

FROM NATURE TO CULTURE.

NOTES ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY BETWEEN PLATO AND LÉVI-STRAUSS.

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Abstract

Through a rapid analysis of the concepts of nature and culture, this contribution aims to lay the groundwork for a research hypothesis that explores an unconventional comparison between a major thinker of antiquity, Plato, and one of the pioneers of 20th-century anthropology, Claude Lévi-Strauss. The goal is to outline possible future dialectical trajectories. The essay seeks to investigate the correlational logics that connect the idealized notions of the state of nature and the state of culture within the framework of theoretical philosophy, philosophy of history, and cultural semiotics. Drawing from these disciplines, it assembles a conceptual toolbox to examine the compatible and incompatible elements between the two authors' theses. This interdisciplinary methodological approach revitalizes the heuristic potential of a systematic comparison between cultural manifestations from different historical periods through the theories of key thinkers, offering a critical perspective on those specific cultures.

Keywords: Plato, Laws, Nature, Culture, Lévi-Strauss;

Introduction

Nature and culture as philosophical categories have innervated the debate within the intellectual landscape of the relevant epochs. Cultures are complex *systems of compatibility and incompatibility*, sets of sets that in so far as they collect and unite certain elements as they exclude and distance others¹. Currently presented in a synthetic way, this essay seeks to explore the concepts related to

¹ A.M. Lorusso, *Semiotica della cultura*, Editori Laterza, Roma-Bari 2010, p. 13.

both the hypothetical state of natural ferinity, where humans are not yet governed by a system of normalized relations – essentially, nature’s state – and the realm of culture, where humanity assumes the role of a subjective protagonist in various processes. In particular, by attempting an introductory comparison between a Greek thinker such as Plato and a contemporary anthropologist of the stature of Lévi Strauss, we seek to trace hypothetical comparisons between the two ways of considering the state of nature and the state of culture to elaborate renewed insights aimed at a new, broader and more articulated research project.

1. Myth and Cataclysms: For an Idea of Plato’s Philosophy of History

For the Greeks, the *mythos* has in common with the *logos* the purpose of seeking and explaining the things of the world, although they follow different ways of interpreting these objects². Therefore, from the former to the latter there is no transition from fable to truth, but two different ways of interpreting and pursuing that purpose³. The different narrative grammars, however, account for common axiological systems. In various dialogues, Plato describes the civilization’s development as cyclically punctuated by cataclysms that would mark the end and beginning of human eras. Among the natural catastrophes, Plato considers ‘the greatest to be fire and water’ (*Tim.*, 22c)⁴. Fires and floods primarily erase skills that were developed over time, forcing individuals to embark once more on a challenging journey of relearning and regaining those skills (*Leg.*, III, 677d-e). The authentic meaning of the catastrophe’s concept consists precisely in the severing of historical memory, i.e. of that faculty, both subjective and collective, of projection in time that differentiates humans from other living beings: only this intellectual function enables the maturation of rational properties. This is how narratives are born, which are handed down from one generation to the next, and which find different

²For a scientific starting point, see R. Di Donato, *Per una storia culturale dell’antico. Contributi a una antropologia storica*, Vol. I, Edizioni ETS, Pisa 2013, pp. 209-221.

³The realm of myth needs to be defined in relation to others. To illustrate the distinct characteristics of classical antiquity’s myth, a contrast between *mythos* and *logos* is essential. This separation required a series of conditions that, between the eighth and fourth centuries BC, generated an exploration within the Greeks’ mental landscape, revealing various distances, fractures, and internal tensions (Cfr. J.P. Vernant, *Mythe et société en Grèce ancienne*, Mspero, Paris 1974, trad. it., P.Pasquino, L.Berrini Pajetta, *Mito e società nell’antica Grecia. Religione greca, religioni antiche*, Einaudi, Torino 1981 p. 193).

