PLATO’S CHARIOTEER: ON MYTHOS AND LOGOS IN THE DIALOGUES

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The following essay seeks to characterize the use of both *logos* and *mythos* in the Platonic dialogues as part of a larger effort to determine how truth is conveyed in Plato’s writings. The relationship between *logos* and *mythos* will also be analyzed.
REFLECTIONS ON MYTHOS AND ITS PLATONIC FORM

I. INTRODUCTION

While Plato may not have outlined a complete theory on the use of muthos or mythos, it can be reasonably assumed that he interpreted myth as being crucial to the epistemic process and to his philosophy overall. As noted by Collobert, Destrée, and Gonzalez in the introduction to *Plato and Myth: Studies on the Use and Status of Platonic Myth*, “myth becomes an integral and constitutive part of [Plato’s] philosophical discourse.”¹ However, there has been much debate as to what constitutes a use of myth in Plato’s dialogues, largely as a result of Plato’s hesitance or failure to precisely describe its essence. As a general term, then, *mythos* is translated literally as ‘a traditional or recurrent narrative theme or plot structure.’² In other words, myths are generally classified as stories with a variety of possible forms; of these, we are left with substantial ambiguity regarding the form of Platonic myth. In *Plato and Myth*, for example, it is remarked that *mythos* is not always easily distinguishable from *logos* in Plato’s writings; they often appear both identical and distinct from each other, as they share many of the same characteristics³ – the

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object of truth being one of these. Socrates himself states in the *Republic*⁴ that “we begin by
telling children fables [i.e. *mythoi*], and the fable is, taken as a whole, false, but there is truth in it
also” (37a). As Robert Stewart notes in “The Epistemological Function of Platonic Myth,” this
seems to deter one from distinguishing between *mythos* and *logos* purely on a basis of validity.⁵
Stewart goes further to reference two other general features of Platonic myth *qua* its subject
matter and literary form: (1) it primarily involves “an account of the genesis of something,” and
(2) it is poetic in style, employing both ‘symbolism’ and ‘a liberty of expression.’
Aristophanes’s myth in the *Symposium* on the origin of love and the nature of human
relationships is an obvious example of both (189d–191d). However, in Stewart’s account, the
first feature is also considered broad enough to include the generation of a philosophical premise
or first principle.⁶

Others have also reached similar conclusions and have gone further in their attempts to
give a rational account of Platonic myth. Glenn W. Most is one such scholar, and he identifies
the following eight characteristics of Platonic myth in his chapter “Plato’s Exoteric Myths”:⁷

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Plato’s writings are taken from this book with the following translators: *Phaedo*, Hugh
Treddenick; *Meno*, W. K. C. Guthrie; *Phaedrus*, R. Hackforth; *Symposium*, Michael Joyce;
*Theaetetus* and *Sophist*, F. M. Cornford; *Statesman*, J.B. Skemp; *Timaeus*, Benjamin Jowett;

⁵ Robert Scott Stewart, “The Epistemological Function of Platonic Myth,” *Philosophy and

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Most, Glenn W, “Plato’s Exoteric Myths,” in *Plato and Myth: Studies on the Use and Status of
Platonic Myths*, eds. Catherine Collobert, Pierre Destrée and Francisco J. Gonzalez (Leiden;
Boston: Brill, 2012), 16-19. The 8 criteria Most identifies are paraphrased as shown; for a
similarly condensed version in his own description, see also Appendix A, p. 24.
1. They are monological.

2. Their narrator is older than the listeners.

3. They belong to oral sources (real or fictional).

4. They are unverifiable.

5. They derive their authority from the tradition (not personal experience).

6. They have a psychagogic effect on their listeners.

7. They are descriptive or narrative – never dialectic.

8. They are located at the beginnings or ends of dialectical expositions.

Most briefly describes and supports each criterion in detail. First, Platonic myths “are presented orally and by a single speaker without any interruption”. Secondly, the advanced age of the narrator is alluded to by the respect of its listeners (i.e. the lack of interruption in Greek conversation). For the fourth list item, “myths deal [either] with the very first things…or the very last things,” providing either an account of origins or an eschatology, both of which are unverifiable. The sixth criterion indicates the appeal of Platonic myth to its listener’s emotions, both as delightful entertainment and a strong motivational tool; the seventh distinguishes the logical procedures of dialectic (including the elenchus and the method of collection and division) from both the synchronic and diachronic structures of myths. Most concedes that these characteristics are by no means completely universal or free from controversy, but he maintains that they are “thoroughly typical of the traditional myths” of Plato and the oral culture of ancient

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8 Ibid., 17.
Greece as a whole.\textsuperscript{9} An example containing all eight characteristics is the myth of the afterlife at the end of the \textit{Phaedo} (107c–115b). Another scholar on the nature of Platonic myth is Monique Dixsaut, professor emeritus at Panthéon-Sorbonne University. She distinguishes \textit{mythos} from \textit{logos} first by referencing the Hegelian conceptualization: “myth…resorts to and wakens sensory images suitable for representational thinking whereas \textit{logos} moves through concepts alone.”\textsuperscript{10}

Later, Dixsaut expands this concept by identifying myth as an essentially enigmatic form of communication which calls for interpretation; for Dixsaut, this interpretation must be non-allegorical, or perhaps more accurately, beyond mere allegory. In furtherance of her point, Dixsaut argues for three rules of such an interpretation: (1) The interpreter must have self-knowledge, (2) identify whom the myth is about, and (3) recognize that the message of the myth is prescriptive, not argumentative.\textsuperscript{11} In sum, through one’s understanding of oneself, coupled with the knowledge that myths describe a “typology of souls,” one can rightly interpret the prescriptive message contained within. Ultimately, these characteristics of Platonic myths and suggestions for their interpretation provide the necessary basis for the study of its function in the dialogues.

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 19.


\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 34. Dixsaut uses “cognitive,” but later describes platonic myth as affective rather than argumentative (p.45), indicating this intended meaning.
II. THE FUNCTIONS OF PLATONIC MYTH

i. *Plato’s Aesthetic Instrumentalism*

In the third section of “The Epistemological Function of Platonic Myth,” Stewart argues for an ‘aesthetic instrumentalism’ of Plato. If this interpretation is correct, Plato would have believed that for art to be considered ‘good,’ it must express, “in an artistic way, that deemed proper by other non-artistic procedures (i.e. dialectic).” This would seem to be concordant with the description of art as one of the five ways to truth that Aristotle sets out in Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics* in which he says that true art is a well-reasoned, productive state [emphasis added]. Thus, common misconceptions about instances of art would actually fall under the contrary description of *atechnia* or ‘non-art,’ – i.e. that which is a falsely reasoned productive state. Stewart supports his argument for Plato’s aesthetic instrumentalism by referencing a passage in Book X of the *Republic* that implies such a criticism of Homer and other similar poets. Here, Socrates essentially labels classic Homeric poetry as *atechnia*, or a falsely reasoned productive state, for its portrayal of dishonorable conduct as acceptable behavior. Specifically, Socrates notes how, when listening to a poet’s imitation of a hero’s grief, we “feel pleasure, and abandon ourselves and accompany the representation with sympathy and eagerness, and we praise as an excellent poet the one who most strongly affects us in this way.”

