

S.S. KHORUZHII

A Rearguard Action

I

My age, my beast, who will be able
To peer into the pupils of your eyes
And glue together with his blood
The vertebrae of two centuries?

A valuable gain of our times is that many fables—true, some of the most terrible ones—have become true stories, and many allegories and metaphors have become almost literal. Take this verse: today we hardly hear in it any poetic convention; everything is the commonplace reality of our age—both its brutishness and its blood, and even the gluing together of its vertebrae after various great breaks. Therefore a clear question is posed; and surely the age is coming to an end and an answer is needed. So then, who was able to do it? Who managed to glue things together? Among the few names and fates that may be given in reply, one of the most indisputable is the name of Aleksei Fedorovich Losev. Yes, he had occasion to do so.

Only he can glue together the vertebrae of two centuries who has blood ties with both. Losev's relations with the new epoch will be considered later. It is necessary, of course, to begin with his roots. Losev's personality and works, his intellectual and moral foundations—all these are rooted firmly in the traditions of

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Sergei Sergeevich Khoruzhii is a doctor of physical-mathematical sciences, a professor, a leading research associate at the V.A. Steklov Mathematics Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and head of the Department of Synergetic Anthropology at the Institute of Man of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

Translated by Stephen Shenfield.

Russian culture, illuminated by the Orthodox faith. As he recalled in his dying days, those profound intuitions that later nourished his views and convictions, his scholarly works, took shape within him while he still sat at the school desk. At the Novocherkassk gymnasium where he studied there was a chapel dedicated to the Saints Cyril and Methodius. These saints are the enlighteners of Slavdom, the creators of the Slavic script, and thus also special patrons of works in the field of language and thought, patrons of philology and philosophy. In the course of time, their images, together with the memory of the school chapel, acquired symbolic meaning for Losev, for his whole life's work was marked by the closest union, the true two-in-oneness of these branches of culture, of philosophy and philology—first of all, classical philology, the study of antiquity. "By the time I completed gymnasium in 1911, I was already a trained philosopher and, at the same time, a classical philologist. And so it remained my whole life."¹

The union of classical philology with philosophy encompassed and absorbed a whole series of intervening, borderline disciplines: classical mythology and classical esthetics, the theory and morphology of classical culture, the philosophical theory of myth and symbol.... And from the very first stages of his work, Losev regarded the whole of this vast domain as the field of his direct activity, and so it was. The problems that he raised and tried to resolve touched on virtually all its main sections and themes. Such universal breadth of creativity is, naturally, always striking, but it is worth noting that it was by no means unique for that cultural milieu and epoch in which Losev was formed. Above we indicated his spiritual sources in extremely broad terms; the time has come to be more precise: Losev's worldview grew in the closest and most direct way out of the Russian tradition of religious philosophy that originates in the Slavophiles and Vladimir Solov'ev. It was again at the gymnasium that he established a firm connection with this tradition. For him all philosophy, the mastery of (as he put it) "the ABC of all philosophizing," began with Vladimir Solov'ev. "At the age of seventeen," he recalled, "I made a most detailed study of this quite difficult philosopher."² Throughout his life Losev preserved a love for his first teacher, interest in his thought, and a high opinion of it. In his declining years he called his early acquaintance with Solov'ev's philosophy "a bit of good luck," and the last book he wrote was the fundamental work *Vladimir Solov'ev and His Times* [Vladimir Solov'ev i ego vremia].

The period of Losev's philosophical formation coincides with the flowering of that rather brief epoch in Russian thought that is often called the Renaissance of religious philosophy. In the intensity and variety of its philosophical life, this was something unprecedented for Russia. However, the main stream stood out clearly against the variety of the philosophical spectrum and all the different philosophical undertakings and trends: the development of the aforementioned autonomous tradition, which rested upon the broad layers of Russian Orthodox spirituality and, most proximately, upon the early Slavophiles and Solov'ev. In this central Solov'evian stream of Russian philosophy, a whole line of first-class thinkers arose within a brief space of time: let me mention at least Sergei and Evgenii Trubetskoi,

Berdiaev, Bulgakov, Losskii, and Florenskii. Here, in this circle, the universal breadth of creativity, the broad sweep of talent that I have noted in Losev was not particularly rare. Viacheslav Ivanov was a poet, a theoretician of symbolism, a philosopher, and a researcher of classical antiquity. Florenskii was a philosopher and theologian, an art critic, a philologist, and a physicist and mathematician. Karsavin was a historian, philosopher, and theologian... This breadth of gifts and concerns went back to the very founders of the tradition: Khomiakov was famous for it. Solov'ev was not only a philosopher but also a great poet, a brilliant publicist and critic, and a master of literary style. And we may say that this trait of Losev's is one of those that are native to and characteristic of Russian thought. It is also worth noting that the theme of classical antiquity was elaborated fruitfully within the philosophy of the Russian Renaissance. Originating in Sergei Trubetskoi (and in part even in Solov'ev, with his work *The Life Drama of Plato* [Zhiznennaia drama Platona]), Russian studies of classical antiquity in the works of Viacheslav Ivanov and especially Florenskii succeeded in making appreciable progress toward articulating their own original interpretation of antiquity—of classical myth, religion, and philosophy. And if Losev's worldview as a whole is connected by heritage and kinship with the Solov'evian tradition as a whole, then he is connected concretely, by definite ideas and themes with this "classical" line in Russian philosophy. As he himself was to indicate subsequently, "I arrived at my first generalizations in the field of Platonic studies under the influence of Vladimir Solov'ev's views on Plato."³ Losev's thought is particularly close to Florenskii's and I shall say more about this below.

During his university years Losev was already an active participant in the philosophical life of Moscow, a regular attendant at the sessions of the Vladimir Solov'ev Religious-Philosophical Society and of the Psychological Society at Moscow University. In those years Moscow was perhaps a greater center of Russian religious thought than St. Petersburg-Petrograd, and it is precisely here, not there, that the main hearth of the Solov'evian tradition, of the Russian metaphysics of total-unity, was located: M.K. Morozova's Put' publishing house and the circle of philosophers connected with it. And Losev, as a gymnasium student, became used to and at home in this tradition, adopted its pattern of thought and its problematic. Philosophical Moscow and the Russian religious metaphysics of the end of the Silver Age—here is the paternal home, the *oikos* of his philosophical thought. But creativity is always a spiritual wandering, not staying at home...

In 1915 Losev graduated from Moscow University in the departments of philosophy and of classical philology simultaneously, and in 1916 published his first work, "Eros in Plato" [Eros u Platona]. In the following years he continued to participate actively in philosophical life, now often delivering papers of his own. Here are the topics of the main ones, delivered in the postrevolutionary period: "The terms *eidos* and *idea* in Plato," "The question of the fundamental unity of Plato's dialogues *Parmenides* and *Timaeus*," "Aristotle's doctrine of tragic myth," and "Pagan Greek ontology in Plato." What does this list tell us about the direction

of Losev's work? The answer is clear and unambiguous: Losev was concerned with the history of classical philosophy or, to be more precise, with specific issues in the work of Plato and Aristotle. Nothing here impels one to think that the novice "philosopher and classical philologist simultaneously" will tackle any broad global questions, whether in the study of classical antiquity or in pure philosophy. Indeed, that was exactly how matters stood then in both fields. Between 1916 and 1927 no works of Losev appeared in print. However, from *The Philosophy of the Name* [Filosofii imeni], which came out in 1927, we learn that as early as the summer of 1923 he had finished this head-splitting philosophical work, "the resume of prolonged reflection" which laid the basis for a new philosophical method and doctrine. His book *The Ancient Cosmos and Contemporary Science* [Antichnyi kosmos i sovremennaia nauka], published at the same time, reconstructs the Greek cosmos by reconstructing the Greek *logos* and the classical mode of thinking, and the preface, dated 14 August 1925, informs us that this fundamental work is merely "a combination of a number of extracts" from the extensive material of many years' research. And it becomes clear to us that those lectures of Losev's are only the tip of the iceberg, small signs of an enormous and intensive effort that went on without interruption, but remained hidden and remained so not because the author wished this, as he gives us to understand in passing in the aforementioned books.

The fruits of this effort finally came to light in the space of three years, from 1927 to 1930, in the form of a series of monographs: *The Ancient Cosmos and Contemporary Science*, *The Philosophy of the Name*, *The Dialectic of Artistic Form* [Dialektika khudozhestvennoi formy], *Music As a Subject of Logic* [Muzyka kak predmet logiki], *The Dialectic of Number in Plotinus* [Dialektika chisla u Plotina], *The Critique of Platonism in Aristotle* [Kritika platonizma u Aristotelia], *Essays in Ancient Symbolism and Mythology* [Ocherki antichnogo simvolizma i mifologii], *The Dialectic of Myth* [Dialektika mifa].

A remarkable Octateuch. Russia's philosophical life in the first decades of the century is uncommonly rich in both achievements and events; but even against this background the Octateuch is a unique fact, and unique in many respects at the same time. The fundamental cycle of books demonstrated the indubitable appearance of a new and original thinker with his own problematic and his own philosophical arsenal, essentially, the appearance of a founder of a new tendency. This sudden appearance of a new name with a whole series of new theories and fundamental works could be called vivid and spectacular, but in the situation of the time it was rather strange and aroused anxiety for the author. For a number of years, beginning with the exile of philosophers in the fall of 1922, free philosophical investigation had been suppressed in Russia and the whole field of philosophical knowledge had been replaced forcibly by official Marxism, which assumed an increasingly crude and aggressive form. Hence there was, and still is, almost nothing like Losev's books as regards not the substance of his ideas but the very nature of his work, as the fruit of the love of wisdom outside the officially prescribed channel. Those were the last fruits of free philosophical thought in Russia.

The multifarious tasks that Losev's cycle undertakes may, to sum up, be reduced to these two main ones: to reconstruct the thinking and worldview of classical antiquity and to build an original system of dialectical-phenomenological philosophy based upon new conceptions of name, symbol, and myth. There is in Losev an inner connection between the two global tasks: the new understanding of the ancient cosmos and ancient thought is attained on the basis of the new philosophical methodology, while the new philosophical conceptions are worked out to a significant extent using the materials of classical antiquity. As it becomes clear, the aforementioned lectures with their concrete themes also contribute to the accomplishment of the global tasks. The art of the telling detail is a special feature of Losev's research method: in the course of working out general fundamental problems, he as a rule analyzes in the most scrupulous fashion some narrow, even technical, points that, upon testing, turn out to be important corroborations of the general conception. This special feature is similar to the method of "excursions" that Florenskii applies widely in *The Pillar and Foundation of Truth* [Stolp i utverzhdienie istiny]. And possibly, it was developed under the influence of *The Pillar*, although Losev's excursions usually do not diverge so far from the main thread of the argument and are connected more closely with it . . .

I shall not dwell now upon the first of the mentioned global tasks. First of all, I shall try to reconstruct Losev's mode of philosophizing and Losev's conception of myth, as presented in *The Dialectic of Myth*; this will give us the opportunity to catch sight also of "Losev's own myth," of the noumenal contours of his path. Of course, in *The Dialectic of Myth* too, as almost everywhere, Losev cannot do without antiquity, and in the analysis of myth carried out here it is often precisely ancient myth that serves as the closest example. However, antiquity plays the role of a substratum here, of the classical milieu of myth, and not that of an independent object of investigation. But as for the second task, it is fully in line with my theme. It is with its analysis that I shall begin.

2

At the foundation of the whole building of Losev's philosophy lies his own philosophical method. This should not be regarded as self-evident: here in fact is an important distinguishing feature of this philosophy, a feature that is far from typical of Russian thought. Philosophy may take as its starting point not method at all, but say some idea or a complex of ideas, or some kind of inner intuition . . . And it is rather the latter that is characteristic of Russian philosophy. For a long time it was marked by a fatal inclination toward what Fedor Stepun ironically called "instinctive philosophy *style russe*" — a profoundly meaningful but poorly differentiated philosophizing that cannot give its assertions an exact sense, let alone prove them rigorously. This is not unsubstantiated invective; there is no lack of specific examples, from Grigorii Skovoroda to Nikolai Fedorov. The techniques of contemporary philosophizing, rigorous philosophical methods remained the

prerogative of Western, above all of German, thought. When Russian philosophers of a Westernizing inclination gave priority to mastering these techniques, they most often ended up at the opposite extreme—perpetual pupils who never tackled creative tasks independently. Here too there is no dearth of examples, from early Russian Schellingianism to late Russian Neo-Kantianism. The decisive overcoming of the prolonged false conflict between philosophical autonomy and philosophical professionalism began with Vladimir Solov'ev — and that, we may be sure, was one of the main reasons why Losev was attracted, from the very beginning, to Solov'ev. As for Losev's own philosophy, it is not enough to say that there is no longer any trace of the former technical backwardness of Russian thought in it. It is distinguished by the closest attention to method and a special love of complex philosophical constructions. In Losev's writing, in his style, the discipline of analytical and dialectical thought as well as unusual energy are evident throughout. Russian philosophy began to acquire such qualities only toward the end of its curtailed development and there are very few thinkers who can be placed here alongside Losev.

