PHILOSOPHY, ADVERTISING MYTHS AND MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Daily need for inner security/safety, meaning/sense and axiological certitude receives a large/wide range of solutions – for the trend of ideas of ordinary consciousness to philosophical speculation. "Demystification of the world" through science goes along with a psycho-social-cultural crisis; the irreversible de-mystification of the perspectives over the world, the erosion of traditional symbolic horizons determine the human ideals, beliefs, the modes of perceiving, grasping and valuing existence to be shaped by means/forms that are substitutes for philosophy, taking the form of mythical scenarios. Advertising, for instance, aims not towards products, but life styles; management can define a mode of being.

KEYWORDS: *common sense, decency, myth, philosophizing, advertising,*

Being concerned with current matters, ordinary man is used to have a regular approach on life, by means of efficiency oriented skills. Carried out by worries and hopes, he does not allow himself to breed the taste for speculation. Usually, his horizon of questions regarding man and life is often mistaken for the sphere of immediate needs – in what concerns its level, contents and solutions. Raising questions – when it happens and inasmuch as it happens – appears attached to unusual events (either good or bad) and, most of the time, just inasmuch as these require a certain effort in order to be integrated into what is called habits. Ordinary judgement is in terms of action and utility. The meaning of life is neither obsession, nor a release of passion, since physical and soul energies are oriented towards goals that do not allow somebody to appeal to reflection. Playing with abstract arguments is frightening, distracts from those acts that are experienced as obligations, and this is why it will be avoided, as much as possible. Self preservation instinct works well enough. Man has the taste for relativity; daily activities witness for the weaknesses of humanity and the powers of hazard, shaping his wisdom; life is intuitively taken as a value, and it is worth living even if there are no strong meanings; thus, life is above all ideas describing it. Daily life receives a immediate link between theory and practice, between knowledge and action; we live under the impulse of satisfying needs; this is why choosing goals and means cannot be endlessly suspended in order to make room for deliberative reflection; one makes appeal to already given knowledge and value instruments that have a certified efficiency. This is why daily subjective life oscillates between decisions founded on momentary, passing and inconsistent reasons and decisions determined by rigid grounds, although they seldom conceptually clarified (tradition, habits).

Ordinary consciousness behaves like a receptacle: the knowledge of reality – taken as a mirroring of reality by thought and senses – remains at the stage of noticing and uncritical description of some empiric correlations, of factual observations, of some modes of external phenomenal manifestation. Realism that is based on the "logic of senses" combines with the concern for normative aspect of life and action.

"Common sense – says Lucian Blaga – is due to some ideas acquired by human spirit in time, by means of living together with the others. Within the individual, it is a

representative of his social side and is displayed in a sum of attitudes and judgments which imply some norms adopted by human community." (L. Blaga, 1983, p. 81). Although special forms of spiritual manifestation (science, philosophy, art) go beyond current norms, judgments, and preconceptions, they modify – if accepted – the meanings of daily life and thought. For instance, without common sense having scientific attitudes, it is and can be penetrated by scientific ideas. Usual opinion can grasp ideas and attitudes that are specific to a philosophical system, inasmuch as they are popular. Nevertheless, common sense does not surpass its condition: it is open for practice and applicative things and for consequences that prove useful for immediate human life. The validation criterion is experience. This is why "it is always the subject of mislead and denies the very experience that ground it can bring about" (Stere, 1979, p. 95), since it is partial, superficial, temporary and, usually, skeptical regarding the value of moral reality and/or theoretical generalization.

Decency is the wise state of common sense. It expresses experiences, traditions, authorized opinions, skills that are proved efficient, empiric evidences, capacity to adapt to given situations, rational wits and intuitive ability, prudence in anticipating possible consequences, moderation, taste for harmony that eliminates flashiness, fair judgment and certainty in difficult situations. Authentic decency is not reduced to calculus and refraining, innocence and modest equilibrium, but that which emerges form an opulence of experience. It does not lack doubt, but it goes straight and sure of itself towards its target, being a synthesis of the instruments of solving/passing over problematic situations and/or matters; but this synthesis is not of a knowledge range, since it lacks explicative and interpretative coherence, but is practical and utility oriented.

