

THE MYTH OF THE MAN-LOVING PROMETHEUS: REFLECTIONS ON PHILANTHROPY, FORETHOUGHT, AND RELIGION

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The mildest and at the same time most widespread form of betrayal (as a form of existence) was not to do anything bad directly, but just not to notice the doomed person next to one, not to help him, to turn away one's face, to shrink back.

—Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*

Introduction

There are widely-held beliefs about human conduct and organization that unfortunately inhibit our ability to imagine new forms of personal and social well-being. Some of these beliefs are well known, for example, the view that because of the size and complexity of modern society, only the state is able to marshal the resources required to address any number of perceived deficiencies. Putting aside both the epistemological problem of how any centralized authority could obtain sufficient knowledge to address enormously complex problems and the wealth of evidence of inefficient bureaucratism when it attempts to do so, the practical consequences of this belief can only be to undermine individual initiative. When individual initiative is, at best, discouraged as a consequence of such a belief, the character of the individual is warped by enervating the willingness of the individual to undertake action that concretely expresses his or her sympathy for another. Furthermore, to render individual initiative inactive can only undermine what Richard Cornuelle (1993 [1965]) designated the “independent sector” that is so necessary for the civil engagement of a society of free individuals. Thus, different, usually unpredictable possibilities for self-organization with new, often emerging aims are foreclosed.

The persistence of such views, despite the evidence of inefficient bureaucratism and the enervation of individual initiative, allows us to characterize them as mythical; and, in this case, they are “negative” myths because of how they not only contribute to warping the character of the individual but also frustrate conceiving of new, beneficial ways of human conduct and organization. While these kinds of myths may service one (problematic) conception of justice, they may in fact undermine philanthropy.

There are, however, forms of human action that are sustained by myths of individual initiative, generosity, and beneficence. I shall designate such philanthropic—man-loving—myths as “positive”, and will examine briefly one of them, the well-known myth of Prometheus. One further terminological clarification is required. By the term “myth” I mean an empirically unverifiable proposition, for example, “all human beings are created equal.” Positive myths are necessary for human conduct. Thus, the term “myth” is, despite current prejudice, not to be understood as being in any way derogatory because it is supposedly conceptually primitive or entirely fanciful. I will not defend here the necessity of myth—empirically unverifiable propositions—for all periods of human activity, as I have done so elsewhere (Grosby 2008).

Our understanding of philanthropy and voluntary action in general will be modestly advanced if we put aside or at least qualify a negative myth that is less obvious than the above example but which also impoverishes our understanding of human action. It is often argued that human conduct consists entirely of the individual acting out of consideration for his or her own gratification. It is further argued that when the individual does so, he or she chooses the means to maximize that gratification by calculating the costs and benefits of different situations and then arranging his or her actions so that the benefits accruing to the individual are maximized while minimizing the costs—so, the myth of economic behavior and the theory of rational choice.

If the purpose of all human action is understood as the maximization of the gratification (or utility) of the actor, then philanthropy can only be merely another vehicle for the reciprocity of the exchange of benefits, even though that reciprocity may be obscured by the form of the gift. And, in fact, this was the mistaken view of philanthropy of Marcel Mauss in his work *The Gift*. While there is clearly merit to this understanding of human action, it nonetheless views the human mind as if it were hermetically sealed by the individual’s pursuit of only his or her own

advantage, itself narrowly conceived, thus having no place for sympathy or even conceptions of what is right or good as motivations for action. It therefore needs to be supplemented; for it appears to have no place for one fact of human behavior: our capacity to have an interest in acting disinterestedly, where one's actions confer benefits to others even when imposing incommensurable costs on the acting individual (Grosby 2009).

Now, this latter fact of human behavior—the possibility of philanthropic action, where benefits or gifts may be freely given with no guarantee or even expectation of return to the giver, that is, a voluntary and essentially non-reciprocal act—has occasionally been equated with an ideal of pure altruism. This view of an unalloyed altruism holds philanthropic action wholly apart from economic behavior by asserting that philanthropy, *qua* philanthropy, must be purged of *any quality* of self-interest. Altruism, understood in this sense, may also be considered a negative myth, as it impoverishes our understanding of human action by essentially bifurcating and over-simplifying the character of moral action.

