

A Study of Plato's Use of Myths and its Relation to Philosophy and Moral Education

Yoshiaki Nakazawa

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ABSTRACT

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The way in which Plato's uses of myth relate to his theory of moral education and his conception of philosophy is examined. Plato's use and conception of myth (*muthos*) is notoriously difficult to determine, however, especially because it is difficult to determine whether and in what way Plato wishes to contrast *muthos* with *logos*. I argue that *muthos* plays an integral role in Plato's philosophical investigation and dialectic, and therefore it is best understood as a “guise” of *logos*. Myth is not a suspension nor transcendence of *logos*, as scholars have suggested. Plato uses myth when he is concerned with moral education, that is, the moral transformation of the reader and the interlocutor. According to this line of interpretation, Plato's myths play a heuristic role in service of his moral pedagogical goals. I outline Plato's pedagogical goals in the context of his theory of moral education, and conclude with some suggestions about the integration of philosophical myths in educational settings today.

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Dedication

For all those dear readers who have been morally inspired by the writings of Plato.

Prologue

Plato, like other Greek philosophers, treats the love of learning as a philosophical achievement. To some extent, taking pleasure in learning is a universal attribute for cognitive creatures, because we naturally take pleasure in perception as such. For cognitive creatures perception is constitutive of experience, and there is no pleasure—or pain—without experience. “[T]o be learning something is the greatest of pleasures”, Aristotle writes, “not only to the philosopher but also to the rest of mankind, however small their capacity for it” (*Poetics* 4, 1448b15). As this capacity for learning is developed into an intentional, rational love of learning, whose object is ultimately the knowledge of reality, one is becoming more like a philosopher. This is what thinkers like Plato and Aristotle contend. The capacity for learning is universal; and therefore there is a universal capacity for developing our philosophical abilities, however little or greatly. But to what extent ought we to develop our philosophical capacity? And what kind or which part of our education develops this capacity? One encounters in Plato’s dialogues various attempts to address these sorts of questions, and one also finds Plato’s Socrates exhorting his interlocutors to pursue the development of their love for investigating, to conceive of the possession of knowledge as a moral achievement, and therefore to take seriously their methods for investigation.

I am considering in a very rough and sketchy way an important Platonic idea. Namely that our natural desire for knowledge finds its expression in the pleasure we take in learning. But this desire is initially inchoate. In the early stages of our education we

obviously do not conceptualize the aim of our “desire for knowledge”, nor the significance of the pleasure we take in learning. But there is the potential for its development into an intentional and rational—that is to say a self-consciously held motivation—desire. According to Plato the development here is a specifically *philosophical* education.

I am interested in examining further Plato’s idea that a philosophical education is an important part of moral development. Plato sees the fruits of a philosophical education as an *ethical or moral*¹ achievement. Naturally, then, in this area of Plato’s thought there are several important assumptions about the purposes of a philosophical education that work toward convincing us of its ethical significance. Plato’s ideas deserve attention in their own right, but what makes his thought on philosophical education more interesting is his incorporation of myths. I wish to examine the ways in which Plato’s mythologizing can further shed light on the connection he envisages between philosophical and moral development. It should become clear, in this study, that Plato’s myths are neither a stylistic idiosyncrasy nor the upshot of failing to grasp a more refined style of philosophical argument. Myths play an important role in Plato’s philosophical thought, a role for which in certain chunks of his dialogues Plato deemed other modes of thinking unsuitable. It is my aim to show that Plato’s use of myths rather reveal the educational transformation he envisaged for his readers (and Socrates’ interlocutors in the dialogues).

¹ I am not employing an important contrast between the ethical and the moral, nor will I do so throughout this work.

But before introducing this topic of study in further detail and outlining its program of pursuit in this dissertation, I will quote an abridged passage from a fragment which, although it did not have a title in the condition in which it was found, is commonly called *The Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism*, following Franz Rosenzweig. I quote this passage for two reasons. First, for what it is worth, the following document, whose author is thought to be Hegel, intimates an important connection between philosophy and mythology, which provided the inspiration for this topic of study. An interest in philosophy's relation to mythology is anchored in the power of philosophy to educate. Second, as difficult as it is to take confidence in one's interpretation of this admittedly strange document, it does make clear its conviction for the idea that philosophy is of interest for all. Again, the justification for this is to be found in philosophy's contribution to educating people about important philosophical ideas like freedom, goodness, and beauty.

Here is the passage:

An Ethics. [...]

Only that which is the object of *freedom* is called *idea*. [...]

[A] Finally the idea which unites all, the idea of beauty, the word taken in the higher platonic sense. I am convinced that the highest act of reason, which, in that it comprises all ideas, is an aesthetic act, and that truth and goodness are united like sisters only in beauty— The philosopher must possess just as much aesthetic power as the poet. The people without aesthetic sense are our

philosophers of the letter. [B] The philosophy of the spirit is an aesthetic philosophy. One cannot be clever in anything, one cannot even reason cleverly in history—without aesthetic sense. It should now be revealed here what those people who do not understand ideas are actually lacking—and candidly enough admit that everything is obscure to them as soon as one goes beyond charts and indices.

[C] Poetry thereby obtains a higher dignity; it becomes again in the end what it was in the beginning—teacher of (history) the human race because there is no longer any philosophy, any history; poetic art alone will outlive all the rest of the sciences and arts.

[D] Until we make ideas aesthetic, i.e., mythological, they hold no interest for the people, and conversely, before mythology is reasonable, the philosopher must be ashamed of it. Thus finally the enlightened and unenlightened must shake hands; mythology must become philosophical, and the people reasonable, and philosophy must become mythological in order to make philosophy sensual. [E] Then external unity will reign among us. Never again the contemptuous glance, never the blind trembling of the people before its wise men and priests. Only then does equal development of all powers await us, of the individual as well of all individuals. No power will be suppressed any longer, then general freedom and equality of spirits will reign—A higher spirit sent from heaven must establish this religion among us, it will be the last work of the human race.²

² Translated by Diana I. Behler, pp. 161-163, in *Philosophy of German Idealism: Fichte, Jacobi, and Schelling*, ed. Ernst Behler; Continuum, 1987. The author of this text is anonymous, although it is agreed that the handwriting is Hegel's. For issues pertaining to

Why must the philosopher “possess as much aesthetic power as the poet”? (A) seems to suggest that the poet’s power lies in the capacity to unite truth with goodness by representing the truth beautifully. Truth is all the more convincing when we are persuaded that apprehending it is itself good for us, that it benefits us in some practical sense. In many cases we are more inclined to believe that something is good for us if we find it beautiful. Socrates declares that the myth of recollection that he tells Meno is “both true and beautiful”, and therefore all the more persuasive (*Meno* 81a). For Plato, beauty is a direct expression of unity, and truth partakes in unity. We find beauty in things that are unified, and we are taken in by this unity. We find pleasure in unity. Hence, the *cosmos* is superbly beautiful and draws our attention and evokes our wonder because it appears supremely unified: it is organized; many of its parts behave in predictable ways; it makes life possible for conscious beings; and so on. In this way of thinking, apprehending the beauty of the *cosmos* is simultaneously to apprehend something about reality (of which the *cosmos* is a part) and to be benefited by that apprehension. Thus, “the highest act of reason” must be a unifying act, and to apprehend the unity of reality is at the same time an aesthetic act, for it is to apprehend its beauty

the authorship and the influences on the author, see for instance D. Henrich’s “Aufklärung der Herkunft des Manuskripts ‘Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus’”, *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* (1976), pp. 510-28; Frank-Peter Hansen (1989), *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus: Rezeptionsgeschichte und Interpretation*. It is thought that the document was most likely written in 1796, with the aim to succeed Kant’s philosophy as a “new philosophy”. I am grateful to Wolfgang Mann for references and information in this note.

also.³ In order to apprehend the unity of reality, however, (B) we must go beyond “charts and indices”, or, as I understand the suggestion, a crude kind of empiricism that shuns the investigation of freedom or beauty. (E) External unity, provided by “charts and indices”—such as sharing discovery of facts, unity in education across diverse communities, and joint inquiry into what is reasonable—is of course desirable. But there is a unity that reason is able to create in its apprehension: one can come to learn some truth about the human condition, but one can represent this truth in many different ways. Thus, aesthetic acts create beauty, and these acts are a deliverance of *reason*, because they are the upshot of coming to apprehend something. Thus, to mythologize is to reason (D). So it is that mythologizing is an aesthetic act that discloses the unity of reality (though it seems that no single myth can disclose the unity of reality in its totality).

(C) Why will poetic art alone outlive the rest of the sciences and art? If we consider the remarks in (D) further, perhaps the author is suggesting that the non-poetic sciences and arts cannot disclose the unity behind reality (assuming it arrived at such an understanding) in a manner that would practically *persuade* the people. The people are taken in by myths because the myths are sensual, beautiful, and pleasant. Plato observes in his *Symposium* that we are drawn to beautiful things by nature, and that our first

³ Cf. Fredrich Nietzsche’s remark in the *Birth of Tragedy*: “the existence of the world is *justified* only as an aesthetic phenomenon”, rather than as a moral phenomenon (p. 22). Nietzsche seems to target a “traditional” morality that is concerned with understanding objective truths about what is good and bad in human behavior or existence (amongst other things). Nietzsche thinks that this type of morality historically failed to provide us with a picture of a unified reality that aided us in finding “meaning” in life. For Nietzsche, morality in this sense is passive: we, as it were, wait or hope for the world to disclose its objective unity to us, so that we can feel assured of the worth of our actions. An aesthetic act, on the other hand, is more active: we create unity that we desire, without thinking that it must in some way mimic some objective moral order.

encounter with beauty is our first spiritual experience. That is, an experience that, at least at first, cannot be entirely apprehended by reason but is nevertheless felt, taken in.

Eventually, however, our desire for beauty can be transformed, through a philosophical education, into a rational desire. According to Plato's theory of education, we learn to recognize that (to put it in Platonic terms) our desire to know the beautiful itself *is* the same desire to know reality, and thereupon our desire to experience beauty becomes a rational desire to know the beautiful, to know reality. Plato ultimately concludes that the aim of *eros*, what is at first a non-rational, inchoate desire for beauty, is knowledge.

Now to return to the passage above: "the people", the author declares, are persuaded by myths because myths are beautiful and pleasant. Myths must become reasonable, the author asserts, and they must become philosophical, so that they might lead to knowledge of reality. If myths do not become reasonable and philosophical, they will not persuade the philosopher either, for the philosopher seeks knowledge. But the people must become reasonable, that is, philosophical, so that they will seek *reasonable myths*. I think the author, therefore, suggests that poetic art will outlive all the rest of the sciences and arts because our sensual desire for beauty, absent a *philosophical* education of the kind that I all too briefly ascribed to Plato, will ultimately hold more sway and have a deeper educational influence by dint of its capacity to represent something beautiful. It would be a mistake to conclude, from the observation that beauty has a stronger affective influence on our psychology, that we must become clever at exploiting and seducing that part of our nature that is non-rational; the conclusion that the anonymous author and, I believe, Plato reach instead is that it is crucial that we pursue an education in which our affective

nature becomes rational, and that this can be accomplished through a philosophical education that uses reasonable myths. Only then will the highest act of *reason* become an aesthetic act, that is, *mythological*.

I will not pretend to understand the last sentence in (E), in which the author claims that the work of transforming the philosophical to the mythological and the mythological to the philosophical will need “a higher spirit sent from heaven”, and that this is in some way tantamount to establishing a “religion among us”. Nor do I understand how this work is supposed to be “the last work of the human race”. (It should not be surprising that this disconcerting claim, along with rest of the document, has certainly caused some wonder. And so, since Plato and Aristotle say that philosophy begins with wonder [see below], this is perhaps not an inappropriate way to introduce this philosophical study.) Now, fortunately, we do not have to wait for a higher spirit sent from heaven to complete the last work of the human race, as the author writes, for at least the work of making philosophy mythological and creating myths that are reasonable is already present in Plato’s dialogues. I will not be concerned with speculations about why the anonymous author may have thought Plato’s work fell short or simply missed the mark, for it is possible that the author wished to revive an interest in Plato’s philosophical use of myths and Plato’s view of philosophy’s power to educate. While I obviously lean toward the latter, what I wish to show is that Plato is concerned with creating myths that are philosophical—reasonable—and that he seeks to make philosophy mythological—aesthetically sensual—because he thinks that philosophical education plays an essential part in our moral development: namely, to learn to love and be able to investigate reality.

Plato seems to think that it takes myths to structure our motivation in such a way that we love to pursue an understanding of reality throughout our lives. The conclusion I wish to draw from this study is that this Platonic education, as I have briefly described it, gives us good reason to think that when one does learn to love learning, in a Platonic way, it is a moral achievement, and it is important to think of it as such. It is the sort of moral achievement that, as the anonymous author suggests above, leads to a sense of freedom and external unity, or equality, among us because it equips each individual, as far as it can, with the capacities to actualize their love of learning.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1. The Phenomena

In the colloquial sense, myths are stories that fall short of the truth. We are not in the habit of calling empirical theories (for example a theory about the motion of the celestial bodies) myths. Perhaps we might call certain empirical hypotheses myths *after* they had been proven false, because they had had some influence in culture and many people took them to be *true* at some point in history. The earth is not flat, that is just a myth our ancestors succumbed to, one might say. But more often myths refer to fantastical tales about things that are beyond our experience. There is the *Genesis* myth, in the Old Testament, about the creation of the world—the parting of day from night, sea from land, and of God’s rest. This myth describes an event well before humans were around. Indeed, in an impressive study of Ancient Greek culture and its myths, George Grote wrote that myths depicted “A past that was never present—a region... neither approachable by the critic nor measurable by the chronographer”.⁴ While many myths cannot be empirically verified, this has not of course prevented many from holding them to be true in some sense. So we can often recognize, then, that what we call myths now appeared to tell the truth for some people during certain historical periods (and evidently sometimes still do). And we can even admit that many myths still appear to convey something true and useful about things we encounter in our experience, about some aspect of the human condition,

⁴ Quoted by Charles Freeman (1999), *The Greek Achievement*, p. 25.

or provide us with a “moral”, that we should behave thus and so toward our neighbors, and so forth. In any event, myths are stories, every one of which originated from human thought and imagination.

Mythologizing, the creation of myth, is born of the capacity for speech, and therefore it is a manifestation of the capacity for thought as such. Indeed, *muthos*, the Greek word from which the English word for “myth” derives, often meant just that: speech. While some mythologize from a desire to explain and understand an interesting and shared facet of our experience, even trying to capture the purpose or meaning of human life, others mythologize because they take pleasure in giving vivid expression to their imaginations as such. Thus, our penchant for listening to myths and telling them is a manifestation of our natural fondness for our faculty of imagination. Put that way, the pleasure we take in myths is certainly an expression of the pleasure we take in fiction. But I have already hinted at the peculiar relation that myth has to truth. It is of course too difficult, then, to isolate and lay hold of an explanation for why humans mythologize in general, and it is not clear what such an inquiry would entail.⁵

But we can say this, following Aristotle: our predilection for mythologizing reflects our desire for knowledge, our desire to explain, and our desire to teach. Aristotle writes in the *Metaphysics* that “All men by nature desire to know” (*Meta* 1.980a), and this nature led

⁵ Luc Brisson (1994) remarks that such an inquiry would involve understanding “the causes of religious phenomena in their totality” (p. 8). But it is clear that much more would need investigating, since, as I’ve just indicated, the pleasure we take in (hearing and telling) myths is the same kind of pleasure we take in fictive literature and poetry about non-religious matters.

to mythologizing: “For it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize. … And a man who is puzzled and wonders thinks himself ignorant (whence even the lover of myth is in a sense a lover of wisdom, for myth is composed of wonders)” (*Meta* 982b). Aristotle remarks that myth seeks to explain the world and what is related to human life—what concerns us—not for any “utilitarian end” but for the sake of knowledge itself. Mythologizing, in this conception, can be said to have an “aetiological intention”, like science and philosophy, and it can be learned by anyone, since it is the deliverance of reason.⁶ Plato insists that it is the very nature of reason—and thereby the part of any human cognitive (or as it were *logos*-possessing) nature to desire knowledge (though of course the degree to which the desire is present varies).⁷ The point here is that it is within the natural purview of reason to mythologize, and this fact (of course reflective of culture, context, and so on) is a reflection of a desire for knowledge. Mythology for Plato—and Aristotle confirms as much—functioned as a mode of philosophical explanation, and we can see this vividly in early Greek philosophy and poetry. Philosophy seeks to investigate many things, and much of it from both the beginning and today aims to *persuade* us to adopt certain explanations and even methods or modes of explaining over others, by rational means. So is there an advantage to using mythological explanations in philosophical investigations? I think the answer is most

⁶ In this vein, Aristotle says, “to be learning something is the greatest of pleasures not only for the philosopher but also to the rest of mankind.” Thus it is our very nature to desire knowledge and understanding (*Metaphysics* 1.980a21; see *De Anima* ii 3, 414b18; iii 3, 429a6–8).

⁷ John Cooper (1984) does an excellent job of stressing the importance of this thesis—that it is part of reason’s very nature to desire knowledge—in Plato’s psychology and theory of motivation. See also Myles Burnyeat’s (2007) “The Truth of Tripartition”, in which Burnyeat also asserts that the aforementioned thesis about reason’s inherent desire for knowledge plays a vital role in Plato’s psychology.

plausibly *yes*, if it can be shown that philosophy can make a vital contribution to *education*, or more specifically, a contribution to the development of reason. And I think there is such a view of philosophical education that employs myth in Plato's thought. This dissertation examines a mode of rational persuasion and philosophical education that is finding less favor in our present philosophical milieu, but that plays an important role in Plato's philosophical thought: namely, philosophical myths. My aim is to bring out the value of philosophical myths by focusing on the fundamental educational role that Plato gave to them. The argument that I will be pursuing, in its most general shape, is the following:

1. For one's education to go well, in general, one must learn to love learning, even though a desire for knowledge (or to learn) is present to some degree in every person.
2. Developing one's love of learning in general—to use Platonic terms—is to pursue an understanding of reality and the ways in which reality is rationally unified.
3. Philosophical myths play a vital role in the program of pursuing (2).
4. (2) is an ethical achievement (and this goes some conceptual distance, so to speak, to explaining why Plato wishes to call the pursuit of understanding reality, or *what is real*, the pursuit of Good).

What I wish to suggest from such an argument is that it is a worthy issue to think more seriously about the ways in which philosophical myths can play an important role in our education today, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, whether we are depriving ourselves of something valuable in our philosophical investigations by making little use of philosophical myth.⁸

2. Issues Pertaining to the Study

Myths play an important function in many of Plato's dialogues. While scholars debate the ways in which myths function in this work, it is obvious that the myths have a philosophical purpose. Within the history of Western philosophy, Plato is peerless in his philosophical style in at least two respects. First, Plato wrote in the (much celebrated and studied) dialogue form; and secondly, he incorporates an enormous number of myths and

⁸ Consider for instance Friedrich Nietzsche's comment in the *Genealogy of Morals*, essay III, p. 137: "Our educated people of today, our 'good people', do not tell lies—that is true; but that is *not* to their credit! A real lie, a genuine, resolute, 'honest' lie (on whose value one should consult Plato) would...demand of them...that they should open their eyes to themselves, that they should know how to distinguish 'true' and 'false' in themselves". See also *The Birth of Tragedy*, §23, pp. 135-6, where Nietzsche argues that the demise of tragedy in Greek culture meant the demise of myth, which led to cultural decadence. He indicates there his interest in "*the rebirth of German myth*", and in mythologizing in general. In spite of the many criticisms that Nietzsche launches at Plato, it is worth noting that Nietzsche did not voice his suspicion over Plato's style and mythologizing.

To be fair, to mention one example, there is a superbly interesting use of philosophical myths in Wilfred Sellars' *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*. There Sellars contrasts two competing myths, "the myth of the given" and "the myth of Jones", the latter of which his preferred account. I mention this here, too, because Sellars is clearly treating "myth" as a type of "account" or "explanation" or "theory" that we have tacitly or explicitly bought into, precisely because we have found the accounts to explain plausibly something true (in Sellars' case, about empirical experience, the nature of the mind, and language). I will be trying to show that Plato uses myth in a similar way, namely as an explanatory account, and sometimes as a normative account.

mythical figures into his philosophical thought. One might ask, then, whether Plato's use of myths is (merely) evidence of an extremely idiosyncratic philosophical style of writing, since the extant writings of other Greek philosophers before and after Plato do not match the frequency of Plato's use of myths. (I will provide some facts about this in the following chapter). Scholars have asked whether, for instance, Plato's myths are indicative of a penchant for adding rhetorical flourish to what would otherwise be dry rational argument, or perhaps that Plato is seeking to dazzle the novice reader into an interest in philosophy.⁹ Scholars of Plato have also proposed that the myths sometimes function as a sort of heuristic device with which Plato is attempting to either psychologically seduce the reader into being taken in by a certain philosophical view, or that they act as auxiliaries to the rational arguments advanced in the dialogues, as a kind of "psychological reinforcement".¹⁰ Another version of this line of thinking sees Plato's myths as methods that aim to persuade the reader, or the interlocutors in the dialogue, at a sub-rational or emotive level. Platonic myths act as incantations for persuasion. On the other hand, some scholars have argued that the myths do not "tell us anything new" over and above the philosophical views that have already been discussed in the dialogues in which they appear.¹¹ In this reading, Plato's myths are a different *mode* of expressing the *same* philosophical views whose rational, that is to say, non-mythical expression, can,

⁹ Kathryn Morgan (2000), Luc Brisson (1998), Janet Smith (1985, 1986), Harold Tarrant (1990).

¹⁰ Jonathan Lear (2003), Janet Smith (1986), Chiara Bottici (2007); "Psychological reinforcement" appears in David L. Hitchcock's unpublished dissertation: *The Role of the Myth and Its Relation to the Rational Argument in Plato's Dialogues* (Claremont Graduate School, 1974).

¹¹ See Brisson (1998), Tarrant (2009), Smith (1985), and Charles Daniels (1992).

perhaps with care, be found in some part of the dialectical exchange within the dialogues.¹² There are also more, as it were, exotic interpretations of Plato's use of myths. Some of have thought that the myths pick up (so to speak) where rational, discursive arguments reach their limits, where philosophical argumentation can go no further.¹³ Interpreters of this ilk have been tempted by this kind of reading because at times the phenomena in need of explanation appears, at least to Plato, to need a supernatural or non-empirical, or perhaps more suitably, *divine*, account. A less exotic reading attributes the supernatural imagery and references to Plato's need for a means with which to test certain empirical hypotheses.¹⁴ Yet other scholars have thought that Plato sets up a contrast between philosophy and mythology for the sake of criticizing and evaluating each side by means of the other, while some have thought that Plato wishes to demonstrate philosophy's superior status over mythology.¹⁵ One can quickly see from the diversity of interpretations how puzzling Plato's use of myths can be. However, we might lay out, quite generally, the following ways of viewing Plato's myths:

(1) Plato's myths *transcend* rational or discursive argument because philosophical investigation has its limits.

¹² Smith (1985); Julia Annas (1982) and Catalin Partenie (2009) consider this sort of question.

¹³ Brisson is tempted by this kind of reading (1998); Kathryn Morgan considers a reading of this sort: p. 4; chapter 7.

¹⁴ Smith (1986) argues for this; Myles Burnyeat (2009) expresses a similar idea in his landmark paper, “*Eikos Muthos*”.

¹⁵ The conclusion at which Brisson (1998) ultimately arrives.

(2) Plato's myths *subscend*: they appeal to our *non-rational* nature for the sake of emotively persuading us of the philosophical views that have either already been or are about to be advanced in the dialogues. In other words, they are psychologically exploitive, meant to seduce readers into accepting certain philosophical views.

(3) Plato's myths are a different mode of expressing rational arguments and thereby function as heuristic devices. As such, they may help us better remember the philosophical views that have been advanced, for example by providing a "picture" of a philosophical view. Myths turn "dry, technical, and forbidding material" into a "honeyed cup": this might be called a Lucretian reading.¹⁶ On this reading, there is available a pure, analytic form of the argument that the philosopher primarily prefers.

(4) Plato's myths set up a contrast between philosophy and mythology that Plato wished to explore for the sake of criticizing and evaluating each by means of the other, or the contrast is meant to demonstrate the superiority of philosophy over myth (or the philosopher over the poet).

(4.2) Similarly, Plato's philosophical myths self-consciously problematize language, issuing from a perceived gap between language and reality, in order to evaluate the value and domain of philosophical language: namely, its (perhaps superior) capacity to represent reality.¹⁷

¹⁶ Kathryn Morgan (2000), pp. 3-4.

¹⁷ Morgan (2000). See p. 37 for her definition of "philosophical myth".

(5) Plato's myths are his only means with which to test and examine certain empirical and normative hypotheses.¹⁸

This list of course is not exhaustive. There are more positions and disagreements within each of the general views laid out.¹⁹ But for now I wish to mention that an interest in Plato's use of myths goes as far back as Plato's Academy. Diogenes Laertius (3.80) shows an interest in Plato's use of myths, and he indicates that many of the philosophers of the Academy were also interested. Diogenes even posits his own explanation, according to which:

(6) Plato's myths are devices that are meant to deter unjust men.²⁰

It seems that Diogenes had Plato's eschatological myths primarily in mind, however, and not many of the others.

Aristotle famously remarks, as I quoted above, in his *Metaphysics*, at 981b12: "For it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize. ...

¹⁸ I shall return to this view in further detail in Chapter 2 by comparing it to a similar remark that Jean-Jacques Rousseau puts forward in Part I of his *Discourse on the Origin of the Inequality*.

¹⁹ This schematic layout has been aided by many sources, but I shall mention one here that has been especially helpful and contains a different, interesting list: Smith (1986).

²⁰ Glenn W. Most (2012) cites this Diogenes passage in "Plato's Exoteric Myths", pp. 13-24. There is another interesting fragment by Diogenes Laertius, of a thought he attributes to Aristotle: "And Aristotle says that the form of [Plato's] words is between poetry and prose" (3.37). This is noted in Leslie Kurke (2006), p. 45, footnote 51.

And a man who is puzzled and wonders thinks himself ignorant (whence even the lover of myth is in a sense a lover of wisdom [i.e. a philosopher], for myth is composed of wonders)". Thus, we might put to service Aristotle's remarks about myth as an interpretation of Plato's use of myths:

(7) Plato's myths induce and evoke wonder so that the reader (and interlocutors) might begin to philosophize and become a lover of wisdom.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that there is a skeptical reading of Plato, exhibited by the Stoics and evaluated by Sextus Empiricus, according to which Plato's dialogue form and use of myths are meant to be (as it were) a safeguard against *dogmatic* philosophizing.

Thus:

(8) Plato's use of myths is in some way representative of a skeptical, that is, non-dogmatic philosophical investigation.²¹

Each of these readings is plausible, simply because of the many myths that Plato incorporates into dialogues in the variety of ways that he does. It is not clear whether all of these positions can be combined in a cohesive way. The sheer diversity and strangeness of Plato's myths make it difficult to find a single, unified interpretation that could accommodate all instances of Plato's myths in the dialogues in which they appear.

