CHAPTER 4

Alienation of the Human and Divine: Prometheus, Fire, and Pandora

KEY TOPICS/THEMES

In the Theogony, Hesiod traced the world's evolution from its origins to the triumph of Zeus and the divine begetting of a race of mortal heroes; in his Works and Days, he tells of humanity's decline from a prehistoric Age of Gold to the present Age of Iron, a downward spiral introduced by the presence of Pandora, the first woman. Created by the gods to punish mankind for Prometheus's theft of fire, Pandora, ancestress of the "race of women," allegedly subverts the masculine values of order, independence, and dominion. Although Hesiod portrays Prometheus as a mere trickster, rightly imprisoned and tormented by Zeus's ravenous eagle, later Greek poets radically reinterpreted the fallen Titan's moral significance, transforming him into a champion of human liberty courageously opposed to Zeus's tyrannical regime.

The dual themes of dynamic change and unending conflict that pervade Hesiod's creation account also dominate his view of human history. In his second major poem, the Works and Days, which describes humanity's steady decline from an original Golden Age, Hesiod praises Zeus for imposing lawful order on a previously chaotic universe but laments the undeniable fact that people are now much worse off than they were under Cronus's rule. Deterioration in human society, Hesiod says, is a consequence of Zeus's personal quarrel with Prometheus [proh-MEE-thee-uhs], the supremely cunning Titan who maneuvered Zeus into accepting the inferior part of animal sacrifices (see Chapter 2).
Chapter 4

Atman, Alienation from the Gods: Prometheus and Pandora

Prometheus, the Titan who defied Zeus by stealing fire for humanity, is a complex figure in Greek mythology. His story illustrates the tension between human desire and divine authority, a common theme in Greek thought. Prometheus's actions lead to his punishment, which in turn sparks the creation of Pandora, who brings both good and evil to the world.

KEY TOPICS/THMES

- Prometheus: The Titan who defied Zeus by stealing fire for humanity.
- Pandora: The first woman created by Zeus, who brought both good and evil to the world.
- Human free will and the concept of justice.
- The tension between human desire and divine authority.

Prometheus's actions, according to Greek mythology, demonstrated the limits of human free will and the importance of obedience to the gods. His punishment, however, also highlights the importance of human creativity and ingenuity.

Pandora, on the other hand, represents the consequences of human sin and the limits of human control. Her creation and release mark the beginning of the world as we know it, with both good and evil existing side by side.
The figure of Prometheus, when Healed, is portrayed as a more tender, kind-hearted being.

Prometheus' details, a divine human figure, depict his role in Greek mythology. He was a giant titan who challenged the gods by stealing fire from the heavens and giving it to humanity. This act caused him to be punished by the gods, who bound him to a rock and had an eagle tear out his liver daily. However, when he was healed, he became a more compassionate figure, more tender and kind-hearted. His portrayal in art and literature often reflects this transformation, serving as a symbol of redemption and forgiveness. In Greek mythology, Prometheus is often depicted as a bringer of knowledge and wisdom, introducing humanity to fire, which is traditionally associated with enlightenment and progress.
The figure of Prometheus, with his original legend, is a more complex one in Greek mythology. In these narratives, Prometheus is depicted as a deity who defies the will of the gods and steals fire from the heavens to give to humanity. This act, considered a monumental achievement, is central to the understanding of Prometheus's character and role in the myths.

In Hesiod's version of the Prometheus myth, Prometheus is punished for his actions. He is transformed into a raven, but eventually escapes his punishment by changing himself into a snake and slipping out of his bonds. The punishment he suffers serves as a warning to humanity about the dangers of defying the will of the gods.

In the Odyssey, Homer's epic poem, Prometheus is mentioned as an ancient god who has caused much suffering to humanity. He is depicted as a wise and mysterious figure, who is often consulted by heroes in their quests.

The character of Prometheus in Greek mythology is an important one, as he serves as a reminder of the consequences of rebellion against the will of the gods. His story is a powerful one, and it has been retold and adapted in many different forms throughout the centuries.
to nature. The guilt incurred in killing a fellow creature, the sacrificial ox, is compounded by (unnaturally) cooking and eating it. By contrast, Zeus’s eagle, which belongs to nature and is also a symbol of the god, eats raw flesh—Prometheus’s liver. The myth’s division of animal sacrifice into two disparate elements adds a further ambiguity: whereas the gods inhale only the intangible scent of burnt meat, men, as physical beings, must consume corruptible flesh to survive. Pandora, who arrives on the scene too late to dine with the gods but who, presumably, will preside over the civilized art of cooking, introduces yet another force dividing mortals from gods: the unresolved tension between male and female.

**Humanity’s Decline: Pandora and Eve**

Despite significant differences, the two most influential forces in shaping the modern Western consciousness—the Greek and Judeo-Christian traditions—agree in regarding women as the catalyst of humanity’s cataclysmic decline. In both the Greek and biblical worldviews, the cosmos is run by and for a male principle of divinity regarded as simultaneously the source of and the justification for a patriarchal society on earth. In the biblical and Hesiodic cosmologies alike, a previously all-male world order crumbles into chaos almost immediately after the first female is created.

Hesiod, whose personal distrust of women everywhere colors his account, wrote two significantly different versions of Pandora’s creation. In the *Theogony*, in which Pandora is not named, Hesiod implies that only two gods, Hephaestus and Athene, were responsible for manufacturing this “sheer deception, irresistible to men.” In the *Works and Days*, a whole array of divine beings contributes specific qualities to fashion a complex creature of tempting beauty who also functions, paradoxically, as Zeus’s “evil” curse on mankind. Hephaestus molds Pandora of “earth and water,” giving her the face of a goddess, and Athene imbues her with domestic skills. Then a procession of divinities, including Aphrodite, the Graces, the Seasons, and eloquent Persuasion, equip her with attributes ranging from sexual allure to luxurious tastes—a great infestation among mortal men.” Finally, Hermes endows Pandora with “a bitchy mind and a cheating heart.” A trickster figure like Prometheus, Hermes is Zeus’s instrument in giving men the feminine counterpart of the inferior animal sacrifice that Prometheus had led Zeus to accept at Mekone. Like the inedible bones and hide covered with an attractive pelt that Zeus selected as his part of the divine-human arrangement, Pandora is alluring on the outside but worthless within, an economic parasite who will subvert the benefits of Promethean fire. She is Zeus’s trump card in outwitting even his trickiest opponents (see Color Plate 2).

