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PLATO'S MANTIC MYTHS IN THE SERVICE OF SOCRATES' MAIEUTIC ART*

As those familiar with Plato's dialogues know, Socrates assumes, in theory, his mother's art of midwifery, which, in practice, he translates into a dialogical procedure, that special form of dialectic he dubs «the maieutic art» (ἡ μαιευτικὴ... τέχνη)¹. By means of this art, he would, with god's help², deliver his patients from *false opinion* and so prepare them for an authentic parturition. As he puts it

What is most important in my art is this, that it is able to put to the test, in every way, whether the young person's thought brings to birth a false phantom or a true offspring³.

Now, in connection with this art, Plato has added on occasions, at the end of a particular argument-line, an appropriate myth (handed down supposedly from an ancient source), which offers, at the least, relief from the strain of the dialectic⁴. These myths, however, are more than dramatic intervals⁵; for, as Plato also makes clear, they serve by

* I am indebted to my colleague Professor Kathleen Johnson Wu, who has read and made corrective comments on this paper, and express my thanks for her criticism and encouragement.

¹ *Theaetetus*, 210b8. (All readings and citations are from the Greek text of John Burnet, ed., *Platonis Opera*, 5 vols [New York : Oxford University Press, 1903-1910]; all translations are mine). Vide Richard ROBINSON, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic* (Second ed.), Oxford, 1953, p. 83-84.

² Cf. *Crito*, 54e; *Apology*, 42a, 19a, 23a, and 35d, where god (θεός) is referred to as 'guide'. The better account of this function occurs at *Crito*, 48c6-7, where 'reason' or 'argument' (which, of course, is considered divine/godlike) takes the place of 'god'. Vide E.R. DODDS, *Plato : 'Gorgias'*, Oxford, 1959, p. 386, at 527e1-2 : «The Socratic precept ἐπεσθαι τῷ λόγῳ naturally led to the personification of the λόγος as a 'guide'».

³ *Theaetetus*, 150b9-c3; cf. 210b4-d1.

⁴ Cf. *Statesman*, 268d8-9.

⁵ Vide K.F. MOORS, *Platonic Myth : An Introductory Study*, Washington, D.C., 1982, p. 97 and 113. On p. 97, he writes : «... myth [is] not merely a trapping or an addendum to discussion. Myth shares the essential objectives of philosophic discussion and projects those objectives in figurative symbolic terms». Cf. P. FRUTIGER, *Les Mythes de Platon*, New York, 1976, p. 267; also P. FRIEDLÄNDER, *Plato : An Introduction*, Hans Meyerhoff, trans., Princeton, 1969, I, p. 209-210;

projection as conveyances of *immediate truth*⁶. What this comes to, I claim, is that these myths are covertly in the service of the maieutic art, playing the special role of furnishing fodder for the extrapolation of fact from fiction. This conjectural process is a unique *mytho-logical* inference of Plato's invention, which I have here christened the «mantic» function of myth.

Taken generally, τέχνη μαντική is the art or faculty of divination, the occult technique of foreseeing future events or divining some unknown lore, beyond the bounds of reason, by invoking supernatural powers⁷. Plato's myths, in this sense, fulfill this basic function, providing fictive accounts of eschatological beliefs. But they also become a curious means of *divining* from these beliefs *philosophical truths* of *moral import*, albeit within the bounds of reason, by adducing plausible probabilities that, while not so convincing as proofs, are beyond reasonable doubt and admittedly persuasive⁸. These probabilities, taking on the role of «truths» and «first principles»⁹, form the background theory to the theory in question and thus furnish the necessary condition that determines the logical limits of the «proofs» formulated in the epagogic¹⁰ procedure of the Socratic method.

Focusing, then, on the significance of Plato's *mytho-logical strategy* and keying on the *Timaeus* as an explanatory model, I shall, in my argument, decode the mantic myth in three ways, with special reference to its occurrence in the *Gorgias* as a paradigm case¹¹ : (1) by showing

and Janet E. SMITH, *Plato's Myths as 'Likely Accounts', Worthy of Belief*, in *Apeiron*, 19 (1985), p. 25-26.

⁶ FRIEDLÄNDER, *op. cit.*, I, p. 209, remarks Plato's myths as truth-bearing fictions. Cf. R. ZASLAVSKY, *Platonic Myth and Platonic Writing*, Washington, D.C., 1981, p. 34, 43-48; MOORS, *op. cit.*, p. 101-103; SMITH, *op. cit.*, p. 32-34. Vide W.K.C. GUTHRIE, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Cambridge, 1975, IV, p. 305-307.

⁷ Cf. *Symposium*, 188c6-3c; *Phaedrus*, 244c1-d5; *Philebus*, 67b3-7. Note, also, at *Timaeus*, 71e-72c, where the liver as the organ of divination lays hold in some degree on truth.

⁸ Vide *Gorgias*, 526d3-4; *Phaedo*, 108d9-109a8. Cf. SMITH, *op. cit.*, p. 32-33 on persuasion and myth; K. DORTER, *Plato's 'Phaedo': An Interpretation*, Toronto, 1982, p. 8-9, esp. 83-97, 159, and 161; RONNA BURGER, *The 'Phaedo': A Platonic Labyrinth*, New Haven, 1984, *passim*.

