Turning the Whole Soul: Platonic Myths of the Afterlife and Their Psychagogic Function

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Abstract

Plato’s myths of the afterlife have, for centuries, puzzled scholars. This has been the case for a number of reasons, including but not limited to Plato’s (perhaps intentional) lack of clarity about the function of those myths in their respective dialogues. This study provides a systematic account of this function: the psychagogy, or soul-turning, that these myths provoke in their readers—that is, the multifaceted ways in which souls are led out of the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge by these powerful image-rich passages. In the course of this account, new light is shed on the very concept of psychagogy in Plato, as well as on what exactly constitutes a Platonic myth of the afterlife, and also on the ways in which the Republic can serve as an illuminating lens through which to read the Phaedo and Gorgias.

The study begins by laying out its foundation in chapter 1: an understanding of Platonic myth situated in secondary scholarship, a working conception of what constitutes a Platonic myth of the afterlife, and an understanding of psychagogy that incorporates both its description
in the *Phaedrus* and its expression in the psychology, epistemology, and metaphysics of the *Republic*. The account of the *Republic* focuses in particular on the tripartite soul (rational, spirited, and appetitive) and on the simile of the Line and the Allegory of the Cave, which provide the interpretive tools for the subsequent study of the myths. The central chapters (2-4) examine the concluding myths of the *Republic, Phaedo*, and *Gorgias*: the myth of Er, the “True Earth” myth, and the *Gorgias* myth of judgment, respectively. Each chapter proceeds first with a literal reading of the myth, showing how such a reading engages each aspect of the reader’s tripartite soul, while also leading the soul from mere conjecture to belief or true opinion—that is, from the lowest stage of knowledge according to the simile of the Divided Line and the Allegory of the Cave to the second lowest. The second major part of each central chapter is a figurative or metaphorical reading that shows how such an interpretation, while engaging each aspect of the tripartite soul, leads it *further* than belief or true opinion toward knowledge in the vast realm of intelligible (as opposed to physical) realities. Chapter 5 considers other mythical passages in Plato regarding the afterlife, from the *Phaedrus, Meno, Laws, Timaeus, Apology*, and *Theatetus*, explaining why these passages are essentially different from the three central myths of the study and, thus, why those three, and not the others, properly constitute Plato’s afterlife myths. The essential difference is the specific manner in which the psychagogy of the three central myths is carried out, which draws largely on the consummating function of these myths within their respective dialogues. The dissertation concludes with a chapter spelling out the contributions of the study in further detail.
This dissertation by Joseph M. Forte fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in Philosophy approved by Matthias Vorwerk, Ph.D., as Director, and by Thérèse-Anne Druart, Ph.D., and Cristina Ionescu, Ph.D., as Readers.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my daughter, Laura Jeanmarie, my love for whom inspired me every day of this journey, and my wife, Elise Renee, my love and appreciation for whom I cannot possibly express in words. Her moral and emotional support provided an essential motivating foundation for me.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Background, Motivation, and Purpose of This Study

1.1.1 Background

1.1.1.1 Basic Introduction to the Topic of This Inquiry.

   The specific aim of this dissertation is to explain the ways in which Plato’s myths of the afterlife provide a psychagogic function by turning the whole soul of their reader, by which I mean that they provide guidance toward both understanding and living the good life. Though these particular texts are a distinct category of Platonic myth primarily because of their thematic similarities, they have historically been an intensely debated topic of scholarship largely because of the perplexities they provoke. For instance, the Republic points to a conception of justice as valuable in itself; however, the myth of Er, which concludes this dialogue, indicates that the pursuit of justice is praiseworthy because of the rewards that await just people in the afterlife. Furthermore, the myth of Er contains an elaborate depiction of the κόσμος while the Phaedo afterlife myth elaborates on the geological structure of the “True Earth” as well as its immediate cosmic surroundings. Both of these aspects of each myth seem ill-fitting since (1) neither dialogue treats either the κόσμος or the earth as a topic of discussion anywhere else and (2) the philosophical need for such detailed astronomical or geological accounts is not immediately clear.

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1 General thematic similarities include the fact that the closing myths of the Republic, Phaedo, and Gorgias (614b-621d, 107c-115a, 523a-527e, respectively) each describe in detail the soul’s journey in the afterlife, including its judgment, as well as its rewards and punishments. For examples of the history of debate and perplexity surrounding these myths see footnote 4 below.

2 See Republic 616b-617c and Phaedo 108c-113c.
Besides the perplexities resulting from tension within their respective dialogues, the myths of the afterlife exhibit confusing inconsistencies among their accounts. For instance, souls in the *Gorgias* afterlife myth arrive at a fork in the road and proceed in one of two directions after their judgment, while souls in the *Phaedo* “True Earth” myth proceed in many directions after judgment, along a complex network of underworld paths. Also, numerous inconsistencies occur in the passages, in their dealing with the kinds of punishments reserved for various souls. For instance, unjust souls in the *Phaedo* afterlife myth are punished by a lack of freedom and banishment to fiery places, while souls in the *Gorgias* and *Republic* myths of judgment endure other tortures, the details of which differ between those two accounts.

Plato marks the three main myths of this study as important or significant, in the following ways: (1) Socrates describes the *Gorgias* myth of judgment as a “rational account,” (λόγον, 523a2), which he says, is opposed to the mythical way Callicles will conceive of it (523a1-3), (2) Socrates closes the *Phaedo* myth of the afterlife by telling Simmias that one ought to repeat the myth as though it were an “incantation” (ἐπάδειν, 114d7), and (3) Socrates says that the myth of Er could save us if we are persuaded by it (*Republic* 621b). Furthermore, each of these myths concludes their respective dialogues. Since Plato dramatically ascribes a high degree of importance to these myths of judgment, it is imprudent to adopt a dismissive stance toward them. The attention and debate devoted to these myths throughout history confirms that many others agree with this conclusion. Furthermore, as I will argue, the philosophical content

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3 See *Gorgias* 524a and *Phaedo* 108a.
4 Aristotle, *On the Heavens* 290b-291a, describes in detail a Pythagorean account of the sounds of the κόσμος that bears striking similarity to that of Plato’s myth of Er. Aristotle argues that the account of the sounds they produce cannot be physically accurate. In *Meteorology* 355e-356a, Aristotle explicitly mentions the *Phaedo* afterlife myth’s account of rivers and the sea, saying that it cannot be geologically accurate. Plotinus refers to both the myth of Er and the *Phaedo* afterlife myth in *Ennead* 3, and the myth of Er again in *Ennead* 4. In both places, Plotinus interprets the mythical details as though they were literally true, but he also expresses some doubt about Plato’s accounts. See *Enneads* 3.4.3 8-13 and 4.3.8 9-23. Proclus’ *Republic* commentary contains an account of the myth of Er that is extensive, to say the least. See Proclus, *Commentaire sur la République*, trans. A.J. Festugière, vol. 3 (Paris:
of these myths, and most importantly, their effects on readers, compels us to take them seriously and to try to learn what we can from them.

As mentioned in the opening of this study, the specific aim of this dissertation is to explain the ways in which Plato’s afterlife myths provide a psychagogic function by turning the whole souls of their readers. The central textual selections of this study include the closing myths of the Republic, the Phaedo, and the Gorgias. I will argue that through these myths of the afterlife, Plato employs psychagogy in order to lead his audience to intellectual conversion. I understand this conversion or turning process as Plato describes it in the Allegory of the Cave. (Republic 514a-518b) There, he illuminates for us a struggle in which not only our rationality, but our appetites and emotions, are involved. The struggle involves emerging from the darkness, narrowness, and slavery of deluded ignorance to the light and freedom of self-aware intelligence, largely with the help of a knowledgeable guide. I will argue that through emotionally-engaging afterlife myths, Plato leads his audience to intellectual conversion with vivid imagery that evokes a spectrum of reactions. Sometimes he perplexes us, other times he delights us, and sometimes he even shocks us. And the spectrum of emotions these myths evoke is not limited to this list.


5 Though the central textual selections of this study are the closing myths of these three texts (614b-621d, 107c-115a, 523a-527e, respectively), other passages that some might consider to be afterlife myths will also be discussed. They include Apology 40d-41b, Laws 903a-905c, Meno 81a-e, Phaedrus 244a-257d, Theatetus 176a-177b, and Timaeus 41a-44c.

I will discuss a specific conception of “Platonic myths of the afterlife” later in this section, and I will define “turning the whole soul” throughout the latter half of this chapter. For our present purposes, we should understand the “turning of the whole soul” as a type of psychagogy that leads the soul to intellectual transformation or conversion—an educational experience that involves a series of epiphanies, resulting in the soul’s full initiation into a life focused primarily on intellectual, rather than physical realities.
Also, as I will explain, the afterlife myths provoke intellectual journeys that mirror the trials and rewards from the cave to the light outside.

Later in this chapter, I examine Plato’s description of the crucial junctures, or turns, of the tortuous journey out of the cave, and then, in the subsequent chapters, I turn to the myths of the afterlife to examine the ways Plato urges and provokes our whole souls as we struggle on our journeys. In the remainder of this section of chapter 1, I provide some background information necessary to understanding my project and its purpose, such as previous scholarship on the eschatological myths of Plato, including its lacunae, as well as the factors that motivated my interest in the psychagogy of the afterlife myths.

1.1.1.2 Why Does Plato Write Myths? Different Approaches in Scholarship

Plato’s myths of the afterlife have inspired a wide range of interpretations, including many attempts to explain Plato’s very choice to use myth at all. Scholarship on Platonic myth diverges on this issue in the following way: Some scholars argue that the function of Plato’s myths is not in line with the capabilities of reason, while others argue that the role of Platonic myth is in line with reason. My own approach aligns itself with the latter view, that Plato matches the functions of myth to the abilities and projects of reason. From the former group, I

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6 Most 19th and early 20th scholarship on Plato’s myths falls into this approach. J. A. Stewart is an interesting figure in this group, as he sees Platonic myth as both sub-rational, in its use of emotion or feeling, and supra-rational, in that it functions or points beyond the capabilities of reason. See Stewart, The Myths of Plato, 2nd ed. (London: Centaur Press, 1960). E. R. Dodds is also a thinker of interest in this approach, since he sees Platonic myth as sub or pre-rational, but does not dismiss it as a subject of mere amusement, in the way that many scholars did during the 19th century and before. See Dodds, “Plato and the Irrational,” Journal of Hellenic Studies 65 (1945): 16-25.

will mostly use scholarship that focuses on the emotional function of the myths. If Plato uses the afterlife myths for purposes similar to those of rational inquiry, then the question remains: why does he write myths at all? As stated, I will argue that the afterlife myths function to turn or convert their readers’ whole souls, and we will begin to see exactly what that means shortly.

1.1.1.3 What is Platonic Psychagogy?

I understand psychagogy, or ψυχαγωγία, based on (1) its explicit, general meaning in the *Phaedrus*, as a winning or leading of souls (261a, 271d), and (2) what I take to be its implicit, detailed explanation in the aforementioned Allegory. By focusing on the former, the current section serves as an introduction to understanding Platonic psychagogy.

Socrates asks “Is rhetoric (ῥητορική) not, as a whole, the craft (τέχνη) of leading the soul (ψυχαγωγία) through speech?” *(Phaedrus* 261a-8) Literally, ψυχαγωγία means directing the soul. Here in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates suggests a connection between psychagogy and rhetoric.

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9 It is worth noting here that Marina McCoy understands psychagogy as “the leading of souls toward the forms.” My explanation of psychagogy below is in line with her view. See McCoy, *Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 167.

10 Other ancient Greeks also referred to this word as amusement or gratification, and some used it in the same sense Plato does, as the winning or leading of souls. *Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed., s.v. “ψυχαγωγία,” by H.G. Liddell and R. Scott.

Elizabeth Asmis provides some helpful additional context, explaining that Aristophanes (Birds 1555) speaks of ψυχαγωγία as Socrates conjuring souls—meaning both alluring and beguiling them. Isocrates (Evagoras 10) talks about it as a charm effect (in line with one sense of the dictionary definition above). In the *Laws* (909b), Plato uses the word in a sense very similar to that of Aristophanes above, as beguiling the living. In the *Timaeus* (71a), Plato uses the word as “beguilement of the desiring part of the soul by means of images.” See Elizabeth Asmis, “‘Psychagogia’ in Plato’s ‘Phaedrus’,” *Illinois Classical Studies* 11 (1986): 156. This last sense, from the *Timaeus*,
with the latter defined as the art of leading souls by means of speech. Furthermore, this endeavor is only successful, Socrates implies in the following lines, if its practitioner employs philosophy, and specifically dialectic. Socrates states that the rhetor or psychagogue leads his subjects “incrementally (συμικρόν) through similarities (διὰ τῶν όμοιοτήτων) away from (ἀπό) that which is (τὸ δῶντος) on each occasion (ἐκάστοτε) contrariwise (ἐπὶ τούναντίον)” (262b6-7), and without truly knowing what is the case, this endeavor would fail. (262b) Socrates explicitly identifies this knowledge needed for psychagogy as dialectic (διαλεκτικούς, 266c1) or philosophy (φιλοσοφήση, 261a4). Above, it is clear that this dialectical process leads the subject away (ἀπό) from what is, but why not lead the subject toward what is? Here, psychagogoy seems to be a reversal of the dialectical truth-seeking process by a practitioner who has knowledge of what really is. Socrates even adds that he may have been inspired by the Muses to “toy with his audience and mislead them.” (262d1-2) This is not to imply though that Socrates has or does not have knowledge of what is.

Is psychagogy, in Plato’s account, simply a tool for deception, given this reverse practice of dialectic, or is Plato perhaps here describing a negative side of psychagogy that ultimately has a positive outcome? The context of the above remarks lends credibility to the latter suggestion because the Phaedrus contains several examples of ways in which we might be more successful at reaching the truth as a result of first pursuing that which is false in comparison:

could complement the meaning of psychagogy for which I am arguing (leading to the true by way of the false) quite well, if Asmis’ assessment is correct.

12 Socrates also uses ψυχαγωγία to indicate the leading or directing of souls by means of speech at 271c10.

13 All translations of Plato’s Phaedrus are by Alexander Nehemas and Paul Woodruff, taken from Cooper, unless otherwise noted. See Plato. Complete Works, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).
(1) Socrates recants his first speech (237a-241d) in elaborate fashion (242b-244a, 257a-b), resulting in the second speech (244a-257b), which Phaedrus considers to be superior to the first (257c).

(2) The description of the charioteer’s erotic experience of the boy proceeds quickly from its detailed depiction of the temptations of sex to recollection of the real. (253e-254b)

(3) The lover’s erotic temptation, when overcome successfully, leads to a life of philosophy. (255e-256a)

Perhaps being toyed with and misled in this way can lead one to the truth, whereas other forms of misleading psychagogy, possibly those that are less artful or philosophical, do not yield this positive outcome. Perhaps Plato is suggesting that the one who is skillfully directed away from what is ultimately finds what is for himself.

Some clarification may lie in Socrates’ description of a sort of shortcut to artful soul-leading. He explains that anyone who wants to direct souls needs to know how many kinds of souls exist as well as all of the kinds of speeches that best convince each type of soul. (271d-272a) He and Phaedrus agree on the obvious, that it is quite arduous to practice psychagogy correctly (272b), after which Socrates says “And that’s why we must turn all our arguments every which way and try to find some easier and shorter route to the art: we don’t want to follow a long, rough path for no good reason when we can choose a short smooth one instead” (272b7-c2). This short smooth path, which he introduces as “the wolf’s side of the story” (272c10-11), involves pursuing what is “likely” (εἰκός, 272e1). “The whole art consists in cleaving to that throughout your speech,” says Socrates (272e5-273a1). He and Phaedrus agree that the likely is “what is accepted by the crowd” (273a7-b1). Socrates then gives an example of the way in which this technique may result in a ridiculous outcome in a court of law, where a weak,
tenacious man beats up and robs a strong man. The strong one will not admit to cowardice, and so, he invents a lie, in response to which the weak man can simply ask how a small man like him could beat up someone so big. (273b-c) Clearly, the weak, guilty man would go free because of the way in which both men were unwilling to challenge the expectations of the many. This outcome undermines the very purpose of a court of law and makes a mockery of it. Socrates follows this by pointing out that a sensible man will make the laborious effort needed in order to speak and act in a way that pleases the gods, “his masters” (δεσπόταις, 274a1), rather than in a way that pleases his “fellow slaves” (ὁ µοδούλοις, 273e9). In summary, Socrates points out a shortcut, which involves essentially leading one’s audience by using the false as a guide, in the form of the likely or crowd-pleasing, and then Socrates immediately recants that shortcut because he reduces it to absurdity with his court of law example. This shortcut to effective psychagogy results in an absurd outcome because its touchstone or standard is lies and deception, not because it leads its audience to the false. This shortcut is a world away from leading one’s audience away from what is, or toying with them, while having knowledge of the truth and using the truth as a guide.

In their consideration of the value of writing, Socrates and Phaedrus agree that the writer who deserves praise is the one who thinks that a written discourse can at most be a source of great amusement and a reminder to those who already know about the topic. (277e-278a) Socrates adds that anyone who writes speeches, poetry, or political documents and (1) has composed them with “knowledge of the truth” (278c5), (2) can defend his writing when it is challenged, and (3) can make the argument that their own writing is almost worthless, is not worthy of being called wise, but rather, is a philosopher or lover of wisdom. (278c-d)
Clearly then, one who takes the psychagogical high road and who does not want to lead souls by crowd-pleasing, but rather by truth-seeking ought to consider seriously these guidelines for praiseworthy writing. I will show in the central chapters that Plato’s afterlife myth psychagogy does indeed satisfy these criteria. The first two rules for good writing are straightforward ways to avoid sophistry, but what about the third criterion (knowing that one’s work is of relatively little worth)? Perhaps the one who knows that his psychagogy is of little worth, whether spoken or written, is all too familiar with the fact that his efforts are inevitably limited to playing with the less true to lead to the more true. As a result, these efforts unavoidably pale in comparison to the truth in pure form. Socrates corroborates this interpretation when he refers to his conversation with Phaedrus as “playful amusement regarding discourse.” (278b7) As I expound in my central chapters upon the breadth and artistry of Plato’s soul-leading, I will keep this third guideline in mind in order to avoid over-stating his achievements.

Since the soul-leading depicted in the Allegory of the Cave is central to this study, I ask: Can one understand the account of psychagogy in the Cave allegory to complement this account from the Phaedrus, or does the Allegory present an account that is best considered independently? My interpretation will point to the former option, and it will do so by considering the Allegory of the Cave in the context of the Republic, just as I have understood the discussion of psychagogy in the Phaedrus within the context of that dialogue. In my treatment of the allegory, we will see that the Republic distinguishes Platonic psychagogy as an art that ultimately

Asmis argues that rhetoric as psychagogy is the unifying theme of the Phaedrus. In her explanation of Plato’s new conception of psychagogy, she emphasizes the knowledge one needs to practice this rhetorical art well, as well as the self-knowledge toward which one must lead one’s subject. She places a secondary emphasis on the fact that Platonic psychagogy involves leading to the true by way of the false. Asmis explains that the whole dialogue moves from pseudo-rhetoric to real rhetoric, and she says, “Like the pseudo-rhetorician, Socrates moves from one position to its opposite, but unlike the pseudo-rhetorician, he guides the listener from falsehood to truth.” See Asmis, 154-168.
leads others toward the true by way of that which is less true, or relatively false, with knowledge of the true as its touchstone or guiding principle.\textsuperscript{16} However, Plato does not offer an explicit definition of psychagogy in the \textit{Republic}, as he does in the \textit{Phaedrus}. As such, the \textit{Phaedrus} serves as a helpful starting point for our understanding of this concept. Also, Plato suggests guidelines for good psychagogy in the \textit{Phaedrus} that will prove not only complementary to those we find in the allegory, but very useful for this study. If any obscurity remains about soul-leading, by examining the psychagogy of the myths of the afterlife, the way in which partial truths have a role in leading souls toward complete truth will become even clearer. But first, we will get some help from Ilsetraut Hadot’s expertise on this topic.

Hadot’s work comparing and contrasting the psychagogy or “\textit{Seelenleitung}” of the sophists with that of Plato and Socrates bears out the aforementioned understanding of Platonic psychagogy.\textsuperscript{17} She explains that the sophists (especially Gorgias, followed by Isocrates) relied on public opinion as their touchstone for truth, while Plato and Socrates, highly critical of this, demanded an alternate test for truth.\textsuperscript{18} As my portrayal of Platonic psychagogy unfolds, it will become clear that his particular brand of soul-leading has an elaborate metaphysical foundation. I will illustrate, therefore, that Platonic psychagogy is well-grounded for leading its subjects to the truth of self-knowledge and knowledge about reality.\textsuperscript{19}

Hadot also accounts for the force and effectiveness of Platonic psychagogy by examining its roots. Referring to fables of the sort we first find in Hesiod, Hadot explains that fantasy

\textsuperscript{16} Although my conception of Platonic psychagogy explains certain basic continuities between the accounts in the \textit{Phaedrus} and the \textit{Republic}, I appreciate the fact that there are likely to be some differences in these accounts based on the needs of their different contexts.

\textsuperscript{17} Hadot, \textit{Seneca und die Griechisch-Römische Tradition der Seelenleitung} (Berlin: DeGruyter, 1969).

\textsuperscript{18} Hadot, 22. All translations from French and German are my own, unless otherwise noted.

\textsuperscript{19} I will make the case for this by means of my analysis of \textit{Republic} 7, specifically the Divided Line and the Allegory of the Cave. Though it may prove interesting to attempt to establish this claim in the face of current epistemology, this endeavor would take us too far afield and must remain for future study.
disguises moral principles in such a way that they penetrate verses and sentences in layers of consciousness much deeper than those that typify daily life. In this way, adds Hadot, these fables operate not only on reason, but also evoke emotion. Hadot points out that the simultaneous engagement of emotions and reason lies at the foundation of Seelenleitung. Regarding the tools used for these purposes, Hadot mentions three in particular: “imitation, suggestion, (and) sympathy,” which modern as well as ancient psychagogues have employed.

Commenting specifically on Platonic psychagogy, Hadot explains that in wandering about the many inner windings of a Platonic dialogue, one may investigate and find true knowledge. She adds that one may speak of certain knowledge only if one has suffered through the task of first considering many other possibilities. Hadot’s words here may remind us of Socrates’ description of psychagogy in the Phaedrus, where soul-leading, when done artfully by one who knows the truth in its fullness, mainly involves directing others toward what is by first leading them toward partial truths. One must suffer and strain through the repeated realizations that what one thought was the real truth actually is not, in such a way that one is ultimately led to what is real and true. Concluding her remarks on Platonic psychagogy, Hadot says that the Platonic dialogue both is itself a way and also shows a way for the soul to progress toward the good. In the upcoming investigation of the myths of the afterlife, I will confirm Hadot’s observation by pointing out not only that these myths can lead readers to the good, but that they can provide a guide or roadmap of sorts for leading others skillfully toward the light of truth.

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20 Hadot, 16.
21 Ibid., 20. I will expand on and explain this list later, when describing the approaches with which the Platonic myths of the afterlife engage in their psychagogic, soul-turning function. When Hadot explains these characteristics, she distinguishes between modern and ancient psychagogues by claiming that modern psychagy focuses intensely on the individual, while ancient psychagogy exhibits the opposite extreme. Ibid., 27.
22 Ibid., 36.
23 Ibid., 37.
1.1.1.4 An Overview of the Features with Which the Afterlife Myths Function

It will prove useful to explain some of the characteristics common to the myths of the afterlife:

(1) Imagery that is compelling or suggestive in its depiction of the traditional, religious or sacred, mysterious, and/or violent

(2) Philosophical content that gains its persuasive force from (a) authoritative tellers, and (b) the support it receives from the arguments of its dialogue

(3) Multivalence or polysemy

(4) An overall function within their dialogues that amounts to a consummation of previous considerations

All three of the afterlife myths central to this study exhibit traditional, mysterious, and violent imagery (1). In many cases, more than one of these descriptors applies to a single image. With regard to authoritative tellers (2), while the character of Socrates, obviously a well-regarded authority figure among Plato and his readers, is the main voice for each of the myths I am treating, in each instance, Socrates notes that other sources conveyed to him elements of his tale. These other sources, despite the vagueness surrounding them, bear authoritative force, as does Socrates. The myths’ multivalence (3), or their ability to convey several meanings at once,

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24 For instance, each of the three myths includes an elaborate depiction of the underworld, which one may understand as traditional, religious, and mysterious. See Republic 614b-616a, Phaedo 107c-108c, 111d-114b, Gorgias 523b-524a, 525a-526c. Each also includes violent depictions of punishment, for example, Republic 615e-616a, Phaedo 113a-114b, and Gorgias 525c-d.

25 He says that a soldier named Er told him the tale recounted in the myth of Er at the end of the Republic, but Socrates does not say to whom Er gave the account, only that it was in Pamphylia. See Republic 614b. Socrates simply refers to aspects of the Phaedo afterlife myth as things that they (he and the interlocutors) have been told. See Phaedo 107c-d. He also mentions that holy rites and customs inspire the myth too. See Phaedo 108a. With regard to the account of the earth, Socrates says that someone in particular has convinced him of it. See Phaedo 108c. Socrates explicitly mentions Homer as the source of one element of the Gorgias afterlife myth (525d), while other elements of the myth implicitly draw inspiration from Homer and Hesiod, which I will explain further in chapter 4. See Gorgias 526b-c.
and hence, to function in multiple ways, largely results from figurative, rather than literal interpretations of the imagery in the myths. The afterlife myths are consummations in their dialogues in that they bring together and add to previous conversations in climactic ways. This consummatory function largely results from features 1-3 above, but other factors are involved as well, such as the way Plato situates each myth at the end of a dialogue.

Since the polysemous nature of the myths hinges on the viability of multiple interpretations of each, and since chapters 2-4 will each include both literal and non-literal readings of the Republic, Phaedo, and Gorgias myths of judgment, I will briefly explain some background to my approach to these readings here. I will argue that whereas a literal understanding of the fearful prospect of afterlife punishments provokes the belief that one ought to pursue a rational, virtuous life in order to avoid harm, a figurative interpretation of these penalties opens a whole horizon of possible discussions about the cognitive achievement of the tripartite soul. In chapters 2-4, the non-literal readings of afterlife punishments portray these penalties as detailed depictions of the self-inflicted harm in this life that comes with the constant pursuit of immediate physical gratification. Some of these punishments include long-term bodily harm, and the enslavement of one’s rational capacity to the whims of bodily perception and desires. The investigation will also understand the literal and metaphorical interpretations of this study as complementary rather than mutually exclusive. This is important, because the co-viability of both types of readings adds to both the myths’ multivalence and, in turn, the myths’ ability to reach readers in a variety of ways.

Why are figurative readings of the afterlife myths different from literal readings? Why pursue non-literal readings at all? In this dissertation, figurative readings will enable the myths to

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26 For my explanation of this study’s approach to literal and non-literal readings, see the paragraph after next in this section.
engage readers in a wider array of philosophical discussions than literal readings can. This is due in large part to the ability of imagery, when interpreted metaphorically, to indicate multiple meanings at once. For example, one of the notable philosophical discussions in which allegorical readings can engage is the question of whether or not the content of the afterlife myths amounts to consequentialism. Whereas figurative readings allow the possibility of non-consequentialism to emerge, literal readings of the myths, as I will argue, simply cannot avoid the problem of consequentialism because of their necessarily narrow interpretation. I will also argue that the multivalence of those mythical details that are interpreted figuratively enables the reader to engage in more of the myth’s emotions than when one interprets details literally. This more robust emotional experience contributes to a richer intellectual experience of the myth, as I will argue in the chapters that follow.27

A note on terminology: this inquiry uses the terms “metaphorical,” “allegorical,” and “figurative” interchangeably. I will avoid using the label “symbolic” synonymously with these

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27 Below, I simply list some notable metaphorical readings, and I include some explanation about the literal readings in order to do justice to the scholarship mentioned. Though literal readings are generally narrower than metaphorical interpretations, all of the sources I mention have valuable insights to offer, and I hope my brief explanations bear that out.

Notable examples of those arguing for metaphorical interpretations include:

Notable examples of those arguing for literal interpretations include:
On the *Phaedo* afterlife myth: As noted above, Aristotle’s interpretation of this myth is literal and critical.
On the *Gorgias* afterlife myth: Dodds and Hitchcock support literal readings. See E. R. Dodds, *Plato: Gorgias* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959, 1990), 372 -386; and Hitchcock, 120- 139. Both qualify their readings by explaining that the reader is not to understand every mythical detail as though its literal truth-value were set in stone. As a result, each of the two readings hones in on seeing certain details literally, rather than trying to portray a viable literal interpretation of the entire myth. Dodds first explains the Pythagorean influence on the myth by briefly defending the view that Plato implies the truth of reincarnation. See Dodds, 375. Dodds later defends the presence of reincarnation as a crucial component to making sense of the remedial nature of afterlife punishment. He sees the latter as clearly implied in the myth. See Dodds, 380-81. Hitchcock claims that the idea that there is life after death is a kernel of truth that Plato uses to reinforce arguments from the preceding dialogue. Hitchcock explains that Plato surrounds this core truth with imaginative conjecture in the myth in order to give the truth emotional force. See Hitchcock, 130, 138.
other names, for the following reason: As will become clear in each chapter analysis, the
metaphorical readings of this study do not always imply the sort of symbolism typical of many
figurative readings. For instance, in certain cases, this inquiry interprets details as reminders of
specific concepts, rather than as symbols for these ideas. The implied story about the Titans in
the *Meno* account of recollection, for instance, serves as a reminder of our appetitive tendencies,
but does not necessarily symbolize those tendencies. I do argue, however, that the various realms
of the earth in the *Phaedo* afterlife myth symbolize the different levels of cognition along the
Divided Line.\(^{28}\)

The chapters that follow will proceed by keeping in mind the limitations of writing noted
in the *Phaedrus*, and the possibility that the features of the afterlife myths endeavor to overcome
these limitations. In his recounting of the story of Thamus and Theuth, Socrates explains that
Theuth, the father of writing, did not realize, according to Thamus, that writing encourages
forgetfulness, since it merely reminds but does not help one to remember. Also, and perhaps
more devastating, Thamus explains, according to Socrates, that the written word merely provides
students with the appearance of wisdom, enabling them to imagine that they know a great deal
when they actually know nothing (*Phaedrus* 275a-b). The idea that when we think we know
something, we actually know nothing, is a clear echo of the Socrates of the *Apology*. (*Apology*
21c-d, 22a, and 22c-23b) Furthermore, these criticisms of writing seem to speak the harsh truth
that if we rely on written documents too heavily, we will store less in our memories. Also,
internalizing information by reading written words does not amount to true knowledge. In the
account of the Cave discussed later in this chapter, we witness a process of learning or coming to

\(^{28}\) For further details about the story of the Titans and other aspects of the *Meno*’s mythical account of recollection, see chapter 5. For further details about the various realms of the Earth and other aspects of the *Phaedo* afterlife myth, see chapter 3.
know that is vastly different from the activity of gathering information. However, any teacher knows all too well that students wrongly think they have true knowledge of a topic after having read something that has been published about it. Furthermore, the *Phaedrus*’ explanation of the limitations of writing does not stop here. Comparing writing to painting, Socrates explains that if one asks a painting something, it remains silent, just like written words. He says that if one questions anything written because one wants to learn more, the writing simply signifies the same thing forever. Furthermore, every discourse reaches everyone indiscriminately, including those who lack the capability truly to understand it. (275d-e) Socrates concludes that a written discourse can at most be a source of great amusement and a reminder to those who already know about the topic. (277e-278a)

After considering the above critique of writing more thoroughly, it seems clear that for writing to be good, according to Plato’s *Phaedrus*, it not only needs to (1) be composed with knowledge of truth, (2) have the ability to be defended, and (3) know its limitations, but also to (4) be able to aid readers’ memory of its content, (5) signify more than one thing forever, such that it can anticipate and respond to questions, and (6) reach different audiences in a way that each can gain an understanding of the document in a way that is in line with the author’s intentions. This is quite a daunting task, and it is possible that one can add more criteria to this list after even closer reading of the dialogue. Despite the overwhelming set of criteria set forth for good writing, I will argue that Plato satisfies many of these in each myth of the afterlife. I will argue that they defend themselves through their interconnectedness with their respective dialogues as well as through their polysemy, and that they recognize their limitations by indicating the direction in which further study ought to proceed in order to continue the lines of discussion to which they allude. They not only remind readers of the content of the dialogues in
which Plato situates them, but they aid readers’ memory of conversational threads therein, as well as thoughts introduced in the afterlife myths themselves by making use of imagery as a mnemonic device and by inviting repeated reading. Finally, the myths’ multivalence not only enables them to signify multiple meanings in a way that anticipates and responds to questions, but it also allows the myths to reach a diverse audience in ways that match up with the interests and background knowledge that readers bring to their engagement with these myths. I will argue that by satisfying these criteria successfully, Plato’s myths of the afterlife engage in psychagogy with a high degree of effectiveness.

1.1.1.5 What is a Platonic Myth of the Afterlife?

The goal of this section is to arrive at an understanding of what we mean by “Platonic afterlife myth,” and thereby of its synonyms in Plato scholarship: “eschatological myth” and “myth of judgment.” Though these terms refer primarily to labels modern scholars use, rather than those Plato uses, my understanding attempts to delimit the afterlife myths in a way that is faithful to Plato. In attempting to distill the essential features of the eschatological myths, I will first explore the various conceptions of μῦθος and λόγος that scholars ascribe to Plato himself. I will provisionally conclude that μῦθος and λόγος are distinct in that the former generally describes passages that are less verifiable or demonstrable than the latter.29 The myths of afterlife, I will argue, are a category or type of Platonic myth that includes tales about the post-mortem judgment of the soul, and that exhibits a robust psychagogical effect, with the latter making use of the unique set of tools described above.

Attempts to account for Plato’s definitions of µῦθος and λόγος have taken many different forms. Recent scholarship widely agrees that ancient conceptions of these two terms substantially differ from the modern conception. Whereas moderns tend to see myth as fantastic invention, and thus divorced from prose that is more grounded in reality, ancient Greek understandings of µῦθος and λόγος do not bear out such a neat divide. 30 Among those who fall under the first category mentioned above, (scholars who see Platonic myth as not in line with reason), some say that Platonic myth is mere amusement, lacking philosophical import in contrast to λόγος, 31 and others argue that µῦθος is distinct from λόγος either because the former is preparatory for the latter, 32 or because the former is a foil for the latter when λόγος fails in some regard. 33 Many of the more recent conceptions of Platonic µῦθος and λόγος, especially those who fall into the second category mentioned above (those who see Platonic myth as in line with reason), see more of an overlap or intertwining between µῦθος and λόγος. 34

30 Kathryn Morgan notes that µῦθος and λόγος are “dynamic, not static categories.” Later, touching on an implication of the lack of distinction between the two in pre-philosophical ancient Greece, she explains that there was no mythology before philosophy, just as there was no criteria to judge whether poetry was false. See Morgan, Myth and Philosophy From the Presocratics to Plato (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 5, 22.
31 Kent Moors reports that Louis Couturat [De Platonics Mythis (Paris: Alcan, 1896)] argued for this view. See Moors, Platonic Myth: An Introductory Study (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1982), 4-5. G. W. F. Hegel says, “At times the excellence of Plato’s philosophy has been held to lie in his scientifically valueless myths.” See Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 44. The following may add some clari ty to this statement: Hegel says Greek mythology is “only an idle invention of fables,” though he notes that it might be credible that a deeper meaning lies beneath the surface of myths. This latter interpretation of myths, he says, may seek “inner rational meanings” and justify mythologies. See Hegel, Aesthetics, trans. T. M. Knox, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 309-311. Here, Hegel implies that superficially, myth is sub-philosophical and sub-rational, and maybe even on par with mere amusement, but that myth can be interpreted rationally if understood symbolically.
32 Dodds sees a clear divide between myth and philosophy as well as myth and reason, with the former preparing the way for philosophy and reason. See Dodds, “Plato and the Irrational,” 23-24.
33 Stewart explains that Plato’s telling of myths arouses and regulates “transcendental feeling,” which he sees as beyond the realm of science and its shortcomings in matters such as the soul’s immortality. See Stewart, 72-74.
34 Annas says that Platonic myth is not mere stories, and thus divided from λόγος. See Annas, “Plato’s Myths of Judgment,” 120. Sara Brill explains that myths do not abandon, but rather, criticize rational discourse. See Brill, “The Geography of Finitude: Myth and Earth in Plato’s Phaedo,” International Philosophical Quarterly 49 (2009): 5-23. C. J. Rowe explains that although myth is sometimes a foil in Plato, this is the exception rather than the rule. He adds that Platonic myth does not necessarily address the irrational in us, giving the example of the Phaedrus myth of the charioteer, which he says invites us to read below the surface. See Rowe, “The Charioteer and His Horses: An Example of Platonic Myth-Making,” in Plato’s Myths, ed. Catalin Partenie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 134-135. Finally, Sedley says that the Gorgias myth of judgment is filled with echoes of the
What sort of overlap may there be between the two? If there is one, why distinguish between μῦθος and λόγος at all? Finally, if it overlaps with λόγος, on what basis may one define Platonic μῦθος? Analyses of Brisson, Moors, and Morgan, three recent contributors to the μῦθος versus λόγος debate, will help to answer these questions.

Brisson maintains that myth, according to Plato, is unfalsifiable, as opposed to λόγος, and that the former produces belief rather than certainty. He adds that myths are incantations that Plato uses to influence opinions. This unfalsifiability pertains to the fantastic inventions that compose myths’ setting and cast of characters. Despite this, Brisson also explains the way in which Plato occasionally assimilates μῦθος and λόγος, during which Plato “reactivates” the ancient meaning of these words. Brisson writes that in Republic 2, 3, and 7, Plato explicitly labels myth as false, but that overall, Platonic myth is true because the criterion for truth is not correspondence to a referent but rather “agreement” with “discourse raised to the level of a norm,” such as Plato’s philosophical discourse. In this agreement, Platonic myth bears some resemblance to Platonic λόγος. Following Brisson, I understand the unfalsifiability of Platonic myth, then, to distinguish it from λόγος only on a superficial level, whereas I see the two as quite similar overall with regard to their essential content, which I will make clearer as I proceed.

Moors sees the myths of the Republic as integral to the arguments the dialogue advances, and he only regards as μῦθος that which Plato specifically labels as such. However, the fact preceding dialectic, with the myth serving as a sort of crescendo. See Sedley, “Myth, Punishment, and Politics in the Gorgias,” 52.
35 Brisson, 10-11.
36 Ibid., 78.
37 Ibid., 90. Here, Brisson notes that H. Fournier, Les Verbes “dire” en grec ancien: Exemple de conjugaison supplétive (Paris: Klincksieck, 1946) significantly influenced him with regard to this idea.
38 Ibid., 105-110.
that a character uses µῦθος as a label does not neatly indicate that Plato feels this way. Also, this
approach runs the risk of over-assimilating µῦθος and λόγος.

Moors discusses Republic 377a, which describes myths as false tales appropriate for
children, or devices whereby people begin to learn for the first time. On the other hand, Moors
explains how, in this very dialogue, myths comment on, embellish, interpret, and/or extend some
aspect of the philosophical conversation.40 Moors adds by discussing Plato’s myths in the
Republic as noble lies, abstractions of what philosophy pursues, as well as mnemonic devices.41
My analysis of the afterlife myths will support the view that Platonic myths can function in all of
these ways, often simultaneously. Overall, Moors sees myth as interconnected with, but distinct
from λόγος, in that the former is involved with the projects of the latter, but in such a way that
the former is at the service of the latter. I agree that µῦθος and λόγος are connected in that the
former may serve the latter, but as my interpretation of the afterlife myths will bear out, the latter
may also serve the former.

Commenting on what she calls the “honeyed cup” interpretation of myth, in which myth
makes philosophy more palatable while being separate from it, Morgan says that this view
ignores myth’s philosophical significance. This leads to her second possible understanding of
myth, in which it does have a philosophical role, by expressing what λόγος cannot. However,
she says that this view limits myth in seeing it as less grounded in a rational project and therefore
less capable of being philosophically fruitful.42 Then, commenting specifically on Platonic myth,
Morgan writes that myths can “culminate” an argument.43 Furthermore, with regard to
philosophical myth like Plato’s, Morgan says myth presents criticism of rational argument, with

40 Moors, 214-227.
41 Moors, 238, 246, 247.
42 Morgan, 3-4.
43 Ibid., 13. I agree with this assessment wholeheartedly and my interpretation will bear this out.
myth providing an “unsettling counterpoint” to philosophy and tempering the optimism of the latter. 44

In her observations about Plato’s Protagoras, Morgan explains that myth recapitulates aspects of Protagoras’ educational project. 45 She adds that there, myth “is designed to validate and obscure,” while λόγος develops the premises of μῦθος. 46 Here, she thinks the reader is to see that Protagoras’ use of myth deceives, while Plato’s points us toward and mirrors dialectical discussion. 47 Morgan also sees certain Platonic myths as serving a particular educational role, such as the myth of the metals in Republic 3. 48 However, she notes that that particular myth, a noble lie, is an example of “mythologizing rhetoric,” which she says does not characterize Platonic myth as a whole. 49 I follow Morgan in discerning one possible, minor role of Platonic myth as simple or seemingly non-philosophical rhetoric. We will see in chapters 2-4 that afterlife myths can serve in this capacity when read on a superficial level, and that this function can aid the turning of the whole soul, thus calling into question whether this sort of rhetoric is non-philosophical.

Many others also discern a particular pedagogical role that Platonic myth exhibits. 50 Morgan focuses on education through Platonic myth more generally and says that educational Platonic myth has an affinity for play. This echoes Smith’s conclusions about the central role of

44 Ibid., 17. On the contrary, I will show that myth can inspire hope and optimism.
45 Ibid., 137.
46 Ibid., 143-144.
48 414d-415c; Morgan, 163.
49 Ibid, 163.
play in the educational function of Platonic myth.\textsuperscript{51} In her concluding remarks, Morgan says that Plato uses myth in philosophical education because of its capacity to affect us emotionally.\textsuperscript{52} My central chapters will elaborate on both the playful and emotional aspects of myth, which will prove crucial to my claims about the psychagogy of the myths of judgment.

Morgan distinguishes philosophical myth as a type that appeals to the reasoning soul, and adds that this latter type of myth is “protreptic,” helping to turn people toward the philosophical life. However, she qualifies that it is not intended for those who are non-philosophers, like the intended audience of the myth of the metals.\textsuperscript{53} Morgan’s view about philosophical Greek myth as “protreptic” is similar to my perspective on the myths of the afterlife, except that in the systematic investigation that follows, I do not argue that Plato solely intends the afterlife myths for a certain audience or a certain aspect of the soul. Indeed, I see these myths as tailored to all three aspects of the soul, as well as multiple audiences with a wide range of philosophical backgrounds. My analyses in chapters 2-4 will point to the possibility that the intended audience is not formed only by those who are experienced in the life of philosophy, but the uninitiated, as well as everyone in between.

My interpretation of the myths of the afterlife will confirm that they are far from mere amusement, and are also not simply a foil for the failures of reason. I will argue this despite the fact that on the surface, their content is less verifiable than many of the arguments and speeches of their dialogues, and hence the fact that they might appear completely to abandon and/or replace the latter. One common understanding of Platonic myth that is in line with my view, and that plays a major role in my reading of the afterlife myths, is that of myth as likely account, or

\textsuperscript{51} Morgan 163-173. Smith, “Plato’s Use of Myth in the Education of the Philosophic Man.”
\textsuperscript{52} Morgan, 286.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 164.
εἰκὼς λόγος. This is the way in which Timaeus describes the account of the world (Timaeus 29b), and so, this understanding of myth is often associated with that dialogue. I see Plato’s afterlife myths, in their lack of verifiability, as merely likely, but in their intertwinment with λόγοι, as indeed worthy of being called accounts. Also, I see the afterlife myths as distinct from the less mythical speeches and exchanges of their dialogues in the sense that the latter need the particular psychagogical function of the eschatological myths. This is not to say that other elements of these dialogues do not function similarly. Other parts or threads of each dialogue in question, as well as of every other Platonic text, may indeed turn the whole souls of their readers, but the range and power of the features with which the afterlife myths function deserve special attention, as this project will show.

The question then remains: What is a Platonic myth of the afterlife? An obvious way to distinguish this type of myth is to describe it as a tale about the soul’s afterlife judgment. As a tale, its details are unverifiable, at least on the surface, and so it fits our provisional way of distinguishing μῦθος from λόγος. By denoting these myths as portrayals of the soul’s judgment in the netherworld, we can distinguish them from the vast majority of passages in the dialogues, but some vagueness remains. For instance, one could describe Socrates’ final words at his trial, as depicted in the Apology, as a tale about the soul’s afterlife judgment, but these words also strike the reader as a set of remarks that may fall short of a proper tale. (Apology 40d-41b) Also difficult to label is a passage in the Theatetus, where there is mention of afterlife punishment in the context of a brief sort of tale, the function of which is to aid a larger explanation of the consequences for wrongdoing. (Theatetus 176a-177b) If we embark on an investigation of these passages, and the other quasi-eschatological myths,\(^{54}\) which endeavors to distinguish them either

\(^{54}\) Laws 903a-905c, Meno 81a-e, Phaedrus 244a-257d, and Timaeus 41a-44c
as tales of the soul’s afterlife judgment or not, we delve into a conversation about what is and what is not a tale, simply to define the parameters of a label given to an ambiguous set of passages in Plato. Rather than going down this road, I will focus my efforts on attempting to define the myths of judgment in a more substantial way, examining each candidate for inclusion carefully, and identifying common thematic features. In the particular approach I will take, it will become clear that one may conceive of the eschatological myths both superficially or incompletely as tales of the soul’s afterlife judgment, and on a deeper, more substantial level, as passages that function as culminations of their dialogues, with their psychagogical effect as a key component of this function, and with the set of features described above as constituting an important part of that effect.55

I am not the first to investigate one or more myths of the afterlife and offer a substantive conception of this category of texts. Edelstein is one who famously wrote about this topic. He refers to the three main myths of this study, as well as the second speech of the Phaedrus (244a-257d), as “ethical myths,” since they discuss the soul’s fate before and after life in a way that bears more on ethics, than metaphysics or science.56 He notes that these myths complete their dialogue’s arguments, as well as stimulate passions, such as hope and fear. Furthermore, Edelstein says that this type of myth is directed toward the emotional aspect of the soul, and that

55 One may wonder if drawing a distinction between myth and allegory may help to define the myths of the afterlife. For instance, if Platonic myths are tales that include aspects of what most would consider traditional Greek mythology, whereas Platonic allegories are tales that do not include such mythology, then Platonic myths of the afterlife are tales that include traditional mythology about the soul’s judgment in the afterlife. Though this may be a viable way of defining the afterlife myths, the process involved in defending this definition must take into account all Platonic myth and allegory, in relation to traditional Greek myth. Since this is tempting, but beyond the scope of my study, the language I use will reflect the aforementioned distinction between Platonic myth and allegory, but I will not venture a defense of this language. Since the essential function of this dissertation is to explain the psychagogy of the myths of the afterlife, defining the myths of the afterlife by means of this function emerges organically from this project. However, even my attempt to do this must be limited in the following way: I will account for the functions of the afterlife myths in a way that shows how the former stand out as psychagogically powerful compared to, or in the context of, the dialogues in which they occur.
56 Edelstein, 472-473.
its effects heighten when one repeats the myth.57 Another category of Platonic myth, which includes accounts of creation or history, like those in the *Timaeus*, *Critias*, and *Statesman*, is a “pastime of the intellect,” rather than of the emotional soul, according to Edelstein.58 Others, such as Hitchcock, also see myths of the afterlife as defined by their capacity to evoke emotion.59 Although this study will confirm that an eschatological myth’s emotional component is essential to its definition, what follows will clarify that it is actually a particular brand of psychagogy that defines the substance of the myths of the afterlife, and that emotion is a critical aspect of this. This psychagogical function involves bringing the soul to new heights of fulfillment in its journey out of the cave.60 This function mainly takes place through dialogue, with the rational-emotional function of the afterlife myths consummating the soul’s journey. The soul is able to get what it came for—that which is both a summit and a commencement of the dialogical journey—through the myths of judgment. Far from diminishing the importance of the preceding dialogue, the eschatological myth ends the former in the way most suitable to Plato’s approach: by indicating the dialogue’s highlights or achievements, while also pointing toward further inquiry, all while appealing to the whole soul of the reader.

1.1.2 The Motivation, Purpose, and Originality of this Study

Though I have already begun to touch on what is driving this study, this topic deserves more clarity, and hence, more attention. My approach is original in its systematic investigation of the ways in which the afterlife myths provoke intellectual conversion by turning the whole

57 Ibid., 472-474.
58 Ibid., 474.
59 Hitchcock, 100-101, 137-138
60 In my portrayal of this psychagogy, I hope to show that the myths of the afterlife have the potential to help raise their readers not only to new heights of knowledge, and hence a better way of life, but also to new heights of Being. In so doing, contrary to Edelstein, I will portray these myths as not only epistemological and ethical, but as metaphysical.
soul of the reader. The *Republic* develops a complex epistemology and psychology, in which true learning amounts to a conversion experience; a turning around of the whole soul (ὅλῃ ψυχῇ, 518c8)—that is, of its appetitive, spirited, and rational aspects—from the level of sensible experience to the realm of universal truth (*Republic* 518b-d). While reason leads this journey and beholds the truth, the lower aspects play key supporting roles and continuously improve their ability to aid the projects of rationality as the journey progresses. The rich imagery and intricate structure of Plato’s myths seem to engage the soul in its three-fold composition and thus to facilitate our learning by addressing these three aspects simultaneously. In other words, while the philosophical content of the myths engages reason, the literary details, some of which are traditional, and some of which are Plato’s imaginative inventions or adaptations, engage a spectrum of our emotions with the result that the myths bring the whole soul under their spell or charm. This simultaneous effect gives the afterlife myths unique psychagogic power to lead Plato’s readers fully to internalize (1) the philosophical message the myths convey and (2) the message of their respective dialogues, since the former almost always mirror the latter.\(^6\) I will, therefore, explore the afterlife myths through the lens of the *Republic* in order to shed light on the intricacies of Plato’s attempts to plant the seeds of conversion in the soul of the reader. In so doing, I intend to contribute to a clearer understanding of the nature and function of these intriguing myths.

Current scholarship lacks a systematic study explaining how Plato uses the myths of the afterlife to turn the whole soul of the reader; in fact, we even lack a book-length treatise solely devoted to investigating the myths of the afterlife philosophically. This dissertation, then, will provide both such a book-length study and an account of the psychagogic function of Plato’s

\(^6\) This is not to say that the myths or the dialogues promote doctrines in a straightforward or unquestioning way. Their messages or teachings are often expressed tentatively.
myths of the afterlife, by converging lines of investigation about Platonic myth, epistemology, and psychology.

The inquiry will proceed by close textual analysis of the relevant dialogues and will critically engage secondary literature. This dissertation focuses on the closing myths of the Republic, Phaedo, and Gorgias because, as I will argue, they are Platonic myths of the afterlife in the clearest sense. Their distinctive character has a great deal to do with their prominent positioning at the end of their dialogues, and as such, as completions of the various dialogical threads that precede them. Accordingly, I will devote a chapter to each of these three myths. This investigation also will attend to six other mythical passages that exhibit varying degrees of similarity to the three myths explored in depth, and which, therefore, merit some consideration alongside them.  

1.2 The Turning of the Whole Soul

1.2.1 Introduction

This section will provide the reader with an understanding of the turning of the whole soul according to Plato’s Republic. I will first explain what the whole soul is according to this well-known text, and in order to do this thoroughly, I will turn to some basic distinctions about the three aspects of the soul in Republic 4, before turning to more complex qualifiers about these aspects in the later books. Republic 4 describes the soul’s capacities as three-fold: rational (λογιστικόν, 439d), spirited (θυμοῦ, 439e), and appetitive (ἐπιθυμητικός, 442a). The rational

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62 As I mentioned above, the six, which I will discuss in the penultimate chapter, are Apology 40d-41b, Laws 903a-905c, Meno 81a-e, Phaedrus 244a-257d, Theaetus 176a-177b, and Timaeus 41a-44c.
63 The Republic also refers to the appetitive part as ἄλογαστον (439d7). Thus, the appetites’ names reflect their nature as both irrational and desiring.
All Greek references to the Republic are to Slings’ Oxford edition.
aspect reasons and oversees, the spirited experiences passions like anger, and the appetitive
pursues bodily desires. (434d-444c) Thus, Republic 4 begins to shed light on causes of the soul’s
certainty and harmony. Republic 6, 8, and 9 introduce further details about the three aspects of
the soul. The dissertation will explain passages from these later books, in large part by relating
them to book 4. One function of this explanation is to shed light on what the whole soul is in a
way that provides the necessary background information for the argument that it is not accurate
to describe the soul as divided strictly into sections or faculties, but rather, that one should
describe the three as aspects or characters that overlap one another considerably, and that
therefore have the capacity to influence each other. The language I use to refer to the soul may
sometimes seem not to reflect this conception of it, for instance, when I refer to one of the three
aspects as a “part,” or when I refer to the three-fold soul as “tripartite.” On these occasions, I am
merely using the accepted terminology for the sake of its convenience and fluidity. Oftentimes, I
will refer to the three as εἴδη, as Plato sometimes does. The ultimate function of this entire
section is to “set the stage” or lay out the necessary groundwork for explaining the many ways in
which the myths of the afterlife affect the soul. The bulk of this section will take place as I
explain the soul’s turning and the Allegory of the Cave, after which I will conclude with further
explanation of the way in which the soul’s three characters interact. This last sub-section will
take into consideration the way in which the early and later treatments of the soul in the
Republic, as well as the Allegory, enable us to understand the soul’s three-fold interplay and
progression towards or away from truth.

64 Though there are a few instances of Plato referring to the three as parts (μέρες, for instance at 442c5), he also
refers to them as kinds or forms, as well as characters or dispositions (see for instance εἴδη, 435e2 and ἡθη, 435e2,
respectively). I will comment more extensively on Plato’s language for soul-parts later in this section.
1.2.2 What is the Whole Soul According to Plato’s *Republic*?

1.2.2.1 *Republic* 4: The Basic Distinctions (431b-443e)

Socrates draws an explicit parallel between the three aspects of the city he has been describing and the three characters of the soul. (434d-435c) He points out that it will be very difficult to get an accurate answer about these three aspects, and he suggests that he and his interlocutors pursue an answer that conforms to the standard of their previous conversation. (435c-d) This is worth noting because, as subsequent sections of this study will show, the basic tripartite division becomes much more detailed and complex as the interlocutors progress. The three classes of the city are: (1) the largest class characterized by its multifarious desires and apparent freedom (431b-c), (2) the soldier class, defined by courage, or its ability to preserve its belief about what ought to be feared (429b-d, 431e, 434b), even in the face of “pains, pleasures, desires or fears”\(^\text{65}\) (429c9-d1), and (3) the smallest class, that of the rulers, which is defined by its wisdom and education, as well as its superior desires (428e-429a, 431c-e).\(^\text{66}\) This remark about the superior desires of the ruling class is a foretaste of later discussions about the reasoning character of the soul.

Before even drawing the above three-fold parallel, and also before clearly defining how exactly these three capacities exist in the soul, Socrates explains a common expression about moderation, which he identifies as ridiculous. He says the expression endeavors to indicate that there is a better and worse part in each person’s soul, and that when one is said to be self-controlled, the better part is in control, and the person is “master of himself” (431a6). When the worse part is in control, the person is referred to as “self-defeated or licentious” (431b1-2).

\(^{65}\) All translations of the *Republic* are by G. M. A. Grube, taken from Cooper, unless otherwise noted.

\(^{66}\) Since some refer to the ruling class as guardians while others refer to the soldier class as guardians, I will not use that label, in order to avoid confusion. I will henceforth refer to the soldier class as such, or as the auxiliaries, while I will refer to the rulers as such, or as philosophers, or as philosopher-kings.
Here, although Socrates introduces this bipartition with some ridicule, we will see clearly later that some of the principles involved in this common knowledge will apply to the tripartite soul. Even the very idea of seeing the soul as not only three-fold but also two-fold may not seem so ridiculous later in this discussion.

Still prior to defining explicitly the three capacities of the soul, Socrates refers to three classes of the city in terms of their parallel in the soul, and asks if we act with one of these aspects or all three when we feel or do something. (436a) He subsequently states that they will determine how the three are like and unlike one another, using the following principle, which Socrates says is obvious: “the same thing will not be willing to do or undergo opposites in the same part of itself, in relation to the same thing, at the same time” (436b5-9). He concludes that if they find some aspect displaying internal opposition with regard to the same thing at the same time, they will know that they are not dealing with one entity, but rather, many. (436b-c) I will refer to this principle as the “Principle of Opposites,” or the “Principle of Opposition,” as many others have.

They turn to a discussion of desires, with an emphasis on those that are physical, and they define a class they call “appetites” (ἐπιθυμίας, 437b-437d). Next, Socrates points out that there are objects for desires, as in the case of drink, which is the object of thirst. (437d-e) Subsequently, Socrates and Glaucon agree that the force that draws one back when thirsting must be different than that which thirsts, in accord with the Principle of Opposites. (439b) The forbidding or drawing back results from “rational calculation” (λογισμοῖς, 439d1) entering in,

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68 The directly quoted lines are 436b8-9 only.
69 It may be possible to argue that this principle is essentially the same as the principle of non-contradiction from *Metaphysics* 4. However, since it may also be possible to distinguish Plato’s principle from Aristotle’s on the basis of distinctions Aristotle adds to it, I will avoid equating the two. Annas, for instance, explains that the principle Plato uses to differentiate soul parts is not the Aristotelian Principle of Non-Contradiction, but rather, the “Principle of Conflict.” See Annas, *Introduction to Plato’s Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 137.
says Socrates, while the drive to drink comes from “both feelings and diseases” (παθημάτων τε και νοσημάτων, 439d2). Agreeing on this bipartition, Socrates and Glaucon also agree that the aspect of the soul that calculates is the rational or calculating one (λογιστικόν, 439d5), while the part that gets aroused by appetites is the irrational (ἀλόγιστον, 439d7) or appetitive (ἐπιθυμητικόν, 439d8). Socrates asks if the spirited aspect (θυμό, 439e3), by which we become angry (θυμοῦμεθα, 439e3), is a third capacity, or the same as one of the other two. Glaucon thinks it is similar to the appetitive, but Socrates counters with the story of Leontius, who had the appetite to look at naked corpses, but whose anger countered the appetite, with the appetite winning in the end. (439e-440a) This example leads to the conclusion that not only does rational calculation counter appetites, but anger or spiritedness can as well. Socrates adds that when both calculation and spirit resist appetitive urges, the spirited allies with the calculating, which Socrates notes is much more common than spiritedness allying with the appetites. In this way, spiritedness is not like the appetites, but it can be reared either to ally with reason or the latter. (440a-441a) Since spirit shows itself in small children and animals from birth, unlike reason, which usually enters in later, it is not the same as reason either, and thus it must be a third aspect of the soul. (441a-b)

As a result of these proceedings by Plato’s interlocutors, the psychic three-fold structure seems to be based on an indisputable principle and supported by empirical evidence. It is also already clear that this is no simple matter. Although the three-fold division is a fairly basic, straightforward concept to assert in outline form, as one might do for a class of novice philosophy students, it is more complex to defend it, and we have begun to see hints that the division may be more intricate than just the three capacities.
Returning to their parallel with the city, Socrates and Glaucon agree that it is appropriate for the rational character to rule the soul, in part because of its foresight, and for the spirited character to obey and ally with reason. (441e) Furthermore, alluding to their earlier discussion, “a mixture of music and poetry, on the one hand, and physical training, on the other” (441e8-9), is what makes the two aspects naturally allied. (441e) This takes place by “stretching and nurturing the rational” (441e9-442a1) by means of literature and learning, and by calming the spirited “through soothing stories, and making it gentle by means of harmony and rhythm” (442a1-2). As a result of this nurturing and education, these two characters of the soul will rule the appetitive part, which is naturally largest and most difficult to satisfy. (442a) The two allies will guard against the appetites to make sure that it does not get so large and powerful that it attempts to rule over the others and bring the whole to ruin. (442a) Furthermore, Socrates says, it is because of the spirited aspect that we call someone courageous (442b), “when it preserves through pains and pleasures the declarations of reason about what is to be feared and what isn’t” (442c1-3). Socrates ends the discussion of justice in the soul by saying that when one unifies the three, as well as any others that may be in between, it is then that one acts. (443d-e) In leaving open the possibility that there may be other aspects of the soul in between the main three, this last remark points to the next discussion in this study: that of the complexities introduced later in the Republic to the basic three-fold distinction.70

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70 Kenneth Dorter argues that the three aspects are “more like locations on a continuum than three parts.” See Dorter, The Transformation of Plato’s Republic (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006), 114-115. As I will explain, I essentially agree with this conclusion.
1.2.2.2 Books 6-10 of the *Republic*: Further Distinctions

In the context of discussing the nature and education of philosopher-kings in *Republic 6,* Socrates specifically mentions the earlier three-fold division and the discussion of the four virtues. (504a) He reminds everyone:

> We said [. . .] in order to get the finest possible view of these matters (the division of the soul and the virtues), we would need to take a longer road that would make them plain to anyone who took it but that it was possible to give demonstrations of what they are that would be up to the standard of the previous argument. [. . .] So it seems to me that our discussion at that time fell short of exactness. . . [. . .] Any measure of such things that falls short in any way of that which is is not good measure, for nothing incomplete is the measure of anything. . . (504b1-c3)

Although it is not yet clear *why* the tripartite structure of the soul and the four virtues must be elaborated upon for the sake of discussing the philosophers’ education, it was already somewhat clear in *Republic 4* that some further discussions or distinctions were on the horizon. Socrates expresses clearly, here in the sixth book, that they should not be satisfied with their previous treatment of the soul and the virtues. Though a full explanation of *every* way in which the later books of the *Republic* expand on, clarify, and/or correct its earlier discussions would bring this discussion too far afield, my remaining explanation of the whole soul, and subsequently, its turning, will point to some answers.

In *Republic 8,* Socrates elaborates on our spirited capacity by discussing the timocratic, or honor-loving soul. He says that this soul surrenders itself to the middle, “victory-loving and spirited” aspect (φιλονίκῳ καὶ θυμοειδεί, 550b6). This soul lacks a mixture of reason with music and poetry and is not very well trained in either. However, this soul loves music and poetry nonetheless, evident in his enjoyment of arguments and speeches. (548e, 549b) Socrates’ elaboration on the lower aspects of the soul in book 10 will explain exactly why the spirited capacity has this sort of relationship with music and poetry. This soul is harsh to slaves, gentle
to free people, and obedient to authorities, since he is a lover of ruling and honor, but this soul bases its claim to rule on its “abilities and exploits in warfare and warlike activities” (549a5-6). The timocratic soul emerges from its philosophical or aristocratic father because of the influence of emotions, such as anger over his father not being manly and defending his mother’s honor. The timocratic youth’s mother is the source of this influence, and the household servants reinforce it by urging the youth to take revenge on people on whom his father has not taken vengeance. People in the city reinforce this influence further by belittling those who mind their own business and honoring those who get involved in other’s affairs. Because this soul keeps bad company, it allows the spirited aspect to take over the rule of the rational. (549c-550b) Thus, the spirit-rulled soul emerges because of outside influences upon it. Below, we will see the way in which Socrates expands on this concept, and in the analyses of the afterlife myths, the importance of this concept or principle will become clear. For our purposes, I will refer to this as the “Psychic Influence Principle.” Most importantly though, in this description of the timocrat, it is not only clear that one who is dominated by the spirited soul has a love of music and poetry, but that he is particularly obedient to authority.

