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THE ROLE OF AFTERLIFE MYTHS IN PLATO'S MORAL ARGUMENTS

by

DANIEL ISSLER

Under the Direction of Tim O'Keefe

ABSTRACT

I will address the issue of Plato's use of myths concerning the afterlife in the context of the ethical arguments of the *Gorgias*, *Phaedo* and *Republic*, and I will contend that while the arguments in each dialogue are aimed at convincing the rational part of the self, the myths are aimed at persuading the non-rational part of the self. In support of this interpretation, I will examine Plato's views on the relation between the different parts of the soul and the relationship that poetry and myth have to philosophy. I will argue that Plato's use of myth is a legitimate tactic in his project of moral education, given his views concerning the role that the non-rational parts of the self play in one's moral life.

INDEX WORDS: Plato, Socrates, Gorgias, Phaedo, Republic, Myth, Afterlife, Rhetoric

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by

DANIEL ISSLER

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2009

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2009

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August 2009

To the memory of Dan Scherlie.

διὸ δὴ δικαίως μόνη πτεροῦται ἡ τοῦ φιλοσόφου διάνοια: πρὸς γὰρ ἐκείνοις ἀεί ἐστιν μνήμῃ κατὰ δύναμιν, πρὸς οἷσπερ θεὸς ὢν θεῖός ἐστιν.

- *Phaedrus* 249c4-7

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thesis has greatly benefitted by the comments and criticism I have received from others. Foremost among these is my advisor, Dr. Tim O'Keefe, who has provided significant guidance to my writing and has also shaped my study of the ancients, for which I am profoundly grateful. I am also grateful for the comments and guidance I have received from Dr. Jessica Berry and Dr. Andrew I. Cohen, and for the input of my fellow students, particularly Joe Bullock, Tim Clewell, Trip Glazer, Lucas Keefer, Richard Latta, and Elizabeth Sund. Lastly, I owe a great deal to the love, patience and support of my wife Christa and daughter Kate.

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1. Introduction

Unlike many of the other myths or images presented in various dialogues, the afterlife myths of the *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, and *Republic* may not seem to have an obvious connection with the arguments of those dialogues. It is fairly easy to see, for example, how the story of the ring of Gyges in *Republic* II fits in with Glaucon's critique of traditional morality. That story serves to illustrate Glaucon's demand that justice be shown to be intrinsically valuable, and it informs the subsequent argument. The story serves its purpose, and then the argument is resumed. But the afterlife myths do not fit this pattern, since they are not followed by further argumentation but are found at or very near the ends of their respective dialogues. What was Plato's purpose in having his character Socrates wind up a long (in the *Republic*, very long) series of arguments by telling seemingly far-fetched stories about the afterlife? It hardly seems likely that they were meant to serve as a kind of satyr play to give the audience some lighter fare after a long stretch of drama; Plato must have had in mind a more serious role for these myths than that, since he spent such effort in crafting them.

I will argue that when Socrates' views about the soul and the relationship between myth and argument are taken into account, then the afterlife myths he tells can be understood as an attempt to get his interlocutors not simply to agree with his arguments, but to fully accept them and to put them into practice. The arguments of the *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, and *Republic* all deal with the value of a life of practicing philosophy, and Socrates is concerned that his interlocutors not only agree with him in argument, but live accordingly (*Phaedo* 115b4-c2); thus, he adds the emotional weight of the myth to the logical weight of the argument. However, if this kind of move is not to be seen as merely a fallacious appeal to emotion, it will be necessary to make an examination of the use of myth and poetry in each dialogue in order to show why Socrates' use of

myth is a legitimate addition to his use of arguments. Myths are useful because of their emotional appeal, but (as will be seen in the *Republic*) Socrates argues that myths can inflict great psychic damage unless they are subjected to the critique of reason.[1]

In each dialogue Socrates crafts myths that are meant to appeal to the particular interlocutor or interlocutors with whom he is speaking, and so in order to understand how each myth is intended to fulfill its function, I will first give an account of the character or characters of Socrates' primary interlocutors by examining their words and actions in the dialogue. I will then show how the account of the human psyche that Socrates gives in each dialogue helps to illuminate his interlocutor's desires and state of character, and shows how exactly the myth is supposed to appeal to Socrates' audience. But on another level, Plato is putting these myths into his dialogues for the benefit of his readers. So the role of the myth must be ascertained on two levels: that of the characters in the dialogue, and that of the readers of the dialogue. I will contend that the function of the myth is to augment the moral argument, and is aimed not at the rational part of the soul, but at the non-rational. The psychology presented in each dialogue will show why the myth is needed, and how it is intended to operate.

Finally, I will examine the details of each myth to show how it is meant to reinforce Socrates' arguments that the best kind of life is one spent practicing philosophy. Socrates borrows freely from various accounts of the afterlife, but as I will show he does not do so haphazardly; each myth has a message that parallels the argument of its respective dialogue. I will also address the issue of in what way each myth is to be understood as true: that is, how much of the story is to be taken literally, and how much should be understood allegorically.

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[1] As Ludwig Edelstein puts it, "The myth…must be made to conform to the results of philosophy. Such stories alone are to be told…as reflect the truth of dialectics" (Edelstein (1949) 465).

As a final note, I should add that I am dealing with the dialogues in the order *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, *Republic* not because I am necessarily committed to a certain chronological ordering of those works, but because I wish to deal with each myth (and the psychology on which each myth is based) in ascending order of complexity.

2. The Myth of the *Gorgias*

Socrates spends the latter part of the *Gorgias* trying to convince Callicles that his views on the nature of happiness and justice are mistaken, but in the end Callicles remains unconvinced, and Socrates closes his arguments by telling Callicles a story about a final judgment in the afterlife. In order to understand why Socrates turns to myth at that point, I must first show what the discussion reveals about Callicles' character, and why the argument eventually grinds to a halt.[2] Jyl Gentzler has argued that Socrates is in fact using sophistical tactics in his discussion with Callicles, in order to counter Callicles' assertions at e.g. 486b4-c2 that spending too much time in pursuit of philosophy will prevent Socrates from being able to use rhetoric.[3] However, I find this reading unsatisfactory, since if it is correct all Socrates has shown at the end of the dialogue is that pursuing philosophy is not in fact a hindrance to learning rhetoric, and it seems to me that Socrates takes himself to be making much stronger claims than that (cf. 527e2-9). Additionally, the inclusion of the myth seems even more problematic on this interpretation.

In order to defend my view that the myth serves to reinforce the argument, I must show that Socrates is making a legitimate argument, and that the reason Callicles fails to agree with it in the end is not because the argument is sophistical. I will show that Callicles is portrayed as someone who is internally conflicted, and it is this internal conflict that prevents him from agreeing with Socrates. Thus, if Callicles is to be convinced fully of Socrates' claims regarding the value of a life of philosophy, his internal conflicts will have to be resolved.

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[2] C.f. Thrasymachus' frustration with Socrates at the end of *Republic* I.

[3] Gentzler, Jyl, "The Sophistic Cross-examination of Callicles in the *Gorgias*." Ancient Philosophy, vol. 15 (1995), pp. 17-43.

2.1. Callicles' Account of Justice

Callicles is the first speaker in the dialogue,[4] but after making some introductory remarks, he does not reappear until the conclusion of Socrates' discussion with Polus at 481b6. He begins his speech by complaining that Socrates has unjustly overcome Gorgias and Polus in argument by equivocating. Callicles states that Polus meant that acting unjustly is more shameful according to law or custom (*nomos*), while Socrates argues as though Polus meant shameful by nature (*phusis*). In other words, Callicles states that what is conventionally considered just is not the same as what is intrinsically just. He instead claims that these two concepts are actually opposed to each other (482e7-8), and that what is just by nature is not at all the same as what is considered just by "the weak and the many" (483b5).[5] On Callicles' view, conventional notions of justice have been put in place to restrain those who are by nature greater and superior than the majority of humanity, and who thus deserve a "greater share" (483c3).

Callicles asserts that Socrates was able to refute Gorgias and Polus only because their commitments to conventional ideas about justice prevented them from saying what they really believed. In contrast, Callicles rejects such a commitment, and states instead that conventional justice should be disregarded by those who are greater by nature. Socrates is thus presented with an opponent who does not share his commitment to other-regarding justice, and so if his argument is to succeed he must argue for this commitment.

Callicles' long speech in praise of what he calls natural justice begins with an account of the campaigns of Darius I against the Scythians and of Xerxes I against Greece; in accordance

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[4] Where his opening words, interestingly enough, are *polemou kai machēs*, "of (=on the subject of) war and battle," perhaps indicative of the battle he will fight with Socrates, and more importantly (if Socrates' view of psychic harmony is correct) the battle he is fighting within himself as well.

