IS THERE
A MYTH OF THE MYTH?

INTRODUCTION

To pose the question of myth and truth is to pose three complementary questions: that of myth, that of truth and that of their relationship. It is also to pose a still more fundamental question: that of knowing if the question of myth and truth is not badly put, a pseudo-problem. In other words, is there not a "myth" of the "myth" and, perhaps, of truth? More precisely, is there a philosophical problem of the myth that is not at the same time a problem of language, of its usage and its claim to truth? The myth-philosophy-science hierarchization is not perhaps itself a "supermyth"? Is not myth always a certain philosophy? And science, is it not always an undertaking of testing concepts suffused in a non-scientific context, i.e., philosophical, religious or mythical?

As for truth, is there a way to consider it philosophically, apart from its assertive and linguistic approaches? Truth in the "substantive" sense: is it not really a linguistic-attributive truth and

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thus assertive? And to the degree in which the approaches to truth, whether they be religious, philosophical or scientific, always have a mythical dimension, must we not conclude that the problem of myth and truth is secondary, indeed, superficial?

If the preceding considerations have any pertinence, we understand why it is so difficult to define or, even more, interpret myth. In taking it up, we have left undefined what characterizes its present understanding: an imaginary tale, a moral plot, philosophical, religious or ideological construction that is more or less uncontrollable, science fiction, etc.

Philosophical literature on the myth goes back at least to Plato reflecting on his own recourse to myth.[1] Before Plato, we may mention Xenophon criticizing the anthropomorphism of Homer's and Hesiod's theology but also that of the Ethiopians and Thracians.[2] None the less, considered in all its acuteness, the philosophical problem of myth seems to be the modern European age with its separation between the new scientific thought and the mythical thought of past generations.[3] Marcel Detienne tells us that the first science of mythology was formed around 1850, created by the traumatism caused in Europe by the discovery in Greek tradition of "histories" as savage and scandalous as those generally associated with so-called primitive peoples.[4] Western philosophy would try to interpret these myths while taking care not to believe in them and seeing only a collection of absurdities. Two paths were offered to research: tautegorical seeking to understand the message of the myth outside the myth.[5]

We may thus make a hypothesis according to which the problem of myth and truth is proper to the European crisis born of scientism after the decline of German idealism. In this sense, it may not be

[1] Plato, *Laws*, II, 659d lss.; VI, 712b2; VII 793cl-2; Aristotle *Retoric*, 1395a; *Politics*, III, 1, 5; 1275a 14-19.

[2] J. Mansfeld (ed.) ö *Die Vorsokratiker* I, Xenophon, Fr. 24-37, Stuttgart, Reclam, 1983, pp. 221-225.

[3] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Mythos und Bedeutung, Fünf Radiovorträge. Gespräche mit Claude Levi-Strauss*, ed. by A. Reif, Frankfurt/M, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1980, p. 17 *et seq.*

[4] Tylor, "La mythologie scandaleuse", in *Traverses* 12, 1978, pp. 3-19.

[5] G. Van Riet, "Mythe et vérité", in *Revue Philosophique de Louvain*, 58, 1960, pp. 15-87; M. Detienne, "Mythologie ohne Illusion" in *Mythos ohne Illusion*, Frankfurt/M, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1984, pp. 18 and 20 *et seq.*, trans. from the French *Le temps de la réflexion*, I, 1980.

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a problem that would arise with the same acuteness in all civilizations. J.P. Vernant writes on this subject: "In civilizations with an oral tradition and in which there are neither authentic written records nor history nor philosophy nor science properly speaking, myth has no place. For it to appear there must be a discourse that, by denying it, gives it an illusory place and a semblance of existence". [6] This thesis calls for some critical comments. First, it seems deprived of all validity as far as concerns the civilization of Pharaonic Egypt, where myth seems perfectly integrated in an intense intellectual activity in mathematics, medicine, architecture, technique and other disciplines. Here, myth is not denied. On the contrary, it occupies as central a place as that of the faith in the hereafter that has given us those unequalled monuments, the pyramids. Furthermore, we do not see the need for "authentic written records" for there to be the consciousness of myth, and Vernant would find it difficult to tell us, even by limiting us to the Western tradition, what criteria are valid for a "philosophy in the proper sense". Finally, Vernant is mistaken when he seems to insinuate the absence in oral civilizations of a clear distinction between an empirical knowledge and a wisdom of religious-metaphysical origin. On the other hand, we believe with Vernant that the problem of myth and truth takes on a particular sharpness when the separation of myth and science to the profit of the latter and total denial of myth, religion and philosophy reigns.[7]

It should be noted that in the Bantu-Luba tradition of Zaire, for example, not only is the problem of myth and truth not posed, but there is also no linguistic equivalent for the modern Western concept of myth; the Ciluba "*lusumwinu*" or "*mwanu*" renders the French "*fable*", "*légende*", or the German "*Marchen*". Nevertheless, we may estimate that the cultural (and not linguistic) analogue for "myths" in the sense of myths of origin, for example, is given in Ciluba by the expression "*Buloji bwa Ditunga*" or "The High Science of the Empire".[8] In this case, it concerns a knowledge *par excellence*, comparable to that of the Veda and thus extremely

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[6] J.P. Vernant, "Der reflektierte Mythos", in *Mythos ohne Illusion,* pp. 10.

[7] W. Beltz, *Die Mythen der Ägypter*, Düsseldorf, Claassen Verlag, 1982.

[8] T. Fourche and H. Morlighem (ed). *Une Bible Noire*, Brussels, Max Arnold, 1973.

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prestigious, the apanage of only those "Initiated into the High Science of the Empire".[9] While "distinguishing" (but not separating) empirical and "inferior" knowledge, the High Science of the Empire, far from occupying an "illusory place" is on the contrary seen as the knowledge the Empire needs to survive. If then today we see in it the cultural analogue of myth, we must see at the same time that it is in a different sense than in a civilization dominated, at least partly, by scientism.

