

# *Antaios: A Mythical and Symbolic Hermeneutics*

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**ABSTRACT** The aim of my research is to define the religious hermeneutics that can be identified as the specific core of *Antaios* (1959–71), the German journal directed by the historian of religions Mircea Eliade and by the writer and philosopher Ernst Jünger. Drawing on their insights, we will focus on the philosophical-religious interpretation of *Antaios* contents: the so-called “mythical-symbolic hermeneutics” is probably the most interesting theoretical theme connected to the *Weltanschauung* of *Antaios*. This cultural journal could embody a counter-philosophical perspective that is at the same time intrinsic to Western speculation. This position has repeatedly emerged in many phases of our cultural history. I refer here to mythical-symbolic thought, characterized by an analogical interpretation of the world, whose structure is considered a stratification of truth levels that are complementary ontological levels of reality. This tradition sees reality as a specific kind of totality that allows human perception to take place through the structures of myth and symbols. The theoretical unity of the project is rooted in the mythical-symbolic tradition that, starting from the religious and esoteric pre-philosophical meditations, spans Platonic thought, the various neoplatonisms, passes through medieval mysticism and alchemy, reappears in Romanticism and is revealed in the twentieth century by the reflections of the “thinkers of Tradition.” With this paper I would like to highlight the main topics that can be identified from this hermeneutics: speculations about symbol, myth, *coincidentia oppositorum* (coincidence of opposites), archetypes, and ontological pluralism. These are at the core of this paradigm.

**KEYWORDS** Antaios; Eliade, Mircea; hermeneutics; Jünger, Ernst; myth; nihilism; symbol

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THE JOURNAL *ANTAIOS*. AN INTRODUCTION

The aim of my contribution is to define the mythical and symbolic hermeneutics that can be identified from a theoretical point of view as the specific core of *Antaios*, a German journal directed from 1959 to 1971 by the Romanian historian of religion Mircea Eliade and the German novelist and philosopher Ernst Jünger.

A discussion of the genesis and history of this journal is beyond the scope of this essay. For our theoretical purposes it is just important to know that the interesting research of the Austrian independent scholar Hans Thomas Hakl (2007, 2009, 2019) shows that the project of this kind of publication had already been developed by the publisher Ernst Klett in 1957—the same year in which the first personal meeting between Mircea Eliade and Ernst Jünger took place. Their agreement to collaborate on a new editorial project was genuine and based on common philosophical and methodological principles. Jünger lyrically explains in a famous letter to Eliade the philosophical perspective that, in his view, should the project: “Today, while the shining sun of Kant becomes more opaque, it is perhaps raising the dark one of his fellow citizen of Königsberg, Hamann” (Hakl 2007, 251).<sup>1</sup> Here Jünger refers to Hamann, the so called “Wizard of the North,” as a philosophical and spiritual alternative to the Kantian legacy: the mystic and symbolic attitude of Hamann. His “dark sun,” that reminds the Christian mystical tradition of San Juan de La Cruz, might represent the favoured vehicle of a Western self-awareness renewal. The theoretical background of my analysis will proceed precisely from the brief but fascinating sentence conceived by Ernst Jünger, showing how *Antaios* inherited and developed its Hamann non- or post-Kantian orientation.

Among the most famous professors, researchers and intellectuals who collaborated on *Antaios*, or whose essays have been translated and published in the journal, the most important were surely: Friedrich Georg Jünger (Ernst’s brother), Roger Caillois, Thomas Altizer, Pio Filippini Ronconi, Gherardo Gnoli, Cristina Campo, Elemire Zolla, Attilio Mordini, Franz Vonessen, Julius Evola, Emile Cioran, Henry Corbin, and Raimon Panikkar. All these authors, with their different views, contributed to the development of the cultural orientation of the new journal, in which different voices concurred to deepen a common philosophical and spiritual paradigm.

The intense daily editorial work was managed by the tireless Philipp Wolff-Windegg, the nephew of the editor Ernst Klett, who was the real

1. Hereinafter the German, Italian and English translation are mine, if not marked otherwise.

editor in chief and the one responsible for the actual management of the journal.

