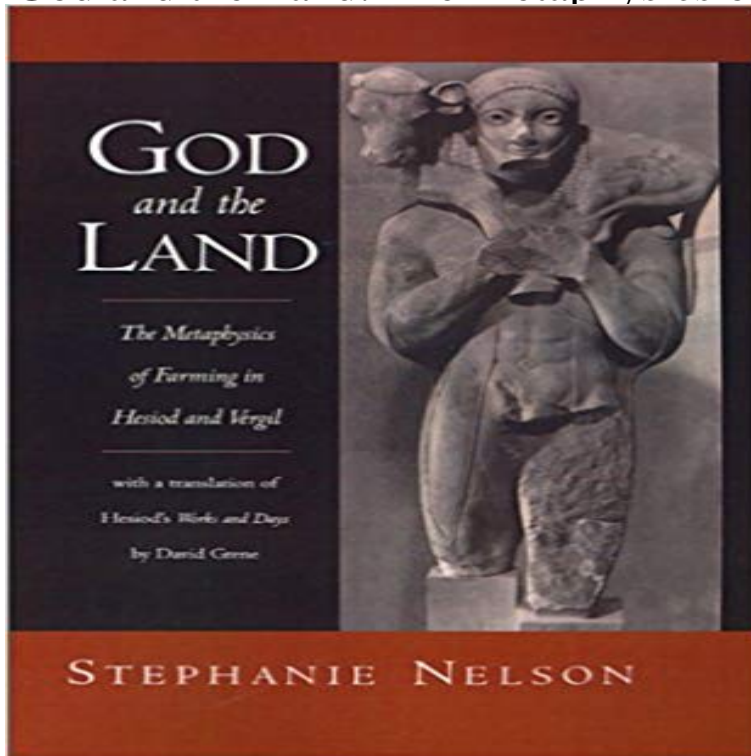


God and the Land: The Metaphysics of Farming in Hesiod and Vergil



In this pathbreaking book, which includes a powerful new translation of Hesiod's *Works and Days* by esteemed translator David Grene, Stephanie Nelson argues that a society's vision of farming contains deep indications about its view of the human place within nature, and our relationship to the divine. She contends that both Hesiod in the *Works and Days* and Vergil in the *Georgics* saw farming in this way, and so wrote their poems not only about farming itself, but also about its deeper ethical and religious implications. Hesiod, Nelson argues, saw farming as revealing that man must live by the sweat of his brow, and that good, for human beings, must always be accompanied by hardship. Within this vision justice, competition, cooperation, and the need for labor take their place alongside the uncertainties of the seasons and even of particular lucky and unlucky days to form a meaningful whole within which human life is an integral part. Vergil, Nelson argues, deliberately modeled his poem upon the *Works and Days*, and did so in order to reveal that his is a very different vision. Hesiod saw the hardship in farming; Vergil sees its violence as well. Farming is for him both our life within nature, and also our battle against her. Against the background of Hesiod's poem, which found a single meaning for human life, Vergil thus creates a split vision and suggests that human beings may be radically alienated from both nature and the divine. Nelson argues that both the *Georgics* and the *Works and Days* have been misread because scholars have not seen the importance of the connection between the two poems, and because they have not seen that farming is the true concern of both, farming in its deepest and most profoundly unsettling sense.

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