⁹ Cf. *Republic*, 510b4-9, on the ἀρχὴν ἀνυπόθετον of «the upward path», concerning which ROBINSON, *op. cit.*, p. 156-179, has an excellent account.

¹⁰ *Epagoge* is used here simply as 'induction', in a wider sense than that found in ROBINSON's account, *op. cit.*, p. 33-48.

¹¹ Other occurrences are found in the *Meno*, the *Phaedo*, and the *Republic*, and, with a different angle, in the *Phaedrus* and the *Statesman*.

how myth in its pragmatic role, as distinguished from its dramatic motive, unveils its mantic function; (2) by adducing from the fictive details of the myth plausible probabilities as adumbrations of true belief and remarking the psychological basis of their sanction; and, finally, (3) by deriving «first principles» from the probabilities and showing how they together form the background theory that defines the logical limits of the argument *in situ*.

Cracking the Fabric of Myth

The dramatic motive. As holistic art forms, Plato's myths play their part in the dialogues in *dramatic* instances which afford the interlocutors, as well as the reader, a refreshing filler from lengthy discourse, a fascinating tale of occult power (maybe, with tongue-in-cheek), or simply a playful diversion; and Plato usually has Socrates or some *dramatis persona* remark that particular motive. For example, in the *Phaedo*, following the final argument on the immortality of the soul and after relating his lengthy myth on the earth and afterlife, Socrates refers to it as a «magic charm» (ὥσπερ ἐπάδειν) that should inspire all with confidence and good cheer¹². Similarly, in the *Laws*, the Athenian Stranger, although admitting the force of compelling arguments, still recognizes the need of myths to charm the soul (ἐπαδῶν... μύθων ἔτι τινῶν)¹³. Again in the *Statesman*, the Eleatic Stranger, after stumbling in the dialectic and failing to define precisely the royal or kingly art, suggests taking a new starting-point by a different route, but first offers a «worthy tale» (μεγάλου μύθου) to mitigate the strain of protracted argument¹⁴. In other places, Socrates also refers to myth in its dramatic force as poetic embellishment, suggesting the role of play and amusement and dubbing the myths with such descriptive labels as «pleasant stories» (πρὸς τὸ ἡδέως μυθολογῆσαι)¹⁵, «prudent tales» (μύθοισι σαόφροσιν)¹⁶, «fairest tales» (κάλλιστα μεμυθολογημένα)¹⁷, and «auspicious accounts» (καλοῦ λόγου)¹⁸. So much, then, for the internal

¹² *Phaedo*, 114d; *vide* BURGER, *op. cit.*, p. 9, 85, 189, and 193.

¹³ *Laws*, 903b.

¹⁴ *Statesman*, 268d.

¹⁵ *Greater Hippias*, 286a; cf. *Protagoras*, 320c.

¹⁶ *Meno*, 96a (quotation from Theognis).

¹⁷ *Republic*, 378e.

¹⁸ *Gorgias*, 523a.

evidence showing that these fictions serve as poetic interludes to fit the dramatic intent and structure of the dialogue¹⁹.

A pragmatic role. Further evidence shows, however, that some myths also have a *pragmatic* role, one in keeping with the intent and structure of the dialectic. They are not just pleasant stories but are also *useful* (χρήσιμον) mantic devices bearing philosophical import²⁰. In his telling brief on a mythic passage in the *Statesman*, Paul Shorey insinuates this practical agency with his forthright statement that «deep truths are hidden in many ancient fables»²¹. This underlying *alethic motif* becomes the pragmatic angle of the mantic myth, that special value feature in which the utility of the myth consists. In the *Republic*, for example, there among the serviceable functions of false accounts (τὸ ἐν τοῖς λόγοις ψεῦδος)²² Socrates alleges that storytelling (μυθολογία) is a *useful* means of *mythotropic conversion* of *fiction* into *fact* (ἀληθείης—'what is true')²³ :

Because of our ignorance of truth about the ancient past, we [now] *portray, as best we can, the fictitious as fact (true)* and so make it *useful* (ἀφομοιοῦντες ἀληθεί τὸ ψεῦδος ὅτι μάλιστα οὕτω χρήσιμον ποιοῦμεν)²⁴.

And, in the *Statesman*, the Eleatic Stranger, using almost the same construction, points out the pragmatic function of myth as a *diagnostic stratagem*, the technique of *discovering deviation from truth* :

¹⁹ Vide MOORS, *op. cit.*, p. 1-24, «Interpretation of Plato's Use of Myth». Note also J.A. STEWART, *The Myths of Plato* (Ed. and newly introduced by G.R. LEVY), Carbondale, 1960, p. 236, who relies on «transcendental feeling» to grasp the meaning of a myth and denies that it can be interpreted apart from its literal expression.

²⁰ This view runs counter to E.R. DODDS' position, *op. cit.*, p. 376-377 and 385, at least, as it bears on the *Gorgias* myth and argument-line.

²¹ P. SHOREY, *What Plato Said*, Chicago, 1934, p. 310, on *Statesman*, 268e-269a. Cf. J. STENZEL, *Plato's Method of Dialectic*, D.J. Allen, trans., New York, 1964, p. 14-15.

²² H.G. LIDDELL and R. SCOTT, *A Greek English Lexicon*, (New ed. and rev. by H.S. Jones and Roderick McKenzie), Oxford, 1951, I, 2021, indicate that ψεῦδος here is most like an adjective. SMITH, *op. cit.*, p. 29-32, on ψεῦδος with the sense of 'fiction'.

