

from the soul to go beyond what we believe to be or we think we know about ourselves. There is a kind of laziness in us, we are content with what little we have, and that seems so much, while instead we possess huge treasures, without being aware of it. Sometimes we live in our misery, denying the presence of our resources to which we draw only in moments of crisis, another nice saying: “The little need makes the old lady trot along”. How many people have said, overcoming a difficult moment: “I do not know who gave me the strength, I do not how I did it!”

This wonder, incredulous, as if it were not our work, must instead make us reflect and understand how little we know, especially in terms of resources and must stimulate us to seek our qualities, our strengths: how? By studying, for example, the psychological type to which we tend mostly by integrating it with other types, developing the deficient psychic functions harmonizing them with each other, and pushing us at any moment and act of our life to give the best of ourselves; M.L.King reminds us: “If you can not be a main road, be a path. If you can not be the sun, be a star. Be always the best of what you are. “This is the work of Psychosynthesis.

You can not rest on your laurels ... that’s why LOVE is IMPERFECT, because otherwise we would be content, presumptuously, deluding ourselves to be ok so, perfect. We all wink at the perfectionism nurturing of our Ego, thus lengthening the distance between our true Being and our Soul. One thing is to do our best, otherwise to pretend it; this attitude closes the heart instead of opening it.

In the paper left by Roberto Assagioli a few months before his death on earth, “Notes dictated in English, on training in psychosynthesis” May 1974, he reminds us that, “... the best attitude to get rapid progress in training and even the most realistic, the most honest and effective is to carry out a merger of HUMILITY, PATIENCE and EXPERIMENTATION”.

All three words are very close to a deep, serene and never predictable acceptance of our human nature, imperfect but perfectible, and exhort us to become co-creators of ourselves.

Once again in the carousel of Life, we go up and we come down, but it’s a game, if we stumble, do not get discouraged, go back up and ready for the next ride!”

PROMETHEAN MAN

Translation by Damiano Pagani

“[Prometheus:] the Titan who brought the Light to humanity and who was eternally punished for this”.

R. A. Wilson, *Prometheus Rising*

“[...] I am a point of fire, eternal, perfect”.

R. Assagioli ¹

Towards a new humanism

In the paper I presented at the conference entitled “For the Emergence of a New Humanity”, organized by the Center for Psychosynthesis in Catania (Catania, October 2018), I shared the idea that psychosynthesis, today, must be explicitly the bearer of a new humanism. The nature of this new humanism - which in some conversations with Alberto Alberti we have begun to call, in a temporary and exploratory way, Humanism 2, has its own peculiar uniqueness².

Compared to *Humanism 1* (the so-called Historical Humanism, Florentine or Renaissance), which is based on the connotations of the personal self - the center of the Assagiolian Egg diagram- *free and independent of traditions*, which discovered its *dignity, freedom, choice, action, destiny*, etc. Humanism 2 is based on an accentuation of the human ego as I-in-relation, following the ‘ascent’ in the I-Self axis.

Now, while a discussion of the differences between Humanism 1 and Humanism 2 is beyond the scope of this contribution, it is relevant here to take up the idea with which I closed that speech: there I argued that the symbol of this new humanism can be identified in Prometheus. The purpose of this article is therefore to outline, through the Greek myth of Prometheus, the characteristics or basic connotations of the new man, of the future man, of the *Promethean man*.

“The Prometheus Chained dominates as an immense rainbow the last millennium, the highest poetry of civilization”.

F. Nietzsche, *Posthumous fragments*, 1986-89

In the first pages of his *Principi e metodi*, R. Assagioli presents psychosynthesis comparing it to existentialism. And indeed, as Jean-Paul Sartre said in his famous lecture *Existentialism is a humanism*, existentialism is a form of humanism³. Together with humanism, existentialism shared the fundamental key words of *freedom, human dignity, action, meaning, values, commitment, project, destiny*, etc. But if the symbol of twentieth century existentialism was Sisyphus⁴, a metaphor of the dimension of the absurd, of fatigue and of human commitment, at the dawn of the new millennium we can now declare that the symbol of Humanism 2 is Promethean Man: an expression of commitment to something greater than oneself, of love for mankind, of the experience of being alive (*fire*).