Likewise, we may show that the problem of truth in the West today is equally tied to the crisis born of scientism. The way of presenting the solutions proposed vary with the philosophical currents that are dominant in this twentieth century: Marxism, pragmatism, phenomenology, existential ontology, neo-positivism, analytical philosophy, pragmatic-transcendental philosophy, and so on.[10] Our own approach would be critical and pragmatic-transcendental. In this sense, the problem of myth and truth is a problem of language as communication and its presupposed necessities such as that of the claim to truth, that being understood as not only an "intersubjectivist" consensus but also, and especially, "*bisoist*".[11]

MYTH IN ANCIENT GREEK TRADITION

In its most common meaning, states M. Detienne, "*mythos*" is a "history of the gods", a fable, a teaching in the form of fable, and so on. Then he adds, following Mauss, that differently from fable and legend, myth calls for the adhesion of all and is part of the system of religious representations. According to Mauss, therefore, we are compelled to believe in myths.[12] Only, to the degree in

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] G. Skirbekk (ed.), Wahrheitstheorien. *Eine Auswahl aus den Diskussionen über Wahrheit im 20 Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt/M, STW 210, 1980.

[11] The adjective "bisoist" is formed from the Lingala-Bantu personal pronoun "Biso" (*We* in English, *Nous* in French and *Tetu* in Ciluba). A *bisoist* view of the world or a philosophy considers that *Biso* or *Tetu* (We) has primacy over the *Ngai* or *Meme* (I, me) and thus also over I-You or intersubjectivity. I thus oppose Bantu-African *bisoité* to Western intersubjectivity.

[12] M. Mauss, *Manuel d'ethnologie*, 9th edition, Paris, 1949, p. 203; M. Detienne, *l.c.*, p. 12 *et seq.*

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which Mauss equally refers to African religious myths, there is reason to observe that the obligation to believe in a sort of well-defined religious or mythical dogma is probably foreign to Africa. Africans do not know and do not recite a definitive "credo". Their religious belief is largely spontaneous: there is neither a minister to define it nor prophetism to reform it, nor missionaries to propagate it.[13]

Criticizing the monolithic concept of myth such as it is propagated by a certain Grecism for which "*mythos*" would obligatorily have a pejorative connotation of ingenuous and infraphilosophical tales, Detienne affirms that such a negative connotation is not as general as we would believe. Certainly, Herodotus, Pindarus and other ancient Greek writers tend to disqualify myths identified with the naive histories of the "barbarians".[14] We even know contexts in which the expression "mythical men" designates "rebel" and "subversive" groups outside the cities and opposed to the citizens.[15] But there are also contexts in which the use of the word "*mythos*" is far from pejorative.[16] In Parmenides we meet a non-discriminatory use of "*mythos*" and "*logos*".[17] Likewise, Empedocles orders his disciples to listen carefully "to the words of the master, to his myths which the Muse has given him so that he may understand the truth".[18]

Detienne notes in particular that the Platonic myth is neither a homogeneous structure nor a primitive form of thought, nor a relation of origins. Countering Parmenides, Plato perceives myth as the only expression appropriate for speaking of the future.[19] Elsewhere, he points out the tranquillity of a pictured, living, educational and mnemotechnic discourse in the myth, for the benefit of the "old children" who were his audience.[20]

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[13] J. Mbiti, *Religion Africaine*; Tshiamalenga Ntumba, "Mythos und Religion in Afrika heute", in *Die religiöse Dimension der Gesellschaft*, Munich, *Civitas*, 1985.

[14] Herodotus, *Histories* II, 23, 45; Pindar, *Die Nemaeischen Hymnen* 8, 32 *et seq.*; 7, 23 *et seq.*; *Die Olympischen Hymnen* I, pp. 27-59.

[15] Gentili (ed.), *Anakreon*, Fr. 21, 1958.

[16] For the entire paragraph, see the eminent Greek scholar Marcel Detienne, *loc. cit.*, pp. 28-43.

[17] Diels/Krantz (ed.) *Parmenides*, Fr. 8, 1-2, 50-51.

[18] Diels/Krantz (ed.), *Empedocles*, Fr. 17, 14; 23, 9-11.

[19] M. Detienne, *l.c.* p. 18.

[20] *ibid.*, pp. 40-43; Tshiamalenga Ntumba, "La vision Ntu de l'homme. Essai de

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In short, according to Detienne the ancient use of the term "*mythos*" is not necessarily discriminatory with regard to the term "*logos*". In this sense, the separation between myth and science and even between myth and philosophy appears to be more the fact of the crisis of the modern European age than a philosophical problem of broader extent. And, to the degree in which such a radical separation is without foundation, it could be that there is a basis for speaking of a myth of the myth, of philosophy and science in the sense of a new, largely fictitious, construction.

MYTH AND ETHNOLOGY

Contrary to Malinowski, Lévy-Bruhl and others, Claude Lévi-Strauss denounces the separation between myth and science such as it appeared in the 17th and 18th centuries. He believes that contemporary science is on the point of overcoming this separation by further rehabilitating the world of meaning proper to myths.[21] He views knowledge as rooted more in the structure of the nervous system than in the structure of the mind or experience.[22]

Concerning myths, Lévi-Strauss writes, "Without a doubt, all myths are born from a tale that one day was recited for the first time by someone. But as soon as they exist, myths no longer come from any one person, and we repeat them as we think we heard them".[23] He goes so far as to say that myths are thought up by man without his being conscious of it, and he believes, as far as he himself is concerned, in a thought without a thinking subject.[24] We see that we are far from the philosophy of consciousness of the modern era with its penchant for introspection and solipsism.

philosophie linguistique et anthropologique", in *Cahiers des religions africaines*, 14, 1973, pp. 175-197; "Qu'est-ce que la philosophie africaine?" in *La Philosophie Africaine*, RPA 1, Kinshasa, 1977.

[21] According to Lévi-Strauss, Malinowski errs when he does not see anything but a utilitarian thought for survival in the primitive peoples. And Lévi-Bruhl later had to retract his thesis according to which primitive thought would be prelogical and merely emotional. Lévi-Strauss, *Mythos und Bedeutung*, p. 28; *Le totémisme aujourd'hui*, Paris, 1962; *La pensée sauvage*, Paris, 1962.

