

A DANGEROUS FORM OF BELIEF:
AN ANALYSIS OF ALFRED ROSENBERG'S *MYTHUS OF THE TWENTIETH*
CENTURY AS AN EXAMPLE OF A MODERN FORM OF RELIGION

by

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the thought of the Nazi ideologist Alfred Rosenberg as it is contained in his book, *The Mythus of the Twentieth Century*. I examine the spiritualized racism he describes in the *Mythus* as a distinctly modern form of religion. I do this by analyzing it according to three categories that I believe reflect the form of the modern consciousness: scientific naturalism, the culture of authenticity and self-conscious narrative epistemology. I argue that although the tribalist ground of this religiosity is pre-modern in origin, it is nevertheless modern in its form. Rosenberg articulates and understands his racist religion of the blood in a form that reflects the three categories that I take to be representative of modern consciousness. I conclude with a discussion of how this form of religion or ‘spirituality’ is characteristic of modernity.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM AND MATERIAL

Alfred Rosenberg (1893-1946) was executed at Nuremberg on October 16, 1946 for his role not only in the German war effort and the atrocities perpetrated by Nazi Germany, but also for laying the foundation of an ideology that went so far in justifying both. His prolific writings were cited as evidence of the horrific plans and nature of the National Socialist movement. Most remarkably, Rosenberg went to the gallows regretting only that National Socialism had been sullied by the egoistic opportunism and cynical power games played by those such as Hermann Goering and Joseph Goebbels (Fest 1970: 174). At no time did he regret or retract any element of his spiritualized racism and explicit anti-Semitism; he died lamenting only that the purity of the movement and its cause had been lost.

In his person, Alfred Rosenberg is an example of an aspect of National Socialism that is often ignored by scholars investigating the Nazi movement. While hyper-nationalism, racist pride and the will to conquer were clearly important elements that formed Nazism and made it popular, Rosenberg was not only devoted to National Socialism as a seemingly sacred cause but articulated a mythic system for the movement in his book, *Der Mythos des Zwanzig Jahrhunderts: eine Wertung der seelischgeistigen Gestaltenkaempfe unserer Zeit* (*The Mythos of the Twentieth Century: An Evaluation of the Spiritual-Intellectual Confrontation of Our Age*), hereafter referred to as the *Mythus*. The *Mythus* displays a religious understanding of and devotion to the Nazi movement that makes it important to examine as more than just a political ideology. Nazi religiosity

was not simply a political religion that sanctified the operation of a racist and nationalistic state in its greedy drive for power. There are too many examples of devotion to Nazi ideals that suggest the movement meant more to people than just an outlet for greed and the lust for power. Aside from the example of Rosenberg himself, a middle-class non-combatant and aspiring intellectual who died honestly believing in the cause, there is also the fact that the resources necessary for the murder of millions of Jews would have been much more useful had they been directed instead to the war effort; while it is certainly reassuring to think that hatred, stupidity or simply evil motives alone could be responsible for Nazi aggression and atrocities, it is both naïve and dangerous to believe that people commit such horrendous and *organized* crimes without any sort of rationale or moral motivation, no matter how twisted.

The topic of this essay is the nature of the quasi-religious vision constructed by Rosenberg in the *Mythus*. I argue that the *Mythus* represents a distinctly modern form of religiosity because it participates in three important aspects of the modern consciousness. These three aspects are: a scientific or naturalistic approach to the nature of reality; the notion that our moral sources are contained within the inner depths of the self; and that consciously produced stories or narratives are authentic expressions and sources of self-understanding. I emphasize that I am interested in the form of this religiosity, rather than only its content. This paper begins with a brief account of the life of Alfred Rosenberg and a short description of the content of the *Mythus*. In the second chapter, I examine the prevailing theoretical approaches to the nature of National Socialism in a review of the literature, culminating in a description of the theoretical approach that I use to analyze the *Mythus* as an example of a modern religiosity. Chapter three is the analysis of the *Mythus*

according to the three categories of the modern consciousness. I conclude with a discussion of how this peculiarly modern form of religion poses particularly difficult questions for liberal thought and people living within modern culture.

Who is Alfred Rosenberg?

Alfred Rosenberg was a Baltic German. Born and raised in Reval in what is now Latvia, he attended university in Moscow and was present in the city during the Bolshevik Revolution. It was there that he was exposed to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the famous nineteenth century Russian anti-Semitic text, and observed that a large number of Jews were involved in the leadership of the Bolshevik party, either beginning or solidifying his intellectual anti-Semitism.¹ Rosenberg hailed the arrival of German troops in his hometown in the summer of 1918, and witnessed with horror their retreat after the armistice of November. By January of 1919, Rosenberg had left Russian territory and emigrated to Munich, one of the hotbeds of counter-revolutionary fervour in the new Weimar republic. He was one of the first members of the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (National Socialist German Worker's Party, or NSDAP) and worked with another founder of the party, Dietrich Eckart (1868-1923), as an editor on the party's official newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter* (Racist or Nationalist Observer). Rosenberg was probably an important influence on the charismatic new leader of the party, Adolf Hitler (Bollmus 1993: 184). When Hitler was sent to prison in 1923, he left Rosenberg in charge of the outlawed NSDAP.

¹ I use the term intellectual anti-Semitism to distinguish it from the more traditional religious anti-Semitism that blamed the Jews for the death of Jesus Christ. Rosenberg's intellectual anti-Semitism is more in the tradition of men like Richard Wagner, who had a rationalized ideological regard for the Jews as enemies.

Rosenberg published *The Mythus of the Twentieth Century* in 1930. Its anti-Christian themes caused problems for the party in parliament after his election to the Reichstag that same year. Hitler made certain that Rosenberg made clear that it was his own personal version of the National Socialist movement. Based on this and various remarks made by Hitler that seem alternately to praise or insult Rosenberg, scholars debate the degree to which the *Mythus* represents 'true' National Socialism (see Bracher 1970: 281; Steigmann-Gall 2003: 91-93; Fest 1970: 173-174; Rhodes 1980: 8, 24-35). Considering that Hitler made Rosenberg head of the *Amt für die Überwachung der gesamten geistigen und weltanschaulichen Schulung und Erziehung der NSDAP* (Office for the Supervision of the Ideological and Intellectual Indoctrination of the NSDAP) in 1934, a largely powerless post within the party but one that allowed Rosenberg to distribute his book to every school in Germany, his job as an editor for the party newspaper, and that his book sold hundreds of thousands of copies, it is reasonable to assume that Rosenberg's *Mythus* represents Nazi ideology to some degree even if not in an official capacity.

Rosenberg's power within the party itself was never very strong, and continued to decline throughout the 1930s. His weak personality and pretensions to be the philosopher of National Socialism, a title Hitler had claimed for himself ever since the publication of *Mein Kampf*, did not make it likely that he would ever gain much real power (Cecil 1971: 44-45). Nevertheless, he was appointed Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories in 1941. He was executed less for his role as Nazi ideologist (international law prosecutes people for what they have done, rather than what they have thought) than in his capacity as minister in a territory that saw the deportation of Jews to the death camps. Yet the

Nuremberg documents clearly refer to his ideology (USGPO 1946: 593-616). Most importantly, he died a true believer (Fest 1970: 163).

The Mythus of the Twentieth Century

Rosenberg's chief work, *The Mythus of the Twentieth Century*, describes his understanding of the meaning of the National Socialist movement, the cause whose corruption and defeat he regretted as much as the loss of his own life. Uriel Tal calls it a sacred manual of Nazism that describes an idolatrous cult of nature and blood, a natural religion based on race (Tal 2004: 101). The *Mythus* is divided into six sections: racial history, an analysis of the distinctive features of Germanic art and creative achievement, a description of the coming Reich, race hygiene, the responsibilities of the coming Reich in religion and education, and international affairs (Cecil 1972: 83). It remains unavailable in a complete English translation to this day; I base my description and analysis of the *Mythus* on Robert Pois's translation of selected excerpts, relying almost exclusively on the sections Pois calls 'Race and History' and 'Nordic Religion' (Pois 1970). I will review only some of its more important aspects in order to familiarize the reader with its general character.

To begin with, Rosenberg clearly ascribes a spiritual nature to race when he says "Soul means race when viewed from within. And, vice versa, race is the externalization of soul" (Trans. Pois 1970: 34). The Nordic race has a particularly important spiritual nature: "Today a new belief is arising: the *Mythus* of the blood; the belief that the godly essence of man itself is to be defended through the blood...the Nordic race represents that *Mysterium* which has overthrown and replaced the old sacraments" (Trans. Pois 1970:

82).² Three things are evident immediately: the qualities of race are associated with blood; the racial blood is itself a power, superior to that of the Christian sacraments, and; Nordic blood is the focus of a new faith that expresses and realizes that power. Rosenberg then goes on to connect the blood both to nature and to the creation of civilizations throughout history:

Man fulfills the command of the blood, in cult and in life, in the realm of the subconscious, 'true to nature' as that happy phrase describes the harmony between nature and civilization...Racial history is, therefore, both natural history and spiritual mystique. (Trans. Pois 1970: 37)

The Nazis took Germanic folk tales and idealized the German peasant living close to the soil, stressing the importance of the *volk* over that of the individual in the culture (Bausinger 1994: 34-35). This amounted to a sort of Nordic German tribal cult that recalled a utopia of the Germanic spirit and put a religious stamp on its power to create culture (40). Blood, race and spiritual power are connected to each other through a distorted version of history that gives the Aryan race (another name for Nordic) credit for the creation of not just German but *all* civilization on earth. The decline of civilization is a direct result of the decline in the purity of blood (Vieler 1999: 50). Only pure Aryan-Nordic blood can sustain civilization; it has a power the other races do not.

Rosenberg describes this special spiritual power of the blood in terms of 'Being' or *Dasein*, and opposes it to *Sosein*, or Being-given:³

This *Dasein*, however, is the race-bound soul...This race-soul lives and unfolds itself in nature, a nature which awakens certain characteristics while inhibiting others. These strengths of race, soul and nature are the eternal preconditions, *Dasein* and life, and it is only from them that *Sosein* is finally produced as civilization, forms of belief, art and so on. (Trans. Pois: 118)

² Following Rosenberg. I use the terms Aryan, Nordic and German interchangeably throughout this essay. Aryan refers to the original race from which the Nordic German race sprang.

³ It is interesting that Rosenberg uses the categories used by Heidegger three years earlier in *Being and Time*. No scholars seem to comment on this. This link between Heidegger and Rosenberg would be a worthy subject of study considering Heidegger's early commitment to National Socialism.

Each race has a religion appropriate to it; for the Nordic Germans, religion is based on this contact with *Dasein* rather than any codified or revealed *Sosein* (Pois 1986: 110-112).⁴ *Dasein* is the direct experience and contact with the mysterious force of ‘life’; thus, the *volk* or German race is the source of its own religion (Pois 1986: 44-45).

Rosenberg is arguing that only the Nordic race is capable of creating an authentic way of life and civilization based on an inner contact with ‘Being’, rather than having to live and build civilization based on an outside dispensation that he calls *Sosein* (Whisker 1982: 106). As Uriel Tal says, God becomes man in the Nordic race (Tal 2004: 98). This is the source (or rationalization) of his anti-Semitism. The Semitic race does not have direct access to Being as the Aryan does; ‘the Jew’, as Rosenberg calls them, must rely on an artificial or crafted *Sosein* that has a source external to the self, therefore rendering it a legalistic obedience to a constructed image rather than a inner devotion to the truths of Being. Judaism is not simply a revealed religion, but a marker of the spiritual quality (or lack thereof) of the Jewish race. The revealed nature of Jewish ethics and experience of the divine are in direct contrast to the direct and immediate relationship with the divine that is characteristic of Aryan blood.

This is the basis for Rosenberg’s rejection of almost all traditional Christian doctrine. The Old Testament, for example, he dismisses as a Jewish document that has nothing to do with Germanic religion (Steigmann-Gall 2003: 95-96). The codification of ethics by St. Paul and the Catholic Church are similar Jewish corruptions of the Germanic spirit because they interfere in the natural contact with *Dasein* and, even worse, attempt to convince the Nordic race that they have no such connection; only inferior peoples need

⁴ This exclusivism is based on Herder, but in Rosenberg is given a racial turn. Rosenberg specifically cites Herder (see Pois 1970: 88-89).

complex, codified laws of *Sosein* (Whisker 1982: 112).⁵ ‘The Jew’ presents a cosmological threat to the German race rather than simply a social or biological one. The Semitic estrangement from God or the divine has corrupted the way the German race thinks about itself and the world, and even worse, interbreeding threatens the spiritual nature of the race itself by polluting it with a strain that diminishes its direct contact with the divine or *Dasein*. A positive Christianity is one that recognizes Jesus as a Nordic prophet and symbol of God’s identity with the Nordic race.

