

*A Zeus wronged by Prometheus and an
Aeschylus wronged by the critics*

The Compassion of Orthodoxy: The Prometheus Bound of Aeschylus

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ONE OF THE central interpretative difficulties with the *Prometheus Bound* of Aeschylus has been to account for the poet's seemingly uncharacteristic treatment of Zeus. The problem for the critics has been simply that the Zeus of the *Prometheus Bound* does not seem very Zeuslike. The poet has portrayed him as brutal, vengeful, insecure—not at all the far-seeing, wise Father-Zeus of Hesiod or the other surviving plays of the Aeschylean corpus.

Most commentators have sought to resolve this seeming anomaly in Aeschylus's treatment of Zeus by suggesting that, over the course of the trilogy, Zeus would "evolve" into a mellower deity.¹ Others have brusquely cut through the knot by positing a Zeus who, rather than change his character, would simply change his mind. They construct a Zeus who will "do a deal" with Prometheus;² or a *Realpolitiker* Zeus, a sort of Attic Bismarck, who will strike a power-political bargain with the rebellious Titan.³ Others wonder whether Aeschylus really wrote the play after all.⁴ What the majority of the play's modern critics do agree upon, however, is this: The Zeus of this play is different from the traditional Zeus. The poet has portrayed him, in his punishment

of Prometheus, as savage, arbitrary, even unjust.⁵

Surely Prometheus sees Zeus as a cruel and high-handed tyrant. So too have most critics seen him. Yet, was this the poet's view of the Zeus of his *Prometheus Bound*? With whom do the poet's sympathies truly lie: with Prometheus or with Zeus? The answer is incontestable. The Zeus of the *Prometheus Bound* is not a brutal and arbitrary despot, but is in fact the same protector of the unseen measure of *Dike*, of justice, that Aeschylus depicted in his other dramas. Prometheus, as Aeschylus portrayed him, is not a victim, but a justly punished transgressor of the divine order.

This view has seemed incredible to some critics. Podlecki mentions the notion, but dismisses it almost contemptuously.⁶ Lloyd-Jones finds it "an opinion that has gone out of fashion in this century, and no wonder."⁷ Yet, a careful if unfashionable reading of the play will reveal that the poet's sympathies lie not with Prometheus but with Zeus. The "problem of Zeus" is a problem only for critics who have read literally what Aeschylus has meant ironically.

This interpretation of the play is neither perverse nor unique, though a reading of

the critics, where they mention it at all, would incline one so to think. Nicolaus Wecklein formulated the view well in 1897:

The whole plot of the drama turns on the character of Prometheus. By his example it is shown that every revolt against Zeus must necessarily come from ignorance of his wise designs, that every fault imputed to him has its foundations in a purblind and malicious judgment, and that any seeming ground for insubordination, however specious and seductive, must in the end prove a snare and a delusion.⁸

Zeus in the *Prometheus Bound* of Aeschylus is not a despot; he is a father. Prometheus is not a rebel to be admired; he is a rebel to be punished and, perhaps, through punishment, made to see the error of his pride and the justice of his bonds.

A handful of other commentators have also argued this position: Eirik Vandvik, in a 1942 monograph, and, more briefly, Eric Voegelin (1957, 1968) and Leo Strauss (1968).⁹ Yet, a student perusing the critical literature will scarcely find these commentators cited, even in bibliographies. More important, he will virtually never find the position they argue examined and confuted. This silence is a puzzle.

As Eric Voegelin once observed, the stream is clearest at its source. Let us try to get behind the secular, romantic connotations that have encrusted the figure of Prometheus and re-examine the play that Aeschylus, not Shelley or Goethe, actually wrote. What we will find is a Zeus wronged by Prometheus and an Aeschylus wronged by the critics.

II

Many in the audience that attended the Prometheus trilogy, first performed at Athens perhaps as early as 479–78 B.C.,¹⁰ would have been men of the generation of Marathon, men who were, like the poet himself, “Marathon champions,” men who had seen war and experienced the “miracle” of the Greek victory. As Vand-

vik plausibly suggests,¹¹ this was a tempered generation. They were not the progress-fattened, increasingly bellicose Athenians of the later fifth century. They were not possessed of a sense of skepticism about the gods. They had experienced, and recently, their providence in the Persian wars. They would have been particularly grateful in recollecting that providence. These men had seen, too, the ambiguous benefits of that fire which was Prometheus’s special gift to mankind, fire which indeed warms the hearth, but also forges the weapons that slay comrades and razes the homes that shelter loved ones. We may well wonder with what unalloyed enthusiasm such a pious and annealed generation would have entertained such a gift and its larcenous giver: “benefactor,” indeed, who gave men fire but not also the *sophrosyne*, the wisdom and due measure necessary to use that gift well.