⁴Transl. F. Fronterotta, *Platone. Timeo*, BUR, Milano 2003. Consider the myth of Phaeton, son of the god Helios, who caused devastating fires on earth because of his inability to drive his father’s chariot (*Tim.*, 22 c-d). Among the most powerful floods is the one unleashed by Zeus after a terrible crime committed by the sons of Lycaon, king of Arcadia (*Apollod.*, III, 8.1).

transmitting subjects in between. The reference to ancient traditions (*palaioi logoi*) is one of the recurring features of the Platonic mythological narrative⁵. The entire history of civilization is punctuated by devastating calamities; so in the *Timaeus* such catastrophes begin to consider humankind to be more inclusive⁶. While the Greeks only have a memory of the most recent natural disaster (*Tim.*, 22b), Egyptian priests preserve the memory of cataclysms. This is largely because Egypt has not suffered any drastic disruptions in its history, thanks to the fact that they have never been affected by apocalyptic phenomena of this kind (23a)⁷.

Plato's most insightful depiction of human civilization's development is located in Book III of the *Laws*, the final dialogue he penned before his death. The Athenian philosopher begins with an account of the destruction of mankind by the universal flood, to reconstruct the evolution of human culture and societies in four stages⁸.

AΘ. Ἄρ' οὖν ὑμῖν οἱ παλαιοὶ λόγοι ἀλήθειαν ἔχειν τινὰ δοκοῦσιν;

ΚΛ. Ποῖοι δῆ;

AΘ. Τὸ πολλὰς ἀνθρώπων φθορὰς γεγενῆσθαι κατακλυσμοῖς τε καὶ νόσοις καὶ ἄλλοις πολλοῖς, ἐν οἷς βραχὺ τι τῶν ἀνθρώπων λείπεσθαι γένος.

ΚΛ. Πάνυ μὲν οὖν πιθανὸν τὸ τοιοῦτον πᾶν παντί.

AΘ. Φέρε δῆ, νοήσωμεν μίαν τῶν πολλῶν ταύτην τὴν τῷ κατακλυσμῷ ποτε γενομένην.

ΚΛ. Τὸ ποῖόν τι περὶ αὐτῆς διανοηθέντες;

AΘ. Ὡς οἱ τότε περιφυγόντες τὴν φθορὰν σχεδὸν ὄρειοί τινες ἂν εἶεν νομῆς, ἐν κορυφαῖς που σμικρὰ ζώπυρα τοῦ τῶν ἀνθρώπων διασεσσωμένα γένους.

ΚΛ. Δῆλον.

⁵On the greater or lesser reliability of the *palaioi logoi*, on which the clarity of the sources also depends, see S. Gastaldi, *La «semplicità» dei primi uomini: l'immagine delle origini nel libro III delle Leggi di Platone*, in F. Calabi, S. Gastaldi (a cura di), *Immagini delle origini. La nascita della civiltà e della cultura nel pensiero antico*, Academia Verlag, Sankt Augustin 2012, p. 107.

⁶Cfr. F. Zuolo, *Fatti e principi nelle Leggi platoniche. I paradossi della realizzazione di un ideale*, in M. Bontempi, G. Panno (a cura di), *L'anima della legge. Studi intorno ai Nomoi di Platone*, Polimetrica, Monza 2012, p. 95.

⁷For a general look at the type of intellectual in Egypt, see recently in S. Einaudi, *La figura dell'intellettuale nell'antico Egitto: Padiamenope e i suoi 'colleghi'*, in «Medea», VIII, 1, 2022, pp. 1-6.

⁸The theme of the world submerged by water is present in many mythical and legendary traditions in the ancient East and the classical world: great affinities are shown above all in the myth of the flood of Utnapishtim contained in the poem of Gilgamesh and the biblical tale of Noah, who is stranded on Mount Ararat (*Gen.*, 6-10).

ΑΘ. Καὶ δὴ τοὺς τοιοῦτους γε ἀνάγκη που τῶν ἄλλων ἀπείρους εἶναι τεχνῶν καὶ τῶν ἐν τοῖς ἄστεσι πρὸς ἀλλήλους μηχανῶν εἰς τε πλεονεξίας καὶ φιλονικίας καὶ ὅπόσ' ἄλλα κακουργήματα πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἐπινοοῦσιν.

