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DECLINE AND PARAINESIS IN HESIOD'S RACE OF IRON

Introduction

The myth of races in Hesiod's *Works and Days* (106–201) is of perennial interest, central as it is to both Greek and Roman discussions of decline and of the golden race / age. In this paper, I would like to approach it from a slightly different angle than usual, concentrating not on the myth as a whole but on the part that pertains directly to Hesiod and Perses – the account of the race of iron (174–201). In brief, I shall argue for the somewhat gloomy thesis that there is no need to suppose that Hesiod implies that anything can be done to halt the race's descent; this runs counter to a popular view in the scholarship, which maintains that it would be senseless for Hesiod to waste his time in extolling justice and hard work elsewhere in the *Works and Days* if the decline of the race of iron were truly a necessary one. I first suggest that if we take the myth of races as an independent unit, as would seem legitimate given current theories concerning the poem's composition as well as the examples of internal contradiction found elsewhere within the *Works and Days*, there is in actual fact no reason to infer that Hesiod leaves any room in this section for an escape from the descent.

In the second half of the paper, however, I attempt also to meet on their own ground those who argue that the destruction of the race of iron is merely contingent, and therefore look to the section's compatibility with the 'message' of the poem as a whole. I argue that the fact that Hesiod gives advice to his brother elsewhere in the poem does not necessarily contradict the view that the iron race will continue to decline, since Hesiod's parainesis can be understood as applying only to the present time. Hesiod explicitly states that some good things still exist at his own point in the history of the race of iron, even though the general trajectory is downward. There is therefore still a place for hard work and justice for Hesiod's contemporaries – since these are the means by which good things are obtained – although there will not be in the times to come. Hesiod

can exhort his brother to cultivate justice and hard work while still holding that the iron race will one day be destroyed by Zeus.

I

First, however, it will be useful to discuss the question of decline in the myth of races as a whole. There has been a great deal of dissatisfaction expressed with the view that Hesiod's myth speaks of a steady decline from one race to the next, even though such an interpretation seems at first compelling owing to the races' ordering by metal.[1] While the silver race is indeed πολὺ χειρότερον ("much worse", 127) than the golden one, there is no such distinction made between the races of silver and bronze, Hesiod only claiming that the latter was οὐκ ἀργυρέῳ οὐδὲν ὁμοῖον ("not similar to the silver one at all", 144). Moreover, the race of heroes is a clear improvement over the race of bronze (δικαιότερον καὶ ἄρειον, "more just and superior", 158), and arguably over the race of silver as well. The standard way of addressing this second issue has been to argue that Hesiod is here borrowing from an eastern story that involves a four-stage decline; in order to adapt it for a Greek audience, he had to insert the race of Homeric heroes between those of bronze and iron, thereby disturbing the impetus of the myth.[2] This explanation has never been disproven, but it must be owned that it only deals with the problem of the race of heroes, not with the first issue or the other apparent flaws in the myth as it stands.

The other possibility regularly put forward is that there is no decline as such represented in the succession of the races.[3] Walcot, although subscribing to the idea of eastern influence and a four-stage process, argued that the original myth constituted a ring pat-

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1) For summaries of the scholarship, see Gatz 1967, 1–6; Schwabl 1978, 783–790; Smith 1980, 147–153; Most 1997, 106. The text I use is that of West 1978; translations are from the Loeb volume of Most 2006. All references are to the *Works and Days*, unless otherwise specified.

2) The first spadework was done by Roth 1860 = Heitsch 1966, 450–470, who compared the myth of races with sections from the Indic *Mahābhārata*. Reitzenstein 1924/5 = Heitsch 1966, 523–544, and Reitzenstein 1926, added the Zoroastrian and Judaic material. Koenen 1994 challenges some of the assumptions of this view. Cf. Gatz 1967, 2–4; West 1978, 172–177; Fontenrose 1974, 1–8.

3) Cf. Rosenmeyer 1957, 274–275; Bamberger 1842 = Heitsch 1966, 439–449.

tern formed by the first four races – ABBA – in which the improvement signaled by the race of heroes was properly marked; according to him, Hesiod attached the race of iron to the end of this succession.[4] Vernant posited a structuralist model, in which the races were organized in pairs polarized by the δίκη / ὕβρις distinction.[5] Most suggested that the myth of the five races in Hesiod's *Works and Days* can be explained by reference to the early Greek tradition and that there is no need to posit eastern influence; nor is there any necessary decline, the myth simply describing what we, as human beings, are not.[6] These authorities have a point: it does not seem that we can read the myth as it stands as narrating a decline from race to race in any simple way. While the deterioration is clear in Aratus' three-stage (Phaenomena 96–136) and Ovid's four-stage (Metamorphoses 1.89–150) versions, it is not so with Hesiod.[7] Even if one accepts this, however, I would argue that Hesiod nevertheless provides us with a distinctly dark world-view that both 1) conceives of the race of iron as the worst of all the races he describes (and does not describe) and 2) depicts a decline within the iron race itself that will continue until Zeus delivers the coup de grâce.

