

## Revisiting the Nature of the Relationship between Myth and Philosophy Today: Reports of Opposition or Collaboration?

Alain-Patrice Minkanda<sup>1</sup>, Ph.D

### Abstract

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This study revisits the nature of the relationship between myth and philosophy in order to know whether it is antagonism or collaboration that characterize them. So we wish to know if the opposition between myth and philosophy is insurmountable and if there is a tight partition between symbols and rational thinking. It is also important to know whether recourse to myth is synonymous to a renunciation of thought or whether myth supersedes dialectics. We also examine the question of whether philosophy is a revival of muthos in a conceptual language, whether muthos is inferior to logos, and whether myth and thought are part of the rational. On examining these questions, it appears that the opposition between myth and philosophy is not insurmountable. Indeed, reflection from myths is likely to lead to interesting philosophical conceptualizations. Philosophy is not only a revival of the muthos, and it is not epistemologically fertile to consider the relations between myth and philosophy from the angle of inferiority or superiority.

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### Introduction

Our study aims at revisiting the relationship between myth and philosophy today: reports of opposition or collaboration? Many philosophers throughout history have resorted to myths and symbolic forms, no doubt about it. Even today, philosophers and even specialists in other "hard" or "vague" sciences that mobilize symbolic forms do not always need to justify the use of these forms of expression that contribute to elaboration their thought. The issue of the relationship between philosophy and myth becomes explicit when scholars examine the relationship between symbols and philosophy, on the one hand, and when the question arises as to whether symbolic forms can be validly mobilized in the development of a philosophical thought or globally within the framework of a scientific approach, on the other. A controversy opposes thinkers as robust as each other. For some, myth and philosophy conceal contradictory logics and an insurmountable antagonism, and for others, symbolic forms are a "given" that "gives" what is "to think", and are therefore a "deposit" meaningless ". So it is necessary today to revisit the stormy debate that continues to oppose the protagonists of the scene and propose tracks that can get us out of the cul-de-sac. Certainly in philosophy the questions are, from a certain point of view, more important than the answers. But just as important will be the answers that will be given to the following skein which constitutes our problematic. Is there any insurmountable opposition between philosophy and mythology? Is there a tight partition between symbols and rational thinking? Can we think critically when resorting to myth? Is the myth marked by inaptitude or the renunciation of thinking? Does myth supersede dialectics? Must the myth collapse so that the idea or the conceptual thought can arise? Do philosophers translate in a particular language what was already contained in myth? Is muthos superior to logos? Do myth and thought all participate in the rational? In what sense is what is "given" in the myth to think and to what extent is myth a source of rationality or a source of meaning? Our reflection will be articulated around three main points: 1) the relations of opposition between philosophy and myth; 2) beyond the opposition between myth and philosophy 3) and the complementarity of muthos and logos.

### I. Opposition Reports Between Philosophy and Myth

#### 1. Definition of philosophy

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<sup>1</sup> Specialization in African Philosophy, Associate lecturer at the University of Yaoundé I, Department of Philosophy, Cameroon.  
Email: [alainminkanda@yahoo.fr](mailto:alainminkanda@yahoo.fr)

To Marcien Towa (1986, p.30), only philosophy "has the courage and the strength to openly submit the absolute to discussion". Unlike religion, which relies on revelation and dogma, philosophy "appeals to reason, to critical thinking and not to fear or trust" (Ibid., p. 32). If religion intends "to evade all examination, all discussion and all criticism, that is, to thought" (Towa, 1979, p.7), it opposes the philosophy that is essentially thought "in the sense of weighing, to discuss the representations, the beliefs, the opinions, to confront them, to examine the pros and cons of each, to sort them, to criticize them so as to retain as true only those that resist at this sorting event. In this restrictive sense, representations, convictions, opinions that have not been tested or resisted by criticism are not thoughts, ideas, but mere beliefs" (Ibid., p.7).

