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Prometheus and Zeus: Can We Be Equal and Excellent Too? Elitism and Equality

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LL LECTURE TWO; Thursday Morning, 20 minutes

PROMETHEUS AND ZEUS; CAN WE BE EQUAL AND EXCELLENT TOO?

ELITISM AND EQUALITY

[Aftnn; New age:Unbinding Prometheus, U.B.p21; L.C, Perennial Conflict P&Z CT

Prometheus is the god of technology. He is also the patron of equality, so he is a most fitting figure to preside over our session today. Our use of myth may need some additional justification. It could be that we choose a Greek god as a symbolic figure having about as much to do with education as Cowboys have to do with football. Or it could be that we are falling for the snob appeal that still clings to the ancient Greeks and Romans. But there are far more legitimate reasons to fasten on myth as a guide to understanding not only past cultures but the very one in which we live. This afternoon we shall explore more deeply the function of myths and begin to get familiar with them, even perhaps get a glimpse of one slipping around the corner as we talk.

Myths generally have a story to tell about creation. How did it all begin? Well, it was this way:
In the beginning, Eurynomy, Goddess of All Things, rose naked out of Chaos and danced southward over the waves, trailing the North Wind behind her. Turning she caught the North wind in her hands, crushing it and forming the great serpent Ophion,'who wrapped about her and impregnated her. She changed herself into a dove and laid the great Universal egg. She commanded Ophion to wrap around the egg to keep it warm until it hatched, when out fell the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth and all the creatures that thereon dwelt. That's it. That's the Pelasgian story as Robert Graves puts it together from pre-Hellenic material, fragments of old Orphic tales, hints from Hesiod, nuggets from Homer. But we can't believe that story, can we? And truth to tell, mythographers pretty well look down their noses at the free associations that Graves takes. I rather like his handling of the myths, and feel comfortable about not havikng to take his word on any point I do not choose to. So how did it really happen?

Well. In the beginning there was nothing. And I mean absolutely nothing, no space, no time, nothing--nihilo. Suddenly, at an infinitessimal point, about fifteen billion years ago, a huge anount of energy appeared, tremendously hot; it was one thing that appeared, a primordal unity. As the energy expanded, creating space, it began to cool down; in the first fraction of a second particles formed,($E=mc^2$,you know) peeling off of the original unity, successively forming leptons and quarks, each time breaking the symetries and releasing one of the fundamental forces: the strong force, the weak force, electro-magnetic, and gravity. The quarks associate with each other according to some seemimngly predetermined plan. forming hadrons (such as neutrons and protons)and mesons, condensing into familiar nuclei such as Hydrogen and oxygen nuclei, still too hot for the leptons (like electrons and positrons) to be captured by electric forces into orbits about nuclei; so for some three hundred thousand years plus and minus charges exist together as a

plasma that light cannot penetrate, shrouding the early years of the universe in a privacy that only the imagination can penetrate.

That's far enough to go with this story. I suppose you get the point that our present day myth is not all that different from the prehellenic myth and the Olympian gods are downright sensible. Of course I didn't expect you to follow the story, partly because it was not complete and I was't entirely clear. And yet you were --I should say are--inclined to believe it. Why? Because it fits into the current myth. What is the current myth? I call it the myth of fact. The facts are just hearsay to you at this point, but you trust me enough--or at least the story I'm telling--to suppose that Plank's Constant is respected, the indeterminacy principle observed, and Quantum theory applied where need be. We'll comeback to to this myth later, but for now let's let it get comfortable in our imaginations while we turn back to Zeus and Prometheus.

For Hesiod, the lineage of the gods appears to be: Gaie {Ge, Geo}Goddess of earth, came out of Chaos along with Tartarus (depth); Eros (love); Erebus (gloom)' and Night. Gaiae on her own then produced Uranas, (Sky); Mountain; and Pontus (Sea).
Uranas mated with Gaie and produced the twelve Titans, among them Cronus, Rhea, and Iapetus who would become Prometheus's father. Themis and Mnemosyne were also of this generation,
The two Titans Chronus and Rhea mated and produced Zeus and Hera and four other Olympians. Prometheus was the cousin of Zeus and Hera--their fathers were brothers. But Zeus's mother was also a Titan while Prometheus's mother was only an Oceanid, a lesser goddess. The twelve Olympians were either Titans or children of Zeus, except Aphrodite who was a more direct descendent of Uranas. Prometheus was not an Olympian, but he sided with Zeus in the great rebellion against Cronus, so Zeus owed him one.