To be sure, we know nothing about the criteria the archon might have applied when approving plays for production. Nor can we be sure precisely how audiences reacted to this particular play (or to any play of the early fifth century). But it is implausible to suppose, as both Wecklein and Vandvik point out, that a play which truly portrayed Zeus as a cruel tyrant (especially if that play were the first play of a trilogy, as the “evolutionary-Zeus” critics are constrained to argue¹²) would have been tolerated.¹³ We do know that Aeschylus was an unusually respected citizen and that his plays were accorded the unusual honor of being re-produced (at a time, perhaps, when some thought his dramas might fortify an increasingly decadent populace).¹⁴ In sum, the Prometheus trilogy, or any other play produced at that time for that audience, could not have portrayed Zeus in any but the traditional Hesiodic light, as far-seeing, wise Father-Zeus, at once stern and gentle, who establishes and ensures justice, but a Zeus also possessed of a “mind unknowable for men.”¹⁵ And this latter is the key point. As all Athenians knew from Hesiod, Prometheus had sought to deceive Zeus at

Mekone, but "Zeus, full of eternal counsel, saw through the stratagem and noted it well."¹⁶ Through the rage of the immoderate Prometheus the Athenian audience could read the true face of Father-Zeus. Children cannot always comprehend the wisdom of a father, especially when he is teaching them hard lessons. How easily they misconstrue his actions and his intent. His ways often seem alien and excessively hard. But mature men can recognize the directing heart behind the firm hand. They recognize the gift of instruction, the need for them to learn certain things, if not through obedience, then through suffering.

To modern critics the gods may be mere literary figures. We are tempted to read them automatically, when we encounter them in myth or drama, as symbols for man. But to fifth-century Athenians the gods were living realities. One might steal from one's neighbor and the gods look the other way. But only a madman — or a mad god — would steal from the hearth of Zeus.¹⁷ An Athenian spectator, though not a modern critic, would take seriously that he was watching a play about the gods. How that spectator must have shuddered to hear even another god, let alone a man, call himself — as early on in the play (1. 120)¹⁸ — the enemy of Zeus! How chilling to hear Prometheus's outburst, "In a word, I hate all the gods!" (1. 975.) And how that spectator might have nodded in agreement with Hermes' quietly precise diagnosis of that outburst: "It appears you have been stricken with no small madness." (1. 977.) Such a spectator might admire Prometheus's courage, his endurance of pain, might even sympathize with his unfortunate plight; but it is exceedingly dubious that any sensible Greek, though not necessarily every modern critic, would fail to understand precisely where justice lay between Zeus and Prometheus. Prometheus had directly violated the order established by Zeus. The Titan and even Zeus's own rather slow-witted henchmen, Strength and Violence,¹⁹ might characterize Zeus's rule as that of a "tyrant."

An Athenian audience, though, mindful of the cruel excesses of genuine tyrants like the Hippias²⁰ of their fathers' generation or the contemporary Hiero at Syracuse, could understand how absurd and even self-damning such a description of the wise and mighty son of Kronos must be. In Prometheus's prideful and distorted accusations that audience would immediately sense disorder. They would see the irony in these descriptions of Zeus as cruel and arbitrary tyrant: Zeus, who overthrew a genuine tyrant, the murderous Kronos, swallower of his own children; Zeus, who established in place of the ancient chaos, not a new tyranny, but the order of *Dike*, an order mirrored in the lawfulness and security of the polis. An Athenian audience, though not all modern critics, could distinguish between the ironic voice of Aeschylus, the playwright, and the deluded voice of Prometheus, the punished.