[22] Cl. Lévi-Strauss, *Mythos und Bedeutung*, pp. 18-20.

[23] *ibid.*, 114; 134.

[24] *ibid.*, p. 15 *et seq.*

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However, we think that Lévi-Strauss' position is insufficient and that we need to make intersubjectivity, or even better, *"bisoism"* valid as an instance of any myth and of discourse in general. For Lévi-Strauss, myth is not a simple fable distant from reality: it is, on the contrary, an authentic speculation on the subject of the physical, social and cultural world, a speculation analogous to philosophy and the forerunner of scientific problematics.[25] In his opinion, the signification of myth is not to be sought outside the myth, and it is neither functionalist nor symbolic. It is instead positional, that is, differential and structural.[26] Myths thus act as structural models. As such, they reflect no reality, any more than they refer to some latent meaning.[27] In this sense, myth is both "historic and ahistoric".[28] Finally, he conceives the fundamental problem of ethnology and all philosophy of man as an attempt to understand how men (in particular the Amerindians) represent the passage from nature to culture. In that concept we find the profound meaning of the suggestive titles of the four volumes of his *Mythologica: I. Le cru et le cuit; II. Du miel aux cendre; III. L'origine des manières de table; IV. L'homme nu* (Paris, 1964-1971). By associating the myth of philosophy, that he does not like, with science, from which he expects a little too much[29] he seems to us to break with the myth of the myth as an ingenuous tale and radically separated from science. What is more problematic is the exaltation of the structural method to the detriment of a more global philosophical approach: hermeneutic, analytic and pragmatic-transcendental. In addition, his thesis according to which myths represent the passage from nature to culture would call for many shadings.

[25]. *Id., La pensée sauvage*, p. 25. Lévi-Strauss sees the difference between uncivilized thought and scientific thought in the fact that the former, less developed, chooses a shortcut to arrive illusorily at a general and totalitarian understanding of the universe whereas scientific thought, which is superior and succeeds in its undertaking, proceeds step by step, limiting itself to explaining well-defined phenomena, according to the Cartesian method of division (*Mythos und Bedeutung*, p. 29 et seq.).

[26] *Id., Le cru et le cuit*, p. 64.

[27] *Id., Anthropologie structurale. La structure des mythes*, p. 231.

[28] *ibid.*

[29] He writes, "I believe that the greatness and superiority of scientific explication is shown not only by practical and spiritual achievements but also by the fact that it becomes possible for science... to also explain what was already valid, in a certain

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For Roland Barthes, structuralist and semiologist, myth is neither an object nor a concept nor an idea: it is a certain form of discourse, a system of communication, in short, "a way of signifying, a form".[30] In other words, myth is not defined by the object of its message but by the way the message is expressed. In this sense, everything may become a myth by taking on the form of a myth.[31] And from the moment that it signifies something, no matter what object (thus not only language) may become a message, so that the study of the myth goes beyond linguistics and belongs to semiology as it was formulated by Ferdinand de Saussure.[32] Semiology is a science of forms insofar as it studies significations independently of their content.[33] According to Barthes, a Saussurian, all semiological systems describe a relationship between three terms: the signifying, the signified and the sign as a relation between the signifying and the signified. For Saussure the signifying is given by the acoustical image, the signified by the concept and the sign by the word. In Freudian psychoanalysis, the signifying is the apparent behavior, the signified is the latent and true meaning, the sign is, for example, the dream, the "*acte manqué*", neurosis or religious behavior. For Sartre, the signifying is literature, as discourse, the signified is the original crisis of the subject and the sign is the work.[34]

Beginning with that, Barthes states that in myth as in a specific semiological system there is something like grafting: the myth is grafted onto a preexisting semiological chain and is therefore a *secondary semiological system*. To be specific, what is sign in the preexisting system becomes signifying, which calls for its own signified and its own sign. The signifying of the myth is thus ambivalent: it is at the same time meaning (filled) of the preexisting system and form (empty) of the secondary system. Thus Barthes sees the characteristic of myth in the transformation of a meaning into a new signification through the mediation of an empty form.

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way, in mythic thought". Lévi-Strauss, *Mythos und Bedeutung*, p. 36.

[30] R. Barthes, *Mythen des Alltags*, Frankfurt/M., Suhrkamp Verlag, 1964, p. 85. Trans. from the French "Mythologies," 1957.

[31] *ibid.*, pp. 85-87.

[32] p. 88.

[33] *ibid.*

[34] p. 91 *et seq.*

This phenomenon of mythification may be produced on the subject of any expression of object.[35]

There is no doubt that the semiological analyses of Barthes are seductive and clarifying in many respects. They validate the classic distinction between meaning itself and figurative or metaphorical meaning. The question is to know if this double meaning or this double semiological system really works with the authors and users of myths. Does this semantic metaphysics have a basis? Like Wittgenstein II, should we speak of a possible multitude of usages of any linguistic or semiologic expression? In that case, the form of life of the myth and its rules dispense with the operation of transformation of a primary meaning (besides, how would we know?) into a second meaning.

In addition, the Barthian semiologic relation is not three-fold but two-fold, signifying-signified=sign. We do not leave the sign and its signified, that is in any case simply structural. The semiosis of Peirce seems better to us: sign-object-interpretant.[36a] Without this relation to an object being at least postulated, as well as an interpretant and thus interpreters, the problem of the discourse and myth and truth does not seem adequately posed.

MYTH SEEN BY PHILOSOPHY

The philosophers have not abandoned the study of myth to ethnologues, structuralists and semiologists alone. Paul Ricoeur, in his monumental *Philosophie de la volonté* devoted the best part of his philosophical wisdom to the Judaeo-Christian symbolism of evil and thus to myth. We know his famous formula from the heuristic and methodological viewpoint: "The symbol causes thought" without being itself a thought. It could be said that with this formula Paul Ricoeur places himself halfway between the detractors of myth and those who, like Lévi-Strauss, make of it a discourse analogous to philosophy and a forerunner of science. By considering the myth as preconceptual, Ricoeur seems a victim of the myth

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[35] p. 93 *et seq.*
[36a] Ch. S. Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, Vols. VII-VIII, ed. by W. Burks, 1958.

