CHAPTER I

MYTH AND REALITY

IF WE look for "speculative thought" in the documents of the ancients, we shall be forced to admit that there is very little indeed in our written records which deserves the name of "thought" in the strict sense of that term. There are very few passages which show the discipline, the cogency of reasoning, which we associate with thinking. The thought of the ancient Near East appears wrapped in imagination. We consider it tainted with fantasy. But the ancients would not have admitted that anything could be abstracted from the concrete imaginative forms which they left us.

We should remember that even for us speculative thought is less rigidly disciplined than any other form. Speculation—as the etymology of the word shows—is an intuitive, an almost visionary, mode of apprehension. This does not mean, of course, that it is mere irresponsible meandering of the mind, which ignores reality or seeks to escape from its problems. Speculative thought transcends experience, but only because it attempts to explain, to unify, to order experience. It achieves this end by means of hypotheses. If we use the word in its original sense, then we may say that speculative thought attempts to *underpin* the chaos of experience so that it may reveal the features of a structure—order, coherence, and meaning.

Speculative thought is therefore distinct from mere idle speculation in that it never breaks entirely away from experience. It may be "once removed" from the problems of experience, but it is connected with them in that it tries to explain them.

In our own time speculative thought finds its scope more severely limited than it has been at any other period. For we possess in science another instrument for the interpretation of experience, one that has achieved marvels and retains its full fascination. We do not allow speculative thought, under any circumstances, to en-

croach upon the sacred precincts of science. It must not trespass on the realm of verifiable fact; and it must never pretend to a dignity higher than that of working hypotheses, even in the fields in which it is permitted some scope.

Where, then, is speculative thought allowed to range today? Its main concern is with man—his nature and his problems, his values and his destiny. For man does not quite succeed in becoming a scientific object to himself. His need of transcending chaotic experience and conflicting facts leads him to seek a metaphysical hypothesis that may clarify his urgent problems. On the subject of his "self" man will, most obstinately, speculate—even today.

When we turn to the ancient Near East in search of similar efforts, two correlated facts become apparent. In the first place, we find that speculation found unlimited possibilities for development; it was not restricted by a scientific (that is, a disciplined) search for truth. In the second place, we notice that the realm of nature and the realm of man were not distinguished.

The ancients, like the modern savages, saw man always as part of society, and society as imbedded in nature and dependent upon cosmic forces. For them nature and man did not stand in opposition and did not, therefore, have to be apprehended by different modes of cognition. We shall see, in fact, in the course of this book, that natural phenomena were regularly conceived in terms of human experience and that human experience was conceived in terms of cosmic events. We touch here upon a distinction between the ancients and us which is of the utmost significance for our inquiry.

The fundamental difference between the attitudes of modern and ancient man as regards the surrounding world is this: for modern, scientific man the phenomenal world is primarily an "It"; for ancient—and also for primitive—man it is a "Thou."

This formulation goes far beyond the usual "animistic" or "personalistic" interpretations. It shows up, in fact, the inadequacies of these commonly accepted theories. For a relation between "I" and "Thou" is absolutely *sui generis*. We can best explain its unique quality by comparing it with two other modes of cognition: the relation between subject and object and the relation that exists when I "understand" another living being.

The correlation "subject-object" is, of course, the basis of all scientific thinking; it alone makes scientific knowledge possible. The second mode of cognition is the curiously direct knowledge which we gain when we "understand" a creature confronting us—its fear, let us say, or its anger. This, by the way, is a form of knowledge which we have the honor of sharing with the animals.

The differences between an I-and-Thou relationship and these two other relationships are as follows: In determining the identity of an object, a person is active. In "understanding" a fellow-creature, on the other hand, a man or an animal is essentially passive, whatever his subsequent action may turn out to be. For at first he receives an impression. This type of knowledge is therefore direct, emotional, and inarticulate. Intellectual knowledge, on the contrary, is emotionally indifferent and articulate.

Now the knowledge which "I" has of "Thou" hovers between the active judgment and the passive "undergoing of an impression"; between the intellectual and the emotional, the articulate and the inarticulate. "Thou" may be problematic, yet "Thou" is somewhat transparent. "Thou" is a live presence, whose qualities and potentialities can be made somewhat articulate—not as a result of active inquiry but because "Thou," as a presence, reveals itself.

There is yet another important difference. An object, an "It," can always be scientifically related to other objects and appear as part of a group or a series. In this manner science insists on seeing "It"; hence, science is able to comprehend objects and events as ruled by universal laws which make their behavior under given circumstances predictable. "Thou," on the other hand, is unique. "Thou" has the unprecedented, unparalleled, and unpredictable character of an individual, a presence known only in so far as it reveals itself. "Thou," moreover, is not merely contemplated or understood but is experienced emotionally in a dynamic reciprocal relationship. For these reasons there is justification for the aphorism of Crawley: "Primitive man has only one mode of thought, one mode of expression, one part of speech—the personal." This does not mean (as is so often thought) that primitive man, in order to explain natural phenomena, imparts human characteristics to an inanimate world. Primitive man simply does not know an inanimate world. For this very reason he does not "per-

sonify" inanimate phenomena nor does he fill an empty world with the ghosts of the dead, as "animism" would have us believe.

