

# **From *Muthos* to *Logos*: Myth, Metaphor, and Logic-Based Therapy**

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This paper examines the role of myth and metaphor in Logic-Based Therapy as these pertain to the development and use of philosophical antidotes. . It maintains that the use of myth and metaphor in LBT can provide a primer for counselees for constructing antidotes for overcoming the real life problems for which they seek counseling.

A key tenet of Logic Based Therapy is the idea that emotions are connected to discursive thought in such a way that correcting faulty thinking can serve as a remedy to maladaptive emotions and their behavioral consequences. The challenge to practitioners of LBT has been to identify and explain the mechanisms by which one can help a client overcome irrational thinking and adopt a healthier, rational point of view. To this end, Elliot Cohen has developed the concept of an antidote, a philosophically potent corrective used to dislodge fallacious thinking and redirect the mind toward more virtuous ends ('virtuous' in the sense of *areté*, human excellence, rather than the Victorian sense of avoiding moral mistakes). My intent here is to explore the role of myth and metaphor in the development and use of philosophical antidotes and to argue for the theoretical compatibility of philosophical counseling and appeals to the imagination.

Let me begin by getting some preliminaries out of the way. To speak about the role of myth and metaphor in the same context as a logic-based approach to counseling may strike one as contradictory or confused. Logic-based therapy is predicated on the view that it is irrational thinking that is at the root of irrational and potentially harmful behaviors, and to speak of such inherently irrational modes of thought such as myth and metaphor may appear to muddy the

conceptual waters considerably. Moreover, for those who view philosophical counseling as *sui generis*, myth and metaphor may well appear to fall within the purview of psychology rather than philosophy, thereby blurring the distinction between various approaches to mental health. Such misgivings, however, are ill-founded: the role of imagination and its products can and should be understood in philosophical terms. For the products of the imagination carry epistemic commitments that can be understood discursively and have the potential to reshape reasoning patterns toward therapeutic ends. In brief, myth and metaphor are thoroughly philosophical notions (or so I shall argue).

Additionally, some confusion may arise about the role of myth and metaphor in logic-based therapy as a result of a more basic confusion about the way logic and emotional responses are related. LBT accepts the idea that emotions are theory-laden, that the way states of arousal are described will influence the way emotions are experienced and hence that adjustments in the characterization of emotion can influence the cognitive and behavioral consequences of arousal.<sup>1</sup> For example, increased heart rate and blood pressure as a result of climbing a flight of stairs may be misinterpreted by someone prone to panic attacks as an indication of an impending anxiety attack which can in turn lead to the onset of genuine anxiety.<sup>2</sup> This is not to deny, of course, that influence works in the other direction as well, i.e. emotional states such as depression can influence cognition, but the influence of the propositional characterization of an emotion is a *sine qua non* of philosophical counseling. The role of myth and metaphor in philosophical counseling will depend, therefore, on the way discursive elements of the imagination interact with one's description of an emotion state.

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<sup>1</sup> The set of descriptions of an emotion outstrip the states of arousal, making this a one-many relation.

<sup>2</sup> . I am indebted to Barbara Van Horn for this informed illustration.

It is worth dwelling on the relationship between emotion and cognition for a moment, since understanding the theoretical commitments of LBT on this score will make the role of imagination in counseling clear. In a recent formulation, the connection between reason and emotion in LBT is presented as a substitution instance of modus ponens, where the conditional statement represents a rule linking an intentional object (the antecedent) to a report of the corresponding emotion (consequent); the second premise of the argument form is a report of the intentional object in question, and the emotional report is then derived deductively as a matter of course. In formulating the connection between an intentional object (a state of affairs) and the propositional expression of an emotional state as a deductively valid inference pattern, the cognitive and affective dimensions of behavior are logically connected in a way that brings one's evaluation of an event to bear on one's emotional reactions. The objective of the LBT practitioner, then, is to expose faulty premises in the deductive reasoning that underlies an emotion and provide an antidote, i.e. a philosophically appealing alternative to the rule connecting a perceived state of affairs and the emotional report. To the extent that the antidote is effective, the maladaptive thinking process can be corrected and the behavior altered.