Rosenberg believes universalism and individualism are examples of the Judaic corruption facing the German race. The *Volk* ought to come before the individual (Pois 1970: 92-93). The myth of the blood, as the expression of the special Nordic connection to Being, must take precedence over the whole of one’s life in order to unify the *Volk* in reflection of its very real blood, and therefore spiritual, kinship: “Personalities must rally around the center of the *Volk* and race-soul around that mysterious center which makes fruitful the very cadence of German Being and Becoming” (Trans. Pois 1970: 97). Likewise, universalism is an attack on the exclusive quality and nature of the Nordic race (96-97).⁶ Rosenberg’s basic premise is that the Nordic race alone is endowed with the an intimate connection to Being and God that is threatened by the Jewish race through its

⁵ Rosenberg is probably influenced by the Christian idea (from Galatians 2:16) that under the new dispensation of Christ, human beings are free from the commandments of the old Law (such as the dietary restrictions). This point of view, that faith in Christ is an immediate experience of God than simple obedience to a set of laws, is part of the traditional caricature of Jewish legalism as opposed to Christian spirituality. Rosenberg transforms this theology into a racial opposition between Nordic *Dasein* and Jewish *Sosein*.

⁶ By universalism, Rosenberg is referring to the idea that all human beings share a common nature. With regard to Christianity, it means universal human access to God (through faith in Christ). With regard to modern liberalism, it means respect for the universal natural rights of human beings *as* human beings. Rosenberg rejects both the salvation of all souls through a Second Coming and the dream of ‘humanizing humanity’ (see Pois 1970: 36).

corrupting blood and accompanying ideologies of individualism, universalism and *Sosein* ethics and civilization.

The Nazi rejection of some of the most important aspects of modern Western civilization, such as some of the core Christian doctrines, individualism and universalism, has played a large role in the way that scholars have characterized and approached the *Mythus* and Nazism theoretically. The next chapter reviews some of the most important literature on Nazi ideology, especially with regard to Rosenberg and the religious characteristics of the National Socialist movement.

CHAPTER TWO

APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF THE RELIGIOUS ASPECTS OF NATIONAL SOCIALISM

There are three general approaches to the study of the ideological character of National Socialism. The first tends to disregard Nazi ideology almost entirely and instead focuses on other aspects, whether this is a sociological study of the structure of Nazism or a study of what Hitler and the Nazis ‘really’ wanted. The second type of investigation seeks to understand the intellectual history or sources of Nazi ideology. These studies tend to examine the roots of National Socialist racism, nationalism, Romanticism, attitudes to modernity and other intellectual sources. A very small portion falls into the third category, those that are interested in exploring the religious aspects of National Socialism. Of these, even fewer are interested in Rosenberg as an example of Nazi religiosity. This chapter first examines the theoretical approaches used by existing studies of Nazism. Secondly, it formulates a new theoretical approach to interpreting Rosenberg’s *Mythus* as a distinctly modern form of religion.

Approaches that disregard ideology

As early as 1934, Ludwig Lewisohn described Nazism as “a pagan revolt against the whole of Christian civilization” that was based on a supposed special spiritual and biological quality to Aryan Germans; even more incredibly, he says, this racial myth is actually believed (Lewisohn 1934: 144-145). In *Revolution of Nihilism* (1939), Hermann Rauschning claims National Socialism is nothing but a nihilistic drive for power that used whatever ideological props served its purpose. This remains a popular tradition in the

characterization of National Socialism. Other important historians in this tradition are Martin Broszat, Friedrich Meinecke and Aryeh Unger (Pois 1986: 14). Nazism is quickly dismissed as an irrational mish mash of anti-capitalism, anti-Bolshevism, anti-modernism, anti-materialism, anti-Semitism, anti-liberalism, with no coherence and no underlying unity. Similar is the tendency to focus on Hitler and characterize him as seeking power more than anything else. Alan Bullock and Hugh Trevor-Roper fall into this category (Pois 1986: 15). Marxist scholars, such as Arther Schweitzer in *Big Business in the Third Reich* (1964) or Wilhelm Reich in *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1970), have no interest in Nazi ideology itself since they consider ideology a sham for class interests. Studies of Nazi ideology often focus mainly on Hitler and *Mein Kampf* (1926), for the obvious reason that one seeks to understand Nazism through its undisputed leader.

The thought of Alfred Rosenberg draws far less attention, despite his role as party ideologue and editor for the *Völkischer Beobachter*. Karl Bracher, in *The German Dictatorship*, refers to Rosenberg's failures in calling him the 'administrative clerk' of the National Socialist *Weltanschauung*, but also believes that despite being marginalized in the party itself, Rosenberg did play an important role in the realm of Nazi ideology: "Rosenberg's disappointment was more the misunderstanding of an impractical theorist; the regime did everything in its power to realize his bizarre ideology" (Bracher 1971: 282). Many of the scholars who pay any attention to Rosenberg dismiss the importance of his ideology. Richard Bollmus calls Rosenberg an important contributor to the 'irrational' ideology of the NSDAP, and notes that Hitler rejected Rosenberg's attempts to give a 'religious intensity' to his racist interpretation of history (Bollmus 1993: 185), opposing

Rosenberg's 'mysticism' to Hitler's 'rationalism' (186). In *The Faces of the Third Reich*, Joachim Fest presents a brief biography of some of the major Nazis, including Rosenberg. Fest portrays Rosenberg as a pathetic figure, 'a prophet without honour in his own country' (Fest 1970: 165). Fest approaches Rosenberg's *Mythus* seeking a rational system of philosophy rather than a mythic expression of spiritual beliefs, saying that it "was based on emotional arguments ... safeguarded against any objective, logical refutation" (167). All of these scholars tend not to take Nazi ideology seriously as a source of German motivation for participation in the movement, and spend little time examining an ideology that they usually dismiss as 'bizarre' or 'irrational'.

Scholarship on the intellectual sources of Nazism

There is more scholarship devoted to the study of the intellectual sources of the Nazi movement. In *The Ideological Roots of German National Socialism* (1999), Eric Vieler describes Nazi ideology in general, and places Rosenberg in the section detailing the mythological roots of Nazism. Many scholars approach Nazism as a negative creed, as a failure of modernity. Jeffrey Herf's *Reactionary Modernism*, for example, argues "It is not the Enlightenment but its inadequate and partial incorporation into German society that should be condemned and understood" (Herf 1984: ix). In a similar vein, in *The Politics of Cultural Despair*, Fritz Stern argues that cultural criticism in German culture and its flawed prophets of national rebirth formulated an ideology that rejected modernity and constituted "a leap from despair to utopia across all existing reality that gave their thought its fantastic quality" (Stern 1974: xi). Mark Roseman, in his article "National Socialism and Modernisation" is part of this discourse, as he discusses whether or not the Nazis were anti-moderns or simply a grotesque form of the modern. Milan Hauner

concentrates on the political nature of Nazism, and suggests that the movement ought to be studied as a racial revolutionary movement, similar to how Bolshevism is studied as theory of economic and political revolution (Hauner 1984: 673). Fritz Nova focuses on Rosenberg in *Nazi Theorists of the Holocaust*, arguing that Rosenberg's racist thought contributed substantially to Holocaust ideology (Nova 1986: 238).

The search for the general intellectual sources of Nazi ideology is also found in the many books of George L. Mosse. In *Masses and Man: Nationalist and Fascist Perceptions of Reality*, after describing the thought of several German thinkers, Mosse says that "In Germany the recovery of the unconscious, in reaction against the positivist ideologies, laid the groundwork for the German form of twentieth century dictatorship" (Mosse 1980: 213). *Germans and Jews* explores the fascist quest for a 'third way' between Marxism and capitalism, and how in Germany this took the form of an anti-Semitic, *völkische* ideology (Mosse 1970). *Toward the Final Solution* examines the roots of European racism, but, like all of his books, Mosse has little interest in Rosenberg in particular. In this case, on of his few references to Rosenberg, Mosse says of the *Mythus* that it essentially argues that "Racism was the one true 'people's Church' which would replace Christianity" (Mosse 1978: 189). In *The Crisis of German Ideology*, Mosse calls *völkisch* ideology the primary ingredient of Nazism; his "object is to show how one trend of German thought could become so strong that millions of people accepted it as the solution to Germany's dilemma" (Mosse 1964: 8). While Mosse's works investigate the most destructive aspects of National Socialism, namely *völkisch* nationalism and anti-Semitism, he does not explore these as serious religious beliefs, and very rarely even mentions Alfred Rosenberg.

Another group of scholars, while still investigating the intellectual sources of National Socialism, examines the religious nature of these ideas. Peter Viereck explored the intellectual roots of National Socialism in *MetaPolitics: From Wagner and the German Romantic to Hitler* (2004), evaluating the influence of German Romanticism, analyzing the thought and influence of Alfred Rosenberg, and comparing Nazi and Christian religion. Viereck was the first scholar to seriously analyze Nazism as an ideological and quasi-religious movement. He recognizes Rosenberg's role and importance, arguing that while "Many of Rosenberg's basic assumptions are sincere and brilliant nonsense...nonsense plus mass will-power is the very stuff of which history is often made" (Viereck 2004: 215). Like Viereck, R. G. Collingwood, opposed Nazi ideology and religion to Christianity; Collingwood ascribes the eclipse of Christianity under National Socialism to the Enlightenment critique of religion and the latent paganism of German culture (see Gilman 1986).

Leon Poliakov investigates the roots of the mythology surrounding the notion of the Aryan race in *The Aryan Myth* (1974). Poliakov explores the tendency to seek identity in one's ancestors, but argues that the Aryan mythos led in Germany to "the official doctrine of the Third Reich when men designated as non-Aryan were sacrificed to the gods of racialism" (Poliakov 1974: 327). Poliakov also opposes Nazism to the Judaeo-Christian tradition; he directly associates the mythology with the pagan association of humanity with nature, rather than the Mosaic distinction between the human and nature (330). This association is not unusual. In her study of the roots of the ecological movement, Anna Bramwell (1989) links the respect for nature with the racism of the Nazi movement through its intellectual ancestors, notably Ernst Haeckel. She explores

these intellectual links further in *Blood and Soil: Walther Darre and Hitler's 'Green' Party* (1994), examining Nazi agricultural and ecological policies with regard to the blood and soil nature-religiosity of prominent Nazis such as Walther Darre. Daniel Gasman, in *The Scientific Origins of National Socialism* (1971), looks at the thought of Ernst Haeckel and how his scientific ideas made their way into Nazi racial ideology,

Nicholas Goodricke-Clarke investigates the more extreme occult elements of Nazism in *The Occult Roots of Nazism* (1992) and *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism and the Politics of Identity* (2002). He says that “The religious and mythic elements of German National Socialism often made the Third Reich resemble a cult in power” (Goodricke-Clarke 2002: 2). In *The Myth of the Master Race*, Robert Cecil devotes an entire book to the study of Alfred Rosenberg’s life and thought in an effort to understand Nazi motivation as something more than simply monsters of hate (Cecil 1971: vii). He recognizes the quasi-religious nature of these ideas, and calls Hitler the ‘tribal chief’ of the primitive cult of Nazism, and Rosenberg its ‘witch-doctor’ (103). James Biser Whisker performs an even more in-depth and exhaustive exposition and analysis of Rosenberg’s thought in *The Social, Political and Religious Thought of Alfred Rosenberg* (1982). In his preface, he argues for the importance of studying Rosenberg and writes: “no other writer, not even Hitler, had such a full and complete perspective on the Nordic past and German future within the context of general Nazi thinking as did Rosenberg. He offers a revitalization of ages-old German racial heritages and religious thoughts” (Whisker 1982: i).

All these scholars investigate the intellectual ideas that go into the various forms of Nazi ideology, but none really explore how these ideas are experienced or followed as

a religious form of devotion.⁷ They either single out certain ideas, such as Mosse's identification of *völkisch* ideology or Poliakov's exploration of the nineteenth century mythologization of the Aryan race, or explain the religious ideas inherent in Nazi ideology, such as Goodricke-Clarke's look at occultism, Bramwell's investigation of Nazi pantheism and Whisker's analysis of Rosenberg's thought. None, however, investigate Nazism *as* a religious movement, even if they do explore how certain ideas could become the focus of religious devotion.

Studies of Nazism as religion

Few scholars take Nazi ideology or Rosenberg's *Mythus* seriously enough as a religious mode of thought to explore it in a detailed fashion for its own sake. In this section, I examine the four principal sources of scholarship that study National Socialism as a religious movement in order to explain both the limits of their accounts and how they contribute to my own investigation. I begin with Eric Voegelin.

Eric Voegelin explores the nature of modern ideology, including both Nazism and Communism, as gnostic political religions in a collection of works collected under the title *Modernity Without Restraint* (2000).⁸ In *The New Science of Politics* Voegelin traces modern gnosticism to the thought of Joachim de Fiore (c. 1132-1202) and argues that in modernity this is transformed into the desire to achieve a state of perfection through revolutionary transfiguration based on that gnostic insight (Voegelin 2000: 186).

