Postmodern Openings
ISSN: 2068-0236 | e-ISSN: 2069-9387
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2019, Volume 10, Issue 4, pages: 132-143 | doi:10.18662/po/98

The Human Existential Regression and the Myth of Prometheus

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Abstract: The theme of the Adamic Fall, of the loss of the heavenly existential paradigm was one of the major creative reasons for the entire European cultural tradition. The role played by the constant reporting of early theological environments to translations of biblical texts cannot be neglected in this context. The myth of the collapse of the human being in the ephemeral mundane space and time is mainly claimed from the Vetero-testamentary tradition, taken up and conceptually continued by the Christian thinking. The way in which this classic motif was received and assimilated in the sphere of all European spirituality, and not only, indicates a prior propaedeutic background, a pre-primary preparatory framework. This cultural background appears to be the universe of Ancient Greek mythology, the universe given to humanity through the writings of the Great minstrels of Greek antiquity such as Homer or Hesiod. From this universe, the image of a hierarchy of human fall begins with the loss of the Golden Age, which emphasizes the Prometheic gesture of stealing the fire from the gods, as symbol of knowledge and technological advancement. Is this myth that indicates the risk of the defiance of a universal axiomatic by the man, still present nowadays? Or does it find its dramatic confirmation nowadays?

Keywords: *Myth; symbol; gods; titans; heroes; ages of mankind; damnation; collapse; hollowness; Pandora; Prometheus.*

How to cite: Cucu, M., & Lenţa, O. (2019). The Human Existential Regression and the Myth of Prometheus. *Postmodern Openings, 10*(4), 132-143. doi:10.18662/po/98

1. Introductory milestones. A myth opened to the hermeneutical approaches of the past, present and future.

The theme of the existential fall of the human being was, for most of the spiritual traditions of mankind, doubled by the nostalgic evocation of the lost Edenic state. If for the ancient Jewish divinity is represented by the image of a sovereign personality characterized by an absolute vigilant principle, for the ancient Greeks, the gods consistently manifest the whims specific to human beings. Thus, many early authors of the ancient Greece believed in a full behavioural correspondence between mortal realms and the kingdom of immortal divinities. The gods seemed to manifest, therefore, negative inclinations such as jealousy, arbitrary wrath, envy, and, in particular, greed. In the poem *Works and Days*, one of the representative authors of the era of ancient Greek rapists, Hesiod, warns that this prospect could be flawed, the image of divinity being overly anthropologized.

Thus, through the mythological language, Hesiod evokes several symbolic conflicting situations developed between the human race and the divine presence. One of these circumstances has as central characters the titan *Prometheus* who assumes the role of protector of men in a gesture of pride and defiance against the Olympian gods, and their master and parent, Zeus. In the approach to reveal the dark and corrupt part of the Divine Being, Prometheus offers it the opportunity to choose between the quality and quantity of a ritual sacrifice. The God chooses what *appears* to be only quantity. In fact, he chose what is specific to divinity, namely the light matter that can be subjected to burning on the altars of the temples in the gesture of adoration, sacrifice and ritual digesting, which will subsequently extend to other religious traditions, through the act of incense of the place of worship. On the other hand, the myth tells that, people's choice of quality, in fact, of the concentrated material factor, meant the inauguration of the entry of human destiny on the path of assimilation and constant takeover of matter, on the road of companionhood with the weight and low pulses of the decomposable corporality (Graves, 2018: 124-125). Hesiod reveals, in the context of the myth evoked, the fact that the gods were not deceived by an alleged negative inclination towards vice and absence of self-sufficiency but, the people who, alongside Prometheus, believed they could avoid divine vigilance were deceived, as for them. The choice of concentrated matter, the reporting of life and survival to the dynamics of transforming the matter has brought with it the necessity of its takeover, craft and the calling of its inexhaustible resources. Thus, fire as a vital element in both the processing of material food and technological and social progress has become a new