In the issues of *Antaios*, regularly published every two months until 1971, more than one hundred intellectuals worked on the concepts of myth, symbols, and archetypes, building a cultural project which was directed towards the promotion of a philosophical, metapolitical and spiritual orientation, that can eventually be characterised through the Nietzschean notion of *unzeitgemass* (*untimely*). The variety of contributions was aimed at highlighting the connections between all the theoretical problems that were judged fundamental for the comprehension—and potentially critique—of Western modernity: “Every essay had to ideally throw light, albeit indirectly, on all the others, and every paper had to contribute to the best visibility of the others” (Wolff-Windegg 1965).

#### THE PATH OF HERMES: MYTHICAL AND SYMBOLIC HERMENEUTICS

I will mainly focus here on the philosophical interpretation of the contents of *Antaios*: a so-called “mythical-symbolic hermeneutics” is in my perspective the most interesting theoretical theme—but also aesthetic and religious—connected with the *Weltanschauung* (“world view”) promoted by *Antaios*. The publication should in fact be considered not just a generalist cultural journal, but rather a genuine intellectual experiment (philosophical and multidisciplinary at the same time), in which the scholars coordinated by Jünger and Eliade attempted to develop a philosophical model that could function as an organic cultural paradigm in opposition to the one which prevailed in their time.

Even now, the current philosophical debate is in fact often disrupted by a rigid and fruitless opposition between analytic philosophy, in which the empiricist and positivist tradition converge, and postmodern philosophy, characterized by a prevalent *pars destruens*, in which genealogical analysis and critical perspectives summarize the history of Western philosophy, while annihilating its main truthful contents. As Edmund Husserl claimed in his studies (1996a, b), the first paradigm is destined to fall into naturalism, by forgetting the criticist perspective and the need for a deeply philosophical discussion around the gnoseological requirements of every philosophical assumption; this theoretical paradigm is opposed to the second, which is linked to a relativistic and subjectivist view, one which denies the objective pole of reality and the notion of truth itself, inevitably falling back upon a radical view that precludes any genuine philosophical speculation.

In this scenario, *Antaios* may represent a counter-philosophical perspective that is at the same time intrinsic to Western speculation. This position

has repeatedly surfaced in many movements of our cultural history. Here I particularly have in mind mythical-symbolic thought, characterized by an analogical interpretation of the world, whose structure is considered as a stratification of truth levels that are complementary ontological levels of reality. This tradition sees reality as a specific kind of totality (*Ganzheit*) that allows human perception to gnoseologically take place through the structures of myth and symbol.

The journal was a multidisciplinary one, open to contributions from all areas of the humanities—and not only the humanities, since issues from science, mathematics, biology and medicine were considered in some articles. Despite the specific factors relating to every discipline and the characteristics of the individual authors, we can notice that the theoretical approach adopted is characterized by a strong degree of philosophical unity. This unity was focused on the will to promote an intellectual development of a new cultural paradigm, one that was at the same time rooted in the mythical-symbolic tradition which, starting from the religious and esoteric pre-philosophical meditations, spanned Platonic thought, the various neoplatonisms, passing through medieval mysticism and alchemy to reappear in Romanticism—particularly in its Heidelberg iteration (Moretti 2013)—and is finally to be found in the twentieth century in the reflections of the “thinkers of Tradition.” The famous “Eranos group” can also be considered an important modern representation of this spiritual and philosophical attitude (Hakl 2014).

This is a perspective that can be identified in all of the journal articles, despite the plurality of themes and methods employed. It is perhaps perfectly illustrated by Ernst Jünger’s manifesto, which originally appeared in a brief text published by Ernst Klett Verlag for communication and advertising purposes, and which was released alongside the launch of the first issue of the magazine. Here, Jünger states:

The particular intention, the task that ANTAIOS proposes in this context, allows itself to be delimited through the words myth and symbol. The myth is conceived, beyond the narrow meaning of the word, as a force that grounds history and, always recurrent, breaks the flow of events. As an immutable foundation it establishes the solidness of the position. (2015, 167)

A solidness that, however, is not set in a fixed defence of ideological positions, but rather in the assumption of a method that promotes a renewed look at things and reality:

This contact is, seen as a symbol, constantly the same and, on the other hand, different in its temporal guise, particularly in a turning point in which not only the earth is technically, economically and politically conceived and embraced in a new way by human awareness, but in which even a powerful spiritual and physical equipment begins to separate itself from it. (Jünger 2015, 168)

The conclusion is lyrically impressive and links the mythical-symbolic perspective to the philosophical analysis of modernity and the problem of technique:

The monstrous increase of power and space will be carried only when the son of the earth will produce a counterweight to it in the ancient, sacred depth. (Jünger 2015, 168)

Who is this “son of the earth”? The answer is clear and fundamental: Antaeus.

