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Prompt 4

Abstract

Both Prometheus and Frankenstein were oblivious of their mortal status, and deserve punishment from their superiors precisely for their repeated, arrogant, and inconsiderate attempts of grandeur. The essay delves into the predicaments one is “funneled into” by fate, and whether the individuals themselves can be held accountable for their actions. With thorough and rigorous examination of the conditions Prometheus and Victor Frankenstein “discover” themselves in, this essay definitively asserts that encountering repercussions from others as a result of one’s recklessness is not only justified, but deserved.

The Antique and the Modern Prometheus

Prometheus and Victor Frankenstein suffer analogous destinies in disjointed timelines. Prometheus, a titan in the play of Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, who stole fire (or knowledge) for humanity, suffers from Zeus’ tyranny. Frankenstein, a careless scientist in Mary Shelley’s novel *Frankenstein, or, the Modern Prometheus*, who traced down the secrets of creation, endures pain for his divine presumption. The two characters are united in their prospects: they defy their superiors and suffer in consequence, they sacrifice themselves for the sake of

humanity, and deem themselves victims of fate. Both disobey authorities twice, and the second revolt of each receives much harsher punishment. The two underestimate how powerful knowledge is; for that, they lose everything they have, impelled to centuries of torment or death. The two texts debate whether answering disobedience towards authority with any punishment is justified, whether every individual should possess equivalent power, and whether individuals are responsible for their actions. Both Prometheus and Frankenstein were oblivious of their mortal status, and deserve punishment from their superiors precisely for their repeated, arrogant, and inconsiderate attempts of grandeur.

Prometheus deserves his binding, as he had thoughtlessly donated power to humanity. The default opinion of Prometheus is that he is a selfless hero, standing up against the tyranny of Zeus. Disregarding Zeus' declaration of his dislike for humankind, Prometheus ventures into the palace of Olympus to steal fire for humanity from Hepheistos' forge, making use of deception to secure it. Fire, symbolically known as power, authority, and knowledge, was stolen specifically for its transformative properties. Having seized fire, Prometheus bestows its gifts upon humanity, who were overindulged with many other rewards from him, "All human arts are founded by Prometheus" (Agee 51); none as figurative as fire. With fire, humanity is able to diminish the separation between them and the gods, *introibo ad altare dei*. Humanity's godlike status demands great responsibility, of which they are unaware. As such, shortsighted by greed, all of humanity wages unprecedented in violence wars. Comprehending the consequences of Prometheus' recklessness, Zeus seeks out a punishment for him. He orders Hephaistos, the victim of thievery, to eternally chain his offender where no one will ever visit him. "Hephaistos, you must carry out the Father's will and bind the criminal [] with chains [] unbreakable" (Agee

30). Making Prometheus serve as an example of the price of careless bestowing of knowledge, Zeus justly binds him. For his thoughtless actions, Prometheus deserves his punishment.

From an opposing viewpoint, Prometheus is unjustly punished by the King of gods, as humanity's acquisition of divine knowledge disprofits Zeus alone. If humanity ascents to the level of gods, then they themselves should be considered gods. As the position of a god, previously limited to a small group, is now expanded to accommodate humankind, it loses its prized status. As such, Zeus, deprived of the privilege that comes with being in a narrow governing body, loses his authority over humanity: “[Prometheus] cleared man’s vision to discern [] all [] arts” (Agee 51). Gaining independence, humanity will no longer be dependent on gods’ mercy. Enraged by his deteriorated power, Zeus punished Prometheus for being an inconvenience to him rather than out of concern for humanity. As such, Zeus should be considered a heartless and self-interested tyrant, unconcerned for anyone’s prospects but his own. However, transformative as fire was, the gods still were at the forefront of technological advancement. Immediately succeeding the heist, Zeus requested a sealed box with dreadful evils inside to avenge Prometheus’ creatures. The completed box was given to Pandora, who by opening it unleashed the evils inside. Unable to combat the released corruption, humanity turned to its last resort: hopeless hope. As humankind is unable to shield itself from divine wrath, it is apparent that the upperhand in power belonged to the gods. Ergo, the loss of the privilege to fire didn’t diminish the gods’ worth. Prometheus is punished mostly for carelessly violating his superior’s decree. Prometheus granted an unprecedented endowment to a group Zeus vehemently disliked and vowed to eradicate. Knowing of the prohibition, Prometheus nevertheless proceeded to impart the gift of fire upon humanity, not considering the consequences of his lavishness.

