

# Imitating the Myth in the *Gorgias*

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## Abstract

The advent of logical positivism contributed to the sharp definitional demarcation between what we consider mythical (*mythos*) and what we take to be a true account (*logos*). This essay attempts to go back to one of the sources of such a supposed distinction. By analyzing the *Gorgias*, I will show that even Plato did not make such a distinction. In fact, Plato even constructed a theory of justice that made use of myth as its medium. The Platonic Myth in the *Gorgias* was used as true *logos* in order to justify Socrates' use of the myth as the paradigm of a life that is philosophical in contrast to that of his accusers who espoused mere sophistry. By using the concept of *historia* in relation with the concept of *mythos*, Plato regarded the futuristic afterlife in the myth as a sufficient condition to live a just life. This sufficient condition exemplified by the Myth in the *Gorgias* is a measuring rod by which we can compare our present system of justice.

*Keywords:* Greek philosophy, justice, myth

There is a very thin line that exists between *mythos* and *logos*. Under the influence of Western Philosophy, particularly from its positivistic mindset which sees the task of philosophy as that of getting rid of the vagueness and the ambiguities of language, the definitional boundary between *mythos* (myth) and *logos* (a rational account or explanation) was made clear. By analyzing the *Gorgias*, I will show that even Plato did not make such a distinction. In fact, Plato even constructed a theory of justice that made use of myth as its medium. Reflecting on the injustice suffered by Socrates under the Greek system of justice, where he was falsely indicted for corrupting the youth, for impiety, and for his refusal to go into exile and escape death by the hemlock, Plato made use of the myth in the *Gorgias* as justification for Socrates' choice "to suffer injustice." Thus, the myth was made to convey a philosophical framework where justice is seen in the light of history, hence, becoming a true *logos* in order to justify Socrates' choice of the myth as the paradigm of a life that is philosophical in contrast to that of his accusers who espoused mere sophistry.

By using the concept of *historia* in relation with the concept of *mythos*, Plato regarded the futuristic afterlife in the myth as a sufficient condition to live a just life. In so doing, Plato was able to present a theory of justice that is mirrored in our present judicial system, with such themes as reformation and retribution, emphasis on evidence, the primacy of impartiality, and the possibility of appeal in cases of indeterminacy and a procedure of review in cases of misjudgment.

The problem, unfortunately, is that our present scholarship is affected by the Enlightenment Age of the 17th and 18th centuries, which saw the dismissal of myths as mere superstition. In an attempt to ridicule religion, the Enlightenment relegated the myths to absurdity, and the analysis of myths was considered unscholarly but also unfashionable. A sharp distinction was, therefore, drawn between what we call *logos*, or a rational account, and *mythos*, lately defined as a mere superstitious tale. Reinforced further by later scientific developments of the 19th and 20th centuries, the bias against myths continued, further labeling them *primitive* and *pre-scientific*, science being considered the culmination of a civilization's quest for knowledge. Because of this, even experts on Plato treated Platonic myths as mere embellishment and decoration that led them to neglect the analysis of myths in favor of the argumentative components in Plato's dialogues. This is where philosophy comes in by posing the questions: Is such really the case? Can what we considered before as truths now be set aside as falsehood? Can we say that how we understood the world in the past is inferior to our present understanding of it?

Plato, because of his attack on poetry in the *Republic*, was viewed as having demarcated *mythos* from *logos*. And yet, what makes the study of the *Gorgias* fascinating is how this seeming sharp distinction between myth and rational account is proven to be a misconception. If there is a sharp distinction, it is not Plato's. Plato, by employing the "Myth of the Final Judgment," was able to show the inadequacy of the Greek justice system to arrive at the truth of a person's guilt or innocence, as exemplified by the trial and death of Socrates who was found guilty because of the use of rhetoric or the art of persuasion. In the *Gorgias*, Plato (1984b) regarded the myth as *logos*:

Hear then, as they say, a very beautiful story, which you will consider a myth (*mythos*), I suppose, but a true account (*logos*).  
For I relate this to you as the truth. (sec. 523a)

This was the introduction with which Socrates, according to Plato, began the "Vision of the Final Judgment" in the *Gorgias*. Though it is accepted that Plato employed myths to go along with his dialectics, there is divergence

in interpretation and analysis of how these myths functioned. Did Socrates really believe in these myths? Or was the analytic distinction between matters of belief and matters of fact, or on believing and knowing a concept too early for either Plato or Socrates? Why did Plato incorporate the myths in his dialogues—myths that were possibly created by him, and manifesting Orphic and Pythagorean influence? Can the question-and-answer account stand on its own even without the myths? If Plato's argumentation can stand on its own, should a reader of Plato just skip the mythical texts?