Voegelin makes several important contributions to the study of National Socialism. The

⁷ There is a much greater body of literature on the relationship between the Nazi government and the Christian Churches, but I am interested in the religious nature of Nazism itself, not its political and social relationships to other religions.

⁸ This collection contains works originally published much earlier. *The Political Religions* was originally published in 1939, and *The New Science of Politics* in 1952.

most obvious is that he challenges the secularization thesis that modern political movements, and particularly the Nazi movement, occupy a realm distinct from that of religion or the sacred. In *The Political Religions*, he argues:

The language of politics is always interspersed with the ecstasies of religiosity and, thus, becomes a symbol in the concise sense by letting experiences concerned with the contents of the world be permeated with transcendental-divine experiences. (Voegelin 2000: 70)

Voegelin is saying that politics becomes a living symbol of religiosity. Gnostic political religions attempt to establish their vision in reality. The problem with gnostic political religions, according to Voegelin, is that their “inner-worldly religiosity” places its *realissimum*, or religious focus, on humanity or nature rather than a definition of God or ‘the good’ that is independent of our own desires (Voegelin 2000: 71).⁹ Voegelin argues that the Nazis and Communists claimed to have this sort of gnostic political vision. However, he also claims that this gnostic element derives from the thought of the medieval Christian mystic, Joachim de Fiore, rather than from a distinctly modern form of consciousness.

James M. Rhodes takes up Voegelin’s thesis and expands on it to argue that Nazism was a millennial-gnostic movement in which the Nazis believed they were called to combat fiendish powers in a desperate based on their special vision (Rhodes 1980: 18). Rhodes’ *Hitler’s Millennial Movement* (1980) quickly dismisses the importance of both Rosenberg and the *Mythus* as examples of abstract system-building that had little to do with the real Nazi movement (Rhodes 1980: 25). Instead, Rhodes focus on Hitler and the nature of his Nazism as a quest for salvation based on a disaster syndrome and a feeling of alienation (Rhodes 1980: 30-39, 100-105). It is based on six primary ideologies: neo-

⁹ I interpret Voegelin through Charles Taylor’s notion of the modern tendency to affirm inner sources of morality and deny the existence of external sources of moral knowledge (see Taylor 1989: 22-23).

Manichean race cosmology, *völkisch* mystique, a myth of cultural self-creation based on Wagner, a myth of heroic fanaticism, the myth of natural selection of peoples for immortality, and an ideology of egalitarianism based on race (Rhodes 1980: 106).

Although Rhodes analyzes Nazi ideology in terms of its ideological content and religious form, he characterizes it as a movement of millennial expectation motivated by sociological and cultural factors; he does not analyze or even mention the *Mythus* in these terms nor does he explore the form or nature of this millennial expectation.

Robert Pois is the only scholar to translate large sections of the *Mythus* into English, demonstrating an interest in the thought of Alfred Rosenberg as an example of the religious aspects of National Socialism. In his book *National Socialism and the Religion of Nature*, he characterizes Nazism as a ‘religion of nature’” which was essentially a “a true religious rebellion or, at the very least, assertion of religious values antithetical to the Judaeo-Christian tradition” (Pois 1986: 11). Pois considers Rosenberg’s *Mythus* a ‘stilted’ attempt to articulate this religion as an ideology compared to Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* (8), and accordingly cites Hitler far more than Rosenberg. He describes this paganistic religion as an exclusive pantheistic creed that is dangerously close to more contemporary forms of nature mysticism and occultism that seek a fantastical ‘re-enchantment of the world’ and ‘oceanic feeling’ as the principle guide to life (Pois 1986: 151, 158).

Richard Steigmann-Gall breaks the tradition of regarding Nazi religiosity and Christianity as naturally opposing creeds. In *The Holy Reich* (2003), Richard Steigmann-Gall argues that the top Nazis, even Alfred Rosenberg and Heinrich Himmler, remained at least partly loyal to Christianity (Steigmann-Gall 2003: 96-97, 131). He calls

Rosenberg's anti-Christian 'paganism' sympathetic to Christianity and claims that only those scholars who espouse 'political religion' theories of Nazism maintain that Rosenberg's ideas were hegemonic in the party (Steigmann-Gall 2003: 91). Steigmann-Gall's underlying argument is that the Christian ideology of the top Nazis (and by implication, of average Germans) was not eclipsed by a new rival Nazi creed, and that therefore Christian religious ideas motivated Nazis as much as other, more pagan ideas. He believes it unwise to protect such an important part of the Western idea from association with Nazism.

That Nazism as the world-historical metaphor for human evil and wickedness should in some way have been related to Christianity can therefore be regarded by many only as unthinkable... The discovery that so many Nazis considered themselves or their movement Christian makes us similarly uncomfortable. (Steigmann-Gall 2003, 266-267)

Nazism, he concludes, does not occupy its own exclusive evil territory that is entirely opposed to Christianity, but shares some disturbingly common ground with it.

These are the four primary scholars that have investigated the religious nature of National Socialism, but in their works, none pays exclusive attention to Rosenberg, largely because his ideas were not hegemonic in the party. Yet other scholars, such as James Whisker (1982), Fritz Nova (1986), Robert Cecil (1972) and Robert Pois (1970) in his partial translation of the *Mythus*, recognize that while unique, Rosenberg's ideas are an important example of Nazi religiosity. Of these scholars, however, all concentrate on the content of Rosenberg's *Mythus* rather than its form. Rhodes characterizes the movement as millennial, but analyzes it in terms of causes and ideological content. Only Voegelin is interested in the form of Nazi religiosity itself, but he argues that it possesses a gnostic basis that is pre-modern in origin. There is room, therefore, for an investigation of the distinctly modern aspects of National Socialist religiosity.

Theoretical Approach of this Essay

In *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor argues that all people necessarily live within a framework oriented toward ‘the good’, that these frameworks are constitutive of human agency, a background for moral judgments, intuitions and reactions (Taylor 1989: 26-27). This is not a simple definition of ‘the good’, nor a list of commandments, but a frame, an orientation in moral space upon which a person builds an identity; this identity is the basis on which a person knows what direction to turn in order to understand their place in the world and decide on appropriate courses of action. I approach the universe that Alfred Rosenberg constructs in the *Mythus* as a sacred canopy, in Peter Berger’s (1967) sense of the word, a canopy that is equivalent to a religious version of Taylor’s moral framework of orientation. In its content, Rosenberg’s canopy is racist, anti-Semitic and mythological. In its form, however, it is not simply a barbaric throwback to pagan or tribal primitivism. I argue that Rosenberg’s *Mythus* represents a distinctly *modern* form of religiosity. I base my definition of what constitutes a modern religiosity primarily on Taylor’s understanding of the modern identity, as he describes it in the *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (1989) and *The Malaise of Modernity* (1991).

This modern religiosity is made up of three inter-related streams that contain interdependent elements: scientific naturalism, the culture of authenticity, and a self-conscious narrative epistemology.¹⁰ Scientific naturalism is the general epistemological attitude of the modern world within which the culture of authenticity and modern mythic religion operate. Naturalism can be understood as “any philosophy in which nature or the natural functions as the most general explanatory or normative concept” (Stout 2005:

¹⁰ There are, of course, are important elements to the modern identity, but Taylor considers the culture of authenticity the most important. I add in scientific materialism.

Vol.9). In the modern world this generally takes the form of asserting that all phenomena fall within the scope of scientific inquiry. Materialism may be defined as the assertion that matter is all that there is (while allowing that the definition of ‘matter’ is often a focus of debate). The doctrine of materialism denies existence to entities that are radically different in kind from, and in some sense superior to, the matter of our ordinary experience, therefore it rejects belief in a god or gods on whom the universe would depend for existence, angels or spirits that affect the material order while escaping its limitations; it questions the notion of a soul, if taken to be an immaterial entity separable in principle from the human body it informs. Its two main targets are, therefore, theism and dualistic views of human nature (McMullin 2005: Vol.9). Along with this goes belief in any form of transcendence beyond this world. Materialism is thus the metaphysical view of the scientific mode of thought that informs so much of modern thinking. The theories and ideas generated by scholars and scientists, for example, hold almost as much, and in some cases more, weight than that of a theologian when discussing the material world. Together, the naturalist respect for scientific authority and the materialist skepticism toward the supernatural form an outlook that forces faith in gods or the soul into naturalistic frames, or simply asserts faith as a category totally independent of rational knowledge.

The culture of authenticity has three basic facets: inwardness, self-determining freedom, and expressivism. It is based on the notion, derived from Rousseau (1712-1778), that morality ought to be based on an inner feeling or voice within rather than on abstract or utilitarian calculation. Taylor explains Rousseau’s pantheistic version of this view: “Our moral salvation comes from recovering authentic moral contact with

ourselves” (Taylor 1991: 27). Closely connected with this inward focus is Rousseau’s notion of self-determining freedom, in which individuals consider themselves to be free if they decide for themselves what concerns them, rather than being shaped by external influence (Taylor 1991: 27). Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) then made this outlook more subjective, by suggesting that each person has his or her own ‘measure’, or original way of being human. According to Taylor, “This idea has entered very deep into modern consciousness” (Taylor 1991: 28). This manner of thinking accords crucial moral importance to one’s own inner nature. Only by heeding the call of the inner depths of the self can one be true to one’s own special nature.

Taylor also describes the Romantic ideal of artistic expressivism as an important part of the culture of authenticity. The moral imperative of the culture of authenticity demands that we articulate our own unique way of being human, and that giving expression to this special inner voice is a necessary part of self-discovery (Taylor 1991: 61). Self-discovery is therefore creative; the articulation of our inner depths amount to an imperative. The expression of this self-truth is not merely a means to be moral, but an aesthetic expression of our own truths that is something valuable for its own sake (Taylor 1991: 64-65). In a culture so heavily under the influence of scientific naturalism, this source of personal truth within can take on a powerful new meaning. Aesthetic expression is taken as a subjective statement of truth akin to that of a prophet, or a poet whose divine muse lies within.

Closely connected to the culture of authenticity is a third aspect of the modern identity, narrative epistemology. Narrative “is a fundamental way humans make meaning” (Boyatzis 2001: 252). Epistemology deals with the nature and scope of

knowledge; narrative epistemology, therefore, deals with the nature and scope of narrative as a way of knowing. Narrative epistemology is a major subject of scholarly discussion that deals partly with the ‘paradox of fiction’, that is, the apparent ability of human beings to become emotionally or even spiritually affected by stories that they know are not literally true.¹¹ A self-conscious narrative epistemology is one that constructs a narrative as a way of investing meaning into life all the while knowing that it is a constructed narrative. This is a characteristic of modernity because of the modern awareness of the plurality of world-views leads to a “double consciousness of living a world-view *as* a world-view”, so that

fully conscious citizens of the twentieth century are aware that their deepest commitments and beliefs are part of a world-view, whether individual or collective, which cannot be transcendently grounded or privileged over other possible world views. The interest lies not in the proposition itself, but in how it is lived, individually and collectively. (Bell 1997: 1)

Self-conscious narrative epistemology involves the affirmation of a meaningful narrative as if it were true, yet at the same time withholding an ontological commitment to it.

Self-conscious narrative epistemology relies on the culture of authenticity for support. If our only authentic moral source is the inner depths of the self and self-discovery occurs through the expression of these inner depths, these expressions obviously take the form of a narrative, even if they are technically in a visual format. They are self-conscious productions of our own subjective understanding of our moral sources or ‘truths’.

¹¹ This discussion occurs across disciplines; in cognitive science, see *Narrative and Consciousness* (2003); in philosophy see Alasdair McIntyre, “Epistemological Crisis, Dramatic Literature” (1977); with regard to fiction and literature see Sarah Worth, “Fictional Spaces”; in literary theory see Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (1990). The other facet of narrative epistemology deals with narratives that people do take to be literally true.

I do not suggest that these three streams constitute a cohesive or exhaustive definition of the modern identity. The culture of authenticity has many variations, some of which deny morality entirely, and some of which are not necessarily compatible with expressivism (Taylor 1991: 65-66). The expressivist aspect of the culture of authenticity need not draw any connections between its productions and truth or even self-truth. Narrative need not be self-conscious nor even meaningful. Scientific naturalism is not shared by all modern peoples, often rests uneasily with a theistic outlook, and is obviously not easily compatible with any kind of mythic epistemology. Yet these three streams do represent strong elements of the modern consciousness that, even if they are not universal, represent important aspects of what it means to live in modernity. A modern religiosity would participate to some degree in all of them. I argue that Rosenberg's understanding of the Nazi project is a modern religiosity because it affirms a morality based on the culture of authenticity and an epistemology based on self-conscious narrative epistemology in the context of a naturalistic materialist outlook. These elements together lead to a mythological understanding of religion, one which is more properly called a religiosity because it consists not in the affirmation of particular pieces of knowledge, but in the participation in a self-conscious myth.