In the *Works and Days*, Hesiod’s picture of many deities lavishing diverse gifts on Pandora provides the context for his interpretation of her name, which he says means “all-gifted.” Many scholars believe, however, that Hesiod either inherited or created a revised version of an older myth in which Pandora was originally an earth goddess called “Giver of All.” Instead of portraying her as an active embodiment of divine generosity (see Chapter 5), Hesiod makes her the passive recipient of Olympian patriarchal largesse. Other versions of the Pandora myth indicate that the jar she brings with her contains not evils but blessings. In this tradition, Zeus gives her a jarful of good things as a wedding present for her marriage to Epimetheus [epih-MEE-thee-uhs], who is a brother of Prometheus and whose role is “after-thought” or “hindsight” (Figure 4-3). When she inevitably opens the blessings fly out and return to heaven, which accounts for the prevalence of negative forces on earth. All these myths agree that Pandora, as the divine purpose, catches Hope before it can escape, retaining the quarry to save humankind from despair. Hesiod’s narrative implies that hope, the contents of Pandora’s jar were completely undesirable—disharmony, hardship, and suffering, the miseries that now afflict humankind. Even some critics suggest, may be an evil: it provides the illusion that life will be inducing people to bear the more transitory evils.

Pandora’s arrival on earth thus ends the original Golden Age, shatters the balance between humanity and divinity, and plunges human history into an endless downward spiral. As the feminine agent responsible for all of our subsequent misfortunes, Pandora serves the same mythic function as Eve in the Garden of Eden. According to Genesis 3, a serpent persuades Eve to eat forbidden fruit as a symbol of earth’s fecundity. The fruit miraculously confers “knowledge of good and evil,” a phrase denoting awareness of the entire spectrum of existence, vision hitherto the exclusive property of divine beings. The prohibited biblical counterpart to Promethean fire, the source of enlightenment, civilization possible and simultaneously severs humanity’s primal bond (Eden) (see the following box).
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After Eve convinces her husband to sample the fruit, the couple suddenly realize that they are naked, that unlike animals they are unprotected and open to harm—the first painful cut from knowledge's two-edged sword. In rapid succession, Eve learns of her vulnerability to the pains of childbirth and to social domination by her male partner, Adam, whose name means “humankind.” Forced into an awareness of their inevitable deaths, the pair are expelled from paradise, because Yahweh, the biblical Creator, does not want them to rival him further. Already possessed of divine knowledge, they might also eat of the Tree of Life and live forever, giving humanity the two qualities that distinguish mortals from gods—cosmic perspective and immortality. Greek myth also associates fruit from the Tree of Life with a guardian serpent and protective goddesses (see Figure 5-6).

The Bible and Greek myth similarly blame the introduction of women for breaking the divine-human connection that prevailed when man existed alone with his patriarchal deity. Hesiod, like the author of Genesis, insists that the price humanity pays for knowledge—a dangerous and divine commodity associated with the serpentine feminine principle—is loss of innocence, loss of peace, and loss of paradise, an environment in which no long-term threats to happiness are perceived. Like the post-Edenic world of Adam and Eve, what remains in Hesiod’s experience is labor, pain, and awareness of death. Despite his suspicion of women, however, even Hesiod admits that the gods’ female creation is, like the male of the species, “a mixture of good and bad”—in fact, a newly minted image of the contradictory system over which Zeus presides. Unlike the Genesis author, Hesiod does not charge the first woman with violating a divine prohibition. In contrast to Eve, Pandora receives no command not to touch a forbidden object or to open her jar. Indeed, Pandora’s “jar” (or womb) must be opened for her to give birth to all subsequent humanity.

When Hesiod states that Hermes endows Pandora with “lies, coaxing words, and a thievish nature,” he implicitly identifies her with Zeus’s first wife, Metis, the embodiment of cunning. Whereas Zeus could claim Metis’s mental acuity as his own by swallowing her, the human male cannot do the same with the female, whose ability to manipulate her mate remains a threat to his sense of masculine autonomy. In a Jungian interpretation, the Hesiodic male’s unwillingness or inability to value or nurture the potentially empowering feminine principle within (the anima) condemns him to an unremitting battle of the sexes.

**Humanity’s Alienation from Nature as the Price of Civilization**

In the myths of Pandora and Eve, it is the action of a woman that disrupts humanity’s primal tie to nature. Some other traditions, however, take a more positive view of women’s mythic role in helping the human psyche to distinguish itself from nature’s mindlessness. In the Mesopotamian story of Gilgamesh and Enkidu, the civilizing of a savage male is used to show that human culture is necessarily—and tragically—based on alienation from natural instincts. Just as the Greek gods fashion Pandora to punish man for his godlike control of fire, so the Mesopotamian gods create Enkidu, a wild, hairy, human animal, to distract and rival Gilgamesh, a powerful king whose unfocused energies disrupt the state he rules (see the box in Chapter 10).
Like Adam before he tasted the fruit of knowledge, Enkidu identifies totally with nature, running naked with wild beasts and freeing them from traps laid by city dwellers. Only after a "holy one"—a priestess of the love goddess Ishtar—awakens his sexuality and teaches him the arts of civilization does Enkidu lose his affinity with the natural world. When animals, his former companions, flee from him because, thanks to the woman, he now carries the scent of humanity, Enkidu is forced to become a part of city life. He joins Gilgamesh in a heroic campaign against the destructive aspects of nature, such as the fire monster Humbaba and the "bull of heaven," a personification of drought and earthquake.

