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## Myth as an anthropological phenomenon in the context of modern cognitive processes

Pavel Tychkin \*

*Department of Philosophy, Tomsk Polytechnic University, Lenin Avenue, 30, Tomsk, 634050, Russia*

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### Abstract

The paper considers the problem of constituting the image of myth in the context of studying cognitive processes in modern culture. A thesis is validated that myth should be considered as an anthropological phenomenon capable of coming into its own in the unity of the main characteristics and logic of thinking in the context of ontological attitudes and principles of modern cognitive practices. The comparative analysis of myth and modern science model based on the category of anthropics makes it possible to state the complementary nature of modality of understanding and functioning of the specified categories in the conceptual field of cognition theory and myth. Anthropics serves as a basis for study in the field of cognitive science due to the idea of human-sizedness foregrounded in both of the specified knowledge forms. Interpreting the categories of creation, imagination and bricolage we prove the importance of studying implementation mechanisms for these world cognition forms in the mythological picture of the world within the framework of modern heuristic processes. The role of creative thinking is justified as one of the fundamental characteristics of mythological worldview as an algorithm of cognitive processes on the whole. This lays the groundwork for creating the ontology of studying of a whole variety of forms of displaying human cognitive activity involving elements and logic of mythological thinking which act as a number of heuristic principles determining cognitive procedures and operations at the current development stage of cognitive science.

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### 1. Introduction

One of the key ideas in the context of the modern science image is a thesis of “human-sizedness” of its research targets. The fundamental change in modality of understanding the subject of cognitive activity in modern epistemology is connected with a whole complex of methodological, axiological and worldview reasons. Positioning the subject as a participant of a dialogue with the object, an element included in the system of relations rather than distanced from it, is caused, to a great extent, by the humanization processes in science; this implies that various social and cultural factors influence its activity (D'Andrade R.G., 1995). The exposure of scientific discourse to the influence of the latter foregrounds the upsurge of interest in the problems related to constituting new intentions in the interpretation of the human status and role as a central element in cognitive processes. “Worldview monopolism” of the classical science with its rigid opposition between the object and the subject is replaced by “worldview pluralism”, focusing on relativity and multi-variance of cognitive activity justifying the “participant’s” status for its main agent – a human. Since culture can not be reduced to a single “scientific-rational principle” (Caillouis R., 2003), the diversity of modalities of its formation is represented in the value system of scientific discourse. Hence, in the context of this research subject matter, we are going to attempt to reveal the main intentions in understanding the human role and place as a subject in myth in order to extrapolate the conclusions made to the conceptual field of cognitive research in the modern scientific discourse.

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\* Pavel Tychkin Tel: +7-913-821-5857  
E-mail address: [tychkinp@tpu.ru](mailto:tychkinp@tpu.ru)

## 2. Syncretism of mind and reality as a cognition principle

In the tradition of myth study (both in the historical retrospective and in many modern studies) there is a common viewpoint regarding a human as a passive element completely subordinate to dogmatic precepts of myth which he needs to monotonously reproduce being limited by “undeveloped” archaic worldview. Although very narrow-minded, this precept is deep-rooted not only in the popular mentality as a result of popularization of the stereotype formed within different humanities but, in fact, in these sciences themselves. The reason for this viewpoint is largely connected with the dominance of ideas of linear culture progress (from “lower” worldview forms to more developed ones) and positivistic views (McCauley R. N., 2005).

At the same time, the theoretical weakness of this position becomes obvious in the modern myth philosophy. From this perspective, “subjectivism” which myth is blamed for (as a factor ostensibly illustrating “underdevelopment” of myth as compared with the “rational” scientific worldview which, supposedly, represents the objective world “as it is”) does suggest the marked anthropomorphic character of mythological thinking and, by no means, its inferiority which could be spoken of only if a form of worldview was found that does not contain a human as a central element, which is impossible by definition. (Kosarev A., 2000). Anthropomorphic quality is an inherent feature of myth determining its whole structure and logic of functioning. Thus, being a “human” view of the world, myth creates a syncretic picture of this world and, as necessary, includes a human as an integral element. The creation of meanings in myth is accomplished at the point of merging of the internal with the external, the intellectual with the sensual, where reality is not set by any of them but is formed as its unity with a human at its heart. Self-awareness, as a basic qualitative characteristic of an individual, implies, on the one hand, determining one’s own definitions, which leads to distinguishing oneself from the entire outer world. However, this self-identification is actualized in a dialectic way because distancing oneself from the environment does require the presence of an image of this environment which is constructed by the mind. Objectification of the experience data comes out in myth as a result of productive activity of the mind, synthesis of the world and its image. This construction of the world picture in myth, however, can not lead to the utterly simplified interpretation of myth solely as a product of a human’s imagination, as an illusory notion based on archaic human’s ignorance and undeveloped cognition because a human in myth is the point of integration of the internal and the external forming the unity of an individual and the world, as well as integration of different communication forms of these two fundamentals implicitly contained in myth.