We can get into that story farther in the seminar this afternoon. What we want to do with them now is set up Zeus and Prometheus as representatives of two approaches to evaluation of educational policy. Zeus, we shall say, is the patron of heroes. In the Iliad, he sits upon Mt.Ida looking down on the battle between Greeks and Trojans, admiring the valiant on both sides, controlling the flow of battle but not interfering with what fate has decreed, grieving deeply that his own son Sarpedan must die but not intervening, Zeus is the god of history, knowing that his role is to see that what is to come to pass does come to pass.

Now, how would Zeus set up an educational scheme? Would he have an honors section, for instance, where the brightest could get the best education, then maybe a couple of tracks below the honors class where the difficulty of the material is adjusted to the level of the students? Would he have the students competing against each other in quiz shows? set up an honor roll?

How would Prometheus do on the same questions? Prometheus is of royal blood, so to say, son of a Titan, accorded the respect due a titan and is indeed referred to as a Titan. He is great hearted, loves to help, and teaches the practical arts to the young men. When Zeus, disgusted with the despicable human race,

determined to destroy it, Prometheus took up for these frail creatures of a day, stole divine fire from the sacred alter to bring intellect to them. and saved them from destruction. He taught them.....

Education aimed at thirty years ahead
The Technological Age
Somewhat premature to speak of the post-technological age but time passage is speeded up.

a readily available files. There is always something original in active wisdom; the roots may tap many resources, but the flower is always fresh blown.

I'd like to think that I could present my own discipline, physics, for an experience of learning together here. It is the most philosophic of the sciences and it is a rich source of analogies. But it doesn't have as many handles sticking out for most people to grab hold of as does literature, say. I have found that my most apt students for physics are ones that also have good minds for literature. Dr. Louise and I thought it exceptionally fortunate that the imagination worked so similarly in physics and poetry, but we discovered that adherents of all the disciplines thimk they share their resources with literature. It seems to be the universal solvent. So I shall ask one of its most adroit practitioners to present the rationale to you.

We are already well into the technological age and are headed toward whatever comes after it. So,though it may seem a bit premature to speak of the post-technological age, it's actually high time for us to do so. There are signs all about us that the technological revolution--so breathtakingly rapid and apparently so infinite--has foreseen its limits. There is talk now of limits to miniaturization. The great contribution of the space program was the miniaturizing of devices to reduce weight and volume and energy demand on space ships. how many bits can a chip handle? The size of a few hundred atoms is a physical limit that cannot be avoided, and complexity will stop it sooner: witness the problems of the pentium. The fact that there are limits is the important point. We can relax on our incessant urge to go farther, to know more, as apparently we have with the super-colider.When we can set up technologies to explore themselves their own limits in all branches of complexity, we can assign a few guardians to keep an eye on orderliness and get along on our business of life.

First, let's clear up what we mean by a technological age. And in order to clear it up, we'll have to take a brief look at the past few centuries.

What is many times called the age of science--the Modern Age--began in the 17th century. Accuracy in measurement, the Myth of Fact. . . . modernity.

The Industrial Age: the machine

technology and its benefits.

the health problem quite differently; with the human genome totally mapped, the various genes identified, and the proper molecular chemistry prepared to snip and correct the genes, corrective measures can be taken before any damage ensues. Surely there will shortly be some device that can supply us each a copy of our genome to carry aropund with us, so that naughty kids, in the age old ceremonies of adolesence, can say "I'll show you my genome if you'll show me yours." With the new biology, we'll never know what illnesses we escaped, what calamities we avoided. Will we be better? well, let's say statistically we'll be better.

Throughout our culture there is a growing confidence that whatever we can conceive of that will benefit mankind we can invent the device that can bring it about. And that conviction, I propose, is the identifying mark of what we now call technology.

When I speak of the post-technological age, I do not mean we pass beyond the uses of technology but rather that we fully exploit them so that that way of thinking becomes the norm. That will take some twenty to thirty years more to reach that stage, just about the time that present students will be taking charge.

