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Mythical Man

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# Mythical Man

At the outset, let me say that even though this paper deals with myth, it will not be a discourse on "Greek gods I have known", nor will it attempt to define absolutely either myth or its function in reductionist terms that remove all doubt. Rather, this paper will address an intellectual activity that is uniquely human, and rather difficult to rigidly specify. In short, I am going to discuss myth as it is used by man to order his perceptions of himself and the concrete world he inhabits. Therefore, I will be speaking of the "mythical man": a being that is simultaneously fact and fiction in that he has (in all ages) encountered the diverse phenomena of the concrete world and has been compelled to account for its existence. But, he cannot do so in any direct fashion. Instead, he must create and them employ symbols or models which are mental constructs devised to account for observed phenomena in his natural world. In addressing these ideas, this paper will examine several diverse but related facets of the myth making process as they relate to their human originators.

First, I will briefly review what others have said on this subject, and then synthesize their views into a working concept of how the term "myth" will be used in this paper. Next, I will use this working concept as a lead-in to a more complete development of the basic premise of this paper, which is that man is compelled to order his existence. Then, I will apply that premise to the process of myth making and how it relates to concrete human experience. Finally, this paper will explore some of the

ramifications to man that naturally arise from his role as a myth maker.

Before continuing, one other point must be clarified. I said earlier that this paper will deal with myth as it is utilized in man's perception of himself. Therefore, it follows that this paper must also deal with the fundamental activities involved in human knowing (simple cognition), or the ordering of perceptions derived from experience. To do this, I will discuss briefly the function of language as the paramount symbol system employed in ordering phenomena; and, I will review some Western philosophical thought on human knowing and then relate a synthesis of that thought and the function of language to the basic premise of the paper.

In gathering resources for this project, I was surprised by two things. First, anyone that ever commented on myths, myth making or human knowing as it related to myth making, always seemed to know precisely what he was talking about. Second, few (if any) of the scholars I read agreed with one another on what a myth or its function is. The differences of opinion were not necessarily grounded in the diversity of scholarly disciplines of the commentators. In fact, in any given discipline it is possible to locate professor X who categorically proves position A. This is followed by professor Y who totally debunks X and establishes position B. Then comes an assortment of others who vindicate X; corroborate Y; synthesize X and Y and give us the real truth in position C. For the student who is neither competent in the

particular discipline, nor capable of original research, the problem of whom to believe is enormous. Nevertheless, I will offer an approach to myth in this paper which (hopefully) subsumes the many views into a more flexible approach that largely transcends the battle of opinion among scholars of myth.

Contemporary scholarship aside, myth and its meaning have provoked not only modern disagreement, but ancient as well. In fact, one could do a volume on whether or not the ancient Greeks (for instance) believed their own myths; or, in what fashion they used them.

Nevertheless, most modern scholarship does seem to converge on at least one point: the relative newness of the term "myth" itself.

> The word "myth" as a substantive is itself of comparatively recent origin, appearing in French in 1811 (Robert); in German in 1815 (Grimm); and in English in 1830 (Oxford English Dictionary).[1]

In other words, the period in Western history remembered as Romanticism gave rise to a conscious effort to explore myth and categorize it.

> The literary movement known as Romanticism was characterized by an interest in, and glorification of the past. Many writers of the late eighteenth century (and early 19th) felt that civilization had corrupted man; that his original benevolence was to be found only among simple peasants and nonliterate peoples who lived close to nature and were still untainted by the evils of civilization. To some authours, they became "noble savages", happy and innocent children of nature with an innate sense for the poetic and the mystic. 2

Thus it was in an atmosphere of the Romantic impulse to probe the unknown and the mysterious that Western thinkers began to regard stories of the golden past as something more than simple folktales spun for the popular consumption of primitives.

Eventually, the examination of ancient myth gave way to the consideration of "modern myth" as well and a number of remarkable ideas developed about myths, myth making and the fundamental premises supporting contemporary society. One eventual conclusion reached by the sociologists and psychologists who followed the Romanticists was that in some fundamental way, myths are necessary to the cohesiveness of a society. In other words, myths are sociologically functional in that they constitute the bond of common opinion, habit, custom and belief necessary to the successful maintenance of a community. However, this conclusion did not fully develop until the 19th century.

In any case, serious attention to the mythologies of ancient and contemporary primitive cultures permeated the Romantic movement. These scholars worked for the most part, however, from a different time premise than later researchers. In other words, the time frame within which myth was supposed to have developed was far more compact than that of later scholars who were influenced by Darwin.

