

Creation; Four Ages;

Lycaon; Flood



compare to
actual science
non-fiction

Graphic
orig → group
responsible for
parts

pair w/
Thucydides
+
Parnides

Now I am ready to tell how bodies are changed
Into different bodies.

I summon the supernatural beings
Who first contrived
The transmogrifications
In the stuff of life.
You did it for your own amusement.
Descend again, be pleased to reanimate
This revival of those marvels.
Reveal, now, exactly
How they were performed
From the beginning
Up to this moment.

Before sea or land, before even sky
Which contains all,
Nature wore only one mask—
Since called Chaos.

A huge agglomeration of upset.
A bolus of everything—but
As if aborted.

And the total arsenal of entropy
Already at war within it.

all mess

No sun showed one thing to another,
No moon

Played her phases in heaven,
No earth
Spun in empty air on her own magnet,
No ocean
Basked or roamed on the long beaches.

Ultimate
nothingness

Land, sea, air, were all there
But not to be trodden, or swum in.
Air was simply darkness.
Everything fluid or vapour, form formless.
Each thing hostile
To every other thing: at every point
Hot fought cold, moist dry, soft hard, and the
weightless
Resisted weight.

Divine
Design

God, or some such artist as resourceful,
Began to sort it out.
Land here, sky there,
And sea there.
Up there, the heavenly stratosphere.
Down here, the cloudy, the windy.
He gave to each its place,
Independent, gazing about freshly.
Also resonating—
Each one a harmonic of the others,
Just like the strings
That would resound, one day, in the dome of the
tortoise.

The fiery aspiration that makes heaven
Took it to the top.
The air, happy to be idle,
Lay between that and the earth
Which rested at the bottom.

Engorged with heavy metals,
Embraced by delicate waters.

When the ingenious one
Had gained control of the mass
And decided the cosmic divisions
He rolled earth into a ball.
Then he commanded the water to spread out flat,
To lift itself into waves
According to the whim of the wind,
And to hurl itself at the land's edges.
He conjured springs to rise and be manifest,
Deep and gloomy ponds,
Flashing delicious lakes.
He educated
Headstrong electrifying rivers
To observe their banks—and to pour
Part of their delight into earth's dark
And to donate the remainder to ocean
Swelling the uproar on shores.

Then he instructed the plains
How to roll sweetly to the horizon.
He directed the valleys
To go deep.
And the mountains to rear up
Humping their backs.

Everywhere he taught
The tree its leaf.

Having made a pattern in heaven—
Two zones to the left, two to the right
And a fifth zone, fierier, between—
So did the Wisdom

Balance

Divide the earth's orb with the same:
A middle zone uninhabitable
Under the fire,
The outermost two zones beneath deep snow,
And between them, two temperate zones
Alternating cold and heat.

Air hung over the earth
By just so much heavier than fire
As water is lighter than earth.
There the Creator deployed cloud,
Thunder to awe the hearts of men,
And winds
To polish the bolt and the lightning.

Yet he forbade the winds
To use the air as they pleased.
Even now, as they are, within their wards,
These madhouse brothers, fighting each other,
All but shake the globe to pieces.

The East is given to Eurus—
Arabia, Persia, all that the morning star
Sees from the Himalayas.
Zephyr lives in the sunset.
Far to the North, beyond Scythia,
Beneath the Great Bear, Boreas
Bristles and turns.
Opposite, in the South,
Auster's home
Is hidden in dripping fog.
Over them all
Weightless, liquid, ether floats, pure,
Purged of every earthly taint.

Hardly had he, the wise one, ordered all this
Than the stars
Clogged before in the dark huddle of Chaos
Alit glittering in their positions.

And now to bring quick life
Into every corner
He gave the bright ground of heaven
To the gods, the stars and the planets.
To the fish he gave the waters.
To beasts the earth, to birds the air.

*Division of
homes/power*

Nothing was any closer to the gods
Than these humble beings,
None with ampler mind,
None with a will masterful and able
To rule all the others.

Till man came.
Either the Maker
Conceiving a holier revision
Of what he had already created
Sculpted man from his own ectoplasm,
Or earth
Being such a new precipitate
Of the etheric heaven
Cradled in its dust unearthly crystals.

Then Prometheus
Gathered that fiery dust and slaked it
With the pure spring water,
And rolled it under his hands,
Pounded it, thumbed it, moulded it
Into a body shaped like that of a god.

Though all the beasts
Hang their heads from horizontal backbones
And study the earth
Beneath their feet, Prometheus
Upended man into the vertical—
So to comprehend balance.
Then tipped up his chin
So to widen his outlook on heaven.

In this way the heap of all disorder
Earth
Was altered.
It was adorned with the godlike novelty
Of man.

