Myth against Philosophy in Ovid's Account of Creation

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MYTH AGAINST PHILOSOPHY
IN OVID'S ACCOUNT OF CREATION

Scholars have expended a lot of legwork trying to track down philosophical sources for the cosmogony with which Ovid opens his *Metamorphoses*. But this effort has left us with little intellectual energy—and virtually no sense of humor—to devote to the question of why Ovid began his massive celebration of the mythical with a demythologized account of creation patched together from the physics of philosophers.[1] Thus the passage is generally taken at face value as a solemn homage from the poet to philosophy. However, if we consider Ovid's cosmogony in relation to his ensuing account of the creation and early history of man, we will, I believe, discover that the poet assumes the role of the philosopher in a spirit of irreverent irony, and that his purpose is to expose philosophy as inferior to myth in its understanding of man and his world. I hope that my argument might further suggest that Ovid's ironical elevation of imagination over reason at the beginning of the *Met.* is vital to the poem's intended intellectual and moral impact.

The contrast between Ovid's pose of sober rationalism in his cosmogony and the imaginative abandon of the bulk of the *Met.* cannot be explained by any desire on Ovid's part to endorse the physics of a particular philosophical school or to present a considered theory of his own. For the only certain conclusions to be drawn from all our source-hunting are that Ovid's knowledge of past cosmogonies is haphazard and superficial,[2] and that he was sublimely indifferent to the conflicting truth-claims of the hodge-podge of

[1]On the shortage of a sense of humor in Ovidian scholarship, cf. K. Galinsky, *Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Berkeley 1975) 158. Notable exceptions are Galinsky himself, esp. his ch. 4; J.-M. Frécaut, *L'esprit et l'humour chez Ovide* (Grenoble 1972); and M. von Albrecht, "Ovids Humor und die Einheit der Metamorphosen", in *Ovid (Wege der Forschung* 92), edd. M. von Albrecht and E. Zinn, (Darmstadt 1968) 405–37. The latter two, however, are more concerned with the typology of Ovid's humor than with its appreciation or interpretation. At any rate, no one has thought to bring a sense of humor to bear on the question of the cosmogony's relation to the poem as a whole.

[2]Three philosophical sources are the maximum number necessary to account for everything Ovid says: a) Stoicism as found in Cicero and in the air (see e.g. F. E. Robbins, "The Creation Story in Ovid *Met.* I," *CP* 8 [1913], 406–10, in conjunction with F. Laemmli's scepticism about the depth of Ovid's acquaintance with the Stoics [*Vom Chaos zum Kosmos* (Basel 1962) 133–34 and n. 882]); b) Lucretius, from whom Ovid could easily have got all he knows about the Presocratics (see Robbins 402–6, in conjunction with the arguments of W. C. Stephens, *The Function of Religious and Philosophical Ideas in Ovid's Metamorphoses* [Diss. Princeton 1957] 48–49, that Ovid's debt to Lucretius is merely verbal, not philosophical); and c) Cicero's translation of Plato's *Timaeus* (the most doubtful of the three, supported by T. M. Robinson, "Ovid and the *Timaeus*", *Athenaeum* 46 [1968] 254–60). Stephens' theory (46–62) that Ovid is directly under the "Orphic" influence of Empedocles is rightly dismissed by M. Boillat, *Les Metamorphoses d'Ovide. Thèmes majeurs et problèmes de composition* (Bern and Frankfort 1976) 25 n. 5.

theories which he conflates.[3]

Despite the acknowledged lack of profundity, or even coherence, in his devil-may-care eclecticism, commentators have invariably assumed that in Book 1 Ovid exudes veneration for philosophers and for the nameless, solitary divinity whom he borrows from them to preside over creation. He hopes with their help to confer some borrowed dignity on the lowlier mode of mythology by writing "the most exalted and sober exordium in his power".[4] Book 1's cosmogony and the interminable disquisition by Pythagoras in Book 15 have been taken together to form a "philosophical frame" for the poem.[5] Some may feel that the frame is meant to reveal the "scientific" truth about the reality behind the myths, even its "mathematical structure";[6] others that the frame consists of mere rhetorical exercises, on the ground that it is inconsistent with his myths and "undermines" their "credibility",[7] or on the contrary that it enhances their credibility by pointing out that "scientific" facts and theories can be amazing too.[8] Even those who have perceived that the "philosophies" of Books 1 and 15 are inconsistent with each other as well as with the myths in between have nevertheless concluded that Ovid is trying, however incompetently, to provide a "theoretical background" for the *Met.*[9] At any rate, on the standard view, he puts his faith in the power of philosophy to redeem his poem from its myths by bestowing upon it, whether in substance or just for show, the appearance of a "tiefere Bedeutung"[10] or a "giustificazione".[11]

