BEYOND THE MYTH/PHILOSOPHY DICHOTOMY. FOUNDATIONS FOR AN INTERDEPENDENT PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract. Philosophy vs. myth; argument vs. narrative. Are these oppositions outdated clichés or are they realistic dichotomies with universal application? Definitions of myth are often confronted with exceptions. Mythic themes and elements regularly surface in philosophy, and vice versa. The boundary separating myth and philosophy continues to be redrawn and the status of the two continually reevaluated. By moving away from an all-encompassing definition of myth I aim to propose a foundation upon which an interdependent relationship between myth and philosophy can be interpreted. New possibilities for interconnection between the two will be suggested along with more compelling questions on which to base inquiries.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY MYTH?

In the Modern era the word 'myth' has become a general term used to refer to revelation, folktales, sacred scripture, fairy tales, legend, epic and even community hearsay.[1] Myth is understood to narrate the exploits of men (from ancestors until the present), gods and a host of other supernatural beings.[2] It can also depict the history of a family or dynasty; the glory

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[1] In the introduction to the second edition of V. Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, Alan Dundes explains that the affinities between these different forms of narrative have been based primarily on content rather than structure. He indicates that one of the virtues of Propp's study is that it illustrates how important cultural patterns are manifested in cultural materials which include novels, plays, comic strips, motion picture and television plots. (See V. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, second edition, University of Texas Press, Austin 1968, pp. xiv-xv).

[2] William Doty collected fifty individual definitions of myth. He groups them into eight types: myth as aesthetic device, narrative, literary form; subject matter pertaining to

or demise of a city or civilization; the adventures or fate of different kinds of souls; the origins of the universe, the structure of the universe and the coming end of the universe. These themes or motifs, in addition to a vast range of other reoccurring ones, are often features of recurring story lines we have become familiar with such as 'the death and resurrection of a god or hero',[3] 'deliverance',[4] 'recurrence',[5] 'cyclical time', 'linear time', 'progress',[6] 'regress', reciprocity', 'alchemical transformation', 'salvation', 'damnation' and, more generally, tragedy, comedy, romance and satire.[7] In some myths these plots are exclusive and in others they are combined.[8]

In his monumental study of myths and rituals, entitled *Mythography*, William Doty lists the various conventional definitions of myth construct-

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gods or a realm beyond ours; etiology; early, weak, or inaccurate science; myth as the literal or verbal concomitant to ritual; an accessible account of universals; explicating beliefs, collective experiences, or values; the expression of 'spiritual' or 'psychic' states. (See W. Doty, *Mythography*, University of Alabama Press, Alabama 1986, p. 9).

[3] For examples of themes, motifs and plots of this nature see T.M. Compton, *Victim of the Muses – Poet as Scapegoat, Warrior and Hero in Greco-Roman and Indo-European Myth and History*, Center for Hellenic Studies, Washington DC 2006; J. Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Pantheon Books, New York 1949; L. Coupe, *Myth*, Routledge, London 1997, pp. 63-65.

[4] Consider Coupe's various references to the theme of deliverance in *Myth* 1997.

[5] For an example of the use of this theme see L. Hatab, *Nietzsche's Life Sentence: Coming to Terms with Eternal Recurrence*, Routledge, New York 2004.

[6] For a study of the use of this theme see J.L. Mehta, "The Concept of Progress", in *India and the West – Selected Essays of J.L. Mehta*, Scholar Press, California 1985, pp. 69-82.

[7] See N. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism; Four Essays*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1957. Of course, Frye's classification is not the only series of plot structures that offers general categories of genre, but it is a helpful tool to begin with. For an example of the influence of Frye's theory cf. H. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1973; hereafter abbreviated *Meta*. In his introduction White briefly explains the features of each mode and gives some examples where they have been used (pp. 8-11). For philosophical critique and development of Frye's mythographic work cf. F. Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism*, Athlone Press, London 1980.

