



Aryan Mythology As Science And Ideology

Stefan Arvidsson

SINCE THE 1980s THERE has been a heated debate about whether or not the influential theories of George Dumézil have been affected by ideological motives. Critics of Dumézil have argued that Dumézil's ideas about the unique structure of Indo-European mythology were governed by his right-wing sympathies and his romantic view of ancient Indo-European—that is, “Aryan”—peoples. This article is meant as a background to that debate. By discussing the historical relationships between the scholarly and the political interest in Aryan religion, I hope to shed light on the intricate but important work of identifying ideological components in the history of religious studies.

Let us begin by looking into one of the most successful attempts to create a religion for “the Indo-European race”: the sounds, visions, movements, and messages of the “total art” of Richard Wagner (1813-1883).

THE MYTHOLOGICAL ALTERNATIVE

Wagner's operas, such as *Lohengrin*, *Parsifal*, and *Der Ring der Nibelungen* have been staged annually since 1876 at the Bavarian city of Bayreuth (on Wagner, see Schüler; Borchmeyer). From all over Europe members of the bourgeoisie went on pilgrimage to Bayreuth to participate in what they, as well as the organizers, thought of as a kind of mystery play or

Stefan Arvidsson is a Ph.D. student in the Department for History of Religions at the University of Lund, 223 62 Lund, Sweden.

ritual of initiation. Quite a few visitors have testified to what a profound experience the opera brought about. The ideas behind the librettos of *The Ring* and other of Wagner's later operas were a mixture of a spirit of revolt, Christian passion mysticism, the pessimism of Schopenhauer, reworked Germanic myths, and anti-Semitism. This idiosyncratic fusion is, if we are to believe the Vienna indologist Leopold von Schroeder, the fulfillment of the ancient Aryan—or with a synonym, Indo-European—mythologies that first saw the light with Homer and the Rigveda. Von Schroeder argued in *Die Vollendung des arischen Mysteriums in Bayreuth* (1911) that the myths first created in the *Urheimat* (primal home) of the Aryan tribes had been ennobled over the millennia and were finally with the works of Wagner ready to be circulated to all of mankind. At the end of the nineteenth century the mission to spread the gospel of Wagner was, in fact, undertaken by a large number of Wagner societies, groups that were often linked to student circles.

Wagner's *Weltanschauung* had the features of a mythology. Just as the classical dramas of antiquity were based on the mythology of the Greek people, Wagner dreamed of creating a new art where revitalized (and by Wagner reinterpreted) myths were to form the framework.¹ Wagner received inspiration for the mythic themes from Christian, ancient Nordic, and medieval texts, strongly flavored by his eroticized and soteriological version of the philosophy of Schopenhauer.

The strategy consciously to produce myths in order to influence contemporary society, which, of course, was Wagner's goal, has been used repeatedly throughout recent history. Romantic writers such as Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman aimed to design a particular mythology for the young American nation (Feldman and Richardson: 511ff.). Fascists like Benito Mussolini and Alfred Rosenberg used mythic themes to mobilize the people.² In the last decades of the twentieth century we are once more confronted with spiritual psychologists professing the quest for myths as a crucial factor in giving life a meaning.

¹ Later on, other artists adopted Wagner's project: Edmond Schuré (whose best-known work is the *philosophia perennis* book *Les Grands Initiés* [1889]) tried to revitalize mythology with the help of drama: at the beginning of the century he staged his own mixture of theatre and mystery play, e.g., *Sacred Drama of Eleusis*. Antonin Artaud aspired to bring theatre back to its alleged roots of esotericism (Cornell:93ff.). Rudolf Steiner, influenced by Wagner and Schuré, made mythic drama an integral part of Anthroposophy (Washington:153ff., 236).

² Behind the fascist view one finds Georges Sorel (1847-1922) who taught that the creation and dissemination of myths (e.g., that there exists an on-going class struggle) promotes political activism. On Sorel, see, e.g., Hughes:90-96, 161-182.

THE INTERPRETATION OF MYTH

Why myths? The creation, use, and distribution of myths, instead of, for example, using genres like political manifestos, philosophical tracts, scientific theses or realistic novels, received its *raison d'être* from a dichotomy that had been constructed and transmitted by romantic traditions (on the history of “myth,” see Feldman and Richardson; Frank; and Scarborough). This theory claimed that humans are either controlled by a calculating, utility-oriented rationality or else are free from rationality in order to live an authentic life in accordance with their own nature. According to the romantic thinkers the computing, instrumental mind, serving the philosophers of the Enlightenment, the scientists, and the politicians drains life of its “meaning,” “greatness,” or “spirituality.” The dictatorship of reason is only to be dissolved by myths able to stir the imagination and reveal ancient wisdom. An authentic life is only possible when myth can prevail against logos. Myth, however, was for the first time thought of as a life-affirming genre in the romantic vogue in fashion around the beginning of the nineteenth century and contradicted the everyday sense of the word (which it retains despite protests from today’s spiritual camps) as a false story.

The word “myth” (mythos) became a synonym of “lie” already in its etymological country of birth, the Greece of antiquity (see Graf; Lincoln 1996; Vernant:203-260). After the criticism of religion presented by Xenophanes and the other sophists, it became difficult to believe in the literal meaning of the stories about the choleric fights, the vicious abuses, and the lascivious pastimes of Zeus, Hera, and the other divinities. The Hellene who let himself be persuaded by the arguments of the sophists but still didn’t feel quite happy simply to dismiss the myths transmitted through authorities like Homer and Hesiod as fables and old wives’ tales was during antiquity offered two different approaches to the meaning of the myths. Myths were in reality poetic exegeses of the laws of nature and of behavior: allegoric interpretation. Or else myths were distorted historical reports in which the heroes had been attributed divinity: euhemeristic interpretation. In both cases the interpretation meant that behind the apparent childish foolishness of the myths a hidden, distorted truth could be detected. Thus myths—behind the overt stupidities and repulsiveness—did, if properly interpreted, display something rational.

In the world of Christian scholars non-biblical, “pagan” (i.e., mainly Greek and Roman) myths were used as educational and artistic aids (de Vries:18-32). With the help of the allegoric and euhemeristic modes of interpretation taken over from antiquity, the religious content of these myths could be disregarded, thus preventing the myths from forming a

truly religious, “heathen” alternative. Aside from the allegorical and euhemeristic ways of interpretation the church also developed what could be called a *hermeneutic of mission*. This mode of interpretation unveiled the pagan myths as mere plagiarisms of the Holy Writ or, even more crudely, as the work of the devil. In contrast to the earlier, classical modes of interpretation the hermeneutic of mission efficiently excludes the possibility of finding anything rational in the mythologies.

In fact, four modes of hermeneutics have continued into our own day, although in a modified form: myths are speculation about nature (the nature-allegoric school of the nineteenth century), myths are disciplinary or moral stories (the sociological approach), myths are distorted history (historicism), myths are lies (Marxism). Outside the scholarly world of late capitalism a new mode of interpretation has, however, become highly popular. At the end of this article this new kind of interpretation will be discussed, but first it seems appropriate to present an outline of how it came about that the concept of myth received such a positive connotation as to make Wagner and others anxious not to interpret or dissolve the “mythopoetic” imagination but instead to revitalize it.