The tone of such remarks sometimes suggests that modern scholarship can be prone to the prejudice that "science" and "theory" are more faithful to reality than myth and that poets of myth ought to defer to them. But my argument will be that we are mistaken to attribute this prejudice to Ovid. We have failed to consider that in Book 1 he may be out to puncture the pretensions of philosophy through irony, just as he so often enjoys ironically mocking the style and substance of epic. The poet does introduce, as we shall

[3]For the verdict that Ovid is not concerned about philosophical consistency cf. e.g. F. Boemer, *P. Ovidius Naso. Metamorphosen,* vol. 1, (Heidelberg 1969) 16; B. Otis, *Ovid as an Epic Poet,* 2nd ed., (Cambridge 1966) 331 and 423; P. DeLacy, "Philosophical Doctrine and Poetic Technique in Ovid", *CJ* 43 (1947) 153–61; O. S. Due, *Changing Forms. Studies in the Metamorphoses of Ovid* (Copenhagen 1974) 97; Boillat (above, n. 2) 25–26; Laemmli (above, n. 2) 133.

[4]Otis (above, n. 3) 94; cf. R. Coleman, "Structure and Intention in the *Metamorphoses,*" *CQ* 21 (1971) 463; Boillat (above, n. 2) 38 ("un morceau d'allure philosophique"); and von Albrecht (above, n. 1) 411 (on Ovid's "naturphilosophische Ernst").

[5]Cf. L. Alfonsi, "L'inquadramento filosofico delle *Metamorphoses*", in *Ovidiana,* ed. N. I.Herescu, (Paris 1958) 265–72

[6]Laemmli (above, n. 2) 26.

[7]D. A. Little, "The Speech of Pythagoras in *Met.* XV and the Structure of the *Metamorphoses,*" *Hermes* 98 (1970) 349–56.

[8]Otis (above, n. 3) 302; cf. R. Coleman (above, n. 4) 473.

[9]H. Fraenkel, *Ovid. A Poet Between Two Worlds* (Berkeley 1945) 110; cf. Little (above, n. 7) 349.

[10]O. Korn, *Die Metamorphosen des P. Ovidius Naso,* vol. 2, 4th ed. rev. R. Ehwald, (Berlin 1916) 349.

[11]Alfonsi (above, n. 5) 269.

see, a God or "higher nature" (*deus et melior . . . natura* 1.21) derived from
Stoicism,[12] a depersonalized and divinely rational Providence; and he does
allow this God to construct a world in accord with Reason. But on my reading
Ovid here indulges in an ironical game at Reason's and Philosophy's expense.
For he proceeds in Book 1 to replace the philosophers' God with the Ovidian
Jove and company, and sets these mythical divinities to work transforming
that rational cosmos into a radically irrational one tailored to the demands of
poetic imagination as opposed to philosophical speculation.

The object of the game is to suggest to the poet's readers by implication,
and by way of preparing them to enter the poem's mythical world, that it is the
mythical and not the philosophical vision which more truly represents reality
as we know it.[13] Ovid does not "believe in" the myths of the *Met.* in any
literal sense, of course.[14] But in my view he suggests in Book 1 that, in
probing their imaginative and psychological dimensions through poetry, he
can capture the paradox and complexity of the world of human experience
with far greater success than a philosopher can through reason.

Ovid begins with Chaos, as Hesiod had done, but it is one of his own
devising (lines 5–20). Instead of Hesiod's empty space or any of its calm,
homogeneous successors in later tradition,[15] Ovid's Chaos is one of violent
commotion[16] among three distinguishable constituents—air, earth, and water
(15)—embroiled both in mutual combat (*pugnabant* 19) and in mutual
transformations, constantly exchanging characteristics and even identities.[17]
Now, apart from the fact that its Hesiodic pedigree places the concept of
Chaos squarely in the mythical tradition, the resemblance between Ovidian
Chaos and the mythical world of the rest of the *Met.* in particular leaps to the
eye: *nulli sua forma manebat* ("nothing maintained its own form," line 17).
And when Pythagoras presents his world-picture in Book 15, Ovid points up
its kinship with Chaos, and thus with his myths, by having him echo this
phrase: *nec species sua cuique manet* ("nor does anything maintain its

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[12]Ovid intends the quoted phrase to identify *deus* with *natura,* as the Stoics had. Cf. Cic. *ND*
1.36–37 and Diog. Laer. 7.136–37 and 148; also Laemmli (above, n. 2) 6 n. 35, Boillat (above,
n. 2) 34 n. 50, Stephens (above, n. 2) 54, Robbins (above, n. 2) 409–10.

[13]Due (above, n. 3) is one of the few scholars to take account of the conflict between
philosophy and myth (cf. n. 9 above). He is content, however, to leave Ovid in a muddle: "he
refuses to make a choice between them, but accepts—or rejects—both" (100, cf. 111–12).