The world appears to primitive man neither inanimate nor empty but redundant with life; and life has individuality, in man and beast and plant, and in every phenomenon which confronts man—the thunderclap, the sudden shadow, the eerie and unknown clearing in the wood, the stone which suddenly hurts him when he stumbles while on a hunting trip. Any phenomenon may at any time face him, not as "It," but as "Thou." In this confrontation, "Thou" reveals its individuality, its qualities, its will. "Thou" is not contemplated with intellectual detachment; it is experienced as life confronting life, involving every faculty of man in a reciprocal relationship. Thoughts, no less than acts and feelings, are subordinated to this experience.

We are here concerned particularly with thought. It is likely that the ancients recognized certain intellectual problems and asked for the "why" and "how," the "where from" and "where to." Even so, we cannot expect in the ancient Near Eastern documents to find speculation in the predominantly intellectual form with which we are familiar and which presupposes strictly logical procedure even while attempting to transcend it. We have seen that in the ancient Near East, as in present-day primitive society, thought does not operate autonomously. The whole man confronts a living "Thou" in nature; and the whole man—emotional and imaginative as well as intellectual—gives expression to the experience. All experience of "Thou" is highly individual; and early man does, in fact, view happenings as individual events. An account of such events and also their explanation can be conceived only as action and necessarily take the form of a story. In other words, the ancients told myths instead of presenting an analysis or conclusions. We would explain, for instance, that certain atmospheric changes broke a drought and brought about rain. The Babylonians observed the same facts but experienced them as the intervention of the gigantic bird Imdugud which came to their rescue. It covered the sky with the black storm clouds of its wings and devoured the Bull of Heaven, whose hot breath had scorched the crops.

In telling such a myth, the ancients did not intend to provide entertainment. Neither did they seek, in a detached way and without ulterior motives, for intelligible explanations of the natural phenomena. They were recounting events in which they were involved to the extent of their very existence. They experienced, directly, a conflict of powers, one hostile to the harvest upon which they depended, the other frightening but beneficial: the thunderstorm reprieved them in the nick of time by defeating and utterly destroying the drought. The images had already become traditional at the time when we meet them in art and literature, but originally they must have been seen in the revelation which the experience entailed. They are products of imagination, but they are not mere fantasy. It is essential that true myth be distinguished from legend, saga, fable, and fairy tale. All these may retain elements of the myth. And it may also happen that a baroque or frivolous imagination elaborates myths until they become mere stories. But true myth presents its images and its imaginary actors, not with the playfulness of fantasy, but with a compelling authority. It perpetuates the revelation of a "Thou."

The imagery of myth is therefore by no means allegory. It is nothing less than a carefully chosen cloak for abstract thought. The imagery is inseparable from the thought. It represents the form in which the experience has become conscious.

Myth, then, is to be taken seriously, because it reveals a significant, if unverifiable, truth—we might say a metaphysical truth. But myth has not the universality and the lucidity of theoretical statement. It is concrete, though it claims to be inassailable in its validity. It claims recognition by the faithful; it does not pretend to justification before the critical.

The irrational aspect of myth becomes especially clear when we remember that the ancients were not content merely to recount their myths as stories conveying information. They dramatized them, acknowledging in them a special virtue which could be activated by recital.

Of the dramatization of myth, Holy Communion is a well-known example. Another example is found in Babylonia. During each New Year's festival the Babylonians re-enacted the victory which Marduk had won over the powers of chaos on the first New

Year's Day, when the world was created. At the annual festival the Epic of Creation was recited. It is clear that the Babylonians did not regard their story of creation as we might accept the theory of Laplace, for instance, as an intellectually satisfying account of how the world came to be as it is. Ancient man had not thought out an answer; an answer had been revealed to him in a reciprocal relationship with nature. If a question had been answered, man shared that answer with the "Thou" which had revealed itself. Hence, it seemed wise that man, each year, at the critical turn of the seasons, should proclaim the knowledge which he shared with the powers, in order to involve them once more in its potent truth.

We may, then, summarize the complex character of myth in the following words: Myth is a form of poetry which transcends poetry in that it proclaims a truth; a form of reasoning which transcends reasoning in that it wants to bring about the truth it proclaims; a form of action, of ritual behavior, which does not find its fulfilment in the act but must proclaim and elaborate a poetic form of truth.

It will now be clear why we said at the beginning of this chapter that our search for speculative thought in the ancient Near East might lead to negative results. The detachment of intellectual inquiry is wanting throughout. And yet, within the framework of mythopoeic thought, speculation may set in. Even early man, entangled in the immediacy of his perceptions, recognized the existence of certain problems which transcend the phenomena. He recognized the problem of origin and the problem of *telos*, of the aim and purpose of being. He recognized the invisible order of justice maintained by his customs, mores, institutions; and he connected this invisible order with the visible order, with its succession of days and nights, seasons and years, obviously maintained by the sun. Early man even pondered the hierarchy of the different powers which he recognized in nature. In the Memphite Theology, which will be discussed in chapter ii, the Egyptians, at one point, reduced the multiplicity of the divine to a truly monotheistic conception and spiritualized the concept of creation. Nevertheless, they spoke the language of myth. The teachings of such documents can be termed "speculative" in recognition of their intention, if not of their performance.

To give an example, let us anticipate our colleagues and consider various possible answers to the question of how the world came into being. Some modern primitives, the Shilluk, in many respects related to the ancient Egyptians, give the following answer to this question: "In the beginning was Ju-ok the Great Creator, and he created a great white cow who came up out of the Nile and was called Deung Adok. The white cow gave birth to a man-child whom she nursed and named Kola."[1] Of such a story (and there are many of this type) we can say that apparently any form which relates the coming into being as a concretely imagined event satisfies the inquirer. There is no shadow of speculative thought here. Instead there is immediacy of vision—concrete, unquestioned, inconsequential.

