

Myth: a Challenge to Philosophy

More strange than true. I never may believe
These antique fables nor these fairy toys.
Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
Are of imagination all compact.
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold;
That is the madman. The lover, all as frantic,
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth
to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy
nothing
A local habitation and a name.
Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream, V, i.

Whether myths and mythologies are essential to our humanity, or whether they are features which account for the persistence of “self-inflicted immaturity”, are questions which cannot be answered by a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’. But since these questions and their assumptions affect all aspects of being human and cultural, they require an understanding of myth which comprises the positive as well as the negative features of mythological expressions and processes.

What matters is not merely the interpretation of particular myths and the messages they convey, but the intention to bring into focus whatever relates to myth, and thus, to consider the ways in which we might, and have to, deal with this problem. Myths may have their own ‘about’, but as occurrences in culture history and as expressions of human beings they are another ‘about’ which invites us to think about it, and how we relate to it, both when we speak of myth, and consider the ramifications of this speaking. Even if the study of myths and mythologies should be no more than an investigation of irrationalities, it will be necessary to come to a – at least by intention – complete understanding of myth, and to approach relevant phenomena in the light of theories which are as adequate as possible. But since we cannot exclude the possibility that myths and mythologies are indispensable conditions of practice and theory, it will be necessary to consider this possibility as well, and to develop our theories accordingly.

Since I assume that the distinction between mythos and logos, or, as the two Greek terms suggest, between the word of tradition and the word of reflective reasoning, is a precondition for the emergence of philosophy and scholarship, I would like to argue that philosophy as well as scholarship has to be careful about their relationship with myth, especially if we agree with Aristotle that knowledge and understanding are, indeed, the subject matter of theoretical reasoning¹.

¹See *Metaphysics* Book XII, 9, 1075a.

In order to comply with the demands of an open and, in principle, comprehensive understanding of myths and mythologies, I begin with some reflections on what it means, or could mean, to be rational about myth, and to study myths and mythologies both as the subject matter requires, and as the conditions permit under which we are able to develop our studies. Next, I would like to focus on several observations in connection with myths and mythologies. Since these observations provide a strong motive to take up the question about an adequate concept of myth, I shall discuss this point in a following step. Finally, since the efforts to come to grips with myth on a conceptual level cannot be separated from actual interests in studying myth, I intend to conclude these explorations with a few words about this aspect of mythological studies.

Though I am convinced that the understanding of myth is a necessary requirement for the development of theoretical reasoning, I do not intend to elaborate this point. But I do hope that the thoughts I present are sufficient to arouse interest in the correlation between myth and thinking, and strong enough to initiate further reflections on the mythic conditions of philosophy and the formation of theories. I begin with my first point under the heading of ‘ways to study myth’.

Ways to study myth

Since the phenomena abound which we associate for whatever reasons with the meaning of myth, we can think of many questions and perspectives in connection with the study of this subject matter. To exemplify this point we can refer to the study of mythologies, especially to comparative mythology, and to various disciplines which focus on myth in connection with biological, psychological, social, political and cultural anthropological problems, or with questions about religion, literature, art history and other issues in the field of cultural and symbolic studies. But in contrast to what could be described as the empirical study of myth, we have to think also of philosophy and its reactions to the challenges and seductions of myths and mythologies. It is a question which concerns the philosophical efforts to clarify the meaning of myth no less than the impact of myth on philosophy as well as the influence of philosophical theories and positions on the scholarly study of myths and mythologies². In fact, since the philosophical assessment of the meaning of myth is directly or indirectly already an issue whenever we engage in mythological studies, I consider it both justified

²When Wim van Binsbergen (see *Rapture and fusion in the approach to myth – Situating myth analysis between philosophy, poetics and world-wide mythical complex of leopard-skin symbolism*, 2005, http://www.shikanda.net/ancient_models/myth%20mineke%20defdefdef.pdf) notices (p 16) that Eliade (see M. Eliade, *Aspects du mythe*, Paris: Gallimard, 1963, 15) “instead of [] aiming merely at identifying elements of empirical reality open to further analytical scrutiny”, provides a definition which “amounts to a theory in a nutshell”, he is right in annotating this observation. But it is also possible that definitions of myth are bound to become theoretical because the subject matter requires a theoretical stance in order to be discernible in one way or another. See also Robert A. Segal, *Myth: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 10 where he states that “theorizing is inescapable”.

and necessary to concentrate on questions about myth and philosophy. These questions may lack the clarity of unequivocal definitions and well-structured arguments. They may be the result of unquestioned presuppositions and apparently self-evident assumptions. But whatever the status of questions and answers may be, since we cannot disregard them without adopting at least some of them in our inquiries, it is a hermenutical requirement and a demand of objectivity to become aware of this issue and to consider its possible impact on the course of empirical studies. What, then, does it mean to be rational about myth, if we refer to myth as a problem of, and in, philosophy?

To the extent that we associate the term “myth” with various meanings, and assume that we know in one way or another what we are talking about, we can think of six basic options in the philosophical study of myth:

- 1) we could reject myth as a relevant topic of philosophical investigations, and use the study of myths and mythologies as a confirmation of this rejection;
- 2) we can think of a mythologization of reason in which reason becomes another, and in essence, the only myth which matches the needs and the potential of intelligent beings, and use the study of myths and mythologies to accomplish this goal; 3) we can think of a rationalization (or critical reevaluation) of myth and use the study of myths and mythologies accordingly;
- 4) we can combine the previous approaches and use this combination as the way to deal with the meanings of myths and mythologies;
- 5) we can try to understand the meaning of myth and study the occurrence of myths and mythologies in their concrete reality as well as with regard to the consequences that are part of this reality;
- 6) we can of course also dismiss the issue and “turn to more important matters”.

In each of the first three cases we can think of particular reasons which ask for ‘their’ specific approach.

If we consider the first option in which we assume that myth is an insult to truth and the dignity of reasonable beings, it is because of truth, dignity, and reason that myth should be abolished. And since one has to know the enemy one struggles with, the study could be of help in reaching victory. An example of this first approach is the work of Ernst Topitsch, a neopositivistic philosopher in the tradition of the Viennese Circle³. But one could also point to the ways in which theology used (and still uses) to approach the issue⁴.