[14]On Ovid's disbelief in the "traditional verity of myth," esp. in contrast to Virgil, see
Galinsky (n. 1 above) 16–25, although I disagree with Galinsky's basic thesis that for Ovid the
value of retelling myth lies solely in the entertainment-value of skillful narrative.

[15]E.g. Ap. Rhod. 1.496–48, Diod. Sic. 1.7, Euripides fr. 488 Nauck, Aristophanes *Birds*
693–94. On the poetic tradition, see also Robbins (above, n. 2) 405 n. 4. Laemmli (above, n. 2)
3–4 misleadingly describes Ovid's Chaos as similarly "formlos."

[16]The *Timaeus* may be the source of the conception of a Chaos in motion (rather than
motionless, like those cited in n. 15 above): see Robinson (above, n. 2) 256–57.

[17]Utque erat et tellus illic et pontus et aer,
  sic erat instabilis tellus, innabilis unda,
  lucis egens aer: nulli sua forma manebat,
  obstabatque aliis aliud, quia corpore in uno
  frigida pugnabant calidis, umentia siccis,
  mollia cum duris, sine pondere habentia pondus. (15–20)

shape," 15.252).[18] Similarly, Pythagoras expounds at length upon the constancy of change in the world as he sees it (15.165–85) and on the way in which the elements in particular are perpetually in the process of mutual transformations (15.237–51, 260–72).

In contrast, the "higher nature" creates its cosmos (1.21–75) by destroying this mythical state of flux through the institution of a static rational order. He puts a stop to the elemental warfare of interpenetration and metamorphosis, and imposes peace instead by roping the elements off in separate regions (*dissociata locis concordi pace ligavit* 25), allowing them no transgressions into one another's territory. Ovid peppers his description of God's acts of creation with a profusion of verbs and adjectives denoting acts of separation— no less than six separation-verbs in the first five lines of the section,[19] plus ten more words or phrases in the following twenty-five lines which denote either God's divisive acts or the impassible boundaries which he imposes to keep each element firmly in its Aristotelian place.[20]

That Ovid is here aping the philosophical manner of describing creation may be seen by comparing passages from Lucretius and Cicero, whose cosmologies exhibit the same stress on the divisions by which the world's constituents are kept apart.[21] And when the poet sums up creation by saying that God "fenced everything off within fixed limits" (*limitibus dissaepserat omnia certis* 69), he clearly alludes to the philosophical ideal of a world in which everything always keeps within the confines assigned to it by inviolable laws of nature—an ideal stressed, for example, by Lucretius with his Epicurean faith that everything is restrained within rational and predictable bounds by a "deep-set boundary-marker" (*alte terminus haerens*).[22] Ovid also imitates the teleological bias common to many rationalistic cosmogonies. Thus God shaped the earth as a sphere "to ensure that it was equal on all sides" (*ne non aequalis ab omni / parte foret* 34–35), and populated each element with creatures proper to it "lest any region be deprived of its own life-forms" (*neu regio foret ulla suis animalibus orba* 72).[23] The higher nature, in short, designs the cosmos as it must be designed if it is to satisfy Reason's demands.

However, no cosmos could be further removed from that of the poem as a whole, whose most striking constant is metamorphosis in defiance of Reason and in violation of the fixed scheme set up by the higher nature.[24]

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[18]Cf. 15.259: nil equidem durare diu sub imagine eadem.

[19]Diremit 21, abscidit 22, secrevit 23, evolvit 24, exemit 24, dissociata 25.

[20]Coercuit 31, secuit 33, sectamque 33, redegit 33, circumdare 37, cinxit 39, diversa locis 40, secant 46, distinxit 47, premuntur 48.

[21]E.g. Lucr. V.443–48 (discludere, dividere, disponere, secernere, sorsum [twice], secreto, secreti, all in six lines); Cic. *Tusc.* 1.17.40 and *ND* 2.91; also cf. Laemmli (above, n. 2) 4 and n. 17, and Robbins (above, n. 2) 407.

[22]Lucr. 1.77, 1.596, 5.90, 6.66; cf. C. Segal, *Landscape in Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Wiesbaden 1969) 88.

[23]For parallels see Boemer (above, n. 3) *ad locc.*, and Alfonsi (above, n. 5) 27.

[24]Cf. Coleman (above, n. 4) 463 on the "antithesis" between Ovid's cosmogony and the phenomenon of metamorphosis, though he thinks that Ovid conceived of the transformations merely as "occasional miraculous intrusions" upon the fixed scheme.