12 Stewart, “The Epistemological Function” 263-264.


Contrary to the usual praise of one’s “ability to remain calm and endure” as conduct befitting a man, this passage re-emphasizes Plato’s notion that works of art have a strong influence over the soul. Thus, in Plato’s view, poetry which is not in accordance with reason or logos as the ruling principle ought to be banned from the state; otherwise, “pleasure and pain will be lords of your city instead of law” (607a). Overall, if the use of mythos in the dialogues can be shown to have a functional role in Plato’s philosophy in harmony with formal reason, Platonist myth would sufficiently meet Aristotle’s conditions as a form of art, and the claim that Plato uses myth as “aesthetic instrumentalism” would be verified.

**ii. Myth’s Emotional Appeal and Persuasive Function**

It is worth noting here how well Most’s characterization of myth’s emotional appeal (the sixth of the eight characteristics identified) fits under Plato’s view on the influence of art over the soul, particularly in relation to the aforementioned passage from the Republic. It would reasonably follow that the emotional appeal of mythos could be used effectively as a form of positive persuasion over its audience; otherwise, the frequency of its appearance in the dialogues would be incongruous with Plato’s artistic instrumentalism outlined above. In this way, the role of mythos in Plato’s philosophy can transcend passivity as mere communication and assume instead an active role in the persuasion or, as Most would have it, motivation of the reader. This precise function of mythos is evidenced quite literally in the Statesman when a young Socrates discusses the art governing the use of persuasion. This ‘art’ is tasked with “persuading the general mass of the population by telling them suitable stories (i.e. myths) rather than by giving

15 Ibid. See also Republic, Bk. III 397d–398b for more on Plato’s critique of mimetic Homeric poetry and Bk. IV 424d–425d for Plato’s view on the role of music in the state.
them formal instruction (i.e. dialectic)” and is labeled as rhetoric (304c–d). The persuasive function of Platonic myth is further accounted for when one considers Plato’s intended audience; as Most notes, “Plato wrote his dialogues not only for philosophically trained readers but also, and perhaps above all, for potentially interested external non-experts, i.e. for young men (and their parents) who wanted to know what they should do in life.”

Pierre Destrée also addresses the emotional appeal and motivational role of Platonic myth in “Spectacles from Hades. On Plato’s Myths and Allegories in the Republic,” defending the traditional view of mythic interpretation. Destrée suggests that mythoi in Plato are similar in function to poetic tools of imagery or allegory – namely, in addressing the “irrational part of our soul”. Thus, allegorical myths are protreptical tools for the motivation of Plato’s audience to lead a philosophical and morally good life. This is subtly represented in the Republic through Glaucon, the main interlocutor of Socrates; Glaucon, despite having “a natural gift for philosophy, and great potential for moral goodness,” also has a natural affinity for poetry and irrational desires, and as such, he is in need of constant persuasion to stay on the right path. Therefore, as Socrates’s interlocutor, he is calling for both intellectual demonstration of why the

16 Most, “Plato’s Exoteric Myths,” 22.


18 Ibid., 112.

19 Ibid., 115.
virtuous life is best and, primarily, emotional motivation to pursue such a life.\textsuperscript{20} In this way, the allegorical nature of myth is established in accordance with Dixsaut’s conception of the prescriptive function of Platonic myth, for artistic allegory itself connotes a protreptic intent.

Dixsaut likens this function of \textit{mythos} to the role of divinatory dreams as described in the \textit{Timaeus} (71b–d) – namely, in their use to correctly orient the appetitive part of the soul.\textsuperscript{21} To summarize, in a just and temperate individual, the ruling function (i.e. the rational mind) can exercise influence over the spirited and appetitive (i.e. the irrational) elements of the soul by appealing to emotion and desire in one’s dreams, employing either terrorizing or soothing imagery. As she explains, myths like that of Er in the \textit{Republic} (614b–621d) soothingly convey “that it is possible [for a soul] to rise above the element of chance and misfortune that all human life brings with it, and to reconcile fate and choice, necessity and freedom” by choosing a just life.\textsuperscript{22} However, Plato’s eschatological myths\textsuperscript{23} also have a certain dissuasive purpose. For example, in the \textit{Phaedo}’s myth of the afterlife, one is dissuaded from wickedness and ignorance due to the soul’s immortality; death does not offer an escape from the consequences of one’s deeds (107d; 108b–c). Thus, all Platonic myths enjoin us to orient our conduct properly and to pursue the power of intelligence – to “raise our heads” as the \textit{Phaedo} implores us – for it is only through intelligence and virtuous activity that humankind escapes chaos and disorder.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 112.

\textsuperscript{21} Dixsaut, “Myth and Interpretation,” 45.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{23} ‘Eschatological’ as being concerned with contemplation of the very last things, thus fulfilling the fourth of Most’s criteria, among others.

\textsuperscript{24} Dixsaut, “Myth and Interpretation,” 46.
iii. Myth’s Imaginative Appeal and Cognitive Function

The connection which Destrée makes between myth and poetical imagery (i.e. analogy and allegory) and the role this plays in the cognitive process should not be overlooked. He clearly shows that mythos has an imaginative appeal to the intellect as well as an emotional appeal to the irrational part of the soul. This is shown in three instances where eikôn\textsuperscript{25} are used in Books VI and VII of the Republic. The first of these is the analogy of the Sun to the form of the Good (VI, 509a–c), the function of which seems clear; the analogy is an intellectual tool to set a basis for the understanding of the form of the Good as responsible for knowledge and truth, a view that is central to Plato’s entire metaphysics.\textsuperscript{26} The second eikôn in Book VI of the Republic is that of the Divided Line (509d–511e), which is even more straightforward in delivery, if not in scholarly interpretation. Here, Socrates employs geometrical pedagogy through imagery and proportion to outline objects of thought and states of mind in the epistemic process (see Fig. 1). Lastly, the third instance is that of the Allegory or Myth of the Cave in Book VI (514a–517b). As noted by Destrée, this third eikôn is not as straightforward as the previous ones.\textsuperscript{27} Thus, understanding the significance of the Cave and its relation to the Divided Line requires further elaboration. Furthermore, the formal statuses of both the Cave and the Divided Line as mythos or logos have yet to be established. For now, let them stand simply as


\textsuperscript{26} Destrée, “Spectacles from Hades,” 117-118.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 118.
further examples of imaginative appeal in Plato’s use of *mythos*. In addition, it is worth noting how each of the three *eikôn* mentioned above fit under the description of myth referenced by Dixsaut as “Hegelian”; each calls upon sensual imagery, whether directly or abstractly, for the dissemination of its underlying ideas.