In this context, personality-oriented, “human-sized” nature of myth is at the same time an idea confirming its worldview syncretism in which the mind produces the reality and acts as its procreation at the same time. Myth is a form of representation of universal integrity involving the mind not only as one of its elements but also as a certain criterion of self-knowledge, a way of self-articulation.

This understanding of myth explicitly correlates with the main postulates of anthropic principle (Barrow J.D., 1988), one the basic propositions of modern strategies of science where anthropomorphism acquires the status of methodological foundation for studying cognitive processes.

A human in myth appears as an active source. In other words, a human in myth develops a model of his identity based on the idea of indissoluble connection with the reality. This pattern of thinking is oriented towards holistic (Grof S., 1992) modality of understanding the category of reality according to which the latter is not pre-specified at the “beginning of time” as an absolutely continuous constant. Sacral events in myth that determined cosmogonical processes and cosmology were surely the results of activity of transcendent forces preserving their timeless importance, however the correlation of the profane and the sacral worlds suggests participation of a human in them because he is present in the universe as an ontological unit. At the same time, in myth the presence of a human in the world is not reduced to stating his existence as a passive element, it implies his involvement in the living process as an active source. The specified activity must in this case be understood as an ability and possibility to act according to the place occupied by a human in the universe. A human here does not substitute for any sacral characters, he interacts with them shaping the reality to different extents and finding patterns and models for his activity in transcendent events.

The importance and role of a personal element, a human in myth (like in the situation of using other categories acting in this research as criteria for comparative analysis) are complementary to the modality determining intentions in human characteristic in the context of his cognitive activity (Ebert, John D., 2008).

“Finding” a human in quantum mechanics that became the pivot of non-classical scientificity predetermined cardinal changes in the methodology of scientific activity. Rejecting demands for a universal and precise description of the object “as it is”, as well as an objectivistic precept suggesting there is the only truth, was connected with relativization of physics and a need for taking instrument reality into account, which, in its turn, was caused by the very character of processes and phenomena of subatomic reality. Subsequently, in the post-nonclassical science this leads to an assertion that conclusions derived about an object depend on a range of factors, in particular, on the ways and means of conceptualization, methodological schemes, paradigm, etc selected by a researcher. In this sense, a human acts as a certain “articulation means” and self-identification of nature.

Being inside the system, the mind (a human) conceives it at the same time as integrity (interacting with its other “areas”) following certain probabilistic regularities and as combination of random processes. A human in myth is like a peculiar prism joining in its focus the world of the mind and the physical world. Using I. Prigogin’s terminology, a human is not a spectator, he is an actor involved in the “performance” of nature (Prigogine, I., 1984). In this context, myth as a thinking system demonstrates a number of patterns comparable to propositions of the global evolutionism. This, in the first place, is

syncretism in the understanding of the categories of the whole and the parts where the latter show, to a certain extent, as identity characterized of integral nature (Cassirer E., 2001).

### 3. Creative work and imagination in cognitive processes

The status of the mind as one of the key elements of the universal evolutionary process finding its reflection in the category of “human-sizedness” of the Universe suggests constituting a human as an active operating element. The category of creative work is therefore an important element that determines perceiving a human as a cognitive source in myth.

Imagination is an impulse, a potential premise for practising creative activity which in myth is inseparably linked with cognitive activity. The diversity of material and, in the first place, spiritual culture forms produced in the conceptual field of myth, apart from their significance as actually objects of this culture, is the result of *dynamics* of the mind as an operating source. This status as an a priori precept implies a cognitive component which in myth comes out as foretelling, supposing a certain state of things, supposing that does not come down to “pure fancy”; it realizes heuristic potential of a human constructing the picture of reality “from the inside” of it. The process and result of such construction to a large extent differ in variability, arbitrariness and freedom of cognitive operations; however, these characteristics do not reflect the lawlessness of the human mind but rather a priori anthropomorphism of the world, determining such characteristics (Pont J.C., 2000). The world where a human is an organic part can not open to the latter “extra-anthropologically”, thus, the “human” way of representation of this world involving imagination as a cognitive principle is legitimate and enables to create its integral authentic image.