Violation of any rules brings punishment; thus disrespecting the divine guidelines, Prometheus gets retaliated with a divine punishment: eternal ostracization in incarceration (Agee 31).

Prometheus deserved retribution for his blatant and malevolent violation of Zeus' will. Conclusively, the gods were not hurt by their loss of privilege; appalled by Prometheus' defiance of their rule, they justly cued him his punishment.

For meddling in divine presumption, Frankenstein duly discovers how costly the acquisition of forbidden knowledge is. Upon realizing the key to overcome death, obsessed with antique philosophy Frankenstein throws himself into the development of the cause sans any *forethought*. Concluding years of labor, on “a dreary night of November, [] [he] beheld the accomplishment of [his] toils” (Shelley 58). During his labors, Frankenstein beheld only the perfection of a theorem, which he never questioned; the moment it was proven, the “frantic impulse” ceased, and he was facing the despicable nature of his employment (Shelley 58). Because he never considered the aftermath of his invention, the events that follow it are entirely Frankenstein’s fault: he issued his own doom by mindlessly fiddling with forbidden knowledge. Resulting from his attempted grandeur, Frankenstein encounters calamitous consequences. After numerous months of illness following the act of creation, Frankenstein returns to Geneva to find two people killed by his imprudence. His brother was strangled by the fiend, and an innocent girl was accused of the murder and executed (Shelley 90). Later, Frankenstein warns Walton, “Learn from me[] how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge...” (Shelley 54). A single seed of conception had flourished into a wretch Frankenstein candidly despises. On the example of Frankenstein, it is apparent that playing god is a perilous undertaking. For his disregard for natural order, Frankenstein suffers brutally from his foolish levity.

As scientific advance can be of exceptional utility, Frankenstein is fully justified for his intentions to advance it. The ability to bestow life, like many other technological innovations, could be used for harm and good. The implications of Frankenstein's discovery can be, despite their initial catastrophe, extraordinarily beneficial. In the process of designing his being, he realizes that "[He] might in process of time renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption" (Shelley 55). The ability to circumvent death would allow humanity to prosper to a level no invention had allowed before. Therefore, Frankenstein's efforts in furthering scientific discovery are justified and admirable. Per contra, Frankenstein cannot be justified, as reckless technological progress can bring atrocities beyond horrid. Any radical advancement should be performed with careful consideration of its implications. Without contemplating the consequences of an invention, being pulled to complete it by an arbitrary incentive, the outcome can be catastrophic. Frankenstein's reckless release of the fiend might have resulted in an outcome far more dreadful outcome not only to him, but to the rest of humanity. "I shuddered to think that future ages might curse me as their pest," (Shelley 164) Frankenstein reflects on the horror that dawned on him when he realized the potential implications of his toils. For the benefits scientific progress delivers, it also has the potential to bring humanity to its demise, and must therefore be taken as matters of utmost gravity. Since Frankenstein paid no regard for the aftermath of the invention, his intentions—however amiable—cannot be justified. For his infantilism in dealing with grim undertakings, Frankenstein deserves the suffering he reaps.

Prometheus expectedly receives bitter punishment for his utter inability to comprehend the consequences of arrogant defiance of authority. Notwithstanding his appalling position, Prometheus sequentially challenges all of Zeus' requests. Prometheus unremittingly refuses to

answer Hermes' inquiry, which is made on the behalf of Zeus. Despite the messenger of the gods' efforts to dissuade him from his course, Prometheus remains adamant, and rejects all of Hermes' deductions, "No torture, promise, or device will ever move me" (Agee 74). In this irrational state, unable to see Hermes' camaraderie, he hinders any attempt of Hermes to help him avoid his horrid destiny. Seeing the ineffectiveness of his attempts to bring Prometheus to mind, Hermes rightly withdraws his cordiality, and the imprisoned becomes subject to Zeus' disciplinary wrath. Done with Prometheus' obstinacy, the King of gods sends him into a "threefold tidal wave of misery;" as the impending torment draws nearer, Prometheus calls out to nature of "the wrongs he suffers" (Agee 78). The hypocrite, whose tenacity towards authority results in punishment, dares to cry out of the injustice that stems from his own actions. The punishment Prometheus receives is deserved, as not only does he defy his superiors, but he also was repeatedly warned against it. Prometheus, therefore, is punished in accordance with his own neglect.