With technology a kind of education is needed that is different from that of the utilitarian education which serviced crafts first and then automation--and serviced, too, the economy that supported that way of life. That economy was product oriented with identifiable units of goods and services. Even medicine had appendices to remove, hernias to repair, esophageal ulcers to cure, with markets or some equivalent fee arrangement. A new sort of economy will have to grow up to support and encourage the development made possible by technology, one that has aspects of a gift society and a noncompetitive market. Devices such as liscensing, patents, and copyrights are likely to prove unmanageable or too restrictive for American ideals. Some profound thought will be needed, a sort of refounding of America on expanded ideals made practical by technology.

What I am saying here is that the education needed will not be directed toward the production of technicians useful for the new technology--that will happen on its own through specialists and inspired amateurs like the present hackers-- and all of us will pick up techniques of usage incidentally just as we learn to drive a car, in the process of using devices as needed.

The major task of education will be the development of an ability in the general public for quick learning over a broad scope with true understanding at a depth more profound than the present ideal of "cultural literacy." If technology can give us what we desire, we'd best be careful about what we want.

What we want to offer in the next several days are opportunities to dig deeper into our own consciousness and tap the sources of our own authority. That authority, we maintain, does not lie in the wealth of facts available in ones memory. Particularly in the time ahead, technology will make the facts one might need quickly available. Neither is one's wisdom a facility with algorithmic logic or sets of laws. Yes, wisdom takes time to accumalate, but wisdom is not a storehouse or a set

the nation's whole economy.]

Technology is of a different order of ingenuity, a different level of imagination.. It doesn't imitate tasks; it doesn't imitate products. It aims directly at desires, serving satisfactions by different routes and making possible new desires. Automation, in contrast, asks "How can I make this product (or any of its parts) faster, more precisely, and with less human effort?" Some kind of machine is the obvious answer, and if various machines make different parts, then all the machines can feed an assembling machine automatically and we have the automated factory which needs human beings only as supervisors.

The automated factory is the triumph of industrialism and yet it heralds its demise. With few workers required, industry loses its political and social clout. The imagination turns in a different direction. The characteristic question turns from how to do an assigned task to what do we want beyond what we can get. Do we really want devices or do we want what the devices can do for us? Do we want a Rolex watch or do we want to know what time it is? Well of course our pride wants status symbols, some manifestation of having aquired goods in excess of our needs, or our neighbors means. But stripped of superfluities there remains the bare structure of our basic needs. What technology does is look at the needs and not the structure. It frees us from the tyranny of things. Its imagination couples with desire to see the form of existence that will be most satisfying to us and, in a burst of magnanimity, to our neighbor as well.. This is all getting a bit apocalyptic now, and we'd best delay it until we pick up the Promethean mind in the next two days.

I should warn you that the dictionary does not give such a grandiose picture of technology as I am presenting. It merely says "the science of practical arts," deriving from the Greek word techne, which is what Aeschylus's drama has Prometheus giving to mortals. Popular usage in our day, however, has enshrined the term to mean the most advanced thinking that human kind can muster, yielding new insights into the natural world which lead to devices of great practical importance. Just fifty years ago the discovery of semi-conductors led to the invention of transistors, permitting the first step in the miniaturization of computers, then the growing of crystal chips with entire circuits, integrating these circuits into devices such that the computer that I now carry around in my laptop is far more powerful than the huge roomfull of electronic tubes,capacitors, inductances, magnetic tapes and cooling compressers that we had in 1965 at the University of Dallas.

At about the same time that the transistor was invented (1948), so too were the DNA and the double helix conceived. Biology took the step into modern science with a rapidly developing technology. Medical Practice, which is in a sense the engineering arm of biology, added new technical apparatus which served as an automation of practice, not changing the basic approach to corrective medicine but making it more precise, more efficient, with less manpower, in the characteristic manner of automation. But the new biology with new technology approaches

LECTURE 1. DAC

THE POST-TECHNOLOGICAL AGE

Assigned: Between Twu Ages, UB; Principals and Prplties, CL

Our topic for these seminars is "Education in a Post-Technological Age." What is implied by this title is a recognition that students presently sitting in college classrooms are the ones who will be in charge of society twenty to thirty years from the inescapable present; the education presented to them must be preparation for that time --in some way be a prophecy of what society will become and what it will need. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy, of course, because as these students nudge their way toward the seats of power they will be shaping that society they are to rule.

