

MIRCEA ELIADE: MAKING SENSE OF RELIGION

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I certify that the material contained in this thesis is completely of my own composition and reflects the results of my own research except where explicitly stated otherwise.

ABSTRACT

This work argues that an interpretation of Eliade's thought as systematic, coherent, and finally rational is fully consistent with his writings. His thought is systematic in that the terms it utilises are inter-definable, although their relations are never explicitly clarified. Within this interpretation his thought is coherent and defensible. Particularly, it does not make unwarranted ontological assumptions but, through his a priori, taxonomic identification of the sacred with that which is apprehended as the real, defers to actual religious phenomena. That said, Eliade's method cannot be assimilated to phenomenology in any strict philosophical sense.

The resultant understanding of religion is well-defined and eminently practical for the study and teaching of the varied religious beliefs of our contemporary world. It makes sense of religion in three ways; firstly it presents as coherent religious expressions of the human existential situation; secondly it seeks to increase the (recognition of) meaning, significance, and relevance of such expressions; and thirdly it attempts to provide direction (Fr. sens) for scholars of religion in our efforts to interpret the data of religious phenomena.

Part one provides a concept-by-concept analysis of the terms of Eliade's understanding of religion, concluding with some observations on the implications of that understanding for the study of implicitly religious behaviour. Part two inspects and attempts to defend against the various criticisms which have been levelled against Eliade by other scholars in the field of the academic study of religion. It concludes with some observations on the significance of this interpretation for methodology in that study of a human phenomenon.

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MIRCEA ELIADE: MAKING SENSE OF RELIGION

Introduction

Eliade himself claims that his work is not systematic, or rather it has never yet been systematized.¹ Yet he affirms that theoretical coherence can prefigure systematic reflection. In an article of 1958, "Bi-unité et Totalité dans la Pensée Indienne" Eliade states that

one must not think that theoretical coherence is necessarily the result of systematic reflection; it is already imposed at the stage of the image and the symbol, it is an integral part of mythic thought.²

Eliade was here talking specifically about Ananda Coomaraswamy. However, the implication is, and I believe

¹ No Souvenirs: Journal, 1957-1969, p. 313.

² "Il ne faut pas croire que la cohérence théoretique est nécessairement le resultat d'une réflexion systematique; elle s'impose déjà au stade de l'image et du symbole, elle fait partie intégrante de la pensée mythique." My translation from "Bi-unité et Totalité dans la Pensée Indienne," p.1, n.1. Repeated in The Two and the One, p.89, n.1.

it to be an acceptable implication, that theoretical coherence can and often does precede the awareness of the systematic thought which generates it. This can be compared to the processes of language acquisition in which a "grasp" of a rule-governed system precedes conscious awareness of that system, as Noam Chomsky has argued convincingly. It can also be compared to Charles Hartshorne's contention that

the idea of "God" ... first reaches vivid consciousness in an emotional and practical, not in a logical or analytic, form and that this preanalytic form is not that simple.³

That Eliade was aware of the systematic nature of his own work is indicated by his complaint that it is a prejudice of the historians of religions that they must turn to other specialists for a world-wide and "systematic" interpretation of religious facts.⁴ Furthermore, in a "fragment autobiographique" Eliade has said

I wrote literature for the pleasure (and the necessity) of writing freely, of inventing, of dreaming, of thinking at all, relieved of the strictures of systematic thought.⁵

Hence it seems he did regard his scholarly writings as at least an attempt at systematic thought and a systematic interpretation of religion, although he recognises that

³ Philosophers Speak of God, p.1.

⁴ The Two and the One, p.195.

⁵ "Je faisais la littérature pour le plaisir (ou le besoin) d'écrire librement, d'inventer, de rêver, de penser même, mais hors du corset de la pensée systématique." Quoted in the Introduction to Andronic et le Serpent, p.13, my translation from the French.

such a systematic nature could issue from pre-reflective thought and subsequently remain only implicit in his work.

Thus I feel justified in seeking a theoretical coherence underlying Eliade's various expressions, despite the lack of superficial systematization and consistent, clear definition. In seeking to discover a constant and systematic relation of concepts throughout his writings I am quite deliberately seeking consistency rather than attempting to disclose inconsistency. I feel further justified in my conclusions since they have been made with reference to a large selection of Eliade's works, scholarly and otherwise. The consideration of that additional material offers valuable assistance in grasping his theoretical coherence. Eliade lamented that Thomas Altizer, for example,

relied exclusively on my scholarly studies published in English and French [and] ignored the complementary part of my oeuvre written in Romanian.⁶

Although this Romanian portion of Eliade's writing has become increasingly available, particularly through the translations of Mac Linscott Ricketts, little analysis has yet been made of it.

Even without the help of this less accessible material it is evident that the major themes in Eliade's

⁶ "Notes for a Dialogue." In J. B. Cobb (ed.), The Theology of T. J. J. Altizer, pp.235-6.

thought are symbol, myth, and ritual,⁷ hierophanies, the sacred and the profane, the coincidentia oppositorum, the repetition of archetypal structures,⁸ illud tempus and homo religiosus.

The recognition of a coherent system in Eliade's thought is not particularly new. It is the central theme in Douglas Allen's book, Structure and Creativity. However, despite the importance of that work, I feel that Allen over-emphasises phenomenology. Eliade had other influences aplenty; other writers stress his morphology as opposed to his phenomenology.⁹ Similarly Allen seeks to subsume under the two headings of the dialectic of the sacred and of symbolism all of the other elements of Eliade's thought. This drive to classify under a reduced number of headings or categories of increased significance is fundamentally foreign to Eliade's approach and hence finally inadequate to the exposition. The actual texts of Eliade's work emphasise meaning, not

⁷ Throughout this work I have largely ignored the question of ritual as a separate issue. I am assuming ritual to be a dramatic, rather than a narrative, reactualisation of mythic structures and symbolic themes. This is mainly because of limitations of space, and I freely admit that it does not do full justice to the issue.

⁸ Not Jungian archetypes, v. 1958 preface to The Myth of the Eternal Return; Ordeal by Labyrinth, conversations with Claude-Henri Rocquet, p. 122; Ricketts, "The Nature and Extent of Eliade's 'Jungianism'." Union Seminary Quarterly Review 25, no.2 (1970), pp.211-234.

⁹ v. Allen, pp.109f.

phenomenology.¹⁰ That Allen's emphasis is foreign to Eliade's position is shown by the latter's approving citation of Raffaele Pettazzoni's statement that "the only way to escape the dangers" of a phenomenological interpretation "consists of constantly referring to history".¹¹ It is also valuable to realise that Eliade considered that "Pettazzoni's work seems to us more instructive than his theoretical position". (ibid.) It was evidently Eliade's position to underplay theory in favour of content.

Critical analysis and especially reductive critical analysis is not valorised by Eliade as highly as creative hermeneutics. The idea of the creative input of the scholar is recognised and valued more highly than the alternative image of revelatory analysis. Allen's approach finally falters by trying to apply the latter instead of the former. It is evident from the interest which Eliade showed in Allen's work, expressed by his writing an introduction to Structure and Creativity, that neither scholar was aware of the real discontinuity between Eliade and philosophical phenomenology.¹²

In the conversation which provided the text for Ordeal by Labyrinth published in 1982, Claude-Henri

¹⁰ v. egs. Australian Religions, p.200; "The Sacred in the Secular World," p.101.

¹¹ "Mythology and the History of Religions," p.100.

¹² v. below, 7.3, pp.257-268, for a fuller discussion of Allen's treatment of Eliade.

Rocquet suggested that the scholar of religion, in reading Eliade, is involved in

a hermeneutics without end, since even as we read Eliade, we are interpreting him, just as he himself is interpreting some Iranian symbol. (p. 130.)

Eliade does not object to this contention (except to point out the fundamental and recurrent significance of the great symbols) and thus accepts that even in his scholarly work he does not transmit an encapsulated meaning clearly retrievable independently of interpretation. He also accepts that the author is not exhaustively aware of the valid implications of his own writings.

In order to appreciate the thought of a hermeneut such as Eliade I suggest that it is not finally productive to apply logical criticism of the minutiae, but rather to question the coherence and consistency of the whole. Despite the unquestioned importance of critical discrimination the radically critical, iconoclastic approach of many contemporary scholars can all too easily prevent the comprehension of the central insights of a talented thinker with a web of Lilliputian objections. I would suggest that Eliade's thought, like that of Paul Tillich, is systematic, each element referring to, supported by, and reciprocally supporting every other element. The rejection of any one element, for whatever reason, can then result in a rejection of the whole. Despite his repeated insistence that he was

not a theologian¹³ Eliade has often been described as having a hidden theological agenda, or more specifically of making an a priori assumption of the ontology of the sacred which disqualifies him from serious academic Religionswissenschaft.¹⁴ However, Paul Tillich has said that

the "scientific" theologian wants to be more than a philosopher of religion. He wants to interpret the Christian message generally with the help of his method. This puts before him two alternatives. He may subsume the Christian message under his concept of religion. Then Christianity is considered to be one example of religious life besides other examples, certainly the highest religion, but not the final one and not unique. Such a theology does not enter the theological circle. It keeps itself within the religious-philosophical circle and its indefinite horizons - horizons which beckon towards a future which is open for new and perhaps higher examples of religion. The scientific theologian, in spite of his desire to be a theologian, remains a philosopher of religion.¹⁵

Obviously, in these terms, Eliade did not even desire to be a theologian, scientific or otherwise. Even accepting that because of a "hidden agenda" he could still be a theologian despite himself, one can see that since he evidently "subsumes the Christian message under his concept of religion" he thus cannot "enter the theological circle" in Tillich's terms.

¹³ eg. "Preface" to Reflective Theology, by T. N. Munson; Images and Symbols, p.158.

¹⁴ Altizer, Hamilton, Penner, and Reno argue Eliade to make "theological assumptions". Baird, Saliba, Strenski, and to a lesser extent Allen argue Eliade to make unwarranted ontological assumptions. (v. my bibliography.)

¹⁵ Systematic Theology, vol.I, p.10.

Furthermore it is doubtful that Eliade accepted the Christian message as "the highest religion". Douglas Allen has argued, with support from Eliade himself, that Eliade's evaluation of the "highest" types of spiritual manifestation is at least partially based on a position much more characteristic of Indian mysticism than Western religious traditions.¹⁶ It is specifically Eliade's refusal to valorise the Christian religion unequivocally above all others that simultaneously constitutes his escape from the theological circle¹⁷ and animates his academic study of religion. Tillich has said that "Christian theology is the theology in so far as it is based on the tension between the absolutely concrete and the absolutely universal".¹⁸ This attitude is, no doubt, exactly what Eliade had in mind when he stated that for the Christian the revelation of the Christ event is the highest.¹⁹ I emphasise "for the Christian", because it seems surprisingly easy for readers to miss the disclamatory thrust of his phraseology. Eliade is in no

¹⁶ "A Phenomenological Evaluation of Religious Mysticism." Revised in ch.7 of Structure and Creativity, v.p.222 and v. "Foreword" by Eliade. This contention is also supported by Sergiu Al-George, op. cit.

¹⁷ NB that throughout Patterns Eliade consistently qualifies his valorisations of the Christian Incarnation with phrases such as "one might say", "one could attempt to vindicate", and "from this standpoint". This fact is often ignored in analyses of Eliade's valuations. (Patterns, pp.29f.)

¹⁸ Systematic Theology p.19.

¹⁹ v.Patterns, pp.29 and 30, n.1, "in the light of Christian theology", and "from this standpoint".

way claiming that Christianity is the absolutely highest form of religion; rather that it has characteristics which have allowed it to be convincingly perceived as such by certain specific people.

Thus Eliade refuses to share with Tillich the focus of his ultimate concern in the Christian religion. Nonetheless he manifests undoubted similarities with the thought and methods of Paul Tillich which have attracted the criticisms of those would-be scientific scholars of religion to whom the predisposition necessarily involved in the theological approach is anathema, preventing all possibility of genuinely creative, free research. I contend that it is mainly because of the detection of this predisposition to the acceptance of the reality of the sacred that Eliade has become

a problem: to at least half of today's historians of religion he embodies the discipline; to the other half he is anathema.²⁰

However, that such a predisposition is finally incompatible with genuine research is an conception of both reality and of the sacred which does not derive from Eliade's work and which is finally incompatible with his whole understanding of religion.

The similarities which Eliade does have with Tillich, the implications of which I do not believe to have been fully realised or researched, is the systematic nature of the categories of the thought of both scholars.

²⁰ Ivan Strenski, "Love and Anarchy in Romania", p.391.

Douglas Allen comes closest to this analysis of Eliade and recognises its lack in other scholars when he says

before proceeding with our systematic treatment of Mircea Eliade's phenomenological approach, we may acknowledge that our analysis is in contrast with most of Eliade's interpreters, who seem to feel that Eliade has never developed a systematic methodology.²¹

To this extent I am in agreement with Allen; however, as I have said, I disagree with Allen's emphasis on phenomenology. Furthermore, I would like to consider why it is that so many scholars have been unable to appreciate the coherence of Eliade's thought.

Tillich expresses the nature of systematic thought well in the statement,

neither the introduction nor any part of the theological system is the logical basis for the other parts. Every part is dependent on every other part. ... The arrangement is only a matter of expediency.²²

But unlike Tillich, whose systematic mentality and approach was a source of wonderment and admiration for him,²³ Eliade lacked the neatness and clarity of expression which would render the implicit system of his thought obvious to his readers. This does not mean that such inherent consistency is lacking.

Adrian Marino has made an admirable attempt to systematise Eliade's hermeneutics but I believe that this

²¹ Douglas Allen, Structure and Creativity p.106.

²² Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology vol. I, p.11.

²³ As expressed in "Paul Tillich and the History of Religions".

is yet to be done for the larger system of his thought. It is not only Eliade's lack of neatness and clarity of thought which obscures his systematic conceptions, it is also a deliberate policy on his part, partly inherited from his philosophy teacher and mentor, Nae Ionescu, to avoid elaborated systematic thought as "the philosophers' tombstone".²⁴

No doubt the critics of Eliade who have cited his "hidden theological agenda" and his unwarranted ontological presumptions would be delighted to see this comparison of Eliade and Tillich. However, my point is not to indicate Eliade's theological status or a priori approach. Rather it is to indicate the presence of a systematic position, the rational defence of which is both possible and credible.²⁵ As Steven Toulmin has pointed out, the inter-dependent nature of certain theoretical structures, such as Newtonian physics, is certainly not necessarily a weakness.²⁶ As long as the categories of such a system can be appropriated and utilised then the whole system can be accepted.

The very fact that Eliade is rejected by both camps - denied entry into the "theological circle" by Tillich, yet accused of a "hidden theological agenda" by

²⁴ On which v. M. L. Ricketts, The Romanian Roots, p.862.

²⁵ See Systematic Theology vol.1, pp.65ff for Tillich's elaborate defence against attacks on systematic thought.

²⁶ Stephen Toulmin, The Return to Cosmology p. 191.

the "scientific" scholars of religion - is to my mind a promising sign that he has managed to walk the middle way, avoiding, as far as possible, commitment to any "orthodoxy", while still allowing religious behaviour to have the significance which it evidently does have to the believer.

Secondary scholars have all too often criticised what on closer inspection turns out to be their own interpretations of Eliade's thoughts on this matter rather than his actual thoughts. Eliade's fiction and some of his Journal entries reveal his dismay with the impossibility of the attempt to reveal certain "secrets" no matter how hard one tries.²⁷ When one is dealing with fundamental categories of thought such as "reality" and "being" fundamental misapprehensions are, apparently, all too easy to make. I do not believe that we can ever fully escape this. It is a fact of life that what I will describe will never be anything other than my own (creative, I hope) interpretation of the thought of Mircea Eliade. To follow his example, I will attempt to mitigate the possible ill-effects of this fact by referring as often as an acceptable style will allow to the primary sources. Of course, even those suffer somewhat from the difficulties of translation and the subtle influences of the institutional context of the

²⁷ This theme occurs in Dayan, A Great Man, Uniformes de Général, Iphigenia, Adio, and The Old Man and the Bureaucrats, v. my bibliography.

scholar. Even so, it is better to read and attempt to analyze what has actually been written rather than derived statements of my own construction. If this has led me to use overly long quotations it is due to my desire for accuracy and my efforts to avoid the dangers of "paraphraseology".

My approach will also be an attempt to clarify by application Eliade's creative hermeneutics. It may seem unsound to attempt to apply a hermeneutics before one has clarified exactly what that hermeneutics consists of. However, my point, and, I believe Eliade's point too, is that interpretation is an iterative and recursive action. One is constantly applying one's understanding in the act of formulating it, and formulating it in the act of its application. Understanding, comprehension, interpretation, is not a precise, step at a time, linear, sequential movement; rather, it is a dynamic, interactive, organic process involving all the coruscations of fractal geometry and the inexplicable leaps of quantum phenomena. While there may be a danger here of simply leaping on a bandwagon of the metaphorical application of fashionable cant, it must be borne in mind that understanding itself is a "metaphorical" process of the application of inexact and partial models, and that until such time as the more positivist theorists can actually provide us with a consistent, precise, linear, step-by-step, sequential description of what understanding and interpretation actually are, such

suggestive strategies are the most effective mode of communication open to us. Thus, rather than pretending to a linear development in my understanding and my interpretation of the thought of Mircea Eliade, I will openly apply my interpretation in the act of explicating it, in the knowledge that this reflects the actual process by which that understanding came about, and in the hope that this will prove the most effective method of communicating both Eliade's views and my interpretation of them. Ninian Smart has said that "Eliade's main position is shrouded in ambiguities".²⁸ It is my hope that this approach, informed by an extensive and close textual reading will resolve some of these ambiguities and reveal Eliade's main position more clearly.

²⁸ The Science of Religion and the Sociology of Knowledge, p.66.

Chapter One

Hierophany

As I suggested in the Introduction the various taxonomic elements of Eliade's thought are mutually dependent, thus each one can only be finally understood when the others are grasped. It makes, therefore, little difference in what order I attempt to explicate each concept; the explanation of one of these categories will always partially involve the explanation of all of the others. With this in mind, however, I have attempted to construct an exposition in which the earlier explanations involve the later ones as little as possible, and the later ones increasingly presuppose the earlier. I have found it quite impossible, for example, to discuss the Sacred and the coincidentia oppositorum without reference to Eliade's concept of "hierophany", and so it is with my attempt to clarify this deceptively simple word that I will begin.

Although it may be strange on first exposure this neologism of Eliade's is, as I say, deceptively simple. It is compounded, we can easily explain to a freshman student, of the Greek hierō, the holy, the sacred, and phainein, to show. Thus a "hierophany" is a perception of the sacred. Eliade himself says "the term in its widest sense [means] anything which manifests the sacred",¹ and the entry from the Encyclopedia of Religion (credited to Eliade and L. E. Sullivan) insists that "the

¹ Patterns in Comparative Religion, p.xiii.

term involves no further specification".² Even so, the matter is far from simple. Completely ignoring for the moment the difficulties raised by the loaded term "sacred" and thus the aporia caused by defining one unknown in terms of another, let me first point out the difficulties raised by Eliade's actual usage of his term. Despite the clear, simple definitions quoted above, it should be noted that the passive form of the verb, phainesthai, means to appear, allowing an interpretation of hierophany as an intransitive action by that which is made manifest. Eliade's first introduction of the term into his text is problematic. "Some hierophanies are not at all clear, are indeed almost cryptic", he states, "in that they only reveal the sacred meanings ... in part, or, as it were, in code".³ Furthermore,

we must get used to the idea of recognizing hierophanies absolutely everywhere ... we cannot be sure that there is anything ... that has not at some time in human history been somewhere transformed into a hierophany. (ibid., p.11.)

So, not only are things "transformed" into hierophanies, but anything can be so transformed, and yet, having been so transformed the hierophany may remain "cryptic". Furthermore, "every hierophany makes manifest the coincidence of contrary essences".⁴ This is a far cry

² Encyclopedia of Religion, Vol. 6, p.313.

³ Patterns, p.8.

⁴ Patterns, p.29. v. below 3.1, pp.62-77, on Eliade's idea of the coincidentia oppositorum.

from the notion of an irresistible and unmistakable self-revelatory, lightning-like manifestation of the divine normally associated with the concept of revelation.

As the Encyclopedia goes on to explain, "the appearance of the sacred in a hierophany, however, does not eliminate its profane existence". The implication of this is that

whenever the sacred is manifest, it limits itself. Its appearance forms part of a dialectic that occults other possibilities. By appearing in the concrete form of a rock, plant, or incarnate being, the sacred ceases to be absolute, for the object in which it appears remains part of the worldly environment. In some respect, each hierophany expresses an incomprehensible paradox arising from the great mystery upon which every hierophany is centered: the very fact that the sacred is made manifest at all. ... The same paradox underlies every hierophany: in making itself manifest the sacred limits itself.⁵

Although the term is of crucial importance throughout Patterns and makes a considerable contribution to the argument of The Sacred and the Profane, it is used only five times in The Myth of the Eternal Return and does not occur in Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries, Rites and Symbols of Initiation, Myth and Reality, Zalmoxis, Australian Religions, nor, most notably, in A History of Religious Ideas. Perhaps this indicates a growing dissatisfaction on Eliade's part with either the complexities of the term itself or the reaction which it received. Nonetheless, its inclusion in the early works

⁵ Encyclopedia, p.314.

alone would encourage an attempt to understand it more closely. The light which it casts on the whole structure of Eliade's thought finally makes such an attempt indispensable. To this end I want to consider the history of the usage of the term by Eliade.

Actually it is not used in his earliest writings but seems to spring fully formed into his vocabulary in Patterns in 1949. Mac Ricketts⁶ points out a pivotal period in Eliade's life towards the end of 1936. Before this date his analysis of religions utilizes a relatively simple structure of polarities. In the published version of his thesis on Yoga, Essai sur l'origin de la mystique indienne (1936), for example, he

sought to interpret Yoga in terms of a few basic categories, chiefly two pairs of opposites: "magical/mystical" and "abstract/concrete". (Ricketts, op. cit., p.803.)

It is only after 1936 that Eliade starts to utilize the terminology and categories of analysis familiar to his Western Readers from 1949 onwards. His first article published in the English language, "Cosmical Homology and Yoga", (1937)⁷ marks most strongly this development of thought. As Eliade had said in his thesis on Yoga, yogic techniques express a tendency toward the concrete, they are empirical in the sense that they emphasize practical experience. The particular empirical experiences which

⁶ Romanian Roots, pp.798ff.

⁷ "Cosmical Homology and Yoga". Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art 5 (1937): 188-203. (V. Romanian Roots, pp.819-825.)

are emphasized are identified as being absolutely "real" in their nature, as experiences of true "Being".

Ricketts points out that "this equation of 'concrete experience' with a quest for the metaphysical 'real' is made only once, and without emphasis, in the Yoga thesis",⁸ it is tacked on to the last page (p.311.) almost like an afterthought. However, in the 1937 article it is immediately and emphatically stated that

this tendency toward the concrete, the effort towards the "real", means a way out from daily, profane, insignificant, "illusory" experience in which man lives.⁹

The experience of the real is now further identified as a soteriology. Yogins seek to replace their experience of the illusory, the unreal, with experience of the real. Finally their effort "makes Being coincide with Non-being, 'sat' with 'asat.'" (ibid., p.202.) Evidently this is a prefiguration of what Eliade will later begin to call the coincidentia oppositorum.

Previously, in his literature and personal philosophy, Eliade had subscribed to Nae Ionescu's philosophy, often referred to as "Trairism" (although not by Ionescu and his followers), the search for and valorization of the "authentic" in and through lived experience (Romanian, traire). In prefiguration of the

⁸ Romanian Roots, p.820.

⁹ "Cosmical Homology", p.188. It is in this same article that Eliade first makes explicit his equation of the real and the sacred, the importance of which will be discussed later in my chapter on the sacred.

French existentialists the Romanian intellectual movement represented by the Criterion group¹⁰ had stressed actual personal lived-experience or Erlebnis as the only source of "authenticity".¹¹ Eliade had militated for "authenticity" in 1932-33 in Fragmentarium and in Oceanografie. However, in 1936 he published two "notes" on authenticity in the Bucharest journal, Vremea. In the first he graduates magic, idealism and authenticity by the power they ascribe to humanity (magic the most and authenticity the least), and identifies authenticity as "a vulgar popularization of idealism, and both authenticity and idealism are failures of the magical consciousness". In the second Ricketts describes Eliade as arguing authenticity to be "a reaction against the abstractions of both romanticism and positivism; it is part of a general trend toward the concrete ... and is the expression of a powerful metaphysical thirst".¹² The implications of the "Cosmical Homology" article are clearly that now Eliade considers normal lived experience to be fundamentally unreal, illusory and inauthentic. This does not, as it might at first seem, constitute a complete schism from Ionescu's thought. As Eliade made

¹⁰ V. Romanian Roots, pp.551-565.

¹¹ V. ibid., pp.96f, and pp.98-126 on traire in the thought of Ionescu. v.also Sergiu Al-George, "India in the Cultural Destiny of Mircea Eliade", and Günter Spaltmann's article on "Authenticity and History in the Literary Works of Mircea Eliade", in Kitagawa and Long (eds.), Myth and Symbol.

¹² ibid., p.982, nn. 55, 56.

plain in an article assessing Ionescu in 1937 he still considered his philosophy tutor to be the foremost thinker in contemporary Romania. On the contrary, Eliade still subscribes to the concept of traire as the source of authentic experience even though it is paradoxically regarded as simultaneously the source of illusion and the unreal. It would appear that this paradox was made clear to Eliade by the fact that the yogin who has attained to the experience of true Being, the Jivanmukta, nevertheless "goes on remaining in 'life,'" even though he "does not partake anymore in the human condition".¹³ The whole exercise of the yogi's efforts Eliade sees as an attempt to nullify or escape the human condition, the "character sine qua non of 'life.'" (ibid.)

Thus normal, everyday experience is seen as illusory, unreal, profane. Eliade supports this perspective with copious textual examples, but to speak to the general student of religions, he is referring to the fact that the Christian tradition sees the phenomenal world as essentially "fallen", reduced by original sin from its original, divinely intended condition to a vitiated, lesser state; the Buddhist tradition sees the world as anitya, impermanent and perishable, and even the human self as negated in the doctrine of anātman; to the Hindu the temporal world is produced by māyā, the magical power of illusion; for the Moslem "all that dwells upon

¹³ "Cosmical Homology", p.202.

the earth is perishing, yet still abides the face of thy Lord", (Qu'ran 55:26-27) and so on. Yet that same experience, when apprehended in a specific way, when interpreted in a certain manner, becomes authentic, real, sacred: it becomes an hierophany. This bears obvious similarities with Nagarjuna's śūnyatāvāda in which nirvāna and samsāra are equated, a philosophy to which Eliade later referred as "one of the most original ontological creations known to the history of thought".¹⁴ It also presupposes Eliade's attitude to the coincidentia oppositorum as the most profoundly meaningful symbol of the nature of absolute, unconditioned reality.

Precisely how Eliade made the shift in the late 1930s from the basic notion of lived experience as the source of authenticity to this more subtle, paradoxical conception of the coincidence of the real and the unreal in the experience of human life is not clear. Ricketts' consideration of Eliade's publications from this period are of invaluable assistance, revealing, for example, that "authenticity is no longer a 'cause,' but a 'subject' to be pondered and debated". (983) However, the personal insights of Eliade's journals are sadly lacking. Unfortunately the journals which he kept for that period were lost during the war and the Autobiography is not helpful on that specific point. His published journals, dating from 1945 onwards, make one

¹⁴ History of Religious Ideas, vol.2, p.225.

possibly valuable contribution to this problem. In October 1949 Eliade wrote, "I must divest myself of this remnant of immaturity, this superstition of 'authenticity' at all costs".¹⁵ Specifically he was writing here of his difficulty in speaking from a prepared text. Only the initial confrontation of ideas seemed "inspired" to him, the considered and rehearsed seeming "artificial". Yet, by extension, one can detect here the dilution, the doubt, of traire as the only mediator of the authentic. As Eliade began to consider the value of the rehearsed (the artificial in the sense that it had been worked on), to consider that it was not actually immediate, unmediated experience which was the vehicle of the authentic, he was becoming more receptive to the concept of the reworked, mediated meanings of poesis as communicative of the real, the authentic; and of the actual lived experience as not inherently meaningful at all. Furthermore, he had recognized the thirst to transform ordinary, run-of-the-mill experience into "authentic" experience of the truly "real" as common to both his Criterion friends and the Indian Yogis.

This recognition opens out into his doctrine of hierophany; lived experience as simultaneously revealing and concealing the sacred. "Anything man has ever handled, felt, come in contact with or loved can become a

¹⁵ Journal I, p.99. Oct.1949.

hierophany".¹⁶ Its inherent meaning is precisely nil, or rather is quite neutral, until it is considered and interpreted. This is simultaneously Kantian and Platonic in structure. The content of sensory experience participates in the sacred which is the source of all meaning, like the Platonic world of Forms, but, like the Kantian noumenal, experience is itself devoid of meaning until it has been "processed" by the interpretative psyche to become the phenomenal world. Lived experience, then, takes the place of the Kantian noumenal. It is not beyond all access; it is, on the contrary, immediately present to our senses, and yet its meaning, its significance is not accessible prior to the perceptual processes of interpretation which identify experience as either sacred or profane. Such an apprehension of the processes of perception and interpretation immediately begins to separate the concepts of external actuality and truth and this inherent reassessment of the constitutive characteristics of truth will be considered further.

This understanding of Eliade's hierophanies does not spring immediately from the data but must be finally inferred from the interrelations of the totality of his statements. A more direct and immediate interpretation is given by Jay J. Kim, in his 1972 article, "Hierophany and History". Kim's description of what he calls the "Ontological Locus of Hierophany" is so clear and

¹⁶ Patterns, p.11.

straightforward that I can do no better than to reproduce it in extenso.

According to Eliade's analysis, each locus by its given constitutional nature provides specific meanings to hierophany and circumscribes the range of the possible modal variations of a given hierophany. Let us examine a few examples from Eliade's analysis.

The sky is even before man is. The sky is there before man, but the sky is not just there. The sky is high, transcendent, infinite, immovable for no other reason than that the sky is. As Eliade says,

let me repeat: even before any religious values have been set upon it the sky reveals its transcendence.

The sky "symbolises" transcendence, power and changelessness simply by being there. It exists because it is high, infinite, immovable, powerful.¹⁷

The essential point is that man does not project or attribute these "qualities" to the sky as a way of apprehending the sky, religiously, mythically, symbolically or otherwise.

The sky shows itself as it really is: infinite, transcendent. The value of heaven is, more than anything else, "something quite apart" from the tiny thing that is man and his span of life. The symbolism of its transcendence derives from the simple realisation of its infinite height.¹⁸

We are aware of and can conceive of infinitude and transcendence only because the sky is there as it is. Our primordial experience of it cannot be otherwise than it is.

Like any other ontological locus of the elementary or central hierophanies, the sky is an inexhaustible source of modal variations and permutations of the ouranic hierophany. Consequently, anything that happens among the stars or in the upper areas of the atmosphere - the rhythmic revolution of the stars, chasing clouds, thunderbolts, meteors, rainbows - is a moment in that hierophany.¹⁹

Another example is water. Water simply is without modal qualifications, for water has no intrinsic shape of its own. Water cannot be created - given a constitutive form - because "it can never get beyond its own mode of existence - can never express itself in forms".²⁰ Since water cannot be created it always exists. This means

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.39. I follow Kim's original footnotes.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.38f.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.40.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p.212.

that water always and necessarily precedes all creation. And because it precedes all it is not alone. "Water is always germinative, containing the potentiality of all forms in their unbroken unity".²¹ It is the necessary matrix of all forms, the necessary basis which upholds all creation. To be created means then to be separated from water. Water can never pass beyond the condition of the potential, of seeds and hidden powers. Everything that has form is manifest above the waters, is separate from them.²²

This primordial nature of water underlies all the innumerable variations on water symbolism. As Eliade emphatically states, "in whatever religious framework it appears the function of water is shown to be the same".²³ The ontological locus of the aquatic hierophany is as inexhaustible as the ouranic but there can be no confusion between them.²⁴

There is an unavoidable conflation of hierophany and symbol apparent in Kim's description which I will for the moment pass over pending my separate treatment of symbols and myths. It is a fascinating thesis of Kim's that the ontological locus of the Hebraic hierophany is the community, people as a corporate body, a point which he argues compellingly. He also suggests that the ontological locus of hierophany for Christianity and Islam respectively might be the person and the word.²⁵ Unfortunately an inspection of these intriguing suggestions is tangential to this study. What must be considered carefully here is my contention that the hierophany is dependent on perception and interpretation

²¹ *ibid.*, p.188.

²² *ibid.*, p.212.

²³ *ibid.*, p.212.

²⁴ "Hierophany and History", pp.345-346.

²⁵ *ibid.*, pp.346-347.

to be an hierophany as opposed to Kim's insistence that "man does not project or attribute these 'qualities' to the sky as a way of apprehending the sky, religiously, mythically, symbolically or otherwise".

Clearly Eliade's position is that it is the true and accurate nature of the sky, for example, which is apprehended in the "ouranic" hierophany. However, it is equally clear that this nature need not be so apprehended. From the totally desacralised point of view the sky is not particularly high, about 3 miles; it is not particularly transcendent, being a relatively thin blanket of atmospheric gas on the surface of the terrestrial globe; it is not particularly powerful, since modern technology can adequately protect us from the weather, and anyway the human race could (nowadays) blow the atmosphere clean off the planet. Likewise water does not necessarily possess, for example, the characteristic of pre-existence attributed to it. Its "formlessness" is merely a characteristic of its normally fluid state and is shared by all fluids, heating or cooling will endow it with other properties; and as a fairly simple compound of hydrogen and oxygen it can be "created" by a number of chemical reactions.

It is not a case of simply apprehending the characteristics manifested by natural phenomena to appreciate the nature of an hierophany, and it is certainly not the case that "we are aware of and can conceive of infinitude and transcendence only because the

sky is there as it is". If this were the case there would be no possible new hierophanies, nor would there be any disagreement as to the nature, meaning, or very existence of hierophanies. Eliade has sought to present his readers with those hierophanies most fundamental to known religious history, those hierophanies most accessible to contemporary humanity, and those hierophanies least likely to cause disagreement. But this has led Kim to over-simplify the relationship of humanity to the hierophany.²⁶

While it is true that we do not simply "project" the qualities of infinitude and transcendence onto the sky it is misleading to assume then that we are simply given these concepts by our experience of the sky. Rather our experience of the world is a reciprocal affair. Without some pre-existent conception of infinitude we could never recognise the infinitude manifested to us by the sky.²⁷ Also the specific apprehensions of these sacred qualities, while not simply "projections", are dependent upon our specific embodied condition. Were we not

²⁶ It should also be noted that Kim's analysis is based almost entirely on one book, Patterns in Comparative Religion. It is an unfortunate aspect of Eliade's thought that it is rather difficult to grasp without extensive reading.

²⁷ It is by reference to earlier experience that later experiences are classified, hence the attraction of the concept of anamnesis for Eliade. Recognition of the hierophany is always a matter of reacquaintance with prior revelations of the sacred, hence also his emphasis on eternal return. However, these are elements of Eliade's thought to which I will have to return later.

sighted beings, would the sky manifest infinitude none the less? Perhaps this is not so compelling an argument in reference to the ouranic hierophany, but consider it in relation to the lunar hierophany, which as we shall see, is one of Eliade's most frequently cited and extensively elaborated loci of hierophany. Simply stated, the periodic waxing and waning of the moon acquaints humanity with a whole complex of manifestations of the nature of the cosmos; periodicity, cyclicity, the harmony of things celestial with things terrestrial (tides and menstrual cycles). But, of course, the moon does not grow and diminish as countless generations have perceived it to. This is an illusion brought about by the orbital arrangement of the solar system. Were we not sighted beings on the surface of this particular planet we would have been vouchsafed no such revelation of the nature of the sacred. The point is that our perceptions are the results of both the external state of affairs and our conditioned predispositions and abilities. As Coleridge has said "the world is half created, half perceived". (rendered into poetry in Wordsworth's *Prelude*, II, 258-260.) It is rather typical of Eliade's debt to his Romantic precursors that he should propose a schema anticipated by Coleridge, Romantic and longtime student of Kant.

One thing finally makes it clear that it must be perception which makes the event an hierophany: if all existence is capable of becoming a hierophany, (pp.16 and

23 above) a "manifestation of the sacred" then the difference which separates a profane from a sacred event is - must be - the perception of the event as such.

Remarkably, Eliade's understanding here coincides with Karl Barth's doctrine of the post facto interpretations of the partial traces left by the actual event of revelation. That is to say, the actual event being beyond our traire, we can only interpret the interpretations. The reality of the event becomes totally dependent on later interpretation, the sacrality of the event is dependent on belief. To that extent Eliade's ideas are remarkably consistent with Protestant Christian thought. However, insofar as Barth et al would seek to restrict revelation to the Christ event, to deny the actual manifestation of the real in all other worldly occurrences, Eliade cannot agree. It is fundamental to his whole vision of the world that all mundane manifestations are manifestations of the sacred, potential hierophanies, capable of being perceived as sacred and of revealing absolute Being if perceived and interpreted (deciphered) in a certain way. It is a particular feature of Eliade's thought that even the most horrifying of events (for him as for most of his generation, the concentration camps of the Second War) is capable of revealing the sacred. He insists that

the strangest, the most aberrant behaviour must be considered as a human fact; if considered as a zoological phenomenon or monstrosity it is not

understood.²⁸

He evidently considers that everything people do and everything we have done in the past is valid, if not indispensable, evidence of the meaning of our existential situation. One manifestation of this feature of his thought has been pointed out to me by Mac Ricketts; evil as such is entirely absent from Eliade's fictional work. Even the Inspectors of the secret police who appear in The Old Man and the Bureaucrats and in Les Trois Grâces are not characterised as evil people. In keeping with this Eliade is insistent that even the most aberrant phenomena of religious history must be recognised as genuine manifestations of the religious life of mankind.

Thus hierophany is established as any element of the experiential world of humanity which is perceived in such a way as to constitute a revelation of the sacred.²⁹ However, by virtue of the fact that it is an element of human experience the hierophany is simultaneously mundane, which is to say profane. Having delineated the experiential and the paradoxical nature of the concept of hierophany it is obviously necessary to pass immediately onto a consideration of precisely what the hierophany reveals, that is to say, onto a consideration of the sacred.

²⁸ The Two and the One, p.12.

²⁹ As such it is comparable with R. M. Hare's notorious "blik". However, it is a "blik" with a specific external and given form. (v. "Theology and Falsification", in New Essays in Philosophical Theology.)

Chapter Two
The Sacred and the Dialectic
of the Sacred and the Profane.

2.1. The Sacred.

One of the most fundamental and, as we shall see, one of the most problematic of Eliade's categories for understanding and explicating the phenomena and the history of religion is that of the sacred. It is in terms of and in relation to the sacred that almost all of his other categories are described. And it is in relation to the sacred that secondary scholars can most often be seen to be criticising their own interpretations rather than the writings of Mircea Eliade.

To begin, then, with one of Eliade's best known and earliest works, Patterns in Comparative Religion, first published in French in 1949 as Traité d'Histoire des Religions. In Section 74, "Stones as Manifesting Power", he states that,

the hardness, ruggedness, and permanence of matter was in itself a hierophany in the religious consciousness of the primitive. And nothing was more direct and autonomous in the completeness of its strength, nothing more noble or awe inspiring than a majestic rock, or a boldly standing block of

granite. Above all, stone is. It always remains itself, and exists of itself. ... Rock shows him something than transcends the precariousness of his humanity: an absolute mode of being. Its strength, its motionlessness, its size, and its strange outlines are none of them human; they indicate the presence of something that fascinates, terrifies, attracts and threatens, all at once. In its grandeur, its hardness, its shape and its colour man is faced with a reality and a force that belong to some world other than the profane world of which he is himself a part.¹

Already we begin to suffer from the lack of transparency of the text, and the uncertainty of interpretation; but worse, having said that, Eliade goes on to say that

the devotion of the primitive was in every case fastened on something beyond itself which the stone incorporated and expressed. A rock or pebble would be the object of reverent devotion because it represented or imitated something, because it came from somewhere. Its sacred value is always due to that something or that somewhere, never to its own actual existence. Men have always adored stones simply in as much as they represent something other than themselves.

This seems to be a contradiction; is it the self-existence and autonomy of stone which effects the hierophany, its fundamental characteristics of strength, hardness, size and shape, or is it something other than the stone's inherent character? If this is not to be a simple contradiction then Eliade must mean that what is beyond the actual existence of stone, what is other, is the quality of strength of hardness, the concept of absoluteness, the implications of motionlessness, the

¹ op. cit., p.216. Does Eliade's final pronoun here refer to the primitive, or to humanity in general? The context does not make this clear; Eliade was talking about the primitive, however, we all share this "precariousness of humanity", so now he is more than likely indicating humanity in general.

otherness of inhumanity. All abstract, notional, conceptual ideas. Although Eliade has frequently been criticised for making a priori assumptions of the ontological autonomy of the sacred it is rather the case that he is investigating an intentional object, to use the language of Husserlian phenomenology, without raising the question as to its proper or pure intentionality. It is an early assumption of Patterns that "we shall see each [manifestation of the sacred] as the manifestation in the mental world of those who believe in it".² That this is not merely my rather forced interpretation is further borne out by his insistence that the structure of the primitive or archaic world was fundamentally Platonic.³ Of course he has been attacked for ascribing such abstractions outside of the culture and language to which they properly belong, but I tend to agree with his statement that "for our purpose, it is not the vocabulary which matters, it is the demeanour".⁴ The very fact that humanity, even in its earliest stages and least literate of manifestations, was capable of entering into as complex a relationship as religious reverence with as simple an object as a rock would seem to be a persuasive argument for the operation of powerful abstractions and

² Patterns, p.10. Emphasis added.

³ The Myth of the Eternal Return, pp.35, 54.

⁴ "Sacred Architecture and Symbolism", in Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts, Diane Apostolos-Cappadona (ed.), p.107.

notional attitudes. In the somewhat later work, The Sacred and the Profane, Eliade attempts clarification.

The sacred always manifests itself as a reality of a wholly different order from "natural" realities. It is true that language naively expresses the tremendum, or the majestas, or the mysterium fascians by terms borrowed from the world of nature or from man's secular mental life. But we know that this analogical terminology is due precisely to human inability to express the ganz andere; all that goes beyond man's natural experience, language is reduced to suggesting by terms taken from that experience. (p.10.)

This still, however, leaves us in a possible quandary as to whether the ganz andere which is suffering from imprecise terminology is an autonomous ontological entity, an inherent property of the sacred object, or an inherent property of the perception of sacrality. Nor does his continued effort to clarify his definition bring any real solution; "the first possible definition of the sacred is that it is the opposite of the profane".

(ibid.) Yet he presses on, "man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane". (ibid. p.11.) It must be pointed out here that Willard Trask, the translator of The Sacred and the Profane from French into English, seems to have been rather insensitive to the common French (and Romanian) usage of the reflexive to avoid the passive. A better translation of "le sacré se manifeste", is "the sacred is manifested", rather than "the sacred manifests itself". The former preserves the original implication of the sacred as the passive object of the phrase, rather than as the active subject. The

perils of translation are many, as W. C. Smith clearly pointed out in his article, "On Mistranslated Booktitles",⁵ and even small insensitivities such as this can engender a resistance in the reader. I would suggest, however, that there is a greater emphasis on the human awareness of the sacred, and the sacred as the object of that awareness than the English translation allows.

By manifesting the sacred, any object becomes something else, yet it continues to remain itself, for it continues to participate in its surrounding cosmic milieu. A sacred stone remains a stone; apparently (or, more precisely, from the profane point of view), nothing distinguishes it from all other stones. But for those to whom a stone reveals itself as sacred, its immediate reality is transmuted into a supernatural reality. (ibid. p.12.)

Thus the object is not actually changed, "from the profane point of view ... nothing distinguishes it". Rather it must be the awareness of its sacrality, the perception of the sacred as manifest in that particular object which has wrought the transformation. As Eliade states in The Quest, for the historian of religions, "our documents - be they myths or theologies [etc. the documents of the historian of religion are always manifestations of the sacred by definition] - constitute ... creations of the human mind".

Furthermore, the revelation occurring in a hierophany is not irresistible, it can be perceived by some and simultaneously unrecognised by others.

⁵ Religious Studies 20 (1984):27-42.

Awareness of a miracle is only straightforward for those who are prepared by their personal experience and their religious background to recognize it as such. To others the "miracle" is not evident, it does not exist.⁶

Thus it is unquestionably the perception of the sacred which constitutes it as it is for those who perceive it. What, then, is it that is perceived as sacred? Eliade is quite clear and consistent about this: "the sacred is pre-eminently the real, at once power, efficacy, the source of life and fecundity". (Ibid. p.28) This is not to say that the sacred is necessarily something independent of this experience, rather

it is this experience of the sacred, that generates the idea of something which really exists and, in consequence the notion that there are absolute intangible values which confer a meaning upon human existence.⁷

Again, "it is, then, through the experience of the sacred that the ideas of reality, truth, and significance first dawn".⁸

As Eliade uses it

the sacred does not necessarily imply belief in God or gods or spirits. I repeat, it is the experience of a reality and the source of an awareness of existing in the world.⁹

Eliade does appear to be discussing notional, rather than independent realities: to use once again the language of

⁶ Mademoiselle Christina, from the French introduction of 1978, p. 7. My translation.

⁷ "Structure and Changes in the History of Religion", p.366.

⁸ Myth and Reality, p.139,

⁹ Ordeal by Labyrinth, p.154.

Husserlian phenomenology (which Eliade himself did not do), purely, rather than properly intentional objects.

In the article from which I have taken the first of these two quotations, "Structure and Changes in the History of Religion", Eliade tells us that "the sacred is manifest in an infinity of forms". (p.353) It is noteworthy that Eliade uses "infinity" not merely "great variety" of forms. As we shall see later, Eliade is clearly arguing that any and every historical/phenomenal object and event can manifest the sacred. Similarly, in Yoga he states that there are "countless modalities of the sacred".¹⁰ Thus the only property necessary to permit the manifestation of the sacred is existence.

Eliade repeatedly defines the sacred as the real. The reader must be very careful here not to ascribe any unwarranted assumptions to this real, not to read their own real into Eliade's general interpretative category. Like the sacred, the real is an intentional object, the object of belief. As Eliade says, the believer

always believes that there is an absolute reality, the sacred, which transcends this world but manifests itself in this world, thereby sanctifying it and making it real.¹¹

The equation of the sacred and the real is consistent throughout Eliade's work.¹² However, most scholars seem either to disregard it or mistakenly to

¹⁰ Yoga, p.96.

¹¹ Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, p.202.

¹² Since "Cosmical Homology", in 1937.

assume it to refer to a deity or a necessarily independent ontology. On the contrary, Eliade repeatedly states that "the sacred is an element in the structure of (human) consciousness".¹³ In other words, Eliade is not discussing an ontological substratum, like Aristotle's hyle or Kant's noumenal, but the psycho-phenomenological real - that which is apprehended as real by the consciousness of the aware, experiencing subject. It is possible to be misled by Eliade's language, but close inspection reveals his consistency. For example, he states,

through the experience of the sacred, the human mind grasped the difference between that which reveals itself as real, powerful, rich and meaningful and that which does not.¹⁴

This could all too easily be read as granting external, independent ontology to the sacred as the object of experience. However, it is more consistent with Eliade's thought to read the experience of the sacred to be the experience of the real. In context, Eliade has made it plain that he does not, as Robert Baird suggests, "assume that there is something out there that corresponds to the term 'religion' or 'the sacred.'"¹⁵ Rather he identifies something in the structure of human consciousness and concomitant phenomena in human history. This is not to

¹³ The Quest, p.i; No Souvenirs, p.1; and The History of Religious Ideas, vols. I-III, vol. 1. p. xiii.

¹⁴ The Quest, p.i.

¹⁵ Baird, op. cit., p.74. For a fuller discussion of Baird's critique v. below 7.4, pp.267-276.

say that Eliade ever denies the ontological independence of the sacred; he does not. However, this is a question for theology or metaphysics, not for the history and phenomenology of religions.

This, then, is Eliade's view of the sacred. It is the intentional object of human experience which is apprehended as the real. His use of the term "sacred" in this way has led to all sorts of criticisms of prejudice, theological bias, metaphysical assumptions etc. An etymological look at the word sacred might be worthwhile. It is, for example, "dedicated or set apart for the service or worship of deity", or "worthy of religious veneration".¹⁶ As "that which is venerated" or "that which is considered worthy of worship", the sacred unquestionably does exist. It exists as the object par excellence of the study of religion. To assume an ontological category existing independently of human involvement, however, is unnecessary and unhelpful to the study. And Eliade does not necessarily so assume. Thus his focus is on humanity, not on the disputed independent existence of a Divine Being.¹⁷

As we have seen,

¹⁶ Webster's 9th New Collegiate Dictionary.

¹⁷ Indeed this dispute is unnecessary, and is little more than a resurrection of Anselm's ontological argument; must God exist in order to be "that than which nothing greater can be thought?" Must the sacred exist (ie. possess independent ontology) in order to be worthy of worship? This question is discussed below, 7.5, pp.277-292.

the sacred does not necessarily imply belief in God or gods or spirits. I repeat, it is the experience of a reality and the source of an awareness of existing in the world.¹⁸

That "reality" of which the sacred is an experience can only be whatever one construes to be real. Contemporary thought usually ascribes that reality to "the outside world", that which exists independent of human creation or construal, but that is an ascription which has a historical source and far-reaching implications.

The narrative style which Eliade adopts in his fiction (which he sees as continuous with though distinct from his academic researches) constantly implies the possibility of the recognition of the sacred in all the objects and events of daily life. This is qualified by the necessity of preparation by personal experience and cultural religious background. Thus Eliade escapes the possibly accurate but potentially ridiculous state of affairs that any insignificant object may become the locus of the sacred, a focus of worship. The converse of this, that the significance of sacred objects is not always and immediately recognised as such, adds weight to Eliade's argument. The crucifix was not recognised by the Christian church as a vehicle of the divine until several centuries after the event in which it featured. Likewise, representations of the Buddha did not attain to significance until the cult of the Buddha had been established for some considerable time, providing its

¹⁸ Ordeal by Labyrinth, p.154.

followers with the personal experience and religious culture to recognise the sacred significance of a certain carved figure.

It would appear that on close investigation Eliade's sacred is a systematic rather than an ontological proposition. The sacred is, by definition, that which underlies all religious experience, possibly all human experience. It is not necessarily an object independent of that experience.¹⁹

However certain I may be of this conclusion, it is not one which many other critics of Eliade have reached. One example of a scholar who has particularly criticised the "ontological" aspect of Eliade's sacred is Antonio Barbosa da Silva. In dealing with the "special background" of Eliade's phenomenology of religion Barbosa da Silva studies Eliade's application of Rudolph Otto's terminology. It should be remembered in this context that Eliade's well-known work, The Sacred and the Profane, was first published in German as Das Heilige und Das Profane (1957), and is very much a response to and in many ways a continuation from Otto's Das Heilige (The Idea of the Holy). Thus it is rather fruitless to point out, as Barbosa da Silva does, that Eliade "identifies the 'Sacred' with the 'Holy,'" ²⁰ since these are simply

¹⁹ v. Ordeal by Labyrinth, p.122, v. also Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, pp. 15, 123.

²⁰ Barbosa da Silva, A. Phenomenology as a Philosophical Problem, p.177. v. my further discussion, below, 7.2, pp.246-254.

alternative translations of the German "Heilige". There is no doubt that Eliade accepts Otto's concept of the sacred as ganz andere, the mysterium tremendum et fascinans, which is seen as the source of numinous experience. Yet Eliade was seeking to go further than Otto in defining the sacred/holy in his specific dialectic of the sacred and the profane.

Barbosa da Silva analyses Eliade's sacred as a phenomenological term, which he further divides into "evaluative" and "theological" phenomenological terms, and as an ontological term, which he further divides into "meta-cosmic" and "transcendental-ontological" senses. These senses refer to the sacred as the cosmos as a whole and to the sacred as "the ultimate principle (Ur-Datum) of Eliade's creative hermeneutics". (ibid. p.175.) I am broadly in agreement with Barbosa da Silva's evaluation of the sacred as a phenomenological term. However, it is his analysis of the sacred as an ontological term with which I will take issue.

Robert Baird's response to Eliade's sacred in the context of his analysis of "category formation" is likewise to point out that, since Eliade accords ontological status to the sacred without clear definition, he thus "proceeds under the essential-intuitional approach". (op. cit., p.74.) Thus Eliade

assumed that there is something out there that corresponds to the term "religion" or "the sacred", and also that the historian of religion can identify it intuitively. (ibid.)

Although Eliade did not give formal and dogmatic expression to his working definitions they are clearly present to the attentive reader as Baird himself came close to recognising when he equates "religion, the sacred, [and] man's response to the sacred". (ibid.) Religion is already defined as man's response to the sacred. Of course that is only meaningful if one has some notion of the meaning of the sacred. One of the institutional difficulties which militated against Eliade giving clear formal definitions in these terms was precisely the fact that many of the academic scholars of religion, especially between the 40s and 60s when he produced his major works, already had clear and unshakable ideas of the meaning of the sacred (and of the real). However, for those of us who are less convinced of our own knowledge of such categories Eliade's work provides an indication of what the sacred has been considered to be throughout the religious history of humanity.

The wary reader might note at this point that Eliade's procedure, too, is somewhat circular; by assuming religion to be the human response to the sacred he identifies the nature of the sacred as it is encountered in religious history. He is assuming the meaning of a word in order to identify the phenomena in which that term is involved, in order to discover the meaning of that term. However, he avoids a vicious circularity. Such "enabling prejudices" have been very

credibly argued to be involved in all our understanding; one must invest a word with some meaning before one can proceed to refine and develop that meaning. It is the "prejudice against prejudice which denies tradition its power".²¹ Of course the circularity of Eliade's description (for it is that rather than an argument, although all descriptions are in part persuasive and supportive of the Weltanschauung for which they are true) is more attractive to the reader with some predisposition to accept it.

Baird concluded that Eliade's understanding "will appear useful to all those who share his ontological stance". (op.cit. p.91.) However, the reader whose predisposed notion of the sacred is of an exclusively Christian deity might equally find it difficult to accept the amorphousness of Eliade's sacred and the ubiquity of its manifestations. Certainly the reader whose predisposition is to resist any ascription of reality to traditional immaterial entities might find it difficult to enter into the play of meaning, to begin the process of refinement and development of the meaning of the sacred. For the latter the only options are to deny any meaning to such a term, or attempt to apprehend its significance through a different field, such as psychology or sociology, which has previously been apprehended as possessed of real significance. The major

²¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method, p.270.

question here is what benefits might be gained in the endeavour to understand religious phenomena and homo religiosus by an acceptance of the meaning of religion as the response to the sacred. For if we cannot invest the word "religion" and its fundamental category, "sacredness", with some meaning then it seems utterly fruitless to attempt to understand religion per se or humanity in its "religious" aspect.

In his study Homo Religiosus in the Works of Mircea Eliade, John Saliba has distinguished between anthropologists and historians of religions specifically on the grounds that

the historian of religions [as opposed to the anthropologist] assumes the existence of the sacred independent of man, and takes religious experience as the effect of the sacred on man. History of religions, in Wach's words, "is the story of man's understanding and appreciation of the fact that God has revealed himself to man". The presence of the sacred and its manifestations are among the main assumptions of historians of religions.²²

If Eliade can be shown to have expressed a coherent understanding of religion which allows for the identification of reality and the sacred, without involving this assumption, he has surely made a unique contribution to both fields.

Douglas Allen, who is certainly one of the more sensitive and sympathetic of Eliade's critics and one who discovers more benefit than most in Eliade's work, has

²² Homo Religiosus in the Works of Mircea Eliade, p.40. Quoting Wach, The Comparative Study of Religions, p.135.

pointed out that

Eliade must not be confused with the numerous scholars who hold metaphysical positions concerning transcendence. He is not claiming that "the value of religious phenomena can be understood only if we keep in mind that religion is ultimately a realisation of a transcendent truth".²³

Allen is also aware that Eliade "appears to have given us a 'definition' of religion which is supposedly dependent on the nature of the religious documents he has investigated, but" he is forced to conclude, one "which is not in fact open to change".²⁴ This is obviously a problem; if the "definition" is not open to change, if it is set for all time in its own interdependent, systematic sub-definitions and categories, can it be of any real use in the changing world of human culture?

Allen sees Eliade as one who

has attempted to understand religion as a way that the human being is in the world; religion arises from existential crises and is understood as a mode of existence in the world. For homo religiosus the sacred "is the category of meaning in the world. The Sacred is what is valid in the world, authentic, substantial, real, true, eternal". ...

Eliade, when he describes the profane as meaningless or nonbeing, is using a religious scale, is describing the profane qua profane, (Allen footnotes: we have written "profane qua profane" because the profane does have meaning and value for homo religiosus, but only in so far as it reveals the sacred) and is presenting the view of homo religiosus only after he or she has evaluated and chosen the sacred, after one has resolved his or her

²³ "Structure and Creativity", p.122. Quoting C. J. Bleeker, "The Future Task of the History of Religions", p.227. NB. that Bleeker's normative statement was rejected in a statement signed by Eliade. V. Numen 7 (1960) p.237.

²⁴ "Structure and Creativity", p.123.

existential crisis.²⁵

This clarifies further Eliade's appropriation of the religious language of the believer. In granting meaning to such language, that language also becomes meaningful to Eliade, and thus usable by him. It is this utilisation of the presuppositional language of religious believers which, I believe, has caused Eliade such hostile criticism. And yet, is not all language predispositional in this sense? Must not meaning be granted before understanding can be furthered?

This discussion of Eliade's notion of the sacred has already exceeded the space I had hoped to allow it without reaching a firm conclusion. I cannot immediately settle the problem of the importance which Eliade accords to the sacred. This is finally a matter of personal experience and predisposition. However, I hope that I have achieved my aim of clarifying what it is that Eliade indicates by the word "sacred". This is still a difficult term and one without which I do not believe one can clearly comprehend the shape of Eliade's thought. Thus it will be worth further exposition of the term in its specific dialectical relation to its binary partner, the profane.

²⁵ *ibid.*, pp.131, (quoting Ira Progoff, "Culture and Being", p.53) and p.133 n.55.

2.2. The Dialectic of the Sacred and the Profane.

One heuristic device which Eliade utilises in order to explicate his conception of the sacred is that of the dialectic of the sacred and the profane. The specific extension which he makes from Otto's expression of the sacred is to try further to clarify this numinous concept in its particular opposition to that which it is not; a sort of via negativa. This dialectic was taken up by Thomas J. J. Altizer in the first book-length study of the thought of Mircea Eliade, Mircea Eliade and the Dialectics of the Sacred, written in 1963.

Altizer was considerably ahead of other scholars in this respect; Kitagawa and Long's edition, Myths and Symbols: Studies in Honour of Mircea Eliade, was not published until 1969, and the next full-length treatment, John Saliba's Homo Religiosus in the Works of Mircea Eliade, not until 1976. This very hiatus in major secondary scholarship may indicate the lack of solid, self-confident reaction to Eliade's thought, although the

articles of Penner and Leach, Radaza, Hamilton, Hudson, Rasmusen, Ricketts, and Welbon (the first two critical, the remainder broadly favourable) indicate that there was a core of assertive critical reaction to Eliade during the sixties.

I have attempted to limit the consideration of secondary scholarship in the first part of this work, holding it in abeyance while I attempt to give a clear exposition of Eliade's thought based on his own work. However, it will be beneficial at this point to make a detailed consideration of Altizer's description of Eliade's dialectic of the sacred because, while the former was by no means a severe critic of Eliade, he has none the less misunderstood that dialectic. His enlistment of Eliade's name to further his own "death-of-God" theology remained the only full-length exposition of Eliade's thought during a twenty-year period after his arrival in Chicago. As such it has set the scene for much of the ensuing understanding of that thought in the English-speaking world and an inspection of Altizer's analysis provides a convenient forum in which to debate this dialectic and, hopefully, to clarify its nature.

It is in agreement with Ricketts' assessment in "Eliade and Altizer: Very Different Outlooks", and in "Mircea Eliade and the Death of God", and with Eliade's own comments in "Notes for a Dialogue", in The Theology

of T. J. J. Altizer,²⁸ that I conclude that Altizer's analysis is rather wide of the mark. Yet Altizer's clear statement of intent brushes aside many potential criticisms. "This book," he states,

is not a scholarly interpretation of Eliade's work. It is true that the first half of the book attempts to elucidate Eliade's understanding of the sacred, and in doing so, it explores various theological and philosophical implications of his thought about which he himself has chosen to be silent.²⁹

Thus Altizer's work is confessedly speculative, and yet he "nevertheless profess[es] to be in a large measure [Eliade's] disciple", (op. cit, p.20.) and so the reader must expect a fundamental consonance with his "master's" thought. From the outset Altizer states that

Eliade posits a sacred that is the opposite of the profane: it is this very dialectical opposition of the sacred and the profane that makes the sacred meaningful to the profane consciousness. (ibid., p.18.)

Certainly Eliade has said that "the first possible definition of the sacred is that it is the opposite of the profane",³⁰ and that

all definitions up till now of the religious phenomenon have one thing in common: each has its own way of showing that the sacred and the religious life are the opposite of the profane and the secular life,³¹

but in both of these cases he has gone on to indicate that this opposition is problematic and in need of

²⁸ Ed. John B. Cobb.

²⁹ Altizer, op. cit., p.18.

³⁰ The Sacred and the Profane, p.10.

³¹ Patterns, p.1.



clarification. In both of these cases the obvious, primary opposition of the sacred and the profane is a starting point from which Eliade progresses to expound his own, more complex view.

In The Sacred and the Profane, the source of the first of the two quotations given above and the major location of Eliade's thought on this topic, he goes on to differentiate the sacred and the profane specifically through the human reaction to these radically different "modes of being", by the differentiation between "historical" and "sacred" being. Altizer explains,

by purely "historical" being Eliade means a radically profane mode of existence, a mode of existence which has withdrawn itself from an awareness of the transcendent, and immersed itself in the immediate temporal moment.³²

There is, no doubt, some truth in this. But is it as simple as Altizer seems to imply? His "death-of-God" theology is interesting and meaningful in its own right, and it is not my intention to criticise that here.

Rather I must question whether the analysis he gives of Eliade's conception of the dialectic of the sacred and the profane accurately reflects Eliade's thought. One must consider the identification of the sacred and the real, which I believe I have established adequately enough in the preceding section to now take for granted. Can "historical" being accurately be said to have "withdrawn itself from an awareness of the transcendent"

³² Altizer, The Dialectics of the Sacred, p.23.

(in this context that is the sacred, the real)? While there remains any awareness of "reality", how can "historical" humanity have achieved a "radically profane mode of existence?" Altizer continues that this "immersion is totally isolated from any meaning or reality that might lie beyond it", (ibid., p.23.) and herein, perhaps, lies the misapprehension. Meaning and reality are not sought beyond actual, empirical, historical experience, granted; they are, however, sought in the profane. Thus the sacred does not transcend the profane in that it "lies beyond" it. Rather for modern, historical humanity the sacred is the profane; empirical actuality is reality.