Losev's philosophical method is the method of the logical and noumenal construction of the meaning of the philosophical object. What does this formula mean? "Construction" may be taken as understood for a start (although later it will be necessary to examine it more closely). But what is "the philosophical object"? It is obviously the given on which philosophical reason directly carries out its work. However, philosophical reason may accept very different things as givens, as given to itself, depending so to say on its own mechanics, on the rules and laws of action it has established for itself. So the object in philosophy is inseparable from the method by means of which it is grasped, and different philosophical tendencies treat the object in different ways. In Hegel's dialectic, the philosophical object is a concept, that is, a purely speculative reality of abstract thought that undergoes its development as self-movement by means of dialectical transformations and can be described by a system of abstract categories. For empiricism or sensationalism the philosophical object is simply the data of sensuous experience, the phenomena of sensuous reality. In Husserl's phenomenology, the philosophical object is a "phenomenon of consciousness." This too is a kind of speculative content; however, it is not interpreted as a concept. It is presented to consciousness by an "intentional act"—an act of the directedness of consciousness at a particular phenomenon of sensuous or intelligible reality, that is, at something external to consciousness, at its other-being. And in this act, which establishes a connection between consciousness and other-being, the phenomenon of consciousness apprehends and makes its own certain characteristics of other-being, of the phenomenon understood in the etymological sense of the Greek *phaino-menon*, of "that which appears and is given visually." In other words, the Husserlian phenomenon of consciousness, without losing its perfectly speculative nature, at the same time acquires the modes of other-being, of the sensuous object and becomes comprehensible—concrete, evident, and plastic. Husserl no longer calls such an object a concept, but applies

to it the well-known term of ancient thought *eidos*. Originally, the latter meant simply "externality," "external appearance," or "visible image"; however, later, starting with Parmenides and, especially, in the Platonic tradition, it began to mean "mental appearance," that is, concrete appearance, a corporeal or plastic given in thought. Thus the philosophical object of phenomenology is *eidos*, interpreted in Losev's formulation as "the highest abstraction of thought, which, nonetheless, is given concretely, evidently," as "that same Platonic *eidos*, but of a purely intellectual nature, without a hint of substantiality."⁴ Such a conception is very broad, allowing one to treat the most varied spheres of reality as objects of rigorous philosophical examination: it extends to the perception of their essence (unlike empiricism), but in so doing does not destroy their concrete nature, does not try to incorporate everything into the Concept, the all-encompassing system of universal categories (unlike the abstract dialectic). Thanks to this, phenomenology, despite the considerable complexity of its basic principles, has become an influential and fruitful method in twentieth-century philosophy and has acquired numerous modifications and applications—in the philosophy of existentialism, in ethics, esthetics, and other fields. But Russian philosophy was no longer able to take part in the phenomenological movement: its development began only in the 1920s. Only two of our philosophers had a deep grasp of philosophical phenomenology and made substantial use of it in their own work. They were Shpet and Losev.

Losev adopted definitely and decisively the phenomenological, Husserlian treatment of the philosophical object. The reason for that, of course, was neither fashion nor chance. He always saw the aim of the philosophical act to be to grasp the phenomenon, be it of a sensuous or of a spiritual reality, both in the fullness of its meaning and in the fullness of its living concreteness simultaneously. And of all philosophical approaches, the aforementioned ones and others, it was the phenomenological approach that best corresponded to this position of his. Later he said of the initial period of his philosophical quest: "At that time Husserl's 'phenomenological method' was my sole support."⁵ However, even this sole support did not satisfy him completely; from the very beginning he had a whole series of substantial disagreements with Husserl's phenomenology. They all sprang from a single root cause: the refusal in principle of phenomenology to explain phenomena. The phenomenological "grasping of essence" consists exclusively of the "phenomenological description" of the meaning structure of a phenomenon as a totality of certain carefully registered components or elements. Phenomenological description merely records the presence of the given elements and in principle rejects as "naturalism" any attempt to go further, "to catch sight of something behind all this," to explain the observed picture of meaning. This, I repeat, is a position of principle for phenomenology, part of its confession of faith—and it is precisely on this most important point that Losev parts with it. Phenomenological description seemed to him fully correct, but at the same time scandalously insufficient. He found that "phenomenology . . . stops at the static recording of the statically given meaning of a thing."⁶ By contrast, he saw the meaning structure of a phenomenon

not as a static collection of elements but as their dynamic, vital unity—as a collection of elements between which there are interconnections, transitions, transformations, generations, and so on. And he considered the task of the philosophical method to be not simply that of describing meaning structures in terms of certain categories but in addition that of "explaining one category in terms of another category in order to make it clear how one category gives birth to another and all of them together to one another."⁷

As, no doubt, the perceptive reader has noticed, this last formulation of Losev's is the classic formulation of the task of the dialectic, of the dialectical method; and thus our author strove to supplement phenomenology with the dialectic, Husserl with Hegel. Here we reach finally the essence of the philosophical method that he developed: he resolved to *apply the dialectical method to the phenomenologically treated philosophical object*. He expressed this combination of the two approaches, which is basic to his whole philosophy, in the following formula: "the phenomenological recording of each concept and its dialectical construction against the background of a general system of categories."⁸ Naturally, it is by no means always possible and unproblematic to integrate or cross different philosophical systems: it may lead to eclecticism or it may be simply impermissible, internally wrong. Nor does the unification considered here occur without loss, as we shall see below. However, there is here no direct incompatibility of the conjoined elements. As is well known, Hegel's dialectic is also a phenomenology in the broad sense—a "phenomenology of the spirit," an observation and description of its categories in motion. And Losev never lets slip an opportunity to emphasize this phenomenological character of the dialectic: "The dialectic is always direct knowledge ... directness itself... The dialectic is simply eyes,... good eyes," which, obviously, can perform pure observations—and nothing more.

The combination and mutual supplementation of the two phenomenologies, Hegel's and Husserl's, yields what Losev calls "the construction of meaning." Now it is not difficult to understand how this specific construction is carried out. Construction as such is understood as "the logical construction of the categorial structure," in other words, the dialectical generation of a system of categories. (This use of the term does not coincide fully with Schelling's well-known concept developed in the work *On Construction in Philosophy* [Über die Construction in der Philosophie] and then in *The Philosophy of Art* [Philosophie der Kunst], which expresses his method of deducing essences from the absolute; here "construction" is interpreted rather in a Hegelian sense.) But what kind of system is this, what is the starting point and the goal of the dialectical process—all this is now modified by taking into account the principles of phenomenology. The starting position here is not the maximalist position of Hegelian logic imbedded in the ontological depths where there is only being and nonbeing and claiming to embrace the Universe within a single global logical system. It agrees to consider as existent what is at hand, sensuous and intelligible reality—everything that "is there" (as in Pasternak's verse: "Then there was a hayloft...," which accurately grasps the

phenomenological standpoint). Correspondingly, the content of the dialectical process as well as its result turn out to be different, and its result becomes an unknown. Now this process is a categorial working out not of the Hegelian concept, but of the Platonic-Husserlian *eidōs*: it is precisely this term that Losev uses everywhere for his philosophical object. In the course of the dialectical generation of categories, the phenomenological picture of meaning is constructed. But, being reached by a dialectical path, it acquires new qualities. Losev, in fact, will not even call the picture of meaning given by the orthodox phenomenological "grasping of essence" a picture: for him it is rather a lifeless inventory ("there was"!), a census of the component parts of meaning. He does not take issue with this census ("I accept both the doctrine of *eidōs* and the doctrine of pure description and, in general, phenomenology in its entirety"¹⁰), but for him this is not enough. In his dialectical phenomenology, the elements of the picture of meaning appear in mutual connection and in motion. And the picture now becomes not simply a real picture, a connected and expressive unity. Thanks to the multiplicity and variety of connections, it acquires also volume, a sculptural quality, and it becomes a sculpture; on account of the dynamism of categories, their generation and transformation, it is full of inner movement and hence a kind of force or energy—it comes to life. The key predicate expression in dialectical phenomenology is not "there was" but "there lived" or "there lives" (which comes to the same thing, for the construction of meaning is carried out in the universe of meaning, in the noumenal cosmos, not in time; and as soon as it produces in its extreme effort a living being, this being lives in that same universe, eternally). The dialectic for Losev is the guarantee and principle of the vitality of philosophizing, "the rhythm of life, the shaping of life, and its infusion with meaning."¹¹

Thus as a result of dialectical construction there arises a special kind of *eidōs*. *Eidōs*, according to Losev, is "the living being of the object permeated by energies of meaning that come from its depths and shape themselves into a whole living picture of the manifest face of the essence of the object."¹² Yet, in spite of the "face" and its "manifest nature," this *eidōs* is as before, in accordance with Husserl, pure essence, an object of intellectual intuition, an object that never loses its "purely intellectual nature without a hint of substantiality." Losev invests it with an abundance of visual characteristics: it is a "sculpture of meaning," an "ideally optical picture," "plastic," "figural"—but all these visual categories must be understood, as Losev says, "in their inner sense:" what is being discussed is mental vision. (One cannot but be amazed at the incomparable acuity of this vision in Losev: it really does provide him with pictures of meaning not a whit less vivid and expressive than the pictures of sensuous reality provided by physical sight. It was precisely this special gift that allowed the philosopher to work fruitfully in the second half of his life when his physical sight, undermined beyond repair in the labor camps, was lost completely.) As for sensuous reality, for *eidōs* it remains wholly other. But here Losev's dialectic again leaves its imprint on his eidology (doctrine of *eidōi*). For the dialectical method, an "other nature" is the dialectical antithesis

of the given, initial nature, its "other," "otherness," or "other-being." And both natures are drawn straight away into the dialectical process, into "the dialectic of the one and the other." In Section IX of *The Dialectic of Myth*, Losev specially demonstrates with a good dozen examples this typical device of any dialectical method. The generally known essence of the device consists of the following: "The one" logically presupposes—self-positing, in the terminology of the dialectic—"the other" and finds itself in a relation of identity and difference with it, the notorious dialectical unity of opposites; and the latter, being a unity, is thereby some kind of new whole: the no less notorious dialectical synthesis. In this connection it is said also (a terminology closer to Schelling's philosophy of identity) that the one reproduces or expresses itself in the other, assumes the appearance of the other or images itself (a caique of Schelling's *ein-bilden*) in the other, and that the one and the other form a two-in-oneness. The dialectical transition that takes place here, the mysterious transformation of the one into the two-in-oneness of the one and the other goes beyond the bounds of formal logic and to convey this Losev introduces the special concept of "alogical becoming."

All this is wholly applicable also to *eidōs* with its mental, that is, noumenal, nature. The dialectic of the *eidōs* and its other-being is unfolded exhaustively by Losev in the very first volume of his Octateuch, *The Philosophy of the Name* (§12); but there is no need for doing so it is clear already that *eidōs*, as Losev understands it, is the most fitting object to use in the dialectical device. It is given so vividly and expressively, with such "figuralness,"¹³ that it is indeed almost sensuous; it could not be better suited for reproduction in sensuous form as in its otherness. The union of the ideally optical picture and the mental sculpture with the sensuous principle gives immediately a perfect optical picture and a perfect sculpture—no longer in the inner but in the ordinary empirical sense. Naturally, this two-in-oneness of *eidōs* and its other-being loses none of its noumenal properties; it remains a picture of meaning. The philosophical object obtained thereby, the picture of meaning expressed in corporeal-sensuous form, the perfect two-in-oneness of noumenal and sensuous content, is nothing other than a symbol, according to the classic definitions of this concept in Schelling's *Philosophy of Art*. Losev accepts these definitions; as he remarks repeatedly,¹⁴ his understanding of the symbol is basically Schellingian.

