got his slave to take note of the comments which the painting elicited. Everyone who looked at the picture found fault with a different part of the horse, whether it be the head or the legs or whatever, and so the painter produced another painting in conformity with the criticisms which the slave had collected and the two paintings were displayed side-by-side; the first, of course, was 'very accurate', the second 'very ugly, quite laughable, and resembling anything other than a horse'. What matters, then, is the judgement of the intelligent man who will not seek after or sway in conformity with the opinions of the uninformed masses. The lesson of the painted horse is then confirmed by a story from the gods, and there is no higher authority than that:

Just so, the myth says that Pandora was not fashioned by one of the gods, but in common by all of them, each giving and adding a different gift, and what was fashioned was not at all wise (σοφόν) nor beneficial, and turned out to be a complicated and elaborate evil (παντοδαπὸν . . . καὶ ποικίλον . . . κακόν) for those who received her. When a motley crowd of gods, a populace creating and working together (θεῶν ὄχλος καὶ δῆμος κοινῇ δημιουργῶν καὶ ἐργαζόμενος), was not able to work well and without fault (καλῶς τε καὶ ἀμέμπτως), what would one say of a way of life and a man which was fashioned and created by human opinion? Obviously, the really sensible man (τῷ ὄντι φρόνιμος) would

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pay no attention to the talk of the masses nor would seek their praise in every matter, and would in fact regard this praise as neither great nor worth having nor, so to speak, good. As he does not think it a good thing, he is incapable of feeling malicious jealousy (βασκαίνειν) towards those who have it. (Dio Chrysostom 77.25)

Hesiod is here not named, but it is clearly his story which is at issue: παντοδαπὸν...καὶ ποικίλον...κακὸν is indeed what the gods fashion in Hesiod (*Theogony* 570, 585, 589, *WD* 56–8, 82–3, 89 etc.). What is most striking, of course, about this telling of the story is the spin which Dio puts on it: in Hesiod the gods did indeed (from one point of view) craft a work of art καλῶς τε καὶ ἀμέμπτως, a work of art perfectly matching the purposes they had in mind, one indeed intended to be κακὸν for ‘those who receive it’. The blame to be attached to their workmanship comes not from the workmanship itself, but from the damage it did to the human race; Dio glides seamlessly from Pandora as a κακὸν to men to Pandora as an example of something crafted κακῶς, just as the claim that the artifact was ‘not at all wise (σοφόν)’ plays with the intellectual and artistic (‘skilful’) resonances of the term σοφόν.²³ The name ‘Pandora’ certainly invited an interpretation based upon the plurality of those involved in her creation (cf. *WD* 81–2), but at the very least Dio suppresses the controlling role of Zeus in the Hesiodic story, if indeed θεῶν ὄχλος καὶ δῆμος, ‘a motley crowd of gods, a populace’, does not entirely misrepresent it by suggesting that some form of Olympian radical democracy was in play. The analogy between the creation of Pandora and the fashioning power of ‘human opinion’ might seem to be fairly loose at best, however helpful our memory of the foolish but accurately named ‘Epimetheus’ might be – Dio’s τῶι ὄντι φρόνιμος is the modern descendant of Hesiod’s Prometheus – but Dio here appropriates a famous story because of its very familiarity; that familiarity carries its own persuasive power. On the other hand, Hesiod is almost entirely erased here: the poet is not named and the (quasi-allegorical)

²³ Very similar techniques for distorting the meaning of verses are clearly on show in Plutarch’s *How to study poetry*.