However, if myth is, as the second option suggests, a force in human history, and as such a necessary ingredient in the realization of humanity, we could argue that reason needs to partake in myth if it is to become effective, and that the study of myth should serve this purpose. Ernst Bloch, Hans Jonas, Rudolf Bultmann favored this

³See “Gemeinsame Grundlagen mythischen und philosophischen Denkens” in H. Poser (ed.), *Philosophie und Mythos*, Berlin (De Gruyter) 1979.

⁴See Jan de Vries, *Forschungsgeschichte der Mythologie*, Freiburg: Karl Alber, 1961.

approach. At the moment, Hans Blumenberg seems to move in a similar direction⁵. Moreover, if we think of the various ways in which ‘philosophy and science’ have tried to establish their superiority in the organization of human affairs, we could mention this point as well⁶.

And finally, as to the third option: if reason is all that counts, one could argue that myth has to become part of reason, that it has to be purified from all irrationalities, if it is to retain or to gain its proper meaning, and that the study of myth is the way in which we may reach this goal. A classical example of this kind of study is the treatment of myth in the work of Plato and, in our time, of Ernst Cassirer⁷.

In contrast to the first three options, the fourth one presents itself as a recollection of the previous ways of understanding. In line with Hegel’s idea of dialectics, we could argue that each of the first three approaches makes sense up to a certain point, and that it is this feature which turns them into elements of a fourth way. Since they exemplify the sequential meaning of *negari*, *conservari* and *elevari*, they form not only a dialectical structure that reveals itself in this sequence, but offer this structure also as a device to cope with the issue. What matters is the combination or synthesis of these options, and the perspective that becomes possible if we remember the synthesis in each of its elements. A work which could be seen as an exemplification of this approach is Heinz Reinwald’s “Myth and Method”⁸. But we can also think of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jean-Pierre Vernant, Paul Ricoeur, Bruno Liebrucks, and many others.

If (and here I refer to the fifth option) we have to take things as they offer themselves in terms of truth and reality, then we should be reasonable and study myth as the features we happen to associate with the term present themselves, and ask for an differentiated understanding. This approach does not exclude the previous options beforehand, but stresses the point that they are no options to begin with.

⁵See H. Blumenberg, *Arbeit am Mythos*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979, 5. edition 1990.

⁶The ‘mood’ of this development can be grasped in a remark of A. Hitler on Rosenberg’s “Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts”. “In einem Tischgespräch vom 11. 4. 1942 erklärte er, “er habe seinerzeit ausdrücklich abgelehnt, diesem Buch parteipäpstlichen Charakter zu geben, da schon der Titel schief sei. Denn man könne nicht sagen, daß man den Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts, also etwas Mystisches, gegen die Geistesauffassung des 19. Jahrhunderts stellen wolle, sondern müsse als Nationalsozialist sagen, daß man den Glauben und das Wissen des 20. Jahrhunderts gegen den Mythos des 19. Jahrhunderts stelle””. The quote can be found in Manfred Frank, *Gott im Exil, Vorlesungen über die Neue Mythologie II. Teil*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1988, 108. See also Heinrich Heine, *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland*, Frankfurt: Insel Verlag, 1966, 201ff.

⁷As to Plato, see Theo Kobusch, “Die Wiederkehr des Mythos. Zur Funktion des Mythos in Platons Denken und in der Philosophie der Gegenwart” in: Gerhard Binder, Bernd Effe, eds., *Mythos. Erzählende Weltdeutung im Spannungsfeld von Ritual, Geschichte und Rationalität*, Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 1990, 13-32. As to Cassirer, see his *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, translated by Ralph Manheim, Volume Two: Mythical Thought, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955; *An Essay on Man*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944; and *The Myth of the State*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946 (in which the experiences of Nazism compelled him to acknowledge the irrational forces of contemporary political myths). See also W. W. & P. T. Barber, *When They Severed Earth from Sky. How the Human Mind Shapes Myth*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.

⁸Heinz Reinwald, *Mythos und Methode: Zum Verhältnis von Wissenschaft, Kultur und Erkenntnis*, München (Wilhelm Fink Verlag) 1991.

If myth is an expression of irrationality, we have to study it as irrationality. If it is something else, we have to take it as this something else. Examples of this approach are Schelling's studies in the philosophy of mythology and revelation, and, in more recent times, Kurt Hübner's "The Truth of Myth"⁹.

Since it is always possible, though not necessarily feasible or wise, to skip an issue, I have mentioned this point as a sixth option as far as the treatment of myth in philosophy is concerned. Aristotle has pointed out already, philosophers have better things to do than to keep themselves busy with the subtleties of mythologists¹⁰. And, if I am not mistaken, there are numerous philosophers who think along similar lines. But as the previous approach indicates, I do not think that this stance is philosophically defensible. Even if Aristotle has been right, it is still necessary to know why he has been right. Besides, it is also possible that myth has a more than superficial bearing on philosophy. For as Robert Segal has pointed out, in dealing with the relationship between myth and philosophy, one cannot disregard the positions "that myth is part of philosophy, that myth *is* philosophy, that philosophy is myth, that myth grows out of philosophy, that philosophy grows out of myth, that myth and philosophy are independent of each other but serve the same function, and that myth and philosophy are independent of each other and serve different functions."¹¹. Since it does not befit philosophy to work with prejudices without examining them, we have to keep all options open, both without, and with, regard of the consequences the study of myth entails. Though it is imperative to be as objective as possible, we can neither exclude the possibility that new insights require a revision of previous forms of understanding, nor can we dismiss the experience that subjectivity is a necessary condition of objectivity. Since subjectivity is always also a matter of intersubjectivity and the cultural processes that shape them both, it remains an issue of continuous clarification.