factor of conflict between men and gods. Their sovereign, Zeus, as the keeper of lightning, prohibits men's access to the mysteries of fire and this is to be kidnapped from the god's workshops by Prometheus and given to the people in the form of a founding spark. The reply for this offense did not delay to appear, according to Hesiod's accounts, and it resulted in the poisoned gift of Pandora, through the box that once opened designed the multitude of endless dramas and tragedies, the hope being the one that was not released and in a constant state of postponement of the fulfilment of its flight over the human destiny. At the same time, the titan Prometheus will be chained eternally to the damnation rock, and Zeus's eagle will torment him unceasingly (Hesiod, 1957:48). It is thus fulfilled in the language of Hesiod's myth, the phenomenon of the fall of the human being, the loss of the state of Edenic innocence. *The Golden Age* is deserted by man and he is stepping into the dimension of his tragic history, constantly intertwined by multiple dramas and unfulfillment. As with the vetero-testamentary accounts, an erroneous choice, a gesture of ancestral disobedience lies at the base of mankind's detachment from the neighbourhood with the gods but it also constitutes the initial impulse for the development of the entire spatial-temporal human journey from immemorial past so far. Before the scale of the conceptualizations of ancient Greek thinking on the phenomenon of temporal and human condition, on how the inner mechanisms of human consciousness can relate to the issue of death as an undeniable landmark that outlines reality against the background of temporal flux, there have therefore been the fearsome attempts at mythological meditation of the ancient Greek poets who understood the mystery that surrounds the emergence and disappearance of the human being located under incidence of emptiness as if it were detached or banished from a higher place where the temporal dissolution is non-existent. These mythological, founding approaches give a measure of the depth of the ancient Greek spirit that cannot be approached, as Nietzsche (1998) suggested, as a simple accident of a flourishing civilization (p. 26).

2. Associations with the myth of the vetero-testamentary Genesis. Positive and negative effects of the prometheic gesture. Pandora's Symbolism.

The Prometheic gesture proves to be an opposite approach to what was originally announced, as opposed to its optimistic, naïve and responsive intent. What was intended to be a blessing to the people was subsequently developed as an uncut chain of misfortune, a primordial curse brought to all

mankind. There are some interesting similarities with the vetero-testamentary texts that address the same theme of the regression of the human being at the level of insertion in the spatial and temporal dimension and of prosaism of the ephemeral corporality. Thus, the intention and plan to kidnap the divine fire are materialized not by humans, but by a titan, so through a mythical being belonging to the rival group of the Olympian gods, the confrontation between them is a moment that inaugurated the cosmic order governed by Zeus. In the accounts of the vetero-testamentary Genesis, it is also said that another being, namely the demonic serpent, is the one that prompted the collapse of the Adamic being through a proposal that seemed constructive but located outside the divine imperatives. At the same time, the fall from the sphere of the heavenly existential innocence determines, in both mythological registers, the meeting with the obscure forces of nature and its own ontic constitution. Adam and Eve, the effort of the processing of matter and the people struck by the curse of the gods brought through Pandora's Box meet the darkness of a violent nature whose pulsations and primary wilderness must dominate and control it for the benefit and progress of collective and individual destiny. With the advent of Pandora, people are no longer born of the Earth, holding the attributes of the vigorous and strong nature, they are no longer like trees, vertical, set in their own ascending and they are no longer innocent beings. The myth emphasizes the idea of discovering sexuality as a source of voluptuous pleasure, but also of endless suffering. The fall in the age of sexuality is interpreted by Hesiod as a collapse from the heights of naive Edenic life in the sphere of decadent incarnations, in the perimeter of assuming matter not only as a subject submitted to tiring machinations, but also as the attire of our own conscience (Vernant, 1995, pp. 316-318). Again one can notice the presence of the same idea, which also appears in the vetero-testamentary text, according to which the birth is a damnation for mankind, the divine curse that targets Eve, projecting upon her the sufferings of procreation, recalling this fact to the fullest. Another element that Hesiod's myth of Prometheus brings to the fore is the concept of *work*. The loss of the Golden Age, the existential regression of the transcendent-edenic sphere in the spatio-temporal framework also involved the meeting with the phenomenon of constant labour. If divine gifts seemed to be available to people in the heavenly state, with the great collapse, all that becomes paramount necessity, vital for the new human existence will have to be gained, gained through sustained efforts to explore, conquer and process matter, that is, through a huge effort of *collective and individual work*. Again once can feel a close proximity to the ideas of the myth of the vetero-