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of the modern era, that of the quasi-radical separation of philosophy, science and myth.[36b] We will limit ourselves here to bringing up some theses of Ernst Cassirer and Leszek Kolakowski.

In his *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*[37] the neo-Kantian Cassirer seems to want to establish a transcendental philosophy no longer beginning with pure and abstract reason but with concrete symbolic forms that people the human spirit through time and space. According to Detienne and Cassirer, speculative idealism looks to mythology for a primary orientation of the spirit, an originary process of the conscience: "To the theogony of the Absolute, constructed and presented by Schelling, Cassirer opposes the necessity to begin with the given, with facts that are empirically affirmed and assured by the cultural conscience".[38] According to Cassirer, the mythic consciousness must be identified and recognized as an autonomous way of knowing, a particular fashion of the spiritual organization of the human species, a sovereign thought having its own categories of space, time and number.[39] As an original form of thought, the myth is, according to Cassirer, a thought of concreteness and immediate sensitive intuition. A captive of intuition, mythical thought does not know conceptual representation and activity. It is a rich and chaotic figure. Reunited in it are the original forces of language and faith. Through its creations, mythical thought appears as an original language and as a religious thought; it constructs the real and establishes a universe of meaning. Therefore it is at the origin of all symbolic forms, according to Cassirer. Almost all forms of culture are rooted in mythical thought: practical and theoretical consciousness, the world of knowledge, language, art, law, morals, including the original models of the community and the State.[40]

We see that Cassirer adopts a thesis dear to Emile Durkheim. As the latter wrote in 1899, mythology or religion "contains from the beginning, although at first in a confused state, all the elements that, while being distinguished from each other, by determining

[36b] P. Ricoeur, *Philosophie de la volonté; de l'interprétation.*
[37] E. Cassirer, *Die Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, Oxford, 1923, Vol. II: *Das mythische Denken.*
[38] Cassirer, *op. cit.*, pp. 16 and 18.
[39] M. Detienne, *loc. cit.*, pp. 13-19.
[40] Cassirer, *Sprache und Mythos*, Leipzig, 1925, p. 72.

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and uniting with each other in a thousand different ways have given rise to the various forms of expression of collective life. Science and poetry were born from myths and legends; ritual practices engendered law and ethics; plastic arts were born from ornaments and religious ceremonies. Our representation of the world, our philosophical conceptions of the soul, immortality and life cannot be understood if we do not know the representations of religious life that are their original form..."[41] According to Durkheim, "scientific thought is only a more perfected form of religious thought".[42] Thus for Cassirer and Durkheim, to refuse to study myth is to cut oneself off from the matrix of all the spiritual forms of culture.[43] And it is this idea of myth as matrix of conceptual thought that Paul Ricoeur seems to have taken up: for him, myth causes thought without being itself a conceptual thought. Nevertheless, it seems that Cassirer, like Durkheim, was already remarkably positive with regard to mythical thought. As for the idea that myth would be only a matrix of all the modern forms of culture, we may say that it disregards the permanent presence of myth in all the forms of culture, past, present and future. In this sense, it is still a myth of the myth that prevails with Durkheim as it does with Cassirer. For us, myth not only pervades culture: it is a large part of it. It is original human faith without which there is neither critical philosophy, nor science, nor technique, nor art, nor any project or ideal.

It is in this direction that the ingenious reflections of Leszek Kolakowski seem to go in his work, *Die Gegenwärt des Mythos*.[44] According to him, the domain of myth and that of religion intersect, especially there where it is a matter of "myths of origin" and that he indentifies with religious myths. This appears to us from the beginning as a rather arbitrary view of things. In fact, there is no reason to reduce religious myths to those of origin alone. But, Kolakowski continues, myth also extends to certain constructions

[41] Durkheim, in L'Année Sociologique II, 1899, *avant-propos*, pp. IV-V; *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, Paris, 1910, pp. 612-623.

[42] Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, p. 613.

[43] *ibid.*, pp. 622-624; Cassirer, *Die Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, p. 4 *et seq.*, IX, XI-XII, 3,9.

[44] L. Kolakowski, *Die Gegenwärtigkeit des Mythos*, Munich/Zurich, Piper, 1972, 3rd ed., 1984.

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that are consciously or unconsciously present in our intellectual or affective life, namely, when we refer our conditioned and changing experience to absolute and immutable realities such as "being", "truth", "value" or "human being".[45] Thus, mythological energy is present in all human *praxis*: scientific and technological, social, intellectual and philosophical, affective and sexual.[46] In short, without separating them Kolakowski distinguishes between religious myths and secular myths. "*Die Gegenwärtigkeit des Mythos*" is precisely intended to analyze the phenomenon of the active presence of the myth (secular) in all daily human *praxis*, including the scientific: "myth in the problem of knowledge"; "myth in the world of values"; "myth in logic"; "the mythical meaning of love"; "myth and the contingency of nature"; "the phenomenon of the indifference of the world"; "myth in the culture of analgesics"; "stability and instability of the myth". The central thesis in all the above is the indifference of contingency of the world on the one hand, and on the other, unceasing human endeavor to overcome it by conceding it an absolute value.[47] Myth is thus defined by Kolakowski as being the permanent attempt of man to give an absolute meaning to what is only contingent or indifferent. This thesis seems excessive to us, if we except the properly religious or metaphysical myths. None the less, it has the merit of being in the main operational: in fact, we can say that all, or most, myths tend to absolutize either a being or a fact: the being, the absolute being, the pharaoh, the race, technique, science, philosophy, love or power.