Finally, again from the point of view of that early fifth-century Athenian audience, consider the disparity between the Prometheus portrayed on the stage — defiant rebel, self-declared enemy of Zeus who considers himself an unjustly persecuted "coordinate power" — and the Prometheus that audience knew well. The audience knew the altar to Prometheus in the Academy. They knew the torch-race run each year in his honor. They knew him as a deity, though a minor deity.²¹ He was the god of potters and craftsmen. He was not, in the fifth-century Athenian pantheon, in any sense a rival of Zeus. That he may have once so imagined himself must have been, to a contemporary audience, a striking example of self-delusion. Moreover, if Prometheus once did imagine himself a serious competitor with Zeus for honor, an Athenian audience would expect the poet to explain, not merely how the Titan came to be released by Zeus, but how he came to be reconciled with Zeus, how he came to recognize his own delusion and to accept Zeus's position — and his own — as just and ordinate. Deals and bargains are not the stuff of reconciliations.

III

Still, such external evidence is only circumstantial. What evidence is there within the play to suggest that Prometheus, though the central character of the drama, is not intended by the playwright to be seen as an admirable character?

The first thing to notice is the most obvious of all: Prometheus is a prisoner. He is being punished. Now some punishments are justified, some are not. We do not know at the beginning of the play (at least those of us for whom the first play of the trilogy has been lost) whether this punishment is justified or unjustified. But we do know that the testimony of a prisoner against his jailer will not necessarily be dispassionate. When Prometheus calls Zeus brutal and ungrateful, we ought not to be too ready to believe him without evidence. It is precisely here, in formulating their evaluation of the character of Zeus on the basis of the testimony of a pinioned opponent, that many critics become astonishingly docile. They believe the prisoner.²²

Yet as we observe the character of Prometheus closely, as the poet develops it, for example, in the exchanges with the chorus of Oceanids, we notice unsettling traits. We learn that Prometheus, when he was unable to persuade the other Titans to use guile to defeat Zeus, went over to Zeus's party in order to be on the winning side. His Titan kin were severely punished by the victorious Zeus. Prometheus now complains when he, having in turn betrayed Zeus as he had his fellow Titans, is similarly punished. In one of Aeschylus's additions to Hesiod's account, Prometheus claims that it was his counsel that had given Zeus victory. We note, though, that he does not say precisely what that counsel was. Does he mean that Zeus had been without sufficient cunning to defeat the dull Titans? Prometheus tells the chorus that when Zeus finally gained victory he "at once appointed various rights to various gods, giving to each his set place and authority." (l. 232.) Ought this apportioning to be seen, as Prometheus

seems to regard it, as a tyrant's allocation of the booty, where Prometheus feels himself to have been "shorted"? Or was it perhaps in truth something nobler and subtler: the establishment of order through the apportioning of that which was due each in justice? In either case, Prometheus does not say what place he was given — perhaps a place not high enough for one of his intelligence and foresight? He then defied the will of Zeus and somehow "protected" the race of men from being destroyed by Zeus, who had intended to create in their place another race of men. With what was Zeus dissatisfied in the present race of men that he intended to create them anew? And with what new characteristics would they be endowed? Prometheus does not say. Nor does he specify how he managed to preserve the race of men from the god who had just subdued the race of Titans. Prometheus, we observe, had not been able to preserve himself.

Prometheus continues, boasting to the chorus, "I dared" (l. 236), and seems pleased with the pity his plight arouses in the chorus. But Prometheus has not been totally candid. The chorus senses that he has omitted something from his account. "Did your offense perhaps go further than you have said?" "Yes, I caused men no longer to foresee their death." (ll. 248-49.) He gave men blind hopefulness. It was a strange gift, one reflects, to obscure from mortals their essential mortality. Prometheus then volunteers yet more information. "I did more than that: I gave them fire." (l. 253.) This revelation shocks the chorus. "What? Men, whose life is but a day, possess already the hot radiance of fire? . . . This then was the offense for which you suffer. . . . Oh, you were wrong — do you not see?" (ll. 254, 256, 260.) Prometheus then petulantly turns upon the Oceanids: "Oh, it is easy for you who are free to give advice. 'Wrong?' I accept the word. I willed, willed to be wrong! . . . Yet I did not expect such punishment as this." (ll. 263-68.) He exults in his willfulness. He is also, surprisingly, surprised at his deserts.