> This attitude becomes understandable when we take into consideration that the age attributed to mankind did not exceed a few thousand years. 3

Thus, initial theories dealing with mythology tended to wrap things up in a neat, orderly package that ignored everytning save the particular opinions of the individual researcher. Moreover, rather than an attempt at objectivity, the Romanticists frequently used myths and their theories of them to validate preconceived notions. However, not all researchers of this period did this. Some attempted to approach myth from a more open and less pre-

conceived viewpoint. These are the ones who are the most influential. One example of a less biased Romantic scholar is Friedrich von Schelling (1775-1854).

> In his scheme, mythology represents the mental world... and he sees it as a reflection of the evolution of human nature. His importance in the study of mythology rests in his attempt to adjust his own philosophy and outlook, rather than the myths themselves in an effort to make them conform to current systems of belief. 4

Another problem of interpretation affecting the Romanticists revolved around their reaction and rebellion against the ideas of their predecessors, the Neo-classicists, who were of the opinion that mythology was a form of religion. And, as such, both myth and religion were regarded as typical errors committed by savages. One example of a counter Romanticist opinion, however, is by Creuzer.

> George Creuzer (1771-1858) is an exponent of the changed view of non-literate man. The philosophers of the Enlightenment had explained the origin of religion (mythology) as an error which had arisen from the uncritical and infantile mind of early man. Creuzer, however, explained the origin of mythology as early man's primeval wisdom. 5

Thus, at the time that the term "myth" is coined, Western thought and ideas about man, his past and his future are undergoing profound changes. Whereas there were formerly theologists and philosophers contending and sometimes agreeing about the nature of man and his world, things were soon split apart as Western thought developed new concepts and disciplines to interpret human experience. The theologian and the philosopher alike found themselves unseated by a new myth: the myth of science, or man's newest intellectual construction for positing theories about his existence. Towards the end of the 19th century, the challenge of the new myth of science was epitomized by Sigmund Freud in his

"Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis" where he said, "The question may now be asked why religion does not put an end to this losing fight by openly declaring: It is a fact that I cannot give you what men commonly call truth; to obtain that, you must go to science".

What was true for religion was only a little less true for philosophy. Anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists and phenomenologists shouldered their way into the domain of Western thought and not only denied the claim of theologian and philosopher, but offered "proofs" that reality was radically different from anything previously imagined. Each of the new disciplines seized upon the term "myth" and subjected it to a reductionist definition that was specific to its user's needs, but confusing to one not initiated into the esoteria of the particular discipline. Thus one may go to the card catalog in any major library and find numerous titles that all begin "The Myth of...", and each of the works is separate and distinct, and might or might not relate to primitive mythology.

Looking at a few of the major disciplines that have examined myth within the confines of a particular perspective, we find the following:

> Anthropology: Myths are stories which however marvellous and improbable to us, are nevertheless related in all good faith because they are intended, or believed by the teller to explain, by means of something concrete and intelligible an abstract idea or such vague and difficult conception as creation, death, distinction of race or animal species, the different occupations of men and women; the origin of rites and customs, or striking natural objects or prehistoric monuments; the meaning of the names of persons or places. Such stories are sometimes described as aetiological because their purpose is to explain why something exists or happens. 6

Sociology: The mythology of a group is the system of beliefs common to that gruop. The traditions whose meaning it perpetuates express the way in which society represents man and the world; it is a moral system and a cosmology as well as a history. Through it, the group periodically renews the sentiment which it has of itself and of its unity; at the same time, individuals are strengthened in their social natures. The glorious souvenirs which are made to live again before eyes, and with which they feel that they have a kinship, give them a feeling of strenth and confidence: a man is surer of his faith when he sees to how distant a past it goes back and what great things it has inspired. 7

The Nature-myth School: The nature-myth school was predominately a German school and it was mostly concerned with Indo-European religions, its thesis being that the gods of antiquity, and by implication, gods anywhere and at all times, were no more than personified natural phenomena: sun, moon, stars, dawn, etc. 8

Psychology: Ideas which refer to what is not directly amenable to perception, mythological thinking as Wilhelm Wundt calls it, originate in emotional processes (chiefly fear) which are projected outward into the environment. 9

Sigmund Freud: Freud has said so much on the subject of myth that he merits a special note. He postulated that mythology, magic, superstition and religion all result from an illusion in the mind of the individual that arises out of feelings of guilt and personal inadequacy embedded in the subconscious. He felt that man projects his most powerful wishes outward upon a dangerous and recalcitrant world and thereby "subdues" the world via his fantasy.

