Ernst Cassirer's Philosophy of Symbolic Formation

by

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TO
Sheila
Preface

A biographical sketch of the philosopher whose works form the subject of the following pages has been omitted out of deference to Dimitry Gawronsky's excellent treatment of this subject in his contribution to The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer (Library of Living Philosophers), under the title of "Cassirer: His Life and Work." Here it suffices to record that Ernst Cassirer was born in Breslau, Germany, in 1874, and died, after a long life of fertile scholarship, in New York on April 13, 1945.

Schopenhauer once wrote that "it is much easier to point out the faults and errors in the work of a great mind than to give a distinct and full exposition of its value." And Schopenhauer was right about the difficulty of this latter. I mention this not to justify the procedure in this thesis but to give a distinguished comment on its inadequacies.

My major aim in this work is to point out two aspects of Cassirer's philosophy which seem to mark him as an original thinker of the first rank. The first of these is his incorporation of the modern interest in semiotics—the science of signs—into an epistemological standpoint of critical idealism. The second aspect is one which marks Cassirer's membership in the Neo-Kantian movement and, as well, his special place in its ranks. This is his extension of Kant's "Copernican revolution" into fields other than physical science. Commentators have noted that the Neo-Kantians aimed
at eliminating the metaphysical elements in Kant and emphasizing the methodological ones. Their activity, with the notable exception of Cassirer, has been directed primarily at the analysis of knowledge in the field of science.

Cassirer felt that he had provided for the possibility of knowledge in the other areas of cultural endeavor. I hope I have shown that he did.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. The Epistemology of Symbolic Formation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Purpose and Scope of the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) The Concept of the Symbol</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) The Theory of Modality</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) &quot;Natural Symbolism&quot;—the Function of Representation</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes to Chapter I</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Language</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) The Importance of the Philosophy of Language for Cassirer</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Methodology in Linguistics</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Language as a Symbolic Form</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Stages of Linguistic Development</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Space, Time, and Number in the Linguistic Mode</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes to Chapter II</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Myth</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) The Critique of Mythology</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) The Nature of the Mythical Consciousness as Contrasted with the Scientific</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Space, Time, and Number in the Mythical Consciousness</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes to Chapter III</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Modal Relationships</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Language and Myth</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Myth and Religion</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) The Transition from Myth to Religion</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Religion as a Symbolic Form</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes to Chapter IV</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Conclusion. Cassirer's Critical Idealism</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes to Chapter V</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I

The Epistemology of Symbolic Formation

(1) Purpose and Scope of the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms

In any theory, whether it be specifically philosophical, scientific, or religious, which undertakes to explain the relationships between man and the world, there is an interdependence among anthropology, epistemology, and what might be called for want of a better term, a theory of external reality. Any account of the real necessarily involves implicit or explicit accounts of how man knows what is real and of what man is in order to be such that he can know it. In the philosophy of Ernst Cassirer these relationships are made explicit, and they provide both the groundwork and the framework for his thought. He pursued the ideal of a complete philosophy—a philosophy able to account for all aspects of man's activity: emotional as well as rational, aesthetic and religious as well as scientific and speculative. Even a quick survey of Cassirer's work will reveal his astonishing range and comprehensive mastery. This is not to say that he attempted to give a full, definitive account of the content of every field of human endeavor. Cassirer defined a formal point of view from which the diverse realms could be systematically understood.

He approached the problem of human culture not as a social scientist but as a Neo-Kantian critical idealist who had discovered that the categories which explained the
possibility of knowledge in the physical sciences were inadequate when applied to the diverse findings of the cultural sciences. Cassirer felt that modern civilization had reached a real crisis in anthropology—in "man's knowledge of himself." He saw about him a philosophical, a scientific, a theological anthropology which knew nothing of each other. He agreed with Max Scheler that "the ever-growing multiplicity of the particular sciences that are engaged in the study of man has much more confused and obscured than elucidated our concept of man." The division indicated here goes deeper than the concept of man as such. The disciplines defined by the different areas of cultural endeavor—science, art, religion, myth—often see themselves in conflict regarding both methodology and discovery: "Scientific thought contradicts and suppresses mythical thought." Religion seems to be under "the necessity of defending the purity of its own ideal against the excesses of myth and art." Cassirer asks the question: what sense can be made of this discord if one holds to the assertion that these various modes of cultural expression spring from a unified function of symbolic formation of reality? Cassirer provides an answer to this question, and it has three general aspects which must be stressed at the outset, for they are definitive of his whole philosophical orientation.

First, for the philosophy of symbolic forms, if there is to be a definition of human nature or human culture, it is not a substantial but a functional one. "Man's outstanding
characteristic," says Cassirer, "is not his metaphysical or physical nature, but his work. It is this work, the system of human activities (in linguistic, artistic, mythical, religious, and scientific spheres) which defines and determines the circle of humanity."

Second, it must be noted that Cassirer adapts to his own ends the "hidden meaning" that he finds in Plato's Republic. He conceives the lesson of this work to be that philosophy cannot give us a satisfactory theory of man until it has developed a theory of the state, but he enlarges the overall perspective to include the whole of culture. Political life after all is not the only form of communal human existence; it is a late product of the civilizing process. Cassirer maintains that we cannot find an adequate definition of man as long as we confine ourselves to the limits of man's individual life. It is only in the area of culture, where we can observe man's work, that we can arrive at the functional definition of man, which Cassirer develops into a comprehensive philosophy of symbolic formation.

Third, in observing the various cultural activities Cassirer makes "a sharp distinction between a material and a formal point of view." He maintains that a philosophical understanding of humanity cannot content itself with dealing with the particular conflicting results of the various modes of human endeavor; it cannot stop at the created products of mythical thought, religious rites, or scientific
theories; it must seek to understand the unity of the creative process at work in each of them. This again is not a substantial but a functional unity.

If the various spheres are seen from such a point of view, the diversity among them need not be accepted as final. Cassirer believes that this fundamental postulate of unity may be retained if it can be shown to develop an idea of "a purely functional unity" which could replace the "postulate of a unity of substance and origin." Cassirer feels that a new task confronts the philosophical critique of knowledge. It must

gather the various branches of science with their diverse methodologies—with all their recognized specificity and independence—into one system whose separate parts, precisely through their necessary diversity, will complement and further one another . . . It must ask whether the intellectual symbols by means of which the specialized disciplines reflect on and describe reality exist merely side by side or whether they are not diverse manifestations of the same basic human function.

In outlining his plan for accomplishing this task, Cassirer returns to Kant's starting points: to an analysis of consciousness and cognition, which alone he holds to be truly accessible and certain in a primary sense. The methodology put forth in the Critique of Pure Reason was sound, but the limited scope of this work must be extended:

The object which transcendental analytics . . . places before us is the correlate of the synthetic unity of the understanding, an object determined purely by logical attributes. Hence it does not characterize all objectivity as such, but only that form of objective necessity which can be apprehended and described by the basic concepts of science, particularly the concepts of mathematical physics.
The further development of the system of pure reason in the Critique of Practical Reason and the Critique of Judgment is witness to the fact that Kant did not hold the field of mathematical physics to exhaust the area of reality available to man. Kant in the Critique of Pure Reason did not set out "to designate the authentic, concrete totality of the spirit in a simple initial formula . . . it develops gradually in the course of his critical analysis."8

And for Cassirer, we can hope to define the scope of the human spirit (and reality, which it and it alone, makes available to man) only by pursuing Kant's analytical process far beyond the function of scientific judgment until we have brought to light every principle by means of which the human spirit gives form to reality. Since cognition is only one of the many forms in which the mind can apprehend and interpret reality, our perspective must be widened. Myth, language, art, and religion all share independently in the decisive characteristic of cognition: "that it does not merely copy, but rather embodies an original formative power . . . Each of these functions creates its own symbolic forms which, if not similar to the intellectual symbols, enjoy equal rank as products of the human spirit."9

In this way Cassirer can say that the critique of culture is the product of the widening of the critique of reason. The critique of reason must become the critique of culture, as culture is manifested along all these "different roads by which the human spirit proceeds toward its objectivization.
And yet we have before us the apparent conflict between these various culture trends—a conflict which has unsettling implications for the idealistic position. The only way to transcend this conflict is to find a standpoint situated above it from which to see the necessary intermediary link between these trends, a link in virtue of which they could be seen to be in a complementary and not a conflicting relationship. If there is such a standpoint, it must be such that from it, the question could be answered:

... do the diverse branches of cultural life actually present such an intermediate field and mediating function, and if so, does this function disclose typical traits, by means of which it can be recognized and described?

Cassirer's answer is affirmative. All of these traits depend on different configurations of given reality by a formally unitary function of symbolic formation.

(2) The Concept of the Symbol

What does Cassirer mean by the term "symbol?" How does it relate to the function of symbolic formation?

Carl Hamburg, in his book *Symbol and Reality*, has given a perceptive summary of the attitudes of traditional rationalism and empiricism toward the symbolic elements in human knowledge. He says that "in both there was an either hopeful or painful realization that a great deal, if not indeed all, of human knowledge of reality was of a mediate and symbolic, rather than of an immediate or intuitive (per-
ceptual) nature. This realization is written on every page of the history of epistemology, and interest in the role of symbols in human knowledge is not new. Corresponding in this history to the rationalist-idealist emphasis on the mediate nature of human knowledge of the real, there is the realistic-empiricist's emphasis on the givenness of some other, more basic substratum of reality which was in no way dependent for its being on man's knowledge of it. It is possible to read the history of philosophy, as Cassirer does, as an attempt to get behind the mediating symbolism to the nature of the "really real." Recent and contemporary philosophy provides no exception to this interpretation. But here the traditional opposition seems to be expressed more in terms of a tension than a conflict. In Hamburg's view recent and contemporary philosophy has neither completely shared the rationalist's trust nor the empiricist's distrust of the symbolizing function. Though it has accepted the symbolic nature of science, philosophy in many cases has sought

... non-symbolic anchoring grounds for the various linguistic and scientific symbolisms of knowledge in immediate intuitions, actual occasions, essences, prehensions, or 'experiences as had/jover against 'experiences as reflected upon.'

Cassirer, of course, seeks no such anchoring ground. He stands in the front rank of modern thinkers who place the problem of the symbol at the center of epistemological attention. Hamburg, Susanne K. Langer, and others consider this a specifically modern development in theory of knowledge.
The society of thinkers working in epistemology has had heterogeneous membership, but the area of semiotics, or the science of signs, seems to be, in comparison, in Hamburg's terms,

... a veritable no-man's land, with anthropologists, mythologists, logicians, mathematicians, physicists, estheticians, 'normal' and 'abnormal' psychologists all roaming about and curiously reluctant to leave, even though, as a rule, they scarcely seem to be interested in each other's company.15

Cassirer hoped to provide a meeting place for this somewhat motley crew by indicating a systematic formal (and not material) point of view from which to observe these endeavors in a complementary light. The danger, however, in a philosophical inquiry into semiotics is that it will flounder in vague generalities leading to nothing except a seemingly arbitrary classification of symbols. This is the criticism leveled by both Hamburg and Langer at Peirce's empirical account of \(59,049\) symbol situations which could be reduced to 66 types.16 Cassirer intended to do better than this.

It is possible to take an outlook on human knowledge, symbol, and reality in which it is acknowledged that human knowledge is mediated through symbols which stand in place of the real, that such symbols are just conventions among men, and that they provide a more or less satisfactory and workable means of dealing with reality. Cassirer, while admitting that symbols do have a merely substitutional role, maintains more than this about their function. Specifically
what more he maintains is that the symbolizing function is finally reality and the ground of all modes of reality—
that this function finds its base in the human spirit and its expression in the various fields of cultural endeavor. That is, for human knowledge the symbol is the real whether it be encountered on the simple level of apprehending an "object" in nature or on the more complex level of apprehending an "object" which in turn symbolizes some other object or relationship. Cassirer says that the question of "what apart from these spiritual functions constitutes absolute reality, the question of what the 'thing in itself' may be in this (symbolic) sense remains unanswered, except that more and more we learn to recognize it as a fallacy in formulation, an intellectual phantasm." 17 This is to say, the object, apart from the spiritual functions which constitute it, is an intellectual phantasm. It cannot be known under any mode, that is, given form and relation, apart from the process of symbolic formation. It truly remains an "X", but it truly remains. This is not to say, of course, that to be is "to be perceived." The real is what man finds it to be by and through the spiritual function which expresses it. It is this form, with its own immanent law, which alone is truly accessible and certain in a primary sense. The particular content of knowledge is present not only according to, but also in virtue of this form and its immanent law. One commentator has noted that this radical insistence on the necessity of the symbolic relation to
reality is the primary mark of Cassirer:

... whereas the import of symbolic media for the intelligibility of reality is certainly not a new discovery and has been realized by philosophers from Plato to Dewey, the thesis that a symbolic relation obtains for every possible (even any perceptual) context in which we 'have' a world, expresses what is most distinctive in Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms. 18

It is perhaps wise to pause at this point and clear up what might later seem to be a confusion in Cassirer's use of the term "symbolic form." An accurate notation of several distinct though related meanings of this term has been made by Carl Hamburg. Cassirer uses the term in three ways:

(1) It covers what is often referred to as the 'symbol concept,' the 'symbolic function,' or simply the 'symbolic.'
(2) It denotes the variety of cultural forms which—as myth, religion, language, and science—exemplify the realms of application for the symbol concept.
(3) It is applied to space, time, cause, number, etc., all of which—as the most pervasive 'symbolic relations'—are said to constitute such domains of 'objectivity' as listed under (2). 19

Cassirer uses the term in these three senses, but most of the time it is manifestly clear which sense he means. But to avoid confusion here, I will try to refer to its usage as "symbolic function" as "symbolic formation," its usage as "culture forms" as "modes" (of symbolic formation), and its usage indicative of pervasive "symbolic relations"—space, time, number, etc., as "intuitive forms." I believe that this terminology will become clear in this chapter.

What, then, does Cassirer mean by "symbol?" What differentiates human symbolism from certain modes of so-
called symbolic behavior in the animal kingdom? The concept of indirect response to a sign or signal which represents a specific object or activity to animals has been given an indubitable status by studies carried out in biology and animal psychology. Cassirer maintains, however, that animal and human semiotics are qualitatively different and should be distinguished as "signs" (signals) and "symbols." Animals react in nature and may be trained to react to signs. Pavlov's bell stood for dinner to his dog, and without the bell, there was no dinner for the animal even when the dog food was present. Yet "symbols" cannot be reduced to signs. Signs and signals are not truly removed from the physical world; the symbol is a part of the human world of meaning. Signals are operators; symbols are designators. Signals, even when understood and used as such have a sort of physical or substantial being; symbols have only a functional value. Sign or signal is related to its referent in a fixed way; the human symbol is characterized by the versatility with which it makes relational thought possible. The symbol is not necessarily tied to one substantial context. Its use is required if a distinction is to be made between possible and actual, real and ideal. It is at once its strength and its major weakness that human knowledge is by its very nature symbolical. For while man makes use of certain signals, much in the physical-substantial way that animals do, a symbol has "no existence in the physical world; it has a meaning."
And all too often being and meaning are confused by man. One purpose of the philosophy of symbolic forms is to delineate carefully the nature of the symbolizing function to see it for what it is—to see its drawbacks and its possibilities.

Cassirer believed that in the concept of the symbol lies a clue to an adequate understanding of the nature of man and culture. He holds it to be undeniable that "symbolic thought and symbolic behavior are among the most characteristic features of human life and that the whole progress of human culture is based on these conditions." The use of symbols as intermediary links between man and external reality is a characteristic which appears to be the distinctive mark of human life. Cassirer maintains that in the acquisition of the symbolic system man has added a new dimension of reality to his universe. In contradistinction to the other animals, man lives not only in a physical universe but in a symbolic one. He cannot escape this universe. He can no longer "confront (physical) reality immediately... (it) seems to recede in proportion as man's symbolic activity advances." Cassirer notes that one might say with Rousseau that "The man who thinks is a depraved animal," that it is not an improvement "but a deterioration of human nature to exceed the boundaries of organic life." But however this may be, language, science, art, myth, and religion all form the varied threads of the symbolic net in which man has
so enveloped himself that he cannot see or know anything except by the interposition of this medium.

The definition of man as *animal rationale* is correct but incomplete for Cassirer. He holds rationality to be an inherent feature of all human activities, but maintains that there is more to man than *rational* symbolic activity: "Reason is a very inadequate term with which to comprehend the forms of man's cultural life in all their richness and vitality." Man should be termed the *animal symbolicum*, a term more adequately describing his specific difference and, which is the same thing, his special way of functioning.

Susanne K. Langer in *Philosophy in a New Key* has given a clear exposition of a similar way of relating the factors of the symbolic situation. Mrs. Langer points out that in any conceptual relationship of subject and object involving the substitution of a term for the object, there are three necessities: there is the term which "means," the object "meant," and the subject using the term. The relationship between the term and its object is logically a one-to-one correlation; yet they are not interchangeable. The reason for this lies in the subject who finds one of the pair "more interesting than the other" and the sign or symbol "more easily available" than the object. If it were not for this function of the subject or interpretant, "sign and object would be interchangeable." The "meaning" which a sign has is not, for Langer, a quality inhering in the conceptual-symbolic relationship but a function of the semiotic term. The meaning of a term is the term's
specific function in relation to its total context. In this sense, both signs and symbols have meaning, but, according to Langer, there is a difference in their respective functions. Symbols, unlike signs, are not merely proxies for their objects, but vehicles for the conception of objects. The fundamental difference between signs and symbols is a "difference of association, and consequently of their use by the third party to the meaning function, the subject; signs announce their objects to him, whereas symbols lead him to conceive their objects."26 Thus in the sign function there are three essential terms: subject, sign, and object. In the symbol function there are four: subject, symbol, conception, and object. This distinction harks back to Cassirer's distinction between sign and symbol in his discussion of animal response and human symbolism.