To illustrate these relationships, consider Cohen's account of the fallacy titled "Damnation," an erroneous rule that leads to self degradation based on a perceived connection between a single act and the agent's character as a whole. Here's an instance of the fallacy:

*(1) If I failed my exam, then I myself am a failure (Rule)*

*(2) I failed my exam (Report)*

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*(3) I am a failure.*

The possibility of providing a corrective measure lies in showing that the conditional statement linking the intentional object (the state of affairs in which I fail my exam) with the emotional report (to be a failure) is false, and hence that the emotional response to failure is out of place.

The antidote to this fallacious rule is the following:

*(4) One should accept responsibility for one's failures, learn from them, construct a new plan of action, and try to achieve it<sup>3</sup>.*

The potential of the antidote to change a client's thinking clearly depends on the client's willingness to accept it as an alternative to the existing rule, but merely stating the antidote is unlikely to inspire anything but a weak acknowledgment of its possibility.

The reason for the counselee's ambivalence in the face of the explicitly stated antidote is that the connection between the antecedent and the consequent expressed in the fallacious rule is far more complex than a surface analysis suggests. As Cohen notes in his discussion of the reasoning pattern illustrated above, "This pattern can be combined with other layers of rules and reports to form a complex network of premises in which rules are derived from further, more general rules and reports. Sometimes these more intricate patterns form syndromes of fallacies."<sup>4</sup> In the case of the conditional that appears as part of the Damnation fallacy, the statement of the rule (1) is in fact shorthand for a complex inferential structure that has culminated in the mental association of one's self-worth with a particular outcome or event. Hence, the power of the antidote would appear to depend on its capacity to correct the inferential connections that underlie and support the surface rule (1).

Needless to say, the challenge of identifying the logical structure of a syndrome of fallacies and dislodging it in favor of a more adaptive, aspirational form of thinking is not an

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<sup>3</sup> . Cohen, E. *The New Rational Therapy*, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> . *Ibid*, p.5, fn. 3.

easy one.<sup>5</sup> One attractive feature of LBT is that it does not require the counselor to excavate a client's past history in the interest of treating a current malady; unlike many psychological approaches to counseling, LBT does not presuppose a deterministic model of thought. Once the logic of a syndrome is understood – regardless of the psycho-social origins – the syndrome can be treated by means of an antidote. As for the issue of providing the justification of the antidote in the face of deeply entrenched patterns of thought, Cohen envisions the use of philosophical theories as a way of buttressing the antidote and remedying fallacious reasoning patterns and their attendant emotional consequences. For example, if the underlying logic of self-damnation involves linking one's dignity to external assessments of various kinds (like passing a test), then the following Kantian reflection will be useful in supporting the antidote (4) considered above:

*(5) Accept your self-worth unconditionally, not as a variable that changes with successes, failures, or the approval and disapproval of others (Kant).<sup>6</sup>*

To the extent that the counselee is amenable to a Kantian philosophy of personal dignity such a reflection can be useful as a corrective to faulty thinking. If the counselee is not so amenable, other philosophical approaches may be used to the same end. For instance, an antidote framed in terms of our sentient rather than rational natures may be more appropriate for some clients:

*(6) Be true to your sentient nature; increase your lasting pleasure through unconditional self-acceptance (Epicurus, Bentham, Mill).<sup>7</sup>*

The possibility of using alternative, philosophically incompatible theories to support an antidote raises important questions. How does one decide which antidote to use? And why does one particular mechanism work while another fails? A general answer to both questions is that

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<sup>5</sup> . I say 'aspirational' because an integral component of LBT is the pursuit of human excellence and happiness.

<sup>6</sup> . The New Rational Therapy, p. 75.

<sup>7</sup> . Ibid, p. 77.

the choice depends on the *logic* of the client's belief system: if the underlying structure of rules and reports that generate the fallacy syndrome involve premises that are couched in terms of rational self-regard, a Kantian philosophy will be more useful than an alternative. If the logic of the fallacy is framed in terms of hedonistic principles, a philosophy predicated on our sentient nature will most likely prove more useful. In unearthing the inference chains that underlie a fallacy, one is also unearthing the philosophical content of that fallacy, and the process of supporting the antidote is a matter of selecting a philosophy that resonates with the views of the client. And it is here, at the level of selecting and employing different philosophical perspectives to support an antidote, that products of the imagination like myth and metaphor become relevant.