[8] Propp has drawn attention to the problems associated with classifying and defining 'themes' or 'motifs'. He is correct in highlighting the fact that dividing selected sections, ideas or events in a narrative into strict classes neglects inherent idiosyncratic qualities within those units and ignores the overlapping nature of different themes (Propp 1968, pp. 7-12). Cf. M. Gerhart and A.M. Russell, "Myth and Public Science", in ed. K. Schilbrack, *Thinking Through Myths – Philosophical Perspectives*, Routledge, New York, 2002, pp. 194-196; hereafter abbreviated "MPS", for examples of how themes influence political and scientific allegiances and how these allegiances characterize the way in which observation and research is narrated. They explain how Gerald Holton imported methodological techniques from anthropology, art criticism and other similar fields, methods associated with thematic analysis, and applied them to scientific writing with great success.

ed by different fields of study: 1) In comparative religious studies myth has been understood in contrast to theology; the first being associated with indigenous cultures or 'primitive' peoples and the second with monotheistic systems of belief or philosophically inclined cultures. 2) In the study of poetry, drama and fiction myth is understood in relation to 'mythic elements' or 'legendary plots'. 3) In anthropology or ethnology the term 'the mythic period' has been used to label, often negatively, periods in the history of a culture that resembles pre-modern ways of thinking and acting. 4) In political science the appellation 'myth' is often used to criticize ideologies such as democracy or socialism. 5) In sociology the term is used vaguely for systems of beliefs and ritualized forms of behavior (Doty 1986, p. 6).

The ways that each discipline understands and uses the word 'myth' are indispensable references for any study of myth because together they encompass both narratives and arguments, past and present. Different cultures, eras and systems of thought build up their own categories and include and exclude different phenomena according to basic and static definitions (monomythic definitions – Doty 1986, p. 13, pp. 174-182). However, knowing how to unite different perspectives, and considering the evaluations of those perspectives constructively, while respecting each individual socially and culturally conditioned myth is a far more difficult task and a more vital and urgent interpretative matter (a poly-mythic hermeneutics – Doty 1986, pp. 56-60). In order to understand the complexities associated with the *mythos/logos* distinction I believe the first step must be to move away from reductive approaches to myth and visit myths in their different varieties. In this paper I will expose some of the obstacles hindering the study of myth and its relationship with philosophy. After revealing some of the underlying presuppositions held by interpreters and rediscovering the intricacies ignored by them I will suggest a series of new questions and some ideas which are necessary if one aims to construct an approach towards the myth/philosophy interaction that resists many of the familiar theoretical simplifications and the dichotomy paradigm that encompasses them.

'MONOMYTHIC' DEFINITIONS

The desire for an accurate definition of myth that delineates myth from other forms of discourse, and the belief that so many essentially different forms of discourse can be explained by one definition, are the most significant methodological influences motivating many philosophical studies of myth. When attempting to draw boundaries between different discourses,

deliberating on the principles and elements that are essential for an account to be a myth, one can be easily confused. For instance, the tale about the goddess Artemis hindering the departure of Agamemnon's ships for Troy by extinguishing the wind is considered a myth.[9] However, the authorized accounts of Mohammed's army being aided by thousands of angels to defeat their opposition at the battle of Badr[10] are not considered to be myths. Both of the stories involve supernatural beings, both of them are narrated according to a plot, and all the authors involved aimed to present historical events in a way they believed to be appropriate. The attempts to define myth and to determine which narratives are to be considered myth raise more questions than they answer. The relationship between history and fiction has been scrutinized in the post-modern era because of the nature of narratives – the fact that all narratives, by definition, use particular kinds of plots and create a story in accordance with the plot, which in turn requires a degree of interpretation and selection and exclusion of available data (White 1973, pp.5-7).[11] In this way, the data used in a historical text relate to reality through particular tropes and are combined to correspond with the imposed plot structure (White 1973, pp. 31-38). A certain amount of 'filling in' occurs when the selected data – at the expense of the excluded data – need to be arranged and matched with each other in order to satisfy the order and rhythm prescribed by the chosen storyline. It would be unfair and over-exaggerated to label history as fiction but it would be inaccurate to assume that historical accounts are representations of events exactly as they happened, or that a historical account could only ever be the one correct story.[12] As an example one could consider historical accounts of events in the twentieth-century which reflect the creative involvement of the historian, film maker or other kinds of artists when depicting history. From

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[9] Euripides, *Iphigeneia at Aulis.*

[10] There are several Qur'anic verses and *hadith* mentioning the assistance of angels in this battle and early Muslim sources take these accounts literally. Also, practically all the sources we have for this event, other than the Qur'an, come from *hadith* and biographies of the prophet written decades after the battle took place. Also, the standard Muslim belief is that the Qur'an was dictated by God to Mohammed through the angel Gabriel. See *Quran* 3:123-125 and 3:13; K. Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet*, Harper, San Francisco 1992, pp. 174-176.