ΚΛ. Εἰκὸς γοῦν.

ΑΘ. Θῶμεν δὴ τὰς ἐν τοῖς πεδίοις πόλεις καὶ πρὸς θαλάττη κατοικοῦσας ἄρδην ἐν τῷ τότε χρόνῳ διαφθείρεσθαι;

ΚΛ. Θῶμεν.

ΑΘ. Οὐκοῦν ὄργανά τε πάντα ἀπόλλυσθαι, καὶ εἴ τι τέχνης ἦν ἐχόμενον σπουδαίως ἠύρημένον ἢ πολιτικῆς ἢ καὶ σοφίας τινὸς ἐτέρας, πάντα ἔρρειν ταῦτα ἐν τῷ τότε χρόνῳ φήσομεν; πῶς γὰρ ἂν, ὦ ἄριστε, εἴ γε ἔμενεν τάδε οὕτω τὸν πάντα χρόνον ὡς νῦν διακεκόσμηται, καινὸν ἀνηυρίσκετό ποτε καὶ ὅτιοῦν;

ΚΛ. Τοῦτο ὅτι μὲν μυριάκις μύρια ἔτη διελάνθανεν ἄρα τοὺς τότε, χίλια δὲ ἀφ' οὗ γέγονεν ἢ δις τοσαῦτα ἔτη, τὰ μὲν Δαιδάλω καταφανῆ γέγονεν, τὰ δὲ Ὀρφεῖ, τὰ δὲ Παλαμῆδει, τὰ δὲ περὶ μουσικὴν Μαρσύα καὶ Ὀλύμπῳ, περὶ λύραν δὲ Ἀμφίονι, τὰ δὲ ἄλλα ἄλλοις πάμπολλα, ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν χθὲς καὶ πρόην γεγονότα (*Leg.*, 677a-d⁹).

The only survivors of the flood were the shepherds on the mountain's peaks, who subsequently lived for a long time without luxury and technology (*Leg.*, III, 677a-d)¹⁰. Such primitive nuclei lived

⁹ «Ath.: The ones that tell of many disasters – floods and plagues and many other things – which have destroyed human beings and left only a tiny remnant of the human race. Kl.: This sort of thing seems entirely credible to everyone. Ath.: Come, of the many disasters let's focus our minds on one that occurred once on account of a flood. Kl.: What shall we think about in regard to it? Ath.: How those who then escaped the destruction would almost all be mountain herdsmen – little sparks of the human race saved on the peaks somewhere. Kl.: Clearly. Ath.: Presumably men such as these, at least, necessarily lack experience in the arts, and especially in the contrivances that city dwellers use against one another, motivated by the desire to have more, the love of victory, and all the other mischief they think up against each other. Kl.: That's likely, anyway. Ath.: Shall we assume that the cities settled in the plains and along the sea were utterly destroyed at that time? Kl.: So we shall assume. Ath: Won't we assert that all tools were destroyed, and that if some serious and important part of an art – whether politics or some other sort of wisdom – had been discovered, all these things would have perished at that time? For otherwise, best of men, if these things had remained through all time as thoroughly ordered as they are today, how could anything new ever have been discovered? Kl.: In other words, for tens upon tens of thousands of years these things were unknown to the men at that time, and only within the past one or two thousand years have they been brought to light, some by Daedalus, others by Orpheus, and others by Palamedes; the things that pertain to music by Marsyas and Olympos, the things that pertain to the lyre by Amphion; and very many other arts by other men – just yesterday or the day: before, so to speak» (677a-d). Translate from T.W.Pangle, *The Laws of Plato*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago-London, 1980.