As reported to common sense, philosophy has an integrative function and a systematic mission. Within daily life one settles generalizations that continue the collective experience and one creates attitudes regarding these generalizations; but philosophy aims towards explanation and development of arguments that surpass the interest for practical immediate goals; therefore it becomes different in nature from the wisdom that nurtures itself from ordinary thought area. The lack of transparency of philosophical ideas in relation with immediate life is the result of a constructive effort; one settles models of understanding of man and world. We can notice a gradual settlement of solutions men render to problems that they feel closer to. The existential aspects are effectively handled, with a variable and changing amount of acknowledgement, within the practice of life. The contacts with life and environment are complex enough, such that intellectual means that are used at a certain moment can be separated from one another as origin and level of competence. One gathers together beliefs, wisdom obtain of own accord, group habits, deeper knowledge and values received due to educational strength of ordinary environment, desires, fears, and preconceptions. Empiric solutions, offered by common sense and decency, are unintentional generalizations withdrawn from a long collective experience, and collections of habits around some interest points. One cannot speak about explanation and logical coherence in this case, but about sets of knowledge, but of examples, temporary value reference points, pieces of wisdom, etc., usually proposed in an apodictic manner; their value is rendered by the fact they resisted to real tests which collective life has imposed on them. Theoretical-philosophical solutions refer to matters regarding man, recover this area and separate the real issues from the false ones, placing them under highly general interpretations. As Blaga says, common sense is defied, surpassed and his illusions are corrected. One discerns some fundamental structures of the world in order to set up some requirements for the human being. One cancel jumbled contents of daily consciousness in order to open horizons of values by which the duplicity of medium intellectual means could be eliminated. Moreover, ordinary life and social *praxis* confront human being with its destiny, stimulating philosophical activity by means of intellectual curiosity, doubt, lack of certitude and existential drama/anguish.

Mircea Eliade utters: "Awareness of a real world is closely linked to the discovery of the sacred. Experiencing the sacred, human spirit noticed the difference between what is unveiled as real, powerful, rich and full of meaning, and what does not have these characteristics, i. e. chaotic and dangerous flux of things, their accidental and meaningless apparitions and disappearances." (Mircea Eliade, 1994, p. 5-6). Always concrete human existence, either individual or collective, functions and evolves only related to a symbolic horizon (values, meanings, norms, models, significations) which is spontaneously considered as absolute, initial, unconditioned, unchangeable and accepted as a supreme goal of specific acts, a *holy* imperative for action, object of an unconditioned devotion. Sacralization has a wide meaning, being practiced in relation to laic contents (idealizing some values, historical events, personalities, events, creators). Myths propose explanations and interpretations regarding certain domains and hypostases of existence directly linked to psycho-cultural reality of human communities passing through different stages of historical evolution. Mythical world offers values/symbols, models and behavioral types that refer to concrete needs, aspirations, and activities. Myths are an axiological role.

As Mircea Eliade says, "human life receives a meaning by imitating some paradigmatic models revealed by supernatural beings"; as an element of the structure of consciousness, *the sacred* always raises the question of a meaningful world in which human life has a meaning, such that "from the beginning philosophical reflection has been confronted with a world of meaning that was, structurally and genetically, *religious* – and this is generally true, and not merely in the case of *the primitives*, Orientals or pre-Socratic thinkers. Dialectic of the sacred preceded and was a model for all dialectical movements discovered by the human spirit afterwards. Revealing being, meaning, and truth in an unknown, chaotic, and threatening world, the experience of the sacred opened the way for systematic thinking." (Mircea Eliade, 1994, p. 6-7). In fact, myth is a primitive form of philosophy set up as pedagogy if meaning. Religion is imposed as anthropology justified in relation to transcendence. In different cultural establishments the experience of the sacred amplifies existential horizons that have a value meaning. "For the primitive man, and for the man of traditional societies, the objects of exterior world do not have a intrinsic autonomous value. An object or an action gain value and this way become real, because they participate, one way or another, to a reality that transcends them." (Mircea Eliade, 1990, p. 124). *The sacred* – considered in a religious, mythical, ritual, artistic or moral manner – signifies a level of the initial existence, which is authentic, meaningful and unconditioned. The scared is a cultural simulation of the absolute, offering models, references and imperatives for the ordinary experience. Modern science eliminated mystery: a detached glance, with no illusions, aiming to objectivity, describes nature as a stupid machine led by rigorous laws and deprived of surprises. Man lives in a universe indifferent to hopes and pains. This duality (man opposed to objective reality) cultivates anxiety, loneliness and despair, skepticism regarding values and psychological dizziness.