Distant from any materialist and biological prospective, Jünger becomes the defender of the Earth in its archetypal, symbolic and spiritual dimension: to be on the side of Antaeus—the eponymous mythical giant of the journal—in fact means to look at the paradoxical transcendent immanence, to connect life, in its totality and organic unity, to the spirit, to experience the power of the chaotic, the shapeless and the elementary, to reappear, in a transfigured guise, into the horizons of the world—of an infinitely enriched and extended world. This perspective allows to talk about *Renovatio mundi* as Jünger’s dreamed-for project: i.e. a renewal of our relationship with that mythical-symbolic world that secularized modernity has radically removed and forgotten.

So, who is Antaeus? According to epic tradition, he was the son of Gaea, the goddess of the Earth, through which his power is always renewed. Heracles’ battle with him as part of his mythical twelve labours was therefore very hard: the only way to defeat him was to lift him up and strike him when he was not in contact with the ground.

The *Antaios* project can be therefore interpreted in light of the Greek myth: Antaeus is the hero of a philosophical and hermeneutical world-view according to which humanity needs to rediscover the spirituality of Mother Earth and her secrets, instead of the lighter Olympian dominion as represented by Heracles which had degenerated into modern rationality.

In this context, Jünger does not talk just about mythology as mythical matter, epic topics and literary religious traditions, but of myth *in se*: he considers myths having a power that has to be understood as a formal

and energetic archetype of the real, as a cognitive and connective structure. Modern man, the so-called *homo saecularis*, is accustomed to treating mythical-symbolic matter archaeologically. Through *Antaios* he is called to a “break of level,” to adopt an expression proposed by Julius Evola: to take on the legacy of analogical, holistic and traditional thinking in order to change his first, spontaneous gaze on reality profoundly and, by so doing, to modify reality itself. Evola, who collaborated with *Antaios* with five essays on different topics, specified the opportunity, still present for men in the modern (and postmodern) world, to achieve a different view of reality, acquiring the capacity to reunify, in a symbolical and analogical way, what modernity had divided. In the contemporary world, men have completely lost

the magical-symbolic apperception, which makes the individual live and act in a nature, in a light, in a space and in a time, in a web of causes and effects that are qualitatively different from those that define the natural environment of modern man. In the case of history a modification has occurred that affects not only the forms of subjective thinking, but also the fundamental categories of the objective experience. It can be said that the veil of *Mâyâ* has increasingly thickened, that the detachment between I and non-I has become increasingly strong, so as to let the universe appear in a pure exteriority and to remove every existential fundamentals from the previous conception of a living and sacred universe. (Evola 2010, 123)

This interpretation of reality is commonly found in *Antaios*. It can be further developed by referring to a short note written by Philipp Wolff-Windegg, in the *Antaios* issue of the sixth year. Here the purpose of this cultural project is again specified, this time programmatically:

The myth, degraded in the daily linguistic use to an injury, has to succeed in speaking to man as an opportunity—an opportunity among several! And not just the myth. A whole tradition, often ignored or removed in our time, because it is considered insignificant, has to be resumed. It is the tradition that teaches us to understand symbolic and analogical thought not as a surrogate, but rather as a corrective of a purely utilitarian rationalism. (Hakl 2007, 259)

And is it not the same perspective—we can ask ourselves—that Eliade considers in his whole narrative, that somehow completes the meaning of his academic religious writings? “Every event, every daily event has a symbolic meaning, it illustrates a primordial, meta-historical, universal symbolism” (Eliade 1988, 83).