Let me be clear on just what I mean by "products of the imagination." Myth and metaphor are obviously complex and in different contexts must be distinguished in terms of their semantic, logical and psychological elements. Here, though, it is what they have in common that interests me. By definition, metaphor is a figure of speech that *implies* the comparison of unlike entities, (in contrast to simile which indicates a comparison explicitly through the use of the words "as" or "like"). Metaphors are constructive, bringing semantic and logical features of one conceptual domain to bear on another in the interest of revealing something important. Here is an example:

#### SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS ARE PLANTS<sup>8</sup>

He works for the local *branch* of the bank.  
Our company is *growing*  
They had to *prune* the workforce.  
The organization was *rooted* in the old church.  
There is now a *flourishing* black market in software there.

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<sup>8</sup> . From Zoltan Kovecses' *Metaphor, a Practical Introduction*, New York: Oxford, 2002. p. 8

Our understanding of plant life is used, through this metaphor, to provide a conceptual framework for understanding social organizations, thus providing insight into the way organizations function. This use of metaphor is constitutive, building structure into the concept of social organizations rather than merely revealing structure that is already there.

Metaphor can also serve to adorn the existing contents of the mind, as is illustrated by the following excerpt from Robert Frost's poem "My November Guest:"

My Sorrow, when she's here with me,  
Thinks these dark days of autumn rain  
Are beautiful as days can be;  
She loves the bare, the withered tree;  
She walks the sodden pasture lane.<sup>9</sup>

To a large extent, myth performs the same constructive and adorning functions as metaphor, though when used to reference entrenched cultural beliefs is usually understood to be more far-reaching. But cultures have their metaphors just as they have their myths. The idea that one is a consumer is a metaphor (or perhaps a form of metonymy), or that America is a shining city on a hill. Myths, like metaphors, can be provincial and personal, as in the case of myths about a father's spirited youth or a grandmother's ability to foretell the future. Both myth and metaphor can play the part of explanation; both can play the part of pure entertainment. There are differences between them, to be sure (one wonders what magic a J. L. Austin would work in separating out the metaphorical from the mythical). Yet both, in the hands of competent speakers, are used with great skill to bring often disparate domains of human experience together in the interest of creating a new and potentially powerful picture of the world. It is the capacity of both myth and metaphor to increase understanding that is most important when it comes to recognizing the role of the imagination in philosophical counseling.

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<sup>9</sup>. Taken from "My November Guest," by Robert Frost.

With this clarification in mind, what strikes me as significant about the use of antidotes in LBT is that this use mirrors the function of imagination in the conceptualization process quite closely. After all, sanctioning the use of a philosophical antidote consistent with Kant's philosophy in one context while appealing to a logically incompatible antidote in another is to implicitly reject the role of truth as an arbiter of one's choice of philosophical theory. It is to use philosophical theories as *tools* for shaping a client's thinking without considering how those theories are grounded in reality -- much the way that metaphor is used to shape our thinking without an explicit concern for truth.<sup>10</sup> Differently put, one's choice of an antidote depends on pragmatic concerns about what will be most effective in dislodging an existence inference pattern that is supporting irrational behavior rather than abstract concerns about the ontological status of the theory itself.

This is not to say, however, that such pragmatic uses of philosophical principles are unphilosophical. Wittgenstein's uses such mechanisms to great effect in his later work, shifting our perspectives on the guiding principles of language, knowledge, and representation. Hilary Putnam has us imagine a race of Super Spartans in his elucidation of the concept of pain, and Thomas Nagel spends an entire paper on the topic of what it is like to be a bat. The history of philosophy is replete with examples of the imaginative use of philosophical principles, thought experiments, and metaphors (we might keep in mind here that language is not *really* a game, and the mind is not in a *literal* sense a machine). It seems to me that whether one is speaking of myth, metaphor, or alternative philosophies, one is dealing with systems of representation that have cash value when it comes to shifting our beliefs and altering our behavior. Philosophers have been quite liberal in their use of these devices in the pursuit of both rigor and truth for good

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<sup>10</sup> . I take this use of philosophical theories as actually consistent with the view of philosophy Wittgenstein reveals in his later work.



reason: such devices link unfamiliar abstractions to existing representational structures in a way that gives an audience epistemic access to unfamiliar territory.