## 2. Opposition between philosophy and myth

Indeed to Marcien Towa (1979), there is a "deep opposition" between philosophy and myth. What essentially characterizes the myth is "its inability or renunciation to think in a personal and autonomous way" (1979, p.10). Yet philosophy "refuses the vagrancy in imaginary countries and, to the beliefs of the devotee, it opposes doubt, unbelief" (Ibid., p.11). Towa (2011, p.224) thinks that there is such "incompatibility", such as "opposition between mythical mentality and philosophical spirit" that's "one can only be born and grown at the expense of the other" (Ibid., p.224). More radically, he states: "Between the mythical mentality and the critical thought, the distance is considerable, so that the same spirit can not participate at the same time with the same one on the same questions, to adhere to the mythical representation of the absolute and at the same time to think it critically. Each of them is, of necessity, exclusive of the other" (Ibid., p.230). Myth and thought, myth and philosophy are like cat and dog: they do not mix well. Therefore, any attempt to think from the myth will be doomed or even condemned to failure. Assuming that the myth is "a given to think", it can not be a generator of thought. In a pinch, Marcien Towa thinks that "ideas are formed on the ruins of symbols, imaginary representations, and myths" (Ibid., p.221). Only ideas that survive when they have been scrutinized by an uncompromising criticism or have been evaluated, and weighed can only become ideas. The idea is the result of the activity of the mind as it thinks and criticizes the absolute. Conceptual or philosophical thought has thus come to replace the mythical thought in Plato. Certainly Plato resorts to myths, but these myths are philosophical insofar as they "are created in a spirit freed from the grip of myth" (Ibid., p.221). These myths do not replace the dialectic or the discussion, but allow to illustrate it. While the dialectic leads to the true, the myth allows only to present in a pictorial way the truth. Myth makes it possible to illustrate the theory of knowledge: the myth of the winged hitch allows to have a pictorial representation of the theory of the soul and the body.

Originally, myth is "sacred narrative" and "word". It is a word that accompanies a rite, a word that is an element of worship. This is not fortuitous if the characters of the myth are "supernatural beings, usually divinities endowed with infinite powers, in any case superhuman" (Ibid., p.222). According to the philosopher, the myth is "a story of miracles" (Ibid., p.223); it is only a "vagrancy in imaginary country and devout beliefs" (Ibid., p.228). In Plato, the myth is "essentially and intentionally allegorical" (Ibid., p.235). He has a psychagogic function. The Platonic myth thus wants to contribute to the shaping of the collective mentality to "make it more favorable to the philosophical enterprise" (Ibid., p.325).

While the mythical universe is full of imaginary characters, the philosophical universe is saturated with abstractions and concepts. The myth, to an extent that it is prescriptive, indicates a "mandatory pattern of behavior" (Ibid., p.221). To the myth, Marcien Towa writes: "For the mythical mentality, the truth is not to be discovered by personal reflection, but to receive, to learn; good is not to invent, to produce, but to reproduce. Truth and good are not first of all the fruit of our efforts, but a gift, a grace to receive" (Ibid., p.224). The myth is not therefore directed to reflection, to reason, to free critical examination, but it is addressed to the heart, the feeling and the imagination.

In the same vein as the Cameroonian philosopher, Jean-Pierre Vernant (1988) who also thinks that there is an opposition between myth and philosophy categorically states: "Rational thinking has a civil status; we know his date and place of birth. It was in the 6th century BC, in the Greek cities of Asia Minor, that a new, positive form of reflection emerged on nature (...). In the School of Miletus, for the first time, the logos would have freed itself from the myth as the scales fall from the eyes of the blind" (1988, p.378).

The myth is a first form of reflection while the logos constitutes a new form of reflection. This was put forward by the Ionians who managed to develop notions such as segregation from the primordial unity, the struggle and the union of the opposites and the eternal cyclical change. Vernant totally disagrees with Cornford's thesis that "philosophers are content to repeat, in a different language, what the myth already said" (quoted by J.-P. Vernant, pp. 400-401). To the former, philosophy marks the advent of a new form of thought characterized "on the one hand (by

the rejection, in the explanation of phenomena, of the supernatural and the marvelous; on the other by the break with the logic of ambivalence, the search in the discourse, of an internal coherence, by a rigorous definition of the concepts, a clear delimitation of the plans of reality, a strict observance of the principles of identity" (1988, p. 401). So philosophy will construct its own rationality by elaborating its own concepts to explain the nature of Being and its relation to thought.

