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*The Struggle for Myth  
in the Nazi Period: Alfred Baeumler,  
Ernst Bloch, and Carl Einstein*

DAVID PAN

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EMPHASIZING THAT THE PROBLEM OF FASCISM IS A contemporary one because “notre présent est loin d’être quitte avec son proche passé nazi et fasciste” (“our present is far from done with its recent Nazi and fascist past”), (8)<sup>1</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy identify the proto-fascist elements of our times in

ces déjà nombreux discours contemporains qui en appellent au *mythe*, à la nécessité d’un nouveau mythe ou d’une nouvelle conscience mythique, ou bien encore à la réactivation de mythes anciens. (10)

those already numerous contemporary discourses that refer to *myth*, to the necessity of a new myth, or a new mythic consciousness, or another reactivation of ancient myths.

Their equation of all discourse on myth with fascism stems from their definition of myth as always ideology. Such a definition of myth limits the category of myth to a conceptual strategy—“une explication de l’*histoire* . . . à partir d’un concept unique: le concept de race, par exemple” (“an explanation of history . . . through a single concept: the concept of race, for example”) (22)—when in fact discussions of myth in the twentieth century include many other perspectives.

The specifically Nazi strategy was to equate myth with ideology in order to delegitimize traditional myth in favor of a new mythology subject to rational manipulation. As Lacoue-Labarthe

and Nancy themselves point out (53, 67), Alfred Rosenberg rejected traditional myths and Adolf Hitler never accepted even the idea of myth but rather spoke the language of modern rationality and Enlightenment (Birken 12–20). Yet, in labeling all attempts to rethink the category of myth as fascist, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy repeat the Nazi instrumentalization of the idea of myth by assuming that myth can be understood only as ideology. They thereby continue a post-war identification of fascist aesthetics with the aesthetics of myth that has been based on the spurious view that fascist theories of myth advocated a return to mythic structures and the idea of myth is thus fascist ideological terrain.

When viewed within the context of the debate on myth in Germany in the 1930s, Nazi theories of myth reveal themselves as a suppression rather than an encouragement of mythic experience. This *anti*-mythic perspective of the Nazis becomes obvious in a comparison of fascist with alternative ideas on myth. For the role of myth in modern culture was a topic of intense interest, not just for Nazis, but for German writers and scholars of widely diverging political persuasions in the early twentieth century. This discussion was interrupted by the separation of German culture into its Nazi and exile components. Yet the theories developed on both sides of this divide still demonstrated many similarities with each other after 1933. While the Nazi appropriation of myth has attained infamous notoriety, corresponding attempts on the Left to analyze myth have not gained much attention, partly because the left-wing perspective was suppressed by the Nazis while they were in power and partly because such discussions of myth were discredited after 1945 by the relation to Nazism. Moreover, because of the assumption that Nazi culture and exile culture could not have any commonalities, the left-wing and right-wing theories of myth produced in the 1930s have never been seriously compared. Yet it would be facile to presume that thinkers who were engaged in a single debate on culture in the Weimar Republic would suddenly have incommensurable ideas after 1933. Taken together, the exile and Nazi arguments concerning myth constitute an intense and valuable debate that has never been properly delineated due to the tendency to separate exile from Nazi

literature as if they belonged to two separate epochs. In situating Nazi concepts and practices against contemporary, but suppressed alternatives, this essay will attempt on the one hand to provide a more precise definition of Nazi conceptions of myth and on the other hand to unearth and evaluate alternative possibilities.

#### RATIONALISTS AND IRRATIONALISTS, NAZIS AND EXILES

Though Ernst Bloch (1885–1977), Carl Einstein (1885–1940), and Alfred Baeumler (1887–1968) all contend that myth still has significance for modern society, differences in their political outlooks led to wide disparities in their specific understandings of the proper function of myth. Though Nazis such as Baeumler and Rosenberg demonstrated intense interest in myth, their theories carried out a repression of myth rather than a retrieval, statements by critics to the contrary notwithstanding (Mann 61–62, Frank 130). If this is true, then alternative theories of myth can be considered anti-fascist only to the extent that they sought to emancipate myth from such repression.

