198 - PROMETEU: MITH AND REALITY AT THE UNIVERSITY

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Introduction:

Prometheus decides to give consciousness to the lovely and tragic creature he had done. Now men can dominate the universe. They know nature, know themselves, and know life general feeling. Thunder do not make them afraid; the nightmares of their own dreams do not make them fear. However, after conquering the earth, the sea, the moon, the nature and themselves, the cyber and the genetics man still keeps on creating his own myths.

Through intelligence, language and feeling, the first myths connected all man could conquer on a life he didn't ask for. Myths are generated from an imaginative projection - anthropormophic vision - which man makes from his major experiences: birth, love and death. Man bends fears and suffers when involved on the idea of death, on a love, which dominates him, and on a kind of nature whose phenomena (sun, rain, wind, and illness) scare him. In the same way it was experienced by the primitive societies, myth maintains up to today, vitality and a splendid image: it cares for the same problems - living, moral and social troubles - that still affect humanity.

Myth appears as a representation system, structured according to social distributions and practices. The French sociology school presented one of the clearest and most coherent theories about this structure. On Pierre Ansart's Ideology, Conflicts and Power (1978), it is possible to meet arguments, which point out that social logic in its totality is ideally transposed to the myth logic. The author organizes this discussion on Durkheim: the gods are nothing but the symbolic expression of reality.

This statement is even more meaningful when we take Ernest Cassirer's (1994) Essays on Mankind, in which he considers that Durkheim, when approaching social character, essential for myth, departs from the principle that we will never be able to explain myth adequately if we keep on looking for their resources on the physical world. Cassirer explains that the real model of the myth is society, not nature. All of its fundamental motifs are projections of man's social life. (p.133)

Referring to myth logic, Cassirer (op.cit) shows that, among all phenomena of the human culture, myth is one of the most resistant to an analysis merely logical, for myth is non-theoretical in its own sense and essence. It defies and faces our thought fundamental categories. Its logic - if there is any - cannot be measured by any of our conceptions of truth, no matter if empirical or scientific, the author says. It is Philosophy task to convince itself that the creations of the function of making myths should have a philosophical and comprehensible sense.

The mythic thought, due to its origin and principles, is a traditional thought, because the myth has no means to understand, explain and interpret the present form of human life, unless it is projected to a remote past (Casssirer, op.cit). What has got its roots on this mythic past; what has been since then; what has existed since unmemorable times is as firm as it is unquestionable.

It is also unquestionable that the symbolical thought and behavior are among the most important characteristics of human life, and that all progress of human culture is based on these conditions. To understand the structure and the functions of the myths on the traditional societies do not mean only to elucidate a step on the history of human thought. The study of this theme is essential to modern sciences not only because they are linked to the basic questions on the world meaning and on human essence but also because the comprehension of our forms of language, expression and communication are essentially dependent on them. Mircea Eliade, one of the most important myth-scholar from nowadays, in his Myth and Reality (1994) tells us that "The world talks to man and, to understand this language, it is enough to know the myths and to decipher its symbols"(p.125)

Living, hearing and daring to understand the language of the University day-to-day, we aim at this paper to integrate the mythic horizons to the symbolic expression of the University world. On the university diversity, it is explicit the privileged "locus" of intellectual effervescence, which, due to its own nature, is not ready yet: its primordial tendency is the continuous production of knowledge - assumed wisdom. This wisdom island makes us symbolically dive into the process interfaces and into the production of knowledge manifested on the investigation of the real.

If the academy role is to venture on the creation of new knowledge, its daily engagement should be with the venture of creating a new university. We share with Luckesi (1991) the origins of our dreams, of our utopias, when we say that they are on the efforts of man, of cultures, through history, to conquer a space in which man can constitute himself wholly as man. Therefore, our unique justification to approach this theme under the mythology perspective is mainly to elucidate that what labels the myth of a university engaged with reality is not equality but the difference, the divergence on the convergence, the multiple facing the unity - this is the university.

