

Hesiod's Theogony (Greek)— 1st-century BCE

The difficult mountains terrain of Greece produced a series of heroes, poets, and philosophers from the eighth century BCE to the Roman conquest, in the first century BCE. Hesiod was a poet who lived during the mythic "dark ages" of Greece ca. 700 BCE. Scholars do not agree that Hesiod was a real person or that all the poems attributed to him were actually his work. Little is known about his life except through his surviving work. Although there is no absolute proof that Hesiod wrote "Theogony," it is very similar in style to another poem, "Works and Days," which is considered authentic. The gods Hesiod wrote about were anthropomorphic and willful. From what you have learned about ancient Greek culture, do you think Hesiod's version of creation was shaped by the struggle for existence on the Greek peninsula?

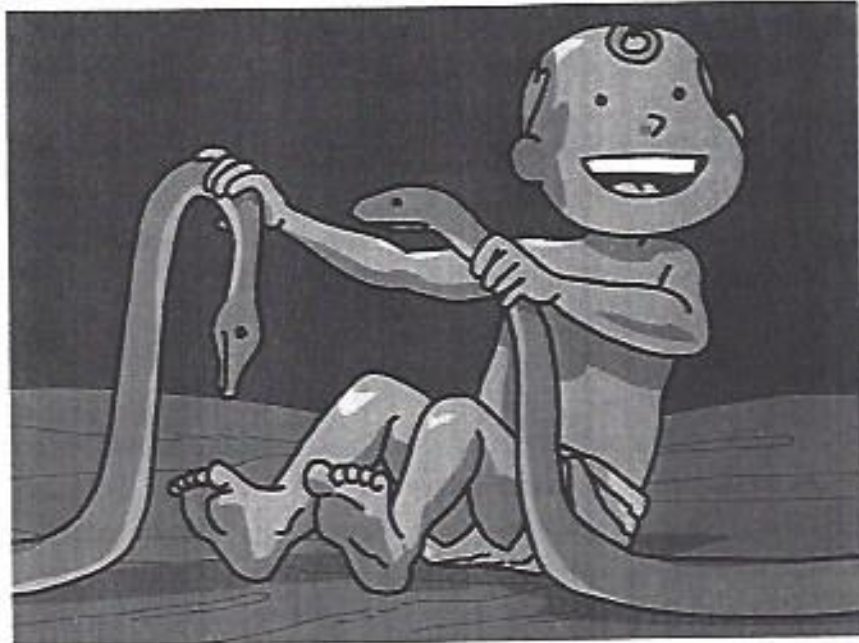
First of all, the Void (Chaos) came into being, next broad-bosomed Earth, the solid and eternal home of all, and Eros [Desire], the most beautiful of the immortal gods, who in every man and every god softens the sinews and overpowers the prudent purpose of the mind. Out of Void came Darkness and black Night, and out of Night came Light and Day; her children conceived after union in love with Darkness, Earth first produced starry Sky, equal in size with herself, to cover her on all sides. Next she produced the tall mountains, the pleasant haunts of the gods, and also gave birth to the barren waters, sea with its raging surges—all this without the passion of love. Thereafter she lay with Sky and gave birth to Ocean with its deep current, Coeus and Crius and Hyperion and Iapetus; Thea and Rhea and Themis [Law] and Mnemosyne [Memory]; also golden-crowned Phoebe and lovely Leto. After these came cunning Cronus, the youngest and boldest of her children; and he grew to hate the father who had begotten him. Earth also gave birth to the violent Cyclopes—Thunder, Lightning, and bold Flash—who made and gave to Zeus the thunder and the lightning bolt. They were like the gods in all respects except that a single eye stood in the middle of their foreheads, and their strength and power and skill were in their hands. There were also born to Earth and Sky three more children, big, strong, and horrible, Coeus and Briareus and Gyges. This unruly brood had a hundred monstrous hands sprouting from their shoulders, and fifty heads on top of their shoulders growing from their sturdy bodies. They had monstrous strength to match their huge size.

From Hesiod's *Theogony*, trans. by Norman O. Stone (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1933).

Of all the children born of Earth and Sky, these were the boldest, and then father hated them from the beginning. As each of them was about to be born, Sky would not let them reach the light of day; instead he hid them all away in the bowels of Mother Earth. Sky took pleasure in doing this evil thing. In spite of her enormous size, Earth felt the strain within her and groaned. Finally she thought of an evil and cunning stratagem. She instantly produced a new metal, grey steel, and made a huge sickle. Then she laid the matter before her children; the anguish in her heart made her speak boldly. "My children, you have a savage father; if you will listen to me, we may be able to take vengeance for this evil outrage; he was the one who started using violence."