Just as the Nazis themselves were split into irrationalists such as Baeumler and rationalists such as Hitler, the left-wing critique of the Nazis was divided by the same dispute. On one end of the spectrum Georg Lukács argues that there is a single unbroken trajectory in German thought that leads from Friedrich Schelling's irrationalism through the *Lebensphilosophie* of Friedrich Nietzsche, Wilhelm Dilthey, and Georg Simmel and then directly into the fascist myth-making of Ludwig Klages, Ernst Jünger, Baeumler, and Rosenberg. For Lukács there are no essential distinctions to be made within this trajectory, and all the different conceptions of myth and irrationalism must be uniformly condemned as proto-fascist (471–73). Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno maintain a more differentiated view of irrationalism, arguing that myth and rationality are intertwined and criticizing Enlightenment for its complicity with mythic regression (50). They also attempt on a few occasions to distinguish a genuine form of myth and popular culture from the false myths of the Nazis (17–19). Similarly, Walter Benjamin discusses the mythic possibilities of "aura" in art, on the one hand

in order to demonstrate its obsolescence in a modern world in which new non-auratic modes of spectatorship become dominant, for example in film (2: 505), but on the other hand to devise new forms of myth and ritual such as profane illumination and involuntary memory (4: 297; 2: 646–47). Yet despite their more flexible attitudes, Benjamin, Horkheimer, and Adorno generally accord with Lukács in denying that myth and ritual might function as positive aspects of culture rather than merely as negative and violent forces.

By contrast, Thomas Mann, Einstein, and Bloch were the exile thinkers who engaged most seriously with myth and thus developed theories that were the closest to Baeumler's. While recent scholarship has focused on the relationship between Mann and Baeumler (Marianne Baeumler, Brunträger, Koopmann), there has been no effort to investigate the work of exile writers who attempted a more straightforward return to myth in modern society. Yet Bloch's and Einstein's pro-mythic views make their work well suited for a comparison with Baeumler's similar evaluation of myth, not only because they are of the same generation, but because their ideas in fact derive from the same intellectual sources.

In contrast to the other left-wing intellectuals mentioned above, both Bloch and Einstein were intimately connected with Expressionism, Bloch's *Geist der Utopie* (1918) having been received as a philosophical manifesto for Expressionism and Einstein's *Bebuquin* (1912) considered as a seminal example of literary Expressionism. Moreover, they were both particularly interested in Expressionism's primitivist aspects. While Einstein was the author of *Negerplastik*, the first European study of African sculpture, Bloch wrote one of the first positive reviews of Einstein's book when it appeared in 1915. Both writers maintained their interest in both Expressionism and primitivism throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Einstein going on to write several other major works on "primitive" art and Bloch continuing to defend both Expressionism and "folk art," most notably during the "Expressionism" debate carried out in the 1930s.

Baeumler's intellectual background intersected with those of Bloch and Einstein at various points. For all three Nietzsche was one of the most important philosophical influences on their

thinking. Bloch's earliest known publication from his student days takes Nietzsche as its topic, and Nietzsche plays a key role in Einstein's *Bebuquin*. Baeumler, for his part, published a number of books and essays on Nietzsche throughout his career and was the editor of the 1930 Kröner edition of Nietzsche's collected works. In addition, they all happened to have attended Simmel's lectures and seminars at the University of Berlin in the same time period around 1908, though Einstein's and Baeumler's interests were probably the most intimately related, both also having worked with the art historian, Heinrich Wölfflin, and both borrowing heavily from his ideas on aesthetic form in order to develop their separate theories of myth in the 1920s and 1930s. Thus, all three were strongly influenced by the "irrationalist" thinkers such as Nietzsche and Simmel, whom Lukács cites as the sources of Nazi thought.

But in spite of the correspondences in their early intellectual backgrounds, Baeumler, Bloch, and Einstein pursued widely divergent political agendas. Baeumler became prominent after Hitler's rise to power, receiving an appointment as chair of Philosophy and Political Pedagogy at the University of Berlin in May, 1933, and working closely with Rosenberg during the Nazi years (Sluga 126–31, 224–25). Bloch and Einstein were by contrast forced into exile by the Nazis, both having been Jewish, Expressionist, and outspokenly left-wing. But while Bloch maintained strong Marxist sympathies during most of his career, Einstein was politically closer to anarchism, having fought, for example, with Buenaventura Durruti during the Spanish Civil War and even presenting his eulogy on Spanish Republican radio in 1936 (Einstein 459–62).

