

WHY DID THEOGNIS NOT LEAVE RESPECT AND RETRIBUTION IN HIS “HOPE ELEGY”?

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The aim of the essay is to give a detailed analysis of Theognis’ so-called Hope Elegy (ll. 1135 – 1150) which was considered an earlier fusion of Hesiod’s story of Pandora and the Myth of the races. The author first focuses on both Hesiod’s story to reveal the context and then turns to the elegy itself to answer why Theognis choose Elpis as the only good god remaining among mankind and why he substitutes Aidōs and Nemesis with Pistis, Sōphrosunē and Charites. The author concludes that Theognis could not let Aidōs and Nemesis go, for if he had, it would have been an indication of the ultimate end of morality for his audience. Using the metaphor of decline Theognis first chose the image of leaving goddesses which is the hallmark of Hesiod’s Iron race last days story and mixed it with some other components present in the story like grace, justice, oaths and hubris, then he took key notions of his own moral thinking – pistis, sōphrosunē and charity and made goddesses from them. Finally, he crowned his elegy by choosing Hesiod’s Elpis with her intrinsic ambiguousness of both expectation and false hope. Such combination enabled him to create a stunning warning for his audience.

Keywords: Theognis – Hesiod – Respect – Hope – Trust – Moderation – Grace

The so-called *Hope Elegy* (ll. 1135 – 1150) is one of the most comprehensive, sophisticated and allusive elegies of the whole Theognidean corpus.¹ It consists of four quatrains (16 lines in sum). Each of them should be read separately, but all four are closely connected by a central topic. The first quatrain is as follows: “Hope (Ἐλπις) is the only good god remaining among mankind; the others have left and gone to Olympus. Trust (Πίστις), a mighty god, has gone, Restraint (Σωφροσύνη) has gone from men, and the Graces (Χάριτες), my friend, have abandoned earth.” (ll. 1135 – 1138).

¹ By the name Theognis and *Theognidea* I am going to refer to the corpus of verses survived to us by the manuscript tradition under the name of Theognis. On the origin and transmission of Theognis’ poetry, see West (1974, 55 – 59), Pratt (1995) and most recently De Martin (2020). For quotes from *Theognidea* I use Gerber’s translation (1999).

The opening quatrain is a clear allusion to Hesiod. Helen Van Noorden (2015, 198, n. 126) characterized it as an “earlier fusion” of Hesiod’s story of Pandora and the Myth of the races. At the very end of Pandora’s myth, Hesiod let Pandora remove the lid of the gift storage jar and relieve all its baneful content, in which only Elpis remained there and did not fly out; “for before that could happen, she closed the lid of the store jar, by the plans of the aegis-holder, the cloud-gatherer, Zeus” (*Op.* 96 – 99). During the closing lines of the Myth of the races, Hesiod pictures the final stage of the Iron race when Respect (Αἰδώς) and Retribution (Νέμεσις) will “cover their beautiful skin with white mantles, leave human beings behind and go from the broad-pathed earth to the race of the immortals, to Olympus. Baneful pains (ἄλγεα λυγρὰ) will be left for mortal human beings, and there will be no safeguard against evil” (*Op.* 197 – 201).²

Why did Theognis choose Elpis as the only good god remaining among mankind and why did he substitute Aidōs and Nemesis with Pistis, Sōphrosunē and Charites? Proper understanding of the opening quatrain is the key to the interpretation of the whole elegy. Thus, we have to look closer to both briefly mentioned Hesiod’s stories and its meanings. First, we start with the Myth of the races (*Op.* 106 – 201), then we turn to the story of first woman, Pandora, and her storage jar with contains Hope at the bottom (*Op.* 57 – 104; *Thg.* 570 – 616).

Hesiod’s Background

The Myth of the races is commonly understood as a story about the gradual decline of the human race. However, such interpretation is too reductive and probably a bit naive.³ Of course, the Golden race is the best one,⁴ but the Silver and Bronze are barely better than the Heroic and, moreover, they seem to be worse than the Iron one too. The Golden race lived at the time of Cronus, free from care, apart from toil and distress, untouched by aging, lacking in all evils, and dying as if overpowered by sleep. They had all good things, “and they themselves, willing (ἄφθονον), mildmannered (ἤσυχτοι), shared out the fruits of their labors together [...] dear to the blessed gods” (*Op.* 116 – 119). The contrast with the next race is obvious. The Silver race men were much worse (πολὸν χειρότερον), they were nourished by its mothers for a hundred years, lived in adulthood only a short time and suffered, “for they could not restrain themselves from wicked outrage (ὄβριον γὰρ ἀτάσθαλον) against each other” (*Op.* 134 – 135). Zeus finally concealed them because in their infantilism they did not give honours to the gods. The next race of the

² For quotes from Hesiod I use Most’s translation (2006).

