

PLATO'S REPUBLIC

Summer 2024

Part 2 | Week 6

Dialectic Method



THE MYTH OF ER – BOOK 10 OF PLATO'S REPUBLIC



-In this session

Start with the Myth of Er

- 1) the wounded soldier, the burial and the return
- 2) the journey of the soul¹
- 3) the Spindle of Necessity
- 4) the tossing of lots and samples of lives
- 5) moral of the story

Then return to the prelude – the dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon and the earlier part of the Republic; The purpose of the myth.

Discuss what is myth? How is it used by Plato? How does it fit into the Divided Line?

THE MYTH OF ER

- the wounded soldier, the burial and the return

Socrates is telling Glaucon a tale - not the kind that Odysseus relates.²

Er was the son of Armenius; a Pamphylian by birth. – παν + φυλη³

He was fierce warrior slain in battle but his body, when found after 10 days, was in tact and unaffected by decay.

He was carried home to be buried and on the 12th day⁴ he was placed on the pyre

At this stage, he come back to life and said that he was selected to tell them what he has seen in the other world and what happens (to the soul) in the other world.

He was to hear and see all that was to be heard and seen; but he was not to participate.

THE MYTH OF ER

- the journey of the soul⁵ (as related by Er)

When his soul left the body, he (his soul) went on a journey with a great company and come to a mysterious place.

Here, there were two openings in the earth near each other.

Over above them, in the heavens, there were two other openings.

In the intermediate space, there were judges seated who gave judgement on the souls and sentenced them.

The **just souls** were commanded to ascend to the heavenly way on the right hand opening.⁶

The **unjust souls** were ordered to descend by the lower way on the left hand. The unjust also bore the symbol of their deeds on their backs.

THE MYTH OF ER

- the journey of the soul (continued)

Once the sentences were given, then the souls started their journey, departing up or down into the holes.

In the two other openings, the left heavenly one and the right earth one, souls returned back to the plain.

The ones ascending from the earth, dusty and worn; the ones descending from the heaven clean, rested and bright.

And the souls asked each other about the things above and the things below.

Those from below wept with sorrow; for each and every wrong they had done, they suffered ten-fold. Or 1,000 years (ten times the length of a man's life).

Those from above described heavily delights and visions. They were rewarded ten-fold for their justice.⁷