In the end, neither the economic nor the altruistic account of human action sufficiently enhances and extends our understanding of philanthropy. Both accounts view human action too simplistically, as if it were only homogeneous. On these accounts, philanthropy must either be dissolved into a rational, if strange, calculation of self-interest, narrowly understood to be where the benefits of any action accrue directly to the actor, or it must be elevated to a categorical abnegation of any self-interest whatsoever, a moral ideal which we approach only asymptotically.

Philanthropy and the Gods

There are other accounts of philanthropy. Many of them are found within the myths constitutive of religious beliefs. It is likely that part of the difficulty today in reaching a proper understanding of philanthropy is a consequence of the currently fashionable skepticism toward religious belief. If so, then what is ultimately required to achieve a proper appreciation of philanthropy is not only to turn to an examination of the myths of religion, for example and of obvious relevance to philanthropy, that of *agape*, but also to raise, once again, the question of the very character of religion. An examination of both the distinctiveness of religion and why myths of philanthropy are a part of that distinctiveness is clearly too ambitious in scope for this paper; however, a few preliminary observations about the philanthropic myths of religion are long overdue.

As early as the Babylonian account of the flood, the *Atrahasis*, we begin to see what might be described as a philanthropic model for human action. It may be that in the *Atrahasis* the god Enki's rescue of the ark-building Atrahasis, in opposition to the god Enlil, who wished to destroy noisome humanity so that he could finally get a good night's sleep, was done out of Enki's love for humanity. Nevertheless, the motivation for Enki's action is not explicitly described this way, as the Babylonian account of the flood is little interested in conveying motivations. It is instead overly aetiological in intention, for example, to provide an account for infant mortality as a means to control over-population. Thus, one cannot point to the Babylonian account of the flood as a myth that has promoted philanthropy. Enki's apparent sympathy for humanity is not portrayed in such a way that it serves as an example for human conduct. After all, in the Babylonian account of the flood (as well as the Babylonian account of creation, the *Enuma Elish*), humanity was only created to relieve the burden of some of the gods by performing toilsome labor that had previously been done by them.

In contrast to the Babylonian's Enki, the motivations of the Greek god Prometheus are repeatedly and explicitly described as being man-loving, at least in Aeschylus's version of the myth, *Prometheus Bound*. Aeschylus's description of Prometheus's act of giving humanity not only fire but also "every art" (lines 110, 256, 506) is in accord with the above understanding of philanthropy as but one expression of a complex spectrum of action; for it was evidently a gift given disinterestedly, that is, freely given with no expectation of reciprocal advantage. One concludes that it was so from two exchanges in *Prometheus Bound*. Early in the play (line 83), the tyrannical Zeus's henchman, the appropriately named "Might," taunts Prometheus, chained to the high craggy rocks of desolate Scythia, with the question, surely rhetorical, "what drop of your sufferings can mortals spare you?" Prometheus does not answer Might's question directly, but the implied answer is "none." A little later in the play we learn from Prometheus that he has acted on behalf of others (humans) even though by doing so he has incurred considerable costs to himself, when he responds to the question of the Chorus, the daughters of Oceanos, "on what charges Zeus has laid on you and tortures you so cruelly?"

But you have asked on what particular charge he now tortures me: this I will tell you. As soon as he ascended to the throne that was his father's, straightway he assigned to the several Gods their several privileges and portioned out the

power, but to the unhappy breed of mankind he gave no heed, intending to blot the race out and create a new. Against these plans none stood save I: I dared. I rescued men from shattering destruction that would have carried them to Hades' house; and therefore I am tortured on this rock, a bitterness to suffer, and a pain to pitiful eyes. *I gave to mortal man precedence over myself in pity.* (Aeschylus 1956, lines 228-41, my emphasis)

From these two exchanges (and Prometheus's previous self-characterization, "you see me a wretched God in chains, the enemy of Zeus, hated of all the Gods that enter Zeus's palace hall, because of my excessive love for man," lines 120-22), one concludes that integral to Aeschylus's description of the myth of Prometheus's beneficence toward humanity was that the god's act was freely undertaken on behalf of humanity with no evident return expected by him. He was presumably motivated by sympathy for "man's tribulation" (line 442), resulting in "the goodwill of my (his) gifts" (line 446). Thus, Prometheus has acted to realize the gratification of the ends of others as the right end of his own action, even to the point of where doing so can be characterized as being selfless—such is the implication of his statement, "I gave to mortal man precedence over myself in pity."

