I. Introduction

For Plato’s Socrates, the concept προμήθεια ("forethought") signifies the height of rationality. Drawing an inference from the city-soul analogy in the Republic, Socrates suggests that the soul’s rational part (λογιστικῷ) should rule because “it [i.e. among the parts] is wise and has forethought on behalf of the entire soul” (σοφῷ ὑπὲρ ἅπασης τῆς ψυχῆς προμήθειαν: 441e4).¹ In the Gorgias, he praises techniques over habits for “having some forethought about what is best regarding the soul” (αἱ μὲν τεχνικαί, προμήθειαν τινα ἔχουσαι τοῦ βελτίστου περὶ τὴν ψυχήν: 501b4-5). At the close of the Protagoras, encouraging Protagoras to share in his investigation of virtue, he says he “exercises forethought over the whole of my life (προμηθούμενος ὑπὲρ τοῦ βίου τοῦ ἐμαυτοῦ παντὸς: 361d4).

Plato assimilates προμήθεια² to the qualities of his highest esteem: phronēsis, virtue, knowledge of the good, and the pursuit of reflective self-understanding through careful discussion.³ But his characters never discuss the concept itself, and so its precise relationship to them, and its solitary meaning, are not clear. Stranger still, the word is absent from Xenophon and Aristotle, and in fact is nearly absent in the four centuries before Philo.⁴ A reader is apt to wonder: did Plato put a novel philosophical spin on a rather old-fashioned and commonplace word—LSJ defines it simply as “foresight, forethought” or “[to hold in great] consideration”—just before it became completely obsolescent? Or did the word already have a substantial ethical depth we have not yet seen?

Questions about Plato’s usage of προμήθεια are made difficult for two main reasons. First, the word has an uncertain etymology, and a vexed relationship with the name Prometheus: it is not clear which word came first.⁵ Second, it has remarkable orthographic similarity to προμανθάνω (to learn beforehand, gradually, by rote)⁶ and to προμαντεύομαι (to foretell, prophesy), and apparent morphosemantic similarity to verbs like προγιγνώσκω (to give a

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¹ All translations are the author’s unless noted; Plato’s text from the OCT.
² And its cognates (which is now to be understood): the noun is also spelled προμάθεια (Doric), προμηθίη (Ionic), προμηθία (tragedy); the verb is προμηθοῦμαι, the adjective προμηθής, the adverb προμηθικῶς.
³ Besides the three uses mentioned above, see the following (to be discussed below): La. 185a9, 188b4, 197b9, 198e3; Cr. 44e2, 45a4; Prot. 316c5; Le. 730a; Minos 318e, Alc. II 138b. (That these last two dialogues are usually suspected spurious is of little relevance, to the extent they are composed in the Platonic era and mimic Plato’s or Socrates’ vocabulary.)
⁴ This has been determined by a TLG search on the noun, verb, adjective, and adverb.
⁵ Beekes 2010, 1237, s.v. προμηθής, largely following Chantraine 2009 and the very detailed Schmidt 1975, states that there is an uncertain IE origin from “direct the mind to,” and claims an etymology “from πρό and *μῆθος, *μάθος, which may be semantically associated with μυθεῖν. Since the latter is compared with μηθής… analogical ablaut must be assumed for προμηθής, perhaps after μηθόμαι or μήτες. This remains a bit doubtful.” At s.v. μανθάνω, a word that has a broad set of forms, Beekes says that μηθής has an uncertain origin, perhaps related to μαθήματα, and is explained as φροντίς, μέριμνα, ‘thought, care.’” Beekes thinks “Prometheus” is derivative of the adjective, but does not cite support for the view.
⁶ See, e.g., Pindar O.8.59-61: ... τὸ διδάξασθαι δὲ τοι / εἰδότι ἄντερον· Ἀγνωμὸν δὲ τὸ μή προμαθεῖν / κοιφόστεραι γὰρ ἀπειθῶν φύγεις. (“teaching is easier / with respect to one who knows: not having learned beforehand is ignorant: / for the minds of the inexperienced are weaker.”)
prognosis), προνοεῖω (to have foresight), προσημαίνω (to foreknow), and προεῖδον (to foreknow).7

Most definitions of προμήθεια and its cognates give two glosses, what we might call the “temporal” and the “due regard” readings, the first concerned with calculating future possibilities, the second with taking the broad view. Beekes 2010 gives this pair in two forms: “forethinking, cautious” and “premeditative, careful.” Chantraine 2009 provides “prévoyant, précautionneux.” LSJ gives for the noun “foresight, forethought,” for the verb “use forethought, take care,” and for the adjective, “forethinking, provident.” These works do not explain why there are these two seemingly distinct meanings, what relations if any hold between the two meanings, or the respective significance of the prophetic and moral denotations.

The following exploration of προμήθεια aims principally to contribute to Plato interpretation, for he is the only classical philosopher to deploy the word regularly. I argue that Plato uses the word to mean basically “rational reflection,” and that in doing so he follows the meaning of his predecessors. But the evidence for this claim has independent value, as part of the history of the Greek moral vocabulary. We find a word whose few extant uses point to its often-charged employment in ideological and political language, and its always-charged employment in critical ethical discussion.

II. The pre-Platonic history of προμήθεια words

We see προμήθεια words earliest in the mid-seventh century. For the first several centuries, a supposed “temporal” reading—as knowing future events or likelihoods—rarely makes sense in the context, and the “due regard” reading, while much closer to the needed interpretation, can be much more tightly specified. The uses imply an acknowledgement of one’s effect on others, and an appreciation for the significance of such effect in deciding what to do. This is “conscientiousness” or “consideration,” cognizance of how the things over which we have control might turn out, and their relative importance to us.

Archilochus

The earliest extant use of the term is as a verb, προμήθεσαι (second singular) in a fragment attributed to Archilochus:8

.................[νται νής ἐν πόντω ̣ ̣ ̣ ̣ ̣ ̣ ̣ ̣ ̣ ̣ ̣ ̣ θοαί
.................πολλὸν δ’ ἰστίων ὑφόμεθα
.................λύσαντες ὄρα ὑμὸς· οὐρὴν δ’ ἔχε
.................[ροὺς, ὁφρὰ σεο μμενεωμεθα
.................] ἄποση, μῆδε τούτον ἐμβάλησ
.................[ν ἰσταται κυκώμενον
.................[χης· ἄλλα σύ προμήθεσαι
.................[μος

7 On these verbs, see Apfel 2011, 145-150, 158; Lloyd 1987, 34-49. There is further large προ-prefixed vocabulary concerned with reporting one’s prognoses: προαγορεύω, προλέγω, προφήματα.
8 Wood 1966, contrary to Adrados 1955 (who follows Croenert’s original attribution), denies the poem’s Archilochan origin on the grounds of its use of προμήθεσαι, which he argues cannot be from the seventh century; Boserup 1969 says we cannot determine the poem’s authenticity, and discusses προμήθεσαι at 32-33; García López 1972 takes a more optimistic view of authenticity, arguing that the hapax status of the verb does not tell against the poem’s authenticity. A discovery that this passage is not seventh century would not undermine my argument.
...our lightweight ships on the sea
...release the ... of the sail
...loosen the ships’ cables. Bear fair winds
...our comrades, so that we remember you.
...removes ... Do not throw your...
...stands and moves all around
...but you: consider us

(106 West = PLit.Lond.54 ed. Milne)

Despite the papyrus losses, it appears that in the first three lines the narrator gives technical instructions to a ship’s captain, but that in the remaining five lines he changes addressees, presumably to whatever divine agent controls the weather. In the fragment’s last discernable word the narrator seems to pray that this god act considerately toward the ship. This request summarizes the earlier requests made to the divine agent that he bring good fortune and forbear from meting out disaster. A god would not need to calculate the consequences of a capsizing ship. The narrator appears to be asking that the god be moved by the value of the sailors and to be sympathetic to human plight.

**Alcman**

Later in the seventh century, Alcman innovated on Hesiod’s genealogy of moral terms, presumably for the purpose of political propaganda. A fragment from his work preserved by Plutarch provides the earliest instance of the noun, in the genitive. “Fortune” (Τύχα), Alcman says, is:

Εὐνομίας <τε> καὶ Πειθῶς ἀδελφᾶ
καὶ Προμαθῆς τυγάτηρ

* Sister of Good Order and Persuasion,
  and daughter of Forethought (fr. 64 Davies)

Alcman must be speaking about fortune for a city, given its parity with *eunomia* (in contrast to violence or stasis) and *peitho* (in contrast to force or anarchy). He says this sort of civic fortune somehow comes from προμαθῆς. It would be a narrow understanding of good fortune to think it comes from prediction or calculation, or even from cautious hesitation, alone. Presumably Alcman has something like “prudence” in mind.

**Xenophanes**

9 Diehl 56a conjectures σάου θ᾽ έται[...]ρους; West wonders whether Ζεῦ πάτερ preceded that.
10 Lasserre 2002, fr. 104 translates: “garde-nous,” and reconstructs the final line εὐώνυμος, “et ton nom nous restera propice” (“and your name will remain favorable to us”).
11 Cf. Tigerstedt 1965, 381-2; Wood 1966, 231-2; Bowra 1967, 72; Buxton 1981, 41-2 (stating that we cannot be sure about the significance of Promatheia); Irwin 2005, 191.
12 *De fort. Rom.* 4.318a, asserting that fortune is neither unpersuadable (ἀπειθής) nor a double steering-paddle.
13 The MSS have Προμηθείας, along with Εὐνομίας, Πειθοῦς, and ἀδελφῆ.
14 On *eunomia* as a civic virtue, see Ehrenberg 1946, 70-93.
15 Contra Bowra 1967, 72, who surmises *promêteia* refers to the Spartan image of planning ahead and carrying out tasks as intended.
About a century later, Xenophanes concludes his instructions for holding a righteous symposium with the following pious recommendation:

\[ \text{θεῶν} \text{<δὲ>} \text{προμηθείην} \text{αἰὲν} \text{ἔχειν} \text{ἀγαθήν} \] (fr. 1.24 Gentili)

*but to hold the gods in good consideration always.*

With the noun προμηθείην, Xenophanes epitomizes the second half of his increasingly didactic moralizing fragment. He had already told the revelers to hymn the gods with well-spoken words and pure language (εὐφήμοις μύθοις καὶ καθαροίς λόγοις 14); to pray for the power to do justice (εὐξαμένου τὰ δίκαια δύνασθαι πρήσειν 16-17); to drink only while one has self-control (17-18); to praise the person who does noble needs and strives toward virtue (20); and to ignore the useless tales that imagine gods fighting among themselves (23). Thus, as a summary-word, *prometheia* must have adequate weight to express a thick moral recognition of the gods.

