

## THEORY AND PERSPECTIVES OF PHILOLOGY

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### PROMETHEUS MYTH AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: A SYMBOLIC PARADIGM OF TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS

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**Abstract.** This article considers the myth of Prometheus as a symbolic basis for understanding the modern discourse on the development of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Parallels between the myth and modern technological processes are analyzed through the prism of the symbolism of ethical, social and philosophical aspects, in the context of the responsibility of creators AI and the consequences of innovations. The use of Artificial Intelligence in a post-information society, like the myth of Prometheus in the era of antiquity, form the same paradigm of ethical issues of technological progress: the desire for development and improvement of human existence is simultaneously accompanied by important moral demands and risks. Prometheus brought fire to people, but made people responsible for their actions, and the use of AI forces modern humans to be responsible for their innovations and their consequences for future generations.

**Key words:** Prometheus, Artificial Intelligence, mythology, technology, ethics.

**Introduction.** Many philosophical debates begin with the question of whether a person can create something that exceeds himself. These topics appeared in the thoughts of ancient thinkers and remain relevant in the modern world. Artificial Intelligence is a technology that can radically influence people's lifestyles and, to some extent, equalize humans in their capabilities, according to the generally accepted opinion, in a post-information society. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is today developed by large technology companies, universities and startups, but its benefits are often concentrated in the hands of a few, causing concern in society.

AI as a technology has the potential to transform society: it helps solve complex problems, but at the same time raises ethical questions about security, privacy, and responsibility. Artificial Intelligence, like Prometheus' fire, is a powerful gift that can either elevate humanity to a new level or become a source of serious challenges, so the image of Prometheus as a cultural hero is extremely relevant in the post-information society. It emphasizes the importance of responsibility, awareness of consequences, and readiness to accept the challenges that progress brings.

**Main part.** Artificial Intelligence can be interpreted as a branch of computer science, having an aim of modeling mental processes on a machine. Due to a semantic error, the term AI has come to denote both technology and a set of technological tools: algorithms, codes, computer programs, etc., if they have functions that can be called "intelligent". Today, AI evokes mixed assessments: some

perceive AI as a fairy tale consisting of a whole series of inventions that testify to human genius (Pickover, 2021), others are critical and see in it a new barbarism (M. David and C. Sauviat, 2019) or a decisive anti-humanist technological offensive (Sadin, 2018). From the very beginning of its appearance, AI has also remained a source of inspiration and reflection in literature and art. Modern literary and cinematic works try to form the ethical foundations of society's perception of AI and raise fundamental questions about ethics and the coexistence of people and machines (Mayor, 2018). However, the idea of the emergence of AI dates back to ancient times and is associated primarily with ancient mythology.

**The purpose of the article.** The purpose of this research is to provide a basis for understanding some of the characteristics of Artificial Intelligence, through similarities with the mythical story of Prometheus to reveal the dangers and ethical challenges of AI. As in the myth of Prometheus, human achievements in the field of AI cause admiration and anxiety: on the one hand, it is a powerful tool for progress, and on the other, it is a potential threat if you lose control of it.

Prometheus myth contains deep symbolism. It tells of the emergence of deception and evil as a principle opposing the good gods. The main theme of the myth is the fall of humanity and the emergence of civilization.

The myth of Prometheus, who gave fire to humans, symbolizes the desire for knowledge and the ability to resist limitations. However, it is also a warning about the possible consequences of such a challenge. By giving fire, Prometheus violated the divine order, which led to severe punishment. The myth of Prometheus, which is about 3000 years old, was retold by the authors of Ancient Greece, in particular Hesiod (Hesiod), Aeschylus (Aeschylus, 2015) Plato (Plato, 1903) and Diogenes, so there are several versions of the famous myth, each of which is equally important for revealing this issue.

One version of the myth depicts Prometheus as the creator and sculptor of humanity (Nathaniel Hawthorne, 2015). Prometheus molded people from clay, mixing earth and water, and Athena endowed them with breath. Clay here acts as a metaphor for form and potential, and water as a symbol of life. Athena, the goddess of wisdom, played a key role in completing this act of creating people, endowing them with breath, that is, life and consciousness.