In keeping all options open, I do not think that it is the task of philosophy to add new myths to old ones, or to alter them in its own fashion, but to understand them as thoroughly and critically as possible. In fact, even if one agrees that, historically, philosophy took off from mythic origins and the runways provided by mythology, there can be no doubt that the proper goal of philosophy is philosophy and nothing else; and, if it should turn out that philosophy relates to something like its own myth,

⁹Georges Gusdorf, *Mythe et métaphysique*, Paris: Flammarion, 1953; Gerd Brand, *Welt, Geschichte, Mythos und Politik*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1978; Kurt Hübner, *Die Wahrheit des Mythos*, München: C. H. Beck, 1985; Gerd Brand, *Welt, Geschichte, Mythos und Politik*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1978; Martin S. Day, *The Many Meanings of Myth*, Lanham: University Press of America 1984; W. G. Doty, *Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals*, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1986; Lawrence J. Hatab, *Myth and Philosophy. A Contest of Truths*, LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1992; Kees W. Bolle, *The Freedom of Man in Myth*, Nashville: Vanderbilt, 1993; and (from a psychological and historical point of view) C. G. Jung and C. Kerényi, *Essays on a Science of Mythology*, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963; J. Campbell, *The Masks of God*, New York: Viking Compass Book, 1970, 4 vols.; Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, translated by Willard R. Trask, New York: Harper & Row, New York, 1963.

¹⁰Metaphysics 1000a.

¹¹Robert Segal, Op.cit. p. 36.

that it develops this myth (and not other ones) as the subject matter in philosophy demands¹². But as the task speaks for itself, it clearly indicates that philosophy should give a name to the truth which – as meaning and as reality – is either present or absent in the occurrence of mythic relations as well as in the manifest and latent messages contained in myths and mythologies¹³.

Observations

Present day usage connects the word *myth* with notions of delusions, unreality, and lie¹⁴. Myth is almost by definition derogatory and misleading. The enlightened mind has no need for myth¹⁵. This understanding has a history of long standing. But does it also do justice to the meaning of myth – and to philosophy and scholarship as they are, or are not, related to myth and mythology? If the term is used with these and similar connotations, we cannot deny this usage. But usage alone does not mean that it is also correct, or that we are free to discard the reasons which require its revision. Since it is possible that present day usage is only partly correct, it is not unlikely that it confronts us with dialectical ramifications because, and when, we desist from acknowledging this partiality. Indeed, if we consider the various meanings in which we speak of myth in the context of social and cultural studies, for instance, it becomes evident that more is at stake than present day usage suggests, and that the solution to this problem depends on the situations we address; that is to say, whether there

¹²See Karl Kerényi, *Griechische Grundbegriffe*, Zürich: Rhein Verlag, 1964, 11: “Es sei aber einmal die Frage in aller Schärfe gestellt: Ist die *gänzliche* Ausschaltung des Mythos, nicht nur die Entmythologisierung, sondern auch die *Entmythisierung*, historisch und phänomenologisch überhaupt *möglich*?”

¹³With regard to the present study on myth see Christoph Jamme, *Einführung in die Philosophie des Mythos: Neuzeit und Gegenwart*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1991; Karl Kerényi, *Die Eröffnung des Zugangs zum Mythos: Ein Lesebuch*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1996; Robert A. Segal, *Theorizing about myth*, Amherst, MA. : University of Massachusetts Press, 1999; Daniel Dubuisson, *Twentieth Century Mythologies*, translated by Martha Cunningham, London: Equinox 2006. See also Wim van Binsbergen, op.cit.

¹⁴In this and the following section I resume thoughts which I have developed in “The Quest for Myth as a Key to Implicit Religion”, *Implicit Religion*, vol. 8, nr. 2, 2005 (2006), 147–165, an in “Moral Cosmos: A Struggle Between True and False Myths”, *Cosmos: The Journal of the Traditional Cosmology Society*, vol. 15, nrs 1&2, 1999 (2003), 23–44.

¹⁵See, for instance, Reinhold Niebuhr *Faith and Politics. A Commentary on Religious, Social and Political Thought in a Technological Age*, edited by R. H. Stone, New York: George Braziller, 1968, 15. – where he points out in a text of 1937: “In the lexicon of the average modern, particularly in America, a myth is a piece of fiction, usually inherited from the childhood of the race. The scientific outlook of our mature culture has supposedly invalidated the truth value of these primitive stories in which gods and devils, nymphs and satyrs, fairies and witches are portrayed in actions and attitudes which partly transcend and partly conform to human limitations. They are regarded as the opulent fruits of an infantile imagination which are bound to wither under the sober discipline of a developed intelligence. Science has displaced mythology . . . Such are the convictions which belong to the unquestioned certainties of the modern man”. ‘In reality’ myth appears in crisis situations: if another person behaves strangely, if she or he relates to vital ideas which are not our own, we are inclined to speak of myth. If the label is no libel for outright lies, ‘myth’ stands for insufficient thinking, for adhering to misleading and false beliefs, for being victim to delusions. If one is convinced that a position in favor of atomic plants is based on packs of lies and delusions, one might easily speak of, for instance, “Five Myths About Nuclear Energy”, no matter whether the arguments are true or false. (see *America*, vol. 198 nr. 20 (2008)). The opponent’s adhesion to myth appears as a form of escapism. People cling to stages of human development that belong to a different time. Unlike our own culture which is based on common sense and realistically oriented, it is other cultures which still live by myth. After all, the obvious needs no explanation.

are situations in which myths turn out to be lies, and others in which it is more to the point to connect myth with truth.

Though it might be true that ‘true’ myths are strictly speaking false (from a logical point of view), this very assumption could also be false for the simple reason that it is necessary to distinguish between true and false myths, between myths which are beneficial (and in this sense true), and myths which are detrimental (and in this sense false). If we consider, for instance, the “Myth of the 20th Century” as it has been proclaimed by national socialists, the myth of honor, blood, and destiny, I think that it is a gruesome example of a false myth, with horrible consequences, and lasting scars on the face of humanity in general and the German people in particular. By contrast, we could point to the Christian Myth, the myth of forgiveness, the suffering God, and salvation history, as an example which indicates at least what a true myth can be if one shapes one’s life accordingly. However, if we focus on the myth of the French Revolution we might say that in some ways it can be classified as a false myth, whereas in other ways it may be said to be a true myth.

The three examples are in themselves a clear indication that the question about myth is no simple matter. If each of the three examples provides indeed a myth, one might wonder what they have in common, where and in what sense they differ, and what it means exactly that they should be true or false. But the issue becomes even more complicated if we look at the history of the term and its many uses.