THE “MYTH” OF ROMANTICISM

From the sixteenth century onwards throughout Western Europe Christianity diminished in political and cultural influence. Several series of events caused this, the most important probably being the rise of the bourgeois class, the progress of science, and the critique of Christian metaphysics, ethics, and clerical power by the philosophers of the Enlightenment. The decline of Christianity opened up new approaches to “myth” and “mythology.” The first re-evaluation of mythic thought is connected with the romantic writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. When looking for inspiration, the romantic writers could select from several different mythologies, since what had been seen as mythology *per se*, i.e., that of antiquity, found itself company with African, American, Chinese, European, and Oriental mythologies.³ The favorite mythologies of the romantics were those of the beauty- and freedom-loving Greeks, the dreamy and metaphysical myths from India, and the harsh and heroic tales

³ African, American, and Chinese mythologies became known through travelogues and reports from missionaries. “European” were those myths published by James Macpherson (1736-1796) under the name of *The Songs of Ossian* (1765) and which most people believed to be genuine, pre-Christian myths. Included in “European” were also the Eddas—first known to a wider audience through Paul Henri Mallet’s (1730-1807) *Monumens de la mythologie et de la poésie Celtes, et particulièrement des anciens Scandinaves* (1756). Thus the (artificial) separation between “Celtic” and “Nordic/Germanic” was not yet in place. “Oriental” were the myths from India, Persia, Mesopotamia, and the Levant (Feldman and Richardson:199-202).

from Ossian and the Eddas. This increase in the sheer number of available mythologies gave the—originally Greek—genre an aura of universality, and the idea arose that mythic expressions were not merely the remnants of an ancient paganism but something vital to the well-being of all peoples in all times (Feldman and Richardson:302ff.).

Mythologies are portraits of the soul of the people (*Volksgeist*) who created them, the romantics argued in a way typical for those impressed by Johann Gottfried von Herder's (1744-1803) epoch-making views on "people" (*Volk*) as an organic totality integrated by tradition and culture. Myths are, however, not only to be viewed as expressions of the soul of the people but are also the cultural cement that ties a people together, according to the romantic view. Greek mythology, for example, consisted of stories and characters that shaped all aspects of life in the different city-states, regulating the practical way to do justice as well as the artistic way to make sculptures. The myths connected the different systems of signification at the same time as they integrated the society. In the eyes of the romantic scholars the "mythopoetic" formed a unique form of art designed to integrate the individual into society and in general to give shape and stability to existence. The production of myths, therefore, was looked upon as crucial for nationalistic politics to be successful.

The earlier generation of romantics (Herder, Goethe, Schiller) looked upon the myths as the spontaneous production of common people and worked to re-elaborate given mythic themes (like Schiller in *Die Götter Griechenlands* [1788]). The younger generation (above all the Schlegel brothers), however, believed that an artistic genius has the capacity to create new myths that catch the nature of his people in a way that might react beneficially on the people. It is this romantic view that echoes more than half a century later in Wagner's efforts to compose operas capable of regenerating the German people.

The romantics imagined that the production and the reproduction of myths would make it possible to heal what destiny and the ideas of the Enlightenment had divided. Myths were supposed to enable a connection between all Germans now living in numerous small countries and to function as a foundation for a united Germany. To make matters worse from the romantic point of view, some of these small countries were, during the heyday of romanticism, occupied by enlightened and revolutionary France. It was during this period that the collection of German myths (folktales) started, with the Grimm brothers taking the lead. Furthermore, on the intellectual level the Enlightenment era had splintered: Kantian philosophy divided human striving into spheres of ethics, aesthetics, and knowledge. A mythic or religious *Weltanschauung* could perhaps end this fragmentation and once more heal humankind.

TWO RELIGIOUS STRATEGIES

The struggle for cultural hegemony between romantics and Christians, on the one hand, and the philosophers of the Enlightenment and positivists, on the other, continued throughout the nineteenth century. A number of people thought of this opposition as unfruitful, threatening, or illusory. The outcome was the emergence of different strategies to stabilize the relationship between a religious or idealistic worldview and a scientific or materialistic one.⁴ One possible expedient was to construct a religion that incorporated scientific ideals. The huge interest that spiritualism caused from 1850 onwards is partly to be explained by the fact that the main ritual, the seance, was understood as an empirical experiment to prove hypotheses about the continued life of the soul after death. Later other similar scientific religions (or whatever we would like to call them) either developed out of the spiritualism or arose independently.⁵

Partly opposed to this strategy was the strategy of “bunkering,” launched by the romantic theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) (Reardon:29-58). Before Schleiermacher, Christian apologetics, when confronted with writers hostile to religion, were supposed to present rational, debatable arguments in favor of Christian morals and doctrines. The great significance of Schleiermacher’s works lies in the fact that he redefined religion so that this kind of confrontation seemed to miss the point. By claiming that the kernel of the Christian religion was not contained in any given statement about ethics or metaphysics, but rather relied upon the individual’s religious experience, Schleiermacher immunized Christianity from rationalistic attacks. Some years before the publication of Schleiermacher’s *Über die Religion* (1799) Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) had moved God from the field of knowledge to that of ethics; now Schleiermacher—affected by the romantic evaluation of feeling and fantasy and by his own pietistic upbringing—removed God entirely from the intersubjective domain. The foundation of God exists only in the soul of the religious person. With the emotions breaking through at the moment of religious experience, the individual gets a sense of the interconnectedness and unity

⁴ Historians of ideas and sciences have for a long time been conscious of the significance of an idealistic scientific tradition during the nineteenth century (see, for example, Hanson). It was, however, the materialistic, mechanistic tradition that was regarded as a threat to the dominance of Christianity.

⁵ On spiritualism, see Melton:83-135. Similar “scientific religions” are mesmerism from the end of the eighteenth century (healing with “animal magnetism”), the French occult vogue from around the 1840s (magical powers are as real as non-mechanical powers like electricity), the Theosophical Society and the Monistic League from the end of the nineteenth century (scientific concepts are incorporated into religious creed), and the teaching of C. G. Jung and today’s New Age movement (spiritual psychology is consonant with modern science).

that is the absolute foundation (God) of fleeting time and endless space. The foundation for religion is the personal experience of the total dependence on the infinite, and without this experience humans are not whole.

A SCIENCE OF RELIGION

A third way to approach the relationship between religion and science was to study religion scientifically. The nineteenth-century spokesmen for a science of religion claimed that an objective study of the religions of the world and a comparison between them would clarify the place of religion for humankind. At stake was first of all the status of Christianity, which would *a priori* not be granted any superior status. The foremost advocate of the establishment of a science of religion was the German-British philologist Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900), whose ideas during the later part of the nineteenth century dominated all disciplines interested in understanding the place of Christianity and of religion in general in the modern, scientific age.