¹⁰ Cfr. K. Gaiser, *Platons ungeschriebene Lehre*, Auflage, Stuttgart 1988 trad it G. Reale, *La metafisica della storia in Platone*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1991, pp. 116-121.

without laws, according to the customs of a gerontocratic patriarchy¹¹, very similar to the Cyclopes's organization (680b). The members of these communities were forced to descend into the valley because herding alone was no longer sufficient for their survival. So, they began to practice work in the fields (680e) and experiment with the hitherto unknown metalworking techniques (678d-e). Changes in customs, the advancement of skills, and the inexorable change in needs and perspectives led humanity toward the second stage of its development. The new customs imposed the aristocracy as the new legislative model (681c)¹². Population growth, the building of walls to defend the *poleis*, and warlike activities marked the third stage of the human species after the Flood (681d-e).

ΑΘ. Κατωκίσθη δὴ, φαμέν, ἐκ τῶν ὑψηλῶν εἰς μέγα τε καὶ καλὸν πεδῖον Ἴλιον, ἐπὶ λόφον τινὰ οὐχ ὑψηλὸν καὶ ἔχοντα ποταμοὺς πολλοὺς ἄνωθεν ἐκ τῆς Ἰδης ὠρμημένους.

ΚΛ. Φασὶ γοῦν.

ΑΘ. Ἄρ' οὖν οὐκ ἐν πολλοῖς τισὶ χρόνοις τοῖς μετὰ τὸν κατακλυσμὸν τοῦτο οἰόμεθα γεγονέναι;

ΚΛ. Πῶς δ' οὐκ ἐν πολλοῖς;

ΑΘ. Δεινὴ γοῦν ἔοικεν αὐτοῖς λήθη τότε παρεῖναι τῆς νῦν λεγομένης φθορᾶς, ὅθ' οὕτως ὑπὸ ποταμοῦς πολλοὺς καὶ ἐκ τῶν ὑψηλῶν ῥέοντας πόλιν ὑπέθεσαν, πιστεύσαντες οὐ σφόδρα ὑψηλοῖς τισὶν λόφοις.

ΚΛ. Δῆλον οὖν ὡς παντάπασί τινα μακρὸν ἀπεῖχον χρόνον τοῦ τοιούτου πάθους.

ΑΘ. Καὶ ἄλλαι γε οἶμαι πόλεις τότε κατόκουν ἤδη πολλαί, πληθυνόντων τῶν ἀνθρώπων.

ΚΛ. Τί μήν;

ΑΘ. Αἶ γέ που καὶ ἐπεστρατεύσαντο αὐτῇ, καὶ κατὰ θάλατταν δὲ ἴσως, ἀφόβως ἤδη πάντων χρωμένων τῇ θαλάττῃ.

¹¹Cfr. F.L. Lisi, *Repubblica VIII e Leggi III*, in *La Repubblica. Traduzione e commento*, in M. Vegetti (a cura di), Bibliopolis, Napoli 2005, p. 659.

¹²For a strictly political analysis of the topic discussed here, I refer to L. Masone, *Cataclismi e Politeiai nelle Leggi di Platone. Alcune note tra filosofia della storia e teoria costituzionale*, in «Storia e Politica. Rivista Quadrimestrale», XV, 2/2023, pp. 320-334. Cfr. also G. Giorgini, *Decadenza e Filosofia in Platone*, in «Filosofia Politica», IX, 1/1995, pp. 5-14

ΚΛ. Φαίνεται.

ΑΘ. Δέκα δ' ἔτη που μείναντες Ἀχαιοὶ τὴν Τροίαν ἀνάστατον ἐποίησαν.

ΚΛ. Καὶ μάλα.