Prometheus' punishment is unjustified, as his obstinance, a result of Zeus' betrayal, highlights his profound regard for others. Prometheus, who is one of the few titans who sided with the Olympian gods in the Titanomachy, securing the new gods' position of power with his "superior guile," is nevertheless punished by the tyrant despite his heavy contribution. Prometheus calls out of this injustice to others, "That was my service to the tyrant god, and this is how he pays me" (Agee 40). To accentuate the atrocities of absolute power, Prometheus invokes awareness around his case by revolting. A solitary tyrant like Zeus should not possess the power to unilaterally decide an individual's fate. In rebelling against Zeus, Prometheus calls for justice not only for him, but for everyone who is under the tyrant's grasp. Prometheus'

resistance therefore puts his thievery in an amiable light, not deserving punishment under alternate circumstances. As such, Prometheus faces retribution disproportionate to his crime. Conversely, as nobody requested he should reveal his oracle, Prometheus clearly called for his own punishment. Prometheus was given foreknowledge of the future by his mother, Themis. Had Prometheus not wanted to worsen his condition, he would not have been unraveling the thread of Zeus' destiny. Overhearing Prometheus' secret, Zeus sends his hound to deal with the garrulous titan, "Supreme conniver, master of complaints [] [Zeus] wants to know [about] []his fatal marriage you boast of" (Agee 70). As such, the punishment Prometheus receives is based justly on his own inaptitude. Prometheus deserves his sequential punishment, for not only had he not learned from his previous mistakes, but he continued making more.

Similarly to his antique counterpart, Frankenstein receives punishment for his inability to timely comprehend the consequences of a rebellion. Despite his previous adversities, Frankenstein allows himself to be persuaded to exhibit compassion towards the murderer of his companions. Impressed by the rational conclusions that the daemon makes about the injustice he faces at his creator's hands, he ventures to rectify his oversight by forging a hideous being akin to him, but of the opposite sex. "I consent to your demand," threatened by the wretch Frankenstein replies to him, once again discarding the potential consequences that will come of his actions (Shelley 146). In complying with the devil's orders, Frankenstein not only undertakes his despicable employment anew, but does so in his typical fashion: without any contemplation of the ramifications of his actions. Further worsening his situation, Frankenstein breaks his oath to the fiend, prompting his wrath. Near the fulfillment of his contract, Frankenstein turns around and destroys the subject of his toils and the creature's only dream. Enraged by Frankenstein's

murder of his future companion, the besotted creature funnels his fury onto Frankenstein's loved one, "The murderous mark of the fiend's grasp was on her neck" (Shelley 193). Frankenstein's abrupt turnaround demonstrates his inability to foresee the implications of his actions. For his ensuing turmoil, Frankenstein is the solitary cause: it is his irresponsible compliance and his following precipitous defiance that constitutes his doom.

Under a different light, Frankenstein's actions are amiable and justified, as his efforts are ultimately directed to saving humankind. Near the completion of his labor, Frankenstein realizes that nothing sustains the verbal promise of the fiend. As a result of unleashing another daemon, Frankenstein realizes that he could doom humanity by allowing a race of superior wretches to be created. Comprehending that, with a "trembling [] passion, [he] tore to pieces the thing on which [he] was [working]" (Shelley 162-164). The daemon, witnessing the destruction, expectedly gets infuriated by Frankenstein's rebellion. By sacrificing himself and decreeing his own verdict, he elevates the plague of the fiendish race from humanity. In effect, Frankenstein saves humanity, and should therefore be admired for his undertaking. Nonetheless, the disagreeable employments of the two are perpetrated by a vicious cycle Victor initiated. The creature only became violent because he inhibited the unremitting hatred of this world. The creature's exposure to the world would have been superfluous had Frankenstein diligently abided his responsibilities. In abandoning the creature, in breaking his dream, and in chasing to kill him, Frankenstein perpetrates the loop that ends in the destruction of both (Shelley 58, 164, 200). If Frankenstein had not abandoned his creation, which possessed the innocence and curiosity representative of a child, he would not have to deal with the deaths of those dear to him. For his ever-worsening

