# Myth and philosophy on stage in Platonic dialogues
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# 1. Introduction

The parallels and connections between the study of Plato's myth and the study of myth as a sub-discipline of religious studies have yet to be explored in detail. Myth studies, like religious studies or comparative religion, emerged relatively recently as a specific discipline and corresponded with the rise in scholarship on Plato's myths. Scholars dealing with the issue of myth have imported views and methods from philosophy, theology and the social sciences which they have acknowledged. Scholars working on Plato have often developed their own philosophical methods and have their own philosophical perspective which they implement and express in their study of Plato. However, when the topic of Plato's myths is addressed one notices how in most cases the analyst has visited an 'intellectual storehouse' to assist his/her critical evaluation and description of an issue that has, until recently, been an understudied subject in philosophy. After over a century of work on the mythical aspects of Plato's dialogues it is incumbent that specialized research be undertaken on this mostly ambiguous intellectual storehouse that Plato scholars have drawn from.

In this chapter I shall investigate the different connections between Plato studies and comparative studies of myth and will also take into account certain developments that have been left out. My own approach towards Plato's myths will involve creating a method of my own that extracts particular features of the dialogues that have been mostly neglected or taken as peripheral. My method, which I term 'mutual scaffolding' and which I will elaborate on in detail in chapter two, will resist defining myth using one explanation. I will also resist reducing myth to one or a limited number of functions and take each myth I engage with individually in its own philosophical and literary thematic context. My methodology proposes that in specific cases myth and philosophy operate in an interdependent unity rather than as two separate genres with their own meanings, aims and agendas.

Myth studies, which is an essentially interdisciplinary subject, has advanced greatly especially over the past half century. I will consider some of the most progressive and sophisticated ideas and theories introduced to and created by scholars of myth, including philosophical studies, and test to what extent they can be helpful to Plato scholarship. This entails that I develop my own approach to the study of Plato's myths which will be used to analyze six dialogues. Each dialogue, I argue, presents myth and philosophy as parts of an orchestrated totality; *mythos* and *logos* are put on stage by Plato to work in unison but are involved in different dynamics depending on the topic and goal. Each dialogue I have selected influenced my choice due to the topic, aim and style. All of my selections stand as the strongest representations of the ideas and directions they represent, contain powerful, elaborate and influential myths and are to a large extent easier to interpret in terms of my mutual scaffolding technique (at least in comparison to other dialogues).

My case studies include:

1) *Meno.* I examine how references to myth operate as a hypothesis and explain that the text functions as an instruction manual to guide the reader in how to do one form of philosophy correctly.
2) *Protagoras.* Plato provides us with an advanced dual between a myth/hypothesis presented by a sophist and alternative lines of argument submitted by Socrates.
3) *Phaedo.* Here we are shown how myth acts as a regulating code for how to follow arguments, opposing arguments and the connections between arguments in the text.
4) *Phaedrus.* Plato introduces myth as a device which facilitates transition from one philosophical position to another.
5) The Atlantis myth in both the *Timaeus* and *Critias*. In these texts myth operates as a tool for Plato's self-reflection and criticism.

In each case study I will deal with a series of features and devices consistently. I will pay special attention to the opening scenes of the dialogues and their peculiarities and the

position of the narrator (Theme introduction, setting and narrative mode). This will be followed by a detailed analysis of the myth itself (The myth/hypothesis or The myth) and the arguments (The philosophical arguments). Next, my method of mutual scaffolding indicates the unity that both discourses participate in and the harmony created in the dialogue as a result (Mutual scaffolding). I proceed to dealing with the complexities of the plot (Plot structure) and Plato's choice of personalities (Character selection). I end with providing the reader with references for specific themes and motifs that Plato repeated in each text (Index of themes and motifs). As both a myth maker and philosopher Plato included some material and excluded others. My study of different dialogues will elucidate how his selection was determined in each case by nuanced situations and complex philosophical paradigms and intentions. The conclusions I arrive at will reveal that myth is a subject that is associated with Plato's philosophical thinking and can be analyzed as being interdependent with it.

### 1.1 *What do we mean by myth? The study of myth in general*

By way of introduction to the topic I want to visit some of the most salient twists, turns, developments and obstacles facing myth studies since its origins as a recognized academic area of study. One of the most important features of this section is to identify a tradition in order to systematically connect ideas, methods and positions with. Once this is established the confusion associated with the status and evaluation of certain approaches in Plato scholarship, and the distinctions between them and approaches from other disciplines, can begin to be clarified.

In the Modern era the word 'myth' has become a general term used to refer to revelation, folktales, sacred scripture, fairy tales, legend, epic and even community

hearsay.[1] Myth is understood to narrate the exploits of men (from ancestors until the present), gods and a host of other supernatural beings.[2] It can also depict the history of a family or dynasty; the glory or demise of a city or civilization; the adventures or fate of different kinds of souls; the origins of the universe, the structure of the universe and the coming end of the universe. These themes or motifs, in addition to a vast range of other reoccurring ones, are often features of story lines we have become familiar with such as 'the death and resurrection of a god or hero',[3] 'deliverance',[4] 'recurrence',[5] 'cyclical time', 'linear time', 'progress',[6] 'regress', reciprocity', 'alchemical transformation', 'salvation', 'damnation' and, more generally, tragedy, comedy, romance and satire.[7] In some myths these plots are exclusive and in others they are combined.[8]

In his monumental study of myths and rituals, entitled *Mythography*, William Doty lists the various conventional definitions of myth constructed by different fields of study.

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[1] In the introduction to the second edition of Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, Alan Dundes explains that the affinities between these different forms of narrative have been based primarily on content rather than structure. He indicates that one of the virtues of Propp's study is that it illustrates how important cultural patterns are manifested in cultural materials which include novels, plays, comic strips, motion picture and television plots (Propp (1968) pp. xiv-xv).

[2] William Doty collected fifty individual definitions of myth. He groups them into eight types: myth as aesthetic device, narrative, literary form; subject matter pertaining to gods or a realm beyond ours; etiology; early, weak, or inaccurate science; myth as the literal or verbal concomitant to ritual; an accessible account of universals; explicating beliefs, collective experiences, or values; the expression of 'spiritual' or 'psychic' states (Doty [1986] p. 9).

[3] For examples of themes, motifs and plots of this nature see Compton (2006); Campbell (1949); Coupe (1997) pp. 63-65.

[4] Consider Coupe's various references to the theme of deliverance in his book *Myth* (1997).

[5] For an example of the use of this theme see Hatab (2004).

[6] For a study of the use of this theme see Mehta (1985) pp. 69-82.

[7] See Frye (1957). Of course, Frye's classification is not the only series of plot structures that offers general categories of genre, but it is a helpful tool to begin with. In order to identify the kinds of plot structures manifested in certain dialogues it is necessary that I fuse Frye's four 'master types' with more specific types of mythic plots. For an example of the influence of Frye's theory cf. White (1973). In his introduction White briefly explains the features of each mode and gives some examples where they have been used (pp. 8-11). For philosophical critique and development of Frye's mythographic work cf. Lentricchia (1980).

[8] Propp has drawn attention to the problems associated with classifying and defining 'themes' or 'motifs'. He is correct in highlighting the fact that dividing selected sections, ideas or events in a narrative into strict classes neglects inherent idiosyncratic qualities within those units and ignores the overlapping nature of different themes (Propp [1968] pp. 7-12). Also, see Gerhart and Russell (2002) pp 194-196, for examples of how themes influence political and scientific allegiances and how these allegiances characterize the way in which observation and research is narrated. They explain how Gerald Holton imported methodological techniques from anthropology, art criticism and other similar fields, methods associated with thematic analysis, and applied them to scientific writing with great success.

1) In comparative religious studies myth has been understood in contrast to theology: the first being associated with indigenous cultures or 'primitive' peoples and the second with monotheistic systems of belief or philosophically inclined cultures.

2) In the study of poetry, drama and fiction myth is understood in relation to 'mythic elements' or 'legendary plots'.

3) In anthropology or ethnology the term 'the mythic period' has been used to label, often negatively, periods in the history of a culture that resembles pre-modern ways of thinking and acting.

