Ritual semiotics and mythology from a historical criticism perspective

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Abstract:

The current paper addresses a central issue that has become a significant and serious topic of research among contemporary critical thinkers. It examines the philosophical foundations upon which modern consciousness is built, particularly in relation to the reading and interpretation of ancient texts and mythology in general, and the nature of religious texts in particular, from various perspectives and methodologies. The goal is to understand the foundational references for social patterns and the textual formations of concepts employed by classical epistemological theories.

This study aims to clarify these aspects while shedding light on the historical and scientific truth of texts and theories in European intellectual heritage, as well as the historical responsibility that much of human and cultural knowledge bears. This responsibility has been adopted by the proponents of the rationalist revolution against the contents of myths in sacred texts and the discourse of Christian theology in general, influencing the effectiveness of society, individuals, science, religion, values, nature, and the world.

Keywords: Semiotics, Myth, Religion, Consciousness, Sacred, Criticism.

Introduction

Many changes occurred in tandem with the Western cultural revolution and among postmodern thinkers. These changes also coincided with the scientific discussions prevalent in contemporary critical discourse. Philosophical propositions emerged concerning the nature of religious texts and the historical, logical, and functional relationships between concepts, mythological perceptions, and the theoretical frameworks within Enlightenment thought. This was viewed through the lens of epistemology, particularly by acquiring critical knowledge achieved through levels of doubt and ambiguity in the reality of raising methodological questioning. This approach allowed for the examination of concepts and the characteristics distinguishing divine discourse from worldly mythological narratives.

In line with the traditional and familiar forms of textual concept formations, religious studies were conducted within various epistemological systems, including theology, religious studies, psychology, sociology, and cultural anthropology. However, over the past several decades, new epistemological systems, such as evolutionary psychology, cognitive science, cognitive anthropology, and the philosophy of mind, have also found their way into the study of religion.

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These new fields have provided valuable and intriguing insights into religion, utilizing the theory of evolution proposed by Charles Darwin (1809-1882) and his ideas on evolution through natural selection to understand religion itself, as presented in his book "On the Origin of Species" (1859)[1] .

Thus, we pose the following question: How have epistemological issues been raised concerning the content of mythological concepts? And to what extent can the historically opposing relationship between religion and philosophy, as highlighted by Enlightenment thinkers, be connected?

First: The Conceptual Framework of the Study

1. **Myth**: One of the general concepts upon which religion is founded is the interpretation of the term "myth." Some view it as a fictional story dominated by imagination, where forces of nature are depicted as living beings with exceptional personalities, forming the basis of folklore [2]. The etymology of the word "myth" in Arabic closely resembles its derivations in European languages. The English and French word "Myth" and others are derived from the Greek root "Muthos," meaning a story or tale. Plato was the first to use the term "Muthologia" to denote the art of storytelling, particularly the type we now refer to as myths. From this, the term "Mythology," used in modern European languages, originated [3].

   Some also consider myth to be a type of story that has existed since ancient times within the traditions of a tribe, a people, or a nation, passed down from generation to generation [4]. These stories revolve around gods, demigods, and supernatural events, and they differ from epics, which record human deeds, and from fairy tales, which were invented for educational and entertainment purposes. Myths are rooted in ancient civilizations and date back to a period preceding science and philosophy, providing explanations for the phenomena of the universe, nature, and humanity through the logic of primitive thought [5]. It is also noteworthy that myths have historical dimensions, as they shape the religious imagination, where the deity surpasses and dominates the forces and manifestations of nature. Ernst Cassirer notes that "true myth does not begin when we form those defined images of the gods, but when we attribute a specific beginning to these gods in time, and when these gods engage in activities and reveal their existence in a temporal context; that is, when human consciousness shifts from the idea of divinity to its history [6]." In general, a myth is "a traditional story in which metaphysical beings play the main roles [7]."

2. **Mythology**: The crystallization of research into the content and history of religious stories is considered a key task of mythology (Mythologie) among scholars. The study of ancient myths, such as those of the Greeks, Romans, and other peoples, falls within the scope of this field[8].

3. **Belief and Ritual**: Discussing myth as a necessary successor and a significant element of religious content, particularly in the stories that form the foundation of worship, reveals the conceptual interplay between "belief" as the earliest form of collective expression of individual religious experience, which moves from the realm of emotional response to the realm of intellectual contemplation [9]. The term "ritual" or "rite" is not merely a system of gestures that

outwardly express internal faith; it is also a set of causes and means that cyclically recreate faith. Thus, "ritual" and "belief" are mutually dependent on each other [10].

