

**THE DICHOTOMY MYTH AND REASON REVISITED
FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF GEOFFREY E. R. LLOYD.
A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT**

DIEGO HONORATO

dhonorato@uandes.cl

Universidad de los Andes, Santiago, Chile

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7965-6429>

Artigo recebido a 18-01-2018 e aprovado a 23-08-2019

Abstract

This article discusses the ideas defended by the well-known classical historian Geoffrey E. R. Lloyd in regard to the dichotomy *mythos* and *logos*. We do so in three steps: firstly, we present briefly the differences that Lloyd sees between these two types of speeches; secondly, Lloyd's case for dismantling any strong form of dichotomy is reviewed; thirdly, we attempt a critical approach to Lloyd's ideas trying to show that there is a veiled epistemological ambiguity in some of his contentions. The study method use is, as in all humanities, the critical reading and discussion of the primary sources (Lloyd's work). We conclude that Lloyd's general approach, insomuch as it urges us to prosecute a *via media* between naïve form of realisms and strong cultural (ethnographic) contextualisms, appears to be a sound strategy, yet –from our standpoint, such loable programme is debunked by the specific strategies Lloyd introduces to account for it.

Keywords: Lloyd, myth, reason, dichotomy, epistemological ambiguity.

Ever since for the first time Plato wrote in the *Republic* (607b) about a certain old discrepancy or disagreement (*palaià diaphorà*) between poetry and philosophy, the imagination of occidental philosophers, mythographers and anthropologists has been captured by this old theme known as the progression 'from myth to reason'. The general –i.e., public–

idea envisaged in this so-called development, which apparently occurred in Greece from the 8th to the 5th century B.C., assumes that humankind has passed through a form of transition from an epoch when man dwelt among the gods, that is, a time when his own reality and the manifestations of the *kósmos* were thought to be in close interaction with the realm of the divine, leading up to an epoch in which man, in the maturity of his capacities, became capable of delivering a rationalized and secularized explanation of himself and the entire *kósmos*. Because of this process –we are told- the reality of the divine and of the world became increasingly confined to the status of a philosophical ‘problem’, which, in fact, was related more with metaphysical foundations, i.e., a metaphysic of forms, than with any living and feared god. Now within such vast encyclopaedic theme we would like to present and discuss some of the ideas of the well-known classicist and historian Geoffrey E. R. Lloyd in regard to this dichotomy. We think, furthermore, that Lloyd’s approach summarizes a clear direction in regard to this topic which Richard Buxton¹ has referred to as the “dissolution of the polarity”. We shall do this in three parts: firstly, we shall briefly review what differences Lloyd sees between these two types of speeches (*mythos* and *logos*); secondly, along the ‘literal-metaphorical’ distinction and the ‘mentalities’ problem we shall explore how Lloyd attempts to dismantle the dichotomy *mythos-logos*; and, thirdly, we shall try a critical debate in regard to some crucial epistemological points which, from our perspective, need to be carefully reconsidered.

1 – Myth and logos: the growing development of two types of speeches

Before trying to answer why, in Lloyd’s opinion, it is not possible to talk of a strong dichotomy between these two forms of speech, it might be useful to explain what actual differences the Greeks themselves conceived between these terms; that is, how does Greek science or philosophy

¹ Buxton 1999: 11. See the introduction where Buxton –referring to Claude Calame and Geoffrey Lloyd– says that “we might seem to have reached a point where not only does ‘the Greek achievement’ have about it more of the mirage than the miracle, but where we are actually left *without a vocabulary* for describing the events which were once thought to constitute that achievement”. We think, nonetheless, that this quote suits better the ideas of Claude Calame than those of Geoffrey Lloyd.

actually differentiate itself from a mythical tale? Or to be more precise, which positive features differentiate the kind of speeches in which these categories, *mythos* and *logos*, would afterwards appear? Now there are a number of issues that Lloyd repeatedly mentions in his works as objective differences between these two modes of speech, which, in the main, can be summarized as follows:

(a) Firstly, in some authors and schools it was achieved an explicit awareness of the necessity of natural regularities, of causes and effects, that is, of universal laws which could be appealed to, and actually were appealed to (whether wrongly or not), in argumentation. Among the pre-Socratics at least, Leucippus seem to confirm this. Thus at Fr. 2 he says, “nothing comes to be at random, but everything for a reason and by necessity”. Nonetheless –as Lloyd points out– the evidence on earlier thinkers such as the Ionians is less promising, for even recognising that Anaximander’s sole extant fragment reads in that direction, the evidence on the rest of the Milesians –both primary and secondary– does not encourage us as much. All in all, Lloyd does find eloquent confirmation regarding the increasing awareness of natural laws in a considerable number of Hippocratic treatises. For instance, the writer of *On Airs Waters Places* considered diseases as being wholly natural, because “each has a nature and nothing happens without a natural cause”². In a similar vein, too, the author of *On the Art* tells us that: “indeed, upon examination, the reality of the spontaneous (*tò autómaton*) disappears. Everything that happens will be found to have some cause, and if it has a cause, the spontaneous can be no more than an empty name”³.

Alongside the attempts to universalise explanations as an exclusively natural and causal matter of fact, there came also the rejection of the gods as the main factor responsible for human welfare or malaise. Therefore, once the tendency to explain phenomena in a natural cause-effect relation irrupted into the Greek scenario, the traditional Homeric view, which set the gods as the principal instigators of change in reality, was gradually abandoned, i.e., left on Olympus, never to return. Here again, a Hippocratic text is summoned to bear witness (*On the Sacred Disease*). “If contact with or eating of this animal generates and exacerbates the disease, while

² Cf. Ch. 22, *CMG (Corpus Medicorum Graecorum)*, 1, 1 74.17, quoted in Lloyd 1979: 32.

³ Cf. Ch. 6, *CMG* 1, 1 13. 1-4. *Ibid.*

abstinence from it cures the disease, then no god can be blamed (*aitios*) and the purifications are useless: it is the foods that cure and hurt, and the idea of divine intervention comes to naught⁴.