From the Myth Prometheus to the University

The Hellenic mythology is one of the most genius conceptions humanity has produced. The Greek people, so observing, created with their fantasies, primary and secondary divinities, gods and heroes, new names and pictures for the different phenomena of natural reality. The occidental culture, specially literature and arts, owe much of its soul and meaning to the Greek Mythology which, surpassing time, still maintains its serenity, balance and happiness.

The direct and indirect relations with existence and the world take the pictures of the gods who live in the Olympics, the surface and the wombs of earth. Thus, beside the family gods, there appear the gods from war and peace, from plantation and from the sailors, the most varied figures which are condensed as the reflections of the desires, needs, historical facts, social and economical situations. The gods come to share with the human beings happiness, hates and other feelings. They come to represent the deep expression of the basic features of human condition and of the dimensions that

Condition assumes in the environment and through the times.

The word myth comes from the Greek mythos and it means fable. The word fable refers to events which are really imagined but which do not modify human condition. In this sense, however, an aspect is hidden, a core which has got a truth. The myth tells, therefore, a true story of events which are eternal because they repeat themselves, similarly to the repetition of life

cycles. This "eternal history" implies on thinking about man - a mortal being, organized in society, with the obligation of working to live, subjected to events which do not depend on his desires. Mythology describes human history through the times. Therefore, some events can be lost on the chronological memory but they are often preserved on the "mythic" memory.

In his defense on the creation of myths, Cassirer (op.cit) shows that there is a principle of formation of myths which makes them to be more than an unexpected set of imagination and fables. The formation of myths obey to a kind of necessity that is inherent to culture, and so they can be considered to be cultural assumptions. In the relation of myths to culture, we can meet in Teves (1993) another approach which points out that in Malinowski's perspective (1970) there are two basic functions inherent to myths: to explain the social order which exists in historical terms and justify this very order, relating it to a right and so giving it its moral dimension. In this way, the myth can be instrumentalized to legitimate the public power.

Mircea Eliade (op.cit) considers the myth to be an archetypal model for all creations, no matter the level in which it takes places : biological, physicological, spiritual. The myth major function is to fix the sample models of our meaningful human actions. In the author's opinion, the myth will come as a symbolic stage of internal and external fights which man faces on the way to his evolution, on the conquering of his personality.

Taking Pierre Ansart's (op.cit) assumptions again, we can understand that the myth is not exactly either a belief or a faith attitude: it is the daily experience, the lively imaginary, the way man gets in touch with themselves, with the others and with the world.(p.23) The myth thus appears as "a system of representation structured according to the social distributions and practices." The social logic comes to be completely transposed - and ideally - to the myth logic. It comes as an attempt to penetrate, through imagination, on the hidden places which cannot be explained in any other way: the mystery of existence.

From the mythic figures, we point out the myth of Prometheus who, on the history creation of evolution marks the beginning of man's consciousness. Its meaning is explicited by the meaning of its own name - to think beforehand. A descendent from the Titas, Prometheus has got a tendency to revolt. But it is not a revolution of senses that he symbolizes : it is the revolution of the spirit. It is the revolution of a spirit which wants to be equal to the divine intelligence - or at least to get from it some of its lights.

According to Gaston Bachelard (1965)the myth of Prometheus illustrates human wish for the intellectuality- of a intellectuality similar to the gods' one. The author thus proposes to get under the complex name of Prometheus all the tendencies which make us want to know as much as our parents do, more than our parents do, as much as our professors do, more than our professors do. The supremacy got by the most powerful instincts attracts a greater number of individuals each time more. If the pure intellectuality is splendid, it is certainly the main characteristic of an evolution which is specifically human.

From the Hellenic Mythology up to the latest centuries, many myths were generated. On the 20th century, among many other myths, there was produced the myth of Science - and of its neutrality-, which is rooted on the university world under the name of knowledge production. Knowledge is therefore the modern myth of the academic production. Besides, the process of myth is often worked on in the name of a wisdom, which is presented as the unique truth, fragmented, unquestionable and capable of dealing with the multiplicity of reality. To assume the continuity of knowledge; to assume the new kinds of knowledge and the plurality of reason is the way to introduce the possibility of inquiring the crystallized wisdom. By revealing these produced myths, it is possible - according to Teves (1975) - to understand better the justification for its different representations. To contextualize these ideas, even that on a concise way, seems to be an important door to comprehend them.

