

LECTURE 4.

MYTHS, ANCIENT AND MODERN*

Let me deal, first of all, with the fact that archaic myths form part of a wide system of archaic beliefs which bristles with absurdities. In his classic study of *Les Conditions Mentales dans les Sociétés Inférieures* (1910) Levy-Bruhl has argued that the representation of the world accepted by primitive peoples differs basically from the views which science has taught to us modern men. He thinks that the cruel shock of initiation ceremonies is bound to suffuse the teaching transmitted to the adolescent by emotions which obscure his mind. The very opposite of this view has been put forward recently by Levy-Strauss in *La Pensée Sauvage*, holding that the mechanism of reasoning is intrinsic to the physical structure of matter and hence must be recognised to be the same both in the minds of primitive people and those of modern men. This is closer in principle to the position of the earlier English anthropologists, particularly Tyler, Frazer and Andrew Lang whose views Levy-Bruhl sharply rejected.

My own view is that the mechanical process of thought deemed to be universal by Levy-Strauss is a crude approximation to the process of acquiring knowledge, which is based ultimately, and often also predominantly on tacit integrations that have no machine-like equivalent. And I think Levy-Bruhl was right in demonstrating that the primitive mind acquires its strange views directly in the very process of perception and not by deriving mistaken conclusions from the kind of perceptions that modern men would accept. But I shall dissent from Levy-Bruhl by arguing that the cognitive process is based on the same principles in both the primitive and the modern mind, and that the results differ only because archaic thought tends to be based on more far-reaching integrations, not acceptable to the scientific mind of modern man. I agree that much of these primitive integrations are nonsensical, but I hold also that a scientific method which aims at dispensing with tacit integrations is also non-sensical. After showing this I hope at last to answer the question in what sense, if any, I can accept Eliade's view that archaic myth is true.

* Polanyi gave this lecture in the spring 1969 at the University of Chicago. Three variants of the text can be found in the collections of the University of Chicago Library; two in Box 39, Folder 11 and one in Box 40, Folder 9. From the texts that Box 39, Folder 11 contains, we chose to publish the variant which includes corrections in handwriting. In English it appeared only in parts in the eighth and ninth chapter of Michael Polanyi and Harry Prosch, *Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), compiled with the text of Polanyi's lecture, published as the third herein, given in 1969 with the title *Visionary Arts*.

I shall deal here only with that part of archaic beliefs which are primarily concerned with day-to-day events. Though such ideas are not unconnected with myths, they have a secular content which can be looked upon as the equivalent of our own ideas on matters of experience based on science and technology.

I said that I believe that the absurdities of archaic thought are due to an excessive use of integrative powers which modern thought applies, on the whole, more wisely. I have shown before that integration is used in perception, in the inducement of muscular coordination, in the practice of skills, in establishing semantic relations, in the forming of conceptions and in the making of works of art. We have also seen that it underlies the process of scientific discovery and of technical invention. Some of our integrative actions require little effort on our part, the mere looking at an object usually suffices to induce the integration of its impressions, but other integrations demand persistent efforts by exceptionally gifted minds. All integration must rely on the services of insight, but the imaginative powers at work become substantial, and indeed massive, only as the effort involved in them increases to high degrees.

I have spoken at some length of the integration of elements which, when focally observed, appear incompatible. Such integration may be spontaneous, as it is in perception, and particularly in binocular vision, but it may require special gifts as it does in the creation of visionary art, or rely more on prolonged training, as it does for achieving visionary experience in Zen Buddhism.

This brief recapitulation should suffice to demonstrate that whether integration results in establishing facts or in producing works of the imagination, the process is essentially informal. The fact that a coherence established by integration has qualities not present in the subsidiaries composing the focal result, is proof enough of this; but I shall presently recall also some particular examples of this fact.

