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Modern scholarship has enlarged our understanding of the myth of the five races in Hesiod’s *Works and Days* in a number of ways. In particular, orthodox philology has established beyond doubt that the myth has Oriental antecedents\(^1\), and structuralist analysis has shown how its driving force is the opposition between *dike* and *hybris* that is central to Hesiod’s concerns throughout the poem\(^2\). But this illumination has had as a side-effect an unhealthy polarisation of opinion between conservatives, who are ready to see almost all points of difficulty in the text as essentially by-products of Hesiod’s unskilful adaptation of alien material, and J-P. Vernant, who in creating a framework designed to explain every detail of the myth, introduces levels of complication which are foreign to the poem. This paper suggests that while both these entrenched positions have important insights to offer, they are also both significantly flawed. In showing how some of these flaws can be corrected, I shall focus principally on the golden race, and having explained my own view of how Hesiod’s presentation of that race is the key to understanding the myth as a whole, I go on to suggest that within Archaic poetry as a whole, contrary to what is often said, the concept of a golden race is not unique to Hesiod, but fits into a much broader pattern of ‘other worlds’, utopian or eschatological, whose inhabitants’ blissful existence is characterized by poetic references to gold which invite significant comparisons with divinity\(^3\).

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\(^1\) See the commentary of M.L. West (Oxford 1978), and L. Koenen, *Greece, the Near East and Egypt: Cyclic Destruction in Hesiod and the Catalogue of Women*, TAPA 124 (1994), 1-34.


\(^3\) I present here in abbreviated form some of the conclusions reached in two