(b) Secondly, besides the regularities discovered in nature and their becoming explicit as natural causes, another general difference to observe between a mythical narrative and a philosophical or scientific text relates to what Lloyd calls the raising of “second-order questions”⁵, that is, an increasing preoccupation with methodological, logical and epistemological problems. The logic, which was implicit in the use of pre-philosophical language, became, in a word, explicit. Therefore, Lloyd adds, “the developments we have been dealing with involve a change in the level of *awareness of aspects of reasoning*”⁶ (italics ours).

Taking the last point a little bit further, Lloyd argues that not only is it that what was previously *implicit* became at some point *explicit* (the informal logic of natural language); but new modes of arguments were invented and new concepts came also to be defined: “Certainly new modes of argument, some of them quite technical, can be said to have been invented. Important new concepts –hypothesis, postulate, proof, axiom, definition itself– come to be defined, and fundamental distinctions are drawn between, for example, valid and invalid arguments, and between necessary and probable ones”⁷.

(c) Thirdly, but also in relation with these so-called second-order questions, there are three aspects that Lloyd considers to be clear innovations introduced alongside this *awareness* regarding the process of reasoning⁸. These three *interrelated* aspects are the following: certainty, foundations and axiomatisation.

⁴ *Morb. Sacr.*, ch. I para. 23 (G) (L VI 358. Iff) quoted in Lloyd 1979: 55.

⁵ Cf. Lloyd 1990: 35. Also 58: “On the other hand, in the west at least, they were [the Greeks], as far as we know, the first to engage in self-conscious analysis of the status, methods and foundations of those inquiries, the first to raise, precisely, the second-order questions”.

⁶ Lloyd 1979: 124.

⁷ Lloyd 1979: 123.

⁸ It must be mentioned that Lloyd not only conceives these three aspects as separating mythical texts from scientific texts. He also explicitly affirms that these are proper to the Greek way of rendering an account, *logon didonai*, but not to the Chinese one.

Firstly, there is the need for *certainty*, which seems to come down all the way from the pre-Socratics, and especially since the Eleatic philosophers, e.g., Parmenides, who were greatly concerned with the possibility of leaving behind appearances –mere *doxa*– and thus grasping the one truth. Similarly, Plato and Aristotle opposed to the unreliable apprehension of appearances an infallible *logos*, which could also grasp what was certain.

Secondly, this quest for certainty took form as a search for *foundations*, which again can be traced back to the early pre-Socratics and to their establishing different principles, *archai* (or afterwards in the elements of mathematics, *stoicheia*), insofar as only through securing the ultimate constituents of the physical *kósmos*, could theories be sustained and claim superiority over another.

Thirdly, and as a sort of corollary, the establishing of these ultimate constituents at some moment of the fourth century –probably not before Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*– gave way to the formal definition of the *axiomatic-deductive method*, which asserted that strict demonstrations are only possible insofar as conclusions are based on ultimate primary and self-evident premises.

Thus, Lloyd concludes that there are indeed some “*positive features*”, some clear differences that should be acknowledged between these two kinds of speech, myth and reason. Nonetheless, we should now hasten to clarify that Lloyd is far from conceiving them in any sort of opposition or strong dichotomy. On the contrary, the question that troubles him is rather the following: “do the radical developments that occur in either the practice or the theory of reasoning in Greek thought imply any shift or transformation in the underlying logic or rationality itself?” Lloyd’s answer, of course, is clearly no. For, he argues, “it is not the case that the logic itself is *modified* by being made explicit, *except insofar as it is made explicit*”⁹. We shall further explore these issues in what follows.

⁹ Lloyd 1979: 123-124. A bit further on, he adds, “but the problem is one of trying to understand how that occurred –that is the conditions under which such second-order questions come to be asked- not one of trying to explain the substitution of one logic, or rationality, for another”.

2 – The dismantling of the old dichotomy: the metaphor’s and the mentalities’ case

As we saw above the shift or turn –according to Lloyd– was a real one, for so were the logical-epistemological developments that took place during that period, however, as we shall discuss now, this should not be understood in the radical sense of a *substitution* of one rationality for another, much less in the sense of a change from one *mentality* to another. Lloyd, instead, prefers to talk of different “styles of inquiry” or “modes of reasoning”, which is of course much less compromising than the old dichotomies:

“But given that the same individuals in our own society, in ancient Greece, in ancient China, among the Dorze, may exhibit *quite diverse* modes of reasoning in the process of expressing thought, belief, arguments, justifications, over *quite disparate* domains of discourse relating to theoretical or to practical affairs, it is rather those *modes of reasoning* that provide the locus of the investigation, not the reasoners themselves nor their supposed mentalities”.¹⁰

Let us try to explain these fundamental assertions by examining further two cases, which Lloyd considers paradigmatic: a) the literal-metaphorical dichotomy and b) the mentalities problem.

a) The literal-metaphorical dichotomy: Metaphors, says Lloyd, following a line of inquiry that M. Detienne made explicit¹¹, must have been invented. That is, the ‘explicit category’, the Aristotelian expression *katà metaphorán*, had to be invented. For although what we call figurative language, including metaphors, is much older, and believed to be as old as human language itself (metaphors would be, in this notion, a property of all natural languages), the fact is that it was only in the fourth century B.C. that metaphors as such became an explicit category. However, there are other pairs of terms that could be mentioned as examples of similar dichotomies: primary/derived, strict/figurative, etc., all of them seem equally to involve the idea of being “mutually exclusive and exhaustive alternatives”¹², an idea, by the way, which, since Aristotle, has shown an outstanding resistance over time, for even now there is wide acceptance

¹⁰ Lloyd 1990: 145.

¹¹ Cf. Detienne: 1986.