4) In political science the appellation 'myth' is often used to criticize ideologies such as democracy or socialism.

5) In sociology the term is used vaguely for systems of beliefs and ritualized forms of behavior.[9]

The ways that each discipline understands and uses the word 'myth' are indispensable references for any study of myth because together they encompass both narratives and arguments, past and present. Different cultures, eras and systems of thought build up their own categories and include and exclude different phenomena according to basic and static definitions (monomythic definitions).[10] However, knowing how to unite different perspectives, and considering the evaluations of those perspectives constructively, while respecting each individual socially and culturally conditioned myth is a far more difficult task and a more vital and urgent interpretative matter (a polymythic hermeneutics).[11] I believe the first step must be to move away from reductive approaches to myth and visit myths in their different varieties.

One can identify many examples of reduction in the short academic history of myth studies. Some forms of reduction attempt to transcend the particular features of the myth and determine its meaning and significance according to theory. The most well

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[9] Doty (1986) p. 6.
[10] Doty (1986) p. 13 and pp. 174-182.
[11] Doty (1986) pp. 56-60.

known examples of this approach are the different forms of positivism and Romantic interpretations. Other forms of reduction try to find certain literary features and project them as the key to discovering the meaning of the work or the single most essential aspect of the myth. According to these approaches one element must be isolated for special consideration in order to understand the myth, i.e. it is only in relation to a certain structural factor that the other major and minor features can be decoded. Archetypal plot structures, for instance, are a necessary concomitant of myth but do not provide the sufficient conditions for analyzing their networks of meanings and significance.[12] When an author summarizes many events over a long period into a story, and emplots the story in order to give it a form of logical coherence, he or she must at times neglect temporal serialization. The study of a story's plot structure is necessary but reducing the different meanings of a literary text to the plot still leaves many questions about the internal dynamics of a story open and gives the analyst or the reader too much interpretative liberty, i.e. privileging the plot creates a tendency in the interpreter to modify, adjust, ignore, attenuate or amplify other parts of the text in order to preserve the imagined authority of the plot. Understanding a text according to its structure – or more accurately, one perspective of structure – is equivalent to a "theory of everything" which implies that the multifarious range of narratives can also be interpreted using one criterion.[13] One must also account for the interaction between the elements constituting the plot such as characters – what they represent, how they represent it and who they represent it to – dramatic setting and the imaginary details evoked by the author, motifs or icons, and the interplay and transformation of all of these throughout the course of the tale.[14]

The identity of myth in contrast to other forms of discourse faces problems as a result of reducing myth to a particular feature that is not exclusive to it. To use the example I addressed above, myth is not the only form of discourse that uses a plot and

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[12] For an application and criticism of Jung's views concerning archetypes to examples of myth see Coupe (1997) pp. 139-146; for a critical interpretation of the use of Jung's archetypes cf. Gould (1981).

[13] Schmitz (2007) p. 50.

[14] In this thesis I will present some possible views on the place and significance of literary plot structures in different Platonic dialogues and explain how they can be integrated with other important literary and philosophical components to inform a reading of Plato's works.

defining it based on the fact that it involves a plot raises questions concerning the status of myth in contrast to other forms of discourse that include a plot of some form. When attempting to draw boundaries between different discourses, deliberating on the principles and elements that are essential for an account to be a myth can lead to confusion. For instance, the tale about the goddess Artemis hindering the departure of Agamemnon's ships for Troy by extinguishing the wind is considered a myth.[15] However, the authorized accounts of Mohammed's army being aided by thousands of angels to defeat their opposition at the battle of Badr[16] are not considered to be myths. Both of the stories involve supernatural beings, both of them narrated according to a plot, and all the authors involved aimed to present historical events in a way they believed to be appropriate.

The relationship between history and fiction has been scrutinized in the post-modern era because of the nature of narratives – the fact that all narratives, by definition, use a particular kind of plot and create a story in accordance with the plot, which in turn requires a degree of interpretation and selection and exclusion of available data.[17] In this way, the data used in a historical text relates to reality through particular tropes and are combined to correspond with the imposed plot structure.[18] A certain amount of 'filling in' occurs when the selected data – at the expense of the excluded data – need to be arranged and matched with each other in order to satisfy the order and rhythm prescribed by the chosen storyline. It would be unfair and over-exaggerated to label history as fiction but it would be inaccurate to assume that historical accounts are representations of events exactly as they happened, or that a historical account could only ever be the one correct

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[15] Euripides, *Iphigeneia at Aulis.*

[16] There are several Qur'anic verses and hadith mentioning the assistance of angels in this battle and most early Muslim sources take these accounts literally. Also, practically all the sources we have for this event, other than the Qur'an, come from hadiths and biographies of the prophet written decades after the battle took place. Also, the standard Muslim belief is that the Qur'an was dictated by God to Mohammed through the angel Gabriel. See *Quran* (1987) 3:123-125 and 3:13; Armstrong (1992) pp. 174-176.

[17] White (1973) pp. 5-7. Also, Gerald Holton has pointed out that in scientific writing, what he terms public science, the writer applies a similar kind of selectivity. He or she reports methods, data and conclusions only after specific laboratory notes are taken and 'disembodied' from the historical context they were taken in to support a particular position or theory and to guarantee further publication and reference (Gerhart and Russell [2002] pp. 194 and 204).

[18] White (1973) pp. 31-38.

story.[19] As an example one could consider historical accounts of events in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries which reflect the creative involvement of the historian, film maker or other kinds of artists when depicting history. From the situation in gas chambers in *Schindler's List* (1993), to the events leading to the shooting of John Kennedy in *J.F.K.* (1991), to the depiction of certain moments in relation to the unsuccessful mission of one of the high-jacked planes on 9/11/2001 in *United 93* ([2006] the high-jacker's preparations and behavior, and the passenger's heroism), are all acceptable to a large extent, are unverifiable, but would never be referred to as myths.[20]

One method that scholars have used to identify myth in distinction to other forms of discourse has been to concentrate on content and to what extent it is empirically and rationally verifiable. Myths have traditionally been characterized as fantastic tales the content of which need not correspond to the laws of physics or logic. But the issue of using verifiable evidence and unverifiable evidence is complicated when the two are used in juxtaposition or when new evidence is found that some interpret as being verification for an event or an action that others consider to be myth. In the first case, the blending of an unverified narrative with a verified discourse, i.e. supported by a different form of evidence, can determine the truth of the tale. *The Histories* of Herodotus, even his most fantastic tales, are not myths because some essential aspects of the stories correspond to a verifiable, logically and physically possible, reality.[21] In relation to the second case, however, the stories contained in *Genesis* are mostly considered myths by those unconvinced by theories based on archeological evidence, and true accounts according to those who draw connections between certain findings and the stories in the text[22] The

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[19] Carroll (2001).

[20] Cf. White's interpretation of the way characters and events are represented in film and literature in White (2000) pp. 66-86.

[21] For the influence of myth in the *Histories* cf. Boedeker (2002) pp.97-116: "Readers of Herodotus both ancient and modern have found the imprint of Homeric epic on all levels of his text, from the occasional use of special poetic words, to literary tropes such as set speeches and dialogues, to overall range and purpose. Herodotus occasionally refers to epic characters and deeds; moreover, story-patterns familiar from myths emerge from time to time in the *Histories* – but attributed to historical characters and situations." (p. 97)

[22] Cornfeld and Freeman (1976). For an analysis of different categories, based on credibility or lack of it, with which narratives can be distinguished cf. Lincoln (1989) p. 25. Also cf. Schilbrack (2002) pp. 7-10.

objects of myth are sometimes unverifiable, and sometimes verifiable, albeit, to different degrees depending on which aspect of it you wish to prove.