And the first age was Gold.
Without laws, without law's enforcers,
This age understood and obeyed
What had created it.
Listening deeply, man kept faith with the source.

*no laws,
or order*

None dreaded judgement.
For no table of crimes measured out
The degrees of torture allotted
Between dismissal and death.
No plaintiff
Prayed in panic to the tyrant's puppet.
Undefended all felt safe and were happy.

Then the great conifers
Ruffled at home on the high hills.
They had no premonition of the axe
Hurling towards them on its parabola.
Or of the shipyards. Or of what other lands
They would glimpse from the lift of the ocean swell.
No man had crossed salt water.

Cities had not dug themselves in
Behind deep moats, guarded by towers.
No sword had bitten its own
Reflection in the shield. No trumpets
Magnified the battle-cries
Of lions and bulls
Out through the mouth-holes in helmets.

Men needed no weapons.
Nations loved one another.
And the earth, unbroken by plough or by hoe,
Piled the table high. Mankind
Was content to gather the abundance
Of whatever ripened.
Blackberry or strawberry, mushroom or truffle,
Every kind of nut, figs, apples, cherries,
Apricots and pears, and, ankle deep,
Acorns under the tree of the Thunderer.
Spring weather, the airs of spring,
All year long brought blossom.
The unworked earth
Whitened beneath the bowed wealth of the corn.
Rivers of milk mingled with rivers of nectar.
And out of the black oak oozed amber honey.

After Jove had castrated Saturn,
Under the new reign the Age of Silver—
(Lower than the Gold, but better
Than the coming Age of Brass)—
Fell into four seasons.

Now, as never before,
All colour burnt out of it, the air
Wavered into flame. Or icicles
Strummed in the wind that made them.
Not in a cave, not in a half-sun

Peace +
coop. →
why?

protect,
control
environ. →
predict →
ag. society

Not behind a windbreak of wattles,
For the first time
Man crouched under a roof, at a fire.
Now every single grain
Had to be planted
By hand, in a furrow
That had been opened in earth by groaning oxen.

After this, third in order,
The Age of Brass
Brought a brazen people,
Souls fashioned on the same anvil
As the blades their hands snatched up
Before they cooled. But still
Mankind listened deeply
To the harmony of the whole creation,
And aligned
Every action to the greater order
And not to the moment's blind
Apparent opportunity.

Last comes the Age of Iron.
And the day of Evil dawns.
Modesty,
Loyalty,
Truth,
Go up like a mist—a morning sigh off a graveyard.

Snares, tricks, plots come hurrying
Out of their dens in the atom.
Violence is an extrapolation
Of the cutting edge
Into the orbit of the smile.
Now comes the love of gain—a new god
Made out of the shadow

greed

Of all the others. A god who peers
Grinning from the roots of the eye-teeth.

Now sails bulged and the cordage cracked
In winds that still bewildered the pilots.
And the long trunks of trees
That had never shifted in their lives
From some mountain fastness
Leapt in their coffins
From wavetop to wavetop,
Then out over the rim of the unknown.

gold → war +
land
acquisition

Meanwhile the ground, formerly free to all
As the air or sunlight,
Was portioned by surveyors into patches,
Between boundary markers, fences, ditches.
Earth's natural plenty no longer sufficed.
Man tore open the earth, and rummaged in her
bowels.

Precious ores the Creator had concealed
As close to hell as possible
Were dug up—a new drug
For the criminal. So now iron comes
With its cruel ideas. And gold
With crueller. Combined, they bring war—
War, insatiable for the one,
With bloody hands employing the other.
Now man lives only by plunder. The guest
Is booty for the host. The bride's father,
Her heirloom, is a windfall piggybank
For the groom to shatter. Brothers
Who ought to love each other
Prefer to loathe. The husband longs
To bury his wife and she him.
Stepmothers, for the sake of their stepsons,

Study poisons. And sons grieve
Over their father's obdurate good health.
The inward ear, attuned to the Creator,
Is underfoot like a dog's turd. Astraea,
The Virgin
Of Justice—the incorruptible
Last of the immortals—
Abandons the blood-fouled earth.

Contm f

But not even heaven was safe.
Now came the turn of the giants.
Excited by this human novelty—freedom
From the long sight and hard knowledge
Of divine wisdom—they coveted
The very throne of Jove. They piled to the stars
A ramp of mountains, then climbed it.

Titans

Almighty Jove
Mobilised his thunderbolts. That salvo
Blew the top off Olympus,
Toppled the shattered
Pelion off Ossa
And dumped it
Over the giants.
They were squashed like ripe grapes.

Mother Earth, soaked with their blood,
Puddled her own clay in it and created
Out of the sludgy mortar new offspring
Formed like men.