It follows that there can be no strict rules for accepting or rejecting the validity of an integration as a certain fact. In many cases there is practically no choice in this respect, but integrative inferences of great importance may appear plainly acceptable to some and just as plainly absurd to others. Take the case of Dr. Immanuel Velikovsky. In his book, *Worlds in Collision* (Macmillan, New York, 1950) Velikovsky put forward a theory based on the acceptance of evidence from the Old Testament, the Hindu Vedas and Greco-Roman mythology which tells of catastrophic events in the earth's history from the 15th to the 7th century B.C. To account for these events Velikovsky supplements Newtonian gravitation by powerful electrical and magnetic fields acting between planets. His book was widely acclaimed, became a best seller, even though it was angrily rejected by all scientists of nature. A number of sociologists actually supported the popular view against the scientists. They came out first in *The American Behavioral Scientist* (September, 1963) and then again in a book (de Grazia 1966), which angrily attacking the whole community of natural scientists for paying no attention to Velikovsky. For my part I believe that the scientists were quite right in refusing to pay serious attention to Velikovsky's writings, and that the sociologists' attack on them was totally unfounded.

I have argued this in a paper in *Minerva* (Polanyi 1967), republished in *Criteria for Scientific Development*, Ed. Edward Shils (The M.I.T. Press, 1968). I said that „a vital judgment practised by science is the assessment of *plausibility*...which is based on a broad exercise of intuition guided by many subtle indications.” The difference between those who take Velikovsky’s theories seriously and those who reject them out of hand is due to a great difference in the assessment of the plausibility of these theories, and since plausibility cannot be demonstrated, the conflict between the two sides has remained unresolved for twenty years.

I think that most differences between modern thought and that of archaic people are of the same kind as those between modern astronomers and the followers of Dr. Velikovsky. These differences are admittedly even more far-reaching, but they are of the same character, as they lie in judgments of plausibility.

Many of the strange observations claimed by archaic people are clearly based on the same kind of inference as those current among us today. Archaic people observe causal relations and many made by them correspond to our own. They are based, as our own observations of causality are, on a temporal sequence of events or a recurrent contiguity of facts. But they may draw fantastic conclusions from these contiguities by being much less prepared than we are to regard them as accidental. However, we should remember that for thousands of years predictions made by astrologers from the position of the constellations at a man’s birth were accepted as valid, though the relations were purely accidental. We reject them today because they do not fit into our modern scientific view of the stars.

So when we are told that the principles of „post hoc ergo propter hoc” and „juxta hoc ergo propter hoc” are characteristic of mythical thinking, we must reply that these are the proper guides of all empirical thinking and that modern man differs from his archaic ancestors only in judging whether the observed temporal or spatial contacts should be deemed accidental or not. It is only owing to our more correct view of the general nature of things – derived mostly from science – that we apply the principles of causation more aptly than primitive people do. Even so, fears of magic causes persist even in modern intellectual circles. For example, in the Athenaeum Club, centre of distinguished scholars and writers in London, the numbering of bedrooms avoids the figure 13 by calling it 12A. The fear that sleeping under a number 13 may bring misfortune has not vanished here.

I have said that the expectation of magical results from the invocation of mythic origins has its counterpart in Christian religious services invoking a divine presence. They are matched more widely by the precatory prayers of all times and peoples.

However, some curious cases of magic rely on relations differing in principle from any that are considered possible today. I have in mind the magical control of persons and sometimes of divine powers by a knowledge of their secret names „... in mythical thinking the name ... expresses what is innermost and most essential in the man ... and it positively is that innermost essence. Name and personality merge” and „He who knows the true name of a god or a demon has unlimited power over

its bearer.” (Cassirer 1955, 40-41) The same applies to images. „A man’s image, like his name, is an alter ego: what happens to the image happens to the man himself.” „If an enemy’s image is stuck with pins or pierced by arrows, he himself will suffer immediately. And it is not alone this passive efficacy that images possess. They may exert an active power, equivalent to that of the object itself. A wax model of an object is the same and acts as the object it represents. A man’s shadow plays the same role as his image or picture. It is a real part of him and subject to injury; a man’s every injury to the shadow affects the man himself. One must not step on a man’s shadow for fear of bringing sickness to him.” (Cassirer 1955, 42)

A name, an image, a shadow; these things mean what they mean because there exists a person and they bear on that person. Nor is the person unaffected by it. If we know a person’s name, we call him by name, we can talk about him and think about him widely. A named man is enlarged by his name as an object is enlarged by adding a handle to it, or a person is transformed by his attire; and so is a person enlarged also by having a painting or a wax model bearing on him and having a shadow that originates in him and points at him as a shadow-casting body. Anything that intimately bears on a person, bears in the way the parts of a whole bear on the whole which they form.

