Ancient Philosophy 35 (2015)
©Mathesis Publications

Articles

The Sophists and Allegoresis

Mikołaj Domaradzki

Allegoresis is a mode of interpreting a poem that aims to bring to light its hidden (i.e., 'allegorical') meaning. Research on allegoresis, however, has been plagued by a certain terminological chaos. This is due to the fact that in French (see, e.g., Buffière 1956; Pépin 1976; Brisson 1996) as well as in English (see, e.g., Whitman 1987; Lamberton 1986; Dawson 1992) the term *allegory* is often used with reference to both the strategy of composing a text and the strategy of its interpreting. Naturally, there have been several laudable exceptions (e.g., Quilligan 1979; Ford 2002; Naddaf 2009), but a consistent differentiation between *allegory* (technique of composition) and *allegoresis* (technique of interpretation) has been particularly well established within German literature.[1]

I maintain the distinction between 'l'*expression* allégorique' (i.e., *allegory*) and 'l'*interprétation* allégorique' (i.e., *allegoresis*), making, thereby, use of the definitions put forward by Pépin 1976, 487-488, according to whom: 'la première allégorie consiste à cacher un message sous le revêtement d'une figure; la deuxième, à décrypter la figure pour retrouver le message'. The need to clearly differentiate between the technique of allegorical *composing* of a text and the technique of its allegorical *interpreting* has been generally recognized in research on allegoresis, albeit (as noted) the distinction is rarely signaled by two separate words.[2] In what follows, the distinction will prove to be of paramount importance for categorizing the hermeneutical activity of the sophists.[3]

Finally, by way of introduction, it should be noted that historically neither of the terms is accurate. While *allegoresis* is obviously a modern word, Plutarch reports (*De aud. poet.* 19e-f) that it is only 'nowadays' (νῦν) that the term *allēgoría* (ἀλληγορία) has come to replace what 'long ago' (πάλαι) used to be

[1] See, e.g., Steinmetz 1986; Blönnigen 1992; Hammerstaedt 1998; Gatzemeier 2005. Pépin 1976, 487-488 n2 has even praised the German language for being 'mieux partagée' in this respect.

[2] Cf. e.g. Coulter 1976, 25; Pépin 1976, 78, 91; Quilligan 1979, 26; Whitman 1987, 3-10; Lamberton 1986, 20; Blönnigen 1992, 14-19; Dawson 1992, 3-5; Struck 2004, 2-3; Richardson 2006, 64-66; Naddaf 2009, 111 and Copeland, Struck 2010, 2.

[3] Thus, one can hardly accept the suggestion made by Radice 2004, 7 that *allegory* be defined as 'un'interpretazione casuale e rapsodica dei simboli' and *allegoresis* as 'una interpretazione *sistematica*, oltre che *filosoficamente motivata* dei medesimi'. Viewing both *allegory* and *allegoresis* as types of interpretation makes it impossible to differentiate between the various forms of hermeneutical activity of the Presocratic 'physicists' and those of the sophists (see below sections 2 and 3). Given the fragmentary nature of the extant testimonies, reliance on the 'systematicity' of a given interpretation can scarcely be useful.

called *hypónoia* (ὑπόνοια).[4] Notwithstanding this, it has also been well established in research on allegoresis that the most important term within the allegorical tradition was neither *hypónoia* nor *allēgoría* but rather *ainigma* (αἴνιγμα).[5] As will be seen below, it is this term that is particularly relevant in the context of the sophists' hermeneutics.

Whilst the practice of allegorical interpretation emerged in ancient Greece in the 6th century BC, two major impulses shaped its development. On the one hand, the allegorists sought to exonerate Homer and Hesiod from the charges raised by the first philosophers and, thereby, to save the traditional *paideia* that built precisely on the works of the poets (*apologetic* allegoresis). On the other hand, the allegorists endeavored to make use of the authority of the poets to promote the novel and revolutionary cosmological theories that were frowned upon in the more conservative circles (*appropriative* allegoresis).[6] Both these types of allegoresis can be found in such thinkers as, for example, Theagenes of Rhegium and Metrodorus of Lampsacus.[7]

My purpose is to discuss the possibility of the sophists' allegoresis. The question whether or not the sophists practiced allegorical interpretation cannot be answered easily, for we do not have a single unquestionable testimony on the sophists' allegoresis of poetry. This is not only unfortunate but also strange given the fact that there have been preserved quite a few testimonies on the allegoresis of the Presocratic 'physicists'. It is undoubtedly this sad deficiency of testimonies on the sophists' allegoresis that accounts for the lack of scholarly consensus regarding the issue.[8]

In what follows, I argue that although the evidence in favor of the sophists'

[4] For a confirmation of the latter term's usage, see Xenophon *Symp*. iii 6 and Plato *Rep*. 378d6-8.

[5] In this respect, see esp. Struck 2004, 39-50, 171-179 and 2010, 68; cf. also Buffière 1956, 45-49; Ford 2002, 72-75 and 85-87; Richardson 2006, 65-66; Naddaf 2009, 112; and Obbink 2010, 16. See also n10 and n22 below.

