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Hesiodic Humanity: The Role of Human Beings in the *Theogony*

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Title: Hesiodic Humanity: The Role of Human Beings in the *Theogony*

An ancient poem attributed to the shepherd-poet Hesiod, the *Theogony* depicts the origins of the Greek pantheon and of the cosmos as imagined in Greek mythology. Compared to other well-known cosmogonies, such as the Book of Genesis, the *Theogony* has little to say about humans. The relative scarcity of comments on humanity follows from Hesiod's stated intention to sing the origins of gods, not humans, and one may surmise that Hesiod is simply uninterested in the affairs of humanity, at least within the context of this poem, and so depicts their exploits only inasmuch as they concern those of the gods. And while many critics have, explicitly or implicitly, asserted such, this conclusion is overhasty. A careful analysis of the structure of the *Theogony* reveals two parallel developments: with each generation, the gods become more anthropomorphic; simultaneously, the human race, whose existence the earlier parts of the poem mostly ignore, become more important and have more interactions with the divine. As a result of these developments, the distance between gods and humans shrinks as the poem progresses. I contend that this relates to a thematic undercurrent in the *Theogony*: that, as humans increasingly come to terms with the natural and psychological forces that the gods embody, humans become more godlike, and the power of the gods recedes. In arguing this, I refer to Freudian and Jungian psychoanalytic theories, as well as Richard Caldwell's psychoanalytic study of the *Theogony*, a study that compellingly elucidates the function of the gods within the poem but is comparatively quiet regarding human beings. The *Theogony* is a highly episodic work, and because of this, as well as questions concerning authorship, most scholars tend to consider the different episodes separately. But attending to the role of human beings in the poem, something frequently overlooked in Hesiodic scholarship, reveals a thematic structure for the *Theogony* that provides the poem with a distinct beginning, middle, and end.