THE ROLE OF MYTH IN PLATO'S REPUBLIC

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Declaration

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Abstract

In the *Republic*, Plato sets out his mistrust of myth and myth-makers, and the dangers that they pose to the good city. At the same time, the *Republic* reveals frequent references to myths and figures from traditional Greek mythology. The opposition between what Plato says and what he does creates a contradiction, which I seek to understand. My argument is situated in the view that Plato's aim in writing his dialogues is to invite his reader to engage in the activity of philosophy. An important aspect of this is *aporia*, because *aporia* is the mindset in which philosophy begins. I argue that the reason that Plato makes use of myth in the *Republic* is because myths have the ability to induce distance in their audience, and this is an experience akin to *aporia* such that the audience is more open to experience *aporia* when they have already experienced a distance from the self. As such, Plato is able to use myth in his dialogue to further the aim of his work. Moreover, the tension between Plato's stated orientation to myth and his actual use of myth has produced just the kind of perplexity that is the starting point of philosophy. The tension has produced *aporia.*

Keywords: Ancient Philosophy, Plato, Myth, The Republic, Hermeneutics, Myth of Er, Aporia

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The Role of Myth in Plato's Republic

Introduction

My project concerns the role of myth in Plato's dialogue, the *Republic*. I argue that Plato utilizes myth in his work as a means of inducing *aporia*. *Aporia* is the experience of being faced with one's own ignorance and having the desire to overcome this ignorance. It is a state of inspired bewilderment. As I will explore in this thesis, *aporia* is a necessary feature of Plato's philosophical project and is the correct mental state of the philosopher who is actively engaged in doing philosophy. This is because philosophers cannot engage in the activity of philosophy, or even begin to philosophize, unless they take themselves to be in a position of ignorance. We do not inquire when we take ourselves to already know.

Modern scholarship on Plato positions his work as being antagonistic towards myth. A cursory initial reading of the *Republic* suggests that this view is true: Socrates explicitly states in Books II (376e-383c), III (386a-402c), and X (595a-608d) that the storytellers are not to be trusted and must be expelled from the city. Poetry and the stories related through poetry are dangerous, according to Socrates, because they praise vice as virtue. The examples that Plato provides of instances where this takes place are all myths. Epic stories of the time were presented in the form of poetry, and often concerned mythical subject-matter, and contained mythical allusions.[1] In the Book II discussion of the luxurious ideal city, Plato identifies artists as imitators (373b5). Poetry is considered to be a kind of art. In poetry, the poet uses words to represent to us the world we live in, just as the sculptor shapes marble to depict the world. The problem is then that artists have the power to convincingly present what is false as if it were true: they can make vice seem to be virtue, and, as a result, praiseworthy. When the gods, who are considered to be good and thus worthy of emulation, are depicted as doing harm, then vice becomes a justifiable choice, and what is bad is portrayed as being good.[2]

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[1] Morgan, K. (2000). *Myth and Philosophy from the Presocratics to Plato.* Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, pp. 3; 22.

[2] The example that Socrates gives at the beginning of the discussion is of Uranus and Cronus, who attempted to destroy (and were later punished by) their children. Here the double wrongs of harming one's children, and those children hubristically punishing their parents for it, are shown to be performed by the gods. See *Republic* 377d3-379c4.

The poets such as Homer and Hesiod, says Socrates, produce falsehoods in their works, where their tales present "a bad image of what the gods and heroes are like, the way a painter does whose picture is not at all like the things he's trying to paint" (377d9-e2). The word used to describe these tellers of tales is, "μυθοποιός,"[3] (377b9) the root of which is μῦθος: myth.[4] Grube translates μυθοποιός as "storyteller,"[5] and Liddell and Scott render it as "composer of fiction."[6] Perhaps "makers of myth" would hold as well. In this multitude of possible translations, we see the difficulty in distinguishing between myth-maker, poet, and story-teller. Poetry was often the vehicle in which stories were told, and myths often their subject-matter. In the words of Kathryn Morgan, "the world of the poets was a world of myth."[7]

The fact that the examples that Plato provides of stories being harmful are all myths[8] indicates, first, that the stories mentioned explicitly by Plato as being a danger to the city are ones that are mythical in subject matter. Plato does not explicitly state that it is the mythic element of stories that makes them problematic. Indeed, he does not explicitly delineate myth as separate from stories or as being a category of stories. There seems to be an underlying connection for Plato and his interlocutors between poetry, stories, and myth. Poetry was the means by which stories were relayed, and these stories were often mythical in subject matter, or at least had mythical elements. This connection is borne out by the philosophical literature concerning myth in Plato, where his discussions of the dangers of poetry are taken to be relevant to philosophical interrogations of the relationship for Plato between myth and

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[3] Plato. (1903). Republic, *Plato. Platonis Opera*, Ed Burnet J, Oxford: Oxford University Press (Publication. Perseus Digital Library, Tufts: http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit::tlg0059.tlg031.perseus-grc1:24e (accessed March 30, 2021)

[4] Liddell, H.G. And Scott, R. (1843). μυθοποιός. 'Greek-English Lexicon'. On *Perseus Digital Library*. Crane, G.R. (Ed). Tufts University. Available at: http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=muqopoioi%3Ds&la=greek&can=muqopoioi%3Ds0&prior=toi=s&d=Perseus:text:1999.01.0167:book=2:section=377b&i=1 (accessed 21 April 2021).

[5] Plato. (1992). *Republic*. Grube, G.M.A. (Trans.). In Cooper, J.M. (Ed.). *Plato: Complete Works*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, p. 1016.

[6] Liddell, H.G. And Scott, R. (1843). μυθοποιός. 'Greek-English Lexicon'. On *Perseus Digital Library*. Crane, G.R. (Ed). Tufts University. Available at: http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=muqopoioi%3Ds&la=greek&can=muqopoioi%3Ds0&prior=toi=s&d=Perseus:text:1999.01.0167:book=2:section=377b&i=1 (accessed 21 April 2021).

[7] Morgan, 'Myth and Philosophy', p. 3.

[8] For example, in the Book II discussion about supervising the storytellers (also referenced above), Socrates refers to Homer's "falsehood" of depicting Uranus and Cronus as attempting to destroy their children (377e5-378a2). He also mentions Homer's reference to Zeus behaving badly in the *Iliad* (379d) and to Athena and Zeus inciting oath breaking, and Themis and Zeus instigating conflict on Olympus (379e3-5).

philosophy. As Kathryn Morgan points out, myths often provided the subject matter for the storytellers of the period,[9] but the fact that it is mythical stories that Plato picks out as dangerous reveals that it is myths that are of primary concern in this discussion. Second, the expulsion of the storytellers indicates that myths have a power that is equal, or near-equal, to philosophy. If this were not so, they would not pose such a great danger to the rule of philosophy in the city that they have to be banished.

The cursory reading that takes note of the banishment of the poets from the city and concludes that Plato does not value myth is mistaken for three reasons. First, it does not take seriously the contradiction between what is said – that storytellers are not to be trusted and that their myths are dangerous – and what is done. Plato makes frequent reference to, and even invents, myths in almost all of his dialogues including the *Republic*.[10] Contradiction and irony are an important feature of Plato's works, not least because they have the ability to induce in the deeply engaged reader a state of *aporia*. This incongruity can be seen as a specific instance of a more general feature of Plato's works: his use of contradiction and incongruity and irony to induce *aporia* in a deeply engaged reader. As Jacob Klein has pointed out, contradiction and irony in Plato serve the function of keeping what Plato sees as the dead written word an obstacle to the activity of philosophy alive such that philosophy can take place even in the absence of spoken conversation.[11] Second, in taking the expulsion of the poets at face-value and not engaging more deeply with the discussion of myth, the reader has taken herself to know what Plato's position on myth is. When she does so, she ceases to inquire, and hence ceases to philosophize. Third, as Plato's philosophical project involves inducing his audience to philosophize, and as this requires the reader not to take herself to be in a position of epistemic authority, cursory readings of the text amount to failures to read the text. However, despite the expulsion of the poets, the conversations in the *Republic*, and in other of Plato's works, extensively utilize and reference myth. This is the contradiction on which my project focuses. The question I ask is, "Given his stated distrust of myth, why does Plato reference and create myth in the *Republic*?"

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[9] Morgan, 'Myth and Philosophy', pp. 3;22.

[10] Some examples of myths that he invents include, although these are not exhaustive: Aristophanes' myth explaining the origin of Eros in the *Symposium* (189d-193d), the myth about the soul in the *Phaedrus* (246a-249d), the myth of judgment in the *Gorgias* (523a-527a).

[11] Klein, J. (1965). *A Commentary on Plato's Meno.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, pp. 6-13.

This question applies to many dialogues, but my attention will be primarily on the *Republic*. I have chosen the *Republic* for the following reasons:

1.It is the dialogue where Plato explicitly sets out his distrust of mythmakers.

2. It contains a rich variety of references to myth. In it, despite his explicit disavowal of myth (in this dialogue itself), Plato references no fewer than three of his own invented myths: the myth of The Ring of the Ancestor of Gyges, the Allegory of the Cave, and The Myth of Er. It is the Myth of Er that will be the focus of this project, against which I test my assertions.

3. Given the abundant engagement with myth in the dialogues, a project of this size needs a narrow focal point, which the Myth of Er provides.

As I have said above, my thesis question is, "Why does Plato create, reference, and engage myth when he is elsewhere explicitly mistrustful of myth makers?" In order to answer the question, I need to answer several smaller questions. These questions are:

1. What is "myth"?
2. What is Plato's philosophical project?
3. What is *aporia*?

In the remainder of this section, I explain the relevance of these questions. An answer to the first question is necessary because in order to answer a question about why Plato employs myth in his dialogues, I need to have some sense of what myth *is.* The question "what is myth?" is the question I investigate in Chapter 3.

Plato has a specific aim in writing his dialogues, and this aim is relevant to unpacking my thesis question. The question, "what is Plato's philosophical project?" is therefore one of the questions that I need to engage before I can arrive at an answer to my thesis question. My answer proceeds from the viewpoint that Platonic philosophy is concerned with care of the soul. By care of the soul I mean self-reflection and self-inquiry aimed at locating ignorance in the self, and attempting to become less ignorant.[12] I also proceed from the assumption that Plato's philosophical project is aimed at drawing his readers towards philosophy, towards caring for their souls; and that his philosophical works are an invitation and inducement to

[12] If the philosopher is the lover of, the pursuer of, wisdom, then the attempt to become less ignorant is patently important. For Plato, it is only through philosophy that we can interrogate what the good is, and thus choose the good over the bad and make good decisions. It is through our ignorant mistaking of the bad for the good that we harm ourselves and others. Care of the soul as self-inquiry is thus of grave importance.

philosophize. This is something that I will deal with in more detail in my project. It is a viewpoint that is shared by Pierre Hadot, Jacob Klein, and Lawrence Bloom, among others. In light of this position, my answer to the question of why Plato references myth so often involves the observation that myth is a form of story-telling familiar to his contemporary audience.

This is where the question, "what is *aporia*?" becomes important. Plato utilizes myth to induce *aporia*. *Aporia*, which I will discuss in depth in the dissertation, provokes the sensation of deep puzzlement and the desire to escape it. Inquiry only begins when we take ourselves as not-knowing, or in other words, inquiry begins in a state of *aporia*. *Aporia* is the correct mindset from which philosophy proceeds and in which the philosopher undertakes the process of philosophizing. Since Plato's project is to encourage his audience into philosophy, inducing *aporia* in his audience is an important feature of that project. He wants his readers to recognize their ignorance and have the desire to escape it. In other words, he wants his audience to feel *compelled* to engage philosophically. The discussion of *aporia* takes place in Chapter 1 of this project.

My position is that Platonic myth induces *aporia*. Myth encourages Plato's audience into the mindset from which they can begin to philosophize. Plato's philosophical discussions, which utilize contradiction and irony to induce *aporia*, can be difficult for the novice philosopher to consistently engage; the philosophical discussions that have the effect of inducing *aporia* are not easy, and so the *aporia* they aim to induce is not always accessible. They can be convoluted and, in their difficulty, off-putting to his reader. Myth as a paradigm familiar to his contemporary audience had the ability to induce *aporia* without deterring engagement in a way that *aporia* created through difficult philosophical discussion cannot. On this point of familiarity, Kathryn Morgan makes the observation that ancient philosophers made use of poetic devices so as to make their philosophical works accessible, in a cultural context where poets had authority, and where poetic works were far more readily engaged by audiences than philosophical ones.[13] It was myth, not philosophy, that was seen to communicate important facts and ideas about reality.[14] I see Platonic myth as not only often providing dialectical support to an argument, but as an important feature of Plato's philosophical project. I think that Platonic myth is an important means by which Plato pursues his philosophical

[13] Morgan, 'Myth and Philosophy', p. 4.

[14] Ibid, p. 36.

project of enabling his audience to engage philosophically. *Aporia* is the experience that initiates inquiry, and Platonic myth has the ability to induce *aporia.*

Chapter Break-Down

This thesis is made up of four chapters, "Chapter 1: Understanding *Aporia*," "Chapter 2: A Brief Account of Plato's Philosophical Project, and Platonic Concepts Important To It," "Chapter 3: Definitions of Myth," and "Chapter 4: The Myth of Er." I briefly describe these chapters below.

I. Chapter 1: Understanding *Aporia*

- In this chapter, I unpack the concept of *aporia*. It is usually translated as "impasse." This definition is not strictly incorrect, but it is an oversimplification of a complex idea, which would have had a much more nuanced meaning to Plato and his contemporaries than is communicated by the word "impasse." *Aporia* can be understood as the recognition of an epistemic deficiency and thus a form of self-knowledge: "I know that I do not know." The *Republic* itself ends in *aporia*.[15] I discuss aporia in the first chapter because *aporia* is important to Plato's philosophical project, as I understand it. And moreover, I understand the reason that Plato utilizes myth so much in his dialogues to be that myths have the ability to help induce *aporia*. The concept is thus crucial to my answer to the question I pose in this thesis, "Given his stated distrust of myth, why does Plato reference and create myth in the *Republic*?" This means that the concept of *aporia* is central to my project.

II. Chapter 2: A Brief Account of Plato's Philosophical Project, and Platonic Concepts Important To It

- In order to engage my thesis question, it is necessary to set out what I understand Plato's philosophical project to involve. Given the size of this project, the discussion here will not be as long and as complex as

[15] Halliwell, F.S. (2007).' The Life-and-Death Journey of the Soul: Interpreting the Myth of Er'. In Ferrari, G. (Ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 471.

Plato's works deserve. Simply put, I take the view that Plato's aim in writing his dialogues – his philosophical project – is to invite his reader to participate in philosophia. Plato's conception of philosophy is fundamental to this project, and to his motivation in drawing his audience into philosophical engagement. As I will discuss in this chapter, Plato sees philosophy – the pursuit of wisdom – as care of the soul. Care of the soul is an attempt to overcome deficiencies in our knowledge that hinder us in making good decisions and cultivating a virtuous way of life. In order to get to the point at which one is caring for the soul, one has to recognize one's various deficiencies. This recognition is none other than *aporia*. Hence the function of many of Plato's dialogues is to provoke *aporia*.

III. Chapter 3: Definitions of Myth

- Engaging the question, "why does Plato reference and create myth in the *Republic*?" requires arriving at some understanding of what myth is. In order to investigate a concept's relation to another, we need to have some idea of what the initial concept is. In the case of myth, this is no small task. As I mention above, there is no scholarly consensus on a definition of myth. In Chapter 3, I look at six different general categories of myth, and then I discuss those that are useful in defining Platonic myth. The answer I arrive at is that a myth is a traditional narrative with fantastical elements that carries secondary meaning and induces distance. In Platonic myths the secondary meaning is relevant to the philosophical discussion in which the myth is situated, and Plato uses the distance induced by myth to create a sensation of *aporia*.

IV. Chapter 4: The Myth of Er

The Myth of Er is an invention of Plato's, though it does make use of traditional Greek elements of myth, such as in the mythical figures of Odysseus and Ajax, and the supernatural beings of the Fates and the Sirens. The Myth of Er concludes Plato's argument that justice is always better than injustice. *Aporia* is induced at various points in the myth. The explicit conclusion of the myth is that it is only in cultivating

> the virtue of Justice in herself that the individual can be able to retain that justice in her soul in the afterlife such that she can choose the best life in which to be reborn. This explicit conclusion, though, is undermined by the myth itself. The myth seems also to suggest that there is in fact no way of avoiding injustice. I will discuss both this contradiction and others apparent in the Myth of Er in Chapter 4, with a view to the fact that they induce *aporia* in the reader.

It must be noted that Plato explicitly states that the relating of myths is permissible if it is done under the purview of philosophers (377c); when guided by the philosopher teacher, myth is not dangerous, but is rather an important means of facilitating education. In the ideal city, myth can be profitably used, by philosophy, as part of education. Under these circumstances myths and stories are not dangerous to the city and its inhabitants. I think, however, that there is more to the importance of myth than this. It is not only in irony and contradiction that Plato offers a multiplicity of meanings, nor only in the case of irony that he has reasons for saying what he says exactly where he says it. More important than myth's ability to relate complex ideas to a child, myth has the capacity to induce *aporia* in the student of philosophy. The philosopher-teacher uses myth to help the philosopher engage in the activity of philosophy. Myths are used in the dialogues for the purpose of enabling and encouraging that mindset from which philosophy begins – *aporia*.

The dialogue of the *Republic* is aimed at answering the question, "What is Justice?" While the dialogue does answer this question, and in Chapter 2 of this thesis I discuss this definition, two further questions raised by the dialogue are perhaps not so definitively answered. These are the question of 1) whether justice is valuable both in itself and for what it brings about, and 2) whether achieving complete justice in the soul is possible. In *Republic* II, Glaucon classifies good things into three categories: things that we value as being good in themselves (that is, things that are intrinsically good. An example that Glaucon give of such a good is joy (357b 7-8). Joy is pursued for the sake of itself, and not because it brings about something else that is valuable), things that we value for themselves as well as for what they bring about, and things that we value only for what they bring about (that is, things that are extrinsically good) (357b3-c). In the first category of kinds of good, he gives the example of joy, and in the third category, he gives the example of medical treatment. The second category of goods – those that are good in themselves and for what they bring about – is the best. Socrates

argues that Justice belongs in this middle category: Justice is both intrinsically and extrinsically valuable.

It is this assertion of Socrates' that provokes the discursive construction of the good city, an endeavour with which the next eight-and-a-half books of the *Republic* are preoccupied. Socrates' interlocutors agree that justice is extrinsically good, but exhort him to prove that it is also good in itself (358a3-367e5). Of their four arguments in praise of injustice, two of them are based on the perceived relationship between injustice and the good life qua *the life that is happy*: Glaucon argues that the life of an unjust person is always more rewarding than the life of an unjust one (360e-362c); Adeimantus argues that the unjust person who is seen to be just is happier than the person who is actually just (363e3-365d5). Socrates responds to their arguments by suggesting that before he and his interlocutors can identify what justice is in a human being, they might better be able to identify what it looks like in an ideal city (368e2-369a2). In order to satisfactorily argue that it is not the case that the unjust person is happier than the just, Socrates proposes imagining an ideal city, and what justice would look like there. This involves imagining the education system for those who are to rule the city. Their education requires the censorship of the kinds of poetry that they can hear. This is because storytelling is the starting point of a child's education, and this is when their minds are pliable (377a-b8). They must therefore only hear stories that depict the gods as being good (379a7-b1). Socrates and Adeimantus agree that a god is truly good, and the cause of all that is good (but not the cause of what is bad) (379b-c6). Depicting them as otherwise would invite a dangerous falsehood into the souls of the young.

Socrates does not actually respond in Book II to Glaucon and Adeimantus' arguments that unjust people are happy. It is only in Book IX that Socrates returns to this particular discussion and offers three arguments for why it is that just people are always happier than those who are unjust. It is also shortly after this, in the beginning of Book X, that he returns to the issue of censorship of the poets. Poets do not know what truth is (599a6-b10) but can produce only images of it in their poetry (598e4-599a4). In both cases, the issue of whether it is the just or the unjust person who is happy is soon followed by the arguments for the censorship of the poets. I do not know if the textual adjacence of these ideas[16] is philosophically significant. I will point out that the focus of the dialogue concerns the nature of justice. The

[16] That is, the ideas of the possible intrinsic and extrinsic good of justice and the untrustworthiness of poetry.

question of justice's always being better than injustice – that is, whether or not justice is valuable both intrinsically and extrinsically – is thus important, and is connected by the flow of the text to the arguments around poetry's place in the city. This connection suggests that the questions around the benefits to education as well as the dangers posed by poetry are likewise important. Socrates argues justice is both valuable in itself and for what it brings about. Poetry, however, seems to be only extrinsically valuable: it can bring about pleasure in its audience[17] and it can be deployed, under the direction of the philosopher-kings, as a tool in the education of the young future city rulers.[18]

The *Republic* concludes with two partially answered questions of the dialogue relating to the definition of justice: is justice valuable both in itself and for what it brings about? And, is achieving complete justice in the soul even possible? While it is the case that Socrates has offered a complete account of both the intrinsic and extrinsic value of justice, it is not clear that he has succeeded in convincing his interlocutors of this fact. Glaucon agrees that justice is good for the soul (612b5), and that people who are seen to be just accrue extrinsic rewards for it in their life (613c5). However, the myth of Er amounts to Socrates' argument for the eternal good of justice in the immortal soul, and as we are not privy to Glaucon's response to it, it remains unseen whether he is convinced. Perhaps this is pedantic; Glaucon at least seems to be on board with the notion that justice is not only valuable for the things that it brings about. The more important question, the one that remains unanswered, is whether complete justice in the soul is possible. I will discuss in Chapter 2 how justice is cultivated in the soul, but the question is whether a soul can become truly just, rather than always being in the process of becoming just. This is the question that the myth of Er attempts to answer, and, as I discuss in Chapter 4, it is not clear that it succeeds in doing so. The myth of Er, then, is the myth I have chosen to analyze in this project, not only because it is a beautiful example of a Platonic myth, but because it has deep philosophical relevance to the dialogue as a whole.

In order to engage this question of why Plato both rejects and utilizes myth, one must examine what myth is. This is a difficult concept to define and there is no scholarly agreement

[17] In Book III, Socrates describes imitative poets as "pleasure-giving" (398a-b3); in Book X, Socrates says that if the "poetry that aims at pleasure and imitation" can be demonstrated to be worthy of being permitted into the city, then it would be allowed, because "we'd certainly profit if poetry were shown to be not only pleasant but also beneficial" (606e-607d).

[18] In Book II, poetry is described as having the capacity to "shape…children's souls," and being the beginning point of the education of the young citizens (376e6-377c4).

on the definition. Anthologists, classicists, and historians have tried to define myth, but there is no substantial agreement on the nature of myth in these disciplines, and no single definition of myth has been set out in the field of philosophy. In brief, I consider two aspects of the prevailing definitions to be important: First, myth distances the audience from their reality, and offers a situation that is so discordant, jarring, and unreal that the engaged reader finds herself feeling uncomfortable. Even those myths that are familiar to their audience nevertheless involve fantastical impossibilities that, when the audience is immersed, have the effect of inducing distance. As I will discuss, the discomfort generated by the incongruity between a reader's reality and the reality related in myth, is a kind of distance, and distance is an aspect of the experience of *aporia*. Second, myths convey information through symbolism and metaphor. Thus, myths can have multiple meanings, just as Platonic irony plays with multiple, often discordant, meanings. The suggestion that a philosophical work can relate multiple levels of sometimes opposing meanings might make some modern philosophers uncomfortable. However, that a philosophical text can simultaneously convey two seemingly opposing ideas is a familiar suggestion for readers familiar with the workings of Platonic irony.

Chapter 1: Aporia

I have, in my introduction, made the claim that Plato utilizes myth in his dialogues as a means of inducing *aporia*. *Aporia*, I have said, is the correct orientation of the philosopher. It is the sensation of perplexity accompanied by a desire to overcome it. That is, *aporia* is the awareness of oneself as not knowing, an awareness from which inquiry begins. In this chapter, I aim to discuss the concept of *aporia* from a Platonic perspective – that is, what it meant to Plato and his contemporaries.

English Translations of *Aporia*

"For this is an experience which is characteristic of a philosopher," Plato has Socrates say to Theaetetus in the *Theaetetus*, "this wondering: this is where philosophy begins and nowhere else" (155d2-4). *Aporia*, a term which is often translated as "impasse," is a kind of wondering. A one-to-one translation though, of *aporia* as "impasse,' while not inaccurate, does not communicate the complexity and nuance that the word carries in the original Ancient Greek. Due to this multifariousness, *aporia* is a word that has multiple possible English language equivalents. In G.M.A. Grube's translation of the *Meno*, for instance, it is translated as "perplexity" (80a2). In her paper 'Beyond Aporia?' Sarah Kofman points out the trouble inherent in one-to-one translations of the word *aporia*, a term which has so many complex layers of meaning that even the attempt itself to translate the word thrusts the translator into a state of *aporia*.[19]

The word '*aporia*' is made up of the terms '*a-*' and '*poros*'. The first, the alpha privatum '*a-*' can be translated as 'without.' As a prefix it indicates absence in the root that it describes, in this case '*poros*.'[20] The second, '*poros*' is less simple to translate as it has multiple possible meanings. It can mean, as Kofman translates it, way or way out; a path or trail; it can mean "expediency."[21] *Poros* derives from the verb πείρω, meaning "to perforate, pierce, pervade."[22] Πείρω descends from the Proto-Indo-European root '*per-' meaning "to cross" or

[19] Kofman, S. (1988). 'Beyond Aporia?' Macey, D. (Trans.). In Benjamin, A. (Ed.). *Post-Structuralist Classics*. London: Routledge, p. 9.

