

An Ancient Greek Story of Creation

From Plato, *Protagoras*

The Internet Classics Archive: <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/protagoras.html>

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Active Reading

Once upon a time there were gods only, and no mortal creatures. But when the time came that these also should be created, the gods fashioned them out of earth and fire and various mixtures of both elements in the interior of the earth; and when they were about to bring them into the light of day, they ordered **Prometheus** and **Epimetheus**¹ to equip them, and to distribute to them severally their proper qualities. Epimetheus said to Prometheus: "Let me distribute, and you inspect." This was agreed, and Epimetheus made the distribution. There were some to whom he gave strength without swiftmess, while he equipped the weaker with swiftmess; some he armed, and others he left unarmed; and devised for the latter some other means of preservation, making some large, and having their size as a protection, and others small, whose nature was to fly in the air or burrow in the ground; this was to be their way of escape. Thus did he compensate them with the view of preventing any race from becoming extinct.

And when he had provided against their destruction by one another, he contrived also a means of protecting them against the seasons of heaven; clothing them with close hair and thick skins sufficient to defend them against the winter cold and able to resist the summer heat, so that they might have a natural bed of their own when they wanted to rest; also he furnished them with hoofs and hair and hard and callous skins under their feet. Then he gave them varieties of food-herb of the soil to some, to others fruits of trees, and to others roots, and to some again he gave other animals as food. And some he made to have few young ones, while those who were their prey were very prolific; and in this manner the race was preserved.

Thus did Epimetheus, who, not being very wise, forgot that he had distributed among the brute animals all the qualities which he had to give-and when he came to man, who was still unprovided, he was terribly perplexed. Now while he was in this perplexity, Prometheus came to inspect the distribution, and he found that the other animals were suitably furnished, but that man alone was naked and shoeless, and had neither bed nor arms of defense. The appointed hour was approaching when man in his turn was to go forth into the light of day; and Prometheus, not knowing how he could devise his salvation, stole the mechanical arts of **Hephaestus** and **Athena**, and fire with them (they could neither have been acquired nor used without fire), and gave them to man... And in this way man was supplied with the means of life. But Prometheus is said to have been afterwards prosecuted for theft, owing to the blunder of Epimetheus.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What problem did humans face after Epimetheus distributed the gifts and how did Prometheus solve it?
2. What does this story tell us about the role technology plays in supporting human existence?

¹ Derived from Greek words meaning **forethought** and **afterthought**