

The Cuisine of Sacrifice among the Greeks

MARCEL DETIENNE

and

JEAN-PIERRE VERNANT

With Essays by

JEAN-LOUIS DURAND, STELLA GEORGOUDI,
FRANÇOIS HARTOG, AND JESPER SVENBRO



Translated by
PAULA WISSING

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS
Chicago and London

Marcel Detienne is directeur d'études at the Ecole pratique des Hautes Etudes, Paris. Among his earlier books, *The Creation of Mythology* was published in English translation by the University of Chicago Press in 1986.

Jean-Pierre Vernant is professor at the Collège de France. His previous books include *Myth and Thought among the Greeks* and *The Origins of Greek Thought*, both in English translation.

BL
795
.S23
D4713
1989

The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 60637

The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London

© 1989 by The University of Chicago

All rights reserved. Published 1989

Printed in the United States of America

98 97 96 95 94 93 92 91 90 89 5 4 3 2 1

First published in Paris as *La cuisine du sacrifice en pays grec*, © Editions Gallimard, 1979.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Detienne, Marcel.

[Cuisine du sacrifice en pays grec. English]

The cuisine of sacrifice among the Greeks / Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant; with essays by Jean-Louis Durand . . . [et al.]; translated by Paula Wissing.

p. cm.

Translation of: *La cuisine du sacrifice en pays grec*.

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-226-14351-1 (alk. paper).—ISBN 0-226-14353-8 (pbk.:

alk. paper)

1. Sacred meals—Greece. 2. Sacrifice—Greece. 3. Cults—Greece.

I. Vernant, Jean-Pierre. II. Title.

BL795.S23D4713 1989

292'.38—dc19

88-39143

CIP

∞The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

Contents

Translator's Note vii

1 Culinary Practices and the Spirit of Sacrifice 1

Marcel Detienne

2 At Man's Table: Hesiod's Foundation Myth of Sacrifice 21

Jean-Pierre Vernant

3 Greek Animals: Toward a Topology of Edible Bodies 87

Jean-Louis Durand

4 Ritual as Instrumentality 119

Jean-Louis Durand

5 The Violence of Wellborn Ladies: Women in the Thesmophoria 129

Marcel Detienne

6 The Feast of the Wolves, or the Impossible City 148

Marcel Detienne and Jesper Svenbro

7 Food in the Countries of the Sun 164

Jean-Pierre Vernant

8 Self-cooking Beef and the Drinks of Ares 170

François Hartog

9 Sanctified Slaughter in Modern Greece: The "Kourbânia" of the Saints 183

Stella Georgourdi

tion of sensate desire—a renunciation that the ego imposes on itself. “It is there we find one of the essential motives of the sacrifice, which from the beginning raises it above the magical vision of the world.”⁸⁰ The simplest forms of the sacrificial act reveal a new orientation of will in human action. Up to then, that is, in the earlier magical state, the ego still knew no barrier that it could not truly surpass on occasion. With the appearance of sacrifice, everything changes, for the most obscure or even the crudest of sacrificial acts implies something unprecedented: a movement of self-abandon. It is the intuition that any expansion, any increase of the forces of the ego, is tied to a corresponding limitation.⁸¹

In the conclusion of the *Essai* and in profound agreement with what Cassirer will write twenty years later, Mauss observes that everyone finds an advantage in sacrifice: the collectivity and individuals, the social norm, and above all, civilization.⁸² By means of sacrificial activity, the collectivity attains “this good, strong, serious, terrible character” that is one of the essential traits of any social personality. The fatherland, property, work, the human person, all are to be credited to sacrifice as a social phenomenon.⁸³ The asceticism within this institution enables the individual to discover a fixed center within, a singleness of will when confronted with the multiple and divergent flux of the pulsions of the sensations. The gift, the desire to give, and the oblation all confirm this orientation. It is then that the human being detaches himself to some extent from the objects of immediate desire. And this movement becomes broader and more elevated, from the fundamental forms of totemism to the enactment of animal sacrifice in the religions of the highly developed cultures with, as the ultimate expression giving sacrifice its true significance, the god who sacrifices himself—the figure that joins, for Cassirer as for Mauss, the mythology of the mysteries of Dionysus with the exemplary spirituality of the Christian mystery of the Eucharist.⁸⁴ Today, from a distance that is extended even more by the analyses published in this volume, it seems important to say that the notion of sacrifice is indeed a category of the thought of yesterday, conceived of as arbitrarily as totemism—decried earlier by Lévi-Strauss—both because it gathers into one artificial type elements taken from here and there in the symbolic fabric of societies and because it reveals the surprising power of annexation that Christianity still subtly exercises on the thought of these historians and sociologists who were convinced they were inventing a new science.⁸⁵