[20] Beekes, R. and van Beek, L. (2009). ἀ. In *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*. Leiden: Brill, p. 1.

[21] Kofman, 'Beyond Aporia?', p. 9.

[22] Beekes, R. and van Beek, L. (2009). πείρω. *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*. Leiden: Brill, p. 1163.

"pass through."[23] It can also mean "passage, ford, narrowing, journey, road, way; means, way out."[24] *A-poria*, then, is the absence of a path or of a way, it is the want of a solution.

Aporia is also related to the word "*apeiras*," which is translated by Kofman as meaning "indeterminacy." The word *apeiras* comes from the noun πεῖραρ, meaning "end, boundary, outcome, goal, decision."[25] Πεῖραρ descends, like πείρω, from the Proto-Indo-Eruopean root '*per-'.[26] The terms *aporia* and *apeiras* share this Proto-Indo-European etymological root, and are not semantically dissimilar in the Greek.[27] If *poros* can be translated as passage, ford, or road, (which are all means of going), as well as way out and means (as in, ability to accomplish or bring about an end), then this word is conceptually linked to the parent word of *apeiras*: πεῖραρ, meaning goal as well as boundary. Kofman translates the root *peiras*, as "limit," "boundary," or "end."[28] *Apeiras* then is without an end, without a boundary; limitless. As such, "ἄπειρος" which in M.J. Levitt's translation of the *Theaetetus* is translated as "puzzle" (155c), is in Grube's translation of the *Republic* rendered as "endless" (373d)[29]; it can also mean "boundless" and "infinite."[30] The word *aporia*, then, would have had a richer meaning to Plato's contemporaries than is communicated by the simple "impasse," or any attempt to communicate it through a one to one, direct translation.

In her unpacking of the philosophical content of the word *aporia*, Kofman likens *aporia* to the boundless directionless-ness of the sea. A *poros*, she asserts, is not just any kind of path; it is a sea-route, or a river passage. A *poros* is,

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[23] Beekes, R. and van Beek, L. (2009). πείρω. *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*. Leiden: Brill, p. 1163.

[24] Ibid, p. 1163.

[25] Ibid, p. 1163.

[26] Ibid, p. 1163.

[27] As discussed in conversation with Dr. David van Schoor and Mr. Daniel Malamis.

[28] Koffman, 'Beyond Aporia?' p. 9.

[29] John Burnet ed. Perseus database.

http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0059.tlg006.perseus-grc1:155c (accessed 30 March 2021).

[30] Liddell, H.G. And Scott, R. (1843). ἄπειρος. 'Greek-English Lexicon'. On *Perseus Digital Library*. Crane, G.R. (Ed). Tufts University. Available at: http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=a%29%2Fpeiros&la=greek&can=a%29%2Fpeiros0&prior=ou)k&d=Perseus:text:1999.01.0171:text=Theaet.:section=155c&i=1 (accessed 30 March 2021).

> a passage opened up across a chaotic expanse which it transforms into an ordered, qualified space by introducing differentiated routes, making visible the various directions of space, by giving direction to an expanse which was initially devoid of all contours, of all landmarks.[31]

A *poros* then is not simply a well-trod means of finding one's way, a *poros* is traversed over unknowable, chaotic terrain upon which it projects some kind of order. A *poros* is a means of introducing order where there is none, of making sense of that which is so vast or chaotic or directionless that it is not entirely knowable. Kofman observes that in this way, the sea onto which the *poros* is projected is not unlike Tartarus, the lowest depths of the underworld.

> Tartarus is a realm of wild swirling squalls where there are no directions, no left and no right, no up and no down, where there are no fixed directions, where one can find no landmarks, no bearings to travel by. In this infernal, chaotic confusion, the *poros* is the way out, the last resort of sailors and navigators, the stratagem which allows them to escape the impasse and the attendant anxiety.[32]

In Tartarus where there are no directions, a person is lost in a way that she is not lost on dry land; at least then she would have a sense of direction, of the sky being above, and the sun moving through it from East to West. The chaos of Tartarus is so complete as to leave the lost soul bereft of not only direction, but even of her own position – she cannot know which way she is oriented with reference to anything else. The *poros* that Kofman describes is the only possible salvation from this absolute, unmitigated confusion; the well-travelled path will not be the means of escape where there is no direction or position of the self. A *poros* then must be adaptable to the chaos that it navigates, just as no one sea-route is ever the same as another, even one navigated by the same captain, on the same ship, repeating a journey. When the philosopher is in a state of *aporia*, she is without a path, and must cunningly forge her own *poros*.

Thus we see that the meaning of the word in Ancient Greek has far more nuance than can be communicated by "impasse." A *poros* is a path, a solution. Being without a *poros*, finding oneself in a landscape of utter epistemic chaos, is the state of *aporia*. *Aporia* is deeper than simple confusion – it is a state of confusion in the soul. It is a confusion deeper than an impasse; it is to be lost in such a way that the pathway out is out of sight. Philosophically, *aporia* is the position from which inquiry can begin. It is through the process of inquiry that a

[31] Kofman, 'Beyond Aporia?' p. 10.

[32] Kofman, 'Beyond Aporia?' p. 10.

poros is found. Thus the two aspects of *aporia* are deep bewilderment and self-awareness. To be in a state of *aporia* is to be thoroughly lost, and to be aware that one is lost. I will in Chapter 2 discuss the relationship of *aporia* to Plato's philosophy in more detail. In Chapter 3, the aspect of self-awareness is picked up in terms of distance. I argue there that myth has the capacity to induce distance in its audience. This distance is a kind of self-awareness, which is an important aspect of *aporia*.

The Mythical Context of *Aporia*

Kofman observes that in the *Philebus*, Plato likens *aporia* to a "'storm of difficulties' which has to be faced at one or another moment in a dialogue."[33] In the passage to which she is referring, as translated by Dorothea Frede, Protarchus says in reply to Socrates, referring to "storm-battered sailors" (29a10) who see land, "[w]e are indeed battered by difficulties in our discussion" (29b). The word "ἀπορίας" is translated as "difficulties."[34] Protarchus is, in his perplexity in this passage, identifying with the sailors that are at the mercy of the violence and fickleness of the sea. And Socrates subtly likens the account that he gives (which is the answer to the problem) to the sailor's longed-for sighting of land. Nevertheless, the discursive difficulties that they are working through, the *aporia* in which they find themselves, are not taken as insurmountable obstacles to philosophical engagement: the dialogue continues for a further thirty-eight passages.

Given the complexity of the concept of *aporia*, belied by the casual translation of it into English as "impasse," it will, I think, be illuminating to look at it in the cultural context of myth. In order to unpack the mythical context of the word *aporia* for Plato and his contemporaries, I will look beyond the *Republic*, at others of Plato's dialogues. Given the importance of *aporia* in Plato's *philosophia*, and that *philosophia* is the love of wisdom, I now turn to Plato's dialogue on the nature of Love, the *Symposium.* The relationship between love and wisdom as set out in the myths of the *Symposium* will involve looking at a third concept that has relevance to the discussion of *aporia*: *mêtis*, cunning. In the *Symposium*, Poros is presented as the personification of resourcefulness, and together with Penia (poverty) is the

[33] Kofman, 'Beyond Aporia?' p. 11.

[34] Plato. Platonis Opera, ed. John Burnet. Oxford University Press. 1903. Available at http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0173%3Atext%3DPhileb.%3Asection%3D29b (accessed 30 March 2021).

parent of Eros (love). In this aetiological myth about Love, Poros is the son of Metis. The word *mêtis* translates as "wise and wily intelligence."[35] The titaness Metis is the embodiment of this wily intelligence, this cunning.[36] There is an ancestral link set up by this myth between Metis, Poros, and Eros the philosopher – between cunning, resourcefulness, and philosophy. The Eros that Socrates describes in the *Symposium* is a philosopher, "a lover of wisdom through all his life" (203d7). The analogy between Eros and the figure of the philosopher is explicitly laid out in the *Symposium.* In Diotima's account, related by Socrates, Eros is not beautiful but "tough and shrivelled and shoeless and homeless" (203d1-2). He is described as "by nature a lover of beauty" (203c5), and "on his father's side he is a schemer after the beautiful and the good" (203d4-4). This is because one does not love what they have, but what they lack, "none of the gods loves wisdom or wants to become wise – for they are wise – and no one else who is wise already loves wisdom" (2041-3). Eros is in love with wisdom because "he is in love with what is beautiful, and wisdom is extremely beautiful. It follows that Love *must* be a lover of wisdom and, as such, is in between being wise and being ignorant" (204b5-7). Eros desires what he does not have – beauty – and wisdom is extremely beautiful. The one who desires and loves wisdom, is the philosopher. The Eros described in Socrates' account of Love, is a philosopher to whom all human philosophers are alike in their love of wisdom. Eros the philosopher is descended from Poros, resourcefulness, and Metis, the personification of cunning. The philosopher needs to be both cunning and resourceful if she is to find a way, a *poros*, through the *aporia* in which she is plunged on her philosophical travels.[37]

The argument for love being desire for what one does not have has been explicitly argued for by Socrates at 199e-200c – just before he recounts Diotima's account of love – and is portrayed as such in Aristophanes' myth about love (189d6-191d4). Aristophanes tells an aetiological myth of human beings, of "what Human Nature was in the beginning" (189d5). Human beings had two faces and four arms and four legs, they were round, "with back and sides in a circle" (189e7). After attempting to overthrow the gods, their punishment was to be cleaved in two, making two persons where there had been one. They forever yearn for their other half, "Love is born into every human being; it calls back the halves of our original nature

[35] Dolmage, J.T. (2009). 'Metis, *Mêtis, Metiza*, Medusa: Rhetorical Bodies across Rhetorical Traditions'. *Rhetoric Review* vol. 28 (1), p. 5.

[36] Ibid, p. 5.

[37] Kofman, 'Beyond Aporia?' p. 9.

together; it tries to make one out of two and heal the wound of human nature" (191d2-4). In Aristophanes' myth, Love is the yearning, the desire, for one's missing other half.

Socrates' argument that Love must be of what is lacked begins with the assertion that Love is the Love *of* something. Love has an object, and it desires this object. Love does not *have* the object that Love desires because "a thing that desires, desires something of which it is in need, otherwise, if it were not in need, it would not desire it…[N]o one is in need of those things he already has" (200b1-9). This desire cannot be of what is ugly, since there is no such thing as love of that which is ugly; Love has to be a desire for beauty, and not for ugliness. Since Love is of what is needed, Love needs beautiful things. Good things are always beautiful, which means that what Love needs is good things. In both Socrates' response to Agathon, and in Aristophanes' myth, as well as in the myth that Socrates offers, Love is presented as a desire for that which one does not have; it inheres where there is a lack and a desire to overcome the lack. Socrates' argument that Love must be desire of what one does not have has philosophical importance – the concept of human wisdom involves the understanding that one does not know. To be humanly wise is to be aware of one's lack, rather than to have no lack at all. To love wisdom does not mean to be wise; to love wisdom is to be aware that one lacks it. The philosopher is one who loves wisdom; one who is not wise, but, most importantly, is aware of this lack, and wishes to meet it.

Kofman notes that in the ancient myth concerning the fate of Metis, she is swallowed by Zeus, who then births Athena from his head.[38] I would like to take this analysis one step further. It is Zeus who apportions their roles to the gods, which means that in some sense he is the divine ordering principle. Socrates' conception of justice is, as I will discuss in Chapter 2, just such an ordering principle.[39] There is a genealogical thread set up in this myth, where wisdom is born from justice and cunning. I do not think that this ancestral link between justice, cunning, and wisdom is far-fetched, nor anathema to Plato's own myth-making. Apart from being portrayed in Ancient Greek myths as the goddess of wisdom, the wisdom of Athena is mentioned in both the *Timaeus* (407a-b) and the *Cratylus* (24d), and in the *Phaedo* Socrates chooses death over exile from the only city wherein wisdom can be pursued – Athens, the city of which Athena is patron. In this myth, Wisdom – the object of the philosopher's desire – is

[38] Kofman, 'Beyond Aporia?' p. 16.

[39] "[J]ustice is doing one's own work and not meddling with what isn't one's own" (*Republic* 433a6-8).

descended from wily intelligence, and justice. In Plato's invented myth, *mêtis* is important for the possibility of the existence of philosophy, or at least of the original philosopher. This link is mirrored in the mythical context in which he was writing, namely in the origin story of Athena, whose domain, wisdom, is the object towards which the lover-of-wisdom strives.

It is also worth noting that in Socrates' myth, Eros was conceived while Poros was passed out drunk at the feast celebrating the birth of Aphrodite. Eros' mother Penia became pregnant when she assaulted his father. This mirrors Athena's conception, where her mother was consumed by her father. In both cases, of both wisdom and Eros the philosopher, each is begot in an act of violence. I do not think that this fact is incidental. The *Republic* itself begins with Socrates and his friends being coerced into returning to Cephalus' house, where the philosophical discussion of the dialogue takes place. "You must either prove stronger than we are, or you will have to stay here," Polemarchus says to Socrates (327c8-9). However much in jest this may have been said, the invitation is couched in a threat of violence. This dialogue, which ends in *aporia,* and reduces its characters to *aporia* at multiple points, begins in some sense against the will of its protagonist.

Thus, both myths – the traditional and that of the *Symposium* – set up a connection between *mêtis*, justice, and either wisdom (in the case of the traditional myth) or Eros the lover of wisdom (in the case of the *Symposium*). In addition, in both myths, as well as in the opening passage of the *Republic,* violence is depicted as an originator of either wisdom or the pursuit of wisdom. In the case of the traditional myth, Wisdom is born from violence. In the case of the birth of Love the philosopher, Eros is born from violence. In the case of the *Republic*, the philosophical dialogue is born from the threat of violence. In the previous section of this chapter, I discussed the description of a *poros* as a way through unmitigated confusion. *Aporia* is thus understood as the experience of being in such confusion, and having no clear way out. The terror involved in being lost in such a way communicates the experience of *aporia* as a kind of violence. The word *aporia* itself, in its ancient context, communicates deep discomfort.

Furthermore, the discomfort of experiencing the *aporia* that dialogue with Socrates induces is communicated by multiple characters: we see it in in the *Republic* in Thrasymachus' violent outburst in Book I; in Book VI, Adeimantus expresses his discomfort in feeling "trapped" by the argument (487b-c). In the *Theaetetus*, the title character's uncomfortable confusion prompts Socrates' famous midwife analogy (147c-151d); Meno likens his perplexity to being stung by the torpedo fish, and he likens Socrates (who has induced his perplexity) to

the torpedo fish (80a5-b2). As has been discussed above, Protarchus likens the sensation of perplexity to being sea-battered (*Philebus* 29b). *Aporia* is not comfortable. Being in a state of *aporia* can be terrifying and bewildering, like being battered by storms at sea, or like labour pains; it can be painful and numbing like being stung by a torpedo fish. It is not surprising that philosophy is depicted in the *Republic* (and similarly in both the myth about the birth of Athena, the goddess of wisdom, and in Plato's myth about the birth of Eros, the lover of wisdom) as being born from an act of violence, when the sensation in which inquiry truly begins – *aporia* – is so deeply uncomfortable that it can feel like a violence in the self.

Alcibiades describes precisely why philosophical discussion with Socrates is so disconcerting in his speech at the end of the *Symposium*. He says,

> [other orators] never upset me so deeply that my very own soul started protesting that my life – *my* life! – was not better than the most miserable slave's. And yet that is exactly how [Socrates] makes me feel all the time: he makes it seem that my life isn't worth living!...He always traps me, you see, and he makes me admit that my political career is a waste of time, while all that matters is just what I most neglect: my personal shortcomings, which cry out for the closest attention. (215e7-216a7)

Like Adeimantus in *Republic* VI, Alcibiades feels trapped by Socrates' argument. He is forced to agree that what is of greatest importance is the well-being of his soul, more important even than an external good such as his career (which is something that Alcibiades values highly). The language that Alcibiades uses communicates that his opinion being changed by Socrates' argument happens against his will, the words translated here as, "he *makes* me admit" (emphasis my own). While the experience that Alcibiades describes here is not aporetic as such, it shares similarities with the experience of *aporia*, and illustrates why, in part, the experience is so uncomfortable. He uses words that elsewhere have been used to describe the sensation of *aporia* ("trapped"), and this happens against his will, just as the *Republic* begins with Socrates going to Cephalus' house against his will. Finally, the experience of being shown that what he thinks is the case (that his political career is of the most importance) is not in fact the case is often part of Socrates' interlocutors' experience of *aporia*. For example, Theaetetus' realisation that what he thought knowledge is (fields of study and different kinds of crafts), cannot be what knowledge actually is, makes up part of his *aporia* (146d1-3); Meno's perplexity that feels like being stung by the torpedo fish follows his realisation that he does not know what virtue is. An important aspect of *aporia* is the realisation that one does not know what one thought one knew, that what one thinks to be the case is not

actually the case, that reality is other than as one has taken it to be. It is the realisation that one is oriented other than one thought one was, and needs to find one's bearings again.

Philosophy for Plato, as has been discussed, is care for the soul. In order to care for the soul, the individual needs to recognize that they are deficient in a certain respect, and to be motivated to take responsibility for this deficiency. Trying to overcome a deficiency requires both being aware of the deficiency, and being motivated to improve. Being reduced to *aporia* involves recognizing that there is a gap between what one actually knows, and what one took oneself to know. This gap between ignorance-that-was-taken-to-be-knowledge of a thing and actual knowledge of that thing, constitutes a lack of self-understanding. Taking oneself to know when one does not know is an instantiation of one's limitation in understanding oneself. Self-knowledge involves the recognition that one is ignorant; the recognition that one does not have knowledge; that one's intuition does not constitute explicit understanding; that one, ironically, does *not* understand oneself. This is why one of the aspects of *aporia* is self-awareness. This self-awareness is a kind of distance from the self. Distance from the self is also created when one is immersed in the experience of engaging a myth.

Pierre Hadot makes the observation that Eros and Socrates are both depicted in the *Symposium* as personifying the philosopher – Eros is the mythical manifestation of the philosopher, and Socrates the historical one.[40] As I have already pointed out, there is a genealogical connection set up in Greek mythology between Zeus, the father of Athena, and Metis, whom he consumes, resulting in the conception of Athena; that is, there is a genealogical link set up between justice, wisdom, and cunning. Plato mirrors this familial connection in his story in the *Symposium* of the conception of Eros, who is conceived when his mother, Penia takes advantage of his sleeping father, Poros son of Metis. In this mythical tale, there is a familial connection between Love and his mythical progenitors, Penia (poverty) and Poros (resourcefulness), and Metis. As Love is in love with what is beautiful, and Wisdom is the most beautiful, then in this tale, Eros is a philosopher. Eros, the lover of wisdom, occupies a similar genealogical position to Athena, the goddess of wisdom, in the Platonic myth that mirrors the cultural one; both are descendants of Metis. If there is a subtle literary connection between not only Eros and wisdom, but between Eros and Socrates the philosopher, then it seems that both wisdom and the love of wisdom are born out of cunning, the kind of wily cunning needed in

[40] Hadot, P. (2002). *What is Ancient Philosophy?* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, p. 41.

order to navigate the directionless chaos of the sea and of Tartarus, which is only navigable using a *poros.* The mythical presence of cunning, of Poros, in the genealogical history of the philosopher imparts on the philosopher precisely the tools needed to navigate the state of confusion in which they must find themself: *aporia*.

Types of *Aporia*

Dylan Futter describes the love of wisdom as "a complex psychological state constituted by a generalawareness of ignorance and desire for knowledge."[41] This is an apt way to describe *aporia*, the inspired puzzlement that motivates inquiry. Futter identifies three types of *aporia*. One kind of *aporia* is seen in a definitional dialogue where an interlocutor cannot define a virtue.[42] They have the sense of what they want to say, and they think that they do know what the virtue is, but when faced with having to adequately and accurately state what it is, they are unable to do so. They took themself to have knowledge, in this case of what the virtue is, when they did not.[43] An interlocutor might experience another kind of *aporia* when they find themself faced with a contradiction. Futter here uses the example of Socrates' puzzlement when faced with the statement of the oracle, which he takes to be contradictory, that Socrates is the most wise. Socrates took himself to be ignorant, and was forced into a position of being faced with trying to accept the contradictory ideas that he was both wise (as the oracle said he was) and not wise, as he took himself to be.[44] As Futter points out, these first two kinds of *aporia* involve logical problems for the interlocutor experiencing the *aporia*, in that they are faced with a problem that they cannot reason away.[45]

The final kind of *aporia* does not involve particular rational problems, but is a state of mind that Socrates consistently inhabits, which precedes particular logical or argumentative problems in the dialogues. It is often the state of mind in which he is presented as entering a dialogue. In the *Euthyphro*, he claims not to know what piety is (an ignorance which precedes the dialogue); in the *Meno*, he is presented as transferring his numbing puzzlement in the same way that the torpedo fish numbs its prey. His state of *aporia* is in the *Meno* presented as, in

[41] Futter, D.B. (2013). 'Socrates' Human Wisdom'. *Dialogue* vol. 52 (1), p. 62.

[42] A definitional dialogue is a Platonic dialogue in which Socrates is searching for a definition for a specific virtue.

[43] Futter, 'Socrates' Human Wisdom', p. 65.

[44] Ibid, p. 65.

[45] Ibid, p. 65.

Futters words, "transferable."[46] Importantly, in the same way that the torpedo fish's ability to numb its prey is an aspect of its identity, *aporia* is an essential part of Socrates' epistemological position, of his philosophy.[47] Thus, we can understand *aporia* as a mental state involving a puzzlement which one wishes to escape. In this third sense, however, the puzzlement is so deep as to be a state of being, just as *aporia* is for Socrates, and being able to numb prey is for the torpedo fish. It is this kind of mental state that is the mindset of the philosopher, who is constantly engaged in the activity of philosophy.

In Plato's dialogues, *aporia* takes several forms: it arises out of an interlocutor's inability to articulate knowledge that they believed themself to possess. It is also seen when an interlocutor has to contemplate a contradiction. These forms of *aporia* are initiated by a contradiction over which the interlocutor must cogitate.[48] Finally, Socrates instantiates an *aporia* that seems to be a mental state that he inhabits, rather than a puzzlement initiated by a specific contradiction.[49] *Aporia* is the state of being conscious that one does not know – where, as Futter puts it, "the object not-known is incompletely grasped."[50] It is this final kind of *aporia* that Futter describes that is of interest to my project. Socrates is in constant pursuit of wisdom, he is always engaged in the activity of philosophy, and he is ever drawing others into this activity. In this sense, and in the similarity set up in the *Symposium* between him and Eros, the quintessential philosopher, he is the ideal. That he is depicted by Plato as inhabiting a mental state of *aporia* speaks to the importance of *aporia* to Plato's philosophy. The activity of philosophy, whether engaged in one conversation like Theaetetus does, or consistently throughout his daily life as Socrates does, requires an awareness of a lack of knowledge and a desire to meet the lack.

The Philosophical Significance of *Aporia*

For Plato, philosophy is an attempt to care for the soul. The activity of caring for the soul involves inquiring into one's deficiency in relation to an ideal; and attempting to bridge the gap. The philosopher recognizes themself as falling short in terms of an ideal such as virtue

[46] Ibid, p. 66.

[47] Ibid, p. 66.

[48] Futter, 'Socrates' Human Wisdom', p. 65.

[49] Ibid, p. 66.

[50] Ibid, p. 67.

and knowledge. The activity of caring for the soul is the activity of trying to ameliorate this deficiency in some way: this is the practice of philosophy. In order for the activity of trying to ameliorate a deficiency to take place, the individual needs to recognize this deficiency, and desire to take responsibility for it. This recognition of deficiency is the state of *aporia*. Without *aporia*, we cannot care for the soul. To work on oneself, to care for one's soul, involves inquiry. It involves understanding how we are limited in relation to an ideal. This limitation involves a limitation in our understanding of the ideal. The reason we are not courageous, for example, is because we do not understand what it means to be courageous.

Care of the soul is an attempt to overcome this deficiency in our knowledge. In order to get to the point at which one is caring for the soul one has to recognize one's deficiency. Hence the function of a definitional dialogue is to provoke *aporia*. The definitional dialogues are designed to lead someone to *aporia*, where *aporia* is understood as a type of self-knowledge. *Aporia* can be understood as the recognition of an epistemic deficiency and for this reason is a form of self-knowledge. To recognize one's deficiency of understanding in relation to an ideal toward which one grasps, is *aporia*. Both philosophy and myth have as their point of origin, the orientation wherein they begin, *aporia*.[51] "For this is an experience, which is characteristic of philosophy, this wondering: this is where philosophy begins and nowhere else" (*Tht*. 155d).

