Hesiod as Precursor to the Presocratic Philosophers: A Voeglinian View

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Early in the *Metaphysics* Aristotle remarks that myth like philosophy begins in a sense of wonder (982b18f). For Voegelin mythology is that compact symbolization of the wondering psyche in testimony to its experience of the tension of existence in the world at the dawn of a people. A thinker like Herodotus, participating in the early stages of differentiation of the compact poesis of Greek mythology, still had a sense of the freshness of the achievements of the two fountainheads of Greek mythos, Homer and Hesiod:

But it was only if I may so put it the day before yesterday that the Greeks came to know the origin and form of the various Gods, and whether or not all of them had always existed; for Homer and Hesiod, the poets who composed our theogonies and described the gods for us, giving them their appropriate titles, offices, and powers, lived, as I believe, not more than four hundred years ago.

But Voegelin correctly discerns in both Homer and Hesiod the seminal impulses of protophilosophers of order. Homer is the great diagnostician of *nosos*, sickness, in the social order of what he took to be Achaean society and in the human conception of the divine order. Though prephilosophical, he is nonetheless a great poet of the movement of the psyche towards truth and its possible derailment in disorder, a philosopher’s concern. Hesiod disentangles this poisesis from the specific "true story" of the Trojan conflict and universalizes it in his *Theogony*, a theological cosmology, and the *Works and Days*, a theosensitive anthropology. Voegelin is explicit on the status of theogonists as explorers of consciousness, and through it, ultimately, the souls’ tension between the metaxy and the beyond:

A theogonic speculation is, among other things, an attempt to make the relations between forces of the psyche intelligible through a story of their "genesis." From the lowest to the highest they follow one another as generations of gods; and since the forces are experienced as conflicting their sequence in the tale will be a sequence of struggles and victories until the highest ordering force of the soul emerges victoriously. That is the element of theogonic speculation that can be transferred from the organization of the polytheistic myth to nonmythical speculations on order.
In Voegelin’s view, Hesiod has a special place in the history of Greek consciousness as the thinker who uses myth as a steppingstone towards the transcendence of myth in the autonomy of philosophy:

The creation of philosophy as a symbolic form is the achievement of Hellas. The new form begins to disengage itself from the myth, towards the end of the eighth century, in the work of Hesiod inasmuch as in his *Theogony* the myth is submitted to a conscious intellectual operation, with the purpose of reshaping its symbols in such a manner that a "truth" about order with universal validity will emerge. Metaphysical concepts are incipiently formed, and their formation raises problems which in their turn press towards further consistent elaboration. In brief: The speculative reason of the thinker asserts its autonomy against the mythopoetic mode of expression.

The creative accomplishment of Hesiod is difficult to overstate. For the first time in Greek thought we have a writer setting out to give a dynamic account of the entire order of being, accomplished largely in the *Theogony* and supplemented with the *Works and Days*, which takes up the origins of man and his orientation to or rebellion against the justice of Zeus in life in a cosmos which is straining against its compact self-containment. This straining is evident in the revolutionary nature of the Theogony with its coming into being of Chaos, Gaia and Eros and its development in three generations of divinities in which the injustice of the reigns of Uranus and Cronos are replaced by the *dike* of Zeus, the supreme god. It also appears in the *Works and Days* in the myth of the five ages of man with its pessimistic pattern of degeneration caused by the rejection of the divine *dike* by mortals, causing a crisis of consciousness in which the poet, filled with the pneuma of the Muses, speaks prophetically to the princes and the people of the need to return to the measure of god.

