Myth and Mysticism In Plato’s Phaedo

by

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A Thesis
presented to
The University of Guelph

In partial fulfilment of requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts
in
Philosophy

Guelph, Ontario, Canada

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores the philosophical significance of eschatological myth as depicted in Plato’s
Phaedo. Against the view that that the eschatological myths of the Phaedo are unphilosophical or
are only made philosophical by being demythologized, in my thesis I argue that they are
essentially philosophical, where philosophy is understood as the love of wisdom. I claim that
Socrates spoke meaningfully when he characterized philosophy as a kind of love rooted in our
complex relationship to the Divine. I support this view by reading Socrates’ claims to ignorance
and appeals to the notion of mystery in the Phaedo, as deeply earnest. In my thesis, I give an
extensive exegesis of the notions of myth and mystery in the text order to explain Socrates’ turn
to eschatological myth and to defend its philosophical status.
To my mother
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following people, to whom I owe my success in this project:

My thesis co-supervisors, Professor Kenneth Dorter and Professor John Russon, for their guidance in this project and for their patience.

Janet Thackray and Pam Armitage, for guiding me through the various bureaucratic intricacies of academia, and for their kindness and for their patience.

Professor Edvard Lorkovic, for introducing me to Philosophy and to Plato, and for being a truly exceptional teacher.

My friend and colleague Richard Valliere, for helping me edit and revise nearly every draft of this document.

My parents, Sabah Lathqani and Bassam Fares, for doing the thankless job of raising me, for loving me, and for supporting me. And my mother specifically, for being the paradigm of *prothumia*. 
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This thesis explores the philosophical significance of eschatological myth as depicted in Plato’s *Phaedo*. The role and importance of eschatological myth in Plato’s dialogues are disputed, not only because Plato problematizes the relationship between myth, poetry, and philosophy himself in a number of his dialogues, but because of long-held beliefs about what philosophy is or does, as well as a perceived incompatibility between the rigorous and rational characteristics commonly attributed to philosophy, and the mysticism and religious content of eschatological myth.

Eschatological myths in the Platonic dialogues are the stories that Socrates tells about the soul’s journey through the afterlife. There are three dialogues in which these myths appear in the entire Platonic corpus. They appear in the *Gorgias*, the *Republic*, and in the *Phaedo*. These stories are not the same, they often contain different details but overall they each give some rendition of the soul's journey after death. In the *Phaedo*, these myths occur three times explicitly, although the idea of the afterlife and the transmigration of the soul permeates the
whole of the dialogue. The first appearance of eschatological myth occurs at 70c. In this section, Socrates merely mentions such a myth. At the beginning of his discussion of recollection, he explains that “there’s a certain ancient account, one that we hold in memory, that the souls are There having arrived from here, and that they arrive here again and come to be from the dead”. The second appearance of eschatological myth occurs at 80c-83a. Socrates here talks about the soul’s journey in the afterlife and its various reincarnations. He attributes the difficulty of the journey and the specific creature in which the soul is reincarnated to how the soul had spent her life. The final appearance of eschatological myth is at the very end of the dialogue at 107c-114d. Here Socrates gives an elaborate and detailed account of the soul’s journey to Hades.

As I said the primary interpretive problems surrounding these myths is related to their role and significance in a philosophical text given their mystical and literary nature. This mysticism coupled with the fact that Socrates is writing poetry on his last day, at the command of a dream no less, makes the eschatological myths of the Phaedo uniquely interesting and problematic. Plato seems both to distinguish and blur the boundaries between theology and philosophy.

In the Phaedo Socrates tells his interlocutors that he has spent his final days writing poetry for fear that he has misinterpreted a reoccurring dream that had previously compelled him to do philosophy. The dream suggests that he “make music, and work at it”. Believing philosophy to be the greatest music, Socrates feels confident that he is doing the right thing. However, just before his death, he begins to have doubts as to whether he had been interpreting

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the dream the right way. Scholars have labored over these lines because they put into question
the common view of philosophy as rational discourse. Moreover, along with Socrates’ various
references to mystery adages, incantations, and objects of faith and hope, it is not clear how we
should be reading the various myths Socrates tells throughout the dialogue. Specifically, scholars
contest whether we should take them as religious accounts, metaphors, or rational arguments,
and more than that, whether they deserve to be taken as philosophy in each of these cases. The
dominant scholarly interpretation is that the mythic elements in the *Phaedo* are simply used by
Socrates to placate the youth on the day of their teacher's death, however, when the role of myth
is not problematized and interpreted in this way, it is often taken for granted altogether. The issue
is left unaddressed and the unimportance of such myths is taken to be simply implied.²

I argue that the role of eschatological myth is justified in a philosophical text such as the
*Phaedo* because myth serves a philosophical purpose. The role of myth is justified by the overall
picture that Socrates provides us of the ontological condition of human beings in the *Phaedo.*
Specifically, Socrates suggests that we humans are daemonic creatures, that is, creatures which
are, in our very nature, oriented, lovingly, toward the ultimate nature of reality—we are “beings
turned toward Being.” I will argue that for Socrates while we are not always attuned to this truth
about our reality, some are, and they are more easily drawn down the path that advances our
aspiration to “encounter” the deeper nature of reality; others are more wrapped up in things like
argument, and so the path for them will have to be different. The eschatological myths of the
*Phaedo* are there to speak to those who are already attuned to this turning, and they serve to
encourage such individuals to persist in their pursuit: it is their already existent *love* for the

highest things, (ultimately, the Good), that is presupposed here, and that is the premise that allows the myths to work. I will thus present Love as the ultimate initiation into eschatological myth and myth ultimately as inspiration and encouragement for those who are predisposed to contemplate the nature of reality. This will lead me to contend against the dominant scholarly interpretation that eschatological myth is unphilosophical or is only made philosophical by being demythologized.

In this thesis, I defend my interpretation of the role of the eschatological myth in the *Phaedo* by analyzing many of the key sections in the text to develop an interpretation of the *Phaedo* overall. I show that Cebes’ belief that the gods are here in this world and Socrates belief that the gods are There in realm or eternals and indivisibles and that there is hope that we can come among them, is the initial impasse that sets off Socrates' entire defense of his belief in mystery adages and his subsequent desire for death (62d,e). I interpret this impasse as one between the young man’s materialism, skepticism, and potential relativism, and Socrates' belief that there is such a thing as truth and Being in relation to human matters and that we can know these truths to some degree. I suggest that Socrates is trying to preserve and defend philosophy as he understands it, namely as the love of wisdom, or the desire to know the way things are with the world as such, against relativism. Thus, I argue he is sincere when he says he believes that such a reality exists and that we can know it to some extent; I also believe that he is sincere when he suggests that he knows it only in a dreamlike way and that he believes he can, at best, communicate it through myth.

Therefore the first move in my thesis is to show that this belief that Socrates frequently professes throughout the text is sincere and unironic; the next move is to interpret what it means
that myth gives us access to the truths that Socrates only grasps in a dreamlike way. I accomplish
the first in my first chapter by enumerating the instances in which Socrates invokes myth and
mysticism and demonstrating the consistency of these invocations to encourage a reading which
not only takes the eschatological myth seriously but potentially philosophically. I accomplish the
second by contextualizing and interpreting relevant sections of the text to provide an overall
interpretation of the text that reveals that Socrates' appeal to myth is a response to the
materialism of the time and subsequent relativism, by a sincere appeal to myth and mysticism.

In the first chapter, I focus on the idea of eschatological myth more broadly. I
contextualize its appearances in the *Phaedo* to show that its role in the text is both problematic
and open to interpretation. I then present and problematize the predominant scholarly
interpretation and offer an alternative to the view that myth is either "a noble lie" or else is only
redeemed by being demythologized.

In the second chapter, I conduct a close reading of the text to demonstrate the way that
myth and mysticism operate in relation to philosophy. I follow the drama and tension between
Cebes and Socrates to establish the tension between materialism and rationalism against
mysticism and find that Socrates seems to indicate that προθούμια, as the experience of taking
heart or having courage, has a role to play in his own belief in myth and that he suggests such a
disposition will allow the youth to grasp the myths as well. I bring attention to the role that
προθούμια plays as a form of initiation into mystery adages (62a) as well as the way it functions
a kind of purification prerequisite to the loving philosophical disposition required for entering

3 The transliteration of this word is Prothumia. Prothumia means to be keen towards or enthusiastic about
something. The word is sometimes translated as courage but has a more nuanced meaning which I will bring out by
interpreting it within the context of the surrounding dialogue.
the afterlife and engaging with the highest truths (69c). I also highlight the extent to which Socrates favors those who hold such a disposition as uniquely capable of grasping myth and as such uniquely philosophical.

Because this idea is complex, in my third chapter I pursue the idea further in the sections on the “argument from opposites” and “recollection”. Just as I did with the initial tension between skepticism and mysticism, I proceed to read the text from the position now not just of the interplay between the skepticism of Simmias and Cebes against Socrates but include a third character, namely the “true-born philosopher” which at this point is depicted by Socrates as someone who embodies προθούμω in the sense that they strive towards a reality which they identify based on contemplation rather than base desire, something which they know only in a dreamlike way, and as such are persuaded by eschatological myths.

I suggest that the argument from opposites operates on two levels: on the one hand, it serves the true-born philosopher” through mythic language and on the other it serves to placate Cebes who is preoccupied with materialistic accounts and arguments at the cost of genuine contemplation and reflection. I suggest that those who embody προθούμω will find that the “arguments” in these sections are meant as reminders of that impulse in a way that reveals the complexity and irreducibility of that human condition to the aforementioned materialistic accounts. In the second half of my third chapter, focussing on recollection, I clarify this notion of myth as a reminder.

Ultimately my point is that the object of myth is a kind of encounter with ourselves that translates into an insight into the human condition, and a reinvention of ourselves through that insight. I argue that this is, in essence, a philosophical encounter. Moreover, I suggest that these
myths are to be addressed again and again throughout our lives as we develop and grow through relating to them. Therefore, I suggest that both the encounter of ourselves through myth and the act of revisiting, and reinterpreting are lost in the demythologizing of myths and the interpretation of them as somehow religious to a fault.
Chapter 1: Myth and Mysticism

Once again, this chapter aims to introduce and problematize the references to myth within the text and the scholarly reception of these references. As such, this chapter will be divided into two parts: the first will introduce and problematize the role of myth in the text as well as the scholarship, the second will introduce a possible alternative to the popular scholarly view.

I. Problematization

In the *Phaedo* Plato attributes Socrates’ belief and dissemination of the eschatological myths among his interlocutors to a certain trust in ancient and divine authorities. Often Socrates seems to be convinced of these authorities and their adages without fully grasping the meaning of the things which they profess. When the young men ask Socrates why he is writing poetry at 60e of the *Phaedo*, he says that he recalls a recurring dream from a “past life” that told him that he should “make music and work at it!”. Socrates explains that while in the past he interpreted the dream to be saying that he should do philosophy, in his present state he wonders if the dream

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had not been urging him to make popular myths instead. Socrates is at once confident that the 
dream is trustworthy but is unsure of the meaning of the dream, and it seems that his doubts 
about his previous interpretation arise from the current situation and not from the dream itself. 
Socrates explains: “it seemed safer not to go away before acquitting myself of impiety by 
making poems and obeying the dream.” Socrates only expresses doubts about the meaning and 
his interpretation of the dream, not whether the dream is authoritative. His worry is rooted in the 
fact that he believes, with certainty, in the dream’s authority.

The matter of Socrates' dream, and other lines like this, has been taken for granted among 
scholars. In part, this is because it is not uncommon for Socrates to speak this way. He often 
talks about having an encounter or divine premonition or recalls the adages of wise and ancient 
ancestors that encourage him to make a defense of some kind lest he be guilty of impiety. 
Socrates has often suggested that he is compelled by his daimon not to leave a situation until he 
has made a defense. Most notably, he does this in the Apology. In Phaedrus, he is encouraged 
by divine inspiration, and the thought of his wise and ancient ancestors, not to leave before 
coming to the defense of Love. Specifically, these scholars often take for granted that Socrates 
is exercising intellectual modesty or irony when he attributes ideas about his moral duties to a

5 Phaedo, 61b.

6 Phaedo, 60d-61b.

7 Phaedo, 61a.


9 For a more thorough account of these instances see Freyberg’s “Oracles and dreams’ commanding Socrates: Reflections on Apology” 33c.


divine or ambiguous source, wise and ancient ancestors, priests, priestesses, and poets. But, it is worthwhile to ask why Socrates expresses such confidence in this dream, given that he also confesses uncertainty regarding the meaning of its command. It is especially important to pay attention to these instances because this behavior reoccurs several times throughout the dialogue in relation to various mystery accounts.

At 62b Socrates says that he heard a mystery adage about the impiety of suicide, and while to him the saying seems true, what it means is complex and difficult to understand. Socrates emphasizes his confidence in this adage, despite the mysteriousness of its meaning. He suggests that if Cebes had was keen and took heart, that is to say if he had προθυμέομαι, he might hear something certain about such matters too.12

At 69c Socrates explains while he has put his heart into purifying himself and becoming initiated to the mysteries, a condition which he considers prerequisite to coming among the gods, whether he has done so rightly will only be determined There.13 He follows this by saying that he believes, nonetheless, that he “shall meet up with good masters and good comrades.”14 Here again, Socrates shows remarkable confidence in the authorities behind the mysteries, although he is uncertain whether he has followed their command correctly.