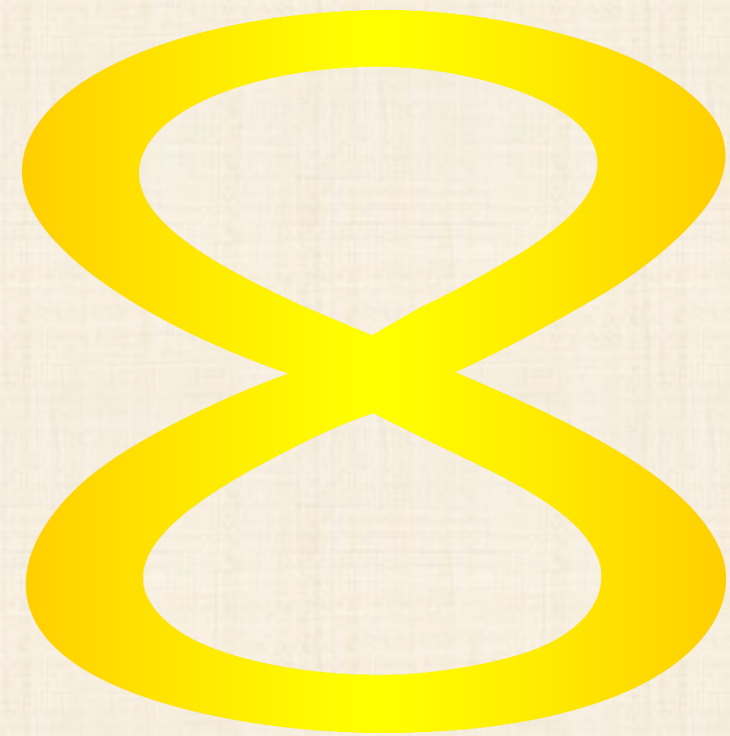
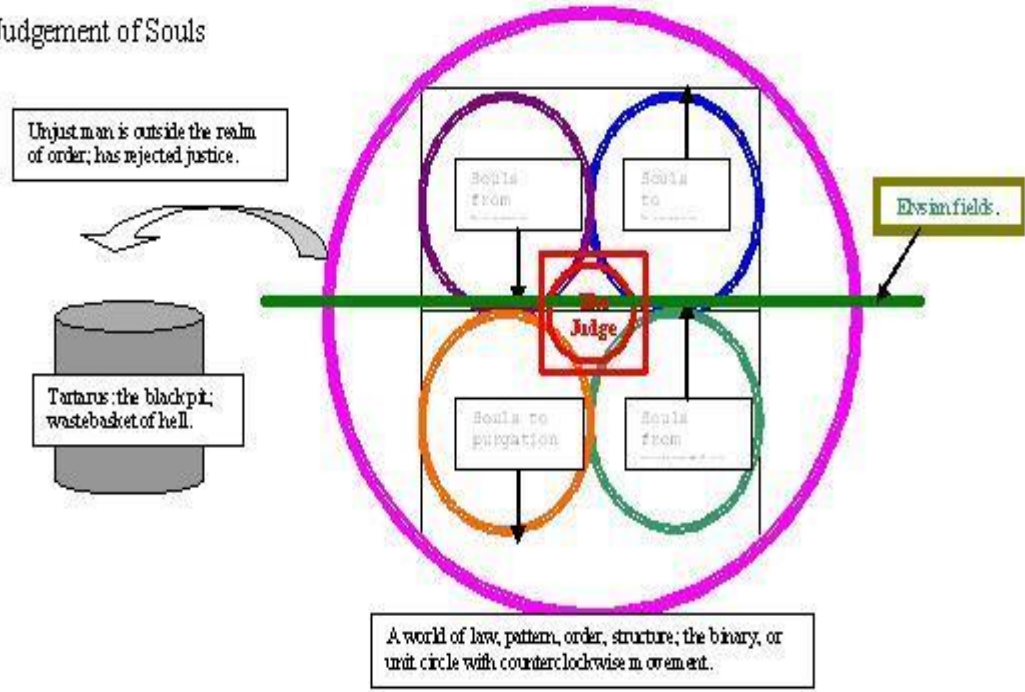
The biggest crimes were for those who did ill by the God's or their parents; or who were dictators, They never escaped (men blocked their exit); they were thrust into Tartarus. (Story of Ardiaeus).

THE MYTH OF ER

- the journey of the soul (continued)

Myth of Er: Apocalyptic literature; metaphor ends the work.

I. The Judgement of Souls



THE MYTH OF ER

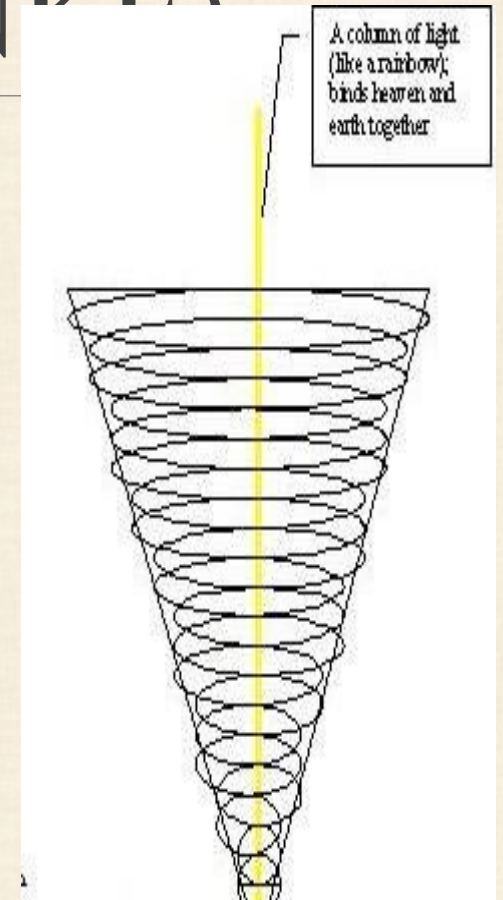
- the Spindle of Necessity (ANANKE)