[11] Also, Gerald Holton has pointed out that in scientific writing, what he terms public science, the writer applies a similar kind of selectivity. He or she reports methods, data and conclusions only after specific laboratory notes are taken and 'disembodied' from the historical context they were taken in to support a particular position or theory and to guarantee further publication and reference (Gerhart and Russell 2002, pp. 194 and 204).

[12] N. Carroll, "Interpretation, History, and Narrative", in *Beyond Aesthetics – Philosophical Essays*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001.

the situation in gas chambers in *Schindler's List*, to the events leading to the shooting of John Kennedy in *J.F.K*, to the depiction of certain moments in relation to the unsuccessful mission of one of the high-jacked planes on 9/11/2001 in *United 93* (the high-jacker's preparations and behavior, and the passenger's heroism), are all acceptable to a large extent, are unverifiable, but would never be referred to as myths.[13]

The issue of using verifiable evidence and unverifiable evidence is complicated even more when the two are used in juxtaposition or when new evidence is found that some interpret as being verification for an event or an action that others consider to be myth. In the first case, the blending of an unverified narrative with a verified discourse, i.e. supported by different form of evidence, can determine the truth of the tale. *The Histories* of Herodotus, even his most fantastic tales, are not myths because some essential aspects of the stories correspond to a verifiable, logically and physically possible, reality.[14] In relation to the second case, however, the stories contained in *Genesis* are mostly considered myths by those unconvinced by theories based on archeological evidence, and true accounts according to those who draw connections between certain findings and the stories in the text.[15]

The objects of myth are sometimes unverifiable, and sometimes verifiable, albeit, to different degrees depending on which aspect of it you wish to prove. It may be accurate to say – to criticize the traditional standards for classifying myth – that the notion of myth is itself a myth, and those very standards, the criteria for what can be considered a myth, are fluid. Myth studies and religious studies has advanced greatly since its inception

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[13] See White's interpretation of the way characters and events are represented in film and literature in "The Modernist Event", in *Figural Realism – Studies in the Mimesis Effect*, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 2000, pp. 66-86.

[14] For the influence of myth in the *Histories* cf. D. Boedeker, "Epic Heritage and Mythical Patterns in Herodotus", in *Brill's Companion to Herodotus*, eds. E. J. Bakker, I.J.F. de Jong, H. van Wees, Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden 2002, pp.97-116: "Readers of Herodotus both ancient and modern have found the imprint of Homeric epic on all levels of his text, from the occasional use of special poetic words, to literary tropes such as set speeches and dialogues, to overall range and purpose. Herodotus occasionally refers to epic characters and deeds; moreover, story-patterns familiar from myths emerge from time to time in the *Histories* – but attributed to historical characters and situations" (p. 97).

[15] G. Cornfeld and D.N. Freeman, *Archaeology of the Bible: Book by Book*, Harper & Row, New York 1976. For an analysis of different categories, based on credibility or lack of it, with which narratives can be distinguished cf. B. Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1989, p. 25. Also cf. K. Schilbrack's introduction in ed. K. Schilbrack, *Thinking Through Myths – Philosophical Perspectives*, Routledge, New York 2002, pp. 7-10.

less than two centuries ago, and today it would be naïve to assume, for instance, that the indigenous Australian stories about the Dreamtime and ancient Greek myths belong to one genre.[16] One thing is certain, myth, if believed in or accepted as relevant in certain ways, allows for the existence of particular kinds of objects. Objects, whether they are physically possible, logically possible or actual, take a certain form and are ascribed a certain meaning when incorporated into one or more of the many forms of myth I listed at the beginning of this section. Levi-Strauss, in *Totemism*, suggests that if we break the authority of a myth to classify objects and experiences, then many of those objects and experiences vanish or undergo a transformation of meaning.[17] If this is the case what happens to the oral stories and texts we bundle together under the name myth if the very notion of myth itself is scrutinized and deconstructed in the same way: Could many modern theories and ideologies be considered myths if we reconstruct the definition of myth in agreement with Levi-Stauss' analysis?[18]

If we consider a well known quote by Levi-Strauss we must pause before we agree to any definitive definition or function of myth.

