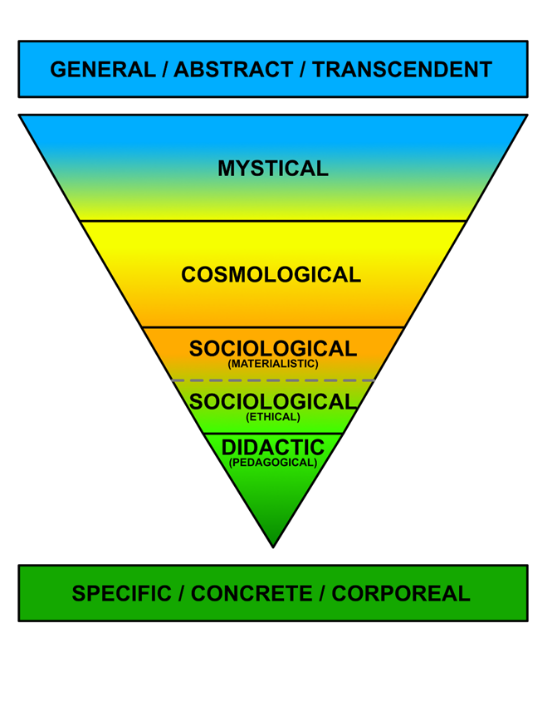
The fundamentals of this approach to studying mythology are based upon Joseph Campbell’s writings, as well as upon statements made in conversation with Bill Moyers in *The* *Power of Myth* video series, first broadcast in 1988. Understanding of the heroic principle is also based in part upon the work of Christopher Vogler in *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*, 3rd Edition[[1]](#footnote-1),and others (see the bibliography). Campbell references four main functions of mythology as a cultural/societal phenomenon:

1. The **Mystical Function**: “Opening the world to the dimension of mystery … [realizing] the mystery that underlies all forms.”[[2]](#footnote-2)
2. The **Cosmological Function**: “Seeing [the totality of experience] as manifest through all things … the universe becomes (as it were) a holy picture, [so that] you are always addressed to the transcendent mystery”.[[3]](#footnote-3)
3. The **Sociological Function**: ”… validating or maintaining a certain society; ethical laws, the laws of life in the society … the values of [a] particular society.”[[4]](#footnote-4)
4. The **Pedagogical Function**: “How to live a human lifetime under any circumstances.”[[5]](#footnote-5)



We can view these functions as progressing from the general and abstract (**The Mystical Function**) to the specific and concrete (**The Pedagogical Function**), and thus approach *all* of them through the lens of how they assist the individual toward self-actualization via the path of understanding the relationships of self-to-self (Pedagogical Function), self-to-society (Sociological Function), self-to-universe (Cosmological Function), and self-to-spirit (Mystical Function). Through the mechanism of exploring one’s own inner relationship with the various levels of human experience in the context of the fundamental fabric of existence, the value of mythology is emphasized by focusing one’s awareness toward the interconnectedness of *all* life’s experience.

# Symbol and Experience

Gary Zukov, in *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*, which explores the similarities between ancient Eastern philosophy and modern Western physics, writes:

The difference between experience and symbol is the difference between mythos and logos. Logos imitates, but can never replace, experience. It is a substitute for experience, [and] mimics experience.… Mythos points toward experience, but it [also endows] experience with value, originality, and vitality, but [does] not seek to replace it.…[[6]](#footnote-6) [all emphases added]

“Logos” (Gk. *lógos* “word, saying, speech, discourse, thought, proportion, ratio, reckoning”) is also the root of the word “logic”, and refers to things that are quantifiable, measurable, tangible.

“Mythos” (Gk. *mŷthos* “saying, word”, ultimate source unknown) is the root of the words “myth” and “mythology”, and refers to things that are *not* quantifiable, measurable, tangible; realities that are “known” spiritually and intuitively, but cannot be “explained” by scientific analysis, “… metaphors referring to what is absolutely transcendent.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

So, the focus of this study of mythology is concerned with how the stories of mythology relate to the *process of participating in life*. As Campbell says:

People say that what we’re all seeking is a meaning for life. I don’t think that’s what we’re really seeking. I think what we’re seeking is an *experience of being alive*, so that the life experiences that we have on the purely physical plane will have resonances within that are those of our own innermost being and reality. And so that we actually feel the rapture [ecstatic joy or delight; joyful ecstasy] of being alive, that’s what it’s all finally about, and that’s what these [myths] help us to find within ourselves.[[8]](#footnote-8) [emphasis added]

It is also useful to associate these four primary functions of mythology with specific archetypes that “embody” the essence of the functions. This necessitates understanding the concept of archetypes.