Fig. 1. F. M. Cornford, *Plato: The Line*. Source: Ken Schles. 2011, Digital Image. Available from: https://kenschles.wordpress.com/2011/07/24/allegory-of-the-cave-the-dialectic-of-the-image-is-thus/ (accessed April 21, 2016). Original from The Republic of Plato (Cornford translation, Oxford University Press). We consider F. M. Cornford’s interpretation of the Divided Line to be fairly accurate in accordance with the description in the dialogues. Here, the two ‘worlds’ are not meant to be taken literally as two separate worlds, but rather as two ontological orders of one reality – specifically, one dealing with intelligibles and one with sense perceptibles.

Dixsaut also comments on the role of Platonic myth in the cognitive process in terms of its imaginative appeal. For instance, she notes that myth is not limited in its expression;
everything is subject to its discussion, but always in relation to the soul and its experiences.\textsuperscript{28} Thus, myth can discuss both that which is sense-perceptible and that which is intellectual in form, yet still demand abstract interpretation for each by appealing to our imagination through symbolism and analogy. As examples of these respective roles, consider the myths in the \textit{Timaeus} and the \textit{Phaedrus}. In the former, the myth discusses the creation of the sensible world in its entirety, as well as the bodies and souls contained therein, in explicitly physical terms (30c–92c); it relates the processes of bodies, both heavenly and human, to their soul counterparts, even claiming that three parts of the human soul reside in specific parts of the body, such as the divine part residing in the liver whereas the two mortal parts reside in the stomach and the heart (70a–72d). In contrast, the \textit{Phaedrus} discusses the purely intelligible forms of Justice, Temperance, and Knowledge directly, describing them as nourishment to the wings of the soul (247d), which it portrays as a team of two steeds guided by a charioteer (246a). In both cases, myth is, as Dixsaut notes, speaking “in a different way”\textsuperscript{29} – namely, by relying on allegory and analogy. In this ‘different’ way of communication, myth forces its audience to ‘see’ differently for a correct interpretation. Dixsaut puts it nicely: “…relating a myth is to make us see [author’s emphasis].”\textsuperscript{30} This, Dixsaut argues, is also key to identifying whom a myth is about – “to see” a myth in Plato’s dialogues is to identify its portrayal of a “typology of souls.”

Destrée and Dixsaut are not alone in their proposal that Platonic myths have an imaginative appeal; Stewart argues for such a function as well. As he says, “…insofar as

\textsuperscript{28} Dixsaut, “Myth and Interpretation,” 38.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 39.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 40-42.
something can be labelled a Platonic myth, it must use language of a sort that makes one begin thinking in the conceptual realm rather than within the physical.”\textsuperscript{31} However, Stewart also notes that myths generally speak in material terms, relying heavily on physical images. For example, in the myth noted above in the \textit{Phaedrus}, Plato uses sensual descriptions to liken the tripartite soul to a charioteer and his two horses (246a). In addition, consider the myth of the afterlife at the end of the \textit{Phaedo} and that of the creation myth in the \textit{Timaeus}, mentioned above; both speak in explicitly physical terms. Steward adds, “But, of course, myth is not restricted to the terms in which it expresses itself,”\textsuperscript{32} for it is, in essence, highly symbolic. Thus, the soul in the \textit{Phaedrus} is not to be taken literally as a charioteer and his horses, nor is the geography of the world or the creation of its parts exactly as the \textit{Phaedo} and \textit{Timeaeus} describe; one must “see differently,” or begin to think “in the conceptual realm” to understand their meaning. As Stewart argues, “In this way myth is enabled to operate within the epistemic process by forming a bridge from the realm of the physical to that of the intelligible.”\textsuperscript{33} Therefore, it is precisely this symbolic characteristic of myth which gives it a functional role in the epistemic process. In developing this point, he likens the cognitive function of myth to \textit{dianoia}\textsuperscript{34} as described in the \textit{Republic} and represented in the Divided Line (see Fig. 1). In this state of mind, “they make use of the visible forms and talk about them, though they are not thinking of them but of those things of which they are a likeness, pursuing their inquiry for the sake of the square as such and the diagonal as such, and not for the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[31] Stewart, “The Epistemological Function,” 279.
\item[32] Ibid., 265.
\item[33] Ibid., 266.
\item[34] Ibid. \textit{Dianoia}, translated from Greek, means “thinking.”
\end{enumerate}
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sake of the image of it which they draw” (*Republic, VI, 510d*). Thus, both Platonic myth and the geometrical sciences make use of physical imagery to symbolize and draw attention to purely conceptual objects.\(^{35}\)

### iv. Conclusion / Transition to Logos

Socrates himself comments in the *Republic* that in dialectics, one must make “no use whatever of any object of sense but only of pure ideas moving on through ideas and ending with ideas” (*VI, 511c*). However, as Stewart notes, this is complicated by the fact that “it is extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible, to express oneself in non-physical terms.” Furthermore, it is “difficult or impossible to be understood when one does attempt to communicate in these terms.”\(^{36}\) Socrates describes this difficulty to Glaucon in the *Republic*:

> “You will not be able, dear Glaucon, to follow me any further, though on my part there will be no lack of good will. And if I could, I would show you, no longer an image and symbol of my meaning, but the very truth, as it appears to me” (*533a*).

Thus, short of successfully describing the “very truth” itself, *mythos*, by using images and symbols, communicates to others the truths reached by dialectic. One example of this is the myth of Er in the *Republic*; Stewart highlights how this eschatological myth communicates “the value of the just over the unjust life”\(^{37}\) in its persuasive appeal for one to choose justice. In this example, the myth communicates the conclusion reached via the dialectics employed throughout

\(^{35}\) Ibid.

\(^{36}\) Ibid., 273.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., 265.
the entirety of the dialogue and satisfies Glaucon’s desire for an emotionally appealing motivation to pursue the just life.