²³ Cf. ZASLAVSKY, *op. cit.*, p. 183, n. 53, who remarks that «one can falsify in such a way as to adumbrate the truth which is being falsified».

²⁴ *Republic*, 382d1-3.

Thus, the end of the tale, so be it; but we shall make it *useful* (χρήσιμον δὲ αὐτὸν ποιησόμεθα) in *recognizing how far we went wrong* in our exposition of the royal and political art in the previous discussion²⁵.

But, perhaps, the most telling case occurs in the *Timaeus*, where, in the preface to his cosmic account, Timaeus claims that myth is also useful in providing *belief so plausible*, as to be an *analogue* to truth, that it is fitting for one to accept it (the «likely story») as *true* :

The copy (belief) statements (τοὺς λόγους) (after the likeness of the model [true statements]) will be *probable* and *analogous* to the true statements : as *being* is to *becoming*, so *truth* to *belief* (τοὺς δὲ τοῦ πρὸς μὲν ἐκεῖνο ἀπεικασθέντος δὲ εἰκόνοσ ἐικότας ἀνὰ λόγον τε ἐκείνων ὄντας· ὅτι περὶ πρὸς γένεσιν οὐσία, τοῦτο πρὸς πίστιν ἀλήθεια)
... let us be content [then] ... on the condition that it is *fitting for us to accept the likely story* (ὥστε περὶ τούτων τὸν εἰκότα μῦθον ἀποδεχομένουσ πρέπει τούτου)²⁶.

The salient point of this *analogical inference*²⁷ is the alleged progressive convergence of kindred values (alethic and pistic) in two otherwise different cognitive conditions (epistemic and doxastic, respectively) to a degree where belief becomes by *conviction* true opinion and, finally, true opinion *confirmed* becomes knowledge.

Admittedly, these tactics seem strange and obscure, and it is rather unlikely that one should accept fiction (ψεῦδος) as fact (ἀλήθεια) on the basis of analogical inference, diagnostic stratagem, or mythotropic conversion. But however odd or difficult it may be, this is the first maneuver of Plato's *mythological* strategy, a mode of indirection which leads to a more acceptable logical refinement in the adduction of plausible propositions, from the fictive accounts, that will serve to underpin the arguments at issue in the epagogic procedure of Socratic midwifery.

Divining Fact from Fiction

An interpretive key. Thus having, in a sense, cracked the fabric of the mantic myth by showing Plato's claim of its *usefulness* as an indirect *truth-bearing fiction*, we turn, again, to the *Timaeus* for a clue as to how fact may be *divined* from fiction, or, more precisely, how *true*

²⁵ *Statesman*, 274e1-4.

²⁶ *Timaeus*, 29c1-3; c8-d3.

²⁷ Vide ROBINSON, *op. cit.*, p. 207-208.

opinion (δόξα ἀληθής) may be *derived* from *unreflected belief* (πίστις). After a distillation of his basic metaphysical assumptions forming the background theory and logical limits of his cosmic myth, Timaeus cautions his auditors on the indirection of the «likely story», especially, on the imprecision of its language and consequent claim to truth, with this caveat and prospect :

Socrates, if we are unable to make *statements* (λόγους) concerning so many things about the gods and the genesis of the universe that are in every way completely *consistent* (ὁμολογουμένους) and *conclusive* (ἀπικριβωμένους), do not be surprised; but if we *adduce probabilities second to none* (μηδενὸς ἥττον παρεχόμεθα εἰκότας), *let us be content*, remembering that *we ... are only human; and so it is fitting for us to accept the likely story* concerning these things (περὶ τούτων τὸν εἰκότα μῦθον ἀποδεχομένους), but beyond this to inquire no further²⁸.

This cautionary word implies two probing inferences which earmark the mantic function of myth and warrant an interpretive extrapolation as its *rationale* : (1) that among the fictive details of the mythical account, there are probable statements or implications whose positive truth-value, while not confirmed, approaches certainty and (2) that these plausible probabilities, being beyond reasonable doubt, are acceptable as true opinion and, thus, worthy of belief.

A paradigm case. At the end of the last «act» of the argument-line in the *Gorgias*, Socrates, having carried out, with Callicles (the immoralist rhetorician), his inductive search on the moral question «whether doing wrong is a greater evil than suffering it», proposes to tell an old story he claims to be true to support his thesis that doing wrong *is* the greater evil.

I want to tell you a *tale*, if you will, *how this is so* [that it is a greater evil to do wrong] (ὥς τοῦτο οὕτως ἔχει ἐθέλω λόγον λέξαι) ... Lend an ear, then, as they say, to a *very auspicious account* (μάλα καλοῦ λόγου), which you may consider, as I suppose, a *child's story* (μῦθον), but I, an *accurate account* (λόγον); for what I am about to tell you I shall regard as *really true* (ὥς ἀληθῆ γὰρ ὄντα)²⁹.

In the beginning of the rule of Zeus, following the older sovereignty of Cronos, the last judgment occurred on the day of one's death, when one

²⁸ *Timaeus*, 29c4-d3. Note the correspondence between Timaeus' admonition and Socrates' advice to Simmias at *Phaedo*, 107b4-9.