II

First, we can note in the *Works and Days* that, regardless of whether the myth of races entails a decline from race to race, Hesiod claims that the race of iron is the worst of all the races into which he could have been born:

> μηκέτ' ἔπειτ' ὤφελλον ἐγὼ πέμπτοισι μετεῖναι
> ἀνδράσιν, ἀλλ' ἢ πρόσθε θανεῖν ἢ ἔπειτα γενέσθαι
>
> If only then I did not have to live among the fifth men,
> but could have either died first or been born afterwards!
> (174–175)

4) Walcot 1961; 1966, 81–82.

5) Vernant 1960, taking his initial cue from Goldschmidt 1950; Matthiessen 1979 offers objections. Cf. Nagy 1979, 151–173.

6) Most 1997.

7) On our instinctive desire to read the myth as describing a decline across the races, see Most 1997, 105–106.

There are different possible interpretations of the words ἔπειτα γενέσθαι: it may be that Hesiod's myth suggests that a better race will come into being after that of iron;[8] alternatively, it may simply be a rhetorical flosculum articulating a stance towards our status as human beings belonging to the fifth race – it could simply never be any worse than this.[9] Either way, these two verses elucidate the essentially flawed nature of the dispensation under which we live; the race of iron is the worst of all the races, regardless of when one is born within it. According to Hesiod's statement, one can be born at the middle of the race of iron, its beginning or its conclusion – it does not matter: wherever we are situated on the historical continuum, we can be confident of the fact that we are constituents of the worst race of men that the world has ever seen or ever will see.[10]

Most suggests that the golden and silver races define who we are through antithesis: we can never attain the happy state of the former, since to do so would be to change our physical and mental makeup. Nor are we ever liable to turn into the latter, since these too are creatures different from us in many respects.[11] The value judgment concerning the iron race is still clear, however, since even the silver race – comprised of giant children who die soon after they reach maturity – is not without honor, and therefore remains superior to our own: ἀλλ᾽ ἔμπης τιμὴ καὶ τοῖσιν ὀπηδεῖ ("but all the same honor attends upon these as well", 142).[12] Similarly, the race

8) This is the view of Roth 1860 = Heitsch 1966, 460; Nestle 1942, 50; Vernant 1960; Nagy 1979, 169. However, West 1978, 197 and Verdenius 1985, 105–106 both think it unlikely; cf. Rosenmeyer 1957, 275–276; Schmidt 1986, 116; Koenen 1994, 7; Most 1997, 114; Nelson 1998, 190.

9) "As for Hesiod's 'If only I had been born later', the best policy is probably to interpret it as a colloquial escapist term, expressing his revulsion from the present, but not to be taken seriously as reflecting a historical timetable. Even if there is to be an improved age after our own, this in no way provides hope: there is no way for us to change races, as it were" (Rosenmeyer 1957, 275–276). Cf. Lamberton 1988, 117.

10) Clay 2003, 83–84, and Koenen 1994, 9–10, argue that the ἔπειτα γενέσθαι alludes to a later point in the race of iron (each for a different reason); but Hesiod explicitly says that he does not want to live in this race: μηκέτ᾽ ἔπειτ᾽ ὤφελλον ἐγὼ πέμπτοισι μετεῖναι / ἀνδράσιν – it makes no difference to him whether he is born at a later point within it. The reference is not to part of a race, but to the race as a whole.

11) Most 1997, 114–116.