It may be accurate to say that – to criticize the traditional standards for classifying myth – the notion of myth is itself a myth – and those very standards, the criteria for what can be considered a myth, are fluid. Myth studies and religious studies has advanced greatly since its inception less than two centuries ago, and today it would be naïve to assume, for instance, that the indigenous Australian stories about the Dreamtime and ancient Greek myths belong to one genre.[23]

One thing is certain, myth, if believed in or accepted as relevant in certain ways, allows for the existence of particular kinds of objects. Objects, whether they are physically possible, logically possible or actual, take a certain form and are ascribed a certain meaning when incorporated into one or more of the many forms of myth I listed at the beginning of this section. Levi-Strauss, in *Totemism*, suggests that if we break the authority of a myth to classify objects and experiences, then many of those objects and experiences vanish or undergo a transformation of meaning.[24] If this is the case what happens to the oral stories and texts we bundle together under the name myth if the very notion of myth itself is scrutinized and deconstructed in the same way: Could many modern theories and ideologies be considered myths if we reconstruct the definition of myth in agreement with Levi-Stauss' analysis?[25] If we consider a well known quote by Levi-Strauss we must pause before we agree to any definitive definition or function of myth.

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[23] The position of Anglo-American New Criticism and Russian Formalism is particularly interesting in this respect. Theorists from these schools, influenced by Croce, hold that any form of artistic expression is its own unique and incommensurable construction and cannot be translated into another language or explained according to another discourse without losing its original character. However, this does not reject the fact that good translations or interpretations are possible – ones that insist on the value of the original. Also, they argue that generic theories destroy the idiosyncratic nature and quality of each text; the idea of genre must be replaced with a close reading of each work. Literary texts of all kinds must be appreciated and understood according to their internal structure and the dynamic interrelation between their constituent units and not limited by an overarching definition that tries to reduce many different texts to a vague category or misrepresentation (Zima [1999] pp. 18-19).

[24] Levi-Strauss (1973) pp. 1-3.

[25] Cassirer (1961).

> Of all the chapters of religious anthropology none has tarried to the same extent as studies in the field of mythology. From a theoretical point of view the situation remains very much the same as it was fifty years ago, namely, a picture of chaos. Myths are still widely interpreted in conflicting ways: collective dreams, the outcome of a kind of esthetic play, the foundation of ritual.... Mythological figures are considered as personified abstractions, divinized heroes or decayed gods. Whatever the hypothesis, the choice amounts to reducing mythology either to an idle play or to a coarse kind of speculation.[26]

Levi Strauss' observation regarding the lack of consensus within myth studies, the difficulties that different positions are still faced with and the limits restricting a resolution to those difficulties draws attention to the dilemma of striving to find an all-encompassing definition for myth. Meta-historical and trans-temporal narratives of the history of myth have given rise to problems concerning the role of the theorizer in explicating the description and function of myth. Modern interpretations of myth are driven by rational concerns that involve a certain understanding of issues such as knowledge, morality and aesthetics, which are deeply rooted in the idiosyncratic views of the interpreter. When these views are combined with a theory of history and are imposed onto historical events and actions, a very particular selection process must take place concerning the almost infinite data available to the interpreter. In addition, the data must be evaluated to correspond and support the theory of history as well as the intellectual, ethical and aesthetic positions. The role of myth, like every other cultural phenomenon, is subject to this selection and evaluation. And it is my aim here to show how different modern methodologies –

1) require that myths be generally categorized as one genre

2) determine the characteristics that myths have

3) determine the function of myths

4) and determine the epistemic status of myths

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[26] Levi Strauss (1955) pp. 428-444, p. 428.

I am critical of this framework for analyzing myth and my approach to the study of myth will aim to address individual myths without assuming a general genre – one with set or predictable characteristics, a repeated function or a standard epistemic quality. Instead of enforcing the "simple and easily memorized statements that suggest that myth does this… or that",[27] it is less problematic and more constructive to approach myths without resorting to a definition but by envisioning a horizon within which previous definitions can exchange prominence and new definitions can be spawned. Also, I will be sensitive to the way theories of myth have been imported into other areas of modern scholarship.

Often, myth is not a single story or a set of images originally intended for one purpose. Worldviews conditioning evaluations of myth, and the hermeneutics constraining approaches to mythography, can only be recognized and addressed constructively once one identifies and explores the most dominant explanations that myth is often reduced to: a preliminary stage of scientific thought; an idealized representation of reality or a reenactment of it (through ritual); an expression of a psychological state; a communication of yesterday's values; or one of the many different varieties of these grand mythographical explanations.[28] One of my aims will be to search for an inclusive horizon which enables many kinds of myths to function according to their social, cultural, political, ideological or literary settings.

## 1.2 *The study of myth in philosophy*

Since the pre-Socratics most philosophers have rejected myth as a valid form for representing reality. Much of the contemporary debate over the relationship between myth and philosophy puts the onus of proof on myth and veers towards the general *mythos/logos* dichotomy. The philosopher who wishes to prosecute myth and demand

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[27] Doty (1986) p. 10.
[28] Doty (1986) p. xiii.

justification for its loitering amongst domains of rationality does so with legitimacy. But reducing the issue to a simple dichotomy is superficial and has little import – the subsequent debates can become almost inconsequential. One needs to consider deeper levels of communication between myth and philosophy even if one begins by simply comparing and contrasting styles of explanation.

However, the crucial first step must be to critically analyze the generally accepted definition of myth which necessarily involves considering the history of the term and what it meant to different philosophers at different times.[29] Myth is usually a mix of different stories, carefully selected and modified, which in turn provide material for further appropriation. The heterogeneous basis of most myths – consisting of units influenced by different moments of history, different religions, cultures and political ideas – reflects the multiple functions, possible interpretations and uses of those myths.[30] The multifarious and often competing interpretations of myth are an obvious outcome of the network of meanings and multiple messages constituting the nature of most myths. The plot line, characters, themes and motifs used to amalgamate the pieces of different stories in order to make a myth are closely associated with the identity of the writer and the philosophical milieu he is operating in. Also, it is crucial to discover the most prominent meaning or meanings of myths without downplaying, ignoring, ridiculing or attacking minor ideas and messages. Later in this study I will deal with the complexities of plot, character selection, tropes, themes and motifs in more detail but it is relevant to

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[29] Hayden White's criticism of historicism is relevant in terms of illuminating the limits of evaluations of myth that are based on particular views of history (such as positivist or Romantic). White contributed to the philosophy of history by blurring the boundaries between historiography and literary criticism, highlighting the relevance and implications of the narrative structure in historical accounts and introducing the use of tropes. For White, historical writing and studies of history are subject to linguistic and cultural constraints. In addition, the moral and aesthetic preferences associated with a historian's account necessarily influence the form of narrative selected to represent a period of events. (Paul [2009] p. 56) These preferences determine the particular form of historical representation and condition the content of the account. Therefore, the status and function of myth need to be understood in terms of the interpreter's historical presuppositions and conditions. For a historical approach to modern theories of religion (which includes myth) that criticizes the different forms of historicism involved in understanding religion see Capps (1995) chapter 2.
[30] Consider Claude Levi-Strauss's explanation of the decomposition and recomposition of "mythemes" and the description of the mythmaker as a *bricoleur* (for the concept of mythemes see (1955) pp. 428-444; for the concept of *bricoleur* cf. Levi-Strauss (1966).

note, at this stage, that the fact that myth makers include some material and exclude others; the way ideological paradigms determine these choices; and, the exclusive social position or elitism pertaining to the one who can make a myth and propagate it, all give credence to the proposition I will argue for: that myth is a subject that is associated with Plato's philosophical thinking and can be analyzed as being interdependent with it.[31]

At least the complexity and controversy associated with reducing myth to one account has reached a level of relative consensus in contemporary debates by some contemporary philosophers working on the issue. When myth is presented in philosophical contexts, i.e. when myth is inserted, referred to or implied in some way in a philosophical treatise, it is naïve and hasty to simply invalidate or demote it as a fictional story or a false account. Taking these reductive measures concerning *mythos* and *logos* avoids more serious questions. Study into the status of myth in relation to philosophy has, thus far, given rise to various approaches toward different questions pertaining to myth and philosophy:

1) What reasons would a philosopher have for using a technique such as myth?
2) Does and can myth symbolize anything expressed in philosophy?
3) What can myth contribute that philosophy can not?
4) And the more particular question that is central to my thesis – what is the relationship between myth and philosophy in a philosophical text (in my case, the works of Plato)?