According to another version, Prometheus revived the people created by Deucalion and Pyrrha from stones. In the myth of Deucalion and Pyrrha, humanity is restored after the great flood (Nathaniel Hawthorne, 2015) Deucalion and Pyrrha, throwing the "bones to mother earth" (stones), create new people. According to some versions, it was Prometheus who helped revive these creations. His participation in this story emphasizes his role as a bearer of life and knowledge, constantly concerned about the survival and development of humanity.

These versions of the myth emphasize different aspects of Prometheus' role in mythology: his ability to create, his desire to give people life forces and support them in difficult moments. They also demonstrate the cooperation between the titan Prometheus and the gods, in particular Athena, which symbolizes the unity of the physical (clay, earth) and the spiritual (breath, consciousness) in the creation of a human. The mythological plot of Prometheus as the creator of people also concerns the relationship between people and the Olympians. People had to bring a sacrifice to the gods. According to custom, the best part of the sacrificial animal was brought to the gods, and the rest was taken from it by people. The large and fat half of the bull meant prosperity. Prometheus decided to divide the sacrificial bull into two parts, one of which consisted of meat, and the other, large one – of bones covered with fat. The titan deceived Zeus, offering him to make his choice. Zeus recognized the deception, but chose a pile of bones under the fat to have an excuse to punish humans and Prometheus. As punishment, humans were deprived of fire. But Prometheus stole fire from the gods and brought it to humans.

The myth of Prometheus, as told by Plato in the dialogue "Protagoras", is one of the most profound and meaningful stories of ancient Greek mythology. Its content raises fundamental questions

about the nature of a human, his role in the world and his relationship to the gods. In Plato's version, the gods entrust two brothers, the Titans, Prometheus and Epimetheus, with creating different types of living beings and endowing each species with the appropriate qualities and abilities. Epimetheus takes on this task, but insists on independently carrying out this creation, asking Prometheus to check the result after the work is completed. Prometheus supports his brother's opinion. Epimetheus carefully distributes abilities between different types of living beings, but suddenly finds that he has forgotten about humanity, leaving it completely defenseless, naked and weak. Epimetheus, acting hastily and unwisely (the name Epimetheus translates as "thinks in hindsight"), forgets to endow people with protective means and abilities. Prometheus, whose name means "thinks in advance", realizes his brother's mistake and seeks to correct it. Prometheus steals fire and gives it to people. This act of Prometheus provokes a whole series of undesirable consequences. In Plato's story, Prometheus and Epimetheus symbolize two sides of the same hypostasis, the opposition of two opposite poles, which are combined into one whole. The brothers worked on the creation of living beings separately, and Epimetheus, probably out of pride, decided to surpass himself, but since he was unable to look ahead (as his name suggests), he made a serious mistake. Thus, the distinction gives rise to delusion and evil. Prometheus and Epimetheus are two brothers of the same type who sought good, but fell into the trap of frivolity and mistakes. Since in Greek mythology the titans have always acted as symbols of the brute force of the Earth, which resisted Zeus, who personified the spirit, Prometheus and Epimetheus can be considered as the first manifestation of dualism.

*The difference between humans and animals.* The myth of Prometheus emphasizes the fundamental difference between humans and animals. Epimetheus successfully distributed qualities between animals, ensuring balance and harmony in nature. The strongest animals also received certain restrictions, and the weakest ones such advantages that help them survive. Everything looked harmonious. A Human was the exception. Epimetheus, having distributed all the qualities and features between different species of animals, left nothing for humans. Prometheus, having stolen fire from the gods, gave the same humans great opportunities and privileges, after which people realized that they had the highest qualities in common with the gods: knowledge, intelligence, as well as a certain level of consciousness.

The theft of the sacred fire of knowledge by Prometheus is reminiscent of the original sin of the Book of Genesis (Old Testament). But in the myth of Prometheus, the original sin is committed not by a human, but by a Titan. This Titan (Prometheus) resembles the serpent-tempter of the Book of Genesis, especially in his cunning and uncentered character. Whatever happens, a Human accepts his new condition: from now on he must work to survive. He loses his spontaneous and natural character; he is condemned to live in effort, questions, doubts, shame and guilt.