testamentary Genesis where it is mentioned, in the divine curse on the adamic being, the fact that only by exhausting work will the man acquire the resources necessary for his life. Along with the thesis of survival through work, there is also an evocation of another new reality, which the Edenic man, the man of the Golden Age, had not known. It is about the tragedy and cruelty of war. What was bestowed in the sphere of living with the gods, now, with the great existential regression, will often be achieved through the path of conflict, the destruction and conquest of others. The poisonous spectrum of war appears as a natural component of a world in which man sees himself faced with the difficulty of finding primordial resources, but also with their limitation to certain geographic areas that must be addressed and subject to full control. Thus, is inaugurates the cult of the *founding warrior* of fortresses and civilizations who, in his search and exploitation of new resources, has conflicts with others and his victory binds the beginning of some nations and cultures that can thrive in the future. He becomes the legendary hero who sets the foundations of the fortress, the kingdom, and even the empire aimed to mark the evolution of the entire history of mankind. The choice of Prometheus to confront divinity therefore generates according to Hesiod's myth and interpretation, multiple effects aimed at radically changing the destiny and paradigm of human existence. Although the overall perspective is dominated by the suppression of the thesis that, for the man, the loss of the Golden Age and living with the gods represented the greatest tragedy of humanity, however, there is no lack of interpretative valences which put in a positive light the emergence of Pandora as a direct effect and divine replica to the Prometheic offensive gesture. Thus, in the frameworks of ancient Greek mythology, Pandora is also found under the name *Anesidora*, that is, the one that brings out the gifts from the depths, the one that confers constructive energies discovered and brought from the abyss of nature. It can therefore represent a mediator being between the uncut forces of nature and the constructive capacities of man, between the dangerous, oscillating, unpredictable environment and the rationality of the human being. The Greeks recognized in it the patron saint of fertility, the fruit emerged by the perseverance of the long and systematic labour of the earth. As a symbol of the taming and settlement at the disposal of the human will of the overwhelming pulses of nature, Pandora therefore acquires the valences of a mythical character with positive foundation functions. Incidentally, the fact that she was assumed as the artistry of the craft can only be the result or continuation of the mythical assertion that she was created by the god of craft, *Hephaestus*. It endowed her with the typical beauty of the unexplored nature, awaiting its discovery. Hesiod evokes the

fact that Pandora is depicted with a gold wreath on which the god has burned images of aquatic and terrestrial life. From a hermeneutical perspective, one can see the presence of three distinct symbols. It is about the crown as a symbol of circumlocution, as a symbol of mastery. Then, the symbolic presence of animals from different natural registers, aquatic and terrestrial beings, indicates the idea of an application of control over the entire nature. So Pandora or Anesidora carries with her the signs of human progress by exercising the explorer's control on the totality of the environment. Again, similarities can be seen with the myth of biblical Genesis, where it is mentioned that, after the loss of paradise, man has been given a destiny of working and exploiting the natural complexity in which he was replaced. Interestingly, Hesiod's myth also mentions that the goddess *Athena* gave Pandora a veil and a dress and these elements come to indicate the inauguration of the art of weaving and light crafts, specific to female concerns. Basically, through Pandora, the gods conferred to people the order of the division of concerns between male and female presence, the social-productive activities being thus distinctly delimited and organized. The Olympian gods will bless the work and the one who works, so that the dilemma that arises here, is if Hesiod's myth presents the appearance of Pandora only as a punishment to Prometheus's gesture or if it sees in this occurrence the possibility of a revival following the dramatic existential regressions and the loss of the Golden Age. If with regard to the axiomatic importance of Pandora's occurrence, Hesiod tends to oscillate between the recognition of certain positive aspects and dramatic-destructive valences characterizing such an occurrence in the existential dynamics of the archaic man, concerning the traits conferred to the titan Prometheus, the prospect is a negative one. Thus, for Hesiod, Prometheus consistently exhibits a pragmatic and mercantile intelligence. It does not tend to large observations, to distant horizons, to the future of mankind. It focuses on the immediate benefits of *here* and *now*, on the favours and opportunities of the ephemeral moment. Attention and lucidity are focused, in this context, on the outcome of present, on insignificant victories in relation to eternity or extensions of distant history. At the same time, Prometheus manifests a lack of prudence and wisdom that betrays an inability to report to transcendence and how people approach the gods. The failure to understand the divine ability to act and think was the basis for the attempt to deceive Zeus, which resulted in the damnation of all mankind.

