MUTHOS, LOGOS, NOUS: in pursuit of the ultimate in human thought

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Abstract

The aim of this essay is to explore as far as possible the full meaning of the three terms muthos, logos, and nous (myth, reason, thoughtfulness) as expressions of human self-understanding and then to link these three terms in an attempt to give an account of the validity and essential place and function of each of them in human discourse, in meaning-giving exercises, and in the understanding of the world, in the hope of revealing in the process the indispensable significance of each of these terms for human life.

For centuries human beings have tried to articulate their understanding of the meaning of human existence, human subjectivity, and human action and have tried to adequately describe who human beings really are. Different terms and descriptions have been used to articulate human existence at different periods of history. Over the centuries, our understanding of human beings has been expressed in different metaphysico-epistemological terms: rationalism, materialism, socialism, existentialism, idealism, and so on. Although there are substantial and fundamental differences between these views, the basic issue of articulating our understanding of what it means to be human remains the primary issue. Each of these approaches (ie rationalism, materialism, etc) focuses on a specific aspect of our humanness as that which is the most basic, primary qualifying aspect of the human being: spirit, reason, matter, togetherness, existence, and so on. The way different human capacities are employed and words used for this articulation are equally interesting. Two examples of such capacities are: *logos* (or reason) and *muthos* (or myth, fable). The Greeks also had another term which, regrettably, fell into disuse, most probably because, at that stage it does not have the same significance as any one of the other two, but which is clearly of high significance in any process of human self-understanding. This is the term *nous,* or thoughtfulness.

One of the best ways of coming to terms with human self-understanding is to study the ways in which human beings express

themselves through the ages on and about themselves and their world. "Words tell our history", Gadamer (1993:170) writes. This brings us to the issue of language and terminology. The three terms mentioned above are excellent examples of giving expression to the way human beings understand their own uniqueness and their unique activities. These terms are, however, much more than mere linguistic entities. One can, in fact, refer to these terms as modes of understanding and even modes of being. Also, certain words become overburdened with meaning while others are hollowed out and, in the process, stripped of their meaning.

One word which is overburdened is the word *logos,* or reason. Its overelaboration has had some serious consequences: because of their capacity of *logos,* human beings claim absolute insight, control and understanding and even access to power; this is a distorted interpretation of *logos* which ignores emotion, imagination, sentiment and spirit. This overelaboration and distorted interpretation leads to what has been eloquently exposed as logocentrism (Derrida is one of many examples of thinkers dealing with this theme). At this stage, we should all know that all "isms", without exception, are distortions in various directions: they all involve an absolutising of the meaning of one aspect of that which is (being), and/or the limitation or reduction of the whole to only one of its aspects (reductionism).

A term which has been hollowed out and stripped of many of its significant dimensions, to such an extent that only the shell remains, is the term *muthos.* In antiquity, *muthos* was the term that articulated meaning in its most comprehensive and deepest sense. Today, it is a word that is almost abusive, a word used to describe someone or a group who represents shallowness, absence of any real significance and, above all, something or someone that is totally insignificant. We have to take a close look at the meaning(s) this word has lost in the process of becoming debased; we also need to think about what could have been gained had this term retained its original sense.

The other term, which is different from the two just discussed, and which is destined for oblivion (if not forced into silence), is the term *nous.* While *logos,* as rational thought, took over the scene of significant discourses in the West and *muthos* has been inherited as an empty, if not abusive, word, *nous* simply disappeared from the scene altogether. Unlike *logos* and *muthos, nous* has never been translated into Latin.

