

The Myth of Mental Illness: Foundations of a Theory of Personal Conduct

Summary

myth, a symbolic narrative, usually of unknown origin and at least partly traditional, that ostensibly relates actual events and that is especially associated with religious belief. It is distinguished from symbolic behaviour (cult, ritual) and symbolic places or objects (temples, icons). Myths are specific accounts of gods or superhuman beings involved in extraordinary events or circumstances in a time that is unspecified but which is understood as existing apart from ordinary human experience. The term mythology denotes both the study of myth and the body of myths belonging to a particular religious tradition.

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As with all religious symbolism, there is no attempt to justify mythic narratives or even to render them plausible. Every myth presents itself as an authoritative, factual account, no matter how much the narrated events are at variance with natural law or ordinary experience. By extension from this primary religious meaning, the word myth may also be used more loosely to refer to an ideological belief when that belief is the object of a quasi-religious faith; an example would be the Marxist eschatological myth of the withering away of the state.

While the outline of myths from a past period or from a society other than one's own can usually be seen quite clearly, to recognize the myths that are dominant in one's own time and society is always difficult. This is hardly surprising, because a myth has its authority not by proving itself but by presenting itself. In this sense the authority of a myth indeed "goes without saying," and the myth can be outlined in detail only when its authority is no longer unquestioned but has been rejected or overcome in some manner by another, more comprehensive myth.

The word myth derives from the Greek mythos, which has a range of meanings from "word," through "saying" and "story," to "fiction"; the unquestioned validity of mythos can be contrasted with logos, the word whose validity or truth can be argued and demonstrated. Because myths narrate fantastic events with no attempt at proof, it is sometimes assumed that they are simply stories with no factual basis, and the word has become a synonym for falsehood or, at best, misconception. In the study of religion, however, it is important to distinguish between myths and stories that are merely untrue.

The first part of this article discusses the nature, study, functions, cultural impact, and types of myth, taking into account the various approaches to the subject offered by modern branches of knowledge. In the second part, the specialized topic of the role of animals and plants in myth is examined in some detail. The mythologies of specific cultures are covered in the articles Greek religion, Roman religion, and Germanic religion.

Reference

[Dr. Mary's Monkey: How the Unsolved Murder of a Doctor, a Secret Laboratory in New Orleans and Cancer-Causing Monkey Viruses Are Linked to Lee Harvey ... Assassination and Emerging Global Epidemics](#)

[Eating Disorders, Addictions and Substance Use Disorders: Research, Clinical and Treatment Perspectives](#)