4. The Sacred: Another key area of focus in the study of mythology is the concept of "the sacred." The French scholar Roger Caillois (1913-1978) defines it in his book *Man and the Sacred* as one of the categories of feeling. The sacred is considered the central idea around which religion revolves; myths and beliefs analyze its content in their own ways, rituals utilize its characteristics, priests embody it, and temples, sacred places[11], and religious monuments establish and root it in the earth. From this, religious morality emerges among individuals and societies.

5. **Religion**: The interwoven relationship between the terms myth, belief, ritual, and the sacred leads to a comprehensive definition of religion. Religion is understood as a set of beliefs, laws, rituals, and institutions that encompass human life in certain circumstances almost entirely. Additionally, religion includes a large number of stories, myths, narratives, and opinions about the creation and structure of the universe, the origin and destiny of humanity, the history and its events, and the individuals who played a role in shaping these events [12].

Thus, the role of contemporary semiotic studies has been one of the actual driving forces in raising critical topics that explore the relationship between humans and their religious and magical perceptions of the world [13]. There is no doubt that the active dialectic between the nature of the relationships that fragment this fundamental opposition between reason and ancient myths was central to the principles of the European Enlightenment revolution in the modern era. This revolution aimed to undermine everything sacred or religious in the social life of the European individual [14].

Secondly: The Historical Context of the European Concept of "Enlightenment"

The European Enlightenment and the revolution in consciousness it brought about are among the most significant events experienced by European society during the Renaissance. As for the temporal and spatial history of the emergence of the idea of Enlightenment as a philosophical movement, its starting point has been a matter of debate among historians. Paul Hazard, in his book *The Crisis of the European Conscience* (1935), traces the Enlightenment back to the second half of the seventeenth century. In contrast, historian Christopher Hill, in his book *The Cultural Origins of the English Revolution* (1965), argues that Enlightenment ideas were prevalent in England in the sixteenth century, thereby establishing a connection between the Enlightenment and the Renaissance [15]. Some, however, argue that the roots of Enlightenment go beyond the European Renaissance [16]. Historian Peter Gray, in his book *Enlightenment*, traces the Enlightenment historically back to the Greeks, stating, "The Greeks are the ones who invented critical philosophy that denies authority," according to the common saying: "Philosophy speaks in a Greek tongue, and nothing else but Greek [17]."

Given these differing opinions, the common consensus is that the eighteenth century is known as the Age of Enlightenment (the age that created philosophers). The term is often written in French, indicating that while Enlightenment was undoubtedly a European phenomenon, it was particularly a French one[18]. The French thinker Voltaire (1694–1778) advocated for the exaltation of reason as a replacement for the sanctity of religion. He launched a fierce campaign against religion and the Church, denied the existence of the metaphysical world, the afterlife, and divine retribution, and asserted that there is no sacred revelation except nature itself.

Amid the ongoing debate, some argue that the origins of Enlightenment thought lie in English philosophy, while others believe it to be German in origin [19]. Nevertheless, various terms referring to Enlightenment were used in different European languages, such as *Aufklärung* in German, *Lumière* in French, and *Illuminismo* in Italian. These terms reveal the diversity of perspectives on the subject of Enlightenment [20].

1. **The Mechanisms and Effectiveness of the Mind in Knowledge**

Thus, the revolutionary Western intellectual concept embraces a constantly evolving epistemological outlook, raising the banner "No authority over the mind except the mind itself [21]." Regardless of the differences in adapting to this new vision of knowledge-seen as a general framework derived from the philosophical achievements and ideas found in the works of Enlightenment philosophers-religion was ultimately rejected as a source of knowledge after a long struggle between science and religion, as well as between thinkers and theologians. This conflict dates back to the time of Copernicus (1473–1543), who expressed his views on natural sciences, astronomy, and the heliocentric model of the universe, all of which contradicted the claims of the Church [22]. The outcome of this struggle was the triumph of reason and the independence of science from religion, highlighting the dualistic conflict between religion and science.

The English school, with the empiricist Francis Bacon (1561–1626) in the seventeenth century, rejected the interference of religion in knowledge, arguing that religion limits all forms of knowledge. Bacon laid the foundation for the modern scientific method and published his first treatise in 1605 titled *The Advancement of Learning* [23]. Max Horkheimer summarizes Bacon's approach by stating that Bacon was able to foresee the conflicts that would be characteristic of science after him, characterized by the unity between the human mind and the nature of things. The mind, having triumphed over superstition, must now control a nature devoid of magic [24]. Knowledge, being a form of power, recognizes no boundaries, whether in excluding creation or in dealing with the masters of this world. By combining reason and sensation, science became "a center of power." Following Bacon, John Locke (1632–1704) explored the origin of ideas in his work *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1695), tracing them back to sensory experience[25].