12) This is probably a safe inference, despite the fact that Hesiod does not explicitly say that the race of iron has no honor.

of bronze is cruel and vicious, but does not suffer in the same way as Hesiod's contemporaries and successors, whereas the race of heroes is plainly superior to them. The members of these other races are described as mortals, but they are fundamentally different from us; they do not serve as models to emulate or avoid, but rather describe what we are not. The other races therefore throw into relief the pain, the fleetingness, and the weakness of our own state even without forming a linear decline – a decline that would arguably have little point, since there is no connection between the races.[13]

III

While Hesiod inhabits the race of iron and therefore belongs to the worst race to have existed, those born into it at a later point will be in a still worse position than he. Vernant argued that there appear to be two different phases to the race of iron – Hesiod's own time, which does not appear to be entirely bankrupt of values and happiness, and a subsequent period in which the last vestiges of justice will be swept away. He therefore polarized the race of iron between an earlier period that was associated with both justice and outrage, and a later one that exemplified ὕβρις alone.[14] In this section, however, I would like to look more closely at the change within the race, and see if there are further nuances that can be observed; this will prepare the ground for the subsequent discussion.[15]

The first thing we should note is Hesiod's use of tense – an obvious place to begin when considering possible expressions of decline.[16] The verb ὤφελλον ("I ought", 174) is in the imperfect, articulating an unattained wish.[17] At line 176, however, we have the phrase νῦν γὰρ δὴ γένος ἐστὶ σιδήρεον ("For now the race is indeed

13) Save that, perhaps, between the race of heroes and that of iron; see Fontenrose 1974, 10; Rosenmeyer 1957, 275–276; Nelson 1998, 68–76.

14) Vernant 1960; cf. Fontenrose 1974, 10.

15) On the internal history of the iron race, see also the illuminating discussion of Nelson 1998, 68–76. On the commonalities with the depictions of society in Theognis and Solon, see the papers in Figueira / Nagy 1985. See also Nünlist 2007, 48–51, and particularly Vernant 1983, 53–57.

16) Cf. Schmidt 1986, 116.

17) See the apparatus of West 1978.

one of iron") firmly rooted in the present tense, and this seems to assert itself for the next few lines. The future tense verb that follows – παύσονται (177) – is given the sense "[t]hey suffer ills which will never end" by West, who sees the future, together with the πότε (176), as standing for "will not cease to"; the verb therefore refers to Hesiod's contemporaries in addition to their descendents, and may be labeled, in line with Kühner and Gerth, a "duratives Futur".[18] More futures follow, possibly attracted to the tense of παύσονται.[19] The temporal adverbs ἦμαρ ("by day", 176) and νύκτωρ ("by night", 177) imply that there will be no respite from toil and grief; taken together, they convey the sense of "at all times". Hesiod and his contemporaries, as well as those who come after them, will always continue to suffer; such is the nature of things within the iron race.

So far, we have only been given a static glimpse of what the iron race will always be like in general: it will never cease from anguish and toil. This holds for the men alive at present as well as those who will come later. In what follows, however, the poet makes a statement that distinguishes the present phase of the race of iron, the phase in which he lives, from what will follow. Although Hesiod had said that he would prefer it if he had died before the iron race or had been born after it, he goes on to suggest that life within it, at the present time at least, is not without its good elements:

> … χαλεπὰς δὲ θεοὶ δώσουσι μερίμνας.
> ἀλλ᾽ ἔμπης καὶ τοῖσι μεμείξεται ἐσθλὰ κακοῖσιν.
>
> … and the gods will give them grievous cares. Yet all the same, for these people too good things will be mingled with evil ones. (178–179)

True, these "good things" are tempered with woes – there is no unalloyed happiness here – but that does not negate the fact that they exist. The ἀλλ᾽ ἔμπης, which can be translated as "but nevertheless", only serves to emphasize this, as it conditions the preceding

18) Kühner / Gerth 1898, 170: "durative Aktionsart"; cf. Smyth 1956, 427: "continuative future".

19) West 1978, 197.

half-line: the gods will always give them grievous cares, but there will nevertheless be some small consolation as well. There is no reason to feel that there is a contradiction here with lines 174–175:[20] Hesiod could not very well say that no good things at all existed in his own day, and the iron race can still remain the worst of all the races in spite of their presence. All Hesiod says is that any other race would be preferable to the one that he actually inhabits.

A change, clearly reinforcing this difference between the present phase of the iron race and its final state, sets in when we come upon the phrase:

> Ζεὺς δ' ὀλέσει καὶ τοῦτο γένος μερόπων ἀνθρώπων,
> εὖτ' ἂν γεινόμενοι πολιοκρόταφοι τελέθωσιν.
>
> But Zeus will destroy this race of speech-endowed human beings too, when at their birth the hair on their temples will be quite gray. (180–181)

Here we have a statement of how the race will meet its end. The future tense verb here (ὀλέσει) is of a different kind from the ones hitherto encountered, in that it clearly speaks of a one-time action that will occur at a point yet to come; this is reinforced by the temporal εὖτ' ἂν ("when", 181). It may be labeled a "momentanes Futur".[21] While the earlier verbs introduced statements in the future tense to illustrate that those conditions will always apply to the iron men regardless of when they exist, now Hesiod is using the future tense to describe what is set to occur only in the future. There is a process implied: while the iron men will continue to suffer for as long as their race exists, there is a single point at which their race will be definitively destroyed, and this will only occur after children are born with gray temples.

