MYTH AND LANGUAGE

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# PREFACE

The word 'myth' appears frequently in contemporary theological and exegetical writing. Unfortunately, it is used with a variety of meanings by different authors, and this gives rise to the layman's general misunderstanding of what is really a technical term. This thesis is an essay in the clarification of the notion of myth, through the use of the techniques of logical analysis of language.

I should like to acknowledge the advice and encouragement given me during the writing of this thesis by my supervisor, Dr. R.F. Aldwinckle, and by Dr. H.W. Lang, who acted as second reader.

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I

## MYTH

The objective of this essay is to draw together
certain trends of thought derived from study in the general
areas of myth and language, in order to see what light
can be shed on such problems as the relation between myth
and truth, and the matter of "demythologizing".

Our first difficulty is with the word 'myth' itself.
This is by no means a word whose meaning is made precise
by consistent usage; the most cursory survey of the relevant
anthropological or theological writing is sufficient to
verify this judgment.  Edward Tylor, for example, uses
interchangeably with 'myth' such words as 'legend', 'fable',
'archaic story', 'fiction', and 'quaint fancy', in addition
to others.[1]  Although such vague use of language is not
conducive to clear understanding of the intellectual arti-
facts of ancient cultures, it does emphasize the complexity
of the issues involved in the study of myth due to the
interpenetration of different modes of symbolic expression,
different types of "stories".

Hence our first task must be to analyze the notion

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[1]E.B. Tylor, Primitive Culture, (Boston, 1874), I,
274-284.

of myth with a view to suggesting a definition of 'myth'
which is adequate to anthropological data. The method
used is inductive; we draw upon the writings of several
anthropologists, philosophers, and students of religion in
order to point out where the lines of argument appear to
converge. The result is regarded as an adequate statement
of the essence of myth, and its usefulness in dealing with
the anthropological data is demonstrated.

The point of departure is the question of the
origins of myth. According to Tylor several factors enter
into the making of myths. These factors are not all of
the same order, but fall roughly into two types. The first
is the intellectual matrix which is the necessary condition
for the generation of myths. Tylor speaks of a peculiar
mental state which is characteristic of primitive peoples.[2]
Primitive man lives in the myth-making stage in the evolu-
tionary development of human thought. This mythopoeic
mentality is much like childhood mentality.[3]

Within this intellectual matrix a second factor
operates as an active principle. Says Tylor,

> First and foremost among the causes which transfigure
> into myths the facts of daily experience, is the
> belief in the animation of all nature, rising at its
> highest pitch to personification.[4]

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[2]_Ibid._, p. 316f.

[3]_Ibid._, pp. 284f, 304f, 392.

[4]_Ibid._, p. 285.

Animism is the primary dynamic factor.  Animistic personi-
fication of natural phenomena is abetted in several ways.
For example, it was by explaining the course and change
of nature on the basis of analogy with human action that
primitive man was able to satisfy his craving to know the
causes of events.[5]  Although such analogies seem fanciful
to us, they helped men of past ages to understand reality
itself.[6]

Primitive man also satisfied his speculative
curiosity by deliberately inventing stories.

> When the attention of a man in the myth-making stage
> of intellect is drawn to any phenomenon or custom
> which has to him no obvious reason, he invents and
> tells a story to account for it....[7]

This story is repeated ad infinitum and becomes entrenched
as a genuine legend of the ancient past.  Many myths
originate in this way.

The "tyranny of speech over the human mind"[8] is
another great stimulus to the development of myths; language
assists myth-making by the very fact that it gives names
to things.  It is very easy, however, for primitive man to
"realize" words, and so myths are born.

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[5]Ibid., p. 368f.

[6]Ibid., p. 296f.

[7]Ibid., p. 392.

[8]Ibid., p. 304.

Another fruitful source of myths is the "stupid pragmatizer", who does not have the ability to hold abstract concepts in his mind, but is forced to embody them in material incidents.[9] This is true in all ages, not only of ancient times.

By way of summary it can be said that, according to Tylor's theory, myths are generated by the operation of animistic beliefs through various channels within the context of the myth-making mentality characteristic of primitive man.

In Tylor's thinking, what does 'myth' mean? As we have seen he uses the term very loosely; however, there are certain main lines suggested in his discussion. Thus, a mythical story is a story about the gods and their activities;[10] it is a story about national or cosmic heroes;[11] it is a story about ordinary events which are controlled by super-human beings;[12] it is a story which personifies the heavenly bodies or natural forces such as the wind.[13]

It is readily apparent from Tylor's use of terms that 'myth' is not to be defined in terms of what it is about.

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[9]Ibid., p. 407.

[10]Ibid., p. 274f.

[11]Ibid., p. 276.

[12]Ibid., p. 285.

[13]Ibid., pp. 337, 345.

It is equally apparent, on the other hand, that for Tylor
'myth' implies 'not true', 'not factual'. This judgment
is borne out by his reference, when discussing explanatory
tales, to our modern "criterion of possibility".[14]  Further
support for this appraisal is found in the way in which
he opposes science to myth; science, in fact, checks the
growth of myth.[15]  Apparently any fanciful story about the
cause of events or about the ancient past qualifies as myth;
but if 'myth' is to be used in this way the only connotation
which it retains is something like 'untrustworthy', 'un-
scientific', 'untrue'.  But surely this is to beg the question,
as will be pointed out later.

Tylor's theory of the origins of myth has three
other weaknesses in addition to those associated with his
use of language.  The notion of "primitive mentality", or
"myth-making stage" of human development can be subjected
to the criticism that anthropological evidence does not
support the idea of a peculiar type of mental "set" which
is the matrix out of which myths arise.  Secondly, and for
the same reasons, it is doubtful that ancient men had the
speculative interest which Tylor attributes to them.  A
third criticism, suggested here but not to be discussed
immediately, arises in the form of a question about the
status of the animistic notions themselves.  It is hard to

14Ibid., p. 392.

15Ibid., p. 317.

see how these notions, embodied in a story, would differ

from myth, in Tylor's usage; but if they do not differ it

seems to be the case that Tylor is committed to saying

that myth gives rise to myth.  This problem will be discussed

in connection with a theory suggested by Franz Boas.

One element of Tylor's theory which is of value

for our present purposes is contained in his discussion

of analogy,

> from which we have gained so much of our apprehension
> of the world around us.  Distrusted as it now is by
> severer science for its misleading results, analogy
> is still to us a chief means of discovery and illus-
> tration, while in earlier grades of education its
> influence was all but paramount.  Analogies which
> are but fancy to us were to men of past ages reality.[16]

In thus assimilating analogy to myth Tylor makes what seems

to be an important suggestion, namely, that myth is a mode

of apprehending reality.  This is a notion to which we shall

have occasion to return.

Some of the foregoing criticisms of an approach

such as Tylor's to the problem of myth are suggested by

Malinowski, who says,

> From my own study of living myths among savages, I
> should say that primitive man has to a very limited
> extent the purely artistic or scientific interest in
> nature; there is but little room for symbolism in his
> ideas and tales; and myth, in fact, is not an idle
> rhapsody, not an aimless outpouring of vain imaginings,
> but a hard-working, extremely important cultural force.
> Besides ignoring the cultural function of myth, this
> theory imputes to primitive man, a number of imaginary
> interests, and it confuses several clearly distinguishable

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[16]_Ibid._, p. 297.

types of story, the fairy tale, the legend, the saga, and the sacred tale or myth.[17]

Malinowski also criticizes the interpretation of myths as attempts to explain abstract ideas by concrete means. He points out that an idea such as death, for example, is not at all vague or abstract, but a concrete, ever-present fact of experience.[18]

As is indicated immediately above one of Malinowski's primary concerns is to avoid abstracting myths from their whole cultural context; "there is an intimate association between myth and ritual, between sacred tradition and the norms of social structure".[19] Myth must therefore be studied in relation to its cultural function. Malinowski's main thesis is thus stated in the following way:

> /Myth/ is not an explanation in satisfaction of a scientific interest, but a narrative resurrection of a primeval reality, told in satisfaction of deep religious wants, moral cravings, social submissions, assertions, even practical requirements. Myth fulfills in primitive culture an indispensable function: it expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilization; it is not an idle tale, but a hard-worked active force; it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom.[20]

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[17]Bronislaw Malinowski, _Magic, Science, and Religion_, (Glencoe, Ill., 1948), p. 75.

[18]_Ibid._, p. 86f.

[19]_Ibid._, p. 76.

[20]_Ibid._, p. 79.

In the process of giving evidence for his theory Malinowski makes some useful distinctions among fairy-tale or folk-tale, legend, and myth or sacred tradition.[21] Stories of the first group are not really taken seriously, and are told primarily for enjoyment. Legends, on the other hand, are a combination of historical tales and hearsay accounts, whether of distant places, ancient times, or perhaps events in which the narrator himself took part. Legends are often regarded as true stories. They sometimes reflect the hopes and ambitions of different social groups.

In contrast with both of these groups of stories is myth. Myth, as a narrative, is not merely a story told as a performance for the mutual enjoyment of narrator and audience; nor is it only an attempt to recount past historical events which seem significant in some way. Myths always refer to a precedent which is the ideal and justification for a present action; "the rituals, ceremonies, customs, and social organization...are regarded as the results of mythical event".[22] Not only does myth refer to a primeval reality which is greater than that in which primitive man lives his daily life, which determines his present action, and which gives him motives for ritual,[23] but myth is also

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[21]Ibid., pp. 79-84. This distinction is made by the Trobriand Islanders themselves, among whom Malinowski lived for several years.

[22]Ibid., p. 85.

[23]Ibid., p. 86.

believed to be efficacious in making that primeval reality present reality.[24]

Malinowski discovers three kinds of myths. First, there are myths of origins, for example, of races, clans, and their relationships. The cultural function of myths of this type is to justify certain social situations, for example, those arising out of differences of rank or power among various people or groups of people.[25] Such a myth is never regarded as a fairy-tale or a mere narrative about a past event but as a statement about a reality which is highly influential in the present situation.

A second type of myth is that whose subject is the recurrent cycle of life and death. The function of myths of this type is to help primitive people tolerate the impact of accident, disease, and death upon them. Says Malinowski of natives with whom he was acquainted,

> They would screen, with the vivid texture of their myth, stories, and beliefs about the spirit world, the vast emotional void gaping beyond them.[26]

The third group of myths are those connected with magic. These myths function to justify the claims of certain people or groups to social power.[27]

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[24] Ibid., p. 79.

[25] Ibid., pp. 96f., 102f.

[26] Ibid., p. 114.

[27] Ibid., p. 119.

Malinowski concludes that,

> The function of myth...is to strengthen tradition and
> endow it with a greater value and prestige by tracing
> it back to a higher, better, more supernatural reality
> of initial events.[28]

What can be said by way of appraisal? Perhaps what
is most significant about Malinowski's discussion is the
clarity with which he demonstrates the fact that myth has
a normative function in culture. This conclusion is the
basis of his distinction between myth and other types of
narrative; we are thus given considerable assistance in the
task of defining 'myth'.