At Man's Table: Hesiod's Foundation Myth of Sacrifice

Jean-Pierre Vernant

TO determine the status of Greek sacrifice we have at our disposal a mythical account that, if fully analyzed, provides a valuable key to the mental system to which the ritual refers and the vast network of meanings that it bears. In an episode of the *Theogony*, some sequences of which are taken up again in *Works and Days*, Hesiod tells the story of how Prometheus, acting as Zeus' rival, works by fraud, lies, and trickery to achieve his own aims while thwarting those of the ruler of the gods. Now, the first result of this battle of wits between Titan and Olympian is the ritual distribution of the pieces of the sacrificed domestic animal (in this case a great ox led, slaughtered, and carved by Prometheus) to men (the meat and the entrails laden with fat, everything that can be eaten) and to gods (the bare bones consumed in the sacrificial fire with some fat and aromatics).¹ Explicitly expressed in lines 556–57, “From this it happens that on earth the human race burns white bones for the Immortals on altars exuding the perfume of incense,” the etiological value of this sequence of the myth has been recognized by all commentators. But its significance has been remarkably reduced. It has almost always been seen as the explanation of a particular and minor characteristic of the rite, the answer to a kind of paradox that the blood sacrifice, which is also a meal, would have posed for the religious conscience of the Greeks because of an incomprehensible detail. Sacrifice appeared as an offering to the gods to honor them and encourage their favor. Under these conditions, how can we explain that instead of setting the best part aside for them, men give the gods the inedible part of the animal, the scraps, as it were? By restricting the meaning of the first part of the text to this single point, we are forced to consider it more or less gratuitous and to misunderstand the connections with

The first half of this article appeared in a different translation entitled “Sacrificial and Alimentary Codes in Hesiod's Myth of Prometheus,” in *Myth, Religion, and Society: Structuralist Essays* by M. Detienne, L. Gernet, J.-P. Vernant and P. Vidal-Naquet. Ed. R. L. Gordon. (Cambridge University Press—Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1981).—TRANS.

the following sequences that give the myth its overall import. If this epic presenting the character Prometheus, his rivalry with Zeus, and his final failure, recounted by Hesiod in the long passage of the *Theogony* (507–616) devoted to the descendants of Iapetus, concerns sacrifice only incidentally and by chance, we are then led to concede that Hesiod arbitrarily chose Prometheus to bear the responsibility for sacrificial practice. Hesiod would not reveal the profound significance of this practice by placing it at the nexus of an elaborate theological system but would instead propose a circumstantial explanation by creating a fable as one would concoct a pretext to justify oneself after the fact. From this perspective it would be impossible to see what the relationship could be between the first act of the Promethean drama in the Hesiodic version and what follows—between the carving of the ox and the ritual allocation of its parts on the one hand, and the theft of fire in the second part and the creation of the first woman that concludes this tragedy on the other. Thus Hesiod would have stitched completely disparate elements together in the same text. To the traditional theme of the theft of fire he would have artificially connected an etiological myth intended to account for what he found strange in sacrificial practice and a story entirely of his own invention about the origins of woman that reflected his personal antifeminist “philosophy.” It would be as vain, then, to seek a coherent meaning in the myth as to hope to find some enlightenment there concerning the nature and function of sacrifice.

This position can no longer be maintained, not only because it arises from a conception of mythical thought that is now outmoded, but more specifically and also more concretely because the text contradicts it on all points. In his study of the *Theogony*, Hans Schwabl has shown that on the formal level the Promethean episode obeys strict compositional rules that give the entire passage an incontestable unity and make it a rigorously articulated whole.² This cohesion is no less strong on the level of the narrative content, since in the linking of the episodes Hesiod emphasizes the perfect continuity of the account and shows very clearly for each sequence its necessary dependence on the preceding one. It is because Zeus never forgets for an instant the trick Prometheus played on him by giving men the meat of the sacrificed animal that he decides henceforth to deny mortals his (heavenly) fire.³ It is because he sees the fire, secretly stolen by the Titan, burning in the midst of the humans that he counters this new fraudulent gift that men have received by offering them this third and last fraudulent gift, this “opposite of fire,” the first woman.⁴ The action obeys a flawless logic from beginning to end, following the thread of a drama whose successive stages are rigorously governed by the order of the nar-

ative. Finally, on the semantic level we have shown in a previous study⁵ that a very tight network of symbolic correspondences exists, so that if the elements are linked to each other in the linear sequence of the narration, they form together at the end a unique picture in which all the parts echo one another in a highly ordered arrangement.