As a result, we have come to the next and the last key feature of Losev's method. The dialectical construction of the philosophical object or *eidōs* does not only lead to *eidōs* as (in the inner sense) a face and sculpture; it presupposes inevitably the further reproduction of *eidōs* in the other and entails the dialectical transition from *eidōs* to symbol. The necessary continuation of eidology turns out to be symbolology. Occupied, according to the principle of phenomenology, with the grasping of meanings, dialectical phenomenology achieves a substantially higher degree of intensity and expressiveness of the picture of meaning and, at the limit of dialectical effort, arrives at the grasping of meanings not only as *eidōi* but also as symbols. Thereby it presents itself as a version of philosophical symbolism. Striv-

ing, as Losev did, for greater expressiveness, I shall present this conclusion in the formula:

Phenomenology + Dialectic = Symbolism

If we call this formula "Losev's equation," the name will be justified in two senses at once: it points equally to the author of the "equation" and to the mental object described by him. Here we have "Losev's *eidōs*." But we wish to proceed further, to his "myth."

3

Only that formula is good that implies many useful corollaries. As we shall now see, not a few substantive conclusions may be drawn from our "equation." Let us take them in order. Although the working apparatus of Losev's philosophy, which we have already surveyed, consists of the dialectic and phenomenology (and in a later volume of the cycle, *Essays in Ancient Symbolism and Mythology*, he introduces into the methodology of his construction also Neo-Kantian transcendentalism), the aim of the whole philosophical process turns out to be, as we now see, symbol. Thus it is precisely symbol (rather than *eidōs*) that should be considered the crucial concept of the developing philosophy, and the type of worldview corresponding to the latter can be defined as symbolism, as I have done above. Thus, my necessary task is to outline Losev's treatment of symbol.

It has already been said that Losev does not put forward here a fundamentally new theory, but joins the classic Schellingian tendency. In this tendency, which took shape at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century in the works of a whole line of German philosophers, the symbol is assigned a role, first of all, in the sphere of art and mythology but, at the same time, a certain significance in philosophy and even in worldviews is affirmed for it: there is a characteristic attraction toward the ancient symbolist world perception for which the *Universum* itself is wholly and thoroughly symbolic; nature, art, and man are symbols or signs, and consist of symbols. It is undoubtedly to Schelling that most of the credit for the general theory of the category of symbol belongs, but Goethe's deep directing influence should also be emphasized. As it has been justly remarked, Schelling and Hegel (who also contributed, though to a lesser extent, to the general theory of symbol) worked out a conception of symbol by "proceeding from Goethe and constantly looking back to him."¹⁵ The tradition that took shape in that epoch became the basis for the understanding of symbol by all later European thought. In its subsequent development, the most significant advances are connected with the names of Spengler, Cassirer, and—Losev.

From what I have said, it is not hard to see what innovations Losev introduced into the tradition. The philosophical definition of symbol, worked out by Schelling and generally shared by the whole tradition, is summarized by Losev on the first pages of his fundamental *Essays* thus: "Symbol is the indistinguishable identity of

the general and the particular, of the ideal and the real, of the infinite and the finite."¹⁶ While Losev in no way takes issue with this definition, he approaches symbol by his own route and explains it in terms of his own concepts. As we saw above, symbol arises in his work as "expressed *eidōs*," the two-in-oneness of *eidōs* and its otherness. Correspondingly, a new definition is also worked out. "Symbol is alogically becoming *eidōs*, which is given as its own hypostasized otherness and regarded as oneness in its correlation with this otherness and, consequently, with any otherness. Symbol... is *eidōs* reproduced in the other."¹⁷ Of this definition the author himself says that it is difficult and obscure in order to be precise but, in light of all the foregoing, it is already comprehensible to us. What kind of conception of symbol does Losev derive from it? Of course, the main and obvious point about it is that it is a dialectical-phenomenological conception, obtained within the framework of the combination of the dialectic with phenomenology constructed by Losev himself. Here symbol is the end result of the dialectical articulation of the phenomenological *eidōs*. From a purely theoretical point of view, this perhaps does not lead to excessively radical deviations from Schelling's classic conception, which was developed on the basis of his philosophy of identity. This conception is also concerned with the dialectic and, in particular, the crucial element in the construction of symbol, the relation between its "ideal" and "real" halves, is treated in it as a dialectical relation between identity and difference. However, in Losev's symbol the dialectical element is greatly strengthened and sharpened. Here again, as in the case of the category of construction, Losev displaces the Schellingian concept into the spirit and structure of Hegelian thought with its chain process of the generation of categories. And thereby certain advantages are gained. Symbol becomes more expressive, the elaboration of its details richer, and the very mechanism of this elaboration more precise and formalized.

Hence we approach gradually the most essential point. Formalized—that means universalized as well. Losev's treatment of symbol opens up a broad scope for concrete applications, for the construction and study of symbols in all the varied spheres of their occurrence—in art, language, religion, and myth. The phenomenological component of his method makes it possible, in constructing any of these spheres, to avoid lifeless abstraction and convey, as Pasternak puts it, the "detailedness" of reality,¹⁸ the living specificity of each concrete kind of symbol. The dialectical component, on the other hand, provides for effective and uniform analysis, making the totality of constructed philosophical sections not "a collection of motley chapters" but a coherent philosophical system. And we see that it was precisely along these lines that Losev's work proceeded. Glancing again at the composition and content of the *Octateuch*, we can now deepen substantially our understanding of this cycle as a whole. In full agreement with "Losev's equation," we discover in symbol the greatest common denominator, the unifying principle of the whole grandiose enterprise. We noted at once certain features of unity, first of all, the unity of method. But that is still rather a limited unity: quite a few unconnected fields can be analyzed using one and the same method. But Losev's

symbolic principle allows us to see his cycle and, in general, the entire range of his philosophical work, as an *ordered* unity in which not only the unity of methods, but also the unity of aims and even the unity of content, the unity in the choice of themes and subjects of philosophical investigation, are evident. First of all, the new conception of symbol implies also new conceptions of everything that is derived from symbol or based on it, including all the special kinds of symbol. And we see that four books of the cycle represent direct studies in constructing *eidōs* and symbol, each in its particular sphere: in language, music, art (irrespective of genre), and mythology, respectively. The other four books are devoted to problems of the ancient worldview; however, when philosophical symbolism arose, the same circle of German authors headed by Goethe and Schelling, at the same time, made it quite clear that this worldview was wholly saturated with symbolism. And on close inspection Losev's studies of antiquity also turn out to be studies of symbol and symbolism, supplementing the general program of his symbolist investigations with a new historical or culturological aspect: symbols are constructed not only for various spheres of the activity of consciousness, but also for various epochs and cultures.

To sum up, behind the two main tasks of Losev's thought that I identified at the very start there emerges a single purpose: to create some kind of all-encompassing symbolist synthesis, not so much a philosophical system as a whole symbolist worldview on a new philosophical basis. In arriving at such a conclusion, it is impossible not to notice immediately the kinship between this global design and two doctrines that arose at practically the same time as Losev's works: Florenskii's concrete metaphysics and Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms. All these are studies in philosophical symbolism with the aim of investigating various spheres of the occurrence of symbol, the main ones being language, myth and religion, and art. All of them possess a type of structure that is new to philosophy: it is prompted by their task and they arrived at it independently. Instead of the traditional division of a philosophical system into ontology, epistemology, esthetics, and so on, philosophy is organized according to the kinds of symbols and the spheres of their application: each of its sections studies "what a symbol means and how it operates in some particular sphere."¹⁹ According to the position of consistent symbolism, symbols permeate the whole world of culture and all fields of human activity. "Man is a symbol-creating being," says Cassirer, and similar judgments are easy to find in Florenskii and Losev as well. Thus the vision of the philosophical task that has been described is distinguished by an exceptional breadth and presupposes universal creativity. The labor required to realize such a global design is clearly comparable to the scale of human life. However, due to the peculiarities of the twentieth century, of the three philosophers-contemporaries, Cassirer alone had the opportunity of bringing his design to completion. Being rector of Hamburg University when the fascists came to power, he emigrated and continued his work in the United States. But Florenskii and Losev did not leave Russia when the bolsheviks came to power. As a result, Florenskii had to abandon further work

on his doctrine as early as the mid-1920s. He was subjected to ceaseless persecution, was arrested for the last time in 1933, and perished in detention in 1937. He managed, nonetheless, to accomplish a great deal; but the main work in which he sets out his concrete metaphysics has still not been published in full.

Losev's work as well was disrupted by the interference of history. His eight-volume cycle is, unarguably, a monumental achievement; yet by comparison with the general contours of his design it is merely a beginning. If you read attentively, you see everywhere in the Octateuch threads that lead on somewhere further; you encounter themes and theses the development of which is deferred; you find pointers to future works. Today we do not know whether they were written, at least in part; but we can see that in many cases they really would have been not in the least superfluous from the point of view of the logic of the design as a whole. The direct task of *The Philosophy of the Name* is the investigation of structures of meaning in language; however, the greater part of the book is occupied by an exposition of the general method and at the end it is indicated that "the author still plans to deal with specifically linguistic questions in a special work."²⁰ Here again we read that the presentation of Losev's views on ontology "on the basis of extensive material from the history of philosophy is a task with which the author is occupied in another of his works."²¹ *The Dialectic of Artistic Form* both begins and ends with the statement that the propositions derived in it "are too general and . . . merely point the way to a special investigation," to conduct which "is our next task."²² But the task that remained unfulfilled. And perhaps the most numerous "references to the future" (which demonstrate that the design continued to expand) are in *The Dialectic of Myth*, immediately after which Losev's philosophical work was forcibly cut short.

And so the building of Losev's symbolic philosophy remained far from complete. Nobody was more aware of this than Losev himself, and he spoke of this definitely and unambiguously: "I have only approached the great philosophical works in relation to which everything that I have written is only a preface."²³ If we inquire which aspects were especially affected by the unfinished nature of his work, we discover among them some that are quite profound and central. And first of all, looking at matters from this perspective compels us to return once more to *method*. I have already emphasized the special attention that Losev devotes to it. The books of his cycle open as a rule with a preamble on method, followed by the method in action, the dialectical-phenomenological construction of *eidoi* and symbols. But here it often turns out that the investigation of a particular sphere manages to go only a little beyond just another reformulation of method as applied to just another sphere. Such a reformulation gives merely an abstract logical scheme, a skeleton of the object (as Losev himself often puts it) which represents it by means of standardized formulas in which the five categories taken as initial and primary are combined in various ways: oneness (one), rest, movement, identity, and difference.²⁴ What happens at this stage is sheer standard construction out of dialectical blocs; and it is clear that, however and however much "hypostasized

otherness" and "moving rest," "self-identical difference" and "alogical becoming" may vary, they cannot convey the living specificity of the object, although both "figuralness" and "tangibility" are encountered among the standardized details. In reading these books, after the initial *embarras de richesse*, you soon start to suspect that their author has forgotten the sober admonition of the Oriental sage: however many times you say halva, you will not taste sweetness in your mouth! You can include "figuralness" and "fact" and even, if you please, "vividness" or "uniqueness" in a system of categories, but alas the philosophical object will not acquire thereby the materiality of fact and will not become "figural." ... Certainly it cannot be said that Losev claims otherwise; in his work there are more than a few direct declarations to the effect that dialectical construction gives merely an abstract skeleton of the object. However, in practice his position is ambiguous and in his work this very construction is assumed over and over again to be capable of producing a picture of meaning of perfect "sculptural" fullness, of "sculptural-tangible figuralness." It was not by chance that I referred above to the category of fact. *The Dialectic of Artistic Form* asserts literally the following: to add "fact" as a fourth element to the dialectical triad means "to save the dialectic from subjective and fleshless idealism, which operates with abstract concepts that have no body in them."²⁵ But the concept of fact, if it is taken out of speech and inserted into a dialectical construction, will be not less but more abstract and fleshless there than other concepts; it will be simply empty. If it is dialectically elaborated, it will become no less bodily than others; however, the "fleshless idealism" of the dialectic (if such it was) cannot be changed an iota here. And what is achieved here is by no means a change in the whole character of philosophy, but only a patent contradiction to Mullah Nasreddin.²⁶ Meanwhile, a real and not nominal advance toward fact and body, a philosophical comprehension of the special and the characteristic, of the specificity and uniqueness of the object is deferred to the future: as it is easy to see, most of Losev's references to later works do precisely this. Typical examples are the already cited "references to the future" in *The Philosophy of the Name* and *The Dialectic of Artistic Form*.