Furthermore, as we will shortly see, Ovidian metamorphosis is intimately associated with the warfare between elements which is characteristic of Chaos but which God disrupts by enforcing his *concors pax*. And on top of these marked contrasts between the world which the higher nature creates on the one hand, and those of Chaos, myth, and Pythagoras on the other, Ovid has Pythagoras deny that the world was created at all by proclaiming that it is eternal (*aeternus mundus* 15.239).[25]

The first explosive device which Ovid implants in the cut-and-dried dream-world of Reason is man (78), and the second is Jove (114). There was need, Ovid tells us (speaking again the language of rationalist teleology), for one more creature, more holy and high-minded than the rest, worthy to lord it over creation (76 f.). "Natus homo est," he immediately appends. Commentators all assume that in the poet's view the "need" was thereby fulfilled. But the text lacks any connective to tell us so. There was need for a *sanctius animal;* man came into being. This bald juxtaposition does not answer but *raises* the question whether man filled the bill or not. The assumption that Ovid is solemnly writing his Book of Genesis has blinded us to the possibility that he is being, as usual, irreverently Ovidian, this time toward the conceptions of God as Divine Reason and of Man as divinely rational. Our suspicion that a real Divine Reason would never have made the mistake of making Man, that Man would be a monkey-wrench in the works of a rational cosmos, is soon to be amply confirmed.

Ovid gives two alternative accounts of man's advent. The first is very brief: "either that maker of all things, fount of the better world, made him from divine seed" (78–79). This account accords with Philosophy;[26] but the second— "or Prometheus made him"—is mythological, and this is the one which Ovid chooses to develop at length (80–88). Prometheus makes man, not from a pure divine seed, but from a *mixture* of the four elements (80–82)—precisely the sort of mixture which the higher nature had outlawed. These alternative creation-accounts for mankind stand as Ovid's first and only departure from his omniscient pose in the cosmogony. However, he no sooner presents the philosophical and Promethean accounts as alternatives than he chooses to drop the former and pursue the latter instead. We are told that the introduction of Prometheus into Ovid's "scientific" account of creation represents "a concession to mythology" as to an inferior way of thinking.[27] But in fact Ovid's choice here to follow up a myth is the pivot on which his narrative suddenly but permanently turns against the "scientific" and toward the mythical world-view. It marks not just the first introduction of a mythical deity and the first crack in the hidebound cosmos of the philosophers' God,

[25]For more on the incompatibility of the "philosophies" of Books 1 and 15, see n. 9 above and Boillat (above, n. 2) 40; C. Segal, "Myth and Philosophy in the *Metamorphoses*," *AJP* 90 (1969) 287; C. C. Rohrer, "Ideology, Tripartition, and Ovid's *Met*. I.5–451," *Arethusa* 13 (1980) 306–7. Contrast Alfonsi (above, n. 5) for an unsuccessful effort to reconcile them.

[26]Cf. the Stoic theory of *spermatikoi logoi*: Diog. Laert. 7.136–37 and 148; Cic. *de fin*. 2.114; Robbins (above, n. 2) 413; D. Hahm, *The Origins of Stoic Cosmology* (Columbus 1977) 60–62, 75–76.

[27]Robbins (above, n. 2) 413.

but also the last mention of that God, who now disappears from the poem for good, abandoning the world to be ruled by the gods of myth.

Now Ovid does not announce explicitly that the introduction of man marks a shift of narrative gears from philosophy to myth. Much less does he declare his philosophical cosmogony false and start over with a mythological one. Rather, his narrative sustains the appearance of an unbroken chronological sequence: first the higher nature created a rational cosmos, then along came man and the gods of myth to throw it out of joint. Nevertheless, the poet makes no effort to bridge the narrative gap between the unexplained disappearance of the higher nature and the equally unexplained appearance of Jove "once Saturn had been sent down to Tartarus" (113). Ovid posits no identity between the higher nature and either Saturn or Jove. Nor does he suggest in the least that the philosophers' God stands above or beyond the gods of myth as some sort of spiritual backdrop for the poem's action.

My contention, then, is that this radical disjunction in the narrative sequence serves to suggest from poet to reader that the rational cosmos and its God never existed in the first place, being figments of philosophers' imaginations, and that the mythical cosmos of the poet's imagination, though according to the narrative it follows on the rational one, is the only one of the two which resembles or represents the world that does exist. The presence of this implication is not "provable" from the surface narrative, of course. But, in examining the myths by which Ovid explains how the world of the rest of his poem came to replace that of the higher nature, I hope to show that my hypothesis provides a plausible and pointed relationship between the two, which up till now they have lacked.

