

REVIEW ARTICLE: SOCRATES AMONG THE MYTHOGRAPHERS

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Daniel S. Werner, *Myth and Philosophy in Plato's Phaedrus* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), vi + 302 pp., \$99.00. ISBN 9781107021280.

Introduction

Daniel Werner's revision of his admirable 2005 dissertation argues that 'myths' in Socratic conversations serve, at least in the *Phaedrus*, a *poikilos* set of goals. Myths — narratives unfolding into a constellation of traditional characters, images and motifs (pp. 7–9, 23–6, 239–43, 252, 263–4) — capture the attention of the audience's sub-rational nature; provide images for philosophers to think about; manifest the limits of language; organize written conversations into literary wholes; and co-opt traditional authority for an ascendant discipline. These goals conduce to *psychagogein* ('soul-lead') a person towards the philosophical life, the life of "grasping" the immutable, imperceptible, and universal Forms' (p. 2). The argument gets its force through close readings of the six most prominent myths in the *Phaedrus* — those of Boreas and Oreithuia, the Charioteer, the Cicadas, Thamos and Theuth, the Gardens of Adonis and Pan. Chapters 7 and 9, previously published, address the supposed 'true *technē*' of rhetoric and the purported problem of the dialogue's unity.

The book includes edifying readings of the myths, notably those in the dialogue's second half, full of telling detail about, for example, Egypt, entomology, agronomy and the catabatic genre. Given the range of internal and external audiences, complexity of human maturation and variety of conversational situations Plato must account for, Werner's pluralistic account of myth-use is of great value. One welcomes too his attention to Plato's vying with Isocrates for students and the public understanding of 'philosophy' (relying mainly on Andrea Nightingale's 1995 *Genres in Dialogue*),² and to the

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² For an application of the 'marketing against Isocrates' view to Plato's (mostly myth-free) *Euthydemus*, see J.H. Henderson, II, 'Philosophical Advertisements: Protreptic Marketing in Fourth-Century Greek Culture', PhD dissertation (Stanford University, 2007); for an implicit critique of the view that Plato wanted to advocate for a proprietary view of philosophy, see S. Peterson, *Socrates and Philosophy in the Dialogues of Plato* (Cambridge, 2011); for a sharply delineated view about Plato's use of myths in the Athenian political-cultural context, see D. Allen, *Why Plato Wrote* (Blackwell-Bristol Lectures on Greece, Rome and the Classical Tradition, 2012).

way Socrates' talking to his interlocutors informs us about the way Plato 'talks to' his readers. Finally, Werner makes a tight case for a manifold thematic, structural, dramatic and dynamic coherence of the dialogue and, more importantly, a plausible argument that 'Plato is implicitly encouraging us to seek out the *interconnections* [throughout], and to consider the philosophical implications of those interconnections' (p. 242).³ This book has considerable reference value in all these places.

All the same, although the book aims to narrow the distance between myth and philosophy, it separates them so much that reconciliation becomes difficult. Werner asks the following type of question throughout his book:

Why exactly does he [Plato] use myth? It is not simply that myth appears out of place in the context of a dialogical and philosophical discussion of ethics or metaphysics; more deeply, myth seems to be *antithetical* to that very discussion. After all, are not myth and philosophy supposed to be two diametrically opposed modes of thought? (p. 2)

Despite these rhetorical pleadings, it does not strike me as out of place for Plato to use myth. Plato depicts conversations among late fifth-century Athenians. Those people — intellectuals, statesmen and upstarts alike — had manifold reasons to talk about mythic events, personages and motifs.⁴ The conversation that Socrates has with Phaedrus concerns how to speak and compose speeches well (259e1–2), and entertains the thought that every kind of talk counts as rhetorical (261a9–e4), and rhetoric would surely exploit the full resources of language (266d7–257d4). If philosophy is what Plato is doing when writing dialogues, or what he depicts Socrates doing in those dialogues, then myth does not seem out of place, even if the reason for its use needs explanation.

When Werner treats philosophy, however, as the knowledge of unchanging forms — a view that he does not altogether substantiate — then Plato's or Socrates' use of myth loses relevance. Neither Plato in his writing nor Socrates in his talking manifest this kind of philosophy alone. The *Phaedrus* becomes a minor witness to the function of myth in Werner's purified form of philosophy. Epistemically deficient, myth gains respectability simply because every other path short of '*direct and unmediated insight*' — Socratic conversation, self-investigation and sequences of division-and-collection included — is also imperfect (pp. 90–100, 214–26).