The poet, in a short space, reveals this suffering god to be ambitious, a little dense, and not entirely open in admitting the nature of his trespass. We wonder what sort of plan Prometheus may have thwarted, what sort of race of men Zeus may have been intending to bring forth before the theft: a race perhaps less inclined to misuse the gift of fire because wiser and more measured; perhaps, in fact, a race of men more like the virtuous and just Heracles, whose father was Zeus and whose great-grandmother was Io, whose fate Prometheus misconstrues as misfortune.²³ Prometheus, the proud fore-thinker, seems not to have foreseen the mixed consequences for man of his "gifts." Even the rather flighty Oceanids see something disturbing and even horrifying in the gift of fire to "creatures of a day." And why does he who can discern the future seem surprised and irritated by the chorus's admonitions? Did he not foresee their reaction, even as he did not foresee the punishment Zeus would visit upon him? Frankly, we soon begin to wonder how stable and reliable are the claims of, as Wecklein describes him, this "short-sighted Forethinker." What of his testimony can we believe? Perhaps the loyal Strength was not being cruelly taunting but simply direct when he left the newly bound Prometheus to his suffering: "You're wrongly named, Prometheus, Wise-before-the-event! Wisdom is just the thing you want." (l. 86.)

Reflecting on these curiosities, we begin to suspect that the poet had, from Prometheus's opening monologue, begun to hint at the Titan's instability of character. Conacher points out clearly, but without suggesting their possible significance, the rapid fluctuations of mood Prometheus displays in his opening lines (ll. 88-101), from restraint through passion to self-rebuke.²⁴ Through this indirection, the poet powerfully suggests that this god is indeed erratic and disoriented, a prisoner not only of Zeus but also of his passions.

Unsettled by these oddities in the portrayal of Prometheus, we may then begin to wonder about this Zeus. We know

about him only through others. He never appears, yet his presence broods over the play — not at all unlike, one might suppose, the all-seeing sun whom the Titan invoked in that opening monologue, who "looks upon his suffering." Nor is the idea on the face of it absurd that far-seeing Zeus is looking on. With what motive? To sate his lust for vengeance? Perhaps. But what if Zeus were in fact allowing events to take this course for another reason? What if he had foreseen and permitted Prometheus's deception, permitted his defiance, permitted his gift of fire? What if Zeus were allowing events to trip along, seemingly out of his control? After all, it was Zeus who had commanded that Prometheus be bound far from the company of gods and men. Yet, apart from his brief opening monologue, Prometheus is never alone. He is visited by Oceanids, by Oceanus, by Io, by Hermes. All have something to say to him about repentance. Even Hephaestus, though pitying him, admonishes him that he has transgressed. Yet Prometheus is not disposed to hear these counselors whom Zeus, if not provides, then certainly allows.

Consider, too, the seemingly minor matter of the location of his punishment. Zeus has ordered that Prometheus be isolated from the community of the gods. Yet he also apparently permits a whole battalion of characters to troop across a desolate beach giving him advice. The Titan's reaction to this parade is revealing. It does not occur to him that Zeus must certainly be permitting these visitations to go on. He does not consider to what end. Rather, he condemns Zeus for the humiliation of such a public punishment. "Would that Zeus had sent me under the earth. . . . Instead . . . my torments bring joy to my enemies." (ll. 152-59.) This particular place of punishment, on the contrary, has been arranged by Zeus as an opportunity for Prometheus to "focus his mind," as Dr. Johnson might have described it, yet to focus it apart from a scolding multitude. In this place the Titan might learn the meaning of his crime, through suffering, yes, but also through counsel by sympathetic

creatures for whom Tartarus would have been inaccessible. Until a punishment is seen by the one punished as being just and deserved, then resentment gnaws, as effectively as an eagle gnawing at a liver — the locus of the passions — and one will not repent. Rather, any punishment will then seem outrageous and unjust. Zeus was not seeking the “secret” that Prometheus thought he could use against the god, nor was he seeking vengeance; he was seeking repentance and with it restoration of the disrupted order within the community of gods and men. But Prometheus, prisoner of his passions more than of Zeus, could not see in his situation the directing hand of the god.