Myth goes beyond serving as mere philosophic ‘spokesperson,’ however; as Catherine Collobert describes in “The Platonic Art of Myth-Making: Myth as Informative *Phantasma,*” myth takes an active role in the transference of the *skhêma* (i.e. sketch or outline) of truth. Specifically, Collobert describes myth as a verbal, philosophic image responsible for the “visible and perceptible expression” of truth.38 It is also important to note that the truths which myths express are also not limited to dialectical conclusions; as Stewart argues, myth is also responsible for the communication of first principles (i.e. the starting-points or axioms) of philosophic argument. For example, the form of the Good can be considered a first principle of Plato’s theory of forms, as it is necessary for the understanding of all other forms. The only instances where Plato offers any insight to this first principle of the Good itself are in Books VI and VII of the *Republic,* in those three *eikôn* mentioned above. As each *eikôn* proves insufficient, Socrates progresses from an analogy which compares the Good to the Sun, to an image outlining the entire epistemic process, and finally, to a complete myth in order to express the truth.39 This heavy reliance upon *mythos* to communicate a first principle indicates its role in expressing more completely that which is indemonstrable, or that which *logos* assumes to begin demonstration. That is not to say that *mythos* is the sole source of this communication, nor that it exercises complete authority over *logos,* rather, *mythos* simply accomplishes something which *logos* or


dialectics struggles to do because of its restriction to what is purely conceptual. Similarly, *logos* accomplishes that which *mythos* cannot, and, in fact, is more authoritative than *mythos*. Stewart eloquently describes this relationship:

Myth remains in a subservient position to dialectics because insofar as it is good, it remains under the Platonic dictum for writing that one ‘must first know the subject you write . . . about’ (*Seventh Letter*, 341c) and it is only through the use of dialectics that one can learn of those philosophical truths which are then communicated through myth.40

Thus, *mythos* works in conjunction with *logos* to increase one’s knowledge and understanding; this will be discussed in more detail in the third section. We conclude this section on *mythos* in Plato’s dialogues by proposing that through both its emotional and imaginative appeals, *mythos* occupies an active and important role in Plato’s philosophy. Generally speaking, this role is to motivate the reader or listener to think more deeply and to pursue a morally good life founded on intelligence. Specifically, myths serve as ‘cognitive bridges,’ so to speak, from the physical to the purely intelligible, and function in the communication of truths – whether first principles or final conclusions. As Stewart concludes, myths “prove necessary both for that [epistemic] process to begin and for it to end.”41 Here, it now seems appropriate to give a similar account of *logos* in Plato’s work.

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40 Ibid., 277.

41 Ibid., 279.
RELFECTIONS ON LOGOS AND ITS PLATONIC FORM

I. INTRODUCTION

The precise nature of *logos* is similarly difficult to describe since understanding a given use of *logos* depends heavily upon the variable context in which it is found. In early Pre-Socratic thought, Heraclitus used the term, *logos*, for the unity that is both unchangeable and everlasting in reference to all that exists.\(^{42}\) Parmenides showed that *logos* was more closely aligned with reason, defining it as “speech, account, or argument.”\(^{43}\) However, in the dialogues, Plato uses words other than *logos* to indicate the type of cognition distinctive to humans: *noesis*, *dianoia*, and *logismos*. Given the alternate ways that Plato refers to rational cognition, *logos* assumes a different characteristic in the Platonic dialogues; *logos* is used not to depict reason but rather as the “deliverance of reason,” as Jessica Moss describes, in the sense that it provides the structure through which reason is produced.\(^{44}\) Despite the differences in the various uses of the term, there is a clear indication that *logos* has a part in reason and argument; it is through *logos* that knowledge is obtained. In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates indicates this explicit function: “So when a man gets hold of the true notion of something without an account [i.e. *logos*], his mind does think truly of it, but he does not know it, for if one cannot give and receive an account of a thing, one has no knowledge of that thing (202b-202c).


\(^{44}\) Ibid.
Logos, therefore, is the medium through which knowledge is obtained. Throughout the dialogues, Plato indicates that to know something is to be able to provide an account of it; by aligning these definitions, we can infer that logos means some sort of rational account of any particular thing. In addition to logos, Plato classifies each attempt to determine truth through reasoned inquiry as a form of “the dialectic.” The main application of the dialectic is to convey truth with respect to a specific subject of discussion. The term itself, however, is applied to a variety of different methods within the dialogues. These methods include the elenchus, the method of hypothesis, the method of collection and division, and the dialectic method (understood as distinct from the general characterization of all the methods as “dialectical”). Some scholars note that the application of “the dialectic” to each method is an indication that Plato’s mode for reason grew over time; others indicate that the methods themselves are different and therefore convey truth in an analogous if not equal way. In order to better understand Plato’s use of logos, each form of the dialectic will be analyzed. This analysis will include a characterization of each method used in the dialogues and treatments of the topic in relevant secondary sources. It will consider various applications of the different methods with a view toward assessing their wider importance. Understanding logos in the Platonic dialogues is essential to understanding Plato as a philosopher and the importance of reason for a well-ordered life.


46 Ibid.
II. THE VARIOUS METHODS OF LOGOS

i. The Elenchus

Elenchus, the most primitive mode for determining truth, is presented in the early dialogues and can be considered the first form of Plato’s dialectic. Noted for producing a condition of puzzlement, “the Socratic elenchus was...a prolonged cross-examination which refutes the opponent’s original thesis by getting him to draw from it, by means of a series of questions and answers, a consequence that contradicts it.”\(^{47}\) This question and answer dynamic was the first method provided in the Platonic dialogues aimed at determining what the essence of any specific thing is; a question would be posed [usually by Socrates himself], regarding the topic of moral truths, and a dialogue would ensue between Socrates and whoever he was questioning.\(^{48}\) In the Meno, for instance, Socrates posits a question regarding the exact nature of general virtue and Meno attempts to answer. A short excerpt proceeds as follows:

> SOCRATES: Well then, didn’t you say that a man’s virtue lay in directing the city well, and a woman’s in directing her household well?
> MENO: Yes.
> SOCRATES: And is it possible to direct anything well, city or household or anything else, if not temperately and justly?
> MENO: Certainly not.
> SOCRATES: And that means with temperance and justice?
> MENO: Of course.
> SOCRATES: Then both man and woman need the same qualities, justice and temperance, if they are going to be good.
> MENO: It looks like it. (73b)


\(^{48}\) Ibid.
Despite his repeated attempts, Meno’s assertions are unable to withstand Socrates’ questioning. At the conclusion of the dialogue, the elenctic argument has rendered no satisfactory answer to the initial question of "What is virtue?" In this sense, elenchus is unique among the various forms of reasoning in Plato. Unlike the other forms of the dialectic, elenchus very rarely produces any truth outside of the understanding that the initial assertion [or the assertions made afterwards] are inconsistent with the beliefs of the person being questioned.49 The Meno exists as a dialogue on virtue, but the main information provided at the conclusion of the elenctic argument is that Meno’s assumptions are not correct.