²⁹ *Gorgias*, 522e5-523a3. Vide I. DILMAN, *Morality and the Inner Life : A Study in Plato's 'Gorgias'*, London, 1979, p. 173-186; W.H. THOMPSON, *The 'Gorgias' of Plato*, New York, 1973, p. 165-166; DODDS, *op. cit.*, p. 376-377.

was still in possession of body and all its accouterments and could muster friends as witness for the defense. The judges, however (themselves also embodied and clothed), were confounded by these external trappings, not being able to discern the real condition of the soul from its appearance. Consequently, their judgments were flawed. The guardians of Tartarus and the Blest Isles complained that they were receiving the wrong souls. Zeus, then, charged Prometheus to keep secret the day of death, so that no one would know when judgment would occur; and he appointed his sons Aeacus, Minos, and Rhadamanthys as judges of the dead, who were now stripped of all bodily paraphernalia. Naked before the judges, and their character clearly revealed, all souls would receive their just dues. The soul that had committed remediable offenses and thus judged curable would suffer bitter pain in torment, but would, through this punishment, receive the benefit of purgation from iniquity and restoration to life incarnate. The soul of a tyrant, king, or potentate, however, being an evil and incurable soul, would be sent away to everlasting punishment in the infernal dungeon of Tartarus, his fearful sufferings serving as an example to all wrongdoers. The soul of the philosopher, having lived a holy life in company with justice and truth, would be sent to the Isles of the Blest, there to dwell in eternal happiness apart from all evil³⁰.

After framing the myth, however, Socrates breaks in to reaffirm his commitment to its truth, but also draw from the fictive details basic *metaphysical assumptions* that will underpin the *ethical demands* of his foregoing argument-line.

This is, Callicles, what I, having heard, *believe* to be *true* (ἃ ἀκηκοὺς πιστεύω ἀληθῆ εἶναι); and *from these tales*, I *logically infer something* such as this (καὶ ἐκ τούτων τῶν λόγων τοῖονδε τι λογίζομαι συμβαίνειν)³¹ [*Socrates' explicit inferences*] :

- (1) That every person is a composite of soul and body, each having its own nature and end;
- (2) that the soul, as the measure of the person, is held accountable for its pursuits through life, its activities determining its destiny; and
- (3) that death is the separation of the soul from the body, and the soul passes into an afterlife to receive its just deserts :

³⁰ *Gorgias*, 523a3-526d2. Here, the myth is compressed to its essentials; cf. G.K. PLOCHMANN and F.E. ROBINSON, *A Friendly Companion to Plato's 'Gorgias'*, Carbondale, 1988, p. 232-241; SHOREY, *op. cit.*, p. 152-153.

³¹ *Gorgias*, 524a8-b2.

- (a) the good soul, having pursued truth, justice, and piety, receives its reward of a preternatural life of happiness;
- (b) the bad, but curable soul, having practiced falsehood, injustice, and impiety, undergoes remedial punishment, after which it returns to life incarnate with another chance to become good by practicing virtue; but
- (c) the incurable soul, having done extreme wrong, suffers eternal punishment and thus becomes an example to others³².

Although compressed, these inferred presuppositions are expressly stated in Socrates' account; and these he *believes* to be *true* and, so, *worthy of belief*.

After his extrapolation, Socrates adds more eschatological imagery and then ends the tale with a reflection on its *power to persuade*, admitting his *conviction* of its *truth* (ὕπὸ τε τούτων τῶν λόγων πέπεισμαι) and professing to *pursue the truth* (τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἀσκῶν πειράσομαι) so to become as *good* a person as possible. Then, chiding Callicles for his callous disbelief, he offers *reasons* for his *acceptance* of the myth.

But then, perhaps, [Callicles] you think this is to be taken as an *old wife's tale* (μῦθος... ὥσπερ γράος) and you treat it with contempt; it would be in no way surprising to treat it so if in our searching we were to *find* elsewhere a *better and truer account* than this (αὐτῶν βελτίω καὶ ἀληθέστερα). But now you see that you three, who are the wisest of the Greeks, today, you and Polus, and Gorgias, *have failed to demonstrate* (οὐκ ἔχετε ἀποδείξαι) that we ought to live any other life than this³³.

Here, Socrates is ready to bank his trust on the truth of the tale on two counts³⁴: (1) it is better and truer than any other accounts known, and (2) it has not been disproved. The reasons are *pragmatic* and are therefore similar to the practical account that he gives in the *Republic* (382d, *vide supra*). And they compare readily with his apology for belief

³² *Gorgias*, 523a-526c: (1) 524b-d; (2) 524d-e; (3) 524b,d and 526b-c; (3a) 523a-b and 526a-c; (3b) 523b, 524e-525c, 525e, and 526b; (3c) 525c-d and 526b.

³³ *Gorgias*, 527a5-b2. *Vide* SMITH, *op. cit.*, p. 32-34; DILMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 170-175 and 177-179.

