

The matrix displays
mythic heroism
through heroism vs.
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The philosophy of Matrix attempted to blend the episodes and characters of the old myths with different philosophic ideas. In particular, the idea of mythic heroism present in the plot of the film is shown through the heroism of human beings in the battle against machines. Though, it should be noted that the matrix view of heroism is modernised. The superpower mentioned in the myths is deliberately explained with the usage of various theories and philosophic points of view. In my paper I will discuss the interpretation of mythic heroism in the film Matrix. To fulfil this task, I will set the mythological background of the Matrix and then analyse the demonstration of heroism by two characters: Neo and Trinity. Finally, I will draw my own conclusions on the main points discussed in the paper.

1. Main body

1) Mythic background of Matrix

The film Matrix has a lot of parallel with Gnostic myth. Gnosticism was a system of religion which had flourished for centuries and at the beginning of the Common Era it violently competed with the orthodox Christianity. The myths of Gnostic religion were spread around the territory of the Ancient Mediterranean world, while in other areas myths blended with legends of Christianity and became their interpretations. The Gnostics had a general sketch of beliefs and possessed their own scriptures which were kept in the form of Nag Hammadi library. Gnosticism as the whole system uses cosmogonic myths to explain its view of the nature of the universe and the place of human beings in it.

According to the Gnostic myth, supreme god is viewed as completely perfect, and therefore this god is perceived as alien and mysterious. In the Apocryphon of John god is characterized as “ unnameable”, “ ineffable”, “ immeasurable light which is pure, holy and immaculate”. (Apocr. of John) Additionally, this god is surrounded with other, though lesser divine beings, who are metaphorically mentioned to possess gender of male or female. (Apocr. of John) The place where the mythic god lives is called pleroma, which is similar to our understanding of heaven and in the division of universe it represents the opposition to Earth. Pairs of divine creatures inhabiting pleroma can produce offsprings which are also perfect and have divine emanations. (Apocr. of John). The problem occurs in the myth when Sophia, or in other words one “ aeon”, decided to bring forth an offspring without the consent of the Spirit. Due to the ancient philosophy, females were able to perform mere reproduction, while males were in charge of its form. So, Sophia’s action was considered to be imperfect and malformed. Sophia decided to hide her child away from the other divine creatures in a separate region of universe. The malformed deity, named by some sources Yaldabaoth, believed himself to be the only god.

Gnostic myths sometimes identified Yaldabaoth as the God described in the Old Testament. This god himself decided to create angels (archons), human beings and the material world (the Earth). According to some versions, Yaldabaoth was tricked into breathing the divine spirit which turned him into a human being. (Apocr. of John). This myth poses a dilemma: people are pearls in the mud, containing a divine spirit (good) which is trapped into a

material body (bad) and has to live a material world (bad). In this way, Heaven can be thought as our original home, and here we are in exile.

Gnostic myths claim that metaphysical reality remains unknown for people. While death the enslaved divine spirit can escape from the material prison of the body and of the world, and move into the upper regions of cosmos. But, on his way to the upper regions, the divine spirit must pass by the archons, who try to hinder his journey because they are jealous of his intelligence and luminosity.

Some episodes of Matrix have direct references to the Gnostic myths. In the plot both the problems humans had to face and the solutions found can be supported by mythological background. Like Sophia, who decided to conceive her child out of its own pride, following the story told by Mortheus, “ Early in the 21st century all mankind was united in celebration. We marvelled at our own magnificence as we gave birth to AI”. (The Matrix screenplay, 1999). However, the offspring of mankind was not perfect; it was malformed for it did not have a spirit. Morpheus described AI as “ a singular consciousness that spawned an entire race of machines” (The Matrix screenplay, 1999), which reminds the story of the Gnostic God of the archons, and the unreal material world. Later on, AI created matrix which was named by Morpheus “ a prison for your mind”. (The Matrix screenplay, 1999).

On the other hand, machines refer to mythic divine creatures, which are given power to control and subjugate men. In the film machines surpassed men in their cognitive capacity. Men desperately tried to win the battle with

the machines and blocked out the sunlight to remove the main power source of the computers. This extreme tactic failed, and humans were enslaved and farmed to supply energy for the machines. The computers prompted the appearance of life in the human beings, kept them docile and asleep to use them and their offspring like batteries for generating energy. Human were trapped in the dreamworld, while living their ordinary life they did not know that their minds were deceived and their bodies were exploited. It prepared the background for the mythic hero to appear in the plot and fight a noble battle for human species liberation.