ΑΘ. Οὐκοῦν ἐν τούτῳ τῷ χρόνῳ, ὄντι δεκέτει, ὄν τὸ Ἴλιον ἐπολιορκεῖτο, τὰ τῶν πολιορκούντων ἐκάστων οἴκοι κακὰ πολλὰ συνέβαινον γινόμενα περὶ τὰς στάσεις τῶν νέων, οἳ καὶ ἀφικομένους τοὺς στρατιώτας εἰς τὰς αὐτῶν πόλεις τε καὶ οἰκίας οὐ καλῶς οὐδ' ἐν δίκῃ ὑπεδέξαντο, ἀλλ' ὥστε θανάτους τε καὶ σφαγὰς καὶ φυγὰς γενέσθαι παμπόλλας· οἳ πάλιν ἐκπεσόντες κατῆλθον μεταβαλόντες ὄνομα, Δωριῆς ἀντ' Ἀχαιῶν κληθέντες διὰ τὸ τὸν συλλέξαντα εἶναι τὰς τότε φυγὰς Δωριᾶ. καὶ δὴ ταῦτά γε ἤδη πάνθ' ὑμεῖς, ὧ Λακεδαιμόνιοι, τάντεῦθεν μυθολογεῖτε τε καὶ διαπεραίνετε (*Leg.*, 682b-e)¹³.

Thus, the final phase concluded with the fall of Troy at the end of the renowned war (682e). As is also evident from the discussion just reproduced, the exchange between *mythos* and historical narration is constant: the state of nature of the first mountaineers corresponds to a kind of condition of purity, which is followed by the slow discovery of techniques and the inexorable transition towards the construction of culture. And with comes corruption and the pursuit of luxury alone¹⁴. The mythological tale is configured as the overriding model for the gnoseological paradigms. The *topos* of

¹³ «Ath.: Ilium was settled, we assert, when they left the heights for the wide and beautiful plain and settled on a low hill with many rivers that rushed down from Ida. Kl.: So they say, anyway. Ath. Don't we suppose that this came to pass many ages after the flood? Kl. It had to be many ages. Ath.: It's likely that they were possessed by an amazing degree of forgetfulness regarding the disaster just now discussed, when they thus set up a city close to a lot of rivers flowing down from the heights, putting their trust in some hills that were not very high. Kl.: This makes it completely clear that they were separated by a great interval of time from such suffering. Ath.: I suppose that already, at that time, there were many other cities being settled down below, since human beings were multiplying. Kl.: But of course. Ath.: And presumably these others undertook a military expedition against this one, and probably came by sea, since now everyone was making use of the sea without fear. Kl: So it appears. Ath.: After remaining about ten years, presumably, the Achaeans sacked Troy. Kl.: They certainly did. Ath.: And so during this time, a ten-year period, while Ilium was being besieged many evils befell each of the besiegers at home, through the revolts of the young men. When the soldiers returned to their cities and homes they were not nobly received by these, nor with justice, but instead in such a way as to produce many deaths and slaughters and exiles. The ones who were driven into exile came back again though, having changed their name from Achaeans to Dorians because Dorieus was the one who gathered the exiles together at that time. And surely it is you, O Lacedaimonians, who tell the myth and complete the account of all the things that happened after this» (682b-e).

¹⁴Plato also refers to other human stages in which there was no need for state organizations, as in the time of Cronus, when all those men, deprived of reason, needed was offered to them by the prosperity of nature (*Polit.*, 271e-272a). Cfr. M. Migliori, *Arte Politica e metrica assiologica. Commentario storico-filosofico al «Politico» di Platone*, Vita&Pensiero, Milano 1996, pp. 86-90.

the cataclysm, peculiar to pre-Socratic dissemination of cultural reflection and the foundation of Greek mythology, is of considerable importance for understanding the outline of a possible semiotic and theoretical study of Platonic thought. However, what reception did these literary formulations receive in later cultures? In the Hellenistic period, for example, there were not a few authoritative representations of pre-cultural worlds free of corruption: Theopompus, Evemerus, and Timaeus of Tauromenius, to name but a few intellectuals who reflected on hypothetical states of nature¹⁵. But even in Latin culture, there has been no lack of theoretical contributions in this sense. One might think, among others, of an intellectual such as Cicero, a pragmatic admirer of Plato's *Laws*, as well as a reader of Lucretius: in the proem of the *De inventione*, for example, the Arpinate outlines the transition from a supposed state of nature, in which men were very similar to beasts, to the civil state (I, 1-3). The primordial man was endowed with neither reason nor religion. Using his intellect, he transformed the primitive state into a city, a hub where people collectively moved away from a savage existence (*Pro Sestio*, 91-92). Nature, however, is regarded as the regulating principle capable of leading to civil and moral peace (*De off.*, I, 127; 133; 146). The reflection is taken up in *De republica* and *De legibus*, where it is conjectured that true justice is a direct emanation of nature itself¹⁶.