The sign for Langer merely stands in the place of the thing signified. Its function is in an immediate reaction with little or no conceptual activity. Thus animals can "understand" signs as in the case of Pavlov's experiments. Human beings use signs also, as for example in driving an automobile. A red light "means" stop, but there is no necessary conscious mental process between seeing the light and the act of stopping. This is not to say that there are no cognitive functions involved; it is merely to point out that humans are capable of conditioned response to signs. Langer says that in the case of the sym-
bol function, there is an additional factor. For his dog, the name "James" signifies his characteristic odor, footfall, etc. Upon this signal, the dog would look for the substantial James. To a human the symbol "James" is a sign for the physical James, but it is also the occasion for the question: "What about James?" As a symbol, Langer says that the name evokes the conception of the object and not necessarily the expectation of the "physical" object itself.

Langer goes on to distinguish between the logical and the psychological senses of meaning in the symbolic relationship. It is possible to say that a certain symbol "means" something to a person or that a person "means" something by the symbol. The former is the logical sense, taking the symbol as the key; the latter is the psychological sense, taking the subject as the key to the relation.

While it is obvious that Cassirer would agree with Langer's distinction between sign and symbol, especially as regards the nature of the sign as not truly removed from the physical world, it is not obvious that he would agree with the implications of the subject's being "led to conceive" the object by the symbol. Cassirer would agree that this does often happen, but not that it is definitive or even indicative of the true nature of the relation between conception and symbolism. For Cassirer, the primary aspect of this relationship is that the subject "leads" the symbol. The symbol is the "created by" and not the "creator
of" conception. The correct relationship is not, as
Langer's account of the elements of the symbolic function
would imply, a serial relationship of distinct entities and
functions, but essentially an integral relationship of
symbolic formation of sensory elements which are "repre-
sented" in consciousness. Furthermore, Cassirer would
obliterate the distinction between the logical and the
psychological aspects of meaning. While he would agree
that meaning is a function of a term and not a quality in
the metaphysical sense, this term--symbol or sign--is at
once a function, a product, and a determinant of the con-
ceptual process itself. He says,

The sign is no mere accidental cloak of the idea,
but its necessary and essential organ. It serves
not merely to communicate a given thought content,
but is an instrument by means of which this con-
tent develops and fully defines itself.27

The obliteration of the distinction between the logical
and psychological senses of meaning is important because
if a position of critical idealism has to distinguish ul-
timately between a pole of "What I mean by it" and a pole
of "What it means," then it is no longer a system of
critical idealism. For Cassirer, who felt that all the
areas of human endeavor could be "elucidated by philosophy
only within a general system of philosophical idealism,"28
the reconciliation of these two poles by the general sub-
ordination of the latter to the former was necessary. To
accomplish this not easy task, the largely empirical science
of semiotics had to be brought into a critical idealistic
epistemology. The schema according to which this was done
was Cassirer's theory of modality.

(3) The Theory of Modality

Using psychological and logical in the broadest senses, we might say that Cassirer describes a relationship between them in which the psychological aspect of meaning is developed or expressed in its own progressive determination according to its own immanent logical law. Here the logical aspect of meaning is subordinate to and determined by the psychological mode in which meaning is expressed.

The doctrine of modality is tied up with the reconciliation and systematization of the aspects of meaning and the accounting for the various "meanings" a symbol may have. The word "man" for example, has a very different meaning for the theologian than it does for the sociologist. The meanings of the term "moon" diverge when it is used by an astronomer and a Polynesian native. Nor is this divergence of meaning limited to the particulars of experience. Time, space, cause, and number, all symbols of basic cognitive and intuitive relations, have different meanings in mythology, religion, art, and science. Yet, from Cassirer's idealistic view, "every feature of our human experience has a claim to reality." Cassirer's discussion of quality and modality provides the pattern by which he reconciles these differences.

In a philosophical approach to art, myth, or language, the first problem can be formulated: "How can a finite and particular sensory content be made into a vehicle of a gen...
oral spiritual meaning? The material aspect of these spheres reduces to aggregates of sensory impressions of sight, hearing, or touch. Yet as these sensory impressions are related to and in human cognition, "a miracle occurs." This simple sensory material becomes something more than what it immediately is. Sensation, in being cognized, takes on a new life, acquires meaning. This meaning is acquired and defined, for Cassirer, from two sources at once:

1. from the general formal context in which the sensory particulars stand; "... the sensory particulars do not stand by themselves; they are articulated into a conscious whole, from which they take their qualitative meaning..."

2. from certain basic forms of relation inherent in human mentality according to which the "simple sensory qualities" are ordered and synthesized. These basic forms of relation, "for psychological as well as epistemological analysis... prove to be just such simple and irreducible 'qualities' of consciousness as the simple sensory qualities."

Among these simple and irreducible forms of relation are time, space, number, and cause. They correspond formally and functionally to Kant's pure forms of intuition and understanding. Cassirer will speak of a few basic forms of relation, but he does not give a "table of categories" as exhaustive of the forms of combination available to the human spirit. The closest he comes to it is his discussion of quality and modality.

By a "mode" Cassirer refers to a totality of meanings which has its own "nature," its own immanent formal law.
There are various modes of human thought and endeavor: mythical, scientific, artistic, and religious. The basic forms of relation, as well as being seen in psychological and epistemological analysis, can also be singled out and described as certain typical relations when the ideal modes, with all their specificity and independence are considered together. In such a consideration, the quality and the modality of the forms can be observed. The "quality" of a given relation refers to

... the particular type of combination by means of which it creates series within the whole of consciousness, the arrangement of whose members is subject to a special law. Thus for example, the relation of simultaneity as opposed to succession constitutes such an independent quality."

The "modality" of a given relation refers to the formal context in which it is found. Thus "the universal relation we call 'time' is just as much an element of theoretical scientific cognition as an essential factor in certain structures of the aesthetic consciousness." But it would not "mean" the same in both (although in both the quality of succession is posited) because "the consciousness of natural laws as laws of the temporal form of motion and the consciousness of (say) musical measure have each their own specific mode of succession." Similarly, cause as a scientific principle of uniform necessary relationship is different from cause as a "mythical potency." Thus in the philosophy of symbolic forms,

... in order to characterize a given form of
relation in its concrete application and concrete meaning, we must not only state its qualitative attributes as such, but also define the system in which it stands. . . For each of these contexts, language as well as scientific cognition, art as well as myth, possesses its own constitutive principle which sets its stamp, as it were, on all the particular forms within it. The result is an extraordinary diversity of formal relations, whose richness and inner involvements, however, can be apprehended only through a rigorous analysis of each fundamental form.

How a group of sensory particulars can acquire genuine spiritual meaning is a problem on which the expansion of meanings in natural science throws light. Nothing in the sensory data of the physicist corresponds to the "important" relational elements of his science: concepts of space, time, force, mass, atom, and energy. Cognition devises these "in order to dominate the world of sensory experience and survey it as a world ordered by law." Thus the conceptual world of physics is systematized and self-contained according to its own fixed rules, and its development goes "hand in hand with the increasing refinement of its system of signs."36

In an article in the Journal of Philosophy written some sixteen years after the first volume of the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Cassirer put this another way. Kant, he says, thought the task of a scientific theory was "to spell phenomena in order to be able to read them as experiences." "Modern evolution of physics has shown us," according to Cassirer, "that science in this spelling of phenomena may follow different ways. It is not restricted to a special
type of spelling and to a single alphabet; it is at liberty to choose various sets of symbols. But of course we cannot use these symbols at random. The point to make here is that this development, this increasing refinement of signs, is a lawful development within the scientific context. Symbolic systems are not arbitrarily overthrown, but they do change:

None of us, I suppose, any longer regards the theory of relativity as a restriction of our ideal of scientific truth. We think, on the contrary, that it has contributed to define and explain this ideal in a clearer and more definite way.

Cassirer's view here is close to James B. Conant's that science aims at the evolution, or lawful development, of more adequate conceptual schemes, the main criterion of which is their provision for the further development of science.  

But the nature of scientific thought is not the primary consideration here; in this brief account, however, we can see two aspects of the relation between cognition and symbol which transcend science as such and apply with equal validity to other modes of thought.

The first of these is that the logic of things cannot be separated from the logic of symbols because in all forms of cultural activity, the sign is necessary not only to communicate a thought content, but also for the very development of that content.

The second aspect is that the symbol is not a purely conceptual element but has a ground also in sensation, which
provides the "material" from which cognition "creates a definite sensuous substratum for itself" by giving it form and order. This substratum is essential for human cognition and for spiritual formative activity in any mode. In fact, it is "so essential that it sometimes seems to constitute the entire content, the true 'meaning' of the forms." Language, myth, art seem to consist, at first glance, entirely in the particular sensuously tangible forms they present. But this is indicative, not of the nature of these modes, but of a broader concept: "The content of the spirit is disclosed only in its manifestations; the ideal form is known only by and in the aggregate of the sensible signs which it uses for its expression."^39

By surveying these manifestations Cassirer is attempting to grasp the typical and consistent features of the activities of the spirit and to observe their special configurations (their modality) as they are encountered in art, myth, religion, and science. In this endeavor he distinguishes his position of critical idealism from traditional idealism which, he says, contained a metaphysical dualism between the mundus sensibilis, where the confinement and passivity of the senses prevailed, and the mundus intelligibilis, characterized by the free spontaneity of the mind. For Cassirer the senses and the spirit are "joined in a new form of reciprocity and correlation."^40 In this new form the function of the spirit must seek its fulfillment in the sensory world. But the sensible world
is not something inert, something given and present to a passive perceptive agent. It is a sensible world of symbols, symbolically formed in apprehension. It is a "world whose inner quality is still wholly sensory, but which already discloses a formed sensibility, that is to say, a sensibility governed by the spirit." 41

This new form of "reciprocity and correlation" is seen in the process of language formation wherein the chaos of immediate impressions gains order and clarity only when names are given it—when it begins to be symbolically ordered and systematized, that is, formed. The world of impressions gains permanence and becomes manageable only when it is designated by names and endowed with intellectual quality in the process. Language has two aspects. In addition to being a "basic implement" of the human spirit in its progress from sensation to ideas, it is itself a type of symbolic formation as are myth, science, and the other modes. In the symbolic differentiation of sensory phenomena there is a germ of that "universal function of separation and association" which is expressed in all the modes and "finds its highest conscious expression in the analyses and syntheses of scientific thought." 42

Holding to the necessity of the "sensuous substratum," Cassirer insists that the creation of the various modal systems of symbols is a free activity of the mind. With the acquisition of symbols, the function of separation and association begins, and this activity is not limited to
linguistic and specifically conceptual areas. The "unreality" of the creations of the mythical and artistic modes stands in testimony that their creations are not founded in passive sensation but in the free spontaneity of the spirit. Further testimony to this is that in all modes a claim is made to objective truth. This claim may be discredited in the light of subsequent critical inquiry with a more highly developed concept of truth, but "the mere fact that it is made belongs to the essence and character of the particular culture forms themselves," that is, to their being a mode in which the spontaneity of the spirit is expressed.

In the first unreflective manifestations of linguistic and mythical thought there is no clear distinction between symbol or sign and object but an indifferent merger of the two. The acquisition of the sign is the first step towards knowledge of the "objective" nature of the thing. The true nature of subjectivity and objectivity becomes available only when the symbolical nature of human knowledge is realized. Only when the "constant flux of the contents of consciousness is halted" by the determination and limitation involved in the application of a symbol, only when consciousness juxtaposes its own unity of form does an ideal meaning become possible. This juxtaposition indicates more and more specifically, as human knowledge increases, the nature of subjectivity and objectivity, because in any mode of thought human mentality apprehends in its sym-
bols the object "and at the same time apprehends itself and its own formative law." 

Cassirer says that this sort of apprehension is a factor which occurs in every type and form of symbolism. One of the first to mention it in connection with a study of language was Wilhelm von Humboldt around 1836; Humboldt maintained that

In speech the energy of the mind breaks a path through the lips, but its product returns through our own ears. The idea is translated into true objectivity without being withdrawn from subjectivity. Only language can do this; and without this translation into an objectivity which returns to the subject—and such a translation occurs even though silently, wherever language is at work—the formation of concepts and hence all true thought would be impossible. . . . For language cannot be regarded as a substance, which is present, which can be apprehended as a whole. . . . it is something which must be constantly produced, and while the laws (formative laws peculiar to language, Cassirer would say) according to which it is produced are defined, its scope and in a certain sense the manner in which it is produced remains indeterminate. . . .

Cassirer's aim in his analysis of the various culture modes is a progressive reduction of this indeterminacy of their own immanent formative laws.

While with the apprehension of the nature of the symbol, the nature of subjectivity and objectivity becomes clearer, we must not see the distinction between them as concrete, established, eternal:

What language (as a mode) designates and expresses is neither exclusively subjective nor exclusively objective; it effects a new mediation, a particular reciprocal relation between the two factors. Neither the mere discharge, nor the repetition of objective sound stimuli yields the characteristic meaning of language; language arises where the two ends are joined, so creating a new synthesis of 'I' and 'world.'
This sort of formative, reciprocal relation extends to all areas of cultural endeavor:

Each particular cultural energy contributes to this definition (of subjectivity and objectivity) in its particular way and plays its own characteristic part in establishing the concepts of the I and of the world. Cognition, language, myth, and art: none of them is a mere mirror, simply reflecting images of inward or outward data; they are not indifferent media, but rather the true sources of light, the prerequisite of vision, and the wellsprings of all formation.\footnote{47}

Not mirrors of reality, not indifferent media, and not simple structures which we can insert in a given world, the modes of symbolic thought must be understood as functions by means of which specific forms are given to reality. The achievements of one mode must not be measured in terms of the standards of another. Each function makes use of different instruments, different standards of evaluation, "and the results are different also."\footnote{48}

(4) Natural Symbolism—

the Function of Representation

Inherent in the specification of subjectivity and objectivity by symbolic indication of subject, symbol, and object is another universal aspect of human cognition. This is the function of representation.

If we take, as Kant proposed to do, for a starting point in critical philosophy an analysis of the elements of consciousness, we see, according to Cassirer, that the "universal function of separation and association is not removable from the "content of consciousness but constitutes
one of its essential conditions." This is to say that every simple quality of consciousness "has a definite content only in so far as it is apprehended in complete unity with certain qualities but separately from others." This seems to be a report of cognitive experience and to be perfectly obvious—in need of no elaborate elaboration. Cassirer is pointing out that the whole of consciousness is modified by ongoing cognitive experience—experience which by the fact of its having been will modify future experience. In this sense, Cassirer says:

... there is no 'something' in consciousness that does not eo ipso and without further mediation give rise to 'another' and to a series of others. For what defines each particular content of consciousness is that in it the whole of consciousness is in some form posited and represented. Only in and through this representation does what we call the 'presence' of the content become possible.

This function of representation (the cognitive process of positing a content necessarily related to a context) is a necessary aspect of relational thought and is immediately evident in the simplest instance of the presence of a content such as the concept of the temporal present. Time as we "know" it is a movement from past "through" the present to the future. The content of consciousness we call "now" can be nothing but, according to Cassirer, the eternally fluid boundary line between past and future. It cannot be posited apart from what it bounds. If the now is interpreted differently, it constitutes a negation of time. If we are to think of the
temporal moment, the now, as pertaining to time, to temporal motion, we must not think of the Eleatic Arrow with its series of "at rests", but we must think of the present as truly situated in the movement, in the process of time as a whole. Thus the "form of time itself can be 'given' for us only when the temporal sequence is represented as running forward and backward." This function of representation is a fundamental characteristic of consciousness, "namely, that the whole is not obtained from its parts but that every notion of a part already encompasses the notion of the whole, not as to content, but as to structure and form." It is a function which finds an expression similar to that found in the spatial and qualitative ordering functions of consciousness as well as in the temporal.

We apprehend specific elements in a spatial whole only "by combining into one idea complete groups of sensory perceptions which mutually displace one another in immediate sensory experience, and on the other hand by diffusing this unity through the diversity of its particular components. It is only by this interplay of concentration that spatial consciousness is constructed." And just as the temporal now depended on its context of past and future in transition, so "for every 'here' we posit a 'there'. The particular place is not given prior to the spatial system but only in reference to it." Cassirer means by a "qualitative ordering function
of consciousness" an objectifying synthesis by which a sum of determinate properties are combined into a constant or relatively constant "thing." This objectifying synthesis depends upon the spatial and temporal functions of representation just described. Certain spatial and temporal configurations must be apprehended before the concept of the thing as a constant "vehicle" of the variable properties can take form. But the idea of this "vehicle," says Cassirer, "adds to the intuition of spatial simultaneity and temporal succession a new factor of independent importance." Empiricist analysis tries in vain to reduce the idea of the thing to the sum of its attributes and in so doing reduces its own argument to the mere description of "combination as such" precisely because, for example,

When we combine the sensations of extension, sweetness, roughness, whiteness into the idea of 'sugar' as a unified whole, this is possible only because each one of these qualities is originally thought in reference to this whole. The whiteness or sweetness, etc., is not apprehended merely as a condition within me, but as a 'property' and objective quality, because I have already attained the desired function and perspective of the thing.

Cassirer's Kantianism shines in every line of his discussion of representation, and yet, like all Neo-Kantians, he has modified Kant's account. Because he is trying to justify a function of symbolic formation as the fundamental form of the activity of the human spirit, because he recognized objectivity as available in several different modes, and because even the basic forms of relation of human
consciousness assume different "qualities" with changes in modality, Cassirer does not attempt a complete system of categories for all the different modes. Such an attempt is beyond the scope of the philosophy of symbolic forms, which has been described as a prolegomenon to any future philosophy of culture. Here is possibly the clue to Cassirer's abandonment of the distinctions made by Kant in the subject matter of the Transcendental Aesthetic and the Transcendental Analytic, between the forms of intuition and the forms of understanding. Even the forms of intuition—the basic apprehension of spatial and temporal configurations—will vary between different types of modality.

