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preferred panel: 11. The Philosophical Significance of Cosmology and Theology

The Heavenly Polis, Olympus in Hesiod's *Theogony*
(20 minutes)

As many contemporary scholars note, Olympus as the home of Zeus, his brothers and sisters and many children, shares obvious features with the human extended *oikos* [cf. Arthur, 1982, 63-4; Redfield, 1993, 31-40; Sissa and Detienne, 2000, 5-6; Burkert, 1985, 218 and 2004, 25], but I shall argue that as early as Hesiod's *Theogony* Olympus is most analogous, on the human plane, to the emergent *polis*. Set apart from the larger cosmos, Hesiod's Olympus is characterized by *nomoi*, *êthea*, the fair distribution of *timai*, and communal song and dance (cf. *Th.* 65--75, 883-85). Its walled separation from the cosmos at large is suggested in the repeated phrase "within Olympus" (*entos Olympou*; *Th.* 37, 51, 408), language comparable to the Iliadic account of Trojans living "within the walls" of Troy (*teikheos entos*; *Il.* 22.85). Within, Olympus features multiple homes of the gods, Zeus' on the "highest peak," dancing floors (*khôroi*), a *boulê*, or council place, and *eirai*, Aeolic for *agorai* (cf., Scholium A at *Il.* 18.531). The *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, and *Aspis* also refer to the *agora* on Olympus, sometimes even mentioning that Themis calls the gods to assembly (*Il.* 20.4-6), a role the goddess also fulfills on earth calling men to assembly in the *polis* (*Od.* 2.68-9). By Zeus' instruction, Olympus as a place apart is able to keep at bay "discord" (*eris*), quarrel (*neikos*) and any god who lies (*pseudêtai*), first by casting that god into a coma for a year and then as a "worse punishment" by excluding him from the feasts, *boulê*, and *eirai* of Olympus for another nine years (*Th.* 782-804). In short, Zeus is not able to free the cosmos of the already-born Eris and her children Neikea, Pseudea, and Dusemonia, but he is able to "ostracize" their "lower case" counterparts, *eris*, *neikos*, and lying gods, from the Olympian community for a ten-year span of time. Expressive of the political themes of the *Theogony*, immediately following the *proem*'s celebration of Zeus' creation of the new order, the narrator describes the Muses' "sacred gift to

humankind”: graced by the Muses’ honeyed voices and speaking straight verdicts, Zeus-nourished kings dispel a “great quarrel” (*mega neikos*) in a discordant city *agora*, “honored like gods” for bringing social concord (*Th.* 80-93). Pace Clay, 2003, 74; West, 1966, 181-82, this “digression” is neither “awkward” or “tangential” but indicative of the *Theogony*’s primary interest in the hard-won creation of polity out of a pre-existing *dusnomia*. As such, this paper shall examine Hesiod’s use of myth and abstract personification at the earliest stage of Greek literature to offer a rich and complex picture of an evolution from violent familial conflict in the first two generations of the gods to a harmonious *Eunomia* of Olympus achieved by Zeus’ creation of a heavenly *polity*, the divine paradigm for the human *polis*.