Many scholars, noting that elenctic argument very rarely produces truth outside of demonstrating a person’s incorrect beliefs, argue that elenchus occupies a solely negative function within the dialogues, demonstrating to people their ignorance without providing truth on the subject of which the person was originally ignorant.50 Robinson argues, elenchus served as a “propaedeutic: a preparation of knowledge though not in itself productive of knowledge or virtue.”51 However, this very characteristic of elenchus is what generates the importance the method has within the dialogues. In the Sophist, Plato asserts that one “cannot profit from the knowledge offered…until the elenchus is applied and the man is refuted and brought to shame, thus purifying him from opinions that hinder learning and causing him to think he knows only


50 Ibid.

what he does know and no more.” 52 Ignorance presupposes an understanding of a topic for which a person either has no understanding or an incorrect understanding. Consequently, people possessing knowledge are unable to search for truth, because no rational person would search for something they are already think they have in their possession. Therefore, the ignorant person is reliant upon elenchus to get rid of ignorance and initiate the philosophical process: “At least it seems that we have made him more likely to find the truth. For now he will be glad to search for it because he knows he does not know it” (84b).

In addition, scholars note that the person participating in elenchus (e.g. Socrates) does not convict one of ignorance, it is the elenctic argument that does this.53 The function of elenchus, therefore, is decidedly positive; although it doesn’t provide truth, it initiates a curiosity and desire to know. As Robinson argued, “philosophy begins in wonder, and the assertion here made is that the elenchus supplies that wonder.”54

ii. The Method of Hypothesis

Elenchus, although used generously in the early dialogues, is never specifically defined. As noted by King, “in Plato’s early dialogues, Socrates’ inquiries demonstrate a pattern of investigation whose rationale he does not investigate.”55 However, as the dialectic becomes more refined, a different version of logos is presented for which a definition is provided. The method of hypothesis is specifically defined in the Phaedo: “I first lay down the theory which I


54 Richard Robinson, Plato’s Earlier Dialectic,” 23.

judge to be soundest, and that whatever seems to agree with it—with regard to either causes or anything else—I assume to be true, and whatever does not I assume not to be true” (100a-101d).

As noted in the description above, the hypothetical method begins with an asserted claim; this asserted claim must be the strongest claim that can be made about the subject of discussion. Information that supports and aligns with the claim is then considered true while all else considered false. Then, the conclusions drawn from accepting all that aligns with the claim are analyzed for consistency:

If anyone should fasten upon the hypothesis itself, you would disregard him and refuse to answer until you could consider whether its consequences were mutually consistent or not. And when you had to substantiate the hypothesis itself, you would proceed in the same way, assuming whatever more ultimate hypothesis commended itself most to you, until you reached one which was satisfactory. (100a–101d).

When the conclusions drawn from the hypotheses were inconsistent with either experience or reason, this inconsistency was alleviated by the development of a “higher hypothesis.” The term “higher hypotheses” is meant to indicate that, as inconsistencies are dealt with, the new hypothesis that is asserted encompasses all that it had before as well as resolving the apparent contradiction with the previous hypothesis. Therefore, it is “higher” in the sense that it pervades over a greater area, involving both the previous hypothesis as well as those conclusions not initially consistent with it. An example of the method of hypothesis proceeds as follows:

SOCRATES: [in reference to virtue] “Will it be teachable? Isn’t it plain to everyone that a man is not taught anything except knowledge?
MENO: That would be my view.


57 Robinson, Plato’s Earlier Dialectic,” 56.
SOCRATES: If on the other hand virtue is some sort of knowledge, clearly it could be taught.
MENO: Certainly.
SOCRATES: So that question is easily settled—I mean, on what condition virtue would be teachable.
MENO: Yes
SOCRATES: The next point then, I suppose, is to find out whether virtue is knowledge or something different. (87c–d)

In the above example, some information about virtue is provided at the conclusion of the dialogue. The hypothesis that is asserted in this section of the *Meno* is that, if virtue is knowledge then it can be taught. After a prolonged discussion, it is concluded by the interlocutors that virtue is unable to be formally taught, therefore *apparently* rendering it something other than knowledge. With respect to formal logic, the method of hypothesis in this example has been characterized by some scholars as a type of *modus tollens*; by proving that the consequent does not hold (in this case, that virtue can be taught), the negation of the antecedent can be inferred (which in this case is that virtue is not knowledge). This version of the dialectic is more sophisticated than the elenchus since it goes beyond merely demonstrating the invalidity of specific beliefs and tries to develop by argument something that is true. Although it is not necessarily true that each example of the method of hypothesis exists as a type of *modus tollens*, the example is meant to highlight something that is necessarily true about the method of hypothesis; namely, that it indirectly points to some truth about the subject being discussed. Whereas the elenchus was simply a preparation of knowledge by alleviating ignorance, the method of hypothesis points towards truth in a more formal way while not entirely grasping the essence of the subject in question. Thus, in this instance of *logos*, there is both upward and downward progression of thought; one moves “upward” to form new, more ultimate hypotheses while also moving “downwards” since the old hypothesis can be deduced from the more
In this sense, the method of hypothesis provides principles that can be both deduced from and inferred to.

In the dialogues, the method of hypothesis is both described and illustrated, however, there are serious questions concerning the ultimate aim of the method of hypothesis; these largely arise from the ambiguous context that surrounds description of the method. As mentioned in the Phaedo, Socrates argues that “higher hypotheses” should be found until an adequate stopping point is reached, with the ambiguous term “adequate” lending itself to multiple interpretations. Some have insisted that “adequate” is meant to only indicate a hypothesis that satisfies a critic of some sort, i.e. provides a sufficient answer to a question that was posed. This interpretation aims to reduce the hypothetical method to something less significant than philosophical discourse and more aligned with debate; the hypothesis, without arriving at the truth, would be adequate if it satisfied the critic. This attempt at reduction is incorrect, however, both with respect to the stopping point as well as the theoretical placement of the method of hypothesis as a tool solely in argument. As noted by Byrd, Plato argues that “one must account for a hypothesis whether or not that hypothesis has an objector.” From this account, the method of hypothesis is a means of determining truth rather than answering a critic. This interpretation of “adequate” is not adequate; there is still a need for a more accurate account.