Yet Cassirer differs from Kant on more than this methodological point as regards the problem of representation. Cassirer criticizes Kant for maintaining "with full force" the rationalistic antithesis between thought and sensibility, between the formal and material elements of consciousness, even though Kant "goes on to say that perhaps the two are connected in a common root unknown to us." Cassirer's principal objection to this formulation is that it is a product of abstraction and not an aspect of

... the unity of the matter and form of consciousness, of the 'particular' and the 'universal,' of sensory 'data' and 'pure principles of order' (which) constitute precisely that originally certain and originally known phenomenon which every analysis of consciousness must take as its point of departure.

For Cassirer, the nature of consciousness is such that

... it exists only in so far as it immediately goes beyond itself in various directions of spiritual synthesis. The consciousness of the mom-
ent contains reference to temporal succession; the consciousness of a single point in space contains reference to space as the sum and totality of all possible designations of position; and there are countless analogous relations through which the form of the whole is expressed in the consciousness of the particular. 56

The statement was made earlier that Cassirer's thesis that a symbolic relation held for every possible context in which we "have" a "world" is the most distinctive thing in his philosophy. It is possible to see how his account of the function of representation is indicative of this radical extension of the symbolic relationship.

Cassirer views the function of representation as necessary for the formal unity of consciousness. This function is also seen as a natural symbolism in which "a certain partial content of consciousness, though distinct from the whole, retained the power to represent this whole and in so doing reconstitute it in a sense." 57 (Italics mine) This natural symbolism is prior to artificial symbols, the "arbitrary" signs which consciousness creates in language, myth, and art: "The force and effect of these mediating signs would remain a mystery if they were not ultimately rooted in an original spiritual process which belongs to the very essence of consciousness." 58 This "original spiritual process" is the function of representation, of "natural" symbolism. It is a function of signification which is present prior to the production of any sign. It has a bond with sensibility but contains within it a freedom from sensibility. It is "an independent mode of configuration . . . a specific activity of consciousness,"
which is differentiated from any datum of immediate sen-
sation or perception, but makes use of these data as ve-
hicles, as means of expression." Herein lies the differ-
ence between this original function of "natural" symbolism
and its "secondary" productions in the various modes.
The symbols encountered within these systems of symbolic
forms, unlike the original function, do not first have
"being" and then beyond this achieve a meaning; "their
being arises from their signification."

The fluid sensory impressions assume form and duration
only as they are molded by symbolic action in one modality
or another. This is obvious from the fact that the pro-
ducts of mythical or scientific activity in no way resem-
ble the sensory material with which they began. The human
spirit, by the function of natural symbolism, inherent in
the function of representation, as it develops the various
symbolic modes, detaches itself more and more from the sub-
strate of sensation, and it so doing, it reveals its ori-
ginal power of synthesis and unification. The chemical
formula, the mythical tale, and other creations in various
modes express finely articulated complexes of symbolic
relations, of which perception as such knows nothing.

We must not ask which takes precedence, the spiritual
or the sensory, because we are dealing "with the revelation
and manifestation of basic spiritual functions in the sen-
sory material itself." Both traditional rationalism and
empiricism failed to develop this fundamental relation.
Empiricism accepted the givenness of the particular but did not recognize that such a concept must always, explicitly or implicitly make use of the defining functions of some universal. Rationalism embraced the universal but failed to see the necessary role of the medium through which it can be represented in consciousness.

Cassirer feels that only by beginning with an analysis of consciousness which alone is truly immediate and by investigating its functions in the various areas of human endeavor, can we overcome the difficulties of both traditional schools:

The illusion of an original division between the intelligible and the sensuous, between 'idea' and 'phenomenon', vanishes. True, we still remain in a world of images—but these are not images which reproduce a self-subsistent world of things; they are image-worlds whose principle and origin are to be sought in an autonomous creation of the spirit. Through them alone we see what we call 'reality,' and in them alone we possess it: for the highest objective truth that is accessible to the spirit is ultimately the form of its own activity.

A Hegelian note is struck in this and other passages, and it poses an interesting problem regarding the relation of Cassirer to the idealistic tradition on the one hand and to the tradition of critical philosophy according to Kant on the other. But this must be reserved for later mention.

As Cassirer begins with the symbolic nature of consciousness and follows its ramifications in the various cultural modes, he finds that

The more richly and energetically the human spirit engages in its formative activity, the farther
this activity seems to remove it from the primal source of its own being. More and more it appears to be imprisoned in its own creations—in the words of language, in the images of myth or art, in the intellectual symbols of cognition, which cover it like a delicate and transparent, but unbreachable veil.62

And critical philosophy cannot go behind that veil, that is, it cannot go behind its own starting point, the symbolic nature of consciousness. A philosophy of culture cannot attempt to penetrate back behind the symbolic functions at the base of its objects of study to an original sphere of intuitive vision—a "paradise of pure immediacy."

Instead of taking the road back, a philosophy of culture must continue forward in its quest of understanding and elucidation of the basic formative principle at work in the various modes of symbolic formation.

In the following pages I will try to follow the road forward in an attempt to indicate both the extent to which it is possible to elucidate the "basic formative principle at work" in the various modes and the main aspects of Cassirer's approach to this problem in the realms of language, myth, science, and religion.
Notes to Chapter I

2. Ibid., p. 95.
3. Ibid., p. 93.
4. Ibid., p. 96.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., p. 79.
8. Ibid., p. 79.
9. Ibid., p. 78.
10. Ibid., p. 78.
11. Ibid., p. 84.
13. Ibid.
16. Ibid. Langer makes a very similar point in *Philosophy in a New Key*, p. 43.
17. The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, v. 1., p. 311. This work is hereinafter referred to as FSF.
19. Ibid., p. 58.
21. Ibid., p. 60.
22. Ibid., p. 45.
23. Ibid., p. 43.
24. Ibid., p. 44.
25. Philosophy in a New Key, pp. 46-47.
26. Ibid., p. 49.
27. FSF, v. 1., p. 86.
28. Ibid., p. 72.
30. FSF, v. 1., p. 93.
31. Ibid., p. 94.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., p. 95
34. Ibid., pp. 95-96.
35. Ibid., p. 97.
36. Ibid., p. 85.


39. PSF, v. 1., p. 86.

40. Ibid., p. 87.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., p. 88.

43. Ibid., p. 88.

44. Ibid., p. 92.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid., p. 93.

47. Ibid., p. 93.

48. Ibid., p. 91.

49. Ibid., p. 98.

50. Ibid., p. 99.

51. Ibid., p. 100.

52. Ibid., p. 101.

53. Ibid., p. 100.

54. Ibid., pp. 101-2.

55. Ibid., p. 104.

56. Ibid., pp. 104-5.

57. Ibid., p. 106.

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid., p. 106.

60. Ibid., p. 110.

61. Ibid., pp. 110-111.

62. Ibid., p. 113.
Up to this point the process of symbolic formation has been presented in a rather abstract scheme. Symbolic forms are modes in which the human spirit gives form to reality. Each symbolic form has a definite and important relationship to a sensuous substrate, the "unformed" reality which the function of representation supplies to the spirit for formation. The process of representation is a sort of "natural symbolism;" through it bare sensa are reconstituted into meaningful materials suitable for entering into a "world." Thus Cassirer underscores the necessity that a symbolic relation holds for any context in which we "have" a world.

Schematic presentation of the process of symbolic formation, though justified as an expository device, is contrary in spirit to Cassirer's method of philosophical inquiry, which pursues the unfolding activities of the human spirit in all its diverse, concrete manifestations. I shall now illustrate Cassirer's way of dealing with the concrete formative activities of the spirit in the special case of language, which plays a central role in his philosophy.

(1) The Importance of the Philosophy of Language for Cassirer

The central role of language depends upon its two different though related aspects. It is of course the most common type of human symbolism and has a definite relation-
ship to the communication and analysis of other non-verbal symbols. In this aspect language is a "basic implement" of the human spirit by which it gives form to reality and finds employment in all the other modes of symbolic activity. The second aspect is that language is itself a symbolic form in the full, if not the fullest, sense of the term. This is to say that language embodies an original formative power which develops linguistically, that is, develops according to its own immanent law, this law being rooted in and expressed by the fundamental relationship between sensation and representation. Language, we might say, is for Cassirer the most fundamental of the symbolic forms, dependent more directly on the basic elements of sensation and representation for its expression than are, say, mythical or scientific thought. While in his "phenomenology of culture" Cassirer insists that so far as we can tell, the linguistic and the mythical modes of thought develop side by side in mutual effective relationship, it is possible, he further maintains, to distinguish the one from the other in terms of their modality, that is, in terms of the characteristic imprint they each give to reality. Professor W. M. Urban expresses this theme of the central role of language in Cassirer's philosophy in Hegelian terms and illustrates well the reason for Cassirer's emphasis on language:

This theme, stated in Hegelian terms, -- which . . . are not foreign to Cassirer's way of thinking, -- may be said to be 'language as the actuality of culture.' 'Language,' [Hegel] tells us, 'stands in a focal point of spirit-
ual being, in which rays of entirely differing origin units and from which lines run into all realms of the spirit. Of these various realms, these ways in which culture actualizes itself, the theoretical or scientific form is that in which knowledge chiefly manifests itself, and it is with this language that philosophy is, if not solely, yet chiefly concerned; but there are other ways and other languages, and the knowledge value of these become also a part of the problem of a philosophy of language. Thus the critique of language becomes, so he holds, the basis of the critique of knowledge.

(2) **Methodology in Linguistics**

Cassirer's idea of the proper methodology of an approach to an understanding of language or any other symbolic form is, of course, dictated by his general dedication to the idea of form. And his idea of form has both an ideal and a sensuous aspect. As Professor Hentel has said, for Cassirer, the spirit "is form giving to whatever is given to it." Any kind of human mental activity has a material and a formal aspect, and Cassirer's insistence on the necessity for philosophical inquiry to take a formal over a material point of view contains a clue to both his methodological dilemma and to its solution. The very wealth of oftentimes contradictory empirical material in linguistics and mythology presents a real difficulty to a position such as Cassirer's. For, as he says, "It can neither disregard empirical particulars nor can it wholly submit to them and still remain entirely faithful to its own mission and purpose." The only way out of this problem, and it is the way of a Kantian, was to "formulate the questions asked of linguistics (or mythology or other) with
with systematic universality, but in each case to derive the answers from actual empirical inquiry."

Thus Cassirer proceeded, aiming at a universal systematic idea of form which was to be elucidated as an imminent principle within the various modes of cultural activity. The idea of form remained uppermost in his mind. In emphasis of this, and as if to say that his presentation of language as a symbolic form was a prolegomenon to any future philosophy of language, he wrote:

It was necessary to seek as broad as possible a view, and not only of one linguistic family, but of different families widely divergent in their logic and structure. The linguistic literature which it was necessary to consult became so vast that the goal I originally set myself receded farther and farther into the distance and I often doubted whether it lay within my reach. If I nevertheless continued, it is because, as the diversity of linguistic phenomena opened up before me, the particulars seemed more and more to case light upon one another and to fit as though of their own accord into a general picture. The following investigation is concerned not only with the study of any particular phenomena, but with the development and elucidation of this general picture. If the fundamental epistemological idea by which it is oriented is confirmed, and if the description and characterization of the pure form of language, here attempted, proves sound, many particulars which I have overlooked or misinterpreted will easily be supplied or rectified in a future treatment of the subject.

If we speak in terms of presuppositions about methodology, we might recall that Cassirer continually contrasts two general approaches to the problem of knowledge and reality. One of these he characterized as the metaphysical approach. With regard to language, we might say that this approach assumes a reality known somehow independently
of language and its form of development, and that it aims at stripping off the "trappings" of language to reach a hypothetical pure immediacy of experience. This approach Cassirer denies. Cassirer presupposes, declaring this assumption to be finally more adequate, submitted to close scrutiny, that experience never had this quality of pure immediacy. Sensation or intuition can never be divorced from its modal expression, that is, its formation by consciousness. As Professor Urban says on this point,

Instead of attempting to get back of the forms of thought and language to a hypothetical pure experience, Cassirer's philosophy assumes that experience is never pure in this sense and that intuition and expression are inseparable. It therefore proposes not to deny but to complete and perfect the principles of expression and symbolism. It proceeds upon the assumption that the more richly and energetically the human spirit builds its languages and symbolisms, the nearer it comes, if not to some hypothetical original source of its being, certainly to its ultimate meaning and reality.

Thus Cassirer's methodology reflects his general philosophical orientation. Neither the material nor the formal view or approach may be ignored, but it is from the formal point of view that questions must be asked of the material. In this sense, Cassirer says, "If we approach spiritual life not as the static contemplation of being, but as functions and energies of formation, we shall find certain common and typical principles of formation, diverse and dissimilar as the forms may be."

The final aim of such a methodology must be that of the whole system of symbolic forms: the liberation of the
human spirit into a realm, to use a metaphysical metaphor, in which it can see its use of symbols for what it is, whatever be the mode. For Cassirer the highest form of objective truth available for the human spirit is ultimately the form of its own activity. In an approach to this truth,

... the aim of philosophy is not to go behind all these creations, but rather to understand and elucidate their basic formative principle. It is solely through awareness of this principle that the content of life acquired its true form. Then life is removed from the sphere of mere given natural existence: it ceases to be a part of this natural existence or a mere biological process, but is transformed and fulfilled as a form of the 'spirit.'

(3) Language as a Symbolic Form

An analysis of any of the symbolic forms will reveal as basic a tension between the sensuous encounter with the "raw material" of experience and its formation by human mentality, that is, its representation in a mode. A full understanding of symbolic formation depends not upon effacing this tension, bringing its poles into a mediate or immediate identity, but in enhancing the tension. Only by such an approach do the specific achievement of symbolic expression and the special content of the various modes of symbolic formation become evident. Cassirer says that this content cannot be revealed as long as we hold fast to the belief that we possess 'reality' as a given, self-sufficient being, as a totality whether of things or of simple sensations, prior to all spiritual formation. If this were true, the forms would indeed have no other purpose than mere reproduction, and such reproduction would inevitably be inferior.
to the original. In truth, however, the meaning of each form cannot be sought in what it expresses, but only in the manner and modality, the inner law of the expression itself. 8

Cassirer's analysis of language as a symbolic form is made along these lines. Language must be observed in its empirical reality if we are to determine "the inner law of the expression itself." As a symbolic form, language reveals elements of consciousness and sensation in a relationship such that not the identity of the two, or their separation, is the dominant note; rather in language the union of spiritual content and sensuous expression is most readily apparent. Content and expression are mutually definitive— that is, they do not have being prior to their interpenetration; the signification they acquire is not an added factor; "it is this signification that constitutes their being." 9

But we must not underemphasize the importance of the fundamental link between language and sensuous expression or non-verbal expressive movement. Cassirer devotes a whole chapter of the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms to this aspect of linguistic development. His consideration of the importance of this aspect of language development can be summarized in two points:

1. Language finds the fundamental types of expressive movement to be basic to its origin and development.

2. This sort of movement contains within it elements of selectivity and emphasis, the development of which result finally in symbolic expression.

The study of sign language has revealed two types of expressive movement which are genuine gestures, distinguish-
ed from other sorts of physical motion. These are indicative and imitative gestures. The general view seems to be that the indicative gesture is a refinement of the grasping movement common to both humans and animals. The indicative gesture, or "grasping at a distance," is specifically human, as is the imitative gesture which is never the mere reproduction of a given reality in its totality, but involves the selection of a "pregnant motif" from the natural context which produces an outline of its form. In both of these gestures there is a definite link with purely physical sensuous reaction, but there is also an element of conscious selectivity which is indicative of all progress in conceptual knowledge which "consists precisely in surpassing this first sensory immediacy." 10

(a) Stages of Linguistic Development

Cassirer maintains that language can be shown to have passed three stages in maturing to its specifically symbolical level. These stages are designated as mimetic, analogical, and symbolical. When Cassirer first mentions these levels, he maintains, in conformity with his ideas of proper methodology, that he is setting up an abstract schema, but a schema which will take on concrete content when it is seen that it represents a functional law of linguistic growth which has counterparts in other modes of symbolic formation. The concept of these three levels is extremely important and will recur in discussions of myth and science.
The process of symbolic formation goes on within the various modes—myth, science, art, language, religion—but not on the same level within these modes. Not all "symbolic forms" reach the "symbolical" state—the stage upon which the symbolic nature of the symbols is realized to be what it is. Cassirer has insisted on the mutually definitive relationship of expression and intuition, and in his account of the three stages, he posits a progression of language from the phase of expressive movement on to the symbolical stage.

The Mimetic Stage: In this stage phonetic language seems to be imbedded the same sort of mimetic designation as that which characterizes unsophisticated or natural sign language. The term "unsophisticated" refers to the sign languages of "primitive" peoples in which there are very few "conventional" signs while most consist in a simple mimicry of natural phenomena.* In the mimetic stage there is a striving to reproduce the sensory impression as closely as possible. Here there are very few general designations for a certain natural phenomenon, but there is an attempt to give every nuance of the phenomenon a phonetic nuance. In certain primitive languages, particularly those of the Ewe and American

* The sign language of the Cistercian monks or the Neopolitan sign language are examples of sophisticated or conventional sign languages in which "concept signs" predominate. These were created for a purpose and are obviously not primitive forms but highly complex constructions greatly influenced by the established spoken languages.
Indian groups, this is particularly apparent. For example,

In Ewe and certain related languages, there are adverbs which describe only one activity, one state or one attribute, and which consequently can be combined only with one verb. Many verbs possess a number of such qualifying adverbs pertaining to them alone, and most of them are phonetic reproductions of sensory impressions. In his Grammar of the Ewe Language Westermann counts no less than thirty-three such phonetic images for the single verb 'to walk,' each designating a particular manner of walking: slouching or sauntering, limping or dragging the feet, shambling or waddling, energetic or weary. But this, as he adds, does not exhaust the number of adverbs that qualify walking; for most of these can occur in a doubled, usual, or diminutive form, depending on whether the subject is big or little.

