

PLATO'S USE OF MYTH IN THE EDUCATION OF PHILOSOPHIC MAN

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THE EFFORT TO UNDERSTAND the place of myth within Plato's philosophy would benefit from noting that Plato had different programs for the education of unphilosophic men (the "many") and for philosophic men (those capable of being philosophers); myth has an important and different role to play in each of these programs.¹ Plato does not directly state the contribution which he believed myth could make to philosophy; most of his commentary on myth is directed towards the place which myth has in the education of the unphilosophic.² Yet it is not right to suppose that what he says about myth there is fully applicable to the use of myth at all times, for just as there is a difference between primitive myths and those which Plato allows in his state, so too his use of myth for the education of the "many" is

¹Plato's use of myth has been the subject of a vast number of studies. Those considered to be standard are Perceval Frutiger, *Les Mythes de Platon* (Paris 1930; reprinted New York 1976); Ludwig Edelstein, "The Function of Myth in Plato's Philosophy," *JHistIdeas* 10 (1949) 468-481; Paul Friedländer, *Plato: An Introduction* 1², tr. Hans Meyerhoff (New York 1958; reprinted Princeton 1969) 171-219; and J. A. Stewart, *The Myths of Plato* (London 1905; reprinted New York 1960). I have also found especially illuminating Paul Stöcklein, "Ueber die Philosophische Bedeutung von Platons Mythen," *Philologus* Supp. 30.3 (Leipzig 1937). Many of the most perspicacious observations made about myth have been made as parts of studies not directly concerned with myth; mention will be made of these studies in the following notes.

The most recent full-scale publication on this topic is Julius Elias, *Plato's Defense of Poetry* (Albany, N.Y. 1984). Elias's views and mine correspond in many ways; he offers what he calls a "weak defence" of poetry which corresponds to my understanding of the place of myth in the education of unphilosophic man. He also offers a "strong defence" of myth which holds that Plato used myth to present the undemonstrable first principles or axioms of his thought. While I am not fully convinced that Plato thought these first principles altogether indemonstrable, much of what Elias has to say about myth in the dialogues is in harmony with the analysis offered here.

Several doctoral dissertations have been written on this subject, some published, some unpublished; David L. Hitchcock, *The Role of the Myth and Its Relation to the Rational Argument in Plato's Dialogues*, (unpublished: Claremont Graduate School 1974); Donald H. Roy, *The Political Status and Function of Plato's Myths* (unpublished: University of Notre Dame 1977); Robert Zaslavsky, *Platonic Myth and Platonic Writing* (Washington, D.C. 1981); Kent F. Moors, *Platonic Myth: An Introductory Study* (Washington 1982); and Janet E. Smith, *Plato's Use of Myth as a Pedagogical Device* (unpublished: University of Toronto 1982).

²In the *Republic* Plato clearly distinguishes the two groups for which his educational programmes are designed: "After much hard work, and a long investigation, Glaucon, we have finally discovered which of the two are philosophical and which are not Since the philosophical are those who are able to grasp that which is always unchanging and those who are not philosophical are those who wander about all over the place among many different things, which of the two ought to be rulers of the city?" (484a-c).

not altogether coincident with his use of myth in the education of the philosophic. It is in the dialogues where we see Socrates engaging in the education of young men with some philosophical ability; thus it will largely be through examining his use of myth there that we will discover its place in the education of the philosophic.³

An examination of the use of myth⁴ in the dialogues shows that myths serve several functions: (1) they are "playful" in a way which is vital to philosophy; (2) they serve the related purpose of providing insights or hypotheses for examination; (3) they help keep the dialogues "undogmatic" and encourage further investigation of topics probed in the dialogues; (4) they serve Plato's philosophical goal of shifting one's attention from the World of Becoming to "worlds beyond" which include the World of Forms and the afterlife; and (5) they tend to draw together many of the concerns and images of the dialogue as a whole. Although this list of functions is probably not exhaustive, it may help to reveal some of the contributions which myth can make to the philosophic procedure.

But before these claims are substantiated, it is proper to review briefly the place of myth in the Plato's educational program for the unphilosophic, since, after all, even the philosophic in their youth must pass through the same educational program as the unphilosophic—and certain features of that education are retained throughout their lives.⁵ In Plato's view myth served two chief functions in the education of the unphilosophic: to assist in the acquisition of true opinion, and to help men learn control of their emotions.

Since Plato believed that the "many" are either incapable of acquiring

³Many have interpreted the dialogues as a "reproduction of the dialectic process in its various stages" (Werner Jaeger, *Paideia*², tr. Gilbert Highet [New York 1944; reprinted New York 1965] 315). See also Robert Cushman, *Therapeia* (Chapel Hill, N.C. 1958) 6; John Gould, *The Development of Plato's Ethics* (Cambridge 1955) 23; and Philip Merlan, "Form and Content in Plato's Philosophy," *JHistIdeas* 8 (1947) 406–430.

