

## What does ἐλπίς mean in the Works and Days of Hesiod?

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Hesiod introduces his poem with the story of Pandora. Pandora is a woman that had been given by Zeus as a punishment for humanity. It was not the human fault, but it was Prometheus, the demigod who had stolen back the fire. Immediately Zeus made an evil for men in return for fire, for the famous cripple [that is Hephaestus] moulded out of earth the likeness of a reverent maiden through the will of Zeus<sup>1</sup>. From Pandora are the destructive rale and tribes of women, who dwell as a great misery among mortal men, as suitable companions not of deadly poverty but of surfeit<sup>2</sup>. Women are frequently revealed, in Greek culture, as both alluring and wasteful, as tricky but necessary<sup>3</sup>. Pandora is a dólos aípus amêchanos, an unexpected trap from which there can no escape<sup>4</sup>. The myth of Pandora is invoked to account for the tough conditions of human life<sup>5</sup>.

Pandora was given a closed jar, full of gifts, yet it should be kept closed. But as a matter of curiosity, Pandora disclosed the jar, when she opened the jar, many things flew from the jar where the good things returned back to the Gods, the evil hovered around human beings while only hope remained. It could be said that the moralizing conclusion of Pandora's disclosure of the jar's lid is that it is no way possible to escape the intention of Zeus<sup>6</sup>.

Since hope ἐλπίς was the only thing that remained in the edge of Pandora's jar, many questions arise here, what was Hesiod's intention?

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<sup>1</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, Edited by M.L. West, Oxford, 1966, vv. 533-75.

<sup>2</sup> Hes. *Theog.*, vv. 591-3.

<sup>3</sup> Kirk, G.S., *The Nature of Greek myths*, Penguin Books, LTD, England, 1980, p. 62.

<sup>4</sup> Detienne, Marcel & Vernant, Jean Pierre, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, Translated from the French by, Lloyd, Janet, Harvester Pr. Sussex, 1974, pp. 44-5.

<sup>5</sup> Buxton, Richard, *Imaginary Greece, the Contexts of Mythology*, Cambridge University Pr., 1995, pp. 78-9.

<sup>6</sup> Kirk, (1980), p. 142.

## What does ἐλπίς mean in the Works and Days of Hesiod?

What was hope for him? This is what I will try to investigate through analyzing the main features of the Works and Days text.

As a matter of fact, hope is a self-conscious allegory in Works and Days<sup>7</sup>. The poet, elaborately, created a lovely figurative form when he personified the hope and portrayed a lively dramatic scene. He personified ἐλπίς here as a human alone in an unbreakable ἀρρήκτοισι room or place δόμοισιν<sup>8</sup>. Starting with the word alone or only μούνη and postponing the verb to the next verse, makes a sense of, it was the only unbreakable place in the jar. The verb remained ἔμμυνε in the imperfect shows the length of the event:

μούνη δ' αὐτόθι Ἐλπίς ἐν ἀρρήκτοισι δόμοισιν  
ἔνδον ἔμμυνε πίθου ὑπὸ χεῖλεσιν, οὐδὲ θύραζε<sup>9</sup>

**Only hope remained in the spot in an unbreakable room  
in the edge of the jar and did not fly.**

If so, the question here should be, why hope? And what does hope mean for Hesiod? and why does it remain in the jar? Hesiod gave no answer and so kept it ambiguous<sup>10</sup>. This opens a debate. Is it kept for humanity? or Is It kept away from humanity? If it is kept for humanity, does this mean it is good or evil? and if it is kept away from humanity, the same question arises. At the first look of the prementioned verses (vv. 96-7) it sounds like it is kept away from humanity, but with more understanding to the whole story we have to take into consideration that it was a gift to humanity. This, consequently, makes the ἐλπίς kept safe for humanity in an unbreakable room ἀρρήκτοισι δόμοισιν.

If ἐλπίς did not fly what are the other things that flew? In verse 100 it starts with ἄλλα = but and continues to describe the evil things, the miseries or ruins λυγρὰ, that remained with humans.

ἄλλα δὲ μυρία λυγρὰ κατ' ἀνθρώπους ἀλάληται<sup>11</sup>.

**But countless miseries hovered around humans.**

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<sup>7</sup> Kirk, (1980), p. 141.

<sup>8</sup> Hesiod, Works and Days, Edited by M. L. West, Oxford, 1966, v.96.

<sup>99</sup> Hes. Ibid, vv. 96-7.

<sup>10</sup> Vernant, Jean-Pierre, Myths and Society in Ancient Greece, Translated from French by Janette Lloyd, Harvester Pr., LTD, London 1980, p.184.

<sup>11</sup> Hes. Works and Days, v. 98.