Now, as we shall see, there are complications to this conclusion in both Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound* and Hesiod's earlier version of the myth in the *Theogony*; for Prometheus has acted with an "interest," but it is an interest involving a conception of a right state of affairs rather than one of gratification, narrowly understood, accruing to him. He accepted seemingly an eternity of suffering for the sake of an end: ostensibly to further the well-being of others, but, as we shall see, to further an additional and related end as well. Those complications aside for the time being, Aeschylus's description of Prometheus's motivation is that it was truly philanthropic, and rightly so. The description conveys an optimistic, hopeful perspective, as it provides an example of the possibility of individual initiative in the service of promoting the goodwill of others. In contrast, Enki's rescue of Atrahasis (and thereby humanity) offers no such hope; it only reinforces a pessimistic perspective by merely re-establishing the previous state of the harshness of life.

It may be that this evaluation of Prometheus's action as being truly philanthropic is a surprising one to reach in the world of polytheistic religion, albeit refracted here through the artistry of Greek tragedy; for we are accustomed not to expect such a philanthropic perspective in this fate-determined world. To be

sure, there was generosity (for example, responsibilities to the guest); but it was with the expectation of an obligatory reciprocity or exchange of benefits. In the conceptual world of religion, this expectation of reciprocal benefit is expressed in the ritual of sacrifice by the phrase *do ut des*: “I give (to you) so that you will give (to me).” Thus, I sacrifice to the god of rain (Baal or Hadad in the ancient Near East) so that the god will give to me crop-nourishing rain. Even with that rational development of religion in the Hebrew Bible that we designate as monotheism, the covenant retains the form of *do ut des*: I will worship YHWH and obey his commandments so that YHWH will give to me and my descendants life in the land. For example, Deuteronomy 11:13-15 states, “If you will only heed his every commandment that I am commanding you today—loving the Lord your God, and serving him with all your heart and with all your soul—then he will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the late rain, and you will gather in your grain, your wine, and your oil; and he will give grass in your fields for livestock, and you will eat your fill.” (The often ignored Jeremiah 44 also clearly conveys the expectation of the reciprocal benefit of *do ut des*.)

To be sure, there are profound complications of *do ut des* in the Hebrew Bible, for example, in Job and Ecclesiastes. Furthermore, while sacrifice of the first animal of one’s flock or the first crops of one’s harvest to God as the religious vehicle of *do ut des* continues, one also finds sacrifice of the self as conveyed by the obvious metaphor (and certainly also an example of the Bible critically commentating on itself) of “circumcision of the foreskin of the heart” (Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4). This metaphor is clearly a call for faith as a necessary component of the obedience to the commandments, thereby conveying the perspective of not merely obedience but also—as is repeatedly stated in Deuteronomy—loving YHWH. The idea of the sacrifice of the self opens up the perspective of an action undertaken where incomparable burdens are accepted by the individual for an end, the benefits of which may accrue *not* to that individual but rather to another, for example, Moses suffering expiation for the sins of the Israelites as described in Exodus and Deuteronomy.

In such a case, the introduction of a philanthropic perspective—an interest in acting disinterestedly, where the benefits of one’s actions accrue to another—pushes the conceptual framework of the covenantal exchange of benefits to its limit. The classic representations of such action in the Hebrew Bible are the four “suffering servant songs” in Deutero-Isaiah. Correspondingly, this philanthropic perspective is also conveyed in the description of YHWH as being not only a god jealous of his

“interests,” thereby punishing iniquity from one generation to the next, but also a compassionate, loving god. Thus, at times it appears that the gift of life is freely given by the man-loving YHWH, so “it is not because you are the most numerous of peoples that YHWH set his heart on you and chose you—indeed, you are the smallest of peoples; but it is because YHWH loves you” (Deuteronomy 7:7-8).