When Gilgamesh spurns Ishtar's offer of love in favor of bonding with Enkidu, whom he loves as a second self, the outraged goddess afflicts Enkidu with a terminal sickness. On his deathbed, Enkidu bitterly curses Ishtar's priestess, a temple prostitute, for having ensnared him in the net of civilization. Hearing Enkidu's dying words, the sun god Shamash wisely reminds him that his gains from acculturation—adventure, fame, and the love of Gilgamesh—far outweigh the loss of his original status as "natural man." Enkidu then pronounces a grateful blessing on the woman who initiated him into the larger possibilities of civilized awareness.

Hesiod's failure to perceive or articulate a comparable tribute to the feminine principle, though not shared by all Greek writers, characterizes much of his culture. Greek mythology, like the patriarchal society it reflects, is essentially a male mythology. A few Greek heroes, such as Perseus and Odysseus, learn to value and assimilate feminine wisdom (see Chapters 10 and 13), but female intelligence and assertiveness, the qualities of a Clytemnestra or Medea, are typically seen as threats to male security (see Chapters 15 and 17).

The Two Natures of Strife

In a cosmos organized on the principles of male competition and conflict, one in which the gods constantly battle or conspire against each other, it is not surprising that Hesiod regarded human wars and violence as inescapable. He saw the entire cosmos as permeated with manifestations of Strife (Eris), a personification of discord that takes two distinctive forms. Although both versions are daughters of Night, an offspring of Chaos, they are not equally bad. The first Strife triggers mindless aggression, driving men to slaughter each other; the second figure of Strife is milder, inspiring healthy competition and a striving after excellence that inspires people to produce their finest work, thus benefiting the entire community.

The Five Ages of Humanity

The Age of Gold

The *Works and Days* divides human history into five distinctive periods, all but one of which (the Age of Heroes) is symbolized by a metal more valuable than that which chronologically follows it. The initial Age of Gold, synonymous with the paradise that men inhabited before woman was created, flourished when Cronus ruled the world. Hesiod includes no account of man's creation, perhaps because he
regarded the primal race as autochthonous (spontaneously born from the earth). According to a variant myth Apollodorus records, Prometheus was humanity's creator, fashioning man from earth and water. Even if Hesiod was familiar with this tradition, his disdain for Prometheus as a mere trickster who was justly punished for breaking Zeus's law would explain omitting the story.

During this Age of Gold, aboriginal men live in peace and enjoy the same freedom from toil or anxiety as the gods. Like pure gold that never decays or rusts, humans live unblemished by old age or hardship until death takes them in the gentle guise of sleep. Even after their bodies perish, their indomitable spirits roam the earth, acting as invisible protectors and helpers of later generations.

The Age of Silver

Whereas Golden Age inhabitants are peaceful, all subsequent generations are perpetrators or victims of Strife's worst manifestation: bloody war. Represented by a less pure or costly metal, the Age of Silver demonstrates Hesiod's belief that each new historical epoch is inferior to the one before it and emphasizes a marked deterioration in the human condition. This second age is characterized by extreme opposites: people take a full hundred years to mature, but after leaving their "mother's side," they live only a short time, cut off by their "lack of wits." Although enjoying a century of preparation for life, as adults they behave like fools: they are the first race the Olympians direct create, but they refuse to acknowledge or worship their creators, which prompts Zeus to order their extinction. This failed experiment does not haunt earth's surface, as do specters of the Age of Gold, but is confined beneath the earth.

The Age of Bronze

Men of the third period are created by Zeus alone, reputedly from ash trees. Commonly used to make warriors' spears, ash wood is an appropriate source for Hesiod's Bronze Age soldiers, "who didn't eat any food at all"—they are incapable of peaceful activities like agriculture—and who mindlessly pursue violent conflict. Mirroring only one aspect of Zeus—his aggressive strength—the warriors achieve mutual extermination and posthumously sink even lower than their predecessors, into the dank pit of Hades.

The Age of Heroes

The next generation, a short-lived Age of Heroes, is an exception to Hesiod's narration of inexorable decline. Described as "juster and nobler" than the races that precede or succeed them, the mortals of this age are the great heroes who fight at Troy or Thebes. Most of these soldiers, whose deeds are celebrated in the Homeric epics, manage to kill each other off in their endless wars; but Zeus carries away some of the noblest to a remote paradise where they enjoy conditions that prevailed during the vanished Golden Age. This Edenic reward, reserved exclusively for Zeus's few favorites, corresponds to Homer's Elysium (or Isles of the Blest), to which the Olympian transports his son-in-law Menelaus (see Chapter 9).

Scholars believe that Hesiod's passage about Greek heroes—to which he assigns no characteristic metal and which interrupts the otherwise consistent historical de-
cine—was inserted into an older tradition of four regressive ages that the Greeks borrowed from ancient Near Eastern sources. The biblical Book of Daniel offers a parallel tradition in which a huge statue, composed of four different metals, symbolizes four successive historical empires. The idol has a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet of mixed iron and clay. Daniel's vision of historical decline, echoing Hesiod's older image of historical epochs as increasingly degenerative, has helped to keep the myth of humanity's post-Edenic devolution alive in some Judeo-Christian circles.

The Age of Iron

The fifth and final epoch, that in which the poet and his audience lived, is the brutal Age of Iron. The least precious and most harsh metal, iron effectively symbolizes the hardness of heart that distinguishes the petty kings who economically exploit the class of impoverished small farmers and shepherds to which Hesiod belonged. The situation will only worsen, for Zeus already plans to wipe out the present generation as he had its forebears. Increasing signs of degeneracy will mark the end's approach: life will be so unbearable that even newborn infants will have gray hair. Natural affection among family members will disappear, and the normal social order will be reversed, with good men punished and evil rewarded. Qualities, such as Shame, that now hold wickedness in check, will flee in horror to Olympus, abandoning humanity to misery and grief.

Hesiod's view of history arbitrarily divided into five epochs of intensifying decline is essentially apocalyptic: he assumes not merely one end of the world—the doom rapidly overtaking the present system—but four earlier, divinely ordained mass extinguitions. The gods thoroughly eradicate each successive race, allowing no survivors of one era to found the next and preventing any normal historical continuity. Human history, which flows inevitably toward the abyss, is thus a painful lesson teaching mortals that "there's just no way you can get around the mind of Zeus" (Figure 4-4).