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The legend of Prometheus

“A revolution is always carried out against the gods, beginning with that of Prometheus, the first of the modern conquerors. This is a claim of man against his own destiny”.

A. Camus, *The myth of Sisyphus*

According to legend, the gods created men using earth and fire, and entrusted the task of giving them some *qualities* to a Titan named Prometheus. The name “Prometheus” refers to the temporal adverb ‘before’, which gives it the *sense of anticipation, of foresight, of the vision of the future*; all noble and elevated qualities in the hierarchy of existential values of the consciousness of the Greeks.

The great narrators Hesiod and Aeschylus first told us about this legend. In Aeschylus in particular, in his work *Prometheus Unbound* - from which the following quotations are taken - emerges above all the character of the Prometheus’ *philanthropy*, rather than his slyness and stealth cunning. In fact, after a contention with Zeus, Prometheus decided to detach from the Chariot of the Sun an incandescent spark and flee with his *gift* to mankind. What Ezio Savino, editor of the Garzanti’s Edition, defines “Promethean guilt”, according to legend consists, in fact, in helping *mankind*.

We will now try to draw from the parallelism with this great myth some ontological elements, that are connotative of the way of *being*, of the new man. The first element is that - precisely because of the ‘foresight’ character contained in his name - in a sense, Prometheus knew, or foreshadowed, what could have happened to him⁵. Hence his was an *authentic choice*, that is, a choice taken entirely on ‘himself’, resting entirely on his own Ego⁶ - rather than on any reason, justification or consideration *external* to it. It is he himself who admits it; when the Oceanines (nymphs that were Ocean’s daughters) ask him about the reason for his torture, Prometheus answers:

“However, you ask why he torments me, and this I will now make clear. As soon as he [Zeus] had seated himself upon his father’s throne [Chronos], he immediately assigned to the deities their several privileges and apportioned to them their proper powers. But of wretched mortals he took no notice, desiring to bring the whole race to an end and create a new one in its place. Against this purpose none dared make stand except me—I alone had the courage; *I saved mortals* so that they did not descend, blasted utterly, to the house of Hades”.

What characterizes the “being” of Prometheus is a new ability to *choose* and to take on a *commitment*. In the phenomenology of the will contained in his *The Act of Will*, Assagioli shows that true, authentic choice comes *after* consciousness has examined a series of possibilities, reasons or considerations, rather than on the basis - or as a result - of them. Choosing our choice entirely from the “I”, determines that we find ourselves being *involved* and therefore *really committed*, that is, *responsible* for what we have chosen.

As a second element, Prometheus tells of his *love for man*. He explains that his giving man fire means sowing *hope*, it means giving man something that can help him to overstep (transcend) the tragedy of his finite, vulnerable and - ultimately - “*deadly*” condition. Prometheus explains:

“[...] [before the fire] I caused mortals to cease foreseeing their doom. [...] Hear the rest [...] This first and foremost: if ever man fell ill, there was no defense—no healing food, no ointment, nor any drink”.

Giving fire to man means giving him power, a type of power that would remove man from the state of minority

into which he was poured from the conditions of nature. It is therefore not blind hope, but a hope that is natural consequence of a certain existential power, a power to alter one's relationship with the circumstances with which man – by his nature – must reckon with.

Pushed to explain even more thoroughly, without sparing, what was the state of man before the gift of the fire, Prometheus explains:

“I will not speak to upbraid mankind but to set forth the affectionate purpose that inspired my blessing. First of all, though they had eyes to see, *they saw to no avail*; they had ears, but *they did not understand*; but, just like *shapes in dreams, throughout their length of days, without purpose they wrought all things in confusion*”.