We have in these instances of self-sacrifice and freely-given love accounts of philanthropic action that serve as examples for future conduct. Nevertheless, even here, this philanthropy remains situated within the context of the covenant, that is, the obligatory reciprocity of *do ut des*. Thus, while the philanthropic perspective is presented and while there are numerous examples of charity, generosity, and personal and necessarily social well-being in the Hebrew Bible given its manifest, this-worldly orientation, at first glance it does not appear that one can say that one finds a clear, consistent expression of philanthropy there, at least as I have chosen to define philanthropy, because of the covenantal framework of the reciprocal exchange of *do ut des*.

I leave aside here for the time being the further, important, and immediately relevant complication and theological conundrum as to what benefit might accrue to YHWH from man’s faithful obedience to his commandments. It is sufficient for our purposes here to note the reciprocal obligation of the covenant. Still, upon reconsideration, is it possible and perhaps more accurate to understand the Hebrew Bible’s covenantal formulations and the sacrifice that it entails as depicting not merely a reciprocal exchange of benefits as with *do ut des*, but rather, a fidelity to a proper order which, as such, is necessary for one’s well-being? This appears to be the perspective as conveyed, for example, in Deuteronomy 10:12-13:

So now, O Israel, what does the LORD require of you? Only to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being (my emphasis).

Here, the perspective is one where the commandments were given to Israel by YHWH not so that the deity might receive an ostensible benefit in return, but so that Israel itself might, through its own actions, accrue the benefit of its own well-being from this gift. Thus, depicted here is, as van der Leeuw (1963 [1933], 354) observed, the philanthropic perspective of *do ut possis dare*, “I give so that you may be able to give (to another).” The covenant with YHWH and its commandments were indeed understood as the proper, moral vehicle for well-

being, for the generation and sustenance of life (see Deuteronomy 30, especially verses 19-20). Needless to say, a relation of “I give so that you may be able to give (to another)” is of particular relevance for a proper understanding of philanthropy, formulated here as philanthropy being necessary for the sustenance of life. Let us maintain this possibility for how to understand the implication of the Hebrew Bible’s covenantal formulations, and thus as a positive philanthropic myth. And it is this understanding that accords with the gift of Prometheus, with possibly one modification: “I (Prometheus) give so that you (humanity) may be able to create.”

As is well known, it is usually argued that it is with the new covenant of the Gospels where one appears to find the gift of life, albeit the myth of eternal life, freely given. It is there where one finds consistently expressed the philanthropic perspective of “I give so that you may be able to give (to another),” where the gift of God is done out of unrequited love, as Paul expresses in Ephesians 2:4-8. The classic formulation in the Gospels of the selfless gift is, of course, John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son”—a love that is, in turn, expected to be extended in the relation of one human to another, thus John 15:12-13, “Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” Here, now, we have the quintessential philanthropic perspective, initially conveyed through, if you will, myth. Allow me to emphasize one implication of what has just been stated: God’s love was to be extended to relations between humans; that is, it is a call to action. Thus, the myth here not only allows us to imagine new forms of action and well-being, but also calls upon us to realize them.

However, complications are to be found here as well. First, the context remains covenantal, or if one prefers, “testamental”; that is, even here this context contains a reciprocal expectation. Those who are familiar with the New Testament will know that the quotation above from John 3 was incomplete. The full verse is, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” The latter half of the verse affirms the expected return of the covenantal framework of *do ut des*: you will achieve eternal life by giving to God your faithful obedience. Even so, there is proposed here a new form of well-being, as the faithful obedience that humanity gives to God entails an expansion of humanity through the compassionate kindness of love in imitation of God’s love of humanity, so John 15:12-13. Up to this point, the love of one’s fellow human as a consequence of one’s understanding of God or even in imitation of God’s act could be understood as

following the call to action of the Hebrew Bible, thus Leviticus 19:2, 18, “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy ... you shall love your fellow as yourself: I am the LORD.” Nonetheless, there is likely a difference here between the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, as the implicit referent of “fellow” in Leviticus 19:18 may be “countryman,” that is, “fellow Israelite” and not all of humanity. Be that as it may, the covenantal framework is maintained; that is, there is an expected reward for the acting individual, in this case, eternal life in heaven. Can we say that such action is “disinterested?”