With respect to this task, however, we discover
in Malinowski a difficulty which is similar to that pointed
out in Tylor's theory. There the problem was that of the
status of the animistic ideas which are manifested in myths.
Malinowski, whose usage of 'myth' seems consistently to
include the idea of narrative, also speaks of ideas which
underlie the narratives:

> I have presented the facts and told the myths in a
> manner which implies the existence of an extensive
> and coherent scheme of beliefs. This scheme does not
> exist, of course, in any explicit form in the native
> folk-lore. But it does correspond to a definite
> cultural reality, for all the concrete manifestations
> of the natives' beliefs, feelings, and forebodings
> with reference to death and after-life hang together
> and form a great organic unit.... The myths are but
> part of the organic whole; they are an explicit develop-
> ment into narrative of certain crucial points in
> native belief.[29]

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[28]Ibid., p. 122.

[29]Ibid., p. 112f.

Here, then, is the same problem, for it is primarily the coherent scheme of beliefs which is normative, rather than the narratives in which these beliefs are manifested.

This problem is also at the bottom of Franz Boas' refusal to distinguish between myths and folk-tales on the basis of subject matter. He observed that the same story elements or plot can appear both in myths and folk-tales.[30] Boas therefore makes an explicit distinction between mythological concepts and the narratives in which they are embodied. "Mythological concepts are the fundamental views of the constitution of the world and of its origin".[31]

Boas does not explain why he calls such fundamental concepts "mythological" but it can be suggested that it is because they are metaphysical or supersensuous notions.[32] There are two main features of such concepts. They are either personifications, or they have to do with a mythical world which is either spatially or temporally distinct from the world of common human experience. All of these characteristics can appear together, of course.[33]

Primitive people take their myths seriously in the

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[30]Franz Boas, ed., General Anthropology, (New York, 1938), p. 609.

[31]Ibid., loc. cit.

[32]David Bidney, Theoretical Anthropology, (New York, 1953), p. 290.

[33]Boas, op.cit., p. 622f.

sense that the myths are about matters which are of great
importance to them. Thus cultural achievements, the signi-
ficance of rites and customs, danger from enemies or animals,
tool-making and tool-using, and thoughts about the future
are elements of their myths.[34]

Boas' distinction between mythological concepts and
myths as narratives is apparently a useful analytic device.
It is valuable for making possible precise speech; as will
become more evident the notion of mythological concepts as
opposed to particular narratives which might be called myths
is a main concern of this essay.

Thus far we have indicated two aspects of myth which
are important for our present purposes, namely, the idea
that myth is a mode of apprehending reality, and the fact
that myth is normative in culture. The first of these is
developed in detail by Ernst Cassirer. In essence his con-
clusion is that myth is one of several forms of intuition
of reality.

Cassirer's point of departure is the apparently
anomalous fact that although theory of knowledge has been
concerned throughout its recent history with the apprehension
of "facts" it has ignored other persistently recurring forms
of human intellectual activity; theory of knowledge has
disregarded religion and myth as products of superstition
and ignorance. But, says Cassirer, such a solution to the
problem of myth is too simple. Such phenomena cannot be

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[34]Ibid., p. 616.

rejected out-of-hand; their irrepressible nature indicates
a lively spiritual function which should be investigated in
its own right.[35] Modern science, for example, rejects as
inadequate and even as a hindrance to its purpose of explana-
tion, the verbal propositions of common speech, for common
language exhibits an implicit substance-attribute metaphysic
which is alien to modern science; nevertheless, according
to Cassirer, this aspect of common language which science
finds misleading is traceable back to a form of intuition
which is independent of the mode of cognition which characterizes
science, and is, indeed, autonomous.[36] Cassirer makes this
point when he says, with reference to theoretical science,
that it is always essentially the same no matter what its
objects are--

> just as the sun's light is the same no matter what
> wealth and variety of things it may illuminate. The
> same may be said of any symbolic form, of language,
> art, or myth, in that each of these is a particular
> way of seeing, and carries within itself its particular
> and peculiar source of light. The function of en-
> visagement, the dawn of conceptual enlightenment can
> never be realistically derived from things themselves
> or understood through the nature of its objective
> contents. For it is not a question of what we see in
> a certain perspective, but of the perspective itself.[37]

As is evident from the foregoing, the position from
which Cassirer approaches the problem of myth is the fundamental

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[35]E. Cassirer, Language and Myth, trans. and with an
intro. by S.K. Langer, (United States, n.d.), p. viii.

[36]Susanne K. Langer, "On Cassirer's Theory of Language
and Myth" in Paul Arthur Schilpp, ed., The Philosophy of
Ernst Cassirer, (Evanston, 1949), p. 385.

[37]Cassirer, op.cit., p. 11.

principle of Kant's "Copernican revolution". This is
explicitly stated at the beginning of Volume Two of his
Philosophy of Symbolic Forms.[38]

> It is one of the first essential insights of critical
> philosophy that objects are not "given" to conscious-
> ness in a rigid, finished state, in their naked "as
> suchness", but that the relation of representation to
> object presupposes an independent, spontaneous act of
> consciousness. The object does not exist prior to and
> outside of synthetic unity but is constituted only by
> this synthetic unity; it is no fixed form that imprints
> itself on consciousness but is the product of a formative
> operation effected by the basic instrumentality of
> consciousness, by intuition and pure thought. The
> Philosophy of Symbolic Forms takes up this basic
> critical idea, this fundamental principle of Kant's
> "Copernican revolution", and strives to broaden it.
> It seeks the categories of the consciousness of objects
> in the theoretical, intellectual sphere, and starts
> from the assumption that such categories must be at
> work wherever a cosmos, a characteristic and typical
> world view, takes form out of the chaos of impressions.
> All such world views are made possible only by specific
> acts of objectivization, in which mere impressions are
> reworked into specific, formed representations.

When Cassirer speaks of myth, art, language, and
science as symbols he does not mean that they merely refer
to, or copy, a given reality; they "are not imitations,
but organs of reality, since it is solely by their agency
that anything real becomes an object for intellectual
apprehension".[39] It would thus seem wholly legitimate, on
Cassirer's view, to regard as analytic the statement that
myth is a mode of apprehending reality.

In discussing Cassirer's idea of myth it is necessary

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[38]E. Cassirer, Mythical Thought, trans. R. Manheim.
Vol. II of The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms. (New Haven,
1955), p. 29.

to keep in mind that he is primarily interested in the odyssey
of the human spirit through its various modes of expression.
He is therefore more interested in giving an account of how
the "mythical consciousness" works, than in its products;
he is more concerned with the dynamism which gives rise to
myths, than in the narratives themselves.  Cassirer, however,
speaks of the "mythical consciousness" in a way closely
similar to the way in which we have thus far spoken of myth
or of mythological concepts, and we can justifiably read
statements about myth from his statements of how the "mythical
consciousness" operates.

According to Cassirer the basic trait of myth is the
fundamental distinction which it makes between the "sacred"
and the "profane".[39]  This distinction is not made on the
basis of the objective content of myth, but is itself a
characteristic "accent" of mythical thinking.  Cassirer givess
us some clues to the content of the idea of the "sacred".
An analysis of the concepts of "mana" and "taboo" discloses
that these concepts essentially distinguish between the
common and customary aspects of daily life, and the unknown,
extraordinary, or unusual.  The unknown realm is filled
with threats and dangers, and with forces, and possibilities
different from those which are familiar in ordinary daily
life.  In the presence of the unknown man's reaction is
ambivalent, at least after sheer terror is overcome.

When mere bestial terror becomes an astonishment
moving in a twofold direction, composed of opposite

emotions--fear and hope, awe and admiration-- when
sensory agitation thus seeks for the first time an
issue and an _expression_, man stands on the threshold
of a new spirituality. It is this characteristic
spirituality which is in a sense reflected in the
idea of the sacred.[39]

This primary division between sacred and profane

permeates all myth; it is what makes the mythical world a

unity. In this respect the distinction between sacred and

profane in mythical thinking functions analogously to the

scientific concept of a general law: both serve to stabilize

their respective perceptual worlds.[40]

Another basic characteristic of myth is the way in

which the reality which it posits lacks depth, both spatially

and temporally. Cassirer traces this characteristic to the

way in which mythical thinking operates. Unlike empirical

(scientific, conceptual) thinking which is characteristically

analytic, mythical thinking is completely absorbed in the

total impression of the instant. Conceptual thinking breaks

down its percepts, compares their parts, locates them in a

system, and constantly revises the synthesis. The content

of mythical thinking, on the other hand, is not differentiated

into its parts. There is therefore no distinction between

a "world of truth" and a "world of appearance", nor a dis-

tinction between a thing and an image, between the real and

the representation. Similarly there is no distinction

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[39] _Ibid._, p. 78. See also pp. 76ff.

[40] _Ibid._, p. 81.

between the temporally past, present and future; there is only a mythical present; the same is true of space. It is thus possible, in mythical thinking, for rites to be efficacious, and for their participants to be identified with deity, for in the myth space and time are overcome. Reality has only one dimension in myth.[41]

A parallel aspect of mythical thinking is the principle, pars pro toto. The relationship between the part and the whole is not representational or symbolic but real, structural. "The part, in mythical terms, is the same thing as the whole, because it is a real vehicle of efficacy...."[42]

Other characteristics of myth can be inferred from the foregoing. For example, since in mythic thought a total complex is not separated into its elements, mere contiguity or co-existence is a causal relation.[43] For the same reason mythical thinking is oriented towards the idea of substance. Even complex relations and attributes assume the status of substances.[44]

In assessing Cassirer's philosophical account of myth it is perhaps important to distinguish between anthropological facts and philosophical explanation. Thus, if

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[41] Ibid., pp. 30-36, 83-94, 104-118.

[42] Ibid., p. 50.

[43] Ibid., pp. 40-45, 51ff.

[44] Ibid., pp. 53ff.

one is sympathetic to the basically Kantian intellectual
postulate from which Cassirer begins one can readily accept
his account of the way in which myth is constitutive of
reality as it is perceived in this mode.  If one is un-
sympathetic, however, one raises the obvious criticism that
for Cassirer "reality as perceived" = "reality as constructed";
but this raises the whole problem of the objective reference
of myth.  Cassirer recognizes this, of course, and argues
in support of his case that it provides a more adequate
account of man's spiritual expressions than the theory of
the naive realist who supposes that he has direct knowledge
of objects; the criticism suggested above thus rests on
questionable assumptions, according to Cassirer.[45]  It is
evident that this issue cannot be settled apart from dealing
with wide-ranging epistemological questions, which is not
our present purpose.  It is our purpose merely to show the
possibility that it might be philosophically defensible to
regard myth as a mode of apprehending reality, in the sense
that myth supplies the structure of a world view.  Cassirer
regards the structural principle as of the order of mind,
dynamic, and operating with an immanent sense of direction
and aim.  If we are critical of the way in which Cassirer
has thus formulated his thesis we might be able to restate
the whole problem of the relationship between myth and

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[45]Cassirer, Language and Myth, pp. 6-8.

language in a way which will take account of Cassirer's insights and yet not involve some of his Kantian, and indeed, Hegelian, commitments. This we shall try to do in a succeeding chapter.