# What Are Archetypes?

A dictionary defines “archetype” as:

1. The original pattern or model from which all things of the same kind are copied or on which they are based; a model or first form; *prototype*.
2. (In Jungian psychology), a *collectively* inherited unconscious idea, pattern of thought, image, etc., *universally* present in *individual psyches*. [emphasis added]

When Campbell uses the term “archetype”, he means both of these (much of Campbell’s work was an adaptation of Jung’s prior efforts – more on this elsewhere). Both Jung and Campbell recognized a potentially infinite register of archetypes; here, we are concerned with four (primarily):

1. The Primal Goddess
2. The Father God (as Usurping Creator and as Moral Authoritarian)
3. The Trickster
4. The Heroic

(The archetype of the ***Victim/Damsel*** makes an appearance as well, in connection with the disempowered and demoted Goddess, and the archetype of the ***Villain*** is also referenced, as one of the expressions of the Trickster.)

Note that this approach uses “heroic” rather than “hero”, because the latter is gender-specific to the binary male in English. Also, “hero” can be used/interpreted as a limiting label when applied to a person (more on this later, in another context).

Each of the Four Functions, then, is in some sense “expressed through”, “embodied in”, or “personified by” an archetype (the Father God and the Trickster are each associated with aspects of two functions via two of their incarnations, (details below).

# The Mystical Function

This function of mythology introduces us to (and reminds us of) the fact that there are things about existence, the universe, and life experience, that are *transcendent*, not submissible to formal, scientific analysis; things which simply must be accepted as they are and recognized as having a significant impact on human experience. The biologist J. B. S. Haldane wrote that, “Theuniverse is not only[stranger] than we imagine, it is[stranger] than we *can* imagine.”[[9]](#footnote-9) The fact that there are aspects of living experience which are not explicable via reason does not mean that those experiences are to be avoided – they are certainly not to be dismissed. Indeed, the very nature of “mythos” in contrast to “logos” is the assimilation of the wisdom of experience disconnected from reason and logic. Some things *just are*.

The **Primal Goddess** is the representative of this function because of her association with the mysteries of life and death. Her dichotomous nature as *both* mother-nurturer *and* implacable punisher reflects the inexplicable variety and vagaries of the natural world: the Earth provides food but also produces earthquakes and volcanoes. This contradiction was a mystery, certainly to early cultures, and it is not unknown even to contemporary societies, as reflected in the question: “Why do bad things happen to good people?”

There also occurs a parallel between this function of mythology and *automatic* creation/origin myths, wherein the fundamental elements of creation either already exist or come into being without explanation (they are *automatically* part of the myth). Examples include Gaia in the Greek tradition, arising from the primordial chaos (she does not cause her own creation (*sui creatus* — she just “happens”); Tepeu and Gucumatz in the Mesoamerican tradition, pre-existing in a cosmic ocean (again, without an explained origin); the Great God Vishnu in the Hindu tradition, who is interwoven throughout the fabric of the universe, but nevertheless contains it simultaneously. There are examples from every mythic tradition, no matter how ancient.

# The Cosmological Function: Creation and The Universe

The first aspect of the Cosmological Function of myth seeks to give reasonable, rational explanations for the “why” of all things — the objects of the physical universe (how the Earth, Sun, Moon, stars, etc., came into being, and what their purposes are), the processes and functions of the objects of the physical universe (wind, rain, volcanoes, shooting stars), and of human beings (why we exist, what our purpose was/is, where we fit into the larger scheme of things). It is in this last aspect that we are “…always addressed to the transcendent mystery,”[[10]](#footnote-10) as Campbell put it. Through our encounters and experiences of the physical universe, we are to be kept mindful of our participation in a broader reality of which we form only a part, and of which we perceive only a minute fraction. It is this aspect of the Cosmological function that many technological societies have lost sight of; they see the universe as something of an adversary to be understood chiefly in connection with controlling or overcoming it.