[5] Quotations from the *Gorgias* are taken from the Zeyl translation found in Cooper, John M., ed., *Plato: Complete Works*. Hackett, 1997. All Stephanus references in this chapter are to the *Gorgias* unless otherwise indicated.

with natural justice each of these kings took what belonged to others (483d9-e2). He also quotes from Pindar's account of the labors of Hercules, in which Hercules took the cattle of the weaker Geryon by force (484b5-c4). He uses these examples to support his statement that "nature itself reveals that it's a just thing for the better man and the more capable man to have a greater share than the worse man and the less capable man" (483d1-4). Callicles then shifts to an attack on the usefulness of philosophy, and quotes from Homer and Euripides in his exhortation to Socrates not to persist in the pursuit of philosophy; at his age such a preoccupation will make him unfit to engage in the proper life of a citizen, since it will keep him from the civic centers where he might distinguish himself in the public eye (484c6-486d8). The life of philosophizing, Callicles maintains, will put its adherent in danger of being unable to defend himself in court, since he will be unversed in the kind of rhetoric needed to win over his audience, and thus will leave him in the shameful position of being at the mercy of "some no good wretch of an accuser" who could have him condemned to death if he so desired (486b2-4). The irony of this last statement with regard to the fate of the philosopher would of course not have been lost on Plato's audience.

2.2. The Character of Callicles

Callicles' speech reveals much about his character, and it contains a number of interesting peculiarities. A closer examination of his speech will show how it displays an inconsistency in his position that Socrates is able to exploit. First, although Callicles admires the Persian kings for their ability to get what they desire, both the Persian campaigns he mentions ended in failure. Darius was forced to withdraw after failing to engage the Scythians in decisive battle,[6] and although the Persians under Xerxes succeeded in burning Athens to the ground, they were also

[6] Herotodus' account of the campaign takes up the bulk of book four of the *Histories*, and I assume that Plato's audience would have had at least a passing familiarity with it.

forced to withdraw after the battles of Salamis and Plataea. Both Persian kings thus proved to be in some sense "worse" and "less capable" than their opponents, and so it is puzzling that Callicles holds them up as examples of those who are greater by nature and whose greatness entitles them to a greater share.

Second, after quoting Pindar, Callicles admits that his quotation may be inexact, since he "[doesn't] know the song well" (484b10). Marian Demos has given convincing arguments that Plato deliberately puts a slight misquotation in Callicles' mouth. Callicles' quotation, when compared with Pindar's actual phrasing, undermines Callicles' belief that the actions of Hercules are unequivocally endorsed by the poet.[7] It appears that Callicles has either misunderstood the historical and poetic examples he has cited in defense of his views, or he is simply being deceptive. So even though Callicles admires figures such as Darius, Xerxes, and Hercules, it isn't clear that he has good reasons for doing so.

Plato's presentation of Callicles' character gives the reader a detailed picture of the specific challenge Socrates faces. His interlocutor has been poorly educated,[8] in the sense that he has failed to learn the correct lessons from his culture and from history, and he has as a result internalized strong desires for wealth and political power. Thus, Callicles is not committed to the same set of conventional beliefs that Socrates appealed to in his discussion with Gorgias and Polus, and so Socrates is compelled to defend them more explicitly. Socrates realizes this difficulty when he says to Callicles that "if human beings didn't share common experiences, some sharing one, others sharing another, but one of us had some unique experience not shared by

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[7] Demos, Marian, "Callicles' Quotation of Pindar in the *Gorgias*." *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, vol. 96 (1994), pp. 85-107.

[8] Socrates' statement seemingly to the contrary at 487b8-9 is most likely ironic, since like the rest of Socrates' descriptions of Callicles at this point (being well-disposed towards Socrates, being willing to speak his mind) it is eventually proven false by the course that the discussion takes. Additionally, it is backed up by the testimony of "many of the Athenians," rather than by Socrates himself.

others, it wouldn't be easy for him to communicate what he experienced to the other" (481c8-d3). Socrates' and Callicles' experiences have led them to two opposing views of justice, and Socrates must now defend his view to Callicles without the benefit of sharing certain important formative experiences with him.

2.3. Socrates' Refutation of Callicles

Socrates then attempts to show that Callicles' position is internally inconsistent. He first addresses Callicles' view that those who are superior by nature deserve more by asking Callicles for an account of this superiority (488b10-d3). By "superior" Callicles cannot mean physically stronger, because the "inferior" many are jointly stronger than the "superior" few, and he cannot mean just any kind of intelligence, since it would be absurd to think that a doctor deserves a greater share of food in virtue of his superior medical knowledge, or that a cobbler deserves a greater share of shoes. Callicles retorts that he is referring to "those who are intelligent about the affairs of the city, about the way it's to be well managed," and who additionally will be brave and resolute in forming their plans, and will not shrink from carrying them out due to "softness of spirit" (491b6). It is this type of person that is suited to rule and have a "greater share."

Although Callicles has given a preliminary account of how the superior people are superior, he has not yet shown why such people are entitled by nature to a greater share, or defined what exactly he means by a greater share. When Socrates asks whether the rulers should rule over themselves as well as others, Callicles replies that self-control amounts to slavery, since it requires the limitation of desire, and that those who are superior should not be enslaved to anything, even themselves (491e2). Callicles then gives an account of the good life as consisting in maximizing and fulfilling one's desires. The inferior many, he states, are incapable of such a life

because they lack the strong desires that are a necessary prerequisite of happiness, and they mask this failing by propagating the conventional belief that getting more than one's share is shameful (492a4-b2). Additionally, they are not powerful enough to get what they want. This completes Callicles' account of the superior people: they are superior in virtue of their strong and expansive desires and their ability to satisfy them, and they deserve a greater share of external goods because happiness consists in desire satisfaction (hence fulfilling a greater desire results in greater happiness), and as Terence Irwin puts it they are "the only ones who have a reasonable prospect of happiness."[9] The superior man, who lives according to natural justice, will seize whatever he wants in order to fulfill his desires, and will not restrain himself either in allowing his desires to grow more demanding, or in seeking their fulfillment. Living according to conventional notions of justice would interfere with the attainment of happiness, since it would prevent the acquisition of many of the objects of desire.

After eliciting this clarification from Callicles, Socrates' next move is to drive a wedge between Callicles' commitment to the best life being one of maximal desire satisfaction, and his commitment to bravery being necessary for a proper human life. He first asks whether Callicles is committed to the belief that the pleasant is identical to the good, and Callicles initially agrees (495d5-10). And this agreement is not unjustified on his part, since Callicles' standard of happiness at this point is simply the strength of the desires being satisfied, despite Socrates' examples of the itch-scratcher and the catamite. Socrates then makes use of Callicles' approval of bravery to show that if he wishes to be consistent, Callicles should not be committed to the idea that the pleasant is identical to the good. Callicles agrees that good people are good in virtue of there being some good thing present in them (497d9-e2), and he admits that both the brave and

[9] Irwin, Terence, *Plato's Ethics*. Oxford, 1995, p. 105.

the cowardly feel a comparable amount of pleasure in seeing their opponents retire from the field (498b1). But he does not want to admit that the cowardly are good, even though they feel much the same kind of pleasure as the brave; rather, he admits that some pleasures are good, while others are bad (499c7-9). Given his commitment to bravery, he is forced to the conclusion that the standard of goodness cannot simply be pleasure. Something must distinguish the brave from the cowardly besides the type or amount of pleasure they feel. Thus, faced with a choice between retaining his view that happiness consists in maximal desire satisfaction and retaining his view that bravery is a virtue, Callicles opts to stick with bravery.

And it seems that this is the best choice available to him, given his ideas about those who are superior by nature being wise and courageous in making and executing their plans. Without bravery, they will let fear of the inferior many unduly influence their decisions and actions. But what Socrates is trying to get Callicles to see is that this commitment to bravery in carrying out one's plans in the face of external opposition also involves bravery in overcoming internal opposition, i.e. from one's appetites and desires.[10] Since Callicles has internalized at least one correct lesson from the myths he quotes, viz. that the bravery of Hercules is admirable, Socrates can latch onto this belief of Callicles' in order to promote his idea of the good life being one of harmony and self-control.

Once Socrates gets Callicles to agree that the pleasant is not the same as the good, he returns to his earlier distinction between a knack and a craft (cf. 462c1-4). Distinguishing between pleasures and pains with regard to whether or not they are good requires the type of knowledge that a craftsman possesses. While the possessor of a knack aims at gratifying though pleasure,

[10] I am not sure how far this section of the *Gorgias* will go in showing a Socratic (or Platonic) commitment to the unity of the virtues (bravery and temperance, in this case), but there seems to be something like the idea that the virtues are inter-entailing in operation here.

without regard for what is genuinely good for his subject, the craftsman knows the nature of his subject, and aims to improve those on whom he performs his craft. Socrates speaks of improvement as giving the subject of one's craft a definite shape, and ordering its parts "until the entire object is put together in an organized and orderly way" (503e10-504a2). On this view, the craftsman's knowledge of his subject will enable him to affect his subject with the aim of making it internally harmonious, and thus improving it. Socrates describes the craft of medicine as being able to make bodies healthy and harmonious, and then makes the analogy between the health of a body and that of the soul (504a7-b6). He speaks of the soul as having an appetitive part that is sometimes in conflict with the rational part, such that it needs to be restrained for the health of the person (505a6-b10). Just as a patient's appetites have to be restricted and controlled for the sake of the health of the body, so a person's desires will have to be restricted and controlled for the sake of the health of the soul. At this point, not even Gorgias can persuade Callicles to continue the discussion (506c4), so Socrates proceeds with his argument on his own with only occasional token interjections from Callicles.