I will return to the question of 'philosophy' later. Given Werner's express interest in the practical political context of Plato's publications, and given the *Phaedrus* having as its main topic *speeches*, we should now ask — as Werner does not — about contemporaneous use of myth in speeches. Why do Plato's

³ Italics in quotations throughout this review are Werner's emphases.

⁴ R. Buxton, *Imaginary Greece: The Contexts of Mythology* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 18–44.

peers use or avoid myth, and how does Plato want to distinguish himself in that use or avoidance?

I

Contemporaneous Myth-Users

The *Phaedrus*' first quotation comes within the first half page (227b9–10), and is to the second and third lines of Pindar's *First Isthmian* (c.458–448 BC).⁵ Pindar is again quoted at 236d2, and often in Plato's other dialogues.⁶ Pindar built stories of legendary heroes into his victory odes to provide vaunted parallels for his athletic champions.⁷ The *First Isthmian*, for example, written for a pilot of his own chariot, includes a hymn to the mythic charioteers Castor and Iolaus (lines 17–32). Pindar says he wishes to include (ἐναρμόξαι) his champion in that hymn so as to 'render honour' (τεύξων . . . γέρας) to him. This association identifies prized communal norms, praises the living person and marks continuity from the mythic era to the present generation. Pindar seems not to care for the historicity or truth-value of the stories; to the extent the stories appear to represent moral or physical exemplars with traditional connections to some people (even Greeks in general), they vivify the traits in the champion worth highlighting.⁸

Pindar provides the dialogue's first quotation, but Lysias is Phaedrus' second word (227a2).⁹ It is Lysias against whom Socrates competes, throughout the dialogue, for Phaedrus' commitment (227a2–228e5, 234c6–237a5, 241d2–243d1, 257b7–d8, 262c5–264e7, 277d6–278e4).¹⁰ It is worth noting that the Lysianic speech (230e6–234c5) that Phaedrus finds so refined (κεκόμψευται 227c7) lacks all mythic elements. Following Socrates, Werner charges the speech with lacking unity, being repetitious, ignoring definition and being wrong-headed about love. What are we to think, however, of the

⁵ C. Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus* (Yale, 1986), p. 250 n.11, C. Moore, 'Pindar's Charioteer in Plato's *Phaedrus* (227b9–10)', *Classical Quarterly* (forthcoming).

⁶ E.g. M. Silk, 'Pindar Meets Plato: Theory, Language, Value, and the Classics', in *Texts, Ideas, and the Classics: Scholarship, Theory and Classical Literature*, ed. S.J. Harrison (Oxford, 2001), pp. 26–45; M. Demos, 'Callicles' Quotation of Pindar in the *Gorgias*', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 96 (1994), pp. 85–107; P. Miller, 'Pindar in Plato', manuscript.

⁷ E.g. L. Kurke, *The Traffic in Praise: Pindar and the Poetics of Social Economy* (Cornell, 1991); Buxton, *Imaginary Greece*, p. 25.

⁸ E.L. Bundy, *Studia Pindarica: The First Isthmian Ode*, University of California Publications in Classical Philology (California, 1986).

⁹ On Lysias, see the 'Introduction' to S. Todd, *Lysias* (Texas, 2000); S. Usher, 'Lysias and His Clients', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*, 17 (1976), pp. 31–40; K. Dover, *Lysias and the Corpus Lysiicum* (California, 1968).

¹⁰ The *Clitophon* opens with Socrates stating that Clitophon gossiped about him to Lysias, 406a2.

narrator's almost studied decision to exclude mythological parallels? One guess is that it is part of his sophistication, to appear intimate, earnest and well-reasoned. Ancient commentators highlighted Lysias' reserved Attic style, which 'smuggled persuasion past the hearer' through narrative rather than through suspicion-inciting literary bombastics.¹¹ Socrates' first speech, the one meant to improve on Lysias' within Lysias' framework, also avoids mythic elements (237b2–238c4, 238d8–241d1). It strives to tell things simply as they are, emphasizing mechanistic — that is, purportedly realistic and deterministic — psychological processes. From this perspective, myth is seen as an overt tool of persuasion, a useful fancy which neither fits private agreement nor can avoid undermining its rhetorical function.