¹² Lloyd 1987: 174. n.5.

of the Aristotelian perspective according to which one word meaning is the ‘proper’ one, yet secondary meanings should be regarded as ‘alien’. Furthermore this point is central to the Aristotelian conception of science and philosophy as only discourses which base their affirmations on univocal terms capable of forming solid premises –the syllogisms of the *Post. An.*– could reach true definitions and so apprehend the true nature of a thing¹³. Of course, Aristotle’s actual writings, do not always tally with the excessively high standards set by the philosopher himself. In fact it must be recognised that besides the syllogisms found in the *Posterior Analytics*, most of them dealing with mathematics and exact sciences (though there are some related to zoological and botanical questions¹⁴), *strict demonstrations* in the Aristotelian corpus are, it must be admitted, quite rare. In particular, Aristotle seems to have been aware of the difficulty of applying his method to natural sciences insofar as premises there cannot simply be true in *all* cases, but rather only “*for the most part*”¹⁵. Equally the seeming ban on metaphors imposed by Aristotle in the *Posterior Analytics* can hardly be interpreted as anything else than an *ideal regulation* to which science should hypothetically subscribe in order to succeed (above others) as a form of knowledge. On the other hand, that Aristotle also envisaged metaphors in a positive way, i.e., at least in certain topics, notoriously those referring to style, rhetoric, dialectic, argumentation, etc, should not be neglected. What matters here, nonetheless, is that according to Lloyd the strong form of dichotomies found in the literal/metaphorical, as also in the *logos/mythos* opposition, is not one given *as such* (*per se*) in the Greek natural language of the 7th – 5th centuries. On the contrary, it is one actually invented (Detienne¹⁶) or more probably, we think, *discovered* (in the sense

¹³ Cf. *APo.* 97b37-38: “If one should not argue in metaphors, it is clear that one should not use metaphors or metaphorical expressions in giving definitions”, quoted in Lloyd 1987: 185.

¹⁴ Cf. *APo.* 98a35, 99a23, b4. See also Lloyd 1987: 135 and 143.

¹⁵ *hos epi to polu*; cf., *Ph.* 198b34.

¹⁶ The idea that the distinction between *logos* and *mythos* is pure fiction, has been introduced not only by Detienne (1986). Among others it also has been worked out by authors as Derrida, who has referred to science and metaphysics as “white mythology” (Derrida 1982, see ch. 8 ‘White Mythology’) insofar as they naturally tend to establish for themselves a (*logocentric*) capacity of revealing what things are ‘*de re*’, i.e., of reaching foundations and giving ‘proper’ (univocal) definitions of them. Authors such as Derrida, of course, have turned down such claims flat. For him metaphysics would be just a mythology in disguise.

Bruno Snell¹⁷ used the term “*Entdeckung*”) by Aristotle insofar as it was designed explicitly as a weapon to put down rivals, which is why Lloyd thinks that any *strong* form of dichotomy cannot be but an opposition made explicit from and for observer’s categories, not actors’ ones.

b) The mentalities’ problem: In the second place the attempt to dissolve the polarity *mythos-logos* can also be enlightened by Lloyd’s discussion of Lévy-Bruhl’s theory of mentalities, which he criticizes in his fine book *Demystifying Mentalities* (1990). Lévy-Bruhl, in short, held that the differences between primitive people and more advanced civilisations (and by that he meant ‘us’) were not simply differences in the degree of technical progress, or any other measurable account, but were differences in the ‘mentalities’ themselves. Primitive people possessed what he called a ‘prelogical’ and ‘mystical’ mentality that –according to him– is in clear opposition to the ‘logical’ and ‘scientific’ mentality of modern civilisations¹⁸. Now Lloyd sums up his critique of the mentalities’ view in two points:

(i) First, to make any sense of the idea of mentality it is necessary to postulate it as a “recurrent and pervasive” structure which “should inform, or be reflected in, a substantial part of the ideas, beliefs and assumptions of the individual or group concerned”¹⁹. However, the evidence related to both ancient and modern magicians and scientists shows that, far from a single mentality, which might have pervaded the whole of their activities, there was a complex, though quite natural, exchange from what we, on the one hand, traditionally regard as ‘magical beliefs’, to what, on the other hand, is considered as simply ‘normal’ or ‘rational’.

Lloyd, however, does not fully support these radically sceptic views. He acknowledges, of course, how delicate the point is, but he nevertheless asserts that ‘demystification here should be attempted’, that is, the attempt to give a rational account of the world should be attempted, though he adds, ‘without believing that *ultimate* demystification can be achieved’ Lloyd 1990: 71.

¹⁷ See Snell 1953.

¹⁸ Lévy-Bruhl, nonetheless, came afterwards to acknowledge that his original thesis regarding pre-logical mentalities in primitive people was excessively rigid. He then re-shaped it in a weak form, recognising that there are features of primitive mentalities in any human mind. Yet he kept all along the term ‘primitive mentality’, and continued to describe it as one strongly marked by ‘mystical’ and ‘magical’ conceptions. Cf., Lévy-Bruhl 1923 and 1975.

¹⁹ Lloyd 1990: 138.

In other words, there is the difficulty of observing that one individual (or one group) can perform activities –and sometimes successively– that might at one time be labelled as satisfying the most rigorous and sceptic scientific methodology, but then shortly afterwards turn his mind into the most superstitious disposition. But then how is it possible that a plurality of mentalities can be attributed to a single individual²⁰?

(ii) Secondly, if mentalities are such pervasive and stable patterns of mind as they are believed to be, then the issue of explaining how is it that they are modified becomes also greatly problematic. And this applies not only to individuals (as examined above), but also to specific historical periods. In this way, though the ‘mentalities’ view may, on the one hand, make easier the job of explaining *contrasts* between two periods, it is also true, on the other hand, that it certainly raises questions regarding how such *transition* between the same two periods should be accounted for. This, of course, seems only to be achievable by replacing the stronger and stable notion of mentality by a sufficiently weaker one which would in the end –Lloyd suggests– put at risk the coherence itself of the ‘mentalities’ program.