⁴There is, of course, some debate among scholars about which passages in the dialogues are to be considered myths. The debate derives from the fact that on occasion Plato does not use the word *mythos* as a label for passages which most would recognize as myths (for instance the "myth" of Theuth in the *Phaedrus* and the "myth" of reminiscence in the *Meno*). Still, for the most part, there is also a remarkable amount of agreement; in this article I have, I believe, used only passages widely agreed to be myths. Frutiger (above, n. 1) includes in Chapter 3 a list of passages he considers to be myth; I accept all the passages designated there. I also accept some of the passages which he includes in Chapter 4 as passages falsely believed to be myths (such as the section on the cave in the *Republic*). I have attempted to provide a definition for myth in an article "Plato's Myths as 'Likely Accounts,' Worthy of Belief," (*Apeiron* 19 [1985] 24–42).

⁵For full discussions of the educational programmes of Plato see Robin Barrow, *Plato's Utilitarianism and Education* (London 1975); B. Bosanquet, *The Education of the Young in the Republic of Plato* (1917, reprinted Folcroft, Pa 1973); R. G. Bury, "The Theory of Education in Plato's *Laws*," *REG* 50 (1937) 304–320; John Gould (above, n. 3); Werner Jaeger, *Paideia* 2 and 3 (above, n. 3); Rupert C. Lodge, *Plato's Theory of Education* (London 1947); Glenn R. Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City* (Princeton 1960); Richard Lewis Nettleship, *Lectures on the Republic of Plato*² (New York 1901; reprinted London 1964).

knowledge or uninterested in it, the educational program which he develops for them in the *Republic* and the *Laws* has as its chief aim the inculcation of true opinion—which will serve to make men obedient to the law (*Rep.* 429d and 522a ff.). And myth constitutes nearly the whole of the “intellectual” education of the unphilosophic; thus Socrates labors to ensure that the content of the myth is in accord with the truth (*Rep.* 379a ff.; in the *Laws* censorship of myths is legislated, 765d ff.). Moreover, this inculcation of or indoctrination into true opinion is an on-going process for the citizenry. In the *Laws* the Athenian sets up three choruses which embrace the whole populace and requires that they “charm themselves unceasingly” (665c); myths, along with songs and speeches (λόγους), are included in the category of “charms” (664a).⁶

Myth also helps to soothe and govern the emotions. In the *Republic*, Socrates speaks of the musical education of the soul (which has myth as its chief component); through a variety of means it makes the soul graceful and harmonious, whereby it acquires the virtues (401c ff.). And the *Laws*, which is to a large extent an elaboration of the educational program of the *Republic*, explicitly presents education as habituation in taking pleasure in what is good and feeling pain for what should be hated (653 b ff.; see *Rep.* 395d ff.).

Yet how could these features of myth be useful for the philosopher? After all, the success of these means of indoctrination depends upon an unquestioning acceptance of these myths by the populace (*Rep.* 538c ff.). How does this fit with the philosopher’s education in the art of dialectic, which has as its purpose teaching students to “ask and answer in the most knowledgeable way” (*Rep.* 534d)? This is a skill to be acquired and exercised all in due time. The education of the philosopher is not something other than but something more than the education of the unphilosophic: it is the longer way (*Rep.* 504b). As Socrates begins his description of the philosopher, he mentions the role of myth in the education of the guardians in their youth:

[Music], the complement of gymnastic, if you remember, educates the guardians by habituation, importing not knowledge, but harmoniousness [of spirit] by means of melody, and gracefulness by means of rhythm and other characteristics akin to these. It does this through stories, both the sort that are mythical (μυθώδεις) and those that are truer. But it included no such learning leading to the good, as you are now seeking (522a ff.).⁷

Philosophers, too, must acquire true opinion and control of their emotions. Nor are these needs that vanish when they undertake their philosophic

⁶For myth as charm see Elizabeth Belfiore, “*Elenchus, Epode, and Magic: Socrates as Silenus*,” *Phoenix* 34 (1980) 128–137; Pierre Boyancé, *Le Culte des Muses chez les Philosophes Grecs* (Paris 1936; reprinted Paris 1972); P. Lain-Entralgo, *The Theory of the Word in Classical Antiquity* (New Haven, Conn. 1970).

⁷The translations for all Greek texts are my own.

studies. Here we shall examine a few passages in the dialogues which show that the myths continue to serve these functions—and more—in the education of the philosophic as portrayed there.