CHAPTER THREE

ANALYSIS OF *THE MYTHUS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY*

This chapter presents an analysis of Rosenberg's *Mythus* as a modern form of religiosity based on the three categories I take to constitute the most important aspects of the modern consciousness. Beginning with the concept of scientific naturalism, I argue that Rosenberg implicitly assumes a scientific outlook that denies supernatural causation and explanation or transcendent realities and expectations and looks to naturalism as a normative mode of understanding the world and religious experience. In the second section, I argue that Rosenberg participates in the modern culture of authenticity as described by Charles Taylor, but in a form of this culture that is grounded in the concept of race rather than one of the individual. In the third section, I argue that the *Mythus* assumes that moral knowledge can only take a self-consciously narrative form. I conclude with a discussion of how these three aspects of modernity, informed by the religious content of the *Mythus*, constitute a distinctly modern form of religion.

Scientific Naturalism

Scientific naturalism is a philosophical position or attitude that practices profound skepticism concerning the existence of supernatural entities and attributing causes to supernatural sources. This attitude is evident as an underlying mode thought in the *Mythus* in several ways. Chief among them is the fact that throughout the *Mythus* Rosenberg explains the spiritual character of race and blood not by reference to any theological doctrines or transcendent qualities, but by reference to nature as an organic process of growth. Whereas a pre-modern theological approach would define the world in

terms of doctrines of creation and revelation, Rosenberg's scientific naturalism defines what he sees as the spiritual world in terms of nature. More concretely, Rosenberg grounds his racist ideas in the scientific theories surrounding race that arose in the nineteenth century. He also rejects any sort of thinking that includes the use of magic and supernatural sources of knowledge.

It may appear incorrect to ascribe to Rosenberg a scientific outlook when he affirms that race has a spiritual dimension. This seems to constitute an immediate departure from the naturalistic and materialistic explanations characteristic of science. Rosenberg's definition of soul, however, does not refer to some transcendent or supernatural entity with a mysterious connection to human biology. Rosenberg directly associates race and soul: "Soul means race when viewed from within. And, vice versa, race is the externalization of soul" (Trans. Pois 1970: 34). Race and soul are two aspects of the same entity; the word 'race' describes its spiritual dimension and 'soul' its biological dimension. Race-soul exists in the natural world: "This race-soul lives and unfolds itself in nature" (Trans. Pois 1970: 118). This is not a dualistic system in which a spiritual world complements or parallels a material one; race and soul are only two words used to describe different aspects of the same existence. This is also apparent in his description of the nature of racial history as "both natural history and spiritual mystique" (Trans. Pois 1970: 37). While this is certainly not a strictly materialistic definition of race, Rosenberg clearly feels compelled to ground his account in a naturalistic rather than purely theological world.

Consider how Rosenberg characterizes the corruption of racial purity. Rosenberg affirms that the Nordic race has a unique and innate capacity for the experience of Being.

The purity of this spiritual connection is not dependent upon, but identical to, the purity of the racial bloodline. When discussing the dangers of ideological pollution, he says that once knowledge of one's racial nature is lost, that person is

torn loose from the bonds of blood and racial order, the individual being sacrifices his absolute, unrepresentable spiritual form; he tears himself away from his natural milieu, mixing enemy blood with his own. And it is this blood crime that causes the death of personality, *Volk*, race and civilization. (Trans. Pois 1970: 37)

The preservation of the value of the blood may be dependent on ideas, but the experience of Being itself is a biological quality dependent on purity of blood. Notice also that he calls the spiritual form (the experience of Being) unrepresentable. Only rational, empirical language can describe the relationship between race and civilization, and only in its natural or biological aspect; the spiritual form itself is cannot be represented rationally. Although Rosenberg insists on giving a spiritual dimension to race that is clearly unverifiable, he goes to considerable lengths to explain this spiritual dimension using naturalistic language that does not depend on supernatural causation but on the identity between race and soul. The form of his argument, while clearly metaphysical, rests on a naturalistic, and not on a theological, foundation. Presumably, Rosenberg believes, like many modern people that that science has more validity than theology when it comes to explanations concerning the nature of the world, and human life occurs within the natural world.

Explaining spiritual qualities in materialistic terms hardly makes Rosenberg unique. Some of these ideas, however, he derives partly from scientific theories on race. As Whisker notes, "The science of racism rejects simple prejudice based in traditional hatreds. It concludes its prejudices for and against according to scientific findings" (Whisker 1982: 32). Although totally dismissed now, over a hundred years later, racial

science was not discredited until after the Nazis were defeated. Rosenberg grounds his ideas of racial struggle and Nordic superiority in the scientific discourse of race that began in the nineteenth century. The inspiration for Rosenberg's scientific racism derived mainly from the writings of Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855-1927). Chamberlain's book, *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* (1899), was itself largely based on the ideas of the Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau (1816-1882). De Gobineau, an Orientalist scholar, conducted research around the globe and concluded that the white Teutonic race was the most superior (Whisker 1982: 38). Robert Pois explains that "Of particular importance [to Rosenberg] was Chamberlain's claim that psychic conditions were reflected in the *physical* form of a given individual. This allowed one to judge a man's blood and spirit using a given physical criterion" (Pois 1970: 23). Thus race could be a criterion of spirit. It has also been noted that Rosenberg bases his notion of racial struggle on a form of social Darwinism derived from Ernst Haeckel and Ludwig Woltmann (Bramwell 1989: 40-45). These men produced theories of biological racism and eugenics by identifying the laws of nature with society; Haeckel advocated a cosmic theory of evolution that operated according to race and Woltmann identified the Nordic race as the source of European culture (Vieler 1999: 6-67). By relying on this kind of naturalistic discourse in his *Mythus*, he displays his respect to science as an epistemological authority. Rosenberg even connects the religious experience of Being with the scientific enterprise by calling Paracelsus' investigation into the totality of Nature's laws a part of his participation in *Dasein* (Pois 1970: 119). All this indicates that Rosenberg aims to bring nature and spirit together in a naturalistic metaphysics that takes scientific,

materialistic explanation as the authoritative way of explaining the natural world, including humanity's place within it.

I have argued that Rosenberg's definition of race-soul, while certainly affirming a spiritual dimension (not to mention unity) to racial biology that goes beyond a strict naturalism, nonetheless participates in scientific naturalist discourse through his reliance on racial science and his preference for biological explanations of the racial struggle and a non-dualistic definition of race and soul. Rosenberg also implicitly regards the natural world as the sole existing plane of existence throughout the *Mythus*. Though he certainly makes metaphysical claims that go beyond strict materialism, he maintains the existence of only the natural world. Nowhere in the *Mythus* does Rosenberg explain or suggest that there is some eternal reward for authentic Being in heaven or some other place. The salvation of the Nordic race occurs in the natural world through its victory over the forces of race-chaos, not in an otherworldly reward or afterlife (Cecil 1972: 85-86).

Another aspect of Rosenberg's scientific naturalism is evident in his attitude toward the supernatural, particularly magic. In various places and contexts throughout the *Mythus*, Rosenberg condemns any sort of belief in magic. When lauding the achievements of the ancient Greeks, for example, Rosenberg says that "The total Nordic avoidance of magical forms is nowhere more clearly revealed than in the religious values of Greece" (Trans. Pois 1970: 48). Rosenberg's contempt for the supernatural is connected to his affirmation of the natural world. For example, he condemns the Etruscans for not only being "completely unpoetic" but because this people "dedicated itself with great perseverance to examining the entrails of birds, and to complicated magical and sacrificial rites" (Trans. Pois 1970: 65). Rosenberg participates in the

Enlightenment-style rejection of superstition as a form and instrument of slavery. For example, it was from the Etruscans that “the most monstrous animal and human daemons have become tools of the papacy” (66). He supported and encouraged the renewal of ancient German festivals, not for the purpose of creating a mystery cult surrounding the German race, but as instruments of cultural revival designed to reawaken the natural *Volk* culture (Whisker 1982: 113). These pagan-like rituals were regarded only as expressions of culture, not magical rites.

Rosenberg resists any notion of magic because by definition it constitutes an extra- or super-natural force. He directly associates the Catholic and Jewish “despotism of magic” (Trans. Pois 1970: 115) with the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* by a supernatural deity. As I explain in the next section, he is resistant to the intrusion of any sort of force that is not natural to a person or the world itself, regarding any notion of such forces as an example of slavish dependence on the external. In a discussion of how the Syrian-Near Eastern corruption of Christianity altered the original Trinity of the generative father principle, the productive earth mother and produced son, by replacing the mother with the ‘Holy Ghost’, Rosenberg calls this a “conscious rejection of the physical” (Pois 1970: 71). He also dismisses the ‘dogmatic assertion’ of the Virgin Birth as an attack on the natural and even calls this supposedly ‘factual’ Resurrection a point of departure for Christianity because it took as dogma that physically impossible (Pois 1970: 71-72). Negative Christianity is characterized by its celebration of the *death* of Jesus and its affirmation of a new life, rather than the positive (and authentically Nordic) Christianity that celebrates the elevation of the world through Christ’s *life* (Pois 1970:

72). In all of these examples, Rosenberg is denying that there are any forces or entities external to what is generally understood to be the natural world.

Rosenberg denies the existence of deities as independent beings. Wotan, also known as Odin, is an important deity in the ancient German pantheon, one to whom Rosenberg refers in the *Mythus* as a Nordic hero-god (Pois 1970: 109). Yet he also states that “Odin was and is dead...[D]ivine Valhalla arose from the infinite, misty-vastness buried in the human breast” (Trans. Pois 1970: 119). The ancient god and hero of the Germans, he proudly states, is an invention and certainly not a real god. Like the Christian god of Meister Eckhart’s writings, whom Rosenberg admires so much, Odin is only a name given to the source of Being experienced by the Nordic race-soul (Trans. Pois 1970: 121). He does not believe that such supernatural entities have an actual existence, no matter how often he uses the term. They are only names for a profound experience that is beyond the scope of science. This does put limits on the breadth of scientific enquiry, but as I argue in the next section, it places only the Nordic experience of Being outside the realm of natural explanation.

Although Rosenberg’s thought has a strong mystical element, he has no illusions about the actual reality of the ancient gods, and has no interest in creating a historically accurate pagan religion. Likewise, he is skeptical about any supernatural explanation or belief, whether it involves reading the entrails of birds or affirming the resurrection of the dead. Neither does he accept any form of dualism: race and soul are the biological and spiritual dimensions of the same entity, one that unfolds and exists only in the natural world. Even though he participates in the spurious conclusions of racial science and bases his own racial history on the worst kind of circular reasoning, attempting to force world

history into the shape of an Aryan epic (Cecil 1971: 91), Rosenberg nevertheless makes appeals to scientific racial theory as an authoritative source and constructs his version of history in terms of struggle between races in the natural world. Even the salvation of the Nordic race is relegated to the natural world: racial salvation is victory over the forces that threaten the race, nothing more (Cecil 1972: 85; Viereck 2004: 284). Neither soul nor race nor (as I argue in the next section) any god has a transcendent existence. All are participants in the natural world. This creates an anti-dualistic attitude that rejects any notion of a transcendent soul, deity or magical source of power. It is an outlook that is both anti-transcendent and anti-theological, yet still affirms a space for spirit within a naturalistic or pseudo-scientific framework. Biological race may have a spiritual dimension, but it can be articulated through scientific and naturalistic means as racial struggle and the need for racial purity. Like many modern movements within world religions, Rosenberg seeks to accommodate a category of 'the spiritual' within a scientific and naturalistic world-view.

It is important to note that there is a distinction between Rosenberg's metaphysical and epistemological outlook and the nature of his book. Rosenberg displays a preference toward scientific and naturalistic explanations that assume the existence of only the natural world and the ability to account for phenomena using primarily naturalistic causes and explanations. Even when his spiritual ideas on race approach theology, he grounds his arguments in the natural world. The book itself, however, relies on some totally unscientific assumptions, particularly the unity of a Nordic race across time and its unique spiritual nature; instead of seeking evidence of the Nordic racial identity over time to back up his claims of notable cultural production, he sees those

remarkable cultures as evidence of Nordic racial identity (Fest 1970: 167). But again, these are couched in scientific and naturalistic terms, and even bad science is evidence of a scientific outlook. Further, despite being grounded in a scientific naturalist outlook, the *Mythus* itself does not claim to be a scientific or philosophical text. It is a sort of existential guide to racist living based on a world-view that takes scientific naturalism for granted, not a scientific treatise on the nature of race.