I wish to expand on this dilemma by exploring deeper questions:

1) What dynamics are at play in a philosophical text when two genres seem to be combined?
2) How and why would a philosopher need to look closer at the hybrid nature and structure of a discursive argument, and the different elements interrelating in a discursive argument, to better understand and strengthen that same argument?

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[31] Doty (1986) pp. 15, 17-18 and pp. 20-21.

Even though there are many approaches toward this issue, it is obvious that the numerous critical theories, both ancient and modern, have been molded out of the old debate we recognize as the "quarrel between poetry and philosophy", i.e., the traditional distinctions drawn between myth and philosophy.[32] Whether one attacks or defends particular aspects of myth, it seems that the overbearing weight of the traditional distinction often determines –

      1) the framework used for evaluations of the distinction and

      2) the development of ideas aimed at understanding the difference.[33]

The major perennial accusations constituting philosophical evaluations of myth and underlying explanations of its place in relation to philosophy may be summed up as the following:

1) Myth is unfalsifiable – it is inaccessible to experience and reason. As a result, it is unavailable to rational demonstration.

2) Actors in myth engage in morally outrageous behavior that renders myth morally inconsistent.

3) The same actors strive to define vice and social law, ordering mortals to practice moderation and adhere to order. However, they, the divine characters in myth, are themselves unable to control their passions and desires or live according to their own rules.

4) The events in myth are bound together using rules of action and reaction rather than logical argument.

5) Myth appeals to the lower part of the soul that is influenced by passion[34]

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[32] Gould (1990) pp. 3-12 refers particularly to Socrates and Plato; S. Rosen (1988); Levin (2001). Also, cf. Doty (1986) pp. 3-4 for a brief description of the origins of the separation which pays special attention to semantic shifts.

[33] Early Greek philosophers, particularly Plato, reject mytho-poetic truth claims and many fundamental features of their arguments are valid. But I will consider the possibility that the outright rejection of all myths including those presented in a philosophical context, such as the myths of Plato, are based on or influenced by the general attack on myth and poetry that was prevalent amongst early philosophical thinkers. I want to distinguish between different kinds of myth and arrive at the conclusion that ultimately Plato, in his role as a creator of myth, is not Homer (Morgan [2000] 15-16).

Even the many contemporary commentators who recognize myth as a legitimate form of philosophical expression ultimately arrive at the conclusion that myth and philosophy reside on opposite sides of an explanatory divide.[35] It is often assumed that the two explanatory methods of presentation can only be considered in relation to each other within an interpretative horizon that gives credence to two contrasting positions with two contrasting referents.[36]

Only a few contemporary philosophers and philosophical schools of thought have paid serious attention to the relevance of myth in relation to philosophical issues. Kevin Schillbrack questions this negligence within modern philosophy and states that a rigorous philosophical project that deals with myth has not been undertaken with the exception of the writings of some thinkers in the German Idealist tradition, Paul Ricoeur, Hans Blumenberg and possibly a number of random philosophers of religion.[37] He also draws attention to the alarming fact that until quite recently there has been very little interaction

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[34] Brisson (1998) pp.9-10. In the introduction, under the heading "Plato's Critique of *Muthos*", Brisson lists these five defects inherent in the nature of myth.

[35] For the influence of Hegel on literary theory and the history of visual art, which played a significant role in this form of modern interpretation of classical poetry and literature, see Zima (1999) pp. 6-8.

[36] As early as 1955 Claude Levi-Strauss presented a model for structuralist approaches of narrative he called the paradigmatic model. This theory involves establishing polar oppositions between phenomena in order to understand the deeper structure of a text. This model and the methods associated with it seem to be influential in many contemporary studies of myth which take dichotomy or independence of genres as a starting point. Levi-Strauss himself attempted to relate the paradigms to other aspects of cultural which have led to the updated view of myth as model (Propp [1968] pp. xii-xiii).

[37] Schilbrack (2002) p. 2. Schilbrack criticizes the overbearing influence of Christian theism on the philosophy of religion and argues that until the philosophers from within that tradition – particularly philosophers in the English speaking tradition – broaden the objects of their study the questions that inspire and enhance the scope of their inquiry will remain limited. For a comprehensive account of the history of religious studies that pays close attention to the significant influence of Christianity and Christian thought in shaping it see Sharpe (1975).

Scanning through the enormous amount of scholarly literature written on religion and myth over the last couple of centuries one notices an unequalled commitment to the use of continental philosophy or philosophers heavily influenced by continental schools of thought. The lineage is a long one including figures such as Friese, Hegel, Schleiermacher, Ritschel, Otto, Nygren and Dewey. More contemporary scholars in this field also reflect a debt to the tradition: I am referring to Muller, Eliade, Jung, Goodenough, Feurbach, Marx, Barth, Tillich and Ricoeur. Among recent essays and books written on philosophical interpretations of myth and religion the presence of continental philosophy is explicitly pervasive (Consider many of the essays in Schilbrack (2002), Hatab's use of Heidegger and Nietzsche [1990], Capps's approach which is based on the influence of Kant and Descartes [1995]).

between philosophy and religious studies, anthropology and the history of religion. He argues, I believe correctly, that philosophy is significantly relevant to the social sciences, and vice versa – particularly concerning an issue as cross cultural and cross disciplinary as myth.

Study of myth in any context is incomplete without some reference or acknowledgment of the contribution of Max Muller. Recognizing the non-systematic and constantly changing state of religious studies or myth studies, he drew attention to the fact that assumptions regarding the human capacity that relates to religion and myth were still in their elementary stage, untested and in desperate need of specialized research. Muller believed that success of such a broad discipline required interdisciplinary dialogue and fusion. Because religion and myth were relevant to theologians, philosophers, philologists, historians, social scientists and natural scientists he felt that contribution from these disciplines was necessary in forming a new area of study.[38] Muller is credited with making the study of mythology popular and many recognize his *Essays in Comparative Mythology* as the first serious specialized study of the subject. He believed that a study of mythology was important because it provided access to understanding the religions of different cultures. Muller held that knowledge of religion and myth was essentially tied up with his main concern which was to uncover the origins of religious thinking and expression. He argued that questions concerning beginnings were fundamental and need to be addressed through an investigation of the earliest myths.[39]

The more contentious issue, however, is how one discourse stands in relation to the other. Robert Segal classifies the different positions held by philosophers and non-philosophers: myth is part of philosophy; myth actually is philosophy; philosophy develops out of myth; myth and philosophy serve the same function but are independent; myth and philosophy function differently and are independent.[40] He identifies that these

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[38] See the foundational work *Introduction to the Science of Religion: four lectures delivered at the Royal Institution, February 19* (1882).
[39] See Capps (1995) pp. 68-71.
[40] Segal (2002) p. 18.

perspectives of the relationship are closely associated with the division between religion and science. In fact in many cases the evaluation of the *mythos/logos* distinction has been predetermined by interpretations of the religion/science division. Scholars such as E.B. Tylor argued for the indispensable link between myth and religion.[41] According to him, myth supplemented religion by providing explanations and stories in which to situate religious belief.[42] Contemporary trends in myth studies have been inclined to veer away from this, generally speaking, nineteenth century interpretation and have attempted to present a more interactive explanation of myth/religion and philosophy/science.[43]

Alternatively, an additional and plausible way of interpreting the relationship between myth and philosophy is to say that myth and philosophy function differently but are *interdependent*. Approaching Plato's myths in relation to arguments in this fashion avoids the burden of having to justify the relevance of the two discourses in the same way one would need to justify the relevance of religion to philosophy. By considering the two as interdependent I believe I can show that a sound conclusion can be arrived at that involves interpreting myths in a specific way which I will explain in the next section. It is incumbent that I argue how myth and philosophy function together but I do not believe I

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[41] For classical theorists of religion and myth, such as E.B. Tylor, myth can be explained in relation to the cognitive human capacity. Mythical explanations ascribe physical events to the personal will of a god or spirit and scientific explanations involve postulating impersonal forces behind physical occurrences. The two are incompatible since there cannot be two different efficient causes for one event but are methodologically connected in that they try to offer reasons for physical occurrences. Tylor believes that postulating personal, non-physical, causes is unscientific and, even though he does not go into details concerning why, one may interpret his criticism of myth as the foundation of the empirical verification criteria concerning the referents of myth.