Cassirer points out that this type of sound painting falls into the background as language develops, but he maintains that all languages, however advanced, preserve numerous examples of it. This is not, however, to embrace an onomatopoeic theory of the origin of language. It does indicate that onomatopoeia represents a fundamental function of language. Cassirer emphasizes this point:

And even where the hope of arriving in this way to a true reconstruction of the original language has been abandoned, the principle of onomatopoeia is recognized as a means of arriving indirectly at an idea of the relatively oldest strata of lang-

**It is impossible to give here adequate consideration to Cassirer's detailed treatment of enormous amounts of empirical data. These products of linguistic research may, of course, be subject to other interpretations than that considered here; the writer can only ask that a judgment on Cassirer's use of this data be made by reference to the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms and Cassirer's other works and not by reference to the few instances in this thesis where such data could be mentioned.
The Analogical State: As language in the mimetic stage proceeds to copy in sound not just a single sensuous object or sense impression but a series in relation, the analogical stage is reached. Since there is no particular sound which must necessarily stand for the relation as such, this sort of context is communicated by a formal analogy between phonetic sequence and sequence of contents designated. This coordination of two series, "phonetic" and "physical," of entirely different content is what Cassirer means by analogy. The transition from mimetic to analogical is particularly apparent in languages like the Siamese, Sudanese, and those of the Ural-Altaic family which make use of tonal gradations to differentiate word meanings and grammatical relations. It is further seen in the linguistic phenomenon of reduplication in which specific meanings and relations are indicated by doubling certain sounds or syllables. The point to make here is that we are above the mere copying of the mimetic stage, but the function of signification is still inextricably bound up with the sensuous sound. In the analogical stage relations are signified in a "thing-context"—as objective events or substances. In the symbolical stage, relations are symbolized as relations.

The Symbolical Stage: Professor Urban summarizes Cassirer's account of the progression of language:
There seems to be little question of the inseparability of intuition and expression . . . that language is present from the beginning (in) the perceptual world. There seems to be just a little question that language develops from copy to analogy and from analogy to symbol; that the function of language is not to copy reality but to symbolize it; and that, more and more, the symbolization of things gives place to the symbolization of relations. 16

The symbolization of relations is characteristic of this third stage. It means that relations are seen to be what they are—largely of a conceptual nature; it means that symbols are not mistaken for a "non-symbolic" reality apart. It seems somewhat strange to say that this stage is not available to all of the symbolic forms. It is not, for example, available to myth. Mythical consciousness does display its modality in symbolic formation; it does develop according to "its own immanent law," but once this consciousness sees the symbolic nature of its elements, it moves out of the mythical sphere and into the religious. This stage is available to language, to art, to religion (in the philosophical, not theological sense), especially to science, but not to myth. In this vein of thought, Urban writes,

Science, so Cassirer maintains . . . differs from the other stages of spiritual life not in the fact that it gives us the truth itself without any meditation through signs and symbols, but rather that science recognizes that the symbols which it uses are symbols and realizes this fact in a way in which the others do not. 17

Language, like other symbolic forms, casts its imprint on intuition and conception. The "forms" of intuition, that is, the "basic intuitions" of space, time, and
number, are particularly revealing of the special imprints cast by the various modes. Regarding language, Cassirer's study reveals how language in all three stages, (mimetic, analogical, and symbolical) puts its characteristic form on intuition and conception. "Characteristic form" here refers to the special kind of tension between sense and sensuous as it is expressed in language and through its function--the forming of impressions into representations.

(b) Space, Time and Numbers in the Linguistic Mode

The various modes of symbolic forms do not of course stand totally apart from one another. Religion contains elements of myth and art. Science is affected at least indirectly by the others, and language, by its nature and function, affects and reflects the development of all of them. For this reason, language seen as a symbolic form will not display as distinctive or impressive a mode of symbolic formation as will, say, myth. Language moves freely through the various modes; its function is essentially logical within each of the modal frameworks. An examination of this function (the forming of impressions into representations) reveals the special modal aspects of language. Such an examination has been undertaken to some extent in the previous discussion of representation. Yet, it is possible to make this function more explicit by reference to space, time, and number as mentioned above. Cassirer proposes that
It is in the *intuitive forms* that the type and direction of the spiritual synthesis effected in language are primarily revealed, and it is only through the medium of these forms, through the intuitions of space, time, and number that language can perform its essentially logical operation: the forming of impressions into representations. 18*

In Cassirer's discussion of these intuitive forms the essential characteristics of language are seen. The relationship of sense and sensuous takes the form of an interpenetration of sensuous expression in language. The development of language through the three stages reflects a change in dominant elements—a shift from the dominance of sensuous to the dominance of spiritual elements, a shift which reveals, in Cassirer's terms, a "spiritual process of liberation from the sensuous." 19

Space: Space is for Cassirer, as for Kant, a form of intuition. Spatial representation reveals most fully on all levels the interpenetration of sensuous and spiritual expression in language. A study of primitive "undeveloped" language reveals the movement "outward from the center" of which the shift in dominance is a primary characteristic. Cassirer draws on a host of studies of primitive languages to point out that in such languages the human body is the primary substantial referent of spatial designations. Abstract spatial designations like "in," "on," and "in front of," are represented by the same symbols

* The special quality of these "intuitive forms" in the mode of language will be readily apparent when it is contrasted to the quality they acquire in the mythical mode. Such considerations are the topic of the following chapter.
which apply to parts of the body:

Where the more highly developed languages tend to use prepositions for the expression of spatial relations, the languages of primitive peoples use almost exclusively nouns, which are themselves either names for parts of the body or clearly derived from such names. According to Steinthal, the Mandigan languages express our prepositional concepts in "a very material way": 'behind' is expressed by independent substantive meaning 'back' or 'rear' end, 'in front of' by a word meaning 'eye,' while 'on' is designated by 'neck' and 'in' by 'belly,' etc. In other African languages and in the South Sea languages, such words as 'face,' 'back,' 'head' and 'mouth,' 'loin,' and 'hip' perform the same function. And if at first sight this seems a peculiarly 'primitive' mode of designation, we find that it has its exact analogy and counterpart in far more advanced stages of language formation.

Cassirer maintains that regardless of the "advanced" stage of the language, there is an obvious sensuous origin of symbols of spatial designation which are used also in non-spatial senses designating pure relation. Terms like "above all," "besides," "over against" are examples of this. That is to say, language uses such terms in two ways. If we say, "The cloud is above the mountain," this is a purely spatial designation. But if we say, "This above all, to thy own self . . . ," a spatial designation is used to indicate a non-spatial, abstract relationship of priority. The distinctions between these two uses is important since it reveals in the latter the essential role of spatial representation in languages: the provision of a schema to language by which intellectual representations of abstract relations are possible.

The term "schema" is used here in Kant's sense. For Kant,
the schema was a third term through the mediation of which pure concepts of the understanding could be applied to sensory intuitions. For Cassirer, there is a schema in language, and this schema is the intuition of space which results in the representation of spatial designations or symbols by means of which pure abstract relations are accessible to language. That is,

Language possesses such a 'schema'— to which it must refer all intellectual representations before they can be sensuously apprehended and represented— in its terms for spatial contents and relations. It would seem as though logical and ideal relations became accessible to the linguistic consciousness only when projected into space and there analogically 'reproduced.' The relations of 'together,' 'side by side,' 'separate' provide it with a means of representing the most diverse qualitative relations, dependencies, and oppositions.

Time: In Cassirer's discussion of the intuitive form of time in the mode of language there is seen a parallel development to that of spatial intuition as it developed from sensuous to spiritual expression, from feeling to concept, from designation in purely material terms to designation in terms of pure relations. Yet the designation of temporal relations presents language with more complex problems than did the spatial. Spatial elements of "here" and "there" can be simply and immediately intuited simultaneously in a unity, but factors like "now," "earlier," and "later" are characterized as temporal precisely because they cannot be given to consciousness simultaneously. Elements of time exist as such only because consciousness "runs through" them. This "running
through" is a necessary factor of temporal representation and forms a basic part of the characteristic form of time itself. For this reason

...the whole fact of the representation of time is never contained in immediate intuition; differentiation and combination, analytical and synthetic thought, consequently play a larger part than in spatial representation. 22

The concept of succession has then a "far higher level of ideality" than the concept of locality does. No more than in spatial representation did language all at once reach the abstract level of temporal relation. There is a process through which language moves from a starting point of material or sensuous temporal designations to an abstract level. In primitive languages, temporal designation is linked markedly to spatial designations (which are referred directly, as was seen earlier, to the human body). Even in advanced languages, some temporal and spatial terms are used interchangeably: we say that it is "nearer" nine o'clock than ten and that quitting time is almost "here." Similarly, the Sudanese phrase for "I am now in the process of going," translates to read: "I am the belly of going." 23 In such languages where the temporal is bound by the material, the distinctive character of the form of time--an irreversible succession of events--cannot be manifested. In such primitive languages in which consciousness intuits temporal relations through spatial analogies, the only essential temporal difference that is grasped is one between a now and a not-now. But the "not-
now" can mean with equal ease past or future. In other languages, slightly advanced over those just referred to, which do distinguish more sorts of temporal relations than now and not-now, evidence of their root in material designations is that the temporal relations are expressed by modifications not only in verb form but also in noun endings.

In general Cassirer distinguishes three stages in the development of time from a feeling to a concept, and they form counterparts to his previous distinction of the mimetic, analogical, and symbolical stages of symbolic representation:

... the development from the feeling to the concept of time reveals three different stages, which are also of crucial importance for the linguistic reflection of the consciousness of time. At the first stage the consciousness is dominated by the opposition of 'now' and 'not-now', which has undergone no further differentiations; at the second, certain temporal 'forms' -- completed and incompletely, continued and momentary action -- begin to be distinguished so that a definite distinction of temporal modes is developed; the final stage is characterized by the pure concept of time as an abstract concept of order, and the various stages of time stand out in their contrast and inter-determination.

Examples of the first two stages have been given above. The last stage characterizes the more fully developed linguistic consciousness. In this state, which finds its highest expression in the consciousness of scientific cognition, abundant gradations of time are encompassed in a unitary temporal order and are comprehended as such. It is at this point that temporal designation becomes free
from substantial and qualitative attributes and is seen in its abstract relationality. Time for Cassirer is apprehended by being pieced together from "distinct moments," but this is possibly only because a unified representation of the form of time is present a priori to the consciousness. The intellectual representation of time takes the form farthest removed from material sensuous designation of temporality in the linguistic reflection of the measurement of certain quantities of time. Such an activity carries over into the development of the concept of number.

**Number:** In considering the linguistic reflection of the progression from the idea of space to that of time, and from these two to that of number, it can be observed that the sensuous element, reflected in material designations and tangible forms, gives way more and more to designation by intellectual principles. The fully developed concept of number as a designation of pure relations transcends the mode of language as a symbolic form and inhere in the mode of science. However, the numbers of pure mathematics have as an indispensable prerequisite the numerical signs created by language. According to Cassirer, only the formation of number as a verbal sign by language opens the road to an understanding of the purely conceptual nature of the numbers of pure mathematics:

Thus the numerical signs created by language represent the indispensable prerequisite for the 'numbers' of pure mathematics; and yet, between linguistic and purely intellectual symbols there
remains an inevitable tension and an opposition that can never be fully reconciled. 27

This tension always remains in the linguistic reflection of number because of the dual nature (sensuous and spiritual) of language itself. But in the linguistic development of number, the germ of this higher development of pure relation is always present. "Although language of itself cannot fill out the intellectual circle in which the concept of number lies, it can circumscribe it in all its scope and thus mediately prepare the way for a definition of its content and limits." 28

The linguistic development of number follows the pattern noted with regard to space and time: it begins with an interpenetration of number and sensuous intuition of "material objects," taking as a primary point of reference the human body and thence "extending over the whole of the sensuous intuitive world." From his study of number in primitive language, Cassirer maintains that numerical concepts are first mimetic hand concepts or other body concepts before they can become verbal concepts. The counting gesture is an integral and necessary part of numerical designation in primitive language and not a mere accompaniment to an independent mental process of numerical designation. There can be various orders or series of bodily reference, but counting in such language is impossible without this reference and without a special order or series of bodily references. On first glance it is difficult to see a relationship between the numerical
systems of pure mathematics and those of primitive languages. The element by which they are related is the special order of referents, although totally sensuous, in which numerical elements are designated. In such primitive counting, one part of the body does not follow another arbitrarily; they follow in a fixed order. This provides a schema of sorts, although conventional and passive, by which objects are designated not according to what they are, but according to an externally imposed order:

In apprehending material objects not only according to what they individually and immediately are, but according to the manner in which are are ordered, the spirit begins to advance from the concretion of objects to the concretion of acts: and through these acts, the acts of combination and differentiation which it performs, it will ultimately arrive at the new 'intellectual' principle of number. 29

Even in primitive linguistic expression, the idea of number is bound up with the other basic forms of intuition: the intuition of space and time. Objects in space are designated here numerically by an order of progression in time. Thus Cassirer maintains that in primitive language there is a reflection of a truth of epistemological analysis: that "the two forms (space and time) must work together in order to produce the essential content of the concept of number:"

The concrete idea of number, as expressed in language, makes use of both achievements (spatial and temporal intuition), that of the spatial and that of the temporal consciousness, and through them develops two different factors of number. Through the differentiation of spatial objects, language arrives at its concept of collective multiplicity-- through the different-
iation of temporal acts, it arrives at its expression of particularity and separation. 30

There seems to be a definite ambiguity in Cassirer's treatment of language as a symbolic form. At one point he denotes the mimetic, analogical, and symbolical stages through which languages passes as it reaches expression in the more fully developed linguistic consciousness. At another, with respect to number, he holds that language cannot finally reach the stage of pure relation but can only point the way. There seems to be a point at which language as a symbolic form stops and the symbolic form science takes over. It seems that the point of this transition is the point of difficulty, and it is one that inheres in the dual aspect of language. Certainly if any of the "symbolic forms" display an "original formative power," language does. But it is also a "basic implement" by which form is given to reality in all the various modes. An attempt to resolve this ambiguity would, I believe, have to be made along these lines: We must keep in mind Cassirer's view of language as a tension between sensuous and spiritual expression. Language never copies a ready-made, self-existent reality, nor does it merely reproduce externally certain supposedly internal subjective relations. We must not expect language to go beyond its functional nature--to transcend this tension. Whether science does, as Urban questions, is another question. Language is a basic kind of symbolic formation which reflects the fundamental function of human cognition: the
"natural symbolism" of the process of representation. In viewing language as a symbolic form we must maintain emphatically a formal point of view. Language moves freely through the various modes, but this movement must not obscure the basic form of language which is essentially the form of the function of representation itself.

In one of his last works, The Myth of the State, Cassirer wrote:

In all human activities and in all forms of human culture we find a 'unity in the manifold.' Art gives us a unity of intuition; science gives us a unity of thought; religion and myth give us a unity of feeling. Art opens to us the universe of 'living forms'; science shows us a universe of laws and principles; religion and myth begin with the awareness of the universality and the fundamental identity of life.

The question arises: "What does language give us?" Certainly the linguistic mode is not as distinct from myth and science as these two are from each other, but language is said to be a symbolic form. One cannot help wondering why language was left out of this list. My guess would be not that language was no longer held to be a symbolic form, but that as a symbolic form--a mode of symbolic formation--the specific form of language is extremely general, that it corresponds, as noted above, to the form of the function of representation, and that it is active in all modes and takes on their special colorations.
Notes to Chapter II


3. PSE, v.1., p. 71 (foreword).

4. Ibid.


6. Ibid., p. 114.

7. Ibid., p. 113-114.

8. Ibid., pp. 186-189.

9. Ibid., p. 178.

10. Ibid., p. 162.

11. See PSE, v.1., p. 182 ff., for Cassirer’s support of this distinction by reference to various works of empirical research into primitive and sophisticated sign language.

12. PSE, v.1., p. 190. See also references on pages 191-6.

13. Ibid., p. 191.


15. See PSE, v.1., p. 195 ff., for extensive reference to this phenomenon of reduplication in the languages of North American Indians, the Aso, and Melanesian languages.


17. Ibid., p. 426.

18. Ibid., p. 198.

19. Ibid., p. 220.

20. Ibid., p. 207.


22. Ibid., p. 215.

23. Ibid., p. 217 ff. (This is another example of Cassirer’s extensive research into linguistics and of his extremely careful documentation.)

24. Ibid., pages 217, 219, and 221.

25. Ibid., p. 219.

26. Ibid., p. 218.

27. Ibid., p. 220.

28. Ibid., p. 229.

29. Ibid., p. 232.

30. Ibid., pp. 233-235.

CHAPTER 111

Myth

The world of myth is a dramatic world—a world of actions, of forces, of conflicting powers. In every phenomenon of nature it (the mythical consciousness) sees the collision of these powers. Mythical perception is always impregnated with these emotional qualities. Whatever is seen or felt is surrounded by a special atmosphere—an atmosphere of joy or grief, of anguish, of excitement, of exultation or depression. All objects are benignant or malignant, friendly or inimical, familiar or uncanny, alluring and fascinating or repellent and threatening.

The real substratum of myth is not a substratum of thought but one of feeling. Its view of life is a synthetic, not an analytical one. There is no specific difference between the various realms of life. To mythical and religious feeling nature becomes one great society, the society of life. Man is not endowed with outstanding rank in this society.

Men and animals, animals and plants are all on the same level.