Later, Socrates explains the tragic downfall of the timocratic, virtue-loving soul, and its transition to an oligarchic, money-hoarding way of life, which also results from outside influences. The timocrat’s son witnesses the stripping of his father’s possessions, a consequence that seems to be a natural result of living virtuously. (553a-b) The son then “immediately drives from the throne in his own soul the honor-loving and spirited part that ruled there” (553b8-c2). He allows the pursuit of wealth, and the “appetitive and money-making (ἐπιθυμητικόν τε καὶ φιλοχρήματον, 553c5)” character to dominate the other two aspects and indeed his entire life. (553c) He reduces the role of reason to calculations about how to turn small amounts of money
into great wealth. (553d) These lines make it explicitly clear that the appetitive aspect of the soul desires not only food, drink, and sex, as mentioned earlier, but also money. Next, Socrates explains where this money-loving aspect of the appetitive soul ranks in comparison to its other desires.

Expanding on the oligarchic constitution of a soul, Socrates says this person satiates his “necessary appetites” (ἀναγκαίους ἐπιθυμίας, 554a5-6) alone and “enslaves his other desires as vain” (554a7-8). Furthermore, “because of his lack of education, the dronish appetites—some beggarly and others evil—exist in him,”71 but are tamed. So, according to Socrates and Adeimantus here in book 8, both necessary (ἀναγκαίους) and dronish (κηφηνώδεις) appetites exist, with the former ruling over the latter in a money-loving soul.72 Socrates clarifies that in this case, the better desires control those that are worse. (553d-e) There is an additional distinction within the dronish or unnecessary appetites as well, between those that are “beggarly” (πτωχικάς, 554c1) and “evil” (κακούργους, 554c1).73 Socrates adds that the oligarch restrains evil appetites not by means of arguments, but by fear and compulsion, in that he is motivated by the fear of losing his possessions. (554d)

Immediately before describing the transition of the oligarchic soul to the democratic, Socrates and Adeimantus agree that necessary desires are unavoidable as well as beneficial. (558d) They include, for example, the desire to eat for the sake of health, and even the desire for finer foods that contribute to “well-being” (εὐεξίας, 559a9). Unnecessary desires are those of which one can rid oneself, through practice beginning in youth. These desires lead either to no

71 κηφηνώδεις ἐπιθυμίας ἐν αὐτῷ διὰ τὴν ἀπαιδευσίαν μὴ φόμεν ἐγγίγνεσθαι, τὰς μὲν πτωχικάς, τὰς δὲ κακούργους, 554b7-c1.
72 We may infer that the latter are thereby synonymous with the class of unnecessary appetites.
73 Though I agree with Grube’s translation of the former as “beggarly,” it might add clarity to this term to name some possible alternatives, such as “excessively needy,” or “unsatisfiable.”
good at all, or to evil. (559a) They include, for example, the desire for food that goes beyond what one needs for health and well-being, and as such, is harmful to the body as well as to the “reason and moderation” of the soul. (559b-c) Here, Socrates implies a parallel between unnecessary desires that either lead to no good or to evil, and unnecessary desires that are either “beggarly” or “evil.” Does he mean to say here that those that lead to no good are the so-called “beggarly” unnecessary desires? If so, then what are evil unnecessary desires? As we proceed, the answer to these questions will become clear. (559d)

The oligarch becomes democratic because of a wide variety of pleasure, (559d) which Socrates later identifies as unnecessary desires like drinking heavily, dabbling in various activities only for the brief pleasure they bring, and being directionless under the delusion that one is free. (561c-d) When Socrates later describes the transition of the democratic soul to the tyrannical, it will become clear that these desires that characterize the oligarch-turned democrat are of the excessively needy variety, while the desires of the tyrant are best characterized as evil. These exceedingly needy dronish desires grow more intense from outside influences, in large part due to the oligarch’s youth and lack of education. Articulating the external influence that transforms the oligarchic soul, Socrates says this soul changes when one aspect of its desires receives external support from those similar to them. (559d-e) Once again, we see the Psychic Influence Principle at work. Later in this chapter, I will explain the desires of the reasoning soul, and will further explain the desires of spirit. In my examinations of the Allegory of the Cave and the myths of judgment, I will explore the possibility that the Psychic Influence Principle applies to all three capacities of the soul and, as stated earlier, that this plays a significant role in

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74 πρὸς τε φρόνησιν καὶ τὸ σωφρονεῖν, 559b11.
75 Furthermore, necessary desires help us to make money, because our various projects benefit from them, and as such, they are fitting for an oligarchic soul. (559c-d)
77 See appendix 1, a diagram of the aspects of the soul and their subdivisions according to my interpretation.
psychagogy. Most importantly, I will consider whether or not mythical details are capable of resembling, and hence, calling forth and encouraging, our better desires. After all, Socrates says that “knowledge, fine ways of living, and words of truth” (560b8-9) are the “best watchmen and guardians of the thoughts of those men whom the gods love” (560b9-10). It will be abundantly clear that these three watchmen are present in the myths of the afterlife, and that the desire for these characterizes the rational desires of the highest aspect of the soul. Also, at least as far as the young oligarchic soul is concerned, when these guardians are absent, “false and boastful words and beliefs rush up and occupy this part of him” (560c2-3), says Socrates, in reference to the young man’s appetitive soul. As a result, the unnecessary desires gain strength, multiply, and take over the man’s soul. (560a-561a) According to these remarks, then, one may conclude that in order to save this sort of soul, one must endeavor to reinforce the presence of knowledge, fine ways of life, and truth.

It is clear based on the above, that at the close of book 8, we need further clarity about unnecessary desires. Republic 9 begins by picking up on this discussion as it treats the degeneration of the democratic soul into the tyrannical soul. Socrates remarks that they have distinguished adequately neither the types nor the specific number of desires. (571a) Subsequently, he says that some of the unnecessary pleasures and desires seem to be “lawless” (παράνομοι, 571b5) in that everyone probably has them, but that laws and better desires most often tame them. (571b) These lawless ones include desires for extreme sexual situations, murder, and unnecessary eating to the extreme, all of which awaken when the rest of the soul sleeps. (571c-d) Here, it seems as though the democratic, “beggarly” desire for excessive food and drink leads to a more insidious set of tyrannical desires.78 Socrates then says that our dreams

78 A healthy, moderate person sleeps only after having (1) roused and fed the rational soul with “fine arguments and speculations,” (2) neither starved nor feasted the appetites, so that they will sleep and will not disturb the rational,
confirm that there is a lawless form of desire in everyone. (572b) He reviews the degeneration of the oligarch to the democrat, and then adds that the democrat’s son is influenced by all kinds of lawlessness, (572c-573b) implying (1) that the Psychic Influence Principle applies here too and (2) that the lawless desires are indeed those that characterize the tyrant. Those who influence him negatively “plant in him a powerful erotic love, like a great winged drone” (572e5-6). Socrates goes on then to describe the tyrannical soul and the lawless desires that rule in him. (573c-580a) Following the progression of souls, and the particular aspects of the soul that dominate them, it is clear that the oligarchic, democratic, and tyrannical constitutions of souls all involve rule by the appetites. The oligarchic, however, is ruled by necessary desires that lead to monetary wealth, the democratic is ruled by “beggarly” unnecessary desires that lead to no good, and the tyrant is consumed by lawless desires that lead to evil. Clearly, the appetitive capacity of the soul has many subdivisions, and encouraging or discouraging these differing levels of desire could affect the direction, balance, and harmony of the whole soul.

In Republic 10, Socrates discusses the effects of painting and poetry on the soul as if it were bipartite: rational and irrational. (602d-606d) This change in language might lead one to consider the interpretation that Plato abandons or muddles the tripartite soul in this closing book. However, I see these later descriptions of the soul as simply providing further clarity about its nature. Jessica Moss expresses this notion, and adds intriguing specificity: “Rather than accusing Plato of muddling his own distinction [. . . ], we would do better to examine his various characterizations of the parts of the soul in search of a substantive concept of rationality that

and (3) soothed his spirited soul in a similar way, for instance, by not falling asleep angry. In this way, when the person sleeps, he arouses the rational soul and causes the other two to slumber, so that he grasps the truth and avoids lawless visions in his dreams. (571d-572b) I will show that the myths of the afterlife are capable of doing all three of these things, and hence, promoting psychic harmony.
explains his carving up psychic phenomena the way he does.”

Why is an examination of Plato’s conception of rationality a potentially useful way of unlocking the confusion of *Republic* 10? How can the soul be three in that it is reasoning, spirited, and appetitive, while it is also two in that it is rational and irrational? The position I will defend is that in *Republic* 10, the descriptions of the soul’s rationality are in line with earlier treatment of the rational capacity, while the descriptions of the soul’s irrationality are in line with earlier discussions of the spirited and appetitive parts. However, *Republic* 10 adds further insight about the three capacities, by indicating the implications of the lower aspects’ irrationality in relation to the calculation of reason.

Calculation enables us to see beyond the possibly deceptive look of something that may be deceiving, whether that deception is due to an artist’s work or simply to a thing’s appearance, like a stick looking crooked in water. This calculation is due to the rational aspect of the soul.

(602c-d) However, the opposite of the measured, calculated appearance also presents itself to the soul when we see a deceiving image, and according to the Principle of Opposition, this other appearance must be the result of another aspect of the soul. (602e-603a) Specifically, Socrates says that the capacity that opposes (ἐναντιούμενον, 603a7) the calculated appearance is “one of the inferior (φαύλων) parts in us” (603a7-8). Though ἐναντιούμενον is a singular verb, φαύλων is a plural adjective, indicating that the latter modifies a plurality of soul-parts or aspects. This language seems to be a clue that the division between the inferior aspects is still in play. Socrates follows this statement by saying that “painting and imitative art in general function apart from truth, associating with that which is distant from reason in us, and it partners and is

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friends with it, for a purpose neither healthy nor true." One notable difference between my translation and Grube’s is his addition that painting and imitation consort with “a part” of us. His addition of “a part” is warranted, because the Greek includes the definitive article, which is often used elliptically, thus possibly implying the language of parthood, but this language is not necessarily present, since there is no explicit mention of the language of parts (μέρεα), nor the other language that Plato typically uses to describe soul-species or characters (γένει, εἰδη, or ήθη). Thus, Grube’s addition might lead one to think that Plato is definitely discussing a single soul-part, when in actuality, Plato might intend to be more vague about this, at least sometimes, which is evident above. I contend in what follows that Socrates refers to both lower aspects of the soul when he refers to the irrational. He is saying here that irrationality taken as a whole, which imitation evokes, is not a natural friend or ally of reason. The interlocutors explored the alliance of spirit and reason previously, and now Socrates leads them to explore the interconnectedness of spirit and appetite. Following Moss, I support the claim that Socrates shows the way in which both appetite and spirit believe in or are deceived by illusions or appearances, whereas the calculation of reason is not so susceptible to superficiality. Moss begins by pointing out that earlier treatment of the soul centered on motivational distinctions, whereas the present treatment focuses on cognitive distinctions. Moss explains that the lower two aspects experience “evaluative appearances, such as that pastries are good or an insult bad. All passions (desires, emotions, pleasures, and pains) are responses to things qua valuable."
Furthermore, “[o]ne and the same susceptibility to appearances explains both our perception of the stick and our appetites for pleasure.”

She is referring here to the discussion of the phenomenon of an object in water seeming to be crooked, while it is straight when outside of the water. (602c) Book 10 leads us to the insight, according to Moss, that what essentially distinguishes reason is its capacity to “transcend appearances,” while that which gives spiritedness and the appetites their irrational nature is their tendency to accept appearances unreflectively. The “ethical status” of the three aspects follows from this essential distinction, according to Moss. In my analysis of the Allegory of the Cave, I will provide corroboration for Moss’ conclusion. In the paragraphs below, I will provide further evidence that Plato is elaborating on the psychic distinctions from earlier in the Republic, and not abandoning or replacing them.

Socrates and Glaucon agree that their analysis applies to imitations they see (e.g. painting) as well as those they hear, specifically poetry. (603b) Socrates then suggests that they see whether that aspect of us with which poetic imitations keep company is really inferior, or not. (603b-c) Socrates asks if one could be internally conflicted about poetry the same way one could be about deceiving appearances, like the object in water, and he quickly notes that the earlier discussion of the soul’s three-fold internal oppositions answers this question. But he then says that he thinks they omitted things before that they must now discuss. (603c-e) Though he does want to fill out the discussion, here he gives no indication that he wants to overturn the previous treatment.

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85 Ibid., 40.
86 Ibid.
87 Once again, Plato uses no language of soul-parts or aspects though.
One of these omitted topics of discussion is about a man who grieves, with reason directing him to resist the grief while he has some other inclination to give in to it. According to the Principle of Opposition, this latter inclination must originate from another aspect of him. (603e-604b) The urge to resist comes from rationality, because, as Socrates says, the law dictates that one remain calm in misfortune, for a number of reasons, including the fact that grief prevents deliberation, which we need most in those situations. (604b-c) The aspect of the soul that leads us to give in to lamentation and dwell on misfortune, then, must be irrational and a friend of cowardice. 89 (604d) Taking this remark in isolation, Socrates must not be referring to the capacity of the spirited soul that enables one to be courageous, but rather, either some lower capacity of the spirited soul and/or some aspect of the appetitive soul. This vagueness will receive clarity shortly. 90

First, Socrates concludes that the poet must appeal to this excitable character in the soul in order to appeal to a diverse crowd, and that he and the interlocutors may consider the painter alongside him. They both appeal to an inferior aspect of the soul, because by arousing this aspect, they strengthen it and destroy the rational capacity. (604d-605b) Clearly, the Psychic Influence Principle is at play here.

Providing clarity about exactly what aspects of the soul he includes in this irrational, excitable aspect, Socrates says that “in the case of sex, anger, and all the desires (πάντων τῶν ἐπιθυμητικῶν, d1-2), pleasures, and pains that we say accompany all our actions (πράξει, d3), poetic imitation has the very same effect on us. It nurtures and waters them and establishes them as rulers in us. . .” (606d1-3). By lumping sex and anger in the same category, Socrates refers to the desires of both the spirited and appetitive aspects of the soul. For as we have seen, the

89 But once again Plato uses no language that he earlier uses to describe parts, aspects, or characters of the soul.
90 See appendix 1 for clarity about what I mean by this.
appetitive soul motivates sexual desire, while the spirited motivates anger. By referring to all desires (πάντων τῶν ἐπιθυμητικῶν, d1-2) that we associate with actions (πράξει, d3), Socrates denotes a class of desire that properly applies only to spiritedness and appetites, and not to rationality. This discussion between Socrates and Glaucon in Republic 10 brings out the link between desires that degenerate the soul and the soul’s tendency to be superficial, overly-reliant on appearances, or lacking calculation. The Allegory of the Cave, as we will soon see, adds a great deal to this link between superficiality and negative desires, for instance, by illustrating the way in which this class of “action” desires are those that are bodily or physically-oriented, as opposed to desires that are properly intellectual.

For further confirmation that Socrates means to refer to both spiritedness and the appetites, and thus maintain that distinction, when he discusses this irrational, excitable aspect, we may refer to Socrates’ remarks in Republic 8 about the spirited soul of the timocrat, and its love of music and poetry. The spirit-dominated soul lacks the involvement of reason in this love, and also is not very good at music or poetry itself. (548e, 549b) This earlier description of spiritedness is in line with Socrates’ description of irrationality here in Republic 10. The irrational within us appreciates music and poetry on a superficial level, allowing a lower class of desires to influence the soul.

One may nevertheless still be inclined to consider the possibility that the two-fold division of book 10 negates the earlier three-fold distinction. One problem with this possibility is that Plato’s treatment of the irrational in book 10 lacks discussion of the way in which spiritedness allies with reason, and enables one to be courageous, or even angry for the sake of

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91 Moss argues that the emotional part that heightens grief “is identical to or includes appetite and spirit” and also “is identical to the illusion believing part.” See Moss, 42.
92 Once again, I will discuss these intellectual desires later.
reason. The earlier treatment of the spirited soul remains necessary to understanding the whole soul, because this positive role of spiritedness cannot be reduced to another function of the rational soul. We saw earlier, especially in the example of Leontius, that anger can ally with reason, and that it is also separable from reason and the base appetites. Anger, identified earlier as perhaps the essential emotion of the spirited soul, illustrates clearly that the spirited soul is a necessary intermediate aspect, because it encompasses this ability we have to use certain emotions either for rational or irrational purposes. The insights of book 10 allow us to see that spiritedness is distinct from rationality for another reason: because of its susceptibility to appearances. It is this aspect of spiritedness that allows it to ally with the appetites. This understanding of the whole soul, and the multifaceted capabilities of spirit, will prove crucial to understanding the psychological effects of the eschatological myths.

1.2.3 Details About the Interaction of the Soul’s Aspects According to the Republic

1.2.3.1 Introduction

The following problem remains in my account of the soul: The parts of the soul are in harmony or conflict depending on whether or not reason is their overarching leader. However, it is still unclear exactly how, and therefore whether, our appetitive self can “listen” to, and subsequently fall in line with, the commands of reason. Does appetite obey because of the compulsion of spirit, as in the stern repetition of commands, or the imposition of shame? Or, do the appetites fall in line because they share in rationality insofar as they are able to interpret and respond to reason’s commands to a certain degree? It may be the case that the lowest aspect of the soul “listens” and obeys in both of these ways. Also, how does our spirited self interpret and obey rationality in order to ally with it? This section must answer this question as well, because
the analyses of the myths of the afterlife rely on the claim that certain mythical details lead
appetite and spirit to follow reason and proceed harmoniously along the ascent to knowledge that
I will explain in the next section about the Line and Cave. Also, the study will lack a complete
explanation of how the divided soul becomes harmonized, unless the issue of the lower aspects’
responsiveness receives the treatment it demands. As a result, what follows will explain how the
lower parts respond to reason’s commands.

The first piece of this explanation will allude to a discussion that already began. I
pointed out earlier that I would favor language that reflected Plato’s with regard to the soul. As a
result, I tended to refer to the three parts as “aspects,” “capacities,” or “characters,” and I often
referred to the tripartite soul as “three-fold.” Plato infrequently uses μέρος or μέρη (part, parts)
to describe aspects of the soul. Instead, he often uses γένη, εἴδη, or ἔθη, which roughly translate
to “species,” “forms,” or “characters,” but since the first two translations may cause some
confusion, I have favored the language previously mentioned. 93

This fact about the language Plato uses, combined with other textual evidence from the
Republic, strongly suggests that Plato did not see the three aspects of the soul as strictly divided
parts. In fact, the three overlap with one another considerably in that they have common
features. 94 I will explain this below by examining selections from Plato’s discussion of the soul

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93 As I noted above, I’ve often used the language of partition for ease of reading. As I also noted above, there are
a few instances of Plato referring to the three as parts (μέρει, for instance at 442c5). A few other uses of μέρος or its
derivatives with regard to the soul include 428e7, 429b8, 431e10, and 442b11. For his use of the other language I
mention, see for instance εἴδη, at 435e2 and ἔθη, at 435e2. Rachel Barney notes Plato’s use of μέρος or μέρη at
444b3, 577d4, 581a5, 583a1, and 586e5. Barney notes Plato’s use of εἴδος or its variations at 435e1, c5, e2, 439e2,
440e9, 504a4, 572a6, 595b1, and 612a5. She also notes his use of γένος or its variations, with regard to the soul, at
435b5, 441c6, and d3. See Barney, “What Kind of Theory is the Theory of the Tripartite Soul?” Boston Area
Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy (forthcoming), 2016: 34.

John Rist’s work is particularly helpful on this point. See Rist, “Plato Says That We Have Tripartite Souls. If He
Is Right, What Can We Do About It?” in Sophies Maietores: “Chercheurs de Sagesse”: Hommage à

94 Anna’s findings support this view, when she argues for the desiring nature of rationality and the rational nature of
desire. See Anna, Introduction to Plato’s Republic, 131. R. C. Cross and A. D. Wozley, relying only on Plato’s
description of the soul early in the Republic, assert that the appetite, “has no reason in it.” See Cross and Wozley,
in the *Republic*. I will therefore show that the three have the capacity to influence each other through their kinship. If the characters were sharply divided, it would be difficult or impossible to explain how they interact, let alone, to explain how they harmonize under the leadership of reason. Explaining the interaction of the three is important for at least two reasons: (1) interaction is a prerequisite for harmonization under reason, and (2) the possibility of negative interactions, like those that issue from the appetites when they are not following rationality, is the reason that harmonization is needed in the first place.

1.2.3.2 The Desires of Rationality and Spirit

I will focus first on passages about the love or desires of rationality and spiritedness. Describing the philosopher-kings’ love of learning about what is, Socrates says, “Like the honor-lovers and erotically inclined men we described before, they love all such learning and are not willing to give up any part of it, whether large or small, more valuable or less so” (485b5-8). Here, Socrates draws an explicit parallel between the desires of the wisdom-loving, rationally ruled philosopher, the honor-loving, spirit-rulled soldier, and the base-pleasure-loving, appetitively-ruled craftsman.95

Adding another dimension to the desires of rationality, Socrates describes the “real lover of learning” (φιλομαθής, 490a9) by saying that “once getting near what really is and having intercourse with it and having begotten understanding and truth, he knows, truly lives, is nourished” (490b5-6). According to this passage, the wisdom lover desires truth in a way that is

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95 Socrates adds to the comparison between the philosopher and the erotically inclined person further at 485c-d. He also calls the honor-loving soul “victory-loving” (φιλονίκω) at 550b6.
very similar to erotic desire, including the aspect of that desire that longs to reproduce.\textsuperscript{96} Except, of course, the love of wisdom desires on a higher order.

In \textit{Republic} 9, Socrates and Glaucon explicitly agree on three kinds of desire that correspond to the three aspects of the soul. The appetitive part loves money and profit, while the spirited loves “control, victory, and high repute” (581a9-10). The philosophical part, finally, loves learning. (581b) The fact that each capacity of the soul has a different object of its desire is what maintains the three-fold distinction. The desiring or yearning of each is a factor that underlies and unifies the whole soul. In this way, the three aspects overlap with one another and are not entirely distinct.\textsuperscript{97}

\subsection*{1.2.3.3 The Rationality of Spirit and Appetite}

In this section, I will discuss passages that reveal the degree to which spirit and the appetites share in rationality, for the purpose of shedding light on the responsiveness of spiritedness and appetite to reason. Describing the lowest level of the hierarchy of desires in the appetitive soul, which I discussed previously, Socrates explains that the lawless desires are usually “held in check by the laws and by the better desires in alliance with reason” (571b6-7). In this way, Socrates identifies a rational, ruling capacity that is present in the higher-order desires. One may infer that even desires that characterize the appetitive soul, like the necessary ones, can exhibit this sort of ruling function, for instance, when one’s desire to accumulate wealth prevents one from eating or drinking to excess, and thus, depleting one’s resources. I should clarify though that rather than identifying the necessary appetites as capable of some sort

\textsuperscript{96} At 499b, Socrates refers to philosophical kingship as involving “a true erotic love for true philosophy.” Erotic love for wisdom, that motivates philosophy, is also described in \textit{Symposium} 203d and 204b, as well as \textit{Phaedrus} 249d-e and 254b.

\textsuperscript{97} On the appetites of spirit and reason, see Lorenz, 45.
of calculation, this passage may merely indicate that the necessary desires themselves merely have an affinity for rationality, while any rational capacity they exhibit derives from their submission to rule by the calculating aspect of the soul.

In his account of the way in which painting appeals to the irrational, which I discussed previously, Socrates mentions that “imitation really consorts with a part of us that is far from reason, and the result of their being friends and companions is neither sound nor true” (603a12-b2). This irrational aspect, as I previously explained, refers both to the appetitive and spirited parts of the soul. If the irrational is capable of consorting or forming a companionship, then it is capable of some sort of discursive thought. Furthermore, Socrates notes that it is “far from reason” (πόρρω δ’ αὖ φρονήσεως, a12), which implies that it may not completely lack reason. There must be some overlap or interpenetration among reason and the lower aspects of the soul given the capacity for basic discursivity in the latter, as well as the latter’s affinity for reason, which is clearly present in spiritedness and necessary desires. Thus, it is not completely accurate to describe spiritedness or the appetites as completely distinct or divorced from reason.

The passages above reveal a basic discursiveness in which spirit and appetite may engage. This type of thought process is best characterized as opinion. In fact, I will argue that these two aspects of the soul share in reason to the extent that they can form opinions most akin to those Plato describes as εἰκασία (conjecture) in the context of the Divided Line and the Allegory of the Cave.98 In Republic 10, referring to the measuring of things by the calculating soul, Socrates says, “Then the aspect of the soul that forms an opinion opposed to the measurements could not be the same as that which opines in agreement with them” (603a1-2).99 Here, Plato describes the activity of the irrational soul as opinion (δοξάζον), but does not

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98 See Moss, 35-68.
99 My translation of: Τὸ παρὰ τὰ μέτρα ἄρα δοξάζον τῆς ψυχῆς τῷ κατὰ τὰ μέτρα οὐκ ἐν εἴη ταύτον.
explicitly use the same term to describe the rational soul. He provides explicit specificity in the next line, when Socrates says, “Now, the part that puts its trust (πιστεύον) in measurement and calculation is the best part of the soul” (603a4-5).100 Also, he says “We must go directly to the part of our thought with which poetic imitations consort and see whether it is inferior or something to be taken seriously (πιστεύσωμεν)” (603b8-603c2). As we know from my earlier treatment, the part that consorts with imitations is inferior and is not to be taken seriously. The language Plato uses to describe the superior part of this bipartition is consistent with the language he uses to describe belief (πίστις) in both the Divided Line simile and Cave allegory, which will soon be evident. However, the language he uses to describe the irrational part, which I have argued is identical to the spirited and appetitive capacities of the soul, indicates that their activity is inferior to the belief or trust of the calculating soul. As a result, Plato implies that the rationality of appetite and spirit is limited to the sort of opining that takes place at the lowest level of opinion, namely, the realm I will describe as conjecture on the simile of the Line and in the Allegory of the Cave.

In explaining that the appetitive soul shares in reason to some extent, I am entering into an ongoing debate about this issue. Some argue that the appetitive soul is completely irrational, while others argue that it shares in rationality to some degree, as noted earlier. Though many scholars point to the money-loving tendency of appetites as evidence that Plato sees them as capable of means-end reasoning, I avoid using this argument for the following reason: I believe Lorenz is correct when he points out that it is unclear whether the appetites love money as a means or as an end in itself.101 If Plato intends the latter, then the money-loving tendency of the appetites does not necessarily point to their having the capability of means-ends reasoning.

100 Grube’s translation
101 Lorenz, 43-48.
However, I do argue that spiritedness and the necessary appetites have an affinity for reason and are capable of low level discursivity or opinion-forming, akin to conjecture. In this way, they are penetrated by the rational soul.

Ultimately, spirit and appetite can “listen” to reason’s communications because they can form simplistic opinions, and because spirit acts as an enforcer, handing down reason’s commands. It is worth pointing out that appetite and spirit can also self-motivate, by responding to imagery and forming conjectures.

The statement about reason’s commands requires two points of further distinction: (1) Since spirit and appetite may only share in low-level reasoning, reason does not counsel or advise them, but rather, reason gives them basic commands. (2) The commands reason gives may on the one hand occur in isolation, or on the other, in the repetition involved in training. The former is a sufficient condition for leading the lower aspects, as is the latter. These commands are but one aspect of the way in which reason affects the lower characters of the soul. It is clear based on the above that reason also influences them by penetrating their very nature.

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102 My treatment of the Leontius example (Republic 439e-440a) illustrates the enforcer role of spirit, as well as the rationale by which the Republic initially distinguishes spiritedness from rationality and appetite, despite the fact that Leontius’ spirited and reasoning aspects happen to lose the battle his appetites wage to look at the corpses.

103 My discussions above of the soldier class (429b-c, 431e, 434b) and the timocratic soul (548e-549a) can also be applied here to illustrate spirit’s enforcer role.

104 R. F. Stalley’s work is helpful on making this distinction. He points out that in commanding, reason does not change the basic constitution, or desires, of the lower parts. Rather, we may infer, those commands are followed with the lower parts’ low-level rationality, and the commands are executed, implicitly, by higher-level rationality. See Stalley, “Persuasion and the Tripartite Soul in Plato’s Republic,” Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy 32 (2007): 77.

105 C. Bobonich echoes my conclusion about the barely rational capabilities of appetitive desire when he warns against attributing “sophisticated content” to appetite’s assent. See Bobonich, Plato’s Utopia Recast: His Later Ethics and Politics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 237.

For the training of the lower aspects, see the early education of the guardians in Republic 2 and 3, for instance, 376c-378d. For an isolated command by reason, Leontius again serves as a good example.
1.2.3.4 Conclusions

In conclusion, the three aspects of the soul can and do influence one another, ultimately because of the ways in which they overlap with or penetrate one another. This is important to spell out here because this study will repeatedly refer to the turning of the whole soul, in which the soul follows the lead of rationality, but also receives motivation from spiritedness and the appetites. In order to understand accurately how the latter two can follow reason and also motivate it, one must understand the interpenetration described here. As I pointed out, this interpenetration does not amount to Plato violating his basic rationale for distinguishing the three aspects, in part because they each have different objects of desire. In the chapters that follow, we will see the interpenetration of the soul at work, as mythical imagery aids the rational soul in its efforts to lead or turn the whole soul toward the light of truth.

Some questions remain, including whether or not reason’s commands are carried out in spite of the lower parts, or due to the positive influence reason enables the lower parts to have on the whole soul. Sometimes, indeed, the former is the case, and this is too obvious to spell out. However, my treatment of the afterlife myths will show that the desiring capacity of reason, or the overlap of reason with spirit and appetite, allows it to use the basic constitution of the latter two for good. In fact, we may see that the soul’s accomplishments in this regard are surprisingly good.

1.2.4 The Turning of the Soul in its Ascent Through the Cave

1.2.4.1 Introduction: Explanation of the Purpose of this Section

The previous section explains the “whole soul” according to the Republic, and the question remains: What exactly constitutes the turning of the whole soul? I will address this
question by examining the simile of the Divided Line and the Allegory of the Cave. The following will proceed with an emphasis on the Cave, because its imagery illustrates the turning of the soul in a way that depends on and builds on lessons from the passages of the Line.

In my analysis, I argue that the details of the account demand that the prisoner turn his whole body several times in order to ascend from one stage of the journey to the next, as he advances up the steep path of the cave, and eventually out of it. Just after his portrayal of the cave, Socrates refers to this turning of the whole body as a metaphor for the turning of the whole soul. (518c) In light of this metaphor, my analysis will explain that the prisoner’s advancement from one stage of the ascent to the next metaphorically depicts three ways in which the whole soul may be turned around.

Another function of this section of the study involves defending the view that the Allegory of the Cave portrays an ascent to knowledge that is parallel to the simile of the Divided Line. It will prove important throughout the following to explain that as the Line and Cave describe four stages of cognitive achievement, they also describe four different levels of reality.

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106 Republic 509d-511e and 514a-520e respectively.
107 I will explain, mostly in footnotes, that the Allegory of the Cave also adds to the content that the Line conveys, in the following ways:
(1) The Cave illustrates the psychology of the advance from conjecture to contemplation, in large part by depicting the turning of the whole soul that is necessary for various stages of this progression.
(2) The Allegory of the Cave illustrates the degree to which conjecture, belief, thought, and contemplation are able to access truth consistently.
(3) The Cave allegory depicts the role of philosophers as teachers who are crucial to others’ advancement from ignorance to knowledge.
(4) The Cave adds a political dimension to the aforementioned advancement.
(5) The Cave illustrates the way in which not only physical objects, but appearances or representations of those objects, may be involved in διάνοια.
(6) By portraying the temporary blindness that results from both turning from darkness to light and from light back to darkness, the Cave illustrates the difficulty of various adjustments involved in the progression from ignorance to knowledge, as well as the difficult adjustment period of those who return to the realm of ignorance to educate others.

The result of the symmetry between the Line and the Cave is that the turning of the whole soul, represented by the ascent from one stage of the Cave journey to the next, also involves proceeding from one level of the Line to the next.

1.2.4.2 The Simile of the Divided Line

The simile of the Divided Line emerges from Socrates’ effort to explain the Idea of the Good, which begins with an elaborate analogy to the Sun. (507a-509c) The heart of this analogy is that what the Sun is to the physical realm, the Good is to the intelligible. (508b-c) Just as the Sun enables us to see physical reality, the Good enables us to understand intelligible reality. As the Sun is the source of physical light, the Good is the source of the light of truth. (508c-e) Socrates then describes a Line divided into two unequal sections, one representing the visible and the other the intelligible.

The first, or lowest, subsection of the visible contains images, which Socrates describes as shadows and reflections, among other things. Socrates says, “One subsection of the visible (sections of the Line) consists of images (ἐἰκόνες, e1). And by images I mean, first, shadows, then reflections in water and in all close-packed, smooth, and shiny materials, and everything of that sort” (509d9-510a3). According to the Divided Line, the objects of the state of ἐικασία, or the lowest subsection, include shadows and reflections of physical things that we perceive with our senses. (509d-e) Therefore, this category is highly subjective, and includes all opinions that are based purely on the perception of appearances. Because of this high degree of subjectivity, the translation of ἐικασία that I will favor is “conjecture.”

108 Malcolm favors this translation as well as R. Robinson. See Malcolm, 38; R. Robinson, 181.
The next subsection of the visible consists of originals of those appearances. This section includes all physical objects. Socrates says: “In the other subsection of the visible, put the originals of these images, namely, the animals around us, all the plants, and the whole class of manufactured things” (510a5-6). Thus, the objects of πίστις are the originals of the images that are the objects of εἰκασία. Socrates and Glaucon agree that the appearances or likenesses are to the things they are like, just as the opinable is to the knowable. (509d-510a) Socrates therefore implies that one knows a thing more truly when one accesses it directly, rather than merely an appearance of it. I will favor “belief” or “true opinion” as the most fitting translations for πίστις.109 It is a belief in the physical, and is not to be confused with intellectual belief, or any other connotation of belief. This type of opining is true in the sense that it achieves correspondence with physical reality, but it is nevertheless still opinion because of its limitation to the physical.

In the next section, the lower subsection of the intelligible, the soul uses the animals, plants, and other objects from the previous subsection as images, while it investigates from hypotheses without reaching a first principle. When Socrates divides the intelligible section of the Line simile, he says, “In one subsection, the soul, using as images the things that were imitated before, is forced to investigate from hypotheses, proceeding not to a first principle but to a conclusion” (510b4-6). Socrates then uses the example of students of geometry who use, but who do not explain or prove, various hypotheses, like figures and angles. (510c) They use the visible figures to discuss “other things that they are like. They make their claims for the sake of

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109 As Dorter explains, πίστις is really a species of δόξα (the latter commonly translates as opinion). See Dorter, The Transformation of Plato’s Republic, 99. He favors “conviction” or “belief” as translations for πίστις. See Dorter, 207. Malcolm also says πίστις is a species of δόξα, superior to that of conjecture, and favors “faith” as a translation. See Malcolm, 38. I am thus following Dorter in calling πίστις “belief” and interpreting Malcom in my referring to it as “true opinion.”
the square itself and the diagonal itself, not the diagonal they draw, and similarly with the others. These figures that they make and draw, of which shadows and reflections in water are images, they now in turn use as images, in seeking to see those others themselves that one cannot see except by means of thought (διάνοια, a1)” (510d6-511a1). I am translating διάνοια as “thought,” following Dorter, Grube, and Robinson.110

In the next subsection, however, which is highest of the four, the soul proceeds from hypotheses to a first principle, not using physical objects as hypotheses, but rather, Forms. (510b) Νόησις, according to the Divided Line, Socrates describes as follows:

By the other subsection of the intelligible, I mean that which reason itself grasps by the power of dialectic. It does not consider these hypotheses as first principles but truly as hypotheses—but as stepping stones to take off from, enabling it to reach the unhypothetical first principle of everything. Having grasped this principle, it reverses itself and, keeping hold of what follows from it, comes down to a conclusion without making use of anything visible at all, but only of Forms themselves, moving on from Forms to Forms, and ending in Forms (511b3-c2).

Νόησις here involves contemplation of (1) Forms with reference to (as stepping-stones to) the Good, (2) the Good itself, and (3) the Good in reference back to Forms.111

Thought, then, reaches Forms by means of physical analogues, like the students of mathematics described above, whereas contemplation only considers Forms in reference to each other, not to the physical realm. Some questions remain after this simile though, like: What is involved in the ascent from one level to the next? What do these differing cognitive levels mean for our freedom, goodness, and happiness? It is these questions and others that the Allegory of the Cave answers.

110 See Dorter, 207; R. Robinson, 181.
111 I translate νόησις as “intellelction,” following Dorter. See Dorter, 207. I also translate it as “intelligence” or “contemplation,” following Malcolm. See Malcolm, 38.
1.2.4.3 Εἰκασία and the Cave

For the sake of a comparison between “the effect of education and the lack of it on our nature” (514a1-2), Socrates asks his audience to imagine an underground cave that contains prisoners who are in bonds that have prevented them, since birth, from “turning (περιάγειν) their heads around” (b1-2) from the back of the cave wall. (514a-b) Also, he explicitly states that their light source is the fire that burns “far above and behind them” (514b2-3). The entrance of the cave, he says, is “a long way up,” and is “open to the light” (514a-5). Behind the prisoners, the path that leads to the fire is elevated, and from it, other cave dwellers use various artifacts to cast shadows for the prisoners to see against the wall of the cave. (514b) These prisoners see neither anything of themselves, nor of one another, nor the artifacts, except for the shadows projected on the wall before them. (515a-b) They consider truth to be nothing but these shadows.\(^{112}\) (515c) They even bestow rewards for those who could remember things about the shadows and best predict the future. (516c-d)

Socrates describes the chained prisoners as exhibiting a sort of conjecture very similar to that which the Line describes. These captives see only shadows and reflections, and their conception of truth is based purely on these appearances. These prisoners therefore represent those who exist in a state of highly limited sense perception. This allegorical portrayal illustrates vividly the conjecture that the Line describes.\(^{113}\)

The Cave’s depiction of the prisoners’ competition implies that εἰκασία relies on mere perception to form principles or hypotheses. Memory is involved, but this is memory based on

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\(^{112}\) Though Grube translates νομίζειν at 515c2 as “believe,” I prefer to use “consider” since the latter avoids confusion with the belief that πίστις denotes.

\(^{113}\) R. Robinson argues that conjecture is analogous to the thought of mathematicians. See Robinson, 191. I will show, partially here, and partially in chapter 2, that it is most in line with the text to understand mathematical thought as occurring at the level of δύναμις, the third level of the Line/Cave. There is a clear parallel, however, between the way appearances can lead to belief and the way in which mathematical imagery can lead to thought, as I will explain. It is this that Robinson seems to notice in his assessment.
nothing more than appearances. In this way, the objects of εἰκασία may also include imagery that is complex, and that could conjure up emotions based on one’s past experiences. This emotionally evocative imagery could engage not only the appetitive but also the spirited soul. For instance, erotic imagery may evoke not only our base appetite for sex, but our remembrance of our beloved, and our desire to compete for his or her approval. 114 As I explained previously, this competitive urge is clearly an example of our spiritedness. 115 The imagery of the Cave adds this psychological perspective to the Line’s portrayal of εἰκασία. The Cave allegory also adds a psychological component to conjecture by depicting the prisoners’ whole bodies as chained down. As my analysis of the Cave proceeds, it will become clear that this bondage metaphorically represents the way in which our bodily desires hold us back from learning when we limit our reasoning capability to the sort of conjecture that is closely associated with the body. 116

In any case, εἰκασία would give rise to many contradictions, hence the conjectures are often false. This occurs because perceptions of mere appearances vary quite wildly. The description of the honors and prizes awarded in the cave for shadow-prediction is a passage that highlights the extent to which any competition that is based only on conjecture is quite ridiculous. One prisoner would only outperform another as a result of their predictions corresponding more closely with the whims of the puppeteers (the “cave dwellers” behind the prisoners). Similarly, since a person making conjectures bases them on the perception of unreliable, inconsistent criteria, any correspondence they achieve with these representations, let

114 This is in line with the account of the lower, irrational aspects of the soul in Republic 10, as well as Moss’ account of the same.
115 See section 1.222. The next section will continue the argument that the level of reasoning that the lower parts of the soul exhibit is akin to εἰκασία.
116 Heidegger sees εἰκασία as representative of everydayness. He explains that that which is nearest to us, even if it is as vague as shadows, holds us captive each day of our lives. See Heidegger, 164. I agree with him about this and appreciate the way in which his insight deepens my treatment of conjecture.
alone the truth, is pure luck. This aspect of the portrayal of εἰκασία is additional evidence of the way that the Cave adds helpful details to the concepts that the Line conveys. Also, this specific contribution of the Cave allegory will later help us to understand what is involved in the turn back into the cave by the person who makes it out.

1.2.4.4 The Turn to Πίστις (Turn #1)

Socrates next asks his interlocutors to consider the idea of a prisoner’s release, explaining that “When one of them was freed and suddenly compelled to stand up, turn (περιάγειν) his head, walk, and look up towards the light” (515c6-8), he would have a great deal of difficulty seeing things whose shadows he had only seen before. (515c) Socrates and Glaucon agree that if the prisoner were asked whether the artifacts or the shadows were real, the freed captive would indicate that the latter are. (515d) Furthermore, they agree that, if compelled to look at the light itself, the prisoner’s eyes would hurt, and he would turn back around and flee towards the things he is better able to see. (515d-e)

Based on Socrates’ previous description of the chained prisoners and the structure of the cave, the only way the freed prisoner can view the firelight is by turning his whole body towards it. Socrates describes this when he says that the prisoner is made to stand up (ανίστασθαι, c7) and walk (βαδίζειν, c7) to look up toward the light (πρὸς τὸ φῶς ἀναβλέπειν, c8). For the fire and various artifacts to create projections in front of the prisoners, the light source and the objects must be directly, or very nearly directly, behind them. Therefore, the only way to view the objects involves a complete, or nearly complete, 180 degree turn, which requires that not just the head, but that the body turns around. This is significant because we later receive confirmation (518c) that this turning of the whole body is a metaphor for the turning of the
whole soul. Why then does Plato describe the captive as standing, turning his head (or neck) (περιάγειν τὸν αὖχένα, c7), and walking? It could be that Plato opts for this account, rather than an explicit description of the turning of the prisoner’s whole body, because the former both implies the latter and conveys the details of the prisoner’s newly acquired freedom. 514a notes that their legs and necks (σκέλη καὶ τοὺς αὖχένας, a6) were in bondage, and 515c explicitly describes the specifics of this freedom from captivity.¹¹⁷

Socrates describes the prisoner who has turned around as being able to see the things whose shadows he had been viewing for his whole life. Plato’s description in the Line simile of the objects of πίστις is strikingly similar to that which the initially released prisoner sees: the objects that had been producing the shadows he used to watch. This correspondence indicates that the reader ought to view the Line’s portrayal of πίστις, as well as the second stage of the journey through the cave, as parallel. Although both the Line and the Cave passages describe πίστις as a state whose criteria for truth is similar to εἰκασία in that it is perception-based, πίστις involves the ability to perceive physical objects first hand, rather than only the ability to observe their appearances like εἰκασία does.

I describe πίστις as an ability because, based on the Cave allegory, one in the state of πίστις may turn away from the objects themselves and look back at the shadows. In its observation of appearances (represented by the shadows), the believing soul assimilates itself to one in the state of conjecture, but because of its point of reference, the soul in the state of belief is able to discern the truth (albeit a distorted version of truth) behind the appearance, unlike the conjecturing soul. Since, according to Plato’s description, one is inclined to regression and delusion in the state of belief, one needs another factor in order to establish firmly the improved

¹¹⁷ This portrayal of the soul’s turning is another addition from the Cave to the Line’s four phases of cognitive accomplishment.
access to truth that one gains when one transitions to the level of πίστις.\(^{118}\) The Allegory of the Cave adds this factor to the Line. It occurs as part of the turn to διάνοια, and takes place as the soul significantly resists. This additional factor is the heavy-handed guidance of someone else. We later learn that this helper is the philosopher, or philosopher king, who has returned to the cave. This is not to say that the philosopher’s involvement begins at the turn to διάνοια though. Notice in the text above that the prisoner “is freed (λυθείη, 515c6),” “is compelled (ἀναγκάζοιτο, 515c6) to stand up (ανίστασθαι, 515c7),” and is asked what is more real: the shadows or their objects. (515c-d) These details demand the presence of an additional agent doing these things to the prisoner if we assume Plato’s language is deliberate.\(^{119}\) Since these things facilitate the prisoner’s ascent toward knowledge, and we later learn that the philosopher is compelled by the founders to return to the cave and help others, we should infer that this additional agent involved in the turn to πίστις is the philosopher.\(^{120}\)

Before describing the turn to διάνοια, I will further defend the symmetry between the Line and the Cave by confirming here that the light that represents the stage of πίστις is the firelight, and not the sunlight. I will later argue that the Sunlight reflected on objects in the realm outside the cave represents dianoetic truth, while both the light of the Sun in the heavens and the Sun itself represents noetic truth. The results of my overall argument will show that the freed captive’s light sources change from the indirect light of the fire, to the direct light of the fire, to

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\(^{118}\) Dorter explains the newly-released prisoner’s impulse to turn back around by comparing them to Socrates’ interlocutors in a state of puzzlement when he provokes them away from passive or uncritical acceptance of subject matter. Dorter, 205.

\(^{119}\) As is already clear, I think this is a fair assumption to make.

\(^{120}\) One possible problem with this account is that it may be taken to imply that those who do not have access to a philosopher cannot manage to rise from ignorance to knowledge. Even referring to philosophers in the broadest possible sense, as highly educated and knowledgeable people, does not fully address this problem. Perhaps a less literal understanding of this external force for education and freedom is viable. Maybe Plato does not delve into detail about who or what this teacher figure is because it can take many different forms: an actual philosopher/teacher/mentor or the memory of one and the inspiration that results, for instance.
reflected Sunlight, and then finally, to nearly direct and eventually direct Sunlight. I will conclude that these four stages correspond with the four stages of cognitive accomplishment that the Line and Cave passages illustrate. Regarding the light that represents πίστις, there seems to be some ambiguity in the text. Socrates’ language (515c-e) does not specify whether it is the firelight or the Sunlight that the prisoner sees, since Plato uses φῶς consistently here, just as he does when he first distinguishes the Sunlight and the firelight (514a-b). Socrates makes it quite clear that the fire provides the prisoners’ light in the cave (514b), and that it is the firelight that produces the projections on the back of the cave wall. Though he describes the light of the Sun as shining outside the entrance of the cave (514a), this Sunlight must, at the very least, be negligible to a freed prisoner who first turns around, since any significant amount of Sunlight would have negated the sorts of projections described, and would have also enabled the prisoners to have some view of themselves and one another. Though Socrates does not specify the degree to which the cave twists and turns, he does indicate that after the freed prisoner first sees the light and then flees back into the cave, someone drags him “up the rough, steep path” (515e7) until he is in the Sunlight. (515e) Therefore, after he is turned around again, the prisoner ascends up an incline to reach the opening to the external world. Given the negligible amount of Sunlight that reaches the back of the cave, it makes sense to understand this incline—from the perspective of one at the back of the cave who has just turned around—as occluding some or all of the bright opening at the entrance of the cave. Therefore, the light that the prisoner first sees, and that is significant enough to hurt his eyes, must be the firelight.
1.2.4.5 The Turn to Διάνοια (Turn #2)

To ascend the steep path beyond the fire, someone must turn the prisoner around again, in the direction of the cave’s entrance, because in the state of πίστις, as I discussed, his resistance to viewing the firelight is so severe that he turns himself back toward the rear wall of the cave. Socrates describes the process of undoing this regression by saying that the captive is “dragged [. . .] away from there by force” (515e6), until he reaches the Sunlight, where he would be “unable to see a single one of the things now said to be true” (516a2-3). Socrates notes that the prisoner is quite annoyed at being treated like this. (515e) Also, the process of adjustment to the world outside the cave, lit by the Sun, takes time. (516a) Socrates says that the freed prisoner would first observe shadows most easily, then reflections of things in water, then objects themselves. He would view objects in the sky and the sky itself, but only at night, at first. (516a)

According to Socrates’ allegory, the turn toward the realm outside the cave repeats the first turn (away from the back wall of the cave) and then advances further amidst much struggle. As explained above, the significance of this repeated turn is that it is the transition to the outside world that firmly establishes the prisoner as turned in the right direction. I will explain the significance of this after defending the fact that this stage of the cave journey indeed describes the διάνοια of the Line.

When the freed captive views things outside the cave, he progresses to viewing things outside the cave by night—that is, he advances toward a partial view of these objects. This progression mirrors the journey in the cave to the extent that the shadows and reflections outside the cave bear some similarity to those of εἰκασία, and the objects of these shadows and reflections bear similarity to those of πίστις. These shadows and reflections in water bear similarity to the appearances that characterize conjecture. All of the objects outside the cave
reflect the light of the Sun, and in this way, these objects are similar to those of belief. However, the shadows and reflections, and subsequently their objects, are necessary stages of vision along the way to seeing real things in their fullness, by the full light of the Sun, in the next phase of the journey. The objects outside the cave then bear striking resemblance to the Forms one accesses in δύναμις according to the simile of the Line. (510b) This is especially true because according to the simile of the Line, one proceeds to Forms by means of objects of thought in a way that depends on physical analogues, (510b) just as, according to the Allegory of the Cave, one proceeds to the things outside the cave by means of images of those objects, only after yet other copies of those objects in the cave. In other words, since the objects outside the cave and their reflections function as hypotheses or stepping stones, they represent objects like the concepts of geometry, which, according to the simile of the Line, we understand through physical representations like diagrams, or even three-dimensional manifestations that resemble these concepts. (510c-e) Since the prisoner who first ventures outside the cave uses these stepping-stones to arrive at seeing yet other objects, these other objects must represent the Forms the Line includes at 510b.122 After all, according to the Line passage, δύναμις arrives at these Forms as conclusions, whereas νόησις uses them as stepping-stones to the first principle: the Good. Furthermore, in the prisoner’s early journey outside the cave, he does use objects similar to those involved in belief, but he does so in a way that does not involve actually descending back into the cave. This corresponds with the Line simile’s account of δύναμις, in that this way of thinking involves repurposing the objects that formerly resulted in belief, to serve, and thus to function as part of, the thought process that occurs in the intelligible realm. The imagery of the Line simile illustrates that although δύναμις involves physical objects, we do not actually return to opining at

122 Heidegger says real freedom occurs at this third stage, where the things themselves are. Heidegger, 169.
the level of πίστις when we are at the level of διάνοια. The account of the prisoner’s initial observations outside the cave parallel this concept, confirming the correspondence between the Line’s account of διάνοια and the Cave’s depiction of the prisoner’s early journey outside the cave.123

I indicated above that the prisoner only remains turned toward the entrance of the cave, rather than turning back toward the shadows, if someone turns him around a second time and then drags him toward the outside world. This aspect of the Cave allegory depicts the idea that only the turn toward διάνοια really convinces us to renounce the ways of conjecture, and in turn, to renounce our orientation toward bodily desires and the lower aspects of the soul. However, this is not meant to imply that the renunciation is final, but only that, at the very least, we tend to stay turned in the right direction once we have reached διάνοια. Only when we reach a conception of the truth based on the intelligible, rather than the sensible, or on Being rather than becoming, do we choose consistently to use the abilities we gained in πίστις. We will also use newly acquired discernment abilities, rooted in the intelligible.

Though it may seem that these observations about the turn toward διάνοια negate the value of the turn toward πίστις, this is not the case. Plato conveys the concept that the prisoner

123 What does the Allegory of the Cave add to the simile of the Line’s portrayal of διάνοια? In the prisoner’s adjustment period outside the cave, he uses shadows and reflections of things in this realm as stepping-stones, as well as the things whose shadows and reflections he first sees. As stated above, the former clearly resemble the imagery of εἰκοσία, while the latter clearly bear some similarity to objects of πίστις. According to the Line, in διάνοια, we use the objects of πίστις as images, but not necessarily the imagery of εἰκοσία (510e) The simile of the Line, however, does not present any reason to negate the possibility of using the imagery of εἰκοσία as stepping stones to thought. The Cave allegory, therefore, illustrates how this could take place, thus adding a dimension to the Line’s account, but not necessarily contradicting any aspect of the Line simile.

It may interest the reader also to consider whether or not the very images of the Line and Cave are examples of using the imagery of εἰκοσία and/or the objects of πίστις, to arrive at thought, just like the process involved in διάνοια as explained above. At first, the answer to this question may be an obvious “yes,” but confusing the matter is the fact that, according to the Line image, geometrical diagrams are considered examples of the objects of πίστις. So, is the Line image more like a geometrical diagram or is it more like the imagery of conjecture? What about the imagery of the Cave? Is it possible that the two involve a mixture of both kinds of imagery and that they do not proceed neatly from one to the other? If so, perhaps διάνοια in actuality is not as simple as its depiction by the Line and the Cave.
needs to be released, to turn around, and to see the firelight for the first time, even if it results in retreat, just as we need to adjust to the freedom of a worldview that extends beyond conjecture by learning difficult or perhaps shocking truths, and then escaping to εἰκασία, even if just for a short time. The Allegory of the Cave illustrates that the turn toward πίστις is a necessary step, even if the initial step forward results in a retreat before one continues to progress on toward knowledge. Following this retreat, after all, we are able to take the difficult journey to the intelligible, due to the guidance of our educators. Furthermore, the grueling nature of the two turns conveys to us the necessity of suffering in intellectual development. The myth of Er, as we will see, has more to say about the intellectual value of suffering.

1.2.4.6 The Transition to Νόησις

After viewing things outside the cave for some unspecified amount of time, the prisoner may observe “the Sun and the light of the Sun” (516b1-2), according to Socrates. Socrates adds, “Finally, I suppose, he’d be able to see the Sun, not images of it in water or some alien place, but the Sun itself, in its own place, and be able to study it” (516b4-7). He adds, “And at this point he would infer and conclude that the Sun provides the seasons and the years, governs everything in the visible world, and is in some way the cause of all the things that he used to see” (516b9-c2).

Earlier, prior to his description of the Divided Line, Socrates refers to the Sun by saying that what the Good is in the intelligible realm, the Sun is in the visible realm (508b-c). Furthermore, he says the Form of the Good gives truth to things that we know and also gives us the power to know. It is not only the cause of knowledge and truth, but an object of knowledge.

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125 Heidegger, 170, points out the endurance and effort involved in liberation, which necessitates much more than just the removal of chains. For further clarification of my understanding of the turns, see appendix 2.
as well. (508e) Finally, he explains that objects of knowledge owe their Being to the Good and that the latter is superior to Being. (509b)

The function of the Sun according to its initial description and according to its description in the Cave allegory are parallel—it is the cause of all things seen. Also, the Good, which explicitly is the cause of truth and knowledge to all things known, according to its comparison with the Sun in the earlier Sun simile, parallels the Sun image in the Allegory of the Cave, which describes it as the cause of everything outside the cave. Following our earlier discussion, this imagery implies that the Sun—the Good—also causes that which represents the Forms. This is also parallel to the function of the Good according to its initial description in the context of the Sun simile.

The last phase of the journey out of the cave represents the noetic phase of the Line simile by including the viewing of things outside the cave by Sunlight, as well as the Sun itself. This is because, as I indicated previously, the objects outside the cave represent Forms, as mentioned in the Line simile at 510b. The prisoner now sees them in Sunlight, which represents the fact that he has an understanding of the Forms that results from his conception of the Good. In this way, the prisoner now understands the Forms’ interrelatedness, which involves knowing their purpose. The person who has progressed to this stage knows the purpose of the whole journey, including all of the objects of becoming and Being along the way. Also, just as the vision of the Sun crowns the prisoner’s journey out, the knowledge of the first principle is the highest stage of cognitive accomplishment according to the Line. We may conclude, therefore,

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126 Dorrer, *The Transformation of Plato’s Republic*, 187, explains that the proclamation of the Good as the cause of the Forms, and all Being, indicates that all of reality is a consequence of that which is Good. He adds that the *Timaeus* defends this view. I will briefly consider this facet of the *Timaeus* in chapter 5.

127 The Line does not explicitly refer to the final object of knowledge as the Good, but since the imagery of the Cave allegory corresponds with the initial description of the sun and parallels with the Line, as I’ve shown, it is clear that the allegory brings together those images to imply that the final object of knowledge is in fact the Good, or the unhypothetical first principle, which is the cause of everything.
that there is a clear correspondence between νόησις according to the Line, and the last phase of the ascent out of the cave.

Though there is no distinct turn involved in the transition from διάνοια to νόησις, the latter is the summit of the ascent to knowledge and therefore the highest cognitive achievement that results from the process of turning around.\textsuperscript{128} Section 518c, which I will examine below, explicitly notes the concept that νόησις crowns the educational journey in this way. Socrates describes the transition from διάνοια to νόησις as seamless, in that the freed prisoner need not turn around to go from the former to the latter. Also, the freed captive does not resist as he does in the previous two transitions, and his guide no longer has a dominating presence. (Indeed, it is unclear whether or not the guide is even still present at all during this transition.) However, the transition to νόησις takes time and involves much adjustment, according to the Cave allegory. What is the epistemological and metaphysical significance of this relatively smooth transition? Plato seems to be indicating that once we have reached διάνοια, we tend not to prevent ourselves from achieving further cognitive accomplishment and increased proximity to the source of true Being. Also, we no longer resent our freedom, as we did when we first realized the truth beyond conjecture. In this way, we are no longer at odds with ourselves when we are in a state of διάνοια. Rather, the intellectual life, even in its early phases, brings us an internal, psychic harmony that we never had before. Far from being hampered by the restraints of conjecture, and its emphasis on the bodily, we are rationally dominated souls free from our enslavement to bodily urges and the darkness of ignorance. In thought, we are even free from the limitations of

\textsuperscript{128} Porter, 179, explains that διάνοια makes “no necessary reference to value—to virtue or the Good,” unlike νόησις. My analysis can be seen to support this interpretation.
the physical world outside us, which the cave walls represent. Notably, the soul is that which accesses the cognitive objects the Line describes.\textsuperscript{129}

1.2.4.7 The Turn Back into the Cave (Turn #3)

After having seen the Sun, when the prisoner “reminds himself of his first dwelling place, his fellow prisoners, and what passed for wisdom there” (516c4-5), he is happy about his change, he pities his former neighbors, and also would rather “go through any sufferings,” than “share their opinions and live as they do” once again (516d6-7). Furthermore, if he went back into the cave and returned to his former seat, his eyes would be “filled with darkness” (516e4-5) after having come out of the Sun so suddenly. (516e) Before he adjusted to the darkness, he would encourage ridicule of himself if he competed with the prisoners again. (516e-517a) As a result, they would say that “he’d returned from his upward journey with his eyesight ruined and that it isn’t worthwhile even to try to travel upward” (517a3-4). Consequently, they would react to anyone who tried to free them by killing him “if they could somehow get their hands on him” (517a5-6). Socrates later adds that “when someone turns from divine study to the evils of human life,” he “appears completely ridiculous if he’s compelled, either in the courts or elsewhere, to contend about the shadows of justice or the statues of which they are shadows and to dispute about the way these things are understood by people who have never seen justice itself” (517d7-e2). Socrates also expresses that it is not surprising that those who view the Form of the Good

\textsuperscript{129} Given the symmetry between the Line and the Cave for which I have argued, the prisoner represents the human soul that goes from the bondage of bodily desires to the freedom of rationality. In turn, the harmony of διάνοια reflects and elaborates upon the psychic harmony or functionality Socrates describes in Republic 4 (441c-444c), where he describes in detail a rationally-ruled soul. Similar to this description, the soul in the intellectual realm is not only functional and hence virtuous because it does not hamper itself with overemphasis on appetites or spiritedness, but, according to the Cave allegory, in this highly rational state, it smoothly journeys through the intellectual world with reason as its ruler. I include these remarks only as a note, however, because they require further defense that would take us too far afield now, and they are not necessary to my argument about the Line, the Cave, and the turning around of the whole soul.
are “unwilling to occupy themselves with human affairs” (517c8-9). Yet, Socrates says it is the duty of the city’s founders to compel the best people to ascend to the Good and also go back down into the cave. (519c-d) The reason this does not amount to doing an injustice to the philosophers is that the law must not concern itself with making one class exceedingly happy, but rather, spreading happiness throughout by making citizens improve one another. (519e-520a) Also, Socrates explains that the founders will tell the philosophers that it is typically justifiable for the latter not to share in the work of the city, because philosophers usually spring up there against the intent of its constitution. But in the city the founders have been describing, philosophers are kings and have a better education than everyone else. As a result, they ought to go back and live in common with the others, and when the philosophers become accustomed to seeing in darkness, their vision will be exceedingly better than those there. (520a-c)

This turn back into the cave requires persuasion or compulsion in that the philosophers will resist it because they despise their former ignorance and way of life. Therefore, the founders must educate them about the city’s need for philosophers to descend back into the realm of human affairs. Just as the philosopher kings facilitate the turns to πίστις and διάνοια, the founders facilitate the turn back into the cave. The founders need to compel the resisting philosophers to return to their old community and give back. The founders therefore need to teach the rulers about why they need to educate others, so that the city can be bound together in harmony. The question arises: What does it mean for the educational process that people who have reached the highest level of understanding (contemplation or intelligence) will not teach and compel themselves to sacrifice for the sake of helping others? What does it mean that this ethical obligation is still lacking after one reaches the summit of all knowledge? Because of the need for this last turn back into the cave, the transition to νόησις crowns but does not complete
the educational process. The philosopher receives his last lesson when he learns about the need to go back. Furthermore, the educated person does not come full circle in his turning around until he reaches and teaches within the deepest pit of ignorance after having reached the summit of all knowledge. Is the philosopher’s position as king in Καλλίπολις enough to stop the ignorant from trying to kill him when he tries to educate them? It seems likely that the ignorant will want to kill him, but will be prevented by law from doing so. If this is the case, then this is yet another factor that would make the philosopher resist this lowly job. Also, if the depiction of the prisoner’s being dragged up to the outside world accurately portrays the role the educated will assume when they return, they will have a difficult job to do in a place that limits the freedom of intellectual vision that they have while in the external world. Thus, even though they will likely not go back to being completely chained and bound in the cave, they will return to find themselves less free. Part of this lack of freedom will likely involve the difficulty the philosopher will encounter when he tries to communicate with those whose sense of truth is highly subjective. These conjecturing people are prone to contradiction and they have a ridiculous honor system, as we saw in our analysis of εἰκασία above. Despite its absurdity, this honor system will be the setting in which the philosopher will have to prove his worth to those the founders charged him to educate. This set of restrictions is another factor making the educated resist the turn back in.\textsuperscript{130} Therefore, those who return will face a tough job and will need more than the persuasion and compulsion of the founders once they find themselves back among the masses. This is presumably one reason why, after describing the turn back into the cave, Socrates engages in a detailed description of how to turn the guardians to the intelligible

\textsuperscript{130} Why though, despite the odds against him in the community of the masses, and the lack of freedom there, does the philosopher’s knowledge of the Good alone not result in this ethical impulse to help others? In other words, why is the compulsion of the founders needed? This is ultimately a question for another study.
realm, (521c) or how to drag them out of the cave to διάνοια. He also discusses how to educate them further once they are there. One main tool involved in the job of turning one to διάνοια is an instrument that one in the state of πίστις would find appealing in its usefulness, such as arithmetic. (521d, 522b-c) Chapters 2-4 will reveal that the myths of afterlife contain pedagogical tools that the educator can use to engage and thus teach those not only in the state of πίστις, but those in εἰκασία and διάνοια as well. Furthermore, the chapters that follow will show how the afterlife myths may intellectually engage philosophers, despite the fact that these myths include examples of pedagogical tools for philosophers to use on others. In this way, the afterlife myths thus convey to educators that (1) the process of descending back into the cave need not be as cognitively restricting as it might have initially seemed, and (2) the learning process is never over, even for those who have reached the greatest heights of contemplation and who have descended to help others.