2) Heroism of Neo

The idea of mythic heroism is expressed in the film through revealing superpower, divine features of the heroic actions of the characters. In order to conquer and win the battle with the machines, people have to gain superhuman power.

The character of Neo refers to the concept of mythic saviour. In order to fulfil his task he has to undergo crucial inner changes: first the change in his outlook and understanding unreality of the dreamworld, and then his second rebirth, which comprises physical, moral and spiritual spheres. In the Homeric world gods were frequently in battle with humans. Just like the agents of Matrix at the beginning of the film, gods outmatched human beings. In order to win, many mythic heroes, like Heracles had to gain supernatural power. According to the plot, Neo has to die to go the upper level of his development. The last point more refers to the religion of Christianity, which claims that we should not fight God, because God is all-

good. God rules the world and sets the things for a benevolent and wise reason. If people do certain things or act in certain ways, after their death, they will free themselves from this reality and will be shown truth in the Heaven.

The character of Neo is constructed as a Jesus figure. In the film Neo is “ the One’ who is predicted to come back again to the Matrix, whose power will change the Matrix from within, who will battle the agents of evil, who will die, but come to life again. The idea of Neo’s as Jesus Christ was repeated in many ways through the film. One hacker said to Neo: “ You’re my saviour, man, my own personal Jesus Christ”. (The Matrix screenplay, 1999). In other example, when Neo entered the ship for the first time, the camera panned across the interior and rested on the sign: “ Mark III no, 11”. This may imply a reference to a new messiah, for the Gospel of Mark 3: 11 reads the following: “ Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, ‘ You are the son of God’.”

Also, the parallel with myths lays in the task to save the whole mankind and to beat the malicious demon that enslaved people. The idea that people are just the victims of a malicious outside force can be found in the works of the philosopher Rene Descartes. In his meditations Descartes wrote: “ Ant yet firmly implanted in my mind is the long-standing opinion that there is an omnipotent God who made me the kind of creature that I am. How do I know that he [God] has not brought it about that there is no earth, no sky, no extended thing, no shape, no size, no place while at the same time ensuring that all these things appear to me to exist just as they do now?” (Meditations, 15)

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Then Descartes made a supposition about some demon, who deluded and subjugated people by trapping them into his artificial world: " I will suppose therefore that not God who is supremely good and the source of truth, but rather some malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning has employed all his energies in order to deceive me. I shall think that the sky, the earth, colours, shapes, sounds and all external things are merely the delusions of my dreams which he has devised to ensnare my judgement." (Meditations, 15) In the film people were enslaved by Matrix and the image of Matrix embodied the evil superpower, or demon, that must be withstood and overthrown by a good super hero. The battles and controversy of Neo's crew and the agents of the Matrix represent the mythic perpetual fight between good and evil.

Another mythic parallel - is in supernatural and superhuman power of Neo. He attempted to reach perfection and to realize the metaphysic laws of the dream world. The way Neo got his training in order to be able to win the battle with the machines, contains some elements of Gnosticism. The training programs taught Neo the concept of " stillness" while freeing the mind and overcoming such emotion as fear. In Gnosticism the concept of " stillness" refers to the state of the " rest" apprehended in meditative and centred manner. The instructions to a certain Allogens hold: " And although it is impossible for you to stand, hear nothing; but I you wish to stand, withdraw to the Existence, and you will find it standing at a rest after the likeness of the One who is truly at rest... And then you becomes perfect in that place, still yourself..." (Allogenes). When Neo realized the truth that the

Matrix was only a dreamworld, he could calmly contemplate the bullets that stopped in the mid-air.