Besides the descriptions mentioned above, one finds numerous scholars who have approached myth from an interdisciplinary perspective. They also defined myth, but they too tended towards a reductionism that is too rigid. A few of the more important are:

Levi Strauss: The essence of his belief is that myth is one mode of human communication.... It is a product of language.... In this respect, he concludes, the meaningful content of myth is entirely abstract; it can be expressed algerbraically; it is not about any particular aspect of the world or human life; about sociological problems or contradictions, for example; rather, it is about the human mind as such. 10

Clyde Kluckholm: Myths are originated therefore for the primary purpose of acting as a socially sanctioned pallitive of the mental ills to which individual members of a society are prone. 11

Ernst Cassirer: The earliest products of mythic thinking are not permanent, self-identical, and clearly distinguished "gods"; neither are they immaterial spirits. They are like dream elements; objects endowed with demonic import, haunted places, accidental shapes in nature resembling something ominous; all members of shifting, fantastic images which speak of Good and Evil, of Life and Death, to the creative mind of man. 12

Bronislaw Malinowski: I should say that primitive man has to a very limited extent the purely artistic or scientific interest in nature...and myth,in fact, is not an idle rhapsody, not an aimless outpouring of vain imaginings, but a hard working, extremely important cultural force. 13

Mircea Eliade: He felt that mythology was a recapitualization or reaffirmation or an archtype that served as an almost Platonic first example, "and all imitations of archtypes, that is, through such imitation, man is projected into the mythical epoch in which the archtypes were first revealed". 14

Where does all of this leave us? It leaves us with the impression that the term "myth" cannot be subjected to the rigorous reductionism of a specific definition. Myth means too many things to too many people. Therefore, as I proposed earlier, what is needed is not a definition, but a working concept that subsumes the diversity of the term itself into a schema that incompasses all of its parts. This working concept must include the known typology of the functions of myth. In other words, it must include the following ideas:

1. There is no single type of myth.

2. There is no invariable connection between myth and gods or rituals.

3. Myths can possess significance through their structure.

4. Myths reflect specific human preoccupations including

those caused by contradiction between instinct, wishes and the intransigent realities of nature and society.

5. Myths establish the natural and social order as products of inevitability and divine mastery. 15

Therefore, what is a myth? I offer the following: a myth is any intellectual construction that orders experience; and, the function of myth is to validate reality. Thus myth provides a world view, a conceptualization of the structure of reality. If a myth is any intellectual construction, it follows that all of the theories reviewed thus far are in fact myths themselves. Thus, the many views of myth can be subsumed into a basic concept because they are all manifestations of the general concept they seek to explicate. So, if an anthropologist feels myths explain phenomena, and the sociologist feel they bind societies by validating social structures, and the psychologist feels they reflect man's inner needs projected upon experience, they are all alluding to the paramount function of myth: the ordering of experience encountered in the concrete world.

I realize that my working concept is general and perhaps vague. I will attempt to refine it; however, as I said at the outset, an absolute definition is not possible.

As one trudges through the first pages of this paper, I suspect that one would tend to become weary of the diverse commentary I quoted or referred to in summerizing the several opinions relevant to myth and its meaning and function. I did this in an effort to allow a reader time to reflect somewhat upon his own ideas concerning myth. I hoped that by introducing conflicting notions

on the subject, I could emphasize the diversity of usage applied to myth. Additionally, I would at this point recall one's attention to the known typology of the functions of myth listed immediately prior to the working concept. Any idea encompassing those requisites must of necessity by all encompassing. However, I do not wish to sacrifice clarity for the sake of universalism. Hence, a few additional thoughts are needed at this point to refine my concept.

The first thought I offer is this: Myths are not "false stories". They are "useful fictions", and as such are tools of the intellect utilized by man to "explain" the "why" and the "how" of existential phenomena. For example, in the Western portion of the United States, there is an Indian tribe which has in its possession a particular breed of horse. This horse (as far as this tribe is concerned) was originated exclusively by them as a new variety of horse. The tribe is the Nez Perce, and their special horse is called the Appaloosa. The Appaloosa's main claim to distinction is his unique coloration pattern. Appaloosas are a solid color over the front half of their body, while their hind quarters are spotted.

According to the Nez Perce, the Appaloosa appears the way he does because long ago a great Nez Perce chief wished to give the tribe some mark of distinction. So, he took a hot potatoe and dappled it all over the hind quarters of his horse. From that original horse sprang the spotted Appaloosa. Thus this story, which is an intellectual construction and by my concept a myth, explains

the how and the why of the strangely spotted Appaloosa. If one rejects this myth, one is still left with the existential facticity of the strangely spotted Appaloosa, and the task of accounting for it because man does not or cannot simply accept it as another horse. He must "explain" its ridiculous appearance, and account for its indigenous peculiarity to an obscure tribe of American Indians.