For Voegelin, the break with the self-contained cosmos begins with Homer, who transforms Achaean myth of disorder into a past of his people: "The decisive step towards the creation of historical form had been taken by Homer when he transformed the Achaean fall into the past of Hellenic society." Hesiod continues the process by comprehending in a new and creative order the Homeric mythology in a meditation becoming transparent for the great leap in being achieved by the insights of the Greek philosophers for whom Hesiod provides the incipit. In Hesiod, as Voegelin declares,

... in faltering and stumbling speculation, the symbols of the myth point searchingly towards meanings for which later generations of philosophers will develop a technical vocabulary. The *Theogony* represents such an incipient penetration of the Olympian myth with a speculative intention; and an intelligible line of speculative evolution runs from these beginnings through the Ionian and Italian philosophers to Plato and Aristotle.
To document the ways in which Hesiod opens myth up to the wonder and transmythic speculations of the lover of wisdom, let us examine more closely the poet’s two great works. Voegelin points out that the *Theogony* and the *Works and Days* can be considered as poetic adaptations of traditional, and indeed Homeric, forms. The *Theogony* is an aristeia, an account of the prowess of Zeus, the majestic Olympian. The *Works and Days*, on the other hand, belongs to the genre of the parainesis, or exhortation, in this case to Perses, Hesiod’s unjust brother. But in each case Hesiod uses tradition to raise questions that ultimately transcend tradition and lead to the breakthroughs of Greek philosophy.

Consider the case of the *Theogony*. Hesiod begins with a hymn to the Muses, the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, or Memory, who appear to Hesiod the lowly shepherd on Helicon. In his last work, "Quod Deus Dicitur," Voegelin argues that since the Muses are not Olympian divinities, but begotten by Zeus on Memory far away from the Olympian Gods, "the source of truth is transOlympian." From this Voegelin concludes,

For Hesiod, Zeus is no god unless there is a divine reality Beyond the gods. In these Hesiodian symbolizations we recognize the first intimations of the comprehending (periēchon) Beyond that ultimately becomes the epiekeina of Plato.

Skepticism is possible. Enemies of Voegelin’s argument might observe that Zeus makes love to Mnemosyne apart from the Olympians simply because Greek gods do not copulate in public. But in any case we certainly have in this proem a testimony to the irruption of the divine into human consciousness that opens the soul to a new level of truth about the highest reality. The muses are the lyrical proclaimers sired on memory, without which experience dies aborning, by Zeus, the highest divine reality in Greek myth. The invocation simultaneously claims for Hesiod’s poem the authority of revelation, provides the model for the subsequent use of divine revelation by philosophical poets such as Parmenides and Empedocles, and points to the testing of experience, including experience of the divine, by the logos of the philosopher, since these Muses declare that they know how to sing things both false and true. Although Hesiod records the proclamations of the Muses with the pistis of the open soul, the reader is invited to reflect on how he might sift between the true and false in the search for truth.

Hesiod’s declaration has a precedent in Homer’s *Iliad*, since in book 2 Zeus sends a lying dream to Agamemnon to bring upon him the ruination called for by his hybris against Achilles. But Hesiod has generalized the possibility that the gods may for their own reasons send us falsehoods in his invocation, setting up a powerful stimulus to human beings to find a way to distinguish between false and true. Voegelin sees in this distinction between truth and falsehood in myth a pivotal moment in the development of Greek thought, and in this he is surely correct. The distinction between true and false marks a differention in mythic consciousness which will eventually transcend mythology in philosophical analysis. This differention is quite self-
conscious in many of the pre-socratics, like Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Democritus, and Empedocles, who contrast their truth with the untruth of their predecessors and rivals, deepening and broadening the consciousness of the tension of existence in a movement which leads the thinkers to make the great discovery of the psyche, to plumb its depths, and to scale the heights of being and intuit the beyond behind the thing reality of the world. Hesiod's work, in one sense, is the great prelude of Greek philosophy.

Hesiod's account of the generation of the gods begins in a what some have seen as a certain unclarity. First, says Hesiod, there came to be Chaos, and then Earth, Tartarus (which Voegelin curiously neglects in his account), and Eros. For Voegelin this is a creatio ex nihilo, which points the finger of questioning towards the yet undifferentiated beyond. If he is right, the Greek philosophers who followed were unanimous in retreating from this seeming violation of the principle of sufficient reason to the principle that ex nihilio nihil fit. Other scholars see Chaos as the gaping void above the Earth created when Earth and Sky are separated from their primordial unity, while M.L. West sees Chaos as the gaping space below the Earth on which Earth rests, a view which makes the differentiation of Tartarus and Erebus (in the next generation) seem curiously pleonastic. The fact that thinkers even now are so divided over something so basic to the work shows that the vatic indeterminacy of Hesiod's beginning invites the further differentiation that Greek philosophy richly supplied.