2.4. Myth as Therapy

Socrates links Callicles' refusal to continue in the discussion with Socrates' earlier discussion with Polus on whether it is better to be punished or to escape justice after committing injustice. Socrates gets Polus to agree, at least verbally, that being punished for wrongdoing is actually beneficial, since it corrects a defect in the wrongdoer. By not continuing in the discussion and undergoing the embarrassment of having his ideas shown to be inconsistent, Callicles "won't put up with being benefitted and…undergoing the very thing the discussion's about, with being disciplined" (505c3-5). By dropping out, Callicles is not allowing Socrates to benefit him through

argument. I will now turn to the question of why he must turn to myth, and how exactly the myth is supposed to benefit Callicles.

Prior to Callicles' long speech, Socrates describes both himself and Callicles as loving (*erōnte*) two objects. He observes that Callicles is unable to contradict either of his beloveds: if the Athenian *dēmos* proposes something he goes along with it, and matches his words with what his audience wants to hear (481e2-5), and he behaves similarly with Demos the son of Pyrilampes. Socrates is a lover of Alcibiades and of philosophy, and while Alcibiades is rather "fickle" and inconsistent, philosophy remains consistent and irrefutable (482a5-b2). Thus, Socrates says that if Callicles finds the things that he says about justice to be extraordinary, then Callicles "must stop my beloved, philosophy, from saying them." In other words, he must defeat Socrates in argument.

But the loves of Callicles are directed at incompatible ends. Callicles has grown up admiring leaders like Darius and Xerxes and heroes like Hercules, since they acted according to natural justice in taking what they desired. But he also has grown up admiring leaders like Themistocles, Cimon, and Pericles, who lived political lives and were very much involved in the *nomoi* of Athens (503c1-4). There is a part of Callicles that wants to throw off all internal and external restraints in order to maximize and satisfy his desires, and yet the part of Callicles that follows his love of political honor and bravery balks at the shameful things that such a life could lead to (e.g. cowardice in battle, as discussed earlier). By showing his internal inconsistencies, Socrates is prompting Callicles to discover his need for another principle by which he may order his various desires in conformity with what has been agreed upon in the argument as being true.

Or, Callicles may simply content himself with thinking and acting inconsistently. Why should he be committed to Socrates' idea of the value of internal harmony? But I believe that Socrates has shown that living such an inconsistent life would not allow Callicles to obtain either

of the ends he seeks. If he follows his desire for pleasure, then he will end up in situations that will seem shameful to him; and if he follows his desire for a political life, then he will have to deny himself certain pleasures. If he tries to split the difference between these two loves, then he will end up not fully satisfying either of them. So while Callicles may not value internal harmony as such, Socrates is trying to show him that he should at least value it insofar as being internally harmonious is more conducive to obtaining the ends he seeks.

If Callicles' desires are in conflict, and if the ends he pursues are a result of those desires, then in order to have a consistent end or set of ends, he will have to somehow restrain or eliminate some of his desires. But since Callicles' desires for sensual gratification and political victory originate in the non-rational part of his soul, they are not directly affected by arguments as is the rational part of the soul. Like a good craftsman, Socrates is trying to bring about a just and harmonious state in Callicles (cf. his exhortation at 527c8-e9) by correcting certain of his desires. And while he apparently believes that Callicles' love of bravery is a good desire, since he affirms it and uses it as a means to argue against Callicles' other beliefs, he sees that Callicles has internalized a poor conception of *phusis*, since he has drawn the wrong lessons from his education. In contrast to Callicles' notion of *phusis* in which one's object is maximal desire satisfaction, Socrates argues for the view that we ought to promote harmony in ourselves. But Callicles is unable to agree with Socrates, since he still looks on the life of the philosopher that Socrates describes as shameful. He cannot agree with Socrates that suffering injustice is preferable to committing injustice, since he believes that suffering at the hands of "some very corrupt and mean man" (521c8) is shameful. In order to convince Callicles, Socrates must show him that it is the life of the unjust person that is truly shameful.

2.5. The Content of the Myth

The myth Socrates recounts involves a judgment that comes at the end of a person's life, and as a result of which they are assigned a place in the afterlife. After Pluto complains that many people were being undeservedly sent either to punishment in Tartarus or to bliss in the Isles of the Blessed, Zeus institutes a new system of judgment. Rather than being judged while they are alive, while they still retain all the outward results of their actions, souls will from now on be judged after they are dead, and by those who are themselves dead (523e3-4). And just as the body of one who has died remains in the final condition that it had while the person remained alive, and bears the marks of what it underwent while the person lived (e.g. fatness, tallness, scarring), so the soul will retain the condition it had while the person was alive, and will show the effects of the treatment it received. Socrates describes the effects of performing unjust actions as being akin to scarring and mutilation: he says that the judge has "often gotten hold of the Great King, or some other king or potentate, and noticed that there's nothing sound in his soul but that it's been thoroughly whipped and covered with scars, the results of acts of perjury and injustice, things that each of his actions has stamped upon his soul" (524e4-525a1). Socrates reinforces his point by appealing to Homer, whose descriptions of the punishments in Tartarus mainly involve great kings such as Tantalus and Sisyphus, while more mundane wrongdoers such as Thersites are not subject to such great punishments. The horrific nature of the unending punishments of Tantalus and Sisyphus speaks to the grievous nature of their unjust and impious acts, while the more common and less serious wrongdoing of Thersites merits only a beating at the hands of Odysseus. Socrates' emphasis is thus on the internal consequences of one's actions, not the external results they may bring.

The images of scarring and mutilation that Socrates presents are quite visceral, and are obviously meant to have great emotional appeal. Socrates is again making an analogy between the

health of the soul and that of the body: presumably, if gaining political power involved having one's body whipped, scarred, and mutilated, Callicles would reject such a life as plainly shameful. But Socrates' point is that the life Callicles wishes to lead will inflict the same kind of damage on his soul, and that this damage is not the less shameful for being outwardly invisible. The image that Socrates gives of the scarred and twisted soul is based on his argument that justice involves the correct and harmonious ordering of the parts of the soul, and that injustice involves the parts of the soul being unruly and in conflict with each other. It is a description of the same state of affairs, but one that is aimed not at the rational part of the soul, as is the argument, but at the non-rational part of the soul. It is designed to put on vivid display the true consequences to oneself of injustice.

But for the myth to be effective, is it the case that Socrates (or Callicles) needs to be committed to its literal truth? Socrates admits that Callicles will think of his story as a "mere tale"[11] even though Socrates believes it to be a true account (523a2). While in general I will resist taking an overly deflationary reading of the myths, it appears that in order for this myth to appeal to Callicles it need not be understood as a kind of fire-and-brimstone tale meant to frighten him into being good now by appealing to horrific punishments that will be inflicted on him later. Although Socrates speaks of a final judgment, the psychic damage that he describes is incurred in this life. Even if psychic damage is not as readily apparent as bodily damage, if Callicles can be shown that such psychic damage is in fact the result of unjust actions, and if he can learn to have the same revulsion for psychic damage as he does for bodily damage, then this would seem to be a powerful disincentive to living unjustly, without the need to appeal to a judgment in a literal

[11] *Muthos* is used in a slightly pejorative sense here since what is being describing is how Callicles is likely to view Socrates' account, but this usage should not be taken as indicating Socrates' (or Plato's) attitude toward myth as such.

afterlife. The description of the judgment of the naked soul could be seen as an attempt to get Callicles to take an objective view of himself, and to look past the external rewards that injustice can bring to see the true price that he is paying.[12] Socrates may in fact be committed to there being some kind of judgment in the afterlife, and such a judgment (and the subsequent punishment it might bring) would serve as a powerful incentive to be just if there were good reasons for thinking that it actually would take place after death, but it is hard to see how such an appeal would be found compelling by Callicles. Socrates' argument has focused on the harmony of the soul rather than on eschatology, and so it seems reasonable to interpret the myth in light of the main focus of Socrates' discourse. Thus, I think that Annas' claim that the myth depends for its impact on an undefended sense of moral optimism is mistaken (Annas (1982) 125). What Socrates is trying to get Callicles to see is that unless he regulates his bodily desires and his desires for political power, he will not only fail to achieve the ends he seeks but harm himself as well.