Whereas for Archilochus the god was to be considerate of the sailors, here the human symposiasts are to feel reverent consideration for the gods. This reciprocity entails that while having προμήθεια means acting well toward those vulnerable to one’s actions, it also means acting well toward those to whom one is vulnerable. These two meanings share the sense of acknowledging how much something should matter to one’s decisions. It is possible to express this sentiment without implying either that one should predict or foresee the way in which impious activities would yield bad results (via some egoistic calculus) or that one must be hesitant and cautious around the gods.

*Pindar*

Pindar uses the noun προμήθεια three times in his extant victory poems. All three uses are in gnomes; this fact itself emphasizes the rhetorical and moral significance of the term. Twice Pindar uses προμήθεια to mean the ability to reflect on what values should motivate a person. As part of his praise of his fellow-Theban Herodotos, Pindar remarks on the fall and rise of the charioteer’s father, who apparently had political or financial difficulties for which he was at least partially responsible. These rough seas had some redeeming qualities:

\[ \text{ὁ πονήσαις} \text{δὲ} \text{νόῳ} \text{καὶ} \text{προμάθειαν} \text{φέρει} \] (I. 1.40)

*Whereas this poem’s gnome is often translated as something like “one who has toiled also gains foresight for his mind,”* Woodbury paraphrases “Though he has gone through troubles, if a man

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16 Lescher 2001, accepting ἀγαθόν (with Fränkel and others), translates it “but it is good always to hold the gods in high regard,” taking ἀγαθήν as a predicate of the infinitive rather than a modifier of προμηθείην, and arguing that Xenophanes would be making a worthwhile claim if he said that one should *always* honor the gods but not if he said that it is always good to honor them. Gentili argues for ἀγαθήν generally on grounds of overall poetic structure and on parallel with Solon 1.4 (ἀνθρώπον αἰεὶ δόξαν ἔχειν ἀγαθήν), I would take προμηθείην … ἀγαθήν not to be distinguished from a bad variety but to have its moral quality completely brought out.

17 Lescher 2001, 51-54, refers to the “progressive elevation of sentiment,” the “demands of moral seriousness,” and the poem’s theme: “even on occasions of great conviviality men must be mindful of the gods and do what is right.”

18 He also uses the noun in a fragment (Paean 8a Race = 52A.25 Snell-Maehler) but no sense is to be gotten from it.

19 In the case of I.1.40, Bundy 1986, 47-53, describes a powerful crescendo with the gnome as highest point.

20 All text of Pindar from Race 1997.
have the guidance of understanding, he can produce even forethought.”22 One could support this proposition by observing that νόῳ as an indirect object (“for the mind”) rather than as an instrumental (“with understanding”) would be otiose; to what other part of a person would forethought be useful? Woodbury himself provides a stronger argument: hard experience alone would bring only hindsight, the disappointment in what one has done. Only mindful reflection on that experience would bring any improved intellectual competence.23 Of course, were προμήθεια a kind of sensitivity to what matters, rather than a cognitive skill or comprehension, then perhaps toils alone could cause it. Or if toils were to “bring” προμήθειαν but not alone, not without the hope to improve oneself, then whatever kind of state προμήθεια happened to be, the usual translation would be acceptable.

Knowing so little about προμήθεια, we cannot decide between the interpretations. But to what does the poem overall limit its meaning? If it is taken as a kind of predictive foresight, Pindar’s narrator would be admonishing Herodotos’ father for having failed earlier in his life to see clearly enough into the future. He would be citing this temporal blindness as the cause of his loss of wealth or position or esteem. The stuff of the poem, however, pushes another way. It repeatedly emphasizes effort and finding and employing one’s resources (6, 15, 26-7, 67-8). This suggests a preoccupation with the right deployment of one’s assets. Herodotos’ father, we are to assume, avoided hard effort altogether or hard effort of the right sort. He is not charged with failing to predict the future (though perhaps he did), but with failing to care about the right sort of things. Thus προμήθεια cannot be taken as solely temporal. Since the father’s failure to throw himself into a noble task is itself faulted, προμήθεια cannot be taken as “being cautious” in the sense of “hesitating” and withdrawing from action. The noun προμήθεια at the high point of the poem suggests instead that it means being able to identify and elevate certain ideals and pursue them doggedly despite the appeal of other tasks, tasks concerned perhaps with money or honor. Forethought is not a kind of forward perception but a sensitivity to what one should value most deeply.

In another poem, and again in a gnome, Pindar relates αἰδώς—reverence, shame, even self-consciousness—to προμήθεια:

... ἐν δ’ ἀφετάν
ἐβάλεν καὶ χάρματ’ ἀνθρώπων προμαθέος αἰδώς (O. 7.44)

The αἰδώς of προμαθέος “shot excellence and joy into men.” Pindar had just warned that “confusions of mind lead astray even a wise person” (αἱ δὲ φρενῶν ταραχαὶ παρέπλαγξαν καὶ οοφόν 33). He then told of Helios’ instructions to his sons, that they were to ensure that they would fulfill a coming duty (μέλλον ἐντειλεν φυλάξασθαι χρέος 39-40). Then comes the gnome, lauding the goodness and pleasure of αἰδώς. It is followed by a darker

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21 Race 1997; see similarly Nisetich 1980, “and suffering brings the sufferer’s mind foreknowledge” and Lattimore 1947, “the man who has had labor of mind wins forethought also.”
22 Verity 2007 translates, similarly, “The man who has toiled with understanding also wins foresight.”
23 Woodbury 1981, 242-244. Cf. Instone 1996, 182-3: “toil in the past can bring you positive consequences, if you are wise.” Instone translates προμήθειαν as “foresight,” glossing it as being “enlightened… with regard to the future,” and takes the poem to be talking about the realization that prosperity follows hardship. Nevertheless, he recognizes that the poem is unclear about whether νόῳ (“with intelligence”) modifies the toil (as “intelligent toil”) or the bringing (as the result of toil), and what exactly the προμήθεια amounts to. In this he is less confident than Bundy 1986, 52n44, who follows a scholion (ὁ παθὼν καὶ τῷ νῷ προμηθής γίγνεται, “the sufferer becomes thoughtful with mind”) in asserting that the intelligence follows.
moment, when an unheralded cloud of forgetfulness comes over Helios’ sons, pulling their minds from the correct path of action (ἐπὶ μὰν βαίνει τε καὶ λάθες ἀπέκμαρτα νέφος, / καὶ παρέλκει προγμάτων ὀρθῶν ὀδὸν / ἐξο φρενῶν 45-47). The sons forget to bring fire (47); but all the same, Zeus rains gold on the fireless expanse (49) and Athena gives humans every kind of craft (51).

What προμαθέος means here depends on the way one takes the genitive. It is commonly interpreted, as in Alcman, as parenthood—“reverence, daughter of forethought”—with or without deifying capitalization. Evidence for this genitive of offspring is the great frequency with which Pindar includes genealogies in his poems. Pindar is singing about the ability to concentrate unfailingly on one’s duty. On the genealogical interpretation, αἰδώς would help one keep on that path because it is the offspring of forethought. Forethought must then have some anti-straying property, and have it more prominently than αἰδώς. Yet αἰδώς must have enough of the same anti-straying property if its possessors are to stay focused enough on significant action so as to share in virtue and happiness.

There are two arguments against the genealogical interpretation: there is no explicit word for offspring, and it focuses on αἰδώς even when the important quality is or is found in προμήθεια. Why talk about the child when the parent is doing the explanatory work? It might be better to take the genitive as qualifying αἰδώς in a different way. Προμαθέος αἰδώς could be read “a sense of respect for the person who has shown foreknowledge,” or “the sense of respect felt by the person who has been forewarned,” or “respect for forethought [itself].” Each of these three interpretations understands the position of αἰδώς as specifying the correct attitude toward forethought, where forethought as the morally-significant term. Αἰδώς simply points to the important thing.

A final interpretation sees a reference to Prometheus. This reading is encouraged by Pindar’s mention of fire-stealing, of Zeus’ dominance, and of the dissemination of human technai. But how reverence for Prometheus would bring excellence to man does not seem answered by this poem. It must be the character-trait and not the personage that is meant here.

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24 Verity, Diane Svarlien (for Perseus). Nisetich hints at this approach without committing himself to a full-scale genealogical model: “Care born of forethought puts success and joy within men’s reach”; Lehnus 2004, 110, approves.


26 Lehnus 2004, 109, seems to turn this reasoning around when he translates it as “la cautela del preveggente” (“the caution of prescience”): for him, it is the αἰδός aspect of promētheia that is responsible for those goods, rather than the promētheia aspects of αἰδός. But this suggests that (i) promētheia is the main virtue at play, but (ii) only the αἰδός elements of it contribute to excellence. In this case, it is hard to explain (a) why not mention αἰδός alone, and (b) what parts of promētheia are irrelevant?

27 Willcock 1995, 124-5, accepts these two arguments.

28 Willcock 1995, 124-5, describes these objective genitive, subjective genitive, and genitive neuter readings. Lattimore goes for the third, but Lehnus 2004, 109, thinks it is redundant (because one could just say “forethought”).

29 Cairns 1993, 176n107, following Jebb and Gildersleeve, thinks this is the most plausible of all the choices, admitting that, all the same, the genealogy is unparalleled and the lack of article or family term is troubling. Nevertheless, Cairns interprets the passage in the metaphorical–genealogical sense, whereby αἰδός depends on promētheia: “The link with foresight and clear-sightedness… corresponds to the traditional association of αἰδός and ‘good sense,’ and indicates that αἰδός, since it involves an evaluative response, must proceed from an accurate perception of the given situation, and that, as a prospective, inhibitory response, it must involve an appreciation of the possible consequences of one’s actions, an anticipation that a given action is unacceptable or disgraceful.”
All interpretations in fact share a common understanding of προμήθεια; they dispute only whether forethought’s function is mediated through αἰδώς, which problem is important only in a study of the latter term. Each links forethought both to living well and to fulfilling a duty. The gnome does not speak of forethought’s prescience or predictive ability. It refers instead to forethought’s role in helping guide a person to do what is most important despite the buzz of distractions, momentary pleasures, and failures of serious reflection. As in the use in the *First Isthmian*, there is no sense of “hesitation” or “caution”; Helios has told his sons of a specific duty and they are to exercise single-mindedness in their discharging of it. Προμήθεια involves mainly the active acknowledgement of the right and the good.