Nonetheless it is a very pregnant beginning. Hesiod presents us with the order of being conceived as an exfoliating world process. In Earth, as both Aristotle and Voegelin observe, we see the deified idea of a creative substrate which became the arche for which the Ionian cosmologists sought. And in Eros we see, in Aristotle's view, perhaps the first intimation of the causa efficiens whose need subsequent thinkers like Heraclitus and Parmenides recognized and sought to supply.

With Eros in the world, the primordial deities can begin to fecundate the order of being. Earth produces Starry Sky to cover her and be her mate. But Dike does not yet exist, and fearing overthrow, Sky will not allow his children to be born. A frustrated Earth stirs up rebellion in her unborn children and the boldest, Cronos, castrates his father and assumes dominion over his fellow Titans. Like Sky he is jealous of his progeny, but he has learned to monopolize their suppression, so rather than imprisoning them in their mother he cannibalizes them, entombing them in his own body. Like her mother Earth, Cronus consort Rhea rebels and spirits her youngest son Zeus away to Crete. When he matures he frees his siblings from his father and liberates the hundred handers whom their brother Cronos had imprisoned in his fear of competition. The Olympians and their allies defeat the titans in a great battle and Zeus is acclaimed king. Unlike his sire and grandsire, he shares power, allotting to his siblings, his allies, and the children of the Olympians their just share of honor and dominion. Voegelin's assessment of the meaning of this process is magisterial:

Since Zeus is the father of Eunomia (Order), Dike (Justice), and Eirene (Peace), the titanomachia brings the victory of the forces of true order over the savagery of cosmic and telluric forces.
In Voegelin's view, this is a mythological symbolization of a "cardinal problem in a philosophy of history and order":

In nonmythical language, it is the tension between a hard-won civilizational order, precariously in balance, and a rumbling underworld of demonic forces which at any time may break loose and destroy it.

Hesiod's view of the order of being, then, is both indeterminate in its inception and precarious in its stability, both incentives to differentiating thinkers to come to more definitively establish being and more clearly distinguish it from becoming and non-being. Zeus in Hesiod represents the highest divine reality, but as Voegelin notes he is still an intracosmic god, only one among many, who came into being and who can theoretically be overthrown. This is made clear in Hesiod's account of the battle between Zeus, the god of order, and Typhoeus, a chaos monster, for supremacy in the universe. The Kosmokrator defeats the beast of disorder, but Hesiod's language shows the outcome could have been otherwise:

And truly a thing past help would have happened on that day, and [Typhoeus] would have come to reign over mortals and immortals, had not [Zeus] the father of men and gods been quick to perceive it.

Such a Zeus clearly cannot be an adequate symbol for the eternal or the beyond without a good deal of philosophical progress by subsequent thinkers, but Hesiod has made a fundamental contribution to his successors by depicting an evolution of a universal order charged with the divine and under the dominion of dike, the symbol of just order. Voegelin sees as one of Hesiod's greatest contributions to the philosophy of history "the evolution of Zeus as an ethical personality." I would go even further. By showing the world under Zeus as the kingdom of dike, Hesiod has laid the groundwork for philosophy by asserting that this cosmos is not the playground for the arbitrary will of divine beings locked in a concupiscent struggle for pleasure and power. The world is under the dominion of an order that is rational and guaranteed by the supreme divinity. The order of being is stable and intelligible, and the work of philosophy can begin. Through his speculative penetration of myth Hesiod makes it possible to transcend myth.

The great exploration of the theme of the justice of Zeus in the world of men is Hesiod's *Works and Days*. While the presocratics were certainly not indifferent to order in society, the fullest philosophical development of this theme was to occur in the work of Socrates, who moved
philosophy from cosmological speculation to ethics, and his philosophical offspring Plato and Aristotle.