³ The decline or “degeneration” position is held for example by Most (1997) and by Zelinová and Kalaš in their recent Slovak translation and commentaries of *Theogony* (2022, 55). For critique of decline position and Most, see Noorden (2015, 30 – 33, 46 – 47, 74 – 75).

⁴ The desire for easy abundance and harmony of the Golden Age will become a standard topos in early Greek poetry. For its use in *Theognidea*, see Levine (1985).

Bronze men was made out of ash trees, “terrible and strong they were, and they cared only for the painful works of Ares and for acts of violence (ἔργ’ ἔμελε στονόεντα καὶ ὕβριες)” (*Op.* 145 – 146). The war like nature of the bronze men finally led them to a mutual annihilation.

After the disappearing of the Bronze men, Zeus created fourth race, “more just and superior (δικαιότερον καὶ ἄρειον), the godly race of men-heroes (ἀνδρῶν ἡρώων θεῖον γένος), who are called demigods (ἡμίθεοι), the generation before our own upon the boundless earth” (*Op.* 158 – 160). The Heroic race is finally followed by our Iron race, in which men are exposed to toil, distress, suffering and grievous cares. “Yet all the same, for these people too good things will be mingled with evil ones (μειμίζεται ἐσθλὰ κακοῖσιν)” (*Op.* 179). Nevertheless, Zeus will destroy these people once and for all. The decline of the Iron race is going to be announced by a series of unjust, irreverent and outrageous acts which will culminate in the departure of the goddesses of Respect (Αἰδώς) and Retribution (Νέμεσις) and cause an outbreak of baleful pains and evil (*Op.* 180 – 200).

There is one significant difference between the first three and the last two races. The first three races disappeared one by one. The Golden one probably faded out because of the lack of sexual reproduction abilities, the Silver generation was personally destroyed by Zeus and the Bronze annihilated themselves in battles. It seems that for now the Bronze generation is the last one that has been completely exterminated. Clay (2010, 93) notices: “No catastrophe or sudden destruction precipitates the end of the heroic race. Instead, a gradual transition occurs as the gods withdraw from intercourse with mortals”.⁵

Above I criticized the gradual decline interpretation of the Myth of the races for its naivety. It can barely be applied for the whole myth due to the extraordinary status of the Heroic race. Likewise, it is a problematic to use it for the interpretation of the first three races. First obstacle is the discontinuity between each of them. The second obstacle is the likeness between the Silver and the Bronze race. Apparently, the Golden race is the best one and the Silver and Bronze are much worse. However, both of the two worse races are similarly criticized by Hesiod for their hubris (*Op.* 135 and 146), thus it is hard to identify some significant decline between them. Nevertheless, the decline interpretation should be used for the period localized between the Heroic and the final stage of the Iron race. The use of such a “decline” metaphor, considering the situation of his actual period, is typical for Theognis too (cf. ll. 53 – 58, 183 – 192).

⁵ Clay (2010, 93) support her interpretation pointing to the lines 173d-e that “nicely express this shift when they say that Zeus did not make (ποίησε) the race of iron, but instead ‘established’ (θήκεν) it” (cf. Vernant 2006, 100 – 101; Noorden 2015, 74 – 75).

There is another interesting interpretative point in the Myth of the races – the contrary pair of *hubris* and *dikē* upon which J. P. Vernant built up his structural reading of the myth (Vernant 2006, 25 – 112). As we already mentioned, the Silver and Bronze races are described by Hesiod as possessed by *hubris* (*Op.* 135 and 146), whereas the Heroic race is characterized as “more just (δικαιότερον) and superior” (*Op.* 158). The characteristic feature of the Iron race is a mixture of good and evil things (thus *dikē* and *hubris*). In short, Vernant suggests to read the myth as a structure of the following pairs: *dikē* – *hubris* (Golden – Silver race), *hubris* – *dikē* (Bronze – Heroic race). For the most of interpretations, the Heroic race represents an anomaly in their “decline” concept when reading the myth, but not for Vernant. According to him: “The strongly marked parallels show that in Hesiod’s version of the myth the race of heroes is not a badly integrated feature distorting the structure of the myth but an essential part of it, without which the overall balance would be upset” (Vernant 2006, 31).⁶ In such a reading the Iron race is supposed to present a problem – there is no other race in Hesiod that could be coupled with it in the *dikē* – *hubris* pair. Vernant solves this problem by following his structural way of reading: “it is clear from the text that in fact there is not just one race of iron but rather two types of human existences, in strict opposition to each other, one of which acknowledge *dikē*, while the other knows only *hubris*” (Vernant 2006, 31). Later on, Vernant gives many examples and arguments for such a reading, and we will use said reading in our interpretation of Theognis’ *Hope Elegy*.