While science and technology prolong the human tradition of transforming nature, metaphysics, affirms Kolakowski, clearly appears as the prolongation of the religious and mythical tradition of humanity in search of an absolute origin for a world and a contingent experience of the world.[48] What is important for him is to show modern man that, while given to scientific, analytical and rational thought, he will be forever destined to draw from a reservoir of mythical images. In fact, he argues, the world is always

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[45] Kolakowski, *op. cit.*, p. 7, 164, 165 *et seq.*
[46] p. 163.
[47] p. 90.
[48] p. 13.

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charged with meaning through man who can only understand himself through a previous prescientific or mythological reception of meaning into himself.[49] To conclude: only a symbiosis of critical rationalism and myth guarantees culture and civilization as human culture and civilization.[50]

In the matter of "truth", in particular, Kolakowski considers that, as a value aiming to transcend the gropings of *praxis*, it participates in the myth that brings the contingent realities of the world to an absolute that is not given. It participates in the myth of reason in the sense of faith or mythical option in favor of reason as an absolute and ultimate instance. Nevertheless, man needs mythology as faith in reason so as to appear reasonable in a world and contingency without reason.[51] We may note here that Kolakowski cannot speak of the myth of reason and truth except in the name of another myth that is his own: the myth of the world as exhausting all that there is, i.e., the myth of the most blind materialism, since it denies—this is his second myth—a meaning or "reason" for this world. To be consistent, Kolakowski should have taken care not to make us believe that his book on the presence of myth has some claim to "truth". It is true that for him science needs to be aware of the mythical and the myth of reason for its own legitimization.[52] So be it! At least that is "true", without the myth of reason!

For Kolakowski, myths are neither true nor false: they describe nothing, their aim being simply to satisfy the need of unconditionality, the need of eternal and transcendental values.[53] Here, Kolakowski makes a logical leap. Just because myths do not aim at a descriptive truth, it does not mean that they renounce all claim to some truth in order to satisfy a simple need to survive. We are

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[49] p. 28.
[50] p. 2, 7ss *et passim*.
[51] p. 58s
[52] p. 9s, 58s
[53] Kolakowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-16. For the author, this thesis is valid for all myths, including those proper to the sciences, and, especially, to logic (p. 50ss). According to him, Husserl does not succeed in overcoming psychologism except at the price of the myth of transcendental conscience. This, free from contingent historical facts may float around in the eidetic heaven. Thus, the Husserlian myth is only the reedition of the Platonic myth of transcendental, eternal and unchangeable ideas. No longer against the Sophists but against psychologism.

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dealing with a new myth of Kolakowski for whom there would be no truth except descriptive or empirical, while he strives to convince us of a thesis that has nothing of the empirical. For us, myth only describes and relates for the uninformed. In its form of life, myth aims at a metem-empirical truth that is therefore uncontrollable and indescribable.

TRUTH AS ADEQUATION OR CORRESPONDENCE

There are theories that deny that we can ever attain truth and at the same time be sure that we have attained it. This position shows that at least these theories "believe" in the truth. There are others that claim that truth is only a myth. This position claims that it must be held for "true" that "truth worthy of the name" does not exist so that it is in the name of truth that the impossibility of truth is affirmed. But what must we understand by "truth"? What is the origin of truth? What are its criteria? What are the truths that we may consider as already attained? Are the chances for truth greater in science than in philosophy? Are they less in myth than in philosophy and science? These questions and others engross the philosophers and do not seem to have received an answer that would lead to the unanimity of the researchers.

There are several theories of truth.[54] One of the most tenacious and one that is implied in many others,[55] is the classic one that defines truth as *adaequatio intellectus et rei*, that is, as the correspondence between the understanding and the thing.[56] The obscurities and difficulties of this formula are known. The most obvious is to replace "*intellectus*" with "*judicium*" (judgment or proposition). The origin of truth then becomes the affirmative or negative assertion. But how can we make such a correspondence between linguistic signs and an extralinguistic reality plausible?

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[54] G. Skirbekk, *op. cit.*; J. Habermas, "Wahrheitstheorien", in H. Fahrenbach (ed.), *Festschrift für Walther Schulz, Wirklichkeit und Reflexion*, Pfullingen, 1973, pp. 211-265.

[55] A. J. Ayer, "Truth", in *The Concept of a Person and Other Essays*, London, 1963, pp. 162-187.

[56] A. Keller, *Allgemeine Erkenntnistheorie*, UTB, Stuttgart/Berlin/Cologne-/Mainz, Kohlhammer, 1982, p. 104.

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The Vienna Circle, with its thesis of the verifiableness of a meaningful statement; Wittgenstein, with his thesis of the isomorphic reflection of reality through a meaningful statement; Popper through his thesis of falsifiability of principle of any scientific theory, explicitly or implicitly admitted the theory of truth as adequation or correspondence between a statement (linguistic) and extra-linguistic reality.[57] Wittgenstein II revised his position later on and saw correspondence no longer between a statement and a reality but between the protagonists within an appropriate form of life. Since then, it is usage and verification that decides meaning. In §241 of *Philosophische Untersuchungen* he writes, "You say then that the consensus (*Übereinstimmung*) decides what is true and what is false? – True (*richtig*) and false is what men *say*; and it is in language that men agree (*stimmen überein*). This is not a correspondence of opinions but of a form of life". In analytical philosophy and following Frege, the golden rule is that there must be careful distinction between meaning or signification and the reference of a linguistic expression. Meaning is given by usage or by a group of rules governing a given form of life. As to the reference or "descriptive" relation of the linguistic expression involved, it is, at the best, only postulated: here also the form of life is decisive. In any case, truth is an affair that is regulated between protagonists of one form of life and not between the discourse and the extra-linguistic world. In addition, it is difficult for us to see how there could be correspondence between linguistic signs and the multiform and multicolored realities or non-realities of the extra-linguistic world, even while setting aside the preceding meaning given by man, deceptive in both language and reality.

A graceful way, both profound and problematic, to schematize the theory of truth as adequation of language and reality is given by Martin Heidegger. In his theory of truth as evidence and of a phenomenological point of view, Husserl had attempted to rehabilitate the theory of truth as adequation. To this effect, he distinguished several ways in which one and the same object may be given. According to him, what must be adequate to the object is neither the understanding nor a proposition made with linguistic

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[57] This concerns, of course, Wittgenstein I, author of *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*.