How, exactly, one wonders, ought Zeus to have reacted toward this god who hates the gods? He did with him what one does with those who defy the law: separate him from the community and punish him. Prometheus was clearly neither powerful enough nor clever enough nor far-sighted enough to elude him. He reveals himself to be a most “ungodly” sort of god: consumed with anger and resentment for the god who will not give him what he insists is his due. He rages, but he is powerless. He boasts of his foreknowledge, yet that which he foresees that we know to be true he has learned only through his mother, Themis (l. 873), not through his own gifts. When he claims, concerning the secret consequence of Zeus’s future liaison with Thetis, “There is no god but I who can reveal to him [Zeus] the way to avert this ignominy [of Zeus’s fall from power through a son born of Thetis]. I know it all.” (l. 915.), Prometheus has forgotten that there surely is another — the woman from whom he learned the secret in the first place, Themis. How much else that he “foresees” does he know only through her? How much in these “foresights” are self-deluded boasts? He solemnly assures lo several times that Zeus shall be deposed, which his audience knows to be untrue. The chorus even suspects the emptiness of these assertions: “These threats against Zeus surely voice but your own wish.” Yet the Titan insists, “I speak what

shall prove true.” (ll. 928-29.) His statement is not conditional.

Increasingly Prometheus appears a short-sighted, impetuous, albeit generous-hearted boaster. We see everywhere the ironic hand of the playwright. With unerring precision, Aeschylus has selected his protagonist for this theme of rebellion against the divine order: a Titan. Kerenyi reminds us of Hesiod’s words about this race:

Father Ouranos had given them (the race of Iapetos, the father of Prometheus) the name “Titans” as a term of abuse and as a pun, as if the word were derived from *titainein*, “to overreach oneself,” and from *tisis*, “punishment”: the Titans had “over-reached” themselves, in their foolhardiness, by attempting to perform a great work, and for this they were later punished.²⁵

As the play proceeds, Prometheus appears less wise rather than more noble, stubborn rather than forbearing. His catalogue of the gifts he has given to man, for instance, bears examination in this light. His gifts are not exclusively materialistic. Rather, they are useful, practical gifts: carpentry; arithmetic; medicine; the harnessing of animals, especially horses; shipbuilding. These latter gifts, though, are not without ambiguity. A harnessed animal can be used to haul water; but it can also become “an ornament of wealth.” (l. 468.) Shipping, too, can transport timber and grain but also unguents and fine cloth. Both gifts would imply to a fifth-century audience the problems attendant upon the growing wealth produced by a vigorous, disciplined people: corrosive tendencies toward indulgence in luxuries and extravagance in consumption, both recurring concerns in Athenian society. Prometheus’s gifts entailed dangers, dangers to private and hence to civic virtues.

What sorts of gifts were left off the Titan’s list? He did not give men the polis — that was the gift of Zeus. He taught men divination — but not the offering of due sacrifice, not piety, not the justice of wor-

ship. His gifts to man reflected his own limited perspective: useful gifts but not the noblest. Isolated from controlling wisdom, a wisdom which he himself rejected, these useful gifts could become, in the hands of unvirtuous creatures of a day, positively perverse. To rule themselves, in the polis and in the soul, but under the acknowledged aegis of far-seeing Zeus: that was noblest for man the creature. The highest gifts came from Zeus. They could be secured only through self-control, self-denial, suffering.

What precisely was Prometheus's crime? Was it ultimately this "gift" of fire (which had not been his to give)? Was it these unblessed blessings, whose ambiguous consequences in some way reflected their blemished origin? Voegelin suggests that the theft was "only the most tangible symptom of a more primordial defiance. . . . This self-willed defiance of Prometheus (see especially l. 268) is not the assertion of a righteous claim against despotism." Rather, Prometheus does not "know himself"; he does not possess "the reflective self-knowledge that makes one aware of limitations and obligations under order." Precisely, Prometheus suffers from an "excess of pity (l. 241) and a deficiency in fear of God." (l. 542.)

For the excess of pity distorts the sense of the place of man in his relation to God, of his *conditio humana*: Prometheus tried to bestow honors (*time*) on man "beyond his true portion" (l. 30), and he replaced the divine decision with regard to the fate of man by "his private opinion or decision (*idia gnome*)."²⁶ (l. 544.)

Prometheus, then, suffers from "a madness, a *nosos*, disease" (l. 977) that "can be healed only by self-conquering submission."²⁷ (ll. 999 ff.). Prometheus, though, vows never to "kneel to my detested enemy, with womanish hands outspread in supplication for release." (ll. 1001-2.)