³⁴ SMITH, *op. cit.*, p. 27, claims that Socrates' persuasion here is based not on its fictive details but rather on the truths for which he has been arguing throughout the dialogue – a view rather close to mine.

in myth in the *Phaedo*, where after narrating an ancient tale³⁵, in principle the same, Socrates explains to Simmias :

To contend stoutly that *such things as these are so* (οὕτως ἔχειν), just as I have related them, is not fitting for anyone who has a mind at all; *but that this or something like this is so* (οὕτως ἔχειν) concerning our souls and their [future] dwellings, since the soul is manifestly immortal, it seems to me that this is clearly seen to be *a risk worth taking for the one believing it* (οἰομένῳ) – for the risk is noble – and one ought to sing such things to oneself, as it were a magic charm³⁶.

But an even more forceful statement concerning the positive truth-value of myth appears in the *Meno*. There, we find the seminal ideas of the emerging eschatological myth, as the purveyor of *immediate truth*, serving as the occasion for the soul's *recovery* (ἀνάμνησις) of previously acquired *knowledge* about *virtue* and other things. In response to the captious argument over the puzzle of «how one can come to know what one does not know», Socrates warrants an ancient tale he is about to profile :

... I have heard from men and women wise in things divine ... [and the tale they told] I, indeed, think true and noble (ἀληθὴ, ἔμοιγε δοκεῖν, καὶ καλόν) ... and what they say is this – but see whether you think they are telling what is true³⁷.

After relating the tale, he declares is a sound rejoinder to the captious argument and *commits* himself to its *truth* :

Therefore, we ought not to be persuaded by this sophistic reasoning (οὐκ οὐκ δεῖ πείθεσθαι τούτῳ τῷ ἐριστικῷ λόγῳ) ... [so] believing it [the tale] to be true, I want to join you in the search for virtue (ὅ ἐγὼ πιστεύω ἀληθεῖ εἶναι ἐθέλω μετὰ σοῦ ζητεῖν ἀρετὴ ὅτι ἐστίν)³⁸.

The integrating factor in these cases, calling up his trust, is the *lack of knowledge* about a network of metaphysical assumptions, *not* open to proof or disproof, but whose plausibility *approaches the certainty* of truth. And the force of these assumptions as stand-ins for confirmed belief elicits from Socrates an immediate reliance on their positive truth-value as the best possible solution to this indeterminacy. As the adduction of

³⁵ Vide *Epistle VII*, 335a2-5, re the truth of ancient tradition.

³⁶ *Phaedo*, 114d1-7. Cf. *Epistle VII*, loc. cit. On persuasion and «magic charm», vide BURGER, *op. cit.*, p. 9, 85, 189, and 193.

³⁷ *Meno*, 81a5-b3.

³⁸ *Meno*, 81d5-e2.

probabilities provides the *rationale* of the mantic myth, so this adumbration of true belief serves as the *psychological* ground on which his *persuasion* rests³⁹.

Now briefly, in passing, I offer a *slight* disclaimer to E.R. Dodds' explanation of Plato's alethic intention here. Dodds asks «In what sense did Plato believe his myths to be 'true' ?» and replies that the clearest answer is given at *Phaedo* 114d (with which I concur). But after a short list of negative suggestions, he adds the clincher that Plato is *not* «presenting philosophical truth in the guise of an allegory» : that this is a λόγος⁴⁰ expressing in imaginative terms a «truth of religion». I reply : that while the fictive details serving in these cases are what we, today, call religious or theological verisimilitudes, they are introduced here as constructs not to be taken literally, but as symbols foreshadowing metaphysical «truths» of *philosophical import*⁴¹ to reinforce *practical (ethical) demands* and to support *legislative rule* based on *moral theory*. Nowhere in the *Gorgias* does Plato register Socrates' epagogic pursuit as a quest for religious verities. Rather, it is an exercise to persuade one to live the philosophic life in the practice of *justice* and the other virtue (τὴν δικαιοσύνην καὶ τὴν ἄλλην ἀρετὴν ἀσκοῦντας)⁴², viz., *temperance* (σωφροσύνη)⁴³. These two moral perfections, representing the unity of the virtues («Mr. Outside» and «Mr. Inside»), produce in geometrical proportion⁴⁴ *order* in the soul and so fashion the best life⁴⁵ – a token of the orderly cosmos and the prospect of an orderly state⁴⁶.

³⁹ Cf. *Phaedo*, 107b4-9.

⁴⁰ DODDS, *op. cit.*, p. 386.

⁴¹ To support religious implication here, DODDS, *op. cit.*, p. 376-377, calls on *Epistle VII*, 335a2-5; some support along this line might be found at *Meno*, 81a-e. FRIEDLÄNDER, *op. cit.*, p. 42 and 189, I think, argues correctly in support of the philosophical significance of λόγος in this context. On legislative rule *re* ethical demands, *vide* *Laws*, 865d, 872d-e, and 972a-d. Cf. PLOCHMANN and ROBINSON, *op. cit.*, p. XXXIV and p. 359, n. 22.

⁴² *Gorgias*, 527e1-5.

⁴³ Cf. *Gorgias*, 504d1-3 and 506e1-507c4.

⁴⁴ *Gorgias*, 507c8-508a7. *Vide* DODDS, *op. cit.*, p. 337-340; THOMPSON, *op. cit.*, p. VII-X; PLOCHMANN and ROBINSON, *op. cit.*, p. 341-344; T. IRWIN, *Plato : 'Gorgias'*, Oxford, 1979, p. 222-224.