Socrates invokes the mysteries again at 70c. He claims that there is “a certain ancient account, one that we hold in memory” about the soul, reincarnation, and recollection. He says that the account is only reassuring provided that the things over There, the Good and Beautiful,

12 The word, that is often translated as courage, here is προθυμέομαι, prothyméomai, and the translation in the focus edition is “taking heart.”
13 “Put his heart” is a translation of the word προθυμέομαι. See footnote 12.
14 Plato, Phaedo, 69e.
exist.\textsuperscript{15} At 76e Socrates expresses confidence that he will fare well in the afterlife, although he only “hopes” that he will come among good gods and good men.

Finally, at 108d Socrates explains that regarding what the mysteries say about the real shape of the earth: “I’ll need the art of Glaucus to recount what they are. But to show that they are true—That does appear to me too difficult for Glaucus’ art.\textsuperscript{16}” Moreover, he explains “Even if I had the knowledge, it seems to me that my life, Simmias, isn’t long enough for the argument! Nevertheless, as for what I’ve been persuaded … nothing prevents the telling.\textsuperscript{17}” Once again Socrates indicates that in the absence of knowledge he will recount a myth which he believes with certainty.

Given these instances, it makes sense that Simmias and Cebes put Socrates’ confidence and hope into question. Socrates’ confidence is questionable because it is grounded in a kind of trust in something unknown and seemingly uncertain. Socrates nonetheless holds it on high authority. We are meant to ask with his interlocutors: on what basis does Socrates have confidence both in his dream and in various mystery accounts of the soul’s transmigration?

Peter Ahrensdorf is one of few scholars who finds it peculiar that Socrates’ belief manifests as a certain confidence he has in some things, and doubt in others. He explains:

Despite his apparent uncertainty as to whether he is guilty of impiety, he displays astonishing confidence that death is good for worthy philosophers and hence,

\textsuperscript{15} Phaedo, 76e.
\textsuperscript{16} Phaedo, 108d.
\textsuperscript{17} Phaedo, 108e.
presumably, good for himself. But how can Socrates be both uncertain that he is free of impiety and confident that he will not be punished for impiety in an afterlife?\textsuperscript{18}

Ahrensdorf attributes Socrates’ behavior to certain overall doubts that the philosopher has about the dream itself and suggests that his apparent confidence in the dream is his attempt at placating the youth.\textsuperscript{19} But, if this were true, then when Socrates chides Crito for believing that he was “merely talking and telling encouraging tales at once to [them] and then to [himself]”, it would seem that he is being unnecessarily disingenuous.\textsuperscript{20} Plato continually emphasizes Socrates’ good hope not only by the philosopher’s words but also by his disposition. Phaedo particularly remarks on Socrates' astonishing good hope on this occasion.\textsuperscript{21}

Socrates further suggests that he has a stake in the discussion and in the music that he makes. At 85a he suggests that he not only sings to the youth to alleviate their fears but sings to rejoice in his good hopes for the future, much as swans do. His song is a kind of prophecy of good things to come. Socrates also explains “I won’t put my heart in making what I say seem true to others except as a side effect, but in making it seem to be the case to me myself as much as possible.”\textsuperscript{22} This suggests that Socrates is invested in the discussion, in some way, and not only speaking to the youth, although he may be doing this too. If we are supposed to take this to be some sort of irony, there certainly needs to be an indication beyond our own ideas of what philosophy is and what it excludes (namely, things like myth, mysticism, and conviction).


\textsuperscript{19} Ahrensdorf, 26.

\textsuperscript{20} Plato, \textit{Phaedo}, 115d.

\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Phaedo}, 59e.

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Phaedo}, 91b.
If Socrates writes myths and sings incantations merely to placate the youth, he will least of all accomplish this by framing an argument in mystical terms, since it is evident by the responses of his interlocutors that some of them do not even have confidence in the religious adages of their own mystery cult. Cebes responds to the invocation of Philolaus’ prohibition of suicide with irreverent skepticism: he says while he has heard this man profess things of this sort, he has heard nothing certain. The tension between Cebes’ materialism and Socrates’ belief becomes a central and recurring theme in the dialogue. The authorities which Socrates frequently invokes hold no weight for his interlocutors. Myths, in particular, do not get off the ground for them. These young men are searching for certainty in the form of material and “scientific” proofs. This is evidenced by Cebes’ fears concerning the soul's disintegration, and Simmias’ and Cebes’ objections to Socrates’ image of transmigration. Thus, while Ahrensdorf uniquely acknowledges the strangeness of Socrates’ confidence in mysterious authorities, combined with his doubt regarding his grasp of them, Ahrensdorf also very quickly dismisses this behavior as an attempt at placating the youth. This is one of many instances in which Socrates’ references to the unknown and mystical are taken for granted by the scholarly literature.

The repetition of Socrates' trust in old mythic and mysterious authorities indicates that the theological dimensions of the text demand serious consideration, especially since it is primarily Socrates’ confidence (not the existence of an afterlife, nor the immortality of the soul) in the face of the uncertainty of death that is currently being put on trial by Simmias and Cebes. The predominant scholarly interpretation, however, seeks to redeem the myth by erasing the mystical or theological elements when it strives to redeem them at all.

23 *Phaedo*, 61e.
The scholars who address the topic of myth in the *Phaedo* claim that Platonic eschatological myths have unjustly been set aside as unworthy of serious philosophical analysis by those who have regarded them either as objects of faith, or else flights from rational thinking because of their mystical content and their resemblance to the Christian judgment myth. Those scholars who call out the proponents of the religious reading for taking the myths for granted, however, do not defend the myths as being philosophical in themselves but instead argue that Plato only spoke religiously and mythically to placate or persuade an audience that may be young, naive and unprepared to follow rational discourse, while providing them as metaphors for rational arguments for the serious philosopher who can demythologize. Others have suggested that myths prepare the youths to be persuaded by rational arguments. As such, the proponents of the rational reading conclude that myths, while not essentially philosophical, are useful to Socrates, who is not just a philosopher, but also a teacher. They suggest that he, like Plato, thought either that myth is a metaphor that contains a rational core for the serious philosopher, or else was a prerequisite to rational argumentation or both of these.

Kenneth Dorter suggests that the myths of the *Phaedo* have several functions. While they may be interpreted as literal accounts of the afterlife by an unphilosophical, perhaps religious audience, “the more philosophically minded may take them as metaphors” or allegories. Dorter argues that the mythic elements in the text are likened to incantations sung to the youth and, by analogy, cater to the unphilosophical and emotional part of the soul. He suggests that myth is a “noble lie”. This is a reference to the *Republic* where Plato implies that myth tells falsehoods that

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25 Dorter, 7.
we would do well to believe to live a relatively (if somewhat superficially) good life. Dorter reads Plato as arguing that while these useful falsehoods mask a more rational reading for the mature philosopher, the young may still benefit from a literal reading of the mythical story. Dorter argues that this interpretation of myth is evidenced by myth’s association with incantation, prophesy, and popular religion.26

Dorter further argues that in the Phaedo Socrates presents himself as a “champion for a cause” as opposed to the impartial inquirer he sometimes claims to be.27 He suggests that this is clear in Socrates’ statements at 91a: “I run the risk of being in the mood not to love wisdom but to love victory”.28 Dorter takes this to mean that, as far as the immortality of the soul goes, Socrates is more motivated to convince the youth for their emotional well-being than to make a philosophical point.29 Moreover, Dorter explains that his claim that Socrates plays a “partisan” role in the Phaedo is supported by the fact that Socrates repeats the language of “conviction” over fifty times throughout the dialogue, language which Dorter takes to correspond to the language of trust, or belief, which appear as lower faculties in Socrates’ divided line in the Republic.30 Dorter is led to conclude that, were it not for the emotional state of the youth and perhaps a more religious reader, it would suffice for Socrates and Plato to deliver the philosophical and rational content of myth though propositions and arguments only.31

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26 Dorter, 8.
27 Dorter, 94.
28 Dorter, 94.
29 Dorter, 94.
30 Dorter, 94.
31 Dorter, 8.
Julias Annas explores Plato’s eschatological myths as forming a trilogy which appear in the *Republic*, the *Phaedo*, and the *Gorgias*. She suggests that while scholars have tended to explore these myths as a repeated and singular account, the eschatological myths are not only inconsistent with one another but often seem to endorse unethical behavior. Similarly to Dorter’s account, Annas suggests that the details of these myths are often ignored because they are believed to be irrational and therefore not meant for analytic scrutiny.\(^{32}\) Yet she argues that this is too simple an interpretation. She writes, “Taking the myths to be lapses from rational thinking encourages a passively uncritical reading of them.”\(^{33}\) She suggests instead that while myth is a lower sort of philosophical speech,\(^{34}\) if we interpret the content of the myths rationally, refusing to conflate them with each other or with the Christian judgment myth, they speak to various models of ethical thought, including utilitarianism and virtue ethics, and reveal a progression in Plato’s moral system.

There is an overlap here between the accounts of Dorter and Annas, in that they both suggest that the mythic, mystical, or mysterious elements of the myth are incidental and secondary to an underlying rational account. Both scholars embrace the Hegelian thesis that while many may be enamored and impressed with Platonic myth, it would be a mistake to think that the myths were at core philosophical. Hegel instead argued that myth belongs to an “earlier stage” of life and that while they allow philosophical propositions to be more easily grasped, they also take something away from the purity of those truths while sufficing for the young and

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\(^{33}\) Annas, 120.

\(^{34}\) Annas, 12.
unphilosophical.\textsuperscript{35} This of course presupposes a sharp distinction between the pre-philosophical and philosophical stages of life. Whether this distinction is so sharp in the text, however, will be a central issue in this thesis.

On the other hand Ludwig Edelstein suggests that the eschatological myths of judgment are in no way rational and that they are not even allegorical since as Socrates explains in the \textit{Phaedrus} he has no time to demythologize the myths of others.\textsuperscript{36} Edelstein argues, nonetheless, that the Neo-Platonists are no closer to the truth when they argue that Plato’s myths were after a “higher knowledge” beyond reason.\textsuperscript{37} Instead, Edelstein believes that, in line with the \textit{Republic} and the doctrine of the tripartite soul, reason \textit{rules} all other forms of knowledge, and that myth speaks to that part of the soul which argument and reason are not capable of moving, at any stage in our life: namely, the spirit.\textsuperscript{38} The spirited part needs things like hope and belief to align itself with reason. This, he suggests, corresponds with Socrates’ references to myth in the \textit{Phaedo} as a kind of lullaby, song, or incantation that serves to placate the childish part of ourselves.\textsuperscript{39}

My argument in this thesis is that myth is neither a childish belief nor something that the philosopher must rationalize to get at true philosophy. I will argue, instead, that myth is philosophical but not at the expense of its being mythical nor to the extent that it can be transformed into a rational argument. That is to say, that while these scholars have shrewdly observed something unique about the \textit{Phaedo}, as well as Plato’s eschatological myths more


\textsuperscript{37} Edelstein, 474.

\textsuperscript{38} Edelstein, 476.

\textsuperscript{39} Edelstein, 476.
generally when they suggest that these myths serve a part of us that is religious, or spirited or child-like I wish to contest the interpretation of the philosophical significance that Socrates attributed to things that are spirited and religious, and child-like. I intend to show that Socrates considered them to be much more philosophical than these scholars do. More specifically, I will suggest that Socrates tells eschatological myths because philosophy is an activity that belongs to daemonic, or spirited, beings — that is, beings who are on their way to Being both ontologically and epistemically. Therefore, I will argue that myth responds to a “mystery” necessitated by our ontological condition and the corresponding epistemic limitations that human beings confront regarding matters of the soul or self-knowledge. Thus, I will defend the claim that more than “noble lies,” the myths of the Phaedo are a uniquely different sort of “lie in words,”. In particular, they are what Socrates will call in the Republic images or copies “of the affection [of that ignorance] in the soul”, that is to say, they are images of desire for wisdom and, as such, reminders of Being towards which all love inevitably strives but never fully grasps. Put another way, myths are “fables [we tell]… owing to our ignorance of the truth about antiquity”.

II. An Alternative to The Noble Lie

The fact that Socrates’ relation to the myth is one of conviction or belief does not lend credence to the suggestion that it functions as a “noble lie,” since conviction need not be something naively childish. As I have shown there is no indication so far in the text that Socrates takes conviction to be naive but rather he frequently and quite earnestly calls himself a believer,

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41 Republic, 382b.