The creation of Pandora and her tricky delivery to men with the jar as a part of her dowry can be read from two perspectives. From the gods’ perspective it can be seen as the result of the “contest of wits between *metieta* Zeus (Zeus ‘who has *metis*’) and Prometheus *ankulometis* (‘of the crooked *metis*’), probably motivated by Prometheus’ ambition to usurp Zeus’s his power and status by using men as potential allies (Clay 2010, 101). The game was initiated in Mekone by Prometheus’ unequal division of the sacrifice (with a better share for men), followed by Zeus depriving men of fire, Prometheus’ stealing back of fire, and finished by Zeus’ final move – the bounding of Prometheus and the creation of a fabricated woman, the first maiden Pandora and her delivery via Epimetheus to mortal men (*Th.* 507 – 616). As the result of the contest of wits, Prometheus was “caught in his own trap, thereby plunging all humanity into misfortune” (Vernant 2006, 62, cf. 99).

From the perspective of mortals, this story can be read as a part of the process from the Golden age like *dolce far niente* state, to the contemporary Iron age stage of toil and distress, when good things are mingled with evil ones (*Th.* 176 – 179).

⁶ For critique of this Vernant’s reading, see Clay (2010, 82 – 83).

The whole process started when gods hid and kept human sustenance (βίος) hidden (*Op.* 42), and continued in Mekone when gods and mortals were in the course of distinguishing themselves by the ritual of offering the sacrifice (*Th.* 535 – 536). Prometheus' tricky division of the sacrificial ox (assigning its edible parts to mortals), caused Zeus to respond to the trick by depriving mortals of fire (hence condemning mortals to eat the raw food and barred their communication with gods by burnt offerings). The process ended with Prometheus' restoring the fire and Zeus's final counterstroke, who "had contrived this beautiful evil thing" – the first maiden, in exchange for the restored fire (*Th.* 585). The outcomes of the whole process are the separation of mortals from gods,⁷ and the introduction of the institutions of agriculture, sacrifice and marriage in the life of mortals (Clay 2010, 104).

Pandora was probably the most sophisticated of Zeus's tricks. This first woman, a bride was fabricated by Zeus's most skilful allies – the Olympians under the supervision of Zeus's mighty nous. Pandora was a substitute for restored fire and like fire she had an ambiguous character. She became a beautiful evil thing (*Th.* 585), a marvel (θαῦμα, *Th.* 588) adored by gods and mortals, with a deceptive and seductive nature, exhausting man's strength but also giving him children, supporting him in old age and further carrying his possessions (*Th.* 590 – 607). That man "to whom the portion of marriage falls as a share, and who acquires a cherished wife, well-fitted in her thoughts, for him evil is balanced continually with good during his whole life" (*Th.* 607 – 610, cf. *Op.* 179).⁸

However, the centre of our interest is not Pandora itself but her gift – a jar and its contents. Before Pandora, "the tribes of men used to live upon the earth entirely apart from evils, and without grievous toil and distressful diseases, which give death to men" (*Op.* 90 – 93). Nevertheless, after removing the lid from the jar she scattered all its baneful contents and countless miseries came out "of their own accord (αὐτόματοι), bearing evils to mortals in silence (σιγή), since the counsellor Zeus took their voice away" (*Op.* 104 – 105). "Only Elpis remained there in its unbreakable home under the mouth of the storage jar, and did not fly out; for before that could happen she closed the lid of the storage jar, by the plans of the aegis-holder, the cloud-gatherer, Zeus" (*Op.* 96 – 99).