“The particular transition we have discussed in some detail –that represented by the emergence of certain new styles of inquiry in ancient Greece in the fifth and fourth century B.C.– offers, as we saw, no justification, indeed no purchase for the suggestion that one *mentality superseded* another, either in the individuals concerned or in particular determinate groups of them”²¹

Hence, Lloyd concludes that any *strong form* of opposition between *mythos* and *logos*, such as the one expressed in the proper dichotomies of the ‘metaphorical’ and the ‘literal’ or that between different ‘mentalities’ (one ‘primitive’ and ‘prelogical’, the other ‘modern’ and ‘scientific’) should, once and for all, be abandoned. Nonetheless what Lloyd does envisage, as we have already mentioned it, is the emergence of what he

²⁰ Lloyd, at this point suggests that explanations for such recurrent phenomena should come from individualizing the proper contexts of our actions, not from appealing to different mentalities: “There is no case for supposing that this involved some sudden switch in, or some strange combination of, mentalities: rather the contexts in which that type of justification was expected or thought appropriate were themselves socially circumscribed, even if that circumscription was far from precise or clear-cut”. Lloyd 1990: 143.

²¹ Lloyd 1990: 139.

calls different “styles of inquiry” or “modes of reasoning”²². So what is primarily defended here is not so much the coinage of a new logic, but rather the becoming *explicit* of the same (unique) logic, i.e., the one that before was simply *implicit* in language²³.

3 – Critical assessment: An epistemological ambiguity

We would like now to analyse what we believe to be an epistemological ambiguity that lies in the heart of the previous arguments, which, if we are right, reveals a certain inadequacy in the form in which, according to Geoffrey Lloyd, *mythos* and *logos* are thought to relate to each other. We will do so addressing two aspects of the problem that we deem, nonetheless, to be closely connected with each other. The first consideration (a) has to do with the sociological (empirical) strategy Lloyd attempts, and the second one (b) with the epistemological and ontological assumptions he defends –especially in his last works.

A. One first problem that might arise at this point has to do with the necessity to reconcile the general statements examined before. Thus, at first glance it might be objected that the more Lloyd assumes –in his late work– second order questions –or methodological issues–, that is, the more he turns his reflection into a sort of sociological approach searching for the *concrete circumstances* of production of knowledge, as the one he displays in the ‘literal-metaphorical’ and in the ‘mentalities’ problem, the more it becomes problematic to understand how exactly can we *meaningfully* speak of *real (transcultural) achievements* in Greece from the 8th to the 5th century B.C. In other words, insofar as Lloyd stresses more and more the need to secure the empirical, and therefore *contingent*, conditions of the production of knowledge, the more it becomes increasingly difficult to justify –that is, without appealing to a priori universals– any form of

²² Cf. Lloyd 2004. In chapter 7, he specifically addresses the problem of the different “Styles of Enquiry and the Question of a Common Ontology”. It should be acknowledged that in this work Lloyd refers to “styles of enquiry” mainly from the point of view of different cultural styles (Chinese versus Greek). Yet he has also used equal or similar expressions (“styles of inquiry”, “styles of wisdom” “new-styles of inquiry” or “modes of reasoning”) referring explicitly to the differences between myth, magic and science or philosophy. Cf. Lloyd 1990: 142, 144, 145.

²³ It should be noted that, saving differences, Bruno Snell expressed this idea in exactly the same way. Cf. Snell 1982: 213.

necessary propositions which might satisfy the epistemic conditions that transcultural achievements presuppose (both philosophical or scientific). Now, although we think that there is a real epistemological tension in here, Lloyd does not lack an answer to this objection. Let us try first a negative approach and remark what Lloyd would certainly deny. He, as probably every scholar since the sixties, would systematically turn down flat the idea advocated by the German scholar Wilhelm Nestle who, in a very Hegelian fashion, thought that this “progress” observed in Greece was the result of a sort of “self-development” of Greek reason (*Selbstentfaltung*), according to which humankind gradually evolved step by step (*Schritt für Schritt*), being irrevocably ordained to leave behind and replace (*ersetzen*) mythical thought by rational thought, i.e., unconscious representation by conceptual and intentional analysis²⁴. Lloyd, instead, assumes a strategy which focuses in “the contexts of communicative exchange and of interpersonal reaction”²⁵, as well as on the necessity of deepening in what he calls “semantic stretches”. Thus, we are told, what scholars should do instead of passively assuming the categories inherited from western philosophy, is to deepen in the communicative contexts, looking for *degrees* of meaning, that is, for a plurality of *semantic stretches*²⁶ as they are found –either as textual or enunciative marks– in the act of communication. In this sense, we think that Lloyd would probably not trouble himself very much with this apparent objection. He could simply assert that (i) there are indeed *particular* and very circumscribed achievements which, in a precise communicative context, can be interpreted as a movement forward, and (ii) that the possible truth of the previous statement is valid insofar as that we do not understand these achievements *in the abstract* as a form of rational *progression*, that is, as if the ‘human mind’ *per se* might have moved from one stage (mythical thought) into another (rational thought).

From our perspective, however, this possible line of argument, does not fully respond to the ambiguity above stressed. Lloyd has modulated his

²⁴ Cfr. W. Nestle (1940), Vorwort: “Denn dies ist sein eigentliches Ziel: zu zeigen, wie in einer überraschend kurzen Zeitspanne, im 6. und 5. Jahrhundert v. Chr., das mythologische Denken der Griechen Schritt für Schritt durch das rationale Denken ersetzt, ein Gebiet um das andere für eine natürliche Erklärung und Erforschung erobert und daraus die Folgerungen für das praktische Leben gezogen wurden.”.

²⁵ Lloyd in R. Buxton 2001: 164.