Logos was translated into the Latin *ratio* (reason), while *muthos,* initially translated as *fabula* (fable) with some predominantly negative connotations, was eventually taken over (in its original form) to mean myth, and was obviously regarded as a word not particularly worthy of translation and adaptation into new settings. *Muthos* remains untranslated and, as such, is

not understood. While myth can be interpreted as a kind of "wild thinking", and reason as a kind of "bounded thinking", *nous* or thoughtfulness represents a human disposition that transcends bounded thinking while, at the same time, "taming" wild thinking; *nous* can therefore justifiably be translated into the term "thoughtfulness". It is important that we examine this term, because it represents an extremely significant mode of understanding and being and, in view of recent developments, is perhaps more important now than ever before. We find ourselves in the age of networks, the atlas of knowledges, and cyberspace; we need to acquire this lost dimension of humanness in order to respond sensibly to these developments. Given the way in which they are characterised, myth and reason cannot, by themselves, respond adequately to the challenges of today.

The aim of this essay is to explore the full meaning of these three terms as expressions of human self-understanding and then to link these three terms, in an attempt to give an account of the validity and essential place of each in human discourse, in meaning, and in understanding the world, in the hope of revealing the indispensable significance of each of these terms for human life. We shall start by exploring, in a fairly comprehensive but also balanced way, the meaning and use of each of these terms, and we shall try to determine the validity and function they have for human discourse, human self-understanding and human orientation in the world, that is, the human world.

We have already indicated that these three terms are not mere linguistic terms, modes of understanding and being. The implication is that our conceptions of myth, reason and thoughtfulness must but be properly founded. We have to analyse how the mythical, rational and thoughtful modes of understanding and being are related to the basic mode of being human in the world. We should try to found our interpretation of the mythical, rational and thoughtful life of human beings on the central characteristic of how humans comprehend their world. The philosopher Martin Heidegger (1983:225ff.) may be very helpful in this attempt at understanding our world. Humans simply find themselves in the world *(Befindlichkeit)* as if thrown into it *(Geworffenheit)* and all they can do with this fate is to take care *(Sorge)* of themselves and their world. It must immediately be realised that the term "world" is of particular significance. It does *not* refer to the cosmos or the universe. Instead, it refers to the place where humans find themselves, find meaning for themselves, and have to take care of themselves; together, all these endeavours find expression in the term "world-view". Each of these three terms reflects, in its own way, the different ways in which humans do indeed take care of themselves, their world, and their fate, and the kind of world-views they develop. The important question in view of the central position of care is: What aspects of care lead, respectively, to the mythical, rational, and thoughtful or noologic thinking and

dispositions regarding the world?

A study of the three terms in dictionaries such as *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (Ritter & Gründer), *The theological dictionary of the New Testament* (Kittel), and *The Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell and Scott) may help us to find direction in our search for the meaning of these terms. The Dutch philosopher Loen's contributions, as those of Husserl and Ortega, are also of relevance here.

In order to reach an understanding of the meaning(s) of these three terms, we shall discuss the linguistic, historical and philosophical presuppositions and developments - that is, the contexts.

MUTHOS

Linguistic: The original meaning of *muthos* is "thought", but thought in a very comprehensive sense. We may accept this as the starting point for the history of the meaning of this word. Kittel (1967:765-769) distinguishes the following main stages of meaning: (1) Thought as the root meaning and may remain unexpressed (as *intention, purpose, opinion or idea, reason, rule, counsel*) with a tendency to communicate itself. It may be expressed since every thought carries with it the urge for expression. In this case it becomes (a) word in the sense of sayings or (b) word in the sense of words or (c) *an account or story*, where the main emphasis is on content. It can therefore be (i) an account of facts; or (ii) a rumour or unauthenticated story; then, (iii) a fairy-story which is not true but is valued for the kernel of truth; (iv) the fable or the fabulous account related to stories where the deities act; and finally (v) the plot of a drama or, more generally, poetic creations.

In the ancient world, the paradox is accepted: that is, that the term for "word" which can also be a "fact" means also "invented story", which is the equivalent of something that is untrue.