Cassirer himself suggests certain aspects of such a restatement. In a discussion of the relation between myth and language he says,

> All theoretical cognition takes its departure from a world already pre-formed by language; the scientist, the historian, even the philosopher, lives with his objects only as language presents them to him.[46]

This statement, and its context, give us an account of the several levels of mental activity which underlie intellectual cognition. Working back through these strata we have, first, a world of ideas and meanings. But this inherited intellectual structure[47] presupposes the activity of naming, or denoting, which is the process whereby the gross, elementary sensations are converted into ideas and meanings, thus making sensation accessible to cognition. But it is just this process of denoting which constitutes a problem, for denotation presupposes the selection of certain properties, and not others, from the field of random sense impressions. What is the criterion for this act?

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[46] Ibid., p. 28.

[47] See A.N. Whitehead, Science and the Modern World, (New York, 1958), p. viii, and Chapter III; e.g., p. 49.

What is it that leads or constrains language to collect
just _these_ ideas into a single whole and denote them
by a word? What causes it to select, from the ever-
flowing, ever-uniform stream of impressions which strike
our senses or arise from the autonomous processes of the
mind, certain pre-eminent forms, to dwell on them and
endow them with a particular "significance"?[48]

For an answer Cassirer points to the similarity in

function between myth and words. One characteristic of

mythical thinking is its intoxication with the immediate

sensible present, its tendency to focus all aspects of the

immediate experience upon a single point. In such a situa-

tion the mythically significant attributes or relations are

objectified, hypostatized: a god or demon is created. When

the immediacy of the situation is somewhat abated, however,

such a "momentary god" does not pass away, but continues to

be effective.[49]

Similarly,

the primary function of linguistic concepts does not
consist in the comparison of experiences and the
selection of certain common attributes, but in the
concentration of such experiences, so to speak, dis-
tilling them down to one point.[50]

Thus, in the same way in which "momentary gods" are created,

so do words achieve an independent existence, in a sense,

and begin subsequently to draw the limits and outlines of

things. An important factor in the positing of certain

qualities as opposed to others, which are suppressed, is the

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[48]Cassirer, _Language and Myth_, p. 24f.

[49]_Ibid._, pp. 32-36.

[50]_Ibid._, p. 37.

interest of the subject.  Thus,

> the order of nomenclature does not rest on the external
> similarities among things or events, /but7 different
> items bear the same name, and are subsumed under the
> same concept, whenever their functional significance
> is the same, i.e., whenever they hold the same place
> or at least analogous places in the order of human
> activities and purposes.[51]

Here, again, it might be argued that Cassirer's
treatment of language follows lines determined by his Kantian
presuppositions; yet the conclusion seems unavoidable that
in this discussion Cassirer has brought forward anthropo-
logical data which seem to bear out his working principle.[52]
In his own way he indicates the close relationship which
obtains between myth, on the one hand, and theoretical,
practical, moral, aesthetic, and social forms of human
expression, on the other.[53]  Cassirer's main contribution
to our own purpose in this essay is his argument that these
close relationships are effected through language.

Cassirer's thesis concerning the relation of myth
to language has shown us how myth is normative in culture
in a sense other than that suggested by anthropologists such
as Malinowski.  There, myth was normative in the sense that
it provided a charter of belief and action; that is, myth
is a way of stating and validating the standards assumed by

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[51]Ibid., p. 40.

[52]Ibid., pp. 39ff.

[53]Ibid., p. 44.

society in order to regulate its functioning.  Here, in

Cassirer's thesis, myth is normative also in the sense that

it provides the intuitions which language expresses.[54]

We immediately ask ourselves about the connection

which might lie between these two senses of 'normative'.

Is there a connection between the way in which myth functions

as a validation of custom and rite, and its role in relation

to language?  In his discussion of myth Mircea Eliade makes

some suggestions which have a bearing upon this question.

According to Eliade, myth is archaic ontology.  Thus,

> If one goes to the trouble of penetrating the authentic
> meaning of an archaic myth or symbol, one cannot but
> observe that this meaning shows a recognition of a
> certain situation in the cosmos and that, consequently,
> it implies a metaphysical position.[55]

The technical philosophical terms which centuries of use have

rendered familiar, for example "being", "becoming", and so

on, are not found in the languages of archaic cultures; but,

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[54]This raises the "problem" of the relative priority,
in a chronological sense, of language and myth.  In so far as
this might be a problem in the present discussion it can be
resolved by recalling that Cassirer is primarily interested
in the "mythical consciousness" rather than in its products.
Hence it can be said that primitive linguistic formulations
are conceived mythically; i.e., they receive their characteris-
tic accent through the mythical consciousness:  "for, no
matter how widely the contents of myth and language may
differ, yet the same form of mental conception is operative
in both".  (Language and Myth, p. 84.)  Thus, although as a
narrative myth presupposes language as a meaningful pattern
of symbols, yet the language itself is conceived mythically,
and expresses mythical intuitions in its very structure.
(See also Schilpp, op.cit., p. 385).

although the words are not found, the metaphysical interest
is there, expressed in a different way; as Eliade says,

> the metaphysical concepts of the archaic world were
> not always formulated in theoretical language; but
> the symbol, the myth, the rite, express, on different
> planes and through the means proper to them, a complex
> system of coherent affirmations about the ultimate
> reality of things, a system that can be regarded as
> constituting a metaphysics.[55]

A fundamental aspect of this archaic ontology is
its implicit devaluation of the empirical world.  Objects
in the empirical world, and human actions as well, do not
have any intrinsic value, nor do they have autonomous being.
Such things acquire existence and meaning only in so far
as they participate in a transcendent reality.  This trans-
cendent reality is thought of as a celestial archetype.
Human institutions imitate it, and human actions are
significant in so far as they follow paradigmatic acts
done by gods, heroes, or ancestors in the primordial,
mythical, past.

For ancient men, therefore, myths were always a
revelation of a creative and exemplary reality, "the
foundation of a structure of reality as well as of a kind
of human behaviour".[56]  "Myths reveal the structure of
reality, and the multiple modalities of being in the world.
That is why they are the exemplary models for human behaviour".[57]

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[55]M. Eliade, Cosmos and History, (New York, 1959), p. 3.

[56]M. Eliade, Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries, (London,
1960), p. 14.

[57]Ibid., p. 15.

It is here indicated not only that myth is normative in culture, but why; myth is the entire foundation of life and culture because it is thought to be the expression of absolute truth;[58] the sacred, the real, the significant, the valuable, are all disclosed in myth.[59] Myth furnishes the ontological categories of ancient thought and language.

Having completed our survey, how shall we define 'myth'? It is perhaps best to preserve the word 'myth' for speaking about narratives; this is to accept common usage of the term. It is convenient, however, to take advantage of Boas' distinction between the narratives and the conceptual matrix out of which they arise. It is obvious that any particular myth (narrative) can adumbrate the battery of mythological concepts only partially. It is equally obvious that it is impossible to define 'myth' in any significant way after making Boas' distinction without stating the essential characteristics of the conceptual background of the narrative. For the sake of economy, and also in order to emphasize the integral relationship between particular myths (narratives) and the mythological concepts which they embody, we shall hereafter use the symbol 'Myth' to denote such concepts, which form the background of the narratives themselves.

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[58]Ibid., p. 23.

[59]For complete discussion of the evidence see the two books by Eliade which are cited here, particularly pp. 7-56 of Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries.

We shall thus define 'Myth' in two steps. Myth is that complex but coherent body of ideas, which might or might not be consciously held, which constitute the understanding of the ultimate nature of reality prevalent in a given society. This step "locates" Myth in the realm of that which is logically prior to overt linguistic formulation. Step two is as follows: the chief characteristic of Myth as thus located is its identification of the sacred and the real.

It might be appropriate here to point out some of the advantages of defining 'Myth', and by implication, 'myth' in this way. First, the definition is adequate to the way in which anthropologists, theologians, and philosophers most often use the word; this can be seen by referring to the works already discussed, or to others. Furthermore, the definition is not too broad, for its statement of the chief characteristic of Myth forestalls the possible objection that by this definition the body of presuppositions of any coherent intellectual expression could be called Myth. But this is not possible, for as has been pointed out from time to time the ideas of the sacred, the divine, or that which of utmost significance for the people involved, have always been integral to Myth. Lastly, it is worth noticing that the definition does not prejudice the question of the truth or falsity of myths; the significance of this will not appear until

later.

We are still left, however, with a question which has recurred from time to time in this essay:  What is the status of mythological concepts?  We are now able to formulate the question more precisely:  What is the logical function of Myth in myths?  In order to answer this question we must first describe the logical structure of language.  To this task we now turn.

## LANGUAGE

In the history of philosophy the peculiar philosophical interest designated by the word 'metaphysics' has been variously described. For Aristotle, who called it First Philosophy, it was the inquiry which considers Being as Being. He argued for the existence of such an inquiry on the ground that each of the special sciences investigates a sphere of Being which is limited by certain special conditions. First Philosophy, on the other hand, investigates not particular kinds of Being, but Being as such. A part of this inquiry is analysis of such notions as identity and difference, unity and plurality, and so on, which are assumed and used in common by the special sciences.[1]

First Philosophy attempts to discover Being's structural principles, in particular the structural principles of substance, which is the primary mode of Being. The task of First Philosophy, then, is the analysis of the notion of substance in terms of the four types of causal relation into which it can enter.[2]

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[1] D.F. Pears, ed., The Nature of Metaphysics, (London, 1957), p. 1f.

[2] A.E. Taylor, Aristotle, (New York, 1955), p. 42.

The idea of metaphysics as a general study whose conclusions are presupposed by the special sciences, present in Aristotle, is of first importance in such philosophers as Descartes and Kant.  Kant, moreover, was interested in securing the metaphysical foundations of ethics, as was Spinoza before him.  Here, in attempts to provide a transcendental underwriting of pronouncements on human behaviour is another concept of what metaphysics is about.[3]

With Kant, however, we have a revolution in the history of philosophy.  Kant was fully aware of the claims of classical deductive metaphysics to give certain knowledge of reality which transcends all possible limits of human experience; he was equally aware of Hume's destructive criticism of such metaphysics.[4]  He was convinced that metaphysical propositions, in order to rank as knowledge, must draw, in some sense, upon the realm of sensory experience for their content; at the same time, however, their truth must be independent of sensory experience.  This is to say that metaphysics is properly concerned with synthetic a priori propositions.[5]

Hume's criticism of classical metaphysics is directed against such principles as "every effect must have a cause

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[3]Pears, op.cit., p. 12f.

[4]I. Kant, Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics, trans. Peter G. Lucas, (Manchester, 1953), p. 9.