But even in the *Works and Days* Hesiod is a trailblazer for the presocratics. He turns again in this invocation to the Muses as the divine sources of consciousness in a hymn to the power of Zeus as a great ordering force in the world that works by the canons of *dike*. The prophetic tone of the god-inspired poet is to find an echo in the authoritative god conscious voices of successors like Xenophanes, Parmenides, Heraclitus and Empedocles. The first exhortation to Perses opens with the reflections that there are two kinds of strife or *eris* in the world, one good and one bad. The evil daughter of Night in the *Theogony* here becomes two, a creative *eris* who operates in accord with the *dike* of Zeus, and a destructive *eris* who works in its despite. Here we have the early intuition of the tension in being which can be turned to good or ill in human life, an intuition to be developed magnificently by Heraclitus and Empedocles.

There follow three cardinal fables, each with implications for philosophy. In the first, mankind falls from a paradise of fulfilled desire (but not beatific union with the divine) to the burden of existence with toil when Pandora is created to punish humanity for the hybris of Prometheus against the order of Zeus. The notion of the fall of humanity into a burdened existence, a great mystery, is taken up again by the myth of the five ages of humanity.

Each generation is created by the gods—the source for humanity is the divine. The golden age lives a paradisal existence in accord with the gods and after a painless death wander the earth as holy spirits guarding justice and enjoying bliss. The silver age is far less advanced, and unable to resist *hybris*, and are covered with earth by an angry Zeus. But they live under the earth after death as venerable spirits. The men of the bronze age live for injustice and violence. They destroy one another and pass nameless to Hades. They are followed by an age which breaks the movement of decline, the demigods of the heroic age who fight at Thebes and Troy, whose greatest members are transported to the isles of the blessed for a happy immortality. Decline resumes and culminates in the iron age, Hesiod’s own time, the nadir of human evil in which there is still some good. The product of the divine can never be wholly evil.

Hesiod is moved by political disorder in his own time to create a myth of decline of the human race from its divine origins to his own time. The decline is caused by the rebellion of human beings against divine *dike*. Voegelin believes that the psyche with its immortalizing movement towards the beyond had not yet been discovered in the time of Hesiod, with its sharp division between the immortal gods and mortal men. But surely in the myth of the five ages is a presentiment of the discovery of the immortal psyche. The more human beings align themselves with divine *dike* in this life, the more fully they survive through grace in a life beyond life. Over the ages the fullness of this survival has been lost, but the secret to its recovery is implicit in Hesiod’s preachments to Perses: make the divine order the measure for your own life, and to your lot will fall the blessings of Zeus.

The final fable is embedded in a Hesiodic vision of the apocalypse which threatens the iron age because of its injustice. If left unchecked, the reign of evil will reach an acme so outraging the god of order that he will bring the age to an end. As a master paradigm of violence in the human order Hesiod gives us a fable from the natural order, the tale of the hawk and the nightingale.
The hawk seizes the nightengale which bewails its destiny. The hawk replies that it is the fate of the weak to suffer the pleasure of the strong, whether life or death. Hesiod rejects this as a model for human life. Zeus has given human beings dike, and as they reject it or accept it so will they suffer destruction, like the evil city, or flourish, like the just city. Implicit in this teaching is the knowledge that human beings transcend the natural order because they are subject to the higher ethics of the divine mind. Hesiod warns both princes and peasants to respect the *dike* of Zeus, and he is himself caught between hope and fear as to how the human race will choose. Warning Perses one final time that his fate will be determined by his obedience to the rule of *dike*, Hesiod concludes his poem with a long description of a human life of labor in accord with *dike* and in pursuit of *arete*. For the poet this is the essence of the human condition in the mysterious tension of the world.

Hesiod had depicted the cosmos as a process which had a beginning, perhaps out of nothing, and which consisted of divine persons proliferating in generations guided by Eros and intergenerational conflict. The growth was a kind of *physis* peopled by mythological beings which often were conceived of as both persons and principles, qualities, or objects such as Dike, Bia (Force) and Selene (the Moon). The compactness of myth was beginning to grow transparent to a higher order of differentiation in Hesiod’s speculation, but his work raised many questions which it was the task of subsequent thinkers to tackle. Hesiod offered no theory of the *hyle* or matter of being. His account of the beginning of the cosmic evolution was unmotivated, and it was not even clear if things came to be by arising from nothing or differentiation from a primordial unity. The first thinkers to begin to work on advancing the analysis of being after Hesiod are the Ionian physicists.