Considering the unscientific methods and assumptions surrounding Rosenberg's theories on the Nordic racial identity and its spiritual nature, 'scientific' may not be the most appropriate adjective, even if he does rely on scientific or pseudo-scientific explanations of race and naturalistic language for the characterization of the Nordic historical and spiritual predicament. Pantheism suggests a belief in spiritual forces too strong to serve as a satisfactory description of Rosenberg's naturalism or even his corrupted scientism. Naturalistic spiritualism is a better description for his world-view. Consider the nature of Being: it is an eternal source of the natural world that is beyond natural explanation without truly being transcendent of nature itself; *Dasein*, or the experience of Being, is the experience of nature at its most primordial. It is a subjective experience. Scientific analyses and explanations for natural phenomena, then, cannot describe Being itself. The term 'naturalistic spiritualism' suggests at least some degree of loyalty to scientific epistemology and displays confidence in 'nature' as a normative concept, but also contains a reference to the spiritual dimension he ascribes to the natural world and the biology of the Nordic race. This leaves room for subjectivity and a form of knowledge outside the bounds of scientific explanation. The next section explains how

the culture of authenticity informs how Rosenberg understands the subjective moral sources of Being.

The Culture of Authenticity

According to Charles Taylor, the three facets of the culture of authenticity are the inward depths of the self as a moral source (or moral naturalism), self-determining freedom, and expressivism. Taylor argues that these are all crucial elements of the modern consciousness (Taylor 1989: ix-x, 369). In the modern consciousness, the culture of authenticity and its elements are grounded in the person's individual nature. In the *Mythus*, however, the culture of authenticity is grounded in a person's specific racial nature. Rosenberg displays his participation in the culture of authenticity in the way he characterizes the spiritual qualities of the Nordic and Jewish races. The Nordic peoples exercise their natural self-determining freedom by heeding the inner voice of their common racial self, and create civilization by expressing this inner voice in art, religion and culture. The Jewish race, he argues, has no inner voice by which to live, and so is slavishly dependent on artificial abstract constructions that amount to a mere methods of life-management rather than an true expression what it means to live as a human being (see Whisker 1982: 63). Rosenberg bases this vision on a monistic metaphysics that affirms a privileged and exclusive Nordic racial access to authentic Being, or *Dasein*, based on that monism.¹² I argue that this basic assumption is framed by the culture of authenticity and articulated through a racial definition of moral naturalism that gives the Nordic race exclusive ownership over the creation of what is authentic, and therefore,

¹² I make implicit use of Voegelin's characterization of Nazism as a gnostic movement in my analysis of Rosenberg's definition of *Dasein* in the *Mythus*. The Nordic connection to *Dasein* is roughly equivalent to a privileged gnostic vision of reality. I argue that Taylor's analysis of the culture of authenticity better describes this privileged insight as a form of modern thought rather than a holdover from the Middle Ages.

‘good’. I begin this section by first describing how Rosenberg’s exclusivist monistic identification of the Nordic race with Being grounds his adherence to the culture of authenticity by connecting the race-soul to ‘truth’. I follow with examinations of how this manifests in Rosenberg’s discussion of moral sources, self-determining freedom, and expressivism.

Rosenberg’s brief history describing the most prominent Aryan peoples provides insights into how he construes the metaphysical relationship between Nordic humanity and the divine or eternal, which he equates with Being. He says that “the Nordic spiritual inheritance comprised consciousness not only of the divinity of the human soul, but of its *equality* with God” (Trans. Pois 1970: 115). By God, Rosenberg means the ground of Being. This is evident in the way that he describes the nature of the mystic religious experience:

The mystic demanded the elimination of the world as an idea, in order to make us as conscious as possible that we were subject[s] of a metaphysical essence that dwelt within us. Since this is not *completely* possible, the idea of ‘God’ was created as a new object of the soul, this finally leading to the proclamation that soul and God were of equal value. (Trans. Pois 1970: 121)

‘God’ is only a name that those with a connection to that ‘metaphysical essence’ give to the source to which they experience. Rosenberg uses the German word *Dasein* to describe the authentic experience of Being (see Pois 1970: n.116).

Rosenberg expresses the direct Nordic experience with Being, or *Dasein*, in various ways, but all identify the Nordic race-soul with the eternal, whether he names it Being, God or Brahman. For example, he lists the various spiritual insights of some of the chief Nordic peoples. The ancient Aryans of India were the first to recognize the equality of the Nordic race-soul and Being through the teaching of the identity between Atman (self) and Brahman (ultimate reality, or Being). The Nordic-Persians conceived of

themselves as partners, not servants, of God in the struggle against evil. Jesus spoke of the kingdom of heaven *within* us (Trans. Pois 1970: 115).¹³ The most recent manifestations of the Nordic race, the Germans, base their spiritual freedom upon the ‘original’, Aryan teaching of Jesus concerning the source of religion as within. The identity of the Nordic race-soul with God are polarities on the same spectrum. “The true Nordic soul is always embarked on a soaring flight ‘to’ and ‘from’ God. Its ‘peace in God’ is synonymous with ‘peace in itself’ (Trans. Pois 1970: 115).

Meister Eckhart (1260-1328) was one of Rosenberg’s most important inspirations and examples of German religion (see Vieler 1999: 50; Whisker 1982: 55-61). Eckhart preached a ‘religion from within’, that ‘the kingdom of God is within you’, an authentic religiosity that he opposed to the institutional religion of the Catholic Church. He summarizes Eckhart’s teachings as follows “Each creative being is driven towards a goal which is perhaps unknown even to him. The soul has a goal: to be true to itself and to attain consciousness of God...this ‘inner work’ means to grasp the kingdom of heaven within oneself, as Jesus had attested to” (Trans. Pois 1970: 121). Compare this to Taylor’s definition of authenticity: “There is a certain way of being human that is *my* way...this gives a new importance to being true to myself. If I am not, I miss the point of my life, I miss what being human is for *me*” (Taylor 1991: 29). Rosenberg, of course, grounds this subjective moral authority on a racial experience, replacing the individualistic emphasis of ‘me’ with a one that depends on a modern (albeit flawed) scientific understanding of racial identity, but in a way characteristic of ancient chthonic religions that privileged the unitary nature of the tribe. According to Rosenberg, the only

¹³ Rosenberg argues that Jesus must have been a racial Aryan, and laments how misused this great personality has been at the hands of the Judeo-Christian thinkers (see Pois 1970, 116).

authentic way of living one's life, thus the only moral way, is one that follows from the subjective experience natural to one's race.

So far, I have described the metaphysical assumptions that inform Rosenberg's *Mythus*, and through them, I have also demonstrated how he identifies this connection to Being with a racially dependent moral naturalism, that is, the grounding of moral authority on an inner experience. This outlook is expressed further in his characterization of the 'Jewish' corruption of Christianity. He portrays the Catholic Church as the chief instrument of the distinctly Jewish *Sosein* metaphysic and ethic that relies on inauthentic abstract constructions of truth and morality (Whisker 1982: 102, 106; Cecil 1970: 91). I will explain this opposition of Nordic *Dasein* and Jewish *Sosein* in order to make the nature of subjective moral authority more clear.

Rosenberg explicitly articulates the distinction between the Nordic *Dasein* and Jewish *Sosein*. He says that, for Jews, law "is no longer the question of expression of moral feeling, but merely of knowledge and mastery of technical rules. Jesaya perceived this when he said, 'Because thy people worship me only externally, therefore its wise men shall lose their wisdom, and their men of reason, their reason'" (Trans. Pois 1970: 185). Rosenberg interprets this Biblical passage in terms of the usual caricature of Jewish obedience to the law as mere legalism, and contrasts it with the authentic, internal morality of the Nordic race. Leibnitz, he says, expressed this truth when he said that "the soul does not adhere to abstract rules imposed from the outside; neither does it move towards a goal posited from without; in no case does it go outside itself, but rather, comes to itself" (Trans. Pois 1970: 87). The lived expression of *Dasein* must be completely

identical with its inner experience by the Nordic soul. It cannot be mediated by abstract thought, but is at best only expressed in abstract forms as *Sosein*.

According to Rosenberg, St. Paul preached a legalistic formalism characteristic of *Sosein*, or granted and therefore dependent Being, thereby making Christianity characteristically Jewish in its metaphysics and ethics (Whisker 1982: 79, 102). For this reason, Rosenberg fiercely denies two of the most important Christian doctrines, that of creation *ex nihilo* and original sin, because they totally contradict the notion of the unique Nordic relationship to *Dasein* or Being (expressed as equality to God). Creation *ex nihilo* implies a complete distinction between Creator and created that Rosenberg finds abhorrent. This would amount to a 'slavish' need that appears as an inauthentic and artificial experience of life and truth when compared to the idea that Being can be found within. Consistent with the world-view Rosenberg is assembling from the historical insights of ancient Nordics such as Eckhart and Leibnitz, he quotes the Rig Veda to demonstrate the monistic wisdom of the ancient Indians in realizing that the idea of a separate and distinct creator is nonsense; the denial of this insight constitutes an attack on the truth of the Nordic race-soul's experience of *Dasein* (see Trans. Pois 1970: 117). Anything that suggests a distance between the Nordic race and God or *Dasein* is an attack on the Nordic race. "Rome...wants to force this *Sosein* upon the *Dasein* of the races and peoples, or...to cripple the natural-grown Being of nature; these spiritual and racial cripples will then be collected under the Catholic roof" (Trans. Pois 1970: 117). Rosenberg rejects the doctrine of original sin for precisely the same reasons. Original sin is incomprehensible to a race born into contact with God (Roetter 1939: 317-318). It asserts an estrangement from the divine that might be characteristic of the Jews, but

certainly does not describe the relationship of the Nordic man to the divine (Steigmann-Gall 2003: 94). For Rosenberg, this ‘religion of dependence’ is particularly Jewish because that race lacks the *Dasein* enjoyed by the Nordic race.

Rosenberg is more sympathetic to Protestantism because he sees in Luther an early German nationalist and defender of racial purity, and most importantly, proponent of spiritual independence (Steigmann-Gall 2003: 97). However, while Rosenberg admired Luther for freeing Germans from the shackles of the Roman Church, he laments that he did not go far enough and forsake the *Sosein* corruptions contained in the Old Testament and the letters of Paul: “For the Lutheran ‘belief’ in justice so far has shut it off from life, because ... it preached a *Sosein*, without directing itself back towards the organic *Dasein*” (Trans. Pois 1970: 118). Luther made progress for spiritual freedom through his affirmation of the doctrine of faith alone and the priesthood of all believers, both in tune with what Rosenberg admired in Meister Eckhart and Jesus for their valuation of the ‘kingdom of God within’ and the ‘inner work’ of finding God through the self. Yet Luther remained dependent on the Bible, particularly Paul, thus failing to attain the authentic experience of Being, or *Dasein*, that is the birthright of the Nordic race.

Rosenberg’s affirmation of *Dasein* over *Sosein* is related to what he calls spiritual freedom, which I identify as the self-determining freedom characteristic of the culture of authenticity. External moral sources, such as dogmas, popes or churches, destroy this freedom (Trans. Pois 1970: 122). Christianity, he argues, denies this self-determining freedom in the dependence it creates on the Church, in the dependence it assumes in the doctrine of *ex nihilo*, and in the moral hopelessness it preaches in the doctrine of original

sin. These constitute a slavish dependence on *Sosein*. *Dasein*, however, is the source of a natural morality that grants freedom from abstract rules and ideologies, from dependence on external gods and their moral laws, and from external sources of salvation. This constitutes a self-determining freedom, a capacity to live and shape a moral existence according to only one's own spiritual nature.

According to Rosenberg, of course, this capacity is solely the possession of the Nordic race. With reference to Herder, Rosenberg states that:

Just as each man and *Volk* stand as living and unique entities, so does each of them embody and retain unique value... This growth (organic) phenomenon is conditioned by inner values... The forced introduction of abstraction would annihilate the form as a whole, as well as its potential. (Trans. Pois 1970: 88)

In practice, this self-determining freedom takes the form of love through honour and duty, the natural moral attributes of the Nordic race (Pois 1970: 101). Love is not a slavish devotion to the weak or an abstract notion of humanity, but a devotion to the recognition of the inner value; this inner value is experience of Being, which is, of course, the unique possession of the Nordic race (Whisker 1982: 67-68). On account of his racial possession of *Dasein*, the naturally moral, and therefore self-determining and free Nordic man, recognizes that same inner value in other members of his race, and so devotes himself to the good of his race in honour and duty. While the introduction of foreign blood into the Nordic race dilutes the natural Nordic experience of Being, the false ideology of external dependence (*Sosein*) threatens the destiny of the Nordic race by blinding itself to its own potential, corrupting its natural moral devotion to the race, and opening itself to racial miscegenation because of false doctrines of universalism.