The impact of the Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711–1776), particularly his work "An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding" (1748) [26], had a significant influence on the contemplative philosophy of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). Kant himself acknowledged this, stating: "The conflict of pure reason (...) was the first thing that

awoke me from my dogmatic slumber and led me to a critique of reason itself[27] ." This highlights the importance of Hume's intellectual influence on Kant's writings, particularly his role in shaping Kant's epistemology when he authored "Critique of Pure Reason." It can be said that the formation of European consciousness was marked by the rise of revolutionary thought and the leadership of Enlightenment figures such as John Locke, David Hume, and Newton in England, the philosopher Voltaire and the Encyclopedists in France, as well as Leibniz, Lessing, and particularly Kant in Germany. This era came to be known as the "Age of Enlightenment," with the concept of enlightenment representing a European intellectual movement that saw reason as the true essence of humanity[28].

From another perspective, the American historian Peter Gay, who began compiling key thinkers and awakeners of consciousness in 1966 in his book "The Rise of Modern Paganism and the Science of Freedom," divides Enlightenment pioneers by the periods of their lives. The first phase, or the first generation, was represented by Voltaire (1694–1774) and Montesquieu (1689–1755), followed by the second generation, which included Denis Diderot (1713–1784), D'Alembert (1717–1783), and the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) [29]. The late Enlightenment period was covered by the generation of Lessing and Kant. Before Peter Gay's classification of these stages, Ernst Cassirer offered his interpretation in a series of discussions that necessarily took various forms and frameworks, primarily rooted in national cultural backgrounds. This topic was significant in the 1930s in his book "The Philosophy of Enlightenment," from which Cassirer derived the concepts of consciousness. In this book, rationalism is defined as a period marked by the lives of the philosophers Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) and Immanuel Kant [30].

Speaking of Kant, we pose a question for further inquiry: On what foundation did Kant base his teachings on the concept of employing reason and critiquing the authority of religion?

2 - Kant's Model School of Critical Reason

It is evident that the issues surrounding the question of consciousness have been crystallized in a succinct statement by Kant, where he defines enlightenment as: "Man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity, through the use of reason without allowing fanaticism to distort his thinking and without others directing this thinking [31]." In another definition emphasizing the importance of reason, he states: "Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage," which means his inability to use his understanding without guidance from others; in other words: "Have the courage to use your own reason [32]." This was the slogan of enlightenment carried by Kant. Kant's text represents a new approach that refutes classical philosophical discourse in a summarized phrase: boldness and freedom in using reason, without relying on any foundation other than reason itself. This principle brought reason to its utmost limit, transforming everything natural into a dominant self [33].

Given this divergence in defining enlightenment, it is not surprising that in 1783, the influential German newspaper "Brilliant Monatschrift" in Berlin posed a seemingly simple and

fundamental question to its readers, asking them to submit their answers. The question was: What is enlightenment [34]? From this newspaper's call, various responses were submitted by individuals of different orientations, such as the playwright Gotthold Lessing (1729–1781), the Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786), and the Prussian philosopher Immanuel Kant, along with many other participants. These essays can be considered a synthesis of the various meanings and ideas prevalent at that time, which became widespread towards the end of the century, all connected to the term "enlightenment [35]."

It also seems that the crystallization of this idea, its formulation, analysis, and methodological presentation, according to the citation of this newspaper, and the first principle of the Enlightenment method, returned to Kant's persuasive answer and his depth in using the term "Enlightenment" to describe the intellectual movement that began in 17th-century Europe and reached its peak in the 18th century. This movement had a widespread influence on European civilization as a whole and on the peoples influenced by that civilization [36]. Ernst Cassirer and Peter Gay, in their classifications, both suggest that the Enlightenment truly matured with the later philosophers, particularly Kant. This view is supported by a question posed by Kant himself: "Are we currently living in an enlightened age [37]?" Kant's answer was: "No, but we are living in an age moving towards enlightenment. Much still remains to be done in the current state of affairs before people as a whole are capable, or even merely able, to use their reason firmly and competently in matters of religion, without the guidance of others [38]."