> Of all the chapters of religious anthropology none has tarried to the same extent as studies in the field of mythology. From a theoretical point of view the situation remains very much the same as it was fifty years ago, namely, a picture of chaos. Myths are still widely interpreted in conflicting ways: collective dreams, the outcome of a kind of esthetic play, the foundation of ritual.... Mythological figures are considered as personified abstractions, divinized heroes or decayed gods. Whatever the hypothesis, the choice amounts to reducing mythology either to an idle play or to a coarse kind of speculation.[19]

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[16] The position of Anglo-American New Criticism and Russian Formalism is particularly interesting in this respect. Theorists from these schools, influenced by Croce, hold that any form of artistic expression is its own unique and incommensurable construction and cannot be translated into another language or explained according to another discourse without losing its original character. However, this does not reject the fact that good translations or interpretations are possible – ones that insist on the value of the original. Also, they argue that generic theories destroy the idiosyncratic nature and quality of each text; the idea of genre must be replaced with a close reading of each work. Literary texts of all kinds must be appreciated and understood according to their internal structure and the dynamic interrelation between their constituent units and not limited by an overarching definition that tries to reduce many different texts into a vague category or misrepresentation – P.V. Zima, *The Philosophy of Modern Literary Theory*, Continuum International Publishing Group, Athlone 1999, pp. 18-19.

[17] C. Levi-Strauss, *Totemism*, Penguin Books, Hardmondsworth 1973, pp. 1-3.

[18] Cf. E. Cassirer, *Myth of the State*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1961.

[19] C. Levi Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth", in *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 68, No. 270, A Symposium (Oct. – Dec., 1955), pp. 428-444 and p. 428.

At least the complexity and controversy associated with reducing myth to one account has reached a level of relative consensus in contemporary debates by philosophers working on the issue. To consider myth (as it is presented in philosophical contexts) as simply a fictional story or a false account is avoiding the more serious questions concerning *mythos* and *logos*. Often, myth is not a single story or a set of images originally intended for one purpose. Worldviews conditioning evaluations of myth, and the hermeneutics constraining approaches to mythography, can only be recognized and addressed constructively once one identifies and explores the most dominant explanations that myth is often reduced to: a preliminary stage of scientific thought; an idealized representation of reality or a reenactment of it (through ritual); an expression of a psychological state; a communication of yesterday's values; or one of the many different varieties of these grand mythographical explanations (Doty 1986, p. xiii). One must search for an inclusive horizon which enables many kinds of myths to function according to their social, cultural, political, ideological or literary settings. Instead of enforcing the "simple and easily memorized statements that suggest that myth does this. . .or that" (Doty 1986, p. 10), scholars must approach the issue of myth without resorting to a definition but by envisioning a horizon within which previous definitions can exchange prominence and new definitions can be spawned.[20]

But moving beyond definition is only the first step towards selecting the features of myth which are indispensable to an understanding of it – particularly an understanding which has philosophical significance. Archetypal plot structures, for instance, are a necessary concomitant of myths which need to be acknowledged in any interpretation. But they do not provide

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[20] Meta-historical and trans-temporal narratives of the history of myth have given rise to problems concerning the role of the theorizer in explicating the description and function of myth. Modern interpretations of myth are driven by rational concerns that involve a certain understanding of issues such as knowledge, morality and aesthetics, which are deeply rooted in the idiosyncratic views of the interpreter. When these views are combined with a theory of history and are imposed onto historical events and actions, a very particular selection process must take place concerning the almost infinite data available to the interpreter. In addition, the data must be evaluated to correspond and support the theory of history as well as the intellectual, ethical and aesthetic positions. The role of myth, like every other cultural phenomenon, is subject to this selection and evaluation. Therefore it inevitable that most modern methodologies 1) require that myths be generally categorized as one genre 2) determine the characteristics that myths have 3) determine the function of myths and 4) evaluate the epistemic status of myths. I am critical of this framework for analyzing myth and am suggesting that the study of myth aim to address individual myths without assuming a general genre – one with set or predictable characteristics, a repeated function or a standard epistemic quality.

the sufficient conditions for analyzing the networks of meanings inherent in all complex myths.[21] When an author summarizes many events over a long period into a story, and employs the story in order to give it a form of logical coherence, he or she must at times neglect temporal serialization. The study of a story's plot structure is necessary but reducing the different meanings of a literary text to the plot still leaves many questions open about the internal dynamics of a story and gives the analyst or the reader too much interpretative liberty. Understanding a text according to its structure – or more accurately, one perspective of structure – is equivalent to a "theory of everything" which implies that the multifarious range of narratives can also be interpreted using one criterion.[22] One must also account for the interaction between the elements constituting the plot such as characters – what they represent, how they represent it and who they represent it to – dramatic setting and the imaginary details evoked by the author, symbols or icons, and the interplay and transformation of all of these throughout the course of the tale.