Although we have numerous "hot potatoes" today, we have no great chiefs; hence, we must intellectually construct other models to explain the fact of the horse. We might say something like: In the basic cell structure of the horse is a substance called deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) which is any of various nucleic acids that are localized in cell nuclei and are the molecular basis of heredity in Appaloosas. This DNA carries a code that dictates to the growing cells of the new Appaloosa: you will be solid in the front and spotted in the back. Again we have explained something through means of an intellectual construction or a myth according to my concept. But wait, one might object that the indians tale is the myth because it is not true; whereas, the DNA story could not possibly be a myth because it is a "scientific fact; which can be proven via empirical means". Therefore, the DNA model cannot by sullied by being placed (intellectually) along side an indian fairy tale. I agree--to an extent.

True, the DNA story does hold up better under empirical analysis than the hot potatoe story. However, they are both products of the same intellectual process, and they are both driven by the same human compulsion to explain the Appaloosa's spots.

Therefore, I see in the two myths a quantitative not a qualitative difference. This is no shame upon the DNA myth. It is merely calling attention to the fact that despite its seemingly incontestable facticity, the DNA explanation is a potentially perishable intellectual construction created by the same human process and human need that developed the hot potatoe theory.

Thus myths are not true or false. Rather, they either explain phenomena, or they do not. True, one may argue that in an objective sense, myths can be true or false; but, my response to that is: it does not matter to the human using it. For him, it either works or it does not work. Hence, one may look with incredulity upon indian potatoes, and with satisfaction upon scientific DNA and be happy. Whether the DNA myth is "correct" or not does not matter so long as it answers the human compulsion to explain existence. The additional consideration that the DNA myth agrees with other intellectual constructions currently in vogue reinforces it as "correct" and serves another human need, namely unity. Be this as it may, we might read in tomorrows' paper that the DNA model has been replaced.

Another idea that will refine my concept is the notion of myth as an intellectual construction in relation to what I call "mundane reality". In other words, our "common sense" list of facts such as: water boils at $100^{o}C$; two bodies of equal density fall at the same rate; when operating a vehicle in America, the driver will stay on the right side of the road; etc. It might be argued that these all represent intellectual constructions, and as such

they are according to my concept, myths. I might simply say, "you are correct, they are myths", and go on. However, that would not serve to clarify my concept. Rather, I should say that each of the above statements employs symbols (that is, words) that stand for the thing in question: boiling water, falling objects, highway rules. Thus I may write the word "water", or the chemical symbol $H_2O$, or the symbol HOH, but I cannot place upon this paper "boiling water". Aside from making the ink run, it might burn my fingers. Therefore, I make a little myth using symbols that stand for the objects and describe the event. The process involved in such myth making is so "natural" to the human mind that I not only am not aware of what I am doing; but if questioned about it, I might think my questioner a little silly.

Thus I say that while boiling water is an existentialist fact, any description of it is an intellectual construction arising from the myth making human mind, and is therefore a myth. Please note, the water is still boiling, only we have a way of dealing with it that makes it safe to handle, and integrates it into the entire fabric of our "knowledge" (catalog of myths). That way is to make a myth about it.

Thus I say that from the most intricate cosmological constructions down to the simplest descriptive statements, man uses symbols strung together in intellectual constructions that arise from a fundamental myth making process. Hence making myths is the most natural human function, and a myth is any intellectual construction that orders for man his experience in the concrete world.

I have said in my concept that the function of myth is to validate reality. To further clarify, I mean that once a person has succeeded in fabricating a myth that deals with (that is, explains, accounts, etc.) some aspect of his existence, that myth must fit into the overall unity of the person's world view. In other words, one myth agrees with (validates) another myth and so on until an entire system of eventually cosmic dimensions is developed accounting for the whole experience of the person. Therefore, when I say that myth orders experience, I mean that in a subjective fashion the myths adjust the world view of the person to a position that achieves unity for that person in the often belligerent presence of raw experience. For those times when a portion of the world view is challenged or even shattered by an "unexplained" event, the result is often catastrophic for the person and perhaps his entire culture.