Müller's ideas about knowledge and religion were interwoven with his romantic view of language and today seem rather obscure (on Müller, see Trompf; Chaudhuri; Olender). He was an adherent of Schleiermacher's belief that the kernel of Christianity is the religious instinct of man, a feeling of "weakness, dependence, dissatisfaction" (Müller:181). This longing for "a friend," "a father," was in the days of the childhood of humankind expressed with the help of a language so primitive that it did not have any abstract nouns. All words that existed had concrete references, Müller argued. How could humans with only such a primitive language express religious emotions or the idea of the divine? According to Müller, primitive people could only speak of such things in parables. It so happened that these primitives chose the sky—powerful, wide, and, though visible, impossible to reach—as a symbol for the religious object. The sky and its sun became the symbols for the religious longing and with it expressions like "Heavenly Father" arose.

Not everyone was, however, able to understand that this primitive form of religion was constructed on the basis of an approximative metaphor ("God is like the sky"), but some understood the metaphors literally ("God is the sky"). Thus polytheistic religions were born, which in the days of Müller were considered to be the worship of the phenomena of nature, which primitive peoples because of their admiration of and fear for the manifestations of nature had granted agency ("Thunder is caused by the Thunder-God"). When the words that had become names became further distorted due to the changes in language, the common people

began to tell stories about these gods of nature. They often elaborated the stories by taking folk etymology as a point of departure ("The Moon-God is called so, since once upon a time."). These tales ("Thunder occurs when the Thunder-God drives across the sky, day breaks when the Sun-God has defeated Darkness," and so forth) became the foundation of the world's mythologies. Müller and his colleagues in the so-called nature-allegoric school taught that each and every myth originally consisted of stories about the different phenomena of nature. In Müller's writings the sun gradually came to be seen as the natural phenomenon that had received the most mythical elaboration. Thus, with the help of his history of languages, Müller could argue that the existence of myths and worship of nature were a natural consequence of the confusion of language and of the creation of popular etymologies.

MYTH OR REASON

According to Müller, the creation of myths was, however, particularly intense among people speaking Aryan/Indo-European languages. The reason for this, as suggested by Müller, would be that the verb roots of the Proto-Indo-European (*Ur-Arische*) language—the language from which all Aryan/Indo-European languages descend—were exceptionally difficult to understand and therefore became easy victims of the exegesis of the folk etymological kind. The word roots in Semitic languages—the other family of languages that interested Müller—were, on the other hand, much more transparent. Accordingly, Müller described what he felt to be the barrenness of myths among people speaking Semitic languages, with the result that the primal religious revelation was better preserved among the Semitic tribes.

The division between, on the one hand, the Semites and (true) religion and, on the other, Aryans and mythology, held a steady grip on the minds of the philologists and scientists of religion in the nineteenth century irrespective of whether the scholar was a Christian, a Jew, or an atheist (Olender). Many people became quite infatuated with the Aryans, their myths, and polytheism. Müller, however, was not one of them. He seems to have been too much of a positivist and sufficiently Christian not to embrace the world of myths. In Müller's view myths were still essentially just faulty knowledge, the outcome of primitive thinking and mistaken folk etymologies. Free and rational thinking is always, Müller claimed, threatened by the seductive tricks of language: "Mythology, in the highest sense, is the power exercised by language on thought" (quoted in Feldman and Richardson:482).

In Müller's historical drama the science of religion fights for the literal, the scientific, and the truly religious, and struggles against the figurative, the popular, and against mythology. Where the work of folk etymology leads astray, the academic philologist will find the way back. Because of the continuing improvement of language, i.e., the increasing capacity for abstraction, philology will be able to liberate humans from the "curse" of myths and lead them back to the primal religion, giving it its proper expression. Science thus opens up room for faith.

HISTORY OF RELIGION: AN ANTI-LIBERAL RIPOSTE

By increasing understanding of and therefore tolerance toward non-Christian religions, and by isolating the religious kernel in the religions of the world, Müller hoped to bring religion/Christianity into the modern era, where religion should have its proper place, separated from scientific thought. The purpose of a science of religion thus was not as secular as the name indicates: its mission was to clear the religious world from mythic fables and thereby safeguard true religion: "The intention of religion, wherever we meet it, is always holy. However imperfect, however childish a religion may be, it always places the human soul in the presence of God" (Müller:263). Müller believed in the existence of a universal religion that must be protected from secularization and scientism. Superstition, repulsive customs, and infantile religious ideas were "misunderstandings" that the science of religion was to explain (away). At the same time, he realized that traditional faith was becoming untenable and was willing to adapt Christianity to the modern world.⁶

In this, Müller was a typical representative of those who fought for the establishment at the universities of a discipline for objective and com-

⁶ The most prominent scholars in the first generation of historians of religion were Protestants, but the effort during the nineteenth century to make religion fit into modern society was not only a Protestant endeavor. Protestant liberal theology had spiritual cousins in Catholic modernism, liberal Judaism, and reform Hinduism, and in Islam there were groups influenced by Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani (1838-97) and Muhammed Abduh (1849-1905). Also Ahmadiyya and Bahai could be counted as modernist movements with their roots in Islam. This global, religious modernism became manifest at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago 1893, where representatives from no less than forty-one denominations gathered to explain their religions and try to understand others. Müller and other liberal scholars supported the co-operation between scientific studies and humanistic idealism. Religious orthodoxy, however, raved against the parliament ("The most unforgivable attack on Christianity the world has seen"). The initiative from Chicago was followed up some years later in Stockholm and Paris, but by then orthodoxy had become more influential and criticism was raised against what the orthodox believed would be a relativization of Christianity. More rigorous scholars, who did not want to see their discipline transformed into a tool for world reformation, also complained. See Sharpe:138ff.; Friis.

parative studies of religion—a discipline in which Christianity should be one of the religions, not *the* religion. Many of the scholars in the first generation of historians of religion—e.g., C. P. Tiele, Chantepie de la Saussaye, and Nathan Söderblom—were, like Müller, liberals in religious as well as political issues (Sharpe:119-161).

The science of religion that Müller dreamt of never materialized. Instead, the discipline called history of religions was created with the aim to study all religions excluding Christianity. This division of labor between academic subjects gave rise to two diverse sets of concepts (Christianity shares some concepts with its “Semitic” cousins, Judaism and Islam): Christian theology/pagan cosmology, Christian liturgy/pagan rituals, Christian angels/pagan spirits, Christian religion/pagan mythology. Even today, the concepts of myth and mythology—the focus of this article—are seldom used when it comes to Christian or “Semitic” (Abrahamic) stories: the man who was swallowed by a giant fish or the carpenter’s son who could walk on water are not “myths”.⁷ The collections of myths that today are sold in large editions follow the same model, as do scientific surveys of the world’s mythologies.⁸

ARYAN MYTH, SEMITIC PIETY

In the nineteenth century outside the clerical world scientists, journalists, artists, and freethinkers began to turn away from Semitic piety in favor of Aryan, mythopoetic speculation (Olender; Poliakov). The two main trendsetters were Joseph-Arthur Comte de Gobineau (1816-1883) and Ernest Renan (1823-1892). Both were, like Müller, among the most influential European thinkers of the late nineteenth century. Both envisaged history as a drama where the Semites and the Aryans played the leading parts in the struggle over the future. Gobineau’s best-known work is *Essai sur l’Inégalité des Races Humaines* (1853/1855), in which he argued that race is the only factor that shapes people and cultures; everything

⁷ The orientalist Ignaz Goldziher (1850-1921) tried in *Der Mythos bei den Hebräern und seine geschichtliche Entwicklung: Untersuchungen zur Mythologie und Religionswissenschaft* (1876) to raise the status of Semitic religion by showing that the Hebrew tribes also had created myths. His effort, however, met with little enthusiasm; see Olender:115-135.