Moral naturalism and self-determining freedom are important aspects of the culture of authenticity that informs so much of the modern identity. This outlook tends to

eschew moral articulation on account of its understanding of moral sources as subjective; morality comes from within, therefore there is no basis for a rational discussion or account of moral sources (Taylor 1989: 9-10). Rosenberg places this culture upon a racial rather than individualistic ground, making moral naturalism and self-determining freedom supreme values and the exclusive possessions of the Nordic race. Whereas in Indian philosophy and Protestantism, the self is equivalent to the soul, for Rosenberg the defining essence of the self is not the unique or individual soul but the blood, the physical dimension of the race-soul. This is an anti-modern aspect of Rosenberg's thought, as it totally denies individualism and is more akin to the religious tribal identity of 'primitive' peoples where, as Peter Berger explains,

The entire collectivity, bound together by ties of blood, thus becomes (to its own self-understanding) quite concretely immortal, for it carries with it through time the *same* fundamental life that is incarnate in each of its members. (Berger 1967: 62)

This racial version of the culture of authenticity values blood and nature rather than individual mental attributes and the universal human capacity for rational thinking because the quality of racial blood is the chief and defining article of the world-view; any argument against it, particularly its anti-Semitism, are quickly closed on account of this privileged and non-rational definition of authentic morality (Tal 2004: 90). Moral knowledge, therefore, cannot derive from reasoning or individual thought because authentic morality is deemed to originate naturally in the spiritual freedom of the Nordic soul in its *Dasein*. Even though this tribalism may be regarded as primitive in substance, its expression in terms of racial science and nineteenth century philological scholarship is modern in form.

The third facet of the culture of authenticity is expressivism, the moral imperative to articulate one's own unique way of being human. Rosenberg's exclusivist racial

framework maintains that this is an expression deriving from the nature of one's race-soul rather than an individualistic expression of one's own unique inner depths. He challenges the traditional ideas about the construction of identity that begin from a universal human nature, and are followed by culture group, *Volk*-group, and national identity (Pois 1970: 93).¹⁴ Rosenberg replaces it with his own 'organic' circle, a format consistent with Berger's description of primitive blood religions, in which race-soul is equivalent to the tribal essence and is the same fundamental life that informs all of its members. This racial essence determines nationality, which in turn determines personality, which in turn determines culture, which then re-informs race-soul (Pois 1970: 95). The experience of Being, which must be personal and personality-forming, follows from race-soul. This makes culture a product of the experience of Being, and personality a product of both. The race or tribe is made the foundation of identity and its racial essence the source of authentic morality. The individual personality is secondary to race and engaged in a dynamic relationship with culture.

With regard to how this is related to the creation of civilization, Rosenberg explains: "Freedom, in the German sense, consists of an inner independence, the possibility to explore, to create a world-view - it is a true, religious feeling" (Trans. Pois 1970: 98) The relationship between the Nordic race-soul, authentic Being (*Dasein*) and civilization is also stated in the following passage:

This *Dasein*, however, is the race-bound soul with its highest values of honour and spiritual freedom, values which determine the constructive division of other values. The race-soul lives and unfolds itself in nature, a nature which awakes certain characteristics while inhibiting others. These strengths of race, soul and nature are the eternal preconditions, *Dasein* and life, and it is only from them that *Sosein* is finally produced as

¹⁴ Rosenberg does not include personality in this list, although he does in his own reformulation of the construction of identity. Wherever he would place personality on this list, what matters most is that he denies the primacy of a universal human nature in constructing identity or providing a foundation for moral nature and instead places it on the tribe or race.

civilization, forms of belief, art and so on. This is that last, inner transformation, the newly awakening *Mythus* of our life. (Trans. Pois 1970: 118)

Spiritual freedom and its accompanying values of honour, derived from the nature of the race-soul and its *Dasein*, create civilization, religion and art as expressions of *Sosein*. In this sense, authentic *Sosein* is the natural expression of *Dasein* and not an artificial construction.¹⁵

Taken to its logical conclusion, this makes Nordic culture, and the civilization it produces, the only authentic culture of Being. Quoting Fichte, Rosenberg says “True culture is character culture” (Trans. Pois 1970: 104). This statement demonstrates the connection Rosenberg sees between cultural expressions and moral naturalism. The culture of authenticity looks to the inner depths of the soul for its moral sources; the cultural productions deriving from those inner depths embody the positive character values one would expect from a representation of *Dasein*. But culture and civilization are not dependent on or derived from the insights of unique individuals. Only the natural self-determining freedom of the Nordic race is capable of producing authentic and moral culture and civilization. Individual persons only express the truths of Being that are follow from their race-soul, not their unique individual experiences.

The culture of authenticity regards the inner depths of the self as the sole source of moral authority. Rosenberg places a racial monopoly on authenticity by grounding the quality of subjective experience on race rather than the individual, making it the exclusive property of the Nordic race. The Nordic race becomes the only natural moral source of humanity, and therefore the only race capable of self-determining freedom and the creation of moral culture and civilization. Because it is dependent on the blood

¹⁵ Rosenberg makes a distinction between authentic *Sosein*, that which is derived directly from *Dasein*, and the normal, inauthentic *Sosein* that derives only from abstract rationality.

through race-soul, Rosenberg sees authentic civilization as a precarious construction. Although the moral insights of Nordic civilization are derived from the blood, ideas also flow back to the race-soul, destroying Nordic self-knowledge and leading to racial mixing. Cultural expressions flow from the race-soul, and these expressions, in turn, help reinforce and inform the natural racial *Dasein*. That is why it is so important that the alien, artificial ideas of inauthentic Being or *Sosein* are almost as dangerous as dilution of the Nordic blood itself. The ancient Indians, Rosenberg recounts, forgot the role of Blood in their monistic identity of Ego and All, and so forgot their own special Nordic nature as Atman and with it the importance of protecting their racial purity (Pois 1970: 42-43). Similarly, Rosenberg argues that “our blood was robbed of its spiritual nature” through the anti-racial doctrines of Christianity and humanitarianism. In both these examples, inauthentic cultural ideas destroyed faith in the blood and led to a corruption of civilization and race. In order for civilization to survive, culture must derive from the *Dasein* of Nordic blood and not become misled by unnatural ideas:

Values will be created and preserved only where blood-law determines the Idea and activities of man, be they conscious or unconscious. Man fulfills the command of the blood, in cult and in life, in the realm of the subconscious, ‘true to nature’...gradually, however, civilization...becomes ever more intellectual, and as time as time goes on establishes not creative tension but discord. In such a manner reason and understanding divorce themselves from race and nature. (Trans. Pois 1970: 37)

As civilizations age they crystallize into rationalistic forms that no longer affirm or even actively deny the power of the blood. The natural attributes of racial blood are forgotten and cultural expression rendered artificial and gain an independent rationality of their own. This is the source of Rosenberg’s concern for culture. As an expression of *Dasein*, cultural production must not participate in abstract ideals such as Christianity’s love of humanity, or modern liberalism’s individualism and universalism, but derive solely from the authentic source of the inner voice of the

Nordic race-soul (Whisker 1982: 117-118). This is another example of the anti-intellectual aspect of the culture of authenticity; it tends to regard the articulation of moral sources as an abstract imposition on authentic understanding. If culture and civilization takes on this kind of rationalistic abstraction, they risk losing touch with the authentic moral sources that produce culture in the first place.

I argued in the previous section that Rosenberg participates in the culture of naturalistic spiritualism, an outlook that considers 'the natural' the normative concept of explanation and generally dismissive of any explanation that refers to entities or causes outside the natural world. The spiritual dimension that he attributes to race in its connection to Being is explained in naturalistic terms that leave the actual subjective experience of Being outside the scope of scientific enquiry. This subjective realm is covered by the culture of authenticity. It shuns rational or abstract explanations of moral sources or the experience of Being because such constructions risk losing touch with the inner depths of the self that constitute our natural moral sources, self-determining freedom and their accompanying expressions as culture and civilization. But, unlike mainstream modern consciousness, Rosenberg grounds the culture of authenticity in race rather than the individual. The subject is not the individual, but the race. The Jewish race is held up as the prime example of producers of inauthentic culture, relying on empty formal and legalistic moral rules that are grounded not in feeling but purely on abstract ideas; from this follows ideologies that deny racial nature, such as individualism or universalism, and deny the Nordic spiritual heritage through doctrines such as original sin and creation *ex nihilo*. The culture of authenticity provides a framework for understanding the subjective nature

of moral sources while denying that they can ever be articulated. It acts as a complement to scientific naturalism (or naturalistic spiritualism) by giving a prime role to subjective experience, but at the same time making any articulation of that subjectivity an artificial product of *Sosein*.

This raises a question concerning the nature of authentic cultural productions. Scientific knowledge is derived from the observation of natural phenomena. Moral knowledge is derived from the subjective experience of Being. This moral knowledge cannot be articulated because of its subjective nature. If the only authentic *Sosein* is only that which is a direct expression of *Dasein*, then *Sosein* itself, as an Idea derived from the blood, remains subjective. The next section deals with the nature of cultural expression itself, exploring how Rosenberg understands authentic Nordic moral knowledge as it is expressed in art, religion and culture.

Self-Conscious Narrative Epistemology

A self-conscious narrative epistemology uses narrative to invest meaning into life all the while knowing that it is a constructed narrative. The meanings contained in these narratives embody truths, but cannot be taken as static representations of the truth. This knowledge, therefore, can only ever be of a provisional nature, a non-binding narrative expression based on some standard of moral judgment. This knowledge is narrative in content because it is provisional, and narrative in form because it is considered a genuine way of knowing. According to the expressivism of the culture of authenticity, the standard of moral judgment for the modern consciousness is the natural moral capacity of the self. For Rosenberg, this standard is contained in the racial nature of the individual. Based on expressivism, he argues that authentic artistic, cultural and religious knowledge

all derive from the unique moral sources of Nordic race-soul. I argue that for Rosenberg, such moral knowledge, as it is expressed as culture, can only take the form of narrative because *Dasein* is a subjective experience of objective Being. Truths or moral knowledge are produced in the form of cultural narratives, as organic expressions of the inner sources of the race-soul. Narratives, therefore, make up both the content and form of cultural expression. Further, because of the spiritual dimension that Rosenberg gives to the insights of the Nordic race-soul, these narratives take the form of myths and therefore express a mythic epistemology.

In this section, I present the three ways in which Rosenberg displays this kind of understanding of authentic moral knowledge. First, he presents a history of Nordic culture that places no value on the consistency of truth statements. I argue that, according to Rosenberg, the content of the various religious insights of the Nordic peoples are cultural narratives that reflect the truth of the Nordic spiritual nature but do not define it. This leads to the second discussion, in which Rosenberg demonstrates that he believes that narrative is a way of knowing. Rosenberg explains the nature of cultural expression as an organic development of Nordic Being and activity of soul and opposes this to the mechanical or rational search for an absolute truth. I argue that these cultural narratives are consciously understood as free expressions of Being (*Dasein*) rather than systems that must be obeyed (*Sosein*). Finally, the *Mythus* itself is a narrative that affirms the spiritual quality of the Nordic race-soul. I argue that it is an example of a narrative in which the author is conscious of its nature *as* a narrative. The use of the word '*Mythus*' is itself a reflection of its nature as a special kind of narrative. For Rosenberg, the *Mythus* is not

just his own individual account of Nordic nature, but a cultural expression of his Nordic nature.

The content of Rosenberg's narrative of Nordic superiority arose from the nineteenth century study of religion and culture. Over the course of the nineteenth century, German nationalism, combined with the study of Aryan language and culture (most notably of ancient India and Persia), led to the mythologization of an Aryan racial heritage, its association with the production of high culture, and its identification with the German race (see Poliakov 1971: 99-105). This sort of thinking is the basis of Rosenberg's assertion of the superiority of the Nordic (Aryan) race. His cultural history of what he calls the Nordic peoples begins from the premise of their racial and cultural superiority. Rosenberg therefore bases his *Mythus* on a narrative: the narrative or myth of Nordic racial quality is accepted first, and from it follows the truths of his historical investigation.

Based on his confidence in the truth of this narrative, Rosenberg discusses and compares the cultural and religious insights of the historical Nordic peoples. He names a wide variety of religious ideas and claims that they all derive from the same Nordic spiritual inheritance. For example, he lists the Indian teaching on Brahman and Atman, the Persian teaching of partnership with God in the struggle against evil, Jesus' teaching on the kingdom of heaven within, the German conception of spiritual freedom, and the will to spiritual seeking as revealed in the teachings of Meister Eckhart and the symbol of Odin, the world-traveler (Pois 1970: 115). Although widely divergent in detail and character, Rosenberg sees them all as historical manifestations of the same spiritual insight of his race, the Nordic spiritual inheritance of 'equality with God' (115).

Rosenberg participates in the expressivist aspect of the culture of authenticity that construes expression of the inner depths of the self as the only authentic form of moral knowledge. He therefore makes no effort to rationally reconcile these disparate philosophical and religious systems because such an attempt would amount to a misunderstanding of the nature of *Dasein* as *Sosein*.¹⁶ These religious teachings are examples of cultural narratives that follow from Nordic *Dasein* and are not meant to be definitive statements of truth. As cultural expressions of the Nordic race-soul and its inherent *Dasein*, they do not require logical consistency.