How can we educate for a society we know will be different from the present? A brief look at history shows us a pattern of increasingly rapid changes of fundamental characteristics in society. By fundamental we refer to the elements that affect the way a culture regards itself, its economy, its aesthetics, its spirituality. What manner of gainful employment engages the major portion of the population? Historically we characterize societies as hunting, agricultural, industrial, and technological, one overlapping another, a craft and small entrepreneur society supplying the overlap between agriculturalism and industrialism. Might technology not be similarly the overlap between industrialism and its successor? Since we cannot know exactly what kind of society lies ahead of us, we don't know whether we are already into its beginnings or are caught still in the gap between two ages. It seems, however, that automation [rather than technology] fills the role of overlap. And automation clearly is part of industrialization, the age that is just now ending; with automation the actions of workers are imitated mechanically, robot-like, the same tasks performed, the same satisfactions served. [The platen press] The machine was doing precisely what the man had been doing. It was a robot. It made no decisions, no judgements. In a sense, then, the man had been a robot. When ------wrote his book on cybernetics, he titled it "The Human Use of Human Beings." And we have to grant that automation has been a step forward for mankind. The economy had to readjust its practices, redefine its markets, move toward a global community. Automation demanded large industrial complexes and nade capitalism a favored financial system.

In the automated industrial world there is still a clear division between labor and administration--[those who do and those who profit from those who do]. The financial aspect of the economy increasingly assumes control, and that leads to unstable political situations. We of the older generations leave to you younger ones the very serious problems of how to maintain a democracy not fettered by excessive constraints.

Fear of machines replacing manpower is of long standing; there were riots stirred by the printers' union when the linotype was introduced at the New York Tribune in 1868. But an expanding economy more than compensated for jobs lost to automation. [That economy can hardly expand more in the same direction ---- something like that--and so a diminution of employment can hurt

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LECT5NEQ	.OKL	399	01-14-95 07:50p	LECT6FWL	.OKL	433	01-14-95 08:30p
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Way back in January you started this semester on the Ancient World with the story of Prometheus — Bound to a rock in Scythia, at the edge of Tartarus -- at the end of the world, where no mortals come. (p.65) You know the story -- why he was pinned to this cliff by Hephaestus at the command of Zeus -- because Prometheus was the god who gave the gifts of techné -- the arts, crafts, language, rationality, imagination -- the fire of the gods to miserable, despicable human beings. These gifts are fit for gods alone, so Zeus decreed; consequently Prometheus must be punished. [Insert] →

There is not much action onstage in Prometheus Bound. The Titan himself never moves, except to be cast--at the end of the play--into deepest Tartarus, with the squealing, admiring sea nymphs (the Oceanids) all around. It is essentially a tableau. The action is in the language. It is a drama of ideas -- and yet it sets the terms of tragedy. The stony place it introduces (recurs in drama after drama --) -- this place of absolute limits where the human spirit has exhausted its energy and can no longer will—and so enters into passion (rather than action), defeated. It is at such a moment that one begins the laborious path to wisdom ("Pathei mathos, is Aeschylus' way of putting it: one suffers into wisdom.) Job's dung heap is such a place. So, too, is the graveyard in Hamlet. In our own hearts we discover a stony place and recognize it as the seat of tragedy.

Prometheus Bound is the ultimate image of the tragic conflict -- between freedom and order, imagination and intellect, spirit and matter. And it shows this conflict to be in the very structure of being: it is

[Insert]

The word "Promethean" had, in my youth, a derogatory implication: the side of the Titan that rebelled against divine order was emphasized in most accounts, with Prometheus being seen as the height of impiety. His Luciferian aspect overshadowed the features of his character that resemble ~~the role of~~ the Christ figure. Milton used him as a source for his Satan; and the Promethean spirit, as we called it, that was unleashed with modernity pictured the Titan as inspiring ~~in man that~~ that impiety which would attempt to turn man into a god and hence to cause him to commit the act of hubris, or overweening pride.

But this is to overlook the Titan's benevolence, his love for the human race, his obvious benefits to man. In our day we are beginning to look upon him more kindly, seeing in him that aspect of divinity which feels a kinship with ~~the human man~~ mortals and wishes to share with the human race the bounties of knowledge, the higher reaches of spirit.

[Back to p. 1]

not of human origin. And since Prometheus, who suffers unspeakable agonies, is himself of the divine life the play shows us too that tragic suffering is not man-made but in the very nature of things.