After these considerations, it seems correct to define the perspective of *Antaios* in terms of mythical-symbolic hermeneutics, namely a form of interpretative and transformative thought based on the mediating structures of myth and symbol. It is an analogical approach to phenomena which is capable of bringing together internal and external, subject and object, idea and matter, transcendence and immanence, fragment and totality. The intent that Jünger and Eliade shared with the many collaborators who participated in this project was to openly approach the microcosm as a pulsating and dignified life. Thus, their objective was to holistically capture the transcendence in the fragments of phenomena, finding a plural and multidimensional ontology in the mesh of the real. It was eventually the spiritual tension devoted to contemplating the hierarchy of forms that always refers to the Origin from which all spring, to that ineffable dimension that Jünger defined *das Zeitlose*—which can be translated as “eternal outside of time” (see: Jünger 2013). It is the same perspective that, according to Costantin Noica, we can recognize in Eliade’s research:

Nature, man or divine express, every one according to his own register, being; being is the substance of the concrete, pursued in many hypostasis; the concrete experience of being takes place not just through one hypostasis, but in their interpenetration. (1987, 179)

With myth, then beyond myth: archaic knowledge has to be connected to philosophical and modern instruments. Both sides are useful hermeneutical devices in order to reach these lands of reality where logical and dialectical thought fades when confronted with the essential forms capable to radiate all around the divine. Jünger teaches us, as Massimo Donà clearly explains, “that we can always transfigure the rigor of the argument, entering in dialogue with the quality of an only ‘perceivable’ existence—that is therefore never resolvable in the flat conceptual definition elaborated by our *logos*” (2017, 76). Moreover Jüngerian philosophy is a radical expression of a way of thinking in which is required

not to remove the experience of a *fundamental difference* like the one that distinguishes the shape we grasp and with which we have always to deal (at least from an empirical point of view) and the original model (*type*) which that shape will never be able to exhaust... And that will however live as something unrepeatably and unique. (Donà 2017, 77)

It is precisely in the mythical-symbolic dimension, therefore, that an extreme cognitive and spiritual possibility can be realized.

Hermeneutics—not by chance—proceeds under the winged sign of Hermes, the messenger of gods. He was a demonic and pontifical figure, as long he was perceived as a mediator between sensitive and supersensitive dimensions. Also, Hans Georg Gadamer recognizes, in his masterpiece *Truth and Method*, traces of the sacred origin of hermeneutics that still survive in its modern philosophical version. This spiritual dimension depends on the very essence of this philosophical attitude: it is a discipline that treats and debates authoritative sentences that need to become sources of admiration and inspiration, recalling men to a different domain of reality. Hermeneutics is therefore the pure art of Hermes, an active philosophical practice that enriches theories thanks to an operational and relational dimension. The truthful content of the divine messages that Hermes, according to traditional myths, always carried, was indisputable and at the same time extremely obscure, difficult to understand. Thus, the figure of Hermes reproduces some key elements of modern hermeneutics on an archetypal level. This is clear even in its mythical narrative, in which Hermes is strictly connected to the word, to the rhetorical and linguistic dimension, as well as to the invention of writing. According to the myth, Hermes promises Zeus not to tell lies anymore but at the same time he is unable to always tell the whole truth. In Plato's *Cratylus* he is a symbol of the power of the word, one that the Indian tradition recognizes as the goddess *Vāc* ("Word"). He also symbolizes and embodies the idea of meaning, conceived as an element that is always in transition.

An ambiguous character, Hermes speaks but at the same time does not, reveals and hides. He ultimately shows the connection of all the oppositions.

Hermes, adopted into the Latin pantheon as Mercury, as the guarantor of trades between men and gods, finds his exact counterpart in the Assyrian god Nabu. The language itself demonstrates this connection: *naba* means "to speak" in Arabic, and *nabi* in Hebrew conveys the idea of "prophet."

Hermeneutics thus approaches the problem of truth in its "eventual" dimension: it means that the opening of *aletheia* can only take place in the event, in that ontological dimension in which reality lives an increase of being through a passage between the multiple states of being itself.