Aeschylus's Transformation of the Prometheus Myth and Humanity's Salvation

Whereas Hesiod depicted Prometheus, the thief of heavenly fire, as a wily trickster whose attempts to outwit Zeus are appropriately punished, the Athenian dramatist Aeschylus (c. 525–456 B.C.) transformed Hesiod's crafty Titan into a heroic rebel who defies Zeus for largely altruistic reasons and who suffers willingly to benefit humanity. Although he borrows his subject from Hesiod, Aeschylus shows a radically different attitude toward both Zeus and Prometheus. Turning Hesiod's theology on its head, the playwright transforms the Titan into a champion of freedom and Zeus into a despot who rules without law, justice, or mercy.

In his *Prometheus Bound*, Aeschylus does not portray Zeus as the embodiment of cosmic justice whom Plato revered as "the god of gods, who rules according to law." Instead, the dramatist imagines Zeus as he may have been at the beginning of his reign—a force of raw power untempered by wisdom or compassion (Figure 4-5). Because this morally infantile Zeus is neither omnipotent (all-powerful)
nor omniscient (all-knowing), he is vulnerable to fatal error. As Hyginus, an astronomer of the second century A.D., observed, “Zeus [when tricked by Prometheus] did not act with the brains of a god, nor did he foresee everything, as befits a god.”

The Question of Authorship

Although most scholars attribute *Prometheus Bound* to the tragedian Aeschylus, some critics, such as Mark Griffith, question Aeschylean authorship of the play, assigning it to another hand, perhaps that of Euphorion, a son of Aeschylus who was also a dramatist (see the Selected Bibliography at the end of the book). Certainly, *Prometheus Bound*’s highly critical portrait of Zeus differs sharply from Aeschylus’ portrayal of a wise and just Zeus in the *Oresteia* (see Chapter 15). Because only six (or seven) of Aeschylus’ ninety plays survive, however, it is impossible to be absolutely sure that the playwright did not, for dramatic effect, vary his picture of Zeus from play to play.

An Evolving Universe

In this text, we take the traditional view that *Prometheus Bound* is the first part of an Aeschylean trilogy, a series of three thematically related plays intended to be performed sequentially in a single day. The other two dramas, *Prometheus Unbound* and *Prometheus the Fire-Carrier*, exist only in fragments, primarily in citations from later writers. Enough references to the lost plays remain, however, to suggest that the conflict in *Prometheus Bound* represents the painful beginning of a complex evolutionary process in which Zeus—perhaps by developing qualities appropriate to divinity—eventually reconciles with the rebel Titan.

Although the means of their reconciliation is not specified, it appears that Aeschylus follows a tradition in which Zeus releases Prometheus from the mountain peak on which he has been impaled. According to Hesiod’s version of the myth, Zeus permits his mortal son Heracles to kill the eagle that repeatedly shreds Prometheus’s liver, chiefly to enhance Heracles’ reputation. For Aeschylus, however, the god’s change of heart is more significant: his evolving Zeus at last comes to value the Titan’s superior wisdom and insight. By the end of the third play, we may assume that Zeus has not only liberated his former enemy but also sponsored his ascension to Olympus, where Prometheus is honored as the divine “fire-carrier.” Making the wise Titan his heavenly companion, Zeus, in effect, restages his swallowing of Metis, assimilating the Promethean qualities that will equip him to rule wisely and thereby perpetuate his reign.

Prometheus and Humanity

In *Prometheus Bound*, however, Zeus’s evolutionary growth has only begun: the godhead is divided, causing divine power (Zeus) to war against divine intelligence (Prometheus). The play opens with Zeus’s henchmen, the unwilling Hephaestus and the allegorical figures of Might and Violence (the qualities by which Zeus then ruled), driving iron spikes through the Titan’s flesh, immobilizing him on a barren crag. Silent during his mutilation, Prometheus later reveals that he stole fire not merely to defy Zeus but to allow the human race to pity for helpless mortals, raising humanity. Although Aeschylus’s dition making Prometheus the most complete identific, suffers. As the nineteen-ized in his version of *Prometheus Bound*, human mind, which, de in thought to explore th

Complexities and Savior and Rebel

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merely to defy Zeus but to rescue humanity from extinction. Zeus had planned to allow the human race to perish in ignorance and darkness, but Prometheus, feeling pity for helpless mortals, gave them fire and taught them the arts and skills of civilization, raising humanity from savagery to a consciousness of its potential.

Although Aeschylus—at least in this one surviving play—does not cite the tradition making Prometheus humanity's creator (Figure 4-6), he emphasizes the almost complete identification between the Titan and the race for whose benefit he suffers. As the nineteenth-century English romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley realized in his version of *Prometheus Unbound*, the suffering Titan is an image of the human mind, which, despite its physical bondage to oppressive rulers, remains free in thought to explore the vast universe and to contemplate its eventual liberation.

Complexities and Functions of the Prometheus Myth

**Savior and Rebel**

The tension between Zeus the despot and Zeus the future promulgator of justice is paralleled in the ambiguity of Prometheus's dual role as rebel and savior. From a human viewpoint, the Titan is a redeemer who endures unspeakable pain for the sake of mortals, whose continued existence he makes possible. From Zeus's perspective, however, he is a lawbreaker whose arrogance must be punished. As a savior figure who subverts divine authority, Prometheus reflects the Greeks' ambivalence toward individualism: although the intrinsic value of the individual was an indispensable component of Greek humanism, it was also recognized that extreme assertion of
individual rights can disrupt the public order. Individual rebels, even when championing a just cause, can collide destructively with legitimate authority, damaging both themselves and the state (see the discussion of Antigone’s defiance of state law in Chapter 16). Some commentators suggest, in fact, that the play juxtaposes two equally plausible versions of the right: Zeus as established authority, to which appropriate deference must be paid, and Prometheus as the force of conscience and critical intelligence, which has an ethical obligation to oppose oppressive authority.

In Aeschylus’s reinterpretation of the Prometheus myth, both Zeus and Prometheus can plausibly justify their respective positions, but it is the passage of slow time, with its potential for contemplative growth and ripened insight, that ultimately reconciles these polar opposites. After long cons, Zeus’s political might and Prometheus’s ethical right at last converge, bringing together king and rebel—uniting them in the Olympian council.