Unlike the *melior natura,* the gods of myth are a plurality conceived in man's image both physically and psychologically. When Ovid tells us that Prometheus made man in the image of gods (83), it is this anthropomorphic plurality which he calls to our minds. And just as the gods of myth make up the divine cast of the rest of the poem to the exclusion of the lone philosophers' God,[28] so it is the mankind made by Prometheus, not the philosophers' *sanctius animal,* which constitutes the mortal cast.[29] Not surprisingly, if we take an Ovidian view of divine nature in the gods of myth, the human nature which Prometheus models on it is far from *sanctus.* Prometheus must *command* him (*iussit* 86) to look toward heaven rather than earthward like other animals. The quasi-divine man of the philosophers' God would need no such command,[30] but Ovidian mankind will of course spend the rest of the *Met.* disobeying it.[31]

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[28]Cf. Segal (above, n. 25) 262–64 on the way that the divinity of man swiftly evaporates from Ovid's picture.

[29]Cf. Segal (above, n. 22) 87 n. 126 on the "devastating effect of the contrast" between the *melior natura* and the gods of Ovidian myth.

[30]Cf. e.g. Cic. *ND* 2.140 and *de legg.* 1.26–27, where man keeps his eyes on heaven by virtue of the divinity in his nature.

[31]Cf. Due (above, n. 3) 100–1: he sees a "contradiction" between "optimism" and "pessimism" in the two alternative accounts of man's creation, and sees that Ovid "makes no attempt to harmonize" the two—which is true enough, but does not mean that Ovid cannot make up his mind between them, as Due once again (cf. n. 13 above) would have it.

First, however, just as Ovid lets the universe appear at first to be more rationally organized than it is in myth or in reality, so he lets man enjoy a brief Golden Age (89–106) in which human life adheres to the same sort of restrictions as the higher nature had imposed upon the elements. Human laws are unnecessary since all men are voluntarily trustworthy and just (89–93). Nor do men violate the order of the elements by removing trees from the land and sailing them on water (94–96). Men keep to their own shores, so that there is no war (97–100), just as God would create peace by keeping the elements within bounds.

Ovid's second reference to mythical gods (after Prometheus) coincides with the demise of the Golden Age. We learn that Saturn had presided over it, while the advent of the Silver Age is marked by Jove's usurpation (113–14). The implication, then, is that the *melior natura* had expired at man's first appearance to make room on stage for the mythographers' Saturn. But it takes the combination of man and Jove to bring about the ruin of Divine Reason's neatly packaged universe.

The Golden Age was one of eternal spring—a world such as the philosophers' God might have made, changeless because, being perfect, it could only change for the worse. But the first thing that Jove does is to introduce change, just as Prometheus had made mischief by introducing mixture. Indeed, Jove ushers in the Silver Age by inaugurating that paradigm of all change, the cycle of the seasons, whose extremes of temperature wreck man's golden life of ease by forcing him for the first time to build shelters and till the land (116–24). This leads to the institution of private property as men draw boundaries where the higher nature intended none.[32]

Predictably, once men have set up such boundaries, it is only a matter of time till they begin to transgress against them. Thus the Bronze and Iron Ages are marked by the rise of belligerence and crime. Men begin to grab for each other's property and possessions, until in the Iron Age everyone, says Ovid, lives by stealing (*vivitur ex rapto* 144). They confound the ordained divisions between the elements as well, not only by setting wood to water in order to trespass beyond their own shores (132–34), but also by digging up metals from underground for wealth and weaponry (137–40), bringing them up to the light where they do not belong. Violent disorder in human society results, and the Iron Age becomes, like the worlds of myth and Pythagoras, strikingly akin to Chaos, as men now do battle with each other (*pugnat* 142) just as the elements in Chaos had fought before the higher nature interfered (*pugnabant* 19).

Yet even the evils of the Iron Age are outdone by the assault of the Giants. This constitutes a climactic transgression of proper limits, the ultimate negation of the higher nature's principles of order, as the vilest of the creatures of the earth attempt to usurp heaven. And, as if Iron-Age man were not bad enough, an even worse breed of men emerges from the blood of the Giants when Jove topples them from their stack of mountains (152–62).

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[32]Communemque prius ceu lumina solis et auras / cautus humum longo signavit limite mensor (135–36). Cf. Rohrer (above, n. 25) 303

Commentators have not sufficiently appreciated that Ovid's attitude in narrating man's moral degeneration is one of ironical insouciance, not moral disapproval or dismay. Thus he caps his account of the Iron Age with a comical picture of a world full of wicked stepmothers brewing poison and sons consulting diviners in the hope that their wealthy father's day of death is nigh. Here Ovid satirizes the tired Roman topos of moral decline not only by his melodramatic choice of exemplars but also with economical word-play and an exaggerated purpling of style, both of which undercut his moralizing pose (144–50):

> non hospes ab hospite tutus,
> non socer a genero; fratrum quoque gratia rara est.
> imminet exitio vir coniugis, illa mariti,
> lurida terribiles miscent aconita novercae;
> filius ante diem patrios inquirit in annos.
> victa iacet pietas; et virgo caede madentes
> ultima caelestum terras Astraea reliquit.

