

Jennifer Lobo Meeks

Allegory in Early Greek Philosophy

STUDIES IN HISTORICAL PHILOSOPHY

Editor: Alexander Gungov

Consulting Editor: Donald Phillip Verene

ISSN 2629-0316

- 1 *Dustin Peone*
Memory as Philosophy
The Theory and Practice of Philosophical Recollection
ISBN 978-3-8382-1336-1

- 2 *Raymond Barfield*
The Poetic Apriori: Philosophical Imagination in a Meaningful
Universe
ISBN 978-3-8382-1350-7

- 3 *Jennifer Lobo Meeks*
Allegory in Early Greek Philosophy
ISBN 978-3-8382-1425-2

Jennifer Lobo Meeks

ALLEGORY IN
EARLY GREEK PHILOSOPHY

ibidem
Verlag

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

ISBN-13: 978-3-8382-1425-2

© *ibidem*-Verlag, Stuttgart 2020

Alle Rechte vorbehalten

Das Werk einschließlich aller seiner Teile ist urheberrechtlich geschützt. Jede Verwertung außerhalb der engen Grenzen des Urheberrechtsgesetzes ist ohne Zustimmung des Verlages unzulässig und strafbar. Dies gilt insbesondere für Vervielfältigungen, Übersetzungen, Mikroverfilmungen und elektronische Speicherformen sowie die Einspeicherung und Verarbeitung in elektronischen Systemen.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the prior written permission of the publisher. Any person who does any unauthorized act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

Printed in the EU

To Amara and Elena

Allegory is a manner of speech
denoting one thing by the letter of the words,
but another by their meaning.

Rhetorica ad Herennium
4.34.46

Contents

Preface	9
Chapter 1	
Introduction: Speaking Wisdom Otherwise	11
A Concise History of Allegory	11
Myth, Philosophy, and the Speculative Task.....	22
The Shift from <i>Muthos</i> to <i>Logos</i>	33
Chapter 2	
The Presocratics and the Beginnings of Allegory	41
Historical and Theoretical Considerations.....	41
Philosophical Anticipations in Archaic Poetry.....	49
The Three Senses of a Presocratic “Poetics”	58
Presocratic Allegorical Practices.....	66
Chapter 3	
Plato on Poetry, Myth, and Allegory	79
Philosophical Myth in Plato’s Dialogues.....	79
The Ancient Quarrel with the Poets.....	86
Imagination, Memory, and Resolution of the Quarrel	93
“Other Speech” in Platonic Thought.....	100
Selected Bibliography	113
Index	121

Preface

Allegory says one thing, but means another. In philosophical discourse, which attempts to achieve clarity and precision of both language and thought, what purpose could such a technique possibly serve? We find allegory in its complementary procedures of interpretation and composition employed in almost every period in the history of philosophy. It appears simultaneously with the birth of philosophy in ancient Greece and remains dominant throughout most of classical antiquity. Toward the end of this period, it is adopted by Christian, Jewish, and Islamic thinkers and gradually becomes one of the most salient philosophical and literary tools of Medieval thought. Allegory continues to flourish during the Renaissance, in large part due to the classicist tendencies of the time, and it persists well into the early modern era. Only in the Romantic movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries does allegory suffer a decline, as it comes to be seen as inferior in both its form and content to the symbol. Allegory has reemerged in contemporary thought in various literary criticism movements, with the result that its role and significance in philosophy has been not only reconceived but also revalued.

In this work, I consider the role that allegory plays in early Greek thought, particularly in the transition from the mythic tradition of the archaic poets to the philosophical traditions of the Presocratics and Plato. My purpose is to explore how a mode of speech that “says one thing, but means another” could be integral to philosophy, which otherwise seeks to achieve clarity and precision in its discourse. Allegory, in both its interpretative and compositional strains, allows philosophy to render myth self-conscious, thereby fulfilling the speculative task of narrating the whole of reality in a way that utilizes both reason and the imagination. In providing the earliest Greek thinkers, the Presocratics, with a way of both defending and appropriating the poetic wisdom of their predecessors, allegory enables philosophy to locate and recover its own origins in the mythic tradition.

Allegory allows philosophy simultaneously to move beyond *muthos* and express the whole in terms of *logos*, a rational account in which reality is represented in a more abstract and universal way than myth allows. With regard to Plato, my account of allegory seeks to reconcile his critique, formulated in the ancient quarrel between the poets and philosophers, with his frequent use of “other speech” in the dialogues. This reconciliation is

accomplished by consideration of the role that imagination plays in his thought as well as the unique construction and function of his “philosophical myth.”

This work is the result of many years of studying the history of philosophy, first at Loyola Marymount University, then at Université Paris-Sorbonne and later at Emory University, supported in some years by Fulbright and Mellon fellowships. It grew out of a longtime interest in the intersection of philosophy and poetry, and specifically in the poetic nature of early Greek philosophy. Writing even a short book is a solitary journey, but one made easier when surrounded by the support of family and friends. In addition to such support, I especially thank the classicist R. Bracht Branham and the philosopher Donald Phillip Verene for their advice on this project over a long period of time. I very much thank Molly Black Verene for her copyediting of the final version of the manuscript.

Without the encouragement of my parents, Christopher and Agnes Lobo, and my sister, Gillian Lobo, this work would have not been possible. I am ever grateful for the support of my husband, Anthony Meeks, who has surpassed all expectations that one might hope for in a spouse. Finally, I put forth this work to my two daughters, Amara and Elena, my unknowing muses in all things—past, present, and future.