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**PERSONAL CONSCIOUSNESS UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL
MYTHS: THE PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECT**

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This article deals with the notion of social myth and the interconnection between myths and personal consciousness as a complex system. The purpose of the work is the integrative philosophical analysis of the issue of interaction and interconnection between personal consciousness and social myths. The key problems of transformation of different social myths in post-soviet Ukrainian society are outlined. The connection between social myths and political, cultural, economic, axiological and ecological aspects of social being is defined.

Key words: Person, Society, Myth, Manipulations, Values.

Myths are important elements of social reality. At first sight this statement may look unconvincing. Nowadays the rapid growth of the role of science in society gives people the possibility to have the rational and critical worldview. But on the other hand, the influence of myths on personal consciousness remains very strong, particularly in such spheres as policy, ideology, mass-media, and even science. Myths always exist in every social environment and post-soviet Ukrainian society is not an exception. In the context of the active social transformations the investigation of social myth becomes a question of great importance for adequate and deep understanding of many social and political processes of modernity such as globalization or democratization, and for making social prognosis for the future.

The problem of social myths has been investigated by many scholars. Among them are R. Barthes [1], A. Losev [2], N. Soboleva [3], V. Morgun [4], A. Maydanov [5], M. Marinovich [6], N. Kirilova [7], and Y. Puchhcaev [8]. But the

majority of works are devoted to the general analysis of myths in cultural or political context. It is not enough for careful investigation of the mechanism of myths' influence on individual and social consciousness.

This article seeks to analyze the issue of interaction and interconnection between society and social myths.

The role of myths in society differed in different historical periods, but they were always one of the main factors of forming the culture and worldview of the epoch. For ancient Greece mythology became not only the basis of culture but also the source of philosophy and first attempts of scientific understanding of the world. It may be proved by teachings of early representatives of ancient Greek philosophy – Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes. In the Middle Ages the main direction of social development was determined by mythologies of Christianity (for European civilization) and Islam (for Arabian civilization). Modern concept of progress appeared exactly due to Christianity. It was derived from Christian interpretation of time as a line or arrow which was directed to the future (unlike the model of time-circle in ancient cultures). Christianity gave modern science the idea of rational rules and laws which dominated in nature and which people could get to know. A lot of today's principles of morality, democracy and tolerance are also mythical (in the positive sense of this word) and have they roots in Christian ontology.

Starting from the so-called “rational optimism” of the Age of Enlightenment myths were understood only in their negative aspect – as false and primitive notions which did not correspond to reality. This point of view was very popular among Soviet scholars. In the USSR the influence of myths on social life regarded as absolutely distractive. Myths were associated with the dark and ignorant past, in contrast to the rational and realistic present. In paradoxical way Soviet society was determined by a very rich and complex mythology itself – the mythology of communism. After the breakup of the USSR the position of science with reference to myths and mythology has greatly changed. Today many scientists try to find elements of scientific knowledge in myths. Ukrainian scholar V. Mogrun considers

that one should search the roots of quant theory in the ancient Egyptian and Chinese mythological systems and in the philosophical doctrines of Plato and Pythagoras [4, p. 288 – 317]. Russian explorer of myths A. Maydanov stresses the importance of the analyses of mythology as a source of real knowledge about the world. The scholar gives an example of untraditional view on Indo-European myth about demon Vritra who was killed by celestial god Indra in cosmic struggle. According to A. Mayadanov's theory, this myth should be decoded as the narration about "extraordinary natural disaster" [5, p. 91] that really took place in Central Asia in the middle of 2000 BC. A. Maydanov also emphasizes the vital necessity of elaboration of a new approach to the analyzing of myths. This approach should include a system of methods to decode real social and cultural facts of the past. This point of view is sufficiently reasonable because myths always appear in the context of a certain society; hence, they reflect (with the help of symbols) the economic, political and cultural experience and the worldview of its members. Existence of so different approaches to myths says about the complex and many-sided nature of this phenomenon.