At first glance, the New Testament leads us to an affirmative answer. For example, one may point to verses such as Acts 20:35, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” However, to reach this conclusion may be to import a foreign conception into the New Testament. It is certainly the case that we are told “when you give to the needy . . . do not announce it with trumpets . . . to be honored by men” (Matthew 6:2); for to announce one’s giving is to act as if the generosity were indeed in accord with the theory of rational choice as the announcement is to seek a reward of some kind (honor). And again, “when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret” (Matthew 6:3-4). It appears here that the human act of giving to another is to be truly disinterested, hence philanthropic. However, the verse concludes with “then your father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” Thus, the seemingly selfless gift of the human actor is, in fact, tied to the expectation of a benefit, albeit from God. Nevertheless, it does seem that both *do ut des* and *do ut possis dare* are operating: both conceptions and the call to action they convey are found in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.

We conclude that for the human actor, the covenantal framework, while maintained, is stretched to its conceptual limit by *do ut possis dare*, and especially so when the giving to another is described as self-sacrificing conduct. It is also stretched to its conceptual limit in another way: the reward for the actor’s giving is expected not from the human recipient of the gift but from God and in the future. Here, we come upon another complication. The reward for one’s action is from God, hence, its mythical character. This mythical character is underscored by how the reception of the reward is presented: in the future, whether in “this world” as in the Hebrew Bible, or in the “other world” as in the New Testament. *The crucial question that arises is whether or not the temporal perspective of futurity, in the Hebrew Bible’s turn to history or the New Testament’s turn to heaven, is a necessary component of the hope that is constitutive of philanthropy.*

The myth of the covenants of both the Hebrew Bible and the Gospels is, as was observed, a call to action: not only “I give so that you will give (to me)” but also “I give so that you may give (to another).” It is an optimistic, philanthropic perspective of furthering life. The prospering of life—even though understood differently in the Hebrew Bible and the Gospels—is an end of action posited as a good in and of itself. Turning again to the myth of Prometheus may help us clarify the complications involved in the biblical conceptions of the covenant and their bearing on philanthropy.

Prometheus’s Call to Action

The authorial intention of both Hesiod’s *Theogony* and Aeschylus’s *Prometheus Bound* is brilliant but obvious. From his rightly famous “invocation,” Hesiod explicitly tells us that his gift to his readers is to bestow upon us a song that will help us to forget our heartache—a song that may contain not only truth but also believable lies. (If we add *necessarily* to believable lies, does the addition of “necessary” indicate that we may have “positive myths”?) And so Hesiod sings about how Prometheus outwitted Zeus, just as one would expect from a god named “forethought,” by stealing fire from Zeus and giving it to humans. We are not told by Hesiod why Prometheus tricked Zeus, other than the implied, aetiological purpose of the myth to account for the forethought required for the development of civilized life made possible through the control of fire. However, we are told by Aeschylus why Prometheus rebelled against Zeus; and herein exists the intention of Aeschylus’s account: to serve as a polemic against tyranny.

Aeschylus describes Zeus’s rule as “new and harsh” (1956, line 34); a rule where “the new customs have no law to them, but what was great before is brought to nothingness” (lines 150-51); and where there are laws, they are “private” (line 403). It is, thus, a rule where, as even Might acknowledges, “only Zeus is free” (line 50), as all must bend to the arbitrary will of Zeus. Endemic to this kind of rule is a “haughtiness of temper toward the gods that were old” (line 405); for, as Aeschylus insightfully observes, the “sickness rooted and inherent in the nature of tyranny” is “that he that holds it does not trust his friends” (line 227). We may rightly extend Aeschylus’s observation on the nature of tyranny by adding that the tyrant not only does not trust his friends, but also cannot allow for others to have friends. For others to have friends is for bonds of affection to exist distinct from the tyrant. The existence of such bonds implies attachments separate from the authority of the tyrant, thus serving potentially as a locus of opposition

to the tyrant. It also implies initiative of action undertaken by others instead of only by the tyrant. Thus, the only kind of philanthropy that the tyrant can permit is that which has its origin in his action; for all must be dependent upon, hence be fearful of, the tyrant—a philanthropy that is, of course, no philanthropy at all.