The paradoxical development of *muthos* may be seen in the interrelation with the terms associated with it in the course of its development, especially the term *logos*. Initially it seems as if *logos* covers very much the same conceptual ground as *muthos*. It, too, can mean rumour, fable, lying tale. According to Greek linguistic sense, the distinction between true and false is as little developed in relation to *logos* as it is in relation to muthos. *Logos* as meaning a true story as distinct from *muthos* (the false) is a later, though dominant, development. However, in the Greek world this distinction is never absolute. *Muthos* is a reflection of *logos* and indirectly mediates the truth which can be culled from *logos* by means of rich allegorical exposition.

Muthos has a threefold relation to *logos*: (1) the fairy tale as distinct from the credible history; (2) the mythical form of an idea as distinct from its

dialectical presentation; (3) popular myth as distinct from the deeper meaning (the kernel of truth) which can be extracted from the word "*muthos*". Understandably, in general instruction, *logos* is more highly esteemed than *muthos*.

Historical: In spite of its deficiency in truth content, and the other objections that could be brought against it, myth has a solid place in the intellectual world of Greece. Phantasy is the ability to build myths that express all experiences which cannot be verified scientifically. It is important, however, to realise that phantasy may also have a different and much more constructive meaning. Reference can here be made to Foucault's comments (1977) on Deleuze. Historically, as a result of the influence of the Christian critique of myth, the mythical world-view came to be understood as the opposite of a scientific world-view. One only has to read Homeros to realise the overwhelming role of reason and, especially, noology which the Greeks assign to human Dasein. Both the worlds of religious traditions and the poetic forms of thoughtfulness are answers constructed as a result of human imaginative powers, as efforts to understand aspects of being human.

Although myth and the mythical do not really have a place, according to some, in our scientific age, it is nevertheless in this age of science that myth is the chosen word penetrating the life of language as the expression of that which lies beyond and on the other side of knowledge and science (Gadamer 1993:170; Cf. especially Gadamer 1999 as well).

Philosophical: Mythology signifies all uncontrollable powers that limit and overwhelm our consciousness but, at the same time, its link with phantasy opens up a totally different set of perspectives on human meaning-giving activities as such. According to Paul Ricoeur (1967:5), myth is "not a false explanation by means of images and fables, but a traditional narration which relates to events that happened at the beginning of time and which has the purpose of providing grounds for the ritual actions of men of today and, in a general manner, establishing all the forms of action and thought by which man understands himself in his world. .. Myth reveals its exploratory significance and its contribution to understanding, ... its power of discovering and revealing ... Myth is a dimension of modern thought." Gadamer expresses the same view. "In truth," Gadamer (1977:51) writes, "myth is obviously and intimately akin to thinking consciousness. Even the philosophical explication of myth in the language of concepts adds nothing essentially new to the constant new movement back and forth between discovery and concealment, between reverential awe and spiritual freedom, that accompanied the entire history of Greek myth." Along the same lines Kockelmans (1973:67) expresses his views on the significance of the

mythical mode of being human when he writes : "Myth is primarily an inherent human form of understanding or conceiving. What is typical of this mode of understanding is that it is oriented toward a certain totality of meaning or world and not immediately toward concrete events, states of affair, or entities of some kind. This form of understanding or conceiving has the character of a firm belief in the totality of meaning or world which it discloses and which is its immediate subject matter. On the basis of this firm belief, action of some kind becomes possible and meaningful." This kind of action extends to all forms of human experience: theoretical understanding, social practice, religious ritual, economic behaviour, and so on. Any time human beings are in need of a totality of meaning in order to be able to act theoretically or practically they appeal to this mode of understanding.

Georges Gusdorf (1973:261-262) adds a significant dimension to these views with his emphasis on the fact that while the death of myth runs the risk of producing ontological despair which made primitive civilizations perish, the mythical consciousness designates the supreme instance that regulates the ontological equilibrium of human beings. It reveals the profound song of human destiny in its plenitude which not only encompasses time but also goes beyond time. Myth consists in maintaining and keeping alive the idea of the infinite and eternity.

