Prometheus the Philosopher: Plato’s Theft of Fire

By Dannu J. Hütwohl

**1:**

Plato *Gorgias,* 523d:

παυστεόν ἐστὶν **προειδότας** αὐτοὺς τὸν θάνατον.

They must stop from **foreknowing** their death.

**2:**

*Prometheus Bound,* 248:

θνητούς γ' ἔπαυσα μὴ **προδέρκεσθαι** μόρον.

At any rate I stopped mortals from **foreseeing** their death.

**3:**

**A:**

Hesiod *Theogony,* 535-541:

καὶ γὰρ ὅτ' **ἐκρίνοντο** θεοὶ θνητοί τ' ἄνθρωποι 535

Μηκώνῃ, τότ' ἔπειτα μέγαν βοῦν πρόφρονι θυμῷ

δασσάμενος προύθηκε, Διὸς νόον ἐξαπαφίσκων.

τοῖς **μὲν** γὰρ σάρκάς τε καὶ ἔγκατα πίονα δημῷ

ἐν ῥινῷ κατέθηκε, **καλύψας** γαστρὶ βοείῃ,

τῷ **δ'** αὖτ' ὀστέα λευκὰ βοὸς δολίῃ ἐπὶ τέχνῃ 540

εὐθετίσας κατέθηκε, **καλύψας** ἀργέτι δημῷ.

For when gods and mortal humans **were divided**, at Mecone, then at that time Prometheus divided a great bull and set it before Zeus with a willing mind, decieving the mind of Zeus. Since he set down for the rest both the flesh and the entrails rich with fat in an ox-hide, **concealing it** with an ox-stomach, and for Zeus in turn the white bones of a bull he arranged and set down with a tricky craft, **by concealing** them with shining fat.

**B:**

Hesiod *Theogony,* 550-555:

— Ζεὺς δ' ἄφθιτα μήδεα **εἰδὼς** 550

γνῶ ῥ' οὐδ' ἠγνοίησε δόλον· **κακὰ δ'** **ὄσσετο** θυμῷ

θνητοῖς ἀνθρώποισι, τὰ καὶ τελέεσθαι ἔμελλε.

χερσὶ δ' ὅ γ' ἀμφοτέρῃσιν ἀνείλετο λευκὸν ἄλειφαρ,

χώσατο δὲ φρένας ἀμφί, χόλος δέ μιν ἵκετο θυμόν,

ὡς **ἴδεν** ὀστέα λευκὰ βοὸς δολίῃ ἐπὶ τέχῃ. 555

But Zeus **who knows** impershible councils percieved and was not ignorant of the trick. And **he foresaw bad things** in his heart for mortal humans, things that indeed were going to pass. But he seized the white fat with both hands and he was enraged in his mind, and anger came to him in his heart when **he saw** the white bones of the bull in a tricky-skill.

**4:**

Hesiod *Theogony,* 565-569:

ἀλλά μιν ἐξαπάτησεν ἐὺς πάις Ἰαπετοῖο

**κλέψας** ἀκαμάτοιο **πυρὸς** **τηλέσκοπον** αὐγὴν

ἐν κοίλῳ νάρθηκι· δάκεν δ' ἄρα νειόθι θυμὸν

Ζῆν' ὑψιβρεμέτην, ἐχόλωσε δέ μιν φίλον ἦτορ,

ὡς **ἴδ'** ἐν ἀνθρώποισι πυρὸς **τηλέσκοπον** αὐγήν.

But the noble son of Iapetos decieved him and **he** **stole** the far-seeing flame of weariless fire, in hollow fennel. And it stung Zeus the thunderer on high down in his heart, and it angered him in his heart when he **saw** the **far-seeing flame** of fire among humanity.

**5:**

Hesiod *Theogony,* 574-575:

— κατὰ κρῆθεν δὲ **καλύπτρην**

δαιδαλέην χείρεσσι κατέσχεθε, **θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι·**

She held down on her head **a bride’s** **veil**, crafted by hand, **a wonder to behold**.