Prometheus was deluded. He thought he was that which he was not. It would not be until the final play of the trilogy, the *Pro-*

metheus Unbound, that the Titan would come to see his delusion, to face reality squarely. That reality was that he was a minor god under the order of Zeus, the order of *Dike*. As the fragments we do possess of that final play indicate, the vanquished Titans have made their peace with Zeus. They have submitted to his order. Prometheus, too, will submit, not from exhaustion but from recognition of the rightness of submission.

Prometheus was great-hearted and courageous beyond the measure of mortals. To call him a minor god is not to diminish much his distance from the creatures he loved too well. Yet, as Leo Sirauss observed:

The very greatness of Prometheus, which is so powerfully exhibited in the play, may be meant to give us an inkling of the greatness of Zeus, of Zeus' wisdom. Zeus is so great that he cannot be understood, that he must appear as a cruel tyrant, before he has manifested himself.²⁸

Zeus is never seen in the play, not primarily from a dramatic convention, but because *Dike*, justice, is never directly seen. It is the unseen measure. Yet it is nonetheless real. Its fruits are visible, as are the consequences of its transgression, to those with eyes prepared to see and ears disposed to hear.

IV

The *Prometheus Bound* of Aeschylus is a play filled with irony and surrounded by irony. It is filled with irony because its central character, Prometheus, misunderstands and hence continually misinterprets his own situation; it is surrounded by irony because the majority of modern commentators share Prometheus's misunderstanding and similarly misinterpret his condition. What a rich, Aeschylean irony: that the deluded Prometheus has also deluded his diviners; that the mistake of one infects those who come after him; that Aeschylus and Zeus prove themselves to be in fact wiser than Prometheus and his creatures.

The *Prometheus Bound* indeed treats a deeply religious theme: the consequences of the revolt against the order of Zeus, which is the order of justice. Grief, Aeschylus shows us, always follows from the revolt. The unseen measure indeed rules. The play affirms that Zeus is both stern judge and wise teacher, that his ways are, as Hesiod taught, often inscrutable but always just.

This is a strange theme to moderns, who believe neither in gods nor in an order of justice inscribed in the very being of things. Hence the inability of the age to fathom a pope who both embraces and admonishes. We no longer understand the compassion of orthodoxy. It is not then surprising that we are not sensitive to the tragic irony in the portrayal of a god whose name we remember but whose crime we hardly comprehend. We read Aeschylus but can see only Goethe and

Shelley. We have precisely reversed the symbols of disease and order.

Whoever was the Alexandrian scholiast who conceived the title of the play, *Prometheus Bound*, he understood well Aeschylus's intent. Prometheus was bound — externally and internally. He was not free because he was deluded. The order of Zeus was not, as he imagined, a tyranny designed to oppress him. It was not designed at all. It simply *was*. What it was was the order of *Dike*, of justice of the unseen measure. Aeschylus understood that that order was real and that reality could never be a tyranny. To imagine it so is the real tyranny. Disease, not health, is the tyranny. The unbinding of Prometheus would consist in not so much the loosing of his chains as in the opening of his eyes and the realigning of his mind and heart with the unseen but real order of Zeus.

¹Friedrich Solmsen, *Hesiod and Aeschylus* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1949), pp. 124-57. ²Hugh Lloyd-Jones, *Justice of Zeus* (Berkeley, 1983), p. 102. ³D.J. Conacher, *Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound: A Literary Commentary* (Toronto, 1980), pp. 133 ff. His chapter "The Zeus Problem" is a good but incomplete summary of the various interpretations. ⁴Mark Griffith, *Authenticity of Prometheus Bound* (Cambridge, Eng., 1976), though his central objections are stylistic. ⁵In addition to the above, see: Leon Golden, *In Praise of Prometheus: Humanism and Rationalism in Aeschylean Thought* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1962); David Grene's introduction to his translation of the *Prometheus Bound* (New York, 1968); Mark Griffith's introduction to his edition of the *Prometheus Bound* (Cambridge, Eng., 1983); E.A. Havelock, *Prometheus* (Seattle, 1968) [Revealingly, the title of the 1950 edition of this book was *The Crucifixion of Intellectual Man.*]; Karl Kerényi, *Prometheus; Archetypal Image of Human Existence* (New York, 1963); H.D.F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy: A Literary Study* (New York, 1954); Anthony J. Podlecki, *Political Background of Aeschylean Tragedy* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1966); Lois Spatz, *Aeschylus* (Boston, 1982); George Thomson, *Aeschylus and Athens: A Study in the Social Origins of Drama* (London, 1946). ⁶Podlecki, pp. 102-3. ⁷Hugh Lloyd-Jones, "Zeus in

