Myth and philosophy on stage in Platonic dialogues

Tofighian, O.

2. *Mutual scaffolding as a method*

The distinction between definition and function will prove to be illuminating in relation to my analysis of myth. One of the main points of contrast between the position I will propose and other views is that the focus of other views is based on a general definition, while my view concentrates on a unique contextual function, i.e. the function of Plato's myths in the isolated context of Plato's dialogues. For many commentators, a universal definition of myth determines the way it is used and, ultimately, what it stands for in Plato's philosophy. In contrast, my position deals with the complexities associated with the function of myth primarily in each of Plato's works. I avoid a direct analysis of myth in general and strive to study the operations of exclusive myths in relation to exclusive philosophical arguments in particular dialogues. It is crucial to address the issue of function, but explanation of the function must coincide with a description of Plato's own myths, which includes distinguishing between the different kinds of myths he uses, and not a generic wholesale perspective or a mainstream reductive notion of myth.

These salient points must be considered in more detail. My close study of the place of myth in Plato's dialogues will show the prominent place the above observations occupy. The aim of this analysis is to allow for a novel, more sophisticated and holistic look at Platonic dialectic and the myths they are partnered with. I argue that very little attention has been focused on Plato as a writer of myth in isolation from other myth makers. And since *mythos* and *logos* are too often dichotomized, the identification of influences by one on the other, or exchanges and appropriations of concepts, themes and motifs, has not been developed in ways outside the 'dichotomy' paradigm. Once one acknowledges the uncertainty associated with delineating the parameters separating myth and philosophy, one relinquishes the search for an authoritative discourse. The content and presentation of myth is important but the initial aim of my investigation is to reveal the philosophical context in which myth appears and the philosopher's comments on the myth he has employed. I want to focus on the interaction between myth and argument in

a philosophical text in order to better understand the particular features that characterize the myth itself and the direction and focus of the arguments it works with.

Brisson's analysis of non-Platonic myth is compelling and offers a valuable insight into, and interpretation of, a culture that has significantly influenced literary culture regardless of the fact that it stands in contrast to it in fundamental ways.[1] But it is one example of scholarship where too much focus is placed on distinguishing and defining genres rather than basing the study on Plato's individual technique. Paying too much attention to the *myth/logos* division or not distinguishing features of Plato's myths from other myths can lead to an evaluation of Plato as an author of myth that is insufficient and inaccurate.[2] Scott observes some of the confusions that may arise when attempting to analyzing the relationship between myth and philosophy in Plato without an appropriate method:

> Some readers may be tempted to treat the dramatic element as mere packaging, or literary joie de vivre intended to draw us into the dialogue, which they then go on to ransack for philosophical arguments. But it is possible to go the opposite extreme, and to be so caught up by Plato's powers of characterization that one ends up reading a passage merely as an episode in an unfolding psychological drama, without asking what philosophical pay-off is involved.[3]

The aim of this part of the thesis is to address Plato's mythological project in light of the above considerations and aim to rethink his purposes and objectives concerning his interest in the traditionally non-philosophical genre. Therefore, in what follows, I will continue by explaining a number of alternative ways to look at Plato's use of myth and how to interpret their relationship to argument. After presenting my own method I will demonstrate its advantages by conducting case studies on a number of dialogues.

---

[1] Brisson (2000).
[2] In contrast to Brisson, Mattei states that Plato's criticism of myth bears only on the myths of his predecessors. But both positions share the same problem of bundling a whole range of myths and literary figures into one category without considering the nuances and distinctions separating them (Mattei [1986] p. 67). For a study of Greek myth that is sensitive to the peculiarities and nuances of different writers and stages of mythic literature see Hatab (1990).
[3] Scott (2006) p. 5.

2.1 *Mutual scaffolding (a dialectical unity)*

One of the major concerns of this thesis is how to approach the question of what Plato actually intended by not only writing myths but also making them an integral part of most of his dialogues.[4] My analysis of Plato's myths describes the relationship between myth and argument in terms of a revolving dialectical circle or unity. In his dialogues Plato orchestrates a harmonious affair between philosophy and myth – an engagement conducted under self-imposed regulations of reciprocity.[5] A method I will refer to as 'mutual scaffolding'[6] can be employed to interpret certain situations in the dialogues where two distinct genres are presented as equally valid yet integrally contingent on each other. It is important to understand that this interdependent use of myth and argument does not occur in every case where myth or a story is used. When I address the dialogues in detail I will identify which myths participate in this form of

[4] Edelstein (1949) gives a compelling explanation of Plato's myths which involves categorizing the most important myths into the "eschatological" and the "historical". The eschatological myths, he says, took on a new and more sophisticated role after the *Gorgias* (p. 475) which featured the ethical dimension characteristic of Plato's epistemology but which also detailed the consequences of wisdom and ignorance. However, one of the most significant differences between Edelstein's approach in comparison to mine is that he does not clarify which particular myths are philosophical myths and which ones are not, and why. Also, he does not specify which characteristics essentially distinguish a philosophical myth from all others. On page 478 he mentions that Plato did not intend his own philosophical myths to be used to educate children being raised to be guardians or used to teach religion to the masses. This clearly indicates that Edelstein saw Plato's myths as a heterogeneous form of explanation but does not explore the details concerning the different varieties. Also, Edelstein's thesis accepts and confirms the bifurcation of myth and reason. He states that Plato reintegrated the two but holds that one pertains to the irrational aspects of the soul and the other to the rational. However, there is no analysis of the cooperation between the two types of explication (p. 476).

[5] Jean Piaget's perspective of structure is extremely relevant to consider in relation to the approach I am taking to the relationship between myth and philosophy in Plato's dialogues: "As a first approximation, we may say that a structure is a system of transformations. Inasmuch as it is a system and not a mere collection of elements and their properties, these transformations involve laws: the structure is preserved or enriched by the interplay of its transformation laws, which never yield results external to the system nor employ elements that are external to it. In short, the notion of structure is comprised of three key ideas: the idea of wholeness, the idea of transformation, and the idea of self-regulation." ([1970] p. 5)

[6] The definition of the term 'scaffold' suits the present argument both literally and metaphorically since 'scaffolding' means to provide or support the construction of something with platforms often elevated high above the ground.

unification, why they are important in this role and why they are necessary when attempting to explicate the point at issue.

The general framework of this technique is as follows: Plato explains the details pertaining to the world of becoming using ideas and arguments such as the theory of Forms and the immortality of the soul as metaphysical and epistemological foundations for his explanations. His description of the realm of becoming, our place in it and the philosophical themes associated with it include an analysis of the physical world's nature and the origins of its existence, as well as the nature of our physical bodies and the origins of our existence. The formal cause of particular things and our eschatological destiny are accounted for in terms of Plato's metaphysics and epistemology which, because it is logically sound and demonstrable, in turn, justifies the notion of a formal cause and the theory concerning afterlife. When the discussion turns to describing the nature of indemonstrable things, i.e. Forms as they are in their very nature, or the soul in its nature and its existence prior to its instantiation, one notices that Plato simply states propositional facts or hypotheses which are usually expressed in myth.[7] The propositions contained in myths function like other propositions – they are suggestions offered for possible acceptance or matters that still need to be dealt with (hypothetical). In this way the propositions presented by myths constitute an indispensable supporting platform for the theories espoused to explain issues such as the nature and origins of particulars, virtue and recollection.[8] Conversely, the myths depend on the logic of the philosophical theories (especially the theory of Forms and the immortality of the soul) for their validity. The way myth acts as a hypothesis and how the arguments and empirical examples surrounding it provide acceptable consequences, and therefore validate it, will be

[7] I am not proposing that Plato's myths present hypotheses the way that E.B. Tylor claims that myths represent scientific-like hypotheses (Segal [2002] pp. 29-31). Unlike Tylor's analysis, that ignores the relevance of the form and concentrates on content, my explanation of Plato's technique pays attention to the central role of narrative form. The form of the myth or the dialogue, which have profound affinities, influences the symbolic content as well as the arguments in the text.