…

Hesiod *Theogony,* 588-589:

**θαῦμα** δ' ἔχ' ἀθανάτους τε θεοὺς θνητούς τ' ἀνθρώπους | ὡς **εἶδον** δόλον αἰπύν, ἀμήχανον ἀνθρώποισιν.

**Wonder** possessed both the immortal gods and mortal humans when **they saw** the steep trick, inescapable for humans.

**6:**

*Prometheus Bound,* 21-22:

ἵν' οὔτε φωνὴν οὔτε του μορφὴν βροτῶν

**ὄψῃ**, σταθευτὸς δ' ἡλίου φοίβῃ φλογὶ

where he could **see** neither the sound or shape of mortals, scorched by the flaming blaze of the sun

**7:**

*Prometheus Bound,* 52-53:

οὔκουν ἐπείξῃ τῷδε δεσμὰ περιβαλεῖν | ὡς μή σ' ἐλινύοντα **προσδερχθῇ** **πατήρ**;

Won’t you hurry to throw the bonds around him so that **father-Zeus does not see** you resting?

…

*Prometheus Bound,* 654:

ὡς ἂν **τὸ Δῖον ὄμμα** λωφήσῃ πόθου.

So that **the eye of Zeus** may find rest from desire.

**8:**

*Prometheus Bound,* 88-95:

ὦ δῖος αἰθὴρ καὶ ταχύπτεροι πνοαί,

ποταμῶν τε πηγαί, ποντίων τε κυμάτων

ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα, παμμῆτόρ τε γῆ,

καὶ τὸν **πανόπτην** κύκλον ἡλίου καλῶ·

**ἴδεσθέ** μ' οἷα πρὸς θεῶν **πάσχω** θεός.

**δέρχθηθ'** οἵαις αἰκείαισιν

διακναιόμενος τὸν μυριετῆ

χρόνον ἀθλεύσω.

Bright upper-air and swift-winged blasts of winds, and streams of rivers, and immesurable laughtor of sea waves, and all-mother earth, and **all-seeing** circle of the sun, I summon! **Look** at me what sort of things I— a god, **suffer** at the hands of gods. **Look** at what sort of torments I suffer, worn away for countless years.

…

*Prometheus Bound,* 1093:

**ἐσορᾷς** ὡς ἔκδικα **πάσχω**.

**You see** how **I suffer** unjustice.

**9:**

*Prometheus Bound,* 253-254:

{Χο.} καὶ νῦν φλογωπὸν **πῦρ** ἔχουσ' ἐφήμεροι;

{Πρ.} ἀφ' οὗ γε πολλὰς **ἐκμαθήσονται** τέχνας.

Chorus: And now mortals have flaming **fire**?

Pro: Yes, from which they will **learn** many skills.

**10:**

*Prometheus Bound,* 505-506:

βραχεῖ δὲ μύθῳ πάντα συλλήβδην **μάθε**,

πᾶσαι τέχναι βροτοῖσιν ἐκ **Προμηθέως**.

**Learn** everything all-together with a short speech, all the arts for mortals are from **Prometheus**.

**11:**

Plato *Euthydemus,* 277e-278a:

**τὸ μανθάνειν** ὅτι οἱ ἄνθρωποι καλοῦσι μὲν ἐπὶ τῷ τοιῷδε, ὅταν τις ἐξ ἀρχῆς μηδεμίαν ἔχων ἐπιστήμην περὶ πράγματός τινος ἔπειτα ὕστερον αὐτοῦ **λαμβάνῃ τὴν ἐπιστήμην**.

**Learning** is what humans apply to a man such as this, when someone from the beginning has no knowledge about something then later **he seizes** **knowledge** of it.

**12:**

*Prometheus Bound,* 609-612:

{Πρ.} λέξω τορῶς σοι πᾶν ὅπερ χρῄζεις **μαθεῖν**,

οὐκ ἐμπλέκων αἰνίγματ', ἀλλ' ἁπλῷ λόγῳ,

ὥσπερ δίκαιον πρὸς φίλους οἴγειν στόμα.

πυρὸς βροτοῖς δοτῆρ' **ὁρᾷς** **Προμηθέα**.

Pr: I will tell you clearly everything which you need **to learn**, not by weaving in riddles, but rather with a simple speech, just as it is right to open the mouth toward friends.**You see Prometheus**, the giver of fire to mortals.

**13:**

*Prometheus Bound,* 697:

**πρῴ** γε στενάζεις καὶ φόβου πλέα τις εἶ·

ἐπίσχες ἔστ' ἂν καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ **προσμάθῃς**

You groan **too early** and you are full of fear. Hold off until indeed you should **learn** the rest.

**14:**

*Prometheus Bound,* 248:

θνητούς γ' ἔπαυσα μὴ **προδέρκεσθαι** μόρον.

I stopped mortals from foreseeing their death.