## Myth and history

How should we define *myth*? Although definitions differ from one philosopher to another, I will define myth as *reality as explained by analogy with the unreal*, a definition intended to encompass all possible myths since some philosophers argue that even Socrates was used as myth by Plato. Very much related with the term *historia*, which can be translated simply as a story or a tale, *myths* reveal the past as well as the future. Contrary to the meaning which we attach now to *history* as an accounting of series of events, the Greek *historia* was originally denoted as a tale of the past, or, simply put, an old tale; and yet this old tale could contain stories about the future. This is the difference in our use of *history* as compared to the Greeks' use of *historia*, which acknowledges that myth and history are related, for both can contain the future. This relation between *mythos* and *historia* explains why the early Greeks would view future events or the *eschaton* to be somewhat certain. This is probably the reason why Christian Theology once held on to the certainty of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and other futuristic events contained in The Revelation of St. John and other apocalyptic accounts. Events in the future contained in myths are events that are certainly bound to happen in the future and something to be hoped for in the present. It is in this way that myths are related to history.

John F. Callahan, in his essay "Dialectic, Myth and History," gave an analysis of how myth is related to history. For him, Plato makes a distinction between Reason and Necessity similar to that between Being and Becoming:

In the economy of the universe, Reason acts according to a pattern and for a good purpose, whereas Necessity, the *wandering cause*, comprises all the subsidiary causes that must be *persuaded* by Reason to act for a purpose since they are in themselves indifferent. (Callahan in North, 1977, p. 73)

Both myth and history belong to Necessity for they comprise what happened in the past. “What had been” happened, and “what had not been” did not happen because it was *persuaded* by Reason. And yet the possibility of something to happen is also there, for Reason can still persuade it to happen. And yet, in all of these time frames, Reason is what necessitates events to happen. “History is of value insofar as it may offer itself as a myth, like any other myth, to the uses of dialectic” (Callahan in North, 1977, p. 73). Events of history will occur only *once*, but if put forth in the form of myth, it can occur several times, thus allowing it to communicate the *truth* of the historical account in the future. This is probably the reason why Socrates regards the myth in the *Gorgias* as a true account, for it signifies a *re-occurring* historical event. History, for the Greeks, is not comprised only of past events, but also of future ones that are yet to happen. We can see this in Parmenides’ concept of the Paths or Ways to Truth and Error—a person who is on the Path of Salvation or of Truth will have a future that is guaranteed as long as he does not stray off the path. The future, then, is something that is not veiled for it has been revealed to them who are in the Way of Truth. For the early Greeks, particularly the followers of Parmenides, this Way of Truth—as opposed to the Way of Falsehood—is as real as any road leading somewhere. This doctrine, also seen in Pythagoreanism, makes use of this *hodos* as a way of a moral life.

The two ways—the right way and the way of error—appear again in the religious symbolism of later Pythagoreanism. There, they serve as an emblem for the choice between a morally good life and a bad one—the choice confronting every man as a moral agent. (Jaeger, 1968, p. 99)

An example along this line of thinking is Christian Theology’s concept of Salvation History. Imagine a straight line with the labels *past*, *present*, and *future*; its starting point is *creation* and its consummation is the *final destination* that is quite similar to Pindar’s Judgment of Souls. This straight line represents Yahweh’s working in human history. History—composed of past, present, and future—is seen as the totality of salvation. Thus, the Creation Account—representing the Fall—has its opposite, the Judgment Day—the eternal salvation of the faithful and the eternal damnation of the unfaithful culminating in the total destruction of the world. Both accounts of Creation and Judgment Day take the form of myth. They are thus regarded as historical by the early believers. The distinction of what is mythical from what is historical is a later development.