There are any number of ways to define what it is to be human; but, being human requires more than eating and reproducing. There is an intellectual or psychic or spiritual aspect to being human that compels man to turn chaos into cosmos; or, less lyrically, to make some sort of sense out of his world beyound simply accepting it. Moreover, man is impelled to reduce his intuitive feelings into symbols such as words, and then into mental constructions (myths) that he can control, examine; and, if necessary alter to account for any disparity between his myth and his concrete experience. Man does this to control his existence between the extremities of birth and death, the poles of his life.

I say "to control" because it seems to me that Freud is correct in his assessment of our human need to create a sense of control in life. Without his myths, man is no different from the eel or eagle. Without a sense of order that can be expressed in symbolic form, man is frustrated and eventually incapacitated as a human being. In other words, man is real to himself through his symbols.

If you will recall, I mentioned earlier that after establishing the working concept of myth, I would relate it to the activities involved in fundamental human knowing, and in the use of language as a symbol system.

If myths are intellectual constructions that order experience, it follows that they are related in a vital way to human cognition. Therefore, I would like to discuss at this point a small portion of the Western philosophic tradition concerning human knowing or simple cognition. Quite arbitrarily, I have selected Plato, Aristotle and Descarte as representative of an evolving Western philosophical tradition concerning human knowing. First, Plato regarded knowing as a function of the soul or spirit of man. In other words, man's soul "experienced" the soul of the thing that was to be known. Additionally, for everything upon earth that presented itself to man's perception, there was in a higher existence the one perfect model after which all other were patterned. Thus, for Plato, knowing was spirit to spirit, and total or absolute knowledge of a thing would only occur when one's spirit experienced the prime archtype

For Aristotle, knowing was a function of two things: a

combination of the brain and the cosmic force that gave it life. Thus, he did not accept Plato's idea of independent soul in a body. For Aristotle, the soul was the force or power that gave life, and knowing occured within the individual mind of man as the soul through the mind perceived the life giving essence of the object to be known. Therefore, there is still the idea of a spirit or essence communicating with another essence.

For Descarte, knowing was again accomplished by means of something inside man. However, it was neither the soul of Plato or the life-power of Aristotle. It was an intangible, though existing "thinking-thing". In fact, Descarte identified himself (that is, what he meant when he said "I") with this "thinking-thing". For Descarte, this "thinking-thing" was the agent of cognition.

Thus we see that in terms of knowing, the tradition briefly sketched here always included the idea of something internal or innate in man that is real, though not empirically tangible. However, it is there nonetheless, because without its existence knowing and perceiving do not make sense because of the unthinkableness of dumb matter acting as a cognitive agent. In other words, the central feeling (until Sartre) has been that there is something about being human that is more than corporeal being. Thus, man equally thinks of himself as being and as having a body.

The debate today of the absence or presence of a being or life-power within but distinct from corporeal being is largely carried on by psychologists who attempt (in accordance with their personal views) to prove or disprove what man is. The two

current viewpoints are the behaviorists, who see man as empty; and, the cognitivists, who see man as possessing as a minimum the compulsion to order existence.

Parenthetically, I mentioned Sartre, who maintains bluntly that concrete being and consciousness of concrete being are the only reality. In other words, there is no higher, inner or spiritual being. Any opinion to the contrary results entirely from weakness. Sartre bases his beliefs on his personal experience of the meaninglessness (neutrality) of concrete being. That is, his "discovery" that being was neither caused nor planned, but simply and pointlessly is. For Sartre, myth would be another manifestation of what he calls "essence worlds", In other words, it is another useless longing for cosmic meaning. Therefore, I (for now) bracket Sartre out of this discussion since (to me at least) the implications of myth making rejects his preclusive philosophy.

Specifying the exact nomenclature of cognition is not my aim. Neither is it my aim to prove or disprove Plato against Aristotle, or that man does or does not have a spiritual dimension. I merely wish to indicate that to many thinkers (including Sartre) human knowing implies acceptance by the knower that something exists and has about it autonomous qualities that set it apart from the knower and from other things that he knows, and that it can in some non-physical, controllable way be incorporated into the intellect. Hence, when a man "knows", he does not do so directly. Rather, he "labels" or "categorizes" or attaches to the thing a symbol which is a step away from the thing itself.

Once this symbol is applied it not only defines the object, it also stands between man and the object itself so that "reality" is not the object (at the cognitive level) but is the symbol projected against the object by the human mind. Therefore, human knowing is never direct but is rather a systematic application of symbols to concrete experience. So also it is with myths, only at a more developed level. They are essentially cognitive in nature in that in highly specific way they mediate between man and his existential condition by validating his given social reality.