It goes without saying—and I have not the slightest doubt on this score—that if Losev's philosophy had been allowed to develop normally then it would have achieved any desirable degree of concreteness. But here is the important point to take into account: it is by no means impossible—on the contrary, it is extremely likely—that, in this advance toward the concrete, the method itself would have changed, perhaps even substantially. A certain evolution in method can be detected even in the *Octateuch*. One half of its books—*The Ancient Cosmos and Contemporary Science*, *The Philosophy of the Name*, *The Dialectic of Artistic Form*, and *Music As a Subject of Logic*—were published in 1927 and, therefore, written earlier, in part considerably earlier. And it is precisely in these books that the dialectical-phenomenological method is defended stubbornly and implemented rigidly and dogmatically and irrepressible construction reigns supreme. In the later books, by contrast, this passion for construction that is subordinated

strictly to a single rigid scheme goes into noticeable decline. It is no less noticeable that the descriptive element is enhanced: observation of the object becomes richer and more attentive. A certain complementarity or inverse proportionality comes to light: the more real "corporeality" in a Losev text and the more living flesh the object has, the fewer building blocks from the dialectical "meccano set," the fewer "moving rests" and "alogical becomings" there are. The last books of the cycle are devoted predominantly to classical antiquity; and aiming to reconstitute the structures of Platonic and Neoplatonic thought to their depths and in full detail, the author evidently becomes convinced that this aim cannot be attained solely by following dogmatically the methodology of construction. In *Essays in Ancient Symbolism and Mythology*—a fundamental work which summarizes Losev's philosophical positions and brings into a single whole his basic investigations of Platonism—his methodological principles become openly synthetic and syncretic. Here, to the dialectic and phenomenology he adds, as I mentioned above, transcendentalism of the Neo-Kantian school, and applies all three methods to the analysis of the Platonic dialogues. But it may be noted that a syncretic character and a lack of inner unity are already inherent in the very methodology of dialectical-phenomenological construction as described above, which at first sight looks quite well integrated. Upon closer examination, it is easy to see that the two components of this methodology still cannot be brought into full harmony and that Hegel and Husserl interfere fatally with each other. (This should be no surprise, if we recall that the phenomenological conception was created precisely in reaction against the absolutized dialectic in order to affirm the meaning- *eidos* as in principle indissoluble and nondeducible.) Losev's method, of course, does not implement fully the principles of phenomenology, for it openly rejects a most important part of them, the principle of pure descriptivity, and introduces what from the standpoint of phenomenology is a deliberate naturalism and arbitrary metaphysical speculation. But it does not implement fully the principles of the dialectic either. We saw that the dialectical process takes as an initial given five primary categories; however, from the standpoint of a consistent dialectic each of them requires in its turn dialectical elaboration and this leads unavoidably to the pure logic of Hegel without any admixture of Husserl. What in fact is "movement" or "rest" in Losev? They are introduced by a volitional act: in the canonical dyad of the existent (the one) and the other, "rest" is attributed to the existent (although how would it be worse to connect rest with the nonexistent or nonbeing, which, after all, is called "eternal rest"?); then "movement," naturally, has to be attributed to the other.²⁷ From that point onward the dialectical machine takes over and produces by the well-known procedure "moving rest" and other products; however, rest and movement themselves—and, therefore, all elements of the constructed *eidoi* based on them!—remain in essence undefined and incomprehensible things. And why take as a starting point precisely five undefined things? Is it not clear that one could take seven of them with the same success and with the same measure of justification? Or seventeen? Thus the desired addition of methods ends up with

their subtraction. As in much else, the powerful unifying and integrating impulse in Losev's work reveals itself here: in tackling any problem he wants to bring together all existing approaches and methods, expose the one-sidedness of each of them, and then combine them into a single all-encompassing super-method. Clearly, the syncretic joining of the heterogeneous is a very real danger here.

Similar thoughts arise from another quarter. This pentad of categories impels us to take note of yet another feature of Losev's method, which, though it may seem trivial, illuminates something in the character of his philosophical style. Let us glance at the "arithmetic" of Losev's texts: simply at which figures and numbers turn up in his work with concepts. We shall agree that rarely does the ontology lead philosophers to constructions based upon more than a triad. But in dialectical phenomenology it is quite otherwise: besides "five basic *eidoi*," we see here six *logoi*,²⁸ seven modes of constructing essence,²⁹ eight antinomies of the artistic form, . . . tetrads of principles, . . . fourteen basic principles of the ancient cosmos, and so on and so forth. This is some kind of evident arithmetical intoxication, an irrepressible urge to multiply schemes, lists, and constructions. And it is a well-known characteristic feature of a certain type of thinking and philosophizing. Like the tendency to combine heterogeneous principles, it indicates syncretism and eclecticism; and manifesting itself in ontology and in *Naturphilosophie* it is gnosticism in the broad sense.

Reviewing all the features noted above, we are now able to make some kind of resume of Losev's method. First of all, it has become clear that the two components of this dialectical-phenomenological method are quite unequal in all respects: in the places that they occupy, in the degree of their acceptance, and even in the author's personal attitude toward them. The latter is especially evident: Losev writes vividly and emotionally, and he sings the praises of the dialectic with enthusiasm many times in various books. Nowhere in his work shall we encounter either doubts or objections indicating that anything in the dialectic is unacceptable to him or requires revision. His position is a true pan-dialecticism, not a whit less radical than Hegel's.³⁰ On the other hand, phenomenology is clearly his stepdaughter: rarely does he mention it without reservations and attempts to distance himself from it. At one point, for example, he says: "I was never close to Husserl."³¹ I have already quoted his words from *The Philosophy of the Name*: "I accept . . . phenomenology in its entirety;" but it is well worth adding that Losev transfers to his own philosophy by no means all of phenomenology and not even its main or essential core, but merely a few particulars, only one of which is really important: the conception of the philosophical object as meaning-eiAtt or a picture of meaning.³²

It is not difficult to understand why and what in precisely this element of phenomenology attracted Losev. First of all, he was attracted by its ancient origins, its Platonic roots. In *Essays* he remarks that the conception of *eidōs* in Husserl gave new nourishment and a new fruitful turn to his studies of Platonism and, in particular, to the fundamental investigation of the doctrine of ideas that constitutes the basis of this book. But besides all else the said conception plays another role,

albeit scarcely a desired one, in Losev's system: by interacting with the dialectic, it changes the character of the latter. The point is that one can hardly consider the category of meaning and, in particular, the concept of *meaning-eidos* to be a good candidate for the role of central category of a strictly dialectical doctrine. This is not a Hegelian category. The concept, the idea, all the more so the Absolute Idea that lie at the basis of the Hegelian dialectic represent something unique, and on their basis arises a strictly monistic philosophical construct within which there is not a multiplicity of constructions but one all-encompassing and all-embracing pan-construction. Conversely, the category of meaning is associated with multiplicity and plurality: meaning is multiple by its very nature; every phenomenon has a meaning of its own. Hence, the world of meanings is pluralistic, fragmented. And if we retain the dialectical method and at the same time introduce the conception of meaning-eidos and think of the dialectical generation of categories as the construction of *eidoi*, then the first thing that the dialectic will lose as a result of such a modification is precisely its consistent monism. And all at once that multiplication of constructions and schemes, that arithmetical immoderation of which I have spoken will become possible. So what we see is the following: the little bit of phenomenology incorporated into Losev's method acts there to reduce and fragment the dialectic. In fusing with the eidetic, the dialectic breaks free of the constricting clamps of Hegelian monism and turns into a kind of boundlessness, an ever-expanding systematics, an unrestrained flow of self-multiplying schemes. These features reveal themselves most vividly in *The Dialectic of Artistic Form*.

It must be said that all this reflected also the tendencies and objective difficulties of the philosophy of symbolism as such. To this day there does not exist a well-grounded and consistent purely symbolist ontology, but there do exist, on the other hand, persisting doubts concerning its very possibility, the possibility of building an entire doctrine of being upon the symbolic principle of the indistinguishable identity and perfect mutual capacity, "imaginability" of the ideal and the real. Schelling made no claim to such an ontology; nor did Cassirer, who connected the tasks of his philosophy of symbolic forms with epistemology and mainly with the philosophy of culture. However, Russian thinkers are more radical than the Germans: both Florenskii and Losev assert firmly their symbolist doctrines as, among other things, attempts at ontology.³³ (In Losev's case this is already clear from his pan-dialecticism, which naturally inherits from Hegel the identification of the dialectic with ontology.) In throwing down this philosophical challenge, they were ready, of course, to defend their views before readers-philosophers, but instead, as happens in Russia, only the secret police took an active interest in these views. Neither of them found any real understanding or response, any real discussion, during his lifetime—neither Father Pavel, shot in 1937, nor Losev, although he was granted a long life. Now long transcripts of his philosophical conversations appear in the press, but they leave a strange impression! Unexpected interlocutors—a writer of pornographic prose, a *Komsomol* employee. For all the respect you may have for these worthy citizens you ask, nonetheless, can they understand

the Russian thinker who traversed his long and hard path to the end as a Christian and an ascetic? And you are not surprised to see how often these conversations bring to mind the exchanges between Miklukho-Maklai and the Papuans, and only with difficulty do you discern in them the classic Losevian themes transposed for the tom-tom. The Soviet delirium lasts and does not leave us free.

And I gasp behind them, knocking
 On some frozen wooden chest:
 Readers! Advisers! Doctors!
 On the prickly stairs—if only a word!

4

It is time to pass over to our second main theme, the conception of myth. A discussion of Losev's *The Dialectic of Myth* should not start with theoretical problems, for this book is not simply a fact of philosophical thought, it is an event. The true history of Soviet Russia has yet to be written; but when it is, it will recall as a matter of justice that in 1930, at a time when the victory of the Stalin regime was already complete, spiritual terror had matured and was gaining in strength, and free thought had long since been banished and forbidden, suddenly there appeared a book that not only dealt with important philosophical problems from positions different from the official ones, but fearlessly and caustically exposed the intellectual poverty of the official positions, the absurdity of the enthroned Soviet myth. The response followed quickly and at the highest level. At the Sixteenth Congress of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik) in the summer of 1930, in a report delivered by L.M. Kaganovich and in the speech of dramatist V.M. Kirshon, threats and abuse poured down on the book and its author. Moreover, Kirshon, as a representative of the arts, showed off with an aphorism that became widely known: "for such nuances put him up against the wall" [a] (waxing indignant at someone's comment that Losev's book "expresses the nuances of philosophical thought"). Soon after this Losev was arrested. For more than a year he was held under investigation in the inner prison on Lubyanka, then, after being sentenced to ten years' imprisonment, he was transferred to Butyrskaya Prison, and, finally, sent to a labor camp engaged in building the White Sea-Baltic Canal. Soon thereafter, Losev's organism was no longer able to stand the penal labor of tree-felling and timber-floating, and his health began to suffer from serious disorders: rheumatism, scurvy, dystrophy, and hemorrhage into the optic nerve. The latter proved fateful: within a few years it led to complete loss of eyesight. In camp he had to be assigned to the status of invalid.

In the outside world, meanwhile, he was not forgotten. He continued to be hounded, but there were also interventions to have him freed. Note the grimaces of the Russian years of calamity! At the new stage the main contribution to Losev's baiting was made by Maxim Gorky, who published in *Pravda* an exceptionally vile and exemplarily cannibalistic article in which he regretted sincerely that the

rotten wretch Losev was slow in dying and still infected our Soviet air. And the main contribution to the cause of freeing Losev was made by Gorky's first wife, E.P. Peshkova. Strange as it may seem, the petitions of the Political Red Cross, which she headed, were crowned with success and in the summer of 1933 Losev returned from prison camp to Moscow.

His return was not, however, a return to the past. The past with its free—in spite of everything!—philosophical activity was never to return for him. The development of his own independent philosophy was curtailed forever. Losev remained a specialist on classical antiquity: of the two tasks of his work the main and unifying one was cut off. What is more, when in his later works he had to touch upon fundamental philosophical questions, he accurately transcribed the answers to conform to the prescriptions of official Soviet Marxism. *The Dialectic of Myth*, in the spirit of the epoch, turned out to be *the book of the great break* in the life of its author.