On the diversity of the universities, certainly, the universities are not a finished project. To make them it still lacks, on the university day-to-day, a being who is capable of teaching and of loving, of investigating and of wondering, of remembering and of creating, of giving himself to the extension of his produced knowledge. A being who, with his powerful soul, is humble enough to fear the gods and to render them honors and rituals. It still lacks the man in the university. To make him, following Prometheus, the daily life at the university chases the Prometheus-like myth of intellectuality.

The creation of the University

On the classical antiquity, especially in Greece, pupils got around the Master to learn medicine, laws, philosophy, and rethorics. Like Socrates, each Master conducted his school - made his school.

The Catholic Church, trying to base its political and religious actions, was responsible for joining all of these kinds of learning into one unique institution - the university. So the university is born identified with society and its culture, and so becoming the channel for molding thought.(Sucupira 1972- 7). At that time, much of the intellectual work so produced was shaped around the faith truths, the religion truths, thus creating the dogmas. The emphasis was not on the search of truth, but on the increasing of knowledge. The Church and the State controlled any kind of intellectual production in order to maintains the unity on the basic knowledge for all fields. Take for instance Colombo's case. He proposed himself to sail to India through the Occident. On May 1486, the King of Spain decided to take some advises from the University of Salamanca professors. Talavera's group advised against the trip. Besides theological reasons, the opposing argument was on the fact that the Earth diameter be bigger than Colombo's figures. The data offered by the professors were more right, even though there had been no correct measurement. With its imperfect figures, Salamanca got it right as concerns the impossibility of reaching India through the Occident; but Colombo got it right through his impulses and dreams - which led to the discovery of a New World. What proved Salamanca to be incompetent, pointed Buarque (1994), was not related to mistakes on knowledge: it was related to its fear of making mistakes and its protective passion for dogmas: the fear of venturing sailing towards the newness.

With Renaissance, there comes the Modern Times. Nevertheless, the University does not follow this new spirit. Chained to the structure it had created on the first centuries, the university was the womb neither for discoveries nor for the great painters and inventors. Sagres School was created to invent sailing, instead of taking back and developing the knowledge produced at the University of Coimbra. At this time, says Luckesi (op.cit), the university is characterized by the repetition of dogmas which were dictated as uncontestable truths. The dogmas were imposed - taught through thesis, which were demonstrated by the label of authority. These thesis, if contested, provoked the anger of the authorities and institutions which maintained the orthodoxy.

Those universities were thus turned to knowledge as an end in itself, an unprofitable knowledge. Created to form the aristocracy, the university however suffered many changes through the times, and it was adapted to the new conditions imposed from reality. With the industrial revolution and the consolidation of the capitalist production means, there was the demand of specialization and of techniques which could serve to the new social work division. On the long run, the universities had to mold themselves to the different processes of economical and social developments generated on each place.

It was under this perspective that Wihelm von Humbold idealized the university as the research institution. At the first time, it seems to be the place not only for transmitting a constituted knowledge but the place to be the core of knowledge production. This ideology born in Berlin became the dominant ideology and it came to visualize the university activity as an endless search for knowledge - and the permanent search for new truths. This time corresponds to the beginning of a university

engaged with the scientific truth, the beginning of the university of invention and research. At the same time that Humbold claimed for the association of professor/student as a means to constitute a community to create knowledge, he also stated the principle of freedom on teaching and learning.

Despite of being one of the oldest social institution, the word universitas was originally applied to some social corporations; during the 14th century, however, the term came to be used exclusively to refer to that community made of professors and students. It has been a long time that the university has been present all over the world: Bolonha (1108), Paris (1211), Salamanca (1243), Oxford (1249), Coimbra (1290). In America, the first university was founded in Lima (1551); afterwards, there came the one from Mexico (1553) and Harvard (1636), among some others. Coming as a result of tradition and varying on time and space, the university has got three main aspects : community, immunity, and university. Oliven (1993) calls our attention to the fact that this set of institutions, which historically have acquired varied forms and functions, according to their specific targets, have created, on the people's imaginary, an outline which is made of contradictions and which is quite hard to define.