Sean Kirkland notes that in his Metaphysics, Aristotle says of *aporia*, "One who is in *aporia* and who wonders thinks himself unknowing, for which reason every lover of myths is in a way a lover of wisdom, a philosopher. For myth is composed of wonders."[52] *Aporia* is not merely a state of confusion. Being in a state of *aporia* involves not only an awareness of a lack of knowledge, awareness of a deficiency, but also the desire to meet it: *aporia* is a state of inspired bewilderment. Philosophy begins in a kind of wondering. Specifically, philosophy begins in *aporia* because it is in *aporia* that one becomes aware of one's deficiency. This is because, as I will discuss in Chapter 2, if the soul is disordered, one cannot properly have the knowledge one needs to overcome one's deficiency or lack of virtue.

Aporia is the correct orientation of the philosopher because it is an invitation to inquiry. *Aporia* reminds the soul that it does not know, and invites it to pursue possible answers. Myth

[51] Kirkland, S.D. (2004). 'Socrates *contra scientiam, pro fabula'*. *Epoché* vol. 8 (2), p. 313.

[52] Ibid, p. 313.

is one means by which Plato can impel his audience towards philosophy. Myth induces *aporia*, or at least a psychic state akin to *aporia*, and Platonic myth is designed to aid the philosophical discourse in which it is situated. The reason, then, for Plato's engagement with myth is because doing so aids his philosophical project. Myth brings about *aporia*, and *aporia* is where philosophy begins. *Aporia* is to the philosopher an invitation to inquiry.

Inquiry is the proper activity of the philosopher, and *aporia* is the place at which inquiry begins. Inquiry does not make suppositions about what the Good is. When we know, we cease to inquire. When we do not know – for example, when we do not know what the Good is – we inquire. If we live a life of inquiry into what the Good is, then we do not make possibly-mistaken-and-therefore-harmful assumptions about what the Good is. The good life is the one that inquires into what the good life is.[53] When we are aware of our ignorance, when we are humanly wise, we are in a position to pursue a life of inquiry. Human wisdom, as I will discuss in the following chapter, enables us to live the kind of life that allows us to care for our souls. This is Plato's object: to lead his audience towards human wisdom. This takes place through philosophy. Myth, being familiar and accessible to his audience, is a means of bringing them into the frame of mind in which they can engage philosophically.

I have argued in this chapter that *aporia* should be understood in the context in which the term originated. For Plato and his contemporaries, *aporia* has the meaning of being without a path or a solution. It is semantically linked to the concept of *apeiras*, meaning boundless. To be in a state of *aporia* is to be lost in a place without boundaries or directions, as one is lost at sea or in the depths of Tartarus. To escape *aporia* is to cunningly search for and construct a *poros*, a flexible, constantly adapting path that is the only way to make it through the chaos. In this way, *aporia* is an invitation to find such a *poros.*

I have also argued that *aporia* can be understood as a recognition of an epistemic gap between what one took oneself to know and what one actually knows. This recognition amounts to self-awareness. This self-awareness is a kind of distance from the self. In its mythical context, as well as in Plato, *aporia* is depicted as uncomfortable, as something that the experiencer desires to overcome. In this sense, *aporia* is an invitation, a motivation, to move away from ignorance. *Aporia* is thus an invitation to philosophy. Since philosophy is the

[53] Bloom, L. (2017). The Principle of Non-contradiction in Plato's Republic: An Argument for Form. Lanham, Maryland, Lexington Books, 55.

movement towards wisdom, and *aporia* is the awareness of ignorance and the desire to escape it, *aporia* is important to philosophical engagement. If the philosopher is one who enquires, then *aporia* is the correct mental state of the philosopher.

Chapter 2: A Brief Account of Plato's Philosophical Project, and Platonic Concepts Important To It

Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss what I take Plato's philosophical project to be, and I will unpack what I take Platonic philosophy to involve. Briefly, Plato's philosophical project – that is, his aim in writing his dialogues – is to invite his audience to take part in the activity of philosophy.[54] What, then, is philosophy? Directly translated, *philosophia* is the love of, the pursuit of, wisdom. Love, as Agathon admits in the *Symposium*, is the desire for that which one does not have (200a-201a1). The notion of philosophy being an activity is entailed in the word itself. To *pursue* wisdom is to be moving, or attempting to move, toward it, from a position of not having wisdom. This pursuit must be an active one, or it is not a pursuit at all. Philosophy, then, is an activity. Plato's aim in his dialogues – his philosophical project – is to invite his audience to devote themselves to engaging philosophically.[55] Plato pursues his aim of drawing people into the activity of philosophy because the only way for the individual to achieve a good life is through philosophy.

To engage in philosophy, for Plato, is to care for the soul. There are at least two conditions needed to engage in philosophy thus understood: first, the individual needs to *recognize* that she is deficient in a certain respect and, second, she needs to be *motivated* to take responsibility in addressing this deficiency. If we think we are already courageous, we have no reason to work to become courageous; furthermore, if we see ourselves as being cowardly, but are not motivated to become courageous, then we will also not work to become so. Likewise, if we take ourselves to have knowledge of x, then we have no reason to work to gain knowledge of x; if we see ourselves as not knowing x, but are not motivated to gain knowledge of x, then we will also not work to gain knowledge of x.

The activity of philosophy as caring for the soul involves both inquiring into one's lack in correspondence to an ideal, specifically the ideal of wisdom and attempting to bridge the gap between where one is and the ideal toward which one aims. To lack wisdom is, of course,

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[54] Hadot, 'What is Ancient Philosophy?' p. 46-47.

[55] Futter, D.B. (2015). 'Variations in Philosophical Genre: The Platonic Dialogue'. *Metaphilosophy* vol. 46 (2), p. 253.

to be ignorant in some way. As such, the practise of philosophy is the activity of caring for the soul by ameliorating the deficiency that is one's ignorance. In order for this to take place, the individual needs to recognize this deficiency, and be motivated to take responsibility for it.

This recognition of deficiency is the state of *aporia*. I will discuss this term in greater detail in Chapter 3, which focuses on unpacking what that term means in its original ancient Greek context, and what it means to Plato's philosophy. Briefly, *aporia* is often translated as "impasse." The word is made up of the terms '*a*-', meaning without, and '*poros*', meaning path. When the philosopher is in a state of *aporia*, she is without a path.[56] When she cannot see a way through the argument, when she realizes that she does not know what she thought she knew, she is in a state of *aporia*. Sarah Kofman makes the observation that the word '*poros*' can also be translated as "to discover an expedient" and "to find a way out."[57]

Without experiencing or being in a state of *aporia*, one cannot care for the soul. This is because *aporia*, as recognition of a lack of knowledge, is an important aspect of care of the soul. *Aporia* is an important aspect of caring for the soul because working on oneself, caring for one's soul, involves a certain kind of inquiry. It involves an inquiry into the self. Answering the question, "what is x?" in an effort to gain knowledge of x, involves asking the question, "what are the limits of my knowledge of x?" or "what do I not know of x?" The question "what is x?" then involves not just an interest in gaining knowledge of x, but also involves being aware of the self and the lack of knowledge that the self has. Being aware of what one does not know is a form of self-knowledge. The statement "I do not know x" is also the statement "I know of myself that I do not know x."

Working on oneself, caring for one's soul, involves a certain kind of inquiry. It involves an inquiry into the self. It involves understanding how we are limited in relation to an ideal – for instance, the ideal as knowledge of a certain kind, knowledge of what virtue is, for instance. This limitation in relation to an ideal involves a limitation in our understanding of the ideal. The reason we aren't courageous, for example, is because we do not understand what it means to be courageous. The person who truly knows what courage is will always know what the courageous course of action is, even though every situation in which it is necessary for her to be courageous will be different to the next. In order to do what is best, we must know which

[56] Kofman, 'Beyond Aporia?' p. 9.

[57] Ibid.

action is best. In order to choose what is best, we must know which option is best. This applies to all choices and to all virtues. If we do not know what the best choice is, then we will rarely make the best choice. If we do not know what the virtuous action is then we will rarely take the best action. It is our ability to live well (and by this I mean both our ability to make good choices such that we can live a good life, and our ability to do what is morally good) that is at stake.[58]

The philosopher, the lover-of-wisdom, is someone who is in-between ignorance and wisdom, who is not wise, but pursues wisdom.[59] That is, the philosopher is someone who inquires. This means that the activity of philosophy begins in inquiry - one does not inquire where one is not perplexed. One does not inquire when one takes oneself to already know. We harm ourselves when we take ourselves to have knowledge that we do not actually have. We harm ourselves when we mistake the bad for the good while being unaware of this mistake. This lack of awareness of the mistake in our thinking amounts to a lack of knowledge of ourselves. We do not know enough of ourselves to know what the limitations in our knowledge are. How do we then live a virtuous life, a life where we are able to recognise the bad, and where what we take to be good is actually good? The answer for Plato is that the least harmful life for humankind is the life of inquiry.[60] Inquiry is the proper activity of the philosopher, and it begins in *aporia*. *Aporia* is a state of puzzlement, often arising from a contradiction where both sides of the contradiction are equally plausible. Importantly, this puzzlement also involves the desire to resolve it.

Virtue

The concepts of knowledge and virtue are in Plato intimately linked. Being virtuous involves having knowledge of what virtue is. I used the example of courage above – one cannot be courageous if one does not know what courage is. The *Republic* lays out the argument that a good city is one in which philosophy flourishes, and philosophy can only flourish where

[58] The connection between the virtuous life and self-knowledge is an important feature of Plato's philosophy In order to make good choices for our own well-being, we must know what is good for us. This involves knowing what we need, which in turn requires knowledge of what we lack. Self-knowledge is then in some sense at the root of the good life, and *aporia* is the impetus to inquire into ourselves.

[59] Hutter, H.H. (1989). 'Philosophy as Self-Transformation'. *Historical Reflections/Reflexions Historiques*, vol. 16 (2/3), p. 181.

[60] Bloom, L. (2017). *The Principle of Non-contradiction in Plato's Republic: An Argument for Form*. Lanham, Maryland, Lexington Books, p. 62.

people engage in the activity of philosophy.[61] By "good life" is meant both a life that is happy, and a life that is morally good. I use the word 'moral' here because, as I discuss below, while for Plato virtue is excellence, to be virtuous also has the connotation of being morally good. To be a good man meant to be good at being a man, and this involves being ethically, or morally, good. From Plato's perspective, this distinction between the good life as the morally good life, and the good life as the happy life, is a false distinction. The argument for the good life being the virtuous life comes at the end of *Republic* I. The discussion of both human happiness and human virtue ultimately also involves the discussion of the function of the human being. Socrates defines the function of a thing as, "that which one can do only with it or best with it" (352e2-3). The function of an eye, for example, is seeing because only eyes can do the job of seeing; the function of pruning knives is pruning because pruning is done best when it is done using pruning knives (cf. 352e-353c). Identity is based on function. For a thing to be what it is, is for that thing to be suited to perform the function that it is intended to perform. Virtue is, then, determined by function. As G.M.A Grube points out, "virtue" as translated from ἀρετή, simply means "excellence."[62] The virtue of a thing is the state of being or feature of that thing that renders it good at being the thing that it is.[63] Another way of saying this is that the virtue of a thing is the feature of that thing that renders it good at performing its function.

Since virtue is determined by function, the virtue of a pruning knife is what makes it good at performing the function for which it is designed. That is, a virtuous pruning knife is one that prunes vines well. For a pruning knife to be a pruning knife is for it to do the job of pruning vines. For it to be a *good* pruning knife is for it to be *good* at pruning vines. A pruning knife that is good at pruning vines is a virtuous one. Likewise, to be a virtuous human being is to achieve excellence with regards to being a human being. From this perspective, when we say that a human being is virtuous, we mean that that human being is good at performing the function of being a human being. This in turn raises the question, "What is the function of a human being?"

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[61] Arguably, this is what is argued for in the whole of the *Republic*. Specifically, that the *leading class must be philosophers* is stated at 473c10-e2 and 503b3-5. The aim of their education is to bring the whole soul under the direction of reason (518b4-519c4), which is precisely what the activity of philosophy does.

[62] Plato. (1992). *Republic*. Grube, G.M.A. (Trans.). In Cooper, J.M. (Ed.). *Plato: Complete Works*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, p. 980.

[63] *Ibid.*

For a person, or more accurately in terms of the language of Plato's discussion, for a soul, to be virtuous, there must then be a function that people have. In Book I, Socrates and Thrasymachus agree that living is the function of the soul (353d9). The function of the soul is living. The virtuous soul is then one that lives well. As Socrates says in Book I, the person who lives well is the happy person: "And surely anyone who lives well is blessed and happy, and anyone who doesn't is the opposite" (354a1). The good life evaluated in terms of virtue, and the good life evaluated in terms of happiness, are thus the same life: to live the good life means to be virtuous, and thus happy. Justice is the virtue of the soul (353e7). The just life is thus the happy life.[64] This is because the virtuous life is the happy life, and justice is the soul's virtue.

What does it mean to live well? Or, in other words, what is involved in being just? The notion of a human being's function, and thus of human virtue, is tied up in the notion of rationality, and of the human soul. The tripartite nature of the human soul is discussed in Book IV (435b7-441c5). The soul is divided into three parts: the appetitive, the spirited, and the rational. The appetitive part is the part that has appetites. This is the part of the soul that desires food when it is hungry, that desires water when it is thirsty, that desires hot when it is cold, and desires cold when it is hot. It is the part of the soul that keeps the organism alive.

The spirited part of the soul is the part that drives and motivates. It is the part of the soul that is concerned with such virtues as honour; it is the socially-oriented part of the soul. Finally, the third part of the soul is Reason. This is the part of the soul the having of which distinguishes human beings from other beings. Because it is the part of the soul that is unique to human beings, it has an important aspect to play in human identity. When we ask the question, "what is the function of the human being?" the answer is going to have something to do with the rational part of the soul because this is the part of the soul that is uniquely human.[65] The function of the human being, the function that only the human being can perform, is to exercise their rationality in a specific way. This means that the virtuous human being, the *just* human being, is one who exercises the rational part of their soul in a specific way. The just human being is thus in possession of a peculiar kind of 'human' wisdom.

[64] "But isn't justice human virtue?" (335c3); "a just person is happy, and an unjust one is wretched" (354a4).

[65] C.f. Aristotle's function argument in *NE* 1.7.

Human Wisdom

In the *Apology*, Socrates relates the fact that the oracle at Delphi made the statement that Socrates is the most wise of human beings (21a6-7). When this statement was at first related to him, he had found it puzzling because he does not think that he knows anything; he does not take himself to be wise (21b2-5). After engaging with this question and questioning various people who are wise in their fields of work or study, he came to the conclusion that to be the most wise, is to be aware of one's own ignorance. He concludes that human wisdom, the wisdom that imperfect human beings are capable of, is comprised of the awareness that we are ignorant (21b7-23b7). For the person who is humanly wise, the content of their knowledge is that they do not know. This has implications for how it is that human beings can exercise the rational part of their souls, such that they are pursuing the function of being a human being.

Reasoning is the activity through which the soul can order itself with a view to being just.[66] In *Republic* IV, Socrates defines Justice. Justice involves each part of a thing doing its own work, and not the work of any other part (433a-b). That is, justice is a virtue that belongs to wholes when they are correctly ordered such that each part can do its own work well, without interfering in the work of any of the other parts. In the city, this means that each citizen must do their own work and not the work of any of the other citizens. The potter must mould clay and bake pots, and not participate in the defence of the city; the guardians must do their own work of keeping the city safe and secure; the philosopher-kings must rule (cf. 434a-c). In the human being, the soul must be ordered such that each of the three parts of the soul can do their own work, with the rational part ruling the whole soul just as the philosopher-king rules in the city (441d-e).

The implication of the fact that human wisdom is knowledge of ignorance for the philosopher, the pursuer of wisdom, is that discursive focus is on asking questions, rather than on dogmatically giving answers. If you take yourself not to know, you are not in a position to offer certainties as answers. On the other hand, if you take yourself not to know, but have no interest in knowing, then you are not going to be engaging with questions, you are not going to inquire. The philosopher then, being the lover of wisdom, the person who is pursuing wisdom, who is moving from ignorance to wisdom, is the person who takes themself not to know, but who is nevertheless motivated to know. This involves being in a constant state of

[66] Bloom, *The Principle of Non-contradiction',* p. 81.

questioning, of inquiry. This is how Plato sees the human function, that to be performing the function of being a human being is to be constantly exercising the rational part of the soul, while being aware that true knowledge, is beyond our ability to completely grasp. We never see the whole of a situation, and we always interpret things against a background of pre-formed assumptions and opinions about what is good. Our view of a thing will always reveal only partial knowledge of that thing, and so it cannot, strictly speaking, be called knowledge. Knowledge must be complete, or it is not knowledge. From a Platonic perspective, to have knowledge of a thing is to see it as it truly is, rather than to see it as it appears to be.

So why is it that this state of inquiry – of being aware that one does not know, and being motivated to try to know, however far out of our reach this might actually be – why is this an important activity? This state of inquiry that I am discussing is the state of *aporia.* If we think about the harms that human beings can cause to each other and to themselves, it is rare that a human being sets out to do something that is harmful to their own aims, or to do something that purposefully brings harm to their community. Most often, when someone does something that causes harm, in other words, when someone does something that is bad, it is because they have mistaken the bad for the good. They *think* that they are doing something that will bring about good, but they *actually* bring about bad. They do not have a true idea of what the good is in that situation. Laurence Bloom uses the example in his unpublished work on the *Apology* of someone who smokes.[67] We can say that smoking is an objectively bad decision to make. We know it is bad for the body, and that it is injurious to the long-term health of the individual who is smoking. It is even injurious to anyone who is in the smoker's immediate environment. Someone who is smoking is making a decision in the moment that they know is bad. Yet, it isn't actually clearly the case that the smoker is consciously choosing what is bad. The smoker is mistaking the immediate pleasure of smoking for the good, rather than looking at the long-term good of health. It is a mistake of distance from the individual: the immediate thing - the pleasure of smoking - is taken to be what is better than the faraway thing, namely health.[68]

This question of "what is the good?" is then of paramount importance to any decision we make. It is both of paramount importance to decisions that we make that have moral content such as, "will this decision cause harm to others?" as well as decisions that have relevance to

[67] Bloom, L. (2017). *Plato's Apology: An Argument for the Examined Life*. Unpublished manuscript, p. 56.

[68] Bloom, '*Manuscript'*, p. 56-57.

our own happiness ("Will this decision be good for me?"). For Plato, that distinction between "good for others" and "good for the self" is not a real one. It is not a distinction that we can make, which is why for Plato the happy life, and the moral life, are the same life.[69] In the *Republic*, Adeimantus makes the observation that a city comes into being because no one person is able to meet all their needs themself. In order to survive and thrive the individual needs a community. Adeimantus says:

> I think a city comes to be because none of us is self-sufficient but we all need many things…And because people need many things, and because one person calls on a second out of one need and on a third out of a different need, many people gather in a single place to live together as partners and helpers. And such a settlement is called a city (369b6-c3).

The entire dialogue concerning justice proceeds from the observation that people need each other. Whatever justice is to be found in the city can only be found because the city exists so that people can depend on and help each other. People need each other, and without community they cannot survive. For a person to make good decisions for herself, she must also make good decisions for the community, because her survival is dependent on the survival of the community. If she is making good decisions, if she is making virtuous decisions, then these decisions will be good for both herself and her community because she depends on the community. Likewise, if she is making good decisions for the community, then these will also be good decisions for herself, because when the city that she depends on thrives, so too does she.

Pierre Hadot observes that Socrates, who alone the oracle deemed to be wise, and who dedicated his life to the pursuit of philosophy and the attempt to bring others into the activity of philosophy, was also involved in the business of the life of his community: he had a family, and he spent his days in dialogue with other citizens.[70] Hadot quotes Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "[Socrates] thought that it was impossible to be just by oneself. If one is just all by oneself, one ceases to be just."[71] Merleau-Ponty argues that in the *Apology* it is not himself that Socrates

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[69] Pierre Hadot, for example, writes: "[c]are for the self is…indissolubly, care for the city and care for others." See *What is Ancient Philosophy*, pp. 37-8.

[70] Ibid, p. 37.

[71] Ibid.

defends, it is the city of Athens. In sentencing Socrates, the tribunal will be sentencing philosophy, and thus separating themselves from what is good for them. Socrates' aim in his argument is to have them accept philosophy, accept the care of the self, and what is good for the city. When the tribunal condemn him, they condemn themselves; they condemn themselves as a city that has rejected philosophy.[72] What is good for Socrates – that he not be found guilty of impiety – is good for the city, and what is good for the city – that the tribunal sees the merit in his philosophy, and find him not guilty – is good for Socrates.

Philosophy is an activity, and it best takes place in dialogue.[73] Klein notes that in the *Phaedrus*, speech is described as "alive." Written words are the images of, imitations of, spoken ones. Yet, written works cannot be depended on. They do not adapt themselves to the context and specific disposition of their reader. They cannot explain themselves, and so they cannot guard themselves against misreading, either wilful or accidental. This means that, as Klein puts it, "a written text is necessarily incomplete".[74] Yet, in a dialogue, it is precisely when an argument is incomplete or unclear, when there is perplexity, that conversation can take place.[75] As such, texts that draw attention to the partiality of the perspectives embodied therein enable the written text to become a conversation with the reader.

The good life in terms of happiness and the good life in terms of morality involves the same good. If you are bringing harm to your community, then you are bringing harm to yourself. And if you are bringing harm to yourself, then you are bringing harm to your community. The example that Socrates uses in *Republic* I involves the question, when you beat a horse, does it become better or worse at being a horse (at pursuing its function of being a horse)? The answer has to be that it becomes worse (335b4-5). In the same way, if human beings are harmed, they become worse in terms of their human virtue, justice (335b12-c5). By extension, *causing* harm likewise causes human beings to become. To cause harm is to act unjustly and, in so doing, to habituate oneself to act unjustly. Socrates explicitly says in Book III, "imitations practised from youth become part of nature and settle into habits of gesture, voice, and thought"(395d1-2). In consistently doing harm, we are putting ourselves into the

[72] Merleau-Ponty, M. (1963). *In Praise of Philosophy*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, p. 38.

[73] Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno*, pp. 6-13.

[74] Ibid, p. 11.

[75] Ibid, p. 17.

habit of bringing about harm. In exercising harm against ourselves in some way, we are ultimately exercising harm against other people. This is because goodness, making good choices, is a habit that forms over time. Such a habit requires the soul to constantly be exercising Reason such that Reason rules in the soul, as I will discuss below.

Justice

The *Republic* is Plato's dialogue about justice. In Plato's definitional dialogues, a question is posited in the structure of "what is x?" and the movement of the dialogue is the discussion of this question. In the case of the *Republic*, the question asked is "what is justice?" and the course of the dialogue is focused on answering this question. Laurence Bloom's reading of the *Republic* is that the principle underlying the whole dialogue is the Principle of Non-Contradiction, which states that "[t]he same one thing cannot both pursue and avoid the same object at the same time with the same part of itself."[76] As Socrates sets it out in *Republic* IV, "It is obvious that the same thing will not be willing to do or undergo opposites in the same part of itself, in relation to the same thing, at the same time" (436b6-8). This principle is, in Bloom's reading, akin to the statement of justice as it is defined in the *Republic*: "[J]ustice is doing one's own work and not meddling with what isn't one's own" (433a6-8).[77] When all the parts of a thing are working together to achieve the end of that thing, then justice is present. Contradiction, a thing's opposing itself, is thus the contradictory of justice. Contradiction is a kind of injustice.

The image that Socrates uses to illustrate the Principle of Non-Contradiction is the image of a spinning top (436d4-e5). When the spinning top is spinning, it is both still and in motion. This description of the spinning top shows it to embody a contradiction. For something to be both moving and not-moving at the same time in the same part of itself is a contradiction. You cannot have something that is doing two opposing things at the same time with the same parts of itself.[78] With regard to the soul, Socrates uses the example of the thirsty person who

[76] Bloom, L. (2017). *The Principle of Non-contradiction in Plato's Republic: An Argument for Form*. Lanham, Maryland, Lexington Books, 49.

[77] Bloom also makes the point that the Principle of Non-Contradiction is another way of expressing the Principle of Identity, since a thing's contradicting itself is a sign that it is not the same as itself (Bloom, 'The Principle of Non-Contradiction', p. 64).

[78] It is not clear that Socrates' explanation for why the spinning top is not in fact contradictory succeeds. With respect to the spinning top's axis, he says, the top is not in motion, while with respect to its circumference, it is

does not wish to drink (439c2-3). This simultaneous wanting and not-wanting is contradictory, unless the soul is comprised of parts. The contradictory desires of a singular soul that both wants and does not want to drink should be impossible according to the Principle of Non-Contradiction. If, however, the soul is comprised of parts, one of which wishes to drink and the other which does not, then it may be possible to escape contradiction. It cannot be the case that the soul as a *whole* is both wanting water and not wanting water, as this is a contradiction, and it is not possible for a singularity to undergo opposites in the same part of itself at the same time. This means that the soul has to be a plurality: one part of it desires water and another part of it does not. Thus, according to Socrates, the soul is a plurality.