The third instance of προμήθεια in Pindar, contrary to the two previous ones, appears to have a temporal connotation. Pindar has just noted that in nature, good fortune is inconstant: sometimes it comes, sometimes it does not. He applies this lesson to humankind. We do not know the future. After all,

προμαθείας δ᾽ ἀπόκεινται ῥοαί

*the streams of forethought lie far off* (N. 11.46).

All the same, the poet says, we go ahead trying to predict the future with enough accuracy that we might engage in long-term projects. When our optimism edges into rashness, we open ourselves to a real risk of failure. Pindar does not, however, resolve that we should therefore forego all planning and abstain from long-range action in the belief that the future is utterly unknowable. He instead recommends seeking gains in a measured way (κερδέων δὲ χρὴ μέτρον θηρευέμεν), obeying the limits of modest human knowledge.30

In this gnome, Pindar appears to reference the ability to forecast external conditions or the degree to which one might realize one’s projects. His use here may thus seem to contrast with that of the first two instances, where προμήθεια meant the maintenance of a comprehensive attention to just whatever justice or propriety or prudence requires. But while this third use does emphasize the temporal quality of προμήθεια, it does not tell against the meaning inferred from the other uses. The reason is that the context of this poem has limited the meaning of the word to just one of its derivative connotations. Pindar is giving advice to an inductee into the Presidency of the Prytanean council. Presidents must make long-range plans. So the terms of uncertainty for a statesman, who is perhaps otherwise aware of the broad range of relevant constituencies and costs, may be more narrowly of a temporal and planning sort. The capacities for preliminary thinking that the new President can rely on will surely be weaker than the actions of the bold men who went before him would suggest. So attention to the “temporal” area of uncertainty—the area perhaps most enticing for a statesman to overlook—is just attention to a subclass of the ignorance προμήθεια is in general concerned with.

**Herodotus**

Several decades later in the earliest extant prose passages, Herodotus uses the term προμήθεια mostly to refer to the social attitudes of “conscientiousness,” “cognizance of another’s needs,” or “consideration of,” what we might call active evaluation of another person’s

30 Cairns 1993, 177, draws out the similarity between this passage and the seventh Olympian: “The intelligence… which enables one to foresee the consequences of one’s actions and properly to characterize one’s own conduct is… indispensable to *aidôs* in its prospective sense.”
needs. Cyrus was *attentive* to Croesus (though Herodotus doesn’t say by doing what) (1.88.1); Darius *worried* that he might accidentally stab Gobryas (3.78.4-5); and *out of consideration for* his brother, Xerxes would not force himself upon his sister-in-law even though he had fallen in love with her (9.108.1). One instance emphasizes well this active valuation encountered in Xenophanes and Archilochus: Amasis tells the Egyptians over whom he has placed himself “to honor and *show respect* for him” (καὶ τιμᾶν τε καὶ προμηθέεσθαι ἑωυτοῦ ἐκέλευε: 2.172.5).

Just as these uses pick up the high-evaluation sense of the term, one Herodotean use highlights a focal point for moral reflection as Alcman’s and Pindar’s genealogies did. Herodotus reports Croesus chiding Cambyses: “Do not sacrifice everything to youth and temper, but restrain and control yourself: foresight is something good, forethought something wise” (ἀλλ’ Ἰσχε καὶ καταλάμβανε οἰωνον· ἀγαθόν τι πρόνοον εἶναι, σοφὸν δὲ ἢ προμηθήι: 3.36.1). This jingly maxim dispensing serious pedagogical advice shows the importance of this moral term. The contrast between πρόνοια and προμηθία gives us further information. First, the two qualities are distinct, contrary to presumption, and thus προμηθία cannot be solely concerned with forecasts and predictions. Second, προμηθία is connected with wisdom, which means general competence in living, an ability dependent on making priorities, evaluating one’s goals, and responding correctly to situations. Third, προμηθία and πρόνοια together counteract impetuosity and self-assuredness. Fourth, if together they denote the content of maturation—the development of self-control and emotional moderation—then they must stand in for the features of the rational life. This allows us to speculate on the division of labor Croesus implies in his maxim. If πρόνοια is the part that allows one to foresee future events and how to get where one wants to go, προμηθία would be the part that decides where in the first place one ought to go. This suggests that προμηθία has a broad and even archetypal connection to the full range of moral and cognitive activities central to living well. This view neither requires nor especially encourages thinking of προμηθία in either the temporal way or the due regard way. It recommends instead taking it as a conscientiousness about the relevant considerations to rational decision-making.

**Thucydides**

Thucydides uses προμήθεια group words four times, two of which deserve close attention. He presents the adjective προμηθής as a term deserving high moral approbation, on par with terms like “restraint” (the opposite of τόλμα μὲν γὰρ ἀλόγιστος), “sound-minded” (οὐφοῦν), and “breadth of wisdom” (πρὸς ἅπαν ἡπαντον). In his meditation on the linguistic strain civil revolution causes, he writes that men came to disdain actions that used to be celebrated with the three terms just mentioned, treating them instead as “failures of loyalty,” “unmanliness,” and “extended laziness,” respectively (3.82.4). He writes that they came also to revalue what had heretofore been called “forethinking delay” (μέλλησις δὲ προμηθής), calling it now a “nice-seeming cowardice” (δειλία εὐπρεπής), wimpiness under a noble guise. Such “deliberateness” or “reflective patience” must have meant not thrusting oneself blindly into

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31 σοφία characterizes Solon (1.30), Anacharsis (4.76), Themistocles (8.124), Athens (1.60), and Hellas (7.102). Lichas, an elder, solved a Delphic riddle with wisdom (1.67-68); Babylonian customs concerned with overall social benefit (a marriage market, crow-sourced medicine) are thought wise (1.197); Darius observes that “where wisdom is apt, force is pointless” (Ἐνθα γὰρ σοφίς δεῖ, βίς ἐξογον ούδέν: 3.127).

32 “Prudent hesitation” (Rhodes, but later acceding to “forethoughtful”); “provident deliberation” (Hobbes); “farsighted delay” (Hornblower, who argues that while “delay” is a key word, it is not a Spartan code word, contra some recent speculation).
action. Cowardice results from feeling that the value of one’s life outweighs the value of the goals its sacrifice could accomplish. If the exercise of προμήθεια appears to cynics as cowardice, then it must look like a way of deciding whether the value of certain goals outweigh the value of other things. So the morally-exemplary exercise of προμήθεια must involve surveying the values one could potentially promote and discriminating between them. Such exercise could appear a mode of hesitation or caution only to the extent that one does not yet know whether to protect oneself or not. The cautious person errs on the side of protecting the status quo; the forethoughtful person errs on the side of goodness. Such an exercise is about the future only in the trivial way that all thoughts about decisions concern the future. (Indeed, it is μέλλησις that denotes delaying till the future in this phrase.)

This sense of forethinking emphasizing “deliberation” or “circumspection” rather than “seeing into the future” is specifically thematized in the following book of the Peloponnesian War. Forethought is precisely the needful thing when we cannot see into the future. Reflecting on the considerations to fight the Athenians, the speaker explains that it is

εξ ίσου … δεδιότες προμηθία μάλλον ἐπε’ ἀλλήλους ἐρχόμεθα

from fear [i.e. of the uncertain future] that we all alike are circumspect about going at one another (4.62.4.5, tr. Lattimore).

This speaker suggests that because we do not know how things will turn out, humans must engage in various nuanced judgments about what we most ought to seek. This use emphasizes the term’s human, rational quality, what we are left with when we lack prophecy (cf. La. 198e3). Having προμήθεια is the human virtue for acting under conditions of ignorance.

Gorgias

Gorgias’ use in the “Helen” corroborates the Thucydidean usage.

θεοῦ γὰρ προθυμίαν ἀνθρωπίνη προμηθία αὖδύνατον κωλύειν

for human forethought cannot resist god’s eagerness (6)

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33 This is the sense Pagondas the Boeotian gives it when saying that those invaded have little chance for careful reflection: οὐ γὰρ τὸ προμηθέας, οἷς ἂν ἄλλος ἐπῆ, περὶ τῆς σφετέρας ὁμοίως ἐνδέχεται λογισμὸν καὶ ὀστίς τὰ μὲν ἑαυτῷ ἔχει, τοῦ πλέονος δὲ ὄρθομενος ἔχων τινὶ ἐπέρχεται (“the same prudence in calculation is not allowable in the way it is for those who are invading others by their own choice, secure in what they hold and grasping for more,” 4.92.2 tr. Lattimore), in contrast with the person who deliberates before deciding to invade someone else, thinking whether acting on his greed is worth it. See Hornblower 1997 ad loc. for parallel passages. 34 Thucydides later mentions actual hesitation: ἄσφαλεία δὲ τὸ δὲ τὸ ἐπιβουλεύσασθαι ἀποτροπῆς πρόφασις εὔλογος (“prolonged deliberation with a view to avoiding mistakes was thought to be just a plausible excuse for avoiding any kind of action” 3.82.5, tr. Hornblower). 35 τὸ δὲ αὐστάθμητον τοῦ μέλλοντος 36 See also Thuc. 6.80.1: “and in your προμηθεία do not consider, to be equitable to us and safe to you, to help neither given we are allied with both” (and μὴ ἔχειν τὴν προμηθίαν δοκείν τῷ ἡμῖν μὲν ἵσθην εἶναι, ἢμῖν δὲ ὀσφαλῆ, τὸ μηδέτερος δὴ ὡς καὶ ἀμφιτέτορος ὄντας ἐξιμιάζομεν βοηθεῖν.) The meaning of προμηθίαν has been open to some controversy and uncertainty: “caution” (Marchant) and “that prudent course” (Charles F. Smith) but “the common sense” (Lattimore) and “your purpose” (Hobbes).
Gorgias here explains why, were it by divine fiat that Helen was taken, god, not she, should be held responsible. The word-choice here of προθυμίαν (“eagerness,” “will,” “zeal”) and προμηθία is obviously influenced by the orator’s concern for alliteration; this may suggest that Gorgias is not putting too fine a point on it. But in fact the sentence reveals an important point about προμηθία. The concept cannot mean knowledge of or insight into the future, since those are not themselves candidates for hindrances to a god’s desires. It must be something more active: an intention, choice, or considered plan, and in this case, what a human, Helen, could think it best to do. Human προμηθία here seems to differ from divine προθυμία in that it is morally better (since we would want it to win out) but less powerful. The term cannot simply mean “care” or “caution,” since in that case, as with “knowledge,” there would be no reason even to hope it might triumph against god’s will. It is clear as well that the term has a minimal temporal connotation. Gorgias uses πρόνοιαν, not προμηθίαν, at 11, when he is speaking about memory, awareness, and the acquisition of perfect knowledge about the future, a skill glossed as μαντεύσασθαι (“to predict the future”).