The Greek word *kósmos* “order, form, arrangement” describes more than the physical universe; the cosmos *contains* the physical universe, but it is also the *context* in which physical reality is embedded. The cosmos, here, is the *metaphysical abstraction of the* *potentiality of existence*. It includes *not only that which has existed in the past, but all that exists in the present, and all which* *might possibly* *exist*, in any of various possible futures. It is transcendent. Thus we can also view the Cosmological Function as (in part) serving as a transitional bridge between the Mystical and the Sociological functions. This role of the Cosmological Function provides a backdrop and stage for the dramas of life, and provides a goad and motivator for the actions of living things in responding to the whimsical (and sometimes, it seems, malicious) changes in the universe over time.

In his book, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi writes:

It is not that the universe is random in an abstract mathematical sense. The … transformations of energy that occur in it might be predicted and explained well enough. *But natural processes do not take human desires into account*. They are deaf and blind to our needs, and thus they are random in contrast with the order we attempt to establish through our goals. A meteorite on a collision course with New York City might be obeying all the laws of the universe, but it would still be a damn nuisance. The virus that attacks the cells of a Mozart is only doing what comes naturally, even though it inflicts a grave loss on humankind. In the words of J. H. Holmes, "The universe is not hostile, nor yet is it friendly — it is simply indifferent.”[[11]](#footnote-11) [emphasis added]

This fact of human existence is often represented in mythology by the capricious behavior of nature or of the gods, as seen in the Greek story of the Judgement of Paris, wherein three goddesses (motivated by an act of the goddess of mischief) involve the young Paris, Prince of Troy, in judging a beauty contest between them. The result of his decision is the true inciting incident for the events of the Trojan War. This aspect of the Cosmological Function thus also encodes a common belief among earlier cultures that human beings had no *agency*, no power to decide nor direct their own destiny, but were entirely at the mercy of the caprice of the gods (nature).

This role of the function is also expressed mythologically through the metaphor of the creation of humans as mere drudges to provide benefits to the gods, as is depicted in the Sumerian myth of Atrahasis, in which human beings are created for the specific purpose of taking on the manual labor that the lower echelon of deities had decided was beneath their dignity.

The archetype associated with this broader role of the Cosmological Function is the **Father God**, in his role as **Usurper Creator**, (the **Creator God**), as exemplified in masculine-dominated creation/origin myths (e.g. South Asian, Northern European, and Middle Eastern cosmologies). These male-dominated creation myths serve to encode both the universal nature of the questions all cultures pose about the origins and nature of the universe, but also the fascinating variety of ways in which they answered those questions for themselves.

Here, also, is a correspondence between this function and the *architectural* creation/origin myths. The origins of the finer details of the physical universe (in most mythologies) involve the *agency* – the conscious, willful exercise of power – of a creator deity or deities (frequently, but not exclusively, male). These roles are often observed in the myths as having been usurped by Father God from the Primal Goddess (Zeus’ demotion and dominance of Gaea, for instance), and as such may encode the historicity of the shift of human society from the more egalitarian, itinerant hunter-gatherer model to the more materialistic, stratified societies brought about by agronomic activity and the establishment of villages and later cities, and thence to inherited territories, such as kingdoms, nation-states, and empires.

# The Cosmological Function: Culture and Tradition

Tied to the **Father God** in his manifestation as **Moral Authoritarian** (The **King God**), the role of this aspect of the Cosmological Function of mythology is that of explaining and justifying *human institutions* (traditions, religious practices, social structures), as well as to perpetuate culture and society down through subsequent generations. In this, the Father God bestrides the transitional realm between the Cosmological Function and the Sociological Function. This aspect is also related to the translation of mystical awareness from spiritual experience to structured religious practice witnessed in the transition from earlier polytheistic pantheons to later monotheistic paradigms.