[42] For a summary of Tylor's theory of religion including background information, see Sharpe (1975) pp. 53-58.

[43] Feminist philosopher, Michele Le Doeuff identifies myth as a narrative that has always provided philosophy with imagery and a way to accommodate passion into rational deliberation (1989). She believes the two to be inseparable and identifies the presence of myth in philosophical texts, thus rejecting the dichotomy paradigm. For Le Doeuff, myth and philosophy, combined, render a complete account of lived experience that must necessarily incorporate aspects of an embodied being such as sexual orientation, ethnicity, class and political affiliation. Another feminist philosopher, Pamela Sue Anderson argues that Le Doeuff's theory offers many important insights into the place of myth in philosophy that have remained unacknowledged by philosophers, but have provided feminist theory with form and content (Anderson [2002]).

am restricted to understanding the status of myth and philosophy in Plato's dialogues to the standard understanding of the relation between religion and philosophy.[44]

## 1.3 *The study of myth in Plato*

It is curious, with such a strong influence from other philosophers and philosophical traditions consistently appearing throughout studies in the history of religion and myth, why studies of Plato's myths have not taken the history of myth studies and their influences into serious consideration when approaching Plato's myths? And, if scholars have been considering them, why has explicit mention, criticism and development been missing? Philosophical approaches to myth that limit themselves in terms of acknowledging traditions or schools of thought – for instance, Enlightenment ideals or frameworks – continue to fall short of providing convincing explanations of how and why myths have been an important part of intellectual history. Modern conceptions of myth were formed within a historically contingent intellectual and cultural milieu. Therefore it is not surprising that many thinkers dealing with myth – a discipline that had little or no theoretical or academic history before the modern era – imported intellectual developments they were comfortable with and that had proven relatively successful when dealing with many other issues. Many problems arise, however, when analyzing different myths that belong to very different historical and cultural contexts. For instance, Enlightenment concerns and methodological techniques only partially relate to ancient understandings of myth and would definitely have been faced with disapproval from ancients. "Only an approach that flexibly combines formal criteria with content features and above all remains aware of its own anachronism can hope to do justice both to Plato's ancient texts and our own modern situation."[45]

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[45] Most (2008) p. 6.

The development of the study of myth is central to my thesis because of its significant influence on the way Plato's myths have been approached. The answers given to the most fundamental questions concerning the topic of myth by modern scholars have shaped and directed modern Plato scholarship. For this important reason, I felt it was crucial to explain the conceptual philosophical framework that determined the theories of myth and highlight the most influential stages of development experienced by the tradition. Regardless of its short history, myth studies functions in a network which involves disciplines such as philosophy, anthropology, aesthetics, sociology, ethics and other topics. Its relevance reaches further than academia and also pertains to issues concerning pop culture and cultural custom. However, it is important to acknowledge the fact that a tradition exists and that it occupies a special place in modern intellectual history. The identification of 'a tradition' is difficult to pinpoint and some may argue that attempting to do so is, to some extent, conceited. But there are many advantages in studying a subject by recognizing the time period in which it was formally initiated and developed; recognizing the individuals who presented the most central questions; and the place of the most significant topics and problems and the responses given to them. This approach gives, at least a manageable work setting in which to create, criticize and evaluate new study. This section is intended to justify my contribution to the study of Plato's myths which confirms the communication between the recent history of Plato studies and the modern history of myth studies.

In relation to the limits of scholarship pertaining to myth, Kent Moors offers a number of interesting critical observations. He encourages a contextual approach to the study of Plato's myths and highlights the interpretative limits that scholars have made by isolating the myths for examination. By dissecting Plato's texts into myth and philosophy the overall perspective of the dialogical context becomes a casualty and is too often replaced by the commentator's own philosophical position.[46] I agree with Moors' objection to attempts to detach Plato's myths from the rest of his work. However, there are also serious problems with ignoring the differences between specific mythical and

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[46] A criticism also mentioned by Mattei (1988) p. 67.

logical features (along with the many other diverse range of details) moving throughout each dialogue; as Moors points out, it is naïve to assume that the text as a whole must be the basis of study.[47]

Kathryn Morgan recognizes the importance of distinguishing between philosophical myths and other kinds of myths in Plato's dialogues. She acknowledges the potential of philosophical myths to elucidate man's inability to arrive at epistemic certainty and to expose the limits of language. As a point of clarification, she explains how philosophical myth does different things in different places. But Morgan emphasizes that one must never accept that it can be a satisfactory substitute for dialectic – a point that links her analysis to some of the traditional dichotomy views. She explicates that on its own philosophical myth cannot present unverifiable axioms. Myth must work in conjunction with dialectic to achieve this goal. The existence of the transcendent realm of Forms and the incorporeal soul are two prominent themes in Plato's myths that are justified in many dialogues by discursive argument. Echoing the position of classical myth theorists, Morgan describes philosophical myth as the "metaphorical expression of the dialectical path" which supplements the discussion where argument cannot because of the constraints of time and the difficulties of comprehension experienced by the characters.[48] But she makes it clear that this category of myth can always be transliterated into logical argumentation which is what differentiates it from educational and prophetic myth. But proposing the view that myth is not simply the 'other' of philosophy is only a step towards multiple levels of understanding the many ties between the two genres. Attempts to find a link between myth and philosophy, such as Morgan's position, are progressive analyses in the study of philosophy however they do tend to leave a number of explanatory gaps relating to the process connecting the two genres and the operational details between the two. For instance, Morgan complicates her integration oriented study of myth and philosophy by not clarifying how myth, inferior by nature, operates with philosophy. According to her thesis Plato's myths exist in a system where they do not

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[47] Moors (1982) p. ix. This position reflects methods in classical structuralism.
[48] Morgan (2000) p. 180.

consist of opposing qualities to philosophy but actually share qualities with it and support many aspects of the overall project of philosophy. She argues that irrationality is not a normative feature of myth but does not elaborate on exactly how myth can be philosophical or the role played by philosophers in the construction of philosophic myth.[49] We are told that since myth presents itself in the form of symbols it weakens itself in the presence of philosophy. However, she also points out that there is nothing innately wrong or nonsensical about symbolism. A gap emerges in the argument when one tries to work out the details that distinguish philosophical symbolism from the inspired use of symbols that feature in poetry.

On the other hand, J.A. Stewart, in his book *The Myths of Plato* (1905) recognizes man's emotive and moral instincts, which he explains are fundamentally grounded in man's dream-world consciousness, and acknowledges their contribution to scientific and philosophical reasoning.[50] However, he does not explain the link between the two, nor the process which facilitated the move from symbolic representation to conceptual deliberation. A whole range of questions are left unanswered. One is unsure of how the emotional state of dream-consciousness gives rise to notions of "value". There is no account of what role reason played prior to scientific thinking and why there was a shift in emphasis. And, more importantly, Stewart neglects rendering an epistemological explication of the coordination between symbol and concept – myth and philosophy.