²⁶ On what Lloyd understands by semantic stretch see Lloyd 1987: 174, 175, 198; also Lloyd 2015: 5, 9.

position since his early writings, *Polarity and Analogy* (1966), becoming increasingly more cautious in considering the contexts and general value of these achievements (for instance in the presence of comparative literature) up to *Cognitive Variations* (2007) and *Analogical Investigations: Historical and Cross-cultural Perspectives on Human Reasoning* (2015). We believe this to be an important consideration because, as Lloyd himself tell us, it obviously reduces more and more –both in scope and degree– the possibility of making general or universal propositions of the kind science and philosophy attempts²⁷. Thus to put a common subject in Lloyd’s recent books, the possibility of finding cross-cultural universals becomes extremely problematic. Greeks and Chinese, for instance, simply do not possess a common concept for nature. In China, we are told, there is no equivalent term for the Greek *physis*. There are, of course, a number of different concepts which represent different aspects of the Greek term *physis*. Thus the Chinese would speak of *tian* (heaven), *wu* (things), *xing* (character), *li* (pattern), *dao* (the way), *zi ran* (spontaneity), where a classical Greek man would simply speak –that is, in different contexts– of *physis*²⁸.

It should be emphasised, nonetheless, that the difficulties Lloyd himself addresses regarding the possibility of constructing a universal language are not restricted to philosophical propositions (as the previous reference to nature), but include scientific explanations in physics, astronomy, mathematics or medicine: “Even physics in the twentieth century is not adequate through and through: it certainly has not delivered complete explanations of all subjects in its purview. Rather, it would be more plausible to argue that the history of science is a history of repeated failures... What our studies illustrate is that there is nothing inevitable about the way in which astronomy, mathematics and medicine developed, and their international modern character should not mask their very divergent early manifestations (and not just in China and Greece)”²⁹. Indeed, Lloyd is aware –as he acknowledges afterwards in that same quotation– that there is a sense in which we can legitimate say that the subject matter of Greek and Chinese inquiries was the same (the particular objects, stars or geometrical

²⁷ On the anti-generalisation strategy, as on other methodological matters see, Lloyd 1996, chapter I, III and X.

²⁸ Lloyd 1996: 6.

²⁹ Lloyd 1996: 225.

figures, they were studying), but the differences in the fundamental concepts and theories they happened to raise in order to explain such phenomena played a huge role not only in the “the questions they focused on”, but also, and more importantly, in “the answers they chose to make central to their understanding”.³⁰

On the other hand, these problematic issues, rightly appointed by Lloyd as contemporary cornerstones within epistemology, i.e., the problem of the unity and the diversity of the human mind and the existence of cross-universal categories, neither bring him to the point of embracing radically sceptical views, nor to consider philosophy and sciences to be simply “white mythology”, using Derrida’s expression:

“The ideological grip of science, its pretension to unchallengeable status in certain contexts, its uncritical acceptance of questionable or downright inexcusable means for uncertain ends, have all to be debunked, and so too the mystifications perpetrated in the name of demystification. But that is not to deny, but rather to assert, that demystification here should be attempted, without believing that *ultimate* demystification can be achieved”³¹

In other words, though Lloyd is perfectly aware of the limitations any rational discourse does have –i.e. the idea that any rational discourse is always situated in a political and cultural context–, he still asserts his confidence in science and philosophy as ways of knowledge that –albeit gradually and approximately– do have a word to say on some given phenomena. Certain demystification, then, can and should be achieved. For as he tells us in *The Revolutions of Wisdom*: “The distinction between science and myth, between the new wisdom and the old, was often a fine one, and the failures of ancient science to practise what it preached are frequent; yet what it preached was different from myth, and not *just* more of the same, more myth.” True, this distinction was –during the classical and Hellenistic period– longer in aspirations than in results, nonetheless, as Lloyd remarks, it was, in time, “to produce extraordinary delivery”. (1987: 336)

Now, as we have been trying to unfold in the last pages, Lloyd’s strategy leads him to attempt a sort of *via media* between naïve forms of

³⁰ Lloyd *ibid.*

³¹ Lloyd 1990: 71.

realisms (which usually resort to cross-universal categories) and strong forms of scepticism, which tend to erase the distinction between myth and science. Let us clarify, however, that our criticism is not directed to this general approach –that we rather tend to share–; our point, instead, as we shall further develop in what follows, is that no matter how sound such goal might seem, the actual premises under which he tries to justify this pretension fall short, insofar as the focus placed on the “contexts of communicative exchange” and “semantic stretches” restrict him *increasingly* to understand science and philosophy as if they were *just*³² cultural (circumscribed) forms of language.

B. In the second place, we shall now address one fundamental piece of argument (theory-ladenness) that embodies Lloyd’s ontological and epistemological premises. As we see it, these premises has a direct bearing on the possibility (or impossibility) of grounding Lloyd’s previous assertions. But before going any further into it, let us first briefly recapitulate some historical issues that might help us to understand, from a historical perspective, the problem we are dealing in here.

Ever since Hellenistic times –from allegoric interpretations through the Enlightenment and up to Wilhelm Nestle³³– the interpretations about how myth and *logos* address each other have broadly agreed in affirming that the job of making sense of these mythical narratives belongs to discursive, rational speech. Reason was supposed to declare which of these narratives were valuable and in which sense they were so. Myth then became a twilight zone that only *logos*, with its clear hands, was free to explore and decipher. Also, and generally speaking, mythical narratives were considered inferior in relation to knowledge and denoted a primitive stage of humankind. They

³² Lloyd, nonetheless, is obviously aware that sciences, circumscribed as they are though, do have a pretension for truth (unveiling structures of the world). Yet, as we shall try to show in the final part of the article, the ontological references to the unity of the subject matter, as well as to the unicity of the phenomenon experienced by different subjects across different cultures, is ultimately addressed by Lloyd resorting to the epistemological framework of theory-ladenness. However, in our opinion, this introduces a veil of epistemic opacity, which compromises Lloyd’s efforts of justifying why (and how) philosophical and scientific explanations are not just more myth or, for that matter, how is that they are two “styles of reasoning”.

