

Although Hesiod's Chaos has long been understood as no more than an aspect of the physical landscape, alongside many other theogonic divinities such as Gaia, Ouranos, Okeanos, and Tartaros, I will demonstrate that its role in the *Theogony* is far more significant. Based on a close reading of the poem's invocation as well as an inclusive approach to its appearances in the text, I argue that Chaos does not simply represent the separation of one object from another but rather the more universal, abstract concept of separation, which allows for individuation and thereby the existence of discrete entities.

Distinguished as the original entity, Chaos is mentioned only four times in the entire poem (*Th.* 116, 123, 700, 814). Despite comparative evidence within the poem, interpretive approaches to Chaos generally rely on its etymological relationship with words like *chaunos*, *chaskô*, and *chasma* and a single appearance in the text (typically 700 or 814). As a result, terms such as "space" and "gap" are the most common ways of understanding this enigmatic entity in the *Theogony*. The later term, gap, does in fact recognize the aspect of separation in Chaos, dividing one thing from another. Wilamowitz (1931, 343), followed by Cornford and Kirk, rely on line 700 for their characterization of Chaos as the gap between Gaia and Ouranos. West (1966, 192), on the other hand, draws his evidence exclusively from 814, where he identifies Chaos as the *chasma* between Gaia and Tartaros. Both interpretations are valid when considered within the context of the individual passages upon which they depend, but are in direct conflict when compared with one another. My paper demonstrates that these ways of thinking about Chaos in the *Theogony* are insufficient in light of the poem's internal evidence and constitute an oversimplification given the critical position of Chaos as the first of all gods "ho ti prôton genet' autôn" (*Th.* 115).

Chaos holds the important position at the head of a poem that is both cosmogonic and theogonic. Through a close reading of *Th.* 104-115 (included on a handout) I argue that the introduction of Chaos comes as an answer to a specific question in the invocation, "which of [the gods] came first?" (*Th.* 115) Second, I recognize that Chaos is a fully fledged *theos* and like many other *theoi*, such as Eris, Eros, Pseudea, etc., represents an abstract entity and as such is not confined to a particular physical space but rather functions as an universal concept. Thus, the concept of separation crucially allows for the individuation of all the entities that follow. Because Chaos comes first, the litany of *theoi* that follow are able to exist discretely, independent of one another. Almost immediately thereafter, the poem introduces Eros, who counterbalances Chaos by allowing for the recombination of distinct entities, the process which results in generation.

In sum, this paper rescues Chaos from oversimplified interpretations as no more than a feature of the landscape and returns it to its position as a primary and crucial aspect of the poem. By critically engaging with the concept of Chaos as an original entity, this paper argues for a new approach to an important figure in early Greek thought.