The conflicts started at the beginning of the universe or near it. Uranus fears and is jealous of his progeny; and the devouring fatherhood motif is repeated with Cronos, the father of the Olympians, as well as with Zeus. Zeus supplants his father and must defeat the Titans before securing order on Mt. Olympus.

The Titans relied on force, but Zeus had the hundred-handed one on his side -- and he had his thunderbolts. "Not by strength," Themis tells her son Prometheus, "but by guile alone" will the fates decree the victory in the war in heaven. ("Guile" is not the right choice of word here. It's great for Odysseus but not for Prometheus. Imagination, we call it, something which Prometheus has in abundance, as indicated by his name -- Forethought. He imagines the possibilites and devises plans to bring about the desired result.)

This forethinking -- imagination -- is the gift of fire he makes to man, out of which all the arts, sciences, and crafts emerge. He had offered it to the mighty Titans, but they scorned it. Zeus accepted it and won the war on Olympus - and sought to keep the gift for Olympians. Prometheus in his generosity gave it to the puny human beings who have very slowly made themselves worthy of existence in the presence of gods. --by its very nature it is a gift that must be shared --

This making of something insensate into a thinking being is a recurrent myth in our civilization, but most often in human attempts to do so we come up with monsters. Mary Shelley gave us such a creature in her story of Dr. Frankenstein -- the modern Prometheus. His monster, you recall, wasn't evil -- just sad.

The evolutionary myth is Promethean -- not in the sense of a Frankenstein making a ~~man~~ creature but in the sense of a gift at the beginning of the race that makes ~~him~~ mankind survive and -- in Faulkner's term -- prevail.

It has been a repellent myth to many of us -- to physicists like me because of its shaky basis in science; to those of us who hold the traditional Christian faith because the evolutionary theory-as it has been propagated-stresses the workings of chance rather than purpose and has been used to discredit any super-natural origins or purposes.

But, shorn of its secularistic biases, the Evolutionary myth may turn out to hold some value for us : and what is interesting is that in its new manifestations it fits well with the Prmetheus story.

A book by two socio-biologists entitled Prometheus Five ~~was is~~ appeared a few years ago. It presented the problem of how man developed into what he is from some original being with a small brain and no intellect.

1. The "Old" 19th cent. story - randomness. Environmental controls. Survival traits. (Destiny)
2. The DNA story. Genes. Fully determinist (Fate) heredity [Planned economy.]
3. Prometheus genes.

Computers our modern effort to Prometheus
Hard wired" models -- dedicated
Binary ~~decisions~~ points
Quantum levels.

Technology and equality

Prometheus suffers, as he feels, unjustly. And despite his prophetic gifts, he cannot understand "the ways of god to man." For Zeus makes overtures to the human race in another manner: his love of Io is token of his sense of destiny for mankind. (Her suffering comes from Hera's ~~and her~~ attempts to thwart Zeus' amours.) (The mysterious and capacious mind of Zeus holds things that he himself does not understand. — the "plan of Zeus" is the whole pattern of destiny. His desire for Io could be said to be dictated by this sense of destiny. For she will eventually conceive a child at his touch -- in a foreshadowing of the Immaculate conception -- and from this child will come the deliverer of Prometheus. (p. 96) The hold of intellect over the universe is fragile; and Zeus will need Prometheus' help to secure his realm. p. 71 and 72. [Text] The prophecy

This long sought for, far-off event: the reconciliation of Zeus and Prometheus -- is something that Prometheus now sees bitterly, and vengefully, in terms of his adversary's possible overthrow. But benevolent god that he is, he will no doubt come to see this union in terms of a cosmic reconciliation that can bring about peace and prosperity, That Kingdom where the lion will lie down with the lambs.

According to my use of the myth, their reconciliation brings about the wholeness of human culture as well. Prometheus gave fire to man; but the god was not available as counselor and guide to the human race, since he was bound to a rock in Tartarus -- and has lain there still -- only now (as I pretend) getting ready to emerge into the light of day.

What is a myth such as the Prometheus story that we can see new meanings in it -- can take such liberties with it as I am (more or less whimsically) doing? Well, myths are many things. But the Prometheus myth is about the origins and ultimate purposes ~~destiny~~ of the human race. And it is about the divine life that governs the destiny of mankind: we are enabled then by its symbolic structure to interpret it as we can. (Indeed, not only enabled but in a sense commanded to interpret: such is the impelling power of a myth.)

