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Myth and the Fate of Secularization*

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Translated by Jon R. Snyder

Myth Today

Philosophical thought about the presence of myth in the contemporary world cannot be founded upon an essential or metaphysical definition of myth. This is due in part to the fact that the dream of philosophy as a rigorous science has been definitively *ausgeträumt.* More specifically, though, it is due to the fact that the theme of myth itself appears to us today in an uncertain light. No satisfactory theory of myth—one that would define its nature and its connection with other forms of relationship to the world—exists in contemporary philosophy. Nevertheless, the term and the concept of myth, even if not carefully defined, have wide currency in our culture today. At least since the appearance of Roland Barthes's *Mythologies,* mass culture and its byproducts generally have been analyzed in terms of mythology; and the presence and place of myth in political thought have generally been conceived in terms of the now distant but still important work of Georges Sorel, *Réflexions sur la violence,* in which myth appears as the sole agent capable of moving the masses to action. Even Claude Lévi-Strauss, who approaches myth from a specialized anthropological point of view, states in *Anthropologie structurale* that "nothing resembles mythic thought today more than political ideology. In contemporary society the latter has in a certain sense replaced the former."[1] Although Lévi-Strauss cannot be accused of making only vague use of the term "myth," a claim such as the one made here—that is, that political ideology has replaced mythic thought for us today—depends in the last analysis upon a rather stereotypical understanding of the term. Indeed, in the later *Mythologica,* when Lévi-Strauss applies a more precise and specific concept of myth to the question of its possible survival in the contemporary world, he makes reference instead to music and literature as the elements of experience in which myth—in no matter how faded a form—endures today.[2]

The presence of myth in our culture, however, generally is not considered in terms of this rather technical and restricted understanding of the notion of "myth." Instead, it is usually dealt with in a much more general sense, where it is understood as any combination of the following: as the opposite of scientific thought; as the opposite of demonstrative or analytic thought; as narrative or as the fantastic; as a locus of affect; as having little or no pretense to objectivity; as having to do with religion, art, ritual, and magic; or, finally, as the target of scientific demythization and disenchantment (in the sense of Weber's *Entzauberung* of the world). Rational knowledge about reality,

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[1] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale* (Paris: Plon, 1958), 231.
[2] See especially the final chapter of *L'Homme nu (Mythologica IV)* (Paris: Plon, 1971), and the "Ouverture" of *Le Cru et le cuit (Mythologica I)* (Paris: Plon, 1964).

> wherever it seeks to constitute itself as a theoretical consideration and explanation of the world, finds itself in opposition not as much to immediate phenomenal reality as to the mythical transfiguration of that reality. *Long before* the world presents itself to consciousness as a complex of empirical "things" and empirical properties, it has already presented itself as a complex of mythical powers and actions.[3]

This citation from Cassirer's classic work of 1923, which is perhaps the last great philosophical theory of myth in our century, contains an element that is implicit and fundamental in the modern theory of myth—that is, the idea that myth is a kind of "prescientific" knowledge, at once ancient and immature, identifiable with the childhood or adolescence of the history of the human mind. Even Lévi-Strauss, who certainly does not have a crudely evolutionistic concept of human development from *mythos* to *logos*, and who in fact sees himself as radically antihistoricist, considers mythic thought as the "past" of our culture (inasmuch as he tries to locate its contemporary surrogate in the guise of political ideology, or its residual traces in music and literature).