Naturally, since he does not write for amatory seduction alone (cf. 257c), Lysias does not avoid myth altogether. He begins his 'Funeral Oration'¹² by retelling the traditional founding story of Athens, setting out its noble prehistoric full of Amazons (II.4–6), Cadmeans (7–10), and the children of Heracles (11–16). In doing so he follows the generic requirements followed by all other Athenian *epithaphioi*.¹³ He likewise opens his 'Olympic Oration' with a reference to the games' founding by Heracles as an effort in Panhellenic friendship (1–2). Here then, in epideictic address, where emotional elevation and ritual propriety, and especially national or international identification, are the goals, appeal to myth is *de rigueur*.

Just as the dialogue opens with reference to Lysias, it closes with reference to Isocrates (278e5–279b2); indeed, some readers have read the dialogue as an indictment of Isocrates.¹⁴ Werner treats Isocrates as a contestant to the name 'philosophy' (pp. 120 n. 40, 227–30), to the point that he 'angered' Plato (p. 229 n. 158, stated without evidence). Were Isocrates Plato's nearest competitor for students and for determining the nature of philosophy, it would be useful to study his use of myth. We might note that he begins his last great work, the *Panathenaicus* of 342–339 BC, with explicit remarks about the rhetorical use of traditional tales:

¹¹ Dionysius, *On Lysias* §§18, 8, *On Isaeus* §16.

¹² Todd, *Lysias*, pp. 25–7, Dover, *Lysias and the Corpus Lysiacum*, pp. 193–4, W. Lamb, *Lysias* (Loeb Classical Library, 1930), pp. 28–9, and J. Snell, *Lysias Epitaphios* (Oxford, 1887), pp. 13–17, are all cautiously optimistic that this is by Lysias.

¹³ N. Loraux, *The Invention of Athens: The Funeral Oration in the Classical City*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 2006).

¹⁴ R. Howland, 'The Attack on Isocrates in the *Phaedrus*', *The Classical Quarterly*, 31 (1937), pp. 151–9; G. De Vries, 'Isocrates' Reaction to the *Phaedrus*', *Mnemosyne*, 6 (1953), pp. 39–45; J. Coulter, '*Phaedrus* 179a: The Praise of Isocrates', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*, 8 (1967), pp. 225–36. M. Goggin and E. Long, 'A Tincture of Philosophy, A Tincture of Hope: The Portrayal of Isocrates in Plato's *Phaedrus*', *Rhetoric Review*, 11 (1993), pp. 301–24, reading Socrates' reference to Isocrates positively, still think the figure of Isocrates plays a central role in the dialogue.

When I was younger, I chose to write the speeches that were not the mythic type (μυθώδεις), nor the ones with monsters (τερατείας) and full of overt fictions (ψευδολογίας μεστούς), which audiences delight in . . . nor those that relate the ancient deeds and wars of the Greeks . . . [but instead] ones advising about the benefits for the city and other Greeks, and full of many arguments (ἐνθυμημάτων) (1–2).

This admission entails that orators in similar positions, over the course of Isocrates' lifetime, and thus Plato's as well, used mythic example in their speeches.¹⁵ Of course, we need not even *infer* this, since Isocrates, contrary to his claim, himself used mythic examples in his other speeches, notably and self-consciously in *Evagoras* 3–19 (from 370–365 BC) and *Panegyricus* 28–32 (from 380 BC, admitting that the story about Demeter and Kore he will tell is dubiously mythic, μυθώδης; cf. 30). Isocrates used myth, even if knowingly, when it could be useful, providing a model for good behaviour and pan-hellenic self-understanding.¹⁶ His criticism focuses on the use of myth as a cartoonish vehicle for mere pleasure, especially for chauvinistic pleasure in national victory.¹⁷ Who is a representative of those playfully using myth? Perhaps even Gorgias, mentioned twice in the *Phaedrus* (261c2, 267a6). Like Hippias (*Hip. Mj.* 285d6–8), Protagoras (*Prot.* 320c10–322d7) and Prodicus (*Xen. Mem.* 2.1.21–34), Gorgias' display speeches, on Helen and Palamedes, deployed mythic material. His paradoxologies provided occasions for supreme rhetorical display, for reformulating traditional material in novel and challenging ways.

