

# History, Truth and the Rational Mind : Why it is Impossible to Separate Myth from History

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# History, Truth and the Rational Mind

## Why it is Impossible to Separate Myth from History

The thesis of this article is that historical critical scholarship gives unwarranted credence to the idea that the measure of all truth, historical and other, is necessarily rational. The stance taken in this article is that preponderant evidence of history does not support this position. The first line of argument against the rationalist interpretation of history is directed against the methodology of historical scholarship, and concludes by establishing the parameters inherent to all possible historical knowledge. The second line of argument is more theoretical in nature, and appeals to a phenomenology of truth in order to illustrate the difference between phenomenal truth, and constructural or historical truth.

Mytho-historical events are the stuff of legends. They are historical events that, because they do not correspond to the modern notion of normative phenomenal reality, have been classified as fantastic, or unbelievable, or legendary, or poetic, although they share exactly the same documentary medium as what might be termed *rationally agreeable* history. The hermeneutical antagonism between acceptable and unacceptable history, however, reflects only those givens that have lately emerged from the historical paradigm of the world-become-rational. For as compulsory participants in the mytho-historical context that presented itself to the Greeks, a world plainly and abundantly documented in the records of history, it was clearly impossible for their men-of-letters, philosophers, and historians to make a type of hermeneutical contrast – viz. the distinction between myth and history – that could only be made by those who were implicated in the later historical context of a world-become-natural.

Anchored in the immediate environment surrounding and illuminating the Greek presence in the world, the different facets of the Greek historical vécu subsequently entered into the documentary heritage of the civilization through its different writers and interpreters. This is true of the Greeks, as well as of the multitude of other communities historically contiguous to the Greeks. And the amalgam of writings left behind by these civilizations of the past, when brought together, reconstitute a documented, and therefore historical experience of the world, a collective encounter with real phenomenal history.

The historical record of the Greek encounter with history, however, does not reflect history in the modern and rationalized sense of the word. For the body and texture of the Greek encounter with history, an experience extrapolated from the accounts and chronicles and journals that the Greeks left of

their world, is profoundly mytho-historical. Thus, the record that the historical past has left for the modern world, is an accumulation of documents that transcribe a constant and unceasing exchange between epi-natural or mytho-phenomena, and strictly natural phenomena. The collective and concerted documentary legacy left behind by the Greeks, as well as by the variety of other historically contiguous civilizations, is a record of an extended mytho-historical period in the unfolding destiny of the human animal. And the documents of that record contain an indiscriminate mixture of both natural phenomena and other phenomena, epi-natural phenomena, which have in the historical meantime ceased to exist in and for the world.

Because it is obvious to any student of history that these *other* phenomena, whose real past-time existence is overwhelmingly attested to by the records of the Greek world, are no longer part of the common historical experience of the world-become-natural, it became ipso facto impossible for the modern interpreters of history to explain such phenomena in terms of *real* history. And so, in complete harmony with their immediate historical environment, the rational chroniclers of the world-become-natural chose to categorize and explain this sort of *other* phenomena not in terms of real historical happening, but as linguistic or psycho-literary phenomena such as myth, poetry, and primitive fictive creation.<sup>1</sup> It goes without saying, of course, that this category of psycho-literary phenomenon stands in contrast to the type of common phenomena that has always been contextually present, and thus historical real, to all the ages of man; namely, the phenomena of strictly natural reality.

The heart and soul of rational hermeneutics is the distinction that the modern rationalist interpreters of history make between psycho-literary history and real historical happening. But it is the contention of this paper that to rationalize or demythologize history is to incorrectly read the documents of history, and that an erroneous reading of the documents of history must inevitably result in a faulty paradigm of the unfolding historical significance of the human animal in the world.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. H. Bergson, *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion*, 1982, 110–111. Compare with pp. 112–113, 137, and especially 207.

### I. *The invention of Rational History*

The scholarly study of historical documents and records has as its object the reconstruction of historical truth.<sup>2</sup> This, it would seem, is a justifiable assertion, because it is obvious that the critical study of the different forms of historical information, e.g. documentary, archeological and other, can have virtually no other purpose than that of determining the credibility of those different sources that constitute for the modern historian the unique point of entry into the otherwise inaccessible and obscure world of the past.<sup>3</sup>

With the application of the historical critical method to the interpretation of history, however, the necessity for the study of the actual historical documents as witnesses of history was relaxed, and a new approach to the critical study the past came into being. Up to this point in time, the predominant factor taken into consideration in the interpretation of history had been the authenticity and value of the actual documents of history. But after the introduction of the historical critical method of text interpretation, the emphasis of historical scholarly research shifted from the texts of history, to the authors of those texts.

From this point on in the analytical study of history, the information that was contained in the documents of history was considered by historical hermeneuts to be nothing more than complex reflections of the interpretive apperceptual structure of the particular historical writers. And it therefore proved to be necessary for the modern hermeneuts of history to go beyond the simple physical documents themselves, and more importantly, beyond the language of those documents, in order not only to discover the psycho-apperceptual paradigm through which a particular author of history perceived and interpreted the events that he narrated, but also to then be able to separate the original so-called *primitive* paradigm, from a more acceptable, modern paradigm of history. It was, then, as a direct result of the hermeneutical method being transferred from the texts of the past, to the apperceptual

<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, instead of taking the attitude that there are in fact hermeneutical criteria that make it possible to study history scientifically, most modern scholars seem to prefer the facility of the type of rationally accommodating, mytho-poetic explanation of history that is advanced by A. France in *Le jardin d'Épicure*, Paris 1924, 107–108.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. R. Mucchielli, *Philosophie de la Connaissance*, Collection des Guides Pratiques, Paris 1969, 287, for the relationship between the historian and his subject. In his *Histoire de la France*, G. Duby reinforces Mucchielli's distinctly academic notion of history and the role of the historian when he makes mention of the "science historique," or the scientific study of history. G. Duby, *Histoire de la France*, Paris 1989, 303.

structure through which the interpreters witnessed the past, that the modern rationalist paradigm of history came into being. An historical paradigm that was developed *in all points* independently of the historical record.

This step in historical hermeneutics, however, was not a simple, unaffected transition from the actual documents to the authors of those documents, but also included a second, and much more subtle transference. Because beyond the obvious shift in focus from the historical document to the author of that document, the more subtle transfer of emphasis was the one that took place from the author of the document, to the beliefs that the author held concerning the world in which he lived and wrote. For it had become necessary for the rationalist hermeneut, in order to obtain what he considered to be *pure* history, or history that harmonizes with the rationalist paradigm of the world, to separate the real historical elements of the past from the “primitive” linguistic and apperceptual paradigms that gave form and texture to those real elements.

Henceforth, it was to become a rudiment of historical hermeneutics that the process of ascertaining historical truth was no longer to be restricted by the physical confines of the historical record, nor was it to be restricted by the supposedly simplistic, and of course extremely narrow criteria based on the quality and authenticity of the historical documents. Thus, with the acceptance of the idea of a multi-level hermeneutical perspective of history, i.e. historical document + author + author’s primitive belief system, it finally became possible, and meaningful, to speak about the true, or at least the rationally acceptable, reconstruction of history. What this means, in reality, is that there was finally an accepted procedure for historians to harmonize the modern experience of an inclusively natural phenomenal world, with the *mythic* experiences recorded in the historical documents, without having to accept that which had become unacceptable for the reason that it had become irrational: viz. a *real* mythic encounter in an inclusively natural world.