## II. BEYOND THE OPPOSITION BETWEEN MYTH AND PHILOSOPHY

### 1. Transcending the opposition between myth and philosophy

Unlike Marcien Towa who thinks that the opposition between the muthos and the logos is insurmountable, the physicist Patrick Trousson (1995), who invites us to a "new rationality", does not share the conception according to which the myth connotes the past, the obscure, fuzzy, rough, subjective and irrational. To the latter, mythology is not conceived simply as that which is imaginary, unreal, false or that which is childish or fantastic stories.

The physicist shows that muthos and logos refer etymologically to the "word", even if they do not want to say the same thing. Logos, which connotes the idea of sorting, choosing, and asking questions, is not the order of the truth. The muthos, which is "absolutely true word", refers to the real. It is in this sense that Walter Otto affirmed: "Muthos is the true word, not in the sense of what is justly thought and which has the force of proof, but of factual fact, of what is revealed, of what is venerated and thus this word is distinguished from any other utterance "(Walter Otto quoted by Trousson, 1995, p.35). Continuing his striking study, the physicist shows that the muthos that was complementary to the logos has become the opposite, and the latter is now the superior of the first. Having originally been that which does not have to prove its "truth", the myth has become what is unfit to prove its truth. So it is taken for "what is wrongly believed to exist, pure invention, the fruit of the imagination, what the secret spirit in the flaws of rational discourse and verifiable knowledge" (Trousson, 1995, p.37).

Science, unlike myth, connotes objectivity, knowledge, certainty, clarity and reason. In Europe, there was a time when myth and science were synonymous and allowed to reflect on the entire cosmos. With what some may have called the "Greek miracle", the mythical mode of explanation of the cosmos has given way to "an explanatory mode based on rational logic and experimentation and no longer on harmonies of nature or transcendent principles "(Ibid., p. 12). This evolution of European thought has consecrated the divide between the scientist and the spiritual and has made dualist, separative and classificatory thought supplant the thought of God and man, the soul and the body, the reason and the imaginary in a global vision. It should therefore be borne in mind that this ancient conception was hardly a "mere addition of facts and measures", but "a real tension towards the apprehension of the whole universe in its material, imaginary and spiritual aspects"( Ibid.,p.12). The physicist shows that science and mythology often arrive at similar points of view, although from different premises: they converge and complement one another.

To Lambros Couloubaritsis (1992), reality supposes the entanglement of visible nature and invisible powers; it comes from, as Patrick Trousson writes, and from the natural and the supernatural. Both the visible and the invisible are important. The latter contains the dead, the gods, the beneficial powers and those who are evil. By death, we move from the visible world to the invisible world. One can understand why he writes: "Myth is a complex discourse about a complex reality in which the visible and the invisible intertwine, and which unfolds itself according to a logic of its own and according to a transcendental's schema that unifies and regularizes the experience "(1992, p.31).

From the moment the logos is apprehended as logical speech, it is therefore present in the muthos. Although each obeys their own logic, the fact remains that both "participate in the rational" (1992, p. 31). To state that there is a profound opposition between philosophy and myth is not to ban all recourse to myth as a philosophical material. Many philosophers have resorted to myth. And Paul Ricoeur has shown that the symbol is given to think and that the thought that takes the symbol as its object is in fact in the tradition of rationality. Commenting on this Ricoeurian sentence, in a very interesting book, François Dosse thinks, on the one hand, that it implies that "the meaning is given to the one who gains access to the symbolic dimension", and on the other, that "what is given is to think". Although everything is already said in the original enigma of the symbol, it is always important to start everything, to start all over again in the dimension of thinking, to promote a new meaning. To rehabilitate the symbol in this way, is at the same time rehabilitate the myth, from the moment when the latter is only a variant of the symbol.

Mythical thought thus becomes an object of science, and Ricoeur, to believe François Dosse (2008, p. 282) "shows that it is not only that it is a source of rationality, but a source of meaning, including and even above all for a modern society that believes to have dethroned the myth in favor of a purely scientific explanation of the world".