At a time where the art of writing is not as it is today, myths were passed on (either orally or written) from one generation to another, sometimes accompanied by legends and heroic folktales, which could be dismissed right away as not-true. But when stories of the origin of the world, of the human race, of the gods, of virtues, and of good and evil were passed on to others, they were accepted as true accounts labeled as *mythoi*. “Maybe you think this account is told as an old wives’ tale, and you feel contempt for it. And it certainly wouldn’t be a surprising thing to feel contempt for it if we could look for and somehow find one better and truer than it” (Plato, 1984b, sec. 527). This statement of Socrates in the *Gorgias* suggests that the use of myths was the best way they knew how to explain the external world as they perceived it in a pre-scientific world. In a world of re-occurring barbaric attacks, plagues, and unexplained natural calamities, the myths kept the people’s hope and their desire for an orderly world alive. With the absence of a set of doctrines or religious beliefs, the myths were used as guide for a way of life formulated by the early Greek theologians.

## Myth and theology

In its primitive mythological stage, the gods were presented with all kinds of human weaknesses. This anthropomorphism, although it gives a good picture of the nature of man, was somewhat irrational for Plato’s approach to the problem of Deity. It is this primitiveness that led Plato to put the “irrational myths” under the scrutiny of the dialectic in the *Republic*, sec. 379a, prescribing in his “patterns of theology” how poets should represent a god as he is, i.e., divine and not human; instead of being weak or frail, a god must be presented as a god who is good:

Thus, when Plato set forth ‘*tupoi peri theologias*,’ ‘outlines of theology,’ in the *Republic* and the *Laws*, Plato’s philosophy appears, at its highest level, as theology in this sense. (Jaeger, 1968, p. 4)

Theology represented by myths, and Philosophy represented by argumentation are clearly distinguished in later Greek Philosophy. The problem, as Jaeger puts it, is in the early Greek philosophers like Anaximander and Heraclitus, for whom there was no such distinction. Myths and philosophy were not distinguished from each other as in the works of Empedocles, for instance:

In Empedocles, we meet a philosopher whose explicit use of materials taken from a mythical source can be related to a purpose that may be called philosophical. We can indeed say that the union—however imperfect in itself and enigmatic for us—of the philosophical and the mythical in Empedocles has set a precedent, the importance of which in the subsequent history of thought would be hard to calculate. (Callahan in North, 1977, p. 67)

The problem with this union is: how can we know which is figurative and which is literal for the philosopher? For Jaeger, Aristotle was able to solve this by giving the formulation: *muthikos sophizomenoi*.

This is a pregnant formulation; it brings out a common factor and an element of difference: the theologians are like the philosophers in that they promulgate certain doctrines (*sophizontai*); unlike them, however, in that they do so in 'mythical form' (*muthikos*). (Jaeger, 1968, p. 10)

In Plato's works, this distinction can be easily marked out although the functions of myth and of argumentation are still connected in the sense that they can both be used to philosophize or to arrive at the truth. For Plato, unlike Aristotle, the myths can be employed to a level of rationality where the gods or the divinities do not act capriciously like little children but instead can comprise the totality of what men consider the Good. *If the gods will be represented as they are, they should be represented as the paradigm of perfection and goodness.* Plato, influenced by the early theologians such as Empedocles, transformed the Greek gods into universal principles. "Empedocles discovers the Divine in that all embracing state of the world which arises when goodness and perfection reach their consummation in the cycle of (the) cosmic forces" (Jaeger, 1968, p. 153).

Did Plato believe in the *Gorgias* myth? Yes, but he believed it not in the sense that such and such is the case but that such and such *could* and *should* be the case. Removing the primitiveness of the myth of the final destination as judged by the caprices of the Fates, Plato transformed it into a prescriptive Final Judgment where we can get an illustration or a partial answer to the What is *X* question—what is justice? Instead of describing only what humans are, Plato used the myths to prescribe how humans ought to live, and, in connection with the central theme of the *Gorgias*, how to live in proportion.

## The *Gorgias*

The *Gorgias* is closely related to the *Apology* in the sense that both deal with the reflective account of the trial and death of Socrates. In this work, considered by many scholars to belong in Plato's middle dialogues where we still see the emphasis on the virtues and also a somewhat similar discussion on justice that can be seen in the *Republic's* Thrasymachus, Plato reflects on the injustice that Socrates suffered in the Athenian court. Indicted for corrupting the youth and for not believing the gods, Socrates was condemned to die by taking hemlock. Accused by Meletus for Socrates' attacks on the poets, by Anytus on behalf of the craftsmen and politicians, and by Lycon for the orators or lawyers at that time who were all troubled by Socrates' teachings against what they do, Socrates could have been found innocent by a difference only of thirty votes. Having been kept in prison for one month to await execution, Socrates was approached by Crito, one of his friends who asked him to accept the arranged exile so that he will not suffer death. Socrates refused. The reflection on the *Gorgias* answers the question: What can possibly cause someone to accept injustice? The answer is simple: *It is better to suffer injustice than to do it.* In the *Apology's* Epilogue (1984a, sec. 38c-42a), we see Socrates standing before his earthly judges giving a speech about the journey he is about to take—a journey to another world which he was so glad to take to face his *real* judges. To suffer injustice in the present world is better than to suffer the real judgment of the afterlife.