Antiphon

One of Antiphon’s moots plays on the strength of προμήθεια:

τοὺς μὲν γὰρ ὃ τε φόβος ἢ τε ἀδικία ἢ ἄδικα κακὰ ἢ τής προμήθειας, τοῖς δὲ ὃ τε κίνδυνος ἢ τε αἰσχύνη, εἰ καὶ διενοήθησαν ταῦτα πράξαι, ἵνα σωφρονεσθῇ τὰ διαφορὰς, εἰ καὶ διενοήθησαν ταῦτα πράξαι, ἵνα σωφρονεσθῇ τὰ διαφορὰς.

For the latter, fear and the great wrong they had suffered overcame their caution; whereas for the former, the danger and disgrace of the crime outweighed their dispute and moderated the vehemence of their spirit. (tr. Gagarin and MacDowell 1998)

What Gagarin and MacDowell translate “caution” could be better translated “prudence,” to give both a more active and a more ethically-significant sense. Antiphon implies that προμήθεια can have more power than fear and the desire for injustice. He goes on to gloss it as cognizance of risk (κίνδυνος), the sense of shame (αἰσχύνη), and something that does the work of σοφροσύνη. This is a rich word, presumably salient in legal affairs, certainly more meaningful than “calculation about the future” or “abstention from action until further decisions are made.”

Hippocratics

Certain Hippocratic authors use the verbal form, meaning “to take care” not to miss a step or do something rashly, often in the formula Ἀλλὰ χρὴ προμηθέεσθαι (“but one must take care to”). This workaday meaning seems to be a counterexample to the argument that the verb has a rich and profound meaning. But its clichéd use in a technical literature suggests it became jargon for some medical writers.

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38 Gagarin 1997 prefers this reading to προθυμίας in MSS A, N; Gernet 2002 and Dillon and Gergel 2003 agree.

39 De diaeta: 72.7; 73.8; 74.12; 76.8; 75.7; 79.7; 81.7; 82.7; 89.90; De articulis 11.45; 13.6; 14.5; 47.54; 69.16; 69.23; De natura hominis 9.44; De fracturis 20.13; 26.40; De mulierum affectibus 69.8; De diaeta in morbis acutis 4.33. A similar imperative construction is in Chares: πολλὴ προμηθήσεται, “exercise forethought” (fr. 1.21, reconstruction from Young 1971, citing [Plato] Minos 318e, πολλὴν προμηθήσεται ποιεῖσθαι, discussed below).
Athenian Tragedy

The works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides considered together contains the largest selection of προμήθεια words. All support the claim that such words mean something like rational consideration.

Aeschylus uses the noun twice. The first time is in the Prometheus Bound, a play in which intelligence and Prometheus’ powers are thematized. Kratos excoriates Prometheus for hubris and taking the gods’ prerogatives, and makes a pun:

ψευδωνύμως σε δαίμονες Προμηθέα
carloúσιν· αὐτόν γὰρ σε δεὶ προμηθίας,
doίω τρόπω τήδ’ ἐκκυλισθήσημεν τέχνης.

falsely the gods call you Prometheus:
for you yourself need promêthias
to find a way to roll free of skilled handiwork like this (PB 85-87 West, tr. Collard modif.)

Kratos believes that Prometheus has his priorities wrong. Thus the audience will expect to hear προμηθίας, the virtue that helps one attain the right priorities. The pun, and Kratos’ snide attitude, shades the word toward “cleverness” or “ability to scheme” (this same shading arises again in Aristophanes’ pun on Prometheus’ name). This is not an incompatible connotation; just as Prometheus should have thought about the veneration the gods deserve, he will now have to think about his own strengths.

Aeschylus’ other use of the noun is preceded by Danaos telling the children to be thoughtful and saying that he himself already has been thoughtful (φρονεῖν χρῆ: ἔνν φρονοῦτι Supp. 176). He now asserts that he will here “take forethought” (προμηθίαν λαβών 178), and charges the children to listen carefully to what he will say. He infers what may happen: messengers likely saw them land on this unknown land, and may send others to accost them. He does not pretend to know what precisely will transpire (εἴτ᾽ ἀπήμων εἴτε καὶ τεθηγμένος 186), however, and so he advises his daughters to act well (ἀμείνόν ἐστι παντὸς 188) irrespective of eventualities. The Chorus deems this advice, echoing the doubling on line 176, thoughtful (φρονούντως πρὸς φρονούντας 204). Exercising προμήθεια means considering one’s situation and preparing to behave as virtuously and well as possible (190-204).

The Sophoclean and Euripidean uses evoke both this sense of mental investigation into the relative unknown and the sense of considering another’s needs and practicing the kind of

40 Cf. Griffith 1983, esp. 167, 177-8; Said 1985. Since I am not accounting for changes in the meaning of this term, neither the authorship nor dating of this play matters.
41 While on line 76 all the MSS have προμηθέως (a person with promêtheia), most modern editors since Elmsley have προμηθίας (the attribute itself); the interpretative question is whether Prometheus needs a forethoughtful person, or forethought itself. Griffith 1983 supports the MSS reading with a parallel play on Prometheus’ name at 506: πάνα τε γέμισαν βροτοῖσιν ἐν προμηθίαις.
42 The scholiasts gloss the line ὁ προορῶν τὰ μῆδεα (καὶ τὰ βουλεύματα, add others), or προγνώστης: Herington 1972, scholia 85a-c; but the context does not recommend rendering the word these ways.
43 In the Birds, Pisthetairos addresses a badly-disguised Prometheus upon learning his scheme both to avoid being caught by Zeus and to report on the status of heaven: “you have contrived this well and prometheically” (εὖ γ’ ἐπενόησας αὐτὸ καὶ προμηθικῶς 1511). Dunbar 1994, 693-4, notes that Prometheus’ “traditional craftiness is here reduced to nervous caution”; this supports our reading of Thucydides, that προμήθεια was interpreted, unfairly, or jokingly, as caution.
44 M has προμήθειαν (with a ι above the iota) λαβέιν
rational reflection that is more virtuous than acting on impulse. As part of his scheme with Odysseus to capture Philoctetes, Sophocles’ Neoptolomus thanks the Trader for telling him about the Greek designs on him, and continues:

"but the graciousness of your forethought, sir, will, unless I am corrupted, remain in my friendly thoughts (Phil. 557)"

Προμηθίας’ consonance and metrical parallel with προσφιλής draw together their semantic overlap, and the sentence’s structure suggests that the latter reciprocates the former. The Trader’s forethought involved him thinking about Neoptolomus’ vulnerabilities and acting charitably toward him. Neoptolomus’ friendly feelings would include respect, concern, and thoughtfulness for the Trader. Both the forethought-involving care and the friendliness are ways to serve the good of others. That such a virtue is at play is clear from the qualification that Neoptolomus be a good person (i.e., not corrupted).

In Oedipus at Colonus, Ismene explains that she has come to see her father out of concern for him (σῇ, πάτερ, προμηθίᾳ: 332), a concern discharged by telling him some news. In his retort, Oedipus wonders whether Ismene does not also come out of another motivation: longing or affection. This contrast in motivations requires distinguishing Ismene’s thoughtfulness from Oedipus’ family feeling and thus from mere sentiment or good-natured impulse. This does not leave only ratification of the sort tacticians perform. But it suggests something more reflective than the natural desire of familiars to be close to one another.

Sophocles uses the term again later in the play to have Oedipus thank Theseus for his “nobility and righteous care” (ὦναίο, ጂηοἐύ, τοῦ τε γενναίου χάριν / καὶ τῆς πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἐνδίκου προμηθίας: 1042-3). This again suggests a conscientiousness more flexible than inborn desire.

The term προμήθεια shows up four times in the Electra. Once it means simply “thinking about someone’s best interests,” when Orestes observes that Electra had exercised forethought in sending the infant Orestes away with the Pedagogue (1350). The other two times go some way toward defining this intellectual virtue as the disposition to think how things might turn out for others and oneself. The Chorus and Chrysothemis exchange these words:

"In such a thing as this, forethought is both to speakers and to listeners an ally." 

CHORUS: In such a thing as this, forethought is both to speakers and to listeners an ally.

CHRYSTHEMIS: And so, women, before she [sc. Electra] spoke, if she’d had an uncorrupted mind, she’d have preserved caution, even as she does not preserve it now. (990-4)

45 οὗ τὸ Φωκέων πέδον / ὑπεξεπέμφθην οῇ προμηθία χεροῖν West (as for all of Sophocles).
Chrysothemis appears to gloss the Chorus’ προμηθία in terms of a sound mind (phren) and the preservation (sôzô) of caution (eulabeia). Over the next twenty lines, Chrysothemis excoriates her sister for wanting to kill Aegisthus, appeals to a range of considerations about the future, admonishes Electra’s rashness (θράσος: 995), and encourages her to become mindful (νοῦν σχὲς: 1013). Electra does not think beyond her narrow rage. She later defends her charges against Electra as not dishonor but forethought (ἀτιμίας μὲν οὔ, προμηθίας δὲ σοῦ 1036) for what is best for her. 46 In the fourth use, the Chorus says that Electra “gives no weight” to death (οὔτε τι τοῦ θανεῖν προμηθήζει: 1078).