The first Brazilian colleges, named by the expression "superior learning", were established during the last century. With a didactic organization and a power structure based on dogmas, they maintain the aristocratic character of teaching and learning - anchored on the label "superior"- and they are far from the needs of the majority of the country people. Moreover, they have no special engagement with the stimulus to science and technology development.

The first university in Brazil - the University of Rio de Janeiro - was created on 1920, joining many isolated colleges. On this way, it had no substance - neither on the functional structure nor on the historical level. The new created institution offered no alternative to the "superior learning": it gave no contribution to the technical courses and it was quite alienated on its curriculum disposal. Besides these points, its objectives were highly selective to form the dominant elit.

On the other way around, the University of São Paulo, founded in 1934, presented many innovations, concerning objectives as well as organization. Under the scientific perspective, this university became quite well-known as a research center for many fields.

A Knowledge Island or an Island of Social Reclusion?

Joining the mythic horizons to the creation and understanding of the University concept, it is quite meaningful to quote Cristovam Buarque (1994) on his comments about the produced myth:

When it constituted itself as the point for the intellectual convergence, the university was proclaimed and it self-labeled itself as the island of knowledge in an ocean of ignorance. {...} Born to fight against the dogmas, the university created a dogma : the dogma that states that all knowledge which is non-academic is a myth, and it arrested itself in this new myth. The conception of the university as the island of knowledge transformed the university into the island of social reclusion (p.58).

Buarque also believes that it is possible that the University comes to suffer the Salamanca syndrome : the fear of making mistakes, the fear of venturing and the loving for its own dogmas. Five hundred years later, the excess of specialization and the utility function of the academic activity made the university reduce its joy for the adventure. Professors and students have chosen the commodity of their careers.

The intellectuals, as Henri Lefebvre (1991) points out in "The daily life of Modern World", attach themselves to the imaginary, literally carried out by rhethorics, language and the metalanguage. This is a perfect alibi that allows these intellectuals to forget the stupidity of their condition, according to the author: no power, little money, needs to overcome pressures and myths to climb some steps and so hang on the higher levels of the social scale (p.102).

On this same critical approach, Jacoby (1990) refers to the despicable attitude of the majority: it is a pity that the intellectuals from the most recent generations have isolated themselves into the universities, worried exclusively with the writing for specialized magazines and journals and creating island-like societies, authentic "ghettos" of knowledge.

On the social imaginary, the intellectual's engagement - i.e, the engagement of the ones who construct the university - goes far beyond this "writing for publishing"; it goes far beyond supplying the academic fire flame; it goes far beyond coordinating research and forming new professors. The vital point of his engagement is basically the reflections about the institutions functions and aims. One of the ways to do this, says Oliven (op.cit) will be the one made of the self-knowledge, through the reconstitution of the institution history, of its projects - either successful or not - foreseeing an evaluation of actual possibilities and of the sources to make them real.

The University, as Sucupira (1983) points at, is an institution to produce Science; to create knowledge; to stimulate a critical self-consciousness; to develop the sense of culture and to propose solutions to the practical problems of its community. Therefore, we can define some negative aspects on the construction of the academic knowledge: it is this process that we have been analyzing, criticizing and also trying to find some changes to make it different. We do not want the academic knowledge to be constituted as a static wisdom; it cannot be understood as a fragmented information; mainly, it cannot be taken as something which is all done, divine and unquestionable. In fact, on the academic engagement, the vital basis must be founded and fertilized as a mosaic of knowledge - highly engaged with the mysteries of being and the mysteries of reality.

It is quite clear that the University functions are kept to being the ones of absorption, application and diffusion of human knowledge, which is a result of the intellectual task of developed nations. Luckesi (1991) adds to his comments the fact that the majority of our Universities maintain, in the maximum, their customers informed about the results of the investigations done concerning the problems of other realities, and not concerning the problems emerging from the needs and defiance of our nation and of our people (p.360).