Werner wants to, and does, adhere to 'principles of *holism* and *organicism*', interpreting dilemmas in the *Phaedrus* by appeal to no other Platonic dialogues but this one. But he adds that 'some consideration of the *historical, cultural, and sociopolitical context* of the dialogues is essential if we are to have a fruitful understanding of them' (p. 16). Werner fails to give a complete consideration to that triple context, thereby limiting what we learn about Plato's use of myth.

Admittedly, in his programmatic second chapter, Werner does discuss some theorists of myth. *Phaedrus* asks Socrates whether he believes the story (μυθολόγημα) that Boreas abducted Oreithuia (229c5). Socrates says that the *sophoi* would doubt the story as told, and might retell it as the north wind blowing a young girl to her doom (229c6–d1). Werner says that these *sophoi* are engaged in 'allegorical interpretation' (pp. 27–30). They follow the tradition of Theagenes of Rhegium, concerned to find, through symbolic readings, philosophical content in their mythopoetic inheritance. The Homeric or Hesiodic

¹⁵ S. Perlman, 'The Historical Example, Its Use and Importance as Political Propaganda in the Attic Orators', *Scripta Hierosolymitana*, 7 (1961), pp. 150–66, 159 n. 40.

¹⁶ T. Papillon, 'Isocrates and the Use of Myth', *Hermathena*, 161 (1996), pp. 9–21.

¹⁷ Cf. S. Flory, 'The Meaning of τὸ μὴ μυθῶδες (1.22.4) and the Usefulness of Thucydides' *History*', *Classical Journal*, 85 (1990), pp. 193–208.

material either intentionally or accidentally encodes rationally informative ideas. 'For the allegorist, myth is an unquestioned repository of truth and a symbol to be decoded' (p. 42). This interpretative discipline indeed has an extremely interesting history.¹⁸ The problem is that, as Werner himself acknowledges in a footnote, Socrates' *sophoi* actually practice 'rationalization', treating 'myth as a misunderstanding of some past historical event', which 'is distinct from allegorization in method and aim' (p. 29 n. 32). The rationalizers adamantly do not treat mythic stories as 'unquestioned repositories of truth', finding them instead vestiges of mistaken perceptions or miscommunications. So Werner admits that he has not identified the actual referent of Socrates' remarks.¹⁹

Who then are these *sophoi* who rationalize — or, more accurately, 'restore' (ἐπανορθοῦσθαι, 229d6) — such mythical tales? Why would someone want to discredit overly-fabulistic stories? Answering this depends on seeing the proximity of myth, history and communal narrative. As we saw from Lysias' 'Funeral' and 'Olympic' orations, a common use of myth is to vivify Athenian identity, and to sponsor Panhellenic unity.²⁰ History, both recent and distant, provides precedent and models for the geographically-linked self-conceptions. Boreas, from Thrace, saved the Athenian fleet. How could that

¹⁸ E.g. C. Collobert, 'Philosophical Readings of Homer: Ancient and Contemporary Insights', in *Logos and Muthos: Philosophical Essays in Greek Literature*, ed. William Wians (Albany NY, 2009), pp. 133–57; G. Naddaf, 'Allegory and the Origins of Philosophy', in *Logos and Muthos*, ed. Wians, pp. 99–131; D. Califf, 'Metrodorus of Lampsacus and the Problem of Allegory: An Extreme Case?', *Arethusa*, 36 (2003), pp. 21–36; R. Janko, 'The Physicist as Hierophant: Aristophanes, Socrates and the Authorship of the Derveni Papyrus', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 118 (1997), pp. 61–94; N. Richardson, 'Homeric Professors in the Age of the Sophists', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, 201 (1985), pp. 65–81.

¹⁹ Cf. H. Yunis, *Plato: Phaedrus* (Cambridge, 2011), 229c5–d1: 'interpretations with the aim of removing supernatural or morally objectionable actions on the part of gods became a trend among natural scientists, sophists, historians, and literary men of the fifth and fourth centuries'. Yunis follows G. Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas: A Study of Plato's Phaedrus* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 234–5, who includes under the title *oi sophoi* 'sophistai, rhētorikoi, meteōrologoi, logographoi, etc.', and claims that the vagueness (i.e. not referring specifically to Homeric allegorists) is deliberate. P. Ryan, *Plato's Phaedrus: A Commentary for Greek Readers* (Oklahoma, 2012), p. 99, is even clearer, noting that 'the down-to-earth naturalism of the interpretation [Socrates] advances makes it certain that what Plato had in mind was . . . something much more like the reduction of the myth of Io's wandering to a mere case of kidnapping we find in the opening pages of Herodotus'.