On the diachronic level, the theft of fire plays a mediating role; by it and through it the link is made between the first act, Prometheus' cunning (*dolos*) in allocating the sacrificial parts, and the last, Zeus' craftiness (*dolos*) in giving men the first woman. This deed also brings about the reversal of the action and respective positions of the actors. In the first part of the story, the initiative and guile belong to Prometheus; Zeus appears to be the dupe.⁶ The Titan gives men gifts that delight them. After the theft of fire, everything is inverted. The initiative and cunning pass to the side of Zeus. Now it is he who “gives” to men, but the joy that the humans feel when presented with the divine gift is precisely the snare in which they will be caught and even, broadly speaking, the symbol of the unhappiness of the mortal condition. From this standpoint, the last episode appears not simply as the ineluctable consequence of what preceded it. As if in a mirror, it reflects all the preceding events, puts them into place, and organizes them. Because of it, they illuminate each other and take on their true meaning, which can be revealed only at the end of the whole adventure. It is necessary indeed for the “trap” of woman to have appeared in order for the true nature of the “trap” set for Zeus at the outset by Prometheus, when the Titan “fixes” the portions of the sacrificial victim so that men benefit from all the meat, to be revealed in all its ramifications. The good portion, over which the mortals congratulate themselves (as they do over the “beautiful evil” that Zeus grants them in the person of Woman), is revealed in reality as the bad. The ambush the Titan prepared to outwit Zeus backfires and ultimately redounds to the humans. Even fire, this fire stolen by Prometheus, despite its advantages, is a gift no less ambiguous than the first feminine creature, as it too is well adorned with dangerous seductive powers.⁷

In the texture of the narrative the sequences are too tightly knit, their symbolic values too enmeshed, for it to be possible to isolate them and treat each one separately. The myth must be taken for what it is, not an aggregate of heterogeneous episodes but a single story; and it is necessary to recognize that in this cohesive structure the relationships that unite the blood sacrifice, the Promethean fire, and the creation of woman cannot be the product either of pure chance or the gratuitous fantasy of the author. They respond to a necessary order that is the result of the very content of

the myth, of the function that Hesiod assigns it in the context of his *Theogony*. What is at issue in the conflict pitting the Titan's craftiness against the Olympian's faultless intelligence is, in the final analysis, the status of the human condition, the mode of existence characterizing humanity. Sacrificial practice is presented as the first result and most direct expression of the distance created between men and gods on the day that Prometheus started his road to rebellion. The myth connects the ritual of sacrifice to primordial events that have made men what they are, mortal creatures⁸ living on earth⁹ in the midst of countless ills,¹⁰ eating grain from the fields they have worked,¹¹ and accompanied by female spouses.¹² In other words, men have become a race of beings completely separated from those to whom at the outset they were very close, living together and sitting at the same tables to share the same meals¹³—the Blessed Immortals, residing in heaven and fed on ambrosia, toward whom now rises the smoke of sacrificial offerings.

The episode concerning the sacrifice is neither secondary nor supplementary. It is at the heart of the myth. It does not aim to explain a strange detail of the ritual, the cremation of the bones. In the distinction between the shares allocated to men and gods in the sacrifice, it stresses the difference that now separates them, their membership in two distinct races. Just as this former proximity was mythically expressed by the image of a community of guests enjoying a banquet together, the eventual separation is reflected in the contrast between two types of eating. The difference between diets found at the very heart of the ritual seeks, however, to establish a kind of contact and communication between the two separated races, a bond that leads, as much as possible, to building a bridge between the earth and heaven.

The issue of food, so pronounced in the myth, has multiple echoes. Sacrifice is presented as a meal in which meat is eaten, but this consumption of fleshly food obeys a whole series of restrictions and constraints. First, it is limited to some animal species and excludes others. Second, the killing, butchering, carving, preparation, and consumption of the meat follow precise rules. Finally, there is a religious intentionality to the meal. It aims to honor the gods by inviting them to take part in a feast that is thereby at least theoretically their own, a *dais theôn*, at which they make themselves present in some manner and the offering of which they can either accept or reject.¹⁴ In this sense as an alimentary rite sacrifice is not limited to establishing the conditions that authorize the slaughter of an animal for food and make it legal or even an act of piety for men to consume its flesh. Because it is directed toward the gods and claims to include

them with the group of guests in the solemnity and joy of the celebration, it evokes the memory of the ancient commensality when, seated together, men and gods made merry day after day at shared meals. However, if in its intent sacrifice hearkens back to these far-off times of the golden age when, sharing the same food, men still lived "like gods," far from all evils, work, disease, old age, and women,¹⁵ it is no less true that sacrifice is a reminder that these blessed times when men and gods sat down together to feast are forever ended. The ritual sets the incorruptible bones aside for the gods and sends them, consumed by the flames, on high in the form of fragrant smoke and gives men the meat of an already lifeless animal, a piece of dead flesh, so that they may satisfy for a moment their constantly awakening hunger. Normally, meat cannot be eaten except on the occasion of a sacrifice and by following its rules. The presence of the gods sanctions this feast of fleshly food, but only to the extent that what truly belongs to the gods is set aside for them: the very life of the animal, released from the bones with the soul at the moment the victim falls dead and gushing forth in the blood splattering the altar—in short, those parts of the animal that, like the aromatics with which they are burned, escape the putrefaction of death. By eating the edible pieces men, even as they reinvigorate their failing strength, recognize the inferiority of their mortal condition and confirm their complete submission to the Olympians whom the Titan believed he could dupe with impunity when he established the model of the first sacrifice. The alimentary rite that brings men into contact with the divine underscores the distance that separates them. Communication is established by a religious procedure that in reminding men of the Promethean fault emphasizes the insurmountable distance between men and gods. It is the very function of the myth, as Hesiod tells it, to reveal the origins and dire consequences of this situation.