Myth is usually a mix of different stories, carefully selected and modified, which in turn provide material for further appropriation for multiple reasons. The heterogeneous basis of most myths – consisting of units influenced by different moments of history, different religions, cultures and political ideas – reflects the multiple functions, possible interpretations and uses of those myths.[23] The multifarious and often competing interpretations of myth are an obvious outcome of the network of meanings and multiple messages constituting the nature of most myths. The plot, characters and symbols used to amalgamate the pieces of different stories in order to make a myth are closely associated with the identity of the writer and the philosophical milieu he is operating in. Also, it is crucial to discover the most prominent meaning or meanings of myths without downplaying, ignoring, ridiculing or attacking minor ideas and messages. A comprehensive study must deal with the complexities of plot, character selection, tropes and

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[21] For an application and criticism of Jung's views concerning archetypes to examples of myth see *Myth*, pp. 139-146; for a critical interpretation of the use of Jung's archetypes cf. E. Gould, *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1981.

[22] T.A. Schmitz, *Modern Literary Theory and Ancient Texts*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden 2007, p. 50.

[23] Consider Claude Levi-Strauss's explanation of the decomposition and recomposition of 'mythemes' and the description of the mythmaker as a *bricoleur* (for the concept of mythemes see Levi Strauss 1955, pp. 428-444; for the concept of *bricoleur* see *The Savage Mind*, translated by J.Weightman and D. Weightman, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1966.

symbols in detail as well recognizing and addressing facts such as the way myth makers include some material and exclude others; the way ideological paradigms determine these choices; and, the exclusive social position or elitism pertaining to the one who can make a myth and propagate it. All these factors give credence to the proposition that myth is a subject that is eternally associated with philosophical thinking and can be analyzed as being interdependent with it (Doty 1986, pp. 15, 17-18 and pp. 20-21).

TOWARDS A 'POLY-MYTHIC' HERMENEUTICS

Since the pre-Socratics most philosophers have rejected myth as a valid form for representing reality. Much of the contemporary debate over the relationship between myth and philosophy puts the onus of proof on myth and veers towards the general *mythos/logos* dichotomy. The philosopher who wishes to prosecute myth and demand justification for its loitering amongst domains of rationality does so with legitimacy. But reducing the issue to a simple dichotomy is superficial and has little import – the subsequent debates can become almost inconsequential. One needs to consider deeper levels of communication between myth and philosophy even if one begins by simply comparing and contrasting styles of explanation. However, the crucial first step must be to critically analyze the generally accepted definition of myth which necessarily involves considering the history of the term and what it meant to different philosophers at different times, and what they wanted to use it for.[24]

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[24] Hayden White's criticism of historicism is relevant in terms of illuminating the limits of evaluations of myth that are based on particular views of history (such as positivist or Romantic). White contributed to the philosophy of history by blurring the boundaries between historiography and literary criticism, highlighting the relevance and implications of the narrative structure in historical accounts and introducing the use of tropes. For White, historical writing and studies of history are subject to linguistic and cultural constraints. In addition, the moral and aesthetic preferences associated with a historian's account necessarily influence the form of narrative selected to represent a period of events (H. Paul, "Hayden White and the Crisis of Historicism", in *Re-Figuring Hayden White*, Ankersmit, F., E. Doma ńska, and H. Kellner (eds.), Stanford University Press, Stanford 2009, p. 55). These preferences determine the particular form of historical representation and condition the content of the account. Therefore, the status and function of myth needs to be understood in terms of the interpreter's historical presuppositions and conditions. For a historical approach to modern theories of religion (which includes myth) that criticizes the different forms of historicism involved in understanding religion cf. W.H. Capps, *Religious Studies*, Augsberg Fortress, Minneapolis 1995, chapter 2.

Study into the status of myth in relation to philosophy has, thus far, given rise to various approaches towards different questions pertaining to myth and philosophy: What reasons would a philosopher have for using a technique such as myth? Does and can myth symbolize anything expressed in philosophy? What can myth contribute that philosophy can not? And what is the relationship between myth and philosophy in a philosophical text? These dilemmas need to be expanded by exploring deeper questions: What dynamics are at play in a philosophical text when two genres seem to be combined? How and why would a philosopher need to look closer at the hybrid nature and structure of a discursive argument, and the different elements interrelating in a discursive argument, to better understand and strengthen that same argument?