This aspect of the Cosmological Function is often embedded in the same male-dominated creation myths mentioned as above; the Father God, through the process of engendering and ordering creation, also decrees the eternal, inviolable *structure* in which creation is to be maintained, both by divine powers and mundane ones (i.e. religion and its priestly classes). The beliefs and practices of human society (according to this function of mythology) are decreed by the Father God; they are, therefore, sacrosanct and adamantine, and — if need be — enforceable or restorable by divine action (miraculous intervention in the manifest world). Thus, we see the transcendent Father God engaging with the physical world through punishments such as diseases and famines, sea monsters laying waste to whole cities, and world-wide floods of waters to eradicate recalcitrant human populations, and the list goes on. Often, as in Hindu mythology, the Father God, himself transcendent, must incarnate as a physical being in order to interact with manifest reality, leading to the concept of prophets, oracles, and messiahs. Individuals and groups which act in accord with the design and wishes of the Father God are rewarded with blessings and prosperity; those which transgress the limitations and strictures receive just punishment. The deity need not bestow rewards and punishments, itself, however; it may designate human agents to perform these mundane tasks in its name and under its authority.

This is embodied in the Sociological Function.

# The Sociological Function

The Sociological Function, which Campbell decried as having, “… taken over in our world …

ethical laws, the laws of life in the society … what kind of clothes to wear, how to behave to each other … in terms of the values of this particular society”[[12]](#footnote-12), is associated with the **Trickster**, the archetype, itself, serving simultaneously a dual purpose (in true Trickster fashion).

The first of these, the ***admonisher***, encompasses what on the surface may seem to be mutually exclusive aspects. In the first, the admonisher is seen in the cautionary tales, which serve to depict what punishments may befall an individual who refuses to adhere to divine and/or social mores and expectations. This relates to the “Messenger of The Gods” characteristic of the Trickster, in which guise this archetype is often employed by the Moral Authoritarian Father god as a bringer of punishments to humans.

However, this aspect is also expressed in stories in which the Trickster is “back-tricked”: caught in its own trap, or has its own practices and methods used against it. Native American and African mythologies are rich with these kinds of Trickster tales. We observe Tricksters being punished by the negative consequences of their *own* actions (“…your sin will find you out”[[13]](#footnote-13)), by their leaders, or collectively by their communities, for engaging in misbehaviors such as refusing to share a bounty; for stealing rather than earning food or possessions; or, for causing disruption simply for the sake of watching the ensuing confusion.

The second aspect of the admonisher (we might call it the “***counselor***” role) is that of also pointing out that it is *not always the wisest choice to blindly obey the rules*, especially if those rules have become outmoded and inflexible. The young child in “The Emperor’s New Clothes” is performing this Trickster function by refusing to subscribe to the dangerous “group-think” of the elders who know perfectly well that the Emperor is naked, but who are all afraid to speak the truth for fear of rejection by the group. We also, however, see Tricksters in these myths “misbehaving” because limitations imposed on society are too rigid and thus detrimental to progress and growth (a prime example comes from the Greek tradition — Prometheus bringing fire to humanity in defiance of divine will). In this we find Campbell’s famous Trickster-Hero melding of archetypes.

The Trickster, thus, manifests across a spectrum from the *unconscious numbskull[[14]](#footnote-14)* who causes disruption unintentionally (sometimes as a result of a poorly planned and executed attempts to do good); to a *malicious spoiler[[15]](#footnote-15)*, who resonates to the baser drives of human nature and seeks self-advancement and personal pleasure at the expense of others. In this spoiler aspect, the Trickster also serves to remind a culture/society of what it values by profaning its sacred icons and institutions.

The Trickster is the most “human” of the primal archetypes, being able to associate with both mortals and with gods (Loki), perform feats of near superhuman daring and strength (Maui), and yet is fallible and often incurs punishment, or at least reprimand. As the *unconscious numbskull*, the Trickster reminds us that fallibility is part of human nature; however, as the *malicious spoiler*, it teaches that our errancy is not a justification for willfully indulging our basest nature. The Trickster reminds us that we are fallible humans, which can make us evil if we consciously choose to follow our darker impulses.

Finally, the Trickster is also the salve for human guilt over the need to kill to eat. Hunters, who are weaker, slower, and/or less agile than their prey, in order to obtain meat, must be able to trick animals in order to kill them: wearing a buffalo hide to get close to the herd; setting snares; dangling worms on hooks, and so forth. Especially among earlier cultures and those which are still “connected” to the natural world, there is an overriding awareness that while killing to eat is an unavoidable necessity, it nevertheless requires a certain abuse of power over other living things to achieve its aims. As Campbell says, in part quoting Schopenhauer, “ ‘Life is something that should not have been. It is in its very essence and character, a terrible thing to consider, this business of living by killing and eating.’ I mean, it’s *in sin* in terms of all ethical judgments, all the time!”[[16]](#footnote-16)

Where the Trickster reminds us that we are fallible, the Heroic reminds us that we are capable of transcending our limitations (real and imagined).