[5]Ibid., p. 24.

equal to or greater than the effect itself". The point of
Hume's attack was the notion of causation itself; his argu-
ment is that in our sense experience there is no referent
to which the word 'cause' can be applied; hence there is no
such thing as causation, except in the attenuated sense that
it is a useful, though spontaneous and arbitrary mental
construct; metaphysical arguments, based on the notion of
real efficacy in the world, are unfounded. This criticism
was also effective against eighteenth-century natural
science; hence, a part of Kant's problem was the very
possibility of a metaphysics having cognitive value.

Kant's revolution, whereby he thought to overcome
Hume's destructive criticism of science and metaphysics,
lay precisely in taking seriously, while reformulating,
Hume's notion that the concept of causation is imposed by
the mind upon sense data and not "read out of" sense ex-
perience. For Kant, then, perception is not a mere passive
receptivity by the mind of "impressions" from external
"objects"; nor is knowledge a mere arranging of such impressions
according to their similarity, difference, or contiguity.
On the contrary, knowing involves an activity of the mind,
whereby it necessarily superimposes the forms of intuition,
(space and time), and the categories of the understanding
upon the gross sensuous data, in order to construct experience.
In brief, for Kant objects determine the content of the mind
much less than the structure of the mind determines the

structure of the phenomenal world, which is what we experience. Hence, an analysis of the formal structure of the process of knowing enables Kant to elicit the a priori elements of all thought and experience. These elements, the categories or concepts of the understanding and the forms of intuition (perception), are such notions as unity, plurality, totality, substance, cause, and possibility, to name but a few.[6] These are the same notions which Aristotle though were the concern of First Philosophy. For Kant they are the formal, constitutive principles of all knowledge and experience. Thus natural science is possible since our experience of causality is not illusory; on the contrary, the notion of causality is a presupposition of experience.[7]

Kant was convinced that the concepts of the understanding were of use only when applied to the realm of phenomena. If applied beyond the realm of possible human experience they yielded illusion, not knowledge. In this way arise the antinomies of pure reason, that is, mutually contradictory propositions which can be demonstrated with

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[6]Ibid., pp. 62, 65.

[7]It might seem at first glance that Kant is saying the same thing as Hume, that is, that Kant, too, is treating causation as a mental construct. Kant attempts to evade this difficulty with his distinction between phenomena and noumena; we do not know things in themselves; all we know is phenomena; but this constitutes our experience, and the categories are a necessary presupposition of that experience. It appears that Kant has deliberately avoided the ontological question which is involved.

equal cogency.[8]

It is not our intent to argue the relative merits of Kant's philosophy; we are concerned merely to show how he deals in a new way with the metaphysical issues with which Aristotle dealt in a different way; the problems remain, but the form in which they appear changes. It is precisely for this reason that we introduced his idea that cognitively significant language must be limited to the realm of phenomena. To use modern terms, we might say that for Kant

> all meaningful uses of language, and all thought, presuppose a certain constant background or context, and they lose all sense and meaning when they are extended outside this context. The forms of language itself show what this context is, and they are what they are because of it. Underneath all the particular grammars of particular languages, there is a deeper grammar which reflects the universal features of human experience....[9]

We can now see how short a step it is from Kant to modern linguistic philosophy: to distinguish between the material and formal elements of cognitive experience, and to distinguish between the material and formal elements of language, is to do the same thing, in so far as language symbolizes experience; to speak of the "categories of the understanding" is to speak of the structural features of discursive language. This means that the philosophical inquiry which is called "metaphysics" is now pursued by

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[8] I. Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, trans. F. Max Müller, (London, 1900), pp. 328ff.

[9] Pears, op.cit., pp. 24f.

making statements about language itself, or more accurately, about an ideal language.[10]

The assumption which underlies the "linguistic turn"[11] in the history of philosophy is that the structural features of an ideal language are correlated point-by-point with the structural features of the world.[12] This is not a totally unfounded assumption it would seem, since we are in fact able to communicate with one another, and to function in the world on the basis of such communication.

It is necessary here to clarify the distinction assumed above between "ordinary" language and an "ideal" language. Ordinary language is language as ordinarily spoken and understood by the proverbial "man on the street". Ordinary language, however, because of certain defects is unsuited for rigorous philosophical inquiry. For example, it does not clearly distinguish between different senses of the same word in different contexts; thus, the copula, is, is used in at least four different ways:[13]

(1) predication: "John is tall".

(2) classification: "A man is a mammal".

(3) identity: "The father of John is the husband of Mary".

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[10]Gustav Bergmann, The Metaphysics of Logical Positivism, (New York, 1954), pp. 10ff., 36.

[11]Ibid., p. 33.

[12]Ibid., pp. 11, 238.

[13]Ibid., p. 9.

(4) as a sign that an existential claim is being made:

"There is an x....."

Because of such defects an ideal language must be constructed.
An ideal language is one which is able, in principle, to
say everything which can be said about the world without
using words ambiguously.

In order to talk about such a language we need a
metalanguage,[14] which is simply language about language.
When we describe the semantics and syntax of the ideal
language, the terms we use are metalinguistic; they do not
denote entities in the world; that is to say that they do
not have ontological "backing".

We are now in a position to outline the logical
skeleton of an ideal language.  In any language which is
used for communication the bulk of its symbols enter into
two different types of relationships.  They are related
first to things in the world; that is, every language which
talks about the world uses certain of its symbols to 'denote',
'refer to', 'describe' things.  This is the semantic relation.
Secondly, there is the relation between words and other words;
this is the syntactic relation, the grammar of the language
which specifies how symbols are to be put together to make
complex symbols (sentences) having their own unique meanings
over and beyond that of the terms taken individually.  To

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[14]I.M. Copi, Symbolic Logic, (New York, 1954), see
pp. 188f. for detailed argument.

use Kantian terms we might characterize the two relations roughly by saying that words functioning in the semantic relation deliver to discourse the "percepts", or empirical content, that which the discourse is about; the syntax of the language, its grammatical structure which is independent of "percepts", is "filled in" by empirical data. It is syntax which makes discourse possible, just as it is the categories of the understanding and the forms of intuition which make experience possible.

Having made the distinction between the semantic and syntactic dimensions of language we discover that language can be analyzed apart from any specific reference which it might have to the world. This is to say that the semantic dimension can be indicated formally (schematically), and that the syntactic dimension can be analyzed by itself; in other words, an ideal language, and any ordinary language in principle, is a syntactic schema, or pattern of symbols, which has been interpreted. When we ask for the description of the logical structure of an ideal language, we are asking for the structural analysis of a syntactic schema.

In brief, any syntactic schema is constituted by four elements.[15]

(1) Primitive symbols. These are of two main types.

(a) Variables. These are uninterpreted marks or

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[15]Ibid., pp. 183-185. See also Bergmann, op.cit., pp. 36-38.

signs which upon intended interpretation will
refer to individual entities, or properties
and relations of entities, in the world:  in
the expression $(x)(S_x \supset W_x)$, "x" is an individual
variable, and "S" and "W" are property or
predicate variables.

(b) Logical operators.  These are certain marks or
signs representing words which have a purely
logical (linguistic) function in language; the
following are a few common ones:  ".", which
symbolizes "and"; "$\sim$", which symbolizes "not";
"$\supset$", which symbolizes "if...then".  These are
the logical "punctuation" of the syntactic
schema, the signs which make it possible to
combine variables in patterns which are unam-
biguous.

Primitive symbols, and symbols defined in terms of
them, are the only symbols which occur in the schema.

(2) Logical syntax, the purely formal rules according
to which certain symbols can be combined with other
symbols.  This corresponds to the grammatical rules
of ordinary language.  For example, in customary
usage among logicians the sequence "$\sim \supset x^v$" is bad
syntax just as its approximate interpretation, "not
if...then cat (or dog, ghost, round, etc.) or" is
bad grammar in ordinary language.

The classical doctrine that substances are
not predicated of substances is a part of logical
syntax, as are the admonitions against "mixing"
categories, for example, talking about coloured
odours, or noisy colours.

(3) Axioms (or postulates). These are certain arrange-
ments of symbols which are regarded as analytic.
The status or logical function of the axioms in the
schema is analogous to the status of a proposition
in ordinary language which is regarded as "self-
evident" and at the same time synthetic, in Kant's
sense of the term. The axioms of the schema are
assumed quite arbitrarily.

(4) Theorems. These are certain other sequences of
symbols which follow deductively from the axioms;
they are the "sentences" of the schema.

From this description of a syntactic schema we
discover certain things about language. For example, it
is obvious that the "reach" of a language, the range of
entities about which it can speak, is a function of the
number of individual constants (interpreted individual
variables) which it has at its disposal.[16] It is equally
obvious that what can be said about these entities is a
function of the number of predicate and relational variables

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[16]Wilfrid Sellars, "Realism and the New Way of Words", in H. Feigl & W. Sellars, eds., Readings in Philosophical Analysis, (New York, 1949), pp. 429f.

which the language has available.  An ideal language has,
by definition, semantic resources adequate to the world,
but ordinary language does not.  For example, we are forced,
by the poverty of our vocabulary, to use the word 'all';
we cannot give an exhaustive list of the individual things
included in 'all', in most contexts, even if we wished to
do so.[17]  This analysis of a syntactic schema therefore
has implications for ontology:  when we ask ourselves what
things exist, we are really asking, "which are the undefined
descriptive constants of the ideal language?"[18]

It is appropriate at this point to take cognizance
of an obvious criticism of the "stance" of the foregoing
argument; apparently, the range of vocabulary determines
the extent of reality, whereas the more usual idea is that
the realm of real things determines what words occur in
language.  What exists is co-terminous with what can be
talked about!  This is a Copernican revolution with a
vengeance!

In answer it can be said that the objection is
based on a confusion of meaning with naming.  Now undoubtedly,
an account of how meanings become attached originally to
symbols must include some reference to the psychological
relationships between symbol, user, and thing symbolized;
but to restrict meaning to naming, or to a purely

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[17]Ibid., p. 427.

[18]Bergmann, op.cit., p. 239.

psychological fact, is either to commit oneself to an
ontology of real essences, in the Platonic sense, or to
make language so ambiguous as to be useless.[19]

From the analysis of the syntactic schema, however,
we discover that meaning cannot be thus restricted; indeed,
it makes sense to speak of the meaning which attaches to a
term by virtue of its syntax alone.  For example, when we
formulate a universal affirmative proposition we are impli-
citly, by virtue of the word 'all', prescribing for future
uses of the distributed term; thus:  'All crows are black'
contains an implicit prescription for the use of 'crow'.
To make the same point, in a schematic way, we might consider
two patterns of symbols, "$\sim \supset x^{\vee}$", and "$(x)(A_x{}^{\vee}\sim A_x)$."  The
first of these is logical nonsense, but the second is not.
This follows from the very syntax of the schema in which
the various symbols operate, entirely apart from any inter-
pretation whatsoever.  This aspect of meaning is purely
formal; in fact, to say that a pattern of symbols is a
pattern seems to be at least part of what is implied by
the word 'means'.