[8] I will explain below that by presenting a hypothesis myth is not simply stating a proposition. The fact that a hypothesis is contained in a narrative means that myth can act as a more exhaustive model or framework, i.e. a metaphysical structure in which to interpret phenomena, render phenomena intelligible and identify the different relations that phenomena can have with each other (Schilbrack [2002] pp. 87-89).

demonstrated when I address a number of dialogues in detail.[9] At this point it is sufficient to mention that Plato's use of myth is part of his philosophic method; among other important functions it presents a hypothesis to be tested through rational argument and empirical facts.[10]

I argue for the view that Plato's myths are essential to his philosophic style in a number of different ways. Myths are fanciful stories but they must be regarded as equally important as the argumentative parts of the dialogue. Myths, as I will argue for through out this study, are an organic part of the Platonic drama and not an added ornament and far from an allegorical reproduction of a preceding argument.[11] Scholars such as Stewart, for example, recognize an inherent value to Plato's myths which he feels deserve the attention devoted to the discursive sections of the dialogues.[12]

When we focus attention on the exchanges between Plato's myths and his philosophy, the relevance of perspective proves to be a sensitive issue. In pivotal places, Plato's dialogues often fluctuate between mythological material and discursive argument. The shifts occur mainly when prenatal existence and life after death are considered. In the dialogues Socrates demands that we ask ourselves the moral question "how ought one to live?" Plato answers this question from two angles. At times he addresses the issue in relation to the afterlife and the consequences associated with one's way of living. Alternatively, he deals with the question as it pertains to worldly happiness and the harmony of the state. The two perspectives are interdependent and one cannot be dealt

[9] Ferrari proposes a similar approach to the *Gorgias*: "… announcing himself convinced of the truth of this narrative that he has heard, Socrates proceeds to "draw inferences" from it (524b, *toionde ti logizomai symbainein*). These inferences are not conclusions so much as they are statements of what is required by the story if it is to make sense. Death, then, must involve the clean separation of the soul from the body; otherwise, Zeus's judges could not judge without prejudice, as the story requires. Furthermore, if the soul is to be judged naked, it must bear judgeable signs that are independent of the body it once wore." (Ferrari [2008] p. 4. Also, see comments on pg. 5)

[10] "Philosophical myth is tied to the rational arguments which surround it, draws its strength from that context, and can influence the progression and formulation of philosophical discussion." (Morgan [2000] p. 161)

[11] Stewart (1905) pp. 1-3.

[12] The major contrast between my approach and Stewart's is that he isolates what he believes to be the most important myths – those of an eschatological nature – and interpret them apart from the rest of the dialogue.

with adequately without reference to the other. What is striking about the two approaches is that discursive argument is used to answer this question in a way that directly influences temporal earthly life. However, understanding the relevance of the same question as it affects us existentially, i.e. its significance to earthly values, principles and their consequences on the future state of man, invites myth. As Plato alternates between the two accounts he makes it extremely difficult to identify whether he is using a myth or he is using argument (or both somehow). The interconnectedness of the two approaches adds to the complexity and confusion of deciphering the status and reasons for using myth alongside philosophy. In relation to these observations one may consider the possibility that views such as the theory of recollection could be myth, or at least an argument based on a hypothesis that derives from a myth/s.

There are many examples in Plato's works that represent the delicate fusion I mentioned above. For instance, to explain the philosophically unconventional style of the argument in the *Phaedo* for the transmigration of souls one may allow for the use of Socratic irony or rhetorical illustration. But certain peculiar features of the passages suggest otherwise; the literary style and certain techniques used indicate a depth to the accounts which require a broader interpretative network of methods in order to penetrate. When responding to Socrates' description of the physical qualities acquired by inferior souls, apparitions and the existence of Hades Cebes states the following: "It seems likely enough, Socrates" (81d). And when Socrates describes the transmigration of souls into animal or insect forms Cebes replies by saying: "Yes, that is very likely" (82a) and "Very likely" (82b). Tarrant briefly mentions the use of the term 'likely' in a footnote (Tarrant [1993] p. xvi, fn. 12), indicating that what is implied is not the truth but an explanation that has some affinity with the truth. Also, at no point do any of Socrates' companions question or refer to the mythic quality of the eschatological account, i.e. no influence from traditional folk tales, conventional Greek religion or the mysteries is recognized, nor is there any hint at this point in the dialogue that Socrates is exercising irony or playing on the prejudices of his audience.

Socrates then changes the focus of the conversation from afterlife judgment to the care of the soul while embodied. At this point (82c) the dialogue begins to reconfirm the dualism characteristic of much of the *Phaedo*. Plato has Socrates prescribe a rigorously ascetic life solemnly devoted to philosophical investigation, avoiding the use of the senses "unless it is necessary to do so" (83a). What clearly distinguishes this part of the dialogue from the previous section is that Cebes' responses are bold, definitive and unambiguously clear. Here we witness Cebes answer by saying "Quite so" (83c), "Yes, that is perfectly true, Socrates" (83e) and when he was questioned on whether he disagrees with the argued points he replied "No, certainly not" (84a). Also, in a number of passages Socrates highlights the fact that he is speaking metaphorically (83d) or clearly indicates allusion to myth (84a). These literary tactics are employed in order to inform the reader of the status of the accounts and the way the two accounts interconnect through the character traits and expressions of the narrator and the narratee. Also, more importantly, there is a guiding principle at work in the scenario which is represented in the myth at the end of the *Phaedo* and operating within the philosophical arguments (details I will elaborate on in my chapter on the *Phaedo*).

The manner in which Cebes replies in the *Phaedo*, referred to above, and the two different referents of Socrates' arguments present us with an introduction to the way Plato appropriates the relationship between myth and philosophy. Clearly, Socrates' account pertaining to the transmigration of souls is logically inferior because the events and objects are unfalsifiable, i.e., neither accessible to the senses nor the intellect.[13] And Socrates' instructions concerning the care of the soul in this world, and the reasons provided to support them, are logically sound, practical and available to speculation.[14] However, it is important to understand the reciprocity between both accounts administered in the scene. The argument for the care of the soul rests on the narrative account presented on the fate of the soul. Without the tale describing the experiences of the different disembodied souls the moral justification for the soul's protection and

[13] For these reasons Cebes refers to Socrates' explanations as "likely".
[14] Therefore, they are acknowledged to be true.

maintenance loses efficacy, but more importantly the argument for the care of the soul has no stable platform on which to build an argument. Certain truisms, or axioms, an ethical vision of the world and a narrative framework (involving a working hypothesis) must be proposed in order for the argument to begin.[15] And these features must correspond to, or ratify, the theory argued for in the passages about the care of the soul. In this case, the hypothetical proposition, taken as absolute, is the view that one's actions ultimately lead to different degrees of damnation and salvation and, therefore, one must live a genuinely philosophical life even though one may be faced with the prospect of death. Plato indispensably employs this doctrine to emphasize the ethical self-responsibility attached to human existence and that our actions will somehow be judged and either rewarded or punished according to a moral order.

The point I wish to make with these examples from the *Phaedo* is that there is something interesting being created out of myth and philosophy that has a profound connection with the philosophical topics in the text. Categorizing particular literary aspects of the dialogues assists in understanding my approach to the individual dialogues and the internal dynamics of their elements; I have decided to consider:

1) plot structure
2) character selection (determined by the plot)
3) the use of mutual scaffolding (which I consider to be a trope) to combine, and separate, elements
4) and the meaningful selection and use of mythic themes and motifs.