[6] The distinction between the two types of allegoresis goes back to Tate (see esp. 1929, 142-144 and 1934, 105-108), who divides allegorical interpretation into the 'negative' (or 'defensive') and the 'positive' (or 'exegetical'). The problem with this evaluative dichotomy is that differentiating between the 'negative' and the 'positive' kind of allegoresis might result in an unjustified belittling of those allegorists that are characterized as 'merely defensive' (cf. Domaradzki 2011; see also n15 below). It is for this reason that I prefer to divide allegoresis into *apologetic* and *appropriative* rather than into 'negative' and 'positive'. One should also bear in mind that the two types of allegorical interpretation are not mutually exclusive (as Tate would have it), but rather complementary (e.g., Coulter 1976, 26; Struck 2004, 14; Naddaf 2009, 114).

[7] For a brief discussion of Theagenes' and Metrodorus' allegoresis, see below section 2.

[8] Naddaf 2009, 118 aptly diagnoses that there is 'an ambiguity with regard to allegorizing Homer found among the sophists'. Ford 2002, 81 cautiously notes that 'the evidence of the fifth century suggests that sophists had no principled objection to allegoresis'. Yet Ramelli and Lucchetta 2004, 63 are far more optimistic, as they do not seem to have any doubts that 'i Sofisti…, non si limitavano all'esegesi etica del mito, bensì si interessarono anche di quella fisica'. This assessment sits very well with the French tradition. E.g., Pépin 1976, 103 asserts that '[l']allégorie naissante fut enfin adoptée par la sophistique', and Brisson 1996, 56 similarly stresses that '[l']allégorie fut aussi pratiquée par les Sophistes'. Cf. also n28 and n29 below.

allegoresis is only indirect, it is, nevertheless, quite weighty. My argument is organized in the following way: first, I briefly discuss the relevance of Plato's testimony; then, I deal with certain crucial distinctions between 'typical' allegoresis and the sophists' approach to myth; finally, I try to make a case that while the sophists' use of mythology cannot be straightforwardly labelled as allegoresis, it, nonetheless, must have been quite conducive to the development of the practice of allegorical interpretation. My considerations focus on Protagoras and Prodicus.

I. Plato's account of the sophists' hermeneutics

We know that the sophists sought to demonstrate the superiority of their wisdom to that of Homer, Hesiod, Simonides, or any other poet. Crucial evidence comes from Plato, who in *Protagoras* 340a-347a and *Lesser Hippias* 363a-365d lampoons such hermeneutical efforts of the most prominent sophists.[9] As Plato portrays them, the sophists (undeservedly) aspire to the role of teachers of virtue and moral educators: while challenging the traditional *paideia*, they, nevertheless, eagerly have recourse to the (dubious) authority of the poets. That is why in the course of his discussion with Socrates, the Platonic Protagoras makes reference (316d3-9) to 'the ancient sophistic art' (ἡ σοφιστικὴ τέχνη…παλαιά) that was to have been practiced by, among others, Homer, Hesiod, and Simonides, on the one hand, as well as Orpheus and Musaeus, on the other: the former were to have hidden it behind the 'screen' or 'cover' (πρόσχημα) of poetry, whereas the latter—behind that of mystic rites and prophecies.

Needless to say, the issue of Plato's reliability as a historian must be approached with extreme caution. What makes Plato so often a rather problematic source for the reconstruction of Presocratic thought is that his goal was not to present a historically faithful and unbiased account of any thinker's views but rather to put forward a critical (philosophical) assessment of their validity. Thus, as far as Plato's account of allegoresis is concerned, we need to emphasize the philosopher's general hostility to the practice: whenever Plato employs the term *ainigma* and its cognates,[10] he does so ironically.[11] With regard to this, Struck 2004, 47 aptly observes that 'Plato uses the notion of "speaking in enigmas" as a trope of subtle mockery'. A prime example thereof is to be found in *Republic* 331c-332c, where Socrates investigates Simonides' claim that justice consists in 'rendering to each his due'. Having noted that it is hardly just for the borrower to return the weapons when the lender has gone insane, Socrates ironically concludes (331e6-332c1) that the 'wise and divine' (σοφὸς…καὶ θεῖος) Simonides must have 'spoken enigmatically' (ἠινίξατο) about justice.

[9] In a somewhat similar vein, Xenophon *Mem.* ii 1.21 = DK 84 B2 reports that Prodicus 'showed off for the many' (πλείστοις ἐπιδείκνυται). Where no English reference is provided, the translation is my own.

[10] Which are the then equivalents to the term allegory; cf. n5 above and n22 below.

[11] The irony has been stressed by Tate 1929, 149-150, 152; Ford 2002, 85, 213-214, and Struck 2004, 47-49.