The acquisition of true opinion, which is the end of the educational process for the unphilosophic, is just a stage in the educational program of the philosophic. Myths can help introduce a young man to a truth which will later receive dialectical examination. Indeed, in the *Laws* the Athenian at one point indicates that it is much easier to do philosophy with those who already have true opinion, who learned the lessons of their childhood and honored the myths they were told (887c ff.). Socrates, too, advises his interlocutors to listen closely to the teachings of myths: for instance, in the *Phaedrus* Socrates admonishes Phaedrus to consider seriously the content of the myth about the origin of the written word. Phaedrus has attempted to dismiss Socrates' explanation of the origin of the written word by calling it a made-up tale from Egypt (275b3). Socrates chides Phaedrus for his false standards:

But, my friend, those at the temple of Zeus at Dodona said that the first prophetic words came from an oak tree. Indeed men at that time, since they were not wise like you young men, were in their simplicity satisfied to listen to oak trees and rocks, provided that they spoke the truth. But to you, apparently, it makes a difference who is speaking and where he is from; you are not content to focus only on this: if what is said is true or not (275b–c).

This remark suggests that there may be much that it is true in myth. The *Seventh Letter* gives similar advice to respect ancient and holy tales (regularly interpreted to mean myths): πείθεσθαι δὲ ὄντως αἰεὶ χρὴ τοῖς παλαιοῖς τε καὶ ἱεροῖς λόγοις (335a2). Certainly Socrates himself evinces an attitude of reverence towards the myths which he tells. He usually cites a revered source or some kind of authority for them. For instance, in the *Meno* he refers to priests and priestesses as the source for the myth; in the *Symposium* he attributes the myth he is going to tell to the wise woman Diotima; and in the *Republic* he claims to have heard Er himself, a man who has returned from the afterlife, tell the tale. In short, Socrates in every way gives the impression that there is much to learn from the myths—and that those who do philosophy should not discount them.

The rôle of the myth at the end of the *Phaedo* gives evidence that the charming or soothing of the emotions does not stop with the early education of the philosophers. In the *Phaedo* Socrates advises control of emotion, not to make the young law-abiding in any direct way, but so that their minds, liberated from cumbersome passions, may engage in philosophy. In this dialogue, it is the fear of death which troubles Simmias and Cebes; Socrates tries to free them from it so that they may become better philosophers (which, in turn, is the truest way to be free from the fear of death). Cebes

asks for a charm to chase away the fear of death (77e) and Socrates supplies this charm when he advises him to sing (*ἐπῳδεῖν*), as a charm, the myth told at the close of the dialogue (114d) and remarks that the myth has been offered as a means of consolation (see 115d4).

Yet, although there are these similarities between the use of myth in the education of the unphilosophic and the education of the philosophic, the most fundamental difference between them is that the unphilosophic are discouraged, not to say prohibited (as the *Laws* teaches) from questioning the myths, whereas the philosophic are encouraged to question the myths, as all else. Indeed, it is the value placed on the questioning which chiefly distinguishes the education of the philosophic from that of the unphilosophic. At *Republic* 538c ff. Socrates tells how questioning upsets those who have learned from their youth to honor the just and how it easily fosters rebellion and disobedience: those who have only true opinion are vulnerable because they have only memorized the truths which they have learnt; they have not learnt the reasons for them, i.e., they cannot defend their true opinions or recover true opinion when lost. Memorization is a good means of acquiring true opinion but not for acquiring knowledge—and the philosophic man seeks to have knowledge. It is only the questioning spirit which will enable the philosopher to “chain down” his views with an account and thus ensure that he will not be robbed, beguiled, or forgetful of the true opinion which he has acquired (*Rep.* 412e ff.). Questioning, then, is encouraged for the philosophic; in fact their education begins with the act of questioning, particularly the questioning of the disparity between appearance and reality (532a).

Not all, of course, are eligible for, that is, capable of, a philosophic education. In Book Six of the *Republic* Socrates repeatedly lists the qualifications for those who are to be trained as philosophers: for instance, at 487a he speaks of a pursuit to be practised by a man “by nature of good memory, of quick apprehension, magnificent, gracious, friendly, and akin to truth, justice, bravery, and sobriety.” The education of these men is best described as a conversion: they must be turned from the World of Becoming to the World of Being. As their education is described in the *Republic*, it seems that after the indoctrination of myth in their childhood, and after the awakening of thought provoked by such things as mathematics, geometry, solid geometry, astronomy, and other sciences (523a), the philosophic will then pursue knowledge exclusively through dialectic, understood in the rather narrow sense of the testing of hypotheses and the attendant tools such as *elenchus* and *diairesis*.

Yet “dialectic” in the root (and broad) sense means discussion, and is frequently used by Plato to describe the sort of discussion which goes on in the dialogues; clearly it includes much more than the testing of hypotheses. Those who make Plato’s method of philosophy their central interest rarely

consider the possibility that myth and other poetic elements may assist dialectic in the narrow sense, and that together with it they may constitute Plato's method of doing philosophy, or dialectic in the broad sense. Robinson's chapter on analogy in his book *Plato's Earlier Dialectic* explains why scholars neglect the rôle of myth, analogy, and other poetic devices in Plato's philosophic method: it is because Plato himself neglects to discuss them. Robinson says that whereas Plato is self-conscious in his justification of his hypothetical method, he offers little justification for his use of analogy and other poetic devices.⁸ Nevertheless, Plato makes regular use of them. If, indeed, the dialogues are a portrayal of the philosophic quest, the very presence of myth in the dialogues indicates that it has contributions to make to this quest. What are these contributions?