In the myth of the theft of fire by Prometheus, fire symbolizes the fire of knowledge that allows us to model and transform Nature (agriculture, crafts, industry, architecture, etc.); it is not only about manual labor, but also about design and creativity. This knowledge is linked to consciousness: it goes beyond simple knowledge, it is dynamic, lively, like flame. This is the knowledge stolen from Hephaestus (god of fire, forging and metallurgy) and Athena (goddess of wisdom): here we find two aspects of knowledge: concrete and abstract. But since the fire of knowledge usually belongs to the gods, its uses are associated with the risk of anomalies. A poorly controlled fire can devastate everything in its path, destroying Nature, and a Human himself. Ultimately, the myth of Prometheus highlights the risk of imbalance and decentration associated with the human condition. Human has the sacred fire of knowledge, but is he worthy of it? To survive, human will have to reinvent himself, perhaps by making a new pact with the gods, i.e. practicing a new spirituality. Because the main obstacle to a Human's survival is a Human himself.

The archetype of fire expresses spiritual energy, full of deep meaning. However, it is not unambiguously associated with either good or evil. Fire can be both a weapon of the gods, a protection

for people, or a manifestation of elemental power, where the eternal struggle between good and evil takes place. Just as a human chooses his side in this confrontation, so the forces of nature can support either the creation and preservation of order, or destruction and chaos. In Rome, the goddess Vesta was dedicated to the cult of fire. A temple was built to her, where an eternal fire burned – a symbol of the stability of the Roman Empire. Care for this fire was the duty of the Vestals – priestesses who took a vow of chastity and celibacy, the violation of which was punishable by death. The Vestals had privileges, for example, they could free those convicted of execution. The fire of Vesta was renewed annually at the beginning of the calendar year, and altars dedicated to the goddess were even located in private homes, most often at the entrance to the house, in the so-called vestibule (where the word vestibule comes from). In Greek polises, the goddess Hestia, the patroness of the home, had a similar meaning. Despite belonging to the twelve Olympian gods, Hestia rarely became the heroine of myths. She and Vesta can be considered symbols of matriarchal elements that have survived in religions even in developed state societies. However, fire in antiquity was also associated with destructive power. In this context, it was embodied in the images of gods such as Ares, Hephaestus, and Vulcan. Ares symbolized destructive war, Hephaestus represented the art of blacksmithing and creating weapons, and Vulcan simultaneously personified the destructive power of fire and protected against fires (James Hollis, 2004).

In fact, the myth of Prometheus lays the foundation for an ambiguous relationship between humans and gods: Humans now possess a portion of the divine, which prompts them to turn to the gods and worship them: certain relationships are established between humans and gods. On the other hand, the status of human is based on errors and prohibitions, which can only provoke the wrath of the gods and the misfortune of humanity.

The myth of Prometheus becomes for Plato a powerful metaphor for the human desire for knowledge and perfection, as well as the challenges associated with this path. Plato in the dialogue "Protagoras" uses the myth of Prometheus as an allegory to explain the process of human formation. Civilization is presented as the result of efforts and mistakes. Humanity arises through overcoming its natural weakness. The fire of knowledge compensates for people's vulnerability, but at the same time imposes responsibility on them. This process symbolizes the active role of a human in creating culture and society, where mistakes become an incentive for improvement. Prometheus, who rebelled against the will of the gods, brings good to humanity, but disrupts cosmic harmony. This act embodies the ambivalence of progress: every achievement carries both creative and destructive potential. Thus, the myth emphasizes the need for a balance between development and preservation of harmony.

*Moral dilemma and freedom of choice.* The story of Prometheus emphasizes the importance of choice and its consequences. Humanity has the freedom to create, but this freedom requires wisdom, self-restraint, and a sense of responsibility. Plato emphasizes that true progress is impossible without ethical reflection on actions.