The context of the description of the method of hypothesis does provide some insight (albeit sometimes ambiguously) into Plato’s meaning of an “adequate stopping point.” Some

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59 Richard Robinson, Plato’s Earlier Dialectic,” 47.

scholars have indicated that the “adequate stopping” referred to in the dialogues could very well coincide with the form of the dialectic mentioned in the Republic, where it was shown that “higher” hypotheses would be grasped until the highest hypotheses [the forms; and with these forms, true knowledge] were obtained. This will be discussed further in the concluding section where dialectic, in the general sense, is treated. In the Meno, the interlocutors arrive at the conclusion that virtue is not knowledge, but this introduces a new hypothesis to be considered, which has yet to be considered. Thus, a positive step has been taken, with more steps to be taken in the future.

iii. The Method of Collection and Division

The method of hypothesis requires upward movement to higher hypothesis and downward movement to implications of the hypothesis. In another form of the dialectic, Plato does not discuss this upward and downward movement of hypotheses. Instead, the form of logos presented primarily in the Sophist and the Phaedrus is meant to systematize concepts in order to determine the essence of a specific “Kind.”61 The method of collection and division is the most sophisticated example of philosophical practice since it has the capability of directly arriving at a definition. Plato argues that this method allows people to become better dialecticians, “discovering how to display in an account the things that are.”62


62 J. D. G. Evans, A Plato Primer (Stocksfield: Acumen Publishing, 2010), 19. It should be noted that this is the first instance where Plato indicates that a method determines what the essential characteristic of something is.
Inherent in the method of collection and division is the dialectical process necessary for dividing all the members of a specific “Kind” from other “Kinds”. Unlike the hypothetical method, the method of collection and division seeks to separate the contents of the discussion based on these contradictions with no ability to move “upward” in creating a more encompassing assertion; movement seeks to locate a genus (Kind) and then identify the various species. In the *Phaedrus*, the general schema of the method is displayed: “The first is that in which we bring a dispersed plurality under a single form, seeing it all together – the purpose being to define so-and-so, and thus to make plain whatever may be chosen as the topic for exposition… [Division is] the reverse of [this], whereby we are enabled to divide into forms.”

Specifically, collection and division is a four step process meant to determine the essential characteristics of a specific Kind. First, an initial assertion is made as to the necessary characteristics of the specific Kind. The veracity of the initial assertion depends on whether there are instances of that Kind which do not contain the specified characteristics. If the necessary characteristics are in fact determined to be necessary, all members of that Kind containing the characteristic are “collected.” Then, a conjecture is made as to “what features should be added to mark off things of that Kind from all other things.” In this sense, “add” is

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63 Here, “Kind” is meant to indicate something having a specific set of characteristics.

64 Evans, *A Plato Primer*, 34.

65 Plato, *Sophist*.

66 Here, necessary is meant to indicate a set of characteristics that are needed in order for something to exist as it does. For example, oxygen is necessary to water, for without oxygen water does not exist.

meant to indicate specific features that distinguishes the specific Kind in question from the particulars that fall under the general definition inherent in the first step of the process. This conjecture is then tested by determining if there are things outside of the specific Kind in question that contain these characteristics. If not, a division occurs. This divisional process is repeated, with characteristics added at each step, until only the essence of the initial Kind in question remains. An example of the method, taken from *the Sophist*, follows:

STRANGER: [with regard to finding the definition of an angler] Let us begin by asking whether he is a man having art or not having art, but some other power. THEAETETUS: He is clearly a man of art. STRANGER: [after further discussion regarding the Angler] Seeing, then, that all arts are either acquisitive or creative, in which class shall we place the art of the angler? THEAETETUS: Clearly in the acquisitive class. STRANGER: And the acquisitive may be subdivided into two parts. There is exchange, which is voluntary and is affected by gifts, hire, purchase, and the other part of acquisitive, which takes by force of word or deed, may be termed conquest? (219c–d).

The method of collection and division enables one to come closer to truth than either the method of elenchus or hypothesis since the essential nature of a specific Kind can be determined directly, i.e. the exact nature of the Sophist or that of the angler can be precisely specified.

The ability of the method of collection and division to provide for truth, however, is possible only if one has the ability to accurately collect and divide with regard to the Kind in question. Socrates argued in the *Phaedrus* that one must make the “proper divisions’ and not merely “hack off parts like a clumsy butcher” (266b). The method of collection and division requires that correct divisions be made; given the infinite amount of divisions that are possible

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68 Ibid. To further clarify this use of “add”, consider an example: If I group together cars, all of that specific Kind will be collected. Then, by adding the characteristic of engine type, all cars will be further divided based on the aforementioned characteristic.
with respect to any one thing, only the divisions necessary to arrive at that thing’s essence [or
definition] should be utilized. "The criticism that the method is not universally applicable is
invalid; the method is the same, but the subject of collection and division is always changing."
Plato does indicate that the dialectician must divide according to the “natural joints of the
world.”69 In this sense, although an infinite number of divisions are possible, the divisions must
be made in accordance with nature. Therefore, in order to effectively use this method, one must
already have an understanding of the essence of the subject in order to make the correct division.
This is said to present a problem, the so-called "Socratic Paradox," that claims one cannot
presuppose specific characteristics of the very thing that is being defined.70 As a counter to this
claim, it has been suggested that the "Socratic Paradox" is not really a defect since it is possible
that Plato felt that the questions and topics that were dealt with using this method were
understood in a general way.71 Thus, Plato indicates that the method of collection and division
forces one to become more dialectical, as noted by the Stranger in the Sophist.72 The type of
understanding required to perform the method of collection and division provides a deeper
understanding of the natural divisions of both sensible and intelligible objects. Unlike the
method of hypothesis and the elenchus, the method of collection and division can be utilized for
discovering truths in areas other than ethics. Neither the elenchus nor the method of hypothesis
could be used to define the nature of the angler, only the method of collection and division has
this capability.

69 Ibid., 275.
70 Ibid., 271.
71 Evans, A Plato Primer, 37.
The method of collection and division, therefore, is more philosophical in nature than the method of hypothesis; the method of hypothesis relies on asserting a thesis and then analyzing beliefs and information regarding that thesis, whereas the method of collection and division requires a deeper understanding of both the sensual and conceptual world in order to identify the essence of any given thing. Plato indicates in the *Sophist* that the nature of the philosopher is to be practiced in the dialectic, with the dialectic existing as the ability to differentiate all that is the same with respect to a certain Kind. 73 However, despite the ability to determine the essence of something directly, the method of collection and division is still unable to provide for the first principles. Although it is able to provide for the essential nature of any one kind of thing, it does so largely in reference to concepts outside of the beginning ideas; there is no mention of the method of collection and division ever demonstrating the fundamental principles underlying philosophical inquiry. 74

iv. *Concluding Remarks on the Dialectic*

The elenchus, the method of hypothesis, and the method of collection and division are all forms of *logos* within the dialogues, such that Plato refers to each as a practice of “the dialectic.” 75 ‘Dialectic’ functions here as a categorical term to describe the various methods of reasoning described by Plato. However, the treatment of the term in the *Republic* indicates that

73 Ibid, 273.

74 Ibid, 278.

75 Robinson, *Plato’s Earlier Dialectic*, 68.
“the dialectic” is not only a categorical term, but is itself a distinctive method of reasoning; here, the term ‘dialectic’ is used without reference to any other methods of reasoning.\textsuperscript{76}