This description of the conclusion of the race of iron wrenches things away from Hesiod's own time. What follows appears to describe what is yet to come, presented in a form of the future that excludes Hesiod's contemporaries in a way similar to lines 180–181; it too is differentiated from the phase of the iron race that

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20) On this, see Gatz 1967, 49–50.

21) Kühner / Gerth 1898, 170: "momentane Aktionsart"; cf. Smyth 1956, 427: future of "simple attainment".

Hesiod and Perses inhabit. In this period, family patterns will break down, there will be no respect accorded to good faith, and envy will abound. The period in which Hesiod himself is living certainly suffers – that much is clear enough – but lacks the dysfunction that we see depicted later on in the history of the race of iron. Hesiod, at the culmination of his litany of familial breakdown, explicitly declares that the state that will prevail at that time will be different from that which went before:

> … / οὐδὲ κασίγνητος φίλος ἔσσεται, ὡς τὸ πάρος περ.
>
> … / nor will the brother be dear, as he once was. (184)

Previously, brother was friendly to his brother, but this will no longer hold. It is of course ambiguous as to what τὸ πάρος actually means – is Hesiod speaking of the conditions that existed under the more upright previous races? Or simply of an earlier state of affairs within the iron race itself – potentially including the period when μεμείξεται ἐσθλὰ κακοῖσιν? The latter is, I think, more probable, and I shall mount an argument for this presently.

Hesiod is already writing in the future tense, and is therefore obliged to have recourse to other means in order to represent a succession of events.[22] Besides the use of tenses to differentiate between the present and future, the varying grades in the amount of woe, and the phrase ὡς τὸ πάρος περ, there are other indications that the decline of the race of iron will be gradual rather than two-step. Temporal markers exist,[23] such as νῦν (176), which describes the time now, and εἶτ᾽ ἂν (181), which sets us at the time at which humankind will be destroyed. But even between these two points there are references to different points in the timeline. The word αἶψα (185), which can mean "quickly", but also "forthwith", "soon", or "swiftly", suggests further temporal progression.[24] Moreover, τότε ("then", 197) determines that Aidos and Nemesis will leave earth only at a certain point in the future, supposedly after what has been hitherto described in the text has actually been achieved; it is also differentiated from both νῦν and εἶτ᾽ ἂν in terms

22) Cf. Kühner / Gerth 1898, 171 (subsection 2).
23) Cf. Falkner 1989, 57–58.
24) West 1978, 200 on αἶψα: "probably not with the participle".

of the set of circumstances it introduces. Like the second of these it identifies a unique occurrence.[25]

There is one final aspect of this section of the myth of races that warrants attention before we move on – its final lines:

> … τὰ δὲ λείψεται ἄλγεα λυγρά
> θνητοῖς ἀνθρώποισι, κακοῦ δ' οὐκ ἔσσεται ἀλκή.
>
> Baleful pains will be left for mortal human beings, and there will be no safeguard against evil. (200–201)

After Aidos and Nemesis abandon the iron race, all that will be left for mortals is woe. Hesiod explicitly blocks off all hope for a change for the better after this point: there will be no defense from evil. Between the disappearance of deities and the final destruction of the race, at least, humankind will be running on fixed tracks, denied any hope for improvement.

Given these cues, it is clear that there is an internal history within the race of iron according to which things grow worse along a continuum; the first stage is Hesiod's own (174–179), although we cannot be sure whether he is situated at the beginning of the race or towards its middle.[26] This cedes into a period of ever-worsening lawlessness that leads up to the abandonment of the earth by Aidos and Nemesis (182–201). It is at some point after this that we should expect children to begin to appear with gray hair and Zeus to destroy the race (180–181). Thus, while Vernant was right to speak of a difference between Hesiod's contemporaries and their descendents, the race of iron does not simply appear to be divided into two states but instead shows signs of progression even between its poles.[27]

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25) West 1999, 42 translates thus: "[s]oon they will cease to respect their aging parents"; "[t]hen verily off to Olympus from the wide-pathed earth …"

26) Schmidt 1986, 116, however, is more certain: "Hesiod macht durch die anschließende Beschreibung der gegenwärtigen Verhältnisse in seinem Ainos (202–12) unmissverständlich deutlich, daß der Anbruch der letzten Zeit ganz unmittelbar bevorsteht."