Thus Cassirer described the world view of the mythical consciousness in *An Essay on Man.* This description, while consistent with his overall view of myth, is indicative of the tone and limitations of this summary work which Cassirer felt was just this and asked that his readers refer to the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* for his systematic presentation.

This chapter will attempt to estimate the underlying rationale of the systematic account, in which Cassirer displays myth's independent mode of configuration, subject in its development to its own ordering factors.
We shall examine Cassirer's critique of mythology, which asks how we are to understand myth and from what standpoint we can best discover the rationale of the mythical consciousness. It is also essential to make quite unmistakable the distinctive features of the mythical mode of symbolic formation, by contrast with the scientific mode. Finally, we shall illustrate Cassirer's interpretation in its application to the intuitive forms of space, time, and number in the mythical consciousness.

The Critique of Mythology

The late nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed a strongly accelerated activity in the collection of empirical data regarding mythology and primitive culture. Cassirer points out that when Schelling wrote his Philosophie der Mythologie, he depended primarily on Creuzer's Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker (1820-23), which was chiefly concerned with the history and theory of mythological gods. In the early nineteenth century, all mythology was essentially bound up with this restricted view of the field. In the time under consideration, however, the view has become broader. There has been an abundance of empirical studies by psychologists, ethnologists, anthropologists, sociologists, and philosophers. Argument about the accuracy of empirical material has largely died down to a scholarly buzz, but the various theories of myth still do clamorous battle. Cassirer felt that it was at this point of controversy that a philosophical theory of myth had to begin.

Conflicting theories bring different presuppositions to and ask different questions of the empirical data. As
was his usual procedure, Cassirer shaped his own view on a survey of the seriously defended theories about myth. According to Cassirer, there have been several major attempts to understand myth. The purely empirical investigators felt that certain basic trends in mythology could be revealed by studying the major objects of myth. The basic premise of such investigations was that all the seemingly arbitrary fantasies of myth could be referred to some natural phenomenon or event and that this was the only way to channeling research on these fantasies into strictly objective channels. From such investigations came storm and tempest theories of myth, astral theories, and more particularly, sun, moon, and planet theories of myth. As each of these strove to assert itself as the sole means of explaining myth, it became increasingly evident that a unified objective explanation of myth would not be forthcoming from such theories which were based on association between the mythical consciousness and certain spheres of empirical objects.

There were also in this period, late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, interpreters of myth who, while embracing the new science of empirical anthropology, brought certain presuppositions about man to their studies and attempted to provide a rationale to myth in their terms. Sir Edward Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (late nineteenth) and Sir James Frazer's *The
Golden Bough (early twentieth century) both wrote in a tradition which had deep philosophical and religious roots in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—a tradition which made them hesitate to assert any significant difference between primitive and civilized mentality. They held that the primary expression of primitive mentality—myth—was not essentially different from the expressions of civilized man. Frazer insisted that myth could not be understood as long as it was regarded as an isolated province of human thought, apart from scientific, aesthetic, or religious thought. Tylor denied any qualitative difference between the crudest form of animism and the most sophisticated philosophical or theological systems, any such difference being only a matter of degree. There were also dissenters to this tradition. Lucien Lévy-Bruhl in Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures held that it is impossible to find a common ground between the mythological consciousness and that of civilized man. For Lévy-Bruhl the primitive mind was prelogical or mystic. He held that the world of myth was impermeable and unaccessible to civilized forms of thought and experience. These positions form the extremes, both of which can be shown, according to Cassirer, to be unsatisfactory. The theories of Frazer and Tylor overintellectualize myth:

It is obvious that in this description mythical thought has lost one of its principal characteristics. It is thoroughly intellectualized. If we accept its premises, we must accept all its
conclusion; for these conclusions follow in a completely natural and, indeed, inevitable way from the original data. By virtue of this conception myth becomes, as it were, a chain of syllogisms which follow all the well-known, syllogistic rules. What is entirely lost out of sight in these theories is the 'irrational' element in myth—the emotional background in which it originates and with which it stands or falls. 4

But Levy-Bruhl's theory fails in an opposite direction:

If this theory were right, any analysis of mythical thought would become impossible. For what is such an analysis but an attempt to understand myth—that is to say, to reduce it to some other known psychological facts or logical principles? If these facts or principles are missing; if there is no point of contact between our own mind and the pre-logical or mystic mind, then we have to give up all hopes of finding an approach to the mythical world. This world would forever remain to us a sealed book. 5

Cassirer holds a middle ground between these extremes. Mythical thinking may seem strange and paradoxical, but it does have a logical structure. Yet, "the primitive man is no discursive thinker or dialectician." 6 Myth represents a first attempt to come to terms with reality:

The results of these first attempts to analyze and systematize the world of sense-experience are far different from ours. But the processes themselves are very similar; they express the same desire of human nature to come to terms with reality... and to overcome the chaotic state in which things and thoughts have not yet assumed a definite shape and structure. 7

Other theories have explained the origin and development of myth in terms of the nature of language. These theories hold that myth originated in the general and therefore ambiguous terms contained in language. This was the position of F. Max Müller, a comparative mythologist
of the late nineteenth century. It was accepted by Herbert Spencer, who endorsed the view, according to Cassirer, that since human speech is metaphorical in its very essence, the primitive mentality takes the metaphor for the real, and thus the world of myth is built up on a basis of linguistic errors. Cassirer cannot agree:

The grave objections to which such a theory is liable are obvious. Myth is one of the oldest and greatest powers in human civilization. It is closely connected with all other human activities— it is inseparable from language, poetry, art, and from early historical thought. Even science had to pass through a mythical age before it could reach its logical age: alchemy preceded chemistry, astrology preceded astronomy. If Max Müller's and Herbert Spencer's theories were right we should have to conclude that, after all, the history of human civilization was due to a simple misunderstanding, to a misinterpretation of words and terms. It is not a very satisfactory and plausible hypothesis to think of human culture as the product of a mere illusion— as a juggling with words and a childish play with names.

The theories of myth so far considered have a common feature: they all presuppose that myth is primarily a mass of ideas, that the primitive mythical consciousness expresses purely theoretical beliefs and judgements about objects and events. This, according to Cassirer, is an error. More often than not, mythical expressions about "objects" conflict with sense experience, yet men cling desperately to the mythical view. In this Cassirer sees the seed of an answer to the problem. The answer is that myth is not an abstract, cognitive, analytical approach to reality, but an emotional formation of it.

Aside from these "scientific" theories of myth which brought to the study full blown concepts of man and
cognition and read them into mythology, there have been philosophical theories which, though burdened with philosophical or metaphysical presuppositions, attempted to get inside myth, and see it as an independent configuration of man's consciousness. Theories which try to approach the problem in this way are usually given the philosophical label of "idealism". Cassirer feels that one of these, that of F. W. Schelling, was among the first to ask the right questions about myth. This philosophy of absolute idealism depended on the theory of conception created by Kant's critical philosophy. Schelling, says Cassirer, sees mythical figures as autonomous configurations of the human spirit which can only be understood from within by knowing the way in which they take on meaning and form. For Schelling, true philosophical speculation aims not at analytically dismembering the life of the spirit, but at synthetically understanding it. This is achieved partly by striving back toward the ultimate positive basis of the spirit and of life itself:

And myth must be taken as such a positive basis. The philosophical understanding of myth begins with the insight that it does not move in a purely invented or made-up world but has its own mode of necessity and therefore, in accordance with the idealist concept of the object, its own mode of reality. 10

In Schelling's system of absolute idealism, the movement and development of mythical figures in human consciousness is paralleled by a corresponding development in the absolute, and the development in human consciousness is
not a series of arbitrary fictions. Mythology for Schelling had no objective existence apart from consciousness, but,

even though the mythological process consists solely in determinations of consciousness—that is, in ideas—this process, this succession of representations cannot have been merely represented as such but must really have taken place, must really have occurred in consciousness.

Mythology was here seen to be something which was discovered and not invented:

No one who understands what its mythology means to a people, what inner power it possesses over that people and what reality is manifested therein, will say that mythology, any more than language was invented by individuals... mythology is not merely a successive series of mythological representations: the successive polytheism which is its empirical content can be explained only if we assume that the human consciousness actually lingered successively on every moment of it. 'The gods which followed upon one another really seized successively upon the human consciousness. Mythology as a history of gods could only be produced in life; it had to be experienced and lived.'

Life for Schelling was neither merely subjective nor merely objective, but was on the borderline between the two. By reference to the corresponding development in the absolute, the movements of human consciousness were capable of some truth. Thus myth in its development was held to be a theogonic process. From an original undifferentiated feeling of the unity of all nature, through the polytheistic stage, and on to the monotheistic stage, mythological thought reflects the process by which God himself becomes, by creating himself in stages as a true God. Cassirer quotes Schelling
It is not with things that man has to do in the mythological process, it is powers arising within consciousness itself that move him. The theogonic process by which mythology arises is a subjective one insofar as it takes place in consciousness and manifests itself by the production of representations: but the causes and therefore the objects of these representations are the truly and essentially theogonic powers, those powers by virtue of which consciousness originally postulates God. 12

Thus for Schelling, Cassirer says, that "Myth is the odyssey of the pure consciousness of God, whose unfolding is determined and mediated in equal measure by our consciousness of nature and the world by our consciousness of I." 13

Cassirer of course rejects the metaphysical assertions of Schelling's absolute idealism. And he not alone in this. Others have rejected it even more radically, although not on Cassirer's terms. After the period of speculative German Idealism, after Kant had limited transcendental (not transcendent) philosophy to dealing with consciousness under the conditions in which experience was possible, inquiry into mythology emphasized the study of the "natural" causes of the genesis of myth instead of its ultimate and absolute foundations: the methodology of metaphysics was replaced by the methodology of ethnic psychology. In this perspective

It was not taken for granted that the mythical world was merely an aggregate of 'representations'; and it was held that these representations could be explained by the general rules governing all production of representations, namely the elementary laws of association and reproduction. Here myth appeared in an entirely different sense, as a 'natural form' of the
human spirit which could be understood simply by the methods of empirical natural science and empirical psychology. 14

Cassirer has outlined two different approaches to mythology: the one rationalistic and idealistic; the other, empirical and realistic. The well-worn pedagogical device of schematizing Kant as midway between traditional rationalism and traditional empiricism is brought to mind as Cassirer asks:

And yet, can we not conceive of a third approach to the mythological 'form' which neither seeks to explain the mythical world through the essence of the absolute nor merely reduces it to a play of empirical-psychological forces? If this approach agrees with both Schelling and the psychologists in seeking the subjectum agens of mythology solely in the human consciousness, does this compel us to accept either the empirical-psychological or the metaphysical concept of consciousness? 15

The answer is negative. Cassirer holds that the critical analysis of the philosophy of symbolic forms stands between metaphysical deduction and psychological induction, both of which, he says, presuppose the unity of the human spirit as a pre-existing and self-evident datum. The former grounds it in a relation to the absolute; the latter, in certain supposedly universal psychological functions of association and reproduction of ideas. For Cassirer such a unity cannot be presupposed. A critical view of mythology must start from the function itself, seen from a formal and not a material point of view, as it is expressed in the concrete manifestations of mythology and religion. If in the study of the function there is found a relatively constant inner form which is
observable in the various modal contexts, we should not infer the substantial unity of the human spirit from this, but should take the constancy of inner form to mean that if there is to be a unity at all, it is expressed by this constancy:

In a critical approach we cannot conclude the unity of the function from a pre-existing or presupposed unity of the metaphysical or psychological substrate; we must start from the function as such. If, despite differences in particular factors, we find in the function a relatively constant inner form, we shall not from this form go back to infer the substantial unity of the human spirit; on the contrary, the constance of the inner form seems to constitute this unity. Unity, in other words, appears not as the foundation but as another expression of this same determination of form, which it must be possible to apprehend as purely immanent, in its immanent significance, without inquiring into its foundations, whether transcendent or empirical. 16

Thus seeking the form of the mythical consciousness means inquiry into the spiritual principle by which all the particular, empirically diverse manifestations appear to be governed.

(2) **The Nature of the Mythical Consciousness as Contrasted with the Scientific**

M. F. Ashley Montague makes the point that "Cassirer's approach to mythology is that of the neo-Kantian phenomenologist: he is not interested in mythology as such, but in the processes of consciousness which lead to the creation of myths." 17 This is borne out by Cassirer as he indicates in the foreword to the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* that his primary interest was not in mythical thought but in the structure of logical and
scientific consciousness as he expressed it in his work *Substance and Function*. Cassirer tells us that he found a limitation in the structure of the scientific consciousness when he attempted to apply his findings in this field to the problems of the cultural sciences:

... it gradually became clear to me that general epistemology, with its traditional form and limitations, does not provide an adequate methodological basis for the cultural sciences. It seemed to me that before this inadequacy could be made good, the whole program of epistemology would have to be broadened. Instead, of investigating only the general premises of scientific cognition of the world, it would also have to differentiate the various fundamental forms of man's 'understanding' of the world and apprehend each one of them as sharply as possible in its specific direction and characteristic spiritual form. Only when such a 'morphology' of the human spirit was established, at least in general outline, could we hope to arrive at a clearer and more reliable methodological approach to the individual cultural sciences.

One of the most ample fields in which such a morphology could be developed was seen to be that of myth, and in view of Cassirer's broadened outlook away from science alone and into other areas of cultural endeavor, it seems quite appropriate that a study of the mythical consciousness be made in terms of a contrast with the scientific consciousness.

Regardless of the model system within which an 'object is encountered, the object is not given to consciousness in a naked "as-suchness." The relationship of representation-function to object presupposes an independent spontaneous act of consciousness. The object does not exist as object prior to and apart from the syn-
thetic unity of the mode in which it is known. Cassirer says that any object, whether it be of the mythical, aesthetic, or scientific mode, is "no fixed form that imprints itself on consciousness but is the product of a formative operation effected by the basic instrumentality of consciousness, by intuition and pure thought." 19

This is the critical idealism of Kant—the "Copernican revolution" which the philosophy of symbolic forms strives to broaden to account for the various forms of cultural endeavor. In doing so it starts from the assumption that categories similar in function and form to those of pure scientific cognition must be at work wherever a characteristic and typical world view, such as those of art, myth, religion, and science, takes form out of the chaos of impressions.

It is in the development of science that this process of symbolic formation reaches its highest degree of exactitude and clarity. Science has for its basic material the content of sensory impressions; "The content of physics," says Cassirer, "... is constituted ... by the phenomena in the form in which they are immediately accessible to us. Colors and tones, smell and taste sensations, sensuous muscle feelings and perceptions of pressure and contact are the only material out of which the world of the physicist is constructed." 20 This is the "substance" with which science deals, but this reception of sensory impressions is not science; it becomes so only in terms of the function of human mentality into which it is in-
tegrated and by which it is given relation and object-

This is done by the function of representation operating in a special (scientific) way:

The transition from the world of immediate sensory impression to the mediated world if intuitive, ... depends on the fact that in the fleeting series of indifferent impressions the constant relations in which they recur must gradually assume an independent character by which they are differentiated from the perceptual flux of sensory contents.

In the encounter with an empirical object or occurrence, naive uncritical thinking speaks candidly of things and attributes, but the critical approach in the scientific mode follows this encounter back to its source and reduces it to the certainty of these "constant relations," particularly relations of measure and number. Thus in the mode of science, objectivity is reached by a necessary act of evaluation which accompanies every apprehension of empirical reality: "The particular sense impression is not simply taken for what it is and immediately gives; instead we ask: will it be confirmed by experience as a whole?" "Objectivity" so evaluated means not an "out-thereness," not the apprehension of the thing-in-itself as it is-in-itself, but it implies a function of the human spirit:

To know a content means to make it an object by raising it out of the mere status of given-ness and granting it a certain logical constancy and necessity. Thus we do not know 'objects' as if they were already independently determined and given as objects,-- but we know objectively, by producing certain limitations and by fixating certain permanent elements and connections within
For Cassirer, too, objectively is "set as a task." This position, set forth at large in Substance and Function is restated in the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms:

"From the standpoint of the theoretical world view and its ideal of knowledge, 'objective' no longer means everything that sensation sets before us in its simple existence and facticity, but only what possesses a guarantee of constancy, of enduring and thoroughgoing determinancy." 24

In the mythical consciousness scientific objectivity becomes mythical intensity. The contents encountered by the mythical consciousness are held to be "objective" and "real," but these contents are markedly taken into consciousness in a homogeneous and undifferentiated state. Scientific knowledge creates nuances of significance, value, and effectiveness according to which different spheres of objects and events are distinguished in terms of reality and appearance, truth and error. Such nuances are lacking in the world of myth. Myth lives entirely in the immediate presence of its objects. Objects are given different degrees of importance according to the emotional intensity of the encounter with them; yet each particular encounter is unique:

Instead of the dialectical movement of thought, in which every given particular is linked with other particulars in a series and thus ultimately subordinated to a general law and process, we have here (in myth) a mere subjection to the impression itself and its momentary 'presence.'
Consciousness is bound by its mere facticity; it possesses neither the impulsion nor the means to correct or criticize what is given here and now, to limit its objectivity by measuring it against something not given, something past or future. And if this mediate criterion is absent, all 'truth' and reality dissolve into the mere presence of the content. All phenomena are situated on a single plane.

In any one experience which is more or less delimited by duration of intensity, there are no degrees of reality for the mythical consciousness. Thus the mythical picture of reality has no significant dimension of depth; it has no differentiation of foreground and background which is characteristic of the scientific view of reality; it has no distinction between the ground of experience and that which is founded on it.

And this is the primary aspect of myth which distinguishes it from science: it lacks any fixed dividing line between "representation" and perception, between image and thing; it cannot, as can science, see its symbols as symbols.