# The Pedagogical Function

Finally, the **Heroic** archetype is the manifestation of the Pedagogical Function, which “teaches us how to live a human lifetime under any circumstances,”[[17]](#footnote-17) as Campbell so poetically puts it. The heroic *archetype* has manifested in many guises in human cultures around the world and across time, but the heroic *character* is *always* a product of the society which produces it, and thus reflects the stresses its progenitor society is experiencing at the time of the archetype’s emergence (and which it is manifested to resolve). This is Campbell’s ***monomyth***; the recognition that the Heroic (and, indeed, all of mythology), is a ubiquitous human expression across all cultures and throughout all time, differing in the particulars of each expression, but universal in substance. The archetypes *never* change, but their expressions across different cultures do.

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The Heroic also highlights that what *was* heroic behavior in past times may be questionable (indeed, reprehensible) in present contexts (witness both Herakles and Theseus and their unkind treatment of some of the people in their lives). Part of the purpose of the Pedagogical Function and of the Heroic archetype is to help individuals address those circumstances wherein the needs of self-expression conflict with the duties of social obligation.

What might have been questionable behavior for your grandparents may be a survival necessity for you. Contrariwise, some things your grandparents may have taken for granted as their just due as human beings may today land you in court. As Campbell says, “The virtues of the past are the vices of today, and many of what were thought to be the vices of the past are the necessities of today.”[[18]](#footnote-18)

The most straightforward presentation of the Heroic archetype for an effective study of mythology is encoded in the twelve steps of Christopher Vogler’s Hero’s Journey[[19]](#footnote-19) (as adapted from Campbell’s original 17-step cycle). This analysis (and template) for the Heroic storyline is applicable to a variety of both ancient and modern heroic figures, but is also not specific to a particular type of Heroic character.

Vogler’s adaptation of Campbells Heroic Journey is not exclusive; nor is it specific to race, culture, society, gender identity, or, indeed, species. A robotic viewpoint character may traverse the entirety of a Heroic adventure.

Vogler, thus, reinforces Campbell’s emphasis that the Heroic archetype was originally intended as an aid, a guide, and a comfort for everyday human life: a guidebook for “how to live a human lifetime under any circumstances.”[[20]](#footnote-20) However, inherent in the Heroic journey is the assumption that the goal of the Heroic’s actions is, itself, worthy and worthwhile, and beneficial to “the greater good.” History, if not the Heroic’s own society, must see their deeds as laudable, selfless, martyrly, etc.

Finally, there is Campbell’s lesson that there are two types of Heroic deed (the spiritual and the physical) and three fundamental types of Heroic character (intentional, accidental, and forced). This formiulation reminds us that Heroic adventures may take any form and that the capacity for extraordinary accomplishment is within us all, regardless of circumstances or nature. As long as there is a “departure, fulfillment, and return”[[21]](#footnote-21), associated with a willingness to sacrifice self, a transformation of consciousness, and a potential created to alter the ordinary world, then a Heroic arc has occurred.

# Exceptional Heroism

The Heroic principle of the Pedagogical Function has been somewhat upended and overshadowed by the *superheroic* concept. The superhero can often place the capacity for heroism beyond the reach of everyday persons and into the realm of the exceptional and unattainable. (This is not an entirely modern phenomenon: Herakles was more-than-man from the moment of his conception.) A viewer/reader may be able to empathize with the moral/ethical dilemmas of a Tony Stark or Kara Danvers, but they will likely *never* experience the beyond-the-ordinary technologies or personal powers to which such as Iron Man or Supergirl have ready access. Thus, these superheroic characters can be admired, even imitated, but never actually *emulated*; you may sympathize with their human aspects and their personal moral and ethical struggles, but you can never hope to achieve what their superheroic counterparts do. In fact, it is a common trope for the superhero to chide their companions (and, by extension, the audience) “don’t try this at home,” or for them to steadfastly refuse to be accompanied by a “mundane” companion because whatever actions they are about to engage in are “… too dangerous,” with the implication “…for anyone else but *me*.”