One of the most informative uses of myth and metaphor in this regard is handed down to us from Plato. Consider, for example, the trouble with Meno. In the dialogue bearing his name, Meno attempts to stifle the discussion of virtue with his famous paradox; Learning, claims Meno, is impossible. Having arrived at the point in the dialogue where Meno no longer sees a way to define virtue unproblematically, he challenges Socrates in the following way:

**Men.** And how will you enquire, Socrates, into that which you do not know? What will you put forth as the subject of enquiry? And if you find what you want, how will you ever know that this is the thing which you did not know?

**Soc.** I know, Meno, what you mean; but just see what a tiresome dispute you are introducing. You argue that man cannot enquire either about that which he knows, or about that which he does not know; for if he knows, he has no need to enquire; and if not, he cannot; for he does not know the very subject about which he is to enquire.

**Men.** Well, Socrates, and is not the argument sound?

**Soc.** I think not.

**Men.** Why not?

**Soc.** I will tell you why: I have heard from certain wise men and women who spoke of things divine that-

**Men.** What did they say?

**Soc.** They spoke of a glorious truth, as I conceive.

**Men.** What was it? and who were they?<sup>11</sup>

Of course, Socrates goes on to offer a myth about the immortality of the soul and the origins of knowledge as a way of introducing the idea that learning is a form of recollection. At this juncture, however, Meno has introduced the rationale for *discontinuing* the conversation. In terms of the LBT framework, Meno is guilty of a fallacy of behavioral and emotional rules; he is guilty of – and I’m quoting Cohen here – “obstructing ...creative potential by holding in and

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<sup>11</sup> . Taken from B. Jowett’s translation, available online through the MIT Classics Department.

refusing to excrete an emotional, behavioral, or volitional *can't*.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, Meno lacks the emotional and intellectual wherewithal to continue the conversation on the very topic about which he claims to be an expert. He lacks courage and perseverance, and his failure is the result of the following reasoning:

(Rule) (x)(-Kx → -Sx)	(If something is not known, then it should not be sought)
(Report) -Kv	(Virtue is not known)
-Sv	(Virtue should not be sought)

The conclusion of this argument is the cognitive driver of the agent’s feeling of indifference about the pursuit of the object. Meno *feels* entitled to back away from the discussion about the nature of virtue in light of the fact that it appears to him irrational to pursue the matter any further.

Yet Socrates does not provide the antidote to the fallacious reasoning directly; he doesn’t simply differentiate latent from explicit knowledge and offer the following rule:

*If one doesn’t know something, then one should endeavor to persevere.*

And there is good reason why he doesn’t. The fallacious rule accepted by Meno is result of a more entrenched form of reasoning, reasoning that involves key assumptions about knowledge, ignorance, and the learning process. This reasoning might look something like the following (two applications of the Hypothetical Syllogism):

1. If x is unknown, then the mind lacks identity criteria for x (Rule)
2. If the mind lacks identity criteria for x, then learning x is impossible (Rule)
3. If learning x is impossible, one should not search for x (Rule)
4. If x is unknown, then x should not be sought (Rule supported by 1-3)

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<sup>12</sup> . Cohen, *The New Rational Therapy*, p. 6.

Line 4 is the rule that links the report “x is unknown” to the rating that then drives the emotional response and ultimately the behavior. But the reasoning here is incomplete: A more comprehensive reconstruction of Meno’s position would expose *additional* assumptions about how the mind processes information, e.g. that the criteria for identification cannot be extracted from existing knowledge structures, that knowledge may be partial, or that perception can play a role in identifying an unknown. Meno also implicitly accepts a version of the empiricist’s blank slate hypothesis to the extent that he views the mind as empty of content relative to new domains of knowledge. For Meno, the ignorant mind is *tabula rasa* and experience is too anemic to remedy the situation.

What is needed to dislodge this entrenched reasoning? To deny the conclusion of the reconstructed argument just offered (4) does not address the rationale that supports it. But why doesn’t Socrates just come out and tell Meno that the mind is populated with innate ideas and that learning is the result of bringing tacit knowledge to consciousness? Why does Socrates resort to a myth about the immortality of the soul?