The recognition of this aspect of myth is extremely important for Cassirer's treatment of the subject. By it he attempts to move inside the mythical consciousness and examine it from that standpoint rather than analyze it from outside, so to speak. In so doing, he avoids Frazer's and Tylor's mistake of reading the mythical consciousness solely in terms of their fully developed scientific epistemology. Cassirer's approach may not be above criticism but it undeniably possesses the merit of accounting for what is special and distinctive about the
mythical mentality without saying that it is merely an underdeveloped scientific mentality.

The scientific mentality is marked by its recognition of the difference or separation between the "real" and the "ideal." That is, it recognizes the ideal functions within its operation to be what they are and does not confuse them with or claim them to be the absolute whole of reality. The scientific consciousness recognizes the "given" in experience and its distinction from the contributions of the human spirit. If, however, myth itself is examined in terms of what it "sees," in terms of "what it known itself to be," such a distinction between a world of immediate reality and one of mediate signification is seen to be absolutely foreign to it. (Where science sees real identity.) For myth, the image does not represent the thing; it is the thing— it has the same actuality and replaces the thing's immediate presence. This is to say that "... mythical thinking lacks the category of the ideal, and in order to apprehend pure signification it must transpose it into a material substance or being." 26

This lack of knowing pure signification as such is present on all levels of mythical thought. For the mythical consciousness, to be real means "to be effective." Here dreams have the same reality, the same efficacly as conscious existence. 27 Here the distinction between life and death is not clear cut. There is
no specific moment when life passes into death, or, for that matter, death into life; both are considered as parts of the same fundamental being. Seen in this light, the universal belief and primitive cults of the dead that the deceased require food and clothing to sustain their new existence becomes understandable.

Here "to be real" equals "to be effective," and the dead are certainly connected effectively to the living through emotional bonds of love, fear, respect, etc. If the dead still exert power on the living, then to the mythical mind, they are as "real" as are the living. This is because the undifferentiated, unreflecting mythical consciousness draws distinctions only on the basis of the immediate content of experience, which in this case reflects the emotional efficacy of the person, whether alive or dead. 28

Another clear indication that the mythical mentality lacks the category of the ideal is found in ritual as it is known in this mode. Rites in the true mythical consciousness are not allegorical. They do not represent beliefs or ideas. They are held to be absolutely real. To the mythical mind the "impersonator" of the god is not representing him— he is the god. The rituals of certain seasons and those which accompany certain forces of nature—rain, sunlight— are not symbolic accompaniments. They are indispensable components of these aspects of nature; without them, the processes of nature would not go on. 29

Certainly, there are rituals of a religious nature wherein
the symbolic function of the ritual is cognized, but this occurs on a specifically higher and specifically religious level. The transition from myth to religion is not historically a sharp change. It comes about by degrees. Even at the higher intellectual levels of religion, there are evidences of the mythical substratum and the necessary inclusion of mythical terminology and hence mythical thought. The detailed dialectical process by which myth transcends itself to reach this level will be presently discussed in connection with religion.

The concept of causality is as fruitful in distinguishing mythical thought from scientific as is the concept of the object. Myth by no means lacks a concept of cause. It is as fundamental to myth as it is to science. The various mythical cosmogonies and theogonies which explain the foundation and historical process of the world by reference to the originating force of some astral body, animal, or plant stand in witness to this. Cassirer maintains that scientific consciousness gains its concepts and judgements of causality in the way described by Kant, according to whom the principle of causality is an a priori synthetic principle which enables man to "spell out phenomena and so to read them as experience."

This spelling out involves a very definite analysis and separation of the flow of sensory contents. This analysis is a necessary component of the ideal function in which contents are synthetically combined under categories. As regards causality,
... contents which are contiguous for immediate sensory impression are progressively dissected and assigned to different complexes of conditions. In mere perception a specific state \( A \) in moment \( A_1 \) is followed by another state \( B \) in moment \( A_2 \). But regardless of how often it is repeated, this succession would not lead to the idea that \( A \) is the 'cause' of \( B \)—the post hoc would never become a propter hoc—unless a mediating concept intervened.

The analysis of the initially given "rhapsody of perceptions" into different spheres of conditions, different strata of relations, is necessary before the concept of causality can stamp the occurrence as a causal happening with a specific cause and a specific effect. Cassirer holds that the fundamental flaw of Hume's critique of causality is that he failed to realize the importance of the analytic function of consciousness. Holding that two contents, appearing in spatio-temporal contiguity often enough, by a mechanism of association or habit, were claimed to be causally connected, Hume failed to see ideal functions both of analysis and of synthesis. Causality is not encountered simply in the combination of sensory impressions. It depends first on the analysis of the "rhapsody of perceptions," then on their combination through a mediating concept.

A fundamental characteristic of the mythical concept of causality is that it, too, makes this mistake of not seeing the analytic function. The isolating abstraction of scientific thought by which it singles out a specific factor in a complex of contents as a "cause" or a condition of something else equally specific is foreign to mythical
thinking. Science is oriented toward establishing one unequivocal relationship between specific causes and effects. In the world of myth, merely by virtue of spatio-temporal contiguity, anything can "cause" anything else, simply because nearly anything can stand in such contiguity with anything else. Every simultaneity, every co-existence, every contact become causal relationships. Thus Cassirer comes to the "astonishing conclusion that Hume, in attempting to analyze the causal judgment of science, rather revealed a source of all mythical explanations of the world." 32 In mythical thought the principles of post hoc, ergo propter hoc and juxta hoc, ergo propter hoc characterize the concept of causality.

But while particular mythical causal explanations such as The cosmos is fished out of the depths of the sea or molded from a tortoise; the earth is shaped from the body of a great or from a lotus blossom floating on the water; the sun is made from a stone, men from rocks or trees; 33 may appear chaotic andlawless, myth actually carries the concept of cause to the extreme. Myth has no room at all for accidents. For every event, the mythical consciousness claims a cause, but not a cause in the scientific sense. At this point the difference between the mythical and the scientific concepts of causality becomes most apparent. Causal explanation in myth contains both something more and something less than in science.

Science aims at apprehending the particular event as a special instance of a general law. To understand an event
in science means to subordinate it to "that universal complex of conditions we call 'nature'." The accidental in science is not that which is immune from general or universal lawfulness but that which rests on a modification of this lawfulness such as is not fully deducible from it. Mythical causality, however, has no idea of the accidental because the form of lawfulness is different here. The immediacy of the mythical world view, which recognizes no distinction between image and reality, which sees all phenomena in a dramatic personal context, is reflected in its concept of causality—or better, in its feeling of causality. It is a causality shot through with teleology. Causality includes as a necessary and inevitable component, purpose. Every event has cause and purpose here. And the purpose imputed to the event has an immediate, personal, emotional relationship to the person involved in it. In the mythical mode there is only one plane of reality, and "natural" events are never merely events in "nature." They are expressions of purpose of friendly or inimical forces. What more the mythical causal explanation has (than the scientific) is this sort of purpose. What less it has is the concept of abstract universal lawfulness of physical, that is, impersonal, nature.

Thus the mythical concept of causality reflects and expresses what was seen in the concept of the object in the mode of myth and what is the most definitive characteristic of it: the undifferentiated, unreflective, and dramatic apprehension of reality. For myth there is only one
plane of being. Not only are the events or objects in causal relation assigned to it, but also the "force" between them is. The universality of the "mana-concept" in primitive culture is witness to this. Mana has power expressed in terms of emotional efficacity; hence it has reality, that is, substantial existence in the only plane of reality that myth knows. This definitive characteristic is expressed further in the other "categories" of the mythical mode. As regards Quantity, the mythical consciousness does not see the whole as consisting of or resulting from its parts. It sees rather a true indifference between them:

The whole does not 'have' parts and does not break down into them; the part is immediately the whole and functions as such. This relationship, this principle of the pars pro toto has also been designated as a basic principle of primitive logic. However, the part does not merely represent the whole, but 'really' specifies it; the relationship is not symbolic and intellectual, but real and material. The part, in mythical terms, is the same thing as the whole, because it is a real vehicle of efficacy—because everything which it incurs or does is incurred or done by the whole at the same time. The consciousness of the part as such, as a 'mere' part, does not belong to the immediate, naive intuition of reality but is achieved only by that analytical and synthetic function of mediating thought which goes back from objects as concrete material units to their constitutive conditions.34

And as regards quality in the mythical mode, we can observe the same kind of coincidence and merging of the members of the relation. For mythical thought, the attribute is not a defining aspect of the thing; it contains within it the whole of the thing seen from a different angle. This
creates a unity, but a unity of mere equivalence:

For myth, which sees reality on a single plane, one and the same substance does not 'have' different attributes; on the contrary each specification as such is substance, i.e., it can be apprehended only in immediate concretion, in direct hypostatization. 35

It is perhaps misleading to speak of myth in terms of cognition, as if myth were primarily oriented around thought and reflection, for this is certainly not the case. "Nowhere in myth do we find a passive contemplation of things; here all contemplation starts from an attitude, an act of feeling and will." 36 Cassirer believed that analysis of mythical intuition as it is colored by powerful emotions of love, hate, joy, grief and hope could enter more fundamentally into the world of myth than any analysis of mythical thought could. He undertook this analysis of the forms of intuition in the mythical mode.

(3) Space, Time, and Number in The Mythical Consciousness

While myth views reality on only one plane and tends to comprehend situations in undifferentiated wholes, it is not merely passive in its encounter with reality. Myth, being mode of symbolic formation, performs the function of giving special meanings in its configurations. To do this myth must interrupt the flow of sensory impressions by the application of some formative distinctions. Myth does not follow in the scientific way of encompassing such sensory logically and articulating the experience as a complex of specific causes and effects. The mythical consciousness
gives its formation to reality by means of a distinction into general realms of sacred and profane. The character of the sacred is applied to any content of existence if it falls under the mythical perspective; that is, if it captures mythical enthusiasm and interest from one angle or another. Cassirer calls this distinction the "basic opposition" according to which the mythical "rationale" operates. The mythical consciousness introduces

... certain differentiations into indistinct, indifferent reality, by dividing it into different spheres of meaning. It too, gives form and meaning by interrupting the indifferent uniformity of the contents of consciousness--by introducing certain distinctions of 'value' into this indifference. All reality and all events are projected into the fundamental opposition of the sacred and the profane, and in this projection they assume a new meaning, one which they do not simply have from the very beginning but which they acquire in this form of contemplation, one might say in this mythical 'illumination.'

Space: This form of intuition reflects the general characteristics of myth as outlined so far and, above all, this basic composition. As the members of a relation have a tendency toward concrescence in myth, so position cannot be ultimately separated from the nature or essence of the thing. Objects at certain points in space and the spatial positions themselves possess kinds of tonality of their own which reflect the sacred-profane opposition. The intuition of space is for myth, as for language and science, fundamental in the construction or formation of reality. In myth qualitative and spatial attributes cannot be separated and, indeed, are mutually definitive as well as de-
finitive of the essence of the thing. Many mythically-minded cultures have carried this spatio-qualitative designation of reality to great lengths. An example of this is the mythical-sociological world view of the Zunis, for whom a sevenfold form of totemic organization runs through the whole world and is "particularly reflected in the conception of space. Space as a whole is divided into seven zones, north and south, east and west, the upper and the lower world, and finally the center of the world; and every reality occupies its univocal position, its definitely prescribed place, within this general classification." Here the physical substances in nature as well as natural processes are differentiated according to this spatial designation. "To the north belongs the air, to the south fire, to the east earth, (etc.)\) Furthermore, the various human classes, institutions, and occupations "enter into the same basic schema."\(^{38}\)

Such elaboration is a late achievement of mythical thinking. Cassirer holds that in order to understand the special quality of the intuition of space in the mythical mode, we must go behind the general distinction between sacred and profane to the sensory substrate on which it is based. The one mythical value accent is expressed in terms of this opposition, but from a detailed study of comparative mythology and religion, Cassirer concludes that in terms of space, this opposition is oriented around the apprehension of the difference between darkness and light. The creation legends of nearly all peoples and religions and every
separation of zones of space ordered according to sacred
and profane are bound up with this darkness-light con-
trast. 39 Generally speaking, for myth

East, west, north, and south are not essentially
similar zones which serve for orientation within
the world of empirical perception; each of them
has a specific reality and significance of its
own, an inherent mythical life. . . . . . The
east as the origin of light is also the source
of life— the west as the place of the setting
sun is filled with all the terrors of death.
Wherever we find the idea of a realm of the dead,
spatially separated and distinguished from the
realm of the living, it is situated in the west
of the world. 40

Almost every mythology has Gods of special spatial zones:
Gods of the north, south, east and west:

In the linguistic mode the intuition of space develops
from a pole of marked by sensual expression to one of in-
tellectual dominance. Spatial designation in this mode
moved from expression in terms of purely sensual refer-
cence to expression in terms of pure relation. For lang-
usage the road led to more adequate conceptualization and
finally ended where science began. The orientation in the
linguistic mode was primarily related to cognition. The
orientation is different for myth; it is oriented not
primarily around cognition but around emotion and feeling,
and this is reflected in the spatial designations of myth.
Cassirer says that "wherever mythical thinking and mythical
feeling endow a content with particular value, wherever
they distinguish it from others and lend it a special sign-
ificance, this qualitative distinction tends to be repres-
ented in the image of spatial separation." 41 And con-
versely, the actual areas spatially designated are defined by qualitative attributes, basically distinguished by the sacred-profane distinction, but also carrying a whole range of emotional nuances. Mythical spatial intuition is marked by its development of an orientation of emotion or feeling in its formation of reality.

Time: For the mythical consciousness time is not a pure relation with factors of present, past, and future seen by consciousness to be continually shifting. The absolute time of Newton, the time of relativity physics, and the historian's time based on a fixed chronology are all foreign to myth. In myth, just as the members of relations of quality and quantity tended to grow into one another and merge, and as spatial and qualitative designations went hand in hand, so do the members of the temporal relation fail to remain distinct. The development of mythical time parallels that of linguistic time. Here too the expression of temporal relations develops only through the expression of spatial designations. And all the constitutive elements of the mythical intuition of space—the apprehension of the light-dark contrast, the expression of the sacred-profane contrast through it, and thus the sacral ordering of spatial divisions into holy and unholy—these are all reflected in the mythical concept of time:

The division of space into directions and zones runs parallel to the division of time into phases; both represent merely different factors in that gradual illumination of the spirit which starts from the intuition of the fundamental physical phenomenon of light. And by virtue of this re-
relationship a particular mythical-religious 'character', a special accent of 'holiness,' is given to time as a whole and to every phase of time in particular. 42

As special spatial zones, because of the emotional efficacy of their qualitative attributes, are raised by the mythical mind to the level of gods, so too are special periods of time:

Even highly developed religions have preserved their basic intuition and their belief. In the Persian religion the cult of time and the segments of time, of the centuries, the years, the four seasons, the twelve months, and particular days and hours, developed from the general worship of light. 43

The emotionally intense, basically non-conceptual aspect of mythical spatial intuition is carried over into time; temporal intervals and dividing lines possess an inherent quality, essence and efficacy of their own.

Number: While number for science has no other being or nature than that which it finds in its relation to a purely ideal series and is no more than an expression of pure conceptual relation, it takes on a very different character in other modes. In the linguistic mode, for example, number in the earlier phases of its development did not have that abstract universality which characterizes it in the mode of science. Number here was grounded in a concrete individual intuition from which it could not be detached. The savage could use numbers only in connection with a definite series of concrete sensory intuitions, usually of his own body. But the series was not arbitrary, and in the orderliness of the series of sensory coordinates
of counting, Cassirer saw the germ of the scientific development of number as a system of pure relation.

The mythical concept of number shows itself to be bearer the linguistic than the scientific, but it maintains its own characteristic difference and identity. Here again the basic motifs of emotional, personal relation to reality, the single plane of reality, and the rule of the concrescence of the members of a relation color and designate mythical number. For myth, number is never a mere ordinal designating position within a comprehensive system; the mythical consciousness sees in each number an individual essence—an individual nature and power. Myth imputes a common nature to quantities if only their number be equal. Number is an original entity imparting its essence to everything subsumed under it. In mythical thinking, number is a medium of spiritualization. In science, number is an instrument of explanation of relations; for myth it is, says Cassirer, a vehicle of religious signification:

In the one case (science) it serves to prepare all empirical existence for acceptance in a world of purely ideal relationships and laws; in the other it serves to draw all existing things, all immediate data, everything that is merely 'profane' into the mythical-religious process of sanctification. For whatever partakes of number in any way, whatever reveals in itself the form and power of a definite number, no longer leads a mere irrelevant existence for the mythical-religious consciousness but has precisely thereby gained an entirely new significance.