In the *Gorgias*, with the use of literary device of foreshadowing, the contributions of sophistry and rhetoric were used to put Socrates to death. With the "What is Rhetoric? question," Socrates showed the inconsistency of Gorgias in that if rhetoric can be taught and rhetoric is about justice, then the orator should necessarily be just (sec. 460a-e), which for Gorgias is not the case; to him, rhetoric is morally neutral. The orator can use rhetoric for both just and unjust purposes. Socrates answers his own question by saying that rhetoric is a knack, and in order to show this, Plato used analogy. In the works of Plato, we see different analogical devices—myths, paradigms, and illustrations. And yet, little or no explanation was given at all on why they were used. This lack of account eventually caused some scholars to treat analogy as mere decorations and embellishments possibly used to entertain, as found in the works of Homer and early Greek poets. We should also recognize that the use of analogy could possibly be more disadvantageous since we don't have any explicit rules to determine when we are pushing the argument from analogy too far for lack of clear boundaries. Plato recognizes this limitation that accompanies any use of analogical devices to the point that any argument from "likeness" can oftentimes be deceptive:

So has the dog to the wolf—the fiercest of animals to the tamest. But a cautious man should above all be on his guard against resemblances; they are a very slippery sort of thing. However be it so; for should they ever set up an adequate defense of their confines, the boundary in dispute will be of no small importance. (*Sophist*, 1957, sec. 231a)

And yet, he continues to employ them to the irritation of some of the characters in the dialogues. “By the gods! You simply don’t let up on your continual talk of shoemakers and cleaners, cooks and doctors, as if our discussion were about them!” (*Gorgias*, sec. 491). Plato uses shoemakers, doctors, and cooks in the early dialogues analogically in relation to his *technai* to show that what they really refer to as P’s are not P’s because the analogies point out that the implied Q’s are really not Q’s after all. If not Q then not P. By using the rule of inference *Modus Tollens*, Plato was able to arrive at what an X is not. The use of analogies in the early dialogues, then, is not really problematic in the sense that they only deal with specific counter examples, as in the *Gorgias*. In the *Gorgias*, with the analogical use of the cobblers, cooks, etc., Socrates was able to point out that rhetoric is not even a craft but a mere knack. It is a knack for it does not have knowledge of what is good and bad, right and wrong, just and unjust; it only guesses what is the best, which is interchanged for what is pleasant (sec. 465a). Having total disregard for the truth, it is used to flatter people and to win arguments in courts and assemblies. Rhetoric is used simply to create an impression in order to win:

A speaker in a law court stood to lose money, property, his political rights, even on occasion his life. Since witnesses were not cross-examined and the jury received no objective guidance on points of law, it was of the utmost importance that the speaker should adopt a *persona* that would convey a good impression. He could not afford to express or imply beliefs or principles which were likely offensive to the jury; at the same time, it was important that he should impose a discreditable *persona* upon his adversary. (Dover, 1994, pp. 5-6)

And with regard to what is pleasant, rhetoric considers pleasure good, causing it to commit injustice and avoid suffering. Socrates pushes the matter to a point where if we really wish for the good, which we all do, it will be better for us to suffer injustice than to commit injustice; and pushing it a little farther, it is also better to be punished for an injustice than to escape it. Socrates then ends the *Gorgias* with the eschatological myth—the Final Judgment.



## The Final Judgment

When a person dies, his soul is separated from his body. Like the body, which bears the mark of either excess or lack of a proportionate life, the soul also carries these marks. Although the body can hide these markings with clothing or apparel, the soul stands naked in the meadow of the afterlife. In the meadow, there are three ways that meet. One way is from this world to the meadow, another to the Isles of the Blessed and another to Tartarus; Good souls go to the Isles of the Blessed while the bad souls go to Tartarus. Rhadymanthus, Aeacus, and Minos, the sons of Zeus, stand as judges.