The political differences separating the three thinkers not only led to key differences in their theories, but also to the circumstance that their ideas, though addressing the same issues of myth, community, and aesthetics, have never been considered together. Baeumler's work on myth was first published in 1926 as an introduction to a collection of Johann Jakob Bachofen's works and later in a series of publications in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s. The Bachofen introduction developed a perspective on myth that was fundamental for the Nazis, Rosenberg having borrowed many of its ideas for his *Mythus des 20.*

*Jahrbunderts* (34–44). But some of Baeumler's most thoroughly elaborated work on myth appeared in the 1930s under the Nazis, for example in his 1933 "Inaugural Address," at a time when it could not be compared with the work of the exile writers. Both Bloch's *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (Zurich, 1935) (*Heritage of Our Time*), which dealt specifically with issues of fascism and myth, and Einstein's ideas on myth in *Georges Braque* (Paris, 1934) were published outside of Germany, in the latter case only in French translation and never to be made available in German until 1985. Consequently, the varying perspectives on myth embodied in the work of these figures have never been compared to each other directly. Bloch's work, in which the mythic element is less pronounced than with Einstein and Baeumler, has remained the most popular up to the present day. Nevertheless, interest in both Baeumler and Einstein has been slowly rising, though Baeumler's theories have been more prominent in recent discussions of myth. Whereas Einstein's ideas on myth are still looked upon with suspicion, Klaus Kiefer referring to them as part of a proto-fascist "neo-primitivism" (519), Baeumler's theories have been taken up by Manfred Frank as the basis for his idea of a new mythology (33–35; Pan 237–43).

The issue of myth is posed by all three thinkers as a question of the intellectual's relation to a popular or folk culture, all turning to popular culture as a source of the immediacy and lived experience that philosophical debates lack. Yet, because of the *völkisch* political implications of this project only Baeumler is willing to explicitly defend the struggle "unseres gesund gebliebenen Volkes gegen den volksfremden Typ des rein theoretischen Menschen" ("of the healthy folk against the unpopular type of the purely theoretical man") (*Männerbund* 114). Instead of referring to the *Volk*, Bloch speaks of "ungleichzeitige Widersprüche" ("non-contemporaneous contradictions") when referring to traditions and rituals that persist in modern culture (*Erbschaft* 116–19; *Heritage* 108–10), and Einstein refers to "die elementaren Kräfte" ("the elemental forces") that he seeks "wieder zu entdecken und wirken zu lassen" ("to rediscover and mobilize") (210), though he also at one point speaks of myth as an expression of the "kollektiv Volkshafte" ("collective folk character") (314–15). In spite of differences in terminology, all three

are drawn to popular culture as a source of insight and power that is missing in purely theoretical debates.

Yet this common project should not be taken as a demonstration that Bloch and Einstein were somehow crypto-fascist. Such a conclusion stems from the idea, most convincingly developed by George Mosse, that all attempts to vindicate a *völkisch* popular dimension of culture are simply variations on an ultimately fascist political project (8–10). Though Einstein's and Bloch's invocations of "mythisch archaischen Zeitschichten" ("mythic archaic levels of time") (Einstein 212) and "Ungleichzeitigkeit" ("non-contemporaneity") (*Erbschaft* 116; *Heritage* 108) link their ideas to Nazis such as Baeumler, their political sympathies were decidedly Marxist in Bloch's case and anarchist for Einstein, his writing directing itself by turns against liberalism (200), Marxism (213), and fascism (341). In order to understand the logic of their positions, it is necessary to consider their championing of myth and collective levels of experience to be part of a larger Expressionist project that in many ways overlapped with a *völkisch* one but cannot be equated with it. Within this broader project, differing political stances (Nazism, Liberalism, Marxism, Anarchism) can be distinguished according to their particular approaches to the common goal of a culture grounded in the people. Rather than demonizing the entire German cultural tradition dealing with such issues and banning all discussions of myth and the folk from serious academic discourse, the following consideration of the differences between these thinkers, in spite of the commonalities in their projects, will not only provide a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between Nazi ideology and the broader German culture but also shed new light on a neglected discussion of the role of myth and tradition in modern society.

#### THE PRIMACY OF MYTH FOR EINSTEIN

The primary issue that separates these thinkers is their willingness to accept the popular dimension of myth and ritual as a true source of authority and insight rather than simply a raw material to be mobilized for political ends. Einstein's unique perspective is based on his anarchist idea that popular culture,



and not a national bureaucracy or class-based party, must be the location of political and social decision-making. He defends this conviction by arguing that the popular dimension of a culture, operating on the basis of myths, rituals, and traditions, is not a barbarous void when compared to an academic and intellectual culture based on arguments and debate, but a valid source of insights. The popular culture of myths and traditions is the sphere in which a specifically *aesthetic* mode of intuition is allowed to develop independently of philosophical debate.