³³ For a fine recapitulation of the history of the myth and logos polarity, see “From Logos to Mythos” by Glenn W. Most, in Buxton 1999. Regarding the history of myth interpretation see also Fritz Graf 1993, especially Ch. I, II, VIII; Cohen, S 1969 4. 3: 337-53.

were normally conceived as polarities or dichotomies. From shadows to light –as the saying goes. However, these interpretations, which persisted until Wilhelm Nestle (and up to the present times in many circles), have come to be challenged since the beginning of the twentieth century, and more aggressively since the late fifties. The structuralism of Claude Lévy-Strauss, the functionalism of Bronislaw Malinowski, the French école lead by Jean Pierre Vernant, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, and Marcel Detienne, or the semiotic approach developed by Roland Barthes, and lately, by Claude Calame, began to defend from different perspectives and backgrounds the status of *mythos* as a kind of speech or narrative (a *logos*!) in its own right. Of course, they did so by means of a rational discourse, but without trying to *subordinate* myth to reason as if it were an inferior model. *Mythos* and *logos* constitute simply *different* forms of ordering experience. So myth –in J.P Vernant’s words– “represents an original system of thought as complex and rigorous in its own way as a philosopher’s construction may be, in a different mode”³⁴. Thus they all denied strong forms of dichotomies between *mythos* and *logos* and asserted that the differences found between them do not constitute *essential* or *qualitative* differences, but just a matter of degree. One is more or less abstract (or concrete) than the other, more or less concerned with practical issues, more or less given to figurative language, more or less explicit in their inner narrative logic, one addresses more or less people than the other, etc. Following this logic it became soon evident that we were simply confronted with two types of *logoi*, the polarization of which was the result of occidental categories, not native ones (Claude Calame). *Mythos* and *logos*, then, were referred to as “modes of thought” (Vernant), “forms of discourse” (Calame) or “styles of reasoning” (Lloyd)³⁵. Mythical narratives, therefore, are equally endowed with the power of grasping and representing reality in “as complex and rigorous” ways as scientific or philosophical thought, but simply in “a different mode”.

³⁴ Vernant 1996: 215.

³⁵ It is worthy of note here that, especially in Claude Calame and Geoffrey Lloyd, there is a tendency to avoid substantivized forms of referring to mental processes, as when we talk of “mentalities”. Thus Calame prefers to adopt the term “forms of discourse”, a rather surface-structure terminology. Equally Lloyd, rejecting the term “mentality”, adopts the gerundive “styles of *reasoning*”, which leaves aside any reference to mental structures. Cf. Calame 2001: 142; Vernant 2006: 15-16.

Now along this schematic historical view, once more we come across with what we believe to be an ambiguous epistemological point, for if we ask these authors how exactly it is that these *logoi* are different, or how precisely is to be understood this particular ‘mode’, then we shall not get any clearer answer than a few degrees more or less abstract, or more or less figurative. But the reason why we believe that these sorts of answers –though being partially right– are not good enough, resides in a consideration that Geoffrey Lloyd has certainly acknowledged, yet –we think– he has not fully realized how problematic its recognition is. We refer, in a word, to those affirmations that express the idea that *logos*, as a rational account, is “not just more of the same”, not simply “more myth”, and also to such kind of statements that, still recognising the mystifying or bluffing side present in much scientific stuff, do at any rate defend the idea that “demystification here should be attempted”. The reason for this has to do with the fact, pointed out by Lloyd, which asserts that Greek aspirations for (objective) knowledge were of a kind that, in time, as we saw, were “to produce extraordinary delivery”. In other words, if we have understood Lloyd right, what distinguishes *logos* from myth relies, among other things, in being able to give us a good approximation of what things really are by themselves.

“Much of the ancient inquiry concerning nature was formalized common knowledge, and much was fantastic speculation. But some of it was neither, as we can see from such examples as the proofs of the sphericity of the earth, or of the role of the valves of the heart, or by such discoveries as that of the precession of the equinoxes, or the nervous system, or the diagnostic values of the pulse”³⁶

Now Lloyd has stated the epistemological and ontological assumptions which are at stake here in a number of recent publications, especially 2004, 2007 and 2015³⁷. In all of these works Lloyd’s primary goal was to find some via media between naïve forms of realism and outright forms of relativism

³⁶ Lloyd 1987: 335.

³⁷ See, for instance, chapter seven in Lloyd 2004, “Styles of Enquiry and the Question of a Common Ontology”, as well as chapter one “On the very possibility of mutual intelligibility” and chapter five “Ontologies revisited” in Lloyd 2015.

which may allow him to respond adequately to the sense “in which the phenomena are the same, and yet may also be different for different ancient investigators across different ancient disciplines”. (2004: ix)

It is precisely in that context that Lloyd sets one fundamental piece of methodological principle, which, although previously mentioned in other of his works, becomes here one of his most central epistemological contentions. We refer to the principle that says that: “there are no theory-free observations in science and no theory-free descriptions in the history of science” (Lloyd 2004: viii)³⁸. Of course, as Lloyd rightly assumes, the acceptance of this principle blows down Aristotelian pretensions of trying to establish a strict distinction between the literal and the metaphorical, as well as the one between *mythos* and *logos*, even though –and this is the point we should like to press further– he still thinks that this does not simply reduce science to being a mere form of “white mythology”. Thus although *mythos* and *logos* are not opposites, neither are they the same, for, we should recall, science is “not just more *muthos*, or *magia* in a different guise” (Lloyd 1990: 69). Why is this? Because Lloyd thinks that although all observations are –without exception– theory-laden³⁹, this claim admits of “degrees of theory-ladenness”:

“More importantly, the theoretical elements that observation statements incorporate vary, not just in that the theories are different, but in that the theoretical charge, or load, may be greater or less. Obviously at the lower

³⁸ For theory-ladenness see also Lloyd 2007: 6, 95, 96.