We conclude from both the description of Zeus's rule and Prometheus's opposition to it that Aeschylus has recognized that philanthropy, distinct from the "welfare program" of the ruler, is a challenge to tyranny. In this regard, it is surely significant that at the end of *Prometheus Bound* the chorus, despite the threats of Zeus's messenger Hermes, proclaims its sympathy for Prometheus. In doing so, the chorus states, "we will bear along with him (Prometheus) what we must bear" (1956, line 1068). It is as if the chorus has now realized that Prometheus's gift to humans also has relevance to them; for the sympathy that he showed to humans was an example, and, as such, a call for the chorus to act to express their sympathy with others, in this case Prometheus. The chorus refuses, to use Solzhenitsyn's phrase quoted above, "to turn away, to shrink back," even when threatened by Zeus's lightning bolts (lines 1061, 1071-79).

One may argue that Prometheus's philanthropy was because he, as the god of forethought, knew that a human (Heracles, according to Hesiod's version of the myth, *Theogony*, lines 529-36) was necessary to free him from his chains. If so, then the motivation for his initial act of beneficence was mixed with the expectation of a return, that is, the benefit of his action would directly accrue to him. However, this explanation does not adequately account for Prometheus's initial decision to confer benefits on humanity; because, according to Aeschylus's version and as we have observed, the two decisive reasons for Prometheus's philanthropy were (1) his sympathy for the plight of humanity, and (2) his fidelity to what is right, requiring his opposition to Zeus's tyranny. Furthermore, one ought not overlook Aeschylus's subtle insertion into the myth of the significance of speech and persuasion for human action. Throughout the play, Prometheus time and again hints at Zeus's eventual downfall, so much so that Oceanos warns Prometheus to be careful because "soon Zeus will hear you" (line 314). Evidently, Prometheus expected Zeus to eavesdrop, as tyrants are wont to do and, in fact, must do. After Prometheus tells the wandering Io, the mortal woman who is the object of Zeus's lust, that her descendant will free him, Hermes proclaims to Prometheus that Zeus "has commanded you to say what marriage of his is this you brag about that shall drive him from power" (lines 949-50). There is a subtle ambiguity here; for whether or not Prometheus's prophecy of his human liberator is

(or will be) true, the very act of Prometheus's speech has persuaded Zeus that it is true. Prometheus knows well what Zeus does not know: to rule successfully requires more than "overmastering force"; it also requires "guile" (line 217) that forethought provides. And it is through the guile made possible by speech that Prometheus will set into motion a series of events. Be that as it may, what is central to this discussion of philanthropy and religious myth is that Prometheus has now enlisted humanity, through his exchanges with Io, in his opposition to Zeus's tyranny.

Now, this enlistment returns us to a consideration of a theological, if you will, conundrum. We know that Prometheus was philanthropic, and the same may be said, notwithstanding complications, of YHWH in the Hebrew Bible and certainly God of the New Testament. But why should Prometheus be described as being philanthropic at all? His opposition to Zeus's tyranny need not have entailed benefits being bestowed upon humanity. Likewise, why should the God of the Bible have an "interest" in our well-being? It is not clear what God receives from humanity. Presumably, God receives no benefit, thus the twists and turns of theological reflection on why God is philanthropic, for example, as stated in Ephesians 2:7-8, "so that in the ages to come he (God) might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast." There are two possible responses to this conundrum.

In *Prometheus Bound*, Aeschylus describes a parallel between the god Prometheus and the human Io. Both suffer; both are the victims of Zeus (1956, lines 576-81); and herein exists one response to our theological conundrum. Each is dependent upon the other: Io for information from Prometheus (and by extension, humanity for Prometheus's gifts), Prometheus on the liberating descendant of Io (lines 773-74). Thus, for Aeschylus, the fate of humanity and the fate of the gods are intertwined. Our monotheistic understanding of God does not have a difficulty with the dependency of humanity on the creator; however, it does make difficult a description of God and the fate of humankind being intertwined, as such a description would imply some kind of dependency of the deity upon humanity.

