

DEVELOPMENT MYTHS

The jargon of the social sciences has a way of evoking an ambiance quite close to that of the tropics, or rather to that of the developing world as first discovered by Europeans. Its metaphysical flights conjure up a Rider Haggard-like world of exploration where ongoing research projects paddle intrepidly down main-streams of theory. This world is animated by a whole bestiary of concepts: the ambling constraint which emerges on the banks, dragging its dysfunctions through the undergrowth; from time to time, the dark shape of a brooding syndrome, glimpsed near the stream pecking moodily at clumps of articulated concern; not least, the hopping, jumping variables on the shore, the sombre paradigm stalking between them. Every so often the travellers become excited by a froth of bubbles ahead as a hypothesis surfaces. They rig the conceptual framework in the bows and, with one clean shot, verify it, empirically.

The myth is of this world, exotic, mysterious, and elusive. To Georges Sorel, who gave it such prominence, myth designated

"a complex of remote goals, tense moral moods,  
and expectations of apocalyptic success".<sup>1)</sup>

Sorel, indeed, is pertinent, for the respect he accorded myth and the contempt he had for the shallowness of those who saw it merely as a symptom of intellectual error. Myth, for him, was a phenomenon to be accepted in its own right, to be considered as a product of the most powerful forces in a society, a political fact invulnerable to the dismissing intellectual.

We do not have to accept the implications drawn by Sorel to take his point in relation to some of the beliefs discussed in the articles below. These myths demand respect at the very least to the extent of our asking in what circumstances they arose and why they became current. But this duty is compatible with a right of criticism. Among our contributors, some have both explained and criticized. We hope that some or all of the contributions will excite and illuminate; that they will make some people more doubtful and everybody more curious.

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<sup>1)</sup> E.A. Shils, "Georges Sorel" (Introduction to the American edition of Reflections on Violence; Glencoe: The Free Press, 1950, pp. 20-21.