One Sophoclean fragment, recorded in Stobaeus (Anthology 4, 50 III), draws a link between forethought and profit. 47

οὐκ ἐστι γῆρας τῶν σοφῶν, ἐν οἷς ὁ νοῦς θεία σύνεσις ἡμερὰς τεθραμμένης, προμηθία γὰρ κέρδος ἀνθρώπως μέγα

old age does not come to the wise, who live with an intelligence nurtured by the daylight of the gods

for forethought is great profit to humans (fr. 950, tr. Lloyd-Jones) 48

The passage expresses the importance of forethought to living a bountiful human life. 49 Another Sophoclean fragment suggests the lost Hipponous might have made the same link:

σωτηρίας γὰρ φάρμακ᾽ οὐχὶ πανταχοῦ βλέψαι πάρεστιν, ἐν δὲ τῇ προμηθίᾳ…

for a saving remedy is not to be caught sight of anywhere; but in forethought… (fr. 302, tr. after Jebb)

Forethought is treated as the way for humans to deal with hard and uncertain conditions. 50

Euripides uses προμήθεια terms to express himself in a similarly gnomic way, speaking of its value to happiness. Having just denigrated quick-temper (ὀξυθυμῇ Andr. 689) and having praised wisdom (σοφοί 645), self-control (ἐσωφρόνουν 686), and thoughtfulness (εὖ φρονῶν 688), Menelaus in the Andromache closes his great speech of cynical consideration with the conclusion that προμήθεια, presumably some sort of consolidation of those intellectual virtues,

46 Cf. Van Hook 1918.
47 Stobaeus introduces this passage: “It is intelligence which relieves old age of its burdens and makes it worthy of much reverence” (ὅτι τὸ γῆρας ἀνεπαχθὲς καὶ πολλῆς αἰδοῦς ἄχιον ἡ σύνεσις ἀπεργάζεται, tr. Pearson).
48 Pearson 1963 translates: “There is no old age for the wisdom in which the mind has been nurtured ere it reaches length of days.” There are many conjectures about the text and meaning of θείᾳ… ἡμερὰς.
49 Pearson 1963 explains: “wisdom is not something drawn from without, but a natural indwelling force which increases with length of time and depends for its permanence upon the co-operation of the human intelligence with the divine capacity which is inherited at birth. … The wise, whose mind has been reared in habitual converse with inspired vitality, never come to a useless old age; for their foresight is a great book to their fellows.” Lloyd-Jones 1996 thinks the third line is an intrusion.
50 There is sometimes explicit concern with the temporal shading of this idea: In the Electra, the Chorus summarizes Chrysosthemis’ advice: “Nothing yields more profit to humans / than the gain from foresight and a wise mind.

(προνοίας οὐδὲν ἀνθρώπως ἐφι / κέρδος λαβεῖν ἄμεινον οὐδὲ νοῦ σοφοῦ 1015-16)
yields himself profit (ἐμοι δὲ κέρδος ἡ προμῆθεια 690). 51 Almost the same formula—elaborate speech of advice about what is really best to do, charged with terminology of wisdom (Supp. 504, 506, 509), timeliness (καιρῷ 509), and the claim that all men really know what is good and what is bad (586-7), concluding with a gnomic summary that προμήθεια is part of courage (τούτ’ ἐμοί τάνδρειον, ἡ προμῆθεια 510)—is found in the Suppliant Women. The reasoning for the relationship between forethought and courage must be akin to that reconstructed in our discussion of Thucydides 3.82.4.

Euripides’ uses of προμῆθεια in general express a range of attitudes connected with rational reflection, consideration, and care of others. Polynestor vindicates his killing by saying that his action was forethoughtful and wise (ὁφῇ Hec. 1137), all things considered. Ion says that one should not hasten toward pleasures before having προμήθεια (Ion 448); 52 Iphigenia says that it is consistent with piety and justice (ΙΤ 1202); 53 Creon’s messenger observes that it prepares one for all eventualities (Phoenicians 1466); and Hecuba notes that it is general concern for others (Hecuba 795). These usages show that προμήθεια is much more connected to moral decision-making than planning for the future (which it infrequently connotes) or hesitation about the present.

**Summary conclusions**

These sources confirm the view that προμήθεια is rarely best translated on either the thin “temporal” or “due regard” reading. The rare situations where one or the other reading would be appropriate are to be understood as derivative and conditioned by literary needs, and as a result of the virtues of forethought sometimes leading to thinking ahead or to caution. After all, some of our decisions matter only down the line, and some situations counsel not acting at all. The great majority of usages require taking the word to refer to a virtue that is related to wisdom, identifies and ranks values, precedes but does not exclude instrumental reasoning, competes with impulse and the immediate ascertainment of pleasure, and is attentive to the values of people around the deliberator. At its narrowest, it seems to mean “taking heed” or “acknowledging others/sympathizing”; at its broadest, “rational reflection.” Put in general terms it refers to acknowledging and dealing with the complex set of medium- and long-term goals we individual humans have, living as we do among other humans for whom we care and must respect.

I next show that Plato’s ethically-weighty use the term προμήθεια brings out the preexisting denotation, though perhaps sharpening the sense of “reasoning about how to live as well as possible, by discovering or deciding upon our central commitments.”

**III. Platonic forethought**

It is not right to say that the meaning of προμήθεια culminates in Plato; indeed, Plato’s use appears consistent with his predecessors’ and his contemporaries’. The word does, nevertheless, have its greatest expression in the philosopher. In the Introduction I quoted three passages from Plato; to these I will return. First, let us look at his other uses.

51 Lloyd 1994: “Menelaus appropriates the political catchword προμήθεια, which connected cautious and rational conservatism.” Lloyd connects the term to ευλάβεια.
52 Burnett 1970: “this is the quality which above all, Ion asks of his god.”
53 Kyriakou 2006: “Iphigenia’s forethought is motivated by, and demonstrates, her piety. … Thaos may imply that a less diligent priestess would take care only of the most urgent need, the purification of the victims for the sacrifice, and put off the purification of the statue, which would potentially create problems for the community later.”
Laches

The *Laches* depicts a conversation about the proper education of young men in a city with citizen-soldiers. It uses προμήθεια-group words five times, enough to make them thematic. In one of his first remarks in that dialogue, Socrates says that the gravity of decisions about education demands that he and his interlocutors “exercise great forethought” about those decisions (προμηθίαν 185a9). Since Socrates directs the conversation thereafter, what that conversation includes—requests for definition, refutations of those definitions, dealing with aporia and hubris and the antagonism between the generals, and efforts to keep the conversation going—must constitute the exercise or development of this προμηθίαν. Socrates’ conversation seems principally to expand the scope of Lysimachus’ decision, from a narrow choice about a particular teacher of training-in-armor to a larger one about whether they know what courage and virtue amount to. A forethoughtful decision about education takes understanding what it is we are overall trying to achieve in helping the youth and ourselves mature.

Later in the dialogue Nicias describes Socrates’ usual activity as involving “reminding [his interlocutors] that [they] haven’t done or aren’t doing finely” (188b1). He praises that activity, and then perorates: “I think that a man who does not run away from such treatment [i.e. being reminded of his faults] but is willing, according to the saying of Solon, to value learning as long as he lives… will necessarily be more forethoughtful (προμηθέστερον) about the rest of life” (188b2-4). Nicias is speaking of learning about one’s successes and failures, which means learning about the consistency between one’s actions and one’s goals and values. What one is learning, then, is about one’s goals and values. To be more forethoughtful, then, is to be able to confront future decisions with a better awareness of the pertinent considerations. It is not about predicting the future, or being cautious about it, but knowing what is important.

It should be noted that Nicias’ usage of προμήθεια provides significant insight into (Plato’s attitude toward) Socrates’ behavior. If he is parroting something Socrates says—plausible given that this entire speech is Nicias’ attempt to report on Socrates’ conversational procedure to Lysias—then we have evidence that Socrates refers to his practice as contributing to προμήθεια. But if Nicias has come up with this word on his own, then we have a sort of independent evidence that Plato or contemporary Greeks would have thought that Socrates’ investigative-analytical-examinative activities could naturally be thought to produce προμήθεια. And if Nicias is praising Socrates’ activity and relating it to the very general wisdom of Solon, then everyone must have esteemed προμήθεια as a great virtue.

The conception of προμήθεια as a decision-making virtue signified in its two earlier uses is confirmed in its third, near the conversation’s end. Nicias explicitly pairs forethought with central virtue terms. He does so first with courage, the virtue-term of most constant concern in this dialogue:

άλλ’ οἶμαι τὸ ἄφοβον καὶ τὸ ἄνδρείον οὐ ταὐτὸν ἔστιν. ἐγὼ δὲ ἄνδρείας μὲν καὶ προμηθίας πάνυ τοιὸν ὀλίγοις οἶμαι μετέχειν, θρασύτητος δὲ καὶ τόλμης καὶ τοῦ ἄφοβου μετὰ ἄφρομηθίας πάνυ πολλοῖς…

I take fearlessness and courage not to be the same. I think that very few people have any courage or forethought, whereas very many have rashness, brazenness, and fearlessness accompanied by the lack of forethought… (197b3-9)

Courage and forethought are put on equal footing, as they may have been in Thucydides’ eyes. Both are judgments about value. We get more information about forethought itself from the
remainder of the sentence. Rashness, brazenness, and fearlessness are related to the lack of forethought; since the first three imply acting without due deliberation, the presence of προμήθεια would be whatever could counteract these. This would involve due deliberation in the way courage exemplifies, presumably by realizing what could be more valuable than saving one’s life.

Laches goes on to pair forethought—by mention of those who are courageous and lack rashness—with prudent things (τὰ φρόνιμα, 197c2). This dialogue treats phronesis as the most general virtue of thought. And so forethought is centrally related to the central intellectual trait. Is forethought virtue itself? Since this is a dialogue in which the unity of virtue is a problem (199e3), it is impossible to say. But there are reasons to think that we should take seriously their close kinship.

In its talk about courage and the duty of the general, the Laches seems to use the verb προμηθοῦμαι in a way that seems to suggest, contrary to our conclusions above, “forecast” or “predict the future”:

καὶ δήπου τὰ περὶ τὸν πόλεμον αὐτοὶ ἄν μαρτυρήσαιτε ὅτι ἡ στρατηγία κάλλιστα προμηθεῖται τά τε ἄλλα καὶ περὶ τὸ μέλλον ἐσεῦθαι, οὖνδε τῇ μαντικῇ οἴεται δεῖν ὑπηρετεῖν ἄλλα ἄρχειν, ὡς εἰδικὴ προμήθεια οἴεται καὶ γεννώμενα καὶ γενομένα

And of course with respect to war you yourselves would testify that generalship prometheizes most finely both about things in general and about what is to come, not needing to follow soothsaying but instead to lead it, knowing more finely about war-making what is happening and will happen (198e2-199a1)

But synonymy with “prediction” or “foreknowledge” is impossible here. First, Socrates twice indicates that generalship has a forethoughtful attitude also toward present things, not just the future ones. One does not predict the present, but one can exercise rational reflection about the future. Second, the prometheizing general uses but does not supplant the skilled mantic. If exercising forethought informed one about the future, no mantic expertise would be necessary. The activities of using forethought and predicting the future must be distinct. Forethought is concerned with deciding what information to seek and how to make use of the information one receives.⁵⁴

Crito

Προμήθεια-group words show up twice near the end of Crito’s speech in the Crito. Crito asks whether Socrates has been prometheizing about the effects of his refusal to escape. He might be worried, Crito acknowledges, about the fate of his friends. His friends, however, are willing to do it; it is the right thing for them to do.⁵⁵ Socrates says he has in fact been

⁵⁴ Suchan 2009, in his concern to illuminate promêthia through thinking about Machiavelli, takes forethought in a way relevant to generalship: a kind of “foresight” connected both to timeliness (1-2) and to knowledge of the systems and character-types that allow prediction (3-7). This concept of “foresight” is better associated with other προ- terms.