42 Republic, 382b.
and he speaks this way about his relation to divine authorities in many of the dialogues.\textsuperscript{43} In fact conviction, even the religious sort, and perhaps especially this sort, can be something much more profoundly meaningful and philosophical. This is so especially if we consider that the definition of philosophy is, for the Greeks, the \textit{love} of wisdom, which implies a not altogether rational relationship with wisdom. The suggestion that myths and adages can function as both an objects of encouragement, religious conviction, while remaining philosophically relevant in Plato’s text has been observed by many scholars, and commonly attributed to the ineffability of philosophical content. These scholars, however, do not argue, as the proponents of the rational reading suggest, that these myths are not worthy of serious address, but only suggest that to address something seriously is not limited to addressing it argumentatively or rationally in a Platonic text. Kathryn Morgan for instance argues that “Educational paramythia” in Platonic texts is not associated with a “soothing, trustable lie” rather she suggests that the \textit{Republic} and the \textit{Laws} represent it as a kind of nourishment of the spirit. \textsuperscript{44} David Roochnik suggests that hope is necessary in philosophical practice because of the incomplete way in which we engage with matters of philosophical and metaphysical concern, thus the philosopher as well as the youth must sing incantations.\textsuperscript{45} Patricia Fagan suggests something similar in her introduction to her book when she suggests that the invocation of poetic and theological matters in Plato’s texts should be attributed to the fact that Plato was not just presenting a piece of writing but presents

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{43} See Bernard Freydberg, “‘Oracles and Dreams’ Commanding Socrates: Reflections on \textit{Apology} 33c,” in Reexamining Socrates in the \textit{Apology}, ed. Patricia Fagan and John Russon (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009), pp 5-15.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Kathryn A. Morgan, \textit{Myth and Philosophy: From the Presocratics to Plato} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 165.
\end{itemize}
the reader with a world, his world, which did not draw such a sharp line between the argumentative and poetic.\textsuperscript{46} I concur with these interpretations and push this view further by providing an alternative to the noble lie, which also appears in the \textit{Republic}, a myth which I believe is philosophical because and not despite its mysticism. I will first provide an account of the noble lie as a point in comparison to that other myth which I believe, and will show in the rest of my thesis, better fits with the depictions of eschatological myth in the \textit{Phaedo}.

The noble lie, which comes up at 415a in the \textit{Republic}, is a myth created by Socrates as a solution to the problem of jealousy and hostility in the city. It is a lie meant to encourage the people of the city to accept their respective roles in society. As the story goes, human beings were born from the earth with a metal in their soul that would dictate their position in the city. Gold souls are designated rulers, silver souls become auxiliaries and bronze souls are to be tradesmen. The story is meant to temper the desires of the people in the city by having them believe that their fate was determined by something superior to themselves. When Dorter likens the myth in the \textit{Phaedo} to a “noble lie,” he is suggesting that the eschatological myth, and even the transmigration myths, serve the youth by tempering their fear, the way that a popular religion might. The youth are meant to have hope when they hear the myth. Although the myth itself is not literally true, a literal interpretation is meant to serve a naive audience and a rational argument hidden within the myth is meant to serve a philosophical audience. The mythic elements themselves are not philosophical in any way, except to the extent that the philosopher can demythologize and address a much more rational account contained therein. This, again, is supposed to draw a sharp distinction between the pre-philosophical and the properly

philosophical. Philosophers, Dorter argues, deal in arguments and the things themselves, while children deal with stories, and poems.

In the *Republic* 382a-e after a lengthy discussion of the myths that should be permitted in the city and the kind of things that ought to be reported about the gods, Socrates provides us with paradigms for another sort of “lie”. He explains that the poets of the city should say that the gods are not “sorcerers … they don’t change themselves nor do they mislead us by falsehoods in word or deed”. He explains that a “lie in the soul” is most hated by men and gods. Socrates suggests that this is because nobody would want a falsehood in the most vital part of themselves, especially not a falsehood concerning the highest things. He goes on to name that falsehood a “true lie” which is to say a genuine lie, to set it apart from another kind of falsehood which is only a partial lie. This he names a “lie in words”. “A lie in words”, he suggests, is not fully a lie or not unmixed with truth and acts as “a copy” or image “of the affection in the soul”, an afterrising image that is not altogether unmixed with falsehood.” A lie in words”, in contrast to “a true lie”, is not hated, and is useful in a few ways. He suggests that it is useful against enemies, and for the sake of helping friends who risk doing harm because of madness. He says that in both of these cases a “lie in words” is a kind of medicine. Socrates explains that a “lie in words” is also useful “in the fables … owing to our ignorance of the truth about antiquity we

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48 *Republic*, 382b.
49 The word for affection here being *pathema*, where the root is *pathos*, meaning feeling or passion and where the suffix, the -ma, indicates the undergoing of a process, or something that is made by the process of undergoing a feeling.
50 *Republic*, 382b.
51 *Republic*, 382c.d.
52 *Republic*, 382c.d.
liken the false to the true as far as we may and so make it edifying.”\(^{53}\) Finally, he suggests that these sorts of lies are useful only to humans and not to divinities. God, he explains, does not need deception, because God, unlike humans, is not ignorant about the things that belong to antiquity and, as Adeimantus proposes and Socrates concedes, God is not friends with mad or ignorant people.

So then, in this dialogue, Socrates mentions two kinds of lies, and while the first lie is harmful, the latter has some use, albeit in different ways. The first lie, a “true lie”, is harmful because it is a “lie in the soul”. That is, a living lie, it is located in the most “vital part of ourselves” and concerns the most “vital matters”. This sort of lie seems to be a false belief that settles in the soul and shapes the trajectory of our lives, and our motivations. Socrates explains that this lie is most dangerous because it concerns “highest things.”, namely those things concerning the immortal gods, their uniformity, and truth.

The second lie, the “lie in words”, can be beneficial and is mixed with truth. My first impression is that a useful “lie in words” is a symbol or a metaphor, where the words may be literally false but point towards something true. This is the kind of lie which Dorter discusses in his book and it is a plausible interpretation because, in this sort of lie, the falsehood is contained in the words and not the soul, and therefore the words can potentially convey something true to the soul, and in this way are mixed with truth. This would imply that the person telling a “lie mixed with truth” has knowledge of truth and is reframing it for his interlocutor for some pedagogical purpose. On this interpretation of Socrates' discourse in the Phaedo, Socrates is a kind of “knower” while his interlocutor is not.

\(^{53}\) Republic, 382d.
The previous interpretation of a lie in words as a metaphor does not, however, account for Socrates’ description of the “lie in words” as “a copy of the affection in the soul”, where “the affection” being referred to is “the true lie” or “falsehood”, and where affection implies an unfolding sort of ignorance. Moreover, Socrates also refers to the “lie in words” as an "afterrising image". This suggests that it is an image of a “true lie” that arises after the occurrence of the true lie in the soul and that in this way it can act like medicine for the person who has it in them. If we reflect on the way Socrates often addresses his interlocutors, however, we get an idea of what these lines might imply.

In Plato’s dialogues, Socrates typically speaks to a certain man or group of men and directs his questions accordingly, rarely stating his own view, or even claiming to have knowledge. By asking them questions he gets an idea of who they are, and draws out their presuppositions on the topic at hand, often revealing to them the problems with their presuppositions. Perhaps, the sense in which lie in words is an imitation of ignorance or falsehood in one's soul then is that rather than revealing a truth that Socrates knows, the lie in words draws out the falsity of one's presuppositions, as Socrates is in the habit of doing with his interlocutors. Thus, it would be an image of ignorance and medicinal in the sense that it is a disarming image: it reveals the ignorance of Socrates’ interlocutors to these men themselves, such that they no longer pose a danger to others with their mistaken beliefs and even pursue knowledge.

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54 Republic, 382b.

55 Republic, 382b.
Socrates seems to have taken on the aforementioned method of speaking because he believed that he could not communicate the truth to men who were not prepared to receive it, and that attempting such a thing would pose a danger to his interlocutor. This is why, when Cephalus, for instance suggests that justice is to “tell the truth and return what is owed,” Socrates rebuts him by proposing that it may be wrong to return weapons to someone mad, responding to the injunction to what is owed and not addressing the injunction to tell the truth. The logic of that response, however, seems to have been intended to encompass both returning what is owed and telling the truth. That is to say, it is dangerous to give the same words to a sick man as you might a healthy one insofar as language is a fickle thing. Language only communicates if the person speaking and the listener are on the same page and therefore it is often best that one speaks using such disarming images. Socrates says something similar in the *Phaedrus*. Namely, that the written word is problematic because it cannot respond or defend itself against misunderstandings and that it can be mistaken for true knowledge in the soul.\(^{56}\) And yet, Socrates is writing poems on his last day. It is possible he found that a particular kind of writing could harness the disarming characteristics of his own dialogue.

Socrates does make mention of the kind of written story that he would deem acceptable considering the limits of the written word, he explains:

It is a different matter for a person who believes that in a written speech on any subject there is a necessity for much playfulness and that no speech, whether written in measured speech or not, can ever be taken too seriously…. He’s aware that the best of them were really written as reminders for men who know, and he also believes that only what is said

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\(^{56}\) Plato, *Phaedrus*, 276d.
about things just, beautiful and good — and these only when they are taught and
discussed for the sake of instruction and actually written in the soul—only then can they
be clear, perfect, and worthy of seriousness. 57

The quotation suggests that the written word is only useful for those who already have
knowledge and can only act as a reminder. This implies a qualified sort of knowledge, insofar as
there is a sense in which it needs to be reclaimed. This sort of account overcomes the previous
issues with communication because it only communicates to those who know in some sense, and
therefore, defends itself from those who do not or are not ready to grasp the truth of the matter. If
we take the lie in words to be this sort of account, this might imply that a lie in words is a mix of
truth and falsehood, because while the matters at stake in the discussion of Phaedo, the Republic,
and in this passage from the Phaedrus — namely, the condition of the divine and our proximity
to divine things— have a divine element, the person is "coming to be" and thus while they have
some part of this knowledge, to the extent that they have some sort of relation to these
metaphysical entities, they will need to be reminded of what they know. Therefore, the individual
would have to recognize the limits of words, that is take them playfully, but also to have
cultivated a divine disposition appropriate to grasping this truth. Josef Pieper has a similar
story — because it is human speech about divine things, spoken by men and comprehensible to
men — necessarily appears like a “lie" in comparison to God's own speech. ‘Only the daemonic
and the divine’ — according to the Republic —is completely free of lies.” 58 Under this

57 Phaedrus, 277e, 278a.
58 Josef Pieper, The Platonic Myths / Josef Pieper; introduction by James V. Schall, trans. Dan Farrelly (South Bend
interpretation myth does not even speak to those who are so woefully ignorant or naive but exclusively speaks to those who know in some sense.

At this point in my thesis, I am not in a position to confirm the significance of the term “reminder” in the aforementioned quote from 276d of the *Phaedrus*, however, it is not unlikely that myth operates as a kind of reminder in the *Phaedo* as well. One of Socrates' eschatological myths places the highest truths in Hades — where our souls reside before they are born and wherefrom they return with knowledge which they must work to recollect. I want to suggest not only that Socrates is serious (although perhaps not literal) about this myth but that he delivers it not to the children but to an audience of knowers, in some sense, and specifically what he calls lovers of wisdom.

Earlier I suggested that the eschatological myth in the *Phaedo* is a lie in words. I wish now to specify that, in the *Phaedo*, myth serves as an edifying fable told because we are ignorant about the matters of antiquity. I will accomplish this by demonstrating that the term “antiquity” is not unambiguously a reference to the Homeric gods as models of good behaviour but rather refers to true gods which unlike those others are characterized by being wholly good,⁵⁹ unchanging,⁶⁰ and wholly truthful⁶¹. Specifically I will suggest the term antiquity has a dual significance: on the one hand, Socrates uses this language in the *Republic* to refer to gods such as Being itself, the Good, and Beauty: things which are divine in their own right and existed before we were born. On the other hand, Socrates is talking about the sayings of the old prophets, those who have lived before us, and lived in such a way that they have gained access to these

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⁶⁰ *Republic*, 383a
⁶¹ *Republic*, 383a
metaphysical mysteries. I will argue not only that Socrates has a sincere reverence and a complex epistemic relationship to this old wisdom, but that he communicates it through myth because he cannot communicate it any other way. I will argue that he must communicate it through myth because of the complex and somewhat incomplete manner in which he knows it and because the youth must be initiated to the kind of wisdom he hopes to communicate. As such, I will argue that no set of propositions or arguments can replace the work of myth in philosophy.

That said, I would like to emphasize my earlier suggestion that eschatological myth "permeates the dialogue". That is to say, I do not interpret eschatological myth to be strictly confined to elaborate mythic accounts of the afterlife, such as the final ‘true earth’ myth. Rather, I argue for a mythic reading even of those portions of the text which scholars have tended to regard as logos in the sense of arguments or accounts as opposed to myth. I argue not only that the line between logos and myth is not so sharp but that it is certainly not a line between the philosophical and unphilosophical respectively. I suggest that Socrates believed that all logos including myths had to be playful when they were concerned with certain metaphysical matters. I suggest throughout this thesis that various so called “arguments” in the text operate on a mythic level such that they may evoke realities which cannot be accessed strictly through reason and in this way subvert that perceived antagonism between poetry and philosophy.

In the following chapter will undermine the notion that Socrates’ references to “belief”, “conviction”, and προθούμα as ways of grasping mythic truths are proof that he is either being ironic or appealing to a childish or unphilosophical audience when he tells the myths. I will do this by giving an exposition of Socrates’ many allusions to these ways of knowing, demonstrating that he is not only consistent in characterizing his epistemic relationship to the
mystery adages but consistent in characterizing those who possess such a disposition as philosophical in some sense.
Chapter 2: Προθούμια, Myth and True-born Philosophers

Once again, in this chapter, I will show that hope, conviction, and particularly προθούμια, regarding the myths are not only contrasted to the childishness of materialism, but are referred to, by Socrates, as philosophical dispositions. I will show that what distinguishes the people which Socrates refers to as "the lovers of learning" and "true-born philosophers" from the rest, is a kind of purification and prothumatic disposition that convinces them of the truths that myths profess. This contributes to my larger argument that myth is neither a noble lie nor a metaphor, but functions as a reminder for those who have cultivated a disposition that allows them to engage with the myth on a noetic level.