1.2.4.8 What, Exactly, Is the Turning of the Whole Soul?

Socrates says about the Cave allegory:

This whole image, Glaucon, must be fitted together with what we said before. The visible realm should be likened to the prison dwelling, and the light of the fire inside it to the power of the Sun. And if you interpret the upward journey and the study of things above as the upward journey of the soul to the intelligible realm, you’ll grasp what I hope to convey [. . . ] In the knowable realm, the form of the Good is the last thing to be seen, and it is reached only with difficulty (517a8-c1).

My examination of the Sun, the Line, and the Cave indicates that all three are complementary, parallel aspects of Plato’s description of the educational journey. Though I have referred to the Line and Cave as parallel, they are complementary in the sense that both are needed to give a complete portrayal of reality, along with the Sun simile. The quotation above confirms this by pointing out explicitly that the visible realm, or the lower section of the Line,
one should liken to the prison in the cave. Also, the Sun of the visible realm in the simile of the Line, one should liken to the fire inside the cave. This correspondence that Socrates points out corroborates the aspect of my interpretation above defending the view that the light the initially freed prisoner sees is the fire.\footnote{Though the Line and Cave descriptions are symmetrical, the analysis above indicates that there are at least six ways in which the imagery of the Allegory of the Cave adds to the content the Line conveys, as I noted at the outset of this analysis. The description of the last turn makes a unique contribution to the political picture that the Cave gives us. The journey back in illustrates the perils of being a philosopher at the time of the Republic’s composition, as well as the exciting possibilities that await if philosophers ever get the leadership status and legal framework they need truly to educate the public. Though this last contribution of the Cave allegory echoes the ship image of Republic 6 (488a-489a), it is nevertheless an addition to the content the Line delivers.}

Before moving on, it is imperative to address a question that arises about the Cave allegory as a result of the following lines: Socrates refers to the “instrument” with which each person learns, and then says: “This instrument cannot be turned around from that which is coming into Being without turning the whole soul until it is able to study that which is and the brightest thing that is, namely, the one we call the Good” (518c8-10). These lines beg the question: Does the turning of the whole soul only signify the transition from the shadows of ἐικασία to the light of νόησις? Or, does turning the whole soul involve ascending from one level of knowledge to another, with νόησις as the climax, and with each stage in between as a further advancement away from becoming and toward Being? I will argue here that Plato means the latter.

There are two critical premises involved in my argument:

(1) Socrates first describes the turning as going from darkness to light, saying “the instrument with which each learns is like an eye that cannot be turned around from darkness to light without turning the whole body” (518c4-8). We see in the Cave allegory that the first way the prisoner turns his whole body toward the light takes place when the prisoner first sees the...
firelight, which occurs again before he journeys to see the reflected light of the Sun. After this journey and the adjustment process, the prisoner finally sees the light of the Sun itself. The prisoner does not break free and turn around suddenly to see the light of the Sun itself, just as εἰκασία does not lead directly to νόησις. The analysis above shows that there is an epistemological need for each step along the way, and that the details of the Cave imagery convey this.

(2) Also, as we noticed above, the prisoner must physically turn around after breaking free in order to shift his gaze from the shadows on the back of the Cave wall to the artifacts and firelight producing the shadows. This same turn happens again in the transition from πίστις to διάνοια.

Therefore, it is in line with the immediate context of 518c8-10, and also with the Allegory of the Cave, to understand the former as implying that the turning of the soul involves ascending from one state of Being to the next along the Line.132

This conclusion, however, does not explain the function of 518c8-10 (the first quotation above). Its function must be to make explicit that the greatest height of the turning around process, or the pinnacle of the educational journey, is the Idea of the Good. The passage also makes explicit the concept that an advance in knowledge is an advance away from becoming and toward Being. One might object that the imagery of the Sun, the Line, and the Cave already established very clearly what the summit of the intellectual journey is. However, the function of 518c8-10 sheds further light on the turning around necessary to reach this height. This sentence points out that only when one has reached νόησις has one completely turned around from that which is coming into Being, implying that all previous stages involve some mixture of Being and

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132 Heidegger, 166, explains that the essence of παιδεία is the turning around of the whole soul, or the reorienting and accustoming of the human essence. He points out that “Bildung,” or “formation” is a close approximation to it.
becoming. Though the imagery of the Sun, the Line, and the Cave implicitly made this point, Plato makes it here explicitly. This is not to say, however, that the turning around of the whole soul is complete once one reaches contemplation or intelligence. One “comes full circle” when one returns to the cave, as I stated.

In the Allegory of the Cave, Plato provides us with a vivid account of the varying levels of struggle involved in the cognitive achievements that the Line describes. The turns toward belief (πίστις) and thought (διάνοια) are achievements that result from the dominance of reason in the soul, insofar as the prisoner’s appetite for conjectural imagery is overcome. The prisoner certainly deserves much credit for this, but as noted above, someone or something else, which we labeled as a philosopher, compels the prisoner to turn around in both of these ways. Though this external force ultimately leads the prisoner toward truth, this force actually initially leads the prisoner toward various manifestations of falsehood, or what we would typically refer to as “half-truths.” In the first turn, to belief, the prisoner is compelled to see imitations of things that really are, represented by artifacts in the cave that are lit by firelight rather than Sunlight. In the second turn, to thought, the prisoner is first compelled to see these same artifacts again, because he regresses after the first turn. Then, after being led through the difficult, winding path out of the cave (the last part of the turn to thought), the prisoner first sees yet another set of imitations of things that really are, represented by the shadows and reflections he sees outside the cave, at night. Insofar as this external educating force has led the prisoner’s soul toward the truth by way of the false (the partially true, to be more specific), incrementally, the prisoner has experienced psychagogy.

The third turn, back into the cave, also involves its subject’s being led toward the false for the sake of the true, except in this case, it is not the subject’s apprehension of the truth that is
at stake, but rather, the necessity of his leading others to it, as he has been led. If one agrees with Socrates, that the most highly educated need to be compelled to serve in this way, then one may argue that this is a truth toward which the educated need to be led, rather, perhaps, than the truth. By showing his readers how one may reach the summit of the intellectual life only then to descend to a world of ignorance and educate others, Plato shows us how the soul may be completely turned around. By showing us the various turns and transitions involved in this accomplishment, Plato begins to show us how to seek the truth, and even how to help others do so. However, this process is a complex one that requires further details.

For instance, how does one become released from the bondage of the bodily in the first place, and rise above conjecture? The previous section about the whole soul answered that question by explaining Plato’s account of the ways in which the lower aspects of the soul may respond to the commands of reason. Also, chapters 2-4 will each show in different ways, how the afterlife myths provide examples of the pedagogical tools that can provoke a soul to turn from one level to the next. Other questions also arise from the account of the Line and Cave above: Those who return to the cave seem to have a nearly impossible task before them. How can they win arguments in the realm of εἰκασία and later drag an obdurate student from the state of πίστις to that of διάνοια? How do both the imagery of εἰκασία and the physical objects of πίστις function in διάνοια? As I discussed above, the imagery of the Cave begins to answer these questions, and the subsequent account of the guardians’ education provides more answers, but the task of educators is so enormous that they need more help. Plato provides this assistance, as the three central chapters of this study will show, in the myths of the afterlife and the soul-turning that they provoke. For instance, I will explain that all of the accounts of afterlife punishments may serve as examples of ways in which educators may challenge the thinking of
those who assume that people who are not penalized for unjust deeds will necessarily remain free from suffering negative consequences. I will explain that those who make this assumption do so at the level of εἰκασία, and that the myths provide examples of how to challenge these people to rise to πίστις. Also, as stated above, we will see how the afterlife myths make the philosopher’s job less slavish and more intellectually stimulating than the details of the Cave allegory suggest. This is not to say that the allegory is inaccurate, but only that its role is to point out the trials of those who journey back in, while the myths of afterlife introduce coping mechanisms for the educated who engage in this difficult labor.

1.2.4.9 Conclusions

This conception of soul-leading is in line with my account earlier, of the *Phaedrus*. Furthermore, the Cave allegory adds detail to the *Phaedrus*’ account of psychagogy by showing the different levels of falsity (or partial truth) that may be involved in leading a soul toward superior levels of truth. We have a more complete conception of psychagogy, then, than what was first evident in the *Phaedrus*. It is clear not only where psychagogy leads souls, but also how, given my explanation of the tripartite soul of the *Republic*, in which appetite and spirit may be led together, through their mutual love of imagery, or separately, with imagery targeting

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133 If the shadows and reflections outside the cave, in the world of the real, represent imitations of what is, then the artifacts in the cave, in the realm of delusion, may represent copies of copies, while the shadows on the cave wall seem to represent copies of copies of copies of the real. Therefore, even a psychagogue who operates with objects that are twice removed from what really is, may indeed lead a soul toward truth, if they practice their craft knowledgeably for this purpose. Fully defending this particular aspect of my interpretation is not essential to this dissertation and thus, is a project for another study. In that other study, it would prove interesting to compare these layers of imitation to the account of painting and poetry in *Republic* 10. In that comparison, it may become evident that painting and poetry, as copies of copies, actually can engage in productive soul-leading if practiced knowledgeably and for that purpose.

134 Foucault’s understanding of psychagogy involves modifying the mode of Being of a subject. See Foucault, 407. My account supports this view, though it has not yet focused squarely on this aspect of psychagogy.
either the unique objects of appetite or spirit. It is clear also that for reason to lead, the lower aspects must be made to “listen” by means of the aforementioned methods of engagement. We understand not only what the three aspects are individually, but how they may affect one another, and either work for or against one another. With the understanding of the turning of the whole soul we now have, we are ready to begin discussing the particular ways in which the myths of the afterlife perform their psychagogic functions.

While the Allegory of the Cave hints at the affective dimension of the struggle to turn one’s soul, the myths of the afterlife will prove useful in helping us to discern the pronounced role that this dimension has in intellectual conversion. By using the myths of judgment to look more closely at the ways in which the whole soul is involved in this turning around, I will help make the case that this conversion is not limited in its being intellectual. In other words, I will help Plato defend his work against the possible objection that the convert still needs to “take to heart” the teachings of their transformation, or the likely objection that the convert’s will to live out their life’s newfound meaning may still need to come around. The turning around of the whole soul is not merely intellectual, it is intellectual in a way that involves the entirety of the subject.

Despite this holistic function of the eschatological myths, the psychagogy of these myths is still just a piece of the psychagogy that the entire dialogue attempts—albeit a consummatory piece—and the psychagogy of Plato’s dialogues is just one component in the intellectual formation of Plato’s followers. Though this project will not delve into the psychagogy of entire dialogues, or that which occurs beyond the dialogues, it is important to ensure that we do not proceed under the delusion that the myths of the afterlife have the power to transform souls in a lasting way singlehandedly. The role of these myths, which is largely overlooked, has the
potential to be very significant in the intellectual growth and development of Plato’s readers.

Just as the prisoner’s journey succeeds in part because of the self-knowledge that increases as his surroundings become brighter, the psychagogic effects of the myths of judgment will be more impactful if we know more about what they are doing to us as we study them.
CHAPTER TWO
PSYCHAGOGY AND THE MYTH OF ER

2.1 Introduction: Plato’s Criticism of Poetry: What Does it Mean for the Myth of Er?

Before delving into the elaborate psychagogy that the myth of Er provokes, including the ways in which it recapitulates and expands on the philosophy from the main dialogue, I must consider the possible objection that, because Plato presents such extensive criticism of poetry in the *Republic*, he does not want his readers to interpret the myth of Er seriously (that is, philosophically).¹

Up until book 10, this objection would be very difficult to overcome. In book 2, Socrates begins censoring art for the sake of children’s rearing, arguing that this is warranted because of their impressionability and inability to understand adult themes. (377b) The censorship eventually grows quite expansive, extending to many well-known passages from Homer, Hesiod, and others. Rather than just banning these passages from use for children, as was initially suggested, much of this literature is either severely restricted or eliminated entirely from the city.² The justification here is that these texts present themes that are dangerous for the average citizen to hear, like portrayals of the gods as deceptive³ and, in general, depictions that might encourage vice⁴ including those of unjust people being rewarded (392a-b).

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¹ This objection assumes that myth is a type of poetry, which is how I understand the relationship between the former and latter. I do not see them as simply equivalent. Janet Smith explains that we can identify myth as poetry since most ancient Greek poetry had myth as its content. Also, Platonic myth has a number of features typically considered poetic, like beautiful language, similes, metaphors, and emotional intensity. Additionally, she says, Plato’s myths are sometimes rhythmical. However, completely equating the Platonic myth with poetry is problematic, according to Smith, because Plato’s myths are not metrical. She cites 393d8 where Socrates says he will speak without meter since he is not a poet. See Smith, *Plato’s Use of Myth as a Pedagogical Device*, 10-12. Catherine Collobert argues convincingly that Plato sees myth as poetic philosophy. See Collobert, “The Platonic Art of Myth Making: Myth as Informative Phantasma,” in *Plato and Myth*, ed. Catherine Collobert, Pierre Destrée, and Francisco Gonzalez (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 87.

² 377e-378b, 378d-e, 379d-e, 383a; This list is far from exhaustive.

³ 379b-c, 381b, 381d-e, 382e

⁴ 388e-389a, 389e-392a
The justification for this censorship is maintained throughout the *Republic*, and even into the final book, where Socrates confirms that they were right not to admit any imitative art (595a) because of its distance from the truth and the way it perverts the thoughts of those who hear it. Socrates explains why the mimetic arts are distanced from truth, saying that, whereas a craftsman produces a copy of a Form, an artist produces a copy of the craftsman’s copy, thus being twice removed from truth. (597b-598c, 602a-c) Explaining why imitation has a perverting effect on thinking, Socrates claims that it relaxes the rational part of the soul and allows shameful emotions to surface. (605d-606d) I contend that Plato responds to both of these criticisms, as well as the criticisms of art from the earlier books, in his mythical poetry. He does this by carefully regulating the emotion his work evokes, and by producing copies that function like objects in the cave that inspire freed prisoners (his readers) to turn around toward the light. Also, he portrays the gods as good, as opposed to deceptive, and presents the unjust as being

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5 595b, 596b-598b, 598d-600e, 602c-d, 605a-b
7 As I discussed in my account of the Cave allegory, when the freed prisoner first turns around and enters the level of belief, he is prone to regress. (515c-e) As I will explain shortly, it is immediately before and after this regression, in the realm of belief, where Plato’s afterlife imagery begins to have its effect on readers, helping them to become firmly turned in the right direction, going out of the cave. It is artifacts in the cave, rather than shadows, that help the prisoner in this way. The artifacts are copies of objects in the intelligible world. Artifacts can serve in this way despite their being manipulated by puppeteers. These objects lose their manipulative effect when they are no longer viewed only by the shadows they create.

Collobert is especially illuminating on this point. She argues that Platonic imagery has a philosophical model as its original, and therefore, delusion is removed from the illusions he creates. While poets and sophists merely copy from the realm of opinion, which leads to the confusion of images with their originals, Plato’s copies are well-grounded, because they are devices to portray philosophical content, and have a grasp of what is as their foundation. Also, unlike the sophist, the philosopher does not conceal the distance between image and model, making the deluded viewer aware of the delusion. See Collobert, 87, 95, 102. Collobert, 99, specifically argues that the imagery of Platonic myth is only once removed from the truth. Gary Gurtler adds a key difference between the idea of the bed, the bed, and the representation of the bed on the one hand, and the objects outside and inside the cave, on the other, saying that there is a dynamic interrelation among the latter that is not present in the former. See Gurtler, “The Distorted City in the Republic,” in *Literary, Philosophical, and Religious Studies in the Platonic Tradition*, ed. John Finamore and John Phillips (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2013), 127. I am not sure I agree with this point, but it is certainly worth considering.
punished while the just are rewarded. As I will show, Plato consequently encourages virtue rather than vice with his depictions. However, even at this point in book 10, we have not heard anything even remotely positive about poetry, so why would Plato even consider writing it? Furthermore, why would he possibly want us to take it seriously?

To answer this question, I will turn now to Plato’s final word on poetry in book 10.

Socrates says:

Nonetheless, if the poetry that aims at pleasure and imitation has any argument to bring forward that proves it ought to have a place in a well-governed city, we at least would be glad to admit it, for we are well aware of the charm it exercises. But, be that as it may, to betray what one believes to be the truth is impious... Therefore, isn’t it just that such poetry should return from exile when it has successfully defended itself, whether in lyric or any other meter... Then we’ll allow its defenders, who aren’t poets themselves but lovers of poetry, to speak in prose on its behalf and to show that it not only gives pleasure but is beneficial both to constitutions and to human life. Indeed, we’ll listen to them graciously, for we’d certainly profit if poetry were shown to be not only pleasant but also beneficial. (607c2-e1)

Four times, Socrates says that the city will benefit from poetry if it is proven to be beneficial. Plato here makes the point emphatically that poetry can really be a good thing, if framed correctly, that is, philosophically or non-poetically. One reason for this benefit, as stated above, is the charm (κηλουμένος, c7) of poetry. Socrates implies here that this charm could be a tool

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8 For instance, in the myth of Er, the afterlife penalty for injustice is ten times the injustice of the deed. (615a-b) The tyrant is punished so harshly that anyone even remotely considering that sort of vicious life may be deterred by the portrayal. (615c-616a) Also, those who choose their next life based only on the appearance of the lot that falls next to them, rather than based on the wisdom of philosophical consideration, risk living a life filled with unimaginable suffering. (619b-620a)

D. Cürsgen thinks the myth fulfills Plato’s criteria for good poetry. Cürsgen, Die Rationalität des Mythischen (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2002), 58. Also, Oliver, 295, argues, using reasoning similar to my own, that the myth of Er meets the criteria for admission into the city. Vorwerk explains that the myth of Er meets the criteria for admission to the city, in part because it does not encourage fear of death, and in part because of its philosophical grounding, through its connectedness to the dialogue. See Vorwerk, “Mythos und Kosmos. Zur Topographie des Jenseits im Er-Mythos des Platonschen Staates (614b2-616b1),” Philologus 146 (2002): 46, 48, 50. Taking a slightly different stance from the above, D. Bouvier thinks the myth of Er helps to justify Plato’s theory of mimetic art in the Republic. See Bouvier, “Ulysse et le personnage du lecteur dans la République: réflexions sur l’importance du mythe d’Er pour la théorie de la mimêsis,” in La Philosophie de Platon, ed. Michel Fattal (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2001), 38-39.
for good if implemented by one who could defend its use.\textsuperscript{11} Plato’s myths, as I will show, possess a built-in philosophical defense, which results in large part from their interconnectedness with the broader dialogical context.\textsuperscript{12} I mentioned this in the previous chapter when explaining how Plato’s afterlife myths respond to his critique of writing in the \textit{Phaedrus}.

As a result of these considerations, we may now proceed to investigate the myth of Er with philosophical earnestness, since we now know that it may be a piece of art that responds to the robust criticisms of imitation in the \textit{Republic}.

2.2 The Myth of Er as an Invitation to Belief: A Literal Interpretation

2.2.1 The First Seven Days: On the Meadow of Souls

Socrates has been teaching the interlocutors about the soul in relation to justice all night, and after concluding his remarks on art, he attempts to prove the immortality of the soul. (608c-611b) He then says that an account of the “prizes, wages, and gifts” (ἆθλα τε καὶ μισθοὶ καὶ δῶρα, 614a1) that await the just and unjust after death is “owed by the argument” (τοῦ λόγου ὑφειλόμενα, 614a8).

This is the tale of a brave man named Er, who died in battle and whose corpse was relatively preserved when he and his fellow dead were picked up after ten days.\textsuperscript{15} (614b) Right

\textsuperscript{11} Stanley Rosen refers to those who have this ability as those who possess the remedy for poetry. See Rosen, \textit{The Quarrel Between Philosophy and Poetry} (New York: Routledge, 1993), 10.

\textsuperscript{12} It is precisely because Platonic myth provokes critical reflection that Marina McCoy argues it satisfies the criteria for good poetry (607e-608a). Also, she says, Plato’s poetry might awaken the lower parts of the soul, but it does so in a way that promotes rational goals. In these ways, Platonic poetry incorporates its self-prescribed limits. See McCoy, “Freedom and Responsibility in the Myth of Er” \textit{Ideas y Valores} 61 (2012): 130-131.

\textsuperscript{15} The following sheds some helpful background on Er’s identity: Daryl Anne McGowan points out the appropriateness of the similarity between Er’s name (Ἠρὸς) and ἥρως (hero), explaining that the ultimate feat of a hero is to travel to the realm of the dead, like Heracles, Odysseus, Orpheus, or Theseus. However, we don’t see many of the traditional features of a Greek hero in Er, since his abilities mainly include observing and thinking about the netherworld. McGowan, “Myth and \textit{Mimesis} in Plato’s \textit{Republic},” (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Buffalo, 1983), 182, 184. Arthur Platt explains we can learn about Er from Moses of Chorene, who wrote an Armenian history. Er, or Ara, was the son of Aram, and succeeded his father as king of Armenia. See Platt, “Plato, \textit{Republic}, 614b,” \textit{Classical Review} 25 (1911): 13-14. J. R. Russell speculates that the Armenians lived in Pamphylia.
away, Socrates’ companions, and Plato’s readers, are drawn into a peculiar story coupled with imagery that is intriguing at the very least. We feel sympathy for Er, since he was brave and was killed in battle, and we are curious about these corpses—his in particular. Our desire to envision these corpses stems from our appetitive soul, according to the story of Leontius (439e-440a), recounted earlier (chapter 1, section 1.2.2.1). Our feelings of sympathy for the brave soldier come from the spirited soul, since this is the part most closely associated with our thoughts and motivations related to courage and soldiering.\(^\text{16}\)

The intriguing imagery continues as Socrates explains that Er’s corpse was about to be burned on the pyre, when Er awoke and started to tell his story. (614b) The imagery of bodies on a pyre might initially strike one as simply graphic or morose, but when we recall the various occurrences of this image in traditional Greek literature, other emotions may spring up, for instance, sadness or anger.\(^\text{17}\) Though we may initially feel highly skeptical about the notion of Er waking up on the pyre after having been dead for twelve days, our skepticism is met by the fact that Socrates is telling this story. Regardless of any conception we may have of Socrates from sources other than the Republic, in this dialogue, he establishes himself as an authority on matters of the soul, and also as one who relentlessly pursues the truth about complex issues. He has also proven himself to be a knowledgeable guide throughout this very long, difficult

\(^{16}\) See chapter 1, section 1.2.2.1 for further explanation.

\(^{17}\) See Patroclus’ pyre at Iliad 23.108-191 and Hector’s at Iliad 24.776-804, for example.
conversation about justice. Because of all of this, we are inclined to believe Socrates’ story, whether or not we accept it as a literal fact, and to trust that Plato is having him speak the truth, even if it seems surprising or shocking to us, which is nothing new for anyone who has been following along with the dialogue.\(^\text{18}\)

The authoritative force of this account also draws support from the many descriptions of the afterlife in traditional Greek literature,\(^\text{19}\) and the long-held tradition of belief in an afterlife.\(^\text{20}\)

There is also the argument for the immortality of the soul that precedes the myth, which many readers may find persuasive.\(^\text{21}\) This adds further credibility to the notion of an afterlife. Despite


\(^{19}\) See *Odyssey* 10-11 and *Theogony* 721-819 for instance.

\(^{20}\) Historical details about influences on Plato lend credibility to the notion that readers were expected to take elements of the myth of Er seriously. For instance: Halliwell remarks on the affinity between aspects of the myth of Er and the funerary gold lamellae, thus confirming the Bacchic-Orphic mystery religion influence on Plato here. See Halliwell, “The Life and Death Journey of the Soul: Interpreting the Myth of Er,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*, ed. G. R. F. Ferrari (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 458. L. Albinus says the Orphic gold tablets were found in Southern Italy, Crete, and Thessaly. See Albinus, “The Katabasis of Er,” in *Essays on Plato's Republic*, ed. Erik Nis Ostenfeld (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1998), 95. The affinity between this Platonic myth and the mystery cult would have provoked many readers to take aspects of the myth as literal truths. Since Plato is intentional about this affinity, he must have written the myth knowing that some readers would interpret it this way. Bruce Lincoln explains that the proto-Indo-Europeans either accepted a cosmology that included numerous different underworlds, or the exact location of the single underworld was up for debate. See Lincoln, “Waters of Memory, Waters of Forgetfulness,” *Fabula* 23 (1982): 19. Wolfgang Biesterfield thoroughly explains the particularly Egyptian influence on Plato, indicating that Egyptian culture influenced Plato significantly with regard to general transcendentalism, cosmology, the conception of history, and the belief in the afterlife. See Biesterfield, “Der platonische Mythos des Er (Politeia 614b-621d). Versuch einer Interpretation und Studien zum Problem östlicher Parallelen,” (Ph.D. Diss., Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität zu Münster, 1970), 109. Lincoln and Biesterfield help us to see that Plato’s historical influences are not limited to the mystery cults, but go back much farther, thus lending further credibility to the general truth that there is an underworld and an afterlife. One other possible piece of evidence that we are meant to take the idea of post-mortem judgment seriously and literally is *Laws* 959b where, as Julius Elias points out, as the myth culminates, Plato discusses the practical benefits of the dissemination of eschatological doctrines. See Elias, *Plato's Defense of Poetry*, 129. Of course, there are good reasons for not taking particular details seriously, which we will get into in my figurative reading.

\(^{21}\) The following are two additional reasons for taking the literal meaning of the myth seriously: Allan Bloom finds it unpersuasive, but acknowledges its importance in persuading readers (he says, the unphilosophical in particular), to be fearful of the consequences for injustice. He thinks its purpose for the philosophical is to entice them to study the soul. See Bloom, *The Republic of Plato* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 435. Smith, in *Plato's Use of Myth as a Pedagogical Device* (126-129), also juxtaposes the philosophical and unphilosophical, and I disagree with this, as I explain below (fn.86). Larivée, 247, rightly cites the argument for the soul’s immortality as a convincing reason to interpret the myth of Er literally. She also says that the very recurrence of eschatological myths in Plato is a reason to take them literally.
the believable setting of the myth of Er, however, the listener still might find aspects of this story quite unbelievable, like Er’s waking up on his funeral pyre after being dead for twelve days. It is this combination of an authoritative, believable framework, and fantastic details, which makes the myth of Er a likely account (εἰκὼς λόγος).\textsuperscript{22}

Also, we must acknowledge that Plato is having his narrator, Socrates, relay a story that the character Socrates told to his companions. Socrates the character says Er originally told the story. Even if Socrates had heard this story directly from Er, we readers would be hearing it third hand, but it is not clear how many people passed the story down from Er to Socrates, so Plato’s audience is quite far removed from the tale. There is also a temporal distance: Socrates the narrator tells us that Socrates the interlocutor told the story yesterday (327a), who tells us that Er told it in the past, at a point specified only as twelve days after he died in battle (614b). Plato has therefore substantially distanced this story from the reader. As a story whose details are largely unverifiable, it is myth, in accord with my earlier explanation of what Platonic myth is,\textsuperscript{23} but as an account or explanation that one may accept as probably true in a general way, Er’s tale is a likely account. The narrative frame of the myth, though possibly fictional, is no more than a

\textsuperscript{22} Smith understands Plato’s myths in this way, and bases her conception of εἰκὼς λόγος on the Timaeus. She says that Platonic myth, as a likely account, is a kind of argument open to revision, which leads to true opinion. She also thinks that the myths incite further dialectical investigation. See Smith, “Plato's Myths as 'Likely Accounts' Worthy of Belief,” 24, 33, 34, 39. My explanation of the myth of Er will parallel Smith’s understanding of myth, by showing how the myth of Er leads to true opinion, or belief, in a literal way, and then also points to a deeper reading that leads to intellection and dialectical investigation. One of the many crucial differences between my account and Smith’s is my emphasis on both a literal and a figurative reading.

A dissenter to reading literally, Halliwell thinks that a literal reading threatens the myth with incoherence, for instance, by literally accepting the embodiment of souls in the afterlife, one admits a contradiction in one’s understanding of death as separation of soul and body, “collapsing the nonmaterial into the material.” See Halliwell, “The Life and Death Journey of the Soul: Interpreting the Myth of Er,” 458-459. Understanding the myth of Er as a likely account, in the manner I have suggested, avoids this problem, because the bodily language used to describe souls can be viewed as just another fantastic detail not to be viewed as true in its details, unlike the general truths of the myth.

\textsuperscript{23} chapter 1, section 1.1.1.6
vehicle to present a philosophically grounded account of the afterlife and its affirmation of justice as a good.

Socrates then explains what Er saw in the underworld. His soul left him and traveled with others until they came to a “marvelous” (δαιμόνιον, 614c1) place with a pair of openings in earth and another pair in the heavens, parallel and above the former. Between them sat judges. The judged proceeded to the next phase of their journey wearing signs indicating how they have been judged, and the unjust have their deeds posted on their backs. (614b-d)

The description of this place of judgment activates the imagination of the listener. It is vivid enough to be interesting, and vague enough to invite the hearer to fill in gaps. In this way, the description still operates at the level of conjecture, i.e., on the level of the lower soul. However, as we begin to hear about the fate of the judged, we begin to move beyond mere imagery and into an account that explains what the imagery means for us and for all humans. This explanatory aspect of the myth moves into the realm of πίστις, or belief, and begins to execute a significant function of this likely account that affects the rational soul.

While the imagery engages our appetite for the sensational and our θυμός for the unjust who have committed bad deeds, the explanatory effect—that is, the aspect of the myth that tells

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24 There are many varying views about the location of the daimonic place. I include a few here. James Adam says the daimonic place is not the aether, as Proclus says, but rather, on the surface of the earth, as described in Phaedo 109e. See Adam, The Republic of Plato (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 440. Vorwerk, 52, informed by the Phaedo myth of the afterlife, sees the daimonic place as in one of the earth’s hollows. He also departs from Neoplatonic commentators (naming Proclus, Damascius, and Olympiodorus), who he says locate the meadow in between heaven and earth—in the aether or sublunar area. Vorwerk, 53, says Numenius saw the place as existing in the center of the earth. Martin Heidegger understands δαιμόνιον as the place of the uncanny—a place that holds the extraordinary and suspends the ordinary. See Heidegger, Parmenides, 102. Shane Ewegen explains that Heidegger translates δαιμόνιον as “extraordinary” or “uncanny,” because this is where the essence of being comes to the fore eminently. See Ewegen, “A Unity of Opposites: Heidegger’s Journey Through Plato,” Epoche 16 (2012): 376. I see all of these views as possibly accurate, but think that this particular detail is not one we are meant to nail down to an actual, physical location. Rather, with Heidegger, I simply see the daimonic place as extraordinary as well as very mysterious.

25 See chapter 1, sections 1.2.2.2, 1.2.4.2, and 1.2.4.3.
us “if you live this way, these may be the consequences you face”—engages our rational soul. The listener begins to calculate that the means to avoiding an embarrassing, humbling judgment involves living a just life.

Socrates then explains that those coming up from the opening in the earth were dirty, while those descending from the opening to the heavens were clean and pure. The souls all met in a meadow to exchange stories about their long journeys. (614d-e) The emotions of these souls ranged quite extensively. They were all excited to gather together, and to conclude the long journey, but some wept as they explained their thousand years of suffering below the earth, while others gladly told of their pleasant time in the heavens. (614e-615a) The extensive duration of

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26 As Irwin Lieb says, in the myth of Er “[t]he parts of a soul that are likely to upset its order are tricked into showing their tendencies, and then are tamed by the rationality of art.” He adds, “A philosophical work of art is designed to free and strengthen reason, and to have it develop and practice its control on the other powers of the soul.” It is a deception of the “renegade powers of the soul—it draws them out and then encourages reason to gentle them.” See Lieb, “Philosophy as Spiritual Formation: Plato’s Myth of Er,” International Philosophical Quarterly 3 (1963): 278. The myth also induces the spirited soul to fear death, with its graphic portrayal of judgment and punishment (explained further just below), and it uses that fear to reinforce further the rational message of the myth: “if you live unjustly, you may face this horror after death.” As Lieb, 283 says, in this way, the myth functions as similar myths affect Cephalus. This is not to say, however, that the psychagogical function of the myth of Er as a whole, or even just its literal reading, is limited to mimicking this “Cephalic” effect (my phrasing).

27 As we will soon see, all of the various punishments described are humbling, and most are embarrassing as well. Shame is a crucial emotion that the democratic and tyrannical souls lack (560d-e, 568e-569b), as well as those whose rational souls are relaxed by the charm of art and who express emotions they would normally be ashamed to express (603e-605b).

28 The following are helpful insights on the relationship between these souls and the preceding dialogue. Paul Friedländer connects this contrast between dirty, earthly souls on the one hand and pure, heavenly souls on the other with the earlier Glauces image, saying that these clean and dirty souls are meant to remind us of the contrast the Glauces image illustrates between a soul enmeshed in the body and a disembodied, pure soul. This is part of Friedländer’s effort to explain that the discussion of the soul throughout the Republic leads up to its treatment in the myth of Er. See Friedländer, Plato: An Introduction, 136. Vorwerk, 57, says the uncleanness of the souls from earth is meant to indicate that their lives were heavily tied to the earthly. I find both sets of remarks to be insightful ways of establishing links between the seemingly bipartite soul highlighted in Republic 10 and the myth of Er. For those who take this as evidence that Plato is only working with a bipartite soul in book 10, I revert to my defense of the tripartite soul’s continuity from the previous chapter.

29 Gonzalez, 260-261, points out that Proclus remarks on the positive emotion of the souls from heaven meeting at the meadow, saying that it seems to mean that even those coming from heaven desire the material life below in some way (Proclus, Commentary on the Republic, 2.160.4-11). Gonzalez thinks Proclus suggests that heaven only satisfies one aspect of the soul—not all of it, and that the soul becomes weary after 1000 years because it cannot fully exercise its powers there. This implies that bodily-related powers are intrinsic to the soul. Gonzalez explains that this might be why the myth of Er blurs the distinction between soul and body by using so much bodily imagery to describe the soul. I agree with Gonzalez’ assessment of Proclus on this issue but would like to suggest two alternatives to Proclus’ interpretation of 614e2: (1) It is quite conceivable that the exuberance at the meadow is due to a long journey being over and a new phase beginning. Souls who suffered are glad that their punishment has
afterlife sufferings and rewards receives explanation when Socrates says that the penalty for each unjust deed was proportionate to a tenfold multiplication of the deed.\footnote{Ten is a sacred number to the Pythagoreans. See David Hitchcock, “The Role of Myth and its Relation to Rational Argument in Plato's Dialogues,” 197; See also Vorwerk, 59.} (615a-b) Seeming to acknowledge that some clarity is needed here, Socrates explains that if someone, for example, “caused many deaths by betraying cities or armies and reducing them to slavery or by participating in other wrongdoing, they had to suffer ten times the pain they had caused each individual” (615b1-6).

The military context of this example invites a thumotic response from the many listeners who feel strongly that those who betray armies ought to receive harsh punishment.\footnote{Plato’s Ancient Greek audience—men, most of whom have some military experience—would have had this response in an especially heightened way.} In this way, the account of punishment activates the spirited soul. Also, the listener who knows that he has committed unjust deeds fearfully winces at the prospect of paying such a hefty penalty for them one day. On the other hand, one may receive this rendition of the prospects of one’s punishment with some skepticism if one engages in rational calculation about the details of the account. If someone caused the death of one person, and a lifetime is roughly estimated to be a century (615a-b), then a thousand year penalty for that deed makes mathematical sense.\footnote{Adam, 437, says there’s little doubt that the 1000-year period is from an Orphic or Pythagorean source. Considering Plato’s sources in relation to the afterlife myths in general, however, there is considerable doubt that Plato mainly was influenced by Orphic and Pythagorean sources. A. Döring is skeptical that Plato’s main source is Pythagorean, and defends the view that Plato drew from various sources. See Döring, “Die eschatologischen Mythen Platos,” Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie 6 (1893): 476-488. Walter Willi explains that Plato adopted Orphic, Attic, family, and state cults to conform to his dialectical inquiry. See Willi, Versuch einer Grundlegung der platonischen Mythopolie (Zurich: Orell Fussli, 1925), 96-101. Two recent scholars, Lincoln and Biesterfield, have much to say about influences on Plato from beyond Orphic and Pythagorean sources.} However, in
the example Socrates provides, of someone who caused many deaths, or who reduced many lives to slavery, how could a thousand years of suffering ever be enough of a penalty? Could the intensity of the suffering perhaps make up for its relatively short duration? The next part of the account answers these questions.

Socrates explains that Er “spoke of even greater rewards or penalties for piety or impiety towards gods or parents and for murder with one’s own hands” (615c2-4). To illustrate these more severe penalties, Socrates discusses the tyrant Ardiaeus who killed his father and brother and also committed many additional impious deeds. He was not even permitted to enter the meadow. As he, and other serious offenders with him, tried to go up from the earth, Socrates explains what happened:

The opening wouldn’t let them through, for it roared whenever one of these incurably wicked people or anyone else who hadn’t paid a sufficient penalty tried to go up. And there were savage men, all fiery to look at, who were standing by, and when they heard the roar, they grabbed some of these criminals and led them away, but they bound the feet, hands, and head of Ardiaeus and the others, threw them down, and flayed them. Then they dragged them out of the way, lacerating them on thorn bushes, and telling every passer-by that they were to be thrown into Tartarus, and explaining why they were being treated in this way. (615e1-616a4)

Clearly, there are measures in place to punish sufficiently those for whom a thousand years of torment is not enough. The desire to see offenders like Ardiaeus receive their harsh deserts is strong in all of us, and this part of the myth activates the anger we have for the severely wicked. Far from encouraging our spirited soul to be affected too intensely, Plato includes this part of the story as remarks Er overheard occurring between two other souls. In this way, the listener is even further removed from this part of the myth. As several commentators have noticed, the degree to which the hearer is removed from the account is inversely proportional to the emotional effect of that aspect of the account on the listener.33 This description of the fate of

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33 See footnote 6 above.
tyrants engages both our appetite for gory imagery and our spirited desire for vengeance more than any other passage in the myth of Er, and Plato treats it with extra care by further removing it from his readers so that their spirited and appetitive tendencies do not overtake their rational capabilities. Plato makes a noticeable effort here to achieve a balance between the engagement of our appetitive and spirited desires, and the activation of our calculative capacity. After hearing the measures in place to account for the rare case of a thousand-year punishment being insufficient, one’s calculating soul might then allow some skepticism to subside and permit the whole soul to be persuaded that the account is at least somewhat probable, since its details cohere in this way.

Just as the prisoner reaches the level of πίστις by seeing the artifacts producing the shadows, the soul is able to access Er’s account not just at the level of conjecture, but at the level of belief, by knowing about the unjust deeds that caused the horrific spectacle of the tyrants’ punishment. Further reinforcing the soul’s belief in the punishment’s cause is the coherence of the account and its authoritative force, as previously explained. By engaging all three of the soul’s parts in a balanced way—that is, allowing rationality to function unhampered by the lower parts—while also allowing the soul to engage in this account’s details at the level of conjecture in a superficial way, Plato leads the whole soul from εἰκασία to πίστις with his likely account.

The imagery itself is quite fantastic; Plato does not portray many of its particulars as verifiable, though he does present the general concept of a soul living on in the afterlife and receiving punishments as probably true. Since it is the fantastic spectacle that aids in leading the soul to the greater truth that some appropriate punishment may await, this Platonic likely account
leads its listeners to greater truth by means of lesser truth. By doing this, it is clearly psychagogic.

Also, in this way, Plato’s account avoids the negative tendency of poetry to lead readers only to imagery that is twice removed from the truth. The reader might object here that if this likely account leads readers from conjectural imagery to truth at the level of belief, it might really lead them from objects thrice removed from the truth to objects merely twice removed, following my interpretation of the Cave in relation to the critique of the poets. However, even if the aim of this account is that which is twice removed from the truth, this is not its final destination. It is a stop on the way, inciting readers to pursue a life of philosophy (and we will soon see why), inciting them to understand this account more deeply, that is, figuratively, as I will explain later in this chapter. As is clear in the Cave allegory, Plato is well aware of the recidivist tendency of those at the level of πίστις, so he knows he needs to lead the believing soul further than he already has.

My understanding of the myth of Er as a likely account answers the possible objection that we should not understand Plato here as stooping to cater to those like Cephalus, who understand justice in merely consequentialist terms, and who are motivated to live good lives simply because of their fear of punishment. Those objectors say, rightly, that a merely consequentialist understanding of justice is either not in line with the overall argumentation of the Republic, or that it is an admission of failure to achieve the Republic’s ambitious goal of

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34 As I explain in chapter 1 (sections 1.2.4.2 and 1.2.4.4), the Line and Cave describe belief as an ability to see objects first-hand that are the originals of images. Following this, any creation by a craftsman would be in the realm of belief, once removed from the true Forms, and any copy of their creation would be twice removed. However, as I explain in 1.2.4.2 and 1.2.4.5, the initial objects of intellection are reflections and shadows of true things in the intellectual realm. If the creations of the craftsman are once removed from these, and if these reflections and shadows are once removed from Forms, then the craftsman’s artifacts are twice removed and the artists’ copies are thrice removed. This is ultimately a debate for another day.

35 See chapter 1, sections 1.2.4.4 and 1.2.4.5.
understanding why being just is good in itself. The likely account itself is consequentialist, and it does function in part because of fear, but given its context, namely, the whole of the Republic and the rest of the myth yet to come, it leads readers further than itself. In the appeal to fear, Plato is stooping, and is thus implicitly admitting some limitation on the part of his audience, but he is doing so in order to lead us further. Plato’s likely account activates the calculating soul, inciting it to consider the means that lead to various punishments. One way of understanding this is as a Pascalian Wager of sorts: the risk for not believing and being harshly punished, outweighs the risk for believing wrongly and suffering what may go along with that by living accordingly. The reader may conclude at this point that it is more prudent to believe the likely

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36 Annas says the myth of Er painfully degrades us to the level of Cephalus with its “hell-fire” emphasis on consequentialism. She says the myth undermines Plato’s efforts throughout the Republic to argue for justice in a non-consequentialist way. The myth of Er, she claims, has a lower moral tone than the rest of the Republic. See Annas, 349-350.

I agree with Annas insofar as she points out a criticism to be taken seriously, but as a whole, my account departs from hers on the grounds that Plato does not simply revive a traditional consequentialist understanding of justice. He uses it as one element in a complex psychagogy—and is also addressing the task introduced in book 2, of explaining the good as valuable in itself and for its consequences. Socrates says the former has been done (612a8), clearly implying that the latter is yet to come. Also, as Vorwerk, 54-55, explains, in the Orphic mysteries there is a portrayal of the just being rewarded and the unjust being punished after death. However, the myth of Er criticizes this view, insofar as it seems to allow for exoneration through sacrifices.

Also, Plato certainly seems to have measures in place to account for the shortcomings of either his work or his audience, especially given the lofty goals of the former. However, we should not take this as a simple, general admission of failure for either. Some of the Republic’s lines of discussion will be lost on some readers. For them, there is imagery that meets them where they are and leads them to the next stage of their intellectual development. For those who can think with Socrates throughout the entirety of the dialogue, there is the rich philosophical content behind the imagery, which they can access more immediately than other readers.

Though Annas later modifies her harshly critical stance of the myth of Er, even her revised opinions about it argue that the myth of Er adds a consequentialist understanding of justice that the Republic had not yet argued for. Here though, she entertains the possibility that the myth of Er is also intertwined with the dialogue’s discussion of justice for its own sake. See Annas, “Plato’s Myths of Judgment,” 130-138.

Defending Plato, Halliwell contends that since the myth of Er treats justice on a cosmic, rather than an individual scale, Plato does not betray his earlier emphasis on the value of justice in itself. See Halliwell, Plato: Republic 10 (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1988), 18. Though this is a very interesting proposal worthy of serious consideration, I prefer my previously-noted position that any consequentialism in the myth is for the sake of Plato’s psychagogic efforts. Defending Plato differently, Bloom, 434-435, thinks the myth of Er returns to a more traditional, previously-criticized way of favoring justice, because the dialogue has not demonstrated that civic virtue is worthy in itself, and Glauccon and Adeimantus are incapable of philosophical virtue. I am perplexed by Bloom’s emphasis on civic virtue and am skeptical about his assessment of Glauccon and Adeimantus. Their eagerness and ongoing receptivity are only two of the signs that they are at least ripe for conversion to the philosophical life, if not ready and capable.

38 Larivée, 248, says that Socrates advocates belief here as a “noble risk.”
account than to disregard it. Fear is allied with reason in this calculation, but it is clearly rational calculation that takes the lead and makes the judgment call. The likely account, then, does not simply encourage being good because of fear, or because of any irrational impulse taken on its own. But the εἰκώς λόγος leads further than this, as will soon be clear.

Others might object here by saying that the intent of the Republic’s argumentation is to lead to an understanding of justice as valuable both in itself and for its consequences. These objectors say that Plato’s argumentation already defended the value of justice for its own sake, and now, here in the final myth, Plato explains why justice is good because of its consequences. We should not dismiss this objection. The likely account clearly does fit this function; however, this is not all Plato is doing here in the myth of Er. Plato is also adding more substance to the portrayal of justice as valuable in itself, as the next two sections explain.

It should also be evident at this point that I have shown several ways in which Plato’s writing defends itself, and also acknowledges its own insufficiency by pointing beyond itself, thus responding to Plato’s own critique of writing in the Phaedrus.39

39 There are many who espouse this view, such as Annas, Introduction to Plato’s Republic, 353. G. R. F. Ferrari also argues along these lines. He says that the Republic has already explained the value of justice in itself, and those who understand this (philosophers) can keep extrinsic rewards in their proper perspective. Not viewing these rewards in their proper perspective, Ferrari says, is the main problem with those rewards; see Ferrari, “Glaucion’s Reward, Philosophy’s Debt: The Myth of Er,” in Plato’s Myths, ed. Catalin Partenie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 118-120. Similarly, Hitchcock, 188, argues that the myth of Er completes Socrates’ account of the benefits and harms of justice and injustice, respectively. Ronald Johnson thinks that by book 10, Plato has already shown that the just life is happiest, and is merely pointing out “extra benefits” to being just in book 10. In this way, the final book is really an addendum; see Johnson, “Does Plato’s Myth of Er Contribute to the Argument of the Republic?” Philosophy and Rhetoric 32 (1999): 4. I agree that the myth of Er may add an account of the consequential value of justice to the dialogue, but I firmly disagree with the claim that book 10 is an appendix of sorts, as my argument in this chapter will show. Lieb, 284, favors this interpretation as well, that the myth of Er adds an account of the consequences for justice that the dialogue lacked in some way. Vorwerk, 47-48, explains that here in Republic 10, Plato returns to the theme of wages or consequences for justice after death, because the discussion of justice in itself has been completed and now a review of the rewards of justice, both in life (612a8-613e5) and in death (613e6-621b7), is in place.

40 I explained this aspect of the Phaedrus in 1.1.1.3.
2.2.2 Days Eight to Twelve of the Journey: The Souls See the Light

On day eight, the souls embarked from the meadow, and on day eleven, they arrived at a place at which they had a bird’s eye view of a column of light that spread through and enveloped the entire universe. (616b) Socrates describes the light as “more like a rainbow than anything else, but brighter and more pure” (616b5-6). On day twelve, they arrived at a place within the light, at its middle, and from there, they saw how “the light binds the heavens like the cables girding a trireme and holds its entire revolution together” (616c2-4).

Here, the souls get to see the entire κόσμος from two perspectives: from above it, and from within. They also get to see the force that holds it all together: the light. This much is clear. The exact location of the place at the middle of the light is unclear, however, as is the exact way in which the light binds the universe. The overall goal of this aspect of the likely account is not yet clear either.

41 Scholars have many informative explanations of the light here in the myth of Er. I include a few notables below:

J. S. Morrison explains that Plato is the first to describe the axis of the universe as a straight light. He says that in Parmenides, Empedocles, and Philolaus, the outer aether binds the universe. Also, two Orphic texts describe a surrounding envelope of aether as well as a golden loop attached to it. Morrison, “Parmenides and Er,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 75 (1955): 66. P. Couvreur points out that Böckh and Schleiermacher think the light is the Milky Way, and that there is a precedent for this view in Cicero and Proclus. See Couvreur, “Un passage de Platon mal interprété (République 10, 616b-617b)” *Revue de Philologie* 19 (1985): 14. Thomas Heath notes that Proclus ultimately rejected this view. Heath thinks there is nothing to suggest that the souls leave the earth at all in this journey. He suggests the possibility that the light passes through both poles of the earth, thus passing through the center of the earth, which was also considered to be the center of the universe. See Heath, *Aristarchus of Samos*, 150-151. Hilda Richardson explains that the sort of girder mentioned—that used on triremes—typically ran over the rowers’ heads, but here, she thinks it is described as an undergirder. Given that, Richardson agrees with Adam that the light must encircle the heavens externally and provide support that way. Richardson endeavors to show that both the straight light, penetrating the axis of the universe, and the encircling light, are Pythagorean. She explains that they combined the notion of fire at the center of all and also fire encircling the sphere of the universe. Also, she thinks that not only late Pythagoreans like Philolaus, but early ones too, maintained the idea of a central fire in the universe. See Richardson, “The Myth of Er (Plato, *Republic* 616b),” *Classical Quarterly* 20 (1926): 116-119. The cables that supported triremes ran from stern to stern over the rowers, and in so doing, they, combined with the ship’s hull, held the ship together along its longest axis. I see no reason to envision these cables as undergirders based on Plato’s text. The cables ran straight, and were taut, just as the straight part of the light is described. The encircling light, then, would resemble the curved hull. J. A. Stewart contends that the meadow, and most of the journey depicted in the myth, is meant to be on the earth’s surface. He suggests that Necessity is either on the surface of the earth or in it. By doing this, he explains, Plato wants us to identify the heavens in the myth of Er with the realm on the surface of the earth in the *Phaedo* myth. See Stewart, *The Myths of Plato*, 153-168. I will consider this possibility in the next chapter. Here, my position is similar to that on the daimonic place: it is extraordinary and mysterious, and is therefore not meant to have a definite, physical location.
Socrates continues by elaborating on the structures attached to the light, beginning with the “spindle of Necessity,” (Ἀνάγκης ὁφρακτον, 616c4) which hangs from the extremities of the light and turns the universe. \(^{42}\) Socrates describes the material that composes the stem and hook of the spindle (pure adamant), as well as its whorl (adamant mixed with other material). (616c) He continues by explaining that the whorl actually contains seven others within it, like nested vessels. Their rims looked circular from above, forming one united surface. (616d-e) Socrates then explains the various widths and colors of the circular rims, as well as the relative motions of the whorls:

The first or outside whorl had the widest circular rim, that of the sixth was second in width; the fourth was third; the eighth was fourth; the seventh was fifth; the fifth was sixth; the third was seventh; and the second was eighth. The rim of the largest was spangled; that of the seventh was brightest; that of the eighth took its color from the seventh’s shining on it; the second and fifth were about equal in brightness, more yellow than the others; the third was the whitest in color; the fourth was rather red; and the sixth was second in whiteness. The whole spindle turned at the same speed, but, as it turned, the inner circles gently revolved in a direction opposite to that of the whole. Of the whorls themselves, the eighth was the fastest; second came the seventh, sixth, and fifth, all at the same speed; it seemed to them that the fourth was third in its speed of revolution; the fourth, third; and the second, fifth. (616c3-617b3)

Each whorl has a unique shape, and each seems to have a unique color as well, though the brightness of the entire spectacle seems to drown out the colors of certain rims. \(^{43}\) The motions of the whorls involve some moving at the same speed while others turn at different speeds, but the general direction of rotation of the inner whorls varies from the rotation of the

\(^{42}\) Halliwell discusses that Necessity was inherited from the systems of Parmenides and Empedocles to represent cosmic purposiveness, rather than the sort of materialist, Anaxagorean conception of necessity deprecated in the Phaedo, Timaeus, and Laws. See Halliwell, “The Life and Death Journey of the Soul: Interpreting the Myth of Er,” 457.

\(^{43}\) Along the lines of my previous notes about the non-Greek influences on the myth of Er, I add here that J. Bidez surveys the non-Greek influences on the description of the κόσμος—the colors Plato mentions in particular—and observes that the cuneiform texts have little to say about those colors. However, there is notable accord between Chaldean beliefs and the myth of Er, with Eudoxus of Cnidus and his knowledge of the orient as a mediator. See Bidez, “La couleur des planètes dans le mythe d’Er au livre X de la République de Platon,” Classe des lettres et des sciences morales et politiques, Bulletin. Académie royale de Belgique 21 (1935): 260-268.
large outer one. This image as a whole is too complex fully to behold in the mind’s eye, but elements of it are quite conducive to imagining. As one tries to envision the different colors, movements, and shapes, the description excites the imagination, and engages one’s appetite for pleasant appearances, which Plato associates with the entire lower soul (both parts), as I explained in chapter 1 (1.2.2.2). The act of trying to envision our universe in this way may provoke a soothing or calming feeling, countering the spiritedness roused in the previous account of punishments. Most notable, perhaps, is the fact that the rims are circular. Circular motion is a divine sort of motion, and its presence in all of the whorls supports the notion that the spindle, and thereby the universe, is well ordered. This picture attempts to give the reader’s rational soul confidence that there is unity, order, and perfection in the κόσμος. By leading his readers to rational comprehension of the physical mechanisms that come together to create the resplendent image of the universe, Plato once again leads us from conjecture to belief.

Furthering the notion that the κόσμος is divinely ordered, Socrates says that the spindle turns “on the lap of Necessity” (617b4) and that above each of the circular rims, a Siren stands, sounding a note unique to each rim. The eight notes come together as a harmony. The three Fates, Necessity’s daughters, sit on thrones equidistant from one another. Lachesis, Clotho, and Atropos wear white, with “garlands on their heads,” (617c2-3) while singing to the Sirens’

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44 See 442a1-2 about calming the spirited soul.
45 By inviting us to think about the circularity in heavenly motions, Plato also leads us to intellection, or διάνοια, but since this involves understanding the divinity of circular motion, and the way in which this circularity mimics or participates in the Forms, this discussion is more appropriate for a figurative or metaphorical reading. As such, it is beyond the scope of a strictly literal interpretation of this myth.
46 This is because we are led to see the physical entity that causes the image, just as the objects in the cave, at the level of belief, cause the shadow-images on the cave wall. By leading us to this aspect of the likely account, we can see that generally, there is probably a highly-ordered, complex, colorful system of rotating stars and planets that constitutes our universe. The account conveys the message to the ancient reader that this picture is probably true in a general way, even if some, or many, details are false. Adam and Heath stand out as two notable sources explaining Plato’s astronomy in the myth of Er. See Adam 441-449 and 472-479, and Heath, 154-158.

The detailed account of the κόσμος here seems to be the main reason that Perceval Frutiger categorizes this myth as “parascientific.” See Frutiger, Les Mythes de Platon (Paris: Alcan, 1930), 209-225.
music. Lachesis sings “of the past, Clotho of the present, and Atropos of the future” (617c4-5). Clotho specifically aids the revolving of the outer ring, while Atropos does so for the inner ones, and Lachesis for both. (617c-d)

The divine Fates contribute to the beauty of the cosmic image, with their white garb, their garlands, and the harmony they co-create. These aspects of Plato’s description engage our appetite for physical beauty at the level of εἰκοσία, and also continue the soothing of the spirited soul begun earlier. The divinity of the Fates, and their specific involvement in the revolutions of the universe, adds persuasive force to the notion that the universe is divinely ordered. The Fates are familiar to Plato’s audience, and their reality was well accepted by many of Plato’s ancient Greek readers. By giving the Fates the role that he does, Plato harnesses popular belief in them and uses it to support his account. The rational soul who believes in the existence of the Fates, the general picture of the universe already described, and the general notion that there is an afterlife for the soul, calculates that the divine presence in the universe, as Plato describes it, is plausible. This plausibility adds to the belief already established, thereby further supporting the likely account of punishments and rewards. The entire description of the universe reinforces the previous likely account, by showing that forces much greater than human beings play indispensable roles in supporting the mechanisms in which the post-mortem justice system is included.

47 Adding to my portrayal of the groundedness of the myth in Greek literature, Hitchcock, 198 points out that the Sirens appear in Odyssey 12, the role of Necessity is Pythagorean, the three fates are from Hesiod’s Theogony, and the concentric whorls are the Pythagorean theory of the heavenly bodies’ motions. Shedding further light on the Greek roots of Plato’s imagery, Geneviève Droz points out that in Homer, the fate is a powerful goddess, and the concept of a three-fold destiny involving three fates is from Hesiod. See Droz, Les mythes platoniciens (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1992), 143.
2.2.3 Choose the Life of Philosophy

The Fates’ roles continue as Socrates begins explaining the choosing of next lives. The souls arrived at this place in the middle of the light and proceeded straight to Lachesis, who had lots and paradigms of lives in her lap (617d). A speaker arranged the souls and took some of the lots and paradigms, having mounted a pulpit to proclaim Lachesis’ message that another death-bringing cycle has begun, and that each soul will now choose their “daemon or guardian spirit” (δαίµων, 617e1). Furthermore, he said, “Virtue knows no master; each will possess it to a greater or less degree, depending on whether he values or disdains it” (617e3-4). The god is not responsible for the choice—only the chooser. (617e4-5)

The message here, which the speaker proclaims thrice, is that the souls, and no one else, will choose their own next life patterns or paradigms. Anyone who thinks they might master or “game” the system receives a clear message that choosing a virtuous life depends on nothing other than a true appreciation of it, which can only be acquired through philosophy. There is no

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49 Mark McPherran points out that having a Speaker or prophet cast the lots keeps the gods blameless. McPherran considers the possibility that the lottery here is rigged like that of book 5 (460a). See McPherran, “Virtue, Luck, and Choice at the End of the Republic,” in Plato’s Republic. A Critical Guide, ed. McPherran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 133, 138. Though I do think that the myth maintains that the gods are blameless in souls’ choices, and indeed that the gods are good, I am doubtful that this lottery is rigged like that of book 5. Souls here in the myth of Er are getting their just deserts, but in book 5, sexual intercourse, which clearly arouses the appetitive soul, is doled out as a reward in a way the justice of which is questionable. The sexual lottery makes it possible for incest between brothers and sisters of the same age to occur, and children created outside the prescribed limits are hidden and not nurtured. Since we do not see problems of the same caliber occurring in the life pattern lottery, I think it is likely that the lottery of book 5 is an inferior one. After all, the gods are said to have designed the former and men clearly designed the latter. When I consider each of the souls’ choices below, I will show that no significant injustice occurs there.

Destrée calls the phrase “ephemeral souls” (617d) an oxy-moron, because the souls are clearly immortal. See Destrée, “Comment Être responsable de son Destin?” in Fate, Providence and Moral Responsibility in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Thought, ed. Pieter d’Hoine and Gerd Van Riel (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2014), 26. Though I agree that this phrase seems oxy-moronic at first, the emphasis here is on the lives the souls lead, which are mortal: Note the repetition of “death” in περιόδου θνητοῦ γένους θανατοφόρου (617d7-e1). Compared to the divine beings mentioned in the myth, the souls addressed are ephemeral, in the sense that they undergo successive incarnations, which divine beings do not undergo.
use for a knack of some sort here.\textsuperscript{50} The only factor in choosing well is a genuine understanding of the value of virtue.

The speaker then cast the lots so that the souls could choose and thus determine the order in which they would pick. Er was prohibited from choosing. Then, the paradigms of lives were arranged on the ground in front of them, with the number of lives far outweighing the number of souls. There were a variety of lives among the patterns available, including those of tyranny, fame, beauty, strength, and nobility, as well as lives of animals and private men. (617e-618b) The patterns did not include the arrangement of the soul, since that would be determined by one’s life, “but all the other things were there, mixed with each other and with wealth, poverty, sickness, health, and the states intermediate to them” (618b4-6).\textsuperscript{51}

Clearly, this choice is a daunting one, and if not made well, will result in not only a bad life, but a thousand years of punishment afterwards. In a general way, the theory of reincarnation, or metempsychosis, had well-established roots, implanted by the authoritative force of Pythagorean and Orphic teachings.\textsuperscript{52} Plato uses the impetus to believe in this sort of

\textsuperscript{50} It is feasible that a knack of sorts could make some guardians better warriors, resulting in their better lottery outcomes, in book 5. The situation is much different here in the myth of Er.

\textsuperscript{51} Commenting on a possible difficulty here, Gonzalez, 263, considers the possibility that all of our life choices are essentially determined before we are born, according to the myth, but, as he notices, the arrangement of our soul is not pre-determined, thus preserving our freedom. Additionally, because this section of the myth indicates that souls are seriously affected by external circumstances, and that happiness is not solely determined by the order of one’s soul, Proclus points out that external goods do contribute to the happiness of souls according to the myth of Er (2.303.13-17). See Gonzalez, 264. I agree with both Gonzalez and Proclus on these points. Considering another possible problem, Jeremy Reid explains that since it is unclear if it is even the same person who made this choice before their reincarnation, there is a problem of personal identity here. See Reid, “Justifying the Myth of Er,” (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Association, 2014), 4. Since the locus of personal identity is the soul, even though it does not have an ordering, there is thus an account of continuous identity. I will concede though that what exactly constitutes that identity in the soul is rather vague.

\textsuperscript{52} Adam, 456, remarks on the familiarity of transmigration in Greek religious and philosophical thought, saying that since it was so well established, it need not be taken allegorically.