In this perspective the analysis of the Hesiodic account confirms and extends the conclusions that Jean Casabona, working from a completely different viewpoint, had drawn from his research on the Greek sacrificial vocabulary.¹⁶ Recalling that for us sacrifice and butchering belong to different semantic zones, he noted that among the Greeks matters were completely different. The same vocabulary encompasses the two domains, from Homer to the end of the classical age. Ancient Greek has no other terms to convey the idea of slaughtering an animal to butcher it than those referring to sacrifice or killing for the gods. *Hiereuō* can be translated in the one way as well as the other. In Homer *hiereion* refers to the animal both as "sacrificial victim" and as "animal to be butchered"; in contrast to *sphagion*, *hiereion* conveys the sense of the victim whose flesh will be eaten.

The term simultaneously evokes sacrifice and butchering. Lastly, *thuō*, which eventually prevailed as the general term referring to the totality of the sacrificial ceremony and never ceased to convey the memory of burnt offerings and fragrant smoke, applies both to the rite of slaughtering the animal and the fleshly feast that follows it. It is found associated with terms meaning "to feast, to eat well."

By distinguishing, in the body of the ritually slaughtered animal, between two and only two parts,¹⁷ which are sharply contrasted because they are opposites from the standpoint of their food value—in other words, by treating the sacrifice as a type of eating characteristic of man as distinct from the gods—Hesiod fashions this first sequence of the Promethean myth within the lines of traditional religious thought. Far from innovating on this point by forcing the meanings of the terms or quibbling about widespread notions, his account is firmly supported by the semantic field of the sacrificial vocabulary and can be substantiated by ordinary linguistic usage.

1. *The Quarrel over the Portions*

Whoever wishes to understand the form of Greek sacrifice that pertains to the consumption of food must therefore take Hesiod's account completely seriously. He must keep to the text as closely as possible, discounting nothing, and examine both the similarities and the differences between the two versions given in the *Theogony* and *Works and Days*.

First of all, how does the Promethean episode fit into each poem? And how may this context clarify the status of the sacrificial rite? In the *Theogony* the situation is clear. The work is entirely devoted to the origins, birth, battles, and victory of Zeus, his achievement of a sovereignty that unlike the preceding reign succeeds in establishing the foundations of a definitively assured, unshakable, and permanent power. Zeus' conquest of the celestial kingship not only means, as the text emphasizes on three occasions, that everything is set in place for the gods with a strict distribution of honors, functions and privileges among them;¹⁸ along with the monarch who has instituted it, the ordered arrangement of the entire cosmos is henceforth maintained as immutable and intangible.

In an account where everything happens on the level of the gods and between gods, there is no place for an anthropogony in the strict sense of the word. We learn how the gods came to be, not men. The *Theogony* does not tell us whether Gaea, the Earth, gave birth to men as she did to the first divine powers, or whether they were created by Zeus and the Immortals, or born from the ashes of the stricken Titans, as the Orphic tradition

has it. Men are nonetheless present in the narrative; they suddenly appear in a byway, in an episode that the poet devotes to the offspring of Iapetus, or more precisely his son, Prometheus. Here is no human genesis, as one might expect in a creation poem. The text speaks of humans as if they are beings that were already there, living with the gods and mingling with them.¹⁹ Prometheus' act does not bring men to the existence they already possess but reaffirms the status imparted to them at the heart of an organized universe; it defines their mortal condition in contrast to that of the Blessed Immortals. This positioning of humanity, this delineation of the ways of living that are appropriate to it and make it a separate race occurs by means of an allocation between men and gods of what is due each of them. At Zeus' demand, or at least with his agreement, Prometheus is responsible for bringing about this decisive apportionment; the procedure that he employs to carry out this task is precisely the carving and the distribution of the parts of the sacrificial victim.²⁰ The division of the ox slaughtered by the son of Iapetus and the creation, by his efforts, of two separate shares intended for gods and men determine the cleavage between the two races. The division of the animal both provokes and reflects the opposition between the two respective parties. The distance separating mortals from Immortals is begun in sacrifice and perpetuated by sacrifice. On the lines separating the different portions taken from the victim is projected the boundary between the immutable youth of the Olympians, masters of heaven, and this ephemeral form of existence that men on earth must assume to become who they are.