According to Gianni Vattimo, truth from a hermeneutical perspective "is no longer what says how things are, but the event in which these basic structures that make every (secondary) truth possible as conformity of the proposition to the thing are announced" (2014, xi). The truth dimension can thus be encountered not just in the naive sphere of "things in themselves,"



but in some privileged places (the place of event) where subject and object can find a new correspondence. The structure of myth and symbol can achieve a fundamental role in this renewed philosophical proposal, and the *Antaios* worldview can represent an original enrichment of another kind of hermeneutics.

In the final instance Hermes is also precisely the elusive and ambiguous figure that the Europe of '68 could not properly understand and appreciate because of the prevalent materialistic and Marxist direction of the time. Instead of the symbol of mediation between immanence and transcendence as represented by Hermes, Oedipus was preferred as a symbolic mentor, the parricidal and incestuous hero (Freud), the mask of linear time that takes us away from eternity (Deleuze).

#### MIRCEA ELIADE AND ERNST JÜNGER: TWO AUTHENTIC PHILOSOPHERS OF RELIGION

The philosophical approach to the religious field that I have presented in the previous chapter was developed openly in the works of the two figures responsible for the journal: Mircea Eliade and Ernst Jünger. Unfortunately, there is not enough space here to even if broadly carry out a complete and exhaustive analysis of their huge academic and literary production, that involves an incredible number of different topics, reflections, even methodological issues.

I would, however, like to briefly highlight some of the general attitudes (partially shared by Eliade and Jünger), that may be useful in better understanding the *Antaios* project and its philosophical basis.

Eliade, as a historian of religion, devoted his entire life to the collection of anthropological and symbolical evidence in order to classify, compare and investigate human religions. He was particularly interested in Indian spiritual practices—especially in yoga (2009), Shamanism (2004) and Eurasian heritage. Indeed, essentially there was no religious domain that he did not touch upon in his many publications: from Christian folklore to Western Alchemy, from Gnosticism to Islam, from Oceanic spirituality to Modern and Contemporary religious movements. Even pop culture was part of his research interest (Eliade 1976).<sup>2</sup> But what is more important in our current perspective is the fact that we can find a vital and philosophical core in Eliade's tremendous body of work that often remains partially hidden in his more academic writings. This tendency, one that was never rejected

2. On Eliade's bibliography, the suggested English reference work is still (Rennie 1996). On Eliade's philosophy of religion see: (Altizer 1963, Olsen 1992).

by Eliade, offers the opportunity to recognize a coherent philosophy of religion within his own approach. This philosophy can be understood as the main methodological issue that characterizes Eliade's work: he was not a simple data collector, merely interested in the comparison of traditions and ethnological discoveries, but an intrepid explorer of human self-awareness, one who was convinced that the right approach to religious materials was not the cold attitude of surgery, but the empathic approach of the traveller.

Moreover, we can recognize two main theoretical directions as pivotal elements of Eliade's intellectual inheritance: first of all, there is the purely theological and philosophical interest that emerges in many of the most significant elements of Eliade's theory of religions—such as the myth of the eternal return (2018), the power of mythological world representation in the revival of *illud tempus* (the sacred time of Origin) (1969), the dialectic between sacred and profane as a constitutive structure of reality and human experience (1959), the universalism of symbolism and religious truths, the opposition between archaic and modern cultures, the New Humanism (1963), and so on; secondly, his fundamental method of phenomenological hermeneutics was applied to his research of the history of religion in order to overcome historicism, materialism, structuralism and scientism. We can thus state, according to Julien Ries (1982, 56–61), that thanks to its anti-dualistic and anti-reductionistic orientation, Eliade's philosophy fruitfully combines historical, phenomenological and hermeneutical methods in order to consider the religious phenomenon respectively in its historical context, within the specific and autonomous structures of its manifestation, and through the symbolical and metaphysical interpretation of its content.