Secondly, the analysis of language in abstraction
from its use presupposes a language which is already
operating; it merely makes explicit the rules whereby it
operates, the skeletal structure assumed by the language

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[19]Sellars, op.cit., pp. 429f.

in order to enable it to function as a language. Thus
the formal analysis can have nothing to say about the "real"
world, but can speak only of the world which is presupposed
by the language as it operates;[20] that is, it can give a
list of the individual constants which constitute the onto-
logical commitments of the language. At the same time,
however, it must be borne in mind that the world which we
know _is_ the world which we talk about; hence, in this sense,
it is correct to say that the ontological question can be
resolved in terms of the undefined descriptive constants.[21]

From the analysis of the syntactic schema we also
discover certain things about "truth". Just as it is
possible to specify the formal rules according to which the
schema is constructed and according to which it can be said
that terms have meaning within the schema,[22] so the formal
conditions for truth can be specified.[23] The notion that

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[20]_Ibid._, p. 443.

[21]This still leaves unsettled the problem of the
relation of language to the "real" world, or to state the
problem in a more traditional way, the problem of perception.
Analysis of schemata does not help in solving this problem;
it can go only as far as the undefined variable, and can
say nothing about how the variable _ought_ to be defined.
Analysis of ordinary language on the same pattern can go
only as far as pointing out the commitments as to the nature
of reality which it presupposes. We cannot get "outside of
ourselves" even through language. But this is precisely
what linguistic analysis concludes, with its notion of the
undefined primitive symbol; the semantic dimension of
language requires extralinguistic reference.

[22]Sellars, _op.cit._, p. 439.

[23]_Ibid._, p. 442f.

the formal structure of the schema specifies what kinds of
statements can receive the predicate 'true' is not to be
written off by saying that these propositions are true ana-
lytically, and hence cannot really say anything significant.
In one sense this is correct, of course, for the entire
schema is tautologous. But this fact is far from insigni-
ficant, for it means that every theorem must be coherent
with the axioms. The axioms and syntax are thus implicit
norms for every theorem which can be formulated within the
system. No theorem which is not coherent with the axioms
is admissible; it is thus formally false. We have here a
restatement of the coherence theory of truth characteristic
of Idealist metaphysics. This is not to say that coherence
defines truth, but only that there is something in the
coherence theory which must be accounted for.[24]

In a thorough syntactic analysis we also discover
that certain words such as 'true', 'means', 'designates',
'refers', and so on, belong not to an ideal language but
to language about an ideal language. They are metalinguistic
terms; there is nothing in the "real" world which they can
designate,[25] or, to put it more accurately, they do not
occur in the list of individual, predicate, or relational
variables of the ideal language. Such words are part of

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[24]Ibid., p. 442f.

[25]Ibid., p. 431.

the structure of the metalanguage.[26]

Another important implication of the analysis of the syntactic schema concerns the evaluation of metaphysical arguments. This follows from the fact that the schema is in principle any language, that is, any coherent body of discourse which purports to be about the world; or, with reference to metaphysics in particular we would say that the schema is any coherent body of discourse which purports to map out the structure of reality. Hence the syntactic schema is, in principle, any metaphysics.

We have spoken thus far as though there were only one ideal language. This is correct in the sense that it is the ideal of reason to construct a language which will be able to say everything which there is to say, or in other words, to generate a metaphysical system which is all-inclusive. Such a hope, however, might be overly sanguine[27] if we can judge from the factual situation: we have in fact several competing systems of metaphysics, each of which purports to be cosmic in scope, and each of which is able to account for the "errors" of its competitors.[28]

These diverse metaphysical systems, or language

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[26] Ibid., p. 433.

[27] Alfred Tarski, "The Semantic Conception of Truth", in L. Linsky, ed., Semantics and the Philosophy of Language, (Urbana, Ill., 1952), p. 21.

[28] S.C. Pepper, World Hypotheses, (Berkeley, 1942, 1961), p. 100.

schemes differ because they "fill out" the schematic vari-
ables in different ways, with different content, and they
begin with different axioms. It is precisely because of
this fact that it is illegitimate to criticize one meta-
physical system in terms of the categories of another system.[29]
The familiar distinction between internal and external
criticism is thus more than a gentlemen's agreement to "play
fair"; it is a consequence of the very nature of a linguistic
scheme.

We might sum up the distinctions between systems of
metaphysics by saying that discrete categoreal schemes are
autonomous.[30] Each categoreal scheme has implicit norms
for what is admissible as "fact", for what kinds of state-
ments are true, and for what kinds of expressions can be
meaningfully asserted.

One of the most striking examples of such legislation
by a system's commitments is provided by the philosophical
attitude generally called logical positivism. One of the
corner-stones of positivism is stated by A.J. Ayer:

> For I require of an empirical hypothesis, not indeed
> that it should be conclusively verifiable, but that
> some possible sense-experience should be relevant to
> the determination of its truth or falsehood. If a
> putative proposition fails to satisfy this principle,
> and is not a tautology, then I hold that it is meta-
> physical, and that, being metaphysical, it is neither

[29]Ibid., p. 98.

[30]Ibid., pp. 51, 79ff., 98.

true nor false but literally senseless.[31]

Now when we attend to this principle we find that it itself does not meet the criterion which it demands of other statements in order for them to be meaningful. Is the principle then meaningless? If the scope of the principle is intended to include the principle itself, then it is meaningless; hence the scope of the principle must be limited by excluding the principle. But this raises the question of the status of the principle. It is not a theorem, since it is not derivable within its own system. It is neither a primitive symbol nor a rule of syntax. It is therefore an axiom.[32]

That the principle is normative is readily seen; for example, it excludes as cognitive discourse all religious, ethical and aesthetic discourse,[33] and leaves in serious doubt the possibility of making cognitive historical statements. Positivism is thus an implicit metaphysics, and as such has built-in standards of what can be true or meaningful.[34] A closely similar analysis could be presented concerning the

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[31]A.J. Ayer, Language, Truth and Logic, (New York, 1952. First published in 1935), p. 31. This is Ayer's first statement of the criterion, and after criticism he altered it somewhat, but not in its general import.

[32]Ibid., p. 16. Here Ayer treats the criterion as a definition, to escape the problem suggested above; this is in the preface to the second edition of the book.

[33]Ibid., pp. 31, 102-120.

[34]Pepper, op.cit., pp. 60ff.

empiricist criterion of truth;  the axioms of the positivist's
scheme predetermine what propositions can merit the predicate
'true'.

Let us now summarize the argument of this chapter.
We have seen how persistent metaphysical problems reappear
from time to time in different dress; we have seen particularly
how the problems of ontology, meaning, and truth appear in
linguistic philosphy.  The pattern of analysis of the syn-
tactic schema has shown its value in the analysis of any
coherent body of discourse.  Our most important conclusions
in this chapter are derived by means of this analysis:

(1) discrete categoreal schemes are autonomous; and,

(2) criteria of truth are relative to their respective
    categoreal schemes.

We must now relate these conclusions to the problem of the
relation between Myth and myths.

III

## MYTH AND LANGUAGE

In drawing conclusions from our analysis of language
in the preceding chapter we restricted our remarks almost
exclusively to metaphysics. It is obvious, however, that
we might have spoken just as easily of a system of ethics,
for example. In such a system particular judgments depend
upon antecedent principles in the way that theorems depend
upon axioms in the syntactic schema.[1] Generalizing, we
might say that a particular valuational system displays
this same structure, with its particular axiological "slant"
dependent upon what principles it adopts as "self-evident",
or perhaps "demonstrated" in another context.

In this chapter we shall assume, on the basis of
evidence advanced above,[2] that the collection of myths
current in a given culture constitutes a story of the world,

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[1]Herbert Feigl, "Validation and Vindication", in
W. Sellars and J. Hospers, eds., Readings in Ethical Theory,
(New York, 1952), pp. 673ff.
    One might object that ethical judgments are not
deduced from principles, and point to the disparity between
Kant's categorical imperative and particular moral judgments.
Yet in every case the argument from maxim to judgment can
be reconstructed in deductive pattern. (See Feigl, op.cit.,
p. 676.)

[2]Chapter I, especially pp. 6-9, 23-25.

and more important, constitutes an oblique statement of that
culture's axiological commitments.  Myths thus tell what the
world is "really" like, and give an account of man's relation-
ship to that reality.  As a story of the world having a
peculiar axiological slant the coherent body of myths con-
stitutes also a language system, already analyzed in
principle in the preceding chapter; myths correspond to the
theorems in the syntactic schema, whereas Myth, the funda-
mental conceptions as to the content and structure of
reality, corresponds to the axioms.  The Myth thus provides
the standards of right and wrong, true and false.  We shall
adduce evidence for this statement of the logical relation-
ship between Myth and myths.

It is necessary first to make some remarks about
procedure.  In order to discover Myth it is necessary to
look for the ultimate appeals contained in myths, that
which is so basic that it is unquestioned.  For example, in
Mesopotamian civilization in the middle of the fourth
millenium the political state was looked upon as a copy
of a cosmic state; this view of the cosmos as a state was
a basic, unquestioned philosophy of existence and civili-
zation,axiomatic in character.

> We have--and that is undoubtedly more than an accident
> --no early Sumerian myth which sets as its theme the
> basic questions:  Why is the universe a state?  How
> did it come to be one?  Instead, we find the world
> state taken for granted.  It forms the generally known
> and generally accepted background against which other
> stories are set and to which they have reference, but

it is never the main theme.[3]
Myth is thus not talked about, in the way in which contemporary
philosophy talks about its own presuppositions, but only
"shows through" in the details, particular myths.

It is also important in this regard to remember the
close connection between myths and ritual; hence we must
turn not only to the narrative, but to the ritual expression
of Myth as well.[4]  It is awareness of the importance of
ritual in ancient culture which prevents us from falsely
assuming that myths, although reflecting a metaphysical
positon, are primarily concerned with speculative issues.
It is the importance of ritual, also, which prevents us from
assuming, when speaking of myths as constituting an oblique
statement of a culture's valuational system, that we are
concerned with value judgments in any trivial sense; on the
contrary, the values which are the concern of a mythical
world-view are ultimate values.  Ritual has to do with
religion, and religion with the sacred and with "salvation",
or the relating of men to that which is sacred.  It is
entirely correct, therefore, to speak of Myth as answering
to man's profoundly felt need for salvation.  Thus,

> the myths of many peoples allude to a very distant
> epoch when men knew neither death nor toil nor suffering
> and had a bountiful supply of food merely for the
> taking.  In illo tempore, the gods descended to earth

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[3]H. Frankfort, ed., The Intellectual Adventure of
Ancient Man, (Chicago, 1946, 1948), p. 151.