One observation that we can perhaps make about dialectic, in the narrow sense, is that it can be tedious; unrelenting, rigorous dialectic needs some means of relief to maintain interest on the part of the participants and the observers. Plato gives much indication in the dialogues that he did not believe philosophy to be a boring business, but rather that he thought it to be a form of play: in the *Seventh Letter*, Plato claims never to have written about the most serious things (341c); in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates refers to all written work as play;⁹ in the *Laws* the Athenian maintains that man should spend his whole life at play (803c ff.; cf. 814d ff.); and in the *Sixth Letter* play is referred to as the sister of seriousness (323d1).

The dialogues and all that is within them seem to be playful in several important ways. First, they are a break from the tedium of the business of daily life; they are regularly set at parties and at other casual and festive gatherings of men. At such gatherings, the guests frequently told tales as part of the entertainment, e.g., the tales told by Aristophanes and Socrates in the *Symposium*. And within the dialogues the myths are often told as a break from the rigors of dialectic. For instance, in the *Statesman*, after a very detailed *diairesis*, at 268d the Eleatic advises a new beginning which he says will offer some amusement; this amusement is the myth. The myth, while offering needed relief, also makes a contribution to the pursuit of the nature of the statesman; it is play with a serious purpose.

It can be said that philosophy inherently has a kind of playfulness about it: it is a kind of "playing with ideas." This, obviously, is not a frivolous kind of play; one can play with serious possibilities. Dialectic needs possibilities to "play with." Myth helps the philosophic search by facilitating the

⁸Richard Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic* 2 (Oxford 1953; reprinted Oxford 1970) 202.

⁹The recognition of the importance of play in Plato's thought is common. See G. Ardley, "The Role of Play in the Philosophy of Plato," *Philosophy* 42 (1967) 226-244; R. G. Bury (above, n. 5) 304-320; W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* 4 (Cambridge 1975) 58-65; Jan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (London 1949); and P. Plass, "Play and Philosophic Detachment in Plato," *TAPA* 98 (1967) 343-364.

playing with ideas: it often provides the possibilities which dialectic tests. Dialectic, in the narrow sense, is the examination of hypotheses through questioning and answering. Dialectic cannot function without hypotheses to be tested. Where do the participants get them? There are many sources for new hypotheses, such as direct intuition, analogy, authority, and common opinion.¹⁰ In a certain sense all have the status of intuition—understood as an insight which provides a new way of seeing things, which may or may not be valid, i.e., it helps one to see that which has not yet been proven.¹¹ These intuitions, then, need to be tested.¹² The insights of intuition provide a kind of new beginning for the dialectical process; they follow upon *elenchus*, which extracts and refutes false opinion, and they provide new material with which to work. Because there is no guarantee, of course, that the insights or opinion offered by intuition will be true, they too are subject to examination. Although it plays no part in proving something true or false, intuition does serve a definite purpose in the philosophic endeavour.

Myth has features in common with all the sources of intuition (analogy, authority, and common opinion) mentioned above. Robinson observes that analogies and examples produce new insights or intuitions (above, note 8, 213). He cites Socrates' use of the comparison of the city and the man in the *Republic* as an example of analogy that produces a new hypothesis about the nature of justice. The analogies and examples in the myths often work in the same way. For instance, the myth of the charioteer and horses in the *Phaedrus* reveals much to Socrates and Phaedrus about the nature of love and rhetoric; the suggestions about the nature of rhetoric are followed up at least to some extent in the second half of the dialogue.

Socrates' use of myth in the *Meno* exemplifies the appeal to authority and

¹⁰For intuition as a source of hypotheses see R. E. Carter, "Plato and Inspiration," *JHistPhil* 5 (1967) 111–121; Victor Goldschmidt, *Le Paradigme dans la Dialectique platonicienne* (Paris 1947) 51; Rene Schaerer, *La Question platonicienne* (Neuchatel 1969) 129 and 294; and Robinson (above, n. 8) 109. For analogy, see Robinson 211 and 215, and Goldschmidt 18. For authority see Goldschmidt 45 and for common opinion, Goldschmidt 47.

¹¹Scholars use the word "intuition" for two different stages of Plato's epistemology. It is used sometimes to refer to the final grasping of a truth (or of an Idea) which is the culmination of the epistemological process. This differs from the "intuition" to which I make reference. This intuition is simply a sudden insight of a possible truth. The two types of intuition are similar in their suddenness, and their independence, in a sense, from dialectical examination. Their differences are greater: the initial intuition is tentative and cries out for examination; the final intuition follows a dialectical examination and is the source of the certainty which characterizes knowledge.