Additional argumentative aspects to explore the dialectical history of this opposition can also be identified in later centuries: through which perspectives were these new narratives about the contrast between the state of nature and culture interpreted in medieval Christendom? In what expansive intellectual environment, marked by new naturalist ideas, was the existence of fantastical beings and forces thought to be genuinely present and influencing human life? Additionally, what evidence exists in Renaissance and modern thought regarding the revival of classical ideas, the reassessment of happiness in a natural state, and the emergence of new utopias? Moreover, what sequence of cultural events prompted these reflections leading to the Enlightenment watershed?

¹⁵Although in the context of reconstructing ancient utopias inherent in hypothetical worlds without slaves, on the observations of various Greek thinkers of the Classical and Hellenistic periods, reference has been made to accounts of the transition from nature-state to culture-state, also recently in L. Masone, *Antichità senza schiavi. Un percorso di sole utopie*, in «Materialismo Storico. Rivista di filosofia, storia e scienze umane», XIV, 1/2023, pp. 9-24.

¹⁶Cfr. F. Fontanella, *Politica e diritto naturale nel De Legibus di Cicerone*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma 2012, pp. 11-17; and pp. 115-132.

2. Up to Levi Strauss

To maintain the text's economy and focus, this article aims to introduce the relationship between nature and culture across various historical periods, particularly ancient and contemporary times. We will examine this theme through the reflections of key philosophers from these eras, employing a synthetic diachronic approach forced.

Nonetheless, it's worth noting that even Rousseau, a keen reader of Plato's *Laws*, viewed the shift from the natural state to that of culture primarily as an ontological progression question. In his *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, Rousseau illustrates the progress and degeneration of humanity from a primitive savage condition to modern culture. The primitive had no knowledge of laws, morality, virtue, or vice. He consisted essentially of physicality, instinct, and passion. Extraneous to rationality, he was dominated by the indispensable impulse of self-preservation. In that man, awareness of change was lacking; time was as if suspended, immobile, while the civilized state is governed by culture and the sweep of history. The discovery of agricultural and metallurgical techniques, the subsequent invention of private property, and the division of labor led to growing inequality between humans. The first governmental model was built based on unbalanced power relations to the detriment of less clever men. Rousseau's critique of social and ethical decay directly condemns contemporary culture and the corruption inherent in civil and political relations. He argues that reason has devolved into a means of abusing power, fueling individualism, and fostering excessive selfishness, all enforced by the hegemonic social structures class¹⁷.

Scientific method and philosophical commitment intersect almost two centuries later in the figure of Lévi-Strauss, a rigorous scholar of Rousseau (and also of Plato). Building on the critique of positivist evolutionism, the idea of progression from nature to culture serves as a key element in his analysis. This begins with *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté*, his first major work employing a structuralist perspective, which is viewed as a methodological choice rather than a designated field or subject analysis¹⁸. To define the circumstances of the transition, one has to go back to a 'pre-historical' dimension, which probably never really existed. This is an ambitious work that finds its

¹⁷Cfr. J. Starobinski, *Jean-Jacque Rousseau. La trasparenza e l'ostacolo*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1982, pp. 53-69.

¹⁸Cfr. A.M. Lorusso, *Semiotica della cultura*, cit., p. 30.

original foundation in the interest in marriage bonds and the taboo of incest. The problem lies in asking what deep-rooted and omnipresent causes make it possible that, in all societies and all epochs, a regulation of relations between the sexes exists¹⁹.