The Pedagogical Heroic also provides a foil to a recent negative development in (especially US American) society: the ascension of the “sympathetic villain” (also-known-as the *anti-hero* or *dark hero*) as a *replacement* for the Heroic. The sympathetic villain is a *fully legitimate* archetype, which explains harmful behavior by a character toward others as the result of their reactions to injustices or injuries they’ve suffered through the caprice of nature, or the malevolence of others. People sometimes *do* become dark and anti-social as a result of traumatic personal experiences, and it is valid for mythology to recount their stories *as cautionary tales*. They also serve as protagonists for redemption stories, in which someone who has fallen into personally damaging or morally reprehensible behaviors comes to recognize the error of their ways, reform their attitudes and actions, and remake themselves as positive forces in their culture/society. These are all realistic human situations and have value in both their formulation and their communication, but they should always be recognized as exceptions to the true Heroic arc, and neither synonyms nor substitutes for true Heroism.

The dark-heroic and/or sympathetic villain archetype *must not be allowed* to supplant the Heroic. These characters may be pitiable, but they are not moral exemplars to be emulated. The danger of allowing the sympathetic villain to usurp the Heroic’s place is that it serves to “excuse” harmful behavior as inevitable — or, worse, justifiable. It is all-well-and-good to sympathize with what made the Joker or Darth Vader what they are; it is another thing altogether to set them up as positive role models (which they aren’t, and weren’t intended to be). This is why we should prefer the term “sympathetic villain” (certainly to “dark hero”); because, it emphasizes that these characters are not, *in any way*, Heroic in the mythological sense.

There may be some value, then, in (controversially) declaring the sympathetic villain to be “the poor man’s Hero” in modern popular cultural expressions. If the Heroic is accessible *only* to the mega-rich or the super-smart (or the alien or semi-divine), then “the rest of us” must make do with the second choice — the character whose heart is in the right place, but whose methods are morally questionable at the best of times. The inevitable result of this contraversion of the archetype is: if the “everyday person” wishes to defeat the forces of “evil” in their own lives, they must resort to villainous means to do so. The ends come to justify the means, and success is paramount, regardless of the process of its accomplishment.

The gateway to this rationalization is, of course, the Trickster-Heroic, often spoken of by Campbell himself: the Heroic character who is willing to break a rule here-and-there in order to uphold the wider Rule of Law. Of course, the Heroic *must* sometimes engage in distasteful acts in order to achieve their ultimate goal. This actually forms a part of the sacrificial nature of the true Heroic – they sacrifice their morality, their serenity, or even their very humanity, to defeat the “big bad” and put the universe to rights once again. But the difference between the Trickster-Heroic and the Sympathetic Villain is that the former experiences and expresses guilt and shame over having to use such means. As Kahlil Gibran wrote, “Oftentimes, I have hated in self-defense, but if I were stronger I would not have used such a weapon.”[[22]](#footnote-22). Most crucially, the audience must recognize and acknowledge *that a terrible price was paid for the success,* and that such solutions should only ever be implemented in the direst of circumstances when all other possibilities have been rendered ineffective or unachievable.

Confusing the dark-but-guilty Trickster-Heroic with the dark-and-impenitent Sympathetic Villain eclipses the original, fundamental function of the Heroic archetype — which was to prove to the audience that it is possible (and preferable) to succeed against hardship and evil, *not by adopting the methods of your adversary*, but by holding to a higher moral and ethical standard than theirs.

A perfect example of a Sympathetic Villain *mistaken* for a Heroic character is Paul Muad’Dib from Frank Herbert’s 1965 novel, *Dune[[23]](#footnote-23)*, a fact which Herbert, himself, addressed on more than one occasion:

*Dune* was aimed at this whole [dangerous] idea of the infallible leader, because my view of history says that mistakes made by a leader (or made in a leader's name) are amplified by the numbers who follow *without question*.[[24]](#footnote-24)

The study of mythology, then, must also include the effort to restore the true, original characteristics and examples of the Heroic, which needs to be revived in modern society. So, the study of mythology must also address the *relatability* of the Heroic.