Now the souls stayed for 7 days and then for the next 4 days travelled until they saw in the distance, a place where

they could see from above a line of light, straight as a column, extending right through the whole heaven and through the earth, in colour resembling the rainbow, only brighter and purer.

In one more day (the 12th day)⁸, they arrived at this place and there they saw

The ends of the chains of heaven let down from above: for this light is the belt of heaven, and holds together the circle of the universe. From this end is extended the Spindle of Necessity, on which all the revolutions turn



THE MYTH OF ER

- the Spindle of Necessity (continued)

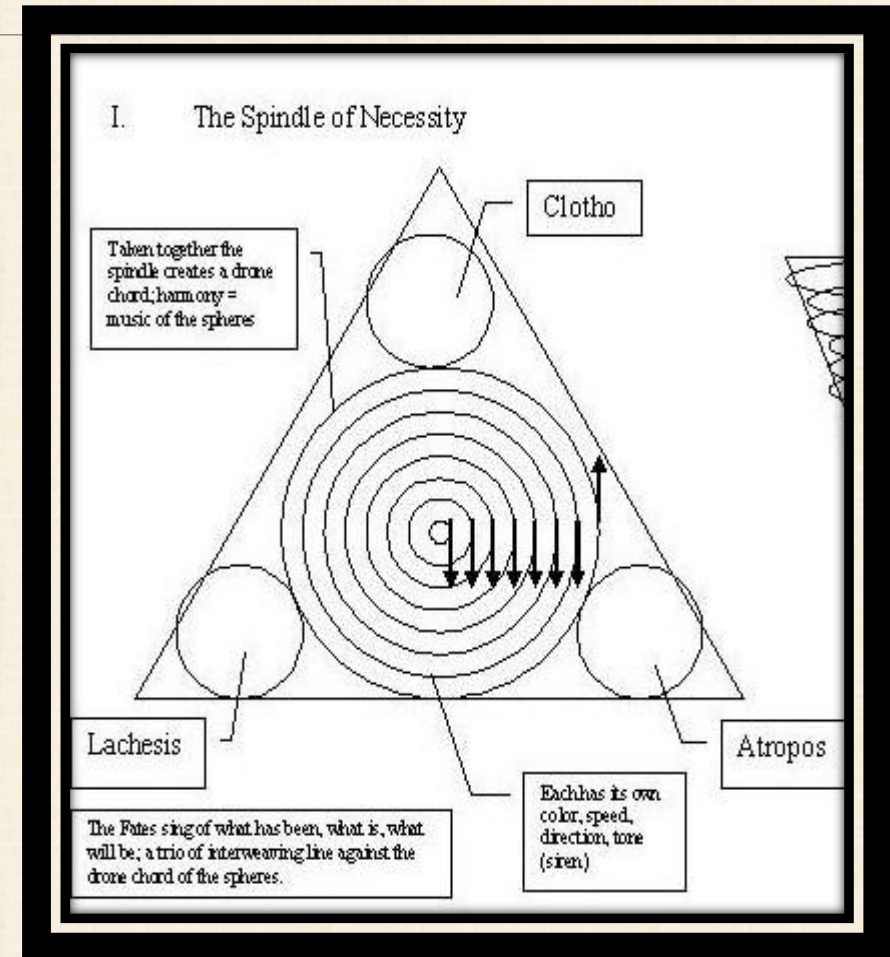
The Spindle's stem and hook are made of adamant.