¹²L. W. Wild, in "Plato's Presentation of the Intuitive Mind in his Portrait of Socrates," *Philosophy* 14 (1939) 326–340, comments on Socrates' divergence from most "mystics" who have "supreme faith in revelation and hold the findings of reason in relative contempt" (331): "... his [Socrates'] work was to apply reason to the notions that men commonly accept unexamined, and to teach his followers that only with the sanction of reason were they to be accepted."

common opinion as a means of providing a new hypothesis. After an elenctic examination of Meno's views, and after Socrates and Meno have made several unsuccessful (though not totally fruitless) attempts to define virtue and thus to understand how one comes to learn it, Meno announces that he is in a state of *aporia* (80a4). Socrates at this point introduces something, a myth, which he has heard from wise men and women. He uses the myth to introduce a new possibility, a new hypothesis for examination: the view that the soul has learned everything before being born (81c5–7). This "doctrine" of the myth is, it seems, a novel one, but the details of the myth are those familiar to the Greeks; the mention of Persephone and Hades gives the story a kind of authenticity. In a sense, Socrates makes an appeal here to common opinion. Now, although Socrates claims that he finds the myth to be true and cites authorities, he also offers to prove it (*ἐπιδείξωμαι*, 82b1) to Meno by examining a slave-boy. Thus Socrates introduces something through a myth before he attempts to establish the same thing through dialectic.

Many of the hypotheses which Socrates offers for examination, many of the "truths" which he seeks to teach, such as the theory of reminiscence, are for many reasons difficult to accept. Myth can often help in rendering the interlocutor more amenable to the proposition being presented. In the *Laws*, after much argumentation, the Athenian indicates that myth serves well as a means to persuade the reluctant of the truth—but it is not a substitute for argumentation; it is a supplement (903a). In the dialogues, we see myth in service of truths which are difficult to accept. Myth along with argumentation helps Socrates in his attempt to convert the false opinions of the interlocutors into true opinion. For instance, in the *Gorgias* Callicles says that if what Socrates says be true, human life becomes turned upside down: men are presently doing the opposite of what is right (481c; and see also *Rep.* 450c ff.). In that dialogue, Socrates labors hard through dialectic and myth to persuade the interlocutors of the truth he is teaching there: that it is better to have wrong done to one than to do it to another (527b2). Callicles resists this truth throughout the dialogue, and finally at the end Socrates tells a myth, which he hopes will help convince Callicles of the truth for which he has been arguing. Although there is no indication that Callicles is swayed by this myth, Socrates does use it as a persuasive supplement to his argument.

Callicles' recalcitrance in the face of the myth may be the exception rather than the rule; Socrates regularly tries to mold his arguments—and his myths—to the tastes of his interlocutors (which in the *Phaedrus* he argues is the mark of the good [philosophic] rhetorician [271d and 261a]). For instance, Socrates' use of the myth in the *Phaedrus* is clearly designed to win over Phaedrus (and quite clearly does). In reference to his first speech, called a *mythos* (237a), Socrates remarks that the enchanting place in which he and Phaedrus find themselves gives him the impression of being divine; under its

influence, he finds himself in a near-frenzy and tending to use speech with the rhythms of dithyramb (241c). While radically changing his argument in the second speech (also called a *mythos*, 253c), Socrates continues to speak in a highly poetic fashion. At the close he claims that he was forced to use poetical figures for the sake of Phaedrus (257a). The myth, however, is not the final word; it is followed by a rigorous dialectical discussion, which touches upon some of the points of the myth—but which leaves others unexamined. Socrates is not so much interested in establishing truths for Phaedrus as in instructing him how to discover truth. The myth, then, in no way supplants dialectic or closes the questioning process; Socrates makes it clear that on-going examination of the topics of the dialogue is desirable.

As we have mentioned, what is “established” in a Platonic dialogue is never made a point of “dogma,” in the sense of a truth not to be questioned; one always senses that whatever truth has been found is open to further consideration and elaboration. Plato’s primary goal was not delivering doctrines but goading people to discover the truth for themselves. Indeed, Plato’s choice of presenting his views in the dialogue form serves to hinder the reader from accepting these doctrines as pronouncements of authority; no authority speaks. Nor is it always easy to determine what has been established. The argument between Socrates and his interlocutors is usually meandering—they follow it wherever it takes them; extracting a coherent “defence” of a doctrine from the many false starts and digressions becomes very difficult. Indeed, it is even the case that several dialogues which have Socrates and his interlocutors arriving at some truth within them nevertheless end in *aporia* (such is frequently the interpretation of the *Meno*); that is to say, although Socrates leads his interlocutors to the truth which would resolve the difficulty they are exploring, towards the end of the dialogue he will introduce or allow the interlocutor to introduce further difficulties which *appear* to throw into doubt the previously established conclusion. This technique ensures that the interlocutor will continue to seek strong reasons for what he is learning; it has the same effect on the reader. The dialogues may indicate what the truth is on a given matter and may give a kind of defense for this doctrine but one is always left with the sense that a tighter defense could be given; one is always invited, not to say compelled, to search for oneself.