In other words, the life of man before the possibility of ‘fire’ was not to *live*, but to *survive*. This makes us understand that the ‘Promethean fire’ - that is, the nature of this ‘hope’ given to man - is not concerned with giving it a meaning, but consists precisely in the *experience of being alive*. As in an interview, the great anthropologist Joseph Campbell once said: ‘People say we are only trying to give meaning to our lives. I do not believe what we really want is this. What we seek is rather the *experience of being alive*. So that our physical lives have inner resonance, and let us experience the *abduction of life*’⁷.

We can understand (i.e. “Take with us”) the fundamental trait of the ontological structure of the new man: the synthesis between the identification – within oneself – of the drive of life, and the authentic commitment as a capacity and responsibility to assume the task of his expression wholly upon himself. Prometheus wants to educate man, to put it in the words of the great psychiatrist L. Binswanger,

“... to stand on his own feet, since the fact that our existence is determined by the *forces of life* constitutes only one aspect of truth; the other is that it is *us* that determine our destiny with these forces”.

A third element is revealed in the fact that, unlike Zeus - despotic tyrant of the *heavens* – Prometheus's cause is man on *earth*: he is the hero of the freedom and dignity of man in his earthly condition.

With the act of putting himself on the side of man Prometheus declares that *hope is not in heaven, but on earth itself*, and in particular it is in *humanity*, among mortals, not among gods. As Ezio Savino explains:

“The divine universe is a cold cycle of brutal struggles: Uranus shot down by Chronos, Chronos by Zeus, Zeus full of poisonous suspicion, lurking against a future, inevitable rival. There is no progress, there is no

civilization. The gods possess whole knowledge and power. Paradoxically, man, a creature who in a single day sets, has the *most lively impulse* in his blood. The *Promethean spark*, the flame stolen from the sun, appears to Aeschylus as a mythical emblem of this *vital spurt* that animates man and sets him on a path of dignity and worth”.

It is important to grasp the *profound* reason. M. Heidegger showed that it is human finitude and contingency - that is, *irreversibility* - that gives *meaning* to choices. In an infinite time (i.e. reversible), sooner or later that work, that love, that situation would happen. Human choice has *weight* precisely because one excludes another. In the same way, there are many things in human existence whose *value* we can only grasp when they are taken from us. The supreme one of these is *life*, of which man can understand the value and the preciousness precisely because he *must die*!

And then, in this state of affairs, it is precisely the human being - whom the Greeks called “mortal” - that being who can experience the *rapture of being alive*; it is the man to whom the spark of fire must be delivered. To him, who one day sets - who is aware of this and perhaps because of this, to him who has the *most lively impulse* in his blood ... only a *spark of fire* is enough for him. Thus, the third part of the Promethean man, of the man of the future, has to do with the theme of “chains” and with one of the greatest contributions of the work of A. Alberti: the decisive intuition that the experience of soul is a synthesis between *vulnerability* and *power*⁸.

The fourth section concerns ethical connotation, to align it explicitly as an *ethic of life*. The commitment assumed by Prometheus is hard and dreadful, because in order to be accomplished it must - necessarily - challenge the current order. In fact, in the Olympus, the Oceanines say,

“[...] Zeus governs with lawless *customs*; that which was mighty before he now brings to nothing”.

These unjust rules referred to are nothing but rules out of those that W. Reich called *laws for that which lives*. Zeus dominates through laws that place the human being (“living subject”, according to Assagioli’s definition) in a state of minority and Prometheus, who wants to stand up for “that which lives”, wants to give to the human being - apex of the possibility of *consciousness of life*, that being in which *life can take full awareness of itself* - all that is needed to rise up, to stand up with dignity. All he needs is a “spark of fire” (fire = life).

Here emerges a fundamental distinction, which Reich first clarified: that between *systemic morality* and the *morality of nature or life*. Prometheus not only recognizes them but places them in a hierarchy: the morality of life - it is one of his lessons - always *precedes* the systemic one, which is secondary to it.