Religious studies and myth scholarship have faced many obstacles when attempting to uncover the basic human capacity or mode that initially gave rise to the genres we now categorize as religion and myth. In their endeavor to explain the creation of myth by Plato and the influence of, and reference to religion in his dialogues, Plato scholars have also assumed the role of a basic human capacity or mode. Ultimately, according to this perspective, religion and myth are somehow evoked by a natural human tendency that motivates all humans from all eras and cultures. The predispositions most

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[49] Morgan (2000) p. 31.
[50] See the opening chapter.

widely proposed by theorists for the creation of myth can be summed up into three categories:

1) Moral – myth is moral education[51]        2)  Aesthetic  –  myth  expresses  beauty[52]

3) Rational – myth is a form of reasoning[53]

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[51] Cf. Wetzel (2002). In his latest book on the topic, Rowe (2007) argues that myth is essentially motivating when it comes to moral behavior (Also see Rowe [2008]). Glenn Most also acknowledges, like many other commentators, the emotionally appealing advantage of myth, which he calls the psychagogic effect, and details a particular kind of emotional appeal characteristic of myth which is associated with duty. Most states that "myth concludes an extended dialectical portion of the text, often so that the results that have already been obtained by logical means can now be repeated impressively in a mythical form." (Most [2008] p. 13). Also cf. Edmonds (2008) pp. 4-7 and 11-12. Edmonds argues for the view that myth is moral allegory. On pp. 12-13 and 14 he represents the persuasive and illustrative interpretation.  See Rowe (2008) p. 3, for an example of myth as persuasion while, in addition, introducing different terms and perspectives relating to punishment (on p. 4, the myth of the *Gorgias* is described as an explanation which is easy for Callicles to understand, i.e. watered down philosophy). On pp. 9-10 he explains that myth is an allegory about the suffering of the unjust which conveys a particular perspective on punishment. However, Rowe disagrees with the modern view that myth is an understandable way of communicating philosophy and explains that the myth of the *Gorgias* is a kind of allegory that is an extension of the arguments.
      For more examples of the moral allegory perspective cf. Annas (1982) pp. 125 and 138; Sedley (1990); Collobert (2008). For ancient interpreters see Diogenes Laertius (1925) (3.80).
[52] See Zeller (1888) p. 163, who makes reference to Hegel, as well; Mattei (1988); Stewart (1905). For a description of the historical place and influence of the 'mystical experience' perspective of religion and a list of its major proponents see Sharpe (1975) pp. 116-118.
[53] E.B. Tylor holds that myth was intended to be explanation and not description; cultures that subscribe to myth actually attempt to tell us something about the causes of physical events. And the need to provide a theoretical scientific explanation, for Tylor, originates in the cognitive faculty of the human mind. He contributed to the literal study of myth and the developments in this field have in many ways been reinforcements or reactions to his position. Segal lists a number of possible scientific reasons for why Tylor labels myth as unscientific which are worth considering. First, the non-physical nature of personal causes; second, the inability to predict and test immaterial forces; third, the difficulty of generalizing mythical causes into a unity; and finally, the final or teleological nature of personal causes (Segal [2002] pp. 21-22). All of these reasons presuppose that science is primarily concerned with the physical world and denounces or justifies a scientific theory based on the extent to which its premises can be empirically verified. Segal identifies the difficulties with applying this kind of scientific criteria since science is not necessarily physicalist and the fact that not all cultures that use myth as explanation are non-physicalist. Also, he argues that the criteria of predictability and generalization are not definitive standards – neither necessary nor sufficient conditions – by which to evaluate scientific discourse or unscientific discourse. Also compare Tylor with the views of evolutionary theorist Herbert Spencer (for a summary of his approach to religion and his affinities with Tylor see Capps [1995] pp. 74-83).
      C. Woloshyn bases his analysis of myth on Plato's comments regarding the status of image, and the 'divided line' analogy, in the *Republic*. He concludes that images fall short of knowledge and equates myth with analogy – both of which are designed to induce dianoetic understanding. For Woloshyn, myths can only be an indirect apperception of the Forms, implying that their relationship with *noesis* is that of a weaker epistemic understanding and never a mutual cooperation toward arriving at knowledge ([2008] p. 4). Also cf. Edmonds (2008) pp. 8-9 (myth is an allegory for rational development through elenchus). Most (2008) pp. 5-7 (myth as discursive). On p. 21 Most recognizes *mythos* as an access to truth complimentary to *logos*. See Tarrant (2008) for comments on Plutarch spelling out Platonic philosophy through myth. See

Other theories pertaining to causation assert that myth must be acknowledged as the epistemological foundation of our abstract accounts of the world.[54] Stewart explains how the inception of science is closely linked with the 'mythopoeic' imagination of early man.[55] He explains that in order to explain the causes of the world of sense experience man referred to the images and events of his dream state. This form of early contemplation, Stewart argues, 'enlarged the mind' and eventually led to scientific understanding. Science is indebted to mythology for its rise and also for its limits. According to Stewart's position, reason is a part of man but not the whole, and it is in relation to this emotional, spiritual context that he believes we should aim to explain myth.[56] Stewart acknowledges the fact that at a certain point in time myth was sufficient for satisfying man's scientific curiosity. More specifically, myth was the initial aetiological account for the creation of heaven and earth (cosmology), man and his faculties, virtues, society, nations, cities, art, instruments, rituals, animals and

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Collobert (2008) p. 1, for the view that myth is grounded in knowledge and its referents are philosophical propositions, argument or form. Collobert also refers to myth as a rational compliment to dialectic (p. 2) a developed metaphor, rational image which is limited since it only captures a part and not the whole of the truth; myth is an image which cannot fully capture or represent knowledge (pp.3-5).

[54] Cassirer (1955). Cassirer argues that underlying the creation of myth is a 'mythical *a priori*' and particular categories of mythic thought. He does not elaborate on the details of these features but deduces them from a unifying, harmony inducing mythical "tonality" (p. 61) that acts as a universal regulative force. Cassirer's conceives of the notion of 'wholeness' or 'unities' as an emotional impulse in contrast to Kant, who understands unities as logical or rational totalities. It is important to clarify that the fact that Cassirer believed that mythical thought grew out of an emotional drive proves that the *a priori* structure giving rise to myth, and myths themselves are irrational, but that they appear to be logical. He explains in *Mythical Thought* (p. 64) that myth categorizes its material like science but instead of logical categories of genus it classifies them according to "the law of concrescence". According to Cassirer, distinctly different elements can be unified under the principle of affect under which the elements both grow to relate to each other in more affinitive ways. They are combined under one category by an irrational desire or need. It seems that a logical force is at work in linking diverse mythical objects. But unlike a valid syllogism, in mythical thinking one is simply unifying things using an uncritical act of the will. Myth originates from the emotions and not from the intellect so it is inferior to science but, using a Hegelian conception of the history of ideas, Cassirer argues that mythical thinking eventually led to scientific thought. Through his theory of myth Cassirer tried to reconcile aspects of Romanticism with aspects of rationalism. He does not reduce the principle of unification and categorization of objects of mythical thought to the irrational but he does claim that the emotional source of mythical thinking, and therefore the content of myths, is irrational and false.

[55] There is also a strong influence from the cultural positivism of Stewart's time deeply imbedded in his various explanations and use of vocabulary.

[56] Stewart (1905) pp. 4-6.

vegetation.[57] This historical aspect of his theory does not concern me or support my thesis. Stewart's view is important for the fact that it is one of the only positions that does not subscribe to the inferior/superior paradigm of *mythos* and *logos* characteristic, to various degrees, of other positions. However, Stewart's analysis stops short in trying to integrate the two elements.

Insofar as the urge to reconsider the epistemological conditions giving rise to disciplines such as philosophy, myth or science is an important issue, it is only one dimension of a larger debate that necessarily involves consideration of many diverse and dynamic examples of communication between myth and reason – a diversity that resists reduction to one aetiological/epistemological theory.[58] Meta-critiques of myth and philosophy, with the aim of uncovering epistemic causes and regulations for either or both, have been conducted by, and have been directly and indirectly the concern of, theorists from different disciplines. In relation to understanding the place of myth in Plato's dialogues many studies tend to search for what is philosophical before addressing the clear literary structure and devices. An interpretation that acknowledges the inherent dynamic that takes place between Plato's philosophy and his myths rarely suits methodologies that are influenced by epistemologies that reduce religious phenomena to a kind of moral instruction, aesthetic representation or a form of weak cognition.

There are many other issues, some related to what I have explained above, that often sidetrack a deeper consideration of the interplay between the philosophical and the literary in Plato's dialogues:

1) attempts to link certain ideas to a mythic origin by virtue of a genetic development
2) attempts to find the relevance of myth to Plato's transcendental views

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[57] Stewart (1905) p. 10.

[58] Cf. the introduction to Brisson (1998). G. Naddaf analyses the relationship between the introduction of writing and the emergence of philosophy. It is interesting that the preface is a historically determinist form of account which precedes Brisson's analysis of myth. Also cf. Scarborough (2002) p. 46 and pp. 62-63.