According to Hesiod, Prometheus is a second-generation Titan, the son of Iapetus and Clymene (Figure 4-7). Aeschylus, however, makes him the child of Themis, whom he implicitly identifies with Gaia, the Earth Mother, generator of gods and primeval source of justice. As a masculine counterpart to wise-counseling Gaea, Themis, and Athene, Prometheus attracts the loyalty of Ocean’s daughters, who compose the chorus, a group of singers and dancers who comment on (and often judge) the characters and actions in a Greek play. In Prometheus Bound, the chorus is torn between sympathy for the hero’s suffering and horror at the example of divine retribution he represents. When Prometheus refuses to submit to Zeus and thus end his pain, his obstinacy provokes the chorus to charge that he “misses the mark” of wise self-interest.

The word Aeschylus and other tragedians use to denote a character’s tragic error is hamartia, a term drawn from archery that means “missing the mark.” Although this is the same word translated as “sin” in English versions of the New Testament, it can apply to any quality or action, such as a mistake in judgment or even an excess of righteousness, that results in failure to hit the target of divine approval. In the chorus’s pragmatic view, Prometheus’s extreme ethical autonomy displays hubris, the blinding pride that tyrannically afflicts the tragic hero (see Chapters 14 and 15).

At the same time, Aeschylus makes it clear that Prometheus will suffer excruciating pain because he is the last free mind in the universe, the only consciousness that can distinguish between absolutes of good and evil. To corrupt his awareness by conformity to Zeus’s demands would rob the light that he had brought to earth. In this respect, Prometheus’s honesty—a virtue—is the quality that occasions his suffering.

Io: A Victim of Zeus’s Despotism

Two important scenes help convey Aeschylus’s purpose in his subversion of the Prometheus myth. The first introduces Io, a young girl almost insane by a stinging gadfly that Hera jealously sends to punish Prometheus, who has deliberately disobeyed Zeus. Io is merely a
FIGURE 4-8  Atlas and Prometheus. The brutality with which Zeus enforces his rule is vividly rendered in this archaic Spartan cup depicting two Titan brothers (c. 555 B.C.). The giant Atlas endures back-breaking pain, his shoulders bent against the weight of the heavenly vault he is condemned forever to support. Facing him while suffering even worse agony is Prometheus, whose flesh is being ripped by the beak and talons of Zeus's hungry eagle. Aeschylus's Prometheus can escape this repeated vivisection if he submits to Zeus's authority, an option he rejects because it means accepting his oppressor's right to enslave bodies and control minds. (Vatican Museum, Rome)

At the same time, Aeschylus makes it clear that Prometheus willingly bears excruciating pain because his is the last free mind in the universe, the sole remaining consciousness that can distinguish between absolutes of good and evil (Figure 4-8). To corrupt his awareness by conforming to Zeus's demands would be to extinguish the light that he had brought to earth. In this respect, Prometheus's intellectual honesty—a virtue—is the quality that ocassions his suffering.

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of the despot’s lust. Io’s case illustrates the fate of vulnerable humanity when no restraints on a despot’s whim exist. Her appearance near the middle of the play is particularly damning to the Olympian ruler: the bully who rapes her is too cowardly to protect Io from his wife’s irrational fury. Both the King and Queen of Heaven are chillingly indifferent to the suffering they cause.

In the climactic episode, Hermes, portrayed as the swaggering emissary of a military junta, appears to announce the torments that Zeus will soon inflict on Prometheus. Ocean’s daughters, who had earlier begged Prometheus to give up his resistance, now reject Hermes’ advice to abandon the Titan. The chorus, which typically voices a mediating position between the tragic extremes of two battling opponents, unanimously decides to take Prometheus’s side, even if it means sharing his punishment. Led by the chorus’s example, the audience is confronted with a choice between seemingly irresistible power and helpless principle and is asked to opt for the latter.

The Secret: Only Prometheus Can Save Zeus

In Aeschylus’s ironic vision, Prometheus’s defiance of Zeus’s injustice gives the Olympian an opportunity to save himself from the fate of his predecessors, Uranus and Cronus. Prometheus alone knows the cause of Zeus’s future downfall—the Olympian’s sexual hunger will drive him to beget (by the sea nymph Thetis) a son strong enough to displace him (see Chapter 12). In the lost plays, Prometheus voluntarily confides this secret to Zeus, rescuing the god from destruction by his own untamed impulses.

In turn, as Hermes prophesies, Prometheus will benefit from the redemptive act of a god willing to die for him. Although Aeschylus does not identify the deity who will sacrifice himself for Prometheus, Apollodorus states that this expiatory role is filled by the centaur Chiron (Figure 4-9). According to Apollodorus, when he is wounded by one of Heracles’ poisoned arrows, Chiron suffers such exquisite agony that he is eager to die, and in perishing he somehow bestows his immortality on Prometheus. Because the Titan is already immortal, however, it is difficult to see how Chiron’s vicarious sacrifice can benefit him. As Mark Griffith suggests, Hermes’ prophecy may refer to either Chiron or Heracles, who not only frees Prometheus but also, as his final “labor,” descends into the Underworld to fetch Cerberus (see Chapters 9 and 10).

Although Zeus finally accepts Prometheus among the Olympian immortals, one tradition states that, because he had sworn by the River Styx (a symbol of the gods’ unbreakable oaths) that the Titan would never be released from his rock, Zeus forces Prometheus to wear a steel ring to which a fragment of the rock is attached. Prometheus is thus forever bound to a tangible reminder of Zeus’s superior authority.

Scenes from Prometheus Bound are included after passages from the Works and Days.