Interpretation of the universe, of life and history of man encompass emotional-affective and practical assumptions, axiological frameworks that ultimately accomplish the existential functions that are proper to myth. Aristotle, taking astonishment as permanent impulse of philosophical knowledge, says that inasmuch as one progresses form usual matters to wider realities and generalities, "that person who doubts and wonders admits by these very facts that his ignorance. This is why he who loves myths is, in a certain way, a philosopher, because myth was invented due to miraculous events, in order to explain them." And if philosophy is meant to satisfy "the perplexity generated by the fact that thing are as they are" (Aristotle, 1965, p. 56), to eliminate doubt and fear, we can accept that, at least as intention, "the function of philosophy does not differ from that of myth. The same intention stimulates the works of thinkers, from Heraclites to Descartes and Kant. The problem is not a mere game, but an existential interrogation, like a questioning of the

thinker himself. The man lost within the world and time discovers the necessity to break through circumstances, to establish his own place within the infinite universe. Myth represents the fundamental form of this spiritual adaptation of the human community to its environment. He renders a primal interpretation of the world, a primal settlement in space and time." (Georges Gusdorf, 1996, p. 247). Just to avoid this change of plans, in modern philosophy, besides the axiological projects that often take the form of myth (even accidentally, as Nietzsche's *übermensch*), one imposes a line of thought in which divinity as existential – and not purely transcendent and strictly separated from human order – experience is the main one. References to Kierkegaard, Marcel and Jaspers are clarifying.

By means of science, the world is irreversibly deprived of myth, re-actualization of magical practices and animist perspectives can have only the meaning of a lack of honesty of man to himself by betraying and/or despising reason. "But – says Jaspers – depriving world of myth is altered if one brings here a state of mind obtained by the inheritance of technical experience." (Karl Jaspers, 1994, p. 15). Since current social life does not have a fashion of scientific thinking – but just a use of its technical results – there are new mental habits and types of affective reaction that destroy life by means of turning the soul blind. "The old magic was replaced by a new thinking, deprived of ideas, quasi-mythical." (*Ibidem*, p. 16). Traditional conceptions over world and life keep on surviving and offer criteria and symbols by which men decode and understand life, history and world. Science rushed their simplification, destroying their aura, the psycho-spiritual impact, the atmosphere and the force of convincing. On the background of such a social-cultural crisis, the beliefs and ideals of man can be settled/shaped by means/forms that substitute philosophy.

Advertising, for instance, inhibits the imaginative progress, orienting it towards a specific action – buying a product. There is a major difference: while authentic myths and artistic creations ensure "one the one hand, certain axes that, without confining the circulation of images, free it on directions that are favorable to fantastic accomplishment of desire" (Haineault, Roy, 2002, p. 71), amplify desire, force us to create, i. e. to involve in fantastic elaboration, advertising hides desires and displays impulses – since these are the only ones that can find satisfaction in the real world. Oriented by mercantile goals, advertising proposes a type of solution different from that of myths: "it must necessary present buying as solution. Thus, never suggest any doubt." (*Ibidem*, p. 217). If myth is related to imagination, advertising is oriented towards buying; if myth stimulates desire, advertising aims towards action. We can say that advertising offers as a response to anxiety biased questions a conclusive interpretation: "There is nothing more to be said: meaning is consumed; there is nothing more to reflect upon: one contemplates solution." (*Ibidem*, p. 94); by a "concrete" action – buying – one realizes the transgression of reality, of the factual level. The product frees: "Appearing as a solution of the mystery… as *deus ex machina*, the product receives a heroic statute. Confronted to latent anxieties of the era, it looks like an welcomed savior, as a permanent protector. The consumer entrusts himself to the product just as the believer does with providence." (F. Brune, 2003, p. 132).

The main stages of advertising actions are: raising an anxiety biased question; stimulating desire; inhibition of desire and its transformation into impulse; "hijacking" it towards a specific action.

The subjacent logic is relatively simple: it exploits the existential issues – which, if not solved, become worrying factor, and create a state of tension to the individual – and offer the product as a response. Finally, offering the appearance of an answer to existential matters, advertising merely frees us – temporarily – by means of consumption, from the tension they created.