²¹ Book I, xiv (trans. Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes, *Outlines of Scepticism*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 37-40).

There are many more comments upon Plato's myths that are difficult to classify.²²

Indeed, some modern interpreters of Plato have argued that it is wrongheaded to try to find a singularly unified interpretation of Plato's use of myths, and instead we ought simply to study and examine each dialogue in which myths appear on their own.²³ This approach, too, has merit and must be appreciated by any serious scholar of Plato.

Now it is not my aim to give a single, unified interpretation of Plato's use of myths, nor to provide a focused study of the nature of Plato's use of the word *muthos* in every passage it occurs. Instead, I wish to focus on the educational ends that Plato sought to realize through the use of philosophical myths. That is, this study aims to sketch out the role of Plato's myths from an understanding of his theory of education and (if there is a significant difference after all) his theory of moral education. So while I agree that it is too difficult to find a singularly unified interpretation of all of Plato's myths, I do think that, in the approach to Plato's thought that I will pursue in this dissertation, a more *unifying* interpretation can be developed. The proposal is, to repeat, to approach the myths in relation to Plato's theory of education and with his (background) assumptions about the purposes of philosophical investigation firmly in mind. Interpreters of Plato's myths have not sufficiently foregrounded Plato's theory of education and its relation to his assumptions about the purposes of philosophical investigation in their understanding of the role and function of those myths. Developing this approach will at best make a more systematic interpretation of Plato's myths available and, at the very least, will

²² Consider for instance Hegel's remark in §71 of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and Lecture I of Heidegger's, *What is Called Thinking?*

²³ Morgan (2000), Brisson (1998); see Most (2012) and Monique Dixsaut (2012).

further reveal how importantly his theory of education and the purposes he envisaged for philosophical investigation are operative throughout the dialogues (at least in the ones I will examine in this dissertation).

I aim for this work to be a contribution to the field of philosophy of education, since I wish to show that a large share of Plato's use of myths is best understood in conjunction with his theory of education. In the field of philosophy of education, however, there is little theorizing about the educational role(s) of Plato's myths, and so I hope that this work will begin to fill part of that gap in philosophy of education scholarship and, further, to prompt further investigation into this topic. It is worth mentioning that in the philosophy of fiction and literature, political philosophy, and more recently in philosophy of education, there has been a great deal of research in the nature of *narrative*.²⁴ No doubt there is an important relation between mythology and narrative, and the research that has focused on the narrative aspects of myth has been fruitful.²⁵ For instance, it has been shown by various philosophers and literary theorists that one's need to find meaning and significance in one's actions and the objects with which one engages under the guise of [e.g.] a "vocation" takes a narrative form—and not accidentally so. Indeed, finding significance in one's life is intrinsically to find a narrative that fits one's life: that is, finding a narrative to explain the purpose of one's actions and place in the world.²⁶

²⁴ See Bottici (2007) for a superb overview of these areas of research, especially her chapters 1 and 2.

²⁵ See for instance Catherine Collobert (2012), Pierre Destrée (2012), Francisco Gonzalez (2012), and Kurk (2006).

²⁶ See for instance Charles Taylor (1989) and Alasdair MacIntyre (2007).

Nearly all myths from various historical and cultural traditions meet some need for significance: for some, myths provide a structure to one's experience by portraying (e.g.) an ideal paradigm or picture, in narrative form, in light of which one's experiences can be judged and fitted (Bottici, 2007), or even ethically improved. Indeed the focus on the narrative structures that our minds give to our experience has surely been fruitful in several domains of research, and in particular this focus has provided the resources for arguments that show the importance of engaging fictional literature for ethical insight into the human condition.²⁷ Furthermore, the importance of myths and fictional literature in providing ethical insight partly consists in a narrative structure that can provide one's imagination with materials to narratively structure one's own mind accordingly. The structural point and its parallel with the mind are fundamental, and their importance in philosophy of education and teacher-education research has been explored widely.²⁸ But

²⁷ See for instance Cora Diamond (1982), "Anything but Argument?", *Philosophical Investigations*, V. 5, Issue 1, January.

²⁸ Some samples of this kind of research: Jane O'dea (1994), "Pursuing Truth in Narrative Research", *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, V. 28, Issue 2, December; Klaus Peter Mortensen (2002), "The Double Call: on *Bildung* in a Literary and Reflective Perspective", *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, V. 36, Issue 3, August; Naoko Saito (2009), "Ourselves in Translation: Stanley Cavell and Philosophy as Autobiography", *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, V. 43, Issue 2, May; David T. Hansen (1996), "Finding One's Way Home: Notes on the Texture of Moral Experience", *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, V. 15, Number 3; Tone Kvernbekk (2003), On Identifying Narratives", *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, V. 22, Numbers 3-4; Sven-Eric Liedman (2002), "Democracy, Knowledge, and Imagination", *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, V. 21, Numbers 4-5; Moira von Wright (2002), "Narrative Imagination and Taking the Perspective of Others", *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, V. 21, Numbers 4-5; Aparna Mishra Tarc (2006), "In a Dimension of Height: Ethics in the Education of Others", *Educational Theory*, V. 56, Issue 3; Carola Conle and Michael deBeyer (2009), "Appraising the Ethos of Experiential Narrative: Key Aspects of a Methodological Challenge", *Educational Theory*, V. 59, Issue 1; Kristjan Kristjansson (2010), "Educating Emotions or Moral Selves: A False Dichotomy?", *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, V. 42, Issue 7.

what I want to point out is that while nearly all mythological accounts are narrative in their structure, not all narratives are of course myths (Bottici, 2007). As I said, there is a good deal of research about the significance of narrative in moral education and philosophy of education, but there has been very little engagement with the place of myths as such in theories of education and moral education; and in particular, there is very little engagement in the scholarship of philosophy of education about the relation between Plato's use of myths and his theory of education. In the field of philosophy of education, however, there is mention of myth in its colloquial use, as "unreality", "fiction", or "fantasy"²⁹, in a positive or negative sense; but myth is not treated as a mode of investigation, argumentation, and demonstrative explanation as it is in Plato's dialogues.

On the other hand, there is substantial research in philosophy of education about the nature of Socratic dialogue, dialectical reasoning, Socratic teaching, and Socratic method, along with analysis of their applications in primary and secondary schools, but these studies do not analyze Plato's use of myths (although they posit interpretations of sections of the myths).³⁰ The focus of this dissertation, however, is not so much on the

²⁹ For example: Robert Nelson Reddick (2004), "History, Myth, and the Politics of Educational Reform", *Educational Theory*, V. 54, Issue 1, Winter; James Palermo (2000), "Reading Mann and Cubberly on the Myth of Equal Educational Opportunity: A Barthesian Critique", *Philosophy of Education*; Eamonn Callan (2002); "Democratic Patriotism and Multicultural Education", *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, V. 21, Number 6.

³⁰ Avi Mintz, "From Grade School to Law School: Socrates's Legacy in Education", in *A Companion to Socrates*, ed. Sara Ahbel-Rappe and Rachana Kamtekar (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); Daniel Pekarsky, "Socratic Teaching: A Critical Assessment", *Journal of Moral Education* 23, no. 2 (1994): 119–134; and Anthony G. Rud Jr., "The Use and Abuse of Socrates in Present Day Teaching", *Education Policy Analysis*

nature of Socratic teaching—although an understanding of Plato’s myths would, I think, enhance our understanding of Socratic teaching—but, first, rather more with the ways in which Plato’s use of myth can better our understanding of his theory of education, and, second, the ways in which goals that Plato envisaged for philosophy and education become apparent when we juxtapose his use of myths with his theory of education. Thus, there is indeed a lacuna in the philosophy of education with respect to the nature of myths in Plato’s thought on education and moral education.

To anticipate, then: while Plato assumes that everyone wishes to know what is real, because knowledge of this sort in general is helpful in procuring the goods that are necessary for sustaining a human life and indeed add pleasure to it, he observes that this does not lead everyone to a desire to understand the rational order behind reality as a whole. A philosophical education transforms what is, as it were, a mere desire for knowledge that is practically suitable into a kind that concerns the ultimate ends of human life and the true nature of reality. On this score, it becomes crucial for Plato to convince his readers (or interlocutors) that there *is* a reality, that it is rationally ordered and therefore unified, and that this concept of reality is supreme in some sense (and *therefore* is to be called *the Good*). Furthermore, Plato is keen to show that philosophical investigation is not so much as possible without an idea of a *unified* reality, which is a kind of whole. Nearly all of Plato’s myths confirm these assumptions, and the rest do not disprove them. Plato’s myths seek to educate the reader (or interlocutor) about the nature

Archives 5, no. 20 (1997), <http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/viewFile/621/743>. These references are taken, exactly, from Mark Jonas (2015), “Education for Epiphany: The Case of Plato’s *Lysis*”, *Educational Theory*, Vol. 65, no. 1.

and *reasonableness* of these assumptions, and in turn provide a source of motivation and establish the psychological conditions for a lifelong investigation of a unified reality. To this end, Plato's myths are extraordinarily useful in the dialogues. I hope that this dissertation will at least make that much clear. Many agree that a range of Plato's myths function as a heuristic device that could teach or convince Socrates' (or the Stranger's) interlocutors or us the reader of a philosophical idea or concept or even method of thinking that Plato thought important. Yet a stronger characterization than "heuristic" may be found by means of considering more deeply Plato's assumptions that bear on the purpose of philosophical investigation and philosophy's power to educate. As I said above, if Plato is right that philosophy's contribution to one's development is indeed ethically beneficial, then I should like to argue that the philosophical value that Plato found in his use of myths may find some application, or at least provide some insight, in our current educational landscape. In other words, can Plato's assumptions and uses to which he put his myths find a foothold in our own educational theorizing? I will try to provide a substantive "yes" to this question and conclude the dissertation with a discussion of how these aims that Plato envisaged for philosophy and education, and how he sought to achieve those aims through philosophical myths, compare with our own assumptions about the purposes of education. At this point in the introduction, I will say that I suspect that our contemporary thinking about the importance of developing "critical thinking skills", as they are often called in education, might not fully appreciate the important contribution that philosophical myths can make, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, our modern proclivity for the professionalization of philosophy and

philosophical argument may be prejudicing us from pursuing the use of philosophical myth.

Chapter 2

Muthos and Logos

A general background to Plato's use of *muthos* and some of the theoretical issues surrounding that will be considered in this chapter. While the purpose of this dissertation is not to conduct an exhaustive survey of each instance in which *muthos* or some cognate of that word appears in Plato's work, a brief overview of Plato's concept and usage of *muthos* (and its cognates) will demonstrate the interpretive difficulties that scholars of Plato's myths cannot evade, and thereby some of the challenges that the present study must face. Thus I will proceed through a range of the pertinent scholarly literature, providing a concise synopsis of the various interpretive positions scholars have taken with respect to Plato's myths. Moreover, it will be helpful to have a conceptual background to Plato's *muthos*, so that we can try to arrive at a notion of it that will further illuminate its role in Plato's educational scheme. For, as I shall discuss in the following chapters, Plato does envisage an inherent educational task for philosophy: to develop rationally the love of learning and to clarify and explicitly fix its object, namely the *real*, the *good*. My aim is to examine in some detail the nature of the relation between Plato's theory of education and his use of myths, and for that a study of *muthos* will be suitable here. Furthermore, in the present chapter, I will introduce the issue of whether Plato makes use of a strong contrast between *muthos* and *logos*, since this will make clearer Plato's concept of *muthos*.

1. Conceptual Background of *Muthos*

Kathryn Morgan (2000) shows in her excellent research that there is not really textual evidence—as had been thought, for example in Hesiod and Herodotus and Homer—that *mythos* had the connotation of fiction. In Homer, *muthos* often means “authoritative speech”, examples of which can be found in the speeches of Agamemnon (1.388), Diomedes (9.51), and Achilles (9.431).³¹ It is interesting to note that one cannot find a consistent conceptual distinction between *muthos* and *logos* in Herodotus’ *Histories*. For example, he calls stories concerning the flood of the Nile and the Egyptians’ efforts to sacrifice Heracles *muthoi* (the only two passages that he mentions the word *muthos*); but he calls a whole host of “historical” accounts, which he utterly rejects, *logoi*.³² Morgan (2000, p. 20) shows that even in Thucydites one looks in vain to find a programmatic condemnation of *muthoi*, nor an interest in determining its semantic scope. Accordingly, Liddell and Scott’s entry in the *English-Greek Lexicon* (1889) has a wide range of meaning for *muthos*, from “anything delivered by word of mouth, word, speech”, to “counsel, advice”, and even “a resolve, purpose, design, plan”, as well as the familiar “tale, story, narrative”.³³ It is noteworthy that *muthos* largely overlaps conceptually with *logos*, where *logos* diverges from *muthos* in English translations of Plato and Aristotle as “reason” and “argument”. Recently, however, Jessica Moss (2014) has shown, through a careful study of many passages in which translators of Plato and Aristotle have been apt to

³¹ Morgan (2000), pp. 17-18; the references in Homer are hers.

³² Morgan (2000), chapter 2.

³³ See p. 521 of the intermediate lexicon.

translate “reason” for *logos*, that “an explanatory account” is a more suitable translation. Indeed, she points out that only a century ago “reason” was a rare translation for *logos* in Plato and Aristotle, and that translators at that time chose “rule”. Of course, there is a connection that Aristotle and Plato held between what we call the faculty of reason and *logos*, and that pivots around the power to reason, the power of reasoning. When Homer and Hesiod call dumb animals “*logos*-lacking”, what they mean is not reason-lacking (which they are) but rather animals without speech.³⁴ Moss goes on to argue that the translation of “reason” in Plato and Aristotle is perhaps too liberal, since in the relevant passages in which “reason” is a tempting translation, “speech” or “account” or “argument” will suffice, and this is moreover in keeping with the usage of the writers who preceded them. She notes that even in Parmenides’ extant fragments, where it is tempting to translate “reason” for *logos* (for instance where he says [28 B7 DK] “judge by *logos* (*krinai logōi*)”), “speech”, “account”, or “argument” will do.³⁵ Now in the case of Plato, Moss reminds us that when Plato is interested in demarcating the part of the soul that reasons, he does not use *logos* but rather *logistikon*, what is capable of calculation (*logismos*). Moss goes on to argue, through a meticulous exegesis, that *logos* in Plato, thereupon in Aristotle, is “something which, when grasped, transforms an inferior epistemic state into a superior one”, which of course means closer to the truth. This formulation is excellent because it works well for a wide range of passages in Plato and

³⁴ See Moss (2014), p. 185. She cites the works of Urs Dierauer (1977), *Tier und Mensch im Denken der Antike: Studien zur Tierpsychologie, Anthropologie und Ethik*, Amsterdam; Roman Dilcher (1995), *Studies in Heraclitus*, Hildesheim; and John Heath (2005), *The Talking Greeks: Speech, Animals, and the Other in Homer, Aeschylus, and Plato*, Cambridge.

³⁵ Moss (2014), p. 185.

Aristotle, and it does not diverge from its traditional meaning in writings of Plato's and Aristotle's predecessors. On this way of translating, where, in passages of Plato that translators often use “[rational] argument” for *logos*, Moss argues that we ought to go with “explanatory account”: “an account of the *aitia*, cause, or explanation, that underlies the facts”.³⁶ Moss further brings attention to passages in which Plato uses the formulation, “to give a *logos*”, or “to be able to give a *logos*” (*Rep.* 534b, *Theat.* 201c-d, *Symp.* 202a, *Phaed.* 76b, *Tim* 51d-e, *Prot.* 338e-9a), which is more comfortably rendered “account”, rather than “reason”. Similarly, in the passages that we will consider in the following chapters, a *muthos* is something that one is able to give when one needs to explain, demonstrate, persuade, educate, or argue a point. Now this puts us back into the conceptual region, as it were, into which Aristotle places *muthos*. As I quoted from his *Metaphysics* in the previous chapter, he explains the reasons the early philosophers and poets began to mythologize: namely, to *explain* so as to *know*. But obviously we have yet to determine whether there is an important contrast that is operative between *muthos* and *logos* in Plato, in spite of their undeniable conceptual kinship in classical Greek. Even if it could be shown that we could put “explanatory account”, keeping in mind that the purpose of an explanatory account is to improve our epistemic position or our grasp of the truth, that does not explain why there appears to be a contrast between *muthos* and *logos* most notably in Plato's *Protagoras* and *Meno*, a problem which is further confounded by an apparent absence of a contrast in the *Theaetetus* and *Timaeus*. An important caveat is needed here. The present study does not aim to settle once and for all whether there is a critical contrast in Plato between *muthos* and *logos*, but it does aim to

³⁶ Moss (2014), p. 188.

further clarify Plato's notion of *muthos*, which will require an engagement with the question of whether there is a contrast. My hope is that a consideration of Plato's theory of education, and philosophy's role in it, will bear on this question, or at least give us a better sense of the concept of *muthos* as well as the role it plays in Plato's thought. So this is a good juncture at which to turn to *muthos* in Plato.

1.2 Conceptual Background of *Muthos in Plato*

There are 87 occurrences of *muthos*, where its meanings seem to range from that of “speech”, a “tale”, a “story”, to an “account” or “discourse”, in 12 of the 26 dialogues that are unanimously considered authentic to Plato; and, if we include the six works that are often considered inauthentic, there are all together 101 occurrences. Of the 87 references, over half of the occurrences of *muthos* (54% to be exact) are found in the *Republic* (20 times) and *Laws* (27), while the remaining uses of the term are strewn through the following dialogues: *Statesman* (8), *Timaeus* (8), *Phaedo* (6), *Protagoras* (5), *Gorgias* (5), *Phaedrus* (3), *Theaetetus* (3), *Sophist* (2), *Cratylus* (1), and *Philebus* (1). Amongst these occurrences of *muthos* there are two derivatives of *muthos*: (1) *muthikos*, at *Phdr.* 265c1: “what belongs to the class of myths”, or “what concerns myth”, and (2) *muthōdēs*, at *Rep.* 522a7: “what resembles myth”, or “what presents the character of myth”. In addition, there are a number of compound forms, all of which are unique to Plato, that is, they are his neologisms³⁷, and several derivatives thereof. Here is a list: *muthopoiois* (*muthos* + *poieō*: “myth-maker”); *muthologos* (“one who says/tells a myth”)

³⁷ Glenn W. Most (2012) confirms this point in “Plato's Exoteric Myths”.

and the derivatives *muthologikos* (“belonging to the myth-teller”, in one occurrence at *Phdo.* 61b5) and *muthologia* (“the activity/fact of telling myth(s)”, in 8 occurrences at: *Phdr.* 243a4; *Pol.* 304d1; *Crit.* 110a3; *Laws* 680d3, 752a1; *Hipp.* 298a4); the verb *muthologeō* (“to tell or speak in the form of a myth”), in 13 occurrences; the nominal compound *muthologēma* (“the result of the action of telling something in a myth”, or “what is told in a myth”, in only two occurrences at *Phdr.* 229c5 and *Laws* 663e5); and finally the compound constructs of *mutheomai* (“to say/speak/tell/recount”; or “to consider”) with *para*.³⁸

Why did Plato invent a host of words built from the noun *muthos* and the verb *mutheomai* in those 12 dialogues? Again it may prove fruitless to try to find a single, unified interpretation that can answer such a question, but, we can say at a general level, as Iris Murdoch points out, that Plato is inclined to call a range of theories he is either positing or evaluating, myths.³⁹ Protagoras’ thesis, for example, considered throughout the *Theaetetus* with utter seriousness because of its plausibility—that perception is knowledge—is called a *muthos* (164d). And we are told in the *Republic* (592) that the description of the city is a mythological description of the soul. To give one more

³⁸ The information in this paragraph, along with the translations (with slight modifications) in quotation marks, is taken from Luc Brisson (1998), Appendixes I-II. Brisson draws from Leonard Brandwood’s (1976) precise and impressive survey. Brandwood’s work also informs us that there are 260 proper names of characters that are related to myths that were circulating in ancient Greece in Plato’s authentic corpus, a list which can be found in Brisson (1998), p. 153, and Brandwood (1976).

³⁹ Iris Murdoch (1992), p.10; Murdoch (1971), “The Sovereignty of Good over other Concepts”; and Murdoch (1977).

example, the explanation for how it is that the earth, which is spherical,⁴⁰ can sustain its location in space without a grounding support in the heavens among the other heavenly bodies (or gods) is given by a myth; that explanation, Socrates argues, ought to be preferred to an explanation that makes use of material causes insofar as the non-material explanation employs a concept of the Good in its causal explanation. Because, according to Plato, the Good “binds and holds things together” (99c), it can properly be called a cause, an *aition*; and a myth that shows or demonstrates this counts as a causal explanation or explanatory account.

Thus, when Plato calls the works of poets like Homer “myths”, it does appear that they are called so because of their aim to *explain* the causes at play in history and in nature, and not because of the genre of writing to which they belong. While it may be tempting to associate myths with the activity of poets, in Plato the variety of words associated with myth marks the activity of those aiming to theorize and explain so as to persuade.⁴¹

The issue of poetry and prose and myth and rational argument is difficult to disentangle in Plato’s works, and this is unsurprising when we consider Plato’s position in his own cultural heritage and the novel ambitions put into the form of his writing. But indeed Leslie Kurke (2006) argues at length that a closer look at Plato’s texts in conjunction with

⁴⁰ David Sedley (1990) argues (p. 362) that “spherical” is the natural reading for the passages at 97d7-e1, 108e5, 110b5ff, and 112c1-2. Gail Fine (1990) rigorously argues against Sedley, claiming that one does not find a teleological account of the Good as a causal force in the *Phaedo*; but that does not show that there is not a *myth* that is playing an important explanatory role in the *Phaedo*, whether it is supposed to be a teleological account in particular or not.

⁴¹ *Republic*, Book X.

a remark of Aristotle⁴² shows that Plato holds a contrast between poetry and prose-writing, the latter for which he uses one of his ‘myth’-neologisms. Kurke goes on to show that it may be more appropriate to think of (Aesopic) prose, as a *style* or *genre* of writing or philosophizing, for *muthos*, rather than something opposed to *logos*. For example, Kurke finds a contrast between “storytellers and poets [μυθολόγων ἢ ποιητῶν]”, at *Republic* 392d1-3 (p. 10)⁴³. Kurke’s central contention is that although “[t]his literary-historical narrative is usually constituted as the inevitable, triumphal march from ‘*muthos* to *logos*’... the presence of the Aesopic lurking behind and within the Socratic dialogues of Plato necessarily complicates this narrative” (p. 8). It would take us too far afield to go through Kurke’s sophisticated analyses of the Aesopic elements and Plato’s “programmatic” remarks that suggest he is mimicking, to some degree, Aesop’s mimetic prose for his own Socratic dialogues.⁴⁴ Yet for my purposes Kurke’s work is worth considering insofar as it begins to de-emphasize the assumption that Plato treats *muthos* as something beneath *logos*, whereby the latter is something that he is pleased to associate

⁴² A remark, that is, preserved by Diogenes Laertius: “And Aristotle says that the form of his [sc. Plato’s] words is between poetry and prose” (D.L. 3.37): see Kurke (2006, 2011, p. 264). Kurke (2006, p. 18) draws attention to Nietzsche’s “clearsighted assessment” of Plato’s style of writing: “Indeed, Plato has given to all posterity the model of a new art form, the model of the *novel*—which may be described as an infinitely enhanced Aesopian fable, in which poetry holds the same rank in relation to dialectical philosophy as this same philosophy held for many centuries in relation to theology: namely, the rank of *ancilla*” (*The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann [New York, 1967], pp. 90-91).

⁴³ The same kind of contrast can be found at *Republic* 394b-c; see Kurke (2006), p. 10.

⁴⁴ Kurke (2006, p. 14) finds such a “programmatic passage” in *Phaedo* 61a-b. She writes, concerning that passage, “While Socrates consistently designates Aesopic fables as *muthoi*, his interlocutor Cebes ... refers to them as *logoi*. At the level of *language*, these two designations are just what we would expect within the diachronic development of Greek linguistic usage: for Aristophanes and Herodotus in the fifth century mainly designate fable as *logos*, while Plato’s successor Aristotle uses the terms *muthos* and *logos*, apparently interchangeably” (p. 15).

with philosophy. The interesting point here is that if Kurke is right, we ought to keep apart poetry and mimetic prose, that is, poetry and *muthoi*. On this reading, Plato's writings in general, subtly and at times explicitly identified with Aesopian fable (mimetic prose⁴⁵), fall within the genera of mythological prose writing—*Socratikoi logoi*. Myth is not so much ancillary to poetry, rather, in Plato's writing, it is the shape that philosophical thought and writing takes.

Another interesting interpretation that Kurke espouses is her agreement with Andrea Nightingale (2000), who says that the famous passage at *Republic* 10, 607b, where Socrates tells his interlocutors that they have, as it were, stumbled into the “ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry”, is “one of Plato's more powerful fictions”.

Indeed, Nightingale writes:

the notion that “poetry”—as a mode of discourse that promulgates a certain set of values—is fundamentally opposed to “philosophy” (and vice versa) was not articulated before Plato. It is Plato's private quarrel, then, which is retrojected back onto the ancients in *Republic* 10 and thereby made to escape the contingency and specificity of Plato's own historical moment.⁴⁶

Plato's scheme—which is plausible—or, perhaps, irony, here is best put by Alexander Nehemas (1999), who says that Plato, driven by his goal to appropriate “the term

⁴⁵ Kurke (2011) writes: “Platonic prose is ‘mimetic’ in several senses: it is a fictive imitation or representation of a whole social world” (p. 251).

⁴⁶ pp. 10-11. Kurke (2006) quotes this passage p. 7.

‘philosophy’ ... for his own practice and educational scheme”, contrasts philosophy “not only with sophistry but also with rhetoric, poetry, traditional religion, and the specialized sciences” (p. 110), for each of which *muthos* and *logos*, without any specialized distinction, are put to service.⁴⁷ Of course, almost all scholars agree that Plato’s Socratic dialogues are peerless because they incorporate *and* simultaneously evaluate so well “rhetoric, poetry, traditional religion, and the specialized sciences” of his time. On this reading then, Plato at times evaluates mythological accounts of various physical and metaphysical phenomena because it is the function of philosophy to evaluate such accounts. Philosophy must take an interest in mythology because from its beginning, mythologizing, Plato shows, had (unselfconsciously) a philosophical aim: to explain and get at the truth of nature, of reality. Plato, however, does not merely stop at evaluating myth for its philosophical success but refines the purpose of mythologizing by creating his own philosophical myths, so that mythologizing becomes a mode of philosophizing. Morgan (2000), who holds a similar line of interpretation as the one I have been describing with Kurke (2006), Nightingale (2000), and Nehemas (1999), summarizes thus: “[Plato’s] Philosophical tales are often newly invented because they have a point to make that does not fit into previous narrative formats, but most importantly because they must demonstrate *how to employ myth correctly*” (p. 16, emphasis added), that is, how to employ myth *philosophically*. In this way, Plato can, so to speak, have his cake and eat it too. He can set up philosophy as its own “autonomous domain of rational thought”, set apart from rhetoric, religion, poetry, and traditional myths, and yet help himself to the power of mythologizing: that is, perhaps paradoxically, *creating* philosophical accounts

⁴⁷ *Virtues of Authenticity*.

that are portrayed as if they are dialectically *arrived* at, as if the pursuit of truth demands it.⁴⁸ Morgan goes on to bluntly conclude: “until the rise of philosophy, there was no ‘mythology’, [and thus the] distinction between *mythos* and *logos* is a function of the rise of philosophical self-consciousness” (pp. 21-3), brought to a victorious culmination in Plato.