This brings me again to the basic premise of this paper: Man is compelled to impose order upon his existence, and he imposes that order by reducing the phenomena of experience into arbitrary (and therefore controllable) symbols that are intelligible to the intellect. The symbol "par excellence" is language. As such, it serves a vital purpose for man in both cognition and in myth making. However, I am not addressing the function of language solely as a tool of the myth maker. I also hope to lay the foundation for the concluding portion of this project which deals with the consequences of myth making.

The function of language has been clearly discussed by Peter Berger in his book, The Social Construction of Reality. In the first section of that book, he offers a comprehensive statement about language that I would like to summarize here. The wording and the ideas are Berger's, I am simply compacting his presentation:

The common knowledge of everyday life is maintained primarily by linguistic signification. Everyday life is , above all,

life with and by means of the language I share with my fellowman.... An understanding of language is thus essential for any understanding of the reality of everyday life.... language is capable of becomming the objective repository of vast accumulations of meaning and experience, which it can then preserve in time and transmit to following generations.... Because of its capacity to transcend the "here and now", language bridges different zones within the reality of everyday life and intergrates them into a meaningful whole.... As far as social relations are concerned, language "makes present" for me not only fellowmen who are physically absent at the moment, but fellowmen in the remembered or reconstructed past, as well as fellowmen projected as imaginary figures into the future. Moreover, language is capable of transcending the reality of everyday life altogether. On the level of symbolism, then, linguistic signification attains the maximum detachment from the "here and now" of everyday life and language soars into regions that are unavailable to everyday experience.... Language now constructs immense edifices of symbolic representations that appear to tower over the reality of everyday life like gigantic presences from another world. 16

Thus it is possible to say that man naturally employs symbols in understanding all aspects of his being. His symbols codify, express and describe his everyday, taken for granted "reality". This reality is the "normal course of life", the "unquestioned truth", "good old common sense". Yet, this "good old common sense" is not what it seems to be. Rather, it is an elaborate intellectual construction maintained by the incredibly rich symbol system of language. From the symbology of language used in "common reality", it is a short step to the construction of larger, interrelated systems which tend to maintain or validate the common reality. This is the point of entry of developed myth as embodied in the stories that members of a society hold to be true.

These stories live not by idle interest, not as fictitious or even as true narrative; but are to the people a statement of a primeval, greater, and more relevant reality, by which the present life, fates, and activities of mankind are determined. 17

In an excellent essay entitled "Wordsworth in the Tropics",

Aldous Huxley captures this idea of myth as a cognitive symbol in a more immediate way. Huxley compares concrete phenomena to a jungle, and man's need for order to a home builder.

> Weary with much wandering in the maze of phenomena, frightened by the inhospitible strangeness of the world, men have rushed into the systems prepared for them by philosophers and founders of religions, as they would rush from a dark jungle into the haven of a well lit, commodious house. With a sigh of relief and a thankful feeling that here at last is their true home, they settle down in their snug metaphysical villas and go to sleep. 18

Now I come to the point at which I hope to develop the ramifications to man that arise from his role as myth maker. To do so, I will once again rely on the thought of Peter Berger to help me organize my conclusions.

Mr. Berger is a sociologist and I suspect a theologian as well. As such, he has developed a theory dealing with what he calls the "Social Construction of Reality". Simply stated he posits the following:

> Man occupies a peculiar position in the animal kingdom. Unlike the other higher mammals, he has no species specific environment firmly structured by his own instinctual organization. There is no man-world in the sense that one may speak of a dog-world or a horse-world. Despite an area of individual learning and accumulation, the individual dog or the individual horse has a largely fixed relationship to its environment, which it shares with all other members of its respective species . One obvious implication of this is that dogs and horses, as compared with man, are much more restricted to a specific geographical distribution. The specificity of these animals' environment, however, is much more than a geographical delimitation. It refers to the biologically fixed character of their relationship to the environment, even if geographical variation is introduced. In this sense, all non-human animals, as species and as individuals, live in closed worlds whose structures are predetermined by the biological equipment of the several animal species.
>
> By contrast man's relationship to his environment in characterized by world-openess. 19

In other words, without getting into absolute "whys",

Mr. Berger is maintaining that in a self-evident way, creatures other than man belong to a predetermined, closed-world, and are consequently bound to a specific existence. Thus an eel or an eagle can never be anything more or less, and they live in modes that do not vary greatly from either their predecessors or their "cousins" in other geographic locations. Man on the other hand has no such radically predetermined mode of existence, but is born into an open world and must therefore create his own mode of existence, and his species specific world. Along with this lack of radical biological predeterminism, man is self-cognizant and therefore aware (perhaps subconsciously) of his need for a mode of existence. Thus Berger states, "While it is possible to say that man has a nature, it is more significant to say that man constructs his own nature, or more simply, that man produces himself." 20

In terms of a simple "why", man is compelled to order his existence because he does not have a genetically built in order. Whether Berger's theory is a fact or another useful myth, or both, does not matter. What matters is that he has observed and described a particular phenomenon: Man is not determined to the radical degree other animals seem to be. Therefore any determinism applicable to man must come from man himself. This brings us to Berger's social construction theory.

