

## Pandora's Diseases, *Erga* 102–04

*R. M. Frazer*

νοῦσοι δ' ἀνθρώποισιν ἐφ' ἡμέρη, αἱ δ' ἐπὶ νυκτὶ  
αὐτόματοι φοιτῶσι κακὰ θνητοῖσι φέρουσαι  
κυγῆ, ἐπεὶ φωνὴν ἐξείλετο μητίετα Ζεύς.

IN THESE VERSES Hesiod describes the diseases that Pandora lets out of the jar as coming upon men *αὐτόματοι*, 'freely', 'of their own accord', and *κυγῆ*, 'silently', since Zeus has taken away their voices. There have been two main interpretations of this description so far as I know, that of Wilamowitz and that of Hermann Fränkel. Wilamowitz interprets as follows: "H. will sagen, dass die Krankheit von aussen in den Leib hereinkommt und man davon nichts merkt. Er verwirft also jeden Versuch, die Erkrankung auf natürliche Ursachen zurückzuführen."<sup>1</sup> According to this interpretation Hesiod apparently thinks of diseases as being godsent and not naturally caused, and his description merely emphasizes the fact that diseases come upon men from outside and catch them unawares. Fränkel, however, in a comment on *αὐτόματοι*, gives a different opinion: "Bei Homer ist alle Spontaneität des Willens und Tuns den Göttern vorbehalten; für Hesiod sind es nicht mehr Apollon und Artemis, die Krankheit und Sterben auf den Menschen schiessen wie der Schütze den Pfeil, sondern die Krankheit fällt ihn an *aus eigenem Willen*. Gewiss hat auch Hesiod geglaubt, dass Gott auf den Lauf der Dinge einwirken kann und dass er es tut. Aber er sieht nicht mehr hinter jedem eingreifenden Ereignis Gottes besondere Fügung; vieles was geschieht, wird von den einzelnen wirksamen Faktoren der Welteinrichtung *selbsttätig* vollzogen." [Italics his.]<sup>2</sup> The diseases are thus seen as com-

<sup>1</sup> U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Hesiodos Erga* (Berlin 1928) 53. L. Edelstein, "The Distinctive Hellenism of Greek Medicine," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 40 (1966) 208 (= *Ancient Medicine: Selected Papers of Ludwig Edelstein*, ed. O. and C. L. Temkin [Baltimore 1967] 378), comments on *Erga* 103–05: "Here the natural explanation of illness is rejected altogether."

<sup>2</sup> H. Fränkel, "Drei Interpretationen aus Hesiod," *Festschrift Richard Reitzenstein* (Leipzig/Berlin 1931) 19 (= *Wege und Formen frühgriechischen Denkens*<sup>3</sup>, ed. F. Tietze [Munich 1968]

ing upon men in the natural order of things; the word *αὐτόματοι* emphasizes that they are not specially godsent but come of their own accord.

Fränkel's explanation seems to me more satisfying than Wilamowitz's, but not completely so. I suggest that Hesiod means to say not only that (as Fränkel explains) Pandora's diseases come to men in the nature of things, but also that they are different from another class of diseases, those that are specially sent by the gods to punish men, those that are not autonomous forces of nature but god-directed avengers of moral evil. I think Walcot is on the right track when he remarks that since Hesiod describes the diseases as *αὐτόματοι*, to become their victim "can hardly be associated with personal guilt in any form."<sup>3</sup> In other words, diseases that come of their own accord are not to be regarded as avenging ministers of justice. But Walcot apparently assumes, as do Wilamowitz and Fränkel, that Hesiod is describing all diseases. I, however, believe that he knows of other diseases whose office it is to punish the wickedness of men, and that he uses *αὐτόματοι* and *ειγῆ* to distinguish Pandora's diseases from these avenging ministers.

Plagues in both Homer and Hesiod are regarded as diseases that are specially sent by the gods to punish men. They do not come *αὐτόματοι*. We must qualify Fränkel's implication in the passage quoted above that Apollo and Artemis in Homer bring sickness and death to men. Both Apollo and Artemis cause sudden, painless death *without* sickness.<sup>4</sup> But only Apollo causes death through sickness, or plague, and then only to punish men for their wickedness. In the first book of the *Iliad* he *drives* the plague (*νοῦσον . . . ὤρσει*, verse 10) among the Achaeans because of their impiety towards his priest.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Hesiod, at *Erga* 242f, tells how Zeus *drives* (*ἐπήγαγε*) plague against the

---

331f); with which compare the same author's *Dichtung und Philosophie des frühen Griechentums*<sup>2</sup> (Munich 1962) 130f.