27) It might be argued that it is possible to have a gradual decline in the first part as well as a radical change between the first and second; but this is a more difficult interpretation than the one adopted in this paper – that the decline of the iron race is a unified phenomenon and that the departure of Aidos and Nemesis simply constitutes a single, albeit significant, event within it.

IV

How certain is it that the iron race will meet its dreadful conclusion? Scholars have argued that the idea of a continued decline is contingent on the failure of mankind to cultivate δίκη and practice good ἔρις, which Hesiod is at pains to promote elsewhere in the poem; only if men turn to crime and injustice, so the argument runs, κακοῦ δ᾽ οὐκ ἔσσεται ἀλκή. Most states that

> [t]he iron race is the only one whose ultimate destiny is still undecided … Will we indeed finish disastrously, as Hesiod warns us we might in his bleak prophecy of the future of our race (180–201)? Or is there a chance that we might end up choosing the good Eris and flourishing as best our human possibilities permit?[28]

In a footnote, he observes:

> [i]nterpreting the future tenses in the prophecy of lines 180–201 as predictions of an outcome from which there is no possible escape is n o t p r e c l u d e d by the rules of Greek grammar, but makes it impossible to understand why Hesiod should have bothered to compose this poem at all and stands in evident contradiction to the moderate optimism he expresses elsewhere.[29]

This is one possible interpretation,[30] and is indeed something of a commonplace in the secondary literature,[31] but I have emphasized "not precluded", because it seems as if the reverse would hold if one takes the myth of races on its own terms (without reference to the rest of the poem): the natural reading to adopt is that Hesiod simply

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28) Most 1997, 117.

29) Most 1997, 117. My emphasis.

30) The Greek future can certainly perform other functions than merely to state what will necessarily take place; see Kühner / Gerth 1898, 170–179; cf. Smyth 1956, 427–429. I am moreover by no means opposed to the idea that descriptions of decline can be used to galvanize an audience towards a certain mode of action; here, however, I would like to argue that the *Works and Days* does not provide the iron race with a means of escape.

31) Verdenius 1985, 105–106: "Hes. solemnly declares (180 ff.) that mankind approaches its own destruction, but this is not an expression of despair. The fact that he profuses in good advice and exhortation betrays the belief that things might take a turn for the better …"; Schmidt 1986, 116: "Es steht sozusagen auf des Messers Schneide, ob die Menschen auf den Weg des Rechtsausgleichs zurückfinden und sich die Verheißungen der gerechten Stadt erhalten oder ob sie dem Bann der Rechtsauflösung verfallen und unaufhaltsam ihrer Gesamtvernichtung entgegengehen"; Neschke 1996, 477; Clay 2003, 85; Clay 2009, 81.

states that there is no hope for the iron race and that it will continue to worsen until decrepitude sets in with infancy – ἔσσεται ἦμαρ (Iliad 6.448).[32] The future tense verbs, together with their temporal markers, suggest a necessary progression and give the sense that there is no real 'Entscheidungsspielraum' hinted at in these lines. It is only when one tries to place Hesiod's prophecy for the iron race in its context that qualms concerning its determinism surface.[33]

Now, many modern scholars would doubt the need to reconcile the myth of races with the rest of the poem in any particularly stringent way. West, for instance, has pointed out that the myth of races is incoherent with the story of Pandora's box that Hesiod relates immediately before it, and posits the accretion of the poem by, to use his terminology, "heavy units".[34] Nagy argues for the role of the oral tradition in the formation of the *Works and Days* as it now exists, a circumstance that would also help to explain the contradictions within the poem.[35] If we accept the implications of these views concerning the poem's composition, there is perhaps

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32) Cf. Rosenmeyer 1957, 276: "I should interpret the futures of the iron age as formulations of the necessary result; in view of the social and material conditions of the present age – which Hesiod takes as understood, and does not sketch in as he had in the case of the other metal ages – these phenomena are bound to occur, and will continue to occur for some time, as long as men remain iron. This use of the future, which seems related to the gnomic future, may perhaps be called the deterministic future; it presupposes a thorough understanding of the principle of causation." Nagy 1982, 58: "As happens elsewhere in myths about the ages of mankind, the present encompassed by the final age merges with the future and becomes a prophecy: in a deeply pessimistic tone, Hesiod predicts that *díkê* will finally lose to *húbris*"; cf. Nagy 1982, 64. See, however, Nagy 1985, 70: "In the end, the dike of Zeus as initially proclaimed by the poet (*WD* 9) emerges triumphant – though not without moments of pessimism or even despair (e. g., 190–194) …"

33) For an early example of the contextualizing argument, see (for instance) Solmsen 1949, 89: "Scholars who have drawn this inference [i. e. that the poet of the *Works and Days* was a "pessimist"] have not been sufficiently aware of the fact that Hesiod allows the perspective of a particular context to determine his thought and his phrasing to the temporary exclusion of every alternative point of view. It is only by referring from one contextual unit of the poem to others that we can hope to … get a more adequate picture of Hesiod's thought about man's destiny and opportunities."