⁸ For example, it is possible to read in the survey *Mythologies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), two volumes compiled by Yves Bonnefoy, about the world’s mythologies (including heathen, European myths that survived the Christian conversion), but the Semitic children of Abraham are not represented: Judaism and Islam are totally absent, and Christianity is only present as a creator of different modes of interpretation of myths. Jonathan Z. Smith has drawn attention to the contemporary use of the expression “the Christ of faith” instead of “the mythical Christ” (1990:87).

else—geography, tradition, or means of production—is unimportant (Poliakov:215-254; Feldman and Richardson:463ff.). Renan was the foremost authority of his time on Hebrew and other Semitic languages—quite a paradox in the light of his celebration of the Aryans—and became internationally famous or notorious because of his historical-critical book on the life of Jesus (*La vie de Jésus*, 1863) (Olender; Reardon). In this and other works Renan elaborated the opposition between Aryan and Semitic religion. Renan, contrary to Gobineau, thought of the concepts Semitic and Aryan as two different mentalities or ways of life. He even claimed that the racial factor is irrelevant in modern Europe: a Parisian Jew is probably more Aryan than a Bengali farmer.

Everything about the Semitics is *mono*, Renan wrote. They have only one sign (the consonant), one language (with some dialects), and only one God. The only thing the Semites have in multiples is wives. The reason for this Semitic lack of creativity is the desert: “The desert is monotheistic, sublime in its immense uniformity” (quoted in Olender:55). In the desert neither time nor space leaves any traces, and the emptiness hinders creativity and suppresses the interest toward the surrounding world. The only thing the Semites are good at is a trait not acquired: their “instinct for religion,” i.e., the revealed ethics of monotheism.

The Aryans, on the contrary, multiply everything except their wives. They have both consonants and vowels, a great number of distinct languages, and innumerable divinities. The Aryan languages are superior to the Semitic ones: with them one can play, idealize, and create mythologies. The great variety of stories about gods, “echoes from nature,” stimulates fantasy and grants freedom of thought. The myths, in which the gods represent different phenomena of nature, transport the faculty of reason to exciting metaphysical heights and, finally, to science which liberates humans from the chains of nature.⁹

The opposition between these two forms of religion, as constructed by Müller, Renan, and other philologists (Adelbert Kuhn, Adolphe Pictet, Rudolph Friedrich Grau, Ignaz Goldziher, etc.), might be outlined in the following fashion:

⁹ One might wonder about those Semitic people who usually are said to have been polytheists: Babylonians, Assyrians, and Caananites. This Semitic polytheism, Renan explained, is not like the Aryan one. The Aryan (genuine) polytheism was an answer to the riddles of nature, the Semitic one only the outcome of splitting—different traits of the only God become separate gods. But real polytheism, in which the gods are altogether different persons, could not arise among Semitic tribes, because they lack the capacity to idealize and to conceptualize multiplicity (Olender:67).

Aryan Religion

Mythology
 Polytheism
 Myths
 Intellect, Nature
 Cosmology
 Proto-Science
 Hereditary transmission
 Nordic

Semitic Religion

Religion
 Monotheism
 Emotional texts
 Moral
 History
 Revelation
 Prophets
 Mediterranean

INDO-GERMANS VERSUS JEWS

In a newly united Germany the theologian and orientalist Paul de Lagarde (1827-1891) called for the creation of a national religion that could constitute the foundation of the German people in their struggle against the French, the English, and the Jews (Poliakov: 307ff.; Mosse:33-39). The new German/Germanic religion was to be based on the Gospel but freed from “Jewish-Pauline” concepts of sin and renunciation. Lagarde had set his mind on wrecking Judaism and advocated deportation of the Jews to Madagascar. Lagarde, with his intense dislike of everything Jewish, stood on the threshold of a new phase in the discussion of Aryans, myths, and Semites—a sign of the times was that the word “anti-Semitism” became popular from around 1879 (von See:300). In Germany this ideological change meant that the nationalistic opposition figure “Germans versus Rome” (i.e., Catholicism, Romance-speaking people, French liberalism and culture) was replaced by “Indo-Germans versus Jews,” where “Indo-Germans” was the German version of Indo-Europeans, Aryans.¹⁰

Lagarde’s dream of a *Judenrein* Christianity soon found its place in the *Völkisch* movement,¹¹ side by side with romantic views of the peasantry;

¹⁰ Besides the work of Gobineau and Lagarde, Houston St. Chamberlain’s *Die Grundlagen des 19. Jahrhunderts* (1899-1901) was important for the coming into being of this new friend-enemy-figure. For the historiography of the history of religions it is interesting to notice that in his depreciation of the Jews and their religion, Chamberlain used William Robertson Smith’s well-known book *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (1889). After a journey to North Africa Robertson Smith (1846-1894) argued from his observations of nomadic Arabs that he could conclude that the most important ritual among Semitic tribes in the days of the Bible was the sacrifice and consumption of the tribe’s totemic animal. According to Robertson Smith, this ritual had much more religious significance for the Semitic tribes than any religious story or doctrine. The idea that Semitic religion was focused on ritual was welcomed by Chamberlain who despised Catholicism; thus, it looked like it would be possible to construct the lines Semitic-ritual-Catholicism and Aryan-myth-Protestantism. Chamberlain was, moreover, Wagner’s son-in-law and one of persons who, besides Wagner’s wife Cosima and his son Siegfried (named after the hero of “the Ring”), conducted the Bayreuth-cult after Wagner’s death (Poliakov:315ff.).

¹¹ “*Völkisch*” was a word that in 1875 was proposed by nationalist language purists as a substitute for the Latin-Romanic “national.” The concept is said to have such a special content or connota-

disdain for democracy, the market economy, and socialism; pseudo-biological naturalization of gender characteristics; scepticism toward materialistic science; and enthusiasm for everything "Germanic." The Jew came to represent everything that at the time was wrong: the destruction by capitalism of everything valuable, the quibblings and nonsense of intellectualism, the cowardliness and emasculation of the bourgeoisie, the anonymity and rootlessness of the metropolis (von See:283-318).

During the first decades of the nineteenth century the contempt of educated people for Jews was abetted by liberal ideas, since Judaism seemed antiquated, intolerant, and dogmatic. To be a Jew was not only to be committed to a religion that denied the fulfillment of the Law in the love and sacrifice of Lord Jesus but also to be an adherent of an authoritarian and conservative theology. However, with the change of the cultural climate in Germany around the time of its unification, when nationalism was turned into an anti-liberal, reactionary mass movement, racists such as Gobineau became popular, and the Jews were looked upon as a biologically defined group threatening the Aryan/Indo-European race. The battle for world domination, which from a socio-biological point of view was equivalent to the question of survival, stood between these two races. Soon the works of Müller and Renan about Aryan and Semitic religion were read from a racist perspective, despite the fact that both scholars wrote critically about the transformation of what were originally linguistic concepts into biological ones.