The following are two further thoughts about the non-Greek influences on the myth of Er, and the deep roots of transmigration: J. R. Russell, 484, says that though metempsychosis was Pythagorean, Herodotus traces its roots back to Egypt, where this belief has nothing to do with rewards and punishments, or free will. Because the Egyptian notion of reincarnation bears so little resemblance to Plato’s, Russell says the Pythagorean concept of it probably came from the Upanishads. Also, Wang Keping claims that if an eastern source influenced Plato on
teaching to support his own account, such that those who already believe in reincarnation are inclined to believe this aspect of Plato’s account in a general way. Here, therefore, the myth of Er begins to lead the literalist reader from their non-rational appetite for the intriguing imagery of life-choosing to rational belief in its general truth. Plato also invites the believing reader here to begin to realize the value of a true appreciation of virtue, in terms of its consequences in the next life. Though the Republic already made clear the value of virtue to the ordering of the soul, and to one’s immediate life on earth, the value of virtue in the afterlife now receives attention. This could be an effort by Plato to have measures in place to persuade those who may not have been persuaded by the arguments of the dialogue, or it could be an additional measure, meant to add to the portrayal of justice as valuable not only in itself, but for its consequences. A literal reader may be able to appreciate virtue in physical terms here, by seeing that one’s appreciation of it has various physical ramifications in one’s next life. For instance, that one could possibly spend one’s next life as an animal as a result of one’s current vice, is a notion that might really strike a chord with a literal reader. This sort of rational calculation, however, would inevitably lead to a memory of vivid depictions of virtue from the dialogue, especially that of the Cave allegory, in which the value of virtue clearly lies in intellection—beyond the physical.

Therefore, this part of the likely account actually leads one from belief to intellection, or διάνοια, and Socrates seems to want to capitalize on this by interrupting the account with a message for Glaucon.55

metempsychosis, it was probably Buddhist samsara or karma. See Keping, “Plato’s Poetic Wisdom in the Myth of Er,” Frontiers of Philosophy in China 4 (2009): 287.
53 441c-e, 442c, 444c, and 514a-517a, for instance
54 The Good, the source of virtue, as well as its intellectual offspring, the Forms, all lie in the intelligible realm according to the allegory.
55 As Kent Moors says, though belief is the expected result of the myth in the majority of cases, the myth also leads one to be persuaded of the need to care for the soul’s order. This is a care that demands the pursuit of understanding, and hence, philosophy. See Moors, “Mythologia and the Limits of Opinion: Presented Myths in Plato’s Republic,” 241-242.
He tells Glaucon that the most important subject of study, above all others, is distinguishing the good life from its opposite and making the best choices in all situations. 

(618b-c) Socrates specifically says that a human being should:

Think over all the things we have mentioned and how they jointly and severally determine what the virtuous life is like. That way he will know what the good and bad effects of beauty are when it is mixed with wealth, poverty, and a particular state of the soul. He will know the effects of high or low birth, private life or ruling office, physical strength or weakness, ease or difficulty in learning, and all the things that are naturally part of the soul or acquired. (618c6-d5)

The lines about wealth and poverty remind us of the discussion of the oligarchic and democratic souls,\(^{56}\) while the mention of “ruling office” (ἀρχαί, d2) reminds one of the various descriptions of the philosopher’s involvement in politics.\(^{57}\) Descriptions of strength and weakness, as well as facility at learning, remind us of the guardians’ training and education.\(^{58}\) These are all reminders of the ways in which the preceding conversation educates its audience about what a virtuous life is, and how it is affected by the various aforementioned factors. One might think that Socrates’ teaching here is specifically about beauty (κάλλος, c7). However, this is a statement about beauty or nobility in a broad sense, as an offshoot or manifestation of the Good as an ingredient that shapes people’s lives in various ways.

Socrates further establishes the meaning of his interlude, saying that all of these considerations will help one to reason about the nature of the soul, and to see that a particular life is good if it leads the soul to justice and bad if it does not. (618d-e) Bringing this message back to the description of life-choosing, Socrates says:

We have seen that this is the best way to choose, whether in life or death. Hence we must go down to Hades holding with adamantine determination to the belief that this is so, lest we be dazzled there by wealth and other such evils, rush into a tyranny or some other similar course of action, do irreparable evils, and suffer even worse ones. (618e3-619a5)
The way to choose the best life pattern or paradigm is to focus intently on the way in which the particularities of the life model lead to justice or injustice. Socrates says here specifically that we must hold to the “belief” (δόξαν, 619a1) that this is so, as if to acknowledge that most of the likely account so far leads to a conclusion that lies within the realm of belief (or “opinion,” which is another common translation), not knowledge or intellection. Going into the afterlife with this belief, furthermore, can help one to avoid choosing a horrible life, like that of a tyrant.

Just in case there is any remaining confusion about how to view a life pattern and determine if it leads to justice or not, Socrates says we must know how to choose the mean and avoid extremes in this life and those beyond. In this way, we become happiest. (619a-b) Going back to the soul-types of Republic 8, we can observe that each one devolves because of some extreme or another, whether it be extreme emotions, wealth, or pleasures.

Though the lines immediately preceding the interlude lead the literal reader toward intellection, the interlude itself does not function in this way. It functions in the realm of belief and attempts to resolve the reader to implant himself in that realm, by instructing him to apply what he has learned about various manifestations of lives and their relation to justice. Plato knows that the believing soul is prone to regression, and he seems to be addressing that here by

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60 As explained in chapter 1 (1.2.4.4), belief or true opinion—πίστις—is in the realm of opinion, not knowledge, according to the Line and the Cave.

61 Josef Pieper says the Platonic eschatological myths convey the idea that our existence is such that our success or failure is manifest beyond death. Though he is reading the myths literally, he adds that the “judgment of the dead” is really only symbolic language for what happens beyond this life. See Pieper, The Platonic Myths, trans. Dan Farrelly (South Bend: St. Augustine’s Press, 2011), 27, 30. Pieper thus posess an interesting layer of symbolism within a generally literal reading. My literal reading has room for this view, and in fact, it works well with my explanation of the myth of Er as a likely account.

64 As I explained in chapter 1, section 1.2.2.2.

65 Oliver, 266, notes that the interlude to Glaucon is in direct speech, which, following Oliver’s reasoning elsewhere, would lead to the reader identifying with these words more intensely.
meeting that soul in its appropriate realm, and not making another, possibly ill-received, attempt
to lead that soul directly to a place that is still well beyond it, namely, the intelligible. By
encouraging souls at the level of πίστις to begin applying their knowledge from the dialogue in
order to fare better in the afterlife, Plato indirectly leads them toward διάνοια, because becoming
capable of choosing a life-pattern that leads to justice involves leading an intellectual life. We
know from the dialogue that this is the only life-type that truly leads to justice. One might object
that choosing the mean—avoiding extreme emotions, observing moderation with respect to
eating and drinking, and so on—seems to be the stated way, at least here in the interlude, of
choosing well in the life hereafter. However, Socrates specifies that one must “know how to
choose the mean in such lives” (619a5). This is very different from just choosing the mean in
one’s current life. Certainly, living moderately is a crucial part of being able to select the mean
among the various life paradigms, but as will soon become quite clear, the most important
ingredient in attaining this ability is living a philosophical life.

Getting back to the myth, Socrates says that Er reported what the Speaker said to the
souls about their choices:66 “There is a satisfactory life rather than a bad one available even for
the one who comes last, provided that he chooses it rationally (σὺν νῦν ἑλομένῳ, b3-4) and lives
it seriously. . .” (619b2-5). Given the outcomes of the choices that follow, it is clear that
choosing with rationality involves having lived a philosophical life.

The first chooser selected a life of tyranny, which involved eating his own children,
because he did not examine the life pattern carefully. (619b-c) Socrates comments, “When he
examined at leisure the life he had chosen, however, he beat his breast and bemoaned his choice”

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66 Though we are once again thrice removed from these words of the myth, I hesitate to argue that this is once again
due to the possible overwhelming emotion that these words may evoke. Rather, this seems like a choice based on
dramatic effect. Oliver, 264, notes the switch to direct discourse here, saying it intensifies the impact of the
Speaker’s words on the reader.
To confirm that this poor decision resulted from living unphilosophically, Socrates explains that this chooser had descended from heaven, having “participated in virtue through habit, and without philosophy” (ἐθεὶ ἄνευ φιλοσοφίας ἀρετῆς μετειληφότα, 619c8-d1). Clearly, living virtuously, like the timocratic soul, is not enough to be prepared for the choice one faces in the afterlife. The literal reader, therefore, is urged toward the life of the philosopher here.

Complicating things, however, Socrates then adds that most of the careless souls had come from heaven and therefore were “untrained” (ἀγυμνάστους, d2) in suffering, whereas those who arrived from the earth, who suffered and saw others suffer, chose carefully. (619d) The literal reader gets the positive message here that if they do suffer an afterlife punishment, it will function as a sort of purgation, enabling them to choose wisely afterwards. However, those who receive a post-mortem reward and who lived unphilosophically in their previous lives, seem

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67 According to Gonzalez, 266, Proclus interprets this passage as indicating that the chooser’s punishment is due to lack of reflection, and the continued appetite for desire and gluttony (2.294.25-27). Proclus also suggests that before the life that earned it a reward, perhaps the soul lived a disordered life that deserved more punishment (2.295.16-21). I think it is interesting that Proclus describes this ailing soul’s tendencies as “against nature” (“contre nature,” 2.295.1-2), indicating that what this soul has become is a distorted soul—a soul that is demented so deeply to its core that even in a disembodied state, its poor life choices from a previous life long ago still affect it.

68 Claudia Baracchi claims that the myth of Er describes the immortal soul in ways that the Glauclus image did not. Specifically, the myth illustrates that the markers of lives lived are informing elements of the soul. See Barrachi, Of Myth, Life, and War in Plato’s Republic, 112-114. If informed by this insight, the literal reader would be urged to reason that their actions here and now will endure by shaping the character of their soul.

69 Gonzalez, 267, suggests that the value of suffering here seems to undermine the value of the philosophical life, by making it possible to avoid the life of philosophy and still be rewarded. I argue, however, that even if purgation can result in a positive outcome, the myth makes it clear that this option is not preferable. Why would one choose to suffer, when one could choose the life of philosophy? It is also possible that the reader is meant to infer that the philosophical life includes considerable suffering, based on Socrates’ life and the fate of the philosopher who attempts to rule and educate the city. Therefore, the one who chooses philosophy is saved not only by philosophy itself, but by the suffering it entails. In this way, it is not suffering itself that redeems, but the insights it elicits. In other words, suffering can foster philosophy. Also, given that, the best option available here is still the life of philosophy, because the dialogue clearly supports the thesis that it is preferable to suffer because of a philosophical life, than it is to suffer because of punishment for a vicious, unphilosophical choice or series of choices.

Kenneth Dorter points out that according to the myth, we never start from a blank slate—some set of circumstances is always already given. In this sense, he argues, the myth of Er confirms the noble lie. See Dorter, “Free Will, Luck, and Happiness in the Myth of Er,” Journal of Philosophical Research 28 (2003):131. I should clarify that although his observation relates clearly to this section of my literal reading, Dorter meant for these remarks to apply to his figurative reading of the myth. Also, it is possible that the set of factors described in the noble lie of book 3 is much more limiting than the set of determining circumstances given here in the myth. This could be an important qualification to Dorter’s point, and it demands further examination.
quite doomed when it comes to choosing the next. The best option here is clearly to choose the life of philosophy now, be rewarded, and then choose well in the afterlife.\textsuperscript{70} Plato leads the calculating souls of literal readers toward belief in this option by means of his likely account, with help from the vivid, dramatic imagery of the first chooser’s folly, which engages the lower parts of the soul. The trusting, believing soul who follows Plato’s lead will subsequently seek the path to intellection in their life on earth here and now.

There is, however, one caveat for this believing soul: Socrates explains that even if it lives philosophically, if it is “one of the last to choose” (619e1) because of the lottery, it may choose a life that leads to purgation. It seems, therefore, that luck plays a role here too, and so the believing soul must hope that it fares well in the lottery, and acknowledge that there are some forces beyond one’s control involved in one’s fate.\textsuperscript{71} Though one’s choices are clearly one’s own responsibility, one’s set of options is not self-determined. Plato’s recognition of the role of fate here may serve as an added factor in the persuasion of the literal reader toward belief in this likely account.\textsuperscript{72} Many such readers in ancient Greece would have had firm opinions about the pronounced role of fate in their life circumstances, and by giving divine fate a role in his account, Plato may gain the sympathy of these readers, making them more apt to question their attitudes about this topic.\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{70} Bloom, 436, confirms this reading, saying that for all but the philosophical, there are constant changes in fortune.

\textsuperscript{71} Dorter, 139-140, rightly highlights the indeterminacy the souls face in choosing a new life, given that the number of lives exceeds the number of souls. He explains that the first nine books never said justice was sufficient for happiness, and so here in the myth of Er, Plato includes the fact that some luck is necessary. Despite this, Dorter argues, it is always in our power to achieve happiness, in a relative sense. While the myth of the metals highlights our limitations, he says, the myth of Er points out what is still very much in our power, all things considered.

\textsuperscript{72} Because non-philosophers who are rewarded are sometimes subsequently punished for their reward, Annas argues that the myth is pessimistic about rewards, and that it inspires fatalism. See Annas, \textit{Introduction to Plato’s Republic}, 351. There are, however, two viable options for being rewarded well, that is, for obtaining a reward that does not result in subsequent punishment: a life of philosophy and a life of suffering. Luck plays a role, but does not determine the course of things completely.

\textsuperscript{73} Plato subverts popular fatalism here, similar to Heraclitus in B119. See Hitchcock, 217. This helps to confirm McCoy’s point, “Freedom and Responsibility in the Myth of Er” 135, that Socrates distinguishes his account from the fatalism popular in Greek tragedy.
Socrates continues describing the choosing of lives, acknowledging explicitly that it was quite a sight to see, “since it was pitiful, funny, and surprising to watch” (620a1-2). Er recounted the way in which afterlife choices depend on one’s life here and now, identifying specific, well-known choosers and their decisions. Several of these souls chose animal lives, like those that used to belong to Orpheus, Thamyris, Ajax, Agamemnon, and Thersites, who chose the lives of a swan, nightingale, lion, eagle, and monkey, respectively, for various reasons stemming from their lives. (620a-c) All five serve as clear examples of those whose poor choices in life led them to choose the lives of animals, and so the reader is meant to infer that these destinies are punishments of various sorts. Since an animal’s life clearly does not involve rationality and, therefore, cannot be philosophical, one may infer that the next round of choices will not go well for these souls either. Using the familiar stories of these figures’ lives, Plato portrays the ways in

74 The following explanations of these characters corroborate my statement: As Grube explains in his footnotes on this passage, Thamyris was a famous poet and singer who was punished by the Muses for his arrogance. Ajax was also arrogant, in thinking he deserved Achilles’ armor, which went to Odysseus. He drove himself mad with jealousy and killed himself, according to Sophocles’ Ajax. Odysseus punishes Thersites for foolish insubordination in Odyssey 8. See Cooper, 1222. Moors says Agamemnon wants to flee the human race because of his horrible deeds, like sacrificing his daughter Iphigenia. For this reason, he chooses an animal life. In particular, the eagle was associated with omens. See Moors, “Named Life Selections in Plato’s Myth of Er” Classical and Medieval Studies 39 (1988): 58. Does the choice of Agamemnon here indicate that he is superstitious even when disembodied—that is—to his core? This may be worth further investigation. Proclus, 2.317.5-10, has a different assessment of Agamemnon’s choice, saying that the eagle is a royal animal, and this is part of the reason Agamemnon chooses it. Also though, the choice is driven by passion, which confirms my assessment that Agamemnon chooses poorly. Russell, 485, thinks Orpheus’ foolish choice is meant to indicate Plato’s independence from the Orphic cult. I am uncertain about this proposal. I am in agreement with McLoughlin, who also argues that all of those who chose the lives of animals will not be able to practice philosophy. I also agree with her addition that these life choices will “embolden” the appetitive soul. See McLoughlin, “The Freedom of the Good: A Study of Plato’s Ethical Conception of Freedom,” (Ph.D. diss., The University of New Mexico, 2012), 65. Oliver, 279, also sees all of the choices, except for Odysseus’, as poor. Atalanta’s for instance, is meant as a warning to Glaucon against excess devotion to manly pursuits, while Epeius’ is a warning against overreaching into areas where one lacks expertise. The following represent alternative viewpoints to the above: Seth Benardete has a notably more positive interpretation of these life choices, saying that each animal represents what is good about each character. See Benardete, Socrates’ Second Sailing, On Plato’s Republic (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 228. Michael Inwood thinks Agamemnon and Orpheus would have no regret, as well as Odysseus. See Inwood, “Plato’s Eschatological Myths,” in Plato’s Myths, ed. Catalin Partenie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 47. I am puzzled by both Benardete and Inwood here, and I disagree with them, based in part on the above. Zaslavsky argues that the choices here are not made freely, but are determined by habit. See Zaslavsky, Platonic Myth and Platonic Writing (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981), 170. As I see it, the only chooser whose decision pertained to habit was the first. The others chose seemingly because of significant life events or because of desires.
which poor choices can lead souls further away from lives of philosophy, and toward choices that are even worse. The stories of these familiar characters engage the soul’s appetites and emotions, while leading the calculating soul to the belief that one must take great care to avoid the sorts of life choices here and now that may lead one further away from the philosophical life.

There are still other famous figures from the Greek literary tradition whose choices Plato describes. Atalanta chose the life of an honored male athlete. (620b) This choice corresponds to the honor-loving timocratic life, which is virtuous, but lacks philosophy.⁷⁵ We know the possibly horrible fate that awaits that soul in the next round of choices. Epeius chose the life of a craftswoman (620b-c), which we know from the Republic is a life that lacks philosophy, and therefore will probably not fare well in the next round of choices.

Finally, we hear about Odysseus’ soul, an example of the way in which suffering can lead to philosophy. He chose last, but his soul’s “memory of its former sufferings had relieved its love of honor” (620c5). The liberation of Odysseus from love of honor, which occurred through suffering, is evident in his soul’s extremely careful choosing:

It went around for a long time, looking for the life of a private individual who did his own work, and with difficulty it found one lying off somewhere neglected by the others. He chose it gladly and said that he’d have made the same choice even if he’d been first.⁷⁶ (620c6-d2)

Why is this choice of a private, quiet life presented as a neglected treasure? Though Socrates does not state this explicitly, we know that this paradigm could enable the soul that chooses it to pursue philosophy in its next life. It will have sufficient leisure to do so and will not face a set of circumstances prohibitive of the intellectual life, as the lives previously described entailed. One

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⁷⁵ See 548c-553b.
⁷⁶ Johnson, 10, says that the private life Odysseus chose is best-suited to pursuing the Good. I agree with this assessment, as is evident below. Along similar lines, McCoy, 140, writes that Odysseus’ choice is the culmination of the myth. In the sense that this soul chose best, and thus represents the culmination of the myth’s teaching about suffering, I agree with McCoy. See below for further details about my explanation of this.
definition of justice that remains operative throughout most of the Republic is that of doing one’s own job—that is, minding one’s own business. Plato’s readers know therefore that a way of life that involves this is a good, just life. Though the dialogue portrays the private, quiet life as clearly the preferred choice of philosophers, the Republic does not straightforwardly or simply present it as the best life for them, since much of the conversation argues for the kingship of philosophers. However, we know from book 5 that this kingship can involve a eugenics program whose unforeseen consequences might be dire, and most importantly, in the ship image of book 6 and the imagery of the philosopher descended into the cave among the prisoners, the philosopher-ruler faces a life of extreme hardship, including possible threats to his life, if he or she tries to lead the many as their political ruler. Because of these descriptions, and because of the conception of justice as minding one’s own business, we readers may have had inklings throughout the text that the private, quiet life is really better for philosophers, according to Plato. Now, Odysseus’ choice confirms this for us. This is not to say that the quiet, non-political life is best for philosophers in an objective or final sense though—it is simply the best for them. The best life a philosopher can have for the sake of the many is to lead them in some way, perhaps even politically. We know from the dialogue why this is best for the many, and we now know from the myth of Er that even if this life results in extreme hardship for the

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77 See 421c and 423d, for instance.
78 See 458d-461e for the sexual lottery, 488a-489b for the ship image, and 516e-517a for the hardships of the philosopher returning to the cave.
79 See 496d, which summarizes this well. There, the private life is presented as the best for a philosopher living in an unjust society; maybe even in any society that falls short of being ideal.
80 I find it difficult to accept the view that Plato favors the philosophical kingship option in the end, because of the many problems that arise: the neglected children, the incest of the sexual lottery, as well as the seemingly irresolvable conflict between philosophers and the many. Since many of these problems arise from preexisting social conditions, I am amenable to the view that philosophical kingship or aristocracy is best under ideal conditions, which may or may not ever come to be. Regardless, the philosophers are clearly the best teachers or advisors for the many, based on the ship image, the Line, the Cave, and the later education of the guardians. Therefore, it’s consistent with the text that under any conditions, the philosopher’s political leadership role is valuable when it is limited to teaching or advising.
philosopher, and therefore less time actually to do philosophy, the philosopher’s suffering will still save his or her soul. When Socrates presents the quiet, non-political life as selected by Odysseus’ soul with care and moderation, and as the result of purgation, we readers know because of the myth that this is a good life choice.

The reader sees Odysseus as an honored hero. From Homer’s portrayal of him, he is already a model for the good life, at least in the perspective of ancient Greek readers, and so the reader is sympathetic toward Plato’s portrayal of him as a role model. However, according to Plato in the myth of Er, Odysseus is not admirable because he devised the plan that sacked Troy, or because he killed the suitors, but because the sufferings he endured following these events enabled him to choose his next life in a non-spirited, well-examined, moderate, altogether rational way. Admiring Odysseus, the literal reader calculates here toward the end of the myth, that suffering with or without philosophy will save us, by enabling us to choose like Odysseus. Because of the lessons of the dialogue, one knows that the life of philosophy comes with great rewards as well as suffering, and so, it is a preferable choice here contrasted to a life of suffering without philosophy.

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81 It also seems quite possible that the afterlife experiences of this soul (experiencing judgment, seeing the κόσμος, and so on) had something to do with its choice. Destrée, 110-111, sees the myth of Er as an explicit rewriting of Homer and argues that, unlike the epic poetry of the past, Platonic myth does not provide stories of heroes for the youth to emulate. Though my account above supports the argument that Plato reworks elements of Homer for his own philosophical purposes, my presentation of Odysseus stands as an exception to the thesis that Plato does not present accounts of heroes to be emulated in the myth of Er. Similarly, Oliver defends the thesis that Plato replaces Homer’s honor-loving poetry with his own. For instance, Oliver, 254-259, sees Er as a hero, but one who just observes and reports. Also, Hades is a miserable place in the Odyssey (citing book 11 specifically), unlike in the myth of Er, where the afterlife can be pleasant. Finally, the souls in Er’s tale are clearly unlike the souls in the Odyssey who do not learn from their time below and who suffer only because they cannot take vengeance. I agree with Oliver’s insights here. Halliwell points out the pre-Socratic precedent for the reappropriation of myth for one’s own purposes, naming Parmenides and Empedocles, as well as the Pythagorean myths about metempsychosis. See Halliwell, “The Life and Death Journey of the Soul: Interpreting the Myth of Er,” 447.

82 To the reader who says Odysseus’ choice was based on luck, Plato’s account shows that Odysseus absolutely did not get lucky with his lot, but he was fortunate that the life he chose was neglected. Luck therefore certainly did not cause him to choose the life he did—he deliberately took a long time to search around for it. Luck almost, however, prevented him from choosing a good life pattern. If that quiet, private life had already been chosen, Odysseus would not have had the opportunity to choose well.
The reader hears about one final benefit from choosing well in the afterlife: The souls proceeded with the daemons they chose to the “Plain of Forgetfulness” (Λήθης πεδίον, 621a2-3) in its severe heat where, next to the “River of Unheeding” (Ἀμέλητα ποταμόν, a5), they “had to drink a certain measure of this water, but those who weren’t saved by reason drank more than that” (a6-8), and the more one drank, the more one forgot about one’s afterlife experiences (621a). Presumably, one could calculate, those who choose good lives are those who are saved by reason and who, therefore, would not drink too much. These souls would have better memories of their post-mortem experiences and would therefore lead their next lives with the afterlife in mind, remembering how important their life choices are for their afterlife choices.

Once again, Plato leads the literal reader to a rational calculation that constitutes a sort of belief, and he does so by engaging all three parts of the soul. After drinking from the river at the “Plain of Forgetfulness in burning, choking, terrible heat” (621a2-3), at midnight, “there was a clap of thunder and an earthquake, and they were suddenly carried away from there, this way and that” (621a2-3) at midnight, “there was a clap of thunder and an earthquake, and they were suddenly carried away from there, this way and that” (621a2-3). After drinking from the river at the

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83 This note presents evidence that Λήθη and Αμέλης were well known names to Plato’s audience. Lincoln, 20, says the river of Λήθη is probably the most famous underworld river. Stewart, 154, explains that Plato’s account is in accord with the popular belief that the river of Λήθη is above ground and is not counted among the rivers of Tartarus. He notes that Virgil placed it underground though. Jean-Pierre Vernant claims that Plato’s name for the river is not found in any other description of the netherworld before him. Vernant suggests that the river Styx, found in the Phaedo myth, became Αμέλης ποταμόν. See Vernant, Myth and Thought Among the Greeks, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1983), 106, 117.

84 Testifying to the deep roots of this imagery, Lincoln, 22-24, relates this detail to the seemingly Orphic gold plate, the Petelia tablet, which was hung around the neck of the deceased and was meant to be their instructions for the journey after death. This account, like Plato’s, suggests that superior people could overcome having their memory stripped at the border of the other world. Lincoln also considers an Indian source as the ultimate origin of this idea. According to an Upanisad teaching, there is a pond, Ara, which one crosses by mind. In that teaching, those who only know the obvious will drown. This last remark interests me because in a Heideggerian reading, it is easy to see a link between Plato’s role for the river of Λήθη and the Upanisad conception of the pond, Ara.

Making a good point about the depth of souls’ responsibility for their choices, Larivée, 238, argues that because of this detail, the myth conveys the point that we not only choose our character, but, if we choose negligently, we are also responsible for that. Her remarks here seem to apply equally well to both a literal and a figurative reading of the myth, though she favors a literal reading.

85 D. E. Eichholz says that drinking from this river is meant to mark the starting place for the soul’s struggle between reason and desire. See Eichholz, “Plato, Republic 621a.” The Classical Review 54 (1940): 182. If Eichholz is right, then Plato identifies this struggle as deeply-rooted, in our souls, starting before birth.
that, up to their births, like shooting stars” (b2-4). The myth then ends with Er waking up to find himself back on the pyre. (621b) The imagery here is clearly rich, engaging, and mysterious, satisfying the lower soul’s desire for such appearances. The myth’s ending has emotional force too, due to its position at the very end of this long, complex, philosophically rich, and potentially transformative conversation. The consummation of the souls’ journeys is also the consummation of the reader’s journey. Harnessing this multifaceted engagement of the lower soul, Plato invites the rational soul to calculate that the culmination of its own afterlife journey could be one of doom, returning to its next life cycle totally unprepared for living a good life—and possibly unable to do so—unless it chooses well now and begins to live the life of philosophy that the dialogue describes. By understanding the factors that culminate in the vivid imagery described above, the rational soul arrives at πίστις, or belief. Socrates’ final words to Glaucon reiterate elements of the preceding tale, and exhort him to be persuaded by it in order to be saved, which Socrates describes as being friends to oneself and the gods, being rewarded like a famous athlete, doing well, and being happy. (621b-d) This final exhortation confirms and adds force to the turn to belief just described. But, as I discussed previously, Plato is not only leading the soul of the literal reader to belief in this account though. By leading readers to belief that they ought to pursue a philosophical life, Plato also points us in the direction of διάνοια, which anyone following the entire conversation would know is the essential next phase of the philosophical journey. This is backed by consummatory force—the force of the entire dialogue. Despite the

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86 Smith explains the pedagogical function of myth as educating through emotion, in that it soothes and orders the emotions of the unphilosophical, persuades the unphilosophical to accept truths, and also serves as a mnemonic device. She associates these features with the early education of philosophers, as described in Republic 2 and 3. See Smith, Plato’s Use of Myth as a Pedagogical Device, 126-129. My account supports the claim that the myth of Er teaches through emotion, by soothing and persuading, but I depart with Smith when she says that this specific approach is meant for the unphilosophical. Since the philosophical also have lower parts of the soul, I think this pedagogical approach is appropriate for them too, though they might not need it as desperately as the unphilosophical.
already-described robust function of this myth, this complex work of art can do even more for its readers, which brings us to my figurative reading.

2.3 Reading the Myth of Er Figuratively

2.3.1 Discerning the Invitation to a Figurative Interpretation: 613b-616a

Before Socrates begins the myth, he and Glaucon agree on a reversal of the previously stated thesis that the just typically suffer punishments while the unjust are rewarded.87 (613b-e) First, they agree that the just are like runners who finish the race and are crowned, while the unjust are like those who fail or falter before the race is over. (613b-c) Explicitly stating that this pattern applies to this life, and not the afterlife, they agree that the unjust become wretched by the end of their lives while the just enjoy worldly success. (613c-d) Socrates and Glaucon agree that the preceding treatment of justice in the Republic supports this conclusion. It is after these remarks that Socrates says of these rewards, “They’re nothing in either number or size compared to those that await just and unjust people after death (τελευτησαντα, a6). And these things must also be heard, if both are to receive in full (τελεως, a7) what they are owed by the argument.” (614a5-8) Though Grube’s translation of τελευτησαντα as “after death” is not incorrect given its context, transitive uses of τελευταω include “bring to pass,” “accomplish,” “fulfill,” and “finish.”88 Plato’s intended meaning of this word may actually include one or more additional senses in which the word may be used, but this depends on whether or not one or more homonyms is contextually appropriate. This, in turn, depends on whether or not we can viably interpret Plato’s description of the afterlife to apply to that which occurs after some other sort of

87 This thesis is initially articulated from 357d-365b.
end or accomplishment in this life. Though I will endeavor to show that this is the case, before doing that, we should examine one further clue. I posit that Plato makes a play-on-words between τελευτήσαντα and τελέως. If one were to convey that, one’s translation would read: “They’re nothing in either number or size compared to those that await just and unjust people after life’s completion (τελευτήσαντα, a6). And these things must also be heard, if both are to receive completely (τελέως, a7) what they are owed by the argument.” Given this pun, it makes sense to translate τελευτήσαντα as a completion of life, which one could viably interpret literally as death, or which one, as I will shortly explain, could interpret figuratively as a different sort of life completion: taking action on a major decision perhaps, completing a life goal, or ascending out of the cave. Of course, this final option only applies to those who are just, because the one who makes it out of the cave has proceeded beyond the realms of conjecture and belief, to intellection, where one possesses knowledge about Forms in relation to the physical world, and possibly even to pure thought or νόησις, where one thinks about Forms in relation to the Good, and therefore understands the value of everything. This person, as I previously explained, is good and just because of his completion of this journey. The analogous completions of life for

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89 Plato could also be conveying that death is a separation of soul and body, and it is really just the body that dies. Hence, death is a completion in one sense, as well as a transition to another phase. Er illustrates this for us quite well by dying on the pyre and subsequently visiting the netherworld. Corroborating my previous statements, Halliwell says every action brings with it its own “afterlife.” See Halliwell, “The Life and Death Journey of the Soul: Interpreting the Myth of Er,” 469.

The following includes a few noteworthy figurative interpretations of this myth: H. S. Thayer argues for a figurative reading of the entire myth, saying that a literal reading is opposed to the main argumentation of the dialogue. See Thayer, H.S. “The Myth of Er,” History of Philosophy Quarterly 5 (1988): 369-384. Additionally, Bouvier, 38, 41, favors a figurative reading, saying that the myth favors choice and transformation much more than transmigration. He discusses the implications of the myth on this life here and now. Finally, Zaslavsky, 158, argues that the transmigration of souls in the myth of Er should be understood as a metaphorical way of describing the internal transformations of a human in this lifetime. His argument is also based in part on Plato’s use of τελευτήσαντα rather than other possible words for someone who has died. He says that Plato’s language here indicates that someone has reached an actuality for which they might strive. All of those who favor a purely figurative reading unfortunately miss the fact that because of the proof of the soul’s immortality that precedes the myth, as well as the myth’s function as a psychagogic likely account, Plato must take the possibility of a real afterlife seriously. This must be reconciled with any figurative reading.

90 chapter 1, section 1.2.4.6
the unjust are their poor choices and their bodily death, both of which are likely to be followed by various negative consequences, depending on the extent of their injustice.\(^1\) In the description of the tyrant’s punishment, understood in relation to his book 9 portrayal, and the first chooser’s selection of a tyrant’s life, we see that there are immediate and long-term punishments for this sort of life and any others that resemble it. These accounts may also indicate that if one simply acts in accord with one’s tyrannical self, or one’s basest appetitive desires, the most horrible immediate and long-term punishments await in life, and possibly in death too. The rewards for a life well-lived, or a journey through the cave completed, are depicted in the journey to the column of light and in the account of life-choosing.

Socrates begins by pointing out that his tale will not be one “of Alcinous” (614b2). Besides simply remarking that this story would not be too long, like the tales of Alcinous were known to be (Odyssey 9-11, according to Grube), Plato reminds readers of the extensive critical treatment of Homer that preceded.\(^2\) It would, therefore, make sense for Plato explicitly to distance the myth from Homeric epic, telling his readers that he is not a poet like Homer, but not necessarily that he is not a poet at all.\(^3\) This should remind us of the quarrel between philosophy and poetry, and the extensive criticism of the latter, as explained above. If poetry may only be admitted as valuable once it has defended itself philosophically, then perhaps the way in which the myth of Er departs from Homer is that it contains a philosophical defense of itself.\(^4\) We have

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\(^1\) See the literal reading above for my account of the various punishments that await the unjust after death.

\(^2\) Vorwerk, 48-49, interprets this detail as an indication that Glaucon expects, and even may want, to hear a tale like that of Alcinous, but Socrates won’t provide it, because such myths were banned from the city. This is because they are not true and may be harmful to bravery by cultivating fear of death. The myth of Er is different, writes Vorwerk, in that it urges us to remain steady in the face of the consequences for justice and injustice. Vorwerk also suggests that Er’s account may be a play-on-words, between Αλκίνου (614b2) and Άλκιμου (b3, meaning “brave”). I concur with Vorwerk’s observation of the pun, as well as his reasoning for defending the myth of Er as a tale that responds to the preceding criticisms of poetry in the dialogue.

\(^3\) Zaslavsky, 159, thinks Er’s tale is an inversion of an Odyssean narrative. See also footnote 80 above for others who see Plato as a rewriting of Homer, as well as my assessment of those views.

\(^4\) As explained previously, this is also one of the key criteria for good writing according to the Phaedrus.
begun to see this in the literal interpretation of the myth as a likely account, in which fantastic
details are framed by their mythical setting and girded by more firmly established theses, like the
claims that there is an immortal soul and that there is an afterlife.

The pedagogical value of this comparison to Homer is in its invitation to the reader to
consider whether or not the story about to be told should be criticized like Homer’s tales. Plato
is encouraging his attentive readers to consider the value of good versus bad storytelling based
on what we have learned thus far in the discussion. The psychagogical function of this
comparison will urge readers toward διάνοια in their critical examination of Homer in relation to
Plato, because they will see that it is the philosophical truths of Plato’s account—Forms and the
teachings they support—that distinguish him from Homer. The psychagogical effect of the
myth’s figurative reading will also complement the comparison to Homer by engaging both the
non-rational and rational aspects of the soul simultaneously with the myth’s imagery.

Socrates describes Er as not only brave and having undergone a notable degree of
suffering—a description which engages the spirited part of the soul\(^5\)—but also as a
disembodied soul that traveled with many other such souls. (614b) Just after the proof of the
soul’s immortality (608d-611b), through the image of the sea god Glaucus, we are privy to a
description of the soul as it is in itself, not marred by its attachment to the body. (611c-d) Its true
nature is “its philosophy, or love of wisdom,” (611e1) namely, its rationality.\(^6\) Knowing this,
when Socrates tells us the story of the disembodied souls’ journey, we may conceive of some of
them—indeed maybe only a few of them—as highly rational in their disembodiment. Clearly, as
my literal reading has shown, some of those souls are meant to resemble those marred by the

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\(^5\) See chapter 1, section 1.2.2.1.

\(^6\) This pure view of the soul, according to Socrates, will allow us really to see if “it has many parts or just one and
whether or in what manner it is put together” (612a4-5).
body, even once detached from it. However, knowing what we have learned from the dialogue about how a philosopher comes to be, and that this is not impossible, we may presume here in the myth that one or more such souls, defined by their love of wisdom, would not be marred terribly by the body, and would travel with the others through the nether-regions. In fact, because the Glaucus image so closely precedes the myth of Er, I think we are encouraged to imagine a soul defined not by its relation to body, but by its love of wisdom, journeying in the afterlife. This endeavor can only be accomplished by a figurative reading.  

The description of Er on his pyre, and all of the other imagery from the literal account above that engaged the lower soul, still does have the same effect on one who reads the myth figuratively. As images, they affect the lower soul whether or not the rational soul accepts them as true, but as we have seen, there is good reason to calculate that much of the imagery is generally likely to be true in some way. This calculation applies to my metaphorical reading, since, as I will show, I do not rule out the preceding literal reading, while I attempt to take it further, to the figurative.  

The whole soul will be engaged in additional ways by this figurative reading, most especially the rational soul, which is called to identify with, and even to aspire to imitate, the rational souls of the myth, who are defined not by calculation, but by love of wisdom. As I explained in the previous chapter, this desiring capacity of the rational soul results from its intertwinement, or overlap, with the appetitive capacity, so I am not positing here that disembodied souls can be totally free from their lower aspects.

97 Thayer, 376, also thinks the myth depicts pure, disembodied souls, who only come to have desires once they choose a life pattern, and who gain spiritedness once joined with their guardian spirit. The fact that these souls can love wisdom according to the myth, indicates, in my estimation, that there are some desires in the rational soul, according to Plato. chapter 1, section 1.2.2.2 supports this.
The souls approach the openings in the heavens and the earth, and the just souls go upwards to the heavens. (614b-c) Before they proceed, Er notices that the souls coming from there have been purified and happily (ἀσμένας, e2) return from their long journey to the sight of other souls—as though they were a crowd at a festival. (614d-e) Those who came from the earth wept as they told of sufferings, but those who came from the heavens told about “the inconceivably fine and beautiful sights” (θέας ἀμηχάνους τὸ κάλλος, 615a3-4) they saw there.98

We learn that the extent of the beauty and goodness of the visions above pertains to the degree to which they reward the just and pious: amounting to ten times the goodness of their deeds. (615a-b) Heaven clearly is a place the very sight of which amounts to a level of goodness and beauty well beyond that which is attainable on earth. After all, its sights constitute a ten-fold multiplication of even the most just deeds done on earth. How ought we conceive of this? One way is by understanding this disproportion as possibly similar to that between the goodness and truth of the realm inside the cave and the realm outside of it. The visions that the souls have of the heavens constitute such a great reward that it provokes happiness in them. Those who return from this find themselves explaining their visions to those who have gone through great suffering and who presumably will not be able to conceive of these heavenly visions, similar to the philosopher trying to account for the real world to those inside the cave—though as we know, not all souls returning from the heavenly journey are philosophical. Those who are philosophical though would probably face the communication difficulty previously described, similar to the difficulty the philosopher returning to the cave does.

The heavenly journey then may be compared in some ways to the journey out of the cave and the turn back into it. If we are informed by this comparison, despite that there is not an exact

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98 This description may remind us of the conversation about beauty in book 5. (480a)
one-to-one correspondence between the myth of Er and the Allegory of the Cave, we now know we do not need to try and calculate *exactly* how heavenly visions are a ten-fold multiplication of good deeds done on earth. Given our understanding of the relationship of the intelligible realm to the physical, based on the Simile of the Line and the Allegory of the Cave, it would be somewhat foolish to calculate how *exactly* the intelligible is ten times better than the physical.\(^9\) Also, we may now further consider the possibility that the realm Socrates describes in the myth is not that of a literal life after death, but that of a life beyond the physical—specifically the life that results from following the path of justice, and is a reward in itself. It is also possible that the similarity of Socrates’ description here in the myth to that of the cave is not meant just to allow for a figurative afterlife, but also for the interpretation that the best way to understand actual afterlife rewards is in terms of the intelligible realm, outside the cave. Perhaps we are even to understand that the intelligible is both literally and figuratively a world beyond the physical.

There’s no reason thus far to negate our literal reading, just because of the viability of our metaphorical one. Now, we readers have been invited to understand the journey about to come in terms of the intelligible realm; the world of Ideas. Going into this, we want to feel excitement, but our spirited aspect is also led to feel anger and fear at the description of the tyrants’ gruesome punishment (615c-616a), which immediately precedes the start of this journey, as I described above. It is as though Plato wants us to keep in mind the horror of the consequences for deviating from the path toward justice, or staying inside the cave, and all of the emotions that go along with those consequences, even though we are about to think about the world of Ideas. Perhaps this negative emotion will help us to think more seriously and earnestly about the intellectual realm. This is not just a whimsical intellectual game; it is not mere amusement for

\(^9\) Rationality, according to my figurative account, invites us beyond calculation, to wisdom-loving of a higher order. There will be more evidence of this to follow.
those who have become bored with their physical lives. The intellectual life is the place in which the real font of goodness and happiness comes forth.

2.3.2 To the Light

After seven days on the meadow, they all are required to “arise” (ἀναστάντας, 616b3) and proceed on a journey to the heavens. The group traveled for four days, when they were able to have an overview of the “straight column of light that stretched through the whole of heaven and earth,” (616b4-5). After one more day, they arrived at the middle of the light, where “they saw the extremities of its bonds stretching from the heavens” (616c1-2). Unlike the Good, described earlier (516b-c), which is the cause and governor of all in the physical realm, in the sense that it provides seasons and years in some unspecified way, this light in the myth of Er binds heaven and supports it so that it can revolve. This light is not the source or cause of all that is, as the Good is said to be, but it does provide support to all that is, according to this description. The fact that this light is all-embracing, and all-pervading, as well as essential to all that exists, makes it similar to the Good in some ways. Also, it penetrates and binds all beings, but also stretches beyond being, and so, can be described like the Form of the Good in this way as well (509b). Knowing that the philosophical study of astronomy leads to Being (527c-530d), we can surmise that there should be something intellectual, rather than physical, that we can

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616a6 reads: ἀναβαίνοι, καὶ ἀσμενέστατα ἐκαστὸν σιγήσαντος ἀναβήναι in Burnet and Slings (though Slings has it going to line 7). I think it is possible here that ἀναβαίνοι and ἀναβήναι are meant as an intentional contrast to Κατέβην (327a1), the first word of Plato’s Republic. Albinus, 94, on the other hand, interprets Er’s journey as a descent. I think it is possible that Er’s journey as a whole is a descent, but that the journey to the light and the cosmic vision involves a sort of ascent within it. There is also good reason to see even this part of the journey to the heavens as not an ascent at all, so my point here may be moot. If I am right though, then the Republic as a whole begins as a descent, contains an ascent to the Line and Cave, and ends with a descent to the underworld, with the myth of Er as a microcosm of this entire structure.

I amend Grube’s translation of διά from “over” to “through,” which proves important for understanding how exactly the light supports the whole like the ὑποξείωμα of the trireme.
gather from the souls’ astronomical visions in this place.\textsuperscript{104} If this light is not meant to function exactly like the Sun’s light (the truth and value imbued by the Good), but somewhat like it, then what is the intellectual substance of the souls’ visions? I will answer this question in what follows.

The spindle of Necessity and its whorls hang within the boundaries of the light, with the Sirens standing on the rims of the whorls and the spindle resting on the lap of Necessity.\textsuperscript{105} (616c-617b) Necessity, the spindle, and the Sirens are all divine entities whose roles in the \kombos are to be understood in relation to the light that encompasses them.\textsuperscript{106} If we are to understand these entities from a purely allegorical perspective, we may see Necessity and the spindle as representative of inevitability. While the light binds the universe, Necessity and the spindle are the ultimate source of the cosmic motions. The offspring of this divine source of cosmic movement, Necessity’s daughters, come to represent three specific manifestations of the inevitable, or time: past, present, and future. (617b-c)\textsuperscript{108} We readers are prompted to think about the spatial structure of the \kombos in relation to the origin of motion and time. Physical structures, like the stem of the spindle and the whorls attached to it, are only the proximal causes

\textsuperscript{104} Adam, 441-449, explains that the astronomical machinery is poetic throughout the myth and is not meant to be a true scientific explanation. Though Plato does follow the Pythagorean ordering of the planets here and in \textit{Timaeus} 38c, there are inconsistencies here in the myth of Er, and so, Adam says, following Cook Wilson, the astronomy here is meant to be symbolic. Adam, 472-479, also engages in an arithmetic and geometric discussion of the account. Insofar as I read this account metaphorically and engage in a mathematical discussion of it below, I am following in Adam’s footsteps.

\textsuperscript{105} Heath, 153, contends that it is impossible to translate the details of the Spindle of Necessity into consistent, coherent physical facts. This is because it must be somehow at the point on the surface of the earth that is in the middle of the column of light, but this would also require it to be inside the earth as well, which is physically impossible. Furthermore, asks Heath, if Necessity is in the middle of the earth, how can she hold the spindle and whorls in her lap? Heath’s interpretation here lends further credence to the notion that Plato is urging his readers either toward a literal reading that does not interpret every detail as exactly true, similar to my literal reading above, or to a figurative interpretation—or toward both, as I contend. Hitchcock, 210, thinks we are not to take the souls’ journey to the Spindle literally, because Plato is so vague about the geography of the journey here.

\textsuperscript{106} Halliwell claims that the Sirens’ positive role here is meant to rewrite their being seductive, destructive forces in \textit{Odyssey} 12. See Halliwell, “The Life and Death Journey of the Soul: Interpreting the Myth of Er,” 447. This confirms further my earlier claim that Plato is reworking Homer.

\textsuperscript{108} Benardete, 226-227, sees the column of light as representative of time, with the colorless light as soul (in relation to \textit{Timaeus} 34b), and the colorful light as the many soul-types.
of motion and time in Plato’s account. Their ultimate cause is divine, represented by Necessity and the Fates, who control the physical motions of the heavens. Much order and organization, then, stems from these divine entities and the light that envelops the universe. In the arrangements of the whorls, one can see that order penetrates the universe’s inner structures as well, which we can understand in terms of mathematics, evident below.

In order to imagine the shapes, sizes, and arrangement of the whorls of Necessity’s spindle (616c-e) with some accuracy, one must employ spatial reasoning that incorporates two-dimensional geometry akin to that described as the second phase of the guardians’ later education in book 7 (526c-527c), as well as three-dimensional geometry (528a-b), which is a key transition to the sort of reasoning involved in astronomy: three-dimensional figures in motion (528a-b). The understanding of solids involved in astronomy, furthermore, is needed to conceive of the whorls’ motions (617a-b), and some knowledge of harmonics or music theory, which follows astronomy in the guardians’ educational program (530d-531c), is necessary for understanding the way in which the Sirens’ eight notes produce one harmonious sound (617b). Socrates describes these five phases of the guardians’ education, which prepare for the study of dialectic (531d-534e), as a matter of “turning a soul from a day that is a kind of night to the true day—the ascent to what is, which we say is true philosophy” (521c6-8). The Allegory of the Cave portrays διάνοια as the phase of being outside the cave seeing shadows and reflections first.

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109 The following three points provide some helpful background for understanding what is going on in this section of text. Halliwell discusses not only the pre-Socratic and Pythagorean influences on Plato’s astronomy and cosmology here, but also astronomical thought that was new to Plato. For instance, the first fully mathematical model of the universe was conceived by Eudoxus of Cnidus during Plato’s lifetime. See Halliwell, Plato: Republic 10, 20. Though this point lends credence to the possibility that Plato’s account is meant to be scientific, it also lends credibility to my mathematical interpretation of this part of the account. Also, with regard to the eight notes, the eight-stringed lyre spanned an octave, according to Hitchcock, 204, and had the same ratios as the Sirens’ whorls. Finally, McClain explains that there are correlations between the whorls and the musical scale. He says the radii of the various circles correspond to string lengths of various tones. The relative measures of the rims refer to musical as well as planetary intervals, except that Plato’s rim widths vary in an order exactly opposite to the musical model. See McClain, The Pythagorean Plato. Prelude to the Song Itself (Stony Brook: Nicolas Hayes, 1978), 48.
and once one is in the full light of day outside the cave, viewing all things in light of the Sun, or the Good itself, one has achieved νόησις.\textsuperscript{110} Given this understanding of the Cave allegory, if Plato’s account of the whorls is meant to lead us along a path parallel to the guardians’ later education, then it should lead us from διάνοια to νόησις.\textsuperscript{111} However, despite the fact that the basic structure of this parallel is clear, it is not yet clear how exactly our thinking about the whorls really does lead us toward διάνοια, and then to νόησις. To see this, we must take another, closer look at the account of the whorls and Sirens in relation to the guardians’ later education.

According to Er’s account of the whorls,

It was as if one big whorl had been made hollow by being thoroughly scooped out, with another smaller whorl closely fitted into it, like nested boxes, and there was a third whorl inside the second, and so on . . . with their rims appearing as circles from above, while . . . they formed one continuous whorl around the stem, which was driven through the center of the eighth. (616d3-e3)

This much is clear: Seven whorls or bowls fit inside the largest one, which would then mean that the next largest would contain six whorls, and so on.\textsuperscript{112} Their rims are concentric circles with a

\textsuperscript{110} See chapter 1, sections 1.2.4.2, 1.2.4.5, and 1.2.4.6. When outside the cave, we look at the shadows on even surfaces first, then at the heavens, first at night, then by daylight. In the simile of the Line, we only have two stages, that of the (mathematical) images and that of the Forms.

\textsuperscript{111} Though Heath, 134-138, does claim that there is a coherent astronomical system that can be pieced together from throughout the Platonic corpus, he explains that according to Republic 7, the purpose of astronomy is studying Being, not becoming. Sensible objects, he says, are useful only insofar as they stimulate the particular intellectual discipline required to understand them. We attain the real science of astronomy when we do away with the starry heavens, that is, the realm of appearances. The true figures in which the stars move are their mathematical orbits. As is evident here and below, I agree with Heath’s assessment about the astronomy of the Republic.

Robert Brumbaugh engages in this philosophical pursuit of astronomy, remarking that the myth’s structure reflects the levels of the Line, and noticing that the souls complete the final courses in the guardians’ education; however, he does not explain either of these points in systematic detail. Rather, he focuses intensely on the significance of the numbers Plato uses throughout the text. Unfortunately, getting into substantive treatment of numerology here would take me too far afield. One interesting remark I will include is his statement that the souls travel for four days from “becoming to being,” and that the Line and Cave have four stages. “At the end of the fourth day’s journey (the eleventh day), the trans-spatial and temporal region at the center of the heavens is visible.” See Brumbaugh, Plato’s Mathematical Imagination (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1954), 161, 167, 177. This last remark corroborates my metaphysical interpretation of the heavenly vision, informed by the Line and Cave.

\textsuperscript{112} Heath, 153-157, says the whorls are probably hemispheres that Plato obtained by halving the Pythagorean spheres that Theon of Smyrna mentions. Nothing in the text though, demands that they be hemispheres; however, Heath, with Proclus, sees them as segments of spheres. Heath also explains that each whorl carries a planet, though some contend that the Sirens are planets themselves. Another perplexity is that Plato only gives the order of the breadths of the whorls, and not the ratios of those breadths. So, if each whorl carries a planet, according to Heath,
common center, which means that the whorls all have a common axis. This all seems to make sense, and one can conceive of this image with some ease, until the following lines:

The first or outside whorl had the widest circular rim; that of the sixth was second in width; the fourth was third; the eighth was fourth; the seventh was fifth; the fifth was sixth; the third was seventh; and the second was eighth. (616e3-8)

If “widest” (πλατύτατον, e4-5) means having the greatest diameter, then this description does not clearly follow from the previous account, for the following reason: If the second whorl (and thereby the seven others) fit inside the first or largest, and then the third (and all six others) fit inside the second, it would follow that the diameter of the first would be largest, with the second as second largest, and so on, but this is not what the previous lines indicate. As I see it, there are three possible ways of understanding this puzzle: (1) “Width” does mean diameter, and the rim of each whorl is supposed to appear as a circle, concentric with the others, from above, meaning that there is an inconsistency in the account of the way in which each fits inside each and the widths of the rims. (2) “Width” does not indicate diameter, but rather, the width of the rim is described as one would describe the width of the band of a belt lying flat. This would reconcile the inconsistency. (3) “Width” does mean diameter, and the rims are concentric, but each rim is not visible from above. Rather, some whorls wrap around others, occluding them and their rims. This also would reconcile the inconsistency, and a diagram is needed to conceive of this too.

we cannot deduce the ratios of the distances of those bodies from earth. The fact that Heath notices perplexities in this account supports my claim below that there is a potentially irresolvable puzzle in the whorls’ description, and that Plato intentionally introduces puzzles in this account to provoke readers’ intellection.


114 Given that some possible translations of πλατός are “flat” or “level,” this option is the most likely. (*Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed., s.v. “πλατός,” by H.G. Liddell and R. Scott)

116 I have not fully conceived of how this ought to look, nor have I found an artist willing and able to render it.
To decide how exactly one is to envision the details of the spindle, which have to bear some similarity to the order of the planetary spheres they apparently ought to resemble, one must be able to interpret Socrates’ description of the whorls with perfect accuracy, which involves applying knowledge of geometry, which, in turn, involves making physical diagrams that represent geometrical Forms.\(^{117}\) In short, διάνοια is required of the reader. Conceiving of the whorls’ colors and relative motions (616e-617b) also requires diagramming, and maybe even more, creating a three-dimensional model, in order really to behold the entire image. These aspects of the account also evoke διάνοια. The imagery of the whorls initially begins in such a way that the lower aspects of the soul can access without much aid from rationality. Namely, initially, the description is an image that one can access as an appearance. Quickly, however, the calculation of the rational soul, and in particular, its capacity for intellection (διάνοια) is needed in order to conceive properly of this account. In this way, the account turns the soul toward intellection, out of the cave.\(^{118}\)

The process in which we have just engaged is strikingly similar to the explanation in book 7 of the way in which intellection is summoned:

If the one is adequately seen itself by itself or is so perceived by any of the other senses, then, as we were saying in the case of fingers, it wouldn’t draw the soul towards being. But if something opposite to it is always seen at the same time, so that nothing is apparently any more one than the opposite of one, then something would be needed to judge the matter. The soul would then be puzzled, would look for an answer, would stir

\(^{117}\) This effort would also entail developing an understanding of the Pythagorean astronomical system, which, according to Heath, 141, is the system Plato found to be best.

\(^{118}\) My account here clearly contrasts with that of Griet Schils, who argues that we do not need to suppose that Plato is being deliberately obscure. This commentator uses Timaeus 38d as a guide and assumes that the eight rims represent from outer to inner: 1. Fixed stars, 2. Saturn, 3. Jupiter, 4. Mars, 5. Mercury, 6. Venus, 7. Sun, 8. Moon. See Schils, “Plato’s Myth of Er: The Light and the Spindle,” Antiquité Classique 62 (1993): 101, 110. I do not assume Plato is being deliberately obscure. Rather, looking closely at his description, perplexity simply emerges and leads to the sort of intellection I describe. If the myth were bluntly fictitious, we would not give it a second thought. It is because it has this appeal of likelihood that it engages us to solve the riddle, as it were. So, the myth is deliberately obscure in this sense. As Brann, The Music of the Republic, 260, says, the cosmology in the myth is meant to be “mathematically beautiful” but “not necessarily observationally correct.” I agree with this assessment and appreciate Brann’s phrasing.
up its understanding, and would ask what the one itself is. And so this would be among the subjects that lead the soul and turn it around towards the study of that which is.
(524d9-525a2)

What Socrates means by the “case of fingers” is their previous exchange in which Socrates explained that the senses notice bigness, smallness, and other immediately perceptible features of the fingers, but understanding realizes that both fingers are two and each individually is one.
(523c-524c) Understanding thus needs to be compelled to reason past the impressions of the senses—to proceed from the visible to the intelligible—for us to understand what the fingers are. I essentially described this process when explaining that the description of the whorls initially appears to us as a solitary image, but then, upon examination, becomes an intellectual puzzle, requiring us to make intellectual distinctions or delineations among its possible meanings and then apply geometrical knowledge. The aforementioned words of Socrates further confirm that the description of the whorls turns the soul toward the intelligible.

As I stated above, there is a parallel between the guardians’ mathematical education, which is an ascent toward νόησις, and the way in which the myth of Er engages us rationally. On the latter side of this parallel there are the kinds of knowledge needed to conceive of the whorls, the Sirens’ music, the Fates, Necessity, and the light that binds it all. On the former there are the same kinds of knowledge, which the guardian class is to master in order to proceed from viewing real things by means of their shadows and reflections (διάνοια) to viewing the real in itself, and eventually by day in reference to the Sun, or the Good (νόησις). By explaining how exactly the description demands our διάνοια for its interpretation, I have already made it clear how we need to apply geometrical knowledge in order to understand the account. The

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120 It is important to note that thought outside the cave takes place in stages: shadows, followed by reflections, and then objects, all by night, and then by day, in reference to the light of the Sun, which is contemplation. (516a-b) Also, the Allegory of the Cave describes the process in more detail than the simile of the Line.
words of Socrates confirm this understanding of geometry: “Geometry is knowledge of what always is. . . it draws the soul towards truth and produces philosophic thought (φιλοσόφου διανοίας, 9) by directing upwards” (527b8-10).

It does not require elaboration to point out that in order to understand the relative motions of the whorls, astronomical knowledge of the motions of solids is needed. Socrates’ description of astronomy in book 7, as a study subsequent to geometry, confirms the philosophical power of the proper study of astronomy, and also confirms that the way we are examining the description of the κόσμος here in the myth of Er is the way to do so if one wishes to access the highest truths of these matters:

We should consider the decorations in the sky to be the most beautiful and most exact of visible things, seeing that they’re embroidered on a visible surface. But we should consider their motions to fall far short of the true ones—motions that are really fast or slow as measured in true numbers, that trace out geometrical figures, that are all in relation to one another, and that are all the true motions of the things carried along in them. And these, of course, must be grasped by reason and thought, not by sight. . . Therefore, we should use the embroidery in the sky as a model in the study of these other things. (529c7-d9)

It is clearly the intellectual substance of these physicalities—the mathematical concepts they represent—that is the most important aspect of the study of astronomy.121

Harmonics, the study that succeeds astronomy, is described in similar terms. In order to understand how exactly the Siren’s notes produce a harmony, knowledge of music theory is needed, and this is the penultimate phase of the guardians’ education. Socrates says, “It’s likely that, as the eyes fasten on astronomical motions, so the ears fasten on harmonic ones, and that the sciences of astronomy and harmonics are closely akin” (530d6-8). It follows that if astronomy

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121 Aristotle describes astronomy as the mathematical science most akin to philosophy, because it speculates about substance that is perceptible but eternal, while the other mathematical sciences do not study substance at all. See Metaphysics 12, 1073b3-8. He also says that the discussion of necessity is best left to more powerful thinkers, possibly in homage to Plato. (1074a16-17)
and harmonics are closely related, then the philosophical or truth-seeking power of astronomy is akin to that of harmonics.

The key missing piece to this entire parallel then is dialectic, the final phase of the guardians’ education. Dialectic, as described in book 7, is necessary to establish and comprehend fully what follows: The whorls and the shapes that compose them serve as metaphors for geometrical objects, which may be Forms that are subservient to other Forms. To understand how exactly they are all related to the Good requires dialectic. Exactly how one needs to employ dialectic to accomplish this task, however, is not a path that the Republic lays out for us as clearly as other dialogues do. However, the Republic provides a detailed description of it in book 7, which is where I will turn now in order to see how exactly this cosmic description from the myth of Er might be leading us to further intellection, and ultimately, to understanding, or νόησις.

After describing the mathematical program of studies, Socrates asks Glaucon, “Don’t you know that all these subjects are merely preludes to the song itself that must also be learned? . . .

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124 The Phaedrus, for instance, lays out an account of collection and division (265d-266c), and the Sophist is an exemplary account of διάίρεσις (beginning at 218e and continuing for most of the dialogue).

Aristotle may serve as a prime example of one who applied dialectic to the heavenly image, in that he thinks he has isolated the number of motions in the κόσμος, each of which, he says, must originate from one of the divine bodies that moves the universe, since there cannot be an infinite regress. (Met. 12 1074a)

Clarifying his understanding of these divine bodies, and confirming the spirit of my figurative reading, Aristotle says his predecessors gave posterity a tradition, in mythical form, that “these bodies are gods” (1074b1-2) and that the divine envelops the whole of nature. “The rest of the tradition has been added” (1074b3-4) in mythical form to persuade the multitude, he says. His language here, and his argument, indicates that the heavenly bodies being divine is not something added simply to persuade the multitude, but that the “rest” is, which he goes on to describe as the notion that these gods are in the form of men or other animals. (b6-7) He reiterates this more explicitly, saying that the idea that “the first substances” (b10) are gods must be “an inspired utterance” (b10-11).

Further evidence of Aristotle’s dialectical understanding of the κόσμος can be seen when he argues that the good of the universe lies in its order and leader, but more in the latter. He argues that all is ordered toward one end. He agrees with the Platonists that the good is a principle, but demands additional clarity: he asks if it is an end, a mover, or a form. (1075a-b) Here, I do not mean to suggest a one-to-one correspondence with Aristotle’s metaphysics and Platonic dialectic, but just to use Aristotle as an illustration of one who studied astronomy—including Plato’s—and derived metaphysical thought from it.
Then isn’t this at last, Glaucon, the song that dialectic sings?” (531d7-532a2) He then goes on to place dialectic explicitly at the climax of the journey from the cave:

It is intelligible, but it is imitated by the power of sight. We said that sight tries at last to look at the animals themselves, the stars themselves, and, in the end, at the sun itself. In the same way, whenever someone tries through argument and apart from all sense perceptions to find the being itself of each thing and doesn’t give up until he grasps the good itself with understanding itself, he reaches the end of the intelligible, just as the other reached the end of the visible. (532a2-b2)

Dialectic, then, is definitely represented by the viewing of objects themselves, and not viewing shadows, reflections, or outlines of the objects. Dialectic is the study that takes one to the end of the journey: to viewing the Good. Glaucon wants to know more about dialectic, and asks, “So tell us: what is the sort of power dialectic has, what Forms is it divided into, and what paths does it follow? For these lead at last, it seems, towards that place which is a rest from the road, so to speak, and an end of journeying for the one who reaches it” (532d8-e3). Socrates’ response is:

You won’t be able to follow me any longer, Glaucon, even though there is no lack of eagerness on my part to lead you, for you would no longer be seeing an image of what we’re describing, but the truth itself. At any rate, that’s how it seems to me. That it is really so is not worth insisting on any further. But that there is some such thing to be seen, that is something we must insist on. (533a1-5)

Socrates says here that the conversation they are having—and possibly the entirety of the Republic—is not meant to describe the truth in direct terms. It is not a conversation that explicitly discusses the highest truths in any terms other than imagery—as such, it seems to go no further than διάνοια. One could ask whether a conversation about truth directly is even possible according to Plato; that is, any conversation besides the one the soul has with truth itself. After all, words are always images. But, as Socrates indicates above, the conversation is meant to convince its audience that there is something to be seen beyond the imagery of the dialogue: the truth itself. Like the philosopher’s involvement in the prisoner’s journey, the Republic directs us toward the intelligible by dragging us out of the cave, but it ceases to lead us
once we are there. With its rich images of Forms, the Republic does provide guidance to us in the early phases of our foray into the intelligible (διάνοια), similar to my account of the Cave allegory, in which the philosopher is heavily involved up to the point of διάνοια, but not in the transition to νόησις. The mathematical education of the guardians and the description of the κόσμος in the myth of Er lead us very clearly toward thought, and even provide some guidance for us once we are in its vast realm, but even when considering the myth of Er and the Allegory of the Cave together, there is no clear way indicated to proceed toward the end of the journey.125 As a result of my preceding analysis, then, the myth of Er leads us to thought and to a realm in which a dialectical path is discernably before us, but just as the philosopher does not guide the freed prisoner once the latter is out of the cave, the Republic ceases to lead its readers in an overt or deliberate way once we have emerged into the intellectual realm.126

Upon our initial reading of Socrates’ description of the κόσμος, if our spirited souls were struck with the feeling of awe, or wonder, then those emotions will only heighten as we conceive of the description with its possible metaphorical meaning in mind. These feelings of the spirited soul motivate our rational pursuit to understand the imagery with which we are confronted. These emotions also seem to be categorized alongside others that the disembodied souls are capable of feeling. Er says that the way the souls chose their lives was quite a sight, “for it was pitiful, humorous, and awe-inspiring to see” (ἐλεινήν τε γὰρ ἱδεῖν εἶναι καὶ γελοῖαι καὶ

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125 Ferguson says that the end, that is, knowledge of the Good, is a hope. See Ferguson, 13. I agree. However, he defines hope (ἐλπίς) here as a good hypothesis, which he says is the normal Ionic sense of the word. Here, I must disagree with him, because the end of the inquiry Plato provokes here is non-hypothetical—it involves knowledge that does not need hypotheses or stepping-stones to proceed. If the end of the journey—knowledge of the Good—is hoped for here at the end of the Republic, I take that to mean that we anticipate this knowledge in a sure and certain way, which is the sense in which Plato uses ἐλπίς in other dialogues, for instance, throughout the Philebus, where it is contrasted with expectation (προσδοκία), which indicates anticipation of an uncertain outcome. See Dorothea Frede, “Rumpelstiltskin’s Pleasures: True and False Pleasures in Plato’s ‘Philebus’,” Phronesis 30 (1985): 170.