The myth of Prometheus reveals deep philosophical and symbolic ideas that have remained relevant for millennia. Fire in the myth symbolizes not only warmth and light, but also humanity's ability to innovate, ingenuity and self-improvement. Plato emphasizes that fire is a gift from the gods, sacred and sublime, but also very dangerous. This aspect reflects the duality of progress: knowledge and technology can serve for good, but if misused, they turn into a destructive force.

*Fire as a symbol of knowledge and technology.* AI, just like fire, can be realized in two forms and represent an ambivalent essence – two forces that unite and divide society. Just as fire, which warmed in the cold, illuminated the path and with the help of which food was prepared, so AI began to perform key tasks of the modern world: to automate work, analyze data sets, diagnose diseases and optimize transport systems, etc. Both fire and AI make life easier, but their impact on modern life is much more significant. Fire has long ceased to be just a source of heat, turning into a symbol of communication and unification of people, on the one hand, and a means of their separation, on

the other. Artificial intelligence, like fire, connects people through global networks, but at the same time increases the gap between them: digital inequality and the threat of job losses are becoming a new reality. In every society, fire has always been opposed as "one's own" and "alien". Today, this same perception is reflected in AI: it is perceived as a blessing if it improves the lives of "one's own", but causes anxiety if it is associated with "foreign" interests – be it military developments or the achievements of foreign companies. This duality is especially clearly manifested in the symbolism of unification and division. Just as fire united ancient tribes, so AI serves as a technological bridge, connecting countries in common goals, starting from space exploration to the fight against climate change. However, in the same environment, it becomes a source of conflict: technological races, disputes over intellectual property rights, fear of the future – all this divides humanity. Since ancient times, fire has been used in rituals as a symbol of national or religious identity, whether it be sacrifices or torchlight processions. Artificial Intelligence, acting as an intangible entity, occupies a similar role in the modern world. Achievements in the field of high technology arouse national pride, becoming a symbol of scientific superiority. The French anthropologist Levi-Strauss spoke of fire as a kind of mediator between opposites (C. Levi-Strauss, 1947). Artificial Intelligence also fulfills this role, combining reality with virtuality, helping a person interpret complex phenomena and manage them (G. Berry, 2017). And, just as fire once changed human relations, AI opens up a new level of social interactions. It becomes a source of both challenges and opportunities, acting for humanity not only as a tool for development, but also a means that emphasizes the need to rethink its own principles.

It is worth paying attention to the relevance of another thesis noted by Plato. As noted above, people in the myth of Prometheus occupy a unique position between animals and gods. Deprived of natural protection, but endowed with the fire of knowledge, they are forced to independently create the conditions for survival. This vulnerability becomes the source of their creative potential. According to Plato, a human is a creature who shapes his destiny, relying on the knowledge and abilities received from the gods.

The relevance of this thesis about the special place of man in nature becomes obvious due to the change in the role of man in the world of technology. As in the myth of Prometheus, where man is deprived of natural protection, but endowed with the gift of the fire of knowledge, today humanity faces similar challenges. AI, as the "fire of Prometheus", provides unprecedented opportunities for expanding creative potential, but at the same time requires a person not only to adapt to new conditions, but also to bear responsibility for his actions. Modern technologies, in particular Artificial Intelligence, place a human in an intermediate position between the role of creator and dependent creature. People shape AI, investing their knowledge and intelligence in it, but at the same time are forced to take into account its impact on society, the economy and nature. This emphasizes the uniqueness of the human situation: we do not just use AI, but also determine the direction of its development, often overcoming our own vulnerability, as was the case with fire in the myth.

In addition, human vulnerability to technologies created by itself stimulates it to seek solutions that maintain a balance between development and risks. For example, the issue of regulating Artificial Intelligence is a reflection of the same struggle between limited resources and the need to create conditions for survival. As in the case of Prometheus, who brought fire to humans to compensate for their weakness, today AI is becoming a means to solve key global problems, such as climate change or overcoming epidemics.