We move one step farther if the creation is imagined, not in a purely fantastic manner, but by analogy with human conditions. Creation is then conceived as birth; and the simplest form is the postulate of a primeval couple as the parents of all that exists. It seems that for the Egyptians, as for the Greeks and the Maoris, Earth and Sky were the primeval pair.

The next step, this time one which leads in the direction of speculative thought, is taken when creation is conceived as the action of one of the parents. It may be conceived of as birth by a Great Mother, either a goddess, as in Greece, or a demon, as in Babylonia. Alternatively it is possible to conceive creation as the act of a male. In Egypt, for instance, the god Atum arose unaided from the primeval waters and started the creation of cosmos out of chaos by begetting on himself the first pair of gods.

In all these creation stories we remain in the realm of myth, even though an element of speculation can be discerned. But we move into the sphere of speculative thought—albeit mythopoeic speculative thought—when it is said that Atum was the Creator; that his eldest children were Shū and Tefnūt, Air and Moisture; that their children were Geb and Nūt, Earth and Sky; and their children, again, the four gods of the Osiris cycle through whom

(since Osiris was the dead king as well as god) society is related to the cosmic powers. In this story of creation we find a definite cosmological system as the outcome of speculation.

Nor does this remain an isolated instance in Egypt. Even chaos itself became a subject of speculation. It was said that the primeval waters were inhabited by eight weird creatures, four frogs and four snakes, male and female, who brought forth Atum the sun-god and creator. This group of eight, this Ogdoad, was part, not of the created order, but of chaos itself, as the names show. The first pair was Nūn and Naunet, primeval, formless Ocean and primeval Matter; the second pair was Hūh and Hauhet, the Illimitable and the Boundless. Then came Kūk and Kauket, Darkness and Obscurity; and, finally, Amon and Amaunet, the Hidden and Concealed ones—probably the wind. For the wind "bloweth where it listeth and thou hearest the sound thereof but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth" (John 3:8). Here, surely, is speculative thought in mythological guise.

We also find speculative thought in Babylonia, where chaos is conceived, not as a friendly and co-operative Ogdoad which brings forth the creator, Sun, but as the enemy of life and order. After Tiʾamat, the Great Mother, had given birth to countless beings, including the gods, the latter, under the guidance of Marduk, fought a critical battle in which she was overcome and destroyed. And out of her the existing universe was constructed. The Babylonian placed that conflict at the basis of existence.

Throughout the ancient Near East, then, we find speculative thought in the form of myth. We have seen how the attitude of early man toward the phenomena explains his mythopoeic form of thought. But, in order to understand its peculiarities more fully, we should consider the form it takes in somewhat greater detail.

THE LOGIC OF MYTHOPOEIC THOUGHT

We have hitherto been at pains to show that for primitive man thoughts are not autonomous, that they remain involved in the curious attitude toward the phenomenal world which we have called a confrontation of life with life. Indeed, we shall find that our categories of intellectual judgment often do not apply to the complexes of cerebration and volition which constitute mythopoeic thought.

And yet the word "logic" as used above is justified. The ancients expressed their "emotional thought" (as we might call it) in terms of cause and effect; they explained phenomena in terms of time and space and number. The form of their reasoning is far less alien to ours than is often believed. They could reason logically; but they did not often care to do it. For the detachment which a purely intellectual attitude implies is hardly compatible with their most significant experience of reality. Scholars who have proved at length that primitive man has a "prelogical" mode of thinking are likely to refer to magic or religious practice, thus forgetting that they apply the Kantian categories, not to pure reasoning, but to highly emotional acts.

We shall find that if we attempt to define the structure of mythopoeic thought and compare it with that of modern (that is, scientific) thought, the differences will prove to be due rather to emotional attitude and intention than to a so-called prelogical mentality. The basic distinction of modern thought is that between *subjective* and *objective*. On this distinction scientific thought has based a critical and analytical procedure by which it progressively reduces the individual phenomena to typical events subject to universal laws. Thus it creates an increasingly wide gulf between our perception of the phenomena and the conceptions by which we make them comprehensible. We see the sun rise and set, but we think of the earth as moving round the sun. We see colors, but we describe them as wave-lengths. We dream of a dead relative, but we think of that distinct vision as a product of our own subconscious minds. Even if we individually are unable to prove these almost unbelievable scientific views to be true, we accept them, because we know that they can be proved to possess a greater degree of objectivity than our sense-impressions. In the immediacy of primitive experience, however, there is no room for such a critical resolution of perceptions. Primitive man cannot withdraw from the presence of the phenomena because they reveal themselves to him in the manner we have described. Hence the distinction between subjective and objective knowledge is meaningless to him.

Meaningless, also, is our contrast between reality and appearance. Whatever is capable of affecting mind, feeling, or will has thereby established its undoubted reality. There is, for instance, no

reason why dreams should be considered less real than impressions received while one is awake. On the contrary, dreams often affect one so much more than the humdrum events of daily life that they appear to be more, and not less, significant than the usual perceptions. The Babylonians, like the Greeks, sought divine guidance by passing the night in a sacred place hoping for a revelation in dreams. And pharaohs, too, have recorded that dreams induced them to undertake certain works. Hallucinations, too, are real. We find in the official annals of Assarhaddon of Assyria[2] a record of fabulous monsters—two-headed serpents and green, winged creatures—which the exhausted troops had seen in the most trying section of their march, the arid Sinai Desert. We may recall that the Greeks saw the Spirit of the Plain of Marathon arisen in the fateful battle against the Persians. As to monsters, the Egyptians of the Middle Kingdom, as much horrified by the desert as are their modern descendants, depicted dragons, griffins, and chimeras among gazelles, foxes, and other desert game, on a footing of perfect equality.