The myths are instrumental in creating this effect as well.¹³ The content and form of myth are provocative and force one to do further investigation; one needs to ponder the meaning of the images of the myth and to attempt to separate what in the myths is fictive detail and what are the truths which Socrates is promoting through the myth. Indeed, the myths have the curious double power of both reiterating truths established by previous argument

¹³For more on this point, see Merlan (above, n. 3) 411.

and suggesting new possibilities. It is the symbols or images of the myth which give it this power; it is the nature of a symbol to have more than one meaning or sense. One sense of a symbol could capture an established truth; another sense of the same symbol could open up new horizons.¹⁴

Philosophy for Plato is "playful," not only because it is the "playing with ideas," but also because, as a passage noted above indicates, "play" is one of the means of access to the "most serious matters." In the *Seventh Letter*, Plato claims that he never wrote about the "most serious things:" the proper interpretation of this claim would seem to be that when he speaks of the "most serious things" here he is referring to the intellection or intuition of the World of Forms, which is the ineffable experience of an individual. Now this is not, of course, to say that one cannot write about the World of Forms, but that writing about them and experiencing them, the most serious thing, are two very different matters. Guthrie's comments (above, note 9, 62) on the playfulness of the dialogues are helpful in this regard:

Now no one will believe that the author of the twelve books of the *Laws* and ten of the *Republic*, to say nothing of the *Statesman* and all of the dialogues aimed at continuing the Socratic quest for virtue, thought of human activity as scarcely worth serious attention. In his attribution of *paidia* and *spoude* he himself can use a little playful irony to remind us that there is a divine realm above the human, there is a changeless reality above the turmoil of the physical world, and it is to these that our highest intellectual and spiritual powers should be devoted.

The dialogues, then, or philosophical discourses, do not put one in contact with the World of Forms, but may help point the way to the World of Forms. The philosophical play which Plato advocates is a tool of philosophy, a means of conversion, of moving one's attention from the World of Becoming to the World of Forms. Certainly dialectic, which is a powerful tool for exposing the falseness of one's opinions and for suggesting that there is a unity behind the claims one makes about reality, serves well the tasks central to the philosophic quest, i.e., not taking things as they seem, but trying to see things as they are, and trying to discover what are the eternal verities. Myth, too, with its images and analogies, helps students to see things in a new way; a brief consideration of the myth of the *Phaedrus* indicates that myth can help to shift one's attention from the World of Becoming to the World of Being.

Socrates, in the *Phaedrus*, argues that the one composing myths and constructing images must have knowledge (269d5). To draw upon the cave image, he must be one who has advanced out of the cave and has seen things as they really are. The myth opens men to the possibility that what they see

¹⁴Stöcklein argues for the provocative capacity of myth and attributes it to the symbolic nature of myth: he observes (above, n. 1, 11) that pure symbol always overflows and is "unfillupable" (*unausschöpfbar*) of meaning and always adequate to lead to deeper expression.

(in terms of the cave, the shadows against the wall) is not the whole of reality, or even in Platonic terms, the “really real.” Socrates, in his discussion of rhetoric, clarifies that the true rhetorician (the philosopher) in writing his speeches knows the truth and thus can construct myths using probabilities, which have a *semblance to the truth* (273d). The myth of the *Phaedrus* (Socrates’ second speech) clearly serves, for instance, to reorient the sight of Phaedrus from strictly human love to a love which has a share of the divine. This requires first a solid understanding of the nature of the soul, which Socrates presents in a scientific manner and then he elaborates through a myth:

Concerning the immortality of the soul, enough has been said. Concerning the form of the soul, we need to discuss it in the following way: to speak of it just as it is, would in every way be a task for a god and it would require a lengthy discourse, but to give a semblance of it (ὥς δὲ εἴκειν), this a man can do and in a shorter discourse. So let us speak of it in this way. Let us liken it (εἰοικέτω) to the combined power of a team of winged horses and their charioteer (246a).