²⁰ Cf. Perlman, 'Historical Example', observing that 'mythological examples were used by all the orators', even Demosthenes (23.65–74, on the trials before the Areopagus), and picking out Aeschines' speeches *On the Embassy* and to the Amphictyons (II.26–32, III.115–24). See, most recently, B. Steinbock, *Social Memory in Athenian Public Discourse: Uses and Meanings of the Past* (Michigan, 2012), pp. 155–210, on Athenian-Theban relations articulated through myths about Thebes.

have happened? Were he just a wind, even sceptics could accept it (Herodotus 7.189). Persistent stories that are absurd or morally odious fit poorly into national narratives, but reformed or ‘naturalized’ they may do fine.

Aristotle writes that political advisors — i.e. orators — need works of history (αἱ τῶν περὶ τὰς πράξεις γραφόντων ἱστορίαι, *Rhet.* I.4.13 1360a25). But try as he might, the historian cannot deterministically separate verifiable ‘history’ from uncertain ‘myth’. Some mythic stories might even seem, with some rectification, likely candidates for historical reality. The fluidity between the historian’s study and the orator’s speech-contents means that the plausibility and verifiability of myth-as-history would be a central trope of political speech. A clever opponent could try to rationalize a too-credulous attitude towards some ancient occurrence, or charge an appeal to dramatic mythology as lightweight pyrotechnics. In other words, historians and thus rhetoricians would have developed a practical epistemology of precedent and exemplar.²¹

A telling case is the historian Ephorus (c.400–330 BC). We learn that Ephorus’ *Universal History* passes over the ‘mythological’ period (τὰς μὲν παλαιὰς μυθολογίας ὑπερέβη), because there is ‘difficulty’ (δυσχέρεια) setting out the earlier period (Diodorus Siculus 4.1.2). Ephorus criticized myth-partisans, preferring to seek the truth (ἐπιτιμήσας γοῦν τοῖς φιλομυθοῦσιν ἐν τῇ τῆς ἱστορίας γραφῇ καὶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἐπαινέσας, Strabo 9.3.11).²² Obviously other historians had tried to build the earlier period (preceding the return of the Heracleidae, or the Trojan War) into a seamless narrative, but had trouble. For all this, and aware of his hypocrisy, Ephorus famously rationalized the myth of the origin of the Delphic oracle (Strabo 9.3.11–12; Theon’s *Progymnasmata* 2 notes his further rationalization of the Giants). He did so to relate a moral, one of a progressive civilization.²³

Given Plato’s concern with rhetoricians, speech-making for the common good (ἀστέιοι καὶ δημοφελῆς, 227d1–2) and history, all of which use myths and their rationalizations for various reasons, and given Socrates’ incessant pastiche and critique of those speakers, speeches and proclivities, Plato appears to tell us to read his myths against this *philomythic* background.

I have already said that Werner admits that he mischaracterizes the *sophoi* Socrates alludes to. This matters because chapter two, in which Werner presents the basic critique of myth, constitutes a long assessment of that *sophoi*

²¹ H.-J. Gehrke, ‘Myth, History, Politics — Ancient and Modern’, in *Greek and Roman Historiography, Oxford Readings in Classical Studies*, ed. John Marincola (Oxford, 2011), pp. 40–71.

²² F. Pownall, *Lessons from the Past the Moral Use of History in Fourth-Century Prose* (Michigan, 2004), pp. 114, 119–29; G. Schepens, ‘Historiographical Problems in Ephorus’, in *Historiographia Antiqua: Commentationes Lovanienses in honorem W. Peremans septuagenarii editae* (Leuven, 1977), pp. 95–118.

²³ F. Pownall, ‘Rationalizations in Ephorus’ Account of the Foundation of the Delphic Oracle’, *Mouseion*, 6 (2006), pp. 353–69; contrast Diodorus Siculus’ other rationalization of the Delphic origin story, 16.26.

passage (229b4–230a6). Werner treats the passage to reveal Plato's multi-point critique of 'allegory' (pp. 30–6).²⁴ First, the details of stories from the mythic past (which often have multiple versions) are closed to verification and depend on the 'merely "likely"'. Second, because myths are interconnected, interpretation of one requires interpretation of them all; perhaps (or perhaps not) relatedly, any set of facts could be interpreted in an infinite number of ways. Third, interpretations of myth present 'only one opinion' as though it were "'the" truth', yet 'the philosopher is interested in a different *kind* of truth than that sought by the allegorist'. Fourth, the proclivity to explain away myths risks explaining away Plato's myths. Fifth, dealing with myth in this way 'is perniciously distracting', when one's urgent goal is seeking self-knowledge.