Just as there was no sharp distinction among dreams, hallucinations, and ordinary vision, there was no sharp separation between the living and the dead. The survival of the dead and their continued relationship with man were assumed as a matter of course, for the dead were involved in the indubitable reality of man's own anguish, expectation, or resentment. "To be effective" to the mythopoeic mind means the same as "to be."

Symbols are treated in the same way. The primitive uses symbols as much as we do; but he can no more conceive them as signifying, yet separate from, the gods or powers than he can consider a relationship established in his mind—such as resemblance—as connecting, and yet separate from, the objects compared. Hence there is coalescence of the symbol and what it signifies, as there is coalescence of two objects compared so that one may stand for the other.

In a similar manner we can explain the curious figure of thought *pars pro toto*, "a part can stand for the whole"; a name, a lock of hair, or a shadow can stand for the man because at any moment the lock of hair or shadow may be felt by the primitive to be pregnant

with the full significance of the man. It may confront him with a "Thou" which bears the physiognomy of its owner.

An example of the coalescence of a symbol and the thing it stands for is the treating of a person's name as an essential part of him—as if it were, in a way, identical with him. We have a number of pottery bowls which Egyptian kings of the Middle Kingdom had inscribed with the names of hostile tribes in Palestine, Libya, and Nubia; the names of their rulers; and the names of certain rebellious Egyptians. These bowls were solemnly smashed at a ritual, possibly at the funeral of the king's predecessor; and the object of this ritual was explicitly stated. It was that all these enemies, obviously out of the pharaoh's reach, should die. But if we call the ritual act of the breaking of the bowls symbolical, we miss the point. The Egyptians felt that *real* harm was done to the enemies by the destruction of their names. The occasion was even used to cast a propitious spell of wider scope. After the names of the hostile men, who were enumerated "that they should die," were added such phrases as: "all detrimental thought, all detrimental talk, all detrimental dreams, all detrimental plans, all detrimental strife," etc. Mentioning these things on the bowls to be smashed diminished their actual power to hurt the king or lessen his authority.

For us there is an essential difference between an act and a ritual or symbolical performance. But this distinction was meaningless to the ancients. Gudea, a Mesopotamian ruler, describing the founding of a temple, mentions in one breath that he molded a brick in clay, purified the site with fire, and consecrated the platform with oil. When the Egyptians claim that Osiris, and the Babylonians that Oannes, gave them the elements of their culture, they include among those elements the crafts and agriculture as well as ritual usages. These two groups of activities possess the same degree of reality. It would be meaningless to ask a Babylonian whether the success of the harvest depended on the skill of the farmers or on the correct performance of the New Year's festival. Both were essential to success.

Just as the imaginary is acknowledged as existing in reality, so concepts are likely to be substantialized. A man who has courage

or eloquence possesses these qualities almost as substances of which he can be robbed or which he can share with others. The concept of "justice" or "equity" is in Egypt called *maʿat*. The king's mouth is the temple of *maʿat*. *Maʿat* is personified as a goddess; but at the same time it is said that the gods "live by *maʿat*." This concept is represented quite concretely: in the daily ritual the gods are offered a figure of the goddess, together with the other material offerings, food and drink, for their sustenance. Here we meet the paradox of mythopoeic thought. Though it does not know dead matter and confronts a world animated from end to end, it is unable to leave the scope of the concrete and renders its own concepts as realities existing per se.

An excellent example of this tendency toward concreteness is the primitive conception of death. Death is not, as for us, an event —the act or fact of dying, as Webster has it. It is somehow a substantial reality. Thus we read in the Egyptian Pyramid Texts a description of the beginning of things which runs as follows:

> When heaven had not yet come into existence,
> When men had not yet come into existence,
> When gods had not yet been born,
> When death had not yet come into existence. . . .[3]

In exactly the same terms the cupbearer Siduri pities Gilgamesh in the Epic:

> Gilgamesh, whither are you wandering?
> Life, which you look for, you will never find.
> For when the gods created men, they let
> death be his share, and life
> withheld in their own hands.

Note, in the first place, that life is opposed to death, thus accentuating the fact that life in itself is considered endless. Only the intervention of another phenomenon, death, makes an end to it. In the second place, we should note the concrete character attributed to life in the statement that the gods withheld life in their hands. In case one is inclined to see in this phrase a figure of speech, it is well to remember that Gilgamesh and, in another myth, Adapa are given a chance to gain eternal life simply by eating life as a substance. Gilgamesh is shown the "plant of life," but a serpent robs him of it. Adapa is offered bread and water of life when he enters heaven, but he refuses it on the instruction of the wily god Enki. In both cases the assimilation of a concrete substance would have made the difference between death and immortality.