⁴⁵ STENZEL, *op. cit.*, p. 31-35, *re* virtue and the good life; IRWIN, *op. cit.*, p. 222, at 507b, notes that courage is also needed for a well-planned life (cf. *Gorgias*, 497d-498c).

⁴⁶ *Gorgias*, 506d-508c. *Vide* A.W.H. ADKINS, *Merit and Responsibility : A Study in Greek Values*, Oxford, 1965, p. 264 : these two virtues are among what ADKINS calls «the quiet virtues» (*vide* p. 268f).

Deriving First Principles

To this point, I have shown that myth in its pragmatic role projects its mantic function as a truth-bearing fiction and that the extrapolation of its «truths» from the fictive details makes explicit this function, *viz.*, to communicate metaphysical premises in support of practical (moral) claims. I shall now argue that these «truths» emerge as «first principles» to serve as the background theory and necessary condition that define the logical limits of particular argument-lines (all of *ethical import*) in the Socratic dialectic. Although evidence for this claim is furnished in the myths and argument-lines of the *Gorgias*, the *Meno*, the *Phaedo*, and the *Republic*⁴⁷, I confine my remarks to the evidence in the *Gorgias*, using it as a single proof case.

An explanatory model. But, first, turning once more to the *Timaeus* as our explanatory model, we find a paradigm account of this logical closure. There, Timaeus performs a preliminary maneuver to establish the ground rules for the narration of his likely cosmic story, drawing these distinctions as his *regulative principles* :

- (1) that *what is* (τὸ ὄν) is always real (τὸ ὄν ἀεί) and has no becoming (γένεσιν... οὐκ ἔχον),
- (1a) but what *becomes* (τὸ γιγνόμενον) is always becoming (ἀεί) and is never real (ὄν... οὐδέποτε); and
- (2) that what is real is grasped by *thought along with an account* (νοήσει μετὰ λόγου),
- (2a) but what is apparent is grasped by *opinion along with sense-perception without an account* (δόξη μετ' αἰσθήσεως ἀλόγου), and
- (3) [it] has, of necessity, *some cause* (ὅπ' αἰτίου τινὸς ἐξ γίνεσθαι), for nothing happens without a cause⁴⁸.

⁴⁷ Cf. also the mantic function of myth in the *Phaedrus* and the *Statesman*, where the argument-lines follow the method of diaeresis rather than the elenctic/hypothetic method.

⁴⁸ *Timaeus*, 27d5-28a6. At 47e-52d, Timaeus takes a new starting-point and posits another basic assumption to account for physical and physiological processes in the sphere of mechanical causation, i.e., what comes about of necessity (ἀνάγκη), the workings of the «errant cause» (πλανωμένη αἰτία); *vide* A.E. TAYLOR, *A Commentary on Plato's 'Timaeus'*, Oxford, 1962, p. 297-351, and F.M. CORNFORD, *Plato's Cosmology*, London, 1948, p. 160-197. I have omitted this principle since it has no immediate relevancy to the ethical demands of the *Gorgias* account – unless some point can be made for the «moral» space of Tartarus, e.g., the λείμων of *Gorgias*, 524a2 (cf. *Republic*, 614a2 and *Phaedrus*, 248c1) and the *purgatorium* of *Gorgias*, 525b, *Phaedo*, 113a,d, and *Republic*,

As A.E. Taylor points out, the distinction between being and becoming is equated with the distinction between the intelligible and the sensible⁴⁹; and this equation entails corresponding equitable distinctions. *What is real* implies the *forms* (εἶδη) as *objects of knowledge* and *models* (παραδείγματα) of *things* (πράγματα)⁵⁰; *what is apparent* implies *things* as *objects of opinion* and *copies* (εἰκόνες) of *forms*. And *cause*, understood as the principle of agency, implies *soul* (ψυχή), the spontaneous initiator of all movement or change – (1) in respect of forms, the cause of mental events, and (2) in respect of things, the cause of physical events – and also the catalytic agent effecting the conjunction of forms and things⁵¹. These basic assumptions as «first principles», Timaeus claims, constitute the conditions and limits of his «likely tale»⁵²: that whatever is represented in the cosmic myth *follows* from these assumptions to form a *systematic* (unified) account.

But more than this. We have here, in brief, I claim, Plato's basic metaphysical background theory (his own «first principles»)⁵³ that frames and supports every argument-line in the dialogues. If the «truths» of the mantic myth entail this theory, they then provide the kind of logical closure Timaeus defines in his prefatory remarks and demonstrates in his cosmic account. The mantic myth thus becomes, to turn Socrates' metaphor⁵⁴, the *formal* «head» of the *material* argument-line to which it is *attached*; and its «truths», now «first principles», provide the foundation and logical restraints of its foregoing set of «proofs».

615a; on these matters, *vide* DODDS, *op. cit.*, p. 375-376, and THOMPSON, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

⁴⁹ TAYLOR, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

⁵⁰ I have used *πράγμα* here as a generic term for 'thing' (cf. *Gorgias*, 507b6-7 and *Phaedo*, 71a10; also É. DES PLACES, *Platon œuvres complètes : Lexique*, Paris, 1964, XIV (2), 433.

⁵¹ *Vide* TAYLOR, *op. cit.*, p. 63-65, *re* soul as cause.