Prometheus and Deucalion’s Flood

Just as some traditions make Prometheus the divine potter who created humankind (in his image?), so others similarly portray him as humanity’s savior when Zeus drowned the world in a flood. According to Aeschylus, Prometheus’s theft of fire originally was prompted it with a new race. When civilization, such as archi- animals—kept humanity fr unleashed a global deluge witted Titan subdued 2 Deucalion’s wife, Pyrrha, ensuring humanity’s surv: morphoses (see Chapter 20 wise mother of Prometheus ing the bones of their moent, Deucalion and Pyrrha (rocks) over their shoule those that Pyrrha throws that both gods and morta Like Hesiod’s tale of the Greek myth of Deucalion Ancient Sumerian and B created all of humanity excep angular wooden chest) to appear in the Atrahasis E, the Greeks but also the a of this ancient Near East
original was prompted by Zeus’s early resolve to eliminate humanity and replace it with a new race. When the Titan’s additional gifts to men—teaching the arts of civilization, such as architecture, writing, agriculture, and the domestication of animals—kept humanity from dying out through ignorance and poverty, Zeus then unleashed a global deluge to rid earth of its human population. Again, the quick-witted Titan subverted Zeus’s intentions, warning his mortal son Deucalion and Deucalion’s wife, Pyrrha, of Zeus’s plan and instructing them to build a boat, thus ensuring humanity’s survival. According to Apollodorus’s Library and Ovid’s Metamorphoses (see Chapter 20), after the floodwaters recede, an oracle from Themis, the wise mother of Prometheus, commands the pair to repopulate the world by casting the bones of their mother. Recognizing the earth, Gaia, as their maternal parent, Deucalion and Pyrrha obey the oracle by tossing fragments of earth’s “bones” (rocks) over their shoulders. The stones that Deucalion throws become men, while those that Pyrrha throws become women—a tale reiterating the Hesiodic tradition that both gods and mortals are descendants of a common ancestor, the earth.

Like Hesiod’s tale of succeeding generations of warring gods in the Theogony, the Greek myth of Deucalion’s flood is a revised version of older Mesopotamian lore. Ancient Sumerian and Babylonian texts refer to a deluge in which the gods wiped out all of humanity except for one family, which survived by building an ark (rectangular wooden chest) to ride out the catastrophe. Detailed accounts of the disaster appear in the Atrahasis Epic and the Epic of Gilgamesh, which influenced not only the Greeks but also the authors of Genesis, who preserve the most famous version of this ancient Near Eastern story.
Perhaps one of the most significant parallels between the Gilgamesh flood narrative and that of Deucalion is the opposing roles played by two different gods, one of whom brings the disaster and the other of whom saves humanity by secretly warning a human favorite of the imminent danger. In the Gilgamesh epic, Enlil, the irritable god of storm, determines to exterminate humanity by flooding the earth. But Ea, the god of wisdom and a friend to humanity, warns a worthy individual, Utnapishtim (the Babylonian Noah), of the coming disaster. Following Ea's instructions to construct an ark and fill it with all kinds of animals, Utnapishtim and his wife survive the world's return to a watery chaos. When the flood is over and his ark is grounded on a mountaintop (the peak is Ararat in the biblical tale and Parnassus in the Greek), Utnapishtim sends out birds to find dry land; eventually, he leaves the ark to help repopulate the earth. His most celebrated descendant is the hero Gilgamesh, a slayer of monsters and explorer of earth's remotest regions (see Chapter 10).

In Genesis, the three sons of Noah become the progenitors of all branches of the human race known to the early biblical writers, with Seth identified as the ancestor of the Semitic peoples, including Israel, and Japheth (Javen) the ultimate forebear of the Greeks. In the Greek adaptation of this Mesopotamian myth, Deucalion and Pyrrha (without throwing stones) produce Hellen, the eponymous ancestor (the person from whom a group reputedly takes its name) of the Greeks. In Hellen's honor, the historical Greeks called themselves Hellenes [HEL-lee-nee] and their country Hellas [HEL-luhz].

Traditions about humanity's decline from a lost Golden Age, evoked in Hesiod's Works and Days, as well as the stories of Prometheus's deeds and Deucalion's flood, provided the ancient Greeks with a mythic past that serves the purpose of history. In employing ancient tales to justify retroactively the values and practices of Hellenic society, including the tensions involved in gender inequality and other forms of social inequity, Hesiod and other storytellers leave many important questions unanswered. The tension between Hesiod's admiration for Zeus and his uncomfortable awareness that the god is largely responsible for humanity's miseries in the present Age of Iron goes unresolved. Three centuries after Hesiod's time, however, Aeschylus creatively reinterpreted the mythic conflict between Zeus, Prometheus, and the mortals whom Prometheus loved to explore further the issues of divine justice, individual freedom, and humanity's possible future in a fitfully evolving universe.

WORKS AND DAYS*
Hesiod

Muses of the sacred spring Pieria
Who give glory in song,
Come sing Zeus' praises, hymn your great Father
Through whom mortals are either
Renowned or unknown, famous or unfamed
As goes the will of great Zeus.
Easy for Him to build up the strong
And tear the strong down.
Easy for Him to diminish the mighty
And magnify the obscure.
Easy for Him to straighten the crooked
And wither the proud.

Zeus the Thunderer
Whose house is most high.

Bend bithet your mind,
Hand down just judgments,
O Thou!

And as for me,
Well, brother Perses,
I'd like to state a few facts.

TWO KINDS OF STRIFE
It looks like there's not just one kind of Strife—
That's Eris—after all, but two on the Earth.
You'd praise one of them once you got to know her,
But the other's plain blameworthy. They've just got
Completely opposite temperaments.
One of them favors war and fighting. She's a mean cuss
And nobody likes her, but everybody honors her,
This ornery Eris. They have to: it's the gods' will.

The other was born first though. Ebony Night
Bore her, and Kronos' son who sits high in thin air
Set her in Earth's roots, and she's a lot better for humans.
Even shiftless folks she gets stirred up to work.
When a person's lazing about and sees his neighbor
Getting rich, because he hurries to plow and plant
And put his homestead in order, he tends to competes
With that neighbor in a race to get rich.
  Strife like this does people good.
    So potter feuds with potter
    And carpenter with carpenter,
    Beggar is jealous of beggar
    And poet of poet.

Now, Perses, you lay these things up in your heart
And don't let the mischief-loving Eris keep you from work,
Spending all your time in the market eyeballing quarrels
And listening to lawsuits. A person hasn't any business
Wasting time at the market unless he's got a year's supply
Of food put by, grain from Demeter out of the ground.
When you've got plenty of that, you can start squabbling
Over other people's money.