Similar observations concern the Jüngerian *opus magnum*. Jünger was certainly many things: philosopher, novelist, pamphlet author, diarist, even entomologist, but he was not a historian of religion. Rather, he was essentially curious about everything related to humanity, nature and history, reconnecting himself to the great German Goethian cultural worldview.<sup>3</sup> His deep and fascinating interest in concrete life experience (which the German philosophical tradition often defines as *Erlebnis*) led him to pay considerable attention to the complex way in which humans relate themselves to the Mystery and the Holy. He was openly negative towards dogmatic theology—the prevalent trend at the time in the Christian tradition—which he considered to be the arrogant and insolent will of human reason to

3. In Jünger theoretical production and life are always connected. An astonishing brilliant biography of Jünger has been written about by Heimo Schwilk (2014). As an introduction to his thought, we suggest (Hervier 1995).

define and control the mysterious Divine. However, at the same time he devoted considerable effort to giving literary and philosophical mystical enlightenment to that invisible domain. Jünger defined it through different images and symbolical representations, depending on the context of his investigation: the *Ineffable*, the *Zeitlose* (the eternal outside of time), the *Kingdom of the Spirit*. While we will not find a “Philosophy of Religion” declared in Jünger’s texts, the majority of his considerations can be considered through this methodological lens.

Humans can only get close to the domain of sacred, but never completely understand it, as has been taught by negative (or apophatic) theology for centuries. We cannot speak of this religious and holy dimension logically, dialectically and directly, but only through images, analogies, lyrical evocations and incomplete signposts. The sacred is still alive, even in the era of secularization which has followed the “death of God” proclaimed by Friedrich Nietzsche. It continues to manifest itself within phenomena—both internal and external, historical and symbolical: from economic choices to virtual images, from politics to advertising communication; nothing is entirely removed from the dialectic between sacred and profane, transcendent and immanent, symbolic and literal. To narrate the contemporary means thus for Jünger to explore the sacred and hidden roots of the archetypical manifestations (see Siniscalco 2019). The sacred, in fact, is understood by Jünger in a “strong” philosophical sense: it is a structural component of concrete reality, together with its emanations, made of archetypes, mythical-symbolic and analogical forms. Jünger openly declared that “gods appear and disappear like figures on a parchment lampshade always illuminated by the same flame. There they are described and named” (2004).

These brief considerations are just a synthetic introduction to the philosophy of religion that can be identified in Jünger’s and Eliade’s texts. It is evident that, despite their different methodological perspectives and particular research interests, both authors show a common attitude towards religions, myths and symbolical interpretations: these elements are seen by both as the fundamental core of human experience and cultural heritage, as elements that need to be taken seriously and, considered through a metaphysical lens, as fundamental steps towards a deep philosophy of religion.

In the following paragraphs I will try to show to what extent this assumption was shared by all the authors involved in the *Antaios* project and which interesting theoretical points can be derived from their reflections.

A RELIGIOUS PARADIGM: THE HORIZONS OF THE *ANTAIOS* PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH

The mythical-symbolic hermeneutics that I have briefly described in the previous chapters can be applied to different domains: aesthetics, literature, history of art, metaphysics, psychology are all fields touched by this perspective, one that promotes an interpretation of the world of phenomena in a symbolic and analogical way. In this paper I will focus my efforts on the domain of the philosophy of religion, showing how the mythic and symbolic hermeneutics of *Antaios* can express an interesting and avant-garde position. My considerations are obviously very general: I am not going to analyse the significant differences occurring between the diverse positions expressed by the collaborators of *Antaios* (which numbered around two hundred!). Instead, I will just try to recognise some of the common fundamental points, of which I have identified seven. In my view, the theoretical and religious development of these ideas could lead to a more structured elaboration of a religious paradigm which is open to the philosophical challenges of the new millennium.

- (1) The pivotal role of myth and symbols as instruments to approach the divine.

Against Rudolf Bultmann's *Entmythologisierung* (Demythologization<sup>4</sup>), the perspective of *Antaios* always looks with interest to everything that is a non-rational (i.e. arational or meta-rational) dimension of religions—myths, symbols, esotericism, legends and popular traditions are considered specific and significant components of religious identity. Mystery, the ineffable