Thus humanity was made into what it is following a division analogous to the one over which Zeus presided with respect to the gods after he acceded to the throne, when he established the domain and attributes for each one.²¹ But among the gods the division follows two modalities that stand in sharp contrast. In the case of his enemies and rivals for divine sovereignty, the Titans and Typhon, the distribution of honors is governed by violence and coercion.²² Banished to Tartarus, the defeated gods are thrown out of the game. Shorn of all honor (*atimoi*), they are excluded from the organized world. Among the Olympians and their allies, on the other hand, the allocation is made amid harmony and mutual consent.²³ What of the distribution that gave men their status? It is the result neither of brutal violence nor mutual agreement. It was not imposed by force or decided by common consent. It operates according to a procedure that is fundamentally ambiguous, contradictory, and rigged. On the one hand, violence is concealed by its opposite: smiles, praises, politeness, and feigned reverence;²⁴ on the other, the contract and the rules of the game

function only as subterfuges that mask the ways the adversary is manipulated in spite of himself. Instead of the open warfare that divided the Titans and Olympians there is a muted conflict, a test of cleverness and duplicity, in which the rival is quietly defeated by being caught in his own trap. Instead of the loyal and trusted agreement that governed the allocation among victorious allies, there is deceit, a double game in which the words uttered in broad daylight always conceal a treacherous ulterior motive. This untrustworthy and contorted procedure corresponds to the equivocal character of the status of men in the relationships which bind them to the gods even as they separate them. For Zeus, men are not adversaries of such high caliber that it would be necessary to remove them once and for all by means of an all-out war. Nor are they peers who must be tactfully managed in an alliance by an equitable sharing of privileges. Like all mortal creatures, like the animals, they are on a different level from the gods, at a distance, alien to the divine sphere. But alone among mortal creatures and unlike the animals, their way of living involves a constant reference to the supernatural powers, a relationship peculiar to them alone. No city, no human life exists that is not linked by organized worship to the divine world and does not establish a kind of community with it. In the divine sphere it is Prometheus who exhibits the ambiguity of the human condition, as separate as it is close to the divine, both external and related to it. With respect to Zeus his position is equivocal on all levels. Though a Titan, he has not gone back to his brothers' clan to fight the Olympian in the war among the gods. He is not the enemy of Zeus, but according to Aeschylus by his plotting he himself ensured the Olympian's triumph. Nor will he be forever banished from the world, consigned at the end to the depths of Tartarus. For all that, however, he is not a faithful and reliable ally. At the very heart of the ordered universe over which Zeus presides, he stands as a rival, embodying even in the circle of the Olympian divinities an opposing point where is expressed, in the form of a claim or even rebellion, a sort of complicity with everything that the world contains in contrast to the gods—negative, gratuitous suffering, inexplicable and arbitrary misfortune. This opposition is all the more dangerous because it takes place on the very ground where Zeus sees himself as unsurpassable: that of intelligence, cleverness, foresight, of that "knowledge" of which men, for their part, claim to have their share. Prometheus uses the resources of a fertile and farseeing mind in order to favor the humans at the gods' expense. He seeks to remove the ills inseparable from the human condition and obtain benefits for them that the gods have kept as their privilege.²⁵ If he secretly undermines Zeus' plans, including the mission

with which the latter had entrusted him, it is because he aims, by reducing the distance between men and gods as much as possible, to make men into beings that in some way are his equals, truly Promethean creatures who will be neither completely separate, distant, inferior, and subordinate, as Zeus wishes them to be, nor completely identical, near, equal, and gifted, as the Blessed Immortals are among themselves. Men would be situated midway between, in an intermediate position that recalls his own mediating function, his ambiguous role of hostile ally, rival accomplice, freed bondsman, pardoned criminal, reconciled and redeemed rebel.

In the episode of the *Theogony* the Titan Prometheus, close enough to humanity to wish to bring it closer to the gods, represents a subverting of the Olympian order. This order has envisioned for the particular category of beings that is humanity (with whom the Titan is on special terms) fatigue, loss of strength, pain, disease, and death—in other words, all misfortune, which constitutes the radical negation of the divine state. If Prometheus had prevailed in this battle of wits waged to separate men and gods, sacrifice would commemorate men's access to this nonmortal form of existence to which men cannot help but aspire. Prometheus' failure not only makes the sacrificial rite into an act symbolizing the complete segregation of the two races, it gives this rupture the character of an irremediable and justified fall whose justice mortals acknowledge every time they sacrifice according to the Promethean mode and enter into communication with the higher powers.