⁵⁵ ἄφα γε μή ἐμοὶ προμήθη καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἐπιτηδείων μη, ἐὰν σὺ ἐνθέν τοῖς ἐξέλθῃς, οἱ συκοφάνται ἡμῖν πρόγματα παρέχοσιν ὡς σὺ ἐνθέντες ἐκπλήσσασιν, καὶ ἀναγκασθῶμεν ή καὶ πάσαν τὴν οὐσίαν ἀποβαλεῖν ἢ συχνὰ χρήματα, ἢ καὶ ἄλλο τι πρὸς τούτοις παθεῖν; εἰ γάρ τι τοιοῦτον φοβή, ἔασον αὐτὸ χαίρειν· ἡμεῖς γὰρ
prometheizing about those things, as well as about other things (καὶ ταῦτα προμηθεύμαι… καὶ ἄλλα πολλά 45a4). Both Crito and Socrates take the word to mean “reflecting about the relative importance of.” Socrates’ mysterious response—repeating the verb—highlights the moral centrality of the term for him. As we see as the dialogue progresses, Socrates’ reasoning is not mainly consequentialist, as concerned as he is with never requiring wrong with wrong. He is deciding which of many considerations most deserve his attention.

**Late Dialogues**

The Athenian Stranger in the *Laws* (730a) uses the noun to indicate the respect one must have for strangers and the importance of treating them well, lest their guardian Zeus come defend them. Similarly, Socrates uses the word (προμηθεύειν) at *Minos* 318e in reference to the right attitude toward gods and great men, and at *Alc.* II 138b in reference to the right attitude to avoid praying for what one wants rather than what is good.

**Republic**

At the point in the *Republic* IV where Socrates seems to affirm some value in using the city-soul analogy, he recapitulates his talk about the various parts of the soul, each of which does its own work. As stated in the Introduction, he characterizes the rational part as “being wise and exercising forethought on behalf of the entire soul” (σοφός ὄντι καὶ ἔχοντι τὴν ὑπὸ ὑπόστασις τῆς σοφίς προμηθεύειν: 441e4), and because of these traits the right part to lead.

What is the relationship between “being wise” and “exercising forethought”? Are they two separate states, or does the latter explain the former? It would appear that the remark about forethought simply gives more information about being wise. The generality of the first conjunct and the detail with which the latter conjunct is spelled out suggests an epexegetical καί. In this case, exercising forethought over one’s entire soul simply is wisdom to the extent rationality (λογιστικῷ) is concerned. So it is in other Greek authors. Socrates goes on, when speaking about the task of the soul, to say that “wisdom is the knowledge standing over such business” (σοφίαν δὲ τὴν ἐπιστεετούσης ταύτη γὰρ πρόξει ἐπιστήμην 443e9-444a1); since he does not repeat προμήθεια, which had an important role at 441e4, we can assume σοφία stands for it.

What does this exercise of forethought amount to? It acts on the entire (ἄπάσης) soul. This suggests a power over its three parts (441a5). Whether those parts be conceptualized as types of motivations or in some other way, the exercise of προμήθεια suggests a kind of traffic control, a vigilant prioritizing. The rational part of the soul, which embodies προμήθεια, leads...
προστήσεσθον: 442a5), watches over each part performing its own role (τηρήσετον: 442a8),
guards on behalf of the whole soul (φυλάττον ὑπὲρ ἁπάσης τῆς ψυχῆς: 442b5), takes
counsel (βουλευόμενον 442b6), rules and commands by means of knowledge about what is
advantageous to each of the three parts and the three parts together (ἦρχέν τ’ ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ
ταῦτα παρήγγελλεν, ἐξον αὐ κάκειν ἐπιστήμην ἐν αὐτῷ τὴν τοῦ συμφέροντος ἐκάστῳ
τε καὶ ὅλω τῷ κοινῷ σφῶν αὐτῶν τριῶν ὅντων: 442c5-9), and exercises σοφροσύνη by
making the parts friendly and symphonic and in agreement about the fact that it should rule and
that they should not factionalize (σώφρονα οὐ τῇ φιλίᾳ καὶ συμφωνίᾳ τῇ αὐτῶν τοῦτον,
ὅταν τὸ τε ἄρχον καὶ τὸ ἁρχομένο τὸ λογιστικὸν ὁμοδοξῶσι δεῖν ἄρχειν καὶ μὴ
στασιάζωσιν αὐτῷ: 442d1-5). None of these functions directly concerns “prediction,” and
while it is not false that they effect in the two lower parts “due regard” for the rational part, such
terminology is too weak to capture the significance of προμήθεια. Forethought judges,
commands, and integrates; it occupies the overlap between wisdom and sound-mindedness; it
has knowledge about what is best, and is therefore a sort of virtue.

In this respect, Plato seems to have modified the meaning of the word little if at all; at
most he has put the term προμήθεια in more evident juxtaposition with terms to which it already
had proximity. What is new, however—as far as the extant literature shows us—is his use, twice,
of “on behalf of the entire soul” (ὑπὲρ... ἁπάσης... ψυχῆς). We see almost the same
construction in the Protagoras line quoted in the Introduction and discussed below. Does Plato
sense that some or most προμήθεια has a narrower scope? This seems unlikely, given the
breadth with which the term is often deployed. It seems more probable that Plato wishes to
express his understanding of the term with more detail: “remember, this attitude deals with
everything, not just long-term benefit, for example.” He may also want to emphasize the interior
dimension, that being fully forethoughtful requires careful assessment of oneself. However we
might appraise his linguistic innovation, it is clear that Plato has reified προμήθεια to a degree
his predecessors may not have, and because he is using the noun, he needs a prepositional phrase
to modify the transitive verb “to have” (ἔχοντι). We can summarize that in the Republic,
προμήθεια is the correct self-directed rational attitude. As in the Laches passages, it exhibits not
just the broad meaning of “conscientiousness” exemplified in earlier Greek authors but also a
meaning apparently quite sufficient for describing, all at once, the most desirable aspects of
rationality, thoughtfulness, and intellectual and moral care and caution.

Gorgias

The Republic’s characterization of the rational part of the soul as principally having
forethought, the scope of that forethought identified with a prepositional phrase (περὶ...), has an
analogue in the Gorgias. After telling Callicles that what Socrates and he had been talking about
were the most important questions of life, Socrates recapitulates the parts of the discussion with
Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles himself that concerned the difference between non-technical
empeira (flatteries, rhetoric, etc.) and skillful, rational practices like medicine, oriented toward
the good and considering what it cares for and how it works. The good practices “have some
forethought about what is best regarding the soul” (αἱ μὲν τεχνικαί, προμήθειάν τινα ἔχονσι
τοῦ βελτίστου περὶ τὴν ψυχήν: 501b4-5). This is the first place we see a practice itself being
called forethoughtful. This must mean that is has a structure appropriate for taking into account
diverse factors. Such practices contrast those learned unreflectively by habit that respond merely
to people’s cravings for pleasure. Socrates goes on to say that the bad practices do not consider
which pleasure is better or worse; they care for nothing beyond gratification (b7-c1). He
summarizes his remarks as saying that good practices consider what is better and what is worse (c5). As with the Republic case, having προμήθεια means neither being a good predictor nor being cautious; the reason here is that the two traits do not characterize all rational skills. Rational skills are so instead because they discern and work toward what is good, not just what, by happenstance, appeals.

**Protagoras**

The Protagoras contains two uses of προμήθεια. Early in the Protagoras, Protagoras thanks Socrates for his forethought about him (again using a verb with a prepositional phrase introduced by ὑπέρ) in asking about the best way for them to talk (ὀρθῶς… προμήθῃ… ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ 316c5). Protagoras worried that he faced suspicion among Athenians as a visiting foreign sophist. Some would worry at his retiring into private colloquy, others might disdain his public appearances. Socrates exercised what we might call “discretion,” reflecting on the broader ramifications of whatever kind of conversation they might have.60

The second use was quoted in the Introduction. It is worth discussing in some detail. At the end of the Protagoras, having refuted Protagoras but still eager to continue the conversation, Socrates says:

ήρεσεν οὖν μοι καὶ ἐν τῷ μύθῳ ὁ Προμηθεὺς μᾶλλον τοῦ Ἐπιμηθέως· ὁ χρώμενος ἐγὼ καὶ προμηθούμενος ὑπὲρ τοῦ βίου τοῦ ἐμαυτοῦ παντὸς πάντα ταύτα πραγματεύομαι, καὶ εἰ εὖ ἐθέλοις, ὅπερ καὶ κατʼ ἀρχὰς ἔλεγον, μετὰ σοῦ ἀν ἠδικτά ταύτα συνδιασκοποῦν.

The Prometheus in your myth pleased me more than the Epimetheus: making use of the former and prometheizing over the whole of my life I busy myself with all this [sc. questions about the nature and teachability of virtue, per 360e7-361c2], and if you should wish it, just as I was saying from the beginning, I should like to scrutinize this jointly with you.(361d3-5)

We see a structure very similar to the one at 316c5: προμηθούμενος ὑπὲρ τοῦ βίου τοῦ ἐμαυτοῦ. Socrates makes two points here. First, he uses Prometheus, presumably as a model or an ideal. Second, his efforts concerning virtue and his desire to investigate it with Protagoras share as explanatory background his prometheizing.61

This remark is Socrates’ most explicit autobiographical claim in the dialogue.62 It shows what Socrates believes differentiates himself most from Protagoras, who parts ways with him shortly after this remark.63 Despite some scholarly attention to the figure of Prometheus in the

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60 Gagarin 1969, drawing attention to this early comparison between Socrates and Prometheus, observes that Protagoras is also showing foresight for Socrates, in keeping the conversation public (140, 161).