[4]Eliade, Cosmos and History, pp. 18-20, 27, 76f.

and mingled with men; for their part, men could easily
mount to heaven.  As the result of a ritual fault,
communications between heaven and earth were interrupted
and the gods withdrew to the highest heavens.  Since
then, men must work for their food and are no longer
immortal.[5]

The mythical world-view is thus a soteriology which the myths

and rituals make explicit and efficacious.[6]

We might illustrate the argument by an example.  The

Babylonian New Year's festival was a complex observance

lasting twelve days.  It had as one of its main features the

recitation of the Enuma elish, the Babylonian creation epic.[7]

The epic is essentially the story of the primordial combat

between the god Marduk and the female monster, Tiamat, the

watery chaos.  Marduk slays Tiamat--puts an end to chaos--

and creates the cosmos from her remains.

Through the recitation of the story creation was

commemorated; but not only was it commemorated, it was

reactualized:

> The combat between Tiamat and Marduk was mimed by a
> struggle between two groups of actors....  /This
> struggle/ not only commemorated the primordial conflict
> between Marduk and Tiamat; it repeated, it actualized,
> the cosmogony, the passage from chaos to cosmos.  The
> mythical event was present:  "May he continue to conquer
> Tiamat and shorten her days!" the celebrant exclaimed.
> The combat, the victory, and the Creation took place
> at that very moment.[8]

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[5]Ibid., p. 91.

[6]See above, p.

[7]S.H. Hooke, ed., Myth and Ritual, (London, 1933),
pp. 47, 50ff.

[8]Eliade, Cosmos and History, p. 56.

The intent of the New Year's festival is to abolish past
time, and all of the sins and evils thereof, and to begin
all things anew through the recreation of the world.  At
the mythical moment of creation, men are once more in contact
with sacred reality.

What elements of Myth are disclosed in such a myth-
ritual complex?  There is first, and most obviously, the
idea of the repetition of the creation; the ordered world
periodically returns to its primordial state, chaos, and is
then renewed.  There is also an idea as to the structure of
time:  the idea that the world can be periodically renewed
is unintelligible without the presupposition that time is
cyclic.  The practical equivalent of the notion that time
is cyclic is the notion that time is eternal.  There is also
an implicit devaluation of historical, or profane, existence;
the myth-ritual complex reveals a desire to escape from
profane existence, and at the same time it is thought to be
efficacious in achieving this end, simply because the
structure of reality is thought to be as the myths presuppose.

From other elements of the Enuma elish we discover
one other very important aspect of the Babylonian Myth.  As
has been implied above, the primordial state of the universe,
before there was even the idea of a sky above or firm land
beneath, or any distinction between land and water, was
watery chaos.  What is important to notice is that this state
of the universe is prior even to the gods.[9]  The practical

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[9]Frankfort, op.cit., p. 170.

equivalent of this idea is the idea that the universe is itself eternal.

Taking all of these elements of Myth together we have a picture of an eternal cycle from chaos to cosmos, in which men and gods are bound up together, and in which for men a return to the time of creation is the proverbial "pot of gold at the end of the rainbow". Against such a background, the myths and rituals are true and right, and their validity is guaranteed by the structure of reality. To return to the mode of expression which we adopted in the preceding chapter, we might say that Myth constitutes the presuppositions of a universe of discourse whose subject is salvation.

By contrasting the Babylonian Myth with another the structure of both will be clarified. An overwhelming mass of evidence has been gathered by scholars to show that Hebrew religion was permeated by mythical conceptions which were then current in Palestine and Mesopotamia.[10] Such cultural connection between the Hebrews and their neighbors is indicated at many points in the Old Testament.

Because such cultural interchange is a historical fact it is tempting to assume that where the same form appears, the same significance is attached to it also. It must be pointed out, however, that this need not be the

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[10] E.g., see W.O.E. Oesterley, "Early Hebrew Festival Rituals", in Hooke, op.cit., pp. 111-146; or G. Widengren, "Early Hebrew Myths and Their Interpretation", in S.H. Hooke, ed., Myth, Ritual, and Kingship, (Oxford, 1958), pp. 148-202.

case. It is well known, for example, that the Christian
Christmas season coincides with the ancient pagan celebration
of the winter solstice; but it would be absurd to say that
the significance of the former is entirely explicable in
terms of the latter. It must be recognized that independent
cultural development can take place alongside of outright
borrowing of alien cultural forms.[11] In looking for a
Hebrew Myth, therefore, we must be guided more by what the
Hebrews said and felt about themselves than by formal
similarities between their myth-ritual complex and those
of their neighbors.

This means that we must look not only at Hebrew
literature which implies ritual depending, formally at least,
upon the Mesopotamian and Canaanite myth-ritual system, but
also at the literature embodying the mature theological
reflections of those who were aware of the full implications
of the religion of the Exodus and covenant tradition, for
example, the prophets, and the compilers of the Pentateuch,
and the writers of Israel's history.

In interpreting Hebrew history different scholars
often place their main emphases at slightly different points.
For example, John Bright regards the Exodus as the beginning
of Israel's history as a nation, and he construes Hebrew
history with the Exodus tradition as normative for future

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[11]Rooke, Myth and Ritual, p. 6.

religious developments in Israel's history.[12]  Eichrodt,

for the same reasons, stresses the idea of the covenant.[13]

Such differences in detail, however, serve only to empha-

size the agreement on main themes, such as the Hebrew

attitude to history.  Thus Eichrodt says that

> faith in the covenant God assumes the existence of
> a remarkably <u>interior attitude to history</u>.  Just
> as this faith was founded in the first place on a
> fact of history...so history provides the field in
> which it is worked out in practice.[14]

In the same vein Bright says,

> The God of Israel stands before us as one God....
> Israel did not believe merely that such a God existed;
> she was convinced that this God had, in a historical
> act, chosen her....[15]

We might easily multiply such scholarly opinion, and adduce

much textual evidence from the Old Testament, but enough

has been said to indicate that one of the characteristics

of Hebrew thought was a peculiar attitude toward history.

This stress on history is perhaps somewhat astonishing

in view of the fact that it is apparently not a primary

concern of those who compiled the creation stories in the

first two chapters of Genesis.  However, the fact that the

stories of creation stand first in the Pentateuch does not

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[12]Bright, <u>The Kingdom of God</u>, (Nashville, 1953),
pp. 27ff. _____, <u>A History of Israel</u>, (Philadelphia, 1959),
See Chapter III in particular.

[13]W. Eichrodt, <u>Theology of the Old Testament</u>, trans.
J.A. Baker, (Philadelphia, 1961), I, 18.

[14]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 41.

[15]Bright, <u>The Kingdom of God</u>, p. 26f.

imply that a doctrine of creation was a central tenet in Old Testament religion, in the sense that it was a doctrine entertained on its own merits.

> Faith in creation is neither the position nor the goal of the declarations in Gen., chs. 1 and 2. Rather, the position of both the Yahwist and the Priestly document is basically faith in salvation and election. They undergird this faith by the testimony that this Yahweh, who made a covenant with Abraham and at Sinai, is also the creator of the world. With all its astonishing concentration, therefore, of the individual objects of its faith in creation, this preface has only an ancillary function. It points the course that God took with the world until he called Abraham and formed the community; and it does this in such a way that Israel looked back in faith from her own election to the creation of the world, and from there drew the line to herself from the outermost limit of the protological to the center of the soteriological.[16]

It is necessary to distinguish here between logical and chronological order. Von Rad has pointed out the fact that in the order of chronology the stories of creation were added to the history for a specific theological purpose. Nevertheless, it is by no means certain that the logical order is the same. It would seem the notion of a God who is able to act in history in a decisive way, that is, a God who can control history, is not intelligible without the idea of God as creator, as this is expressed in Genesis and also in Deutero-Isaiah. "The monotheism which had been implicit in Israel's faith since Moses...is now a self-consistent doctrine: there is but one God, beside whom no

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[16]G. von Rad, Genesis, trans. J.H. Marks, (London, 1961), p. 44.

other exists".[17]  This God is able to control history because
he is the maker of all things.  Thus the notion of God as
creator is correlative with the notion of God as "Lord of
history".  These ideas stand as the two pillars upon which
Hebrew soteriology is supported.

In the Priestly account of creation there is still
further evidence which shows how great the distinction is
between Hebrew and Babylonian thinking.  For example, the
verb bārā, 'create', which was restricted specifically to
discourse about divine creative activity, implies two things.
First, there is the idea of the effortlessness of God's
creation of the world.  God creates with a word.  More
important, this implies also a distinction between God and
creation.

> The idea of creation by the word preserves first of
> all the most radical essential distinction between
> Creator and creature.  Creation cannot be even re-
> motely considered an emanation from God; it is not
> somehow an overflow or reflection of his being, i.e.,
> of his divine nature, but is rather a product of his
> personal will.  The only continuity between God and
> his work is the Word.[18]

Secondly, there is the idea of creatio ex nihilo, since
bārā is never used in connection with the manipulation of
material.  God does not simply arrange a pre-existing chaos;
there is no "primeval mystery of procreation from which the
divinity arose, nor...a "creative" struggle of mythically

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[17]Bright, The Kingdom of God, p. 139.

[18]Rad, G. von, op.cit., p. 49f.

personified powers from which the cosmos arose...."[19]

Such beliefs, of course, demand that God be trans-
cendent to his creation. This means, practically, that the
universe itself is not thought of as being inherently sacred,
either in part or in whole; "Yahweh is not in nature. Neither
earth nor sun nor heaven is divine; even the most potent
natural phenomena are but reflections of God's greatness".[20]
The existence of the universe is contingent upon the
ultimate reality, God. This does not imply that the created
order is inherently corrupt; indeed, the Priestly account
deliberately asserts that God saw that his work was very
good.[21] At the same time, however, it is very important to
note that the goodness of creation is not inherent; it, too,
is contingent upon the ultimate good, God. This conclusion
is demanded by the notion of divine transcendence. Thus,
although the created order is good, on an absolute comparison
between Creator and creation, the latter is valueless.[22]

This distinction between God and the world on the
basis of value is exceedingly important since it has
soteriological implications. It means that the ultimate
good for man, that is, salvation (= making and maintaining
contact with the sacred), is in the last analysis not man's

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[19]Ibid., p. 47.

[20]Frankfort, op.cit., p. 367.

[21]Genesis 1:31.

[22]Frankfort, op.cit., p. 367f.

doing at all but God's, since ultimate good, salvation, is
not attainable in the universe, because the universe is not
sacred in whole or in part.  We might say, then, that the
notion of creatio ex nihilo is of greater significance as
the starting point of a doctrine of salvation, a gospel,
than as an account of origins given for purely speculative
reasons.

What elements of Myth are disclosed in these
creation narratives, and in the historical material?  There
is first of all the notion of creation out of nothing, and
the idea of the universe as being contingent upon God both
for its existence and its value, and we might add, its
salvation.  Secondly, there is the idea of real history; that
is, history composed of events made significant by the
intervention in them of God.  The prophets, in fact, conceive
of history as a dialogue with Yahweh;

> Historical facts thus become "situations" of man in
> respect to God, and as much they acquire a religious
> value that nothing had previously been able to confer
> on them.[23]

Time is thus composed of a series of events which are
important because they disclose the sacred; it is not an
essentially meaningless cycle.  For the Hebrew, time progresses
to a goal; this gives rise to eschatology, which is impossible
in principle in the Babylonian Myth, since there time is
eternal.