Rosenberg never explains the details of the Nordic spiritual insight in rigorously theological or philosophical terms except through comparison with *other narratives*, such as those of the ancient Indian monists or Meister Eckhart. The philosophy of Eckhart and India may in themselves be rigorous theologies, but Rosenberg is not interested in them as such, only as narratives that reflect an underlying *Dasein*. It is not only that cultural expressions of truth take the form of narrative, they cannot take any other form. The nature of moral insight is subjective and therefore beyond rational language, so its explanation must rely on narrative itself, even for an explanation of its very nature. This is why two-thirds of Rosenberg's *Mythus* takes the form of a history that asserts the Nordic spiritual nature, and an analysis of Nordic art that attempts to explain how these cultural expressions reflect the truth of Being (Cecil 1972: 83). Authentic cultural knowledge *is* narrative.

¹⁶ Authentic moral knowledge follows directly from *Dasein*, and is understood as such, not as an independent source of truth. It cannot take the form of an absolute statement; it is always understood *as* a representation of *Dasein*, otherwise it takes the form of *Sosein* as an external command to obey.

Rosenberg has no interest in simply reviving the old pagan religion of the ancient Germans. Resurrecting old myths and ideas is equivalent to being bound to inauthentic rational abstractions:

This will does not merely ‘recognize’ the essence of old and new cultures in order to draw itself around them; rather, in self-conscious recognition of the highest values bequeathed to us by our own culture-group, it shuns them as limiting. That our researchers remain transfixed by historical forms without being able to construct anything themselves only demonstrates that their will to construct has been broken ... It, itself will break its own trail and *create* facts. (Trans. Pois 1970: 98)

The facts that it creates are religious, artistic and historical narratives that express the truths of *Dasein*. This reflects Rosenberg’s participation in the modern ethic of self-creation derived from expressivism. He is loyal to the old Nordic cultural narratives *as* Nordic cultural narratives, but has no interest in enslaving himself to their ideals. These old insights are legitimate only if their truths can be experienced as *Dasein*, otherwise they would constitute an inauthentic *Sosein* dominion over the soul.

Rosenberg supplements the nineteenth century myth of Aryan racial superiority with a monistic metaphysics, but these are only examples of the *content* of his Nordic narrative. Because cultural knowledge arises from race, and the race-soul is the source of the experience of Being, narrative is not just the content of knowledge, but its form. This leads to the second discussion, in which I explain how Rosenberg argues that knowledge of *Dasein* is narrative in form as well as content, and how he opposes this to the inauthentic artifice of rational *Sosein*.

Rosenberg contrasts the ‘scholastic-mechanical’ struggle for absolute knowledge with the ‘organic’ search for truth. These concepts are equivalent to *Sosein* and *Dasein*, respectively. He argues that “with the surrender of a form which corresponds to our own measure to the form of a fictitious abstract, eternal, absolute truth, we not only do *not* come any nearer to the ‘truth’, but actually push farther away the possibility of

approaching it” (Trans. Pois 1970: 90). The ‘form which corresponds to our own measure’ is that of the organic, or authentic experience of Being that is characteristic of the Nordic race, to which he opposes a rational, absolute standard of truth. The Nordic form of knowledge must not rely on rational accounts of truth, but narratives that flow from its racial nature. Cultural narratives may change over history, but they arise from an eternal racial source that makes them valid across time:

From the insight that reason-determined, definable experience of the formal variety does not determine life but rather simply represents or can represent a heuristic principle...the question does not involve acknowledging the validity of a form of belief, but rather perception of soul and character values...the race-soul seizes upon old questions in newer forms; *however, the constructive strength of will and soul remain, in direction and nature, the same.* (Trans. Pois 1970: 91)

The race-soul perceives its own nature as *Dasein*; its natural strengths remain the same in direction and nature no matter the context. The natural capacity of the Nordic race-soul to understand Being directly makes its insights independent of historical time and rational constructions. Defining experience through rational means can only be an heuristic tool, presumably because it is contingent on historical circumstances and its own rational constructions. Patterning one’s life after such rational forms of understanding represents a dependence on external forms that constitutes *Sosein*. The life of a race depends on an activity of soul, not obedience to the constructions of reason:

The life of a race does not represent a logically-developed philosophy nor even the unfolding of a pattern according to natural law, but rather the development of a mystical synthesis, an activity of soul, which cannot be explained rationally, nor can it be conceived through a study of cause and effect. (Trans. Pois 1970: 84)

As an activity of soul, the subjective experience of Being makes objective statements of truth unnecessary and therefore suspect. The Nordic race has the capacity to construct narratives that authentically express the old questions of human life in ever newer forms. The cultural narratives of the various Nordic cultures, then, are historical manifestations

of eternal truths known only through Nordic *Dasein*. They remain authentic representations of the truths of Being as long as one keeps in mind their contingent character as narrative and experience their truth immediately, rather than through the faculty of reason. The moment they are construed as authentic representations in themselves, they become inauthentic *Sosein* tyrants of conscience. This is consistent with the self-determining freedom of the culture of authenticity. Narrative makes no absolute claim on its participants; they are free to affirm its truths or refuse them. Absolute truth claims based on reason, however, assert an external authority of truth that demand assent rather than free affirmation based on authentic racial moral sources.

The *Mythus*, therefore, displays an idea of narrative as both the content and form of moral knowledge. The various cultural narratives of the Nordic race have served to determine the lives of the various Nordic peoples in the same way because in their content they are based on the same authentic racial source. This moral knowledge, however, can only ever take the form of narrative because it is subjective and non-rational by nature. Rosenberg is conscious of the differences in the content of these narratives, but he is confident of their unity because he sees them only as narratives that derive from the same moral sources. The importance of narrative, then, lies in its *form* as an epistemology, an expression of truth that is open to affirmation or rejection by the race-soul based on its subjective experience of being.

Rosenberg himself recognizes that the racial history of the *Mythus* can only proceed from a racial heuristic principle; he makes no attempt to call it a work of philosophy (Pois 1970: 34). Members of the Nordic race must remain aware that cultural productions are narrative constructions following from the racial subjective experience of

Being. All moral knowledge and truth claims take the form of self-consciously created narratives.

The Nordic individual thus expresses the truths of *Dasein* not as individual expressions of the truth, but as uniquely Nordic cultural narratives based on the nature of that individual's Nordic race-soul. For Rosenberg, truth or moral knowledge is the organic expression of Nordic cultural production rather than the rational or even aesthetic insights of the individual. This epistemology is consistent with Rosenberg's racial interpretation of the culture of authenticity: it depends on the Nordic race-soul as a moral source, it considers the narrative expression of this moral source an authentic expression of the truth or Being, and it asserts the natural freedom of the Nordic race to affirm or refuse the truth of a narrative. There is a danger, however, that inauthentic cultural productions that do not arise from *Dasein* may pollute Nordic culture. "Values will be created and preserved only where blood-law determines the Idea [*Idee*] and activities of man, be they conscious or unconscious" (Trans. Pois 1970: 37). Without authentic culture, the Nordic race risks losing touch with its own moral nature and giving up its own natural moral knowledge. The Nordic race requires an authentic narrative that derives from genuine *Dasein*. This leads to a discussion of Rosenberg's *Mythus* itself as an example of this kind of narrative.

Rosenberg considers the *Mythus* an attempt to reconnect the Nordic race with its spiritual nature through a mythic narrative. This narrative, he believes, has the power to reinvigorate the German people by inspiring them with knowledge of the spiritual power of their blood. The core of the *Mythus* is the affirmation of the spiritual superiority of German-Nordic racial blood:

Today, a new belief is rising: the *Mythus* of the blood; the belief that the godly essence of man itself is to be defended through the blood; that belief which embodies the clearest knowledge that the Nordic race represents that *Mysterium* which has overthrown and replaced the old sacraments. (Trans. Pois 1970: 82)

The *Mythus* will not only empower the German people with knowledge of their unique spiritual nature, but will *in itself* act as the mode of the salvation of the Nordic race by the *experience* of its truths, thus motivating them to action. The authentic ideological reflection of the Nordic spiritual experience of Being will rescue the Nordic race “through a re-experiencing and cultivation of the primal blood combined with an elevated will to struggle” (Trans. Pois 1970: 75).

Although Rosenberg has complete faith in the truth of this statement, he is aware of the nature of his work as a narrative, even referring to the spiritual awakening he is participating in as the rise of a new *Weltanschauung* (Pois 1970: 35). This use of the word ‘*Weltanschauung*’, meaning world-view or ideology, suggests that the reader or participant remains aware of its constructed nature as a narrative. Charles Taylor argues that all people necessarily live within a moral framework that is constitutive of human agency (Taylor 1989, 26-27). The *Mythus* is a self-conscious, narrative version of this kind of framework; it is constitutive of Rosenberg’s life as a Nazi. Following his statement about the rise of a new *Mythus*, he says that the recognition of Nordic moral character as the source of European culture “is the foundation for a new *Weltanschauung*, a new-yet-old theory of state, the *Mythus* of the new life-feeling...” (Trans. Pois 1970: 83). The new myth is only a world-view, but this does not mean that it is not true. It means only that an authentic moral framework or *Weltanschauung* cannot be something derived from rational calculation but from *Dasein* only. Consider how Rosenberg characterizes Wotan in a passage quoted by Viereck: “Wotan, as the eternal mirror of the

primeval soul-forces of the Nordic man, is living today as five thousand years ago” (Trans. Viereck 2004: 292). Rosenberg does not truly believe that the ancient Norse god exists, but he clings to the truths that Wotan embodies as a narrative representation of Nordic *Dasein*.

The *Mythus* is an example of an Idea that follows from the blood-law, and must in turn determine the life of the race (see Pois 1970: 37). “The inner voice now demands that the myth of the soul, race and ego, *Volk* and personality, blood and honour; that this myth alone and uncompromisingly, must penetrate, bear and determine all life” (Trans. Pois 1970: 97). Without this mythus, the Nordic race-soul risks its own extinction, and the total chaos that would be wrought by an inauthentic civilization based on materialistic individualism and anti-natural universalism (see Pois 1970: 96). As a myth, the *Mythus* begins from the premise of Nordic racial-spiritual superiority and creates a self-consciously crafted narrative that the author must believe is based on his race-soul rather than his own personal insight.

Aside from its racial bigotry and demonization of the Jews which, as Fritz Nova argues (1986), played an extremely important role in motivating ordinary Germans to participate in the Final Solution, the *Mythus of the Twentieth Century* is often derided for its irrationalism, groundless claims, non-systematic nature and opaque style (see Fest 1970: 67; Cecil 1972: 82; Viereck 2004: 215). Considering the nature of narrative epistemology, however, its outlandish assertions, illogical arguments and lack of true research and evidence are consistent with the characteristics of a mythic narrative. Most cultural myths appear to be poor representations of reality at best; that Rosenberg’s *Mythus* is no different only seems strange if one expects a work of philosophy. Yet he

includes the word myth in the very title. Robert Cecil captures the intent of the *Mythus* when he states that “The function of myth is not to record history, but to create it by first evoking belief” (Cecil 1972: 91). This, of course, leads most scholars to dismiss it along the lines of the usual definition of myth as an inadequate etiology or pure fiction. The *Mythus* is indeed both of these things, but it is also an expression of what the author supposes to be an authentic representation of Being. If it appears irrational that is because reason is not a standard of judgment for *Dasein*.

Rosenberg grounds this mode of moral orientation within a monistic metaphysical world that gives the Nordic race exclusive claim to authentic knowledge. This knowledge, however, can only take the form of a self-consciously constructed narrative that considers itself the authentic ideological expression of the Nordic blood-law. Despite its ground in the mythic qualities of the Nordic race, the self-conscious narrative epistemology employed by Rosenberg in the *Mythus* reflects the form of the culture of authenticity. It bases the moral authority of its cultural narratives on the inner depths of the racial self; it demonstrates participation in expressivism in its belief that self-discovery of moral sources and knowledge takes the form of cultural expression; it insists on an ethic of self-determining freedom that refuses to accept any moral authority aside from the free affirmation of a mythic narrative based on the exclusive racial experience its own moral nature. The affirmation of a defining mythic narrative based on the assertion of racial superiority obviously lends itself quite well to fascist politics. That this narrative is immune to external rational criticism on account of its racial exclusivism is part of what makes it so dangerous; the accompanying demonization of the Jewish race as the opposite of Nordic *Dasein* makes it even more so. As a self-conscious myth, the

Mythus portrays itself as the saviour of the Nordic race, in both its spiritual and natural dimensions as guardians of Being and a biological entity requiring purity of blood.