But that you're going to get
Another chance with me. Let's settle this feud right now
With the best kind of judgment, a straight one from Zeus.
We had our inheritance all divided up, then you
Made off with most of it, playing up to those
Bribe-eating lords who love cases like this.
Damn fools. Don't know the half from the whole,
Or the real goodness in mallows and asphodel.

WHY LIFE IS HARD
You know, the gods never have let on
How humans might make a living. Else,
You might get enough done in one day
To keep you fixed for a year without working.
You might just hang your plowshare up in the smoke,
And all the fieldwork done by your oxen
And hard-working mules would soon run to ruin.

But Zeus got his spleen up, and went and hid
How to make a living, all because shifty Prometheus
Tricked him. That's why Zeus made life hard for humans.

Stole fire. But that fine son of Lapetus stole it
Right back out from under Zeus' nose, hiding
The flame in a fennel stalk. And thundering Zeus
Who rides herd on the clouds got angry and said:

"Lapetus' boy, if you're not the smartest of them all!
I bet you're glad you stole fire and outfoxed me.
But things will go hard for you and for humans after this.
I'm going to give them Evil in exchange for fire,
Their very own Evil to love and embrace."

That's what he said, And he laughed out
And told him to hurry And put a human
And to make the face And the figure like
Then he told Athena And Aphrodite gold
And painful desire a
And he ordered the
To give her a bitchy
That's what he told
Kronos' son. And rich
Plastered up some clas
Just like Zeus wanted
Got her all dressed up
And Lady Persuasion
On her skin, and that
Put on her head a crown
Pallas Athena put on
And the quicksilver
Lies and wheedling
Just like rumbling Z
Puta voice in her, a
Pandora, because all
And she was a real t

When this piece of
Zeus sent Hermes to
As a present, and that
Epimetheus didn't take
Not to accept presen
Right back, in case
No, Epimetheus too
Then he thought on

Had lived off the la
No sickness or pain
(And when men are
But) the woman too
And scattered all the
Only Hope was left
Stuck under the lip
The woman clamped
All by the plan of d
But ten thousand o
The earth is full of
That’s what he said, the Father of gods and men,
And he laughed out loud. Then he called Hephaistos
And told him to hurry and knead some earth and water
And put a human voice in it, and some strength,
And to make the face like an immortal goddess’ face
And the figure like a beautiful, desirable virgin’s.
Then he told Athene to teach her embroidery & weaving,
And Aphrodite golden to spill grace on her head
And painful desire and knee-weakening anguish.
And he ordered the quicksilver messenger, Hermes,
To give her a bitchy mind and a cheating heart.
That’s what he told them, and they listened to Lord Zeus,
Kronos’ son. And right away famous old Gimpy
Plastered up some clay to look like a shy virgin
Just like Zeus wanted, and the Owl-Eyed Goddess
Got her all dressed up, and the Graces divine
And Lady Persuasion put some gold necklaces
On her skin, and the Seasons (with their long, fine hair)
Put on her head a crown of springtime flowers.
Pallas Athena put on the finishing touches,
And the quicksilver messenger put in her breast
Lies and wheedling words and a cheating heart,
Just like rumbling Zeus wanted. And the gods’ own herald
Put a voice in her, and he named that woman
Pandora, because all the Olympians donated something,
And she was a real pain for human beings.

When this piece of irresistible bait was finished,
Zeus sent Hermes to take her to Epimetheus
As a present, and the speedy messenger-god did it.
Epimetheus didn’t think on what Prometheus had told him,
Not to accept presents from Olympian Zeus but to send any
Right back, in case trouble should come of it to mortals.
No, Epimetheus took it, and after he had the trouble
Then he thought on it.

Because before that the human race
Had lived off the land without any trouble, no hard work,
No sickness or pain that the Fates give to men
(And when men are in misery they show their age quickly).
But the woman took the lid off the big jar with her hands
And scattered all the miseries that spell sorrow for men.
Only Hope was left there in the unbreakable container,
Struck under the lip of the jar, and couldn’t fly out:
The woman clamped the lid back on the jar first,
All by the plan of the Aegisholder, cloud-herding Zeus.
But ten thousand or so other horrors spread out among men,
The earth is full of evil things, and so’s the sea.
Diseases wander around just as they please, by day and by night, 
Soundlessly, since Zeus in his wisdom deprived them of voice. 
There's just no way you can get around the mind of Zeus.

If you want, I can sum up another tale for you, 
Neat as you please. The main point to remember 
Is that gods and humans go back a long way together.

THE FIVE AGES

Golden was the first race of articulate folk 
Created by the immortals who live on Olympos. 
They actually lived when Kronos was king of the sky, 
And they lived like gods, not a care in their hearts, 
Nothing to do with hard work or grief, 
And miserable old age didn't exist for them. 
From fingers to toes they never grew old, 
And the good times rolled. And when they died 
It was like sleep just ravelled them up.

They had everything good. The land bore them fruit 
All on its own, and plenty of it too. Cheerful folk, 
They did their work peaceably and in prosperity, 
With plenty of flocks, and they were dear to the gods. 
And sure when Earth covered over that generation 
They turned into holy spirits, powers above ground, 
Invisible wardens for the whole human race.

They roam all over the land, shrouded in mist, 
Tending to justice, repaying criminal acts 
And dispensing wealth. This is their royal honor.