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[23]Eliade, Cosmos and History, p. 104.

The Hebrew Myth, like the Babylonian, is thus a picture of "reality", according to which the sacred is personal, purposive, source and salvation of all that exists apart from himself. Historical existence is not an evil; on the contrary, history is itself the vehicle of salvation. Creation is not repeatable, but unique. Time is not eternal, but has a beginning and an end, and indeed, a result. The universe does not contain God, but is made and sustained by him. These are the chief normative elements in Hebrew thinking. Against such a background the oracles of a man like Amos are true.

We have selected four features which are common to both the Babylonian and Hebrew Myths; in both occur the ideas of creation, notions as to the structure of time, evaluations of history, and ideas as to the extent of the universe. At this point the similarity stops, for in every case the respective interpretations of these ideas are contrary if not contradictory. To use the terminology adopted in the preceding chapter we might say that because the axioms of the two systems differ, so do the possibilities as to the nature of the sentences which can be formulated; but since we are discussion axiological systems, the practical consequences also differ,[24] as the diverse ritual emphases

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[24] Karl Löwith, speaking in a context which differs from the present one only in detail gives a good statement of the contrast between the two Myths: "the logical place for a Christian treatment of cosmological problems is, indeed, not the universe but God and man because the existence of

show:  for example, the Babylonian New Year's festival recreates the cosmos and overcomes time; the Hebrew celebration of the Passover celebrates an act of God in time. Examples can be multiplied.

In this chapter we have sought to provide evidence for the proposition that what we have defined as Myth is logically prior to particular myths and rituals, and in this way demonstrate that the relation between Myth and myth-ritual is to be interpreted as the same as the relation between axioms and theorems in a syntactic schema.  We have shown how certain features of two Myths are simply assumed, and in this way function as axioms; we have shown further some of the ways in which these axioms are regulative for other statements or actions in the respective systems, and have concluded the demonstration by pointing out some of the ways in which the Myths and their respective practical consequences are incompatible.

We must now pass on to some of the implications of the entire argument.

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the world depends entirely on God and its significance on man as the purpose of God's creation.  Conversely, the logical place for a classical treatment of God and man is the cosmos, because it is itself eternal and divine and controls man's nature and destiny".  (Meaning in History, Chicago, 1949, 1958, p. 160.)

# IV

## CONCLUSIONS

If the argument thus far is sound and the evidence has been correctly interpreted there are implications which have a bearing on questions which arise in connection with various programmes of "demythologizing", or questions concerning the relation between myth and truth. Before presenting details it would be appropriate to summarize very briefly the main points of the preceding chapters.

We first defined 'Myth' as the complex but coherent body of ideas which constitute an understanding of the ultimate nature of reality. As such, Myth is logically prior to the overt linguistic formulation of myths. The chief characteristic of Myth we asserted to be its identification of the real with the sacred. We next sketched the structural features of any language by means of an analysis of a syntactic schema. From this analysis we concluded, chiefly, that discrete categoreal schemes are autonomous, and that criteria of truth are contingent upon their respective categoreal schemes. We then presented two Myths to illustrate the affirmation that Myth functions in the world-view of which it is a part in the same way as the body

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of axioms functions in a syntactic schema.

What implications can now be drawn from the problem of "demythologizing"? It is, of course, impossible to discuss demythologizing without making some reference to Rudolf Bultmann, whose famous essay, "New Testament and Mythology"[1] brought a host of problems to the forefront of attention; not the least of these problems was the matter of a satisfactory definition of 'myth', such as has been our concern also.

It has been pointed out many times that Bultmann's use of the term is not consistent. He defines mythology as "the use of imagery to express the other worldly in terms of this world and the divine in terms of human life, and the other side in terms of this side".[2] Against the adequacy of this definition Ronald Hepburn[3] argues that it is itself partly framed in mythological language and is so wide in scope as to include any pictorial, analogical, or symbolical speech. Bultmann, however, wishes to distinguish between mythological and analogical speech. For example, he regards statements about God's action within "the closed weft of

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[1] R. Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology", in H.W. Bartsch, ed., Kerygma and Myth, trans. R. Fuller, (New York, 1961), pp. 1-44.

[2] Ibid., p. 10, n. 2.

[3] R. Hepburn, "Demythologizing and the Problem of Validity", in Flew and Macintyre, eds., New Essays in Philosophical Theology, (London, 1955, 1961), pp. 229ff.

history" as analogical but not mythological, since "Mytho-
logical thought regards the divine activity, whether in
nature or in history, as an interference with the course of
nature, history, or the life of the soul...."[4]  Apparently
Bultmann's original definition requires many qualifications.

Ian Henderson,[5] on the other hand, argues that
Bultmann's definition is too narrow.  Henderson points to
such modern phenomena as the Nazi "myths" of blood and soil,
and argues quite plausibly that such should be regarded as
genuine myths.[6]  Henderson's comments rest on a failure to
distinguish, unlike the definition of 'Myth' which we
proposed in Chapter one, between the function of myth and
its content.  His remarks that "modern" myths are "non-
transcendent" is wholly accurate.  One might with considerable
justification go as far as to say that the distinctive
features of the modern "secular" man are his identification
of reality with the spatio-temporal realm, and his assumption
that all ultimate values (i.e., the sacred) are to be found
in this realm; for example, secular man identifies deity
with humanity, in so far as he retains any concept of the
sacred at all.  It is, indeed, just such secular men whom
Bultmann has in mind when he embarks on his programme of

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[4]Bartsch, op.cit., p. 197.

[5]I. Henderson, Myth in the New Testament, (London,
1952, 1960).

[6]Ibid., pp. 52, 54.

demythologizing,[7] men who have repudiated notions of trans-
cendence of the sacred.

This all has to do with the content of Myth, however,
and Bultmann seems to be aware of this when he says that he
is not using myth "in that modern sense, according to which
it is practically equivalent to ideology".[8] Henderson,
however, in asserting that Bultmann's definition is too
narrow does not rest his argument on an appeal to the usage
of 'myth' by competent anthropologists, but apparently on
the fact that the function of Myth, as we have described it,
is the same as the function of the secular ideologies, such
as those produced in nineteenth-century France,[9] or Nazism
or Marxism.

Henderson's criticism at this particular point is,
therefore, not too damaging for Bultmann has already pro-
tected himself by stipulating, with some justification it
seems, that 'myth' connotes 'transcendence'; this raises
other problems, however, and we have seen that they are dealt
with by Hepburn.

John Macquarrie, recognizing that Bultmann's notion
of myth needs much clarification, makes some attempts to
salvage enough of the definition in order to make a case

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[7]Bartsch, op.cit., pp. 3ff.

[8]Ibid., p. 10f.

[9]D.G. Charlton, "New Creeds for Old in Nineteenth-
Century France", Canadian Journal of Theology, VIII, 4
(October, 1962), 258-269.

for the program which Bultmann is trying to carry out. Thus, he points out that the difference between analogical and mythological language "lies in the fact that the myth gets broken, its symbolic character is recognized, and the symbolic imagery is refined and tends to be conceptualized".[10] We might state this briefly by saying that myth is myth when it is believed; symbols and analogies, on the other hand, seen for what they are, are simply used. Again, myth in Bultmann's usage is not to be confused with modern "quasi-myths".[11] Nor is myth to be confused with legend. For Bultmann, 'myth' refers

> to the central Christian story of incarnation, atonement, resurrection, and exaltation, represented as a cosmic drama of redemption. The word 'legend' is used of peripheral stories which serve to illustrate aspects of the central myth.[12]

Nor is myth cosmology; it might contain cosmology, but it is not limited in intent to what cosmology would be in the modern world.[13]

Hence it seems fair to conclude that although Bultmann has not stated it well, he has a fairly stable notion of what he means by 'myth'.

If we were to criticize him any further on this point it would be because he appears to think that 'myth'

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[10] J. Macquarrie, The Scope of Demythologizing, (London, 1960), p. 206.

[11] Ibid., pp. 206ff.

[12] Ibid., p. 209f.

[13] Ibid., pp. 211-214.

implies 'not true', 'not historical'.[14]  In fact, it is this

notion that seems determinative of what is myth and what is

not, granting the other distinctions already made above.

This, taken together with Bultmann's apparently strong con-

victions as to the need of modern men for the Christian

gospel, is what impels him to his programme of demythologizing,

which is simply a  certain type of interpretation of myths.

Thus, he says,

> The real purpose of myth is not to present an objective
> picture of the world as it is, but to express man's
> understanding of himself in the world in which he lives.
> Myth should be interpreted not cosmologically, but
> anthropologically, or better still, existentially.[15]

This is necessary since, according to Bultmann, "the kerygma

is incredible to modern man, for he is convinced that the

mythical view of the world is obsolete".[16]  Modern man

cannot accept the kerygma because of its mythological

(=fantastic, incredible, untrue) trappings.

Demythologizing in Bultmann's hands is thus not

interested in getting rid of myth just because it is myth;

it has in view the positive end of interpreting the myth into

meaningful language by interpreting it existentially.

What is existential interpretation as Bultmann

thinks of it?  In its widest sense, existential interpretation

is the understanding of a text in such a way that one is

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[14]Hepburn, op.cit., p. 235.
   Macpherson, op.cit., pp. 31, 46.

[15]Bartsch, op.cit., p. 10.

[16]Ibid., p. 3.  Italics in the original.

presented with the possibility of making a decision in one's situation;[17] for example, one might take seriously, and therefore act upon, ethical insights derived from the New Testament. Demythologizing, however, differs somewhat from existential interpretation as thus broadly construed, for it denies that myths have any objective reference at all; myths make no claims, and have no value, beyond their existential significance.[18] A few examples of "demythologized" terms are helpful at this point. Thus 'faith' means "to open ourselves freely to the future".[19] 'Sin' is "The old quest for visible security, the hankering after tangible realities, and the clinging to transitory objects...."[19] Statements about Jesus' pre-existence, and stories of the Virgin birth are attempts to assess the meaning of Jesus for a Christian understanding of human existence.[20]

Now despite Bultmann's defective definition of 'myth' we can see from these examples just the sort of programme which he intends by the word 'demythologizing'. We can see, in particular that it involves the filling out of the uniquely Christian categories with a certain specific content. Such a programme is admirable in intention, but highly

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[17]Macquarrie, op.cit., p. 15.

[18]Ibid., p. 18f.
Bartsch, op.cit., p. 16.

[19]Bartsch, op.cit., p. 19.