2. Muthos and Logos

More recently, scholars of Plato’s work have become interested in reexamining the overall interpretation of those dialogues in which Plato discusses or makes his own myths. David Sedley (2009) remarks: “It remains the case that Plato’s myths, for all the interest they have attracted, are far too rarely used in the interpretation of the dialogues to which they belong”.⁴⁹ I concur with Sedley; but the aim of my dissertation is perhaps more ambitious: I aim to gather together a general sense of the importance that Plato saw in myth and myth-making as it emerges in light of considering his theory of education as it is developed in several of his dialogues, in conjunction with some assumptions about philosophy about which Plato himself is not always explicit. The rest of this section, however, will not make good on this ambition; rather, I shall describe several more important issues in the interpretation of Plato’s texts and mythological parlance, surveying some of the relevant, modern scholarship.

⁴⁸ The quoted “autonomous domain of rational thought” appears in Kurke (2006), p. 19.

⁴⁹ “Myth, Punishment and Politics in the *Gorgias*”, pp. 51-76.

It is thought that the pre-Socratics begin to mark a shift in a concern for examining a suitable form of literary expression that represents the true nature of the world. And hence begins philosophical writing, although up until Plato it takes the form of poetry. Plato begins explicitly to question poetry's capacity for the task of philosophizing; but, as discussed above, he at times does pursue a philosophically appropriate poetic expression of truth (or, more precisely, what resembles the truth). Yet, since linguistic convention always represents (to some degree) cultural conventions and practices, philosophical writing from the sixth to fourth centuries still largely relied on poetic language. Plato may be seen as the culmination of the beginning of an explicit philosophical self-consciousness about the scope, power, purpose, and limits of philosophical writing and thought.

Hegel thought of philosophy as tracing the history of the development of reason. What I wish to say here is that myths in Plato's philosophy (as well as in that of his predecessors) have played an interesting and important, non-tangential part in that history. Therefore it is no surprise that, even if this philosophical history finally leads to inextricably linking *logos* with *reason*, because *mythologizing* is a capacity of *reason*, *muthos* is also linked with reason.

Most philosophers, however, maintain that there is an important contrast in Plato's thought between *logos* and *muthos*. The question of there being a contrast of a certain kind is unavoidable and important. Indeed, it can seem that for those studying *muthos* in Plato, the question of whether it contrasts with *logos* is *the question*. For instance, in the

Protagoras, Plato has Protagoras ask those present whether he should give a *logos* or a *muthos* (320c), which seems to suggest that they are not the same thing. His audience, including Socrates, agrees that they would prefer a *muthos*: “give us a *muthos* because it is more pleasant”, they say. Philosophers have supposed that *logos*, in that context, stands for a rational demonstration or proof, formulated in a *philosophical* way, as opposed to a *mythological* way. The latter, it is thought, is less rigorous and caters to the non-rational elements of the soul.⁵⁰ We do not need to assume, however, that Plato’s myths themselves are non-rational or irrational. On the contrary, Protagoras’ myth is proposed as one of two ways that can *prove* to Socrates that virtue is teachable. (I do not think that the persuasiveness of Protagoras’ account, if it is at all persuasive, depends on its ability to stir up our less-than-rational desires.) The interlocutors choose Protagoras’ mythical version of his account over the *logos* not because it would be more persuasive but because it would be more “pleasant”. Moreover, Protagoras concludes the great demonstration with a *logos* (beginning at 324D) as a continuation of the *muthos* he began, with the exception that he does not reference any gods. But we should not assume, at least from the *Protagoras*, that myths are merely stretches of decorated and dramatic ways of clothing bits of rational arguments, what could otherwise be put into a more perspicuous (and austere) logical form.⁵¹

⁵⁰ See Christopher Rowe (1999) “Myth, History, and Dialectic in Plato’s *Republic* and *Timaeus-Critias*”, and Rowe (2009) “The Charioteer and his Horse: an Example of Platonic Myth-Making”; and Malcolm Schofield (2009) “Fraternite, inegalite, la parole de Dieu: Plato’s Authoritarian Myth of Political Legitimation”.

⁵¹ I disagree with Brisson (2994), who does hold that Plato’s myths pick up on the work of persuasion where rational argument fails. Indeed, Brisson calls this an “extreme situation [in philosophy] which is also the mark of [Plato’s] originality” (p. 11; see also p. 75).

The question of contrast quickly becomes especially complicated when we consider the famous passage from the *Gorgias* (523a), where Socrates insists that the mythological account he gives is a *logos* even though Callicles would consider it a *muthos*. Socrates says, at *Gorgias* 523a: “‘Give ear, then,’ as people say, to a very fine account [καλοῦ λόγου]—one that you, for your part, I imagine, will consider a story [μῦθον], but that I consider an account [λόγον]; because the things I’m going to tell you I’ll tell as being true”.⁵² I will return to this passage and the one in the *Protagoras* above in the following chapter for a closer analysis, but for now one can easily see that *logos* and *muthos* do not appear conceptually equivalent. But it does seem obvious that the mythological form with which Socrates delivers his arguments for a different notion of justice (among other things) in the *Gorgias* is significant. Moreover, that the mythological form of the argument for Socrates’ conception of justice is declared to be a *logos* by Socrates is further evidence that *muthos* and *logos* are deliverances of the *same* faculty of thought.

Plato seamlessly transitions, in the *Timaeus*, between calling the account of the creation of the *cosmos* an *eikôs muthos* (three occurrences: 29d, 59c, 68d) and an *eikôs logos* (seven occurrences: 30b, 48d, 53d, 55d, 56a, 57d, 90e).⁵³ Luc Brisson (2012) interprets this difficulty thus: “Because it appears in the form of a story that describes the making of a god, the world, by another god, the demiurge, the *Timaeus* is akin to a myth (*muthos*) like the one told by Hesiod in the *Theogony*. Yet it also wants to be an explanation (*logos*), backed up by arguments. . . . The major difficulty to be faced by the interpreter of

⁵² The translation here is Christopher Rowe’s (2012), p. 187.

⁵³ The references in the *Timaeus* are found in Brisson (2012, p. 371).

the *Timaeus* resides in the fact that Plato *adopts both views, without really choosing between them*” (p. 390, emphasis added). The contrast between *logos* and *muthos*, in Brisson’s interpretation, consists in its literary form and epistemic scope. Myths tell a story through narration that is grounded in belief rather than the facts, although of course it is trying to get at the truth of things. A *logos*, on the other hand, is a formal argument that has the potential to be grounded in *empirical* facts, and so has the potential to explain how things *really* are. Myles Burnyeat (2009), however, argues that an *eikôs muthos* ought to be thought as a *reasonable account*, because it is the best account that we can infer, given the important connection between the *reasonable* order that inheres in the sensible world and our reason’s capacity to perceive that reasonable order. On Burnyeat’s reading, Plato’s account is first called a *muthos* because, as Brisson says, the account has limits, since it is attempting to explain events that took place before (and therefore beyond) our experience, and because it takes a narrative form. But Burnyeat suggests that Plato is happy to call it a *logos* because it does seek to explain, through carefully reasoned out premises, in conjunction with the facts that we can indeed perceive. The *eikôs muthos* thus succeeds (at least for Timaeus and his interlocutors, including Socrates) because it “disclose[s] the reasonableness of the cosmos”; and because it does, it also empowers Plato to “overcome the traditional opposition between *muthos* and *logos*” (p. 179).⁵⁴ Thus, there does seem to be a contrast, at least in literary form, between *muthos* and *logos*, but even that contrast is complicated if we keep passages like the *Gorgias* in mind, where the narrative story that Socrates gives is declared to be a *logos*.

⁵⁴ Note that Burnyeat does indicate that he thinks the opposition between *muthos* and *logos* mentioned in the *Republic*, *pace* Kurke (2006) and Nightingale (2000), is Plato’s fiction.

On the other hand, it has been thought that Plato holds myths in higher regard than (mere) rational arguments. Chiara Bottici (2007) affirms such a view. She writes: “Platonic myths could be seen as ways of expressing a conceptual content which is superior to rational argument, because once the argument is translated into a single written form it is dead, whereas myths are open to a proliferation of meaning that can always generate further discussion”.⁵⁵ It is clear that Plato was interested in, and well aware of, the power of images and stories to impress themselves on the psyche, and thus it makes sense that for those philosophical views that Plato thought most important to convey (such as the supremacy of justice for the individual and community) he would use mythological constructions. I do not think, however, that the question of superiority between myth and rational argument in Plato yields a very helpful approach in understanding Plato’s philosophical purposes for myth in the considerations and passages I have adduced so far. Plato does seem to show an interest in examining the limits and possibilities of philosophical investigation and how the philosopher might convey the meaning and truth that philosophy can discover. The idea that Plato’s myths aim to evoke, in his readers or characters, a kind of philosophical reflection that may be more difficult to accomplish by a more obvious and familiar style of rational argument, is plausible. As Myles Burnyeat puts the point: “My own view is that some truths are too important to stand or fall by mere argument”.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ *A Philosophy of Political Myth*, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 32.

⁵⁶ Emphasis added. P. 1, in “The Truth of Tripartition”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Vol. 106, 1, pp. 1-23, 2006.

Does Plato rely on myths, then, to convey or even discover truths that “mere argument” cannot deliver? This question must be considered in light of another question, and that is a question about Plato’s philosophical purposes more generally. But characterizing Plato’s philosophical purposes and intentions is precisely what remains so difficult. While I cannot answer this question fully, the dissertation will try to show that the philosophical purposes and assumptions that motivate Plato’s use of myths are better understood with a firmer grasp of his educational scheme that is woven into his view of philosophy. It should be emphasized that this way of characterizing Plato’s philosophical purposes is very far from the idea that Plato saw myths as a foil for demonstrating the rational purity, or superiority, of philosophy over mythology.⁵⁷

It is worth asking, however, if Plato saw myths as either capable of conveying something that he thought philosophical argument—that is, *rational* argument—could not, or of *persuading* someone of something that rational argument could not. One line of

⁵⁷ It is tempting to think that Plato wishes to show the superiority of philosophy to myth (or poetry) in the *Republic*, but I do not think such a reading is necessary, nor attractive. Julius Annas (1982) seems to hold such a view, unfortunately, and I will consider it in Chapter 4. Cf. Monique Dixsaut’s (2012, pp. 25-46) “Myth and Interpretation” (pp. 25-46); Dixsaut thinks that the contrast between *muthos* and *logos* is best approached by considering Plato’s interest (most notably in the *Phaedrus* and the *Republic*) in examining, and experimenting with, the different modes that are available for conveying meaning. Gerard Naddaf (“Translator’s Introduction” in Brisson’s *Plato the Myth Maker*), too, portrays Plato in this vain, though with a sharper focus on Plato’s fascination with evaluating the different forms of written communication that have emerged by his time and the ways in which the Greeks’ consciousness and psyches were being transformed thereby. Superseding the oral tradition, Naddaf notes that, “Plato was the first great exponent of an entirely new kind of consciousness”. Plato, then, *pioneered* a most novel way to write philosophy: a written philosophy integrating mythological elements, traditional and new, and serving as an exploration of this new Greek consciousness and psychology. Cf. G. R. F. Ferrari (2012) “The Freedom of Platonic Myth” (pp. 67-86).

interpretation is that Plato thinks there is a range of truths whose expression *must* be mythical. Franco Trabattoni (2012) pursues this thesis: “The aim of Socrates here [in the *Phaedrus*] is to show that there is a kind of truth that only the myth is entitled to expound” (p. 308) (for which, interestingly, Socrates claims courage is needed: *Phaedrus* 68a). Trabattoni supports this thesis with the passage in which Socrates reproaches Phaedrus for his skepticism about the authority of the sources of various myths. Socrates says, in admiration, that Dodona’s priests (before their time) were willing even to listen to rocks or oak, “provided only they spoke the truth” (*Phaedrus* 275b-c). The remark is strange indeed. But Trabattoni then turns our attention to what we learn from the *Phaedrus*, *Symposium*, and the *Republic*. In each, Plato discusses the process and aim of dialectical investigation: namely, the idea that the *logos* (account) about some sensible phenomena should, if pursued, eventually lead the investigator from its various instantiations in the sensible world to a single, unified *idea*, a Form, of which it partakes. (My claim here is that *muthos* can play a function in the development of knowledge; or to put it another way, a *muthos* can improve our epistemic position.) It is entrenched in many readings of Plato that the realm in which the Forms exist is not fully accessible by our faculty of reason or perception, and therefore must be spoken about in a *likely* (*eikôn*) way, which is to say mythical. Thus “if philosophy seeks to advance human knowledge past the world of perception and beyond the unifying work that man is in a position to perform upon that world, then it must indeed turn to myth”.⁵⁸ This line of interpretation, in my view, is attractive because it resists denigrating myth in the name of philosophy, and rather sees myth as in some sense completing or supplementing the task of

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 315.

philosophy.⁵⁹ According to this way of reading Plato's myths, myths by all means play a philosophical role, nothing less or more.

Catherine Collobert (2012) proposes that we understand Platonic myth as Plato's "synthesis of poetry and philosophy".⁶⁰ The aim of such a synthesis is to provide the reader with verbal imagery that can get at the truth—truths that a non-synthesized philosophy aims at anyway, but truths that mere poetry (i.e. non-philosophical myth) cannot attain. Collobert does not see in Plato's thought a deep contrast between *logos* and *muthos*, but rather sees each as a species of representation, and *muthoi* as a category of *logoi*.⁶¹ Collobert says that the purpose of a Platonic myth, then, is to represent the likeness of something real. Put this way, "What is at stake in understanding the art of image-making is ultimately the type of reality with which the myth-maker [in this case the philosopher] should deal".⁶² Collobert draws attention to a distinction between types of images found in the *Sophist* (267e): images grounded in knowledge and images grounded in *doxa* (opinion). The philosopher is keen to create images grounded in knowledge, whose representations are portions of a stable reality. On this view, the image of the soul that is presented in the *Phaedrus*, for example, is an image of the "actual

⁵⁹ Cf. Harold Tarrant (1990) "Myth as a Tool of Persuasion in Plato" (pp. 19-31), and Tarrant (2012), "Literal and Deeper Meanings in Platonic Myths" (pp. 47-66).

⁶⁰ "The Platonic Art of Myth-Making: Myth as Informative", pp. 87-108.

⁶¹ P. 91. I do not think a lot turns on categorizing things this way, and this issue seems to become needlessly difficult in Collobert.

⁶² Pp. 94-5

structure of the soul”—the image is a “copy [*eikon*] of the soul’s nature”.⁶³ This line of investigation seems promising in that it circumvents the difficulties of postulating a substantive contrast between *muthos* and *logos*, but nevertheless provides a framework in which Plato’s *philosophical* purposes are illuminated in his use of *muthoi*.

So far I have been considering some interpretations that put the contrast between *muthos* and *logos* as one of superiority, or one that sees myth as supplementary or auxiliary, or one that sees Plato as trying to supersede or synthesize any contrast. But there is another kind of interpretation that is suggested by the myth of Cronus as it appears in the *Statesman* and, perhaps, the so-called *eikōs muthos* (translated by Burnyeat as a “reasonable account”⁶⁴) that appears in the *Timaeus*, as I discussed above, as well as the myth of Er in the *Republic*. In each of those passages, Plato seems to be interested in evaluating the dialectical investigations themselves, their epistemic value and principles. It might be thought that Plato needs a different mode of thinking by which to evaluate the progress of the investigation at hand—or at least make us see the need for such an evaluation. Truth must be tested and represented in different forms. Truth should remain the truth that it is, even when it is represented in a medium other than the one in which it was discovered or proved. Myths can provide a different medium through which the merits of the philosophical investigation at hand can be examined.⁶⁵ One way in which

⁶³ P. 96.

⁶⁴ “*Eikōs Muthos*”, (*Plato’s Myths*, pp. 167-186).

⁶⁵ Though with considerable more detail, something like this line of interpretation is pursued in Kathryn Morgan’s (2000) *Myth and Philosophy From the Pre-Socratics to Plato*. She, too, thinks that Plato’s myths seek to express transcendent truths that “rational

myth can evaluate philosophy, or at least provide an occasion for such an evaluation, has been described as the “disjunctive effect of myth”, by Morgan (2000). Morgan writes that this “makes us aware of changes in perspective, as in Plato we move beyond the confines of one human lifetime and an earthbound body. It makes us look at our lives and our intellectual tasks differently, [producing] the vertigo necessary for converting earthly and prudential rationality into something more”.⁶⁶ What is this “something more”? One of Morgan’s suggestions is that it turns into a substantial education, something that changes the flow of the individual’s life and is capable of drastically casting one’s beliefs and perspectives into another light. There is no doubt that Plato’s philosophical myths aim to change one’s (philosophical) perspective toward what is more real. We will have to look at some of Plato’s philosophical myths more closely to see how Plato seeks to educate his interlocutors and readers in this way, and what objectives such an education entails.

Things become particularly interesting and difficult when, as I will try to show, we encounter Plato’s assumption that, in some cases, believing what is more real is to believe what makes us ethically better. Such an assumption is present, for example, in the myth of recollection that Socrates espouses in the *Meno*. I will further this assumption later, as well as a similarly difficult assumption of Plato: even when Plato’s myths purport to provide an empirical explanation—for instance, as I mentioned above, how it is that the

and scientific language cannot” (p. 4). Plato’s lesson is supposed to help us “realise that all language is a story that interprets reality, with greater and lesser degrees of success”; and the idea of there being a “degrees of success” requires the comparison of different mediums of communication, in our case that between *muthos* and *logos* (p. 287).

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 6

earth is able to maintain its location in space without a foundation to support it (*Phaedo*)—if the explanation makes, so to speak, contact with the Good, that is, reveals the way in which the Good is a causal factor, embracing the myth (account) is supposed to benefit us ethically in this case as well. One who contemplates and in some sense takes on the myth of recollection in the *Meno* will be better off because of the way in which it motivates us to pursue philosophical investigation; and this is in itself an improvement in our epistemic position. In other words, an improvement in our psychology, which, importantly, is something a proper philosophical myth can bring about, improves our disposition to know reality. On the other hand, pursuing and taking on mythological explanations that reference the Good make us more ethical agents as well. One way to capture both of these assumptions is in the idea that developing a rational love of learning to investigate reality is a moral achievement. For Plato, this moral achievement is the upshot of a philosophical education that incorporates and positively relies on myth. Myths are not a secondary recourse when we cannot grasp formal, and, as it were, purer arguments: myths just are the deliverance of reason(ing) itself. But myths do have a special function; in the various interpretations of Plato's use of *muthos* and *logos* that I have considered so far, Plato does seem to conceive of *muthos* and *logos* differently, however subtly, although they both seem to function as *explanatory accounts*.

Chapter 3

Myth and Education in *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, and *Meno*

1. Myth and Education

The *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, and *Meno* share a common concern about the nature of moral education. More specifically, each dialogue examines whether moral education is even possible. Socrates asks explicitly in the *Meno* and *Protagoras* whether human excellence (*arête*)—the kind of excellence one must possess if one is to lead a morally good and, therefore, happy life—is something that one can pass on to another. Now these dialogues also have one more thing in common, and that will be the central concern of this chapter: namely, in each of these dialogues Plato incorporates a myth that serves an important function in advancing the dialectic about moral education. But each myth plays a different function in each of the dialogues, although there are also similar, or overlapping, functions. For now, I can put it concisely as the following: the central respective myths of the *Protagoras*, *Meno*, and *Gorgias* serve as *motivational* myths. These myths are meant to motivate the interlocutor, and more importantly the reader, to pursue virtue and the knowledge of virtue. Plato's motivational myths provide a framework, a way of viewing one's life and the various faculties and capacities that one develops in one's life, such that one is persuaded that moral improvement is indeed possible and that it is worthwhile to try to pursue. The *Protagoras* myth, however, also functions as an *explanatory* account of how it is that virtue not only *is* teachable but *must* be teachable by its nature. The central myth of the *Gorgias* that Socrates delivers plays the important function of not only

motivating one toward virtue but also providing a framework within which moral deliberation can find, as it were, a starting point. Lastly, the famous myth of recollection in the *Meno*, which primarily functions as a *motivational* myth, also reveals an important educational principle: namely, that it may behoove the educator to exercise some creativity in creating myths to help students overcome a variety of skeptical arguments against a rigorous pursuit of objective knowledge.⁶⁷ We can see that while Plato intends for the readers to be taken in by the myths, the myths themselves also stand as examples of philosophical explanations that can be put to service in one's philosophical education. In other words, Plato is setting forth examples of the nature of explanations and accounts—myths—that, by his lights, play an important role in philosophy and philosophical education.

In Chapter 1, I said that it would be helpful to see Plato's myths as normative explanatory accounts, and I still wish to treat them that way. I will try to show, in this chapter, that the motivational aspect of Plato's myths is an outcome of the framework—that is, either a way of viewing how things are or how things ought to be—that Plato seeks to recommend. And within that framework, Plato aims to persuade the reader, or interlocutor, to be taken by a Socratic moral (and epistemic) disposition. It is my contention that what is especially difficult in understanding the important educational

⁶⁷ It is worth noting that in the *Protagoras*, the myth is delivered by Plato's Protagoras, while in the *Meno* and *Gorgias*, the myths are delivered by Plato. One might wonder whether a myth told by Socrates, Plato's main spokesperson, holds the same status for Plato as a myth told by Protagoras. It is my contention that Plato's respect for Protagoras that we encounter in the *Protagoras* and *Theaetetus*, for instance, shows all the more the honorable and philosophically legitimate status that myth held for Plato and Protagoras, among other philosophers of the fourth and fifth centuries.

function that all of Plato's myths exhibit is that Plato ultimately wishes the reader to *love* the pursuit of virtue. (Or, if it is appropriate to put it in a modern way: Plato wishes the reader to fall in love with a Socratic worldview, even to be dazzled by it.) For Plato seeks to show that adopting the Socratic worldview, or framework, leads to as it were a generative source of motivation for moral improvement and philosophical investigation. As I have said, it will also be important to see that Plato consolidates the pursuit of moral improvement and philosophical investigation: to find a source of motivation for ongoing philosophical investigation is to find the same motivation for moral improvement. Perhaps it is the manner in which love, or *eros*, is intermixed with Plato's mythological argumentation that inclines some scholars to describe Plato's use of myths as *seductive*.

Now whether there is an important difference between seducing the reader by psychological exploitation or rationally wooing the reader into a worthy Socratic worldview—and I do contend that there is a difference, a topic to which I will turn shortly—the value of Plato's myths is to be found in the ways in which they advance the philosophical and moral education in us the readers, and in some cases Socrates' interlocutors in the dialogues. To this point, Christopher Rowe (2009) says that “Written dialogue (in Plato's case) is not the same thing as, and does not follow the rules of, ordinary philosophical dialectic...and his focus is—I suppose—on *our*, the readers' improvement” (p. 22). I agree with Rowe's point about the function of Plato's use of dialogue, and I wish to carry this point over to Plato's use of myths as well. Thus, while myth in Plato functions as a means of persuasion, it is important to examine, first, just what kind of change Plato wishes for the reader, and, second, in what ways Plato

persuades. We do Plato's myths a disservice, however, if we are inclined to see them as less than perfectly rigorous auxiliaries to proper philosophical argumentation, as if the myths are simply there to persuade those who are less than philosophically inclined (although they may accomplish that) or unfamiliar with proper dialectical thinking (in Plato's opinion, anyway). Plato is concerned with inculcating a change in our view of how things are and how we stand in relation to others and to reality. Rowe continues:

The truth [that Plato wishes us to see, consider, evaluate, and ultimately take on with our lives] cannot be given us on a plate, directly. ... We have to see things for ourselves. But this is more than just a sound educational principle: seeing the way things are involves, as it may be, having to give up the way we currently see them. A long process of persuasion is involved, of gentle, perhaps... progressive, exposure, combined with questioning our own (Socrates' interlocutors') ideas (p. 25)

In some cases, then, incidentally, the views espoused by the interlocutors may reflect some of our own assumptions. But in any case, the views of Socrates' interlocutors likely represent the kinds of philosophical views to which Plato's contemporaries may have been attracted, and they are the kind of views that Plato wishes to critically evaluate and replace, through his own philosophical education, with a Platonic (or Socratic) view of reality. Rowe concludes: "The set of ideas, truths, that Plato and his Socrates want to persuade us to accept is no more than a beginning; it provides us with a framework for thinking, and for acting, without actually telling us what we should do here and now" (p. 25). The reading of Plato that I wish to advance complements Rowe's view of the

educational ambitions Plato holds for his readers: namely, Plato's myths are one of his most powerful and important vehicles for helping us readers 'see' the views and truths and ways of thinking of which he wishes us to be persuaded.

Rowe's way of so describing Plato's educational aims for his readers respects the power of myth without portraying its power as something seductive or sub-rational or less than philosophical. But as I will argue more in this chapter and the following chapter, according to Plato's moral psychology, becoming rationally persuaded by a myth does induce a change in one's desires and motivation. No wonder, then, that Plato's myths appear seductive and psychologically exploitative. Indeed, perhaps it is not unfair to characterize Plato's myths as psychologically exploitative; it is just that his use of myths is an educationally sound way of bringing about a change in one's psyche.

Part of the reason that scholars have been inclined to describe Plato's myths as psychologically exploitative in a derogatory way is because it can appear as if he intends for a strong contrast between *logos* and *muthos*, according to which *logos*, conceived as formal (or perhaps pure) argument, is placed above *muthos*, in a philosophically minded hierarchy. Thus, in this way of conceiving the contrast, Plato's myths become seductive. Luc Brisson (2012) expresses such a view:

Myth cannot produce certainty in man, and remains on the side of belief. This being the case, however, whence does the efficacy of myth derive? Myth touches the lowest part of

the human soul, which corresponds to spirit (*thumos*) and desire (*epithumia*), dealing respectively with fear and temerity, pleasure and pain. Hence its efficacy... (p. 375).