Only a few contemporary philosophers and philosophical schools of thought have paid serious attention to the relevance of myth in relation to philosophical issues. Schillbrack questions this negligence within modern philosophy and states that a rigorous philosophical project that deals with myth has not been undertaken with the exception of the writings of some thinkers in the German Idealist tradition, Paul Ricoeur, Hans Blumenberg and possibly a number of random philosophers of religion (Schilbrack 2002, p. 2).[25] He also draws attention to the alarming fact that until quite recently there has been very little interaction between philosophy and religious studies, anthropology and the history of religion. He argues, I believe correctly, that philosophy is significantly relevant to the social sciences, and vice versa – particularly concerning an issue as cross cultural and cross disciplinary as myth. The more contentious issue is how one discourse stands in relation to the other. Robert Segal classifies the different positions held by philosophers and non-philosophers: myth is part of philosophy; myth actually is philosophy; philosophy develops out of myth; myth and philosophy serve the same function but are independent; myth and philosophy function differently and are independent.[26] He identifies

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[25] Schilbrack criticizes the overbearing influence of Christian theism on the philosophy of religion and argues that until the philosophers from within that tradition – particularly philosophers in the English speaking tradition – broaden the objects of their study the questions that inspire and enhance the scope of their inquiry will remain limited. For a comprehensive account of the history of religious studies that pays close attention to the significant influence of Christianity and Christian thought in shaping it see E.J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion*, General Duckworth and Company Ltd., London 1975.

[26] R. Segal, "Myth as Primitive Philosophy: The Case of E.B. Tylor", in ed. K. Schillbrack, *Thinking Through Myths: Philosophical Perspectives*, Routledge, London 2002, p. 18.

that these perspectives on the relationship are closely associated with the division between religion and science. In fact in many cases the evaluation of the *mythos/logos* distinction has been predetermined by interpretations of the religion/science division. Scholars such as E.B. Tylor argued for the indispensable link between myth and religion.[27] According to him, myth supplemented religion by providing explanations and stories in which to situate religious belief.[28] Contemporary trends in myth studies have been inclined to veer away from this, generally speaking, nineteenth century interpretation and have attempted to present a more interactive explanation of myth/religion and philosophy/science.[29] In any case, an additional and plausible way of interpreting the relationship between myth and philosophy is to say that myth and philosophy function differently but are *interdependent*. Approaching myths in relation to arguments in this fashion avoids the burden of having to justify the relevance of the two discourses in the same way one would need to justify the relevance of religion to philosophy.

An interrelated approach towards *mythos* and *logos*, in contrast to the reductive approach I criticized above, demands that a number of salient questions be considered. The direction of these questions concerning the cooperation between myth and philosophy leads the reader to appreciate

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[27] For classical theorists of religion and myth, such as E.B. Tylor, myth can be explained in relation to the human cognitive capacity. Mythical explanations ascribe physical events to the personal will of a god or spirit and scientific explanations involve postulating impersonal forces behind physical occurrences. The two are incompatible since there cannot be two different efficient causes for one event but are methodologically connected in that they try to offer reasons for physical occurrences. Tylor believes that postulating personal, non-physical, causes, is unscientific and, even though he does not go into details concerning why, it is very likely that his criticism of myth had a strong influence on later theories that use empirical verification as the criterion for evaluating the referents of myth.

[28] For a summary of Tylor's theory of religion including background information see Sharpe 1975, pp. 53-58.

[29] Feminist philosopher, Michele Le Doeuff identifies myth as a narrative that has always provided philosophy with imagery and a way to accommodate passion into rational deliberation (*The Philosophical Imaginary*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1989. She believes the two to be inseparable, identifies the presence of myth in philosophical texts, thus rejecting the dichotomy paradigm. For Le Doeuff, myth and philosophy, combined, render a complete account of lived experience that must necessarily incorporate aspects of an embodied being such as sexual orientation, ethnicity, class and political affiliation. Another feminist philosopher, Pamela Sue Anderson argues that Le Doeuff's theory offers many important insights into the place of myth in philosophy that have remained unacknowledged by philosophers, but have provided feminist theory with form and content. P.S. Anderson, "Myth and Feminist Philosophy", in ed. K. Schilbrack, *Thinking Through Myths: Philosophical Perspectives*, Routledge, London 2002.

