

FOREWORD

by
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Does myth exclude reason or does it possess a reason of its own? The question has provoked heated controversy since the eighteenth century. In our time a consensus has been reached that mythical thought, however different from analytic understanding, follows a genuine path of reason. But in describing the nature of its logic contemporary thinkers all too often fail to define its true identity and indirectly continue to uphold the rationalist thesis of the Enlightenment. Phillip Stambovsky critically exposes traces—and frequently more than traces—of the *mythos/logos* dichotomy in prominent theorists of myth today. Outstanding anthropologists as Malinowski and Lévi-Strauss as well as philosophers as Cassirer and Ricoeur persist in abstracting *mythos* from *logos* in the very attempt to understand their unity. The significant contribution of this study is to have shown that the nature of mythopoetic thinking becomes fundamentally distorted when defined in concepts borrowed from the human sciences. Instead its author proposes a wholly different mode of understanding that allows the myth to present its own *depictive rationality*. This method, more literary than “scientific,” enables us to appreciate the critical function the myth has traditionally exercised upon accepted ways of thinking, not least upon the very abstractive rationality that excludes myth. A careful analysis of four modern narratives shows the new approach to be not merely desirable but *possible*.

This suggestive and very humane book is written with literary sensitivity as well as critical acumen. It changed my thinking on the subject and I suspect that it may do the same to others. At any rate, philosophers, literary critics, and anthropologists ought to read this study before writing or teaching on myth again.

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