³⁹ The theory-ladenness debate has been one especially important within philosophy of science since the 60’s as well as in actual theory of perception. Thus, among the former, Kuhn (1962) and Feyerabend (1970) argued against the presupposition that there is a theory-free or neutral observation language. Since then a very interesting debate with radical discrepancies has followed until the present day. Lloyd, of course, is not alone in his position, but not few would disagree with him. From the extensive literature on this subject there can be consulted the following: Carl R. Kordig, 1971: 467-485 where he argues against Kuhn and Feyerabend; contra Kordig see George Gale and Edward Walter 1973: 415-432; see also the debate between Jerry Fodor 1984: 23-43 and Paul M. Churchland 1988: 167-187. There can also be consulted the most recent contributions of the cognitive scientist and philosopher Zenon Pylyshyn who builds a very persuasive case, for the existence of non-conceptual content of perception. Cf., Zenon Pylyshyn 1999: 341-423 and 2003. See also below note 41.

end of the spectrum, where the charge is less, the possibilities for comparing theoretical frameworks are greater”⁴⁰

In other words not all observations, not all experiences –whether at the base of science or myth, we may add– are equally laden by theory. The epistemological ground for this assertion, of course, is a substantive one. The different systems of belief, which explain the styles of enquiry –Lloyd tell us– would be ultimately referred and grounded in a shared view of the world:

“Using first the differences in degrees of theory-ladenness, and then what I called the multidimensionality and openendedness of data, we can uphold the claim that, despite the differences in their world-views, there is still a sense in which Aristotle and the writers of the *Huainanzi* *inhabit one and the same world, ours in fact*” (italics ours).

And some lines below he adds,

“Yet the differences in perspective do not rule out points of contact between what *there is for the perspectives to be perspective of*. That is precisely where the multidimensionality of the explananda allows for different, but still related, explanations⁴¹ (italics ours)”.

Thus, although Lloyd has argued that Greek astronomy and Chinese astronomy represent different styles of enquiry based on sense-data *inevitably loaded*, with a certain level of ideology, that is, “constituted by preferred modes of argument and different preoccupations and methods”

⁴⁰ Lloyd 2004: 82. Lloyd thus attempts to follow a middle course between skeptic forms of relativism which assert that systems of belief are strictly incommensurable and that, because observations are theory laden, there is no way of having access to ‘the’ reality, and for the other, naïve forms of realism that claim the existence of cross-cultural universals and non-mediated forms of access into reality: “Many have come away from the historical encounter with ancient societies with a strong sense of how each was the prisoner of its own value systems and political prejudices, and of how what was claimed as objective knowledge of the world was merely the reflection of ideology. Those reactions have some validity, but...we have no need to endorse the view that *all* assertions of objectivity are ideological. However, the claim that all observations are theory-laden admits of degrees, but of no exceptions. We delude ourselves if we think that we escape, with our modern science, and with our own historical descriptions” (2004: 189).

⁴¹ Lloyd 2004: 91.

(Lloyd 2004: 189), the possibility to attempt a comparison between those styles remains a feasible thing to do. The reason for this –we are told– relies in that those different perspectives presuppose at their base one and the same thing of which those perspectives are perspectives of. So, according to Lloyd, theory-ladenness pervades all observations, without exception; however, because there are some observations which are more reliable than others, there would be enough epistemological space for allowing a weaker form of realism into play (or relativism, depending on the point of view) which, while denying cross-cultural universals, still grants that –at least– ‘some’ rational enquiries are grounded in an experience of the world, *sufficiently symmetric* as to allow us to compare them and decide which one represents a form of progress in respect to the other.

Now, as we saw it, this is precisely what calls for clarification. How is it meaningfully possible to admit that there are different degrees of theory-ladenness? That is, by appealing to which type of criterion are we to decide which observation is less or more theory-laden? Lloyd, if we understand him, would respond to this by appealing to the unicity of the world. He would thus repeat to us: we can do it because we all, Greek and Chinese, ancient and modern, apprentices of magic and apprentices of science “*inhabit one and the same world*”. Yet the point that we would like to address to him is precisely this: how is that he knows that? On which epistemological grounds can Lloyd affirm that this or such theory (or we may add, this or such myth) partakes ‘more’ or ‘less’ of the one and same reality which they are both trying to explain? Or vice versa, if all observations are equally loaded by theories, on which grounds are we to decide which one is ‘more’ or ‘less’ loaded with theories? How can we know which observation is more reliable than others? Perhaps calling to witness a third observation? But that would obviously generate an infinite regress. In this way we will always be a step away (no matter how small that step might seem) from understanding, not only which theory is a better candidate for explaining a given phenomenon of the world, but also in which meaningful way it can be argued that science is not just more myth. As we see it, what is required, instead, is a more robust *surface of contact* with worldly phenomena than that which theory-ladenness (or conceptual content in perception) can provide⁴².

⁴² It could be objected that, despite showing a difficulty in Lloyd’s proposal, we have not done any better. Unfortunately to attempt here a positive response to these admittedly

Conclusion

Geoffrey Lloyd has led the reflection on the dichotomy myth and reason to a point where no longer is possible to understand these terms as opposites. Instead we are urged to see them simply as different “styles of reasoning”. Thus, even though they present distinctive features, they do not constitute in the abstract a progression from a mythical mentality to a rational or scientific mentality. Similarly –we are told– the strict distinction between the literal and the metaphorical had to be invented, that is, artificially brought by philosophers (Aristotle) to justify their pretensions of reaching a *universal* form of knowledge grounded on univocal terms and premises. Following this line of thought the key debate that lies at the bottom of this dispute, and which Lloyd has discussed with some detail in *Ancient Worlds, Modern Reflections* (2004), *Cognitive Variations* (2007) and *Analogical Investigations* (2015) has to do with the historical pretension of occidental rational discourse (scientific and metaphysical *logos*), which based upon universal and necessary categories, claims a real knowledge of the phenomena of the world. Now the problem, as we see it, resides in that Lloyd simultaneously makes two different affirmations which can not be so easily reconciled. He attempts a sort of middle epistemological course by (a) denying cross-cultural universals and (b) proposing in their place a weaker form of continuity between different languages and cultures by means of the right understanding of what he calls the “multidimensionality of reality” (cf. Lloyd 2004: 91, 93; 2015: 5, 23, 24) and “semantic stretches” which has to do with the proper characterization of the “contexts of communication” and the “cultural values” of each society. Now, as we see it, there are in here two fundamental objections that require to be signalized: in the first place, the more Lloyd stresses the importance of the