The final clause about Astraea, the goddess of justice, can of course be understood two ways: "The virgin Astraea is the last of the gods to leave," or "Astraea leaves, the last virgin among the gods."[33] And when Ovid avers with mock moral horror that "even among brothers good will was rare" (145), he reminds us of the winds, whose brotherly strife (*discordia fratrum*) survived the higher nature's' would-be *concors pax* (57–60), just as strife between human brothers now overpowers the peace of the Golden Age. The poet exploits similar stylistic devices at the expense of the Giants' clumsy attempted coup, which Jove foils by "knocking Pelion off Ossa" with a thunderbolt, toppling the insurgents so that their "dreadful bodies" (*corpora dira*) land on top of one another "buried under their own bulk" (*obruta mole sua*) (154–56). Further, while Ovid's language is plainly designed to recall Jove's battle with the Giants in Horace (*Odes* 3.4),[34] where the analogy between Jove's and Augustus' triumphs served as pro-Augustan propaganda, Ovid's ironic tone, combined with the satirical portrait of Jove which immediately follows (to be discussed presently), just as plainly suggests a mockery of such propaganda.[35] Thus, whereas in Horace Augustus-Jove's victory over his enemies and their mother Earth is final, Ovid has the Earth get revenge on her would-be conqueror by producing from her children's blood a race of men even more bloodthirsty and *contemptrix superum* than those with whom Jove must already contend (160–62).[36]

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[33]Cf. W. R. Johnson, "The Problem of the Counter-Classical Sensibility and Its Critics", *Cal.St.Cl.Ph.* 3 (1970) 141.

[34]E.g. Horace: *fulmine sustulerit caduco* (44), cf. Ovid's *misso perfregit . . fulmine* (154–55); Horace: *Pelion imposuisse Olympo* (52), cf. Ovid's *subiectae Pelion Ossae* (155); Horace: *vis consili expers mole ruit sua* (65), cf. Ovid's *obruta mole sua* (156); Horace: *monstris Terra dolet suis* (73), cf Ovid's *perfusam multo natorum sanguine Terram* (157).

[35]Contrast e.g. V. Buchheit, "Mythos und Geschichte in Ovids *Metamorphoses* I", *Hermes* 94 (1966) 84–86; but cf. Rohrer (above, n. 25) 304–5 on Ovid's Jove as a god of power rather than justice, and nn. 36 and 39 below.

[36]For the debate about Ovid's anti-Augustanism in the *Met.*, see Rohrer (above, n. 25) 311 n. 47

It seems to me obtuse, then, to read Ovid as seriously upset at his spectacle of man's degeneration.[37] He is simply widening to comical extremes the gulf between the higher nature's *sanctius animal* and human nature as portrayed in myth. Humanity in the *Met.* resembles the men of the Iron Age and of Giants' blood far more than it does those of the Golden Age, just as the Ovidian cosmos resembles Chaos far more than it does the cosmos of the higher nature. But the poet is no admirer of the Golden Age any more than of the philosophers' God. To the poet, both are not only unreal but unattractive, the higher nature's cosmos being the negation of the metamorphic world of mythical imagination, and the Golden Age being likewise a world of negatives[38] where nothing of interest can ever happen.

Ovid's last epithet for the higher nature—"fount of the better world"—raises the question "better than what?" We are about to discover that the answer Ovid implies is, not just "better than the world of myth," but "better than the world really is"—except that he means "better" only by the standards of philosophers. The poet himself, I suggest, uses *melior* ironically. He feels at home in the "worse" but more true-to-life world of Myth and presents the philosophers' "better" world as an arid and alien ideal.

By introducing man as Prometheus' creation, Ovid had implied that such a creature, composed as he is of the outlawed mixture of elements, would have had no place in the "better world." Similarly, when he introduces Jove as the god whose rule brings about the collapse of the Golden Age, the same ironical current of implication runs beneath the surface of Ovid's narrative, suggesting that no such a world as *we* live in could possibly be run by the austerely rationalistic Providence whom the philosophers imagine to be in charge. Rather, if there are gods of the world as we know it, they must be a lot like us—randy, irrational, given to disorderly fits of pique and passion. And the proper Ovidian response to such beings is not worship or obedience but rather knowing amusement and urbane fellow-feeling, the same response which Ovid encourages toward those qualities in other human beings.