**15:**

Plato *Gorgias,* 523b-e:

τούτων δὲ δικασταὶ ἐπὶ Κρόνου καὶ ἔτι νεωστὶ τοῦ Διὸς τὴν ἀρχὴν ἔχοντος ζῶντες ἦσαν ζώντων, ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ δικάζοντες ᾗ μέλλοιεν τελευτᾶν· κακῶς οὖν αἱ δίκαι **ἐκρίνοντο**. ὅ τε οὖν Πλούτων καὶ οἱ ἐπιμεληταὶ οἱ ἐκ μακάρων νήσων ἰόντες ἔλεγον πρὸς τὸν Δία ὅτι φοιτῷέν σφιν ἄνθρωποι ἑκατέρωσε ἀνάξιοι. εἶπεν οὖν ὁ Ζεύς· “Ἀλλ' ἐγώ,” ἔφη, “παύσω τοῦτο γιγνόμενον. νῦν μὲν γὰρ κακῶς αἱ δίκαι δικάζονται. ἀμπεχόμενοι γάρ,” ἔφη, “οἱ κρινόμενοι κρίνονται· ζῶντες γὰρ κρίνονται. πολλοὶ οὖν,” ἦ δ' ὅς, “ψυχὰς πονηρὰς ἔχοντες ἠμφιεσμένοι εἰσὶ σώματά τε καλὰ καὶ γένη καὶ πλούτους, καί, ἐπειδὰν ἡ κρίσις ᾖ, ἔρχονται αὐτοῖς πολλοὶ μάρτυρες, μαρτυρήσοντες ὡς δικαίως βεβιώκασιν· οἱ οὖν δικασταὶ ὑπό τε τούτων ἐκπλήττονται, καὶ ἅμα καὶ αὐτοὶ ἀμπεχόμενοι δικάζουσι, **πρὸ** τῆς ψυχῆς τῆς αὑτῶν ὀφθαλμοὺς καὶ ὦτα καὶ ὅλον τὸ σῶμα **προκεκαλυμμένοι**. ταῦτα δὴ αὐτοῖς πάντα ἐπίπροσθεν γίγνεται, καὶ τὰ αὑτῶν ἀμφιέσματα καὶ τὰ τῶν κρινομένων. πρῶτον μὲν οὖν,” ἔφη, “παυστέον ἐστὶν **προειδότας** αὐτοὺς τὸν θάνατον· νῦν γὰρ **προΐσασι**. τοῦτο μὲν οὖν καὶ δὴ εἴρηται τῷ **Προμηθεῖ** ὅπως ἂν παύσῃ αὐτῶν. ἔπειτα γυμνοὺς κριτέον ἁπάντων τούτων· τεθνεῶτας γὰρ δεῖ κρίνεσθαι. καὶ τὸν κριτὴν δεῖ γυμνὸν εἶναι, τεθνεῶτα, αὐτῇ τῇ ψυχῇ αὐτὴν τὴν ψυχὴν **θεωροῦντα** ἐξαίφνης ἀποθανόντος ἑκάστου, ἔρημον πάντων τῶν συγγενῶν καὶ καταλιπόντα ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς πάντα ἐκεῖνον τὸν κόσμον, ἵνα δικαία ἡ κρίσις ᾖ.

But the jury-men of the dead in the time of Kronos, even still recently before Zeus held rule, were living jury-men of living men, and judging them on that day they were going to die; Therefore the judgements **were judged** badly. Then Pluto and the guardians going from the Isles of the Blessed were saying to Zeus that humans were coming to them, unworthy for either side. Then Zeus said: “But I will stop this from happening. For now the judgements are judged badly. Since the accused are judged when they are covered. Therefore many men having wretched souls are clothed with beautiful bodies and lineage and wealth, and indeed, when there is the judgment, many witnesses go on their behalf to witness how they have lived justly. The judges are struck in amazement by these men, and even they themselves give judgment while clothed, and **having concealed** their eyes and ears and whole body **in front** of their soul. Certainly all these things happen to be in front of them, both their cloths and those of the accused. Therefore at first they must stop from **foreknowing** their death. For now **they foreknow** it. Therefore this was indeed commanded to **Prometheus** that he stop them. Then they must be judged naked from all these things; For they must be judged when they have died. The judge must also be naked and dead, **gazing** with the soul herself the soul herself of each who has immediately died, deprived of all his kin and leaving behind upon the earth all that adornement, so that the judgement is just.

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