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signs, nor anything else. What must be adequate to the object is the same thing but given in a different way. For Husserl truth, with regard to objects or concepts, is a "filling" (*Erfüllung*) through which the given as a represented given and the actual given coincide: truth is thus identity, and this identity clearly appears. We may ask the status of these "givens" and how they come to coincide in the aforementioned *Erfüllung*. In addition, how can we reconcile this static and contemplative conception of a truth-evidence with the historical reality of fallibility and amelioration in our search for the truth?[58]

In §44 of *Sein und Zeit* (1927) Heidegger rejects the three following theses: 1, the origin of truth is judgment of proposition; 2, the essence of truth lies in the correspondence (*Übereinstimmung*) between judgment and its object; 3, Aristotle, the father of logic, consigned truth to judgment as to its origin.[59] In §44b, Heidegger writes, "It is not the statement (*Aussage*) that is the primary location of truth; on the contrary, it is the statement as a way of appropriation of the "disclosed-being" (*Entdeckheit*) and in that way being-in-the-world, that is based on "disclosing" (*Entdecken*) or "open-being" (*Erschlossenheit*) of *Dasein*. The most original truth is the statement and the ontological condition of possibility for which statements may be true or false (*entdeckend oder verdeckend*)."

Actually, Heidegger begins by analysing the truth of the assertion. Here, truth is defined as "discovery" (*Entdecken*), later as "unveiling" (*Entbergen*). Heidegger then extends the concept of truth to any *Entdecken*, to any *Begegnenlassen*, to any *Erschlossenheit*, even extra-theoretical such as *Besorgen*. In that way, he dilutes the concept of truth to the profit of an ontological constitutive existential of *Dasein* that he calls *Erschlossenheit*. Because of this, he cannot explain the possibility of the true and the false.[60] In addition, by his thesis of *Jemeinigkeit* and *Eigentlichkeit*, Heidegger

[58] Ed. Husserl, *Das Ideal der Adäquation. Evidenz und Wahrheit*, in *Logische Untersuchungen*, 1900/1901; G. Skirbekk, *op. cit.*, pp. 402-412; E. Tugendhat, "Heideggers Idee von Wahrheit", in *Der Wahrheitsbegriff bei Husserl und Heidegger*, 2nd ed., 1970; taken up in G. Skirbekk, pp. 431-448.
[59] M. Heidegger, "Dasein, Erschlossenheit und Wahrheit", in *Sein und Zeit*, 1927, taken up in G. Skirbekk, pp. 413-430.
[60] E. Tugendhat, *loc. cit.*

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seems little inclined to intersubjectivity, even less to "*bisoism*" that affirms the primacy of *Biso* (we) over I-You.

We see that we cannot renounce with impunity a minimum of adequation or correspondence in a theory of truth, and taking into account the difficulties of a correspondence between linguistic signs and extra-linguistic reality, it seems that this correspondence must be sought in a consensus between the protagonists of a given form of life and the protagonists of an ideal form of life. In reality, the rules governing the activities of language or forms of life, or speech acts, in Wittgenstein, Austin and Searle, are either conventional (Wittgenstein and Austin) or constitutive-institutional (Searle). The truth to which they might lead would be at the most institutional in the sense of a relative consensus. Now, truth cannot be purely relative. In fact, to affirm that truth is relative offends by a self-pragmatic destruction that we may reconstruct in the following way: I absolutely affirm the following truth: I cannot absolutely affirm any truth. To get out of this predicament we must be able to postulate universal and restrictive rules as normatives.

THE TRUTH AS CONSENSUS IN THE IDEAL DIALOGICAL COMMUNITY

In 1973 two representatives of the Erlangen School proposed what we may call an intersubjective theory of truth. Wilhelm Kamlah and Paul Lorenzen, authors of *Logische Propädeutik*,[61] suggested that the truth or falsity of a proposition does not depend on the proposition: it depends on something quite different. Take "Werner is traveling". This proposition is true if and only if a competent speaker attributes to the aforementioned Werner the predicate "is traveling". It follows that the verification of a proposition is *intersubjective* and *interpersonal*.[62] This leads the two authors to explain their thesis relative to the pragmatic-transcendental constitution of competent speakers taking into account their socialization. Thus,

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[61] W. Kamlah & P. Lorenzen, *Logische Propädeutik. Vorschule des vernünftigen Redens*, Mannheim, 1973, ch. IV, §1: Wahrheit und Wirklichkeit, p. 117, taken up in G. Skirbekk, pp. 483-495.

[62] Skirbekk, p. 27s.

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interpersonal verification, as social activity, necessarily presupposes the following: the protagonists of interpersonal verification must have linguistic competence, competence in the matter as well as good will. They must be open to the consideration of their interlocutors and the subject under discussion; finally, they must take a position independent of their emotions, traditions and habits. The verifying activity is only rational under these conditions of discourse in which only the arguments count and in which each and every one recognizes equal rights. The consensus thus obtained is a true one: the propositions verified by it can be said to be true.[63]

As we see, Kamlah and Lorenzen do without the correspondence between proposition and extra-linguistic reality in their definition of truth, while admitting implicitly that interpersonal verification refers to that reality.

Many questions arise here. Is not the choice of conditions too empirical and thus aleatory? Does not the theory of truth as interpersonal and counterfactual verification postpone to an eternal future the decision on the truth or falsity of a given proposition? And thus on the truth or falsity of this same theory? Is not interpersonality or intersubjectivity an endless succession of camouflaged monologues? Is not intersubjectivity a meeting of Heideggerian *Jemeinigkeiten* and thus of fundamentally solipsist or monologist subjectivities? Must we begin with an interpersonal or *bisoist* consensus? Does the primacy belong to the relation I-You or, on the contrary, to the biological-cultural dialectics of We (*Biso, Tetu*, in Bantu) and I-You, the primacy going to *Biso* (We)? In other words, is truth always a *bisoist* consensus beginning with our real, historical and dynamic *bisoism*, or must we wait for an unrealizable inter-monologist verification?