According to the rationalist perception of history, then, the label of historical truth becomes applicable only after the content of an historical document had been carefully separated from the author’s apperceptual concept of the contextual milieu in which he lived,<sup>4</sup> and after that content had been passed through the refining filter of the rationalist paradigm of

<sup>4</sup> The interpretative or psychological *dépouillement* of history, which is both unwarranted and impossible to control methodologically, is the process whereby the hermeneut goes beyond what an historical author materially communicates in his text, in order to determine what that author *truly* saw; namely, what he really *might* have seen, or what he really *could* have seen.

possible history. For it is the paradigm through which the interpreter of history reads the documents of history, a paradigm grounded in the modern experience of the world, that determines just how much of the author's concept of his world might have corresponded to real phenomenal happening, and how much was simple fiction, or artistic creation, or unfounded belief. These were the beginnings of the creation of rational history.

### The Text Critics

Historical critical scholarship was an intellectual movement born of a German generation seeking to demonstrate the historical reliability of the biblical documents.<sup>5</sup> And a simple overview of that movement shows that, from its earliest days, the critical approach to the study of historical documents had a tendency to channel itself into one of two distinct currents. The first of these currents is the school of text criticism, or the *historisch-kritische Forschung* properly speaking.<sup>6</sup>

The historical critical method of text criticism gained its initial impetus from the philological efforts of such Old Testament scholars as Wellhausen, Keil, Eissfeldt, and Gesenius. In this tradition, the fundamental thrust of the scholar's effort was geared toward the study of the origins and development of the actual historical documents that, when taken together, form the structure of the Old Testament.<sup>7</sup> This was a significant step in historical, and especially biblical, scholarship. Because in the process of establishing the authenticity of the biblical documents qua documents of history, and not simply qua documents of faith,<sup>8</sup> text scholars were convinced that they would be better able to reconstruct a historically credible *Urtext*<sup>9</sup> of the Old Testa-

<sup>5</sup> Cf. C. Kuhl, *Die Entstehung des Alten Testaments*, Bern 1953, 16.

<sup>6</sup> For an introduction to the *historisch-kritische Forschung* in the Old Testament, see O. Eissfeldt, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, Tübingen 1934, 2–3.

<sup>7</sup> For the task of the Old Testament critical scholar, see K.F. Keil, *Lehrbuch der historisch-kritischen Einleitung*, Frankfurt 1859, 1–2.

<sup>8</sup> Voltaire underscores the idea that an authenticated document is not necessarily a divine or inspired document. Voltaire, *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, Salomon, Paris 1964, 348.

<sup>9</sup> The term *Urtext* does not refer to the original text that actually came into being under the pen of the different writers of the Old Testament, but refers rather to the original form or content of the text. For in most cases the original document is lost to posterity. In the best of instances, however, the original form of an historical document may be critically reconstructed from a compilation of fragments, citations, manuscripts, and other supporting documents. Cf. Eissfeldt, *Einleitung*, 2, 693 ff.

ment if they could isolate the different sources and different literary tendencies that had contributed to the narrative traditions of those documents.

Ultimately, this critical research in comparative textual development was destined to uncover many different non-biblical traditions, for textual scholarship was not restricted just to biblical texts, that had clearly and significantly contributed to the narrative content of the biblical documents. As a result, when biblical history was discovered to be simply another of many currents in the flow of ambient history, and because the Old Testament documents were found to contain information that was neither unique nor original either to the Old Testament or to the Hebrew culture, but information that was borrowed or inherited from other cultures of historical proximity, scholars became convinced that there was really nothing specifically mystical or inspired about the biblical texts. Thus, through the efforts of historical-critical research, the historical elements of the biblical texts were finally isolated from the paradigm of religiosity and divinity, and the biblical texts themselves became more appreciated as reliable documents of history.

Through their studies of the origin and development of the biblical documents, then, and their efforts to systematically separate the religious paradigm through which biblical history had been understood and transmitted, from the elements of real history contained in the biblical documents, historical critical scholars were convinced that they had successfully uncovered the real historical framework, or that which was truly historical, in the Bible. What this really meant, however, was that historical hermeneuts were now free to re-write and re-construct the facts of history in order to make them fit any and every paradigm. For thanks to this new interpretive approach to history, it had finally become possible, acceptable, and even academically fashionable, to translate the so-called essential and actual historical truth (*der historische Kern*) of historical documents out of a realm defined supposedly by myth, and governed supposedly by faith, a realm that was, precisely for these reasons, unbelievable for the modern historian, and back into the framework of real history and the realm of reason, of the believable, and of the rationally acceptable. Thus, along with the scholarly re-creation of a rationally acceptable form of biblical historical, a general tradition for rationalizing history came into being.

### The New Hermeneuts

The second current that arose out of the movement to re-insert the Bible back into history, consisted of scholars who concentrated their studies on the hermeneutical *Auslegung* of the reconstructed biblical documents. Now the significance of the hermeneutical approach to an historical document cannot be overstated, for, quite in contrast to a document's historical credibility, the rational credibility of any document, which is a qualification of a fundamentally different sort, does not come as a result of objective textual research. Rather, rational credibility is arrived at by considerations that are entirely hermeneutical or interpretive in nature.

In the interpretive reading of historical documents, the historian methodologically "lays out" – thus *Auslegung* – a historical text. What this means is that the historical hermeneut re-constructs, based upon (1) whatever pertinent historical documents may be at hand, as well as upon (2) his own experience of the phenomenal world, what he perceives to have been actual historical reality. This is a very natural and perhaps even instinctive procedure. Unfortunately, however, the end result of this process has been that the rationally-oriented interpreter has arbitrarily presumed to re-write history, whenever the events narrated in the documents of history have been incongruous with the modern experience of the phenomenal world, in order to make history agree with his philosophical notion of what constitutes a possible historical experience of the phenomenal world.

The rationalist historian has constructed an, at least from his perspective, harmonious and integrated, but entirely rational paradigm through which to interpret historical phenomena. He has elected to erect an interpretive paradigm that allows him both to remain consistent with the rationalist philosophical presuppositions of modern scholarship, and to reject certain elements of the historical record that are otherwise problematic to a uniquely natural interpretation of the history of the human animal.<sup>10</sup> It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the historian of the world-become-rational, when confronted with so-called *problematic* historical phenomena such as gods, angels, flying horses, and miraculous happenings, should simply read

<sup>10</sup> In trying to determine the value of paradigm making in the different sciences, it is worthwhile to keep in mind France's metaphor concerning philosophical systems. "Les systèmes [philosophiques] sont comme ces minces fils de platine qu'on met dans les lunettes astronomiques pour en diviser le champ en parties égales. Ces fils sont utiles à l'observation exacte des astres, mais ils sont de l'homme et non du ciel. Il est bon qu'il ait des fils de platine dans les lunettes. Mais il ne faut pas oublier que c'est l'opticien qui les a mis." Anatole France, *Épicure* 102–103.



those phenomena out of real history by hermeneutically transforming them into myth or legend.