I will explain the significance of these features for my method before entering into an analysis of the texts.[16]

[15] There are significant parallels between my approach and E. Gould's theory in *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature* (1981) where he outlines the relevance of semiotics, interpretation theory, mythic expression and the function of hypotheses in contemporary literature.

[16] For a study of the importance of recognizing the profound relationship between literary analysis and myth criticism cf. Doty (1986) chapter 6. Also, consider W.L. Power's analysis of the literary structure of the "Christian myth" ([2002] pp. 70-73).

Specific myths in Plato seem irrational yet they are contingent on the support of discursive argument for their viability and often refer to the conclusions arrived at by argument – conclusions they initially proposed. In this way myths are not left to the imagination and can never be interpreted in any way other than to support philosophy, i.e. in the context of the specific part of the dialogue they are placed in they are unique and necessary creations – they could not be replaced or be other than what they are.[17] Morgan addresses this important issue regarding the necessity for a reliable discourse to be unequivocal. One of the many criticisms aimed at myth by philosophers was that myth came in multiple versions, all of which were unavailable for verification, whereas philosophy provided the inquirer with a stripped down explanation which was committed to argument, completely open to verifiability and which, upon being scrutinized, showed that it could not be otherwise.[18] In relation to particular myths found in Plato's dialogues Morgan shows how myth can exhibit the same univocal quality found in the most rigorous philosophical treatise. In my examination of the dialogues I will reveal how the myths and the arguments interrelate in such a way that the major themes and the fundamental structure of the myth could not have been otherwise and, by way of indispensable correspondence, how the arguments are controlled by the same necessary form.

As I explained briefly, there are certain convincing examples of how propositions stated in Plato's myths function extremely significantly in his philosophy; the myths are hypotheses which are essential for the 'life' of the text because valid arguments proceeded from them. The very notion of the immortality of the soul and its relationship with eternal entities that exist on a non-physical plane of reality beyond the heavens provide a foundational base for certain pivotal arguments in the dialogues. These beliefs

[17] Plato uses different myths for some of the same topics. However, the perspective on the issue, or the aspect of the debate being addressed, has nuances from dialogue to dialogue. When the general point is being discussed in two different dialogues and they are accompanied by a myth it is important to notice the similarities between the themes and motifs used in the myths but it is even more important to account for the differences in the narrative and how and why they are different in comparison to the new perspective, the method of approach and the style of presentation – all integral features of the myth as well as the argument.

[18] Morgan (2000) p. 36.

in supra-sensible beings and themes constitute an integral part of Plato's ethical, aesthetic and political theories and provide the framework by which to understand his epistemology and view of salvation. For the sake of precision and clarity, I suggest analyzing the place of myths in the dialogues by studying myth as it pertains to the subject matter at hand in each particular dialogue. For instance, I want to point out how dialogues such as the *Phaedo* and the *Phaedrus* cultivated and enhanced the arguments concerning the soul and afterlife in different ways that were crucial to the major points that Plato wanted make in each dialogue. It is clear that aspects of Plato's arguments such as Socrates' 'divine voice' and 'recollective' insight (both replacing Muse-based inspiration) became intrinsically 'given' ethical truths because of the indispensable role they played as premises for philosophical arguments.[19] However, these ideas are represented in relation to different rhetorical programs; for different theoretical purposes; where different elements are attenuated or amplified; and where only a few perspectives from the diverse range of possible perspectives are relevant. Supporting the view that context influences the meaning of beliefs, concepts, myths and arguments, the 'given' truths are justified by arguments if they are presented convincingly by the protagonist and accepted by the interlocutors.[20] In this way the arguments validate their place in the logical inference or raise doubts if the situation is not positive or conducive. In relation to these literary factors it is always important to remember that the inference of each dialogue has a narrative framework (plot and themes) that influences the status of each mythical motif or logical concept in the dialogue and the relations between them.

In terms of their nature, the metaphysical propositions stated in myth can not be argued for objectively. There is no possible way that these things can be experienced empirically or be subject to rational evaluation. However, they can be understood as hypothetical propositions that can be proven on the basis of their requirement for Plato's rational arguments. The practical relevance of a myth/hypothesis depends on its function as a general unifying tool. A proposition is proven when Plato shows how it controls a

[19] Morgan (2000) p. 13.
[20] Ferrari (2008) pp. 5-6.

logical inference by regulating its direction and nature. Once the scene in the dialogue demonstrates that the issue at hand is a crucial practical and existential dilemma – particularly in relation to living a 'good life' or defending the virtue of inquiry – and convinces the interlocutors and the reader that Plato's approach is valid and can ideally direct one towards possible solutions, then the metaphysical statements, presented in myth and used in the arguments, find justification. When a myth/hypothesis functions in a demonstrative argument and is contextualized in a situation that has practical relevance, or addresses earthly concerns, it satisfies certain ontological criteria without having to subject the transcendent things, or mythical accounts, to objective physical criteria. Instead, the transcendent aspects of the myth dictate how the other features of the dialogue must be understood according to the plot they invite, the characters they require, the motifs they deposit, and the tropes they need for integration into the philosophical narrative. In this case, objective reality is inconsequential and the combination of logical inference and narrative sequence takes priority.

The *Phaedrus* (which I will deal with on its own in detail) for instance, states a number of propositions and explains certain events that cannot be objectively proven. Whatever account is given for the prenatal process experienced by the soul can never be empirically verified. An explanation of things, events and states of affairs that exist or existed outside of the physical realm of being are also unavailable to reason. The only hope for justification of pre-embodied existence is based on its consistency and coherence with the logic of the theory of recollection and Forms and their relevance to living a good life. To account for the existence and experience of the prenatal soul, which validates his metaphysical and epistemological theories, Plato first reaffirms the immortality of the soul. Therefore he confirms the fact that we are of divine origin and the fact that that origin has affinities with the knowledge that we recollect. Next, Plato introduces the myth of the charioteer and his horses. The myth is a vital prerequisite to justifying the theory of recollection and gives credence to the argument for the theory of Forms.

Also, in the *Phaedrus* Plato revisits the topic of rhetoric – a theme he referred to in the *Gorgias* as an 'unscientific knack'. In the *Gorgias*, rhetoric, which aims to simply persuade, was contrasted with philosophy, which aspires to truth and therefore establishes conviction. However, the argument in the *Phaedrus* is that rhetoric can be a real art worthy of acquiring and utilizing if it is based on knowledge of truth. At 244 Plato has Socrates detail the different types of "heaven-sent madness". This is done primarily to explain why a simple 'knack' in a certain field is insufficient for one to become wise. To gain wisdom one needs to be possessed by an external force that ultimately leads one's soul to knowledge of a perfect reality. The external force is the vision of the Beautiful or The Good which shares affinities with every individual soul as the entelechy or goal of human life inherent in every human being. The natural course of human existence is to be truly happy and, therefore, to arrive at a vision of the Beautiful is a natural ascending movement within oneself that one must foster and facilitate. But the question remains: why is one's soul moved by a vision of beauty? Why is it that only some human beings feel compelled to comprehend the ultimate reality that exists beyond the physical realm? How do we know these realities are the truth when we catch glimpses of them while we are in the particular world? Plato's theory of recollection offers an explanation for how we often come to discover knowledge without direct pedagogical instruction – a kind of recognition of innate ideas. But there is no rational explanation or empirical evidence given for what the disembodied soul encountered prior to birth that in turn influences our purpose and course in life during our corporeal phase. In the case of the *Phaedrus*, the theory of recollection, as premise, must be based on another hypothesis that accounts for the degrees and types of inherent knowledge. The hypothesis and the supporting premises need to be directed using some systematic order of explanation – in relation to the *Phaedrus* we are presented with a myth.