Yet, Plato not only derides the very practice of allegorical interpretation, but also skillfully employs it to caricature and jibe at his adversaries. In *Theaetetus* 152a-164d, for example, Socrates examines Protagoras' famous tenet that 'man is the measure of all things'. Having first noted (152b1) the improbability of Protagoras' 'talking nonsense' (ληρεῖν), Socrates refutes the sophist's position and draws the ironic conclusion (152c8-9) that the 'all-wise' (πάσσοφος) Protagoras must have 'spoken enigmatically' (ᾐνίξατο). Struck 2004, 49, who analyzes these and other Platonic references to the practice of allegorical interpretation, convincingly argues that Plato's mockery attests to 'a developed, mature tradition of such a practice among his contemporaries'. In other words, Plato was able to demonstrate the 'enigmaticity' (i.e., absurdity) of his opponents' views, only because the practice of discovering the 'enigmatic' (i.e., 'allegorical') meanings was so widespread at this time that everybody knew what Plato disparaged.

This is of paramount importance for our considerations, for even if we agree that the *Protagoras* needs to be taken as (at least to some extent) a literary construction, it can hardly be denied that Plato's satirical depiction must have presupposed a general recognizability of the practice ridiculed by the philosopher. Thus, we may rather safely assume that for all its irony and parody, the *Protagoras* does provide us with a credible glimpse of what the sophists' hermeneutical expositions were like.[12] Consequently, we may also take it that in all probability the sophists did treat archaic poetry as a treasure trove of (sophistic) wisdom. This assumption sits very well with the assertion put forward by Protagoras that 'a most important part of a man's education is being knowledgeable about poetry' (ἀνδρὶ παιδείας μέγιστον μέρος εἶναι περὶ ἐπῶν δεινὸν εἶναι, 338e7-339a1 Taylor trans.). It goes without saying that becoming skilled in the matters of verses required developing some sort of hermeneutics.

The sophists' revolutionary views caused quite a turmoil in the more conservative circles. The best way to avoid charges of atheism and/or corrupting the youth was to show that their seemingly disturbing doctrines were in fact a continuation or even completion of the traditional world-picture transmitted by the poets. That is precisely why the Platonic Protagoras elucidates (316d5-6) that the ancient wise men who practiced their sophistic art 'put forward a screen and hid themselves behind a veil' (πρόσχημα ποιεῖσθαι καὶ προκαλύπτεσθαι) of poetry, for 'they feared the offence' (φοβουμένους τὸ ἐπαχθές) that their teachings

[12] In this respect, I, therefore, wholeheartedly agree with Wehrli 1928, 82, who has already regarded the *Protagoras* as a 'platonische Satire', stressing at the same time though that 'Protagoras lehrte zweifelsohne, daß Homer Sophist gewesen sei'. The same point has been made recently by Goulet 2005, 95-96, according to whom: 'Même si on ne prend pas trop au sérieux cet argument de Protagoras, on peut estimer que présenter ainsi Homère ou Hésiode comme des sophistes qui avaient déguisé leur enseignement sous une forme poétique, invitait à mettre en œuvre une méthode de lecture susceptible de retrouver l'enseignement caché que ces sophistes auraient dissimulé sous leurs poèmes.' In a somewhat similar vein, Brisson 1996, 56 is also inclined to treat Plato's testimony as a credible source of information on the sophists' hermeneutics. Cf. also Ford 2002, 202; Ramelli, Lucchetta 2004, 60n38; Richardson 2006, 67; Long 2006, 215; Naddaf 2009, 118.

might cause.[13] Citing the authority of Homer or Hesiod made it possible for the sophists to present the archaic poets as—*sit venia verbo*—'proto-sophists', whose teachings used to be once as disquieting as the sophists' doctrines seemed now.

All things considered, the testimony of the *Protagoras* suggests, then, that it is highly probable that the sophists did allegorically interpret the poets. If that was the case, then their allegoresis must have aimed to show that a great deal of archaic poetry should be seen as a prefiguration of the views held by the sophists themselves. Thus, when trying to demonstrate that the poems of Homer (or other archaic poet) in one way or another anticipate some sophistic doctrine(s), the sophists must have presented themselves as capable of decoding the ancient wisdom that the archaic poets had encoded in their poems.

II. Examples of pre-sophistic allegoresis

Everything that has been said so far does not change the aforementioned fact that not a single unquestionable testimony on the allegoresis of the sophists has survived. All that we have is several examples of appropriating mythology for the purpose of illustrating a complex argument. While the strategy can be found most notably in Protagoras and Prodicus, it should not be rashly characterized as allegoresis. Thus, before one stampedes into classifying the sophists' approach to myth as allegorical interpretation, it seems advisable to discuss some clear-cut examples of allegoresis. While this is done in the present section, the ensuing one will seek to categorize the sophists' use of mythology. Here, I confine myself to three, more or less prototypical, cases.

