

RESTING FROM OUR LABOURS

WITH MYTH

The term ‘Myth’ refers to the telling (or murmuring) an ancient symbolic tale.¹ From what follows here it appears that these ‘Myths’ are designed to provide the imaginative power with symbolic imagery that addresses the intuition, and, as it were, bypasses the discursive or logical. The power of this way of using symbols is that the imagery is drawn from sense-data, and linked to a ‘ripping yarn’ as it were which remains in the memory of the auditor. Such a device enabling the transmission of a tradition even by someone (a story-teller) who doesn’t necessarily know what the symbols could represent and therefore remains unaware of the full content and import.

The power of Intuition referred to in this way, is not the same as, or part of, instinct. Rather it is the ‘Eye of the Soul’, the visive (or ‘seeing’²) power of the living intelligence rather than the instinctual energies of the material and corporeal animal (such as anticipation of ‘fight or flight’ etc.) which in themselves depend upon sense-data. The intuition is completely separate, dealing as it does, only with realities, but is linked to the instinct via the imagination. It is also seen as being above, but linked with, the dialectical, discursive and logical power, and as was pointed out above. Myth is concerned primarily with addressing this Intuitive power.

There are, however, different ways of perceiving the mythic message, along with different types of myth, as is pointed out later.

Recently, over the last few sessions, we have exerted ourselves with intellectual exercises over a range of related subjects. We have now reached a point where, like certain places in the Dialogues of Plato, we introduce a Myth. Those who are familiar with these Dialogues will be aware that sometimes there is one myth, other times more. For example, see the myth of The Upper and Lower World, “There are many wonderful regions in the Earth, and the Earth itself is neither in nature or in size such as geographers suppose it to be”, says Socrates at *Phaedo* 107e, ff, preparing us for the myth concerning the world about to follow. Being urged to tell more by Simmias, Socrates responds with, “Well, Simmias, It doesn’t require the skill of a Glaucus to relate my belief, but to prove it is true seems to me to be too difficult, even for the skill of a Glaucus. In the first place I am probably unable to do it, and on the other, Simmias, what remains of my life is too short for such a long explanatory proof”. The myth, therefor relates, in a succinct and codified manner, a view of the world beyond the hollow or Cave, ‘as it is’ and not ‘as it appears to be’.

There is also the famous myth of ‘The Cave’, *Republic* Book VII 514a ff, ‘The Vision of Er, son of Armenius’, *Book IX* 614b ff, and also ‘Soul is as a Jar’, *Gorgias* 493a f, etc. etc. There are many other instances throughout the Dialogues.

Following this model in general, turning from the elenchus³ dianoetic analytic activity, (not attempting to halt such activities, but not paying them overmuch attention, and operating instead from the still clear point in a turning world

¹ For further information see *Greek Lexicon*, Liddell Scott, And Jones, abbreviated LSJ.

² The word ‘idea’ is from the Greek ‘idein’ which means ‘to behold’

³ (1), Refutation of an argument by proving the contrary of its conclusion, esp. syllogistically, and (2), Socratic elenchus, the drawing out of the consequences of a position in order to show them to be contrary to some already accepted position.

(apologies to TS Elliot⁴), and opening the eye of the Soul, as it were, look at a short explanatory key to by Sallust,⁵ who illustrates a certain way of ‘unpacking’ Hellenic myths.

*That there are five Species of Fables; and Examples of each.*⁶

Concerning fables, some are theological, some are concerned with physics (pertaining to nature), others psychological, (or pertaining to soul,) others material, and lastly, yet others mixed from these.

Theological fables employ nothing corporeal, but speculate the very essences of the Gods; such as the fable which asserts that Kronos (Saturn)⁷ devoured his children: for it obscurely intimates the nature of an Intellectual God, since every intellect returns into itself.

We speculate fables according to physics when we speak concerning the energies of the Gods about the world; as when considering Chronos (Saturn) the same as Time, and calling the parts of time the children of the universe, we assert that the children are devoured by their parents.

We employ fables in a psychological (animastic) mode when we contemplate the energies of soul; because the intellections of our souls, though by a discursive energy they proceed into other things, yet abide in their parents.