34) West 1978, 41–59.

35) The general assumption at the beginning of the twentieth century after Friedländer 1913 = Heitsch 1966, 223–238 was that the *Works and Days* issued from a single poet; this view has been severely questioned by Nagy 1979 and 1982, which build on Parry's observations; cf. Lamberton 1988, 2, 12–37, 111, and here 36: "Hesiod contradicts and repeats himself because Hesiod is a composite that defies analysis, a tradition and not an individual voice." On poetics in Hesiod, see now Tsagalis 2009.

less need to worry about how the gloomy message of one section sits with the rest of the poem; we would be able to take the myth of races more or less on its own terms without the need to square our interpretation with the neighboring units. In what follows, however, I would like – for the sake of argument – to attempt to meet on their own ground those who seek to reconcile the myth of races with the remainder of the poem.

V

The task that we have set ourselves, then, is to see how this interpretation of the myth of races, which finds the decline of the race of iron to be inevitable, fits against the backdrop of the *Works and Days* as a whole. The main objection to interpreting the myth of races as a description of inevitable deterioration is that this would seem to kill the poem's protreptic power: why should Hesiod emphasize the benefits of work throughout the poem, why should he recommend justice so strongly to his brother, if he truly believes that humankind is bound for such a fate as the one he describes? What meaning would the poem have if Hesiod really is implying that there is no remedy for the race's downfall? The description of the just and unjust cities that follows immediately after would suggest that δίκη remains a thing towards which men should strive: they can improve their lot by living just lives, but they can worsen it by acting in an unjust fashion. How can the dispensation of this advice be coherent with the bleak account of the future that Hesiod provides?

There seems to be a solution forthcoming, given our analysis of the narrative of decline contained in Hesiod's description of the iron race. This race has, at the time of the poet's writing, only reached a certain point in its degenerative arc (178–179):[36]

> … χαλεπὰς δὲ θεοὶ δώσουσι μερίμνας.
> ἀλλ᾽ ἔμπης καὶ τοῖσι μεμείξεται ἐσθλὰ κακοῖσιν.

Good things still exist, even though they are ineluctably connected with toil and cares.[37] According to our provisional reading of

36) Cf. Gatz 1967, 49–50.
37) Compare the lot of man at Iliad 24.525–551.

the myth of the five races, there is no means of changing things: Hesiod's contemporaries occupy a certain position in the history of their own race, but there will come a day when the poet's prophecy will be vindicated. There is, however, for the moment at least, some good mixed with the bad, and there is therefore a place for work and justice: the living is hard for the present generations of the race of iron but it is possible, and Hesiod's compatriots may still gain the good things that exist amidst the bad. Moreover, Hesiod does not specify the time scale of the change – whether it will happen over the next few generations or over a thousand years. The poet only says that destruction is on its way, not that it is imminent or that it will fall in the generations that follow his own. "Forthwith" and "soon" are relative concepts. Only – and this is my key point – if the total disintegration of δίκη were indeed imminent would it be senseless to advise one's compatriots to cultivate it.

Just as in the turning of the agricultural year, there appears to be a time and a place for different types of moral action in the race of iron. For Hesiod's contemporaries, there is a point to labor and to justice; these are things that can improve their lives and for which rewards are duly forthcoming, even given the grim conditions upon which their lives are predicated. It will be different, however, later on in the race of iron, when there will be reward for neither justice nor honor; the men of that period will honor only the wicked individual. This interpretation, it should be noted, is coherent with what we find later on in the poem, where Hesiod suggests that he would only be just so long as there is a reward for justice:

> νῦν δὴ ἐγὼ μήτ' αὐτὸς ἐν ἀνθρώποισι δίκαιος
> εἴην μήτ' ἐμὸς υἱός, ἐπεὶ κακὸν ἄνδρα δίκαιον
> ἔμμεναι, εἰ μείζω γε δίκην ἀδικώτερος ἕξει·
> ἀλλὰ τά γ' οὔ πω ἔολπα τελεῖν Δία μητιόεντα.
>
> Right now I myself would not want to be a just man among human beings, neither I nor a son of mine, since it is evil for a man to be just if the more unjust one will receive the greater justice. But I do not anticipate that the counselor Zeus will let things end up this way [yet]. (270–273)