The question is: does modern humanity's choice to live exclusively in the profane world automatically and necessarily close us off from the realm of the sacred? An analysis of Eliade's thought would indicate quite clearly otherwise. It does however close us off from the realm of the traditionally sacred, and it should be noticed that Eliade has differentiated modern from traditional humanity in precisely this way.³³ Thus Altizer's perception of "a yawning void in even the most powerful expressions of contemporary religious life"

³³ Eliade explains that "by this term [traditional cultures] we mean any culture, whether ethnographic ('primitive') or literate, which is governed in its entirety by norms whose religious or cosmological (metaphysical) validity is not doubted by any members of the community". Barabadur, the Symbolic Temple, first published in 1937. V. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona ed. Symbolism, the Sacred and the Arts, p. 131, n.1.

because "theology has lost all contact with the sacred",³⁴ goes too far to have a real basis in Eliade's thought.

It is rather the contemporary identification of the real with the historical/empirical which opens this void between the traditionally sacred and that which is contemporarily perceived as the real. Altizer's contention that theology

must be prepared for the possibility that the most radical expression of profane existence will coincide with the highest expressions of the sacred, (ibid., p.17.)

would no doubt have found some agreement from Eliade, but to continue that "only the Christian can greet the radical profane with faith" is exclusivist, contradicting Eliade's valorisation of Asian and "primitive" religions. The insistence that the Christian can greet the profane with faith because "the Christian believes in both Creation and Incarnation ... in a Christ who is in some sense Creator and Redeemer at once",³⁵ may be true, but that this is exclusively true of the Christian is not supported by anything Eliade has written. In fact the ability to recognise the sacred in the radically profane is precisely the central feature of all religion according to Eliade's analysis of the sacred as the real.

It would appear that Altizer has been misled by a superficial resemblance of Eliade's thought to his own.

³⁴ Altizer, op. cit., p.14.

³⁵ Altizer, op. cit., pp.17-18.

Reading such statements as "the non-religious man refuses transcendence", or "modern man cannot be content until he has killed the last god",³⁶ Altizer has either assumed a deeper consonance with the death-of-God theology than is actually the case, or he has deliberately made a one-sided presentation of Eliade's thought in order to clarify his own position. Altizer's protestations that his book is "not a scholarly interpretation of Eliade's thought" (above, n.29) would seem to support the latter conclusion.

Certainly Eliade's reaction was one of disappointment. In his direct response, the "Notes for a Dialogue" mentioned above, which was published in 1970, Eliade expresses a desire to

express publically my friendship for the man and my admiration for the author. The issue of agreeing or disagreeing with his theological innovations is, at least in my case, irrelevant. I am interested in Altizer's writings for their own sake; I consider them original and important spiritual adventures. (op. cit., p.234.)

However, that he did disagree is the inevitable conclusion, especially considering his 1968 denunciation of the "Death-of-God" theology as part of "the provincialism of the latest crisis, fashion or cliché of Western religious language and traditions".³⁷

As I have already mentioned, Eliade's main complaint is that Altizer relied entirely on Eliade's scholarly

³⁶ The Sacred and the Profane, pp.202, 203.

³⁷ Preface to Reflective Theology by T. N. Munson, p.vii.

production to the exclusion of his complementary fictional writings. (p.3 above) The very fact that Eliade makes such a complaint is alone sufficient to indicate that he considered Altizer's understanding of his (Eliade's) thought to be incomplete. As he says, he does not "recognise [his] thinking" in much of Altizer's description.³⁸

Altizer clearly saw

an essential foundation of Eliade's understanding of the sacred: the sacred and the profane are human phenomena, they are created by man's existential choice.³⁹

Yet he could not, apparently, follow this through to its logical conclusion that the opposition of the sacred and the profane lie within the human existential condition and not outside it in some ontological dichotomy. We cannot be completely closed to the sacred, we can only "choose" not to recognise the sacred in some particular, in the case of modern humanity, in the traditional-mythic, form.⁴⁰

Modern man "accepts no model for humanity outside the human condition as it can be seen in the various historical situations".⁴¹ That is, he specifically

³⁸ "Notes for a Dialogue", p.240, n.6.

³⁹ Altizer, op. cit., p.24.

⁴⁰ I write "choose" in inverted commas because, as we shall see, that "choice" is to a certain degree conditioned by the religious experience and cultural tradition of the individual.

⁴¹ The Sacred and the Profane, p.203.

rejects the other loci of paradigmatic models for humanity - traditional culture and its myths and the contemporary speculative imagination. However revealing the "various historical situations" of humanity might be they do not reveal an exemplary model, they do not reveal what humanity might be, what we ought to be, or what we could be. They reveal only what we were in fact, which is of no necessary significance for the future until it is interpreted, until some mythic structure is imposed upon it. (Here I am particularly including secular ideologies such as the Marxist dialectic as interpretative and mythic structures.) However, Eliade describes as a "malentendu" Altizer's contention that the older scholar "presents the 'situation' of the shaman, the yogi, the alchemist, and particularly the 'archaic mode of being in the world,' as models for modern man".⁴²

Eliade's dissatisfaction with the modern restriction of (sacred) reality to historical time and physical space would seem to stem from internal considerations. The modern scientific world view is inherently incapable of providing humanity with adequate exemplary models. (It should be pointed out that Eliade's acquaintance with and understanding of modern scientific concepts is indicated by, for example, his short story "Dayan" in which the protagonist is a mathematician who has found the [impossible?] solution to Gödel's theorem.) It is modern

⁴² "Notes for a Dialogue", p.237.

science itself which has revealed these inadequacies. For example, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle has shown us the necessary incompleteness of our knowledge of even the external, empirical world. The concept of the sensitive dependence on initial conditions revealed by Lorentz's research into the prediction of the weather has taught us that in complex systems such as global weather conditions and human life, even the fullest understanding of past actualities and present fact does not allow any meaningful predictions of the future without an applicable and necessarily fallible (because finite) interpretative structure.⁴³ I repeat, history can only show us where we have been, not where we are (or should be) going.

A major disagreement of Altizer's perception of the dialectic of the sacred and the profane from that expressed by Eliade is that "neither can become fully itself apart from a total negation of the other; it is precisely the profane which is negated by the sacred".⁴⁴ On the contrary, Eliade states several times that a sacred tree, for example, remains precisely a tree. The revelation of the sacred is always in and through the

⁴³ As James Gleick has put it, "you can make your model more complex and more faithful to reality, or you can make it simpler and easier to handle". James Gleick, Chaos: Making a New Science, p.278. V. ibid. p.11-31, on the sensitive dependence on initial conditions, known as the "butterfly effect". V. eg. Stephen Hawkin, A Brief History of Time, p.53-61 on Heisenberg's uncertainty principle.

⁴⁴ Altizer, op. cit., p.26.

specifically profane.⁴⁵ The sacred does not abolish the profane object in and through which it is manifested,

in fact hierophanies could not abolish the profane world, for it is the very manifestation of the sacred that establishes the world, i.e., transforms a formless, unintelligible and terrifying chaos into a cosmos. ... In short hierophany is ontophany - the experience of the sacred gives reality, shape, and meaning to the world.⁴⁶

Although the starting point for an understanding of Eliade's sacred is its dialectical opposition to the profane, it becomes apparent that the conclusion is not one of simple opposition but one of complex interdependence. Having pointed out that "anything man has ever handled, felt, come into contact with or loved can become a hierophany",⁴⁷ Eliade is quite aware of the difficulty this raises. If anything at all can reveal the sacred, can the sacred/profane dichotomy stand? The answer is affirmative because while all things can reveal the sacred, not all things do. Not only is there no culture which recognises all the manifestations of sacrality which have been detected in various times and locations, but also

while a certain class of things may be found fitting vehicles of the sacred, there always remain some things in the class which are not given this honour. (ibid., p.13.)

Thus there is still a real and meaningful distinction to

⁴⁵ egs. Mademoiselle Christina, Introduction, p.7. Patterns, p.29. The Sacred and the Profane, pp. 12, 14.

⁴⁶ "Notes for a Dialogue", pp.238f.

⁴⁷ Patterns, pp.10f.

be made here. The sacred is still perceived as distinct from the profane.

The sacred, the significant, is perceived to be manifested in the profane, the mere. Whilst the object, symbol, narrative, or person which is seen to manifest this excess of reality, of meaning, or significance, is thus itself sacred, it simultaneously, and paradoxically, remains profane. The revelation of the sacred to humanity in our embodied condition requires the involvement of the profane. Eliade was most insistent that all such revelations must occur in and through historical time and material occurrence. (eg. *ibid.*, pp.2f.) Thus despite the fundamental opposition of the sacred and the profane, the one being what the other is not, they are inextricably interconnected, they are each other in a very real way. They are radically different modes of being, but they are both modes of being. Eliade's fictional form and style reflect and embody in many ways his understanding of this paradoxical relationship. I will content myself here with the general observation that central to his style is the revelation of the mysterious or fantastic concealed or camouflaged in the quotidian. Eliade has admitted that

this technique to some extent reflects the dialectics of the sacred: it is characteristic of what I have called "hierophany" that the sacred is thereby both revealed and concealed in the profane. To give but one example, a sacred tree which embodies the sacred to the worshippers of the religion under consideration remains merely a tree of a certain type to all others. The same dialectic: profane-sacred-profane, explains what I

have called "the unrecognisable aspect of miracle".⁴⁸

Finally the dialectic of the sacred and the profane is the ultimate example of the coincidentia oppositorum, the coincidence of opposites, the being one of two apparently polar oppositions. The sacred/profane dichotomy is quoted as the religious dichotomy par excellence "which, as a matter of fact, signifies a total dichotomy, relating concurrently to cosmos, life, and human society".⁴⁹ This very notion of the coincidence of opposites is one of Eliade's best loved and most used symbols of the nature of the sacred, the real, and must be inspected independently.

⁴⁸ Mademoiselle Christina, 1978 Introduction, pp. 6-7. My translation.

⁴⁹ The Quest, p.174.

Chapter Three

The Coincidentia Oppositorum and Homo Religiosus

3.1. The Coincidentia Oppositorum.

In his PhD thesis on yoga, translated into French, revised, and published as Yoga: Essai sur les origines de la mystique Indienne in 1936, Eliade expounded yoga mainly through two pairs of opposites; magical/mystical and abstract/concrete.¹ However, he did not at that time consider (or at least not publically) the coincidence of opposites to be an important problem. I use the word "problem" advisedly here since Eliade refers to the "problem of the coincidentia oppositorum" which "will fascinate me till the end of my life".² Evidently he did not consider the coincidentia a solution to the mystery of life, but itself a problem to be studied. He again referred to it as a "problem" which still engrosses him in Autobiography II, (p.194), written towards the end of

¹ The polarity "magical/mystical" from the thesis on Yoga is carried on in Images and Symbols in the form "magic/religion". Unfortunately, this is hardly any more clear and one must rely heavily on Mac Rickett's interpretation in Romanian Roots, pp.502-504.

² In Journal IV, p.2, a note made in 1979.

his life.

The relationship of apparently polar oppositions obviously concerned Eliade when he was writing Yoga and he referred to its conceptual power in a radio talk given on Good Friday of 1935;

Jesus penetrates into Death and conquers it. The light splits the darkness and scatters it. From this simple confrontation of contraries, the whole greatness of Christianity derives.³

In the same year as his thesis was published Eliade wrote an important article "Cosmic Homology and Yoga", his first published in English.⁴ Here he asserts as an extrapolation from his thesis that the yogin causes Being to coincide with Non-being. (p.202.) As I mentioned above (p.19, n.9.) it is in this article that Eliade first makes the explicit equation of the "sacred" with the "real" (Being) and the "profane" with the "unreal" (Non-being). (p.188.) It is here also that he first definitively states that the realisation of the coincidence of these two apparent opposites is a form of the absolute, a transcendence, an "abolition" of the human condition. (p.203.) These insights were incorporated into the later revised text of Yoga, immortalité, et liberté.⁵

The actual term, Coincidentia Oppositorum is not

³ Quoted by Ricketts, Romanian Roots, p.814.

⁴ Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art 5 (1937): 188-203.

⁵ v. the English translation, pp.95-100.

used, as the researches of Mac Ricketts reveal,⁶ until an article of 1938, although Eliade was well aware of it, having taught a seminar on Nicolas of Cusa's De Docta Ignorantia at the University of Bucharest in 1934-35. In the period 1938-39 he wrote several articles directly on this problem, some were published in Mitul Reintegrarii and others used in Patterns and The Two and The One.⁷ By the time of the publication of Patterns in 1949 the term had assumed major importance. Although Thomas Altizer remarked, and Douglas Allen concurred, that "the coincidentia oppositorum is Eliade's favourite symbolism",⁸ Eliade's critics and commentators do not have so much to say on this important concept as they do on, say, homo religiosus. John Saliba in his book of that title affirms that

Eliade is ... correct in highlighting the concept of "coincidentia oppositorum" and in seeing it as a necessary element in religion. ... Some of the key concepts in religion unite apparently incompatible ideas. (p.172.)

Saliba refers to Evans-Pritchard who has agreed that "it is in the nature of the subject [i.e. religion] that there should be ambiguity and paradox".⁹ Yet despite his realisation of the importance of the coincidentia Saliba

⁶ Romanian Roots, p.821, n.54.

⁷ V. Autobiography II, p.82

⁸ Allen, Structure and Creativity, p.221, Altizer, Mircea Eliade and the Dialectic of the Sacred, p.17.

⁹ Saliba, p.172. Evans-Pritchard, Nuer Religion, pp.123f.

is quick to criticise Eliade for over-emphasising the "withdrawn" (i.e. otiose) nature of God. Given this very stress on the complementarity of opposites it should be obvious that in Eliade's thought the "transcendence" of the divine being is always complementary to its immanence, as Saliba approvingly quotes John Mbiti as saying.¹⁰

For Guildford Dudley Eliade's coincidentia is a way in which "mythic language can also reconcile diametrically opposed motifs" and can, for example "present a God who is simultaneously gentle and terrible in a way that defies rational explanation". This Dudley attributes to Eliade's belief that "mythic language possesses the autonomous power of coincidentia oppositorum".¹¹ Altizer considers that the principle of unity behind the sacred rests on a "pretemporal and pre-cosmic Totality" to which the oppositorum points "in its Hindu and specifically Tantric form". (op. cit., p.17.) Evidently these critics have recognised the importance of the concept for understanding Eliade's thought, but they have made no great effort to clarify precisely what it is that Eliade means by it. To do this one must turn to a detailed examination of what Eliade himself has to say on the matter.

¹⁰ African Religions and Philosophy, p.33, Saliba, p.173.

¹¹ Religion on Trial, p.150.

The earliest prolonged exposition on the coincidentia oppositorum occurs in Patterns, first published in French in 1949, where Eliade gives credence to Dudley's analysis by saying that

myth reveals more profoundly than any rational experience ever could, the actual structure of the divinity, which transcends all attributes and reconciles all contraries. (p.419.)

The coincidentia is here seen as a fundamental "mythic pattern", which "enters into almost all the religious experience of mankind", and is "one of the most primitive ways of expressing the paradox of divine reality". (ibid.) Part of the paradox of divine reality, as we have seen in the chapter on "Hierophany" above, is that the sacred, the really real, is always and necessarily detected in the profane, the conditioned, the unreal. Not only is it paradoxical that the profane should have the ability to manifest that which exceeds it in significance and power, but also that the sacred should limit itself through its manifestation in the lesser, the quotidian. That is not all, however;

this conception, in which all contraries are reconciled (or rather transcended), constitutes what is, in fact, the most basic definition of divinity, and shows how utterly different it is from humanity, the coincidentia oppositorum becomes nevertheless an archetypal model for certain types of religious men, or for certain of the forms religious experience takes. The coincidentia oppositorum or transcending of all attributes can be achieved by man in all sorts of ways. ... the orgy: for it symbolises a return to the amorphous and indistinct where all attributes disappear and contraries are merged. ... The ascetic, the sage, the Indian and Chinese "mystic" tries to wipe out of his experience and consciousness every sort of "extreme", to attain to a state of perfect indifference and neutrality. ...

This transcending of extremes through asceticism and contemplation also results in the "coinciding of opposites"; [the ascetic, sage etc.] remakes within himself and for himself the primeval unity which was before the world was made; a unity which signifies not the chaos that existed before any forms were created but the undifferentiated being in which all forms are merged. (ibid., pp. 419f.)

Eliade cites the further examples of divine androgyny familiar from Greek, Egyptian, and Indian myths and even in some versions of the Adamic myth and also the importance of maithuna, the pair, or sexual coupling, to Tantrism, all of whose "real point ... is to express - in biological terms - the coexistence of contraries". He also refers to a series of rituals which he interprets as "directed towards a periodic returning to this original condition which is thought to be the perfect expression of humanity". (ibid., pp.421-424.) Elsewhere he has referred to the Chinese concept of yin and yang as an example of the coincidentia and to Nagarjuna's śūnyatāvāda as containing "one of the most original ontological creations known to the history of thought", in that "one cannot say of śūnyatā that it exists or that it does not exist or that it exists and at the same time does not exist", which "carried to the extreme limit the innate tendency of the Indian spirit towards the coincidentia oppositorum".¹² Eliade also cites the 13th century Bonaventure and the 15th century Nicolas of Cusa as exemplars of this thought. Towards the end of volume

¹² The History of Religious Ideas, vol. II, pp. 17; 225f.

II of The History of Religious Ideas, in describing Tibetan Lamaist groups, Eliade baldly states that

as in India, it is above all the various Tantric schools which apply, and transmit in the strictest secrecy, the techniques of meditation and the rituals aiming at the realization of the coincidentia oppositorum at all levels of existence. (ibid., p.275.)

This is certainly the type of progression which has earned Eliade the opprobrium of his critical commentators. He presents myths widely separated in time and geography and then presents his own interpretation with the same force as the source material, and finally applies the conclusions of his interpretation to describe the primary material. Who is to say that the subjects of his original documentary evidence had any intention of returning to an original perfected expression of humanity? Or that their androgynous myths sought to express in biological terms the coexistence of contraries? Or that there is an innate tendency in "the Indian spirit" towards the coincidentia? And if his interpretation should be partial or inaccurate can he fairly describe Tantric sects as seeking to realise the coincidentia if they do not so describe themselves?

However, it should be accepted that, although Eliade's progression from data to interpretation and back to data certainly does not provide us with apodictic logical proof that his interpretation is correct, his evidence does indicate a temporally and geographically widespread phenomenon of the transmission and performance

of myths and rituals concerning the unification of a binary pair. It is thus not unreasonable to posit an interpretation of this fact suggesting a human (widespread if not actually universal) fascination with the coincidentia oppositorum as somehow representative of the sacrality which Eliade equates with that which is apprehended as the real, the significant, the true. The fact that the coincidentia can be detected in such disparate religious systems and in such a variety of forms indicates a lasting human recognition of the reality, significance and truth of this mythic structure. One of the suggestions which Eliade bases upon this recognition is explicitly revealed in Images and Symbols, published in 1952, about three years after Patterns. Here Eliade refers to the myth of Narada and Visnu (pp.70ff.) which he takes as indicating "that in the final reckoning the great cosmic Illusion is a hierophany". (p.91) That is to say that this fascination with the coincidentia oppositorum develops from an inherent recognition that the profane world in its entirety and in its diversity is itself revelatory of genuine ontology, real being, the sacred. Existence, as it presents itself to us, is itself a coincidence of opposites, it is both sacred and profane, both real and unreal. It is both a concealment and a revelation of the real.¹³ This, in its positive form of the profane as

¹³ As we saw above ch.2, pp.59f.

inherently embodying the sacred, leads directly and definitively to a concept of general revelation which I believe to be crucial to an understanding of Eliade's thought.

While Eliade was unquestionably challenging the inability of modern thought to provide a meaningful escape from the terror of history, to invest modern life with significance and to escape the anomie of the existentialists, he could still, in perfect keeping with the concept of the coincidentia oppositorum as indicative of the nature of the real, recognise that the modern identification of the profane, the material, with the sacred, the truly real, was in fact accurate. Since the "great cosmic Illusion is a hierophany", what is revealed to modern man in his fascination with the material and the empirically manifest is still itself real. What Eliade objected to, I believe, was the arrogance which considered the empirical and/or the rational as the only contact with reality; to the evident inability of empiricism and concomitant historicism to provide real and meaningful interpretations to those who suffered at history's brutal hands; and to the amnesia which this total camouflage of the sacred within the profane brings about as regards traditionally transmitted truths.¹⁴

¹⁴ One should note in this context Seymour Cain's observation that, for Eliade "the most petty details become interesting in the hands of a writer so endowed, whose very urge to jot them down, to preserve these ephemeral moments in words, gives them light and life. The simple fact of being written down raises up the

One such traditionally transmitted truth is, of course, the coincidentia oppositorum itself, and one of the traditions which has transmitted it is the Indian, which

has distinguished two aspects of Brahman: apara and para, "inferior" and "superior", visible and invisible, manifest and nonmanifest. In other words, it is always the mystery of a polarity, all at once a biunity and a rhythmic alteration, that can be deciphered in the different mythological, religious, and philosophical "illustrations": Mitra and Varuna, the visible and invisible aspects of Brahman, Brahman and Maya, purusa and prakrti, and later on Siva and Sakti, or samsara and Nirvana.

But some of these polarities tend to annul themselves in a coincidentia oppositorum, in a paradoxical unity-totality, ... That it is not only a question of metaphysical speculations but also of formulas with the help of which India tried to circumscribe a particular mode of existence, is proved by the fact that coincidentia oppositorum is implied in jivanmukta, the "liberated in life", who continues to exist in the world even though he has attained final deliverance; or the "awakened one" for whom Nirvana and samsara appear to be one and the same thing. ... Now, however one may conceive the Absolute, it cannot be conceived except as beyond contraries and polarities. ... The summum bonum is situated beyond polarities.¹⁵

Although Eliade derived his conception of the summum bonum as being "beyond polarities" from ancient and traditional religious data it was in fact somewhat "ahead of its time". The whole movement of modern thought, or arguably, post-modern thought, beyond polarity has been

seemingly insignificant to the meaningful. The act of writing is inherently transformative or revelatory". Imagination and Meaning, p.88. Also Culiuanu's observations that "at the limit" even the stains of moisture on a wall can reveal meaning (with reference to Eliade's short story, "Incognito à Buchenwald".) From "La Tortue Bourgne", in Homo Religiosus, eds. Arcade, Manea, and Stamatescu.

¹⁵ The Quest, p.169.

gathering momentum for some time and is particularly evident in the area of literary criticism and linguistic philosophy. Yet it is not thereby simply validated and concluded, as I said, Eliade regarded this matter as a problem which he never satisfactorily resolved. That some polarities "annul themselves in a coincidentia oppositorum" is not clearly comprehensible. Did Eliade simply mean that the opposition of polarities was annulled in their coincidence? He had seemed to imply earlier that it was the paradoxical nature of the unity-in-opposition which empowered the coincidentia; thus surely their opposition is not annulled. In what sense, then, are they annulled? The answer is perhaps given in The History of Religious Ideas where Eliade refers to

a conception, widely attested globally, according to which the cosmos and life, and also the function of the gods and the human condition, are governed by the same cyclic rhythm, a rhythm that is constituted of mutually self-implicating alternating and complementary polarities which periodically resolve themselves into a union-totality of the coincidentia oppositorum type.¹⁶

Thus the opposition of the polarities is not "annulled" as such, but is resolved, falls into an homogenous totality which nonetheless contains the original opposition.

A further difficulty arises in Eliade's explication of the thought of Nicolas of Cusa where he states that

¹⁶ The History of Religious Ideas, vol. III, p.267. This should be compared to Eliade's personal experience as alternating between the "nocturnal and diurnal" sides of his life, his fictional and analytic writings.

in understanding the principle of the coincidentia oppositorum, our "ignorance" becomes "learned". But the coincidentia oppositorum must not be interpreted as a synthesis obtained through reason, for it cannot be realised on the plane of finitude but only in a conjectural fashion, on the plane of the infinite.

To which he adds the footnote

Let us note the difference between this conception - i.e., the coincidentia oppositorum effected on the infinite plane - and the archaic and traditional formulas relating to the real unification of opposites (e.g., samsara and nirvana.)¹⁷

So Eliade clearly detects a difference between the concrete, archaic "formulas" which relate, in fact identify, opposites, and this doctrine of Nicolas which conjecturally posits, "on the plane of the infinite" the coincidence in God of complicatio and explicatio, in other words that God envelopes (complicatio) all things, but at the same time is in all things (explicatio). What precisely is the difference? Even if the specific difference is intended that Nicolas strove to utilise the via negativa which made possible the coincidence of opposites and thus opened up the possibility of such a theological conception, whereas the Indian thinkers, Nagarjuna for example, were attempting to explicate reality as it directly confronts us, surely both are nonetheless examples of the coincidentia? In The Quest Eliade distinguishes two types of polarities; "(1) the groups of cosmic polarities and (2) those polarities

¹⁷ The History of Religious Ideas, p.211.

related directly to the human condition".¹⁸ Yet he states that there is a structural solidarity between them and it should be pointed out that the sacred/profane dichotomy is subsumed under the second group. Thus the difference here is not one of an infinite, eternal as opposed to a finite, temporal dichotomy. My tentative suggestion is that Eliade did not finally consider the coincidentia of Nicolas of Cusa to be a real coincidence of opposites, since for that the sacred has to coincide with the profane, but a coincidence of extreme attributes (rather than polar opposites) to explicate the nature of Nicolas' theological understanding.

The true coincidentia oppositorum consists in the unification of utterly opposed poles which, apart from this symbolic expression, could not be assimilated to each other. The importance which Eliade attaches to this form of the coincidentia is apparent.

One of the most important discoveries of the human spirit was naively anticipated when, through certain religious symbols, man guessed that the polarities and antinomies could be articulated as a unity. Since then the negative and sinister aspects of the cosmos and the gods have not only found a justification, but have revealed themselves as an integral part of all reality or sacrality.¹⁹

It should be noted that in common with most, if not all, of Eliade's interpretative categories, the coincidentia oppositorum was more than just a scholarly device.

¹⁸ The Quest, p.173.

¹⁹ "Methodological Remarks", p.102.

My spiritual equilibrium - the condition which is indispensable for any creativity - was assured by this oscillation between researches of a scientific nature and literary imagination. Like many others I live alternatively in a diurnal mode of the spirit and in a nocturnal one. I know, of course, that these two categories of spiritual activity are interdependent and express a profound unity ... I know likewise from my own personal experience that some of my literary creations contributed to a more profound understanding of certain religious structures, and that, sometimes without my being conscious of the fact at the moment of writing fiction, the literary imagination utilised materials or meanings I had studied as a historian of religions.²⁰

It is evident from this, and from the whole question of Eliade's "double approach", that the coincidentia oppositorum had an experiential basis in Eliade's life. Eliade's journals reveal an ongoing conflict between his desire to write fictional literature and his desire to produce scholarly works of analysis.²¹ He seems to have experienced his life as itself composed of separate, opposed aims and drives which, in their reconciliation, gave his life meaning and brought him his most profound insights. This personal experience of the coincidentia could sustain considerably more attention than I have given it here.

The coincidentia oppositorum may be the area where

²⁰ Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts, p.173.

²¹ As discussed by eg. Seymour Cain, "Poetry and Truth", in Imagination and Meaning, eds. Ricketts and Girardot, pp.87-103, and by Adriana Berger, "Eliade's Double Approach", Religious Studies Review 11 (1985): 9-12.

Eliade makes a real ontological assumption;²² the final nature of uninterpreted reality (which must, by definition, be sacred for Eliade), is presented as having a nature in which all attributes coalesce, all oppositions are transcended and all differentiations achieve unity. Here is the only point in Eliade's whole structure of thought where the actual nature of existence, rather than the description of human perceptions, is presented as a datum; this is how reality is, which is both indicated by and explanatory of the constant presence of the coincidentia in manifest religious phenomena. Such an interpretation in which the nature of an apprehended reality is simultaneously indicated by and explanatory of a phenomenal occurrence, is itself an example of, or at least, made possible by the type of thought which supports, the coincidentia. The relationship of the undifferentiated unity which is presented as underlying and transcending all material, historical forms, and those very forms, is not a simple one of cause and effect, or of signifier and signified. It is both/and rather than either/or. Still, the logical validity of such a movement from clue to cause then back to the clue with the putative cause as explanation is quite obviously non-existent. If the widespread occurrence of examples of coincidentia in the historical religions is indicative of the actual nature of a

²² cf. "Douglas Allen: Eliade's Ontological Assumptions", below, 7.3, pp.257-268.

non-differentiated ontological substrate, then of course the existence of such a substratum would explain those phenomena. If illness is seen as indicative of demon possession then, of course, demon possession will appear to be an excellent explanation of illness. The initial acceptance or rejection of such an interpretative stratagem is based on a priori, personal, almost aesthetic criteria, and cannot be itself validly proposed as a persuasive argument. Of course, the utility of such a stratagem is a secondary phenomenon, as is the number of adherents it finds and the uses to which they put it. All these factors can be seen as criteria of evaluation of the validity of the interpretation and thus of the experience which informs it and thus can be used as a logical form of persuasion.

Homo religiosus, humanity under our religious aspect, can be recognised precisely as humanity insofar as we adhere to a specific interpretative stratagem inspired and informed by particular hierophanies and the symbols which carry forward those hierophanies. It is to a consideration of homo religiosus in the works of Mircea Eliade that I now wish to turn.

3.2. Homo Religiosus.

It is immediately noticeable on studying the term homo religiosus in the writings of Mircea Eliade that the infrequency with which he actually employs it belies the degree of interest it has generated in secondary scholars. Although he was no doubt well aware of the term Eliade does not use it in such important works as Yoga, Patterns in Comparative Religion, nor in Cosmos and History nor Images and Symbols. Its earliest thorough application is in The Sacred and the Profane, Eliade's major exposition of his dialectical opposition of the sacred and the profane. Here it occurs only some ten times throughout that work, as compared to 20 occurrences of "religious man". This fact alone supports the analysis of Gregory Alles in The Encyclopedia of Religion, that Eliade uses homo religiosus generally to indicate "religious humanity" and specifically to contrast humanity in its religious aspect from humanity in its non-religious aspects.²⁴ However easy this clarity may be to achieve in retrospect there has been some confusion along the way. For example, Douglas Allen, in his study of Eliade, stated simply that

²⁴ The Encyclopedia of Religion, vol.6, p.442.

throughout this study, the terms homo religiosus, premodern man, traditional, archaic, and primitive will be used interchangeably. By modern and nonreligious, we refer to a characteristic attitude of contemporary Western society.²⁵

The characteristic attitude of contemporary society is the determination to be regarded as a purely historical being, to live in a desacralised cosmos, which Eliade expounds in various works.²⁶ While I agree wholeheartedly with Allen's recognition of this specific usage of "modern", and therefore with his opposition of homo religiosus to "modern", I cannot concur with his identification of homo religiosus with "traditional", "archaic", and "primitive". The people of traditional, archaic, or "primitive" societies are featured in Eliade's thought as exemplary illustrations of homo religiosus, but they are not to be exhaustively identified as such since homo religiosus (humanity in its religious mode) can certainly exist outside of traditional, archaic, or "primitive" societies. As Eliade puts it,

the man of traditional societies is admittedly a homo religiosus, but his behaviour forms part of the general behaviour of mankind and hence is of concern to philosophical anthropology, to phenomenology, to psychology.²⁷

Barbosa da Silva also makes this equation of homo religiosus and archaic man, although in a more qualified

²⁵ Douglas Allen, Structure and Creativity, p.5.

²⁶ Rites and Symbols p.ix. The Sacred and the Profane, p.100.

²⁷ The Sacred and the Profane, p.15.

form.

Eliade uses the term "homo religiosus" in at least two major senses. It occurs in Eliade's works in (1) an ideal sense, and (2) a concrete sense. In the sense (1), it designates archaic man who is regarded by Eliade as essentially religious and who, in Eliade's view, had the genuine or purest form of experience of the Sacred. In the sense (2), it designates religious individuals who, in different historico-cultural contexts, have actualised their religious capacities and experienced the Sacred ...²⁸

In the ideal sense which da Silva detects, homo religiosus actually applies to all of humanity rather than to archaic man as he thought. As he realises, the actual individuals who have "experienced the sacred" are to be found in all "historico-cultural contexts" and thus, even in its ideal sense, homo religiosus must be capable of referring to all of humanity, but humanity qua religious; the human being in so far as we apprehend and thirst for the real.

John Cave in his soon-to-be-published PhD dissertation, with the benefit of access to Alles' article, actually comes closest to Eliade's meaning;

the usage of the term homo religiosus commonly refers to all of humanity, not just to a single charismatic individual, as it was used by Schleiermacher, Max Scheler, and also Joachim Wach. Homo Religiosus designates an aspect of the human condition. Gerardus van der Leeuw used it in this way.²⁹

However, da Silva's recognition that Eliade also refers to homo religiosus in a concrete sense invalidates Cave's

²⁸ Barbosa da Silva, Phenomenology as a Philosophical Problem", p.196.

²⁹ John David Cave, The New Humanism, p.172.

further criticism that

a limitation to Eliade's use of homo religiosus, however, is its non-reality and its abstractness for social and ethical relations. Homo religiosus is an archetypal postulate. There is no way to prove the existence of homo religiosus. (ibid., p.174.)

Robert Baird likewise assumes the abstract nature of Homo religiosus.

It is true that Eliade's goal is to understand homo religiosus. But homo religiosus is not a historical but an archetypal religious man. Historical persons participate in this archetype to varying degrees.³⁰

I am led to ask whether historical persons also participate in the archetype of homo sapiens to varying degrees?

Homo religiosus is in fact a systematic postulate, dependent on the acceptance of other parts of the system. If it be accepted that the religious person is the person in specific relation to the sacred, and it be accepted that the sacred is equated with the real, then homo religiosus must be seen as humanity in so far as we apprehend the real, and apprehend ourselves as standing in some specific relationship to reality. How then can this be contrasted to some form of "non-religious man?" Is this not so broad as to encompass all of humanity? Certainly "Eliade is hospitable ... to including atheistic worldviews in the range of phenomena which the historian of religions ought to consider".³¹ Alles

³⁰ Robert Baird, Category Formation, p.86.

³¹ Ninian Smart, Scottish Journal of Religious Studies 5 no.2 (1984) p.153.

adequately describes Eliade's conception of religious humanity but his description of non-religious humanity is somewhat weaker. That "homo religiosus is driven by the desire for being; modern man lives under the dominion of becoming",³² is too simplistic and uninformative a conclusion. The mode of being of modern humanity is a complex and confusing one in which "the sacred" has become almost completely camouflaged and concealed within and identified with the profane. Matter, once the profane par excellence; mere, dead material stuff, is now seen as the ultimately real. For example, subatomic physics, the exhaustive study of the nature of the physical world, is often felt to hold the key to human salvation on the scientific level.³³ Alles does recognise that, unlike homo religiosus, modern man thus experiences no discontinuity between the sacred and the profane. He also realises that finally,

the break between the two cannot be complete. ... Determined by history, modern man is thus determined by his unrenouncable precursor, homo religiosus.³⁴

This diffusion of the concept of homo religiosus until it is so general as to seek to involve the entire human race is quite deliberate. Only those people who specifically and deliberately insist on their own

³² The Encyclopedia of Religions, loc. cit.

³³ On this "confusion of the planes" of science and salvation see Midgeley's Science and Salvation, and Eliade's "Homo Faber and Homo Religiosus".

³⁴ Encyclopedia of Religion, vol.6, p.442.

determination in time by history, are temporarily allowed to escape this classification, and they too are eventually subsumed by the logical argument given concise form by Alles here, and by the acknowledgment that their insistence is itself religious in structure, still claiming access to the ultimately real, but equating that real with precisely that which was formerly regarded as profane and therefore unreal.

Nonreligious man in the pure state is a comparatively rare phenomenon, even in the most desacralised of societies. The majority of the "irreligious" still behave religiously, even though they are not aware of the fact.³⁵

In "Homo Faber and Homo Religiosus", an article published in 1985, only a year before his death, Eliade made this identification of religious and "nonreligious" humanity in somewhat clearer terms. His analysis involves rock music from Bob Dylan to Blue Oyster Cult, films, science fiction, Newton's involvement in alchemy, and Raymond Ruyer's book on The Princeton Gnosis. He concludes that

in the last analysis, we discover that the latest activities and conclusions of scientists and technologists - the direct descendants of homo faber - reactualise, on different levels and perspectives, the same fears, hopes and convictions that have dominated homo religiosus from the very beginning.³⁶

It is particularly the apocalyptic trend exhibited by these subjects which Eliade takes to be parallel to religious conviction. This takes two forms, the

³⁵ The Sacred and the Profane, p.204.

³⁶ "Homo Faber and Homo Religiosus", p.11.

pessimistic - nuclear holocaust, environmental or genetic exhaustion - and the optimistic - technological or political conquest of all human problems.

Of course, [he continues] the representatives of these two opposite trends are not aware of the religious implications of their despair or their hopes. What is significant is that all of them relate the inevitability and the immanence of our world's end to the fantastic realisations of human workmanship. (ibid., p.5.)

That is to say that it is the specific restriction of the termination of history to human agency which distinguishes these moderns from traditional homo religiosus. And it is the artificial restriction of humanity to the historical factors which condition our nature which generates the illusion of a discontinuity from traditionally religious humanity.

Everyone agrees that a spiritual fact, being a human fact, is necessarily conditioned by everything that works together to make a man, from his anatomy and physiology to language itself. In other words, a spiritual fact presupposes the whole human being - that is, the social man, the economic man, and so forth. But all these conditioning factors do not, of themselves, add up to the life of the spirit.³⁷

As a historian of religions Eliade has thus made a move to bring all of humanity within the purview of his methodical perspective, just as, for example, psychologists who began with the specific study of mentally ill patients expanded their perspective to all of humanity. It can be argued that as long as some people are allowed to avoid classification within an understanding of human religiousness then that

³⁷ Images and Symbols, p.32.

understanding will never be complete. Just as, if certain (especially self-identified) people were allowed to be independent of the findings of psychology or sociology, then psychology and sociology could never achieve coherence as an academic subject. If it be suggested to, say, sociologists, that a certain group of people simply are not involved in sociological realities their scorn would be guaranteed. However, scholars of religion are all too willing to concede that certain people are not involved in religious realities, usually because they have a prior self-perception as either "religious" or "non-religious", and from their predisposed perspective the differences between "religious" and "non-religious" appear all too obvious, but are, in fact, secondary and partisan. Although this expansion of the classification of homo religiosus to cover all of humanity may at first appear illegitimate, it is actually the modern insistence that a certain group of people, the self-styled non-religious humanity, simply steps out of the religiousness ubiquitous in the rest of human history, which exceeds its rational remit.

Some other scholars, notably Wilhelm Dupré, in his Religion in Primitive Cultures, have also argued for the inevitability of human religiosity. It does seem possible that Eliade was not aware of the radical importance for the academic study of religion of this conclusion, or perhaps he was not willing to take the considerable risk of making such a claim openly.

However, it is apparent throughout The Sacred and the Profane that almost every time he mentions "non-religious" man Eliade immediately proceeds to indicate the superficiality of the concept.³⁸

Of course, this is not to say that the distinction religious/nonreligious is utterly devoid of meaning. It is precisely the meaning of that distinction which Eliade strives to clarify throughout The Sacred and the Profane. The most fundamental distinction is that of time and history; religious man "refuses to live solely in what, in modern terms, is called the historical present".³⁹ Humanity in its specifically religious aspect, rather, lives in a time which is

neither homogeneous nor continuous. On the one hand there are intervals of a sacred time, the time of festivals (by far the greater part of which are periodical); on the other there is profane time, ordinary temporal duration, in which acts without religious meaning have their setting. ... This attitude in regard to time suffices to distinguish religious from non-religious man.⁴⁰

Thus the distinction between religious and nonreligious, radically blurred in other ways, is re-established on a meaningful level. Yet, as I hope to make plain, this is

³⁸ v. esp. pp. 24, 186, and the conclusion, pp.201-213.

³⁹ The Sacred and the Profane, p.70.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, pp.68, 70. Once again it is apparent that in order to fully understand one aspect of Eliade's thought, it is necessary to consider another. Obviously, if this is the linchpin of the distinction of religious from nonreligious humanity, then in order to understand homo religiosus we must also consider Eliade's conception of time. v. below ch.5.

not finally a distinction between religious and nonreligious humanity, rather, since it is essentially a religious distinction, it is a distinction among religious humanity. In the last analysis, modern humanity's self-imposed restriction to and final identification with historical time is itself an identification with the real. As such it is religious and obviously cannot constitute a distinctive characteristic of "non-religious" humanity.

Chapter Four

Symbols and Myths

4.1. Symbols.

One element of the study of religion which particularly supports and is clarified by the preceding analysis of homo religiosus as ubiquitous is that of symbol. Although symbols are themselves ubiquitous in the human world and play a role even in the life of the most secular of humanity, they are usually interpreted as having some specifically religious connotations. This tension between "religious" and "secular" symbolism has, I would contend, contributed significantly to the difficulty and complexity of the debate over the nature of symbolism.

In order to get a clear idea as to the etymology and history of the word "symbol" and of the history of the study of symbolism one would be well advised to consult the entry on "Symbolism" in the Encyclopedia of Religion, vol. 14, pp.198-208, by James W. Heisig. However, as a probable influence on Eliade Goethe is notable by his absence from this entry. René Welleck, for example has asserted that the concept of symbol as we know it derives from the German romantics.¹ the Belgian-American scholar, Gustaaf Van Cromphout, cites Gadamer, Todorov, and Cassirer amongst those who have attributed the modern

¹ "Coleridge [for example] picked it up from Goethe, the Schlegels, and Schelling." Discriminations: Further Concepts in Criticism, p.139. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970.)

concept of symbolism to Goethe. Goethe's idea of the symbol was that it was not only representative, but was also a "living, instantaneous (lebendig- Augenblickliche) revelation of the inscrutable".² This is certainly similar to Eliade's conception of the symbol as hierophany and, given his lifelong dedication to Goethe, was doubtless influential in shaping that conception.³

Despite this lacuna it is significant that Heisig describes Novalis (Freidrich von Hardenberg, 1772-1801, a younger contemporary of Goethe, 1749-1832) as one who

defended the primacy of imagination and poetry as means to produce the symbolism of a higher reality, and drew special attention to the "magical" power of words. (p.199.)

Eliade has said of that same author that he

rediscovered "the dialectic of the sacred", to wit, that nature, such as it shows itself to us, does not represent absolute reality but is only a cipher. His extraordinary intuition: that it is not necessary to die, to become "spirit", in order to be able to communicate with higher worlds, and that, beginning here below, one can know beatific experience. Some day someone must point out how ancient, even archaic, were the ideas of Novalis: one must also try to explain due to what circumstances these ideas were so long forgotten or voluntarily ignored.⁴

² Quoted in Emerson's Modernity and the Example of Goethe, p.69.

³ Although Eliade does not make many references to Goethe in his scholarly work, the influence of the German author is clearly revealed in the Journals. A succinct statement of that influence is made by Norman Girardot in the introduction to Imagination and Meaning, (eds. Girardot and Ricketts) pp.3-6. An important reference to Goethe as an exemplary figure is made in Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, p.33.

⁴ No Souvenirs, p.326.

This not only indicates the Romantic heritage of Eliade's thought but also gives an insight into the way in which he conceived of the function of symbols.

It is not my intention in this section to enter into a debate about symbolism and Romanticism, or to attempt to disclose Eliade's precise sources (an almost impossible task given the vast scope of his reading). Rather I hope to give a clear exposition of Eliade's conception of the symbol. Although some serious objections have been raised against Eliade's theory of symbolism, I will inspect these later in a section specifically devoted to such objections.

As was remarked earlier, (p.26) there is an evident connection between Eliade's conception of symbol and that of hierophany. They are both phenomena of the empirical world which are held to communicate or reveal something other than their own physical being. Francisco Demetrio y Radaza, S. J., in his work on religious symbols and the Georgics, gives an extensive (and broadly favourable) critique of Eliade in whose thought he recognises three dialectics at work. The dialectic of the sacred, the dialectic of hierophany, and the dialectic of symbol. Evidently Demetrio y Radaza detects here a progressive descent of the sacred into the profane world through its own dialectical opposition to profane reality, through its revelation in hierophany, and through its representation in symbol. However, he is not unaware of the difficulties of such an hierarchical organisation,

since "some symbols are themselves hierophanies".⁵

The actual relationship of hierophany and symbol does present some difficulty to reaching an understanding of Eliade's work. In Patterns in Comparative Religion Eliade says, "the symbol is carrying further the dialectic of the hierophany", and "the majority of hierophanies are capable of becoming symbols".⁶ This implies that an hierophany is not automatically a symbol. The relationship of these three dialectics may be simply one of increasing dilution of the sacred in the profane since Eliade contends that

the term "symbol" ought to be reserved for the symbols which either carry a hierophany further or themselves constitute a "revelation". (ibid., p.448.)

If this reservation be adhered to, while all hierophanies are not symbols, all symbols are hierophanies or at least "carry forward" the hierophanic revelation of the real. However, a certain dependence of the hierophany on the symbol seems to be implied by Eliade's statements that "the symbolism of the moon makes clear the actual structure of lunar hierophanies". And that "I have tried ... to interpret a given hierophany in the light of its proper symbolism". (ibid., p.449.) As he later states,

a symbolism does not depend on being understood. ... [Symbolic meanings] make up a symbolic system which in a sense pre-existed them all. We are therefore

⁵ "Mircea Eliade: His Methodology and a Critique," p.26. In Symbols in Comparative Religion and the Georgics.

⁶ Patterns, p.446.

... justified in speaking of a "logic of symbols", of a logic borne out not only by magico-religious symbolism, but also in the symbolism expressed in the subconscious and transconscious activity of man. (ibid., p.450.)

Whereas the symbol or "symbolism" (which is used in such a way as to indicate an interrelated "system" of symbols) does not depend on understanding, the hierophany as we have seen above, is dependent on recognition to be constituted as a hierophany.⁷ A closer look at Eliade's understanding of symbol is required before the systematic implications of this differentiation will become clear.

The best known source for Eliade's analysis of symbol is his contribution to the volume of 1959 edited with Joseph Kitagawa, The History of Religions; Essays in Methodology. However, this article was reprinted in Eliade's own work The Two and the One in 1962. I have drawn from both editions in reproducing this analysis and, although the discrepancies between the two are slight, I have placed alternative renderings from the later publication in [square] brackets, and given the page numbering for both.

1. Religious symbols are capable of revealing a modality of the real or a structure of the world that is not evident on the level [plane] of immediate experience. ... a modality of the real which is inaccessible to human experience.

The example Eliade gives is that of water,

which is capable of expressing the pre-formal, the virtual [potential], and the chaotic. This is not a matter of rational knowledge [cognition]; rather does the living [active] consciousness grasp reality

⁷ "Hierophany," pp.24, 28-30.

through the symbol, anterior to reflection.

2. Symbols are always religious because they point to something real or to a structure of the world [World-pattern].

3. An essential characteristic of religious symbolism is its multivalence, its ability to express simultaneously a number of meanings whose continuity is not evident on the plane of Immediate experience.

The multitude of meanings thus disclosed are

structurally coherent, although that coherence is neither constituted nor appreciated by a rational process or act of reason. It is disclosed by another order of knowledge [cognition].

4. The symbol is thus able to reveal a perspective in which heterogenous realities are susceptible of articulation into a whole [diverse realities can be fitted together], or even of integration into a "system". In other words the religious symbol allows man to discover a certain unity of the World and, at the same time, to disclose to himself his proper destiny as an integrating [integral] part of the World. ... Owing to the symbolism of the moon,⁸ the world no longer appears as an arbitrary assemblage of heterogenous and divergent realities.

Symbols also have

5. a capacity for expressing paradoxical situations, or certain structures of ultimate reality, otherwise quite inexpressible.

Lastly,

6. a symbol always aims at a reality or a situation in which human existence is engaged [concerning human existence]. Symbols have a necessary existential dimension and existential value.⁹

These six points, although quite clearly stated, are

⁸ For example, which integrates lunar rhythms, temporal becoming, plant growth, the female principle, death and resurrection.

⁹ "Methodological Remarks on the Study of Religious Symbolism"/"Observations on the Study of Religious Symbolism," pp.98-101/201-205.

evidently not alone sufficient to clarify Eliade's theory here. An inspection of his earlier work, Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism (1952) casts a great deal of light upon the more difficult implications of his thought.

The capacity of the symbol to reveal something not evident to immediate experience (no.1 above) is connected with the creative processes of human thought.

Symbols cannot be reflections of cosmic rhythms as natural phenomena, for a symbol always reveals something more than the aspect of cosmic life it is thought to represent. The solar symbolisms and myths, for example, reveal to one also a "nocturnal", "evil" and "funerary" aspect of the sun, something that is not at first evident in the solar phenomenon as such.¹⁰

He goes on to say that since this side is not perceived in the phenomenon but is "constitutive in" the symbolism it is proven that the symbolism is a "creation of the psyche". (ibid.) The coincidence of opposites (no.5), likewise, is not given anywhere in the cosmos, it is not accessible to immediate experience, but it is expressed by symbols, and simply expressed. It is this way, as an expression of the creative imagination, that the symbol expresses an otherwise non-sensory modality of the real.

To "have imagination" is to enjoy a richness of interior life, an uninterrupted and spontaneous flow of images. But spontaneity does not mean arbitrary invention. Etymologically, "imagination" is related to both imago - a representation or imitation - and imitor, to imitate or reproduce. ... The imagination imitates the exemplary models - the Images - reproduces, reactualises and repeats them without end. To have imagination is to be able to see the

¹⁰ Images and Symbols, p.177.

world in its totality, for the power and the mission of the Images is to show all that remains refractory to the concept. (ibid., p.20.)

In this same connection the ability of the symbol system to express a structural solidarity of meaning (no.4) is directly linked with its ability to express something not immediate to perception.

One of the principal functions of the myth is to unify planes of reality which, to immediate consciousness and even to reflection, seem to be multiple and heterogenous. (ibid., p.99.)

In certain cases it is precisely that solidarity of meaning, that potential homologisation, which was not itself previously perceptible, which, through symbolism, becomes susceptible to the human imagination. The solidarity between the lunar rhythms, temporal becoming, the female principle, and human mortality, for example, is not immediately accessible to human experience. But once grasped, once revealed by lunar symbolism, it then becomes an accessible and communicable reality.

The implication that such coherent "systems" are "creations of the psyche" or the imagination in no way lessens their potential impact on human life. It is a major tenet of Eliade's thought that the valorisation of the material and the independently extant, and the accompanying devalorisation of the abstract and dependent (i.e. the creations of the human imagination, or poesis), is a specific and religious perspective of modern humanity, intimately instrumental in what he calls the concealment or camouflage of the sacred in the profane.

Once one begins to combine the various points of Eliade's analysis in various ways, as I have combined sections 1, 4, and 5 above, certain deeper implications begin to appear. For example, section 2 states that symbols are religious because they "always point to something real or to a structure of the world", and section 6 that "a symbol always aims at a reality or a situation in which human existence is engaged". In an article of 1968 Eliade has said,

contrary to what may be called "cosmic symbols" - stars, waters, the seasons, vegetation, etc. - which reveal both the structures of the universe and the human mode of being in the world, the symbolism of tools and weapons discloses specific existential situations.¹¹

Since (no.2) symbols always point to some thing real or to a structure of the world, and since (no.6) symbols always aim at a real existential situation, then the something real at which they always aim must be an existential situation. Cosmic symbols indicate both (existential situation and structure of universe) tool symbols (for example) indicate only, but necessarily, an aspect or element of the human existential situation. Thus it would seem that the reality of the human existential situation is finally indispensable to symbolism. It is the very reality of the situational element thus revealed which sacralises a particular symbol. The Christian crucifix, for example, can be seen as indicative of the immediate helplessness of the human

¹¹ "Notes on the Symbolism of the Arrow," p.465.

existential situation, pinned down by the brutal realities of physical existence, but also of the hopefulness of our situation, redeemed by the ultimate sacrifice, the involvement of the deity itself, and thus capable of escaping the doom determined by pure physicality, of "escaping from history". (And here the cosmic function of the cross as cosmic tree, ensuring the connection of earth and heaven, of profane and sacred, of conditioned and free, comes into play.) However, the reality and therefore the sacrality of this symbolic significance is determined by the individual reaction to the cross as hierophany. Should this apprehension of the human condition strike one as revelatory of the real, then the symbolism of the cross will be self-evident. However, to a mind constrained to the physical determinatives of the human condition; a mind which does not perceive that condition as essentially hopeful, connected with sacred realities which surpass it, and possessed of real freedom, the symbolic reference of the crucifix is lost, and with it its sacrality.

However, it must also be considered that in an article first published in 1960, Eliade states that

the symbol translates a human situation into cosmological terms; and reciprocally, more precisely, it discloses the interdependence between the structures of human existence and cosmic structures.¹²

So cosmic structures are not finally dispensable from

¹² "The Symbolism of Shadows," p.13, in Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts.

symbolism, nor is the human situation alone finally sufficient thereto. Rather it is specifically the relationship of the two which is at issue here. In fact, in order to be a real existential situation of humanity a given structure must also be a structure of the world or cosmic structure. It is a further function of the symbol that it unifies the human and the cosmic levels of reality.

Symbolic thought makes it possible for man to move freely from one level of reality to another. Indeed, "to move freely" is an understatement: symbols, as we have seen, identify, assimilate, and unify diverse levels and realities that are to all appearances incompatible.¹³

And he concludes Patterns in Comparative Religion, from the final paragraph of which the preceding quotation is also taken, with the observation that,

thanks chiefly to his symbols, the real existence of primitive man was not the broken and alienated existence lived by civilised man today. (ibid., p.456.)

This has constituted something of a difficulty in the appreciation of Eliade's thought. Not only does it appear to be a polemical valorisation of the archaic over the modern, it also appears to be finally incoherent in the light of Eliade's repeated claims that

symbols never disappear from the reality of the psyche. The aspect of them may change, but their function remains the same; one has only to look behind their latest masks.¹⁴

Or again that

¹³ Patterns in Comparative Religion, p.455.

¹⁴ Images and Symbols, p.16.

symbols and myths come from such depths: they are part and parcel of the human being, and it is impossible that they should not be found again in any and every existential situation of man in the Cosmos. (ibid., p.25.)

If this is indeed the case then how can modern humanity suffer so much from the "broken and alienated existence" caused by the lack of symbols?

I believe that the only possible coherent explanation of this difficulty lies with Eliade's constant pressure upon the radical concealment of the sacred within the profane in the modern mentality. For the modern, empirical reality and historical actuality have become exhaustive of the real, the sacred. As remarked above, this involves a simultaneous devalorisation of the abstract and the imaginary.

However,

although it is true that man is always found "in situation", his situation is not, for all that, always a historical one in the sense of being conditioned solely by the contemporaneous historical moment. The man in his totality is aware of other situations over and above his historical condition; for example, he knows the state of dreaming, or of the waking dream, or of melancholy, or of detachment, or of aesthetic bliss, or of escape, etc. - and none of these states is historical, although they are as authentic and as important for human existence as man's historical existence is. (ibid., p.33.)

Eliade makes this point all the more strongly in the 1968 article mentioned above:

human creativity and, ultimately, the history of human culture is more directly related to what man has dreamt, believed and thought of his specific mode of being in the world than to the works which he has undertaken in order to promote and validate

this mode of being.¹⁵

The alienation in the modern mind is thus not directly caused by a lack of symbolic material, but by an inability to perceive the reality of that material, to perceive it as hierophany and thus actually to appreciate it as symbolic. That is to say that in attempting to totally restrict our existence to the plane of the spatio-temporal, modern humanity has lost the ability to apprehend the meanings of other planes of existence as true expressions of our existential situation. Symbolism has become opaque to us because we have refused, or become unable, to make the fundamental pre-rational assumptions which empower it as a language. It is, finally, as a sort of pre-verbal language that Eliade conceives of symbolism, as can most clearly be seen from the following;

the symbol reveals a pre-systematic ontology to us, which is to say an expression of thought from a period when conceptual vocabularies had not yet been constituted. To give only one example, the terms designated "becoming" appear fairly late in history, and only in some languages of high culture: Sanskrit, Greek, Chinese. But the symbolism of "becoming", the images and the myths which place it in motion are already evidenced in the archaic strata of culture. All the images of the spiral, of weaving, of the emergence of light from shadow, of the phases of the moon, of the wave, etc. ... [are] symbols and myths of "becoming".¹⁶

Thus symbols are a type of language capable of expressing, to those who use that language, complex

¹⁵ "Notes on the Symbolism of the Arrow," p.474.

¹⁶ "The Symbolism of Shadows in Archaic Religions," p.3f.

relationships and concealed truths which have not received verbal expression.

I must point out that Eliade does not directly use these words. However, that he constantly emphasises the coherent nature of symbols is consistent with its status as a language.

Certain groups of symbols, at least, prove to be coherent, logically connected with one another; in a word, they can be systematically formulated, translated into rational terms.¹⁷

Furthermore, speaking of Freud, (whose originality and contribution to the thought of the twentieth century Eliade respects, despite his frequent statements concerning the scientific inadequacy of Totem and Taboo) Eliade states that

Freud substantiated the gnoseological values of the products of fantasy, which, until then, were considered meaningless or opaque. Once the expressions of the Unconscious became articulated in a meaning-system comparable to a non-verbal language, the immense number of imaginary universes reflected in literary creations disclosed a deeper, and secret significance.¹⁸

Certainly the imaginary universes of symbolism, since they can in fact be reflected by quotidian experiences such as "any immersion in darkness, any irruption of light ... any experience of mountaineering, flying, swimming underwater, or any long journey", etc. (ibid., pp.43f.) are precisely those imaginary universes reflected in literary creations and so are themselves

¹⁷ Images and Symbols, p.37.

¹⁸ Occultism, Witchcraft and Cultural Fashions, p.54.

"comparable to a non-verbal language".

It is in terms of linguistic analysis that I would finally like to suggest an applicable differentiation between the concepts of symbol and hierophany. Part of the difficulty, as we saw above (p.91, n.6), is that Eliade finally wants to identify hierophany and symbol. Really the difference is between symbol (with which the hierophany can easily be equated) and symbolism (with which it cannot). This is, I think, best seen as the distinction between langue and parole made by Saussure in his Course in General Linguistics.¹⁹

Eliade states that for symbolic thought "the Universe is not closed, no object is isolated in its own existentialness; everything holds together in a closed system of correspondences and assimilations".²⁰ The applicability of the image of language, in which all the linguistic elements similarly hold together, to a universe conceived in this way is self-evident. Meaning is thus not the "fundamental" to which all possible significations are reduced, but is itself profoundly symbolic of the relations of elements in a coherent reality.

¹⁹ I am aware of Gregory Alles criticism that "the preoccupation with meaning - with parole and with langue - projects upon all religions the goal for which so many Western theologians, philosophers, scholars, and litterateurs have taught us to yearn ... : the recovery of meaning". "Wach, Eliade and the Critique from Totality." I hope to answer it below, 7.6, pp.295-305.

²⁰ The Sacred, Symbolism, and the Arts, p.6.

The hierophany, then, is the specific spatio-temporal phenomenon which effectively reveals such an otherwise imperceptible modality of the real. If it is not recognised as such then an hierophany has not occurred. However, the potential is still present if the language of symbolism constitutes that phenomenon as symbolic. The best example which occurs to me, although perhaps rather trite and simplistic, is that of a joke. A joke remains a joke, at least in potentia, even if the audience does not "get" it. And a symbol remains a symbol, even if an hierophany has not occurred.

The hierophany is the paradoxically limited revelation of the real in history, the symbol is the (possibly non-verbal) linguistic element in an extended and coherent system of such elements (symbolism) which makes such a revelation comprehensible, which dictates its meaning.

The notion of the coherence of symbolic structures is fundamental to Eliade's interpretations. As well as the system of lunar symbolism and all it entails (as mentioned above, p.93, n.8), he expounds the coherence of the symbolisms of the centre; of time and eternity; of shells; of knots; of shadows; of ascension and flight; of death; light; bodily fluids; of the cosmos/city/temple/dwelling/body; and of water and the flood (which is assimilated to lunar symbolism).

At one point Eliade says that,

in the present state of our knowledge, it is

difficult to specify whether their uniformity proceeds from imitation - from "historic" borrowings, in the sense given to this term by the historico-cultural school - or whether it is to be explained by the fact that they all follow from the very situation of man in the world - so that they are all variants of one and the same archetype realising itself on many planes and in different cultural areas.²¹

This passage is of considerable significance. Firstly, it calls into question the contention of, for example, Ingvild Gilhus. In her article on the gnostic symbolism of the trees of life and death Gilhus remarks on two extremes in the analysis of myth in the history of religion. The first insists on the examination of a symbol "as a part of one cultural system of symbols". The second "as a part of a universal system of symbols".

In the first case, the religious symbol is seen as meaningful only in relation to other symbols in the cultural system. In the second case, the meaning of the symbol is clarified only by comparison with similar symbols in a universal system of symbols. The second approach is especially advocated by Mircea Eliade.²²

Obviously Eliade is aware of both possibilities in his treatment of symbolism and does not restrict his examination to only a single universal system, although his contention that the symbol can develop from the actual physical situation of humanity does allow for the possibility of symbolism as a human universal. Furthermore, although Eliade argues for the universality of certain symbols, one of which is that of the

²¹ Images and Symbols, p.118.

²² "The Tree of Life and the Tree of Death: a Study of Gnostic Symbols," p.346.

experience of light whose existential basis is only too evident (light is a symbol because human beings can see). He none the less accepts that

certainly, we do not find universally a well-articulated theology or metaphysics of the divine light, comparable, for instance, with the Indian, Iranian, or Gnostic systems. But one cannot doubt the "experiential" character of the majority of mythologies, theologies and gnososes based on the equivalence: light-divinity-spirit-life.²³

Secondly Eliade can be seen to connect the concept of symbol to that of archetype and gives us a conception of "archetype" reminiscent of the passage from The History of Religious Ideas (vol.I, p.3), which describes the paradigmatic nature of the orientatio in three dimensions as based on the human upright, bipedal form. It is based solidly in the actual embodied nature of the human existential condition and not on any conceptual a priori or uncritical assumption. This clarifies his continuing contention in Images and Symbols that it is the

tendency of every "historical form" to approximate as nearly as possible to its archetype, even when it has been realised at a secondary or insignificant level: this can be verified everywhere in the religious history of humanity. Any local goddess tends to become the Great Goddess; any village anywhere is the "Centre of the World", and any wizard whatever pretends, at the height of his ritual, to be the Universal Sovereign. It is this same tendency towards the archetype, towards the restoration of the perfect form - of which any myth or rite or divinity is only a variant, and often a rather pale one - that makes the history of religions possible. Without this, magico-religious experience would be continually creating transitory or evanescent forms of gods, myths, dogmas, etc.;

²³ Occultism, p.95.

and the student would be faced by a proliferation of ever new types impossible to set in order. But when once it is "realised" - "historicised" - the religious form tends to disengage itself from its conditions in time and space and to become universal, to return to the archetype.²⁴

There is an inherent twofold justification here; firstly the archetype, which can be seen as the existential basis of each symbol, is based in the "very situation of man in the world" and is thus a genuine universal, although every communicable form of that situation is "historicised" or socially conditioned; secondly, unless some such archetype be assumed for the purposes of classification, the study of religion, indeed any study, falls foul of what Ibn al-Arabi called the "sea of names" and cannot hope to deal with the phenomenal proliferation of specifics.