It was as if there was a large hollow whorl (with its insides swooped out – the fixed stars), and with a 2nd smaller one lying precisely inside it, and 6 others more. 8 in total.

They formed a continuous whorl around the shaft which drives right through the middle of the 8th whorl.

The whole thing moved one direction and the 7 inner circles moved another.

A description of the whorls are given, each with its own color, speed, direction and sound. which commentators then related to the stars and planets.



THE MYTH OF ER

- the Spindle of Necessity (continued)

Whorl	carries	Description		Speed	Breadth
1 st	The fixed stars	Spangled		Turned the opp. direction	1 st
2 nd	Saturn	Yellowish		5 th	8 th
3 rd	Venus	Whitest		4 th	7 th
4 th	Mars	Reddish		3 rd	3 rd
5 th	Mercury	Yellowish		2 nd	6 th
6 th	Jupiter	Yellowish		2 nd	2 nd
7 th	Sun	Brightest		2 nd	5 th
8 th	Moon	Had its color from the 7 th		1 st	4 th

THE MYTH OF ER

- the Spindle of Necessity (continued)

The Spindle's turns on the lap of Necessity⁹.

On the upper circle of each circle is a Siren, that goes round with them, sounded a single note¹⁰.

All 8 notes made a single continuous harmony.

The three daughters of Necessity, the Fates, were also sitting on thrones spaced evenly around the spindle, accompanying the Sirens song.

Lachesis singing of the past, Clotho of the present, and Atropos of the future.

Clotho periodically laid her right hand on the outer circle of the Spindle and helped to turn it.

Atropos did the same with her left hand to the inner circles.

Lachesis alternately helped the inner circle and the outer circles with alternate hands.



THE MYTH OF ER

- the tossing of Lots

When Er and the souls arrived, their duty was to go at once to Lachesis, but first there was a prophet who arranged them in order; then he took from the knees of Lachesis lots (tokens) and models of different life, and said

Hear the words of Lachesis, Mortal souls, behold a new cycle of life and mortality. No divine guide will be allotted to you; the choice of guide will be your own; and let him who draws the first lot have the first choice, and the life that he chooses will be his destiny (his choice will be irrevocable). Virtue (excellence) has no master, and as each honours or dishonours her, he will have more or less of her. The blame is the chooser's not God's.

Then the prophet threw lots down among them and each picked one that fell beside him. (except Er).

Then the prophet placed beside them the model of lives (all kinds of life, tyrannies, famous lives, riches, poverty, beauty, strength etc and also different combinations of each); many more lives than the souls present. They had plenty to choose from.

Er observed the first person (motivated by greed and carelessness) chose the biggest of tyranny. Later realizing he will eat his own children and suffer, he regretted it. But he could not change.

Why did he choose badly? He had come from heaven, and had virtue derived from habit, not self examination. He was untrained in philosophy.

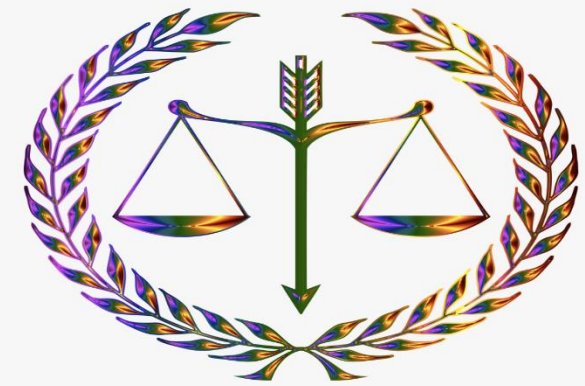
Most choices were based on previous lives and were laughable. **Except Odysseus, who had the last choice, chose the life of a private man, able to sustain himself and mind his own business.**

They then went to Lachesis who assigned them their chosen life (and a guide); then to Clotho who ratified the destiny of each, then Atropos, who spun the threads and made them irreversible., then without turning around, they passed Under the Throne of Necessity.