# The Relatable Heroic

This takes the form of a two-fold exploration:

1. Determining whether or not particular Heroic characters represent a model of behavior and/or achievement that is actually, realistically attainable by the members of the audience; and,
2. Discovery of how the “anti-hero/dark hero/sympathetic villain” has implemented moral relativism to justify anti-social actions by both groups and individuals, so that these affects may be exposed and corrected.

This effort also involves exploring and clarifying the distinction between myths and legends, the conflation of the two having been the root cause of the ascendance of both the superheroic and the sympathetic villain over the true Heroic.

Legends are, by definition, exaggerated stories about actual, historical figures, but their exploits have been hyperbolized after the fashion of tall tales, to the point where they are not humanly possible actions. Abraham Lincoln never walked two miles in a blizzard to return a library book before it could become overdue; relatability suffers when you aren’t able to achieve such a similar feat. Your societal training tells you that you are a worthless excuse for a human being as a result. Lincoln was a real, flesh-and-blood, historical human being, but he was far from superheroically infallible. The same goes for George Washington, Giuseppe Garibaldi, Charlemagne … the list goes on.

The Heroic isn’t perfect or infallible; the Heroic succeeds *despite its inabilities* by overcoming them, not by circumventing them.

# The Feminine Heroic

This also informs the study of the *feminine Heroic.* By discussing the absolute paucity of Heroic female characters in Classical mythologies, we draw the circle closed by referring back to the feminine energy of the Primal Goddess. Witness Durga and her extreme expression, Kali, slaughtering demon hordes with wild abandon. To say that the feminine is incapable of violence is just as demeaning as all other restrictions that have been placed upon women by male-dominated culture for the past two hundred centuries (or more).

Studying the (admittedly rare) examples of feminine Heroics in mythology has the effect of emphasizing the loss of the balancing power of the feminine in modern, techno-industrial society. The need to recognize the effects of this loss can be seen in an exploration of the relationship of *mythological* awareness to *ecological* awareness, focusing on how the ancient Earth-connectedness of mythology is (or is not) present in modern ecologically minded (green) philosophies and movements.

# The Value of Studying Mythology as a Humanities Course

In Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, Robert M. Pirsig writes:

In the past our common universe of reason has been in the process of escaping and rejecting the romantic, irrational world of prehistoric man. It’s been necessary since before the time of Socrates to reject the passions and the emotions, in order to free the rational mind for an understanding of nature’s order, which was as yet unknown. Now it’s time to further an understanding of nature’s order by re-assimilating those passions which were originally fled from. The passions, the emotions — the affective domain\* of man’s consciousness — are a part of nature’s order, too: the central part.[[25]](#footnote-25)

The European “Enlightenment” left Western thought with the misapprehension that anything not quantifiable and reproducible wasn’t “real”, that such experiences and events were the realm only of obscure philosophical cogitations, and not only had little to do with everyday life, but were actually detrimental to the average person’s success.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The modern (correctly structured) study of mythology reminds the student that science is ***one*** way of understanding “reality” (certainly a way of attempting to control *physical* reality), but it is relevant *only to those matters which it embraces*. Western science ignores (and deplores) all contexts with which it cannot effectively interact to create “understanding” and “control”. For example, while most astrologers readily acknowledge the value and worth of astronomy, you’ll be hard-pressed to find any astronomer who’ll say anything positive about astrology.

The human psyche needs *both* mythos *and* logos to function fully and successfully in the Cosmos, and the proper study of mythology is the route to that inestimable goal. Ignoring the psycho-emotional aspects of human experience shuts one away from fully half of the data one needs to completely encompass a working theory of the human condition.

Logos has “coincidence”; mythos has “synchronicity”. (Both of these words, by-the-way, mean *exactly* the same thing: “happening at the same time”; the former is from Latin, the latter is from Greek, a fact about which an entire essay in itself could be written.) It may be that *scientifically* (logically) there is no relationship between your thinking of someone you’ve not spoken to in a while and the next phone call you receive being from that very person.

However, as Jung (coiner of the term “synchronicity”) pointed out, whether or not there’s any *scientific, measurable, quantifiable* connection between the two events, *you react to them happening close to one another in time as if there were a connection* — and your subsequent behavior is dependent (at least in part) on that *perceived relationship*. Ignoring this aspect of human reaction to the experience of the world guarantees that any theory you form of human behavior will be incomplete, at best, and dangerously naïve at worst.

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