Myth is neither allegory nor parable, though kin to both; it is like both in being a symbolic construction. But unlike them it does not represent merely an instance in life, a particular set of circumstances. Myth represents the whole destiny of the human race; attempts to say why things are as they are; and since it does so darkly and obliquely, it impels us to meditate upon it and to interpret.

(The Old Testament uses at times the form of myth to instruct us in the revealed truth of Jahweh, the Unnameable source of all being, the God beyond the gods. Hence the truths of the Bible are true in a different sense from all other knowledge. But the form in which they are presented is mythic. The Genesis story, though "true", as we have said, in a different sense from Prometheus, is also mythic in its outlines -- requiring us to interpret the course of the entire human enterprise in the light of the fall and the loss of the garden.

Implied in the Prometheus myth (to which Aeschylus gave definitive form) is several possible universes, several possible worlds that we could call the world "out there" -- the real world.

First is the world that the Titans inhabit and sustain: a world of force: of inert objects that must be moved by something outside them: the world of volcanoes and hurricanes, of the endless coursing of rivers, the boundless energy of tides. The Titanic world is still with us; but it would not be an attractive one to be limited to.

The second possible "world" is that of Zeus: a realm ~~world~~ of clear ideas, of essences, of perfections -- which has little to do with the world of matter. Zeus' clear and truthful mind is repelled by the conditions of physical existence; finiteness is repellent to him; and yet his mind contains the essential ideas of being which establish order (justice, courage, freedom, beauty, the good, the true.) But this realm ~~world~~ has no place in it for the imperfections of the human; the approximations dictated by space and time and further increased by the refractoriness of matter make man a sluggish brute indeed for the clarity and precision of the ideas of Zeus.

The third "world" implied in the Prometheus story is the w realm ~~orld~~ of imagination: and it is this power, I am maintaining, that Prometheus brought to mankind. The Olympian fire, introduced into matter, becomes that incarnating force of imagination. And imagination creates a universe ~~world~~ in which intellect may do its work: the human person, within a framework of imagined reality, can reason toward truth and even at times discern the Zeusian essences. But he can do so because his world is constructed by what Coleridge called the magical and synthesizing power, the imagination.

End 9:16

The fourth world suggested by the Promethean myth is the world of love: It is implied in the suffering and wandering of Io but is to be fulfilled only in the long-distant future. A universe governed by the laws of love is the future toward whicch we direct our gaze; but it is not easily achievable (though individuals may achieve it all along).

(The Catholic theologian Romano Guardini has said something like this when he says that "the real world," the world of fact and empirical evidence is only one of the universes in which we can live: the othrs, he maintains, are the worlds of intellect (of significances and spiritual realities) and the world of love, in which the brute facts are healed and re-formed through the miraculous power of outgoing charity.)

But for those of us concerned with education, it is the third mode of being suggested by the myth, with which we are concerned. It is the imagination that constructs our world, that gives place to the elements within it; that enables us to synthesize our experiences, that gives meaning to life.

The myth of Prometheus is one of the most fundamental to Western civilization. It has many permutations which have shaped the imagination of Western man. But it is perhaps only in our day that its prophetic significance may be understood in all its implications. For it is only in our day that society is undertaking the task of educating all its young. What this task implies is the work of universal education -- educatio for everyone. whatever their status. whatever their native mental ability. And universal education of the sort that will create a structure-- a form. a container--for knowledge must be universal liberal education. an education in meaning. not mere skills and information. In reply to the widespread objections to such idealism we can turn to Prometheus: If those whom he taught had "eyes but saw not. ears but heard not." then it is likely that the ones to whom he first brought the Promethean fire did not begin with high SAT's. It is obvious as well that the Titan was interested not so much in individuals as in the human race. The educational task he initiated (mythically. of course) is fully as obligatory to those who care about the good of civilization as food and shelter. We understand that all need food. whatever their talents. whatever their IQ. whatever their rank in society.

Prometheus knew that if the human race were to be saved from extinction. people must be given "blind hopes." by which they could elevate themselves beyond what seemed evident. beyond what practical rational men would consider 'realistic." The hopes have to be blind. in a sense. to protect them from the apparent factual evidence that would refute them. Some things are not decided by statistics (marital fidelity. for instance. the high accord given to selflessness. despite all evidence to the contrary.) We sometimes have to be blind to the facts if we are to achieve our ends.