⁵² Note these two phrases, apparently, used interchangeably: τὸν εἰκότα μῦθον (*Timaeus*, 29d2) and κατὰ λόγον τὸν εἰκότα (*Timaeus*, 30b7). On the meanings of λόγος and μῦθος, *vide* FRUTIGER, *op. cit.*, p. 17-18, esp. n. 4; FRIEDLÄNDER, *op. cit.*, p. 172, 189, and 368, n. 2; BURGER, *op. cit.*, Chp. 2; MOORS, *op. cit.*, p. 100 sq.; and SMITH, *op. cit.*, p. 24-26.

⁵³ Put in perspective, *vide* G.C. FIELD, *The Philosophy of Plato*, London, 1961, p. 28-162.

⁵⁴ *Gorgias*, 505c10-d3; cf. *Laws*, 752a2-4. In opposition to my argument, DODDS, *op. cit.*, p. 385 at 527a7, claims that «the preceding ethical arguments ... are independent of the myth...».

A proof case. Reading the *Gorgias* myth more closely, we can construe Socrates' moral postulates to conform to the pattern of the regulative principles of the cosmic myth and thereby show that they express the same metaphysical formula, only in meta-moral dress. The categorial distinction between appearance and reality is implicit in the contingent separation of body and soul :

- (1) that the *soul* is the subject of reality, active, eternal, and thus imperishable;
- (1a) that the *body* is the vehicle of appearance, passive, temporal, and thus perishable;
- (2) that the *virtues* (forms) are the principles of reality, the objects of knowledge and models of moral action;
- (2a) that the *vices* (phantom-images) are the deceptions of appearance, the objects of false opinion and devices of immoral action; and
- (3) that the *soul* (cause) is the agent of reality, the initiator of human action and choice-maker of value judgments : (a) in respect of virtues, the cause of moral action; (b) in respect of vices, the cause of immoral action⁵⁵.

It now remains to show how this set of presuppositions as «first principles» extends regulative control over its preceding argument-line. An abridgement of the lengthy «three act» debate, focusing on two moral issues central to the argument-line, provides sufficient proof of the claim.

In the «first act», Socrates engages Gorgias the Sophist in discussion, requesting the definition and power of rhetoric. And Gorgias responds, without defining it, that it is the greatest good for man and an effective teacher and guide. With elenctic acuity, Socrates counters decisively, showing (1) that rhetoric stems from *ignorance*, not knowledge⁵⁶, and (2) that it is not a teacher of *truth* and *justice*, but simply a producer of persuasion for belief⁵⁷, heedless of truth or falsity, without an account of right and wrong, and with more concern for *appearance* than *reality*⁵⁸.

In «act two», Polus the Sophist takes up the brand in Gorgias' behalf. But, again, in similar fashion, Socrates checks the claim, adding that rhetoric is not an *art* (τέχνη), but merely an *empiric knack* (ἐμπειρία καὶ

⁵⁵ Extrapolated from *Gorgias*, 523c2-526c5.

⁵⁶ *Gorgias*, 455a-456a. N.B., the key citations in the footnotes 56-82 are from the *Gorgias* and only the sections are given; other citations are given in full.

⁵⁷ 459c-461b.

⁵⁸ 458e-460a.

τριβή), a branch of *flattery* (κολακεία)⁵⁹ (1) that deals in *speculation* and pretense⁶⁰, (2) that gives no account of the *real nature* of things and so does not know their *cause*⁶¹, and (3) that aims at the *pleasant* and ignores the *best*⁶². The upshot of this censure is that rhetoric is a base and harmful profession, doing wrong by pandering to the lower tastes of the crowd. And, here, Socrates makes his central moral point that *doing wrong is worse than suffering it* (τὸ ἀδικεῖν κάκιον... τοῦ ἀδικεῖσθαι)⁶³. Against Polus, who alleges the latter, Socrates argues, convincingly, that doing wrong is more *painful* (λυπηρότερον), *baser* (αἰσχίον), and *more evil* (κάκιον)⁶⁴ than suffering it and makes the wrongdoer *more wretched* (ἀθλιώτερος)⁶⁵. His reasoning, based on the following grounds, is (1) that *knowledge is virtue*⁶⁶; (2) that no one, while caring for the *good*, will do evil⁶⁷; (3) that one pursuing *justice* will never act unjustly⁶⁸; and (4) that the *good* and *noble* person is *happy*, but the unjust and base person is wretched⁶⁹. To this moral point, he adds a corollary : that the wrongdoer, who pays the just penalty and is justly punished, suffers what is *good*⁷⁰. This he argues on the ground that one is benefited from *justice* (1) by being relieved from the greatest evil and *vice of the soul* (ψυχῆς πονηρία)⁷¹; and (2) being thus relieved, one becomes *better in soul* (βελτίων τὴν ψυχήν) and is less wretched, receiving requital from gods and men⁷². But to do wrong and not pay the penalty is the *greatest of all evils and takes first place* (πάντων μέγιστον τε καὶ πρῶτον κακῶν)⁷³.

In the «final act», Callicles the Rhetorician enters the debate, taking issue with Socrates' position on wrongdoing. The argument turns on the

⁵⁹ 463a-d; 464e; 466a-468e.

⁶⁰ 464b-d.

⁶¹ 465ab.

⁶² 464d-465a.

⁶³ 468e-481b.

⁶⁴ 475b.

⁶⁵ 472e5-7.