The view society has got about the university - as shown in Barros (1990) - presents the institution to be much more a place to study and a locus to form qualified workers to become future bosses than a center to generate new knowledge and meaningful political attitudes concerning social questions. The author mentions Lewin(1988) to state that

The crisis of Brazilian university is still the crisis of unknowing or of being alienated from society. The university and its professors, in some fields, do not know the society reality and its demands, because they are arrested on the "trap of scientific wisdom" or on the trap of an alienating "technicism". (p13)

The attempt to see the university from behind its mythic image and targeting on the improvements that can be foreseen on the construction of a new university, the origin of our dreams, of our utopias, as it is projected by Luckesi (1991), there must be men's efforts, culture's efforts, through History, as a way to conquer a space in which man can constitute himself as a whole. To share knowledge production with human realization , on the coming of a new university, we face some still unanswerable questions, which should nevertheless be stated. On this perspective, we can close with Santayana (1994), on his presentation of "The University Adventure", when he points of some of its roles:

to stimulate and to defy reason; to free intelligence to reach the wholeness of its possibility, and above all, to the loveable discover of the other;

to make it climb down its arrogance up to the world floor, where life is the great challenge of a part of the Universe to the Universe itself; or, just to remember once more the old wisdom , "the joke of Zeus towards himself".

This perverse understanding constitutes a fatal movement to the ratio and on the root of the University. Prometheus' boldness - fire and yeast - will not be able to overcome the rests of a fossilized and pathological knowledge. In other words, if the Brazilian University - or any other University - does not have the courage to dare -to follow Prometheus' example- it will be getting any time more distant from its vital engagement, which is the one "to produce and share light"; the university has not -and must not have - the target to constitute itself as the center of social reclusion and of darkness.

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"PROMETEU": MITH AND REALITY AT THE UNIVERSITY

Abstract: This paper of theoretical investigation aims at integration the myth horizon to the university universe in order to shake its image of producing knowledge engagement, manifested on the investigation of reality, making it closer to the university day-to-day. It also wants to approach the theme of University under mythology perspective, verifying the following belief: what labels the myth of University, engaged with reality, is not the equality; in fact, what labels this myth is the difference, the divergence on the convergence, the multiple facing the unity. This makes the university.

Key words: University; myth; Prometeu

PROMÉTHÉE: MYTHE ET RÉALITÉ À L'UNIVERSITÉ

Résumé: Ce travail de recherche théorique a pour but reunir les horizonts mythiques au corps enseignant universitaire, afin de démystifier les compromis de la production de la connaissance, manifestée à l'investigation du réel, en l'approchant du quotidien universitaire. Il vise aborder la thématique de l'Université à lumière de la mythologie, en mettant en évidence la suivante croyance: ce qui marque le mythe de l'Université, compromise avec la réalité, il n'est pas l'égalité, mais la différence, la divergence dans la convergence, le multiple devant l'unité. Ainsi, il surgit l'Université.

Mots-clefs: Université; Mythe; Prométhée.

"PROMETEU": MITO Y REALIDAD EN LA UNIVERSIDAD

Resumen: El trabajo de investigación teórica objetiva congregar los horizontes míticos a la docencia universitária, a fin de desmistificar los compromisos de la producción de conocimiento, manifestada en la investigación de lo real, aproximandola del cotidiano universitário. Busca abordar la temática de la universidad a la luz de la mitologia, evidenciando la seguiente creencia: lo que marca el mito de la Universidad, comprometida con la realidad, no es la igualdad, mas si la diferencia, la divergencia en la convergencia, la múltipla face la unidad. De haí la Universidad

Palabras claves: Universidad; Mito; Prometeu

"PROMETEU": MITO E REALIDADE NA UNIVERSIDADE

Resumo: O trabalho de investigação teórica objetiva congregar os horizontes míticos à docência universitária, a fim de desmistificar os compromissos da produção do conhecimento, manifestada na investigação do real, aproximando-a do cotidiano universitário. Visa abordar a temática da Universidade à luz da mitologia, evidenciando a seguinte crença: o que marca o mito da Universidade, comprometida com a realidade, não é a igualdade, mas sim a diferença, a divergência na convergência, o múltiplo face à unidade. Daí a Universidade.

Palavras Chaves: Universidade; mito; Prometeu