Theoretically, when the historical hermeneut constructs a paradigm of history, he incorporates as much as possible all the historical givens that are at his disposition into the creation of that paradigm in order to create the most universal and consistent interpretive framework through which to read and understand human history. This is the natural and accepted procedure of correct scholarship.<sup>11</sup> So the point of contention with rationalist scholarship is not the procedure itself of forming paradigms; it is, rather, the particular paradigm through which rationalist scholars have elected to read history. Because when history is entirely re-constructed through the rationalist paradigm, very significant parts of the historical record must be ignored or dismissed or rationally rewritten.

In as much, therefore, as the adherents of rationalist history remain faithful to the presuppositions of historical criticism, it is clear that they are no longer involved in the scholarly re-construction of actual history; rather, having left the domain of historical re-construction, they have become engaged in a parallel process of literary creation in which they themselves become the authors of a sort of neo- or pseudo-history.<sup>12</sup>

However normal and reasonable the rationalization of history may appear to modern hermeneuts, the procedure of reading history through a rationalist paradigm did not really become a cognizant or accredited element of historical critical scholarship until after Bultmann advanced his theory of *Entmythologisierung*. Since then, of course, the deliberate and systematic application of this procedure to the interpretation of historical documents has resulted not only in a total de-mystification of the phenomenal world of the past, but it has also encouraged a profoundly rationalist *parti pris* to take root in all sectors of the scholarly community. And yet, while rationalist hermeneuts are indeed correct in their perception of the shift that has so very obviously taken place between the era of mythical history (pre-modern history) and the era of natural or rational history (modern history), they are

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Th. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 1970, 17ff.

<sup>12</sup> France also speaks of interpretation as creation. And he recommends actively participating in the creative process of interpretation instead of energetically resisting the tendency to rationally re-create that which is, to the rational mind, historically unacceptable. (France, *Épicure* 99). Such a position is only tenable of course when one, such as France, does not admit the possibility of historical truth, or of truth derived from the documents of history. (*Ibid.* 31).

neither correct in the method that they have chosen to resolve this fundamental discrepancy in the historical record, nor, consequently, in the general paradigm of history that they have since created.

It is evident that the manner in which one perceives history is, for the most part, a natural consequence of the time/space orientation of the particular age in which one lives. Thus, for example, if the flow of history were to be reversed, with the modern era (AD) being anterior to the pre-modern era (BC), Homer would undoubtedly be looking for the causes of the Trojan War in economic instability and an up-swing of nationalistic ideologies, instead of in the anger of Achilles and the will of Zeus, and Plato would be arguing that Socrates has been proven incorrect in his idea concerning poets, and that the decline of the great civilizations of the West was not at all caused by poets who spoke of the gods in a way that was detrimental to the State,<sup>13</sup> but was caused, rather, by political, economic and military excesses. So while neither a deliberate mythologizing – from Homer’s perspective, or a deliberate de-mythologizing – which is precisely the same process only from the point of view of the historian of the world-become-natural, are acceptable or justifiable solutions to the problem of how to interpret shifts in the historical record, the faux pas is at least comprehensible.

## *II. History and Truth*

### The Rational *Auslegung* of History

Generally speaking, the problem of what shall be called the rationalist *Auslegung* of history need not have any direct bearing on the critical study of actual historical texts. In fact, the earliest text critics and philologists were anything but hostile to a rationalist reading of history. And yet, because these scholars were principally concerned with the objective reconstruction of the historical text *qua* text, and only secondarily with the reading of that text as a document of history, their scholarly work was not necessarily prejudiced by their philosophical convictions. Thus, a rationalist philosophy really need not affect the actual task of amassing and critically evaluating historical documents *qua* text. However, the rationalist approach to the reading and interpretation of those reconstructed historical documents proves to be extremely problematic.

<sup>13</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, Paris 1970, Bk. II 377d–e, 378a–e; Bk. III 398a.

The philosophical presuppositions that guide the historical hermeneut in his reading and translating of the documents of history, profoundly affect the manner in which he eventually organizes and re-constructs the phenomenal world of the historical past. This is inevitable. And yet this is also a significant part of the problem that undermines the credibility of rational scholarship. It is, for example, due almost uniquely to a lack of rational credibility, and not to any lack of historical credibility, that problematic historical testimony – i.e. any record that contains or makes reference to epi-natural or otherwise *unacceptable* phenomena, has been systematically censored, or hermeneutically de-mystified, by rationalist scholars. This, despite the fact that it is indefensible, at least academically speaking, to make philosophical pronouncements concerning what may or may not have constituted actual history, if those pronouncements contradict an otherwise credible historical record.

Rationalist scholarship has been inspired by the modern rationalist philosophy concerning that which constitutes acceptable or possible phenomenal reality – past or present, and uses that philosophical framework as a basis for establishing the interpretive criteria in the study of history. Therefore, because it is evident that there are shifts in the modes in which reality has historically presented itself to the human animal, there inevitably comes a point in his study of the historical record when the rationalist scholar elects to make a distinction between otherwise identically authenticated historical documents. This distinction, which is, of course, based uniquely on his philosophical opinion concerning that which is possible or impossible in the phenomenal world, has taken the form of a very logical classification. For the different modes of reality reflected in the historical record have been separated into two very general categories.

The first of these general hermeneutical categories is the “mythologische Rede”,<sup>14</sup> which includes any document containing information making reference to *obviously* non-historical or rationally impossible phenomena. The second general category, then, which contains only those records that attest to a more reasonable and natural type of phenomena, obviously becomes the category of actual historical phenomenal happening, or the rationally acceptable historical event.

To cite only one example from among many in the long tradition of rationalist scholarship, Nicolas Wyatt’s approach to the interpretation of biblical documents is a very typical illustration of the rationalist scholar’s

<sup>14</sup> R. Bultmann, *Neues Testament und Mythologie*, in: *Kerygma und Mythos*, Hamburg 1967, Bd. I 16.

hermeneutical method. For in an essay entitled <Interpreting the Creation and Fall Story in Genesis 2–3,> Wyatt allows himself, under the aegis of historical critical scholarship, to make the absolutely indefensible affirmation that “there are many mythical features underlying the story [of the creation and fall of man in Genesis 2–3], and yet [that] it has been remarkably emancipated from a *purely* (emphasis mine) mythical view”.<sup>15</sup> Now while the rationalist apriori of acceptable or possible history is clearly evident in the way in which he develops his argument concerning Genesis 2–3, it is both significant and unfortunate that Wyatt passes over in silence the criteria that allow him, as the late-come interpreter of historical documents, to determine what or how much of the documented information is an actual record of past phenomenal happening, and how much of the information is truly non-historical, in which case that information must either be erroneous or originating from a spurious source, and thus unreliable.