⁶⁶ 466e-468b. Vide THOMPSON, *op. cit.*, p. VIII-X; IRWIN, *op. cit.*, p. 2-3.

⁶⁷ 467c-470b. Cf. 509e; vide THOMPSON, *op. cit.*, p. 135-136; DILMAN, *op. cit.*, Chp. 9; IRWIN, *op. cit.*, p. 140-148.

⁶⁸ Vide 460a-c.

⁶⁹ 470e-473b.

⁷⁰ 476d-477a.

⁷¹ 477a-e.

⁷² 477a-478e; cf. 472e.

⁷³ 479d4-6.

question «how one ought to live» or «what course of life is best». Callicles claims, on the ground of natural justice, that the stronger should have the advantage over the weaker and should have free reign of the appetites. Socrates counters with epagogic precision (1) that the descriptive 'stronger' and all other such predicates are ambiguous and referentially opaque⁷⁴, (2) that the life of insatiate pleasure is not an orderly life of *temperance* and *self-control*⁷⁵, (3) that *the good*, not pleasure, is the end of all our actions⁷⁶, and (4) that the *good life*, ordered by *temperance* and *justice*, aims toward the *best*⁷⁷. Turning again to his central moral focus, Socrates argues here, as with Polus, that doing wrong is the greater evil; suffering it, the less; and the greatest evil is to do wrong and to pay no penalty⁷⁸. But he makes the salient point that since no one does wrong willingly⁷⁹, one must have a certain *power* (δύναμις) or *art* (τέχνη) to save oneself from wrongdoing⁸⁰. The tail of the argument-line then tapers with Socrates and Callicles debating the qualifications and functions of a true statesman⁸¹. Finally, silencing Callicles, at least for the moment, Socrates tells his doomsday tale and then, with a plaintive protreptic, ends his abortive maieutic effort⁸².

The crucial requisite of a «saving art» (referred to above) remains, as Dodds notes, an unexplained prescription (remedy ?) in the *Gorgias*. But it may well suggest what is implicit in the claim argued here : that to live a good, orderly life, one must have a set of moral principles which serve as a necessary condition for correct moral reasoning and to which one commits oneself for proper moral action. This lack marks the failure of Socrates' three disputants to argue successfully the immoralist's case, for their radical skepticism precludes any such

⁷⁴ 488b-491c.

⁷⁵ 490d-499b.

⁷⁶ 497d-499e.

⁷⁷ 500cd; 504a-508c.

⁷⁸ 508b-511a.

⁷⁹ 509c-e.

⁸⁰ 510a3-5. N.B. DODDS, *op. cit.*, p. 343; also ADKINS, *op. cit.*, p. 273 and 280, n. 12, points out that Plato introduces a philosophical redefinition of τέχνη as a skill aiming at an ἀγαθόν, a skill that can give an account of the real nature of things (*Gorgias*, 465a).

⁸¹ 513d-522e.

⁸² 522e-527e. *Vide* DODDS, *op. cit.*, p. 384, on 526d3-527e7.

moral formula⁸³. Without a basis, then, for moral reasoning, they are unable to comprehend the force of moral argument, and their sallies of stratagems and rhetorical ploys are invariably *ad hoc* and myopic⁸⁴. Moral argument, as other forms of discourse, is possible only within a frame of reference which furnishes a systematic set of principles that determines the logical limits and adequacy of the premises. This is precisely Socrates' advantage. His background moral theory is the «saving art» that enables him at every point in the epagogic procedure to argue coherently and forcefully and to sustain his moral claims⁸⁵.

Thus, Plato has introduced the mantic myth as a complement to Socrates' art of midwifery. These two dramatic fabrications are inseparable logical maneuvers⁸⁶. Committed to the pursuit of truth and its consequent knowledge, each undertakes the task in its own way. The maieutic art, adopting the technique of *indirect inference*, sets its sails toward the *recovery of knowledge*, while the mantic myth, employing the strategy of *indirect communication*, steers its course toward the *discovery of truth*. This mythic course, as Plato conceived it, is an effectual passage from belief (πίστις) to true opinion (δόξα ἀληθής) and provides the logical charter for the maieutic craft to make the difficult passage from true opinion to knowledge (ἐπιστήμη).

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⁸³ Gorgias : 451e and 463d (cf. Socrates' remark at 465e); Polus : 461d and 477c; Callicles : 468c1, 491b, d-e, 497a6, 497b3, 498d1, 500d, 511a, 511b, 513c, 515b-c, and 518a-519d.

⁸⁴ Cf. *Gorgias*, 467a-c. Vide DILMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 9-24.

⁸⁵ Vide IRWIN, *op. cit.*, p. 3, 5-8, 156, 224, 228, and 243, where he distinguishes in various ways the Socrates of the *Gorgias* from the Socrates of the earlier dialogues. The point that I have made (in general agreement with IRWIN) is that Socrates here in the *Gorgias*, whether offering an epistemic disclaimer, demonstrates, nevertheless, a background theory of regulative moral principles – «saving art» – to which he is committed and which controls the argument-line. The earlier Socrates professes ignorance, disclaiming knowledge of the moral virtues, and relies solely on the argument (elenchus) to out with the requisite moral truth and knowledge.

⁸⁶ DODDS, *op. cit.*, p. 385 at 527a7, claims that the myth and the preceding argument-line are independent of each other.