For Voegelin, the great accomplishments of Thales, Anaximenes and Anaximander were the speculative break with myth and the discovery of nature. Each thinker sought to ground the process of *physis* in a fundamental substance or principle, an *arche*, which was eternally existent. For Thales, perhaps influenced by Mesopotamian mythological speculation, by the fact that moisture is vital to life, or simply by the fact that it can exist as gas, liquid and solid, declared that water was the substrate of the world. It existed eternally in its various changing forms, and on it all things depended. All things were full of gods, or psyches, since they moved. Life remains the cause of movement, as in Hesiod. In Thales the divine principle has begun to lose the anthromorphic and often scandalous history of the gods in Hesiod, but spirit and matter are still promiscuously confounded.

It would seem that Anaximander was led to correct Thales on the grounds that the older thinker attempted to generate the whole from water, a determinate part. Anaximander, apparently the first to call his material cause a principle or *arche*, declared that all things arose from and returned an eternal, infinite, indeterminate origin, the boundless or *to apeiron*, in a never ending process of generation and decay. The process was governed by a kind of principle of order in which we may perhaps detect the retributive justice which punished Hesiod’s Uranus and Cronos for the injustice of their attaining supreme power: "They [things arising from and returning to *to apeiron*] pay penalty and retribution to one another for their injustice in accordance with the arrangement of time." Unlike the gods of Hesiod, the *arche* of Anaximander is immortal, unborn and imperishable, and hence Anaximander is the first to call his *arche* or first principle, the divine, *to theion*. 
Anaximines continued the monism of the Milesians but he replaced *to apeiron* with air, *aer*. He may have been guided by the thought that the eternal substrate should remain eternal as it differentiates into the manifold substances of being, while *to apeiron* must cease to be itself when it acquires the determinate qualities of, say, fire, air, earth, and water. Anaximines seems to have been the first to ground the changes in the substrate in observable natural processes, rarification and condensation. For Anaximines, the air is god, eternally and immutably. He seems to have also posited that there were other gods, who came to be. In this way he accommodates the gods of popular religion, and Hesiodean speculation, to his system, while distinguishing between the many gods and the one god beyond them which was to culminate in Plato's conception of the one god beyond the world.

In Voegelin's view the crowning achievement of the Milesian philosophers was their transcendence into nature. They were followed by another group of philosophers whose special genius was the transcendence into the depths of the psyche: Pythagoras, Xenophanes, Parmenides and Heraclitus. Highly influential in the work of all four mystic philosophers was the Orphic/Pythagorean belief in the fall of the soul into time and its restoration to eternity through purification. The Pythagorean school apparently took the form of an aristocratic political association interested in governing society under the right order of the soul as shaped by consciousness of its high origin and destiny, a differentiation of the regime of *dike* in the just polis as conceived by Hesiod. For Voegelin, this communal orientation should not obscure the fact that the mystic philosophers including the Pythagoreans were accomplishing a great leap in being by discovering "the personal order of a soul through orientation toward transcendent reality." This order of the psyche was essentially singular, since it "could not be institutionalized by individual human beings."