Without reverting to an anti-rational or even mystical viewpoint, Lévi-Strauss does not seek to retrace the historical circumstances of the transition; rather, he aims to demonstrate how both nature and culture are ever-present within man's symbolic creation. He posits that the original transition may have been facilitated by the institution of the prohibition of incest, not as an instinctive and natural reaction, but as a universal cultural phenomenon rule²⁰. The prohibition of uniting with one's family members implies the need to seek a *partner* from other communities. Lévi-Strauss hypothesizes that marriage relations can be considered languages and studied as such. The relationship of *reciprocity that is* thus generated between the various human groups makes it possible to define kinship relations as communication systems. Reciprocity is regarded as a fundamental structure of the human spirit. Based on this transformation, the various kinship patterns, the expression of a norm and therefore a cultural manifestation, are grafted on. For the scholar, 'primitive thought' must be understood as a form of understanding the world and nature, itself endowed with rational laws and internal coherence. The state of nature precedes the understanding of the institution of the rule and, therefore, does not historically anticipate rational thought: they are heterogeneous paradigms of the same human need to orientate oneself among the meanings of perceived reality.

This exegetical construct of 'savage thinking' constitutes an attempt to identify the complexity of the structure of myth. The Belgian anthropologist observes that some aspects of these narratives recur across all cultures, regardless of their distance in time and space. Similarly, myth is a cultural *phenomenon* that can be deconstructed into *mythemes*, the essential components of the mythological tradition. When these units are connected with others like them, they contribute to a semiotic process, forming a system of relationships. This system is valuable for comprehending the narrative and the cognitive processes that ultimately shape the prevailing common sense within human groups in a specific culture. From this, symbolic representations of recognizable signs such as language, religious

¹⁹C. Lévi-Strauss, *Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1947-1967, trad.it. A.M. Cirese, L.Serafini, *Le strutture elementari della parentela*, Feltrinelli, Milano 2010, p. 65.

²⁰See recently E. Radaelli, *In un lampo. Il tuto e le part in Lévi-Strauss*, in *Antropologia e Teatro. Rivista di studi*, Numero speciale: Logiche del concreto. Le eredità variabili del magistero di Claude Lévi-Strauss, 11/2019, pp. 56-58.

systems, and social organization emerge determined²¹.

Brief Project Conclusions

At this point, the questions to be investigated expand: in a potential connection between the indicated theoretical constructions, what affinities or divergences can be found in the reflections concerning the symbolic function of Plato's and Lévi Strauss' narrative grammars respectively? Is a compatible philosophical perspective between them possible? Is it possible to trace a common denominator that makes mythical narratives' peculiar theoretical and semiotic processes comparable in their cultural contexts?

Too little space has been devoted in this short essay, which assumes the sole purpose of hypothesizing a potential phenomenal field of study, to advance comprehensive answers in this regard. But it is already possible to trace a few visual angles. Certainly, what distinguishes the Athenian philosopher from the structuralist anthropologist is the consideration of the state of nature. For the former, it appears as a historically given moment characterized by a decidedly positive ontological purity. In contrast, for the latter, man's ability to move away from a 'savage' attitude is seen as an advancement in the human condition itself, even though Lévi Strauss confines himself to scientifically ascertaining theoretical events. However, the overcoming of this state, although not identifiable in a precise chronological moment, represents the recognition of a collective rule. It is from this unwritten rule that social relations are constructed. Likewise in Plato, the mountaineers of the post-catastrophe state of nature have no rules. However, this condition before *nomos* is presented in an almost favorable guise: the development of techniques represents the turning point and transition from one state to another. In this sense, Plato blames the excess of technique but sees the correct and limited use of it as an improvement on the primordial Cyclops-like degree.

But there is one issue that holds the two thinkers' reflections together more than two millennia apart: the study and attitude towards myth. For both of them, *mythos* represents an interpretative stage in the perception of reality through which men have been able to provide authentic and clarifying explanations. For both Plato and Lévi Strauss, the *mythos* is no less culturally authoritative than the *logos*. This represents a further major element of the study.

²¹Cfr. F. Remotti, *Lévi-Strauss. Struttura e storia*, Einaudi, Torino 1971, pp. 193-201.



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