Rational scholarship notwithstanding, the charge of non-history is not equivalent to saying that the information, or some of the information, contained in a particular document is fictional or mythical. For to say that a document is of little, or no historical merit, is a charge that the historian can only level against the credibility of a document as a witness of history, and one that he must substantiate either by the demonstration that the document is not authentic, or that it is, generally, an unreliable witness concerning those things that are recorded in it.<sup>16</sup> If, therefore, a historical document has already been declared authentic, or historically credible, then that document may not be arbitrarily dismissed as non-historical, or of limited historical value, simply because it may contain information that rationalist scholars have elected, for philosophical reasons, to classify as unbelievable or mythical. Thus, when rationalist scholars dismiss or denigrate an otherwise authentic historical document simply because it contains references to rationally unacceptable or mythical phenomena, it must be clearly stated that this decision is based purely on personal philosophical conviction, and that such a decision has no place in the realm of historical scholarship.

<sup>15</sup> N. Wyatt ZAW 93 (1981) 11.

<sup>16</sup> According to Voltaire, “[c]e n’est pas assez qu’un manuscrit soit tiré de l’abbaye de Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire, ou d’un couvent de célestins de Paris, conforme à un manuscrit des feuillants, pour que cet acte soit authentique: il faut que cet acte soit ancien, écrit par des contemporains, et qu’il porte d’ailleurs tous les caractères de la vérité.” *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, Christianisme 131.

## Causes and Effects: Historical Phenomena and Their Historical Effects

In the study of Physics, significant discoveries are often made because physical symptoms or effects are observed and documented, although the presence and nature of an actual causal phenomenon – the cause of those symptoms – may be totally unknown and unsuspected.<sup>17</sup> Likewise in historical hermeneutics. For in all the various forms that the protean record of human history might assume, the otherwise intangible structures of the different historical contexts and periods are always faithfully reflected. Thus, by critically studying the accumulated texts of one specific written genre, such as the genre of tragic literature,<sup>18</sup> from its historical beginnings through the different cultures and up to its present state in the modern era, it must necessarily be possible not only to discover the differences between the particular historical situations that provoked the development of that genre in the different cultures, but also to discover the differences in the manner in which the universe of a given civilization was experienced, or at least understood, by its particular historical chroniclers.

In the example of the tragic genre, the profound disparity between the existential nature of the Greek mythoi, and the types of literary tragedies that were subsequently created from those mythoi, is a symptom of historical change. And just as in the physical realm, this symptom clearly points to the occurrence of an historical phenomenon, or phenomena, that must have caused the world reflected by the Greek texts to give way to an entirely new type of world.

The most obvious difference between the Greek mythoi and the later use of those mythoi by the different cultures, is in the relationship between the natural and the epi-natural dimensions. For the concerted perspective of the records left behind by the Greeks is that, up to and including the time of the earlier generations of Greeks, the gods were actively and phenomenally present in and to the human dimension. So the documented, and thus historical reality of Greek civilization is that the gods were eminently and tragically present to the world. But the record also clearly shows that, while the gods had indeed been a very real and very concrete presence in the

<sup>17</sup> Cf. A. Einstein, *Mein Weltbild*, Frankfurt a/M 1986, *passim*, but particularly: “Prinzipien der Theoretischen Physik” 110–112; “Zur Methodik der theoretischen Physik” *passim*, but especially 117–118; “Einiges Über die Entstehung der allgemeinen Relativitätstheorie” 134–138; “Das Raum-, Äther- und Feld-Problem der Physik” 138–146.

<sup>18</sup> The author is currently preparing just such a study in the development of tragic literature entitled, *History in an Age of Reason. Myth, Tragedy, and the Pursuit of Historical Truth*.

Greek universe all through their history, with the decline of the Greek civilization and the rise of the Roman Empire came an inexplicable void in the divine sphere, and divine activity was replaced by a dubious silence.

When taken from their native historical climate and translated into other historical environments, the quintessence of the original Greek tragic mythoi is, surprisingly enough, transfigured from what seems to be existential history into simple literary artifice. And based upon this unexpected and apparently inexplicable change in the development of one and the same phenomenon, viz. the tragic phenomenon, it now becomes the task of the historian to deduce the events, or historical climate that best elucidate and explain the historical truth surrounding the change in that phenomenon.

Under the aegis of rationalist scholarship, it is really quite easy for the rationalist hermeneut so simply dismiss an historical change of this sort by merely redefining the phenomenon in question. For to the rational mind born of a rational era, the phenomenal existence of gods – and especially the types of gods that haunted the Greek cosmos! – is obviously an absurdity.<sup>19</sup> And even if it were possible that a rationalist thinker should seriously consider the eventuality that the disappearance of God from the world could be a possible phenomenon of real history, due to the fact that the present interpretive structure of the world is monotheistic in nature and not polytheistic, he would still find it preposterous to consider either the possibility that a *pantheon* of gods could really have existed in history, as per the Greek records, or that the pantheon could have subsequently disappeared from the face of the earth.

Such considerations are impossible in the realm of rational history, for rational scholars assume *philosophically* that really existing, phenomenal

<sup>19</sup> After Descartes, questions concerning the existence of God, and thus of the existence of all the earlier gods of history as well, definitively lost all point of contact with the notion of *phenomenality* or *materiality*. And in that the gods were no longer part and parcel of the human existential experience, as they had once been for the Greeks, it was only natural that philosophers should turn their thoughts away from questions concerning the existential assurance of the physical presence of gods in the world, to the more abstract arguments concerning what the gods would necessarily be like if they did in fact exist. For in a world in which gods are not an integral part of the everyday phenomenal experience, it is both obvious and logical that the gods, if in fact gods there be, are not clothed in or defined by material existence. Thus, Descartes' contribution to transcendental metaphysics was to attribute to the gods of the modern world the same type of ideal existence as that which defined geometrical objects, which, although they have their own "*veras & immutabilis naturas*," are not present to the perception of the senses, but only to the perception of the mind. Descartes, *Méditations Métaphysiques*, Paris 1979, Méditation V 51; cf. Méditation I § 16. Cf. D. W. Aiken, *The Search for Truth. A Textbook for Transcendental Philosophy*, Frankfurt a/M 1988, 74–78.

gods – as opposed to ideal gods, not only do not exist, but that they cannot exist and could not have historically existed. Thus, it is philosophically impossible for a rationalist hermeneut to arrive at any conclusion other than the conclusion that the gods of the Greek mythoi can never have had real historical phenomenal existence. The result of this philosophical *parti pris* is that, instead of analyzing the Greek tragic phenomenon as *real* history, rationalist scholars see only a phenomenon of *literary* creation. For instead of observing a significant change in the historical mode, a change that has tangibly and repeatedly manifested itself in historically reliable documents, and that was brought to light through the critical study of a specific historical genre, the paradigm through which the rationalist scholar interprets the happenings of the world allows him to see only myth or literary creation, and not actual historical happening.

### Historical Shifts

Because of the necessarily rigorous criteria regulating an inclusively natural paradigm of history, it is obvious that the philosophical foundation of the rationalist hermeneutic has seriously prejudiced the entire critical interpretative process. This, of course, must be remedied before a definitive paradigm of history can be constructed. Nonetheless, historical critical scholarship as a whole still addresses a very legitimate, and even vital problem concerning the general *Auslegung* of history. Namely, the problem of resolving the conflict between that which Bultmann describes as “das mythische Weltbild einer vergangenen Zeit”,<sup>20</sup> which he calls “sinnlos” and “unmöglich” for the modern man,<sup>21</sup> and the *Weltbild* of the modern scholar that, he says, has been formed through “wissenschaftliches Denken”.<sup>22</sup> Because notwithstanding Bultmann’s clearly biased language, there is still the very real problem to be solved of how to interpret shifts in the historical record. And with all due respect to Bultmann’s frank psycho-apperceptual approach

<sup>20</sup> Bultmann, *Mythologie* (see n. 14) 16.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 16.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 16.

to understanding historical shifts,<sup>23</sup> the problem of how to interpret so-called mythical history, over and against modern, and to all appearances, inclusively natural history, is much more than a simple conflict of psycho-apperceptual perspectives.