<sup>3</sup> P. Walcot, *Greek Peasants, Ancient and Modern: A Comparison of Social and Moral Values* (Manchester 1970) 85.

<sup>4</sup> Death by sickness is contrasted at *Od.* 11.172f and 198ff with the gentle death brought on by Artemis, and at *Od.* 15.407ff by Apollo and Artemis.

<sup>5</sup> We can compare the plague that Apollo brings at the beginning of *Oedipus Tyrannus*. A close biblical parallel is Ezek. 5.15-17 (NEB): "You will be an object of reproach and abuse, a terrible lesson to the nations around you, when I pass sentence on you and do judgement in anger and fury. I, the LORD, have spoken. When I shoot the deadly arrows of famine

unjust city. He is conscious that such diseases are god-driven and not, like Pandora's, *αὐτόματοι*.<sup>6</sup>

As for the fact that Pandora's diseases afflict men 'silently', I think we should note that madness with delirious speech was regarded as a disease specially sent by the gods to punish men.<sup>7</sup> That madness was considered a godsent punishment is shown by the report of Herodotus (6.84) that most people so interpreted the insanity of the sacrilegious Cleomenes; and we have good evidence that delirious speech was explained as being god-induced and was regarded, as it still is, as a major symptom of madness. The author of the *Sacred Disease* (4.21ff) offers the following examples of those whose diseases were believed to be caused by the gods: "If the patient imitates a goat and roars, or his right side is convulsed, they say that the Mother of the Gods is responsible. But if he utters cries that are piercing and loud, they compare him with a horse and say that Poseidon is responsible." Sophocles, at *Ajax* 243f, has his distraught hero speak a language "that no mortal taught him, but a daemon." In the ninth book of the *Odyssey* the Cyclopes, answering the wailings of the godless Polyphemus, are put off by his saying that no one is bothering him, and conclude that "it is by no means possible to avoid the sickness from great Zeus" (*νοῦσον γ' οὐ πως ἔστι Διὸς μεγάλου ἀλέεσθαι*, verse 411). These Cyclopes are earlier described (verses 106 and 275f) as lawless monsters to whom Zeus and the other immortals are of no concern, but faced with the inexplicable ravings of Polyphemus they are forced to acknowledge the power of Zeus.<sup>8</sup> Thus it seems likely to me that Hesiod uses *κυγῆ* as well as *αὐτόματοι* to describe the diseases of Pandora as coming upon men naturally in contrast to those the gods send as punishments.

This interpretation agrees well with the interpretation of the Pro-

---

against you, arrows of destruction, I will shoot to destroy you . . . Pestilence and slaughter will sweep through you, and I will bring the sword upon you."

<sup>6</sup> Socrates, at *Pl. Ap.* 38c and 41d, speaks of natural death in old age as coming *ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτομάτου*, with which he contrasts his death by execution as one that is specially caused and even divinely sent, for his divine sign had in no way opposed him during the proceedings that led to his sentence. Demosthenes (18.205) uses *αὐτόματος θάνατος* in the sense of 'natural death' as contrasted with death in battle.

<sup>7</sup> On the subject of madness see E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Sather Lect. 25, Berkeley 1951) 64ff; and W. D. Smith, "So-called Possession in Pre-Christian Greece," *TAPA* 96 (1965) 403ff.

<sup>8</sup> H. Ebeling, *Lexicon Homericum* (Leipzig 1885), explains *πολύφημος* as *multas voces habens*, a fitting epithet for a raving maniac.

metheus–Pandora story as an explanation of natural evils to be contrasted with the immediately succeeding story of the Ages of Man, which deals with moral evils. Walcot, in the passage to which we have already referred, writes as follows: “The first of these [*i.e.* the Prometheus–Pandora story] is not unlike the Christian tradition of Adam’s fall from grace, and may be regarded as Hesiod’s aetiology of ancestral sin or evil over which man has no control and for which, therefore, he cannot be held accountable as an individual.” I omit several sentences to the effect that Hesiod specifies only two evils, toil and diseases. “The latter are said to range the world by day and by night under their own volition (*αὐτόματοι* in verse 103), and so to fall victim to disease can hardly be associated with personal guilt in any form. The idea of personal responsibility, however, is featured in the alternative myth, the story of the declining ages of mankind.”<sup>9</sup> This contrast between the Prometheus–Pandora story and the story of the Ages of Man is sharpened and strengthened if *αὐτόματοι* and *κυγή* are meant to distinguish Pandora’s diseases from those that come to punish men.

TULANE UNIVERSITY

May, 1972

<sup>9</sup> Walcot, *loc.cit.* (*supra* n.3).