From the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, the dependency of humanity upon God is obvious. Nevertheless, can it be that lurking within the covenantal framework, even with its wide variations as alluded to above, there is a relation of mutual dependency of some kind between God and humanity? Even though it may be difficult for us, as monotheists suffering under the influence of Greek

philosophy, to imagine a reciprocal dependency, such as the one portrayed in *Prometheus Bound*, perhaps Aeschylus's play provides a suggestion to what may be implied by the covenantal framework and, thus, to our conundrum.

Let us entertain the possibility that there is implied in the covenantal framework, a recognition of a dependency of God upon humanity in the Judeo-Christian tradition. If so, it surely cannot be one where God receives some benefit as posited in the theory of rational choice or the ideal of economic behavior. Perhaps one can say that God has an "interest" in the very existence of life. Certainly this possibility is central to the biblical myth. (There are putatively "naturalistic" versions of this interest, as in, for example, the philosophical biology of Hans Jonas.) Moreover, one can further say that God is described as having an "interest" in the proper—legal and moral—ordering of life because such an ordering is necessary to sustaining the divine, philanthropic gift of life. The biblical narrative also suggests this possibility, for example, the reasons for the flood as described in Genesis 6-9 with the ensuing, life-protecting covenant with Noah (Genesis 9:6). However, the realization of this ordering is dependent upon human action, thereby implying a relation between the human and the divine.

What if, similar to the relation between Prometheus and Io in *Prometheus Bound*, the biblical formulation of the covenant implies the necessity of partnership in the work of creation between God and humanity? As theologically odd as this may sound, such a possibility was already explicitly entertained in antiquity, for example, in the Babylonian Talmud (Shabbat 10a).

R. Hisda and Rabbath son of R. Huna were sitting all day engaged in judgments (over lawsuits), and their hearts grew faint, when R. Hiyya b. Rab of Difti recited to them, "and the people stood about Moses from the morning to the evening" (Exodus 18:13). Now can you really think that Moses sat and judged all day? When was his learning done? But it is to teach you, every judge who judges with complete fairness even for a single hour, the Writ gives him credit as though he had become a partner of the Holy One, blessed be He, in the creation. For here it is written, "and the people stood around Moses from the morning to the evening," while elsewhere it is written, "and there was morning, and there was evening, one day" (Genesis 1:5).

Thus, for humanity to establish proper, legal order is understood as continuing the acts of God; we are, as it were, co-creators with God. This possibility of partnership between the human and the divine has an odd ring to it, because it cannot avoid implying some kind of dependency of God upon humanity for the realization of God's interest in life. Still, it is a partnership infused with the

philanthropic perspective: each freely gives (even when doing so requires self-sacrifice, i.e., “and their hearts grew faint”) so that another may be able to give with the admitted goal (surely, an adventure) of furthering life.

Still left unanswered is how to account for God’s interest in life. Doing so may address the oddness of the partnership just discussed. Of course, one need not attempt to account for the interest at all, as in the apophatic tradition, the so-called “negative theology,” where one is not entitled to describe what God is. However, according to the Hebrew Bible, God’s interest in life appears to be inseparable from his holiness, the latter perhaps to be understood as an attribute, so, for example, Leviticus 19. And, as is well known, there is the long tradition in Christianity of describing God as inseparable from *agape*. In fact, while only a minor current within the Christian tradition, it has even been proposed that the crucifixion was neither a ransom nor an atonement, but the means by which the divine gift of life is fulfilled, so Rupert of Deutz. Now, these kinds of theological speculations about the previously raised conundra may appear to some to be conceptually barren distractions from the task of understanding the character of philanthropy. However, if we recall the crucial question posed earlier, the possibility must be considered that these kinds of speculations are central to philanthropy; for it may very well be that these myths are the necessary grounding for imagining new forms of personal and social well-being. They certainly have been resilient; and one ought to think long and hard about why this is so.

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