61 Punning on Prometheus’ name is found also at Ae. PB 85-6 and perhaps 506: Eu. Ion 448, 455; Ar. Av. 1511. These are discussed below. From the same era is Platon’s likely pun: Προμηθία γάρ ἐστιν ἀνθρώποις οὐδὲν ἐπεξετάζει (for humankind, the mind is promêthia” 136 K; Storey 2011 estimates the play is from the 410s); Syncellus, from whom we have the fragment, introduces the remark as: “Prometheus is said to have molded men from out of ignorance and irrationality leading them over to learning, per Platon, the old comedian, in Sophistais, for…” (p. 174.22 Mosshammer = 1499282 Dindorf). Textual uncertainties, discussed in greatest detail by Pirotta 2009, 288-90, show only that the direction of the pun is hard to establish: where Sync. has Προμηθίας, a scholiast has Προμηθεύς, and some MSS have Προμηθεία (Edmonds 1957, oddly, prints Προμηθίος).

62 The Protagoras otherwise lacks any Socratic disavowals of knowledge, proclamations to be a philosopher, or claims to know the erotic technique.

63 It is obvious that Protagoras wants to distinguish himself (e.g., 317d1-4, 335a6-10). It seems clear that Socrates too wants to distinguish himself. Though he calls Protagoras the wisest man alive (309d1), he also says that
dialogue, and mention of the pun and its back-reference to Protagoras’ Great Speech, there has been little satisfactory attention to this remark as a locus of Socratic self-revelation.

Socrates’ self-proclaimed use of Prometheus is hard to square with the Socrates we know. Protagoras’ Prometheus leaves questions of virtue to Zeus (321d5-8, 322c1-d4), but in this very passage Socrates says he wants to take them up (360e8-361c8). Prometheus seriously errs in allowing his brother Epimetheus to foul up the distribution of powers to the species (320e1, 321c4-7, 322a2-3), but Socrates endeavors to prevent Hippocrates from hiring Protagoras without due diligence (313e3-314b9, 316b8-c2, 318a1-4, d1). Nothing in Protagoras’ story suggests that Protagoras engages in abstract conversation or in joint inquiry into moral concepts and civic pedagogy—indeed, he seems instead to go headlong into things—but Socrates’ constant refrain is his commitment to both (e.g., 348c7-349a5). Let us return to this analogy.

Some commentators take the verb, which they translate “using forethought,” to mean thinking about the future. Anna Thorpe’s dissertation on this passage concludes that Socrates’ skill “is providential or promethean… [in that it is] nothing but a science of looking ahead to outcomes, of taking the long view of one’s actions.” Laurence Lampert’s recent study states that Socrates out-prometheized Protagoras because he

sophists—among whom Protagoras is included—might deceive his purchasers (313d1), and thus he should help Hippocrates decide whether he ought to study with Protagoras (313e2-314c1). The implicit question is whether Hippocrates should study with Socrates himself. That he is prepared to is suggested by his two exchanges with Hippocrates: the one in the dialogue’s second frame (310b1-314c3), and the one on the walk between Socrates’ and Callias’ places, which they did not finish until they reached agreement (314c4-d1). That Socrates wants Hippocrates to see the exchange between Protagoras and himself is suggested by his glance to the young men just as he begins his challenge to Protagoras’ Great Speech (328d10). Protagoras recognizes Socrates’ singularity (361e1-9).

Cf. Beresford forthcoming. Lloyd-Jones 1983 argues that Prometheus leaves matters of virtue up to Zeus not just in the Protagoras but probably also in the Aeschylean trilogy that starts with Prometheus Bound; he conjectures the trilogy may have Prometheus and Zeus compromising in a way that involves Zeus granting dikê to humans (95-103).

One might also say that Prometheus is known for his clairvoyant foreknowledge (e.g., Aesch. PB 703ff.) and Socrates disavows any such knowledge, but in the Protagoras itself clairvoyance doesn’t come up, and neither do explicit Socratic disavowals.

Thorpe 1989, 126. The dissertation as a whole discusses how Socrates’ self-revelation at 361c notes the superiority of his forethought to all significant persons in the dialogue: Epimetheus, Hippocrates, Protagoras’ family-members, Protagoras and even Prometheus himself. Socrates’ main audience in the dialogue is Hippocrates, the boy he brought along to Callias’ house. It is Hippocrates who must be reminded to think ahead and avoid Epimetheus’ impetuosity. Socrates “counsels foresight and caution, arguing that Hippocrates must attempt to see the outcome of his education before committing himself psychologically and financially to Protagoras’s influence” (30, cf. 38-39, 21). In the frame dialogue Socrates reminds Hippocrates that before significant decisions, people usually deliberate carefully, consulting with friends and relatives, calling in experts, and investigating with one’s elders (35, citing 313a4-6, 314a6-7, b4-5). The containers in which grocers sell their products provides an automatic vehicle for forethought—the consumer can inspect the contents before consuming them. Since Hippocrates’ family-members have not insulated Hippocrates from the risks his desires pull him toward, in traveling to meet Protagoras with Hippocrates Socrates treats himself as such a container (ἀγγεῖον) (36). Just as Prometheus was to audit Epimetheus’ distribution, Socrates will audit Protagoras’ provisions to Hippocrates (125). Socrates bests Protagoras himself in forethought. Just as the Protagoras speaks about protection from danger (16-17, 16n25, 44-45), it speaks too about the courage to face the unknown without concern for one’s reputation (20). Protagoras, Thorpe says, lacks courage. Socrates and Hippocrates finish a conversation before entering Callias’ house (314c3-7), whereas Protagoras wants to abandon the conversation (361e6) (39-40, 69). Protagoras’ failure of courage, presumably from his failure to prepare adequately against Socratic examination, makes him hesitant and withdrawn. Thorpe’s boldest claim is that Socrates’ “brand of forethought” (11, 130) is an improvement over Prometheus’. Whereas Prometheus let Epimetheus distribute the powers among the species and leave no time for correction, Socrates doesn’t let Hippocrates do whatever he wants (67). He inspects preventively (125). Thorpe brings to the front forethought’s
came [to Callias’] well briefed, having worked out in forethought just what he was compelled to say to the founder of sophism at a meeting with young Athenians. He could direct the conversation as he did, he could rule it, because through forethought he knew what he would have to convey. A more strategic claim is also implied in Socrates’ assertion that he is Prometheus: he is the teacher of virtue who had the forethought to think through the whole nature of virtue and the manner in which to teach it. 68

These two authors take the word to mean thinking about the consequences of one’s actions and in this way looking forward in order to decide about now. They, with others, 69 treat προμηθοῦμαι as generally synonymous with Greek’s προ- prefixed verbs of prognostication. Taking προμηθοῦμαι as a species of this class of thinking-ahead activities, Socrates implies that he thinks about the consequences of his actions or forecasts the situations he will find himself in. He states that he prometheizes to highlight his temporal sensitivity.

But the temporal reading lacks compelling evidence. The linguistic assumptions are unconvincing. As we have seen, no earlier author when discussing prediction, divination, or forecasting uses the term προμηθοῦμαι or its related adjective or noun. Socrates’ proposal of about a method of measurement (356d1-357b10) is concerned more with the vaunting of knowledge over appearance, and indeed knowledge of good and bad (e.g., 352b1, c7, 354cd, 356b1), than with knowing what is to come. The local context of the remark also makes the “temporal” reading implausible. Socrates says that his prometheizing is the background for his having talked about the nature and teachability of virtue and for his desiring to continue the investigation. But the conversation has not concerned the ways by which present decisions inform future outcomes, and Socrates does not say that he wants his future investigations to cover this. It is conceivable that knowing more about virtue and its teachability would help one predict the outcomes of choices one makes. But for a person really worried about seeing how the future might go, the conversation Socrates just had with Protagoras—about the unity of virtue, the best mode of intellectual debate, and Simonides’ poem—seems, at least on the surface, highly roundabout. That he cares to “look ahead” on behalf of his entire life would not be a transparent explanation for his wanting to continue joint investigation with Protagoras. 70 We should therefore consider an alternative understanding of Socrates’ prometheizing.

Socrates goes on to say that he prometheizes on behalf of the whole of his life. The Laches and Republic passages, as well as at Prot. 316c5, showed most explicitly that προμηθεία may take the entirety of one’s life or one’s soul as its object, and that Plato wants to emphasize the appropriateness of this wide scope. This whole-life attitude tells us that when I προμηθοῦμαι I consider how best to live, given the many things I would like now to do that may conflict with one another.

Socrates ends his remark saying that it is his prometheizing on behalf of the whole of his life that explains why he busies himself with questions of virtue and why he would like to

connection to courage, and ends with an intriguing thought that if courage is in an important respect ignorant (per the Laches) but also a kind of wisdom, then courage, like Socrates, combines ignorance and wisdom (130). She also shows how the dialogue thematizes “thinking ahead.”

68 Lampert 2010, 122, cf. 38, 54, 68, treating promêtheia as thinking ahead, predicting what will happen, planning for long-term goals, and foresight at 37-8, 42, 47, 48, 61.

69 Detienne and Vernant, in their 1991 study of μῆτις, equate προνοία with προμηθεία (3, 18), as does Kesters 1930, 49, both without evidence.

70 The joint investigation is important to Socrates: see 348d1-349b2.
continue a joint investigation into those questions with Protagoras. How would Socratic conversation of the sort depicted so far contribute to this? Patrick Coby suggests that getting knowledge of virtue prepares one to know the features (for example, the teachability) of virtue:

Having forgotten to define the nature of virtue, [Protagoras and Socrates] set out blindly to decide whether virtue is teachable. Socrates compares this procedure to that Epimethean misstep which delivered men into the world ill-prepared for survival. As a consequence of Afterthought’s taking precedence over Forethought, primordial men found themselves without an adequate defense for their lives. Socrates suggests that the human soul is similarly hazarded when men endeavor to expound on the attributes of virtue without first knowing what virtue is. This, too, is an example of afterthought’s supplanting forethought.71

Socrates is surely concerned about acting without adequate preparation. But Coby’s view confronts two interpretative difficulties. Unless Socrates is constantly seeking to know about virtue with the goal of making statements about the features of virtue, his previous concern with virtue would not be instances of “forethought” about virtue. He says that he exercises forethought on behalf of his “entire life”; the importance of forethought for him seems not, then, to be in getting knowledge that is logically prior to some other knowledge, but rather to be living in a virtuous way. The second and related difficulty is that for Coby forethought is like a set of beliefs one might possess; but the history of the word’s usage presents it as being more like an ability than some information. Michael Naas realizes that forethought cannot be simply a sort of preliminary thought or a kind of knowledge. He denies that Socratic forethought is

mere calculation of future gains or losses based on past experiences, but an openness—perhaps even a skepticism—with regard to the future… a sort of knowledge of what is to be dreaded—a knowledge of what is not to be done…. more a cautionary voice than an advisory one… an attempt to envision and determine such ultimate questions as the nature of the Good and the relationship between human life and Necessity, human life and death.72

This account, that forethought registers what is important and what is prohibited, rings truer with the history of προμήθεια. Of course it is too abstract as well. How does the conversation with Protagoras instantiate a kind of προμήθεια?