Proceeding to the direct discussion of this special book, I shall note, first of all, one feature of it that is connected directly with the events that were being played out. *The Dialectic of Myth* is no ordinary scholarly monograph. It is endowed with a special dual composition, a dual movement. On the one hand, it has a well-defined task and theme—to construct a conception of myth, precisely a conception and not a whole theory: it is only a matter of revealing the philosophical aspects of myth and forming a philosophical definition of it, not of trying, let us say, to develop a classification of myths or to analyze their structure. Any investigation of how myth lives and functions in consciousness and in society is to be only episodic and illustrative. And the task is accomplished in the most systematic fashion: each section of the book contributes the next point to the sought-after definition, to the composite philosophical formula for myth. However, this model scholarly layout is accompanied by another line or, more accurately, a series of points, a chain of insertions and digressions of quite another kind and content. Taken together, the two lines constitute exactly the composition which Pasternak's hero contemplated: "He dreamt of a book . . . in which he could insert, in the form of hidden explosive charges, the most stunning things he had managed to see and ponder."³⁴ Explosive charges! That is the best description of what Losev's digressions in *The Dialectic of Myth* represent. In them he unburdens his soul, speaking directly about everything that disturbs him as "a philosopher who builds a philosophy not of abstract forms, but of the living phenomena of existence,"³⁵ that is, first of all, about his times and the reality around him. He denounces what he finds alien and absurd and defends what is dear to him, the things on which he takes his stand. And because what he finds most absurd is the dogmas of official atheism and communism, while what is most dear to him is the Orthodox faith and asceticism, the explosive force of these charges, measured by the standards of 1930, was more than enough to destroy the philosopher's life.

At the same time, the presence in a book of philosophy of various nonacademic themes and motifs expressing the author's personal convictions and emotional

experiences is in itself quite traditional for Russian thought. The philosophy of the Silver Age grew up "in the shadow," under the influence of Russian literature, inheriting its existential and confessional character and acquiring from it artistic sensibility and a refined verbal and artistic culture. Florenskii's *The Pillar and Foundation of Truth* and Bulgakov's *The Unfading Light* [Svet nevechernii], not to mention the books of Rozanov or Shestov, are besides all else good literature; and they are also personal documents in which the author's personality itself appears without concealment before the reader. And Losev stands directly in this tradition: he too is an excellent stylist and he too cannot imagine erecting a wall in the Western manner between philosophy and life. But how time has transformed this customary trait! Formerly, the emotional and existential element was expressed usually in a confidential and warm tonality, in the author's image of the reader as a friend and fellow-thinker... But the atmosphere of Losev's books is the complete opposite: what is striking in it is first of all the concentration and pressure of negative emotions. The author seethes and gasps, he is vehement and aggressive, and clearly he pictures the reader not as a friend but as an enemy. All his "explosive charges" are bursts of indignation and mordancy, furious rebukes directed at unnamed people for their stupidity and thoughtlessness ... When you come across this kind of thing, at first of course you ask: are the times really to blame? Perhaps the problem is with the author himself, his emotional instability? However, Losev himself answered this question unambiguously: "Under conditions of normal public opinion ... there could not have been this often irritable and sharp polemical tone that I have permitted myself."³⁶ The root of his outbursts and aggressiveness, it appears, lay in the fact that he saw all around him no sign of "normal public opinion" or of a figure such as the old "friendly reader." All around him were ignorance and hostility. And the author rallied against them like a fighter.

Now that the word "fighter" has been uttered, one understands suddenly that it encapsulates the whole essence of the situation. The rupture with and divergence from his surroundings that one senses in the author's position are in no way less acute than, let us say, in Kafka; but, in contrast to Kafka, the author asserts himself not as an outcast or as a victim, but as a fighter in encirclement. Outside this *strategic* or, which is the same thing, historical-cultural dimension, the phenomenon of Losev cannot be understood. For him his activity was the rearguard action of Russian Christian culture. It had departed, retreated, but by the will of fate he was left behind and he would not lay down his arms. *The rearguard fighter*—that is the author's image in *The Dialectic of Myth*. And that is the image of Losev in general. Up to the great break. The image for the subsequent period then suggests itself: *the captured fighter*. "The myth of Losev" has begun to take shape.

I shall examine the content of the collateral or "explosive" line in *The Dialectic of Myth* later. My first duty is to consider the main or "scholarly" line. (However, as will become clear, the two lines are sufficiently interconnected and the "explosive charges" are by no means alien insertions that bear no relation to the basic theme.) So how is myth analyzed here? In light of the first sections of this article,

one would expect it to be analyzed according to the method of dialectical-phenomenological construction. However, that is not the case. Losev had already examined myth a number of times within the framework of this method (in *The Philosophy of the Name*, *The Dialectic of Artistic Form* and, especially, in *Essays in Ancient Symbolism and Mythology*), and such examination did not require a whole book. Here myth is one of the categories of the general eidetic, signifying a certain moment or stage in the dialectical construction of *eidōs*, on the path of its (self-)creation and (self-)embodiment. The special characteristic of this stage lies in the fact that it is the last or closing stage: the limit to the embodiment of *eidōs*. "Myth is the necessary completion of the dialectic."³⁷ Starting out from this point, it is not hard to understand the standardized dialectical-phenomenological formulas for myth. In these formulas there usually occurs yet another of Losev's categories—intelligence or (self-)consciousness. It is defined thus: "consciousness or intelligence is the correlation of meaning with itself,"³⁸ and is traced back by Losev in the first instance to Fichte.³⁹ Its connection with myth is derived in Losev from the consideration that the completion and limit of embodiment or expression is embodiment in that which is living and invested with consciousness (intelligence). After this explanation I shall cite one or two typical formulas: "Myth . . . is *eidōs* given as intelligence"⁴⁰ or, conversely, "Myth is . . . intelligence as *eidōs*"⁴¹ or, in somewhat more detailed fashion, "Myth is *eidōs*, intelligentially correlated with itself and realized in the form of a thing. In other words, it is *materially given eidetic intelligence, personalistic and living being or simply the living.*"⁴²

And so the specificity of myth lies in the fact that it is the ultimate embodiment and expression, that it is "realized in the form of a thing" and thereby "is directly sensed reality."⁴³ It "is no longer *eidōs* but being as well."⁴⁴ However, all the formulas produced by dialectical-phenomenological construction are in principle "noumenal" formulas that draw a picture of the meaning of one or another essence, in the given case, of the essence of myth; they exist within the framework of the eidetic and what is revealed in them is precisely the eidetic of myth and nothing else. But if myth is not only *eidōs* but also being or, to be more precise, sensuous and empirical reality (Losev's formula is not altogether exact: *eidōs* should not be counterposed to being), then to investigate myth is not only and even not so much to describe the *eidōs* of myth in the context of other *eidōi*, but also to describe myth itself as a "thing" among other things. The eidetic can no longer do this. None of the "noumenal" formulas enable us to cognize and identify myth in the reality of the here-and-now, to distinguish and outline the domain of myth among other phenomena and domains of reality. These formulas do not equip us with the means of distinguishing what is myth from what is not myth in the surroundings. Even when they say that "myth is the living" or "myth is personality," all this is about *eidōi*, at the level of *eidōi*, while how the myth that is *here* is connected with the personality that is here, with the human being (and indeed by personality does Losev mean human being? Different interpretations are possible), remains, alas, unknown.

The conclusion is quite simple: the eidetic of myth must necessarily be supplemented by the concretic of myth, by its examination in empirical reality. Let me clarify: I am not speaking of "concretics" in the narrow sense of an empirical approach to myth, a collection of materials, an analysis of the particular features of concrete myths, and so on. Not at all. But, while remaining (as I said above) at the level of the discussion of the fundamental features of myth and the construction of its definition, we discover that besides eidetic definitions, which Losev constructed readily and in abundance in his preceding books, there is also need for a definition of another kind, constructed directly in terms of the here-and-now. To obtain such a definition is the task of *The Dialectic of Myth*. But before I discuss the solution to this problem I must make yet another general remark concerning the connection between myth and symbol. (This connection is touched upon in part in the book itself (§5), but in accordance with its concrete aims, not at all at the level of theoretical analysis.)

It is not hard to see that here there has arisen if not a contradiction then at least a need for clarification. Let us recall what I said concerning symbol: according to Losev, it is "*eidos* reproduced in the other," "given as its own hypostasized otherness" and, thereby, as sensuous (together with mental) content, inasmuch as the otherness of the intelligible reality of *eidos* is the sensuous. The synthesis of *eidos* and its other-being in the symbol concludes the dialectical process. And judging by everything that has been said, the concepts of symbol and myth turn out to be as it were in competition with one another: both lay claim to being the limit of the embodiment and realization of *eidos* and "the necessary completion of the dialectic." Losev solves the problem in the following way: the indicated role is assigned unreservedly to myth, while symbol shares it in some restricted sense insofar as it too is mythical or coincides with myth. This correlation between symbol and myth is not analyzed in an especially detailed way, but its general character is sketched sufficiently clearly. Although symbol too is a perfect two-in-oneness of *eidos* and its other-being and in this sense the ultimate *embodiment* (investment in the other), it is not, generally speaking, the ultimate *expression*: for the latter requires not simply embodiment but embodiment in the living and the personalistic, and in Losev's terminology this means the possession of intelligence. A symbol may possess or not possess it, but myth, according to its definitions, always possesses it. "A symbol that has become intelligence . . . turns essence into a living being or myth."⁴⁵ Thus myth clearly possesses not only fullness of embodiment but also fullness of expression and is, therefore, able to be "stronger" and more intense in its expressiveness than symbol; it is always personalistic, while symbol may be merely statuary. Hence, Losev's solution is obviously close to Viacheslav Ivanov's well-known conception, according to which myth is, to put it loosely, a symbol that has come to life or, to put it more precisely, a symbol "that has acquired a verbal predicate," that has been made a *dramatis persona* or protagonist of some action, drama, or mystery. In the end, the two concepts are connected in the closest manner, and myth stands out as a symbol of some higher degree of expressive-

ness, which is attained in the intelligent symbol, that is, in personality. "The identity of symbol and myth . . . is personality."⁴⁶ By virtue of this connection, our "equation" dialectic + phenomenology = symbolism is equivalent to the relationship dialectic + phenomenology = mythology, and the promotion of myth to the foreground does not compel me to renounce my characterization of Losev's philosophy as symbolism.

5

Naturally, the construction of a "concrete" definition of myth is very different in terms of its methodology from the construction of *eidoi* that is familiar to us. It is required to characterize myth and distinguish it from other kinds of phenomena and human activity of the here-and-now; and this can be approached by the standard procedure (applied also by Schelling, in particular) of successive delimitations of myth from similar phenomena. And that is precisely how the presentation is developed; moreover, the chosen methodology naturally determines the composition of the book as well: the author devotes a special section to each of the delimitations of myth. Losev selects the series of similar phenomena in counterposition to which myth acquires its definiteness as follows:

- fiction (§ 1),
- ideal being (§ 2),
- science (§ 3),
- metaphysics (§ 4),
- scheme, allegory (§ 5),
- poetry (§ 6),
- dogma (§ 9),
- historical event (§ 10).

The methodology of "definition through negation" goes back to the classic medieval tradition of apophatic (negative) theology: God is grasped through ultimate negation, which establishes that He is none of the things of present being. In Christian thought, a necessary supplement to the apophatic tradition is the approach of cataphatic (positive) theology: God is grasped through ultimate affirmation, which attributes to Him in the utmost degree the perfections of things of present being. Losev's philosophical thought bears the invisible but firm imprint of the doctrine and the style of thought of the Orthodox Church; and in *The Dialectic of Myth* the "apophatic" and "cataphatic" methodologies are present side by side. Myth is characterized not only by delimitations but also by a series of identifications: myth is

- symbol (§5),
- personality (§ 7),
- miracle (§ 11).

And finally the author distinguishes one important domain that touches closely on myth but can be placed neither in the negative nor in the positive series, since it

is both closely related to and essentially different from myth: religion (§ 8).