The curious thing about this assessment is its sweeping scope. It applies not just to myths — as traditional tales — but to any historical claim, or indeed to any descriptive claim whatsoever. Historians dispute over factual details from even the recent past, when eyewitnesses were present. Even in ideal situations, their explanations are merely highly plausible, not indubitable; they are never better than candidates for the truth; to the extent that their task is to give the best explanation, they present *one* explanation, and it is an explanation proper to history; a historian is always vulnerable to later historiographical or critical uptake; and history too takes time away from self-knowledge. This may be a justified criticism of history, though it would gain bite only if it also addressed the philosophical apologists for history. But the point is that Werner reads Socrates' remarks about the Boreas-concerned *sophoi* in a way that does not address 'myth' or 'myth-allegory' or 'myth-rectification' but accounts of the events in the world. It is possible that we *should* take Socrates' criticism that way (if we take Socrates to excoriate investigations into concrete particulars), but then we must *not* take these claims as claims about *myth per se*, but just about the general category into which much use of myth falls.

Chapter Two ends with a positive message, about the attitudes towards and uses of myth Plato can certify (pp. 37–43). Typhon, the beast whose similarity to him Socrates wonders about, provides a counter-image for the unifying human being, framing the question of self-knowledge. This is the standard view about exemplary illustrations, and as such is neither controversial nor new. So Werner enlarges this claim, saying that the figure of Typhon is 'a means of provoking the individual to engage in philosophical inquiry', or 'conveys the importance of self-knowledge'. The claim is that someone like

²⁴ For all its infelicities, Werner's view is still much better than older ones, e.g. R. Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedrus* (Cambridge, 1952), p. 26, claiming that this passage simply 'precludes any questions that might arise later on about the local divinities who inspire Socrates', or W. Verdenius, 'Notes on Plato's *Phaedrus*', *Mnemosyne*, 8:4 (1955), pp. 265–89, p. 268, that 'allegorical interpretation should always be directed by self-examination'.

Phaedrus, who ‘has already demonstrated his attachment to sophistry, common opinion, and external authority’, will be more receptive to myth from someone trying to turn him towards philosophy. This is surely true, but in the first place ‘myth’ now stands in for anything that is appealing to someone, and in the second place, it ignores the main work of turning a person to philosophy, the conversational and erotic skill manifested by Socrates.²⁵ To give the *myth* the turning power, and not the speaker, seems to misplace the force.

How does Socrates himself deal with myths? He says he will ‘say goodbye’ to myth and allegorical interpretation, and thus avoid assessing myths for truth-value, but will still ‘believe (πειθόμενος) what is customary’ (230a1–2). What he means in this paradoxical remark gets at the heart of the question of myth: what role is myth to play in one’s mental economy and practical life? Werner’s interpretation — that Socrates believes *x* (some myth) without thinking *x* is true (p. 40, cf. p. 49) — strikes me both as analytically impossible (because belief, as I understand it, simply is the epistemic attitude of thinking something true; contrast it with imagination or entertainment) and as avoiding the issue. It does not answer the counterfactual: what does Socrates do when he is to make a decision on the basis of some mythic story being presented as true? In other words, how is Socrates to use myth when he is not using it aesthetically or imaginatively (as he is doing in the Typhon case)?

II

The Use and Function of ‘Myth’

The main argument for Plato’s use of myth comes in the book’s third to fifth chapters, on the Palinode. In some respects, the richness and variety of Werner’s account proves its greatest contribution. The following fourteen reasons — my enumeration and headings — come scattered across eighty pages of text.

1. *Matching dynamism*. Because, as the palinode assumes, ‘the soul is eternally mobile and changeable’, and ‘myth . . . is an endlessly variable and changeable type of discourse . . . constantly evol[ing] in the hands of new generations of story tellers’, ‘it is appropriate for Plato to use a mode of discourse in his writing that is tailored to such a soul’ (p. 52).