1) the literary, textual and performative aspects, 2) structural authority and 3) hermeneutical matters.[30]

Questions relating to 1:
a)   What are the literary and dramatic characteristics of the myths?
b)   How is the myth related to other similar materials? Does the myth have an equivalent in terms of genre? Is it an anti-genre? Is it unique?
c)   What materials may have influenced its formation and development?
d)   What are the dramatic or literary markers which are not found elsewhere in other cultural creations and literature, and why are they there?
e)   Are there indications in the myth of the correct context for interpretation?

Questions relating to 2:
a)   What are the innate dynamics of the myth and do they correspond to those found in philosophical discourse?
b)   To what extent does the myth represent a class of similarly structured materials, and to what extent is it unique?
c)   How does the myth fit into particular conceptual, aesthetic, and semiotic systems? Is it shaped by other privileged codes or does it function as a master code that governs elements in other texts?

Questions relating to 3:
a)   What symbolic and iconic traces of the myth can be found in a philosophical text? And, correspondingly, how can the place and function of certain symbols and icons be understood once they are identified as traces of the myth?
b)   What relevance does the positioning of myths have in a philosophical treatise? How can we understand the myth as a primary element rather than a secondary or peripheral element?
c)   How self-evident is the meaning of the myth to the reader-listener? Does it require extensive exegesis?

Questions pertaining to the validity and veracity of narrative are, no doubt, worthy of further examination. However, this line of investigation

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[30] I am indebted to William Doty for listing some of these crucial questions and categorizing them in a way similar to the way I have done it here (Doty 1986, pp. xvi-xvii).

has diverted attention from other equally salient problems. If we aim at stressing myth's vicinity to philosophical truth we risk neglecting the inherent ambiguity or the poly-semantic character of myths which resists conceptual definition.[31] And, if we stress the non-conceptual character of myth and disregard its truth value we risk not recognizing how it conditions the reader epistemologically and the very existential, yet subtle, ways it makes critical suggestions. I am not suggesting that the direction I have taken in this study is more relevant than the direction taken by past commentators on myth. Nor am I suggesting that my method reveals the only insight or illuminates the fundamental features pertaining to the issue. But I am certain that the way scholars have dealt with the issue of myth and philosophy has evolved out of, and paid closer attention to, a study of genre and other kinds of classification rather than the technical use of genres and themes in connection with each other; one must approach the notion of 'genre' more cautiously and avoid acquiring it as a tool that will misdirect and cloud interpretation of a text.[32]

Specific literary themes and devices must be considered in an analysis of the interaction between myth and philosophy that aims to respect the idiosyncrasies of individual myths – one which respects their narrative form and helps identify the elements which are to be analyzed in relation to potential discursive counterparts. In addition to being guided by the questions above it is worth considering the literary elements of myth and investigating whether they play any particular role in philosophical texts. A philosophical inquiry into myth can be greatly enhanced by giving serious attention to elements and devices such as plot structures, character selection, narrative mode, the use of tropes and liminality. In turn, this approach towards myth can benefit the way philosophy understands itself and its relationship with myth.

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Investigations of the relationship between narratives and arguments have a history that has not proceeded along a smooth linear path. The place of myth in this tradition has been acknowledged in multifarious ways from different perspectives and by a diverse range of thinkers. Whether a culture accepts a basic definition of myth or a system of thought establishes

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[31] C. Flood, "Myth and Ideology", in ed. K. Schilbrack, *Thinking Through Myths: Philosophical Perspectives*, Routledge, London 2002, pp. 183-186.

[32] Croce is credited for introducing the criticism and mistrust of the notion of genre into literary theory.

a theory by which to reduce myth one is always faced with the exclusion of perspectives that need to be acknowledged if a more encompassing and sophisticated interpretation of myth is to be formed; what I have called a poly-mythic hermeneutics. Moving away from the reductive approaches to myth assists in understanding the complexities associated with the *mythos/logos* distinction but it is only the first step. In this paper I have exposed some of the problems associated with the study of myth and its relationship with philosophy and shed light on a number of intricate details often ignored by scholarship. And I have suggested a set of new questions and ideas indispensable to a philosophically relevant study of the myth/ philosophy relationship that resists dichotomy or other forms of reduction; a move towards an interdependent perspective.

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