There is a long debate among scholars why Elpis remained in the jar and whether it may be regarded as a good or as an evil. We do not have space to reconstruct all

⁷ "Moreover, in the Prometheus myth, humans do not have any direct responsibility for what befalls them. They suffer the consequences of a separation they neither wanted nor caused. They are not culprits but victims. Their only wrong is Prometheus's affection for them..." (Vernant 2006, 99).

⁸ For Pandora's similarity to fire and for her ambiguity, see Clay (2010, 101 – 124) and Vernant (2006, 42 – 43, 62 – 64).

interpretations of this peculiar problem;⁹ I am going to present only one that appears to me the most plausible. The jar with its contents was designed not to annihilate men but to weaken them. Whereas miseries come to humankind automatically and silently from the outside, Elpis became the part of our inner nature (we are all the offspring of Pandora). Is Elpis, as a part of our nature, a good or a bad thing? On the one hand, Elpis was a part of a jar's baneful content, and it has to be evil too. On the other hand it can be the thing that should, as an "apotropaic daemon" (Noorden 2015, 54) compensate escaped evils, prevent humankind from ultimate destruction and thus be good. However, this is not the only way to understand Elpis. It could have the same ambiguous character as Pandora herself (cf. Clay 2010, 103). The word *elpis* is ambiguous in Greek too. It can be translated as an expectation. We can expect either bad or good things. Hence, on the one hand *elpis* could help us to anticipate the bad things, to prepare for them and somehow compensate the fact that they come automatically and in silence. On the other hand, we can expect the good things, and that is the hope, which helps us to forget our miseries in the expectation of something good. In both cases, *elpis* is not a knowledge, it is rather a kind of necessary illusion helping us to bare our tough life.¹⁰

Theognis' "Hope Elegy"

Now we can finally return to Theognis and the first quatrain of his *Hope Elegy* (quoted above), and look for the substitution of Hesiod's *Aidōs* and *Nemesis* with Theognis' *Pistis*, *Sōphrosunē* and *Charites*. As we mentioned above, at the closing lines of the Myth of the races Hesiod pictures the final stage of the Iron race when, after the disruption of civilisation values by humans, *Aidōs* and *Nemesis* will leave mortals and there will be no safeguard against evil (*Op.* 197 – 201). *Aidōs* and *nemesis* are closely related – the lack of respect provoke revenge. In Hesiod *aidōs* renders people to be sensitive to the general values of society and inhibits departure from them. *Aidōs* also works closely with justice. Both concepts "reflect the notion that other people have certain rights, namely to honour, (recognized by *aidōs*) and to their possessions (the sphere in which *dikē* is most obviously active)" (Cairns 1993, 154). Thus, *aidōs*

⁹ Analysis of modern explanations of Elpis, see in Verdenius (1985, 66 – 71).

¹⁰ Plato characterises *elpis* in similar way. In *Republic* (330d – 331b) he contrasts bad and sweet hope, in *Laws* (644c) he defines *elpis* as "opinions about the future (δόξας μελλόντων)" and divides it to those which precedes pain and that which precedes pleasure, and in *Timaeus* (69d) *elpis* is characterised as "credulous" or "easy to lead astray" (εὐπαράγωγον). Jenny Strauss Clay (2010, 103) concludes her analysis of Elpis in Hesiod: "Thus Hope, the ultimate *kalon kakon*, characterizes the human condition and once again situates us between the ignorance of the beasts and the certain knowledge of the gods, between forethought and hind-thought, between Prometheus and Epimetheus".

and *nemesis*, together with *dikē*, are essential preconditions of any functioning community and its presence separates humankind from beasts (*Op.* 276 – 280).

When Theognis writes about the gloomy atmosphere of the communities of his time, he is letting go of three deities: Pistis – faith or trust, Sōphrosunē – restraint, moderation or sound-mindedness and Charites – grace or gratitude. Let us start with *Sōphrosunē*, which can be seen as a moral term invention of an early Greek lyricist, and later massively used in philosophy.¹¹ For an individual *sōphrosunē* is a thinking element which controls his behaviour, directs him from hubris and improves his ability to recognise and keep to the right measure. In a political sense it is closely related to justice and if present among citizens it helps to avoid instability and political strife (Porubjak 2017).