So, what do we understand from Kant's answer? We understand that the subject of Enlightenment is still a project in progress, with its raw materials yet to be fully shaped. It involves the removal of the tutelage of theological texts (the guidance of others). The points of intersection between the Enlightenment movement and religion are summarized in various intertwined issues, including the rationality of religion and the freedom of worship, according to the political context of 17th-century Prussia. However, the Enlightenment is also supported and reinforced by the discourse of a ruling authority that upholds this freedom of belief and even believes in individual liberty. Kant adds: "A prince who does not feel dishonored by saying that he finds it his duty not to prescribe anything to people in matters of religion, but instead leaves them complete freedom in this field, such a prince (...) is himself enlightened [39]." This was the case with the rulers of free states such as England and Holland, which were the most liberated countries in Europe [40].

Kant's reference was to Prince Frederick II (1712–1786), also known as "Frederick the Great," King of Prussia, who was a key supporter of the Enlightenment throughout his reign, succeeding his father from 1740 to 1770[41]. Kant considered Frederick to be the primary intellect behind this enlightenment. The freedom achieved under Frederick's rule gradually diminished the intellectual immaturity of individuals, which stemmed from their political, social, and historical circumstances [42]. According to Kant, this was because the prince "allowed every individual the freedom to use his own reason in all matters related to religion." From this perspective, which Kant laid out in establishing the Enlightenment project, he started with a fundamental point: challenging any authority that combined religious and civil power, whether held by popes

or kings anointed and blessed by popes. This system was historically known in Europe as "the divine right of kings [43]."

The second principle that Kant's educational project established was the foundation of a broad base, extending its influence across Europe [44], starting from Prussian lands. This principle had a purely educational focus for the coming generation, where Kant addressed the issue of pedagogy and the reform of education and general upbringing during that period. His approach emphasized individual experience and reason. Kant summarized the state of education in his time by saying: "Educational institutions were not non-existent, but most were poor; they worked against nature (...) and blindly followed the traditions of ignorant and barbarous centuries [45]." Kant sought to reshape the Enlightenment question in a way that responded to the logic of growing knowledge and changing societies, starting with a reexamination of the foundation of schools and improving the education of future generations through the renewal of their structural and organizational frameworks. As someone who worked in education, Kant responded: "For indeed, the educational system is flawed in its fundamental organization, and the teachers themselves need new training[46]." Kant elaborated on this vision in detail in his educational treatise, "Reflections on Education," which expressed his ambition to change the state of education in his time and bring about a qualitative shift in it[47].

Kant's logical answer seems to be a prerequisite for mutual understanding among individuals regarding the concept of consciousness, based on the separation of theological discourse from social life. This is one of the principles of the "secular revolution" sparked by European Enlightenment philosophy, which established modern secularism on both the ancient European heritage and the rationality of the modern Enlightenment. This rationality replaced the principles of "religion and theology" with "reason and experience[48]." Kant reinforced this by stating that "such a change cannot be achieved by gradual reform but only by a swift revolution. For this, one well-organized school, founded on the right method, is enough[49]." Its educational role would be to dismantle all mythological or magical conceptions of knowledge.

However, research into ancient mythology and contemporary critical studies of Enlightenment ideas has shown that, according to ancient Greek tales, the word *Numina* is a neutral term found in myths meaning "a nod of the head." It was associated with the idea that "fertility resides in the head," and this concept was anthropomorphized (transferring human traits to the gods). But this view did not last long. Over time, *Numina* transformed into a god that resembled a human being, either male or female[50]. Nevertheless, as these myths and transformations evolved, the stories associated with Greek gods became attributed to Roman gods, indicating Greek influence, because the *Numina* spirit in Roman mythology had no stories of its own. Enlightenment thinkers borrowed this concept directly from Greek colonies, and Kant was one of the philosophers who used the term *Numina* as part of the transcendental categories of reason to understand existence beyond the sensory world.

Thirdly: The Response of Contemporary Critical Schools to the Issues of the European Crisis of Consciousness

Despite the immense attention that has been directed toward the theories and views of Enlightenment philosophers, there have also been works dedicated to studying the origins of the phenomenon of religion and theology in Western society. Some critics from the fields of sociology, history, psychology, and others, who are interested in the development of the idea of religion among primitive peoples, have focused more on an ancient aspect of understanding the relationship between religious beliefs and myths with human reality. This critical approach has been particularly directed at examining the role of Christian ideas, specifically in their connection between divine discourse and the earthly world (human beings).