Despite the morphological connection of symbols to an archetypal event or situation of humanity upon which he wants to insist, Eliade accepts that

this is not to say that ... one cannot distinguish certain groups that are historically interconnected, or that we have no right to regard them as dependent upon one another, or as derived from a common source. (ibid., p.121.)

He recognises full well that certain symbols

are not, as such, spontaneous discoveries of archaic man, but creations of a well defined cultural complex, elaborated and carried on in certain human societies: such creations have been diffused very far from their original home and have been assimilated by peoples who would not otherwise have known them. (ibid., p.34.)

However, this category is by no means exhaustive of the

²⁴ Images and Symbols, pp.120f.

stock of symbols. To give but one example;

the symbolism of climbing up stairs recurs often enough in psychoanalytic literature, an indication that it belongs to the archaic content of the human psyche and is not a "historical" creation, not an innovation dating from a certain historical moment (say, from ancient Egypt or Vedic India, etc.). (ibid., p.50.)

Evidently, if Eliade considers the symbolism of ascending a staircase to be sufficiently widespread and automatically recurrent to be basically autonomous of historically conditioned sources, he must consider the vast bulk of symbols to be independent of this historical "diffusionist" origin. Certainly the references he makes to the kulturkreis school associated with Schmidt and Koppers are often dismissive, although he otherwise respects their scholarship.²⁵

Yet the symbol is not simply a reflection of the natural world as we saw in connection with cosmic rhythms, they are also reflective of human creativity and imagination. As he says in Patterns on the symbolism of the Pearl,

what constitutes the manifold significance of the pearl is primarily the framework of symbolism surrounding it. ... The "origins" of the symbolism of the pearl, then, were not empirical but theoretical.²⁶

In this instance Eliade clearly puts theory before fact in the development of a symbol, once again it is the creative human agency which is emphasised rather than any

²⁵ ibid., p.121, n.74; Patterns, p.38; Australian Religion, pp.17, 19f.

²⁶ Patterns, p.440.

external power, even the existential situation.

There is a confusing shift in emphasis between the statement from Patterns immediately above stressing the theoretical origins, and the statements from Images and Symbols stressing the existential origins of symbol. Eliade's point seems to be that our power to theorise, "what man thought of his specific mode of being in the world", (p.100 above) is itself an immeasurably significant element of our existential situation, and one which is both conditioned and yet free (through the power of creative imagination). This is itself symbolic, assimilable to all the symbolism of the coincidentia oppositorum discussed above. It is possibly this symbolic aspect of human nature which prompted Eliade to suggest that

by envisioning the study of man not only inasmuch as he is a historic being, but also as a living symbol, the history of religions could become a metapsychoanalysis.²⁷

Certainly, when symbolism is seen as a pre-reflective system of communication of the most complex and the truest elements of the human existential situation, the notion of the study of the history of religions as a "metapsychoanalysis" makes more sense. It should be recalled that, as Kim pointed out, Rudolf Otto

insists that the cognition or rather the re-cognition of the Holy cannot be derived from "experience" or "history". As he argues throughout the book, the Holy as an a priori category must be assumed in order for anything religious to appear

²⁷ Images and Symbols, p.35.

"in history" and for us to recognise it as such.²⁸ It is Eliade's contrary contention that the sacred imposes itself on us in the form of fundamental hierophanies which are apprehensions of existential situations and thereafter it is the creatively constructed symbolic systems which continue the revelation of the real to what extent they can. The innate human desire which he detects to live in proximity and constant contact with the real produces symbolisms which extend the hierophanies throughout otherwise profane human existence. Paradoxically this has eventually led to a complete identification of the profane with the sacred and a concomitant difficulty in recognising the real even in the primordial hierophanies. This I hope has gradually become clear as the primary characteristic of modern secular humanity.

The study of religions, through the study of symbol and myth, can then be seen as the total analysis (total hermeneutic) of the creative spirit (creative hermeneutic) of humanity in our embodied existential situation in the world. It is to the study of myth that I now wish to turn.

²⁸ "Hierophany and History," p.339, quoting Otto, The Idea of the Holy, p.175.

4.2. Myths.

Myth is one of the most tangled of concepts, not only in Eliade's writings, but in the broader arena of academic study, involving the Classics, comparative mythology, regional studies, literary criticism, and the study of religion. To paraphrase a notorious quip on the phenomenology of religion, there are as many interpretations of myth as there are students of myth. As Eliade himself said,

it is not without fear and trembling that a historian of religion approaches the problem of myth. This is not only because of that preliminary embarrassing question: what is intended by myth? It is also because the answers given depend for the most part on the documents selected.²⁹

The "innumerable definitions of myth" which preceded Eliade, he claims, "have one thing in common: they are based on the analysis of Greek mythology". (ibid.) While this may have been obviously true in 1966 when Eliade first delivered the lecture which later became this

²⁹ "Cosmogonic Myth and 'Sacred History'," Quest, ch.5, p.72

chapter of The Quest, it is less so now. Thus it may appear questionable that I have elected to explicate Eliade's understanding of myth and the mythic through a specific consideration of the work of G. S. Kirk, the well-known classicist. However, Kirk provides not only a broad-based analysis of recent theoretical approaches to myth but also a specific critique of the unique elements of Eliade's endeavours in this area. Myth has been generally under attack at least since Xenophanes (565-470 B.C.E.) criticised the activities of the gods as related by the Homeric tradition and Hesiod.³⁰ More recently Ivan Strenski has argued that myth is, in fact, non-existent and that the only real products of the academic "myth factory" are theories and "applied writings" about this otherwise non-existent category.³¹ Somewhat more conservatively but in much the same vein, G. S. Kirk has said of books about myth that, "if they add anything at all in the way of interpretation it tends to be arbitrary and intuitive - in other words, valueless".³² This is the sort of charge frequently levelled against Eliade: that, like Frazer and other

³⁰ Myth and Reality, p.148.

³¹ Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth Century History, p.2. I shall return to Strenski's intriguing point of view later, ch.8.

³² The Nature of Greek Myths, p.13. Abbreviated as Greek Myths.

"armchair anthropologists",³³ he merely adduces examples to support his original intuitive insight. The fact is that examples are so many and various that support can be found for almost any number of conflicting insights. However, Kirk's statement is typical of those who reject the intuitive as worthless, immediately identifying intuition with the arbitrary, and I believe this attitude to be instrumental in the continuing inability to appreciate fully both Eliade's assessment and myth itself.

On the contrary, intuition can be seen as the invaluable basis of all research, the combination of insight and intention, based on personal experience, which provides both direction and meaning to our inquiries. Alone and unsupported one person's intuition has no more weight or sway than any other conflicting opinion, but the conclusion that intuition per se is valueless is not entailed. Even in the hard sciences intuition (as guesswork or hunches) is seen to be a necessary part of the whole process of setting up a program of research and experimentation to produce valid conclusions in our inquiry into the nature of reality. In the humanities, where the very complexity and

³³ I should point out that I do not consider Eliade to be an "armchair" anthropologist. Not only does his three year stay in India constitute valuable fieldwork, but also his position in a theological faculty was a prime location for ongoing practical research. In fact, to one who considers religion a human universal, all rigorous observation of one's fellows could be argued to represent fieldwork.

individuality of our objects of inquiry (people) render experimentation problematic on many levels and often unrepeatable, the role of intuition is of primary importance. Intuition is also involved in the Kantian sense of actual sensory perception. As we have seen, several of the key elements of Eliade's perspective are grounded in experiential perceptions. The task of increasing our familiarity with actual examples drawn ultimately from sensory perception in order to render our insights increasingly accurate involves both senses of intuition. Unfortunately, this task is practically infinite; not only does complete familiarity with the actual data of a field as extensive as mythology exceed the capabilities of any individual; not only are all data increasingly recognised as "theory-laden;"³⁴ but it is almost universally accepted (since the work of Karl Popper) that an infinitude of data is needed to validate any general hypothesis. This not only necessitates the move from validation to falsification; it also implies that any given hypothesis must be in some degree intuitively derived - any chain of induction leading to a conclusion must be incomplete, every hypothesis remain only thus far unfalsified. This is not the place for a

³⁴ As Goethe pointed out, Maximen und Reflexionen, no. 575, in Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche, (ed. Ernst Beutler) Zurich: Artemis Verlag, vol.9, p.574. J. Z. Smith suggests that Goethe's influence on Eliade is apparent for example in the latter's concept of morphology, Map is not Territory, p.225.

detailed digression into the role of intuition in theory formation. Suffice it to say at the moment that intuition is not simply arbitrary but is conditioned by prior experience in a way which is (thus far) supra-rational. Certainly both intuition and reason are necessary elements of human thought, and it is the utility, applicability, and credibility of any given intuition which best validates it. That is to say the degree to which it commends itself to and is in correspondence with the intuitions of others, rather than the degree to which it is held to correspond to or derive from "facts".

In accordance with his conceptions regarding authenticity and hierophany_Eliade certainly has made his personal intuitions the basis of his understanding of myth. This cannot be made an a priori criticism but must be considered in the light of the significance which that understanding can assume in our confrontation with myth.

We cannot know apodictically and exhaustively the significance of a myth (or any other religious manifestation) to any single individual, certainly not of all myths to all individuals at all times. We can only generate speculative³⁵ generalisations and attempt specific understandings. It will clarify Eliade's understanding of myth at this point to compare it in more detail with Kirk's analysis. Kirk considers that

³⁵ i.e., based on observations, speculari, as Eliade points out, v. No Souvenirs, p.261.

"myth" is such a general term, and its etymology and early applications are so unspecific, that one is compelled to take some notice of contemporary usage.. "Most people" assume that myths are a special kind of traditional tale, and that the qualities that make them special are those that distinguish them as profound, imaginative, other-worldly, universal or larger-than-life.³⁶

By Eliade's lights, these qualities are truth and reality, in the sense that, as we will see, fables can exceed historical reality in truth value. Through its "truth" myth becomes hierophany and reveals the real, the sacred, to the listener. "The cosmogonic myth is 'true' because the existence of the world is there to prove it." That is to say, that "myth narrates a sacred history"; it "tells only of that which really happened"; it relates the

breakthrough of the sacred that really establishes the World and makes it what it is today. ... The Myth is regarded as a sacred story, and hence a "true history", because it always deals with realities.

Association with the primordial period of creation is an archetypal persuasive argument. "The cosmogeny is true because the world is there to prove it".³⁷

Kirk admits that "on the whole I feel that the attempt to isolate some central specific quality of myths is misdirected. There are too many obvious exceptions".

³⁶ Greek Myths, p.25.

³⁷ v. Myth and Reality, pp. 1,5,6; Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, p. 23; The Quest, pp. 72f. It seems likely that Eliade shared this opinion with Pettazzoni, v. "Mythology and the History of Religions", p.101: "as Prof. Pettazzoni remarks, a myth is always a true story because it is a sacred story".

However, he goes on to say that the distinguishing features of myth must be "not just one such characteristic like sacredness in some sense, but a whole range of possibilities".³⁸ Among the phrases Kirk uses to describe the possible distinguishing features of myth are;

1. narrative force, power or charm.
2. offering an explanation for some important phenomenon or custom.
3. palliating in some way a recurring social dilemma.
4. recording and establishing a useful institution.
5. expressing an emotion in some way that satisfies some need in the individual.
6. reinforcing a religious feeling.
7. acting as a powerful support or precedent for an established ritual or cult practice.

Eliade's attitude seems to generally agree with Kirk's analysis thus far; firstly, the force or charm of the narrative can be assimilated to Eliade's concept of the "truth" of the narrative. Secondly, he positively insists on the etiological aspect of myth. Features 2, 4, and 7 can be grouped together here; explanation, recording, and support flow together in the positive valorisation of the etiological myth.

To tell how things came into existence is to explain them and at the same time indirectly to answer

³⁸ Greek Myths, p.27.

another question: Why did they come into existence?³⁹

Thus transmitting the mythic origins of an institution or phenomenon performs all three functions. Features 5 and 6 are intriguing but so vague as to be of little use. I am not sufficiently familiar with Kirk's other work to know if he clarifies these concepts elsewhere but they remain unclear here. Whatever may be the precise import of these functions, it seems clear that they can be fulfilled by other narratives than myths and other religious elements than the mythic, that is to say they are not unique characteristics of myth.

The third of Kirk's features can be assimilated to Eliade's notion of a consolation from the terror of history and will be discussed elsewhere. Kirk concludes his introductory section on "Problems of Definition" with the declaration that

the position at which we have arrived is that myths are on the one hand good stories, on the other hand bearers of important messages about life in general and life within society in particular.⁴⁰

The whole question of aesthetics is raised here; what is the exact relationship of the "important message" to the "good story"? In retrospect the two are obviously connected, but is that connection teleological (the messages considered important being deliberately associated with powerful vehicles of transmission to

³⁹ Sacred and the Profane, p. 97.

⁴⁰ Greek Myths, p.29.

ensure their propagation and preservation), or causal (the importance of the message naturally generating a successful vehicle), or the reverse (the aesthetic power of the vehicle ensuring that its message is perceived and transmitted as important). An answer to this question would undoubtedly explain the perennial association of religious themes and (at least pre-Renaissance) art.

A revealing statement of Kirk's analysis is that myths must "possess both exceptional narrative power and clear functional relevance to some important aspect of life beyond mere entertainment". (ibid., p.28.) The problem here is more clearly one of disentangling the two characteristics. In order to "possess exceptional narrative power" must not a story have some a priori relevance to some important aspect of life? Further, can that relevance be anything but functional? That is to say the myth will explain, establish, support, reinforce, or express that to which it has relevance. It should be noticed in this connection that the types of relevance listed by Kirk are always positive. He, too, sees myth as a positive rhetorical device, whose function is supportive, establishing, etc. rather than destructive or hostile. It would seem that the analytic method of philosophy gradually established since the Socratics serves the negative side more readily. However, positive valorizations are made by more mythic means. Kirk points out that in pre-Socratic Greece myths, as powerful narrative pieces, were used as supportive material for

philosophic standpoints. Even Plato, although reviling this poesis of myth as the enemy of philosophy falls back on this tradition. As Kirk says, "probably the habit of falling back on myths as an emotive form of persuasion belonged to Socrates himself". (ibid., p.108.) In the post-Socratic tradition the reliance on "rational" rather than "mythic" forms of persuasion can be seen as developing from an increased valorisation of the historical as the "real". This provides a convenient touchstone to determine the "reality" of an argument: that which actually historically occurred would be seen as more "real" (ie. sacred; more powerful, meaningful, significant, etc., therefore more credible), than that which was a human fabrication. Thus rational discourse upon elements of common human experience would become more esteemed than mythic persuasion which does "not set out to give philosophical proofs, rather to effect an altered emotional response to an aspect of our existence". (ibid., p.83.) This is entirely consistent with Eliade's insistence that myth is the true story par excellence.

In developing his own theory of myth Kirk gives a resumé of the most influential alternative theories, isolating "five monolithic theories of myth". The first of these theories is that made famous by Max Müller:

"all myths are nature myths, that is they refer to meteorological and cosmological phenomena". (ibid., p.43.) This theory Kirk sees as having been exploded

largely by Andrew Lang. (ibid., p.17.) For his own part Kirk states that

exactly how and why the earliest myth makers thought about the world as they did, and what particular kind of anthropocentric and symbolic motives persuaded them to imagine the gods in the form of the sky, or the sky as behaving in some respects like a man, must remain unknown. (ibid., p.49.)

However, the idea that myths are allegories of nature or meteorological events must have corresponded to the intuitions of the 19th century Europeans who so readily accepted it. To Kirk it may now seem "incredible that many of the best minds in 19th century Europe could envisage myths as encoded descriptions of clouds passing over the sun etc". (ibid., p.17.) Yet this "strange exaggeration" evidently was acceptable at that time, in that place; it accorded with the prevalent view of human nature. In his journal Eliade commented similarly on the acceptance of Freud's theories on myth despite the paucity of supportive evidence. However, he has a partial explanation;

the interpretations of Freud are more and more successful because they are among the myths accessible to modern man. The myth of the murdered father, among others, reconstituted and interpreted in Totem and Taboo. It would be impossible to ferret out a single example of slaying the father in primitive religions or mythologies. This myth was created by Freud. And what is more interesting: the intellectual élite accept it (is it because they understand it? Or because it is "true" for modern man?)⁴¹

The implication of Eliade's thought here is that the 19th century, naturalistic explanation of myths was, like

⁴¹ No Souvenirs, p.117.

Freud's primordial parricide, a myth itself. Eliade's usage of the term can be seen to be diametrically opposed to one aspect of the "contemporary usage" of the term which Kirk commended to our notice.⁴² It is not in the sense of "falsehood" or "fable" that Eliade uses the word "myth". This he considers a "semantic inheritance from the Christian polemic against the pagan world".⁴³ Myth is seen rather as a narrative "considered to reveal the truth par excellence".⁴⁴

Evidently the type of truth intended in Eliade's description of myth is quite distinct from historical actuality. This is actually consistent with the common alternative usages of "true" given in any sizeable dictionary, for example, "being that which is the case rather than that which is manifest or assumed".⁴³ The sense of true as being in accordance with an actual, historical state of affairs, is a rather recent and specialised usage. To give an example; even the most hardline of Christian fundamentalists who argue for the absolute historical veracity of the Bible would not

⁴² Greek Myths, p.25.

⁴³ Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, p.23, although elsewhere he says, "if in every European language the word 'myth' denotes a 'fiction,' it is because the Greeks proclaimed it to be such twenty-five centuries ago". (Quest, p.72)

⁴⁴ Eliade, The Quest, p.73, and v. esp. Myth, Dreams and Mysteries, p.23 on his opposition to myth as "untrue".

⁴³ Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary.

insist that it necessarily occurred on some historical occasion that a certain traveller was robbed and beaten by specific thieves, neglected by an actual levite priest, and rescued by an historical Samaritan for the parable of the Good Samaritan to be a story revelatory of the truth. This usage of the concept of truth is further clarified in Eliade's journals. For example, he states that "the Bucharest of my novella Pe Strada Mantuleasa, although legendary, is truer than the city I went through for the last time in August 1942".⁴⁴ And in his narration of the story of Savonarola and Lorenzo de Medici from the same source one can read more clearly Eliade's dissociation of truth from history. Popular legend had it that Savonarola eventually denied extreme unction to Medici when the latter would not restore liberty to Florence, and, apparently, learned critics accepted the historicity of this version. This Eliade takes to be because the

archetypal image - Savonarola the prophet of civil liberties, Lorenzo the absolute tyrant - was too "true", too suggestive, to be invalidated by documents and specific testimony. It was "truer" in legend than in history. In history Savonarola conducted himself as any Christian monk and absolved the repentant sinner.⁴⁵

Thus mythic truth is seen as independent of, but certainly not in opposition to, historical actuality. As we saw in the preceding exposition on hierophany, Eliade

⁴⁴ No Souvenirs, p. 51.

⁴⁵ Greek Myths, p.57.

considers the experience of historical actualities to be the perennial source and auditor of the truth which is expressed in creative interpretation.

The next theory which Kirk inspects is the etiological theory, attributed particularly to Andrew Lang - "all myths offer a cause or explanation of something in the real world". (ibid., p.53.) It is remarkable that Kirk does not consider Eliade in the context of etiological myth. In one of his most widely read books Eliade states his opinion clearly that "every myth shows how a reality came into existence, whether it be the total reality, the cosmos, or only a fragment - an island, a species of plant, a human institution".⁴⁶ Furthermore, it is one of the central tenets of the Eliade's understanding of myth that the cosmogonic myth is the pattern of all myths as the exemplar of all genesis stories. It is a fundamental characteristic of a myth that it is

always related to a "creation", it tells how something came into existence, or how a pattern of behaviour, an institution, a manner of working were established; this is why myths constitute the paradigms for all significant human acts.⁴⁷

And again.

In general, one can say that any myth tells how something came into being, the world, or man, or an animal species, or a social institution, and so on. But by the very fact that the creation of the world precedes everything else, the cosmogony enjoys a special prestige. In fact, as I have tried to show

⁴⁶ Sacred and the Profane, p. 97.

⁴⁷ Myth and Reality, p.18.

elsewhere, [Eliade footnotes The Myth of the Eternal Return and Myth and Reality] the cosmogonic myth furnishes the model for all myths of origin.⁴⁸

Perhaps Kirk's reading of Eliade is not extensive, this is not meant as a serious criticism of Kirk: on the one hand it is a perennial problem in this field that one cannot cover all available sources, on the other it is a difficulty with Eliade that one should need to read him so extensively in order to appreciate his thought.

Although he does not make the point himself, Kirk's objection stands as well for Eliade as it does for Lang. "Myths," he says, "are obviously not concerned just with that [etiology]; they plainly encompass such things as the emotional valuation of many aspects of personal life."⁴⁹ The only possible reply here is that it would seem that, by Eliade's definition, stories which do not encompass these etiological concerns are excluded from the category of myth. Yet stories which "encompass the emotional valuation" of phenomena can be interpreted as giving the origin of that emotional valuation and will thus not be excluded.

Thirdly, Kirk considers the theory that myths are "charters" for customs, institutions, or beliefs. This was the theory forwarded by Bronislaw Malinowski, whose

idea that the "serious" uses of myth are neither emotional nor reflective, but rather are connected with the mechanical functions of social life, became the core of the exaggerated theory known as

⁴⁸ Quest, p.75.

⁴⁹ Greek Myths, p.53.

"functionalism" that developed into an orthodoxy in the circle of A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and Edmund Leach. (ibid., p.32.)

Although he evidently opposes this "orthodoxy", Kirk is more favourably disposed to Malinowski's understanding, conceding that Malinowski was right in requiring more observations of myth "in action" rather than theoretical speculation. It will soon become clear in what ways Eliade's understanding of myth encourages a broader observation of myth "in action" in the contemporary world. Also, Eliade quotes from Malinowski's Myth in Primitive Psychology, pp.101, 108 at some length, to the effect that myth is "a narrative resurrection of a primeval reality", and "supplies man with the motive for ritual and moral actions", finding here support for the concepts of the internal coherence and exemplary status of myth.⁵⁰ Robert Baird has pointed out that Eliade and Malinowski are in agreement that "men in archaic cultures justify their actions in terms of the prior acts of the gods", although the significance of this differs for the two scholars.⁵¹

To a certain extent the etiological and the "charter" concepts of myth overlap. As we have seen, Eliade points out that insofar as a myth describes the origin of a given institution or phenomenon it thereby supports it. Mythology

⁵⁰ Myth and Reality, p.20.

⁵¹ Category Formation, p.79.

relates how things came into being, providing the exemplary model and also the justification of man's activities. One understands what one is - mortal and of a certain sex - and how that came about, because the myths tell how death and sexuality made their appearance.⁵²

That is to say that the "accidents" of one's personal life experience are orientated within a given extended matrix of significations and thus "justified". As with any language, from the most natural to the most formal, each element is defined in terms of other elements in the whole structure of meaning. Thus the act of description in the mythic framework simultaneously operates as justification. The significance of a number, for example, is not fixed, not essential, but is given by its relationship to other elements of the mathematical system.⁵³ Similarly the significance of one's own existence is not given a priori by its form, it lacks essential significance. Only by orientating the various experiential elements of one's own existence (mortality, sexuality, social duty, alimentation, in short, one's existential situation, as Eliade often refers to it), in

⁵² Quest, p.76.

⁵³ For example, 10 can = 8×2 , as it does in the hexadecimal mathematics used for computers, where the base number is sixteen rather than ten. Usually $10 = 5 \times 2$, because suffixing the zero to any number indicates that that number is thus multiplied by the base number, that, in the decimal system, having counted all the fingers on both hands one begins the sequence over again, adding each number to the total which becomes the base. It is a fundamental assumption of Sausurrian linguistics that words are likewise defined, their meaning being given and justified by their relationships to other elements of the language.

an extended matrix of interrelated significant entities, can one appreciate its significance and escape the dreadful social and psychological consequences of an otherwise utterly insignificant existence. In this aspect of myth Kirk's concept of "palliating a recurring social dilemma" and Eliade's concept of countering the terror of history combine. To escape further from the implication that this extended matrix is itself insignificant, no more than a palliative, in fact a placebo, it must be grounded as frequently and firmly as possible in reality, in the sacred. However, as I have argued, reality itself is an element in the existential situation of the individual, or rather a concept therein, the actual experience of which is necessarily beyond our empirical senses. It too is given significance by its relationship to the various elements of our experience. Our concept of the real is grounded in those experiences which we hold to reveal most clearly that which is real, in hierophanies and archetypal intuitions, yet our experience of certain phenomena as hierophanic or ontophanic is determined by our "personal experience and religious background";⁵⁴ thus our very apprehension of the significance of the elements of our personal experience takes shape within a hermeneutical cycle of object-observation-subject-observation-object. This type of constructivist attitude which ultimately makes

⁵⁴ From Mistress Christina, v. below p.213.

humanity instrumental in its perceptions of reality, is implicit in both the Italian humanist insistence on the coherence of "primitive thought" [eg. Vico] and in Goethe's observation that all facts are theory-laden, both of which certainly influenced Eliade's thought.

The fourth of the "monolithic" theories of myth presented by Kirk is the one which he attributes specifically to Eliade; that "the purpose of myths is to evoke or actually re-establish in some sense, the creative era".⁵⁵ Certainly this is an important and original element of Eliade's thought, but as we have seen, it does not exhaust his understanding of myth. Although Kirk does not himself make such a claim the reader could give him the benefit of the doubt here by assuming that this "theory" which he derives from Eliade's writings is that element of Eliade's theory of myth which is unique and original to him. As we have seen Eliade also subscribes to the etiological theory, and to some extent to the charter theory and even allows some truth to the "primordial physics" concept. Yet it is the "Myth of the Eternal Return" which is particular to Eliade's interpretation, and it is that which Kirk critiques.

"Many myths of many societies are not of this kind and do not respond to any such interpretation", Kirk states. (ibid., p.64.) However, even in the Amerindian

⁵⁵ Greek Myths, p.63.

myth which he offers as a specific exception as proof of this he accepts that the action takes place in "a mythical epoch that was, admittedly, the time when things were put in order". (ibid.) It is Eliade's point that myths refer to such an "other time" in which the cosmos was either created or ordered. "Such works constitute properly speaking a cosmogony; the ancestors did not create the earth, but they gave form to a pre-existent materia prima."⁵⁶ Furthermore, in establishing his own distinctions between myth and folklore Kirk himself had accepted that myth takes place in a "timeless" past, rather than a remote chronological era or an anonymous period.⁵⁷ Since the action of myths "take place" in such a timeless, eternal period it seems pointless to deny that the telling of these myths "evokes" that period, and Eliade's numerous examples must stand as their own evidence that this is seen as the creative period par excellence. Whether or not the myths actually seek to re-establish that timeless period here and now is a more complex argument and will be considered later. When Kirk turns to the area of his own expertise, the Greek myths, to cast doubt on Eliade's theory he occasionally adduces examples which support it.

Greek myths, too, utterly fail to support Eliade's universal theory. [Writes Kirk] The whole range of Greek heroic myths lies outside any true "creative"

⁵⁶ Quest, p.85. referring to Australian aboriginal myths.

⁵⁷ Greek Myths, p.34.

era. (ibid., p.65.)

Yet later in his exposition Kirk states that for Pindar

the "excellence" ... that he celebrates in his victors seems to him to owe its value precisely to its heroic and divine connections, to its roots in a radical mythical past of which the Olympic Games, above all other occasions, are seen as a rare surviving relic. ... For Pindar, at least, the myths represented a past that was of higher value than the present. ... In this use of myths as an active force for conserving a semi-divine past Pindar returns to a function that is more than merely literary, and reproduces in a way the evocative function of certain myths that was discussed on page 63". (I.e., Eliade's theory of the evocation of the creative era. (ibid., pp.101-102.)

This certainly does not "utterly fail to support Eliade's universal theory", even when the aspect of the reinstatement of the primordial, creative period is artificially separated from its properly accompanying elements. As a highly valorised timeless time which is the object of nostalgia and of periodic re-establishment Pindar's attitude to the Olympic Games is a clear example of Eliade's mythic nostalgia for paradise and eternal return to the primordial sacred time.

It is apparently Kirk's desire to isolate and criticise some "monolithic" and "universal" theory of myth and his resultant restriction of Eliade's theory to the notion of a re-establishment of a creative era which makes his criticism appear credible. The point is that Eliade's "definition" of myth is systematic and taxonomic. It is a deliberate attempt to classify so as to render comprehensible an extremely complex phenomenon. As Kirk says,

myths are not uniform, logical and internally consistent, they are multiform, imaginative and loose in their details. Moreover their emphases change from one year, or generation to the next. (ibid., p.29.)

Thus accepting the complexity and polyvalence of myth (which is always and unavoidably a human classification of the broader category of narrative, itself a subset of human communication) Kirk is hardly justified in using Eliade's failure to cover all myths as a serious negative criticism. Eliade makes an attempt to restrict the classification to a particular group of narratives having the characteristics which he highlights. Certainly he thus cannot cover all tales, stories, records, and so forth which stake a claim to the title of "myth". The classification which Kirk produces, motivated by his desire to create a "guide to the understanding of all of them", (ibid.) is so broad that it "does not turn out to be an analytic category of any great usefulness", as Jack Goody said of Kirk's earlier work on myth.⁵⁸ In order to make one's analytic category of any value in this area one must necessarily exclude some candidates from the field of mythology. Simply accepting the complexity of myth will always result in some such broad and unusable definition. Eliade, on the other hand, in his desire to establish the coherence and the exemplary status of myth has perhaps been too willing to impose upon that category

⁵⁸ Antiquity 45 (1971), p.159, reviewing Kirk, Myth: its Meaning and Function in Ancient and Other Cultures, v. Greek Myths, p.38.

a description which would not be immediately meaningful to those for whom a given myth is current. However, as I said earlier, the value of his intuitions concerning myth should be assessed in the light of the significance they reveal to his readers in their own confrontation with the mythic.

If Eliade's concept of myth appears more restrictive than Kirk's we must look further to ascertain what it is that qualifies the myth beyond its narrative charm and functional relevance. The clearest expositions of Eliade's thought in this area are in Myth and Reality, ch. 9, "Survivals and Camouflages of Myth" and in Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, ch. 1, "The Myths of the Modern World". In the former, Eliade discusses first the continuation of mythic thought in Christianity and then he outlines specifically mythic elements in "secular" thought. The obsession with "the return to the origins" in modern society is related to the etiological function of myth. The "eschatological and millennialist structures" of Marxism are described as mythic. Perhaps more surprisingly in such a scholar is the perception of mythic structures in the mass media, comic art, modern art, the obsession with success, the exodus to the suburbs, the "automobile cult", the "myth of the élite", and in the novel. These are seen as the surviving, if camouflaged, myths of the modern world. This is where modern man finds his true reality, the meaningful, the powerful.

Despite the chapter heading of "Survivals and Camouflages of Myths", Eliade warns that these mythic elements do not

represent "survivals" of an archaic mentality ... [rather] certain aspects and functions of mythic thought are constituents of the human being.⁵⁹

This pronouncement might at first sound enigmatic and unclear, however, its implications were already clarified in his work of six years earlier. There, although he warns of the enormous scope of myths in the modern world, he seeks to trace the general survival of myth. He writes,

of what is essential in mythic behaviour--the exemplary pattern, the repetition, the break with profane duration and integration into primordial time--the first two at least are consubstantial with every human condition.⁶⁰

What is seen as essential to myth beyond its narrative power and relevance is the specific recognition of and response to exemplary patterns. Eliade considers that "the foremost function of myth is to reveal the exemplary models for all human rites and all significant human activities".⁶¹ The response to, the repetition of, these exemplary pattern constitutes a repetition of a segment of the primordial time and thus a break with profane, historical time. This is, in fact, integral to the "truth" of the myth. It is the exemplary, imitable

⁵⁹ Myth and Reality, p. 181f.

⁶⁰ Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, p. 31.

⁶¹ Myth and Reality, p.8.

elements of the narrative which give a story mythic status. (Allow me to emphasise once again that Eliade is using "true" in a sense which has more in common to the Classical Greek arete, virtue or excellence, and less in common with the notion of propositional truth or historical accuracy. This is, of course, consistent with the whole body of his thought.) It is the perception that the myth is exemplary that gives rise to the concept of the "reactualisation" of the primordial, creative era. Insofar as a mythic act is open to imitation, insofar as we can narrate or reenact the events of the mythic era, the time of illud tempus is open to re-establishment, we can re-discover and thus re-actualise its meaning and its power.

The greatest suspicion of myth which Kirk expresses in his study is of myth "as a collective term" because this, and other forms such as "mythology",

misleadingly imply that what one should be defining is some absolute essence of all myths, some Platonic Idea of "that which is truly mythic".

However, "myths are a vague and uncertain category, and one man's myth is another man's legend, or folktale, or oral tradition".⁶² This sort of suspicion is given greater rein in Strenski's complete rejection of myth as a reality. However, it can readily be seen that in Eliade's understanding, myth is determined by the prevalent attitude to a popular narrative. Myth is the

⁶² Greek Myths, p.20.

popular narrative which is uncritically (or with reference to other myths!) held to be true, to represent the real, and thus to be exemplary. In Eliadean terms, to be sacred. No doubt the hostile attitude to myth from Xenophanes to Strenski is grounded in a justifiable rejection of the a priori, uncritically positive valorisation characteristic of myth. It is a typical and admirable characteristic of science and the "scientific" approach that everything, especially traditionally established values, should be open to rigorous criticism. It is this specific characteristic of criticism of tradition which Eliade has cited as definitive of "modern man". (p.53, n.33) The problem here resides in the concomitant claim or belief that for the scientific or critical modern nothing is received from tradition without prior critical analysis; that "modern man" "does not believe in myths", that is, has no myths of his own, an assertion with which Eliade is in fundamental disagreement. The implication of his thought is that myth is functional as much when the myth is concealed in the message as when the message is concealed in the myth. The reliance upon nonrational, narrative, "emotive forms of persuasion" will always draw upon mythic sources of power. Thus, for example, it could be said that when a specious statistical argument is utilised, one which strictly speaking is not rational, that appeal is being made to the myth of mathematics, that is to the popular association of number and truth.

Only if all of one's persuasions are formed on the basis of fully rational support can one be said to have transcended all myth. One of the gains made by such an acceptance of our own mythic influences is that the problem of a "Platonic Idea" of the truly mythic is completely avoided. It is the intentional attitude of the believer which makes a myth a myth, not some necessary participation in an ideal form. In terms of Eliade's sacred it is the perceived participation in or revelation of the real which makes a particular narrative mythic for a particular believer. However, it is not necessary that the student of myth be party to that participation or revelation to recognise the mythic status of that narrative. It can thus be accepted that "one man's myth is another man's legend", as Kirk puts it, while simultaneously recognising the truly mythic status of the narrative in its relationship to its hearers.

Given the preceding observations the foundationalism characteristic of much of modern thought, especially since Descartes, can itself be seen as a form of "nostalgia for paradise". The prevalent mythology of pre-modern society was not seriously challenged, one's firm location within a particular culture would ensure a certitude, a reality, a sacrality, to the mores of that culture. Nowadays, however, with the entry of the Orient into History as Eliade has it and the propagation of the mass media the "sacred" standards of the traditional

religion of the West are challenged. That is to say, not simply the doctrines of Christianity, but all the heirs of our culture's positive valorizations. As Eliade states in his conclusion to "Cosmogonic Myth and 'Sacred History'", "it is with such myths of sacred history - still alive in many traditional societies - that the Judaeo-Christian idea of history has to vie".⁶³

Secular modern Westerners are no more justified in their complacent acceptance of their idea of history than are Christians in their acceptance of the Atonement. Both are traditionally transmitted and in their apprehension as powerful, relevant and exemplary, with its self-referentially positive valorisation, both can be seen as mythic.

It is only through the discovery of History - more precisely by the awakening of the historical consciousness in Judaeo-Christianity and its propagation by Hegel and his successors - it is only through the radical assimilation of the new mode of being represented by human existence in the world that myth could be left behind. But we hesitate to say that mythical thought has been abolished. As we shall soon see, it managed to survive, though radically changed (if not perfectly camouflaged). And the astonishing fact is that, more than anywhere else it survives in historiography!⁶⁴

Paradoxically myth tends to re-establish itself as a fable, an illusion. As in the story of Visnu and Narada,⁶⁵ what is the ultimately seductive fault is accepting one's own myths as real, and yet in order to

⁶³ Greek Myths, p.87.

⁶⁴ Myth and Reality, p.113.

⁶⁵ Related in Images and Symbols, pp.70f.

reach this conclusion, we had to begin with the recognition that the myth is the true story par excellence. Perhaps the paradox can be resolved in the recognition that the myth is a true representation of reality in the sense that it is honest and has integrity, and excellence but is not a reiteration of reality itself.

The hearer of myth, regardless of his level of culture, when he is listening to a myth, forgets, as it were, his particular situation and is projected into another world, into another universe which is no longer his poor little universe of every day. ... The myths are true because they are sacred, because they tell him about sacred beings and events. Consequently, in reciting or listening to a myth, one resumes contact with the sacred and with reality, and in so doing one transcends the profane condition, the "historical situation". In other words one goes beyond the temporal condition and the dull self-sufficiency which is the lot of every human being simply because every human being is "ignorant" - in the sense that he is identifying himself, and Reality, with his own particular situation. And ignorance is, first of all, this false identification of Reality with what each one of us appears to be or to possess. (ibid., p.59.)

As he makes clear later on, this does not deny the relevance of the historical situation, or the reality of personal experience. In Indian terms he points out that "the great cosmic illusion is a hierophany". (ibid., p.91.)

If Time, seen as Maya, is itself a manifestation of the Divinity, to live in Time is not itself a "bad action": "bad action" is to believe that nothing else exists, nothing outside of Time. One is devoured by Time, not because one lives in Time, but because one believes in its reality, and therefore forgets or despises eternity.(91)

In other words, the primary fault is not in perception itself, but in mistakenly assuming perception to be

itself the Real rather than a secondary manifestation, a representation or imitation of the real, to mistake the illusion for reality.

The emphases of myth have changed drastically, as has so much else of human life since the industrial revolution. So radical is the change that it is often difficult to recognise the connection of modern myths with archaic ones. The mythic importance of the narrative form has been much reduced; stories are now in enormously greater supply. This has resulted in a general demythologisation of narrative and the occasional sundering of myth from its familiar narrative setting. Thus ideology, cosmology, ontology, and other, strictly metaphysical assumptions can bear no obvious trace of the "good story", but nevertheless be of degraded mythic status because of their perception as self-evident truths, their highly effective emotional persuasiveness, and their etiological character. Although superficially distinct, popular forms of media such as films and comic books⁶⁶ still share common characteristics of myth of etiology, entertainment value, positive valorisation but above all, exemplary status. If it is at first difficult to accept popular media as myth, it should be borne in mind that both Franz Boas and E. E. Evans-Pritchard

⁶⁶ Certainly, fantastic creations such as strip cartoon super heroes cannot be excluded from this later category. (cf. Eliade's photograph with Jack Kirby's comic art Asgardians, Waiting for the Dawn, pp.66-67), and v. Myth and Reality, p.185 on the "myth of Superman."

refused to make any absolute distinction between myth and folktale, and that Kirk agrees that "the data show a continual flow of material from mythology and folktale and vice versa, and that neither group can claim priority".⁶⁷ Also of interest in this context is the widespread belief that the violence in children's cartoons is responsible for the violence in society, that the directly exemplary status of these tales is still effective.

One possible weakness of Kirk's analysis (in common with many other commentators) is his insistence that "it cannot be repeated too often" that myths are traditional tales, (ibid., p.38.) thus underplaying this concept of contemporary myths, and disabling any attempts to observe "myth in action" in our own society. This would imply that our modern society is in this respect radically different from all others in that it would be the only society ever known to exist without myths. It is a conceit typical of "modern" thought that we in the contemporary West are somehow essentially different from all other societies. Against this, Eliade has said,

a restriction of the inquiry to "primitive" mythologies risks giving the impression that there is no continuity between archaic thought and the thought of the peoples who played an important role in ancient history. Now, such a solution of continuity does not exist.⁶⁸

I would argue that Eliade's universal humanism is one of

⁶⁷ Greek Myths, pp.31-33.

⁶⁸ Quest, p.73.

the elements which makes him a precursor of the "postmodern" rather than himself a typical modern. In defence of Kirk, however, it must be said that the cultural matrix which empowers a myth as a form of persuasion independently of its rationality is necessarily traditional, that is to say that the positive emotional response to a myth is received rather than innate. It is intuitive in the sense mentioned above. (p.114.) Unfortunately, with the devalorisation of the "reality" of such a form of persuasion and such uninspected "truths", (that is to say, with the association of myth and the unreal and the concomitant devaluation of nonrational, intuitive insights), these received persuasions have largely become concealed and the traditions which support them largely unrecognised. One major cause of this unwarranted association is the longstanding tendency to study as myths exactly those narratives which are held by other peoples to be revelatory of the real, but are not so held by ourselves. The concept of "myth" was thus formed as "other peoples' myths" rather than as "myths" tout court,⁶⁹ and it is in correcting this misapprehension that Eliade's consideration of myths has diverged from the conventional understanding of the word.

⁶⁹ v. Wendy Doniger's Other Peoples' Myths, and my review in Style, 24, no.4 (1990):642-645.

Chapter Five
Time, History, and Illud Tempus

5.1. Introduction

The terms of the preceding analyses are either neologisms of Eliade's own construction or specialist terms of the study of religio-cultural phenomena; hierophany, symbols etc. However, now the object of analysis is a group of terms which are of a much more broad and common usage; history and time. Although Eliade's characteristic use of the Latin illud tempus clearly indicates an idiosyncratic application of the concept of time it is precisely the tension between this idiosyncrasy and the deeply ingrained assumptions of the reader which generates many of the difficulties of comprehension of this aspect of Eliade's thought. As anyone who has tangled with Heidegger's Sein und Zeit knows only too well, it is the common and fundamental

terms of our conceptual vocabulary which generate the most crucial and labyrinthine problems, time no less than being. Eliade, too, was aware that The Myth of the Eternal Return, which "had we not feared to appear overambitious, we should have given ... the subtitle: Introduction to a Philosophy of History",¹ was "the most significant of my books; and when I am asked in what order they should be read, I always recommend beginning with the present work".² First published as Le Mythe de l'éternel retour: archétypes et répétition by Gallimard in 1949, this work was translated into English as Cosmos and History (Harper Torchbooks, 1959) and reprinted as The Myth of the Eternal Return or Cosmos and History from 1965 onwards. It certainly contains the most detailed exposition of the interpretation of the attitude to time and history which Eliade based on his notoriously broad readings of religious documents.

The notions of time and history as they are applied by Eliade himself, as they are manifest in the documents of the study of religion, and as they are commonly applied in the West today are of fundamental importance to this study in every respect. As Eliade applies them they condition the meaning of his entire oeuvre; as they are manifest in the documents of the study of religion (as Eliade conceived it) they represent an expression of

¹ The Myth of the Eternal Return, Foreword, p.ix.

² *ibid.*, p.xv, preface to the English edition, dated November 1958.

the existential situation of humanity other than our own; and as they are commonly applied in the West today they represent the realities of our own existential situation as it differs from but is conditioned by our cultural precedents. As sacred or sacralisable, as hierophanies, the documents of religious studies are by definition expressions of that which was apprehended as the real. Thus the attitude to time expressed in the sacred traditions of humanity past and present represent the actual apprehensions of those alternative modes of (human) being. Eliade's interpretations of time and history simultaneously condition and are the products of his implicit system and its concomitant methodology.

5.2. The Archaic and the Modern Conceptions of Time

Although Eliade admits the difficulty of describing concisely the nature of time for modern humanity³, he characterises clearly the conception of time which he has abstracted from religious documents. For humanity in its religious aspect,

profane temporal duration can be periodically arrested; for certain rituals have the power to interrupt it by periods of a sacred time that is nonhistorical (in the sense that it does not belong to the historical present). (ibid., pp.71f.)

Thus,

religious man lives in two kinds of time, of which the most important, sacred time, appears under the paradoxical aspect of a circular time, reversible and recoverable, a sort of eternal mythical present

³ The Sacred and the Profane, p.70.

that is periodically regenerated by means of rites.
(ibid., p.70.)

This, as we saw, was Eliade's main means of distinguishing religious, archaic humanity from modern, nonreligious humanity, (above, p.86) and finally reflects the thesis of The Myth of the Eternal Return. However, before I attempt to clarify Eliade's position by close reference to that work, let me immediately emphasise one point which he makes in The Sacred and the Profane. This sacred time "is a mythical time, that is a primordial time, not to be found in the historical past".⁴

Obviously this "primordial time" is not located in any long-gone historical era of our known world, but is in empirical terms notional, conceptual or imaginary.

Eliade is certain that

the nostalgia for the lost paradise excludes any desire to restore the "paradise of animality". Everything that we know about the mythic memories of "paradise" confronts us, on the contrary, with the image of an ideal humanity enjoying a beatitude and spiritual plenitude forever unrealisable in the present state of "fallen man".⁵

That is to say, the nostalgia is not for a chronological past, an actual or historical condition, rather it is for an imaginary ideal which none the less functions as an exemplar. Once again, as in my interpretation of Eliade's sacred, the ontological status of Eliade's analysis should not be assumed. In the very opening words to The Myth of the Eternal Return he states that

⁴ The Sacred and the Profane, p.72. Emphasis added.

⁵ The Myth of the Eternal Return, p.91.

this book undertakes to study certain aspects of archaic ontology - more precisely, the conceptions of being and reality that can be read off from the behaviour of the man of premodern societies.⁶

Thus it can be seen that at no point is he necessarily discussing archaic ontology; how things were in premodern societies, but rather archaic conceptions of ontology; how things were thought to be, or, to be more factually accurate; how things were said to be.

Eliade's thesis, supported as ever by a formidable array of textual references, is that the "archaic" mentality, seen as typically representative of humanity in its religious mode, apprehended sacred time (as "a primordial mythical time made present")⁷ as the locus of real significance, of the sacred, of the real. Thus it was felt that

neither the objects of the external world nor human acts, properly speaking, have any autonomous intrinsic value. Objects or acts acquire a value, and in so doing become real, because they participate, after one fashion or another, in a reality that transcends them.⁸

Time is one of the primary categories of knowledge or of humanity's knowledge of the world which is subject to the sociologisation of knowledge.⁹ Lévy-Bruhl, in his Primitive Mentality pointed out that the linear and unrepeatable nature of time was a feature of the modern,

⁶ ibid., p.3. Emphasis added.

⁷ The Sacred and the Profane, p.68.

⁸ The Myth of the Eternal Return, pp.3f.

⁹ v. eg., The Sociology of Knowledge, David Glover and Sheelagh Strawbridge, ch.1.

"civilized" time-consciousness. Despite the fact that he was forced to retract his postulate of a "primitive mentality" Lévy-Bruhl's recognition of the recent nature of the specific apprehension of time as "dimensional" is still borne out by an overwhelming number of sources and theories. As usual, Eliade supports this perspective with copious textual examples, but he is once again referring to the fact that the Christian tradition sees the phenomenal world as essentially "fallen", reduced by original sin from its original, divinely intended condition to a vitiated, lesser state, and so on.¹⁰ All known religious traditions posit a realm or mode of being which is infinitely more significant than the world of everyday personal experience. George Stirrat has agreed,

Eliade's formulation of the sacred as existing outside of time ... is a fair characterisation of much that is claimed within the religious discourses of most, if not all, the world religions. Thus, in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Catholicism, it can be argued that what is most sacred, that which is concerned with salvation, is that which is outside time.¹¹

The religious person can gain access to this alternative time through performance of ritual, narration of myth, and in "archaic" and "primitive" societies, by the performance of sacralised human functions, such as hunting, fishing, construction, and the more obvious sacraments (to the modern Westerner) of birth, marriage,

¹⁰ For similar examples from other traditions, v. above, pp.21f.

¹¹ "Sacred Models," p.202.

and death. Eliade suggests that what all of these observances have in common is that they constitute, and are sacralised by, repetitions of a sacred model. This includes, but is not exhausted by, the imitatio dei familiar to the Christian West. The implications of the concept that imitation can confer ontic weight upon the activities of humanity implies a certain understanding of time:

insofar as an act (or an object) acquires a certain reality through the repetition of certain paradigmatic gestures, and acquires it through that alone, there is an implicit abolition of profane time, of duration, of "history"; and he who reproduces the exemplary gesture thus finds himself transported into the mythical epoch in which its revelation took place.¹²

The concept of the specific imitation or repetition of divine mythical models is not the only indicator of this alternative attitude to time, "the traditional societies (that is, all societies down to those which make up the modern world) knew and applied still other methods to bring about the regeneration of time". (ibid., p.76.) Nor is this attitude utterly foreign to contemporary humanity. It can be most easily recognised in New Year scenarios which feature a return to primordial chaos and a repetition of the creation and in

the Christian liturgical year [which] is based upon a periodic and real repetition of the Nativity, Passion, death, and Resurrection of Jesus, ... that is, personal and cosmic regeneration through reactualisation in concreto of the birth, death, and resurrection of the Saviour. (ibid., p.130.)

¹² The Myth of the Eternal Return, p.35.

This is of no small significance and emphasises Eliade's frequent insistence that there is no "solution of continuity" between archaic and modern. However, the present point is that "for traditional man, the imitation of an archetypal model is a reactualisation of the mythical moment when the archetype was revealed for the first time". (ibid., p.76.) These sacred models Eliade refers to as "archetypal" and as "archetypes", although he expresses regret at this choice of words, which has led to a common equation of his thought with that of C. G. Jung.¹³ As we have seen, the sacred models do not belong to the profane, historical realm, no more do they belong to the un- or sub-conscious mind. They issue from the alternative realm, considered to be the locus of the real and the true and the significant. This realm is illud tempus, the continuum of a different, sacred time, of which, by repetition of the sacred model, be it an act, bodily function, or narrative structure, the religious person reactualises, repeats a segment.¹⁴

¹³ v. the Preface to the Torchbook edition of Cosmos and History, and for a discussion of the problem v. M. L. Rickett's, "The Nature and Extent of Eliade's 'Jungianism.'"

¹⁴ For readers unfamiliar with Latin, it is worthwhile to point out that illud tempus simply means "that time." It occurs in Jerome's Vulgate where it usually indicates the heilsgeschichte in which God's actions were seen as unquestionably decisive for humanity. The alternative, in illo tempore, is simply the locative case of the same phrase, in that time. In many ways it is a narrative device comparable with "once upon a time," although indicative of far greater sacrality.

Hence this alternative time is repeatable as well as intensely real.

As has already been mentioned, the concomitant of this attitude to illud tempus was an inability to perceive ordinary events and objects as possessed of any real value. Since the objects and events of much of one's everyday experience do not have mythical models, do not reactualise the continuum of real time, they are not in and of themselves of any significance. Since they are not specifically orientated in an extended matrix of familiar, interconnected structures and events of predetermined value, they themselves lack value, they lack a determined response, and hence they lack meaning. This has immediate implications for the concept of "history".

As Eliade describes it, "'historical' memory, that is the recollection of events that derive from no archetype, [is] the recollection of personal events".¹⁵ Thus it can be seen that he equates history with personal event. George Weckman, in "Mircea Eliade on the Role of History in Religion", concludes that Eliade actually uses the word "history" to refer primarily to "contemporary event" as opposed to "the past", and that this is tied to what Weckman calls "Eliade's rejection of religion based on history". (op. cit., p.17.) The fact is that Eliade is specifically referring to history as Erlebnis,

¹⁵ The Myth of the Eternal Return, p.75.

actually lived experience, which is directly contiguous with his early interest in trairism, authentic, lived experience. As Eliade says,

the expressions "history" and "historic" can occasion much confusion; they indicate, on the one hand, all that is concrete and authentic in a given human existence.¹⁶

It is this lived experience, rather than history as a record of past events which are perhaps not within the orbit of personal experience, to which Eliade commonly refers as "history". Actually history is "the totality of the human experiences provoked by inevitable geographical conditions, social structures, political conjunctures, and so on".¹⁷ Of course, the totality of that experience is not actually accessible to us, it cannot become part of our own experience, it cannot become our own personal history. We are restricted to the study of the documents, activities, and relics which express that experience, the texts (in the broadest sense of the word) of the student of religion. And so, as Seymour Cain has pointed out,

the term "history" for Eliade stands for the concrete actuality with which the religico-historical scholar must deal, for which he must account in his interpretations, and to which he has access through the historical documents. But historical data by themselves are not enough for the historian of religions. The facts ... do not tell us what they mean.¹⁸

¹⁶ Images and Symbols, p.171f., n.13.

¹⁷ The Myth of the Eternal Return, p.119.

¹⁸ "Mircea Eliade: Attitudes Towards History," p.14.

This locates Eliade's understanding of history neatly within his overall thought, dovetailing as it does with his concepts of hierophany and the dialectic of the sacred. The real (the sacred) is revealed (and concealed) within the actual historical documentary evidence which confronts the scholar (or anyone else in so far as they seek to discover truth). These documents, in becoming part of our personal experience, part of our history, become potentially hierophanic, depending on our background and personal religious experience to recognise the real which is revealed in and through them.

The unquestionable implication is that traditional humanity had been unable to adequately valorise their actual lived experience without specific reference to some independent, non-historical reality. That reality is illud tempus, the non-temporal time, the primordial creative epoch, a "reality" which, since this "time" does not partake of historical actuality, the modern would say was merely imaginary since it is accessible only through the imagination or, so it is said, through rare and difficult religious experience. However, in The Myth of the Eternal Return Eliade collected certain facts for the specific purpose of revealing the "reality" of illud tempus;

1. Facts which show us that, for archaic man, reality is a function of the imitation of a celestial archetype.
2. Facts which show us how reality is conferred through participation in the "symbolism of the

Centre".¹⁹

It would have been simpler, more accessible to his readers, given Eliade's equation of reality and the sacred, if he had said "sacrality is a function... sacrality is conferred..." He does stress this equation shortly after, "the outstanding reality is the sacred; for only the sacred is in an absolute fashion, acts effectively, creates things and makes them endure". (ibid., p.11.) The fact that he insists that it is reality which is in question here is a deliberate attempt to alert the reader to the fact that, for the archaic and religious mind under consideration, the actual perceptions of the real differ from those of the modern mind for whom the actual experience of everyday life, that is to say whose history, has been evaluated as the real.

It matters little if the formulas and images through which the primitive expresses "reality" seem childish and even absurd to us. It is the profound meaning of primitive behaviour that is revelatory; this behaviour is governed by belief in an absolute reality opposed to the profane world of "unrealities"; in the last analysis, the latter does not constitute a "world" properly speaking; it is the "unreal" par excellence, the uncreated, the nonexistent: the void.

Hence we are justified in speaking of an archaic ontology, and it is only by taking this ontology into consideration that we can succeed in understanding - and hence in not scornfully dismissing - even the most extravagant behaviour on the part of the primitive world; in fact, this behaviour corresponds to a desperate effort not to lose contact with being. (ibid., p.92.)

Once again it is emphasised that the archaic ontology is

¹⁹ The Myth of the Eternal Return, p.5.

not posited as an independent, autonomous reality, but as the Being within which certain people are, the conceptions (cf. Eliade's opening sentence quoted above, p.146, n.6.) of reality which condition the perceptions, the belief which governs the behaviour.

Opposed to this archaic, traditional, and religious humanity is "historical man" who is equated with the modern "who consciously and voluntarily creates history". (ibid., p.141.)

The crucial difference between the man of the archaic civilisations and modern, historical man lies in the increasing value the latter gives to historical events, that is, to the "novelties" that, for traditional man, represented either meaningless conjunctures or infractions of norms (hence "faults", "sins", and so on) and that, as such, required to be expelled (abolished) periodically. The man who adopts the historical viewpoint would be justified in regarding the traditional conception of archetypes and repetition as an aberrant reidentification of history (that is, of "freedom" and "novelty") with nature (in which everything repeats itself). (ibid., p.154.)

However, the modern world is

not entirely converted to historicism; we are even witnessing a conflict between the two views: the archaic conception, which we should designate as archetypal and ahistorical; and the modern, post-Hegelian conception, which seeks to be historical.²⁰

In The Myth of the Eternal Return Eliade wants to restrict his examination to "the solutions offered by the

²⁰ ibid., p.141. What Eliade specifically denotes as "historicism" is indicated elsewhere. "In the various historicist and existentialist currents of thought, 'history' and 'historic' seems to imply that human existence is authentic only insofar as it is reduced to the awakened consciousness of its historic moment. It is to the latter 'totalitarian' meaning of history that I am referring when I take issue against 'historicisms.'" Images and Symbols, p.172.

historicistic view to enable man to tolerate the increasingly powerful pressure of contemporary history". (p.141.) This examination takes the form of a comparison of the way in which these two attitudes offer resistance to "the terror of history". For the modern mind "history could be tolerated, not only because it had a meaning but also because it was, in the last analysis, necessary".²¹ Although this might at first appear to say very little, our very reaction that of course history is "necessary", that is to us a self-evident truth, indicates our acquiescence to this view that history is tolerable because it is necessary. For the alternative mindset

historical events could be given value by the expedient of ... myths... Adapted to a particular myth theory ..., catastrophes could not only be tolerated by their contemporaries but also positively accorded a value immediately after their appearance. (ibid., p.136.)

Those events which could be so adapted gained ontology and significance by their assimilation to the sacred time of mythic origins and, as such, were no longer seen as history in the strict sense of irreversible events of autonomous value. Against this history traditional civilisations "defended themselves",

either by periodically abolishing it through repetition of the cosmogony and a periodic regeneration of time or by giving historical events a metahistorical meaning, a meaning that was not only consoling but was above all coherent, that is, capable of being fitted into a well consolidated system in which the cosmos and man's existence each

²¹ The Myth of the Eternal Return, p.132.

had its raison d'être.²²

This periodic repetition of the cosmogony is the major characteristic of Eliade's "eternal return" along with the whole concept of a time which was not linear but cyclic and thus accessible to reactualisation.

The stated point of chapter three of The Myth of the Eternal Return, "Misfortune and History", is

to learn how this "history" was tolerated by archaic man; that is, how he endured the calamities, the mishaps, and the "sufferings" that entered into the lot of each individual and each collectivity. (ibid., p.95.)

His initial observation is that "his suffering had a meaning; it corresponded, if not always to a prototype, at least to an order whose value was not contested".

(ibid., p.96.) That is, to a mythic order as we have described myth.

Thus "archaic man also knows a history, although it is a primordial history, placed in a mythical time".

(ibid., p.155.) Here again Eliade uses "history" in the sense of antecedent events which have led to and condition the present, without any overt attempt to distinguish this usage from his idiosyncratic usage of history as personally experienced actuality. It is a matter of pure conjecture whether this is deliberate

²² ibid., p.142. Of particular interest here, beyond this description of the way in which traditional societies counter history, is this emphasis on meaning as "coherent," which in turn is defined as being fitted into a system. As we saw above, p.150, orientation within a system is precisely what the ordinary historical event lacked for premodern humanity.

stylistic policy to reproduce the conditions of an archaic text in need of decipherment, or an unfortunate oversight born from the lack of methodological rigour in an area of complex speculation. The effects in general have, I believe, been negative, resulting in the suspicion and opposition of those thinkers of a more rigorous disposition and the frequent failure of even those who recognised their agreement with Eliade's thought to fully appreciate its ramifications.

However this may be, it is Eliade's contention that "suffering becomes intelligible and hence tolerable", (ibid., p.98.) through mythic and non-historical treatment. It is specifically by explaining hardships, by accounting for adversities, that humanity manages to tolerate them. This too is a claim which the critical modern mind might find hard to accept without support or clarification. Is it implied that without explanation suffering cannot be tolerated? That unless the ailment is made intelligible there is no hope of recovery? Obviously this goes too far, such an unconditional reading simply does not find accord with our intuitions of the real, our experience of history. Yet we are all familiar with the phenomenon of the increase of human tolerance with the increase of understanding; anguished children seek understanding of nettle rash and stomachache just as terminally ill patients seek understanding of their disease, and both seem to find in the proffered explanations the strength to regain control

of their actions, to stem the tears and continue to live in the face of our present mortality. It is an undeniable fact of modern medical practice that placebos work. A clear strategy is often effective in what is now referred to as "pain management" even if the causal processes are dubious. Arguably knowing what response to make in the face of hardship is more important than what the response actually is. The "will" is just as important as the "free" in freewill. That is to say, the fact that we will something, and that we have a clear vision of the desired end, and that we believe that we can attain that end,²³ is just as important to the "integral man" as the "freedom" to attain that end.

It is certainly a common enough apprehension of religion to see it as a diagnosis and therapy for the ailment which is the incarnate human condition. Eliade sees popular refusals of the hierophanisation of history, of historicism, as having occurred because

it was more consoling and easier, in misfortunes and times of trial, to go on accusing an "accident" (e.g., a spell) or a "negligence" (e.g., a ritual fault) that could be easily made good by a sacrifice.²⁴

Obviously the "ills that flesh is heir to" cannot be

²³ Which, if one accepts Wilfred Cantwell Smith's analysis of belief (v. Belief and History, ch.2), simply means that we really want to attain that end and to remain loyal to that desire. The effectiveness of an ability to conceptualise and to believe in an end has been pointed out by psychological studies such as Martin Seligman's Helplessness.

²⁴ The Myth of the Eternal Return, p.108.

"made good" by a simple sacrifice, but the implication is that the archaic conception that these ills were caused by specific archetypal acts (or their negligence) provided a more easily accessible explanation and one which prompted a clearer response. This is why

the great majority of so-called Christian populations continue, down to our day, to preserve themselves from history by ignoring it and by tolerating it rather than by giving it the meaning of a negative or positive theophany. (ibid., p.111.)

Alternative means of preserving oneself from history or "abolishing" the significance of its effects are:

1. "consciousness of living in an eternal present (coincidence with the atemporal instant of the revelation of archetypes)"
2. "periodically repeated ritual (for example, the rites for the beginning of the year)", and
3. the future abolition of time, as in eschatology. (ibid.)

These are present even in those "historical" religions which do recognise the value of the unique, experienced and irreversible event and, in common with the "pre-historicist" religions they do not "abolish" the event in any ontological sense, but re-establish the importance of a nontemporal, idealised moment, located and orientated within the extended matrix of mythical meanings. They do not "do away with" history as experience; rather they give another significance to those events which can be assimilated to archetypal models and drastically, if not totally, reduce the significance of those events which do not. To use a metaphor from radio reception, they filter out the noise of personal experience in favour of the signal, the message, of the impersonal, non-experiential,

and mythological.