They then marched to the Plain of Forgetfulness (Lethe) and the River of Unmindfulness and drank her water thus forgetting all things. (Some forgot and drank more, some less). Then there was thunderstorms and earthquakes and they were driven upwards, like shooting stars, to their birth.

THE MYTH OF ER

- Socrates Conclusion ¹¹



Here Socrates says,

*This is the supreme peril for our human nature; and the utmost care should be taken. He can leave every other endeavor and give his attention above all **to finding someone who will be able to teach him to discern between good life and a bad one**, (a certain kind of teacher) and to always choose the better life. He should know how everything bears upon virtue, (the effects of beauty, of poverty of wealth, noble birth, cleverness or dullness; or combination of each; what effect do they have on virtue?) He will look at the nature of the soul and he will be able to determine, which is the better life, and which is the worse.*

The best life is the one that makes the soul more just, and the worst life is that that makes the soul more unjust. He will not be dazzled by anything else. He will not choose extremes (eg too much wealth or too much poverty) he will choose the middle way, for this is the way to happiness.

(Last words in the republic) This tale will save us if we believe. Therefore my counsel is that we hold fast to the heavenly way and follow after justice and virtue always, considering that the soul is immortal and is ever able to endure every sort of good and every sort of evil.

Prelude¹²

- the dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon

Socrates was explaining to Glaucon that a just man is rewarded in this life eg race; and an unjust ridiculed

But (as was mentioned in the earlier part by Thrasymachus), that the God's can be fooled by the unjust, because they offer sacrifices or the just may be forgotten by the God's and be "dragged through the courts by the people" or suffer other hardship for being just.

Is the man just of does he just appear to be just? All considerations should be stripped away other than the **effect that justice has on the soul.**

This dilemma does not appear to be resolved by dialectics but by the Myth. The myth is birthed by Plato to explain how justice and measure are most important considerations for the soul. Thus feeding back to the entire Republic and the themes of the measured tripartite soul and the pursuit of a virtues/just life.

The myth tells us that the immortal soul will be judged in the afterlife; the just soul receives rewards, and the unjust soul unspeakable punishments.

The myth also emphasis that the old myths, those of Homer, are not adequate examples for us. Odysseus remembering his past live, and being wise, chose a measured and plain life, minding his own business. Ie he did not choose the heroic life.

Finally, he combines the theme of harmony and higher forms, by outlining the harmonic and perfectly rotating arrangements of the Cosmas.

What is myth? How is it used by Plato?

Plato uses myth both as a means of persuasion and a teaching tool. It is a sacred story, symbolizing archetypes (platonic Pre philosophocal Forms?)

Some say the myths are influenced by other traditions (Orphic mysteries; Eleusinian Mysteries; other older cultures eg Solon learned about Atlantis in Egypt)

Plato draws on Socratic logic (clear terms/distinctions; true premises/valid logic) and combines myth.

The person that cant understand myths is a materialist (the material/literal is all that exists); a lover of myths is also a lover of philosophy (looking at things beyond the material eg the soul itself).

Socrates asks *What is it?* (justice, love, virtue) Looking for universal/forms/essence, not particulars

Joseph Campbell (The Power of Myth) *The myth is the penultimate truth because the ultimate cannot be put into words.*

PLATO'S "DIVIDED LINE"



Where is the Myth in the Divided Line or in the Cave?

DIVISION	SUB-DIVISION (Faculties of the soul)	CHARACTERISTICS	Degree of Truth
Intelligible	Reason	Principles (above hypotheses, making no use of images) Attained by the power of dialectic The realm of knowledge and being	<i>Highest</i>
	Understanding	Hypotheses (using images from below) Can only be hypothetical The Arts, Geometry, Cognate sciences	
Visible	Faith (or Conviction)	The animals Everything that grows or is made	
	Perception of Shadows	Images Shadows Reflections in water Reflections in solid, smooth, or polished objects	<i>Lowest</i>