REAL ARYANS CELEBRATE LIFE

Lagarde's appeal for the creation of a national religion spread epidemically (to use the historian Poliakov's expression) from the end of the nineteenth century until the 1930s. At the turn of the century this quest for a new religion was integrated with experiments in new ways of life (*Lebensreform*) that were then in progress, such as vegetarianism, free sex, self-sufficient farming, and pagan festivals (on "*Lebensreform*," see Green; Szeemann). In Germany the influential publisher Eugen Diederichs (1867-1930) published the magazine *Die Tat* together with books written or inspired by Tolstoy and Nietzsche, both of whom advocated a radical change in the bourgeois way of life (Mosse:52-63). Tolstoy, Nietzsche, and their "life philosophical" ideas were to complement and change the dichotomies of Müller and Renan.

tion that it seldom is translated. On studies about this *Völkische* tradition of relevance for historian of religions, see the references in von Schnurbein:81n.1.

In the very influential works of Nietzsche from the 1880s the Judeo-Christian tradition was depicted as world-rejecting and contrary to the nature of man—revenge and bad consciousness were said to be its cardinal virtues.¹² In opposition to the crucified God Jesus Nietzsche raised the life-affirming ecstasy of the Greek God of wine Dionysos. Nietzsche's attack on Christianity was mainly directed at the belief in transcendence: the idea of the existence of an otherworldly realm is the product of a people unfit for life, who in that way reject an earthly life that in comparison to the heavenly ideal loses its power of enchantment. But when the transcendent God, thanks to D. F. Strauss, Feuerbach, and Nietzsche, is dead, humans must occupy God's throne and decide for themselves what is valuable. The possibilities of earthly life are affirmed by the *Übermensch* who, intoxicated by life, dances above pain and guilt. The traditional view of history as a linear process leading to a goal (Judgment Day, a free or classless society) was criticized on the same grounds (it depreciates what is prevailing). Reactionary and anti-Christian thinkers adopted Nietzsche's prophecies of the *Übermensch* as well an alternative view of time, viz., the cycle (in Nietzsche's philosophy, the Eternal Return).¹³ At the time of their writing, the reactionary and anti-Christian thinkers considered the cycle to be at its lowest point (with the progress of secularism, egalitarianism, industrialism, and so forth) and set their faith on a rebirth (not a development/evolution) of the people.

For those who followed Nietzschean philosophy the opposition between Aryan/Indo-European and Semitic religions was no longer a matter of the opposition between bold thought and religious feeling but a matter of affirming authentic life against resentment. The reflective and specu-

¹² I am aware of the fact that for three decades or more one is looked upon as a philosophical Neanderthal if he/she, in the footsteps of the Nazis and George Lukács, regards Nietzsche as some kind of proto-fascist. But even if it is true that this view is much cruder a simplification than what a Walter Kaufmann or a Gilles Deleuze thinks of Nietzsche, it is still a fact that a *Völkisch* interpretation of Nietzsche was common around the turn of the century—despite Nietzsche's own repudiation of anti-Semitism and nationalism during his last sound years—and it is this interpretation more than Nietzsche's philosophy on which I focus here. All this stated as a kind of defense, since the historians of ideas and science Sten Dahlstedt and Sven-Eric Liedman, who have kindly read a draft of my article, have commented on faults in my description of Nietzsche's thought. On the impact of Nietzsche's philosophy in Germany, see Aschheim.

¹³ Today the cyclic view of time as an alternative to Jewish/Christian/liberal belief in the future can be found among postmodernist philosophers (from Nietzsche via Heidegger) as well as among neo-pagans (from Eliade). The predilection for the cycle and the immanent led an earlier neo-pagan generation to try to form a nature-religion with the sun as the major object of worship (see Noll:75-108). Ernst Bunsen was presumably the first person in modern times to promote the establishment of a sun cult; in 1870 Bunsen tried to construct a sun cult based on the Bible (where Adam was an Aryan and the snake a Semite (Bernal:348f.)). Ernst Bunsen was the grandson of the orientalist Christian von Bunsen, a close friend of Friedrich Max Müller who behind the pagan myths had detected stories about the sun's journey from morning to evening to morning.

lative reason that Renan conceived of as the vehicle that had brought civilization and science to the Aryans was re-evaluated in the life-philosophical ideology and found to be mere intellectualism—a threat to the sound, heroic way of life. Rational thinking had changed sides, and had become associated with Jewish and bourgeois inauthenticity and anxiety (see for example Lukács:184-196).¹⁴

The *Völkische*, life-philosophical, and later fascist version of Aryan and Semitic religion might be schematized like this:

<u>Aryan</u>	<u>Semitic</u>
Life-affirming	Life-rejecting
Worldly	Escapist, Ascetic
Heroic	Priestly/Clerical
Ritual, Festival	Scriptural
Myth, Cycle	History, Line
Rebirth	Salvation
The Evergreen Tree	The Cross of Suffering

JESUS THE ARYAN

For people like Lagarde who strove to free the German religious heritage from everything Semitic, the great problem, of course, was Jesus and Christianity. After all, wasn't Jesus Jewish? And what is Christianity but a Jewish cult? Does a religious movement fit for the German people and the Aryan race therefore have to reject Christianity entirely? One solution to this dilemma was the attempt to rid Christianity of its Jewish-Semitic roots: "Fundamentally there was nothing Jewish about Jesus," wrote Renan, and argued that Jesus really had a very un-Jewish personality (Olender:68-79). Purportedly, Jesus never felt at ease in the deserts of Judea, "the saddest country in the world"; Galilee, in the north, with its green oases, was where Jesus felt at home ("Jesus loved flowers") (quoted in Olender:72). In Galilee there was happiness and a tolerant atmosphere; in Judea there were neither. Thus, Jesus was no real Semite, and despite the fact that Christianity had a Jewish-Semitic origin, it was only when it was expressed in Aryan languages (i.e., Greek and Latin) that Christianity became a religion of universal significance.

According to Renan, the Semites had, however, been given one "sublime mission": to watch over monotheism—a mission they had carried

¹⁴ The same combination of anti-Semitism and anti-intellectualism was also found in France. It is significant that when the anti-Dreyfusard writer Maurice Barrès coined the totally pejorative word "intellectual," he was above all thinking of the the great Jewish believer in progress Émile Durkheim.

out throughout history with intolerance. Unfortunately, however, they were unable to develop their religion and to successfully fight polytheism. Therefore the “sublime mission” had to be taken over by Aryan tribes who could carry on the torch of monotheism, which they did by creating Christianity. “Originally Jewish to the core, Christianity over time rid itself of nearly everything it took from the race, so that those who consider Christianity to be the Aryan religion par excellence are in many respects correct” (quoted in Olender:70). The true continuation of Semitic Judaism was, according to Renan and a large number of other scholars, not to be found in Christianity but in Islam.