Myths do not only reflect the process of social development but make a great impact on it. Mythologization of external world is still one of the main directions of human activity. Unlike classic myths of ancient times modern social myths in most cases have an author. Sometimes it happens that a name of an author is forgotten as it was with the author of popular Russian myths "Moscow is the Third Rome" (i.e., the last orthodox kingdom in the world), monk Philophey.

Social myth is a system of semiotic values that has an ontological status and is actual for a certain society during the certain period of its development. As R. Barthes affirms, myth makes social, cultural, ideological and historical things turn into "natural" (the phenomenon of mythical inversion) [1, p. 47]. Social myths interconnect with a society in various ways. They reflect the interests and values of different social groups. Some myths are closely connected with policy and the interests of elites. Social myths are often used as an instrument of power.

According to N. Kirilova, political mythology is practical mythology because every political myth includes interests of certain persons and social groups [7, p. 131]. Political image plays the dominant role in this case. It may be identified as a process of development of “mythical inversion” which takes place in mass-media when the image of a certain official is endowing with the features of a superman. Then this image becomes an object of belief for many people even if it has nothing in common with reality. Usually the process of creating political myths is intensified before election. For example, according to social monitoring before the election of the president of Russian Federation it is twice as many TV programs with the participation of V. Putin’s successor D. Medvedev as TV programs with the participation of V. Putin himself. Besides that, 81% of topics and comments were positive and 19% were neutral. It is also not accidentally that Venezuela’s president and the author of myth about “21st century socialism” H. Chavez is interested in mass-media so much that in 2007 he officially pledged to close an influential TV station and nationalize all telecommunications in the country [9]. Nowadays telecommunications are an effective device for spreading social myths. That is why the absolute freedom of mass-media in democratic societies is just a “quasi-liberal myth” [8, p. 4 – 5]. Every piece of information is not only a piece of information. It contains certain trend and corresponds to a certain social and political purpose. It does not mean that all mass-media are completely mythological but the situation when a person can see certain pictures only one time and fast tempo of giving the information has an influential suggestive effect. Mass-media create the illusion of real presence and lower the level of critical thinking. Like a myth, mass-media often try to be out of contradictions and first of all out of conflict between understanding and its absence. That is why mass-media are widely used for spreading various social myths.

The process of creating myths takes place in every society, but the highest level of this activity can be observed during the periods of dramatic social transformations when old and new mythologies coexist in social consciousness.

Usually this coexistence is very far from harmony. For instance, it may be a conflict between myths of totalitarian past and myths of democratization that exist in many post-soviet societies.

In the USSR a political system was followed by forming of corresponding social mythology and rituals. There were such elements of social rituals as agrarian traditions, rituals and traditions of working class, personal and civil ritual (initiation ceremonies of factory or farm workers, tractor-drivers, students, etc.), professional festivals, jubilees, and calendar and family festivals. All these traditions were closely connected with large variety of social myths. But the core of Soviet mythology was the myth about perfect economy. As A. Losev affirms, in Soviet society economic life had the status of an Absolute; it had to be a substitute of God and human personality [2, p. 131]. Economy worked magic and performed sacral rituals. It was believed to be able to give people the cessation of suffering and cure society from its spiritual and ethical wounds such as envy, malice, and criminality. Several the most significant Christian festivals were substituted with state ones. For instance, the Day of Transformation was turned into the Day of Industrialization (i.e., the festival of symbolic transformation and saving of a toiler). In this case the Christian myth about saving of a sinful human soul was used. But instead soul we have economic life and instead saving – the process of industrialization [2, p. 132]. All social ceremonies and traditions of Soviet society had aesthetical and ethical meanings such as cultivating of collectivism, diligence and other socialistic values. But in fact their sense was much deeper. They were an integral part of the process of actualization of social myths (components of the world out-look of Soviet society).