Finally, in the myth Socrates describes two effects that punishment may have. Punishment may have a beneficial effect on the one being punished, in that it may bring about a positive change in character. Or, the punishment may have a beneficial effect not on the one being punished, but on those who see the suffering of the one being punished (525b3-4). If one's soul is "curable," then there is a possibility that, through punishment and suffering, the soul might be cleansed of its injustice. But if the soul is not curable, then it can at least serve as an example to others of the consequences of acting unjustly. In the dialogue, if Callicles is curable, then he may react to the picture of the scarred and twisted soul with revulsion, and this may bring about a reformation of his desires. However, even if Callicles remains incurable, he could still serve as an example to others whose souls are curable: e.g. to the other characters in the dialogue, or to the

[12] As Annas states, the message of the myth is that "justice pays 'in the end', on a deeper level than we can now see" (Annas (1982) 125).

readers of the dialogue who have been given a detailed picture of Callicles' internal conflicts, and who may very well share those conflicts.

The use of myth is therefore a logical outcome of the psychology described by Socrates, and serves to augment the argument, rather than to undercut or to replace it. The story that Socrates tells parallels the course that the discussion takes: he speaks of souls being examined, judged, and then sent either to punishments or to rewards. In the same way, the soul of Callicles has been examined and found to be unharmonious, and he has therefore been assigned a course of punishment: in this case being refuted by Socrates (cf. 505c3-5). Since Callicles drops out of the argument, and thereby refuses to be benefitted, Socrates makes a different kind of appeal. There is apparently a part of Callicles that can still feel shame, as is shown by his distaste for cowardice in battle, and so Socrates paints a vivid picture of the mutilating effects of practicing injustice. Socrates is encouraging Callicles to look past the riches, honors and pleasures that unjust acts can bring, and to contemplate the consequences that injustice has for one's own soul. It is an emotional appeal, but not an inappropriate one, since it is in agreement with the view of justice as internal harmony that has been arrived at by dialectic.

Whether the myth will succeed in getting Callicles to change his character is not clear, and in fact Socrates seems rather doubtful on that point (cf. 523a2). At the end of the dialogue, Callicles appears to remain in disagreement with Socrates, but this is not in itself a display of the failure of the presentation of myths in general. Socrates seems to think that if Callicles will not follow his arguments, then the myth is his best hope for psychic recovery, if only he will let himself be persuaded by it. But the portrayal of Callicles' character, together with the argument and the closing myth, may also serve as an example and a warning to others who are curable.

3. The Myth of the *Phaedo*

In many respects, the conversation recounted in the *Phaedo* follows the standard form of a consolation: the philosopher is appealed to by those who are, or who are about to be, bereaved, and he summons various arguments in an attempt to comfort them. However, Plato adds a twist to the form by placing Socrates in both the role of the one who is facing death as well as the role of comforter. Socrates can thus demonstrate to his interlocutors by his arguments as well as by his actions that the philosopher will face death cheerfully, since as he states (e.g. at 61b9-c10)[13] he has spent his life preparing for it. Whereas in the *Gorgias* Socrates is confronted by a series of hostile interlocutors, in the *Phaedo* he is surrounded by close friends who are highly sympathetic to his views (even though they may raise difficult objections during the course of the argument, as Cebes does at 85e3-86d5). Socrates' companions are distressed at the prospect of being separated from him, but he seeks to calm and reassure them by demonstrating that those who have spent their lives caring for their souls by pursuing philosophy will face death easily and will be looked after by the gods.

The discussion closes with an account of the soul's journey in the afterlife that differs slightly in emphasis from the myth in the *Gorgias*. At 63b7-11 Socrates states that it is his belief that he will be looked after by the gods that enables him to not fear death, and in the myth he gives a more detailed account of what befalls the soul in its journey through the underworld. In order to make sense of this myth, I will take a closer look at the characters of Socrates' interlocutors and the course of the arguments, which will show what role the myth plays in the discussion, both on the level of the characters in the dialogue and the readers of the dialogue.

[13] All Stephanus references in this chapter are to the *Phaedo* unless otherwise indicated.

3.1. The Characters of Simmias and Cebes

Simmias and Cebes, Socrates' main interlocutors, are associates of the Pythagorean Philolaus (61d6-8), and presumably have a fair amount of familiarity with the Pythagorean doctrines concerning death and rebirth. They are obviously friendly towards Socrates, since they have chosen to attend him in his final hours, and they express reluctance to offend or displease Socrates during the course of the argument (84d7-8). Cebes is described as being intellectually rigorous in pursuing arguments (63a) and as being someone who weighs arguments carefully and is therefore difficult to convince (77a7-9). Simmias also indicates his commitment to examining important matters thoroughly (85c2-7). Both interlocutors are therefore favorably disposed towards Socrates, and are eager to hear what he has to say about the soul in order that they might subject his account to intense rational scrutiny. Unlike Callicles, Simmias and Cebes will pursue an argument to its logical end, even if they find the implications of their views disturbing or distasteful (e.g. at 88b11-c7). Their pursuit of philosophy has implanted in them a strong desire for the truth.

At 107a2-10, Simmias and Cebes agree that Socrates has adequately defeated their objections to the thesis that the soul is immortal. Nevertheless, in light of the gravity of the topic under discussion, Simmias admits that he still has some doubts. This admission echoes Cebes' earlier statement to Socrates at 77e2-8 that there is a "frightened child" in him that needs soothing.[14] There appears to be some part of Simmias and Cebes that has not been fully brought into agreement with the conclusion of the argument, and it is to this part that Socrates addresses the myth: what the "frightened child" needs according to Socrates is not further argumentation,

[14] Quotations from the *Phaedo* are taken from the Grube translation found in Cooper (1997).

but a soothing charm (77e8-9).[15] I do not think that the reason for Socrates' use of myth at this point is that he views reason itself as deficient on some way. On the contrary, Socrates is explicit in his commitment to rational discourse.[16] When Simmias and Cebes provide arguments that contradict Socrates' assertion that the soul will survive death, Socrates prefaces his counterargument by exhorting his friends not to become "misologues," or haters of argument, simply because their argument that the soul is immortal has seemingly been refuted (89c10-d3). Socrates states that we should sooner mistrust ourselves (literally believe ourselves unhealthy) than mistrust reason itself.

3.2. The Relationship between Myth and Argument

Socrates' words to Crito at 115b4-c2 suggest a way to understand his use of myth: he states that Crito and the others will please him if they take care of their "own selves," even if they happen to disagree with the arguments he has presented. However, even if they do agree with what Socrates has argued concerning the need to practice philosophy, but do not themselves practice philosophy, then they will "achieve nothing." Here, Socrates is observing that there is a great difference between assenting to the conclusion of an argument and living it out.[17] Just as in the *Gorgias*, one's non-rational parts need to be in harmony with one's rational part if the whole person is to be psychically healthy. But in the *Phaedo*, Socrates describes the various desires in more detail. He speaks of the desires of the body at 66c2-d3, which hinder the soul's activity in

[15] C.f. *Memorabilia* III.xi.17, where Xenophon tells of Socrates' claim that his "charms" and "incantations" have brought Cebes and Simmias from Thebes to see him.
[16] This is highlighted dramatically at 63d6-e5 where Socrates is advised by the executioner to avoid talking, as such activity might necessitate multiple doses of the poison. Socrates disregards this advice in favor of continuing his discussion.
[17] C.f. Alcibiades' speech in *Symposium* 215c10-216c5 about the love and shame that Socrates arouses in him. While Alcibiades is present with Socrates he is able to agree with him, but when he leaves Socrates' presence he is unable to stand by his rational convictions, and this weakness causes him to be ashamed.

pursuit of what it desires, viz. truth (66b9) and wisdom (66e2). And whereas in the *Gorgias* Socrates places great emphasis on attaining internal harmony by redirecting or checking certain desires (e.g. for political honor), here the focus is on minimizing and eliminating certain kinds of desires in order that they might be less of a hindrance to the fulfillment of other, higher desires. The fear of death that Socrates' interlocutors have must be calmed and charmed away, while their desire for wisdom must be strengthened in order that they will not only agree with the argument but live their lives accordingly.

The *Phaedo* deals more explicitly with the relationship between myth and poetry on the one hand and argument on the other. At 60c4, Cebes asks Socrates (on behalf of the sophist Evenus) why Socrates has taken up the writing of poetry. Socrates replies that he has done so not out of a desire to rival his contemporaries in poetic skill, but in obedience to a certain recurring dream of his exhorting him to "practice and cultivate the arts" (60e7-8). Previously, Socrates had understood the dream to be a command to practice philosophy, but since the festival of Apollo has delayed his execution, and in case the dream was referring to poetry, Socrates has taken up that practice as well (61a7-10). At first he writes in honor of Apollo, but realizing that a poet's domain concerns fables (*muthoi*) rather than arguments (*logoi*), and not being himself a "teller of fables (*muthologikos*)" (61b6), he has instead taken the fables of Aesop and put them to verse. Soon after this, Socrates says that the most fitting way for the group to spend the time until Socrates' execution would be to recount and examine tales (*diaskopein te kai muthologein*) concerning the afterlife (61e1-2).