Like Hesiod, Xenophanes was a poet who used the cultural authority of poetry to ground the prophetic authority of his pronouncements. In his work the opposition to the myth becomes prominent, because with his deepened understanding of the human and the divine he saw the form of myth as "an obstacle to the adequate understanding of the order of the soul." The attack on Homer and Hesiod is explicit: "Homer and Hesiod have ascribed to the gods all things that are a shame and disgrace among men, such as stealing, adultery, and cheating each other." The reason is that human beings conceive gods in their own likeness and image. Against this manlike conception of god Xenophanes poses his own vision of one god supreme among gods and men, not like mortals in body or thought, swaying all things with its thought but at rest in one place, that is, a universal unmoved divinity. For Xenophanes, "the gods did not grant knowledge of all things to mortals from the beginning, but by seeking they find in time what is better." Thereby Xenophanes establishes the charter for philosophy. He makes clear that this search for truth does not end in the human grasp of wisdom or the divine being: "there never was nor will be a man who knows about the gods and all the things I speak of." Xenophanes has carried the Hesiodic conception of Zeus as the supreme god to a very high level indeed. Voegelin puts his contribution to the plumbing of the psyche and the order of being in this way: "[Xenophanes] was a religious genius who discovered participation in a nameless realissimum as the essence of his humanity." In the Milesian transcendence into nature and Xenophanes' transcendence into the universal, both grounded ultimately in Hesiodic speculation on the myth, Voegelin sees the origins of two species of philosophical transcendence, the "physiology" of Aristotle and the "theology" of Plato, which continue into modern philosophy.
The fixity of being had been a philosophical problem ever since Hesiod called the order of being into existence in the pulses of the precarious dynasties of the gods culminating in the vulnerable rule of Zeus. The Milesian philosophers had attempted to solve the problem in an eternal arche, the Pythagoreans in the eternal numbers which constitute the world and the eternal realm of divinity from which the soul falls, and Xenophanes in his eternal, unmoved divine zoom. The great Elean Parmenides in vatic poetry went beyond all these in a radical assertion of being that totally dissociated it from non-being and the realm of becoming. His great poem is organized into a proem, in which the poet is carried from night into the presence of the goddess of light by a divine chariot guided by goddesses of the sun, and two major parts, the goddess of light's teaching on truth, Aletheia, and delusion, Doxa. The influence of Hesiod is clear. Like Hesiod, Parmenides in a state of mystic intuition is instructed by a goddess who knows how to tell of truth and falsehood. Like Hesiod, Parmenides makes clear that he who follows the way of truth finds arete, while he who follows the way of falsehood finds misery. And the goddess of light tells Parmenides that he has been brought to her by Themis and Dike, recognizable Hesiodic goddesses of Justice.

But Parmenides goes far beyond Hesiod and the rest of his predecessors. He discovers nous as the faculty of soul which explores reality. He discovers logos as the further faculty which rationally articulates the experience of reality. He discovers the symbol "being," "eon," a reality beyond the perceptible things, "ta onta," explored by the Milesian physicists. For Voegelin, Parmenides is a great original genius who begins the history of philosophy. Parmenides does not identify as divine the timeless, changeless being perceived in a mystic transport as "Is". And yet there are divinities in his poem. The relation between gods and reality he does not clarify. He denies the reality or even conceivableability of non-being. If being is changeless, then non-being is an illusion. But men live in a world of illusion, and after the first half of her teaching, on truth, the goddess of light turns to give the best account of the world of doxa that can be given. For Voegelin, this account is a cosmology in the Ionian sense, with Light and Darkness as the causative principles that generate the world. For Voegelin, the vision of doxa is not false. It is the most likely account of the world of phenomena, but not the truth of the realissimum. And the task of philosophy is the immortalization of the soul through the mystical intuition of the realissimum. Parmenides is silent on the connection between divinity and "Is!", and between the world of truth and doxa. Making the connections would occupy Plato and Aristotle throughout their careers.

Heraclitus, perhaps the greatest explorer of the psyche among the presocratics, opposed his truth to the falsehood of his predecessors: "Learning of many things does not teach intelligence; is so it would have taught Hesiod and Pythagoras, and again Xenophanes and Hecataeus."

Reminiscent of the Milesians, Heraclitus found a predominant substance in being, fire. He saw the cosmos as an eternal dance between the fixity of law (logos) and the flux of matter. His synoptic view of being led him to conceive of the world as the unity of opposites in the tension of strife, a conception which articulated itself in the paradoxical sayings for which he was famous. On these grounds he challenges the authority of Hesiod: "Teacher of most men is Hesiod. They are sure he knew most things, a man who could not recognize day or night, for they are one." For Heraclitus, being was constituted by strife, polemos, a triumphant reminiscense of the war between the divine generations that exfoliated the cosmos in Hesiod. Heraclitus' sense of the loneliness and difficulty of his mission as the pursuer of elusive truth
led him to be scornful of the mass of mankind which lives the life of animals in accord with the senses and appetite. Yet the truth of being is by nature common, xynon, and it is the philosopher's duty to reveal it to those who will see. The good society is that which is ordered by the man who knows the truth of being, but in their folly people drive such sages away, a thoroughly Hesiodic and Platonic judgement.