Rhadymanthus will judge Europe, Aeacus will judge Asia, and Minos will review the judgment done by the two, or help them if they cannot decide on the destiny of the soul before them. In the meadow, the judges do not know the name of the souls they are judging. If the soul is sent to Tartarus, it is marked as either curable or incurable. The curable souls are “purged” or reformed while the incurable are punished so as to set examples.

Used as part of the arguments presented with Callicles as against rhetoric that can influence the decisions of judges by persuasion and not by evidence, the myth’s connection with the arguments is analogical. The myth, in a sense, calls unjust what the courts did to Socrates. By presenting the paradigm for the perfect administration of justice, Plato is saying that what happened to Socrates falls short of this paradigm, which is to say that the courts did everything wrongly. For example, if we are able to know the answer to the question “What is *chairness*?” and pointing ostensibly to a chair will partially answer this question, the chair being referred to can also provide us with descriptions of things which are *what-is-not-a-chair*. It is in this sense that the myth becomes a *true account*.

Socrates, in posing the What is *X*? question in the early dialogues, is looking for the equivalent or the essence of *X*. But can we really find *X*’s equivalent? Some scholars argue that although we cannot find *the* equivalent or the exact definition to the *X* question, what we can do is limit the search to elements that can be similar to *X*. Again, we can see here that an argument based on analogy will be used. *X* is like *Y* can be more easily accommodated than saying  $X = Y$ .

If *X* is like *Y*  
 And *Y* is like *Z*  
 Then *X* is like *Z*

Although this seeming implication is invalid, this is probably how analogy was used by the early Greeks to distinguish and differentiate one thing from another. If the myth in the *Gorgias* can provide the elements of the *X* in the What is *X*? question, we can see how the trial and death of Socrates differs from the eschatological myth. What Socrates suffered in his trial was injustice.

Did Plato believe that the account's mythical characters and elements were real? No, because by using the myth as analogy, an early way of presenting an account (*logos*), the myth becomes true not in the reality of its elements but in what the elements represent—like the broken jar in the *Gorgias* representing a person who cannot be satisfied (sec. 493e). It is relevant to mention that Plato, in the *Gorgias*, was able to point out the difference between belief and knowledge: "Knowledge deals with what is; belief deals with what is and is not" (Denyer, 1991, p. 47). As contemporary analytic philosophers would define it, knowledge deals with matters of fact, while belief deals with probability or, in Wittgensteinian jargon, with half-truths. In relation to this, is it possible that Plato is not dismissing the probability that the myths are true in the sense that there will be a historical judgment after a person's death? I think so. It is a possibility that Plato, reflecting on the injustice done to Socrates, needs the Final Judgment to justify the commitment of Socrates to die and end all human possibilities for the sake of justice. It seems to me that even though Plato knew the fictitious nature of the characters in the myth, in the realm of probability or belief, the judgment of the souls can be true because of necessity .

What in the Myth can be considered *alethes* or truth? 1) the concept of retribution, reformation, and reward in the administration of the system of justice; 2) the emphasis on evidence and not on rhetoric in the courtrooms; 3) the impartiality of justice as a prerequisite for a sound judgment—impartiality which can be affected by previous knowledge of the case involved; and 4) the system of check in the judicial system by means of another jury in case of indeterminacy as represented by Minos. These are principles which we can consider true then, and now, as well.

1) The *concept of retribution, reformation, and reward in the administration of the system of justice*. Plato in the *Gorgias* presented three concepts that, even up to now, are being discussed in penology. Why do we imprison people? Is it to punish them for their crimes or to reform them so that they can no longer be a threat to society once they have served their sentence? The analogy of capital punishment, whether death or life

imprisonment, to Tartarus can also be discussed. It will also be good to note that this kind of accounting is not present in the myths employed by the New Testament of the Christian Tradition. In the myth of The Judgment Seat in the “Book of Revelations” in the New Testament, there are only two destinations: heaven and hell.

2) *The emphasis on evidence and not on rhetoric in the courtrooms.* Rhetoric plays a major part in our courtrooms today. A client is usually gotten off the hook because the judge is a member of the same law fraternity or of the same civic organization. Rhetoric has taken a new definition. A lawyer doesn't even have to speak well. A lawyer's affiliation, connections, and even education, (especially if one is from the University of the Philippines) can be a guarantee of victory. Although the emphasis, in theory, is on rules of evidence, presentday lawyers are able to manipulate the rules by doctoring evidences or even by making evidences disappear. The goal is to win, by hook or by crook. Plato's question is still posed today: Can a lawyer use his craft for both justice and injustice?