LOGOS

Linguistic: *Logos* can be translated as "word" or "saying". In the second case, it can mean "reason" and "rational activity". According to Kittel (1967:73-75) terms such as "counting", "calculation", "account" and "consideration" are not far removed from the term "*logos*". These terms, then, bring us very close to reflection, ground, and condition, ideas which became important in everyday use and in philosophy. Whereas *muthos* can refer to "meaningful statements" related to history, *logos* is used for rationally established and constructed "speech". Kittel (1967:77) elaborates on this in the following way: "Although little used in epic, *logos* achieved a comprehensive and varied significance with the process of rationalisation which characterised the Greek spirit. Indeed, in its manifold historical application one might almost call it symbolic of the Greek understanding of the world and existence." This agrees with the point already made: that these terms are modes of understanding about what it means to be human.

Historical: Initially, *logos* was understood as being very similar way to the word myth. As a result of the emphasis on *logos*, the scientific world-view is characterised by an understanding of the world as calculable and controllable, thus dissolving mythical world-views. For the scientist everything

which cannot be methodologically verified is of a mythical nature. Hence the move from *muthos* to *logos* during the age of the enlightenment. This view is also supported by Christianity. In the case of Christianity, world is understood as the untrue, as the being of humans in need of salvation. The romantics, however, take a different view. According to the romantics, myth is seen as the carrier of its own truth which cannot be reached by rational explanations of the world. Eventually myths, as a unique human ability to bestow meaning, were forced into the background, and reason emerged as the sole meaning-giving agency.

Philosophical: *Logos* thinks in terms of the essence or being of things and thus possesses a certain knowledge of things and, as such, is in direct opposition to what myth (Latin:fabula) represents.

The agreement between inner consciousness and the reasonable organisation of beings is included in the human capacity called "*logos*" by the Greeks and "*ratio*" by the Romans. We should never underestimate the immense significance of human rationality for the human race in the world. Scientific and technical developments provide ample proof of this significance. Likewise, that this mode of understanding and being is nevertheless limited and has its own shortcomings should never be denied. Human reason (ie in the sense in which rationalism and empiricism and all related approaches use it) is inadequate as a means of fully expressing what belongs to humanity. This view has been extensively explored in the literature and will therefore not be discussed here. Nonetheless, rationalists and empiricists accept the complete adequacy of rational exercises.

NOUS

Linguistic: According to Liddell and Scott (1955) the root Greek verb *noew* means roughly the following: to perceive by the eyes; to observe, but also to think, to suppose, to be thoughtful; *noesis* means intelligence or thought, and *noema* that which is perceived. *Nous* means mind, or to be sensible; to have one's mind directed to something; also heart and the thoughtful. For a concise definition of *nous* the following descriptions given by Kittel (1967:952) should suffice: The original meaning of *nous* is the "(inner) sense directed on an object", embraces "sensation", "power of spiritual perception", "capacity for intellectual apprehension". Of the wealth of possibilities of meaning contained in the term the following, according to Kittel (1967:952-953), are the chief senses found in actual usage: 1. Mind, disposition for the total, inner or moral attitude; 2. Insight, inventiveness, and more generally spirit, reason, consciousness, the mental side of human beings which shows them to be feeling, willing and thinking beings; 3.

Understanding, thinking ability, capacity of intellectual perception, wisdom; 4. Meaning, significance.

For the purposes of this article "thoughtfulness" appears to be a suitable translation of *nous.*

Historical: The rediscovery of *nous* may contribute to a reassessment of the place and value of myth and the rediscovery of *nous* and the reassessment of *muthos*, together with the deconstruction of reason, may succeed in enriching and uplifting sensible human discourse. Furthermore, this may come about at a time when the implications of the deconstruction of *logos* (ie the rational or logocentric) seem to be fading away without the comprehensive impact one was hoping for and that is so urgently needed.