Jove now summons a council of the gods, satirically modelled on a meeting of the Roman Senate (163–74), at which to decry the sorry state of religion among mankind from his perch on the heavenly Palatine while making the whole world tremble with a shake of his fearful *caesaries* (175–80). Here the poet unmistakably suggests that the god who rules the world of his myths is much like the man who ruled the world he lived in, Caesar Augustus.[39] Jove's righteous rage zeroes in on Lycaon, a paragon of human presumption who had

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[37]Contrast Johnson (above, n. 33) 141, who sees the joke about the virgin Astraea, for example, but nevertheless takes Ovid to be seriously expressing moral disapproval of "man's depravity." Similarly, Johnson sees the absurdity of Pythagoras' claim that carnivorous gluttony caused the end of the Golden Age (15.103–10) but somehow feels that "the wit of this turn on the *topos*" should "heighten, rather than detract from, the poignancy" of the event. Cf. Segal (above, n. 25) 263: man after the Golden Age becomes "diseased and evil."

[38]*Nullo* 89, *sine* 90, *aberant* 91, *nec* 91, *nec* 92, *sine* 93, *nondum* 94, *nullaque* 96, *nondum* 97, *non* 98 (twice), *non* 99 (twice), *sine* 99, *intacta* 101, *nec* 101, *nullo* 103.

[39]On satirical points in the "senate" scene see e.g. V. Poeschl, "De Lycaone Ovidiano", in *Ovidiana* (above, n. 5) 509; and Due (above, n. 3) 104–5 with n. 54. Also see my n. 36 above.

refused to worship and even plotted to try murdering him during the god's visit to earth to spy on human impiety (182–239). Jove has turned Lycaon into a wolf, but now announces his intention to punish the rest of humanity as well, with genocide no less, and to create a more pious race in its stead to satisfy the gods' need to be worshipped (240–52)—an obvious satire on Augustus' attempts to legislate a religious revival.

He decides on a world-wide flood as punishment, after abandoning his first impulse, to blast the race with thunderbolts. For he remembers a prophecy of universal conflagration and fears that his bolts might start one which would engulf heaven as well as earth (253–61). Such a conflagration is of course a Stoic concept, and Ovid's picture of Jove as a rather reluctant follower of Stoic doctrine is another shaft of satire directed against God as conceived by the Stoics. And Jove's universal flood, just like the Giants' assault, constitutes a wholesale breach of elemental boundaries, with water overreaching its assigned region to the farthest possible degree. Here the greatest god of myth is himself responsible for the breakdown of the order which the God of philosophy had ordained.

The portrait of post-deluvian mankind in the *Met.* makes it clear that Jove fails to keep his promise of a race more divinely disposed than the one he drowns.[40] He does engineer the survival of the most submissive couple in the world, Deucalion and Pyrrha. But when they act out the third and last of Ovid's myths about men's origins (313–415), we find that, like the previous two, it makes a mockery of the philosophers' notion that man's true nature is divinely rational and virtuous. For men now spring from ordinary stones which the couple fling over their shoulders (395–413).

Once again the reader should see past the chronological sequence of the surface narrative and examine the symbolic pattern created by Ovid's series of myths of man's origins. We then get a composite picture of human nature as a complex *mixture* of, on the one hand, piety (Deucalion and Pyrrha), rationality (the etherial seeds in Prometheus' mixture), self-discipline (the Golden Age), and hardiness (the stone-men), but on the other of belligerence (the Bronze Age), greed (the Iron Age), violent rebelliousness (the men of Giants' blood), and gross impiety (Lycaon). In short, Ovidian myth presents human nature as an irreducible and ungovernable paradox, in contrast to the philosopher's one-dimensional and unreal *sanctius animal,* the crown of a rational cosmos and the image of a divinely rational creator.

Indeed, in conjunction with the last myth in the series, Ovid explicitly points out that a myth about man's origin symbolizes a truth about man: "That's why we're such a hardy race (*genus durum*)," he says of our creation out of stones, "and we are ourselves the evidence for our origin" (414–15). I must stress again that Ovid is no fundamentalist preacher; it would be rather pedantic to suppose that, even in the lines just quoted, Ovid evinces *literal* belief in any of his myths. He is concerned instead to suggest the validity of myth as a means of symbolic representation, and to contrast it with the inadequacy of philosophy's vision of man.

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[40]Cf. Due (above, n. 3) 74.

And so, having stated that a truth about man may be found in a mythical account of man's creation, Ovid goes on to suggest that the philosophical account of the world's creation with which his poem began is falsified by the very existence of any life in the world at all. For when Ovid describes the spontaneous regeneration of the lower forms of life after the flood (430–37) he makes it clear that, just like Prometheus' creation of man, this process requires the embattled mixture of elements which was characteristic of Chaos but which the higher nature had forbidden. The wet and the hot must fuse into the temperate (*temperiem sumpsere* 430), fire and water must fight (*ignis aquae pugnax* 432) like the elements in Chaos (*pugnabant* 19), in order to create the moist steam which is necessary for life (*vapor umidus omnes / res creat* 432–33).