## 2. There is no superiority of the logos on the muthos

Jean Ladrière (1970) gives reason to Gusdorf when he writes: "Thus, as a source, as a first discourse, as the origin of meaning, myth is present within all theoretical thought, as a nucleus that this thought necessarily resumes in itself, as a first operation that this thought necessarily re-assumes in its own movement (...). Myth is present in thought as what in it inaugurates and makes possible its characterizing operation" (p. 214).

Marcel Biveghe Mezui (2007) addresses the issue of myth and rationality. According to him, classical historiography has established that the emergence of logos in the Hellenic world has been in opposition to the civilization of myth: it has distinguished the universe of rationality from the mythical universe. Edmund Husserl, who is one of the illustrious representatives of this trend, argues that rational Western Civilization differs from non-Western Cultures that are religious and mythical. Mezui calls into question this thesis insofar as it does not take into account the links that exist between the culture of the Greek world and that of the Barbarians, nor the historical context that allowed the emergence of rational thought, nor even links that can be established between the logos and the muthos. In the same light, Samir Amin (2008), arguing the research conducted by Martin Bernal (1987), highlights the latter called "the making of ancient Greece". The Greeks recognized indeed what they had learned from the Egyptians and Phoenicians and did not perceive these as the anti-East; they were aware of belonging to the cultural era of this ancient Orient. The linguistic borrowing from the Greek language to Egyptian and Phoenician is obvious and irrefutable, even if the Eurocentric mythologists have invented the "proto-Aryan" to replace it with the Eastern loan.

Mezui like Patrick Trousson's notion of myth and science have evolved or even semantic mutations that could justify this controversial thesis. The transition to modernity has made the myth appear as a set of "questions that constitute the raw material of thought" (Mezui, 2007, p.102) whereas it was among the Greeks "a first form of explanation of things and the universe" (Ibid., p.102). Cassirer established the existence of an original relationship between myth and science that justifies the allegorical interpretation of myth in Greek philosophy. It is only gradually that muthos has detached itself from the logos. Indeed, Cassirer shows that the world of myth in Plato's philosophy "appears as a coherent totality that it confronts with the totality of pure knowledge to measure them one to the other (...). To Plato, therefore, myth contains a certain conceptual content, for myth is the language that alone makes it possible to express the world of becoming" (Ibid., pp.102-103).

According to the modern conception of science, the explanation that resorts to myth is considered to be "of the order of feeling and not of reason" (Ibid., p.103). For the reason, myths are only "mere constructions of the imagination that detach themselves from the actual, empirical and stable reality of things, to rise above it like a light fog" (Ibid., p.103). Science thus distinguishes itself from myth: the first connotes the idea of certainty, clarity, objectivity, and reason, while the second suggests that of the obscure, the subjective, and the irrational. For Mezui as for Patrick Trousson, it was not until scientific knowledge became "dualistic, rationalist and utilitarian" (Ibid., p.103) to oppose mythology. It seemed to lose sight of the fact that both science and philosophy "are always sheltered by culture" (Ibid., p.103). Let us listen to what Mezui says: "Some philosophers often misunderstand the birth of philosophy, arguing that it has historically supplanted the myth and could only be born in a mentality that has defeated explanations mythical. Their thesis is that the first Greek philosophers, the pre-Socratics, were able to transform mythical cosmogonies into rational cosmogonies, which they proposed not to recount the formation of the world through myths, but to explain it by substituting to supernatural characters, natural elements" (Ibid., p.103).

Patrick Trousson has proved, in a very interesting study, that the new science abandons certain concepts and endows itself with more abstract notions. It broadens its vision of the world, takes on new forms and approaches the symbolism and magic of the founding myths. Ernst Cassirer, on the other hand, has established that questions of mythology are matters of philosophy. While it is true that philosophy is concerned with the elaboration of concepts, it must be noted that the process going from particular impressions to the formation of concepts integrates "involuntary and unconscious representations" (Mezui, 2007, p. 105). To him, myth is at the same time "form of thought", "intuition (...) of the spatio-temporal world" and "life in which the subjective reality is discovered and determined" (Ibid., p.107).