Just as Socrates has adapted the fables of Aesop, so he will draw on Homer's account of the underworld (*Illiad* viii.14, viii.481, *Odyssey* x.511 ff, xi.157) in order to shape that myth to fit his own arguments. However, poetry is subject to rational scrutiny and correction, as Aeschylus'

account of the road to the underworld in the *Telephus* is at 107e5-108a3. What makes the myth rationally acceptable is that it has been examined and confirmed by reason. But what makes the myth effective is that it is soothing: it calms and charms the fear of death that is in us. It provides a vivid illustration of the kinds of things we can expect to undergo after we die.

3.3. The Content of the Myth

The myth that Socrates relates begins with an account of the soul leaving the body at death: those who have purified themselves by practicing philosophy will readily part from their bodies and will readily follow their appointed guides to the place of judgment, while those who have not purified themselves will part unwillingly with their bodies, and must eventually be compelled to travel to the place of judgment (108a10-b2). Socrates next gives an account of the shape of the earth, and the paths that various souls may take after they are judged. He distinguishes between what is commonly taken to be the surface of the earth and its true surface. Like a fish or crab living in the slime and mud at the bottom of the ocean, we falsely believe ourselves to be dwelling on the earth's surface, when in reality the earth's true surface is "far superior to the things we know" (110a8-9). The trees, fruits, and gemstones with which we are familiar are only corroded versions of the ones on the earth's true surface (110d6-8).

This description is followed by an account of the circulation of water throughout the earth. Annas dismisses this account as "fanciful cosmology" which is "hardly…a display of learning, since there is no learning, only fantasy" (Annas (1982) 126). But J.S. Morrison has argued that the account of the earth presented in the *Phaedo* is drawn from cosmologies that were prevalent in West Greece, and is appropriate in a dialogue preoccupied with Western Greek (i.e.

Pythagorean) ideas concerning the soul.[18] Just as Socrates draws on mythic elements in order to compose his account of the underworld, so he draws on an account of the physical world with which his audience would be familiar. The myth is an attempt to find common ground with his interlocutors that Socrates can use to illustrate his views about the soul and the afterlife.

After the dead are judged, they are carried by one of the great rivers to a reward suitable to the life they have lived. The majority of the dead, who have lived lives undistinguished by any great good or evil, are sent via the river Acheron to a lake where they receive either purification or reward, and are then reincarnated (113a2-6). Those who have committed greater crimes are sent to Tartarus: if they are incurable they will remain there, but if they are curable then they are periodically cast up from Tartarus to the Acherusian lake, where they must obtain forgiveness from their victims before they are allowed to be reincarnated (114a7-b6). Those who have purified themselves with philosophy, however, are allowed to travel to the earth's surface, where they live with those who dwell in happiness with the gods (111b9-c4); and those who are deemed pure enough will live "altogether without a body" (114c2-7).

As in the *Gorgias*, the picture that Socrates gives of the afterlife journey is meant to have great emotional force. He is attempting to excite desire both for the afterlife spent in the upper regions of the earth, in which the philosopher will enjoy the society of other philosophers and of the gods, and disgust (or at least dissatisfaction) with the world we are familiar with by describing it as a slimy, muddy swamp in comparison with the higher, purer parts of the earth. Just as the myth of the *Gorgias* strips away the external benefits that injustice can bring to reveal the true effect of injustice to oneself, so the myth of the *Phaedo* gives us an image of the kinds of things at

[18] Morrison (1959).

which our bodily desires are directed, and shows how unfavorably they compare with the pure and uncorrupted kinds of things that the soul of the philosopher desires.

Although he describes the geography of the earth in great detail, Socrates admits that it would be unwise to insist on its literal truth.[19] However, it is "fitting" to believe that the soul's journey after death will be like the myth in its essentials: the just person, who has spent his life making himself a fit companion for the gods, will be cared for by them after death. While Socrates is not willing to hold too closely to every detail of his account, for the myth to have any force it must be the case that there is a literal afterlife. But unlike the discussion in the *Gorgias*, the discussion of the *Phaedo* has largely revolved around giving arguments for the belief in the soul's existence after death, and so while Callicles might not necessarily have had good reasons to think that a judgment awaited him after he died, by their own admission Simmias and Cebes do. Socrates may thus legitimately base his myth on this belief, since it has been properly examined in the argument.

Whereas the myth of the *Gorgias* is meant to put on display the true consequences to oneself of an unjust life, the myth of the *Phaedo* is meant to be a soothing remedy to the fear of death that Socrates' interlocutors have. In the *Phaedo* myth the judgment of the souls is only very briefly mentioned, since what Simmias' and Cebes' fears seem to be based on is their belief that death will irrevocably separate them from those they hold dear, rather than the fear that after death they might be punished (as is the case with Cephalus in *Republic* I). What the myth emphasizes is Socrates' conviction that the soul deserves our greatest care, since it will survive the death of the body, and his belief that philosophy can make its practitioners fit to dwell in an

[19] Perhaps something like the philosophy of science found in the *Timaeus* is being alluded to: although Socrates is drawing on contemporary theories of the structure of the earth, any such account of the world of becoming will be at best a "likely tale" (*Timaeus* 29d1), and it would be unwise to insist on a greater degree of precision than that, given the nature of the subject.

afterlife with others who have likewise practiced philosophy. Thus, it is imperative to care for one's soul by practicing philosophy. In this way, Socrates attempts to console his friends by holding out the hope of their reunion after death (provided they all purify themselves sufficiently), and by exciting their desire for wisdom.

3.4. Difficulties in the Myth

However, in order for my interpretation to be acceptable, there are several difficulties that need to be addressed. First, it seems that the psychology presented in the *Phaedo* is not entirely consistent: in 78b10-80b8, Socrates argues that the soul is in no danger of dissolving at death, since unlike visible bodies it has no parts. But how then are we to make sense of the soul's different capacities for arguing, desiring, and fearing? The psychology of the *Phaedo* is not as explicitly laid out as that of the *Republic*, but there is a clear indication that there are different faculties in the soul (towards which either argumentation or myth can be directed), which means that the soul is in some sense composite.

But I think that what Socrates is emphasizing is the soul's greater resemblance to the invisible than to the visible. He repeats (at 79b11-c1 and 79e2-6) that the soul is "most like" that which is invisible and incorruptible, whereas the body is like that which is visible and corruptible. And although invisible, abstract objects, e.g. a curve, can be said to have parts in a sense (the curve's concavity can be thought of as distinct from its convexity), they are not parts in the sense that Socrates means here. Even though the curve can be said to have "parts," it is not thereby in danger of dissolving, as though it could change by losing its concavity while retaining its convexity. I do not think that Socrates is claiming that the soul has no parts in this strict sense, but only that it has no material parts that could be recombined or separated.

The second major difficulty is that if the prospect of a future blessed existence is to be thought of as motivation for *me* to practice philosophy, then it must be the case that it is really *I* who will enjoy such an existence; and so there must be a continuity of consciousness between reincarnations. Julia Annas has argued that no such continuity appears in the myth, and concludes that the ideas of a final judgment and of reincarnation are in conflict.[20] David Bostock has also argued that what grounds personal identity in the myth is the soul's memories, since "nothing else seems adequate to ensure the *identity* of an immaterial centre of consciousness over time."[21] I will give two responses to this objection: first, why should we think that it is on the basis of memory that personal identity persists though reincarnation? Second, I will argue that even if this role is granted to memory, a plausible account of personal identity can be extracted from the text. In either case, the blessed existence in the afterlife that Socrates speaks of does in fact provide motivation for the practice of philosophy in this life.

Bostock rejects outright the idea that any kind of immaterial "stuff" could be thought of as grounding personal identity, in the same way that the same lump of gold could be molded into successively different shapes.[22] Bostock observes that a newly-reincarnated soul will not have the same memories, knowledge, and character that it had in its previous incarnation. But Socrates states that one's character does have an effect on one's subsequent reincarnations. Even if we agree with Annas that Socrates' examples at 81e6-82b9 of various kinds of people being reincarnated as appropriate animals are not entirely serious, he does insist in the myth that the way in which our characters are shaped affects both the process of dying and our existence after death. For instance, it is only those who have restrained their bodily desires that will readily leave their

[20] Annas (1982) 129.
[21] Bostock (2000) 899-900, all page citations are from the reprinted edition.
[22] Ibid 899.

bodies and accompany their guardian spirit along the path to the afterlife, and who will be able to ascend to the true surface of the earth. On the other hand, those who have indulged their desires for earthly things will only reluctantly part from their bodies, and it is their bodily desires that eventually result in their reincarnation. So it does seem to be the case that in the myth of the *Phaedo* one's character persists through the process of being re-embodied. The desires that we have stick with us, and this is why Socrates urges his friends to strengthen their desires for truth and wisdom, and to moderate, reduce or eliminate their desires for bodily things, since it is these desires that will determine whether or not we will attain blessedness after death by making ourselves worthy to dwell in the purer regions.

But even if it is agreed that it is our memories, rather than our character or our set of desires, on which our identity is grounded, a case can be made on Socrates' behalf for how the soul's memories might persist through reincarnation. In order to do so, I will closely examine what Socrates has to say about the soul's journey.