4. "Term adopted by Rudolf Bultmann to describe the means by which the essential truth of the gospel could be made acceptable to modern people. The world of the NT is alien to us; we cannot believe in the interventions of God or supernatural beings in the affairs of our lives, and we have long ago discarded the cosmic framework of heaven, earth and hell which was assumed in the 1st cent., and for long after. Of necessity, the NT writers were bound to use a cultural framework that made sense in their generation: the question is whether the gospel is still intelligible when that world-view is superseded. Bultmann's work in the historical criticism of the gospels had led him to take a fairly sceptical view of what may be regarded with any confidence as authentic, but as a Christian apologist he sees this as a positive advantage; faith should not rest on provable facts. Faith is the decision to choose the new life in Christ; the choice confronts us when the preacher proclaims Christ crucified. This new life is described by Bultmann in terms of the philosophy of existentialism; the old life of fallenness and alienation is exchanged for the possibility of total integrity and authenticity. 'Myth' means the description in terms of this world of alleged supernatural events, such as the virgin birth and the resurrection. These stories are not history; they are the means by which facets of the meaning of the Cross can be disclosed. The gospel may still be a 'scandal' causing offence to modern people, as it did in Corinth (1 Cor 1:23), but, according to Bultmann, his demythologized gospel at least puts the 'scandal' in the right place" (Oxford Biblical Studies).

dimension and the “uncanny” (*unheimlich*) have to be understood as structural and not removable components of an authentic religious experience. There is a secret world, different to the rational modern one, that is fundamental within the religious event and this world needs to be reinforced and reanimated.

The authors of *Antaios* often refer to the brilliant analysis of Rudolf Otto. The German author offered an excellent description of extraordinary religious experience, something which termed “numinous,” a mystery (*mysterium*) that is at once terrifying (*tremendum*) and fascinating (*fascinans*):

The feeling of it may at times come sweeping like a gentle tide pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship. It may pass over into a more set and lasting attitude of the soul continuing, as it were, thrillingly vibrant and resonant, until at last it dies away and the soul resumes its “profane,” non-religious mood of everyday experience. ... It has its crude, barbaric antecedents and early manifestations, and again it may be developed into something beautiful and pure and glorious. It may become the hushed, trembling, and speechless humility of the creature in the presence of—whom or what? In the presence of that which is a Mystery inexpressible and above all creatures. (Otto 1936, 12–13)

(2) The comprehension of a plurality of ontological levels of reality. Immanence and transcendence are not opposite sides of reality, but complementary and interconnected dimensions. A dynamic, dialectic, *hierophanic* (Mircea Eliade) process always occurs between these two spheres, connecting perceptible and spiritual worlds, history and meta-history. Signs and symbols are mediation structures that allow to comprehend this dynamic and perpetual switch. From this perspective, being can be said and experienced in different ways. In N.G. Dávila’s famous phrase: “Being is infinite presence of beings” (2002, 98).

*Anima mundi* is a core figure in this specific tradition, representing a cosmological apprehension of life itself rather than a purely biological or organic view, and structuring the relations between the different elements inside it.

(3) *Coincidentia oppositorum* (coincidence of opposites). Philosophy of religion should break the dualistic and purely logical form of representations and oppositions by trying to overcome the limits of rational and dialectic thinking, creating links instead of contrasts, and overcoming the theoretical and religious concepts that are often seen as static, substantial and pure contraries without relations. Oppositions are

not just pacifically composed and synthetized in unity: there always remains an internal dynamic difference that preserves the authenticity of the unitary relation of differences. This is why some authors prefer to define this concept through the expression *complexio oppositorum*, that seems to better preserve that internal difference.

Furthermore, Eastern philosophy can give significant insights in this direction, especially thanks to Buddhist and Hindu metaphysical insights. The texts and research of many contributors to *Antaios* are aimed at this ambitious objective.

- (4) The importance of the aesthetic, existential, cognitive experience of the dominion of the sacred.

Here, religion is conceived not just as abstract theology or dogmatism, but as a vital, concrete, individual experience of the spiritual dimension. The transformation of our inner perception of reality through a mythical and symbolic hermeneutics is at the core of this paradigm. Many traditions—both in Christian and pagan contexts—have configured this inner switch in terms of *deificatio*, *theosis*, *unio mystica*—while in the Buddhist tradition it is spoken of as *Bodhi* (Awakening): through the transformation of the spiritual and ontological essence of the individual, it is even possible to overcome the human dimension and reach the supernatural and spiritual realm. A new way of seeing being, a renewed experience of the world itself, can be established through this perspective.

- (5) A hermeneutical interpretation of reality.