The myth also gives explanation for why we are attracted to beautiful particulars and, consequently, to the intelligible concept of Beauty. The emotion of attraction, rather than being an enigma, finds a logical explanation in the myth of the charioteer (love is no longer a mysterious thing), which in turn finds a place in the theory of Forms and

recollection that does not need further justification. In comparison, the *Phaedo* is known for explicating the relationship between the soul and the body in contrast to, for instance, the *Timaeus* that deals with how one must cope with living in a body, while the *Phaedrus* describes the process through which the soul comes to be encased in a body. Since this process occurs at an undetermined and unverifiable time and place – the events that determine the nature of our earthly existence take place during an unspecified time and involve a realm beyond the heavens – its details can not be evaluated using criteria one uses for particulars. However, the myth is not irrational and completely free from logical scrutiny. It has validity insofar as it acts as a basis, both propositionally and in terms of its narrative structure, for the support of the theories such as recollection and the theory of Forms and their practical consequences. It is only in the context of these other views, pertaining to issues of logical deduction and in the realm of particulars, that a mythological narrative can be considered viable. If presented on its own one could justifiably criticize its inferiority to logic. But in the context of the dialogue, and its interdependent relationship with Plato's metaphysical and epistemological theories, the myth of the charioteer stands apart from epics, tragedies and other non-Platonic myths. In light of this interpretation the *mythos/logos* distinction is dissolved.

For these reasons – the mutually supporting nature of myth and reason – Plato is not at liberty to construct myths, or things in his myths, in whatever form he wishes. His commitment to reason, as well as his disdain for allegory, restricts the subject matter in his myths. However, the themes and the plot of the myth itself are the regulating principles dictating Plato's selection, exclusion and arrangement of diverse elements. In this sense, the myths which interrelate with arguments, and the particular aspects which constitute both of them, must be interpreted as unique and necessary. And since Plato's myths and his arguments are in correlation with each other – and the fact that the myth imports the plot – a modification of the myth would alter the logical structure and efficacy of the rational part of the dialogue.[21] It is important to note that not all myths play this dialectical game with argument explained above. The myths I analyze in this

[21] Ferrari (2008) pp. 6-9.

thesis must not be confused with illustrative or educational myths which have their own place and function in the dialogues.[22]

It is important to clarify the fact that the interpretation involving 'mutual scaffolding' is not being proposed as the definitive way to understand the relationship between myth and reason. I believe that it is a technique the likes of which has not been considered until now and when implemented reveals interesting possibilities for interpreting the multifarious elements in the dialogues. However, by confirming the validity of my approach, and the insights it reveals in relation to Plato's method and style of presentation, I am not attempting to justify or show the truth of his conclusions, whether philosophical or mythical. To prove the truth of Plato's theories and narratives – if an absolute truth is what he intended – is not the aim of this thesis. Rather the coherence of his methodology which uses a particular kind of myth in cooperation with philosophy is my primary concern.

My mutual scaffolding approach is aided by an appreciation of and careful philosophical use of specific literary techniques. There are many profound methodological reasons for Plato's decision to fuse *mythos* and *logos* in the way I have discussed and what follows in my thesis will be a meta-philosophical exploration of Plato's style. In order to prove convincingly the mutual scaffolding connection between myth and argument I will examine certain dialogues by approaching the literary and philosophical components of the text systematically.

1) First, I will begin by concentrating on the way Plato introduces the theme of the dialogue – basically, how the philosophical question and problems arise, who brings them up and what they are in response to. In addition, I will deliberate on the setting of the dialogue, the potent themes and motifs portrayed and their significance in relation to the other major elements of the text. This focus on

[22] One example of a myth that does not operate in a mutual scaffolding relationship is the myth of the Egyptian gods in the *Phaedrus*. An example of another dialogue that contains a myth with which my method is applicable is the *Symposium* (I have the creation myth in mind).

introduction and setting will also involve consideration of narrative mode, i.e. the role of the explicit or implicit narrator/s and narratee/s; I will be concerned with Plato's choice of narrator/s and narratee/s and what this choice tells us about the intention of particular important issues in the text.[23]

2) After a description of the myth and the philosophical arguments I will concentrate on exposing the way Plato orchestrated the intricate interplay between the two; a technique I have called mutual scaffolding.
3) Afterwards, I clarify some of the most important literary features I claim are at work in the reciprocal relation between myth and argument: plot structure and character selection.
4) Finally, each dialogue analysis will be accompanied by a table which lists the many themes and motifs in the text. Illustrating Plato's consistency in this way will support my interpretation of the major elements inherent in the introduction, setting, myth, argument, plot and other scenes. I will list the well known or well-recognized themes and motifs as well as those that are often ignored or rejected as unimportant but, which I will reveal, are extremely effective.[24]

To reiterate in more detail, the first dialogue I will analyze is the *Meno*. It is important for its instructional value; the fact that it demonstrates how we must understand the potential hypothetical nature of myths. The *Meno* does not contain a myth but makes strong reference to myths and creates a hypothesis out of the belief system the reference implies. It is an excellent introductory example of how *mythos* and *logos* can cooperate together, i.e. how a hypothesis is verified by the desirability of its consequences. The *Meno* is a great 'meta' dialogue in which Plato shows us the more complex way that he does philosophy. It is an ideal dialogue to introduce my methodology and prove why my

[23] For a comparison and contrast between dramatic dialogues and narrative dialogues and their use of literary devices such as setting, narrators, narrates, etc. see Morgan (2004).
[24] For the use of motif in historiography, i.e. the transformation of a chronicle of events into a story, see White (1973) pp. 5-7. White discusses the significance of 'inaugural motifs', 'terminating motifs' and 'transitional motifs' in characterizing certain events in a chronicle. I believe that considering some of the themes and motifs in the dialogues in similar ways can be helpful. I want to expand on these three motifs by searching for examples in Plato's texts which reflect or strengthen ideas and structures in the plot, characters or events and the relationships between them.

selection of literary features clarifies Plato's technical strategy (i.e. theme introduction; setting; narrative mode; myth/hypothesis; philosophical arguments; mutual scaffolding; plot structure; character selection; index of themes and motifs). I will move on from the *Meno* to deal with four other dialogues using the same framework of interpretation and methodology: the *Protagoras*, the *Phaedrus*, the *Phaedo* and the Atlantis myth in the *Timaeus* and *Critias*. In my investigation of these other dialogues it will become clear that they are far more advanced in their philosophical message than the *Meno* since the topics they deal with are more ambiguous and the place of the texts in Plato's life and thought are more culturally, philosophically, politically, religiously and personally compelling, as I will elucidate. Even though these crucial details affect each dialogue in different ways my study always remains methodologically consistent and structurally obedient. This, I hope, will increase the applicability of my approach and render my findings more convincing after each dialogue is considered.

Through out my study of Plato's work I focus on specific literary features of the dialogues in order to illuminate the significant role played by Plato's myths. In my analysis of six dialogues I have limited my selection of topics for investigation to what I found to be the most constructive: 1) Theme introduction, setting and narrative mode, 2) The Myth/Hypothesis (*Meno*, *Protagoras* and *Phaedrus*) or The Myth (*Phaedo* and *Timaeus/Critias*), 3) The Philosophical Arguments, 4) Mutual Scaffolding, 5) Plot Structure, 6) Character Selection and 7) Index of Themes and Motifs. I believe that using these particular topics to approach the issue a) identifies the most significant features and potency of the mythical and philosophical content and b) best assists my arguments for elucidating the kind of interaction that exists between them. I will pay special attention to these different aspects of Plato's dialogues in each chapter of dialogue analysis. Linguistic, semiotic and literary concepts and theories are important to the study of philosophical texts and I will make use of different techniques and ideas from a range of disciplines which I have made reference to in this chapter and the first chapter. Many approaches to the study of literature and many philosophical methods and concerns emerged together which both justifies my use of them and makes their use easier to

integrate.[25] These historical and methodological issues are important especially for research of Plato's dialogues which are clearly on the borders of modern disciplinary categories.[26]

Some mention must be made as to why I am concentrating on the specific literary themes and devices in my analysis of the interaction between myth and philosophy in Plato's dialogues. I have discussed what I consider to be the most important elements of a philosophical-literary text and explained why an inquiry will be insufficient without serious attention paid to the role of each of them. These elements and devices, some of which have their own sections in my dialogue analyses, are 1) the plot structures 2) character selection 3) narrative mode 4) the use of mutual scaffolding as a trope and 4) liminality.

