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# PRECONDITIONS AND STARTING ATTITUDES OF THE GENERAL THEORY OF MYTH

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## Abstract

The article is devoted to the consideration of preconditions and initial attitudes of the general theory of myth created within non-classical mythology where the myth, in addition to tales about gods and heroes, is considered as the basic universal of culture creating areas of meanings. The myth is understood as an ontological property of conscience that develops abilities of a person. In the 20th century, science and society have grown to understand the myth in its modern interpretation. To adequately understand the myth, modern researchers of different specializations need to combine their efforts, in order to create the general theory of myth (GTM). The purpose of the article is to consider main preconditions for emergence of the GTM based on the universal (phenomenological or transcendental) approach to myth and myth-making. The authors analyze three main groups of preconditions for the creation of the general theory of myth: historical, theoretical and organizational. The first group is associated with the development of society which, while moving to the digital era, actualizes the interest in the myth. The second group relies on achievements of non-classical rationality which significantly facilitate the understanding of the myth and its social and cultural mission. The third group covers problems of organizing myth researchers into a network community integrated around specific conferences and journals. All together create the preconditions for systemic integration of myth ontology studies as a culture basic universal, which will allow creating the general theory of myth.

*Keywords:* General theory of myth (GTM), myth, myth-making, non-classical mythology

## 1. Introduction

The analysis of modern strategies of re-mythologizing the myth evidently showed that behind it there was rather a global turn of science and society to the myth to realize its true nature than a formal return of the myth as a result of society degradation.   Such a turn became possible due to discoveries in both humanities and natural sciences. Non-classical mythology arose, for which the myth is rather an image and a symbol reflecting reality in a mind and forming an area of values and meanings than a "classical" tale about Gods and Heroes. However, such a non-classical mythology acutely needs the general theory of myth to be created.

## 2. Problem Statement

Creation of the general theory of myth can result from critical analysis and summation of main achievements of authors of outstanding theories of myth of the 20th century.  However, to create it, certain conditions are required. The analysis of these conditions is the subject of the article.

## 3. Research Questions

In the 20th century, the impression of the world moving to a new mythological era has been forming. This fact caused us to rethink the usual and raise basic questions anew (Cook, 2018). Why is the myth so resistant? Why has it persisted to this day despite the intense struggle of science against it?  Was the myth return caused by morale decline, general social and intellectual degradation, or by anything else? What is the cause of total social myth-making? In what way does a person make myths? Do they make myths purposefully? Or is myth-making based on deep "unconscious" reasons? What for does a person need myth-making? What can the myth give to a person, and what does it deprive? Can we block sources of modern myth-making in any way, and must we do this? What may happen to a person if they are fully deprived of myths? Can the science win the myth, and what does it need for this? Can the talk about the pure science and its freedom from the myth be just one of the prejudices related to scientific myth-making? How can we fight against the myth and should we do this if we could not overcome it for thousands of years? Isn't the fight against the myth just one of myth-making forms? If so, is it right to deprive the modern myth of its ontological status? Will we be able to overcome scientific prejudices that hinder the development of mythology as a science?

## 4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to consider main preconditions for the creation of the general theory of myth based on non-classical mythology, and to reveal its starting attitudes.

## 5.   Research Methods

In the course of the research we applied principles, approaches and methods of non-classical science which allowed considering the myth within the framework of non-classical mythology based on transcendental and phenomenological analysis of the myth understood with maximum expansion.

## 6.   Findings

The above questions are concerned with problems of not the myth but the science, and the inability of the latter  to cognize the different – any phenomenon that does not fit into the logic of the usual. These questions search to overcome the variety of scientific topics at least in relation to the myth, the natural syncretism of which forces us to study it as a whole, hinting that, in the 20th century, there is a non-classical mythology in addition to the traditional classical one.