While this kind of reading can acknowledge the educational value that myth plays in Plato's educational scheme—the type of ethical education and ethical exhortation that Plato seeks to achieve through philosophical practice—it denigrates the role of myth to mere heuristic devices that are psychologically seductive, catering to the “lowest part of the human soul”. Brisson's reading suggests that myths work at a sub-rational level, and that *logos*—reason, arguments, rational accounts—on the other hand, interact with the rational part of our soul. Not only is this reading difficult to square with the passages that I will examine below, in which Plato's Socrates ties myth closely together with truth, but it also assumes anachronistically that Plato's conception of philosophy is concerned with “certainty”. No doubt Socrates is preoccupied with truth; even in Plato's moral psychology one finds a concern with the view that one ought to *feel* convinced by the truth (insofar as one recognizes something as being true), but “certainty” is a concept that, in our study of Ancient Greek thought, we should not purport to find (lest we become ensnared in interpolating modern philosophical ideas⁶⁸). The more serious issue, however, is to see Plato's philosophical myths as seeking to convince the interlocutors and readers of some view by arousing “fear and temerity, pleasure and pain”. A closer look at the myths that Socrates delivers in the *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, and *Meno* should make Brisson's reading less tenable, since Socrates does seem to think of those myths as

⁶⁸ There are good, cautionary remarks of this kind, against importing modern philosophical ideas into our reading of Ancient Greek philosophy, in John McDowell's writings, for example in *Mind and World* (1994).

being *rationally* persuasive and, moreover, accounts that capture some important truth. (Moreover, Plato writes in the *Laws* (664a-b) that to maintain a unified communal conviction and commitment to living a just life the lawgiver must “charm [ἐπάδειν] the souls” of the young with “songs and stories and doctrines [or perhaps discourses]” (φῶδαῖς καὶ μύθοις καὶ λόγοις). Setting up a contrast in the way that Brisson does is not so straightforward; for *logos*, too, plays the role of *charming* its subjects.⁶⁹)

Now consider an alternative reading, by Most (2012), that finds a complementary relation between *logos* and *muthos*:

In Plato’s project of educating a new philosophical audience, his dialectic and his myths are closely bound together. It is not at all the case that only dialectic represents the true philosophy in Plato’s writings: instead, Plato’s myth and his dialectic are complementary and interdependent. … Without *logos* there would be in Plato’s writings no proofs, no analysis, no verifiability, no intellectual conviction; but without *muthos* there would be no models, no global vision, no belief, no emotional motivation (p. 23).

While I agree with Most, that Plato’s myths provide emotional motivation, models, and global vision, I will show that Plato’s myths do serve to analyze, prove, verify, and provide intellectual conviction. Indeed, it is for this reason that Rowe (2012) reminds us, importantly, that Plato’s views and framework and assumptions are so different from our

⁶⁹ Cf. Janet Smith (1986, p. 22) on this point.

own that we risk misinterpreting the philosophically respectable function and status he gave to his myths.

In this chapter, then, I will turn to those key passages in which commentators find Plato presenting a strong contrast between *muthos* and *logos*, and which most notably appear in the *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, and *Meno* (which on Plato's part is surely no accident). In this chapter I will consider three passages that are thought to present a contrast of some sort between *muthos* and *logos*. Studying these passages and the educational and philosophical assumptions that are revealed in them will help make clearer the educational aims that Plato is seeking to accomplish through his use of myths. We should then become less inclined to characterize Plato's use of myths as seductive and think of them as operating at a level that is either above or below philosophy. For one thing at least becomes clear in considering the *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, and *Meno*: to give a myth as a philosophical argument is in some sense a privilege that is *earned*, either by seniority or dialectical mastery. (Passages found in Plato's other dialogues also serve to buttress this point: that the Eleatic stranger in the *Statesmen* begins to tell a myth early on without question from the young Socrates, and that Phaedrus yields to Socrates' dialectical moves as well as his claim that myths do get at the truth in an important way, both support the reading that mythologizing is a mature way to philosophize, that it must be delivered and used with considerable philosophical acumen and skill.)

2. *Muthos*, Logos, and Education in the *Protagoras*

In the *Protagoras*, Socrates is concerned with whether virtue is teachable, that is, whether someone is really able to make another more excellent in matters of choosing well and acting in a morally good way. Socrates' concern with the problem of moral education is expressed in conversation with Hippocrates. Hippocrates believes that a sophist like Protagoras, who possesses the pedagogical skills and the relevant knowledge about human excellence, is able to make someone better than they were before simply in speaking cleverly (312d). When, however, Socrates presses Hippocrates to explain the content or knowledge about which a sophist like Protagoras is able to improve one's speaking, Hippocrates fails to give a satisfactory answer: "I really don't know what to say" (312e). Socrates then reprimands Hippocrates for risking the health of his soul, and explains the danger in which Hippocrates has unwittingly placed himself, whereby we come upon an important assumption in Plato's theory of education. Plato's Socrates says (313a-b):

Do you see what kind of danger you are about to put your soul in? If you had to entrust your body to someone and risk its becoming healthy or ill, you would consider carefully whether you should entrust it or not, and you would confer with your family and friends for days on end. But when it comes to something you value more than your body, namely your soul, *and when everything concerning whether you do well or ill in your life depends on whether it becomes worthy or worthless*⁷⁰, I don't see you getting together with your father or brother or a single

⁷⁰ The part I have emphasized reads: "...ο δὲ περὶ πλείονος τοῦ σώματος ἡγῆ, τὴν ψυχήν, καὶ ἐν φιλάντῳ ἔστιν τὰ σὰ ή εὖ ή κακῶς πράττειν...".

one of your friends to consider whether or not to entrust your soul to this recently arrived foreigner [Protagoras].⁷¹

Socrates then says that “a sophist is a kind of merchant who peddles provisions upon which the soul is nourished”, and that the soul is “nourished” ($\tauρέφεται$) on “teachings” ($\muαθήμασιν$) (313c-d). And the risk with absorbing teachings into your soul is that one “cannot carry teachings away in a separate container” in order to examine it before one determines whether it will benefit one or not (314d). Plato has Socrates advance the idea that there is no such thing as a mere education or mere acquisition of knowledge: education changes the way a life goes. Indeed, Socrates is convinced that education affects the way a whole life goes, whether a whole life goes well or badly. Things that are learned either improve the soul or make it worse off, which affects how one’s life goes in general. So how and why does Socrates think this? Unfortunately, Socrates admits that they are “too young to get to the bottom of such a great matter” (314b), and, perhaps ironically, suggests that they go to Protagoras (anyways) to see if he can explain for them the ways in which his teaching can improve them.

When Socrates and Hippocrates meet with Protagoras, they immediately ask what Protagoras teaches and how it will improve Hippocrates. “If Hippocrates studies with Protagoras”, Socrates asks, “exactly how will he go away a better man and in what will he make progress each and every day he spends with you?” (318d). Protagoras responds

⁷¹ On issues related to this passage, see David Blank (1985), “Socratics versus Sophists on Payment for Teaching,” *Classical Antiquity*, 4, pp. 1-49. I owe this reference to Wolfgang Mann.

that he teaches “sound deliberation, both in domestic matters—how best to manage one’s household, and in public affairs—how to realize one’s maximum potential for success in political debate and action”, which, absent unfortunate, contingent circumstances, will also lead to a good reputation. Socrates generalizes Protagoras’ education, calling it an art of citizenship, of making people morally better in the private and political sphere. Protagoras agrees that this is indeed what he teaches, and everyone present accepts this proposition.⁷²

Nevertheless, Socrates adduces two cases that make it appear as if virtue is not teachable. Both of Socrates’ arguments proceed from his own observations in the public sphere and in family concerns. I will describe both briefly in order to see better that Plato sees fit to turn to a *muthos* to explain away problems of this kind.

In the public sphere, Socrates reports that when, for instance, the city has decided that it will build something, then it consults builders; and if the city is deliberating about building a ship, they turn to ship-builders, and so on. Where there is a matter of expertise, the city turns to the relevant expert(s). But if the Athenians are deliberating about how best to manage the city in general, then there are no experts to turn to because there are no teachers of this kind of expertise, that is, of how a city should be run, or what would be good for a city in general. Socrates infers from the fact that everyone speaks when the city is deliberating about how to manage its own affairs that there are no experts nor teachers; for if there were experts or teachers, naturally only they would speak (except for

⁷² 318b-c; 318e-319a.

fools). Therefore, Socrates says, it follows that the Athenians do not think that this type of knowledge is teachable, for there are no experts of this kind whom the Athenians consult (319a-e).

In his argument concerning family management and affairs, Socrates admits that he is puzzled about how it is possible that someone such as Pericles—whom all Athenians and everyone present at the dialogue agree is virtuous—failed to make his sons virtuous. Socrates assumes, without problem, that anyone virtuous would be concerned and take every measure within his or her power to try to make his or her children virtuous. If virtuous people can and do fail to make their own children virtuous, it must be the case that virtue is something that cannot be taught. Socrates' skepticism about whether virtue is teachable, in the *Protagoras* and *Meno*, reflects a question about why moral education does not succeed in the same way, or to the same degree, as education does, say, in mathematics or literacy. With the exception of the certain cognitive differences, for the most part many people succeed in learning to read and succeed in learning basic mathematical executions—even in spite of mediocre teachers. Even the slave boy in the *Meno* successfully learns how to double the area of a square. But when it comes to teaching the virtues—namely, the value and worthwhileness of practicing moderation, justice, and pursuing wisdom, and so forth—students do not end up virtuous, even with, in Socrates' example, an exemplary moral teacher like Pericles (319e-320b).

2.1 Protagoras' *Muthos* and *Logos*

Socrates urges Protagoras not to withhold an “explanation” (*ἐπίδειξον*) for (1) why it appears that virtue is unteachable and, (2) if virtue is teachable, how that is so. Protagoras responds to Socrates, at 320c: “I wouldn’t think of begrudging you an explanation. But would you rather that I explain by telling you a *muthos*, as an older man to a younger audience, or by developing a *logos*?⁷³ Socrates and the others who are present agree that Protagoras should proceed as he sees fit, to which Protagoras responds that it would be more “*χαριέστερον*” (agreeable or graceful or pleasant) to give a *muthos* instead of a *logos* (although, as the reader well knows, he later provides a *logos* as well). There are two points I wish to note here.⁷⁴ First, (Plato’s) Protagoras’ suggestion, in conjunction with the audience’s consent, shows that with respect to dissolving Socrates’ puzzlement over moral education, for both (1) and (2), as mentioned above, a *muthos* will do *just as well* as a *logos*. Socrates makes a similar remark in the *Gorgias*, which we will examine below, but this should begin to show that a *muthos* is not being treated as something which goes above or below rational argument, nor does it immediately suggest that philosophical arguments have their limitations. Secondly, in Liddell and Scott’s *Greek-English Lexicon* (1889), under the entry for “*χαρίεις*”, one will note that for the masculine plural nominative use, “*οἱ χαρίεντες*”, “men of education”, is an appropriate translation. This accords with Plato’s Protagoras describing his circumstance as an older educator speaking to a younger audience interested in being educated. Thus, Protagoras’ *muthos* seems to suggest that employing a *muthos* to answer Socrates’ puzzlement about moral

⁷³ The Greek text is: ἀλλ’, ὃ Σώκρατες, ἔφη, οὐ φθονήσω: ἀλλὰ πότερον ύμῖν, ὡς πρεσβύτερος νεωτέροις, μῆθον λέγων ἐπιδείξω ἢ λόγῳ διεξελθών;

⁷⁴ cf. *Statesman* 286d: the pleasure that might be enjoyed by his mythological discussion is a *πάρεργον* (“appendix”). See Daniel C. Russell (2001), p. 570, for this point.

education would be not only be rationally persuasive but also more educational. Giving a *muthos* here is educationally appropriate.⁷⁵

Protagoras' *muthos* tells a story about what capacities are necessary for social life and cooperation among human beings: the gods, in their own wisdom, determined that it was necessary for all humans to be endowed with a sensitivity to justice, that is, a capacity for learning about what is just. The gods agreed that humans would eventually destroy each other or, following a failure to band together into a community, scatter and die in nature, if they did not possess a sensitivity to justice, which is an actualization of their capacity to learn about justice. Protagoras says that the fact that there *are* cities and politics and communities and laws and, especially and significantly, *punishment* for lawlessness shows that we must, to some extent, be able to learn and, therefore, teach virtue (320d-324d).

At 324d-e, Protagoras announces that in order to dissolve Socrates' puzzlement about how it is that a virtuous person such as Pericles can fail to make others (like his children) virtuous, he will now give a *logos* instead of a *muthos*.⁷⁶ I will give a brief outline of Protagoras' *logos*.

⁷⁵ I diverge here from Morgan (2000), pp. 138-147, who thinks that "Protagoras manipulates his listeners into allowing his choice of approach, and makes it seem as though the two approaches are equivalent and easily distinguishable". Morgan does not consider the possibility that Plato aims to educate his readers through Protagoras' use of myth. Neither is the lesson here "beware of sophists who give myths!", for Socrates and the Eleatic Stranger in the *Statesman* as well as the speaker in the *Laws* rely on myths. Cf. Claude Calame (2012) and Gerd Van Riel (2012) on Plato's use of Protagoras' myth.

⁷⁶ Morgan describes Protagoras' transition from *muthos* to *logos* as such:

Protagoras observes that there are six stages of educational development, each of which makes an important contribution to the development of human excellence.

Stage 1: Parents, nurses, and family members educate their children through speech and deed, by setting a good example. 325c-d: “Starting when they are little children and continuing as long as they live, they teach them and correct them. As soon as a child understands what is said to him, the nurse, mother, tutor, and the father himself fight for him to be as good as he possibly can, *seizing on every action and word to teach him and show him that this is just, that is unjust, this is noble, that is ugly, this is pious, that is impious, he should do this, he should not do that* (emphasis mine).

Stage 2: 325d-e: “After this they [i.e. family members] send him to school and tell his teachers to pay more attention to his good conduct than to his grammar or music lessons”. The teachers continue the moral education that began at the child’s home.

Here Protagoras explicitly leaves *mythos* for *logos* (324d6-7). The fundamental problem of the *logos* is set up at 324de-325a by a question that recapitulates the conclusion of the myth: is there or is there not one quality which all must have if there is to be a city at all? This question should properly be regarded as an equivalent of the myth: the myth sets down as axiomatic that there *is* one quality necessary for the survival of the city and that this is political excellence. The axiom is in the form of a conditional; the *logos* will hold *only if* we presuppose the myth (p. 141).

Gábor Betegh (2009) says of Protagoras’ use of *muthos* and *logos* that “both would express in two different expository modes the same overall view that Protagoras holds on the matter”, that contrary to the appearances that Socrates has focused on, present circumstances and facts about social life and practice suggest that we believe that virtue is teachable and learnable (p. 82). Betegh further observes, importantly, that Protagoras’ myth, as well as other myths in the *Gorgias*, *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, *Phaedo*, and *Statesman* are in keeping with the restrictions laid out in Rep. II, 377d-e and 380a.

Stage 3: The schoolteachers now provide the students with moral exemplars in literature and poetry so that the children will have outstanding descriptions of people to emulate and imitate. 325e-326a: "... [the students] are given the works of good poets to read at their desks and have to learn them by heart, works that contain numerous exhortations, many passages describing in glowing terms good men of old, so that the child strives⁷⁷ to imitate (μιμῆται) them and become like them.

Stage 4: Musical education makes an indispensable contribution to the moral education of the students. 326a: "the music teachers too foster in their young pupils a sense of moral decency and restraint, and when they learn to play the lyre they are taught the works of still more good poets, the lyric and choral poets. The teachers arrange the scores and drill the rhythms and scales into the children's souls, so that they become gentler, and their speech and movements become more rhythmical and harmonious. *For all of human life requires a high degree of rhythm and harmony*"⁷⁸ (emphasis mine).

Stage 5: 326b: Physical training for courage now improves their moral education, providing the students with "sound bodies in the service of their now fit minds", helping them to avoid cowardice and act on their moral knowledge.

⁷⁷ I put "strives" for "όρέγηται", instead of "is inspired to", as Stanley Lombardo and Karen Bell translate it in John Cooper's (1997) *Plato: Complete Works*.

⁷⁸ The emphasized sentence in the Greek text reads: "πᾶς γὰρ ὁ βίος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εὐρυθμίας τε καὶ εὐαρμοστίας δεῖται" (326b).

Protagoras then concludes his schematic layout of moral education with an analogy, according to which this view of education is like the way writing teachers teach their students how to write, by drawing large faint letters over which the student can trace and learn how to write. “In the same way”, Protagoras remarks, “the city has drawn up laws”, and the students are learning to internalize those laws throughout their education (326d-e). Therefore, Protagoras concludes, it would be even more puzzling if virtue were not teachable.

Protagoras’ myth coheres with the educational views that Plato lays out elsewhere, including the educational methods and assumptions that support it. Stages 1 through 5 are essentially reiterated in the *Republic* and *Laws*, especially at 401d-e, 442a, 518c-d, 532, 595c-d, 792d-e.⁷⁹ It is morally good for students to learn reading and writing and poetry and the interpretation thereof because these impart “rhythm and harmony”, and it is assumed that all participants in the dialogue agree that these are necessary ingredients for moral development and, therefore, for living a morally good life. In the *Statesman*, Plato reaffirms the assumption that people are amenable or “susceptible” to moral improvement, and “in general are never completely ignorant, or totally insusceptible to improvement”.⁸⁰ Moreover, it is passages like these in the *Protagoras* and elsewhere, in their mythological expression, that lead Aristotle to say the following: “Hence we ought

⁷⁹ I am not committing myself to a certain chronology here; perhaps Plato’s theory of education and his assumptions about how to best carry out a moral education and its indispensable role in social life were laid out in the *Republic* and then reiterated in the *Protagoras*. Either way, Plato places a high premium on musical and poetical education, within certain parameters, in inculcating virtue.

⁸⁰ Gerd Van Riel (2012), p. 156.

to have been brought up in a particular way from our very youth, as Plato says, so as both to delight in and be pained by the things that we ought" (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1104b9-13), because we *are* indeed capable of being brought up that way. The myth makes clear that moral education makes social life possible and good. More interestingly, the *logos* that follows the myth relies on the myth's assumption that moral education must be possible, and Plato goes on to show that the variety of subjects that the Athenian students study throughout their lives—writing, grammar, music, and gymnastics—can each be seen as making an important contribution to the central and fundamental task of moral education, of instilling virtue. Indeed, the idea seems to be, perhaps surprisingly, that the mere fact that we are able to train our bodies and study music, poetry, literature, grammar, and writing also supports the thesis that we assume that moral education is possible.

Gerd Van Riel (2012) summarizes this perspective and the relation between Protagoras' *muthos* and *logos* as follows:

[T]he Athenians presuppose that all have a basic capacity that can be instructed and educated towards virtue (322d-325c), and that people like the sons of Pericles do not have a well-disposed capacity to learn how to become virtuous (325a-327e). In other words, Protagoras and Socrates both take for granted what is explained in the myth. ... [The myth] constitutes the pre-dialectic common ground that is presupposed in the discussion. ... It reflects Plato's views on the

origins of morality and of religion, and provides the ... starting point of the discussion, on which both partners agree (p. 163).⁸¹

Following the myth, Socrates and Protagoras disagree over the nature of virtue. But nowhere is the myth criticized for its mythological form or argumentation. Socrates agrees on the structure of the story and its premises. I think Plato agrees with Protagoras, that a concern with what's good, what's shameful, that is, a basic sensitivity toward other people—however it is that we are able to pass on this sensitivity—is no doubt a condition of society. We cannot so much as make sense of the very idea of the necessity and value of education outside of the truths about our social nature. That we are the kind of creatures that live together and exchange our thoughts, that our survival depends on our ability to exchange our thoughts with one another, so as to be sensitive toward one another, shows that moral education is taking place. But it is one thing to identify the conditions of society, and it is another investigation to determine how moral education

⁸¹ Cf. Gábor Betegh (2009), who writes:

The [myth] of Protagoras ... construct[s] generic explanations to specific explananda. The fundamental problem with these explanations, however, is that their explananda are not true. They try to construct a formally valid explanation to something that is not the case. ... Protagoras [gets] the first step wrong: [he is] mistaken in establishing the fact, but [he is] then using the correct explanatory principles to provide an explanation for the 'fact' as [he] establish[es] it. Or, to use contemporary language, if one accepts that myths in general can provide explanations, these myths can be taken as *potential explanations* as philosophers of science use the term: they have all the required formal features of a genuine explanation without however being true (p. 90).

The lesson in using mythological explanations is not to give a factual account but rather to give a rational explanation that explains some feature of reality, some fact about the human condition, and so on. A myth can demonstrate how to show, rationally, imaginatively, and creatively, why it—that is, some fact about our human condition—appears to be the case, or even appear that it must be the case.

ought to take shape in society, and, furthermore, what kinds of possibilities can be realized through moral education. Protagoras' myth, without relying on facts, is nevertheless able to elucidate an insight about our social nature: that, at some basic level, however minimal, all of us *must* be concerned with our relations with other people. But identifying this condition is still a far way off from the idea that education affects whether a whole life goes well or badly. To reiterate, stating what must be the case—that it is a fact that being the social creatures we are we must all have an interest in education—does not tell us anything about *how* we *ought to* carry out our education. But we can at least begin to see that Plato's use of Protagoras' myth does not readily lend itself to the view that myths are something either more or less rational explanations. Protagoras' myth, in Plato's dialectic, spurs an important investigation into the nature of moral education, and it also functions as a lesson in philosophical explanations. It is also worth emphasizing again that Protagoras is not criticized once for delivering a myth. Mythological explanations, without relying on facts, can demonstrate certain conditions that must hold, and they can elucidate interesting assumptions that influence our thinking and practices.

It is interesting to note that Jean Jacques Rousseau pursues a similar program of explanation in his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*. There, Rousseau sets out to prove that social inequality is not a necessary or intrinsic feature of the human condition, and he draws a distinction between natural and social inequality through his mythological description of the primordial conditions of human beings. Likewise, Plato is not concerned with whether Protagoras' myth gets the facts right; he is more interested in

improving our thinking in the area of evaluating explanatory accounts. Rousseau introduces his investigation with the following remarks:

Let us begin then by *laying facts aside*, as they do not affect the question. The investigations we may enter into, in treating this subject, must not be considered as historical truths, but only as mere conditional and hypothetical reasonings, rather calculated to explain the nature of things, than to ascertain their actual origin; just like the hypotheses which our physicists daily form respecting the formation of the world.⁸²

Rousseau's programmatic remarks about the nature of his argument capture well, I think, the purposes of Protagoras' mythological argument: to show that such-and-such conditions are necessary, and to reveal that such-and-such assumptions are operative in our thinking and practice. But the form of mythological argumentation in Plato also works toward educating the reader philosophically, testing the reader's assumptions, as well as inviting the reader to consider a framework within which to think about certain philosophically important issues such as moral education. It is clear that Plato thinks that moral education and the nature of virtue is a philosophical topic of the utmost importance

⁸² Translated by G. D. H. Cole (2005), p. 15.

Most (2012) states that all of Plato's myths say something that concerns human beings but that nevertheless cannot be empirically verified, and concludes that they "must be taken on faith" (p. 17). But given the purposes of Protagoras' mythological demonstration, in conjunction with the programmatic remarks about mythological argumentation made by Rousseau, Most's conclusion misses the mark. Plato is not asking the reader to take the myths on faith, to suppose them literally true for the sake of the argument. Plato signals, through Socrates in the *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, and *Meno*, that the myths are to be treated as relaying some philosophical truth. They are not to be "taken on faith"; Plato is rather asking us to consider and evaluate them philosophically, and ideally, to be motivated by them to pursue virtue.

and deserves serious philosophical engagement. Mythologizing, then, as Plato's Protagoras says, has the further advantage of being educationally stimulating (*χαριέστερον*), and thereby motivating us to consider the issue in a new light.

3. *Muthos* and *Logos* and Moral Education in the *Gorgias*

The *Gorgias* is concerned with the issue of moral education and the nature of moral improvement. In particular, Socrates challenges Gorgias to show how the art of rhetoric (or the rhetorician) brings about moral improvement in students, after Gorgias admits that the rhetorician knows what justice is and (therefore) tries to persuade his or her student's to act justly (460b-c). Yet, Gorgias also had admitted earlier (456a-457c) that the student who learns rhetoric may nevertheless use his rhetorical skills and knowledge to commit wrongdoing and act unjustly. There, Gorgias argues that if the student who learns rhetoric from a good teacher does go on to commit wrongdoing, his or her teacher ought not to be blamed or punished; instead, the student alone should take responsibility and be punished.⁸³ Socrates goes on to show how Gorgias has entrapped himself in a contradiction of sorts: even though the rhetorician (teacher) knows what justice is and tries to persuade his or her students to act justly, the student who becomes a rhetorician may employ his rhetorical knowledge or skills to act unjustly. The issue that Plato brings out here, as he does in the *Protagoras*, is, again, the difficulty of moral education: moral education is not successful unless knowledge of virtue, in conjunction with a genuine concern and desire for acting justly, is passed on to another; importantly, only someone

⁸³ Charles L. Griswold (2003).

who possess the knowledge of virtue and the desire that constitutes that knowledge can truly teach someone to be virtuous. The conclusion that Plato arrives at in the *Gorgias* is that it is the philosopher, and not the rhetorician, who primarily seeks and comes to possess moral knowledge *and* who seeks to pass on this moral knowledge. It will be helpful to see Socrates' grand myth against this background. For unless we do, we will be inclined to see Socrates' myth about virtue in this life and the afterlife as simply an argument—admittedly, however strange and, as we shall see, incompetent we may be inclined to think it—for choosing a life of virtue and (again, perhaps strangely) for virtue as its own reward.

Given Socrates' claim that virtue is its own reward in this life, scholars have found Socrates' myth strange, since the myth seems to show that virtue is rewarded in the afterlife as well. If one is convinced by the thought that acting virtuously is its own reward, would one be all the more motivated by learning that virtue is also rewarded in the afterlife? If Socrates' myth is to figure in an interpretation of the arguments that appear in the dialogue, in particular, that justice is intrinsically good, then it may appear as though the myth threatens to undermine that claim, because it seems to threaten an punishment in the afterlife—i.e., the “threat of hell”—for acting unjustly, thereby motivating one to act justly (David Sedley, 2009). Daniel C. Russell (2001), too, notices that even though Socrates claims that virtue is its own reward, Socrates' myth seems to posit a reward for virtue in the afterlife. He writes, “How could one show that virtue benefits us already, *on the grounds that* it will benefit us later?” (p. 558).⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Russell cites Terrance Irwin (1979) for an articulation of the same problem.