Yet the idea implicit in the respective positions of Cassirer and Lévi-Strauss—to say nothing of Weber—is one that today makes us feel uneasy. No one would now accept the thesis, for instance, that myth is the specific form of thought of the primitive mind alone, or that civilization is a process of demythization in which the mythic worldview is gradually abandoned for the scientific one. At the root of this uneasiness is the fact that the modern philosophical theory of myth—right up until that of Cassirer—has always found its articulation within the framework of a metaphysical and evolutionistic idea of history. It is this very framework of a philosophy of history that can no longer be recuperated today. As a result, even a philosophical theory of myth can no longer be precisely defined, and the common use of the term *myth* registers and expresses a theoretical confusion. On the one hand, the term *myth* continues to refer to a form of thought no longer current and often considered more primitive than our own, in any case to one characterized by a lesser degree of objectivity—or of technological efficacy—than that ascribed to scientific knowledge. On the other hand, the concept of myth as primitive thought appears unsustainable in the wake of the crisis of the evolutionistic metaphysics of history (along with that of the very idea of scientific rationality), as well as in the light of less theoretical motivations linked to recent and current political events. This confusion can best be understood through a brief survey of the principal attitudes that today most influence our thinking about myth—attitudes that I will describe on the basis of certain "ideal types.: For the most part, these are not explicitly articulated at a theoretical or practical level but are nonetheless present and representative of the cultural situation in which we find ourselves. These "ideal types" can be called *archaism, cultural relativism,* and *limited rationality.* All three are characterized by incoherence and self-contradiction, chiefly the result of having left unresolved the problem of the philosophy of history, which is at the source of every concept of myth. All three are born out of a rejection of the metaphysics of history that sustained the "modern" theory of myth, yet all three fail to formulate their position in theoretically satisfactory terms because they lack a new philosophical concept of history: they have simply set the problem aside.

Archaism

I would describe archaism as an attitude that, to use a term Derrida employs to describe an analogous state of things, could be called "apocalyptic." It is typified by the widespread contemporary

[3]Ernst Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen* (1923), vol. II, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1958).

distrust of Western scientific and technological culture, seen as a way of life that violates and destroys man's authentic relationship with both himself and nature, and which is inextricably bound to the capitalist system of exploitation and its imperialistic tendencies. The early twentieth-century avant-garde artists' fascination with African masks can be understood as a sign of the prophetic function that art has often had, as is the case here, in regard to the general direction of a culture and of a society. What was, for the early twentieth-century avant-garde, principally an interest in modes of representation of the real that were uncontaminated by the long tradition of inherited artistic languages and genres—freely combined, especially in expressionism and surrealism, with a programmatic polemic against bourgeois culture—has today become a widely held attitude. The bad conscience of the liberal intelligentsia toward the so-called Third World can certainly be found in its approach to myth as well. Without the backdrop provided by such a sweeping political perspective, it would be impossible to explain either the popularity that cultural anthropology has enjoyed in these last decades as an intellectual fashion or indeed the spread of "structuralism" (not just in anthropology) as a left-wing theoretical position during the years of its greatest diffusion at a mass level.

At the basis of all this, there was originally the idea that both a purely structural study of "primitive" myths and cultures and a general reconsideration of man in nonhistoristic terms (as exemplified by Lévi-Strauss's statement, in his polemic against Sartre, that "we should study men as if they were ants") would destroy the Western myth of progress and its imperialistic and colonialistic implications. This was to be done in the name of a mode of thought that would recuperate the "authentic" values of a relationship between man and nature unmediated by scientific objectivization, which was seen as strictly linked to the capitalist organization of labor, as both the critical philosophy of the Frankfurt School and the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness* had shown. Both this critique and a sense of bad conscience about imperialism and neocolonialism have more recently been combined with ecological concerns about the devastating consequences that science, technology, capitalist exploitation, and the arms race have had on both nature and the physical nature of man himself. Archaism is the sum of all these factors. In this perspective, myth appears not only as *not* being an essentially overcome phase of our cultural history, but precisely as a *more* authentic form of knowledge, one that precedes the destructive mentality of objectivizing, quantitative modern science, technology, and capitalism. From a renewed contact with myth, archaism hopes to discover a possible way out of the errors and contradictions of current scientific and technological civilization. This renewed contact with myth takes the form of either an analysis of the myths of "other" cultures (those studied by anthropologists working among existing primitive peoples) or a reading of the ancient myths of our own Western tradition (as is the case for the Greek myths, reexamined with anthropological methods and mindsets by philologists and historians of the structuralist school). Much of Nietzsche's and Heidegger's recent popularity in continental European culture seems to be related to these tendencies (even if based upon misinterpretations that I will not discuss here). Nietzsche's critique of Socratic thought and of decadence, as well as his concept of the nihilistic direction of Western culture, and Heidegger's *Seinsvergessenheit* (with all that it implies), are interpreted as appeals for the recovery of a premetaphysical (prelogical) attitude toward reality, which is largely identifiable with a return to myth. The critique of scientific and technological civilization, as well as the renewed interest in archaic thought—both of which are found, in different forms, in Nietzsche and Heidegger—are taken as a point of departure for the recuperation of myth, even if neither Nietzsche nor, least of all, Heidegger justifies such an undertaking.