Given that my argument will centre around the term *nous* in order to rediscover an appropriate place for *muthos* and *logos*, we need to pay some attention to noology as it is, for instance, explored by Edgar Morin (1983, 1990, 1991) in a very special way. We have to take heed of the remark by Dreyfus & Dreyfus (1988) that *nous* has never been translated into Latin and how unfortunate this neglect really was. The two terms, *noema* and *noesis*, are extensively employed by Husserl (1954) in the development of his philosophical views, and are still highly relevant. The intentional and strictly non-material component of an experience is described by Husserl as *noesis*. This word is related to *nous* and acquires a deep philosophical significance. Husserl looks at *noesis* as 'specifications of *nous'* and the *noema* is the ideal content correlate of *noesis* often referred to as 'noematic meaning'. Equally relevant are the views of Ortega (1961:42-43) on *nous*. He writes "that the value that justice and truth have in themselves, that plenary sufficiency in them that makes us prefer them to the very life that produces them, is the quality we denominate spirituality." The spiritual is not an incorporeal substance, not a reality, but simply a quality that consists in the possession of a special significance and value. The perception of justice, the knowledge or thought of truth, artistic creation and enjoyment possess a significance of their own, a value in themselves. They are spiritual life or culture. The Greeks would have called this spirituality *nous.*

Philosophical: Noology means a study of the activities related to *nous* or the phenomenon called *nous.* Edgar Morin has developed some very significant views on this and how crucial noology is not only for the human sciences, but for all the sciences (1983) and also, perhaps more importantly, for human thinking (1990). Morin names the human noetic activities in many ways, but the two main foci are the noosphere (articulating the life of ideas), and noology (articulating the organisation of ideas). These views are made

explicit and are comprehensively explored in his book on ideas (Morin 1991). "The noosphere is in us and we are in the noosphere" (1991:241) he states emphatically. Morin's work is a formidable articulation of human spirituality in an age of reductionism in the forms of technicism, scientism, and logocentrism.

In his "Apologia for the art of healing" Gadamer 1996:73-74 began from the Greek experience of the world. We have to recognise, he stated, that the body (as well as other capacities or functions such as reason, mind, soul, etc) cannot be treated without, at the same time, treating the soul. He also suggests that perhaps even this is not enough. It is impossible to treat the body, soul, and so on without possessing knowledge concerning the whole of being. In Greek the whole of being is *hole ousia.* Anyone knowing this phrase in Greek will also hear, along with the expression "the whole of being", the notion of "hale and healthy being". The being whole of the whole and the being healthy of the whole, the healthiness of wellbeing, seems to be intimately related. When somebody is unwell, you often hear people say that something is lacking, or that something is wrong.

We need to recognise that a genuine consciousness of the problem and a genuine concentration of thought upon that problem is only possible if the whole is disturbed. We know only too well how physical illness can make us insistently aware of our bodily nature by creating a disturbance in something which, normally, by its very freedom from disturbance, almost completely escapes our attention. And what is wellbeing if it is not precisely this condition of not noticing, of being unhindered, of being ready for and open to everything?

Through Heidegger we have learned that this sense of "it is there" does not have the thinglike character of an object. The decisive point is that, in this "it is there", in our being given over to the world, in our state of openness, in our spiritual receptivity for everything, whatever it may be, we are also there ourselves. For this the Greeks used the term *nous.* This term, when properly applied to human beings, refers to the awesome capacity humans possess to give themselves over to something completely, and to allow what is other to be entirely "there" in its own right. No other capacity, than this neglected one called *nous,* has these same dimensions. In another essay Gadamer (1993:166) makes *nous* even more explicit when he states: "The highest way in which truth is revealed, in which in this way the logos-bearing capacity of being in human thinking reveals itself, is called *nous* by the Greeks." This concept of *nous* is, according to contemporary thinking, in agreement with "thoughtfulness" (German: Vernunft). "According to Kant, it is the ability of ideas. Its fundamental need is the need for unity, in which disparate experiences are taken together and integrated. Mere multiplicity does not satisfy thoughtfulness. Where there is multiplicity, it wants to see

what it signifies and how it is formed... Thoughtfulness is there where thought is with itself."