Lagarde and other writers of the same persuasion reiterated Renan’s ideas: “the Aryan Jesus”—a book published in 1931 written by Hans Hauptmann was entitled *Jesus der Arier*—was crucified by “Semitic Jews”; Paul re-Semitized the gospel of Jesus; Christianity was unimportant until it was conceptualized in Indo-European languages. A radical wing among the pro-Nazi *Deutsche Christen*, who ruled the Evangelical churches during the Third Reich, demanded that the Aryan-paragraph (prohibition of Jews in state service) should be applied in the churches and wanted to abolish the Old Testament because it was Jewish (Gunnarson:115). Other people, searching for a religion fit for the Germans, however, felt that the attempts to purge Jesus and Christianity of Semitic elements were useless and instead looked for pagan alternatives (Schnurbein:81-124; Jones and Pennick:196-220).

MYTH AND AUTHENTICITY

The identification and isolation of Aryan and Semitic elements in the sphere of religion continued, among other places, in Vienna where Leopold von Schroeder, the Wagnerite, assembled disciples who were to identify “racially alien” elements in the Habsburg-German culture (Bockhorn).¹⁵ To be banished were such stories, customs, and ideas that could not be traced back to the pre-Christian *Urheimat* of the Aryans. With the help of data about the Aryan/Indo-European mythology Schroeder and his disciples were to identify “the alien” elements with which the Church

¹⁵ Another school that should be mentioned in this context is the so called *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, consolidated in the 1890s (Sharpe:150; references in Rudolph). Influenced by the work of Renan concerning the religious context in which Christianity was born, Lagarde’s nationalism, and the liberal theology of Ritschl, the members of this school tried for the first time with help from historical-critical methods to investigate the relationship between Semitic and Aryan religions in the biblical Near East. One can observe how anti-Semitic ideology governed the entire project: all forms of “superstition” in the Gospels are Jewish survivals; Christianity is essentially non-Jewish; and Christianity evolved from an anti-rabbinical and Hellenistic tradition.

or State had defiled Aryan-German tradition. In their search for “the genuine (own) tradition” the Viennese mythologists employed the philological study of Indo-European texts as well as the folkloristic method developed by the Grimm brothers and Wilhelm Mannhardt (1831-1880): tales, customs, and art from the German-speaking peasantry were documented, and, since the peasant way of life was supposed to be untouched by the changes of the last millennia, the collected material gave evidence of ancient Aryan culture.

The disciples of Schroeder (Karl von Spiess, Wolfgang Schultz, Matthes Ziegler) were in the 1930s enlisted in the National Socialist apparatus of indoctrination directed by Alfred Rosenberg (1893-1946). In Rosenberg’s bureau they continued Schroeder’s project of purifying German culture and education. Rosenberg himself was one of the foremost among reactionary thinkers who—with *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhundert* (1930)—made the interwar period one of the peaks in the craze for everything mythic (cf. Zinser).

Characteristic of these times was the use of the notion of myth to designate something unchangeable in the individual, in the people, or in humankind, something neither history nor culture could reshape completely and, to be sure, should not try to change. “Myth not only reaches back to prehistorical times, but to the deepest foundations of the human soul,” wrote the Nazi philosopher Alfred Bäumler (quoted in Lukács:192). It is not necessarily the psychology of C. G. Jung (see below) that echoes in this quotation, the affinity between Jung and Bäumler could instead be explained by the fact that they both took part in similar reactionary societies, aiming to find something so solid that it could not melt into air and something so holy that it could not be profaned. Beyond the historical course of events—industrialization, changing gender roles, the dissolution of the family, and so forth—there had to be something determinate, something out of reach of modern human beings who from the throne of God constantly re-evaluate all values. This something, this thing-in-itself, was often some romantic idea about the soul of the people, the land, or the blood. Myth was supposedly the genre that could express this ruling principle, the guarantee that the world could be understandable and have order and meaning. Without myths people were said to be deprived of their roots, at risk of becoming disillusioned and thereby easy targets for foreign influences. The leading German race-theoretician H. F. K. Günther wrote: “The spirit of the ages has deprived present-day people of all sense of being destined, born into a mighty chain of generations, past and coming, of national characteristics and of racial factors conditioning these national characteristics” (quoted in Madsen:94). The rebirth of the myths, the regeneration of the people’s sense of community (nationalism), would

change this, Rosenberg declared: "It is the mission of our century: to create a new man out of a new myth of life" (quoted in Madsen: 94).

The phenomenologist of religion Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) devoted his scientific achievements to the construction of a universal conflict between myth, on the one hand, and historicism and the linear view of time, on the other (on Eliade, see Ricketts; Cave; Rennie).¹⁶ A historicist approach sees every religious phenomenon (and all other concrete phenomena) as determined by historical, social, and cultural factors. Such an approach thereby threatens to relativize all religious or spiritual values. The comparative, ahistorical method of Eliade (the phenomenology of religion) is an attempt to do historical research without falling into the relativizing trap of historicism. The eternal, unchangeable in humans' encounter with the world becomes the object for the scientist/phenomenologist of religion. The phenomenology of religion was, like Müller's science of religion, a method of protecting religion from the influence of modernity. The denial of the mythic dimension by the western rationalist has, according to Eliade, struck people with feelings of meaninglessness, since they can no longer situate their lives in mythic stories about the origin, structure, and future of the world.

Obviously these realities are sacred realities, for it is the *sacred* that is pre-eminently the *real*. Whatever belongs to the sphere of the profane does not participate in being, for the profane was not ontologically established by myth, has no perfect model. As we shall soon see, agricultural work is a ritual revealed by the gods or the culture heroes. This is why it constitutes an act that is at once *real* and *significant*. Let us think, by comparison, of a agricultural work in a desacralized society. Here, it become a profane act, justified by the economic profit that it brings. The ground is tilled to be exploited; the end pursued is profit and food. Emptied of religious symbolism, agricultural work becomes at once opaque and exhausting; it reveals no meaning, it makes possible no opening toward the universal, toward the world of spirit. (Eliade 1959:95-96)

In his eagerness to depreciate modern society Eliade ends up in this kind of armchair romanticism, with the rather strange conclusion that

¹⁶ If anybody takes offense at the transition from fascist philosophers to "the champion of a New Humanism" (that's Eliade according to Cave), the reader should bear in mind that Eliade himself never seemed to have had any difficulty in associating with fascists: in his youth in Romania Eliade was sympathetic toward the fascist movement, the Iron Guard; between 1959 and 1979 he edited *Antaios: Zeitschrift für eine Freie Welt* together with the fascist Ernst Jünger (the chief ideologist of the Italian fascists, Julius Evola, was a diligent collaborator); in the 1970s he took part in a *Festschrift* to the germanist Otto Höfler, a scholar, who like Evola, spent World War II teaching SS soldiers about heroic, Aryan virtues. Research about Eliade's connections with Evola and Jünger is now carried out by Cristiano Grotanelli and Steven Wasserstrom. Until their results are published one might look at Rennie's summary of the on-going debate about Eliade (143-177).

secularized people do not really have any existence.¹⁷ The theoretical inspiration to such a daring conclusion was the German theologian Rudolf Otto (1869-1937), who in the interwar period brought the ideas of Schleiermacher up to date. By means of the militant pietism that saturates Otto's best-seller *Das Heilige* (1917) all possibilities to work out a dialogue between religious and non-religious individuals are cut off—those who have not had any religious experience are exhorted to put the book away—and “the Sacred” becomes the most basic category in the discourse about religion, possible to describe but impossible to explain.