Karl-Otto Apel tries to answer these and other questions with his theory of truth as consensus of the ideal dialogic community.[64] The overall project of Apel is to transform the transcendental philosophy. He draws inspiration from Charles Sanders Peirce in order to go beyond Hegel, Wittgenstein and Searle, toward a

[63] *ibid.*, pp. 28-30.

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"transcendental pragmatics" understood as "philosophy of the play of language of the ideal dialogic community".[65] With Hegel and against Kant, Apel affirms the impossibility of a radical critique that would not always be the implicit recognition of the ability to arrive at integral truth by means of critique. Against Hegel, he affirms that taking into account the presence of new and possibly future language absolute language as a total knowledge is impossible and that, on the contrary, we must postulate a language that would encompass the unlimited community of past, present and future interpreters.[66] With Wittgenstein, Apel admits that, thanks to usage, some elementary situations of communication can explain certain practical evidence of a given form of life and extra-linguistic activities with which usage interacts. For more complex situations of communication, especially where it is a matter of understanding the language that puts into question and is therefore transcendental, those elementary situations of communication, as is the case with scientific and philosophic expression, the situation typical of such or such form of particular life must be overcome toward a universal expression, that of dialogic reflection and the best argumentation. Language is thus not exhausted by being only one activity to the detriment of any theory, even less, since Wittgenstein himself continues to make strongly critical distinctions on the subject of language, thus practicing a use of language of a critically universal reach. There is reason, then, to distinguish prescientific, scientific and philosophical expression, the latter being needed to problematize all the others. Thus the intertwining (*Verwobenheit*) in a typical situation is not the ultimate instance of ordinary discourse: the ultimate instance is philosophic expression as occasion for unlimited dialogic and universal reflections.[67] This same argument is valid against Wittgenstein, who while defending the obvious thesis of the impossibility of a private language, nevertheless demands that we hold to a simple description of the many typical situations involving language following

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[65] Tshiamalenga Ntumba, K.-O Apel. "Transzendentale Sprachpragmatik", idem, *Denken und Sprechen. Ein Beitrag zum 'linguistischen Relativitätsprinzip' am Beispiel einer Bantusprache (Ciluba)*, Dissertation, Hundt Druck, Cologne, 1980, pp. 168-179, p. 169.

[66] Tshiamalenga Ntumba, *op. cit.*, pp. 170, 175.

[67] *ibid.*, p. 173.

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rules that are also typical and particular. In fact, for us to know if, in a typical situation, the appropriate rules are followed, it is necessary to put ourselves in control so as to enable us to confirm or deny the pretension of following the said rules. Now, that transcends the merely empirical description of a situation of discourse which would be merely typical.[68]

Finally, Searle sees his thesis of the constitutive-institutional rules for the speech act declared insufficient by Apel and transformed into "pragmatic-universal rules" in the Habermasian sense. Apel, following Habermas, demands that Searle go beyond the Chomskian and superficial distinction between linguistic competence and performance, the latter being erroneously considered as an extra-linguistic activity of a psychological nature. He asks him to rise to the Habermasian distinction between linguistic competence and *communicative competence*, the latter being submitted to a logic of reconstruction of the conditions of generation and transformation of grammar sentences. And it happens that the rules that make communication possible have a nature of necessity, universality and normativity, obscured by the constitutive-institutional rules of Searle. Habermas, in a procedure that appears more logical than that of Kamlah and Lorenzen, shows that the conditions of possibility for communication worthy of the name are intelligibility, a reciprocal claim to truth, sincerity and exactness.[69]

The point of departure for Apel's theory of truth as consensus of the ideal dialogic community is thus the following: an affirmation presupposes that the speaker holds his statement as true and that he believes he can support it with arguments. In other words, he presupposes that, in the framework of a discussion in which only arguments have weight, his statements would appear to be true. Seemingly, in action the agent assumes that he can demonstrate the validity of the norms governing his action by arguments, so that to legitimate an action is to refer it to universally valid norms. In each case, it is a matter of a consensus obtained through

[68] *ibid.*, pp. 172-174.
[69] Tshiamalenga Ntumba, *Jürgen Habermas. Universalpragmatik, idem, Denken und Sprechen...*, pp. 159-168.

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argumentation and thus of a validity through universalization and rational intersubjectivity.

Therefore, to speak and act rationally refers to a presupposed necessity: the unlimited dialogic community as a transcendental condition. For there to be a guarantee of truth any competent arguer of the past, present or future must be taken into consideration. It goes without saying that the real historical community will always be a long way out: it will always be distinguished from the unlimited or ideal community. The truth is not for all that Utopian: in fact, one who sees the insufficiencies of real community also sees, *eo ipso*, that he must necessarily presuppose an unrealized and ideal validity.

The transformation of Kant's transcendental philosophy is thus the passage from a philosophy of solipsist and monologist subjectivity to a philosophy of intersubjectivity. But it is also the passage from a pure and ahistorical subject to an ideal community in dynamic tension with real community. Real community must work for the realization of the ideal community.[70]

Apel's thesis seems to me more solid than that of Kamlah/Lorenzen, although in both cases it is a question of an intersubjectivist theory of truth. Instead of "interpersonal verification" Apel speaks rightly of an argumentative consensus that seems much more conclusive than recourse to the mere testimony of competent and well-disposed interlocutors. The acquisition of the universal pragmatics of Habermas that Apel adopts are the result of a reconstructive analysis that is logically more controllable than the conditions listed by Kamlah/Lorenzen. Finally, Apel's ideal community is more dialectic than that of Kamlah/Lorenzen: it is to be realized through the real community. However, my objections to Kamlah /Lorenzen seem to be valid also for Apel, with the exception of the above nuances. In both cases, it is a matter of a cumulative, additive and successive intersubjectivity. One of the main reasons for which Apel presupposes his ideal community as subject of the truth of discourse and the validity of rational action is in effect the following: an unusual expression that is not understood by the real community is always possible and therefore calls for the only

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[70] Skirbekk, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30.