Yet the confusion over the myth that Plato gives to Socrates in the *Gorgias* does not need to be so disconcerting if, as David Sedley (2009) aptly points out, we remind ourselves that, at 492a-493d, “Socrates has explicitly advertised the idea that myths of afterlife punishment serve as allegories for moral truths about this life” (p. 53). It should be said, however, that Socrates’ myth is not merely an allegorical reiteration of his philosophical arguments for the virtuous life—in particular, that it is better to be a victim of injustice than to perpetrate it—but the myth plays a philosophically *educational* role for the reader (and for Socrates’ opponents, although it appears unsuccessful), a task that Plato did not think was accomplished, or, better, finished, in the dialectical exchange up to the point where Socrates delivers his myth. David Sedley’s subtle and fruitful reading leads to the idea that the program that Plato’s Socrates envisions for the reader (and interlocutor) is to transform people into their own moral evaluators, that is, to train them into becoming “dialectical witness[es]” (p. 57). The “dialectical witness” possesses the same Socratic art of examining whether one has acted justly, or whether one is leading a life based on true beliefs or false ones. The argument in the myth is that the kind of moral improvement that can be made through a dialectical exchange with Socrates is more educationally effective than judicial punishment, or the threat thereof. Part of the education of Socrates’ myth consists in “making each person their own character witness”, a point that is more vividly made in a myth that describes that the consequences of acting justly and unjustly carry all the way through one’s life and thereafter.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ See 471e-472c for a contrast between the “law courts” and dialectical examination. David Sedley takes the effect of Socrates’ myth on Gorgias and Callicles as Plato’s preferred counterpart to judicial punishment: “just as dialectical *interrogation* is the superior counterpart to judicial *trial*, so too are the respective outcomes related: dialectical *refutation* is the superior counterpart of judicial *punishment*”, with respect to

But why does Socrates call his mythological account a *logos*? Is Plato setting up a strong contrast here? To further reinforce the educational role that Plato gives to Socrates' myth, and for the sake of maintaining my argument that Plato does not intend to denigrate myth and praise *logos* (or some “pure” philosophy), it will be helpful to examine Socrates’ introductory remarks to his myth, as well has his closing remarks after it.

Socrates introduces his myth, at 523a, as follows: “Give ear then—as they put it—to a very fine account [μάλα καλοῦ λόγου]. You’ll [Callicles] think that it’s a story⁸⁶ [ήγήσῃ μῦθον], although I think it’s an account [ἐγὼ οἶμαι, ἐγὼ δὲ λόγον], for what I’m about to say [λέγειν] I will tell you as true [ἀληθῆ].⁸⁷

Socrates is not insisting on the *literal* truth of his account (Rowe 2012, Sedley 2009), but the philosophical truth of it. Given what we have seen in the *Protagoras*—namely that it is appropriate for philosophical demonstrations and explanations to take a mythological

false or “worthless” (527e) beliefs (p. 60). I think this view is compatible with viewing the myth as a tool for philosophical education, since Plato’s Socrates clearly thinks that dialectical interrogation and refutation are morally (and epistemically) beneficial. Indeed, Sedley characterizes Socrates’ dialectical interrogation and refutation as “therapeutic” for the soul, leading to “moral improvement”: pp. 63-65.

⁸⁶ Donald J. Zeyl, in Cooper’s (1997) *Complete Works*, translate “μῦθον” as “mere tale”, which gives the impression of a stronger contrast. I am not saying that adding “mere” is translational blunder, especially because if one looks ahead to 527a, where Socrates says that Callicles will probably look down upon his account as if it were a myth told by an old woman, one will be inclined to find the same sentiment expressed here at 523a. But, for 523a, adding “mere” may nevertheless beg the question concerning whether Plato is setting up a hierarchical contrast *for his readers*. Thus, I have put “story” instead.

⁸⁷ The Greek reads: “ἄκουε δή, φασί, μάλα καλοῦ λόγου, ὃν σὺ μὲν ἡγήσῃ μῦθον, ως ἐγὼ οἶμαι, ἐγὼ δὲ λόγον: ως ἀληθῆ γὰρ ὄντα σοι λέξω ἢ μέλλω λέγειν”.

form when they can serve to be more educative and establish assumptions that may be shared in the dialectic—Socrates' announcement at *Gorgias* 523a, that his account may seem like a myth to Callicles but that it will be told as a true *logos*, can be interpreted as a signal to Callicles and the reader that the following myth will do more than educate and establish (however successfully or unsuccessfully) certain philosophical assumptions that might be shared. Socrates is saying to Callicles, “you might think that this myth is only functioning as a mythological account that reinforces the (potential) eternal reward of virtue and vividly describes the (potential) eternal punishment and misery of living a vicious and unjust life—but that would miss the mark”. If a god’s divine *logos* can distinguish between a virtuous soul and a vicious one, and if we are the sort of people to be motivated by the thought that we have all the more reason to make our souls amenable to perfect (divine) judgment, and we have obvious reason to try to avoid divine punishment, the account might only succeed as a motivationally efficacious account, and lack in argumentative force. But Socrates also claims that the account is a very fine, beautiful, or noble account ($\muάλα καλοῦ λόγου$), an account that, absent a better and finer one, also captures the truth about the nature of virtue and the virtuous life. Socrates’ declaration that his myth is a *logos* is Plato’s more overt signal that the myth is to be treated as a vital part of the whole dialectical exchange that has taken place so far between Socrates and his opponents.⁸⁸ Thus we might see the dialectical exchange as a whole as amounting to the dialogue *Gorgias*, which itself is a philosophical account that investigates the nature of rhetoric, language, and ethics, and seeks to persuade us of

⁸⁸ Cf. Morgan (2000), chapter 7. At p. 191, Morgan says that Socrates views his myth “as an *extension* of his philosophical *logos* …because doing so dramatises the incompatibility of his views of language, logic, and ethics with those of Kallikles” (emphasis added).

certain positions and views with respect to those subjects. Mythologizing, in Plato's context, is a way of philosophizing. And Callicles and the readers are told not to treat Socrates' account as *only* a myth, something that serves to educate, persuade, and motivate—although it does that, too. We are being told to treat myths, in these contexts, as manifestations or guises of *logos*. Socrates' myth, in the *Gorgias*, is being treated as an account that (as strange as this sounds to our modern ears) is by all means a philosophical account, a *logos*, of the supremacy of the virtuous life.

After Socrates tells the myth, he says, at 524a: “This, Callicles, is what I’ve heard, and I think that it’s true [ταῦτ’ ἔστιν, ὡς Καλλίκλεις, ἀ ἐγὼ ἀκηκοώς πιστεύω ἀληθῆ εῖναι]”. The myth captures the truth about virtue. Later again, from 526d-527e, he says:

For my part Callicles, I’m convinced by these accounts, and I think about how I’ll reveal to the judge a soul that’s as healthy as it can be. [A] So [οὖν] I disregard the things held in honor by the majority of people, and by practicing truth I really try, to the best of my ability, to be and to live as a very good man, and when I die, to die like that. And I call on all other people as well, as far as I can … to this way of life, this contest [i.e. to strive for virtue], that I hold to be worth all the other contests in this life. … [B] Maybe you think this account is told as an old wives’ tale, and you feel contempt for it [τάχα δ’ οὖν ταῦτα μῦθός σοι δοκεῖ λέγεσθαι ὥσπερ γραὸς καὶ καταφρονεῖς αὐτῶν]. And it certainly wouldn’t be a surprising thing to feel contempt for it if we could look for and somehow find one better and truer [βελτίω καὶ ἀληθέστερα] than it. As it is … *you’re not able to prove*

[ἀποδεῖξαι] that there's any other life one should live than the one which will clearly turn out to be advantageous in that world, too. But among so many arguments this one alone survives refutation and remains steady: that doing what's unjust is more to be guarded against than suffering it, and that it's not *seeming* to be good but *being* good that a man should take care of more than anything. ... So listen to me and follow me to where I am, and when you've come here you'll be happy both during life and at its end, as the account indicates [ώς ὁ λόγος σημαίνει]. ... [C] So let us use the account [τῷ λόγῳ] that has now been disclosed to us as our guide, *one that indicates to us that this way of life is the best, to practice justice and the rest of excellence both in life and in death.* Let us follow it, then, and call on others to do so, too, and let's not follow the one that you believe in and call on me to follow. For that one is worthless, Callicles [ἔστι γὰρ οὐδενὸς ἄξιος ὃ Καλλίκλεις] (526d-527e; emphasis mine).

(A): "So" (οὖν), Socrates concludes, the myth compels him to live a virtuous life; that "by practicing truth I really try, to the best of my ability, to be and to live as a very good man, and when I die, to die like that". The myth is motivational and rationally persuasive, such that because of it Socrates chooses to live a life of virtue.

(B): Because Callicles is not persuaded, he may have contempt for Socrates' mythological *logos* as if it were told by some old woman who is trying to fear monger someone into a life of virtue; but that would be missing the mark. The myth may be all the more convincing because it can show that the life of virtue—which by all means is its

own reward in this life—is also the more advantageous and healthy life in the afterlife as well, *if* there were an afterlife. But I think the real reason that Socrates finds his account a fine and true one is because it (at least by Plato’s standards) has begun to show that an account of the supremacy of virtue ought to show that virtue is to be chosen over anything in *any* circumstance. The virtuous life is not a contingent and accidental good. If the life of virtue is truly the healthiest and best life here and now, *intrinsically*, then it must be the case that it will benefit in any potential circumstance, even in something as remote as the afterlife. The virtuous life is so supremely and non-accidentally good that if there were an infallible divine *logos* that could morally judge lives perfectly, it too would deem the virtuous life supreme and best. Socrates also claims that a better account has not been offered. Socrates reminds Callicles that he has failed to *prove* [ἀποδεῖξαι] his own account—that might makes right, or that virtue is a relative and contingent good that is entirely dependent on, and vulnerable to, the circumstances in which one finds oneself—with or without a myth.⁸⁹ Socrates says that his account captures the important thought that “it’s not *seeming* to be good but *being* good” that we ought to seek, for otherwise we might believe in the false and “worthless” account that the good we are seeking in life is merely contingent and circumstantially advantageous. Socrates’ claim is that virtue brings about the unified health of one’s soul such that one’s soul, in any kind of circumstance, is well off. Insofar as the myth succeeds in showing the non-contingent good of virtue, it is a philosophically fine (*kalon*) and *true* account.

⁸⁹ Cf. Charles B. Daniels (1992): “the view [Socrates] has argued for all along is unrefuted ... because... the myth, as expressing reasoned and unrefuted truth, is no more than a closing summary in exemplary fable form of that very view [that was argued by Socrates prior to the myth]” (p. 279).

(C): Another conclusion that Socrates draws from his mythological *logos* is that it can lead or guide (ἡγεμόνι) one toward living a virtuous life: “So let us use the account [τῷ λόγῳ] that has now been disclosed to us as our guide, *one that indicates to us that this way of life is the best, to practice justice and the rest of excellence both in life and in death*. Let us follow it, then, and call on others to do so, too”.⁹⁰ Socrates also thinks that his account should motivate them to call on others to live a just and virtuous life, using this myth if the philosophical, dialectical, or educational opportunity calls for it.

(D): Socrates calls Callicles’ account worthless (οὐδενὸς ἄξιος). Notice that Socrates does not deplore Callicles’ account by dint of being false; Callicles’ account is rather worthless because it not only fails to capture the intrinsic goodness of the virtuous life, but it also miseducates us into pursuing the wrong things—contingent and circumstantial goods that may falsely appear advantageous. Callicles’ account miseducates us by failing to motivate us to morally improve ourselves, and it fails to motivate us to continue pursuing virtue and philosophical investigation about virtue.

Lastly, at 527d, Socrates makes clear that espousing his mythological account will not only motivate one to pursue virtue—a non-contingent, or non-accidental good—but that it will lead to an improvement in one’s deliberations. Socrates reprimands his opponents, saying that they must all be uneducated (“... εἰς τοσοῦτον ἥκομεν ἀπαιδευσίας ...”), because they have hitherto failed to seize upon an account of the kind that Socrates has

⁹⁰ “οὖν ἡγεμόνι τῷ λόγῳ χρησώμεθα τῷ νῦν παραφανέντι, ὃς ἡμῖν σημαίνει ὅτι οὗτος ὁ τρόπος ἄριστος τοῦ βίου... τούτῳ οὖν ἐπώμεθα, καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους παρακαλῶμεν”.

given. Socrates' dialectical interrogation has revealed that they have failed to agree about the most important matters: namely, the worthwhileness of pursuing a life of virtue. Perhaps part of the negative aspect of Plato's educational program in Socrates' myth is that one begins to learn how to feel contempt for the kind of "worthless" views that presume that there is no non-relative, intrinsic good that can be pursued in a human life. Perhaps we are even to learn to feel contempt at their philosophical obstinacy as well.

4. The Motivational Myth in the *Meno*: Philosophical Investigation is a Moral Achievement

Here again the central concern of the dialogue is with moral education. Interestingly, it is Meno who asks the same question that Socrates posed to Hippocrates and Protagoras in the *Protagoras*. Meno asks: "Can you tell me, Socrates, can virtue be taught? Or is it not teachable but the result of practice, or is it neither of these, but men possess it by nature or in some other way?" (71a).⁹¹ Familiarly, Socrates states that the first question that ought to be asked is about virtue itself; but one gathers from Plato's engagement with the question of its teachability here and in other dialogues that it is not a misguided question to ask but indeed an important one to consider. Now it is well known that Meno gives four answers that fail Socratic examination, but Socrates insists that they carry on the investigation into the nature of virtue. Socrates' persistence, along with Meno's failed attempts to answer the question, leads to the dramatic scene in which Meno poses his

⁹¹ The Greek text reads: "ἔχεις μοι εἰπεῖν, ὁ Σώκρατες, ἄρα διδακτὸν ἡ ἀρετή; ἢ οὐ διδακτὸν ἀλλ' ἀσκητόν; ἢ οὔτε ἀσκητὸν οὔτε μαθητόν, ἀλλὰ φύσει παραγίγνεται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἡ ἄλλω τινὶ τρόπῳ;"

infamous sophistic argument, at 80d-e: “How will you look for it [i.e. the knowledge of what virtue is], Socrates, when you do not know at all what it is? How will you aim to search for something you do not know at all? If you should meet with it, how will you know that this is the thing that you did not know?”⁹²

Socrates acknowledges that he understands (“μανθάνω”) what Meno wishes to say. But when Meno asks whether Socrates finds the argument “καλῶς”, Socrates emphatically says that he does not. Now “καλῶς” is usually translated as “sound” or “fair” but I am inclined to think that Socrates’ response to Meno, at 81a, suggests that “fine” may do. In any case, it does not appear that Meno is asking Socrates about whether his argument is logically sound in the sense in which we speak of sound arguments in logic.

To dissolve Meno’s skeptical paradox about finding knowledge one does not have, Socrates delivers a myth, an account he flags as “both true and beautiful” (“ἀληθῆ, ἔμοιγε δοκεῖν, καὶ καλόν”). According to Socrates’ myth, which most scholars call the “myth of recollection”, the soul is immortal and, because of its immortality, it has had time to experience and take in all that is knowable by it. And since the soul has taken in everything that is knowable, it has the capacity and potential to recollect all knowledge. It becomes a difficult task to recollect all knowledge, or even difficult to recollect this or that piece of knowledge, because, according to the myth, the soul eventually forgets

⁹² The Greek text reads as follows: “καὶ τίνα τρόπον ζητήσεις, ὃ Σώκρατες, τοῦτο ὁ μὴ οἶσθα τὸ παράπαν ὅτι ἐστίν; ποῖον γὰρ ὃν οὐκ οἶσθα προθέμενος ζητήσεις; ἡ εἰ καὶ ὅτι μάλιστα ἐντύχοις αὐτῷ, πῶς εἴσῃ ὅτι τοῦτό ἐστιν ὃ σὺ οὐκ ἤδησθα;”

much of what it has learned when it becomes embodied. This myth, then, also asserts that the (phenomenological) experience of discovery is really an instance of recollection.

Now in this “true and beautiful account”, Plato enfolds (at least) two important philosophical and educational assumptions.

The first assumption is that reality is unified, what I earlier in this work called the unity of reality. Socrates says, at 81d: “As the whole of nature is akin [ἄτε γὰρ τῆς φύσεως ἀπάσης συγγενοῦς οὖσης], and the soul has learned everything, nothing prevents a man, after recalling one thing only—a process men call learning—[from] discovering everything else for himself, if he is brave and does not tire of the search” [καὶ μεμαθηκίας τῆς ψυχῆς ἄπαντα, οὐδὲν κωλύει ἐν μόνον ἀναμνησθέντα—ὅ δὴ μάθησιν καλοῦσιν ἄνθρωποι—τᾶλλα πάντα αὐτὸν ἀνευρεῖν, ἐάν τις ἀνδρεῖος ἦ τοι καὶ μὴ ἀποκάμνῃ ζητῶν]”. The unity of reality is the assumption that reality is a kind of whole, a whole whose parts are integrally and *meaningfully* connected. Reality is unified in such a way that learning or coming to know a part of it gives one the potential and means by which to come to know the rest of it. From our modern scientific perspective, this may appear to beg several questions about the nature of reality, whether it is unified, and, if it is, in what way. But we will not be able to appreciate the educational value of the myth if we focus on whether this assumption about the unity of reality can be verified (if it can be verified at all) against the facts. Indeed, Socrates admits, at 86b-c: “I do not insist that my argument (*λόγου*) is right in all other respects”, but that it is nevertheless an account worth believing. Socrates does make clear that his mythological account ought to be taken seriously, because if we begin with the assumption that reality is unified we will be

all the more motivated to investigate it. If we did not assume reality was unified in the way that Socrates describes, Plato seems to think that we might fall into a skeptical position like Meno, worrying whether we can successfully and fruitfully investigate reality at all, whether we can in fact acquire knowledge (of reality). Indeed, as I will discuss in the following chapter, the assumption about the unity of reality, as well as the educational principle that complements it (namely, that we ought to assume that “the capacity for learning is in everyone”), is repeated in the *Republic*. I mention this here because Plato seems to think that the assumption about the unity of reality can also reveal important insights about the nature of our minds and our reason. It is a fine and important educational principle, then, to assume that the student has the capacity to learn many things he or she might think he or she cannot learn, and to tell the student that it is worthwhile and important to try to learn, even if it is difficult. As the student pursues learning one thing, so too will the student learn many other things in turn (about the world and his- or herself). This is not a trivially true platitude. Socrates’ myth here does raise an important and difficult question about whether there is occasion—and whether it would in fact be efficacious—to give a mythological argument about the unity of reality and the recollection of knowledge. I think this is a difficult question, and I will return to it in the concluding chapter of this work. For now, it does seem clear where Plato stands, which leads me to his second assumption.

The second assumption is that acquiring a love for learning is a moral achievement in itself, for a commitment to investigating reality (as if it were unified) leads, eventually, to virtue. This is part of the reason why it becomes important for Socrates to identify virtue

with knowledge (see 87d). From a philosophical and educational perspective, myths of this kind are important for motivating students, or whomever, to pursue learning and investigating, because they try to persuade the student that he or she has the capacity to learn, and that there really is something (out there) that can be learned. The consequences of not believing that there is a reality that can be investigated, or believing that there may be a reality but that it is not one that is knowable, is dire and, eventually, leads to moral dissipation. That idleness and skepticism about knowledge and the unity of reality leads to moral dissipation can be inferred from, again, Socrates' identification of virtue with knowledge. If we are not motivated to pursue knowledge in general, for whatever reason—although Socrates seems to think that the main culprits for a feeble and irresolute motivation are, to repeat, (1) not assuming that reality is unified and (2) thinking that one may not have the capacity to acquire knowledge, or thinking that one would not recognize that one did learn something—we, like Meno, may fail to pursue virtue. For how would one be motivated to pursue virtue if one did not think it was something real and something that could be known? Socrates declares that his mythological account is a truer and finer account than Meno's. He says, first, at 81d: “We must not believe that debater's argument, for it would make us idle, and fainthearted men like to hear it, whereas my arguments makes them energetic and keen on the search”⁹³. Later, after the geometrical demonstration with Meno's slave, he repeats the point again, at 86b-c: “I would contend at all costs both in word and deed as far as I could that we will be better men, braver and less idle, *if we believe that one must search for things one does*

⁹³ The Greek text reads: “οὐκον δεῖ πείθεσθαι τούτῳ τῷ ἐριστικῷ λόγῳ: οὗτος μὲν γὰρ ἀν ἡμᾶς ἀργοὺς ποιήσειν καὶ ἔστιν τοῖς μαλακοῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἥδὺς ἀκοῦσαι, ὅδε δὲ ἐργατικούς τε καὶ ζητητικούς ποιεῖ”.

not know, rather than if we believe that it is not possible to find out what we do not know and that we must not look for it” (emphasis added).⁹⁴

Given these two assumptions, Plato seems to think that if a mythological account that argues for a certain position or view of things motivates one to do the right thing, for instance, pursue a life of virtue, then the account is a *fine, noble, beautiful (kalon)*, and even *true* one. In this line of thinking, therefore, it is no accident, nor a sign of a psychologically seductive maneuver, that the fineness of the account is motivationally efficacious. The myth is effective because it gets at something true and fine. The fineness and educational value of a myth is buttressed by the integral connection between its content, that is, its worldview and the behavior and the actions that worldview endorses and motivates.

From this philosophical and educational view of Plato’s use of philosophical myths, it is not surprising that Protagoras’ myth is never called a worthless or false account, which we can assume is not an accident of omission on Plato’s part; Protagoras’ account aims to show us that moral education and improvement must be possible and that we must continue to pursue moral education because the good of society depends on it. Protagoras’ myth can motivate us to further consider the nature of moral education and its

⁹⁴ The Greek text reads as follows: “ὅτι δέ οἱόμενοι δεῖν ζητεῖν ἀ μή τις οἴδεν βελτίους ἀν εἶμεν καὶ ἀνδρικώτεροι καὶ ἡττον ἀργοὶ ἡ εἰ οιούμεθα ἀ μὴ ἐπιστάμεθα μηδὲ δυνατὸν εῖναι εὐρεῖν μηδὲ δεῖν ζητεῖν, περὶ τούτου πάνυ ἀν διαμαχούμην, εἰ οἴος τε εἶην, καὶ λόγῳ καὶ ἔργῳ”. Socrates makes a similar remark at *Phaedo* 114d, about the myth of the immortality of the soul: that it is “a belief worth risking, for the risk is a noble one. We should use such accounts as if we were charming ourselves, and that is why I have already drawn out my myth so long”.

possibilities. Socrates' myth in the *Gorgias* also motivates us to take the life of virtue seriously, while also providing an argument for the intrinsic goodness of virtue and a framework for thinking about the educational and moral value of dialectical interrogation, refutation, and investigation.

There is a sort of unity to the *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, and *Meno* in that they are all explicitly concerned with moral education and that in each Plato creates a myth (drawing on some familiar mythological materials from other sources) that plays an important philosophical and educational role in the respective dialectical investigations.⁹⁵ We have seen in the myths of the *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, and *Meno* that Plato seeks to lead the reader to engage with questions about the nature of moral education and its possibilities. Through these myths, Plato is rationally arguing for the importance of living a virtuous life and, therefore, the importance of actively pursuing moral education. Toward these ends, Plato's myths also present us with frameworks in which to consider a certain set of philosophical and educational ideas. While the mythological presentation of these ideas makes the ideas more vivid and more memorable—which is surely an educational advantage—we have seen that it makes little sense to suppose that Plato intends to set up a strong contrast between *muthos* and *logos*, either because he seeks to denigrate the former and set apart the latter, or because he simply wants the convenience of hypothesizing without the burden of proving the facts. Plato's myths do not go beyond where philosophical argument can follow. It is rather that philosophy must become

⁹⁵ Cf. Morgan (2000), who broadly divides Plato's myths into three categories, although of course some myths fit into several: (1) traditional, (2) educational, and (3) philosophical.

mythological when it seeks to teach and educate someone of important philosophical ideas and frameworks within which, and from which, to think about moral deliberation. Philosophy must also become mythological when it can provide a source of motivation for further philosophical investigation and, what I wish to argue amounts to the same thing, moral improvement.

Chapter 4

Plato's Mythological Education: Learning to Love the Investigation (of Reality)

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter we saw that Plato uses myths to educate his readers and interlocutors in philosophy. In the myths we have considered, Plato lays out certain philosophical and educational ideas for critical evaluation; advances particular conceptual frameworks or perspectives; and seeks to motivate the reader and interlocutors to pursue virtue and other values. While Plato's myths, in the hands of Socrates or his interlocutors, are cast as accounts, demonstrations, and explanations, their cogency does not rely on verifiable facts. For the purposes of advancing philosophical and educational views, however, choosing not to rely on facts does not need to be seen as problematic or philosophically irresponsible. Plenty of important philosophical insights can be found through mythologizing, because, as we have begun to see, mythologizing in Plato's hands is a form of philosophical investigation and normative argumentation.⁹⁶ I also began to argue that an education in philosophy, in Plato's view, is a form of moral education. This is because Plato sees moral education—and education in general—as a movement toward

⁹⁶ Indeed there are plenty of philosophical myths, images, frameworks, and fictive narratives in modern philosophy that play a role in philosophical investigation as well. As I already mentioned, there is Rousseau's myth of primordial human beings. Nietzsche mythologizes his Zarathustra and has his own myth of the so-called eternal recurrence. John McDowell (1996) has written a parable about wolves (in "Two Sorts of Naturalism"). Wilfred Sellars wrote his famous "myth of Jones", which clearly functions as a philosophical investigation into the nature of language in the hands of cognitive creatures like us. And, as I will mention again in the following chapter, Iris Murdoch (1970) has a concise yet poignant myth of M.

a better understanding of reality. As Plato argued in the myth of recollection in the *Meno*, it is better to assume that reality is unified because that will make one more inclined to seek knowledge and (therefore) philosophical investigation. The purpose of this chapter is to continue to examine the philosophical and educational views that Plato advances in the *Republic*. The *Republic*, like the three dialogues I discussed in the previous chapter, provides a sustained inquiry into moral education, since Plato's strategy for discovering the nature of justice and injustice is to look into the way in which one can be raised to be just, including the social conditions that would make such an upbringing possible. One of the important conditions for a good moral education, about which there is very little discussion in the *Republic*, is kinship (οἰκειότης). Plato's idea is that moral education establishes a kinship between (mythological) accounts of virtue and one's psyche, or motivational makeup. For example, we might say that Meno's skeptical argument about the possibility of acquiring knowledge has no kinship with Socrates' motivational structure and beliefs. Socrates claims to "understand" the argument, but the argument does not accord with him. It is not simply that Socrates disagrees with Meno's argument, as argument; it is that Socrates finds Meno's argument—and the larger ethical (and epistemic) lifestyle that it implies, or to which it may belong—misaligned with his character. Socrates finds Meno's argument, as we saw in the passage I cited in the previous paragraph, not *kallon*. The myth of recollection and the myth of the afterlife in the *Gorgias*, on the other hand, are accounts that, given the remarks we will examine in the *Republic*, can be said to share a sort of kinship with Socrates: they harmonize with his character, and in turn he recognizes the truth of the accounts. I wish to lay out Plato's idea that myths play an important role in moral and philosophical education because they

are able to shape one's psyche in a way that one's reason learns to recognize, or is readily responsive to, "fine" (*kalon*) and "true" (*agathon*) accounts. For the establishment of this kinship between reason and, essentially, external manifestations of reason, Plato argues that the idea of reality can be identified with the idea of the Good. I will return to this topic below, in section 3. First I want to continue to argue against a reading of Plato's myths that denigrates myth and privileges argument.