1 - Paul Hazard and the Christian Experience in the Theory of Astrology

The French historian, writer, and academic Paul Hazard (1878–1944) in his work *The Crisis of the European Mind 1680-1715*, sought to rewrite the history of modern Europe. In this book, he discusses the readings and ideas of the Enlightenment and their intellectual struggle throughout history. He provides a detailed analysis of the revolutions led by Enlightenment figures and their bold efforts to uncover the truths of sacred texts and the mysteries and myths nurtured by Christianity[51]. Free thinkers fought against tradition, spoke of natural rights, and dreamed of an age of happiness built on reason and science. This quest for "the value of man" is something that later philosophical movements, especially Marxism, historical philosophy, and existentialism, attempted to instill in humanity, [52]particularly after the discovery of the "historical man," i.e., the idea that man is defined to the extent that he creates himself within the heart of history[53].

Paul Hazard begins his work with a critical historical perspective, stating: "People in the seventeenth century loved hierarchy, discipline, and order, which authority ensured, along with doctrines that organized life with stability [54]. But immediately following them in the eighteenth century were people who rejected coercion, authority, and doctrines." As for his description of the intellectual and cultural state of Europe, Hazard argues that the role of free thinkers during the period of ecclesiastical rule was to activate the power of reason and highlight the intellectual capacity of individuals which distinguishes humans from animals. He writes: "The essence of reason was examination, and its first task was to attack everything obscure, unexplained, and ambiguous, in order to cast its light upon the world. The world was full of errors created by deceptive spiritual forces, reinforced by unchecked authorities (including the media), which were spread through gullibility and accumulated, with time strengthening their influence."

This accumulation of errors, with its historical and epistemological nature, appeared, according to Paul Hazard, as the absolute truth for the public[55],. The free thinkers of that era worked to establish the idea that the role of reason was to eliminate these widespread obstacles. They believed that the mission of reason was also to eradicate these countless errors, and they were eager to complete this task. Any religious conception of the world assumed a distinction between the sacred and the secular[56]. During this period, thought drew its mission from itself and from the importance of its own existence, due to the influence of rationalists and their penetration into universities, where they undermined the teachings of theologians. The Bible,

with its constant reminder of the obligation to submit to its texts, was the source from which all doctrines and superstitions were derived, presenting them as knowledge and science[57].

Moreover, the great metaphysical problems might be renewed through our knowledge of ancient ontology, particularly in the study of the history of religions, by examining the principles that these ancient ontologies were based upon. These superstitions in the Bible, according to Paul Hazard, were the entrenchment of an old myth [58]. Among these myths was the propagation of the "miracle," which became an enemy, attracting the faithful and those who prayed in churches. They had to be cautious against attacking it freely and attacking superstitions, especially denouncing certain preconceived notions. Since authority, consent, and habit were the foundations of belief in the "miracle," they needed to be confronted[59].

A - The Phenomenon of the Comet and the Idea of Salvation in the Bible

One of the tools used by the church to spread its version of the truth to the public was its influence on scientific journals, including ideas about astrology[60].. According to Paul Hazard, through this indirect means, the church returned to its familiar rhetoric, as seen in the *Journal des Savants*. On Monday, January 1, 1681, Hazard revisits the myth of the comet, saying: "Everyone was talking about the comet, which was undoubtedly the most significant new event at the start of this year. Astronomers were observing its path, while the people saw it as an omen of a thousand misfortunes..." [61].Hazard further describes the scene of the comet and how the public received this astronomical phenomenon, with different groups reacting according to their level of awareness and education whether naïve or scientific. He writes: "The event occurred in December 1680, when a comet appeared in the sky, and in the years that followed, other comets appeared. At this sign, people resumed an old argument, though in a surprising manner... Some claimed that comets were dangerous in themselves, as their material was formed from accumulated vapors from the earth. When these vapors ignite, they cause significant atmospheric disturbances in the region, followed by a major and important upheaval[62].."

Others, according to Hazard, responded with a different perspective: "And some answered that ancient philosophy used to think this way[63], but today we know that these comets are celestial bodies, and the earth has nothing to fear from them..." This highlights the ways and mechanisms of traditional thought regarding the problem of human existence and history[64], within the framework of ancient spirituality connected to imitating the celestial model and its link to the earth[65].