The viewing of a name, an image and other attributes that bear on a person as substitutes for the person, has been called the principle of the *alter ego*. Closely akin to this principle, and indeed comprising it, is the principle of *pars pro toto*, the archaic mind’s way of identifying a part with the whole to which it belongs. Let me quote Cassirer on this: „The whole does not ‘have’ parts and does not break down into them; the part is immediately the whole and functions as such. This relationship, this principle of the *pars pro toto* has also been designated as a basic principle of primitive logic. However, the part does not merely represent the whole, but ‘really’ constitutes it; the relationship is not symbolic and intellectual, but real and material. The part, in mythical terms, is the same thing as the whole, because it is a real vehicle of efficacy – because everything which it incurs or does is incurred or done by the whole at the same time.” „... anyone who acquires the most insignificant bodily part of a man - or even his mere name, his shadow, his reflection in a mirror, which for myth are also real ‘parts’ of him – has thereby gained power over the man, has taken possession of him, has achieved magical power over him. From a purely formal point of view the whole phenomenology of magic goes back to this one basic premise, which clearly distinguishes the complex intuition of myth from the abstract, or more precisely abstracting and analytical, concept.”

This description can be recast and expanded in the structure of tacit knowing. Anything that bears on something else, be it as designating it or being part of it, is known to us in this connection subsidiarily. Viewed in this from-to relation it has a meaning, which lies in the focus to which we are attending from it. The meaning of a subsidiary is wiped out by turning on it our direct focal attention and this destruction of the from-to relation changes both the appearance of its subsidiary

parts as that of its focal point. These changes are best known for the dismemberment of a figure by attending focally to its parts and they form the very foundation of gestalt psychology.

But it applies equally to all other meaningful relations. The archaic mind seems sharply impressed by the sensory qualities of meaningful relations and its imagination greatly exaggerates the interaction between subsidiaries and their focus. I have met with no evidence of this exaggeration in the from-to relation between the names of inanimate things, like bows, arrows, or rivers, and the things they designate, nor between the parts of broken objects, like the shards of a broken vase and the vase itself. It seems that it is only when the focus of the semantic relation is a living being and particularly when it is a human person that forces enlarge so greatly on the dynamics of a meaning attached to such a focus. I have said before that the vastly indeterminate manifestations of a human being may well lend it a mysterious quality which often stimulates the imagination far beyond the range of experience. The modern mind errs in the opposite direction. Its conception of meaning fails to recognise the deep-set qualities of from-to relations and seeks to reduce the human mind to a predictable system of responses.

I shall yet return to this; meanwhile let me enlarge further on the archaic mind. The same difference between the archaic and the modern views of nature arises sharply at yet another point, namely the identification of man with animals, particularly in totemism. This brings up yet another feature of the structure of tacit knowing. All observation is based in our interpretation of the reactions in our sense organs and also in deeper parts of our body to the impact of external stimuli. These bodily reactions are experienced subsidiarily and what we perceive is the joint meaning of these subsidiaries. The moving of our limbs has a similar structure to which I have referred before. It consists in mobilising a set of muscles that jointly bear on our deliberate movements; this movement is in fact their joint meaning.

Our perceptions and deliberate bodily motions have therefore the same structure as we have ascribed generally to meaningful relations. But to observe a meaningful relation is to integrate its subsidiaries as bearing on it as their focus, and so it is to handle these subsidiaries as if they were responses inside our own body. In this sense the structure of such an observation is an indwelling of its subsidiaries. Generally, all comprehensive entities are known by indwelling and to this extent we participate in them as if their subsidiaries were parts of our body. Indwelling is more accentuated in the case of living things, particularly human beings and animals having a structure similar to our own. For in these cases we indwell and relive thereby the very motions by which the person or animal carries out its actions. This is a sharing of lives between us and other men as well as between men and the higher animals.