126 See chapter 1, section 1.2.4.6.

I should clarify here that, as Socrates explains (533c-d), dialectic is not only the way to the end of the intellectual journey, but it can be incorporated in διάνοια at the very least.
If, according to the myth of Er, these feelings of pity, humor, and awe are possible for those who are disembodied, then perhaps these feelings the souls are experiencing are not affections to be associated with physical bodily motions. In this way, then, when the souls experience these emotions here, they experience them in a more regulated, less distracting way. By distancing us from the account as Plato has, he leads us to a deescalated emotional experience of the myth. Nonetheless, if the souls are experiencing such emotions, then the reader probably is too, given our sympathy for the traveling souls, especially those characters who are so familiar to us, like Epeius, Atalanta, Odysseus, and so on. Given the rational philosophical message of the life choosing spectacle, combined with the fact that we readers are united to lower soul parts, it makes sense to posit that these emotions are examples of spiritedness reinforcing rationality.

2.3.3 This Myth Can Save Us

As imperfect mortals who may have committed foolish insubordination, like Thersites, arrogant overconfidence like Thamyris, or mistakes like those of the other characters mentioned, we identify with the shortcomings described. If read metaphorically, the transformations of these souls indicate the animalistic characters we become when we commit these errors. We deprive ourselves of a crucial aspect of our humanity, seemingly our rationality, when we display gross overconfidence or foolishness. Inasmuch as we do this to ourselves when we commit these misdeeds, these actions are punishments in themselves. As we already know, the life-choosing

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127 My translation.
128 As such, Plato may be identifying these as emotions, rather than as passions, though it may be anachronistic to say that he is fully aware of the distinction.
129 Below are a few notable metaphorical interpretations of the life-choosing section of the myth: Brann, 262, favors a metaphorical interpretation of the life-choosing described here, saying, “Today’s deed is in effect the choice of tomorrow’s life. Our next life begins every morning, and our past days partly determine the next day’s choice, which is nonetheless free as well.” Also, Hitchcock, 218, understands the choosing of lives symbolically, saying that the
ends with souls drinking from the River of Unheeding and then shooting back to earth, with

those who drink too much not remembering the visions they beheld in the netherworld.130 (620e-

lots stand for circumstances beyond our control, and the pre-natal choices are an allegory of the choices we make in this life. Similarly, Stewart, 172, says that these prenatal choices are like those we make in our natural lives, which are great irrevocable decisions that dominate our lives afterwards. Furthermore, the main use of education is to prepare us for these crises, by training our will and our sense of judgment. He says that this is the education offered in the city—a liberal education suited for free men of the ruling class. Though I agree with Stewart about reading the life-choosing metaphorically, and about seeing the educational program of the Republic as a liberal education suited to free people, I disagree with the notion that that program is mainly driven at preparing people for significant choices they might have to make. Indeed, part of that education will help immensely with such choices, but a significant component of it will lead the educated to contemplation, rather than practical action. Adding a slightly different twist to his figurative reading, Friedländer, 136, says that these life choices, especially that of Ajax into a lion, are meant to remind us of the description of the soul in terms of animal heads in book 9. The myth is meant to reinforce the idea that sometimes men become animals (speaking figuratively) and vice versa. These remarks are an additional part of Friedländer’s effort to point out the ways in which previous discussions of the soul lead up to the soul-related imagery in the myth of Er. Also, here in the remark just mentioned, he entertains a figurative reading, but he does not generally seem to favor this interpretation over a literal one, or vice versa. Interestingly, Gonzalez, 270, reports that Proclus was puzzled by heroes choosing animal lives, and concluded that Plato’s own thoughts do not agree with the myth (2.312.10.6). Proclus also offers a charitable interpretation, that the names of heroes are code for the types of lives that imitate them (2.313.7-15 and 2.314.11-14). Proclus bases his interpretation, in part, on Apology 41a (2.312.17), where Socrates speaks positively of the possibility of conversing with Orpheus and Ajax, among others, in the afterlife. There, these heroes are compared to Socrates in their unjust deaths. This comparison alone, however, and Socrates’ enthusiasm to meet them, does not necessarily conflict with the notion from the myth of Er that their lives did not culminate in philosophical choices, which is the interpretation I defend above in my literal reading. They may have been unjustly convicted like Socrates, according to certain accounts, and it may be very interesting and enjoyable for Socrates to converse with them, and to examine them, but this does not necessarily mean that they lived philosophical lives, or that their sufferings led to the sort of philosophical decision that Odysseus’ soul makes. Finally, Siobhan McLoughlin, 53-59, claims that the first chooser represents the “crude” conception of freedom: the ability to follow any desire in an uninhibited way. This soul had all kinds of lives available to him, and yet chose poorly. McLoughlin thinks that Plato is leading us to a conception of freedom that is ethical and rational: One is freest when following the best part of the soul. The Speaker emphasizes this when he says that all will find a satisfactory life if they choose it rationally and live it seriously.

130 The following are notable symbolic readings of this detail: Halliwell points out that although the Republic does not explicitly treat recollection, souls’ drinking or not drinking too much here seems to suggest it. (Halliwell, Plato: Republic 10, 21) I agree that recollection may be implied, though further study is needed to confirm that. Along different lines, Hitchcock, 222, thinks this aspect of the account represents those who make archetypal decisions that they will repeat throughout their lives due to carelessness. Famously, Heidegger thinks the section of the myth about the plain of oblivion or concealment (Λήθης Πεδίον 621a2-3) is the high point of the myth of Er. He thinks that this place is the most “extreme” or “ultimate” in this demonic or uncanny region. This is because concealment or oblivion (λήθη) is the complete opposite of nature (φύσις), which he sees as a coming forth. See Heidegger, 92, 105, 118. According to the myth, Heidegger, Parmenides 120, says men without philosophy are lacking insight; they simply give themselves over to what happens to appear and disappear. It is they who drink beyond the proper measure of the water “carefree.” My understanding of the myth’s portrayal of philosophy is in agreement with Heidegger on this point.

The next two points support the notion that this detail of souls’ drinking from the river is a culmination of the entire dialogue. As such, these claims support my contention, indirectly, that the myth of Er is a consummation of the Republic, which I defend below. Lincoln, 20, thinks the passage about the river of λήθη is the culmination of the dialogue. Charles Segal hones in on ἄττοντας ὀσπέρ ἀστέρας (621b4) and indicates that here Plato uses an “alliterative iambic dimeter.” See Segal, “‘The Myth Was Saved’: Reflections on Homer and the Mythology of Plato’s Republic,” Hermes 106 (1978): 323. The unique poetic nature of this line indicates that it might be a culmination of sorts, and/or perhaps it is meant to evoke a particular emotional response. This also could be simply a way of grabbing the readers’ attention here as the dialogue comes to a close.
621b) In fact, the waters of this river “no vessel can hold” (621a6). These waters cause their drinker to become oblivious and ignorant, just as the pleasure-seeking of the oligarchical and democratic souls causes them to stray further from the life of philosophy (553a-565c): the life of self-awareness, knowledge, and virtue. These waters, then, represent overindulgence and license, as “those who weren’t saved by reason drank more” (621a7-8) than their specific measured amount. How do we know who was saved by reason? We know that the lives souls choose mostly depend on the character of their previous lives (620a), and we have also seen that luck plays a role in the choosing of life daemons. At the end of the myth of Er, however, one more piece of this puzzle is revealed to us. Socrates says about Er’s account: “And so, Glaucon, his story wasn’t lost but preserved, and it would save us, if we were persuaded by it, for we would then make a good crossing of the River of Unheeding, and our souls wouldn’t be defiled” (621b8-c2). Reading this figuratively, it is not just the choices we make during our

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132 This is similar to the way in which pleasure-seekers are described as sieves in the Gorgias. (493b-c)
134 Gonzalez, 272, suggests that the description of this Plain of Oblivion and the River of Unheeding symbolizes the “opacity” that generally dominates human life. He says that while philosophy makes the choice between good and bad clear, the myth “thematizes” everything that reason “cannot penetrate and master,” including “embodiment, chance, character, carelessness, [. . . ] forgetfulness,” as well as the inherent complexity of life. In this way, the myth describes everything that resists what the argumentation of the dialogue recommends. Though I agree that the myth of Er thematizes the philosophical life’s mitigating factors, I disagree with the idea that reason cannot master all of the aspects of life that Gonzalez mentions. For instance, there are some people, like elite athletes, who have attained mastery over their embodiment. Perhaps adding the qualifier that no one can master these aspects of human life consistently forever would make Gonzalez’ claim stronger, for even the elite athlete’s body will wither from age, and even she will give into various bodily temptations at some point, even if she maintains perfect discipline for stretches of time.
136 This notion reinforces large sections of the dialogue as well, like the account of the five soul-regimes and the way in which the flaws of each cause each one to devolve. (550b-573b) The degradation of each regime in book 8 results from elements of the previous one.
138 Gonzalez, 275-278, explains that Socrates’ words to Glaucon defy the myth and the mitigating factors to the philosophical life it presents, but in doing so, Socrates does not reject the myth, but rather, acknowledges its power. The myth of Er describes what lies outside the bounds of philosophy, limiting it and threatening it. The myth is needed not just for the supersensible, but for the “nonsensical.” The myth doesn’t undermine philosophy, but rather, intensifies its exigency. For example, what evades the philosopher king is timing and good luck, which are arguably incalculable and beyond the control of reason. The myth brings these recalcitrant elements into view. Though I agree that the myth of Er highlights mitigating factors that the dialogue does not, I think it is more than just timing and luck that are problematic for the philosopher-king. The conflict between what the philosopher king wishes to accomplish and what she can accomplish goes to the very core of human nature—to the deeper conflict between what we are able to theorize and what we can accomplish in the practical, physical realm of our existence.
lives—this life here and now—combined with luck, which save our souls; the myth itself—its psychagogic effect—has the power to save us. Whether we read this myth literally or figuratively, it has the potential to lead us to a higher stage of knowing and to a better state of being. Whether we turn toward belief or toward intellection as a result of the dialogue and its crowning myth depends on what we bring to the dialogue: our character and level of knowledge, our desires, motivations, and opinions. We know, then, that it is not the myth alone that holds this psychagogic power. The myth of Er gets its force from the knowledge that the reader brings to the reading. We also now know that this myth derives its psychagogic effect from the entire dialogue of the Republic. Finally, here at the end of this great dialogue—this all-night conversation of companions—we come to Socrates’ final words. We know that he has led us as far as he can, and that he has descended to levels of knowledge that involve imagery so that we can follow him. We may have already experienced from this conversation a conversion or turning of our souls as we happen upon Socrates’ final remarks. All of this, added to the fact that it is accompanied by familiar, emotionally evocative imagery from the Greek literary tradition, produces the feeling of a consummation. We realize that we have arrived at the end of something great, and that we are experiencing the interaction of a complex set of thoughts and emotions the results of which may not yet be immediately clear for us. It helps us to realize

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140 Destrée, 121, says the account of life-choosing should be understood as a “mirror-like description” of the way we regularly make our choices. Echoing this, Monique Dixsaut explains that life in the hereafter, according to the afterlife myths, is meant as a metaphor for this life here and now. She adds that the myths are mainly meant to help us see the utter absurdity of the way in which many lead their lives here and now, rather than to persuade us that there really is afterlife retribution. See Dixsaut, “Myth and Interpretation,” in Plato and Myth, ed. Collobert, Destrée, and Gonzalez (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 44. Adding his own spin, Ferguson, 32, says the cycle of lives is meant as a parody of the cycle of our earthly lives. I agree with all of these assessments and find them to be illuminating to my understanding of the text, though if Dixsaut means to posit mutual exclusivity between literal and figurative readings, I clearly disagree with that.

141 We may also realize that what we have experienced is similar to the effect of Homeric epics on us, but that in its leading our whole souls to a higher stage of knowledge, it has accomplished something distinct from them.

142 Gonzalez, 259, says the myth of Er leaves us with the “irresolvable tension between what the philosopher demands and the tragicomedy of human life.” I agree and also appreciate his phrasing.
that something significant is happening to us as a result of reading this dialogue, and it will help
us remember, beyond the text, what this dialogue means to us. This consummatory effect is a
fitting completion, most especially because of the role it plays in completing the myth’s (and
hence the dialogue’s) psychagogical effect.

In one of his final sets of remarks about dialectic in book 7, Socrates says:

Unless someone can distinguish in an account the form of the good from everything else,
can survive all refutation, as if in a battle, striving to judge things not in accordance with
opinion but in accordance with being, and can come through all this with his account still
intact, you’ll say that he doesn’t know the good itself or any other good. And if he gets
hold of some image of it, you’ll say that it’s through opinion, not knowledge, for he is
dreaming and asleep throughout his present life, and, before he wakes up here, he will
arrive in Hades and go to sleep forever. (534b8-d1)

Only Odysseus’ former soul chose a life conducive to philosophy—all others mentioned chose
carelessly or unwisely. Er was not permitted to choose, nor did he drink from the waters of
Forgetfulness and was thus able to recount his visions in great detail. Are we to presume that
only Er and Odysseus can distinguish the Good “from everything else” and “survive all
refutation, as if in a battle”? Er definitely did not drink—but he was not permitted to, and so, it is
difficult to say whether he truly makes a philosophical choice here. We can presume that
Odysseus probably did not drink too much, given the sort of life he chose, and why. Odysseus’
life choice, furthermore, was dialectical, in that there were certain life patterns available, and he
discerned which one would be most conducive to a philosophical life, as described above.
Therefore, it makes sense that he will not “go to sleep forever” in Hades according to the myth.
Rather he is returning with the ability to provide some account of his journey. Linking these
mythical details with the remarks above from book 7 indicates that Odysseus shows us how to
save our soul. Socrates’ remarks about dialectic, combined with Odysseus’ choice, point to the
way in which dialectic has the power to awaken us to virtue and to true knowledge. Without it,
we are asleep, or in the cave, or simply oblivious, which can have terrible future consequences. Philosophy, as dialectic, can save us. We need it to awaken to whatever stage of knowledge lies just ahead of us. While the literal reader knows that belief in the myth can save us in the afterlife, the figurative reader knows that it is dialectic that saves everyone, so that “both in this life and on the thousand-year journey . . . we’ll do well and be happy” (621d1-3).144

2.3.4 The Turn Back In

The multiple readings of the myth of Er, and their varying functions or goals, can serve as examples for those of us interested in leading others toward the truth. In this way, the myth of Er prompts us to turn back into the cave. For a person who seems to be particularly fond of imagery—even addicted, perhaps—and who exhibits a tendency to make decisions based on mere appearances or superficialities, the sort of approach Plato models in the literal reading of the myth of Er may inform this person’s educators. First, one’s primary goal should be to meet the person where he is, in the darkest part of the cave, and to help him turn toward belief. One’s goal for the student should be incremental in this way, and one should be aware that if one stops at that goal, the student is likely to regress.145 Just as a literal reading of the myth of Er leads naturally to the figurative one, and to intellection, the interactions of an educator with this person should also naturally lead further than belief, once the first goal of πίστις is met. Also, in leading this soul to πίστις, and meeting it in its state of being, we must make abundant use of imagery, and we must somehow harness the power of the lower soul—the desire for imagery, and the capacity to experience emotion—in ways that reinforce the turn toward belief—the upward,

144 Hitchcock, 223, thinks that Socrates’ words at the end of the myth apply not only to it, but also to the argument for the soul’s immortality and that of the superiority of justice. In this sense, Hitchcock also understands Socrates’ words here as consummatory, thus supporting my view.
145 See chapter 1, sections 1.2.4.3-1.2.4.5.
rational journey. In this way, the psychagogue must attempt to engage the whole soul, as Plato does. My literal reading of the myth of Er contains examples that Plato provides of how to do all of this: One ought to make use of a framework that is readily available, like familiar tales and characters, as well as popular beliefs, but most importantly, one must tap into a larger conversation somehow, the way Plato builds on the lines of discussion in the *Republic* and on the traditions and teachings of his predecessors. One must be intriguing with one’s use of imagery: entice the student to venture further, to inquire, to question. Be puzzling, without being blatantly contradictory.\(^{146}\) In short, all of this would seem to be an overwhelming to-do list for a teacher or psychagogue, but now that we have the example Plato sets forth, set out in its distinct, yet interwoven parts, we can extrapolate from it and tailor it to our educational needs. If we are truly to follow Plato’s example, then we need to acknowledge that our whole effort must involve a high level of artistry: diligent planning, carefully-chosen examples, a built-in defense against objections,\(^{147}\) creative inventions,\(^{148}\) and most importantly, a high degree of knowledge of one’s subject matter.

For one who seems to be taking to the sort of reasoning that considers causes and consequences (belief), rather than mere appearances (imaging), and who might be ready for philosophy, educators of this sort of person have the example of the figurative reading that Plato

\(^{146}\) As in the account of the ten-fold punishments over a thousand years that initially does not seem to explain how extreme wrongdoers, like those who betrayed entire armies, get their just punishment. This necessitates further investigation by the reader and also further inquiry into the text, leading us to the vivid description of the tyrant Ardaius’ punishment—our answer to this puzzle.

Collobert, 103, says Platonic myth is heuristic, meaning it is like a puzzle, persuasive, in that it is emotional, and didactic, in that it is relatively easy to grasp. This description encapsulates elements of my interpretation well.\(^ {147}\) For example, the way in which the setting of the myth of Er encourages us not to take every detail as literally true preempts the argument that the myth is inconsistent, because the details seem too fantastic to believe or at odds with each other. Yet, we are to take the idea of the soul’s immortality and of metempsychosis, which are supported by the dialogue, and other general aspects of the account as true.\(^ {148}\) Such as the journey that connects the place of judgment to the cosmic vision, then to the choosing of lives, and then back to earth.
makes available to us. Its distinct, yet interwoven elements as laid out in my account above lead to διάνοια, and even contain elements or resources for one who is ready to venture further, to νόησις. Once again, the teacher must engage the whole soul, as Plato does, with enticing imagery and powerful emotion—all of which is directed toward the goals of reason. Here though, the teacher must use intellectual stepping stones, specifically those of mathematics, or perhaps those that are akin to the mathematical disciplines, in such a way that the study of each leads into the next, such that the whole program of study leads upward to dialectic. One must use images to point the way toward Forms, and the Forms toward which one points must lead, in turn, to other, more overarching Forms. Though the psychagogue may be deliberately leading his pupil only toward διάνοια, as Plato does, these stepping-stones will probably lead the pupil to the self-guided transition to νόησις, especially when one is tapping into a larger conversation.

My own efforts in the figurative reading may serve here as a prime example of the way in which one’s course of inquiry may end in dialectic, just as this very section may serve as a prime example of the way in which one may lead another back into the cave. By inviting us to reflect on the many ways in which his account guides us in our efforts to educate others, Plato has led us back into the cave.

Despite the kind of student one is teaching—and whether one’s goal is belief or intellection, the consummation of one’s approach is important, and may be used to its fullest extent toward the goal of psychagogy. The consummation of one’s efforts provides a fitting crown to them, by capping off one’s proceedings with significant lessons or kernels of truth distilled from one’s account and delivered with heightened emotional intensity, just as Socrates

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149 I also agree with Vorwerk’s assessment, 50, that although the mythological details are not a true account on their own, the myth of Er has a philosophical essence that grounds it in truth.

150 I explained the way in which the transition to νόησις is self-guided in chapter 1, section 1.2.4.5-1.2.4.6.
delivers the interlude and final words of the myth of Er to Glaucon. Like a celebration of a major life event, perhaps a wedding reception, marked by special food and drink, as well as customs that do not usually take place in ordinary life, like dancing and speeches, the myth of Er incorporates many characters, events, and places that we have not yet seen in the dialogue up to that point. It describes events that are the culmination of a long journey, and it also is a culmination of a long journey itself. It contains words of advice from Socrates to Glaucon that bring together not only the significant threads of the myth, but of the dialogue as a whole—much like an excellent speech or toast at a wedding. We are invited, like guests at this celebration, to reflect on our own psychic journey through the dialogue of the Republic. This consummatory effect is a tool of the myth of Er that is unique to the dialogue. In this way, this afterlife myth has extraordinary psychagogic potential.151

Whether one is using images to lead to belief or to intellection, one is leading others toward full truth by way of partial truth, which is the definition of psychagogy I explained in chapter 1, based on the Phaedrus and the Allegory of the Cave. This interaction of partial and full truth is formulaic or calculable insofar as it leads either from imaging to belief or from belief to intellection, and also insofar as it engages the lower soul in such a way that is regulated and directed toward the aforementioned goals of rationality (either πίστις or διάνοια). This sort of effort, however, is, as Plato shows us, not strictly logical or calculable. The selection of one’s images and the selection of truths or λόγοι that they point to, as well as the duration of the

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151 Lieb, 283, says that the myth is “equally part, summary, and anti-climax in the dialogue, not one of these alone.” My interpretation supports the first two points, but I clearly disagree with the idea that the myth is an anticlimax. Lieb argues the myth is an anti-climax because of the way it settles its readers. Though I do agree that one aspect of the myth’s emotional effect is a settling of sorts (the account of the κόσμος does this for instance), I do not think that this feature makes the whole myth an anti-climax. Oliver, 288, argues that the myth is the “capstone” of Glaucon and Adeimantus’ education. Vorwerk, 48, thinks the myth of Er is the concluding high point of the entire dialogue. The fact that many scholars discern elements of the myth as culminations supports my contention, with Vorwerk, that the myth of Er is the culmination or consummation of the entire dialogue.
account as a whole and each section therein, involves a finesse that cannot be distilled into a formula or prescription.¹⁵²

2.3.4 Conclusions

By analyzing the ways in which the myth of Er leads souls to belief in one sense and διάνοια in another, and also by pointing out the potential the myth has for stimulating νόησις, my account is dialectical, in the sense that dialectic is not just the final phase of the intellectual journey, but pervasive, complex tool for full comprehension of the intelligible.

The aimed for result of the psychagogy at work in the myth of Er is, as we have seen, a turn toward a higher level of knowledge and a better state of Being. This means that readers of this myth have the chance to become freer as a result of it as well. Just as the prisoner is less enslaved as he journeys through the cave, the reader of the myth of Er can become less enslaved by the world of appearances, and more free to pursue the vast world of Ideas.¹⁶²

¹⁵² The following statements can be seen to describe Plato’s myth as playful or not strictly logical. Collobert, 106-107, discusses the protreptic function of the afterlife myths, and says that part of the way in which they provoke us to philosophize is by not using dry analytic reasoning, but by providing us with a sensible experience of what we are to reason about. Destrée, 112, describes the myths and allegories of Plato’s Republic as “emotionally loaded protreptical ways to motivate his audience.” Dixsaut, 45-46, says that the myths make evident, not by sheer demonstration, but by elevated perspective. A crucial part of this is mythical rhetoric, which she says is affective rather than argumentative. Elias, 120, explains that Plato’s myths are produced in what Schiller calls “musical mood,” where the rigidity of rigorous, structured thought is softened, while the mind makes tentative explorations. Elias argues that this is a liberating of the mind, making it ripe for the gestation of new patterns. My detailed explanation of the myth’s turning of the soul out of the cave can be seen as an expansion of this idea. Ferguson, 13, 17, explains that Plato is trying to defend a novel way of life as superior to what is normally valued, and the conversion to this way of life is so complete, and even dangerous, that Plato’s presentation calls on all of his artistic resources. He adds that the Republic as a whole is a model in the protreptic genre, the subsequent contributors to which include Augustine, Alexander of Hales, and the sermons of John Donne. I agree with Ferguson, except that I cannot assess what “all” of Plato’s artistic resources are. I can, however, state that my account shows many artistic resources at play in the myth of Er. The authors Ferguson mentions may be interesting for further study, in comparison to my treatment of Plato here. Smith says that Plato’s myths are examples of “probabilities” that lead to “philosophical play” and hence, conversion. See Smith, Plato’s Use of Myth as a Pedagogical Device, 177-181. Vorwerk, 50, explains that the myth is situated where logical argument and scientific speech are no longer possible, and one can only deduce the probable.

¹⁶² McCoy, 134, 141, sees the myth as focusing on three kinds of human limit: that of knowledge, of mortality, and external necessity. The myth of Er emphasizes our degree of freedom within these limits and points to the possibility of a just and happy life despite the limits of our world. I agree, except that insofar as the limits of our knowledge are
In many ways, it has become clear that my account unifies multiple interpretations of the myth of Er, and incorporates elements of many others.\textsuperscript{163} I still wish to emphasize, however, the words of Halliwell, that the myth’s “densely allusive texture yields a surplus of possible meanings that cannot be adequately encompassed by a single interpretation.”\textsuperscript{164} Furthermore, as Halliwell adds, the myth of Er invites a cyclical reading with the dialogue, which is a fruitful problem.\textsuperscript{165} Just as there is more to this myth than can be unpacked in a literal reading, there is more that can be brought out from a figurative one. In its pointing to a vast realm beyond itself, the myth of Er is like the objects outside the cave. As such, it is a fitting ending to a dialogue that functions similarly as a whole. Because of this function, those who read the \textit{Republic} attentively, closely, and rationally, end with good hope—the sure and certain anticipation of good things to come from their reading. This myth indeed can play a role in saving us, since, along with the dialogue to which it serves as a capstone, it can lead us further in our quest for knowledge again and again. Even philosophers who are led back into the cave may need some help getting out again.

Another important question remains: Does the \textit{Republic} need the myth of Er? Yes, in at least four distinct ways: (1) Stylistically, the \textit{Republic} certainly needs a fitting ending, and philosophically, it needs a way to teach the philosophers it inspires how to lead souls. Whereas the Divided Line and the Allegory of the Cave explain in detail where souls are to be led, and not defined or reached by the myth—but rather pointed to and hoped for—the limits of our knowledge are as boundless as the realm of the intelligible.

\textsuperscript{163} Such as the way in which my account brings together literal and figurative readings where most interpreters will favor one or the other.


\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., 446. Baracchi, 161, says that Socratic pedagogy is a movement meant to turn the soul toward the unknown, to make the unknown no longer an object of hostility, and thus to undermine the guardian watchdog way of thinking. I completely agree.
why, the myth of Er is one passage from the dialogue that shows how, while endeavoring to do this work itself. (2) The Republic also needs a defense of free will, so that it can send its readers off with the knowledge that their lives are up to them to a great extent. Without this, much of what the dialogue teaches would be lost.167 (3) The Republic also needs to send its readers off with good, confident hope about what they learned and the future knowledge they will gain. As is clear in my account, the myth of Er does this. (4) Finally, the myth is a fitting end because it returns to the beginning, but in light of what has been achieved in the dialogue. It returns to Cephalus’ comments on afterlife stories and justice (328d-331d), Polemarchus’ definition of giving each what is owed (that is what the souls get, and also what readers get) (331d-337e), and to Thrasy machus’ argument for the advantage of the stronger (the portrayal of the tyrant) (338a-344c). As book 1 is an introduction to the Republic, the myth of Er is its conclusion.

The myth of Er is also beneficial to the Republic in other ways. The dialogue as a whole benefits from the many reminders in the myth of the dialogue’s lines of discussion. In this way, the former reinforces the latter. Also, it is arguable that the dialogue provides a justification for Socrates’ life in a way that is more expansive, and perhaps more appropriate, than the Apology and thus completes the account that the Apology begins.168 In its portrayal of the philosophical life and the way in which it turns readers toward this life, it testifies to the importance and complexity of what was presumably Socrates’ life work. It helps its readers to understand better why and how they may imitate Socrates.169

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167 This is not to say that the account of free will in the myth of Er is meant to be final, or even a full-blown defense at all. It is a portrayal of the way in which we are probably free, but as a myth, it leaves the question up for debate by inviting various interpretations, as is evident above in the many scholarly positions on the myth’s depiction of freedom. Since it was not possible to explain this defense of free will fully here, it would be an interesting topic for further study.

168 The Republic provides justification for a philosophical way of life, as well as indications of the best societal role for philosophers, along with the risks that accompany it.

169 John Connelly exposed me to the possible interpretation of the Republic as an imitation of Socrates, in September 1999.
CHAPTER 3

THE TRUE EARTH AND THE TURNING OF THE WHOLE SOUL

3.1 Introduction

I turn now to the “True Earth” myth, which immediately precedes Socrates’ death scene at the close of the *Phaedo*. My reasons for comparing this afterlife myth to the myth of Er are somewhat obvious: they both discuss the afterlife judgment of souls, they both contain an account of the geography of the underworld as well as the cosmology of that which exists in the heavens, and they share many other distinctive similarities. A less obvious and more complex reason for this chapter is that I think it will be fruitful to read the *Phaedo* myth through the lens of the psychology and metaphysics of the *Republic*, just as it was fruitful to read the myth of Er through this lens. Reading the *Phaedo* “True Earth” myth through the lens of another dialogue requires the following justification: Besides the striking similarities between the two myths, there is also continuity between the psychology and metaphysics of the two dialogues. Regarding the latter, both dialogues explicitly discuss, at length, topics related to the Theory of Forms,\(^1\) with the *Phaedo* even referring to the realms of “visible” and “invisible” (79a6-7). Regarding psychology, both dialogues offer proof for the immortality of the soul, with the *Republic* only doing so briefly and the *Phaedo* doing so in at least four different ways, taking up much of the dialogue.\(^2\) Moreover, the *Republic* briefly treats the concept of the body as a sort of prison for the soul, which the *Phaedo* then treats more extensively.\(^3\) So, in at least two ways, the *Phaedo* expands on psychological themes from the *Republic*. As I begin to explain just below, the *Phaedo* has much to offer about emotion as it relates to rationality, and in this way we may see

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\(^1\) See *Republic* 478e-480a, 489e-490b, 493e-494a, 500b-501d, and 504e-518b; *Phaedo* 65d-66a, 74a-77a, 78d-79d, and 100b-105c.

\(^2\) See *Republic* 608d-611b; *Phaedo* 70d-77a, 78b-84b, and 85e-107a.

\(^3\) See *Republic* 611b-612a; *Phaedo* 62b, 65a-68b, and 82d-84b.
that the *Phaedo* also treats the relationship between the spirited and rational aspects of the soul. Below, I explain ways in which the “True Earth” myth may be seen to use the psychology of the *Republic*, while I focus on my main task, which is to illustrate the psychagogic function of the myth.

3.2 The Context and Themes of the *Phaedo* in Relation to Its Final Myth

Life before birth and after death is a persistent theme in the *Phaedo*. There are at least twenty-four explicit mentions of this theme throughout the dialogue, before the afterlife myth of the “True Earth” (107d5-114d8). These twenty-four mentions do not include a set of remarks about the fate of soul after death (80c-82c), which is a precursor to the afterlife myth, as I will explain. Similar to the mood surrounding any discussion of someone’s impending death, the emotional atmosphere in Socrates’ cell is complex and intense, marked initially by the extreme emotions of some of those present (59a-b), including Xanthippe (60a), and followed by many other instances of significant emotion related to Socrates’ execution. Phaedo sums up the

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4. 59a, 61d-e, 63c, 63e-64a, 66e, 68a, 69c, 70a, 70c, 71e, 72a, 75d, 76c, 77b, 77c, 77d, 83d, 84b, 84e-85a, 87a, 87e, 91a-b, 95c, 106e

Theodor Ebert considers whether or not the myth starts at 107d5 or at 110b5, and he ultimately remains indecisive, indicating that both of these places are a sort of starting point for the myth. The clue word for him is λέγεται. See Ebert, “‘Wenn ich einen schönen Mythos vortragen darf. . . .' Zu Status, Herkunft, und Funktion des Schlußmythos in Platons Phaidon,” in *Platon als Mythologe*, eds. Markus Janka and Christian Schäfer (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche, 2002), 254-257. Dorothea Frede also sees λέγεται at 107d5 as a starting point for the myth, but she does not remain indecisive about whether the myth starts here or at some other place. See Frede, “Platons ‘Phaidon’,” (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1999), 154. I will follow Frede in marking 107d5 as the starting point. In addition, 107c-d provides a transition between the proof for the soul’s immortality and the myth of the afterlife.

Regarding whether or not the passages I will discuss are mythological, we will see that many of their details are presented as unverifiable, which is consistent with the conception of myth I argued for in chapter 1.

5. The following are a few instances of emotion expressed later in the dialogue: At 64a-b, Simmias remarks that most in Thebes agree that philosophers are nearly dead and deserve to be so. Though his remark is comical, it points to the ignorance of the many, which is the very reason for Socrates’ execution. As a result, given the current setting, this is a dark joke, with a serious undertone. One can infer that there is a great deal of anger among those present toward the multitude in Athens who convicted Socrates. This joke may be an expression of that anger—perhaps an attempt to relieve it. Additionally, fear of death is discussed at 67e, and it is followed by a mention of hoping for good things after death at 68a. At 77e, Cebes asks Socrates to persuade them not to fear death—an odd request to
emotional atmosphere as one in which those present lament and are “disturbed” (ἐτεταράγμην, 59b4), but also laugh.⁶

They do not feel pity for Socrates since he faces death hopefully and happily (58e-59b), being a notable exception from this intensity himself, since he is sure he will fare well in the afterlife. Another example of Socrates’ exceptional emotional state is when immediately following the departure of his wife and baby, the last time he would see them, Socrates rubs his leg and discusses the mixture of pleasure and pain as well as Aesop’s poetry.⁷ (60b-c) Instead of asking him why he is so calm, Cebes then asks Socrates why he himself decided to write poetry recently. (60c-d) After Socrates’ explanation, which ends with his telling Cebes to instruct Evenus to follow in Socrates’ footsteps (61b-c), Cebes asks why anyone would want to follow in the footsteps of one who is dying (61d). Under normal circumstances, one might rightly call Cebes rather callous and unsympathetic, but given Socrates’ love of frank, honest, philosophical questioning, we can see that Cebes is providing Socrates with the sort of end-of-life care most appropriate for him.

Socrates responds by saying it would be most fitting given the time he has left to convey and examine “tales” (μυθολογεῖν, 61e2) about what we think the afterlife journey is like. (61d-e) Essentially, he will be explaining to them why it is good to die the way he is dying, and he says he wants to do this mainly by means of tales, or myths. Though rigorous arguments for the immortality of the soul follow, Socrates expresses here that the part of the conversation he really wants to get to is its mythical component. In this way, Socrates may be indicating that the proofs ask a man who is about to die, under normal circumstances, but a fitting request of a man who spent his life asking others pointed, frank, philosophical questions. Also, Socrates discusses lamentation and despondency from 84e-85b.⁶ All Greek references are to the most recent Oxford edition, by Duke, et al.

really lead up to the closing myth. Regardless of whether or not this is the case, the proofs are valuable as well, not just for their philosophical content, but because they provide temporary relief from the tendency for all present to be emotionally disturbed by the execution of their beloved teacher on the immediate horizon. As the end of the conversation draws near, all of the fear, sadness, anger, and hope, as well as the philosophical discussions about the relationship of soul to body, come together in Plato’s portrayal of the last story Socrates tells his close friends: the myth of the “True Earth.”

Instead of directing his audience to the sort of cathartic purgation of emotion typical of those grieving the loss of a loved one, Plato leads his audience to a purgation more fitting for those mourning the loss of Socrates: the purgation of certain bodily tendencies for the sake of philosophy. This purgation involves not succumbing to emotional disturbances, but rather, remaining strikingly calm and sober in the face of even the most severe emotions both with the aid of philosophy and for the sake of it, like Socrates does. This purgation involves redirecting our thoughts away from that which might emotionally disturb us and toward rational pursuits. One might then expect sober, pure λόγος to be the remedy here, but instead, Socrates indicates that we must seek out μυθολογεῖν. The following will explain that myth is the most appropriate remedy for bodily disturbances, because it channels our emotions toward rational pursuits in a way that engages the whole soul (not just our rational capacity), and directs us toward a level or type of knowledge that is the most appropriate for us. The True Earth myth addresses readers at various stages of knowledge simultaneously, and urges them to take the next step toward the philosophical life. It also acts as a sort of control valve for readers’ emotions. Rather than

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8 For example, from imaging to belief, or from belief to thought; though the tripartite soul of the Republic, as well as the Line and Cave, are not explicitly discussed in the Phaedo, we will see that the concepts conveyed by these images are indeed at play in the psychagogic function of the True Earth myth.
suppressing them, like pure λόγος tends to do, it channels them. Therefore, in its psychagogy, the True Earth myth is cathartic, but Socratically so. This myth can help us to manage our emotions like Socrates does.

3.3 Reading the Myth Literally:

It is Right to Think that We Should Care Greatly For Our Souls

Simmias and Socrates agree that further investigation is needed into the matter of the soul’s immortality (107a-b), but despite that, as well as any other grounds for doubt that one may find, the previous conversation has proven that the existence of an immortal soul is at least plausible. Socrates’ words reflect the status of this conclusion when he says, “It is right to think then, gentlemen, that if the soul is immortal, it requires our care not only for the time we call our life, but for the sake of all time, and that one is in terrible danger if one does not give it that care” (107c1-5). Before he has even begun the closing myth, Socrates expresses the sort of wager that the myth of the True Earth will invite its readers to believe in: Whether one has proven the immortality of the soul beyond a shadow of a doubt or not, “it is right to think” (δίκαιον διανοηθῆναι, 107c1) that the soul requires great care, since we may be stuck with it for eternity. The myth will explain that terrible consequences await for one who does not hold to this thought, which we will see in the next three sections, is initially manifest as belief (πίστις) for the literal reader. These consequences, the myth implies, outweigh those for holding this belief in the event that it turns out to be false.

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9 Henceforth, all translations of the Phaedo are those of G. M. A. Grube, unless otherwise noted.
10 Plato’s use of διανοηθῆναι seems to indicate that this account ought to lead us further than belief, to thought. My interpretation will confirm that.
11 Ebert, 253-254, argues that this myth is meant to be taken literally, referring to the new myths of Plato’s time, like Empedocles’, which were not interpreted allegorically, but rather, religiously. Ebert argues that Plato’s eschatological myths are meant to be read in this tradition. Radcliffe Edmonds argues for the exact opposite of this claim, remarking on the reference to Aeschylus that it reveals the non-canonical, non-religious way the Greeks
3.3.1 The Beginning of the Journey Yonder: Many Paths and Guides

All we bring with us to the underworld is our “education and upbringing” (παιδείας τε καὶ τροφῆς, 107d3-4), which “are said” (λέγεται, d4) to affect our soul’s fate more than anything else right at the beginning of the journey (107d). Why? Because “we are told” (λέγεται, d5) that a guardian spirit is assigned to us, and leads us to a definite place, and the very fact that we have a guide indicates that there are probably many paths, with forks and crossroads.\(^{12}\) (107d-108a)

When we die, the wise souls follow their guides well, while the soul “passionately attached to the body” (ἐπιθυμητικῶς τοῦ σώματος ἔχουσα, 108a7-8) remains near its body in the physical world “for a long time, struggling and suffering much until it is led away by force and with difficulty by its appointed spirit” (108a8-b2).\(^{13}\) Even worse, the spirits completely shun a soul that commits murder or another similar crime. This soul wanders aimlessly for a long time until it is “forcibly led to its proper dwelling place” (108c1-2). So, our education and upbringing—our degree of wisdom—will either enable us to follow our appointed guide and journey smoothly in the netherworld, or if we are ignorant, living for our bodily urges and not caring for our souls, will cause us to face much difficulty.

Why believe this story? First, the preceding conversation has given us good reason to think that our soul will live on past our bodily death. Second, as Socrates says, this account is handled myths. They saw myths as a contest of authorities competing with their explanations. See Edmonds, *Myths of the Underworld Journey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1. I will show that both a literal and figurative reading are viable, and that it is unfairly limiting to completely exclude one or the other.

\(^{12}\) Edmonds, 189, explains that the motif of the fork in the road after death is in the gold tablets. This is an important piece of evidence about the historical influences on this myth. This correspondence between the myth and the tablets strongly suggests an Orphic influence.

\(^{13}\) Walter Burkert sheds helpful light on the guardian spirit, explaining that it is an “occult power, a force that drives man forward where no agent can be named.” That which is daimonic can be described in many ways: the gods of Olympus can be characterized as such, as well as that which flies from Pandora’s box. It is not a class of beings, but really an activity, says Burkert. See Burkert, *Greek Religion*, trans. John Raffan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 180. Damascius says the spirits are “companions of the Gods,” and he puzzles about how such guides lead self-moving entities. See Damascius, *The Greek Commentaries on Plato’s Phaedo*, vol. 2, trans. L. G. Westerlink (New York: North-Holland, 1977), 252. Clearly, at least in this way, Damascius reads the myth literally and raises an interesting question for such readers.
based on commonly-accepted stories, as well as “sacred rites and customs” (108a5). Third, the difficulties for unjust, ignorant souls will be much worse than the wandering and confusion described above, once their guardian spirits lead them to their proper places. It is these more devastating consequences that support the notion that belief in caring for one’s soul is a risk worth taking. The harshest punishments take place deep within the earth, which Socrates begins to explain next.

3.3.2 The True Earth

Instead of introducing his tale of the True Earth as something based on what “we are told,” Socrates says “someone has convinced (πέπεισµα, 108c8)”14 him about its nature, size, and regions. (108c-e) The account that follows, then, carries more weight than the previous explanation of the many roads and guides. However, this account of the earth still is incomplete and not fully defended because of the limits on Socrates’ time and skill. (108d-e) Also, Socrates does not mention who exactly has convinced him.

The first aspect of the earth he discusses is its roundness, which would be readily accepted by his audience.15 Socrates explains the many hollows within the earth, saying that this

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14 Emphasis mine.
15 There has been much debate about whether or not Plato portrays a spherical earth here, or one that is round in its being disk-shaped or cylindrical. Thomas Heath provides some helpful background to the debate, saying that only the Pythagoreans and Parmenides postulated a spherical earth, while the Ionians and others said it was flat. Aristotle attributes the disc-shaped theory (in which the earth is supported by air) to Anaximenes, Anaxagoras, and Democritus. See Heath, Aristarchus of Samos, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 144. Burnet says that Socrates rejects Archelaus’ disk-shaped model as well as Anaximander’s cylindrical model. Also though, the True Earth is not totally Pythagorean. This is because the hollows are “distinctively Ionian.” See Burnet, Plato’s Phaedo, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949). W. Calder also argues that Plato portrays a spherical earth here in the Phaedo, against Rosenmeyer. See Calder, “The Spherical Earth in Plato’s Phaedo,” Phronesis 3 (1958): 121-125. Damascius is another who argues for sphericity, saying “that it is spherical can be deduced from the rule that all totals conform to the universe, as well as from the fact that at all points heavy objects show an equal downward trend.” He also argues that the spherical shape of the universe is proven by the argument “from finality,” saying that of all shapes, the sphere is most similar to the One. See Damascius, 258, 260. Paul Friedländer also says that Plato portrays a spherical earth here, which is Parmenides’ theory. Some elements of the geography (not the shape of the earth) are Anaximander’s, observes Friedländer. Plato distinguishes himself from his natural science predecessors
is where we live, but that we actually think we live up on the earth’s surface above. Provisioning an analogy for our delusion, Socrates says, “It is as if someone who lived deep down in the middle of the ocean thought he was living on its surface” (109c4-5). It is after Socrates elaborates on this analogy that he returns to describing the earth’s regions. This aspect of the account makes the reader aware of the fact that our perspective of our physical existence may be skewed and limited based on the nature of our habitations. Also, we have a tendency, because of our own nature, to fool ourselves about our physical reality. Given the fact that most would readily agree on the vast size and round shape of the earth, this statement about our delusion would also resonate with most who realize that we usually cannot perceive the roundness of the earth from our position on it (whether that roundness is spherical or not), nor can we accurately grasp its size from our perspective. So, the reader then is led to take a different perspective on things: a perspective that Socrates, an authority on many matters, and perhaps a hero to those present, has been convinced of. The perspective we are persuaded to adopt here is a cosmic one—one that would commonly be called a “bird’s eye view,” except we are really being led to

when he discusses the color and beauty of the earth, as well as the hollows. See Friedländer, Plato: An Introduction, 262-263, 265. J. S. Morrison argues, contrary to several above, that there are no good grounds to attribute a belief in a spherical earth (as opposed to a spherical world) to anyone before Aristotle. Morrison hones in on the description of the earth’s surface being like a leather ball, and says that this is just meant to describe the top of the earth. Plato does not write that the earth is like a multicolored ball, he argues. See Morrison, “The Shape of the Earth in Plato’s Phaedo,” Phronesis 4 (1959): 102, 110. Rowe presents evidence to the contrary, saying that twelve pentagons of leather sewn together (dodecahedron) is the “closest approximation to a sphere which can be constructed from flat surfaces.” See Rowe, Plato: Phaedo, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 275. T. G. Rosenmeyer, whose side Morrison takes, is skeptical about sphericity here. See Rosenmeyer, “Phaedo 111c4 ff” Classical Quarterly 6 (1956): 193-197. Rosenmeyer also responds to Calder’s attack on him point-by-point. See Rosenmeyer, “The Shape of the Earth in the Phaedo: A Rejoinder,” Phronesis 4 (1959): 71-72. A. E. Taylor takes an intermediate stance, saying that Plato is attempting to combine the flat Ionian earth and the spherical Pythagorean one. See Taylor, Plato: The Man and His Work, 4th ed. (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2001), 208. Since an argument for either position would amount to a digression here, I will follow the majority of scholars in supposing that Plato means to portray the earth as spherical. However, I will argue later that Plato does not mean for his account to serve simply as straightforward geology, geography, or cosmology, thus making the detail about the exact shape of the earth less critical than the above debate indicates.

16 Heath, 146-147, interestingly points out that the hollows are similar to the account of Archelaus, in which the whole earth was one large hollow.

17 Of course, he never refers to himself as such. Rather, he often refers to others as authorities.
view things from a perspective even more objective than that, which observes what is far above and below the earth’s surface.

Socrates then briefly explains the ugliness below the sea, which includes caves, sand, slime, and mud. (110a) He embarks on a detailed description of the beautiful things on the surface of the earth, including its appearance from above, which:

Looks like those spherical balls made of twelve pieces of leather; it is multi-colored, and of these colors those used by our painters give us an indication; up there the whole earth has these colors, but much brighter and purer than these; one part is sea-green and of marvelous beauty, another is golden, another is white, whiter than chalk or snow; the earth is composed also of the other colors, more numerous and beautiful than any we have seen. (110b6-c6)

This imagery activates the lower, image-loving aspects of the soul especially because of the way in which the colors of the earth are described. Also, the elaborate depiction of beautiful sights, in contrast to the previous brief account of ugliness under the sea, might evoke a feeling of wonder or awe in the spirited soul. Socrates continues, including some details about the earth’s hollows where we live, in addition to further detail about the surface:

The very hollows of the earth, full of water and air, gleaming among the variety of other colors, present a color of their own so that the whole is seen as a continuum of variegated colors. On the surface of the earth the plants grow with corresponding beauty, the trees and the flowers and the fruits, and so with the hills and the stones, more beautiful in their smoothness and transparency and color. Our precious stones here are but fragments, our cornelians, jaspers, emeralds and the rest. All stones there are of that kind, and even more beautiful. (110c6-e2)

The image-loving aspects of our soul are engaged further, as is our spirited capacity for wonder and awe. Socrates’ descriptions of beautiful things with which we are familiar, like plants, flowers, fruits, hills, stones, and precious gems might strike a different emotional chord as well, due to our knowing that he will never see such things on our earth again, which is, of course, different from the True Earth, about which he says, “the earth is a sight for the blessed” (111a2-3). In the lines above, Socrates also continues his explanation of the limits of our habitation and
hence, our perspective. What we think of as natural beauty—what we tend to admire, like Socrates does—is significantly surpassed above the surface of the earth, beyond our dwelling places. Explaining why this is the case, Socrates continues, saying about the inferiority of our stones: “The reason is that there they are pure, not eaten away or spoiled by decay and brine, or corroded by the water and air which have flowed into the hollows here and bring ugliness and disease upon earth, stones, the other animals and plants” (110e2-6). While still engaging the image-loving aspects of our soul with the detail of his depiction, Socrates uses his description of our physical habitat to emphasize the ephemeral, corrupted nature of the bodily. This description, then, complements the dialogue’s discussion of the body and soul, reinforcing an important aspect of that previous conversation.

Socrates describes the realm of those living on the surface of the earth, where there is no disease and people live much longer. Their senses are superior to ours, and they are able to see the heavenly bodies as they really are. (111b-c) Furthermore, “they have groves and temples dedicated to the gods, in which the gods really dwell, and they communicate with them by speech and prophecy and by the sight of them” (111b6-c1). Here, Socrates’ account gains further legitimacy in the eyes of his audience because of the way it includes the gods, the existence and nature of whom was widely accepted. At the close of the myth, Socrates says that “No sensible man would insist that these things are as I have described them, but I think it is fitting for a man to risk the belief—for the risk is a noble one—that this, or something like this, is true about our souls and their dwelling places” (114d1-3). In the general sense that his

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19 This set of remarks may also serve as an addition to Socrates’ defense against the charge that he did not believe in the gods of the city (Apology 24b-c). These words may also remind us of the top of Mt. Olympus depicted above the clouds in eternal sunshine in Homer, Odyssey 6.43-45.

20 Unlike Jacqueline Salvat and myself, David Hitchcock does not think Plato is proposing a Pascalian wager, because there is much more concern for rational support on Plato’s part than there is in Pascal. See Hitchcock, “The Role of Myth and its Relation to Rational Argument in Plato’s Dialogues” (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate School,
account describes dwelling places for souls, with one of these places being a pure, immortal region, the account is true. However, the exact details of this account may vary in their truth and falsity. In this way, this myth functions as a likely account (εἰκὼς λόγος), just like the myth of Er.

Socrates then describes the hollows and the deepest regions, including the subterranean rivers. The details of his explanation as a whole support the cohesion of his account of the earth, while many individual details lend further legitimacy to the account by including familiar, widely-accepted aspects of nature. For instance, Socrates describes “huge rivers of both hot and cold water,” which “flow beneath the earth eternally,” “much fire and large rivers of fire,” as well as muddy rivers that flow “in advance of the lava and the stream of lava itself in Sicily.”

(111d6-e1) Anyone in Plato’s audience familiar with and accepting of Philolaus’ and Heraclitus’ work would be prone to approve of Socrates’ explanation of the opposing forces of hot and cold, as well as the fire, all beneath the earth.21 Those in the audience familiar with the Sicilian lava stream, especially the Pythagoreans, would appreciate and possibly be receptive to Socrates’ explanation of its origin.22

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21 There are at least eleven fragments of Heraclitus on the unity of opposites and sixteen on fire as the essential element, according to G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, and M. Schofield. See Kirk, Raven, and Schofield, The Presocratic Philosophers, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 188-208. According to Kirk, Raven, and Schofield, 337-338 and 342-343, there is one fragment by Philolaus on opposites (DK 58b5), and two on fire (DK 58b37 and DK 44a16). Peter Kingsley adds that Plato’s reference to fire linguistically echoes Empedocles.3 See Kingsley, Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 86. If Kingsley’s point is accurate, this only further supports my argument here that the incorporation of details from familiar thinkers adds to the legitimacy and cohesion of Socrates’ account.

22 Adding further evidence to the claim that various details of the account contribute to its credibility, Kingsley (81, 84) says the reference to Sicily gives the story a “practical, tangible dimension.” He adds that the hollows are a rather routine way of referring to Sicily’s craters and crevices. Further, Rowe, 280, claims in regard to the reference to Sicily that Plato “anchors” his account of the underworld to “known features of our world.”
Socrates then explains the deepest chasm, which penetrates the entire earth: that which Homer and many other poets call Tartarus.\(^\text{23}\) (111e-112a) Socrates uses the familiar, widely-accepted pit of darkness to explain the tides, saying that its water “oscillates up and down in waves” (112b1-2) and all of the rivers below the earth flow into and out of it (112a).\(^\text{24}\) The air in Tartarus oscillates with the water, creating “terrible winds as it goes in and out” (112b8). This place, therefore, also explains the origin of wind. Tartarus lends cohesion to the portrayal of the earth by giving Socrates a way to explain tides and wind in a way that is consistent with the rest of the account. Also, anyone familiar with the work of Thales and Anaximenes would appreciate Socrates’ explanation of the water and wind, respectively, which penetrate and flow out of the earth.\(^\text{25}\) Though water and air do not have the central, all-pervading roles in nature that those two pre-Socratics ascribed to these elements, Plato has included prominent, plausible roles for those essential aspects of our world.

The imagery Plato uses to describe the deep regions clearly titillates and thereby engages the lower soul. The description of Tartarus, furthermore, might also evoke some emotions from readers familiar with this place from other literature. It is fearsome, to say the least, but Plato’s account does not exacerbate that fear. Rather, by explaining the important role Tartarus plays in the natural world, some of the mystery about the place is removed and, thereby, some fear and

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\(^{24}\) Robert Zaslavsky argues that the shift from indirect to direct discourse at 111e5 indicates a return to λόγος. See Zaslavsky, *Platonic Myth and Platonist Writing*, 200. Though I agree that this shift may indicate a break from myth, the mythological account ends when Socrates begins reflecting on the whole account of the earth and the underworld, saying it is noble to risk belief in what he has explained.

\(^{25}\) Paul Stern says that Plato uses Heraclitus’ phrasing about eternal flux to describe the flowing in the underworld. See Stern, *Socratic Rationalism and Political Philosophy: An Interpretation of Plato’s Phaedo* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993), 169. If true, this observation adds support to my contention earlier that Socrates’ explanation incorporated some of Heraclitus’ thought.

\(^{25}\) For Thales, see fragments 84 and 85 in Kirk, Raven, and Schofield. The latter do not refer to Diels and Kranz here because Diels and Kranz do not cover those cosmological fragments as substantially as they do. For Anaximenes, see fragments 139, 140, and 141 in Kirk, Raven, and Schofield who again do not refer to Diels and Kranz for the above reason.
This same sort of alleviation happens when one is fearful of or intimidated by any aspect of the natural world. When the phenomenon is explained in detail, with its mysterious aspects at least partially illuminated, the object is no longer quite so intimidating. One may still feel some fear, and wish to exercise caution, but that feeling will not be as intense as it was initially. Plato does want to evoke fear in his audience with his description of Tartarus, but he also wants to regulate it so that it can ally with the rational aim of his likely account: to turn the reader’s whole soul toward the belief that one ought to care for one’s soul as well as possible. Unregulated, extreme fear would not serve this purpose. The subject of that intense emotion would simply dwell in the emotion and focus on it rather than the rational goal it is meant to support. The emotion of the spirited soul would likely dominate.

### 3.3.3 The Judged Journey to Their Proper Places In, On, or Above the Earth

After explaining the origins of the many smaller marshes, rivers, and springs, Socrates discusses four notable larger rivers, which play key roles in the judgment of the dead. The four rivers Plato describes, Oceanus, Acheron, Pyrphlegethon, and Cocytus, are each somewhat familiar to Plato’s audience, but also each contains some element of mystery. Their

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26 David Sedley points out that even Tartarus contributes to the overall good of the universe. See Sedley, “Teleology and Myth in the ‘Phaedo’,” *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 5 (1989/90): 371-372. This bears on the question of whether or not Plato portrays the gods as good here, if we can account for the creation of this earth in the term of the *Timaeus*—that is, by the demiurge. This is one way, then, in which the myth of the *Phaedo* satisfies the criteria for good poetry outlined in the *Republic*. One piece of evidence that Plato may be considering these criteria in the writing of the *Phaedo* is Socrates’ explicit banishment of the very names of the Cocytus and Styx from the city of the *Republic* (387b-c). If such names are so powerful to be worth banning, one must, then, presumably use them carefully and justifiably.

27 It is possible that Socrates’ detailed explanation of what happens to a body after death functions similarly for his audience (80c-d), who may be fearful of their own death or that of others because of what happens to the body. By providing some details and taking some of the mystery out of this aspect of death, it may become less fearsome.

28 Damascius, 276, says the four rivers correspond to the four subterranean elements and the four cardinal points in two sets of opposites, according to the tradition of Orpheus. This is another possible piece of evidence for an Orphic influence on Plato here.
descriptions are fearsome, but once again, by describing details of each one, that fear is regulated. All the while the imaging soul is engaged:

The biggest which flows on the outside (of the earth) in a circle is called Oceanus; opposite it and flowing in the opposite direction is the Acheron; it flows through many other deserted regions and further underground makes its way to the Acherusian lake to which the souls of the majority come after death and, after remaining there for a certain appointed time, longer for some, shorter for others, they are sent back to birth as living creatures. The third river issues between the first two, and close to its source it falls into a region burning with much fire and makes a lake larger than our sea, boiling with water and mud. From there it goes in a circle, foul and muddy, and winding on its way it comes, among other places, to the edge of the Acherusian lake but does not mingle with its waters; then, coiling many times underground it flows lower down into Tartarus; this is called the Pyriphlegethon, and its lava streams throw off fragments of it in various parts of the earth. Opposite this the fourth river issues forth, which is called Stygion, and it is said to flow first into a terrible and wild region, all of it blue-gray in color, and the lake that this river forms by flowing into it is called the Styx. As its waters fall into the lake they acquire dread powers; then diving below and winding round it flows in the opposite direction from the Pyriphlegethon and into the opposite side of the Acherusian lake; its waters do not mingle with any other; it too flows in a circle and into Tartarus opposite the Pyriphlegethon. The name of that fourth river, the poets tell us, is Cocytus. (112e6-113c8)

Clearly, the Cocytus is well known because of the poets, and it is well documented that the Styx is well known, though it is typically referred to as a river. The Oceanus is quite intimidating in size, and the Acheron is presumably nearly as large, since it flows opposite to the Oceanus, passing through “deserted regions” and to a subterranean lake where most souls go after death—we will hear more about this shortly. The Pyriphlegethon is almost as large as the Oceanus as

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29 Referring to * Odyssey* 10 and 11, Burkert, 196, explains that the entrance to Hades is marked by a “confluence of rivers: the river of fire, Pyriphlegethon, and the river of wailing, Cocytos, and offshoot of the Styx, flow into the Acheron; in the name Styx, the subterranean spring, the word ‘hatred’ is heard, and in the name Acheron there sounds the word ‘woe’.”


The Babylonian map of the world is surrounded by a circular “bitter river,” and Anaximander’s map (which was the first in the Greek world) was made around the same time. It seems as though the former inspired the latter, and the former was also probably familiar to the Greeks. See Friedländer, 271. This is a very interesting piece of evidence for non-Greek influences on this myth. Not only this though—if the geography of the myth pre-dates Anaximander, to Babylon, and was familiar to Greeks, then the geography of the myth is presented with heightened legitimacy.
well, since it flows between the first two. It seems to have a waterfall near its source into a fiery, boiling, muddy lake. It is “foul,” and spirals down to Tartarus and also shoots lava out all over the earth. The description of the Pyrphlegethon strikes the reader as the most fearsome of the three. One may feel some relief that most souls go to the Acheron and not to the turbulent, highly unhospitable Pyrphlegethon. The Cocytus, however, rivals it, given the “terrible and wild region” it flows through, as well as the “dread powers” its waters acquire from the Styx.\textsuperscript{31} It also spirals down to Tartarus. The description of these two rivers is perhaps the most fear-inducing part of the account so far, and the general sense one gets from this whole picture is that our soul will occupy a very small place in a very large, intimidating region after our death. It seems as though we will be completely powerless to escape or to alter our fate, but as Socrates explains in what follows, there are ways out. Also, the picture of the earth becomes rather complex at this point—too complex to envision without a visual aid probably. However, one who wishes to see the cohesion of Plato’s account is able to fit the whole image on a diagram—with some improvisation.\textsuperscript{32} The important role of the harmony of opposites is present here too, perhaps in further homage to Heraclitus, in such a way that those familiar with his work may be receptive to these elements of Plato’s account.\textsuperscript{33} The degree to which the imagery here in the account of the rivers stimulates the lower soul parts cannot be understated. Just as Socrates will explain our way out of this terrible region in what follows, he will also immediately link the

\textsuperscript{31} Kingsley, 96, says that the Cocytus, etymologically, is the river of “mourning and tears.” This is how its name was understood in antiquity. Therefore, just the name of this river may have been emotionally evocative to Plato’s audience.


\textsuperscript{33} See footnote 21 above.
aforementioned to a rational message for all who are listening to his tale. Therefore, the heightened fear, intimidation, and titillation does not last for long. Plato quickly redirects it to a rational path.

The dead are judged in an unknown place, where their guardian spirits lead them, and those who live mediocre lives go right to the Acheron. There, they receive purgative penalties for their misdeeds as well as any rewards they deserve. (113d-e) In contrast, murderers and those guilty of “many great sacrileges” are deemed to be “incurable” (ἀνιάτως, e2) and are “hurled into Tartarus never to emerge from it” (113e5-6). Murderers who feel remorse and those who exhibit great impiety toward their parents but who experience regret are deemed curable. They also get thrown into Tartarus, but only for a year. This is notably merciful compared to the 1000 years of torment described in the myth of Er. The murderers emerge by way of the Coecytus and the highly impious by way of the Pyrithlegethon. They all must call out to the Acherusian lake, to those they murdered or mistreated, and beg for forgiveness.34 If the perpetrators successfully persuade their victims to end the formers’ punishment, then the perpetrators may leave either the Ccecytus or Pyrithlegethon (which one they are on depends on the nature of their crime) and join the others on the Acherusian lake. If they are not successful in their begging, then the guilty are taken back to Tartarus, and back to either the Ccecytus or Pyrithlegethon, after which they will repeat their entreaty. This cycle repeats until the perpetrators are successful. (113e-114b) When the curables beg for forgiveness, they must “cry out and shout, some for those they have killed, others for those they have maltreated” (114a8-9). This remark is not only an interesting detail

34 Though the time spent in Tartarus is clear, it is not clear for how long souls must beg and persuade others to forgive them. Perhaps it takes much longer than a year.