In Einstein's approach, myth and art are parallel forms. The power of myth derives from its aesthetic success, and the significance of art for life depends upon art's mythic function as an organizer of experience for the audience. Because he considers myth aesthetically, it cannot be defined as an historically "non-contemporaneous" phenomenon as in Bloch's work, but rather must be based in contemporary psychic structures and processes. Einstein consequently considers the contradictions within the individual subject to be the basis for myth and ritual.

As opposed to a Nazi view of myth, which objectifies and instrumentalizes the rituals and objects of myth, Einstein is only interested in the extent to which the myth or sacred object mediates a human experience. The permanence of the work of art or religious object itself is not important. He notes for example

daß die Sache "Bild" nur eine apparence ist; wichtig bleibt nur die jeweilige Verwirklichung eines menschlichen Prozesses. (237)

that the "image" as an object is only an appearance; that which is important is only the corresponding actualization of a human process.

Because the vitality and essence of the sacred object lies in the experience of the recipient and does not reside within the object itself, the material image or object is secondary to the process of myth but at the same time essential to it. The goal of both the traditional myth and the modern work of art for Einstein is to be the point of departure for the spectator's experience of the sacred. The aesthetic form does not try to replace experi-

ence. Instead it enables experience by setting up a specific set of parameters for it to unfold in the consciousness of the spectator.

Mythic experience for Einstein consists of a constant construction and dissolution of images as they gain and lose their ability to resonate with the experiences of the receiver. The moment of reception becomes constitutive for the myth because the recipient does not merely receive, but plays the crucial editorial role in determining which works survive and which do not. For Einstein, myth is aesthetic because it is defined by the relationship between spectator and work of art. This continuing relationship creates the basis for a process of continual revision of mythic experience, and Einstein's discussion of myth does not isolate it in the past but attempts to locate it in the present, for example in the Cubist work of Georges Braque (294–96).

#### BAEUMLER'S REPLACEMENT OF MYTH WITH PHILOSOPHY

Baeumler shares Einstein's interest in myth as a contemporary event. But whereas Einstein contends that the sacred quality of myth is a consequence of its aesthetic ability to enable a collective mediation of subjective experience, Baeumler insists on a separation of myth from art, arguing that myth attains its sacred quality through the relation to material facts such as ritual practices or, later in his career, blood and race. This recourse to "material" explanations of the sacred rather than psychic ones leads Baeumler to promote a scientific and philosophical attitude rather than a mythic one. The attempt to understand myth as a consequence of material facts eventually leads Baeumler to the argument that blood and race are the determiners of culture. His Nazi understanding of myth is based on a materialist, scientific explanation and manipulation of myth rather than upon a regeneration of irrational, mythic structures.

At first glance, Baeumler's theory of myth seems similar to Einstein's in that Baeumler emphasizes the importance of the "symbol" in contrast to the danger of the "word." In his May 10, 1933, "Inaugural Address" upon appointment as Professor of Philosophy and Political Pedagogy in Berlin immediately after

Hitler's rise to power, Baeumler uses this opposition in order to exhort the students of the university to participate in the book burning that would occur immediately after his lecture. But though he prefers the symbol to the word, Baeumler does not appeal to the aesthetic quality of a mythic image as Einstein does, but rather to its non-aesthetic character as something that is prior to the "aesthetic" word.

Der Dienst am Worte führt schließlich zu einer zarten und feinen, zu einer "ästhetischen" Einstellung und schließlich dazu, daß der Mensch den Sinn verliert für das, was noch nicht Gestalt hat, was noch nicht zu Wort gekommen ist, aber was vielleicht gestaltenträchtig, daß er den Sinn verliert für das Ursprüngliche, für das Chaos, das einen Stern aus sich gebären wird. (*Männerbund* 131–32)

Service to the word leads in the end to a soft and delicate, to an "aesthetic" attitude and finally to a situation in which man loses a sense for that which has not yet taken form, that which has not yet been articulated, but which is perhaps capable of form, a situation in which he loses a sense for the primal, for the chaos that will give birth to a star.

Baeumler condemns a preoccupation with words because they are for him merely "aesthetic" and only serve to divert attention from the more important "primal" and "chaotic" reality. As opposed to the aesthetic irrelevance of the word, Baeumler affirms the "reality" of the symbol.