Does this mean that those λυγρὰ (miseries, ruins) are the things that flew from Pandora's jar? Maybe the verb ἀλλάσσεται which means "to hover or to go around" suggests that these are the other things that went out from the jar as it is consistent with the idea of understanding Hesiod's purpose from the story (vv.90-2) "since before this time the races of men had been living... free from all evil...free from all wearing sickness...".

It deserves mentioning that Homer, in the Iliad, refers to two jars, one for evil and the other for good. Zeus gives the two jars to human beings and now the man has both and he can deal with both<sup>12</sup>. Hays thinks that Pandora's jar is a collective jar of both good and evil, where the good things returned back to the gods, the evil hovered around human beings and only hope remained<sup>13</sup>. If so, what, then is the nature of hope ἐλπίς in Hesiod's Works and Days?

Most critics think that ἐλπίς then has double meaning. It could be evil, good or both since the Hesiodic version has none of limpidity<sup>14</sup>. However the vital fact is that myths in Greek literature exist for the most part only in brief allusion, with certain exceptions without setting it out in full<sup>15</sup>. In the light of this fact we should not expect an explicit meaning of ἐλπίς, but we should extract it from the text. ἐλπίς could be understood as "expectation of good" or "expectation of bad" and this explains why Pandora tried to close the jar again before it escapes<sup>16</sup>. The meaning of ἐλπίς is meant, I think to be neutral in order to be intuitive or distinguished according human behavior. According to Vernant hope in such an assumption as expectation of good or bad makes it possible for human to live out this ambiguous, two-sided life<sup>17</sup>. In the light of this concept Snell says that the notion that man has two roads before him, and the behest not to take the one which is easy and populous, but that which is narrow and deserted = this idea derives ultimately from the

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<sup>12</sup> Hom. Iliad, 2 Vols, with an English Translation by Murray, A.T., Revised by Wyatt, L.C.L., 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Harvard University Press, 1999, XXIV, vv. 527-33.

<sup>13</sup> Hays, Heber M., Notes on the Works and Days of Hesiod, Chicago, the University of Chicago Libraries, 1918, p. 206.

<sup>14</sup> Buxton, (1980), p.212.

<sup>15</sup> Kirk, (1980), p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> Hes. Works and Days, v. 98.

<sup>17</sup> Vernant, Jean-Pierre, (1980), pp. 184-5.

## What does ἐλπῖς mean in the Works and Days of Hesiod?

Works and Days of Hesiod. In Hesiod the narrow path leads to virtue, the broad avenue to vice<sup>18</sup>.

It seems to me that hope in Works and Days appears as a persistent underlying thread of its unity. Indeed the entire sequence of myths in Hesiod – Prometheus, the sacrifice, the theft of the fire, the creation of women, the punishment of Prometheus, the five races of men, the hawk and the nightingale – leave us with a feeling that evil things might improve if only we learned to avoid evil and seek well. This shows Hesiod’s optimistic view of ἐλπῖς as an expectation of good. Whosoever takes advice is, as Adkins indicates “ἔσθλός” good man, but the man who doesn’t is useless “ἀχρεῖος”<sup>19</sup>. Hesiod entreats his brother Perses to be virtuous by running him into the path of justice, then directing him to work as the sole legitimate mean of gaining a livelihood<sup>20</sup>. The way of life which in the main theme of the Works and Days may be summed up in the advice “do right and work hard”.

This call for work couldn’t come from a pessimistic person but from an optimistic one who dreams of hope as an expectation of good and sees the importance of waking up early to take benefit of every moment of the day. It is what we can see in one of his nicest passage about work and its importance:

ὄρθρου ἀνιστάμενος, ἵνα τοι βίος ἄρκιος εἴη.  
ἠὼς γὰρ ἔργοιο τρίτην ἀπομείρεται αἶσαν,  
ἠὼς τοι προφέρει μὲν ὁδοῦ, προφέρει δὲ καὶ ἔργου,  
ἠὼς, ἥτε φανείσα πολέας ἐπέβησε κελεύθου  
ἀνθρώπους πολλοῖσι τ’ ἐπὶ ζυγὰ βουσι τίθησιν<sup>21</sup>.

**Getting up early to make your livelihood sure.  
For dawn takes away a third part of your work,  
dawn advances a man on his journey and advances him in his work,  
- dawn which appears and sets many men on their road,  
and puts yokes on many oxen.**

<sup>18</sup> Snell, Bruno, The Discovery of the Mind, New York, 1960, p. 268.

<sup>19</sup> Adkins, Arthur, Merit and Responsibility. A Study in Greek Values, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1965, p. 71.

<sup>20</sup> Hes. Works and Days, vv. 25-41, 202-211.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, vv. 577-81.

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