The science dealt with the myth in full accordance with the practice of specialized dismemberment. Researchers dissected the myth according to their disciplines, analyzing its manifestations in their individual responsibility area, and completely ignoring results obtained in adjacent scientific branches (Fernandes, 2020). As a result, the myth turned into the set of particular features (Wellerstein, 2018). Specialized researchers of the myth seem to talk about different things in different languages, without understanding each other at all (Rivera, 2018) since each of them studies the myth within the selected particular subject. Such disregard for the myth ontology leads to wrong conclusions since "within the scientific discipline taken separately, to ontologically study the myth as a whole is impossible" (Gabrielyan et al., 2019a, p. 153). That is why various myth theories as special directions of mythology in the 20th century need to be combined into an orderly coherent system, in order for their achievements to serve a common cause.

We believe that main preconditions for creating the general theory of myth (GTM) can be subdivided into historical, theoretical and organizational.

*Historical preconditions* are related to "the myth return" and a sharp growth of interest it it in all areas despite the general negative attitude. Changes in lives and interactions of people and societies caused a social need for holistic knowledge. Along the way, it became clear that it was the myth that "is closely related to practically all the problems of the life of a person and society, their moral values and social ideals, their spirituality" (Stavistkiy, 2012, p. 9). So, the myth turned from a research problem into the incomparable mechanism for solving social problems.

Certain thinkers believed that the myth had not returned but the science had come to understand that it had been always there, had been immanent to the person, as it was generated by the human need for myth-making. Today, more and more researchers tend to draw such a bold conclusion, so the myth breakthrough in all areas resemble the invasion and is associated with the "virtualization" of society: fakes, post-truth, manipulations of consciousness, "virtual worlds", and even such sciences as, for example, virtual anthropology have become familiar. To separate them from the truth is quite problematic since total substitution of reality, especially by advertising and PR, is dictated by demands of business and state for which it is easier to create a façade than a specific product. On the other hand, for us nothing

else is left than to realize the myth as a powerful weapon that we must be able to use and from which we must be able to defend ourselves.

To be able to properly use the myth, much knowledge disregarded by science and society is required. Not only mythology is spoken of, since "threat and risk of global transformations force us to anew appeal to that tradition which was reflected in great myths that appear to be simple and clear, but indeed they are incredibly complex" (Gabrielyan et al., 2019b, pp. 27–28). In modern conditions, "the myth has already became a tool of meta-politics and a factor of national security which is a weapon of mass destruction in relation to people's minds" (Gabrielyan et al., 2019a, p. 155), leading sometimes to the full recoding of minds and civilization recruiting of peoples and societies. Consequently, "if we do not deal with the myth, then the myth will deal with us, but we will no longer control it with all the consequences for us and the country" (Gabrielyan et al., 2019a, p. 156) since nothing can resist the myth whose time has come. It is left for us to hope that science and society are ready for such a turn.

As a result, these critical problems cause an urgent need to rediscover the myth (Tobias, 2017). The question arises why the myth as a basic scientific and cultural topic did not become a research subject within the whole (Simmons, 2018). Indeed, "the myth is inherent in the man at all stages of their development" (Gabrielyan et al., 2019b, p. 28), which generates the need to identify theoretical premises for the general theory of myth.

***Theoretical preconditions*** are extremely important but their formation is associated with the general crisis of science that accompanies the modern crisis of mankind when the dictatorship of technical progress, liberal ideology of profit, and unlimited consumption turned into a serious threat for nature and mankind (Weigand, 2018). Problems of modern science turned into a theoretical and methodological impasse and crisis, during which it will not be able to perform social and state functions at all, without first changing itself (Fernandes, 2020). First of all, a change in the paradigm of scientific knowledge requires a change in the attitude to the myth, refusal to ascribe one's own delusions to the myth (Hawkins, 2018).