Myth is a form of thought that separates neither the moments of time nor the parts of space. There is also no break between the whole and the parts of the body. The muthos does not pose the question of the "how" of things, but questions the "from what" or the "towards which" (Ibid., p.6). Myth as a form of thought has particular categories, namely, quantity, quality, similarity, or likeness.

The quantity implies the absence of a border between the whole and the parts; quality, on the other hand, is not a property which determines the thing, but the expression of the thing itself; finally, similarity or resemblance is not a "reflexive rational concept", but "the expression of an identity" (Ibid., p.107).

Mezui rejects the thesis of the "Greek miracle" and admits, on the other hand, that it is the clash of traditions between Asia Minor (Troy, Ephesus, among others, which were Greek colonies) and Great Greece (Elea and Agrigento to the south of Italy) which has allowed the emergence of a rational thought and considered universal. In view of the foregoing, it would be appropriate to speak of "universal civilization in its diversity" rather than of "Western civilization". The myth in this context is not taken in the sense of unfounded belief, but it is a particular thought enjoying a proper coherence: the rational discourse has its origin in the mythical universe. So we should not think that science as "elaboration of a different discourse" is a surpassing of the myth, nor believe that there would be a "superiority of the logos on the muthos" (Ibid., p.109). He thinks that it is necessary to avoid the two pitfalls that are the total forgetting of the myth on the one hand, and its omnipresence, on the other. Western rationality failed because it failed to avoid the first pitfall while Black Africa did not experience the emergence of science and rationality and failed to overcome the second pitfall which implies the existence of a continuity between the visible and the invisible.

### III. COMPLEMENTARITY OF MUTHOS AND LOGOS

#### 1. Collaboration of muthos and logos

Unlike Marcien Towa who asserts that there is a radical opposition between muthos and logos, Michel Fattal (2009) asks the question of whether these relations are antagonistic or not. **Are they** relations of collaboration with Parmenides, as to the question of the designation of being and truth? The philosopher begins by noting that the muthos is the "word" of the Goddess, that he is the "word of truth". As for the logos, it is the "reliable speech" of the Goddess and consists in the "sweet words" of the Young Girls of the Sun. Thus muthos and logos would refer both to the "word" and truthful "discourse" of the Goddess. This last recommends to the disciple to listen well and to preserve this "word" which must be thought then passed to the sieve of the critical reason which reaches the muthos of the being and the truth only when it separated the *estin* and the *ouk estin*. The logos or "credible speech" closes the research about the path of being that began at fragment 8.1. Muthos and logos are interchangeable at Parmenides. But it should be noted that the purpose of the Parmenidian Logos is to lead the disciple to the Goddess and the Truth of Being. In the light of what precedes, Michel Fattal writes precisely: "By the fact that muthos inaugurates and introduces all the development devoted to being and that the logos concludes this presentation worthy of being listened to and preserved, by the fact that also at the end of fragment 8, 50-51 of a thought (noêma) which "surrounds the truth" (amphis alêthees) so that nothing escapes it, I would be tempted to say that the being is He finds himself enclosed in the "limit" (peiras) of speech and thought, just as he sees himself enclosed in the bonds of the "limit" by Dike, Anagke, and Moira. Muthos, logos and noêma have therefore said and thought "everything" that must be said and thought "around" (amphis) of being and truth: "all" to be the being who is identical to himself and "the self-sufficient truth" to which "there is nothing to add or to subtract" (Fattal, 2009, p.112). Critical logos allow us not to confuse being and non-being, as mortals do; it allows us to distinguish what we can not mix and confuse. The philosopher Michel Fattal is thus led to think that "krinai lôgoi designates, (...), the" critical reason "and not simply the" critical discourse ", because like the goddess who " judges by the logos " the disciple must also be able to use the logical principle of non-contradiction to eliminate non-being from being. This ability to "judge" and to use the logical principle of identity is the result of a mental operation which is that of reason "(Ibid., p.112).

#### 2. "Ontomythological" thought beyond "ontological" reason

Bonaventure Mvé-Ondo (2007) analyzes fang texts to show how thought unfolds there through the mediation of beings and images. For this philosopher, we must go beyond the "apparent and direct sense" of myths, tales and legends if we want to grasp the "unconscious truth". Mamoussé Diagne (2005) in this sense showed that in the civilization of orality "the image (...) is an indispensable adjunct to the making, the conservation and the transmission of knowledge" (p.207) and that it is important to avoid the immediate vision to "pierce the meaning that the image conveys" (Ibid., p.207).