In Early Greek usage, myth (or *mythos*) was no lie, but a word that was spoken with the authority of a living tradition¹⁶. *Mythos* is synonymous with *logos*, though the word that is myth has more weight. *Mytheomai*, I speak, was an expression for saying the truth. As Xenophanes tells us, we must not forget that “prudent people praise God first, with devotional sayings, *mythoi*, and pure words, *logoi*”¹⁷. If Parmenides insists on the necessity to follow the right way, to think as truth and *logos* demand, he calls this “the myth of the way” (*mythos hodoio*)¹⁸. In the course of time, as the Greeks came to think in terms of reflective reasoning (not only about nature but also) about the various stories of gods and goddesses, they developed not only different theories about the meaning of myth, but began to oppose *logos* against *mythos*. As a result of this opposition, myths turned into fairy tales while the term ‘myth’ became a symbol of delusion and ignorance¹⁹. Though the original

¹⁶See W. F. Otto, *Die Gestalt und das Sein*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1955; K. Kerényi, *op.cit.* 11vv.

¹⁷Xenophanes VS 21, B1, 13.14.

¹⁸Parmenides B8.

¹⁹Cf. Hans-Peter Müller, “Anfänge der Religionskritik bei den Vorsokratikern” in A. T. Houry, G. Vanoni (Hg.), *„Geglaubt habe ich, deshalb habe ich geredet“*, Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1998, 281–295. As to the first attempts at demythologization see also K. Hübner, *op.cit.* 145: “Unter den Logographen, Genealogen und Mythographen versteht man eine Gruppe, die versuchte, den Mythos auf den „Logos“ zu bringen, also ihm eine dem aufkommenden Rationalismus entsprechende systematische Ordnung zu geben. Dazu gehörte aber nicht zuletzt, mittels möglichst lückenloser Genealogien die mythischen Geschichten in den durchgehenden Zusammenhang der profanen Zeit zu bringen. Dennoch blieb man dabei teilweise noch in der alten Anschauungsweise befangen. Besonders deutlich zeigt sich dies bei Pherekydes (6. Jahrhundert v. Chr.)... (146) So archaisch

meaning of *mytheomai* lingered on, the meaning of mythos was overtaken by different connotations. As Socrates remarks in Plato's *Gorgias*: "Hear, then, a very beautiful *logos*. A fable (*mythos*), you will think. But I call it a *logos*. For what I am going to tell, I tell you as pure truth"²⁰.

As language and usage develop, the same words do not necessarily keep the same meaning. They can assume meanings which differ considerably from what they used to convey before. But there is more going on in Ancient Greece as far as the meaning of mythos and logos is concerned. Since their shifts in meaning concur with changes of identity and belonging, the terms themselves turn into symbols and criteria of mutual assessment. Indeed, if we consider the emergence and development of philosophy in Ancient Greece, we become not only witnesses to a new tradition in culture history, but observe also a far-reaching struggle between traditional truth claims and philosophical insights²¹. For when Plato points out (in third book of *The Republic*) that philosophy provides a "better" theology, it becomes clear that he sees in it an alternative tradition which serves as a replacement of the Homeric canon. Though the "cultivation of reason"²² aims at knowledge for the sake of knowledge²³, thought and word insist on becoming practical realities. While the *logos* stands for those who follow the ways of philosophy, *mythos* becomes the mark of those who are unable or unwilling to accept the challenges of true humanity. Mythos is not merely a term that has changed its meaning, but turns out to be a symbol which, as 'tacit myth' within and outside philosophy, functions as a label that initiates and confirms social and cultural otherness.

The reference to the Apostle Paul may be no more than one of many instances which confirm the changes in the usage of the term myth, but it reveals nevertheless the dialectical ramifications of these changes. For when he tells Timothy that he

auch der Stil des Pherekydes anmutet, so wenig kann doch darüber hinweggesehen werden, daß nunmehr in Prosa geschrieben wird. Man distanziert sich von den Dichtern. „Alles haben den Göttern Homer und Hesiod angehängt“, klagt Xenophanes, und Hekataios (6. Jahrhundert v. Chr.) betont, er erzähle den Mythos so, wie er ihm „wahr zu sein scheint“, er erzähle einen „logos eikós“, etwas Wahres: „Denn die Geschichten der Griechen scheinen mir auch mannigfaltig und lächerlich zu sein“. [Hekataios, perhaps a student of Anaximander, lived in Miletus and had considerable knowledge about the countries and traditions of various peoples]. „Eikós“ war offenbar in dieser Zeit ein Schlagwort. Wir finden es auch bei dem Mythographen Hellanikos (5. Jahrhundert v. Chr.), womit er das in seinen Augen Natürliche und Vernünftige gegenüber dem Phantastischen, nur Erfundenen der Dichter hervorzuheben sucht. Nun beginnt auf breiter Front die "Entmythologisierung". Da wird durch Hekataios aus dem Höllenhund Kerberos eine gewöhnliche giftige Schlange. Herakles holt die Rinder des Geryones nicht von einer fernen Insel im Westen, sondern aus dem nahen Ambrakia, und selbstverständlich zieht er nicht alleine gegen den König Augeas, sondern zusammen mit den Epeern, um nur einige Beispiele zu geben". Der Mythos wird also nicht einfach aufgegeben, er wird nur "vernünftig" erklärt". See also Detienne, M., *The Creation of Mythology*, translated by M. Cook, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986.

²⁰Gorgias 523a. In the translation of this quote I follow Xaveer de Win, *Plato: Verzameld Werk*, Antwerpen: De Nederlandsche Boekhandel, 1978, deel I, 204.

²¹See Lawrence J. Hatab, *Myth and Philosophy: A Contest of Truths*, La Salle: Open Court, 1992; and Hans Schwabl, "Notizen zu den Quellen über die Anfänge der Philosophie: Aristoteles und Hesiod", in Danilo N. Basta et al., *Kriza I Perspektive Filozofije: Mihailu Djuriću za sedamdeseti rodendan*, Beograd: Tersit, 1995, 309–322.

²²Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book X. 8, 1179a.