Theagenes of Rhegium is reported (DK 8 A2) to have identified the gods with the elements (Apollo, Helios, and Hephaestus with fire, Poseidon and Scamander with water, Artemis with the moon, Hera with the air) as well as with various dispositions (Athena with thoughtfulness, Ares with thoughtlessness, Aphrodite with passion, and Hermes with reason). While Porphyry attributes to Theagenes the invention of both physical and moral allegoresis, he also unequivocally classifies (*Quaest. Hom.* i 240, 14 = DK 8 A2) Theagenes' allegoresis as a 'defense' (ἀπολογία) of Homer and strongly insists that Theagenes 'first' (πρῶτος) wrote about the poet. Unfortunately, all these assertions have been seriously questioned. First of all, many scholars consider the Porphyrian scholion to be in one

[13] A somewhat similar thought is expressed in *Theaetetus* 180c8-d1, where 'the ancients' (οἱ ἀρχαῖοι) are said to 'have disguised themselves from the many by means of poetry' (μετὰ ποιήσεως ἐπικρυπτομένων τοὺς πολλούς). It may not be superfluous to note that this position is somewhat reminiscent of Strauss 1952 and 1959, who likewise argued that the danger of persecution and/or the conviction that the truth is not for the hoi polloi might produce such a kind of writing that makes it possible for the author simultaneously to convey two distinct messages: the obvious and superficial sense is designed for the majority of readers ('the many'), whereas the hidden and profound meaning can only be accessed by a select few ('the philosophical elite'). Strauss' idea that writing between the lines is necessary in light of the inevitable conflict between philosophy and society seems quite similar to the justification that the Platonic Protagoras gives for the need to unravel the poets' ancient sophistic art.

way or another contaminated.[14] Second, the relevance of Theagenes' allegoresis has been belittled as 'merely' apologetic.[15] Finally, one has also rejected the idea that Theagenes invented the practice of allegorical interpretation.[16] Be that as it may, one can hardly impugn the allegorical nature of the interpretation preserved by Porphyry: on this reading of Homer's theomachy, the battle of the gods becomes a battle of the elements and/or dispositions. Thus, the *Iliad* transpires to be much more than its surface meaning *prima facie* suggests: underneath the naïve and outrageous sense of the poem, various profound cosmological as well as ethical truths have been hidden.[17]

Metrodorus of Lampsacus is reported (DK 61 A4) to have equated the heroes with the heavenly bodies (Agamemnon with aether, Achilles with the sun, Helen with the earth, Alexander with the air, Hector with the moon) and the gods with the human organs (Demeter with the liver, Dionysus with the spleen, Apollo with the bile). There is a general consensus that this allegoresis was shaped by certain physical and medical theories of the Anaxagorean school: Metrodorus' idea to identify the heroes with the heavenly bodies (i.e., various parts of the universe) and the gods with the human organs (i.e., various parts of the human body) builds on the Anaxagorean analogy between macrocosm and microcosm.[18] While the

---

[14] As Porphyry was a Neoplatonist Homeric commentator, it is possible that he read into Theagenes various Pythagorean and/or Stoic ideas; cf., e.g., Wehrli 1928, 89-90; Pépin 1976, 98-99 n16; Lamberton 1986, 32-33; Ramelli and Lucchetta 2004, 53. Thus, Lamberton 1986, 32 notices e.g. that 'the simultaneous creation of both physical and moral allegory' attributed to Theagenes by the Porphyrian scholion is 'an unlikely accomplishment for any one individual'. In quite a similar vein, Brisson 1996, 55 observes: 'Peut-on vraiment, en se fondant sur le seul témoignage de Porphyre (seconde moitié du IIIème siècle apr. J.-C.), attribuer à Théagène de Rhégium (première moitié du VIème siècle av. J.-C.) l'invention de l'allégorie physique et morale? Il est permis d'en douter.'

[15] Most vehemently by Tate 1927, 1929, and 1934, who characterized all defensive allegoresis as 'negative'.

[16] Tate 1927, 214-215 and 1934, 107-108 has argued in favor of Pherecydes rather than Theagenes. Recently, the scholar has been followed by Struck 2004, 27, who is inclined to regard Origen's testimony (*Cels*. vi 42 = DK 7 B5) on Pherecydes' allegoresis as 'our earliest known instance of allegorical reading'.

[17] It is highly probable that Theagenes read into Homer the cosmological theories of Anaximander and/or Anaximenes; cf. in this respect Buffière 1956, 82, 88-89, 103-104; Gatzemeier 2005, 340, 370; Naddaf 2009, 105-106, 109, 123; Domaradzki 2011, 212-219.

[18] Wehrli 1928, 92-94 has questioned the (in my opinion obvious) relationship between Metrodorus' allegoresis and Anaxagoras' cosmology. The scholar repudiates the account put forward by Nestle 1907, but offers nothing in exchange. Inasmuch as Wehrli 1928, 93 confines himself to merely noting the 'Phantastik' of Metrodorus' interpretations, his approach proves of little value. The overwhelming preponderance of scholars acknowledge that the extant testimonies unequivocally point to the existence of a certain intellectual affinity between the various allegorical interpretations presented by Metrodorus and the particular physical and medical theories put forward by the Anaxagorean school. Cf., e.g., Nestle 1907, 503-510; Buffière 1956, 125-132; Pépin 1976, 99-101; Califf 2003, 30-33; Struck 2004, 28; Gatzemeier 2005, 378; Richardson 2006, 67-69; Naddaf 2009, 117; Domaradzki 2010, 236-242. While Hammerstaedt 1998, 28-32 discusses the authenticity of the sources, Califf 2003, 27n14 offers a critical appraisal of this discussion.

intentions of Metrodorus' allegoresis were appropriative rather than apologetic,[19] the allegorical nature of his reading of the *Iliad* is, again, unquestionable: Homer's poem is revealed to express allegorically several crucial insights that anticipate the theories expounded by Anaxagoras and his disciples.