As he spoke of the forms of intuition as they were characterized by the mode of language, Cassirer wrote,
In three diverse but closely related phases, language develops the three basic intuitions of space, time, and number and so creates the indispensable condition for all intellectual mastery of phenomena and for every synthesis of these phenomena into the unity of a "world concept." 45

The same sort of development of a "world concept" can be seen in myth. Number seems to round out the mythical world view and to provide, if not a symbol of the affective immediacy of reality, since myth never sees symbols as symbols, then at least a means by which all mythical reality is united. Spatio-temporal intuition here points up the purposive, immediate, efficacious, that is, mythical, reality of actual spatial zones and temporal moments as well as of objects and forces. Any numerical ordering of such zones, periods, objects, or forces gives them a previously unpossessed aura of mythical potency. In number myth has a virtually unlimited means of extending itself over the whole of reality. Cassirer draws widely on the sources of comparative mythology to show that, for example, in the mythical world where north, south, east, and west are imbued with mythico-religious significance and feeling, the number four is the sacred number par excellence since it is connected in the mythical mind with these spatial designations which also have temporal counterparts:

Anything which shows an actual four-fold organization—whether as an immediately known 'reality' imposing itself upon sensory observation, or whether conditioned in a purely ideal way by a specific mode of mythical apperception—seems attached, as though by inner magical ties, to certain parts of space. Here mythical thinking does not see a mere mediated transference; rather it sees with
intuitive evidence the one in the other; in every particular fourness it apprehends the universal form of cosmic fourness. 46

In contrasting Cassirer's treatment of space, time, and number in the modes of language, science, and myth, I have been trying to illustrate what Cassirer means by modality and how the process of symbolic formation works itself out in these various modes. There is another problem with regard to Cassirer's concept of modality which deserves treatment but has not been fully considered so far. It is one which Cassirer does not elaborate. This is the problem of the relationships between the various modes of symbolic formation themselves. This problem forms the topic of the following chapter.
Notes to Chapter III

1. An Essay on Man, pp. 102-3; 108.
2. PSF, v.2, p. 15.
3. The Myth of the State, p. 7 ff.
4. Ibid., p. 13.
5. Ibid., p. 13.
7. Ibid., pp. 16-17.
8. Ibid., p. 18 ff.
11. Ibid., p. 6.
12. Ibid., p. 6.
13. Ibid., p. 9.
15. Ibid., pp. 10-11.
18. PSF, v.1, p. 69.
22. Ibid., p. 31.
25. Ibid., pp. 35-36.
26. Ibid., p. 38.
27. Ibid., p. 36.
28. Ibid., p. 37 ff.
29. Ibid., p. 39 ff. A similar point is made in The Myth of the State (p. 28 ff.) when Cassirer asserts the necessity of an understanding of ritual to a full understanding of the mythical consciousness.
30. Ibid., p. 43.
31. Ibid., p. 44.
32. Ibid., p. 45.
33. Ibid., p. 47.
34. Ibid., pp. 49-50.
35. Ibid., p. 65.
36. Ibid., p. 69.
37. Ibid., p. 75.
38. Ibid., pp. 86-87.
39. Ibid., p. 94 ff. Cassirer's documentation of the fundamental importance of this contrast between darkness and light for the
mythical concept of space is far too elaborate to consider here in its entirety.

40. Ibid., p. 98.
41. Ibid., p. 103.
42. Ibid., p. 107.
43. Ibid., pp. 107-8.
44. Ibid., p. 143.
45. PSF, v.1, p. 226.
46. PSF, v.2, p. 147.
Chapter IV

Modal Relationships

The concept of modality plays a central role in Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic formation. The terms "mode" and "symbolic form" are synonymous when they are applied to certain specific areas of human cultural endeavor -- language, art, myth, religion, and science -- which represent specific kinds of ideal activity in which the human spirit gives form to reality. A number of questions arise when the relationships of these modes to one another are considered: Do language, myth, art, science, and religion spring from the same primal source? Do they develop concurrently? Or does one flow into another? If so, where does one stop and the other begin? Are all symbolic forms linked together? If so, how are they linked? And how is it possible to know this? What is the relation of language and science, of myth and religion, of myth and science? Cassirer does not answer all these questions. Some he answers. Some he holds to be unanswerable. This chapter will try to indicate the direction in which answers to some of the questions lie and the reason for the "unanswerability" of others.

There is a relationship which we might characterize as "organic" between some of the modes of symbolic formation in that they deal with the same sorts of elements of experience. The relation between language and science was indicated in a previous chapter. That language and myth have,
if not a common source, then at least a mutually definitive relationship in their origin is one of Cassirer's main themes and will be considered presently. He also offers an explanation of the development of the religious consciousness from the mythical. What can be said about such relationships?

We have seen that each mode (science, art, myth, language, and religion) is an autonomous form of activity, subject to its own immanent norms, providing its own form of necessity and hence of objectivity. They are different ways in which the function of the human spirit, the process of symbolic formation, goes on. They all have their origin in the human spirit — this is the fundamental presupposition of any kind of idealism. What can we say about their primordial or undifferentiated relation prior to their specification in culture? The answer is "nothing." Cassirer points out that the more the human spirit engages in its characteristic function, the farther behind it leaves this primordial undifferentiated state:

The more richly and energetically the human spirit engages in its formative activity, the farther this very activity seems to remove it from the primal source of its own being. More and more, it appears to be imprisoned in its own creations — in the words of language, in the images of myth or art, in the intellectual symbols of cognition, which cover it like a delicate and transparent, but unbreathable veil. But the true, the profoundest task of a philosophy of culture, a philosophy of language, cognition, myth, etc., seems precisely to consist in raising this veil — in penetrating from the mediate sphere of mere meaning and characterization to the original sphere of intuitive vision. But on the other hand, the specific organ of philosophy —
and it has no other at its disposal — rebels against this task. To philosophy, which finds its fulfillment only in the sharpness of the concept and in the clarity of 'discursive' thought, the paradise of mysticism, the paradise of pure immediacy is closed. Hence it has no other solution than to reverse the direction of inquiry. Instead of taking the road back, it must attempt to continue forward.

We can follow the developing relationship of language and myth as it unfolds. We can see the formal principle of the transition from myth to religion. But this is only because we have a cultural "nature" to which we can pose the right questions. We cannot ask questions of the undifferentiated primordial unity of the human spirit. However, we can observe a relatively constant inner form according to which the human spirit works in the various modes, but we cannot inquire into its foundations for they are not objects of a possible cultural experience.

We can examine those modal relationships about which we have some empirical data. We can examine the relationship of say, art and myth, of myth and language, of language and science, of myth and religion. Cassirer undertakes some of these examinations, but the absence of those answers which Cassirer might have provided but didn't should not be seen as a defect in his presentation of the philosophy of symbolic formation. Cassirer was trying to point out the correct formal point of view for an approach to the findings of the cultural sciences. His work could in fact be called a critique of the cultural sciences in the same sense that Kant called his work on speculative philosophy a critique of pure reason. Cassirer felt that
he was presenting the outline, the form of a philosophy of culture and that the detailed material would have to come from the cultural sciences themselves.

There are two kinds of questions about symbolic forms which have been asked here. One is a question of modal origin; the other is a question of modal transition. As regards questions of origin, at points where there was material (or a "nature" in Kantian terms) of which questions could be asked, Cassirer felt that some sort of answer could be obtained. The best example of such an answer is Cassirer's treatment of the relationship of language and myth. Questions of transition, questions of how a mode transcends itself to become another are not relevant in most cases. Religion could not become science; art could not become language. Even if we presuppose a fundamental, pre-historical, unitary beginning of all the modes, the development of modal transitions could not be portrayed as linear, with language going to a point where myth takes over only to be superseded by art, then science, etc. Even granted such a presupposition, the best portrayal of the development would involve some sort of tree-like metaphor according to which the "trunk" of the human spirit would develop "branches" of language and myth which would respectively branch off into science and religion. Art would perhaps be another "branch" from the main trunk, and the fruits and leaves of the various branches would intermingle. This unhappy metaphor places the unfolding of human culture in too rigid a schema, and besides presupposes a metaphysics about
which *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* disclaimed any knowledge. Cassirer, nevertheless, speaks at the end of *Language and Myth* of myth, language, and art as beginning in a "concrete undivided unity which is only gradually resolved into a triad of independent modes of spiritual creativity." But knowledge of this would involve metaphysical claims which seem to have been repudiated by his assertion of the impos- sibility of returning to this primordial state, this "paradise of mysticism" in the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Cassirer's whole philosophy is aimed at justifying his idealistic presupposition that the various modes are ultimately founded in the functions of human spirit, but for Cassirer, unity is finally expressed by function and is postulated only on the basis of the "relatively constant" inner form seen in the various spiritual areas of symbolic formation.

This is well illustrated at one point where Cassirer is considering the relation between language and religion; what he says here could be applied with equal facility to all of the symbolic forms. He says that the philosophy of symbolic forms

.....cannot, of course, strive to dissolve the specific difference of language and religion in any original unity whether this unity be defined as subjective or objective, as a unity of the divine source of things, of reason, or of the human spirit. For its inquiry is directed not toward a common origin but toward a common structure. It does not seek a common unity of foundation for both language and religion but asks whether in these two absolutely independent and unique forms a unity of function may not be demonstrable. If there is such a unity, it can be sought only in a basic trend of symbolic ex-
pression, in an inner rule according to which it develops and unfolds.}

The metaphor above does illustrate, however, that the possibility of the transition from one mode to another demands that there be a close similarity between the kinds of experience dealt with by the modes in question. In the case of language and science, speculative, abstract cognitive experience provides the basis for the transition. In the case of myth and religion, experience of emotional feelings does so. Cassirer has said that the highest truth available to the human spirit is the recognition of the form of its own activity. This means a recognition of the nature of the process of symbolic formation. In the transition from language to science and from myth to religion, this recognition, attained, to be sure, by degrees, of the symbolical nature of reality is the most distinguishing mark.

This chapter will examine the question of origin and the question of transition, each in one example. The question of origins will be considered in terms of language and myth. The question of transition will deal with myth and religion.

(1) Language and Myth

The original indication of the bond between the linguistic and the mythical consciousness is that in the primitive mythical mentality, all verbal structures appear also as mythical entities, endowed with characteristic, mythic powers. This point, made in Language and Myth, corresponds to Cassirer's development (in the second volume of the
Philosophy of Symbolic Forms) of the idea that the mythical consciousness lacks any concept of purely ideal signification. Myth and language are originally inseparable and mutually condition each other in their development. Word and name, seen in the single plane of reality of the mythical view, do not have a symbolic function in description and signification but contain within them the object and its real powers. The name and word are inseparable from their objects. And in controlling the name, the primitive mentality sees itself as controlling the object. Threatening events or catastrophes are "exorcised" by song and loud outcry. In ritual, the invocation of the deity is not made in the civilized sense of prayer; in calling the God's name the very essence of his being is brought to bear on the situation. Throughout religious history it is possible to encounter the view that

.....the true nature of the god, the power and diversity of his action, is contained and, as it were, concentrated in his name. In it rests the secret of divine plenitude: the diversity of God's names, the many names of the divine, indeed, the thousands of names, are a true indication of His omnipotence. 

This mythical attitude toward the elements of language is further evidenced by the original attitude found in myth that a person and his name are inseparable and that the name does not merely express the innermost essence of the man, but actually is identical with it.

Thus myth exerts a definite influence on language; yet the influence between these two is not one-sided, running solely from myth to language. Language is an indispensable
component in the development of myth. The primary function of language, the separation and concentration of certain elements of experience, which are specifically stamped in the linguistic mold by their linguistic expression and which are given a definite stability by verbalization, is necessary for the development of the mythical mode.

Cassirer says that "what the mind has once created, what has been culled from the total sphere of consciousness, does not fade away again when the spoken word has set its seal upon it and given it definite form." Of course, what it is that is so formed depends upon the subject's range of interest which is originally dominated by the aura of myth. Language and myth function together, side by side, as modes of symbolic formation. One cannot be derived from the other or explained strictly and solely in terms of the other. This would, Cassirer says, "level them both (and) rob them of their characteristic features." The intertwining of the contents given form by language and myth indicates that such an explanation is not necessary. The close relationships of contents is best explained in terms of their common form of development, in terms of the conditions which govern both linguistic and mythical formation from their earliest beginnings.

Language and myth have a common form of development because both are oriented in their spiritual formative processes around particularity and not around universality. This means that language aims originally at the specific designation and expression of certain particular contents.
of experience. Verbal designation separates a content from the rest of experience, giving it a definite meaning, a definite role in reality which depends on the clarity and specificity of the term. It is science, not language, which aims at the elucidation of reality in a comprehensive systematic lawful whole. For myth there is this same sort of hypostization of the immediate particularity of the thing, since it is given a place in the single plane of reality found in the mythical mode.

The words and names of language provide part of myth's reality, and the mythical perspective determines in part which contents of experience shall receive linguistic expression. Thus "myth receives new life and wealth from language, as language does from myth. And this constant interaction and interpenetration attests the unity of the mental principle from which both are sprung, and of which they are simply different expressions, different manifestations and grades."8

(2) Myth and Religion

(a) The Transition from Myth to Religion

Cassirer described the development of the transition from myth to religion (and the development of religion itself as a symbolic form) in terms of a dialectical process in which the mythical consciousness advances to a stage from which it comes to see the single plane of reality of its image world as something "outside" itself and inadequate to its own drive for expression.
In the original encounter of the mythical consciousness with the world of sensuous reality, the mythical images engendered are by no means taken as images, as spiritual expressions. Here there is no division between "ideal" and "real," between "meaning" and "existence." On myth's single plane of reality we can look in from above, so to speak, and see that there is a continuous flux between these two general spheres in man's thought, belief, and action. The man and his name are the same. The ritualist in the mask of the god is transformed into him, assumes his nature, and fuses with him.

But as the mythical world view is built up, a separation begins to appear. With it a new reality begins to take form which is unknown to the mythical consciousness as such. This separation is one in which myth draws back from its image world and for the first time recognizes a bifurcation between itself and this world. It is at this point that the religious consciousness is born. The mythical contents remain with the religious consciousness, but here they are placed in a new perspective. Indeed, the mythical components of religious belief cannot be removed without eliminating the very objectivity and historical manifestation of religion. But although the contents of myth and religion are so interwoven, their form is not the same. The special aspects of the religious mode, its particularity, is disclosed in the changed attitude here taken by consciousness toward the mythical aspects of its images. The religious consciousness cannot do without these aspects, but as the
mythical image world is seen through the religious attitude, it takes on a new meaning:

The new ideality, the new spiritual dimension, that is opened up through religion not only lends myth a new signification but actually introduces the opposition between 'meaning' and 'existence' into the realm of myth. Religion takes the decisive step that is essentially alien to myth: in its use of sensuous images and signs it recognizes them as such -- a means of expression which, though they reveal a determinate meaning, must necessarily remain inadequate to it, which 'point' to this meaning but never fully exhaust it.

Every religion, according to Cassirer, comes to such a point of crisis in its development and there breaks loose from its mythical foundations. Different religions do this in different ways. In this break each reveals its historical and spiritual particularity. Once the break is made, once the symbols of myth are seen to be symbols, the religious consciousness begins to manifest its characteristic form.

In recognizing its images and symbols in their symbolic function, as a means of expressing a "meaning" not wholly tied to them, the mythical consciousness, as it becomes religious, enters into an ongoing dialectical relationship with these images in which they are seen on the one side as necessary to express religious meaning and on the other as not ultimately adequate to it. This dialectical refinement of symbols is seen by Cassirer to be a fundamental feature of religion as a mode of symbolic formation.

Cassirer did not envisage this dialectic as a purely rational adventure. True to his methodology, he looked to the history of religion and found there abundant empirical
material which confirmed that he had asked the right ques-
tions in this area.

The religious consciousness as expressed in the Pro-
phetic books of the Old Testament is for Cassirer a classi-
cal example of such a transformation. Of the Prophets,
Cassirer says,

The entire ethical-religious pathos of the Prophets
is concentrated in this one point. It rests on the
power and certainty of the religious will that
lives in the Prophets -- of a will which drives
them beyond all intuition of the given, the merely
existent. This existence must vanish if the new
world, the world of the Messianic future is to
arise.\[10\]

The Prophetic consciousness was oriented around relig-
ious spirituality and could not settle for the image world
of myth which allowed equal reality to all aspects of ex-
perience. As a matter of fact, the Prophetic attack on
idolatry and the injunction against the making of "graven
images" of the polytheistic deities of the mythical men-
tality, rests on a kind of \textit{petitio principii} since the Pro-
phetic critique here imputed to the mythical consciousness
a conception of image and symbol which was not its own but
was a product of the new and specifically religious per-
spective. The mythical world was not guilty of worshiping
\textit{images} of its deities; this world saw no difference between
archetype and image as such. The images here were the gods.
The prophetic consciousness had to inject into the mythical
consciousness an alien tension which it did not know in
order to disintegrate it. "Yet," says Cassirer, "the truly
positive factor consists not in this disintegration itself
but rather in the spiritual motif from which it grows, in
a turning back to the heart of religious feeling, which now causes the image world of myth to be recognized as something merely outward and material.\textsuperscript{11} In this Prophetic view a basic aspect of the religious mode of symbolic formation is illustrated: reality or "being" is attributed to contents of experience as they relate to the center of religious feeling which is symbolized specifically only in the particular sensuous symbols of the religious doctrine and only generally and indirectly in the whole phenomenal world. In the Prophetic view, "there can be no relation between man and God other than the spiritual-ethical relation between the I and the Thou (and) everything that does not belong to this fundamental relation now loses its religious value."\textsuperscript{12} Thus in the religious mode the images, which for myth were alive and vital, become mere symbols of a higher reality.

The religion of Zoroaster, from a formal point of view, provides another example of this sort of transmutation of mythical elements. Here the veneration of certain elements of nature — fire and water — is an indication that the connection between myth and religion is never completely severed. But the veneration here is not that of myth. It has been adapted to the religious perspective. These elements of nature are not worshipped for their own sakes; the religious die has left a characteristic stamp: ".....in the Persian religion what gives them (the elements of nature) their actual significance is the position assigned them in the great religious-ethical decision, in the
battle between the spirits of good and evil for world domination. In Zoroastrianism the transcendence of the divine being is asserted, but this does not mean that nature must be unhallowed. Nor is it a direct image of the Divine. It is in relation to the divine will and its goal: the ultimate defeat of Ahriman and the forces of evil. In this religion as in all others the underlying mythical elements are not simply suppressed but are progressively transformed. Even after the mythical elements have been transcended, they do not lose all meaning and force but retain a place within the overall context of the religion although they are often relegated to the sphere of evil, illusion, or error. Here again the link between myth and religion is seen. Christianity has its Satan, and in the Persian religion "the old name for the Aryan gods of light and the heavens has undergone a decisive change in meaning: the deivae or devas have become daeva, which designate the evil powers, the demons in Ahriman's train." Illustrations of this sort could be continued at great length in terms of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity, but the formal principles of the transition would remain the same. It will perhaps be more fruitful to turn more specifically to religion as a symbolic form to see in more detail the development of the relation between symbol and meaning and the transcending of mythical elements. Reference to a particular religion will here be made in terms of Christianity, the religious tradition with which Cassirer was of course most conversant.
(b) Religion as a Symbolic Form

Minimal definitions of religion are as numerous as they are varied, and most of them make what Cassirer would call a mistake in defining religion in terms of the content of a belief, regardless of the generality of the terms in which this content is stated. For Cassirer "it is not the content of a doctrine, but solely its form, that can serve as a criterion for its classification as a religion: What stamps a doctrine as religion is its affirmation not of any being, but of a specific 'order' and meaning." This is an emphatically formal point of view -- the kind Cassirer likes. Indeed, it is far too formal for many. But in this formality lies its strength because in virtue of it, diverse systems of religious doctrine can be approached by a critical philosophy of religion. It is a point of view which does not, after all, per se negate any possible existential relationship to an ultimate reality; it might even help to clarify such a relationship.