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community ready for it, which must be the ideal community successively unlimited in time. Now, that leads us to understand that Apelian intersubjectivity, like that of Habermas and Kamlah /Lorenzen only reluctantly overcomes monologism. In this inter-subjectivity it is again a solopsist and monologist I but one logically forced into a dialogue with a You, that seems to have primacy and not an original We. It is as though the philosophy of conscience of the modern age refused to die and used the intersubjective as a logically necessary corrective, of course, but metaphysically powerless to depose the I in order to empower the We.

Of course, truth presupposes the argumentative consensus of an adequate dialogic community. The entire problem is to define such a community. More precisely, the first problem is to know if it is a matter of a community obtained through a complete totalization of I monologists or, on the contrary, of an always and original *bisoist* community in a phylogenetic-cultural sense. In the first case, it is the I or the solipsist or monologist individual who has primacy over the I-You and the intersubjectivity always comes too late as a meeting of monologist subjectivities. In the second case, it is the biological-cultural unity of We (*Biso, Tetu*, in Bantu) that has the primacy as much over the I as over the I-You or intersubjectivity. In the latter case, the argumentative consensus that constitutes the truth is not intersubjectivist or inter-personalist: it must be said and is *bisoist*. Because of this, there is an enormous difference between an intersubjectivist dialogue and a *bisoist* communion. In the one case it is the confrontation, in the other the qualitative self-enrichment of *Biso*, of the original We.

From a strictly critical point of view, we could say that only solipsism or monologism appears as logically untenable. Intersub-jectivity, even in the negative sense of intermonologism, seems logically defendable on the condition, however, of presupposing and aiming at a true consensus. Likewise, a *bisoism* that does not presuppose and does not aim at a true consensus would not accomplish rational verbal acts. That seems demonstrated by the universal pragmatism of Jürgen Habermas[71] and by all the linguis-

[71] Habermas, "Was heisst Universalpragmatik?" in K.-O. Apel (ed.) *Sprachprag-*

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tic turn. The primacy of We over I or I-You or, on the contrary, the primacy of I over We thus appears as a question of philosophic option. The risk run by a philosophy of I, of intersubjectivity in the sense of intermonologism is, as we know since *homo homini lupus*, that of "*la guerre de tous contre tous*". To escape this, we must look for truth in a true consensus. On the other hand, the risk run by a philosophy of We or *bisoism* is that of communalism without remarkable personalities and without great originality. To escape this, we must dialectalize the We into differentiated We/I-You/We. That also supposes a veritable dialogue, free from all restraint and domination.[72] For the rest, we believe we have shown elsewhere that the Bantu-African philosophy is a fundamentally *bisoist* philosophy: in Africa, the We has supremacy over the I and the I-You. That is seen at the level of both linguistic and social structures.[73]

But what does truth bring to the *bisoist* structure? A more historic and living dimension of truth. Without being perfect, a *bisoist* truth is a truth of which the "We" of today is always the artisan: it does not wait for the unrealizable community that is infinitively additive and claims to be ideal. In this sense, the real *bisoist* community is not deprived of sufficient truth for its orientation. Aware of its limits, the real *bisoist* community glimpses truth as being the elimination of all limits.

CONCLUSION: MYTH AND TRUTH

From the preceding it results that it would be ingenuous to consider myth as an ingenuous tale, entirely on this side of a line of separation beyond which would be situated philosophy and science. Myth does not seem to be either a matrix or a nebula of

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matik und Philosophie, Frankfurt/M, Suhrkamp, 1976; *idem*, "Vorbereitende Bemerkungen zu einer Theorie der kommunikativen Kompetenz", in Habermas/Luhmann, *Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie*, Frankfurt/M, Suhrkamp, 1971, pp. 114-141; K.-O. Apel, *Transformation der Philosophie*, 2 vol., Frankfurt/M, Suhrkamp, 1973.

[72] In the meaning of Jürgen Habermas.

[73] Tshiamalenga Ntumba, "Philosopher en et à partir des langues et problématisations africaines", in *Actes du Premier Congrès International du 'Centre International des Civilisations Bantu'* (CICIBA), Libreville, 1985; *idem, Culture et Déve-*

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all the forms of later culture. Nor is it a raw material whose function would be to cause thought without being itself a thought. And it would be a new myth to define myth as a speculation intended to give a meaning to contingencies dedicated to indifference and without rapport with the absolute. At the same time, myth seems to be the most constant human discourse for transcending what is empirical and what does not seem to enclose the ultimate meaning in it. That is true for religious as well as secular myths that are present everywhere, including philosophy and science.

As discourse, myth may be analyzed to the profit of many disciplines. The history of religions, ancient ethnology, structural anthropology and semiology have greatly benefited in this respect.

As a discourse posing the question of its possible rapport with truth, the analytical approach of analytical and pragmatic-transcendental philosophy seems for the moment the best to lead to fruitful discussions on myth and truth.

If we consider as plausible the thesis according to which truth is the consensus (*bisoist*) of an adequate dialogic community, then myth constitutes, for each human generation, a permanent effort to arrive at a consensus on the subject of what seems to transcend a world that, although empirical, is none the less the object of an ineluctable original donation of meaning for man through ordinary language, the language of religion, of mythology, philosophy and the multiform experience of all the generations. Thus myth is always at work in the search for truth, so that without myth, human truth would cease to be human. It has appeared to us that this truth was to be looked for in an argumentative and *bisoist* consensus, beyond all discrimination of myth and with the risk of foundering in some myth of the myth.

Tshiamalenga Ntumba
(*Faculté de théologie catholique
de Kinshasa, Zaire*)

loppement. Le primat de la "bisoité" sur l'intersubjectivité, Colloque International sur la fonction de la culture dans la IIIe Convention de Lomé, Chantilly, 1985; idem, *Langage et Socialité. Primat de la "bisoité" sur l'intersubjectivité* (to appear).

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