Socrates operates largely through presenting people with their own views until they see that they are conflicted. He then has them decide which views seem to them most worth saving. If they cannot yet decide, he recommends further conversation. The Protagoras depicts Socrates taking this attitude toward both Hippocrates and Protagoras. He makes them see that they should not go forward with their intentions until they have reflected on what goodness really demands. This reflection—whether to study with Protagoras or not, or with what critical eye; whether to

71 Coby 1987, 175-6. “To be epimethean in this dialogue is to be chronically afterthinking, not occasionally so [as Socrates was, at the dialogue’s beginning, in thinking virtue is not teachable].” This explains how Socrates can be Promethean, for even though Prometheus too made an error, he does not always err, and is able to salvage the situation in the end. “Socratic philosophy is promethean because it responds to a crisis (for which it may be partially responsible, as was also Prometheus) that is brought about by epimethean sophistry.”

72 Naas 1995, 134-5. Naas observes further that in the Gorgias, Zeus had Prometheus strip people of their “foreknowledge (προειδότας) of their death” (GrG 523d, cf. PB 250-253) so that people could not, in their wish to meet their final judgment well, calculate their good and evil deeds; they would have instead to act well throughout their lives. In this spirit, the forethoughtful conversationalist would look forward not to a particular ending of his discussion but to aporia; he would be eager to meet new challenges and be optimistic in confronting them (135-6).
treat virtue as teachable, and as a single thing to be taught or not, and with what qualifications—is necessary for treating oneself and others as rational human beings. Socrates appears to believe in the Protagoras that one grows in conscientiousness through conversation. We have good reason to think that Socratic prometheizing is trying to be thoughtful in this broad and plausible and familiar and civically- and socially-relevant way, and that Socrates takes his overall task—in relation to but in some departure from Protagoras’—to be to encourage such conversational conscientiousness among his fellow citizens.

Understanding προμήθεια helps us understand the pun on Prometheus’ name. Protagoras’ Great Speech contrasts Prometheus with Epimetheus (320d4-322a2). This contrast does not reiterate Hesiod’s contrast between “Forethought” versus “Afterthought,” and indeed says nothing about any purported ability to look into the future. In the Speech, Prometheus accedes to Epimetheus’ request that he be allowed to distribute the abilities to the new-formed animals. (That Epimetheus ultimately fails means that this Prometheus lacks clairvoyance, and even lacks the presumption of having it.) Epimetheus goes about the distribution. “To some he assigned strength without quickness; the weaker ones he made quick. … And so on down the line, balancing his distribution (ἐπανισῶν ἔνεμεν), making adjustments (ἐμηχανᾶτο), and taking precautions (εὐλάβειαν) against the possible extinction of any of the races” (320e1-321a6, tr. Lombardo and Bell). Epimetheus seems to have done so with reasoning and process. Protagoras says that Epimetheus was “not very wise” (οὐ πάνυ τι σοφὸς) and “forgot himself” (ἔλαθεν αὑτὸν) and “didn’t know what to do” (ἠπόρει ὅτι χρῆσαιτο) upon running out of powers to distribute. But this lack of wisdom is not a lack of calculative ability. Protagoras is not judging his thinking ability: nobody criticizes the allotment among the animals. What Epimetheus fails to do is retain any abilities to distribute to the humans, the species he comes to last (321c1-2). In time Epimetheus notices this. Prometheus does as well, and realizing that the humans were about to be exposed to the world and its elements, decides to steal from the gods fire and “skillful wisdom” or “life-wisdom” (ἔντεχνον σοφίαν 321d1, immediately glossed as τὸν βίον σοφίαν 321d4). He is later punished for this transgression.

The story may seem to show the value of considering all of one’s needs before acting on any of them. But it has a more important lesson. The story admits that while plenty of people, like the good-natured, eager, and methodical Epimetheus, are thoughtful and capable of both complex instrumental reasoning and decent execution, they still lack a key trait. This additional quality is concern for humans. We need to explain not the general fact that Epimetheus failed to distribute powers to every species, but the specific one that the only species he neglected was the humans. (There is no reason given for his leaving them for last.)

74 τοῖς μὲν ἵσχυν ἄνευ τάχους προοίμητεν, τοὺς δὲ ἀσθενεστέρους τάχει ἐκόσμει… καὶ τάλλα οὕτως ἐπανισῶν ἔνεμεν. ταῦτα δὲ ἐμηχανᾶτο εὐλάβειαν ἔχων μή τι γένος ἀστορθείη·
75 Contrast Thorpe 1989, 60-66, who after acknowledging that Epimetheus is often read as working “deliberately and self-consciously, adapting means and ends towards a perfect conclusion,” failing exclusively in forgetting to deal with the humans, claims that Epimetheus failed from the start. He neglected to compare the number of species and powers he had to distribute; “he simply doled out willy-nilly what appears only in hindsight to be a thoughtful balance of powers” in a process that was nothing more than “a continual process of self-correction.” In giving out one power at a time, moving on to the next power only once he ran out of the first, Epimetheus showed he reacted only to the immediate circumstance. Using no calculation or paradigm he failed to exercise forethought.
76 Contrast this view with Beresford forthcoming, which argues that “Epimetheus is the god who blunders and learns from his mistakes,” and that “Prometheus (i.e., our cleverness) cannot deliver ethical wisdom” and “is the god of deliberation and reasoning; but deliberation is about means, not ends.”
Aeschylus calls Prometheus φιλανθρώπου (PB 11, 28); Plato has Socrates say he acts from φιλανθρωπίας (Euthyp. 3d). Prometheus throughout Plato models those skills appropriate for specifically human flourishing. In the Philebus, Prometheus’ gift, which Socrates says he will try to practice (18b), is the ability to “lead the good human life,” as it happens, through a comprehensive practice of talking and reflecting. In the Statesman, the same Prometheus gift is associated with “teaching and education” and the capacity for self-sufficiency (269a-274d).

In saying that he uses Prometheus and that he prometheizes, then, Socrates seems not merely to be punning on Prometheus’ name, making a joke at the expense of Protagoras’ mythic speech. The Prometheus Protagoras outlines strikes us as remarkably similar to Socrates, the man who worries over and cares most about people (ἀπορίᾳ οὖν ἔχομεν… ἥντινα σωτηρίαν τῷ ἄνθρωπῳ εὕροι 321c6-d1), the one willing to go to trial and sacrifice himself for the good of the people (δίκη μετῆλθεν 322a1-3). Protagoras might, in contrast, seem rather more like Epimetheus, eager to distribute goods to all (cf. 317c10), inadequately thoughtful about the needs and capacities of humans. Socrates may model himself on Prometheus by caring less to develop his skills of instrumental reasoning than his sensitivity to others, Protagoras included.

IV. Conclusion

The appeal of the temporal reading of προμήθεια seems to come both from Hesiod’s story about Prometheus as well as from earnest but careless etymologizing. Hesiod contrasts Prometheus with his brother Epimetheus, calling the former αἰολόμητης, “quick-scheming,” the latter ἁπαρτίνοος, “mistaken-minded.” He also calls Prometheus ποικιλόβουλον (“shifting-planning,” 521); ἄγκυλομητής (“crooked-counseled,” 546); ὁλοφρονεόν (“plotting deception,” 550); and says that he contended in planning (ἐρίζετο βουλὰς, 523). Zeus speaks of Prometheus as πάνων πέρι μήδεα εἰδώς (“you who know counsels beyond all others,” 559). From Hesiod, therefore, it looks like the word compounds προ-, “fore-,” “ahead,” and –μήδεα (“counsels”) or –μῆτης (“schemes”). But this is not the case. More recent etymological discussion has put more confidence in taking the word as compounding προ- and a lost form of μανθάνω, “I learn,” that has itself been modified; but even this proposal is quite speculative. The result is that little may be inferred from the supposed etymology. We can acknowledge only the probable fact that προμήθης (taking the adjective as oldest) once referred to a kind of thinking or learning necessary for or other adjunct to something else.

We began the paper by asking whether Plato dramatically modified the meaning of προμήθεια. It seems he did not. If it started out meaning something like “conscientiousness” or “due regard,” by the time of Pindar it had acquired a richer meaning, perhaps expanded from an
earlier mostly religious context. Through the fifth century, we find Plato’s understand of the term as similar to wisdom, practical reason, and self-control.

Why did the word go out of fashion after the death of Plato? It is found minimally until Philo. And after that, it becomes possible again to say that “the ant is more forethoughtful than the grasshopper: he stored up food from himself from the earth” (τῆς γῆς τὴν ἐαυτοῦ τροφὴν ἐθησαύριζεν, οἷα προμήθεστερος ὃν ὁ μύρμηξ τοῦ τέττιγος, fr. 2.5 Haurath and Hunger). My only guess is that the word-group had an old-fashioned aspect to it (like “chastity” or “continence” in contemporary English) combined with the sense that it has no more meaning than other much more common words. But this is pure speculation.

Bibliography


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84 The collection of Aristotle fragments by Rose includes under the heading of Aristotle’s *Symposium* on “On Drunkenness” the following maxim: “speed without forethought is harmful, but judgment with good hope is beneficial” (οὐ προμήθεις μὲν γὰρ τάχος βλαβερόν, βραβευτής δὲ μετ’ εὐελπιστίας ὑφέλιμον: 1.16.102.31), but it is a paraphrase, and a purely conjectural attribution, by Philo, *Plantat. Noe*. 161.7 (§39). In the very slight case it were from an Aristotelian dialogue, its form suggests a preexisting bromide; but the fact that Philo uses προμήθεις-group words frequently (42 times per TLG), and Aristotle nowhere else appears to have used one, tells even more strongly against attribution.

85 Most significantly, Polybius 3.76.3.1; Aristophanes Gramm., *Hist. Anim.* 2.228.6; Arier Didymus, 100.1.9; Nicolaus Hist. 96.9, 101.674,