One wonders, of course, whether such a divine discourse is even in the realm of possibility, for even in the myth of this dialogue, Socrates argues that knowledge of the divine is possible only to the divine (247d). But he also argues that a part of man is divine: the *voûs* or reason of man is divine and thus can have some knowledge of the divine. Nonetheless, knowledge of the nature of the soul, like any knowledge of the divine, including the Forms, is extremely difficult to achieve. As Socrates remarks, it is easier to *suggest* truths about the soul *in an image* than to *prove* them. He also remarks that his understanding of the soul, especially when applied to the souls of the gods, is not a product of vision (ἰδόντες), nor of adequate comprehension (ικανῶς νοήσαντες), but of the imagination (πλάττομεν, 246c). Socrates openly declares that in the myth he is speaking of matters very out of the ordinary:

No earthly poet has ever yet sung worthily of that region beyond the heaven, nor ever will. But it is thus—one ought to dare to speak the truth, especially since I am speaking about the truth. You see, it is there that True Being has its home; True Being is without shape, colorless, and intangible; it is visible only to the reason, the pilot of the soul; and all true knowledge is knowledge of True Being (247c).

Note that although Socrates claims that he speaks of the “region beyond,” he also claims that he speaks the truth, a truth accessible to the reason. The world of which he speaks is quite clearly the World of Forms. Throughout the myth he acknowledges that knowledge of this world is very difficult for man and gives advice much like that given elsewhere in the dialogues, notably the *Republic* and the *Phaedo*: that one must leave “the field of manifold sense-perceptions and enter that in which the object of knowledge is unique and grasped only by reasoning” (*Phaedrus* 249b).

We also find one of the main points of Plato's philosophy made very naturally in the context of this myth. Socrates calls upon the theory of *anamnesis* to explain man's ability to recollect the Forms—a doctrine not confined to myth but demonstrated in both the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*. Much of the myth, then, assumes the World of Forms and other Platonic doctrines such as the immortality of the soul and the doctrine of *anamnesis*. The myth of the *Phaedrus* also serves to give "likely" explanations for the different natures and ways of living among men and some explanation of the nature of both life before birth and after death, for the myth tells how souls are attached to different gods in the "regions beyond" and make choices of lives and loves on the basis of these attachments. These explanations obviously cannot be confirmed in a philosophical way, but much is conveyed to us about different types of men and about love which can be verified. Later when Socrates is explaining how his speech met the rules of rhetoric, he remarks upon the part of the myth which used the image of the charioteer in this fashion:

. . . and in some way we described in a figure (ἀπεικάζοντες) the passion of love, perhaps achieving some truth, but perhaps also going astray somewhat. We have, thus, put together a not altogether unpersuasive discourse; we have sung a mythic hymn (μυθικὸν τινα ὕμνον) reverently and piously in honor of your master, Phaedrus, and mine, Eros, the guardian of beautiful boys (265b).

The myth, then, works together with the dialectic, both that of the dialogue in which it appears and with dialectical demonstration in other dialogues, to expose the interlocutors to "regions beyond," which include the World of Forms and the afterlife, and to reiterate and at times to introduce other doctrines connected with these. Now myth rarely offers arguments for these doctrines. Nevertheless, it does aid in making the interlocutor receptive to arguments and leads him to these arguments by offering him insights to be tested, insights often about "worlds" with which he is not familiar. The myth, then, helps the interlocutor begin his philosophical conversion from attachment to what seems to be so to what is so. In the *Phaedrus* the myth has served this purpose by drawing the attention of Phaedrus to the World of Forms in its discussion of the activity of souls before incarnation, and by suggesting that dedication to philosophy, or study of the World of Forms, will affect one's attainment of immortality.

Myth also provides a service for the dialogues (and the philosophic quest) which is really quite beyond the powers of dialectic: it helps to embrace or synthesize, in a sense, many of the topics of a dialogue. Platonic dialogues are wonderfully integral works of art which have themes, images, vocabulary, characterizations, i.e., all parts of the dialogue, designedly appropriate to each other and all contributing to the aim of the whole. But the dialectic, with its analytical thrust, is not the element of the dialogue which draws

together these different elements. Myth, however, often does draw together many of the themes of the dialogue: there is often a repetition of language and mention of topics or names which appear elsewhere in the dialogue; the myth often reiterates or sometimes introduces quite directly and explicitly central points of the dialogue; and the myth often includes an image or a series of images which captures in a vivid way many of the chief concerns of the dialogue (cf. Jaeger, above, note 3, 151).

The myths do have the power to help one remember, to some extent, the contents of a dialogue, and often to provide a kind of "picture" of the meaning of the dialogue; indeed, each is carefully crafted to "fit" with the dialogue in which it appears. The myth of the *Phaedrus*, with its striking image of the charioteer and the horses, again provides a good example of the power of myth to capture the main themes of the dialogues.¹⁵ A full presentation of all the connections of the myth with the dialogue is not feasible here, but the following brief review of some of the larger connections should suggest the richness of the myth in this regard.