It would be difficult, however, to point to philosophical positions or cultural projects that explicitly propose a return to mythic knowledge. The single exception is, at present, the so-called New Right movement in France and Italy, which takes up the anticapitalist polemic of Fascism and Nazism and combines it with themes from the 1968 student revolt. As is the case for the

two other "ideal" approaches to myth that we will discuss shortly, though, archaism does not articulate a complete doctrinal position. This, as I have already suggested, is a consequence of the failure of archaism to propose an alternative to the crisis of metaphysical historicism of which it is itself a product. Thus, it is destined to remain theoretically mute, or in any case not to define a precise position for itself. Archaism, when it does not turn to the restoration of traditional cultural values and consequently to right-wing politics, may also elaborate a utopian critique of scientific and technological civilization and capitalism (as is the case for some of liberal European thought). Such a critique openly admits that it is not only pointless but politically dangerous and unacceptable to try to restore the traditional values of European culture. At the same time, though, it appeals to mythic knowledge—uncontaminated by Western capitalist rationality—as the foundation for its rejection of modernity and its errors. In this critical perspective, currently popular in continental left-wing circles, authors like Nietzsche and Heidegger are joined together with the more radical members of the Frankfurt School, such as Walter Benjamin and his intellectual precursor Rosenzweig. Yet here too—often on the basis of rather arbitrary readings—myth is understood as the kind of thought that is closest to that original or sacred language theorized by Benjamin and supposed to be outside of the rational knowledge of Western science and philosophy.

Cultural Relativism

The second approach that, in our present-day attitudes, conditions and qualifies the "presence of myth" is cultural relativism. According to this position, the fundamental principles and axioms that define rationality, the criteria of truth, ethics, and the experience of a "historical humanity" in general, are not the object of rational knowledge or demonstration insofar as the very possibility of demonstration invariably depends upon these same principles and axioms. Kuhn's theory of paradigms, for instance, at least in its original form, could be considered as representative of this approach (which has proven to be extremely popular in the epistemological debate of the last few years). Heideggerian hermeneutics often is taken to be a theory of this type, even if there are good reasons to think that this is not necessarily the case. In cultural relativism any thought of a univocal rationality, thanks to which we could call certain forms of knowledge "mythic," has been banished. Moreover, the idea that the first principles upon which a specific cultural universe constitutes itself are in fact *not* the object of rational and demonstrative knowledge opens the way to our seeing them also as the object of a kind of mythic knowledge. Even scientific rationality, long the guiding value for European culture, finally reveals itself to be a myth: not more than a shared belief on the basis of which our culture has been organized. Thus, as Odo Marquardt has pointed out, the very idea that the history of Western reason is the history of a progressive abandonment of myth (or *Entmythologisierung)* is itself a myth, a central belief that is neither proven nor provable.[4] As opposed to archaism, cultural relativism does not ascribe any sort of (mythic) superiority to mythic knowledge in regard to modern scientific knowledge. It only refuses to place these two modes of knowledge in opposition to each other, since both are founded on fundamental assumptions that share the characteristics of myth—that is, they are based on beliefs that form a part of lived experience and are not susceptible to scientific proof. These beliefs, which lie at the basis of every cultural universe, are not always called "myths" (as Marquardt chooses to call them). Nevertheless, cultural relativism's interest in myth is every bit as vital as that of archaism, not because it tries to uncover in myth a more authentic form of knowledge, but because in the study of the myths of other civilizations it seeks a more revealing method for studying our own, in the conviction that our civilization too has a

[4] See Odo Marquardt, *Abschied vom Prinzipiellen philosophische Studien* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1981), 93.

fundamentally mythic structure. Such a presupposition (even if never made explicit) can be shown to be present, for instance, in Roland Barthes's "mythological" approach to mass culture. As in Marquardt's use of the term, "myth" in this case stands for a nondemonstrable and immediately lived knowledge. Thus, its meaning is still, in the last analysis, highly conditioned by its strict opposition to the characteristics of scientific knowledge.