Creative work in this aspect is therefore a form of world cognition creating its picture. Such approach correlates well with modern principles of studying cognitive processes connected with ideas of multi-variance, interdisciplinarity, unity of a human and the world, pluralism (Prinz, J., 2011).

In this connection the idea of “bricolage” is of great interest as a characteristic of mythological way of thinking representing creative process as an activity for constructing concepts not guided by a fixed objective or a store of specially prepared means (Lévi-Strauss C., 1999). The creative process in this situation takes place with the use of anything at hand, when a bricoleur freely combines different elements depending on their probable potential for a certain action.

Although, bricolage is, according to C. Lévi-Strauss, a nonspecialized type of activity in which no prior stock of “material” is taken in accordance with a clearly outlined objective, its core characteristic is what matters to us, namely, the prominent creative component in such kind of work method combined with a probabilistic nature of predicting its results. The modesty of bricoleur’s means does not deprive him of a possibility to get something new (as a concept-making characteristic of creative work), nor does it set limits to this something (Golosovker J., 1987).

With all its obvious differences from the scientific way of thinking as such, taken as an abstract set of principles, operations and activity norms, bricolage, along with other forms of creative activity, which, in the long run, represent manifestation of a human as an active source in myth, finds a whole range of correlates in the system of precepts forming the main trends in modern studies of cognitive processes.

### 4. The principle of “confidence in the subject” and humanization of knowledge

Considerable limitations of visualization of reality types, which are objects of study for modern science, determine the enhanced role of creative thinking capable of building models of such reality. The specified models must reflect its non-linear character and take into account different possible variants of its description complementing one another. On the one hand, it creates a need for interdisciplinary research in which a scientist integrates methodological schemes, principles and precepts from various disciplinary fields in different combinations, which enables to create a more versatile picture of reality under study. On the other hand, the store of scientific means and principles proper proves to be insufficient in this situation, so the use of elements and regularities of various extrascientific cognitive practices in science becomes critical.

Constituting the subject of cognition as a creative source that builds up reality and is its integral element serves as one of the pivotal postulates of modern science image implemented, in particular, in ideas of synergy and global evolutionism. The image of a human as a participant of universal evolutionary processes confirms his broader cognitive possibilities spectrum in the status of the subject of science. In this connection, when characterizing heuristic methods and operations, a metaphor of “play” and “a player” is currently employed in science, when a human practising creative cognitive activity and being an organic part of the systems researched to a great extent expresses a stochastic character of regularities which determine the functioning of these systems. Similarly, we can describe the cognitive aspect of bricoleur’s actions in myth where a bricoleur integrates his personal views and worldview positions into the description of events and the picture of the world.

One of the central trends in modern epistemology is the idea of humanization of knowledge according to which a human is included in the cognitive process in the situation of a dialogue with the object, collaboratively the image of reality is constructed and different cognitive practices are foregrounded. This position radically changes the complex of notions and standard precepts determining the status and role of the subject of cognition in modern epistemology. It is in the process of this dialogue that the heuristic potential of modern strategies of science is actualized. The creative nature of cognitive process is in this case the logical display of “human-sizedness” of the world manifesting itself in its different forms and in the framework of myth logic (Schrempf G., 2012).

Such immanent characteristics of creative work and bricolage as variability, stochasticity and high degree of unpredictability, which in the Cartesian paradigm are factors considerably reducing cognitive capabilities of the subject, are constituted in terms of cardinally different positions in modern scientific discourse. In the current context, the principle of

confidence in the subject confirmed by a range of fundamental postulates of global evolutionism is put into practice. The main intention in the specified principle is aimed at the idea of human involvement in nature which determines “the existence of human cognitive possibilities (organs and abilities), evolutionarily formed and developed in a certain way, and guided by objective features, structures and regularities of reality” (Mikeshina L., 2005, p. 39). In other words, the category of “human-sizedness” of the world repeatedly mentioned in the present paper, presented in the structure of myth and its logic in its different aspects, is fully implemented in the postulates of modern cognition theory. Complementarity of a human and the world paves the way for the proposition about a high probability of success of cognitive activity provided that its subject is constituted as a cohesive phenomenon integrating the diversity of cognitive practices.

Hence, we can state the presence of a whole range of features characterizing complementarity of modality of understanding a human and his role in the cognitive process in myth and in the system of ontological attitudes of modern science represented in the postulates and principles of cognitive research.

The point at issue is stating the human status as a creative element in the cognitive process, as a source of constructing concepts at the confluence of the mind and the world, as a subject of conceiving reality being at the same time its element, a participant of the processes studied which are represented as “human-sized” reality.

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