For Heraclitus as for none before him the depths of the soul open up unfathomably: "You could not find the limits of the soul, even if you travelled every path; so deep is its logos." When the fire in the soul reaches out to the divine fire that embraces the world, when the logos in the psyche unites with the logos that rules being, the psyche achieves its telos, consummation with the eternal. As Heraclitus says in one of his most famous fragments, "character [or (his) nature: ethos], to man, demon [daimon]." For Voegelin, this both signifies the affinity of the human with the divine and sets the divine apart as a goal to be striven for, since Heraclitus says that only the divine is sophon. Considered in itself, the cosmos is like a randomly strewn garbage heap. But as it grows transparent for the invisible measure of god, the cosmos is beautiful. Voegelin sums up the relationship in this way:

The cosmos now is nature in the Milesian sense and, at the same time, it is the manifestation of the invisible, universal divinity; it is a universe given to the senses, and, at the same time, the "sign" of the invisible god.

In the fifth century one of the great tasks of philosophy before Socrates and Plato was to come to terms with the sundering of being from the alleged illusion of becoming advanced in the speculation of Parmenides. This involved the attempt to explain the world process and its relationship with divinity, a theme that had first been mapped out in the poems of Hesiod. Empedocles of Acragas proposed a solution whereby nothing came to be or perished but nonetheless the world of phenomena was produced by the coming together and separation of four elements, fire, air, earth, and water, which were eternal and imperishable and thus divine. These processes were guided by four principles, themselves divine, love (philotes), strife (neikos), chance (tyche) and necessity (anangke). The realm of being was driven by these powers in great cycles from the harmonious unity under love to the differentiated world under strife and back again. Empedocles, heavily influenced by the Pythagoreans, declared that he himself was a god (daimon) who had fallen from the world of bliss into the wheel of incarnations until he could purify himself and return to the divine. In this belief he was also influenced by Hesiod's myth of the spirits of dead surviving as good daimones, and by the myth of the punishment by exile from heaven of gods who falsely swear by the Styx. This conviction leads to his advancing as his authority in his hierophantic poetry not the authority of the Muses, like Hesiod, but his own divine nature.

Like Empedocles, Anaxagoras attempts to save the phenomena while conceding to Parmenides that being can neither be generated nor destroyed. For Anaxagoras, seeds of everything are in everything, and things assume their differentiated appearances according to the type of seeds that
predominate in them. Recognizing that this process must have a motive cause, as Hesiod seems not to have in his account of the divine arche, Anaxagoras has nous or mind set things in motion at the beginning. For this Voegelin faults, him, since in making nous a cosmic principle rather than the faculty whereby we experience transcendence and hence search for the logos in things, Anaxagoras lost the very being the knowledge of which he sought. As for humanity, human beings were simply composites of the seeds of things, and knowledge is acquired through the mechanism of perception. Thereby Anaxagoras sets the stage for the materialism and immanentism of the Sophists.

The last and one of the greatest of the presocratics is Democritus of Abdera. He dealt with the challenge of Parmenides both by accepting his principle that nothing can come into being or pass away and contradicting his principle that non-being is unthinkable. For Democritus, the void is as real in its way as the eternal atoms, the material archai of his speculation. The eternal movement of eternal atoms in an eternal void generates all phenomena. Hence, as Voegelin points out, Democritus immanentized Parmenidean Being. He accepted the discovery of the soul and saw moral phenomena as proper to it. Human happiness is analyzed as consisting in euthymia, a harmonious condition of the soul brought about by pleasure in moderation and contemplation of the order of being, including the gods. But both the gods and men are composed of atoms. Men are ineluctably mortal, and even the gods do not live forever. Democritus had advanced far beyond Hesiod, but in doing so he had lost vital parts of Hesiod’s intuition which it would be the task of Socrates and Plato to recover. Greek Philosophy was approaching its zenith, and it owed far more than most of its greatest practitioners were willing to concede to Hesiod, the prophet of Ascra at the dawn of Greek thought.