

## Male Suffering and Promethean Punishment in Hesiod's *Theogony*

The Prometheus episode of Hesiod's *Theogony* (521-616) opens with the Titan's twofold punishment: bondage to a column (521-522) and torture by an eagle (523-525). The narrative next relates that Heracles slew that eagle "and *released* [Prometheus] from cares" (καὶ ἐλύσατο δυσφοροσυνάων, 528). While this seems at first to mean Heracles freed Prometheus from the column as well, the episode's closing words declare the Titan's ongoing bondage: μέγας κατὰ δεσμὸς ἐρύκει ("a great bond restrains [him]," 616). This apparent contradiction between the episode's beginning and end led early editors to athetize the entire account of Heracles' exploit (526-534; e.g., Paley, 1861, *ad loc.*) and even all mention of the eagle (523-533; e.g., Gerhard, 1856, *ad loc.*). Since then, West (1966, 313, following Sittl, 1889, *ad loc.*) has observed that "there is in fact no contradiction," since the word δυσφοροσυνάων may merely refer again to the agony of the eagle.

This paper proposes that, while there is in retrospect no contradiction, the verb ἐλύσατο, together with reference to Zeus's cessation from anger (παύθη χόλου, 533), do *imply* Prometheus' release from bondage and initiate a narrative tension resolved only with the episode's final line (616). In the meantime, the intervening account, which culminates with the consequences of Prometheus' trickery for men, heightens this tension. Specifically, the episode's depiction of male suffering as an elaborate echo of the Titan's own twofold punishment raises important questions about the future of men's affliction and the nature of Zeus as punisher.

Early in the episode, Zeus foresees evils that are bound to be accomplished for mortals (κακὰ δ' ὄσσετο θυμῷ | θνητοῖς ἀνθρώποισι, τὰ καὶ τελέεσθαι ἔμελλεν, 551-552). The first κακόν proves to be wives, whom Zeus made as an evil for men (ἄνδρεςσι κακὸν θνητοῖσι

γυναίκα | Ζευς...θῆκε, 600-601), an affliction that notably echoes Prometheus' torture by the eagle (observed briefly by Clay, 2003, 115). Just as drone honeybees (= wives), consume the daylong (πρόπαν ἥμαρ ἐς ἡέλιον καταδύντα, 596) harvest that the worker bees (= husbands) bring home by day (ἡμάτια, 597), so the eagle consumes all day long (πρόπαν ἥμαρ, 525) Prometheus' immortal liver that regenerates by night (νοκτός, 525). The opportunity for both men and Titan to escape their respective sufferings further strengthens this parallel. While Heracles, in accordance with Zeus's will (529), freed Prometheus' from the eagle (526-528), a man may of his own will escape a wife simply by eschewing marriage (γάμον φεύγων, 603), thereby keeping his store of wealth presumably as untouched as the Titan's liver.

There are, however, for both Prometheus and men, not one but two plights. For the Titan, there is also his bondage to the column. For men, the second affliction (ἕτερον κακόν, 602) is defined by their mortality. If a man rejects marriage, he grows old with no one to care for him (604-605) and at his death the wealth afforded by his bachelor's life proves pointless with no proper heirs to receive it (605-607). A man, then, must choose between two κακά, a choice that *Theogony* proceeds to complicate further: even marriage, it turns out, can prove worse than no marriage at all, depending on the quality of the wife (607-612).

At this point, the parallel seems broken, as the disconnect between Prometheus' implied escape from bondage and yet men's compulsory choice of a κακόν raises important questions. Does Prometheus' freedom imply Zeus's vulnerability (so Loney, 2014, 511)? Does it offer hope that Zeus (or Prometheus himself) will free men from their second κακόν as well, reasserting the parallel between men and Titan? Or is the nature of Zeus's retribution simply such that while a perpetrator may go free his beneficiaries (men) must suffer the consequences of his actions?

The episode's conclusion answers these questions by clarifying the initial ambiguity and affirming the fact of Prometheus' continued bondage. The parallel between Titan and men thus resumes, but with differences that bear on the nature of Zeus as punisher. Like men, Prometheus forever retains one of his two afflictions, but unlike men he has no choice between them. Furthermore, while choosing the first κακόν (a wife) may offer a man comfort and purpose in the face of the mortality that defines him, it is Prometheus' immortality that makes his bondage unmitigatedly eternal and renders him an ageless example to the other gods of this episode's central point: "It is not possible to deceive the mind of Zeus" (613).

#### Works Cited

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