Whereas *sōphrosunē* operates mainly on individual level (although carefully observed by the community), *pistis* and *charis* operate on a collective level – both require reciprocity and both are the basis for the functioning of relationships between friends and in the family. Relationships in the community can be imposed by legal decree, but relationships between friends and within the family are based on mutual trust (*pistis*)¹² and on the ability to do a favour (*charis*) for the other person and to get the gratitude or recognition (*charis*) that is shown in return (Pearson 1962, 86; cf. Levine 1985, 193 – 194).¹³

While Hesiod is letting go of the goddesses necessary for fundamental survival of human society, Theognis is focusing on much more subtle elements – on the lack of ability of taking control of ourselves, and willingness for reciprocity. Only Elpis remains among people. Elpis – the only goddess remaining among people is clearly different from the triad Pistis, Sōphrosunē, Charites – she does not required neither training (as moderation), nor reciprocity (as trust and gratitude), she is completely one-sided and intrinsic. In sum we can say, that in the first quatrain Theognis is letting the goddesses of social ties that provide social coherency depart.

The second quatrain shows the consequences of such departure. “Men’s judicial oaths (ὄρκοι [...] δίκαιοι) are no longer to be trusted (πιστοί), nor does anyone revere (ἄζεται) the immortal gods. The race of pious men (εὐσεβέων) has perished and men no longer recognize (γνώσκουσ’) established rules of conduct (θέμιστας) or acts of

¹¹ There is four occurrence of *sōphrosunē* in Homer, none in Hesiod and 15 in *Theognidea*. For the evolution of this notion, see Rademaker (2005), for *sōphrosunē* in *Theognidea*, see Porubjak (2017).

¹² The phrase “πιστὸς ἐταῖρος” – “trustful friend” could be found eight times in *Theognidea* (ll. 209, 332a, 416, 529, 645, 1164f, 1316, 1367), “πιστὸς νόος” – “trustful mind” three times (ll. 74, 88, 698, 1082d). For the role of the trust and friendship in *Theognidea*, see Donlan (1985).

¹³ The word χάρις means both favour and gratitude (cf. LSJ 1996, s.v. χάρις).

piety (εὐσεβίας)” (ll. 1139 – 1142). Modern readers should consider this quatrain as “purely religious”. Indeed, it is, but not in a modern sense, as we try to show now.

The first two lines of the quatrain start with the topic of “men’s judicial oaths (ὄρκοι [...] δίκαιοι)”, which are “no longer to be trusted” (l. 1139). An oath is one of the most archaic legal toll among men (and gods) and breaking an oath is considered as an ultimate hubris (cf. Hom. *Il.* 15,38; Hes. *Th.* 400, 784, 805). Thus, breaking oaths is obviously incompatible with the reverence of the gods. In the quoted lines, it is judicial oaths of men, which are no longer to be trusted. Indeed, breaking judicial oaths (ὄρκοι [...] δίκαιοι) is the ultimate hubris against justice (δίκη). For both, Hesiod and Theognis, the opposite of justice is hubris. In *Theognidea* justice is the hallmark of a good / noble man and unjust, hubristic act is the hallmark of a base.¹⁴ Theognis goes even further and does not hesitate to consider justice (δικαιοσύνη) as an ultimate excellence (l. 147).¹⁵

However, in *Theognidea* justice is connected not only with excellence but also with *sōphrosunē*. In one of the most recognized elegies (ll. 39 – 52) Theognis says, that although citizens are still of sound mind (σαόφρονες), their leaders have fallen into the depths of depravity because they took “delight in outrageous behaviour (ὕβριζεν) and ruin the people and give judgements in favour of the unjust (δίκαζ τ’ ἀδίκουσι διδοῦσιν), for the sake of their own profit (κέρδος) and power (κράτος)” (ll. 44 – 46); such behaviour, warns Theognis, used to lead to civil strife and the rise of tyrants.¹⁶ Civil strife is caused by intemperate and unjust behaviours of leaders who regard only their own profit. The critique of unjust acquisition of possession and wealth is a leitmotif of *Works and Days* framed by a quarrel between Hesiod and his brother Perses.¹⁷ Theognis carries on this topic, enriches it with the connection with *sōphrosunē* and goes even further when he declares: “Of wealth no limit

¹⁴ V. Cobb–Stevens (1985) offers a fruitful analysis of the key terms of the value system in *Theognidea*. They occur in pairs of contraries, the most important of which are *ataghos / kakos* (or *esthlos / deilos*), *dikē / hubris*, and *metron / koros*.