The last fairly clear-cut example of allegorical interpretation that will be briefly touched upon here is that of the Derveni papyrus.[20] While the papyrus contains the most elaborate allegoresis of that time, its astounding richness and complexity cannot be fully discussed here. For the purpose of our considerations, it should suffice to note that in his allegorical interpretation of Orpheus' poem, the Derveni allegorist identifies, among others, 'Kronos' (Κρό-νος) with the 'Mind' (Νοῦς) that is 'striking' (κρούων) individual things against one another (XIV 7, cf. also XV 6-8) and Zeus with the air that dominates all things (XIX 1-4, cf. also XVII 2-9).[21] The allegorical interpretation put forward in the Derveni papyrus brings to light the hidden ('allegorical') meaning of Orpheus' poem,[22] upon which a whole narrative is excavated from underneath this Orphic theogony. For example, Kronos' castration of Ouranos becomes an allegory of the transition from the fire phase to the stage in which the Mind brings about the collisions between the individual things (XIV 2-10). Consequently, the 'magistracy' (ἀρχή) of Kronos marks the 'beginning' (ἀρχή) of a new era in the history of the universe (XV 7-8). To the best of my knowledge, no scholar has so far questioned the authenticity of the Derveni papyrus, although there is less scholarly consensus on the intentions of the Derveni allegorist.[23] Irrespective of whether the Derveni author practiced apologetic or appropriative allegoresis, the most important thing is that the allegorical nature of the Derveni interpretation is, one more time, indisputable: while Orpheus' poem proves to express the cosmology of the Anaxagorean school, the literal meaning of the poem turns out to be but an invitation to search for its 'real' (i.e., allegorical) sense.

The three aforementioned cases of allegorical interpretation can now be taken as a point of departure for an attempt somehow to classify the sophists' approach to myth. It is argued below that while neither the sophists' rationalization of mythology nor their use of myths for the purpose of illustrating an intricate argument should be hastily equated with allegoresis,[24] Protagoras' and especially

---

[19] Gatzemeier 2005, 378 is clearly right in the following assessment of Metrodorus' allegoresis: 'Die Intention dieser Allegorese ist nicht nur die "Rettung" Homers, sondern auch (und vor allem) die "Rettung" der Philosophie'. In other words, it was rather a promotion (or: 'Rettung') of Anaxagorean physics than a defense of Homeric poetry that was Metrodorus' goal. This is clear from his remark (DK 61 A3) that such heroes as Hector, Achilles, and Agamemnon actually never existed.

[20] The text along with translation is that of Kouremenos, Parássoglou, Tsantsanoglou 2006.

[21] Subsequently (XXIII 3), the air is identified with both Zeus and Oceanus.

[22] Instead of 'allegory', the Derveni author uses, of course, the terms: αἴνιγμα (VII 6), αἰνιγματώδης (VII 5), and αἰνίζεσθαι (IX 10, X 11, XIII 6, XVII 13). Cf. n5 and n10 above.

[23] For an overview and discussion of the various possible options, see Betegh 2004, 349-380 and Kouremenos, Parássoglou, Tsantsanoglou 2006, 45-58.

[24] With regard to the former (interpretative) strategy, the objection raised by Steinmetz 1986, 19

Prodicus' appropriation of mythology must have been quite conducive to the development of the practice of allegorical interpretation.

III. The sophists and allegorical interpretation

It seems that it is in Prodicus that we encounter something that within the sophists' hermeneutics most clearly resembles allegorical interpretation of poetry.[25] We know Prodicus interpreted the gods of Homer and Hesiod as personifications (allegories?) of 'useful things' (τὰ ὠφελοῦντα, DK 84 B5). On this rationalizing interpretation, bread was deified as Demeter, wine—as Dionysus, water—as Poseidon, fire—as Hephaestus, and so on. Sadly enough, it is impossible to ascertain whether Prodicus actually believed that Homer and Hesiod *intentionally* presented the gods as allegories of various beneficial things.[26] Personally, I am inclined to think that this was not the case. It is tantalizing to assume that from Prodicus' perspective the archaic poets (inadvertently) preserved in their poems the then world-picture. Inasmuch as Prodicus would be, thus, investigating the origins of religion, his hermeneutical activity could be said to have an *ethnographic* dimension.[27]

For the purpose of the present considerations, however, the most important fact is that Prodicus' rationalizing interpretation of the gods is very much like allegoresis. After all, Prodicus does reduce Demeter to (the allegory of) bread, Dionysus – to (the allegory of) wine, Poseidon – to (the allegory of) water, Hephaestus – to (the allegory of) fire and so on. It can hardly be impugned that such an equation of the gods with various useful things is very similar to identifying them with the elements, various dispositions, heavenly bodies, human organs,

---

is particularly valid: 'Wollte man auch die rationalistische Mythendeutung zur Allegorese zählen, wären zum Beispiel Thukydides oder Euhemeros Allegoriker.' With regard to the latter (narrative) strategy, the reservation expressed already by Wehrli 1928, 71 is still accurate: 'Irgendeine Geschichte kann auch als bloßer Vergleich herangezogen werden, ohne daß man von einer Umdeutung eigentlich sprechen kann.' In a somewhat similar vein, Tate 1930, 6 also cautioned: 'The moral of the tale is not to be confused with the *ὑπόνοια*.'