The message is that the new man must never place social stereotypes before the laws of life and the organism, the exact opposite of the previous ‘form of humanity’. If Zeus dominates with rules imposed by him, Prometheus sides with justice, freedom and the dignity of man, which he recognizes to be values of an ethics superior to that in force and takes entirely on itself what this position entails.

Placing it on himself, Prometheus is the example of *commitment* and *resolution*, that total and absolute act of will in which a choice is placed entirely on his shoulders; as he himself explains:

“Yes, I wept – the choice was mine – regarding human beings. I, I knew the full extent of things.

I chose, I chose to sin, I do not wish to deny it. It is I who have created my lot for the protection of man.”

The Oceanines, who recognize this moral distinction, tell him:

“Sweet it is to pass
all the length of life
amid confident hopes,
feeding the heart in glad festivities.
But I shudder as I look on you, racked by infinite
tortures.
You have no fear of Zeus, Prometheus,
but in *self-will* you reverence mortals too much”.

To put it in the words of R. M. Rilke, Prometheus challenges the “laws of today” to defend “laws that are wider than those that exist”⁹. Finally, the fifth element concerns *who a man ‘must be’ until he can create a new future*. To actually guide the realization of a created future, it is required that a man *be* that future - and not just that ‘declare it’. Anyone who wants to *create* a future is required *to be totally* the future he wants to create. This means *to constitute oneself as the future that one wants to achieve*. Prometheus does not *speak* of a future; he *is* the clearing, the space or the opening through which that future - to put it again with Rilke - “speaks brutally through him”. What he *is*, and what his life *is*, becomes the space of possibility within which the future for which he is fighting can *come to life*. That’s why to Hermes, who mocks him, Prometheus responds in a radical way, a way that gives us a strong sense of what it means *to be the future*:

“Worship, adore, and fawn upon whoever is your lord. But for Zeus I care less than nothing. Let him do his will, let him hold his power for his little day [...] Bravely spoken, in truth, and swollen with pride is your speech, as befits a minion of the gods. *Young* you are, and young your power, and you think indeed that you inhabit heights beyond the reach of *grief*. [...] Your service, my sacrifice: I would never exchange them, learn it well”.

The “being” of the Promethean man

At this point our initial statement - that the purpose of this article was to “identify certain *ontological elements* (i.e. connotative of the way of *being*) of the man of the future” - should be clearer than in the beginning. We may still feel that we do not possess the big picture, but we certainly have a sense of the fact that there is a certain way of *being*, a certain configuration of the human ego, which has some connotations. Promethean man has a way of being organized differently than that of ordinary man, because of at least five elements:

- 1) *Authentic choice* (and commitment)
- 2) Love for *what lives*
- 3) New relationship between *limits* and *power*
- 4) *Ethics of life*
- 5) *Being* the future

These are different *aspects* that indicate the passage of humanity, a *turning point* and a *transformation* in our way of being “human beings”. They are different facets of the Promethean “I”. But what is its nature? We must remember here that Prometheus is *chained*: he will suffer atrocious pains (an eagle will eat his liver every day) for thousands of years, and besides he *does not win*. But if he does not win, he *lives*. Despite the terrible sufferings, the chains and the loss of physical freedom, Prometheus has with himself all the calm of *self-identification* to the real “I”. Real “I” that R. Assagioli defines

- in his meditation – as a “point of fire”, “eternal”, “perfect”. Prometheus *knows* that beyond any punishment that can be inflicted on him - and however powerful - even Zeus could not bring about “the total death to his ego”, which is *all that remains to him* ¹⁰. Prometheus declares at the end:

“No news to me, in truth, is the message this fellow has proclaimed so noisily. Yet for an enemy to suffer ill from an enemy is no disgrace. Therefore let the lightning’s forked curl be cast upon my head and let the sky be convulsed with thunder and the wrack of savage winds; let the hurricane shake the earth from its rooted base, and let the waves of the sea mingle with their savage surge the courses of the stars in heaven; and let him lift me on high and hurl me down to black Tartarus with the swirling floods of stern Necessity: do what he will, *me he shall never bring to death*”.