2.2 *Plot structure*

Many insights into the relationship between *mythos* and *logos* can be acquired by considering a distinction made in literary criticism between plot and story.[27] Generally speaking, the story is the sequence of narrated events and the plot is the form in which they take place (emplotment). The narrated events begin and end in the dialogue, whereas the plot presents them but is not determined by time or logical order.[28] Plato's dialogues are interestingly different from other forms of literature in that the story, the sequence of events determined by time and order, represent or contain philosophical arguments. But

[25] Cf. Zima (1999) particularly chapter one, "The Philosophical and Aesthetic Foundations of Literary Theories", pp. 1-16.
[26] Eckstein (1968) pp. 16-17 also promotes an interdisciplinary approach to the dialogues and explains how Plato reveals his meanings through what the characters *do* (active judgments), *make* (exhibitive judgments) and *say* (assertive judgments).
[27] Russian Formalism has been credited for introducing this distinction into modern literary criticism and expanding on it with beneficial consequences. For an example of the influence of this approach see White (1973) pp. 6-7 and fn. 5.
[28] Schmitz (2007) pp. 43-44.

since the dialogues are also examples of literary prose they are also governed by plot structures; the arguments are emploted. As examples of imbedded narratives, the myths in Plato's works are also controlled by a plot which forms the sequence of events so that they convey an intelligible meaning. These are interesting features to consider and the distinction between story and plot becomes more fascinating once we compare the plot structures of certain myths with the plot of the dialogue it is presented in and investigate the significance of the connection – a connection I will argue exists and has profound connotations.

By focusing on the plot structure of the dialogue and its relation to the myth I will be able to penetrate the deep structure of the dialogue as opposed to simply following a sequence of events or the order of arguments.[29] Within the deeper structure or plot the ordering of individual elements, whether literary symbols or stages of an inference, and the influence each element has on the others becomes clearer; the arrangements are defined in richer ways once one realizes how the plot structure determines how the units are to be interpreted, in what kind of imaginary picture, and for what end.[30] Approaching the dialogue in this way raises awareness of features such as the setting, introduction,

[29] Mythic narratives have also played crucial roles in the development of knowledge in other disciplines such as science. See Gerhart and Russell (2002) pp. 192-193.

[30] Roland Barthes' distinction between the syntagmatic level and the paradigmatic level has proven extremely useful for understanding the 'grammar' of narratives (for a brief account of the origins and original details associated with this distinction in structuralist approaches see Propp (1968) pp. xi-xii. The syntagmatic level is characterized by core functions, or essential events that cannot be omitted from the story, and catalysts, which absorb the core functions and shape them into a progressive course. The paradigmatic level is made up of informants, which are usually unalterable facts about people, places and situations, and indices, that depict the atmosphere in which the facts acquire meaning and influence our judgment of the events and actions (Barthes [1996]. Also see, Schmitz [2007] p. 51). In my study of the dialogues I will be concentrating on the plot as a paradigmatic feature that governs the units of information in the text and, correspondingly, projects a particular environment in which the units take form. I consider the myth to be an indication of the kind of plot that pervades different dimensions of the dialogue, including the myth itself. Also, the myth is paradigmatic in the sense that it submits a hypothesis with which the arguments in the text proceed. Certain features of Barthes' view of the syntagmatic level will be represented when I investigate the mutual interrelation between the myths and the arguments in the dialogues. Also see comments on plot by Doty (1986) p. 16. See Gould (1986) for the relationship between logic, myth and plot and the extent to which an author's system of logic is constrained by modes of mythic thought.

narrator/s and narratee/s, characters and motifs and their important relationship with the arguments and their premises.[31]

2.3 *Character selection*

Some Formalist theoreticians are worth referring to because of their focus on the details of speech acts in a narrative. They draw attention to the connection between the nuances of what is being said, the specific features of the character who is saying it, the context it is being said in and the recipient of the speech act. The author does not highlight these nuances explicitly but through carefully selected literary techniques that express the most salient characteristics of the most important people and scenarios in the text. Important details to consider include the name of the protagonists, their way of speaking, the way of narrating, the expression of the discourses and what is happening while someone is speaking, including interruptions and diversions of different sorts. "By imitating language mimetically, by reproducing its phonetic particularities and oddities, the narrator conveys a vivid impression of people's psyche, their social status, their problems…. what counts is the *how*: the way of saying and the narrative technique".[32]

2.4 *Narrative mode*

In order to concentrate on some of the most salient features of narrative mode I want to distinguish between the act of narrating, the produced narrative action, from the narrative text (the signifier) and the story or content (the signified).[33] Once the narrative

[31] For a similar approach used to study fairy tales see Propp (1968).
[32] Zima (1999) p. 30.
[33] I am indebted to Gerard Genette's theory regarding the actual act of narrating in a story for this distinction. His work is indispensable to any study of narratology in general and narrative mode in

mode is respected as a distinct feature of a text worthy of specialized research a number of insights can be gained for an understanding of the text as a whole. A sensitive approach to the narrator – explicit or implied narrator/s – is essential particularly in a dialogue where sometimes the task of narration switches.[34] Also, the perception of the narrator in relation to the story at the time of narration must be accounted for along with the reception of the characters in the story (narratees).[35] In addition to these important issues some temporal factors need to be acknowledged and integrated into a study of narrative mode. For instance, the distance between the narration and the story, and the events that took place in this interval, need to be seriously considered when determining the levels of meaning expressed by a text. And in the case where no narrator is mentioned or implied the issue is complicated even further.[36]

The fact that the primary narrator is conditioned by certain external factors which influence his or her perception is a fascinating problem connected to the plot used in the text and the overall message the author might be trying to convey. In instances where the external influences on the narrator are obvious and consistent, i.e. his or her perspective is recognized and predictable, we can get a clearer picture of why certain events are chosen to construct the account, why the events are structured in the way they are and what judgments are presupposed in the narrator's activity.[37] The problem becomes more compelling when the narrator becomes influenced by the point of view of other characters in the story, which is the case in many Platonic dialogues: "the narrator-text does not consist of a succession of events only, but is interspersed with short 'peeps' into the minds of the characters participating in those events."[38] Considering these aspects of narration raises more interesting questions about the aim and message of the text and how

particular (Genette [1980]; [1982]; [1988]; [1992]). "Genette's narratological system is arguably the most important one today because even narratologists who do not simply accept and follow it often take it as a starting point of their own approaches." (Schmitz [2007] p. 56). For Genette's influence on Plato studies see Morgan (2004). In addition, it is important to consider the work of Mieke Bal in relation to the most salient aspects of narratology (1997).

[34] de Jong (2004) pp. 2-4.

[35] de Jong (2004) pp. 4-6.

[36] See Genette's interesting view of "zero focalization" ([1988] p. 73).

[37] Schmitz (2007) p. 60.