Burkert, 76, explains the Greek social value of purification, most commonly by water. Reprobates, criminals, and outsiders were all considered unclean and in need of purification. The prevalence of this social value is yet another reason why the myth can appeal to Plato’s audience as likely. It would have made sense to many that the unjust are purified after death. Burnet, 140, adds, “Purgatory is an essentially Orphic idea.”
added to Plato’s imagery, but a possibly emotionally evocative one. We may imagine here various criminals familiar to us begging their victims for forgiveness. We may envision Meletus and/or Anytus begging Socrates for forgiveness, as well as possibly the entire jury, and even any Athenian who contributed to Socrates’ poor reputation, all of whom played key roles in his conviction.

Knowing how unhospitable the Cocytus and Pyrphlegethon are, not to mention Tartarus, we readers realize that the punishments for serious crimes are proportionately serious. We ought to have some fear of these prospects, given Plato’s account. The existence of the underworld, of Tartarus, and of the rivers was likely accepted by Plato’s audience, and due to the preceding proof-laden dialogue, the immortality of the soul had a high probability of being accepted too—even if just tentatively. The likelihood of these general aspects of the account, combined with its coherence and its visually and emotionally engaging details, engages the whole souls of Plato’s audience, led by their rational parts, toward the conclusion that one ought not to commit these great crimes, since a harsh afterlife punishment probably awaits such criminals. Because the goal of the account is rational, and because it is supported by a highly rational, cohesive portrayal of the earth’s regions, as well as at least four attempts to prove the soul’s immortality, the rational soul leads the way. The engagement of the lower soul parts thereby supports rationality in its endeavor. The lower soul stays subordinate also, because Plato does not get carried away with visual or emotional engagement.\footnote{As Zaslavsky points out, (see note 23) Plato favors indirect speech in parts of this myth, and as I explained in the last chapter (2.2.1), this lessens the effect of Plato’s words on the emotions of the reader.}

The myth does not end here though. Plato continues by having Socrates explain the rewards for the pious:

Those who are deemed to have lived an extremely pious life are freed and released from the regions of the earth as from a prison; they make their way up to a pure dwelling place
and live on the surface of the earth. Those who have purified themselves sufficiently by philosophy live in the future altogether without a body; they make their way to even more beautiful dwelling places which it is hard to describe clearly, nor do we now have the time to do so. Because of the things we have enunciated, Simmias, one must make every effort to share in virtue and wisdom in one’s life, for the reward is beautiful and the hope is great. (114b6-c8)

Upon mention of the pious, the audience likely thinks of Socrates and begins to imagine his immediate future. He will be freed not only from the prison cell in which he and the interlocutors are sitting, but from the prison of his body. He will live in a region even purer than what we can imagine on the earth’s surface. Unhampered at all by his body, he will live among unimaginable beauty. We feel sorrow for Socrates—for ourselves actually—because, like the interlocutors, we will lose him by the dialogue’s end. We also may feel pity for Socrates due to his trial and unjust execution, despite his optimistic outlook and even-keeled acceptance of his fate. In the end, however, we feel hopeful, not just for Socrates, but for ourselves. If we have understood the rational conclusions of the dialogue and if we now believe in the probable rewards and punishments for our immortal soul, we must face the future with the great hope (ἐλπὶς ἐγάλη, 114c9) that we will live intellectual lives, not spent in devotion to the body, but spent devoted to pursuing truths like the soul’s immortality and the Forms. After partaking in the dialogue, and now its concluding myth, we want to be like Socrates—we are invited to live and die like him, just as Evenus is explicitly and all of the interlocutors are implicitly. By summing up themes from the entire preceding dialogue, and also by representing the last story Socrates tells his friends, the True Earth myth is a consummation of the dialogue, and maybe even of Socrates’ life. As a concatenation of a number of themes and series of events, the myth is also a concatenation of emotions. This consummatory function adds force to the psychagogy

37 The Islands of the Blessed in the realm above the surface draw their inspiration from Odyssey 4 and the Elysian fields, as well as the Myth of Ages in Hesiod. See Burkert, 198. Burnet, 133, says to see Pindar on this (Ol II 130). The ancient roots of this motif lend further credibility to an ancient audience accepting the myth as a likely account.
of this myth, further persuading the whole soul to follow the guide of rationality in accord with the dialogue’s conclusions.

The literal reader may wonder here about which souls come back to earth and why. Clearly, the incurables do not come back at all, while the curable and the mediocre ones do. It is not evident, however, who, if any, among the pious return to life on earth. They are “freed and released from the regions of the earth” (114b8-c1), but it is not clear if this release is once and for all, or for a specific period of time. Also, all who spend their appointed time at the Acherusian lake come back to earth as “living creatures” (ζῴων, 113a5), but we are not told here in the myth how this happens or what specific living creatures they are reborn as. The Phaedo’s previous set of remarks about the fate of the soul in the afterlife answers these questions.  

First, according to Socrates, those who live philosophically and then live happily with the gods, freed of their bodies, indeed “spend the rest of time” (81a9) doing so, and Cebes agrees to it. (81a)  
Second, Socrates describes the fate of those who live their lives focused on their bodies:

Nothing seems to exist for (this soul) but the physical, which one can touch and see or eat and drink or make use of for sexual enjoyment, and if that soul is accustomed to hate and fear and avoid that which is dim and invisible to the eyes but intelligible and to be grasped by philosophy, . . . We must believe, my friend, that this bodily element is heavy, ponderous, earthy and visible. Through it, such a soul has become heavy and is dragged back to the visible region in fear of the unseen and of Hades. It wanders, as we are told, around graves and monuments, where shadowy phantoms, images that such souls produce, have been seen. (81b4-d3)

Here, Socrates describes the difficulty such souls have in traveling smoothly through the underworld and arriving at their place of judgment, but he uses details that are different from, yet complementary to those he uses at the start of the True Earth myth. Then, he says, “They wander until their longing for that which accompanies them, the physical, again imprisons them

39 Julia Annas argues that the dual punishments—in the underworld and in new bodies—are not successfully combined. See Annas, “Plato's Myths of Judgment,” 127. Though this is possible, I invoke the words of Socrates here in not insisting that every detail of the account be accepted as true.

40 In the latter, the presence of the guardian spirit, or the lack thereof, determines the soul’s ease of travel.
in a body, and they are then, as is likely, bound to such characters as they have practiced in their life” (81e1-3). Cebes asks for examples, and Socrates says that those “who have carelessly practiced gluttony, violence and drunkenness are likely to join a company of donkeys or of similar animals” (81e5-82a1). Cebes agrees that this is a likely account (εἰκὼς λέγεις, 82a3).

Since we can pair this account with the True Earth myth, as I contend, Cebes’ remark here lends further support to my thesis that the myth is an εἰκὼς λόγος. Remarking about other inferior souls, Socrates says, “Those who have esteemed injustice highly, and tyranny and plunder will join the tribes of wolves and hawks and kites” (82a3-5). The happiest of those who associate largely with the bodily “are those who have practiced popular and social virtue, which they call moderation and justice and which was developed by habit and practice, without philosophy. . . . It is likely that they will again join a social and gentle group, either of bees or wasps or ants, and then again the same kind of human group, and so be moderate men.” (82a11-b8) The best of those who spend their lives satisfying their bodies return as gentle animals and may rejoin the human race at some undefined interval. We can infer from all of this that the worst of those who spend their lives satisfying bodily desires, besides the incurables, return as wolves, hawks, kites, or something like those animals. This group must be that of the curables, who spend time in Tartarus, take journeys on treacherous rivers, and beg for forgiveness, often repeatedly. We can presume, based on the above, that once they are forgiven and join those on the Acherusian lake, they then return as violent animals after some time period. The next worst, the gluttonous, violent, and drunk, return as donkeys or something similar. This last group probably characterizes the average souls who proceed immediately to the Acheron for both punishments and rewards. Based on all of this, if one spends one’s life ignoring the intellectual and divine,

41 See appendix 3 for a diagram of the realms of judged souls.
but constantly satisfying physical desires, chances are good that one will bar oneself from the human race forever.\(^\text{42}\)

The more we allow ourselves to be hampered by our bodies in this life, the worse our fate will be in the afterlife. If we can live philosophically, which we know now involves complete detachment from bodily urges, then we can dwell with Socrates in the beautiful region. If we can even be nearly so disciplined, we may be fortunate enough to dwell on the surface. Though the latter does not involve complete detachment from the body, both of these fates are nonetheless very pleasant. Based on the earlier remarks in the \textit{Phaedo}, the fate of the philosophers lasts forever.\(^\text{43}\) If we live mediocre lives devoted to fulfillment of the body, yet punctuated with various good deeds, we can go to the Acherusian to receive both rewards and punishments. The reader might ask: How can a life focused on the body lead me to commit great misdeeds, like those of the curable and incurable souls? The remarks from earlier in the dialogue answer this question: It is not only immoderate eating, drinking, and sex, but extreme emotions like hate and fear, which result from a life devoted to the body and which can lead to great evils.

\(^{42}\)Only the best of the three average groups—those who lived in accord with popular virtues, but without philosophy—get a chance to rejoin the human race.

R. Hackforth interestingly points out that while the afterlife myths of the \textit{Gorgias} and the \textit{Republic} distinguish three groups, namely, curable, incurable, and righteous, this myth adds two more—the “indifferently good” and the pure philosophers. See Hackforth, Plato’s \textit{Phaedo}, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 185. I agree that the \textit{Phaedo} myth adds two more categories, but I disagree with Hackforth about the pure philosophical souls—they are not unique to this myth (see below). Rather, this myth distinguishes three groups of curable souls, one of which becomes the less righteous of the two righteous groups. It is thus the three subsets of curables that is new here, adding two more categories total, since there is usually just one type of curable soul in each myth. The latter is very clear in the \textit{Gorgias} myth, but less so in the myth of Er. As I argued in the last chapter about the myth of Er, there are the incurables who are not admitted to the meadow, those who choose lives of philosophy like Odysseus’ soul, and everyone else—the curables—some of whom choose poorly and become incurable, and some of whom choose lives that enable them to choose well, like lives of suffering. Odysseus’ soul can be seen as quite similar to the pure philosophical souls of the \textit{Phaedo} myth, while those souls who choose lives that enable them to choose well the next time around are similar to the righteous, but unphilosophical souls of the \textit{Phaedo} myth. Philosophical souls who get to go to the islands of the blessed are represented in the \textit{Gorgias} myth (526c), as the next chapter will show. Why Hackforth would not view these souls as pure philosophical souls is puzzling.

\(^{43}\)Presumably then, these souls would be exempt from further involvement in the cycle of reincarnation, which is surprising. One might argue that exemption from reincarnation demands total purification from the body, which would apply only to purely philosophical souls. Also, according to the \textit{Phaedrus}, only philosophical souls who have lived three such lives escape reincarnation (249a)—making it even more surprising that souls who are less than totally philosophical could escape the cycle after one such life.
(81b-e) If one follows the dialogue’s, especially Socrates’, regulation of emotion and exercise an emotional equilibrium, one will prevent oneself from committing these horrible misdeeds, and instead, one will live more intellectually.

The myth, with the dialogue, does not advocate complete emotional detachment, though it does advocate some form of emotional independence. It seems that, like the myth of Er, this myth may associate some emotions with rationality—like the way in which love of wisdom is treated in the former. Some degree of fear for the underworld supports the rational endeavor to avoid the extreme urges that lead to extreme crimes. Some degree of sorrow and sympathy for Socrates strengthens our conviction to live like he did, and in so doing, to make him live on in a way. Most of all, our wonder for natural beauty and the beauties of even purer regions, as well as our great hope, motivate us to live well and to care for our souls.

By leading us to the belief that one ought to care greatly for one’s soul and not neglect it for the sake of the body because of the risk of great punishments in the afterlife, the myth leads or turns our whole souls to πίστις. In its explanation of the bodily misdeeds that cause punishment in the afterlife, and also in its detailed, coherent description of the physical nature of both misdeeds and punishment, the myth leads readers away from conjectural, partial accounts of the consequences for misdeeds in the afterlife (like those of some of Plato’s predecessors, and certainly like those of popular belief), and toward a clear understanding of the deeds (the causes) and their effects (psychic punishments explained in physical terms). In all of this, and also by leading readers from the myth’s imagery to its rational goal of belief in caring for the soul, the myth turns readers from εἰκασία to πίστις. By leading readers toward the intellectual life as the

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44 In chapter 1, I explained the difference between belief and conjecture according to the Line and Cave in these terms, with the state of belief characterizing one who has some knowledge of the causes of physical appearances. Namely, this person has knowledge of physical phenomena that is more cohesive and comprehensive than one operating at the level of conjecture.
remedy for an afterlife of punishment, the myth also leads whole souls toward διάνοια, since the intellectual life necessarily entails the contemplation of Ideas according to the *Phaedo*, which begins to happen at the level of διάνοια according to the *Republic*. According to the Allegory of the Cave, however, one will only arrive at this level of knowledge once one remains firmly turned toward belief and tries to lead an intellectual life. As the *Phaedo* indicates, in seeking and struggling to care for one’s soul and to avoid distraction by the body, this person will eventually reach the realm of Forms.\(^{45}\)

As I have been noting throughout, many of the details Plato incorporates were quite familiar to his audience. As we can observe in the differing categories of judged souls, however, especially the incorporation of philosophical ones, Plato has integrated the unfamiliar—his philosophical touches—within the highly familiar context he constructs. There is, therefore, an interplay of familiarity and unfamiliarity in the details of this myth. This interplay strikes the lower, image-loving soul-parts, as does the image-rich description of the earth, with some intensity. This is my response to the possible objection that *any* written description of things or events engages the lower soul and that the intricate imagery of myth is not needed to do so. The imagery Plato incorporates and the way his account strikes the lower soul is uncommon and is crafted to engage these inferior aspects of ourselves in a particular way. There is a detailed depiction of natural beauty, an interplay of familiarity and unfamiliarity, and also a measured emotional undertone. Our author is drawing out the lower soul parts, but not engaging them in the way *any* mere descriptions can—and certainly not in the way that portrayals of extremes can. To provide another example, we hear about souls calling out for forgiveness, and we can imagine this to be quite emotional, but we do not hear details about the words they exchange and the

\(^{45}\text{79c-d for instance.}\)
deeds they committed. To elaborate on such details would amount to an extreme, or immoderate enticement of the lower soul, which Plato carefully avoids.

At least two other questions remain: First, the literal reader may ask what happens to the offenders of victims who do not dwell on the Acherusian lake. How can the victims forgive them if the victims dwell in a pure region on the surface or above the earth? Second, does the myth encourage people to harm only those who are kind and merciful, and who are therefore more likely to forgive? These are perplexities in the account—holes—and we can deal with them in two ways: (1) We can realize that Socrates does not insist on all of the details of this story as exactly true, and leave it there, or (2) we can understand that since the details are not all meant as literally true, perhaps this inconsistency can be better resolved with a figurative reading.

3.4 Reading the Phaedo Myth of Judgment Figuratively

3.4.1 Discerning the Invitation to Interpret Metaphorically

Not only is there a major inconsistency to resolve, but Socrates explicitly invites us to read the myth again, saying that “a man should repeat this to himself as if it were an incantation, which is why I have been prolonging my tale” (114d6-7). We can surmise here that repeating the myth like an “incantation” (ἐπῳδοὶ μύθοι, d7) would not only prolong its emotional effect—calming us by giving us great hope for death if we live well—but the very act of repeating such a complex tale is likely to uncover new details or themes.46 By explicitly inviting us to repeat the

46 Elizabeth Belfiore explains the charm-effect of myth in terms of the Republic’s account of the soul. She says this “magic” affects us by “emotions of pleasure. . . and fear.” See Belfiore, “Elenchus, Epode, and Magic: Socrates as Silenus,” Phoenix 34 (1980): 129. Following Belfiore, we can further confirm that the incantation of this myth affects the spirited soul. As my account shows, the interlocutors’ fear of death, and their fear of losing Socrates, are both diminished by the myth. By re-reading it, I will show that these sorts of fears can be even further diminished by the heightened rationality of a figurative reading. Belfiore, 135, also argues that the charm or incantation effect strengthens emotions to be in harmony with reason. Matthias Vorwerk also has an interesting take on Platonic myth as charm, though with a focus on Laws 10. See Vorwerk, “Zauber oder Argument? Die ἐπῳδοὶ μύθοι in Platon,
myth like an incantation, Plato encourages us to prolong the story’s effect on the whole soul and to look more deeply into the myth’s intricacies. It is with this invitation in mind that we ought to read the account of the True Earth again.

The very language Plato uses to describe the body is metaphorical: it is like a prison, it is heavy, ponderous, and hampering to our souls. If we take this language literally to mean that the body physically traps our souls or actually makes them physically heavier, we miss the point entirely. This is not to say though that my literal reading misses the point as well. This is because I interpreted the soul’s afterlife as literally meant, but not the soul’s entrapment in the body. The dialogue’s language about the body’s relation to soul, as well as the language of the myth, illustrates in clear, readily-graspable imagery the many ways in which bodily desires derail

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Nomoi X (903a10-905d1),” in Plato’s Laws: From Theory Into Practice: Proceedings of the VI Symposium Platonicum, ed. Samuel Scolnicov and Luc Brisson (St. Augustine: Academia, 2003), 81-86.

47 62b, 65a-67b, and 79c for instance.

48 Janet Smith explains that the way this myth cannot be identified as completely true in a literal sense marks a break from the unphilosophical education described early in the Republic. Given this, the Phaedo myth, she says, is part of the education of philosophers. One facet of this education is the way the myth provokes catharsis in its removal of the fear of death, thus making philosophy more possible. See Smith, Plato's Use of Myth as a Pedagogical Device, 136, 162. Though I agree that this myth provokes a philosophical education and is definitely of a different character from the myths used in the early education of the Republic, I disagree with Smith’s sharp distinction between the philosophical and unphilosophical as Plato’s two possible audiences, as distinguished in the Republic. There are clearly those who are closed to a philosophical education, like Thrasymachus or Cephalus, as well as those who are clearly not yet ready for a philosophical education—like young children. This whole group can accurately be called “unphilosophical.” On the other hand, it is clear that there may be some who have reached the intelligible realm and have thus become philosophers. It is arguable that Socrates fits into this group, according to Plato, since Socrates’ character describes the intelligible so adeptly. Even if this is true, Socrates is the only one even remotely qualified to be called a true philosopher. What about Glaucon and Adeimantus, and those, like them, who are ready for a philosophical education and open to it, but have clearly not proceeded as far as Socrates? If they are simply characterized as unphilosophical, then are we to infer that Plato does not think a philosophical education is appropriate for them? This is clearly preposterous, since they are the audience of Socrates’ philosophical education throughout the Republic. There is thus at least one additional category, either in between the unphilosophical and philosophical, or perhaps as a sub-group of the philosophical: those who are on the way to being philosophers but who have not yet completed their education. It may be the case that everyone who might be called “philosophical” fits into this camp, including Socrates, but even then, does it not make sense to distinguish those who are struggling to revoke the bodily and be free from that realm, from those who have already done so? It is possible that Socrates’ distinction between knowledge, opinion, and ignorance (477a-b) corresponds with the three groups I discern.
or distract our soul from pursuing its love of learning—it's pursuit of Forms—which has the capacity to save it from doom and inhumanity.\footnote{Also, in my literal reading, I understand the fact \textit{that} there are afterlife punishments literally, but I do not commit my reading to interpreting these punishments as literally taking place exactly as described. In this way, my literal reading is a modified one, intermediate between literal and figurative.}

It is this confusion or distraction that Plato illustrates early in the myth. The soul “passionately attached to the body” (108a7-8) has a difficult time even leaving the physical world for the afterlife. It needs its guardian spirit to lead it away by force. (108a-c) This difficulty metaphorically depicts the way in which the body imprisons the soul. Our tendency to fulfill bodily desires becomes like an addiction, and the stronger it is, the more difficult it is for us to turn toward the intellectual. In fact, if we suffer from this addiction to the body, we will need to be \textit{forced} toward the intellectual realm. This imagery is very similar to that of the philosopher dragging the prisoner out of the cave.\footnote{\textit{Republic} 515e} The imagery and the concepts conveyed are so similar in both texts that it would be hard to argue that Plato did not want readers to connect the two.\footnote{I am neither implying that one was written before the other, that they were composed at the same time, that one is preparatory for the other, nor that they were revised to reflect one another—just that they are clearly connected. I take no stance on the chronology of Plato’s texts, except that almost any position on this issue is dubious given recent developments. See Jacob Howland, “Re-Reading Plato: The Problem of Platonic Chronology,” \textit{Phoenix} 45 (1991): 189-214. The following scholars also connect this myth to the Allegory of the Cave: See Sara Brill, “The Geography of Finitude: Myth and Earth in Plato’s ‘Phaedo’,” 12, 18. Diskin Clay says “the hierarchical scheme of the three levels which structures the world [. . .] has its counterpart in the image of the cave in Book VII of the \textit{Republic}.” See Clay, “The Art of Glaukos (Plato \textit{Phaedo} 108d4-9),” \textit{The American Journal of Philology} 106 (1985): 235. Perceval Frutiger is another who compares the \textit{Phaedo} myth to the Allegory of the Cave, specifically paralleling \textit{Phaedo} 109b-110b with \textit{Republic} 514a-517b. He specifically says he wants to break with Aristotle and Teichmüller by reading the \textit{Phaedo} myth symbolically. See Frutiger, \textit{Les Mythes de Platon}, 62-66. Along similar lines, Hackforth, 174, interprets the myth symbolically, pointing out that the reason for the hollows is to contrast our world not only with a better one, but to contrast the world of appearances with the world of reality. The True Earth, then, symbolizes the intelligible region. Somewhat similarly to the above, Hitchcock, 169, claims that this myth is a “prototype” for the Allegory of the Cave. I regard the addition of “prototype” as dubious given recent scholarship casting doubt on the accepted chronology. Joseph Lawrence also compares this myth to the Cave allegory, especially because of the simile between our sun and the true Sun, as well as our earth and the True Earth. See Lawrence, “Plato Encounters Zen—Atop the Mountain Peaks of Iran,” \textit{Comparative and Continental Philosophy} 1 (2009): 128.}
world)—by firelight, and once out of the cave, one sees real things (intelligible objects) by the dim light of nighttime at first, in order to get adjusted to the world outside the cave. This metaphorically depicts the way in which we struggle to understand our own reality when we are hampered by our focus on primarily the physical world. According to the *Phaedo* myth, we struggle and suffer in the physical world for no good reason because of our habitual over-emphasis on bodily urges. It takes a δαίµων, something or someone with a connection to the divine, intellectual realm, to drag us away, just as we need a teacher, a philosopher, to free us from the cave.

### 3.4.2 The True Earth Considered Metaphorically

Since we have a clear invitation to understand both the body’s relation to soul and the myth’s introduction metaphorically, and since this produces a fruitful understanding of souls’ embodiment, we may now see if it bears fruit to interpret the rest of the myth symbolically as we make good on the invitation to re-read it.

Socrates explains that “the earth itself is pure and lies in the pure sky where the stars are situated” (109b7-8). Furthermore, we dwell in the earth’s hollows and wrongly think that we live above, on the surface. (109c) Socrates here, as I previously explained, conveys our tendency to be deluded about the nature of our existence. By reading what follows metaphorically, we may see another side to this delusion.

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52 Monique Dixsaut says that in this myth, the afterlife is meant as a metaphor for *this* life. See Dixsaut, “Myth and Interpretation,” 44. Michael Grosso also suggests that the depiction of the afterlife in this myth is really an extension of our life on earth. In particular, the myth gets us to focus on “modes of earthly existence excluded from our current mode of perception.” See Grosso, “Death and the Myth of the True Earth in Plato’s *Phaedo*,” (Ph. D. diss. Columbia University, 1971), 69-70. Along similar lines, Hackforth, 172, claims that one of the effects of this myth is to broaden our intellectual awareness beyond this life and our “little” corner or hollow. John Sallis also suggests that Socrates’ discussion of the earth might be about this world, here and now. Also, the True Earth praises φρόνησις, not in death, but in life. See Sallis, “*Phronesis in Hades and Beyond,*” *Epoche* 7 (2002): 121, 131. Presenting a slightly different figurative reading, Nightingale, 235, explains that ancient geographic texts that depicted the ends
There are four main regions of the earth, which Socrates describes: Two below the surface, and two above.\textsuperscript{53} Below the earth’s surface, one region includes the hollows or caves in which we dwell, and the other includes various caves within the caves, which connect to Tartarus. The hollows within our hollow include those under the ocean, as well as the subterranean rivers, including the four large ones connected to Tartarus, the largest, deepest hole below our hollows.\textsuperscript{54} The constant agitation of Tartarus, including its waters and winds, causes the subterranean caverns, especially the Pyrophlegethon and Cocytus, also to be agitated and unpredictable, though not to the extent of Tartarus. Socrates says about these underworld caverns, “all these places move up and down with the oscillating movement of the earth” (111e4-5). The most extreme hollow, Tartarus, “has no bottom or solid base but it oscillates up and down in waves” (112b1-2). The constant flux of these regions—their unpredictability—is of the earth were referred to as “eschatiai or eschata at least as early as Herodotus.” She says, eschatology, then, is “not necessarily concerned with the afterlife.” Following Nightingale, then, we can see that Plato may very well not be concerned with depicting a literal final judgment, but rather, the limits of our reality, and that which transcends those limits.

\textsuperscript{53} See appendix 3 for the placement of the four regions and their correspondence with my literal reading.

\textsuperscript{54} The following is an account of several scholars who claim that the Phaedo myth engages in psychagogy or intellectual conversion. None of them present a systematic argument for psychagogy as I do—basing the argument for psychagogy or conversion on the presentation of that concept in the Phaedrus and Republic, and comparing the psychagogy of this myth to other similar myths. Frede, 154, 166, discerns three regions: the over, middle, and under world. She claims that the three have a psychagogical function. Besides the difference in the depth of our arguments for psychagogy, where she sees the upper world as one, I see it as split, between those who live on the surface with some attachment to body, and those philosophers who dwell above totally without a body. Somewhat similar to Frede, Grosso, 70, says the myth conveys a “drama of conversion” like that of the Cave. Salvit, 32, is another who points out that the purpose of the myth is conversion, saying it is not for the child within us. Somewhat similar to those above, Smith explains that, with this myth, Socrates aids the interlocutors’ shifting from the world of becoming to that of the Forms. See Smith, “Plato's Myths as 'Likely Accounts' Worthy of Belief,” 33. Finally, along slightly similar lines, Brill considers a figurative reading in which the myth teaches by perspective shifts like the Cave allegory. See Brill, 12, 18.

Not only Frede, but also Pender offers an interpretation of the number of regions different from my own. Pender argues that there are six, including those above the surface, on it, our habitat in the hollows, the Acherusian Lake, the Cocytus and Pyrophlegethon, and finally, Tartarus. See Pender, “The Rivers of Tartarus: Plato’s Geography of Dying and Coming-Back-To-Life,” in Plato and Myth, ed. Collobert, Destrée, and Gonzalez (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 215-216. Where I see the Acherusian Lake and the places of the Cocytus and Pyrophlegethon as one region of hollows like ours but within and below ours, she sees each of them occupying separate regions. My interpretation preserves some kinship between our level of cave-like dwellings and the region below. This is because the regions of the myth convey to us that our natural or normal tendencies are really not on the surface, a place of philosophical clarity emerging from its attachment to the body, but in an existence inferior to that. Some of us are deluded, and most are doubly deluded. I will explain this further below. This idea is similar to that of Socrates who says at the start of the Cave allegory that the prisoners are like us (Republic 515a).
similar to the unpredictability of the shadows on the back cave wall, as well as the prisoners who simply guess at what they think is the truth and might try to kill the one who can save them.\(^{55}\) Although the freed prisoner in the cave is deluded about what he thinks is real, the bound prisoner facing the wall in the back of the cave is doubly deluded. In the \textit{Phaedo} myth, Socrates describes those under the ocean and, hence, in the region below our hollows as exhibiting this extreme delusion. We in the hollows think we live on the surface, and, in this way, we are like the one who lives “deep down in the middle of the ocean” (perhaps in one of its caverns) and thinks he lives “on its surface” (109c4-5). Those living below us are doubly deluded, just like those chained up at the deepest part of the cave. Just as most souls in the True Earth end up in the Acherusian lake, which is a hollow within our hollows like the ocean-dwelling place described, the souls of the majority are chained up in the cave according to the Allegory.\(^{56}\)

Socrates identifies hollows or caves beneath the earth’s surface as our habitat. Why Socrates understands it as a hollow is perplexing when one tries to conceive of it literally. Some people actually live in caves, but most do not. We literally dwell on the surface. Socrates may be speaking metaphorically here then.\(^{57}\) We are in a metaphorical cave just like the freed prisoner who is able to attain, with some effort, a generally accurate perspective of the physical world, like that which Socrates describes here in the \textit{Phaedo} myth. Because of this, we think we are looking at what is real, but we actually have a long, difficult journey ahead of us out of our

\(^{55}\) \textit{Republic} 515a-d and 516c-517a.

\(^{56}\) In the True Earth myth, those in the hollows just below the surface most closely resemble us, according to Socrates, though he explains that the souls of the majority are below our region. This is different from the Cave allegory, in which the chained prisoners are identified with us. This difference may pertain to the differing sets of interlocutors in the \textit{Republic} and \textit{Phaedo}. Thrasy-machus, for instance, a sophist, is present in the \textit{Republic}, whereas Socrates’ audience in the \textit{Phaedo} is a group of devoted friends and followers. Perhaps then, the souls this myth attempts to turn toward belief are not those who are like Socrates’ interlocutors, but others who are less familiar with Socratic-Platonic thought.

\(^{57}\) Even though this particular reading may be more accurate than my literal reading, it still does not negate the value of the former, which, as we saw, has the capacity to lead the literal reader from conjecture to belief regardless of what a metaphysical interpretation uncovers.
metaphorical cave if we wish to see what is really real. We have a tendency to get caught up or distracted by the physical because of our position within it—because of our embodiment. Just as we are physically embodied and therefore trapped in a way, so are those living within the hollows of the True Earth, and so is the prisoner who has turned around from the cave wall to the firelight.

Just as the freed captive is prone to regression, so are we. Just as the freed one needs a guide with a forceful hand, so do we. Most of us will end up in a deeper hollow—the Acherusian lake—according to the True Earth myth, and so most of us will be highly distracted by the body, being very confused, and regressing further and further throughout the course of our lives. The coiling descents of the Cocytus and Pyrphlegethon represent the differing downward spirals of souls doomed by their attachment to their bodies. This regression to a state of being that is further removed from the real and true than where one began is the result of a long series of choices—it is the result of habitually choosing bodily pleasures. As such, this regression is a sort of death—and our state of being after it is a sort of afterlife. Although our free choice in this matter is not pronounced here as it is in the myth of Er, responsibility on our part is seemingly implied in the *Phaedo* myth. Also, regarding this metaphorical death, as Socrates explains, chances are good that we will never again return to the human race—to the realm where we began, where we have the ability to escape from our attachment to our bodies and live a non-mediocre life. We will likely live out our lives as sub-humans; as slaves to our bodily desires, similar to the ways in which certain animals are slaves to their bodies. If we habitually give in to the desire to eat and drink, we will begin to live like donkeys—ignorant, and perhaps even slothful. If we continuously satisfy the desire for rage and physical violence, we will become wolf-like, spending all of our time and energy preying on others and acting violently toward
them. Even worse, our bodily addictions, like that for vengeance, could eventually result in a downward spiral to incurability, to an existence of extreme restlessness, inner torment, and torment of others. In the above ways, the lower two realms of the earth illustrate what we become—deeply unhappy—if we do not risk belief in this myth. Unlike in the literal reading, this belief means here that we will become unhappy in this life if we do not care for our souls by purging them of bodily dependence here and now. In this way, the figurative reading uses imagery to turn readers toward πίστις, in addition to its (upcoming) provocation from the latter toward intellection.

Though it is obvious here in the True Earth myth that philosophy can save our souls, just as in the myth of Er, it may be less obvious that the two myths treat civic or social virtue and their corresponding habits differently. The one who lives virtuously without philosophy in the myth of Er is portrayed as choosing the life of a tyrant. This hasty, superficial, unphilosophical chooser immediately dooms himself to a life of torment—of eating his children—as a result of his lack of philosophy and in spite of his socially virtuous habits. (Republic 619b-c) The socially

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58 Several others suggest that the reincarnation into animal lives may be read metaphorically: See Karin Alt, “Zu einigen Problemen in Platon’s Jenseitsmythen und deren Konsequenzen bei späteren Platonikern,” in Platon als Mythologe, eds. Markus Janka and Christian Schäfer (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche, 2002), 272. Brill says that the myth presents “less a futural theodicy” and more a “nascent phenomenology of violence,” “an attempt to consider the uncanny endurance of violent deeds.” Also, Plato wants to “mark the endurance of psychic effects beyond the life of their ‘agent.’” She says the prohibition of reincarnation for certain souls illustrates the effect of their acts: “radical isolation.” See Brill, “On the Uses and Abuses of Eschatology for Life,” Ideas y Valores 61 (2012): 87-88, and 98. Kenneth Dorter argues for a figurative reading of this myth’s account of reincarnation, but he does not exclude the possibility that a literal afterlife is meant. See Dorter, 163-167.

59 A question arises here: If Socrates identifies his immediate audience as singly-deluded, like those living one level below the surface, which is philosophically similar to the dwelling of the freed prisoner in the cave, why try to turn one’s audience to belief? Why not move on to intellection? I venture that this is because of the regressive tendencies of those at the level of mere trust. We need some engagement at that level in order to entice us to move to the realm of thought.

I should also add here that it is not necessary to conceive of the turns in temporal succession. I will explain this further in the conclusion.

Finally, it might interest the reader that this pattern—from an inferior state resulting from bodily pleasures to an even worse one, mirrors in a general way the degradation described in Republic 8 and 9 of the oligarchic soul to the democratic, and finally to the tyrannical—with the latter defined as incurable.
virtuous souls in the *Phaedo*, on the other hand, are portrayed as redeemable. There is a chance that they will spiral down, but there is also a chance that they will eventually lead philosophical lives. In fact, it is this particular sort of virtue that saves them, insofar as it prevents them from living like those who display more extreme bodily vices. The *Phaedo*, in this way, paints a more hopeful picture of this soul. This facet of my metaphorical interpretation will prove important to the way in which this myth prompts one to turn back in to the cave, which I will explain later after returning to the four realms.

The two places above the surface of the earth are pure, and those who dwell just above the surface are where the gods dwell. (111b) As divine entities who are fairly numerous, the gods may serve as a metaphor for Forms (though perhaps because they are on the surface, these are Forms viewed in reference to physicalities, as in δύναμις). After all, Forms are eternal, divine, and supersensible, just like gods. Souls on the surface live longer, and “their eyesight, hearing and intelligence and all such are as superior to ours as air is superior to water and ether to air in purity” (111b3-5). This is similar to the way in which one initially outside the cave, seeing by way of reflected sunlight, sees better than the freed prisoner in the cave. Also, the one who has just ventured outside the cave sees reflections and shadows of real things, not man-made copies, just like those on the surface see the gods as they are, as well as seeing “the sun and moon and stars as they are” (111c1-2), though still not from (presumably) the perspective of philosophers in the realm beyond, totally free from their bodies. This region on the surface, Socrates

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60 This is not to say that the *Republic* does not allow for the socially virtuous to be redeemed—only that where the *Republic* highlights their possible doom, the *Phaedo* highlights their possible redemption.

61 Peter Ahrensdorf interprets the sight of those in this realm as Plato’s indication that there are people who “attain wisdom by means of perception.” Ahrensdorf argues that humans can attain knowledge of the divine through the senses. One result of his argument is the claim that humans can attain wisdom and happiness in *this* life, here and now. See Ahrensdorf, *The Death of Socrates and the Life of Philosophy: An Interpretation of Plato’s Phaedo* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995), 189-190. If Ahrensdorf is right, then rather than simply supplementing the dialogue’s portrayal of the body as a prison, the myth adds to the dialogue a portrayal of a different possible role for the body. In this different role, which one can only manifest by being a philosopher, bodily perception becomes a
describes as grounded, or founded, on the physical earth. The realm just outside the cave, that of διάνοια, is similar to this, since one arrives at the Forms by means of physicalities, like diagrams, in this kind of intellection.\textsuperscript{62}

Those in the region above the surface are among “even more beautiful dwelling places which it is hard to describe clearly, nor do we now have the time to do so” (114c4-6). This region bears a striking resemblance to the noetic realm, since it is not grounded on the physical at all—it is completely beyond the physical, just as νόησις involves only Forms, and which one arrives at by Forms, not by physical examples (Republic 511b-c). Also, this realm in the Republic includes the Good, which is described as “beyond being” (509b). Here in the Phaedo, this upper realm is so beautiful that it is difficult to describe. Similarly, Socrates spends a great deal of time in the Republic describing the Good and the noetic realm, but he does get to the point at which he says that he cannot proceed further.\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{62}This point hinges on my explanation of the parallelism between the Line and the Cave in chapter 1.

\textsuperscript{63}There are others who discern the possibility that the various regions on this myth indicate different levels of knowledge or opinion. See Alt, “Diesseits und Jenseits in Platons Mythen von der Seele,” Hermes 110 (1982): 289. Also see Pender, 199, who says the different “terrains and climates match the moral condition and cognitive capacities of the souls dwelling there.”
The earth, as previously explained, is full of beautiful things, according to Socrates. By imagining all of these beautiful things—plants, trees, flowers, fruits, hills, precious gems, and rare metals (110d-e)—and then trying to imagine that which is purer, which is “not eaten away or spoiled by decay and brine, or corroded by the water and air” (110e2-3), we are invited to think about true Beauty. The beauties of our realm come to be in large part because of decay and corrosion, and so we are led to think about Beauty that exists neither as a result of natural processes, nor as something that comes to be and then passes away. Since it is the myth’s imagery that leads us to contemplation of this Idea, we can say with confidence that the myth leads us to thought or intellection in this way.  

Our release from the earthly hollows to the upper realms is a sort of death different from that previously described. This is a death of the body, but not as it is typically conceived. When one has practiced the virtues well and has pursued the philosophical insofar as one has mostly freed oneself from enslavement to bodily urges, one may dwell in the dianoetic realm, where one has a better view of what is real: the Forms, and where one is less confused and distracted by the body. Once one has arrived on the surface—to the intellectual life—one no longer regresses, just like the emerged prisoner no longer does. This change is permanent, like death. This is why those who dwell on the surface experience longevity superior to those in the hollows. Now, if one has completely freed oneself from bodily distractions, then one is free to move above to a completely intelligible realm, where the physical is no longer necessary and is therefore no longer a distraction. This is a full deliverance from bodily dependence; it is a

64 Just as in the transition to the world outside the cave, we need to be resolute in the face of any disillusionment or disorientation that we may experience in this contemplation. See Grosso, 86.
65 Grosso, 82, says “we have to ‘die’ if we wish to depart from the hollow, from illusion to the upper surface of the earth, to the truth.” Furthermore, our blind existence in the hollow symbolizes “self-alienation” and “inauthenticity,” following Heidegger.
66 This is similar to the way Socrates is described at the start of the Symposium (174d-175b). The idea that souls will live without bodies for the rest of time, interpreted strictly, may be incompatible with the theory of reincarnation in
release to the *noetic*. If some confusion persists about what freedom from the body entails, this myth may very well provide the needed clarity. The myth shows us that there are many different types of attachment to the body, varying significantly in severity. If we wish to care for our souls and pursue philosophy, we must not only free ourselves from bodily addictions, but we must liberate ourselves from our exclusive focus on our narrow, cave-like world, to see what lies beyond and what makes our world pale in comparison. Finally, we must seek out the Beauty that is beyond comparison to the physical, as well as the other Ideas, in their own realm, compared only to one another.

Our time in the upper level of hollows is brief; it is transitory just like the time the freed prisoner spends within the cave. The latter will either regress and move back, or he will progress upward. This is not a place where we remain for long, and as such, it is represented well by our earthly life in the *Phaedo* myth. We will not stay in the hollows for long. Just as our mortal life will end relatively soon, we will soon experience either a “death” that brings us to deeper, more tumultuous places, where we very well might stay forever, or we will bring on ourselves a sort of death that leads us to freedom, beauty, goodness, purity, and longevity.

While the figurative reader contemplates these different levels of Being, which are also different stages of knowledge, the reader also still experiences all of the engagement of the lower soul that one would experience from a literal reading. The intricate descriptions of the earth still this myth. See Gallop, 224. This point is a good reason not to rely solely on a literal interpretation of this myth. Either that, or the literal reader can simply assume that once one becomes a true philosopher, they are exempt from the cycle of reincarnation.

Grosso, 92-93, argues that this realm beyond the surface does not correlate with the *noetic* realm of the Line and Cave. One reason, he says, is that the one who has reached the *noetic* outside the cave discerns only the realm outside clearly, and not that inside the cave, whereas in the True Earth myth, those who live in the future bodiless can see everything below them clearly. I disagree with this assessment, not only because of my previous point about the striking similarity between the physical grounding of those on the surface and those (the *dianoetic*) just emerging from the cave, as well as the similarity between those who are beyond the surface and those who are beyond physical analogues or stepping stones outside the cave. Grosso’s assessment here is incorrect because there is no implication in the *Phaedo* myth that the one who has reached the beyond can discern everything in the hollows, all the way down to Tartarus, clearly. Even Socrates, who is our source of authority on this account and who most closely approximates a philosopher to us, says not to insist on the truth of every detail.
engage the image-loving lower soul parts, and the emotional aspects of the story still affect our spirited self, including the consummatory function of the myth. While this is taking place, the reader must consider where he stands on these different levels—and where he is going. By using the imagery of this tale to think about the intelligible realm, the nature of the Forms, and the distinction between διάνοια and νόησις within this realm, one has already arrived on the surface. In this way, this tale turns the figurative reader’s whole soul to διάνοια. As people in this dianoetic state, we realize through this tale that we are still affected by our bodies. We have experienced a partial, yet permanent death, and we are relatively free, yet we still long for more. We long for complete bodily detachment—complete death—and full initiation into the most beautiful region. In this longing, we are urged toward the noetic realm and toward the Good. The Phaedo myth of judgment turns us to διάνοια, and in so doing, points us toward νόησις. We cannot use Plato’s imagery to get there, though. Rather, this part of our journey lies beyond the dialogue.

Once again, we should recall Socrates’ qualification that no one would insist that all of these things are exactly as he has described them (114d). Though this tale may have turned us to intellection now, and though we have lodged it in our memories, there will be times when we are more limited by our bodies, and there may even be times when we are completely caught up in the tumultuous hollows. These can be exceptions though, as long as we do not let ourselves become sub-human; as long as we do not let our human qualities die, like our capacity for civility, and especially that for higher forms of rationality. We ought to judge ourselves based on our overall character: that which is shaped by what we spend most of our time practicing. Just like Socrates facing his death, we can face our death—our passage into the immaterial—with

67 Though this may initially strike the reader as Aristotelian, there are grounds for this conception of character in relation to habit right here in the True Earth myth. For example, see my explanation above of what the downward spiraling of the underworld rivers metaphorically represents.
great hope. If we practice philosophy, we can dwell in this great hope for much of our lives. A substantial part of this hope is knowing what we do not know, like Socrates did. The deluded, let alone those who are doubly so, are ignorant of what they do not know, and also lack the corresponding great hope. This great hope is additional fuel for the spirited soul, allied with reason, driving us forward in our pursuit of the beyond.

Another side to this, which several recent interpreters have revealed, is that the True Earth can teach us about our relationship with our own personal physicality. In other words, the earth seems metaphorically to represent our body, while the realm above the surface seems to represent our soul. There is great turbulence and darkness within us, rooted in our bodily urges. As Plato explains in the Republic, these tendencies sometimes come out in our dreams (571c-d). The effects of this turbulence and darkness can be seen in our bodily temptations. We are constantly being pulled this way and that by our various urges, just like the tides, and oftentimes various desires and emotions bubble up rather unexpectedly. Our human tendency is to focus on these urges, as well as the physically beautiful, which is also part of our bodily existence. We tend to pursue physical stimulation as a remedy to our inner turbulence when we should actually practice gaining an improved intellectual perspective on ourselves. We ought to emerge from our bodily hyper-focus and see that there are beauties accessible to our intellects that far exceed those of our senses, just as the prisoners chained down need to release themselves from the limitations of their overemphasis on bodily desires and the accompanying image-loving. The

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68 Several scholars interpret the True Earth as a metaphor for the body: Ronna Burger, for instance, says that if the soul is imprisoned in the body, its character ought to be revealed in its attachment to the latter, according to the myth. She then draws comparisons between elements of the myth and aspects of the body, as they relate to the soul. See Burger, The Phaedo: A Platonic Labyrinth (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 194-200. Pender, 220-221, says that the whole region of Tartarus is a “super-body” for corrupted souls. She explains that impure souls have shed their bodies only to find themselves “imprisoned in a much larger and more powerful physical frame: the Tartarus region, presented as a sort of gigantic body,” like a prison. Human bodies are prisons but at least they allow for more freedom than during afterlife punishment “when they are encased in a body writ-large, over which they have no control whatsoever.”
prisoners’ punishment for their ignorance—total immersion in the darkness of the world of the appetitive soul—is very similar to the punishment depicted in the True Earth myth for wrongdoing. We imprison our whole selves in the most depraved parts of ourselves when we overindulge in bodily desires and negative emotions. In being privy to this perspective on ourselves, we can take steps to liberate ourselves from that which has the potential to imprison us. Becoming aware of our emotions is a key part of this process. This may take place by writing poetry like Socrates does (60c-61b) (and Plato), or by entering into dialogue with others who are interested in this critical self-examination: like-minded friends, a guide who has more wisdom about this than we do, and so on—also as Socrates does.69 Seeing the True Earth as a metaphor for one’s self, therefore, leads us to self-examination, and in so doing, leads us to philosophy. At the early stages of this self-examination, when we are still getting our bearings on our complexities, including the vastness of our intellects, we are likely to be prone to feeling overwhelmed, and therefore will be tempted to withdraw back into our physical hyper-focus (like one just released from bonds in the cave). At the later stages of this critical self-examination, however, we can begin to investigate the truly real, because we will have practiced the art of liberating ourselves from the physical. In this way, we will eventually no longer need a guide and can eventually become guides ourselves (like one outside the cave). This function of the myth is also psychagogical, leading us to intellection and beyond while engaging the whole soul.70 It allows us to see what we are capable of if we continue to live philosophically. Knowing that we are likely to live this way, we can face the future with great confidence in our own happiness, and therefore, great hope.

69 It would be interesting to explore the similarities between this process and the modern practice of cognitive behavioral therapy.

70 The lower soul is engaged by the same imagery that engages it during a literal reading, described above.
Just as I concluded my literal reading with consideration of the confusing presence of the victims of the curable souls in the mediocre realm of the Acherusian lake, I would like to conclude this section by returning to that perplexity. If we extend my figurative reading to this detail, we can see that those who have not yet forgiven—who have not yet released their offenders from extreme guilt—are depicted as dwelling within the mediocre place occupied by the majority. Plato might be indicating that those who have not yet forgiven their offenders, who are experiencing a just form of wrath, are burdened by negative emotions until they forgive and are not fully capable of virtuous living, let alone the philosophical life. This concept, though hard to accept since the victims’ situation is ultimately not their fault, resonates with anyone who has held on to a grudge or feelings of hatred. These extreme emotions can be all-consuming and threaten our whole souls with degradation to a more extreme realm of desires, like the wolf-like urge for vengeance, where just wrath becomes a serious vice. Unless one releases oneself from this negativity, chances are good that one will “banish oneself from the human race,” so to speak, in depriving oneself of a life lived under the direction of rationality. Unless we forgive, our outlook for a happy life is not very hopeful.

3.4.3 The Turn Back Into the Cave

Like the myth of Er, this myth teaches us how to lead others, and also how to lead ourselves. In doing so, it entices us to “turn us back into the cave.” Though we are strongly drawn to explore the intellectual realm as a result of this myth’s psychagogy, we can also see that the first step in leading souls out of mediocrity, confusion, and evil, is to help them believe that there is more to this life than what they can perceive with their bodies alone. There is a way of doing this, we can now see, that involves using imagery to appeal to their love of the partially
true, and in so doing, to lead them to more complete truth. Although the end goal, or larger function, is to broaden their understanding of reality, the paths to that goal may involve the fantastic, the familiar, the surprising, and so on. For souls who believe—who trust—but who are still very much enticed by imagery and prone to regress to superficial ways of thinking, the myth instructs us as follows if we wish to teach them: if they enter into dialogue with philosophers and so open themselves to the possibility of further altering fundamentally their perspective on Being, we can still appeal to them with imagery, but the larger goal of our efforts can be much richer than it is for those proceeding from conjecture to belief. The imagery with which we engage believing souls can provoke an investigation of True Beauty, the relationship of body to soul, the philosophical life, or the different “deaths” we can experience in fundamentally changing ourselves for better or worse. Though our foray into the cave will be met with much resistance and necessitate a great deal of effort, we can reflect on the way in which Socrates’ efforts changed his friends, as well as the way in which Plato’s have changed us. We can discern many elements involved in these changes encapsulated in the afterlife myth. In that consummation of Plato’s efforts, we are privileged to a perspective of the value of the epistemological journey that ordinary discourse is not capable of revealing to us.

In its portrayal of the socially virtuous, yet unphilosophical soul as at least somewhat redeemable, the *Phaedo* makes the job of the psychagogue less overwhelming than perhaps it may seem in the Allegory of the Cave or the myth of Er. Although Socrates eventually was killed for his soul-leading efforts, he practiced his craft on Athenians for decades and clearly had a positive impact on at least a small group of friends, and probably on more people if the vote tally at his trial is any indication.\(^7\) Perhaps it is for these reasons that Plato did not think it fitting

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\(^7\) Thirty votes out of the 501 would have exonerated Socrates (*Apology* 36a).
to portray the job of the psychagogue as rather hopeless; perhaps this was part of his reasoning process in practicing psychagogy himself.

3.5 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have explained the multivalence of the True Earth myth in the *Phaedo* and the ways in which it addresses and stimulates the whole soul to turn or ascend. While the lower soul parts get drawn out in regulated fashion, the rational aspect of the soul considers the results of the prior conversation, moving not only unhindered by the lower parts, but motivated by them, inspired by hope, toward wisdom-seeking. Rather than being cast aside, or simply along for the ride, that which the lower soul loves about this myth—its imagery, and all of the emotion that it evokes—becomes part of the rational journey. If we repeat this tale like an incantation, not only does a figurative reading emerge, redoubling the effects of the initial literal reading, but intriguing details emerge in new light—like the presence of unforgiving victims on the Acherusian lake—such that we can see why it would be fruitful to read this myth yet again and again.

I made the remark earlier that it is not necessary to conceive of the turns of the soul in temporal succession. Understanding this myth figuratively reveals that not only are multiple aspects of the soul being engaged simultaneously, but one may turn to intellection while one is also turning from εἰκασία to πίστις. Though it is easier to explain the turns in temporal succession, it is empirically verifiable through self-reflection that, at any given time, we may be thinking about Forms while still resisting the urge to obsess about the physical aspects of our existence. We may be in the cave and outside of it at the same time—or such a turn could happen in temporal succession.
This deeper meaning of the Cave allegory is evident in the *Republic*, and Plato does not need to convey it in his afterlife myths to evoke it. This brings us to the question of why the *Phaedo* needs the True Earth myth. After the proofs of the soul’s immortality, the question remains about what to do with all that preceded. Simmias seems to know that it is worthwhile to investigate the matter further, but it is not clear whether or not all who are present are reasoning the same way. Some were overcome with emotion earlier, in sympathy for Socrates and also because of their own fears and apprehensions about death. Given the tentativeness of the dialogue’s conclusions about the soul’s immortality, it is likely that all those present need more than the proofs to be persuaded to care for their souls by practicing philosophy. The myth provides this additional persuasion, addressing simultaneously audience members coming to the myth at different cognitive levels and also encapsulating the most important themes of the dialogue in that persuasive effort. Of course, the sort of persuasion involved here is not that which is at play in common rhetoric, but rather psychagogy. As a result, the True Earth myth serves as a thematically, emotionally, and cognitively dense capstone well fitted to the preceding discussion.

Despite its role as a consummation, Socrates’ death scene is arguably even more of a consummation.\(^{72}\) It is perhaps the most emotionally intense passage in the Platonic corpus, and it illustrates the ease with which a true philosopher sheds his bodily shell, as well as the tension that goes along with doing so. Socrates shows us literally how to die, but also how to do so figuratively. We ought to stop feeling, or being so aware of our bodies, from our toes, up to our torsos, and proceed confidently into the intellectual unknown despite the emotions pulling us

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\(^{72}\) *Phaedo* 116a-118a. Pender, 203, says that there are three climaxes: the final argument for the soul’s immortality, the myth, and the death scene.
back to the familiar. The question remains then: Why does Plato need the True Earth myth when he has such a fitting consummation in Socrates’ death scene? The latter, as so emotionally intense, threatens its own cognitive purpose. It is difficult to read Plato’s detailed depiction of Socrates’ death and also think clearly about both its literal and metaphorical significance. It also does not use the traditional, familiar imagery that the myth incorporates so persuasively, and that he juxtaposes with such effectiveness to the unfamiliar. Additionally, there are detailed descriptions of differing attachments to the body that the myth adds to the preceding dialogue, which would be inappropriate for the death scene to include. Finally, what better way to do homage to Socrates than to conclude with a myth that provokes self-reflection, self-knowledge, and knowledge of the invisible through its treatment and transformation of concepts formerly limited to the domain of philosophy of nature?

One additional possible function of this afterlife myth, and possibly even the others, is to issue judgment about the fate of the souls involved in and even just mentioned in the discussion. In dialogues like the *Hippias Major* and the *Euthyphro*, no final judgment is offered for the discussants—there is no final pronouncement about who is doomed, who will be happy, and anyone who is in between. By offering such a clear, detailed judgment in the *Phaedo*, the philosophical import of the preceding conversation is spelled out much more than in those other dialogues. The reader is still free to decide for oneself who in the conversation represents the philosophers, if anyone, and who represents the various inferior soul-types. But by giving us the myth of judgment, Plato provides more direction than in the aforementioned dialogues about the fates connected to the differing paths one can take as a result of the dialogical proceedings.

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73 See *Phaedo* 117e-118a.
One possible objection that might remain to the ethics of the myth is that of Annas, who argues that the True Earth myth conveys a consequentialist message.\(^{74}\) My account counteracts this impression by arguing that Plato portrays various types of lives as punishments or rewards in and of themselves.

I spoke earlier about the “great hope” that emerges from a metaphorical reading of this myth, especially when one begins to consider the possibility of noetic contemplation. As I explained in the last chapter, hope (ἐλπίς) for Plato means sure and certain expectation—confident trust—in contrast to mere expectation (προσδοκία). In this sense, the possibility of νόησις results in a trust that is transformed from that within the cave. It is trust on a whole other level.

There are some who incriminate these afterlife myths as a downfall of Hellenic culture, or as an enervation of the present in its application of an otherworldly standard to human life.\(^{75}\) However, this chapter stands in solidarity with the work of many others who see these myths as beginnings of exciting ways of thinking.\(^{76}\) Plato does not urge us to stop after we read this myth, but rather to re-read, re-think, and continue to hope.\(^{77}\)

\(^{74}\) Annas, 129. I also discuss this objection more extensively in the previous chapter (2.2.1).  
\(^{75}\) Edmonds, 16, explains that Rohde, in a Nietzschean spirit, sees these ideas about the afterlife as a downfall of Greek culture. Nightingale, 220, says that Bakhtin sees “chronotopes” about eschatology as draining and bleeding the present by measuring human life according to an otherworldly standard.  
\(^{76}\) Edmonds, 16, cites Jaeger, who sees these ideas about the afterlife as the first blossoms of the Greek’s true legacy to Western Civilization: the rational philosophy of Plato and the spiritual religion of Christianity. Nightingale, 221-230, explains Plato’s eschatological discourse can critique Bakhtin. She argues for a new eschatology that is “ecological rather than theological,” mixing principles of Plato and Bakhtin (221). She says she shares Bakhtin’s suspicion of texts that offer dogmatic judgments of “good and evil, truth and untruth,” but that the Phaedo myth is “heterochronic: the reader is invited to consider different versions of temporality and to view human life from radically different perspectives” (228). Also, it is “heterotopic,” in that it conjures different places. Furthermore, she notes the way the story does not really end in the Phaedo myth, which is a “bit paradoxical” for something eschatological (230). She adds that the True Earth is as much about incarnate life as it is about the soul’s experiences after bodily death. The story is ongoing, it is not about beginnings and endings—we are not asked to pine for something lost or at the end of time. This eschatology places much more value on the present than those which focus on the future, and the latter rightly do “bleed” and “drain” the present, as Bakhtin says.  
\(^{77}\) Josef Pieper expresses a notably different interpretation from Nightingale, saying that Platonic dialogues seldom end with a conclusion. Rather, he points out, conversations typically end with the speaker facing the unforeseeable. He says that the Gorgias, Phaedo, and Republic do not fall into this pattern. Rather, they each end with conclusions
that are myths. See Pieper, *The Platonic Myths*, 21. Vallejo challenge this view when he says myth cannot function on the same level as λόγος, but rather goes much further to penetrate a sphere where there is room only to hope and to confront the risk of believing. See Alvaro Vallejo, “Myth and Rhetoric in the Gorgias,” in *Gorgias-Menon: Selected Papers From the Seventh Symposium Platonicum*, eds. M. Eraler and Luc Brisson (St. Augustine: Academia Verlag, 2007), 142. Also, we ought to consider David White, who, referring to *Meno* 88b, states that confidence without understanding is harmful and foolish, but that confidence with understanding is a virtue. In reference to the *Phaedo*, he says confidence is not lacking understanding (95a), and is “justified only if the destiny of the soul after death is described in relation to mind and the good.” See White, *Myth and Metaphysics in Plato’s Phaedo* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1989), 221. What he implies here, in my estimation, is that real hope—that is, sure and certain expectation—results from a figurative reading that considers the intellectual realm and its τέλος, the Good, which, of course, is the ultimate hope and the ultimate object of thought, and which can be sought for many lifetimes, both literally and figuratively speaking, without the exhaustion of future possibilities.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE PSYCHAGOGY OF THE FINAL MYTH OF THE GORGIAS

4.1 Introductory Remarks

There are many similarities between the Gorgias and Republic, but one of the most notable is the Gorgias’ discussion of the desiring part of the soul (493a-b), which uses terminology quite similar to that used in the Republic to describe the appetitive tendency.¹ It is not only this psychological element of the Gorgias that is congruent with the Republic, but also the Gorgias’ epistemology, in its efforts to distinguish wisdom from rhetoric. Although the Gorgias does not distinguish sophistry from wisdom and philosophy as the Republic does by using the language of Forms, the Gorgias nonetheless does illustrate at length the differences between knackery and skill (or art), and between sophistry and philosophy, distinguishing sophistic rhetoric from skill (or art) as well as from philosophy.² Although these congruities between the two dialogues justify approaching one in terms of the other, the fact that artless versus artful rhetoric is discussed in the Gorgias (504d) is a very good reason on its own to look for psychagogy, or artful philosophical rhetoric according to the Phaedrus and Republic,³ in the Gorgias’ final myth.

4.2 Context: “Mytho-Logos”

Socrates’ conversations with Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles proceed from a debate about the nature of rhetoric to one about the good life itself, including the question of the role of pleasure in such a life. It is probable that by the dialogue’s end, Socrates has neither convinced

¹ I discuss this in detail in my literal reading below (192-193).
² 448c-467b, 482a-b, 484c-488a, 500a-521b
³ See chapter 1, sections 1.113 and 1.24.
all of his interlocutors of his assessment of rhetoric as requiring less knowledge than an art, nor
of his position that the good life is anti-hedonistic. It is clear, however, that all present have been
led by Socrates through philosophical examinations of these matters. Socrates then tells
Callicles to “hear” a “very fine rational account, which you consider a myth, as I think, but I
consider it a rational account; for I shall tell you the things I am going to tell as being true.”
(523a1-3) Socrates frames this story as rational and true, while acknowledging that it can be
considered myth, because of its unverifiability and, hence, resemblance to the mythical genre. It
is thus appropriately called “mytho-logos,” in line with the understanding of myth that I argued
for in chapter 1 and maintained throughout the preceding chapters. Perhaps Socrates’ emphasis
on λόγος here is meant to clue us in to the fact that the verifiable content is really what is most
important, while the mythical details are more of a device serving the former. After all, most of
us do not want to emulate Callicles’ understanding of Socrates, whether or not the dialogue has
succeeded in convincing us of Callicles’ argument’s defeat. In any case, the following is my
explanation of the psychagogical function of this account, beginning with my literal reading.

4.3 Reading the Gorgias Myth of Judgment Literally

The start of Socrates’ account certainly strikes the reader as more of a μῦθος than a
λόγος. He explains a new side of Homer’s account of Zeus, Poseidon, and Pluto dividing rule
among themselves, after usurping Cronos. In the latter’s rule, just as is the case now, Socrates
says, humans who lived justly were to dwell in happiness on the islands of the blessed after
death, while the unjust were to go to Tartarus for punishment. When Zeus had just begun to rule,
Socrates continues, the judges of these men were living judges and the men were judged on the
last day of their lives. Because of this, judgments were made badly. Pluto and those in charge
on the islands of the blessed reported to Zeus that undeserving people were in both places. (523a-c)

So Zeus said:

‘Nay, I,’ . . . ‘shall stop this from coming to pass. For now the judgments are judged badly. For those on trial,’ he said, ‘are tried clothed; for they are tried living. Hence many,’ he said, ‘who have base souls are clothed in fine bodies, ancestry, and wealth, and when the trial takes place, many witnesses go with them to bear witness that they have lived justly; the judges, then, are driven out of their senses by these men, and at the same time they themselves pass judgment clothed as well, with eyes and ears and the whole body, like a screen, covering over their soul. All these things come in their way—both their own clothes and those of the men being tried . . .’ (523c1-d5)

Before finishing Socrates’ story, I should note that he does not tell us where he heard this tale, unlike in the myth of Er. In the True Earth myth of the Phaedo, he remarked that his account is based on what others have said. Here, however, he reports a major change in afterlife judgment as though it is an accepted truth; it is presented as just as ancient and highly regarded as the tales of Homer and the other conveyors of widely accepted truths about the gods.

By presenting Zeus’ words directly, Plato brings an important detail of this story one step closer to the reader. Our perspective of the story suddenly becomes more intimate, and it is possible that this shift has an effect on the spirited aspect of the soul, especially for those who are prone to being moved by the words of Zeus, whom they honor and are pious toward.