This sharing of lives is not always a pleasant sensibility, it might be most unwelcome to us. Medical students must harden themselves against being overwhelmed by the spectacle of a surgical opening of a human body. We can see here also the powerful

effects of *pars pro toto* which we regard as so strange in archaic people. The dead body of a person dear to us moves us deeply and we do not find any absurd Antigone's rebellion when seeing her brother's body thrown to the dogs. I have seen a first year medical student fainting at the sight of a thigh-bone freshly carved out from a carcass. Operations on animals are almost equally disturbing.

There is strong evidence here for the view that our knowledge of other persons and of animals too, is based on participating vividly in their lives. And if we ourselves know animals and men in such profoundly stimulating manner, it seems understandable that at a time when much of life consisted in hunting or being hunted, men's imaginative participations with the life of animals would tend to go beyond this and become altogether totemistic.

It does, admittedly, seem quite absurd when members of a Brazilian tribe called Bororós declare with pride that they are a kind of red paroquet (Levy-Bruhl 1910, 77, quoting K. von den Steinen)⁴. And we can well understand that Levy-Bruhl regards such identifications as evidence of distinctive prelogical powers in the archaic mind, a kind he calls *participation*. Though I have used the same term for all knowledge of animals, but this partering goes further when archaic tribes identify themselves with a particular kind of animal.

Actually, the identity claimed by totemism does not mean that the two things, the man and the animal, are interchangeable. Never is a red parrot mistaken for a Bororó tribesman, nor is it unusual for us to identify two objects that we can easily distinguish. It is done all the time when we recognise different members of the same species. Bororós seem to think that in some ways they and the red parrots belong to the same class. But should this identification not be a manifest absurdity? I should say that it may well be within the range of their particular sense of plausibility. Many scientists and philosophers have for centuries and up to our time asserted that all human beings, including themselves, are automatically functioning machines. Some modern thinkers have made this even more telling by arguing that machines possess consciousness and can have every kind of human feelings. To me this seems absurd but to them it is the view that we have minds which control our actions, that seems absurd. What the Bororós mean by identifying themselves with red parrots may be difficult to fathom, but I see no reason to say that it is any more absurd than the view of many scientists and philosophers that they are machines.

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Eliade's view of archaic myth as a source of truth is to be viewed in this connection. It is based on the rejection of the modern scientific outlook. I will tell therefore, how the strange beliefs of the scientific world view came about and so firmly impressed the modern mind.

⁴ K. von den Steinen. *Unter den Naturvölkern Zentralbrasilien*, pp. 305-6 (quoted by L. Levy-Bruhl 1910).

All science grows from pre-scientific thought, the articulate machinery of science originates largely tacit antecedents. Biology has broadly confirmed its antecedents, while physics developed by rejecting or by-passing them.

Take the latter case first. Fundamental features of life were commonly known in this way before biology developed. Animals and plants were recognised before zoology and botany; health and sickness before pathology; the contrast between sentience and insentience, between intelligence and its absence, were known before they were studied by science. These were common knowledge, and so were many details of living functions, hunger for food, need for breath, the processes of digestion, elimination and secretion, the functions of our senses, the process of procreation, of embryological development, of growth and maturation, of senescence. One could go on without end enumerating the subjects which biologists took over from popular knowledge.

Large branches of biology now cover a single section of life summarily identified before the rise of science. These scientific studies have modified and supplemented the conceptions by which they were guided, but they have rarely superseded them. Their richness testifies to the perspicacity of the insight that led to their original formation.