*

Indeed, the context and some details of the text in Hesiod's account of the series of misfortunes unleashed by Prometheus find their full justification on a theological level. Paradoxically, Prometheus is described as good, benevolent (*eus*).²⁶ But the benevolence he displays toward men is only the other side, the visible obverse of his secret hostility toward Zeus. The partiality (*heterozēlōs*, l. 544) he shows in his allocation of the meat reflects his desire to subvert the distributive order embodied by Zeus the sovereign. The plots he contrives in carrying out the arbiter's tasks entrusted to him are the expression of his deep-seated rivalry with Zeus (*erizeto boulas*, 534). Humanity's fall is thus directly connected with competition, jealousy, and quarrelsomeness—in a word, with *eris*, that sinister daughter of Night who, because of Prometheus, has insidiously slipped into the ethereal world of the gods of Olympus. Now in this world *eris* is foreign. More exactly, with Zeus as king, *eris* should have vanished. Although this world was the result of an open battle, the victory of the son of Cronus has not only put an end to conflict but has consigned the period of the conflicts

between the gods to a time predating the Olympian order, just as it has banished the enemy powers to a space outside the realm of the Immortals.²⁷ A passage of the *Theogony* is clear on the subject; if any conflict and discord (*eris kai neikos*) arise among the Blessed Ones, a procedure has been established to dispatch the guilty party without delay or debate to the reaches beyond the divine domain. Deprived of awareness, breath, and life, wrapped in a deathlike sleep, he is excluded from the council and the banquets where the Immortals feast.²⁸

As the narrative of an *eris* between a god and Zeus, the entire Promethean episode introduces into the plot of the *Theogony* the tale of a rivalry that is paradoxical, unlike others, and essentially concerning creatures other than the gods. Compared to the quarrel between the Titans and the Olympians, the difference is obvious. Promethean *eris* is not frank hostility or open war. It seeks no power and does not claim to usurp Zeus' place. It does not appear prior to his victory, at the foundation of order, when the honors were distributed. This *eris* does not question the Olympian's sovereignty, but in a surreptitious way attempts to bend it from within. And it does not resemble the other *eris* mentioned in the *Theogony* as occurring among the Immortals, whose rule, already firmly established and organized in divine society, is settled from the first by a quasi-judicial procedure of expelling the guilty one. Promethean *eris* does not appear after the foundation of the order or prior to it. It seems to occur mythically at the same time as the foundation of order, coextensive with the distributive tasks undertaken by Zeus. More exactly, it coincides with a very particular aspect of these tasks, with something that does not fit and raises a problem because it involves equivocal, disconcerting creatures whose status could only be the result of a lopsided compromise—a rough and ready arrangement at the outcome of a contest between divine adversaries who have opposed one another point by point, each blocking the projects of the other in turn until the final result is achieved. Certainly, at the end of the match, Zeus' will triumphs. But to prevail it must follow the path laid out by the conflict with Prometheus, accepting new stakes with each hand and keeping track of the points scored in favor of men by the Titan in his cleverness—points that Zeus, unable to simply make disappear, must turn against men.

This analysis explains the skewed character of the Promethean episode, which forms a parenthesis within the developmental line of the *Theogony*. It is a double parenthesis, which appears first on the level of the genealogical exposition and then on the succession of divine events. In line 337, Hesiod begins to relate the lineage of the Titans, whose names he has

already given in the order of their birth running (for the males) from Oceanus to Cronus—from eldest to youngest—by way of Coeus, Crios, Hyperion, and Iapetus. In this way we learn who were the children of Oceanus, Hyperion, Crios, and Coeus. But beginning with line 453, where the lineage of Cronus appears instead of Iapetus', the genealogical account, via Zeus' birth, connects with the account of mythical events forming the second set of legends of divine succession (the first set contained the emasculation of Uranus and the establishment of Cronus as king) and goes into the central theme of the conflicts over the sovereignty of heaven (the struggle between Zeus and Cronus, the Olympians against the Titans). Cronus swallows his children so that none of them will take his place on the throne. Zeus escapes his father's voracity. First he makes Cronus cough up those he has swallowed. Then he delivers the Cyclopes from their bonds, and they give him the instrument of his victory, lightning, "on which Zeus henceforth relies in order to reign over mortals and Immortals" (506). It is at this point that Hesiod interrupts the narrative of Zeus' battles to return to the genealogy with the lineage of Iapetus, which normally should have appeared after those of the Titans older than Cronus. But in reality the primary function of Iapetus' genealogy is to introduce the account of the *eris* that pits Prometheus against Zeus. This *eris* is at the periphery both of the battles for sovereignty (it has nothing to do with the battles of the Titans) and of the organization of the divine world under Zeus' reign (since this reign excludes *eris*). Thus its logical place in the account is neither clearly before nor clearly after Zeus' victory. It is located to the side, at the periphery, just as the status of the human race in the *Theogony* appears external and foreign to the great conflict over the possession of power that split the world of the gods. Indeed there is not the slightest allusion in the poem to human existence under the reign of Cronus. The Promethean sequence precedes the florid narrative of the war against the Titans, the triumph of Zeus, and the distribution of honors. Positioned between the liberation of the Cyclopes and the gift of lightning that precede it, and the liberation of the Hundred Arms signifying the Olympian victory, which immediately follows, this parenthesis appears in a context where Zeus' reign appears assured even before the details of the struggle have been the subject of a real narrative.