Even among rationalist scholars, Bultmann's apperceptual explanation of problematic history has not necessarily reflected the most popular approach to reconciling the differences between the modern experience of reality, and the phenomenal world of the past as it has been handed down in the historical record. For Schweitzer, who is also clearly within the tradition of rational scholarship, resolves quite differently the problem of how to unify history. Instead of clothing the issue of historical interpretation in terms of apperceptual evolution, as does Bultmann, Schweitzer, with all the frankness that a realist brings to bare in the analysis of historical phenomena, poses the problem in the form of as a question concerning the fundamental nature of phenomenal reality: "Wie kann sich die historische Darstellung mit übernatürlichen Ergebnissen abfinden?"<sup>24</sup> It is evident, then, that for Schweitzer the conflict is not so much a conflict of perspective or apperception, but a conflict between that which is, according to the modern experience of the world, *obviously* possible within the confines of the physical world, and that which is, given the nature of the physical environment, *obviously* physically impossible.

The problem of how the historical hermeneut should interpret the shifts that have so obviously marked the historical record, and that clearly reflect changes come about in the modes of phenomenal reality, is unquestionably complex and far-reaching in its implications. But the problem is really not historical or textual in nature, for shifts in phenomenal reality do not bring into question the reliability of authenticated historical documents *qua docu-*

<sup>23</sup> Bultmann's argument for *Entmythologisierung* is certainly one of the more honest and straightforward attempts at resolving the problem of how to reconcile apparently irreconcilable differences in the historical record. The premises of his argument are (1) that the *Weltbild* of the New Testament is a mythical *Weltbild*, and (2) that the description of any historical event that occurs inside of that particular culture's mythical *Weltbild* will obviously be clothed in language that corresponds to that *Weltbild*, which is to say, mythical language. His conclusion, therefore, is only logical, when he asserts that historical events must be separated not only from the language of their contextual *Weltbild*, but also from the cultural *Weltbild* itself, if they are to have any historical, as opposed to strictly mythical, value. Bultmann, *Mythologie* (see n. 14) 15–16. Cf. Fr. Delitzsch's description of the *Weltbild* of the Old Testament in *Babel und Bibel*, Leipzig 1921, 40ff. Voltaire uses this same type of "raisonnement des Lumières" in his *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, *Athée, Athéisme* 57–58.

<sup>24</sup> A. Schweitzer, *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu Forschung*, Tübingen 1984, 53.



*ments*. The problem, rather, is hermeneutical. For the manner in which the modern reader of history resolves the problem of reconciling the phenomenal world of the past, as per the historical record, with his own immediate experience of phenomenal reality, is directly related to the *philosophical parti pris* that he brings with him in his reading of historical documents. And unfortunately, although, it seems, inescapably so, the resolution of this problem is inseparable from the arbitrary, and perhaps not fully impartial judgement of each interpreter.

It is incontestable that the numerous and diverse efforts of the historical hermeneuts to separate the historically accurate from the historically inaccurate, have been inspired by a very real problem concerning the differences that so evidently exist between the world of the past, as that world has been chronicled by the witnesses of the past, and the present phenomenal world that lies at our immediate fingertips.<sup>25</sup> And yet, notwithstanding the obviously profound change come about in the historical mode of the phenomenal world, it remains absolutely indefensible for the historical scholar, uniquely on the basis of his own normative experience of the phenomenal world, to separate that which he considers unacceptable history, i.e. myth – which invariably includes “religious elements”,<sup>26</sup> or elements such as Schweitzer’s *übernatürliche Ereignisse*, from that which he considers acceptable history.

This type of hermeneutical distinction is clearly indefensible in the realm of historical research, for in the final analysis, rationally acceptable history proves to be acceptable only because it belongs to a more accessible and, *uniquely for the more modern generations of historical interpreters*, more normative form of phenomenal reality.<sup>27</sup> Such a distinction is all that much more indefensible, however, when one considers that approximately 6000 years of circa 8000 years of written history is quite explicit, and amazingly

<sup>25</sup> Voltaire alludes to the change come about between the world of the historical record and his generation’s experience of the world, but he offers no other explanation of this phenomenon than an enigmatic and question-begging Amen. Voltaire, *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, Christianity 128. Cf. Religion, Quatrième Question 333.

<sup>26</sup> This language comes from Köberle; see J. Köberle, *Sünde und Gnade im religiösen Leben des Volkes Israel bis auf Christum*, as quoted by H.-J. Kraus in: *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1969, § 26, 380.

<sup>27</sup> One need only consider the early civilizations of the world to see that the phenomenal world of the past, at least according to the documentary witnesses of that world, is not so much natural, and indeed not natural at all, but *epi-natural* or *mythic* in nature. Cf. S.N. Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer*, New York 1959, and H.M. Chadwick’s, *The Heroic Age*, Cambridge 1967.

uniform, in reflecting actual epi-natural or *übernatürliche* happenings in the real world of time and space phenomena.<sup>28</sup> In the interpretation of history, then, the role of the historical hermeneut cannot be to dismantle the psycho-apperceptual and linguistic infrastructure of the supposedly primitive minds of the earlier chroniclers of human events, in order to liberate the real events of history. For it is conceivable that the world may have changed, and that the historical record, even in the form of the primitive paradigms, accurately reflects that change. Furthermore, when confronted with the preponderant and overwhelmingly mythical orientation of the historical record, it becomes impossible for the interpreters of history to *legitimately* separate the events of history from the cultural structure that gave rise to those events, using as their pretext their own normative experience of the world.

Another compelling factor that speaks against a rational reading of history is the tremendous discrepancy that exists between the historical record, and the rational interpreter's significantly divergent re-construction of what he believes to be accurate history. This is the same point that Stauffer so succinctly and convincingly disputed in his analysis of Bultmann's theory of Entmythologisierung. For in a rather curtly formulated thesis and conclusion, Stauffer argues:

“Man kann Bultmann's Kritik methodologisch kritisieren und feststellen: Das ist keine historische Kritik. Leopold von Ranke hat die alleinige Aufgabe des Geschichtsforschers bekanntlich schlicht und klassisch so formuliert: Der Historiker soll ermitteln, wie es eigentlich gewesen ist. (...) [Er] fragt, wie es eigentlich gewesen ist, nicht, was gewesen sein kann oder wie es gewesen sein muss.”<sup>29</sup>

### The Parameters of Historical Knowledge

Due to the fact that the actual physical documents of history constitute the material parameters of *all* possible historical knowledge, the historical critic must strictly conform, if not his personal, at least his professional paradigm-making to the actual information contained in the historical docu-

<sup>28</sup> Even though Voltaire himself is obviously not convinced concerning the phenomenality of mytho-historical events, he is both bombastic and cogent as he ironically itemizes, in an abbreviated version, the gargantuan record of the distinctly epi-natural events that are interminably woven into the historical fabric of man's past. Voltaire, *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, Miracles 290–291.