For the creation of the general theory of myth, theoretical developments, especially in the field of myth ontology, are extremely important. For two centuries, a huge amount of data was accumulated in the field of studies of myths of various peoples and cultures. However, these successes are minimized by the ignorance of the myth ontology, stagnation, especially in history and political science which are full of prejudices and delusions.

Not surprisingly that, with such a difference in approaches, scientists could not even agree on definitions of the notion of myth. This is due not only to the existing contradictions in interpretations of the research subject, but also to the fact that, although the myth as a social and cultural phenomenon seems to have simple manifestations, it is so complex, deep, changeable that today the question of its competent definition within the well-known theories cannot even be correctly formulated. The way out appears to be in the expanded interpretation of the myth within the framework of non-classical mythology that allows us to study the myth beyond the borders determined by the science due to its inert approaches and underdevelopment, but in all areas and directions where the myth manifests itself sometimes in a way completely unexpected by the science.

Due to such universal (phenomenological) approach, we may consider the myth within the general theory as a reality reflected by the mind in a figurative and symbolic form arising as an image of reality and perceived as a fact of mentality. Such expanded interpretation of the myth allows regarding everything that the myth includes within the borders of our ideas and considering the myth as one of the most complex and comprehensive phenomena created by people, caused by their need to understand the surrounding reality in relationships with them and the culture created by them.

Another basic delusion which hinders the understanding of the myth is the attempt to oppose genesis to essence, when the origin of the myth is associated only with the emergence of man but not with their being, as if their development finishes at this point since they become more and more intellectual and successfully get rid of the myth as of something vicious and false in the course of the growth of their intellect. The reason for such an explanation is quite simple: archaic peoples living in our days (the so-called "wild", "primitive") do not develop their myths, having preserved them unchanged for thousands of years. However, why should primitive tribes change their myths if they themselves do not change? After all, they make myths for themselves, for their own spiritual needs. The fact that myths can change together with peoples who made them if they develop does not occurred to researchers because then they will have to understand themselves. It would seem that such a position is evidently incorrect, but it is this position that dominates science to this day. According to it, the myth is deprived of development though reality whose peculiar reflection the myth is has inherent historicity due to its nature.

The attempts to kill and dilute the myth, denying its development and functioning in modern society on the grounds that myths of archaic peoples do not develop and there are almost no archaic people now have been made in science many times. However, these attempts can be considered unsuccessful (Lynch, 2016). The myth is gradually making its way and requires not only to recognize itself as a historical reality but it also forces one to regard itself, taking into account great discoveries of scientists-mythologists over the past century and a half. These scientists tell that the myth develops with us and in accordance with our ideas about it since it is what we think of it.

What theoretical developments can form the basis of the general theory of myth in the context of the above?

1) With regard to the myth, it is time to talk about its expanded understanding that would take into account all its manifestations and not leave out of brackets what is associated with the myth but it not yet considered as such.

2) The myth cannot be examined without basing on it as the whole. "The myth is internally syncretic" (Naidysh, 2021, p. 383) and it is the basis of the wholeness of consciousness since it is rather the very content of culture than the source and beginning. Syncretism of the myth is not its weak or strong side but the disconnection between researchers, their disciplinary separation. Therefore, they deal with not the myth itself, sometimes they know nothing about it, mindlessly repeating delusions related to it, and interpreting only its particular manifestations in their professional area.

3) Even Cassirer (2017) insisted that art, science, language and myth should be perceived as certain fundamental and equivalent values, without which neither society nor a person can do. In this regard, the myth must be taken with all seriousness, since the phenomenon which we understand as the myth is not inferior to any of spheres in its scale and importance, representing the most complex living

universe, which is in constant development in accordance with needs of people and is created by them as meta-reality. With this approach, the myth is a basic cultural universal forming fields of important meanings without which a person cannot do. Of course, these meanings can be deceitful and vicious but no more that the person that forms them. Therefore, they contain personal truth needed for a person to live. In this sense, the myth is a type of social and cultural coding, the mechanism for socialization and spiritual self-organization of societies and people, symbolically expressed and specially organized systemic knowledge (Segal, 2020), which needs to be studied systematically, taking into account its special features, in so doing any selectively used scientific methodology can turn out ineffective.