In order to overcome the dualism between subject and object, interpretations and facts, a hermeneutical perspective can be fundamental. In this way, as I have tried to express throughout, mythical and symbolic hermeneutics is seen in *Antaios* as a “strong” one: it is not merely considered as textual interpretation but rather, according to Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*, as a specific philosophical approach to understanding reality itself, also from an ontological point of view. This process is always in progress and doesn’t assume truth as something already given and stated; on the contrary, it conceives truth as something emerging and defining itself in the very process of hermeneutical labour.

We are thrown into a world whose contexts moulds us and limits our imagination and, hence, our options. Our very being is a process of interpreting our past, which is projected onto us and to which we respond. As Gadamer later put it, Heidegger’s central lesson is “not in what way being can be understood but in what way understanding is being.” (Eskridge Jr. 1990, 614)

The mythic figure of Hermes can be understood as the patron saint of this way of thinking.

Assuming these reflections in the contemporary philosophical debate, it is possible to state that the *Antaios* paradigm offers the opportunity to rethink the postmodern inheritance and convert this complex and contradictory model into a pluralistic and fruitful hermeneutics of differences. Contingency and the absolute can be thought of as reconcilable powers or trajectories of the same interpretative model. “Neither the inspired symbols of revelation nor the great conjectures about God are mere fantasies, since the imagination of the human soul mirrors, however darkly, the fecundity of the divine mind” (Hedley 2008, 8).

(6) Interest in religious traditions and metaphysics—and the comparisons between them.

Through different perspectives (*Sophia Perennis* school, religious phenomenology, religious hermeneutics, religious comparativism, symbolical interpretation, Jung’s psychoanalysis, etc.) all of the authors involved in the *Antaios* project showed interest in the pluralistic and comparativistic valorisation of the traditional and metaphysical religious insights. The Hindu Īshvara—to give an example—can therefore be compared to Jesus Christ, in relation to the *Trimurti* and the Holy Trinity respectively (Panikkar 1961).

Religious metaphysics contains fundamental concepts that can be extended to many different domains of knowledge: philosophy, aesthetics, or the political and sociological comprehension of reality and so on. Conceiving the traditional truths in modern language and making them understandable and stimulating for the modern generation are considered pivotal by most of the authors involved.

(7) Treatment of nihilism and the analysis of the religious consequences and opportunities it embodies.

Assuming the importance of the topic introduced by Nietzsche in the European philosophical debate, many authors have tried not to ignore the religious consequences related to the “uncanniest of all guests” by integrating their religious perspective with insights also derived from it. Their conclusions are strongly different, but they all try, at the same time, both not to abandon the traditional religious path and to accept the theoretical challenge of nihilism. The “call of nothing” in fact has to be considered not just as a subjective and relative position, one that can be ignored or rejected, but as an epochal phenomenon that has already touched all human souls and needs to be confronted by the whole intellectual élite. The discourse about the requirement of new religious forms should be addressed by means

of a deep study of traditional metaphysics, that still offers some hints to overcome the modern spiritual stagnation.

Ernst Jünger, Mircea Eliade, Henry Corbin, Julius Evola, Filippani Ronconi and Cristina Campo reflected extensively on these topics and the theologian Thomas Altizer, through his discussion of the “Death of God” theology, did so even more. Altizer published two important contributions to the *Antaios* project, extending the journal’s scope to encompass the theological horizons to the USA: *Amerika und die Zukunft der Theologie* (*America and the future of theology*; V, 1963-1964) and *Amerikas Schicksal und der Tod Gottes* (*America’s destiny and the death of God*; IX, 1967-1968).

#### CONCLUSION

The seven points I have briefly introduced here are significant attempts to elaborate a coherent path into a multidisciplinary approach towards a new proposal of the philosophy of religion. All the topics considered require further investigation and could even be shaped into a more systematic and comprehensive system. Western and Eastern spirituality, as well as theological and mythological heritage, nineteenth century theoretical speculation and traditional archetypes, all need to be understood as fruitful components and indispensable ingredients of the same mythical and symbolic hermeneutics. *Antaios* can thus be understood as the great “building site” of this hermeneutical approach to the divine.

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