Line 273 is crucial: West suggests that the interpretation of the enclitic πω here should be "yet",[38] translating "[o]nly I do not expect resourceful Zeus is bringing this to pass yet!".[39] The possibility therefore exists that Hesiod would not dissuade anyone from behaving in a hubristic fashion if circumstances dictated that everyone behaved in such a way. But he does not expect that this will come to pass in the near future: he and his putative son will act justly, live in accordance with good ἔρις, and work hard, since the times demand it, but he does not say anything to contradict his earlier view that there will come a time when 'Faustrecht' will become predominant. At that later period, no sensible man will act in a just fashion; but that is not to say that Hesiod would want to live in it.[40]

In order to assert the desirability of justice in his own time, Hesiod provides his description of the just and the unjust cities (225–247); in the former, the fields are fertile, women give birth, and prosperity flourishes, while in the latter the reverse obtains. There can be no doubt that the purpose of the two descriptions is to impel the audience toward justice.[41] Yet I would add that this does not contradict Hesiod's warnings of the eventual decline and destruction of the iron race: even though just cities are never blighted by Zeus, it is not necessarily the case that human beings will always be able to live up to the standard of justice that they postulate. To put it in another way, Hesiod states that Zeus causes just cities to flourish, but this does not mean that there will always be

38) Cf. LSJ s.vv. πω, οὔπω. Cf. West 1966, 323, with reference to Theogony 560. Verdenius 1985, 273, endorses the other interpretation, "ever". For an instance of οὔ πω in the *Works and Days* that supports the interpretation of West, see: ἥ τε δόμων ἔντοσθε φίλῃ παρὰ μητέρι μίμνει / οὔ πω ἔργ' εἰδυῖα πολυχρύσου Ἀφροδίτης (520–521). See, on the other hand, Hesiod's statement concerning his experience with boating: οὐ γάρ πώ ποτε νηί γ' ἐπέπλων εὐρέα πόντον, / εἰ μὴ ἐς Εὔβοιαν ἐξ Αὐλίδος (650–651), although it must be noted that here the word is used in conjunction with πότε (οὔ ποτε = "never"). Cf. 591 (μή πω); The Shield 10; Theogony 560.

39) West 1999, 45; Nagy 1985, 35.

40) For a different view of these lines, see Clay 2003, 81–99.

41) See, for example, Querbach 1985, 6: "The description of the Just and Unjust Cities (225–47), with its obvious similarities to the four-race myth in language and content, suggests a balanced, and even optimistic, view of the potentialities of human communities in Hesiod's own time. Past ages have illustrated that men can be either good or bad, just or violent, and their material well-being will depend upon that choice. Even if a complete return to the Golden age is impossible, a good approximation of it, as described in lines 225–37, can be achieved through practicing *dike*." Cf. Schmidt 1986, 96–118.

just cities.[42] Hesiod couches the choice in the here and now, a time when the fruits of justice are still obtainable – the parainetic value of the story of the two cities holds as yet, but it will not do so forever; it is only natural to aim for justice at present, even if this will not change the ultimate fate of humanity.

Moreover, while the description of the just city serves as a protreptic towards δίκη, Zeus' 30,000 watchers (248–269), the supposed remnants of the golden race, serve as a negative force dissuading the kings and Perses from ὕβρις; both they and Dike have Zeus' ear, and he punishes those who act in a lawless fashion.[43] Hesiod thereby claims that it is in the kings' interest to act in a just fashion:

> ταῦτα φυλασσόμενοι βασιλῆς ἰθύνετε μύθους
> δωροφάγοι, σκολιῶν δὲ δικέων ἐπὶ πάγχυ λάθεσθε.
>
> Bear this in mind, kings, and straighten your discourses, you gift-eaters, and put crooked judgments quite out of your minds. (263–264)

Once again, however, I would argue that this does not rule out a gradual decline into profligacy; there is no statement made that either the watchers or Dike will have any marked effect on the ultimate course that humanity will take, and it is Zeus himself who will in actual fact destroy the race of iron (180–181).[44]

Hesiod's is a poem about works and the proper days on which they should be carried out.[45] The idea of temporal appropriateness

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42) Although Hesiod states that Zeus never sends war to the just city (οὐδέ ποτ' αὐτοῖς / ἀργαλέον πόλεμον τεκμαίρεται εὐρύοπα Ζεύς, 228–229), cities will be sacked by their enemies in the later phases of the race of iron (ἕτερος δ' ἑτέρου πόλιν ἐξαλαπάξει, 189).