²³Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Book I. 2, 982a.

should not “waste his time with unholy, silly myths, but practice piety instead”²⁴, he may have a point as far as the cultivation of religious attitudes is concerned. However, when he remarks: “from truth they will abstain, and turn to myths”²⁵, it becomes clear that he has more in mind when using this term. For whereas this usage implies the mythlessness of his own message, it functions also as a device which, by pointing to religious backwardness, puts his fellow humans into a place in which the people he refers to, do not want to be.

These few indications are sufficient to state the problem. If we focus on the usage of the term ‘myth’, the question is not whether this usage has changed (as it undoubtedly has), but whether it still refers to notions of identity and belonging; whether labelling is still taking place when we call a conviction or a way of behaving and doing things a myth. Since there are sufficient indications that the latter is indeed the case, we are still burdened with the history of the word and its usage. Though labelling is a common human attitude, it is definitively not an ideal philosophy and scholarship should strive for. If we think about it, it is quite possible that our own convictions and evidences are not so very different from those of others. For this reason, we are undoubtedly better off when we concede that there is mutuality in labelling (or since myth is the label: in ‘myth-calling’²⁶), and concentrate on the question of true and false (or beneficial and detrimental) myths instead of ignoring the issue. After all, if one insists on ‘being without myth’, such insistence could turn out to be the myth that persists in the denial of myth or, as Laurence Coupe puts it, in “the myth of mythlessness”²⁷.

Basic meanings

If it is true that present day usage of the word myth relates implicitly to issues of identity in conjunction with more or less obvious forms of labelling, these connotations are sufficiently important to be acknowledged, and to revise this usage accordingly. To do this, we have to consider the relationship between philosophy and tradition, and to focus especially on religious traditions and the ways they tend to disregard the truth claims of other religions. At least since David Hume’s *Natural History of*

²⁴1 Tim. 4. 7.

²⁵2 Tim. 4. 4. See also 2 Ptr 1. 16: “We did not follow sophisticated myths when we proclaimed the power and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but have been eye witnesses to his sublime greatness”.

²⁶I use the term ‘myth-calling’ analogously to ‘name-calling’ which Webster’s *New World Dictionary* defines as “the use of disparaging or abusive names in attacking another”.

²⁷L. Coupe, *Myth*, London: Routledge, 1997, 9. See also for instance K. Hübner, op.cit. 109: “Der Grieche, der im Mythos lebte und nicht, wie wir, außerhalb seiner, konnte ebenso wenig in dem hier gemeinten Sinn über ihn sprechen wie über ihn reflektieren”. If we ask how it is possible to study myth, the problem of speaking about myth is indeed a real problem. But Hübner’s approach is ambiguous. For if we are really outside myth, as he assumes, we may wonder how we are able to relate to myth in the first place, unless this ‘outside of’ is in itself a myth which enables us to recognize similarities in the myths of others. In this regard, I prefer to rely on the experiences of intercultural differences, both as they confront us with contrasts that make us ‘see’, and relate to cultural realities under conditions which reveal similarities and dissimilarities in relatively distinct ways.

Religion, philosophers have been (or could have been) aware of this tendency and the fact that something is wrong if one ignores the challenges of mutuality. Unfortunately, though philosophers of the Enlightenment noticed the problem of mutuality in religious traditions, and took the ignoring of this problem as an indication of delusory beliefs, they forgot to notice that the history of philosophy and the belief in reason display similar patterns of mutual labelling and ‘myth-calling’.

Indeed, if we observe today that what is a myth for one is a non-myth for another, or that positions and convictions assume opposite meanings as positions and perspectives change, we have every reason to pay attention to this observation. It is an issue which asks for the *deconstruction of prejudices* as well as for an assessment of the conditions under which we might *recover the meanings* that have been lost in the course of biased developments. Moreover, when we focus on the relationship between mythos and logos in philosophy, we may even wonder whether this relationship is not covered by the same mythological figure which Lévi-Strauss has discovered in traditional mythologies²⁸.

The practice of religious, philosophical, and ordinary ‘myth-calling’ is of interest to us all. Specifically, it is an issue which underlines the necessity to come to an understanding of myth which covers not only the history of ‘myth-calling’, but which recalls also the (Greek) beginnings of this history when mythos and logos were equally indebted to (what was believed as) truth.

The question about a revised or critical use of the term ‘myth’ is primarily a problem of Western history and its beginnings in Greek thoughts and attitudes. But since it concerns in principle all cultures and traditions, it becomes a problem of philosophical anthropology within the horizon of culture history. In fact, if we think about the method that could lead to an adequate concept of myth, I would like to argue that we take our cue from Greek tradition, but turn to the primal (or life-communal) cultures of gatherers and hunters in order to recover the meaning of myth. With regard to the Greeks, we know already that myth referred to stories about gods and divine beings on the one hand and, more generally, to the word of tradition on the other hand; that is, to the *hieros logos* both as it could be found in these stories,

²⁸I refer to: $f_x(a) : f_y(b) \cong f_x(b) : f_{a-1}(y)$ (“Here, with two terms, a and b, being given as well as two functions, x and y, of these terms, it is assumed that a relation of equivalence exists between two situations, defined respectively by an inversion of *terms* and *relations*, under two conditions: (1) that one term be replaced by its opposite (in the above formula, a and a-1); (2) that an inversion be made between the *function value* and the *term value* of two elements (above, y and a).” C. Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, Garden City, Anchor Books, 1967, 225). When applied to the tension between mythos and logos, the formula can be read as follows: Myth (a) which seduces (fx) relates to Logos (b) which liberates (fy) like Logos (b) which seduces (fx) relates to Liberation (y) in the destruction of Myth (a-1). – What is surprising in this interpretation is the possibility of drawing a direct line to the ‘death of God’ myth. Since we ‘know’, as I assume, God only in, through, and as myth, the meaning of this knowledge depends on the relation to the myth from which it originates. Hence, the more we insist on the myth which finds its expression in the destruction of myth, the greater the chances become that *God* is disappearing, too. The alternative to the ‘myth of mythlessness’ consists, however, not in a renewed identification of mythos and logos, but in a distinction which implies mutual recognition. It is an invitation to consider the differences in questions, interests, ways of thinking, object relations, and so forth, as they mark the meaning of being human under changing conditions.

and as it exceeded them in its meanings. But when we ask what we can do with these two notions, we are already in the middle of controversy. Though our understanding of primal cultures is limited, and biased by the conditions under which we relate to them, they offer at least examples of more or less homogenous traditions. These traditions can and must be studied on their own grounds, but we can also refer to them as we try to come to grips with the meaning of being human and cultural in a more general sense; that is to say, as we think about our own being within the context of cultural multiplicity and human unity. Since the two notions of myth are such that they permit us to distinguish similar phenomena in other cultures and traditions, I think that it makes sense to focus on primal cultures, and to develop the question about myth as we try to get hold of our own being in the light that has been provided by them.