Limited Rationality

In the third contemporary attitude toward myth, which I call limited rationality, the term *myth* instead is assigned a specific meaning, one linked to the original etymological significance of the word—for *myth* means *narration*. In this form it sets itself in opposition to, or distinguishes itself from, scientific knowledge, accomplishing this, however, not through a simple reversal of the latter's characteristics—such as demonstrativeness and objectivity—but through the working of a positive element of its own, namely *narrative structure.* Limited rationality describes that ensemble of cultural attitudes that treats mythic knowledge, understood as narrative, as a more adequate form of thought for certain fields of experience. Yet at the same time it does not challenge or explicitly call into question the validity of scientific or positive knowledge for other fields of experience. We can find examples of limited rationality in at least three disciplines:

1. In psychoanalysis, where psychic life tends to be considered as structured in terms of narration (both in its everyday functioning and in the therapeutic situation). In the case of Jungian psychoanalysis and its variants, this same psychic life is seen as necessarily expressing certain basic themes and archetypal myths, which in turn structure it not as abstract principles nor as an interplay of forces, but as stories that cannot be reduced to underlying structural patterns for which they would serve as mere surface manifestations (Hillman speaks of "polytheism" in this same sense).
2. In contemporary theories of historiography, where the narrative hypostasis has shown itself to be increasingly important as a model. Narrative analysis not only reveals the rhetorical models on which historiography is constructed, but—above all else—also points, through revelation of the essential multiplicity of these very models, to a basis for negating the unity of history. It recognizes the irreducible plurality of history itself, a history ever more difficult to distinguish from myth (insofar as it no longer reflects the norms of reality).
3. In the sociology of the mass media, which has substituted Sorel's original application of the notion of myth to (revolutionary) mass movements with an analysis, in mythological terms, of the contents and images of the world produced and distributed by film, television, literature, and other mass-market media.

These various ways of thinking about myth—taken as a term that can be applied to numerous fields of experience—can be called theories of limited rationality for the following reason: all three have in common the idea (which goes back to Plato and Aristotle; see, for instance, *Timaeus* 29d) that certain fields of experience cannot be understood through the use of demonstrative reason or the scientific method, but require instead a kind of knowledge that can only be described as "mythic."

The Limits of Myth

As I said at the outset, these different attitudes (which generate markedly different positions in regard to myth, but which nonetheless all share an intensive interest in it) have resulted from the dissolution of the various metaphysical philosophies of history. Yet, at the same time, all three have failed to take the fact of that dissolution sufficiently into account. Precisely for this reason they cannot avoid the errors and contradictions that render them unsatisfactory from a theoretical standpoint. Archaism clearly does not tackle the problem of history, insofar as it is powerless—

when confronted with the modern world—to produce a viable position that is anything other than a call for the restoration of traditional culture (from, significantly enough, a right-wing perspective). Right-wing traditionalism, representing the only apparent political program of archaism, reveals the latter's theoretical weakness pushed to an extreme degree. That weakness consists in simply reversing the myth of progress into a myth of origins, which as such are supposed to be more authentically human; they are therefore supposedly worthy of serving as the goal of a political revolution or, at the very least, as the touchstone for a critique of modernity.

The idealization of origins, though, is just as empty as the idealization of the future for its own sake (which is what the secularized ideal of progress and development has always done and continues to do). Furthermore, we have a relationship today with our origins only through the mediation of a process that is, in the last analysis, derived from those same origins. This process — the context in which origins are given to us — both separates us from them and connects us to them. Archaism would simply put aside the problem that this process presents, for if the condition of alienation and dehumanization in which we find ourselves today is derived from our origins (as their *Wirkung*), why would anyone wish to *return* to those origins? Problems of this type — which are problems of the philosophy of history—are precisely what archaism tries to put aside without having really addressed. Yet these same problems are still urgently contemporary ones, even if metaphysical and evolutionistic philosophies of history have been definitively abandoned.