However, as Bloom picks out, the puzzle that Socrates sets up is deeper than this first layer of supposed contradiction. There is a further logical problem involved in separating the soul into many parts. The problem is that the unity of the soul is presupposed in the very observation that some kind of conflict is present in the soul: in order for there to be conflict at all, the conflicting parts have to be connected in some way. For us to say that conflict exists in something that is attempting to move in opposite directions at the same, it must be the case that it is indeed *one* object that is attempting to do so.[79] For example, there is no conflict present when two cars move in opposite directions: one moves north and the other moves south and that is all that there is to it. If these two motions are to conflict with each other, then they must be connected in some way. If the cars are tied together, for example, and set off in their original directions, then there would be a genuine instance of conflict. It is precisely the addition of *unity* that allows such conflict to occur.

In the case of the soul, of a person who is thirsty and does not want to drink, the person is both wanting and not wanting to drink. How do we explain that? There is only a conflict if there is a genuine connection between the parts that want and do not want to drink respectively. The fact of conflict that motivated the partitioning of the soul depends on the ultimate unity of the soul. Thus, Plato's solution to the contradiction of one soul both wanting and not wanting the same thing – to posit the existence of different parts in the soul, one of which wants to drink, and one of which does not – faces a problem. The problem is that for these parts of the soul to be capable of coming into conflict, they must be connected. This means that whatever

in motion (436e1-3). As Socrates will ultimately argue that all sensible things are contradictory, this explanatory failure is likely purposeful.

[79] Bloom, '*Principle of Non*-Contradiction', p. 49.

it is that connects the parts into one soul must be present in all the parts. But this means that the contradiction still stands: whatever it is that makes the parts belong to one soul must be present in each of those parts during the conflicting wanting-and-not-wanting. That is, that which connects the different parts of the soul will itself be forced to undergo opposite things at the same time. Even in the case of the soul being a plurality, the contradiction is still present in that soul.[80]

I take Bloom's unpacking of the contradiction to be a fair reading of what Plato intended for us to find in the text. After all, he wants us to philosophise, and we do this when we take ourselves not to know. Opening the Russian doll of contradictions leads us to continue to inquire. One way of reading the contradiction in the text is to conclude that the argument is incoherent, and take this as a reason not to take it seriously. Doing so, however, would not be engaging Plato in the spirit of Philosophy as he practised it. In finding the contradiction in the text, we are faced with two options: we can either conclude that it is incoherent, and cease engaging with the contradiction, or we can take the contradiction as an invitation to engage more deeply with the text. If we assume that the contradiction is an intentional aspect of the text, and if we take ourselves not to be in a position of epistemic authority (that is, that we take our finding the contradiction as evidence of our ignorance rather than as evidence of bad philosophy), then we will not only be engaging philosophically as the Ancients might, but we will take something more meaningful away from such an engagement, than if we were to abandon it.

The same is true of the contradiction involved in Plato's dismissal of and simultaneous utilisation of myth in the *Republic*. We *could* take this contradiction to be permission to disregard Plato. Alternatively, we could take the contradiction to amount to rational failure on Plato's part, and ignore its presence in the text as a mistake. We could even find a superficial means of resolving the contradiction – by saying, for example, that the myths are stories that give us a break from engaging in the tiring activity of real philosophy. If it is the case, however, that Plato's philosophical project is to encourage his audience to engage philosophically, and

[80] Bloom, '*Principle of Non*-Contradiction', p. 50.

that he sees *aporia* as the mindset in which inquiry, and thus philosophy, begins, then we need to take the contradiction to be an intentional and significant aspect of the dialogue. The contradiction in the engaged reader inspires the desire to understand it; the *aporia* is encouragement in the engaged student to take part in the activity of philosophy. Understanding the myths in Plato to be important aspects of his dialogue produces a more philosophically fruitful conversation. Taking the contradiction seriously is more philosophical than ignoring it as a failure in reasoning.

In Chapter 1, I argued that *aporia* is not merely an impasse; it is deeper than simple confusion. It is a state of confusion in the soul. To be in a state of *aporia* is be lost in such a way that the pathway out is incomprehensible. It is to be thoroughly lost as to be unable to apprehend even one's own position. Such a state of confusion invokes an abject discomfort, which is commensurate with what is at stake: if we understand philosophy to be care of the soul, then what is at stake is the well-being of the soul. Engaging philosophically is thus of the utmost importance. To be in a state of *aporia* is to grapple with soul-level confusion, and the motivation for doing so is looking after the soul.

Plato's Philosophy

Plato's philosophical project – his aim in his philosophical works – is closely bound up with his view of philosophy. What is his view of philosophy? For him, philosophy is the activity of inquiry, through which we are ultimately caring for our souls. Philosophy *is* care of the soul. Why is this so? Because philosophy is the activity of inquiry, the activity of pursuing wisdom, while being aware of our ignorance. The implication of pursuing knowledge while being aware of our own ignorance, is that philosophy is more often going to be about asking, and engaging with, questions than it is about arriving at answers and operating with a sense of certainty. This means that the activity of philosophy is the activity that exercises the rational part of the soul. The rational part of the soul is the thinking part of the soul, the part that is able to analyse and to contemplate; the part of the soul that ultimately would be able to apprehend the Forms.

Why is philosophy the activity of caring for the soul? When a soul is ruled by the appetites, it cannot make good decisions.[81] When the soul is ruled by the spirited part of the soul, it can also not ultimately make good decisions.[82] The only way in which the soul can be just or ordered is when the soul is ruled by reason. In the case of the person who smokes, the smoker is making an objectively bad decision. Smoking is bad for their health, and it is bad for the health of the people around them. The argument could be made that it is bad for the environment. Thus, the decision to smoke is being made either by the appetites, because it is a decision to pursue pleasure, or by the spirited part of the soul, because smoking is, for a lot of people, a social activity. Either way it is not a decision that is being made by the rational part of the soul. If the smoker were in that instant governed by Reason, they would not be smoking. This is because they would know that this decision right now has bad consequences for their future self, and it has bad consequences for the futures of the people around them.

For the soul to be ordered in such a way that reason rules is for the soul to be just. The just soul is the soul in which reason is in control of the whole (441e).[83] The parts are working together in such a way that appetite can do its job of keeping the organism alive, and the spirited part can do its job of keeping the organism motivated, and the rational part can do the job of organizing the soul. This involves a circular relationship between the parts of soul, where the just soul is the soul that is ruled by reason, while the reasoning soul can rule only when the soul is just, that is, when it is the case that reason is making the decisions and not the other parts of the soul.[84] For the appetitive part and the spirited parts of the soul to rule the soul, to be making the decisions, is for the soul to be disordered and unjust. Following Socrates, Bloom defines justice as, "each person doing its own work without interfering with that of others (433a)." He quotes Socrates' definition of justice as, "doing what's properly one's own," provided this "comes about in a certain way" (433b2-4).[85] "What we are told in Book IV, that being just entails following reason, the part with wisdom, (443e9) is incomplete."[86] This Book

[81] Socrates uses example at 439e of Leontius who allowed his sexual appetite to overrule his reason, and disgusted himself by gazing at the corpses of criminals.

[82] Socrates uses example at 440b of the spirited part and anger.

[83] Cf. Bloom, *'Principle of Non-Contradiction',* p. 32.

[84] Ibid*,* p. 41.

[85] Ibid, p. 54.

[86] Ibid, p. 55.

IV definition is a partial one. If justice is the "cardinal virtue" of the soul, and virtue is what enables a thing to perform its function, then justice must enable the soul to pursue its function: living well.[87] This explanation is incomplete, though, as we do not know what living well means. If living well requires one to be just, and being just involves following reason, then this raises the question of *how* to follow reason.

The answer is that for reason to rule the soul, for the soul to follow reason, is for the soul to be constantly engaged in philosophical questions, to be engaged in the activity of philosophy. This is because for the rational part of the soul to be able to rule the soul, it must constantly be engaged in the activity of reasoning. For reason to be in the habit of ruling the rest of the soul well, of being able to rule in the first place, there must be the constant activity of exercising the rational part of the soul. This takes place when the soul is philosophizing. Philosophy is the activity that exercises the rational part of the soul, and is therefore the activity that allows a human being to perform its function of being a human being and of being a human being well. In other words, it is the activity that allows the soul to be virtuous. To be virtuous, as has been discussed, simply means to be good at being the thing that you are. It is through philosophy that we might be able to better reach for the good, and thus be better able to make good decisions. It is through philosophy that the soul becomes just and ordered.

Plato's philosophical project is intertwined with his conception of philosophy. He sees philosophy as the activity of pursuing wisdom. Philosophy is the pursuit of wisdom, and pursuing wisdom requires that the person is aware that they are not wise. They must be *motivated* to inquire: we do not inquire when we take ourselves already to know. So, philosophy and Plato's understanding of it require a conception of our own epistemic frailty, of our own ignorance. The philosopher must see themself as being ignorant in some way, and motivated to overcome that ignorance, however improbable that overcoming might be. Inquiry requires, first, that we take ourselves not to know, and, second, that we are motivated to overcome this not knowing. This is what the activity of philosophy is.

Plato's view of philosophy as pursuit of wisdom, motivates his philosophical project. If it is the case that philosophy is care of the soul, then the philosopher wants as many people as possible to be engaged in philosophy, because it is when they are engaged in philosophy that they are pursuing the good and bringing about good for both themselves, and their community.

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[87] Ibid.

What is good for the self is what is good for the community. And what is good for the community is what it is good for the self. Given the fact that Plato views philosophy in this way, his philosophical project is to invite his audience into philosophy, and to help those people who do accept the invitation to philosophize.

In this chapter, I have attempted to show that Plato is concerned with inviting his audience to participate in the activity of philosophy, and convince them that the life spent engaged philosophically is the good life. His writing often involves irony and contradiction precisely because in perplexing his audience and bringing to their awareness the fact that they do not know he is bringing them to engage philosophically. To misquote Merleau-Ponty, "he inflicts upon [us] the unpardonable offence of making [us] doubt ourselves."[88] In our self-doubt we become more self-aware because we are disabused of the dangerous notion that we know. This is where the contradiction inherent in my thesis question is situated. He gives us the contradictory mistrust of and utilization of myth because contradiction is a means by which he induces *aporia* in us, and *aporia* is the sensation wherein inquiry begins. What, then, is *aporia*?

[88] Merleau-Ponty, 'In Praise of Philosophy', p. 37.

Chapter 3: What is Myth?

Introduction

Myth is difficult to define. Myths not only often relate opposing ideas, but mythology itself exemplifies opposites: mythological traditions are unique to the cultures to which they belong, and at the same time, myths from different cultures can share common features. Myths are taken to be both significant in their societies, and taken to be so ordinary as to fade into the cultural background. Myths can be seen to have many meanings, or to communicate something so dated as to be meaningless. To call a narrative a 'myth' can either be to say that it is true, or to say that it is false. Myths can communicate many ideas, or very few; myths are often complex, while appearing simple. There is no scholarly consensus as to what precisely myth is, in part, possibly, because 'myth' is so multivalent. As such there are many schools of thought regarding how best to approach an understanding of it, and how best to engage with it.

I have attempted to categorize six different general understandings of myth, although this categorization is far from exhaustive. These categories often overlap, and given the richness and variety of mythical traditions, and their very many myths, there are many different ways of approaching its study. Below, I list the six categories, and briefly describe them. More detailed discussion follows.

The Ritual Theory of Myth: Under the ritual theory of myth, myth and ritual are seen to be closely linked to each other, and understanding myth involves discovering the corresponding ritual. Either myth is seen to arise out of ritual practice, or ritual practice is seen to come out of myth.

1. **Myths as Stories Involving the Supernatural**: Many mythologists consider the presence of the supernatural in a story to be an important feature of myth. Among scholars who defend this view are folklorist William Bascom,[89] and the classicists Joseph Fontenrose[90] and G.S. Kirk.[91]

[89] Bascom, W. (1965). 'The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives'. *The Journal of American Folklore* vol. 78 (307), p. 4.

[90] Fontenrose, J. (1966). *The Ritual Theory of Myth.* Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 54.

[91] Kirk, G.S. (1970). *Myth: its Meaning and Function in Ancient and Other Cultures.* Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 19.

2. **Myth as Origin Stories**: Philosopher Catalin Partenie's analysis of the significance of myth in ancient societies is that they regarded myths as "true stories…about the ultimate origin of reality."[92] This assessment understands the ancient view as ascribing both a positive truth value to myth, and taking it to involve an etiological explanation. Mircea Eliade, in addition to his notion of the link between myth and ritual mentioned above, similarly identifies myths as either origin stories, or stories that relate a sacred history of events.[93] Historian of philosophy Luc Brisson defines history as true discourse about the past, with the implication that myth is also a discourse about the past, albeit one to which we cannot ascribe a truth value.[94]
3. **Myth as Speech**: Partenie notes that in Homer, *muthos* means "speech," or "something uttered."[95] Similarly, Richard P. Martin,[96] Fournier[97] and Chantraine[98] all identify myth with some kind of discourse.
4. **The Functional Theory of Myth**: Walter Burkert identifies the defining feature of myth neither in its form nor in its content, but in its function. Under this view, myth is a story that is part of a culture's established practice, that has a secondary reference.[99] By secondary reference is meant that there is a second layer of meaning over and above the one explicitly stated.
5. **Myth as Distancing**: Sean Kirkland points out that for both Luc Brisson and Søren Kierkegaard, myth involves distance. Under Brisson's definition, myth is a discourse about events that are distanced in time. Kierkegaard sees myth as

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[92] Partenie, C. (2009). 'Introduction'. In Partenie, C. (Ed.). *Plato's Myths*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 1.

[93] Eliade, M. (1963). *Myth and Reality*. New York: Harper & Row, p. 5.

[94] Brisson, L., Naddaf, G. (1998). *Plato the Myth Maker*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 22.

[95] Partenie, 'Introduction', p. 1.

[96] Martin, R.P. (1989). *The Language of Heroes: Speech and Performance in the Illiad.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p. 14.

[97] Ibid, p. 14.

[98] Ibid, p. 15.

[99] Burkert, W. (1979). *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual.* Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 23.

concerning that which is distanced by virtue of being placed outside the realm of human experience.[100]

The first and final two categories are similar in that they understand myth in terms of its relation to its audience. The second and third categories can be grouped together, in that they all understand myths as stories concerning a certain kind of content. The fourth category, understanding myth as a kind of speech, understands myth in terms of its form.

1. The Ritual Theory of Myth

Historically, one of the ways in which mythologists have sought to understand myth is in its relation to ritual. An understanding of myth that was popular in the late 19th- to mid-20th centuries was the Ritual Theory of Myth, which sees myth and ritual as either related to each other, or coextensive. A rigid version of this theory sees all myths as having associated rituals, and all rituals as having associated myths. Myth is understood to either explain or describe a ritual practice - that is, ritual precedes myth - or ritual is an enactment of myth – meaning that myth precedes ritual.

As this discussion looks at the possible relationship between myth and ritual, I will briefly discuss what is meant by ritual. A ritual is a type of activity. It is distinguished in that it is a formalised activity that carries symbolic meaning, and is performed for the purpose of the personal transformation of the participants.[101] Ritual is a manner of communicating through symbolic language. A ritual is an activity that is formal in the sense of being governed by rules, and in the sense of being imbued with a secondary meaning[102] which is communicated symbolically, and which is aimed at bringing about some kind of change – either an internal change in the people who take part in the ritual, or a change in their environment. The ritual of taking communion in a Catholic mass (where wafers that carry the secondary meaning of being the body of a manifestation of the Christian god, are consumed) is intended to bring about an internal change in the people taking communion. The rainmaking ritual, which is practised by many First Nations communities of North America, is intended to bring about a change in the environment, namely, to bring about rain.

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[100] Kirkland, 'Socrates *contra scientiam, pro fabula',* p. 319.

[101] Anderson, J.L. (1987). 'Japanese Tea Ritual: Religion in Practice'. *Man* vol. 22 (3), p. 476.

[102] By "secondary meaning" is meant, meaning that (apparently) similar, everyday activities do not share.

Given these observations, an activity can carry vastly different connotations when it is performed ritually than when it is undertaken informally, as part of the business of life. For instance, the activity of drinking tea will have different connotations to the drinker when it is done informally, as a means, say, of warming and rousing the drinker, than when that activity is done ritually, such as in the case of Japanese tea ritual, *chaji*. As Jennifer L. Anderson observes, it is "the symbolic exchanges which give the experience [the ritual] its true meaning."[103] The primary meaning of the ritual is that tea is prepared, served and consumed. The secondary level of meaning is where the symbolic meaning of the activity resides. There are correct and incorrect ways of performing the ritual.[104] This means that there are rules that govern how the ritual is to be performed, and these have to be both learned and habitually practiced in order for the meaning of the ritual to be communicated and understood.[105] An incorrectly performed ritual will not communicate the intended meaning, and so will not bring about the intended transformation.

William Robertson Smith, writing in the nineteenth century, proposed that ritual precedes myth. In his view, myth is a retroactive explanation for how a ritual came about, but it is the ritual that is of significance, not the myth. He argues that ancient religions, rather than having their basis in dogma, were comprised of their ritual practices:

> No doubt men will not habitually follow certain practices without attaching a meaning to them; but as a rule we find that while the practice was rigorously fixed, the meaning attached to it was extremely vague, and the same rite was explained by different people in different ways, without any question of orthodoxy or heterodoxy arising in consequence… [I]f you had asked why [rituals] were done, you would probably have had several mutually contradictory explanations from different persons, and no one would have thought it a matter of the least religious importance which of these you chose to adopt. Indeed the explanations offered would not have been of a kind to stir any strong feeling; for in most cases they would have been merely different stories as to the circumstances under which the rite first came to be established, by the command or by the direct example of the god. The rite, in short, was connected not with a dogma but with a myth.[106]

[103] Anderson, 'Japanese Tea Ritual', p. 476.

[104] Ibid, p. 475.

[105] Ibid, p. 476.

[106] Smith, W.R. (1894). 'Lecture I' in Lectures on the Religion of the Semites. Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, p. 18.

In other words, the explanation for the ritual can change over time, without the ritual or the importance of the ritual being altered. Smith argues that the explanation, then, for the ritual is not as important in ancient religions as the ritual itself; the ritual precedes the explanation. As stories about the gods, myths offered an explanation for the rituals that were performed, but it was the ritual that was most important, and worshippers could choose to apply an explanation from a number of myths associated with the ritual. It was not through belief in the myth that one acquired divine credit or religious approval, but through appropriately enacting the ritual. As such, myths should be seen as "secondary" to ritual, "for the ritual was fixed and the myth was variable, the ritual was obligatory and the faith in the myth was at the discretion of the worshipper."[107]

Jane Harrison also sees ritual as preceding myth. She understands myth as a narrative description of a ritual.[108] For Smith, ritual is enacted for a reason, but this reason is of secondary importance to the ritual, and the reason can change over time. He postulates that the reason for the ritual is originally non-mythic, but over time the reason is forgotten, and is replaced by a myth which explains how the ritual came to be established (at the behest of a god, for example).[109] Even though, in this model, the myth explains why the ritual is, it is the ritual that is important and necessary, while the myth is optional, and various mythical explanations of the same ritual can be offered over time. Harrison sees myth as the spoken aspect of a ritual. The myth is spoken, while the ritual is enacted. The myth describes what is enacted in the ritual, but both have a magical power that allows participants to enact some sort of control over their context; the imitation of an event causes the event to happen.[110]

The association between myth and ritual, where ritual precedes myth, leads to an understanding of myth as either a narrative description o the ritual, or an antedated explanation for it. Raglan gives the example of the myth of Helios. In ancient Greek mythology, Helios was the god of the sun. He rode his golden chariot across the sky from east to west, bringing the sun across the heavens with him. This, argues Raglan, is a ritual wherein the priest drives

[107] Ibid, p. 19.

[108] Segal, R.A. (2004). Myth: A Very Short Introduction. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 71.

[109] Smith, 'Lecture I', p. 18.

[110] Segal, 'Myth', p. 72.

a ritual chariot. The myth sees the god, in his ritual of carrying the sun across the sky, enacting the part of the priest.[111] The myth is projected on the ritual.

Bronislaw Malinowski is a proponent of the view that myth and ritual are connected. He also sees myth as coming out of ritual.[112] That is, myths are created subsequent to their associated rituals, being narratives that are inspired by, or created to explain, rituals that are already in practice. Both the retelling of myths and engagement in ritual practice allow those who participate in their telling or enactment to "live" in a sacred time when all things came to be, and thus where they can be found. A myth about the first rain might correspond to ritual that is performed to end a drought. The ritual brings the mythical event into the present, and thereby allows participants to exert some control over their social and natural environment.[113] Events of the past are not irreversible, but rather, can be repeated through ritual.[114] For Malinowski, myth provides the motive for ritual.[115] Similarly, historian Mircea Eliade sees myths as explanations for ritual. Through enacting ritual, those who take part have the opportunity to take part in the divine.[116] Ritual enactment takes the actor back in time to the mythical beginning, and thus closer to the divine.[117] Malinowski sees myth as "a narrative resurrection of a primeval reality".[118] For him, myth is closely tied to ritual: myth is "a hard-worked active force."[119] Both Eliade and Malinowski are widely referenced in the literature.

Dabney Townsend, writing half a century after Harrison and in some agreement with her, sees myth and ritual as conceptually linked: myth is the logic of ritual, and ritual is the performance of myth.[120] Townsend uses the example of the myth of Prometheus' gifting fire to humankind, and his punishment for doing so. In the myth, he is both saviour and sacrifice. These aspects of the myth suggest ritual connotations. Sacrifice itself is a ritual activity, while

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[111] Raglan, L. (1955). 'Myth and Ritual'. *Journal of American Folklore* vol. 68 (270), p. 455.

[112] Ibid, p. 457.

[113] Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, p. 14.

[114] Ibid, p. 13.

[115] Malinowski, B. (1948). *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays*. Glencoe: The Free Press, p. 86.

[116] Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, p. 11.

[117] Ibid, p. 14.

[118] Ibid, p. 20.

[119] Malinowski, 'Magic, Science and Religion', p. 79.

[120] Townsend, D.W. Jr. (1972). 'Myth and Meaning.' *The Centennial Review* vol. 16 (2) p. 193.

the gift of fire to humankind offers a means of conducting ritual after the schism between gods and mortals that is initiated by Prometheus' transgression takes place – fire being an important aspect of many ritual activities. Fire belongs to the gods, and its irreverent mis-placement in the world of mortals is a crime that deserves perpetual punishment.[121] Both myth and ritual interrupt the ordinary, the "profane." This is what links them. They offer a transcendence of the ordinary, and induct the participant into an incompletely grasped, but altered, level of reality.[122]

Raglan, also offering a similar interpretation to that of Smith, defines myth as "a narrative associated with a rite."[123] A myth is simply a kind of story that is connected to a ritual. The myth exists to legitimize the associated ritual. The myth shows why the efficacy of the ritual should be trusted, and in this way, validates it. Raglan sees myth to be so closely connected to ritual that, and he quotes A.M. Hocart, "[i]f we turn to the living myth, that is the myth that is believed in, we find that it has no existence apart from the ritual."[124]

A proponent of the view that myth precedes ritual was Edward Burnett Tylor, who was writing before Smith. Tylor saw myths as expositions of what the world is, and why the world is the way it is, rather than as expositions of rituals. In his view, ritual serves as an enactment of the myth; in an attempt to exert mastery over the world that the myth describes, the ritual was enacted in the hopes of altering some aspect of the way the world is.[125] Understanding myth as related to ritual, but preceding it, still does not explain what myth is; it only tells us what ritual is, that it is something that comes out of myth.

From the viewpoint that myth precedes the ritual, myth is seen to explain how and why the ritual came to be. Lord Raglan offers the example of the myth of Guy Fawkes and the ritual burning of an effigy on November 5th.[126] The explanation for the ritual burning of the replica of Guy Fawkes is that the historical figure was burned at the stake. This is in fact not true, Guy

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[121] *Ibid.*

[122] Townsend, 'Myth and Meaning', p. 194.

[123] Raglan, 'Myth and Ritual', p. 454.

[124] Ibid, p. 457.

[125] Segal, *Myth*, p. 63.

[126] I do not think that the case of Guy Fawkes counts as a myth in the sense in which I am approaching the word in my project, but the illustration is a useful one. I include the example here with the caveat that this story is not a myth as I see it, though it is a story that corresponds to a ritual, and for that reason is a helpful illustration.

Fawkes was hanged, drawn, and quartered, but not burned.[127] The ritual - the burning of the effigy - is seen as arising out of the myth, which acts as an explanation for the ritual. In this instance, we can see that there is not always a direct correlation between historical fact, the myth that arises out of it, and ritual.