The characteristic shapes of living things have no geometrical definition and must be recognised as physiognomies. The same is true of living functions that are physiognomies extending both in space and time. Our pre-scientific knowledge of living things had, therefore, to be gained by a profound indwelling, which comprehended the general panorama of biotic features *and this remains the way these features are known today, even by scientists.*

Biology must ultimately bear on life as known to the non-biologist. It must contribute to the explanation of the features that form the generally known panorama of life. These features have one thing in common, namely, *that they can go wrong*; this lends them the nature of *achievements*. Attempts to understand an achievement must ask the question: How is it done? What may cause it to go wrong? Biology consists predominately of answers to such questions. It seeks to discover the mechanism by which life works.

The same logical structure is found in the science of engineering. We may be in the habit of using a watch, a motor car or other machinery, without knowing how it works. To find this out we take the object apart, map out the relation of its parts and discover the way each functions in keeping the mechanism going. There are ancient crafts, like brewing and pottery, which have developed empirically. Enquiries undertaken to find out how these processes work have exactly the same logical structure as enquiries into physiological performances. Some of Louis Pasteur's major biological studies were indeed part of such technological investigations. Biology is, in effect, the technology of life.

Biological analysis alternates with integration. New comprehensive entities may be established in the manner in which Harvey discovered the circulation of the

blood, Mendel discovered atomistic heredity, or when the process of evolution was established from a great range of clues bearing on it. But after the discovery of a new comprehensive entity, we shall once more ask, How does it work? Biological knowledge can be mightily expanded by phases of integration, but biology must aim beyond this at solving the fresh analytic problems raised by a new integrative discovery.

The practical advance of engineering and technology consists primarily in the invention and construction of devices that will work. This too is an integrative pursuit. It skilfully combines specially devised objects and processes to form a useful mechanism. The task is conceived in the imagination and is completed by producing the mechanism and making it work.

Turn now from the panorama of life and of human contrivances to the spectacle of inanimate nature. Where is this spectacle? In my room there are plenty of inanimate objects, but they are all contrived by man. Through my window I see my garden full of living things. Some soil and traces of rainwater represent inanimate nature. I must think of some desolate region, of rocks, sands, rivers, seas; of the winds, the clouds, the sun by day and the moon and the stars by night. This is about the range of conception men had of inanimate nature before science. It contrasts with the wealth of intriguing items from which the study of biology originated and on the interpretation of which its ultimate interest continues to depend. Its only distinctive features were the stars, the sun and the moon, with their curious motions; there were few other inanimate objects known that would puzzle men by their distinctive shapes or behaviours. Nothing suggested the hidden beauties of the gas laws, of thermodynamics, optics and acoustics; of the potential presence of atomic spectra; of a thousand elementary particles and a million organic compounds; of Newtonian mechanics, of quantum theory and relativity. And hence this great intellectual system derives little interest from the light it throws on its pre-scientific antecedents.

Such intellectual stimulus as inanimate nature has provided to scientific enquiry, came almost exclusively from watching the skies. This stimulus was intense and eventually brought beautiful results, crowned by Newtonian gravitation and general relativity. But before this many centuries had been dominated by the misleading impression that the universe centered in the earth. This was expressed in Babylonian astrology and later in Aristotelian cosmology, which have imbued man's outlook with a host of erroneous suggestions. When the Copernican revolution had finished refuting these ideas and inspiring in its stead a great new system governed by natural laws, this shattered the common man's confidence that he could understand the world in his own way. He agreed henceforth to accept unconditionally the scientific view of things, however absurd some of it might appear to him.

Ever since Laplace raised the point in defining Universal Knowledge, the fact that from today's topography of the ultimate particles of an object we could predict by the laws of mechanics any future topography of these particles, has been discussed by philosophers. The immense task of carrying out such computations has diverted

attention from the greater difficulty that the results of such a calculation would in themselves tell us nothing. Admittedly, some observable features could be derived from them. By adding up the energy of the particles, we could estimate changes of the heat contained in different areas. But the computation of temperature changes would be beyond our power, since we would not know what probability (i.e. entropy) to attribute to any particular section of the topography.

But let us assume that this could somehow be overcome so that we could derive a complete physical-chemical topography of our object; could this provide us with a comprehensive, meaningful knowledge of all objects?