The same could be said for cultural relativism, except that in this case it is evident that the problem of historicity has been neither raised nor resolved but simply avoided altogether. Cultural relativism ignores both (a) the effective context in which the thesis of the irreducible plurality of cultural worlds is put into place, and (b) the effective impossibility of isolating one cultural world from another (and not only from our own universe). The problem that anthropologists working "in the field" must often confront—what is the relationship between themselves, as representatives of a strong and often colonialist culture, and their indigenous sources of information?—presents only one aspect of the broader hermeneutic dilemma with which cultural relativism does not deal. The study of "other" cultures always occurs in a context in which the pretense that these "other" cultures are (or can be) represented as distinct and separate objects of enquiry must appear as utterly false and impossible. They are instead like speakers in a dialogue; but, once we recognize this, the question must then be raised of the common horizon on which the dialogue itself takes place. Such a question, obviously, invalidates from the first any project — like that of cultural relativism—to represent "other" cultures as isolated objects. This common horizon is the problem of the philosophy of history itself and cannot be so easily done away with.

Finally, the theory of limited rationality also attempts to skirt the problem of its own historical position. Recall that limited rationality depends upon the idea, found in a number of different forms, that myth is a kind of narrative knowledge that is supposed to be suited to certain fields of experience (mass culture, psychic life, historiography). Limited rationality does not recognize, though, that it is founded on a tacit acceptance of the distinction between *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften*. Yet this same distinction has become ever more problematic and tenuous in recent years. The notion that even exact science is a social enterprise has become widespread; the objectifying methods of the natural sciences are now seen as a moment within a social context, and this realization thus returns us once again to the field of historical and social "sciences." It is an antihistorical illusion to think that the two fields—history, psychic life, and so on, on the one hand, and experimental science on the other—can possibly be kept apart. Both the hermeneutic developments of historicism, and recent epistemological studies of the *Naturwissenschaften* (here I am thinking of Kuhn, Feyerabend, Lakatos, et al.), point toward a breaking down and an elimination of this distinction.

In varying degrees, and in different forms, then, the three contemporary attitudes toward myth—all of which deserve more consideration than can be given here—put aside much too

quickly the problem of their own historical contextualization. They do not state where they themselves stand as theoretical positions. Archaism proposes a return to origins and to mythic knowledge without asking what the intermediate period (or meantime) between today's world and its beginnings might be. Cultural relativism speaks of separate and autonomous cultural universes but does not say which of these universes is the domain of relativistic theory itself. Limited rationality does not have an explicit theory about the possibility of distinguishing fields reserved for mythic knowledge from fields reserved for scientific rationality. The idealist or positivist version of the metaphysics of history had an answer for all of these problems: it conceived of history as a single progressive process of *Aufklärung* and emancipation of reason. The process of emancipation of reason, however, went far beyond the expectations of both idealism and positivism. A vast number of peoples and cultures spoke up on the world's stage, and it gradually became impossible to believe that history was a unitary process with a continuous development toward a *telos.* The coming true of the universality of history made universal history impossible. Even the idea that the historical process could conceive of itself as *Aufklärung*—as the liberation of reason from the shadows of mythic knowledge—lost its legitimacy, and demythization was recognized as being itself a myth.

Myth and the Postmodern

Since the discovery of the mythic nature of demythization fails, then, to legitimize the three approaches to myth we have described, it follows that to demythize demythization does not mean to restore the privileges of myth—if only because, among the myths whose validity we must recognize, there is the myth of reason and its progress in history. Demythization, or the idea of history as a process of emancipation of reason, is not something that can be exorcised so easily. Nietzsche already demonstrated that, when the value of truth itself is shown to be a belief founded on vital needs (and is therefore an "error"), previous errors are not simply restored to their former position. As he says in *The Gay Science* (aphorism no. 54), to go on dreaming with the knowledge that you are dreaming is not the same thing as pure and simple dreaming. The same can be said for demythization: if we want to be faithful to our historical experience, we must realize that our relationship with myth, once demythization itself has been proven to be a myth, will not be restored to its original state, but will remain marked by this very experience. A theory of the presence of myth in contemporary culture must take this as its point of departure. Nietzsche's remark in *The Gay Science* is not just a philosophical paradox; it is the expression of one of the fundamental aspects of the destiny of our culture, one that could also be called "secularization." In this term we find the two elements of Nietzsche's paradox—to know that one is dreaming and yet to continue dreaming. The secularization of the European spirit over the last few centuries is the result not only of the discovery and demystification of the errors of religion, but also of the survival of those errors in different, and in a certain sense, degraded forms. A secularized culture is not a culture that has simply left behind the religious contents of its tradition; it is one that continues to live them as traces, as models that are hidden and disfigured but nonetheless profoundly present.