Aeschylus," *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 76 (1956), 56. ⁸Nicolaus Wecklein, introduction to his edition of *Prometheus Bound* (Boston, 1897), p. 27. ⁹Eirik Vandvik, *Prometheus of Hesiod and Aeschylus* (Oslo, 1942); Eric Voegelin, *World of the Polis*, vol. 2 of *Order and History* (Baton Rouge, 1957), pp. 243-62, and *Science, Politics and Gnosticism: Two Essays* (Chicago, 1968), pp. 34-40; Leo Strauss, "The Liberalism of Classical Political Philosophy," in *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (New York, 1968), pp. 41-43. ¹⁰See Conacher, pp. 22-23; Lloyd-Jones, *Justice of Zeus*, p. 110, n.110; Wecklein, p. 27. ¹¹Vandvik, pp. 5, 29; see also Jon D. Mikalson, *Athenian Popular Religion* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1983), p. 18. Though his work draws primarily upon evidence from the late fifth and the fourth centuries (405-323 B.C.), it seems reasonable that the Athenians were not more pious and devoted to the gods than they were in the early fifth century. The trend was the other way, from piety toward skepticism. See also André-Jean Festugière, *Personal Religion Among the Greeks* (Berkeley, Calif., 1954), pp. 27 ff. ¹²On this question of the position of the play within the trilogy, see M.L. West, "The Prometheus Trilogy," *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 99 (1979), 131 ff. West, unlike most commentators, argues that the play was not the first but the middle drama: "The plan of

the trilogy was then Crime-Punishment-Reconciliation. This and not Punishment-Reconciliation(?) is surely the scheme that would naturally have occurred to the poet.”¹³Wecklein, p. 19; Vandvik, pp. 5, 29. ¹⁴Arthur Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals of Athens* (Oxford, 1968), p. 86. Regarding selection of a poet’s works for production in the City Dionysia, see p. 84. Regarding the behavior, attitudes, and tastes of the audiences, see pp. 272-80. ¹⁵Hesiod, *Theogony. Works and Days* . . . (Harmondsworth, Eng., 1973), p. 74, l. 484. ¹⁶Hesiod, *Theogony*, ll. 550-51, cited in Kerényi, p. 47. ¹⁷See Mikalson, chap. 1: “The Priority of the Gods.” See also pp. 30 ff. The Greeks believed that the gods intervened in human affairs when their own prerogatives were threatened: in cases of murder, treason, the violation of oaths, and various impieties toward sacred places and objects — such as the theft of fire from Zeus’s hearth.¹⁸ The edition of the play I have used is *Prometheus Bound* (Baltimore, 1961). ¹⁹Strength and Violence are loyal but not necessarily very bright or percep-

tive analysts of the nature of Zeus’s regime. They are, after all, only soldier-servants. Moreover, the peace of every state, republics as well as tyrannies, is guaranteed in some measure by “strength and violence.” Order in the soul does not, this side of the parousia, establish order in the community. That Zeus employs force in the execution of his designs does no automatic discredit to his regime; and that that regime is “new” counts for nothing in deciding whether that guaranteeing force is justly deployed in the case of Prometheus. ²⁰Recall too that it was this expelled tyrant, Hippias, who guided the Persians onto the plain at Marathon (Herodotus VI: 102). See Podlecki, p. 117. ²¹Lloyd-Jones, *Justice of Zeus*, p. 103. ²²See Golden, pp. 101-2; Conacher, p. 70; Solmsen, pp. 135, 137; Thomson, pp. 322-23. ²³See especially Vandvik’s analysis of the Io scene, pp. 58-59. ²⁴Conacher, p. 35. ²⁵Karl Kerényi, *Gods of the Greeks* (London, 1951), p. 207. ²⁶Voegelin, *World of the Polis*, pp. 259-60. ²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 260. ²⁸Strauss, p. 42.