Such is the book's panorama. It is hardly expedient for us to follow and examine the course of deliberations in each section. The reader himself will do this without difficulty, for everything here is simple: there is almost none of the spark-discharging apparatus of the dialectical eidetic. But it must be noted that in the given case the apophatic approach by no means yields solely negative conclusions: in analyzing the delimitations of myth, for each delimited phenomenon as the negative a certain positive comes to light, and the conclusions obtained typically have the form "myth is not this but that." The conclusions to the delimitations examined in the first six sections are recapitulated concisely in the seventh section, and I shall now cite them. (As I have condensed them a little further, I have omitted the quotation marks.)

1. Myth is not fiction but a logically necessary category of consciousness and being.

2. Myth is not ideal being but vitally sensed and created material reality.

3. Myth is not a scientific construction but living subject-object intercommunication.

4. Myth is not metaphysics but sensuous reality, albeit detached from the usual course and laws of phenomena.

5. Myth is not scheme nor allegory, but symbol (in the general case, moreover, a complex multilayered symbol that may include other symbols of various kinds as well as schematic and allegorical elements).

6. Myth is not poetry but the elevation of isolated and abstractly singled out things into the intuitive-instinctual sphere, which interrelates with man in a primitive-biological fashion and in which they unite into an organic whole.

These theses, like Losev's analysis of them, in many respects can be traced back to Schelling's introductory lectures on the philosophy of mythology. It is easy to agree that this is only the beginning of the road, and that so far not too much has been revealed about myth. Some assertions make quite obvious or almost obvious points (the difference between myth and pure invention, science, and metaphysics). Others have already been noted when I discussed the eidetic of myth (myth is symbol and sensuous reality). Nonetheless, at least one important new aspect, one deeper feature of myth has appeared here: Losev expresses it by the term "detachment." Myth is sensuous reality, but one that has been removed somehow from the control of natural laws, is detached from them, and in this sense is "strange and unexpected." The essence and character of this detachment are in part clarified in thesis 6. Poetry and the poetic, after all, are also detached from empirical reality, but this detachment, according to Losev, is of another, even opposite, kind. Poetry does not presuppose different properties of empirical things or different laws controlling them, but it is detached from empirical reality itself, and creates its own conventional reality of art. On the other hand, myth preserves the same kind of reality within its sphere, but affirms for it different laws and connections, a different meaning. "In myth reality remains *the same as in ordinary*

life, only its meaning and idea change" (448).⁴⁷ This is precisely what the rather complicated formulation of thesis 6 expresses: the reality of myth is a certain rearrangement or reconstruction of empirical reality, carried out in accordance with the principles of prereflective, primitive-intuitive consciousness.

At the next stage, the book proceeds to grasp myth by the "cataphatic" approach. The author puts forward and analyzes a very important positive characteristic of myth: "Myth is a personalistic form" (479). The connection with personality has already been noted briefly, in the eidetic of myth. But if this connection is to yield substantive information about myth, it is necessary, first of all, to establish a certain interpretation of personality. Without striving here for an exhaustive treatment, Losev merely marks out two or three basic propositions in the conception of personality. The first of them at once indicates to us on what the close connection between personality and myth is based: like myth, "personality presupposes *self-consciousness*, intelligence" (459). In addition—and this has also been noted already as a feature of myth—personality "is always a material realization of intelligence" (460). This material aspect of intelligence is its *corporeality*: personality is unthinkable without body; moreover, the latter is reinforced in Losev as an expressive principle, as "a form of the actual manifestation of spirit," not "a dull material mass." Furthermore, as soon as personality exists in time, it is characterized by temporality, and time, once it has become an arena for the existence of personality, is history. "Personality . . . exists in history. It lives, struggles, is generated, flourishes, and dies" (*ibid.*). This is its *historicity*. Being "a personalistic form," myth also acquires historicity. "Myth . . . is fluid, moving; it deals with *events*, which are generated, develop, and die" (492). "Myth is history" (*ibid.*)—although, of course, it cannot be asserted "that myth is always solely history or historical narrative" (493). As Losev shows, the historicity of myth merely means "that the mythical object is *in principle* historical, is assessed from the point of view of history, or is *potentially* historical" (*ibid.*). Then it must be explained exactly what kind of "personalistic form" myth is. Alongside personality, Losev introduces the special category of face. Face is the expression of personality, its "image, picture, or manifestation of meaning, not its substance" (484). Here is the necessary explanation: "myth is not personality itself but its face" (*ibid.*). And finally one more clarification is required—of the reverse connection: let myth be personalistic; but does that mean that any personality and personality as such are mythical? The answer is affirmative, but accompanied by an essential general remark: "it must be borne in mind that any thing is mythical by virtue not of its pure material quality but of its belonging to the mythical sphere, its mythical formation and comprehension. Therefore, personality is myth not because it is personality, but because it is *comprehended and formed* from the viewpoint of mythical consciousness" (461).

By establishing the connection between myth and personality, Losev opens the way to a yet deeper understanding of myth. Personality has a special capability: to create an environment for itself, to color its surroundings with itself in a certain

way and endow them with qualities, making things "living things not of physical but of *social* and *historical* being" (464). Things that enter the field of its activity acquire its imprint—personhood and, consequently, they acquire mythhood as well. Thus we arrive at the conclusion that the whole domain of man's empirical activity may properly speaking be assigned to the sphere of myth. Losev declares decisively: "The objects of living human experience *are necessarily myths*. All things in our everyday experience are mythical" (ibid.).

The author agrees that such an interpretation of myth is a very broad one and points out that what he calls myth is something different "from what is usually called myth" (ibid.). A certain ambiguity of the author's guiding intuitions that could be noticed sometime before comes to the surface here. These intuitions clearly contain the seeds of two different conceptions of myth: the "narrow" one, corresponding to "what is usually called myth" (to put it briefly, this is myth as an archaic narrative that expresses a prelogical form of consciousness) and the "broad" one, according to which myth is an all-pervasive element that exists everywhere in man and around man, a mode of seeing and interpreting oneself and the world that is innate to man and society (albeit not the only such mode at their disposal). The author is more inclined to the broad conception. It is precisely with the latter that his original personal view of the nature of myth is connected. The digressions, the "explosive charges" that were discussed above serve very often to develop and confirm that view. Many of them are practical examples and illustrations on the theme of "the myth around us." Here the author uncovers the mythology of everyday life (digressions about a certain philosopher's necktie, the author's gait, medical treatment, dying . . .), of political doctrine (philippics against the proletarian myth), of the doctrines of positivism and materialism, and of much else besides. Unexpectedly and ingeniously selected and written in a fresh energetic style, these examples are often small sketches in prose that the reader, one can vouch, will not forget. Both the artistic and the entertaining side of the book gain enormously from this whole theme. On the theoretical side, however, there remain quite a few questions concerning the justification of the broad interpretation of myth, its relationship to the usual narrow interpretation and to concrete mythological materials, and other matters. I shall turn to these questions below, when I have finished the outline of the conception constructed in the book.

There are now only a few points about this conception that I have not considered: myth and religion (in particular, myth and dogma), myth and history, and myth and miracle. In general outline, Losev's solution to the problem of the relationship between myth and religion is very simple: myth is the broader category. "Religion cannot exist without myth, . . . it cannot but blossom into myth" (488-89), but myth is quite possible even outside religion, without reference to it. This is a sufficiently widely accepted solution (only in contemporary Protestantism do they dream of demythologized religion) that is not connected specifically with the broad interpretation of myth: of course, it is especially obvious within the framework of the latter, but even in the narrow interpretation it remains valid in view of

the indisputable existence of nonsacral myths. While the theme of "myth and religion" is not subjected to deeper theoretical analysis, it does provide the basis for a new series of digressions that actively defend the mythological element in religion. The tendency to expand the sphere of myth takes a new form here: the author includes in the mythology of Orthodoxy simply all of Orthodox everyday life and custom—not only, say, the ringing of bells, but also a strictly defined kind of lighting in churches, fuel in the icon lamps, women's clothing. . . . And with the slightest change in such customs he refuses to recognize the religious authenticity and full value of prayer or divine service.

What can be said about this? The role of ritual is a classic theme and mountains of arguments have long weighed down both sides of the scales—both in favor of the essential character of ritual and in favor of its inessential character. Not wishing to repeat them, I shall limit myself to two points. First, the author's position must be clarified: having chosen a sharply polemical style he does not intend to do this himself. Losev defends the wholeness of myth as a living unity and the impossibility of changing its appearance arbitrarily. However, his conception does not presuppose the uniqueness of religious myth; according to the methodological position that he usually chooses in the digressions—inside a specific mythical consciousness—such a question simply cannot be posed: different myths are different and noncommunicating worlds. Therefore, upon examination, what results from the slightest deviation from ritual is not necessarily the loss of communion with God, but only the loss of a specific myth and a move from it into some other myth. Such a position is a coherent one and there is no reason to object to it. However, and this is my second point, Losev proceeds to declare something more: that the Orthodox myth in its authenticity and purity is represented exclusively by the Muscovite kingdom of the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries (agreeing on this, as on much else, with Florenskii). Therefore, adherence to Orthodoxy is impossible without preserving the ritual of that time down to the last iota. Life itself, I think, has given its answer to this extremism. At the time when all this was being written, impoverished Russian emigres in Europe were celebrating the Orthodox liturgy in barns and garages; to say nothing as to where and how the persecuted Orthodox people in Russia conducted their prayers and liturgy! Is it fair to declare those prayers and services non-Orthodox? Undoubtedly, later on Losev learned and thought a great deal about this. He could hardly have retained his previous view unchanged...

The relationship between myth and dogma, a particular aspect of the relationship between myth and religion, is also described in a pretty traditional manner. First of all, myth is a product of prereflective consciousness, while dogma belongs to reflective consciousness. Therefore, they are successive stages of the development and crystallization of religious experience: "The first Christians . . . lived not by dogmas but by myths. . . . Dogma . . . is the principle of the rational comprehension of myth" (495). What he is discussing here is obviously myths that lie in the sphere of religion. The other essential difference

is the fact that myth, as we recall, is historical, while dogma—the affirmation of particular truths as absolute and eternal—is outside history.

However, the conception of the historicity of myth of which I spoke above undergoes significant development in the concluding part of the book. This historicity does not mean that myth belongs to empirical history and is an immediate event or chain of events. In its final form, Losev's interpretation of the historicity of myth is determined by his original interpretation of history. For the category of history he establishes three different mutually complementary conceptions which correspond to "three layers of the historical process." The first "natural-material" layer comprises only events and facts. For the typical historian who takes the positions of empiricism or positivism, history consists of this and nothing else. For Losev, by contrast, this is only raw material that does not yet have the right to be called history. Here is one permanent feature not only of his philosophy but of his whole attitude to life: reality that has not been illuminated and reworked by reason—moreover, from within, by its own reason! in other words, reality that has not been absorbed into intelligence—is for him not yet reality. He repeated this central postulate of his thought in the last piece he wrote in his life, "A Word About Cyril and Methodius" [Slovo o Kirille i Mefodii]: "I have learned too often that all so-called facts are always random and unreliable," while true reality is that "real unity without which the facts themselves cannot be understood."⁴⁸ It is obvious that this postulate coincides very closely with the positions of symbolism that precisely affirms the existence of "real unities," of inner meanings behind empirical phenomena. However, in part it goes beyond the bounds of symbolism, as we shall now see.

The second layer of the historical process, according to Losev, comprises generalizations of facts—general structures of the historical, conceptions and schemes of history. In this layer, "history is . . . one or another mode of consciousness" (530). But here it is examined and given meaning from without as it were. The third and last layer is history as conscious of itself. In this layer, "history is self-consciousness," "the history of self-knowing facts." Here it appears as intelligence, as a personalistic form, and as its own face; and here, correspondingly, it expresses itself. The way in which history expresses itself is speech, the word. Such a conception of history is really no longer orthodox symbolism, for self-consciousness, intelligence, and personality are not among the accepted symbolist categories. And in including them in his philosophy Losev is fully aware that thereby he shifts it away from symbolism toward personalism (or if you will—it is not names that matter but the essence—toward the rethinking of symbolism as personalism). Of this important tendency in his thought I shall say more below. On the other hand, we clearly approach here another remarkable conclusion: in this layer of its meaning and its being, history is "history" in the literary meaning of the word—a verbal narrative, a story. Returning now to myth, we note without delay that what it shares with history is precisely the third layer of the latter. Here history becomes the face of personality, that is, myth. Myth presents itself not only as history, but also as

"history," as story. To sum up, *"myth is not an historical event as such, but is always word... myth is a personalistic history given in words"* (535).