In the phenomenology of religion (comparative studies), a discipline in which Eliade is the best-known name, religion and the Sacred have been claimed to be “irreducible,” which, in fact, implies that all attempts at explanation—be they psychological, sociological, or historical—defile religion and therefore must be rejected. Among these scholars the pietism of Schleiermacher serves as a platform from which they can lecture about the inevitable meaninglessness of the modern way of life—inevitable since it is secularized (stripped of myths and holiness). The same theory of religion that the liberal scholars of the nineteenth century had employed in order to increase tolerance towards non-Christian religions and to give Christianity a place in a modern world ruled by science is thus a generation later used by scholars with strong anti-modernist views: people such as Gerardus van der Leeuw, Walter Otto, and Jan der Vries (cf. Kippenberg and Luchesi; Canick). The purpose of the comparative study of religions was, according to this group of scholars, to inculcate the unique and indispensable quality of religious experience. Since every explanation of religious experience was thought of as distorting the experience, the only solution for the re-enchanters was to present adequate descriptions and classifications of the different elements in the world's religions: “sacred stones,” “sacred places,” “rites of regeneration,” etc. Arguably, most books read today by the average western reader about non-Christian religions belong to this tradition.¹⁸

¹⁷ It is perhaps significant for Eliade's view of religion that he could not imagine people to be engaged in anything unless it was a religious issue. Therefore, he thought that communists must be unconsciously religious, and nudists and advocates of free sex he labelled followers of “hybrid forms of black magic and sheer travesty of religion” (1959:206). His attitude toward the spiritual awakening of the 1960s and 70s was ambivalent. The re-enchanting new cults were considered good insofar as they actualized mythic structures, but since they were optimistic Eliade also found them repulsive. In his hostility towards optimism, Eliade was a follower of the “traditionalist” and Sufi René Guénon (Eliade 1976:47-68).

¹⁸ Around Eliade gathered a group of scholars who shared his interest in a re-enchantment of the world. The group included esteemed scholars such as Gershom Scholem (Jewish mysticism), Raffaele Pettazzoni (History of Religion), Giuseppe Tucci (Buddhism), Paul Tillich (Christianity), Jean Daniélou (Christianity). Among the more peripheral friends of Eliade were people such as Julius

MYTH AND WISDOM

The interwar period's understanding of myths as stories expressing something independent of the doings of men and of the transformations of nature met Freud's psychoanalysis in the theories of Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) (Noll). The outcome was the theory of the collective unconscious and its instruments, the archetypes. In each and every individual there exists, according to Jung, a mental storeroom handed down through the human species, the race and the tribe. If the individual loses contact with these strata, e.g., when totally identifying herself/himself with his/her intellect, psychic disorder occurs. The *Völkische* psychoanalysis of Jung operates with a division between the rational and the mythic, archetypal sphere. Spiritual maturity occurs when reason subordinates itself to the call of the archetypes. With the concept of archetype Jung, influenced by the *Völkische* movement's flirtation with the heritage of the ancient Teutons, transported the old pagan deities into modern psychology. The life-philosopher's attack on the idea of transcendence effected the resurrection of the ancient gods on earth, or, more exactly, in each and every individual mind. Furthermore, Jung emphasized the importance for every individual to connect with the gods/archetypes of his or her own people. Similar ideas were at the same time being formulated among neo-pagan groups, active in Europe since the late nineteenth century: to be able to bear living in the modern, disenchanting world one has to contact—through heathen rites, "Germanic yoga," or the like—the ancient Aryan divinities or one's own Teutonic ancestors.¹⁹

Jung is the main source behind the contemporary tradition of mythical hermeneutics where myths are thought of as stories to aid people in their process of spiritual healing and self-discovery. Jung, like the American humanistic psychologists (William James, Gordon W. Allport, Abraham Maslow, and others), claimed that the function of religion was not to work as social discipline or to secure a good life after death but rather to be a means for human beings to reach self-reliance and self-fulfilment. Even though the connections to the romantic view of myths are evident, this

Evola (Fascism, Hinduism), Ernst Jünger (Fascism), Nae Ionescu (Philosophy). Together with the ideas of two other loosely formed schools, the Eliadean circle of friends have thoroughly shaped our comprehension of religion as something interior, meaning-giving, and essentially unexplainable. The other circles are a school of orientalists—René Guenon, Frithjof Schuon, Henry Corbin, Louis Massignon (all wrote mainly about Islam, with special emphasis on Sufism and Shiia), and Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (Indian religion)—and a third circle with different scholars who used to assemble at C. G. Jung's Eranos meetings in Ascona, Switzerland, or who followed in their footsteps: Heinrich Zimmer (Indian religion), Károly Kerényi (Greek religion), D. T. Suzuki (Zen Buddhism), Erich Neumann and Joseph Campbell (both "spiritual" psychologists).

¹⁹ The best-known "ariosophic" mysticism was developed by Guido von List (1848-1919) and his fraternity of Armanen (see Schnurbein:87ff.; Noll:passim).

kind of hermeneutic has become a distinct tradition due to the impulses from psychology and the psychology of religion; it is more “personally utopian.” In the same fashion spiritual psychologists such as Joseph Campbell, Rollo May, and Robert Bly have since the 1960s proclaimed that myths are stories by which wisdom may be attained and that myths help us to reach the experience of living fully. Today, this view of myths—I would like to propose to call it *the biosophical interpretation*—has become completely dominant in the public opinion about what myths are (and makes it possible to publish books entitled *The Best Myths of the World*). It is, furthermore, the unquestioned hermeneutic of the contemporary spiritual and neo-pagan movement (on the roots of the New Age in humanistic psychology, see Alexander).

Müller’s and Renan’s ideas about myths as proto-scientific speculations have today been displaced by the life-philosophical and humanistic psychological focus on “life.” Nor are the Aryan/Indo-European peoples any longer the sole masters of mythical tales. Instead, at night, in each and every person an archetypal myth can be born.

THE REBIRTH OF THE ARYAN MYTHOLOGY

While psychologists and phenomenologists of religion once again altered the meaning of the concept of myth, other twentieth-century scholars—mainly anthropologists and sociologists—have followed the sophists of antiquity and interpreted myths as allegorical renderings of societal ethos determined by historical and social circumstances. Their works and views have, however, had little if any impact outside academia. The same is true for the structuralist way of explaining myths.²⁰ The work of the historian of religion Georges Dumézil (1898-1986) on Aryan/Indo-European mythology, on the other hand, seems to have had some impact outside scholarly circles.²¹

²⁰ When it comes to modern studies of myth, the reader probably thinks of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-) and his structural analysis. One reason I do not include Lévi-Strauss’s theories is that he does not link myths especially to Indo-Europeans but instead argues for the universal existence of mythic structures. The main reason, however, is the lack of data concerning this Jewish scholar’s attitudes towards Aryan/Indo-European studies.