Material fables, are such as some ignorantly employ, when they consider and call corporeal natures divinities; such as Isis, earth; Osiris, humidity; or Typhon; heat. Or again, denominating Saturn, water; Adonis, fruits; and Bacchus, wine. (Indeed, to assert that these are dedicated to the Gods, in the same manner as herbs, stones, and animals, is the part of wise men; but to call them gods is alone the province of mad men; unless we speak in the same manner as when, from established custom, we call the sphere of the Sun and its rays the Sun itself).

Lastly, we may perceive the mixed kind of fables, as well in many other particulars, as in the fable which relates, that Eris (Discord) at a banquet of the Gods threw a golden apple, and that a dispute about it arising among the Goddesses, they were sent by Zeus (Jupiter) to take the judgement of Paris, who, charmed with the beauty of Aphrodite (Venus), gave her the apple in preference to the others. For in this fable the banquet denotes the supermundane powers of the Gods; and on this account they subsist in conjunction with each other: but the golden apple denotes the world, which, on account of its composition from contrary natures, is not improperly said to be thrown by Eris. But again, since different gifts are imparted to the world by different Gods, they appear to contest with each other for the apple. A soul living according to sense, (for this is Paris) not yet having developed the ability to perceive other powers in the universe, asserts that the contended apple subsists alone through the beauty of Aphrodite.

But of these species of fables, those that as are theological belong to philosophers; those concerning physics, and the psychological to poets; but the mixed belong

⁴ “At the still point of the turning world, there the dance is”, cf T S Elliot, *The Four Quartets*. Book & Audio Cassette.

⁵ Circa 400ce

⁶ cf ‘On The Gods and The World’ Ch.4. translated by Thomas Taylor, (TTS Vol. IV, chapters III & IV pp.5-8)

⁷ The names in brackets refer to their Latin (Roman) equivalents.

especially to initiatory rites⁸ (τελεταιν) since the intention of all mystic ceremonies is, to unite us with the World and the Gods.

To relate another fable, we may employ the following with advantage:

It is said that the Mother of the Gods perceiving Attis by the river Gallus, fell in love with him, and having placed on him a starry hat, lived afterwards with him in intimate familiarity; but Attis fell in love with a Nymph, deserting the Mother of the Gods, entering into intimate association with the Nymph. Because of this the Mother of the Gods caused Attis to become insane, who cutting off his genital parts, left them with the nymph, and then returned again to his pristine connection with the Goddess.

The Mother of the Gods then is the Vivific Goddess, and on this account is called Mother: but Attis is the Demiurgus of natures conversant with generation and corruption; and hence he is said to be found by the river Gallus; for Gallus denotes the Galaxy, or milky circle, from which a passive body is said to descend to the earth. But since primary Gods perfect such as are secondary, the Mother of the Gods falling in love with Attis imparts to him celestial powers; for this is the meaning of the starry hat. But Attis loves a nymph, and nymphs preside over generation; for everything in generation flows. But because it is necessary that the flowing nature of generation should be stopped, lest something worse than things last should be produced; in order to accomplish this, the Demiurgus of generable and corruptible natures, sending prolific powers into the realms of generation, is again conjoined with the Gods.⁹

But these things indeed never took place at any particular time, because they have a perpetuity of subsistence¹⁰: and intellect contemplates all things as subsisting together; but discourse considers this thing as first, and that as second, in the order of existence. Hence, since a fable most aptly corresponds to the world, how is it possible that we, who are imitators of the world, can be more gracefully ornamented than by the assistance of fable? For through this we observe a festive Day.

And, we ourselves falling from the celestial regions, and associating with a nymph, the symbol of generation, live immersed in sorrow, abstaining from corn and other gross and sordid aliment; since everything of this kind is contrary to the soul: afterwards, the incisions of a tree and fasting succeed, as if we would amputate from our nature all farther progress of generation: at length we employ the nutriment of milk, as if passing by this means into a state of regeneration: and lastly, festivity and crowns, and a re-ascent, as it were, to the gods succeed. But the truth of all this is confirmed by the time in which these ceremonies take place; for they are performed about spring and the equinoctial period, when natures in generation cease to be any longer generated, and the days are more extended than the nights, because this period is accommodated to ascending souls. But the rape of Persephone (or Proserpine) is fabled to have taken place about the opposite equinoctial; and this rape alludes to the descent of souls.

And thus much concerning the mode of considering fables; to our discourse on which subject, may both the Gods and the souls of the writers of fables be propitious.