After being judged, most souls are sent to the Acherusian lake for either punishment or reward, and such punishments or rewards provide incentives to practice justice and avoid injustice. But then each soul is reincarnated, and at 81d10-e2 Socrates suggests that it is the soul's longing for bodily things that causes the reincarnation, and he goes on to suggest that the kind of body it receives is appropriate to its character, e.g. a gluttonous soul might find itself in the body of a donkey, while a just and moderate soul might find itself in the body of a sociable creature such as an ant, or even a human being. But the myth gives no explicit indication that the re-embodied soul will remember its past life, specifically its conduct in that life that resulted in its present incarnation; so it is unclear how being reincarnated as a wolf (or even as a human being) is supposed to provide motivation for me to practice justice in this life.

But Socrates does say that some of what we have learned in a previous life is available to us in our present life, viz. our recollected knowledge of Forms. In 73c1-76c9, Socrates argues that seeing objects that are equal in a certain respect reminds us of the Equal itself, and our knowledge of the Equal is not gained through sense perception, but was gained by the soul prior to embodiment. We thus retain a dim recollection of our knowledge of Forms, and so there is at least some persistence of memory between rebirths. Additionally, the myth implies that the souls in Tartarus and the Acherusian lake retain the memories of their previous life, since those in Tartarus who are curable must obtain forgiveness from those they have wronged before they are released, and it is hard to see how such forgiveness could be meaningful if those who are asking forgiveness and those who are granting it do not have any memory of the specific deeds that were committed. So it seems that the soul after death will retain memories of its past life, even if it loses all of those memories apart from a dim recollection of the Forms after it is re-embodied.

I believe that a more complete account is suggested by the comparison that Socrates makes between falling asleep and waking up on the one hand and dying and coming to life on the other at 71c1-72e1. Here, Socrates argues that just as we observe the pairing of opposite processes that give rise to each other (cooling and heating, enlarging and reducing, being awake and falling asleep), so the process of dying has its opposite, i.e. coming to life. But the analogy between the cycle of sleeping and waking and the processes of dying and being reborn is especially interesting, because it suggests a further analogy concerning what we can remember at each stage of the process. There seems to be an obvious similarity between the state of being asleep and being dead (one that Socrates himself refers to at *Apology* 40c5-e5), but a closer examination of Socrates' statements concerning the soul's search for knowledge strongly suggests

an analogy between the embodied soul and the sleeper, and between the disembodied soul and the one who is awake.

While the soul is embodied it is forced to make enquiries by means of the senses, which cloud the truth (65b1-8), and direct the soul's attention to the changing, sensible world, with the effect of making the soul "confused and dizzy, as if it were drunk" (79c1-10). If the soul is to pursue truth, it must disassociate itself as much as possible from the body (66d2-e1), and this will happen only after death. So the state of death, in which it is possible to have clear knowledge, is much like the state of being awake, which is unhampered by the confusion we often associate with dreaming, and the state of being alive and embodied is much like that of being asleep and dreaming. And just as the dreamer does not have a full memory of her waking life, but will upon waking remember her dreams, so the one who is alive and embodied will only recollect imperfectly, if at all, her previous life. So if it is granted that a continuity of consciousness persists even through periods of unconsciousness in the case of someone who is sleeping and then awakens, it seems reasonable to grant that such continuity persists in the case of someone who has been reincarnated, even if most or all of the memories from previous lives are not available.

3.5. The Addition of Reincarnation

I have spoken until now of the "processes" of dying and being reborn, but I think that a continuing cycle of rebirth is implied by Socrates' argument from opposites, even if it is not as explicit here at it is in the myth of Er in of the *Republic*. He states at 72a10-d6 that unless there was a continuing process of dying and being reborn, ultimately nothing would remain alive.

Leaving aside the plausibility of this argument,[23] it suggests that those whom Socrates describes as being reincarnated into various kinds of animals are only at one stage of an ongoing cycle. So in one sense this myth is more optimistic than that of the *Gorgias*, since there is more than one chance to attain blessedness in the afterlife. And if death is something that is to be faced potentially many times, rather than only once, it is all the more important to prepare one's soul for it by practicing philosophy.

In the *Phaedo* we are given a more complete picture of the need for myth and how the myth operates on the soul by soothing and charming away fear and by exciting desire, along with a more complete account of how Socrates makes use of traditional poetry for his own ends. The psychology of the *Phaedo* is slightly more complex than that of the *Gorgias*, as it deals with fear as well as desire, and hints at the doctrine of the tripartite soul developed by Socrates at the end of *Republic* IV. Likewise, the afterlife myth of the *Phaedo* is more complex than that of the *Gorgias*, while hinting at the fuller treatment that the doctrine of reincarnation will receive in *Republic* X. As in the *Gorgias*, the myth serves to reinforce the argument, and it is meant to appeal to the particular interlocutors of the dialogue by operating on the non-rational part of their souls. It is crafted with the particular characters and needs of the interlocutors in mind, and it acts as a kind of "charm" to help them fully accept the truth of the argument. I have argued that the account of the soul's judgment in the *Gorgias* is an attempt by Socrates to get Callicles to recognize the appalling effect that living unjustly would have on him. Similarly, by getting Simmias and Cebes to contemplate the image of an afterlife spent in the company of those who have purified themselves with philosophy, Socrates hopes to calm their non-rational fear that they

[23] For instance, it does not seem to square with Socrates' statement at 114c2-4 that those who are sufficiently pure will exist without bodies, and his statement at 113e2-8 that the incurably wicked will not leave Tartarus: if there is a point at which a soul no longer becomes incarnate, would this imply that the supply of souls available for reincarnation will dwindle or become exhausted?

will cease to exist after death (perhaps because an image, even a mental one, is easier to fix one's attention on than an abstract idea like the immortality of the soul) and to excite their desires for truth by the use of an aesthetically pleasing account of the true surface of the earth.

4. The Myth of the *Republic*

Of the three dialogues I am examining, it is in the *Republic* that we find the most complete discussion of myth and poetry, and the most elaborate description of the nature of the soul. Appropriately enough, this myth is the most detailed in terms of its account of the soul's fate after death. It is here that Socrates must work his hardest to present his views on how to live well, since the challenges raised by Glaucon and Adeimantus are quite strong.

4.1. The Characters of Glaucon and Adeimantus

Glaucon and Adeimantus share many important characteristics with Cebes and Simmias, the primary interlocutors of the *Phaedo*. Both pairs are depicted as spirited young men who are eager to engage in discussion, and to follow the discussion to its conclusion. Socrates describes Glaucon and Adeimantus at 368a6 as "divine,"[24] since they are able to raise serious objections to Socrates' account of justice, while remaining unconvinced themselves by those objections. Like Cebes and Simmias, they are favorably disposed towards Socrates even while compelling him to defend his position. Cebes and Simmias needed their fear of death charmed away, but Glaucon and Adeimantus are in need of a different kind of charm. Traditional Homeric religion has informed their characters, but they are also aware of the critiques that their contemporaries have offered against tradition. They are eager to engage in the life of the city,[25] and are desirous of knowing how best to order their lives. Although Socrates praises them for their spirit, it is this character trait that may lead them into trouble if they do not order their lives philosophically. I will next examine the view of the soul presented in the *Republic* in order to show why this is so.

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[24] Quotations from the *Republic* are taken from Bloom, Allan, *The Republic of Plato*, 2nd ed. Basic Books, 1991. All Stephanus references in this chapter are to the *Republic* unless otherwise indicated.
[25] Perhaps overly eager, c.f. *Memorabilia* III.vi.

Socrates spends part of book IV making distinctions between different parts of the soul. He does this on the basis of various motions in the soul that are directed either towards or away from certain objects. For instance, it might be the case that someone is thirsty, and yet abstains from drinking. It cannot be the case, Socrates argues, that the same thing can simultaneously be attracted and repelled by the same object, so there must be distinct elements in the soul that are either attracted or repelled by a given object, in the same way that shooting an arrow involves one hand thrusting the bow away and one hand drawing it near (439b6-c1). The example of thirst allows Socrates to make a distinction between the part of the soul that desires bodily things such as food and drink, and the part that calculates and determines whether the bodily desires should be indulged. In a similar manner, Socrates makes distinctions between the part of the soul that desires bodily things and the spirited part that feels anger and shame (using the example of Leontius at 439e5-440a7), and the calculating part and the spirited part (using the example of Odysseus at 441b6-7).

This is the most detailed account of the soul we have seen thus far. In the *Gorgias* and *Phaedo* Socrates speaks of the conflict that can arise between reason and the appetites and the need for internal harmony, and he makes a distinction between the rational and non-rational parts of the soul. Here, he further divides the non-rational part into the spirited part (*thumos*) and the appetites (*epithumiai*). Each part of the soul has its own proper desires: the rational part desires wisdom, the spirited part desires honor and victory, and the appetites desire wealth or bodily gratification of one kind or another. Socrates argues that it is the rational part's proper function to rule and guide the soul, since it is able to calculate the best course of action for the whole soul, and to use the spirited part as an ally (441e3-6, cf. 440e3-6).