A new human civilization

“Everything that refers to humanity’s unfolding or true progress is spiritual. The inner human world is now becoming as real to us as everything we see, and we are beginning to awaken to the reality of a greater Life. [...] Let us feel the need that arises from the pressing demand of the need to heal the serious diseases that currently affect humanity; let us try to contribute to the realization of a new civilization”.

R. Assagioli

More than two thousand years ago, the mathematician Archimedes said: “Give me a foothold, and I will raise the world.” *Promethean man* is a perceivable tension within us, it is a *way of living* relative to a place, within us, which draws from the very heart of *who we are*. This way of living is not a point of arrival, but a starting point. The Promethean “I” - in particular - is the starting point for finding authority, power, authenticity and clarity to play our part in the emergence of a *new human civilization*. In fact, whenever someone has been in the presence of a man who has given voice to the Promethean tension in himself, new qualities, visions and possibilities have become accessible for him and those who have been involved.

From his “I” of which he speaks at the end of the work, from this foothold, Prometheus works to raise man from the larval state in which he was, and to build the foundation of the new *human culture and civilization*. “Thanks to him” - Ezio Savino rightly explains - “there is introduced into the human world an element that not even the divine cosmos can possess: the ability to *progress civilly*, to build - albeit with sacrifice and with punishment - a better tomorrow”. Prometheus gave the *fiat* to a new human culture and civilization, and “[...] the source of the new culture is fire, taken from the sky in a reed stem”.

I want to conclude with the observation that Prometheus is the myth of a vision of spirituality which cannot be understood as pure transcendence from the world, but as a *being in the world*, a spirituality understood as *totality* and *completeness*, a full “yes” to life here on earth. Certainly the greatest hymn to his message is found in *Prometheus*, Goethe’s moving poem. Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe: minister, author of *Faust*, botanist scholar, philosopher and scholar, considered by people like Napoleon, RW Emerson, F. Nietzsche ¹¹, R. Steiner and R. Assagioli himself the exemplary model of a “Great Man”, of the *complete* and *total* man:

Prometheus

*Cover thy spacious heavens, Zeus,
With clouds of mist,
And like the boy who lops
The thistles’ heads,
Disport with oaks and mountain-peaks;
Yet thou must leave
My earth still standing;
My cottage, too, which was not raised by thee;
Leave me my hearth,
Whose kindly glow
By thee is envied.
I know nought poorer
Under the sun, than ye gods!
Ye nourish painfully,
With sacrifices
And votive prayers,
Your majesty;
Ye would e’en starve,
If children and beggars
Were not trusting fools.
While yet a child,
And ignorant of life,
I turned my wandering gaze
Up toward the sun, as if with him
There were an ear to hear my wailings,
A heart, like mine,
To feel compassion for distress.*