Whatever else may be the implications of this discussion of the archaic and modern attitudes to history, Eliade's explicit conclusion is that "none of the historicistic philosophies is able to defend him [historical man] from the terror of history". (ibid., p.159.) In context this implies that historicism leaves the details of personal experience as unique, unrepeatable, individual events, accidents in the stream of time. They are thus incapable of location in a coherent, consolidated system capable of explaining the raison d'être of man and the cosmos. Because of this they are meaningless, insignificant, and thus "intolerable". Eliade does

imagine a final attempt: to save history and establish an ontology of history, events would be regarded as a series of "situations" by virtue of which the human spirit should attain knowledge of levels of reality otherwise inaccessible to it. (ibid., p.159.)

In a footnote he continues that

it is only through some such reasoning that it would be possible to found a sociology of knowledge that should not lead to relativism and scepticism. ... But it goes without saying that a sociology of knowledge, that is, the study of the social conditioning of ideologies, could avoid relativism only by affirming the autonomy of the spirit - which, if we understand him aright, Karl Mannheim did not dare to affirm. (ibid. n.15.)

In light of these considerations, and from the point of view of modern historicism, it would seem that Eliade can be seen to propose a sociology of knowledge conditioned by the creativity and autonomy of the human spirit.

Simply put, a holistic or integral sociology of knowledge in which the spirit as the product of the confluence of conditioning factors (culture and tradition and belief which is the individual response to tradition) is yet seen as autonomous, capable of altering and partially controlling the factors which condition it.

Such a suggestion sees Eliade as moving forward, attempting to add newly created modes of thought, if not being, to contemporary humanity. He is thus not simply attempting to reactualise the archaic ontology. Although Eliade has been criticised for being a "champion" of the archaic attitude and he is certainly ready to recognise the values of this alternative to the modern view of history and time, he is not totally uncritical of it.

The need these [archaic] societies also feel for a periodic regeneration is a proof that they too cannot perpetually maintain their position in what we have just called the paradise of archetypes, and that their memory is capable (though doubtless far less intensely than that of a modern man) of revealing the irreversibility of events, that is, of recording history. (ibid., p.75.)

This stands against the contention that Eliade valorised the archaic over the modern, a priori. Both visions ultimately fail to "maintain their position" independently of some concept of regeneration.

Furthermore,

in the last analysis, modern man, who accepts history or claims to accept it, can reproach archaic man, imprisoned within the mythical horizon of archetypes and repetition, with his creative impotence, or, what amounts to the same thing, his inability to accept the risks entailed by every creative act. (ibid., pp.155f.)

It is true, however, that in the final "dialogue between archaic man and modern man"²⁵ Eliade gives more credence and more space to the archaic point of view. It could be credibly argued that he was simply supporting the underdog, however, since he does finally indicate strengths and weaknesses in both points of view and seems ultimately to support a synthesis.

All that is needed is a modern man with a sensibility less closed to the miracle of life; and the experience of renewal would revive for him when he built a house or entered it for the first time (just as, in the modern world, the New Year still preserves the prestige of the end of a past and the fresh beginning of a new life). (ibid., p.77.)

One thing that Eliade is certain of is that

the life of archaic man (a life reduced to the repetition of archetypal acts, that is, to categories and not to events, to the unceasing rehearsal of the same primordial myths), although it takes place in time, does not bear the burden of time, does not record time's irreversibility; in other words, completely ignores what is especially characteristic and decisive in a consciousness of time. Like the mystic, like the religious man in general, the primitive lives in a continual present. (ibid., p.86.)

This in itself constitutes a cushion between such a mindset and the impact of brute historical event. This superiority in enabling a toleration of history is perceived as the major virtue of the archaic attitude. The major vice of the modern is perceived to be its self-deceptive nature. "Modern man's boasted freedom to make history is illusory for nearly the whole of the human race." (ibid., p.156.) This is because it is in truth a

²⁵ ibid., p.159, and v.p.155-159.

small minority of people drawn from a small minority of nations who have any real effect in the "making of history", that is to say, a very small effect on the creation of those events which predate and condition the present. However, on the events which are anyone else's experience, on history as Eliade uses the word, everyone of us has an effect. Since we cannot live in isolation we all do have a positive contribution to make to the history whose conception underlies the whole of Eliade's theoretical edifice. It is Eliade's innate élitism, his refusal to recognise the contribution of the masses to the creation of history which conditions this flaw in his thinking. If history is taken on this personal, experiential level, which I believe it clearly must be in order to render the main body of Eliade's thought coherent, then humanity is unavoidably free to make history since we are all intimately (albeit not totally, deliberately, or in a fully controlled manner) responsible for the personal experiences of others.

5.3. The Development of Conceptions of Time

Eliade does not simply posit this archaic or religious attitude to time and support it with examples, he also attempts a detailed explanation of its development from the universal existential situation of humanity in the world. For example,

if the moon in fact serves to "measure" time, if the moon's phases - long before the solar year and far more concretely - reveal a unit of time (the month),

the moon at the same time reveals the "eternal return". (ibid., p.86.)

As this "eternal return" is experienced in human life it is evidently cyclical as opposed to circular. That is to say it is nowhere claimed that every actual physical being recommences with the new moon. Obviously, each individual still ages and the solar year still progresses. To think otherwise is to equate history (as personal experience) with time, an identification which Eliade does not make, and which he claims that archaic humanity repudiated. An analysis of his thought in this area reveals that this identification is part of the characteristic matrix of "modern" thought. For archaic man, on the other hand, the assimilation of temporal duration and human life to the lunar cycle

is important not only because it shows us the "lunar" structure of universal becoming but also because of its optimistic consequences: for, just as the disappearance of the moon is never final, since it is necessarily followed by a new moon, the disappearance of man is not final either; in particular the disappearance of an entire humanity (deluge, flood, [sic] submersion of a continent, and so on) is never total, for a new humanity is born from a pair of survivors. (ibid., p.87.)

The primitive, by conferring a cyclical direction upon time, annuls its irreversibility. Everything begins over again at its commencement every instant. (ibid., p.89.) Yet the insignificance and the arbitrary nature of history (as experience) cannot be annulled.

The process or development which Eliade seems to envision leading to the modern "historical" view of time is that archaic cyclically repeated time gives way to a

single time cycle from Creation to Apocalypse, from illud tempus to illud tempus, in which every historical event is seen as of hierophanic value since it is under the direct control of the one true God. This conception is permitted by the novel religious attitude of faith, which emphasises that "for God everything is possible".²⁶

For the first time, the prophets placed a value on history, succeeded in transcending the traditional vision of the cycle (the conception that ensures all things will be repeated forever), and discovered a one-way time. ... for the first time we find affirmed, and increasingly accepted, the idea that historical events have a value in themselves, insofar as they are determined by the will of God. ... Historical facts thus become "situations" of man in respect to God, and as such they acquire a religious value that nothing had previously been able to confer on them. ... the Hebrews were the first to discover the meaning of history as the epiphany of God.²⁷

Thus the Judaeo-Christian tradition, for Eliade, provides a bridge between the two types of, or attitudes to, time.

Christianity radically changed the experience and the concept of liturgical time, and this is due to the fact that Christianity affirms the historicity of the person of Christ. The Christian liturgy unfolds in a historical time sanctified by the incarnation of the son of God.²⁸

This valorisation of historical time continues the trend

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.160, and v. pp.108-110 on the novelty of faith.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p.104. It is interesting to note that Eliade repeats this section almost verbatim in his History of Religious Ideas, p.356, some thirty years later. Although he omits the references to cyclical time and archetypes these are mentioned elsewhere in that volume and so do appear to still have currency in his thought.

²⁸ The Myth of the Eternal Return, p.72.

which Eliade argues to have begun "among the Hebrews" for whom, "every new historical calamity was regarded as a punishment from Yahweh". In this way there first occurred "History regarded as Theophany", (ibid., p.102.) and this eventually leads to the situation of modern man who insists that he is "constituted only by human history",²⁹ and in that very insistence is distinguished from traditional homo religiosus. It is not my purpose at the moment to perform a detailed analysis of the accuracy of Eliade's argument, rather to inspect and clarify his conclusions. George Weckman has pointed out that other scholars do not agree with Eliade's restriction of the source of this valorisation of the historical to the Jewish tradition. For example, Helmer Ringgren "does not want to get caught in asserting that Israel was unique in regarding historical events as acts of God".³⁰ Also Ninian Smart has remarked that "historical events were considered important by the Chinese".³¹ However, as Weckman continues,

it remains distinctive and consequential that ancient Israel first developed a style of religion on the basis of a special comprehension of historical events. (ibid.)

While Weckman's unease is perfectly understandable at this point since Eliade does make strong claims for the

²⁹ The Sacred and the Profane, p.100.

³⁰ Weckman, "Mircea Eliade and the Role of History in Religion," p.13.

³¹ "Eliade and the History of Religious Ideas," p.70.

priority of the Hebrew valorisation of history, it should be pointed out that Eliade does accept a broader base than the purely Jewish for its source. "Those with whom history, properly speaking, begins," he writes, " - that is the Babylonians, Egyptians, Hebrews, Iranians."³² Even if he is wrong as to the specific source of this valorisation in the Hebrew tradition, as some scholars would insist, Eliade's recognition of the phenomena of the sacralisation of the previously profane in the valorisation of historical time can still be valid.

This valorisation of the historical event has several implications. Firstly it leads to the concomitant de-valorisation of the traditionally valorised, religious real, "emptied of every religious value or meaning nature could become the 'object' par excellence of scientific investigation".³³ Although this is not an explicit doctrine Eliade takes it to be an unavoidable implication of the structure of the Hebrew revelation:

we may even ask ourselves if monotheism, based on the direct and personal revelation of the divinity, does not necessarily entail the "salvation" of time, its value within the frame of history. Doubtless the idea of revelation is found ... in all religions ... but these revelations occurred in mythical time. ... The situation is altogether different in the case of the monotheistic revelation. This takes place in time, in historical duration.³⁴

³² The Myth of the Eternal Return, p.74.

³³ Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts, p.83

³⁴ The Myth of the Eternal Return, pp.104-5.

The implications of this are borne out by the development of the secular, "post-Christian" West. The concept of "general revelation" implied by the valorisation of historical time eventually comes to confront that of the "special revelation" of the Biblical text (egs. Copernicus and Biblical criticism).

Secondly, "history as the epiphany of God" leads to a linear notion of time as once-and-for-all. This crystallises in Christianity with the belief in the Incarnation as the ultimate hierophany hapax, ephapax, semel.³⁵ Not only is the singular unrepeatable notion of historical event emphasised, it is sacralised, and with it the whole of historical time is "redeemed". Also the teleological linearity of time leads irresistibly to the notion of evolution whose "mythical" aspect, that of continual improvement, proves more tenacious than its scientific aspect of the chance viability of random mutations.³⁶ Time is increasingly perceived as a linear progression, a direction, a single continuum outside of eternity (illud tempus), rather than an oscillation in eternity. With the concomitant increasing devalorisation of the traditional concepts of the sacred this time was even extended ad infinitum. Rather than a closed cycle returning to illud tempus the cosmos was for a while seen as infinite in extent and duration. However, this

³⁵ Hebrews 9¹². Eliade also refers to 1 Peter 3¹⁸.

³⁶ v. particularly Mary Midgeley Evolution as a Religion, on this aspect of evolution.

extension has itself fallen prey to the hierophanisation of the manifest. Observation has indicated that the universe is not infinite either in time or space. The consensus of scientific opinion is that our universe had a temporal commencement, it is finite, and it may well have a temporal end. This scientific return to a theory of temporal cycles was not lost on Eliade.

In connection with this rehabilitation of cyclical conceptions, Sorokin rightly observes that present theories concerning the death of the universe do not exclude the hypothesis of the creation of a new universe, somewhat after the fashion of the Great Year in Greco-Oriental speculation or of the yuga cycle in the thought of India.³⁷

The Big Bang/Big Crunch concept of time as a closed cycle has certainly gained in scientific support since Sorokin published his observations in 1928,³⁸ however, the question of a continuous re-creation is not clearly established.

Weckman concludes that "because Eliade thinks of history as contemporary event he has ignored the important role of history as stories about the human past which can function like myth".³⁹ But this fails to grasp the point. History which "functions like myth" is by that very definition sacred history. Eliade's contention is that it is by virtue of a spiritual development of the

³⁷ The Myth of the Eternal Return, p.146.

³⁸ Contemporary Sociological Theories, New York. For a modern conception of the closed cycle of time v. Stephen Hawkin, A Brief History of Time, p.138.

³⁹ Weckman, op. cit., p.17.

most far-reaching implications that modern humanity has been able to see historical events as themselves exemplary, revelatory, possessed of real meaning. It is in any event historiography and not actual history which so functions, and so is not actually a temporal reality. Thus it is that Eliade recognises the survival of mythology "more than anywhere else" in historiography.⁴⁰ This is the specific characteristic by which Eliade distinguishes "modern" humanity. We have "sacralised" history; that is, that we have specifically assumed that real-time, historical actualities can function as exemplary, that is sacred, history, and in so doing have "camouflaged" or "confused" the sacred with the profane.

5.4. The Linearity of the Modern Conception of Time

In an article of 1985, "Homo Faber and Homo Religiosus",⁴¹ Eliade once again makes important reference to time in his analysis of the religious aspect of human life. He reiterates and emphasises the point he first made in The Forge and the Crucible that the labour of homo faber "replaces the work of time". For homo faber, who in the contemporary western world has become "modern man", the identification with historical time has become complete and humanity takes the place of time. Not only is humanity the product solely of history,

⁴⁰ Myth and Reality, p.113.

⁴¹ In The History of Religions: Retrospect and Prospect, ed. J. Kitagawa.

created and determined purely in historical time, but humanity is now seen as the final judge and arbiter of our destiny; racial death or technological glory. This identification with historical time, which alone is real and thus sacred, is from this perspective a religious act or awareness. Once again "modern man" is not the antithesis of religious man but a very specific (and possibly rather aberrant) example.

In this same edition Paul Ricoeur presents a paper in which he describes how Steven Toulmin and Judith Goodfield in The Discovery of Time

tell the story of [the] progressive expansion of a uniform timescale from human history to geology, to thermodynamics, and finally to the gigantic changes among galaxies.

Ricoeur concludes that "cyclical time appears paradoxically as a particular case of, and not an alternative term for linear time".⁴² However, he has already pointed out that linear time seems to have begun from the Judaeo-Christian notion of time as a 6,000 year period which was then extended to make room for the large scale phenomena that together constitute the history of mankind, of the earth, of the universe, and even of matter itself. (ibid.)

Although teleologically a straight-line progression from Creation to Eschaton this 6,000 year period was a manifestation of cyclical time since it proceeded from

⁴² "The History of Religions and the Phenomenology of Time Consciousness," p.14.

and returned to the eternal illud tempus. We are all familiar with the phenomena whereby an arc of a circle, if sufficiently short in relation to the radius of curvature, or viewed from a sufficiently close range or small scale, is perceived to be a straight line. Rather than cyclical time being a particular case of linear time the converse would appear to be more credible. Linear time is a particular case of cyclical time viewed from the limited human perspective. Not only does the narrow localism of the original Judaeo-Christian viewpoint explain the perception of (microcosmic) time as linear, but the speculations of astrophysics concerning a "big bang" leading, via the expansion and contraction of the universe, to a "big crunch", re-establishes the view of (macrocosmic) time as cyclical. Thus "repetition of some pattern" is not merely "a complexity superimposed on the linear character of chronological time", (ibid., p.15.) linearity is rather a perceptual phenomenon, generated by the scale of embodied human existence, which is then expanded into the abstract notion of linear time as Ricoeur describes it. (ibid.)

Once again the perception of modern man as a specific example of the pan-human homo religiosus is justified by such a consideration of time-consciousness. It is only the intensely focused self-consciousness (which is admirably utilitarian in certain ways) of modern humanity which has contracted the scale of time consciousness to make our historical time appear linear.

Even Eliade's distinction of modern from religious humanity through their alternative perceptions of time begins to blur.

5.5. Some Problems in Eliade's Usage of History

It is not only in direct confrontation with religious dogma, nor in scientific theories that this developing conception of time manifests itself. It is especially active and effective in philosophy. As Eliade states,

Hegel affirmed that in nature things repeat themselves for ever and that there is "nothing New under the sun". All that we have so far demonstrated confirms the existence of a similar conception in the man of archaic societies:⁴³ for these things repeat themselves for ever and nothing new happens under the sun. But this repetition has a meaning, ... events repeat themselves because they imitate an archetype - the exemplary event. Furthermore, through this repetition, time is suspended, or at least its virulence is diminished. But Hegel's observation is significant for another reason: Hegel endeavours to establish a philosophy of history in which the historical event, although irreversible and autonomous, can nevertheless be placed in a dialectic which remains open. For Hegel, history is "free" and always "new", it does not repeat itself; nevertheless, it conforms to the plans of providence; hence it has a model (ideal but none the less a model) in the dialectic of the spirit itself. To this history which does not repeat itself, Hegel opposes nature, in which things are reproduced ad infinitum. But we have seen that, during a considerable period, humanity opposed history by all possible means.⁴⁴

⁴³ I feel it necessary to point out that for Hegel it is nature, for the archaic, it is Time which repeats. It seems likely that, rather than not having detached himself from nature, archaic man had simply not detached his concept of time from nature.

⁴⁴ The Myth of the Eternal Return, p.90.

This is confusing because Eliade has not clearly established a base concept of history for his reader, he has not distinguished his working definition of "history" from the archaic concept of "history", or from the common sense of antecedent events. How can archaic humanity "oppose history" if they lack the concept? How can the "unreal", "uncreated" elements of the profane world be detected, let alone opposed and refused? (v. *ibid.*, p.92.) His terminology is unclear and confusing. A few pages later he states that

archaic man, as has been shown, tends to set himself in opposition, by every means in his power, to history, regarded as a succession of events that are irreversible, unforeseeable, possessed of autonomous value. He refuses to accept it and grant it value as such, as history. (*ibid.*, p.95.)

This clarifies "history" as such a succession of events but it also clarifies the problem. How can archaic man, how can anyone, set themselves in opposition to history, regarded as something which they refuse to regard as history? In one sentence the reader must accept both Eliade's conception of history as profane personal experience and the concept of history as the proper conditioning antecedents, before the meaning becomes clearer. What is opposed in this proposed archaic mentality is personal experience which cannot be assimilated to an archetypal model or exemplary pattern, events which cannot be located in a system and are thus without sacred significance or real meaning. They can be detected, as can any meaningless combination of

consonants and vowels. As we have seen, archaic humanity's

memory is capable (though doubtless far less intensely than that of modern man) of revealing the irreversibility of events, that is, of recording history. (ibid., p.75.)

But once inspected for meaning, i.e. for correspondence to an exemplary model, for a positive orientation in the mythical world which is the source of meaning, for a graspable significance and a clearly required response, they will be refused, rejected, opposed, as mere experiential "noise", and thus cannot be apprehended as real antecedents. Archaic and religious humanity does have history, but it is "sacred history". It consists of myths regarding illud tempus rather than records of temporal antecedents. This sacred history seeks to give an authoritative explanation of phenomena and their origins, but does not seek for that authority in what "modern" humanity recognises as the "real world".

Weckman considers this another flaw in Eliade's thought since it

confuses us by using the term "sacred history" to refer to myths about illo tempore, the time before time, and not as a translation of Heilsgeschichte as it is commonly used to refer restrictively to Israel's perception of God's role in human events.⁴⁵

However, as we have seen, Eliade's concept is broader.

"Sacred history" refers to that which is perceived as the real conditioning antecedent, thus myths about illud tempus, the Hebrew Heilsgeschichte, and finally the

⁴⁵ Weckman, op. cit., p.11.

plenary history of the historicists, are all "sacred history."

5.6. The Sources of Eliade's "History"

In the opening section of this final Chapter, "The Terror of History", Eliade's Romanian roots show quite clearly. It is still, he states, the traditional defence against history which

continues to console the agricultural (=traditional) societies of Europe, which obstinately adhere to an anhistorical position and are, by that fact, exposed to the violent attacks of all revolutionary ideologies. The Christianity of the popular European strata never succeeded in abolishing either the theory of the archetype (which transformed a historical personage into an exemplary hero and a historical event into a mythical category) or the cyclical and astral theories (according to which history was justified and the sufferings provoked by it assumed an eschatological meaning).⁴⁶

Virgil Nemoianu has noted that Eliade and Vladimir Nabokov

were both lifelong emigrés; both are East Europeans. In consequence, the literary work of both is marked by an obsession with the injustice and destructiveness of historical Time which has wreaked havoc in their lives and in that of their family, class, or nation. Their work can be seen as an attempt at a historical retaliation. [And thus that] in the struggle between normal time and mythical time the first is usually the villain and more often than not the loser.⁴⁷

Nemoianu is no doubt right that Eliade's life experience had a decisive effect upon his later apprehensions. It

⁴⁶ The Myth of the Eternal Return, p.142.

⁴⁷ Virgil Nemoianu, "Wrestling with Time: Some Tendencies in Nabokov's and Eliade's Later Works," p.82.

was surely the senseless and unstoppable events of his life as a citizen, and a very proud one, of a "secondary" culture which was constantly victim to the irresistible currents of history, which gave him the perspective of experiential history, the "existential situation" of the majority of humanity, as inherently without meaning. It is only through the "sacred histories", the mythological narratives and religious beliefs, that meaning can be invested in the otherwise vacuously horrible and horribly vacuous events of life itself. This in no way lessens the importance or validity of that viewpoint. History (both sacred and profane) is too often written by the victorious, the triumphant, the conquerors; founders of empires and inheritors of a powerful culture. For such people, their own historiography is sufficient to invest the motions of "real-time" history with coherent meaning. Certainly on the social and cultural level and also, to a lesser extent on the personal level. However, it is very much time that we listened to the point of view of the other, those from the "lesser" cultures; the victims of empire, whose cultures are constantly under threat from some "superpower" or other. These are, after all, the great majority of humanity, even among the "superpowers". How do such as they (we, for I am a Scot) invest our lives with meaning? It is not always the history of some successful, vigorous culture with which the individual can identify, which lends form and significance to human life. Eliade points out the ubiquitous human tendency to

defer to the sacred history, the mythological time, (and also, by extension, to the socially constructed historiography) by means of which human life (both individual and collective) can be interpreted as meaningful and coherent. It may be true that Eliade is, as Nemoianu suggests, "devoted to Language as opposed to Time", (ibid., p.89.) but in a society in which time can only be grasped either directly through personal experience or indirectly through language, should not a great deal of attention go to that language through which impersonal Time is expressed, rather than to lionise that which we can never really know?

This is not a simple retreat into fantasy. As Charles Long has pointed out,

Eliade accepts the fact that historical reality defines reality par excellence for many in the modern world, but he is unwilling to accept the imperialism of the historicistic and rationalistic modes of interpretation as the only valid approaches to the real.⁴⁸

In other words, the meaning conferred upon historical time by mythic interpretations is also real. By way of explanation Long continues that

a materialistic approach to history can explain the progress of man's technology and account for the abundance of material goods in our life, but it cannot tell us why we cannot truly enjoy our life; it cannot tell us why we have lost our sense of meaning. (ibid., p.142.)

This obviously comes from a modern Western man for whom the historiography of his own culture manifestly fails to

⁴⁸ Charles Long, "The Significance for Modern Man of Mircea Eliade's Work," p.136.

invest life with sufficient meaning, hence his "loss of a sense of meaning". It is Eliade's contention that modern humanity's only possible reply to this loss of meaning, orientated as we are to the historical as the real, is hermeneutics, the increase of significance through the interpretation of historical data.

This is precisely what Eliade does in interpreting the historical background of his native country and it is also worthy of note at this point that Eliade had an even more personal experiential basis for his notion of reactualisable, alternative, and significant time. At the very beginning of his Autobiography he quite candidly tells of an event when he was four or five years old, walking with his grandfather on the Strada Mare in Bucharest, when his eyes met those of a fellow toddler, also walking with her grandfather.

For several seconds we stared at each other before our grandfathers pulled us on down the street. I didn't know what had happened to me; I felt only that something extraordinary and decisive had occurred. In fact, that very evening I discovered that it was enough for me to visualise the image from the Strada Mare in order to feel myself slipping into a state of bliss I had never known. ... For years the image of the girl on the Strada Mare was a kind of secret talisman for me, because it allowed me to take refuge instantly in that fragment of incomparable time.⁴⁹

Shortly thereafter, although the occasion seems to be chronologically earlier, Eliade relates another incident in which he entered a room into which he was not normally allowed to go:

⁴⁹ Autobiography, vol. I, p.4.

the next moment I was transfixed with emotion. It was as if I had entered a fairy-tale palace. The roller-blinds and the heavy curtains of green velvet were drawn. The room was pervaded by an eerie iridescent light. ... As was true also of the image of the little girl from Strada Mare, I could later evoke at will that green fairyland. ... I practised for many years this exercise of recapturing the epiphanic moment, and would always find again the same plenitude. I would slip into it as into a fragment of time devoid of duration - without beginning and without end. (ibid., p.7.)

The very phrases are obviously meant to recall his theory of eternal return; the "fragment of incomparable time", the "epiphanic moment", "devoid of duration", which he can later "evoke at will" is evidently an echo of illud tempus which later animates his apprehension of religious life. This is not to say that Eliade's theories are based on mere subjective experience, grotesquely expanded to subsume all of the spiritual experiences of humanity. The Autobiography was not written until the 1970s, and these events were supposed to have taken place in 1910 or 1911,⁵⁰ it is rather the vocabulary of his theories which shapes his later descriptions. Nor would Eliade, after a lifetime of academic involvement, be ignorant of the accusations such a description could evoke. I believe that he is quite deliberately revealing that he considered this subjective experience of reactualisable, non-chronological time to be an elementary human experience, and furthermore that subjective experience is

⁵⁰ Although Eliade did utilise the description of his experience in the iridescent room in his Noaptea de Sanziene (The Forbidden Forest) written between 1949 and 1954.

not "mere" but is in fact the source of hierophany, in Judaeo-Christian terms it is a "terrifying dialogue with Yahweh".⁵¹

5.7. Eliade as Anti-Historian

When history as personal experience is seen as the source of all hierophany the question of Eliade's "anti-historicism" takes on a wholly different aspect. In a recent discussion of this criticism Douglas Allen has said,

while demonstrating the primacy of the nonhistorical in Eliade's history and phenomenology of religion, even showing that this approach does indeed have an antihistorical normative basis, I shall argue that simply to dismiss or praise Eliade as antihistorical is to neglect what is essentially historical in his method and theory of religion. I shall argue, in other words, for the need to recognise a complex, dynamic, historical-nonhistorical, dialectical interaction if one is to do justice to Eliade's hermeneutical approach.⁵²

Allen's discussion of the critical appraisal of Eliade as "antihistorical" points out Wallace, Lord Raglan, Lessa, Leach, and Saliba as anthropologists who support this contention and Strenski and Baird as scholars of religion who do likewise. (ibid., p.547.) Allen accurately traces much of this reaction to the response to Patterns, in which

critics noted that this synchronic, morphological study was not historical; religious structures were detached from their historical and cultural contexts. (ibid., p.563.)

⁵¹ The Myth of the Eternal Return, p.108.

⁵² Douglas Allen. "Eliade and History," p.547.

He would insist that

Eliade affirms that one must do justice to both the historical particular and the universal structure, there can be little doubt that his approach emphasises the nonhistorical universal structure rather than the concrete historical particular and that he conceives of his primary task as the interpretation of transhistorical religious meanings. (ibid., p.559f.)

Allen even goes on to say that

without a recognition of the historical dimension of the data, there would be no appreciation of the contrary historicising movement; there would be no understanding of the structurally necessary dialectical tension existing between the contrary but interacting dialectical movements. In short, without the dynamic historical-nonhistorical interaction, there would be no process of sacralisation as the universal structure of religious experience. (ibid., p.561.)

I think this could be even more directly phrased: without an incarnate existence involving the physical experience of the external world (history) we could not perceive those structures and relationships which we recognise as real (the morphology of the sacred), but without this latter, which is abstract, hence non-temporal, non-empirical, and unmanifest, we could not react coherently with that world. That is to say we could not survive, could not be.

Still, Allen concludes that "Eliade's approach does indeed have an antihistorical normative basis", (ibid., p.564.) which, I think goes too far. Eliade is unquestionably anti-historicist, in that he repudiates that restriction of humanity to a purely historico-temporal, physical reality.

It seems to me, indeed, that the authenticity of an

existence cannot be limited to the consciousness of its own historicity; one cannot regard as "evasive" or "unauthentic", the fundamental experiences of love, anxiety, joy, melancholy, etc. Each one of these makes use of a temporal rhythm proper to itself, and all combine to constitute what might be called the integral man, who neither denies himself to his historic moment, nor consents to be identified with it.⁵³

The motivations, the reasons, the justifications, for any action ultimately lie on an ideal or abstract plane.

Very few human actions can be satisfactorily or fully explained by physical determinatives. The reasons why we act in a certain way are almost always grounded in ideal structures of good and bad, right and wrong, normative notions which form archetypal, exemplary structures which, in their ideality, exist quite independently of the actuality of human experience which for Eliade constitutes history, and which are thus e-ternal.

Although we cannot be said to be actually repeating an archetypal act we can still be said to be following an archetypal morphology. As Eliade pointed out in connection with Hegel, use of the ideal as model still follows the exemplary morphology of the sacred.⁵⁴ It is an important "methodological presupposition" of Eliade's that

human creativity and, ultimately, the history of human culture is more directly related to what man has dreamt, believed and thought of his specific mode of being in the world than to the works which he has undertaken in order to promote and validate

⁵³ Images and Symbols, pp.171f., n.13.

⁵⁴ The Myth of the Eternal Return, p.90, v.n.44, above.

this mode of being.⁵⁵

Thus the alternative to a reality restricted to physical space and historical time, while allowing for the reality of the religious, while insisting, in fact, on the reality of God, the Dharma, the Tao, Allah, and so on, could none the less be explained in terms of the autonomy and creativity of the human spirit. Hence Eliade's terminology of hermeneutics as a "metapsychoanalysis" and his drive towards a "new humanism". Eliade cannot accurately be called "antihistorical" since the human condition still admits of the possibility of having its plenary existence in historical time and since he undoubtedly takes history to be the source of hierophany, the actual revelation of the real. Eliade certainly conducts a polemic against the valorisation of history as the only real as provincial, Western, pseudo-religious, spawned as a "decomposition product of Christianity",⁵⁶ and capable of fulfilling a soteriological function only through an omniscient and omnipotent deity ("God for whom everything is possible",)⁵⁷ yet incapable of supporting belief in such a deity.

⁵⁵ "Notes on the Symbolism of the Arrow," p.474.

⁵⁶ The Sacred and the Profane, p.112. V. also Images and Symbols, p.170; "Historicism as such is a product of the decomposition of Christianity: it could only come about insofar as we had lost faith in the trans-historical reality of the historical event."

⁵⁷ v. The Myth of the Eternal Return, p.160, History of Religious Ideas, vol.I, p.176.

Seymour Cain echoes Charles Long's insistence on Eliade's historical basis.

There is a firm commitment on Eliade's part to starting with the scholarly sources, directly or secondarily, through the work - translation, textual and historical criticism, etc. - of other scholars. "To the historical sources" would seem to be his motto.⁵⁸

But whether these historical sources are personal experience in Romania, or the learned observations of his fellow intellectuals (eg. the story of the mythicisation of an accidental death in the mountains)⁵⁹, in fact, whether his other particular observations are right or wrong, the principle still stands. Humanity observably attempts to inhabit a cosmos in which those elements which fit into a well consolidated system capable of describing and explaining the existence of humanity, the cosmos, and humanity in the cosmos, are emphasised and those which do not so fit are repressed. The alteration of our perception of time and history is a particularly influential factor in our overall conception of the cosmos and construction of such systems of meaning. The substitution of a linear and singular structure of time for a cyclical and repetitive one has far-reaching implications in any attempt to decipher the meanings of any religious reality.

⁵⁸ Seymour Cain, op. cit., p.13, v. n.48 above for Long's statement.

⁵⁹ The Myth of the Eternal Return, pp.44-46.

In the section on "The Difficulties of Historicism",⁶⁰ Eliade does, perhaps, outstep the bounds of his philosophical remit in depreciating historicism and appreciating the archaic outlook on time. His proposed examination, as we have seen, is of the ability of the two conflicting attitudes to "enable man to tolerate the increasingly powerful pressure of contemporary history", (ibid., p.141.) and there can be no doubt that he considers the archaic approach to be superior in this respect. As we have seen the ability to enable toleration is equated with the ability to explain or describe meaningfully, which in turn is equated with an appropriate orientation or coherent fit into a consolidated system. Thus inconsistencies or self-contradictions are reductive of meaning and therefore of the ability to tolerate history as so defined. Eliade's major criticism is of the historicism of Hegel which emphasises the unalterability and thus the necessity of historical events. Hegel had long been a fascination of Eliade's. In the Journals he writes, "I return to Hegel. This has been happening for the past five or six years, since I've been wrestling with the meaning of 'history.'"⁶¹ His conclusion was that in order to know what was "necessary" in history,

Hegel believed that he knew what the Universal Spirit wanted. We shall not insist on the audacity

⁶⁰ The Myth of the Eternal Return, pp.147-154.

⁶¹ Journal I, p.174, entry for Sept. 1952.

of this thesis, which, after all, abolishes precisely what Hegel wanted to save in history - human freedom. But there is an aspect of Hegel's philosophy of history that interests us because it still preserves something of the Judaeo-Christian conception: for Hegel, the historical event was the manifestation of the Universal Spirit. Now it is possible to discern a parallel between Hegel's philosophy of history and the Hebrew prophets: for the latter, as for Hegel, an event is irreversible and valid in itself inasmuch as it is a new manifestation of the will of God - a proposition really revolutionary ... from the viewpoint of traditional societies dominated by the eternal repetition of archetypes.⁶²

Although Eliade's major point seems to be to emphasise the dependence of Hegelian philosophy of history on the spiritual insights of the Hebrew prophets, he also points out the contradiction in this philosophy of its own declared end, that of retaining human freedom. This poses a serious challenge to the adequacy of such a philosophy to the task of increasing the ability to tolerate history. Of course, Eliade was aware that Hegel's was not the only philosophy of history, not the only "historicism", and he also crams the mention of Rickert, Troeltsch, Dilthey, Simmel, Croce, Karl Mannheim, Ortega y Gasset, Meinecke, Heidegger, Gentile and Karl Löwith onto one page. (ibid., p.150.) He states that

this essay does not require us to discuss either the philosophical value of historicism as such or the possibility of establishing a "philosophy of history" that should definitely transcend relativism.

And he repeats,

⁶² The Myth of the Eternal Return, p.148.

again, there is no question of judging the validity of a historicistic philosophy, but only of establishing to what extent such a philosophy can exorcise the terror of history. (ibid., pp.150, 160.)

However, it would seem that in the last analysis that is precisely what is required. As he repeatedly says, "only one question concerns us: How can the 'terror of history' be tolerated from the viewpoint of historicism?". (ibid., p.150.) Since the ability to tolerate history is intimately connected with internal coherence and the uncovering of raisons d'être⁶³ this question cannot be answered independently of an assessment of the philosophical validity and transcendence of apparent internal difficulties. Despite his manifest philosophical timidity here, Eliade does, in fact, attempt a concise attack on the philosophy of the historicist position; the substance of which is that Dilthey and Meinecke failed to surpass the problems of relativism and that Heidegger showed "that the historicity of human existence forbids all hope of transcending time and history". (ibid., p.150.)

Furthermore,

justification of a historical event by the simple fact that it is a historical event, in other words, by the simple fact that "it happened that way", will not go far toward freeing humanity from the terror that the event inspires. (ibid., p.150.)

Eliade immediately goes on to explain that this is because beyond the historical event per se the suffering

⁶³ ibid., p.142, and v. above p.155.

man

can see no sign, no transhistorical meaning. ... In the past, humanity has been able to endure the sufferings we have enumerated: they were regarded as a punishment inflicted by God, the syndrome of the decline of the "age", and so on. And it was possible to accept them precisely because, for the greater part of mankind, still clinging to the traditional viewpoint, history did not have, and could not have, value in itself. Every hero repeated the archetypal gesture, every war rehearsed the struggle between good and evil, every fresh social injustice was identified with the sufferings of the saviour, etc. (ibid., p.151.)

This is to say that historicism fails to answer this need in the endurance of the human condition because it does not orientate the historical event in an extended system of recognisable evaluations, a mythic matrix of meanings. Accurate description of the event does not fully suffice to this end, it merely re-presents the event rather than revealing its significance, it reforms it rather than transforms it. Of course, if you say that an event has no significance then it has no significance; this mythic significance must be a construct of socialised knowledge and as such is always open to refusal.

While fulfilling the requirements of coherence a purely factual description neglects the question of the raison d'être. The modern, historicist attitude states finally, "that is how it is because that is how it is", which is no account at all. The archaic attitude is, "that's how it is because that's how the Gods made it, or because when Śiva passed this way with the dead Satī a drop of her blood fell here". This is an account which appeals to mythic structures to reveal the correct

evaluative response and thus to provide a specific relation to the phenomena in question and a means of dealing with, "enduring" or "tolerating" it. While the historicist might reply that such an explanation induces complacency and unnecessary languishing in a situation which might be improved, Eliade's counter is that

by virtue of this view, tens of millions of men were able, century after century, to endure great historical pressures without despairing, without committing suicide or falling into that spiritual aridity that always brings with it the relativistic or nihilistic view of history. (ibid., p.152.)

5.8. Conclusions

This is an argument which will not be easily settled. The fact is that much of humanity, both in the past and in the present, has survived without the benefits of a "modern" civilisation. It is also a fact that "modern" humanity is not committing suicide in droves, although given the material benefits of contemporary Western civilisation, suicide and other acts of palpable despair do seem troublingly common. It is Eliade's contention that the despair of modern humanity

is a despair provoked not by his own human existentiality, but by his presence in a historical universe in which almost the whole of mankind lives prey to a continual terror (even if not always conscious of it). (ibid., p.162.)

I cannot hope to deal with the question of the relative adequacy of the historicist as opposed to the mythic attitudes to explanation of the harsh realities of life any more than Eliade could. I take my lead from the

footnote which he adds to his discussion in which he points out that

"historicism" was created and professed above all by thinkers belonging to nations for which history has never been a continuous terror. These thinkers would perhaps have adopted another viewpoint had they belonged to nations marked by the "fatality of history". (ibid., p.152, n.11.)

It seems likely that historicistic positivism is a philosophy which is adequate for those societies and individuals who can "afford" it, that is, who are not suffering from the continuous vicissitudes and turmoils of political, social, economic or geographical crises. If this were the case then those societies which are so troubled would not only be marked by the mythic attitude of return to the "horizon of archetypes and repetition", they would, in fact, be sustained by it. The twin difficulty which arises is then, how does a crisis-ridden "traditional" society escape the complacent acceptance of historical event as divinely ordained which ensures the continuation of its condition, and how do the members of a modern secular society endure the personal existential crises which historicism and positivism fail to adequately account for? The only answer would seem to lie in a struggle for equilibrium between the two; whenever one attitude becomes prevalent or achieves a monopoly, society is dependent for its health and improvement on the reassertion of the alternative. Such an account would not only recognise the value of both attitudes to history but would also account for Eliade's

staunch defence of the traditional attitude in a world (the Europe of 1948) where the modern historicist-positivist attitude seemed to be in danger of sweeping all before it and burying all spiritual values completely beneath an adamantine crust of empirically assured and materially manifestable dicta. His conclusion, that humanity must have "faith or despair"⁶⁴ stems from these considerations.

Faith, in this context, as in many others, means absolute emancipation from any kind of natural "law" and hence the highest freedom that man can imagine: freedom to intervene even in the ontological constitution of the universe.⁶⁵

It should be recalled that "archaic man takes part in the repetition of the cosmogony, the creative act par excellence", (ibid., p.158.) and is thus also involved in the ontological constitution of the universe.

As a propaedeutics to a sociology of knowledge which posits the autonomy of the human spirit Eliade's thought can be seen to reveal a potentially valid dynamic which conditions and produces positive evaluations of history as experience. In so doing Eliade could attempt a restitution of "faith" without the total abandonment of the critical attitude. In order to have such faith in one's religious tradition one need not relinquish all criteria of recognition of the historically real, but must see these apparently conflicting and mutually

⁶⁴ the title of the final section of this chapter.

⁶⁵ The Myth of the Eternal Return, p.161.

exclusive attitudes as rather different planes of reality, possibly different paradigms which apply independently, different models which both partially and incompletely represent the totality which language, as a closed system is inadequate to express.⁶⁶

It is my hope that this prolonged and rather laboured discussion of Eliade's treatment of time and history has served not only to clarify his meaning but also his implicit method. As we have seen it is crucial at certain points that one accept his definitions, even though they remain only implicit, before one can grasp his meaning. The given relationships of the elements of his analysis must be accepted as given before the meaning of the whole becomes transparent. Credo ut intellegam becomes a methodological device relating at least to the temporary suspension of one's disbelief if not the active engagement of one's acceptance. The interrelations of the elements of a mythic matrix must be accepted as they are before they can be understood for what they imply. This does not mean that I must become a Buddhist with all that that entails in order to understand Buddhism, any more than that I must become French in order to understand French. It does mean that I must accept that lapin means rabbit and that sauvage means undomesticated rather than vicious, before I will understand the meaning of un lapin sauvage. (And it could be argued that in so

⁶⁶ Both Gödel's theorem and deconstruction point to the truth of this contention.

doing I do become that little bit more français, but that's another story.) The point is that in order to come to an understanding of the religious meanings of other peoples' beliefs scholars of religion must not "isolate themselves in their own beliefs".⁶⁷ We cannot commence by insisting on our own intuitions of the real and thus denying the reference of others' hierophanies to reality any more than we could arrive at an understanding of Eliade's meaning here if we commenced by insisting on the accepted usage of the word history and denying his alternative usages of the word as personally experienced events or as determinative antecedents. If we insist on our own usual interpretations of sauvage, then un lapin sauvage becomes quite ridiculous. Similarly, if we insist on our own intuitions of the real, conditioned by our own personal experience of our own culture, then the expressions of different modes of human being, be they exotic or merely alternative, will remain opaque to our interpretation.

⁶⁷ No Souvenirs, p.233.

Chapter Six

The Implicit Religion of Meaning.

Having considered in some detail the major elements of the system of thought involved in Eliade's writings I now wish to consider some of the further implications of that thought. The device which I shall employ to do this was suggested to me by an article by Edward Bailey about "implicit religion". (Although, of course, I take full responsibility for any inconsistencies in the conclusions reached in this chapter.) Implicit religion as a topic of study has attracted an increasing amount of attention in works such as Thomas Luckmann's Invisible Religion and Andrew Greeley's Unsecular Man: the Persistence of Religion,¹ and the conferences of Edward Bailey's Network

¹ Luckmann, T. The Invisible Religion: the Problem of Religion in Modern Society. Greeley, Andrew M. Unsecular Man: the Persistence of Religion.

for the Study of Implicit Religion² have attracted a wide variety of scholars from around the world. In October and November of 1991 a major conference on this topic was organised by the University of Leiden in Holland.

The very term "implicit religion" must indicate an inappropriate definition or understanding of religion whereby something thought to be non-religious is in fact religious. Its religious nature is undetected. While Mircea Eliade did not, to my knowledge, use the term "implicit religion", he did quite frequently apply the adjectives "concealed, camouflaged, hidden, unconscious or unrecognizable" to religious phenomena. It is my intention to clarify his concept of those aspects of the religious which might be called implicit, and my further hope to elucidate his understanding of meaning as itself implicitly religious.

Eliade's work became the subject of academic enquiry as early as 1962,³ and many scholars have focused critical attention upon him. However, I tend to agree with Mac Linscott Ricketts, author of the painstakingly researched Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots, that not only is a short, plainly written introduction to his thought not yet available but that Eliade is often

² V. Edward Bailey, "The Implicit Religion Of Contemporary Society: an Orientation and Plea for its Study."

³ Altizer, "Mircea Eliade and the Recovery of the Sacred."

misunderstood.⁴ This will become clearer in the second part of this dissertation. It is Ricketts' conclusion that the "Unifying Theme" of all Eliade's writings is "the unrecognisibility of miracle". (ibid., p.1209.) The Romanian literary critic Matei Calinescu has likewise said that "the problem of miracle and the disguises through which it renders itself unrecognizable is central"⁵ to some of Eliade's fiction. It is my intention in this chapter to discuss the meaning and implication of the unrecognizable aspect of religious phenomena and its centrality to Eliade's work.

As we have seen above, it is Eliade's understanding that ritual, myth, and symbol are hierophanies, that is to say manifestations or revelations of the sacred, which is the real, the true, the powerful and the meaningful.⁶ I have emphasized this definition - the sacred is the real - and I will return to it again. It is made repeatedly by Eliade, yet most commentators either insist that he fails to define the sacred or assume a facile identification either with the Judaeo-Christian God or with some indeterminate but autonomous "transcendent" ontology. The sacred for Eliade exists in a dialectical

⁴ Mac Linscott Ricketts, Mircea Eliade: the Romanian Roots, p.1.

⁵ Calinescu, M. "The Disguises of Miracle: notes on Mircea Eliade's Fiction," p.561.

⁶ Egs. "Cosmical Homology and Yoga," p.188; Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, pp.14,23; "The Structure of Religious Symbols," p.506; The Sacred and the Profane, pp.12, 28.

relationship with the profane. This relationship is paradoxical, the sacred being both concealed in and revealed through the profane. It is the coincidentia oppositorum in which all opposites are united.

Hierophany acquaints the believer, homo religiosus, with archetypal structures, paradigmatic models, or exemplary patterns. The repetition of these exemplary patterns ensures the believer's participation in or connection with the sacred. It should be said that in so far as Eliade was an historian of religion, rather than a metaphysician or theologian, his approach to the sacred was as "the something intended in ritual actions, in mythical speech, in belief or in mystical feeling".⁷ Here I am using the words of Paul Ricoeur, a close colleague of Eliade. As that which is worshipped, whatever it might be, the question of the existence of the sacred does not occur.⁸ In studying religion one cannot deny that humanity worships. That which is worshipped, the intentional object of reverence, whatever it may be, whatever ontological status it might be afforded, is a real and meaningful category of the study. The sacred exists qua the intentional object of worship and qua an element of the study of religion. To debate its existence is no more meaningful than to challenge the existence of psychosis or affection or any other

⁷ Ricoeur, Freud and Philosophy, p.29.

⁸ It is a telling fact that "worship" is from weorthscipe, Old English for worthiness.

intangible or abstract category.

Eliade's major themes are investigated through his tripartite methodology of history, phenomenology, and hermeneutics; or, in clearer language, the discovery, description, and decipherment of the meaning, of religious phenomena. Throughout his work Eliade maintains this emphasis:

there is no such thing as a "pure" religious fact. Such a fact is always also an historical, sociological, cultural, and psychological fact, to name only the most important contexts.⁹

However,

a religious phenomenon will only be recognized as such if it is grasped at its own level, that is to say, if it is studied as something religious.¹⁰

Eliade repeatedly insists that a religious phenomenon cannot be "reduced" to one of its other aspects. This is of little assistance if one lacks a functional definition of the religious, and as Eliade "doubt[s] the value of starting with a definition of the religious phenomenon",¹¹ this does seem to be the case. Even Ricketts, by far the best informed scholar on Eliade, mentions this lack of definition.¹² However, it is my perception that there is an underlying concept of religion which is theoretically coherent in Eliade's thought although it lacks deliberate expression.

⁹ The Quest, p.19.

¹⁰ Patterns, p.xiii.

¹¹ Patterns, p.xiv.

¹² Ricketts, op. cit., p.186.

Succinctly it is this: religion always concerns the manifestation (hierophany) of the sacred in the profane. Apparently this only succeeds in defining one unknown in terms of another: what is the sacred? As I have said Eliade repeatedly defines the sacred as the real and I repeat: the reader must be very careful not to ascribe any unwarranted assumptions to this real.

Since Eliade views the sacred as the intentional object of human experience which is apprehended as the real¹³ it is not surprising that he can then state that

modern man, radically secularized, believes himself, or styles himself, atheist, areligious, or, at least, indifferent. But he is wrong. He has not yet succeeded in abolishing the homo religiosus that is in him: he has only done away with (if he ever was) the christianus. That means that he is left with being "pagan" without knowing it.¹⁴

"Modern man" is frequently juxtaposed with homo religiosus in this way, but as Eliade says, modern man has not succeeded in abolishing the homo religiosus within him. If modern man is not the antithesis of homo religiosus, what exactly is he conceived to be? Certainly he is not simply "contemporary man". In a paper originally given to the Eranos conference in 1955 Eliade contrasted the contemporary "popular soul" with the man of the modern society.¹⁵ Although the dubious accuracy of the term "primitive" has been recognized and

¹³ v. pp.38-40 above.

¹⁴ No Souvenirs, p.164.

¹⁵ Eliade, "La Vertu Creatrice Du Mythe," p.76. Reprinted in Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane, ch.2.

it is now usually placed in inverted commas, the concomitant truth has not been assimilated that "modern" should receive similar treatment. However, I suspect that Eliade has a specific usage for this term and I shall return to it later.

Eliade is not particularly explicit about the survival of "religion" by that name in the modern world. He is, however, more forthcoming about the survival of myth. Lest this be thought an unacceptable substitution or a diminution of the significance of our topic, it must be emphasized that in Eliade's thought the two categories are inseparable: where there is religion, there is myth; where there is myth, there is religion. Firstly, it is not in the sense of "falsehood" or "fable" that he uses the word "myth" but, on the contrary, as a narrative which he describes as "considered to reveal the truth par excellence".¹⁶ That is to say, that "myth narrates a sacred history"; it "tells only of that which really happened"; it relates the

breakthrough of the sacred that really establishes the World and makes it what it is today. ... The Myth is regarded as a sacred story, and hence a "true history", because it always deals with realities. The cosmogonic myth is "true" because the existence of the world is there to prove it.¹⁷

Thus myths are inseparable from that which is apprehended as the real, from the sacred and from religion. Where

¹⁶ The Quest, ch.5.

¹⁷ Myth and Reality, pp.1, 5, 6; Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, p.23; The Quest, pp.72f.

myths survive in the secular milieu, there we have implicit religion, and as we have seen¹⁸ Eliade considers the recognition of and response to an exemplary pattern to be not only essential to mythic behaviour but also "consubstantial with every human condition".¹⁹ By way of the connection between myth, the sacred, and religion, one can detect an understanding of the response to an exemplary pattern as religious behaviour. Religion is the response to the sacred. The sacred is that which is apprehended as the real, which is expressed in "sacred history", or myth. The essential element in mythic behaviour is the response to the exemplary pattern. Thus the response to an example is religious. By these lights the influence of any cultural form over human behaviour is religious. It should be pointed out that such a systematic analysis of terms is analytic in the Kantian sense; it is tautological or "circular" in the reciprocal dynamic of the hermeneutical circle. Eliade was well aware of this circularity in interpretation. Nor does "interdefinability" undercut the explanatory power of a theory, Newton's physics is also interdefinable.²⁰ Although this may seem an extreme and possibly

¹⁸ above, p.133.

¹⁹ Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries, p.31.

²⁰ V. Patterns, pp.5-6, Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, p.176. V. also Adrian Marino, "Mircea Eliade's Hermeneutics," p.33, in Norman Girardot and Mac Linscott Ricketts eds., Imagination and Meaning, for Eliade's self awareness in this area.

procrustean reading of Eliade it must be remembered that he insists that "non-religious man descends from homo religiosus and, whether he likes it or not, he is also the work of religious man",²¹ and that "an areligious society does not yet exist".²² He also insists upon the ubiquity of religious phenomena which follows from this reading. "To be - or rather to become - a man means to be 'religious'."²³ It would seem that the converse applies to Eliade's constant emphasis on the concrete manifestations of religious fact. Not only is there no such thing as a "pure" religious fact, all religious facts being also historical, psychological, etc.; but there is no such thing as a "pure" historical fact, for example. All human facts, historical, sociological, psychological, are also implicitly religious. Everything is, or has been, or could be, religious.²⁴ But the specific areas in which we will find religious realities involve the uncritical valorisation of socially constructed realities and the response to exemplary models.

The fundamental interconnection of religion and the response to exemplary patterns of behaviour is reinforced in an important article of 1973, "The Sacred in the

²¹ The Sacred and the Profane, p.203.

²² No Souvenirs, pp.163f.

²³ The Quest, p.ii.

²⁴ Patterns, p.11.

Secular World". Once again Eliade insists that modern, secularized man still occupies a sacred dimension. The sacred is said to be

part of the human mode of being in the world, the expression 'being in the world' is not used here in the post-Heideggerian sense. ... It means that man simply discovers himself in the world, that the structure of his consciousness is such that somewhere in his experience there is something absolutely real and meaningful, something that is a source of value for him. (p.101.)

What is of value is that

so long as modern man is interested in discovering the meaning of life, that meaning can serve as a model for human life, and thus is in the same family as the archaic myth which presented the exemplary model for ritual repetition.(p.102.)

Modern man "looks for being and does not immediately call it being, but meaning or goals; ... we do not see anything religious here; we just see a man behaving as a human being".(p.103.) But Eliade's work finally insists that this is religious. He writes,

when man becomes aware of his specific mode of being in the world, he realizes that he is a mortal being, that he is created. His creation is recounted mythically in a sacred history and he realizes that he is merely the result of what happened. (pp.101-2.)

This is not necessarily to say that humanity was created by an omnipotent, omniscient creator deity. That is a specific anthropogeny. Rather it is the realization that human existence is finite and conditioned. "Sacred history" is that narration of that conditioning that is held to best account for what humanity is and why we are so and is thus accorded a positive value. To certain people biological evolution, as the true account of the

factors which produced and conditioned humanity, is their sacred history.²⁵ To others socio-psychological histories seem more apt, to others economic or theological, or combinations of several styles. "The world of meaning of modern man plays the same function that myth plays among the primitive," says Eliade, and thus he cannot believe someone immediately when he consciously says that he is not a religious man.²⁶

One's initial reaction to this might be to object that this is merely an extension of inclusivist theology of Karl Rahner's "anonymous Christian" variety.²⁷ This may be construed as a fallacious universalization of certain specific categories of thought. However, Eliade's case is based upon extensive research and the elevation is not of any specific or provincial categories, but of the generic, human tendency to invest experience with meaning, to find in our environment adequate sources for a coherent response. It is worthy of note that the present incumbent of the Mircea Eliade Chair at the University of Chicago, Wendy Doniger, makes

²⁵ The tendency of evolutionism to slide over into the area of the overtly religious is well documented in Mary Midgeley, Evolution as a Religion, and the general tendency of narrow scientific explanation to be expanded into cosmology in Toulmin, op. cit.

²⁶ "The Sacred in the Secular World," p.102.

²⁷ v. eg. Frank Whaling, Christian Theology and World Religions, pp.87ff. Rahner, Schriften zur Theologie, vol. 6, pp.545-54; vol. 5, pp.136-58; vol. 8, pp.187-212. (Trans. as Theological Investigations. Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961.)

a similar correlation of myth, the sacred, and meaning. "To say that a myth is a sacred story is to say that it must have a religious meaning (though it need not be a story about the gods)." Myths, she says, "are about the sorts of questions that religions ask, ... basically about meaning itself".²⁸

As we have seen the concept of meaning expounded in the article of 1973 is directly related to human behaviour, to activity rather than merely to signification. Something - a text, a narrative, or an event, some element of experience - is invested with meaning in so far as one can detect in it an exemplary model or paradigm upon which one can base one's behaviour, often through repetition of the sacred act, or imitation of the sacred characteristics, as in the imitatio Christi. However, Eliade does not restrict such bases for behaviour to clearly recognisable religious examples. He often speaks with astonishment and admiration of people finding meaning in incarceration.²⁹

Such a theory of meaning requires a careful consideration to situate it amongst the variety of recent theories. It is evidently similar to the theories of American pragmatists, such as Charles Sanders Pierce, or William James. As James has said, "to develop a

²⁸ Other Peoples' Myths, p.28. v. my review in Style, 24, no.4 (1990): 642-645.

²⁹ For example Constantin Noica, Harry Brauer and his wife, Lena Constante. v. Journal II, 1957-1969, p.315 and Journal III, 1970-1978, p.124.

thought's meaning we need therefore only determine what conduct it is fitted to produce".³⁰ However, Eliade goes further than they, conceiving a sort of "religious pragmatism" which never reduces the thought/behaviour dichotomy to a simple polarity but keeps the iterative, reciprocal interaction open as a human unity as Adrian Marino recognises with his text-interpreter-text, interpreter-text-interpreter cycle.³¹ I would suggest, however, that the iterative cycle is somewhat more complex, involving an ongoing evolution of the interpreter, effected in part by the interpretation; interpreter-interpretation-text-interpretation-interpreter.

Eliade's thought here can also be compared to that of philosophers such as, for example, Hans Georg Gadamer, who connects hermeneutics with praxis. Richard Bernstein has said that "the most intriguing and most central theme in Gadamer's understanding of philosophical hermeneutics is the fusion of hermeneutics and praxis".³² Gadamer argues that the three subdisciplines of the older tradition of hermeneutics (understanding, interpretation, application), are three moments of a single process. Thus genuine understanding always involves application.

³⁰ Varieties of Religious Experience, p.427.

³¹ Imagination and Meaning, Girardot and Ricketts (eds.), p.20.

³² Philosophical Profiles: Essays in a Pragmatic Mode, p.61.

"Application is neither subsequent nor a merely occasional part of the phenomenon of understanding but codetermines it as a whole from the beginning."³³ This not only involves behaviour with meaning, but does so in the same recursive, iterative fashion I have indicated above, which refuses to give either one priority.

Eliade's affinities with the phenomenological school of interpretation to which Gadamer belonged are to be expected. On the other hand, how does he relate to, say, the deconstructionist followers of Jacques Derrida, whose concept of meaning seems to be largely restricted to the play of signs, the inter-relationship of signifier and signified, and finally to the denial of any transcendental signified and to the infinite deferral of meaning? Colin Falck has pointed out

that the much-mentioned "aporias", and the "abyss", along with the rest of the transcendence free vocabulary of post-Saussurian literary theory represent only post-Saussurian theory's uncomprehending encounter with the inherent mystery of all life and all experience.³⁴

Such uncomprehending encounters are by definition the failure of the understanding of the critic and are identical with the inability to detect meaning. They

³³ Gadamer, Truth and Method, p.289, quoted in Bernstein, loc. cit. This concept of "application" has some affinity with Eliade's concept of response to an exemplary pattern. Does this imply that one has not genuinely understood the meaning of a myth unless one responds to it by applying it as some kind of paradigmatic model?

³⁴ Colin Falck, Myth, Truth, and Literature: Towards a True Postmodernism, p.25.

usually lead to an insistence of non-ontology (what Falck refers to as the "Abolition of Reality"). That is, an insistence that there is nothing there to understand, hence the lack of meaning (like the linguistic philosophers' rejection of "God-talk"), because the "signified" is assumed to have a merely a priori existence. However, Falck also draws attention to the fact that

the Derridean notion of différance takes us beyond both Kant and Saussure in its recognition of the essential inseparability of the a priori and the empirical. (ibid., p.21.)

Such a notion would be quite familiar to a student of Goethe such as Eliade, from Goethe's insistence on the theory-laden nature of the fact.³⁵ Despite the evident tension between Eliade's humanist conception of meaning and this semiotic scheme, there are other possible connections; for example, the relationship of Derrida's recognition of the desire for a centre in his idea of "logocentrism" (Of Grammatology, p.12) and Eliade's emphasis on the symbolism of the centre. Ioan Culianu's conclusion that for Eliade the interpretation of religious mysteries is efficacious only on condition that one does not succeed in deciphering the message is also reminiscent of deconstruction's infinite deferral of meaning.³⁶

³⁵ V. above, p.113, n.34.

³⁶ "Mircea Eliade et La Tortue Borgne." In Arcade, Manea, and Stamatescu eds., Homo Religiosus, p.82.

However such affinities may be seen, one thing is quite clear: for Eliade, the "living" myth is a myth specifically in so far as "it supplies models for human behaviour and, by that very fact, gives meaning and value to life".³⁷ By that very fact also, I might add, the myth is sacred. It is the apprehension of the myth as conveying "the truth par excellence", as being the repository of the real, the true, and the meaningful which simultaneously empowers it as an exemplary model and makes it a "sacred history". Although Eliade has said that "on the archaic levels of culture, the real - that is the powerful, the significative, the living - is equivalent to the sacred",³⁸ he has also said that there is no resolution of the continuity between the "primitive" world and the modern West.³⁹ To say, as we do modernly, that "real" is equivalent to historically actual is, in Eliade's terms, to grant sacred significance to the empirically manifest. Concomitant with this emphasis on the significance of the materially extant is an emphasis on its independence. Human creation is not independently extant and so is considered "less real", less significant than independent empirical phenomena. However, such views may not themselves be coherent. Firstly, one cannot deny human responsibility

³⁷ Myth and Reality, p.2.

³⁸ "The Structure of Religious Symbols," p.506.

³⁹ Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, p.38.

in shaping human history; the history of the human race is a product of the human race. I do not mean the "historiography" but the actual events of the past. If human history is seen as significant then other creations of human activity cannot be denied significance.

Secondly, any imaginary construct, a theoretical model of the atom, a speculative reconstruction of geological history, a religious belief, or an ideology, may have no independent ontology or empirical manifestation. It nonetheless exists and may be effective. As Eliade clearly states,

human creativity and, ultimately, the history of human culture is more directly related to what man has dreamt, believed and thought of his specific mode of being in the world than to the works which he has undertaken in order to promote and validate this mode of being.⁴⁰

In fact, Eliade insists that in the modern world "the 'sacred' is present and active mainly in the imaginary universes".⁴¹ Whether something is an epiphany of the real, an hierophany in Eliade's terms, is clearly held to be a matter of personal perception.

It is characteristic of what I have called "hierophany" that the sacred is thereby both revealed and concealed in the profane. To give but one example, a sacred tree which embodies the sacred to the worshippers of the religion under consideration remains merely a tree of a certain type to all others. The same dialectic: profane-sacred-profane, explains what I have called "the unrecognizable aspect of miracle", awareness of a miracle is only straightforward for those who are prepared, by their personal experience and their

⁴⁰ "Notes on the Symbolism of the Arrow," p.474.

⁴¹ The Quest, p.128.

religious background to recognize it as such. To others the "miracle" is not evident, it does not exist; in fact, it is concealed in everyday objects and events.⁴²

This is also revealing as regards the question of "modern man". In the final analysis of Eliade's thought, "modern man", or non-religious humanity, is either those of us who recognize no sacred, no real, find no meaning and thus have nothing upon which to model their behaviour (and, as such, exist only as an hypothetical construct), or represents those of us with the specific characteristic of valorizing empirical being as "the real". Modern western people find it almost impossible not to accord automatically the greatest significance to, for example, that speculative reconstruction which is deemed to conform to the actual event. This, we think, is the real, the true, the powerful. But is this necessarily the case? Newtonian mechanics was once considered to conform to the actual but has been superseded by relativity, which itself is challenged for accuracy by quantum theory, yet classical Newtonian mathematics was enough to put men on the moon,⁴³ enough to alter radically the situation of man in the world. Historical studies frequently refer to the impossibility

⁴² Mademoiselle Christina, 1978 introduction p.7. My translation.