As for the reaction of the general and naïve populace, Paul Hazard adds: "Those quick to believe said that comets are signs of the future, sent from above to announce a great punishment that the people deserve[66]. When these comets are seen, woe to those who do not repent of their sins. Remember, throughout the ages[67]." According to their beliefs, and the consequences that follow such astronomical phenomena, rooted in ancient myths, and echoed in sacred texts, they would say: "Their appearance was always followed by ominous events, such as the assassination of kings, earthquakes, famine, wars, or plagues. Weep and pray, for unbelief has

reached its peak. God is showing His wrath and sends His messengers from heaven against us[68]. "

In contrast, the class that rejects anything irrational and views the phenomenon as mere superstition responds, according to Paul Hazard: "Others replied: Are we so important that we imagine the heavens consume a comet for our sake? No matter how much we search, we find nothing that strengthens the argument of popular belief[69]., nor anything convincing in the arguments of scholars, nor anything in the Bible that justifies this preconceived opinion." This seems to reflect the viewpoint of the more critically conscious group.

Paul Hazard then begins to analyze the logic behind the response of the "free thinkers" or rationalists to all the opinions surrounding the comet phenomenon[70]. They would say: "What are comets if not the most beautiful stars in the sky? Night, darkness, and shadows inspire fear, but not a shining star. Suppose it involves vapor: how can we think it could be a sign of the future[71].? How could a purely material object, without mind or emotion, indicate the future?" This is where every superstition that lacks truth falls apart; it is the activity and capability of human reason that carries out the systematic analysis and interpretation of anything related to the prediction of natural phenomena. After this logical analysis, which counters all misconceptions about prophecy and the alleged idea of salvation tied to human sin[72]., rebellion against God, and original sin, the rationalists reached a logical conclusion about the reality of comets: "Comets obey the laws of nature that God created, and the original sin did not disturb this harmony. They follow these laws but do not influence them[73]."

Undoubtedly, according to Paul Hazard, the general acceptance by the public of tradition, miracles, and the belief that comets are omens of widespread disasters is, in his view, an ancient pagan superstition. This superstition, which originated from the intellectual heritage of the ancient world particularly Greek science, philosophy, and mythology was integrated into Christianity and preserved within it[74]. In the end, many of the errors of paganism were retained throughout the ages, and it is easy to find them in customs, celebrations, and even in the beliefs of Christians. These superstitions, absurdities, and even horrific crimes, led people into a form of idolatry that is almost inconceivably ridiculous and detestable. Such notions, when scrutinized and subjected to rational and scientific analysis, collapse under the weight of reason[75].

2 - Roger Caillois and the Need to Restore the Sacred to Society

From a different perspective, the French sociologist Roger Caillois sought to continue his studies, which focused particularly on the contributions of ancient Greek and Latin culture in the fields of language and classical literature. His research earned him entry into the prestigious École Normale Supérieure, where he received a professorship in linguistics. In 1938, he co-founded the Institute of Sociology with Georges Bataille and Michel Leiris, dedicated to studying "aspects of social life." [76]. In his work, Caillois explored the structures and deep motivations of social life and emphasized the need for correct scientific interpretation and production.

Returning to religious customs and traditions, Caillois aimed to reintroduce the concept of "sociology of the sacred" into Western society as a response to Enlightenment trends. This idea traces its roots back to Émile Durkheim's exploration of the foundation of social existence as a generator of shared beliefs and concepts. Among these concepts is "myth," which, when it operates within the deep human psyche, imposes itself on all individuals without question and establishes the values upon which society is built. Myth represents a symbolic truth capable of rebuilding the lost social connection and revealing the relationship between the sacred and the secular, as seen in Caillois' "theory of the absolute and sacred festival. [77]."

A - The Sacred as a Category of Sensation

From Caillois' perspective, religious communities, like other groups, possess shared systems of beliefs, values, and behaviors that are followed as distinguishing markers for those within the group[78]. In his social project, Roger Caillois delves into the contents and functions of the rituals passed down and practiced in societies, which help organize relationships and communication among individuals. He states in this study: "... Therefore, I have limited my efforts to describing distinct types of relationships... The explanations I provided are based on specific realities, carefully selected from the most consistent and distinctive realities. However, if these realities are taken out of the context of which they are an integral part, or rather, out of the broader set of beliefs and behaviors that give them meaning, they will lose much of their factual significance and become mere illusions[79]."