Since Plato used the term ‘dialectic’ to apply to a variety of methods of argument and reason, the discussion of dialectic in the literature contains some ambiguities. However, there is reasonable evidence presented in the Republic that the above mode of defining the dialectic, where the dialectic is purely used as a categorical term, is inaccurate and that “the dialectic” is in fact a separate and distinct form of Platonic logos. The first description of the dialectic is substantially different from the method of collection and division, “In like manner, when anyone by dialectic attempts through discourse of reason and apart from all perceptions of sense to find his way to the very essence of each thing and does not desist till he apprehends by thought itself the nature of the good in itself, he arrives at the limit of the intelligible” (VI, 532a). Unlike the method of collection and division, the dialectic deals only with the intelligible, for it is by thought alone that the dialectic is practiced. Therefore, there is no foreseeable situation where the dialectic could provide an account of the angler; the dialectic, Robinson argues, is “the highest method, dealing only with understanding of conceptual forms.”\textsuperscript{77} Moreover, the dialectic is the only method able to grasp the “nature of the good in itself.” The nature of the good provides the dialectic with its ability to grasp the essence of each thing; Plato argues that the “greatest thing to learn is the idea of the Good by reference to which just things and all the rest become useful and beneficial” (VI, 505a). It is by an understanding of the Good, Plato asserts,

\textsuperscript{76} As mentioned previously, Plato uses the term “the dialectic” to refer to the various methods. In the Republic, he uses “the dialectic” as the name of the method itself, distinguishing it from the general sense of the word in the earlier dialogues.

\textsuperscript{77} Evans, \textit{A Plato Primer}, 73.
the function of all things becomes apparent. Further explanation is provided through the comparison between the visible and intelligible realms as they apply to the Myth of the Cave. In the Myth of the Cave, Plato indicates the sun, although not vision itself, is the cause of vision through its nature of providing light (VI, 508c). Likewise, the idea of the Good is to the intelligible region as the sun is to the visible region; the idea of the Good, while it is not itself understanding or knowledge, provides the basis for understanding and knowledge by demonstrating a specific thing’s function. Therefore, the understanding of the idea of the Good is a substantial distinction inherent in the dialectic as it is presented in the Republic against all other presentations of logos in the dialogues. Dialectic allows one to arrive at the limit of the intelligible and obtain knowledge of the forms themselves; the forms are intelligible, and it would not be possible to arrive at the limit of the intelligible if the forms themselves were not understood. It is through the forms that one is able to grasp the most purified and essential form of knowledge, as noted by the highest distinction on the Divided Line (see Fig. 1), and since the dialectic provides an understanding of the forms, the dialectic is the most important version of logos within the dialogues: “Only the dialectical way of inquiry proceeds in this direction, destroying the hypotheses, to the beginning itself in order to make it secure” (VI, 532d).

Plato seeks to demonstrate the dialectic as an upward path of reasoning that concludes with understanding of the forms themselves. Unlike the method of hypothesis, the dialectic does not proceed downwards; it proceeds upwards in the direction of first principles. Socrates argues that, in the dialectic, reason uses hypotheses as “stepping stones to take off from, enabling

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78 Ibid. In order to determine if something is useful, as Plato indicates the Good provides the ability to do, one must know the object’s function.

79 Evans, A Plato Primer, 63.
it to reach the hypothetical first principle.”\textsuperscript{80} The method of hypothesis, by virtue of continually approaching “higher hypotheses”, could theoretically find its stopping point at the first principles; however, this is not a requirement, i.e. the method of hypothesis could conclude prior to reaching first principles. However, the dialectic, if properly practiced, is unable to conclude prior to demonstrating first principles. In the \textit{Sophist}, the stranger indicates that the dialectician is the one who can distinguish according to kinds, i.e. distinguish objects based on their essence or essential character. This once again indicates the tie between the dialectic and the forms themselves, demonstrating the implied importance of the dialectic as presented in the \textit{Republic}.

\textit{v. Conclusion / Transition to Final Argument}

Presented in the above analysis are the various methods of \textit{logos} in the Platonic dialogues: the elenchus, the method of hypothesis, the method of collection and division, and the dialectic as presented in the \textit{Republic}. Each method demonstrates a way of advancing towards truth. The elenchus provides little truth outside of demonstrating ignorance on the part of an interlocutor. However, this ignorance provides the initial spur towards understanding. The method of hypothesis, although providing truth only indirectly, is able to test hypotheses in order to reach wider and more adequate positions. The method of collection and division goes beyond the method of hypothesis in that it is able to provide definitions by genus and species. Lastly, the dialectic is able to provide one with an understanding of the first principles; it leads its participants to the very beginning of philosophical practice. However, it cannot demonstrate

\textsuperscript{80} Robinson, \textit{Plato’s Earlier Dialectic}, 103.
these first principles. Furthermore, expressing these principles also remains beyond the capacity of logos; in the Platonic dialogues, this task is accomplished through mythos.

RECONCILING MYTHOS AND LOGOS

I. FINAL ARGUMENT

Mythos and logos are both instrumentally important within the dialogues; there are few dialogues, if any, that do not contain both. Given the myriad uses of each throughout the dialogues, it is reasonable to assume that there exists a relationship between mythos and logos that warrants their consistent use. This relationship, although never explicitly stated by Plato, is evident in the account that is given of the relation of two terms that are, in many ways, analogous to mythos and logos – namely, ‘true opinion’ and ‘knowledge’. In the Meno, Socrates distinguishes and compares the two directly; although the basis for each differs, both are capable of conveying truth, or of guiding one towards the correct path of life. In brief, “true opinion is as good a guide as knowledge for the purpose of acting rightly” (97a–d).

True opinion, sometimes referred to as intuition, consists of a general sense of the truth of something without having an ability to rationally account for why it is true. For example, a guide knows the correct way to reach a destination but is unable to articulate how he knows the correct way other than the fact that he simply does. As previously mentioned, mythos can be considered a fictional account of the genesis of something, and specifically, the genesis of philosophical thought.81 These “first principles” provide the basis for every field of study; it is these first principles that provide myth its ability to convey truth, for the first principles are undoubtedly truthful in themselves, yet incapable of demonstration. The truth that the myth

conveys, therefore, is not dependent on the factual nature of the myth itself, for myths are not meant to be taken literally. Therefore, there must exist some other means to validate the assertion than an analysis of the premises that provided it; however, this seems to be a very difficult view to defend rationally, for what is there by which to judge a conclusion if not by the preceding material that was offered in support it? This reasonable concern may be overcome through further contemplation of the dialogues. For example, if mythos is taken to be analogous to true opinion, some insight as to establishing the validity of claims made in a myth may be gained from this statement in the Meno: “True opinions are a fine thing and do all sorts of good so long as they stay in their place, but they will not stay long. They run away from a man’s mind; so they are not worth much until you tether them by working out the reason…. Once they are tied down, they become knowledge [emphasis added]” (97b–c).