[25] It is worth noting here that Prodicus has been suggested as one of the possible authors of the Derveni papyrus; cf. in this respect Bernabé 2002, 97n29 and Betegh 2004, 64n27.

[26] Brisson 1996, 56, however, does not seem to have any doubts: 'intentionnellement'. Naddaf 2009, 118 more cautiously and quite rightly points out that 'it is unclear if Prodicus thought that Homer himself…had "consciously" allegorized the gifts of nature' (cf. also Goulet 2005, 109).

[27] This characterization builds primarily on the suggestion made by Long 2006, 226 that in interpreting Cornutus' treatise interchangeably uses such terms as 'ethnographer and 'cultural anthropologist'. In a somewhat similar vein, Lamberton 1986, 23 ascribes to Herodotus 'a sort of ethnographic curiosity', whereas Kany-Turpin 2000, 513 speaks of Democritus' 'anthropology'. The idea that certain interpretations put forward in antiquity can be labelled as 'ethnographic' has been nicely expressed by Long 2006, 236 in the following way: 'the Stoics treated early Greek poetry as ethnographical material and not as literature'. I, obviously, assume the diagnosis to apply not only to the Stoics' hermeneutics but also that to that of the sophists. It is worth stressing, though, that the presence of an 'ethnographic' dimension does not automatically preclude allegoresis: scholars such as Long erroneously deny altogether the allegorical dimension of Stoic hermeneutics; cf. in this respect Domaradzki 2012, 139-143.

etc. (cf. the previous section).[28] While Prodicus' rationalizing interpretation of the gods is highly comparable to allegoresis, the remaining testimonies on the sophists' use of mythology are far more difficult to classify.

In Xenophon *Mem*. ii 1.21-34 = DK 84 B2, we find a paraphrase of Prodicus' myth of Heracles, who at his existential crossroads encounters two women: Vice (Κακία) and Virtue (Ἀρετή). As is well known, both women allegorically personify two paths of life, between which the young Heracles has to choose.[29] Virtue requires numerous sacrifices and renunciations (i.e., 'the long road'), but ultimately leads to genuine and authentic happiness. Vice promises a life of ease (i.e., 'the short road'), but in fact only tempts into a permanent and insatiable pursuit of pleasures. While the strategy of allegorical personification makes it possible for Prodicus to illustrate the highly abstract values between which the young Heracles needs to make his choice, the suggestiveness of this portrayal is achieved precisely by presenting the elusive concepts of *virtue* and *vice* as concrete individuals: a decent, modest and dignified woman, on the one hand, and a wanton, voluptuous, and meretricious harlot, on the other.

A highly comparable appropriation of conventional mythology has been attributed to Protagoras. In Plato's dialogue named after him, Protagoras employs a traditional myth to elucidate his conception of the genesis of the state.[30] The myth presented by Protagoras (320c8-322d5) is as allegorical as the one offered by Prodicus. Prometheus and Epimetheus paradigmatically represent two types of 'intelligence' (as contemporary psychologists might say), Hephaestus symbolizes 'the art of fire', i.e., 'the smith's art' (ἡ ἔμπυρος τέχνη), Athena—'the other art' (ἡ ἄλλη τέχνη),[31] while beside Zeus and Hermes, two allegorical personifications appear: Respect (αἰδώς) and Justice (δίκη). As Prodicus allegorically explains the young Heracles' existential dilemma, so Protagoras in an equally allegorical language explains what political virtue is, where it comes from, and how it makes democracy possible.

Neither Prodicus' nor Protagoras' narrative strategy can be immediately characterized as allegoresis. Nevertheless, allegorical interpretation does presuppose that abstract concepts (κακία, ἀρετή, αἰδώς, δίκη, etc.) be personified and, then, woven into a coherent narrative. Thus, it is evident that the narrative strategy employed by the sophists must have been quite conducive to the develop-

[28] Pépin 1976, 103 classifies Prodicus' interpretation as 'allégorie physique', whereas Ramelli and Lucchetta 2004, 63 speak in this context of 'esegesi fisica'.

[29] Whitman 1987, 22 characterizes Prodicus' narrative as '[t]he first true personification allegory in the West'. Pépin 1976, 103 classifies it as 'allégorie éthique' and Brisson 1996, 56 as 'une interprétation moralisante'.

[30] Naddaf 2009, 118 emphasizes that 'Protagoras's use of myth in the *Protagoras* is a perfect instance of his endorsement of the allegorical method, albeit in defense of the democratic state.'