Man does create a world, But, it is a symbol world maintained through language. It is grounded in concrete experience, but it is removed from that experience by symbolic description because only a symbol is useful in the intellect. Given a suf-

ficient volume of symbols, they no longer describe reality, they "become" reality. All of this is necessary, however, because of the open world man inhabits.

This symbolic world is a precarious one. It works only so long as it explains man's concrete experience. Because it is so precarious, it is not really useful. Something must be done that orders reality on a level not susceptible to the vicissitudes of daily life. Something must be created or imagined that subsumes the individual and his adversities into a greater or higher frame of reference. Thus a symbolic universe is required, and consequently created. It is at this point that systematic mythology comes into being. The mythology posits, validates and maintains an entire cosmic universe that accounts for man's origin, purpose on earth and destination beyound death.

> All the members of a society can now conceive of themselves as belonging to a meaningful universe which was there before they were born and will be there after they die. The empirical community is transposed onto a cosmic plane and made majestically independent of the vicissitudes of individual existence. 21

Now, in terms of consequences, more Berger. An interesting thing happens as a result of man's myth making: he believes it. In fact, he believes it so deeply and it is so powerfully embedded in his symbol system that he does something even more remarkable: he forgets that he created it. If the "first man" does not forget it; it will certainly be forgotten by his children or grandchildren. In any case, there is a point in man's history when the symbols cease representing reality, and become reality itself in a process that is totally natural to the human intellect.

Once the symbols are the reality, they may or may not be as functional as they formerly were in accounting for existence. At this point, the symbols of a "higher existence", or the mythology, has achieved a transcendent or even holy status that confronts the poor individual who can no longer find in them a satisfactory means of dealing with his concrete experience. But, if he criticizes them, he is attacking or flying in the face of what everyone else "knows" is reality. In short, he becomes an outsider; a deviant who must be helped to see the error of his ways. Anxiety arises for the "deviant" because he is attempting to affirm himself against reality. Even though that reality does not help him function in his existential condition; he nonetheless is afraid to leave the "truth" for the chaos of an unknown world.

> Put crudely, the individual is now is a position to shudder at himself. The essence of all alienation is the imposition of a fictitious inexorability upon the humanly constructed world. 22

And so, we come full circle. Man posits a reality by myth making; grants to that myth qualities of a higher existence through the edifices of language; passes it on to his children as the truth; forgets that he created it; ceases to be comforted by it; and, feels anxiety thinking he no longer possesses common sense.

Where does all this leave us, and what is the import of these things to ideas about human values?

An initial conclusion might be the famous "despair" of Sartre and its correlative abondoning of any hope that such

things as truth, good or evil are anything more than opinion or, worse yet, wishful thinking. Perhaps that initial conclusion is correct and all we are ultimately dealing with is opinion fabricated by dumb matter.

However, even though one must concede that much (and perhaps all) of the things man constructs to order his life are "artificial" in the sense that they are not "handed down from Olympus"; or "written on stone tablets by the hand of God:; or "formerly practiced beneath the surface of the earth before man came to the surface": one must acknowledge that they are genuine creations. In other words, man as an agent has taken chaos and himself fashioned it into a cosmos. True, it may not be an imitation of a real god made cosmos; but, it is nonetheless a genuine blow against the primeval void. To derive from the fact that man symbolically defines himself and socially constructs his reality the idea that there is no truth other than physical being seems to me an unwarranted conclusion.

Concerning truth, and man's search for it, Huxley has some interesting thoughts:

> Man approaches the unattainable truth through a succession of errors. Confronted by the strange complexity of things, he invents, quite arbitrarily, a simple hypothesis to explain and justify the world. Having invented, he proceeds to act and think in terms of this hypothesis as though it were correct. Experience gradually shows him where his hypothesis is unsatisfactory and how it should be modified. Thus great discoveries have been made by men seeking to verify quite erroneous theories about the nature of things. 23

Thus, to put it more simply, man is ever learning, yet never coming to a knowledge of the truth. For many people, this is a

disquieting idea; yet it is one that must be given some attention because it is easy to concentrate on the "never coming" portion of the idea to the exclusion of the equally valid "ever learning". Hence, progress in terms of man's understanding of himself is as it ever was: grounded in his concrete experience, but interpreted by his intellectual dimension. And, progress in a quantitative sense is occuring in that man is increasingly mastering his relationship to his concrete environment and thereby inferring less from it that inaccurately describes his cosmic dimensions.