Socrates describes Zeus’ remedy for the problem:

‘One must try them naked, without all these things; for they must be tried when they are dead. And he who decides the trial must be naked, dead, and must with his soul itself contemplate the soul itself of each man immediately upon his death, bereft of all kinsfolk and having left all that adornment behind on earth, so that the trial may be just.’ (523e1-6)

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4 All translations from the Greek are those of James H. Nichols, Jr., unless otherwise noted, and all references to the Greek are to Burnet’s Oxford edition.

5 E. R. Dodds, noticing that no named source is given for the Gorgias’ closing myth, the myth of the water carriers, or the Phaedo myth, speculates that the source for all three is the same and that this is a device for making Socrates not responsible for opinions he did not hold. See Dodds, Plato: Gorgias, 373. I agree that the source for all three is the same: Plato, who is pulling from other sources, as I have been discussing. As to whether the historical Socrates held the views presented in the myths, I have no comment.
The reader who views the mythology of Homer, Hesiod and others as authoritative and trustworthy is presented now with the possibility that there is an unfamiliar account of the gods’ afterlife judgment of mortals. This account challenges the notion that mainstream Greek status symbols, and any physical adornment for that matter—including good looks—will aid one’s afterlife judgment the way it would aid one’s judgment if one were on trial in Athens. One may be totally naked—down to one’s soul—to be judged while totally exposed and vulnerable.

Another detail Socrates includes here is that, before Zeus’ reforms, people had foreknowledge of their death and were able to prepare for judgment, but with Prometheus’ help, Zeus changes this so that we cannot know when our time has come. (523d-e) Everyone in Plato’s audience knows that they do not know when their end will come, and by highlighting this truth in the context of such a stark, penetrating afterlife judgment, the reader’s feeling of vulnerability, and possibly even their fear of death, is heightened.

The portrayal of mortals being stripped of their clothes and of all adornments clearly engages the lower soul parts, in the compelling nature of this imagery. Insofar as this account is an unfamiliar addition to a familiar, important story, Socrates’ tale draws listeners in—even if they are skeptical of its veracity. The appetitive soul in particular is engaged by the portrayal of nudity, though just a few lines after describing the judged and judges stripping off their clothes, Plato includes the remark about bare souls judging bare souls—which likely puts an end to any eroticism that might pertain to the initial description of nudity.

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6 Dodds, 373, correctly thinks that the references to Homer are to “give an air of orthodoxy” to a fairly unorthodox story.
7 W. K. C. Guthrie, following Dodds, thinks that the transition to Zeus’ way of judging is Plato’s addition to this story. See Guthrie, A History of Greek Philosophy, vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 306.
For those skeptical that Plato is appealing to the lower soul parts in a way that is similar to its portrayal in the *Republic*, here in the *Gorgias*, Socrates discusses the desiring part of the soul as one that is prone to being persuaded and that changes frequently (493a). Also, he says quoting an unnamed Sicilian or Italian, this part is intemperate and insatiable (493b). As the appetitive soul in the *Republic*, this part is described in the *Gorgias* in terms of its capacity for desires (ἐπιθυμία, 493b1). It is also denoted as thoughtless (ἀνοητος, 493a7). In chapter 1, I explained that the appetitive soul in the *Republic* is labeled as both desiring (ἐπιθυμητικός) and irrational (ἄλογοςτον), which is quite similar to the way in which the *Gorgias* describes this desiring part. It seems quite plausible then, that in the latter Plato has conceived of the appetitive aspect of the soul, or something along similar lines. As in my explanations of the previous two myths, however, I will mostly refer to the appetitive and spirited aspects of the soul together as the lower soul, which, as I explained in chapter 1, shares the characteristic of being easily persuaded by imagery.⁸ Although it is not clear whether the *Gorgias* describes the two lower soul parts in this manner or whether the tripartite soul is even present in the *Gorgias*, the fact remains that our image-loving self, as described in the *Republic*, is engaged by this myth. All I am contending here with these references to the desiring soul earlier in the *Gorgias* is that elements, or at least hints, of the tripartite soul are at play in the dialogue. I will show throughout this

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⁸ Seth Benardete argues that Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles represent the soul structure of the *Republic*, with Gorgias representing rationality, Polus spiritedness, and Callicles appetite. See Benardete, *The Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy: Plato’s Gorgias and Phaedrus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 91. This is a worthwhile argument to consider, but one problem I discern right away is that the argument can be made that Polus is less rational than Callicles, which is why Socrates turns to the latter for the end of the dialogue and addresses the closing myth mainly to him. Benardete and I are not the only ones who discern the psychology of the *Republic* at play in the *Gorgias*. Charles Kahn, for instance, defends the claim that the *Gorgias* illustrates and confirms the psychological theory of the *Republic*. See Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 145. Also Mark McPherran argues that the *Gorgias* myth makes reference to a moral psychology that does not parallel the intellectualism of earlier dialogues. See McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates* (University Park, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 268.
chapter that it is plausible to see the tripartite soul involved in significant ways in the *Gorgias*

myth.

As Socrates continues to portray the judgment, it only becomes more fear-inducing. The souls to be judged arrive at a fork in the road and, after they are judged, they will only go to one of two places: the Islands of the Blessed or Tartarus. (524a) If one’s case is clear-cut, one judge (either Rhadamanthus or Aeacus) will decide which road one takes. If there is some grey area and the other judges are undecided, Minos will decide which road that soul will take. (524a) Even if one is not clearly a just or unjust soul, one’s fate will conform either to the fate of the just or of the unjust. In the end, it is all black and white.  

After explaining these parts of his account, Socrates addresses Callicles directly and tells him that he believes (πιστεύω, 524a8) this to be true. We now have a clearly stated cognitive outcome for the account: belief (πίστις). Any reader with lingering sympathies for Callicles’ position is invited to believe in the possibility that, in the end, they will be judged for their transgressions and may be headed for Tartarus. At this point, however, all such a reader has as evidence is something Socrates said he heard and believed. Although the mythology contains elements commonly accepted as true and Socrates is a revered authority figure to most of Plato’s audience, this account still lacks elements that make it a λόγος.

This fact immediately begins to change when Socrates says that “from these speeches I calculate (λογίζομαι, b1) that something of this sort follows” (524b1-2). What the account implies according to Socrates is that death is the separation of soul and body, and just as the body bears the markings it acquired while the person was alive, so does the soul. Socrates then

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9 Dodds, 374-375, says that, since the names of the judges are traditional, it is unlikely that Plato is using exclusively Orphic sources. Dodds adds that Plato is the only one who had a meadow as the place of souls’ judgment. Homer, for instance, describes judgment happening at a set of gates, not a meadow. (Od. 11.650-655)
elaborates on many physical features of corpses, including those with long hair, scars from whippings or other wounds, and broken limbs. (524c) This imagery, besides setting up the analogy to the soul in clear terms, engages the appetitive aspect’s desire for the macabre.

Socrates continues by explaining that, when one is judged by being stripped down to one’s soul, all of the distortions it endured are visible to the judges, just as the aforementioned scars and abnormalities are visible on a corpse. To describe this phenomenon, Socrates uses a great king or potentate’s judgment as an example. (524d-e) This soul’s distortions include its having “been severely whipped . . . from false oaths and injustice” (524e5-525a1). Also, the soul will appear “crooked from lying and boasting, and there is nothing straight on account of [its] having been reared without truth” (525a2-3). Finally, it will be “full of asymmetry and ugliness from arrogant power, luxury, wanton insolen
cce, and incontinence of actions” (525a4-6). All of these features are impressed upon his soul by his actions in life. (525a) Although the reader, and Callicles, clearly both know where this soul is going, Socrates nevertheless says that, when the judge sees it, “he sends it away dishonorably, straight to the prison, having come to which it is going to endure fitting sufferings” (525a6-7).

Socrates clearly presents an argument from analogy here, and in so doing, shows us why his account is no mere tale. The literal reader may be persuaded by this argument simply on intuitive grounds: namely that, if the body bears the scars and sufferings of life, it makes sense to consider seriously the possibility that the soul does too, in its own proper way.\(^\text{10}\) However, if the reader demands evidence for such things happening to the soul as a result of unjust actions, such evidence is not present here. Rather, one must look to a metaphorical reading, and for a full

\(^{10}\) Plato draws a similar comparison at *Phaedo* 80c-d: as the dead body does not decay immediately, even more so does the soul not dissolve after the body’s death.

Dodds, 379, explains that here Plato gives a new turn to the old idea that ghosts bear the scars of their lives’ sufferings (cf. *Od*. 11).
answer, possibly even to the *Republic*’s portrayal of the soul’s maiming and distortion—the punishment it immediately endures from injustice (explained in chapter 1). Understanding the soul’s scars and distortions as representing the sort of disharmony that results from injustice involves figurative reasoning, and so, since this is a line of thinking only possible for such a reader, I will explain it further in the next section.

Our literal reading of this account, however, is not yet finished. Socrates continues by explaining the results of the judgment to Callicles. Those who are sent to Tartarus are either rehabilitated by their sufferings or, if incurable, serve as an example to those who can be cured.\(^\text{11}\)

(525b) The unjust, then, fall into two categories: curable and incurable. For the former, the only possible path toward improvement is to endure punishments in Hades, one of which includes seeing the incurable suffer “the greatest, most painful, and most fearful sufferings for all time, simply hung up there in the prison in Hades as examples” (525c5-7). The only fate then, for the incurable, is the very worst fate possible: damnation to the most horrible torments. The image of incurables “hung up” is certainly fear-inducing on our spirited self, as well as engaging to the image-loving lower soul parts. Although there is no explanation of what becomes of the curable souls after their improvement, there is one of what lies ahead for the incurable: everlasting punishment. Socrates refers to Homer for support here, since “he has represented those who pay retribution for all time in Hades” (525d7-e1). The fact that Socrates alludes to Homer for support, and specifically mentions the everlasting nature of the worst punishments, probably

\(^{11}\) Dodds, 375, says that this “doctrine of purgatory” seems to be Pythagorean. Mary Margaret MacKenzie insightfully explains that this is a “bipartite penology,” in that it combines reform and deterrence. Furthermore, she claims, it is the magnitude of one’s offense that determines incurability here rather than “insusceptibility to reform.” See MacKenzie, *Plato on Punishment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 186, 187. MacKenzie’s hypothesis about what determines incurability bears on discussions about whether or not any of the interlocutors of the dialogue represent an incurable soul. If one follows MacKenzie, none of them fit this description since they have not committed great crimes, as far as we know. This contrasts with the claims of those who might argue that Polus or Callicles are incurable because of their admiration for tyrants.
implies that the incurable souls will suffer forever, with no hope of respite or escape. Also, the authority of Homer further supports the likelihood of Socrates’ account in the mind of the reader, who is now more likely to be persuaded to believe Socrates.

Who are the incurables? They are those who have committed the worst injustices (525c), tyrants such as Archelaus (525d), whom Polus seems to admire (479a). Socrates adds, “I think the majority of these examples, indeed, have come into being from tyrants, kings, potentates, and those who engage in the affairs of the cities” (525d2-5). Homer bears witness to this in portraying those who suffer for eternity as “kings and potentates—Tantalus, Sisyphus, and Tityus” (525d7, e1-2). Furthermore, “no one has represented Thersites, or anyone else who was a base private man, as held fast by great retributions on the grounds of being incurable” (525e2-4). Not just Homer, but the entire Greek literary tradition nails down this aspect of Socrates’ account, adding great persuasive force to it. Socrates explains that the reason why such powerful men become the worst kind of soul is that “these through having a free hand make the greatest and most impious errors” (525d5-6). It is the ability to live above the law—to elude prosecution—that causes many souls to become incurable. The ability to avoid legal constraints to the pursuit of one’s desires is something Callicles praised as manly (491e-492c), but that is now presented here by Socrates as a serious evil, resulting in the complete opposite of passing pleasure: everlasting pain.

12 Dodds, 381, expresses disdain for the handicap of the powerful here and, in part because of his consternation at this detail, agrees with Friedländer that reincarnation is implied. Dodds thinks that because of the unfairness of this handicap, some balancing in future lives is needed. Dodds also testifies that the doctrines of reincarnation and purgatory are both Orphic and explains that there cannot be a clear distinction between this and Pythagoreanism with regard to these matters. See Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 149. Michael Inwood also thinks potentates are treated unfairly in this myth. Offering a plausible explanation for the unfairness, he points out that the treatment of kings here invites a perspective shift by the audience, from their usual view that kings are better. See Inwood, “Plato’s Eschatological Myths,” 29-30. I agree with Inwood about the perspective shift which encourages readers to consider seriously the possibility that worldly status really means very little in the end and that a status of power can actually become a handicap in the trial that really matters. The main reason I see for postulating reincarnation is so that the notion of curability makes sense.
Since the lack of restraint that goes along with great power is such a potent temptation, Socrates says that those who are free to do injustice, but who live justly nonetheless, are highly deserving of honor, since this is very difficult to do. (526a) Socrates says that a few such people have lived, like Aristides for example, who “even became altogether well spoken of among the other Greeks as well” (526b1-2). According to Socrates, not only he, but many people across the Greek world bestow honor on the powerful who are also just. This appeal to honor entices the spirited aspects of the souls of Plato’s readers—especially those who may think that there is no earthly reward for those who use their power justly.

Socrates then explains the afterlife rewards for the just, among whom there are a few potentates like Aristides, but whose ranks are mostly philosophers who have minded their own business. Rhadamanthus admires them, sending them to the islands of the blessed, as does Aeacus with Minos overseeing.13 (526c) Furthermore, each of the judges holds a staff, and Minos alone holds “the golden scepter, as Homer’s Odysseus says he saw him” (526c7-d1). Here, Plato appeals to the spirited soul’s love of honor again, with the image of Minos and his golden scepter, as well as other judges with their staffs. Also, with these details Plato nails down another aspect of his account with the authority of Homer: the judgment of the just.

Socrates then concludes with an exhortation to Callicles, explaining that he is persuaded by this account, and wants to present a healthy soul to the judges, for it is “this contest” that is the one that concerns him most, rather than “all the contests here” (526e3-4). By the latter, he seems to imply the many trials that typically occupy our earthly lives, as opposed to the one trial that matters most: the one for afterlife rewards. Socrates says that he is “bidding farewell . . . to

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13 Radcliffe Edmonds explains that Aeacus, according to Pindar (Isthmian, 8.21), settled disputes among the gods. According to later tradition, he is Hades’ doorkeeper. See Edmonds, Myths of the Underworld Journey, 182. Edmonds, 183, adds, in agreement with my claim, that the way Plato’s ideas fit into the framework of Greek culture makes them more persuasive, “even as he engages in shifting their values and ideals.”
the many honors that come from the many human beings” (526d4-5), in exchange for this most important trial. After having appealed to the readers’ and Callicles’ love of honor throughout the account, Socrates now urges his audience to concern itself with different honors—one could even say that he wants us to transform or redirect our love of honor. He appeals to the honor-loving soul one last time, saying:

When you come to that judge, the son of Aegina, and when that one seizes hold of you and brings you in, you will be gaping and dizzy there no less than I here, and perhaps someone will dishonorably strike you a crack on the jaw and completely trample you in the mud (526e6-527a4).

Here, Socrates takes Callicles’ warnings about the consequences Socrates will face for his actions (508d-e) and turns them around on Callicles, except now with Callicles’ soul facing a possible eternity of dishonors rather than just the relatively short duration of earthly consequences that Socrates might face. Just as in the previously discussed eschatological myths, afterlife consequences are of a much more serious order than those of this life. The authority of those such as Homer, which appeals to the rational soul, as well as multiple appeals to honor and the spirited soul, accompanied by the engagement of the image-loving soul with descriptions like the one just above, all come together to persuade the reader to believe in this account and thus not to rely on his perception of what appears to be the contest of most importance in his life, but rather to discern, following Socrates, the likely account of the one true contest.

Though it is clear that belief in this rational account is Socrates’, and therefore Plato’s, goal, the question remains: How does this account persuade the reader to the sort of belief described in the Allegory of the Cave? Also, the question remains of whether or not this account constitutes a likely account like those of the Republic and Phaedo. I will address the former first and then the latter.
The objects of πίστις are the proximate causes of the images or shadows in the cave. The former, then, are more real than the latter, although the objects of πίστις still are in the realm of the physical world and not the intelligible. Those at the level of πίστις have a more reliable grasp on the physical world than those who merely conjecture. Socrates’ account of afterlife punishments and rewards in the Gorgias, like the previous two eschatological myths discussed, uses examples of consequences for misdeeds oriented towards the physical (like being hung up on a rack of some sort) to persuade his audience that there very well may be consequences for actions beyond those ramifications that are immediately apparent, that is, those one may suffer or get away with in life. In this way, then, the account encourages listeners to consider their local justice system as just an immediate, even superficial system of rewards and punishments, like the shadow games in the cave, which is only a reflection of a more real, consistent system of justice that exposes all lies and misdeeds and that has the capability of punishing for eternity.  

14 The literal reader need not make the connection between the symbolism of the Line and Cave and the Gorgias myth, but he is brought to see that there is another layer of justice, another legal system, holding one accountable, that is not susceptible to the whimsical displays of adornments and rhetoric that regularly fool the judges in one’s present legal system. If Plato’s audience believes

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14 Several scholars discern the likelihood that Plato is criticizing the Athenian legal system here and explaining a more just version. See Edmonds, 169, for instance, and Terence Irwin, Plato. Gorgias (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 243. Christopher Rowe explains that Callicles will not grasp the suggestion that there is a new and better legal system available to Athenians and that, therefore, there is a subtext that makes the myth not just about the afterlife but this life. See Rowe, “The Status of the Myth in the Gorgias, or: Taking Plato Seriously,” in Plato and Myth, ed. Catherine Collobert, Pierre Destrée, and Francisco Gonzalez (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 190-191. Sedley makes this claim, saying that Cronus’ system did not aim at soul’s improvement because it shared defects of Athens. Sedley then argues for parallels between Socratic cross examination and Zeus’ hearings. He says that Socrates’ interrogation does what the Athenian judicial system could not do: identify bad souls and start curing them. See Sedley, “Myth, Punishment, and Politics in the Gorgias,” 56-58. Voegelin says, “The transfer of authority from Athens to Plato is the climax of the Gorgias.” He explains that Callicles is the representative of Athenian democracy and is clearly disordered. Voegelin adds, “Here at last the soul is free to pass through the desired catharsis that was prevented in earthly existence by the obstacle of the body.” See Voegelin, Plato, 39, 42. Matthias Vorwerk explains that the reform of final judgment under Zeus implies a criticism of the Athenian legal system. See Vorwerk, “Der Arzt, der Koch und die Kinder. Rhetorik und Philosophie im Wettstreit,” in Gorgias-Menon: Selected Papers From the Seventh Symposium Platonicum, ed. M. Erler and Luc Brisson (St. Augustine: Academia Verlag, 2007): 301.
in this possibility—nay likelihood—, then that belief is a manifestation of the πίστις described in
the Line and Cave, because that soul now grasps a conception of justice that is more reliable and
consistent and that is only exposed by discerning the justice that may lie beyond that which is
immediately apparent.

Why is this account of afterlife rewards and punishments a likely account (εἰκὼς λόγος)?
Although its details may not hold up to rational scrutiny, like the concept of an immaterial soul
bearing physical scars and distortions, its general truth is supported by the authoritative
testimony of the Greek literary tradition. Namely, the very notion that there is an afterlife
where souls are judged is supported by Homer and others. More importantly, because of the
preceding dialogue, there is rational support for the idea that doing injustice is worse than
suffering it. Socrates uses the image of a suffering, ailing soul to illustrate the notion that doing
injustice is its own punishment (479a-b is but one instance). Here, in this literal reading of the
myth, one can begin to grasp the ways in which these ailments of the soul can extend into one’s
afterlife, even if the mythical details cannot all be taken as literally true. If one takes a step back
from specific details and examines the general picture the myth conveys, one can see, for
instance, that the suffering one inflicts on one’s soul can affect one’s post-mortem state in a way
that has eternal, irreversible consequences. What does seem to be lacking for our likely account,
however, is a proof for the immortality of the soul. For this reason, the Gorgias’ likely account
seems lacking in argumentative strength compared to those of the Phaedo and Republic. One
could object here, saying that presenting the afterlife in terms of “final destinations” is more

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15 I acknowledge that there may be some uncertainty about whether or not the notion of an immaterial soul is even
present in this myth, but to objectors, I say that if only the immaterial is immortal and immortality is implied, then
the soul discussed in the myth must then be immaterial.

Alvaro Vallejo also argues that the Gorgias myth is a likely account in which the combination of probability and
uncertainty adds force to persuasion. See Vallejo, “Myth and Rhetoric in the Gorgias,” 142.

16 Annas echoes the sentiment that the Gorgias’ argument for the value of justice is lacking in strength compared to
those of the Phaedo and Republic. See Annas, “Plato’s Myths of Judgment,” 125.
forceful as an argument against the sophists, but I maintain that a proof for the immortality of the soul would nonetheless help.

The literal reader then does not get a full justification for the argument presented to him. Although a literal interpretation can persuade one to consider believing in the account’s truths, such an interpretation does not have all of the support of Plato’s arguments—unlike a metaphorical reading.

Nonetheless, the belief Socrates intends to inspire with this myth is not one that results from mere persuasion, or persuasion without knowledge (454e-455a), but rather, “didactic persuasion about the just and the unjust.” (455a1-2) We will now begin to consider the way in which a figurative reading may inspire this sort of belief by leading the reader toward thought (διάνοια): the realm of knowledge.

4.4 Interpreting the Gorgias Myth Metaphorically

During his conversation with Polus, Socrates explains that one who suffers justice is benefited in his soul (477a), and the worst souls are those who have done injustice but are not released from it through purgative just punishments (478e), like Archelaus and other tyrants and rhetors, whose souls are sick the way a body is when one ignores a physical ailment (479a-b). The best option, of course, is not even to do wrong in the first place and, therefore, not to need release through suffering. (478d-e) The comparison of a soul suffering from injustice to a body suffering from physical maladies has its roots in Socrates’ argument with Polus and becomes a major theme again in the afterlife myth, which is directed mainly to Callicles. In the myth, Socrates focuses on violent wounds, like whips and blows (524c) that result from “false oaths and injustice” (524e5-525a1).
Additionally, according to the myth, the entire soul can become “crooked from lying and boasting” (525a2-3), as well as asymmetrical and ugly from “arrogant power, luxury, wanton insolence and incontinence of actions.” (525a4-5) This concept has its roots earlier in the dialogue as well, when Socrates explains justice and moderation as the harmonious arrangement and ordering of the soul (504a-d). There, this arrangement is also compared to the ordering of the body—to its general health and strength. (504b) This conception of justice as the harmonious ordering of the soul is strikingly similar to that of the Republic (see chapter 1). Both in the Republic and here in the Gorgias, the disorder one inflicts on one’s soul by doing vicious things is an immediate punishment for such vice. Such disharmony needs to be corrected, and, if it is not, it only grows worse according to both dialogues.

Although this theme emerges from a literal reading of the Gorgias myth of judgment, it strikes the reader with more immediacy and force from a figurative reading. This is because rather than imagining one’s soul undergoing dishonorable punishments after one’s death, one who understands this myth figuratively imagines one’s soul stripped bare now, bearing all the wounds one has inflicted upon it: the immoderate habits one has developed, with which one struggles every day, or the unfair treatment of others that one bears each day as an ongoing cycle of vengeance that continuously grips the soul with anger and fear. These “wounds” are brought

\[17\] The following are some notable figurative interpretations of the myth, including some whom I have identified as actively opposed to a literal reading: Edmonds, 166, interprets metaphorically, saying the myth is about the benefits of justice here and now. Highlighting the immediacy of a symbolic reading, Ferrari explains that Socrates’ practice strips one of the body while one is still in it. See G. R. F. Ferrari, “The Freedom of Platonic Myth,” in Plato and Myth, ed. Collobert, Destrée, and Gonzalez (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 69. Grosso proposes a figurative reading of this myth, saying that the “other worldly judgment is in fact an exposure of the soul’s this-worldly existence.” See Grosso, “Death and the Myth of the True Earth in Plato’s Phaedo,” 75. Guthrie, 307, says, “the truth lies not in a literal interpretation of the details of the story, but in the lesson it conveys, that the Socratic ethic is not only morally superior to the Calliclean but leads in the end to greater happiness for the individual.” Though I agree with Guthrie about the value of a figurative interpretation here, I clearly do not agree that this myth does not convey important truths through a literal interpretation. Explaining Levinas’ interpretation of this myth, Tanja Stähler says that it “symbolizes radical openness to the Other, an encounter from soul to soul, a proximity that gets under the skin.” She adds that this myth represents the other approaching me in an immediate way, with external attributes stripped, including the body. See Stähler, “Getting Under the Skin: Platonic Myths in Levinas,” 73. Against a literal
to view with intense clarity when one “strips” away or looks past the worldly adornments that typically direct attention away from psychic self-harm: a good-looking body, impressive material possessions, and notable societal status.

We may, then, understand the fork in the road and the two paths (524a) metaphorically as well.18 Every day, when we choose to give in to an immoderate habit or to continue a cycle of vengeance, we lead ourselves down a path of further suffering and purgation, which has the potential to awaken us to our wrongdoing—and cure us—or simply worsen our disharmony, making us more and more incurable. Thus, a habit is very much like a road that comes to a fork periodically, where it can be subjected to judgment and where its course can be either altered or continued. In light of this and the aforementioned intensive focus on our soul, we can see how very good it would be for us to choose virtuous habits rather than vicious ones. In our typical everyday lives, we are likely to be distracted by various aspects of our physical existence, to continue bad habits, and to inflict more psychic self-harm. A separation of soul and body; of

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18 Regarding the two paths or roads, Annas, 123, notices that there are no roads leading back from the underworld, and interprets this detail as an indication that once justice is done, it stays done.
soul from everyday distractions—a “death” of sorts—is needed, in order to expose ourselves to ourselves; to make us vulnerable to the most incisive judgment possible, self-judgment, and to alter course. One possible objection to my reading is that the notion of habit is not at play in the Gorgias, but it is, as it is at least implied in Socrates’ conversation with Polus when the former uses the sickness of the body as an analogy for vice. Socrates says about one who does injustice, that he ought “willingly go to that place where he will pay the just penalty as quickly as possible, to the judge as to the doctor, hurrying lest the disease of injustice, become chronic, should make his soul fester with sores underneath and be incurable.” (480a7-b2) The notion that the soul can fester from injustice clearly implies that habitual vice is horribly damaging for the soul.

By inviting us to view our “naked” souls, this afterlife myth furthers the argument earlier in the dialogue that vice is its own punishment and doing injustice, therefore, worse than suffering it. The figurative reading above invites us to confront ourselves now, to see beyond the shadow-play of our material lives and discern a higher truth: the reality that we have an existence beyond the superficialities of our physicality and that we may be harming ourselves in ways that are not immediately apparent. The figurative reading, then, leads us to true opinion, or belief, about ourselves, but does it lead to thought (διάνοια)?

As in the previous two chapters, I will now consider whether or not my metaphorical reading of the Gorgias myth leads the reader to consider Forms. In the Phaedo myth, as I explained in the last chapter, the places of indescribable beauty where the best souls go, represent the intellectual realm “outside the cave”: one of freedom and hope, where one thinks about Forms. However, in that dialogue, Forms were discussed explicitly and at length, and so the association of the realm beyond the True Earth with the intellectual one followed organically.

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19 Dodds points out the possibly Empedoclean influence on this concept, quoting fragment 126: “Nature clothes the soul in the ‘alien tunic of flesh’”. See Dodds, Plato: Gorgias, 378.
from the dialogue. In the *Gorgias*, however, although justice and other virtues are treated at
length, Forms are not, and so associating the Islands of the Blessed (524a) with the intellectual
realm is not something I think Plato means for us to do. It is possible that the *Gorgias* afterlife
myth incites us to learn about the Forms of Beauty and Justice by thinking about the beauty and
justice of the ordered versus disordered soul, but, once again, since this dialogue does not
explicitly treat Forms, I would rather not venture this hypothesis. The *Gorgias* myth nonetheless
does lead us to a more philosophical understanding of ourselves, as I have explained above. In
this way, we can begin to see how looking beyond the apparent leads to happiness and freedom.

In our being led to πίστις, then, we may also continue the philosophical pursuit of self-
understanding and proceed to διάνοια.20

20 Olympiodorus presents an alternative way in which this myth provokes thought. He argues that Cronos represents
pure Intellect, based not only on the etymology of his name, but on the fact that the poets say he swallowed his
children and vomited them up, similar to the way in which Intellect turns back on itself and is both seeker and
sought. Since there is nothing without order or innovation in Intellect, he says, he is described as old and slow to
change. (47.3) Furthermore, he relates Europe to the earthly and Asia to the heavenly, interpreting the two in
relation to the monad and the dyad. (49.2) If Olympiodorus is correct about Plato’s intentions here, then this myth
does indeed lead us to consider the realm of Forms, thus leading us to thought. However, fully defending this
Neoplatonic reading here would take us too far afield.

Another possible metaphorical reading involves understanding the reign of Zeus as a reformation of the Athenian
justice system, as I have already mentioned. (See fn.14 for a list of scholars who argue for this view.) Edmonds says,
“Just as souls under the new regime cannot prepare an elaborate defense speech, so Socrates repeatedly prohibits his
interlocutors from making the long oratorical speeches that would be appropriate in a lawcourt.” (170) In this way,
then, the legal reforms suggested by the myth draw support from the truths exposed by the previous Socratic cross-
examinations of the dialogue.

Alessandra Fussi offers yet another possible metaphorical reading of this myth, worth commenting on here. She
says “The myth suggests that the recognition of our powerlessness with respect to death, and the admission that
death is beyond our control, opens us up to the truth because it removes the fundamental emotional obstacle to truth:
our denial of the unexpected.” See Fussi, “The Myth of the Last Judgment in the ‘Gorgias’,” *The Review of
Metaphysics* 54 (2001): 535. She explains that Socrates’ interlocutors are still in the age of Cronos, where everyone
does all they can do to deny truth. (535-536) Those in this age are “full of themselves,” in that nothing surprises or
confuses them—they can “do everything” and “answer all questions.” (538) Fussi explains that for those in the age
of Zeus, the capacity to think goes together with awareness. One loses omnipotence but gains power. (539) In the
age of Zeus, “we know that we do not know,” and are thus aware of our limitations. In this way, Plato portrays a
revolution in human self-understanding. (542) Along the lines of what I suggested earlier, Fussi says that our social
mask—like kingship—can be a sort of “second skin,” serving as an occlusion to the truth of our identity. (547)
Fussi’s interpretation of this myth encourages a shift to a more Socratic perspective—one in which we are aware of
our ignorance—is highly plausible given what we know about Socratic wisdom from the *Apology*. Furthermore, this
awareness of our ignorance can be seen as a necessary aspect of turning around the whole soul toward the entrance
of the cave; toward an intricate, not altogether clear, undiscovered realm. Once we are in that realm, and once
everything before us is clear, one may say that we are even more aware of our own ignorance, while also being
4.5 The Turn Back In to the Cave

As do the previous two myths of judgment I have treated, the *Gorgias* myth provides a roadmap of sorts for potential psychagogues. Observing the ways in which the myth may turn the souls of those who tend toward imagery and conjecture and perhaps those who have already attained firm belief or trust in the basic truths of the myth, we potential psychagogues learn how to do the same for others.

One feature we witness, which I have not yet discussed, is the shame affecting Callicles’ spirited aspect of the soul. Edmonds explains that Socrates illustrates different modes of ἐλεγχός in the myth, and Edmonds also traces the Greek roots of ἐλεγχός to shaming.\(^{31}\) Expanding his symbolic reading, Edmonds says “Plato presents in graphic form the contradictions exposed by the Socratic *elenchus* as the scars and wounds that mar the soul which is laid bare to Aiakos or Rhadamanthys.”\(^{32}\) Since the exposure of these scars serves a curative function according to the myth, ἐλεγχός is not totally negative—it is potentially rehabilitative and, therefore, has a role to play in effective psychagogy.\(^{33}\) Edmonds explains that ἐλεγχός is a “correction or restraint of disordered elements,”\(^{34}\) which the previous dialogue supports. Modern educators tend to associate shaming as an outdated element of pedagogy, and so the question comes to mind of whether or not the corrective role of shame that Plato portrays still has relevance today. I think it does, if one considers Plato’s audience, and especially his characters, who are all mature adults with many opinions that are deeply-rooted and also cemented with pride. For such an audience, Plato shows us, a measured dose of shame can play a key role in loosening firm biases, at least to

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\(^{31}\) See Edmonds, 168.

\(^{32}\) Edmonds, 173.

\(^{33}\) Edmonds, 174, points out the fact that the myth teaches us something about whether ἐλεγχός is only negative or if it is also curative.

\(^{34}\) Ibid., 174.
the extent that one’s interlocutor will consider and enter into dialogue about views opposed to one’s own.\textsuperscript{35}

4.6 The \textit{Gorgias} Myth As Good Poetry and Good Writing

There are two remaining questions to consider about this myth of judgment, the first being whether or not it fulfills Plato’s criteria for good poetry in the \textit{Republic}.\textsuperscript{36} It encourages moderation in its tempering of imagery that excites the lower aspects of the soul, which fulfills one criterion from \textit{Republic} 3, as well as one from book 10, which specifies that bad poetry suppresses rationality and draws out spiritedness. Also, this myth certainly supports the happiness of the just alongside the unhappiness of the unjust, fulfilling another criterion from book 3. Additionally, it does defend itself philosophically, since its themes are all supported with argumentation from the dialogue—this fulfills another important criterion from book 10. Finally, the myth portrays the gods as good, fulfilling the main criterion from \textit{Republic} 2, except that the \textit{Gorgias} myth portrays Cronos as imperfect, since it was his rule that led to unjust judgments, swayed by physical appearances, which needed to be reformed by Zeus in order to be more just. If one read \textit{Republic} 2 in isolation and considered this detail of the myth in isolation as well, it would seem as though an important criterion was broken. Because of \textit{Republic} 10, however, where we learn that poetry must be able to defend itself, I believe we are to use the built-in defense of philosophical poetry to frame properly details such as Cronos’ imperfection, in the following way: According to this myth, the specific nature of judgment under Cronos led

\textsuperscript{35} Fussi, 548, points out, however, that, though shame usually reveals what is truly within, this is not the case for Socrates’ interlocutors, who perceive any attempt to see their woundedness as a threat and therefore respond by obscuring the truth further.

\textsuperscript{36} For a more detailed treatment of the \textit{Republic}’s criteria for good poetry, please see the very beginning of chapter 2. Also, I realize I did not devote a separate section to this issue and the issue of writing in the previous chapters. This is because I treated these issues throughout the course of my investigation in those chapters.
to a set of much-needed reforms. It is possible, then, that, in a literal understanding of this myth, the error of Cronos was needed in order to lead to the justice of Zeus. In this way, Cronos’ imperfection was actually a good thing. In a figurative reading, one need not understand Cronos’ system of judgment as an error of a god at all. Rather, as I explained, several scholars have argued that this unjust judgment is meant to represent the Athenian legal system. Given this defense of the myth, which is built into it in the sense that this defense is available to anyone reading the myth closely in the context of its dialogue, the Gorgias myth of judgment does fulfill Plato’s criteria for good poetry.

From this discussion of the myth’s ability to defend itself follows the second question: Is the Gorgias myth an example of good writing, given Plato’s criteria in the Phaedrus? Clearly, the myth fulfills the criterion of good writing being able to defend itself, which is the second criterion from the Phaedrus. It is also probable that the Gorgias myth of the afterlife was composed with knowledge of the truth, thus fulfilling the first important criterion. Finally, could one make the argument that the Gorgias’ myth is almost worthless? In the sense that this myth on its own is philosophically insignificant without its dialogical context and even with this context is relatively insignificant if one does not pursue further the lines of investigation it incites, one plausibly may say that the Gorgias myth of the afterlife is indeed worthless in a way. Therefore, this myth fulfills Plato’s own criteria for good writing.

4.7 Conclusion

As in the cases of the previous two afterlife myths, all of the details engaging the three aspects of the soul in the literal reading also do so when one reads the myth figuratively. In this

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37 For a detailed explanation of the Phaedrus’ discussion about writing, please see chapter 1 (section 1.113: What is Platonic Psychagogy?)
way, both readings attempt to turn the reader’s soul from conjecture to true opinion about the
good life not only by engaging the rational soul, but the spirited and appetitive soul as well. As I
explained in the introductory chapter, these lower soul parts respond to imagery—they do not
calculate like reason (though they may calculate with the aid of reason). Therefore, to urge them
to follow reason, imagery is needed to coax them down the right path. The various appeals to
these soul parts throughout the *Gorgias* myth draw them out or awaken them, but do not gratify
them excessively, as I explained when considering the myth’s portrayal of nudity. As images,
every detail that engages the lower aspects of the soul is less than true in that it is a distortion of
reality; however, since all of these partial truths play roles in turning the whole soul toward
greater truth, they are integral parts of the myth’s psychagogy, which, as we have seen three
times now, leads the soul toward truth incrementally (up the Line/out of the cave) by way of
partial truths that engages the soul’s entire tripartite structure.\(^{38}\)

Not only as the closing of the *Gorgias*, but as its final attempt to convert the souls of its
audience to the philosophical life, the eschatological myth is the consummation of the dialogue.\(^{39}\)
As I have explained, it recapitulates and also uses the arguments of the dialogue in its
psychagogical efforts. This consummation involves not only emotions like fear and shame, but
also the love of honor, as well as feelings of sympathy for Socrates, who we know will suffer
terrible punishments on earth for his intellectual life. We are reminded of this in Socrates’
concluding remarks, where he reaffirms his decision to continue practicing philosophy (526d-e)

\(^{38}\) Vorwerk, “Der Arzt, der Koch, und die Kinder,” 301, says it is protreptical, leading one to heed the importance of
philosophy for the whole soul, unlike rhetoric at its base.

\(^{39}\) Andrea Tschemplik says the final myth of the *Gorgias* is the “head” of the dialogue in that it is there that Socrates
“responds to many of Callicles’ condemnations of the philosophical life.” The myth is Callicles’ final punishment.
and turns Callicles’ warnings around toward him (527a). The confluence of emotions in this myth is notable, then, and contributes to its consummatory, psychagogic function.40

40 Although I reserve my main comparison of the three afterlife myths for the concluding chapter, I would like to close here by briefly considering the three alongside one another in a way that highlights the Gorgias myth. T. C. Brickhouse and N. D. Smith make the point that the myths of judgment in the Phaedo and Republic are more striking in their dissimilarity to the Gorgias myth than their similarity. See Brickhouse and Smith, “The Myth of the Afterlife in Plato’s Gorgias,” in Gorgias-Menon: Selected Papers From the Seventh Symposium Platonicum, eds. M. Erler and Luc Brisson (St. Augustine: Academia Verlag, 2007): 131-132. Although I do not completely agree, because the Gorgias, just like the Phaedo and the Republic, culminates with its afterlife myth and its eschatological myth turns the whole soul just as those of the latter two do, the Gorgias afterlife myth does not have the elaborate “dianoetic” function of the True Earth myth and the myth of Er, in part because it is lacking an account of the soul’s immateriality, and in part because it does not portray either the True Earth or the κόσμος. In this way, I agree with Brickhouse and Smith.

Similar to the way in which each of the two preceding eschatological myths sets readers up for inquiries of indefinite duration about specific discussion threads or topics, the Gorgias afterlife myth does so as well, by encouraging literal readers to think about the value of rhetoric and the just life given the likelihood of the myth’s truths, and by inciting figurative readers to think about how they might avoid falling into the bad habit of allowing daily life and all of its comforts to obscure their soul’s true health. Dodds expresses this general sentiment, saying about the λόγος of the Gorgias afterlife myth that it may be a kind of “extrapolation,” “a prolongation into the unknown of the lines established by philosophical argument.” See Dodds, Plato: Gorgias, 376.
CHAPTER FIVE

RELATED MYTHICAL PASSAGES ON THE AFTERLIFE IN PLATO’S DIALOGUES

5.1 Introduction

The three main myths considered so far bear many similarities, and therefore, invite consideration alongside one another. My detailed treatment of each further confirms this and has shown the fruits of this systematic consideration. The most notable similarity of these three myths is that they each conclude their respective dialogues, which is the main feature setting them apart from other similar passages in Plato, as I will show below. In doing this, I will assess whether or not any other passages merit the label “Platonic myth of the afterlife” as the three main myths of this study do. These considerations, therefore, will guide my investigation of six other mythical passages in Plato’s dialogues that are eschatological in character: Phaedrus 244a-257d, Meno 81a-e, Laws 903a-905c, Timaeus 41a-44c, Apology 40d-41b, and Theatetus 176a-177b.

Not only my results support the grouping of the three previous myths into the same category, but also numerous scholars agree on labeling these three as Platonic myths of the afterlife, or one of the alternate equivalent names I have mentioned, since no study of this type of myth excludes one of those three.¹ The same cannot be said of those passages, however, that are subject of this chapter. Only some scholars characterize the second speech of the Phaedrus as a Platonic myth of judgment, and very few people label the other passages under consideration here as such.² Even so, it is worth discerning whether or not it satisfies the criteria I have established.

¹ Those alternative names, as I mentioned in chapter 1 (1.116), and that I have used throughout this study, include “eschatological myths” and “myths of judgment.”
² Julia Annas, writing about the myths of judgment, focuses mainly on the three myths of my central chapters, but briefly mentions the second speech of the Phaedrus at one point. See Annas, “Plato’s Myths of Judgment,” 136.
The sections of this chapter will proceed by (1) briefly providing context for each passage, (2) considering whether or not it makes use of the features that the main three eschatological myths use, and finally (3) deciding whether or not the passage is psychagogic. I will start with the passage that, out of the six, is most commonly referred to as a Platonic myth of the afterlife: the second speech of the *Phaedrus*. I will then proceed to the mythical introduction of recollection in the *Meno*, since it has in common with the *Phaedrus* the reference to the theory of recollection. Next, I will consider selections from *Laws* 10 and the *Timaeus*, since these two passages share important features with one another as well as with the previous two. Subsequently, I will turn to Socrates’ words of consolation about the afterlife from the conclusion of the *Apology*, a passage that stands on its own in some ways. Finally, I will briefly consider a short passage from the *Theatetus*.


David Hitchcock stands as an exception to all of the above in that he considers all of the mythical passages of this chapter in his chapter on the Platonic myths of the afterlife, devoting a separate section to each, except for the passage from the *Apology*, which receives very brief treatment at the opening of that chapter. He devotes a very short sub-section to immortality in the *Symposium* (206a-212a) as well. See Hitchcock, *The Role of Myth and Its Relation to Rational Argument*, 116-274. The passage from the *Symposium*, although it was relevant to Hitchcock’s aims, is so dissimilar from the passages I am considering here—mentioning nothing of afterlife judgment, for instance—that I am not including it.

3 From chapter 1:
(a) Imagery that is compelling or suggestive in its depiction of the traditional, religious or sacred, mysterious, and/or violent
(b) Philosophical content that gains its persuasive force from (i) authoritative tellers, and (ii) the support it receives from the arguments of its dialogue
(c) Multivalence or polysemy
(d) An overall function within their dialogues that amounts to a consummation of previous considerations
5.2 *Phaedrus* 244a-257d:

The Second Speech: A Palinode in Honor of Love

Socrates frames his second speech in the *Phaedrus* (244a-257d) as a recantation or palinode in honor of love. He first announces that he wants to explain the truth about the soul, after which he outlines a proof for its immortality and an explanation of its structure. (245c-246a) It is here where he introduces the image of a chariot pulled by a pair of winged horses and driven by a charioteer as an analogy for the soul. He then explains the way in which souls either fly high into the heavens to glimpse intelligible reality or, if the soul’s wings are not nourished by things like Beauty, Wisdom, and Goodness, the soul sheds its wings, plunging down into physical reality. This is what souls do either before or after their life on earth, according to this speech, and the success of souls in this regard is linked to the souls’ ability to become human in its next life and also gain wisdom in that life. (246b-249c)

Socrates later explains the nature of the two horses and the charioteer in further detail, to shed further light on the nature of the soul. In the context of this description, he says that what keeps the whole chariot under control is the charioteer’s recollection of intelligible realities from before birth. The charioteer represents the soul’s rationality, and, if it is able to control the soul’s erotic appetitive urges (represented by the horse that is untame), it will live virtuously and happily both during life and after it, while those who give in to the demands of the appetites adopt a lower way of living and are punished beneath the earth during the afterlife. (253c-257a)

The images Socrates describes include the horses and charioteer (246a-b) (which bears a striking resemblance to the tripartite soul of the *Republic*), the heavens (246e-247c), and the realm that is beyond the heavens (247c-e), with the latter two both helping to explain the intellectual heights to which the soul may ascend. Socrates also conveys the story of the souls’
journeys before and after life, including their judgment (248a-250c), as well as their rewards and punishments (256b-e). These details arguably convey the benefits of intellectual love and the negative aspects of physical love by portraying the rewards of the former and the punishments associated with the latter. So it seems that, if this speech turns the whole soul toward anything, it is to pursue intellectual or real love rather than physical love, which only appears good. Socrates also conveys the beauty of intellectual love by using erotic imagery and by either treating or mentioning shame, fear, anguish, yearning, jealousy, modesty, anger, and awe. (250c-252d, 253e-256b) Emotion thus plays a substantial role in this speech, by (1) engaging the spirited aspect of the soul and (2) possibly also receiving philosophical treatment itself by being portrayed as both contributing to and working against reason in various ways. The descriptor “palinode in honor of love,” however, is somewhat misleading, since the speech spans such topics as madness, the immortality of the soul, the structure of the soul, rewards and punishments in the afterlife, recollection and Forms, all the while explaining the intertwinement of love and the intellectual life. This passage is highly complex, then, and also relatively long at 13.5 Stephanus pages.  

One question that arises immediately is whether or not this whole passage is a myth at all. From 244a to 246a the speech does not seem to be a myth. 244a-245b offers a description of madness and 245c-e a proof of the soul’s immortality. At 246a, there is a distinct shift to more mythical language, namely, imagery, analogy, and an invented story that eventually claims to convey an inner truth (247c). Socrates then begins to extend the imagery and unverifiable details to discuss how humans come to be and what they are. (246b-d) Is 246a, then, the real beginning of the *mytho-logos*, with the earlier sections of the speech being just λόγοι? No, for the following

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4 The *Gorgias* afterlife myth is roughly 3.5 Stephanus pages in length, while the *Phaedo* “True Earth” myth and the myth of Er are both about 7.5 pages long.
reasons: 246e-247c contains a mythical description of the heavens, while 247c-e is a mythical
description of what is beyond the heavens. The story of the souls in the heavens then begins,
(248a-b) followed by afterlife/pre-life judgment of souls. (248c-249d) After that, love is
discussed in relation to the charioteer again, including its relation to rewards and punishments in
the afterlife. (256a-e) These sections of the passage can be characterized as a mytho-logos, with a
distinct emphasis on the mythical or unverifiable. But, since they are so closely tied to the
imagery and seemingly to the λόγοι that precede and follow them, it seems reasonable to
classify the entire second speech as a mytho-logos.⁵ Of course, the interweaving of these
stylistically varied sections needs further explanation. If dividing the speech into clearly-
separated parts that are only myth and other parts that are exclusively λόγοι introduces arbitrary
and, hence, false partitions, then any treatment of the second speech ought to consider it as a
whole, not to mention its dialogical context.

I will now discuss whether or not this myth is eschatological, as the three main myths of
this study are. As a mythical passage that includes a story about souls’ journeys in the afterlife,
the palinode seems to be a myth of the afterlife. However, the primary focus of the passage is
the pre-life; the period before the first incarnation. It is this pre-life that explains the love of
beauty, and it is in this context that afterlife and judgment are treated.

Also important here is considering whether or not the second speech uses the features
characteristic to the Platonic myths of judgment. Now that I have defended a number of
common characteristics of three myths of judgment, explaining their overall function in terms of
their psychagogical effect on their audience, any myth that merits the same treatment ought to
share the common characteristics that contribute to a robust psychagogical effect. Based on my

⁵ Janet Smith points out that Socrates calls the second speech μῦθος (253c7) and λόγος (244a). See Smith, “Plato’s
Myths as 'Likely Accounts' Worthy of Belief,” 38.
account of the features with which the afterlife myths function in chapter 1, the first question, then, is, whether the *Phaedrus* myth makes use of imagery that is compelling or suggestive in its depiction of the traditional, mysterious, and/or violent. The answer to this question is definitely affirmative. For example, possession by the Muses, traditional religious figures in ancient Greece, is the third type of madness. (245a) It awakens one to songs and poetry that glorify the achievements of the past and teaches them to future generations. This possession is needed to make good poetry. Another example is the lover, who, if an attendant of Zeus, bears love with dignity, but if a soldier of Ares, is murderously jealous and is willing to sacrifice himself and the boy (the beloved) if he even slightly suspects that the boy has done him wrong. (252c)

The next question to consider is whether this passage conveys philosophical content that gains its persuasive force from (a) authoritative tellers and (b) the support it receives from the arguments of the dialogue. The character of Socrates conveys this speech, and he is clearly an authoritative figure. The question of whether this myth receives support from more argumentative, i.e., less mythical passages is an interesting one, for a number of reasons. Most notably, since this is not a closing myth, it makes sense that it does not function as the other concluding myths do, by mainly relating to previous lines of argumentation and supporting or amplifying them. This myth introduces to the dialogue many of the topics it treats, thus preventing it from building on philosophical arguments that have already taken place in the previous conversation. It does relate to the two previous speeches on love (one by Lysias, through Phaedrus, and one by Socrates), but it contradicts the argumentation in those passages. There are, however, less mythical parts of the passage (like the enumeration of the kinds of madness in 244a-245b or the proof of the soul’s immortality in 245c-e) that do seem to offer
support to the more heavily mythical passages, so that this criterion may be fulfilled in this myth after all, albeit in a different way from the other afterlife myths discussed.

The next criterion to consider is whether the second speech of the *Phaedrus* contains multivalence or polysemy. It is not difficult to defend the viability of a figurative reading in this case, in large part due to the built-in allegorical elements, especially the charioteer image.\(^6\) A purely literal reading is not viable, due to the myth’s inherent reliance on a figurative image of the soul. It is viable, however, to understand the story of the soul’s journey, including its rewards and punishments, as an account with many elements likely to resemble a probable literal truth.\(^7\) The second speech treats love, in large part, by means of explanatory passages that do not tell a story with invented details, but that rely on the aid of a central analogy, as well as a story and its invented details. The speech also relies on a proof of the immortality of the soul. The entire speech can thus be called a likely account. Furthermore, the element of reincarnation, a widely-accepted belief, found in Orphism and Pythagoreanism (as explained in chapter 2), adds to the likelihood of the account.

Moreover, the account contains a story of the soul’s journey, including its punishments and rewards in the afterlife. (248a-249d, 256a-e) Just as in the cases of the other afterlife myths, it seems possible to understand this aspect of the account literally, and it may even be possible to argue for the coherence and the general truth of this literal account. If this is the case and if the myth uses the tools the other eschatological myths use to turn the souls of their literal readers to

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\(^7\) Richard Bett argues for the viability of a literal reading. See Bett, “Immortality and the Nature of the Soul in the *Phaedrus*,” *Phronesis* 31 (1986): 24. Hitchcock, 230, argues for a literal interpretation of the divine procession, but he also considers a metaphorical reading of the speech’s account of reincarnation and recollection. Morgan, 160, argues that only a sophist, according to the opening of the *Phaedrus* (229c-230a), would seriously investigate the literal truth of a myth.
πίστις, then it is probable for the *Phaedrus* afterlife myth to function in the same way as those other three myths.

Since this account lends itself naturally to a figurative reading, it would not be difficult to argue for the viability of such an interpretation. Like the other afterlife myths, there seem to be grounds for a metaphorical reading portraying the immediate rewards or punishments for injustice in *this* life, like the description of immoderate souls not being able to see true reality as well as moderate souls can. (247b) Since there is a clear discussion of Forms in this account, it may also be possible to argue that, like the other afterlife myths’ metaphorical readings, this myth leads its audience to διάνοια, and possibly even νόησις.

The next question is whether this myth has an overall function within its dialogue that amounts to a consummation of previous considerations, like the three myths of judgment previously discussed. The function of Socrates’ second speech involves teaching the reader about the nature of intellectual love, including its rewards, in contrast to the deprecating results of purely physical love. This myth is unique in that it is the primary vehicle for these important concepts in the dialogue, unlike the previously discussed myths that mainly summarize and add to considerations from their preceding dialogues.  

This is an important difference between the second speech of the *Phaedrus* and the three preceding afterlife myths. The second speech is arguably just as climactic as the three aforementioned myths, in terms of its importance to its dialogue and its dramatic effects, but it does not function as a culmination or consummation of threads of discussion already begun simply because it *introduces* lines of discussion and themes of importance, unlike the bulk of the three central myths of this study. This difference marks the psychagogical effect of the second speech as unique compared to the three myths of judgment.

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8 Pieper, 42 (*The Platonic Myths*), thinks the second speech is the “real” content of the *Phaedrus*, making the whole dialogue worthwhile.
The second speech not only introduces themes that receive philosophical treatment in the myth, but also addresses themes that receive treatment after the myth, later in the dialogue, like the effects of rhetoric on the soul for instance. The psychagogy of the second speech illustrates the way in which the true art of rhetoric can direct the soul, and this topic is discussed in less mythical argumentative terms, later (269d-274a).

I will only be able to provide a brief sketch here of why the *Phaedrus*’ second speech is psychagogical, since the passage is so long that it would require a substantial chapter of its own to fully flesh out this issue. While the erotic language and imagery engages the appetitive soul on a basic level, the emotions associated with this imagery, especially that of shame, engage the spirited soul.9 While the myth entices the rational soul to view the erotic imagery in a way that recollects divine Beauty, the engagement of the appetitive and spirited aspects of the soul create a moving effect that motivates this attempt.10 In 251a-252d, for instance, Socrates describes the way in which one experiences the longing of love. At the same time that the erotic language he uses engages the appetitive soul, Socrates’ description of the pain of yearning for one’s beloved strikes the reader. The reader simultaneously recalls the feelings of erotic longing and awe for his beloved, as well as the desire to compete for this person’s love. These feelings engage the reader’s spirited soul. Then, describing the experience of love with explicit reference to the tripartite structure of the soul, Socrates highlights the important role of shame in helping to keep the soul from acting on appetitive impulses. (254a-e and 256a-b) This account thus further engages the spirited soul, the aspect that desires honor rather than base satisfaction. For fully

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9 The erotic imagery Plato provides represents any personal erotic equivalent that the reader sees fit to envision in its place. I think that Plato invites the reader to consider a personal example that includes the mixture of emotions Socrates describes, and I explain this briefly below. Dissenting from this view, C. J. Rowe notes that passion in Plato is from reason and that it is pointless to discuss the emotions of the irrational parts. See Rowe, “The Charioteer and His Horses: An Example of Platonic Myth-Making,” 146-47.

10 Morgan, 219, notes that the rush of emotion, for instance, at a beautiful body precedes any philosophical awareness.
experiencing the various desires and pains of love and refusing to give in to the temptations of
the appetites, the reward is the greatest good possible for a human being: one ascends to the
intellectual realm of the divine. (256b) This aspect addresses the rational aspect of the soul,
which recalls the imagery of the heavens and the place beyond, and feels longing and awe for the
Beauty of that realm. (246e-247e, 250b-c) The result is that this three-fold engagement awakens
the reader to the desire for a vast realm of intellectual possibilities. Plato guides this desire with
his depiction of the heavens and the place beyond.

Just as the psychagogy of the previous three myths invites further inquiry, so does this
one. The audience is invited to understand madness by beginning a philosophically fruitful
conversation about it and not arriving at a final definition. The audience is also invited to engage
in dialectical metaphysics. When the soul travels its circular path, it sees Justice, Self-Control,
and Knowledge. (247d) This discussion of the Forms invites dialectical engagement with the
following questions: Why are only Justice, Self-Control, and Knowledge mentioned? Are Justice
and Self-Control the most notable Forms, constituting the highest type of knowledge? Why is
Plato highlighting them? Perhaps they are the Forms that pertain most to love? Human self-
control is a bad thing according to the speech, so then, what is divine Self-Control by
comparison? The audience is invited to all of these considerations. Also, why is inferior
knowledge not labeled opinion? Are these two types of knowledge opposed as belief and thought
are on the Divided Line in Republic 6?

Describing souls in the heavens before birth, three levels of vision are described, and then
nine types of lives. (248a-b and d-e) Which lives correspond with the soul who is god-like,
which with the one who misses some real things, and which with the one who sees no reality?
Apart from the gods’ souls, there is a three-fold distinction: souls that see Forms fairly
continuously, those that see them intermittently, and those that do not see Forms at all. (248a) In
the discussion of incarnations, there is a corresponding distinction: (1) Souls that follow gods
and see the Forms are not incarnated (248c3-5), (2) souls that are not able to follow gods
continuously, but have glimpsed some of the Forms are incarnated into the nine types of human
lives in the order of the extent of their vision (248c5-249b5), and (3) the souls that have not even
glimpsed Forms are incarnated into animals (249b5-6). This pair of three-fold distinctions invites
important questions about the cognitive potential of human beings: Are human beings capable of
more than just brief glimpses of Forms? If not, then what does this mean? Is contemplation still
possible if our access to Forms is so limited? It is easy to see how investigating such questions
further may invite dialectic.\footnote{R. S. Bluck says that this myth exemplifies the principles of collection and division. See Bluck, \textit{Plato's Meno} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 52. Cristina Ionescu engages in a thorough exploration of the relationship between recollection and dialectic in the second speech. See Ionescu, “Recollection and the Method of Collection and Division in the \textit{Phaedrus},” \textit{Journal of Philosophical Research} 37 (2012): 1-24. Morgan argues that the method of collection and division could not be developed in the second speech, because it is only there by chance and needs to be developed by rational inquiry. See Morgan, 239.}

It seems difficult to claim that the psychagogy of this palinode is any less effective than
that of the three main eschatological myths. It is possible that this similarity in effectiveness is
due to the fact that the placement of the second speech lends it as much climactic force as the
placement of the concluding myths. This passage definitely does merit further treatment, along
the lines of my investigation in the central chapters of this study, but because of this passage’s
length and complexity, as well as its central, rather than consummatory role in its dialogue, my
treatment of this myth would take a shape different from that of the three myths of judgment in
the \textit{Republic}, \textit{Phaedo}, and \textit{Gorgias}. For now, I will conclude simply by saying that Socrates’
second speech of the \textit{Phaedrus} is a myth that is very similar to the three main myths I have
treated, but it has essential features that set it apart from those three.
5.3 *Meno* 81a-e:
The Mythical Introduction of Recollection

The *Meno* begins with the question: What is virtue? After just ten pages of conversation, Meno says that Socrates has numbed him with perplexity (80a-b), after which Socrates proclaims that he is more perplexed than the people he perplexes, admitting he does not know what virtue is (80c). Meno then asks how Socrates can search for something without knowing what it is, since, even if he found it, he presumably would not realize he had done so because he did not know what he was searching for. (80d) Socrates calls this a “debater’s argument” (ἐριστικὸν λόγον, 80e2).12 He responds that the soul is born with knowledge of “all things” (πάντα χρήματα, 81c5-6), making the search for knowledge actually a process of recollection, which enables the soul to recognize the objects of its searches, once it happens upon them. This introduction of recollection in the *Meno* (81a-e) leads into Socrates’ conversation with the slave boy, where recollection is explained in further detail with specific examples (82a-86c).

Socrates conveys that “priests and priestesses” (81a10), as well as Pindar “and many others of the divine among our poets” (81b1-2),13 all say that the soul is immortal, that it dies and is reborn, but is never destroyed. One ought to live, therefore, a pious life, because, in the words of Pindar, Persephone will punish souls before returning them. Socrates adds that because the soul has been born and reborn often, it “has seen all things here and in the underworld” (81c5-6), such that there is nothing it has not yet learned. Therefore, it can recollect things it knew before its current life, like virtue and other things, and so we must not believe the “debater’s argument.”

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13 All translations of the *Meno*, unless otherwise noted, are by G. M. A. Grube. See Plato. Complete Works, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 870-897.
It is possible to mark the beginning of this passage as the point at which Socrates says he has “heard wise men and women talk about divine matters” (81a5-6), immediately after which, Meno wants to know what they said. It seems logical, then, to mark the end of the passage as Socrates’ transition back into the investigation about the nature of virtue, with Meno keen to learn more about recollection. (81e) One complicating factor is that six lines of this passage convey a brief story about the soul’s punishment and rebirth presented as a direct quotation (possibly from Pindar), to which Socrates adds several lines about what the soul learns throughout its reincarnations.¹⁴ There is thus a story of the soul’s punishment and implicit judgment, containing unverifiable details, like Persephone’s judgment process, within the passage that introduces recollection. At least on the surface, then, this introduction to recollection contains a myth of the afterlife, but can it be called a Platonic myth of the afterlife when part of the story is an indirect report of the words of others, part is a direct quotation from Pindar, and part is Socrates’ addition? Certainly the mere appropriation of mythical details from others does not disqualify this myth as Platonic, since all of the afterlife myths involve such appropriation, although perhaps not to the extent of this passage due to its substantial direct quotation.

We can attempt to discern the similarity of this mythical passage to the three Platonic myths of the afterlife of chapters 2-4 by turning back to the set of features with which the Platonic myths of judgment function, seeing whether or not this mythical introduction of recollection makes use of them as the three main myths of this study do.

First, this mythical introduction does contain imagery that is compelling or suggestive in its depiction of the traditional, religious, mysterious, and/or violent. Socrates mentions wise

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priests and priestesses, as well as Pindar and other poets, (81a) who account for the soul’s punishment in the underworld by Persephone (81b-d), the traditional goddess of the underworld.

The passage also contains philosophical content that gains its persuasive force from (a) authoritative tellers, and (b) the support it receives from the arguments of its dialogue. The passage introduces and accounts for the origins of recollection, a philosophical doctrine, and it does so by means of Socrates, a clear authority figure, referring to other authority figures, including priests, priestesses, and revered poets. This passage does not receive support from the previous dialogue, but it does do so from subsequent dialogue—that is, the conversation with the slave boy that illustrates what recollection is. The passage from the Meno, then, fulfills this criterion, although not in the same way as the three eschatological myths of this study. I pointed out in the previous section that some of the mythical passages within the second speech of the Phaedrus receive support from less-mythical passages within that speech, as well as from passages posterior to it. We can now see that the latter is a notable similarity to Meno 81a-e.

Furthermore this mythical introduction can be read both literally and figuratively. Literally understood, this mythical passage indicates that metempsychosis results in (a) the soul’s judgment and possible punishment after death and before rebirth and (b) the soul’s learning before birth. Metempsychosis was supported by Pythagoreanism and Orphism, as I explained in chapter 2, while the notion of afterlife judgment also had well established roots, as explained in that chapter. This literal interpretation, then, would be received by many as a likely account, even if some of its details are ultimately unverifiable.

One may, on the other hand, accept the account as a figurative explanation of our innate knowledge and the way we learn, seeing the fantastic imagery mainly as a way to make the account more engaging rather than accepting such imagery as a truth unto itself. Several details
do clearly seem to engage various aspects of the soul: Socrates mentions “noble kings”
(βασιλῆς ἀγαυοί, 81c1) who emerge from purgation strong and wise. This detail appeals to the
spirited soul’s love of honor. Socrates also says that nothing prevents learning and discovering if
one is “brave” and does not tire of the search (81d), appealing to the spirited soul in its love of
competition, and admiration of courage. The imagery in general appeals to both of the lower
parts of the soul, in their image-loving tendency (explained in chapter 1). Unlike the previous
myths, however, much of this imagery is only part of a poetic quotation, which means that it is
difficult to argue that Plato creates a myth here.