We are touching here on the category of *causality*, which is as important for modern thought as the distinction between the subjective and the objective. If science, as we have said before, reduces the chaos of perceptions to an order in which typical events take place according to universal laws, the instrument of this conversion from chaos to order is the postulate of causality. Primitive thought naturally recognized the relationship of cause and effect, but it cannot recognize our view of an impersonal, mechanical, and lawlike functioning of causality. For we have moved far from the world of immediate experience in our search for true causes, that is, causes which will always produce the same effect under the same conditions. We must remember that Newton discovered the concept of gravitation and also its laws by taking into account three groups of phenomena which are entirely unrelated to the merely perceptive observer: freely falling objects, the movements of the planets, and the alternation of the tides. Now the primitive mind cannot withdraw to that extent from perceptual reality. Moreover, it would not be satisfied by our ideas. It looks, not for the "how," but for the "who," when it looks for a cause. Since the phenomenal world is a "Thou" confronting early man, he does not expect to find an impersonal law regulating a process. He looks for a purposeful will committing an act. If the rivers refuse to rise, it is not suggested that the lack of rainfall on distant mountains adequately explains the calamity. When the river does not rise, it has *refused* to rise. The river, or the gods, must be angry with the people who depend on the inundation. At best the river or the gods intend to convey something to the people. Some action, then, is called for. We know that, when the Tigris did not rise, Gudea the king went to sleep in the temple in order to be instructed in a dream as to the meaning of the drought. In Egypt, where annual records of the heights of the Nile flood were kept from the earliest historical times, the pharaoh nevertheless made gifts to the Nile every year about the time when it was due to rise. To these sacrifices, which

were thrown into the river, a document was added. It stated, in the form of either an order or a contract, the Nile's obligations.

Our view of causality, then, would not satisfy primitive man because of the impersonal character of its explanations. It would not satisfy him, moreover, because of its generality. We understand phenomena, not by what makes them peculiar, but by what makes them manifestations of general laws. But a general law cannot do justice to the individual character of each event. And the individual character of the event is precisely what early man experiences most strongly. We may explain that certain physiological processes cause a man's death. Primitive man asks: Why should *this* man die *thus* at *this* moment? We can only say that, given these conditions, death will always occur. He wants to find a cause as specific and individual as the event which it must explain. The event is not analyzed intellectually; it is experienced in its complexity and individuality, and these are matched by equally individual causes. Death is *willed*. The question, then, turns once more from the "why" to the "who," not to the "how."

This explanation of death as willed differs from that given a moment ago, when it was viewed as almost substantialized and especially created. We meet here for the first time in these chapters a curious multiplicity of approaches to problems which is characteristic for the mythopoeic mind. In the Gilgamesh Epic death was specific and concrete; it was allotted to mankind. Its antidote, eternal life, was equally substantial: it could be assimilated by means of the plant of life. Now we have found the view that death is caused by volition. The two interpretations are not mutually exclusive, but they are nevertheless not so consistent with each other as we would desire. Primitive man, however, would not consider our objections valid. Since he does not isolate an event from its attending circumstances, he does not look for one single explanation which must hold good under all conditions. Death, considered with some detachment as a state of being, is viewed as a substance inherent in all who are dead or about to die. But death considered emotionally is the act of hostile will.

The same dualism occurs in the interpretation of illness or sin. When the scapegoat is driven into the desert, laden with the sins of the community, it is evident that these sins are conceived as hav-

ing substance. Early medical texts explain a fever as due to "hot" matter's having entered a man's body. Mythopoeic thought substantializes a quality and posits some of its occurrences as causes, others as effects. But the heat that caused the fever may also have been "willed" upon the man by hostile magic or may have entered his body as an evil spirit.

Evil spirits are often no more than the evil itself conceived as substantial and equipped with will-power. In a vague way they may be specified a little further as "spirits of the dead," but often this explanation appears as a gratuitous elaboration of the original view, which is no more than the incipient personification of the evil. This process of personification may, of course, be carried much further when the evil in question becomes a focus of attention and stimulates the imagination. Then we get demons with pronounced individuality like Lamashtu in Babylonia. The gods also come into being in this manner.

We may even go further and say that the gods as personifications of power among other things fulfil early man's need for causes to explain the phenomenal world. Sometimes this aspect of their origin can still be recognized in the complex deities of later times. There is, for instance, excellent evidence that the great goddess Isis was, originally, the deified throne. We know that among modern Africans closely related to the ancient Egyptians the enthroning of the new ruler is the central act of the ritual of the succession. The throne is a fetish charged with the mysterious power of kingship. The prince who takes his seat upon it arises a king. Hence the throne is called the "mother" of the king. Here personification found a starting-point; a channel for emotions was prepared which, in its turn, led to an elaboration of myth. In this way Isis "the throne which made the king" became "the Great Mother," devoted to her son Horus, faithful through all suffering to her husband Osiris—a figure with a powerful appeal to men even outside Egypt and, after Egypt's decline, throughout the Roman Empire.

The process of personification, however, only affects man's attitude to a limited extent. Like Isis, the sky-goddess Nūt was considered to be a loving mother-goddess; but the Egyptians of the New Kingdom arranged for their ascent to heaven without

reference to her will or acts. They painted a life-sized figure of the goddess inside their coffins; the dead body was laid in her arms; and the dead man's ascent to heaven was assured. For resemblance was a sharing of essentials, and Nūt's image coalesced with its prototype. The dead man in his coffin rested already in heaven.