Because the symbol's reality is not a result of an aesthetic experience, it must define its "originality" in terms of a direct and immediate connection between the symbol and a people. While Baeumler criticizes the old word in the same way that Einstein claims that mythic forces must constantly manifest themselves in new forms such as Cubism, Baeumler does not seek to encourage an aesthetic process whereby such old myths would be replaced with new ones. Rather, he claims that the symbol *is* reality and no effort must be made in order to adjust it to fit a

contemporary context. "Das Symbol ist schweigend, sein Verstehen erfolgt unmittelbar." ("The symbol is silent, and comprehension is direct.") The immediacy of the symbol makes it into a source of unity that is prior to the conflicts connected with the word.

*Wir sind uns einig in den Symbolen—wir sind uns noch nicht einig im Wort. Was uns hindernd entgegensteht, ist nicht böser Wille, sondern ist das alte Wort, das Wort, das den gegenwärtigen Symbolen nicht mehr angemessen ist. (Männerbund 132)*

*We are unified in the symbols—we are not yet unified in the word. That which hinders us is not an evil will, but the old word, the word that is no longer commensurate with the contemporary symbols.*

Baeumler's separation of symbol from word isolates the former from the constant transformation that is part of the latter. Because the unity of the symbol is prior to all social interaction, it can only be based on "material" characteristics such as a set of existing ritual practices or the biological determinants of blood and race. For Baeumler, the fixed materiality of blood lends it its objective, historical quality as a foundation for myth:

*Jeder echte Mythos ist ein Mythos des Blutes. Blut ist die letzte geschichtliche Wirklichkeit, die wir kennen. (Baeumler, Alfred Rosenberg 70)*

Every true myth is a myth of blood. Blood is the final historical reality that we know.

This turn to blood and hence to race as the underlying mechanism of myth is a modernizing move that delegitimizes myth even as it attempts to affirm its significance. As Zygmunt Bauman points out with reference to Nazism in general, racism is "a thoroughly modern weapon used in the conduct of pre-modern, or at least not exclusively modern, struggles" (62). Though racism "was instrumental in mobilizing anti-modernist sentiments and anxieties," the racial policies themselves turned out to be

the culmination of a modernist project of social engineering (61, 67). Similarly, while the invocation of myth tapped anti-modern sympathies, the interpretation of myth as based on blood channeled these feelings into support for a modernist, rationalist project.

Because myth's sacredness actually lies outside of myth in another source for Baeumler, he is able to go directly to this source and do away with myth as a mediator of the sacred. From Einstein's point of view, such an elimination of myth is also the elimination of the sacred because the form of myth is itself the place where the sacred is experienced. What remains in Baeumler's focus on the "reality" of the symbol is a rationalist instrumentalization of the idea of the sacred in which myth is deprived of any sacred status and is considered a manipulable legitimator of other practices rather than an independent authority in its own right.

But because for Baeumler the meaning of the cult is on the one hand fixed and pre-defined through the symbol and on the other hand undefined in terms of specific contents, he must ultimately return to the word in order to give it "form." Neither the symbol nor blood has any specific content and neither can directly determine the structures that define a community. As a consequence, Baeumler does not insist on a return to the purity of symbols at the end of his "Inaugural Address," but rather on the need for a "Deutung der Symbole" ("interpretation of symbols") (138). Whereas Einstein designates such a recourse to judgment and analysis as a result of the spectator's rejection of a mythic image (230–31), Baeumler sees this analytical attitude as the necessary philosophical determination of the meaning of the mythic symbol.

Baeumler's insistence on the necessity of philosophical interpretation for symbols to unfold leads to the fascist consequences that Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy attribute to myth. When philosophy is necessary for myth to develop, then mythic consciousness is no longer a process that must develop in each individual member of the community and remain dependent upon a collective reception process, but something that must be orchestrated by a select group of thinkers. As Baeumler points out, the task of interpreting and determining the symbol falls to

a philosophical-political leader. According to Baeumler, philosophers:

sind Handelnde, einsame und kühne Männer, vom Schicksal dazu ausersehen, den sterbenden Mythos durch eine neue Weltansicht zu ersetzen. Der Philosoph ist der Schöpfer des Weltbildes, das an die Stelle des volkstümlichen, mythischen tritt. (*Studien* 258)

are actors, lonely and bold men, chosen by fate to replace the dying myth with a new world view. The philosopher is the creator of the image of the world that takes the place of the popular, mythic one.