A Modern Religiosity: The Mythic Understanding of Religion

Thus far, I have analyzed Rosenberg's *Mythus* according to the three categories that I have argued are distinctive of modernity. In this section, I explain how these together constitute in the *Mythus* a modern form of religiosity. First, I identify Charles Taylor's theory of moral frameworks of orientation with the three categories of the analysis and associate these with the religious content of the *Mythus* in order to show its moral framework takes a modern and religious form. I then review the chief characteristics of the *Mythus* according to the three categories of analysis, and explain how they fit together to form a religious world-view. I finish with a discussion of how the *Mythus* shares characteristics with other modern forms of consciousness and religiosity.

Charles Taylor argues that all people necessarily live within frameworks of moral orientation that create a landscape in which a people make moral judgments (Taylor 1989: 26-27). As part of my theoretical approach, I chose three categories of analysis that represent important features of the modern consciousness: scientific naturalism, the culture of authenticity and self-conscious narrative epistemology. Scientific naturalism is an obvious part of modernity whose definition I derived from the Encyclopedia of Religion. I based my understanding of culture of authenticity as a modern form of consciousness on the writings of Charles Taylor (see Taylor 1989; 1991). I based the category of narrative epistemology on the expressivism of the culture of authenticity and relied primarily on Michael Bell for the definition of this category.

Throughout my analysis, I have attempted to distinguish between the content and form of Rosenberg's *Mythus*. In its content, the *Mythus* is primarily an assertion of the superiority of the Nordic race based on a supposedly unique racially exclusive spiritual quality. The cosmological scope of its ideas and its spiritual aspect give the moral framework of the *Mythus* a strong religious dimension. The form of this moral framework, as I have argued, is distinctly modern because it participates in the culture of authenticity, scientific naturalism and a self-conscious narrative epistemology. It is on this basis that I believe the *Mythus* represents a distinctly modern form of religiosity. Its content gives its otherwise neutral form a religious dimension.

Scientific naturalism is the intellectual context of this form of religiosity. I have suggested that Rosenberg's version of this outlook might be more properly called naturalistic spiritualism, but it nonetheless maintains 'nature' as the normative concept of explanation. He uses its language to explain his ideas, but also uses its empirical limitations to create or secure a subjective category for 'the spiritual'. Naturalistic explanation is the only acceptable objective means of explaining the nature of racial life, but its authority ends with objective, physical or observable experience. The spiritual dimension of race is subjective, and therefore beyond the scope of scientific explanation.¹⁷ This is supplied by the culture of authenticity. It asserts a purely subjective source for moral knowledge which is identified with *Dasein*, the spiritual experience of Being. Rosenberg replaces the individual with race as the ground of spiritual access to Being, but maintains the subjective authority of the culture of authenticity and its emphasis on self-determining freedom and expressivism as the mode of self-discovery.

¹⁷ Science might inform moral reasoning, such as through racial science or social Darwinism, but it is not the source of moral knowledge.

Self-conscious narrative epistemology describes the nature of moral knowledge as the authoritative expression of subjective moral truths. It is narrative, a cultural expression the participant knows is not literally or absolutely true but is nonetheless authoritative. These cultural narratives are expressed and understood as myths that are derived from, affirm and express the truths of racial nature and conduct but do not seek to define it. But again, for Rosenberg these are based on a unique racial ground based on the framework of the culture of authenticity. Myths, such as the ancient German stories or the *Mythus* itself, are the authoritative expression of subjective moral truths derived from the authentic experience of Being, or *Dasein*.

The *Mythus*, then, represents a distinctly modern form of religiosity because it participates so closely in these three crucial features of the modern consciousness. Of course, the form is not itself intrinsically religious but is made so because of the strong spiritual dimension of its content. The 'religion of blood' of the *Mythus* operates within a naturalistic context that rejects supernatural causation, theological explanation and transcendental entities or planes of existence and asserts that moral knowledge follows from a natural subjective experience beyond the scope of rational explanation or discovery. Mythic narratives are considered the only authoritative forms of moral knowledge, with subjective experience as their only acceptable criterion of truth.

One of the central themes of Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* is the subjective turn of modern moral sources (Taylor 1989: 9). His description of the modern tendency to resist any notion of a moral ontology is reminiscent of Rosenberg's rejection of *Sosein* accounts of moral knowledge. In a section called 'The Ethics of Inarticulacy', Taylor outlines how the modern consciousness

possesses a strong faith in natural moral intuitions and powerful distrust of grand narratives of moral authority; these views are very often associated with a naturalist or sociobiological outlook (Taylor 1989: 53-90). The *Mythus*, of course, also shares a naturalist viewpoint in how it understands the location of moral authority and the nature of knowledge about the natural world. It also defines itself against rational moral ontologies that claim to represent an absolute moral truth and instead claims a purely subjective location of moral sources.

The *Mythus* shares these characteristics with other modern forms of moral thinking and religiosity. Many forms of New Age spirituality rarely claim that their gods, goddesses or divine entities have a literal existence; they focus instead on how the participants ‘feel’ an inner connection, how the myths and narratives resonate with their inner depths. Many modern people, both Christian and non-Christian alike, insist on a strict separation between their subjective faith and the ‘objective’ facts of modern science. Paul Tillich, for example, defines faith as

the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern. And, since only that which is the ground of our being and meaning should concern us ultimately, we can also say: Faith is the concern about our existence in its ultimate ‘whence’ and ‘whither.’ (Tillich 1955: 51)

This faith is obviously subjective, and the ‘ultimate concern’ has a narrative quality to it. Of course, Tillich would obviously reject not only any kind of spiritualized racism as a valid kind of ultimate concern, but also insist that the definition of one’s ultimate concern cannot be purely subjective. Yet it is clear that the *Mythus* of Nordic race does function in a similar way; it affirms a narrative describing the special quality of Nordic blood as a sort of ultimate concern and constructs its religiosity on a subjective understanding of our moral sources. The tension between objective and subjective definitions of morality is an important characteristic of modernity.

There are, of course, other tensions and logical inconsistencies between the three aspects of modern consciousness, but these are as characteristic of our own culture as much as Rosenberg's thought. What makes Rosenberg different is that he incorporates them into a religious world-view by giving subjective moral insights a spiritual dimension and creating a mythic understanding of truth. It is a religiosity that self-consciously regards its myths as fictions yet affirms the authenticity of its moral truths. Science is regarded as the authoritative way of understanding the operation of the natural world, and even informing the content of these myths, but is also relegated to a separate, objective realm of investigation. This modern, mythic religiosity participates in what Sarah Worth calls the 'paradox of fiction', the capacity of human beings to become emotionally effected by stories its readers or listeners know are not true (Worth 2004, 443-445). Thus, Rosenberg can hail Wotan as the god of the Germans, while at the same time asserting that the god never existed. He can write an entire book, explicitly called a *Mythus*, that he hopes will inspire a religion of the blood based on a self-conscious *Weltanschauung*. This religion is not one of ritual, doctrine or based on organized institutions, but a kind of personal experience and affirmation of the spiritual nature of a self that has a racial identity as its foundation. Except for the replacement of an individual personal experience with a racial one, this kind of religiosity shares a great deal in common with modern spirituality. The *Mythus*, though idiosyncratic and even anti-modern in its tribalist content, is thoroughly modern in its articulation of a 'Nazi spirituality.'

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSIONS

The atrocities committed by the Nazi regime, and the obvious connection between the Mythos and the thinking that went into the Final Solution, make Rosenberg and National Socialism the subject of obvious moral condemnation. Yet more than a few studies of National Socialism take the form of polemic, dismissing the movement as a strange aberration, a unique monstrosity, or a peculiarly German entity that is divorced or antagonistic toward modernity (see Voegelin 2000; Mosse 1964; Stern 1961; Herf 1984). Or they attempt to trace the intellectual sources of its ideas in order to understand where its hyper-nationalism, racist ideology and extreme anti-Semitism come from (see Mosse 1964, 1970, 1985; Vieler 1999; Viereck 2004). Nazi thought, like Rosenberg's Mythos, is also commonly attacked for its anti-intellectual outlook and outright irrationalism (see Broszat 1966; Fest 1970; Cecil 1972; Tal 2004). All of these approaches tend to place Nazi ideology in a safe, self-contained box of evil that dismisses Nazi ideas as perverse distortions of good things like Romanticism, innately despicable hatreds like anti-Semitism, or a thinly disguised drive for power. Few take Nazism seriously as a movement that inspired people. This kind of approach might suggest that something inspirational must be in some way good. That is not what I am suggesting. I suggest only that there was something about National Socialism that made it attractive to people beyond the usual diabolical motives.

The study of the religious aspects of National Socialism do focus on this inspirational aspect, but usually focus on the questionable content of its religious ideas.

Pois and Poliakov call Nazism a religion of nature and fear that the removal of the transcendent doomed the movement to immorality (Pois 1986: 156-158; Poliakov 1974: 329-330). Rhodes calls Nazism a millennial revolution that combined some strange ideologies together in a dangerous package (Rhodes 1980: 198-199). Voegelin does analyze the form of Nazi religiosity, calling it a gnostic political religion, but argues that this was a thoroughly anti-modern throwback to the flawed Gnostic religiosity of a medieval mystic (Voegelin 2004). Only Richard Steigmann-Gall challenges this kind of approach by arguing that many of the sources of Nazism were all too mundane by demonstrating how Christian ideas and average Christians were swept up by the movement (Steigmann-Gall 2003: 266-267). He pays significant attention to Rosenberg is his analysis of Nazism, and concludes that he showed strange loyalty to Christian ideas. Steigmann-Gall thereby questions the traditional approach to National Socialism that places it in its own safe category of evil.

This is the approach that I took in this essay, only I chose to focus on the thought of Alfred Rosenberg as an example of Nazi ideology and examine the *form* more than the *content* of his thought. I chose three elements that I believed to be major elements of the modern consciousness: scientific naturalism, the culture of authenticity and self-conscious narrative epistemology. I discovered that Rosenberg's *Mythus* is analyzable by these categories. The truths of this mythic religion are grounded in a privileged gnostic insight that Rosenberg believes unique to the Nordic race, but this racially exclusive *Dasein* is only the content for a modern form of religiosity that is all too familiar.

Scientific naturalism has a difficult time making moral judgments in our culture; many argue that it has nothing to say about moral knowledge. The culture of authenticity

privileges the subjective inner depths as a moral source, and through it, as a source of cultural expression and dedication to whatever narrative or myth we hold to be true. Modern culture honours those who hold to what they believe in, fight for it and are even willing to die for it, as if this devotion to their own beliefs were an authentic and satisfactory criterion of moral judgment. Yet Alfred Rosenberg also died for what he believed in. He went to the gallows in 1946 for participating in a cause that he honestly believed was a just one. But he believed in the superior qualities of the German race, its destiny to rule, and in the need to fight the supposedly evil menace of the Jewish race. While it is true that these three elements reflect the content of National Socialism, he nevertheless was willing to die for them.

The modern tendency to honour those who stand by what they believe irrespective of criticism depends on the same moral sources that led Rosenberg to affirm the validity of his religious *Mythus* of Nordic blood. Rosenberg claimed the truth of his *Mythus* based on a subjective insight that takes the form of a belief. Whether it is founded on individualistic or a special racial nature, this purely subjective claim to moral truth cannot in any way form an adequate standard of moral assessment. This is extremely uncomfortable in a liberal culture that takes the privacy and independence of conscience as a legal right. If ordinary Germans in the 1930s claimed the ability to make moral judgments based on a subjective understanding of truth, what does that suggest for the modern which simply replaces the racial ground of moral insight with an individualistic one? I do not presume to have the answer to what criterion of judgment can be applied to those who are willing to stand by their beliefs no matter what the cost. I argue only that the tendency to honour people purely for adherence to their beliefs is derived from the

same three elements of the modern consciousness that inform Rosenberg's *Mythus*. In a world that is constantly aware of alternative sources and definitions of truth, our beliefs take on a mythic element analogous to the self-conscious narrative epistemology that derives from scientific naturalism and the culture of authenticity. But these relativistic and subjective truth claims cannot stand on their own as our own personal *Mythus*.

Nazi spirituality shared a form similar to that of modern consciousness. This is why it is important to analyze and understand what motivates people to join, participate and commit crimes in the name of a cause or movement rather than simply placing that movement and its adherents in a safe category of evil all its own. By seeking what we have in common with those we would prefer to think of as radically foreign examples of evil, we gain an insight into the potentially dangerous nature of our own forms of consciousness. This is not to say that modern culture is as evil as the murderous political movement that shared important features of its form; Rosenberg's Nazi blood religion is grounded on a collective identity rather than an individual one that makes it particularly amenable to fascist politics, a quality not shared by a culture of a similar form but founded on individualism. But it does indicate the dangers of a spirituality that encourages a subjective sense of morality and a narrative or mythic understanding of moral knowledge.

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