¹⁵ “Prefer to live righteously with a few possessions than to become rich by the unjust acquisition of money. For in justice there is the sum total of every excellence, and every man who is just, Cynus, is noble” (ll. 145 – 148). Line 147 is also attributed to Phocylides (fr. 10) and quoted by Plato in *Laws* 630c5. Aristotle cites last two lines as a proverb (*EN* 1129b29). A. Adkins (1960, 78) notes: “at the time of its composition, however, far from being a proverb, it was not even a proposition to which the majority of Greeks would give assent if it were put to them”. For Theognis’ poetry as both a recipient of “traditional wisdom” and a means of perpetuating it, see De Martin (2020).

¹⁶ For the analysis of the elegy in context of *sōphrosunē*, see Rademaker (2005, 86 – 92), cf. Porubjak (2017, 664 – 667).

¹⁷ The analysis of Hesiod – Perses relation and its role in *Work and Days*, see in Nagy (1990, 64 – 72). Standard Hesiod’s motive of just and unjust acquisition of possession and a motive of breaking oath could be find in next lines of *Theognidea*: “Whatever possession (χρήμα) comes to a man from Zeus

is revealed to men [...] In truth possessions result in folly (ἄφροσύνη) for mortals” (ll. 227, 230).¹⁸ When sōphrosunē leaves citizens, the city falls to an unjust and hubristic state and when Sōphrosunē leaves mankind, trust and reverence to the gods will fade away.

The next two lines of the quatrain focus on piety and established rules. The word translated as “piety” occurs here twice. Once used as an adjective – for pious men (εὐσεβέων), and once as a substantive for acts of piety (εὐσεβίας). *Eusebeia* means “reverence towards the gods or parents, piety or filial respect” (LSJ 1996, s. v. εὐσέβεια). As we mentioned above, it is trust and charity, which requires sense for reciprocity and could guarantee proper relationships in family and among friends.¹⁹ Acts of *eusebeia* go hand in hand with “established rules of conduct” or “social norms” (θέμιστας), the norms and conducts that had been established by customs.²⁰ However, without trust and charity the proper conduct could not be recognized (οὐκέτι γινώσκουσ’ – l. 1142) as proper and stops working. Departure of Pistic and Charites caused the end of the filial respect and conducts established by customs, departure of Sōphrosunē resulted in folly of breaking judicial oaths in sake of unjust profit. Life without departed goddesses finally results in disrespect for the immortal gods. Does Theognis have any idea what to do in such a circumstance?

The third quatrain seems to offer an answer: “But as long as a man lives and sees the light of the sun, let him show piety to the gods (εὐσεβέων περὶ θεοῦς) and count on Hope (Ἐλπίδα προσμενέτω). Let him pray to the gods (εὐχέσθω δὲ θεοῖσι) and burn splendid thigh bones, sacrificing to Hope first and last” (ll. 1143 – 1146). The quatrain consists of two sentences. In both we can find Elpis and a motive of reverence to gods. The motive of reverence seems to be clear. The gods are powerful and the outcomes of human intentions depends on them (ll. 657 – 666; cf. 133 – 142, 171 – 172, 617 – 618). Moreover, in the unstable, hostile human world without Pistic, Sōphrosunē and Charites, only praying and piety to the gods could help. Nevertheless, do we – the mortals, know how to conduct acts of piety? “We mortals have vain thoughts, not knowledge” says Theognis (l. 141). He even asks without giving a clear

and is obtained with justice and without stain, is forever lasting. But if a man acquires it unjustly, inopportunistly, and with a greedy heart or seizes it wrongly by a false oath (εἴθ’ ὄρκωι πὰρ τὸ δίκαιον ἐλῶν), for the moment he thinks he’s winning profit (κέρδος), but in the end it turns out badly and the will of the gods prevails” (ll. 197 – 202).

¹⁸ The analysis of wealth in *Theognidea*, see in Donlan (1999, 80 – 85).

¹⁹ Disrespect to parents is “the worst and most grievous of all things in human life [...] whenever you have raised sons, provided everything that is fitting, and stored up wealth (for them) after much bitter suffering, they hate their father, pray for his death, and loathe him as if he were a beggar at the door” (ll. 271 – 278; cf. more optimistic view in ll. 933 – 938).

²⁰ *Themis* means “that which is laid down or established, law (not as fixed by statute, but) as established by custom” (LSJ 1996, s.v. θέμις).

answer: “Have no rules been set by divinity for mortals, is there no path along which one can go and please the immortals?” (ll. 381 – 382).²¹ It seems that only Hope could help us in our precarious situation.