This understanding of *living* myth as a narrative which has a connected ritual, addresses the observation offered by critics of the ritual theory of myth that not all myths do have associated rituals. Not all extant rituals have obviously associated myths, and vice versa, because not all of them (myth or ritual) are still alive. Some rituals are no longer practiced, while their associated myth remains; some myths have been forgotten while the corresponding ritual is still enacted. The problem with this reply is that, like the criticism, it is hard to find evidence for it. If the assertion is that some rituals have been forgotten, but their associated myths remain, then the contended evidence is absent – it is forgotten. It is impossible to prove either way - that the ritual exists, but has been forgotten, or that there is no corresponding ritual and there never was one. In the case, for example, of the myth of Adam and Eve, there is no extant ritual. Is this because the ritual has been forgotten? Or have we found an example of a myth that does not have a corresponding ritual?

For Smith, Raglan, Malinowski and Eliade, myth and ritual are still distinct concepts, and the myth associated to a specific ritual is incidental to it – one could be traded for another without incurring conceptual problems (in their view). The conceptions of the relationship between myth and ritual offered by Townsend and Harrison tie myth and ritual together conceptually in a way that the other theorists discussed do not. Their understandings of myth and ritual being two forms of the same thing offer an interesting viewpoint on myth in that, if the concepts of 'ritual' and 'myth' are in fact coextensive, then myth, like ritual, must have the capacity to bring about a transformation of some kind. These conceptions of myth as having a ritual aspect tie myth to a specific kind of activity, an activity that brings about an internal alteration in the person enacting the myth, their being is altered in some way. This idea that myth is transformative does not sit well with a modern, common sense understanding of what 'myth' means. Either we must reject this view as being too bizarre to be taken seriously, or we must try to explain how this may be the case.

[127] Raglan, 'Myth and Ritual', p. 454.

In any case, even if we concede that myth and ritual are necessarily connected, we have still not arrived at a satisfactory understanding of either: if a myth and its corresponding ritual are to be understood in terms of each other, what is it that we understand of them? A ritual understanding of myth can offer only a partial view of it. Despite these concerns, a ritual understanding of myth nevertheless might provide a helpful viewpoint in grappling with what it is that myth involves. If we see ritual and myth as closely related, and some scholars discussed here have defined these cultural phenomena in terms of each other, we perhaps can learn something important about myth.

I will briefly digress here and make reference to Claude Lévi-Strauss, whose 1955 paper, 'The Structural Study of Myth', is also deeply baffling. John Frederick summarises Lévi-Strauss's understanding of myth as "myth is…repetition."[128] He understands this repetition in terms of male and female binaries, a reduction with which I do not agree, but it is a succinct summary of a complex and condensed paper. In the 'Structural Study', Lévi-Strauss observes that in myth, themes, contradictions, and events (what he calls 'gross constituent units'[129]) are repeated throughout the myth. Myths themselves are repeated with each retelling. The presence of narrative repetition, then, distinguishes myths from stories of other kinds. In the words of Malinowski, "The essential truth of the myth lies in the fact that it embodies a situation of profound emotional significance…which is in its nature recurrent." This truth requires repetition in order to be conveyed.[130] The repetition of the myth provokes an internal transformation. Something similar seems to be the case with ritual as well, although the analogous term with regard to ritual is perhaps *habituation.* This notion of habituation is perhaps better expressed in terms of the Aristotelean concept of ἐνέργεια, or at least of ἕξις: an activity the mastering of which brings about an alteration in one's being, which moulds one's being. Myth-as-ritual brings about an alteration in the participant. Myth can then be understood to be transformative.

This notion of myth-as-ritual-as-transformation is perhaps a bit of a stretch. Not least because, as is easily observed, not all myths have associated rites. This means that a one-to-one correlation cannot always apply. I will address this criticism later in this chapter, but

[128] Frederick, J.F. (1989). 'Myth and Repetition: The Ground of Ideality in Lévi-Strauss and Lacan'. *Journal of the British Society of Phenomenology* vol. 20 (2), p. 122.

[129] Lévi-Strauss, C. (1955). 'The Structural Study of Myth'. *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 68 (270), p. 431.

[130] Raglan, 'Myth and Ritual', p. 454.

briefly, certain kinds of myths do have associated rites. Another, more important criticism, is that myths are such complex, multi-layered narratives, that a reduction of them to a single level of meaning seems to rob them of their potency. That is, to say that a myth is coextensive with a ritual, and that the purpose of both is to induce some kind of transformation, is to reduce the myth to its specific intended transformative power. As will be seen in the discussions of the other understandings of myth, myths have multiple important features, and to reduce them to a single one of these is to lose the richness and nuance that is present in myth. Nevertheless, this does seem to be a peculiar, critically important, feature of many myths, but especially of Platonic myths: that they are aimed at the personal transformation of the people who engage them.

Despite these concerns, a ritual understanding of myth nevertheless might provide a helpful viewpoint in grappling with what it is that myth involves. If we see ritual and myth as closely related, and some scholars discussed here have defined these cultural phenomena in terms of each other, we perhaps can learn something important about myth. I have suggested that what is of interest is the transformative aspect of ritual, and the implication that myth – or at least, certain myths – too have some sort of transformative power. I do not mean by this that myth has the ability to effect external change that some rituals are aimed at, such as in the case of the ritual of rainmaking. Instead, it seems more plausible to consider that myth has the ability to transform the individual in some way. I will argue that in the case of Platonic myth, myths can induce a certain state of mind, and in this way bring about a transformation in the soul of the audience, or at least in the specific aspect of their mental state. This state of mind is the experience of *aporia*, which is, as I have discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, an important feature of Platonic philosophy, and of Plato's philosophical project.

2. Myths as Stories Involving the Supernatural

Many mythologists consider the presence of the supernatural in a story to be an important, if not complete, feature of myth. Folklorist William Bascom considers myths to be sacred stories, *related to ritual and religion*[131], that are taken to be true by the communities in

[131] I italicize these words here because, as I have mentioned, these categories do overlap, or at least the definitions provided by proponents of these categories have multiple aspects, which overlap.

which they are told. In his view, myths are authoritative and dogmatic within their societies.[132] The actors in myths, according to Bascom, are frequently not human, although they are often anthropomorphized.[133] In the sense that they are not human, they may be (as Mircea Eliade identifies them) supernatural beings, such as gods, or monsters.[134] This seems a wild claim to make, that people truly believed that there were monsters with multiple heads, such as Cerberus or the Hydra, that they were taken to be true in a literal sense, or dogmatic in the sense of setting out rigid, inflexible rules or ideas. It nevertheless seems plausible to make the less extreme assertion that myths do have the feature of being culturally significant, they are taken to communicate something important to the culture in which they are told, about that culture, or at least its values. Were they not important in this way, they would not survive over the millennia, nor become such a cultural staple as to fade into the background. (We see this fading into the background in the form of idiomatic uses of mythical references, such as the term "Herculean" as it has been picked up in Western languages, or in the fact that phrases such as "he was an Adonis" need no further explanation.)

Joseph Fontenrose, like Bascom, notes the relation of myth to religion. He sees myths as orally related, traditional stories "of a certain kind," stories of a kind that concern "*daimones*", which are supernatural beings such as gods and spirits.[135] That a myth is a kind of story picks it out as being in some way qualitatively different to other stories. Here, Fontenrose picks out the difference as lying in the fact that myths make reference to *daimones.* While such supernatural beings do often seem to be featured in myths, this is not a constant. They are not involved, for instance, in the myth of Oedipus. The converse is also true – there are stories that we would not wish to consider to be myth, that involve supernatural beings. These ideas are picked up in the discussion of myth as distancing.

G.S. Kirk considers the ritual theory of myth to be a narrow version of the view that myths have supernatural elements, or religious messages.[136] To the Greeks, according to Kirk, a *muthos* could involve anything from a story, to a statement, to a dramatic plot.[137] Kirk offers

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[132] Bascom, 'The Forms of Folklore', p. 4.

[133] Ibid, p. 4.

[134] Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, p. 6.

[135] Fontenrose, *The Ritual Theory of Myth*, p. 54.

[136] Kirk, *Myth*, p. 19.

[137] Ibid, p. 8.

Schelling and L. Rademacher as proponents of the view that myths are within the purview of religion, as histories of the gods[138], while E.W. Count sees mythology as a body of literature, which concerns the gods.[139] Classicists W.K.C. Guthrie and Angelo Brelich likewise reduce mythology to an aspect of, or source for, religion.[140]

While it does seem to be the case that myths do often involve supernatural elements, this does not sufficiently capture what it is that we mean by "myth." This understanding of myth as involving the supernatural is either too vague or too specific to be helpful in arriving at a satisfactory understanding of what myth *is*. In terms of their being too vague, there are many stories that involve the supernatural that we would not want to consider to be myths – such as the Little Mermaid, or the Lord of the Rings. These are stories that do involve supernatural elements, but we would not want to call them myths. I have mentioned the myth of Oedipus above. And even if we were inclined to do so, the fact of myths involving supernatural elements does not capture the strangeness of myths: that they can involve multiple layers of meaning, that they can be interpreted in multiple ways, that they inhabit such an important place in their cultural context. In terms of the identification of myth with supernatural elements as being too specific, I think that locating *daimones* or supernatural forces in myth is a means of locating the fantastical and the extraordinary in myth. The element of myths involving the bizarre and the extraordinary is important, and in the sense that supernatural elements contribute to 'the extraordinary' featured in myth, the observation that myths often involve supernatural elements is not valueless. I think that an important feature of myth is that they do present a reality that is strange, that is in a sense unbelievable. When we are drawn into the myth and buy into its logic, this strangeness can be jarring because reality as presented in the myth is both plausible (we have bought into the narrative flow, we have suspended disbelief) and implausible. We are presented with two realities, the mythical and the actual, and this is uncomfortable. This is further discussed in the section on myth as distancing.

[138] Ibid, p. 10.

[139] Ibid, p. 10.

[140] Ibid, p. 11.

3. Myth as Origin Stories

Catalin Partenie's analysis of the significance of myth in ancient societies is that those societies regarded myths as "true stories…about the ultimate origin of reality."[141] This assessment understands the ancient view as ascribing both a positive truth value to myth, and as taking it to involve an etiological explanation. In other words, under Partenie's view, ancients took myths to relate actual events, as well as explanations for how the world, and aspects of the world, came to be. Eliade agrees that myths are either origin stories, or stories that relate a sacred history of events.[142] Bascom includes in his understanding of myths the view that they are narratives concerning the distant past, but more specifically, that they also have a religious dimension (we can see here how interconnected these categories can be – that Eliade offer definitions of myths as being related to rituals, but also that they relate a sacred history, which means that his understanding of myth can be placed in all three categories; meanwhile, Bascom sees myths as both involving the supernatural, and as religious stories concerning the past).[143] Luc Brisson defines history as true discourse about the past, with the implication that myth is also a discourse about the past, albeit one to which we cannot ascribe a truth value.[144] For Eliade, myths are creation stories: they relate how something – be it a place, a natural phenomenon, a cultural norm, or a facet of human nature – came into being. The presence of supernatural characters portrayed in myths reveals the presence of the sacred in reality and the intrusion of the supernatural into the everyday, and also explains those human behaviours that are considered to be of importance by the society that tells the myth. Myths, as they involve beginnings, explain why human nature is the way that it is, and are regarded as true because they explain how reality came to be what it is.[145]

4. Myth as Speech

In this category, myth is understood as having a specific form. Bascom identifies myth as a type of "prose narrative."[146] He compares them to legends and folktales. Myths are kinds

[141] Partenie, 'Introduction', p. 1.

[142] Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, p. 5.

[143] Bascom, 'The Forms of Folklore', p. 4.

[144] Brisson, *Plato the Myth Maker*, p. 22.

[145] Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, p. 5.

[146] Bascom, 'The Forms of Folklore', p. 3.

of prose narratives that are believed to be true, and concern the distant past. Legends, in contrast, are true stories set in between the distant past and the present, and folktales are stories that are known to be untrue, set at any time period.[147] Partenie looks at the literal meaning of the word "*muthos*" and notes that in Homer, *muthos* means "speech," or "something uttered."[148] Richard P. Martin, in a discussion concerning the difference between *muthos* and *epos* makes the further clarification of the meaning of the word, showing that in Homer, *muthos* involves speech centred on the person speaking. This aspect, he notes, wherein the text is oriented by the perspective of the speaker, is so consistently associated with *muthos* that those analyzing Homer have often defined *muthos* as a kind of thought.[149] Thus Fournier identifies *muthos* as thought that expresses itself, opinion, and inner language[150]; and Chantraine describes it as words that have meaning, purpose, discourse, and are associated with Eros that designs the world, the speech, and the form[151]. Martin shows that in the *Iliad*, *muthos* is often described by or embedded in words for thinking.[152] Nevertheless, "*muthos*" always denotes the speech that conveys the speaker's thought[153]; it attends as much to what is said and how it is said.[154] In his 'Structural Study of Myth', Lévi-Strauss emphasizes the oral tradition in which myth necessarily originates, saying that "myth *is* language: to be known, myth has to be told; it is a part of human speech."[155]

5. The Functional Theory of Myth

Walter Burkert identifies the defining feature of myth neither in its form nor in its content, but in its function:

> The specific character of myth seems to lie neither in the structure nor in the content of a tale, but in the use to which it is put; and this would be my final thesis: *myth is a traditional tale*

[147] Ibid, p. 5.

[148] Partenie, 'Introduction', p. 1.

[149] Martin, *The Language of Heroes*, p. 14.

[150] Martin, *The Language of Heroes*, p. 15.; "*pensée qui s'exprime, le langage, l'avis, langage intérieur*"

[151] Martin, *The Language of Heroes*, p. 15.; "*Suite de parloes qui ont un seus, propos, discours; associé à eros qui désigne le mot, la parole, la forme*"

[152] Ibid, p. 15.

[153] Ibid, p. 16.

[154] Ibid, p. 16.

[155] Lévi-Strauss, 'The Structural Study of Myth', p. 430.

> *with secondary, partial reference to something of collective importance.* Myth is traditional tale applied; and its relevance and seriousness stem largely from this application. The reference is secondary, as the meaning of the tale is not to be derived from it – in contrast to fable…and it is partial, since tale and reality will never be quite isomorphic in these applications. And still the tale often is the first and fundamental verbalization of complex reality, the primary way to speak about many-sided problems, just as telling a tale was seen to be quite an elementary way of communication. Language is linear, and linear narrative is thus a way prescribed by language to map reality.[156]

Burkert sees a myth's defining feature as its function. Under his view, myth is a story that is part of a culture's established practice, and that has a secondary reference. Its having a secondary reference means that there are multiple levels on which the myth can be read. This multivalence enables the exploration of multi-faceted questions.[157] A myth's having a secondary reference suggests that it is not simply taken at face value to be a statement of fact about an historical or supernatural event by the people who pass it on. Truth values are not necessarily applied to it. Instead, myth is meant to be engaged. A myth can convey cultural norms or rules, while at the same time explicitly discussing specific rituals, such as those concerning marriage, and implicitly addressing the emotions that humans grapple with. Let us consider the biblical myth of the Marriage at Cana. At a wedding in Cana, Jesus' mother informs him that there is no wine. She tells the servants to do whatever Jesus instructs them to do, and he instructs them to bring vessels of water to the head waiter. Jesus turns the water into wine, and the head waiter says to the bridegroom that it is the best of the wine, and in serving it last, they had departed from tradition. Under Burkert's reading of this, the myth is not intended to have a truth value – it is not intended to convey that someone did in fact turn water into wine.[158] Instead, the myth concerns established cultural practise, in the form of aspects of wedding celebration, and in social hierarchy, and social interaction.

Moreover, it has multiple layers of meaning: it concerns the cultural norm of conducting marriage, and these being seen as important; it concerns aspects of the specific enactment of the ritual of weddings, which are portrayed as reasons for celebration. The myth further conveys the social norm of not saving the best till last, and the value of the present moment

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[156] Burkert, 'Structure and History', pp. 22-23.

[157] Ibid, p. 23.

[158] In giving this example, I recognize that historically (and in some places, presently) this story was in fact not seen as a myth, and so Burkert's analysis would not have applied.

that this action conveys, while at the same time clearly disrupting this social norm – the best in fact is saved for last. The expression of two ways of seeing something and of valuing it allows for the cultural discussion of two values that might be seen as equally important – the value of living in the present, in not trusting in the certainty of there being a future where the best may be enjoyed, while at the same time conveying the perspicacity in being aware that while the future may be uncertain, it is still possible, and it needs to be prepared for. Finally, the myth can be read as discussing joys and fears involved in navigating social hierarchies, and in bringing multiple communities together. There are many ways of unpacking the myth of the Marriage at Cana; the brief discussion here is intended to convey the multiplicity of layers of meaning that are discernible in a myth. This multiplicity is an important aspect of myth, according to Burkert, and I agree with him. Thus, both the Functional Theory of Myth and the Ritual Theory of Myth offer the observation that a feature of myth is that it communicates more than one layer of meaning. I am in agreement with this assessment, and I think that it is important to note that the same is true for irony, and especially Platonic irony.

Irony involves the communication of a secondary meaning: one thing is said, while something else is meant (or apparently meant; Platonic irony is not so straightforward as the stated word and its meaning being completely disconnected). The meaning is secondary because it is not the same as the ordinary meaning of the statement. The obvious meaning of the statement "It is a good day for a football game" is that conditions – such as the weather, or the availability of a group of people to play – are conducive to a game of football taking place. The statement becomes ironic when the speaker says it during a thunderstorm, weather that is *not* conducive to playing outdoor sport. That is, it becomes ironic when it gains a secondary meaning that is not the same (in this case, directly opposite) as the primary meaning of the words used.

Platonic irony is far more complex than this, and it is beyond the scope of this project to discuss it in the depth required to do it justice, or communicate its complexity. Dylan Futter makes the point that the detached manner in which audiences engage with dramatic theatre is a kind of irony.[159] Futter argues that irony in the dialogues has the effect of leaving the audience with the sensation that there is some truth or idea that they are not getting. It leaves them with the awareness that there is something that they do not know. This awareness of one's own

[159] Futter, 'Variations in Philosophical Genre', p. 253.

ignorance is an aspect of *aporia*. Even in dialogues that end in *aporia*, Futter argues, Socrates nevertheless instantiates the virtue under investigation. "For example, in the *Laches*, Socrates displays courage in the search for the nature of courage; in *Charmides*, he displays temperance in the search for temperance; and something similar is true in the other texts."[160] The failure to arrive at a conclusive answer to the question of what a specific virtue *is*, is met by the incarnation of that virtue in the figure of Socrates. Jacob Klein makes the observation that in order for irony to be present in a dialogue, there must be an audience who can detect the irony, who can read between the lines, and get at what is not explicitly stated. This is so important a feature of Plato's dialogues that Klein says, "A dialogue, then, presupposes people listening to the conversation not as casual and indifferent spectators but as silent participants."[161] Thus, the fact of the dialogues having the dramatic aspect of being dialogues is one feature of irony in Plato. In order for there to be irony in this sense, the dialogues must have an audience that is capable of picking up a layer of meaning different to the one that is explicitly communicated. Plato communicates not by offering dogmatic instruction, but rather, through irony, he gives multiple possible answers and multiple ideas, such that his audience may engage in the activity of pursuing wisdom themselves. It is not, then, surprising that he ironically *says* that myth is not to be trusted, but *does* include mythical references in his dialogues. The inclusion of myth, a kind of narrative that operates on multiple levels of meaning, is very much in line with the way in which he undertakes his philosophical project of bringing people into the activity of philosophy.

6. Myth as Distancing

Sean Kirkland points out that for both Luc Brisson, and for Søren Kierkegaard, myth involves distance.[162] Kierkegaard sees myth as concerning that which is distanced by virtue of being placed outside the realm of human experience.[163] When the divine appears in myth, it does so in such a way that it cannot be grasped, its appearance to mortals is marked by its distance from them. The distance described is between possible human reality and impossible

[160] Ibid, p. 253.

[161] Klein, 'A Commentary on Plato's Meno', p. 6.

[162] Kirkland, 'Socrates contra scientam, pro fabula', p. 319.

[163] Ibid, p. 319.

fantasy.[164] The "supernatural", that which is beyond nature, then becomes a feature of this distancing. In this instance, the myth is distanced by being located in a different reality – one where gods and monsters exist. Conversely, Kirkland notes, under Brisson's definition, myth is a discourse about a beyond, about events that are distanced by their place in a distant time. The distance here is temporal; in this second instance, the myth is distanced from the audience by being located in a different time.[165] Nevertheless, it too involves a distancing from reality. While reality is challenged when it is brought into contact, through myth, with the fantastical, real life is also challenged when brought into contact with a different temporal reality. The experiences of historical figures are distanced by time and in this sense are unreal to us – their reality is a different reality to ours. This distancing from reality, either temporally or fantastically, creates a psychological distance. Psychological distance is created by inserting that which is ordinarily distant from reality – that is, the supernatural, the fantastical, the distant past – into the realm of human experience. That which is distant from the everyday, and by extension from the reader, is brought bizarrely into contact with the everyday, which has the effect of distancing the reader from her present experience; a psychological distance is created.

A psychological distance is created by the temporal or fantastical distancing. In a sense, the reader is distanced from herself. This is perhaps a strange thing to say. To illustrate this point, I will appeal to Edward Bullough's concept of psychical distance. He employs the concept of distance in relation to the aesthetic attitude: he describes 'psychical distance' as the orientation that allows both critical distance and affectivity when viewing art. He describes the novice sea-farer's first experience of fog at sea, an experience that is both objectionable and enjoyable. The fog silences and conceals. On the one hand, with both the senses of sight and hearing disadvantaged, the sailor begins to fear what he can neither see nor hear, he begins to fear the unknown.[166] His heightened emotional response engenders a change in his mental state. On the other hand, if he is able to distance himself from his fear, he may come to enjoy the separated elements of the experience, which, when compared to the practical disquiet, allows for psychical distance – in stepping out of his fear, the sailor becomes an observer to the elements of the experience. He is distanced from his practical concerns. Each element – the

[164] Ibid, p. 320.

[165] Ibid, p. 319.

[166] *Bullough, E. (1912).* '"Psychical Distance" as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle'. *British Journal of Psychology* vol. 5 (87), p. 758.

visual texture of the fog, the feel of the air, the appearance of the water and the atmosphere surrounding the seafarer on the deck of the ship – is accompanied by its own affective impression, of grotesqueness, smoothness, or remoteness.[167]

The sailor's discomfort in the fog at sea is precisely what allows for greater enjoyment of it; more than that, the sailor's psychical response, of conflicting discomfort and enjoyment, is a characteristic of the experience of the phenomenon of the fog at sea. The combination of restfulness and distress creates a feeling of ecstasy that contrasts with the unpleasantness of the experience of the fog at sea. The disparity allows for a change in perspective.[168] This distancing of oneself from one's practical concerns at sea in the fog is the same distancing required when engaging art. I argue that the sensation experienced when immersively engaged in myth – such that one is suspended from awareness of one's own reality, and buys into the fantastical logic of the myth – is a similar kind of distance. Instead of simply being distanced from one's practical concerns, one is distanced from the self. The self is distanced from the self, and it is this kind of distance that is an element of *aporia.* As I have argued, self-awareness is an element of *aporia.* This self-awareness is specifically related to one's awareness of one's own ignorance. Being distanced from the self, in the way that one is through mythical engagement, creates a similar orientation to the self-awareness that is the state of *aporia.* It is the distancing of the self from the self that is involved when engaging with myth. It is awareness of the self that is involved in *aporia,* an awareness that is a kind of distance from the self. These mental states are similar enough to each other that engagement with myth can put the audience in a mindset that is adjacent to that of *aporia*, and so make the audience more open to the experience of *aporia.*

In conclusion, these six models for understanding myth are each by themselves insufficient to adequately answer the question, "What is myth?" Each suffers from the problem of being either too specific – in each case, there are stories that we would wish to call myths that are excluded by the definitions offered – or too vague to be helpful. Nevertheless, they each offer something important to honing in on a definition of myth. The first three categories – the Ritual Theory of Myth, myth as involving the supernatural, and myth as origin stories, all, as I have noted, concern identifying myth as stories involving a certain kind of content or

[167] Ibid, p. 759.

[168] Ibid

structure. The first of these, the Ritual Theory of Myth, correlates myth with ritual. While this correlation is insufficient in that if myth precedes ritual, then we are still no closer to understanding what myth *is*, and if ritual precedes myth, then there must always be a ritual associated with a myth, which does not seem to be the case. Nevertheless, we do learn something of value when considering this definition of myth.

It is the first, penultimate, and last of the categories, namely: the Ritual Theory of Myth, the Functional Theory of Myth, and Myth as Distancing, which I think will be most useful for the purposes of my project. If a myth is a story that has multiple layers of meaning (as is communicated both by the Ritual Theory of Myth and in the Functional Theory of Myth) and that also has the effect of distancing the reader from herself, then we can easily see that Plato has turned these elements towards the effect of inducing *aporia* in his own myths, and has done so because *aporia* is important to his philosophical project. In the first case, he offers multiple, sometimes conflicting ideas, such that the argument becomes aporetic. In the second case, the distance from the self and the self-awareness this this affords is likewise conducive to *aporia*.