2. *Second-best for epistemic weaklings*. Because ‘only the Forms are genuine objects of *knowledge*’, and the soul is not a Form, humans cannot know souls; even were soul a Form, Forms cannot be known by incarnate humans; so ‘Socrates must satisfy himself of what the soul is like . . . by making use of an *image*, the second-best mode of exposition’ (pp. 55–7, 95).

3. *Showing off the limits of inquiry*. Because it is in principle impossible to describe souls, ‘the mythical mode of discourse is a powerful means of *pointing toward* the limits of such inquiry’ (pp. 58, 83–5, cf. p. 99).

²⁵ See E. Belfiore, *Socrates’ Daimonic Art: Love for Wisdom in Four Platonic Dialogues* (Cambridge, 2012); and Peterson, *Socrates and Philosophy*, on the demanding and skilful work Socrates exercises.

4. *Images for the thumos*. Because all souls contain irrational elements, myth 'is well suited to targeting the irrational parts of the soul, as the mythical images of honor and the pleasures of the good life easily find their way to spirit and appetite' (p. 60); this will 'draw [them, but especially *thumos*] into a harmonious internal arrangement . . . and provoke intrapersonal communication within the soul' (p. 68).

5. *Models for dialogue with oneself*. Because souls have to improve themselves through intra-psyche communication, the image of the charioteer and his horses 'provides an example of *how* one's charioteer [i.e., reason] might "talk" to one's spirit and appetitive parts' (p. 74).

6. *Amatory seduction*. Because the mythic palinode is 'a type of speech', it is also 'an erotic discourse', and '*because* the palinode talks about *eros* . . . it is an effective form of *psychagogia*'; thus, 'Platonic myth is a form of "wooing" of the soul, as it uses seductive speech' (p. 77).

7. *Consequentialist drama*. Because humans are not fully rational, the eschatological part of the myth has 'dramatic and emotional appeal . . . serv[ing] to address the *hopes* and *fears* of the soul', its consequentialist story providing both a 'soothing factor' and a 'deterrent factor' (pp. 80–1).

8. *Enticement to self-knowledge*. Because 'self-knowledge simply *consists* in a knowledge of the soul', but because the Palinode could evidently be false, this myth 'is telling us that the pursuit of self-knowledge *matters*, but without revealing the final truth of such self-knowledge' (pp. 86–7).

9. *Inducement to recollection*. Because '*the palinode is an image of the very Forms that it mentions* . . . Justice, Self-Control, Knowledge, and Beauty[,] and to varying degrees, the speech itself offers us a discursive image of each of these Forms', 'Platonic myth itself can serve as a trigger for intuitive recollection', and this causes 'a state of cognitive perplexity', which may '*in turn* serve as the occasion for further reflection . . . where philosophical reflection is possible' (pp. 105–6, 131).

10. *Co-opting traditional authority*. Because the Palinode uses material traditional to authoritative Greek myths, 'Plato can therefore *co-opt* this aura of authoritativeness, and transfer it to the new discipline (philosophy) that he feels is genuinely deserving of it. This provides him with a powerful means of legitimating his own conception of philosophy while also undercutting those of his rivals' (p. 120).

11. *Depictions of philosophy*. Because the Palinode myth 'offers a vivid and detailed image of philosophy itself', one that is uncannily familiar and inviting, Phaedrus and Plato's readers 'will regard philosophy as desirable and worthwhile' (pp. 124–5).

12. *Prompting philosophizing*. Because the Palinode broaches 'philosophical *topics*' in a context of 'conspicuous *ambiguity* and *incompleteness*', it encourages philosophical questioning and activity (pp. 126–7).

13. *Reflection on myths as images.* Because the Palinode is an image, ‘the very act of *reflecting on* [it] — questioning its claims, considering the ways in which it does or does not resemble the reality it purports to describe — is itself a philosophical one’ (p. 131).

14. *Reflection on myths and philosophy.* Because the Palinode represents myth in general, it prompts inquiry into ‘*myth itself*’, and through its relations with philosophy, into the fact that ‘*philosophy itself* is limited in key respects’ (p. 131).