Denigrating Plato's myths can be the result of misapprehending the roles that Plato's myths play as a method of philosophical argument and as a mode of conveying his educational schemes and ideas. I have been pursuing a reading of Plato according to which Plato's philosophical arguments and his pedagogical goals cannot be sharply separated. Indeed, my claim is that it is intrinsic to Plato's philosophizing to educate his readers: in particular, to try to motivate his readers to pursue ethically good lives, often by morally exhorting Socrates' interlocutors through philosophical interrogation and (mythological) investigation. Plato seeks to educate the reader, that is, to philosophically and therefore morally benefit the reader, *through* the dialogues (and that is one important reason he wrote dialogues). Plato lays out his philosophical investigation in the form of dialogues, nearly half of which incorporate myths, because it is educationally effective to do so. Indeed, one might say that Plato is a pedagogical philosopher *par excellence*.⁹⁷ Plato holds that the purpose of philosophical investigation really is to improve one's life, and this is because he assumes that a better understanding of reality and improving our

⁹⁷ Rousseau claims in the *Emile, or On Education* that the *Republic* "is not at all a political work, as think those who judge books only by their titles. It is the most beautiful educational treatise ever written" (p. 40; trans. Allan Bloom 1979).

natural capacity to perceive and represent the unity of reality is a moral improvement. This way of reading Plato is wonderfully advocated by Iris Murdoch, which I will discuss further in the following chapter. As I mentioned above, for the sake of continuing to dismantle the strong contrast between *muthos* and *logos* (or philosophy)—a reading that prevents us from appreciating the important roles that Plato’s myths play in his philosophy and education—I will now turn to another instance of such a reading.

2. Myth and Argument

The myth of the ring of Gyges, in the *Republic*, does an excellent job of helping the reader think about the idea of something having intrinsic value. In particular, the myth of Gyges directs the reader to consider whether justice is an intrinsic good. There is of course no ring of Gyges. Like many hypothetical thought experiments, the ideas and theses that are at stake, in philosophy, can sometimes be made clear(er) without facts. The ring of Gyges asks the reader to imagine someone possessing a magical device, a ring that has the power to free the individual from all external consequences that may likely accompany acts of injustice. With the ring, one can get away with theft and manipulation, escape judicial punishment, and much else. The myth of Gyges makes vivid the fact that one might be inclined to act unjustly if one knew one could get away with it in every case. The upshot of the myth, in the *Republic*, is to raise the important question about the value of justice: could we find any reason to act justly even if there were no negative consequences to acting unjustly? “Why, then, should we still choose justice over the greatest injustice?”, asks Adeimantus, if it appears that injustice has its

advantages (366b). Is there an argument for the intrinsic goodness of justice⁹⁸ that can overwrite or nullify any perceived benefit from acting unjustly? The myth of Gyges plays an important role in the *Republic* because it sets an additional goal to the inquiry into the nature of justice and injustice, and their respective effects, fundamentally, on the individual and society: namely, that not only do Socrates, Glaucon, and Adeimantus hope to inquire into the nature of justice so as to learn what justice is, but, in so doing, that they become convinced that justice is intrinsically good and superior to injustice. The ring of Gyges is just one of several myths in the *Republic* that play an important philosophical and educational role in the dialectical inquiry and dialectical exchange between Socrates, Glaucon, Adeimantus, and Thrasymachus. The myths in the *Republic* are not mere auxiliaries to a finer and purer style of argumentation, nor, again, are they a means by which to seduce the readers—by appealing to the non-rational parts of their souls—into adopting Plato’s views. The ring of Gyges is a clear instance of Plato using a myth to sharpen the focus of his philosophical inquiry into justice, and, importantly, to demolish the dangerous assumption that in moral education the goal is to learn how to *appear* good (363a). The myth of Gyges can still bring that view into focus for modern readers today.⁹⁹ There are of course several more myths and images in the *Republic* that have struck a stranger and more critical note with modern readers—the myth of metals, the

⁹⁸ At 367c ff., Socrates, Glaucon, and Adeimantus concur on an analogy for the kind of intrinsic goodness that they wish to see in justice, according to which “seeing, hearing, knowing, being healthy” are “worth getting for their own sake” and are “goods that are fruitful by their own nature”.

⁹⁹ See Myles Burnyeat (1998, 1997) for an insightful discussion of the educational ideas and principles in Plato’s *Republic*, as well as a superb appraisal of Plato’s influence on modern educational thought. See also Jonathan Lear (2004) for an in-depth analysis of the educational effects of Plato’s myths in the *Republic*.

cave, and the myth of Er. Of course, criticism of Plato's myths should not be discouraged. The point I wish to make is that a critical evaluation of Plato's myths can be philosophically productive precisely because in those myths there are philosophical views and ideas with which one can either agree or disagree. Consider, on the other hand, a much different and unfortunate reading of Plato's myths. Julia Annas (1982) writes:

[Plato] uses the myth form to express truths that are profound and important; yet for him myth or any form of storytelling has low epistemological status, the preferred philosophical method being argument. ... It is, clearly, a mistake to make Plato's myths or imagery central to interpreting his thought, at the expense of the arguments; to make this use of the more accessible passages would be unplatonically lazy and unphilosophical. But it is also a mistake to ignore the myths (or images) as being clearly dispensable. For Plato, his use of philosophically low-grade forms to present important philosophical content produces a *problem*, a problem which he never explicitly solves, but which is inescapably obvious to an author who has chosen to do philosophy in a literary medium (pp. 121-122).

To her credit, Annas acknowledges that the myths, at least by Plato's lights, are not dispensable, since they supposedly "express truths that are profound and important". But Annas is wrong to treat the myths as some "low-grade" vehicle for conveying philosophical content. This is the sort of reading that I have been targeting and arguing against. Plato's myths are not simply there to convey some "profound" truth that Plato

does not think he can convey through some pure philosophy or argumentation. Nor is it the case that he could put some profound “truth” into rigorous philosophical argument but chooses not to because he does not think it will be as persuasive. On the contrary, it is clearly not a mistake, as I have tried to show, “to make Plato’s myths or imagery central to interpreting his thought, *at the expense of the arguments*” (emphasis added). While Annas urges the reader not to lose sight of the *arguments* by focusing too much on Plato’s myths, I have been insisting that we will lose sight of Plato’s arguments if we do not appreciate the central role that the myths play in Plato’s arguments, *as a form of argumentation, and as part of a larger argument in his dialectic.*¹⁰⁰ Plato wishes to argue for a certain philosophical position or “outlook”.¹⁰¹ And in the dialectical exchange between Socrates (or the Eleatic stranger) and the interlocutors, various positions are considered and evaluated. Upon close analysis one can gather that a Socratic or Platonic position that Plato thinks is philosophically important and—according to Plato’s way of thinking—*therefore* morally important is being advanced in his myths. I do not think Plato thought he had created a “problem” for himself, as Annas says, because his myths are not philosophically “low-grade” vehicles; rather, they are philosophically effective and interesting vehicles to change our philosophical outlook. As we saw, Socrates calls his myths good, fine, and true accounts. Matters are not any different in Platos’ *Republic*,

¹⁰⁰ It is not clear to me that Plato saw himself as consciously pursuing philosophy in a “literary medium” as opposed to a conventional, “philosophical” medium. In light of Annas’ (1982) observation that, at Rep 501e, “the Republic’s account of the growth of the state is called a mythos” (p. 121), I do not see why she fails to see that the myths are a form of philosophical argumentation that Plato does not denigrate. The mythological growth of the state itself is a philosophical account of and argument for the intrinsic value of justice.

¹⁰¹ A philosophical and epistemological “outlook” is the upshot of being taken in by Plato’s myths, according to Jonathan Lear (2004).

arguably Plato's most mythologically layered work. Indeed, the vast majority of the *Republic* is occupied by myth-making. The mythological building of an ideal state, which is launched in Book II, begins the explicit philosophical investigation into the nature of justice and injustice. The mythological building of the cities functions for Plato as (1) a philosophical investigation into justice and injustice; (2) a philosophical argument for the intrinsic goodness of justice; (3) a philosophical education for Glaucon, Adeimantus, Thrasymachus, and the reader, which culminates with the myth of Er¹⁰², aiming to motivate them and the reader to become just; and (4) a philosophical evaluation of the conventional myths familiar to Plato's milieu. This list highlights the central roles that the mythological building of the cities plays¹⁰³, and as I mentioned, there are further myths Plato embeds therein. I will not, however, give an analysis of each occurrence of myth in the *Republic*, for there is sufficient scholarship in this area.¹⁰⁴ Instead, as I mentioned, I will examine Plato's notion of kinship, in the context of his theory of (moral) education, and its relation to Plato's myths.

3. Myth, Kinship, and Moral Education

¹⁰² Socrates even claims, at 621b, that the myth of Er would “save us, if we were persuaded by it . . . practicing justice with reason in every way” [καὶ οὕτως, ὃ Γλαύκων, μῆθος ἐσώθη καὶ οὐκ ἀπόλετο, καὶ ἡμᾶς ἀν σώσειεν, ἀν πειθώμεθα αὐτῷ... δικαιοσύνην μετὰ φρονήσεως παντὶ τρόπῳ ἐπιτηδεύσομεν].

¹⁰³ For an in-depth discussion of the role of the mythological building of the cities, especially for its educational role, see Jonas, Nakazawa, and Braun (2012).

¹⁰⁴ Again, see especially Jonathan Lear (2004). Also see Janet E. Smith (1985), Burnyeat (1997), Morgan (2000), G. R. F. Ferrari (2009), Catherine Collobert (2012), Annie Larivée (2012), Francisco J. Gonzalez (2012), and Jonas, Nakazawa, and Braun (2012).

From the outset, then, I agree with Rousseau in taking the *Republic* to be primarily an educational text rather than a political one.¹⁰⁵ In Book II, when Socrates sets out to investigate the nature of justice and injustice, he proposes that he and his companions investigate the conditions under which justice and injustice might arise in a city and thereafter investigate how it might arise in an individual, “observing the ways in which the smaller is similar to the larger” (368e-369a). The method Socrates proposes for the investigation into the nature of justice is one by which they undertake the mythological building of a city. Now, what I wish to emphasize here is Socrates’ response to the First City that they construct, which sharply differs from Glaucon’s. Socrates says of the First city that, for him, it is the “true” (*ἀληθινὴ πόλις*) and “healthy” (*ὑγιές*) city (373d). Glaucon, on the other hand, calls the city a “city of pigs”. Socrates remarks that Glaucon appears to be after the construction of a “luxurious city” (*τρυφῶσαν πόλιν*), following which, as the reader well knows, Socrates then goes on to construct the “luxurious city”, then purges the luxurious city with a program of education, and then finally goes on to convert the luxurious city into the Kallipolis. Along the way, Glaucon is changed. The mythological construction of the cities in the order and manner in which they are constructed assists Glaucon and Socrates in their investigation into justice and eventually persuades Glaucon of the superiority of the just life to the unjust life.¹⁰⁶ Why did the First City, however, appear as “true” and “healthy” to Socrates and not to Glaucon and Adeimantus? One answer is that Glaucon’s preference in Book II for a luxurious city

¹⁰⁵ Again, see Jonas, Nakazawa, and Braun (2012) for a detailed argument and exegesis for a “pedagogical” reading of the *Republic*. See also William H. F. Altman (2012), *Plato the Teacher: the Crisis of the Republic*, for a pedagogical reading of the *Republic*. I am indebted to Avi Mintz for this reference.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

prevented him from appreciating the health and justice of the First City; whereas, for Socrates, the health of the First City was apparent. I want to add a notion to this answer, to explain Socrates' espousal of the First City and Glaucon's initial rejection of it. The notion is that of "kinship", or "οἰκειότης" (in its nominal form), and "οἰκείωσις" in its abstract form, a concept that Plato (and later Aristotle and the Stoics¹⁰⁷) makes use of in describing the upshot of the educational program outlined for the guardians and philosopher-rulers in the later books of the *Republic*.

Liddell and Scott's (1889) entry for "οἰκειότης" lists "kinship", "relationship", "intimacy", "friendship", "connection", and even "conformity to nature or environment".¹⁰⁸ The word also captures the idea of something that belongs to one's home, a household item, or a family member. What belongs to one's household is something that is familiar and intimate. One's familiarity with one's household items can make one immediately notice when there is a new item in the house (e.g., new furniture, a guest, etc.), or one often notices when things have been rearranged in one's house.¹⁰⁹ So,

¹⁰⁷ "οἰκείωσις", "familiarization", is an important concept in Stoicism. See *The Stoic Theory of Oikeiosis: Moral Development and Social Interaction in Early Stoic Philosophy (Studies in Hellenistic Civilization, Vol. 2)*, by Troels Engberg-Pedersen (1990).

¹⁰⁸ Liddell and Scott also reference Plato's *Symposium* 197d, where the sense is "intimacy", in Agathon's speech about love. Cf. also 463c: where G. M. A. Grube's translation of "kinship names" ($\tauὰ ὄνόματα \dots οἰκεῖα$) is straightforwardly about family names (i.e., brother, sister, father, and mother). *Timaeus* 33a-34b "proper": the motion that is "proper" to a spherical object is to revolve.

¹⁰⁹ Sometimes one fails to notice that the furniture has been rearranged, which is sometimes captured by a remark such as "something seems different, but I can't tell what it is". This is most likely because, in the case of rearranged furniture, the items are still

in laying out the education of the guardians and philosopher rulers, Socrates posits (what might be called) a theory of kinship, according to which a relation of (what might be called) belonging or familiarity is established between one's psyche and the external manifestations of it.¹¹⁰ Plato's idea is that moral education seeks to render, as it were, a class of reasons—reasons for acting virtuously, for instance—as familiar, welcome, and, importantly, as what belongs to one's self.¹¹¹

It appears that the kinship is established most effectively, in the early stages of education, by an education in music and poetry, since both are able to inculcate a sensitivity to “grace”, “rhythm”, and “harmony”. Socrates claims that “gracelessness, bad rhythm, and disharmony are akin to bad words and bad character, while their opposites are akin to and are imitations of the opposite, a moderate and good character” (400e; 400d). “Akin” is G. M. A. Grube's translation for “ἀδελφή”, which means sister or kinswoman. Thus Plato is saying that gracefulness, rhythm, and harmony are the sisters of moderate and good character, and forms of imitation. The image that Plato is pursuing here is one of a familial bond or intimacy. Plato's moral education leads students to find reasons for

the same, familiar ones, and so their special rearrangement might initially escape one's notice. I do not think anything turns on this observation.

¹¹⁰ An inculcation of a kinship toward nature, a sort of filial love toward the nature, is also part of Rousseau's educational program (or curriculum) for Emile. Rousseau says that Emile will instinctively know what is naturally fit for him; e.g., finding foreign and distasteful food that is cooked too fancifully. Plato's notion of inculcating a kinship in early childhood, such that a certain range of reasons, or certain kind of reasoning, will appear natural, seems to be a notion that influenced Rousseau's thought on education.

¹¹¹ A modern idiom that might capture this idea is in the way one says, “No, not that, but yes, *this is me*”, in making choices about interior décor. One speaks as if some decorative item represents or manifests one's personality.

acting virtuously (amongst other things) as something akin to themselves, something that belongs to them. Socrates' theory is as follows (401d-402a):

... because rhythm and harmony permeate the inner part of the soul more than anything else, affecting it most strongly and bringing it grace, so that if someone is properly educated in music and poetry, it makes him graceful, but if not, then the opposite. Second, because anyone who has been properly educated in music and poetry will sense it acutely when something has been omitted from a thing and when it hasn't been finely crafted or finely made by nature. And since he has the right tastes, he'll praise fine things, be pleased by them, receive them into his soul, and, being nurtured by them, become fine and good. He'll rightly object to what is shameful, hating it while he's still young and unable to grasp the reason, but, having been educated in this way, he will *welcome the reason when it comes and recognize it easily because of its kinship with himself* (emphasis added).¹¹²

(The emphasized phrase reads: “ἐλθόντος δὲ τοῦ λόγου ἀσπάζοιτ’ ἀν αὐτὸν γνωρίζων δι’ οἰκειότητα μάλιστα ὁ οὗτο τραφείς”.) Establishing a kinship between one's psyche, one's internal motivational structure, and external objects and manifestations of reason,

¹¹² The Greek text reads as follows:

... ὅτι μάλιστα καταδύεται εἰς τὸ ἐντὸς τῆς ψυχῆς ὃ τε ῥυθμὸς καὶ ἀρμονία, καὶ ἔρρωμενέστατα ἄπτεται αὐτῆς φέροντα τὴν εὐσχημοσύνην, καὶ ποιεῖ εὐσχήμονα, ἐάν τις ὄρθως τραφῇ, εἰ δὲ μή, τούναντίον; καὶ ὅτι αὖ τῶν παραλειπομένων καὶ μὴ καλῶς δημιουργηθέντων ἡ μὴ καλῶς φύντων ὀξύτατ’ ἀν αἰσθάνοιτο ὁ ἐκεῖ τραφείς ὡς ἔδει, καὶ ὄρθως δὴ δυσχεραίνων τὰ μὲν καλὰ ἐπαινοῖ καὶ χαίρων καὶ καταδεχόμενος εἰς τὴν ψυχὴν τρέφοιτ’ ἀν ἀπ’ αὐτῶν καὶ γίγνοιτο καλός τε κἀγαθός, τὰ δ’ αἰσχρὰ ψέγοι τ’ ἀν ὄρθως καὶ μισοῖ ἔτι νέος ὕν, πρὶν λόγον δυνατὸς εἶναι λαβεῖν, ἐλθόντος δὲ τοῦ λόγου ἀσπάζοιτ’ ἀν αὐτὸν γνωρίζων δι’ οἰκειότητα μάλιστα ὁ οὗτο τραφείς[.]

equips the students to take pleasure in “fine things” and hate “shameful” things *before* he is able to grasp the reason for doing so. Then, when (and if) the students are presented with an account of the relation between their character and reality, of why they are inclined to act justly and why their emotions and reasons and spirits shun injustice, they will “recognize it easily because of its kinship with himself”.¹¹³ Later, in the *Laws*, there is a passage that recapitulates this theory, which anticipates Aristotle very well (see below). Plato writes:

I call “education” the initial acquisition of virtue by the child, when the feelings of pleasure and affection, pain and hatred, that well up in his soul are channeled in the right courses before he can understand the reason why. Then when he does understand, his reason and his emotions agree in telling him that he has been properly trained by inculcation of appropriate habits. Virtue is the general concord of reason and emotion. But there is one element you could isolate in any account you give, and this is the correct formation of our feelings of pleasure and pain, which makes us hate what we ought to hate from first to last, and love what we ought to love. Call this “education”... (653b-c).

¹¹³ See Burnyeat (1980), and John McDowell (1998). Burnyeat emphasizes the significant way in which Aristotle draws a distinction between the content of moral education, that is, the habits that are put in place, and the explanation for that reveals the good of such a moral education. Aristotle’s locutions for the distinction is “the that” and “the because (or why)”. John McDowell (1998), in “Some Issues in Aristotle’s Moral Psychology”, helpfully warns the reader against taking “the because” as an explanation that is supposed to justify the whole ethical theory from without, on independent grounds.

It is worth noting that Aristotle says: “Hence we ought to have been brought up in a particular way from our very youth, as Plato says, so as both to delight in and be pained by the things that we ought” (1104b9-13). Later again, in Book 10, at *NE* 1179b20 ff., Aristotle paraphrases Plato and summarizes his own lecture:

... the soul of the student must first have been cultivated by means of habits for noble joy and noble hatred, like each which is to nourish the seed. For he who lives as passion directs will not hear argument that dissuades him, nor understand it if he does. ... The character, then, must somehow be there already with a *kinship* to excellence, loving what is noble and hating what is base [δεῖ δὴ τὸ ἥθος προϋπάρχειν πως οἰκεῖον τῆς ἀρετῆς, στέργον τὸ καλὸν καὶ δυσχεραῖνον τὸ αἰσχρόν].

Aristotle uses the verbal form, *oikeiōw*, which can mean either to “make a person a kinsman”, or “make a person one’s friend”, “to appropriate”, “to adopt, make fit or suitable”, or “to become familiar with”, or, in its passive forms, “to be related”, or “be familiarized to”.¹¹⁴ Aristotle’s thought is that if one’s moral education goes badly, one of the disadvantages will be an insensitivity—or insusceptibility—to good moral reasoning and arguments for acting virtuously and justly. Aristotle is appropriating this part of Plato’s theory of moral education into his own.

¹¹⁴ Liddell and Scott (1889).

Recall from the previous chapter that Protagoras asserted that good teachers “compel [ἀναγκάζουσιν] the souls of the children to appropriate [i.e. become familiar with: οἰκειοῦσθαι] rhythms and harmonies,¹¹⁵ so that they become gentler, and their speech and movements become more rhythmical and harmonious. For all of human life requires a high degree of rhythm and harmony” (326b).¹¹⁶ Whether the *Protagoras* was written before or after the *Republic*, Plato thinks that inculcating rhythm, harmony, and grace into one’s character through music, poetry, and myth is an effective way to establish a kinship between one’s character and morally worthy reasons and actions.

To return to the *Republic*, as the student develops, Socrates says that other objects, or subjects, besides music and poetry can accomplish the establishment of a kinship, a specific shaping of character. As one learns to perceive grace, harmony and rhythm, one begins to see that they are present in painting, crafts, weaving, embroidery, architecture, and in natural objects and beings (400d-e). But much later, in a discussion about the education of the philosopher-rulers, at 522a, Socrates speaks of the “musical” education they had discussed earlier in Book III, as a habituation in (again) rhythm and harmony that, at an important stage in the educational program, is inculcated by *myths*, either ones that are intentionally fictional or ones “nearer the truth”. For the educational myths for the young inchoately function as explanations of reality, and they also function as models

¹¹⁵ Translation of this clause is mine.

¹¹⁶ The Greek text reads: “... καὶ τὸν ὥρθμούς τε καὶ τὰς ἀρμονίας ἀναγκάζουσιν οἰκειοῦσθαι ταῖς ψυχαῖς τῶν παιδῶν, ἵνα ἡμερώτεροί τε ὕσιν, καὶ εὐρυθμότεροι καὶ εὐαρμοστότεροι γιγνόμενοι χρήσιμοι ὕσιν εἰς τὸ λέγειν τε καὶ πράττειν: πᾶς γὰρ ὁ βίος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εὐρυθμίας τε καὶ εὐαρμοστίας δεῖται”.

of justice, which, eventually, the students recognize later on as “accounts”, as models or images of justice.¹¹⁷

Thus, according to Plato (and Aristotle), without a kinship between one’s psyche, or character, and a certain class of moral reasons, in some cases, one will not perceive a certain class of reasons altogether, or, in other cases, one will not understand why those reasons should have any bearing on oneself.¹¹⁸ Recall Socrates’ remark to Callicles, in the *Gorgias*: there is perhaps something more than disagreement between Callicles and Socrates. Callicles does not even seem to recognize Socrates’ reasons or accounts *as* reasons or accounts, while to Socrates, Callicles’ account of justice is “worthless” (527e). Callicles’ account has no kinship to anything in Socrates, and Socrates’ account does not seem to register as an account to Callicles. Socrates seems aware of this (527a). Socrates says (and I am paraphrasing here): “the mythological account I am about to give is truly a *logos* for me, a genuine account because of which I live in such and such way, whereas *for you*, Callicles, it will even fail to seem like an account”. Recall, too, Socrates’ claim about the myth of recollection in the *Meno*. The account, to Socrates, registers as a true and fine (or beautiful) account. There is a kinship between the account of recollection and

¹¹⁷ Jonathan Lear (2007) argues that it is a mistake to think that the kind of myths that are told in the early stages of education, such as the “noble lie”, work like propaganda or function as “legitimizing myths”. He says: “in contrast to other myths and ideologies that are meant to legitimate the status quo, [Plato’s educational myths in the *Republic*] teaches us to be dissatisfied with all of our experience up until now insofar as we have taken it to be experience of reality. This is not how legitimizing myths normally work”. Lear thinks that Plato is trying to ensure that the myths will inculcate a desire to investigate reality by the time the student is old enough to begin to reflect on the idea of “reality”.

¹¹⁸ See John McDowell’s (1998) fascinating parable (or myth) of the wolf, in his *Two Sorts of Naturalism*, in which he discusses the way in which certain reasons may have no force.

Socrates' character. Socrates welcomes the account as a good account, whereas for Meno it does not present itself as a true and fine account, but rather an unfamiliar and confusing one.

To return again to the *Republic*, the last significant passage in which Plato uses “οἰκειότης” appears in 537b toward the culmination of the philosopher-ruler’s education. In describing the education of the philosopher-rulers, Socrates says: “the subjects they learned in no particular order as children they must now bring together to form a unified vision of their *kinship* both with one another and with the nature of that which is” (537b). The Greek reads: “... τά τε χύδην μαθήματα παισὶν ἐν τῇ παιδείᾳ γενόμενα τούτοις συνακτέον εἰς σύνοψιν οἰκειότητός τε ἀλλήλων τῶν μαθημάτων καὶ τῆς τοῦ ὄντος φύσεως”. It is important to keep in mind that the city in which there are three classes of citizens, the philosopher-rulers, the guardians, and the merchants, is a philosophical-mythological model of the soul. On this reading, the kinship that the students would establish “with one another” represents a coherence in the knowledge Reason has acquired in the variety of subjects it has learned and studied. In one sense, Reason (or the “student”) has learned disparate subjects, each with its own questions and methods of investigation; yet, at the culmination of one’s development, all pieces of knowledge, so to speak, must be brought together under the concept of (a single and unified) reality. Thus, Plato says that everything the philosopher-ruler (Reason) has learned must be brought together to form a “unified vision [σύνοψιν] of their kinship with ... the nature of that which is [τοῦ ὄντος]”. “τοῦ ὄντος” is Plato’s locution for “reality” or “that which is”.

“Unified vision” is G. M. A. Grube’s translation for “σύνοψιν¹¹⁹” (which is also preserved by C. D. C. Reeve). Interestingly, a few lines later, Socrates claims that having a “unified vision”, “σύνοψιν”, is the necessary skill of a dialectician, for, without it, dialectical investigation cannot be undertaken. 537c: “for anyone who can achieve a unified vision is dialectical, and anyone who can’t isn’t”: “...ό μὲν γὰρ συνοπτικὸς διαλεκτικός, οὐδὲ μὴ οὐ”¹²⁰. The dialectician is one who is able, eventually, to “relinquish his eyes and other senses, going on with the help of truth to that which by itself is” (537d).¹²¹ In short, the goal of education is a unified vision of reality.¹²² Dialectical investigation seeks to unify all knowledge claims into one (big) account of reality. But it is important to add that Plato thinks a unified vision of reality is also what is necessary for living virtuously. Or better: living virtuously *is* having a unified vision of reality. One

¹¹⁹ There is a fascinating commentary note on this word, by Paul Shorey (1969), that is worth quoting here:

cf. 531 D. This thought is endlessly repeated by modern writers on education. Cf. Mill, *Diss. and Disc.* iv. 336; Bagley, *The Educative Process*, p. 180: “The theory of concentration proposed by Ziller . . . seeks to organize all the subject matter of instruction into a unified system, the various units of which shall be consciously related to one another in the minds of the pupils”; Haldane, *The Philosophy of Humanism*, p. 94: “There was a conference attended by representatives of various German Universities . . . which took place at Hanstein, not far from Göttingen in May 1921. . . . The purpose of the movement is nominally the establishment of a Humanistic Faculty. But in this connection ‘faculty’ does not mean a separate faculty of humanistic studies. . . . The real object is to bring these subjects into organic relation to one another.”