3. Three classical interpretative versions of the myth of Prometheus: Hesiod, Aeschylus and Plato. Conceptual similarities and distinctions. A parallel to the Platonic myth of the Cave.

The myth of Prometheus also met other interpretations in the dimension of ancient Greece's spirituality, substantially different from that of Hesiod exhibited in *Works and Days* and *Theogonia*. Thus, the Aeschylus resumes the myth's approach, emphasizing Prometheus' organizational capabilities. In fact, Aeschylus will consider that this myth expresses the fall of man from the place of heavenly innocence in the area of the space-temporal immanence, immanence that supports the evolution of human civilization. Thus, Prometheus is the first decisive initiative of social organisation and distribution of work and its results at the level of the human fortress. From this perspective, the regression of the human being, with the loss of the Golden Age, coincided with the inauguration of man's assumption not only of labour but also of the social-political order, order capable of guaranteeing the security of the evolutionary dynamics of mankind as a whole. For *Plato*, the symbolic importance of the character Prometheus and the myth built around it is entirely different than in the case of poets such as Hesiod and Aeschylus. Plato, when referring to the myth of Prometheus, is considering the version of this myth which appears to have reached him from Protagoras through Socrate's accounts. According to this variant, Epimeteus, the brother of Prometheus, when he gave the gifts and qualities of all beings, he omitted or neglected to provide people with the specific capacities of crafts. Thus, Prometheus pledged to kidnap the fire from Hephaestus's workshops and had the intention to also steal other gifts for the mankind. Managing to bring only the spark of the craft, Prometheus opened the era of the technological evolution of man, the ages of the dominion of nature through technology. Therefore, for Plato, the Prometheus myth indicates this vital passage of man towards the time of the excessive and excessively-consuming obedience of the whole complex of nature-specific forces and energies. Another unique aspect of Plato's interpretation of this myth is the assumption of a narrative-mythical detail that was considered the source of the Platonic philosophical approach of the differences between social classes and functions. Plato insisted on an indication of the myth version reported by Protagoras, namely the fact that the art of politics, of negotiation and of military discipline were those gifts that Prometheus was no longer able to kidnap from the gods but they were subsequently offered by the god Hermes, the mediating divinity between Zeus and mortal beings. In fact, according to the mythical account, Hermes

