



# Myth And The Limits Of Reason.(Value Inquiry Book Series 39)

*Phillip Stambovsky*

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## **Myth And The Limits Of Reason.(Value Inquiry Book Series 39)** Phillip Stambovsky

Traditionally understood as pre-critical, even pre-rational, mythical thought has in fact played a critical role in post-Enlightenment intellectual history. Modernists in philosophy and literature have used the depictive rationality of myth to disclose, in self-reflective ways, the limits of discursive sense-making in various domains of human experience. In so doing, they have effectively furthered, without resort to analytical abstractions, the epistemological critique of reason begun during the Enlightenment. Stambovsky illustrates four widely diverse examples of this critical form of mythical thinking in works by Kierkegaard, Miguel de Unamuno, Henry James, and Margaret Atwood. The selected texts focus respectively on religious, national-cultural, psychosocial, and psychobiological realms of experience. These illustrations follow an inquiry into why the very possibility of critical, mythically inventive (mythopoetic) reflection is unsatisfactorily explained by leading rationalist accounts of myth. It is with this problem in mind that Stambovsky begins his monograph with observations on the origins of rationalist and counter-rationalist conceptualizations of myth in the fragments of Xenophanes (the father of rationalist mythology) and in Plato's Phaedrus. Of pivotal import is the early rationalist discrimination of mythos from logos and its epistemological implications (the rationalist legacy) in the history of the idea of myth. Following his look at paradigmatic classical precedents, Stambovsky traces the influence of the rationalist legacy in the myth theory of Malinowski, Levi-Strauss, Cassirer, Ricoeur, and Blumenberg. The aim is to reveal how this influence in different ways limits these theories as instruments for detecting and explaining the seminal critical and historical significance of modern mythopoeia. This study will be of particular interest to teachers and students of myth theory in departments of philosophy, religion, literature, and cultural anthropology.

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