¹²⁰ Iris Murdoch remarks (1990), from *Phaedrus* 249b, that Plato thinks “It is characteristic of human reason to seek unity in multiplicity”: it is an aim that is natural or intrinsic to reason. For a further and deeper discussion of Plato’s theory of reason having its own ends, see Burnyeat (1997, 2007).

¹²¹ The Greek text reads: “... τῇ τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι δυνάμει βασανίζοντα τίς ὄμμάτων καὶ τῆς ἄλλης αἰσθήσεως δυνατὸς μεθιέμενος ἐπ’ αὐτὸ τὸ ὃν μετ’ ἀληθείας ιέναι”.

¹²² Cf. the *Sophist*.

of the interesting claims, then, in the *Republic* that is often not mentioned, or at least not put in this way, is this: becoming a good citizen, and thereby contributing to a better society, is no doubt the upshot of a good education, but the aim of (moral) education, for Plato, is not directly aimed at good citizenship, or undertaken for its sake: rather, the aim of education is primarily to develop one's psyche in such a way that one is motivated to pursue a unified understanding of reality. Plato then finds it easy to show that an education that brings about the psychological conditions for an indefatigable motivation to investigate reality is what is truly necessary for a conception of good citizenry and a healthy political order. But I have tried to show that myths play an important role in Plato's theory of education, for they make an important contribution to the establishment of a kinship between one's psyche and external manifestations of reason in reality (or the rational order that Reason can perceive or apprehend in reality).

The upshot of an education in which a kinship between one's psyche—reason, spirit, and appetite—and external manifestations of reason (e.g. in art, literature, philosophical and mythological accounts, and nature) ultimately leads to a sensitivity to what is just and unjust in one's psyche and in external circumstances, such as just and unjust people, just and unjust political communities, and so forth. At 443e-444a, Socrates summarizes one of the advantages of a musical and mythical education, yet again making use of the notion of kinship:

He regulates well what is *really his own* [τῷ ὅντι τὰ οἰκεῖα εὗθεμενον] and rules himself. He puts himself in order, is his own friend, and harmonizes the three

parts of himself like three limiting notes in a musical scale, high, low, and middle.

He binds together those parts and any others there may be in between, and from having been many things he becomes entirely one, moderate and harmonious.

Only then does *he* act.¹²³ And when he does anything, whether acquiring wealth, taking care of his body, engaging in politics, or in private contracts—in all of these, he believes that the action is just and fine that preserves this inner harmony and helps achieve it, and calls it so, and regards as wisdom the knowledge that oversees such actions. And he believes that the action that destroys this harmony is unjust, and calls it so, and regards the belief that oversees it ignorance.

The things that are “really his own”, as it were, his soul’s household items, what is most intimately familiar to the soul—these are *his* reasons, his reasons for being virtuous and just, since those reasons are the ones that cohere best psychically and accord best with reality. Having a just constitution of one’s soul is a condition for perceiving reality aright. That is to say, if one fails to perceive the occasions for which just action is required, in Plato’s view, one has failed to perceive reality in an important sense. This inference is ultimately licensed by conceptually merging the idea of reality (of that which is) and the Good. This is the topic of the next chapter. But lastly, I wish to return to the issue I mentioned about Socrates’ praise of the First City and Glaucon’s rejection of it. We can now say that Socrates’ praise of the first city as “true” and “healthy” is a reflection of the

¹²³ Emphasis added. Christine Korsgaard (1999) makes much of this sentence in particular, and much of this passage in general, in her “Self-Constitution in the Ethics of Plato and Kant”. Korsgaard explains that Plato’s point is that only with an internal, psychic unity can it be said that one *acts* as an autonomous agent. When one lacks an internal, psychic unity, one is not acting as *one* self. Cf. also Paul Katsafanas (2011), “The Concept of Unified Agency in Nietzsche, Plato, and Schiller”, and Burnyeat (2007).

kinship he shares with that mythological portrayal of justice, whereas Glaucon does not have a kinship with the First City, but rather, a kinship with the luxurious city. (What we might even say, within the confines of the concept of “οἰκειότης”, is that Socrates feels at home in the First city, whereas Glaucon does not feel at home. to Glaucon, the First City does not feel familiar; it does not describe a city to which he belongs.) And again, the answer, I contend, is that Glaucon is not internally just in the way Socrates is, and therefore, in one sense, Glaucon does not perceive justice in the First city.¹²⁴ In the next chapter, I will discuss the kind of perception that Plato’s theory of education makes available, through a study of Iris Murdoch’s reading of Plato.

¹²⁴ I agree with Catherine Collobert (2012), who writes: “It [Platonic myth] is meant to be an education of vision insofar as it makes us see differently” (p. 108).

Chapter 5

Plato's Mythological Education: Learning to Love the Investigation of Reality is Learning to Love the Good (Life)

1. The Good

At *Republic* 505d-e, Socrates says of the Good:

Nobody is satisfied to acquire things that are merely believed to be good, however, but everyone wants the things that really *are* good and disdains mere belief here. [...] Every soul pursues the good and does its utmost for its sake, intuiting that the good *is* something, but it is perplexed and cannot adequately grasp what it is or acquire the sort of stable beliefs it has about other things, and so it misses the benefit, if any, that even those other things may give.¹²⁵

2. Murdoch on Plato, Philosophy and Moral Education

So far I have been examining the educational purposes for which Plato weaves myths into his philosophical dialogues and the philosophical assumptions and hypotheses that bear on them. In these works myths are important for the reader and Plato's characters, because through them Plato is able to provide a twofold education: on the one hand, one

¹²⁵ I have put “intuiting” for ἀπομαντευομένη, following Iris Murdoch (1970) (*Sovereignty of the Good*, p. 95) and less obviously Jonathan Lear (*A Case for Irony*, p. XIII).

learns *about* philosophical investigation—its methods and its aims—and on the other hand, one receives an education *in* the worthwhileness of philosophizing—that is, one develops a rational love for knowledge whose fullest practical expression is a love for living virtuously. Moreover, Plato shows that the virtuous life is the philosophical life. So with a concern for this twofold education, Plato uses myths to create persuasive pictures: some of which portray the (developing) internal psychological conditions of a philosophical life, of a unified soul, while others portray the kind of methods and types of explanation that the philosopher ought to pursue in explaining the nature and importance of virtue and moral education toward it. While the philosopher aims to know reality, in Plato's view, the way in which she can recognize her progress is the degree to which she understands the Good, an understanding that paradigmatically takes the form of representing a unified picture of reality, along the lines described in the allegory of the cave. Plato thinks that this normative picture can take a mythological form, which is not, as I have argued, a philosophically or rationally second-rate way to philosophize. Human reason not only relies on images, models, metaphors and myths to grasp various aspects of reality and the human condition, and to impress these models of understanding upon memory,¹²⁶ but it relies on these modes of thought to build rational frameworks with which to question whether what is presented to reason as morally good is indeed really good.

Apprehending the Good in Plato's conception is the ultimate aim of philosophical investigation and, paradoxically, the condition for understanding and explaining why

¹²⁶ See Janet Smith (1986), p. 32; Brisson (1998), Part I.

other, relative goods are merely relative goods. I have tried to show that this pair of ideas is expressed mythologically by Plato so that we might develop a rational desire (an *eros*) for knowledge of reality. Plato's view here importantly relies on the thesis that with further philosophical investigation, of a Platonic kind, we will come to discover that reality is unified. It follows for Plato that for whatever aspect of reality we seek an explanation, at some level we will ultimately explain it by referring to the Form of the Good.

I set out to study Plato's use of myths in order to understand better his theory of education and his philosophical assumptions behind it. While this study has tried to show that there is a logically consistent and heuristically sound connection between his method—in particular, his use of myths—and his thought, one might be inclined to object to the latter. In particular, one might very well object to Plato's central thought, that the (Form of the) Good is the Real. In the previous chapters I examined Plato's mythological formulation of this thought, and now I wish to ask whether this thought can find a respectable position in our modern moral philosophizing *and* educational thinking. I wish to argue that we can do so for both domains of investigation, and that is because I do not see a relevant difference in kind between the two. Iris Murdoch admirably and substantially argued that modern moral philosophy ought to abandon its attempt to pursue a “discussion of morality which does not take sides”, that is, to remain neutral about moral questions, and instead it should focus its efforts on answering the difficult question: “how can we make ourselves better?” If this is one of the tasks of moral and educational philosophy, then, Murdoch claims, “the answer will come partly at least in

the form of explanatory and persuasive metaphors".¹²⁷ What she is thinking of here is Plato's use of myths. A central question for Plato is indeed how we can make ourselves better: how we can live a good life. Plato thinks that philosophical investigation itself makes us better off. Plato does not suggest, then, that we would have to have a moral theory in place first so that we could then derive and justify educational content and methods that could be shown to make us better off. However, if one were to insist on remaining neutral with respect to moral questions, then there is parasitic pressure (though obviously not only from philosophers) upon educational theorizing to remain morally neutral in its normative recommendations. This order of theorizing presumes a certain demarcation between what it takes to be different domains of inquiries (or perhaps even different domains of knowledge), a view that, Murdoch shows, operates on assumptions about morality and education and moral psychology, and that is not as cogent as it appears. Although I will not be able to analyze sufficiently Murdoch's complex ideas and difficult arguments about these thorny issues, the purpose of this chapter is to push for a Platonic view of education by looking at Murdoch's push for Platonism in moral philosophy. I then wish to suggest, by way of returning to the source of inspiration with which I began this project—"that reason must become mythological and mythology must become reasonable", so that we might all educate our philosophical natures—that if we can give the idea of the Form of the Good a reasonable foothold in our conception of education amongst students and teachers, that will be (so to speak) to take a step toward re-enchanting education. It will be a re-enchantment in the sense that we might free our educational thinking from the fetters of neutrality regarding values and moral questions in

¹²⁷ *Sovereignty of Good*, p. 76.

primary and secondary education. The argument against neutrality will follow Plato's thought that all instances of education, of being changed, either lead to one's improvement—that is, to a better understanding of reality—or leave one worse off in some way. There is no middle here. Education must proceed with an idea of reality, and it must also assume that we can learn to see and understand reality better.

Plato's consistent concern with education is not so much the upshot of philosophical discovery or argument, say, in showing that it is within the purview of philosophy to determine educational content that is fit for a truly just and good political order (although it appears that Plato might have thought so, anyway); it is rather straightforwardly philosophy's concern to educate and to give shape to our philosophical nature, that in us which naturally loves knowledge (our *eros*), so that we might know the Good, know what is real. Philosophical investigation seeks to disclose an external unity in reality that, according to Plato, is made possible by an internal unity in our psyches. This requires an education that may be described as opening our eyes to the layout of *logos*, that is, the layout of reason, and its place in reality.¹²⁸ And I have tried to show why Plato thinks that this sort of education benefits from and positively relies on myth.

¹²⁸ Or to put it in a modern turn of phrase by Wilfred Sellars: to open our eyes to the layout of the “logical space of reason”. I am persuaded by John McDowell’s elaboration of Sellarsian thought in the context of Plato’s view of *logos*: namely, that a *natural* upbringing equips us to understand reason’s *sui generis* character, and there is nothing supernatural about a rational creature’s ability to apprehend the rational structure of reality, nor is the rational structure that it perceives in reality merely a projection of itself. See McDowell’s (1994, 1998) *Mind and World*, “Two Sorts of Naturalism”, and “Virtue and Reason”.

Plato seeks to impress upon the reader the relation between thought and reality. In the beginning of our education, we begin to acquire a *logos*, a capacity for speech and thought; with the development of this acquisition, our desire for knowledge of reality, for what is truly good, is only inchoate. Beauty arouses us, but our sensual arousal is not fully rational at first because we do not recognize the true object of our desire, often mistaking it for mere possession of beautiful things or certain pleasurable experiences. Plato goes to various lengths to show through his philosophical myths the importance of developing, motivating, and shaping one's inchoate love for knowledge into a full-blown consciously rational love for it. It is not a given that one's *logos* will perceive or apprehend that reality is a kind of whole, but for Plato it is important to do so: one's motivation and psychological unity depends on it. An education in acquiring the idea of a unified reality, along with the motivation and methodological tools for investigating it, requires a philosophical education that, in very interesting ways, as I just said, positively relies on myth.

I have also tried to show that a philosophical education for Plato is essentially a moral education—the two cannot be separated. Once there is an idea of reality that can be known truly or falsely (or somewhat vaguely¹²⁹), our eyes are opened to values the proper perception of which is a capacity that merits the name of virtue. Virtue is knowledge because its possession ensures that we are seeing things aright.¹³⁰ The good person must

¹²⁹ Someone might possess a true opinion without knowing that it is true.

¹³⁰ Cf. Aristotle, *NE*, 1144a: “virtue makes the goal right”. For an in-depth discussion of this passage, and the controversies it has evoked, see Jessica Moss’s (2011) “‘Virtue Makes the Goal Right’: Virtue and *Phronesis* in Aristotle’s Ethics”. My formulation is

be understood as knowing reality, while the bad person must be understood as being in a state of illusion.¹³¹ This moral characterization between perception and reality is couched in terms of an education in *vision* and *love* of the Good in Iris Murdoch's bold elaboration of Plato. This is the topic of this chapter. Like Murdoch, who gave a central role to moral philosophy amongst other philosophical branches of inquiry, I wish to place moral education at the center of our conception of education. Doing so, I shall argue, will allow Plato's thought about the Good and the Real to find a foothold in education, and will thereby make philosophical myth more attractive.¹³²

3. Philosophy and Moral Education

Murdoch argues for the centrality and autonomy of moral philosophy amongst other philosophical branches of inquiry. According to her argument, the assumption that moral philosophy must be dictated from other philosophical findings that are considered *prior* to it is unnecessary, and this is because it can be shown that there are moral assumptions that are constitutive of that kind of view itself. In other words, the kind of commonplace

meant to side with John McDowell's; see "virtue and reason". As it may become apparent in this chapter, some of McDowell's views about the perception of value seem to have been influence by Iris Murdoch. Justin Broacks makes this case, with convincing textual detail, in his "Introduction", in *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher*.

¹³¹ Iris Murdoch (1990), *The Fire and the Sun*, p. 46.

¹³² In the following section, I will be working with a moral realism (of a kind) about values and moral development, although I will not be providing an argument that defends the moral realism and the metaphysics that Plato and, in a similar way, Murdoch hold. My aim below is rather to intimate the sort of moral transformation that might be made possible by the use of story, metaphor, and myth in education, with the assumption that moral progress is real in the sort of way that Plato and, similarly, Murdoch conceive.

view that demarcates the domains of knowledge and subject matter in philosophy is itself, upon closer examination, indicative of “a particular kind of moral vision”, or position.

Murdoch finds that it has become challenging to invent concepts that might improve our moral vision—which she sees as the primary task for moral philosophers, that is, to find concepts that shift our gaze toward a just and loving vision of the individual and of reality.¹³³ This is so because we have become accustomed to the view that empirical studies can dictate the appropriateness of such a task. On the other hand, some philosophers have come to think that a sound philosophy of language, from a morally neutral vantage point, can illuminate better the nature of evaluative concepts (and thereby, e.g., the social utility of inventing them) than moral philosophy (since an interested moral philosophy may helplessly beg all kinds of questions).¹³⁴ Murdoch also attacks philosophers of a Kantian persuasion who focus upon the priority of investigating the metaphysics of the will and freedom: what we first need to know, it is thought in this view, in order to determine the correct moral principle toward which and by which moral action and development ought to proceed. Murdoch ultimately argues, though I will not say anything more about this issue, that the Kantian conception of will and freedom is too thin in its moral psychology to provide a persuasive picture of the ways in which our imagination and emotions, as well art, all significantly impact our moral vision. She

¹³³ *Sovereignty of the Good*, p. 27. The shifting of one’s gaze, or the turning of the soul, is a Platonic locution (*Republic* 518c), and in Murdoch’s (1970) thought, one’s gaze can be shifted by acquiring new moral concepts or improving the concepts that one already has. When one’s gaze is shifted, one realizes at the very least that what one took to be real is not real. Cf. Murdoch’s parable of M and D.

¹³⁴ See Sabina Lovibond, *Realism and Imagination in Ethics*, for a discussion of this issue.

writes, “I can only choose within the world I can *see*, in the moral sense of ‘see’ which implies that clear vision is a result of moral imagination and moral effort”.¹³⁵

As I mentioned, what these kinds of movements have in common, Murdoch shows, is that they see a certain branch of philosophy, or empirical science, as being *prior* to moral philosophy, and therefore able to dictate, from the outside, the limits of moral philosophy.¹³⁶ Murdoch argues against moral philosophy being dictated from the outside, however. She writes, “Moral concepts do not move about *within* a hard world set up by science and logic”.¹³⁷ She claims instead that moral philosophy seeks to see a world in which the Good is the Real, as Plato thought. Reality transcends us—not all of it can be known at once—but nevertheless calls on us, as it were, to “make discoveries” about it. These discoveries are instances of moral progress.¹³⁸ Moral philosophy’s task is to

¹³⁵ *Sovereignty of the Good*, pp. 34-35.

¹³⁶ See Cora Diamond (2010), “Murdoch the Explorer”, in particular pp. 59-61. At p. 61 Diamond calls Murdoch’s argument the “anti-dictation argument”. Diamond writes that Murdoch questions the assumption that our understanding of the “divisions” of branches of philosophy, for instance, is morally neutral. On Murdoch’s view such divisions *do* reflect (however subtly) a commitment to using moral concepts in a certain way, and that is, Diamond writes, “a particular kind of moral vision”. And again: “Murdoch’s objection would be to the idea that ‘the metaphysics of the modern world’ could hand over to ethics the appropriate understanding for us of the nature of the world”. I have benefited greatly from Diamond’s superb analysis of Murdoch’s difficult ideas.

¹³⁷ *Sovereignty of the Good*, p. 28. See also Megan Lavery (2007, p. 49), Diamond (2010), and Justin Broackes (2012) for an elaboration of this idea in Murdoch.

¹³⁸ See Iris Murdoch (1956), “Vision and Choice in Morality”, p. 56. Murdoch goes so far as to claim that her position is one of a “true naturalist”. Traditional versions of naturalism that find values “queer” have (1) an impoverished moral psychology and (2) place the rational will and the values that it creates, following Kant, outside of the natural world. See Justin Broackes’s (2012) excellent summary of this issue in Murdoch’s works, in the “Introduction”. See also John McDowell’s “Virtue and Reason” and “Two Sorts of

discover *real* moral improvement and the ways in which to achieve it. Moral philosophy, in this view, is not secondary to other investigations, in the sense that it must proceed from their discoveries or at least be compatible with their theses, because moral intuitions are pervasive in all thought. That our thoughts are permeated or colored with moral ideas and beliefs is a core argument that runs throughout Murdoch's *Sovereignty of Good*. Murdoch's argument surely has a Platonic ring to it, and thus she is just as concerned with moral education.

Now I wish to argue, with a similar structure to Murdoch's argument, for the centrality of moral development within our conception of education. The way in which I wish to state this thesis is not with the (familiar) formulation that every aspect of education has, or may have, a moral dimension or influence; but rather the other way around: that since human development is a moral endeavor as such, there is just moral education, from beginning to end, and *it* is multifarious in its educational manifestations. Moral education is a single whole, and it has many parts.¹³⁹ The suggestion is that placing moral education at the center of our theory of education brings about the following. First, we re-establish a Platonic (and Murdochian) form of realism in education, the contemplation of which

Naturalism" for setting out an understanding of Naturalism that seeks to prevent value from being subsumed into a supernatural realm.

¹³⁹ Myles Burnyeat's (2000) admirable exposition of the way in which Plato values mathematics, in the *Republic*, for its place within a whole moral education, I think, fits my suggestion here: "Why Mathematics is Good for the Soul".

Cf. also Megan Laverty (2007), Chapter 2, especially p. 50. Cf. David Robjant (2012), p. 62.

provides a source of energy (to use Murdoch's terminology¹⁴⁰) to learn to love the Good, because that is to tie the idea of moral improvement (learning to see and love reality) with every aspect of one's education. Second, this form of realism would, I think, change the nature of justification that is typically envisaged for implementing this or that educational content and this or that method of transmission. The consequence, I think, is that educators could rid themselves of the impossible and theoretically confused task of maintaining a neutral (or agnostic) stance of the kind that is admired in scientific inquiry, an attitude that officially sees moral education as something private, special, and extraneous to the ordinary subjects of learning.

What would be the possible dangers of this conception of education? I think the intuition behind the admiration of a neutral, disinterested inquirer or teacher is a desire to avoid dogmatism. This intuition in education is surely important, and dogmatism by all means ought to be avoided. But as I mentioned briefly above, Murdoch persuasively shows that it is a mistake to think that we can remain morally neutral in the organization of our concepts and the ways in which we are initiated into conceptual schemes during the course of our upbringing.¹⁴¹ The question, then, is whether we can countenance Plato's central thought.

¹⁴⁰ *Sovereignty of Good, passim.*

¹⁴¹ For even empirical concepts fit within a scheme that ineluctably has a moral character insofar as it is a conceptual scheme employed by rational creatures to navigate social life. Cf. Charles Taylor (1989), who shows, with an impressively sustained argument, which is partially inspired by Murdoch, that moral ideas (*inter alia*) pervade our language because the learning of a language, in a historical community, is our primary exposure to values. *Sources of the Self*. Cf. also Sabina Lovibond, *Realism and Imagination in Ethics*.

Can the Good be the first non-hypothetical principle of explanation (see quote in §1 above) and, as Murdoch says, the “magnetic centre” of all our activities and endeavors in the way in which Plato envisaged? And would this be enough to underwrite the value of philosophical myths in education? These are difficult questions. What I have argued so far is for a convergence in the task of moral philosophy and educational theory: namely, to engage with the question, how can we *really* make ourselves better? I have posited a conception of education, following Plato, that is, as a whole, moral, within which there are many different parts. And Murdoch urges that moral philosophy follow Plato’s lead, once again, in trying to invent new moral pictures (*muthoi*) and concepts that can improve our moral psychology such that we will keep our gaze focused outwardly, away from the ego, toward an objective reality.¹⁴²

4.2 Philosophical Myths in Moral Education

As I have said, Murdoch (1970, 1990) gives a bold and, admittedly, abstruse defense of Plato’s philosophical assumptions and educational aspirations with a view to showing the reader that philosophy cannot go on without myths, images, and metaphors, because these are constitutive of linguistic consciousness as such.¹⁴³ Plato appears to recognize

¹⁴² *The Fire and the Sun*, p. 45: “Plato’s connection of the good with the real [...] is the centre of his thought and one of the most fruitful ideas in philosophy”.

¹⁴³ “The Sovereignty of Good over other Concepts”. She writes, at p. 75: “The development of consciousness in human beings is inseparably connected with the use of metaphor”.

this.¹⁴⁴ As Murdoch (1970) puts it, the philosopher's task is to try to "invent" concepts that can bring about moral improvement, and this task depends for its cogency on the idea that we can come to know an objective reality that is constituted with value. The language of virtue and values are naturally metaphorical, but this in no way means that they describe anything less real. In this way, Murdoch (1970) characterizes herself as fighting under Plato's "banner" and trying to effect a "movement of return" toward Plato's conception of moral philosophy.¹⁴⁵ There may be worry that such a "movement of return" is a token of moral nostalgia for a bygone metaphysics, a hankering for that old metaphysical consolation—an external *telos* that could potentially provide a blueprint for living a good life.

What remains, then, is to show that coming to see reality more clearly and in a more unified way is the basic sense of moral development, and, importantly, whether we can understand this view in its Platonic formulation: namely, to identify the idea of the Real with the Good. But it will be said that this is difficult to envisage in the way in which Plato seems to have, since the dawn of modern science portrays a "hard world" of facts bereft of moral value.¹⁴⁶ That is, as some philosophers have noted, we no longer conceive

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Gerard Naddaf's "Introduction" to Luc Brisson's *Plato the Myth Maker*. See Chapter 1 above.

¹⁴⁵ *The Sovereignty of Good* (1971). For "banner" see p. 76. For "movement of return" see p. 1. Megan Laverty (2007) and Justin Broackes (2012) both affirm that it is clearly Plato Murdoch has in mind. See Laverty, *Iris Murdoch's Ethics: A Consideration of her Romantic Vision*, p. 112. Broackes writes that Murdoch has "Platonic roots", p. 11, p. 73.

¹⁴⁶ See Christine Korsgaard (1996), *The Sources of Normativity*. Diamond (2010) summarizes the first five pages of Korsgaard's book thus: "The real is no longer the

of reality as unified in the way that many thinkers did historically, which is to see reality with a “permanent background” underwritten and held together by a divine being, for instance, or under the single guise of Reason.¹⁴⁷ Science does not discover (because it cannot) *meaning* in reality, as if reality were a (single) story book.¹⁴⁸ So in the end, the objection continues, we had better treat Plato’s myths as mere myths: there is not a metaphysically respectable sense in which we can countenance a thought that the Real is the Good. It is fine to consider that thought in philosophical discussion, but it goes against the spirit of an empirical education to assume that thought. It is also a fine thing to acknowledge that Plato’s “metaphysics” did not prevent him from shedding light on empirical psychology, and providing insight into different forms and degrees of psychological unity, and describing well the manner in which psychological breakdown can occur, for instance.¹⁴⁹ In this vein, we might admit under suitable conditions that philosophical myths may have some pragmatic and heuristic value. Above I called Murdoch’s position “bold”, because she says explicitly that her suggestions are not “a

good. For us, reality is something *hard*, something which resists reason and value, something which is recalcitrant to form”, p. 59.

¹⁴⁷ *Sovereignty of Good*. At p. 78, Murdoch writes, “Values which were previously in some sense inscribed in the heavens and guaranteed by God collapse into the human will”.

¹⁴⁸ See John McDowell (1994), *Mind and World*, pp. 70-71; Cf. Laverty chapter 3: she quotes Andrew Bowie (*Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche*, 1993, p. 3), at p. 64: “There is nothing in science that provides the individual with ‘a sense of the meaning of nature’. A conception of experience modeled on science impoverishes ‘our world’ by depleting it of feeling, meaning and significance”.