taught the politics to people, with the secrets of negotiating between states, and the military art. On the basis of this episodic fact, Plato considered that the craft arts given by Prometheus's gesture and the appearance of Pandora must be considered inferior in relation to political and military art, fields learnt from and through the wisdom of the god Hermes. Therefore, the craft social classes should have been considered inferior, in the fortress hierarchy, compared to politicians and militaries. The latter relate directly to the well-being, the evolution, the efficient organisation and the protection of other social classes. In Plato's view, there is the idea of the necessity of delimitation between the community spirit, specific to politicians and militaries, and the spirit of private property, characteristic of craftsmen and farmers. In fact, this difference integrates in the bivalent ample ontological and gnoseological vision proposed and supported by Plato along his entire philosophical endeavour, a vision that gives the image of a dual world in which there is a superior dimension, of perfect ideas and a lower world, of imperfect copies. Thus, politicians and militaries, as disciples of Hermes, must be led, in thought, deed and attitude, by the ideal nature of the great visions, located in direct correspondence with the transcendence of a divine empire. On the other hand, farmers and craftsmen are to assume the status of people of the immanence, of action and thought aiming at surviving, but also at perfecting the standard of everyday life. They hold a consciousness deeply anchored in the soil of this materialistic and pragmatic world. Their values are not in connection with the possibility of the existence of a superior ontic sphere, of divine order, they are the human existences of the earth, dedicated to the constant effort of adaptation, conquest and processing in relation to the resources and the hidden potential of nature. Thus, in Plato's view, from the interpretation of the myth of Prometheus, as it came through Socrates and Protagoras's accounts, it can be said that the ideational wisdom or intelligence must belong to politicians and career militaries and the technological intelligence belongs to craftsmen and farmers. In other words, Plato argues that the governors must be characterized by wisdom, militaries by courage and craftsmen by labour. And for Plato's interpretation, however, the Promethean myth comes to indicate that the loss of the heavenly state, the regression of the human being from the areas of coexistence with the gods constituted a negative result of Prometheus's attempt to deceive the divine vigilance and to underestimate the self-awareness of Zeus. According to Plato, any excessive anchoring in the dynamics of this ephemeral world carries the risk of generating the forgetting of the gods and the imperatives they set upon people, and this oblivion always determines the individual and collective

tragedies and dramas of the human being (Platon, 2000, p. 23). In the Platonic vision, however, there is also the possibility of an inversion of the phenomenon of human regression. Thus, the human being damned and positioned in the dimension of a spatial and temporal illusion can be capable of a resurrection of consciousness, a release from the typology and the stage of the existence of spiritual decadence. This fact is symbolically reproduced by Plato in the myth of the cave, where the event of an ontic and gnoseological detachment is evoked, of an existential escape from the sphere of the immoral world, of coarse corporations and imperfect copies. Essentially, this myth presents a group of people who, being positioned in a deep cave, mistake the shadows on its walls, shadows generated by the light of an obscure fire, with the ultimate and unquestionable reality of the world. A member of the group manages to free himself, reaches the surface of the cave, comes into contact with the world of authentic realities, with the world of perfect ideas but, as he comes back from the light of this world into the cavern, in the darkness of former comrades, he fails to persuade them of what he has seen and experimented outside the cave (Platon, 1996, p. 93). The myth makes a decisive reference to the situation of the post-prometheic man, to the decadent human paradigm, subjected to divine damnation and isolated in the cave of ignorance, of daily transience. This man can be offered the chance of the great liberation and return to the divine light, in the world where, according to Plato, the ideas of good, beautiful, right and truth are sovereign, the idea of good being the guiding principle. The hermeneutical prospects developed by *Martin Heidegger* on the cave myth will emphasize this aspect, insisting on understanding the word truth as *aletheia*, that is, the state of *unhiding what is hidden*, the state of revelation of the last reality and the *alley*, the path to Theos, to the god (Heidegger, 1988, p. 180). Therefore, the one who travels the reverse way from the decadent ages to the edenic state steps on the road leading to the god and finally encounters the lost light of it.

Alongside Hesiod and Plato, *Aeschylus* also proposed another interpretation of the myth of Prometheus and its mythological-symbolic consequences. To him, the authentic villain of the myth is represented by Zeus, the Olympian leader. His decisions are relentless, devoid of any tolerance or indulgence in respect of human beings. There is therefore a disproportionate disparity between the naïve actions of the people and the radical nature of divine replicas. To Aeschylus, the loss of the paradise must not be compensated by a postulation of a possible return solution. The Golden Age must not and does not deserve to be recovered. On the contrary, it is necessary for the man to assume the effort of the technological