These hybrids were deaf
To the intelligence of heaven. They were revolted
By the very idea
Of a god and sought only

How to kill each other.
The paternal bent for murder alone bred true.

Observing all this from his height
Jove groaned. It reminded him
Of what Lycaon had done at a banquet.
As he thought of that such a fury
Took hold of the Father of Heaven
It amazed even himself.

Then the gods jump to obey
His heaven-shaking summons to council.
The lesser gods come hurrying
From all over the Universe.
They stream along the Milky Way, their highway,
To the Thunderer's throne
Between wide-open halls, ablaze with lights,
Where the chief gods
Are housed in the precincts of Jove's palace
At the very summit of heaven
As in their own shrines.

When the gods had taken their seats
Jove loomed over them,
Leaning on his ivory sceptre.
He swung back his mane
With a movement that jolted
The sea, the continents and heaven itself.
His lips curled from the flame of his anger
As he spoke: "When the giants
Whose arms came in hundreds,
Each of them a separate sea-monster,
Reached for heaven, I was less angered.
Those creatures were dreadful
But they were few—a single family.

*Hierarchy
as balance*

Many venomous branches, a single root.
They could be plucked out with a single gesture.
But now, to the ocean's furthest shore,
I have to root out, family by family,
Mankind's teeming millions.
Yet I swear
By the rivers that run through the underworld
This is what I shall do.
You think heaven is safe?
We have a population of demi-gods,
Satyrs, nymphs, fauns, the playful
Spirits of wild places,
Astral entities who loiter about.
When we denied these the freedom of heaven
We compensated them
With their grottoes and crags, their woods and their
well-springs,
Their dells and knolls. In all these sanctuaries
We should protect them.
Imagine their fears
Since the uncontrollable Lycaon
Plotted against me, and attempted
To do away with me—Jove, King of Heaven,
Whose right hand
Rests among thunderheads and whose left
Sways the assemblies of heaven!"

The gods roared their outrage.
They shouted
For instant correction
Of this madman.
Just as when those gangsters
Tried to wash out Rome's name
With Caesar's blood,
Mankind recoiled

As at the world's ending and
The very air hallucinated horrors.

O Augustus, just as you see now
The solicitude of all your people
So did the Father of Heaven
Survey that of the gods.

Just so, too, the majesty of Jove
Quieted heaven with a gesture.
"This crime," he told them,
"Has been fully punished. What it was
And how I dealt with it, now let me tell you.
The corruption of mankind
Rose to my nostrils, here in heaven,
As a stench of putrid flesh.
Seeking better news of the species
I left Olympus, and in the shape of a man
Walked the earth.

If I were to recount, in every detail,
How man has distorted himself
With his greed, his lies, his indifference,
The end of time, I think,
Would overtake the reckoning.

Alerted as I was
I was still unprepared for what I found.

I had crossed Maenalus—
The asylum of lions and bears.

I had passed Cyllene
And the shaggy heights and gorges
Of freezing Lycaeus.

At nightfall
I came to the unwelcoming hearth
Of the Arcadian King.

I revealed, with a sign,

Punish for
bad choices,
abuse of
freedom

The presence of a god.
But when the whole court
Fell to the ground and worshipped,
King Lycaon laughed.

He called them credulous fools.
'The simplest of experiments,' he snarled,
'Will show us whether this guest of ours
Is the mighty god he wants us to think him
Or some common rascal. Then the truth
Will stare us all in the face.'

"Lycaon's demonstration
Was to be the shortest of cuts.
He planned to come to my bed, where I slept that
night,
And kill me.
But he could not resist embellishing
His little test
With one introductory refinement.

"Among his prisoners, as a hostage,
Was a Molossian. Lycaon picked this man,
Cut his throat, bled him, butchered him
And while the joints still twitched
Put some to bob in a stew, the rest to roast.

Violent,
vengeful
reflection
society +
time

"The moment
He set this mess in front of me on the table
I acted.
With a single thunderbolt
I collapsed his palazzo.
One bang, and the whole pile came down
Onto the household idols and jujus
That this monster favoured.
The lightning had gone clean through Lycaon.
His hair was in spikes.

Somehow he staggered
Half-lifted by the whumping blast
Out of the explosion.
Then out across open ground
Trying to scream. As he tried
To force out screams
He retched howls.
His screams
Were vomited howls.
Trying to shout to his people
He heard only his own howls.
Froth lathered his lips.
Then the blood-thirst, natural to him,
Went insane.
From that moment
The Lord of Arcadia
Runs after sheep. He rejoices
As a wolf starved near death
In a frenzy of slaughter.
His royal garments, formerly half his wealth,
Are a pelt of jagged hair.
His arms are lean legs.
He has become a wolf.

Crazy →
Worst
punish?