[31] Taylor 1996, 77 suggests that the reference is probably to spinning and weaving and/or pottery and/or the cultivation of the olive. It may not be superfluous to note that somewhat earlier (321d1) Hephaestus and Athena are robbed of their 'skill in the arts' (ἡ ἔντεχνος σοφία).

ment of allegorical interpretation.[32] After all, it will hardly be an exaggeration to claim that just as a concept can be (allegorically) presented as a person or deity, so can a person or deity be (allegorically) interpreted as a mere concept. It is precisely for this reason that allegorical personification (technique of composition) has been for a long time recognized as the inverse of allegorical interpretation (technique of exegesis).[33] One might, therefore, say that the narrative strategy of personification 'naturally' paves the way for the interpretative strategy of bringing to light the hidden (i.e., 'allegorical') meaning(s) of a narrative.

While the sophists' narrative strategy must have been, then, instrumental in the growth of allegoresis, it also nicely illustrates how challenging it may be always unequivocally to classify an ancient text as a straightforward example of either 'allegory' or 'allegoresis' given the similarity of allegorical personification and allegorical interpretation. Both Protagoras and Prodicus use the strategy of allegorical personification for elucidating highly abstract concepts and their explanation succeeds precisely owing to the allegory. What at times might blur the difference between their allegorical *composing* (i.e., a technique of 'encoding' certain ideas) and allegorical *interpreting* (i.e., a technique of 'decoding' them) is the aforementioned similarity between personifying (or deifying) a concept, on the one hand, and reducing a person (or deity) to a mere concept, on the other.

Finally, we should also note that although Protagoras defends his argument by means of both *mythos* (320c8-324d1) and *logos* (324d7-328c2), at a certain point he, nevertheless, explicitly asserts that the former is 'more enjoyable' (χαριέστερος) for the audience (320c6-7 Taylor trans.). Naturally, this evaluation of *mythos* might come from Plato, but, as I have argued above (cf. section 1), Plato's portrayal (however ironical) must have presupposed at least some recognizability of Protagoras' expositions. Thus, we may surmise that for all its satire the *Protagoras* does reflect the sophist's conviction about the heuristic value and explanatory potential of *mythos* and *allegory*. Given that Prodicus definitely appropriated mythology for the purpose of illustrating his arguments, we may reasonably conjecture that Plato's depiction of Protagoras' is somewhat historically true in this respect. Similarly to Prodicus, Protagoras believed, then, that the suggestiveness of *mythos* and *allegory* invariably helps to make various convoluted arguments more tangible and accessible.

---

[32] This was brilliantly recognized by Richardson 2006, 67 that stressed that although the use of myths by Protagoras and Prodicus 'is not the same thing as allegorical treatment of earlier poetry, it suggests a readiness to allow such an approach'. The same can be said of the early Pythagoreans: while the thinkers did not deal with allegoresis directly, the very manner of presenting their teachings contributed, nevertheless, significantly to the growth of allegorical interpretation; cf. in this respect Domaradzki 2013, 93-103.

[33] Most notably by Whitman 1987, 4-5 that in a pioneering study made the following observation: 'In procedure, personification is virtually the inverse of allegorical interpretation. While interpretive allegory moves, for instance, from the fictional Athena to the underlying meaning of "wisdom", compositional allegory begins with "wisdom" itself, and constructs a fiction around it' (cf. also Whitman 1987, 22).

IV. Conclusions

Let us recapitulate. The above discussed testimonies seem to justify the conclusion that Protagoras and Prodicus were deeply convinced about the heuristic usefulness and explanatory value of myth as well as allegory. Both sophists employed these narrative tools for the purpose of elucidating their elaborate arguments. Although such appropriations of mythology are not in themselves allegoresis, they definitely create premises for allegorical interpretation of poetry. This is spectacularly corroborated by Prodicus' 'ethnographic' interpretation of the traditional gods: this interpretation sits very well with the tradition of revealing the hidden layer(s) of a narrative (albeit the sophist presumably did not attribute to Homer and Hesiod the intention of such a construction). As the sophists' hermeneutical activity comprises the use of myth and allegory for heuristic purposes as well as an ethnographic interpretation of mythology, it is highly probable that (at least some of) the sophists did allegorically interpret the archaic poetry so as to demonstrate that poets such as Homer and Hesiod in one way or another anticipated their teachings.

Institute of Philosophy
Adam Mickiewicz University,
ul. Szamarzewskiego 89c
60-569 Poznan, Poland

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bernabé, A. 2002. 'La théogonie orphique du Papyrus de Derveni' *Kernos. Revue internationale et pluridisciplinaire de religion grecque antique* 15: 91-129.

Betegh, G. 2004. *The Derveni Papyrus: Cosmology, Theology and Interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Blönnigen, C. 1992. *Der griechische Ursprung der jüdisch-hellenistischen Allegorese und ihre Rezeption in der alexandrinischen Patristik*. Frankfurt am Main: Lang.

Brisson, L. 1996. *Introduction à la philosophie du mythe*. vol. 1: *Sauver les mythes*. Paris: Libraire Philosophique J. Vrin.

Brunschwig, J. and G.E.R. Lloyd edd. 2000. *Greek Thought: A Guide to Classical Knowledge*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Buffière, F. 1956. *Les Mythes d'Homère et la pensée grecque*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.