¹⁴⁹ See Jonathan Lear (2011), *A Case for Irony*, Chapter 2, §1.

sort of pragmatism or *a philosophy ‘as if’*.¹⁵⁰ What sense is left, then? Murdoch (1970)

rejects the kind of empiricism that is found in (her understanding of) pragmatism.¹⁵¹

There is nothing empirically discoverable in the nature of reason that dictates against the expression of truth through metaphor or myth.

The resistance toward Plato is in the idea that it is not clear in what sense the concepts or myths that describe the supersensible are aiding us in our quest for truth, *even if* we acknowledge that it appears that such heuristics really can and do affect our psychology positively.¹⁵² Murdoch (1970) puts the point vividly: “Is there, however, any true transcendence, or is this idea always a consoling dream projected by human need on to an empty sky?”¹⁵³ Murdoch argues for a conception of transcendence according to which one sets aside personal fantasy and ego as much as one can, and instead one proceeds

¹⁵⁰ *Sovereignty of Good*, p. 61, pp. 72-73. She also places this pragmatist attitude in the voice of an interlocutor, at p. 61: “are these [claims] not simply empirical generalizations about the psychology of effort or improvement, or what status do you wish them to have? Is it just a matter of ‘this works’ or ‘it is as if this were so?’” She responds flatly: “This is not a sort of pragmatism or a philosophy ‘as if’”.

¹⁵¹ I am not prepared to assault empiricism in all of its pragmatist guises, for that would require a work of its own; I only wish to align myself in questioning, as Murdoch, does the kind of empiricism that insists on being able to provide “a non-moral moral psychology” and takes value to be projected upon a world by minds.

¹⁵² Cf. Lear’s (2011) *A Case for Irony*. Lear speaks of a “transcendence-inducing quality” that philosophers complain Plato builds into his moral psychology to “get the morality he wants out of it”. Cf. the formulation of Platonism in mathematics, in McDowell (1998), “Mathematical Platonism and Dummettian Anti-realism”, pp. 344-365, in *Meaning, Knowledge, and Reality*.

Cf. Broackes (2012), who points out that when Murdoch talks “of the Good as *transcendent*, this means something like *beyond the veil of selfish consciousness*, and *infinitely beyond our own limited conceptions* [...] we are not talking of it as an object in a heavenly realm of ‘transcendent’ items”, p. 70.

¹⁵³ *Sovereignty of Good*, p. 57.

with the thought that there is an objective reality. The interesting aspect of Murdoch's argument is that because the world is ineluctably known morally, the reality is embedded with values that can come to be known. This idea would lead, I think, to a reasonable re-enchantment of education, since we develop in a world with moral values to which our reason can become susceptible.¹⁵⁴ We do not have to determine what counts as a fact, first, in order to be able to go on in our philosophical investigations in other areas of inquiry. As Plato's Socrates remarks (§1), we do intuit that some activities and responses and choices are better than others, but we are often perplexed; therefore, we must investigate what is *really* good for us. Myths and metaphors that provide new descriptions of reality and ethical concepts with which to assess our position in logical space, that is, assess our grasp on reality, are not our last resort when we have difficulty discovering the "facts" and "truth" about ethical reality. Rather, myths and metaphors are, as Murdoch argues, the fundamental mode by which we can seek to understand our human condition and the reality into which we are born.

John McDowell's (1998) remarks are pertinent here: "But ethical reality is immensely difficult to see clearly. If we are aware of how, for instance, selfish fantasy distorts our

¹⁵⁴ See John McDowell (1998) "Projection and Truth in Ethics", in *Mind, Value, and Reality*. There McDowell discusses the notion of becoming susceptible to reasons. And at p. 164, he poses a question that captures Murdoch's resistance toward a dubious scientism and its metaphysical assumptions, nicely: "But how good are the credentials of a 'metaphysical understanding that blankly excludes values ... from the world in advance of any philosophical inquiry into truth?" McDowell goes on: "Surely if the history of philosophical reflection on the correspondence theory of truth has taught us anything, it is that there is ground for suspicion of the idea that we have some way of telling what can count as a fact, prior to and independent of asking what forms of words might count as expressing truths, so that a conception of facts could exert some leverage in the investigation of truth".

vision, we shall not be inclined to be confident that we have got things right”.¹⁵⁵ But it does not follow that we ought to give up on the possibility that there might be cases of getting it right; the difficulty arises when we hanker after certainty, a certainty that can vindicate from outside the ethical, conceptual scheme and life in which it looks like one has gotten it right. It is a fact about our subjectivity that we must investigate truth from within the conceptual scheme and life in which we find ourselves. Where does this leave us, then? The mythological and metaphorical language that philosophers like Plato employ may tempt us into thinking that we can give up on the idea of acquiring a capacity or code—what is described as “other philosophical responses” in the passage from McDowell below—for verifying whether we have made *real* moral progress. But that is simply an assumption about the role of metaphor and myth in the nature of cognition. McDowell (1998) writes:

But though Plato’s Forms are a myth, they are not a consolation; vision of them is portrayed as too difficult an attainment for that to be so. The remoteness of the Form of the Good is a metaphorical version of the thesis that value is not in the world, utterly distinct from the dreary literal version that has obsessed recent moral philosophy. The point of the metaphor is the colossal difficulty of attaining a capacity to cope clear-sightedly with the ethical reality that *is* part of the world. Unlike other philosophical responses, this one may actually work towards moral

¹⁵⁵ “Virtue and Reason”, pp. 72, in *Mind, Value, and Reality*.

improvement; negatively, by inducing humility, and positively, by an inspiring effect akin to that of a religious conversion.¹⁵⁶

“An inspiring effect akin to that of a religious conversion” is the experience of transcendence, of realizing that one has not been seeing things aright, that one has been blind to the demands of reasons that appear to have been there all along.¹⁵⁷ The nature of our consciousness needs ethical paradigms to make more visible the values that we otherwise would not see. The move that Murdoch wishes to eschew is a pragmatic one: act *as if* such and such an ethical paradigm is real and you’ll get “real” (“good”) practical results, and accomplish this with the fallacious assumption that we are not making any metaphysical commitments with respect to the epistemological status of these ethical paradigms.

¹⁵⁶ “Virtue and Reason”, pp. 72-73. At the end of this passage, McDowell cites Iris Murdoch’s *Sovereignty of the Good* as an influence in his thinking. Compare Murdoch’s interpretation, in *The Fire and Sun*, p. 25:

One does not have to read far in Plato to see that the Aristotelian explanation of the origin of the Theory of Forms in terms of “logic” is only part of the picture. Form the start the need for the Forms in Plato’s mind is a moral need. The theory expresses a certainty that goodness is not fully expressed in the sensible world, therefore living elsewhere”.

I think McDowell’s interpretation of Plato’s myth of the Forms places the emphasis on the difficulty of perceiving and evaluating values in our world, which I think is preferable, here, rather than emphasizing, as Murdoch does, the phenomenal experience that value appears to transcend the material world.

¹⁵⁷ Jonathan Lear (2011) discusses the idea of transcendence in Plato’s moral psychology astutely: “so the main question for his psychology is why it is that we are creatures who, for the most part, do not grasp the real situation we are in; and how it is that on occasion an individual can break free of appearances and engage in genuine acts of pretense-transcendent aspiring. On occasion he attributes this to our erotic natures—our capacity to be stunned by beauty and overcome by pretense-transcendent longing” for what is really good, on occasion invoked by myth and art. *A Case for Irony*, p. 44.

Murdoch (1970) writes:

If a scientifically minded empiricism is not to swallow up the study of ethics completely, philosophers must try to invent a terminology which shows how our natural psychology can be altered by conceptions which lie beyond its range. It seems to me that the Platonic metaphor of the idea of Good provides a suitable picture here.¹⁵⁸

Speaking of conceptions which lie beyond the range of our capacities for understanding and their reality as something that does not depend on human minds is a familiar way of capturing an aspect of Platonism that philosophers typically deplore. But is this a fair portrayal of Platonism? Platonism accepts the premises that “The development of consciousness in human beings is inseparably connected with the use of metaphor. Metaphors are not merely peripheral decorations or even useful models, they are fundamental forms of our awareness of our condition”.¹⁵⁹ Some of Plato’s myths, as I

¹⁵⁸ *Sovereignty of Good*, p. 69.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 75. Cf. David Robjant (2012): “The Good is not a ‘concept’ but is (in our experience of the better and of our distance from perfection) a fact of life. Plato’s Good is [quoting Murdoch] ‘... not something obscure. We experience both the reality of perfection and its distance away. ... If we read [Plato’s] images aright they are not only enlightening and profound but amount to a statement of a belief which most people unreflectively hold’”, p. 66; Robjant’s quote of Murdoch is from *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 508. Cf. also Murdoch’s remark from *Metaphysics as a Guide*, p. 182: “Plato ... ‘saves’ metaphysics by showing how the noumenal and the phenomenal exist inside each human life. There is nowhere else, it is all here”. Robjant applauds Murdoch’s “earthly” reading of Plato’s metaphysics, a version of Platonism that is not “otherworldly”.

have tried to show, turn to mythological language to capture the *attitude* we ought to bring to our efforts in trying to see reality better. Plato's myths induce humility in making vivid the thought that reality and our condition in it are tremendously difficult to grasp clear-sightedly. The point is that Plato's interest in metaphysical thinking is best understood as an attempt to understand better our condition in sensible reality. And it is within sensible reality that, Murdoch (1970) flatly declares, "A deep understanding of any field of human activity [...] involves an increasing revelation of degrees of excellence", such that we eventually intuit the idea of there being a perfect good.¹⁶⁰

The Form of the Good is the idea of perfection, and Plato declares that it is most real because to see it, to understand it, would be for a human mind to understand her own condition in nature and the relation in which her neighbor stands to her. The Form of the Good is transcendent because the totality of reality is a whole, the knowledge of which exceeds our human capacities at any given moment in time, and therefore moral improvement is a "never ending task", as Murdoch (1970) says. Plato is critical of the kind of skepticism that precludes or eschews unified ethical reality, for that attitude is demonstrably lazy (*Meno*), or miserably elitist (*Thrasymachus*), or leads to a relativism that eschews the idea of a truly good man *simplicata* (*Protagoras*), or leads to a sophistic intensity without philosophical substance (*Gorgias*). Understanding our human condition and our relation to reality as Socrates did, philosophically, is stated in the *Apology* with the saturnine thought that "human wisdom" is worth very little: for the starting point is with the realization that one knows that one knows nothing—everything is in vain, as

¹⁶⁰ *Sovereignty of Good*, p. 61. Cf. Justin Broackes (2012), p. 60.

Murdoch (1970) writes. There is a paradoxical attitude in Socrates in that his pondering of the worthlessness of human wisdom in no way detracts from his motivation for philosophical investigation, and this *must* be because this says nothing against his belief that there *is* a reality to be investigated, the world and oneself. Investigating ourselves reveals that metaphor and images and models are fundamental to our understanding, which is to say that they are constitutive of our *logos*. One need not *resort* to myth in philosophy, for it is fundamental to philosophical investigation. And it is not peripheral to education—and there is, as I have argued, only moral education: when we direct our thinking toward understanding (some bit of) reality, always from our contingent, historical position, we mythologize. To put it in a Murdochian way, *muthos* is a *persona* of *logos*.¹⁶¹ In a way, my aim has been to come to this conclusion so that we might say, painlessly: when we investigate and seek to explain reality, we mythologize because we cannot do otherwise.

The idea that the Form of the Good is necessary in our efforts to become morally better, and that it must guide our efforts in investigating reality is indeed, after all, a myth. Educational theorists and moral philosophers would do well to (re)mythologize education, like Plato and Rousseau did; and educators would do well to teach students how to mythologize philosophically, that is, investigate reality and themselves. My argument is that leading students to think that investigating the world and seeking

¹⁶¹ I think this line of thought explains better how Plato can so easily slip between *eikos muthos* and *eikos logos* in the *Timaeus* (pace Brisson, 2012) without feeling any need to signal (to the reader or the interlocutors) that the mode of explanation has changed.

knowledge—knowledge as pieces that constitute a unified reality—is a moral achievement.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, a study of Plato's use of myths showed that for Plato moral education is the central goal of education for a human life. From this point of view, other subjects of study are seen as integral parts of moral education that aim to further moral development. For Plato, the study of mathematics, for instance, or physical exercise, or the study of history, or cosmology are all seen as playing a part in the overall education of the person, which is a moral education aimed at living a good and flourishing life. I have argued that a philosophical education—or an education in philosophical and mythological thinking—for Plato, is fundamentally a conception of moral education because, unlike the other disciplines of study, a philosophical education (eventually) *unifies* all of the domains of study and inquiry into a unified picture of moral education. A philosophical education reveals that each particular aim of each study can be unified with one another under a larger moral or ethical end: to know and live a good life. To recall, I discussed the passage from Plato's *Republic* in which Socrates says that the study of philosophy begins with the cultivation of a love of learning, which then leads to the study of philosophical, mythological, and dialectical investigation, and culminates with a “unified vision” (“σύνοψις”) of the end of the whole of education.¹⁶² Thus, an education in philosophy plays the important role of synthesizing each part of education into a unified moral education. I have tried to show, with the myths I have examined in this study, that Plato uses myth, in philosophical dialogue, to educate the reader—directly and

¹⁶² Recall again Iris Murdoch's (1990) reading of Phaedrus 249b, that Plato thinks “It is characteristic of human reason to seek unity in multiplicity”.

sometimes dramatically through a portrayal of the educational transformation of Socrates' interlocutors (think of Glaucon of the *Republic*). The philosophical education that Plato brings about by his use of myths in the dialogues is multifarious. The myths can educate the reader in philosophical explanation, argumentation or demonstration, and methods of investigation. At another level, Plato's philosophical myth, drawing as it were from the power of the whole dialogue in which it is dialectically situated, seeks to persuade the reader to consider or adopt an orientation, framework, or outlook that, by Plato's lights, are ethically or morally beneficial or superior to some other view (*Gorgias* 527e: that to practice justice and the rest of virtue is the best life). Plato's myths, whether they are about scientific phenomenon or philosophical quandaries, aim to persuade us of a certain ethical outlook. Hence Socrates is able to say (for instance at *Phaedo* 114d and *Meno* 86b-c) that practically espousing certain philosophical myths, even if they are not true in every sense, can nevertheless motivate us to pursue a life of virtue, and render us better off.

Plato's ideas about pursuing a better life lead to the question of the role of the teacher. If all education is moral education, and moral education is dependent on philosophical education, then teachers must, in an important sense, become philosophers. One might balk at this claim if one is inclined to think that being a moral educator is not the proper role of the teacher. One might think that teachers should remain neutral so as not to detract from the student's moral autonomy.¹⁶³ On first glance, moral neutrality—or

¹⁶³ See Kristjan Kristjansson (2006), "Habituated Reason: Aristotle and the 'Paradox of Moral Education'", *Theory and Research in Education*, 4 (1), for a discussion of this

abstaining from influencing one's students morally—may seem attractive for education. But looking back to Murdoch, as I discussed in the previous chapter, we saw that there is no such morally neutral position for the teacher.

In the last chapter, following Iris Murdoch and her reading of Plato, I tried to argue that we could not separate moral education out from the rest of what goes on in education, since Murdoch shows that there is no such morally neutral position. Murdoch explains that it was tempting, for some at least, to think that a morally neutral inquiry into the nature of morality or moral concepts could take place because it appeared that scientific inquiry had provided a paradigmatic model of such an inquiry. Thus, one might think that a teacher can educate from a morally neutral position, without imposing any particular moral outlook on her students. However, Murdoch shows that there is no morally neutral position that the human mind can occupy. It follows that in any moment of education the student is moving toward some moral position or other, that is, developing moral capacities and inclinations in some way or other; and the teacher inevitably plays a role in that. The main point I wished to advance from this discussion was that if Murdoch's argument is cogent—there is no morally neutral position—then it applies just as well to education. There is no morally neutral education, even if one takes oneself only to be teaching mathematics, science, or literacy. And if this is the case, I think it follows that philosophy should play an important and unique role in education, since philosophy is well equipped to inquire into morality. In other words, since every life is in some way moral, and social life is permeated with a multiplicity of moral views, it would be

issue and for references to other literature on issue of the teacher's role in moral education.

practically beneficial to incorporate a philosophical education into teacher education and education for students at the appropriate age.¹⁶⁴ I have interpreted Plato to hold a view of this kind, namely that a philosophical education is in its nature essentially moral education, and I have tried to show that an education in philosophy that incorporates myths can provide the tools with which to evaluate moral concepts, paradigms, and lifestyles, as well as develop our own capacity to posit new moral pictures, metaphors, and images. Now, since I have argued that for Plato myths play a central role in a robust philosophical education and I have interpreted Plato to hold a view according to which a philosophical education is in its nature essentially moral education, it follows that a philosophical education would be important for teacher educators and students. But the question comes up: what would constitute such an educational program, for teachers and for students? This is a difficult question and would require a treatise all by itself. From this study, however, we can follow Plato and draw some provisional ideas about *a part* of that education, namely how educators might select materials that would function as philosophical myths in a classroom, myths that would help students develop philosophically and morally. I will therefore conclude this study by saying a little more about integrating myths into a philosophical education for teachers and students, although my thoughts here are necessarily adumbrated and in need of further research. In other words, I hope to point to the following areas in need of further research.

¹⁶⁴ It is not my purpose to determine exactly when, as it were, an overt or robust philosophical education should begin, although I do think it could very well begin before higher education. I only wish to emphasize what I take to be Plato's position that moral education begins as soon as one can think.

If teachers are going to be moral educators, and if, as Plato says, philosophical myths play an essential role in moral education, then educators would benefit from training and instruction in how to choose and teach myths so that they can have the impact Plato believes myths can have on the transformation of the individual. There are two criteria that are essential to effective use and selection of myths for the classroom, which I wish to discuss briefly.

The first criterion may seem obvious, and perhaps even a truism, but the application of the criteria does not appear straightforward. If we refer back to *The Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism*” document, which I discussed in the Prologue to this study, the myths that a teacher uses must be reasonable and logical: they must, as the anonymous author declares, “stand in the service of ideas”. That is to say, the myths must aim, in some way, at conveying an explanation, demonstration, or argument that can be assessed and analyzed (to some degree, though not exhaustively). For if the myth were incoherent or unanalyzable it could not figure into a philosophical education. Yet, on the other hand, if the myth were so conspicuous in its logical form, such that it could easily be rendered into syllogistic form toward a proof, for instance, then the student or teacher may wonder why it was written in its mythological form in the first instance. Indeed, the student may see the myth, or the author of the myth, as trying to seduce the student, at some sub-rational or emotive level—a maneuver that some readers have mistakenly attributed to Plato—and feel manipulated. Philosophical arguments, whether they take a mythological or syllogistic form, ought to be innocent of an intention to manipulate, although of course all arguments aim at persuasion. Plato’s myths, as I have argued, do

not seek to seduce the reader into certain philosophical views or ethical orientations, through vivacious language, powerful narrative, or the threat of a painful afterlife—or whatever—but they rather seek to lead the reader into further philosophical investigation, and motivate the reader to consider the intrinsic value of pursuing virtue, among other things. Thus if we reject, as I have argued we should, that the use of philosophical myths is a sign that the philosopher has reached the limits of argument, or seeks to transcend argument, the philosophical myths must serve a philosophical end: either to argue a point, demonstrate the truth or falsehood of a proposition, or set of propositions, answer a philosophical question, raise a philosophical question, or seek to persuade someone of a philosophical position, and spur further philosophical investigation. That the myths should serve a philosophical purpose is beneficial for students, since it will make it all the more difficult for any one student or teacher to claim an exclusive insight, like Ion of Homer, into the myth. Thus, to some degree, the myth must be amenable to philosophical analysis. Again, this may seem to be a truism: that a *philosophical* myth should be philosophically analyzable.

Setting criteria for the myth to be reasonable, logical to some degree—although there may be details and descriptions, without detriment, in a philosophical myth that may not be suitable for logical analysis—not incoherent, and philosophically analyzable entails another, related criterion. For instance, that the myth should not abandon altogether (if this is even conceptually possible) the relation of cause and effect, and other relations students and teachers would be familiar with from experience, such that the myth becomes too bewildering. In other words, the myth must employ sufficient mechanics,

grammatically, conceptually, and stylistically that the student can engage with it fruitfully. One of the claims of the myth of recollection in the *Meno*, that our souls have been around eternally and possess memories of all the facts, are strange indeed; but they are not incoherent in the context of the dialogue. The reader can see that the soul's memories and the process of recollection, or investigation, has a causal relation of some kind, even if it may be difficult to conceive of idea of the soul having existed from eternity and having perceived all facts. The main question, here, is that there still remains the difficulty of how conspicuous the logical form of the myth should be in order for it to be most effective in a philosophical and moral education.

Second, following an asseveration from *The Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism*, some or perhaps all of the myths that figure into a philosophical ought to have an aesthetic quality such that the student will be drawn into it and learn to find the manifestations of reason in its mythological guise pleasing and beautiful. Again, I do not think that the aesthetic quality of a philosophical myth should be directed at an effort to seduce the student into a certain philosophical view without argument and instead by invoking passion for a position. Much more needs to be said here, but the aesthetic quality of a philosophical myth can play an important role in invoking, instead, (philosophical) wonder and desire for philosophical investigation. It is worth researching more precisely how the aesthetic quality of a philosophical myth might invoke wonder and a desire for philosophical investigation, two qualities Plato and Aristotle avow. The aim of invoking (philosophical) wonder in the student is to inspire and motivate the student to love learning in general, as I have said in previous chapters, which, in its

classical understanding, is tantamount to cultivating a philosophical disposition—or a predilection for philosophy. Again, I cannot spell out, precisely, under what circumstances philosophical wonder is invoked, nor the nature of the aesthetic qualities of a philosophical myth that spur further philosophical investigation, but for Plato philosophical investigation is beautiful. The love of learning is connected with a love of what is beautiful. Iris Murdoch (1990) writes:

Love of beauty and desire to create inspire us to activities which increase our grasp of the real... Plato does not analyse in detail how selfish love changes into unselfish love, but the asides in the early dialogues do not suggest that this should simply be thought of as a transference of affection to philosophy.¹⁶⁵

I read Murdoch to be saying that Plato's aim is more than making philosophy look aesthetically pleasing and attractive so that one might acquire an affection for philosophy. The aim is not to make philosophical discourse or inquiry itself more aesthetic in form so as to make philosophical activity more attractive and pleasing (although it may do that too); but the goal is rather to show that it is intrinsic to moral development to learn to find the morally good life beautiful. And this change in view is effected by a philosophical education that helps itself to art and myth. The anonymous author of the *The Oldest Systematic Program for German Idealism* says, with confidence:

¹⁶⁵ *The Fire and the Sun*, p. 59.

Finally the idea which unites all, the idea of *beauty*, the word take in the higher platonic sense. I am convinced that highest act of reason, which, in that it comprises all ideas, is an aesthetic act, and that *truth* and *goodness* are united like sisters *only in beauty*— The philosopher must possess just as much aesthetic power as the poet.

One can surmise that the “platonic sense” which the author attaches to the idea of beauty is significant, in the role that beauty is to play in the project of promulgating philosophical ideas through the use of reasonable (i.e., philosophical) myths for all people, not just trained philosophers. While it is not clear what the “highest act of reason” would amount to, it does seem that the author is suggesting that the highest act of reason would be reason’s highest achievement, an actualization of its highest potential, and that this would have to be aesthetic as well, since reason is able to appreciate beauty and conceive of beautiful things. If we place the emphasis on the fact that since all creatures endowed with reason are able to appreciate beauty, the aesthetic quality of philosophical arguments, in mythological form, can play an important role in assessing its cogency. The idea is that the educational value and, even cogency, of a philosophical myth turns on its aesthetic quality, because aesthetic qualities are something that can be perceived and evaluated by students with their faculty of reason. The aesthetic quality of a philosophical myth might function as something which draws a student’s interest, but its nature would also be something which could be philosophically assessed in tandem with the philosophical ideas found in the myth. Just how the appreciation of the aesthetic qualities of philosophical myths can improve a student’s philosophical thinking and skills is an

area that would require more research. Philosophical myths would be a fruitful area of study with respect to the role of aesthetics in a philosophical education. I hope that the questions, in this area of research, will be further clarified and improved.

Lastly, what remains to consider is the ways in which the application of these criteria might assist the teacher in his or her selection of philosophical myths, and which sort of medium might be a suitable vehicle for bringing philosophical myths to the classroom. For instance, would it be most advantageous for students to interact with a philosophical myth that came from literature, works of fiction? Or would it be helpful for students to interact with a philosophical myth that was delivered through a digital platform, like a video game or an animated television series? Or some other medium like staged drama? Would incorporating visual media be most helpful to students? Can a philosophical education motivate students to pursue philosophy if were delivered through movies or comic books? There are many questions here, and I hope that research in this area will prove interesting and fruitful.

It seems that the crux of the matter here is whether the medium that is chosen to deliver the philosophical myths spurs further, *active* philosophical investigation in the students. Thus, a medium that delivers philosophical myths to the students whereby the students are more *passive* participants in the learning may be less effective for a philosophical education. One way to capture the contrast between active and passive participation is to think of what medium will require the student to exercise her reason and imagination as much as possible. For instance, one might think that a philosophical myth that was

instantiated in a television series may not require as much active participation by the student. Since the medium is primarily visual, the student does not have to exercise her imagination as much as she would if the medium were written word. In the case of reading a philosophical myth, whether it is embedded in a dialogue or in a work of fiction, the student must exercise her imagination in creating the images that are described in words. Perhaps that is one reason that Plato chose to embed his myths in a dialogue, since the reader must be actively following the dialectical exchange, which is not visually but verbally represented to her. Nevertheless, the question is: what about some medium will help the student actively engage with the philosophical myth? Comic books, for instance, are an interesting medium in that they are comprised of visual images and written words. The visual images, however, are schematic, capturing only some of the scenes of the story. In this medium, students would exercise their imagination, filling in on their own the scenes that are not depicted. The question, then, is how the images would foster philosophical engagement along with the written part of the medium? For instance, would adding some schematic scenes to one of Plato's dialogues make the philosophical engagement with the dialogue more active, salient, and conducive for learning philosophy and in turn morally beneficial? It seems that a lot turns on whether a philosophical education that used philosophical myths employed visual material and content. There are two questions here. First, would an education in philosophy—and therefore moral education—in general, benefit from the use of visual material and content? Second, would philosophical myths in particular benefit from employing visual representations? The two criteria that I have sketched out above do not settle the

question, but I hope that it might provide a starting point for teachers who are interested in providing a philosophical and moral education.

Indeed, the questions I have raised above and the criteria I have sketched reinforce the point that there are many more difficult and interesting questions pertaining to the curriculum of a philosophical education. There is more research to be done with respect to finding works and media that would be suitable for a philosophical education, according to the criteria I have discussed, as well as other pertinent criteria yet to be researched.

I have tried to show in this dissertation that a philosophical education is fundamentally a moral education, and that educators must take on the task of moral education directly, since it cannot be evaded. And in addition to whatever else might be an important element in a philosophical education, philosophical myths do play a vital role, a role that neither transcends nor falls short of the methods of philosophy.

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