There are three parts to this chapter: the first is a contextualization; it sets up the narrative and the relationships in the room. The second section will contain a more thorough analysis that hones in on the tension between the materialism and skepticism of the youth, and Socrates’ affinity with myth and those who have a disposition (προθούμια) which allows them to be persuaded by myths. In the final section I define this disposition in order to better make sense of Socrates’ suggestion that such a disposition is necessary for grasping the content of myth.
I. Contextualization

To preface this section, I want to clarify that while I have put into question the argument that Socrates speaks mythically for the sake of the youth, I do not intend to dismiss the idea that the youth have something to do with Socrates’ turn to myth. Rather, I think it is a mistake to dismiss the relationship between the language of mystery, myth, and conviction, as a form of epistemic access as childish. To maintain that Socrates is merely placating the youth, is to dismiss, too quickly, the nuance of what he is doing, as well as the unique group of men, and circumstances, he is presented with.

The occasion and the emotions of the youth are significant for understanding why Socrates seems to have “changed course”. Xanthippe even relates the situation to Socrates as “the last time your companions will talk to you and you to them!” Phaedo describes the emotions in the room as an “absurd feeling…an unusual blend blended from pleasure and from pain too.” It is no coincidence then that on this occasion Socrates is not only writing poetry but specifically setting the myths of Aesop to verse: the same poet who, as Socrates suggests, would likely write a myth about how pleasure and pain were fastened together by the god to reconcile their antagonism.

Moreover, it is not a coincidence either that Socrates makes a prayer to Apollo. This conversation only takes place because Socrates' execution is delayed on account of some religious proceedings that prohibited the execution of prisoners until the return of a certain vessel to Athens. It is said that this is the same vessel

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62 Plato, Phaedo, 60a.
63 Phaedo, 59b.
64 Phaedo, 60c.
in which Theseus once went off leading those Twice Seven to Crete, and both
saved them and himself was saved. So, it is said, the Athenians at that time made a
vow to Apollo that if they were saved, an embassy would be dispatched to Delos
every year— which always and still now…they send to the god.\textsuperscript{65}

Socrates has likely changed course to save the fourteen or “twice seven” men who are present at
his execution and are intentionally enumerated by Plato. But we should pause and ask ourselves
what it means that Socrates has changed course. Is this change in direction a matter of his telling
myths? Hasn’t Socrates always told myths? It is certainly unusual that he is writing them down,
but to suggest that Socrates’ change of course amounts to the difference between rational
arguments and, now, poems, is not persuasive. After all, Socrates is famous for being a teller of
stories. Moreover, at no point in any of his dialogues does Socrates suggest that philosophy
should be equated solely with logical propositions. So, if Socrates has changed course in some
way, we should ask what exactly he is doing differently. Further, we should ask why Socrates
changed course on \textit{this} occasion, and with \textit{these} people? What is Socrates responding to in these
young men?

That which Socrates is saving his twice seven from can be found in the continuation of the
aforementioned sailing analogy. At 85c, Simmias explains:

\begin{quote}
It seems to me, Socrates, perhaps it does to you too, that to know anything sure
about such matters in our life now is either impossible or something altogether
hard…for in these matters, a man must…learn or discover what’s the case, or, if
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{65} \textit{Phaedo}, 58a-c.
that’s impossible, he must sail through life in the midst of danger, seizing on the best and least refutable of human accounts, at any rate, and letting himself be carried upon it as on a raft — unless, he could journey more safely and less dangerously on a more stable carrier, some divine account.

The death of Socrates represents the death of philosophy as these young men know it. The risk for them is that upon Socrates’ death they will give up hope that there is such a thing as wisdom concerning human conduct and virtue. They will no longer keep faith that a stable or “divine account” is something accessible through philosophy. Cebes and Simmias express this much. When Socrates asks Simmias whether people “can communicate knowledge which they recollect”, Simmias replies, “I’m terrified more than anything that tomorrow at this time there’ll no longer be anybody among human beings worthy of the task.”66 And when Socrates suggests that Cebes sing incantations to the child within him so that he no longer fears the disintegration of the soul, Cebes replies, “where, Socrates,… are we to get a hold of a good singer of such incantations, since you,…are abandoning us?”67 It is clear that Socrates’ turn towards myth and even his references to mysticism are in some way a response to the skepticism of the youth regarding their access to knowledge concerning metaphysics and ethics, as well as their fears regarding the condition of their souls and more generally and connectedly their potential misology.

My hypothesis thus far is that in referring to mysticism Socrates is trying to communicate something quite serious about the complex and mysterious relationship we have to the divine,

66 Phaedo, 78b.
67 Phaedo, 78a.
truth, and Being. This is something he can only communicate through myth as a kind of image and reminder of that relationship. Moreover, if Socrates is sincere when he suggests that what distinguishes his own epistemic relationship to the highest metaphysical mysteries from that of the youths is a certain kind of conviction, hope, and προθούµια concerning the old religious sayings, as well as things like Beauty, Goodness, and Being, then we might wonder whether encouragement, myth, song, and incantation do not have some more serious role to play in the philosophical process.

II. Προθούµια and Myth

In this section, I will further establish the tension that exists between the materialistic skepticism of the youth, and particularly Cebes, against Socrates’ mystical accounts. In doing so I hope to establish προθούµια as a philosophical ideal which acts as a kind of initiation into the mystery adages. This will set up my argument that the function of myth is a reminder for those who are initiated, which are not those who are most rational but rather those who are most capable of receiving a noetic vision.

The mystery adage about the unlawfulness of suicide prompts the entire discussion of the immortality of the soul. Socrates suggests that Evenus would do well to follow him towards death as soon as possible. Simmias is shocked by this exhortation and suggests that Evenus would be resistant to this. Socrates then responds that if Evenus is a philosopher, he would be willing, even eager, to follow in his footsteps, although he certainly should not kill himself for, as

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68 Phaedo, 108d.
69 Phaedo, 70a.
70 Phaedo, 62b.
Socrates explains, “they say it isn’t lawful.” Cebes is confused that a philosopher should be eager to die but that it should be unlawful for him to help himself. Socrates is shocked, however, that Cebes had not heard this before, since he has spent time with Philolaus.

Socrates is shocked that Cebes is ignorant of this adage because Philolaus is a prominent Pythagorean figure. There is no known specific historical passage that Socrates refers to, but Philolaus’s philosophy is important in the dialogue to the extent that Philolaus is known to have discussed limiteds and unlimiteds as the basic constituents of reality. This is something that Socrates will get into shortly. Socrates introduces a theory of opposites related to several pre-Socratic theories of natural science. Moreover, Philolaus, among other Pythagoreans, also talked about the transmigration of souls which becomes a central myth that reoccurs several times throughout the dialogue and culminates in the final eschatological myth. However, while Cebes seems compelled by the natural science component of Philolaus’ thought, he is much less compelled by his religious accounts of piety.

Cebes responds that while he has heard Philolous himself and some others say something to that effect, he says he has not heard “anything sure”. This can be attributed to the fact that the young man puts no stock in such religious accounts, but requires a more rigorous and definite proof. It might also be attributed to the fact that the young man also happens to be a materialist which can be gleaned from the fact that he believes that the soul is the sort of thing that can be destroyed or blown away with the wind like smoke upon death. Socrates suggests that Cebes...

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71 Phaedo, 61c.
72 Phaedo, 61e.
73 Phaedo, 77e.
might hear something certain about these matters if only he would "take heart". The word being translated here is προθούμα which is sometimes translated as “courage”.74

This last comment has drawn much scholarly attention to the extent that it is not clear why courage would allow Cebes to find something certain in the adage.75 The comment seems significant, however, given the importance attributed to courage in the following discussion of purification and initiation, as well as the discussion of recollection.76 προθούμα is referred to as a kind of purification and a characteristic of a true philosopher. Socrates implies that the certainty he has regarding matters of the afterlife comes from courage. In each case, Socrates attributes his belief in the mystery adages to this prothumatic tendency. Moreover, while the implications of this disposition are essential to understanding the role of myth and mysticism in the text, a serious investigation of this is undercut by the scholarly idea that Socrates uses the myth merely to placate the fear of the youth, and that courage and conviction are lower ways of engaging in philosophical matters. The suggestion that encouragement and hope are lower forms of engaging with reality implies that one needs to abandon them before grasping a dispassionate truth. Thus far, however, this has not been implied in the text.

Socrates explains that, out of context, it may be strange to suggest that philosophers should be destined for death and that it should, nonetheless, be impious for them to take the matter in their own hands. Cebes confirms the absurdity of the comment by letting out a gentle laugh at the idea that the Athenian jury should be referred to, in this case, as Socrates' benefactor, Phaedo, 62a.

74 Phaedo, 62a.
75 See Dorter, 15, David White, Myth and Metaphysics in Plato's Phaedo (Selinsgrove: Pennsylvania University Press, 1989), 34.
76 Plato, Phaedo, 68c.
and that his death should be considered a kind of favor. Socrates explains, however, that in a certain context—namely, in the context of the mysteries— the suggestion is not as absurd. Specifically, he recalls the story that the mysteries tell which suggests that “we humans are in a sort of garrison and one is bound not to release oneself from it nor to run off.” Socrates suggests that this idea is complex and not easily understood, but that it seems true that the gods are indeed our benefactors. The word being used as “garrison” in this translation can also be translated as “prison.” Moreover, it seems that Socrates makes use of this ambiguity to the extent that he suggests that we should not “release [ourselves]” as if we were imprisoned, or “run-off” as a soldier might in battle.

That we are in a garrison might suggest that the philosopher is like a soldier: willing to die in battle in the name of honorable and pious things while unwilling to take his own life. This interpretation would go some way into explaining why προθούμα is something important in understanding the adage. It could be that only someone with the disposition of a soldier would understand why someone would give up their own life for a good that exceeds life itself, or that there could even be such a good. This, however, is not the way Socrates explains it (though it is not inconsistent with Socrates’ actual suggestion). Socrates explains that we are the possessions and beneficiaries of the gods and that, as their possessions, it would anger them if we were to take the matter of our death into our own hands. This explanation makes sense to the extent that Socrates wants to correct Cebes' presumption that the adage refers to the Athenian jury as

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77 Phaedo, 62a.
78 Phaedo, 62b.
79 Phaedo, 62b.
80 Phaedo, 62b.
Socrates’ benefactors, and that it is they who release him. Instead, Socrates explains that it is the gods who release him.

Socrates will go on to explain that his hope in the face of death, in part, lies in the fact that the gods exist on the other side of death, defined as the separation of soul and body and the start of the soul’s journey. There to that place where the highest things reside. Cebes, however, responds in a way that suggests that the gods reside here and that by dying Socrates is abandoning these gods. Cebes’ materialism prevents him from understanding what is foundational to Socrates’ point. Namely, that the gods are not the Homeric gods who reside here in this world and who give goods in exchange for sacrifices. The gods, for Socrates, reside There, and are “intelligible and single formed and indissoluble”. In this case, the gods are more likely one God or many manifestations of one thing. These gods are what Socrates will later call “Being itself”, “Good Itself and the Just and The Holy”, all of which he similarly regards as beings whose existence manifests in the questions we ask and the answers we give. Ironically, Socrates’ worship of these alternate gods and his dispute regarding the place of the divinities prompts Socrates’ second trial which occupies the rest of the dialogue, and which results in a long discussion on the soul's fate after death.

Socrates will attempt not only to explain but to instill some confidence and certainty in the idea that Being—the “intelligible and single formed and indissoluble”—exists that we have

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81 Phaedo, 62d,e.
82 Phaedo, 80b.
83 Phaedo, 78d.
84 Phaedo, 75d.
85 Phaedo, 75d, 78d.
some share in it, and therefore he will not have done any injustice in desiring death. However, what is strange is that Socrates does not actually argue for this idea but presupposes it throughout. He argues only that the philosopher loves wisdom and that the philosopher believes that he will one day commune with those things which he loves on the other side of death, and in this way, they are justified in desiring death. Socrates uses philosophical love itself as his justification for these points, and he is consistent in this regard.

Socrates begins this odd justification by asking Cebes if death is a freeing of the soul from the body, whereby the soul is “herself by itself”. Socrates explains then that since the philosopher is a lover of wisdom, which is to say a desirer of things which belong to the unadulterated communion with soul (truth, the things in themselves and Being) as opposed to those of the body (food, drink, and sex), the philosopher desires death. This implies that the philosopher is his soul, and will be released from the body as though he were being imprisoned by it. Socrates goes on to establish the point that wisdom belongs to the unadulterated communion with the soul by suggesting that it is through the reasoning capacity that we grasp the things that are. Therefore, since it is the soul that reasons, "the soul of the philosopher… seek[s] to become a soul herself all by herself". Moreover, he explains that since the soul reasons best when it is not overly pleased or pained by bodily things, and since the body "fills us up with erotic loves and with desires and terrors and all in the manner of images and lots of

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86 Phaedo, 64c.
87 Phaedo, 64d.
88 Phaedo, 65c,d.
89 Phaedo, 65d.
nonsense”, the soul should avoid communing with the body. Socrates concludes that for these reasons the philosopher does himself some good by fleeing the body as much as possible in life. He goes on to attribute this conclusion not only to the fact that the senses reveal nothing of truth, but to the fact that bodily desires stir up “factions and battles” and deprive the philosopher of the leisure to philosophize. Therefore, he suggests, that “If we are ever going know anything purely, we’ve got to free ourselves from the body.” Furthermore, he explains “Either there’s nowhere to attain knowing, or else it’s only for those who’ve met their end.”