Califf, D.J. 2003. 'Metrodorus of Lampsacus and the Problem of Allegory: An Extreme Case?' *Arethusa* 36: 21-36.

Copeland, R. and P.T. Struck edd. 2010. *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Copeland, R. and P.T. Struck. 2010. 'Introduction' 1-11 in: Copeland and Struck edd. 2010.

Coulter, J.A. 1976. *The Literary Microcosm: Theories of Interpretation of the Later Neoplatonists*. Leiden: Brill.

Dawson, D. 1992. *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Diels, H. and W. Kranz. 1951-1952. *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. 6th edn. Berlin: Weidmann.

Domaradzki, M. 2010. 'Allegoresis In the Fifth Century BC' *Eos. Commentarii Societatis Philologae Polonorum* 97: 233-248.

Domaradzki, M. 2011. 'Theagenes of Rhegium and the Rise of Allegorical Interpretation' *Elenchos. Rivista di studi sul pensiero antico* 32: 205-227.

Domaradzki, M. 2012. 'Theological Etymologizing in the Early Stoa' *Kernos. Revue internationale et pluridisciplinaire de religion grecque antique* 25: 125-148.

Domaradzki, M. 2013. 'Sull'allegoresi simbolica del primo pitagorismo' *Peitho. Examina antiqua* 4: 93-103.

Ford, A. 2002. *The Origins of Criticism: Literary Culture and Poetic Theory in Classical Greece*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Gatzemeier, M. 2005. *Philosophie als Theorie der Rationalität*. Bd. 1: *Zur Philosophie der wissenschaftlichen Welt—Analysen und Rekonstruktionen*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann.

Goulet, R. 2005. 'La méthode allégorique chez les Stoïciens' 93-119 in Romeyer Dherbey and Gourinat edd. 2005.

Hammerstaedt, J. 1998. 'Die Homerallegorese des älteren Metrodor von Lampsakos' *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 121: 28-32.

Kany-Turpin, J. 2000. 'Theories of Religion' 511-522 in Brunschwig and Lloyd edd. 2000.

Kouremenos, T., G.M. Parássoglou, and K. Tsantsanoglou. 2006. *The Derveni Papyrus. Edited with Introduction and Commentary*. Firenze: Leo S. Olschki.

Laird, A. ed. 2006. *Oxford Readings in Ancient Literary Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lamberton, R. 1986. *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Long, A.A. 2006. 'Stoic Readings of Homer' 211-237 in Laird ed. 2006 [reprinted from: 41-66 in Lamberton, R. and J.J. Keaney edd. 1992. *Homer's Ancient Readers: The Hermeneutics of Greek Epic's Earliest Exegetes*, Princeton: Princeton University Press].

Naddaf, G. 2009. 'Allegory and the Origins of Philosophy' 99-131 in Wians ed. 2009.

Nestle, W. 1907. 'Metrodors Mythendeutung' *Philologus* 66: 503-510.

Obbink, D. 2010. 'Early Greek Allegory' 15-25 in Copeland and Struck edd. 2010.

Pépin, J. 1976. *Mythe et allégorie: Les origines grecques et les contestations judéo-chrétiennes*. Paris: Études Augustiniennes.

Quilligan, M. 1979. *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Radice, R. 2004. 'Introduzione' 7-45 in Ramelli and Lucchetta 2004.

Ramelli, I. and G. Lucchetta. 2004. '*Allegoria*'. vol. 1: *L'età classica*. Milano: Vita e Pensiero.

Richardson, N.J. 2006. 'Homeric Professors in the Age of the Sophists' 62-86 in Laird ed. 2006 [reprinted from 65-81 in *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 201, 1975].

Romeyer Dherbey, G. and J.B. Gourinat edd. 2005. *Les Stoïciens*. Paris: Libraire Philosophique J. Vrin.

Steinmetz, P. 1986. 'Allegorische Deutung und allegorische Dichtung in der alten Stoa' *Rheinische Museum für Philologie* 129: 18-30.

Strauss, L. 1952. *Persecution and the Art of Writing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Strauss, L. 1959. *What is Political Philosophy? And Other Studies*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

Struck, P.T. 2004. *Birth of the Symbol: Ancient Readers at the Limits of Their Texts*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Struck, P.T. 2010. 'Allegory and Ascent in Neoplatonism' 57-70 in Copeland and Struck edd. 2010.

Tate, J. 1927. 'The Beginnings of Greek Allegory' *Classical Review* 41: 214-215.

Tate, J. 1929. 'Plato and Allegorical Interpretation' *Classical Quarterly* 23: 142-154.

Tate, J. 1930. 'Plato and Allegorical Interpretation' *Classical Quarterly* 24: 1-10.

Tate, J. 1934. 'On the History of Allegorism' *Classical Quarterly* 28: 105-114.

Taylor, C.C.W. 1996. *Plato. Protagoras*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wehrli, F. 1928. *Zur Geschichte der allegorischen Deutung Homers im Altertum*. Borna/Leipzig: Noske.

Whitman, J. 1987. *Allegory. The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Wians, W. ed. 2009. *Logos and Muthos: Philosophical Essays in Greek Literature*. Albany: SUNY Press.