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**The Mortal Condition and “Blind Hopes” in the *Prometheus Bound***

1. Prometheus gave humans “blind hopes” (Aesch. *PV* 247–51)

**Χο**. μή πού τι προύβης τῶνδε καὶ περαιτέρω; **Chorus**. You didn’t, I suppose, go even further than that?

**Πρ.** θνητούς γ’ ἔπαυσα μὴ προδέρκεσθαι μόρον. **Prometheus**.I did: I stopped mortals foreseeing their fate.

**Χο**. τὸ ποῖον εὑρὼν τῆσδε φάρμακον νόσου; **Ch**. What medicine did you find for this illness?

**Πρ**. τυφλὰς ἐν αὐτοῖς ἐλπίδας κατώικισα. **Pr**. I planted blind hopes within them

**Χο**. μέγ’ ὠφέλημα τοῦτ’ ἐδωρήσω βροτοῖς. **Ch**. This was a great benefit that you gave to mortals.[[1]](#footnote-1)

2. Prometheus gave ignorance of death (Plato, *Gorgias* 523d6–7)

παυστέον ἐστὶν προειδότας αὐτοὺς τὸν θάνατον· νῦν γὰρ προΐσασι.

It is necessary that they cease from foreknowing death. For now they foreknow it.

3. Cassandra foresees her own death (Aesch. *Ag.* 1295–98)

ὦ πολλὰ μὲν τάλαινα, πολλὰ δ᾿ αὖ σοφὴ Woman unfortunate in so many ways and also wise in so many ways, you

γύναι, μακρὰν ἔτεινας· εἰ δ᾿ ἐτητύμως have spoken at length; but if you truly have foreknowledge of your own

μόρον τὸν αὑτῆς οἶσθα, πῶς θεηλάτου death, how comes it that you are walking boldly towards it like an ox

βοὸς δίκην πρὸς βωμὸν εὐτόλμως πατεῖς driven by god to the altar?

4. Plato on hope (Plato, *Laws* 247–51)

Πρὸς δὲ τούτοιν ἀμφοῖν αὖ δόξας μελλόντων, οἷν And that, besides these two, each man possesses opinions about the

κοινὸν μὲν ὄνομα ἐλπίς, ἴδιον δὲ φόβος μὲν ἡ πρὸ future, which go by the general name of “expectations”; and of these, that

λύπης ἐλπίς, θάῤῥος δὲ ἡ πρὸ τοῦ ἐναντίου. which precedes pain bears the special name of “fear,” and that which

precedes pleasure the special name of “confidence.”

5. Hesiod’s empty hope (Hesiod, *WD* 498–501)

πολλὰ δ᾽ ἀεργὸς ἀνήρ, κενεὴν ἐπὶ ἐλπίδα μίμνων, A man who does not work, waiting upon an empty hope, in need of the

χρηίζων βιότοιο, κακὰ προσελέξατο θυμῷ. means of life, says many evil things to his spirit. Hope is not good at

ἐλπὶς δ᾽ οὐκ ἀγαθὴ κεχρημένον ἄνδρα κομίζειν, providing for a man in need who sits in the lounge and does not have

ἥμενον ἐν λέσχῃ, τῷ μὴ βίος ἄρκιος εἴη. enough of the means of life.

6. Sophocles’ blind tomorrow (Soph. fr. 593)

ζώοι τις ἀνθρώπων τὸ κατ’ ἦμαρ ὅπως Let any man procure as much pleasure as he can as he lives his daily life;

ἥδιστα πορσύνων· τὸ δ’ ἐς αὔριον αἰεὶ but the morrow comes ever blind.

τυφλὸν ἕρπει.

7. Io’s entrance (561–65)

τίς γῆ; τί γένος; τίνα φῶ λεύσσειν What land, what people are these? Who should I say this is

τόνδε χαλινοῖς ἐν πετρίνοισιν that I see, wind-battered,

χειμαζόμενον; harnessed to the rocks?

τίνος ἀμπλακίας ποινὰς ὀλέκηι; For what crime are you thus being murdered?