The tethering reason that Socrates refers to is undoubtedly logos. It is through the use of reason or logos, applied to experience and thought, that one can establish the validity of a myth’s assertions. Logos is unable to provide for these first principles; it is from these first principles that logos proceeds to conclusions. Thus, the validity of a myth’s assertions can be ascertained by their logical conclusions, in accordance with common experience. For example, the Principle of Non-Contradiction is unable to be proved deductively; however, it is the basis—the first principle—for a plethora of existing proofs, as it accords with common experience that a statement cannot be simultaneously the same as and different from itself. Therefore, logos provides the means to validate the assertions of Platonic myths by analyzing all that follows from them (i.e. their logical conclusions). Mythos accomplishes the production and communication of first principles within the Platonic dialogues because of the relative inability of logos to do so. The most reasonable way to understand this relationship is to recognize that, in order for
demonstration not to continue ad infinitum, there must be a starting point that has no need to be proven; *mythos* provides these starting points.

The relationship between *logos* and *mythos* can be further explained by characterizing Platonic myth as a form of art in the Aristotelian sense. As described previously, Aristotle argues that art “is a productive state that is truly reasoned.” In order to judge whether reason was involved in producing any specific thing, that which is produced is evaluated. Thus, the quality of the product signifies its relative status as art or non-art (*atechnia*).\(^{82}\) This, as we argued, was the basis of Plato’s criticism of mimetic Homeric poetry. As for Plato’s art, *mythos* is concerned with bringing into existence a philosophical beginning—a first principle—in a manner that is fictional, emotional, and largely imaginative.\(^{83}\) Therefore, in order to determine if this specific art form was produced from a reasoned state, the conclusion that is reached from a myth must be analyzed. This analysis must occur via the use of *logos*; *logos* provides the tools to determine if myth arose from a well-reasoned state, and therefore assists in determining if a given myth conveys truth. In this sense, myth relies on *logos* to bolster the truth of its conviction, and *logos* protects against bad or falsely reasoned myths as well as their erroneous conclusions and potential for unscrupulous persuasion.

An illustration of this relationship is found in the *Republic* when *mythos* is combined with *logos* via the Myth of the Cave and the image of the Divided Line. In the Myth of the Cave, Plato provides a fictitious account: a man is removed from the depths of a cave and forced to transition from only comprehending the “shadows” of real objects to understanding the greatest good. This allegory serves a variety of functions: while illustrating the state in which the

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\(^{83}\) Stewart, “The Epistemological Function,” 262.
common man exists, Plato provides a mythical account of how learning takes place in general. Although this account of how one learns will not be discussed in detail, the same process is explicitly outlined in the image of the Divided Line, but with an added feature. In this image, the learning process is depicted geometrically by ratios, with proportionality present between the various states of mind as well as their objects. In addition, there are suggestions as to how one might move to the top of the line, increasing one’s intellectual ability until eventually understanding the forms. With respect to *logos* and *mythos*, the Cave story is solely mythical: it presents a fictitious account to illustrate a specific but indemonstrable process. The conclusions are then depicted mathematically (rationally) in the Divided Line, including both proportionalities and means of moving from one state to the next; this falls within the field of *logos*, for it determines whether the process is consistent with its respective parts and common experience. In other words, this is essentially a form of analysis to determine whether the various means of learning depicted in the myth are consistent with common experience. It is worth noting, however, that the use of the Divided Line as an image or eikòn also establishes its role as being, at least partially, in the realm of *mythos*. In this way, *logos* is immutably combined with *mythos* in the logical and mythical portrayal of the learning process. Ultimately, this reveals Plato’s fundamental understanding that *logos* and *mythos* are both interdependent and functionally necessary in philosophy.

*Mythos* and *logos*, as has been previously shown, are related in the sense that both can convey truth; however, they differ with respect to the types of truth that are conveyed as well as the medium through which truth is produced. It is these differences that indicate an interdependency between *mythos* and *logos* in Plato’s philosophy. To further understand this relationship, we can look to another of Plato’s fundamental assertions: the tripartite division of
the soul and state. In what constitutes a large part of Book VI of the *Republic*, Plato discusses this topic, proceeding to the logical conclusion that there exists within both the soul and the state a ruling function, a protective function, and a productive function. The reasoned support for this is that, at any given time, man has the capacity to be pulled in different directions, i.e. he may exhibit desire for something that his reason is indicating he should not have. As a basic example, consider a scenario in which a man, while knowing that he needs to lose weight, is presented with a large piece of delicious cake; his desire pushes him towards devouring the dessert, but his reason, based in an understanding that cake greatly impedes his ability to lose weight, pushes him away from the object that lies before him. Therefore, based on the Principle of Non-Contradiction, the soul must be made of different parts, for the same part cannot at the same time be responsible for contrary emotions or actions. Of the three functions Plato identifies, the ruling function is due to the rational part of the soul which is responsible for one’s intellect and reason. In contrast, the protective function is a result of one’s *thumos* or spirited element which induces emotions, while the productive function is of the appetitive part which is responsible for one’s desire. These characteristics of the soul are further illustrated by the myth of the winged charioteer in the *Phaedrus*; the ruling part of the soul is likened to the charioteer, while the protective and productive parts are likened to the charioteer’s two horses—thumos and appetite. As Plato shows, a harmony results when each part accomplishes its own function well, such that the *thumos* and appetite are receptive to reason and submissive to the rational part, and the appetite is also receptive to emotion and submissive to the *thumos*.

Interestingly, it turns out that Plato’s composition of the dialogues and his use of *logos* and *mythos* precisely fit the Charioteer myth. Using the myth as a model, we can compare the function of *logos* to that of the soul’s protective function; it protects against improper use of
**mythos** by ensuring that it is a truly reasoned form of art. Moreover, it ensures that a myth’s persuasive function and reasoned conclusions accord with common experience and scrupulous principles. *Mythos*, on the other hand, is comparable to the soul’s productive function; it artistically produces those views or premises from which *logos* ascertains and evaluates its conclusions. It is this production of premises or starting points that provides *logos* with direction for its demonstrations while the persuasive or motivational function of *mythos* produces practical applications of those logical conclusions. Thus, the ruling function is Plato’s intelligence which properly employs and directs both *mythos* and *logos* to produce the highly polished dialogues. In other words, Plato is the charioteer, responsible for properly directing each of the steeds – *mythos* and *logos*. *Logos*, then, is symbolized by the “noble and good steed,” receptive to and reliant upon reason, while the steed of *mythos* is the very opposite, having the potential to make philosophy “difficult and troublesome” (*Phaedrus*, 246b). If we are ever to perceive the beauty of Plato’s genius and follow in his guidance, we must not discredit either *logos* or *mythos* individually, but strive to understand their relationship and respective functions in the dialogues, just as we strive to understand and discipline the parts of our souls. Otherwise, we will simply “trample and tread upon one another,” (*Phaedrus*, 248b) becoming lame and broken in our mere semblances of understanding and virtuous pursuits.