[20]Ibid., p. 35.

questionable in execution. The first question which arises
is that of criteria. By what possible standards is one able
to say that a given interpretation completely, and adequately
and accurately fills out the Christian categories in question?
To use the more precise, though more technical language of
logical analysis, we ask, by what criteria does Bultmann
choose to interpret his primitive symbols by drawing upon
Heidegger's existentialist analysis of human existence? We
would not wish to deny that Bultmann's use of such analysis
is highly illuminating to our own existential understanding,
in the broad sense indicated above, of the New Testament; it
is questionable, however, whether such existential under-
standing presupposes demythologizing, in the sense that
certain narratives and expressions are designated as mytho-
logical and then, ipso facto, denied objective reference of
any kind. It is highly likely that here Bultmann has allowed
alien criteria of possibility to influence his hermeneutic.[21]

        Bultmann appears, therefore, to be criticizing one
conceptual scheme in terms of another; he is criticizing the
Christian Myth, which is integrally bound up with the Hebrew
Myth outlined in the preceding chapter, in terms of criteria
which are drawn from a mechanistic world view with its notion
of inviolable causal law[22] operating in a closed universe of
impermeable atoms. But it is a direct consequence of our

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[21]Henderson, op.cit., p. 46.

[22]Bartsch, op.cit., p. 4f.

analysis of the syntactic schema that such external criticism
is invalid, simply because the two systems in question appeal
to different standards of truth.  To use the technical termi-
nology again, they interpret their primitive symbols in
different ways and begin with different axioms; they have
different ontological commitments, and are thus about
formally different "worlds".

It is failure to understand the logical status of
Myth in a mythical world-view, and an uncritical assumption
of criteria of truth which have their primary currency in
another world-view which leads Bultmann to the belief that
myths are untrue.  This immediately suggests the question,
Is demythologizing possible, at all?  As usual, everything
depends on definition.  On any definition of the term 'myth',
existential interpretation is possible, in the broad sense.
But for this one does not need to come to the radically
negative ontological conclusions which seem implicit in
Bultmann's notion of demythologizing.[23]  However, if we are
speaking of Myth, and our argument in this paper is sound,
then demythologizing means not merely existential inter-
pretation, but a complete excision of axioms, as axioms,
altogether.  To ask for a "demythologized" kerygma is to
ask for a soteriology with no presuppositions!  But a
language without presuppositions is a logical impossibility.[24]

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[23]Macquarrie, op.cit., p. 19.

[24]See above, p. 33, n. 14.

It is to Bultmann's credit that he refuses to make his definition of 'myth' so air-tight as to compel him to this self-contradictory position.

We have from time to time suggested that men who, like Bultmann, assume that myths are untrue, fictitious, are begging the question. At the same time we are aware of the rather common affirmations that "myth is a way of communicating truth that cannot be communicated in any other way". We here come to the rather large question of the relation between "myth" and "truth". This is by no means a simple problem, and we shall be able to contribute no more towards a satisfactory solution than to point out certain implications of our argument in the preceding chapters.

We have already shown reasons why, in the interests of precision, it is useful to speak not of "truth", but to regard the word 'true' as a metalinguistic predicate whose use can be accurately specified.[25] We have also shown that such linguistic rules are to be treated as axioms. But it is characteristic of axioms to be independent of the symbolic system of which they form a part; that is, the axioms are not demonstrable within the system. The question whether they are "true" or "false" is thus a completely different matter from the truth or falsity of theorems in the system, and completely different criteria must be used. Briefly, the test of the latter is that of the coherence of propositions within a system, whereas the test of the former is the

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[25] See above, p. 39f.

adequacy of the entire system itself.

Now if, as we have maintained, Myth is axiomatic,
then whether a particular myth is true or false is not to be
determined by an appeal to extraneous criteria; to appeal to
positivist standards of cognition, for example, in order to
say that a myth is false is to beg the question, for the
issue which must be settled first is the relative adequacy
or inadequacy of the Myth, and, indeed, the relative adequacy
or inadequacy of the set of axioms which define the positivist
temperament. The chief question, therefore, is what is
involved in the notion of "adequacy".

It might be objected here that we are neglecting
the role of "obvious empirical data" in the construction or
criticism of a world-view. In answer to this objection two
things can be said. First, it must be granted that "empirical
data" are "obvious" in the sense that they are there, "right
before our noses", so to speak; but concerning their
cognitive significance, they are not at all obvious.[26] We
must certainly grant that the world of common-sense data,
the world of logically atomic facts, is in the sense indicated
obvious; but the structure of the world, the possible
connections between atomic facts is not obvious. To put the
matter briefly, perception is not knowledge; on the contrary,
a cognitive judgment entails empirical data which are very

[26]Pepper, World Hypotheses, pp. 26-29.

highly refined.[27]  Thus, although the world of common-sense
experience is the empirical core of all world-views, it is
in many fundamental respects differently regarded by each.

Secondly, cognition is concerned with elucidating
the underlying structure of reality.  A world-view of any
kind is much more concerned with the essential, rather than
the aesthetic, in the etymological sense of the term in
which it signifies the undifferentiated perceptual field.
This means that judgments coherent with the axioms of the
language are of much greater cognitive significance than the
relatively low-level judgments of common-sense.  In other
words, common sense does not legislate for comprehensive
hypotheses.

Now if, as we have maintained, the various Mythical
world-views can be analyzed on the pattern we have suggested,
there are two implications which bear directly on the matters
just discussed.  First, myths, as theorems, are true in so
far as they are in accordance with their Myth.  This we have
already pointed out.[28]  Secondly, what we have spoken of as
the common-sense realm, the realm of uncriticized experience,
can neither establish nor refute a Mythical world-view; it
provides nothing but ambiguous, raw data which are inter-
preted (explained, evaluated) by the Mythical world-view,

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[27]Ibid., pp. 39-59.

[28]See above, pp. 25, 34-36, 45-47, 50, 57.

which is in fact a highly complex and coherent structural
hypothesis with a specific soteriological intent.

This is not to say, however, that the realm of
common-sense experience has nothing to say in any way
whatever about what can be constructed upon its deliverances.
Although the data supplied by this realm are raw and am-
biguous, they are, nevertheless, data; although they might
seem to fit with equal ease into diverse interpretive
schemata, yet they do fit such schemata, and where they do
not fit, it seems, inadequacy is indicated. Briefly, the
raw and ambiguous data of the common-sense realm do not
give us an unequivocal 'yes' to our attempts to construe
them in different ways, but they do seem to give us an
unequivocal 'no' in the long run if we make mistakes. Thus
the assertion of the equivocal nature of common-sense
experience does not obviate the possibility of knowledge;
furthermore it is in accord with the facts of the history
of philosophy, and of religion, and of science.

We have  now seen that a myth can be 'true' or
'false', but we have also seen the extent to which these
predicates are emasculated. We have seen that the appeal
to uncriticized "facts" in order to refute or establish
Myth is a question-begging procedure. We are left with just
one means of appraising Myth, namely, its relative adequacy.

When we speak of the adequacy of a conceptual scheme
we mean its adequacy to facts.[29]  "Fact" is itself a

problematic term; it is probably quite correct to say that one of the prime motives for the construction of metaphysical systems is the desire to say what "facts" "really" are. For our own purposes, however, we can regard 'fact' as the term which denotes those things which are given in the encounter of the self with the world.[29] A conceptual scheme is adequate to the facts, in this sense, when it maps out the encounter of the self with the world, to use a geographical metaphor, without omitting large areas of the terrain, or insisting on drawing the outlines of natural features according to some preconceived notions of how they should look.

It is, of course, difficult to speak of the relative adequacy of different conceptual schemes from a neutral point of view, since as we have already seen there is always a debate as to what "facts" are; furthermore, the notion of adequacy seems to contain a perhaps unavoidable teleological connotation; a scheme is adequate with respect to some purpose. But this presupposes prior value-commitments. To say this is not to imply that adequacy is a bad test, or that it is regrettable that different interpretations of "fact" and different value-judgments are involved. On the contrary one might argue that such differences serve a good dialectical purpose, enabling the clearer understanding of respective conceptual schemes and their implications, for

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[29]John A. Hutchison, Faith, Reason, and Existence, (New York, 1956), p. 13.

certainly on any interpretation of "adequacy" at least a part
of it will be to the effect that a given conceptual scheme
is not adequate if it cannot conserve the human values which
other schemes enshrine.

At least one other thing can be said about the test
of adequacy.  A scientific hypothesis proves its experimental
value not only when it subsumes under it certain empirical
data, and thus "explains" them, but when it points to new
data whose connections had not hitherto been as well under-
stood.  This is a particular application of the idea that
the ultimate test of adequacy of any conceptual scheme must
be its ability to unify the entire range of the area of
human experience which is its specific concern, and also
its ability to stimulate and illuminate man's efforts to
understand himself and his relationship to what is.

How, then, do we apply the test of adequacy to Myth?
We have pointed out three ways in which we might think of
adequacy; first, adequacy to fact, in the sense indicated;
second, conservation of human values; third, unification
of experience and illumination of the cognitive venture.
It is obvious that these three are three ways of speaking
about the same thing, three points of view connected by a
common concern.  In applying the test of adequacy to Myth
we must bear in mind that the distinctive content of Myth
is the identification of the sacred with the real; the
practical consequence appears in what can be called, loosely,
the ritual systems consequent to Myth, namely, the effort on

the part of man to attain and maintain contact with the sacred reality. Hence any test of adequacy must take into account the fact that Myth has a specific soteriological intent. It is for this reason that the realm of common-sense "facts" with which Myth is concerned is primarily that of human values as opposed to what might be designated as the speculative venture; this distinction, of course, appears to be relatively modern, and quite impossible in an age when "facts" and "values" were referred to the same reality.

We will give one example as an illustration. The notion of free, self-conscious personhood is an integral part of the Hebrew-Christian Myth. We in the western world hold this as a fact of our experience; we regard it as an ideal for which education should strive; we regard personal freedom as a value to be defended at high cost. Undoubtedly the notion has more than one source, historically; yet the Hebrew-Christian Myth conserves this human value, this apparent fact of experience, and greatly illuminates it by fitting it into a conceptual scheme of cosmic scope. This Myth affirms the value of novel personal action, and by implication, personal responsibility; Myths like the Babylonian, on the other hand, find this abhorrent, and affirm the value of the imitative, archetypal action.

At this point one's choice of Myth is a function of one's evaluation of the notion of free, self-conscious personhood; it seems that we must pose the alternative in

this way.  But it seems also that by the very fact of being able to pose the alternative as an alternative, we have really moved beyond the point when we could really choose; in effect, having been made aware that there is a choice, we have already made the decision in favour of free, self-conscious personhood.  This has now become a fact for us, and we must find for it a conceptual scheme which is congenial to it.

What relation, then, is there between "myth" and "truth"?  We have seen that this is not at all a simple question.  It is a direct implication of our entire argument that there is no final solution to the problem of the "truth" of Myth, but only a progressively clearer use of Myth as an interpretive schema applied to the world in which one lives and acts and knows as a free, responsible person; it is a direct implication of our argument that there is a final solution to the problem of the "truth" of myth, but this problem and its solution have turned out to be relatively trivial.  When we say that "myth is a way of communicating truth that cannot be communicated in any other way" we are in danger of confusing logical coherence with adequacy to experience.  In principle, no Myth is 'true' or 'false', but every Myth is more or less adequate, and at the level of phenomenological analysis, every Myth stands as an invitation to enter into the world through it.

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