hard epistemological problems exceeds the scope and range of this article. Such enterprise would require from us a philosophical survey regarding conceptual and non-conceptual content within theory of perception. However, as the reader might guess we tend to agree with those views that defend, against rigid conceptual positions, the existence of pre-theoretical (pre-categorial) layers of *articulated* content (on this regard see, for instance, Shim’s contribution on Husserl’s conception of “hyletic data” as non-conceptual content, and Dreyfus use of Merleau-Ponty’s descriptions of pre-reflective actions; cf. Shim 2005 and Dreyfus 2007). For a good collection of essays arguing for the necessity of non-conceptual content on perceptual, emotional and practical experience, see Gunther (ed.) 2003; also Crane 2013, who convincingly discusses McDowell’s and Dreyfus’ positions.

“contexts of communication”, that is, of those *contingent conditions* under which knowledge is produced, the more difficult becomes to account for *universal and necessary statements* as the one philosophy and empirical science exhibit (and particularly when a priori universals are neglected). In the second place, although theory-ladenness can be particularly useful in advocating for the multidimensionality of reality –especially from a cultural point of view– it makes it very hard to justify how is that such multiplicity of views are, in fact, different aspects of the one and same reality –the one and same world– that we all behold.

Thus, because Lloyd avoids at all cost strong (but admittedly naïve) forms of realist conceptions, he has been forced, so to speak, to assume epistemological positions (i.e., that all observations are theory-laden) that compromise his own former tenets and makes it for him very hard not only to explain why science is not just more *mythos*, but also in which meaningful sense it would be possible to think of these speeches as “styles of reasoning” about something else than just cultural biased representations.

True, Lloyd’s *general approach*, inasmuch as it urges us to prosecute a via media between naïve form of realisms and strong cultural (ethnographic) contextualisms, appears to be the right thing to do, yet, from our standpoint, such loable programme is debunked by the *specific strategies* Lloyd introduces to account for it.

Bibliography

- Buxton, R. (ed.) (1999), *From Myth to Reason? Studies in the Development of Greek Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Calame, C. (2001), “The Rhetoric of *Muthos* and *Logos*: Forms of Figurative Discourse”, in R. Buxton (ed.), *From Myth to Reason? Studies in the Development of Greek Thought*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 119-144.
- Churchland, P. M. (1988), “Perceptual Plasticity and Theoretical Neutrality: A Reply to Jerry Fodor”, *Philosophy of Science* 55.2: 167-187.
- Cohen, P. S. (1969), “Theories of Myth”, *Man* 4.3: 337-353.
- Crane, T. (2013), “The Given”, in J. Schear (ed.), *Mind, Reason and Being-In-The-World: The McDowell-Dreyfus Debate*. London: Routledge, 229-249.
- Derrida, J. (1982), *Margins of Philosophy*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Dreyfus, H. (2007), “Detachment, Involvement, and Rationality: are we Essentially Rational Animals?”, *Human Affairs*, 17.2: 101-109.

- Detienne, M. (1986), *The Creation of Mythology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Fodor, J. (1984), "Observation Reconsidered", *Philosophy of Science* 51.1: 23-43.
- Gale, G., & Walter, E. (1973). "Kordig and the Theory-Ladenness of Observation", *Philosophy of Science* 40.3: 415-432.
- Graf, F. (1993), *Greek Mythology*. Baltimore, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Gunther, Y. (ed.) (2003), *Essays on Nonconceptual Content*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Kordig, C. R. (1971), 'The Comparability of Scientific Theories'. *Philosophy of Science* 38.4: 467-485.
- Lévy-Bruhl, L. (1922), *La Mentalité Primitive*. Paris: Les Presses Universitaires de France.
- Lévy-Bruhl, L. (1975), *The Notebooks on Primitive Mentality*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Lloyd, G. E. R. (1966), *Polarity and Analogy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lloyd, G. E. R. (1979), *Magic, Reason and Experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lloyd, G. E. R. (1987), *The Revolutions of Wisdom*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lloyd, G. E. R. (1990), *Demystifying Mentalities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lloyd, G. E. R. (1996), *Adversaries and Authorities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lloyd, G. E. R. (2004), *Ancient Worlds, Modern Reflections: Philosophical Perspectives on Greek and Chinese Science and Culture*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Lloyd, G. E. R. (2007), *Cognitive Variations: reflections on the unity and diversity of the human mind*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Lloyd, G. E. R. (2015), *Analogical Investigations: Historical and Cross-cultural Perspectives on Human Reasoning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nestle, W. (1940), *Vom Mythos zum Logos. Die Selbstentfaltung des griechischen Denkens von Homer bis auf die Sophistik und Sokrates*. Stuttgart: A. Kröner.
- Pylyshyn, Z. (1999), "Is vision continuous with cognition? The case for cognitive impenetrability of visual perception", *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 22: 341-423.

- Pylyshyn, Z. (2003), *Seeing and Visualizing: It's Not What You Think*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Shim, M. K. (2005), "The duality of non-conceptual content in Husserl's phenomenology of perception", *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 4: 209-229.
- Snell, B. (1982), *The Discovery of the Mind*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Vernant, J. P. (1996), *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*. New York: Zone Books.
- Vernant, J. P. (2006), *Myth and Thought among the Greeks*. New York: Zone Books.