[38] de Jong (2004, org. published 1987) p.113.

literally one must interpret the encounters and outcomes as direct representations of the view of the author.[39]

2.5 *Mutual scaffolding as a trope*

The potential for reevaluating myth after recognizing the problems associated with most modern interpretations is immense. Particularly after taking the criticisms from the first chapter into account I can now begin analyzing how the chasm between myth and reason became so wide and how the possibilities for an integrated understanding of the two deteriorated. Narratives about the advancement of Western civilization predominantly support the myth/argument dichotomy by arguing for the victory of reason, history, science, and liberation over unreason, myth, dreams, and religious speculation.[40] This view of Western history has been criticized by philosophers such as Horkheimer, Adorno and Foucault who argue that interpreting the two sides of the dichotomy as polar opposites and striving to eliminate the weaker side is not possible since both sides need to be harmonized if a truly human approach to the world and oneself is to be effective. White follows up on these criticisms and explains that both sides must be taken seriously. In *Metahistory* he aims to illuminate the continuity between reason and fantasy and their partnership in assisting in our discovery of truth.[41] In relation to understanding the place of myth in history and its relationship to reason one must avoid using the modality of opposition and introduce continuity and interchange instead. Myth and philosophy must not be seen as binary opposites but as parts of a

[39] Different forms of narrative mode and their possible relationships to authorship are areas of study that are central to philosophy, literature, cinema and other forms of media. For insightful studies of these issues that deal with literature and cinema cf. Wilson (2006) and Currie (2006) pp. 185-210. Also, cf. the helpful introduction to the anthology by Carroll (2006), pp. 175-184.
[40] Paul (2009) p. 62.
[41] White (1973) p. 51.

whole, similar to the way Nietzsche, Hegel, Herder, Vico and Leibniz interpreted the relationship between the two.[42]

In my explanation of plot structure above I explained how the strategy of emplotment generally uses one or a combination of plot structures in order to administer explanatory effect. An author's emplotment of selected empirical data or concepts requires that the information gathered for the story be prefigured in a way that slots into the chosen structure but also that it corresponds with the theoretical or ideological conclusion that the author wishes to arrive at. Prefiguration is administered using tropes of poetic language; according to Aristotle, Vico and many modern linguists and literary theorists, there are four tropes used for this process: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony.[43] In light of this view, it is interesting to consider Plato's interpretation of the historical Socrates and the historical events that the dialogues are based on as an act of prefiguration that supports Plato's own philosophical concerns.[44]

Attempts to determine the relationship between *mythos* and *logos* have also been made using tropes. I find it interesting that thus far the most dominant views have interpreted myth as philosophy's metonym; myth as a metaphor to help explain philosophy; or myth as a contrast to philosophy using irony.[45] However, the interpretative potential of using synecdoche has yet to be fully explored for understanding the relationship between *mythos* and *logos*. In contrast to the other three tropes synecdoche resists reduction of two different kinds of phenomena to various contrasting structures (agents and causes, acts and effects, inferior and superior, rational and irrational, oral and

[42] Paul (2009) p. 63; Coupe (1997) pp. 118-121.
[43] White (1973) p. x.
[44] In *Time and Narrative* (1984-1988) Paul Ricoeur offers an interesting theory of narrative where a narrative text "configures" reality whereas the reading of the text "refigures" it. He also explains how historical and fictional narratives are intertwined. Gerhart and Russell expand on Ricoeur's theory about the interconnection between history and fiction and apply his view to the weaving together of non-fictional and fictional narratives ([2002] p. 199). Also, see J.J. White's notion of *prefiguration* (1972).
[45] Thinkers such as Nietzsche, Barthes, Derrida and the American deconstructionists, and De Man discuss the relevance of tropes in epistemology. They raise issues regarding the impossibility of translating literary or philosophical texts into conceptual structures and the importance of considering the rhetorical dimensions in discourse (Zima [1999] p. 15).

literary, etc.). However, synecdoche is limited in the sense that it is based on an unequal part/whole relationship. I propose that we consider my technique of mutual scaffolding as a trope that constructs myth and philosophy into an interdependent unity where both things participate equally and share essential qualities.

The value of synecdoche needs to be explicated in order for me to then compare and contrast it with my technique of mutual scaffolding. In relation to synecdoche White explains: "By the trope of Synecdoche, however, it is possible to construe the two parts in the manner of *integration* within a whole that is *qualitatively* different from the sum of the parts and of which the parts are but *microcosmic* replications."[46] In his introductory section, 'The Theory of Tropes', in *Metahistory* Hayden White provides a basic example of the use of synecdoche which demonstrates its potential for integrative communication between two kinds of phenomena. He uses the phrase "He is all heart" and contrasts it with metonymy by explaining that, in this case, the heart is not simply a part of the body but also, and more importantly, represents a particular quality of character also exhibited by the individual.[47] In this case the heart is a micro version of the individual that possesses it – the individual being the macro version – and in the context of the phrase both require each other to illustrate the quality, its significance and function. It is clear from this example that the phrase cannot be read literally, metaphorically or metonymically. In similar fashion, I want to challenge the way myth and philosophy has been compared till now by using synecdoche as a basis and expanding on it to introduce the value of mutual scaffolding as a mediation tool. My claim is that mutual scaffolding, as a trope, elevates the unity of myth and philosophy to a more profound level of rendition and avoids problems of asymmetrical part/whole relationships.

The success of mutual scaffolding as a tool to unify the two genres is an important factor to consider due to the misdirected conclusions arrived at after the use of other tropes like irony, metaphor and metonymy. Scholars often suggest that Plato's use of

[46] White (1973) p. 35.
[47] White (1973) pp. 35-36.

myth is ironic in order to explain his reason for contrasting it with argument in certain parts of some dialogues.[48] This view is weakened by the fact that myths and arguments in the dialogues share essential features – a factor that violates the criteria of irony.[49] When an essential feature is shared by both forms of explanation – either juxtaposed, in different parts of the dialogue or different dialogues altogether – the most useful trope seems to be synecdoche, particularly if the aim of the investigation is to arrive at the philosophical comprehensiveness and cogency of the texts and corpus as a whole. But one may criticize the synecdoche relation by arguing that all Plato's myths, philosophical and non-philosophical, can be related in some remote way to the rest of the dialogue they are situated in; in terms of synecdoche the balance and necessity remain unclear. It is true that the non-philosophical myths relate to the argumentative parts of the dialogue, otherwise they would not be there. However, whereas the philosophical myths share an essential feature with the arguments, the other myths are only metaphorically related – an object, word or idea that is intended to stands for another but has no necessary element in common with the central points in the arguments. Metonymy also fails to be adequate because even though the mythical metonym is related to some aspect of the argument it is not an essential part of the object it stands for – and therefore can be done away with at any moment. However, the use of mutual scaffolding to understand the relationship between myth and philosophy is insightful and can also be extended to interpret the

[48] Interpreting Socrates' philosophical narrative enterprise as an instance of 1) irony or 2) artistic license leaves us with two somewhat unsatisfactory options. Both of these explanations are unfounded. 1) The texts that use philosophical myths give no direct indication of the use of irony. The passages including philosophical myth represent an important part of the dialogue that should not be ignored or downplayed. 2) To depict the scenario as simply an entertaining 'fill-in' insults the carefully structured nature of the dialogue, like all of Plato's dialogues.

One would fairly presume that the Platonic tales, like all stories, are not rational demonstrations, and the story line is not connected by logical deduction but by action and reaction. Yet the stories obviously occupy an important place in Socrates' attempt to reach the truth and there is little doubt that he would have found it problematic if they became part of his legacy. Therefore, an interpretation of myth needs to be implemented which remains consistent with the essential meaning intended by the parts of the dialogue they are situated in.