3) concern for the historically accurate meanings of terms

4) evaluating myth using a particular kind of rational criteria that explains it away in terms of metaphysics, morality or politics

These concerns do not occupy a central place in my study of Plato's myths. Instead, I aim to promote a move towards an interactive and internal understanding of the operation of myth and philosophy in Plato's texts rather than an analysis of details pertaining to the two separate genres as such.[59]

My approach to the interrelation between *mythos* and *logos* within the confines of Plato's style of writing and his philosophical method demands that a number of salient questions be considered. The methodology I use to analyze certain dialogues, which I will elaborate on in the next chapter, will address these questions  The directions of these questions concerning myth, in general, are leading the reader to appreciate 1) the literary, textual and performative aspects, 2) structural authority and 3) hermeneutical matters.[60]

Questions relating to 1:

a) What are the literary and dramatic characteristics of the myths?

b) How is the myth related to other similar materials? Does the myth have an equivalent in terms of genre? Is it an anti-genre? Is it unique?

c) What materials may have influenced its formation and development?

d) What are the dramatic or literary markers which are not found elsewhere in other cultural creations and literature (including other Platonic dialogues), and why are they there?

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[59] I find the approach of the New Critics, and to some extent the Russian Formalists, particularly attractive in this respect. For them anything other than the specific interest in *how* a text is made is primary leaving issues about *what* literature communicates and *why* it was written as peripheral (Zima [1999] p. 21). This view is attractive and important to consider for my study because it focuses on form with the purpose of analyzing the purpose, direction and nuances suggested by the intricate details and devices inherent in the structure.

[60] I am indebted to William Doty for listing some of these crucial questions and categorizing them in the way I have done here (Doty [1986] pp. xvi-xvii). His methodology for understanding different kinds of myth has helped shape my approach to the study of Plato's myths.

e) Are there indications in the myth of the correct context for interpretation?

Questions relating to 2:

a) What are the innate dynamics of the myth and do they correspond to those found in the wider context of the dialogue?

b) To what extent does the myth represent a class of similarly structured materials, and to what extent is it unique?

c) How does the myth fit into the dialogue's conceptual, aesthetic, and semiotic system? Is it shaped by other privileged codes or does it function as a master code that governs other elements in the text?

Questions relating to 3:

a) What symbolic and iconic traces of the myth can be found in the rest of the text? And, correspondingly, how can the place and function of certain symbols and icons be understood once they are identified as traces of the myth?

b) What relevance does the positioning of myths have in Plato's dialogues? How can we understand the myth as a primary element rather than a secondary or peripheral element?

c) How self-evident is the meaning of the myth to the reader-listener? Does it require extensive exegesis?

In addition, I believe that one must not approach the relationship between *mythos* and *logos* in Plato based solely on the general meaning of the terms in ancient times or his use of the terms in the dialogues. It is extremely significant to consider linguistic issues and be sensitive to the use of terminology but an overemphasis on the terms themselves runs into problems when one is faced with Plato's notorious inconsistency in using the terms *mythos* and *logos*. At times they are understood as alternatives (*Prot.* 320c), sometimes one follows the other implying that they express different perspectives of one point (*Prot.* 324d), and other times a myth is actually a *logos*, as well (*Symp.* 193d and *Gorg.* 523a,

526d-527a).[61] To complicate matters, Plato does not elaborate conclusively on the criteria for evaluating the difference between the two; whether they are better or worse, true or false, accurate or misleading, primary or secondary, emotionally or rationally appealing. One thing is certain; one cannot determine the relationship between the two based on fixed normative categories. The relationship needs to be understood by focusing on Plato's use of the two in each text and, more specifically, in each individual instance in each text which deals with its own distinct problems and themes.

Approaching the matter by trying to identify mythical form or mythical content does not clear up the confusion. The dialogues themselves are narratives and therefore necessarily contain plots that share a structure similar or the same as many myths. In addition, many of the arguments import ideas and material from their corresponding myths or myths from other dialogues.[62] Simply searching for the appearance of the term myth or its derivatives in the dialogues does not necessarily provide justification that the passage is a myth. In opposition to the view that merely the use of the word myth signifies the appearance of myth one need only consider the many parts of the dialogues which are clearly myths yet are not referred to as myths (end of the *Gorgias* and the Egyptian myth in *Phaedrus*). If the passage in question is in fact a myth many other questions are raised more compelling than the question of whether the term *mythos* or its derivatives have been used or not: 1) What kind of myth is it? 2) Why was it used in that particular section? 3) What kinds of interpretations and meanings does it invite? 4) How does it pertain to the issue at hand? 5) How does relates to the rest of the dialogue?

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[61] Most (2008) pp. 3-4.
[62] Morgan (2000) p. 37.

**1.4** *Methodology and genre*


Questions pertaining to the validity and veracity of narrative are, no doubt, worthy of further examination. However, this line of investigation has diverted attention from other equally salient problems. If we aim at stressing myth's vicinity to philosophical truth we risk neglecting the inherent ambiguity or the poly-semantic character of myths which resists conceptual definition.[63] And, if we stress the non-conceptual character of myth and disregard its truth value we risk not recognizing how it conditions the reader epistemologically and the very existential, yet subtle, ways it makes critical suggestions. I am not suggesting that the direction I have taken in this study is more relevant than the direction taken by past commentators on Plato's myths. Nor am I suggesting that my method reveals the only insight or illuminates the fundamental features of Platonic thought. But I am certain that the way scholars have dealt with the issue of myth in the dialogues has evolved out of, and paid closer attention to, a study of genre and other kinds of classification rather than the technical use of genres and themes in connection with each other. One must approach the notion of 'genre' more cautiously and avoid acquiring it as a tool that will misdirect and cloud interpretation of a text.[64] This approach is more profoundly critical if it is accompanied by an understanding of the fallacies some genres seem to be based on. In the case of Plato's writings I will argue that the definitions of Plato's own myths have been heavily determined by the explanations of the origins of myth in the wider cultural context of classical Greek literature (the genetic fallacy). Also, Plato's own attitude to poetry has greatly influenced receptions of his use of myth (the intentional fallacy). And third, the reaction of readers has impacted the study of the myths Plato either wrote or included in his dialogues (the affective fallacy).[65] In the context of a Platonic dialogue, we notice that scholars have begun with an evaluation of myth based on one or a combination of the three sources of information and proceeded to analyze the

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[63] Flood (2002) pp. 183-186.
[64] Croce is credited for introducing the criticism and mistrust of the notion of genre into literary theory.
[65] For an explanation of the denunciation of the three fallacies by the New Critics in the study of literature see Zima (1999) p. 22.

place of all the myths in the dialogues.[66] I wish to propose an inversion of this method. I aim to explicate the inherent logic or dialectic taking place in the dialogues between myth and argument and only then attempt to develop an evaluation of Plato's myths, primarily and solely, as they are presented and used by Plato in a Platonic dialogue[67] (one which will inevitably lead to a poly-mythic hermeneutics).[68]

The problem of reducing myth to an all-encompassing definition deserves more focus in my study of the relationship between myth and philosophy in Plato. Both defenders of myth and its prosecutors in many cases share one problematic feature: they both account for myth under a general description without conducting a comparative study of, or being sensitive to, the different kinds of myth prevalent within the different stages of myth from Homer, through the lyric and tragic poets, to Plato.[69] As I will show in this study, critical awareness of the irreducibility of myth to a basic set of rules or a single structure,[70] and recognizing the dynamic nature of its function, is essential to understanding where myth stands in its relationship to philosophy.[71] Consequently, and a

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[66] Edelstein makes the point that the question of the significance of Platonic myth, according to modern commentators, is closely related to problems pertaining to the relationship between reason and imagination/philosophy and poetry ([1949] p. 464). Like the issue of studying the details concerning genre, and applying the results to the dialogues, the study of imagination and poetry themselves can also distract one's focus from the unique and central features of Plato's mythological project.

[67] Edelstein proposes a similar approach ([1949] p. 464)

[68] W. Doty uses the term "polyphasic definition" to represent a view of myth that uses the many different 'schools' of modern myth studies to address the many different myths and their diverse contexts ([1986] p. 40).