⁴³ Although quantum mechanics was necessary to produce the computers used in the space program, the actual programs which they ran were Newtonian. As Ilya Prigogine puts it, "space trip experiments. . .confirm Newton's equations to a high degree." Order Out of Chaos, p.251.

of an unbiased account, an objective reconstruction, of history. Chaos theory stresses the superiority of the simple, manipulable, theoretical model rather than the complex model which attempts to faithfully correspond to external reality.⁴⁴ The advances of technology have proved as threatening as they have benevolent. Theory does not need to be understood or even accurate to be practically applicable.⁴⁵ Yet still modern humanity clings to its conviction that the real, the true, the powerful, is the historically accurate, the independently extant, the empirical. Whether or not this attitude is finally justified is not at issue here; the point is that this constitutes a belief of a basically religious nature characteristic of modern humanity. Whereas archaic humanity considered their sacred myths to recount the real, much of contemporary humanity considers the observable to be the real. It is in the discoveries of contemporary physics that modern man seeks for meaning. The works of such writers as John Gribbin, Fred Alan Wolf, Gary Zukav, Carl Sagan, Fritjof Capra, and other popularisers of science are increasingly read by the ordinary seekers after truth. As Stephen Toulmin pointed out, "the popular scientist has won over the audience of the popular preacher".⁴⁶

⁴⁴ James Gleick, Chaos: Making a New Science, p.278.

⁴⁵ John Gribbin, In Search of Schrödinger's Cat, pp.123, 134.

⁴⁶ Toulmin, op. cit., p.21.

If the sacred is seen simply as that which is worshipped, that which is considered worthy of respect, that which reveals real being and has real meaning, then modern humanity's sacred is the material. The actual events of the external world are considered to be more worthy of attention, to reveal greater truth, to be more meaningful than traditional cultural forms. This is not a generic shift from religion to non-religion as is usually thought to be the case in a consideration of secularization. Rather it is the triumph of a particular, concealed religious attitude of valorization of the empirical as the major manifestation of the real. However, when meaning is seen in this sense of exemplary behaviour, one must wonder whether the cryptic traces in a cloud chamber at the end of a particle accelerator can effectively be more meaningful than a religious text.⁴⁷

I would like to conclude this chapter by mentioning some of the positive possibilities of Eliade's implicit system. Firstly, one of the greatest barriers to an adequate definition of religion has thus been removed. The belief that certain people, specifically modern rationalist-empiricists, are not religious has

⁴⁷ Culianu has pointed out that "the object of this mechanism [of interpretation] is of no real importance: in the extreme, water stains on the walls will serve." ["Ce sur quoi ce mécanisme s'exerce n'a pas vraiment d'importance: à la limite, on peut se servir des tâches de moisissure sur un mur (Incognito à Buchenwald)". My translation.] However, it should be remembered that this is "à la limite". Such restriction is neither normal nor beneficial. (Culianu, loc. cit. v. p.208 above.)

necessarily entailed the rejection of all definitions broad enough to include, say, early Buddhism or Marxism. Such definitions are also broad enough to include the rationalist-empiricists, and their categorical denial of religious motivation appears to invalidate this inclusion. However, it is typically religious behaviour for the newly emerged sect to attempt to divorce itself radically from previous religious forms. Barth's rejection of all religion as idolatry, compared with the true divine revelation of Christianity, calls into doubt any self-styled divorce from "religion" as an attempt to distinguish a tribe from a species, to claim as essential differences which are finally superficial. Observable fact seems to concur with Eliade that all humanity everywhere throughout history has been classifiable as "religious" in some, possibly unrecognized, way and that "modern man" is no different, despite a unique existential situation and an unshakable conviction in the meaning and significance of material, non-human phenomena. One must wonder whether psychology could ever coherently present itself if some people were allowed to have no psyche, or sociology if some people had no society.

A second positive implication of Eliade's thought is that truth, reality, power, meaningfulness, in short his "sacred", are not necessarily tied to historical actuality and ontological independence. The occasional frantic attempts to establish the historical veracity of

religious texts, encountered in varying degrees from fundamentalism to religiously motivated archaeological speculations, may be called into question. They would seem to be attempts to reconcile two different traditions, that of modern historicism and that of an earlier traditional belief. As Eliade pointed out in Les Trois Grâces,⁴⁸ theological or mythological systems of thought can be utilized in "integrating the presuppositions and conclusions" of one's experiences of reality, regardless of the historical accuracy of their contents.

Thirdly such an understanding would serve to stand against all sweeping rejections of religion per se as meaningless reference to a non-existent realm. The insistence upon empirical, manifest, poke-it-with-a-stick "reality" as the ultimate locus of meaning is itself a recent belief of a religious nature. It has no more inherent authority than any traditional religious system. Its powerful compulsion resides, in fact, in its breadth of acceptance, its spread as a faith. Symptomatic of this is the ease with which we accept the non-empirical and mysterious trappings of modern science, from viruses to quantum interconnectedness. As Robert Towler has pointed out, we now inhabit a world more densely stocked with accepted invisible entities than ever did the most

⁴⁸ Tales of the Sacred and Supernatural, p.44.

superstitious of medievals.⁴⁹ As I have said, Eliade agrees that the sacred (and therefore the real) is present and active in the imaginary universes of modern humanity. Yet our imagination is often exercised in realms which are so radically divorced from that of human experience that meaning, in the sense I have discussed here of exemplary structures requiring a human response, is increasingly difficult to find, and the meanings of traditional religious expressions have tended to be increasingly occluded. They are not thus meaningless but their messages may have been forgotten. However, as with any structured narrative, the point of a parable, like the wit of a joke or the meaning of a myth, can be reactualised, re-realised, by scholarship which involves the creative involvement of the active imagination, informed by experience with a coherent sense of the reality or sacrality implicit in the structure.

⁴⁹ Robert Towler, Homo Religiosus: Sociological Problems in the Study of Religion.

analysis of Eliade's categories of the study, before considering in some detail the criticisms of other scholars of religion of his approach.

As William Baird has pointed out

ethnologists [among others] are sometimes confused by Eliade's "history of religions" since it is unlike any "history" with which they are familiar.¹

I have argued above that Eliade had a specific, and rather idiosyncratic, understanding of history which did not, however, prevent him from using the word in its common sense of temporal antecedents. So his "history of religions" is the study of the historical antecedents of the human phenomenon referred to as "religion", but it is also the interpretation of the data which present themselves to the individual scholar and thus become part of his or her actual lived experience (history in his personal sense).

Insofar as the scholar can recognise the real revealed by these data, they constitute hierophanies for him or her. That this makes the history of religions itself a religious exercise is no adverse criticism since it is held that "living as a human being is in itself a religious act".² The historian of religions can thus realise the meanings of archaic, exotic, or contemporary religious phenomena; which is to say, can realise both the significance of that religious phenomenon for the

¹ Category Formation and the History of Religions, p.77.

² The Quest, preface.

actual life of the believer and the significance of that particular phenomenon for the general existential situation of humanity in our confrontation with our environment. In order to do this, it would seem that a certain commitment is necessary to the acceptance that those data are (or were) actually and realistically meaningful to the believer and that this meaning is capable of reactualisation. Given this commitment, an extensive exposure to the actual historical data is absolutely necessary in order to "ground", as it were, one's interpretations with the external realities implied in one's texts, as opposed to the internal realities of one's other personal experience. This is equivalent to both Eliade's much criticised principle of the non-reduction of religious experience and his insistence on the dependence of the scholar on accurate historical information. The religious phenomena must be understood in their own terms in order for their real meaning, both for the believer and for the present scholar, to be realised. It is precisely this principle of understanding one's object of study in its own terms that I am seeking to apply in understanding Eliade in his own terms as he used those terms.

Isiah Berlin, in his book on Vico and Herder, indicates seven theses thought to be Vico's main creations; the fifth of these is that

the creations of man - laws, institutions, religions, rituals, works of art, language, song, rules of conduct, and the like - are not artificial

products created to please, or to exalt, or teach wisdom, nor weapons deliberately invented to manipulate or dominate men, or promote social stability or security, but are natural forms of self-expression, of communication with other human beings or with God. The myths and fables, the ceremonies and monuments of early man, according to the view prevalent in Vico's day, were absurd fantasies of helpless primitives, or deliberate inventions designed to delude the masses and secure their obedience to cunning and unscrupulous masters. This he regarded as a fundamental fallacy. Like anthropic metaphors of early speech, myth and ritual are for Vico so many natural ways of conveying a coherent view of the world as it was seen and interpreted by primitive men. (p.xviii.)

This explains as clearly as any words could Eliade's attitude of "nonreduction". It should be borne in mind that Eliade's Master's thesis at the University of Bucharest was written on Italian Renaissance Philosophers from Ficino to Bruno, and that Italian Renaissance Humanism was one of the major influences on the young Eliade before he set off for India in order to "universalise" the "provincial" philosophy he had inherited from his European education.³ Berlin sees this principle of Vico as leading directly to a nonreductive type of aesthetics in which

works of art must be understood, interpreted, evaluated, not in terms of timeless principles and standards valid for all men everywhere, but by correct grasp of the purpose and therefore the peculiar use of symbols, especially of language, which belonged uniquely to their own time and place. (p.xix.)

This was the same banner which Eliade carried forward in

³ On Eliade's master's thesis, v. Ricketts, Romanian Roots, pp.319-324. On his motivations for visiting India, v. Al-George, "India in the Cultural Destiny of Mircea Eliade", pp.124f.

his attempt to understand religion "in its own terms".

A further thrust of Eliade's thought on the history of religions is clearly evident in his criticism of van der Leeuw, who

thought, wrongly, that he could reduce the totality of all religious structure to three Grundstrukturen: Dynamism, Animism, and Deism. However, he was not interested in the history of religious structures, here lies the most serious inadequacy of his approach; for even the most elevated religious expression (a mystical ecstasy, for example,) presents itself through specific structures and cultural expressions, which are historically conditioned.⁴

Thus Eliade strongly affirms the significance of history (i.e., both erlebte Zeit and recorded history) as established, as he would have it, by the Abrahamic traditions. He is in no way denying the importance of the "desacralised cosmos", but seems to be saying that it is one among many loci of significance, and that, in accordance with his dialectic of the sacred, significance is in everything in which it is apprehended. Only our failure to appreciate it as sacred makes a thing profane. His writings are so profuse on one hand, and unsystematised on the other, that there is sometimes a tendency to read into Eliade things he may not have intended. However, it is also quite possible to miss in the huge haystack of his oeuvre radically some very significant needles, and his insistence on the importance of historically accurate data has been one of the most critical.

⁴ The Quest, p.35.

Eliade's conclusions are in favour of an integral study of religion:

if the "phenomenologists" are interested in the meanings of religious data, the "historians" on their side attempt to show how these meanings have been experienced and lived in the various cultures and historical moments,

This can provoke a tension by means of which Religionswissenschaft escapes dogmatism and stagnation. Unfortunately, as is so often the case, his concluding sentence of this section of The Quest (p.9.) imparts an almost mystical tone: "the history of religious meanings must always be regarded as forming part of the history of the human spirit". This is a vague caveat whose meaning is unclear. It may be that Eliade merely seeks to remind us that, on the one hand, the history of religions is a process of self-understanding for humanity rather than an attempt to reveal any transcendent ontology. On the other hand, such terms as "spirit" are not without significance to the latter process.

He repeatedly states that the ultimate aim of his research is to discover the meaning of religious facts and particularly of the change and development of religious facts through history. Rather than seeking an accurate "archeological" reconstruction or phenomenological description of religious data, Eliade is attempting to discover the meanings of these data. It is typical of a hermeneutical approach to assume there to be a "meaning" in a certain datum. In literary theory, "positive" hermeneutics assumes a singular meaning to

have been deliberately and consciously embedded in a text by an author. The aim of interpretation is to recover that meaning unchanged. "Negative" hermeneutics, on the other hand, assumes that the meaning is derived from the text but is also dependent on the act of interpretation.⁵ Eliade certainly agrees with the latter, but his "creative hermeneutics" of religious data reflects a development in which the response of the interpreter, conditioned by historical influences but liberated from determinism by the creativity of human imagination, is recognised as crucial to the interpretation of all lived experience, not purely of the literary text.

Possibly a major source of this conviction is the Romanian folk ballad, the Mioritza, discussed by Eliade in his Zalmoxis, the Vanishing God (pp.226-256). To relate briefly and simplistically the point salient to my argument here, a shepherd is warned of his own impending murder at the hands of rival shepherds by a clairvoyant ewe-lamb. Rather than bemoaning his fate, the shepherd imaginatively valorises his death as a celestial marriage. This is, in fact, a grossly over-simplified reading of a complex issue and Eliade's discussion should be consulted for an introduction to the themes involved. However, this theme of an imaginative reappraisal of an unavoidable death is repeated in Eliade's play Iphigenia,

⁵ This division of hermeneutics can be attributed to Wolfgang Iser, v. eg. "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach." New Literary History, 3 (1972):279-299.

based on Euripides play Iphigenia in Aulis. Iphigenia, daughter of Agamemnon, is sacrificed to pacify the gods whose winds held the ships of the Achaeans and their allies pinned on the shore at Aulis, unable to depart for Troy. Once again the victim, to the complete incomprehension of the other characters, manages to see her fate as positive if not glorious. Once again the point seems to be (or, rather, one of a complex of points seems to be) that the exercise of the creative imagination can render meaningful (which is to say, can provide an adequate and satisfactory personal response to) the most grossly determined of historical events.

Another factor of Eliade's history of religions is indicated by his statement that

the contribution made by the historian of religions seems to me crucial. It lays bare the unity of the human condition, and it does so in our modern world, which is becoming a "planetary" one.⁶

This is to say that, although specific individual experience and personal history condition (and are reciprocally conditioned by) the individual creative imagination, Eliade recognises a basic unity of the human race revealed in universal religious structures even though the capability to apprehend certain meanings in certain events is itself culturally conditioned. Not only the common anthropological biology, but the location of that biology in a common world and the possession by that biology of a creativity of the imagination, ensures

⁶ Ordeal by Labyrinth, p.122.

a human unity to the history of religion.

This fundamental unity of religion ensures that the understanding of religious phenomena is finally a self-understanding. Eliade speaks of "profound changes in religious concepts and behaviour", and recognises that "religious structures are susceptible to radical changes".⁷ Such a change

indicates modifications in man's existential situation. It is part and parcel of the discoveries which man has been led to make about himself and his world. These discoveries are of a religious nature. The task of the historian of religions is to show how they are articulated in the total process of history. (ibid., pp.354-5)

Thus he sees the task of the historian of religions to be to show how humanity's progressive discoveries about ourselves in the world lead to changes in our existential condition, expressed as changes in the history of religion. Finally, Eliade sees this process as a way to increase our awareness of our contemporary existential situation,⁸ a task some might consider more suited to philosophy. But it must be remembered that Eliade considered the history of religions to be an essentially philosophical task.⁹

⁷ "Structures and Changes in the History of Religion," p.353.

⁸ v. The Two and the One, p.13.

⁹ v. the 1952 Foreword to The Myth of the Eternal Return.

7.1. R. F. Brown: Some General Criticisms.

The survey of criticisms given by R. F. Brown in his article of 1981,¹ although he insists it is not exhaustive, is full and informative and makes an excellent basis for a general consideration of the criticisms addressed to Eliade. Thus I have abstracted briefly the central salient points in the various shortcomings that have been detected in Eliade's work.

Professor Brown identifies two main areas of criticism. Firstly, "a number of ways in which [critics] find [Eliade's] general methodology wanting". In this he recognises seven separate criticisms of Eliade's approach;

1. His use of anthropological source material is irresponsible. Specifically: (a) He often neglects to evaluate the quality of his sources and therefore uses data which contemporary anthropologists repudiate as inaccurate or outdated by later or more thorough fieldwork. (b) He fails to take sufficient account of the interpretative bias of authors, treating secondary sources as if they were usable in the same way as primary data. (c) He lumps together

¹ "Eliade on Archaic Religions: Some Old and New Criticisms," Sciences Religieuses 10 no.4 (1981):429-449.

the most heterogeneous kinds of data (scriptures, artifacts, ethnographic reports, etc.), deploying them as if they were uniform in meaning and evidential value.

2. Eliade's use of the comparative method is defective.

3. The procedures of generalisation which Eliade employs are not properly inductive and fail to satisfy scientific criteria.

4. Eliade utilises Lévy-Bruhl's discredited theory that non-literate peoples lack the scientific attitude because their mental structure and logical thought differs fundamentally from that of modern Western people.

5. To construct his profile of the archaic religious mind Eliade groups living non-literate peoples together with ancient cultures no longer extant.

6. Anthropologists are sharply critical of Eliade's "descending approach",² which begins with the assumption that in religious phenomena one has to do with a transcendent sacred reality disclosing itself.

7. Many censure Eliade's "science" as not value free. ... His overriding personal wish to recover and preserve the religious values of the archaic perspective, ... is itself a religious programme of the sort that ought not to be distorting a genuine quest for knowledge.

The second area or type of criticism concerns objections to Eliade's particular theories and explanations, of which Brown highlights a further six arguments.

8. The sacred/profane contrast is not an all-important category for non-literate peoples.

9. Non-literate peoples are not constantly preoccupied with religion, with myth, or with origins.

² This term is taken from John Saliba's book, Homo Religiosus, p.40.

10. Eliade presents a one-sided portrait of religion as an effort to escape from the profane sphere. However, in most societies religion involves a variety of rites and techniques employed to cope directly with the challenges of ordinary life, taken on their own terms.

11. His interpretation of myth largely ignores its social functions and consequently treats it in a one-dimensional manner as almost exclusively religious in orientation.

12. In his treatment of symbolism Eliade is guilty of ignoring two levels of investigation and concentrating only on the third. ... [he ignores the ethnographic and exegetical level in favour of the explanatory level]. His procedure needs to be emended by attending to how the people themselves use these [symbolic] objects, and what they say about the structure and meaning of their own symbols.

13. In particular, Eliade dwells far too much on death/rebirth symbolism. (pp.432-434.)

Before passing onto the following sections which deal with specific criticisms, made by particular authors in more detailed commentaries, I would like to make a brief reply to each of these criticisms outlined by Prof. Brown. I would be more confident in doing so if I could draw directly on the writings of Mircea Eliade, for this is my historical source data, and I do not wish to encounter the criticism that I, too, treat secondary sources as if they were the same as primary data. (1b, above.) However, despite the fact that Eliade several times wrote of his awareness of critics and his intention to answer them,³ he does not often do so. Unfortunately,

³ eg. "I plan someday to dedicate an entire work to discussing the objections put forth by some of my critics, those who are responsible and acting in all good faith." "Foreword" to Douglas Allen's Structure and Creativity," p.vii.

with the ongoing pressure of the Encyclopedia, and of the History of Religious Ideas, which Eliade considered his chef d'oeuvre, and with the increasing arthritic disability of his hands, (Eliade continued to write longhand throughout his life) combining with his personal dislike of polemics, his direct replies to critics are few.⁴ Thus usable quotations may not always be forthcoming, and I will have to resort to my own interpretative abilities. As I have said in my introduction this is unavoidable in any case, since even the editorial selection of quotations influences their received meaning. I have always insisted that what is expressed here is my interpretation of Eliade rather than some immaculate reconstruction of his mental operations. Lastly, I hope it is perfectly clear when I am quoting Eliade and when I am interpreting him, and I will otherwise attempt to avoid "paraphrases".

One of the clearest statements Eliade makes against these criticisms comes from his Images and Symbols. Although written in French in 1952 the English translation was published in 1961, and so considerably anticipated these critiques. Here he states,

we have now gone beyond the "confusionist" position of a Tylor or a Frazer, who, in their

⁴ v. Ricketts Romanian Roots, pp.134-139. At the age of 19, after having written a critical review of Nicolai Iorga's Essai de synthèse de l'histoire de l'humanité Eliade was obliged to resign as a student journalist on the Bucharest University Review. "Nor did Eliade's resignation end the controversy." Thereafter he seems to have avoided polemics.

anthropological and ethnographical researches, accumulated examples which had no geographical or historical contiguity, and would cite an Australian myth together with one from Siberia, Africa, or North America, persuaded as they were that always and everywhere they were dealing with the same "uniform reaction of the human mind before the phenomena of Nature". Compared with this position, so similar to that of a naturalist of the Darwinian epoch, the historico-cultural school of Graebner-Schmidt and the other historicist schools represent an undeniable progress. It was important, however, not to let ourselves become fixed in the historico-cultural point of view, and to inquire whether, in addition to its own history, a symbol, a myth or a ritual, might not reveal something of the human condition regarded in its own right as a mode of existence in the universe. ... Thus, when leaving on one side the "history" that divides them, we compare an Oceanian symbol with a symbol from northern Asia, we think we are entitled to do so, not because both the one and the other are products of the same "infantile mentality", but because the symbol in itself expresses an awakening to the knowledge of a "limit situation".⁵

Elsewhere he explains further that

it is somewhat as if, in order to gain a better understanding of the poetic phenomenon, we should have recourse to a mass of heterogeneous examples, ... From the point of view of literary history, such juxtapositions are to be viewed with suspicion; but they are valid if our object is to describe the poetic phenomenon as such, if we propose to show the essential differences between poetic language and the utilitarian language of everyday life.⁶

Thus Eliade himself replies to points 1c, 4, and 5. The related, and interrelated, points 1a and 1b, are only indirectly countered, however. No scholar can be utterly unaware that the texts we read are written by other scholars and are thus subject to their interpretive bias. Nor can we hope to become exhaustively acquainted with our

⁵ Images and Symbols, p.175f.

⁶ The Sacred and The Profane, p.16.

subject materials. The acceptance of such unrealistic aspirations results in statements such as John Saliba's final insistence that

formulation of generalisations can only be reliably reached after many individual studies have been carried out. ... It is not an easy task to decide when there are enough studies at one's disposal. ... The task of the scholar is to take into account all available literature and at the same time be aware of its contributions and limitations.⁷

Obviously this sets the historian of religions (and most other scholars) a quite impossible task.

It must be recognised that specific criticisms made by, for example J. Z. Smith and Richard Gombrich, do reveal real faults in Eliade's interpretations.⁸ However, that Eliade makes occasional misinterpretations and accepts the descriptions of Western scholars as true descriptions of the beliefs of other peoples merely reflects the fallible and interdependent nature of the scholarly endeavour and does not seriously compromise the coherence of his thought. That these errors are made uncritically is simply untrue. He minimises the risk of being egregiously misled by broadening the scope of his readings as much as possible in a considerable number of languages, thereby avoiding serious misapprehensions contracted through concealed bias. Furthermore, an inspection of his writings reveals that Eliade was in

⁷ Saliba, Homo Religiosus in the Works of Mircea Eliade, pp.142, 143, 149.

⁸ v. eg. Gombrich's article, "Eliade on Buddhism" and Smith's criticisms in Map is not Territory, pp.91-95 and in Towards Theory in Ritual, p.122, n.2.

fact extremely critical of the majority of Western authors, and of their interpretative biases, even of those who most impressed him.

That Eliade accepted Lévy-Bruhl's discredited theory is a rather ludicrous suggestion in view of the former's criticisms.⁹ Although he does cite Lévy-Bruhl quite extensively in Patterns (20 times, in fact), Eliade was well aware of the untenability of his "prelogical mentality", and takes every opportunity to mention it.

For example, In The Sacred and the Profane;

Lévy-Bruhl sought to prove that religious behaviour could be explained by the prelogical mentality of primitives - a hypothesis that he renounced towards the end of his life. (p.231)

In The Two and the One;

at the end of his life Lévy-Bruhl abandoned the hypothesis of a primitive mentality pre-logical and radically different from the modern mentality, and actually argued against it. (pp.189f.)

Even in Patterns, although he refers to Lévy-Bruhl's L'Expérience mystique et les symboles chez les primitifs as an "excellent book" (p.444), Eliade uses such works mainly as a source book for the beliefs of native peoples rather than a source of theoretical understanding. He even suggests a disagreement with Lévy-Bruhl's original restriction of the "primitive mentality" to "primitive" people. Speaking of an example of "infantilised magic"

⁹ Apparently he did accept, at the age of 19, that magic "represents a primitive rudimentary mentality," (v. Ricketts, op. cit., p.141.) However, this does not indicate that he was unaware of the critical shortcomings of the "pre-logical mentality" as we will see.

among Romanian peasants Eliade compared it to an African belief cited by Lévy-Bruhl.

In the minds of the natives, the symbol communicates itself concretely by participation, just as ..., in the infantilised magic just quoted ... This, I must repeat, is only one instance of an infantilism of which there are great numbers of examples in the religious experience of every civilised people. (p.445)

In fact, of "primitive man" in general, Eliade insists

their mind was neither "pre-logical" nor paralysed by a participation mystique. It was a fully human mind. But this also means that every significant act was validated and valorised both on the level of empirical experience and in a Universe of images, symbols and myths. No conquest of the material world was effected without a corresponding impact on human imagination and behaviour.¹⁰

Not only does Eliade specifically repudiate the pre-logical fallacy, he also reveals how he considers the pre-rational or pre-systematic to operate in all of us through imagination and behaviour.

Eliade's criticism of Lévy-Bruhl seems to be that there is some kind of alternative mentality; an ability to grasp a coherence in a system of symbolism prior to its logical or verbal extrapolation. However, this mentality, this ability, is far from absent in "civilised" peoples. In fact, "every historical man carries on, within himself, a great deal of prehistoric humanity".¹¹ It was precisely the untenable contention that the "pre-logical" mentality historically preceded

¹⁰ Notes on the Symbolism of the Arrow," p.465, and v. The Quest, p.16, where he refers to the pre-logical mentality as "an erroneous hypothesis."

¹¹ Images and Symbols, p.12.

and radically differed from the mentality of modern, logical humanity which finally forced Lévy-Bruhl, and E. B. Tylor, to abandon the concept. Eliade's recognition of some kind of "pre-verbal", symbolic mentality (v.p.100 above) in which communication is achieved "concretely by participation", is considerably more critical than Lévy-Bruhl's concept, although it is doubtlessly the cause of this disparaging contention.

Points 1c and 3 above seem to combine to produce the second criticism. That Eliade "lumps together heterogenous material" and uses improper induction in his procedures of generalisation is surely the cause of an apprehension of a "defective comparative method" in his work. As we have seen, Eliade makes his own defence against 1c. In support of the procedures of generalisation employed by Eliade, Brown discusses the alteration of the conceptions regarding scientific theory formation, the new paradigm becoming that of the creative and imaginative insight rather than the step-by-step linear deduction/induction. New paradigms are not formed from the integration of new data, but rather from a relinquishing of the old paradigm (which necessarily implies an immersion in the chaos of undifferentiated perceptions), in order to come up with a new way of seeing the problem. From such a point of view Eliade's procedures, idiosyncratic as they may be, are not immediately open to criticism simply because they lack a repeatable linear progression.

Of the criticism of Eliade's "descending approach" (point 6 above), I will simply state here that Eliade's "assumption" concerning the ontological status of the sacred has been the source of most of the criticism marshalled against him. It is integral to the criticisms of Barbosa da Silva and Douglas Allen, which I inspect in the following sections, and I will leave those sections to answer it.

Similarly the 7th point is integral to the consideration of Robert Baird's criticism of "Normative Elements" and so may be passed over here. I would, however, like to point out that Brown passes with remarkable ease from "not value free" to "itself a religious programme". While an increasing number of scholars would accept that no investigation, and perhaps even no perception, can be value free, few of them would insist on the religious dimensions of that fact. However, in their eagerness to criticise Eliade, several scholars have argued precisely that; that because he is not utterly objective, he is religious (and vice versa). I rather doubt that Eliade could consider this a criticism, especially in the light of his claim that "to be - or, rather, to become - a man means to be 'religious.'"¹² Furthermore, a reading of Eliade's works suggests very strongly to me that his overriding personal concern is not to recover the religious values of the

¹² The Quest, preface.

archaic perspective.¹³ Rather it is to combat personal and collective despair, to generate individually and socially meaningful optimistic understandings of human existential conditions. He seems to perceive the modern secular values as having left humanity with little more than the common slogan, "the one who dies with the most toys wins".

Against points 8 and 9 Eliade accepts that

the great god of Heaven, the Supreme Being, Creator omnipotent, plays a quite insignificant part in the religious life of the tribe.¹⁴

It is not religion or myth as we commonly conceive them, anymore than it is the specific sacred/profane dichotomy as expounded by Eliade, which is held to preoccupy non-literate peoples. Rather it is the common human trait of focusing exclusively upon those elements of our experience which we have been predisposed to recognise as manifesting the real, the meaningful, the significant, and the powerful: that which Eliade recognises to be the sacred.

In fact, the difficulties of points 8 to 11 are largely terminological. To say that the sacred/profane dichotomy is not all-important, or that people are not preoccupied with religion, or that Eliade's treatment of myth is inaccurate because exclusively religious, depends very much on the prior understanding of the terms

¹³ cf. his denial in "Notes for a Dialogue" that he held the archaic to be exemplary. v.p. 57 above.

¹⁴ Patterns, p.47.

involved. It is quite clear in point 10 that anyone who levels such a criticism has simply failed to grasp Eliade's use of his terms. He obviously equates "tolerating" or "withstanding" the terror of history with "escape" from profane time. His critics do not. It must be remembered that the jivanmukta does remain in historical time, paradoxically transcending it. Escape does not imply removal from time but avoidance of the causal distress of temporal existence.¹⁵ Thus in fact "escape" is "coping with" time although this might be difficult to appreciate if escape is held to imply avoiding dealing with that which one escapes. As Eliade repeatedly states, this state is paradoxical, it partakes of the exemplary structure of the coincidentia oppositorum, it is by escaping time that one deals with it.

Similarly, if the inclusive meanings of sacred/profane, myth, and religion are grasped, these points are not problematic. Since both religion and myth lack pre-determined and widely accepted definitions, it is part of the task of the religion scholar to establish their own. Eliade's definitions, as we have seen, are mutually supportive and imply a ubiquity of religious orientations. In these terms myth is exclusively religious in orientation and the social functions are secondary (although not unimportant) to the religious

¹⁵ On the paradoxical state of the jivanmukta v. The Quest, p.169 and Images and Symbols, p.89.

orientation of the apprehension of the real in the myth. However, the 12th point immediately becomes involved here. Can Eliade simply pass off his interpretative categories and his implicit definitions despite the conscious refusal of many of his subjects? Must he not defer to what religious people themselves say about themselves? Eliade himself said of Durkheim that he "would have done better had he taken into account the work of his ethnological and anthropological colleagues".¹⁶ Brown considers Eliade's own defence against these pointed questions, and he states the latter's case for him.

First, he concurs with depth psychology that often persons grasp symbolism unconsciously while they are simultaneously unaware of it explicitly in the conscious mind. This working assumption probably accounts for his scant interest in the anthropologists' demand that one take as the primary control a people's explicit interpretation of its own symbols. Second, Eliade asserts that religious symbols, even those standing for the most inward human experiences, possess "cosmological values" which correlate closely with the objective features of the natural environment. These environmental features are directly accessible to inspection by the interpreter and are significantly uniform from the experience of one culture to that of another. Therefore, the interpreter can turn directly to them and not be stymied by an inability to occupy the subjective posture of the particular believer, nor predisposed to find only isolated and unique meanings for particular symbols when several diverse cultures are in view. Finally, Eliade believes that there is a "spiritual unity" to the human race more fundamental than its accidental historical divisions and differences. This belief demands that the interpreter deliberately stress those elements common to separate instances of a particular type of symbolism and play down their differences. Even if Eliade cannot convince his critics to share them,

¹⁶ Images and Symbols, p.23.

all three of these assumptions in concert show that he is well aware of how and why he handles the data as he does. (p.436.)

Despite his support in these areas Professor Brown considers two "systematic issues" as problematic in understanding Eliade. Firstly, Eliade's anti-reductionism, the "problematic assumption that religious phenomena are sui generis and not reducible to mere natural events". (p.435.) As I have indicated (especially concerning points 7, 10, 11 above) Brown has not fully grasped Eliade's theories as coherent. His understanding of religion as sui generis and of Eliade as anti-reductionist suffer the same lack of a coherent interpretation. It is rather the case that "religion" is not susceptible to one explanation since religion itself is an attempt to construct a total explanation of the human encounter with the real.

Secondly Brown considers Dudley's argument that Eliade's methodology should be reconceived as a research programme. One of the points which Brown goes on to make is of interest and can best be made by direct quotation.

If the interpreter should discount completely the possibility that the sacred (as an object of belief) actually could be a transcendent reality distinct from the believer's own consciousness and distinct from the natural and social environment itself, then his or her naturalistic interpretation would violate the integrity of that very human belief which is to be understood. The limited extent to which Eliade can pass muster as a phenomenologist in any very definite philosophical sense appears in this determination to honour rather than to dissolve the intentional structure of religious consciousness. But wholesale dissolution is just what the reductionistic social scientists demand when they insist a priori that the sum and substance of

religion comprises merely natural events and human cultural creativity. For them, one captures the true meaning and purpose of each rite and belief by giving an account of its purely natural functions in the life of the group or the individual. Against this naturalistic bias Eliade poses as a defender of the sacred as autonomous, as sui generis as something which must not be banished by a reductionist prestidigitation if one intends to take seriously the structure of belief as it is actually found in human experience. Because of his conviction that the independent reality of the sacred should be accepted as a "given", and also because he regards the sacred as having specific and relatively invariant structures Eliade does not see the historian of religions as bound to the narrow orthodoxies which constrain empirical social scientists. His perspective is broader and therefore presumably superior because it does not overlook the essence of religion as he thinks theirs does. Moreover, he is confident that by examining a sufficient number of examples he can get a handle on the essential structures of the sacred. All these assumptions taken together enable him to feel justified in "reading into" certain anthropological data more or different symbolic meanings than those which the anthropologists themselves find there by operating cautiously within narrowly empirical criteria. (pp.436-437.)

Firstly I agree wholeheartedly with Brown's analysis of the value of phenomenology in respect of the intentional structures of religious consciousness. The contentious nature of all descriptions, the theory-laden nature of fact, unavoidably implies the self-assertive nature of description. Even if one intends no more than a completely accurate description of a rite or belief then one's own intentional apprehension of complete accuracy will condition that description and make its truth dependent upon the "truth" of that apprehension. For the believer a description cannot be complete if it omits the essentially true relation of the creature to the creator, the fundamental dependence on the real, the conditional

and imperfect nature of human existence. In order to redeem our descriptions there must be a recognition of, a willingness to defer to, the intentional structure of those beliefs which we would describe. Actually this redemptive willingness is present, albeit muted, in the social sciences (as Brown describes them) in their desire to include "human cultural creativity" along with natural events. The recognition of the creativity of humanity, in Eliade's archaic terms, our imitation of and involvement in the primordial and archetypal creative event, the cosmogony, saves both humanity itself and the social scientific attempt to comprehend it from a total "fall into history". Strict bio-physical determinism cannot account for either the human will or the human ability to create.¹⁷ Creativity itself is a participation in Eliade's sacred time, a reactualisation of the mythic realities, evincing the structures of the emergence of form out of chaos, the re-emergence of life from its own dissolution.

However, caution must be exercised in seeing Eliade as a "defender of the sacred as autonomous". Brown is quite insistent on this phrase, repeating it at intervals throughout the remainder of his analysis: "the autonomous integrity of the sacred". (p.437) And

Eliade routinely supposes that uniformities in meaning of separate instances of religious symbolism derive from the nature of the sacred power

¹⁷ not yet, at least. I will consider the possibility of such an account later.

presenting itself through the symbolic objects.
(p.443)

I think it more consonant with Eliade's actual words to conclude that what he regards as autonomous and sui generis is the existential situation which constitutes and conditions the actual perception of this or that religious phenomena as real, as sacred.

Brown's mistake is quite apparent if one pays close attention to his words. He has himself fallen into the trap which he lists as argument 1b; he has interpreted an interpretation rather than the primary source. It is Dudley's insistence on the sacred as autonomous and independent which seems to have influenced Brown's vocabulary here rather than Eliade's own writing. The alternative interpretation, which is closer to the actual words of the original scholar, is that the sacred is eternal supreme reality and therefore that which manifests it or partakes of its structures possesses power. (Rather than "the sacred is an eternally real power".)

As it is the reality in which we dwell we cannot in any way possess the sacred, nor exhaustively describe it. Perhaps we could aspire to an exhaustive description of present spatio-temporal reality. However, the whole point here is that this is not exhaustive of the real; there are also subjective and even imaginary realities which are of enormous significance, and future realities which necessarily surpass our powers to predict because

the predictive models we can construct cannot bring about the result any faster than the reality being modelled.

So Brown's question

might not these common features which are purported to be manifestations of a supernatural reality, more appropriately be attributed to uniformities in the biological and psychological constitution of homo sapiens as it interacts with relatively constant features of natural objects which make up our environment, (p.428.)

once again misses the implications here. Those concepts which are used to represent the real, that which the real is said to be or thought to be, that which it is believed to be, are, of course, socially, culturally, and historically conditioned, including the biology, psychology, and physics to which Brown would appeal. As such they are not autonomous, not independent. That is to say that while the sacred as absolute reality might be fairly said to be independent, expressions of the sacred such as "God", "Jahweh", "Brahma", or "scientific fact" are not. The problem is that "absolute reality" is itself such an expression and so, in the last analysis, is not itself autonomous. What is held to be autonomous and independent is the human experience which constitutes the perception of the real and the human creativity which constitutes those expressions of the sacred which are capable of communicating that reality to others correctly predisposed to be able to decipher the communication.

Since religion is based on these self-authenticating perceptions and the total orientation based on them in turn, religion is sui generis in the sense that any claim

for the reality of a theory is thus itself religious and only the total study of all such self-authenticating intuitions of the real (the history of religions) can claim to be the unprejudiced interrogation of the real.

The fact that Brown interprets Dudley, and in so doing utilises the vocabulary determined by Dudley determines his own interpretation.¹⁸ Eliade's own vocabulary and terminology must be used to understand his intentionality. There is an important lesson to be learned here about the process of interpretation; one must become engaged with the vocabulary of a religion, on its own grounds, before one will understand the intentionality being represented. Even then one might still not share the intuition of the real intended, but it is a fundamental assumption of Eliade's analysis that it is the real which is intended in any religious expression.

This still leaves the problem of differentiating possible pseudo-religions. For example, what if L. Ron Hubbard, the founder of Scientology, did not himself perceive the reality of their main scripture, Dianetics as he wrote it? The point is that, whatever he perceived, certain of his followers do perceive the real

¹⁸ This is not to reject Dudley's important work on Eliade. I do not consider it in detail because the issue of the ontology and autonomy of the sacred is discussed with reference to other scholars. Other differences between Dudley's interpretation and mine are not at issue here. However, his important question as to the goals of "Eliade's Research Program" should be constantly borne in mind as my interpretation progresses.

here and it must be interpreted accordingly. This does concur with Eliade's insistence that anything can become a hierophany, which itself implies that the real is the undifferentiated sum total of all possibility. (So Eliade's system is not an "answer" itself but a method of allowing other answers to become accessible, meaningful, for one's consideration or simply for one's education.)

So Eliade's perception of the historian of religions as unconstrained by the narrowness of "orthodoxies which constrain empirical social scientists" is rather because of the insistence of the latter on a specific and a priori limitation of the working concept of the real. Of course, in exactly the same way, if historians of religions limit their working definition of reality to the dogmatic expressions of any one religious tradition, they too are narrowly constrained and, in fact, fail to be historians of religion so conceived.

In these lights, Brown's question, "does Eliade himself believe that the sacred is objectively real?" and even the statement of Ricketts that "as to what the real 'really' is, Eliade never ventures an answer"¹⁹ reveal a failure to comprehend Eliade's systematic thought and its implications. Eliade has made an a priori identification of the phenomenally real and the transcendent sacred. Obviously he cannot but believe then that the sacred is actually real. It is real both

¹⁹ op. cit., p.438 and Ricketts, "In Defense of Eliade," p.28.

on the level of the expressions of the sacred which are (or have been) apprehensions of the truly real and on the level of the final Being which is everything. Only if it be denied that humanity has believed in contrasting realities and that there is something real can these be seen as unwarranted assumptions.

7.2. Barbosa da Silva: the Ontology of the Sacred.

As mentioned in my chapter on "The Sacred" above, Antonio Barbosa da Silva analyses Eliade's sacred as a phenomenological term, which he further divides into "evaluative" and "theological" phenomenological terms, and as an ontological term, which he further divides into "meta-cosmic" and "transcendental-ontological" senses. These senses refer to the sacred as the cosmos as a whole and to the sacred as "the ultimate principle (Ur-Datum) of Eliade's creative hermeneutics".¹⁷ As I have said, I am broadly in agreement with da Silva's evaluation of the sacred as a phenomenological term, although he does not fully clarify what he means by the sacred as a "theological" phenomenological term. However, it is his analysis of the sacred as an ontological term with which I take issue.

Even as "the cosmos as a whole" and the "Ur-datum of Eliade's creative hermeneutics" one must question to what degree the sacred is given a necessary and independent ontology. As the cosmos as a whole it is undoubtedly

¹⁷ Barbosa da Silva, A. Phenomenology as a Philosophical Problem, 1982, p.175.

true that Eliade regards every minute element of cosmic existence as capable of revealing the sacred, as sacralisable, as potentially and inherently sacred, and thus as "real", simply because it exists. The sacred is disclosed in the manifest realm of historical being, in the existential world of historical time and physical space, which itself is ontological. To this extent it unquestionably partakes of the characteristic of being.

Similarly with the sacred as the ur-datum, the presuppositional given of Eliade's hermeneutics, this notion of the sacred is adjectival rather than substantial. It should be remembered that only after Durkheim's usage of the term as a noun was commonly employed in this way. In Eliade's use it evidently refers to a mode of experience, "a structure of the human consciousness",¹⁸ a relationship with the real, rather than the real itself. It is the very fact that the sacred as the real is perceived in so many modes, and that we carry our own inner certainty as to what is and is not "real" that permits, in fact positively encourages, so many varied interpretations of Eliade's thought and generates the almost unavoidable impression that he is describing an autonomous, independent ontology. However, detailed analysis of Eliade's writings without any prior assumption as to the referent of the sacred reveals that the sacred does not occur in

¹⁸ The Quest, p.i; No Souvenirs, p.1; and The History of Religious Ideas, vols. I-III, 1978, vol. 1. p. xiii.

any context independently of human perception. It is always presented as occurring in and through the act of its perception. It is always presented as an intentional object, without the question of its pure or proper intentionality actually being raised.

Again, this is by no means to deny its autonomy, but in the familiar Kantian structure of the noumenal/phenomenal dichotomy, it insists that the sacred is accessible only through its manifestations in historical forms. The function of the historian of religions is presumed to be the study of the historical manifestations of the sacred, which exist exclusively (for the historian of religions qua historian of religions) in those historical manifestations. For the committed religious believer the sacred might also be held to exist as an element of immediate experience, but that experience per se is the object of mystical theology. The expression of that experience as a historical datum is the proper object of the history of religions.

To affirm the independent ontology of the sacred as it is described by any individual, group, or tradition as a given is to step immediately beyond the bounds of the study of religion into the practice of a particular religion. And this Eliade does not do. However, the temptation to read Eliade as doing precisely that is enormous because of the language which he employs, identifying the sacred as the real. Yet the fact is that

he does not seem to conceive of sacrality independent of the act of its perception, leaving the sacred as a potential of human experience, possibly an abstract idea, but one which is nevertheless ubiquitous and unimaginably significant throughout human history.

Da Silva states that "an important question in this context is whether [a sacred object] really possesses some intrinsic properties which constitute a necessary condition for the sacredness of [that object] or not". He concludes that this must be the case as far as Eliade is concerned. He rejects the interpretation that "'sacred' means the same as that there is a religious person [who] ... perceives [some object] as sacred", (p.179.) on the grounds that the necessary condition for the perception of any object as sacred is that the object posses some intrinsic property which evokes or causes the numinous experience. Thus he concludes that

to say that an object is "sacred" means the same as that the necessary and sufficient condition for the object to manifest the sacred (to cause numinous experience) is that the object possess some inherent property, in virtue of which it will evoke numinous experience when it is contemplated by the religious person. (p.180.)

This leads further into the conviction that Eliade attributes some necessary independence to sacrality as a manifest property of sacred objects. However, both interpretations can be reconciled when it is realised that the only necessary inherent property that an object must posses in order to be sacralisable is existence, its own objecthood. "All nature is capable of revealing

itself as cosmic sacrality" for Eliade.¹⁹ Further, that there is no inherent property which is a sufficient condition to evoke numinous experience to any and all religious people. I repeat;

awareness of a miracle is only straightforward for those who are prepared, by their personal experience and their religious background to recognize it as such. To others the "miracle" is not evident, it does not exist.²⁰

Thus there need be no identifiable "inherent property" (apart from the fundamental one of existence) in the sacred object which could be equated with an ontologically independent sacrality. Thus the rejection of the former interpretation is not necessitated; the fact that an object exists and is perceived as sacred is the necessary and sufficient condition for its sacrality in Eliade's terms.

However, Eliade never actually stated this, and such a method of formulating a derived proposition and attributing it to Eliade can only lead to difficulties of interpretation. For example, da Silva directly attributes to Eliade the equation of archaic, "primitive" man with homo religiosus. (p.183.) Eliade never makes that statement per se and to limit his understanding of the religious person to archaic man is another unfounded supposition, undermined by Eliade's insistence that there is no solution of continuity between modern man and

¹⁹ The Sacred and the Profane, p.12.

²⁰ Mademoiselle Christina, from the French introduction of 1978, p.7. My translation.

primitive man, and that modern man "has not yet succeeded in abolishing the homo religiosus that is in him".²¹ Eliade's fundamental point is that the perception of the sacred qua the real (and the real qua the sacred) is the primary characteristic of homo religiosus, humanity in the religious mode. Thus da Silva's apprehension of Eliade as contrasting modern with archaic humanity is also inaccurate. Eliade is comparing rather than contrasting. Archaic man reveals more clearly than does modern man the mechanisms whereby the apprehension of the sacred gives value to the elements of mundane existence. This is not to say that herein lies the difference, the characteristic separation of archaic from modern, but that here is a concealed similarity, a continuity in all of humanity.

Of course this does, as da Silva recognises, leave the problem of

how to prove that the numinous experience is not an exclusive product of man's mind. If it is so, and if it has only a purely intended object, it can be regarded as a merely subjective experience. (p.182.)

I would suggest that the lack of "proof" of the independent existence of the sacred as the source of numinous experience is firstly itself characteristic of Eliade's self-imposed restriction to the history of religions as eschewing personal theological statements. It is thus evidence that Eliade does not insist on the sacred as a specific autonomous ontological entity,

²¹ No Souvenirs, p.164 and v. Patterns, p.463.

although his methodical openness to that possibility permits the alternative interpretation. Secondly this lack of proof is completely consistent with his morphology of religious history in which the sacred can only be manifest in historical actualities. Since it cannot otherwise be manifest, that is it cannot otherwise be experienced, it is not susceptible of proof either logically or empirically. The direct experience of believers is not itself communicable, and their subsequent expressions are always and necessarily historical and conditioned and thus proof of nothing but an experience whose intentionality cannot be established unless it be shared.²²

Da Silva has already accepted that

whether it [religious experience of the Divine Being as meta-cosmic reality] has a proper intentional object is a very controversial question into which we cannot go here. (p.70.)

He has made precisely the same evasion of the theological problem of the pure or proper intentionality of numinous experience as I insist that Eliade does. Yet he accuses Eliade both of assuming the proper intentionality of the sacred and of failing to provide any proof for this assumption. My point is that Eliade does not provide any proof for this assumption because he does not make it. In this same context I would point out that da Silva's

²² This lack of susceptibility to empirical proof leads to the criticism that religion finally lacks a proper object. This is further discussed in 7.5 below pp.279-294.

application of the subject/object dichotomy, especially his reduction to "merely subjective experience", (my emphasis) does not accurately reflect Eliade's thought. I hope to make my case elsewhere that Eliade make some moves towards transcending this occasionally unhelpful polarity, and would recognise nothing mere about subjective experience.

It is notable that da Silva has to introduce difficult qualifications into his use of the word ontology, such as the concept of "ontological objectivity in a non-empirical sense". (p.23.) He has also said that he will use the word in the strict sense of Husserl's material as opposed to formal ontology²³ and he describes these categories as ontological and phenomenal objectivity respectively. Thus it is something of a contradiction to speak of non-empirical ontology rather than utilising Husserl's formal ontology or his own term of phenomenal objectivity. In these terms Eliade's sacred would be a phenomenal object or formally rather than materially ontological. This is characteristic of the lengths to which one must go when one seeks to ascribe independent ontology to the sacred as it is conceived here.

The ontological senses of the sacred have become so qualified as to be of questionable validity. However, it cannot be proven to have properly intentional status and

²³ Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, pp.62ff.

evidently does not partake of material ontology in the Husserlian sense. Those senses in which the sacred can be said to be ontological "can be used in a purely phenomenological description, provided such a description makes clear whose intention they express, i.e. that of the scholar or that of the believer". (da Silva, p.185.) In what way, then, does it differ from the phenomenal sense of the term? It is a major feature of Eliade's writings that he never clearly expresses his own religious intention in this sense. His expressions are always on behalf of the believer. It must be allowed that he often does not make perfectly clear his appropriation of the intentional language of the believer in his attempt to reveal the truth or the "deep meaning" of the belief. Yet it is quite evident that Eliade cannot personally hold all the beliefs which he expresses and later critics have been all too ready to give quotations out of context and omit qualifying phrases such as "it might be said that", and "for the Christian..." thus giving the false impression of personal support for the statements which follow. This is especially true of the passage in Patterns relating to the Christian Incarnation as the supreme hierophany which "could be said to be" prefigured and thus predicted by all earlier examples of the hierophany of the sacred in the profane.²⁴

²⁴ v. Patterns, pp.29f.

7.3 Douglas Allen: Eliade's Ontological Assumptions.

This will be a necessarily limited treatment of Douglas Allen's excellent book on Eliade, which cannot hope to substitute for the reading of that work. My intention is to isolate and assess the most crucial central criticism of the thought of Mircea Eliade and determine whether it can be answered from within that thought as I have perceived it to be.

The fundamental criticism put forward in Allen's Structure and Creativity is that

Eliade's more-than-historical-explanation claim involves ontological judgements about the nature of the human being and experience. (p.178.)

The "non-historical" elements in Eliade's writings are considered to be finally unwarranted ontological "universals". For example in his essay on "Recent Works on Shamanism", Eliade stated that

as an experience, ecstasy is a non-historical phenomenon; it is a primordial phenomenon in that it is co-extensive with human nature. (p.154.)

Allen's suspicion of unwarranted ontological assumption

is supported by two related criticisms:

1. if Eliade insists that he has inductively generalised from the particular religious facts to his universal religious structures, then the aforementioned criticisms of his methodology seem justified. [i.e., that he makes hasty and uncritical generalisation and "reads into" the data meanings not actually present] (p.196.)

Secondly,

2. one may notice a certain ambiguity throughout Eliade's phenomenological analysis of what is revealed in religious experience. On the one hand Eliade usually interprets the revelatory experience by emphasising a fundamental "givenness" in experience and a definite passivity on the part of homo religiosus. ...

On the other hand, Eliade sometimes analyses the revelatory experience by emphasising a sense of activity and creativity on the part of homo religiosus. (p.181.)

That is to say that, if Eliade claims that he has logically induced the existence of universal entities, and that these universal entities are autonomous of humanity, capable of imposing their perceptions on a receptive and essentially passive observer, then he has thus made assumptions which are ontological and unwarranted by the available data, which would

take[s] him far beyond the descriptive and involve[s] highly normative judgements based on an assumed ontological position. (p.160.)

In order to understand this criticism it is advisable to consider Allen's approach to Eliade as a whole. Douglas Allen was broadly favourable to Eliade:

my position is that if Mircea Eliade, who is considered the foremost contemporary phenomenologist of religion, represents a methodological improvement over previous approaches, this is because of an impressive hermeneutical framework which serves as the foundation for his phenomenological approach to religious phenomena. (Author's Preface, p.xi.)

Thus it would seem that Allen's desire to ally Eliade with the phenomenological cause was essentially benevolent towards the older scholar. However, the whole question of whether or not Eliade actually was a "phenomenologist" is problematic, as Allen is well aware.

Neither Eliade nor his interpreters usually identify his approach with phenomenology. We are aware of no interpreter who has shown a relationship between Eliade's methodology and philosophical phenomenology. (p.108.)²⁵

However, Allen received Eliade's approval, as Eliade's foreword to this work clearly shows. Eliade doubtless concurred with Allen that the phenomenology of religion was more rationally respectable than the theological approach which Kenneth Hamilton had detected in Eliade's work and especially more so than the "mystical" approach which T. J. J. Altizer had found there.²⁶

However, neither of them could, at that stage, have been aware of the full implications of the attempt to assimilate Eliade to phenomenology. He is evidently not a phenomenologist in any strict sense of the word. He is not a follower of Husserl, and while influenced by the leading phenomenologists of religion, Otto, van der Leeuw, and Wach, he does not deliberately pursue any line

²⁵ Here Allen rather surprisingly neglects Baird's chapter "Phenomenological Understanding: Mircea Eliade," published in his Category Formation and the History of Religions in 1971, one year before Allen's first article was published, and in the same Religion and Reason series as published Allen's book seven years later. Allen does mention this later, p.176, n.5, p.230, n.31.

²⁶ V. Allen p.129 and my bibliography.

of research instituted by these scholars. Nor is Eliade's vocabulary indicative of the characteristic foci of phenomenology, epochē, for example, or eidetic vision. Although he does repeatedly express the opinion that the student of religious phenomena is interested in deciphering the meanings of religious phenomena, this is always done to emphasise the goal of meaning rather than any specific method of phenomenology. Eliade several times emphasises this goal of meaning without reference to the method of phenomenology.²⁷ That Eliade had initial reservations about the phenomenological approach is indicated by his approving citation in 1955 of Raffaele Pettazzoni as revealing that "the only way to escape the dangers" of a phenomenological interpretation "consists of constantly referring to history".²⁸

In fact, it would seem that the attraction of "phenomenology" for the scholar of religion resides almost exclusively in the emphasis which the term places upon the object of study as actual, extant phenomena of the external world as opposed to purely internal states or beliefs. Eliade's position as a phenomenologist consists almost entirely in the fact that he insists that our interpretations of religious data must be based on the data, on actual historical sources, i.e. from the phenomena of religion. The stress placed upon the

²⁷ egs. Australian Religions, pp.xvi, 200; "The Sacred in the Secular World," pp.101ff.

²⁸ "Mythology and the History of Religions," p.100.

intentional structures of the religious consciousness is also an important area of common ground. (v.p.240 above) Both can be seen to be drawn as much from Eliade's deliberations concerning the Trairist movement in inter-war Romania, and from his own personal philosophy, as from any influence by Husserlian or any other kind of philosophical phenomenology.²⁹

This is not to reject Allen's careful analysis of the similarities between Eliade's methodology, or his hermeneutical framework, and phenomenology, but it is to warn against the procrustean fitting of the former to the latter. For example, although there is a movement from the individual to the universal in both it should not then be simplistically assumed that the meaning of a religious phenomenon for Eliade is the same as the essence of the phenomenon for the philosophical phenomenologist.

Eliade has said that religion "does not necessarily imply belief in God, gods, or ghosts, but refers to the experience of the sacred".³⁰ Allen has gone on to inquire as to what precisely the sacred is, phenomenologically speaking. He then draws his understanding of this element of Eliade's thought, not wholly from Eliade's writings, but in part from phenomenologists of religion who are held a priori to

²⁹ v. above pp.19-21 and n.11, also Ricketts, Romanian Roots, pp.96-98.

³⁰ Preface to The Quest, p.i.

have ideas in common with Eliade. The sacred may be described as a "Power", (van der Leeuw), as "wholly other", (Otto), as "ultimate reality", (Wach). (pp.120f.) Allen recognises Eliade's usage of a wide variety of terms related to the sacred, such as "absolute reality, being, eternity, divine, and also metacultural, transhistorical, transhuman, transmundane, and the source of all life and fecundity".³¹ He concludes that "Eliade seems to be indicating that religion always entails some aspect of transcendence". (p.121.) This may in fact be correct, the second group of terms do indicate transcendence, but transcendence of specific, known "modes of being;" the cultural, the historical, the human, and the mundane. This is no way necessarily involves an ontological transcendent: the transcendent, which goes beyond everything and thus has independent, unconditioned existence. While it does not exclude such a possibility, it does not posit it as a necessary assumption.³² In fact, the even simpler interpretation is to assume that by transhistorical Eliade meant "not subject to historical dissemination"; by transhuman, "common to the human condition"; and by transmundane, "ubiquitous".

³¹ v. Allen, p.121, and eg. Rites and Symbols, p.130, Yoga, p.165, The Sacred and the Profane, p.28.

³² In fact, that Jay Kim can infer from Eliade's understanding of hierophanies that we can only conceive of transcendence because the sky is there (p.25 above), militates towards a dependent, conceptual transcendence.

In terms of such an interpretation, it is no real criticism to comment that "Eliade intends this sense of transcendence to be viewed as a universal structure of religion". (p.121.) The concept of exceeding the merely historical, the mundane, and the biologically human is, by definition, universal in Eliade's understanding of religion. In order to challenge such a contention, one would need to adduce some religious phenomena which had no conceivable reference to the transcendence of human and temporal limitations or conditions, and successfully defend its status as religious.

Allen recognises that "Eliade must not be confused with the numerous scholars who hold metaphysical positions concerning transcendence". (p.122.) For example, Eliade is distinguished from C. J. Bleeker who held that "the value of the religious phenomena can be understood only if we keep in mind that religion is ultimately a realisation of a transcendent truth".³³ Eliade put his name to a document, the so-called "Marburg platform" drafted by Zwi Werblowski, which includes a positive and direct refutation of Bleeker's statement as "outside the terms of reference of Religionswissenschaft".³⁴

³³ "The Future Task of the History of Religions," p.227. Quoted by Allen, p.122.

³⁴ Numen 7 (1960), p.237, v. *ibid.*, pp.215-240 for a discussion of the platform taken by certain scholars at the 10th International Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions in Marburg, September 11-17, 1960.

Although he is aware of the possibility of "a purely descriptive and secular sense of transcendence", (p.121.) without actual textual support, Allen insists on a differentiated "religious" sense of transcendence. "What differentiates the religious sense of transcendence is its special normative basis for homo religiosus." (ibid.) What Allen seems to have done is to have constructed a possible descriptive characteristic of the sacred - its "special normative basis for homo religiosus", but then to introduce another term, "transcendence", (not actually employed by Eliade who talked of transhistorical, transhuman, as we have seen), under the influence of the "other" phenomenologists of religion. In so doing Allen destroys his own interpretation of Eliade as a phenomenologist by insisting upon a necessarily abstract and thus non-phenomenal category, the transcendent, as a universal structure of religion. Eliade himself does not appear to do so in his writings. For example, that the sky gods, whose primary characteristic is transcendence, tend to become dei otiosi rather undermines this emphasis on transcendence.

It must be granted that the section which Allen quotes from The Sacred and the Profane (pp.202ff., Allen, p.122.) does define and differentiate religious and non-religious humanity in terms of transcendence: "homo religiosus always believes that there is an absolute reality, the sacred, which transcends this world but manifests in this world, thereby sanctifying it", and

"non-religious man refuses transcendence, ... In other words, he accepts no model for humanity outside the human condition". However, it can be seen that the "transcendence" involved is the relatively simple transcendence of actual, determined, conditioned human existence by some exemplary model. Once again, this does not imply any independently ontological transcendent entity; any fictional hero can fulfil these requirements.

Furthermore, as I pointed out above (p.86 and ch.5, §.2.) the most fundamental distinction applied by Eliade throughout The Sacred and the Profane is actually that of the homogeneity and the heterogeneity of time, a distinction which Allen almost totally ignores. As the most basic of handbooks on the social construction of ideas or of reality will immediately inform the reader, time is one of the categories most susceptible to the active construction of human conceptualisation.³⁵ In emphasising this distinction as fundamental to religious humanity Eliade answers Allen's debate over the "givenness" of the hierophany or the "creativity" of the believer (pp.181-190.) quite positively on the side of creativity. It must be concluded that Allen's insistence on Eliade as a phenomenologist has resulted in his over-emphasis on the ontology of the transcendent and a concomitant de-emphasis on the active role of humanity in our religious aspect in constituting the hierophany.

³⁵ v. eg. The Sociology of Knowledge, David Glover and Sheelagh Strawbridge, pp.2-7.

However, Allen's conclusion is none the less problematic. It is that Eliade

is making general judgments about the human mode of being in the world and the human condition as such; and on the basis of such judgments, he is claiming that the "historicistic philosophies" of Hegel, Marx, Dilthey, and others cannot defend the modern Western human being from the terror of history.

Now such a procedure clearly involves an ontological stance. On what basis can Mircea Eliade proceed beyond his perspectival limitations? Isn't he guilty of the same reductionism he attacked ...? It would appear that Eliade assumes that the structures of religious experience ... reveal fundamental structures of the human mode of being generally. (p.236.)

Allen's own defence against these troubling questions is that "such an ontological move is founded on and informed by the primary symbolic structures". (p.237, italics original.) That is to say that

symbols serve as "ciphers" of reality. We can decipher the meanings of such ciphers in an infinite variety of ways and on many planes of interpretation. (p.238.)

However, he has to continue that

Mircea Eliade, on his levels of greatest generalisation, is involved in a reductionist analysis, which, if he upholds his previously elucidated methodological principles, probably pushes his phenomenology of religion beyond the proper domain of the History of Religions. (p.242.)

While I am immediately suspicious of any statements about the "proper domain" of the study of religion, because such statements frequently conceal uncritical a priori judgements, and while I maintain that Eliade is a phenomenologist in only the loosest sense of the word, it must be recognised that Allen has uncovered a real difficulty here. There is an inescapable circularity to

the fact that Eliade has moved from the "primary symbolic structures" to conclusions about the real nature of human existence and the actual existential condition of humanity. According to Eliade's own thought (or rather, my exposition of it so far), the symbols of flight, of the moon, of the lost paradise, actually constitute hierophanies for Eliade. That is to say they are apprehended by him as self-authenticating revelations of the real. To refer to analogies I have used elsewhere, he claims to "get the joke" or to understand the language of symbolism. But how can this be verified?

Ultimately I cannot imagine how such a claim can be liable to rational verification. However, it is indicative of Eliade's success that he identifies the real as the source of meaning and meaning as the significant ordering of elements within a cosmos. I believe that Eliade would agree with Charles Long's assessment of revelation as an "ordering principle".

