

Sparks (Conversation Starters)

For Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days*

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"Let him hear the advice of Hesiod. . . . The advice of Hesiod is good." —Aristotle

"Lampon . . . greatly honors the sayings of Hesiod, the one he declares and recommends to his sons."

—Pindar

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Suggestions for use ▪ Use the following Sparks to start a conversation with a friend or group. Or journal with them, using them to get to "know yourself" —an imperative straight from the ancient Greeks.

Spark 1 ▪ Failure and Success

Spark 1 Quotation

Hesiod says, "It is easy to grab at Failure (Kakotēs). It is there in abundance for you. The way is smooth to her, and she dwells very near to you. But the immortal gods have put sweat in front of Success (Aretē). The path to her is long and steep. And so it is rough-going at first. Nevertheless, when one comes to the highest point, then the path becomes easy—however hard it is at first."

Spark 1 Questions

1. What is failure? What is success? Does it depend on what the failure or success is relative to? Do you agree with Hesiod that "it is easy to grab at Failure"? —that "the way is smooth to her, and she dwells very near to you"? Explain. Do you like Hesiod's description of the path to Success? That it involves sweat (hard work)? —that it is "long and steep" and "rough-going at first"? —but that, in the end, it becomes "easy" —or easier? Explain.
2. Does failure have any value? If so, what is the value of failing? Does it depend on what the failure is relative to? Explain. Does success have any downside? If so, what is the downside of success? Does it depend on what the success is relative to? Explain.
3. What are the three most important things for a human being to succeed in in life? How does your own life (the way you live life, your goals, your success or not) line up with the three?

Spark 2 ▪ Literature and Other Forms of Art

Spark 2 Quotation

Hesiod says, "Happy is the man whom the Muses love! Sweet speech flows from that man's mouth. Even when some man is bearing sorrow, even when it is some brand-new care in his spirit that dries out his heart with weeping, even so, when the poet-singer, the servant of the Muses, sings about the glorious deeds of men from long ago and about the blessed gods who hold Olympus, that man suddenly forgets his concerns and does not remember his troubles. Quickly do the goddesses' song-gifts divert his mind!"*

*The man the Muses love is the poet. The word "poet" comes from a Greek word (*poieō*) that means "to make, produce, create." Relative to today, he or she is not only the poet but also the singer-songwriter, novelist, playwright, screenwriter, director, painter, sculptor, dancer, content creator, and so on—really, most artists.

Spark 2 Questions

1. According to Hesiod, why is art or an artist (in this case, poetry or a poet) significant or valuable? Do you agree with him? Are there other reasons you'd give for why art (any form of art) is significant or valuable?
2. What do you believe the correlation is between hearing "about the glorious deeds of men from long ago and about the blessed gods who hold Olympus" and a man "suddenly forget[ing] his concerns and . . . not remember[ing] his troubles"? How does art (any form) offer diversion ("divert his mind")? Does the latter (diversion) make art valuable?
3. Have you ever been emotionally touched by art (again, any form)? Explain. Why do you believe the art emotionally touched you as it did?

Spark 3 ▪ Procrastination

Spark 3 Quotation

Hesiod says, "Do not put your work off until tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. For the aimless worker who puts his work off does not fill his storehouse. Careful attention prospers work. But the negligent man is always wrestling with ruin."

Spark 3 Questions

1. Are you a procrastinator? That is, do you typically put off work? Or do you typically do your work when it needs to be done? Explain why you put off work or why you do it when it needs to be done.
2. What is the value of work? What value does Hesiod give to work? What does work do for you?

3. Imagine your “storehouse” is filled (you have plenty of what it takes to live) and so you do not have to worry about ruin. If you are in this situation, is work still valuable for you? Explain why or why not.

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