43) On the "fulfillment" of Dike, at least for the present time, see 217–218: δίκη δ' ὑπὲρ ὕβριος ἴσχει / ἐς τέλος ἐξελθοῦσα. Cf. 220–224; 256–269.

44) One might look to lines 284–285, which concern the relative fates of the families of the perjurer and the just man, to find a way out of the bind: τοῦ δέ τ' ἀμαυροτέρη γενεὴ μετόπισθε λέλειπται· / ἀνδρὸς δ' εὐόρκου γενεὴ μετόπισθεν ἀμείνων. This, however, seems to refer to the actions of the current batch of men, and need not interfere with the broader development of the myth. Each generation must strive to uphold justice on its own account.

45) It is worth iterating at this point that my contextualization here serves to meet on their own ground those who object to the inevitability of the decline of the iron race because of the tone of the remainder of the poem.

can be found throughout the second section of the *Works and Days*, which opens with the reference to the celestial signs for sowing and reaping at line 383:

> Πληιάδων Ἀτλαγενέων ἐπιτελλομενάων
> ἄρχεσθ' ἀμήτου, ἀρότοιο δὲ δυσομενάων.
>
> When the Atlas-born Pleiades rise, start the harvest – the plowing, when they set. (383–384)

There are appropriate times for gathering grapes (609–617), marriage (695–705), and opening a cask of wine (819–820).[46] There is a season for everything, and it is important not to attempt things inappropriate to each period. This idea of timeliness, of being in season, serves to augment Hesiod's censure of Perses. On our reading, which emphasizes the possibility of justice in the present phase of the iron race but denies that it will exist forever, Perses might be thought of as an untimely individual, a premature harbinger of the twilight of the iron race. The sins enumerated at the denouement of the account of the race take us back to the impasse between Hesiod and his brother – in the later phase of the race of iron brother is certainly not φίλος to brother, as before (… οὐδὲ κασίγνητος φίλος ἔσσεται, ὡς τὸ πάρος περ, 184). That earlier time (τὸ πάρος), the future's past, is Hesiod's present: Hesiod and his brother (κασίγνητος) exist at a period prior to the final throes of the iron race, and therefore ought to respect one another. Hesiod's rebuke to his brother consists in the fact that the time at which Hesiod and Perses are alive is not appropriate for fraternal discord; a living may still be obtained by working the soil and abstaining from ὕβρις. The decline will continue – it is unavoidable, and there is no hope for the iron race in the larger scheme of things – yet the power to determine one's own prosperity does, to a greater or lesser extent, exist for the present time, and this is where the dispensation of advice comes into play.[47]

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46) On this aspect of the *Works and Days*, see Jones 1984.

47) Similar thoughts concerning temporal appropriateness can be found throughout archaic literature, Solon's description of the phases of life being a prime example (Solon fr. 27 West). Much later writers have fallen upon similar strategies for dealing with their own position within history. Oswald Spengler, for example, with flamboyant lugubriousness summarized the needs of his age thus: "We are

Conclusion

The bind of the race of iron, as Hesiod describes it, is compound. First, there is no way in which Hesiod's fundamental lot may improve, since his nature has been defined by the very fact that he has been born into this particular race. Second, Hesiod's race will decline until its destruction at the hands of Zeus, although this might take a good amount of time. While I have stressed that the evidence for the role of the oral tradition in the formation of the poem hampers those who seek consistency within the *Works and Days*, I have also argued that there is no real contradiction between my interpretation of the myth of races and the parainesis found elsewhere in the poem. The ethical protreptic of the *Works and Days* towards justice and hard work remains firmly in place, and the criticism of Perses stays strong: by mistreating Hesiod, Perses is acting in accordance with the morality of the final phase of the iron race when brother will hate brother, but this is, as yet, untimely behavior. There is, for better or for worse, still a place for toil, justice, and for parainetic poetry in Hesiod's world.[48]

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civilized, not Gothic or Rococo, people; we have to reckon with the hard cold facts of a *late* life, to which the parallel is to be found not in Pericles' Athens but in Caesar's Rome"; Spengler 1926, 40–41 = Spengler 1922, 55. And again: "we have not *chosen* this time. We cannot help it if we are born as men of the early winter of full Civilization, instead of on the golden summit of a ripe Culture, in a Phidias or a Mozart time"; Spengler 1926, 44 = Spengler 1922, 61.

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