<sup>29</sup> E. Stauffer, *Entmythologisierung oder Realtheologie*, in: *Kerygma und Mythos*, Bd. II 16–17.

mentation at hand. In this point von Ranke was adamant, and correct. For in terms that may not be misconstrued, von Ranke spells out that the historian's task is not to re-create or re-write history, but rather to transmit (*ermitteln*) history on the basis of the testimony that is contained in the historical record.<sup>30</sup>

Facts of history may take any number of different forms, but they inevitably share the same quality of being phenomena that have been recorded by reliable sources in documents that have a seal of authenticity. As for as the interpreter of history is concerned, therefore, historical facts exist only in this format, and it is only through the critical study of this format that historical truth may be reconstructed and known. For in lieu of any other eye-witnesses to the past, whatever may be known of past happenings is necessarily and strictly limited to that which is communicated by the historical record concerning those events.

Apart from the various forms of the historical record, there are no other witnesses to the world of the past. Thus, as far as the historian is concerned in his quest to discover and reconstruct historical truth, it is not only futile, but obviously impossible to attempt to verify *independently of those records* – which is to say hermeneutically or philosophically, whether or not a documented event actually took place. This type of verification is categorically impossible, for the very good reason that there is absolutely no legitimate methodological procedure for going beyond the information contained in the historical record, and into the netherworld of past-time itself.

All knowledge of history is restricted to and by the information contained in the historical record, and apart from that record it is methodologically impossible to determine whether or not an otherwise acceptably documented space/time phenomenon may or may not have in fact occurred in past time. Likewise, independent of the evidence contained in the texts of history, it is impossible for the modern historian to seriously contend that a problematic event of the past was recorded simply as myth or metaphor or fictive creation, and that the event did not in fact actually occur as real historical happening. Thus, for example, in his evaluation of *Heilsgeschichte*,<sup>31</sup> Köberle rightly argues, because he argues from the perspective of historical knowledge as it is presented in the framework of actual historical documentation, when he says:

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 16–17.

<sup>31</sup> For a general understanding of the usage of the term *Heilsgeschichte*, see Kraus, *Geschichte* § 21, (see n. 26) 379ff.

“Die göttliche Offenbarung hat nicht ihre Geschichte neben und ausserhalb der profanen Geschichte Israels, sondern in ihr; sie nimmt die gesamte Geschichte, äussere wie innere, auf und durchdringt sie. Sie ist nicht Mitteilung von religiösen Lehren, sondern erweist sich in eine Kette von Tatsachen.”<sup>32</sup>

Köberle’s conclusion is backed, of course, by the most reasonable of principles. For, in order for properly documented historical phenomena (viz. past events that, because they are recorded in documents possessing a high degree of authenticity, must be accepted as phenomenally possible) to be subsequently classified – or censored – as hermeneutically impossible simply because they record epi-natural or *übernatürliche* phenomena, the historian must first have the overwhelming weight of the entire historical record in his favor. Yet this is clearly not the case. And, in fact, the crushing weight of the entire written record of the human animal, which is to say circa 6000 years of the approximately 8000 years of recorded history, is actually ir-rational, which is to say blatantly epi-natural, both in form and in content.

### History versus Non-history

In spite of the rationalist historian’s philosophical need to re-write the historical record in order to make it agree with what he perceives to be the normal experience of history, no interpreter of history is equipped, methodologically speaking, to determine independently of the historical record whether or not an event that has been recorded in an authenticated document may or may not have in fact occurred in the phenomenal world of the past. Furthermore, once the authenticity, and thus the integrity, of a given historical record has been correctly established, an acceptable interpretation of that document must treat *all* the information contained in the document in the same consistent fashion: as historical factum

Thus, quite in contrast to the rationalist procedure, the *historical* reliability or accuracy of a document is not determined by whether or not that document contains information that the rationalist scholar finds *philosophically* acceptable or unacceptable. Rather, it is determined by following a series of established criteria: by comparing the date of the writing of the document in question with the date of the events that it records, by substantiating the authorship of the document, by showing that the document is

<sup>32</sup> Kraus, *Geschichte* (see n. 26) 380.

internally consistent in the information that it contains, and by verifying that the information contained in the document is consistent with the knowledge that was generally accessible to the time-frame from which it is supposed to come. A guarantee, therefore, however slight, that the information contained in a document may in fact correspond to actual historical phenomenal truth, is possible only after the reliability of the document in question has first been established.

Because it consists of only two types of critical analyses, the actual process of authenticating an historical document is fairly straight-forward. In order to determine whether an historical document is authentic, it is first necessary to study the history of the document itself – viz. its origin, approximate date, the channels through which it has been transmitted, its language, and its authorship, in order to determine whether or not the document itself is actually what it claims to be.

The second type of analysis that is essential to the process of historical authentication takes the form of a comparative study. This is the phase in the critical study of the document in which the information and ideas contained in the document are measured against what is already known from other sources about that document's particular historical context. So if, for example, a document were to be found in which Homer makes reference to the philosophy of the Peripatetics, that document would generally be considered to be spurious, or unauthentic, because Homer could not have had any knowledge of a school of philosophy that came into prominence much later in Greek history. Even if this should be the case, however, it still does not preclude the possibility that the spurious document may be of historical value.

After a document has been thoroughly scrutinized in accordance with these different critical criteria, then, and after it has been determined to be an authentic or reliable record of the events that it records, there can be no more serious question as to whether or not a problematic event that might be recorded in that document can have actually occurred in the phenomenal world of the past. For the authenticated document clearly attests to exactly the occurrence of that possibility. If, therefore, in neglect of correct scholarly procedure, a conflict between an interpreter's philosophical conviction and the historical record should still arise, it is that much more evident that what is really at issue in the interpretation of history is not history itself, nor even the records of history, but rather the rationalist critic's presupposition concerning that which constitutes, according to rationalist norms, acceptable or possible modern phenomenal reality, and thus acceptable or possible past phenomenal reality, or history.

The extensive disunity that presently exists between the “received” or rationalist version of history, and the actual historical record, shows to what extent historical critical scholarship has diverged from the *raison d’être* of the study of history. For instead of accomplishing the task of re-constructing historical phenomenal truth from the different witnesses of the past, critical scholarship has been involved in the enormous, and unwarranted, task of re-writing history. This is a task that does not have as its goal the transmission of history, but rather the harmonization of the historical record with the rationalist concept of how things must *really* have been. And, of course, the notion of how things must really have been is inevitably molded by the mainline philosophical conviction of historical critical scholarship, that there is only one possible way things could have been: inclusively natural. An example of this divergent approach to history, and of the resulting conflict that has arisen between the historical record and the hermeneutical *Auslegung* of that record by rationalist scholarship, is Samuel Kramer’s analysis of early Sumerian history.