The scene takes place in Mecone, the ancient name for Sicily. Therefore we know the exact earthly and human place that was the arena of the match but not the precise moment it occurred in the the divine chronology. In other words, to the extent that the confrontation between the two divinities concerns the nature of the relations between men and gods in-

stead of divine society itself, Promethean *eris* operates on a temporal axis that does not exactly match that of the gods. The two temporal orders seem to correspond in the account, but exact congruence is impossible. Similarly, Promethean *eris*, unlike the Titans' and the juridical *eris* of the Olympians, brings to the divine sphere a dimension of existence, a quality of being that is too closely linked to the human for it to be perfectly integrated into the hierarchical order of the divine powers.

*

The drama of the *eris*, in the *Theogony* directed toward and finally reaching men by way of the gods, is played out in *Works and Days* on Boeotian soil with no intermediaries between Hesiod and his brother Perses.

The parallels between the contexts of each account are more developed than is first apparent. In the *Theogony*, the Promethean hoax concerning the parts of the sacrificed animal had been introduced by *gar*, "for," which connected the episode that is the source of man's misfortune directly with the preceding line relating Prometheus' *eris* toward Zeus. In *Works and Days*, the version of the Promethean theme also opens with a *gar*, which this time relates to the lesson that Hesiod has just given his brother on the occasion of the *eris* that divides them. Their *klēros*, their family inheritance, has been divided between them. This division is not the result of violence or brute force, as when one makes off with enemy loot in a war. Nor is it the result of an amicable agreement between the two brothers, as it should have been. To get more than his share Perses stirred up quarrels and dissension (*neikea kai dērin*). He brought the affair before the judgment of the kings of Thespieae, who in principle represent the distributive justice of Zeus the sovereign. But bribed by presents, the kings did not decide equitably. They gave a twisted sentence, a biased opinion. Favoring the party in the wrong, they divided the shares unequally, giving to one much of what belonged to the other, in the same spirit of partiality that, ironically, Zeus resented in Prometheus in the *Theogony*. The analogy between the two situations, divine and human, introducing the Promethean myth in each work with the sad consequences involved for mortals, appears obvious. This is not all. Hesiod does not stop with reminding his brother of the quarrel the latter had sought with him and of the fraudulent distribution he was able to obtain at Hesiod's expense. He widens the scope of this private conflict to the dimensions of universal justice and order, and finds on it what can be termed a veritable theology of *eris*, insofar as Night's daughter has stamped all of human existence with her seal. And this theology opens *Works and Days* with an explicit allusion to the *Theogony*, which it takes up and refines in the chapter on *eris*.

From the gods' perspective, in fact, *eris* appeared unique. The only example the Immortals knew was the violent fight during which Zeus triumphed over his rivals; his victory banished it from divine society.²⁹ But the moment matters are viewed from the human standpoint, the picture changes. Then there is no longer one *eris* but two, and this duplication of the daughter of Night corresponds to the omnipotence she exerts over men's lives, to her constant presence for good as well as for evil. In her contrasted, doubled, and ambiguous form, *eris* is consubstantial to the human condition. The bad *eris* already has two sides, just as there are two sorts of evil disputes among men: war with a foreign enemy on the battlefield, and discord within the community in the public square.³⁰ The first relies on the force of arms, the second sets tongues wagging and guile in motion.³¹ However, whether they utilize force or guile, both have the same goal: to lay a hand on the loot, to take a part of the wealth at another's expense by stripping him of what is rightly his. Ill-gotten gains are short-lived. Zeus himself hastens to award the guilty the hard retribution for their crimes,³² just as he squelched the brutal force of the Titans and punished the fraudulent ruse of Prometheus. This bad *eris*, extinct among the gods, punished among mortals, is not loved by men. If they honor it, says Hesiod, it is against their will, compelled by the decisions of the Immortals (1.15).

But before giving birth to this divisive *eris*, which the divine will has given man as companion against his will, Night had given birth to another one, similar but with a different nature, whose praises the wise man must sing. This *eris* inspires any man who sees abundance thrive in the fields and house of a neighbor who has worked harder than he to emulate that neighbor. From his luminous ethereal heights Zeus established this competitive *eris*, this zeal for work, as the foundation here below of any fairly-gotten wealth. He buried it deep in the roots of the earth (*gaie*)³³ where men live and from which they draw their subsistence. The son of Cronus wanted men to find the way to wealth by this *eris*, according to the order that he himself established. So there is no way for mortal man to escape *eris*, which completely bounds his life. There is only the choice of the good over the bad. It is not by idling away the hours talking in the agora, meddling in disputes, and avoiding agricultural labor (*ap' ergou*) that Perses can hope to manage his affairs.³⁴ If he is to have the means to live (*bios*), that is, the fruit of Demeter (*Dēmēteros akte*)³⁵ that Gaea gives to men in the necessary quantity when the earth is cultivated, he must devote himself to the task—water the furrows with his sweat, and compete with others in the work. How could it be otherwise? On the one hand, Zeus makes

men struggle to atone for the gains obtained by violence or deceit, the gains obtained by bad *eris*; on the other hand, he does not want them to acquire the wealth he concedes to them, these riches concealed in the earth that give them life (*bios*), without labor (*kai aergon eonta*),³⁶ without doing so through the good *eris*.