σήμηνον ὅποι Tell me where on earth

γῆς ἡ μογερὰ πεπλάνημαι. I have wandered in my misery.

8. Io’s exit (877–86)

ἐλελεῦ ἐλελεῦ· Eleleu, eleleu!

ὑπό μ’ αὖ σφάκελος καὶ φρενοπλῆγες My mind is struck again by hot spasms

μανίαι θάλπουσ’, οἴστρου δ’ ἄρδις of madness, and I am pricked

χρίει μ’ ἄπυρος, by the gadfly’s fiery dart!

κραδία δὲ φόβωι φρένα λακτίζει, In terror my heart is thumping my midriff,

τροχοδινεῖται δ’ ὄμμαθ’ ἑλίγδην, my eyes are rolling in circles,

ἔξω δὲ δρόμου φέρομαι λύσσης I am blown off course by the wild winds

πνεύματι μάργωι γλώσσης ἀκρατής, of insanity, I cannot control my tongue,

θολεροὶ δὲ λόγοι παίουσ’ εἰκῆι and its turbid, random flow of words

στυγνῆς πρὸς κύμασιν ἄτης. dashes against the hateful waves of ruin.

9. Io’s desire to know the end (622–23)

καὶ πρός γε τούτοις τέρμα τῆς ἐμῆς πλάνης And in addition to that, reveal to me the end of my wandering and what

δεῖξον, τίς ἔσται τῆι ταλαιπώρωι χρόνος. time will there be for me in my misery.

10. Io contemplates suicide (750–51)

κρεῖσσον γὰρ εἰσάπαξ θανεῖν It is better to die once and for all than to suffer terribly all

ἢ τὰς ἁπάσας ἡμέρας πάσχειν κακῶς. the days of my life.

11. Excerpt of Prometheus’ first speech (93–105)

δέρχθηθ’ οἵαις αἰκείαισιν Look, with what indignities

διακναιόμενος τὸν μυριετῆ I am tormented, to endure

χρόνον ἀθλεύσω· these trials for endless years!

τοιόνδ’ ὁ νέος ταγὸς μακάρων Such a degrading bondage has been invented for me

ἐξηῦρ’ ἐπ’ ἐμοὶ δεσμὸν ἀεικῆ. by the new high commander of the Blest Ones.

φεῦ φεῦ τὸ παρὸν τό τ’ ἐπερχόμενον Alas, I groan for my present suffering

πῆμα στενάχω· πῆι ποτε μόχθων and for that which is coming: where can one fix

χρὴ τέρματα τῶνδ’ ἐπιτεῖλαι; a limit for these sorrows?

καίτοι τί φημί; πάντα προυξεπίσταμαι But what am I saying? I have precise foreknowledge of all that will

σκεθρῶς τὰ μέλλοντ’, οὐδέ μοι ποταίνιον happen: none of my sufferings will come as a surprise. I must bear my

πῆμ’ οὐδὲν ἤξει. τὴν πεπρωμένην δὲ χρὴ destined fate as easily as may be, knowing that the power of Necessity is

αἶσαν φέρειν ὡς ῥᾶιστα, γιγνώσκονθ’ ὅτι unchallengeable.

τὸ τῆς ἀνάγκης ἔστ’ ἀδήριτον σθένος.

12. Prometheus’ willing *hamartia* (263–67)

ἐλαφρόν, ὅστις πημάτων ἔξω πόδα It’s very easy for someone who is standing safely out of trouble to advise

ἔχει, παραινεῖν νουθετεῖν τε τοὺς κακῶς and rebuke the one who is in trouble. I knew all that, all along. I did the

πράσσοντας· εὖ δὲ ταῦθ’ ἅπαντ’ ἠπιστάμην. wrong thing intentionally, intentionally, I won’t deny it: by helping

ἑκὼν ἑκὼν ἥμαρτον· οὐκ ἀρνήσομαι. mortals, I discovered trouble for myself.

θνητοῖς ἀρήγων αὐτὸς ηὑρόμην πόνους.

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1. All translations of *Prometheus Bound* are taken from Sommerstein (2008), with modifications, and the Greek text follows Page (1972). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)