The relationship between the three parts of the soul is made clearer by the discussion in book IX. Socrates asks Glaucon to picture a beast with many heads, some of which are wild and some of which are tame (588c6-d1). Next, Glaucon is to imagine a large lion, and a human being, and he is to imagine finally that all three are joined together and covered over by the image of a human being. Thus, what appears on the outside is the single image of a human being, while the multiform entity inside remains hidden (588d8-e2). The many-headed beast represents the appetites, some of which are lawful and some of which are not (cf. 571b4-c1). The lion represents the spirited part of the soul, and the human being which it dwarfs is the rational part. In a well-ordered soul, the spirited part is the ally of the rational part, and helps it manage the appetites by "nourishing and cultivating" (589b1-4) the lawful ones, while seeking to eliminate the unlawful ones. To speak less metaphorically, we might say that reason, if it is functioning well, can determine which of the soul's appetites are healthy and should be indulged, and which are ultimately detrimental to health, and should be starved and eliminated. But rationally accepting that an appetite is bad for me and taking action to eliminate it are two different things, and so we need some motivation to act.

Something like this is in operation in the discussion Socrates has with Callicles. There, Socrates does not explicitly delineate between the spirit and the appetites, but what he effectively does is make an appeal to Callicles' spirit (i.e. the part of him that loves honor and bravery and can feel shame) in order to make him see that some of his appetites are beneficial and some are not. It is the spirited part that is concerned with honor, so it can be appealed to against certain appetites: Socrates tries to show Callicles the shameful consequences to his own soul of unrestrainedly following his appetites. In the *Republic*, making a distinction between the two non-

rational parts of the soul allows Socrates to show more explicitly how poetry and myth can shape our characters.

4.2. Socrates' Critique and Rehabilitation of Poetry

What we find shameful or honorable is the result of the education we have had, and the Homeric myths, along with the works of other poets such as Hesiod and Pindar, form the basis for much of the education of Socrates' contemporaries. Figures such as Achilles and Odysseus are held up as examples to be imitated. But are these figures worthy of imitation, and if so, in what way? In order to provide the best education to shape the spirited part of the soul, Socrates must examine the myths and stories that form the basis for traditional morality. To put Socrates' examination in its proper context, it will be necessary to begin with the criticisms of traditional morality raised for the sake of argument by Glaucon and Adeimantus.

At the beginning of book II, Glaucon is not convinced by Thrasymachus' argument that justice is the advantage of the ruler (348a2-3), but he is not satisfied with Socrates' account either. Even if Socrates has shown Thrasymachus' account to be unsatisfactory (which Glaucon does not seem to be willing to grant, cf. 358b2-4), he has not shown that it is best to live in accordance with justice. Glaucon wants Socrates to demonstrate that justice is intrinsically superior to injustice, and that even the possessor of the ring of Gyges, who can avoid any negative consequences for his actions, would be better off being just. After this, Adeimantus expands on his brother's challenge. He notes that it is widely believed that acting justly is hard, while acting unjustly is easy, although it brings censure since it goes against traditional morality (363d9-364a6). If there was a way to escape the consequences of injustice, then it seems as though acting unjustly would be the best course of action. Adeimantus first describes a conspiracy of the unjust,

who scheme to avoid the consequences that society will impose on them if their injustice is uncovered (365d3-7). And to the objection that divine retribution follows injustice even if human retribution can be avoided, Adeimantus poses a dilemma: either the gods exist, or they do not. If they do not exist, then there is no cause to fear divine punishment either now or in an afterlife. But if the gods do exist, we only know of them through traditional morality, which also states that the gods can be "persuaded" (that is, manipulated) by offerings and sacrifices. If, like Cephalus, we fear retribution in the afterlife for our misdeeds (330d4-331b9), we only have to offer the correct sacrifices in order to escape being punished (provided that, like Cephalus, we are wealthy enough to afford them!). Belief in the gods and belief in the efficacy of sacrifices both have the same grounding, and if one is thrown out the other must be thrown out also (365e7-8). So it appears that even if the gods do exist, they pose no threat to the unjust man who can buy off the gods with the material rewards of his injustice, and the fear of punishment in the afterlife can provide no motivation to live a just life.

Socrates essentially responds to this critique by denying that we must either completely accept or completely deny everything that traditional morality tells us about the gods. As in the *Phaedo*, the myths must be examined by reason. From the standpoint of the myths themselves, there is no criterion for judging which ones are acceptable and which ones are not; they stand or fall together. But the philosopher is able to stand outside of the myths and subject them to the examination of reason. In many ways, the discussion of myths that occurs in books II and III is just as subversive of traditional morality as are the views of Thrasymachus and Callicles. In order to begin his critique, Socrates must effectively reject the idea that the myths are divinely inspired. As Allan Bloom points out, Socrates conveniently omits Homer's claim that the stories he is recounting in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were told to him by the Muses (*Iliad* i.1-7, *Odyssey* i.1-

10) and attributes them instead to the poet's own invention.[26] So Socrates can retain his belief in an afterlife, gods, and heroes, while at the same time rejecting much that the poets have to say about them as being contrary to reason.

Socrates is highly critical of Homer's portrayal of the underworld. He tells Adeimantus that if those who are to be warriors are to be free from the fear of death,[27] they must not hear Achilles' lament to Odysseus that he would rather have even the most servile position on earth than rule over and be honored by all the dead (*Odyssey* xi.488-491, quoted at 386c5-7). Other descriptions of the underworld as being dreadful and abhorrent are similarly excised. Homer's portrayal of Achilles as being overcome by grief is also denounced (388a7-8), as is the account of Achilles being swayed by costly gifts (390e3-391a1), and the impious challenge Achilles casts at Apollo (391a6-7). The Achilles portrayed by Homer is a man of unrestrained spirit, and it is against this kind of model that Socrates wishes to guard his spirited interlocutors Glaucon and Adeimantus.

The art of poetry is subjected to some rough handling in book III as well as later on in book X, but for all his condemnations of it Socrates makes use of poetry to serve his own ends. His vigorous denouncing of the poets must be understood not as a blanket condemnation of poetry as such, since it would hardly be consistent of Socrates to then make use of poetry in the way that he does. Rather, this criticism of poetry should be compared with the treatment that rhetoric receives in the *Gorgias*. For the one without knowledge, rhetoric is a dangerous thing,

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[26] For instance, the discussion of what the poets are to be allowed to say (i.e., on their own authority) at 379d1-380c9.

[27] Homer's portrayal of death, however, does not seem to make those such as Achilles fear it to the extent that they run away from battle. But what Socrates is concerned with is the proper motivation for bravery in battle. Driving out cowardliness by implanting an unrestrained love of honor is not, on Socrates' view, an improvement; c.f. Bloom (1991) 354. Just as in the *Phaedo*, Socrates wants bravery in the face of death to be the result of true understanding.

since it aims at gratification rather than the genuine good. But rhetoric can be used for good purposes, as in Gorgias' example of his being able to convince a man to undergo medical treatment when even the doctor, was unable to do so (*Gorgias* 456b1-6). The doctor, even though he has the knowledge of the craft of medicine, is not always able to persuade his patients to undergo treatment. But the persuasive art of rhetoric, when used in conjunction with the medical craft, can provide benefits that the craft of medicine itself cannot always provide. In the same way, if actually being a just person is our goal, it will not be enough to agree with the argument; we must be fully persuaded to act on our beliefs. It is this role that myth can fill, but it will only be beneficial if it acts in concert with rational argument, like the myth that Socrates tells.

4.3. The Content of the Myth

By saying that the story of the afterlife that he will tell is not "a story of Alcinous," Socrates is explicitly contrasting his story of the afterlife with the account of the journey to Hades told by Odysseus to Alcinous in book XI of the *Odyssey*. Homer's account of the afterlife has already been found wanting, and so Socrates will fashion his own myth out of similar elements. Like Odysseus, Er has made a journey to the underworld and has returned to tell of it. Er is brought to a meadow where the dead are judged. Those who are deemed unjust are sent on a thousand-year journey under the earth, where they pay tenfold for the injustices they committed in their previous life. When they have completed their journey under the earth, they must pass through the mouth of the cave to reach the meadow; but if they have not fully paid for their unjust actions, or are deemed incurably wicked, the mouth roars and will not let them pass (615e1-5). Those who are incurable are dragged off to Tartarus by fierce-looking fiery men.

As in the myths of the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedo*, tyrants make up a disproportionate part of those who are incurably unjust. In the *Gorgias* Socrates states that the reason for this is that given their political power, tyrants are naturally in a position to "commit the most grievous and impious errors" (*Gorgias* 525d7-8). But as Socrates' account of the tyrannical man in the *Republic* shows, the tyrant is in a perilous state quite apart from the particular unjust actions he may commit during the course of his reign. He is the kind of man that Callicles praises who is full of unrestrained desires and who does not let anything stand in the way of fulfilling them. His soul is internally conflicted, since his reason, the most divine part of him, is enslaved to his desires rather than ruling and restraining them both for their own good and for the good of his whole soul. The overrepresentation of tyrants in Tartarus serves as Socrates' warning to those who have a strong desire to rule.