Once upon a time, however, during the Golden Age, things were different. The earth needed no plowing or sowing for the nourishing grains to sprout with such great bounty that neither destruction by war nor theft by stealth—no *eris* of any kind—had any place here below or in the heavens. People could live and eat without effort.³⁷ But from the moment Zeus found himself tricked by the wily Prometheus, the gods have hidden men's livelihood from them, burying it in the depths of the soil.³⁸ Since that time human existence is as we see it today: completely locked into a double struggle. Men are endlessly torn in two directions: mercilessly punished by the gods if they chose the bad *eris* in an attempt to avoid the harsh effort of labor, or shackled by the chain of painful toil if they chose the good one in hopes of peacefully enjoying honestly gotten riches.

*

The two versions of the Promethean fraud echo and illuminate one another—one, located in the *Theogony* within the framework of the divine epic having consequences that concern men only indirectly, and the other in *Works and Days*, directly inspired by Hesiod's own bitter experience of his quarrel with his brother. If men's lives, unlike those of the gods, cannot avoid *eris*, it is because the mortal condition finds its origin and *raison d'être* in the *eris* that pitted Prometheus against Zeus. Inversely, if Prometheus holds an equivocal position in divine society as the founder of a sacrificial rite whose ultimate consequence is to remove men from the gods and deliver them to Night's progeny, it is because the Titan's affinity with humanity is expressed first of all in the nocturnal *eris* that he stirs up in his rebellion against Zeus even in the luminous world of Olympus. Sacrifice itself, with its delicate equilibrium, is a response to this tension between two competing poles. As the central act of worship it links men with gods, but it does so by separating their respective shares. Men cannot take more than what they were given at the end of the trial in which the two rival divinities confronted each other. By conforming to the ritual order in the fleshly meal, which reflects and recalls this first *eris* between the two powers of the beyond, sacrifice—by the same right as its mythical founder Prometheus and with an ambiguity comparable in all points—takes on a mediating role between gods and men. It serves as an intermediary between the two races. But if sacrifice makes communication be-

tween them possible, it is by means of an allocation that sets them against each other. It unites them, not so they may be rejoined (as Prometheus wished, according to the *Theogony*; as was indeed the case in the Golden Age, according to *Works and Days*) but to confirm the necessary distance between them.

** STOP READING **
2. Ox and Wheat

The comparison of the two accounts is enlightening on yet another point. *Works and Days* does not repeat the first sequence, which the *Theogony* had broadly developed, of the cutting and sham distribution of the pieces of the sacrificial meat. It only mentions it as if it were a well-known fact, with an allusion to Zeus' anger "when Prometheus with his crooked schemes had duped him."³⁹ Then it immediately proceeds to the second episode of the myth, the theft of fire. Thus we may wonder if the version in *Works and Days*, with its account of the divine rivalry from which the current state of humanity is derived, has dropped the issue of food, which seemed so fundamental in the *Theogony*. As we said, sacrifice, the model for which was established by the Promethean deception, is capable of establishing and expressing the distance between gods and men because it involves completely opposite types of food for each party. Why does Hesiod not refer more explicitly in *Works and Days* to the allocation that by establishing the first sacrifice not only began the whole process of decline but continues, by its twofold nature as religious rite and way of eating, to symbolize the ambiguity of a human condition, a state that finds men connected with the gods by cult and separated from them by everything that their portion of sacrificial meat unfortunately represents?

In reality, the alimentary dimension of the Promethean myth is no less pronounced in *Works and Days* than in the *Theogony*. The theme of a food reserved for man and intimately connected to his specific form of existence is central to each of the two accounts. The theme has only changed its locus. And this shift, which can be explained if we consider the different perspective of each text, sheds light on some of the essential aspects of the myth in its relation to sacrifice. In *Works and Days* the products of the cultivated soil—Demeter's wheat, or grain food—occupy a position analogous to that of the sacrificed ox—pieces of meat, or fleshly food—in the *Theogony*. Indeed, for the author of the *Erga* (i.e., *Works and Days*)⁴⁰ man is considered in his capacity as farmer. Therefore he is viewed first of all as someone "who eats bread." For the author of the *Theogony* man, seen from the viewpoint of the divinity, is the one who eats the part of the sacrificial victim offered to the gods that is ritually reserved for him. But in both