Platonic Myth

It seems that, largely, the methods for understanding Platonic myth fall within pre-existing frameworks for uderstanding myth in general. I have located some of these in the 'myth as speech' school of thought, but it seems that modern scholars of platonic myth understand Plato's myths more in terms of their function. The models for understanding myth that I have distinguished above all suffer from the problem of being either too vague or too specific. Either the definition is too non-specific to give us a helpful definition, or it is too specific, in which case there are stories that we would wish to call myths that are excluded by the definitions offered. This same problem is exacerbated in the case of applying these definitions to Platonic myth specifically.

In Chapter 4 I will use the myth of Er as an example of Platonic myth against which to test the application of the definitions offered. While I discuss the myth of Er in more detail in that chapter, I will briefly summarise the story here for the purpose of clarity. In the final chapter of the *Republic*, Socrates recounts the story, which he presents as fact, but which Plato has invented, of Er. Er is a young man who dies in a war, and journeys to the afterlife. There he sees souls who have performed good deeds going up into the heavens, and souls that have done wrong, descending into the underworld. There are also souls returning from their reward

above and their punishment below. With these returning souls he journeys for several days, until they arrive at a giant spindle, where the three Fates are apportioning fates to the souls that will soon be reborn. Through a system of lots, the souls choose from a selection of models of lives that have been laid before them. These models of lives dictate what sort of life they will lead; and what transgressions they will make, or what fortunes they will have. The choice of model that the souls make is of the utmost importance, because once they make their choice, they cannot change it, and whatever wrongs or rights they commit in that life will be punished when they die again. Er makes note of several souls and their choices. All the souls then drink water from the river of forgetfulness and go to sleep, and Er is returned to his life in order to recount what he has seen.

Platonic Myth: Myth as Speech

Glenn W. Most, in his paper Plato's Exoteric Myths, takes note of Louis Couturat and Robert Zaslavksy, who consider the presence of myth in Plato purely in terms of the word 'myth.' They each identify myth in Plato's dialogues wherever the text identifies a *muthos*.[169] Locating myth in the presence of a single word is a misleading over-simplification. For instance, Socrates only refers to the myth of Er as a *muthos* in the final lines of the *Republic*. Moreover Plato, as has been touched on in the discussion of irony, is a trickster, and he might call a story that is not a myth a *muthos*, or a story that is a myth will not be identified as such. Looking at form, A. Croiset identifies myth in Plato wherever there are extended uninterrupted speeches.[170] (Most considers this to be a necessary but insufficient feature of a Platonic myth, although he describes this necessary feature as monologue.[171]) An example of such is in the myth of Er. Again, this definition seems overly simple. As Most points out, the *Symposium* relates eight different speeches that meet this criterion, yet only two of them (those of Aristophanes and Diotima) relate content that we would want to call mythical.[172] Not all uninterrupted speeches will turn out to be myths, and not all Platonic myths are uninterrupted. Phaedrus' speech on the nature of love in the *Symposium* (178a6-180b9), for example, is both extended and uninterrupted, but it is not a myth. In the myth of Er, Socrates interrupts himself

[169] Most, G. W. (2012). 'Plato's Exoteric Myths'. In Collobert, C. et al (Eds.). *Plato and Myth*. Boston: Brill, p. 15.

[170] Most, 'Plato's Exoteric Myths', p. 15.

[171] Ibid, p. 16.

[172] Ibid, p. 15.

by switching between the reported speech of Er's journey, and his own commentary on it. Frutiger defines three essential characteristics of Platonic myth: symbolism, freedom of expression, and careful imprecision of thought, intentionally kept from being straightforward assertion.[173] He also sees these three characteristics as the source of the critical confusion endemic to interpretations of Plato's view of myth.[174] Thus, Couturat and Zaslavsky identify a myth with the word *muthos* in the text. Similarly, Croiset identifies myth wherever there are uninterrupted speeches. Neither of these definitions are helpful. The first tells us nothing of what a myth is like, and the second both incorrect and likewise uninformative. To say that a Platonic myth is an extended, uninterrupted speech is to say almost nothing about myth at all. Frutiger's definition is most helpful, though still vague. That myth involves symbolism is supported by the Functional Theory of Myth, which I have discussed. While it does not seem to me that there is a freedom of expression in Platonic myth that is not present elsewhere in the dialogue, this does seem to be a feature of Platonic writing in general. Likewise, if we interpret "imprecision of thought" to communicate something of the ambiguity and irony of Plato's writing, then this is a feature of both the dialogues and Platonic myth.

Partenie catalogues three different kinds of instances in which the word *muthos* is used in Plato's dialogues, which correspond to three main categories of myth in Plato: First, Plato uses the word '*muthos'* to refer to traditional Greek myth, either generally (for example in R. 350e3), or in particular (such as in R. 359d-360b, the myth of the ancestor of Gyges).[175] This corresponds to the first category of Platonic myth, namely traditional Greek myth that Plato may modify to some degree.[176] Second, the word *muthos* is used to refer to Plato's inventions, such as the myth of Er (R. 621b8): "And so, Glaucon, the [myth] was saved, as the saying is, and was not lost."[177] This usage corresponds to the second category of Platonic myth, those myths that Plato creates, but which involve elements of traditional myth, such as traditional

[173] Frutiger, (1930). *Les Mythes de Platon: Études Philosophique et Littéraire.* Paris: F. Alcan, p. 36.; "Symbolisme, liberté de l'exposé, imprécision prudente de la pensée volontairement maintenue en deçà de la franche affirmation, tels sont, à notre avis, les trois caractères essentiels des mythes platoniciens, telle est aussi la cause de la perplexité des critiques qui les interprètent."

[174] Frutiger, 'Les Mythes de Platon', p.36.

[175] Partenie, 'Introduction', p. 1.

[176] Ibid, p. 2.

[177] Ibid, p. 1.

mythical characters or images.[178] Third, the word *muthos* is sometimes used to refer to philosophical doctrines.[179] This kind of usage corresponds to the third Platonic myth: philosophical doctrines that Plato explicitly calls "myths", or "mythical."[180]

Glenn Most sets out eight discursive criteria for Platonic myth: first, Platonic myths are given as monologues.[181] This is true of the myth of Er, which constitutes seven pages of uninterrupted speech by Socrates. Second, Platonic myths are recounted by older to younger listeners.[182] This is not always the case: in the *Symposium*, Agathon and Aristophanes, both much younger than Socrates, recount myths concerning the nature of love. Third, Platonic myths depend on older oral sources.[183] It is certainly the case, notably with the myth of Er, that elements of traditional myths are used, but it would be a stretch to call it "dependent" on these older sources. Even absent traditional mythological references, the myth would remain intact, if less beautiful. Fourth, they are not verifiable.[184] This point seems to require that the truths found in myths be discoverable in their direct elements, as opposed to their secondary references. Fifth, the authority of the myth comes from tradition.[185] This does not seem plausible: Plato does refer to elements of traditional myths, and this seems to be in the interest of drawing his own myths into the body of mythology, but the ability of the myth to engage his audience comes from a number of elements, not least of which is the extent to which the myths are compelling. Sixth, Platonic myths have a stated intended affective effect.[186] Seventh, Platonic myths are not dialectic, but are instead narrated or set out as description.[187] Eighth, they either begin or end a philosophical discussion.[188] The seventh point is quite clearly incorrect, as in the case of the myth of Er, the myth closes Socrates' attempt to persuade his audience of the strength of his argument. As Kathryn Morgan has pointed out, they often seem

[178] Ibid, p. 2.

[179] Ibid, p. 1.

[180] Ibid p. 2.

[181] Most, 'Plato's Exoteric Myths', p. 16.

[182] Ibid, p. 16.

[183] Ibid, p. 17.

[184] Ibid, p. 17.

[185] Ibid, p. 18.

[186] Ibid, p. 18.

[187] Most, 'Plato's Exoteric Myths', p. 18.

[188] Ibid, pp. 18-19.

to serve some sort of philosophical purpose.[189] The other final two assertions, while not incorrect, nevertheless do not seem to capture elements vital to pinning down what precisely a Platonic myth consists in.

Both Most and Partenie have provided a catalogue of similarities between different Platonic myths, but their observations have still not provided a satisfactory definition. Some of Most's assertions are, as I have noted, incorrect, but more than this, they don't tell us anything helpful about Platonic myth. The same is true for Partenie, that the three categories offered do not tell us anything about what Platonic myths are like.

Platonic Myth: The Functional Theory of Myth

As discussed above, Burkert identifies the defining feature of a myth with its function: a myth is a traditional story with a secondary reference. Kathryn Morgan points out that this definition is insufficient for describing philosophical myth, as not all, or even most, of Plato's myths can be said to be traditional, although they often employ elements of traditional myth.[190] This dismissal seems to miss the point of Burkert's analysis. While the feature of belonging to a culture's literary heritage, its "tradition," is an important aspect of Burkert's definition of myth, it is equally important to his definition that a myth has a *secondary reference.* The myth of Er, while it contains references to traditional Greek myth, is nevertheless an invention of Plato's. In the sense of being his own creation, it is not a traditional story. Nevertheless, its having multiple secondary references, pointing to a meaning beyond the surface elements and sequence of events, is an important aspect of the myth, and indeed of the other myths of the *Republic*. I will discuss the complexity of meaning in the myth of Er in Chapter 4.

For Morgan, philosophical myth involves self-reflectively using literary devices, which she calls "mythological material" (that is, "story patterns (such as quest, *anabasis*, *katabasis*,), motifs, or narrative characters"). I include her work in this section because she identifies philosophical elements in Platonic myth, and as such, the secondary meaning in Plato's myths – specifically, their philosophical significance that Plato is trying to communicate, but which exists with the non-philosophical, literal narrative. An example of this is the myth of the ancestor of Gyges in *Republic* II (359d-360b1). The myth could be read as a story about a

[189] Morgan, 'Myth and Philosophy', p. 16.

[190] Ibid, p. 16

shepherd who uses a ring to gain power, but it has a secondary meaning in terms of its philosophical significance and interpretation with regards to justice.

These self-reflectively employed literary devices may involve elements of the supernatural, but more importantly, they step outside the accepted structures of philosophical reasoning, and often reveal discursive problems.[191] I am sympathetic to this view. These supernatural elements are seen, for example, in the myth of Er, and the presence in the myth of the Sirens. In the case of the myth of Er, Socrates offers the myth as a final argument in favour of his position that justice is necessarily better than injustice, and that the choice to live a just life is always better than choosing an unjust one. He appeals to discourse that is not straightforward philosophical reasoning to push forward his argument, and in doing so, reveals discursive problems both with the opposing view, and with his own. While it seems that the myth *does* show that the just life leads to the best afterlife, it also suggests that it is not the case that the making of this choice is possible for everyone. The lots that the souls choose determine how well they are able to pursue a philosophical life, that is, a life altered by justice, and this choice, far from being affected by their experiences above and below, is most influenced by what they had been accustomed to on earth. Socrates shows not just the problems with a view that does not always value justice over injustice, but also the discursive problems involved in his own position.

Morgan's analysis, while more nuanced than Burkert's, is not incongruent with his notion of the 'secondary reference.' In her view, philosophical myths subvert the characteristics of traditional myths. They have the characteristics of being literary, and they first come into existence as literary texts, as opposed to oral narratives. They are crafted in a philosophical setting for a specific philosophical purpose, and they are never separated by the text from the philosophical context that they serve.[192] These aspects are true for the myth of Er. The myth of Er subverts the characteristics of traditional myths: it makes use of traditional elements of myth while it itself does not belong to the tradition of Greek mythology. Far from being a tale about the capriciousness of the gods or the operatic tragedy of human life, as many Greek myths are, the myth's narrative endorses the life of philosophy even as its internal contradiction encourages philosophical cogitation. I agree with this view – Platonic myths serve the

[191] Morgan, 'Myth and Philosophy', p. 37.

[192] Ibid, p. 16.

philosophical discussion in which they are located. The myth of Er, while related orally in the dialogue, nevertheless belongs to a literary text. It is crafted in the setting of a philosophical dialogue for the purpose of promoting philosophical inquiry. Morgan elaborates,

> Philosophical tales are often newly invented because they have a point to make that does not fit into previous narrative formats, but most importantly because they must demonstrate how to employ myth correctly. That they are different is an implicit criticism of the tales told by the poets.[193]

Philosophical myths, unlike traditional myths, are subordinated to, and in tension with, philosophical discourse. Morgan sees philosophical discourse as aiming at objectivity and abstraction, while myth is subjective and can bring the reader back to specifics. Myth has elements of the poetic, from which philosophy distinguishes itself, and for this reason is unsettling – an unsettling that is useful to the philosopher.[194]

I do not find an analysis of Platonic myth that identifies myth with a certain kind of speech to be helpful. Such an analysis does not communicate what a myth is like, or offer a reason for myth's being of sufficient significance to Plato to be so frequently referenced in his work. However, I do think that Morgan's analysis – where the significance of literary device is read – is helpful. I am particularly in agreement with her observation that they allow for a different way of engaging with philosophical material. They create distance from the philosophical material. A problem for philosophers is the issue of locating mistakes in one's thinking. How does one root out false beliefs when the thought processes that seek out those beliefs are predicated on or informed by them? Distance, and the self-awareness that it enables, is thus crucially important.

Given these observations, I think that Platonic myth is a kind of narrative that uses fantastical devices – that is elements of the supernatural, or of events that are beyond belief - to induce distance, that at the same time offers multiple layers of meaning that are important to the philosophical action of the specific conversation or the broader dialogue in which the myth is located. Plato criticises myth in terms of its style in *Republic* III. Poets, such as Homer, present their stories as if they were being spoken by the characters in them (392e-393b3). The poet is thus an imitator, and his poem an imitation (393b8-d2). Images present themselves as

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[193] Morgan, 'Myth and Philosophy', p. 16.

[194] Ibid, p. 37.

being the things of which they are images. They thus obscure the truth. The specific problem that is being identified in this passage in *Republic* III is one of distance – the distance between the poet and the historical figure, between myth and fact, is closed. At the same time, as I point out in the section on myth as distancing, when the divine appears in myth, it does so in such a way that it cannot be grasped. The divine's appearance to mortals is marked by its distance from them. The distance described is between possible human reality and impossible fantasy:[195]

> In the divine's appearance there is also essentially a withdrawal into concealment. That is, with its appearance, there also appears a great *distance* between ourselves and the all-important, all-determining divinities, a *distance* that usually goes unacknowledged, but is always there…[Myth's] divine subject matter stands at an essential *distance* from mortal experience and understanding, but participates and appears there nonetheless. This term, *distance*…describes the phenomenon or the appearance of the divine for the Greeks in its essence. The divine appears *as what it is* when it withdraws, retains its obscurity, and, thereby, disallows a complete grasp by our human intelligence.[196]

This distancing, where the god's nature is beyond human understanding, and so is only knowable in its "distance," that is, in its withdrawal, is akin to the sensation of *aporia*. In a state of *aporia*, as Futter puts it, "the object not-known is incompletely grasped."[197] Myth is one means by which Plato can impel his audience towards philosophy. Myth induces *aporia,* or at least distance, which is a psychic state akin to *aporia,* and Platonic myth is designed to aid the philosophical discourse in which it is situated. The reason, then, for Plato's engagement with myth is because doing so aids his philosophical project. Myth brings about a state of *aporia*, and *aporia* is where philosophy begins. The following chapter will discuss the Myth of Er and its place in Plato's philosophical project.

Platonic Myth: Myth as Distancing

As I have discussed, the presence of fantastical elements in myth – whether in the form of supernatural beings or of realities too bizarre to fully comprehend – creates distance. This is especially true of Platonic myth, as we shall see in the discussion of the Myth of Er in Chapter 4. The distance is between possible human reality – the actual reality of the audience

[195] Kirkland, 'Socrates contra scientiam, pro fabula', p. 320.

[196] Ibid, p. 320.

[197] Futter, 'Socrates' Human Wisdom', p. 67.

– and impossible fantasy.[198] In the Allegory of the Cave, Plato describes people chained down, and complacent in their chains. While on one level, the secondary meaning of this has philosophical relevance, but on another, the situation he describes is so bizarre as to be difficult to imagine. This fantastical distancing creates a psychological distance. The audience is distanced from themselves. This is not unlike the disinterested attention illustrated by Bullough, but rather than being distanced from only the practical concerns of the self, the self is distanced from the self.

I am sympathetic to the view that myth carries secondary meaning. A feature of myth is that it communicates more than one layer of meaning. As I have noted, the same observation is true for Platonic irony. It is thus in line with Plato's writing style that his myths, like myths in general, carry multiple layers of meaning. As Morgan has observed, philosophical myths are the subordinates of philosophical discourse. Their narratives also carry ideas that are in line with the philosophical discussion in which the myth is related. In the case of the Allegory of the Cave, the myth is used to support Socrates' philosophical argument, and examination with the myth itself invites philosophical engagement. Thus, my position is that a Platonic myth is a story that has multiple layers of meaning, at least one of which is philosophically significant, and that it also has the effect of inducing distance.

[198] Kirkland, 'Socrates contra scientam, pro fabula', p. 320.

Chapter 4: The Myth of Er

Introduction

The Myth of Er is an invention of Plato's, though it utilizes elements of traditional Greek mythology, such as making reference to mythical figures like Odysseus and Ajax. The myth of Er constitutes the final discussion of the *Republic*. It is the conclusion to Plato's argument that justice is always better than injustice, and that it is always better for the individual to cultivate justice in herself, rather than taking material advantage of injustice in her life. The myth gives the account of Er, a young soldier who died in a war. His body, however, does not decay, and he comes back to life at his funeral. He recounts his experience in the afterlife: He first witnessed the judgment of souls who were newly deceased being sent up into the heavens or down below the earth, depending on whether they were judged to have done good or bad in their lives. He also witnessed souls returning from those places, with whom he journeyed to the spindle of Necessity. The spindle of Necessity is a giant, fantastical spindle where the three Fates weave the lives of those who are to be born. The souls must choose the life that they will lead when they are reborn. There are a number of "models of lives" from which they can choose, and the wise person will carefully examine each model, such that they choose the life that will allow them to do good (and ascend at their next death into the heavens), rather than do bad (and be sent down to be punished below the earth, as Er had witnessed when he first entered the afterlife).

This is the crux of the issue of choosing justice in life, regardless of the extrinsic good it might achieve: if one has cultivated justice in one's soul such that one can reason well and pursue wisdom, then one is likely to make a good choice of model of life in the afterlife. In this way, the soul can avoid the torment of punishment that comes with having done wrong, and can at the end of each life choose a model of life that enables them to cultivate justice in their soul. However, as I will discuss, it is not clear that the myth is ultimately optimistic with regards to the possibility of doing so. The myth offers the idea that in cultivating justice in the soul in life, the soul can be able to reason clearly such that when it is to be reborn, it can choose the best life for cultivating justice. In this way, the soul can continually cultivate justice and avoid harming itself such that it causes harm of some kind in life, which would invite punishment in the afterlife. At the same time, the myth casts doubt on this optimism, and seems to suggest the opposite: that punishment is not ultimately avoidable. Since suffering makes the soul less

just,[199] the oblique suggestion is that justice in the soul will ultimately, over time, deteriorate. These conflicting possibilities for justice in the soul create a contradiction, one which invites inquiry.

My aim in this chapter is to show that the Myth of Er, as an example of a Platonic myth, induces *aporia* in the reader. I will test the assertion I have made concerning the nature of Platonic myth – that a Platonic myth is a story that has multiple layers of meaning, at least one of which is philosophically significant, and that it also has the effect of inducing *aporia*. My assertions in Chapters 1 and 2 have been that Plato makes use of contradiction and double-meaning in his dialogues in order to induce *aporia* in his audience. He does this for specific philosophical reasons, namely, that being in a state of *aporia* is the correct mindset of the philosopher. Myth helps him to induce *aporia* in his audience. The reason, I think, that Plato uses myth as a means of inducing *aporia*, when he is so apt at doing so through philosophical discourse, is that it is easier for Plato to introduce the sensation of *aporia* using myth, than it is to do so entirely philosophically, when he is engaging an audience that might be unfamiliar with, or even antagonistic to, philosophy. Myth is a familiar kind of narrative to Plato's audience. The discomfort induced by the myth of Er is a familiar kind of discomfort that is experienced by an audience exposed to the monstrousness (to use Kirkland's language) of mythical narratives.[200] Plato utilizes this in inducing *aporia.* The myth is a philosophical myth because he references and augments the philosophical argument (that justice is always preferable to injustice) in the myth of Er. He turns the myth of Er into a tool of philosophy.

I have said here that Plato utilizes myth in addition to philosophical argumentation as a means of inducing *aporia* because 1) these myths are familiar to his audience in a way that philosophical engagement may not be, and 2) myths induce distance, which is an important aspect of *aporia*. How is it that something can be both *aporetic* and familiar? In Bullough's description of the fog at sea, he illustrates an orientation that allows for both distance (in the form of critique) and affectivity (in being emotionally affected by, and thus close to, the art object). Likewise, as I have discussed in Chapter 3, the artform that is dramatic theatre creates

[199] While the *Republic* does put forward the claim that the just soul does not suffer (329d, 353e), this is not true for the soul that is in the process of becoming just.

[200] The myth of Er is an invented myth, and thus not one known to Plato's audience. However, it contains mythical elements and traditional mythical figures, and so the familiarity applies.

distance between the audience and the drama.[201] The fog at sea can be a familiar experience for the sailor, and yet still induce psychical distance.[202] A story can be familiar to us, and yet still draw us in, such that we suspend our disbelief in the fantastical or improbable, and our emotions are affected. We can be so drawn in as to find ourselves uncomfortably caught, when we stop reading, between the fantastic reality that we have bought into and the actual reality in which we are reading. Likewise, myths and mythical elements could be familiar to Plato's audience and at the same time induce distance in them.

There are many instances where the myth, in different ways, induces *aporia* in the reader. Most notably, the myth ends in *aporia* (and thus so does the dialogue). The explicit conclusion of the myth is that it is only in cultivating the virtue of Justice in herself that the individual can be able to retain that justice in her soul in the afterlife, such that she can choose the best life in which to be reborn (621b4-d). As I have mentioned in Chapter 2, in the Book I discussion of virtue, it is argued that harm is detrimental to virtue. When a horse is beaten, it becomes worse at pursuing its function – it becomes less able to pursue the function of being a horse. Since virtue is a thing's excellence in functioning at being the thing that it is, harming a horse makes it less virtuous (335b4-8). The same is true for human beings. Harm to a person makes them less able to be virtuous. The human virtue is justice; when a person is harmed, they become less just (335b12-c5). As such, the punishment that souls who have behaved unjustly receive in the afterlife appears not to serve the purpose of *improving* justice in the soul. This is because the text has shown that such punishment must bring about further injustice in the soul, since harm to a thing makes that thing less virtuous, and human virtue is justice.

At the same time, the souls who come down from the heavens do not seem to necessarily make just decisions either – the soul that chooses the unjust life of a tyrant is one that has journeyed from the heavens (619b7-d2). Herein lies one of the aporetic aspects of the myth: it is not clear that living a life that avoids injustice really does preserve justice in the immortal soul, since neither an afterlife spent in reward nor one spent in punishment ensure that the soul chooses wisely before it is reborn. This contradiction is illustrated in the figure of

[201] Sedgewick (1948, p. 33) quoted in Futter, 'Variations in Philosophical Genre', p. 253.

[202] As I have discussed in Chapter 3, this psychical distance is intended to illustrate aesthetic distance, where the self is distanced from the self in terms of practical concerns, such that the art viewer can objectively view the art object. *Aporia* is analogous to this psychical distance. In a state of *aporia*, the self is distanced from the self in terms of having self-awareness.

Odysseus, who is presented as one of the last souls to choose a model life. He is described in this passage as a lover of honour, and yet his traditional mythical journey likens him more to a lover of wisdom. The traditional mythical figure of Odysseus is as Odysseus the cunning, who resolves the siege of Troy and in his constant journey towards (pursuit of) his wife, is a mythical philosopher. Here, the character is borrowed by Plato at the end of a dialogue that has argued that justice relies on wisdom. Odysseus is presented as making a good choice in choosing the model of life of a private citizen. He is presented as making this choice because he remembers how he suffered in life – suffering that should, following the observation made in Book I, make him less able to choose justice. Furthermore, the choice of the life of a private citizen is one that precludes philosophy. Philosophy is the activity in which the rational part of the soul comes to govern the whole, such that the soul is just. The good choice made by Odysseus cannot be a good choice after all. The text gestures both towards the possibility and the impossibility of preserving justice in the soul by making good choices in the afterlife. Moreover, as the end of the myth is also the end of the dialogue, we do not see the reactions of the interlocutors for whom Socrates tells the myth in an attempt to convince them of the intrinsic value of justice. It remains unclear if the myth has succeeded in convincing them, and so the question of the justice's intrinsic worth remains, ultimately, unresolved.