This topography is still almost meaningless in itself. How far can we go beyond it? If the topography is that of a living being, say a frog, can we recognise the frog from it and derive the mechanism of the frog's vital functions?

We have seen that living beings are characterised by their physiognomy, including the space-time physiognomy of their functions. A physiognomy obeys no mathematical formula; it can be recognised only tacitly by dwelling in its numberless particulars, many of them subliminal. We can know the emotional and intellectual life of animals only by even deeper indwelling, deep enough to achieve an empathy of their consciousness. And suppose that we study a great mind, we can enter into its thoughts only by respectfully submitting to its guidance.

To attribute such levels of existence to an atomic topography seems as absurd as it would be to talk about the smell of differential equations. Yet the modern mind hardly hesitates to countenance such incongruity. Cowed by the experience of the Copernican revolution, we dare not trust the testimony of our senses to contradict the teachings of science. To „doubt that the sun doth move” was still the epitome of absurdity to Shakespeare seventy years after the death of Copernicus. About this time Galileo spoke triumphantly of the acceptance of Copernicanism as „the rape of the senses.” By the age of Kant the Newtonian view of the world, as composed of hard masses in motion, had gained the status of a necessary framework of experience. The acceptance of seeming absurdity had ushered in the triumph of actual absurdity.

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My account of archaic thought confirms Levy-Bruhl's rejection of the theories of Tyler, Frazer and Andrew Lang. I have also confirmed Levy-Bruhl's view that the primitive mind acquires its strange views directly in the very process of perception and not by deriving mistaken conclusions from the kind of perception that modern men would accept. Though I quoted mostly Cassirer's more ample evidence of archaic thought, I much admire Levy-Bruhl's earlier account of it. His simple comparison of it with the view current today, is preferable to Cassirer's analysis relating archaic ideas to modern thought in the Kantian terms of pure *Anschauung* compared with an *Anschauung* disciplined by the categories of reason.

But I do not agree with Levy-Bruhl that primordial minds used some different 'pre-

logical' modes of inference, or at least I would put the matter differently. All empirical observation rests ultimately on the integration of subsidiaries to a focal centre. All such integrations – from perception to creative discoveries – are impelled by the imagination and controlled by plausibility, which in turn depends on our general view about the nature of things. Over a wide range of day-to-day affairs the archaic mind thinks and acts sensibly, much as we do. Levy-Bruhl says so clearly (Levy-Bruhl 1910, 76). But in certain respects the archaic view of things is different from what is loosely known as their modern scientific view. The difference is perhaps not deeper than are differences about the plausibility of coherences between various groups of people in a modern Western university. But they certainly range more widely.

In the differences between the archaic and the modern approaches, I side in many ways with the archaic mind. It is right in experiencing names as part of a named person and an image as part of its subject, for a name is not a name, nor an image, except as a subsidiary to the focal center on which it bears. And such is the nature of all meaningful relations. Admittedly, the archaic mind tends to exaggerate this coherence to the point of absurdity, but it is closer to the truth than the modern view is which has no place for the quality and depth of these coherences. This difference becomes essential in the observation of comprehensive entities, which can be done only by indwelling. The archaic mind recognises indwelling as the proper means of understanding living things. Modern biology and psychology abhor this approach to life and mind. It teaches that we are all machines and in the last analysis mere atomic topographies. These ideas of Galileo, Gassendi and John Locke, coupled by Humean associationism, have paved the way to the achievements of modern science, but have deprived at the same time all that is of primary interest in the world of any grounds for meaning anything to us.

This brings us back finally again to the question to what extent the archaic myth of creation can be said to be true, as Mircea Eliade says it to be.

I have shown by the example of the Velikovsky case how profoundly our judgments of plausibility affect the conclusion we draw from a particular set of data. This has also served as an example to show that plausibilities cannot be demonstrated. Even within the same academic community contradictory judgments of plausibility can be upheld by different groups. This proves that these judgments, which underlie every empirical inference, rely to a decisive extent on grounds that are not specifiable. We have seen that the often fantastic aberrations of archaic beliefs are largely due to a reluctance of accepting the truly accidental character of conceivable coherences. And I have pointed out that our modern scientific education teaches us an even more absurd view about the nature of things, when affirming that all coherent systems of our experience – including our own conscious existence – can be ultimately represented by their atomic particles interacting according to atomic forces. This too is an aberration of the imagination: a fantastic extrapolation of the exact sciences.