²¹ In the so called New Right in France and Germany, Dumézil’s theories about Indo-European ideology are being used as a conceptual antidote to Judeo-Christian tradition and the American way of life (see Wegierski). Also Germanic neo-paganism has listened to Dumézil (see, for example, the most influential contemporary Germanic neo-pagan writer, Edred Thorsson (27ff.). Dumézil’s influence has mostly been spread by other scholars’ work on Norse religion (E.O.G Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North*, [New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964] and several of H. R. Ellis Davidson’s works), but his own books have also been discussed; see Kaplan (233) for references to a debate about Dumézil in the neo-pagan magazine *Mountain Thunder*.

When the influence of Müller and the school of nature-allegorical interpretation declined at the turn of the century, due to protracted and intense criticism from the anthropological camp, the Aryans lost their status as prime exponents of mythopoetic creativity; Africans or Chinese were now supposed to have an equal share of this ability. The Semitic/Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—still are given no share of it, as we saw above. Dumézil, however, had since the 1930s argued that the mythology of the Aryan/Indo-European peoples is altogether unique. In the Vedas, in the Eddas, in Roman texts, and in other texts written in Indo-European languages, Dumézil detected a special “tripartite ideology” that he claimed, due to the similarity between the structure occurring in different sources, had been transmitted from a primordial proto-Indo-European people and thus could properly be called Indo-European. The three different “functions” in the tripartite structure appeared, according to Dumézil, in the social organization as well as in the pantheon of the Indo-Europeans. In the Vedas, for example, Dumézil found traces of the three positions: farmers and artisans (*vaiśyas*), warriors (*kṣatriyas*), and priests (*brāhmaṇās*) and corresponding divinities: the Gods of production (*Nāsatyas*), the God of War (*Indra*) and the Gods of Sovereignty (*Mitra-Varuṇa*).

In his early works Dumézil used a sociological perspective in which the pantheon was conceived as a reflection of the social order. It was the drift away from Müller’s nature-allegorical view to this perspective that could be called social-allegorical, which made it possible to restore the tarnished Aryan mythology and to make it appear more relevant to contemporary scholarly concerns. The sociological approach, however, threatens the entire project: if mythology is determined by social organization, why then should linguistic criteria determine the field of study, i.e., why select myths recorded in Indo-European languages rather than myths grounded in similar socio-political systems? Therefore, Dumézil in his later works chose to place the Indo-European “essence” in a Platonic world of ideas, since he claimed that an Indo-European “ideology” had existed that determined both the pantheon *and* the social organization (see Littleton:3-5; Pinotti).²² What it is exactly that should have supported the existence of this “ideology” so firmly that it was able to continue its existence over centuries of geographical, cultural, and economical change was never established. Was it the languages, the race, or something else?

A similar ontological ambiguity is seen in the efforts of the historians of the French *Annales* school who during the interwar period tried to

²² According to the Danish historians of religion Hans Jørgen Lundager Jensen and Jens Peter Schødt (45, 195) the Indo-European ideology has existed from 1380 B.C.E. into the nineteenth century, that is, it has survived for more than 3000 years!

uncover “mentalities” more or less untouched by time. In contrast with most of these sociologically oriented historians, Dumézil thought of himself as *un homme de la droite*. It has for good reasons been suggested that the “tripartite ideology” of the Aryans/Indo-Europeans owes its origin as much to the politics of fascist Italy, which Dumézil admired, as to the Vedas or the Eddas.²³ In his scholarly work Dumézil seems to have tried to ground in nature—with the help of his theory about the Indo-Europeans’ unique order of producers, warriors, and sovereigns—the fascist dream about an integrated, hierarchical society consisting of workers, soldiers, and leaders. Even the division of “the sovereign function” into two distinct parts—the power of magic and the power of legislation—which, according to Dumézil is a typical Indo-European trait, might, if we are to believe the historian of religions Bruce Lincoln, be nothing but a reflection of Dumézil’s enthusiasm for Mussolini’s decision not to crush the magical power flowing from the Vatican but instead to reach an agreement about the distribution of power (the Lateran treaty) (Lincoln 1997).

POSTSCRIPT

As we have seen, the scientific study of Indo-European mythology has been permeated with different ideologies (Christian liberalism, romanticism, fascism, and so forth). Today it is disputed whether or not the

²³ For criticism of Dumézil’s scholarly work, see Momigliano; Ginzburg; Lincoln 1986 (reprinted in Lincoln 1991, which also contains a couple of other texts critical of Dumézil’s work: 244-268); Lincoln 1997; and Grotanelli. The book of Lundager Jensen and Schødt (1994), on the contrary, continues in the hagiographic tradition of Littleton (1982). Lundager Jensen’s and Schødt’s note (22:10) about the discussion whether Dumézil’s work was influenced by fascist ideas is annoying: the discussion is whisked away with “in France monarchists are considered to be ‘right-wingers,’” and Jensen and Schødt find that “the whole discussion is utterly superfluous.” On the other hand, faultless is their observation that a good point of departure for a discussion about Dumézil’s views and theories is Didier Eribon’s interview with Dumézil. Here one can read (Eribon:119-144) how Dumézil paid homage to Mussolini’s fascist Italy under the pseudonym Georges Marcenay (cf. Lincoln 1997). In defense of Dumézil’s work, see also Dumézil 1985a; 1985b; Littleton et al.; Polomé and Puhvel in Polomé 1996. The heat of the debate might be illustrated by some quotations from Polomé: “Unfortunately, the last years of Dumézil’s life were marred by the paralysis of his wife and by an unfair and vicious set of attacks by Marxist historians” like “the Italian essayist” (!) Arnaldo Momigliano and Bruce Lincoln. “In a letter to the editor [=Polomé], published in December 1986 [that is, in Littleton et al. 1986] Jaan Puhvel and three other American Scholars stressed the defamatory bias of Lincoln’s scurrilous attack, and instead of leaving the matter at that, as Dumézil’s family privately did, Lincoln persisted, without any respect for a deceased 89 year old recognized scholar, with his venomous condemnations by implication” (8-10). And Puhvel, one of America’s leading scholar in Indo-European studies, writes about “the sneak attacks [. . .] from some writers who neither knew nor read the man (Dumézil). It is part of a larger trend, the kind that led Brendan Gill and others to the posthumous blackening of Joseph Campbell, and induced Lincoln to turn on his own teacher, Mircea Eliade. Deviated [*sic*] criticism has been a blight through ages, but when it rides a flippant and corrupt *Zeitgeist* it takes on especial virulence” (147f.). The more refined defenses of Dumézil have tried to demonstrate that he could not have been some kind of right-wing extremist because he had friends who were Jews (Sylvain Lévi, Marcel Mauss) and socialists (Marcel Granet).

downfall of the Third Reich brought about a sobering among scholars working with "Aryan" religions; the discussion of Dumézil's Indo-European mythology, his political sympathies, and their impact on his scholarly works, which historians of religion have lauded as some of the best research the discipline has produced, is still not closed. Perhaps it will lead to the *ragnarök* (twilight of the Gods) of the concept of Aryan/Indo-European mythology.

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