We have come noticeably closer to the traditional canonical understanding of myth, which regards myth precisely as a kind of "history." At the next and final stage of his analysis, Losev completely includes this understanding into his own. At this stage myth is compared with miracle. The definitions of myth as personality, as history, and as "history" all overlooked the detachment of myth that was noted right at the beginning of the analysis. But this is a very important feature, and at this last stage it will finally occupy its rightful place—at the very core of the conception. It is clear that miracle is an adequate concept for conveying the property of detachment. At the same time, in origin it is not at all a philosophical concept but only a word from everyday speech; it still needs to be adapted for philosophical use, to be made a concept. And this operation is carried out in exemplary fashion (despite—or thanks to!—the fact that here the formation of the concept does not at all follow the universal rules of the dialectical-phenomenological method and its result is not expressed in a standardized formula of the eidetic). The author analyzes the well-known points of view and rejects them all: none of them looks at miracle from the perspective he needs, from the positions of mythical consciousness, in its own perception. Accordingly, he forms a new conception, distinguishing the meaningful elements or key points in the initial mass of raw ideas about miracle and gradually revealing the structure of meaning behind these ideas. The following three are key elements: two different planes of reality must be present and contiguous, and even coinciding in the structure of miracle; both these planes must be personalistic and may belong to the existence of one and the same personality; and one of these planes is the empirical existence of a personality, the other its "ideal task or condition" that gives it its proto-image or archetype, its "primordial and original bright predestination" (561). Hence one of the basic formulas is now clear: "The coincidence... of the empirical history of personality with its ideal task is miracle" (555).

I shall not repeat the author's deliberations. His clear presentation, following the analysis itself, provides both a general picture of the philosophical structure of miracle and its ancillary but profound special characteristics (such as the moment of portent or manifestation and the moment of wonder: "The word *miracle* in all languages points precisely to this moment of *wonder at what has appeared and occurred*" (551)), and a convincing example of healing in the sanctuary of Asclepius. Special emphasis is placed on the main point: a miracle is not some kind of extraordinary event but "a definite method of *interpreting* historical events" (552). This whole section on miracle belongs to Losev's best philosophical writing. You can feel that for the author this is a personal theme, one close to his heart, and that the experience is all his own, not borrowed from others. Here dialectical-phenomenological construction is thrown away like an outgrown school uniform; and we get an inkling of what Losev's true religious philosophy might have become.

If only the flowers had escaped the frost. Let us return to myth. The concept of miracle has appeared and with it all is now ready for the concluding summation. Through the category of detachment myth is identified, as it should be, with miracle. "*Myth is miracle*" (537) and this is not simply its next feature but "the final formula that encompasses synthetically all the antinomies and antitheses that have been examined" (ibid.). In graphic confirmation of this, Losev in a special section (§12) surveys anew the delimitations and identifications of the preceding sections, demonstrating that all of them are really deducible from the final formula and, viewed in its light, acquire greater detail and become more coherent. Here again we shall not follow his argument, but only turn our attention to the (brief, alas) appearance of the concepts of magic and name, which are very important for myth. ("*Myth is an unfolded magical name*" [579].) And in addition we shall examine how the problem of the relationship between the "broad" and the "narrow" interpretation of myth, which has long been of concern to us, is solved in light of the final formula.

It is easy to see that on this problem too we have now a new and more universal position that encompasses synthetically our previous positions. From the characterization of miracle as a "method of interpretation" given above, it is already clear that "the concept of miracle is a relative concept" (563) and, in particular, that "everything in the world can be interpreted as a most genuine miracle" (566). (Although, let me add, such a vision is attained with difficulty, and according to Losev it is inherent not in the primitive but in the purified and enlightened consciousness.) In other words, a broad—an infinitely broad!—interpretation of miracle is possible, but alongside it various narrower interpretations are also possible. All of this is transferred to myth and our problem is solved without contradiction. Expressing his "final formula" more articulately, Losev arrives at the following definition: "*Myth is a miraculous personalistic history given in words*" (578). Obviously, this definition coincides completely with the traditional narrow interpretation of myth, and Losev himself calls it "banal and generally recognized." But, of course, it is such merely on the surface, while within it lies the whole essence of Losev's original conception of myth, in particular, the broad conception according to which any person, any thing within the range of his experience, and the whole world are myths. For all that, the apparent ease with which the problem is solved must not conceal from us another point. The different interpretations of myth are not only various theoretical or speculative alternatives. Not at all, for to each of them corresponds a special mode of vision and, what is more, a mode of life, and to adopt it means to place oneself in a special world, whole and self-enclosed, with a different type of personality and history. Of course, such worlds exclude one another. And fully in the spirit of Losev's dialectical thinking, we conclude that the various interpretations of myth are both compatible and incompatible with one another. We have before us a certain kind of theory of multiple worlds; one for each myth.

6

What else is there to discuss? First, the sideline of the book. The authorial digressions that constitute it are by no means extraneous to the main theme; however, they are not theoretical, but rather illustrative of various aspects of myth and mythical consciousness. A whole series of subjects are examined here. And inasmuch as this whole line consists entirely of challenge and polemic, the overwhelming majority of these subjects are divided by the author into those to be defended and those to be attacked, into white and black. Few are neutral. The main part of the chain of digressions breaks down into two chains, one of which portrays and glorifies a bright myth, while the other portrays and exposes a dark myth. Both of these myths are quite concrete and historical: the bright myth is Orthodoxy and, in particular, Orthodox asceticism; the dark myth is the modern European worldview that has been dominant since the Renaissance and includes, according to Losev, the following main elements: the Newtonian picture of the physical world, atheism, and materialism. There is no sense in recounting the most vivid pages of the book with their furious anathema against "Renaissance's degenerate nihilism" and their sweet hosanna to asceticism, virginity, and fasting. However, some small clarifications will be of use. First, whence exactly comes Losev's choice of the negative, dark myth? This is not only a matter of religious protest; it is the position of a philosopher. The rationalism of the Enlightenment is antisymbolism, the antipode of mythical and symbolic consciousness, which it categorically declares to be dark, backward, and obscurantist. Here the symbolist Losev is simply paying back in kind. And he is by no means alone, either in Russian or in European thought, in his hostility to the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Quite the contrary. The rejection of the Enlightenment (rationalism, the theory of progress, bourgeois Philistinism . . .) and the defense of the Middle Ages were the dominant mood and main trend not only in philosophy but in the whole culture of Europe after the World War II, and had been noticeable even before it. In particular, it is difficult to find anyone among the Russian philosophers, starting not only with Leont'ev and Rozanov but even with Herzen, who would not have expressed similar ideas. So Losev stands here in the mainstream of European culture, while official dialectical materialism, to the contrary, went against it and was, therefore, a reactionary doctrine in the direct sense of the word. Berdiaev concisely described this clash between victorious Soviet ideology and creative European thought: "Ideas that were defeated in creative thought, at the same time were winning—and won—in the mass movement."⁴⁹

Only here we must be a little more precise. Losev does not equate the Marxist worldview that had acquired supremacy in Russia with the "degenerate" modern European myth. Of course, he treats it too as mythical and assesses it as a myth in accordance with his fundamental postulate that a specific myth or mythical layer lies at the basis of each and every worldview, each picture of the world. But this communist (proletarian, class) myth must differ from the dark myth of the modern

age if only because the latter is connected firmly with the principles and values of bourgeois society. And the fact that this proletarian myth appropriates virtually all the slogans of the dark myth the author attributes to its inconsistency. In this still young myth he sees a kind of adolescent immaturity and pristine innocence—and sometimes explains it carefully to itself, demonstrating the ultra-mythological character of class and revolutionary phraseology or, for instance, pointing out that the elimination of exploitation requires the elimination of art and that the adoption of atheism directly undermines proletarian ideology because it means agreement with the bourgeoisie on a very important point of worldview... So one can certainly understand Comrades Kaganovich and Kirshon!

Further. In rejecting the worldview of the modern age, the author with a poisonous jeer also throws out fundamental scientific facts established by it such as the rotation of the Earth and the wave nature of light. It must be understood that in doing this he is not simply mocking the reader (his enemy, let us recall!), but also developing quite logically the methodological position chosen in the book. I have already talked about it. According to this position, declared clearly even in the preface, the author locates himself within mythical consciousness, at its point of view. And the authorial I, which in philosophy is always a specific methodological I, in the given case is a "mythical I." (In accordance with the book's aim, it is the main I in it but not the only one. Losev distinguishes four basic methodological positions or levels of comprehension: myth, dogma, dogmatic theology, and religious philosophy; and when he leaves the first of these his presentation is quite objective and analytical.) However, myth is concrete, and the actual mythical I is not mythical in general, but always corresponds to some specific myth. The origin of the mythical I that condemns the modern European lack of spirituality in the pages of *The Dialectic of Myth* is beyond a shadow of doubt. It is the bright myth that, using the author's voice, speaks of the dark myth. This is Aleksei Losev's rearguard action, his lonely heroic counterattack at a time when all around him the bright myth was persecuted furiously by the dark myth. And his own myth acquires definiteness as it is recognized as part of the life of the bright myth of Orthodoxy.

What else? Only one thing, perhaps: let me say, as they do in the epilogue of a novel, a few words concerning the further fate of our heroes. Since the time of *The Dialectic of Myth* mythological studies have had a stormy history. Their empirical base has widened immeasurably, taking in whole tracts of new factual material pertaining to both ancient and especially contemporary myth-bearing ethnic groups. Fundamentally new methods for analyzing this material have been developed and very close ties have been established with many disciplines that previously either were unconnected with myth or did not exist at all such as linguistics, ethnology, semiotics, information theory, and sociobiology. But it must be said at once: *The Dialectic of Myth* has very little in common with all this development. Let me recall and emphasize: this book chose for itself one very specific aspect of the mythological problematic: the philosophical analysis of the concept of myth. Char-

acterizing myth by means of such categories as miracle, personality, and history and defining its position within the sphere of religious consciousness, this analysis is not, of course, an abstract metaphysical construction. Nevertheless, it is still too general to make serious contact with today's theory of myth: for example, it does not even raise questions such as what is the dividing line between myth and epic, myth and fable, and myth and popular belief, questions that are the starting points of contemporary theory.

There is also another circumstance that is even more important. In recent decades, the main tool in the theoretical investigation of myth has been the structural method, behind which stands structuralism as a general view and approach, as a philosophical tendency. And there can be not the slightest doubt that this tendency is deeply alien to the author of *The Dialectic of Myth*. It belongs firmly to the modern European type of worldview and in many respects is no less extreme and "nihilistic" a form of Losev's "dark myth" than neopositivism. Therefore, Losev's well-known assessments of the latter probably express in no small measure his attitude to structuralism as well: "the annulment of all traditional philosophical problems ... a juggling with formulas that are hostile to any ontology ... philosophical suicide."⁵⁰ Losev's own approach differs fundamentally from that of structuralism. In its origin and general features, his approach is a continuation of the good old Schellingian line that traced the conception of myth, as it did all philosophical conceptions, back to ontology and erected ontology on the foundations of classical Greco-German idealism. After Losev and Cassirer this line in essence dried up, leaving behind only indirect echoes in symbolist, primarily Jungian, conceptions of myth. However, this hardly proves that the whole approach has exhausted itself completely and has no prospects of at least a partial revival. At the present time, structuralism is already losing its dominant position and undergoing critical reassessment; and quite possibly that which is forming in its place will reflect the need for a spiritual deepening of theoretical thinking, for "real unities." Hence it is also possible that it will adopt at least some elements of the ontological understanding of myth.