Some myths and social rituals and festivals of Soviet period remained in social consciousness of post-soviet communities, although they were partly transformed. For example, in Ukraine, Russian Federation and other post-soviet states such Soviet holidays as the 8th of March (Women's Day), Victory Day on the 9th of May, the 23rd of February (former professional holyday of the Soviet army), and

the 1st of May are still popular, though the attitude to them has somewhat changed. For example, in the eastern part of Ukraine Soviet values were firmer than in the western part of the country and today the attitude of people from eastern regions to former Soviet holidays is more positive. Not everybody remembers their original meaning but celebration of these dates has become a tradition. It also plays an important psychological role. It creates the illusion of stabilization and organization of unstable and transforming social reality. According to the results of sociological interrogation (2007) the most favourite holidays of citizens of Kiev, Donetsk, Kharkov, Odessa and some other cities are New Year and personal birthday [10]. In western regions of the country where national Ukrainian folk and religious traditions preserved better the situation is not identical. For instance, in Lvov peoples' attitude to former Soviet holidays differs. One part of citizens still celebrates them together with traditional holidays, another part does not celebrate. Some citizens even have negative attitude to holidays which came from Soviet period. But on the whole the most popular holidays of Ukrainians are following: New Year' Day (83,9%), personal birthday (52,8%), Easter (37,5%), Christmas Day (36,6%), friend's or relative's birthday (25,2%), the 8th of March (23,6%), the October Revolution Day (3,5%), the 23rd of February (3,4%). This statistic speaks about significant role of Soviet traditions in modern Ukrainian society and also about the increasing impotence of Christian values and traditions which is connected with the "religious renaissance" of 1990s.

In Soviet society religious myths and dates of religious holidays were often substituted with socialistic myths and holydays. In modern post-soviet societies religion sometimes overlaps secular spheres. Today in Ukraine priests often take part in ceremonies of initiation of soldiers or students. Many social rituals involve such religious elements as collective prayers and blessings. Before 1989 such things were impossible. These facts characterize the transformations of social consciousness and ways of interaction between social and religious myths and rituals. Many of these transformations are caused by decline from totalitarian

system. At the same time there is one more powerful factor – the process of globalization. Modern globalization (which is an equivalent to westernization) brings post-soviet societies new social myth. The “Great American Dream” is among them. A lot of modern people feel the impact of this myth and begin to interpret individual material success as a sense of life and way of saving from all problems. Historically this idea does not correspond to traditional Slav mentality and often causes a feeling of disorientation.

Social myths often include the idealistic project of the future social development. In successful social systems this project is deeply infiltrated into social consciousness. Sometimes it is articulated as a national idea which is able to become a powerful factor of social transformations itself. A national idea and other myths establish an ideal scheme of actions for all members of social community. It is the result of collective agreement between citizens of a state about the most important values and convictions. A national idea should not be obligatory connected with a certain nation. Its inner sense consists in potential ability to integrate and consolidate the whole social community which may be mononational (like in Japan) or multinational (like in Russia or Ukraine). A national idea is a national myth but it helps society to find its real position in the geopolitical and economical environment. Artificial creation of modern Ukrainian national idea speaks about its mythological nature. A success of any national idea depends upon that how firmly it is established in public mind. Every idea which has a national status plays a tremendous role in the economical, political and cultural development of a state because it operates as a unifying force within society. Many modern democratic societies become increasingly individualized. But at the same time they are based on a universal system of values which may not change for a very long period. Absence of such system or trying to transform it in mechanical way usually causes a deep social, political, and axiological crisis as it was in Ukraine after the Orange revolution (2004).

Most of post-soviet societies faced the problem of conflict between old and new myths. Modern Ukrainian society experiences it especially hard because of absence of stable democratic tradition. After the disintegration of the USSA political system many social myths of that period continue to act in modern society. The myths about the omnipotence of bureaucracy, about the defectiveness of national social system in comparison with other social systems, about the total social harmony are among them. Russian scholar N. Soboleva argues that there is a paradox in the process of forming of new social mythology: spreading of new social myths is always followed by setback for progress of social changes [3, p. 148]. If a society has no powerful unifying idea this trend becomes dangerous and destructive. Many modern scientists express the view that the idea of private property is the most effective for social consolidation but on the whole, this theory remains open to question.