“Sumerian men of letters originated and developed a number of written literary genres myths and epic tales, hymns and lamentations, . . . and several of these, the epics and lamentations in particular, do utilize, at least to a very limited extent, what might be termed history [e.g. votive inscriptions on statues, steles, cones, cylinders, vases and tablets].”<sup>33</sup>

Kramer concludes from the study of these different forms of “what might be termed” history, that “the events recorded on them are merely a by-product of the urge to find favor with the gods.”<sup>34</sup> The flaw, of course, in this absolutely astonishing and unfounded conclusion, is that neither Kramer nor rational scholarship is in the position to offer an adequate response to the inevitable question: Who is to say, if not the historical record itself, that the events recorded in a given historical document do not in fact correspond to actual, past space/time phenomena?

### Comparative History

The conundrum that presents itself to the modern interpreter of history is that, as it has been preserved in the documents of history, the record of the peripeties of the human animal is not uniform. Up to the beginnings of the

<sup>33</sup> Kramer, *Sumer* (see n. 27) 367.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*; cf. 37–38.

modern period of history, which seems, at least in the Near East and the West, to be contemporaneous with the beginnings of Christianity, the historical record is *inclusively* mythic<sup>35</sup> in nature. With the beginnings of the Christian era, however, the epi-natural element seems to have gone out of both history and the historical record, leaving behind an all too human world of all too human events.<sup>36</sup>

Around the beginnings of the Christian era the historical record marks a very significant and important shift in paradigms.<sup>37</sup> To refer to this phenomenon as a simple shift in paradigms, however, is to employ a slight misnomer. For the shift was certainly not limited just to the manner in which man perceives, or has historically perceived, his world, but actually extends into the very routine and reality of his day-to-day life. Thus, historically speaking, the actual phenomenal world of the modern era is significantly different from the actual phenomenal world of the past; and the difference is not simply apperceptual in nature, but phenomenal.

Regardless of the historical period in which he lives, when confronted with significant shifts or transitions in the historical record, the natural response of any historian is to compare the records of the past over and against his particular generation's experience of the phenomenal world. In his discourse on metaphysics, for example, it was not at all out of keeping, or historically inconsistent, for Aristotle to refer to the gods as the dispensers of metaphysical knowledge,<sup>38</sup> nor to take the time to seriously analyze the arguments of the earlier Greek philosophers concerning the possible first causes of things,<sup>39</sup> although no modern thinker would ever consider the *real* possibility of such *obviously ludicrous* arguments.

<sup>35</sup> In his assessment of the problems involved in historical interpretation, Bultmann stresses that "das mythische Weltbild" that characterized pre-modern or pre-rational history, which was a worldview comprised of elements from the "zeitgeschichtliche Mythologie der jüdischen Apokalyptik und des gnostischen Erlösungsmythos", is not only unbelievable (un glaubhaft), but also impossible to accept as true historical happening (unmöglich. . . als wahr anzuerkennen). (Mythologie 16.) Now although Bultmann only applies his theory of *Entmythologisierung* to biblical documents, his arguments concerning the separation of the historic from the mythic certainly have more general ramifications in the scientific study of history.

<sup>36</sup> Voltaire argues that already by the time of the Church Fathers the miraculous or supernatural events that had characterized the era Christi were no longer to be observed. *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, Miracles 292–294.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Kuhn, *Structure* (see n. 11) 19 ff.

<sup>38</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* A 983a 4–10.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, A 983a33–987a29.

Unlike modern thinkers, though, Aristotle was very much a part of a particular world, the Greek world, in which the gods were an integral part of a commonly experienced historical reality. And Aristotle's particular experience of reality was consistent with the collective Greek experience of the world, even though a study of the texts of Homer and Hesiod clearly shows that the manner in which the gods were experienced in Aristotle's generation had already considerably changed – lessened in intensity, from the manner in which those same gods had been experienced by the earlier generations of Greeks.

The point to note is this example in that Aristotle's experience of his phenomenal world (and what he writes concerning his experience of the world is, for the historian, methodologically indistinguishable from the manner in which he might have otherwise perceived, or wished to have perceived the world), while consistent with the overall Greek experience of the world, was not precisely the same experience of the world that was transmitted by the earlier generations of Greeks,<sup>40</sup> and is not at all the same as the present generation's experience of the phenomenal world. And, in fact, Aristotle's world seems unbelievable or mythical to the modern generation. Indeed, if the modern critical scholar was present in the world *in the same manner* in which Aristotle, historically, was present in the world, the need for Entmythologisierung would never have arisen.

But this is precisely the point and the problem. And in the historical interpreter's attempt to make a uniform historical paradigm of the unfolding presence of the human animal in the world, it has certainly been the much easier solution to simply explain away the problematic shifts in historical reality by positing shifts in applicable *Weltbilder*, than to explain why or how a change has come about, or could come about, in the modes of phenomenal

<sup>40</sup> Even as early as Socrates the existence of the gods seems to have already become strictly a matter of historical record. Otherwise he would not have argued that, "if the gods do not exist at all or if they do not intervene in the affairs of this world, why should we bother to try to escape [from their sight]? And if they exist and if they care about the things of this world, we have no idea and no knowledge of their existence except by hear-say and by the poets who have recorded their genealogy". Plato, Republic, Paris Les Belles Lettres, 3 vol., 1967–1970, Bk II 365 e.



reality.<sup>41</sup> For it is far easier for a world-become-natural to accept history as a progressive sophistication of human perception, than to try to explain how it is that a multitude of gods and other beings no longer openly participate in human affairs as, if the historical record is in fact correct, they at one time did, and not unequivocally.

It is a natural and inevitable element of the *Auslegung* of history to measure one's own experience of the phenomenal world against documented experiences of the phenomenal world of the past. Yet this comparative process is one that is obviously prone of fostering many ambiguities. So if the historical hermeneut is to be thorough and accurate in his analysis of the historical record, he must be continually cognizant of the natural tendency to measure his immediate experience of the world against the historical record's description of the common experience of the world of the past. For quite in contrast to the modern experience of the world, the historical record presents an universe that is overwhelmingly epi-natural both in structure and in content. Unfortunately, it has been an accepted premise of rational scholarship from the very beginning, to reject ipso facto that which falls outside of the realm of rational and rationalized experience.

### Mytho-History

In the records of man's past there are documents that refer to, or explain, or treat in some fashion, what rationalist thinkers continue to consider logically inexplicable facets of the human animal. And yet these documents, as documents of history, are very legitimate and, generally speaking, very reliable sources of knowledge.