work, of the discovery and of the elaborate obedience of the forces of nature. Through technological toil and the will of a definite self, the man will tend to replace the religious reporting and adoring of gods with a religion of his own being, with a self-worship, with a cult of his perfectibility. The gods will thus be permanently banished from people's concerns and a society of progress and full goodwill will announce its arrival at the horizon of history. This will be the human replica of the attitude dominated by the injustice and cruelty of the Olympian gods. It is noted how the man freed from the relationship with the gods proposed by Aeschylus presents significant similarities with the Supra-Man of Friedrich Nietzsche, announced by Zarathustra, the imaginary prophet of his reactionary ideas. However, unlike Nietzschean enthusiasm, a prudent balance is retained by Aeschylus, with warnings regarding the divine replica being frequently evoked as well as references to a possible failure of the human uprising and human progress without reporting to transcendence (Eschil, 1982:239). At the same time, as evidenced by the few Aeschylus's texts that were preserved, even if he hoped for a new balancing of the cosmic balance between the gods and the people, at a possible time of peace in which, under the auspices of the goddess of wisdom, Athena, Zeus, along with the goddess of Destiny, Moira would accept to re-welcome the human being in their blessings and gratitude. It can be said, in this context, that, according to Aeschylus, there are several ontic assumptions, possible scenarios of future human destiny, only its subsequent evolution indicating which of the versions is the real one (Eschil, 1979: 195).

In all three interpretative versions of the myth of Prometheus, it is noted the tendency to invest this ancestral character with the valences of a *civilizing archetypal hero*. Practically, regardless of the consequences of his anti-divine acts, he is considered the initiator of a first gesture of affirmation at the level of human consciousness. According to the myth, before his terrible gesture, people did not have self-awareness, they did not think about the essential and possible meaning of their existence. Only through this initial shock, through the disturbing and dramatic impact of the collapse under divine damnation, did they acquire the consciousness of the self, but also the suffering of being stuck in space and time and in the soil of historical transience (Kernbach, 1978: 263). Interestingly, the name Prometheus means provision and it appears to be a terminological derivative of the Sanskrit word pramantha which translates into swastika or fire-burning tool, not incidentally this mythical character being considered the bringer of fire to humans. It appears that his image was superposed with that of a Carian hero, Palamede, the inventor of the arts and the god of Babylon, Ea, creator of the perfect man. All this symbolic and terminological syncretism

contributed to the construction of the image of Prometheus, as it came to us from the great early Greece poets, but also from the thinking, with frequent references to the mythological symbolism of Plato (Graves, 2018: 128).

4. Brief conclusion: the actuality of Prometheus's myth as openness to realities of human consciousness.

Do myths such as Prometheus's still have relevance nowadays? Shouldn't we consider them simple memories of a long-gone creative fantasy? Or perhaps, on the contrary, the themes tackled by these myths are extremely current? Looking at the tragedies of the 20th century, we will notice how the mythical subjects of the denial of the gods, of faith in the archetypal hero or of progress towards the supra-man represented the essential resort for the doctrines that generated incalculable dramas. From this perspective, it may be necessary, more than ever, to reinterpret mankind's great myths, their philosophical and psychological revaluation as productions of the dynamics of the collective unconscious and as symbolic echoes of spiritual realities (Jung, 2015:93), doubled by addressing the old descriptions and interpretations that were brought to them by ancient authors such as Hesiod, Homer, Plato or Aeschylus. Starting from the deepening of these early hermeneutical approaches, we will refer to the moral warnings and the ontological and gnoseologic conclusions proposed by these early visionaries, which have a pronounced topical degree. The dramas of the 20th century generated and sustained through the cultivation of these forms of beliefs and collective investment in ancestral myths, were perhaps already anticipated in the thoughts of Aeschylus or Plato, in the meditations of Homer or Hesiod. The vital risk of the current society is that, like the late 19th century one, it blindly trusts the mirage and the fascination of mythical themes without thinking about the disastrous consequences of such naive projections. Following the great authors of antiquity, we will notice that they have always indicated the presence of the risk of collapse, their mythological characters, from Achilles and Prometheus to Sisyphus and Atlas, being tributary to either selfishness or an often imprudent momentum.

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