Next, Caillois addresses the role of historical religions, particularly the monotheistic ones, which embrace the idea of salvation and the liberation of the world. He then turns to modern religion, which emerged as a result of the Protestant Reformation and its profound effects, viewing religion as something that forms within any society through institutions of worship. These institutions, in turn, consist of a set of rituals, all of which share the same general goal: they are rituals justified explicitly by a collection of similar or interconnected beliefs, all of which are reinforced by the social community itself[80]. This leads to Caillois' "theory of the absolute festival," where each festival serves a specific function within the community. These rituals provide a stable reality through the analysis of the sacred from a psychological perspective. Caillois explains: [81]"The sacred is one of the categories of sensation; indeed, it is the category upon which religious behavior is built. It grants religious behavior its distinctive quality and imposes on the believer a unique feeling of respect, shielding their faith from criticism and placing it beyond futile debate, by situating it outside the realm of reason and beyond it[82]."

According to Caillois, the interpretation of the results of this semiotic analysis of the religious phenomenon throughout its historical development leads to a logical conclusion: religion is the management of the sacred. He raises the issue of the objectivity of such research, questioning how much the selection of the sacred breathes life into the various aspects of religious life. Caillois views the sacred as representing the sum of relationships between humans and the divine, relationships explained and maintained by beliefs, while rituals serve as practical

guarantees of these connections. Despite this, Roger Caillois acknowledges the difficulty in finding a precise scientific explanation for this relationship within the study of ethology (behavioral biology). [83]He states: "Since I have seen that the issue of the sacred touches upon something deep and fundamental in human nature, I feel the need to avoid addressing the matter on a metaphysical level. I have exceeded the boundaries allowed by positivist knowledge, which will likely be considered a deviation from the principles of positivist science. [84]"

Conclusion

From this analytical reading, we conclude that mythology's historical and functional role contributed to a significant intellectual revolution. This revolution spurred critical studies on the philosophical achievements of Enlightenment thought in Europe, renewing the objective interpretation of Western heritage texts by understanding ancient ontology.

We also find that the ideas of free-thinking philosophers, who sought to separate religious discourse from the freedom of reason's principles in establishing theories of knowledge, aimed to distance themselves from the realm of magic and superstition. Yet, some of these ideas retained their ancient mythological dimension, such as the concept of "noumenon" in Immanuel Kant's philosophy.

Furthermore, the reinforcement of new epistemological systems in fields like psychology, sociology, and anthropology, particularly in the study of religion, was bolstered by Darwin's theory of evolution and Durkheim's sociological theory. These theories revitalized the role of scientific methods in effectively interpreting and analyzing ancient patterns of social life, the development of concepts, and their definitions and histories. They also emphasized the importance of understanding the semiotic interpretations of myths and their relationship to the behavior of individuals and societies in shaping religious phenomena.

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13. The term "semiotics" is used to refer to the unreal aspects of magic, which result in creating imaginary representations that do not actually exist. It can also refer to the creation of those representations in beauty and the formation of images in the essence of air. See: Baha' al-Din al-Amili: Al-Kashkool, edited by Muhammad Abdul Karim Al-Namri, Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyyah, Beirut, (1st ed.), 1998, Vol. 2, p. 52.

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18. Murad Wahba: Introduction to the Enlightenment, previously cited, p. 19.

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29. Lloyd Spencer, Andrzej Krauze: I Introduce You to the Enlightenment Era, previously mentioned reference, pp. 11-12.

30. Dorinda Outram: Enlightenment, previously mentioned reference, p. 61.

31. Dorinda Outram: Enlightenment, previously mentioned reference, p. 15.

32. Immanuel Kant: Three Texts, Reflections on Education, What is Enlightenment, What is Orientation in Thinking, translated by Mahmoud Ben Jamaa, Mohamed Ali Publishing House, Tunisia, (1st edition), 2005, p. 85.

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35. Dorinda Outram: Enlightenment, previously mentioned reference, pp. 54-55.

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37. Immanuel Kant: Three Texts, Reflections on Education, What is Enlightenment, What is Orientation in Thinking, previously mentioned reference, p. 92.

38. (Same reference, p. 92).

39. (Same reference, p. 92).

40. Lloyd Spencer, Andrzej Krauze: I Introduce You to the Enlightenment Era, previously mentioned reference, p. 16.

41. mmanuel Kant: Three Texts, Reflections on Education, What is Enlightenment, What is Orientation in Thinking, previously mentioned reference, p. 92.

42. Immanuel Kant: Three Texts, Reflections on Education, What is Enlightenment, What is Orientation in Thinking, previously mentioned reference, p. 92.