It is the reflection on *nous* that leads Morin (1983) to his significant insight, which in a substantial way complements the views of Gadamer discussed above, of relating *nous* to the knowing mind and noology to the science of the knowing mind. It is in terms of *nous* that Morin articulates "the real complexity of an unheard-of interpenetration" of the sciences, as well as his consideration that "there is likewise a Gordian knot where everything is tied together and which reflects the multi-determined character of knowledge." Knowledge in this sense has the following determinations which are individual, bio-anthropological, sociocultural, psychoanalytical, and noological (which encompasses the linguistic, logical, and ideological moments). This combination of moments, in forming the noological, constitutes at the same time the notion of paradigm, and governs the whole organisation of reasoning and the direction of the reasoning process, and orients the discursive developments at the heart of ideologies and theories and all logical processes. At the same time it relates logically the central axioms of a theory to its rules and inferences. It is in this combination of the linguistic and the logical that the noological system is formed, while integrating into this system mythology, ideology and theory. No wonder Morin characterises these events as noology, that is, as the organisation of ideas (1991:161-238), ideas that find themselves in the noosphere (1991:105-157) from where it calls for organisation and integration.

The massive and elemental idea of the noological system, that is the *nous* in full function, holds up the entire intellectual edifice. The whole structure of our thought system is hereby transformed; the whole superstructure of ideas is affected, caved in. It concerns both our views of, and actions on, the world and the heart of our societal existence. This focus has enormous implications for the existential, inter-individual, social, political and cultural dimensions of human beings, and of course for the future of humanity. In other words, *nous* has the function of relating and directly integrating the central issues of the human make-up and, as such, constitute a core, but the highly missed core, of a philosophical anthropology. Where these foci are missing we indeed encounter in the words of Morin (1990:18-21) "a pathology of knowledge" and "blind intelligence".

New developments in the field of knowledge and the field of information and communication technologies pose new challenges to human thinking and our handling of knowledge. The comprehensive and penetrating nature of these challenges, and possible human responses, are worked out by many. In this context, Lévy's notion of collective intelligence and intelligent communities, directly related to information and

communication technologies, are excellent examples (1997, 1998). Stiegler's analyses of, and reflections on, "technics and time" are equally relevant (1994, 1996). Gilles Deleuze (1993), Pierre Lévy (1993), and Michel Serres (1994) all offer examples from a theoretical point of view and from the point of view of challenges to the future of human thinking in this context, and which are relevant to these developments. An atlas of knowledges, network theory, a new conception of thinking, and the future of human thinking in view of developments in information technologies offer new ways of dealing with current challenges related to knowledge, understanding, humanness and so on.

All these explorations rest on one assumption: there exists a human capacity which can meet these challenges in a pertinent and unique way, but which needs awareness and articulation. Stiegler (1996:9) emphasises the need for a new way of handling matters in view of certain new developments. In previous centuries, human beings slept in the beds in which they were born. They consumed food which varied very little from that of the diet eaten by their grandchildren. For seasons, years and generations landscapes, objects and ways of living remain identical. Everything appeared to be essentially stable. In recent times, however, and especially under the impact of technics, technology and technoscience, things have been transformed dramatically. Stability seems to be the exception and change has become the rule. Everything is a process. Tensions are created. A deep and fundamental disorientation emerges. It would be madness not to give an account of these developments. To these radical changes humans have to respond. It is expected of us to at least attempt to think another world.