There is, however, one theme in *The Dialectic of Myth* that turned out to be very much in tune with contemporary ideas and anticipated them. I have already spoken of it too: it is, of course, the theme of "myths around us," myths in everyday life and in mass consciousness. In Losev the theme is developed in an extensive series of digressions of the most varied content which reveal the mythology (mythological character) of dress (400; 489), behavioral stereotypes (gestures, gait, manners ... see, for example, 465-66), gender (462-63), marriage and virginity (463-64; 478-79), the details of religious ritual (440; 452-53; 489), ideological clichés (488), perceptions of color and sound (432-37; 456), and much else besides. Practically all aspects and spheres of human existence are encompassed here. Today similar themes enjoy wide popularity; for a long time now the myths of mass consciousness have been a fashionable theme for this consciousness itself. As regards efforts at theoretical understanding, they have been undertaken mainly

within the framework of semiotics, which has likewise been around for a long time. And it is not stretching the point to say that Losev's digressions have much in common with this tendency. In essence, by "mythology" he understands here precisely semiotics, and the "mythological character" of the phenomena under examination is their semiotic load or significance. The inclination and ability of the author of *The Dialectic of Myth* to discover everywhere "at least weak dispositions toward a mythological attitude to things" (400) clearly represent the seed and basis of a semiotic approach to reality. From this point of view, the series of digressions about "the myths around us" could be compared with the famous series of sketches in Roland Barthes's *Mythologies* (1957). This is an early stage of semiotics: here, as in *The Dialectic of Myth*, there are as yet no special semiotic concepts, elements of reality cognized as signs are not classified and are not grouped into semiotic systems, and the main accent remains on the discovery of their semiotic nature that Barthes, like Losev, still calls their "mythological nature." There is also a kinship between the two authors' themes: Barthes, for example, explores the anatomy of the bourgeois myth, Losev that of the proletarian myth, and both authors expose the "class myth" in the same spirit of skeptical debunking and unmasking. Barthes's analysis is more thorough and many-sided, but after all it was carried out a quarter of a century later. And another small difference: it was not carried out under the axe of the secret police...

But Losev's closeness to semiotics should not be exaggerated. We should keep in mind what I said before about his attitude to structuralism. In his later works on linguistics he mentioned the semiotic approach a number of times and consistently maintained a certain distance from it, drawing a dividing line between it and his own positions." A rather similar relationship can be found between Losev's "mythology of everyday life" and another widely recognized approach, the one developed by Jung and his school. Here again there are many features in common. The Jungians also assert the omnipresence of symbol and myth, and perhaps could even accept, albeit with reservations, Losev's fundamental proposition that myth is not the property of some early stage or primitive level of consciousness, but constitutes an invariable formative layer of any worldview in any epoch. However, these resemblances conceal a radical difference in philosophical and, to put it more broadly, spiritual foundations. Jung's approach is psychological, while Losev's is consistently ontological. Although some of the examples of mythologisms of everyday life, which abound in the works of Jungians and *The Dialectic of Myth*, are similar to one another (in discussing, say, mythologisms in ideology and politics), their interpretations have nothing in common. For Losev the mythical nature of human experience is not a product of the human psyche, but is an inner, immanent nature that goes back to the mythical nature of the very proto-elements of this experience, to sensations of colors and sounds. He asserts the mythical nature of man's situation itself.

We shall be able to understand better the meaning of Losev's position and, at the same time, its profound originality, if we try to grasp the inner tendencies of

The Dialectic of Myth and discern the potential end-result to which further evolution of the views developed there might have led. There is not much material in the book for such conjectures, but there is some. In the concluding section, the author presents a draft of a philosophical doctrine that he calls "the absolute mythology." At first glance, the draft is very easily taken for the next manifestation of a feature that I have already criticized: Losev's urge to create a supermethod and panphilosophy by means of the "dialectical synthesis" of various principles and doctrines. In part this is the case, but we must examine more carefully the type to which the proposed doctrine is to belong. We discover something very interesting. First of all, in accordance with the method and problematic of the book, the absolute mythology is conceived of as a dialectical doctrine concerning myth, an experiment in dialectical mythology. But at the same time, in all its foundations, ideas, and themes, this must be a system of religious philosophy: among its central themes, as indicated by the author, are the dialectical deduction of the existence of God, faith and prophecy, heaven and hell... What is more, the absolute mythology is connected not only with general themes and postulates of religious thought, but also directly with Christian dogma: it rejects pantheism, speaks of divine incarnation and the immortality of the soul, and declares the necessity of the church. ("The absolute mythology ... is always a religion in the sense of a church" [590].) But there is more. Among the propositions of the absolute mythology we see some that are connected specifically with Orthodoxy. These are "the dialectical necessity of the icon" (597) and, what is very important, the profound core of all Orthodox spirituality, namely, Orthodox energeticism, the conception of man's destination as "deification by the energy of grace" (ibid.) or union with the divine energies, which is affirmed in Hesychasm and in Palamism. And so the doctrine contemplated in the finale of *The Dialectic of Myth* is a church and Orthodox philosophy that makes the comprehension of the truths of faith its central task.

It is also very instructive to see what kind of philosophical ideas appear in the draft of the doctrine. Now that we know the orientation of the latter, we are not very surprised to discover the closeness of these ideas not so much to one or another theory of myth as to the constructs of Russian religious thought. Thus Losev assigns a leading place in the system of categories of the absolute mythology to matter, which is treated here on equal terms with idea. And Orthodox philosophy, which is based on matter, inevitably comes close to the "religious materialism" of S. Bulgakov and others. Analogously, when the absolute mythology gives prominence to the principle of creativity, then in the idea of Christian philosophy governed by this principle we naturally find common ground with the thought of Berdiaev. But these are special cases, minor points. A more essential point is that in his absolute mythology Losev outlines a transition from symbolism to personalism—a type of philosophy that is significantly more organic to Christian thought and the Russian philosophical tradition. "The absolute mythology is personalism" (588). Turning back in light of this thesis to the deliberations of the basic part of the book, we ascertain (to repeat what was said in the discussion of history) that

here Losev's philosophy, which we invariably characterized as symbolism, already contains clear elements of personalism, of the philosophy of personality. The concept of personality itself, as I noted, remains poorly developed and rather unclear in his work; however, the very presence of this concept, just as the elaboration of the concept of intelligence and the full mastery of the doctrine of divine energies (which is most important)—all these features indicate a departure of the philosophy of *The Dialectic of Myth* from orthodox symbolism and an evolution toward Christian (Orthodox) personalism.

It is useful to compare Losev with Florenskii. In Florenskii's "concrete metaphysics" there are only symbols, which for him are the same as faces, and a conception of personality, whether divine or human, is wholly absent; his position is a polished and well-articulated symbolism. But in Losev of the Octateuch period "nothing has yet been completed and nothing has come into being," as Rilke wrote in *The Book of Hours*; and in the maelstrom of ideas and passions, in the philosophical proto-matter that we here encounter, it is possible to find everything. Dialectical-phenomenological symbolism became at this stage the language of his thought and the principle of its unity; however, from its very beginning, from its Solov'evian and Orthodox sources, other impulses that did not find full expression were also active in this thought. For that reason it should not have remained the final form of Losev's philosophy. A sketch of this final form is given in the draft of the absolute mythology and from it (as indeed even without it, albeit not so distinctly) we see that the "symbolist synthesis," as I defined Losev's philosophical project above, should have become, potentially, an Orthodox-personalist synthesis. By a complicated and circular route, through the theory of myth, through many ancient and modern philosophies, Losev's thought made its way back toward its own spiritual sources, toward Orthodox speculation and the philosophical tradition of Solov'ev. This path was quite promising, for it led not toward the imitation of already present examples but toward a new stage of Orthodox philosophizing that would imbibe—something that had not yet occurred in Russian thought—the experience of the ascetic tradition and Palamite theology. However, our philosopher was not destined to blaze his path to the end. "If they allow me," he adds with caustic bitterness in *The Dialectic of Myth* as he tells the reader about his plans for the future. If they allow me! This Soviet supplement to Tolstoy's "if I am alive" reminds us anew that the image of the captive Orthodox fighter is linked firmly with Losev's life myth.

Notes

1. "Real'nost' beskonechnosti," *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, 1 January 1989. (Here and henceforth, references without an indication of the author are to the works of A.F. Losev.)
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ocherki antichnogo simvolizma i mifologii* (Moscow, 1930), p. 682.
4. "Eidos" in *Filosofskaia entsiklopediia* (Moscow, 1970), vol. 5, p. 535.

5. *Ocherki*, p. 684.
6. *Antichnyi kosmos i sovremennaiia nauka* (Moscow, 1927), p. 17.
7. *Filosofiia imeni* (Moscow, 1927), p. 8.
8. *Muzyka kak predmet logiki* (Moscow, 1927), p. 213.
9. *Filosofiia imeni*, pp. 10, 12, 19.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
12. *Muzyka*, p. 120.
13. Losev's term that signifies a high degree of expressiveness of a mental object that is characterized by a differentiation and elaboration of detail.
14. See, for example, *Ocherki*, p. 21.
15. E. Cassirer, *Wesen und Wirkung des Symbolbegriffs* (Oxford, 1956), p. 175.
16. *Ocherki*, p. 21.
17. *Antichnyi*, p. 163.
18. "... life, like the autumnal quiet, is detailed. ..."
19. Cassirer, *Wesen*, p. 174.
20. *Filosofiia imeni*, p. 249.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 241.
22. *Dialektika khudozhestvennoi formy* (Moscow, 1927), p. 130.
23. "Lagernoe pis'mo k V.M. Losevoi ot 12.XII.1931," in Losev's *Zhizn'* (St. Petersburg, 1993), p. 367.
24. This set of categories goes back to the "five existing kinds" in Plato's *The Sophist*. See Platon, *Sochineniia v 3-kh tomakh* (Moscow, 1970), vol. 2, pp. 378-81.
25. *Dialektika*, p. 133.
26. It would not be amiss to clarify this in rigorous terms. This is precisely the philosophical error that Kant examines in his critique of the ontological proof, ending with the well-known conclusion: "Man can as little enrich his knowledge by means of ideas alone as can a merchant improve his economic situation by adding several zeros to his bank statement" (*Kritika chistogo razuma. Sochineniia v 6-ti tomakh*, trans. N.O. Losskii [Moscow, 1964], vol. 3, p. 524).
27. See *Antichnyi*, pp. 59-61. However, in the notes (*ibid.*, p. 296) the interpretation of these categories is clarified and traced back to *Enneads* (VI, 2, 7). Thus I too am able to clarify matters: it is more correct to consider this interpretation ambiguous and eclectic rather than arbitrary, for it attempts to unite the dialectic of Plato and Plotinus with that of Hegel, which as we know rejects the "five existing kinds" as the first principles of ontology.
28. *Filosofiia imeni*, p. 244.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 243.
30. Let me cite one or two expressive formulas: the dialectic is "the sole correct and complete method of philosophy," "the rhythm of reality itself," and even "the sole permissible form of philosophizing" (*Filosofiia imeni*, pp. 8, 9). "The dialectician ... compelled all the logical and illogical forces of being and life to march under the command of his method" (*Ocherki*, p. 542). The idealization and absolutization of the dialectic are condensed here into a kind of **Utopia** of the Absolute and Omnipotent Doctrine.
31. *Ocherki*, p. 683.
32. The known exception is *The Philosophy of the Name*, which uses Husserlian categories more extensively than do his other books.
33. Compare *Filosofiia imeni*, pp. 240-41.
34. B.L. Pasternak, *Doktor Zhivago. Sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow, 1990), vol. 3, p. 67.
35. "Lagernoe pis'mo k V.M. Losevoi ot 11.III.1932," in *Zhizn'*, p. 401.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ocherki*, p. 483.
38. *Dialektika*, p. 18.

39. Ibid., p. 143.
40. *Filosofia imeni*, p. 216.
41. *Dialektika*, p. 25.
42. *Ocherki*, p. 482. (The author's italics.)
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. *Filosofia imeni*, p. 114.
46. *Dialektika*, p. 26.
47. Here and henceforth the numbers in parentheses indicate pages of *Dialektika mifa* in the edition A.F. Losev. *Iz rannikh proizvedenii* (Moscow, 1990); the italics in quotations are the author's.
48. "Real'nost' obshchego. Slovo o Kirille i Mefodii, *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 8.VI.1988.
49. N.A. Berdiaev, "Russkaia religioznaia mysl' i revoliutsiia," *Versty*, 1928, no. 3, p. 59.
50. "Gibel' burzhuznoi kul'tury i ee filosofii," in A. Khiubsher [Hubscher], *Mysliteli nashego vremeni* (Moscow, 1962), pp. 345-16.
51. See, for example, "Terminologicheskaia mnogoznachimost', sushchestvuiushchaia v teoriiakh znaka i simvola," in A.F. Losev, *Znak. Simvol. Mif.* (Moscow, 1982), p. 226.

Translator's note

a. The internal rhyme of the Russian ("za takie ottenki stavit' κ stenke") is lost in translation.