[49] This also supports criticism of the traditional dichotomy approach.

possibility that the dialogues as a whole can be related through this trope to more general phenomena such as society or human psychology.[50]

The use of tropes in a philosophical text does not differ from their use in other contexts – they are relational terms and help identify patterns that connect a variety of distinctly different forms of explanation and representation. For example, the way an argument is related to a situation, a past historical event to the present, an idea to a particular, a theory to a prescription, cannot avoid the use of tropes if the relation aims to achieve intelligibility and rhetorical appeal. In relation to my analysis of the relationship between *mythos* and *logos* I want to test the use of mutual scaffolding as a trope and see to what extent one can use it to interpret the interdependency of the two forms of description. No doubt, it is possible to connect them using the other main tropes I mentioned above, or using another trope that we have yet to mention and investigate. But it is my concern here to analyze a trope that best gives justice to the epistemological potential inherent in the relationship and a trope that best illuminates the relationship between philosophical myths and argument in Plato's dialogues.

White argues that Western Enlightenment theorists, such as Kant, were convinced that a metonymical relation existed between myth and philosophy – one which operated in the mode of severance or extrinsic opposition. In their accounts of the place of myth in history, Enlightenment historiography eliminated the possibility of recognizing the symmetrical part-whole interaction and simply assumed that truth developed out of fantasy. Kant conceived of human nature as acting either rationally or irrationally and understood these functions as being in contradiction to each other.[51] This perspective determines the place of essentially non-rational phenomena such as myth. It represents those individuals whose lives do not correspond to the principles of reason, or who live

[50] White refers to Erich Auerbach's analysis of Balzac's 'atmospheric realism' as "a part and result of an atmosphere" (Auerbach [2003] p. 473). Through mutual scaffolding, rather than synecdoche, I propose that the dialogues of Plato can be related to the social and political situations of fourth century Athens. The use of mutual scaffolding extends further than synecdoche and is more appropriate if we understand Plato's myths and arguments, similar to Balzac's works, as a part and a result of an atmosphere.
[51] Kant (2002).

according to a culture or myth based logic, as simply satirical, i.e. distanced from reality and human potential. I am not arguing for the position that a mythical way of thinking is accurate and that reason misconstrues our view of the world. I am arguing for the position that both need to be recognized as part of a symmetrical unity if the full reality of human experience and thought is to be encompassed. In fact, to avoid Kant's criticism of Herder, that a human soteriological need for a reunion of science and myth is itself a myth,[52] it is better to focus on the artificial borders separating myth and philosophy, the cognitive consequences of maintaining these borders and the cognitive possibilities that arise once we deconstruct them. I believe an interdependent, symmetrical harmony through mutual scaffolding is closer to what we find in Plato's dialogues in relation to philosophical myth – a way of thinking about the two in terms of creative interdependence or mutual scaffolding. I will argue that this approach to Plato's myths, and other myths of similar import, will deconstruct the traditional binary interpretations and dichotomies – such as rational and Romantic – that have laid the foundation for most modern theories of myth.

The mutual scaffolding relationship between Plato's myths and his arguments can be enhanced further by testing to see, once the literary, religious and philosophical unity is clarified and detailed, if it influences the expression and representation of certain ideas and facts. I will argue that Plato's core ideas and his experiences are situated in a literary mythical-philosophical setting which means that the data – the ideas and experiences – must undergo a form of 'figuration'.[53] Unlike objective mathematical, geometrical or

[52] Paul (2009) p. 64.

[53] Erich Auerbach uses the term 'figural causation' for a similar interpretation of literary history in his book *Mimesis*. In his essay "Auerbach's Literary History: Figural Causation and Modernist Historicism", Hayden White develops an idea he received from a comment made by Fredric Jameson regarding how the aim of contemporary literary history is to 'produce' a 'concept' of its object rather than attempt to replicate it (White [1999] p. 87). White, as well as Auerbach and Louis Althusser, who Jameson also refers to, deal with issues surrounding historical representation. I believe some of the ideas they use in their field can be transferred to my study of myth in Plato without serious difficulties. The main features of the debate I am importing deal with the use of narrative and the effect of certain narratives on other narratives or discourses. The connection between myth and history becomes clearer if we understand historical representation, as it is argued for by critics such as White and Northrop Frye, as fictional. That is, not as merely 'make believe' but as an account that is designed and arranged in order to satisfy a particular plot through the implementation of particular literary tropes (see White [1973] and Frye [1957]). The concept in question here is an aesthetic one that consists of representations as figuration or, to use Auerbach's term, "figurality". The notion of figurality entails that the figures constituting the history of Western literary

logical data, appropriated figures have a particularly fluid structure which can assist in accommodating different phenomena and can connect things not commonly recognized as being correlative. Applying these insights to a study of the interaction between myth and argument is less complicated than trying to connect time periods and the relationships between moments within those periods.[54] Myth and philosophy can generally be categorized together since, at the time of Plato, they both existed in written forms, their creators can in most cases be identified, and their limits are well defined.

Interpreting myth and argument in the dialogues in this way entails that Plato has full control and authority over the construction, the meaning, and the interactive structure of the two elements in the dialogues. However, the organization, presentation and direction of the *mythos*/*logos* unity define the nature of the data by molding them into appropriate 'figures'. By readdressing the myth and the arguments through a close reading and deep analysis with respect to their participation in a unity, specific features begin to stand out and the themes and motifs contained in the myth have a more enhanced meaning and a new status. In relation to a mutual scaffolding approach one can understand how a discursive argument can be indispensably bound to an aesthetic representation.[55]

---

realism have the potential to progress towards fulfillment (*Erfullung*). The figures are causal because they provoke writers to appropriate and radically recreate the figures as an act of fulfillment, which in turn each become a potential figure for another text. (See E. Said's introduction to Auerbach [2003] p. xxii.). The production of 'figures' and 'fulfillments' are equally as relevant in other forms of literature. Auerbach also discusses the perception of historical events and actions as characterized by these concepts. However, for the purposes of this thesis I will primarily concentrate on, and refer to, the manifestation of these concepts as they are represented in written form (narrative and argumentative).

[54] Auerbach suggests the possibilities for this task in a number of places and applies it at times – see Auerbach (2003) p. 549 and White (2000) fn. 13, p. 96. There are more serious difficulties with relating a text to an age, epoch or era; applying the figure-fulfillment relationship approach to connect a text with a timeframe

[55] It may be interesting to explain here the difference between Auerbach's theory of figure-fulfillment and allegorical exegesis. In the chapter "Farinata and Cavalcante", Auerbach details the idea of figural representation in opposition to allegorical and symbolic personifications. Referring to his own essay entitled *Figura*, Auerbach explains how the characters in Dante's work, Cato, Virgil and Beatrice, by virtue of existing in the world beyond, are fulfillments of their lives in this world (which are seen as figural). In the schema of figural realism both poles are legitimate and the characteristics of concrete historical reality are salvaged from symbolism or allegory. The events in the text have a reality – the true reality of their being – as "God's design in active fulfillment" and the lives of the characters in this world were simply figural and potential. "In the fulfillment of their being they find punishment, penance, or reward". The text,

I must stress that combining myth with philosophical arguments in the way I explained above does not suggest demythologizing. Simply, Plato is respecting the value of both forms for what they can contribute to his texts as a whole and therefore avoiding the limitations imposed by external categories or vague notions of genre. The modality of each discourse differs; the myth provides the necessary conditions for the argument, whereas the arguments provide the sufficient conditions for the creation of the myth. In this sense both are specially selected and carefully combined to construct Plato's completed literary-philosophical work. Plato's dialogues allow both forms of discourse to remain faithful to their own expositions and styles of presentation while immersing them into a meaningful whole. It is true that Plato's myths are symbolic, fictional, extravagant and unfalsifiable. Plato's philosophical components are argumentative, factual, logical and demonstrative. What they are not is independent of each other unless some salient, illuminating and indispensable features are compromised. Also, my interpretation implies certain controversial views such as the possibility that the existence of the soul and its immortality; the existence of Forms and their causal nature; and the fate of souls after death may be considered as figural, i.e. not fictional but having an interdependent ontological status and function within a myth/argument unity. In the figural realism of myth and philosophy the reader witnesses the cohesion of literature and proof; absolute ideas and empirical facts; purpose and satisfaction; general and particular; and a complete view of where reason must go and the direction it must take.