To be able to think some new world, to invent a new world, thinking should go beyond the rationalistic and empiricist tradition of thought. Lévy (1997) develops the idea of collective intelligence as being a unique possibility that will enable humans to cope with this new kind of thinking, a thinking which will be nomadic not in the sense of "moving from point to point of the surface of the globe, but crossing universes of problems, lived worlds, landscapes of meaning" (1997:xxii). Mere rational thought will be inadequate. He links it deliberately to *nous* and the noetic by emphasising the link of thought to imagination (in a comprehensive sense). He writes (1997:248): "Unimaginable, imaginable, and imagined not only uniquely determine the three steps of *a noetic staircase,* but a dynamic spiral of the imagination." The ultimate finality of collective intelligence will be "to place the reins of *the great ontological and noetic machine* in the hands of the human species." (p250). *Nous* should inform, instruct and guide thinking. Deleuze (1994:138-139) also calls very emphatically and convincingly for a new approach to thinking. He distinguishes between a dogmatic image of

thought and a new image of thought. The conditions for a true critique of thinking and a true creation or invention are the same: the destruction of an image of thought which presupposes itself and the genesis of the act of thinking in thought itself." In view of Deleuze and Guattari's opinions, this may be called a noological activity. In a later publication they explicitly state that "nous creates the image of thought" (1994:44), a view which, of course, is clearly supported by the full weight of their philosophical standpoint. That is what Deleuze's "philosophy of phantasm" hopes to achieve; and this idea was made explicit by Michel Foucault (1977:169): "We should be alert to the surface effects in which the Epicurians take such pleasure: emissions proceeding from deep within bodies and rising like the wisps of a fog - interior phantoms that are quickly reabsorbed into other depths by the sense of smell, by the mouth, by the appetites; extremely thin membranes, which detach themselves from the surfaces of objects and proceed to impose colors and contours deep within our eyes...; phantasms created by fear or desire...It is this expanding domain of intangible objects that must be integrated into our thought: we must articulate a philosophy of the phantasm that cannot be reduced to a primordial fact through the inermediary of perception or an image, but which arise between surfaces, where it assumes meaning..." This view is a confirmation of the view of Pascal as quoted by Dreyfus & Dreyfus (1988:193): There are two equally dangerous extremes - to shut reason out and to let nothing else in".

Michel Serres (1997:xvi) also expresses this need to go beyond rationalism and to cultivate a kind of thinking characterised by invention and inventiveness; Serres, however, specifically refers to science and scientific rationality: "Science speaks of organs, functions, cells, and molecules, to admit finally that it's been a long time since life has been spoken of in laboratories, but it never says flesh..." The "liberty of invention, thus of thought" is what he calls for since that is what transcends limits and boundaries (pxvii). The enabling capacity of humans in this regard is *nous* or the noetic and noological. He links inventiveness and thinking, but a thinking with a unique character. What these thinkers articulate is precisely the awareness of the need for something different in human approach and disposition from our normal type of thinking.

They emphasise a human position of understanding which lies outside myth and its bewilderment, and beyond reason, rationality and its keenness towards power to control, to take possession, to occupy and to expand. In other words, these writers have searched for a position on the other side of our generally accepted notions of myth and rationality. However, these writers want these modes of understanding and being to be incorporated and mobilised and taken further — further, that is, than they can take human societies by themselves. This new position is nothing but an

exploration of the notion of *nous* in its full scope; it includes complexity and fruitfulness and the opening up of remarkable inventive possibilities. This is the notion that takes us away from repetition and linearity into domains of the differential, the multiple and the tabular and that demonstrates that humans can cope if they can mobilise myth and reason by eliminating the deficiencies and focus on the positive moments. This mobilising mode of understanding is what the Greeks called *nous*; it is *nous* that is in the process of being rediscovered and that should be explored and exploited more intelligently and inventively. This mode of understanding and being qualifies the human being to inventively respond to the challenges of our time and to give meaning to our lives and to make sense of our world (Nancy 2001) in the age of globalisation.

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