Nonetheless, the account appeals to rationality in several ways. A literal reading leads
one’s rational soul to the belief that one ought to live virtuously, lest one suffer afterlife
punishments as consequences for one’s actions. This is the same sort of belief characterized in
chapters 2-4, which I explained is consistent with πίστις in the Line and the Cave. There may
also be grounds for arguing that the account in the Meno leads the soul to belief in the soul’s
journeys before life and, thus, the notion that learning is recollection.

The ways in which a figurative reading of Meno 81a-e engages the rational soul are more
complex. Plato implies that the soul is disembodied, through Socrates’ direct words and the
quotation, and he may be doing so to portray that what it knows, and thus recollects, is not
bodily. If this is the case, then this mythical introduction to recollection invites us to consider
what non-empirical knowledge is, and how it is innate. This sort of knowledge is clearly
depicted in the Line and the Cave in the stages of thought and contemplation. The passage in the
Meno may lead the rational soul, then, to the cognitive activities of these stages.

Looking at the conversation with the slave boy, it is clear that the slave’s knowledge of
geometrical concepts receives treatment. (82b-83e, 84d-85b) Plato uses such concepts and their
corresponding diagrams to illustrate διάνοια in the Line and Cave passages, as well as in the subsequent description of the guardians’ education. There is a rich debate in the scholarship on this passage about whether or not Plato does lead the reader to consider Forms here, which would seem to be possible, at least.\footnote{Theodor Ebert and Rosslyn Weiss argue for purely physical (empirical) interpretations of the mythical introduction to recollection. Ebert, “Plato’s Theory of Recollection Reconsidered: An Interpretation of \textit{Meno} 80a-86c,” \textit{Man and World} 6 (1973): 163-81; Weiss, \textit{Virtue in the Cave: Moral Inquiry in Plato’s \textit{Meno}} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 72-76.}

The next question to consider, then, is whether or not this mythical introduction to recollection exhibits an overall function within its dialogue that amounts to a consummation of previous considerations. Clearly, this is not the case, since this passage is an introduction or commencement, not a consummation or culmination. This is a major difference between \textit{Meno} 81a-e and the three afterlife myths of this study. We saw in chapters 2–4 that the consummatory function of the eschatological myths contributes significantly to their psychagogical capacity. This difference, then, between the introduction of recollection in the \textit{Meno} and those three myths decreases the potential psychagogical effect of the former. I wish to suggest that this difference may have contributed to Plato’s decision to include such a lengthy direct quotation in the \textit{Meno} myth, or perhaps as this myth, for the reason that readers familiar with those lines of poetry would experience emotions similar to those they would feel as a result of coming to the conclusion of great dialogues like the \textit{Republic}, \textit{Phaedo}, and \textit{Gorgias}. When one hears several lines of familiar poetry, one feels nostalgic, and one very well may associate the pleasure one

feels from those lines with the philosophical content they have been appropriated to support. The consummatory effect of the main myths of this study is similar, in that one feels a distinct sort of pleasure, including that of nostalgia, when one reaches the end of a great dialogue and is reminded of its key themes. Our spirited soul is inclined to associate this pleasant feeling with the philosophical content being presented. So, even though the mythical introduction of recollection in the *Meno* does not fulfill this consummation criterion, there are grounds from which to argue that it makes up for the lack of emotion that results from not being such a consummation. The component of the main myths’ consummatory effects that it cannot make up for, however, is the rational consideration of multiple lines of discussion that have all been developing in the course of their respective dialogues. The *Meno* passage in question does lead the soul to various rational considerations, as I have explained, but none of these have been developed yet in the dialogue, and so one’s thoughts about those considerations are of a different nature from one’s thoughts at the end of the three previously mentioned dialogues. The main difference I observe here is that one’s thoughts about recollection do not have the clarity, direction, and potential that one’s thoughts do (about different topics) after having followed along with Socrates throughout the entirety of a lengthy dialogue like the *Republic*, *Phaedo*, or *Gorgias*. The answer to the question about whether or not *Meno* 81a-e shares the psychagogically significant features of the afterlife myths and, thus, merits the same sort of investigation as the main myths of this study is not so clear. I will explore that in what follows.

It is already clear that this myth does seem to have a psychagogical function because it engages the soul’s three aspects and has the potential to turn it toward belief and thought.16

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16 Fully defending this claim involves a great deal more, such as arguing that the *Meno* can inspire πίστις (belief) as the *Republic* presents it rather than only a different account of belief that is unique to the *Meno*. Gulley, 13-20, argues for the latter, making the case that the opposition between belief and knowledge is different in the *Meno* from the *Republic*, because in the former the opposition centers on explanatory ability, whereas in the latter the opposition
Despite this, there are some key differences between the turning of the whole soul possibly provoked by *Meno* 81a-e and that provoked by the main myths of this study, mainly stemming from the positioning of the former early in its dialogue. Although I have explained some of those differences, there are yet others, e.g., the fact that the turn to διάνοια just begins in the mythical introduction to recollection and gains its direction in the conversation with the slave. In the main myths of this study, the thought they produce gains its direction from multiple discussion threads in lengthy preceding dialogues. Also, *Meno* 81a-e is barely a full page long, making it about 2.5 pages shorter than even the briefest afterlife myth of this study (the final myth of the *Gorgias*).

It is possible that the brevity of the *Meno* passage is a result of the lack of preceding dialogical considerations being treated in it, or perhaps because it is just a reference to a (possible) myth. Nonetheless, it is difficult to see how such a brief passage, based on so little preceding conversation, could lead to the wealth of rational activity that the main myths of this study lead to—despite the fact that the former does seem to exhibit a distinct but minimal psychagogic function. When one proceeds from the mythical introduction of recollection in the *Meno* to the remainder of the dialogue, however, the philosophical activity that results may not be so different in direction, clarity, and scope than that resulting from, say, the *Gorgias*. But then it is not the *Meno*’s mythical introduction to recollection that prompts this activity, whereas the final myths of the *Republic*, *Phaedo*, and *Gorgias* do prompt, in ways that only they can, the wealth of rational investigation that results from each of those dialogues. Given that the psychagogical effect of *Meno* 81a-e is clearly less philosophically significant than that of the three myths of

centers on Forms. The former he labels as involving a “non-specialised” sense of belief, unlike the latter, which involves a “specialised” notion of belief. One additional matter to note on this point is that, immediately after the passage, Socrates only expresses trust in the account, using πιστεύω at 81e1. I interpret this as a clue that the passage has the capacity to lead to belief (πίστις) about the searching and learning involved in recollection.
judgment I have treated in chapters 2-4, it may merit a separate study alongside some of the other
mythical passages of this chapter, as I will explain below.

5.4 Laws 903a-905c:

Persuading Those Who Think the Gods Do Not Care for Humans

In book 10 of the Laws, Clinias, Megillus, and the Athenian lay out measures to deal with
three possible impious states of mind that may result in the city. The three possible
manifestations of impiety include those who do not believe the gods exist, those who believe
they exist but that they have no care for humans, and those who think the gods can be bribed
easily with offerings and prayers. (885b) Initially, Clinias offers a simple proof for the existence
of gods by pointing to the beauty of the earth and the many Greeks and barbarians who believe in
gods. (886a) The Athenian points out that Clinias does not realize the extent of the problem: the
corruption of the unbelievers by their scientists, who trick people into becoming materialists.
(886a-e) Clinias and the Athenian agree then that they need to furnish those non-believers with
adequate, persuasive proof for the existence of gods, which follows after more remarks about the
extent of the problem of disbelief. (887a-899d) The Athenian, with the help of Clinias, seems to
provide two proofs: one for the existence of gods (891e-896e) and another for the fact that the
best soul guides the earth and heavens (897b-898d).\(^\text{17}\) After some follow-up considerations, they
turn to their argument against the one who says that the gods simply do not care about mortals
(899d-905d), which includes words of counsel to act as a “charm” (ἐπιστῶν, 903b1) on the one

\(^{17}\) V. B. Lewis, investigating Laws 10 for the relationship of its theology to questions about natural law theory, says
that the detailed arguments of this book are not so much about the existence of gods, but of the priority of soul to
who says the gods are neglectful (903b-905c). As I will explain, these words that are to charm these impious souls include what seems to be a Platonic myth of the afterlife.¹⁸

They want to persuade the impious that he who cares for the world orders all things systematically, for the good of the whole, with each part doing and suffering what is proper to it. (903b) In trying to explain how what is best for the “All” is best for individual souls too, the Athenian explains that in the process of souls being joined to different bodies at different times, while undergoing many changes, the characters that grow better get moved to a better place, while those who become inferior go to worse places. (903d) Clinias asks for further explanation, and the Athenian says that since he who orders everything realizes that good souls tend to benefit the world and bad souls injure it, he secured the victory of the good and the defeat of evil. In this effort, he designed a rule prescribing what kind of character ought to dwell where. (903e-904b) Where souls go depends on our desires and our nature. (904c) The less a soul changes, the less it moves in its positioning, but when changes are great and souls pursue evil, they move toward deep regions, like Hades, where men are haunted by fearful images. On the other hand, if a soul is in union with divine virtue, it moves to a better region. (904c-d) Quoting Odyssey 19, the Athenian says this is the decree of the gods who dwell on Mount Olympus. (904e) He adds that “while you’re still alive on earth or after you’ve descended into Hades [. . . ], you’ll pay the proper penalty of your crimes.”¹⁹ (905a6-b2) Unless one learns this, one cannot even discern a hint of the truth, nor will one be able to contribute to an account of life regarding its happiness or


¹⁹ All quotations are from Saunders’ translation, unless noted otherwise. See Cooper, 1318-1616.
lack thereof. (905c) They then turn to the argument against those who say gods can be won over easily by bribes. (905d)

This passage certainly does contain unverifiable details, including its use of Hades, other regions, and the fearful images associated with those places. Since the passage occurs within a series of proofs about the existence and nature of divinity, it is certainly part of a λόγος, while including clear markers for μυθος, which make it seem quite similar to the mytho-logoi I have been discussing throughout this study.

Even on a superficial level, it is difficult to call this passage a Platonic myth of the afterlife, because it hardly tells a story about the soul’s journey, including its afterlife judgment, with a beginning, a middle, and an end, like the other myths I have treated in chapters 2-4. It is more of an account of souls’ judgment, and the cycle of reincarnation, fitting into a larger account about the way in which the divine orders all things. It is like the other myths of this study in that it is a likely account, with its fantastic elements supported by the authority of Homer, and more importantly, proofs for gods’ existence. Given all I have considered so far, Laws 903a-905c seems to share important defining characteristics with the main three myths of this study, in its being a likely account and a mytho-logos, but it departs from those three in that it does not really tell a story about the soul’s afterlife judgment. I will now consider other similarities and differences between this mythical passage and the central myths of this dissertation, by examining whether or not Laws 903a-905c makes use of all of the features with which the afterlife myths function. The passage contains descriptions of Hades and other deep regions below the earth, as well as of the gods on Mount Olympus; so it clearly does contain traditional, religious imagery that is also somewhat mysterious. It also definitely contains philosophical content that gains its persuasive force by the support it receives from the
arguments of its dialogue, mainly from the preceding proofs. However, it is debatable that the
teller of this mythical account is an authority figure. Though some may argue that the Athenian
is meant to represent Socrates or Plato, both of whom the audience of this passage would accept
as authority figures, it is not ultimately clear who the Athenian is or whom he represents, if
anyone. Since he does not cite any other source for the entirety of the account—only relying
upon the Greek religious and literary tradition, including Homer, for elements of it—and the
Athenian is not a clear authority figure himself, this passage does not gain persuasive force from
authoritative tellers in the robust way that the central myths of this study do.

Regarding polysemy, the Athenian says that in life and death, one suffers what is fitting
to one’s character. (905a) This remark seems to bring together what is implied in both literal and
figurative readings of the afterlife myths: Literal readings support the thesis that one suffers and
is rewarded appropriately after death, while the figurative readings I have explained in the
central chapters support the view that there are immediate punishments and rewards for our
actions in this life here and now. By bringing together these themes of both literal and
metaphorical interpretations of the eschatological myths, this mythical passage of Laws 10 may
be obviating a proper tale that can be read in both of these ways. Furthermore, I see no other
compelling evidence in the previously-described text to indicate that it can or ought to be read
both literally and figuratively along the lines of the central myths of this study.

Moreover, this mythical passage of Laws 10 does not exhibit an overall function within
the dialogue that amounts to a consummation of previous considerations. This text supports an
important point that is crucial to the development of the city, but it does not bring together
previous lines of discussion, reinforce them, and add to them, such that it provides a fitting end
to the previous dialogue.
Finally, I can now address whether the *Laws* 10 mythical passage is psychagogical. The mythical details of this passage certainly engage the lower soul parts, but in a measured, limited way, as in the afterlife myths of chapters 2-4. The passage also attempts to persuade the rational soul to the belief that the gods care—or that there is cosmic justice. Since this belief challenges the conjectures that corrupted souls may develop from the appearance of the unjust being rewarded and the just being punished, it is arguable that this mythical account leads the souls of its readers from conjecture to belief. It is possible, furthermore, that this passage provokes διάνοια, when the Athenian says:

I fancy I could explain how easy it could be for gods to control the universe. Suppose that in one’s constant efforts to serve its interests one were to mold all that is in it by transforming everything (by turning fire into water permeated by soul, for instance), instead of producing variety from a basic unity or unity from variety, then after the first or second or third stage of creation everything would be arranged in an infinite number of perpetually changing patterns. But in fact the supervisor of the universe finds his task remarkably easy. (903e3-904a4)

Clinias responds with perplexity, asking the Athenian to expand and rephrase, and the Athenian says:

Our King saw (a) that all actions are a function of soul and involve a great deal of virtue and a great deal of vice, (b) that the combination of body and soul, while not an eternal creation like the gods sanctioned by law, is nevertheless indestructible (because living beings could never have been created if one of these two constituent factors had been destroyed), (c) that one of them—the good element in soul—is naturally beneficial, while the bad element naturally does harm. Seeing all this he contrived a place for each constituent where it would most easily and effectively secure the triumph of virtue and the defeat of vice throughout the universe. With this grand purpose in view he has worked out what sort of position, in what regions, should be assigned to a soul to match its changes of character; but he left it to the individual’s acts of will to determine the

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20 Lewis lends credibility to the idea that the tripartite soul of the *Republic* is at least implicitly involved in the *Laws*, explaining that books 8-10 treat sources of resistance to the law grounded in the soul as divided into three parts: ἔρως, θυμός, and λόγος. See Lewis, “Gods for the City and Beyond: Civil Religion in Plato’s *Laws*,” in *Civil Religion in Political Thought: Its Perennial Questions and Enduring Relevance in North America*, ed. John von Heyking and Ronald Weed (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 21.

The Athenian himself remarks, after refuting the third denier, that he apologizes for the spirited tone of the refutations. Since one may think this apology applies only to the third, Leo Strauss makes a point of adding that this remark applies to all three, including the myth. See Strauss, *The Argument and the Action of Plato’s Laws* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 155.
direction of these changes. You see, the way we react to particular circumstances is almost invariably determined by our desires and our psychological state. (904a6-c4)

The Athenian touches on the one and the many by discussing the way in which the creator’s producing variety from unity, and vice versa, is an elegantly simple way of arranging all things to support the cosmic justice for which the Athenian has been arguing. The connection between unity, variety, and such justice among all things is admittedly unclear, which Clinias notices, and, subsequently, we hear an explanation of the creator as “Our King” ordering body and soul, as well as good soul and bad soul, in a “grand purpose” that results in the triumph of virtue and the defeat of vice. Furthermore, this account by the Athenian includes in this grand design the place of human free will, which determines the direction in which our soul goes (to a bad place or to a good place), and which is determined by our desires and “psychological state.” By including the role of our individual souls in all of this, the Athenian seems to distinguish some type of larger, cosmic Soul from individual souls, and he seems to set the creator of all above that cosmic Soul as its arranger. Furthermore, all is ordered toward the good in this arrangement, implicitly, which makes one wonder if the Form of the Good is meant to reside above the creator as its purpose and source of value. On the one hand, one can obtain a superficial understanding of these matters and create a simple hierarchy of individual souls, cosmic Soul, the creator, and the Good, but on the other hand, in order to understand this hierarchy, διάνοια and νόησις are needed. This is because these entities are not physicalities; rather, they are objects in the intellectual realm. Since it is difficult to see how they are even rooted in the physical, or physical analogues, like the objects of διάνοια, I am inclined to say that understanding these matters entails νόησις. This passage is rich in detail, and is worthy of an effortful unpacking, in order to discern all that is really going on here. There are large chunks of the passage I have not even commented on above, and the selections I have included are clearly
doing something psychagogical, although in a much different way from the central myths of this study. Although it is highly debatable that this passage from the *Laws* is a Platonic afterlife myth in the fullest sense (like those of my central chapters), it is much less contentious to say that the passage is similar to the afterlife myths in some notable ways.\(^{22}\)

5.5 *Timaeus* 41a-44c:

The Birth of Humanity

Critias begins an ancient story in the *Timaeus* (20d), a dialogue explicitly linked to the *Republic* (17a-20d), and Timaeus takes over that story (27c), explaining the origins of the universe and mankind for the remainder of the dialogue. He first explains the craftsman’s creation of the broader universe, including time and the orbits of heavenly bodies. (27d-39e) He then turns to an account of the birth of the immortal gods. (40e-41a) An account of the birth of humanity follows (41a-48a), and parts of this account bear a striking resemblance to the myths of the afterlife (42a-d and 44c).

Describing the origin of souls, Timaeus explains that the first capacity they come to have must be sense perception, followed by love and other emotions as well as their opposites. (42a) Those who could master their emotions would live justly, while those who could not would not, and the former, at the end of their lives, would return to their dwellings in their “companion star(s) to live a life of happiness that agreed with” (42b3-4) their characters.\(^{23}\) One who failed at

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\(^{22}\) Vorwerk, “Zauber oder Argument?”, 81-86, also argues that this myth is different in character to those of the *Republic* and elsewhere. His argument focuses on the different audience to whom this passage is directed and the stronger presence of λόγος compared to other myths.

\(^{23}\) All translations of the *Timaeus* are by Donald Zeyl. See Cooper, 1224-1291.

James Robinson points out, related to the detail about companion stars, that a soul’s star is described as the site of its first and best condition. Furthermore, although Plato does not state that the star becomes the body of the soul, this possibility should not be rejected without consideration. See Robinson, “The Tripartite Soul in the *Timaeus*,” *Phronesis* 35 (1990): 104-105.
mastering his emotions would be punished by being reborn as a woman. (42b) If the person failed again, then he would be changed into “some wild animal that resembled the wicked character he had acquired.” (42c3-4)

And he would have no rest from these toilsome transformations until he had dragged that massive accretion of fire-water-air-earth into conformity with the revolution of the Same and Uniform within him, and so subdued that turbulent, irrational mass by means of reason. This would return him to his original condition of excellence. (42c4-d2)

These rules exempted the god from responsibility, and after sowing souls, he turned over the task of “weaving mortal bodies” (42d6-7) to the young gods. He also had them create anything else the mortal soul needed. (42d) The account then focuses on the joining of soul to body, including many details about the body, and is interrupted by the following remark about an intelligent person:

If such a person also gets proper nurture to supplement his education, he’ll turn out perfectly whole and healthy, and will have escaped the most grievous of illnesses. But if he neglects this, he’ll limp his way through life and return to Hades uninhibited and unintelligent. (44b8-c4)

The remainder of that account focuses on explaining body parts (44c-47e), after which Timaeus restarts the account with an emphasis on Necessity as opposed to the earlier emphasis on Intellect. The retelling does not contain a passage resembling an afterlife myth, unlike the initial telling summarized above.

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24 Sara Brill sheds light on this passage, saying that human failure is not only “woven into the fabric of the cosmos, but is required by it, since without this failure the cosmos would be incomplete.” This is because human failing “is generative of the other forms of animal life the cosmos must embrace in order to be complete.” See Brill, “Animality and Sexual Difference in the Timaeus,” in Plato’s Animals, ed. Jeremy Bell and Michael Naas (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 170.

25 Brill, 171, says the account here relies unquestioningly on a tradition of praise and blame, with various hypotheses not having received examination. Thus, she argues, it is not a “dialectical cosmogony;” it fails to be a fully philosophical investigation according to the terms laid out in the Republic. Though further investigation into the Timaeus is needed in order to confirm or deny Brill’s claim, it is nonetheless worth keeping in mind here given my argument that this mythical passage from the Timaeus is of a different essential character from the three central afterlife myths.
The account of humanity’s origin above includes many unverifiable details, making it mythical, but to be a Platonic myth of the afterlife, even in a superficial sense, this passage must include a story of the soul’s judgment after death. Although Timaeus does not preface his explanation of reincarnation with the sort of introductory remarks that Socrates uses to introduce the three central myths of this study and this reincarnation account does not have the length and level of detail that the aforementioned afterlife myths do, the report Timaeus provides could be called a story about the soul’s afterlife judgment. It conveys what happens to a soul after its first incarnation, and then proceeds to explain subsequent reincarnations. In this sense, it could count as a brief story that begins by detailing the coming to be of a soul and that ends by discussing its ultimate fate after several reincarnations. Superficially, at least, the words of Timaeus above seem to be what we typically refer to as a Platonic myth of the afterlife.

As with the other passages above, the next consideration is whether or not this passage uses the features the Platonic myths of judgment use. In its inclusion of images of the gods, and of the wild animals into which reincarnated souls would transform, this passage definitely exhibits imagery that is compelling or suggestive in its depiction of the traditional, mysterious, and/or violent. The passage also conveys philosophical content in its depiction of the happy fate of the just and the unhappy fate of the unjust. Moreover, this passage’s criterion for virtue focuses on the mastery of emotions. In this way, it seems to ascribe a central role for this practice in its account of a good life. This is certainly “philosophical content.” Does it gain its persuasive force from (a) authoritative tellers, and (b) the support it receives from the arguments

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26 Monique Dixsaut draws parallels between this mythical passage and the closing myths of the Republic, Phaedo, and Gorgias, as well as the second speech of the Phaedrus. One of the commonalities she discusses is the metamorphoses involved in reincarnation, which this passage has in common with the afterlife myths of the Phaedo, Republic, and Phaedrus. Dixsaut also comments on the narrator’s perspective in all five passages, in which he has, or even embodies, a view of the whole. See Dixsaut, “Myth and Interpretation,” 37-40.
of its dialogue? On both counts the answer seems negative. Timaeus is not clearly an authority figure like Socrates, Er, Homer, or other similar figures named as the sources of the central myths of this study. One objection here may be that Critias and Timaeus refer to the account as ancient (20d-e), which may mean that it is authoritative, having been passed down through history. Also, reincarnation and the very notion of Hades are handed down from authoritative figures from the Greek literary past, and, with further inquiry, one may be able to prove that some other details above have their origins in similar authorities. So, perhaps the negative answer to this criterion deserves some degree of tentativeness. Regarding (b), the passage mainly introduces content and, in this way, does not rely on other discussions from the dialogue to support that content. It does not recapitulate, summarize, and conclude content from previous lines of inquiry like the three eschatological myths of chapters 2-4.

Does this Timaeus passage exhibit polysemy? When the myth of Er and the True Earth myth describe reincarnation, it is clear that one may read those accounts literally or figuratively, as I showed. This same polysemy then may be possible for the Timaeus myth in question. The latter may be conveying, for instance, that when one masters one’s emotions, one continues to live as a rational being in the future, meaning possibly in this life or in the next. Likewise, when one does not master one’s emotions, one lives as an irrational human (which the life of a woman seems to refer to above) or as a sub-human, meaning that this will be the case in their next life, and/or in their future during this life here and now.

It would be quite dubious to claim that the Timaeus myth above is a consummation of the dialogue’s previous considerations, since that myth mainly introduces new content and does not take place at the end of the dialogue, or at the conclusion of some lengthy set of considerations. Nor does the passage strike the reader as climactic.
Next, then, I can consider whether or not the passage is psychagogic. Timaeus’ description of the negative consequences for living unjustly could strike fear into the spirited soul of the reader, and the imagery of souls being reborn and transformed into various different sorts of lives certainly engages the lower, image-loving soul parts. While all of this is taking place, the rational soul is engaged by considering the philosophical content I previously mentioned. In the sense that the reader’s soul is led to consider what really happens to someone who does or does not master one’s emotions (whether that fate is meant literally or figuratively), rather than what merely seems to happen, the reader may be led to belief or true opinion about this matter. Furthermore, Timaeus’ remark about the “massive accretion of fire-water-air-earth” and its need to be in “conformity with the revolution of the Same and uniform within him” seems to be a statement worthy of unpacking in metaphysical terms. In other words, what is the revolution of the Same and what does it mean to be in conformity with it? The answers to this question most likely lie in the realm of thought. In this way, then, the Timaeus myth does seem to exhibit a psychagogic effect potentially similar to that of the central myths of this study.  

This passage, and the previously discussed mythical selections of the Phaedrus, Meno, and Laws, share many of the same distinctive similarities with the myths of judgment of the Republic, Phaedo, and Gorgias: They describe the soul’s judgment in the afterlife using striking traditional imagery, with the result that they have a psychagogic function on their readers. The mythical passages of the Phaedrus, Meno, Laws, and Timaeus have this function despite the fact that they do not share all of the other features that contribute to the psychagogy of the three concluding afterlife myths. Most significantly, the former four texts are not consummatory, 

27 One notable author who discusses the role of psychagogy in the Timaeus is Thérèse-Anne Druart. She mentions at one point, for instance, that one of the crafts of the demiurge is soul-leading, or psychagogy. See Druart, “The Timaeus Revisited,” in Plato and Platonism, ed. Johannes M. van Ophuijsen (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 165-166.
while the latter three are. Because of this missing feature, and also because of other characteristics some of the former texts do not share with the latter, the psychagogic effects of the former are not as pronounced, or as powerful, as those of the latter. Because of this, the myths of judgment in the Republic, Phaedo, and Gorgias, I contend, are Platonic myths of the afterlife in the fullest sense. This finding reveals the question of why Plato would include psychagogic quasi-afterlife myths in his dialogues, knowing that there is a way (that he devised) to include such myths more effectively. Perhaps the answer is that Plato wanted to harness the soul-turning effects of the quasi-afterlife myths, and the increased interest of the reader that results, to incite readers to engage with the dialogue more effectively. In the big three afterlife myths, on the other hand, readers are left engaged, interested, and incited to further thought beyond the dialogue’s end. Plato has much less control over where these thoughts will go, unlike readers whose thinking can still be guided by the dialogue. The hope for intellectual discovery that the big three incite beyond the dialogue, the four of this chapter incite within the dialogue. The four quasi-afterlife myths of this chapter certainly merit further study, because a full accounting of their psychagogic effects requires more detailed, systematic treatment than I have been able to provide here. Most especially, further study is required to explain what intellectual hopes they inspire and whether or not their respective dialogues fulfill those hopes and/or incite them further.

5.6 Apology 40d-41b:

Socrates Consoles Friends and Admirers With Words About His Fate

After Socrates is convicted, he explains in Plato’s Apology that his “divine sign” did not oppose his actions in court, thus indicating that “[w]hat has happened [. . .] may be a good thing”
This is because, as he thinks he can prove, death is not an evil. (40b) He says that “there is good hope that death is a blessing,” (40c-4-5) for it is either an endless, dreamless sleep, or a relocating of the soul to a different place. The former, he explains, is pleasant and easy, like the best night’s sleep one can have. (40c-d) The latter is also a great blessing. He explains:

If anyone arriving in Hades will have escaped from those who call themselves jurymen here, and will find those true jurymen who are said to sit in judgment there, Minos and Rhadamanthus and Aeacus and Triptolemus and the other demi-gods who have been upright in their own life, would that be a poor kind of change? Again, what would one of you give to keep company with Orpheus and Musaeus, Hesiod and Homer? I am willing to die many times if that is true. It would be a wonderful way for me to spend my time whenever I met Palamedes and Ajax, the son of Telamon, and any other of the men of old who died through an unjust conviction, to compare my existence with theirs. I think it would be pleasant. Most important, I could spend my time testing and examining people there, as I do here, as to who among them is wise, and who thinks he is, but is not.

What would one not give, gentlemen of the jury, for the opportunity to examine the man who led the great expedition against Troy, or Odysseus, or Sisyphus, and innumerable other men and women one could mention? It would be an extraordinary happiness to talk with them, to keep company with them and examine them. In any case, they would certainly not put one to death for doing so. They are happier there than we are here in other respects, and for the rest of time they are deathless, if indeed what we are told is true. (40e7-c7)

Socrates subsequently tells the jury to “be of good hope as regards death” (41c8-9) because “a good man cannot be harmed either in life or in death” (41d1-2). He explains that he thinks what has happened to him was divinely ordained and that he is not angry with either the jury or the accusers. He does say the latter ought to be blamed for wanting to hurt him, and he actually asks them to reproach his sons as he reproaches them, if his sons seem to care for money more than virtue, or if they have an inflated sense of self-worth. (41e-42a) He then concludes by saying, “Now the hour to part has come. I go to die, you go to live. Which of us goes to the better lot is known to no one, except the god” (42a2-5)  

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28 All translations of the Apology are by Grube. See Cooper, 17-36.
29 S. Montgomery Ewegen casts some helpful light on these lines, saying that because of Socrates’ mantic power, not his reason, he knows everything went as it should have. Ewegen adds, “There is an additional sort of truth at
Regarding the question of whether or not this passage is mythical, we can easily say it includes unverifiable details, and it even comments on that unverifiability in the last line. It is not as easy to mark where this passage begins and ends. One could say it begins when Socrates starts discussing the nature of death (40b) or perhaps where he starts mentioning the unverifiable details we typically associate with myth, like Hades and the underworld judges (41a). If the latter, then the mythical passage ends at 40c, but if the former, then the account really ends at 42a. Like the other myths I have discussed, this passage is a likely account, since it is based on familiar testimony that has been handed down and would be accepted as generally true by many even if they doubted the specifics, like Socrates’ cross-examining the great figures of the past. The likely account is more “likely” if one includes the broader delimitation of the passage, because that entire passage is more convincing: it considers the endless, dreamless sleep option as well as Socrates’ concluding remarks about no one being able to harm a just person in life or death, whereas the more narrow delimitation does not consider these details.

The passage does not tell a story of the soul’s judgment in the afterlife like the afterlife myths of the Republic, Phaedo, and Gorgias, because the Apology passage does not have a clear beginning, middle, and end to its account of what happens to the soul after death. It is more of a set of remarks, or an explanation of the soul’s judgment after death, but even in that regard, it only conveys the fate of Socrates’ soul and other just souls like him. It, unlike the three

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play in the Apology, one that operates independently of, or at least antecedently to, reason.” See Ewegen, “We the Bird-Catchers. Receiving the Truth in the Phaedo and the Apology,” in Plato’s Animals, ed. Bell and Naas (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 88. Ewegen, 84, cites Theaetetus 142c and Phaedrus 242c as other places illustrative of Socrates’ mantic or prophetic power. Ewegen’s remark that there is something besides reason at play in the Apology supports my argument below that Socrates’ account of death at the close of the dialogue is psychagogic (just not in the same way as the three central afterlife myths). In its psychagogic function, as I explain below, this passage of the Apology makes use of emotion and the image-loving lower soul parts, both of which are distinct from reason according to the Republic.
concluding myths, does not account for the judgment of unjust souls. Thus, even superficially, this passage only somewhat resembles the Platonic myths of the afterlife.

By looking into the passage more deeply and investigating whether or not it makes use of the features with which the afterlife myths function, we will be able to discern better if the passage ought to be considered a Platonic myth of the afterlife or merely a quasi-afterlife myth, namely, one that resembles those myths and functions like them partially but not fully.

The *Apology* passage above, whether one includes the narrower set of remarks or the broader possible limits of the passage, clearly does make use of imagery that is compelling or suggestive in its depiction of the traditional, mysterious, and/or violent. Hades is mentioned, as well as the familiar, traditional underworld judges, in addition to traditional sources of religion like Homer and Hesiod, including some of their characters. Furthermore, the imagery of Socrates cross-examining those great figures of the past is quite engaging in its novel mixture of familiar traditional figures and Socrates’ unique ways.

The passage also contains philosophical content that gains its persuasive force from (a) authoritative tellers, and (b) the support it receives from the arguments of its dialogue. The philosophical content of this passage is that death is probably a blessing for the just, and therefore, the just person cannot be harmed in life or death. Certainly Socrates and the sources of the imagery he uses to support this account are authoritative tellers. The question of whether or not the content receives support from its dialogue is slightly more complex, but the answer to this question is probably affirmative. Socrates’ defense of his life’s decisions, and consistent lack of fear in the face of death throughout the text, as well as his explanation of the injustice of his accusers, can all be seen to support the message here in these mythical closing remarks that death is a blessing for the just, and that the just cannot be harmed in life or death.
Moreover, these mythical final remarks can be read both literally and figuratively in the way that the three main afterlife myths can be. I see no obvious clues leading to a metaphorical reading, like the descriptions of reincarnations in the myths of the afterlife. I can see, however, why a metaphorical reading would be valuable, if it were viable. If this passage only shows that ultimately, after death, Socrates will prevail, then it does not really show why Socrates’ way of life is happier (unharmed) during life as well as after death. For the passage really to show that Socrates’ is unharmed in both life and death, it needs not only to persuade readers of the literal truth about Socrates’ fate in the afterlife, but also needs to convey something about Socrates’ happiness in life. Perhaps the remark about the “extraordinary happiness” (41c5) of speaking with great figures of the past and cross-examining them is meant to symbolize Socrates’ happiness during his life of cross-examining the great people of his time in Athens. If so, then perhaps the passage uses its pleasing imagery of Socrates conversing with the great Greek literary figures to convey to readers some element of the happiness Socrates experienced in life from his way of living. This reading is at least possible, but would require further defense.

Does this passage have an overall function within its dialogue that amounts to a consummation of previous considerations? As a closing passage that conveys the core philosophical content of its dialogue one final time and that also employs imagery to enhance the significant mix of emotions any reader is likely to experience due to sympathy for Socrates, anger at his unjust sentence and admiration for his way of life, this mythical passage is indeed a consummation of the dialogue—even perhaps of the life of Socrates.\textsuperscript{30} As a consummation and culmination, this mythical passage is similar to the final myths of the Republic, Phaedo, and Gorgias.

\textsuperscript{30} Regardless of the results of the debate about where the passage begins and ends.
Finally, the passage is clearly psychagogic. The emotional imagery surely does engage both aspects of the lower soul, and the text is a final attempt to persuade readers that the just life—the Socratic life—is worth it, despite the fact that it—like Socrates—seems to be doomed. By using its soul-engaging imagery to persuade readers of a truth behind an appearance, this mythical passage does turn the whole soul of its audience from conjecture to belief. At the moment, I see no reason to suppose that it turns readers toward thought as well though, except in its motivating us to live like Socrates.

Although Socrates’ final remarks in the *Apology* superficially seem quite different from the afterlife myths central to this study, the former not only does seem to make use of most of the features with which those myths function, but it is a consummation of its dialogue. In this way, this passage from the *Apology* is a quasi-afterlife myth that stands apart from not only the three main myths of judgment, but also the other quasi-afterlife myths of this chapter.

5.7 *Theatetus* 176a-177b

*Theatetus* 176a-177b bears slight similarity to the Platonic myths of the afterlife, but, as we will see shortly, is so clearly not one of these myths, that my consideration of this passage will be much briefer than the above.

Theatetus proposes that knowledge equals perception (151e), setting off a lengthy discussion of this matter, which later results in this hypothesis being equated with Protagorean relativism and Heraclitean flux (160d-e). Socrates subsequently defeats Theatetus’ theory (164b-d), but wants someone to defend Protagoras (164e), eventually coaxing a reluctant Theodorus to do so (169c), after which Socrates seems to defeat Protagoras, on different grounds from which he had previously defeated Theatetus (169e-171e). Socrates then explains that they are
beginning their third discussion (172d), which is about philosophers compared to evil men. Within that discussion, a quasi-afterlife myth seems to occur.

Socrates explains that it is not for reasons commonly thought that one should avoid evil and pursue virtue. One should not be virtuous to avoid a bad reputation and have a good one. (176b) One alternate reason Socrates mentions as more worthy of consideration is that evil in human life will never be destroyed (176a), so humans ought to endeavor to escape earth for heaven by becoming god-like (176a-b), which means being “just and pious, with understanding” (176b2). He explains what he means by genuine wisdom, saying that it is a realization that one can only be as just as humans can be, in contrast to the god, whereas things that pass for wisdom, like political power and manual labor, are not wisdom, but are merely tools for survival in one’s community. Those who live lives that fall short of real wisdom need to be told about the penalty for doing so. (176c-d) Socrates then explains the penalty for this injustice, which is not whipping and death, from which one may escape, but rather an inescapable penalty. (176d-e) This ultimate penalty is that there are two patterns in reality: one that is most happy and the other that is godless and miserable. Evildoers live lives that correspond to the latter (176e-177a), thus inflicting their own punishments on themselves. When people warn them that, if they continue to live this way, they will not go to a place purified of evil, they will assume that this is the way in which fools talk to clever people like them. (177a) Socrates concludes that, in the end, their famous eloquence expires, and they are left looking like children. (177b) Socrates then indicates he wishes to end this digression within their third discussion. (177c)

This passage does contain unverifiable details, making it mythical, and it does tell a brief story of the soul’s judgment, although there is only brief mention of the afterlife and the torment

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31 Translations of the *Theatetus* are by M. J. Levett, revised by Myles Burnyeat. See Cooper, 157-234.
of the evil place there for evil souls. Superficially, then, this mythical passage hardly resembles a myth of the afterlife.

The violent imagery Socrates uses (his mention of whipping and death) is not an afterlife punishment according to this passage. There really is no traditional, religious, mysterious, and/or violent imagery of the afterlife in this passage. Even the description of the two patterns in reality mainly applies to this life here and now, with only a brief indication of the way in which this dualism is manifest in the afterlife. There is philosophical content in this passage, which gains its persuasive force from Socrates, an authoritative teller, as well as possibly the arguments of its dialogue, but there is no indication of polysemy, nor is it viable to argue that this passage is a consummation of previous considerations.

Given all of this, as well as its scant imagery and the brevity of its story, if this passage does have a psychagogical effect, it is a mild one (if that is possible), lacking a number of the characteristics with which the afterlife myths function. If this passage turns readers’ souls, it is toward the truth that what may seem to be the way to a virtuous life actually is not. In other words, the passage argues that rather than accepting the conjecture that one ought to cultivate one’s reputation and do things that seem to be good and wise, one should believe that one really needs to pursue philosophical wisdom in order to be happy both now and in the hereafter. By making use of so few of the tools with which the Republic, Phaedo, and Gorgias myths of judgment function psychagogically, this passage from the Theatetus is a quasi-afterlife myth that clearly ought not be categorized among the former three myths. As a final note, it would be interesting to compare this passage’s emphasis on the continuity between immediate punishments for injustice and afterlife punishments, to the quasi afterlife myth of the Laws, which are similar to it in this regard.
5.8 Conclusions

It is now clear that only the three closing myths of the afterlife that I discussed in my central chapters share all of the features I identified that they have in common. Because of this, only those three have the robust, powerful psychagogic effect that results from their incorporation of all of the features I have been discussing, most especially their consummatory function and their intertwinement with earlier lines of dialogue. Because they share these significant characteristics, and secondarily, because they are most commonly identified as Platonic myths of the afterlife, I can now say with certainty that the eschatological myths of the Republic, Phaedo, and Gorgias are Platonic myths of judgment in the fullest sense. All other myths that are similar make partial use of features that those three myths used fully, and as such, those other similar myths are quasi-afterlife myths.
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Similarities and Differences Among the Three Central Myths

I will discuss here similarities and differences among the myths of the afterlife in relation to the central thesis, namely, that Plato effectively employs them psychagogically, to turn or lead the whole soul toward truths developed in the dialogues.

Broadly speaking, each of the closing myths of the afterlife uses striking imagery, some of which is familiar, like Tartarus, and some of which is unfamiliar, like the radical punishments for incurable souls meant to serve as deterrents to others. The punishment-related imagery is quite violent in the myth of Er and the Gorgias myth, and although it is not as explicitly violent in the True Earth myth, it is nonetheless equally severe. Images of familiar divinities make their way into each myth, but each also leaves out details, leaving much to the imagination of readers. In this way, the imagery of the eschatological myths is mysterious as well as traditional, violent, and religious, which makes it engaging to readers’ lower soul parts.

The philosophical content of each of the three closing myths involves not only their conveying clear philosophical messages, like the doctrine that vice will be punished and virtue will be rewarded, but also philosophical content that is not so clearly expressed as a doctrine or teaching. In the myth of Er, we behold a cosmic system that touches on aspects of the intelligible realm that are not easy to summarize concisely and simply. In the Phaedo myth, we journey through layers below and above the True Earth that parallel the layers of the physical and intelligible realms of the Line and Cave. In the Gorgias myth, we learn about a reformed justice system that has clear advantages over the Athenian one familiar to Plato’s audience. In all of these cases, the philosophical content is conveyed by the authority of Socrates and
supported by authoritative voices of the Greek literary tradition. It is not only this authoritative backing that lends the philosophical content its persuasive force, but also the arguments of the dialogues that precede this content. The discussions about Forms in the *Republic* and *Phaedo* lend credibility and support to the treatment of the intelligible realm in each of the myths of judgment, while Socrates’ defense of his way of life throughout the *Gorgias* supports the afterlife myth’s portrayal of a true justice system.

Each of the three closing myths uses both literal and figurative layers of meaning to convey their rational, philosophical content while engaging readers’ lower aspects of the soul with their imagery. Also, each of the three final myths of the afterlife serves as a consummation of its dialogue, bringing together the dialogue’s strands of investigation, recapitulating it in some cases, and adding to it in other cases. In each case, the consummatory function adds to the emotional effect of the myth. The myth of Er is the final poetic invention to cap an epic night of philosophy shared by friends during a major festival. The True Earth myth crowns the last philosophical investigation Socrates undertook with his close friends, in the jail cell where he would soon die before their very eyes. The *Gorgias* myth of judgment crowns Socrates’ arguments for the life of philosophy by vividly portraying the ultimate vindication of philosophers and the downfall of others.

The imagery, the philosophical content, the polysemy, and the consummatory function of each closing myth all contribute to the ways in which each of these works of art engages the whole souls of their readers while leading readers’ souls away from the conjectural realm of appearances to the realm of belief or true opinion, and even further, toward thought and the intelligible realm.
The three closing myths have a great deal in common, when considered in terms of their overall function. Reading the afterlife myths as I have, it has become clear that they accomplish much in a succinct way because of their format: In the afterlife myths, Plato combines (1) his understanding of myth, education, and the human soul with (2) the philosophical discussions in each dialogue, resulting in (a) his audience internalizing or personalizing the dialogues’ proceedings and (b) learning about its topics during their reading and during future investigation. In this way, the density or richness of these myths is another important similarity they share.

In terms of specific details, these myths have only modest commonality—they have many differences in this regard. Each closing myth portrays the underworld journey as one that involves a series of paths with at least one fork in the road. Each one also involves the casting of the incurably wicked to Tartarus, specifying a different, rehabilitative punishment for the curably unjust. Those who live philosophically are the most highly rewarded in each tale. Nearly every other specific detail pertaining to the souls’ journey, judgment, and punishment varies among the three myths. In the Gorgias eschatological myth, the journey to the underworld is by one road, which splits at a fork, with one path going to Tartarus and the other going to the Isles of the Blessed. The True Earth myth of the Phaedo involves a journey along many roads, with many forks. In the myth of Er, there is an upper, smooth, heavenly path, contrasted to a path below the earth that is difficult, with a meadow in between. The Gorgias’ closing myth includes the most detailed portrayal of the judges, but it is also the only one of the three that does not include an elaborate depiction of reality, like the cosmic depictions in the myth of Er and the True Earth myth in the Phaedo. The Gorgias myth also does not focus on reincarnation, as the other two do. The time intervals spent in the underworld vary among the three myths, as do specific methods of punishment. I could continue this list of specific differences for many pages. It
suffices to say that the three closing myths portray generally the same story, that our souls separate from our bodies at death and that we are judged, with the virtuous being rewarded and the vicious being punished. Furthermore, the philosophers among us are the most highly rewarded in the afterlife, and the punished fall into two groups: curable and incurable, the latter being doomed. This general account is supported by the authoritative testimony in each myth, the philosophical content of each dialogue (most especially the proofs of the soul’s immortality in the Republic and Phaedo), and also the fact that each of the closing myths conveys this same account. The three, then, in the commonality of their general content and the deviations from one another in their specific details, could be considered a likely account altogether. In this way, all three combine to turn the whole souls of their readers toward the belief that the just actually are happier than the unjust in the long run, in contrast to that which merely appears to be the case when one calls to mind the many well known unjust figures who seem to enjoy great riches, fame, and other pleasures.

6.2 Casting New Light on What Constitutes a Platonic Myth of the Afterlife

Chapters 2-4 illustrated that the concluding myths of the Republic, Phaedo, and Gorgias use the same set of features in their psychagogic efforts, while chapter 5 highlighted not only the scholarly consensus that these three myths are what we have typically had in mind when we refer to the Platonic myths of the afterlife, but that the other likely candidates for this label have crucial differences from those three. Most significantly, the other candidates do not use the same set of features as the “big three,” as I have called them. The most notable characteristic lacking is the consummatory effect of the three closing myths—the emotional-intellectual effect that they have as a result of both functioning as conclusions and being intertwined with the themes of their
dialogues. One result of my study, then, is that we now have compelling reasons to see the concluding myths of the Republic, Phaedo, and Gorgias as Platonic myths of the afterlife in the fullest sense. Other similar myths are only quasi-afterlife myths.

6.3 New Light on the Nature of Psychagogy

According to the Phaedrus, as explained in chapter 1, psychagogy is the art of leading souls toward the true by way of the false. According to the Republic, this truth-leading process takes place incrementally, proceeding from conjecture to contemplation. The simile of the Cave portrays the falsities that are essential to this process as partial truths, not complete and utter falsehoods like the shadows on the cave wall. The objects in the cave are certainly partial-truths, since they are copies of real objects and are lit only by firelight and not sunlight. The objects seen outside of the cave as shadows or reflections are still only partial truths, representing the knowledge of διάνοια. Finally, the objects outside the cave, lit by the Sun, and of course, the Sun itself, all represent the truth proper to contemplation, or νόησις. Book 7 of the Republic gives us further detail about the partial truths of thought that constitute the guardians’ later education and ultimately make them philosophers, who will be compelled to turn back into the cave to lead others. The myths of the afterlife provide us with further insight into the partial truths that practitioners of psychagogy can use to lead souls away from conjecture and toward the intelligible realm. These partial truths include many aspects of the Greek literary tradition, as well as inherited doctrines like the judgment of the dead and reincarnation. Scientific theories about our physical reality also serve in this capacity, at least in the myth of Er and the True Earth myth. Thus, through the myths of the afterlife, we gain further insight into what objects can be employed as partial truths in the service of the psychagogue.
The partial truths encourage perspective shifts by the audience as well. The depiction of the universe in the myth of Er, for instance, invites the reader to consider one’s small place in the grand scheme of the κόσμος. By thinking about one’s relative insignificance, one avoids the error of arrogance, which often results from uncritically accepting the appearance of one’s place in the world as highly important. By thinking about our insignificance, we move beyond this conjectural way of thinking, to the belief that we have good reason to be humble, like Socrates. The True Earth depiction leads readers to this same sort of cosmic shift in perspective, even though the entire universe is not portrayed in that passage. According to Socrates there, we are but ants or frogs on a swamp. (Phaedo 109b) Although the Gorgias myth does not use a depiction of our broader dwelling to encourage such a perspective shift, it does lead readers to reconsider the semblance of their own moral invulnerability. We uncritically tend to assume that we can get away with injustice, and the Gorgias myth’s portrayal of our nude souls exposed to powerful judges who truly discern our justice and injustice invites us to consider the very real possibility of our exposure—not just in the next life but in this one here and now. By opening our thinking to this possibility, we move past the arrogant conjecture of invulnerability to the humbling belief in our vulnerable state.¹

The myths of judgment also give us further insight into the incremental nature of psychagogy. Although the Cave allegory portrays the movement from conjecture to belief in further detail than that of the Line, the eschatological myths provide even more detail about how this turn takes place and what it means. We get to comprehend this turn from different angles by

¹ Vulnerability itself has emerged as a sub-field of scholarship, and it would be interesting to compare my results on this issue to that recent scholarship. See, for example, Marina McCoy, Wounded Heroes: Vulnerability as a Virtue in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
observing it in the afterlife myths. The same is true for the other two turns—from belief to thought, and from contemplation back into the cave.

The commonalities among the eschatological myths’ psychagogy give us a set of criteria that we may employ in our soul-turning efforts: (1) The subjects of psychagogy must first be primed by a larger conversation—not only by witnessing it, but by being participants, like Socrates’ interlocutors—; subjects must be questioned until they admit to impasses, only to be redirected toward different lines of thinking. It may even be better if these subjects are already quite familiar with and sympathetic toward the views of the psychagogue, as are some of Socrates’ interlocutors in the Republic and Phaedo. (2) The psychagogue must be an authority figure who commands the respect of his audience while allowing objecting voices to be heard. He must be at ease among those who respect him as well as those who do not. (3) The falsities, or rather, partial truths that the psychagogue makes use of must be striking in both their familiarity and unfamiliarity. The psychagogue must go as far as using the sacred for his philosophical purposes. The imagery the practitioner uses must not only engage the lower, appearance loving soul parts as a union, but also occasionally target the appetites alone, drawing them out at first, but then tempering them, doing the same with the emotions, all while engaging the rationality of the subject. The irrational must not be avoided altogether, but rather, it must be selectively co-opted for rational aims. (4) The entire effort of the psychagogue must draw not only on the larger previous conversation or education of the subjects, but it must point forward to the hopeful possibilities that await those who convert to the intellectual life. In other words, it must be past-oriented and future-oriented in its present-oriented efforts. By showing potential psychagogues all of these techniques and approaches, the myths of the afterlife portray to soul-turners-in-training that our work in the cave, which we may dread, is not as overwhelming and
impossible as we may think. In fact, this work can be done by means of scholarly writing, which is something many potential psychagogues enjoy. In this way, Plato’s afterlife myths provoke us to turn back into the cave and educate others.

6.4 From Platonic Education to Modern Education

I would now like to consider the relevance of the criteria of psychagogy to modern day educators—the psychagogues of the present. By “educators,” I am referring not just to those engaged in the practice of formal, institutional education, but to anyone who is interested in helping others to ascend to new intellectual heights. Just as the turning of the whole soul that Plato describes in Republic 7 applies to education considered most broadly, so do the implications of my study of Plato’s myths. I will proceed in this section by discussing each of the above criteria in order, considering its relevance to current attempts to educate.

(1) Educators cannot fall into the common evangelical error of thinking that a simple message conveying a particular truth can bring a soul one step closer to the intellectual life. A billboard, a bumper sticker, or skywriting will not do the job; neither will one sermon, one lecture, or one piece of advice. Subjects of psychagogy must be involved in a larger conversation, ideally one that has been taking place for years in the context of their education. Soul-turning efforts, even powerful ones like the afterlife myths, must enter into this larger picture and be a part of that. A powerful psychagogical component like an afterlife myth is no magic wand; rather, it is a carefully crafted piece of a larger puzzle. Without the larger context, it would be basically useless. Similarly, modern attempts to turn students’ souls cannot be standalone efforts. Educators must create the context for psychagogy together, and psychagogues must assess the extent to which their subjects are ready for their next step: Have
they been active participants in an ongoing education? Have they struggled through, or around, impasses? If one’s potential subject is simply an aimless soul showing little interest or active engagement in their ongoing education, it is unlikely that one’s soul-turning efforts will bear any results, because that student has clearly not really been educated. Psychagogues must approach their students carefully, then, knowing how effective one’s efforts may be on a given student; knowing not only how to try and engage them, but also when to stop and when to keep going. Nonetheless, like Socrates, we ought to engage with all who willingly enter into dialogue with us, for such an action on their part is a sign that there may be hope for them.

(2) Educators who silence dissent by means of an authoritarian approach do not fit the description of a psychagogue according to Plato’s afterlife myths. Nor do those who crumble under the pressure of opposition, showing no evidence of steadfastness or direction. In this way, an authoritative, rather than an authoritarian, approach seems quite consistent with Plato’s portrayal of the practitioner of psychagogy.

(3) Imagery that is employed must draw out the emotions and the appetites, but in a regulated way. Imagery that is overly stimulating will disrupt the voice of reason—it will make it possible for the lower soul’s activity to overshadow the project of the rational soul. The regulated stimulation of the lower soul parts makes them receptive to the commands of reason. A rational project that is overly dry and unstimulating will not be received well by the whole soul, because the lower parts are left wanting, while a project that arouses intense emotions and appetites will become simply that—an emotionally or appetitively evocative endeavor. Academic philosophical discourse falls too often into the former camp, becoming so dry that very few find it interesting, thus compromising its ability to serve a pedagogical function. Works of art in popular culture fall too often into the latter group, similar to much of the art of
Plato’s time, according to the Republic, in simply arousing emotions or stimulating people’s appetites for the erotic or violent, thus compromising any rational pedagogical purpose such works might be able to serve. The psychagogy of the afterlife myths has shown us that for our rational projects to be well received, the lower soul cannot be ignored, but it also must not receive too much attention. In their pedagogical roles, neither appetite nor spiritedness are irrational. Rather, they constitute an indispensable aspect of the projects of reason. These soul-parts are dangerous to draw out, so the imagery that is selected for this aim must be carefully chosen. Plato knew what his audience would think and feel when hearing about Hesiodic accounts of the gods or Homeric depictions of the underworld. He knew that they would latch on to this sacred imagery, but that they would not get carried away with the titillating aspects of the imagery because of its careful placement within a highly rational, philosophical context. The evocative imagery is really just alluded to, and then often modified or made new. We do not see Plato have Socrates create an entirely new epic tale, with elaborate plot lines, characters, and so on. Rather, Plato’s poetry does not devote much of its effort to this sort of endeavor, instead devoting most of its effort to developing the philosophical lines of inquiry. Modern attempts to educate can follow Plato’s lead here. References to Biblical passages, well-known films, best-seller books, and familiar tropes can be employed effectively in an educational context, for the purposes of modern psychagogy, but this must be done in a measured way, and as a part of an essentially rational endeavor, such that the evocative references do not dominate or overtake the endeavor.

(4) How ought psychagogy to be hopeful in its future-orientedness? Throughout the Republic, we learn about the nature and value of dialectic, and in the myth of Er, we receive our last lesson of the dialogue on this topic, with an account of the universe that has metaphysical
bearing and a clear pronouncement that the only souls who will be saved are those who choose the life of philosophy, which we know is the life that includes the art of dialectic. The reader who is turned toward the intellectual realm by the myth is able to discern that beyond the horizon lies a vast realm of Ideas still in need of further articulation and organization. Just as the results of the dialogue as a whole were intellectually fruitful, the myth of Er helps us to see that our further philosophical labor is highly promising, involving not only contemplating the order of the universe of Forms but also working toward the salvation of our own souls. In this way, the myth of Er leads the reader to hope in its psychagogy.

The True Earth myth inspires us to hope by contrasting the beauty of our habitation with both inferior and superior beauty, thus giving us hope that if we continue on the philosophical journey by continuously moving forward on the path to enlightenment, we will discover great Beauty. In portraying this, the True Earth myth reveals to us how we can liberate ourselves from the torments of the physical world the way Socrates did—by living and dying for philosophy. By portraying the sure and certain pleasure of this liberation and the Beauty to be discovered, the afterlife myth of the *Phaedo* inspires hope through its psychagogy as well.

Finally, the *Gorgias* myth shows the philosophical how their vindication lies in the future. It portrays the certain victory of philosophy once all is laid bare and every form of justice and injustice is exposed for what it is.

In each of the above instances, the specific manner in which the reader will continue his philosophical quest is not delimited. Rather, the particular way forward toward these hopes is left somewhat open, for the reader to tailor at his discretion. By laying open the hopeful possibilities that they do, the Platonic myths of the afterlife are truly gratifying for readers—not in the way that the beholders of titillating imagery are gratified—but in the way that lovers of
learning are gratified. So, it is not only beholding the object of one’s hopes that provides
gratification, but the activity of hoping itself. This is consistent with my explanation of Plato’s
concept of hope in chapter 2. Unless one’s psychagogical efforts can lead souls toward this sort
of promising expanse of possibilities and, therefore, the gratification that goes along with hoping
for it, one’s soul-turning simply will not have the necessary power to strengthen the resolve of
the subject towards conversion, just as the prisoner initially turned toward firelight is prone to
regression. When one’s soul is turned, one only becomes resolute once one can envision the
light of truth and the vast realm of reality exposed by it. This happens in the turn toward
thought, and it is this toward which Plato’s efforts and our modern efforts need to lead.
Although Plato’s efforts to turn souls toward belief may have less than firm results, this does not
make them worthless. Turning souls from conjecture to belief is valuable as part of the project
of leading souls toward the intellectual realm.

6.5 Μῦθος and Λόγος

Like some scholars, I see myth as a foil for the projects of reason. Unlike them, however,
I do not see it as taking over when reason in general fails, but rather, as capable of reaching
rational heights in a way that demonstration cannot. Myth brings together concepts and lines of
discussion in such a way that their interplay yields something that they could not have on their
own. This yield, in the case of the myths of judgment, is a psychagogic effect capable of
bringing souls out of the Cave and into the expanse of the intelligible realm. If pure λόγος could
do this, then there would be no need for myth in Plato’s dialogues. There clearly is a need for
myth, however, and, therefore, pure λόγος cannot accomplish the soul-turning effect that Plato
has particularly ascribed to myth. If myth turns souls toward the hopeful possibilities in the
realm of the intelligible in ways that λόγος alone cannot, then λόγος needs μῦθος. Myth does turn souls in ways that pure λόγος cannot, since the psychagogic function of myth depends in part on unverifiable details. Therefore, λόγος needs μῦθος. This study has illuminated, then, the many ways in which μῦθος needs λόγος in order to accomplish its mission. Therefore, as a whole, this study contributes to the view that μῦθος and λόγος are interdependent and that, in order to function, they build upon each other.²

6.6 The Republic and Phaedrus Reflected in the Phaedo and Gorgias

My study has established the possibility that the doctrine of the tripartite soul of the Republic, as well as the simile of the Line and the Allegory of the Cave, are at work in the Phaedo and Gorgias. Additionally, I have shown continuity between psychagogy in the Phaedrus and soul-turning in the Republic, Phaedo, and Gorgias. Finally, my study also demonstrated that the criteria for good art in the Republic and good writing in the Phaedrus are reflected in the Platonic myths of the afterlife. I am not interested, however, in trying to prove once and for all that the Republic and Phaedrus are reflected in the Phaedo and Gorgias. My reason for this is that just as soon as I point out evidence for this conclusion, someone will be able to point out evidence to the contrary. The result will be a back and forth bearing little on philosophy. Also, I am avoiding to extrapolate any results from my study that may bear on various theories of Platonic chronology. I am avoiding this topic because of recent studies casting a great deal of doubt on the previously widely accepted chronology and also the difficulty of discussing this topic in a way that bears philosophical fruit.³ Rather, what I set out to

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² See especially Janet Smith on play in Plato’s myths. See Smith, Plato’s Use of Myth as a Pedagogical Device.
³ See especially Jacob Howland, “Re-Reading Plato: The Problem of Platonic Chronology.” See also Charles Kahn, Plato and the Socratic Dialogue. Catherine Zuckert argues for a grouping of the dialogues based on their dramatic
do, and what I am here recapitulating, is that it is extremely fruitful to understand the afterlife myths, to read them through the lenses of the Republic and of the Phaedrus. By reading these myths as I have, we now see commonalities among their overall function that were not evident previously. We also have a better understanding of what Platonic psychagogy is.

Appendix 1

Aspect of the Soul | 1st Level of Subdivision | 2nd Level of Subdivision
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**Rationality**
(λογιστικόν, 439d5)
(Characterizes the philosophic or aristocratic soul; not subdivided at all)

Part allied with reason that can see beyond appearances (I make this distinction tentatively.)
(More active in best souls, but suppressed in appetitively-dominated souls)

**Spirit**
(θυμός, 439e3)
(θυμοειδείς, 550b6)
(Characterizes the timocratic soul)

Part allied with appetites that does not see beyond appearances (I make this distinction tentatively.)
(More dominant in appetitive souls, and suppressed in better souls)

**Appetites**
(ульόγιστον, 439d7)
(ἐπιθυμητικόν, 439d8)

**Necessary**
(ἀναγκαίους ἐπιθυμίας, 554a5-6)
(Characterize the oligarchic soul)

**Unnecessary**
(“Dronish”)
(κηφηνώδεις ἐπιθυμίας, 554b7)

“Beggarly”
(“Lead to no good”)
(πτωχικάς, 554c1)
(Characterize the democratic soul)

“Evil”
(κακούργους, 554c1)
(“Lawless,” Lead to evil)
(παράνομοι, 571b5)
(Characterize the tyrannical soul)
Appendix 2

Cave

Turns 1 & 2
(εἰκασία to πίστις and πίστις to διάνοια, respectively)

Puppeteers’ Wall

Path out

Outside world

Turn 3
(Back in)

Back cave wall

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1 Fire image courtesy of http://www.clipartbest.com/clipart-bcyodn8Bi
Appendix 3
The Realms of Judged Souls in the True Earth Myth

Region 1:  *Beyond the True Earth*

- Philosophers (114c3), who spend the rest of time here (81a)

Region 2:  *The surface of the True Earth*

- The pious (114b6), who will probably return to a similar human life

Region 3:  *The hollows or caves in which we dwell*

Region 4:  *The underworld; the hollows or caves within our hollows*

The Acheron, which flows into the Acherusian Lake

The Acherusian Lake:

- Mediocre souls, who receive rewards and penalties (113d-e); the non-philosophical, socially virtuous; the happiest of those who associate with the body, who return as social and gentle animals, like bees, wasps, or ants, to return to the human race after some period of time (82a-b)
- Careless souls: Those who lived intemperately, to return as donkeys or something similar (81e-82a)

The Cocytus and Pyrphlegethon run between these deep caverns, around the Acherusian Lake, to the deepest below: Tartarus

The deepest pit below the surface--Tartarus:

- Curably wicked souls: Murderers who feel remorse and those who were impious toward parents, but regretful, sent from Tartarus to Acherusian Lake after 1 year to beg for forgiveness (113e-114b); to return as animals once forgiven (113a5), specifically as wolves, hawks, and kites (82a)
- Incurably wicked souls: Murderers and those guilty of many great sacrileges, never to return (113e)\(^1\)

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\(^1\) Not depicted are the many roads and guides (108a), which one can imagine as interconnecting the underworld regions in addition to its rivers. Also not portrayed are the various wanderings of dead souls who were passionately attached to bodies, and who have not yet arrived at their appointed places (108a-c). They are also depicted wandering around graveyards at 81b-d.
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