I do not wish to create any more myths here, but man learns from his experience within his concrete environment. I do not think he will learn, however, that the concrete is the only dimension of existence. Therefore, in terms of human values, I think that they are subject to the same processes impacting on any other aspect of the human mythology. They are based in concrete experience, but they are created in the human intellect; and, they "live" or "die" insofar as they are consistent with they overall mythology of the individual.

In summing up, I have posited that a myth is any intellectual construction that orders experience, and that the function of myth is to validate reality. Furthermore, I have based my project on the premise that man (for whatever reason) is compelled to seek order and meaning in his life. Finally, using Berger as a guide, I have said that the result to man from his myth making is a potential alienation from the other members of

his society.

In arriving at these conclusions, I have trudged the term "myth" through a dozen or so interpretations in an effort to prepare it for the use I had in mind. And, I have maintained that myth extends from the simplest human description of the everyday world to the highest cosmic schemas. In doing all of this, somewhere along the line, I mentioned that I would make a final note on Sartre. I would like to do that now, and then offer a few concluding remarks on the "values" aspect of this project.

Sartre has done something which (whether we accept or reject his ideas) we must imitate. He has determined that he is a "sufficent cause" in and of himself. That is, he had consciously advocated his own self-affirmation in spite of his belief that life had no meaning or purpose other than what he chooses to give it himself. In short, Sartre had admitted that he is a myth maker, and that he can live in spite of it. Here I abandon Sartre because I disagree with his final conclusion about the nature of man. That is, I believe Sartre errs when he fails to grant to man a spiritual dimension. I am not prepared in this space to develop a systematic argument, and perhaps I could not anyway; but, I merely assert that man as a myth maker does not equate to man as a self-deceiver, or a poor creature comforting himself with "stories". Rather, I see man's intensive myth making as an affirmation of his spiritual dimension.

I said earlier that we must imitate Sartre. By that I meant that we must have the courage as he did to look at our socially

given reality and recognize that it came from a human process. However, I leave Sartre here because I do not experience "despair" at this idea; I experience something akin to "rest". Pondering the maze of human endeavor, it is a relief to realize that it is in fact human activity; and, it is a natural part of the beast. It does not result from the absence of God or worse the whims of a prankster cosmic force. Rather, it is our natural state to create meaning.

Looking for some kind of unity in man's myth making can have interesting results. First, myth making always results in granting "meaning" for man. Secondly, if one examines a few of the cosmological myths of widely dispersed cultures (both in time and distance) one notes a striking series of similarities. For instance, most known cultures have a myth that states that men first came from the earth. That is, the Trobriand Islanders say men first came from holes in the earth; Plato taught that men rose from the earth; the Hebrew tradition states that man was fashioned from the earth; etc. One wonders at the unity. Is it a manifestation of a common psychological need; or, is it a manifestation of some prime archtype or event that in fact occured?

In any case, man's activity as a myth maker is exclusively allied with his compulsion to find order; and, I would add to give meaning to his existence, both temporal and cosmic.

Thus when it comes time to talk about "values" and what is "good" or "evil", we must not make the mistake of leaping into a theory of relativity that undercuts all hope of establishing truth.

Let me explain. The fact that two people band together and quite on their own establish a symbol system and a pact for how they will treat one another; and then they agree to that system and pact without the authorization of an external authority, in no way invalidates their relationship as long as that relationship is restricted to themselves. They can entirely on their own treat one another with a concerned mutual reciprocity that promotes their common well being. This is the gift and power of the myth making man, and it is ultimately his responsibility as well. For good or ill, myths will arise. It is the responsibility of man to judge them by such means as he can, even though his means are frail and semi-adequate. When he ceases judging, he sacrifices the essence of his being: namely, the power of judgement itself.

Thus, one cannot question the existence or non-existence of values as long as there are humans around of the current myth making variety. Values exist because they are a natural part of the beast. As long as man is a judging, self-cognizant being, he cannot refrain from "valuing" without some kind of spiritual suicide. Thus, man is committed to dealing with them because in the myth making process, they arise and turn back on their creators, and drive man's existential activities. Anything that drives a man to a specific course of action is totally real regardless of its origin.

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