3) *The impartiality of the justices as a prerequisite for a sound judgment—impartiality which can be affected by previous knowledge of the case involved.* It is very hard for a judge to evaluate the merits of a case on the evidence alone, especially if he has personal knowledge of the defendant or of the petitioner. It is even harder if the people involved are his friends or friends of friends. This is probably the reason why there is a provision of inhibition in our present judicial system. A judge has to inhibit himself from the case if he thinks he cannot make a sound judgment on the basis of evidence alone.

4) *The system of check (or review) in the judicial system by means of another jury in case of indeterminacy as represented by Minos.* This point will provide us with a clue to how Plato used the analogy to prescribe. If the myth will reveal to us instances of the *Xness* of justice, why create a Minos character to review a previous judgment by both Rhadymanthus and Aeacus? Probably because the Athenian courts did not have a system of review in their justice system. If only Socrates' case had been reviewed, maybe justice could have been afforded him.

If analogy was used by Plato in the myth, to what is he comparing the *Gorgias* myth? To the early Greeks system of justice?

Indeed the Greeks themselves were probably the first to point out not only that men tend to conceive the gods in their own

image, but also that they tend to imagine the modes of life of the gods as their own. (Lloyd, 1992, p. 194)

But the system of justice during the time of Socrates was very much different from the mythical account. By making use of the account, Plato was prescribing how justice in the courtrooms should be conducted. Having seen how Socrates suffered from such lack of justice in the courtroom, he was probably introducing reforms in the justice system at that time. If this is the case, the Myth was used by Plato as a vehicle to philosophize by presenting a prescriptive account of justice. I am using the term *prescriptive* in the sense that he was presenting the Myth not in a descriptive but in an *ought* kind of way. This way, the *Gorgias* myth becomes a paradigm or a model of justice that can be applied particularly in the courts of law.

## A theory on proportion

But the *Gorgias* is not only about court proceedings and rules of evidence. Although the courtroom elements I mentioned cannot be removed from the theme of the *Gorgias* due to its reflective nature on the trial and death of Socrates, they all fall under the theory that the main theme of the *Gorgias* is *to live in proportion*. This “proportionate life” is in response to a bigger principle—the proportion that is involved in dealing with other people. This is the *justice* that Socrates is talking about in the *Gorgias*. *Nomos* or conventional justice creates a relational principle between people so that if a person harms another, in a sense he is harming himself. We see this in the *Apology*:

I say to you who have decreed my death that to you there will come hard on my dying a punishment far more difficult to bear than the death you have visited upon me. (sec. 39c)

In sec. 507 of the *Gorgias*, Socrates points out, in a sense, that proportion can be achieved by moderation or temperance. In this passage, we can see that a moderate person possesses all the virtues. To live in moderation is to live in harmony with gods and men, to be part of the universal world order—the *kosmos*:

You’ve (Callicles) failed to notice that proportionate equality has great power among both gods and men, and you suppose that you ought to practice getting the greater share. That’s because you neglect geometry. (*Gorgias*, sec. 508a)

I believe that this theory of proportion is what permeates the *Gorgias* and also what provides the connection that ties the Socratic arguments to the myth. The myth placed at the end of the dialogue not only summarizes the arguments raised by Socrates against Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles, but is also part of the argumentation itself.

By using myth, Plato was able to make use of analogy and not be limited by the constraints of argumentation to prove his point: that the whole universe is controlled by the principle of equal proportion. From birth to death and even the afterdeath, this principle is applied to a person's soul. The purpose of the myth is not really to show what will happen when a person dies, but it is, in a sense, a call to live a just life because a just life is the best life and the best life is a happy life.

Did Socrates die in vain? Plato's answer is *no*. For by living a just life, Socrates lived his life to the fullest by maintaining the balance that not only society requires in order to be called "orderly" but also what the entire universe requires in order to be called a "world-order." Socrates was able to balance pain and pleasure. At the moment that he was given the opportunity in the *Apology* to live in exile, he did not see the point in doing so because he had lived his life to the fullest—a life that had no lack. So, in the *Apology*, we see an excited Socrates talking about a journey he was about to take. For him, if the tales of old were true, he would meet heroes and men who also suffered injustice and compare experiences with them (*Apology*, sec. 41b).