In every case where we would see no more than associations of thought, the mythopoeic mind finds a causal connection. Every resemblance, every contact in space or time, establishes a connection between two objects or events which makes it possible to see in the one the cause of changes observed in the other. We must remember that mythopoeic thought does not require its explanation to represent a continuous process. It accepts an initial situation and a final situation connected by no more than the conviction that the one came forth from the other. So we find, for instance, that the ancient Egyptians as well as the modern Maori explain the present relation between heaven and earth in the following manner. Heaven was originally lying upon earth; but the two were separated, and the sky was lifted up to its present position. In New Zealand this was done by their son; in Egypt it was done by the god of the air, Shū, who is now between earth and sky. And heaven is depicted as a woman bending over the earth with outstretched arms while the god Shū supports her.

Changes can be explained very simply as two different states, one of which is said to come forth from the other without any insistence on an intelligible process—in other words, as a transformation, a metamorphosis. We find that, time and again, this device is used to account for changes and that no further explanation is then required. One myth explains why the sun, which counted as the first king of Egypt, should now be in the sky. It recounts that the sun-god Rē became tired of humanity, so he seated himself upon the sky-goddess Nūt, who changed herself into a huge cow standing four square over the earth. Since then the sun has been in the sky.

The charming inconsequentiality of this story hardly allows us to take it seriously. But we are altogether inclined to take explanations more seriously than the facts they explain. Not so primitive man. He knew that the sun-god once ruled Egypt; he also knew that the sun was now in the sky. In the first account of the relation between sky and earth he explained how Shū, the air, came to be

between sky and earth; in the last account he explained how the sun got to the sky and, moreover, introduced the well-known concept of the sky as a cow. All this gave him the satisfaction of feeling that images and known facts fell into place. That, after all, is what an explanation should achieve (cf. p. 16).

The image of Rē seated on the cow of heaven, besides illustrating a nonspeculative type of causal explanation which satisfies the mythopoeic mind, illustrates a tendency of the ancients which we have discussed before. We have seen that they are likely to present various descriptions of identical phenomena side by side even though they are mutually exclusive. We have seen how Shū lifted the sky-goddess Nūt from the earth. In a second story Nūt rises by herself in the shape of a cow. This image of the sky-goddess is very common, especially when the accent lies on her aspect as mother-goddess. She is the mother of Osiris and, hence, of all the dead; but she is also the mother who gives birth each evening to the stars, each morning to the sun. When ancient Egyptian thought turned to procreation, it expressed itself in images derived from cattle. In the myth of sun and sky the image of the sky-cow does not appear with its original connotation; the image of Nūt as a cow evoked the picture of the huge animal rising and lifting the sun to heaven. When the bearing of the sun by Nūt was the center of attention, the sun was called the "calf of gold" or "the bull." But it was, of course, possible to consider the sky, not predominantly in its relation to heavenly bodies or to the dead who are reborn there, but as a self-contained cosmic phenomenon. In that case Nūt was described as a descendent of the creator Atum through his children, Shū and Tefnūt, Air and Moisture. And she was, furthermore, wedded to the earth. If viewed in this manner, Nūt was imagined in human form.

We see, again, that the ancients' conception of a phenomenon differed according to their approach to it. Modern scholars have reproached the Egyptians for their apparent inconsistencies and have doubted their ability to think clearly. Such an attitude is sheer presumption. Once one recognizes the processes of ancient thought, their justification is apparent. After all, religious values are not reducible to rationalistic formulas. Natural phenomena, whether or not they were personified and became gods, confronted

ancient man with a living presence, a significant "Thou," which, again, exceeded the scope of conceptual definition. In such cases our flexible thought and language qualify and modify certain concepts so thoroughly as to make them suitable to carry our burden of expression and significance. The mythopoeic mind, tending toward the concrete, expressed the irrational, not in our manner, but by admitting the validity of several avenues of approach at one and the same time. The Babylonians, for instance, worshiped the generative force in nature in several forms: its manifestation in the beneficial rains and thunderstorms was visualized as a lion-headed bird. Seen in the fertility of the earth, it became a snake. Yet in statues, prayers, and cult acts it was represented as a god in human shape. The Egyptians in the earliest times recognized Horus, a god of heaven, as their main deity. He was imagined as a gigantic falcon hovering over the earth with outstretched wings, the colored clouds of sunset and sunrise being his speckled breast and the sun and moon his eyes. Yet this god could also be viewed as a sun-god, since the sun, the most powerful thing in the sky, was naturally considered a manifestation of the god and thus confronted man with the same divine presence which he adored in the falcon spreading its wings over the earth. We should not doubt that mythopoeic thought fully recognizes the unity of each phenomenon which it conceives under so many different guises; the many-sidedness of its images serves to do justice to the complexity of the phenomena. But the procedure of the mythopoeic mind in expressing a phenomenon by manifold images corresponding to unconnected avenues of approach clearly leads away from, rather than toward, our postulate of causality which seeks to discover identical causes for identical effects throughout the phenomenal world.

We observe a similar contrast when we turn from the category of *causality* to that of *space*. Just as modern thought seeks to establish causes as abstract functional relations between phenomena, so it views space as a mere system of relations and functions. Space is postulated by us to be infinite, continuous, and homogeneous—attributes which mere sensual perception does not reveal. But primitive thought cannot abstract a concept "space" from its experience

of space. And this experience consists in what we would call qualifying associations. The spatial concepts of the primitive are concrete orientations; they refer to localities which have an emotional color; they may be familiar or alien, hostile or friendly. Beyond the scope of mere individual experience the community is aware of certain cosmic events which invest regions of space with a particular significance. Day and night give to east and west a correlation with life and death. Speculative thought may easily develop in connection with such regions as are outside direct experiences, for instance, the heavens or the nether world. Mesopotamian astrology evolved a very extensive system of correlations between heavenly bodies and events in the sky and earthly localities. Thus mythopoeic thought may succeed no less than modern thought in establishing a co-ordinated spatial system; but the system is determined, not by objective measurements, but by an emotional recognition of values. The extent to which this procedure determines the primitive view of space can best be illustrated by an example which will be met again in subsequent chapters as a remarkable instance of ancient speculation.

