The greek mythological characters prometheus, pandora and icarus essay sample

The fates of three mythological characters, namely Prometheus, Pandora and Icarus are important because they give rise to metaphors that help us understand more about the internet. Each myth has important lesson to be leaned, which can be related to the internet today. Each character had traits that are imperative for technological innovation. However the hubris and hamartia caused by these mythological characters helps us realize that the same flaws can be applicable to the internet today.

Prometheus is one of the most important titans in Greek mythology as he was able to surpass the rest with his cunning and deceit. Prometheus was best known as the creator of man and together with his brother Epimetheus were given the task of populating the earth by the Gods. As his brother set about creating creatures of quantity, Prometheus spent lots of time creating a creature that would resemble the Gods. As Prometheus took so long over his creation, all the gifts given by Zeus (such as fur, wings, fins) were over. Prometheus feeling sorry for his creature feeling cold through the nights, decided to steal fire from the Gods and give it to human kind. This was Prometheus's hamartia, as the Gods strictly forbade giving fire to the humans.

The importance of this is that Zeus's punishment for Prometheus was having an eagle eat his liver out everyday; which would cause him daily pain. 1

Though Prometheus's intentions were noble, his hubris of thinking that he could outwit the Gods, led to Zeus punishing mankind by creating Pandora and her box.

What Prometheus did and his fate can be related to the internet with the utopian idea of trying to make things better and superior with technology. Prometheus's attitude of pushing things too far resulted in something like fire (technology) actually be turned against the user. The metaphor of life improving as internet and/or technology evolve can be contradicted by the fate of Prometheus. Prometheus giving fire (technology) to the

humans and thereby insulting the Gods, resulted in punishment for mankind, making things more difficult rather than easier.

However it could also be argued that though mankind was punished for Prometheus's flaw, in the long run the fire stolen by the Gods would help the humans tremendously. According to Mark Stefik , fire (seen as knowledge) was stolen from the Gods and handed down to mankind, which would then be passed down from generation to generation forming a new information infrastructure. 2 Thereby implying that knowledge gained from the internet can be passed down for generations.

The role of Prometheus versus the Gods is important to the relation of the internet. Prometheus's cunning attitude helped him outwit Zeus and the Gods and get fire (technology) for mankind. However when he played a trick on the Gods later by giving them the bones of his offering while he kept the meat for himself and the mortals, his flaw of going against the Gods caused punishment for mankind.

Just like the story of Prometheus, the internet should be taken step by step, and we should not make the hamartia or flaw of taking technology too far.

Before Prometheus was chained to the rock, he warned his brother Epimetheus not to accept any gifts from the Gods. However when Pandora arrived from the gods, he instantly fell in love with her. Pandora was sent from Zeus as a poisoned gift to man. She was molded out of clay by the God Hephaestus and given different traits by the other Gods. Finally Hermes, along with cunning and boldness gave her a box. In the box contained all the misfortunes of mankind – plague, sorrow, and poverty among many. However, Hermes did warn Epimetheus that Pandora was a gift to the titans by Zeus and that he must not open the box.

Epimetheus passed down this warning to Pandora and told her never to open the box. However, Pandora's curiosity got the best of her and she opened the box, releasing all its evils. However Pandora did manage to shit the box just in time to keep one thing in the box, hope. As mankind faced a very miserable period, Pandora reopened the box, letting out hope. Now even in its times of trouble, man always has hope for better days. 3

Pandora and her box can be related to the internet by the metaphor 'curiosity killed the cat'. The idea that many evils and troubles on the iinternet are opened up by curiosity is supported by the myth of Pandora's box.

Viruses, pornography and misguiding information are just few of the evils waiting to be unleashed on the internet. However though there are many dangers related to curiosity, technology can only progress through curiosity

(the hope in Pandora's box). We just have to make sure not to take this curiosity too far.

Pandoras box can also be argued gives rise to the notion that life was better without technology and that technology is the ' evil' that comes out of the box. These people are often called neo-luddites, people who oppose technology because they fear that it will cause environmental degradation, decay or social values and the collapse of traditional ways of life. 4

Icarus, the son of Daedalus was imprisoned along with his father in a tower in Crete. Daedalus tried to devise a method from which he could escape the tower. As all the boats leaving the island were checked before leaving, Daedalus decided the best way to escape would be through the air. So he gathered all the feathers he could find and fabricated it together to form wings. He used wax to keep the feathers together.

Before taking flight, Daedalus told his son to follow him and warned him not too fly too high as the sun would melt the wax. As they flew through the air, Icarus having mastered the art of flying felt his father and soared upwards, as if to reach heaven. The heat of the blazing sun then melted the wax holding his feathers together. With no more wings he fell to the sea, where he drowned. 5

The fate of Icarus can be described by the phrase ' do what authority tells you'. It was because Icarus strayed from his father's advice that he ended up falling to his death. In the same way it can be said that not listening to authority, internet can be a very dangerous place. The internet is the

stepping stone for lots of technical innovation (like the wings that daedalus created) but if taken too far (like Icarus's reach for the heavens) could cause problems like invasion of privacy and viruses.

As philosopher Francis Bacon rightfully quoted ' knowledge is power'6, we must understand that as the internet provides us with more and more knowledge, we must most misuse the new power we have obtained. Just as Icarus misused his newfound power of flying by going too far despite his fathers warning, misusing power on the internet could lead to bad things as well.

Once again Icarus's hubris of flying to close to the sun caused his downfall. The lesson to be learnt from the myth of Icarus is adequately described by McGeorge Bundy, national security advisor to president Kennedy with the phrase " there is no safety in unlimited technological hubris." What this means is that all societies, no matter how technologically advanced, are still vulnerable if social problems are not addressed. 7

The fates of all three characters are important because it shows us what could happen if we are not carefully with the internet. Prometheus, Pandora and Icarus all had one thing in common; they all had the traits needed to push technology and the internet further. However each character had a fatal flaw, which can be metaphor to what might happen in the future with the internet. Prometheus wanted to take things to the limit and defy the Gods telling us that internet should not be developed to the point where it fails completely. Pandora showed us that curiosity leads to bad things if we

are not careful and finally Icarus taught us that we should not misuse the

power we have and stick to what we have been taught.