Later, the Olympians made a second generation, 
Silver this time, not nearly so fine as the first, 
Not at all like the gold in either body or mind. 
A child would be reared at his mother's side 
A hundred years, just a big baby, playing at home. 
And when they finally did grow up and come of age 
They didn't live very long, and in pain at that. 
Because of their lack of wits. They just could not stop 
Hurting each other and could not bring themselves 
To serve the Immortals, nor sacrifice at their altars 
The way men ought to, wherever and whenever. So Zeus, 
Kronos' son, got angry and did away with them 
Because they weren't giving the Blessed Gods their honors. 
And when Earth had covered over that generation— 
Blessed underground mortals is what they are called, 
Second in status, but still they have their honor— 
Father Zeus created a third generation 
Of articulate folk, Bronze this time, not like
The silver at all, made them out of ash trees,
Kind of monstrous and heavy, and all they cared about
Was fighting and war. They didn't eat any food at all.
They had this kind of hard, untameable spirit.
Shapeless hulls. Terrifically strong. Grapplehook hands
Grew out of their shoulders on thick stumps of arms,
And they had bronze weapons, bronze houses,
And their tools were bronze. No black iron back then.
Finally they killed each other off with their own hands
And went down into the bone-chilling hails of Hades
And left no names behind. Astounding as they were,
Black Death took them anyway, and they left the sun's light.

So Earth buried that generation too,
And Zeus fashioned a fourth race
To live off the land, juster and nobler,
The divine race of Heroes, also called
Demigods, the race before the present one.
They all died fighting in the great wars,
Some at seven-gated Thebes, Kadmos' land,
In the struggle for Oidipous' cattle,
And some, crossing the water in ships,
Died at Troy, for the sake of beautiful Helen.
And when Death's veil had covered them over
Zeus granted them a life apart from other men,
Settling them at the ends of the Earth.
And there they live, free from all care,
In the Isles of the Blest, by Ocean's deep stream,
Blessed heroes for whom the life-giving Earth
Bears sweet fruit ripening three times a year.

[Far from the Immortals, and Kronos is their king,
For the Father of gods and men has released him
And he still has among them the honor he deserves.
Then the fifth generation: Broad-browed Zeus
Made still another race of articulate folk
To people the plentiful Earth.]

I wish

I had nothing to do with this fifth generation,
Wish I had died before or been born after,
Because this is the Iron Age.

Not a day goes by
A man doesn't have some kind of trouble.
Nights too, just wearing him down. I mean
The gods send us terrible pain and vexation.
Still, there'll be some good mixed in with the evil,
And then Zeus will destroy this generation too,
WILL be left for mortal men, and no defence against evil.

There go Shame and Necessity, and horrible suffering
of to join the immortals,brandishing human
lovess apparitions wrapped in white veils,
up to Olympus from the wide-paved Earth,

And then

With both bold mouth and brashly face,fulling evil,
Envy will be ever polls,common companions
Slender thin,and wean on cattle on top of it.
Some good-for-nothing will hurt a decent man.
And shame and justice will lie in their bands.
For the wrongdoer, the man who is violence incarnate,
The just man, No, they'll keep their pride.
For the man who keeps his erson, the good man,
Seduce each other's crosses to respect all.
They'll start taunting justice into their own hands,
For all the tricks it was to write them.
Godless Reed, and never think done,phyling them back,
But they'll curse them and give them a hard time.
Nobodys I honor good persons when they're old.
And brothers wont be friends, if they vert went to be.
Not equals with hous, no patience with partner.
Then faithes wont get along with their kids anymore.
Soon as they start being born, they around the empire.
So think it over carefully, and remember
To make your choice not obstinately but wisely.

Leader
Yes, we agree with Hermes. He is right. He urges you to lay self-will aside
And follow the path of wisdom and discretion.
Being so wise, you must for shame comply.

Prometheus
I knew this message would come. Unashamed I defy him. I take back nothing. And so let him now set his fireballs rolling! Let him scorch hill and valley, blacken the sky, smoke out heaven, quench stars in the sea, and then sweep me, plunged in the ironbound Tide of Necessity, down into Tartarus—all this he can do but not kill me!

Hermes
He is mad, stark mad, you can see for yourselves. So now, stand clear! Having offered your sympathy, hurry away! Stand clear from the volley of thunder!

Chorus
No, no, we refuse to desert him, we stay at his side to the end; for of all vile things in the world the worst is a traitor.

Hermes
Very well, but remember that, caught in the whirlwind, you must not blame Zeus for it, whimpering in the trap of your own sweet folly.

Prometheus
It is coming. The ground shakes. In the distance a rumble of thunder. Forked lightning above, and the dust-clouds dance as the winds frolic madly, the crests of the sea topple into the skies. It is on me, the full force of the fury of Zeus. Mother Earth! O light of the world, moving in majesty in the heavenly spaces! You see this injustice.

Questions for Discussion and Review
1. Describe Prometheus's role in humanity's primal history. What does his gift of fire to mankind signify? Why does Zeus retaliate with the creation of Pandora? In what respects is the first woman a “lovely evil”? How does she resemble Eve in the Book of Genesis? Why do both Zeus and the biblical Yahweh try to prevent humans from acquiring forbidden knowledge?
2. Describe Hesiod's view of the two Strifes, and explain their role in the devolving history of humankind. Describe the four metallic ages and the Age of Heroes. Why does Hesiod regard human history as characterized by a downward spiral toward ultimate calamity?
3. Discuss the mythic themes of a lost Golden Age and primal fall from grace that appear in both Greek and biblical traditions. Does a Freudian or Jungian approach help explain this persistent myth?

4. What is Strife's (Eris's) function in Hesiod's concept of the world order?

5. How does the Athenian playwright Aeschylus, writing more than two centuries after Hesiod, change the character of Prometheus? At what ethical stage of his development do we find Zeus in this dramatic retelling of the myth? Why does Zeus operate primarily through the agencies of Might and Violence, allegorical figures who bind Prometheus to his rock?

6. Describe Io's thematic function in Aeschylus's version of the myth. In what way does her innocence of wrongdoing implicate Zeus? Why does the chorus, which usually represents a middle ground between two battling opponents, ultimately decide to take Prometheus's side, even though it means they must share in his punishment?

7. How does Aeschylus portray the Titan as both lawbreaker and savior who suffers for humanity? What qualities of the two opponents—Zeus and Prometheus—keep them in conflict? What changes in attitude and ethical maturity will eventually, after cons, allow them to reconcile so that divine power (Zeus) is again linked to divine wisdom and compassion (Prometheus)?

8. According to traditions not mentioned by either Hesiod or Aeschylus, Prometheus was both humankind's creator and its savior during Deucalion's flood. What new dimensions to his myth do these traditions add?