These observations concerning the connection between myth and philosophy using mutual scaffolding are extremely relevant to my interpretation of Plato's use of *mythos* and *logos*. But determining which myths are engaged in such a unity must be clarified (I will indicate and demonstrate these myths in relation to the dialogues I have chosen for my case studies). To avoid confusion it is important to consider the fact that

---

therefore, rather than symbolic or allegorical, is the ultimate completion of a soul's existence that is loyal to an Aristotelian-Thomist anthropology and concept of form (Auerbach [2003] pp. 195-196).

Plato's comments on, and use of, myth are both 'critical' and 'applied'.[56] By 'critical' I mean an analysis and evaluation of myth that definitively describes what it is and prescribe how, and for what, it is to be used. The term 'applied' refers to the way myth is appropriated, manipulated or implemented by a writer or artist without providing an explicit theory relating to its new status. I believe that a plausible study of the relationship between myth and argument in Plato must show awareness of when Plato approached myth critically and when he applied myth.

Addressing both perspectives is crucial but perplexing. At times Plato does not entertain the possibility of seeing myth in different ways – he just reduces it to one explanation or dictates what it is.[57] Other times he tolerates myth and we are given the impression that Plato accepts the fact that it is more complex than one theory can accommodate for (see the *Protagoras* or the *Timaeus*). At certain times he includes myths in the dialogues without reservations and other times he has Socrates make comments on myth that may be interpreted as critique of myth or at least suggesting a particular interpretation of myth (*Meno* 86b-c).

The difficulty arises if we assume that Plato is dealing with one and the same discourse when he is being critical of myth and when he is applying myth. Also, my intention here is to distinguish between different kinds of myth in order to help understand Plato's ambivalent attitude (also, to remove the title 'myth' from certain stories that have become falsely recognized as myths such as the 'myth of the cave'). In relation to non-philosophical myth one should consider that the allegory of the cave, apart from the fact that it is neither presented as a fiction or a real event, does not pertain to argument in terms of mutual scaffolding but rather is unified with argument through metaphor. This is in opposition to certain other myths, which may be called philosophical

[56] Ivan Strenski uses these two terms to refer to, on the one hand, the theoretical analysis of myth by writers such as Cassirer, Eliade, Levi-Strauss and Malinowski, and cultural and practical exploitation of myth by people such as Joyce, Rosenburg and Bultmann (Strenski [1987] p. 2).

[57] R. Benitez describes Plato's reduction of *mythos* and *logos* as the contrast between story and arguments. He points out the problems associated with understanding this distinction in terms of a dichotomy ([2007] p. 226).

myths, which participate in a unity and display mutual scaffolding. The myths that Plato critically addresses, like the cave simile, cannot be connected to argument using mutual scaffolding but with one of the other main tropes. Therefore, Plato is critical of most myths that are not related to argument but at times applies these non-interrelated myths for other reasons (for rhetorical reasons: illustration, education or persuasion). And, myths that pertain to argument through the technique of mutual scaffolding are only ever applied and never criticized.

2.6 *Liminality in Plato*

Liminality is a term first used by Arnold van Gennep to refer to the phase in a rite of passage or transition ritual when change occurs in relation to place, state, social position and age.[58] The use of the concept was made popular by Victor Turner who realized the applicability of liminal themes to a wide range of sociological and anthropological topics. According to Turner, a liminal phase is an intervening period in the sequence of a ritual when the subject's status and qualities are ambiguous. The initiate does not posses the attributes of the exited state of being or the upcoming state; social status is temporarily suspended; and the stability characteristic of mundane social structures is shattered. In fact, liminality can be contrasted with structure, i.e. the hierarchy based social system (political-legal-economic) that governs everyday life.

> The attributes of liminality or of liminal personae ("threshold people") are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.[59]

[58] Turner (1969) p.94.
[59] Turner (1969) p. 95.

Turner explains that the ambiguity associated with liminality propagates a spectrum of profound symbols. These symbols often represent death, imprisonment, pre-natal or pre-birth states, invisibility, darkness, bisexuality, timelessness, wilderness and the eclipsed sun or moon. Liminal individuals may be symbolically represented as, likened to or equated to monsters, ascetics, certain animals and special mythological and divine figures.[60] A familiar character trait of liminal figures is passivity, humility and a willingness to accept punishment. These features play a crucial role, in various ways, in empowering the liminal person, people or other entity and provide possibilities for surviving the liminal phase and successfully reentering the social structure – a structure which is disrupted and transformed after interaction with an example of liminality.

In my study of myth in Plato's writings I want to draw attention to a recurring 'liminal' theme that is implemented for different reasons and is manifested in different forms in certain dialogues. Liminality represents the marginal, the interstices, the outcast, underground or rejected elements in relation to a structure.[61] Also, liminal phases in ritual are those moments coinciding with a structure, sometimes as an anti-structure, where an individual or group breaks free and explores expressions of creativity made impossible or not tolerated within the standard structure or system. "It is especially in the freedom of liminality that new metaphors are born, revisions of the social structure are first attempted, and creative insights are developed and nurtured."[62] The 'outsiders' that have the potential to express this kind of creative freedom in phases of liminality include

[60] Turner (1974) p. 253.
[61] Turner (1969) pp. 110-111. As examples of despised or outlawed people who represent universal human values or 'open morality' Turner refers to the good Samaritan, the Jewish fiddler Rothschild in *Rothschild's Fiddle*, Jim in *Huckleberry Finn*, the fool in *King Lear* and Sonya in *Crime and Punishment*. Turner also makes reference to Hume's view of the "inferior" or "outsider" who symbolizes the "sentiment for humanity". In relation to political philosophy Turner uses the images of Rousseau's Noble Savage, Marx's Proletariat and Gandhi's Untouchables (Turner [1974] p. 265).
[62] Doty (1986) pp. 91-92.

shamans,[63] diviners, mediums, priests, monastic ascetics, hippies, hoboes, tricksters (the mythological character)[64] and gypsies.[65]

Turner explains how liminal figures and phases allow original hypotheses to emerge. When a particular structure is disconcerted by a liminal feature a free rearrangement of elements and factors is made possible and the newly constructed systems are tested according to reconsidered and reevaluated criteria. Plato makes use of this motif, as I will explain in my dialogue analysis, primarily through liminal figures (*Meno*), liminal time (*Phaedo*) and liminal space (*Phaedrus*).[66] In my study of the dialogues I will indicate where liminal features are being used, how and for what reason.

> Liminality, marginality, and structural inferiority are conditions in which are frequently generated myths, symbols, rituals, philosophical systems, and works of art. These cultural forms provide men with a set of templates or models which are, at one level, periodical reclassifications of reality and man's relationship to society, nature, and culture.[67]

[63] Bertens (1995) pp. 74-75.
[64] Doty (1986) pp. 91. For a contemporary example of use of the trickster as a literary device cf. Emily Wroe's analysis of Diran Adebayo's novel *My Once Upon a Time*: "Towards a 'non-ghettocentric Black Brit vibe': A Trickster Inspired Approach to Storytelling in Diran Adebayo's *My Once Upon a Time*" (2005). For a cross-cultural and cross-historical study of the trickster character cf. Helen Lock, "Transformations of the Trickster", www.southerncrossreview.org/18/trickster.htm (visited 2008).
[65] Turner (1974) p. 233.
[66] For a narrative that combines liminal time and liminal space one may consider the myth of Er in the *Republic*. Also, cf. Gonzales (2008). In addition to spacio-temporal peculiarities associated with the narrative Gonzales discusses the way the tale blurs certain dichotomies – a characteristic of liminality.
[67] Turner (1969) pp. 128-129.