When we discussed the question of Elpis in Hesiod above, we noted her ambiguity. The situation seems to be the same in *Theognidea*. Except in the now discussed elegy, we find *elpis* five times (ll. 47, 333, 637, 639, 823). The meaning of the lines 47, 333 and 823 is simply “false hope”. The meaning of the remaining two instances is more interesting. Both are part of the couplet. In the first, *elpis* is coupled with risk or venture: “Expectation and risk (Ἐλπίς καὶ κίνδυνος) are similar among mankind; for they are both harsh forces (χαλεποὶ δαίμονες)” (ll. 637 – 638). Both *elpis* and risk are mighty forces (δαίμονες) which are difficult or even grievous (χαλεπός). An expectation has the same quality as a risky enterprise – both can turn out well or badly and we do not know how – we have only vain thoughts, not knowledge (cf. l. 141). Such statement is also clear in the next couplet: “It often happens that the activities of men flow along well contrary to expectation and hope (πὰρ δόξαν τε καὶ ἐλπίδα), while their plans meet with no success” (ll. 639 – 640). It is a question whether to read here δόξα as an expectation, as it usual is in Homer, or as an opinion or seeming as we can find it in Parmenides and later philosophy (the meaning “reputation” makes no sense here). Nevertheless, both *elpis* and *doxa* here are aiming at something we desire, but unable to predicate by our vain thoughts whether we will obtain it or not, a kind of illusion.

The meaning of the third quatrain is much more pessimistic than it might seem. The only goddesses left among mankind do not help us much in our precarious situation. She does not tell to us how to live in the world without Pistis, Sōphrosunē and Charites, nor how to pray to the gods in a truly proper way that pleases them. It seems that Theognis, this early Greek Schopenhauer,²² tries to tell us, that the only thing we can do is “burn splendid thigh bones, sacrificing to Hope first and last” and hope that our hope will help us to bear our tough life with honour. Alternatively, in a bit of a less pessimistic way taken by W. Donlan, we can conclude, that only in good goddess Hope “lies the possibility of the return of Pistis, Sōphrosunē, the Kharites, oaths that are trustworthy and just [*horkoi pistoi dikaioi*], norms [*themistes*], and observances of piety [*eusebeiai*]: a slender solace, but the only one available to mankind now” (Donlan 1985, 243).

²¹ Gerber (1999) and West (1974) takes this lines as a question. However, most others (cf. Nietzsche 2015, 85 – 87) takes it as a statement (see commentary in West 1974, 154). If it is a statement, the human position is even more blurry.

²² Cf. Theognis’ famous verses: “It is best of all for mortals not to be born and not to look upon the rays of the piercing sun, but once born it is best to pass the gates of Hades as quickly as possible and to lie under a large heap of earth” (ll. 425 – 428).

Finally, we are getting to the last quatrain of the *Hope Elegy*: “And let him ever be on guard against the crooked speech of unjust men (ἀδίκων ἀνδρῶν σκολιὸν λόγον) who, with no regard for the immortal gods, always direct their thoughts (νόημα) to other people’s property, making shameful compacts to further their evil deeds (αἰσχρὰ κακοῖσ’ ἔργοις σύμβολα θηκόμενοι)” (ll. 1147 – 1150). In the last quatrain Theognis went back to the motif implicitly included in the second quatrain – unjust men led by their intemperance and hubris, who ganged up to gain wealth unjustly at the expense of good men. The critique of unjust and hubristic behaviour is a recurrent topic in *Theognidea*. To better understand the last quatrain, we should turn to the elegy, in which Theognis discusses the character of a just and unjust man (ll. 381 – 382).