Without dismissing three-fourths of the documents of history, and without repudiating 6000 years of an 8000 year-old record, an inclusively natural

<sup>41</sup> The crux of Bultmann's argument concerning the demythologizing of human history is that phenomenal reality (my expression) has always been stable and consistent, but that the *Weltbild* of man changes with the ages: "So kann sich das Weltbild ändern etwa infolge der kopernikanischen Entdeckung oder infolge der Atomtheorie; oder auch indem die Romantik entdeckt, dass das menschliche Subjekt komplizierter und reicher ist, als dass es durch die Weltanschauung der Aufklärung und des Idealismus verstanden werden könnte; oder dadurch, dass die Bedeutung von Geschichte und Volkstum neu zum Bewusstsein kommt." Bultmann, *Mythologie* (see n.14) 17. Kuhn shall later describe the phenomenon of "changing Anschauungen" in terms of paradigm crises; cf. *Structure* (see n. 11) Chs. VI & VII.

interpretation of the history of the human animal is impossible. For the records of the unfolding history of the human animal are preponderantly mytho-historical, or epi-natural, in nature. And notwithstanding the rationalist paradigm of history, it is the unequivocal consensus of 6000 years of documented history that, in the course of his existence in the world, the destiny of the human animal has *happened* at the point of inter-section between the epi-natural and the natural dimensions. For it is at this intersection of mytho-history that the epi-natural and the natural dimensions have met and mingled, and at this intersection that the epi-natural must necessarily have submitted itself to the laws of being, to the laws of space and time, in order to enter into history. The residual effects of this historical intersecting of the natural and the epi-natural are still incontrovertibly apparent in certain mechanisms of the natural order,<sup>42</sup> but the actual transcriptions of these two-dimensional interphases are contained within the documents of history. Thus, far from being the watered-down literary creation of the rationalist interpreters of a natural world,<sup>43</sup> mythos, or mytho-history, is nothing less than a documented consequence of the meeting between the natural and the epi-natural dimensions.

Truth is not restricted to only those types of knowledge that may be submitted to mathematical or logical demonstrations for verification. And in the realm of history there is no such thing as syllogistic truth. So the speculative and critical mind must content itself with acquiring a different kind of truth in a different type of structure: truth as it is defined in the structure of historical knowledge. For both the documents of history and the syllogisms of reason can, in the best of instances, lead to *aletheia*. And in either instance it is only the form in which truth presents itself that has changed, and not the truth that has been clothed in that particular form.

<sup>42</sup> This argument is fully developed in Chapter II of this author's *Philosophy of Ethics. The Birth of Morals at the Crossroads of Myth and History*, Frankfurt 1988.

<sup>43</sup> The historical experience of the past does not correspond to the experience of the world as we know it. But modern interpreters of the world of the past cannot just dismiss *ohne weiteres* the records of historical events that they consider to be *unacceptable* history, simply because those events do not conform to the modern experience of the phenomenal world. And yet it is also understandable that modern hermeneuts should be reluctant to accept as real historical phenomenal happening, events that are so obviously *implausible* in the modern experience of the world. The result of this conundrum has been to conceive of unacceptable history as literary or poetic creation, whence the existence of the modern notion of mythos. The thesis of this paper, of course, is that this is an inadequate resolution to the problem of how to interpret the transitions, which have been inadvertently recorded in the historical record, in the modes of reality that have at one time or another defined the historical experience of the human animal in the phenomenal world.

### III. Conclusion

#### Paradigmatic Truth

With his theory of *Entmythologisierung*, Bultmann reconstructed a paradigm of phenomenal reality, past and present, that assumed that the phenomenal world is universally consistent and immutable, and inclusively natural. And, of course, the justification for this paradigm is obvious. For it is undeniable that the extended experience of phenomenal reality during approximately the last 2000 years has been, with few or no exceptions, consistently natural (rational). A study of the documents containing the record of the last 2000 years of human history, a period that corresponds to approximately one-fourth of the entire time-span of the written historical record, would also seem to generally confirm Bultmann's conclusion that phenomenal reality is constant, stable and rational. So, at least according to the more recent historical records, Bultmann's paradigm of an inclusively nature unfolding of human history would seem to be consistent, and therefore true. And because this natural paradigm of history seems to best correspond to the accumulated picture of history present in the documents of the last 2000 years, for the interpreter of history it is therefore not only reasonable, but necessary, to hermeneutically separate myth from true historical happening.

As a general construct of the *entire* history of the phenomenal world, however, the suitability of Bultmann's inclusively natural paradigm of the world is only as relevant as the information that is contained in that paradigm is universal. For in the event that there should, in fact, be authenticated historical documents attesting to shifts in the phenomenal world, i.e. to a time when phenomenal reality was not all natural, but overwhelmingly epi-natural, then Bultmann's contention that reality per se is constant and immutable would no longer be consistent with the information at hand. And this is indeed the case. For the theory of *Entmythologisierung* takes into consideration only the last 2000 years of the history of a world-become-natural. And based upon criteria of historical interpretation deduced from the generally natural framework of this world-come-lately, the partisans of historical demythologizing denigrate or dismiss as non-history approximately three-fourths of the entire historical record. Bultmann's paradigm for general historical aletheia, therefore, because it is not a *general* paradigm of history, is indefensible, and his hermeneutical construct should be re-structured in order to bring all the available information (the three-fourths + the

one-fourth) into general hermeneutical conformity. This is the only possible type of historical aletheia.

In the search for historical truth, the scholar must organize the documents of history in such a way as to be able to interpret the information contained in those documents through the general framework of a consistent and harmonious paradigm. And without exception, the truth quality of the paradigm that an interpreter constructs shall be relative not only to the degree of universality in the information that is contained in the particular construct, but also to the perspective, or the specific orientation, of the paradigmatic construct.

A unilateral concept of truth, viz. the notion that a phenomenon can be entirely grasped and significantly defined through a single paradigm, while it might seem to go hand in hand with the formation of structural truth, is, nevertheless, the bane of the interpretive process. Because if it is true, as has been argued, that the degree of truth in any historical construct is entirely dependent upon the universality of the information that is contained in the construct, then it is impossible that any single construct should ever be the definitive historical paradigm of the human animal. For the process of acquiring knowledge in and of the world, both present and past, is periodic in nature, and has neither final telos, nor distinct point of termination.<sup>44</sup> Historical truth, therefore, can never come in the form of a static concept or a definitive paradigm having immutable boundaries and a conclusive content. Rather, in the likeness of all that is in the world, including the creator of the significant world, all truth is in-process.

Historical truth is limited to the material witnesses of the past. If one accepts this as truth, then that theory of history is grossly inadequate that attempts to explain as a progressive evolution of "wissenschaftliches Denken," the shift from the mode of 6000 years of essentially epi-natural phenomenal reality, to the mode of the last 2000 years of essentially natural reality. The problem confronting the interpreter of history is clear: namely, that the historical record of the human animal is not uniform in its presentation of the phenomenal world. But the resolution to the dilemma of how to gain a holistic and consistent historical perspective of the human animal from a two-dimensional historical record, cannot be to dismiss that which the modern scholar finds unacceptable in the historical record, nor can it be to re-write in the language of the modern world that segment of the historical

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Kuhn, *Structure* (see n. 11) *passim*, but especially 170 ff.

record that attests to the very-different phenomenal world of man's past. These solutions are unacceptable, unjustifiable, and ultimately impracticable.

The only acceptable solution to the problem of how to read and understand shifts in the historical record is to re-examine the whole historical record, natural and epi-natural alike, not in terms of what must be fairytale<sup>45</sup> and what history, but rather, as the only available record of man's presence in the world of the past. For the records of the past provide the only available key to unlocking the historical mythos of the human animal. This must be done, if for no other reason than to clarify how it is that the gods no longer involve themselves in human happenings in the way in which, historically, they once did.

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<sup>45</sup> For a hermeneutical sketch concerning the apparently correct manner to believe in fairies, cf. S. Clark's article, 'How to Believe in Fairies', *Inquiry* 30, 337–55, No. 4, December 1987.