These ideas are seen clearly in the works of Max Weber. Modern capitalism does not create itself out of a rejection of the Christian medieval tradition, but instead becomes its transformed application. Löwith's research on modern historicism leads in the same essential direction: the various metaphysics of history, up until Hegel, Marx, and Comte, are only interpretations (deprived of the original theological context) of the Judeo-Christian theology of history.[5] Not so much in Löwith as in Weber, though, or as in Ferdinand Tönnies's opposition between "community" and "society," we find that gain and loss are inseparably bound together in the process by which modernity (understood as industrial capitalism in Weber, or, in Tönnies, as

[5] See Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).

a society no longer based on organic relations) detaches itself from its original religious foundations. Modernization does not occur because tradition is abandoned, but rather because of the appearance of a sort of ironic interpretation, or distortion, of it. Heidegger speaks, in a somewhat similar sense, of *Verwindung*.[66] The latter preserves tradition but also, to a degree, deprives it of its content. Both Norbert Elias's argument about the history of European civilization and Rene Girard's thesis about violence and the sacred (and about Christianity as a process of desacralization) appear to be quite close to this notion of secularization.[7] For Elias the modern process of civilization develops when power and the use of force are concentrated first in the figure of the sovereign, then in the absolute state, and finally in the constitutional state. In the succession of these phases, collective consciousness undergoes a radical transformation: the individual subject, in all social classes, internalizes the "good manners" of the courtier, who had been the first to renounce the use of force in favor of the sovereign. Passions are no longer as strong and open as they were in past periods. Although existence has lost some of its liveliness and color, it has acquired a greater degree of security and formalization. Here as well we see that progress is accompanied by a lesser degree of intensity of experience, or by a sort of emptying-out or dilution of experience. Girard is concerned instead with civilization in general. According to him, its path goes from the birth of the sacred—which exorcises universal human violence by concentrating it on the sacrificial victim, but nonetheless allows it to survive as the basis of all institutions—to its demystification by the Old Testament and Jesus Christ. Christ shows that the sacred *is* violence and opens the way to a new human history that can be called "secularized" (even if this goes against Girard's own terminology).

Modern European culture is tied to its own religious and mythical past, not only by a relationship of overcoming and emancipation, but also, inseparably, by a relationship of preservation/distortion/dilution. Progress has a sort of nostalgic nature, as classicism and Romanticism have taught us. The meaning of this nostalgia becomes manifest only when the experience of demythization is pursued as far as possible. When even demythization is unmasked as myth, myth itself recovers its legitimacy, but only within the framework of a generalized, weakened experience of truth. The presence of myth in contemporary culture does not stand in opposition to modernization; it is instead a consequence of modernization and should be seen as modernization's ultimate point of arrival, at least up until now. Moreover, the moment of the demythization of demythization can be considered the true and proper moment of transition from the modern to the postmodern. It is in Nietzsche that this transition takes place in its most explicit philosophical form. After Nietzsche, and after radical demythization, the experience of truth simply can no longer be the same as before, for there is no longer any apodictic evidence of the kind in which thinkers, during the era of metaphysics, sought to find a *fundamentum absolutum et inconcussum.* The postmodern subject, when it turns toward itself and searches its consciousness, is confronted not by the certainty of the Cartesian *cogito*, but by the *intermittences du coeur* described by Proust, the *récits* produced by the mass media, or the mythologies rediscovered by psychoanalysis. It is precisely this experience that the return of myth in our culture and in our language tries to capture, certainly not that of a mythical primitive culture uncontaminated by modernization and rationalism. Only in this sense—through a weakening of the notion of truth—can myth be understood to point toward the overcoming of the opposition

[6] On the notion of *Verwindung,* see especially Martin Heidegger, "Überwindung der Metaphysik," in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1954).

[7] See especially Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*, vol. 1 (Bern and Munich: Francke, [1937] 1969) and vol. 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980); René Girard, *Des Choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1978). It is hardly necessary to add that neither Elias nor, especially, Girard drew the same conclusions from their work that we try to draw here.

between rationalism and irrationalism, and to open a possible new direction for contemporary thought.