Those who are just are sent on a thousand-year journey through the heavens, and are rewarded tenfold for their good deeds. After the group arriving from under the earth and the group arriving from the heavens come together at the meadow, they are led to a place where they see the planetary spheres turning on an axis of light. This vision of the afterlife has none of the horror and dread which characterize Homer's description of Hades and its inhabitants. For instance, Odysseus is told by Circe that Teiresias is the only one of the inhabitants of Hades who retains his reason; all others are mere shades (*Odyssey* x.494). The souls in the myth of Er, however, possess their reason, even if they do not make the best use of it (as at 619b7-c7). The souls that Odysseus encounters fill him with dread, and at last he flees from Hades in fear that Persephone will send a Gorgon after him (*Odyssey* xi.634-5). But Er makes his journey in the company of many souls who greet each other and tell each other their stories. Even though the souls emerging from underground seem a little worse for wear (614d7-8) and tremble to recount

what they have seen (614e7-615a3), they are not themselves objects of horror, and they join the company of souls who have descended from heaven. In the myth there is nothing terrible about death as such, especially since death will be shown to be just one stage in a continuing cycle of reincarnation. The only horrors in the afterlife are for those who are unjust, and even then these are only temporary for those who are curable.[28]

All of the souls other than Er are told that they will choose their next life in an order assigned by lot, and the spokesman states that choosing last is no obstacle to receiving a good life, "if [one] chooses intelligently and lives earnestly" (619b3-5). This is the key moment of the myth, where the value of practicing philosophy can be seen most clearly. The practice of philosophy helps the soul choose the best kind of life, and guards it against a foolish choice. The first soul to choose a life seizes the life of a tyrant, and does not realize until later the evils that he will undergo in the life he has chosen. This soul is described as one who had just returned from a journey of heaven, but his virtue was not the result of practicing philosophy, but was the result of the regime he happened to live in. Living justly out of habit may result in a virtuous character, but this character can be lost if habit is not reinforced with philosophical argument, and thus is not as stable or long-lasting as the virtuous character that is arrived at through philosophy.

Another contrast between the myth of Homer and the myth of Socrates can be seen in the passage describing the rest of the souls choosing their next lives. Socrates states that the soul who received the twentieth lot, Ajax, chose the life of a lion, while the next soul, that of Agamemnon, chose the life of an eagle. What would have been immediately noticed by Plato's audience is the

[28] However, as Annas points out, this may also mean that the rewards for justice are similarly temporary, and may easily be lost. But in the myth, the soul who has practiced philosophy will not only choose a life wisely, it will also not drink more than its appointed share from the river of forgetfulness (621a7-10), which implies (even if the myth is understood allegorically rather than literally) that a virtuous state of character, once attained, is hard to lose, since it will protect its possessor from committing the kinds of actions that can bring about a vicious state of character.

absence of Achilles. In the *Odyssey*, the twentieth soul that Odysseus speaks to in Hades belongs to Ajax, while the eighteenth belongs to Agamemnon. In between these two, Odysseus speaks to Achilles, and it is this passage which contains the account of Achilles' attitude towards death that Socrates takes issue with at 386c5-7. Not only are Achilles' words removed, he himself is absent from his usual place between Agamemnon and Ajax. Socrates wishes him forgotten, for he is not at all a suitable model for the young. His kind of unrestrained spiritedness is too much of a danger to those like Glaucon and Adeimantus who are spirited young men and who wish to involve themselves in the rule of the city. Instead, Socrates holds up the figure of Odysseus. According to the myth he is assigned the very last lot of all, but he still finds a good life for himself, and he states that he would have chosen it even if he had chosen first (620c4-d2). Odysseus' sufferings have cured his soul of its excessive love of honor. Socrates has much to criticize in Homer, but Homer's portrayal of Odysseus escapes censure, here and elsewhere in the *Republic*.

The souls are then bound to the lives they have chosen, and are then told to drink from the river of Forgetfulness. Each soul has to drink a certain amount, but the souls who are imprudent drink more than they are told. Then, each soul is carried upwards to be reborn. Socrates ends by advising his listeners to hold fast to philosophy, so that in their present life and in the thousand-year journey that is before them, they will all fare well.[29]

4.4. Myth and the Philosophical Life

The myth is Socrates' appeal to his interlocutors to carefully examine their lives. If the rational, calculating part of the soul is not in command, then the soul will be carried by its desires towards ends that are not ultimately beneficial. And if the spirited part of the soul is not allied

[29] [*E*]*u prattōmen* (we shall do well) is the appropriate closing phrase both of the myth and of the dialogue, and also served as Plato's customary greeting when writing to friends (c.f. the opening of *Letters* III).

with the rational part, then the appetites will become wild and unruly, and the soul will be the captive of its appetites with similarly disastrous results. In his description of the tyrants in Tartarus and the fate of the souls who are not careful in their selection of a life, Socrates is issuing a warning to those like Glaucon and Adeimantus who seek honor in the realm of politics. It is only by the use of reason, he argues, that we can best understand how to live our lives. It is the philosophical life, not the public life, which is the best guarantee of happiness.

But in order to be an effective doctor of the soul, Socrates must persuade his patients to undergo his course of treatment. The philosopher, since he sees the truth, is the only one who can legitimately use myth, poetry and rhetoric. And since the human soul has multiple parts and desires that must all be harmonized with one another, an appropriate appeal must be made to each part to bring it in line with itself and with the other parts. While argument is aimed at the rational, calculating part, myth is aimed at the non-rational part, in order to mould and shape it so that it will be the ally rather than the antagonist of reason. The whole soul will thus be made internally harmonious, which is the aim of philosophy as described by Socrates. The rational part of the soul will calculate and determine the best course of action, and can reproach and appeal to the spirited part (as Odysseus is quoted as doing earlier) to aid it in taming and moderating the various desires. The one who practices philosophy will thus be guarded from the danger of committing injustice, which scars and deforms the soul (and requires a thousand-year purgation), and will also be guarded from acting foolishly and carelessly.

The myth completes the account of justice that Glaucon and Adeimantus demanded of Socrates in book II. Socrates has argued that justice consists of internal harmony, and is therefore to be preferred to injustice. Additionally, justice will be rewarded, if not in this life then in the afterlife: the gods cannot be deceived or persuaded by sacrifices, and they will mete out rewards

and punishments according to the state of one's soul. The consequences of the life of the tyrant serve as a warning to the politically ambitious young men (both the participants in the dialogue and its readers), and the rewards and benefits of the life of philosophy are put on vivid display.

As with the myths of the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedo*, we may ask how much of the myth we are to understand literally. In some respects, the impact of the myth does not depend on there being a literal afterlife. The account of the souls choosing their next lives could very well be taken as an exhortation to plan one's present life wisely, with the warning that what may seem like a good idea at the time, e.g. making oneself tyrant, could in the long run turn out to have extremely unpleasant consequences. But I think that, as in the *Phaedo*, Socrates is very much committed to there being an afterlife of a certain kind, and a cycle of reincarnations, if only because it is a theme he consistently repeats. And it does seem as though Socrates' response to Adeimantus' challenge requires that there be an afterlife ruled over by gods who are just, and who are not moved by the sacrifices of the unjust. The account of the gods in the myth of Er parallels the discussion of the gods in books II and III, where it is argued that the gods are entirely just, and as such will not act unjustly toward anyone. Thus, we should expect that we will receive just rewards and punishments for our actions, and live our lives accordingly.

5. Conclusion

After this examination of the afterlife myths within the context of their respective dialogues, it is evident that these myths are not hasty emendations but are an integral part of Plato's moral project. The characters in his dialogues are shown engaging in argument and listening to myth, and the readers of the dialogues can be benefitted by both. Myths have great influence because they inform our sense of honor and shame, and because they have the power to calm or excite our fears and arouse our desires. Provided they undergo the scrutiny of reason, myths can have the power to bring about an internally harmonious state in one's character. The afterlife myths that end the *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, and *Republic*, dialogues in which the subject at hand is the value of a philosophical life, can be seen as exhortations to actually live one's life according to what has been determined by argument to be the case, and not to remain content with verbal assent to the argument.

Myths are powerful, which is why Socrates subjects them to such scrutiny in the *Republic*. Socrates crafts the myths he tells out of the traditional accounts of the afterlife, accounts which his audience would have found emotionally forceful. But this force can be destructive if the myth is accepted uncritically: we might end up envying the life of unscrupulously powerful men like Callicles does, or we might be deceived, as Cephalus is, into thinking that the gods can be bribed. But when used in conjunction with rational argument, myths can motivate their hearers to live virtuously, and can be tailored to address particular fears and desires in the same way that a doctor will match symptoms with treatments.

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