Proposing to resolve existential problems by means of buying products, one operates a **reduction**, and then activates **frustration**; "enclosing" the aspirations of the

individual in things, advertising reduces his psycho-social-cultural life to consumption: "thus one presupposes that the warmth of the family is to be found in a flan, the experience of holydays is to be found in a pair of shoes, one opens towards the world using a pair of shorts, and one can find God in a plate." (*Ibidem*, p. 23). But, considering that all values the product has are not transferred to the individual by the mere act of buying (as promised), the consumer will be permanently disappointed. In fact, this is the goal of advertisement: if the individual is satisfied, he would no longer make appeal to consumption to fill in his existential gaps"; in exchange, being continuously frustrated, his desire to buy will be permanently re-launched: "renewing lusts destroys frustrations. Thus one creates and maintains a dynamic lack of equilibrium that makes people live for the sake of consumption; **existing** is **drooling**" (*Ibidem*, p. 116).

This way advertising meets the individual propensity to search – within the outer world – a plausible answer to questions that torment him. For all relevant situations, "all time, for all matters – daily or eternal – for all needs we do not yet feel, the **product-answer** is ready." (*Ibidem*, p. 116).

Mythical thinking grants a super-human entity (god, hero or ancestor) with the function to perform a series of behaviors that, on the one hand, solve problematic matters; and, on the other hand, offer models for all relevant activities. Following (imitating) them, the individual "transcends" the immediate, the concrete and passes into a sacred universe which he rules due to his identification with the super-human being. The manner of thinking advertising tries to impose on us has the same structure, following a few steps: the product is transformed into a saving hero, it becomes a provider of civilization – meaning it establishes a model for our behavior; buying it becomes a model to behave since, on the one hand, it solves the problematic situations and, on the other hand, receives the statute of **relevant** action. Thus, advertising accomplishes one of the most important functions of myths: it offers models of thinking and behavior for all relevant situations – "advertisement specifically indicates behaviors to imitate. All refusal to do so is equaled to self-exclusion from society" (*Ibidem*, p. 10). This is why it receives the same socializing powers that myths have – "it contributes to our education, showing how to behave and what to believe, to feel, to think, what frightens us and what we desire – and what not to." (D. Kellner, 2001, p. 13).

A second function of myths that advertising exploits is that of offering the individual the possibility to transcend the immediate and to integrate into some other level of existence – "The message of numerous ads often goes around a proposal like '**flee from reality**'."(F. Brune, 2003, p. 39). Fleeing from reality happens when the individual imitates the exemplar gesture and buys. "The logic" promoted by advertisement is shaped by the following key-messages: buy and you will enjoy: disappearance of all problems; transfer of all values your product has; identification with the "super-human being" that promotes the product; access to the existential level this being has. Concerning the characteristics of this other "existential level", we will not reach the conclusion that, like in the case of traditional societies, it is sacred. We rather consider that it gathers the form of a universe of opulence, in which all problems of the individual miraculously disappear, resolved by the solution-product, in which all desires are suddenly satisfied. This way one organizes the chaos generated by desires, anxieties and lack of security of the individual. The individual has no reason to fear: to integrate into another reality all he has to do is to buy. Thus, advertising has the capacity to ground the image of authentic reality, since "it proposes for consumption rather a mythology and a hierarchy of values, and less a product." (F. Brune, 2003, p. 168). Spectators/buyers undergo a risk of becoming "individuals for whom the field of consciousness was replaced with advertising field." (*Ibidem*, p. 15). "Advertising offers the utopian image of a newer ego, which is more attractive, successful and prestigious, obtained by means of buying certain products. It proposes a magical

transformation of the self and of the new identity and associates the change from consumption behavior, from fashion and appearance with the **metamorphosis into a new person**." (D. Kellner, 2001, 2. 297). The model becomes a sort of divinity that we are presented with either under the form of a "**star**" (one belonging to the culture of media – already perceived within collective mentality as a person living a life which is "different" from the others and has qualities that are "superior" to those of the rest of the people) or under the form of **positively biased human type** (macho-man, *femme fatale*, a. s. o.). In case a normal product is promoted (a product having a daily used, like detergent), one proposes a representative character for the target. These stakes/effects are present/active even if the artistic reception of the advertising message is dominant.

In a world in which the values of utility obviously dominate the system of life values, management science and scientific management receive paradigmatic potencies, since they offer existential solutions, extending their applicability beyond their specific domain: that of increasing functionality and sustaining the competitive character of organizations. Next to *homo oeconomicus* and the myth of success in an American style, management surpasses the technical-bureaucratic reductionism by an anthropological reconfiguration/grounding, under this new image, it can be a part of foreseeing some archetypal scenarios that shape not only the professional conduct/activity, but a personal perspective on the world, life and history.

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