The Context of the Myth of Er in Book X

The final speech given by Socrates in *Republic* X relates the myth of Er (614b2-621d). It is given as Socrates' final argument in favour of his position that justice is necessarily better than injustice, and that the just life is always better than the unjust one. He has immediately before this speech argued that the just life is the best life to live, both due to the good that it brings (external good), and due to the fact that it is good in itself (intrinsic good). Book X begins with Socrates arguing that poetry is imitative, and that it distorts the truth (595a-608b8). Because the soul is immortal, the rewards that justice brings over the soul's whole existence are greater than the brief pleasure of poetry (607e3-608d1). Glaucon doubts that the soul is immortal (608d4-7). Socrates argues that it is by showing that the things that are bad for the body can destroy it, but that the things that are bad for the soul (such as injustice) can harm the soul, but cannot destroy it (608d8-611a10). Ultimately, as Stephen Halliwell points out, the dialogue ends before we witness Glaucon's reaction to it, and so it is uncertain whether or not

he is ultimately convinced by Socrates' argument.[203] In this way, the myth of Er ends in *aporia* because the confusion presented by Glaucon as to the soul's immortality and the eternal rewards brought to it by justice remains unresolved. There are other ways in which the myth ends in *aporia*, as I will discuss.

Socrates uses the myth of Er to argue that the just life also leads to the best afterlife, and the best life after the afterlife. He says that in quantity, the goods that the just man accrues while alive, are nothing in comparison to those that await him in the afterlife (614a3-4). "And these things must also be *heard*," says Socrates (emphasis mine), "if both are to receive in full what they are owed by the argument" (614a4-5). In phrasing the statement in this way – "must be heard" – Socrates is emphasising the importance of the discussion of the afterlife, and the rewards that await the just and the unjust. (Grube translates this as "prizes, wages, and gifts" (612e5).) This is another example of irony – the just will be rewarded by going up into the heavens, but the "prizes" that await the unjust are their punishments in the underworld; what they are owed in recompense for their deeds are not rewards in any positive sense. The stakes are so high here because the soul is immortal, and will continue to face punishment for its transgressions in perpetuity if it does not take pains to order itself justly.

The fact that Socrates begins the myth, then, with reference to *hearing*, an action that is grounded in the sensible experience of sound, is strange. Throughout the *Republic*, comparison is made between knowledge and sight: In Book II, Socrates compares his inability to answer Glaucon's argumentative challenge to short-sightedness (368c4-d6). In Book IV, Socrates speaks of "see[ing] whether by dealing with each part appropriately, we are making the whole…beautiful" (420d2-4); in Book V, Socrates asks Glaucon, "who are the true philosophers?" and he answers, "Those who love the sight of truth" (475e3-4). Thus, Socrates' reference to *hearing* as opposed to *seeing* is a doubly strange one; in this most important of discussions, he appeals to a sense that does not have these textual connections with knowledge. Phrasing his introduction to the myth in this way does three things, that I can see. First, it emphasises the importance of what is to follow – the discussion *must* be heard. Second, from this point onwards, the dialogue ceases to be a two-way conversation – while Socrates interrupts himself as narrator, he is not interrupted by any of his dialogic partners, and no one else speaks again. The dialogue becomes a one-way conversation from this point, and his

[203] Halliwell, 'The Life-and-Death Journey of the Soul', p. 471.

interlocutors become listeners entirely, as opposed to also speakers or argumentative sparring partners. Third, in issuing the instruction and then taking over the reins of the dialogue (in the sense that he now becomes the only speaker), Socrates becomes the authority (although he is telling the story of someone else's (Er's) experience). While he has consistently asserted that he is not an epistemic authority, that he respects the intellect of his interlocutors, and that he does not have knowledge that they do not possess, here he no longer wears the mantle of the fellow-learner. He alone knows the myth of Er, it rests on him to prove the point that justice is always better than injustice, and it is he alone that now speaks. It is typical of Plato that at a point in the dialogue that might otherwise have become tense as a result of this emphasised power dynamic, he also makes humorous reference to punishment as prizes and the ironic reminder, in emphasising hearing, of his and his interlocutors' position in the contradictory, sensible world even while they are engaged in the philosophical discussion of the fate of the immortal soul. There are, therefore, multiple layers of meaning, or a multiplicity of things being communicated at once, and the audience can experience both amusement and solemnity within the same sentence.

Remember that in Book I, Polemarchus offers the definition of justice that "it is just to give to each what is owed to him" (331e2). Socrates restates this first definition of justice ("…if both are to receive in full what they are owed by the argument"), which sets off the discussion of the *Republic*, right before he sets out his final support for the importance of justice, which he gives through the Myth of Er. This original definition of justice was abandoned because the interlocutors agreed that there were instances in which giving what is owed – such as returning weapons to a friend who has lost his reason (331c3-7) – is not just. However, now that Socrates has shown that justice is "doing one's own work – provided that it comes to be in a certain way" (433b3-4), we can see that the original definition was not far off the mark. Both definitions have to do with correct apportionment, the first concerning the correct apportioning of property, and the other concerning the correct apportioning of work. Polemarchus was on the right track, but his definition required deeper engagement, it required *further philosophical work*.[204] Plato's use of irony and contradiction to invite further engagement is thus illustrated

[204] In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates describes himself as a midwife, helping his interlocutors to give birth to their ideas (150b7-c1). Pierre Hadot makes the point in *What is Ancient Philosophy?* that the implication of this is that knowledge is within the soul, and the thinker discovers it once he has realized that what he thinks he knows is "empty." Reaching for knowledge is thus akin to remembering (p. 27). C.f. Socrates' argument in Book VI that philosophers are the best able to rule because they have a good memory (486c-d).

here. We see here that contradiction and the perplexity that it induces has been the beginning point of philosophical inquiry. He is making reference at this point in his telling of the myth of Er, to a mistake in reasoning made earlier in the dialogue. But it was not, it turns out, an outright mistake; it was a partial view of the correct answer. What was required to bring this out was further philosophical engagement. Not only this, but an interlocutor's discovering that he does not have knowledge where he thought he did is the experience of *aporia*, as I have discussed in Chapter 1. Polemarchus had a partial view where he took himself to have a complete view, and the incompleteness, once discovered, becomes a step in a long and philosophically fruitful discussion. *Aporia* is where philosophical engagement begins, and Socrates makes reference to this as he begins to relate the myth of Er.

Odysseus in the myth of Er

Glaucon encourages Socrates to tell the tale, saying that it would be one of the greatest pleasures.[205] Socrates begins the telling of the myth by saying that it is not of Alcinous that he will speak, but of the brave son of Armenias, named Er, who "once died in a war" (614b2-3). Reeve notes that Books 9, 10, & 11 of the Odyssey were called the "tales of Alcinous."[206] Odysseus – who in the Odyssey goes on an epic journey – later features in the myth of Er, the myth about Er's epic journey into the afterlife. As I have pointed out in Chapter 1, Pierre Hadot has shown the similarity between the philosopher and the personification of Love (Eros) as presented in the *Symposium*.[207] The philosopher in the Platonic context is not wise, but aware of her own ignorance. She pursues wisdom. Love is always of a lack; it involves moving towards (pursuing) what is not possessed. In the same way that we can draw parallels between Eros and the philosopher, we can draw parallels between Eros and Odysseus. Odysseus is known for his cunning. In Diotima's account of Eros, Metis (cunning) is the grandmother of Eros. Cunning is observed to be an important feature of love. In the myth, Eros could not exist had not his grandmother, Metis, existed. Likewise, the pursuit of wisdom requires cunning. To find a *poros* where no path is clearly visible, one must be cunning. Odysseus' journey home to

[205] C.f. pleasure of philosophy; leisure a requirement for philosophy.

[206] Reeve, C.D.C. in Plato. (1992). *Republic*. Grube, G.M.A. (Trans.). In Cooper, J.M. (Ed.). *Plato: Complete Works*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, note 11.

[207] Hadot, P. (2002). *What is Ancient Philosophy?* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, p. 41.

his wife takes as long as did the siege of Troy. He is separated for decades from the one that he desires. His journey home is an enactment of the pursuit of the object of one's desire, just as Socrates describes Eros in the *Symposium* as being in pursuit of that which he lacks (beauty, and wisdom, because wisdom is the most beautiful).

Just as Socrates' description of Eros is a description of the philosopher, Odysseus bears similarity to Eros. When Socrates says that, "[i]t isn't, however, a tale of Alcinous that I'll tell you but that of a brave Pamphylian man called Er," he is setting up the two figures, Er and Odysseus, together in our minds, in the same way that when one is told not to think of an elephant, one thinks of an elephant. Odysseus' appearance in the myth that describes the importance of the philosophical life cannot be coincidental, and neither can the comparison here between Odysseus, who journeyed home to his wife for ten years, and Er, who goes on a journey to the afterlife. Both these journeys involve an epic separation. Odysseus is separated from his wife by a temporal space of twenty years and a physical space of thousands of miles; Er is separated from the living when he travels to the afterlife. In this regard, both figures are comparable to Eros, as described in the *Symposium*, and in the same way to the philosopher. It is thus noteworthy that Odysseus is portrayed in the myth of Er as the last of the souls to choose a model of life. He takes his time in making the selection, and once he has, he declares that he would have made the same choice even if he had been the soul to choose first. Nevertheless, as I will discuss, his choice is perhaps not a good one.

Socrates the Narrator (614b2-8)

Socrates describes how ten days after Er died, the dead were collected. All the corpses were rotting, except for that of Er, who was "still quite fresh" (614b4-5). They brought him home, and he was prepared for cremation. Twelve days later, already on the funeral pyre, he awakened, and relayed all that he had seen in the afterlife. There is a connection in the *Republic* between wisdom and sight. The fact that Er is said to relay what he *saw* is the first instance in which the myth contradicts itself. Socrates' argument for the immortality of the soul is dependent on the fact that the soul is understood to be separable from the body, and Er leaves his body behind when he enters the afterlife. The fact that he apprehended the afterlife using physical senses thus presents a conundrum. How is it that the soul when absent from its body engages the afterlife using embodied senses?

In order to engage this question, I will make reference to the fact that in addition to the examples given above, in the Allegory of the Cave, the Good is compared to the sun, in that it is what allows everything else in the intelligible world to *be* intelligible; all the things outside the cave are only visible because the light of the sun makes them so (516b). Gyges' ring, which Glaucon describes as the tool by which one can pursue injustice with impunity, does so by fooling the sense of sight. In Glaucon's story, injustice is facilitated through invisibility – through tricking the sight of others (359d-360b1). That wisdom is described as a kind of sight, and injustice is pursuable when the sight of others is fooled, makes sense when we consider the role that reason plays in enabling justice in the soul. As I have discussed in Chapter 2, the just soul is one ordered by reason. The soul that is engaged in the activity of philosophy is the soul that is training the reasoning part of the soul; the soul in pursuit of wisdom is best able to cultivate justice in itself. Thus, for the pursuit of wisdom to be interrupted is for the cultivation of justice to be undermined. When the ring of the ancestor of Gyges fools the sense that is likened to knowledge and wisdom (that is, the sense of sight), it at the same time enables the pursuit of injustice. This coheres given the connections we can observe between sight and wisdom, and between wisdom and justice. The reference, then, to Er's relating what he has seen makes textual sense given these observations. Thus, while it is contradictory for Er to have *seen* anything in the afterlife, it is also thematically consistent. We are thus presented with Er's *having seen* as being both impossible and textually consistent. This suggests that while the reference to Er's navigating the afterlife using his senses is contradictory, it is also not an authorial error.

The rest of the myth is a retelling of Er's experience in the afterlife. Remember that the entire dialogue of the *Republic* is related by Socrates the day after the conversations that make up the dialogue took place. The myth of Er is thus Socrates' retelling of the conversation of the day before, where he related the story of Er's experience.[208] The myth is thus the reported speech of a reported speech; it is twice removed from the source material. As H.S. Thayer points out, as Socrates is both the central character and the narrator of the *Republic*, the dialogue is self-referential.[209] This is unsurprising if we take seriously that Platonic philosophy is fundamentally concerned with the care of the soul: the self is often both the inquirer and the

[208] Thayer, H.S. (1988). 'The Myth of Er'. *History of Philosophy Quarterly* vol. 5 (4), p. 369.

[209] Ibid, p. 369.

object of inquiry. Even in a definitional dialogue such as the *Republic*, which overtly seeks to answer the question, "What is Justice?", the question is often more precisely, "What are the limits of my understanding of Justice?" Thus, the interrogation of Thrasymachus' definition of Justice in Book I is both a journey in an earnest quest to uncover whether his definition is without contradiction, and thus satisfactory (that is, it is an earnest effort to answer the question, "What is Justice?"), and simultaneously an exploration of the limits to Thrasymachus' own understanding. This partly explains his angry outburst at the end of the chapter: Thrasymachus finds that it is not only Justice, but also himself, that has been under investigation, and so the failure of his definition feels like a personal attack (336b3-5).

Socrates' position as both narrator and character within the narration points to the centrality of the philosopher within Platonic philosophy: the philosopher is not a removed, objective observer of the object under discussion, but is herself always also under investigation. It is through this activity of inquiry and self-inquiry that the philosopher is able to care for her soul. What, then, does Er's removal from the myth of Er communicate? By "removal" I mean that his story is reported by Socrates to his interlocutors and then reported by Socrates to the audience of the *Republic*. Er's telling of his own story is thus retold twice over; his voice is twice removed.

There are two possible reasons for this, that I can see. First, myths are legitimized within their cultures in the process of being related multiple times, over multiple generations. As both Claude Lévi-Strauss[210] and Joseph Fontenrose[211] observe, myths are usually orally related. The myth of Er likewise is presented as being orated by Socrates to his interlocutors. Because myths are orally related, it is also a feature of theirs that they must be told over and over again; if they cease being told, they are forgotten, and then they cease to be. As such, in giving the myth of Er a history of retelling, Plato is making it more myth-like. He is legitimizing it as a myth.

Second, this process of retelling offers support for what is said in the sense that Socrates the philosopher has heard it and found it to be valuable, and so have his interlocutors of the previous day. Ancient Greek myths had the dual, conflicting cultural context of being understood to be inspired by the Muses (themselves supernatural, mythical figures), and being related in such a way as to seem like they were statements of fact (an aspect of them that is the

[210] Levi-Strauss, 'The Structural Study of Myth', pp. 430; 443.

[211] Fontenrose, 'The Ritual Theory of Myth', p. 54.

source of Socrates' criticism of myth). They were thus presented as being both grounded in supernatural inspiration and in historical factuality. Both sides of this conflict have the effect of conferring believability onto them. As stories inspired by goddesses, they have the endorsement of all-seeing, all-knowing deities, and as stories presented as concerning history, they are presented as having a basis in fact. In presenting the myth of Er as a myth, Socrates is couching it in a narrative tradition that confers credibility on the stories that fall under it. The myth of Er is fundamentally about the importance of choosing the best possible life such that one can care for the soul. The stated purpose of the myth is to persuade us of this fact. In presenting the myth as having multiple tellings and multiple audiences, it is silently endorsed by its previous (absent) audience. Socrates is thus utilising the very aspect of myth that he has explicitly criticised. In Book III, he points to the imitative aspect of poetry. The example he uses is that in the *Iliad*, the poet (Homer) speaks as if he himself were the characters in the *Iliad*. The poet imitates them (392d7-394c). In Book X, it is this imitation that leads Socrates to denounce poetry (and the myths that it relates). This is because poetic imitations are three times removed from the truth – they are imitations of things in the sensible world, which is itself an imitation of the truth. The example that Socrates gives is of a painting of a couch: the painting is the imitation of a physical couch, which itself is an imitation of the true couch, the form of the couch (596b-597b13). Poetry is likewise an imitation of an imitation of the truth (598e-599a). Socrates, is presenting the myth of Er as if it is a story of something that actually took place, and in doing so, Socrates becomes an imitator like the poets that he distrusts. What enables Socrates to do so without hypocrisy?

He has argued in Book II that poetry is permissible when it is supervised by philosophers (377b7-c4). He has also said in Book X that only poetry that praises goodness is permissible (607a2-4).[212] As a philosopher who is constructing a myth in praise of justice, he meets both of these requirements in his narration of the myth of Er. This explains the frequent and somewhat clumsy instances of reported speech in the myth – in setting the story out as a reported speech of a reported speech, Socrates is not doing what he has criticised Homer for doing in failing to distinguish between his voice and the voice of the figures in his story. The frequent reported speech is jarring, it brings us out of the story and reminds us that it *is* a story.

[212] His exact words are, "hymns to the gods and eulogies to good people." What these have in common is that they present what is actually good as being good. This is precisely the kind of story – that does not present what is bad as being good – that Socrates and Adeimantus agree in Book II are permissible (378d).

In removing himself from the narration by pointing out that it is a story, Socrates is removing himself from the myth, rather than placing himself in it. Thus, while the myth of Er is guilty of imitation in that it presents itself as narrating something that actually happened (Er "once died in a war"), it nevertheless, in interrupting the flow of the story through reported speech, continuously points to itself as being an imitation. The imitation is not disguised.

The Judgment of Souls (614b8-616a)

When Er's soul left his body, it journeyed with other souls to a "marvellous" place (614c1), which is also described as a meadow (614e2). They arrived at two apertures in the earth, side by side, and opposite them in the heavens, two others, and between the openings in the earth and in the heavens, sat judges. The judges decided which of the souls were just and which were unjust. If justice is the appropriate ordering of the parts of the whole, and souls are judged based on whether or not they are just, then the ordering of souls into those that are punished and those that are rewarded is based on how well-ordered the souls themselves are. The judges apportion punishment or reward, that is, they put in order both the souls and the recompense for past actions, based on the justice of the souls that they are judging.

The just went upward through the door on the right, to the heavens, with "the signs" of their judgment displayed on their chests, and the unjust went down through the door on the left, with their deeds displayed on their backs (614c4-d1). This means that the signs of the judgment of the souls going up are viewed by those in front of them – they are moving towards the viewer, while the signs of the judgment of the souls going down are to be viewed by those behind – moving away from the viewer. The reader of the signs is thus above both the place below, and the apertures. The viewer is in the heavens. Since Tartarus is described as being below even the place below the earth, the heavens are the furthest away from it. Tartarus is the place of primordial chaos. The souls that have done justly in life such that they are rewarded with entry into the heavens are given entry to the place furthest from chaos. Chaos, that which is utterly disordered, is the conceptual opposite of justice. The reward for just souls is separation from chaos.

When it was Er's turn, he was told that it was his task to report back to humankind on everything that he had *heard* and *seen* (emphasis my own) in that place (614d3). I will point out that again the sense of vision and hearing are referenced. On the one hand, Socrates is

relating a myth about the ultimate safety of the immortal, unembodied soul, and on the other, he relates this myth with frequent reference to embodied sensations. Er is presented as hearing and seeing the things of which he tells, but in the afterlife, he was a disembodied soul, and so should not be relating these experiences in terms of embodied sensations. The reference to the activity of hearing situates the myth in relation to its narrative context – it being a myth means that it must be told, and heard. The reference to the activity of sight is a reminder of the philosophical context of the myth, since knowledge, as I have observed, is frequently associated with sight.

Souls left, after being judged, through one of the holes in the earth, and one in the heavens, while souls entered through the remaining two. Souls arriving from the door in the earth were dirty, while those arriving from the door in the heavens were clean. Those souls that were entering went gaily to the meadow, as if they were attending a festival. It seemed to Er that they were arriving from long journeys; souls that had met before greeted each other. Souls who had come up from the earth asked those who had come down about the heavens, and were themselves asked about the place from which they had come. Those who had come up from the earth wept while they recounted all they had seen and endured on their journey, which had taken a thousand years. Those souls who had come down from the heavens recounted their prosperity, and "the inconceivably fine and beautiful sights they had *seen*" (emphasis my own) (615e3-5).

Socrates tells Glaucon that there was a great deal for the souls to relay, but that most importantly, every just deed, and every unjust one, was punished, or rewarded, tenfold, "once in every century of their journey". Socrates says each soul was punished ten times over for the injustices they committed. Socrates recounts that Er gave the example of Ardiaius, whom another person asked someone else about. Socrates gives as an aside that Ardiaius was "*said* to be" (615c5), one thousand years previously, tyrant of a city in Pamphylia. (Note, again, the frequent, jarring reported speech!) He murdered his father and brothers, and "committed many other impious deeds as well" (615c7). Socrates says that Er said that the person who answered the inquiry about Ardiaius said that Ardiaius would never return to the meadow; his punishment was one of the terrible things that the souls that journeyed beneath the earth saw. As they came to the end of their journey, and their punishments were ended, they saw him, and other tyrants, and a few private citizens who had "committed great crimes" (615d6). Socrates then tells that Er recounted their terrible suffering – thinking that they had paid their penance, these greatly unjust people tried to exit through the opening above, but as they did, it "roared" (615e2) – as

it did whenever anyone who had not sufficiently paid their penance tried to leave – and savage men, "fiery to look at" (615e4), hearing the roar, took hold of them and pulled them away, binding their feet, hands, and heads, throwing them down, and flaying them. They were then dragged away, through thorn bushes. Onlookers were told that they are to be taken to Tartarus. The man relates that everyone's greatest fear was that the opening would roar and not permit their exit, and that they were greatly relieved when it let them through.

The amount of reported speech at this point of the myth is so abundant as to be noteworthy. If we take Thayer's observations on the self-referential nature of philosophy that is communicated through the use of reported speech in the myth of Er, then perhaps we should consider the clumsy relay of speech here to have significance too. Ardiaius is not present here. He does not speak for himself. Presumably, his soul is at this point languishing in the chaos of Tartarus, that place that is (as Kofman describes it[213]) unnavigable. His crimes are so unspeakable as to render him voiceless. The hopelessness of the ultimate improbability of the soul escaping punishment through philosophy, as I will discuss later in this chapter, is reflected here in the hopelessness of Ardiaius's suffering. It seems that his crimes were so great as to keep him in the underworld for longer than he predicted, and his hubris in trying to escape before his allotted punishment was up, sentenced him to chaos – the complete disordering that is the antithesis of Justice. We do not hear from him, we only hear from someone who heard from someone who heard from someone who heard of his fate. His crime and his punishment are so terrible as to four times remove him from the action of the myth, which itself is a reported story. His distance from the audience (listening ostensibly for the purpose of learning the importance of ordering their souls) and the extent of his punishment suggest the impossibility of his soul ever emerging from the underworld, of it ever even achieving the opportunity to pursue justice. In chaos, he cannot hope to learn to order his soul such that he does not cause harm as he did in his previous life. The hopelessness of his situation is mirrored by the implication at the end of the myth that the possibility of ever entirely escaping injustice and the punishment that goes with it is slim.

[213] Kofman, 'Beyond Aporia?' p. 10.

Journey to the Spindle of Necessity (616b-617d1)

Both groups, those who had entered from heaven, and those who had entered from below, spent a week at the meadow. On the eighth day, the souls again began to travel (they do not appear to have been told whereto). On the fourth day of their travels, they come to a column of light, brighter and purer than, although alike to, a rainbow. It stretched over "the whole of" heaven and earth (616b5), and they looked down on it from overhead. After another day of journeying, they came to the centre of the light itself. In the middle of the light, they saw the limits of its bindings extending from the heavens, which encircled them like the cables that secure a trireme, holding together its whole rotation. From the furthest limits the spindle of Necessity was suspended, and it was with this spindle that the rotations revolve.

Its stem and hook were made of adamant, while the whorl was made from a mixture of adamant and other types of materials. The whorl was shaped like any other, except that it had, according to Er, an exceptional structure, as if a great whorl had been hollowed out, and a smaller whorl fitted narrowly into it, and a third inside that, and so on, so that there were eight whorls altogether, one inside the next. Viewed from above, their rims looked like circles, while viewed from behind, they created a single interminable whorl around the spindle that went through the centre of the eighth and final whorl. This description is so complex as to be unfathomable. The everyday object of the spindle is rendered fantastical, and inapprehensible. Even the image of the spindle of Necessity induces *aporia.*

Er then described the sizes and colours of the whorls within whorls. The outermost whorl – the first – had the widest rim. Then, in order of greatest to least width, came the sixth, fourth, eighth, seventh, fifth, third, and finally, second whorls. The largest whorl, the first, was spangled. The seventh – the middle-sized whorl – was the brightest. The eighth whorl was coloured by the light of the seventh whorl shining on it. The second and fifth whorls – the third-thinnest and thinnest – were more yellow in colour than the others, and equal in brightness to each other. The fourth whorl was red, the third and sixth whorls were whitest and second-whitest respectively. The spindle as a unity revolved at the same speed, but the inner circles "gently" turned in the opposite direction to the whole (617a5). The innermost sphere, the eighth, turned the fastest; the seventh, sixth, and fifth spheres turned at a pace equal to one another, second in speed only to the eighth. Then came in order of decreasing speed, the fourth, third, and then second. The spindle spun in the lap of Necessity. Above the rims of each of the whorls stood a Siren, who turned as it turned, and sang a single note. Together the "concord"

of the eight notes created a harmony. Again, it is difficult to conceive of eight continuous notes creating a harmony.