[69] This is beside the fact that different cultures, both internationally and within the Greek world, saw and continue to see myth in ways that may not completely correspond in every way to the general view of myth that many scholars work with when discussing the relation between *mythos* and *logos*. For an example of how a reductive view of 'Greek Myth' is used to understand Plato's myths see Most (2008) pp. 16-18.

[70] Thinkers such as Roland Barthes argue for a poly-semantic interpretation of literary texts – as well as philosophical texts (cf. Barthes [1975]). I share his anti-metaphysical or anti-logocentric position on literature which illuminates the multi-dimensions and the multi-functions of literary texts and allows the diverse features to be appreciated. For a brief explanation of the background to Barthes' thought and other similar thinkers see Zima (1999) chapters six and seven.

[71] Almost all commentators bundle all myths from Homer to Plato into one general genre with shared characteristics and as the target of one standard criticism (cf. Edelstein [1949] p. 465). Plato's attack on the poets in certain parts of some dialogues confirms that there was a general view of poetry held by philosophers. But this does not establish the fact that it was the only perspective on the vast range of poetry available at the time. Nor does the fluctuating dissatisfaction of philosophers like Plato signify anything substantial about the intricacies and complexities involved in understanding different myths, poets and audiences. L. Hatab's book, *Myth and Philosophy*, is an illuminating study on the diversity of meaning and

fact that is equally important, I will elaborate on the contextual contingency at play in the many transformations of myth, thus offering an appreciation of its multifarious forms and meanings.[72] This critical awareness will be used to appreciate the nuances dividing the different kinds of myths Plato referred to, paraphrased, quoted and wrote himself. My critique of reductionism in relation to myth in general is analogous to my critique of reductionism in relation to the myths in Plato's dialogues.[73] All myths need to be considered as self-contained entities with logics of their own imposed on them by their creators who are conditioned to varying degrees by external views but, simultaneously, create myths by interpreting those views.

Interpretations of myth as essentially allegorical, educative, persuasive, intuitive and illustrative, for instance, have been held by thinkers before the modern era.[74] However, the particular character of contemporary interpretations of myth, its intellectual basis, and the fundamental arguments supporting it, are products of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thought.[75] Coinciding with the creation of religious studies as a distinct academic discipline, studies of myth became intelligible by being subject to

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significance of myth in the ancient world. This text is useful when dealing with issues of worldview and identity during different stages of mythic literature.

[72] In linguistics and semiotics the arbitrary nature of the signifier in relation to the signified – its 'polysemic' aspect – and the exchanges that take place between them has been dealt with profoundly by figures such as Ferdinand de Saussure, Andre Martinet, John Lyons, and Louis Hjelmslev. The philosophical background to their theories of art has been generally described as Kantian because it rejects the conceptualization of art (Zima [1999] pp. 1-3).

[73] I must clarify that I am not rejecting the view that Plato's myths or myth in general, are completely autonomous or cannot be reduced to political, social or philosophical ideologies or influences. Rather, I am arguing that myth by definition has a semantic liberty to transform according to the purpose and context in which it is used. However, I accept that there is an indispensable relationship between myths and certain ideas and theories but that this connection is dynamic, meaning that a transformation of the signifier and the signified is always possible and the two can impose influence on each other or one can change the meaning of the other without necessarily transforming itself completely. Also cf. Coupe (1997).

[74] As early as Diogenes Laertius, commentators have alluded to the practical use of myth for educative and rehabilitative purposes (Laertius 3.80). However, the epistemological complexity associated with learning from myths or the inherent argumentative logic in myth has not been explored completely. According to many interpretations, myth seems, paradoxically, to be both useful for teaching very sophisticated moral ideals, assisting agents to recognize the virtue in practicing ethical behavior, and elementary or insufficient as a method for acquiring knowledge.

[75] The influential 'myth and ritual' school championed by anthropologist Sir James Frazer is one of the best representatives of an Enlightenment influenced method of interpretation. For a brief description and criticism of Frazer's approach to myth see Coupe (1997) pp. 22-26. Also cf. Capps (1995) pp. 71-74.

specialized analysis, description and systematic interpretation. Like religious studies, the methodological foundations of myth studies and the results arrived at by academics have been, and continue to be, tested, transformed and supplemented. Since the Enlightenment myth has been a specialized area of study that has invited perspectives from various disciplines that have transplanted and developed specific methods; utilized techniques; selected objects of study; asked a set of fundamental questions and have, consequently, established a continuous dialogue over the information gathered and the knowledge arrived at. Myth studies has had the advantage of reaping the benefits of advances made in philosophy, theology, anthropology, sociology, history, classics, psychology, literary theory and criticism and many other disciplines. The vast amount of material to work with from different parts of the world and different cultures was another significant factor contributing to the enhancement of myth studies. As a result, the study of myth in the modern era has expressed a particularly active dynamism that was not characteristic of prior approaches to myth.

The definitions of myth that have arisen during the past couple of centuries are many. However, it is not difficult to identify patterns, positions, and presuppositions when reading the history of myth studies. Religious studies and myth studies are relatively robust and have a short but intense history. Contemporary research into aspects of myth, or different kinds of myths, can refer to a history and traditions in order to be critically self-aware; they can indicate certain schools of thought and methods of inquiry which have become well established and are unambiguous. Today, academics are in a position to approach myth in a variety of ways and with numerous intentions. "Scholars can engage in descriptive, comparative, isolative, and synthesizing intellectual activity, sometimes in order to defend the propriety of a subject, sometimes to demonstrate its utility, sometimes to verify it, or, conversely, to explain it away, sometimes to give it sanction, and sometimes to illustrate the attractiveness of a theory of their own."[76]

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[76] Capps (1995) p. xvi.

Regardless of the diversity of approaches and intentions in myth studies, the fundamental questions that modern commentators ask remain the same:

1) How does myth arise?

    a) Which human capacity gives rise to it?

    b) What kind of symbolic expression is it?

2) How can one describe it?

    a) How can its truth be assessed?

    b) What method of interpretation is valid?

And, 3) What is its function or purpose?

    a) What difference does it make to our lives?

    b) How does it affect different kinds of thought?

It is interesting to note that the questions pertaining to causes, explanations, and essential and distinguishing characteristics have determined the third set of questions relating to function. The analysis and the conclusions arrived at concerning the description and the cause have shaped and provided the material to argue for the function of myth. Even though many theorists describe myth in one way they accept that it can still have a number of functions. But ultimately, the function never steps beyond the limits drawn for it by the description of its essential meaning.

The responses to the above questions have shaped the study of myth and, in relation to my thesis, determined the way Plato's myths have been received. In order to understand the answers that modern scholars have given to these questions I felt it was indispensable to describe the conceptual philosophical framework that the theories of myth operate within, or have developed out of. The short history of myth studies consists of theories that stem from concerns about philosophical, anthropological, aesthetic, sociological, ethical and other interests. The relevance of the theories of myth in the modern era extends far beyond the subject of myth. The important thing is that regardless of where the ideas originate, or the consequences of those ideas for other issues, there is nevertheless a tradition in modern intellectual history to draw upon. Regardless of the

fact that the identification of 'a tradition' is to some extent conceited, viewing the study of a subject, in a particular time period, with certain influential individuals driven by central questions gives a manageable work setting in which to critically evaluate our findings afterwards. Therefore, this chapter was designed to justify my approach to the issue of myth in Plato. Now, the dominant approaches in Plato studies that I will consider can be recognized as being part of another narrative: the modern creation and development of myth studies.

In addition to these historical and thematic background issues is the fact that there has been, in most cases, a striking difference between the uncritical use of myth and the way philosophers used myth. The failure to recognize this distinction can easily lead to the stigmatization of myth as the irrational 'other' in contrast to philosophy and thus leads to the traditional *mythos/logos* distinction.[77] Morgan acknowledges the fact that there are boundaries separating myth and philosophy but that these boundaries need to be redrawn. In this form of analysis, issues pertaining to the levels of linguistic truth are raised, criticized and transcended to a more profound discussion on the imposition of one sphere of meaning on another and "the permeation of one level by material from another."[78] Myth considered in isolation from philosophy renders itself vulnerable to being categorized as decorative.

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[77] Morgan (2000) p. 3.
[78] Morgan (2000) p. 5.