There are several possibilities here. The complexity of the syndrome which is driving Meno’s paradox, i.e. the number of background assumptions and their logical interconnections, would make an explicit statement of Socrates’ position difficult to understand. When things are difficult to understand people resort to more familiar patterns of reasoning, and this would diminish the impact of an explicit refutation of Meno’s paradox. A myth is less cognitively taxing and can be used to introduce alternative assumptions that erode Meno’s position without fracturing his belief system altogether.

A subtler answer can be derived from the very concept of dialectic itself, viz. the idea that teaching through questions and answers begins with accepted opinion (*endoxa*) rather than

abstract principles. Here is where the subtlety comes in: Meno's paradox actually reveals an interesting problem about our ability to recognize solutions to problems without already knowing the answer. This is the Problem of Analysis, a variant of the ancient Problem of the Criterion, and it can be stated colloquially as follows: If one is looking for a correct analysis of a something, then the judgment about which analysis is the right one presupposes that one already knows the answer. Now, it seems to me this problem is intractable unless one is willing to accept the possibility that knowledge of new domains is built from existing knowledge structures and some process of extension (what psychologists term as *Constructivism*). To put the point more Socratically, one seeks knowledge of unknowns by beginning with what is already familiar (*endoxa*); the participants in a Socratic dialogue ascend to truth gradually, and that ascent is almost always aided by appeals to myth and metaphor. Such appeals make sense in light of our current reflections: If existing knowledge structures support the introduction of new information – as the paradox would suggest – and those knowledge structures are more or less remote from the new information, then one must provide some kind of bridging principles that link old and new information in a way that constitutes learning.

The appropriate use of figurative language serves this purpose well. The flexibility of myth and metaphor provides a mechanism by which existing domains of knowledge can be linked to the new information in ways that make sense for the learner. Moreover, figurative speech is not without its own ontological commitments, and these commitments can then be used to dislodge erroneous assumptions in the client's existing knowledge structures. For example, Socrates' myth about the immortality of the soul and the origins of innate ideas is used to introduce the concept of tacit knowledge and establishes the possibility of viewing learning as a process of utilizing existing knowledge structures in varying degrees to assimilate new

information. Socrates is literally showing Meno how learning can take place, providing a demonstration of the way myth and metaphor can be used to dissolve the infamous paradox.

What then is the role of figurative language in LBT? Figurative language serves as a primer for the counselee, a way of orienting the client so that an antidotal rule can take root. The use of myth, metaphor, and other forms of figurative language can introduce key assumptions and principles that then interact with existing lines of thought in a way that open up new possibilities for the counselee. It is only if one recognizes alternative possibilities that one can exercise free will, and true recognition depends on understanding the logic of those possibilities.

Of course, such reflections would remain uncomfortably speculative, and uncomfortably vague, without a more specific treatment of the logic of the process described above.

Fortunately, the logic has already been worked out in another domain by Jaakko Hintikka in the form of an interrogative model of reasoning. Hintikka's work is grounded in the logic of scenarios, misleadingly termed *possible world semantics*, as well as his work in game-theory, and it is predicated on the idea that the key to good reasoning lies in the capacity to construct alternative scenarios through which to evaluate one's own beliefs.<sup>13</sup> It seems to me that LBT is not only consistent with this idea, but that the underlying logic of Logic Based Therapy must involve an account of how the logic of scenarios can be used to reinforce antidotal reasoning. To this end, I propose looking at metaphor and myth in terms of Hintikka's epistemic logic, taking figurative thought as a mechanism that maps one conceptual domain to another and introduces new deductive structures into existing epistemic frameworks.

Let me close with some remarks on the practical implications of what has been said here. For the practitioner the idea of using figurative speech and scenarios in the counseling process is

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, J. Hintikka, "Questioning as a philosophical method," in J. Hintikka and M. Hintikka *The logic of Epistemology and the Epistemology of Logic*, The Netherlands, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989.

unlikely to be new. Intuitively the use of these conceptual and linguistic devices makes sense, and the pervasiveness of the imagination in our daily communication makes their use in counseling unavoidable. But that this use is unavoidable does not make it intentional, and my interest here has been to provide a rational justification for exploring the role of myth and metaphor as an extension of the principle already set out in LBT. If the logic of metaphor is compatible with the logic of the rational assessments of fallacious thinking, one need not fear blurring the boundaries between philosophical counseling and psychology. Moreover, understanding the logic of figurative language will make the practitioner's choice of metaphor more effective and the use to which those metaphors are put more informed.