Man's world is an ordered world of meaning, but the organising principle is interpreted as a revelation which comes from a source outside his ordinary life. It is the source which is given (revealed) and [it] defines any future possibility of man's existence.³⁶

Thus, the fact that that which Eliade has apprehended as the real has allowed him to order a massive amount of data into a coherent oeuvre militates towards the recognition of the truth of his vision. Of course, I am aware of the circularity of this defense; if Eliade's

³⁶ Alpha: the Myths of Creation, N.Y.: George Brazillier Inc., 1963, p10-11. Quoted by Allen, p.128.

oeuvre be initially apprehended as incoherent, then he must have failed to have perceived the real in what he apprehended as hierophanies and his whole structure topples. To put it bluntly; just because he wrote a lot about a lot doesn't make him right. However, I hope I have allayed a certain amount of the suspicion often felt against such circularity of argument in my discussion.³⁷

In conclusion of this specific section I can only say that if the final ontological status of the sacred be held in abeyance as a problem for theology or the philosophy of religions, then those ontological claims which Eliade does undoubtedly make do not seem excessive. It is a necessary concomitant of this refusal of the indubitable autonomous ontology of the transcendent as it is apprehended by an individual or group, that the active, creative role of humanity in the apprehension of reality will be increasingly emphasised.

³⁷ v. eg. pp. 127, 202, 206, 373, 397f.

7.4. Robert Baird. Normative Elements.

Robert Baird's chapter on "The Category of Understanding" in his book entitled, Category Formation and the History of Religions, includes a section on "Phenomenological Understanding: Mircea Eliade". This section is well worth reading in its own right and explains Eliade's understanding of symbols, myths, and rites well, up to a certain point. However, Baird has failed fully to appreciate Eliade's meanings, as we shall see.

His major criticism of Eliade is that not only does he make an unwarranted assumption of the ontology of the sacred as da Silva and Allen have both claimed, but that this leads him to "normative" statements which are unsupportable and unacceptable in a supposedly unbiased academic study. Firstly, Eliade "proceeds under the essential-intuitional approach". (p.74.) That is to say he employs

a method in which the historian of religions does not recognise a need to begin his work with a

definition of "religion", thereby marking the limits and extent of his study. This method assumes that we all know what is meant by the word, and that, given room for accidental differences, "religion" is essentially unambiguous. This introduces the other aspect of this method: essentialism or realism. It means (by implication and by method) that religion is something out there whose "essence" can be apprehended by the historian of religions. (p.2.)

Eliade proceeds to accord ontological status to religion and to the sacred without clear definition. His assertions concerning the structures formed by symbols are

based on an implied ontology which is nowhere philosophically defended. This ontological stance is most apparent when clear hierophanies are used to clarify the intention of obscure "hierophanies". Such a hermeneutic is possible only if one assumes not only that the sacred has ontological status, but also that its structures (and hence the system of symbolism) also have ontological status. (p.77.)

The final flaw in Eliade's analysis comes, as Baird sees it,

when it is suggested that modern man is poorer because his cosmos has been desacralised, because the human body or the process of eating is no longer a sacrament, a shift has been effected - a shift made possible only because an ontological basis has already been posited. If not before, then at least here it is clear that Eliade is not dealing with what men have held to be sacred, but with the structures of the sacred. His focal point is not only the subjective, but also the objective and hence ontological. Not only are the hierophanies which he describes hierophanies for those involved, but they are in fact hierophanies. One would normally expect further argumentation when a shift is made from the apparently descriptive to the normative. Here, however, an ontology has been posited from the start. (p.87.)

Here Eliade has moved, provoked by his assumption of the real ontology of the sacred and of those symbolic structures which reveal that reality, to an assumption

that "archaic man is the most authentic", and thus provides the norm of human behaviour. He has moved from a description and analysis of historico-religious phenomena to a stance on how things ought to be and to an attempt to influence the behaviour of his readers. This is not only unacceptable for a detached scholar, but

as with all normative understanding, if the norm proves erroneous, one no longer has understanding at all, but rather misunderstanding. Hence if the universal structures on which Eliade bases his understanding of the religious data should turn out to be non-existent, then his approach would result in misunderstanding as well. (p.91.)

This apparently strong argument, however, proves specious on close inspection. Firstly, as I argued above in connection with Barbosa da Silva's apprehension of archaic man as fundamentally differentiated from modern man, this is simply not the case. Homo religiosus represents humanity in its religious aspect and is the connecting, and not the differentiating characteristic between modern and archaic man. So archaic man is certainly not seen as the "norm", although there is a sound reason in the structured thought of Mircea Eliade for suggesting that the traditional and archaic is more authentic, as we shall see.

Secondly, the suggestion that modern man is the poorer for the desacralisation of his cosmos, which Eliade certainly does make, is not a value judgement based on the assumed ontology of the sacred. Rather it is a lamentation for the confusion of sacred and profane, for the concealment of the sacred within the profane, and

at the very least, for the concomitant lack of self-awareness. As Douglas Allen puts it, Eliade

maintains that our limiting views of the human mode of being in the world and the human condition have not allowed us to understand our own behaviour. This has led to self-deception and impoverished sensitivity and creativity.³⁷

This may be compared to what Gadamer calls "the tyranny of hidden prejudice".³⁸ In the identification of the sacred and the profane modern man has lost the capacity to recognise clearly the different levels of significance involved, and the processes whereby they are differentiated. Eliade's focal point can still be the subjective; it is a personal impoverishment by a subjective lack of understanding which he is bemoaning.

Thirdly, the hierophanies which he describes he quite positively states, do not exist for those who are not prepared to recognise them.³⁹ Again there is no shift from the descriptive to the normative, apart from the fact that all descriptions are persuasive and theory-laden as I have said, and thus all description assumes a normative base in one's ability to talk about reality at all.

Fourthly there is no necessary assumption of an independent ontology as I have consistently argued. Once again Eliade is opened up to the superficially accurate

³⁷ Structure and Creativity, p.244.

³⁸ Gadamer, Truth and Method, p.270.

³⁹ Eg. the quotation from the introduction to Mistress Christina given above p.210.

criticism that he fails to support an assumption, when he has not in fact made such an assumption. It should be borne in mind that, while Eliade can be accurately described as insisting that hierophanies are not only hierophanies for the believer but are in fact revelations of the real, behind his assertion is the structure which insists that everything could be a hierophany. Any object which exists, any event which occurs could be an hierophany. Everything which is, reveals the true nature of being because it is. Of course, the true nature of being is only partially revealed in each event or object, it is simultaneously partially occluded. This is precisely Eliade's understanding of the dialectic of hierophany. It is based on no more of an ontological assumption than that something exists, that the world we inhabit is real. Only if he were to deny the validity of such an assertion could Baird finally maintain his claim that Eliade's posited ontology is unacceptable.

However, the question remains as to the "normative" nature of Eliade's judgements as to the benefits or detriments of the recognition or refusal of specific hierophanies as being revelatory of the true nature of the human mode of being. As Baird says,

once one sees "the sacred" or "religion" as an ontological reality and once one operates as though its structures are also ontologically real, having identified these structures one has discovered reality. It then follows that those whose lives are lived in the sacred as completely as possible are the most authentic since they exist closest to reality. (p.87.)

This is a remarkable example of Eliade's concept that one need not understand the meaning of a revelation to communicate it, that meaning can be independent of authorial intention. From the context it is not unreasonable to assume that Baird intends this statement as a refutation of Eliade's ideas. He intends to reveal the unwarranted arrogance of the "normative" stance which insists that religious believers are in some wise superior to their fellow, but secular, humanity. However, Baird has not fully understood the meanings of Eliade's thought and so is unaware of the implications of his own statement. It is true that, according to Eliade's definitions, "those whose lives are lived in the sacred as completely as possible are the most authentic since they exist closest to reality". But, in order to be consonant with those definitions, this should be interpreted as follows: Once one recognises the reality of the sacred for the believer and once one has identified the structures which transmit and maintain that specific apprehension (this sacred = the real) then one has discovered a fact of human existence. It then follows that those who recognise the structures which identify the real in their own lives have the most authentic existence since they exist in the awareness of the facts, i. e., more completely in the real, the sacred. It is the mistaken apprehension of an ontological distinction between religious and "non-religious" humanity which implies a normative judgement.

Eliade is not insisting that humanity should be religious. He is pointing out that, in truth, we are religious.

To live one's life as fully as possible in the sacred is then to be aware of the sources of one's own apprehensions of the real, of one's own hierophanies, one's own religion.

In the end Baird's striking and often repeated accusation that Eliade "assumed that there is something out there that corresponds to the term 'religion' or 'the sacred,' and also that the historian of religion can identify it intuitively" (p.74.) can be seen to be a procedural assumption of his own analysis. It relies entirely on the assumption that Eliade proceeds under the essential-intuitional approach described above, in other words that he does not attempt to define religion or the sacred. Baird's reasoning is in fact tautological, viciously circular. Eliade is accused of presuming the ontology of the sacred because he must assume that he can intuit its essence because he uses the essential-intuitional approach, which is to say that he gives no definition of his object, because he assumes its prior ontology. It could equally be argued that Eliade does not need to presume the independent ontology of the sacred because he assumes that the word religion, and also the word sacred, has a meaning and can thus be used meaningfully whether its referent is autonomous or not, and that its meaning will be revealed through its use.

However, such tautological argument as this is convincing only to people with a predisposition to be convinced by it. I would argue that it is Baird's predisposition to refuse to recognise the definitions given throughout Eliade's writings which is most clearly revealed here.

Baird accepts that Eliade's goal is the understanding of homo religiosus, but he sees that category "not as an historical but an archetypal religious man", of whom "no one person is the complete embodiment" but "archaic man comes closest to this model of authentic existence". (p.86.) Thus Baird's predisposition to recognise a radical distinction between religious and non-religious man has prepared the ground for his major argument that Eliade assumes archaic humanity to be the norm of human existence; the way we ought to be. It is indicative that Baird uses language like "modern man has been guilty of desacralising the universe and is reaping the just deserts", (p.77.) which Eliade nowhere employs, when the context suggests that Baird is simply paraphrasing Eliade.

Rather it is the case that Eliade's history of religions indicates that there are structures which dictate or determine the immediate apprehension of a given experience as "real" or "unreal". These structurally determined apprehensions condition human activity. To insist that our particular apprehensions of reality, conditioned as they are by structures of meaning

or significance, are reality is simplistically to deny the relevance of the data of the history of religions. Also it is to conceal or reduce the reverence properly felt for the revelatory sources of the real. One final outcome of this is that we could not possibly hope to appreciate the significance of the ritual-mythical-symbolic elements of religions other than our own as hierophanies, that is to say, as actual perceptions of significance greater than the mere significance of random or accidental phenomena.

The affirmation or denial of the ontological reality of the sacred as expressed in a specific religious tradition is actually irrelevant to the study of religions. As an expression the ontology is open to verification. (Or falsification, if it be preferred.) For example, that some people have considered a black-skinned, voluptuous female with bloodied lips, decorated with a garland of dead infants and human heads to be the highest expression of divinity, the one most worthy of worship, can be factually verified. Once verified, its ontology as an expression of the real is no longer open to doubt. This expression is seen as exemplary, determinative of the behaviour of some people. Obviously, it is no simple imitatio dei which is implied here. The believer does not attempt to simply and directly emulate the figure which expresses the nature of the real, (there are intermediate religious figures which court direct imitation). However, having conceived of

the great goddess in this form one acts accordingly; as if life were ultimately benevolent and desirable, but also ultimately intimidating, capable of terrible violence, especially when set on the path of violence by conflicting forces.⁴⁰ Thus the hierophany has ontology as an hierophany, and it has effect as exemplary, but at no point is it necessary to debate the independent ontological existence of the sacred behind the hierophany. In fact it could be argued that such a debate is not only irresolvable, but is finally impossible, since it is only the expressions of the sacred, of the real, which can be brought under scrutiny, never the sacred itself.

⁴⁰ cf. my article, "Kālī: the Terrible Goddess of Hindu Tantra." Journal of Religious Studies of the University of Patiala, 42 no.2 (1989):27-34.

7.5 Hans Penner: Symbolism Without an Object.

Hans Penner's critique of Eliade's understanding of symbols was published in German in 1967 in the journal Antaios under the title "Bedeutung und Probleme der Religiösen Symbolik bei Tillich und Eliade".⁴¹ Although it was originally written in English I have worked from the German. I am sure that Bridgitte Weitbrecht's translation is quite adequate and so any weaknesses in the re-translation are my own.

To follow Penner's example and plunge directly into the substance of his critique, it is this:

both [Tillich's and Eliade's] opinions have the same problem based on the so-called monopolar fallacy (monopolaren Trugschluß) which leads to a pansymbolism without a proper object (Bezugsobjekt), in short, it is the problem of a phenomenology of religion without a defined (beschreibendes) object, for the object is, and remains, "wholly other".
(p.127.)

This concept of the monopolar fallacy is derived from the introduction to Philosophers Speak of God, by Charles Hartshorne and Willian Reese, pp.1-25, where it is most commonly referred to as the monopolar prejudice.

Hartshorne describes a "crude and one-sided" tendency in the history of the philosophy of religion which consists of

taking each pair of ultimate contraries, such as one and many, permanence and change, being and becoming, necessity and contingency, the self-sufficient or non-relative versus the dependent or relative, the

⁴¹ Antaios 9 (1967):127-143.

actual versus the potential, one decides in each case which member of the pair is good or admirable and then attributes it ... to deity. (pp.1f.)

Thus one makes

the assumption that the highest form of reality is to be indicated by separating or purifying one pole of the ultimate contrasts from the other pole. ... This may be called the "monopolar" conception of deity - and the principle involved, that of "monopolarity". (p.2.)

The preceding inspection of Eliade's interest in the coincidentia oppositorum should suffice to give the reader confidence that this is not a crudity that can be attributed to Eliade. In fact, Eliade's notion of the sacred as that in which all attributes coincide and in which all distinctions are surpassed clearly concurs with Hartshorne's recommendation that "we must equally affirm both poles of each pair of ultimate contraries", (p.4.) and resembles what the latter calls the "theory of dipolarity" much more closely than the monopolar prejudice. However, it would not be prudent to sweep aside Hans Penner's objection in this way. He has obviously seen some one-sidedness in Eliade's position which needs careful consideration.

After boldly stating his conclusions on his first page, Penner goes on to outline Tillich's understanding of symbols as follows;

1. they have a pictorial quality (Bildqualität) in so far as their deeper meaning is always contained in them, so they are always self-evident. They give access to a level of reality not accessible to the empirical, conceivable world.
2. they are graphic rather than sensible, confrontational, or notional structures of meaning.

3. they have inherent significance which is neither arbitrarily based nor accidentally arrived at; they are not liable to the characteristic arbitrariness of signs.

5. they make clear that which notional, sensible, and manifest reality leaves implicit, they represent or are transparent to the final essential ground of Being itself.⁴²

Tillich's analysis does have certain points in common with Eliade's, particularly the first, but also considerable differences. For example, Eliade avoids the problematic claim of transparency which leads Penner to point out that, according to Tillich,

all religious expressions for the "unconditioned transcendent" or Being-in-itself are transparent. There are no religious phenomena which are not symbolic in this way, so it is only while some non-figurative expression of their proper object is possible that god is Being-in-itself.

Penner concludes specifically of Tillich's analysis that "God exists only as a symbol"; God is not Being-in-itself because that would be a non-figurative expression, while it is agreed that all statements about God are, in fact, symbolic. Of both Tillich and Eliade, he later says,

the monopolar emphasis leads in Tillich and in Eliade to a limitation to experience. This one-sidedly stressed dualism levels the way for pansymbolism which excludes nonsymbolic description of the proper object of the symbol.⁴³

After his treatment of Tillich, Penner goes on to outline Eliade's description of religious symbols from "Methodological Remarks". Since that outline is given

⁴² Abstracted from Penner, p.128, and in turn from various works of Tillich, v. Penner, op. cit., p.142 n.2.

⁴³ *ibid.*, pp. 129, 130, 142.

above in greater detail I will not reproduce it here.

(pp.93f.) Penner, however, includes an ongoing critique. In connection with Eliade's first contention (religious symbols are capable of revealing a modality of the real not evident on the level of immediate experience), Penner points out that

the statement that symbolic significance precedes reflection implies that the rational process itself presumes a symbolic meaning. In other words conscious reflection is supported on a symbolic foundation which contributes to an understanding of reality and promotes an orientation in the world. The symbolic orientation is extended to or leads to later reflection. (p.135.)

Of 2. (Symbols are always religious because they point to something real or to a structure of the world):

a symbol is in so far as it signifies something, but in and of itself it is not the signified being. This significance of the symbol includes for Eliade an ontology even if, as in an archaic tradition, that ontology is not systematised. As we will see, this ontology is connected closely with that of Tillich and with the same monopolar problem. (p.136.)

Penner does not really criticise 3. (which insists on the multivalence of the symbol) but contents himself with a simple restatement.

Of 4. (the symbol is able to reveal a perspective in which heterogenous realities are susceptible of articulation into a whole): Penner points out that Eliade's

presentation of the meaning of religious symbols forms an exact parallel to his description of the problem of the history of religions. To my mind the best example of this is the significance of religious symbols as an integrated coherent unity and the work of interpretation as the integration of the various phenomena of religion into a unified

coherent correlation. This exemplifies the principle that "the method must fit the phenomenon". (ibid.)

Having made these specific points Penner goes on to say that Eliade "employs the expression 'religious symbol' in at least three ways". Firstly, any object can become a symbol.

Objects, the sun, the moon, a river, a tree, a name, are symbols of a specific religious history. They spring from the world of everyday experience and come to bear a new significance. The second usage of symbol in Eliade's thought is connected with the notion of archetypes. Eliade represents these archetypes as universal models generated from a unified, coherent system. Symbolic objects reveal or manifest these universal patterns. From reading Eliade's books and articles one finds that one is first and foremost concerned with this plane of symbolism. (p.137.)

In this connection Penner mentions the cosmic tree, ascension, water symbolism, lunar and solar symbolism.

Furthermore, both preceding uses of symbolism appeal to the sacred.

The sacred as such is the unmeditated, unapproachable experience. It is paradoxical that it can be made manifest at all. Eliade understands this paradox as the manifestation of being, of the absolute, the unconditioned, and the eternal in the profane. It is opposed to becoming, to the relative, the conditioned, and the finite world. Here it becomes apparent that Eliade shares Tillich's monopolar notion of the sacred as the final proper object of all religious symbols. This use of the term symbol is the central premise of Eliade's interpretation of the history of religions. The dialectic between the duality of the sacred and the profane modes of being does not allow the profane to become the sacred. That means that the profane never becomes the sacred.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ ibid., p. 139. This statement is an almost verbatim repetition of the misapprehension of the dialectic of the sacred made by Thomas Altizer discussed (and, I think, refuted) above, pp.50ff. I quote the

Penner continues,

it should now be clear that immediate, everyday experience is equivalent to the profane. The profane mode of being is equivalent to becoming, the unreal, non-being, subjective reality, and illusion. Between the two worlds is the experience of humanity in its prevalent factual alienation.⁴⁵ At this boundary the delineated ontological premises stay explicitly on the side of Being and the eternal, which in itself is wholly other than becoming and the temporal world.

Each structure of religious symbolism from the individual symbol to the universal archetype and the hermeneutics of the sacred inhere within the symbolic significance. The symbol indicates something which is also symbolic. The sacred can be only symbolic and have no object. ... The circle is complete, the dilemma of pansymbolism appears expressed in this opinion of symbols with reference to a hierarchy of symbolic significance. The monopolar misjudgment resides in the one-sided understanding of the sacred as Being, the Absolute, and wholly other. (p.140.)

Nor, indeed, is this powerful critique reserved for the understanding of symbolism as expressed by Paul Tillich and Mircea Eliade. Penner forges ahead to state that

a phenomenological enquiry into religion which grounds itself in the sacred, the meta-empirical (the wholly other) cannot, by definition, describe the object which religious symbols characterise or indicate. As we see, it is thus wrong to speak of a religious or sacred object at all as we once again apprehend these expressions symbolically. Such a phenomenology of religion remains pansymbolic and the development of this phenomenology into a

German here to ensure that there is no mistaking the sense. »Die Dialektik zwischen der Dualität der heiligen und der profanen Seinsweise verwandelt das Profane nicht in das Heilige. Das bedeutet, daß das Profane nie zum Heiligen wird.«

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.140. There is some problem with the text here: it reads, »Zwischen den beiden Welten und der Erfahrung des Menschen in ihnen herrscht tatsächlich Entfremdung«. Since there is no verb I assume the erroneous substitution of »und« for »ist«.

metaphysical system, explicit in Tillich, implicit in Eliade, only further reveals this pansymbolism to defer to a very abstract, notionally contrived symbolism. (p.141.)

Here it becomes evident that this article is a precursor of Penner's piece of three years later, "Is Phenomenology a Method for the Study of Religion".⁴⁶ Here, following the same logic, he concludes that

if, then, a phenomenology of religion can be actualised, it would seem that the sacred as a subject, or reality wholly other must be denied. Or, conversely, if the history of religions is grounded upon the sacred as in principle wholly other, being-in-itself, then a phenomenology of religion becomes an impossibility. A phenomenology of religion as a pure description only prolongs the problem; it does not overcome it. (ibid., p.38.)

It would appear that Hans Penner has, to a certain extent, anticipated my defence of Eliade against the ontological accusations of his other critics. It would seem that the only way to avoid these criticisms is to deny the ontological reality of the sacred, which leaves religion devoid of a proper object, and symbolism with nothing to symbolise. In response to this I would argue that, finally, the autonomous existence of the sacred is a matter for theology and is irrelevant to a phenomenology of religion. Real existence is itself an interpretative category which becomes applicable only in interpretation based on personal subjective intuition (which is all interpretation). The history of religions as conceived by Eliade is founded upon the sacred qua the taxonomic assumption of a reality inherent in all

⁴⁶ The Bucknell Review, 18 no.3 (1970):29-54.

religious phenomena. However, the applied taxonomy is based on the actual experience or perception of reality which is itself conditioned by previous experience, by culture, and by "archetypal intuitions".

It should further be said that if conscious reflection is supported by a symbolic foundation, as Penner understands Eliade to suppose, then nothing escapes Penner's critique. Nothing can finally be described other than symbolically. This seems to be in accordance with the deconstructionist critique of the limitations of language.⁴⁷ Thus Eliade's symbolism is not especially vulnerable to this claim of pansymbolism. The fact that the referent of religious symbols can never be apprehended on the empirical plane as other than the referent of symbolism does not immediately deny its real existence. Objects of experience can be genuine intentional objects even if they are experienced as an element of inward subjective reality.⁴⁸ It is central to Eliade's position that to deny reality to subjective experience, or even to hierarchise ontology with "subjective" as lesser than "objective" experience is a religious perception characteristic of modern Western humanity, and is putative. The exhaustive identification of ontology, of being, with material manifest existence, is what Eliade identifies as the complete concealment of

⁴⁷ v. eg. Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology.

⁴⁸ v. eg. Berger and Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality, p.20.

the sacred in the profane.

Penner's insistence on the restriction of the referent of religious symbolism itself to the level of symbol is finally no criticism. Since the true symbol is a hierophany, the symbol is a manifestation of the real, the real has initially been restricted to the level of the symbol. The fact that Penner does not himself perceive any true ontology inherent in symbols merely indicates his acquiescence in the mindset of the modern. The contention that both symbols and the phenomenology of religion lack a proper object can be seen as an insistence that God, for example, is "merely" imaginary,⁴⁹ that symbols have an imaginary reference only, that people only imagine that god exists. In fact, this is another example of reduction, of contending that symbolism is just symbolism, "pansymbolism" and nothing else. Eliade would not agree with this, nor does he say that religion is just hierophany or just meaning.⁵⁰ To say that it is just some (or any) such thing is to attempt to reduce its ontological significance, to limit its becoming to mere mental image. On the contrary Eliade seeks to increase the ontological impact of

⁴⁹ or Allah, Brahman, etc. I use the English word "god" as a specific and conditioned concept involved in the religious mythology of my own culture.

⁵⁰ In fact, "the interpretation of symbols by this reductive method, that is to say the reduction of all possible significations to only one proclaimed "fundamental," appears erroneous to us." Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts, p.6.

religion in general both by his insistence on the sacred as the real and by his stress on the imaginary as effective. For example, he has said,

no conquest of the material world was effected without a corresponding impact on human imagination and behaviour. And I am inclined to add that the reflections of the objective conquests upon such imaginary Universes are perhaps even more important for an understanding of man.⁵¹

To Eliade's mind it has been a quite recent, and very positive, development that "we are now beginning to acknowledge the importance of that mysterious sur-réalité revealed by any imaginary universe".⁵² He clarifies this in his History of Religious Ideas where he states that

the empirical value of [practical] inventions is evident. What is less so is the importance of the imaginative activity inspired by familiarity with the different modalities of matter. ... The imagination discovers hitherto unsuspected analogies among the different levels of the real. (vol.I, p.34.)

For the history of religions it is the actual phenomenon of belief which is the proper object of our study, not the putative ontological status of the object of belief. The existence of religious concepts as imaginary objects is not open to doubt, although the significance of such concepts undoubtedly is. Evidently religious symbolism, religious behaviour, and religious concepts are extremely resilient, adaptable, and (especially if Eliade's understanding be accepted) ubiquitous. This empirical fact alone should secure the recognition of their

⁵¹ "Notes on the Symbolism of the Arrow," p.465.

⁵² Occultism, p.88.

significance.

That imagination is not only of great importance but that it is also considered to be an integral part of religious life is indicated by Eliade's statement that

insofar as one is able to act "spiritually", insofar as one possesses imagination and intelligence and, consequently, is capable of detaching oneself from immediate reality".⁵³

This clearly identifies "spiritual" existence with imagination and intelligence and, specifically, with the ability to "detach oneself from immediate reality". This shows an identification of soul or spirit and mind which might escape the normal English speaking reader, although it will be familiar enough to German speakers as geist. The concomitant implication is that, for Eliade, it is the specific human imaginative ability to become detached from immediately experienced reality, Erlebnis, or "history" as he conceives it, which constitutes "spiritual" existence. This is the "escape from history", nothing more (or less) mystical than the ability to learn from that which one has not oneself experienced and to avoid via mental (spiritual) discipline the purely physical effects of causal determination. At the extremes this may be sitting naked on a glacier for three days, or simply not allowing the quotidian pressures of life to "get you down". In such an interpretation one "escapes from history" every time one smiles in the face of adversity.

⁵³ "Methodological Remarks," p.101.

The ability to do so is directly conditioned by (among other things) our relationship to imaginative narrative. In an empirically controlled experiment Martin Seligman has reported that "merely telling a human subject about controllability duplicates the effects of actual controllability".⁵⁴ This implies that a story which one is told, a narrative structure to which one is exposed (and Seligman is quite clear that it does not have to be "true", in the sense that it does not have to correspond to the actual state of affairs in the world of experience), can have the same effect as if it were a part of the world of real experience. Once again, by dint of intelligence and imagination the human spirit can be seen to "escape history", to be "detached from the immediate reality". In other words, and to this degree, the human spirit is "autonomous" in that it is not wholly determined by its physical environment but contributes, particularly through the imaginative generation of narrative, to the construction of its own determining environment. In terms of archaic mythology, humanity participates in the cosmogony.

Even as a concept, an imaginative fiction in the sense indicated here, God etc. is an infinitely creative entity, a being of unbounded imaginative fertility, capable of supporting a wealth of imaginary universes. Once the idea of God has been conceived, for example, it

⁵⁴ Helplessness, p.48.

is eminently possible to conceive the idea of heaven, paradise, etc., that is to say a mode of being in which humanity is not conditioned or limited by our actual, physical state. It can quite credibly be suggested that if one cannot imagine an eternal and flawless state of human existence then one cannot have imaginatively realised the idea of god. Yet it seems to be precisely those people who cannot even imaginatively realise the possibility of a heaven (etc.) who insist on the (merely) imaginary nature of the deity.

Eliade constantly, if rather quietly, insists on the importance of this imaginary realm. For example, in The Quest he points out that initiatory motifs and symbols "partake of an imaginary universe, and this universe is no less important for human existence than the world of everyday life". (p.121.) And in Images and Symbols: "that essential and indescribable part of man that is called imagination dwells in realms of symbolism and still lives upon archaic myths and theologies". (p.19.) On a slightly different note which serves to explain his meaning somewhat further, he states that

the novel must tell something, because narrative (that is, literary invention) enriches the world no more and no less than history, although on another level.⁵⁵

The point is that imaginative, narrative creations of the human mind, which can be enormously increased by the infinite creativity of the divine being, themselves

⁵⁵ No Souvenirs, p.205.

become a conditioning factor in human experience, and one which is historically revealed to be of the greatest significance. In this way Eliade seeks to increase the ontological weight of the sacred, which is itself an argument against those scholars who have detected a reductionist tendency in his work. "Reducing" the study of religion to the categories of the sacred (i.e. the really real) and to meaning, in no way "reduces" its ontological significance, rather its whole dynamic is to increase the significance of religious phenomena.

This itself may raise two objections. Firstly, it is not the task of scholarship to increase the significance of the objects of study, but to reveal what significance they inherently possess. However, the post-structuralist thought of, for example, Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida, has suggested strongly that significance is not an inherent characteristic of objects or events, but is a creation of human interpretation. Thus the creation of significance is precisely the aim of interpretative scholarship. Secondly, it could also be said that Eliade has ultimately failed in his aim since he has certainly not increased the ontological significance of the sacred for his critics. To those who insist on the self-evident nature of the manifest as the real, the creative hermeneutics of Eliade's history of religions must remain the unwarranted proliferation of imaginary non-entities. Although this argument is itself subjective and relativist, insisting that lack of meaning

for a certain group of people indicates actual lack of meaning, it is currently impossible to refute. Only time will tell whether Eliade's detractors will have more influence than his admirers, and thus whether he will finally be seen as succeeding in increasing the significance of the sacred or otherwise.

One indication would seem to be that the characterisation of the study of religion as the mere proliferation of imaginary non-entities is a deliberate restriction of imagination, the denial of meaning, the refusal of creativity and little else. If it be accepted that the creative imagination has an effective role in assessing reality then symbols, as creative, meaningful, pre-reflective devices, are not just symbols but also effective tools of the pre-reflective imagination. Only by denying the effective role of the symbolic imagination can you support an argument which concludes that symbols are no more than symbols and that therefore such an analysis as Eliade's has made a mistake, ein Trugschluß. Either Penner's critique is totally unimaginative, (imagination not being required to see that symbols are just symbols, this is simply an observation not a creative act) or it is wrong. It could likewise be suggested that if one is capable of imagining that imaginary ideas have real effects then the restriction of an idea capable of infinite effects to the imaginary is finally no restriction.

However, such a suggestion has more appeal to those

who are disposed to accept it than to those predisposed to reject it. It is finally a statement of personal predisposition rather than an impersonal datum of evidence. In fact, this entire discussion has come down to a statement of personal predisposition, in other words, to theology. Finally, the argument has taken a familiar turn. It is the return to the initial affirmation, it is the self-enclosed closed turn of the theological circle. It is the inevitable turn of all arguments for (and against) the existence of God.⁵⁶ The notable thing here is that it is a circle into which Eliade did not step. Despite his almost certain knowledge of Penner's articles⁵⁷ Eliade does not choose to take up the challenge. This may be partly of his aversion to polemics (v.p.229, n.4 above) but also in part because it is a thinly veiled argument against the existence of god and as such may be valid subject matter for religious interpretation, but to attempt to answer Penner's critique is unavoidably to enter into a theological debate.

⁵⁶ It should be borne in mind that since the advent of Popperian falsification, the argument against now has an a priori weight, and since the development of deconstruction, arguments against significance are inherently more credible than those for.

⁵⁷ Although he does not mention them directly, Eliade's journals show that he was aware of his critics, and the fact that the journal Antaios was produced under the supervision of himself and Ernst Jünger means that he was almost certainly aware of this one.

7.6. The Tyranny of Meaning

Gregory D. Alles, whose PhD dissertation, "Epic Persuasion: Religion and Rhetoric in the Iliad and Valmīki's Ramāyana", was accepted at the University of Chicago in 1986, contributed "Dynamism", "Homo Religiosus", and "Sanctuary" to the Encyclopedia of Religion. Alles conducts a rather strident critique of Eliade which concludes that the latter's analyses are procrustean and inadequate, subordinating the acts which condition both the content and interpretation to the meaning of the text.⁵⁸ Not only that, but Eliade is seen as representative of those historians of religion who "long for a position at the centre of European and American culture, indeed, at the centre of an emerging global culture". (p.132.) Not only does Alles challenge Eliade's thought but he further seeks to impugn Eliade's motives as a concealed egoism.

The basis of Alles' critique is that

the Chicago school conjoined a perspective with a claim. Endorsing the perspective of hermeneutics,

⁵⁸ Gregory D. Alles. "Wach, Eliade and the Critique from Totality," p.124.

its exemplars [Wach and Eliade] viewed religion as fashioned in the image of meaning. At the same time they claimed to study - and demanded that others study - religion in its totality. The compound that resulted from their fabrications is unstable. Measured against the claim, the perspective is inadequate. Hermeneutics cannot study religion in its totality. (p.116.)

Alles goes on to quote Rüdiger Bubner, a dialectical theorist, to the effect that,

if the claim to totality is made, concepts become, despite their differences in content, incompatible with each other ... one concept stands to the other in the peculiar relation of denying its claim to totality in order to assert the same claim on its own behalf.⁵⁹

The critique from totality that results Alles considers to have a direct bearing upon the Chicago school's attempt to articulate the totality of religion via hermeneutics. Not only is their claim to have access to the totality of religion unsupportable in the first case, but their approach to that supposed totality is inadequate.

Hermeneutics - the drive to "decipher" "deeper meanings" - overwhelms the impulse to totality. Concerned to do justice to what he sees as the one irreducible element of religion, its intended object, Eliade writes a history of religions capable of doing justice virtually to that element alone. He has in effect drafted the "objectivist" counterpart to the earlier "Psychologismus", and he is subject to the same critique. Religion is not just hierophany; it is not simply the dialectic of the sacred. (p.119.)

The critique to which Alles refers is that of Joachim Wach, who accused the purveyors of psychologism of being never so happy as when they can claim that some

⁵⁹ Alles, p.119, quoting from Bubner, Modern German Philosophy, p.164-165.

phenomenon is just something else.⁶⁰ As Alles goes on to say, "there is always more to religion than just meaning". (p.123.) Evidently Alles is contributing to the idea that Eliade falls foul of his own critique of reductionism and himself reduces religion to an overly narrow category. Not only that, but

hermeneutics in and of itself suffers when it is conjoined with the emphasis on totality that the history of religion requires, for religion is greater than meaning as life is greater than language. The history of religions must be more than a hermeneutical enterprise.⁶¹

Alles has made this progression from religion being more than just hierophany to religion being more than just meaning by reference to Eliade's statement in Patterns (p.126.) that we may summarily define religious life "as the experience of kratophanies, hierophanies and theophanies", and by an identification of Wach's Religionswissenschaft as "a vast monument to meaning conceived as the systematic ordering of parts in a whole". (p.112.) Wach followed Dilthey in making meaning

the highest category of human value; he derived meaning from the objectification of lived experience (Erlebnis); and under the rubric of Nacherleben - "re-living", "re-experiencing" - he posited

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.110, with reference to Wach, "'Nür.' Gedanken über den Psychologismus." Zeitschrift für Missionskunde und Religionswissenschaft, 39 (1924) p.212.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p.123. v. also above p.266 for a similar criticism, and also Segal, "In Defense of Reductionism". Eliade's "equation of the actor's point of view with an irreducibly religious one proves entirely arbitrary. Indeed it becomes hard to see why his interpretation of the actor's point of view is any less reductionistic than the interpretations of religion he opposes as reductionistic". p.99.

Verstehen, "understanding", as the peculiar method of the human sciences. (p.122.)

Even in the special province of the interpretation of texts, Alles argues, this "reign of meaning" is inadequate and must end. Hermeneutics is inadequate because even text are

complex instruments; their production and use requires non-semantic acts and structures without which text could not exist, acts which condition both their content and their interpretation [and] even the most complex hermeneutics will insist on subordinating these acts to the meaning of the text. (pp.123f.)

Eliade is guilty not only of reducing the study of religion to the study of meaning ("to count as religious, an activity had somehow to be meaningful"), (pp.122f.) but of simultaneously claiming that this constituted the totality of the religious phenomenon and that the religious phenomenon is a totality at all. The myth of meaning is, granted, the myth par excellence of the twentieth century West. That is certainly not to say that it is untrue. Meaning is the myth and language is the symbol. The myth is the narrative constructed from the words (paroles) of the language (langue) of symbolism. Furthermore it is the best narrative possible, the one met with the most positive possible valorisation.

Regarding the totality, Alles paraphrases Eliade as claiming that

the irruptions of the Sacred constitute a totality, an integral, coherent system that crosses the bounds of culture and history. ... every hierophany tends to reveal the Sacred in its totality. As a result,

to be understood, every hierophany must be placed in the context of the Sacred as a totality. (p.115.)

Unfortunately this, which is the heart of Alles' identification of a "totality" in Eliade's thought, is an erroneous reading of the text. Alles' source for his paraphrase is Patterns, pp.8 and 26 where in fact Eliade says that, although hierophanies are heterogeneous in origin and in form, in history and in structure, the historian of religions should

make use of all these kinds of evidence. .. In this way we shall get a coherent collection of common traits which, as we shall see later, will make it possible to formulate a coherent system of the various modalities of the vegetation cult. We shall see in this way that every hierophany in fact supposes such a system.⁶²

The fact is that, in the first case, and by implication in all other cases, it is we as the interpreters of hierophanies who "formulate" the system. Granted that there is a system presupposed by the recognition of every hierophany, but that system is none the less formulated by the human agent in his or her particular embodied human existential situation. There is, of course, a paradox of the chicken-and-egg type involved here, but that paradox has never prevented chickens from laying eggs. No more does Eliade say that every hierophany tends to reveal the sacred in its totality and can only be understood in the context of that totality. Rather,

the sacred expresses itself through something other than itself; it appears in things, myths or symbols, but never wholly or directly. ... in every case the

⁶² Patterns, p.8. Emphasis added.

sacred manifests itself limited and incarnate.⁶³

The value which Eliade accords this formulation of all hierophanies as being part of a whole is this: "it would preserve the older hierophanies, by according them value on a different religious level, and the performance of a function there". (ibid.) In other words, this recognition of hierophanies as part of a whole system which we formulate has the specific function of allowing for the valorisation of archaic hierophanies as hierophanies, which the insistence upon only some events as revelatory of the real does not do. Furthermore, as we have seen, this relation of parts to a whole is not exhaustive of Eliade's concept of meaning.

Alles has mistakenly interpreted Eliade's "system" as necessarily referring to an "autonomous intended object" and to "autonomous" or "disembodied meanings"⁶⁴ whose activity constitutes the whole of religion. However, "the history of religions must include the entire interaction of the subject and the object, human activity as well as divine". (p.119.) By my

⁶³ ibid., p.26. It should be pointed out once again that the language of the original French does not have the same active impact as the English translation. "la manifestation du sacré à travers quelque chose d'autre que lui-même; il apparaît dans des objets ... en se manifestant le sacré s'est limité..." (*Traité*, pp.35f.) This allows for a considerably more passive function of the sacred than Rosemary Sheed's translation. Eg., "The manifestation of the sacred appears through objects, ... as it is manifest the sacred is limited..." which in turn allows for a more active function of the human subject for whom a given phenomenon is an hierophany.

⁶⁴ Alles, pp.119, 124, 130.

interpretation, which accords more closely to Eliade's own words, the latter is precisely what Eliade does. In fact some would say that this interpretation allows too great a possibility of overemphasising the human side of the equation and actually excluding the divine as an independent agent.

In the same way Alles can be seen to have misinterpreted the one irreducible element to which Eliade seeks to do justice. It is not so much the "intended object" as the recognition of that intentional object by specific individuals, i.e., not the intended object, but the act of intention. All religion involves the act of intention of the real, the true, the significant, in some object or event which does not, and cannot, autonomously, and automatically communicate that intentionality to all observers. This certainly could be criticised as an a prioristic assumption, for such is what it is. Given the extreme dubiety of ever "bracketing" our critical contentions and other assumptions, it is an eminently practical assumption to make that a religious text which has been cherished for millennia, or a native myth which permeates the total life of a tribe, is apprehended as possessed of real meaning. In Alles' case, however, we are presented with no such assumptions and thus we are left with no apparent means of identifying what religion is. Alles' whole critique of totality has, from the outset, refused to allow that, if the word religion be given a specific

definition then the group of cases to which that definition refers constitutes a totality. This does not make competing concepts of totality incompatible, as Bubner's quotation (above, p.294) suggests, but does challenge competing definitions which circumscribe a differing totality. The problem arises if, and only if, the concept be mistaken for the object. Eliade's concept of the totality of religious phenomena, being circumscribed by his implicit definition of religion, cannot exclude anyone else's concept and thus cannot exclude anyone else's totality. It can have different, and possibly preferable, characteristics, however.

Alles seems to have likewise misapprehended Eliade's concept of meaning. As I have argued in my chapter on the Implicit Religion of Meaning, Eliade's conception of meaning is finally related to the response to an exemplary pattern. It is a human action, or becomes meaningful in activity. He cannot "idolise meaning" as Alles fears, precisely because he recognises the manifestation of the real in all hierophanies and thus in all "competing" meanings. The fundamental error in Alles' analysis is to react against a concept of "autonomous meaning" where none exists.

Furthermore, Eliade thus provides us with act (or, as Alles calls for it, "event") as the architectonic category which Alles desires for the history of religions. (p.125.) Alles calls for an escape from the "preoccupation with meaning" (p.123.) implying that it is

a provincial Western concept artificially foisted upon all religions. This might be true of a narrower concept of meaning, such as that ascribed to Dilthey and Wach of the relation of parts to the whole. However, one which is grounded in human activity in such a way escapes this provincialism. (I might add that anyone familiar with Eliade's journals would recognise his horror of such provincialism.)

While Alles' desire to escape provincialism, to allow the Shinto priests to dance, rather than trying to force our theology upon them,⁶⁵ is wholly admirable, it is in some ways naïve. One might insist that life is greater than language, but as a colleague of mine responded, "try and convince me of that - without using language". This is no mere quip; it is through language, and through language alone, that we can become aware of life's greatness. It is no mere attempt to elevate humanity to a fallacious "higher" status by a preoccupation with a mere form of communication when we distinguish ourselves from other sentient beings as a language-using animal. (Nor is this a denial that other animals can use language.) In his attempt to install the event as the grounding category of religious studies Alles fails to recognise that the concepts of space, time, and consciousness of which the event is "a

⁶⁵ V. the anecdote related by both Eliade and Joseph Campbell, Autobiography vol.II p.199 and in the Introduction to Campbell's videotape of The Power of Myth.

constellation" (p.125.) are themselves socially constructed concepts, as, of course, is event. How can we then put the event before the "linguistic code" which determines it?

Alles affirms that he

deliberately correlate[s] [t]his view with a metaphysics that assigns priority to actuality rather than to potentiality and an anthropology that sees thought as activity. (ibid.)

But in so doing he seems to be unaware that thought is the activity par excellence which is governed by exemplary models, by mythic structures, and thus by structures of language and meaning. His desire to escape the inescapable leads him into the finally self-contradictory position of claiming that "the obsession with meaning is yielding to topics that assume greater significance", and to recommending Michael Baxandall's book Patterns of Intention as avoiding the notion of meaning.⁶⁶ Only the narrowest possible definition of meaning could escape restoration as intention or significance, and Eliade's concept of meaning is, whatever else may be the case, not that narrow.

In fact, as I have interpreted Eliade's thought he provides us precisely with all that Alles seeks in the history of religions. Human activity as the grounding category of the historical study (as we have seen); an extraverted rather than introverted discipline (because all humanity can be seen as religious so the religiosi do

⁶⁶ ibid., pp.126, 137, n.32.

not receive privileged status, and the original meanings of other peoples' myths are sought rather than our own meanings); and a critical and self-critical study (because Eliade encourages us to inspect the dialectical sources of our own hierophanies as constituted in a similar way to those of exotic and archaic peoples).

I cannot spend more time on Alles' critique than is strictly necessary, but I would like to point out that I respect deeply his attack on scientism, analytical economism, technologism and Western provincialism. However, I would contend that his insistence on history and event, extraversion, and critical thought does not counter these trends as effectively as Eliade's emphasis on coherence, original meaning, totality, and hermeneutics. Finally, Alles has been less than extravert himself in attributing his own meanings (of history, of religion, of hermeneutics, and of meaning itself) to Eliade rather than seeking to disclose Eliade's meanings. It is this combination of Eliade's words and Alles' meanings which results in procrustean fittings, inadequacy, and subordinating acts to the meanings of the text. Eliade's act in producing his oeuvre was an attempt to communicate a constellation of thought which was to him coherent, adequate, and tailored to an enormous experience, both personal and literary. Alles subordinates that act to the meaning which he derives from the texts, in this case, Patterns, The Quest, and Shamanism and secondary sources.

7.7 Relativism

The major problem which occurs in the light of the foregoing analysis and critical defence is that of relativism. Is it not the case that my defence of Eliade, by deferring the question of the ontology of the sacred, by reducing the questions of religion from reality to being and meaning, and particularly by making truth dependent on belief, open Eliade's thought to accusations of relativism? Previous critics have stopped short of accusing Eliade of relativism precisely because of his apparent insistence on the sacred as real. Robert Segal, for example, has said that

Eliade declares that a believer's belief in the transcendent is true because it corresponds to external reality, Wittgensteinian fideists would declare that belief is true only because it is as coherent as a non-believer's.⁶⁷

Thus if the external reality of "the transcendent" be taken away as the preceding arguments seem to contend, Eliade is left in the same relativist trap as the fideists with no criteria of judgement other than pure subjectivity. Certainly subjectivism has been prominent

⁶⁷ "In Defense of Reductionism," p.106.

in the charges levelled against the Romanian historian of religions, and as Roger Trigg has pointed out

the term "relativism" is often used without any great precision, and it sometimes appears to be no more than a synonym for "subjectivism". The subjectivist thinks that what I think is true for me and what you think is true for you. He is making truth relative to individuals rather than to groups of people.⁶⁸

Furthermore, it is noticeable that Mac Ricketts had appealed to precisely this relativist aspect of Eliade's thought in his article, "In Defense of Eliade".

Eliade has misled some readers by his definition of the sacred as the "real". Some have thought that this means that Eliade himself regards the sacred as Reality: that is that he is making a theological statement. Eliade would deny this. All he means here is that for the believer, that which is sacred for him is the Real, the True, the meaningful in an absolute sense. (p.28.)

In order to clarify and adjudicate in this issue I would firstly like to consider briefly the nature of "relativism" before attempting to decide whether or not this appellation is applicable to Eliade.

7.7.1 What is Relativism?

Keith Yandell has described "simple relativism" as the contention that "a proposition P is true if and only if it is true for me".⁶⁹ "Complex relativism" Yandell sees as the same contention but concerning truth "for" a society rather than "for" an individual. These two forms

⁶⁸ Reason and Commitment, p.3.

⁶⁹ "Some Varieties of Relativism," p.62.

of relativism can, although not exactly, be assimilated to conceptual relativism and cultural relativism respectively. Finally, Yandell describes "a more sophisticated relativism" in which it is held that

if both of radically different worldviews can be immune to external rational assessment and are internally coherent and not observationally disqualified, according to whatever their possibly quite different internal standards (if any) require, then each, the suggestion goes, passes what muster one can rationally ask a worldview to pass and if one person accepts one and another accepts the other, neither is more rational in so doing than the other. A person who must choose between one such worldview and another had best hope that tossing a coin is included in his present perspective (so he can make a choice) and in both worldviews he is choosing between (so that once he has chosen he can still understand how it was he, conceptually speaking, came to be where he is). (ibid., p.65.)

Roger Trigg clearly points out one of the conclusions of both conceptual and cultural relativism; "truth is then made to depend on what groups of people happen to believe. The possibility of false beliefs is ruled out". (op. cit., p.2.) Yandell echoes these words with, "one simply cannot be wrong, if relativism is right", and indicates one of the further "alleged benefits" of relativism, which is that

the enterprise of trying to rationally assess religious, ethical, philosophical, etc. traditions and claims, insofar as these deal with basic issues at any rate, is no longer necessary. (op. cit., p.70.)

Both scholars are agreed that once one defers to the relativism of truth and belief one relinquishes all appeal to rational criteria of judgement and to truth as

corresponding to an external, objective reality.⁷⁰

(Yandell refers to the example of a virus which causes a disease, quite irrespective of the belief of the infected person, or of the medical community. op. cit., p.74.)

William C. Sheperd refers to another consequence of the relativist tendency. In Berger and Luckmann's Social Construction of Reality he detects an "extreme form" of "anthropological circumspection" which argues that

there is no such thing as human nature, only the manifold varieties of human natures, culturally relative artifacts.⁷¹

Such extreme forms of relativism which categorically repudiate the possibility of a universally valid conception of human nature have been more or less critically devastated. As Yandell says of cultural determinism, "that horse is dead, and it need not be beaten more - one need only put up a memorable gravestone". (ibid., p.74.) However, it is an unavoidable consequence of extreme conceptual relativism that the denial of an objective reality leads to the denial of a universal human nature. As Trigg insists, "relativism does not lead to the denial of objectivity since that is itself the very essence of the relativist position", and "the denial of objectivity is the denial

⁷⁰ As W. W. Bartley has said, "if relativism is inescapable then a consistent rationalism becomes intellectually impossible." The Retreat to Commitment, p.xxv.

⁷¹ "Cultural Relativism, Physical Anthropology, and Religion," p.159.

of any kind of independent reality".⁷² Thus it would seem that if cultural determinism is an unavoidable consequence of relativism, and cultural determinism has been critically devastated, then relativism cannot be an acceptable stance. In this light it must be determined whether or not Eliade can be said to be a relativist.

7.7.2 Eliade's Relativism.

As I have already mentioned, Mac Ricketts in "In Defense of Eliade", makes reference to what can be seen as a relativist aspect of Eliade's thought, the truth for the believer is what is apprehended as the sacred.

Reality for the believer is what is revealed in hierophany, it is what symbols and myths refer to, by definition. This certainly appears to make truth and reality dependent on personal or communal belief rather than upon an external, objective reality. The fact that the capacity to perceive the sacred in certain specific hierophanic objects or events is conditioned by prior personal religious experience further smacks of cultural determinism. Also, Eliade has asked,

which is the true meaning of Durga and Śiva - what is deciphered by the initiates, or what is taken up by the mass of the faithful? In this book I am trying to show that both are equally valuable.⁷³

Likewise, he has stated,

idolatry and its condemnation are thus attitudes

⁷² "Religion and the Threat of Relativism," pp.299f.

⁷³ Patterns, p.7.

that come naturally to a mind faced with the phenomenon of the hierophany; there is justification for both positions. To anyone who has received a new revelation ... the earlier hierophanies have not only lost their original meaning ... but they have now become obstacles to the development of religious experience. (ibid., p.25.)

These simultaneous avowals of competing positions as equally true, valuable, or justifiable seem to be characteristic of relativism's inability to recognise any belief as false. So does Eliade's insistence that

for the historian of religions, every manifestation of the sacred is important: every rite, every myth, every belief or divine figure reflects the experience of the sacred and hence implies the notion of being, of meaning, and of truth.⁷⁴

If all manifestations of religion imply the notions of being, meaning, and especially truth, has Eliade not fallen into the relativist trap of relinquishing all access to rational, objective criteria of truth by making applicable criteria internal to each religious system?

Certainly Eliade himself did not openly espouse the relativist stance, in fact he seems to attack it. In The Sacred and the Profane he describes

man's desire to take up his abode in the objective reality, not to let himself be paralysed by the never-ceasing relativity of purely subjective experiences, to live in a real and effective world, and not in an illusion. (p.28.)

In The Myth of the Eternal Return, he seeks to avoid the discussion of a philosophy of history that "should definitely transcend relativism". (p.150.) But he points out that

⁷⁴ History of Religious Ideas, vol.I. p.xiii.

in vain did [Wm. Dilthey] proclaim an allgemeine Lebenserfahrung as the final means of transcending this relativity. ... In vain did Meinecke invoke "examination of conscience" ... Heidegger had gone to the trouble of showing that the historicity of human existence forbids all hope of transcending time and history. (ibid.)

Later he points out that

a sociology of knowledge, that is, the study of the social conditioning of ideologies, could avoid relativism only by affirming the autonomy of the spirit - which, if we understand him aright, Karl Mannheim did not dare to affirm. (ibid., p.159, n.15.)

This does not immediately clarify the issue. Eliade considers the relativity of purely subjective experience "paralysing" and indicates the inability of historicism and sociology of knowledge to avoid relativism to be failures, but he does not explicitly describe how he himself might escape from it.

However, the implication is that the historical situation of humanity, that is to say the exhaustive identification of reality with history (in this case both actual temporal antecedents and personal physical experience), is what give relativism its cutting edge. As long as historicism is accepted, as Eliade argues Heidegger to have demonstrated, relativism cannot be transcended. The question must be, how does positing the autonomy of the human spirit, as Eliade certainly does, through creativity and imagination, achieve the escape from relativism which he seems to desire?

One indication of an answer can be found in Yandell's discussion of "simple relativism" mentioned

above. He considers that this "simple relativism"

carries the power of positive thinking to the final degree, since if I can only persuade myself that I am an indestructible and wise billionaire, I am one, and in order to have the perfect marriage I need only believe that I have one. (op. cit., p.62.)

It must be seen that the two examples given differ enormously; in one the external state of affair is necessarily involved; one's physical reaction to being struck by a falling safe, one's ability to give sound advice to others, the amount of money stored in one's bank; whereas in the other the mental state of the experiencing subject could be sufficient, the external, physical world is not necessarily involved. It may, indeed, be the case that it is the necessary and sufficient condition of perfect marriage that one believes one's marriage to be perfect (even if one's spouse does not). Similarly, the conditions of religion do not necessarily involve the external, physical/temporal world, as has been consistently argued. Belief can be the necessary and sufficient condition for salvation (or Moksa, nirvāna, etc.). In these non-physical (spiritual), non-temporal (eternal) worlds the human spirit is autonomous and effective.

It should also be noted that Yandell operates with exactly the modern view of "belief" which Wilfred Cantwell Smith critiques as spurious; that belief = acceptance of a propositional truth.⁷⁵ Yandell is aware

⁷⁵ W. C. Smith, Belief and History, esp. ch.2.

of the problem this engenders for relativism; if relativism is the contention that a proposition is true if and only if someone believes it, then, since "believes" means "accepts as true", the word "true" appears in both definiens and definiendum, rendering the definition valueless. However, he does not consider the alternative; if belief is held to mean "to hold dear, to prize, to give allegiance, to value highly" (Smith, op. cit., p.41.) then a positive definition is made. It is one in which "truth" is seen as a function of the human will, which restores the older sense of the word "true", as "true love", a "true socialist", and so on. That is to say a mode in which the actual conforms to the ideal. Along with the restoration of the older concept of truth goes the older concept of belief as "I believe in non-violence", or "I believe in marital fidelity", etc. That is to say, not a propositional affirmation, but a commitment to an ideal state of affairs.

The gradual shift of the words "believe" and "true" towards propositional accuracy and correspondence to external data can be seen to reflect exactly Eliade's apprehension of the gradual camouflage of the sacred in the profane. That in which we believe has been increasingly identified with that which we cannot propositionally deny, i.e. material existence. The real has been increasingly identified with the physical and manifest, valorising what is over what we desire, so that "true" human existence is now equated with the profane,

mundane, and gross, whereas previously the "true" nature of humanity was apprehended as a desired ideal of nobility, responsibility, humaneness, etc. It is this "myth" of objective reality, that is to say the uncritical valorisation of the actual over the ideal, and the concomitant exhaustive equation of truth with actuality, which renders relativism, the understanding of "truth" as dependent on "belief", unacceptable. As Yandell has it, "for realism belief is truth's prisoner; for relativism, truth is properly the product of belief". (op. cit., p.68.) From this alternative viewpoint both these statements would be acceptable, each depending on the systematic definition of belief and truth operative in the (pre-reflective) system of the realist or the relativist.

However, this seems to raise exactly the problematic position of two conflicting and mutually exclusive worldviews and a hapless subject with no way other than arbitrary random selection to choose between them. But surely this is a radical fiction designed specifically to increase the attractiveness of the proffered criteria of assessment, the "rational". None of us starts from nowhere and chooses between total and preformed worldviews. The process of acquisition is gradual and recursive. Elements and expressions of worldviews are assessed, based on prior experience, and interpreted and incorporated into our pre-existent worldview. Yandell evinces one of the basic positions of those who oppose

relativism. He accepts as a "necessary truth" that "if P is true, then P is either true or false". (op. cit., p.67.) However, to one who apprehends the coincidentia oppositorum to be a symbol of absolute reality, to be expressive of the nature of the real, then that P is true would imply that P might be either true for all people, or false for some people, i.e. that P is both true and false, certainly not either true or false.

Another answer can be given in relation to Trigg's statement that the "seeds of relativism" are sown when "the emphasis is moved from a question about reality to one about our response to that reality".⁷⁶ This too can be seen to apply to Eliade; he certainly shifts the emphasis from the sacred per se to the human reaction to the sacred. In fact he seems to consider this a procedural necessity for a discipline which would study the human response to reality, that is to say, those expressions and activities of humanity which are classified as religious (the history of religions), as opposed to a discipline which would study the nature of ultimate reality (theology, the philosophy of religion, or philosophy tout court). Trigg insists that this leads to the conclusion that

only a participant can properly understand a society, which can never be judged by external standards. Each society has its own conceptual scheme, and reality for that society is what the scheme says it is. This is conceptual relativism. (p.302.)

⁷⁶ "Religion and the Threat of Relativism," p.301.

However, Eliade's insistence on archetypal intuitions, or fundamental, transhuman experiences, or the universal basis of the human existential situation, allows a common ground from which all societies can be (begun to be) understood. That is not to say by external standards however; the point is that we, as humans, are not totally external to other human societies, and that all human conceptual schemes overlap precisely because they are human. External standards are not required to understand an exotic society, internal standards, given by our human biology, our similar personal histories (birth, language acquisition, cultural conditioning), will suffice.⁷⁷ Each society may have its own conceptual scheme but no such human conceptual scheme will be utterly opaque to another human being because we are human. As Eliade indicated to Claude-Henri Roquet in the conversations published as Ordeal by Labyrinth,

that is why I am so very proud of being a human

⁷⁷ William Sheperd points out (op. cit., p.170) the human constant of birth, which "quite simply orders that paradisaic interuterine omnipotence be suddenly and dramatically left behind in favour of a world far less happy". This constant is evidently comparable to Eliade's constant of nostalgia for paradise or the religious constant of the "fallen" (etc.) world. As well as this human constant there is the subsequent process which we all undergo of language acquisition and the dependent period of culturally specific learning. This is possibly sufficient to account for the ubiquity of the symbolic. All humans have experienced a period in which they were not adept verbal language users, in which they were dependent upon pre-verbal understanding. We have all undergone a period of pre-logical (or at least pre-verbal) mentality in which symbolic signification would have been our only way of understanding the world at large.

being, not because I am a descendant of that prodigious Mediterranean culture, but because I can recognise myself, as a human being, in the existence taken upon himself by an Australian Aborigine. And that is why his culture interests me, and his religion, his mythology. (p.137.)

7.7.3 Conclusions.

Although Eliade manifests the primary characteristics of the relativist in seeing alternative worldviews as each true, and of making truth a function of meaning and meaning a function of belief, although he might accept that there are truths relative to systems, his understanding of the ultimately common basis of human nature reduces the implications of relativism from complete incommensurability to partial and temporary unintelligibility, and thus evades the thrust of the major arguments against total relativism. As Trigg says, "total relativism is incoherent".⁷⁸ This is precisely the point. Total, or absolute, relativism is incoherent almost by definition. It is a contradiction in terms. What is critiqued by Trigg and others who would warn us of the dangers of absolute relativism, is not an actual position held by actual people, but a logical extension of the trend of relativism, a sort of monopolar relativism which is held to exist without reference to its other pole of absolute realism. In such a form relativism is absurd, but in such a form relativism does not seriously make any claims to our attention. Such

⁷⁸ "Religion and the Threat of Relativism," p.305.

relativism might claim that "people can believe what they like [and] there is no point believing one thing rather than another". (ibid., p.305.) Eliade certainly does not make such a claim.⁷⁹ Rather it is fundamental to his understanding that one is prepared by one's religious experience and cultural background to apprehend the real in certain modalities. Thus there is no "choice" in one's apprehension. The real appears to impose itself upon one's perceptions as a self-authenticating experience. However, this does not issue in total cultural relativism since humanity is universal in human culture and thus we all have a similar preparation and inhabit a similar reality. Thus Trigg goes too far when he claims that

once it is stressed that different cultures have different concepts, and that their members see the world differently, it is no very great step to saying that there is no right way of seeing the world and that it is pure arrogance to assume that one's own society's understanding of things is the correct one. It thus becomes impossible to judge other cultures at all.⁸⁰

This type of criticism, usually accompanied by "it is then a very small step" or some such phrase, is common throughout Trigg's analysis.⁸¹ My point is that it does

⁷⁹ For example, "I oppose with all my strength Hegel's "historic" vision." Journal I, p.54.

⁸⁰ Reason and Commitment, p.6.

⁸¹ v. also p.32, "it is only a short step from this to saying that the meaning is the commitment," and p.146, "there is only a short step from this admission to the view that the rational man does himself make a non-rational commitment."

not matter how small a step it is if it is not made. This kind of logic could state that it is a small step from open-heart surgery to murder. The step from culturally conditioned difficulties in communication to absolute conceptual incommensurability is one which Eliade's whole life was dedicated to disproving.

The extremes of conceptual relativism ensuing from interpretations of Wittgenstein are resolved in this interpretation of Eliade. Trigg has said that

according to Wittgenstein, our basic religious or moral commitments can make no claim to truth. The only way to adjudicate between them is for us to adopt one and reject the others. We can never tell someone who does not share our commitment that he is wrong. (ibid., p.53.)

The understanding that all people are already religious emphasised by Eliade's work resolves the problem of such a statement; we do adjudicate between religious and moral commitments precisely by virtue of the fact that we have already made a religious commitment to our present understanding of the world. The view that rational people are not religious and have made no such commitment is itself the cause of the basic problem here; if we have no such commitment we cannot adjudicate between commitments and we will never know what commitment to make. Once again the linguistic metaphor is applicable; if we do not assume that words are meaningful we will never be able to begin the process of language acquisition. Likewise, without some prior commitment to some conceptual system (which, it must be recalled,

Eliade held actually to precede rational reflection) we will not be able to adjudicate between competing concepts. However, the point is that we do utilise pre-reflective modes of coming to a decision, and the commitment to rationalism can itself be seen as such a commitment. At this point it becomes apparent that the word commitment could be rather misleading. It could be seen as implying a conscious and reasoned decision, whereas it is crucial to the understanding of this theory that the deference to a given conceptual schema is pre-critical. The fact that rationalists would hold that their commitment to reason is wholly rational and conscious in no way lessens the possibility that that commitment occurred prior to its rational analysis and justification.