In Egypt the creator was said to have emerged from the waters of chaos and to have made a mound of dry land upon which he could stand. This primeval hill, from which the creation took its beginning, was traditionally located in the sun temple at Heliopolis, the sun-god being in Egypt most commonly viewed as the creator. However, the Holy of Holies of each temple was equally sacred; each deity was—by the very fact that he was recognized as divine—a source of creative power. Hence each Holy of Holies throughout the land could be identified with the primeval hill. Thus it is said of the temple of Philae, which was founded in the fourth century B.C.: "This [temple] came into being when nothing at all had yet come into being and the earth was still lying in darkness and obscurity." The same claim was made for other temples. The names of the great shrines at Memphis, Thebes, and Hermonthis explicitly stated that they were the "divine emerging primeval island" or used similar expressions. Each sanctuary possessed the essential quality of original holiness; for, when a new temple was founded, it was assumed that the potential sacredness of the site became manifest. The equation with the primeval hill

received architectural expression also. One mounted a few steps or followed a ramp at every entrance from court or hall to the Holy of Holies, which was thus situated at a level noticeably higher than the entrance.

But this coalescence of temples with the primeval hill does not give us the full measure of the significance which the sacred locality had assumed for the ancient Egyptians. The royal tombs were also made to coincide with it. The dead, and, above all, the king, were reborn in the hereafter. No place was more propitious, no site promised greater chances for a victorious passage through the crisis of death, than the primeval hill, the center of creative forces where the ordered life of the universe had begun. Hence the royal tomb was given the shape of a pyramid which is the Heliopolitan stylization of the primeval hill.

To us this view is entirely unacceptable. In our continuous, homogeneous space the place of each locality is unambiguously fixed. We would insist that there must have been one single place where the first mound of dry land actually emerged from the chaotic waters. But the Egyptian would have considered such objections mere quibbles. Since the temples and the royal tombs were as sacred as the primeval hill and showed architectural forms which resembled the hill, they shared essentials. And it would be fatuous to argue whether one of these monuments could be called the primeval hill with more justification than the others.

Similarly, the waters of chaos from which all life emerged were considered to be present in several places, sometimes playing their part in the economy of the country, sometimes necessary to round out the Egyptian image of the universe. The waters of chaos were supposed to subsist in the form of the ocean surrounding the earth, which had emerged from them and now floated upon them. Hence these waters were also present in the subsoil water. In the cenotaph of Seti I at Abydos the coffin was placed upon an island with a double stair imitating the hieroglyph for the primeval hill; this island was surrounded by a channel filled always with subsoil water. Thus the dead king was buried and thought to rise again in the locality of creation. But the waters of chaos, the Nūn, were also the waters of the nether world, which the sun and the dead have to cross. On the other hand, the primeval waters had once

contained all the potentialities of life; and they were, therefore, also the waters of the annual inundation of the Nile which renews and revives the fertility of the fields.

The mythopoeic conception of *time* is, like that of space, qualitative and concrete, not quantitative and abstract. Mythopoeic thought does not know time as a uniform duration or as a succession of qualitatively indifferent moments. The concept of time as it is used in our mathematics and physics is as unknown to early man as that which forms the framework of our history. Early man does not abstract a concept of time from the experience of time.

It has been pointed out, for example, by Cassirer, that the time experience is both rich and subtle, even for quite primitive people. Time is experienced in the periodicity and rhythm of man's own life as well as in the life of nature. Each phase of man's life—childhood, adolescence, maturity, old age—is a time with peculiar qualities. The transition from one phase to another is a crisis in which man is assisted by the community's uniting in the rituals appropriate to birth, puberty, marriage, or death. Cassirer has called the peculiar view of time as a sequence of essentially different phases of life "biological time." And the manifestation of time in nature, the succession of the seasons, and the movements of the heavenly bodies were conceived quite early as the signs of a life-process similar, and related, to that of man. Even so, they are not viewed as "natural" processes in our sense. When there is change, there is a cause; and a cause, as we have seen, is a will. In Genesis, for instance, we read that God made a covenant with the living creatures, promising not only that the flood would not recur but also that "while the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease" (Gen. 8:22). The order of time and the order of the life of nature (which are one) are freely granted by the God of the Old Testament in the fulness of his power; and when considered in their totality, as an established order, they are elsewhere, too, thought to be founded upon the willed order of creation.

But another approach is also possible, an approach not toward the sequence of phases as a whole but toward the actual transition from one phase to another—the actual succession of phases. The

varying length of the night, the ever changing spectacles of sunrise and sunset, and the equinoctial storms do not suggest an automatic smooth alternation between the "elements" of mythopoeic time. They suggest a conflict, and this suggestion is strengthened by the anxiety of man himself, who is wholly dependent upon weather and seasonal changes. Wensinck has called this the "dramatic conception of nature." Each morning the sun defeats darkness and chaos, as he did on the day of creation and does, every year, on New Year's Day. These three moments coalesce; they are felt to be essentially the same. Each sunrise, and each New Year's Day, repeats the first sunrise on the day of creation; and for the mythopoeic mind each repetition coalesces with—is practically identical with—the original event.