The study of myth I propose, is largely indebted to the authors I have mentioned in connection with the fourth and fifth option above. In particular, I would like to refer to Schelling's proposal of a philosophical ethnology²⁹. But as I consider it necessary to emphasize the persistence of elementary conditions on cultural grounds, I see a closer connection than these authors have seen between the life-communal cultures of gatherers and hunters and our own as well as other people's conditions of primal existence.

To give a few indications, I would say that myth, as word of tradition and as story about divine beings, becomes above all a key concept in and for the constitution of cultural reality and personal consciousness. In its primary meaning, myth is not a story (in the sense of an incidental account), but the configuration of evidences by which people live, in which they are aware of themselves and all reality, which they presuppose as they concentrate on the particulars of ordinary life. Myth speaks in the tale of being human³⁰. It comes into being where the world becomes evident; where reality – that is: true reality – begins to be an issue. Myth is primarily not a form of knowledge (as Cassirer assumed), but a dimension and form of consciousness. In the light of myth, the world reveals itself as an integral feature of the semantic space that enables human beings to communicate, and to disclose in their own way the truth that is in and behind appearances. If we approach myth in the experiences of cultural differences, it makes itself known as the “grammar” that guides and orders the arrangement of symbolic meanings.

In its basic function myth does not give insights, but specifies the conditions under which it becomes possible to search for them. It is the grid, as Mary Douglas

²⁹See F. W. J. Schelling, *Historisch kritische Einleitung in die Philosophie der Mythologie*, (1842/46) Werke (M. Schröter), München: Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1959, VI, p. 130. See also W. Dupré, *Religion in Primitive Cultures: A Study in Ethnophilosophy*, The Hague: Mouton, 1975; and “Unio Mythica. The One that Differs in Oneness”, in S. J. Denning-Bolle, E. Gerow, eds., *The persistence of religions. Essays in honor of Kees W. Bolle*, Malibu: Undena Publications, 1996, 259–283.

³⁰Cf. Wittgenstein: “An entire mythology is stored in our language”, *Wittgenstein, Sources and Perspectives*, ed. by C. G. Luckhart, Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1979, 70.

has pointed out, that determines and qualifies the life that evolves in and around it³¹. The study of myth is, in this regard, not about truth-claims, but about the presuppositions of these claims. Myth forms and opens the space that is home and world. Because of myth it is possible “to give” – in Shakespeare’s words – “to airy nothing a local habitation and a name”³²; or, perhaps more to the point, to find myth in the realization of this very possibility. As myth attracts and harbors knowledge and experiences, it endorses and legitimizes them while and as it is also shaped by them.

Moreover, as myth relates to divine beings, these beings present themselves as names that speak in and with the tradition that is part of them. The central names of myth are no allegories, at least not primarily, which say something else that is encoded in them, but – as Schelling has pointed out by using a term of Coleridge – *tautegories* which say what they are and as they are in the saying³³. The divine beings, whether they are ancestors or heroes, totems or creator gods, do, or do not, exist in ‘their’ specific modes of existence and non-existence; not as things exist, but as the non-visible realities of numbers and laws, of ethical codes and values, of communities and the ideals of humanity, are part of our life in accordance with their respective characters. To understand the meaning of tautegorical names, one could say that they imply, and hinge on, different ways of speaking – which in a sense is trivial, but which gains meaning as we explore the extreme possibilities of speaking. If we think along these lines, it makes sense to relate not only to the individual subject that speaks, but also to language and tradition as they form their own beginnings, and join in the same processes which consist in and structure the expressions of humanity – and thus, as they account for particular ways of speaking³⁴.

The conditions under which we become aware of mythic phenomena in primal cultures make it necessary to approach myth within a dynamic perspective. If we contrast mythic names with the stories in which they occur, and observe that stories may be told and retold in variable combinations, we encounter myth as it unfolds in stories, and mythic names and notions as they enfold these stories as well as the traditions by which people live. On the one hand, the result is such that we are left with a body of narratives which can be collected and fixed. On the other hand, if we consider the collections of myths and recall the manner in which they are produced (and collected) we notice that they are temporary and in the making. The tension we face in these opposing movements underscores the necessity to distinguish between actual myths as they are part of specific mythologies, and the latent myth

³¹Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*, New York: Vintage Books, 1973.

³²Midsummer Night’s Dream V. 1.

³³See F. W. J. Schelling, op.cit. 197f. See also H. Stachowiak, “Über tautegorische Modelle”, *Philosophy of Mind, Philosophy of Psychology*. Proceedings of the 9th International Wittgenstein Symposium, 19th to 26th August, Wien (Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky) 1985, 143–155.

³⁴See J. W. Rogerson, “Slippery Words: Myth”, in A. Dundes, ed., *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, 62–71, 63.

that appears in them. But as we cannot dismiss the processes in which this latent myth is generated, we have to think of what we may call the mythic as it becomes the myth that is at basis of mythology.

To come to an understanding of the relationship between myth and mythology, the available stories offer themselves as (first) indications of the latent (untold) myth from which they derive. Conversely, if we follow these indications and think of the myth that enfolds them, we may return to the stories and approach them once more in the light of this preceding (and, in principle, enchronic) myth. But as a body of stories refers to the untold myth from which it stems, its stories do not necessarily reflect and articulate the whole myth by which people live. Though life-communal cultures are spontaneous enough to cover large segments of culture and consciousness in mythological expressions, they do not cover all of them. In its actuality, a particular mythology may be more or less comprehensive. And, whereas the idea of total coverage assumes the meaning of a limit, we can think of an opposite limit where all narratives are gone inasmuch as they have disappeared in words and notions which encapsulate their myths without releasing them. The assumption of this second limit is a thought experiment. But it is an experiment which makes one wonder about situations in which we know many mythologies, though are not sure any more whether we can, or should, embrace any one of them.