Socrates concludes that

“true-born philosophers would be won over to some such opinion as this and so would say something like the following to one another: ‘it looks like there’s a shortcut that brings us to this conclusion — that as long as we have the body accompanying the argument in our investigation, and our soul is smushed together with this sort of evil, we’ll never, ever sufficiently attain what we desire’.”

This passage is perplexing for several reasons not the least of which is the fact that Socrates suggests that philosophers would take a shortcut which persuades them of what the preceding argument suggests, namely, that so long as they are living and combined with the body they will never commune with the wisdom that they seek.

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90 Phaedo, 66c.
91 Phaedo, 66c.
92 Phaedo, 66e.
93 Phaedo, 67a.
94 Phaedo, 66b.
95 The word being translated as shortcut is ἀτραπός. It generally means: a direct path.
The word which is translated as “true-born” is γνήσιος and usually means genuine. One of the lines that closes off this discussion of purification is “Whoever arrives in Hades ignorant of the mysteries and uninitiated will lie in muck, and whoever arrives there purified and initiated will dwell with the gods. For as they say about the mysteries: 'Many the wand bearers, but the celebrants few.' And these celebrants are in my opinion none other than those who have philosophized rightly.” Socrates here is talking about the process of initiation into the mystic rights. In ancient Greece, there were several mystery cults and a process one would need to undergo to be able to grasp their mysteries. It was considered dangerous for someone to learn the mysteries without proper initiation or purification. Celebrants of the mystic rights are those who have undergone initiation some kind of process of purification. The “wand-bearer” is then someone who goes to the realm of the gods without having undergone the proper channels. Perhaps the same person who is said to commit suicide. This person seems to enter Hades without the grace of the god and in so doing seems to dwell in Hades among the shadows.

The fact that Socrates says that the true-born philosophers take a shortcut invites a comparison between these true-born philosophers who are persuaded and the young men who are consistently unpersuaded. While it is not exactly clear what Socrates is referring to here as the shortcut that true-born philosophers take, I believe that the preceding account of death and its desirability is itself the shortcut. That is to say, Socrates has given a strange and perhaps insufficient account by the young men’s estimation. He does not justify the philosopher’s desire for death in the way Simmias and Cebes expect him to. The young men expect that Socrates will

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96 Phaedo, 69c.

97 Phaedo, 81c,d.
justify the philosopher’s desire for death by showing that the soul, as a material substance, is immortal and that it persists in some way. The presupposition by the young men is that death is worthwhile only if we continue in a material sense. This is apparent from Cebe’s initial comment that the gods are in this world. The gods, for him, are those that provide material subsistence: Poseidon is the god of the sea, Hera is the provider of fertility, and so on. More than that, however, it seems that the young man does not even take these human-like gods very seriously as personified beings. Rather, judging by Cebe’s Pythagorean origins and given his disregard of the religious components of the mystery cult, it is very likely that he takes the gods to be personifications of material elements rather than the providers of such elements so that by placing the gods in this world he is suggesting that these elements are the highest beings and all that there is. This would be consistent with the pre-Socratic tradition(s), which place(s) a certain material substance as the first primary constituent of reality. As such, when Cebe asks Socrates to justify his desire for death, he is asking him to provide some such materialist account. And while Socrates will make use of such explanations in the “argument from opposites,” Socrates only does this to appease the young man who he perceives as having a childish materialism. In fact the other interlocutors who indicate a belief in myth will be treated much more sympathetically than Cebe. Socrates has already referred to them as philosophically minded in some sense. The suggestion is that Simmias and Cebe lack something on account of which those true-born philosophers are persuaded. The previous exchange between Cebe and Socrates indicates that this thing which the young men lack is something like courage or Προθοδοξία.

This is to say, the direct account which persuade philosophers is not direct to the extent that there is a longer account that articulates matters in the way that Simmias and Cebe would
like, but to the extent that Socrates has not fully said or articulated in speech the whole of which is convincing about the account because it seems that it is not utterly up to him. That is to say, the account demands something on the part of the listener and specifically it demands that the listener change their disposition. The listener must undergo a kind of purification involving the cultivation of προθούμια and moderation whereby they will be able to encounter the truth of the mythic mystery adages. Socrates will indicate this more than once.

At 77c-e, after giving an account of recollection, Cebes suggests that Socrates’ demonstration was incomplete, for while he proved that the souls of the dead come from Hades, Socrates has yet to prove that they do not perish afterlife. Again, Cebes expects a materialistic account and, consistently, Socrates suggests that this short or incomplete argument that he gives should be sufficient and, further, attributes the seeming insufficiency of the mystery account to a lack of courage on Cebes’ part. Socrates’ specifically suggests that Cebes is not convinced because he has the same fear that children have.

At 108d-e Socrates says that, regarding the things that concern the true shape of the earth, he requires Glaucus’ art (the art of seafaring and prophesy) "to recount what they are. But to show that they’re true”, he explains, “that does appear to me too difficult for Glaucus’ art”. Here Socrates means that his prophetic capacity to communicate things he believes about the afterlife only goes so far, suggesting that his audience may not be receptive to his message. He continues: “[E]ven if I had the knowledge, it seems to me that my life, Simmias, isn’t long enough for the argument!” Here again, Socrates implies that given his lack of “knowledge” regarding metaphysical matters, and the lack of time necessary to give a longer account, he will give a myth instead, one that is persuasive to him and true-born philosophers. Of course, what Socrates
will offer will be “nothing sure” as Cebes would say, and will not constitute knowledge by Cebes’ standard. For Cebes “something sure” is an empirical account. Socrates suggests that Cebes is unconvinced because he has not undergone a kind of “purification”.

III. Προθούµια and Philosophy

Socrates explains that “Purification” involves a combination of courage and moderation, and that, specifically, it is “separating the soul from the body as much as possible and habituating her to gather and collect herself all by herself out of the sites of the body and to dwell as much as possible, both in the present time and in the time to come, alone by herself.” It is not clear what it should mean for the soul to gather herself by herself or where the soul gathers herself to dwell by herself “in the present time” unless she can be separated from the body in the present life.

Socrates will say later that the soul is immaterial and so, of course, the language of the soul being removed from the sites of the body and located elsewhere is strictly symbolic, nonetheless, the symbolism is significant. What does it mean that the soul dwells at times within the sites of the body and that the soul is collected out of the sites of the body? And what is this qualified sense in which the soul can be released as much as possible?

This account of purification is strange because Socrates suggested just a moment ago that "either there's nowhere to attain knowing, or else it’s only for those who’ve met their end." Socrates seems to suggest that the soul can dwell by herself in the present time. This would imply that that we could know and be with the gods, in a way, while we are still living or before the final death. That is to say, we could die to the world while we are still living, but that the

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98 Phaedo, 67c.

99 Phaedo, 67a.
“knowledge” we would have here is something which Socrates hesitates to equate with the knowledge we grasp while we are There, in the realm of the eternals. Our earthly knowledge seems to be no less true, but it is a shadow of what we received in Hades.

Perhaps, then this is the reason that the philosopher is a lover of wisdom: the philosopher is the one who is oriented towards wisdom because of a direct experience with it, which compels her to track it down. The philosopher both possesses wisdom and, in a sense, she does not. She has encountered it, and to the extent that she “holds on to it and hasn’t utterly lost it”, she is guided by the image of that which she once saw. This is not controversial to the extent that this is how Socrates describes knowledge in his account of recollection. Socrates describes his dreams at the start of the dialogue this way as well. Socrates has this reoccurring dream, and while he is certain that the dream is authoritative and true, he is compelled by that fact to test the meaning of the dream. He does this by making myths, believing that this is what is meant when the dream tells him to make music. Now to be sure Socrates is not testing if the dream is true, but if his understanding of the dream true. He knows without a doubt that he should sing and make music but he is worried about the quality of the song. And although he believes that he won’t know for sure if he has got it right until he dies, he is not altogether without guidance in this regard; he is compelled by the memory of something he encountered many times in the past.

I take Socrates to imply that one undergoes many deaths and reincarnations, so to speak. This is an idea that reemerges in another version of the transmigration myth. Socrates suggests that we are reincarnated into different creatures, implying that in undergoing these “deaths” we

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100 Phaedo, 75d.
seem transformed through our relation to them.\textsuperscript{101} The idea then is that those who are purified in this way will be persuaded by the account because they alone will have experienced death to some degree. They will have seen beyond death in a way, and will realize not only that those eternal things to which Socrates often refers exist, but that we can have a share in them. While the account is certainly not literal, it does seriously refer to a kind of death to the world. That is to say, the account refers to an experience and direct encounter with the beyond. Socrates describes courage or Προθοόμα as a disposition capable of facilitating an encounter of this kind.

Socrates explains that it belongs to these purified philosophers to be courageous and moderate, but not in the way that is commonly thought.\textsuperscript{102} He explains that one is not courageous by means of “exchanging pleasures for pleasures and pains for pains and terror for terror and the greater for the less, as if they were coins.”\textsuperscript{103} We typically think of a courageous person as courageous because they overcome something which they fear, usually because they fear something else far more. For example, while a soldier may be afraid of death, they might sacrifice their lives to fight in a war because they fear dishonor, or a detriment of their loved ones, much more than they fear death. The philosophical pursuit of death is different. In the philosophical pursuit of death one does not act for the sake of avoiding the greater of two evils or gaining the greater of two benefits, but acts purely for the sake of wisdom, which he deems good for its own sake. Knowing that there is nothing in this life that one should be afraid of losing, and that everything worthwhile resides on the other side of death, the true-born philosopher regards pleasures and pains as inconsequential, intent upon only what is true. Thus, the benefit of all

\textsuperscript{101} Phaedo 80c-83a.

\textsuperscript{102} Phaedo, 68c,d.

\textsuperscript{103} Phaedo, 69a.
things is not measured against the way the philosopher feels, but rather against something much higher.

Socrates explains:

Maybe this alone is the right coin for virtue, the coin for which all things must be exchanged — thoughtfulness. Maybe this is the genuine coin for which and with which all things must be bought and sold; and maybe courage and moderation and justice and true virtue as a whole are only when accompanied by thoughtfulness, regardless of whether pleasures and terrors and all other such things are added or subtracted. 104

There is a tension in this metaphor to the extent that exchanging wisdom for courage seems incompatible with the language of exchange. That is to say, in Socrates’ account, thoughtfulness is not lost or spent in courage. If courage is a purification through which we gain thoughtfulness and thoughtfulness reinforces courage, then nothing is spent in gaining courage. Dorter suggests that, at this point, Socrates uses “exchange” in the sense of “changing denominations within the same total value.” 105 However, if courage is nothing but thoughtfulness regarding things that are worthy of fear, how might we regard courage as a purification on our way to wisdom?

There is a lot said about courage in the example of being at war. Socrates suggests that our desires for things in the world create factions and battles. 106 To be courageous then is to remain steadfast towards a singular love above all others: wisdom. There is also a premature kind of courage or zeal which Socrates mentions in the Republic in relation to the Auxiliaries that

104 Phaedo, 69b.

105 Kenneth Dorter, Plato's Phaedo: An Interpretation, 31.

106 Plato, Phaedo, 66c.
matches this description. Socrates suggests there that courage is a disposition reminiscent of the behavior of “a well-bred hound.” Socrates suggests that courage is a disposition reminiscent of the behavior of “a well-bred hound.” It is a certain indifference towards pleasures and pains on account of loyalty towards one's friends and masters. He implies that dogs possess this disposition insofar as they regard everyone familiar to be a friend and everyone else an enemy, regardless of the benefits or injuries they have endured at the hands of these individuals. This attitude is described as unpragmatic or uncompromising but steadfast towards what one recognizes as masterful. Socrates suggests that this disposition is also philosophical. This then depicts the budding philosopher as a sort of zealot.

The best representative of such a disposition, in the dialogues, is Apollodorus. Apollodorus is the young man who narrates the whole of the Symposium to a businessman. He is, in fact, present at Socrates’ execution and is singled out at the beginning of the Phaedo as someone who is most of all in a condition which Phaedo describes as an unusual blend of pleasure and pain. Most of what we know about the Apollodorus is from the opening of the Symposium. In that dialogue, Apollodorus runs down his poor friend and interlocutor: the unnamed businessman. He says: “I don't know anything that gives me greater pleasure, or profit either, than talking or listening to philosophy, but when it comes to ordinary conversation, such as the stuff you talk about[,] financiers and the money market, well I find it pretty tiresome personally.” Apollodorus's friend then gives a remarkable description of Apollodorus’

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107 Plato, Republic, 375e.
108 Republic, 376a.
109 Republic, 376a.
110 Plato, Phaedo, 59b.
111 Plato, Symposium 173c.
character, saying: “[Y]ou seem to have an extravagant idea that the whole world, with the sole exception of Socrates, is in a state of utter misery—beginning with yourself. You’re always the same—perhaps that’s why people think you’re mad.”