⁸ See more concerning this species of fable in my *Dissertation on the Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries*. T.T. (TTS Vol. V)

⁹ This explanation of the fable is agreeable to that given by the Emperor Julian, in his *Oration to the Mother of the Gods*, p75, a translation of which is available in the same volume (IV) of the TTS Series as the above.

¹⁰ i.e. Are always substantially existent.

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"The Paternal Self-begotten Intellect, understanding his works, disseminated in all things the bond of love, heavy with fire, that all things might remain loving for an infinite time; that the connected series of things might intellectually remain in the light of the Father; and that the elements of the world might continue running in love."

(Chaldaic Oracle. Fr.101, Kroll [39, Majercik])

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THE MYTH OF THE CAVE

(REPUBLIC VII, 514a – 517b)

The myth of the Cave of Plato, in the *Politeia*, or 'Republic' begins at Book VII, 514a, ff. In this we can see from what it follows this is about both the social structure and the individual, we can interpret this myth in either way or, in fact, as both! While the social, per se, is an interesting concept, in this place we are concerned with the individual.

The analogy opens with a description of the general setting. At 514a Socrates says, "After these things, and with reference to training and the lack of it, assume our nature to be in the following condition:

Consider people in a subterranean cave that has a tunnel to the light. Suppose also, that the inhabitants have been there since early childhood. They are chained both on their legs and necks so that they cannot move even to turn their heads, they can only look straight ahead.

Now suppose also, that a fire behind and far above them gives off the light that by which they see, and which is kept burning. Between the fire and the chained inhabitants there is a raised road with a low wall on one side of it running the width of the cave. Along this road others are walking carrying shapes of all sorts of things along with statues, animals, furniture and so on. Some of those carrying these things are speaking while others are silent".

He then continues: "The things carried by those on the road behind the prisoners, being illuminated by the fire are casting their shadows on the rear wall of the cave, and it is only this that the prisoners can see".

Clearly in this situation, the chained people have been subject to extensive deprivation – not only are they unable to move, but they have been in this situation for so long that they take their situation as being normal. Not only that, but to compound the problem, all things perceived by them in this manner, the objects of appetites, desires, fears and resentments regarding all material things etc. are taken by them as being real!

So what these prisoners are taking as being real are the shadows of things and not the substance, or reality. This has clear connotations. Plato's text is saying that those who take living in the world of sense perceptions as being the only reality are deluded. That they do not perceive the underlying conditions (that give rise to what they perceive by the senses), as being more real, and also, because they cannot change their own conditions, they require help from those who have managed to get a greater grasp on reality. The shadows that are seen and that are apparently real are illusions, or phantasms. A little further on, at 517a, he says that such people will resist intervention, and that they will fear or resent anyone who disturbs their 'reality'.

Surely the philosopher, engaging with those who are in such situations, will have to deal with those for whom phantasms or 'shadows' have become a type of 'reality', (this through a variety of causal clusters), and will need to become both familiar and comfortable to the patient in order to establish a link so that a healing process can begin. The problem for the philosopher, as Plato points out, is that the people in the cave may be content with what they perceive, and desire to remain in that condition, and resent intervention for this reason. This is actually quite understandable, for in an apparently isolated situation, who would choose to utterly rely on, to trust our very existence to, a complete stranger?

So is there a way out? Yes says Plato, for there is another path, one that leads out of the cave, and if one should get free enough to explore the situation, they would find the path and follow it upward to the very mouth of the cave.

But he cautions us here, in that he says that after being in the cave for so long, to come out into bright sunlight would damage and blind us, and cause pain. He suggests that such a one should exit the cave at night, by the gentle light of the moon and stars. In this way the individual will gradually become accustomed to reality. He also says that having become accustomed to this, such an individual would greatly desire to return to the cave to free the others.

The goal of all this is not to attempt to become something we are not, but to consciously realise what we in fact are. After having developed the abilities to the point where each is a fully developed individual who has become 'epopteia' or 'beholder' and who is at one with what truly is.

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"When you behold a sacred fire^a without form, a shining splendour leaping through the profundities of the whole world, HEAR THE VOICE OF FIRE".

(Chald. Orac. fr.14,Kroll. Majercik 148)

a. This oracle relates to the vision of divine light