Whereas the distinction between myth and mythology aims at the recovery of the myth in mythology and the understanding of mythology in conjunction with this myth, the distinction between myth and the mythic centers on the formation of myths and mythologies in culture history, and the mythic as timeless source and beginning of this formation. If the first distinction relates to the plurality of mythological expressions in more or less distinct unities, the second distinction refers to the convergence of myths and mythologies in the unity of being human and cultural. To the extent that the basic myths of different mythologies are one inasmuch as they concur with momentary (though relatively lasting) configurations of the semantic space that defines culture and consciousness, they can be used to distinguish various cultures with their specific histories. And conversely, inasmuch as cultural differences concur with shifts in myth and mythology, they can be used in the clarification of these shifts. However, inasmuch as myths are similar and dissimilar, they let, and compel, us to think of the mythic in being human and cultural – not as another myth, but as focus and vanishing point of mythological processes.

Since the distinction between the myth and the mythic derives from the perception of actual myths and mythologies and the necessity to account for distinct and related phenomena, it raises the question whether the relation with the mythic is transient; whether it is typical for particular cultures and not for others; whether it reflects certain stages in cultural development or persists in all situations. The answer to this question depends on the understanding of being human and cultural as well as on

the meaning of language and communication on the one hand, and the conditions of thinking and tradition on the other hand. If we accept the idea that human beings do not exist without a life-world in which they find their identity and personhood, and take into consideration that myths account for the cosmological character of cultural reality in life-communal cultures, we may as well say that the mythic turns out to be an unconditional requirement of human existence. We may think of the mythic in terms of a dimension of consciousness, or as a principle which becomes effective in the formation of mythic symbols and the configurations that determine the myth of mythologies, but in either way we relate to and rely on it as we cope with reality in practice and in theory. As vanishing point of all reality it is unseizable as reality itself. But as we think of it – not as object, but as the implicit limit of thinking and speaking – it gives us the notion of truth both as it precedes being and understanding, and as it guides and accompanies the assessment of actions and attitudes.

From a historical point of view it is evident that the stories about gods and goddesses became problematic when the word of philosophy and scholarship began to compete with the word of tradition. But the fact that these myths have been abolished, does not necessarily imply that philosophy and scholarship relinquished their own myth. As I have indicated already, if we consider the relationship between myth and mythology, we can also think of myths without mythologies. In this regard we could argue that reason and being became terms of a different myth which, as myth without apparent mythology, became the matrix of a new tradition within traditions. The tension between the word of the one and the words of other traditions became a powerful stimulant to the dynamics of being human and cultural as well as to the ways in which thinking relates to itself and the whole of reality. In coping with the words of surrounding traditions, the myth of philosophy and scholarship may have been forgotten and hidden away in the evidences of reflective thought. But the fact that it has been or is forgotten, does not mean that the myth has ceased to be a decisive factor in the formation of philosophical systems and the development of scientific paradigms. Whatever the ways may be in which we understand, and relate to, the mythic in the distinction of myths and mythologies, I do not think that philosophy and scholarship can be reasonable in the study of myth if they disregard their possible dependence on mythological conditions. What matters is not whether myths and mythologies are ‘primitive’ forms of science, which they are not, but whether and how they form the medium in which we exist as human beings and are aware of ourselves and the whole of reality.

Why should it be of interest to study myth?

Since myth is a question of the semantic spaces in which we operate as thinking beings, there are numerous reasons to be interested in the clarification of this issue. In a

formal sense, we could argue that the paradigms or disciplinary matrixes of scientific studies are especially sensitive to the delineations in which the subject matter of our investigations appears. Even if myth should not be decisive for the dimensionalization of reality, we should still know why and how it interferes with the perception of things, as it apparently does. Before we know what myth truly implies, it is possible that myth is no more than a distorting factor which needs to be checked, and with regard to which we have to be careful that it does not creep into “off-duty” writings as Stephen Toulmin has pointed out³⁵. But it is also possible that myth is, in fact, an indispensable condition of reflective thinking as well as of science, and that the primary issue is not the rejection of scientific myths, but the recovery of those mythic elements which sustain the idea of “pure science” and are likely to affect, change, and deepen its meaning as they become subject of critical and self-critical considerations³⁶.

Another point which could be mentioned in this context concerns the *epistemological* aspects of the problem of myth. Because myth is an empirical reality at least to the extent that cultures, traditions, and human beings do, in fact, enact its meaning, we cannot discard the questions of how we become aware of this reality, how we know what we perceive, what the experiences are that permit and compel us to distinguish relevant phenomena, and so forth. The questions are part of the problem of interpersonal relations in the form of selfunderstanding and the understanding of others. They have their place in the study of one’s own and of other cultures, of one’s own and of other religions. But they refer also to the possibility of meeting myth on its own ground and in terms that agree with the demands of empirical existence. Since Theagenes of Rhegion (6th century BC) became convinced that myth needs an allegorical interpretation, Western scholars have tried to come closer to myth by connecting it with various parameters. Myth became an expression of poetry, of priestly fraud, of forgotten histories³⁷. Today we try to make sense of myth by connecting it with social functions, with subconscious processes, with archetypical mappings, with historical connections and developments. I do not think that these connections are necessarily wrong or not to the point. They do make sense in a variety of ways, and we have to explore these possibilities. But I do not think that this is sufficient if we do

³⁵Stephen Toulmin, “Contemporary Scientific Mythology” in Stephen Toulmin, Ronald Hepburn, and Alasdair MacIntyre, *Metaphysical Beliefs; Three Essays by Stephen Toulmin, Ronald W. Hepburn and Alasdair MacIntyre*, 2nd ed., London (S. C. M. Press) 1970.

³⁶As to the discussion of this point, see for instance Langdon Gilkey, *Religion and the Scientific Future: Reflections on Myth, Science, and Theology*, London: S.C.M. Press 1976; Edward Maziarz, “Science and Myths as Symbolic Structures” in George F. McLean, ed., *Myth and Philosophy*, Volume XLV of Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, 1971; Thomas N. Munson, *Religious Consciousness and Experience*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975; Ian Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms: A Comparative Study in Science and Religion*, New York: Harper & Row, 1984; and Milton Scarborough, *Myth and Modernity: Postcritical Reflections*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.