The fact is that all empirical knowledge is rooted in subsidiaries which are to

some extent unspecifiable. And we may add to this as its counterpart that the range of meaning covered by verbal statements is unlimited. We have seen how richly poetic meaning can serve to clarify our own experiences and serve us to express them effectively. The myths of archaic people should be regarded in this light. They are clearly the work of their imagination and their truth can only consist in their power to evoke in us an experience which we hold to be genuine.

But is this not to move too far away from what is usually considered as verification, particularly in science? Not altogether. In the history of science there are many instances of ideas that were partly true and which were totally rejected by some scientists because of their erroneous content while others accepted them with all their errors. Mesmer's fantastic demonstrations of mesmerism were successfully followed up by Elliotson, but his version of them still included an ample portion of absurdities. Most scientists rejected his results as they had rejected Mesmer's, and it was not till Braid's reformulation of mesmerism by the conception of hypnosis, that, a century after Mesmer, the truth content of his work was discerned and recognised as distinct from its fantastic errors. There is a myth abroad today that a scientific theory is instantly rejected if we come across any facts that are incompatible with the theory. The actual practice of science is often to doubt the validity of such facts, however inexplicable the evidence may appear to be; or else to include any facts apparently contradicting an accepted theory as anomalies of it; or in yet other cases, to accept two mutually contradictory principles, ascribing to each its range of applicability in the hope that something will turn up to explain the conflict between them. I have collected a number of illustrations of such cases in my writings, all the way from my *Science, Faith and Society* of 1946.

With this in mind, we can renew the question about the truth of archaic myths of creation. There is a great deal of nonsense in them. Much of this we may be able to separate and disregard. But even the heart of the story contains much that is unacceptable. Is this one of those cases where a truth is so interwoven with error, that it cannot be expressed without affirming the error as well? In other words, if we reject archaic myths on account of their manifest errors, would this purification not be outweighed by a concomitant loss of truth contained in myth?

What are its truths? Eliade says that the myth of creation makes us aware of a deeper reality of which we lose sight in our personal pursuits. It sets us free from a „false identification of Reality with what each of us *appears to be and to possess.*” (Eliade 1961, 59) „The myth continually re-actualises the Great Time and in so doing raises the listener to a superhuman and suprahistorical plane; which among other things, enables him to approach a Reality that is inaccessible at the level of profane, individual existence.” (Eliade 1961, 59)

The myth of creation opens its followers a view to the universe and makes them feel at home in it. In the light of the myth every major event of man's life evokes his descent from his ancestral cosmic origin and his every major enterprise is undertaken as a rehearsal of the mythical act which first performed such an enterprise. The myth

of creation teaches knowledge of perfection, of perfection in nature and of virtue in action. Its immemorial knowledge links those who possess this knowledge to an endless company of fathers. Mythical knowledge provides on sacred occasions the experience of thoughts, beyond the range of men's individual lives. It secures to its disciple access to a detached experience of meaning, echoes of which will follow him into his daily life.

These results of accepting the myths of creation produce in us experiences that I believe to be largely true. I believe that man's gradual emergence from an inanimate universe reveals that the dead matter of our origins was fraught with meaning far beyond all that we can see in it. To set aside an achievement of such an event full of meaning as if it could happen any day by mere accident, is to block the normal sources of inquisitive thought.

Man's origin is a mystery which the myth of creation expresses in its own way. And man's destiny derived from his mythical origins is much nearer to the experience of our lives, of human greatness, of the course of our history since history began, and the shattering forces of our Utopias, than is the atomic topography to which the ideal of detached observations seeks to reduce these facts.

There is therefore important truth in the archaic myth of creation that is missing from the present ideal of scientific knowledge and in this sense I would agree with Eliade, when he speaks of the myth being true.