“But still his humanity clings to him
And suffers in him.
The same grizzly mane,
The same black-ringed, yellow,
Pinpoint-pupilled eyes, the same
Demented grimace. His every movement possessed
By the same rabid self.

“So one house is destroyed.
But one only. Through the whole earth
Every roof
Is the den of a Lycaon.

Lycaon:
greed,
weak man

In this universal new religion
All are fanatics—suckled
Not by the sweet wisdom of heaven
But by a wolf. All adore, all worship
Greed, cruelty, the Lycaon
In themselves. All are guilty.
Therefore all must be punished. I have spoken.”

As he ended, one half the gods
Added their boom of approval
To his rage. The other deepened it
With solid and silent assent.
All were quietly appalled
To imagine mankind annihilated.
What would heaven do
With a globe full of empty temples?
Altars attended
Only by spiders? Was earth's beauty
Henceforth to be judged
Solely by the single-minded
Palates of wild beasts
And returned to the worm
Because man had failed?

God comforted the gods.
If everything was left to him, he promised,
He could produce a new humanity—
Different from the first model and far
More prudently fashioned.

So now Jove set his mind to the deletion
Of these living generations. He pondered
Mass electrocution by lightning.
But what if the atoms ignited,
What if a single ladder of flame
Rushing up through the elements

Reduced heaven to an afterglow? Moreover,
God as he was, he knew
That earth's and heaven's lease for survival
Is nothing more than a lease.
That both must fall together—
The globe and its brightness combined
Like a tear
Or a single bead of sweat—
Into the bottomless fires of the first, last forge.

Afraid that he might just touch off that future
With such weapons, forged in that same smithy,
He reversed his ideas.
He dipped his anger in the thought of water.
Rain, downpour, deluge, flood—these
Could drown the human race, and be harmless.

Diluvian =
match
bible

In a moment he had withdrawn the blast
That fixes the Northern ice.
He tethered the parching winds
Off mountains and out of deserts
That bare the flaring blue and crack lips.
He gave the whole earth to the South Wind.
Darkening into the East, and into the West,
Two vast wings of water opened. One
Thunderhead filled heaven,
Feathered with darkness, bringing darkness
From below the Equator.
The face of this South Wind, as he came,
Boiled with squalling tempest.
Beard and hair were a whorl of hurricanes.
He dragged whole oceans up, like a peacock shawl.
And as he drubbed and wrung the clouds
Between skyfuls of fist, quaking the earth,
Shocks of thunder dumped the floods.
Juno's messenger, the rainbow,

Swept from earth to heaven, topping up the darkness.
Every crop was flattened. The farmer's year
Of labour dissolved as he wept.

But still there was not water enough in heaven
To satisfy Jove's fury.
So Neptune, his brother, god of the seas,
Brought up tidal waves,
And assembled every river
There in the bottom of the ocean
And ordered them to open their aquifers
Ignoring all confines.
The rivers raced back to their sources
And erupted.

Neptune himself harpooned the earth with his trident.
Convulsed, it quaked open
Crevasse beneath crevasse
Disgorging the subterranean waters.

Now flood heaps over flood.
Orchards, crops, herds, farms are scooped up
And sucked under
By the overland maelstrom.
Temples and their statues liquefy
Kneeling into the swirls.
Whatever roof or spire or turret
Resists the rip of currents
Goes under the climbing levels.
Till earth and sea seem one—a single sea
Without a shore.

A few crowds are squeezed on diminishing islets
Of hill-tops.

Men are rowing in circles aimlessly, crazed,
Where they ploughed straight furrows or steered
wagons.

One pitches a sail over corn.

Another steers his keel
Over his own chimney.
One catches a fish in the top of an elm.
Anchors drag over grazing
Or get a grip under vine roots.
Where lean goats craned for brown tufts
Fat seals gambol over and under each other.

The Nereids roam astounded
Through submerged gardens,
Swim in silent wonder into kitchens,
Touch the eyes of marble busts that gaze
Down long halls, under the wavering light.

Dolphins churn through copses.
Hunting their prey into oak trees, they shake out acorns
That sink slowly.
Wolves manage awhile,
Resting their heads on drowned and floating sheep.
Lions ride exhausted horses. Tigers
Try to mount foundering bullocks.
The strong stag's fine long legs,
Growing weedier, tangle in undercurrents.
The wild boar, the poor swimmer, soon goes under.
Even his faithful heavy defenders,
The thunderbolt and lightning-flash of his tusks,
Have joined the weight against him.
Birds grow tired of the air.
The ocean, with nowhere else to go,
Makes its bed in the hills,
Pulling its coverlet over bare summits.

While starvation picks off the survivors.

Drowned mankind, imploring limbs outspread,
Floats like a plague of dead frogs.

*But some
must live...*