

Plato's Legacy and the Problem of Myth in Political Thought

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The author:

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She studies political myth: narratives about political events or conditions that are taken for granted, and which do not lend themselves easily to critical scrutiny. She is interested in asking whether a political theory committed to rational ideals can afford a place for such narratives.

Her work on Plato has been published in *History of Political Thought*.

The paper:

Myth has historically been understood in opposition to critical reason, a defining feature of our most cherished philosophical and political ideals. The position that political theory cannot afford a place for myth is, in turn, a defining feature of Plato's legacy – that is, a legacy that credits Plato with the inauguration of a practice of philosophy that subjects unexamined beliefs to critical challenge, and progressively eliminates myths from our world views. Such a characterization of Plato's significance for the Western philosophical tradition, however, comes into tension with the fact that Plato famously wrote his own myths.

This paper argues that a reconsideration of Plato's myths and the Platonic legacy opens up a broader question concerning the place of myth in political thought. In so doing, it casts the project of understanding Plato's legacy in the framework of an urgent and contemporary problem that exercised, among others, Popper, Habermas, Horkheimer and Adorno, Barthes, and Blumenberg.

In particular, it should reconcile us to the impossibility of perfectly triangulating the following: the predominant argument against myth in political theory, the popular identification of Plato's legacy with the history of Western philosophy, and the philosophical significance of Plato's myths.