Because myth has no source of legitimacy on its own and the legitimacy of ritual is mute, the mythic community must give way to a philosophical leader, and myth must defer to philosophy. Instead of using myth as a basis for community life, Baeumler instrumentalizes the idea of myth for a rationalist philosophical and political project whose goal is the victory of the philosopher over the myths of the people. This instrumentalization of myth is made possible by his denial of the aesthetic character of the sacred. The sacred becomes an inflexible and static constant rather than the locus of constantly changing forces in human experience that Einstein envisions. As a consequence, Baeumler never considers myth as an independent sphere of human creativity and a source of aesthetic (as opposed to philosophical) insight that could provide the basis for social structure. Instead, he attempts to instrumentalize myth as a legitimator of political projects, whose final justification is based on philosophical and rational arguments.

When contrasted with Einstein's aesthetic understanding of myth as an independent sphere of human experience, Baeumler's theory of myth turns out to be an anti-mythic affirmation of the authority of philosophy. But Baeumler does not merely turn away from myth in order to affirm the primacy of philosophy. Rather, philosophy must colonize the sphere of experience previously occupied by myth. The philosopher's view of the world

must “take the place of the popular, mythic one.” This replacement is the basis of Nazi cultural politics, for it allows the Nazis to speak the language of myth while at the same time delegitimizing active, mythic traditions. Rather than ceding power to a popular dimension the Nazis colonize this space with a conceptual and instrumental construction of values.

#### BLOCH'S MARXIST MANIPULATION OF MYTH

This project accords surprisingly well with Bloch's attempt to functionalize myth for a left-wing political project. The only difference is the political tendency to which myth is to be subordinated. In Bloch's analysis, myth consists of all aspects of a culture, such as tradition and ritual, that are somehow obsolete or out of place in the present. They are significant only insofar as their non-contemporaneity threatens the unity of a modern system, the “kapitalistischen Jetzt” (“capitalist Now”) (*Erbschaft* 117; *Heritage* 109), and their ideal function is to aid in bringing about their own dissolution into a future built upon contemporaneity (116–19; 108–10). His theory seeks neither to suppress nor completely to unleash myth, but to allow these remnants of the past a controlled existence until they dissolve of their own accord into the future. Bloch does not advocate a return to myth but rather seeks to “release” it from fascist control in order that it might be subordinated to an emancipatory, i.e., Marxist, goal (121–22; 113).

In spite of the fact that he has an historical rather than a biological understanding of the source of mythic experience, the structure of Bloch's argument is very similar to Baeumler's. Bloch discerns the objectivity of myth in its contradiction to a capitalist present and is only interested in how the power of such “non-contemporaneity” might be wrested away from support for fascism and sublated into a utopian Marxist future (122–23; 113–14). Baeumler meanwhile sees myth's objectivity in the silent symbol that always requires the intervention of the philosopher-politician to provide a concrete interpretation of its meaning. Neither attributes to the popular dimension any true insights nor any decision-making authority. Rather, they both attempt to mobilize the forces they see active in this dimension

for political goals that are determined outside of the popular dimension.

#### CONCLUSION

The centrality of Baeumler's perspective for the Nazis can be seen in the passages from Rosenberg's *Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts* in which he quotes Baeumler's Bachofen introduction in order to defend the Nordic character of Apollo, the god of light, against the degeneracy of a Dionysian mysticism (42–45). Though couched in mythic terms, the point of this suppression of the Dionysian is to legitimate, not a mythic dimension, but rather its suppression at the hands of an Apollonian domination of the concept. Such Nazi condemnations of popular traditions make it impossible to simply pose a fascist myth against an Enlightenment anti-myth in order to condemn the former in favor of the latter. Rather, a contemporary evaluation of myth must recognize a popular sphere of experience, outside of philosophy, that can be the source of values and social structure.

While myth and ritual are only temporary historical contradictions for Bloch and popular symbols soon to be superseded by philosophical-political interpretations for Baeumler, Einstein treats them as part of a realm of human experience that is constantly relevant and continually changing. Einstein attempts to discern how myth might be valuable in its own right as a site of irrepressible psychic processes. On the one hand this means that Einstein, in contrast to Bloch, detaches myth from a particular position in a universal history of mankind. On the other hand, Einstein does not locate myth in an inaccessible "foundation" of human existence as Baeumler does, but investigates myth as part of processes that evolve within a popular dimension of culture. In contrast to both Bloch and Baeumler, Einstein claims that myth presents an irreducible dimension of experience that must be allowed to unfold without philosophical or political intervention. It is only when thinkers dare to give up authority over this sphere that an alternative to the Nazi understanding of myth can be developed.



## NOTE

<sup>1</sup>Translations of French and German quotations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

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