The creative potential of a human, described in the myth, is revealed through the use of AI as a tool that helps to go beyond limitations. The idea of a human as a being who shapes his own destiny through knowledge received from the "gods" (in the modern context it is done through science and technology), remains extremely relevant. Artificial Intelligence allows us to implement ambitious projects, explore space, create new medicines, but at the same time poses new challenges. Thus, the

thesis about the unique position of a human in nature demonstrates that the vulnerability of the human being, its certain imperfection, compensated by knowledge and innovation, is a source of strength and progress. AI, as a modern "fire", provides humanity not only with new tools for creating conditions for survival, but also stimulates it to rethink its role in nature and society.

*Prometheus as a cultural hero.* The image of Prometheus symbolizes sacrifice for the sake of humanity. He suffers for his gift, which raises the question of the price of progress and responsibility for knowledge. Unlike tragedians such as Aeschylus, Plato focuses on the ethical and philosophical meaning of myth, revealing dilemmas associated with the development of culture and civilization.

The relevance of the thesis about Prometheus as a cultural hero in the context of the use of artificial intelligence is manifested through parallels between sacrifice for the sake of progress and the challenges faced by modern humanity. Just as Prometheus, who brought fire to people, taking on the punishment of the gods, so modern innovators, scientists and societies as a whole are forced to make a choice between development and the risks that accompany the introduction of new technologies.

Artificial Intelligence, like a "new fire," promises humanity unprecedented opportunities – from medical breakthroughs to the automation of complex processes. However, its implementation raises questions about the price of such progress: job losses, threats to privacy, uneven distribution of technology, and even potential ethical dilemmas related to the autonomy of systems. All of this symbolizes the sacrifices that humanity is forced to make in order to move forward.

Like Prometheus, who gave humans the power to transform their existence, today's AI developers often find themselves in the role of bearers of enormous responsibility. The development and use of Artificial Intelligence systems require a deep awareness of how this knowledge can be used: for good or for harm. This provokes a public debate about the ethical framework of progress, similar to the questions posed to humans by Prometheus's act and the sacrifice that the hero made for the sake of the human good. Prometheus' sacrifice reflects the complexity of the price of progress. His punishment is a reminder that every step forward can have consequences. In the case of Artificial Intelligence, this is the risk of losing human control or even the emergence of unpredictable results when technology develops faster than the ethical norms and standards that regulate it can be formed.

**Conclusions and perspectives for further research.** *Parallels between myth and modernity:* The myth of Prometheus provides a deep symbolic understanding of technological progress and its consequences for humanity. Like Prometheus, who brought fire to people, Artificial Intelligence becomes a new "fire", opening up unprecedented opportunities for humanity. However, as in the myth, these opportunities are accompanied by risks and moral dilemmas, which pose an important choice for humanity: how to properly use these technologies for the benefit of all.

1. The Price of Progress. Just as Prometheus suffered a severe punishment for his gift, so too does humanity, which is introducing Artificial Intelligence into various spheres of life, facing questions of ethics, safety, and social consequences. The development of AI requires responsibility for its consequences, as these technologies can lead to significant changes in society, the economy, and even the very understanding of human nature.

2. The Dualism of Progress. The myth of Prometheus emphasizes the dual nature of progress: it can be both a blessing and a threat. Similarly, Artificial Intelligence carries with it not only opportunities for scientific and social development, but also potential dangers, in particular in the areas of automation, privacy, and control.

3. The role of a human in technological progress. Prometheus personifies a human as a creator, capable of shaping his destiny through knowledge. Today, the role of a human is to responsibly approach the development and application of technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, ensuring a balance between innovation and ethical norms.

4. The philosophical aspect of technology. The myth of Prometheus teaches us that technology should serve the good of humanity, but its use requires a deep understanding of the consequences and

moral principles. Modern technologies, including Artificial Intelligence, require not only scientific knowledge, but also a philosophical understanding of their impact on the future.

That is, the myth of Prometheus sheds light on the fundamental imbalance that exists in nature: human is endowed with a higher power, but it is a human who disrupts the general harmony. The current ecological crisis is a perfect illustration of this. Prometheus was punished, but what awaits those who create innovative systems, and do they possess the gift of foresight to mitigate the wrath of the gods?

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