Surprisingly, Apollodorus concedes emphatically to that man’s description, replying, “My dear man, of course I am!... I shouldn’t dream of thinking such things about myself or about my friends if I weren’t completely crazy.”

Of note here is that Apollodorus is considered crazy for the same reason that Socrates is. Like Socrates, he is considered worthy of death, in the same way, that causes Simmias to chuckle at 64a. In that passage, Socrates says “Others are apt to be unaware that those who happen to have gotten in touch with philosophy in the right way devote themselves to nothing else but dying and being dead.” In response, Simmias laughs because Socrates has said something terribly ironic. Socrates’ description of the philosopher is comedically consistent with the way that the Athenian jury thinks about philosophers, and, specifically, Socrates. However, while Socrates reverently believes the philosopher is “ripe for death” in a very complicated way (the explanation of which spans the entire dialogue), the Athenians believe it with mockery and hostility. Apollodorus, like the philosopher, is considered mad because he is in some sense already dead to day to day matters, practical things. All he cares about is philosophy and wisdom, and he takes these things not only to be beyond this world, but also to be the measure of a happy life. He has some conviction that only Socrates has gotten a hold of this. He does not seem to have an account or explanation, but as his friend explains: Apollodorus is “always the same,” steadfast and passionate towards this one conviction, in the same way,

112 Symposium, 173d,e.
113 Symposium, 173e.
114 Plato, Phaedo, 64a.
Socrates seems to believe with certainty the adages of the mysteries, though he is unsure of their meaning and is unable to account for them.

This disposition of the philosopher seems so absurd that even contemporary scholars will not accept it. Ahrensdorf concludes that Socrates, despite all suggestions that he maintains a joyful disposition on the day of his death, must be deeply distraught and putting on a brave face. What is more, Ahrensdorf feels that Socrates must be invoking mysticism for the sake and benefit of the youth. On the contrary, however: Socrates believes that philosophy manifests as the kind of madness that so many scholars want to deny him. He is earnest when he attributes philosophical clarity to those who embody this sort of ΠΡΟΘΟΪΜΙΑ.

Cebes, on the other hand, lacks the ΠΡΟΘΟΪΜΙΑ and zeal which Apollodorus embodies and which Socrates considers a kind of philosophical madness. According to Socrates, Cebes has a “down-to-business manner”, he is “always tracking down the best argument or other and isn’t willing to be persuaded right off the bat by what anybody says”, and while this attitude is commendable in some ways, a critical mind is of no use to someone who has no knowledge of the way things are. Socrates contrasts Cebes' business-like manner against his fellow interlocutors who are persuaded by myth. Cebes is firmly situated in this world and the language of exchanges. His rebuttal of Socrates’ initial defence of his desire for death places the gods in this world and describes our relationship with them as one of exchange. That is to say, the gods are our benefactors and we the beneficiaries, we desire, and provided we give the right sacrifices we will gain what we desire. What Socrates describes is different. The gods for him reside in that realm of indivisibles and eternals, and we must purify ourselves and meet them where they are. This scene acts as a good example of the limits of argument. Both arguments are valid. The
question of the placement of the gods, however, and our relationship to them — or rather where truth resides, whether there is some such truth, and whether we have access to it — are questions cannot be answered by such arguments but rather require some inward reflection on our own ontological state. Socrates is not undermining the arguments, but suggesting that we have no use of them if we do not understand the way things stand in relation to Being.

Socrates believes that philosophical love desires the good as such, and pains to meet it where it is, to enjoy it as it is. This implies a recognition that there is such a thing that is beyond our personal desires. That is to say, there is something that we know to Be, even before we can account for it. This seemingly involuntary ontological question itself comes from an intuition that there is some such Being and that we have some share in it. This however by no means closes the mystery, but rather seems to be a point of departure for genuine philosophy.

As Pieper says:

Philosophy…flows from man’s basic existential disposition toward the world, an attitude largely beyond any willful determination and decision. To approach the subject matter philosophically, to philosophize, therefore — is not a process simply at our disposal.…

It follows, then, that how to philosophize is not something you can “learn” — at least not in the sense at all as you learn a foreign language, or say, how to use a microscope: by acquiring the specific knowledge, by methodological practice, repetition, and such like.115

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Socrates is trying to describe the ontological primacy of metaphysical knowledge, as compared with other sorts of knowledge. That is to say, to the extent that the knowledge at stake is metaphysical knowledge—knowledge of Being and our own relationship to it—we cannot gain this knowledge from an objective distance like we might gain knowledge of physical things. There is something given about the human condition, and in turning away from matters of exchange inward towards matters of Being we may gain the existential and epistemic resources to observe something of what we are. To the extent that Cebes and perhaps the reader have not cultivated this disposition, they will have to trust Socrates, but those who have cultivated courage will find something edifying in the myth.

Therefore it seems that Socrates uses Cebes’ language of exchange to subvert that monetary metaphor used at 69b. For as long as we treat our ontological and epistemic conditions as resources which are at our disposal, resources that we exchange for achieving our desires as opposed to turning our attention towards those very conditions as phenomena which are quite baffling, and worthy of knowing in themselves, we will never come to realize what Socrates and “true-born philosophers” believe with confidence, which is that there is an aspect of our reality that reaches behind and beyond exchanges towards something that is. That is to say that part of the way we unfold in the world strives towards Being.

The accounts that Socrates gives are poetic in that they are not supposed to be scientific accounts but rather reminders, they are evocative of a certain prothome and passion which are as fundamental to philosophy as the human condition, and which, upon reflection, reveal the two points that Socrates continues to emphasize but does not account for. The first is that Being exists and the second that we participate in it. This “phenomenal” knowledge is appropriate to
the matters at hand, those issues relating to the divine. Moreover, this knowledge is the source of all philosophical investigation that attempts to account for this Being which we all intuitively grasp. Socrates intends to show that we ought to take this intuition as our point of departure for making good arguments and our guide towards a better grasp of those arguments, as opposed to materialist accounts and suggests that myth is a reminder of those things for which there is no complete account. In this way, myth is not only essential to the matters of concern but indispensable to philosophy.
Chapter 3: Myth as a Reminder

In his chapter, I suggest that the true-born philosopher is convinced of myth because they alone have cultivated a disposition whereby they relate to myths as reminders, or phenomenal accounts of their own prothumatic tendency, and therefore, have the potential to see that tendency as a point of departure for asking about their own relationship to Being. I suggest that any kind of demythologizing ends up undercutting the role of myth as a reminder of this kind. This chapter has two sections. In the first section, I interpret the "argument from opposites" as operating on two levels. I argue that, on one level, it appeals to Cebes’ materialistic tendency and addresses matters with reference to the pre-socratic theories of Empedocles and Anaxagoras. I argue that, on another level, it appeals, mythically, to "true-born philosophers" who have undergone a certain kind of purification involving the cultivation of προθούμια. I will suggest that Socrates’ account should confront the initiate, as I have described them, with a kind of paradox that characterizes their experience of προθούμια. The encounter with such a paradox, I argue, facilitates a great deal of metaphysical insight.
In the next section, I interpret Socrates’ account of recollection as a further demonstration that myth is a reminder of προθούµια, that is an image or copy of "the affection of [the ignorance] in the soul” that affords us a unique aporia, which compels us to ask questions about our relationship to Being. I interpret myth as a reminder and argue that, because of the phenomenal nature of its content, it cannot be reduced or demythologized.

I. The Argument From Opposites

Socrates begins his account of what has been called the “argument from opposites” by explaining that “there’s a certain ancient account, one that we hold in memory, that the souls are There having arrived from here, and that they arrive here again and come to be from the dead.” Socrates then suggests that if he could prove that the souls of the living come from the dead, he will have sufficiently demonstrated that they reside in some place and that they can return There after death. That is to say, the souls of the dead persist somewhere and do not disintegrate as Cebes worries. The argument appears, at this point, to be a materialistic one. Socrates suggests that if we could make the case that opposites come from opposites with things that we are familiar with, then we can apply that same principle to the soul which is no different from any of those other things. This line of thinking, of course, takes for granted that the soul is like those other things.

Socrates begins by explaining that this account will be easier to grasp if the men were to consider the nature of becoming not just in relation to human beings but also in plants and

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116 Plato, Phaedo. 70c.
117 Phaedo, 70d.
animals. At first it is not quite clear why he suggests this. He asks whether it is necessary that a contrary "come to be from nowhere else but from its own contrary." He names examples such as Beauty and Justice before asking: “whenever something comes to be bigger, isn’t it a necessity that it become bigger later from something that was littler before?” He goes on to mention examples such as stronger and weaker and being awake and being asleep. He suggests then that the prior two examples are the same as the latter, but only questions Cebes about the reciprocal relationship between the latter, in response to which the young man concedes that contraries do indeed come from one another.

Justice and injustice, however, do seem to be different from bigness and smallness, although it would require a certain relationship with those things to discern that fact. Just moments ago Socrates suggested that true virtue is not a matter of exchanges. That is to say that truly courageous people do not exchange fear for fear, and moderate people, pleasure for pleasure, and pain for pain but rather a courageous person would consider things like justice and beauty, things related to human virtue, as things which come about from nothing other than thoughtfulness. The truly courageous person would believe that we can only manifest those things by contemplating them. As such, they would consider justice to be an orientation towards Justice itself, both ontologically and epistemically. Therefore, unlike big and small, justice for the courageous person would not be sufficiently defined in relation to its contrary but in relation to an absolute. As such, when Socrates suggests that it will be easier to agree to his suggestion that opposites come from opposites if we did not just look at humans but also animals and plants,

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118 Phaedo, 70d.
119 Phaedo, 70e.
120 Phaedo, 71a.
he is suggesting that someone might find it difficult to assent to the idea that opposites come from opposites in relation to virtue in the same way as big and small provided they have cultivated a disposition which Socrates earlier described as a προθούμια, and provided that they see themselves as a point of reference for grasping the argument.

Socrates continues, nonetheless, to suggest that based on these examples that there must be two becomings that are related to all contraries, and therefore, life must come from death and vice versa. That is to say that the combination of the soul and the body comes from an earlier separation of the soul and the body. However, once again, when we consider this example, we are confronted with the fact that there is something of which all these characteristics (sleep, and wakefulness, bigness, and smallness) are predicated, and that the soul and the body seem to be essential to the nature of that which "comes to be" in the way that sleep and wakefulness are not. That is to say, it is by being a soul and body that one can talk coherently about coming to be one way or another, and this is especially true of coming to be virtuous.

You might say, for instance, that we are a soul which comes to be dead, in which case we undergo the separation from the body, or that we are the body and that we undergo separation from the soul—but of course, the former does not make sense since the soul, which Socrates later refers to as god-like and changeless, does not undergo a becoming; and the latter does not make sense, because the body does not persist such that it could Be. It is the combination of soul and body that makes talk of "coming to be" coherent. Thus, when we reflect inwardly on the way we

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121 Phaedo, 71a,b,c.

122 Dorter points out this tension in his commentary. See Phaedo: An Interpretation pp. 36.
unfold in the world we realize that we are neither a soul nor a body but an irreducible combination of both.

This intuition about our relationship to Being, and the subsequent aporia, is played out by Simmias later in the dialogue. Simmias suggests that the body seems to be like a lyre and the soul like a tuning. Simmias is not too specific, but he seems to suggest, as a good Pythagorean would, that the lyre is the kind of thing that one adjusts through the manipulation of the instrument as one gets a better sense of harmonic theory. He suggests that if the soul, like the lyre, is the result of finely tuned bodily parts, then it must be the case that the soul, like the tuning, is the first thing to disintegrate in the breakdown of the body.\textsuperscript{123} That is to say that the body would outlive the soul since it is the manipulation of bodily parts that makes up the soul.\textsuperscript{124} Socrates responds by calling Simmias’ suggestion just\textsuperscript{125} before explaining, nonetheless, that the suggestion goes against another intuition we seem to have that the soul is a masterful and guiding entity in our lives that often goes against our bodily instinct.\textsuperscript{126} Socrates explains that sometimes we are hungry but we do not eat because we regard health above hunger such that it cannot be the case that the soul is simply the composite of many parts of the body, for if it was it could not command us to act contrary to our bodily instincts.\textsuperscript{127} Moreover, Socrates argues that the soul cannot be that thing that can be said to be more or less virtuous, any more than it can be considered more or less a soul, nor can a tuning, insofar as it is a tuning, be more or less tuned.

\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Phaedo}, 86c.
\textsuperscript{124} \textit{Phaedo}, 86c.
\textsuperscript{125} \textit{Phaedo}, 86d.
\textsuperscript{126} \textit{Phaedo}, 94b.
\textsuperscript{127} \textit{Phaedo}, 94b,c.
He suggests that the soul, insofar as it is a soul, it was “agreed earlier”,\textsuperscript{128} is the paradigm of virtue.\textsuperscript{129} However, it seems that there is something in between the Tuning as such, that is the perfect theoretical tuning, and the parts of the lyre. Namely, there is the \textit{particular} tuning, which is no more a composite of parts than it is a unity by relation to that Tuning. Thus, Simmias’ perplexity and hesitancy is appropriate, for just as a tuning is no more a composite than a unity a human being seems to be an irreducible combination, smashed together, of both natures as well.