Among other theoretical developments important for the formation of the general theory of myth, the following should be mentioned:

- division of mythology into classical that studies the traditional classical archaic myth, and non-classical that considers the myth as a property of consciousness at all stages of its functioning and development;
- main reasons of myth-making, starting with peculiarities of human perception and thinking and ending with myth-making of state and its institutions;
- role and functions of the myth in society which cannot be substituted by any other activity, including science;
- variations of existence and interaction of mythological structures;
- problems of interaction of the science and the myth within the single whole.
- The last statement allows us to remind that:
- the myth is invulnerable for the science in principle since it appeals not to the mind but to the heart, and possesses a high degree of suggestion;
- in any fight against the myth, the latter inevitably grows.

Moreover, although there is an official negative attitude to the myth, both society and science are vitally interested in the myth since it helps them to develop according to the principle of mutual complementarity. Therefore, the creation of the general theory of myth for science, culture and society on the whole is comparable in its scale and results to the latest revolution in physics resulting from the development of the theory of relativity and quantum mechanics which prepared conditions for transition to non-classical science. In fact, we speak of Copernican coup in mythology which cannot be performed by one person but requires effort of many. That is why it does not start from scratch but is created within the framework of non-classical mythology, relying on the tradition of phenomenological approach that forms conceptual foundations of a general theory of myth.

Unfortunately, such activities have been fragmented in a significant degree. Not all mythologists knew about such investigations, mainly appealing to works of generally recognized classical authors, simultaneously reproducing their individual delusions. So, references to their works in the latest investigations were evidently not enough. In this regard, the work of organizing and coordinating mythological research becomes especially important but this work is extremely difficult in the Russian Federation due to the absence of any coordinating scientific structures. In this way the third group of preconditions for the creation of the general theory of myth was gradually formed.

***Organizational preconditions*** became the last group of the GTM preconditions. They are associated with organizational activities of scientists ready to accumulate their works, uniting in groups of fellow enthusiasts whose activities is built on scientific selfless devotion. Over the past 25 years a number of attempts have been made to coordinate the work of myth researchers within the framework of separate

conferences but they were episodic, not systemic and did not continue. However, since 2004, the annual conference 'The Perishable and The Eternal' began to work thanks to the efforts of a group of philosophers of Novgorod University. At this conference the myth is one of the main topics. Another center for uniting myth researchers is the annual international conference 'Myth in History, Politics, Culture' the participants of which prepared and published 492 articles in article collections. What is especially important, the organizers of this conference structurally verified all the main directions of myth studies which determined the structure of the published collections of works. During the year, on the basis of the last conference, the periodic journal 'Mythologos' will start to be published. Its preparation is well under way. Of course, this is just the beginning. On this basis, we can create and develop a network community of mythologists from various regions and countries. Therefore, we can state that the preconditions for the creation of the general theory of myth already exist and are developing.

## 7. Conclusion

So, to create the general theory of myth, we need to rediscover the myth (Palmer & Midgley, 1993). In order to understand the myth, it is necessary not to separate the knowledge about it but combine, add and multiply, using the variety of approaches and methods of all the sciences that study the myth on the basis of non-classical rationality.

The task of the general theory of myth is to synthesize and accumulate already existing scattered developments of leading theoretical schools studying the myth over the past hundred and a half years. These schools reveal general conditions of myth-making, and lead them at a principally new level. This level allows us to consider the knowledge as the whole, in order to determine and regard both sources and constituents of the general theory of myth, objects and subjects to be investigated, define main methodological approaches.

Nothing can stop the myth whose time has come. Nothing can prevent the creation of its general theory, especially taking into account that the preconditions for its emergence have already been formed.

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