In the context of social transformations myths have the meaning of ideological convictions or objects of quasi-religious belief. A rapid change of social order is a serious stress for practically all members of the social community. When any rational planning does not correspond to reality the general strain is often realized in the active creating of social myths. The highest level of such activity can be observed during the wars, revolutions and other manifestations of social disorder. In this case the ancient mythical opposition “We – They” (or “Our – Their”) is actualized. This phenomenon took place during the Orange revolution in Ukraine. The name of one of the most influential political forces of that time a party “Nasha Ukraina” (“Our Ukraine”) may serve as a bright example of the attempt to actualize the opposition “We – They”.

Speaking about the situation in modern Ukraine many scholars argue that the country is open for infiltration of new ideas and trends, social, political and religious movements. As A. Kolodny and L. Philipovich affirm, it is possible to characterize modern Ukrainian out-look as uncertain, disorientated, inconsistent, and unprotected from potentially negative influences [11, c. 173]. Modern

Ukrainian society is also described as increasingly open and this aspect explains the active process of creating new myths. At the same time this thought is not shared by all scholars. For instance, N. Kachan expresses the contrary position: Ukrainian society is closed, non-plural and oriented on its own identity [12, c. 60]. According to this conception all today's political processes can be reduced to the attempts of the state to preserve its national independence. The idea of national state is proclaimed the highest purpose of social development. This trend causes the excessive concentration on the national history, forming of the "sacrifice complex", identification of national idea with the notion of sacred. All these phenomena prevent people from forming adequate and critical national self-awareness. Social mythology becomes a quasi-religion and even tries to substitute religion as a form of spiritual culture. It can be exemplified by establishing of the cult of national language, culture, state, and highly-politicized discussion about the problem of the Ukrainian National Church.

Social myths interact with society not only in cultural, economic and political spheres. It is also strongly connected with a current ecological situation. Scientific and technical progress is a powerful factor that determines social development. It provides society with economical welfare. At the same time scientific and technical progress has negative consequences such as ecological problems, trends of consumerism and over-consumption, violence and dehumanization. Solutions to these problems necessitate new ways of thinking. Criticism of modern civilization often includes a discussion about the increasing crisis of humanism. But on the other hand, humanism as a mythology that proclaims an individual the highest value may cause the ecological crisis itself. Humanism is based on a myth about the dominant role of people in nature and provokes inadequate attitude to nature resources. The root of this myth can be found in Bible (Adam as a master of nature). In philosophy and science of the Age of Enlightenment this myth was transformed into the idea of omnipotence of a person armed with scientific knowledge. One of the brightest formulations of this idea is the words of Francis

Bacon, who said: “Knowledge is a power”. In spite of intensive scientific development it is obvious that society is still dependent upon nature and should try to harmonize relations between nature and culture. In answer to ecological crisis a mythology of ecological culture has appeared. This mythology takes plays through policy, social and religious movements, science, and even fashion. Philosophy of Russian cosmism (V. Vernadsky and others) became one of the new alternatives to the traditional scientific paradigm based on a strict distinction between people and nature. Modern society needs to continue the elaboration of original approaches to nature and to renew the ancient mythological feeling of unity with it on the new practical and theoretical level. On the whole, phenomenon of ecological culture is not absolutely new. It goes back to the revival of traditional values of ancient period the most important of which were a belief in the inward relationship of all living beings and mythological image of Mother-Earth. A person of traditional culture was not a conqueror of nature. On the contrary, it tried not to destroy the natural and cosmic order of the world but maintained it through myths and rituals. A lot of modern theories of healthy way of life are based on ancient philosophical and religious traditions such as yoga or Daoism.

The worldview of modern society is based on scientific rationality but in certain moments of historical development irrational factors begin to play the dominant role. A clear example of it is the actualizing of the Christian myth about Armageddon after Chernobyl catastrophe of 1986 which was connected with a myth about a “sinful people” [6, p. 33]. In modern social consciousness the myth about Armageddon in most cases is connected with the global ecological crisis. Thus, today’s ecological problems are perceived not only through real facts and processes but also through the lens of different social myths.

Therefore, social myths are an integrate part of any social system. Social myth and society interact on political, ideological, scientific, cultural, and ecological levels. Social myths express the interests of different social groups and may be used as an instrument of power or object of quasi-religious belief, etc. The activity of

social myths increases during the periods of intensive changes and transformations of social reality.

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