The myths of Plato were not mere ornaments to decorate and embellish the dialogues but are part of the arguments themselves. In the *Gorgias*, the myth was used not only to wrap up the entire dialogue but also to invite the interlocutors to change their minds.

Unlike the earlier dialogues which ended in perplexity, the *Gorgias* ends with an admonition:

So, listen to me and follow me to where I am, and when you've come here you'll be happy both during life and at its end, as the account indicates. Let someone despise you as a fool and throw dirt on you, if he likes . . . let's use the account that has now been disclosed to us as our guide, one that indicates to us that this way of life is the best, to practice justice and the rest of excellence both in life and in death. Let us follow it, then, and call on others to do so, too, and let's not follow the one that

you believe in and call on me to follow. For that one is worthless,  
Callicles. (*Gorgias*, sec. 527e)

## Conclusion and application

If Plato's theory of forms developed as he moved out of the shadow of Socrates, so did his myths. In the *Phaedrus*, we see a much more elaborate and spectacular use of myth bordering on theology similar to that of the "Revelation of John" of the New Testament; and yet Plato devised it in a way as to use it philosophically by presenting it together with his argumentation. Plato was not only able to mirror a culture that was Greek in his *mythos*; he was also able to bring forth a theory of justice.

Myths in themselves are not works of philosophy. Although they represent some sort of *weltanschauung* or an understanding of the world, they simply do not comprise a philosophy. The use of myths, as is common in religion and theology, allows us to speak of things we do not have a complete grasp of. It aids us to understand the external world and presents us with an option on how to live, e.g., the Christian and Islamic myths. It criss-crosses with philosophy, science, social sciences, arts, etc. And yet, no myth should claim any superiority over the others. The problem begins when instead of seeing it as a vehicle or a means, we view it as the entire machinery of how things are. Accompanied by our ultimate questions and our ultimate *possible* answers, it becomes a vehicle by which we can philosophize. Myths, then, can serve as a starting point.

But there is much work to be done. Scholars, fascinated by such thematic similarities between myths like the Deluge, Judgment Day, Fire-theft, Virgin birth etc. in almost all tribal and pre-scientific cultures of the world, have tried to create a unified theory to account for myth-making, with implications that when such similar conditions are met like pestilence, famine, plagues, wars, abundant harvest, etc., myths are formed. And because these human adversaries know no geographical boundaries, a theory that can explain all myth stories into a universal accounting is possible. This is an illusion. Myths are conveyed through language, whether written or oral. And language is unique for any given culture. One can't simply vouch for similarities of experiences. And if language connects us somewhat to our specific experiences, myths should be studied in their original dialects. This is where cooperative effort comes in. Cooperation between ethno-linguists, anthropologists, social

scientists, and philosophers is much needed in order to discover or unearth the myths in our possession.

What can the acceptance of the belief that myths can be vehicles for philosophizing possibly entail? By way of an application, we can perhaps begin with our very own *Pilosopiyang Filipino* for when this is discussed, it is always accompanied by the question “Is there such a thing as Filipino Philosophy?” And despite the attempts made to answer such a question, we all go back to the same vagueness and ambiguity that accompany the concept. Resorting to question-begging, we heap up theory upon theory trying to arrive at a unique description, and yet the closest that we get to is to differentiate the *what is not* from the *what is*. Unfortunately, the line that exists between the ‘is’ and the ‘is not’ suffers from the same vagueness.

The term *philosophy* itself is not Filipino. It comes from the Greek *philia* and *sophia*. The combination resulting in *philosophia* can be translated as love of wisdom. And yet there is such a sentiment that its translation—*pilosopiya*—belongs to the *is* part contrary to the *is not* of Western Philosophy. Resorting to conceptual analysis of terms like *kagandahang-loob*, *utang-na-loob*, and other *x-loob*, we again beg the question whether the very methodologies we employ to analyze is philosophically *Filipino*. As part of imitating Plato’s methodology of the employment of myths, this paper puts forward the recommendation that instead of creating more theories and formulations in order to discover a philosophy that is uniquely ours, what we can do is to analyze what we already have—our myths.

If we will only be able to see the richness, for instance, of the Ifugao culture and dialect in *The Marriage of Bagan and Kinggauan* (Eugenio, 1993, p. 33) or of any of the elaborate ethnic myths through research and scholarship, maybe we can imitate Plato by analyzing them, and raise ultimate questions with possible solutions so that the question, whether or not there is a Filipino philosophy, need not be raised again.

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