At any rate, it is Cassirer's view. The question which arises in relation to it is "What is involved in this specific 'order' and meaning?" Generally speaking, what is involved is the dialectical development of religion in which the symbols, which by their nature and role in the dialectic partake of myth, necessary for the encounter with and expression of religious feeling are progressively transcended in the ongoing development of the "meaning" religion finds beyond them.

In these symbols the perpetual link with the world of
mythical image is seen. Only the great religious mentalities have drawn the line between image and meaning radically. In the general historical development of religion the

.....images of the mythical fantasy keep rising to the surface even after they have lost their actual life, even after they have become mere dreams and shadows. Just as in mythical belief the dead still live and act as shades, so the mythical image world long continues to demonstrate its old power, even when its existence is denied in the name of religious truth.16

It is characteristic of the religious mode that "being" or reality is imputed to all things, inward as well as outward, only so far as they are related to the religious process and its center. This center is for religion essentially the sole reality. In the various historical religions with their shifting value accents, different elements are singled out and are given the stamp of "being."

This principle is important for Cassirer, since it leaves room for religions of action, religions of suffering, culture religions, and nature religions to proceed along different lines in their approach to religious meaning. It is another aspect of the form of the "specific 'order' and meaning" definitive of religion.

The tension between symbol and meaning in the religious mode creates a difficulty and a peril for any particular religion. Often an historical religion is so bound up with its traditional imagery that it runs the danger of becoming unrecognizable when these images are refined in the pursuit of religious meaning. Those Christians who would seek to "de-mythologize" their religion had best become prepared to accept some hitherto unacceptable bed-fellows, namely
philosophers delving into the "pure form" of religion in general, if Cassirer is right when he says:

In its whole development Christianity also fights this battle for its own peculiar definition of religious 'reality.' Here release from the world of mythical images seems all the more difficult because certain mythical intuitions are so deeply embedded in the fundamental doctrines, the dogmatic substance of Christianity, that they cannot be removed without endangering this substance itself.17

The reply to this might be that a formal point of view is desirable in approaching Christianity, too. But what results when Christianity transcends its own substance? Is it possible for a particular religion to refine its symbols to a point where the gulf between this refinement and the cultural and historical manifestation of the religion is so great that the refined religion cannot maintain its identity? Cassirer would say that a question something like this in form has been debated throughout the development of Christianity: "The entire history of dogmas, from the earliest beginnings down to Luther and Zwingli, indicates a constant struggle between the original historical significance of symbols, sacraments, and mysteries and their derived, purely spiritual meaning."18 In such a struggle Cassirer sees — correctly, it seems — a concrete manifestation of his formal view of the dialectical development of religion. Recognition of the struggle in the history of dogma is not, of course, to disparage dogma, for it is "nothing more than the form assumed by pure religious meaning when men seek to express it in terms of objective representation."19
That the tension between symbol and meaning presents a recurring difficulty to religion is further evidenced by the development of a faction of mysticism in most religions which is historically more or less distinct from the main currents. Mysticism strives to arrive at the pure meaning of religion as such, free from the encumbrance of sensuous images, whether verbal, material, or psychical. Success in this endeavor would mean an immediate encounter with the godhead.

In mysticism the pure dynamic of religious feeling strives to slough off and negate all rigid outward data. The relation of the human soul to God finds adequate expression neither in the image language of empirical or mythical intuition nor in the sphere of 'actual' existence and events. Only when the 'I' withdraws entirely from this sphere, only when it dwells in its essence and foundation, can the simple essence of God touch it without the mediation of an image; then alone do the pure truth and inwardness of this relation open up to it.20

In attempting this, mysticism rejects both the mythical and the historical aspects of the faith within which it was nurtured. God is no longer represented by mythical images, but neither is He encountered in the objective historical process as an "Other." He is known immediately in the pure mystic consciousness.

It is at this point that the mystic consciousness separates itself from the mainstream of its tradition, especially in Christianity and Islam. And here stands what Cassirer sees as the dividing line between the philosophy of religion and any such mystical view. In a strict sense, the philosophy of religion "sees the unity between God and man less as a substantial than as a synthetic unity: a
unity of different entities. For it, therefore, differentiation remains a necessary factor, a condition for the achievement of the unity itself. This view of the philosophy of religion also distinguishes it from the religious consciousness in general which is never satisfied with such a differentiation of God and man, of symbol and meaning, as absolutely separate entities. But the destruction of such a difference would also destroy the characteristic form of religion itself:

In the religious consciousness.....the conflict between the pure meaning it embraces and the image in which it is expressed is never resolved but bursts forth anew in every phase of development. A reconciliation between these two extremes is continuously sought but never fully achieved. The striving beyond the mythical image world and an indissoluble attachment to this same world constitute a basic factor of the religious process itself.

And in Cassirer's view, the highest spiritual sublimation of religion would not at all aim at the dissolution of this opposition and tension. It would try to make this opposition increasingly clear and would try to understand it in its immanent necessity. The highest and most sublime religious feeling is expressed by a conscious orientation toward the progressive refinement of religious symbolism.

It was mentioned earlier that while its own methodology prevents the philosophy of symbolic forms from going back to dissolve any of the modes, including religion, in some sort of original unity, whether it be a unity of the divine source of things, of reason, or of the human spirit, Cassirer believes that it can account for a unity of function among them. (see ante p. 99.) This unity of
function finds its expression in the mode of religion in the dialectical involvement between symbol and meaning which results in the progressive refinement of the symbols and deepening of the meaning.

In conclusion, one point should be mentioned in connection with Cassirer's treatment of religion, even though, in view of Cassirer's Kantian orientation, it should be obvious. Cassirer's whole critical approach is aimed at broadening Kant's "Copernican Revolution" to provide for the possibility of knowledge (in Kant's sense) in fields in addition to physical science. Of the fact that Cassirer treats religion, as regards both its form and its cultural manifestations, as a phenomenon of immanence there is no doubt. There is equally little doubt, in my mind at least, that his approach to religious truth is that of a critical humanist. But in fairness to other possible interpretations, it must be noted that Cassirer does not, by his critical idealism (as Kant did not), preclude the possibility of transcendence. He does preclude the possibility of knowledge of it. Cassirer does not seem to be concerned with transcendence in religion except as it is related in the history of religion to the form of religious development. To repeat once more: "The highest objective truth available to the human spirit is ultimately the form of its own activity."
Notes to Chapter IV

1. FSF, v. 1, p. 113.
4. Language and Myth, p. 44 ff.
5. FSF, v. 2, p. 41.
7. Ibid., p. 9.
8. Ibid., p. 97.
9. FSF, v. 2, p. 239.
10. Ibid., p. 240.
11. Ibid., p. 241.
14. Ibid., p. 244.
15. Ibid., p. 247.
16. Ibid., p. 245.
17. Ibid., pp. 247-8.
18. Ibid., p. 248.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid., p. 249.
22. Ibid., p. 251-2.
Chapter V

Conclusion. Cassirer's Critical Idealism

It is one of the first essential insights of critical philosophy that objects are not 'given' to consciousness in a rigid, finished state, in their naked 'as suchness,' but that the relation of representation to object presupposes an independent, spontaneous act of consciousness. The object does not exist prior to and outside of synthetic unity but is constituted only by this synthetic unity; it is no fixed form that imprints itself on consciousness but is the product of a formative operation effected by the basic instrumentality of consciousness, by intuition and pure thought. The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms takes up this basic critical idea, this fundamental principle of Kant's 'Copernican revolution,' and strives to broaden it. It seeks the categories of the consciousness of objects in the theoretical, intellectual sphere, and starts from the assumption that such categories must be at work wherever a cosmos, a characteristic and typical world view, takes form out of the chaos of impressions. All such world views are made possible only by specific acts of objectivization, in which mere impressions are reworked into specific, formed representations.1

This statement, given at the beginning of the second volume of the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms is a good summary of Cassirer's view of a philosophical standpoint of Critical Idealism. Within the various modes of symbolic formation the human spirit reveals the form of its constitutive function. The aim of this function is the attainment of objectivity. But this is not an objectivity in its "as suchness." The attainment of objectivity, whether in regard to an "object" or a "relation," and regardless of the mode, depends not so much on the what of knowing as on the how. Objectivity is known by knowing objectively. Thus objectivity is a matter of degree. The progress of knowledge in
any mode depends on the progressive refinement of this sort of objectivity on the normative basis of experience as a whole. To know at all means to know to some extent objectively, for "the critique of knowledge shows that mere sensation, i.e., a sensory quality without form or order, is not a fact of immediate experience but a product of abstraction." Objectivity depends on the constitutive functions of the human spirit as they are expressed in the inner form of the process of symbolic formation. This inner form of these constitutive functions, this immanent law can only be found "through the phenomena themselves from which we 'abstract' it; but this very abstraction shows that the law is a necessary constituent factor of the content and existence of the particular."

If these considerations are related to Cassirer's insistence that knowledge of any original source, of any substantial unity of the various modes of symbolic formation is impossible (see ante, pages 96-99) Cassirer's Kantian orientation becomes obvious. Kant's denial of any metaphysical or transcendent knowledge is seconded by Cassirer as he denies the possibility of knowledge of a substantial unity of the human spirit, claiming that the only unity which can be known is a functional unity, expressed in the concrete manifestations of the cultural forms. Valid knowledge within the different modes is possible and is tested in a Kantian way: by an appeal to the whole of experience contained under each of the modes separately. The content of a mode must be judged in terms of that mode.
If we look solely at this critical idealistic epistemology, it is difficult to see how Cassirer has deserved the label of Hegelianism sometimes applied to him. Yet such application is not entirely without foundation although it does, it seems, indicate a misinterpretation of Cassirer's overall position. What are the foundations of such an interpretation? They are several. For one thing, certain passages can be found in the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* which can be interpreted to have a Hegelian tenor. Such a passage is:

The true concept of reality cannot be squeezed into the form of mere abstract being; it opens out into the diversity and richness of the forms of spiritual life— but of a spiritual life which bears the stamp of inner necessity and hence of objectivity. In this sense each new 'symbolic form'— not only the conceptual world of scientific cognition but also the intuitive world of art, myth, and language — constitutes, as Goethe said, a revelation sent outward from within, a 'synthesis of world and spirit,' which truly assures us that the two are originally one.  

Yet this passage could, it seems, have been as easily interpreted in the contest of critical idealism as in that of absolute idealism. For another thing, a reader of Cassirer might recall certain passages on culture from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* which would bring to mind Cassirer's idea of modal formation. Hegel has said

The means... whereby an individual gets objective validity and concrete actuality here is the formative process of culture........Individuality molds itself by culture to what it inherently is, and only by so doing is it then something per se and possessed of concrete existence. The extent of its culture is the measure of its reality and power.............The inner essential nature, the simple life of spirit that pervades self-conscious reality, is resolved, spread out into similar general areas or masses, spirit-
ual masses in this case, and appears as an entire organized world.5

But the resemblance goes farther than mere similarity of tone of certain passages. Cassirer felt that he was adopting Hegel's phenomenological method but not his metaphysical presuppositions. The broad formal range of the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms which proposes to account for the totality of human culture in its concrete historical manifestations is reminiscent of the Phenomenology of Spirit.

Yet Cassirer is not a Hegelian. He denies the adequacy of Hegel's account of culture, maintaining that it does not account for the special and unique aspects of the various modes:

Hegel stated that we must think of the human spirit as a concrete whole, that we must not stop at the simple concept but develop it in the totality of its manifestations. Rich and varied as they are in content, their structure is subordinated to a single and, in a certain sense, uniform law — the law of the dialectical method, which represents the unchanging rhythm of the concept's autonomous movement. With all Hegel's endeavor to apprehend the specific differentiations of the spirit, he ultimately refers and reduces its whole content and capacity to a single dimension — and its profoundest content and true meaning are apprehended only in relation to this dimension.6

From Hegel's standpoint, says Cassirer, "it follows that philosophy provides the foundation for the other culture-forms only in the sense that it forthwith dispenses with them and takes from their own autonomous and independent worth and all this is done to make them subservient to its own systematic purpose." Against this, Cassirer proposes that "The task of the critical philosophy, on the contrary,
is to show the unity of reason precisely in the different basic lines along which the world is constructed and formed in its scientific, artistic, moral, and religious aspects.  

Charles W. Hendel in his introduction to the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms has indicated his view of the basis of the separation between Cassirer and Hegel. Hegel moves from the encounter of spirit with life to the final resolution of the dialectic where the spirit has "absolute knowledge" of itself. But Cassirer, says Hendel, keeps the twain ever twain, spirit and its other. It is never forgotten that in the constitution of whatever appears as 'given' at any stage, even the highest, there is always a factor not contributed by the form-giving activity of consciousness. Cassirer sees the unsolved problem of Kant, that the human understanding is 'an image needing one.' Expand 'understanding' to 'spirit,' and it still remains the case in every instance that the human spirit needs images which it uses symbolically to disclose meaning beyond them. There is no leaping clean out of an image-world so that spirit knows ultimately itself. There is always the added phrase, 'and reality,' the reality of the phenomenal world. To Cassirer there is an 'endless task' ahead, and the course for man is one of discovering the inexhaustible possibilities of the formative role of the human spirit in the course of experience and history.

Edgar Wind in the Journal of Philosophy in 1925 wrote an article on "Contemporary German Philosophy" which seems to have been very perceptive in its forecast of the form and content of the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, which was at that time in the process of printing. In this article he presents a hypothetical argument between an epistemological realist and a neo-Kantian critical idealist. He says that the critical idealist's approach to objective relations as based on constitutive functions of the mind
is difficult to attack because such an attack can be averted by logical argument:

If anybody contradicts the Neo-Kantianist, the latter has the right to say that his opponent assumes certain determinants. And, certainly, he will succeed in proving that these determinants which are believed to be principles of thought, are really products of thought. If, on the other hand, his opponent asks him to solve the problem how it is possible that the mind grasps objects which (in their existence and meaning) are independent of the mind, he will reply: 'The idea of a thing, independent of the mind, is itself a conception of the mind. The idea of absolute independence, (sic) as you form it is self-contradictory. Therefore the problem as you put it, is illogical.' His opponent has only one thing to answer: 'You may prove that my problem is illogical; but how can you prove that, being illogical, it ceases to be a problem? Your purely logical method enables you to eliminate problems, but thereby it prevents you from approaching them. It makes you safe; but it leaves you poor.'

Can this poverty be attributed to Cassirer? I think not. As Cassirer displays the general neo-Kantian tendency to eliminate the metaphysical elements of Kant and emphasize the critical parts of his philosophy, he sees the unity of the various fields of cultural endeavor, which, Wind says, was for Kant the "object of a quasi-religious creed," as a problem for investigation. Cassirer finds no poverty of problems in these fields. The "purely logical method" is ordered within language, myth, science, art, and religion — modes which, while being often in contradiction as regards content, display an inner form, the progressive objective determination of which is the highest task of the philosophy of symbolic formation.
Notes to Chapter V

1. PSF, v.2, p. 29.
2. PSF, v.1, p. 198.
3. Ibid., p. 81.
4. Ibid., p. 111.
Bibliography

Works Cited in this Thesis

Books by Ernst Cassirer:

The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953 and 1955). This work is in two volumes; the first is subtitled Language and the second Mythical Thinking. Yale University Press will publish in September of 1957 the third volume, Science. The three volumes were originally published in Germany from 1925 to 1929.

Language and Myth, trans. Susanne K. Langer (N. Y.: Harper, 1946). This work was originally published in German as Number VI of the "Studien der Bibliothek Warburg," under the editorship of Fritz Saxl.


Other Works:


The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer, ed. Paul Arthur Schlipp (Evanston, Ill.: The Library of Living Philosophers, Inc., 1949). This extremely useful volume comprises the bulk of the critical work in English done on Cassirer. Not all the articles in it were cited in this thesis. In his introduction to Manheim's translation of the second volume of the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms (cited above), Charles W. Hendel has listed (on page xi) accurately, I believe, those which seem to be the most pertinent.


Cassirer, "The Influence of Language upon the Development of Scientific Thought" in the Journal of Philosophy, XXXIX, 12, 1942.
Edgar Wind, "Contemporary German Philosophy" in the Journal of Philosophy, XXII, 18, 1925.
Charles W. Hendel, "Introductions" to the first and second volumes of the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms cited above.

Other Pertinent Works

All of Cassirer's works are, of course, pertinent to a full understanding of what I have termed his philosophy of symbolic formation. A number of these, while not directly cited, have made a significant contribution to the writing of this thesis. Foremost in this group would be


Rather than go on to list here the rest of Cassirer's work, it seems best to refer to an excellent chronological bibliography of all the writings (and translations, completed, and then in preparation) of Ernst Cassirer through August of 1946. This is to be found at the end (pp. 883-909) of The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer (Library of Living Philosophers) which was mentioned above.
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