misfortunes, Frankenstein is the sole cause. Frankenstein need not have resorted to self-sacrifice had he been responsible for his actions since the beginning.

The ultimate punishment both Prometheis receive is the expected conclusion to their efforts. The two Prometheis experience firsthand how costly their disobedience is. Resulting from their arrogant and ignorant conjectures, they are justly bound on a course to supreme suffering. Both of them lose everything: Prometheus loses freedom and glory, eternally chained to a rock, unable to die, “Witness the torture and disgrace I must endure through endless time—” (Agee 35); Frankenstein loses his career, status, and sanity, losing everyone that is dear to him, dying in a pursuit for revenge, “The forms of the beloved dead flit before me, and I hasten to their arms” (Shelley 215). The punishment the pompous duo earns culminates all of their previous misfortunes, setting a definite limit over their ceaseless ventures. For the resulting punishment, they are the solitary cause. Prometheus’ unremitting arrogance when it comes to superior law constituted his downfall; Frankenstein’s endless chain of errors brought him into death’s embrace. In his fascination with natural philosophy, in his discovery of forging life, in his impulse to override nature, each of Frankenstein’s decisions dug him deeper into the grave (Shelley 40, 53, 55). In stealing fire and in refusing to complete the secret he revealed, Prometheus’ continuously worsened his already despicable condition (Agee 30, 73, 78). Thoughtlessly pursuing grandeur, trying to act with divine perfection, they are greeted by their mortal reality. In their justified circumstance of suffering, they are the only responsible figures.

For their actions, neither of the Prometheis can be blamed, as their destinies were settled long before them. The events Prometheus and Frankenstein undergo were predetermined by fate. As fate cannot be changed, neither of them are responsible for their misfortunes. When Hermes

approaches Prometheus regarding his obstinacy, he answers with, “This was determined a long time ago” (Agee 74). In retelling his own story, Frankenstein enunciates that it was fate that decided his doom, “Such were the professor's words—[] let me say such the words of the *fate*—enounced to destroy me” (Shelley 49). From their accounts, Frankenstein and Prometheus are nothing other than victims of fate. Powerless, their only choice was to be a bystander to their own downfall. Their punishment, therefore, is not justified, as they themselves had no control over the inputs. However, their obedient compliance with their destiny definitively settles that their suffering is proper. Prometheus, despite his foreknowledge of the future, willingly begins his descent into doom. Frankenstein, who had not stopped to consider his situation for a moment, comes to meet his downfall. Knowing of the consequences of stealing fire, Prometheus commits his thievery; knowing the consequences of his rebellion, he persists in obstinacy (Agee 31, 74). In creating life just to abandon it, to once again taking up in his despicable employments, Frankenstein only considers the immediate consequences of his actions (Shelley 54, 164). Their erroneous chains of mistakes, which they could have prevented at every point in their journey, brought them to their knees. With no explicit effort to change for the better on either side, it is not surprising that they end up in the conditions they do. Their actionless obedience to fate puts the final nail in their coffin: the punishment of Prometheus and Frankenstein is justified.

Victor Frankenstein and Prometheus were blind to the consequences of a defiant act, and are punished in exact with their unawareness. For their careless and arrogant actions, both suffer the consequences of their defiance. Not having understood the principle of their first punishment, they are greeted with harsher consequences for their second defiance. The ultimate punishment

both receive is the expected conclusion for their previous efforts. Their actions remain unjustified neither by their intentions, nor by external circumstances.

Works Cited

- Aeschylus. *Prometheus Bound*, Translation and Introduction by Joel Agee. NYRB, 2013.
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