Finally, it must be said that we can, of course, tell someone who does not share our commitment that they are wrong. We cannot, however, persuade them to change or somehow force them to accept that they are wrong. No doubt if everyone were absolutely reasonable we could, by applying the rules of reason, persuade any dissenters that they were simply mistaken in their application of those rules.⁸² The empirical fact is that certain people

⁸² Trigg states that "the presence of reason does not force us to adopt any particular position. No reason can have any influence until it is recognised by someone to be a reason. ... Men would still be free to assess such reasons as they wish and to ignore or reject what are in fact perfectly good reasons ..." (ibid., p.134.) However, do their decisions to ignore good reasons themselves have (good) reasons? The point is that our

(in fact, the majority) find themselves emotionally committed to a conceptual schema which does not clearly and entirely correspond to the dictates of rationalism. They are not so committed to rationalism that this failing persuades them to alter their commitment. The further empirical fact is that these people can lead entirely well-adjusted lives, some of them even managing to be productive and beneficial to society in a purely practical manner, some of them even being successful scientists.⁸³ Thus any rationalist claim to exclusive viability finds no empirical support, but is itself only supported by the internal criterion of coherence within its own dictates.

This is not to say that the rationalists' commitment to reason is itself unreasonable. No such claim is being made; it is absolutely reasonable. The point is that reason is not experienced by the majority of humanity as fully adequate for the management of their lives, certainly not to the fundamental adjudication of their

reasons are compelling or they are not finally reasonable. Absolute rationality removes the human freedom which is part of our experience of life and is thus finally as absurd as the absolute relativism against which Trigg argues.

⁸³ It should be noted that although Trigg points out that the extreme relativist position on the "incommensurability" of different conceptual systems results in the religious scientist suffering from a "totally crazy compartmentalisation of understanding", (ibid., p.120) he himself can provide no more acceptable description. His ongoing argument seems to be that science and religion are fundamentally incommensurable which does not account for the empirical facts.

basic conceptual systems. Reason is not experienced as hierophanic to the majority of humanity, it is not an exemplary revelation of the real. This could quite conceivably be because most people do not have any really clear grasp of what "reason" is and so do not know exactly how to apply it to the formulation or adaptation of their conceptual systems. Alternatively, it could be because many people accept that the formulation of belief systems occurs on a sub-conscious level where reason is not entirely dominant. My purpose here cannot be to adjudicate between absolute reason and relative reason but to point out that the criticisms of relativism operative here amount to little more than the statement that relativism is not absolutely rational and thus fails to permit the reasonable adjudication of all decisions. Of course absolute relativism is not absolutely rational. The point is that truth is capable of more than a singular interpretation. There is truth which refers to the actual states of external reality, but there are also truths which refer to the internal worlds of human creativity and imagination. There are truths which can be determined by wholly rational criteria and there are truths which can only be assessed through internal criteria of meaning.

Both Trigg and Yandell can be seen to argue from an unyielding position of unequivocality as regards the meaning of truth but a more fluid or polyvalent concept of truth permits of a far more fertile understanding. Mark

Taylor's courageous and well-argued case, for example, is for a much more subtle relativism; "a relativistic epistemology and a relational ontology".⁸⁴ Although related to the work of Paul Ricoeur, Taylor's conceptions can be seen to agree largely with Eliade's as I have interpreted them here. Meaning is seen as contextualised and holistic, "truth is relative because meaning is contextual and being is relational". (ibid., p.53.) Even though truth is seen to be

the unity of thought and being, the coincidence of subjectivity and objectivity, the coadunation [sic] of sense and reference, (ibid.)

Taylor sees that

consequently the meaningfulness of truth necessarily entails a dialectical relation with contrasting frames of interpretation and is constantly subject to reformulation. (ibid., p.54.)

While the attack on extreme relativism reopens the possibility of a panculturally viable conception of human nature (and of religion) closed by radical conceptual relativism, that same attack has reduced the likelihood of such a conception by discouraging the deference to relational concepts of meaning and truth. Eliade's concept of human nature, humanity as homo religiosus, in proposing a universally valid schema for humanity does so precisely via the relationality of meaning and truth; the subjective and self-validating experience of the Real through the Hierophany. The potential to detect,

⁸⁴ "Towards an Ontology of Relativism," Abstract, p.42 and conclusion, p.55.

actually to apprehend, the real, the sacred, in a particular profane object or event is culturally conditioned, but it is also affected by, and effected through, the creativity of the human imagination, and thus it is not culturally determined. Meaning, truth, reality, sacrality are defined inter-referentially and culturally relationally, however, this is done in the context of a unified vision of human nature based in our physical existential situation in this particular biology in this particular environment. The truth of this vision is maintained through the insistence upon the external world as the locus of hierophany; only what is can reveal the nature of being.

In this context it is worthwhile to make mention of Richard Bernstein's book, Beyond Objectivism and Relativism. It is Bernstein's "central thesis that we are witnessing and participating in a movement beyond objectivism and relativism" and that this can be seen in the works of Gadamer, Habermas, Arendt, and Rorty. Rorty, for example,

claims that it is a illusion to think that there is a permanent set of ahistorical standards of rationality which the "philosopher" or epistemologist can discover and which will unambiguously tell us who is rational and who is not. (p.67.)

This would be thought to be the worst form of relativism to one entrenched in the "Cartesian persuasion" of the search for an assured foundation for knowledge, but in fact actually corresponds to a redefinition of

rationalism as an effective, but not inescapable, form of persuasion. In Rorty's discussion of the controversy between Galileo and Cardinal Bellarmine he points out that

much of the 17th century's notion of what it was to be a "philosopher", and much of the Enlightenment's notion of what it was to be "rational", turns on Galileo being absolutely right and the church absolutely wrong.⁸⁵

"Lurking in the background here" Bernstein points out,

is a false dichotomy: either permanent standards of rationality (objectivism) or arbitrary acceptance of one set of standards or practices over against its rival (relativism). We need to alter our understanding of how rational argumentation (and the history of forms of argumentation) works, to realise that there are times when there are disagreements that we cannot immediately resolve by appeal to fixed standards. (p.68.)

He further refers to "The Recovery of the Hermeneutical Dimension of Science" as one of "the areas in which there has been a significant movement beyond objectivism and relativism". (p.30) I would suggest that Eliade, in attempting to assert the hermeneutical dimension of the history of religion, was likewise attempting a transcendence of the specious dichotomy of objectivism and relativism by rejecting the Cartesian dilemma and asserting this liberation in and through the creativity of human nature. Like Gadamer, Eliade operates with an understanding of truth which "is not exhausted by the achievements of scientific method and which is available to us through hermeneutical understanding". (p.151.)

⁸⁵ From Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, p.328, Bernstein, op. cit., p.66.

7.8. The Retreat to Commitment

7.8.1. The Problem

One final criticism which arises in part out of the preceding consideration of relativism is the inherent attitude to commitment implied by my interpretation of the thought of Mircea Eliade. Not only do I follow the lead of Eliade's thought in claiming the finally religious nature of all human apprehension of reality, but I also explicitly argue for the prior commitment involved in all coherent thought, specifically in the recognition of phenomena or events as meaningful. I have argued that "without some prior commitment to some conceptual system we will not be able to adjudicate between competing concepts". (above pp.320f.) This will undoubtedly be apprehended by rationalist and realist critics as a restatement of the neo-orthodox argument that everyone, all human thought, is eventually dependent upon a commitment to an ultimately non-rational, intuitive or emotional stance, and that thus Christian faith is as acceptable as rationalism. Arguments put

forward ostensibly to support a position are in fact ex post facto attempts to justify, or to persuade others to adopt, that position which is actually held independently of its "supporting" arguments. All positions are positions of faith, including modern science, and, finally, justification is by faith alone.

William Warren Bartley III has traced the development, implications, and criticisms of this argument in great detail in a fascinating book called The Retreat to Commitment, and it is in the context of a consideration of this book that I would like to assess the relevance of this argument to the thought of Mircea Eliade.

As Bartley has incisively pointed out this argument concerns the problem of the limits of rationality. It is the argument relied upon by both Karl Barth and Soren Kirkegaard, and can also be referred to as the dilemma of ultimate commitment and the problem of presuppositions. "The argument provides a rational excuse for irrational commitment," as Bartley states, calling it the tu quoque (you also) argument, since it claims that all people are in the same final position of irrational commitment. Simply stated, it is this;

(1) for certain logical reasons, rationality is so limited that everyone must make a dogmatic irrational commitment; (2) therefore, the Christian has a right to make whatever commitment he pleases; and (3) therefore, no-one has a right to criticise him (or anyone else) for making such a commitment. The theologian can reply "tu quoque" to his critic, and remind him that people whose own rationality is limited should not admonish others for admitting

that the limitation exists.⁸⁶

The relation to Eliade's position is this; if Bartley is right and this argument proves to be finally specious, then the position which Bartley describes as "pancritical rationalism" does not rely upon prior irrational (or non-rational) commitment to the nature of reality as it is apprehended to be in "archetypal" (or any other type of) intuitions. That is to say it is not dependent upon the real as mediated through hierophany, symbol, and myth and is thus not religious, even in the broad sense implied by Eliade's terms. The fully rational person need have no recourse to pre-rational, pre-critical, or pre-reflective judgement. Pancritical humanity is not homo religiosus, and Eliade's claim (or rather my claim through this interpretation of Eliade) to a universally valid comprehension of human nature is overthrown.

7.8.2. The Tu Quoque Argument

Although I cannot do justice to all the issues discussed in Barley's engrossing book, especially the second, enlarged edition, I hope to assess fairly the specific points of argument relevant to my interpretation of Eliade. Bartley indicates the historical harmony of Protestant and rationalist thought; it has only been during the twentieth century that the relationship between the two has broken down. Since that schism, he

⁸⁶ All these quotations are from Bartley, op. cit., p.72 with the exception of the final sentence, p.78.

would claim, the only "rational" excuse available to the religiously-minded for their commitment to an "independent starting ground" in faith is the problem of ultimate commitment and the limits of rationality. Bartley sees the real schism as having resulted from the "Quest for the Historical Jesus". Schweitzer's study particularly finally revealed that Jesus could not be the practical and moral leader of Protestant liberal thought but rather a radical, mystical apocalypticist.⁸⁷ The real problem then is that

a truly Christian identity, it was plausibly argued, demanded assent to the person of the historical Jesus - as he actually had been, not as one might have liked him to be. To the extent that honest identification with the rationalist tradition required that one withhold assent to the newly discovered historical Jesus, it became impossible for a man to be, in good conscience, both a Protestant Christian and a rationalist. (p.35.)

This brings us to the position that Protestant liberal Christians have refused to relinquish their belief, even when their supportive argument was removed. They are thus not rational.

When a person sees no reason to abandon a position when an argument put forward to support it is refuted, that indicates that his position, far from depending on the argument, was held independently of it. (p.71.)

As Bartley then goes on to say,

the "truth" of one's beliefs is then ultimately rooted not in their self-evidence or in their universality but in one's whim, or in the belief, say, that God has commanded one to accept these standards. (p.74.)

⁸⁷ Albert Schweitzer, The Quest of the Historical Jesus, London: A. & C. Black, 1910.

This finally irrational basis for faith is given a pseudo-rational justification, or rather excuse, via the tu quoque argument as it is outlined above. This, however, has unfortunate repercussions; one

ironic consequence of using the tu quoque is rarely noticed. To the extent that anyone employing it strengthens his own position by insuring that it is parallel to his opponent's, to that extent he increases the invulnerability of the opponent to criticism. ... Ultimately, the use of the tu quoque makes nonsense of the idea of the historical development and change of ideas in the face of criticism. (p.79.)

Like the criticism of relativism this criticism of the tu quoque argument targets the final inability to adjudicate between conflicting truth claims and the incapacitation of criteria of rational judgement and contributes to the problem of pluralism. As Bartley concisely states the case:

in sum, the belief that rationality is ultimately limited, by providing an excuse for irrational commitment, enables a Protestant, or any other irrationalist, to make an irrational commitment without losing intellectual integrity. But, at the same time, anyone who makes use of this excuse pays a high price for it. For anyone who uses it may no longer, in integrity, criticise the holder of a different commitment. One gains immunity from criticism for one's own commitment by making any criticism of commitments impossible. (p.82.)

Bartley, as representative of the whole rationalism-as-opposed-to-religion school of thought, considers a (if not the) crucial problem of contemporary philosophy to be

showing that it is possible to choose in a non-arbitrary way among competing, mutually exclusive theories, and - more broadly speaking - among competing "ways of life", (p.83.)

and thus of defeating the tu quoque argument. In the

hope of achieving this Bartley rejects panrationalism, which he characterises by two rules,

(1) A rationalist accepts any position that can be justified or established by appeal to the rational criteria or authorities; and (2) he accepts only those positions that can be so justified. (p.87.)

The "rational criteria" are either intellectualist or empiricist, but Bartley can accept neither because,

as Kant showed with his "antinomies", clear and distinct ideas could lead to two contradictory theories. It would be impossible, therefore, on the basis of clear and distinct ideas alone, to decide rationally between such theories. The fact that one's beliefs had been deduced from clear and distinct ideas was a distinctly insufficient guarantee of their rationality. [Likewise] Hume's arguments ... showed that ... the empiricist criterion was inadequate; it excluded not only belief in God and the angels but also belief in scientific laws, memory, and other people. None of these could be reduced to sense experience; empiricism in effect reduced to solipsism.⁸⁸

He further attacks this species of rationalism on the grounds that the first rule is not, itself, "justifiable by sense experience, by intellectual intuition of clear and distinct ideas, or by any other rational authority". Furthermore such justification, even if possible, would carry no weight except "to those persons who had already adopted the belief that arguments should count". Since the rationality of the first statement cannot be proven, then these statements cannot both be held. All these

⁸⁸ p.89. It should be noted here that Bartley is aware that for post-Humean empiricists submission to the rational authority of sense experience became "an irrational procedure." (p.93.) As will become apparent, in his inspection of rationalism Bartley loses more and more apparent allies to the irrational.

arguments militate towards a compromised form of rationalism whose integrity Bartley attempts to rescue by his appeal to "pancritical" rationalism. (pp.93-94.)

7.8.3. Bartley's Pancritical Rationalism

This "pancritical rationalism" is a development from Karl Popper's critical rationalism. Bartley also refers to it as "fallibilism" since it holds that even its own basic tenets are open to error and revision.

By dropping the comprehensive claim that all legitimate positions must be rationally justifiable and by candidly admitting his supposed limitations the critical rationalist saves himself ... from a crisis of integrity. (p.97.)

Bartley will not accept any position which, like A. J. Ayer's, claims to evade the requirement of proof.

Ayer fails to show anything of the sort. Why, on his account, do our standards of rationality not need rational justification? Simply because any such standard "could be irrational only if there were a standard of rationality which it failed to meet; whereas in fact it goes to set the standard. ... There can be no proof that what we take as good evidence really is so, [thus] it is not sensible to demand one".⁸⁹ Thus [Bartley concludes] Ayer's discussion begs the question and is itself a variety of fideism. (p.98.)

Fideism to Bartley seems to be any position which assumes that its basic tenets are correct or that its particular standards of rationality are true. (p.99)

If some particular standards of rationality are correct, then there can exist no other standards which are also correct but which can nevertheless invalidate the former as irrational ... this is precisely what is at issue. (ibid.)

⁸⁹ A. J. Ayer, The Problem of Knowledge, Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1956, pp.75, 81.

He concludes that "the rationalist position, unable to be rationally based or justified, is finally based on irrational moral commitment". (p.100.) In fact he goes further to state that

the position of arch rationalists and anti-theologians like Ayer and [Morton] White are closely parallel not only, as might be expected, to fideistic positions like contemporary Oxford theology, but also to that of the arch theologian and belligerently fideistic irrationalist, Karl Barth. (p.101.)

The question, of course, must be whether Bartley himself escapes this structural similarity and establishes his own logical starting point critically. Even Popper is regarded as "fideistic". He has said,

the fundamental rationalist attitude is based upon an irrational decision, or upon faith in reason. Accordingly our choice is open. We are free to chose some form of irrationalism, even some radical or comprehensive form. But we are also free to choose a critical form of rationalism, one which frankly admits its limitations, and its basis in an irrational decision ...⁹⁰

Bartley is obviously close to Popper and influenced by him, this, however is a major point of disagreement. Apparently Bartley convinced Popper to accept the former's distinction between justification and criticism (p.105) and to change the terminology of the Open Society, chapter 24 and to add an addendum against relativism. However, Bartley's point here is that

an unjustifiable commitment to accept the results of argument is not strictly parallel to the unjustifiable commitment that existentialists, Protestant theologians, or Marxists speak about.

⁹⁰ The Open Society and its Enemies, pp. 416-417. Also in Conjectures and Refutations, p.357.

(p,106.)

This is because any argument on behalf of any position presupposes a precommitment to accept the results of argument.

Bartley proposes a "new framework" which

permits a rationalist to be characterised as one who is willing to entertain any position and holds all his positions, including his most fundamental standards, goals, and decisions, and his basic philosophical position itself, open to criticism; one who protects nothing from criticism by justifying it irrationally; one who never cuts off an argument by resorting to faith or irrational commitment. (p.118.)

This is "pancritical rationalism". As can be seen, it is an integral part of Bartley's argument that positions cannot finally be justified at all, since justification is an archaic remnant of a bygone authoritarianism.

(p.89.) So final justification is not an element of his new framework but rather critical assessment. As he puts it:

if all justification - rational as well as irrational - is really abandoned, there is indeed no need to justify irrationally a position that is rationally unjustifiable. The position may be held rationally without needing any justification at all - provided that it can be and is held open to criticism and survives severe examination. The question of how well a position is justified differs utterly from the question of how criticizable it is, and how well it is criticised. (p.119.)

7.8.4. A Consideration of Bartley's Argument

As described by Bartley the difficulty for the liberal protestant theologian who would affirm the equality of reason (or unreason) in Christian (or any)

religious commitment lies in the inability of the rationalist to assent to the historical Jesus, an assent that Bartley takes as a priori necessary to Christianity. However, (1) the position that no coherent picture is possible (accepted by Bartley, p.33) is more than a mere convenience to fideist Christian thought. It is itself the product of critical scholarship. As such it is fruitless to argue about the nature of the historical Christ. And (2), assent to the historical Jesus is typical of Eliade's identification of the concealment of the sacred in the profane; the replacement of traditional-mythical by historical authority, the identification of the historical as the real. The problem that

a truly Christian identity, ... demanded assent to the person of the historical Jesus - as he actually had been, not as one might have liked him to be, (above, p.330)

is a clear example of Eliade's notion. However, Bartley points out that Kirkegaard explicitly rejects this History/Sacrality equation. "History," Kirkegaard writes, "makes out Christ to be other than he truly is."⁹¹ In agreement with Kirkegaard, Bartley considers that any form of Christianity which is this-worldly and ethical rather than relying on special revelation is "in danger of losing its identity". (p.41.) The real irrationality of Barth (as presented by Bartley, v.p.45)

⁹¹ Quoted in Bartley, p.41. The source of the quotation is unclear; perhaps Philosophical Fragments.

lies in this insistence on a historical authority, or rather the restriction of the Word of God to a single event, the insistence on that event as total and exhaustive revelation of the sacred.

The limitation of reason may be the only serious argument upon which Kirkegaard and Barth relied, and it may be that these are the most influential of Christian scholars, (this may be why Christianity lacks influence among Western philosophers), but this is not the only serious argument for Christian commitment today. Bartley's whole argument shows this a prioristic turn, defining the problem to justify his own solution; throughout Bartley insists that the Protestant is irrational (eg. p.78), without having proven other than that Barth and Kirkegaard can be called this. As he rightly says, "Kirkegaard stresses not simply the existence but even the necessity of a conflict between religion and reason". (p.43.) However, in the light of this interpretation of Eliade, could it not be said that one is not aware of the full range and extent of the "reasons" which persuade one to a specific conclusion? One is aware of many supportive arguments, none of which are necessary or sufficient. The fact that committed believers can lose faith indicates that their commitment is supported by something frangible, it is dependent on something but not on conscious reason alone. If the rationalists themselves were supported by reason alone, would they not find more consensus amongst themselves?

That they do not agree stems from the inability to define reason and rationality acceptably.

By rationalism Bartley does not mean the seventeenth century sense of the opposition to empiricism, but rather "the tradition whose members are dedicated to the task of trying to learn more about the world through the practice of critical argument". (p.xxvi n.3.) Also he states that rationalists are "eager to make all their decisions - moral, scientific or otherwise - rationally, on rational grounds, or with good reasons". (p.76.) This is not necessarily exclusive of religious conviction, both by empirical and logical derivation, unless the irrational commitment to doctrine be an a priori condition of being "religious". A belief of the "general revelation" kind could easily square the two. There are good and sufficient reasons for one's commitment, involved in one's interpretation of one's experience of life, though they may be too subtle, complex and personal to communicate. If there are such grounds for belief, despite their incommunicable nature, then the "irrationalist" is not "free" as Bartley suggests, but is just as constrained by environmental factors as the "rationalist". There are, in fact, no grounds for accepting that commitments are "necessarily arbitrary" rather than based on subtle, complex and personal data. Such a view is suggested by the fact that "Protestant existentialists often deny that this is a matter of picking and choosing, stressing that we are chosen", as

Bartley recognises.⁹²

Rejecting "self-evidence" or "universality" as grounds for religious conviction, and having assumed a rejection of reason, Bartley can only conceive "whim" as the foundation of belief. Although this is not actually an argument but a statement dressed as such ("any belief which is not rooted in reason, self-evidence, or universality is mere whim"), it should be considered. Is religious conviction based on some support other than mere whimsy? If so what? (Are people willing to suffer and die on a whim?) Are self-evidence and universality the only arbiters of reason? Do rationalists hold only those opinions rooted in self-evidence and universality? This restores the tu quoque in a slightly different form. Not that all opinions are finally irrational, but that in experiential fact people do accept profound convictions which are not based on the conscious application of a reasoned process. A committed religious believer assumes that there are good and sufficient reasons for their belief, Bartley assumes that there are not. The difference may be mainly that the former has a tendency to accept that the grounds of belief will be mysterious, inaccessible, the latter insists that they must be accessible. This establishes a slightly different form of the argument, evading all these difficulties by

⁹² p.77, n.9. This can be likened to asking whether we actually "free to choose" our aesthetic preferences, for example.

stating that the reasons for one's convictions transcend argumentative logic in the holistic sense that the commitment is greater than the sum of the supportive reasons since one cannot adequately, consciously, consider all reasons simultaneously in detail and in all their complex relations. Although this is still an argument from the limits of rationality, it is not a formal but an existential limitation. It is rarely adequate to transfer such an existential problem of conflicting truth beliefs into the forum of pure logic. Although this does still tend to a form of relativism the issue can still be addressed by verbal argument, exposing opponents to the reasons which add to one's own convictions to discover whether those reasons carry more weight than opposing ones. This certainly does not make nonsense of historical development etc. but is integral with it. Bartley himself accepts that even the "pancritical rationalist" still "holds countless unexamined propositions and assumptions, many of which may be false". (p.121.) Assessments of validity are already made, based on non-conscious, complex reasons.⁹³ The fact is that most people do establish their own "ultimate concerns" without conscious rational procedures - thus empirical, logical procedures should lead us to the conclusion that the establishment of ultimate

⁹³ I.e. "chaotic" in the sense of pre-formal and unpredictable. This itself lends a new revalorisation to the symbolic structure of order out of chaos.

concerns is not consciously rational. That is to say not describable in terms of logical rational argument. So the establishment qua establishment of ultimate concerns may be beyond criticism, but elements of experience claimed to be constitutive and supportive can be personally assessed and judged, and one's concurrence can be (and is) given or withheld.

In further clarifying his position on rationality Bartley quotes the Fontana/Harper Dictionary of Modern Thought that rationalism denies "the acceptability of beliefs founded on anything but experience and reasoning, deductive or inductive". (p.86.) My point is that all beliefs are so founded, although not necessarily on direct experience and conscious reasoning. Different life experience and different styles of reason, deeply conditioned by cultural tradition, will produce different beliefs. These differences need not be justified by appeal to irrational criteria. According to Bartley's reasoning they cannot be justified at all, since justification is an archaic remnant of a bygone authoritarianism. That the same critique can produce different reactions in different auditors leaves the pluralist position unscathed. Eliade's theory seems to be that the decipherment of the existential situation reveals the relationship of the individual with the sacred (i.e., that which is apprehended as the real, the true, etc.), and therefore conditions what one apprehends to be the rules of reason. The existential situation is

one's own personal experience, and the means of decipherment are the rules of reason. It is questionable whether the latter have ever been successfully universalised, and even if they were, since the former cannot be universalised, the resulting relationship revealed thereby will always be relative to the individual. Of course, standardising the rules of reason would be desirable if only for the increase in effective communication, but we cannot standardise experience, and so we cannot hope for complete consensus of the beliefs "founded upon experience and reason".

7.8.5. Conclusions

As we have seen, Bartley's argument is forced to consign most thinker who would wish to be considered rational to the same fate as the "irrationalists", even Ayer and Popper. On the other hand he has shown committed "irrationalists" like Barth to be dependent on rational forms of argument and attempted "justification". It would seem that as irrationalism is "infected" with rationalism, so rationalism is infected with irrationalism. A schema such as underlies Eliade's work, recognising a presystematic rationale, a coherence which precedes methodic thought, would account for this. Rationality is suffused with irrationality and vice versa, since both are based on a perceived coherence which preceded rational reflection, yet which was itself possessed of a system, and thus was in some way rational.

Because of this any attempt to distinguish absolutely between reason and unreason will inevitably run into difficulty. This is precisely what happens to Bartley.

As he says,

it is not irrational to hold a belief that cannot be derived from - i.e., justified by - the rational authority unless its denial can be derived from the rational authority. (p.116.)

This creates a confusion of authoritarian justificationism and criticism:

to criticise a position, one must show either that it cannot be derived from, or else it conflicts with, the rational authority, which is not itself open to criticism. (ibid.)

The question, of course, is as to the source of the "rational authority". Since he states that a

position may be held rationally without needing any justification at all - provided that it can be and is held open to criticism and survives severe examination, (above, p.335)

Bartley's answer to the question of the establishment of rational authority is constant criticism. But since more than one position on the same point evidently can survive severe examination, and constant criticism, relativism becomes an unavoidable outcome of "pancritical rationalism". Two persons, even applying the same criteria of reason to their differing personal experience, will achieve differing conclusions, which will nevertheless be equally correct for each of them. Bartley himself says that the

objective structure of belief will be relative to the basic critical statements we accept ... If we were to make these basic critical statements at which we stop absolute, then we would get

subjectivity or relativism of the vicious kind. But this we have not done. (p.122, n.14.)

Apparently Bartley and Eliade are finally in agreement that the real problem of rationalism, or of any form of human thought, is to assume one's own absolute unquestionable and complete correctness. (v. below ch.9, §.7) As observed above (p.331) Bartley takes fideism to be any position which assumes that its basic tenets are correct or that its particular standards of rationality are true. (p.99.) Similarly, although more in the style of an historian of religions than a philosopher, Eliade states,

if Time, seen as Maya, is itself a manifestation of the Divinity, to believe in Time is not itself a "bad action": "bad action" is to believe that nothing else exists, nothing outside of time.⁹⁴

Thus, commitment, in the sense of insisting that I am absolutely and exhaustively and exclusively correct in my apprehension of the real, and thus cannot be criticised and need never alter my beliefs even if I am, is a position repugnant to both scholars. However, commitment, in the sense of having recourse to a prior apprehension of the real (a hierophany in Eliade's terms, for Bartley evidently the apprehension that constant criticism should provide rational authority) is also basic to both scholars. Bartley accepts, along with "countless unexamined propositions and assumptions" that "pancritical rationalism" is desirable. He believes in

⁹⁴ Images and Symbols, p.91.

it and to that extent he is committed to it and one must say, "tu quoque, Professor Bartley". His insistence that his commitment is not absolute, unquestionable, or unchangeable is wholly admirable. However, his claim that "pancritical rationalism" is the only fully rational position, that is that it exclusively makes full use of the exercise of reason, which is our only guarantee of the truth and hence "reality" of our beliefs, smacks of the very exclusivism which he seems to attack.

Certainly, these arguments do not finally convince me that Bartley himself, or any true "pancritical rationalist" escapes religious commitment in the sense which it has been interpreted here, and hence do not disprove any of the contentions made concerning the ubiquity of religious belief and behaviour, or disrupt the coherence of Eliade's thought. That that commitment is ir-rational and thus not open to criticism is not a necessary concomitant of that thought. Rather it is pre-rational and not open to conscious inspection as it happens. It can certainly, and I would agree with Bartley that it should, be open to later consideration and criticism. I am forced to speculate as to what precisely Bartley means by "uncriticizable" or "accepted as uncriticizable"? It would appear that he means not open or susceptible to rejection despite severe criticism. As long as one person holds a position (despite the critical argument which have swayed all others away from it) then that position could be said to

be uncriticizable. Contrariwise if a million people hold a position (despite the critical arguments that have swayed one other away) then that position could still be said to be uncriticizable. No argument is guaranteed to achieve the rejection or acceptance of a position, so acceptance of any position which is rejected by any other can be seen as "cutting off an argument by resorting to faith". (p.118). The basic point of the tu quoque as I have reformulated it is that the conclusion of any and all arguments is a position of faith since no argument is the source of apodictic knowledge. Since apostasy does occur - even amongst Barthians - it can be argued that despite their protestations to the contrary they do not accept uncritically their own faith. The question is: at what point does criticism become conviction? Granted the tu quoque argument loses its sting against one who insists that all his convictions are open to revision or rejection, however, does not the very possibility of a lapse of faith indicate that even a committed Barthian, for example, is also open to revision and rejection in fact?

Just as early Christian apologists used their moral life as an argument for their theological justification so Bartley is using the intellectual life of the "pancritical rationalist" for the philosophical justification of his position. The fact that the pancritical rationalist (claims) to hold all convictions open does not and cannot philosophically elevate his

position above all others. How many would accept the title pancritical rationalist in this sense but still disagree with each other? Are we not all pancritical rationalists in fact, despite an occasionally expressed desire to be other? What does it mean, apart from the admittedly honest methodology of admitting that one could always "change one's mind"? And what, then, is commitment apart from the equally honest admission that one does not wish to change one's mind?

Chapter Eight

Ivan Strenski's Support for Eliade's Theory of Myth.

In the preceding considerations of some of Eliade's critics I have generally restricted myself to answering their objections. However, it has, I think, been increasingly evident that Eliade's thought, interpreted in this way, is capable not only of sustaining itself as coherent and resisting these criticisms, but of itself providing an explanation for the source of both the misapprehensions and the antipathy which fuel the critics. In a more detailed consideration of one of Eliade's most recent and most virulent critics I hope now to make that implication explicit.

In his book Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth Century History and in his earlier article in Adrian Cunningham (ed.), The Theory of Myth: Six Studies, Ivan Strenski gives a powerful critique of Mircea Eliade's theory of myth. He concludes that Eliade disdains history, disregards falsifiability, assumes the a priori reality of the activity of the sacred, makes

methodological prescriptions which are disastrous for the study of religion, and he argues that the traditionalist and mythico-religious feelings of the Romanian right-wing Iron Guard have produced Eliade's ontological and religious viewpoint. It is my contention that close scrutiny of Strenski's work reveals not only a lack of familiarity with the materials in question and thus a partial autonomy from historical and cultural data, but also a degree of polemical zeal which actually supports Eliade's understanding of myth. Finally, I will argue, the application of Strenski's critique to Eliade can only serve to reduce the significance of the latter's writings, whereas the application of Eliade's theory lends greater significance, not only to myth itself, but also to Strenski's work.

In Four Theories of Myth, Strenski suggests that "myth" is, in fact, non-existent. Or, rather, it is a fabrication of "the myth industry" whose real "export" is literature in two classes, critical theory and "applied" writing about myths. (p.2.) In this book, as the title suggests, he probes the work of four theorists: Ernst Cassirer, Bronislaw Malinowski, Mircea Eliade, and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Recognizing that theorists "assume and apply far more than they let on; they trade in the currency of their cultures much more than even they perhaps realise", (ibid.) Strenski

propose[s] a radical shift from the "textual" approach to the search for common ground in the study of myth: not just "text" but text in context,

informed by intention ... appreciating the role of authorial intention ... (p.9.)

He then goes on to ask the questions,

given a certain context or framework of significance, what did our theorists intend to accomplish? Why did they care about "myth"? Why did they care as they did? Given an understanding of the contextual conventions making sense of discourse about "myth" at a crucial time in the lives of our theorists, why did they bother to engage the subject? Why did they intend to engage it as they did? (p.10.)

This is an admirable proposal and the questions raised are important and meaningful ones, particularly the further question, "do any of our modern theorists understand why past theorists thought they were right?". (p.5.)

It was, perhaps, stylistically unfortunate, spoiling the excitement of the chase, the dramatic suspense of original research, that Strenski had already answered the question concerning his subjects' understanding of earlier theorists in the negative and had anticipated the answer to his questions concerning motivations with the statement that

like Malinowski, Lévi-Strauss simply asserts another viewpoint amid the plurality, without giving us a sense of why this view is compelling ... They want to dominate the field. Thus, the secret locked up in the ploys of our theorists is their move to corner the "market", their intellectual imperialist grab for power. (p.5.)

Eliade and Lévi-Strauss are considered equally guilty of this "intellectual imperialism" and its concomitant grab for power. (p.7.) Here, before the case is considered, is Strenski's final reply to the above questions.

Shifting his metaphors between capitalism and imperialism, he has concluded that the motivating factors of his four chosen theorists are personal and selfish, based in a desire to "corner the market" and in a "grab for power". This, he is suggesting, is what they intended to accomplish, this is why they cared, this is why they engaged the subject. Why they engaged the subject "precisely as they did" Strenski seeks to answer by way of a consideration of the lives and backgrounds which are contexts to the theories produced. This must, I feel, be a valid approach as the institutional settings and personal intentions which condition a scholar's expressions are all too often ignored.¹

Having no great depth of acquaintance with his other three subjects but being specifically concerned with the thought of Mircea Eliade I will inspect Strenski's attempt to substantiate his aggressive claims in that specific instance. His case, as I said, proposes "a measure of contextualism informed by an appreciation of the role of authorial intention in helping us understand theories". One of his expressed desires is to understand "why past theorists thought they were right". (p.5.) This promises to be both widely informed and sensitive; to consider the whole context of the scholar as well as

¹ This approach had already been successfully applied by, for example, L.S. Feuer, who shows how the cultural context of Nils Bohr's youth could have helped his decision to look for a non-mechanistic model of the atom; Einstein and the Generation of Science. New York: Basic Books, 1974.

providing a sympathetic insight into his subjective motivation. Strenski's conclusions are based on several elements, some of which are actually "textual" and some of which are "contextual".

Strenski begins his analysis

by asking what Eliade takes a "myth" to be. [He does] so because [Eliade] himself never offers a fully ramified statement on the matter. (p.71.)

This is not actually a criticism considering Strenski's opening statement that

myth is everything and nothing at the same time ... there is no such "thing" as myth. There may be the word "myth", but the word names numerous and conflicting "objects" of inquiry, not a "thing" with its name written on it. (p.1.)

Accepting this to be the case, offering a fully ramified statement is hardly a feasible aim; however, there is, as Strenski recognises, a complex understanding of "myth" involved in Eliade's writings.

In his earlier article Strenski stated, "besides functioning to bring about ontological orientation, myths originate in the need for and experience of the same".² Now he states solely that myths "originate in the human experience of a yearning for such a fundamental orientation".³ He has neglected the contention that myths originate in the experience of an orientation as well as in the yearning for (further) orientation. This

² "Mircea Eliade: Some Theoretical Problems," in Adrian Cunningham (ed.), The Theory of Myth: Six Studies, p.64. Emphasis added.

³ Four Theories, p.1.

addition alone would suffice to give Eliade's concept of myth a significant content, indicative of the existential situation of mankind, to which Strenski henceforward pays no heed. Thus, while Strenski is quite correct that Eliade does make this existential experience of orientation a focal point in cross-cultural comparisons of mythologies, he neglects to deal with the experience of orientation as experience. For example, the experience of orientation in three dimensions, largely due to humanity's vertical posture,⁴ may be similar to Tylor's notion of animism in seeking to provide a cross-cultural universal, but unlike Tylor's notion it is not so easily contested.

Given certain of Eliade's statements it is understandable how Strenski can reach the conclusion that he does concerning Eliade's belief in creation:

narrowly speaking, Eliade believes both that a real creation of things in time occurred, and that all subsequent "creation" stories, in the broad sense, actually refer to the first creation of the world by God.⁵

Eliade states, for example, that "the creation of the world being the pre-eminent instance of creation, the cosmogony becomes the exemplary model for 'creation' of every kind".⁶ However, further reading of Eliade soon reveals that, in context, Eliade's references to

⁴ V. The History of Religious Ideas, vol. I, p.3.

⁵ Four Theories, p.73.

⁶ Myth and Reality, p.21.

"creation" could equally indicate Biblical Genesis or the Big Bang. The idea that the cosmogony is the exemplary model for all creation myths does not necessarily imply belief in a specific cosmogony. The narrative model of the cosmogony is intended rather than any specific description of the origins of the cosmos. This is clearly indicated by Eliade's observation that "the cosmogonic myth is 'true' because the existence of the world is there to prove it". (ibid., p.6.) This cannot apply exclusively to any particular cosmogony, but only generally to the narrative model of cosmogony. While the temporal and ontological priority of cosmogony are undeniably claimed to be characteristics of the narrative, nothing which Strenski quotes, or which I have read from Eliade, exceeds this claim. Only when we are faced with seriously conflicting cosmologies does the logic of the cosmos justifying the cosmogony become problematic, and this is a specific problem of "modern" humanity. As has already been mentioned, "traditional" humanity deferred to the authority of tradition, by definition. (p.53, n.33) It could be said that "traditional" humanity lived in a "monomythic" world, and was not faced with a plurality of conflicting myths which demanded contradictory valorisations.

The very fact that Eliade could be interpreted as referring to a specific cosmogony which is the model of all creation stories is characteristic of his style: he writes in such a way as to admit coherence to belief in a

cosmogony in its own sphere of reference, without deferring to any specific cosmogony and to the provincialism that this would entail. However this may be, Strenski refuses to allow that Eliade's "interest in the priority of creation stories" might be phenomenal or taxonomic. "If it were," Strenski insists, "his view would be just as arbitrary and/or conventional as any other."⁷ Yet he criticises Eliade precisely because his view is finally arbitrary, being based on "personal intuition" and little more,⁸ thus reinstating the possibility that the latter's concepts are phenomenal and taxonomic. This does leave the charge of potential arbitrariness, as Eliade himself was certainly aware. In the preface to From Primitives to Zen, he has stated, "any thematic classification of religious documents implies a certain amount of arbitrariness". That charge is resisted by an appeal to precisely those historical documents which Strenski takes Eliade to disdain.

That Eliade disdained historical documents is a charge which has been levelled by several critics as we have seen and which is taken up by Strenski under the label of "anti-historicism". Actually, this epithet was originally applied to Eliade by a more supportive scholar, Guildford Dudley III, with reference to Eliade's

⁷ Four Theories, p. 73.

⁸ Strenski reports from Prof. P. Hammond of the University of California at Santa Barbara that Eliade admitted this himself. *Ibid.*, p.70, n.2.

opposition to the post-Hegelian philosophy of history and never implied a disdain for documentary evidence.

Strenski's case for the accusation of "anti-historicism" is most clearly stated in his earlier article where he contends that history is disqualified from Eliade's explanations of religion because it "neglects some constituent 'interior' dimension of human existence".⁹

In fact, Strenski and Eliade appear to agree that if history were, in Strenski's words, "to exclude some vital feature from its account, such as human intentions", then it would be inadequate as an explanation. (ibid, p.45.)

Strenski quotes Eliade as saying that "the historian of religion sensu stricto can never ignore that which is historically concrete".¹⁰ He further refers to Eliade's criticism of the aim of history as "merely to piece together an event or series of events", which, he protests "history proper" does not do.¹¹ Why should he then accuse Eliade of "disdaining history" when he agrees that history proper "is not all positivist history",¹² and thus that the history of religions is inadequate if reduced to a mere chronicle?

That Strenski seeks further to support his claim that Eliade "disdains" history with the quotation that

⁹ "Some Theoretical Problems," p.45.

¹⁰ ibid., p.45. Eliade, Images and Symbols. Studies in Religious Symbolism, pp.32f.

¹¹ Patterns in Comparative Religion, p.5.

¹² "Some Theoretical Problems," p.45.

"religious documents are at the same time historical documents",¹³ shows that marvellous aptitude for perceiving facts to fit preconceived theories that one is more accustomed to encountering in religious polemics. So does his attempt to ascribe to Eliade the logically incoherent view that "a plenary history gives meaning both "internal" and "external" but it falls short of the higher, transcendent, "prehistoric" meanings which condition the lower or historical meanings".¹⁴ This concept of a "plenary" history is introduced with no explanation or textual support (surely, the only "plenary" history is the event itself, all later description is historiography and necessarily limited by its perspective). Then Strenski proceeds to attempt to make Eliade responsible for the self-contradictory phrase "a plenary history ... falls short". He goes on in this earlier article to interpolate phrases into Eliade's writings which were never there. With no more support than an unquoted reference to The Myth of the Eternal Return, pp. 34-35, where Eliade discusses the nature of archaic ontology, Strenski proceeds to read "logical, chronological and ontological" into Eliade's thought. (ibid., p.46.) Surely, a scholar should exercise extreme caution before slipping a word such as "ontologically" into a context where an author did not actually use it.

¹³ The Two and the One, p.196.

¹⁴ "Some Theoretical Problems," pp.46f.

As I pointed out in my detailed consideration of The Myth of the Eternal Return the opening sentence of that book states clearly that Eliade intends to study the "conceptions" of ontology that "can be read from the behaviour" of archaic humanity. (p.3.) This in no way justifies the ascriptions of ontological assumptions which Strenski, like da Silva and Allen, proceeds to make.

What is the reason for such a concerted effort to discredit Eliade's thought? To adapt Strenski's own words, given a certain context or framework of significance, what does he intend to accomplish? Why does he care as he does? Given an understanding of the contextual conventions making sense of (academic) discourse, why did he engage Eliade as he did? I will return to these questions later.

Now, however, I wish to pass from a consideration of the "textual" analysis of Eliade's thought to the "contextual". The contemporary history of Eliade's native Romania is not as obscure as Strenski seems to think. Mac Linscott Ricketts's Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Roots goes a great distance towards revealing Eliade's sources and the context of his early years. Unfortunately it was not available when Strenski first published his Four Theories of Myth. It must, however, be stated that Strenski's misinterpretations of Eliade's historical context cannot simply be explained by lack of information. For example, volume one of the

Autobiography, published in 1981, makes it clear that Eliade did not "detach himself from the Indian scene of 1932 in order to devote himself to writing", as Strenski states.¹⁵ In fact he was recalled to Romania to fulfil his national service, a duty which he felt himself compelled to discharge.¹⁶ Nor was his "detachment" from Romania entirely a matter of choice. Strenski actually quotes him as saying, "it was a departure which saved my life".¹⁷ Why then does Strenski insist that "we can know little of the real significance of Eliade's choice to leave his own country". (ibid., p.88.)

His consideration of Eliade's fictional production also suffers from conflict with recorded history. The claim that "creating fiction seems not only to have been Eliade's first love, but perhaps his truest", is unsubstantiated. While writing in general was compulsive for Eliade, and he considered occasional immersion in fantasy and fiction as necessary for his mental health, both Eliade's own words¹⁸ and the testament of his literary legacy bear out the fact that "scientific"

¹⁵ Four Theories, p.88.

¹⁶ Autobiography, vol.I. Journey East, Journey West. 1907-1938, p.208.

¹⁷ Four Theories, p.101.

¹⁸ In a letter of 1934, after the publication of the novels Isabel si apele diavolului, Maitreyi, and Lumina ce se stinge, Eliade referred to his work on Yoga as "my first book." His other publication he refers to as, "a mere passe-temps, a safety valve against overwork." V. Ricketts, Romanian Roots, vol. I, p.745.

analysis of the human existential situation as recorded by the documents of historical religions was indeed his greatest obsession. In fact, it seems that he almost gave up fiction in 1948, despairing of an audience since he felt capable of producing literature only in Romanian, until his wife, Christinel, persuaded him otherwise.¹⁹ Strenski is also aware that Eliade's "longstanding affection for dream and fantasy may have been put aside for a while in the 1930s".²⁰ How, then, can he justify his conclusion?

Similar defects beset Strenski's characterization of Ionescu's philosophy. The description of the latter's "irrationalism" as inferring that

salvation was possible only if people gave up their desire for knowledge and sacrificed their intellects on the altar of religious faith, (ibid., p.93.)

betrays a striking ignorance of Ionescu's philosophy of mutually exclusive "planes" or "levels" of existence.²¹ It also reveals the real villain of the piece: Strenski's major motivation seems to be to oppose any appeal to

¹⁹ Autobiography, vol.II, p.132.

²⁰ Four Theories, p.97.

²¹ V. Ricketts, op. cit. pp.91-126 on the philosophy of Ionescu. Esp. p.102. "Ionescu's reputation for being an "irrationalist" is well founded, then, in the sense that he opposed all rationalistic "philosophies" which affirmed explicitly or by implication that the world of time and space - which for him is the realm proper to reason - is the only realm, or that the only means of cognition is by inductive reasoning from sense data." [The text erroneously reads "denied explicitly." Prof. Ricketts has confirmed this erratum.]

intuition or "introspectively-detected information"²² as utterly removing a stable basis of knowledge. Strenski has wrongly assumed that "Eliade has taken the self-authentication of intuition and introspection as the epistemological grounds for his discipline". (ibid., p.49.) If that were the case Eliade would not have stressed the need for the generalist historian of religion to be constantly aware of the developments in specialised fields and to diligently return to original sources whenever possible.²³ Confusion is possible, however, since Eliade seems to assume that for homo religiosus the self-authenticating appearance of intuitions²⁴ permits the recognition of the sacred/real in the profane/contingent. In Strenski's case it appears that he has his own self-authenticating intuition, which some of us do not share, as regards the plausibility of immediate empirical and falsifiable claims. It is this observable tendency to accept one's own intuitions as self-authenticating which is given logical priority in Eliade's understanding of religious data.

It is not the case that the historian of religion's own intuitions as regards his data have logical priority

²² "Some Theoretical Problems," p.49.

²³ v. eg. The Sacred and the Profane, p.15; The History of Religious Ideas, p.xiii; Images and Symbols, p.163; and also Seymour Cain, "Mircea Eliade; Attitudes Towards History," p.13, and Charles Long, "The Significance for Modern Man of Mircea Eliade's Work," p.133.

²⁴ esp. "archetypal intuitions," v. Ricketts, p.1151.

and are thus the epistemological foundation of his discipline. The foundation is, and always has been, the original source documents and the researches of specialists, including fieldwork. Exercising Strenski's own "contextual" approach it would be interesting to investigate how Strenski came to these conclusions, since this cannot be directly inferred from a reading of Eliade's works. Unfortunately I lack the data to do so. Thus it is merely internally-generated speculation to suggest that he has perhaps encountered supposed "followers" of Eliade who did apply this cavalier, authentication-by-intuition approach to the history of religions.

Whatever may be the case, this fear of "autonomy from historical and cultural data" seems to be a negative influence on Strenski's scholarly deportment. Although he has said that

if "influences" are claimed one needs to show that there are true similarities between the thinkers in question, some sort of awareness of their "influences", and significant dependence on the thought of the "influence",²⁵

he continues as if merely stating such an admirable methodological caveat were sufficient. He certainly does not seem to put it into practice. This is true of Nae Ionescu's influence on the young Eliade and it is doubly so of the influence of the Romanian extreme rightist movement, the Legion of the Archangel Michael, frequently

²⁵ Four Theories, p.9.

referred to as the Iron Guard.²⁶ Strenski is well aware of the dubious and speculative nature of his case. "Readers," he says, "should also be cautious in drawing inferences concerning Ionescu's (and especially Eliade's) involvement in legionary politics."²⁷ Where Strenski fails to attempt to prove any "significant dependence" on the thought of Ionescu, he fails to indicate even a "similarity" with the Iron Guard. However, this does not prevent his boldly stated conclusion that the traditionalism and mythico-religious feelings of the Romanian right "become" Eliade's ontological judgment of the world and the basis of his dominant religious viewpoint. (ibid., p.102.) The only logical support for this is that, the historical facts of Eliade's life having been considered,

none of this denies the affinity between the ideas of the Legion and the Romanian right-wing irrationalist traditionalists, nor the intellectual home Eliade found there. (p.97.)

Not only has Strenski failed to establish such a connection, he has failed, as we saw above pp. 350-4, to demonstrate an accurate understanding of what Eliade's judgment and viewpoint might be. Thus he cannot be in a position to determine accurately what affinities that judgement may or may not have with other ideas. Certainly Eliade was influenced by his existential

²⁶ v. my discussion of Eliade's Political Career below, appendix A.

²⁷ Four Theories, p.96.

situation and his particular cultural background as was argued above (pp.176f., p.190). His experiences as a citizen of a nation "marked by the fatality of history"²⁸ unquestionably influenced his attitude to the "terror of history", for example. However, it is a considerable progression from this to the attribution of the basis of Eliade's judgement of the world to a specific political movement.

It should be recognised that Strenski's consideration of the affinities between Eliade and the philosopher-poet, Lucian Blaga is considerably more reasonable and justified. I imagine that Eliade would not have objected to such a comparison.²⁹ Strenski's conclusions, however, still bear the stamp of a ~~an~~ polemical attitude. For example, he has stated that the traditional Romanian poem, the Mioritza, concerns "a nuptial death for the sake of others". It is about "death both as a defiant gesture and as an heroic, selfless act of comradeship".³⁰ Nothing could be further from the truth. The text of the Mioritza (a prose translation of which can be found on pp.227-8 of Eliade's Zalmoxis, which Strenski cites) concerns rather a shepherd's transformation of a meaningless death, which benefits no-one except his murderers, into a mythical

²⁸ The Myth of the Eternal Return, p.152, n. 11.

²⁹ On Eliade and Lucian Blaga see Ricketts, Romanian Roots, pp.857-864.

³⁰ Four Theories, p.99.

identification with Nature. A creative valorisation of an otherwise meaningless event. A frequent criticism of this ballad was, in fact, that it valorised a submissive resignation to death. Nor does Eliade at any point in his consideration of the scholarship centred upon this ballad indicate it to be "part of universal human nature". (ibid., p.127.) In fact Eliade concludes,

the "adherence" of a whole people to this folk masterpiece nevertheless remains significant, and it is impossible to conceive of an adequate history of Romanian culture which should fail to analyze and interpret that profound kinship.³¹

This misreading of the Mioritza, carried over into Strenski's discussion of Blaga and "Volkish" themes, serves further to falsely associate Eliade with some "heroic", violent ideal reminiscent of the "aryan" ideals of Nazi Germany. Considerable light can be thrown on Eliade's conception of the Mioritza by a reading of his play Iphigenia. (v. above pp.223f.)

Despite the accepted importance of context, text, as the deliberate statement of the author's intention, is still of enormous significance. Having failed to establish the extent of Eliade's connection with the Romanian right, having repeatedly warned against "political labels" and "leaping to conclusions",³² Strenski, with no more support than the assertion that history does not deny his intuition, requires more than a

³¹ Zalmoxis, the Vanishing God, p.256. Emphasis added.

³² Four Theories, pp.96 & 213, n. 97.

questionable textual understanding of Eliade before leaping to the conclusion, whence, in fact, he started. He has taken an admirable and viable methodological stance and reached over-simplified, hastily drawn conclusions based on insufficient data and by failing to control his own preconceptions.

Strenski's misreadings and debatable contextualising aside, his major objection against Eliade's viewpoint is that, conditioned by his antipathy to actual history as evinced by his literary device of subsuming history in fantasy, Eliade is led to a

disregard for a crucial canon of good behaviour in the present scholarly community--falsifiability. Say what one will about the word "history", Eliade's decision to operate with methodological notions such as the "transhistorical" and "non-temporal" effectively means that his claims are unfalsifiable by any criterion grounded in the human world of time and space. (p.108)

This unfalsifiability eventually leads to "granting the same plausibility to transcendent religious claims as to any other". (ibid.) As Strenski said in his earlier article, "any valid explanation of religion requires, to Eliade's mind, the assumption of the reality of the activity of the sacred".³³ This is evidently such an horrendous methodological sacrilege (and I use the word advisedly, as I hope will become clear), that Strenski is prepared to engage it as violently as he does. His belief that Eliade's "methodological prescriptions are disastrous for the study of religion" (ibid., p.42.)

³³ "Some Theoretical Problems," p.47.

inspired his analysis. But was he right in 1973? Is his assumption in his more recent analysis, founded as it is in his own "internal" and "external" contexts, justifiable?

In fact, the best examples Strenski could adduce from Eliade's actual writing in support of this claim of the assumed ontology of the sacred are from Images and Symbols, p.32f, that man's existential situation "is not always a historic one in the sense of being conditioned solely by the contemporaneous historical moment", and from The Two and the One, pp.196f, that a complete description of the history, diffusion and evaluation of the symbol of the sacred tree, does not exhaust its significance, "the meaning of this symbol, what it reveals, what it shows in its quality as a religious symbol". Neither of these really supports Strenski's claim. Man is conditioned by other than "the contemporaneous historical moment". He is conditioned by his awareness of the past and by his expectations of the future, that is not to say the actual historical past and future which collapse into the immediate historical moment, but the meanings which both may have for a specific individual. Those meanings are realised by the interpretations of the human mind as it actively constitutes inter-related systems of significance. Even though those significations are conditioned by humanity's real experience (that is to say revelations of reality in hierophanies) they are none the less original and

unpredictable. They thus transcend the purely causal relationships of physical reality.³⁴

Similarly, the symbol of the sacred tree is not exhausted by such descriptions because they do not dictate its present and future significance. In order to apply to novel situations not specifically considered earlier when the symbol, myth, or ritual came into being, the significance of a myth must be "open" to novel interpretations and applications. It must transcend the limitations of formal logical definition. That is to say its meaning remains potential.³⁵ A statement or narrative may come to mean something which it does not yet mean when it is applied under new circumstances. Religious faith consists, in part, in the ascription of the possibility of such infinite future significance to particular symbols, myths, and rituals.

Although there is a sense in which Eliade does require the assumption of the reality of the sacred, this is because he identifies reality and the sacred.³⁶ The sacred is that which is apprehended as the real by homo religiosus, humanity in so far as we apprehend reality.

³⁴ For further exposition of determined but unpredictable phenomena, v. James Gleick, Chaos: Making a New Science, pp.250-255.

³⁵ Cf. Culianu's insistence that one cannot finally succeed in deciphering religious symbols, p.208 above.

³⁶ Egs. "Cosmical Homology and Yoga, p.188; Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, pp.14,23; "The Structure of Religious Symbols," p.506; The Sacred and the Profane, pp.12,28.

This is an eminently sound procedural assumption which becomes problematic only when "real" is equated with "available to sensory perception;" an old saw which has lost more than a few teeth. It is unnecessary to go into the question of the constitutive characteristics of "reality" here. Suffice it to say that Strenski's implicit a priori rejection of the reality of the sacred is a less than helpful methodological assumption which militates towards a perception of the adherents of any religion (other than my own) as at best misguided (where I have access to the true guide) or at worst stark mad (where I, of course, am sane).

According to Eliade's methodological postulate of the equation of the sacred and the real, those who believe that they have an unshakable, apodictic authority by which to guarantee the reality of their own claims are operating a belief of a religious nature. Actually, the "plausibility" of any claim, transcendental or otherwise, can only be objectively measured by the number of people who make that claim.³⁷ Strenski's unqualified restriction of the "human world" to that of "time and space" (above, p.362), itself a strangely ill-defined concept except in the context of relativity theory, where its application to the human world becomes problematic,

³⁷ Similarly, the significance of any folkloric or mythic element is, in some measure, indicated by the scope of its geographical and temporal dissemination, its "capacity to adapt to geographical and regional realities". Eliade, Zalmoxis, p.240.

is itself a metaphysical and therefore transcendent claim. This immediately goes beyond Ninian Smart's "methodological agnosticism", and is diametrically opposed to the concept of "planes" which Eliade does seem to have inherited from Ionescu. Perhaps we do not know, or cannot yet express, the nature and extent of the human world, but to restrict it to "time and space" is to assume the prior implausibility of other transcendent religious claims. This is simultaneously to practice an unconsidered bias and to ignore the phenomenal fact that millions of people in various existential situations do find plausible their own religious claims.

The exercise of an uninspected bias and the wilful ignorance of historical fact have long been considered the worst, most pernicious characteristics of an entrenched religious attitude. And, according to Eliade's methodological assumptions, that is precisely what is at work here.

Exercising this understanding of religion one can see how Strenski's attitude, his equation of "time and space" with "the human world", his implicit insistence that transcendent religious claims (other than his own) are a priori implausible, is an example of the complete concealment of the sacred in the profane. Not only is it an example of a religious attitude which is so deeply entrenched as to be unaware of its own existence, it is also a case of identifying absolute and exhaustive reality (i.e., the sacred) with the phenomenal world of

time and space (i.e., the profane).

In the earlier article Strenski moves from Eliade's attempts to "explain the modality of the sacred that that hierophany discloses",³⁸ and the latter's statement that "before making the history of anything we must first have a proper understanding of what it is in and for itself",³⁹ to his own statements regarding "the discovery of the necessary laws of religion".⁴⁰ This reveals Strenski's equation of sacrality and being with "necessary laws". Perhaps to him "the real" is exhaustively equated with the "laws" of physics. His religion is that of modern man, the equation of the sacred with the profane. However, the descriptions of modern physics are increasingly perceived as limited and arbitrary. In Order Out of Chaos, for example, Prigogine and Stengers state,

there is an irreducible multiplicity of representations for a system, ... Various possible languages and points of view about the system may be complementary. They all deal with the same reality, but it is impossible to reduce them to one single description. The irreducible plurality of perspectives on the same reality expresses the impossibility of a divine point of view from which the whole of reality is visible.⁴¹

Even the belief in the discoveries of modern science as revelatory of the real may be seen as one faith among

³⁸ Patterns, p.5.

³⁹ Images and Symbols, p.29.

⁴⁰ Four Theories, pp.48-49.

⁴¹ Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers. Order Out of Chaos, pp.224-225.

many, or one complementary description among others.

Strenski recognises the "perhaps unthinking" acceptance of the distinction between "faith" and "reason", between "belief" and "knowledge" and states that "how and why these distinctions themselves arose is still a matter of some dispute".⁴² However, it seems to me that Eliade's inherent understanding of the perception/intuition of the real can go some way to settling the dispute. "Reason" can be seen as that which produces "knowledge" for those for whom "reality" is exhaustively identified as the world of historical time and physical space. "Faith" is that which produces "belief" for people who believe other than this. This also helps to explain the trials of modern liberal Christians who identify the world of space and time with reality, the redemption of man in time by the historical Christ, but cannot quite find their God in physical space and historical time, and so suffer from an inability to separate "belief" from "knowledge". In fact, belief and knowledge are not mutually exclusive categories. That which we know and that which we believe interpenetrate each other. The theory of the social construction of reality allows for a gradual realisation of our own positive valorisations. This is particularly clear if one considers Wilfred Cantwell Smith's definition of believe as "to hold dear, to prize, to give allegiance to, to be

⁴² Four Theories, p.108.

loyal to, to value highly".⁴³

The major weakness of Eliade's understanding is its reliance upon "archetypal intuitions", a weakness which Strenski was not slow to exploit. Such a reliance on "intuition" or "introspectively-detected information", he suggested, gives the historian of religion absolute license to make pronouncements about religion.

It is as if, once possessed, this introspectively-detected information allowed one to make assertions about religion with the same force that one makes certain statements about one's own mind.⁴⁴

This is, as we have seen, not the case. Intuitions are the experiences which commend themselves most highly as experiences of the real. That they so commend themselves is not open to dispute. What is later said to be commended is open to dispute. Thus the information that the speed of light is a constant to all possible observers was introspectively-detected by Einstein. That he had an intuition of the real, an hierophany in Eliade's terms, was at no point open to doubt. What was revealed, which is to say, the ensuing expressions of the real, of course, was open to doubt. Without making grandiose claims for Eliade it is true to say that his insight has certain parallels to Einstein. Where Einstein took the problem of the invariable measurement of light speed and transformed it into the postulate of his theory, Eliade has likewise taken the problem of

⁴³ Belief and History, p.41.

⁴⁴ Four Theories, p.49.

conflicting truth-claims about reality and faith in unverifiable, "transcendent" propositions and transformed it into the postulate of his theory. In the same way, Newton "did not try to explain gravitation; he took it as a fact. Similarly, each discipline should then take some central unexplained fact as its starting point".⁴⁵

Religion always concerns hierophany, that is the apprehension of the sacred in the profane. The sacred is that which is apprehended as the real, as such it is "an element in the structure of human consciousness".⁴⁶ As such the sacred is the real. This does not mean to state that "the world was created by God" any more than it means to claim that the sun was vomited up by Bumba, creator deity of the Boshengo.⁴⁷ It is an effective methodological presupposition which approaches religion as an accessible and comprehensible phenomenon. It explains, amongst many other things, why Ivan Strenski should become so incensed by his apprehension of unverifiable, unfalsifiable elements in the method of Eliade that he would neglect the constraints of rational scholarship. Eliade's approach challenges Strenski's own basic intuition of the identity of the real with the spatio-temporal and gives equal plausibility to

⁴⁵ Prigogine and Stengers, op. cit., pp.28-29.

⁴⁶ Eliade, The Quest, p.i; "The Sacred in the Secular World," p.101; The History of Religious Ideas, vol. 1. p.xiii.

⁴⁷ Eliade, From Primitives to Zen: a Sourcebook in Comparative Religion, p.91.

alternative intuitions. While Strenski's analysis of Eliade does not make Eliade's thought any more meaningful to his readers, the application of Eliade's methodological presuppositions to Strenski's writing does serve to explain an otherwise puzzling intensity of invective and tendency to disregard his own procedural admonitions.

Chapter Nine

Conclusions

9.1 Myth in the Study of Religion

The whole development of the study of religion may have been beset by contemporary "mythic" valorisations such as those discussed above, implicit by virtue of their currently valid status or acceptance, mythic by virtue of their finally pre-reflective persuasion. For example, the clamour for "origins".¹ The etiological function of myth (possibly the mythic nature of etiology) is one of the best known, most clearly documented and obvious factors in the field of religion; seen in the Book of Genesis, the introductory cosmologies of the Puranas, the explanatory, origin-stories of "primitive" myths, among others. Yet it is still not easy to see our own contemporary search for origins and explanations as itself religious in nature. As with Barth's religion/revelation dichotomy the tendency is to separate one's own mythic structure, the contemporary, current myth, from the recognised structures of (geographically, culturally, socially or temporally) foreign myth. In general, myth (as an emotional, pre-rational persuasion or support for a specific Weltanschauung) will be

¹ cf. Australian Religions, p.xiv.

effective if it is etiological and will be firmly separated from the mass of other myths by virtue of acceptance as valid. My myth is not myth, any more than my religion is religion. Scientific approaches to the study of religion are also susceptible to this criticism. Although they might accuse theological approaches of invalidating themselves by beginning from an assumed given of divine revelation, the scientific mind begins from the "real" given of material existence and personal experience. The confidence of empiricism is profoundly suspicious. "Facts" are held to be real and true because they are experienced. All the Cartesian method appears to have achieved was to call into doubt confidence in the senses and to transfer that confidence to the intellect, to reason.