43. Mohamed Emara: The Battle of Terminology Between the West and Islam, previously mentioned reference, p. 24.

44. Lloyd Spencer, Andrzej Krauze: I Introduce You to the Enlightenment Era, previously mentioned reference, p. 13.

45. Immanuel Kant: Three Texts, Reflections on Education, previously mentioned reference, p. 7.

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48. Mohamed Emara: The Battle of Terminology Between the West and Islam, previously mentioned reference, p. 24.

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50. Geoffrey Parrinder: Religious Beliefs of the Peoples, translated by Imam Abdel-Fattah Imam, World of Knowledge, Kuwait, (no edition), 1993, p. 73.

51. The term "free thinkers" appeared in the studies of the French philosopher "Ernest Renan" in his book Averroes and Averroism, where he discussed the use of the term for a group of intellectuals, artists, and philosophers graduating from the University of Paris who advocated the need for reasoning and freedom of thought. It initially emerged as "free philosophy," which the Latins later named "Averroism" after Ibn Rushd (Averroes). Ernest Renan: Averroes and Averroism, translated by Adel Zaiter, Dar Ihya Al-Kutub Al-Arabiya, Cairo, (no edition), 1957, pp. 56-57.

52. Paul Hazard: The Crisis of the European Mind, 1680-1715, translated by Youssef Assi, Arab Organization for Translation, Beirut, (1st edition), 2009, p. 606.

53. Mircea Eliade: The Myth of the Eternal Return, translated by Nihad Khayyata, Dar Tlas for Studies, Translation, and Publishing, (1st edition), 1987, p. 9.

54. Paul Hazard: The Crisis of the European Mind, 1680-1715, previously mentioned reference, p. 7.

55. Paul Hazard: The Crisis of the European Mind, 1680-1715, previously mentioned reference, p. 150.

56. Lloyd Spencer, Andrzej Krauze: I Introduce You to the Enlightenment Era, previously mentioned reference, pp. 22-23.

57. Roger Caillois: Man and the Sacred, previously mentioned reference, p. 35.

58. Paul Hazard: The Crisis of the European Mind, 1680-1715, previously mentioned reference, pp. 150, 173.

59. Mircea Eliade: The Myth of the Eternal Return, previously mentioned reference, p. 10.

60. Paul Hazard: The Crisis of the European Mind, 1680-1715, previously mentioned reference, p. 193.

61. The Stoics and Platonists were in favor of astrology. The "Theory of Astrology" assumes a relationship between people and the stars, as they claimed, "We share abilities and emotions with the planets." Since Saturn's path is slow, they believed it made people lazy, while Venus governed love, Jupiter bestowed strength, and Mercury blessed commerce. Astrology was considered a quasi-science, and astrologers were referred to as "mathematicians" (Mathematici). Astrology was a widely spread superstition. See Geoffrey Parrinder: Religious Beliefs of the Peoples, previously mentioned reference, p. 82.

62. Paul Hazard: The Crisis of the European Mind, 1680-1715, previously mentioned reference, pp. 193-194.

63. (Same reference, p. 194).

64. Mircea Eliade: The Myth of the Eternal Return, previously mentioned reference, p. 15.

65. Paul Hazard: The Crisis of the European Mind, 1680-1715, previously mentioned reference, p. 194.

66. Mircea Eliade: The Myth of the Eternal Return, previously mentioned reference, pp. 19-20.

67. The idea of divine punishment and salvation seems to originate from the religions of ancient Roman peoples, as seen in the poetry of the 1st century BCE. When seeking to dispel the fear of punishment after death, they believed that the vital force within each individual constituted the essence of their existence and was also the aspect that kept them alive after death. Geoffrey Parrinder: Religious Beliefs of the Peoples, previously mentioned reference, p. 70.

68. Geoffrey Parrinder: Religious Beliefs of the Peoples, previously mentioned reference, p. 85.

69. Paul Hazard: The Crisis of the European Mind, 1680-1715, previously mentioned reference, p. 194.

70. Paul Hazard: The Crisis of the European Mind, 1680-1715, previously mentioned reference, p. 194.

71. Lloyd Spencer, Andrzej Krauze: I Introduce You to the Enlightenment Era, previously mentioned reference, p. 16.

72. Paul Hazard: The Crisis of the European Mind, 1680-1715, previously mentioned reference, p. 195.

73. Karam Mahmoud Aziz: The Great Myths of the Torah and the Heritage of the Ancient Near East, Al-Nafidha Library, Cairo, (1st edition), 2006, p. 133.

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82. Roger Caillois: Man and the Sacred, previously mentioned reference, p. 36.
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84. Roger Caillois: Man and the Sacred, previously mentioned reference, p. 34.

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