To assess each claim would require a library of articles and monographs on myth; if Werner’s book justifies further studies, then it has done significant good. I will make only two points here. First, many of Werner’s epistemological claims (about knowledge and the Forms) depend on inferences from the imagery of the Palinode (pp. 88–95). But the Palinode is presented, or taken, as a competitive, persuasive speech, insofar as it is part of a three-speech sequence (257b2–c4).²⁶ Socrates calls it a plaything, and possibly useless except in its attention to division and collection (265c8–9). It may present ‘philosophy’ more narrowly than Socrates does elsewhere in the dialogue (239b4, 257b3–6, 259d3, 261a4, 278d4, 279a9). There are difficulties inferring the value of a myth, admitted to be of questionable truthfulness, from claims that the myth itself makes, especially when those claims are made for potentially tendentious purposes.

Second, a review of the fourteen reasons listed above shows that the object of Werner’s analysis reaches more broadly than ‘myth’ as such. Sometimes he means traditional myth or stories that dress in traditionally mythic garb (1, 10, 14); sometimes he means imagery alone (2, 4, 5, 7, 13); sometimes this particular story about a charioteer (5, 8, 9, 11, 12); sometimes any persuasive speech at all (2, 6); and sometimes writing as such (2, 8, 12). Elsewhere he talks about the peculiar effect Plato’s representations of conversations have, and so ‘myth’ stands in for the literary genre called ‘the dialogue form’. One reason for Werner’s proliferation of myth-caused effects, especially *vis-à-vis* philosophy, then, is that many of the effects are not specific to the ‘myth’ as he takes effort to define or circumscribe it.

III

The *Phaedrus* and Philosophy

Though Plato’s myths all come through Socrates’ story-telling, Werner’s book is not entirely about Socrates. It is also about the connection between something called ‘myth’ and something called ‘philosophy’, and what is called philosophy in this respect does not get its content from what Socrates does. Consider the opening claim:

²⁶ D. Scott, ‘Philosophy and Madness in the *Phaedrus*’, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 41 (2011), pp. 169–200, shows that its primary argument, that a philosophical *mania* exists, is invalid and thus deceptive.

As Plato's Socrates repeatedly stresses, the best kind of life is the philosophical one, and within that life our most important goal is to use philosophical dialectic as a way of 'grasping' the immutable, imperceptible, and universal Forms. (p. 2)

One might wonder where in the *Phaedrus* Socrates asserts, in his own voice, this goal for dialectic. His main points about 'dialectic' (naming the practitioners, διαλεκτικούς, though cf. 276e5) are at 265d3–266c1. He says that 'collection' serves to 'define' and to 'make clear whatever one wishes to instruct'; it does not ensure the truth (εἴτ' εὔ εἴτε κακῶς ἐλέχθη), only clarity (σαφές) and self-consistency (αὐτὸ αὐτῷ ὁμολογούμενον). Division makes important distinctions. Together, they allow speaking and thinking.

Dialectic, from this perspective, is at the root of everybody's speaking and thinking,²⁷ allows clear and cogent explanations, and does not independently ensure the accuracy of any claims. Indeed, 'dialectic' from this quotidian perspective appears very much the kind of sensitive, responsive, authentic formulation of answers that Socrates always encourages. Werner even says that the second half of the dialogue presents us mainly with 'dialectic' (p. 70), and anyone who reads those last twenty-two pages as twenty-two pages of grasping for the immutable forms through the use of precise and truth-preserving division and collection will see much they cannot account for. What they would see is Socrates, in his inimitable way, opening *Phaedrus* up to the life of reflection, critique, distinctions, suspicions and self-examination.²⁸ True, Socrates never says that he himself practices philosophy— he treats it as an ideal to be striven for (279b7–d6) — but even more than the myths and set-pieces he seems to be the main attraction of the dialogue.

Werner says that Plato asks the following more strikingly in the *Phaedrus* than elsewhere:

Just what does it mean to 'do' philosophy, and so to be a philosopher?
Which practices and activities are essential to it as a way of life? And why
should we care about philosophy in the first place? (p. 13)

I think Socrates' love for *Phaedrus* and for every kind of talk, mythic or not, shows the answer.

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²⁷ Werner claims that dialectic is 'that practice in which the philosopher alone engages' (p. 172), despite Socrates' quite mundane self-application; to account for this paradox he later, in a footnote, asserts 'a contrast between *ordinary* thinking/speaking and *philosophical* thinking/speaking' (p. 178 n. 59), but this is *ad hoc*, without evidence, and more complicated than believing Socrates' claim that everybody needs division and collection.

²⁸ See Yunis, *Plato: Phaedrus*, pp. 1–17, for a description of Socrates' manifold methods.