This very long description of a complicated image is, I suggest, a means by which an element of the fantastical is inserted into the myth. The image is so bizarre as to be almost beyond imagining. There is a great amount of detail given that is not matched by a clarity of the image that the detail describes. At the very least, the whorls within whorls seem like a hindrance to the proper functioning of a spindle. The image of the instrument of the spinner is a reminder of the three fates, who spin the destinies of souls. These supernatural beings, figures in ancient Greek myth, are rendered here by Plato even more strange and fantastical than they are in traditional myth. Even an ancient Greek audience would have found this version of the spindle of the Fates to be bizarre. Plato is playing with the familiar monstrosity[214] in the form of the Fates, and the unfamiliarly mundane, in the form of the everyday instrument (the spindle) that he has in his description rendered fantastical.

On three thrones, equidistant from each other were the three fates, the daughters of Necessity: Lachesis, Clotho, and Atropos. They were clothed in white, and wore garlands on their heads, and sang with the harmony of the Sirens. This description of the Fates reminds us of the description of the inhabitants of the city of pigs described in Book I, the city before art and luxury is introduced to it, whose inhabitants are "crowned with wreaths, [they will] hymn the gods" (372b5-6). Lachesis (the apportioner)[215] sang of the past, Clotho (the spinner)[216] of the present, and Atropos (the inflexible)[217] sang of the future. With her right hand, Clotho (who sang of the present) helped the spindle revolve, touching its outer circumference. Every so often she left off doing this. Atropos (who sang of the future) likewise helped the inner ones to turn, while Lachesis (who sang of the past), with a hand on each, aided in the turning of both.

The Choosing of Life After the Afterlife (617d2-621d)

Arriving at the light, the souls immediately came before Lachesis. They were arranged in order by a Speaker, who took from Lachesis' lap lots and "models of lives" (617d4). The

[214] (to use Kirkland's words); Kirkland, 'Socrates contra scientiam, pro fabula'.

[215] Landwehr, M. (1992). 'Balancing Scales of Justice: Chance, Fate, and Symmetry in Kleist's Novellas'. *Colloquia Germanica* vol. 25 (3), p. 256.

[216] Ibid, p. 256.

[217] Ibid, p. 256.

Speaker then stood on a pulpit, and addressed the souls, relaying a "message" from Lachesis (617d5), whom he calls "the maiden daughter of Necessity" (617d6). Lachesis' message that she sent to the "Ephemeral" souls was that they are about to enter a new "cycle" that too will conclude with death (617d6-7). She said that each would choose their daimon, or guardian spirit, it would not be allocated by lot.

The lots would decide in what order the souls were to choose the life to which they would be "bound by necessity" (617e1-2). She said that "Virtue knows no master" (617e2). In the opening scene of the *Republic*, Polemarchus sends his slave to ask Socrates and his party to wait for him. "Well, you must either prove stronger than we are, or you will have to stay here… But could you persuade us if we won't listen?" (327c8-12). If virtue knows no master, but the *Republic* begins with Polemarchus exerting his dominance over Socrates and his friends, then the improbability of the soul becoming completely just throughout its eternal life has been foreshadowed. The dialogue is focused on the virtue of justice, yet it begins with Polemarchus forcing Socrates and his friends to do as Polemarchus wants, as if he were their master. If virtue really does know no master, then virtue will elude Polemarchus and his reluctant guests.

She goes on to say that those who valued virtue would have more of it, and those who do not, would have less. As I interpret this, it suggests that the correct apportionment of virtue is determined by how well it is valued. Justice in the case of virtue, she is saying, is determined by virtue's value to the individual soul. In some sense this is congruent with the description of virtue as has been discussed in Chapter 2: cultivating a virtue in the soul, such as justice, is an ongoing endeavour. Indeed, justice in the soul is predicated on constant activity in the soul. This will only happen in a soul motivated to be just. Such a motivation would only be present where the soul considers virtue to have value. In another sense, however, her words here are cruel. Souls that choose badly are doomed to commit crimes in their future lives that render the soul more unjust. This ultimately creates a cycle of injustice, such that a soul that has in the past been unjust will not now be able value virtue, and will choose a less virtuous life, and will become even more unjust. An error made once in the choosing of a life has exponentially deleterious effects on the soul. This is in line with the gravity that Socrates imparts on the conversation (621c-d). The eternal fate of the soul is at stake.

She says that it is the choice of the soul whether they would be virtuous or not; the god did not decide. Having relayed this message, the Speaker threw the lots, and they – all but Er,

who was prohibited from drawing one – selected one that fell near him. Already, there seems a limit to how much choice souls really have. The choosing of lots offers the appearance of fairness. In Oliver Twist, the boys use lots to choose who must undertake the unenviable task of asking for more food, because this is a means of fairly making the selection. Yet the system of using lots here, to assign the order in which lives are chosen, seems to be in actuality unfair. If it is chance that lands lots in a soul's vicinity, limiting which lots she can select, and the lots determine the order in which models of lives can be chosen, then chance has a hand to play in the quality of models of lives that the souls can choose from. It is not only bad choices that can disadvantage a soul's future virtue, but luck as well. If there are only so many good options, and a person's position in the order assigned by lots means that all of those options have already been selected, then this seemingly fair system has unfairly condemned the soul to injustice. The entire system turns out to be flawed – why limit the number of good lives? Why give souls the options of choosing lives wherein they are doomed to make unjust choices and incapable of improving the virtue of their souls at all? As with the punishment of souls having no positive purpose for the soul, offering the option of living the life of a tyrant can have no possible positive purpose either. It is clearly not up to the choice of the soul whether they are virtuous or not. There are many other factors also at play. What is explicitly stated to be simple, is in fact complex. This contradiction is precisely the kind of contradiction that induces *aporia* and invites contemplation. A surface reading of the text leaves us with the impression that it is the case that the virtue of the soul is up to the soul – this is what is explicitly stated. However, when we consider the implications of what is laid out – the implication of assigning the order of choice by lot, and assigning lot by chance; the implication of punishment for the soul; the implication of one bad choice – it is clearly not the case that the virtue of the soul is up to the soul. Even if we allow that in a cosmic system where supernatural beings have such powers, it is possible that the problem of finite options does not apply – that is, that there are in fact options for everyone – it is still the case that the grave outcome for the soul is at least partly dependent on chance. Cogitating on these contradictions and trying to make sense of them invites the activity of reasoning, which is precisely the activity that will enable the soul to cultivate justice within itself. The *aporia* induced by the myth is good for the soul.

Having selected their lot, each soul was assigned their place in the order in which to choose. Then the "models of lives" were laid out on the ground in front of them (617e9). The number of models of lives exceeded the number of souls present. There were many different kinds of lives: those of famous men, famed for their physical beauty, famed for their physical

strength or athletic abilities. There were those famed for their family's nobility, and the great virtue of their ancestors. There were some famous for none of these things; the same went for the lives of women. The life a soul chooses inevitably changes it, and so the soul's arrangement was not included in the models of lives. That is, the relationship within the soul between its parts is not determined by the model of life, but by the nature of the soul before it is reborn. The justice in the soul – the relative arrangement of reason to the other parts – is not determined by the life the soul chooses, but by the justice already in the soul. "All the other things" were included, however, mixed with each other, as well as with wealth and poverty, sickness and health, and all the states in between.

Socrates tells Glaucon that it seems to him that it is in choosing one's life that the soul is in the gravest danger. Thus, of the greatest concern for everyone during life should be pursuing those subjects that enable the detection of the difference between the good life and the bad life.[218] All other subjects may be neglected. One should always make the attempt to actively make the "best choice possible in every situation." Socrates says that all the things that have so far been discussed (in their conversations together?) should be considered, and how both together and separately they decide what constitutes the virtuous life. Thus will it become apparent what effects, whether beneficial or detrimental, beauty will have when combined with riches, or hardship, and the state of the soul. The effects of noble or humble status, private life or public office, physical prowess, or its lack, great effort or little struggle in scholarship, will become known, as well as which aspects of the soul are natural and which are acquired, as will what all these things will accomplish when they are combined. And using this understanding, it will become possible to determine, taking into account the nature of the soul, which life is better and which is worse and thus to make a good choice, deciding that a life is worse when it prompts the soul's becoming unjust, and better when it allows the soul to become just, and not taking into consideration anything else. Socrates says that "we have seen" (618e2) that this is the best way to make one's choice, whether during our lives or after them. Thus, he says, we must enter the underworld holding strongly the belief that this is the best way to make choices, otherwise we might be dazzled by evils such as wealth, and hastily choose the life of the tyrant or something similarly detrimental, commit terrible wrongs, and experience even more terrible

[218] Socrates pauses in relating the Myth in order to comment on it (Thayer, 'The Myth of Er', p. 370).

ones. Further, he says, that we be guided by reason in ordering our souls, such that we avoid excess and are able to make good choices. This is how a human being lives the happiest life.

Socrates relates that Er then reported that the Speaker said that even for the soul that chooses last, there is a choice-worthy life, as opposed to an objectionable one, as long as the soul makes a rational choice, and lives that life carefully. This means that neither should the first choose recklessly, nor should the last despair. Er reported that once the Speaker had said this, the first soul to choose came up and selected a terrible tyranny. Foolishly and greedily, he failed to scrutinize the life he chose, and didn't see that, along with other terrible things, he was doomed to devour his own children as part of it. When, at his leisure, he did carefully study the life he had chosen, he lamented his choice. And failing to heed the Speaker's counsel, he held fate, and spirits, and everything but himself, accountable for his bad choice. He was among the souls that had journeyed from heaven. He had lived a life punctiliously structured, taking part in virtue through habit rather than philosophy. Mostly, the majority of the souls who made such choices were those that had come from heaven, and so were unfamiliar with suffering. Those, however, that had journeyed up from beneath the earth, who had both seen others suffer, and themselves had suffered, did not hastily make their choices.[219] This is perplexing, given the observations we have made about what harm does to virtue. If beating a horse makes it worse at being a horse, then surely punishing a soul for a thousand years makes it worse at being virtuous? It is a contradiction, that a soul that came from the heavens should make a bad choice, and the souls that come from below should make careful choices, since given what the text has said about cultivating virtue, these should be the other way around. Again, the myth leads us into *aporia.* It seems that a life that is rewarded in the afterlife will ultimately choose badly, and choose a life that will be punished in the next afterlife. The possibility of a soul's escaping punishment is brought into doubt.

Must we then doubt that suffering is bad for the soul? I think not. In his description in Book VIII of how the tyrant comes to be, Socrates describes deterioration of justice in the souls of citizens because the son of the aristocrat is the timocrat, whose reason is overpowered by the spirited part of his soul (548e-549a5). He is harsh to his slaves, but good to his peers and respectful to his superiors (548ee-549a2). Just as the good city begins to devolve because the

[219] C.f. Socrates pointing out that beating a horse makes it worse at being a horse. Here, the souls that have suffered seem to make better choices?

parts of the whole begin to be disordered (545b-547b), the good citizen begins his descent into tyranny because the reasoning part of his soul ceases to order the soul. Once the deterioration has begun, each successive generation produces citizens who are less and less just, until the son of the democratic soul who is always hungry for freedom (which he mistakes for the good) (562b12), is the tyrant. The deterioration of the soul into tyranny comes about because what is not the good is taken to be the good. The timocrat is the son of the aristocrat, the oligarch is the sone of the timocrat. The democrat is the son of the oligarch, and finally, the tyrant is the son of the democrat. At each step in the increase of injustice in the citizen, the society in which they find themselves is inconducive to justice being improved in their souls. The timocrat cannot see the value in responding peaceably to provocations and being uninterested in wealth (549c9-d5). A society of timocrats is a militarized one (349a). The son of the timocrat sees the sacrifice made by his honour-loving father, and values money instead of honour (553a7-c2). The rational and spirited parts of his soul become subordinate to the appetitive part (553c7-d6). The city of oligarchs creates such economic inequity that the oligarchs are overthrown by those in poverty (556c6-e). The democratic city that follows the oligarchic one values freedom (557a-b). The democrat, like his father, allows the appetitive part of his soul to rule, but instead of pursuing and hoarding wealth like his miserly father, he pursues pleasure (559d6-e2). In each instance, the society in which the individual finds themself is harmful to them. The timocratic city is militarised, the oligarchic city is concerned with wealth above everything else, and so on. The souls of the citizens are harmed by the society in which they find themselves, which do not value reason, and do not encourage the cultivation of reason in the soul. This harm to the soul *does* make it less virtuous. This discussion in Book VIII seems to obliquely land on the side of harm being for the virtue of the soul. We cannot escape the contradiction by discarding the observation made about harm and virtue in Book I.

Socrates goes on to relate how, since the souls coming from either punishment or reward made different choices, as well as because they drew lots to decide the order of their choices, there were both goods and evils present in the lives that were chosen. Despite this, says Socrates, should a person reasonably pursue philosophy when he begins his life, and if he is not the last to make his choice, then, as Er had recounted, it seems that he will be able to be happy, and that his journey to the afterlife and back again will not be along the uneven underground path, but the even heavenly one. Again, there is at this point in the myth an explicit contradiction concerning how we are to understand the effect that the order of choosing has on

the fate of the soul. The Speaker has just said that the last to choose must not despair, but here Socrates implies that choosing last does disadvantage the soul.

Socrates relates that Er had said that the sight of the souls choosing their lives was worth seeing, because it was wretched, amusing, and astonishing: generally, the souls' choices were determined by their previous lives – Er saw the soul that had once been Orpheus choose the life of a swan, because, due to the nature of his death, he had grown to hate females, and did not wish to be borne by one. Socrates relates how Er saw the soul of Thamyris, the poet who lost his voice to hubris, and who chose to become a nightingale; he saw a swan, and other musical animals, choosing human lives. The twentieth soul, the soul of Ajax, chose to become a lion. Remembering the judgment about armor, having been driven mad by the injustice of being denied the inheritance of Achilles' armor, he did not wish to be human. Given the text's definition of justice, this means that his having suffered this injustice makes him disinclined to seek the life that can pursue justice. After Ajax came the soul of Agamemnon, who chose the life of an eagle, his sufferings having made him detest humankind. Atalanta's turn to choose came near the middle. She saw the distinctions given to a male athlete, and being unable to let them go, chose his life. Next, Er saw the soul of Epeius, who aided in the construction of the Trojan horse, choose the life of a craftswoman. One of the last souls was that of "the ridiculous" Thersites (620c1-2), the soldier that criticized Agamemnon, who chose the life of a monkey.

Finally, it was Odysseus' turn to choose. He remembered the sufferings of his human life, and no longer felt drawn by a love of honour. Again, the text seems to suggest here that suffering ultimately allows the soul to make a careful choice. He spent a long time deliberating, searching out a private life in which he could do his own work. Eventually he found it, lying to the side, ignored by the others. He was happy with his choice, and said that had he been the first to choose, his choice would have been the same. Some souls, having been animals, chose the lives of humans; unjust human souls chose the lives of wild animals, just souls the lives of tame ones, and every kind of combination. The fact that Odysseus chooses a private life casts doubt on the possibility of his cultivating justice in his soul. This is because philosophical engagement happens in dialogue.

In Chapter 2, I made noted that philosophy is an activity. Pierre Hadot makes the observation that philosophy in the context in which Plato was writing primarily took place *in*

conversation.[220] It was only in conversing with each other that the student could ask questions and receive responses to them, or the adept could respond to falsehoods and help the student become aware of them, and alter the philosophical discussion to suit the specific needs of the student.[221] As Klein points out, Plato explicitly sets out the problems involved in communicating philosophy through written texts. He shows that in the *Phaedrus*, Phaedrus says that the spoken word is "alive" and the written word an imitation of it. Socrates agrees, saying that only the spoken word is not counterfeit.[222] It is no coincidence that the means by which Plato communicates his philosophical project is through dialogue. He meets the deficiency of the written word by communicating it in such a way that it can mimic philosophical conversation. Klein observes that Plato is able to convey the essence of conversation through his dialogues by utilising irony and double meaning, and unanswered questions or unfinished arguments, such that the reader is never told what to think, but is confronted with invitation to contemplate.[223] Philosophy in this context cannot take place in solitude. As such, Odysseus' choice of a private life precludes philosophical discourse, the very activity which can save his soul.

Having made their choices of lives, the souls came to Lachesis in the order in which they had chosen. She gave them each the daimon that was the guardian of the life they had chosen, which would fulfill their choice. The daimons led their charges to Clotho, under whose hand they turned the spindle to validate the destiny that the lots and their own choice had decided. From Clotho, the daimons led their souls to Atropos, where the choices that had been spun were made permanent. After that, without retracing their steps, they came under the throne of Necessity, and when all of them had made this circuit, they journeyed to the Plain of Forgetfulness, which was choked with a tremendous heat, as it was barren of florae. Next to the River of Unheeding, the river whose waters cannot be held by any receptacle, they set up camp – nightfall was upon them. They each had to drink some of the water. Those that were not checked by reason drank more than they ought, and as they drank, they forgot all that had happened, and fell into a sleep. In the middle of the night, thunder rang out, accompanied by an earthquake (reminiscent of the one that reveals the cave to the ancestor of Gyges), and

[220] Hadot, 'What is Ancient Philosophy?' p. 62.

[221] Ibid, p. 62.

[222] Klein, 'A Commentary on Plato's Meno', p. 11.

[223] Klein, 'A Commentary on Plato's Meno', p. 17.

without warning, the souls were taken away, in every direction, like shooting stars, towards their births. Er was prohibited from drinking the water, and yet, he found himself returned to his body, and woke up at dawn on his funeral pyre, with no recollection of how he had gotten there. Again, this poses the contradictory image of a bodiless soul undertaking the embodied activity of drinking, and then returning to its body. There is a contradiction here – if the souls have left their bodies, then they should not be able to partake in embodied activities, such as drinking.

Socrates ends by saying to Glaucon that the myth has been conserved, rather than lost, and if it is persuasive, then we are saved, because then we can prevent our souls from being sullied, and so easily cross the River of Forgetfulness. If we are indeed persuaded, then we'll believe that our souls are immortal, and so be able to overcome all goods and all evils, and stick with the journey that takes us upward[224], and be able to pursue justice with reason at every point along the way. Thus, we'll be the friends of both our own selves and of the gods both while on earth and in the afterlife, and so receive our honors. Socrates likens this to the winners in the games who receive their accolades. And so, both in this life and in the ten-fold journey, we will be happy.

My aim in this chapter was to show that the Myth of Er induces *aporia* in the reader. The myth of Er is a philosophical myth because Plato references and augments the philosophical argument (that justice is always preferable to injustice) in the myth of Er. He turns the myth of Er into a tool of philosophy. I have shown that, as a Platonic myth, the myth of Er is a story that has multiple layers of meaning, at least one of which is philosophically significant, and that it also has the effect of inducing *aporia*. There are clearly multiple layers of meaning in the text – we see this in Socrates' use of reported speech throughout, which has the effect of reminding us that he is telling a story (which has the effect of distancing us from it), and in the frequent descriptions of Er's immortal soul as seeing and hearing. These all have a stated meaning in the myth, and another layer of meaning that comes about through their relation to other points in the text, which have philosophical relevance. There are multiple points in the myth that correlate to philosophical arguments in the dialogue: Socrates' introduction to the myth relates back to Polemarchus' definition of justice; the punishment of the souls invites comparison to the discussion in Book I of virtue; the role of the judges

[224] Upward, further away from the chaos of tartarus.

corresponds to the concept of justice as it is discussed in the dialogue. The myth of Er induces *aporia* at multiple points: the elements of fantasy in the description of the spindle are so bizarre as to be aporetic. The familiar, traditional elements of myth – such as the Fates and the sirens – are made unfamiliar by their reimagining in this myth, which has the effect of creating distance. The asserted possibility of choosing correctly at the end of one's life such that the soul can pursue justice and avoid suffering is at odds with the fact that this appears to be logically possible, an impossibility held up in the example of Odysseus. This contradiction is aporetic. The myth thus does not clearly achieve its stated aim of convincing the audience of the value of justice. What this aporia does, however, is invite precisely the activity that allows justice to flourish in the soul: the activity of philosophy. While the stated aim of the myth does not appear to succeed – we are not convinced that the soul can cultivate justice such that it never chooses badly – it nevertheless does succeed in inducing precisely the activity that enables justice to be cultivated.

Conclusion

I have argued in Chapter 1 that *aporia* should be read as it was understood historically, by Plato and his contemporaries. In Ancient Greek, *aporia* had the meaning of being without a path or a solution. It was linguistically linked to the concept of *apeiras*, which meang boundless. To be in a state of *aporia*, following these semantic links, means to be lost in a place without boundaries or directions, as when one is lost at sea. To escape *aporia* is to cunningly construct a *poros*. A *poros* a pathway, but not any kind of pathway – it is an adaptable path that is the only way to make it through the chaos of *aporia*, its exact opposite. In this way, *aporia* is an invitation to find such a *poros.*

I have also argued that *aporia* can be understood as a recognition of an epistemic lack. One becomes aware that where one thought one knew, one was actually ignorant. This awareness is a kind of self-awareness. This self-awareness is a distance from the self. In both its mythical context, and in Plato, *aporia* is described in terms that illustrate it to be extreme discomfort. It is such a state of discomfort that the experiencer desires to escape it. In this sense, *aporia* is an invitation to pursue wisdom, and in so doing, move away from ignorance. *Aporia* is thus an invitation to philosophy. This is because philosophy, *philosophia*, is the movement towards wisdom, while *aporia* is the awareness of ignorance and the desire to escape it. *Aporia* is thus greatly important to philosophical engagement. If the philosopher is one who enquires, then *aporia* is the mindset in which she is able to do so.

I have attempted to show in Chapter 2 that Plato's aim in the *Republic* is to invite his audience to participate in the activity of philosophy. His dialogue aims at convincing them that the life spent engaged philosophically is the good life. His writing often involves irony and contradiction because in inducing confusion in his audience and bringing to their awareness the fact that they do not know, he inducing *aporia,* and thus inviting them to engage in the activity of philosophy. In our self-doubt, we become more self-aware. Our self-awareness consists in the awareness that we do not know. This is where the contradiction inherent in my thesis question is situated: Plato offers at the same time the contradictory mistrust of and use of myth because contradiction is a means by which he induces *aporia* in his reader.

In Chapter 3, I discussed the different ways that we can understand *myth*. I did this because in order to answer my question about myth in Plato, I needed to be able to work with some understanding of what myth is. A feature of myth is that it communicates more than one layer of meaning. I have argued that one aspect of the definition of myth is that it is a narrative

that carries a secondary layer of meaning. The narratives of philosophical myths also carry ideas that are conducive to the philosophical discussion in which the myth is related. In the case of the Allegory of the Cave, the myth is used to support Socrates' philosophical argument, and engagement the myth itself invites philosophical inquiry. Thus, my position is that a Platonic myth is a story that has multiple layers of meaning, at least one of which is philosophically significant, and that it also has the effect of inducing distance. The conclusion of Chapter 3 was that a myth is a traditional narrative, with fantastical elements, which carries secondary meaning, and induces distance. In Platonic myths the secondary meaning is relevant to the philosophical discussion in which the myth is situated. Plato also uses the distance induced by myth to aid in creating a sensation of *aporia* in the reader. A Platonic myth is thus a narrative that in its unbelievability evokes distance, and operates on multiple layers of meaning, which are of philosophical significance.

In Chapter 4, I attempted to show that the Myth of Er induces *aporia* in the reader. The myth of Er is a philosophical myth. This is because, first, Plato references and augments the philosophical argument that justice is always preferable to injustice in the myth. He turns it into a means of augmenting his philosophical aim. As a Platonic myth, the myth of Er is a story that has secondary meaning, in that some of the meaning of the imagery of the myth has philosophical relevance. Second, the myth of Er also has the effect of inducing *aporia* in terms of its philosophical argument, and distance in terms of its mythical aspects. There are multiple layers of meaning in the text and there are multiple points at which the myth correlates to philosophical arguments in the dialogue. The myth of Er induces distance at multiple points: the elements of fantasy in the description of the spindle are so bizarre as to be aporetic. The familiar, traditional elements of myth are made unfamiliar in this myth, a creation of unfamiliarity out of familiarity that has the effect of creating distance. The asserted possibility of achieving true justice in the soul, and avoid suffering, is at odds with the fact that this appears to be logically possible. The impossibility is held up in the example of Odysseus. This contradiction is aporetic. The myth thus does not clearly achieve its stated aim of convincing the audience of the value of justice. What it does do, is aid Plato in achieving his philosophical aim, which I have argued is to draw his reader into the activity of philosophy. While we are not ultimately convinced that the soul can cultivate justice such that it never makes the wrong choice and so the stated aim of the myth does not appear to succeed, it nevertheless does spectacularly induce *aporia* in us.

My question was, “why does Plato reference and create myth in his dialogues, when he is explicitly mistrustful of it?” In the process of attempting to answer this question, I have Plato utilizes myth as a means of inducing distance within the self. Distance of the self from the self is an element of *aporia*, where one gains self-awareness in the awareness that one is ignorant where one took oneself to have knowledge. *Aporia*, as the awareness of ignorance and the desire to escape it, is the mindset in which inquiry can begin. It is thus the mindset of the philosopher. Hence, the answer to my question, is that Plato references and creates myth because myth has the ability to induce distance, an aspect of *aporia* which is fundamental to the activity of philosophising. The tension between his stated distrust and his use of myth is itself an example of the kind of contradiction that he utilizes in inducing *aporia*.

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