Morpheus predicted that Neo would be able to defeat the agent of Matrix, because while training they would adhere to the rules of Matrix and Neo's mind would allow him to bend or break these rules. Here the concept of mind does not refer only to rational intelligence, otherwise, computers would win every time. Human mind is considered in the film in a wider meaning: intuition, capacity of imagination and, as it was called "thinking outside the box". Both Gnosis and the film convey the idea that 'divine spark' in humans allows perception greater than it can be achieved by any archon or agent of Yaldaboath: "And the power of the mother {Sophia} went out of the Yaldaboath into the natural body which they had fashioned. And at that moment the rest of the powers became jealous, because ... his intelligence {man's} was greater than that of those who had made him.... And they recognized that he was luminous and that he could think better than they..." (Apocr. of John, 19-20). Thus, in the final episodes Neo overcame Agent Smith when he had realized the illusion of the Matrix. Apparently, Smith was not capable of doing this. Neo broke the rule, and Smith could not. Thus, the revolution in Neo's mind helped him to become powerful and commit heroic actions.

3) Heroism of Trinity

Williams, G. Christopher in his article *Mastering the Real: Trinity as the 'Real Hero' of The Matrix* (2003) expressed the idea that the mythic structures of Matrix are centralized around female protagonist, just like in the famous

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stories: *Through the Looking Glass*, *Alice of Alice in Wonderland*, *Sleeping Beauty* or *Snow White*. The very name of Trinity suggests some inversion of cultural expectations and assumptions. This name refers to God, most likely masculine. Such play on expectation is obvious in Neo's observation while he first met Trinity in flesh: "I just thought ... you were a guy." (The Matrix screenplay, 1999). Then Trinity's biting answer showed irony: "Most guys do." (The Matrix screenplay, 1999).

In the film Trinity demonstrated self-assurances, one of the main features characterizing a hero, and played the role of a guide to Neo's new life. She told Neo "follow the white rabbit" in order to lead him to Morpheus. Then Morpheus, who was named after mythological god of sleep and dreams, must awaken Neo and show him unreality of dreamworld. Williams remarked that "yet another contradiction that the god of sleep and dreams should awaken someone, but the more critical contradiction concerning Neo is related to the centrality of a kind of stereotypical feminine narrative in The Matrix." (Williams, 2003). Williams considers Trinity to be a more powerful figure with masculine character than Neo, and even more, Neo's weaknesses made him an 'inferior' stereotype and highlighted the strengths of Trinity.

The superiority of Trinity over Neo can be traced through the film. First, Williams argues that Neo is somewhat feminized in the film. This feminization is viewed through Neo's parallel with Alice in Wonderland and through his "hapless, almost virginal innocence so similar to the female protagonists of fairy tales." (Williams, 2003). Morpheus instructed Neo using some references to the Alice story: "take the blue pill and the story ends . . .

[or] take the red pill and you stay in Wonderland and I show you how deep
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the rabbit hole goes.” (The Matrix screenplay, 1999). Further, like Alice, Neo discovered new reality after ‘entering rabbit hole” and choosing the red pill. While Neo was waiting for the program to get disconnected from the Matrix, he touched a mirror bedside him. Unlike Alice, who went through her looking glass into surreal and dreamlike Wonderland, the mirror encroached upon Neo: creeping up Neo’s body and covering it. Williams concluded that Neo did not go through the looking glass, the looking glass went through him. (Williams, 2003). Thus, the image of hero Neo is somewhat overshadowed by his feminization and similarities to another female hero who also had adventures in a dreamworld.

On the other hand, following point of view of Williams, feminization of the male protagonist showed Trinity as a character who possessed the features absent in Neo. Trinity was a warrior equal to all the males in her crew, she was self-assured and did not lose her self-possession in any situation. In addition her love performed miracle and her kiss resurrected Neo, thus becoming the driving force of his renewal and his gaining super power to win the Matrix. It may be logical to conclude that feminine love became the force of a mythic heroism and with the help of a woman the protagonist won the final battle.

III. Conclusion

In my paper I have found out the main points of the mythic understanding of god, and the universe the place of humans in it. Thus, according to the mythic beliefs, god was deemed as perfect. The imperfection of man made his weak and easy to be subjugated by more divine beings. Though, as it was

noted in the myth, the “divine spark” in men permitted them to raise in their perception higher than any inhabitants of the Heaven could. This point implies the power of human mind which, can lead the way to human perfection, enable men to gain superhuman power and overthrow the laws of the dreamworld. This essence of myth was included into the context of human heroism in the battle against ‘perfect’ machines. Neo attempted to win the agents of matrix only after revolutionary changes in his mind occurred. On the other hand, Trinity represented the idea of female power which could compensate the deficits in male’s character and enable the man to commit outstanding deeds.

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