We have here, in the category of time, a parallel to the phenomenon which we recognized in the category of space when we learned that certain archetypal localities, like the primeval hill, were thought to exist on several sites throughout the land because these sites shared with their prototype some of its overwhelmingly important aspects. This phenomenon we called coalescence in space. An example of coalescence in time is an Egyptian verse which curses the enemies of the pharaoh. It must be remembered that the sun-god Rē had been the first ruler of Egypt and that the pharaoh was, to the extent that he ruled, an image of Rē. The verse says of the enemies of the king: "They shall be like the snake Apōphis on New Year's morning."[4] The snake Apōphis is the hostile darkness which the sun defeats every night on his journey through the nether world from the place of sunset in the west to the place of sunrise in the east. But why should the enemies be like Apōphis on New Year's morning? Because the notions of creation, daily sunrise, and the beginning of the new annual cycle coalesce and culminate in the festivities of the New Year. Hence the New Year is invoked, that is, conjured up, to intensify the curse.

Now this "dramatic conception of nature which sees everywhere a strife between divine and demoniac, cosmic and chaotic powers" (Wensinck), does not leave man a mere spectator. He is too much involved in, his welfare depends too completely upon, the victory of the beneficial powers for him not to feel the need to participate on their side. Thus we find, in Egypt and Babylonia,

that man—that is, man in society—accompanies the principal changes in nature with appropriate rituals. Both in Egypt and in Babylonia the New Year, for instance, was an occasion of elaborate celebrations in which the battles of the gods were mimed or in which mock-battles were fought.

We must remember again that such rituals are not merely symbolical; they are part and parcel of the cosmic events; they are man's share in these events. In Babylonia, from the third millennium down to Hellenistic times, we find a New Year's festival which lasted several days. During the celebration the story of creation was recited and a mock-battle was fought in which the king impersonated the victorious god. In Egypt we know mock-battles in several festivals which are concerned with the defeat of death and rebirth or resurrection: one took place at Abydos, during the annual Great Procession of Osiris; one took place on New Year's Eve, at the erection of the Djed pillar; one was fought, at least in the time of Herodotus, at Papremis in the Delta. In these festivals man participated in the life of nature.

Man also arranged his own life, or at least the life of the society to which he belonged, in such a manner that a harmony with nature, a co-ordination of natural and social forces, gave added impetus to his undertakings and increased his chances for success. The whole "science" of omens aims, of course, at this result. But there are also definite instances which illustrate the need of early man to act in unison with nature. In both Egypt and Babylon a king's coronation was postponed until a new beginning in the cycle of nature provided a propitious starting-point for the new reign. In Egypt the time might be in the early summer, when the Nile began to rise, or in the autumn, when the inundation receded and the fertilized fields were ready to receive the seed. In Babylonia the king began his reign on New Year's Day; and the inauguration of a new temple was celebrated only at that time.

This deliberate co-ordination of cosmic and social events shows most clearly that time to early man did not mean a neutral and abstract frame of reference but rather a succession of recurring phases, each charged with a peculiar value and significance. Again, as in dealing with space, we find that there are certain "regions" of time which are withdrawn from direct experience and greatly

stimulate speculative thought. They are the distant past and the future. Either of these may become normative and absolute; each then falls beyond the range of time altogether. The absolute past does not recede, nor do we approach the absolute future gradually. The "Kingdom of God" may at any time break into our present. For the Jews the future is normative. For the Egyptians, on the other hand, the past was normative; and no pharaoh could hope to achieve more than the establishment of the conditions "as they were in the time of Rē, in the beginning."

But here we are touching on material which will be discussed in subsequent chapters. We have attempted to demonstrate how the "logic," the peculiar structure, of mythopoeic thought can be derived from the fact that the intellect does not operate autonomously because it can never do justice to the basic experience of early man, that of confrontation with a significant "Thou." Hence when early man is faced by an intellectual problem within the many-sided complexities of life, emotional and volitional factors are never debarred; and the conclusions reached are not critical judgments but complex images.

Nor can the spheres which these images refer to be neatly kept apart. We have intended in this book to deal successively with speculative thought concerning (1) the nature of the universe; (2) the function of the state; and (3) the values of life. But the reader will have grasped that this, our mild attempt to distinguish the spheres of metaphysics, politics, and ethics, is doomed to remain a convenience without any deep significance. For the life of man and the function of the state are for mythopoeic thought imbedded in nature, and the natural processes are affected by the acts of man no less than man's life depends on his harmonious integration with nature. The experiencing of this unity with the utmost intensity was the greatest good ancient oriental religion could bestow. To conceive this integration in the form of intuitive imagery was the aim of the speculative thought of the ancient Near East.

NOTES

1. Seligmann, in *Fourth Report of the Wellcome Tropical Research Laboratories at the Gordon Memorial College, Khartoum* (London, 1911), Vol. B: *General Science*, p. 219.
2. D. D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, Vol. II, par. 558.

3. Sethe, *Die altaegyptischen Pyramidentexte nach den Papierabdrücken und Photographien des Berliner Museums* (Leipzig, 1908), par. 1466.
4. Adolf Erman, *Aegypten und aegyptisches Leben im Altertum*, ed. Hermann Ranke (Tübingen, 1923), p. 170.

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