Here Socrates shows that even Simmias is impressed with the intuition that we \textit{are}, in some sense, and are coming to be what we \textit{are}. This intuition presupposes that there is such a thing as Being and that we have some share in it. Moreover, the realization of that intuition drives us to manifest that paradoxical nature all the more by striving towards truth in relation to these matters. That is to say, the more we contemplate our paradoxical human condition, the more we manifest this paradox as the pursuit of truth and Being, and the more we manifest it, the more capable we are of observing it. This process is not just the beginning of philosophy but one of many beginnings, it is the \textit{movement} of philosophy. Philosophy, as a love of wisdom, is the cultivation of a deeper and deeper love or passion towards Being multiplied by our persistent contemplation and the manifestation of it. This is all moot, however, provided we do not experience what the philosopher, as the lover of wisdom, experiences: a wonder and love that has Being both as its beginning and end.

At core Socrates argues that philosophy is a teleological pursuit of Being that comes out of the realization that we reside at the intersection between Being and becoming. This

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128 \textit{Phaedo}, 93d,e.
129 \textit{Phaedo}, 93e.
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realization, however, is something that cannot be simply communicated. It is something encountered. Moreover, Socrates decides to tell eschatological myth on this day and to this group of men because they are in a position to be confronted with this encounter. Most of them according to Phaedo experience an unusual blend blended together from pleasure and pain. Thus, contrary to the Aesopian fable earlier in the dialogue, pleasure, in the experience of the young men, is not always contrary and contingent to pain.

That is to say, implicitly the young men have a grasp of pleasures that are pleasurable in themselves and not relative or contrary to pain. Consistently, they demonstrate the beginnings of a disposition which Socrates earlier called essential to purification, namely a combination of moderation and προθούμως. In this moment, they do not exchange lesser pleasures for greater ones, but experience a pleasure that is pleasant regardless of the pain of their teacher’s impending death. Thus, in order for Socrates to get Simmias and the other young men realize their own potential for pursuing the Good both ontologically and epistemically, he must take that philosophical προθούμως, which they all seem to demonstrate to some degree, and turn it inward on itself such that they might observe their condition as a point of departure for investigating Being, the Good, and Beauty as such. Thus, Socrates needs to turn them away from common materialist explanations which do not take inward reflection as their point of departure but instead reduce human phenomena to material phenomena.

This brings us to the value of myth. Myth is valuable, for Socrates, because it allows philosophy to be what he believes it is, namely, a kind of love. Philosophy is not the kind of thing grasped once and for all, but rather it is a back and forth between Being and becoming, what we are and how we unfold in the world, between nous and discursive thinking. Myth
reminds us of that aspect of reality which we only access through inward reflection, and, in being
only a reminder, maintains the in-between nature of the human condition without simplifying it
or explaining it away. Socrates demonstrates just this point by contrasting the mythic and the
scientific account in the following passages.

Socrates explains:

“Then look at it this way, Cebes,” … “and you’ll see we did no injustice when
we so agreed, as it seems to me. For if things that come to be didn't always make
a return, each to its corresponding other, just as if they were going in a circle, but
if instead becoming were a kind of straight line that proceeded only from one
end directly to the opposite end and did not bend back again towards its other or
make any bend at all — do you know that all things would end up being in the
same shape and would be affected in the same way and would stop coming to
be?”

“What do you mean?”

“It isn't at all hard,” … “to take note of what I mean. For example, if there were
falling asleep but no waking up again to correspond to and come to be from
sleep, you know things would end up making nonsense of Endymion. He’
d make a poor showing, since all things would be affected in the same way he was
— they’d all be asleep! And if all things were combined and not separated, then
the saying of Anaxagoras — 'All things together' — would quickly have come
about130

130 Phaedo, 72a-c
Initially, it looks as though Socrates is continuing the idea that opposites come from opposites by suggesting that if things did not revert to their corresponding opposite, all things would end up the same, or like Endymion. In Greek mythology, Endymion was a beautiful youth placed in an immortal and perpetual sleep by Selene, goddess of the moon. The image is apparently meant to invoke the idea that Endymion, unlike the other things which come to be, does not come to be awake from having been asleep. Socrates then puts his point in pre-Socratic terms: if things were separated and never combined, and if there were strife and no love to correspond, then all things would end up together and everything would be undifferentiated matter. Socrates' suggestion seems, at first, to be that because we are alive, this is evidence that the souls of the dead persist and are the material from which the living are animated.

But his language in this passage is very particular. Socrates says, “if instead becoming were a kind of straight line that proceeded only from one end directly to the opposite end and did not bend back again towards its other or make any bend at all — do you know that all things would end up being the same shape and would be affected in the same way and would stop coming to be”\textsuperscript{131} Here, Socrates’ emphasis is not so much on things returning to their corresponding opposite, but making “any bend at all”. The emphasis is on ‘making a bend,’ whatever it may be, in the way that a circle does as opposed to a line, gives the passage a different meaning from the initial suggestion that opposites come from opposites. That something should make a bend, like a circle, suggests that there is identity or continuity amid change and that it is \textit{this} that prevents all things, when they change, from turning out to be the same shape. This is consistent with the observations I attribute to the courageous person, namely,

\textsuperscript{131} \textit{Phaedo}, 72b.
there seems to be a sense in which we are at once self-same and different, in the sense that we are striving towards Being. If we did not proceed in such a way that we maintained some identity, or if it were not the case that we both were and were not coming to be all at once, then all things would either Be in a determinate way or else there would be nothing but undifferentiated matter and thus, things would be the same in that regard. We seem to unfold in a way whereby we have form but are not utterly determined. That is to say, we are not driven to our corresponding other by necessity, but often we diverge from necessity—and not by some external force, either, but by our thoughts and choices, and specifically our regard or disregard for what is in relation to us. As Socrates suggests, he sits in prison because he had made up his mind that it was the just thing to do, not because of the way that his body is fixed. Here Socrates suggests again that opposites do not come from opposites regarding matters of virtue; Such things come from thoughtfulness even to the disregard of instinct. There is something inhuman perhaps and un-pragmatic about the conduct of the human. Socrates exemplifies this by appealing to Endymion. While at first Endymion seems to be a redundant example of all things being together, under this interpretation, the mythic Endymion functions differently and Anaxagoras’ principle turns out to be insufficient.

It is not just Endymion that is on display in the initial example, but also the effect that his myth has on the listener. The fact that Endymion does not make a “poor showing” is being emphasized. We only recognize that there is something noteworthy about Endymion because we relate him to ourselves. We recognize that he resembles us in some way; we also recognize, at the same time, that he does not quite capture the experience of being human. The way we relate

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132 Phaedo, 98d.
to Endymion, as a mythic figure, is revealing of our ontological condition as something which is both is self-aware and self-identical, to the extent that we relate to him by some relation we have with ourselves. Nonetheless, we are also at a loss, in some sense, of just what it is that we are. Facilitating such a perplexing encounter is precisely the intention of myth.

This aporia we confront and insight we gain through self-reflection cannot subsequently be reduced to a materialist account. This process of recognizing Endymion, and the extent to which he is both like and unlike ourselves, is Socrates' demonstration of what he has been trying to get across all along. He is trying to show that we all already have an intuition or insight of what we are which implies an acknowledgment that Being exists. To trust the givens of our reality should be the point of departure for philosophy. The process of recognition of ourselves as beings who are in some sense and are striving towards Being is what Socrates later calls *recolletion*. The experience of recollection is the acknowledgement that we have some intuitive grasp of ourselves as related to the divine and that we can and must strive to articulate it as Socrates has throughout his life. This interpretation of recollection is something I will get into more in the following section. This is all to suggest, however, that the significance of a mythic figure such as Endymion is neither metaphoric, nor literal, but rather symbolic. We see ourselves more clearly through Endymion. Reducing his impact to the simile of the Anaxagorous’ ‘all things together’ takes away several mythic elements that are significant. In demythologizing, Endymion ceases to be a Demi-god and a beloved figure who is transformed by the goddess such that she might admire his Beauty eternally.

Moreover, the fact that Endymion is beloved by the goddess is significant. He like Socrates inspires his lover not only to take note of his beauty but to raise him to the level of
immortality. Socrates is held up as a prophet in the same way. The young men acknowledge some kind of virtue in Socrates that they aim to emulate. This is apparent in Apollodorus’ speech at the opening of the Symposium, and in the way that Phaedo marvels at Socrates’ disposition at the opening of the Phaedo. While the young men hail Socrates as a prophet and as their only hope, what Socrates will suggest in the following section, however, is that the very act of love by which these men marvel at his virtue is evidence of their capacity to know and actualize it. He says:

Whenever somebody who’s either seen or heard something — or has grasped it by some sense — not only recognizes that thing but takes note of another, the knowledge of which isn’t the same but different, don’t we justly say that he recollects that of which he grasped in the notion?133

He then immediately begins with an example of lovers who recollect their boyfriends when they see a lyre or some such object that that boy is in the habit of using.134 This reference to Phaedo and Apollodorus is undeniable. I will demonstrate this further in the following chapter.

On the other hand, the idea of “all things together,” and even Empedocles's idea of combination and separation almost imply the psychic phenomena which Socrates points to. However, while they even use the language nous, and Eros they then seem to reduce these to material phenomena. Socrates believes that Cebes carries on the pre-Socratic tradition’s materialism so that for Cebes’ sake Socrates takes issue with the view that these phenomena are merely material. In the pre-Socratic tradition, Empedocles talks about love and strife as the

133 Phaedo, 73c-d.
134 Phaedo, 73d.
combining and separating of elements to account for the appearance of becoming, and
Anaxagorous suggests that all things are in an original state of undifferentiated matter and that,
were it not for *nous* as a natural force which does the combining and separating, all things would
be together. For Socrates, however, *nous* and *Eros* are not material forces, but are phenomenal.
That is to say, they are things we talk about because we understand them implicitly, we
participate in them, although perhaps we only know them in a dream-like way.

I take Socrates suggestion that the soul is able to purify herself and thus commune with
the wisdom found There to be indicative of a noetic encounter. Moreover, in the *Symposium*
Socrates describes love as a spirit that travels between the heavens and earth and which delivers
messages from that place to this one.135 Given the preceding analysis, describing these
phenomena in these mythical and mystical terms is meant neither as metaphor nor as hyperbole.
For Socrates *Nous* manifests in our lives as a love and desire for Being. To put it in the terms of
the *Symposium*, love is between “Ignorance” and “wisdom”136— that is to say, it is a desire for
wisdom grounded in a kind of incomplete dream-like knowledge or insight. The mythic example,
in contrast to the materialistic one, acts as a mirror and exposes the *pathos* which drives the
question of the meaning of Being in a way that is revealing to whichever initiates are awakened
to that desire—in the context of Socrates’ social circle, likely Phaedo and Apollodorus.

This argument is no different from the one at the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

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“Every craft, every line of inquiry, and likewise every action and decision, seems to seek some good; that is why some people were right to describe the good as what everything seeks”\textsuperscript{137}

This line marks the point of departure for Aristotle’s entire ethical philosophy which aims at articulating the good in its various manifestations. I cannot definitively say so but I think those people to whom Aristotle refers as those who “were right” were Plato and Socrates. I cannot help but notice that Aristotle’s “argument” in these two lines is striking in its resemblance to Socrates’ argument which goes something like this: lovers of wisdom aim at a Good that is, therefore, they are well justified in being persuaded that Being exists in some eternal realm and we have a share in it.

To be sure this is not a bad argument, it is a meaningful argument to those who are in a position to grasp it. Moreover, I believe Socrates turns to myth because he believes that this fundamental truth must be realized, that one must encounter it oneself. The young men will have no use for arguments if they cannot see and do not even strive to see philosophy as a pursuit of the self, ethics, and politics as they are (as opposed to relative notions).

Socrates explicitly identifies Anaxagoras’ consideration of nous only as a material force as problematic and presents myth as a fitting medium for exploring those things with which philosophy is concerned. Socrates claims that as a young man he, like Cebes, was enamored by natural science, and desired to know how things grow and develop and whether it is through the brain or some other thing that beings develop senses, thoughts, memories, opinions, and knowledge.\textsuperscript{138} After “looking” to the physical processes of the natural world, Socrates claims he


\textsuperscript{138} Plato, \textit{Phaedo} 96b.
came out empty-handed, and, even worse, he was more confused about nature than he ever was before, having even abandoned his old opinions on the subject. Socrates explains that he used to believe that it was through mechanics, contact, collision, and proximity that natural things unified and separated and that all things could be measured relative to their counterparts, but that, after looking to the natural world, he could not persuade himself that he could know “why things come to be, pass away and exist by this [mechanical] way of proceeding”. Socrates explains that he was particularly disappointed with Anaxagoras who suggests that “mind” as the cause of the natural world. Socrates was initially thrilled with this idea because he expected that if mind or intelligence was responsible for the natural world, the world would be ordered in the best possible way. As such, he assumed that answering the question about why things come to be, pass away, and exist would require us to ask of natural phenomena, “in what way it is best for it either to be or to undergo or to do anything whatsoever”, insofar as he had some insight that the soul strives towards some such condition. Socrates goes on to say that he had hoped that Anaxagoras would take him through the physical world and the cosmos and explain to him the “cause and necessity of it,” and that he had hoped in this way to discover “the good of each thing and the good common to all things”. To Socrates’ disappointment, Anaxagoras made use of the same mechanical explanations that had occupied his predecessors. With no teacher to guide him, Socrates moved on from natural science in pursuit of a “second sailing”.