The image of the charioteer and his team represents the conflict within man between his reason and his passions: man's reason, the charioteer, may either control his passions or succumb to them, for occasionally the black or unruly horse prevails and occasionally the white or good horse. The struggle represented in this image between two opposing forces, one good and one bad, appears so many times in the dialogue that, in a sense, it dominates the dialogue. We see the spirit of contest which pervades the dialogue in the following pairings: the non-lover versus the lover, Phaedrus versus Socrates, Lysias versus Socrates, Socrates (1st speech) versus Socrates (2nd speech), the written versus the spoken word, and rhetoric versus philosophy. And within the dialogue Socrates, as a lover of Phaedrus, seems to embody the struggle represented by the charioteer and horses: he appears momentarily to yield to the bad horse and gives a speech which, at least ostensibly, argues for a bad passion. But eventually the good horse wins out and Socrates leads both himself and Phaedrus to be lovers of philosophy, which, as Socrates indicates in the myth, is the proper outcome of a love relationship (256a ff.). The dialogue closes with indications and promises that the participants will continue their struggle in pursuit of wisdom. Socrates admonishes Phaedrus to try to lead Lysias, his beloved, aright (278c). Phaedrus also suggests that

¹⁵Anne Lebeck, in "The Central Myth of Plato's *Phaedrus*," *GRBS* 13 (1972) 267–290, provides an excellent treatment of the connection of the relation of a myth to a dialogue. She, too, sees myth as a means of provoking insight and of synthesizing the major themes of the dialogue (289): "A key doctrine of the myth is *anamnesis*, that process of recollection which culminates in insight. This same term could be used to describe the technique of verbal reminiscence which characterizes both myth and dialogue. As words and images recur they call up whole passages, major ideas. A network of association is created which continually expands the reader's consciousness."

Socrates deliver their message to Isocrates, who, it is suggested, has a special relationship with Socrates. For both absent rhetoricians there is hope that their more philosophical lovers will lead them to the love of philosophy. This application of the charioteer and horses could be expanded as we traced Socrates' response and relation to Phaedrus throughout the dialogue in comparison with the depiction of the experience of falling in love in the myth; the other "contests" in the dialogue could be probed in the same fashion. The image and the myth in which it is found truly capture the main concerns of the dialogue and even, in a sense, overflow the boundaries of the dialogue as they point to the philosophical discussions based on lover-relationships which are to take place in the future.

Another indication that the myths "fit" the dialogues in which they appear, and that they capture some of the themes of the dialogues, is the fact that the myths, even those about the same topic, could not be removed from one dialogue and placed in another. There are four eschatological myths in the dialogues, and they are in no sense interchangeable. Socrates' presentation of the afterlife in the *Apology* has Socrates spending an eternity in conversation, the very activity for which he has been defending himself. The myth in the *Phaedo*, with its emphasis on catharsis of the soul (note the number of occurrences of forms of the word "pure" in the myth; 108c3, 109b7 [twice], 109d3, 110c2, 111b6, 113d7, 114c1, 114c3), reinforces the argument of the dialogue that death is not frightening for the philosopher, for he has purified himself. And whereas both the *Gorgias* and the *Republic* are concerned with justice and reward and punishment, the myths are very different, since they are allied closely with the central arguments of the dialogues in which they appear. In the *Gorgias* Socrates argues that it is better to have injustice done to oneself than to do it to one another, for injustice corrupts the immortal soul. Thus the judgment of the dead, featured in the myth, wherein men are judged stripped of their bodies, reinforces a point central to the dialogue, i.e., that the soul is more important than the body. The myth is tied to the preceding discussion in other important ways, for instance, even the great king (whom Polus used as an example to argue that power was the greatest good [470e]) appears in the myth [524e]. In the myth of the *Republic* (which has certain parallels with the image of the Cave, for both feature men who have been to different worlds and have seen strange things which those left behind ought to know), Socrates, in an attempt to encourage men to be just, tells of men choosing their next lives—a choice determined by their goodness (or lack of it) in their former lives. He stresses a main point of the argument of the preceding discussion of the *Republic*; one ought to pursue studies which enable one to judge what is truly good in this world (618c). Stories are much more pleasing to many than dialectical analysis; many of the readers of these dialogues—and not only the unphilosophic—find the myths among the most memor-

able portions of the dialogue. For them the myths capture much of what Plato was attempting to convey through the dialogues. Plato's efforts to link the myths closely with the main line of argumentation, then, have borne the fruit he seems to have hoped and planned for.

Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* (A 982b16) says that the lover of myth is a lover of wisdom; a lover of myth is one who is filled with a sense of wonder, and this is the first step for the philosopher. The dialogues portray many young men taking their first steps and some of their more advanced steps on the path of philosophy. The myths which Plato has composed for his dialogues are worthy companions to dialectic; they are designed to foster and stimulate and assist the philosophic quest. As the composition of a man with brilliant abilities both philosophical and literary, Plato's myths are a treasure-house of material for those in his time, and ours, who embark on the philosophical quest.

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