The introduction of phenomenological techniques into the study of religion seems to have constituted an attempt to free the study from the worst tendencies of its own subject matter: the tendency to unquestioning adherence to and absolute valorisation of an orthodoxy (the "right" opinion). This aim may be seen to have been only partially successful. While phenomenology has operated as a necessary "Interimsmethode", liberating the scholar from the despotic dictates of institutionalised religions, it has failed to liberate from the equally despotic though more insidious dictates of a currently quasi-scientific orthodoxy. (I say "quasi" advisedly since such dictates are under constant attack within the

scientific fields.)

9.2 The Myth of Science

Assuming this attitude of "scientific" valorisation to be reflective of genuinely religious tendencies, what does it imply for Eliade's central thesis of "eternal return?" While it accords with his analysis of myth as the repository of the real, the true, and the powerful, it does not appear to accord with any desire to "escape history", certainly not to return to a previous time of pure beginnings. The proponents of this approach do not hark after a period in the past when the clear and coherent flow of thought was unclouded by the muddying effluvium of subjectivity. However, they do seem to infer such a period to be both potentially achievable and desirable. They "believe" in the "scientific" method in W. C. Smith's sense, they hold it in high esteem as a means of radically changing human life, actually in the technological revolution of the past and potentially in their own academic field. In this respect their attitude fits Eliade's understanding of religion. They recognise a basic human failing for which they claim to have the solution. Their illud tempus appears to be a period which although not held to have actually occurred at some time in the past is at least a potential if the mores of truly "scientific" enquiry be followed. This does, in fact, accord with Eliade's conception of illud tempus as the logic of this other time is neither linear nor

strictly rational. It is by definition the time sought after, the period of our desires, the condition which would prevail should all people do as they ought to do. The fact that many religious traditions have held this period to have existed in fact at some previous point is a result of a less linear conception of time itself and a less hidebound attitude to self expression. The desire to stress the very real potentiality of this condition naturally leads to the expression of its actual prior existence. The expression of illud tempus as actually having occurred already permits a persuasive, if circular, logic in which the illud tempus was lost because of some fault, which has led to the current undesirable period. The reversal or redemption of that fault will then lead to the "restoration" of illud tempus. This allows for the fault and its correction to be described from both the point of view of the "fall" it has caused and the improvement it could effect. The "myth of science", because of its involvement with historicism, may repudiate the circularity of this traditionally religious argument, but it eventually uses the same mythic, i.e. pre-reflectively valorised, argument in which the reversal of the human fault of irrationality is seen to lead to the sought-for paradise of perfect understanding.

The very exclusivity of the objectivist/realist, "scientific" position smacks of a religious stance. That this should be the correct manner of progress which will

suffer no alternative, right for all people at all times, the solution to the problem is an absolutist valorisation of a relative position characteristic of the religious devotee of recent western disapproval. Since the advent of phenomenology discouraged openly exclusivist displays of religious affiliation in the academic field, the problem has not disappeared but has become more subtle and difficult both to recognise and to avoid. In other words, the sacred has been camouflaged and it has become unrecognisable.

Furthermore, a scientific study relies on a controlled, restricted body of data or of types of phenomena. It is a specific method for the solution of specific problems which have undergone specific definition. Religion, in this interpretation, relates to the total experience of human existence, the total hermeneutics of the totality of human apprehensions of the real. It is what-I-am added to all others to make what-we-are, and thus the methodology developed for the solution of well-defined problems is not (and this accepts perhaps not yet) generally applicable. Both scientific and traditional attitudes to the religious would accept that religion includes par excellence that which we do not understand: primordial origins, abstract concepts such as justice (theodicy) and morality, experience (as a brute fact), existence (likewise). Scientific methodology commences from a delineated group of phenomena (radiation, chemical interactions,

mechanical relations, man in society, the mental life); hence the ultimate importance to the scientific method of analysis - the division of data into coherent, restricted groups or entities - is necessarily prior to such a method. Religion is immune to such restriction a priori since, holistically, every element of all religious phenomena implies reference to a cosmic, self-contained, all-embracing system, the sum total of (human) existence, and thus defies final analysis into a restricted classification.

Of course, certain areas of religion can be studied in this restricted scientific manner: historically or geographically restricted phenomena and specific social or psychological effects. But the phenomena of religion as operant in contemporary experience defy such restriction. Attempts to enforce such a restriction have led to the various misappropriations of the study, the countless and costly inadequate definitions,² the insensitivity to the personal involvement of the scholar.

It is crucial that we understand as we restrict, as each such restriction will tend to reinforce the Weltanschauung from which it is made. Denial of the workings of the intuitive is disastrous because as it does work to considerable effect. The attempt of the scientific to be exclusive is potentially as disastrous as any other exclusivity in academic studies: it creates

² v. eg. H. Mol, Identity and the Sacred, pp.1f.

an orthodoxy and thence a dogma essentially opposed to the development of knowledge.

While it is frowned upon for scholars to predispose the direction of their studies by any declaration of specific religious commitment, some scholars are actively arguing for a similar predisposition along the lines of a scientific, objective predisposition. This is troublingly close to a claim of possession of The Truth such as has been held to disqualify the institutionally religious from a realistic study of the phenomena of religion. That disqualification would not apply exclusively to the institutionally religious if it were seen that the secular scientific approach can be as "religious" and "mythological" as older forms of faith. The real grounds of disqualification from the process of the apprehension of the truth is the inability to admit to the relativity of one's own apprehensions. As Eliade maintains, "ignorance is, first of all, this false identification of Reality with what each one of us appears to be or to possess".³ It is absolutely crucial to this understanding of Eliade to realise that he challenges the common fundamental categories of thought: objectivity, reality, history, knowledge. Of the history of religions he has pointed out that

we wanted at all costs to present an objective history of religions, but we failed to bear in mind that what we were christening objectivity followed

³ Images and Symbols, p.59.

the fashion of thinking in our times.⁴

He is thus working from a point of view which resembles the sociology of knowledge but insists upon the creative autonomy of the human spirit and the factual possibility of escaping from the brute conditioning factors of embodied existence.

9.3 General Revelation

The preceding position does not argue for the complete unattainability of truth. Rather it allows for the recognition of truth in both visions of the real. As Roger Trigg has said

the emphasis on commitment and the dismissal of the notion of reasons for it derives in part from the contrast drawn with science. Religious belief, it is thought, is radically different from the entertaining of a scientific hypothesis. ... [the] point is that science and religion just involve different systems of thought, and what counts as "truth" in each is radically different.⁵

Eliade's indication of the fundamental equivalence (not identity) of science and religion, and finally all human attitudes to the real, does more than militate against this distinction. Even though it recognises the difference between scientific and religious truth, and between Christian and Buddhist truth, it insists on a universal humanism which also militates against the pernicious consequences of patronising conceptual toleration which are manifest as extreme relativism.

⁴ Images and Symbols, p.28.

⁵ Roger Trigg, Reason and Commitment, p.36.

It is worth recalling that Eliade has said "the great cosmic illusion is an hierophany".⁶ In other words, the whole of profane time and existence is itself revelatory of the reality which underlies it. This is a sentiment that the most hardline of positivists would hardly deny. Yet it is one which supports the whole of Eliade's view of the religious. Here it can be clearly seen that Eliade subscribes to a doctrine of "general revelation". Both religious revelation and scientific methodology are reactions to a real state of affairs and are descriptive of a real, although subjective, orientation. For the believer the existence of God is a real and positive effect upon life, and for the sceptic the explanation for the assumed existence of God is likewise a positive and beneficial recognition of the truth. The question, but which is true? holds no real validity outside of the paradigmatic structure necessarily adopted prior to the recognition of the "truth" of each statement. The truth of each conception stands in relation to the special revelations, the hierophanies, which animate each one.

While it exceeds the scope of this study to argue for the relativisation of all truths, the relativisation of truths concerning (supposed) realities external to our embodied experience and to the empirical world is certainly not an unreasonable claim to make. Nor does

⁶ Images and Symbols, p.91.

this result in a final loss of all criteria of judgement concerning the validity or utility of such conflicting "truths". I believe Eliade to have accepted the criteria of geographical and temporal extent.⁷ These factors have much to say about the applicability of religious paradigms or worldviews. However, it can soon be seen that even these criteria are founded in similar and equally relative or non-justified paradigmatic assumptions. To assume that a religious worldview which was evidently acceptable for thousands of people for thousands of years must still have much to offer to the constantly changing human condition is not based on any apodictic logic. But likewise to assume the superiority of the more recent materialist worldview which succeeds in increasing the immediate physical security of a privileged few while threatening the long-term security of the totality of global life (and does that without securing the mental contentment of even those few) is hardly more logically founded. This attitude to general revelation in which the contents of personal experience (the scientists' experience of cyclotron experiments as well as the mystics experience of ecstasy) are open to creative interpretation capable of uncovering real and valid meanings, preserves a meaningful access to the true and the real. One is constantly confronted with the true

⁷ v. eg. Zalmoxis, p.240, where he speaks of the Mioritza's capacity for adaptation to "geographical and regional realities."

and the real if only one can interpret them suitably.

9.4 Religion and Literature

Eliade repeatedly states that literary criticism would be the richest source of "inspiration" for the interpretation of religion rather than anthropology, sociology, psychology, etc. thus locating both religion and its study in the world of the arts rather than the sciences. The artistic attitude allows for the fundamentally intuitive basis of all methodology, whereas the "scientific" approach depends on a covert intuitive assumption of an apodictic basis and point of departure in the empirical method.

In Ordeal by Labyrinth Claude-Henri Rocquet points out that

if the religions and masterpieces of our culture are akin, then a hermeneutic stance is clearly unavoidable. Because, after all, it is obvious to everyone that linguistic analysis cannot exhaust our relationship with Rilke or Du Bellay. We all know that a poem cannot be reduced to its mechanics or to the historical conditions that made it possible. and if we do reduce it to those things, then so much the worse for us! If we understand that in the case of poetry, then why can we no longer understand it in the case of a religion? (p.138.)

Eliade heartily agrees. He makes the interpretation of literary and other creative, fictional, or poetic products of human culture (and it should be recalled that these words all have the same fundamental meaning of human fabrication) the model for the interpretation of religion. To say this in a slightly different way; in Eliade's view, language itself is an hierophany. It is

revelatory of the real mode of human being in the world.

One consequence of this is that

the "sacred history" of the Primitives ought to be considered a work of the human mind, and not to be demythologised in order to reduce it to a "projection" of psychological, sociological, or economic conditions. Reductionism as a general method for grasping certain types of "reality" may help to solve Western man's problems, but it is irrelevant as a hermeneutical tool. [We must] take seriously these oeuvres - in the same way we take seriously the Old Testament, the Greek tragedies, or Dante, Shakespeare, and Goethe.⁸

Rocquet calls Eliade "a very reserved, very reticent person, if not actually secretive",⁹ which rather conflicts with Eliade's publication of his journals. One of his stated reasons for publishing was

to oppose that academic superstition, which is still alive in Anglo-Saxon countries and even in the United States, which consists in a tendency to depreciate the act of the literary imagination. As though a spontaneous, free creation is valueless in comparison with a purely scientific procedure. It's a very damaging superstition.

In support of his positive valorisation of the act of literary creation Eliade refers to a statement of Bronowski that

the step by which a new axiom is added cannot itself be mechanised. It is a free play of the mind, an invention outside the logical processes. This is the central act of imagination in science, and it is in all respects like any similar act in literature.¹⁰

It is this belief in the central importance of the

⁸ Australian Religions, p.xvii.

⁹ Ordeal by Labyrinth, p.179.

¹⁰ Preface to the English edition of Forbidden Forest, p.vi, also Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts, p.155

creative activity of the imagination which leads Eliade to

rebel against this so-called scientific positivism of academics who claim that literary creation is no more than a game, unconnected with cognitive activity. I believe just the opposite.¹¹

Evidently he homologises the processes of creative language use to his understanding of religion. In so doing he has produced his own creative interpretation of religious data. This interpretation reveals hitherto unrecognised significance in our experience of religious pluralism.

9.5 Contemporary Religion

The religious life appears complex even at the most archaic stages of culture. Among the people still in the stage of food-gathering and hunting small animals (Australians, Pygmies, Fuegians etc.) the belief in a Supreme Being or "Lord of the Animals" is intermingled with beliefs and culture heroes and mythological ancestors.¹²

Likewise religious life must be complex now. "Western Man" cannot be a clear-cut case of "living cut off from an important part of oneself, made up of fragments of a spiritual history he is incapable of deciphering,"¹³ any more than homo religiosus can be simply the alternative to this, or "economic man"¹⁴ a third type. Rather we are

¹¹ Ordeal by Labyrinth, p.179.

¹² "Structures and Changes in the History of Religions," p.351.

¹³ v. The Two and the One, p.14.

¹⁴ Patterns, p.127.

all complexes of these potential modes of being. Perhaps Eliade would have done better to bring this out more clearly as I am convinced he did accept it. His writings often appear more complicated than is strictly necessary.

This apparent identification of contemporary, non-technological cultures with "archaic man" has led to much criticism of Eliade's anthropological approach. It takes too much for granted to be acceptable and is rejected by most contemporary anthropologists. It was also rejected by Eliade himself.¹⁵ Modern hunter-gatherers are still just that, contemporary people who live in a non-technological culture, and have a cultural history correspondingly longer than their archaic counterparts. However, the point stands that all contemporary religion appears complex, from sophisticated technologies to self-subsistent, hunting-gathering communities.

Eliade's language is undoubtedly misleading on the point of the identification of contemporary non-technological and "inferior" ancient societies. He speaks of "advanced cultures", "superior cultures", "more highly evolved societies, (totemistic hunters, paleo-cultivators, pastoral nomads)".¹⁶ He does clarify his position on this point,¹⁷ and although we might deplore the apparent value-judgement implied by such terms, it

¹⁵ v. Australian Religion, pp.xivf.

¹⁶ "Structures and Changes," pp.351,353.

¹⁷ in Australian Religions, p.xii, n.2.

must be borne in mind that they are used to refer to extant, not extinct, cultures. (Eliade was well aware that "we do not have any documents concerning an ultimate 'first phase' of the religious life of primitives".)¹⁸ These terms have a contemporary ontological referent. Although it may be dubious whether they are of any historical value, insofar as they serve to understand past events, they do possess validity as regards current religious phenomena.

In the light of Eliade's attempt to understand contemporary thought, many of his theories assume renewed significance. For example, his thoughts concerning "the disappearance of the cult of the Supreme Being and the substitution of other divine figures", (ibid., p.354.) applies just as readily to his view of the contemporary situation as to the historical. That the Supreme Being of "primitive societies" has become a deus otiosus upon whom people only call in extremis is perhaps as much expressive of the current condition in which self-professed non-religious people will call upon the god of their own cultural background only in crisis situations. Eliade cites a prayer of the Selk'nam of Tierra del Fuego: "do not take away my child; he is too little" (ibid., p.355.) addressed to the normally ignored supreme Being, a deus otiosus in Eliade's parlance. Surely we can all recognise here the contemporary situation of

¹⁸ "Structures and Changes," p.352.

modern parents, usually thoroughly "secular", who will, internally if nothing else, call upon "God" to spare the endangered life of their child, at least to make the situation meaningful, to account for "why" such terrible events must be. It is unquestionably true that modern people are just as likely to call upon the otherwise otiose concept of a Supreme Being in a crisis.

Much of Eliade's writing can likewise be read as more authentically expressive of modern humanity than of any specific historical situation, more self-expressive and symbolic than previously recognised, despite its scholarly nature. His fear of dilettantism and of reducing the academic impact of his analyses of religious phenomena by having them connected to his fictional oeuvre led him to attempt to divorce the two aspects of scholarly and creative writing completely, and although he has expressed regret that he did not attempt to write "beautifully" in his scholarship, he believed that he had succeeded in separating his scholarly from his literary work in a substantial sense. However, can one person ever be so split? The suggestive mode of his fictional authorship seems to carry over into his factual. He states that

ultimately, what I have been doing for the last fifteen years [1945-60] is not totally foreign to literature. It may be that my research will be regarded one day as an attempt to rediscover the forgotten sources of literary inspiration.¹⁹

¹⁹ No Souvenirs, p.119.

It certainly seems to be the case that his homo religiosus functions more as a symbol of humanity in its religious mode than as any actual example of human behaviour. To criticise Eliade as though his homo religiosus were a putative past phase of human culture, represented now by contemporary, non-literate or non-technological tribes, is to misunderstand the implications of his thought²⁰ and necessarily generates logical fallacies.

Similarly, I would suggest that other of Eliade's assertions might be better applied as a description of the contemporary situation than as a general laws of the historical development of religions. For example,

the disappearance of the Supreme Being from the cult indicates man's desire to enjoy a religious experience which is "stronger", more "dramatic", and, though it is often aberrant, more human.²¹

The move from dependence on a supreme being and from mythic cosmogony to more "human" religious experience expresses a discovery of greater responsibility in the existential situation of humanity. The "aham Brahmasmi" of the Kenopanisad as well as modern psychological research into the active nature of perception (and the human embodiment of God in the Incarnation) indicate this same tendency towards the authenticity of human responsibility.

²⁰ v. Australian Religions, preface.

²¹ "Structures and Changes," p.357.

9.6 Religious Belief as Significant

The insistence that the events of religious belief must have occurred in historical time to have significance for contemporary humanity can be seen as symptomatic of the post-Christian world's obsession with historical time. It is primarily this obsession with the significance of historical event which fuels the problems of pluralism and exclusivism in contemporary religious studies. When a religious tradition is seen as a network of significant details, of texts, rituals, buildings, institutions, traditions, and faith, it has no necessary conflict with another tradition. But when it is seen as issuing from an historical event (the truth of which cannot be disputed as this truth is the final source of the tradition's authority) then disputes concerning the historical accuracy of interpretations are all too likely.²² As Origen recognised, the possibility of establishing historical apodicticity, even of factual events, is tenuous indeed. He recognised the near-impossibility of "an attempt to substantiate the truth of almost any story as historical fact, even if the story is true, and to produce complete certainty about it".²³

One of the implications of this interpretation is

²² v. The Quest, pp.66ff. on accepting the existential significance of religious statements rather than challenging their historical or empirical accuracy.

²³ Contra Celsum 1,42. v. R. M. Grant, The Earliest Lives of Jesus, pp.10ff.,65,71 v. Myth and Reality, p.165.

the suspension of any belief in the necessarily greater significance of historically accurate description and the concomitant acceptance of the relative insignificance of "mere" human creation or "fictions".²⁴ The steady devaluation of the products of the human imagination has accompanied the valorisation of historical factuality which Eliade sees as a product of Judaeo-Christianity. It is a religious apprehension specific to one cultural tradition although gaining ascendancy via "first world" colonialism and technological supremacy.

In this interpretation, religious rather than historical language can be seen as the language of significance. When a believer states that Jesus of Nazareth is God Incarnate, he states concisely and in traditional language, the significance of Jesus. (It should go without saying that significance is always significance to ...) In these terms it is pointless for the non-believer to claim that Jesus is not historically God Incarnate since this is simply a statement of his or her personal affirmation of the significance of historical facticity. The fact remains that Jesus possesses this transcendent significance to certain people.

Unfortunately, modern believers are all too likely to confuse traditional with historical language, to

²⁴ v. eg. Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary - "Fiction - act of fashioning, to shape, fashion, feign - la: something invented by the imagination or feigned; specif: an invented story."

attempt to restrict significance to the realm of the historical, to commit the historicist error of grounding their faith in a presumption of historical factuality, and thus to fall prey to the terror of history. Confronted with modern technology and research techniques, claims of strict historicity are difficult to substantiate; thus a religious tradition whose significance is seen to reside in historical events of the distant past will suffer a loss of credibility. Rather, for the academic interpreter, the significance must be seen to reside in elements present to the experience: the meanings of the traditional narratives, arts, and rituals, accessible through interpretation, the ability of the institution to assist in the spiritual life of the individual and the community, and so on.

9.7 Reduction, Demystification, Fundamentalism

Within the academic study of religion Eliade considers reductionism and "demystification" to be roughly homologous. Referring to the common belief that the village, temple, or house is situated at the centre of the world, he says,

there is no sense in trying to "demystify" such a belief by drawing the attention of the reader to the fact that there exists no Centre of the World and that, in any case, the multiplicity of such centres is an absurd notion because it is self-contradictory.... On the contrary it is only by taking this belief seriously ... that one succeeds in comprehending the existential situations of a man

who believes that he is at the centre of the world.²⁵

If my interpretation of Eliade's approach be allowed then such a statement can be made, mutatis mutandis, for all religious claims. Only by "taking seriously" (ie. accepting as significant rather than challenging as historically inaccurate) the various beliefs of a religion under consideration might one succeed in comprehending the existential situation of the people who hold those beliefs. The question raised here is whether this increase in mutual understanding can be seen as a valid goal for the study of religion.

Generally "demythification does not serve hermeneutics", (ibid.) particularly when seeking to comprehend the existential situation of people who hold beliefs different to one's own. The facts are that different people experience the same events and objects as possessing different significance and articulate their existential situations in different ways. If we seek to understand these situations, to assimilate the new data, we must not focus on traditional beliefs of our own which prevent us from appreciating the significance perceived by the people under consideration (such as the identification of historical accuracy with truth). Instead we must attempt to "take seriously" the perceptions of significance, the articulations of the existential situations. Not only does Eliade equate

²⁵ The Quest, p.69.

reduction with demystification as discussed here, he also equates it with fundamentalism. He describes the reductionist method as "the reduction of all possible significations to only one proclaimed 'fundamental.'"²⁶ In combination with his understanding of ignorance being firstly the false identification of reality with appearance it can be seen that reductionism is homologised to fundamentalism in the religious sense. For Eliade there is one universal fault: the dogmatic insistence on the equation of opinion with reality.

9.8 The Academic Environment of Religious Studies

The study of religion, far from being an undertaking of the individual scholar who then consents to publish or lecture on his or her findings, is an institutional affair. Most scholars are employed by institutions of education for the specific purpose of lecturing, of communicating their understanding of religious phenomena to students who, one way or another, pay for the privilege. The sine qua non of such an organisation is that the lecturer is more informed about the subject than the students and that the students will thus benefit from their exposure to their lectures. This is true of all subjects. In the field of the study of religion, our fundamental position is one in which the observable facts are that throughout recorded history and across the

²⁶ Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts, p.6.

terrestrial globe, human societies have produced systems founded in the imaginative manipulation of non-empirical elements which explain and encourage particular reactions to existential situations. Individuals react to these systems in differing ways and to differing degrees. Some devote their lives completely to the pursuits recommended by religion; some largely ignore the spiritual exhortations of their traditional cultures. It is an evident recommendation of contemporary Western cultural tradition, and one with which I agree, to inspect critically especially those recommendations which are made most strongly and with least empirical support - that is, what I have been identifying as myth.

However critical our assessment of the mythic traditions of our own and of other cultures may be, it can hardly be adequate to the demands of institutional education simply to acquiesce in our own inability to respond positively to the mythic valorisations of cultural traditions other than our own. We cannot respond to the inquiries of students regarding the meanings of religious phenomena with the assertion that, since they have no meaning to us, then they have no meaning. To give an example: a scholar of religion could lecture on South East Asian Buddhism and point out that the Buddhist Sangha receive considerable charitable support from the impoverished laity, in return for which the laity receive "spiritual merit". That scholar has, after perhaps years of careful research, found no

acceptable meaning to the term "spiritual merit" and thus utilises it as an empty phrase, devoid of any meaning save as a means of persuading the peasants to part with their hard-earned material wealth. The student audience will then be confronted with a religious system at whose centre resides a vacuum of insignificance. The lack of meaning of the term "spiritual merit" will evacuate the whole cultural phenomenon of inherent significance and into this vacuum will be drawn the pre-existent cultural biases of the student: perhaps the understanding that anyone who persuades another to part with goods for a non-existent exchange is a "confidence trickster" and should be punished under law.

In order to avoid this situation, in which the bare phenomenal facts of religion become empty vessels to be filled with our own preconceived ideas, it is necessary to attempt to explicate the meaning of those facts. It is necessary to assume that those facts do have a meaning, even if we are presently utterly incapable of its recognition. (The alternative in this case is to assume that the peasants of S. E. Asia have been consistently deceived by a criminal organisation for over two thousand years. Whereas, of course, some of us in the West have thrown off the oppressive yoke of superstitious ideology.) It could be argued here that if a religious phenomenon has no meaning to the scholar, especially after some time of study, then there is no meaning there. It must be accepted that in some ways

this is true, but this is precisely why Eliade exhorts the scholar of religion to seek for meanings "even if they aren't there". This statement seems to provoke some disgust in Ivan Strenski.²⁷ However, when it is seen in the sense of limited semantic relativism implied here, it is not as offensive as would be the ex nihilo creation of meaning which Strenski seems to fear. Rather, the assumption is that the religious datum in question did (or does) have meaning for the believers in question and it is the task of the interpreter to seek to expound that meaning. Thereby the whole religious structure involved in the examination will be imbued with its own significance, rather than dominated by predispositions.

In this way both scholars and students will come to realise meanings which are new to them, rather than simply reiterating pre-existent semantic structures and relationships. In this context it is crucial to realise that, as with Eliade's analysis of symbol, the meanings of religious phenomena are polyvalent. (p.93 above) Thus there is no singular, correct meaning to which the scholar is restricted (or to which Eliade claimed to have access²⁸). Of course, particular meanings for particular people do exist and, insofar as they are capable of verification, they are open to debate. To return to the previous example, a scholar could be right or wrong in

²⁷ Eliade, No Souvenirs, p.85. Strenski, "Love and Anarchy in Romania," pp.392ff.

²⁸ v. Strenski, op. cit., p.401.

seeking to describe the meaning of "spiritual merit" for actual people in an actual town in Thailand.

9.9 The Aim of the Study of Religion

It is Eliade's advice that "an historian of religions must resist the temptation to predict what will happen in the near future".²⁹ Evidently predictability is not a criterion of evaluation in which he puts any great store. From the context in which this statement is made, it is clear that he considers prediction to be the stock in trade of the astrologers. This is, in fact, an extremely significant statement, made in a surprisingly nonchalant manner. If the interpretations of the historian of religions cannot be verified by accurate prediction, then what is the criterion of accuracy, truth, success, or whatever it may be termed? Judging from internal evidence, I think the answer is significance, meaning, reality. In other words, the sacred. So the hermeneutical circle closes in in the sense that the very "faculty" which recognises the sacred per se at the outset of the process of interpretation is, finally, the same criterion which recognises the value of the conclusion. Thus Eliade's position, too, requires some positive initial and intrinsic valorisations. It, too, is mythic to that extent; it, too, is religious.

To those critics of Eliade who might greet this

²⁹ Occultism, p.67.

statement with some relish, receiving it as proof that Eliade is proposing another religion amongst many rather than an objective way of assessing religion as a phenomenon, it must be said that this is wholly consistent with his procedural assumptions. Humanity is initially seen as inherently religious. Religion is the expression of the fact of our embodied existence in the world and our constant and ongoing interaction with the reality encountered in that world. Eliade insists that "to be, or to become, human means to be religious".³⁰ Having made such a contention, he could hardly be expected to somehow escape his own classification of humanity. Nor is the closing of the hermeneutical circle evidence of its vicious tautology. Within that circle has been inscribed all actual human experience of the world (the history) and all coherent imaginary universes which express the valorisation of that experience (of religion). Empirical criteria of evaluation of religious phenomena have been suggested - their temporal and geographical extension and the ability of the religious phenomenon to generate new appraisals, new significances, new meanings which ensures this spread. This interpretation also implies a methodology which I feel to have been clearly demonstrated by this inspection of the reactions to and interpretations of the thought of Mircea Eliade. In order to understand the universes of

³⁰ The Quest, preface.

religion, a certain critical but positive and imaginative valorisation is required. If one enters on the quest for truth in the interpretation of religious data convinced that one already possesses the only infallible criterion of evaluation, be it faith in a venerable text or a particular system of pan-critical rationalism, one is hardly predisposed to recognise the true meaning of what other people have apprehended as the real, the true, and the Sacred.

9.10 A Pragmatic Pluralism

Eliade's system cannot support the valorisation of any exclusive religion, but rather of religion itself, of religiousness, which he perceives to be a human universal. His thought is inherently, almost a priori pluralist. It thus militates against "areligiousness" as a form of self-deception (typical, I may say of the "modern" consciousness which paradoxically seeks radically to dissociate itself from the very history which it valorises so highly), but it cannot militate for any specific form of religion. It does, however, imply a series of criteria by which different forms can be compared. These include the extent to which religious belief relieves the pain and suffering occasioned by the embodied experience of the human individual (the "terror of history"), which is directly related to the personally apprehended meanings and significations of that belief, which in their turn contribute to the geographical and

temporal spread of specific beliefs.

The equation of the sacred and the real in the history of religions has one crucial, a priori assumption and intention: it places all individual human apprehensions on an initially equal level of opinion (doxa) rather than granting any one (usually one's own) a privileged access to the real. Assuming this attitude, one can never begin a study with the presumption that one knows, finally and certainly, what "the real" actually is. Not only is this in consonance with much modern philosophical speculation concerning epistemology and the collapse of foundationalist methodologies and correspondence theories of truth, but it also allows an a priori sympathy with conflicting belief systems. Rather than commencing with the attitude that I know what "truth" and "reality" are, and thus that I know that beliefs which conflict with my apprehensions are positively "wrong", the historian of religion then commences with the self-knowledge of what he or she believes to be the real and the recognition that others equally believe their apprehensions to be of "the real". Given this assumption of what we might call "foundational equality" we are then quite free to apply those criteria of judgement which we have established. Hopefully through critical and empirical methods, we can discern the significance of belief systems and their concomitant behavioural patterns without the dangerously misleading assumption that those criteria are somehow possessed of a

superhuman warrant.

The whole process of thought whereby these conclusions were attained might be seen as a personal reenactment of the developments within the history of religions, which began as a process of Christians inspecting pagans and evolved through those stages which W. C. Smith has characterised as "us/them, me/you, we/all".³¹ It is in order to attain to this "we/all" understanding that the scholar of religions adopts a humanist approach which concedes that no one body of people has exclusive and sole access to any divine Truth and is thus distinguished above all other people. (In making such an assumption of exclusivity one certainly becomes the champion of a mythical belief rather than the scholar of human religiousness.) Whether exclusive access is established by way of special revelation through a traditionally venerated text or through a scientific or empirical methodology is quite inconsequential. It is the immensely destructive power of the concomitant assumption of justification thus avoided which is of consequence. In adopting such a position scholars are not deprived of all relation to truth and reality. We are forced to accept, however, that our personal relationship to the real, the sacred, is one of belief rather than one of certain knowledge.

³¹ "Comparative Religion - Whither, and Why?" p.34.

Appendix A

The Political Career of Mircea Eliade:

a response to Adriana Berger.

Abstract.

The paper read on Adriana Berger's behalf at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in November 1990 continues her attack on Eliade's connection with the Romanian right-wing movement, the Iron Guard, or Legion of the Archangel Michael. This paper and the earlier article, "Fascism and Religion in Romania", make much of certain British Foreign Office documents which I have inspected in detail. Not only do these documents fail to corroborate Berger's conclusions but they cast real doubt on Berger's critical detachment. Her claim that "Eliade was detained in England because of his political activities on behalf of the Iron Guard and also of Nazi Germany", is without foundation. Likewise, other insinuations which she makes about Eliade's political motivations are subject to alternative interpretations. Her insistence that Eliade "was not a Cultural Attaché (or secretary) as he has stated", attempts to make a liar out of Eliade by wholly ignoring the fact (which she recognises in the earlier article) that Eliade was appointed Secrétaire presse at the Romanian legation in Portugal. While Eliade undoubtedly was over-enthusiastically nationalist in his youth, Berger has resorted to fabricating evidence in order to justify these accusations of "anti-Judaism" and active fascism.

"Anti-Judaism and Anti-Historicism in Eliade's Writings," a paper written by Adriana Berger and presented on her behalf at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting in New Orleans in November of 1990 continues the attack on Eliade's political and personal history made in her article of 1989, "Fascism and Religion in Romania". (Annals of Scholarship, 6 no.4, (1989):455-465.) Despite its questionable relevance to the significance of Eliade's work as a historian of religion, this attack should not go unanswered, especially after its airing at such a prestigious gathering. Although I am not myself a reader of Romanian and thus cannot check all of Berger's references, I am familiar with much of the material relating to Eliade's thought and history and believe that I can give an adequate assessment of the argument and much of the detail given in Berger's articles. In both these articles, for example, Berger makes much of the British Foreign Office material relating to Eliade's posting at the Romanian Legation in London in 1940 and the suspicions of the British Government concerning his political sympathies. These documents are preserved at the Public Records Office in London and I have been able to inspect them and assess the degree to which they support Berger's conclusions and the picture they give of that period of Eliade's life. As to the other material, I can do no better than to refer the reader to Eliade's

own Autobiography vol.II, chs. 15, 16, and 17, the relevant sections of the Journals vol.I, and to Ricketts, Mircea Eliade: the Romanian Roots, especially chs. 22, 24, and 27, which deal quite openly and clearly with Eliade's perhaps misguided nationalism and his anti-democratic tendencies. Also worthy of note in this context is the article by Seymour Cain, "Mircea Eliade, the Iron Guard, and Romanian Anti-Semitism", in the Jewish journal, Midstream, 35 (1989):27-31.

Before the AAR Berger claimed that "official biographies" make "a deliberate effort to conceal" Eliade's "collaboration with the Iron Guard and Romania's Nazi governments". ("Anti-Judaism," p.13) This must refer to Ricketts' volumes as the only biography in the English language. Her earlier article was actually a review article focused on the second volume of Eliade's Autobiography and on Ricketts' work. In it she has made a more direct attack on Ricketts' contribution, complaining that he "begins with Eliade's childhood and early youth rather than with a survey of the historical and cultural climate from which Eliade emerged". (462) In order to avoid this type of criticism allow me to give a brief synopsis of the political situation in which Eliade found himself prior to his "exile" in Paris. Romania had gained its independence only following the first World War in 1918 and had subsequently been governed as a monarchy. In the turmoil of inter-war Europe, dominated by the rise of German and Italian

fascism to the West and Russian communism to the East, Romanian nationalism had given birth to the "Legion of the Archangel Michael", a movement founded by Cornelia Zelia Codreanu and his father in 1927. Although explicitly committed to a religious and spiritual renovation of the Romanian people this movement was capable of overt violence and was responsible for the assassination of the Romanian Prime Minister, I. G. Duca, in 1933. Codreanu was at the time cleared of complicity in that crime. The Legion spawned a para-military organisation, popularly called the "Iron Guard".

Threatened from all sides, the monarchy under King Carol II imposed a fascist inspired dictatorship in February of 1938, with Patriarch Miron as President and Armand Calinescu as minister of the interior. Together they set out to crush their popular rival, the Iron Guard. On the grounds of slander against the Romanian scholar, Nicolae Iorga, Codreanu was arrested and imprisoned for six months. This was soon increased to ten years at hard labour and eventually, in November of that year, the King and Calinescu ordered his execution. Other Legionary leaders, and their intellectual supporter, Eliade's friend and mentor, Nae Ionescu, were arrested in April.

To quote Ricketts at this point,

between January 1937 and the imposition of the royal dictatorship in February 1938, Eliade gave open and enthusiastic support, through his periodical writings, to the Legionary movement. Because of the eight or ten explicitly pro-Legionary articles he

wrote in this period of slightly more than a year, and because of the close association with Nae Ionescu who had been a Legionary supporter (though he was never a member) since late 1933, Eliade became suspect in the eyes of the government. (op. cit. p.882. This is hardly seeking to conceal Eliade's connection with the Legion.)

In mid-June of 1938 Eliade's house was searched and papers were taken away, mainly correspondence in English from scholars such as Ananda Coomaraswamy and Raffaele Pettazzoni who were contributing to Eliade's journal of Comparative Religion, Zalmoxis. Eliade himself managed to evade arrest by retiring to the country after an anonymous telephone call warning him of the impending search. General M. M. Condeescu, the president of the Society of Romanian Writers, and related to Eliade through his first wife, Nina, contacted Calinescu, who assured him that there were no accusations against Eliade, who accordingly returned to Bucharest. However, on July 14th his house was raided by the Sigurantza and Eliade was taken to their headquarters for questioning. He was held there for three weeks and told that he could leave as soon as he signed a "declaration of dissociation" from the Iron Guard. Eliade refused to do so on the grounds that to dissociate himself from this popular movement at that time was to dissociate himself from his entire generation. In the first week of August he was transferred to the internment camp at Miercurea Ciucului where many other Legionary supporters were being held. Eliade was treated relatively well, despite having to sleep on the floor of a permanently lighted cell at

the Sigurantza H.Q. for three weeks, he was not actually tortured. It seems likely that Calinescu's regime were primarily interested in him as a spokesman of the Romanian youth. He was 31 at the time and his popularity had been well established by the publication of his best-selling novel, Maitreyi four years earlier. Thus his dissociation from the Legion would have been a useful propaganda coup for the royal dictatorship, of which Eliade did not fully approve, mainly because of its acceptance of Western, fascist ideology.

When Eliade began coughing blood in October of that year it seems equally clear that that government did not want his death in internment for exactly the same reasons. Fearing tuberculosis they had him transferred to a clinic at Moroeni. As it transpired the blood was from a ruptured vein in his throat, a relatively minor condition brought on by excessive coughing, in turn caused by incipient pleurisy, which could easily have developed into T.B. had the government not acted so quickly. He was given a clean bill of health and on November 12th, almost four months after his arrest, he was simply released. However, his employment at Bucharest University as the assistant of Nae Ionescu was lost and Eliade was without work. For some time he worked at the Society of Romanian Writers, but the unexpected death of General Condeescu in the spring of 1939 removed his "protector". He still had friends, however, and Prof. Alexandru Rosetti prevailed upon

Constantin Giurescu, the minister for propaganda of the Carol regime, to send Eliade to Britain to work for the Romanian Legation there in the office of Press and Propaganda. It is worthy of note that this same Giurescu who helped Eliade later enjoyed some favour under the communist Ceausescu government.

Eliade and Nina set out for London in early April and it is at this point that the documents kept at the Public Records Office begin to be relevant. Unfortunately, there are no records of diplomatic appointments kept by the British Foreign Office for the year of 1940. The documents referred to by Berger as revealing that "the inclusion of his name among the names at the Romanian Legation raised objections from the British Foreign Office" ("Anti-Judaism," p.9. "Fascism and Religion," p.459, n.9) no longer exist. The index of records (see appendix) does list these files (T7026/318/383), but only as referring to Eliade as "on the staff of the Romanian Legation", with no mention of any objections to this. The other file to which Berger refers (T6561/1522/378) is a later file referring to his visa for Portugal. This explains why Berger refers to these files but does not quote them.

Since his arrival at the Romanian Legation in London on the 15th of April, 1940 Eliade's diplomatic status had not been recognised by the British Government. Unfortunately the actual reasons for this refusal of recognition are not given in any of the documents

preserved in the Public Records Office. There are, however, several possible explanations. His recent incarceration as a sympathiser of the Legion of the Archangel Michael is not the least among these. But there are others. Although Viorel Virgil Tilea was not appointed as Minister until February 1st, 1939 he, and other members of the Legation under him, had been in Britain for some years and their loyalties were assured, or at least known. Tilea himself had been President of the Anglo-Romanian Society in Romania and along with D. Mateescu, for example, was regarded as zealously anglophile. New arrivals, favoured by the current regime, were automatically regarded with suspicion. The very fact that they had been appointed to the Legation after the establishment of the fascist inspired royal dictatorship was enough to connect them with anti-British sympathies. And yet it was this very fascist/royalist dictatorship which had had Eliade incarcerated for four months. It should be noted that both the regime which imprisoned Eliade and the movement which he was imprisoned for refusing to disown are now called fascist.

King Carol abdicated in 1940 and General Ion Antonescu and Horia Sima declared a "National-Legionary" state. Tilea was recalled from his position as Romanian Minister in London but refused to return. Thereafter all Romanians who continued to show allegiance to the Legation under the acting Chargé d'Affaires, Radu Florescu, were eventually seen by some as those who

"threw in their lot with the Iron Guard by remaining on the Romanian Legation under M. Florescu".¹ Florescu was evidently regarded with deep suspicion and a Foreign Office note of 21st of September, 1940 reads, "we must request his removal as soon as M. Stoica takes up his duties".² However, Florescu's removal was never effected. On the first of September, 1940, Eliade's appointment at the Legation in London ceased and in mid-September he and his wife and several other Romanians moved to Cambridge to escape the Blitz. Shortly thereafter he was appointed Secrtaire Presse at the Romanian Legation in neutral Portugal.³

However, while Eliade's application for an exit permit was still under consideration the suspicion of his political sympathies surfaced. When six British subjects were arrested by "Iron Guard Police" in Romania and brutally treated and tortured, the possibility arose of arresting some Romanians in direct retaliation.⁴ Messrs Treacy, Anderson, Young, Brassier, Miller, and Clark presented accounts to the Foreign Office which indicate that during five days of detention they were

¹ FO 371 29993, R1424, p.138. Telegram to H. L. d'A. Hopkinson at the Foreign Office, February 19th, 1941. Note that the British government habitually refers to foreign diplomats as Monsieur (abbreviated M.).

² FO 371 24989, p.14.

³ FO 371 24996, R7698/6850/37, p.143.

⁴ Times, 28th Sept. and 7th Oct., 1940, FO 371 24989, pp.53ff., 184.

significantly ill-treated by the Iron Guard although the official civil authorities showed them proper respect.⁵

Mr. P. J. Dixon of the Foreign Office wrote to Sir Norman Kendal at New Scotland Yard on the 4th of October, 1940 that

when we heard of the first arrests of British subjects in Romania last week, M.I.5 were asked to produce a list of suitable Romanians in this country for possible arrest as a retaliatory measure. M.I.5 finally admitted that they were unable to produce any names since their card index of Romanians had unfortunately been destroyed by hostile action. They added that so far as they knew there were very few undesirable Romanians in the country and that a good many of them were Jews.

I then approached New Scotland Yard, who have now produced a list of eleven possible candidates. I have since spoken to Mr. Howe who is dealing with the matter. He says that very little is known about these people but he hopes to produce further details by Monday. I asked him to bear the following points in mind:-

- (a) We would not wish to arrest any Jews;
- (b) It would be useful to know if any of the candidates are known to be pro-British, since it would be a mistake to arrest them;
- (c) The ideal candidate would be persons against whom something is known, particularly if it concerned anti-British activities.⁶

Eliade was not included on this particular list, which was made up of businessmen and women and excluded all diplomatic staff. Evidently the government was taking the standard quid pro quo approach and seeking to arrest only civilians, rather than to expose their own diplomatic staff in Romania to the danger of retaliatory

⁵ FO 371 29992, R 80/80, pp.2ff.

⁶ FO 371 24989, R 7624, p.167.

arrest. However, the Romanian legation included several people, like Eliade, whose status was not recognised. Although he was listed as an "official in active service of the Legation" attached to the Press and Propaganda Office by Radu Florescu in a document of 28th of October, 1940, when Florescu called on Lord Dunbar on the 2nd December he was told that it was impossible to place Eliade on the Diplomatic List.⁷ Florescu continued quite strenuously to try to obtain Eliade's inclusion on the Diplomatic List, but to no avail.

Sir Reginald Hoare, head of the British Mission in Bucharest, had telegraphed Dixon on the 7th of October to say that the "arrest of any six Romanian nationals merely [as] hostage would in no way strengthen my hand". On the bottom of this telegram, which is preserved at the Public Records Office, P. L. Rose, Dixon's immediate junior at the Foreign Office, has written "I still think we might arrest perhaps one or two hangers-on at the legation - such as M. Eliade who is known to have Iron Guard sympathies: it would evidently be useless to do six indiscriminate arrests". Dixon, however, adds to this, "I doubt whether, in the light of the considerations adduced by Sir R. Hoare, it is worth pursuing this question".⁸ Yet the very fact that he had been considered for such retaliatory arrest would ensure that

⁷ FO 371 29999, R119/119, p.10. Unfortunately the actual reasons are not stated in this document.

⁸ *ibid.* p.175.

Eliade would never be accorded diplomatic status. Berger has made some political meat of the application of this term, "hanger-on", to Eliade ("Anti-Judaism," p.9, "Fascism and Religion," p.459.). However, the Foreign Office used the term even for British citizens attached to their Legation in Romania, quite legitimately, but without diplomatic status.

Dixon's recommendation notwithstanding, the question of Eliade's possible arrest was pursued. A note from Commander Croghan of Naval Intelligence Division which considers the attitudes and sympathies of several members of the Romanian Legation indicates that this option was being kept open.⁹ It is this same Croghan who describes the telegram cited by Berger in both articles. In this telegram, which itself is not extant, Eliade reportedly denounces one Dimancescu of the Romanian Legation as Anglophile, and requests that he (Eliade) be appointed in the latter's stead. He also is said to have "added to his message the Romanian equivalent of 'Heil Hitler.'" ("Fascism and Religion," p.459, "Anti Judaism," p.10.) These events are quite possible, and quite explicable. Several of the members of the Legation were actively Anglophile, as we have seen, and were seeking to continue to be paid by their government for the privilege of remaining in Britain with no intention of serving their government. Some people might consider this "deserving"

⁹ FO 371 24996, R7624, p.122.

of denunciation. The government of the royal dictator, Carol, had actually been overthrown by General Antonescu, with the backing of the Iron Guard and considerable popular support, and recognition of the "conducator" was a condition of loyalty to the current government. It seems that Croghan's informant in this matter was Dimancescu himself, who was evidently motivated by fear for his employment and fear of returning to his own country. The former fear seems to have had grounds as he is not mentioned in a list of salaried members of the Legation sent to the Foreign Office in October and it appears that he may have indeed been replaced by Eliade. However, in the same file which refers to this telegram Dixon said of Eliade, "There is considerable disagreement as to his sympathies and a minute has just reached us from the P.I.D. urging that he is a man who might be useful to us".¹⁰ One Captain Campeanu, who is also mentioned in the N.I.D. document, left no such doubt in the minds of British Intelligence. He was arrested by M.I.5 on the 7th of November and incarcerated in Pentonville Prison.¹¹ He was finally released only when his transport out of Britain had been assured on the 28th of March, 1941.¹² Eliade, on the other hand, although clearly thought to be connected to the Iron Guard, was

¹⁰ *ibid.* p.127.

¹¹ *ibid.*, R8543, p.204.

¹² *ibid.*, R8410, p.197, R8543, pp.202-207, FO 371 28953, W3656.

viewed rather differently. Specifically, he was known to be anti-German and thus potentially useful to the British Government.¹³ Mr. Philip B. B. Nichols, Dixon's immediate senior at the Foreign Office, wrote concerning a discussion he had had with members of the Romanian Legation on the 28th of September, 1940,

I asked what was the position of M. Eliade, concerning whom we had a request from Prof. Mitrani that we should facilitate his departure. M. Styrcea said that M. Eliade was an intellectual with Iron Guard leanings. He had written a book on Yogi in India. He thought it possible that if he returned to Romania he might well become closely identified with Iron Guard activities.

On October 1st, 1940 Nichols further asked Tilea about the possible return to Romania of Eliade.

M. Tilea made it plain that he hoped it would be possible for H. M. Government to refuse facilities for the return of any of his Romanian personnel. His reason was that if we facilitated the departure of M. Eliade, the Romanian government would then inquire how it was not possible for eg. Captain Iliescu and M. Styrcea to return; and he was strongly of the opinion that these two latter would be of more use in this country.¹⁴

In another Naval Intelligence document Eliade is mentioned in a list of Romanian Legation personnel who would require passage out of Britain. Everyone listed, it states

with the exception of M. Eliade, are anxious for their departure to be postponed as long as possible...Captain Iliescu...is known to be very pro-British; he therefore fears that he will be killed, if he returns to Romania. M. Eliade is an intellectual, to some extent a supporter of the Iron

¹³ FO 371 24996, R7858/6850, p.146.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, R7698/6850, p.133.

Guard, and is willing to return to Romania.¹⁵

Professor Mitrani, referred to by Mr. Nichols above, was then at Balliol College, Oxford as a Fellow of the Royal Institute of International Affairs. He has written widely on political theory and the political history of Romania and southeastern Europe. According to a note from Mr. Dixon he "frequently assured us that Eliade is a friend", but his word alone could not be relied upon in such matters of diplomacy.¹⁶ Beginning in late September 1940 Mitrani made several polite requests on Eliade's behalf for permission to leave the country, but was equally politely refused by Philip Nichols, initially in deference to Tilea's tacit request, but eventually quite truthfully because the U.K. to Lisbon service was over-subscribed and seats were being given to people on important government business.

Although pressure was still being brought to bear from Rose in the Foreign Office, from Mr. White of M.I.5, and particularly from Dimancescu, to detain Eliade, Dixon and Nichols were not convinced. "It will be seen that the suggestion is that to allow Eliade to return to Romania will be dangerous for the loyal Romanians remaining in this country," wrote Mr. Nichols, having considered the others' arguments. However, he continued, "I do not myself believe there is much in this,

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.135.

¹⁶ FO 371 29995, R119/119, p.8.

particularly if Eliade stays in Lisbon".¹⁷ It was eventually decided, in response to some pressure from the Romanian government, to allot two seats for Eliade and his wife on the Bristol to Lisbon service on the 9th of February, at least four months after he had made his first moves to leave the country.¹⁸ At this time Dimancescu wrote to the Foreign Office suggesting that if they wished to delay Eliade's departure further, they could simply make one seat only available to him on the flight. Eliade would not leave his wife behind and so would be prevented from leaving the country, whilst the British government would be seen to have fulfilled their political obligations.¹⁹ I believe this speaks for itself as regards Eliade's loyalty to his wife, and as a condemnation of Dimancescu's underhand tactics, probably inspired by the loss of his salary. The British government did not act on his recommendation.

The members of the British Legation to Romania were in the process of withdrawing, a state of war having been declared between the two countries effective from 7th December, 1940. Under such conditions the British government was responsive to requests concerning the movements of Romanian Legation members to avoid retaliation impeding the movement of their own diplomats.

¹⁷ FO 371 29999, R119/119, p.19.

¹⁸ FO 371 24996, R7858/6850, pp.144, 164,165.

¹⁹ FO 371 2999, R119/119, p.19.

On the 13th of November Dixon wrote to a Mr. McCombe of the treasury that "unless and until relations are broken off with Romania, it seems to us that members of the Romanian Legation must be treated in these matters as representatives of any other neutral government".²⁰ Despite Radu Florescu's petitions and despite Eliade's appointment as Secretaire Presse to the Press and Propaganda Office in Lisbon, the British Government never did acknowledge Eliade as having diplomatic status. Florescu tried sometimes dubious means to ensure Eliade's diplomatic recognition, at one time simply writing that "M. Eliade who according to my previous communication has been granted diplomatic privilege", when this was not so.²¹ It is noteworthy that even Tilea joined in the voices speaking out for Eliade's departure and invoking the latter's "tuberculosis" as grounds for granting an exit permit.²² However, the initial suspicions of Military Intelligence, fuelled by Dimancesu's protestations, had never been allayed. Thus when Eliade presented himself at the airport in Bristol claiming diplomatic status, carrying a courier's passport stamped "diplomatique" but not signed by the relevant British authorities, and carrying a diplomatic bag, he was treated by the Security Control Officer as something of a

²⁰ FO 371 29993, R8031, p.336.

²¹ FO 371 29995, R978/119, p.9.

²² FO 371 24996, p.219.

fraud. Military Intelligence, whose job it is to act on suspicions, were suspicious that Eliade would leave the country with sensitive documents and had ordered in advance that all his belongings be thoroughly searched. The Romanian Legation, in fact the whole Romanian Government, were treating Eliade as a bona fide member of the Legation and of diplomatic status. One wonders whether Florescu had actually admitted to Eliade his failure to secure the Foreign Office's recognition, although Tilea claimed that he had warned Eliade not to carry any couriers.²³ It is hardly surprising then that an embarrassing incident ensued.

Eliade, considering himself to be a member of the Legation, was incensed at being stripped and searched, and thought the refusal by the Security Control Officer to allow him to carry his diplomatic bag out of the country without search to be a breach of protocol. He evidently complained bitterly to his home government. On the 13th of February the Foreign Office received a telegram from Sir Reginald Hoare, the third paragraph of which read:

it appears that Mr. Eliade who, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is cultural attaché of the Romanian Legation and bearer of a diplomatic passport was most rigorously searched at Bristol airport a few days ago and [the] diplomatic bag which he was carrying was returned to the Legation. It is obvious that any repetition of this treatment will lead to reprisals here.²⁴

²³ FO 371 29999, R119/119, p.3.

²⁴ FO 371 29993, R1061, p.50.

Evidently the Romanian Government were consistently insisting on Eliade's diplomatic status at the highest level. The British Government were just as consistently refusing to recognise it and immediately replied to Sir Reginald that

the facts are as follows:-

Mr. Eliade was not, as has been claimed, cultural attaché to the Romanian Legation in London and had no diplomatic status, a request by the Romanian Chargé d'Affaires to have him placed on the Diplomatic List having twice been refused. On being questioned at the airport, Mr. Eliade first claimed that he was Press Attaché, but subsequently admitted that this was not so. A place was reserved for him on the aeroplane to Lisbon at the urgent request of the Romanian Government, but no prior notification was received that he was to carry a diplomatic bag. An examination of his courier's passport and of his ordinary passport showed that the Legation had not complied with the regulations regarding temporary couriers with which all Missions in London are fully acquainted. The Security Control Officer accordingly invited him to obtain his Legation's confirmation of his bona fides. Mr. Eliade refused to return to London for this purpose, but stated that he would burn his bag. The S.C.O. refused to allow this, and Mr. Eliade then handed in the bag for return to the Romanian Legation and it was duly returned to them. It will be clear from the above that the diplomatic bag was not taken away from Mr. Eliade and that the incident was due entirely to his not possessing diplomatic status and to the failure of the Legation to obey the regulations regarding temporary couriers.²⁵

Thus the British Government justified its actions without breach of protocol, ensuring Eliade's departure from Britain without any possibility of his transporting sensitive information, and forestalling, as far as possible, any direct retaliatory action against British diplomats still in Romania. This was in fact successful

²⁵ *ibid.*, W3239/2008/49.

and the British Legation left Romania without serious incident on the 15th of February, after which date all diplomatic relations with Romania ceased. Eliade states that his first knowledge of the severance of diplomatic relations came on the evening of February 10th, the same day he flew to Lisbon (Autobiography vol.II, p.89.)

Such an action was not without risk, however, and a further telegram from the U.S. Ambassador in Bucharest on the 14th of March again refers to the incident.

Our contact with the authorities concerned make it clear that the suspicion is hardening that the British authorities are not putting themselves out to provide places on planes to Lisbon for the remaining members of the Romanian Legation and their families who wish to leave. This coupled with a smouldering resentment over the treatment reported accorded to a member of the Legation and his family who departed before the British Minister left here may lead to serious misunderstandings and consequences. The report of the official in question has been received from Lisbon and states that both he and his family were stripped and searched and their possessions upset and thrown about, and a bag of diplomatic correspondence taken away from him. The attitude of the Romanian authorities is that Sir Reginald Hoare and the large party of British who accompanied him were permitted to depart on the personal pledge of the British Minister that every effort would be made to facilitate the departure of all members of the Romanian Legation in London who wished to leave.²⁶

There is possibly a clash of styles of diplomacy here between the British who proceeded very cautiously and correctly, "by the book", and the Romanians who seemed to consider a certain amount of bluff and bluster, exaggeration and occasional downright lies, to be the normal stuff of foreign relations. The diplomatic

²⁶ FO 371 29993, R1467, p.147.

necessity of presenting the facts in the light most favourable to one's own government causes occasional questionable statements, such as the Foreign Office's claim above that "the diplomatic bag was not taken away from Mr. Eliade" when it obviously was, and their refusal to recognise that he was secretaire presse to the Legation in Lisbon. That Eliade exaggerated the treatment he received on his departure from Britain is hardly damning evidence.

That the suspicions which fell upon Eliade were finally unfounded seems to be indicated by the pattern of events which followed upon his departure from London. There is no evidence that the Legation staff who remained in Britain suffered any persecution at his instigation. Eliade only once again visited Romania and there is no evidence that he was particularly highly regarded by or involved with the increasingly fascist regime, or with the Iron Guard. Otherwise he did remain in Portugal until the end of the war as Nichols had hoped, when his break with Romanian politics was final. Radu Florescu was allowed to remain in Britain, despite the low opinion in which he had been held, when he offered his services "in the matter of pursuing an activity controlled by your institutions which aims at the re-birth of the Romanian nation in self-determination with Great Britain's help and wisdom".²⁷ Evidently the suspicion with which he was

²⁷ FO 371 29993, R1467, p.147.

regarded and which had fallen on Eliade by association was eventually dispelled. Even the Iron Guard, initially suspected to be "merely German tools" of whom General Antonescu was "completely the prisoner",²⁸ were regarded with less suspicion. Following further intelligence, including the interception of Guardist literature en route for Detroit, U.S.A., they were seen rather as a dangerous, over-emotional, popular and religious movement whose nationalism occasioned an inherent anti-German tendency and thus British Intelligence "suggests that attempts should be made in Romania at securing the adherence of the Iron Guard".²⁹ Of course the violent anti-semitic atrocities of which the Iron Guard were guilty occurred some time after Eliade had left the country and he cannot be realistically seen to share any culpability in respect of such actions. When the Iron Guard assassinated Nicolae Iorga, to whom Berger refers as "the anti-semite, Iorga ("Anti-Judaism," p.6.) in November, 1940 Eliade deemed them to have "nullified the religious meaning of the 'sacrifice' made by the Legionaries executed under Carol and had irreparably discredited the Iron Guard". (Autobiography vol.II p.69.) Also, the fact that after the execution of C. Z. Codreanu, his father established an alternative Legionary movement in opposition to Horia Sima's Iron Guard

²⁸ FO 371 24989, p.64.

²⁹ FO 371 29993, R1600/G, p.185a.

suggests a change in the nature of the Guardist movement with which some of its original leaders, let alone possible sympathizers, could not tolerate. The British historian, Seton-Watson, originally recognised that Eliade was pro-British although a sympathiser of this "milder" wing of the Guard. Under the influence of Dimancescu and in the increasing paranoia of an embattled nation he later became profoundly suspicious of Eliade as a potential spy. However, this does seem unlikely, even though any descriptions of war damage which Eliade sent back from Britain to Romania certainly could have been used as propaganda, whether or not this was his intent.

Although these documents do not give hard evidence either way about Eliade's connection with the Guardist movement, circumstantial evidence; the fact that the British did not see fit to arrest him; their eventual reconciliation with Radu Florescu, who was likewise under suspicion; the fact that Eliade remained in Portugal; and the possible alternative explanations, serves to minimise the significance of any such connection.

One conclusion which can be drawn from this inspection of the available information is inescapably that Berger has been strongly biased in her treatment and presentation. She has referred to Foreign Offices files which, although listed in the index, are no longer extant and which thus cannot provide any real evidence.

(T6561/1522/378; T7026/318/383) She has quoted several references the Eliade's being "a member of the Iron

Guard" without reporting that the same sources admit that there was "considerable disagreement as to his sympathies", (n.10 above.) and, in fact, she can adduce no hard evidence that Eliade ever was a member of the Guard. She has made statements which are completely unsupportable, such as; "Eliade was detained in England because of his political activities on behalf of the Iron Guard and also of Nazi Germany". ("Fascism and Religion," p.459, "Anti-Judaism," p.9.) This is clearly not the case, Eliade was detained in Britain originally at the request of V. V. Tilea and later because of suspicions that were never confirmed of his anti-British propagandising. She has failed to recognise even the possibility that Eliade's actions could be more easily accounted for by his loyalty to the country of his birth than by any malice against anyone. While we must guard against the situation which Seymour Cain reports in Romania of Eliade being "idolised by the public, and no real criticism of his work is allowed", we must just as zealously guard against personal antipathies being allowed to bias our presentation of the facts. To baldly state that "Eliade was not a Cultural attaché (or Secretary) as he had stated in interviews, diaries, and in his Autobiography", ("Anti-Judaism," p.9) is to attempt to make a liar out of Eliade by wholly ignoring the fact that he was appointed to the Press and Propaganda Office of the Lisbon Legation, a fact which Berger accepted in her earlier article. ("Fascism and

Religion," p.460) Berger has completely failed to indicate any actual activity in which Eliade might have been involved which might justify the slur of "anti-Judaism". Seymour Cain's article on exactly this topic is a level-headed contribution to this debate, and he makes the clear statement that he "never saw the slightest sign of anti-Semitism in [Eliade's] works or in his person. He always impressed me as a good man as well as a great creative scholar, and above all, as a treasurable human being". ("Mircea Eliade, the Iron Guard, and Romanian Anti-Semitism," p.27.) I should hope that such a personal assessment is actually more weighty evidence than such a tendentious rendition of "factual history" as Berger present us in her papers. Finally, when Berger writes that Ricketts distorts Eliade's articles and quotes them out of context ("Fascism and Religion," p.463) I can only assume after an inspection of this data that she is wrongly assuming Ricketts to use the method which she so clearly applies herself.

Appendix B.

Public Records Office index of files relating to Eliade.

[--] indicates Public Records Office file reference numbers.

_____ indicates files referred to by Berger.

References in bold type are to files extant at the P.R.O.

1939 - no references

1940 - "On staff of Romanian Legation."

MI5 file

T5104/T6167/T7401/318/383

- "Exemption from alien restrictions."

T5878/5839/5593/377

T6167/318/383

- "Inclusion of name in diplomatic list.

Activities."

T7401/T7026/318/383

- "Request by Romanian government for facilities for his return to Romania."

R8800/6850/37 in [FO 371 24996]

- "Proposed expulsion from U.K."

R7790/392/37

R7624/37

- "Portuguese visa facilities."

T6561/1522/378

- "Facilities to travel to Portugal. Activities.
Attitude of H. M. Government toward."

R7858/R7698/6850/37 in [FO 371 24996]

1941 - "Departure from U.K.: effort at airport to persuade local officers of diplomatic privilege to which he was not entitled: passport etc. stamped diplomatic: so called diplomatic bag left at aerodrome."

R978/119/37

R1087/80/37 in [FO 371 29995]

[This episode is also recorded in R1061, in FO 371 29993, although this is not mentioned in the index.]

- "Use of as temporary Romanian courier."

W3239/2008/49 in [FO 371 28953]

- "Priority of passage on Plane to Lisbon."

Y171/Y 469/7311/2 650

- "Request for facilities for his departure and anti-British outlook."

R119/R283/119/37 in [FO 371 29999]

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