139 *Phaedo*, 96b.
140 *Phaedo*, 97a.
141 *Phaedo*, 97c.
142 *Phaedo*, 97c,d.
143 *Phaedo*, 98b.
144 *Phaedo*, 99d.
The mythic stories which I take to be images of Προθούμα are distinctly appropriate to the matters at hand which possess divinity that is not overstated. Whether we choose to say that Endymion is a metaphor for the undifferentiation of matter, or is some other psychic metaphor, Endymion nonetheless ceases to be the Demi-god and the beloved figure that is made into an immortal by his divine lover, because of his beauty. While this action is reminiscent of the spirited disposition of young Apollodorus and Phaedo, both of whom raise Socrates to the status of a prophet. In the next section, I will show that Socrates believes that an awareness of our prothumatic tendency is the life-blood of philosophy, that this tendency can only be communicated through myth, and its encounter is inevitably undercut by any attempt to demythologize.

II. Recollection

Socrates has just finished explaining all this regarding opposites when Cebes recalls that this account is similar to one that Socrates is in the habit of making, a myth, that is most notable to the reader from its appearance in the *Meno*, which suggests that “learning happens to be nothing other than recollection.”145 For Cebes this account reinforces the idea that the soul existed before we were born and was able to grasp all those things which we now learn or recollect.146

The following exchange proceeds as a result of Cebes’ comment:

"We agree I suppose, that if anybody is to recollect anything, he must have knowledge of it at some time before….”

145 *Phaedo*, 74e, 73a.
146 *Phaedo*, 73a.
“Then do we also agree on this, that whenever knowledge comes to be present in this way, there’s recollection?…This: Whenever somebody who’s seen or heard something — or has grasped it by some other sense — not only recognizes that thing but takes note of another, the knowledge of which isn’t the same but different, don’t we justly say that he recollects that of which he grasped in the notion?”

When Simmias expresses confusion, Socrates responds by saying something even more perplexing. He explains that every so often lovers see a lyre or cloak or some such other thing that their beloved is in the habit of carrying with them, and recollect the form of that beloved boy, just as someone who sees Simmias might subsequently recollect Cebes, and that in each case this is recollection. These two examples, side by side, are perplexing because it is not clear how either is comparable to the principle that they are meant to demonstrate, namely, that when something is grasped by one sense, a person might take note of something else which is knowable in a different way than the former. While knowledge of a lyre is different from knowledge of “the form of the boy”, to the extent that knowledge of a lyre and of a human are different from each other, and knowledge of any material thing in the world is different from knowledge of a concept or form, knowledge of Simmias, it seems, is the same as knowledge of Cebes, to the extent that Socrates knows them both as humans.

Socrates asks whether we can recollect a horse from seeing the image of a sketched horse, or a human from the image of a sketched lyre, or whether someone who sees Simmias

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147 Phaedo, 73c,d.
148 Phaedo, 73d.
sketched could recollect Cebs.\textsuperscript{149} Simmias concedes. Socrates then asks whether it follows that someone could recollect Simmias after seeing him sketched, to which the young man also concedes.\textsuperscript{150} Socrates finally asks whether it follows from all these examples that recollection stems from what is similar and dissimilar, and again he is met with agreement.\textsuperscript{151}

Despite the agreement from the young men, just what it is to which Socrates is referring in each example when he concludes that recollection arises from what is similar and dissimilar is unclear, for they are each similar and dissimilar in different ways. A sketched horse and a real horse could be regarded as similar to the degree that they both carry the idea of a horse and Simmias and Cebs to the degree that they are both men. Lyres and cloaks may be considered the similar to the “form of a boy” insofar as later in the text they are used as metaphors for the relationship between the soul and the body, and in this way are symbolic of the boy. Yet all these things are also different, in that the sketch is a representation and the thing it represents is living and real, Simmias and Cebs are different people, and a lyre is an object while a human is a living thing. If there is any sense in which they are all similarly both the same and different, it is to the extent that they all refer to some idea, and to the extent that, to varying degrees, they all fall short of the idea to which they refer.

I believe that this passage is intentionally ambiguous, and meant to challenge the reader to engage in just this exercise, because in the following section Socrates explains that it is the habit of someone who recollects something similar “to note whether or not, with respect to

\textsuperscript{149} Phaedo, 73e.
\textsuperscript{150} Phaedo, 73c.
\textsuperscript{151} Phaedo, 74a.
similarity, this thing somehow falls short of the thing he’s recollected.”\textsuperscript{152} And indeed when pressed, we could come up with some ways in which similar things turn out to be dissimilar, but what is noteworthy is that we did so in each case by measuring the differences against some form or idea which unites them as a pair, instead of measuring each against the corresponding other.

Socrates then uses an example of Equality to demonstrate this point. He asks the young man whether he has taken note of Equality, not equal things but the idea of Equality, and if so, where he must have gotten such an idea.\textsuperscript{153} Socrates suggests that he must have noticed it from observing particularly equal things, and yet, that knowledge we have of Equality is different from equals.\textsuperscript{154} For while Equality always appears the same, equal things sometimes appear equal, and at other times do not.\textsuperscript{155}

This characterization of similarity and difference concerning Equality and equal things would have seemed uncharacteristic of all the previous examples — the boy and the lyre, Simmias, and Cebes, sketched beings and their living equivalents—before we had recollected the idea towards which each pair refers. After we have so recollected, it is characteristic of them, for we realize that, when pressed, we measured the similarity and dissimilarity in each case against some idea invoked by each pair. For instance, we measured the dissimilarity of Cebes not against Simmias, but the form of the boy. Moreover, we measured the dissimilarity of the lyre against the form of a man, and the sketch against some such idea that the sketch and the thing itself strove after. In engaging with Socrates’ perplexing examples, we realize that the similarity and

\textsuperscript{152} Phaedo, 74a.
\textsuperscript{153} Phaedo, 74a,b.
\textsuperscript{154} Phaedo, 74b,c.
\textsuperscript{155} Phaedo, 74b,c.
difference of each thing is recollected and measured against a prior and more perfect idea and, particularly, some idea of manhood.

Socrates then asks:

“Then do we agree to this: Whenever somebody who’s seen something notes, 'what I am now seeing wants to be of the same sort as something else among the things that are; yet it falls short and isn't able to be that thing but is inferior,’ then mustn't the man who notes this necessarily have had occasion to see beforehand that thing he says it’s like but falls short of?” 156

“Then it’s necessary that we saw the Equal before that time when we first saw equals and noted: ‘All these things are striving to be like Equal but fall short of it’” 157

“Therefore, before we began to see and hear and use the other senses, I suppose we must have had occasion to grasp knowledge of the Equal itself, the equal that is, if we were ever to refer There the equals that came from our senses and to think that all such things are putting their heart into being the sort of thing the Equal is but are inferior to it” 158

It's strange that Socrates not only personifies equality but repeats this personification. This would seem out of place if you did not know the language of “taking heart” or “striving after” is a

156 *Phaedo*, 74 d,e.
157 *Phaedo*, 74e-75a.
158 *Phaedo*, 75b.
translation of the προθούµια which Socrates has held up throughout the text as essential to
philosophy. Moreover, just a few lines later, Socrates explains:

   The discussion is no more about Equal any more than it is about the Beautiful
   Itself and the Good Itself and the Just and the Holy and, as I say, about all those
   things upon which we set the seal ‘that which is,’ in the questions we ask as well
   as in the answers we give; so we must necessarily have grasped the various
   knowledges of all these things before we were born.159

   We see that Socrates is, once again, saying that those who have courage or take heart are
likely to take note that “the Good itself and the Just and the Holy” exist, and that we have some
share in them. These people can take note in this way because they place the seal "that which is”,
with the questions they ask and the answers they give. That is to say, whether they strive after a
beloved or after wisdom, the very act of striving after or taking heart, takes the form of a
question, or a hypothesis. One could not strive after something which they did not know in some
way, nor would they if they knew it completely, and in response to this Meno’s paradox Socrates
suggests that we both know and we do not know. We seem to have some insight into Being
which manifests as a kind of teleological desire or προθούµια. Lovers, I have suggested, have the
unique privilege of recollecting their ontological condition through the observation of myths.

159 Phaedo, 75d
At this point, the idea in the *Republic* that myth is an image or copy of the affection of the ignorance in the soul, which helps us grasp the matters of antiquity, becomes coherent. What Socrates is saying is that myth is a response to the human difficulty of grasping metaphysical matters insofar as myth acts as a reminder of love and προθούμια. That is to say that love, as both the presence and the absence of Being in our lives that compels us to pursue wisdom, is “midway between ignorance and wisdom”. Eschatological myth is an image and reminder of this *aporia*, through which we might gain hope in our ability to further contemplate the presence of Being in our lives.

I have shown that Socrates describes this προθούμια as a kind of initiation into the mysteries contained in myth, and a distinct characteristic of true-born philosophers which allows them to grasp those mysteries. To better understand what he means by this I followed the references to προθούμια, a term that became central to my thesis because of its deep relationship

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160 *Phaedo*, 204a.
to eschatological myth. I developed the idea that προθοόμια is an uncompromising enthusiasm that strives towards what is considered by the person who holds that disposition as masterful. I suggested that προθοόμια resembles Socrates’ love of wisdom. I suggested that while this disposition and philosophical love are not the same, they are similar in that they are both dispositions which strive after something against any pragmatic decision or base desire, the pursuit of which seems to spring out of a kind of wonder and a knowing ignorance— each is a condition in which someone has a vague noetic sense of something and, in recognizing insight and the limit of that knowledge, one then pursues the idea more thoroughly. (This is almost exactly how Socrates describes recollection and his relationship to his divine dream at the start of the dialogue)

I suggested that what distinguishes the desire contained in προθοόμια from more base desires is that it doesn't seek to satisfy a privation but is instead something quite outside the realm of necessity. Socrates believes that philosophical love desires the good as such, and longs to meet it where it is, to enjoy it as it is. This implies a recognition that there is such a thing that is beyond our personal desires, something we know to Be, even before we can account for it. This seemingly involuntary pursuit of Being itself comes from an intuition that there is some such Being and that we have some share in it. This, however, by no means closes the mystery, but rather seems to be a point of departure for genuine philosophy, as Socrates understands it.

As such, I argued that this desire justifies the pursuit of truth, against Meno’s famous suggestion that we must either know wholly or be utterly ignorant, a paradox which rehashes the tension between Parmenides and Heraclitus and does not account for the experience of learning or striving towards knowledge. That is, an experience which seems to suggests that human
beings are neither wholly self-sufficient as Being is, nor utterly given to chaos, but rather have a
foot in two realms, both Being and becoming. Thus, I argued that this disposition itself is
revealing of that truth which Socrates has professed since the beginning of the dialogue, that
Being exists and that we can come to know it.

Therefore, I conclude that Myth is significant because although this truth is implicitly
manifest in the disposition of προθοόμια, not all those who possess this impulse are aware of its
implications, and those who are aware to some extent do not grasp the whole. Socrates himself
admits that regarding the mysteries of myth, he will only know them wholly and certainly after
he dies. Therefore, I suggest that it is both this philosophical impulse in the youth and the lack of
awareness around it that Socrates responds to through myths in the text.

My suggestion is that eschatological myth acts as a mirror for the person who is given to
the experience προθοόμια and love in a way that reveals their ontological condition to them and
the depths and limits of our epistemic capacity. That is to say, since we are a blend of Being and
becoming, we have it in us to know something about our nature although perhaps not fully and
only when we transcend the more basic aspects of our condition. Thus eschatological myth is a
means of confronting the complexity of the human condition in a way that encourages the pursuit
of wisdom despite the fact that our knowledge of it will always be limited by our ontological
condition.

The problem with the de-mythologizing tendency then is that myths, according to Socrates,
sincerely refer to something daemonic, in the sense that it is a truth that resides at the intersection
between the Being and the becoming. Myths are meant to point to the phenomena of human
existence, which is on the one hand beyond the written word, and on the other hand known, albeit incompletely, and in doing so encourage the contemplation thereof.

The language of professional philosophers, like the language of the pre-Socratics, is mistaken then because it presumes to have pinned something down and to have understood it once and for all. This language presumes to contain everything there is and lacks the self-awareness and playfulness of Platonic myth, which at core, is symbolic, provocative, and evocative. We would not feel compelled to take the word *Daemonia*, for example, and change it to the word “character” unless we thought that there was something more commonplace and easy to grasp in such a word, but, I think part of Socrates’ point is that there is nothing commonplace or easy to grasp about character. What should it mean, for instance, that we have *Daemonia*? Someone might say that it means that we have an internal guide or conscience, but changing the language in that way does not clarify things, instead it takes away several things from the original image. First to be lost is the idea of divinity, and then the idea of mediation between the divine and human, between Being and becoming at the same time, which seems to be a genuine suggestion on Socrates’ part but also genuinely paradoxical.

To say that eschatological myth is a metaphor is problematic in just this way, because it presumes, with a wink and a nod, that Socrates understands the things he hopes to represent, fully and once and for all, and that he is masking the truth for these young men. In fact, philosophy, according to Socrates, is genuinely a love, which is to say that it is always, to some degree, a pursuit.
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