Since Empedocles, strife had traditionally been conceived as a sundering force. We saw, by contrast, that in Ovid's Chaos strife held the elements together in an inseparable tangle, like cats in a catfight. The philosophers' God sundered them to *stop* the strife and tried to keep the peace by keeping them apart. But now we find that this world of *concors pax* (25) would be, unlike ours, a lifeless one. Life springs rather from *discors concordia* (433), not from the rational order of a "harmonious peace" but from the paradoxical mystery of a "harmony of discord." The elements must be left alone to mix it up and fight it out amongst themselves. We noted earlier that Ovid's mythical world and the world according to Pythagoras both resemble Ovid's Chaos and stand in opposition to the "better world" of philosophy. Here we discover that the same can be said for the world we live in, the one that gives us life.

However, despite the kinship between the Pythagorean world of perpetual flux and the Ovidian world of metamorphosis, and despite the fact that both presuppose the demise or the unreality of the philosophers' God, Ovid presents Pythagoras nevertheless as a philosopher himself, and does not let him escape the ironical drubbing to which the *Met.* subjects the rest of the brood. For the philosopher of Book 15 is clearly a comic figure, Pythagoras' usual fate in Roman literature.[41]

As Book 1's cosmogony satirizes philosophical physics, Pythagoras' speech satirizes philosophical moralizing. By the measure of the *Met.*'s myths, Pythagoras may have his physics more or less right. He believes in metempsychosis and sees that fluid change, not rigid order, is the constant factor in our world. Moreoever, in citing a world-wide range of both ordinary and incredible phenomena to prove it, he demonstrates the kinship between his world and that of the *Met.* by including some phenomena which have featured in the poem's myths, such as Salmacis' pool from Book 4 (15.319). Ovid presents him as garrulous and credulous in cataloguing "evidence," but lends Pythagoras' general theory a certain dignity and power, as in lines 165–80:

> omnia mutantur, nihil interit . . .
> . . . nihil est toto quod perstet in orbe.

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[41]For other examples see Segal (above, n. 25) 280, adding Juvenal 15.171–74 in accord with my interpretation of that poem, forthcoming in *Phoenix*.

cuncta fluunt, omnisque vagans formatur imago.
ipsa quoque adsiduo labuntur tempora motu
non secus ac flumen.

However, when Pythagoras attempts to draw a moral from his doctrines, Ovid presents the reversion from mythologized physics into mythologized ethics as a backslide from the sublime into the ridiculous. The doctrine of metempsychosis recalls the many transformations in the *Met.* of people into animals, but his conclusion—vegetarianism (15.75–142, 456–78), on the ground that in eating cows you might be eating your own dead *coloni* (138–42)—is as plain a satire on moral philosophy as one could wish for, particularly in a poem in which plants are as likely as animals to house the souls of human beings.[42] The reason that Ovid satirizes ethics at the end of his poem, as he had physics at its beginning, is that the "moral" of myth as the *Met.* presents it is as antithetical to the moralizing of philosophers as the cosmos of myth is to their cosmologizing. But therein lies, not just another article, but a book about the *Met.*

However that may be, after the rebirth of animals in Book 1 Ovid abandons "philosophy" and "science" altogether until Book 15, launching himself on the mythical river between them by telling of Apollo's adventures with Pytho and Daphne. But his description of spontaneous generation as born of elemental metamorphosis and strife not only completes the poem's progress from the sterility of Reason to the fertility of the imagination. It has also returned us to the Chaos from which we started. And in doing so, Ovid ironically implies that he has simply returned us to the world as it is—that, in moving on with him from Philosophy into Myth, we are passing from a dream-world which is false to reality into a dream-world which is true to it.[43]

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[42]R. A. Swanson, "Ovid's Pythagorean Essay", *CJ* 54 (1958) 22, and Boillat (above, n. 2) 39–40, both see the absurdity of Pythagoras' inference from metempsychosis to vegetarianism, but neither displays any sense of humor in response. For efforts to take Pythagoras seriously as Ovid's moral mouthpiece see W. S. Anderson, "Multiple Change in the *Metamorphoses*," *TAPA* 94 (1963) 24; Stephens (above, n. 2); D. Little, "Non-Parody in *Met.* XV," *Prudentia* 6 (1974) 17–21; and Little (above, n. 7) 341–42 and 344–45, with his citations from others. Segal (above, n. 25) 280–84 and Johnson (above, n. 33) 139 see elements of caricature but neither considers the possibility that Ovid may be presenting Pythagoras' moralizing in a satirical light.

[43]I want to thank J. Arthur Hanson for his advice and encouragement in response to an earlier version of this paper, and Michael von Albrecht for his criticisms of my general approach. A version was also presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Philological Association in December 1983, and the final draft has benefited from the comments of that audience (thanks especially to Richard Tarrant).