This was what she said; but all the children were gripped by fear, and not one of them spoke a word. Then great Cronus, the cunning trickster, took courage and answered his good mother with these words: "Mother, I am willing to undertake and carry through your plan. I have no respect for our infamous father, since he was the one who started using violence."

This was what he said, and enormous Earth was very pleased. She hid him in ambush and put in his hands the sickle with jagged teeth, and instructed him fully in her plot. Huge Sky came drawing night behind him and desiring to take love; he lay on top of Earth stretched all over her. Then from his ambush his son reached out with his left hand and with his right took the huge sickle with its long jagged teeth and quickly severed the organs from his own father and threw them away. The drops of blood that spurted from them were all taken in by Mother Earth, and in the course of the revolving years she gave birth to the powerful Erinyes [Spirits of Vengeance] and the huge Giants with shining armour and long spears. As for the organs themselves, for a long time they drifted round the sea, just as they were when Cronus cut them off with the steel edge and threw them from the land into the waves of the ocean; then white foam issued from the divine flesh, and in the foam a girl began to grow. First she came near to holy Cythera, then reached Cyprus, the land surrounded by sea. There she stepped out, a goddess, tender and beautiful, and round her slender feet the green grass shot up. She is called Aphrodite by gods and men because she grew in the froth, and also Cythera, because she came near to Cythera, and the Cyprian, because she was born in watery Cyprus. Eros [Desire] and beautiful Passion were her attendants both at her birth and at her first going to join the family of the gods. The rights and privileges assigned to her from the beginning and recognized by men and gods are these: to preside over the whispers and smiles and tricks which girls employ, and the sweet delight and tenderness of love. Great Father Sky called his children the Titans because of his feud with them; he said that they blindly had tightened the noose and had done a savage thing for which they would have to pay in time to come.

Test this

As Tim mentions in the movie, the Ancient Greek gods had many human characteristics. They were often jealous and angry, and usually reacted well to flattery and worship. The gods sometimes fell in love with one another, too. And occasionally, they fell in love with humans and produced half-god/half-human offspring called **demigods**.

According to Greek myth, Zeus, the king of the gods, fathered a slew of offspring, usually by coming to Earth in some weird form to romance various humans and semi-humans.

For instance, the hero **Perseus**, who killed the evil Medusa, was conceived when Zeus took the form of a golden rain to impregnate his mother, Danae. And Zeus took the form of a swan to romance a woman named Leda. **Helen of Troy**, the famous beauty whose kidnapping started the Trojan War, was their daughter.

Perhaps the most famous of Zeus's half-human offspring was **Heracles** (known in the Latin-speaking world as Hercules). Hera, wife of Zeus, wasn't too happy about her husband's latest girlfriend, a woman named Alcmene, so she sent two poisonous snakes to kill Alcmene's baby Heracles. But Heracles was so strong that he killed one serpent with each hand, and his nurse found him playing with their limp bodies as if they were toys.

WAY BACK WHEN



Jews, Christians, and Muslims believe that their god created the universe in six days. For the Ancient Greeks, the process of creation was quite different. The poet Hesiod, who lived around 800 B.C.E., explained how the gods came to be in his long poem, *Theogony*, which means “birth of the gods.”

According to mythology, before creation there was **Chaos** (literally “gaping void”), a blank, empty space. Hesiod wrote that the first divine beings—**Gaia**, (pictured) the goddess of the earth, and **Eros**, the god of love—spontaneously appeared out of Chaos. Gaia then gave birth to two additional gods: **Uranus**, the sky; and **Pontus**, the sea.

Gaia and Uranus then became parents of a whole host of beings. Foremost among them were the **Titans**, a race of powerful god-like beings. Uranus hated the Titans, but Gaia loved them, and urged them to overthrow their father. Led by **Cronus**, the youngest Titan, they did exactly that, freeing themselves and becoming the rulers of the universe.

Soon, Cronus learned that he himself would eventually be overthrown by his children. So every time his wife, **Rhea**, bore him a child, Cronus quickly ate the baby. Eventually, Rhea got fed up with this. The next time she gave birth, she hid the child—who turned out to be **Zeus**—and presented Cronus with a stone wrapped in clothing, which he ate. Zeus freed his brothers and sisters from Cronus’ belly, leading them in battle against the Titans. The Titans were imprisoned underneath the earth, and Zeus got to be king of the gods.