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- 1) Last line of the “exercise of disidentification and self-identification” devised by R. Assagioli, present in his studio in Florence.
- 2) M. Ventola, “La crisi dell’essere umano e l’umanesimo del futuro: l’uomo ontologico di R. Assagioli”, Congress of the Center of Psychosynthesis of Catania *For the Emergence of a New Humanity*, Catania, Mercure Hotel, 6th-7th October 2018.
- 3) Sartre, J. P., *L’esistenzialismo è un umanismo* (Existentialism is a humanism), Mursia, Milan 2014.
- 4) Son of Aeolus and Enarete, was defined by Homer “The most cunning of men, he managed to deceive even Death. In Hades, he was subjected to a proverbial punishment. With the help of both hands and feet he had to carry a big stone on top of a mountain, making it roll, but at a short distance from the top, the stone constantly escaped him, rolling down and forcing him to start again his eternal effort, symbol of man’s vain poignancy against his own destiny “. (*Il piccolo grande libro della mitologia classica* [The small great book of classical mythology], Arsenale Editore, Verona 2007). As a metaphor of the human existential condition, see the work of Albert Camus. (Camus, A., *Il mito di Sisifo* [The myth of Sisifo], Giunti, Milan 2017)
- 5) In the first bars of Aeschylus’ work, Prometheus is mocked by Domain, henchman of Zeus, just about his name: “And the divine called you Prometheus, the Omen: illusion of a name! It is you needing omens, you need someone who tells you the turning point, how to slip away from this ingenious circle. “
- 6) The word *authentic* in fact has its root in *autòs*, which has the same root as “author”. The author corresponds to what R. Assagioli calls “real ego”, distinct from the “phenomenal ego”.
- 7) Campbell, J., *Il potere del mito* [The power of myth], Neri Pozza, Vicenza 2012.
- 8) “In the Old Testament it is written that when God appeared to Moses in the burning bush he said to him: ‘I am who I am’. [...] Even man is therefore ‘what he is’. He can therefore recognize his own divine essence precisely in coincidence, not with God, but with himself. [...] Here then is the concrete possibility of the liberation of the human soul, which is not ‘liberation from the chains’, but simple affirmation by man of his own intrinsic freedom to be himself. Since man is not a Being, but a being here, his freedom coincides with his being-here, that is, in his ‘being that he is’, which also includes ‘here’, that is, his limits, his anchorage, his condition of earthly existence, his bonds, his chains. [...] Then the soul is the human totality [...] In short, the ‘chains’ are an integral part of the spiritual dimension of man. The chains are not to be broken, because this would

*Who helped me
Against the Titans’ insolence?
Who rescued me from certain death,
From slavery?
Didst thou not do all this thyself,
My sacred glowing heart?
And glowedst, young and good,
Deceived with grateful thanks
To yonder slumbering one?*

*I honour thee, and why?
Hast thou e’er lightened the sorrows
Of the heavy laden?
Hast thou e’er dried up the tears
Of the anguish-stricken?
Was I not fashioned to be a man
By omnipotent Time,
And by eternal Fate,
Masters of me and thee?*

*Didst thou e’er fancy
That life I should learn to hate,
And fly to deserts,
Because not all
My blossoming dreams grew ripe?*

*Here sit I, forming mortals
After my image;
A race resembling me,
To suffer, to weep,
To enjoy, to be glad,
And thee to scorn,
As I!”.¹²*

liberate only a light but also inconsistent aerial figure, which could one day be again recounted by the laces, momentarily broken. It would temporarily soar in the sky, but the earth would be lost. Man would turn away from his essence at the same time human and divine, because he would no longer be 'that it is' in his completeness: he would only become 'part' and would thus lose 'totality'. “ (Alberti, A., *Nel cuore dell'uomo* [In the heart of man], L'UOMO Edizioni, Firenze 2014)

- 9) “*Again and again in history / some special people wake up / Have no space in the crowd / But they are moved by larger laws / They bring strange costumes with them / And they ask for space for bold and audacious actions / The future speaks brutally through of them / They change the world*”. - Rainer Maria Rilke
- 10) Here emerges in its power the principle of *integrity* (*being* one's own word or considering one's word as an *expression* and a *measure* of 'oneself'). Prometheus has been deprived of everything; without body (since chained), all that remains to him is his ontological nucleus (his *identity*, his *will* and his *word*: which are coordinated in the intention / cause to which he has decided to give himself).
- 11) Goethe, J. W., “Prometheus”, in *Opere*, Sansoni, Florence 1970.
- 12) It is thought that the title of the work of Nietzsche *Ecce Homo* (from the Latin: “Here is a man!”) is referred to Goethe.

The English translation of *Prometheus bound* is taken from: <https://www.theoi.com/Text/AeschylusPrometheus.html#3> (translated by Herbert Weir Smyth)

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