Mvé-Ondo distinguishes two levels of interpretation from traditional African narratives or texts. The first, which is that of the innocent, uninitiated and children or common mortals, is in the order of the event, the daily. As for the second level, it is initiatory, philosophical, and refers to the symbolic order where the "stories are not simple

tales, but they deliver a truly philosophical or rather metaphysical meaning" (2007, p. 12). In the eyes of the philosopher, any creation worthy of the name, any authentic philosophy "is conceivable only in so far as its bed is constituted by the most fundamental original symbols of the tradition in which it is inscribed" (2007, p.12) There is, therefore, no fang in the mythology of separation, of sealed partitioning between symbols and rational thought. If Western reason is "ontological", African reason is "ontomythological". The ontological reasoning is "non-empirical and speculative" (Mvé-Ondo, 2007, p.142), includes an analytic, a dialectic, illuminates knowledge and action. The ontological reason consists in reasoning to universalist, free, above all external influence, all cultural presuppositions and all affectivity (Ibid., p.144). The five "logical categories" of this reason are known: they are causality, space, time, the person, and the object. In short, Bonaventure Mvé-Ondo will say: "For the ontological approach, these categories are universals that function independently of the circumstances, the contexts and the actors" (Ibid., p.114).

Ontomythological thought is a thought that lies beyond the propositions of mathematical logic. It does not proceed by "inference" and is not concerned with "the establishment of a logical and direct relationship between a subject and a predicate" (Ibid., p.114). On the other hand, it is "oblique, indirect, and analog" (Ibid., p. 114). In his approach and thought, the frame of formal logic breaks out. In the context of onthomythological reasoning, causality is not mechanical, that is, it does not imply a cause-and-effect relationship; it is a generalized causality in which "every event has a meaning and every phenomenon has a cause and a consequence and must be interpreted within the framework of the interrelations that connect the individual to his universe of meaning and man to the world. (Ibid., p. 145). Space, on the other hand, is not a "neutral and inanimate environment", but rather "a receptacle of acting forces invested by invisible powers" as well as "a dimension that man must not disturb. the order" (Ibid., p.145). Time for its part is "predestined", "organized by the notion of destiny" (Ibid., p. 145). As for the object, it is "subjectivated" and "linked to the subject by a network of affiliations". The object is a "language", "a medium of meanings" allowing communication between men and groups. Finally, the person is not a "separate being, but a character inscribed in networks of various affiliations" (Ibid., p.145); it is not a "geometric point, but an open being, a location of variable extent through which influences" (Ibid., p.145).

## Conclusion

Our study sets out to revisit the nature of relations between myth and philosophy today: relations of antagonism or collaboration? Around this main concern, more precisely, we wanted to know if the opposition between myth and philosophy was insurmountable and whether there was a tight partition between symbols and rational thought. The question then arose as to whether recourse to myth was synonymous to a renunciation of thought or whether myth superseded dialectics. It was also a question of examining whether philosophy was merely a revival of muthos in a conceptual language and whether muthos was inferior to logos. Finally, we wanted to know if myth and thought were all part of the rational and to what extent what was "given" was to think and constituted a deposit of meaning. On examining these questions, it appeared that if there is an opposition between myth and philosophy, this opposition is not insurmountable as some philosophers have claimed. Indeed, reflection from the myths of symbols, images and characters can allow the development of interesting philosophical conceptualizations. We must not confuse the path, here the myth, with the objective of the journey, namely the expression of a conceptual thought. Therefore, we have marked our disagreement with the thesis according to which the recourse to symbolic forms condemns philosophy to be only a resumption of the muthos in a proper language. Moreover, the posture that myth and philosophy should be viewed from the standpoint of inferiority or superiority did not appear to us to be fruitful from an epistemological point of view. Indeed, myth and philosophy participate in rationality. However, this one can take the form of an ontomythological rationality or that of an ontological rationality.

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