³⁷See Jean Pépin, *Mythe et Allégorie, Les origines grecques et les contestations judéo-chrétiennes*, Paris: Éditions Mouton, 1958; and Jan de Vries, *Forschungsgeschichte der Mythologie*, Freiburg: Alber, 1961. With the “forgotten histories” I refer to the Euhemeristic interpretation of myth in which Zeus (and other gods) are said to have been historical figures. As the historical knowledge faded away, the memory acquired features of divine admiration and religious worship.

not try to take myth at its word; if we do not cope with its face value first, and before we look for hidden meanings. Though Schelling has already made this attempt, the issue itself is still grossly neglected³⁸.

Since I have already touched on the issue of *identity formation and labelling*, I do not have to repeat this point. Within the context of philosophical anthropology it is obvious that we have to focus on myth if we intend to do justice to the meaning of reality. But as this issue extends into various aspects of philosophy and culture, it assumes special significance in the discussion of philosophy and ideology on the one hand, and for the question about epochal shifts and their impact on the understanding of philosophy on the other hand. Moreover, as Kolakowski and Hübner have pointed out³⁹, if philosophy intends to make sense of questions about chance and providence, or how we cope with ‘strange’ experiences in our life, with illness and death, with disaster and war or events like that of 11th September, with salvation and doom – then it must not disregard the ways in which myth tackles these problems. Nor does it make sense to exclude the possibility that only myth is able to provide a solution – or that these problems present themselves in mythic terms the moment we try to define them. And, if it should turn out that this kind of experiences is an essential ingredient of and for the notion of God, one might wonder how it will ever be possible to develop a philosophical theology, that is indeed philosophical and not another version of theological reasoning, without an adequate theory of myth.

Finally, I would like to point to the *ontological* significance of myth. As Kurt Hübner has shown, it is possible to contrast scientific ontology with mythological ontology if we assume that they both provide models to cope more or less reasonably with experiences⁴⁰. But as the two models are specifications of cultural reality in their particular ways, I do not think that it is sufficient to juxtapose them without answering to the question of their mediation. Here I would like to refer once more to the distinction between myth and mythology (and the mythic as depth and lasting origin), but now with the additional consideration that myth itself is more comprehensive than the mythologies which reflect some of its meanings, and that it is precisely this comprehensiveness which needs to be taken seriously: in its nature, its possibilities, and consequences. For if it is true that myth consists in the configuration of evidences with the implication of naturalness, and that it insists on the tautologies which attract meanings in their own way, then there can be no doubt that myth is always a whole, no matter how limited it may be in its actuality. As tautologies form their own centers of reality, the space between them becomes a field for various activities. As we can think of changing configurations, we can think of new and different possibilities. But whatever the shifts may be, whether some of the tautologies fade

³⁸See M. Djurić, *Mythos, Wissenschaft, Ideologie – Ein Problemaufriß*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1979.

³⁹See L. Kolakowski, *Die Gegenwärtigkeit des Mythos*, München 1974, and K. Hübner, *Die Wahrheit des Mythos*, München 1985.

⁴⁰See K. Hübner, op.cit. part three, 239ff. (The rationality of the mythic).

away while others appear or whether they stay the same and extend, as they form a whole in tautegorical difference, it is the whole that extends or changes together with them. Within the limits of tautegorical symbols and the semantic spaces they entail, there is room for ordinary existence both as it evolves in conjunction with them and as it modifies them in concrete relations. Because of these symbols and spaces and their dimensions we can think of religion as a particular mode of human existence, and of religions as modifications of this mode in connection with different sets of tautegories and various relations to the meaning of tautegorical difference⁴¹. But for the same reason, we could think also of philosophy and science as they evolve from ordinary existence in conjunction with their specific tautegories – not as the mythologies we know from prephilosophical and prescientific cultures, but as *logomythies* whose purpose it is to understand the world as well as the various mythologies. If the universe – not the universe of which we think that it exists ‘out there’, but the one that is formed by the tautegories of myth – is large enough to contain God and Nirvana (as tautegory of tautegories), one should certainly not beforehand exclude the possibility that the tautegoric whole is capable of including philosophy as well as science and scholarship. It is at least a point to think about. Since we hardly scratch the surface of reality, we should not believe that we have reached its essence, even if we assume that it has no essence at all.

The distinction between *mythos* and *logos* is a necessary distinction as far as the possibility of philosophy and science is concerned. It is a necessity which concurs with the emergence of philosophy and science inasmuch as they relate to the *logos* in forms of self-relation: as Parmenides has taught his fellow philosophers, with the *logos* we have to decide, and come to a conclusion⁴². But the distinction does not necessarily mean that myth is a delusion, that only *logos* is true, that *mythos* and *logos* could not both be true and false, or that it should not be possible that the distinction is, in fact, an *indistinction* when seen from the viewpoint of myth. If Parmenides called his way a myth, he probably meant what he said. But as philosophers developed their myth of the way, and started to refer to the ‘myths’ of others in order to state their cultural superiority, it would not be surprising if this has been the beginning of “off-duty” mythologies.

⁴¹With the notion of tautegorical difference I refer to the idea that the cultural universe which is constituted in the constellation of tautegorical names is closed: in one sense, we always have to say, that is it! But as there is tension and movement in the constellation of tautegories, their last word is always also a first one. If we begin to understand, it is fine. But there is more to it, in depth and beyond all extensions. There remains the question: what is it all about? Both moments are of vital importance for religious existence. If one of them is neglected the result is either fundamentalism or nihilism. Though I do not agree with Blumenberg’s simplistic opposition between myth and dogma – see Hans Blumenberg, *op.cit.* 239ff – I think that he has a point here. For as myth tells dogma that dogma derives from myth and mythology, it becomes a thorn in the flesh of dogmatic thought, which reminds one to look out, to avoid dogmatism, to accept myth as jester in the court of dogmatic reasoning.

⁴²See frag. 7: “...do thou judge by reason the strife-encompassed proof that I have spoken”. G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts*, Cambridge: University Press, 1962, 271.