At the beginning of the elegy Theognis admires Zeus for his great power and prestige and for knowing the mind and heart of every man. Then he asks Zeus two questions: “How then, son of Cronus, does your mind bear to hold sinners (ἄνδρας ἀλιτρούς) and the just man (δίκαιον) in the same esteem, whether the mind of men is disposed to prudent discretion (ἐπὶ σωφροσύνην τρεφθῆι νόος) or to wanton outrage (πρὸς ὕβριν), when they yield to unjust acts (ἀδίκοισ’ ἔργμασι πειθομένων)? Have no rules been set by divinity for mortals, is there no path along which one can go and please the immortals?” (ll. 377 – 380). It seems, Theognis continues, that many bad men have a prosperity free from harm, while the just one gets poverty. The problem with poverty is, that it forces man “to endure much that is shameful, yielding to need which teaches many bad ways (κακὰ πολλὰ διδάσκει), including lies, deceit, and deadly strife (ψεύδεά τ’ ἐξαπάτας τ’ οὐλομένας τ’ ἔριδας)” (ll. 389 – 390). Poverty is the worst ill, concludes Theognis, for it gives birth to painful helplessness (ἀμηχανίη) (l. 392; cf. ll. 651-652). On the other hand, it can help to reveal something significant: “In poverty, whenever need takes hold, both the base man (δειλός) and he who is much better (ἀμείνων) are brought to light.²³ For the latter’s mind has its thoughts on justice (τὰ δίκαια φρονεῖ νόος) and straight judgement (ἰθεῖα γνώμη) is ever implanted in his breast, while the former’s mind does not go along with either bad times or good” (ll. 393 – 397; cf. ll. 441 – 446, 1162a–d, 1177 – 1178). In the last lines of the elegy Theognis concludes, that the noble man (ἀγαθός) must bring himself to endure both good and bad times, respect his friends (αἰδεῖσθαι δὲ φίλους), and to shun false oaths (ὄρκους), avoiding the wrath of the immortals (ll. 398 – 400).

In light of this elegy, Theognis in the last quatrain of the *Hope Elegy* hopes that there are and still will be good noble men (ἀγαθοί) even they are so few, that a single ship could carry them all (ll. 83 – 86). The loyal friends – just men with a sense of respect (αἰδώς), good judgements and excellent character (cf. ll. 74, 150, 635, 933)

²³ Except need, there are other characters revealing things in *Theognidea*: time (ll. 963 – 70), trial (ll. 571 – 572), and wine (ll. 499 – 502).

who will be able to face the evil deeds of the bad and unjust, which ruins people and whole cities.

Conclusion

Finally, we can answer the question why Theognis choose Elpis as the only good god remaining among mankind and why he substituted Aidōs and Nemesis with Pistis, Sōphrosunē and Charites. When we discussed Hesiod's myth of the races we concluded, that the decline interpretation could not be used for the whole myth, nevertheless it is valid for the periods started with the Heroic race. Whereas the Heroic race is characterized as "more just (δικαιότερον) and superior" (*Op.* 158) – than the Bronze race – the characteristic feature of the Iron race is a mixture of good and evil things (thus *dikē* and *hubris*). In myth Hesiod deals with Iron race only in four lines (*Op.* 176 – 179), in the next 21 lines he describes their further downfall (*Op.* 180 – 201). At the end of the Iron race father will not be like-minded with sons, nor does guest with host, nor will comrade with comrade and people become ignorant to gods' punishment. "Nor will there be any grace (χάρις) for the man who keeps his oath (εὐόρκου), nor for the just man or the good one (οὐδὲ δικαίου οὐδ' ἀγαθοῦ), but they will give more honor to the doer of evil (κακῶν ῥεκτῆρα) and the outrage man (ὑβριν ἀνέρα). Justice (δίκη) will be in their hands, and reverence (αἰδώς) will not exist, but the bad man will harm the superior one, speaking with crooked discourses (σκολιοῖς ἐνέπων),²⁴ and he will swear an oath (ὄρκου) upon them" (*Op.* 190 – 194). In the end, all will culminate in the departures of goddesses Aidōs and Nemesis to Olympus, and for mortals only baleful pains will be left and there will be no safeguard against evil (*Op.* 197 – 201).

Theognis could not let Aidōs and Nemesis go, for if he had, it would have been the hallmark of the ultimate end of morality and human society. Theognis is writing for the people of his time, the people who are still of the Iron race. His *Hope Elegy* is a masterpiece. Using the metaphor of decline – the dangerous shift from justice to hubris – he first chose the image of the leaving goddesses which is the hallmark of Hesiod's Iron race last days story, then he added some other components that are present in it, like grace, justice, oaths, hubris, evil, and crooked speech. After that he took the key notions of his own moral thinking – grace, moderation and trust and made goddesses from them. Finally, he crowned his piece of work by choosing Hesiod's Elpis with her intrinsic ambiguousness of both expectation and false hope. When he tied it all together in 16 verses, he created a stunning warning for his audience.

²⁴ Cf. "the crooked speech of unjust men (ἀδίκων ἀνδρῶν σκολιὸν λόγον)" in the last quatrain of the *Hope Elegy* (l. 147).

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