

## *Ix11 – Changing Ideas about “Life after Death”*

Dear: In this **Ix** “excursion”, the final topic on which I want to at least comment is the one described by this chapter’s title: *Changing Ideas about “Life after Death”*. I put the words “Life after Death” in quotation marks, because they’re meaningless: not only do no data support the concept of “life after death”, the expression is an oxymoron (i.e., self contradictory).

Ideas about “the afterlife” are contained in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, in Homer’s *Odyssey*, and in the Bible. In this chapter, I especially want to alert you to how such ideas changed – over time and even as described within a single “story” (such as in *The Epic* and in the Bible). Thus, not only did people’s ideas about “the gods” change (as I began to show you a few chapters ago and will show you more in later chapters), their ideas about “the afterlife” also changed.

Such changes can be seen most easily (and most dramatically) in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. As I’ll show you below, *The Epic* contains two ideas about “life after death” – and these two conflict! The first idea about “the afterlife” appears on Tablet VII of *The Epic*, and as I’ll also show you, it’s similar to ideas about “the afterlife” in other ancient cultures, including those in ancient Mesopotamia, those found in the first part of the Bible’s Old Testament (OT), and those found in early Greek and Roman literature. One of the best descriptive phrases for this “afterlife” is the one given in a translation of Tablet VII of *The Epic*: “**the horror-filled house of death**”. Meanwhile, the second idea about “the afterlife” in *The Epic* appears in Tablet XII and describes later Mesopotamian ideas about death (possibly imported from Egypt or India) – especially the idea that one’s fate after death depends on one’s behavior during life. For a number of reasons (some of which I’ll show you), scholars suggest that Tablet XII was written not by Sin-leqe-unnini but by a later cleric.

To provide you with at least a little evidence to support the statements of the previous paragraph, I’ll start by showing you some ancient Sumerian ideas about “the afterlife”. Before doing so, however, I should warn you, Dear, that if you seek additional evidence on your own, then constrain yourself: if you start digging, even just on the internet, you can soon get buried in your diggings! For example, when in your searching you come across “the queen of heaven” or “goddess of fertility” or “goddess of love” [Inana (or Inanna),

Ishtar, Isis, Aphrodite, Ashtoreth, Ostara, Eostre or Eastre (Easter)...], then if you should become interested in learning more, you can quickly find that there's enough information to keep you busy for the rest of your life!

### EARLY MESOPOTAMIAN IDEAS ABOUT “THE AFTERLIFE”

I'll start with a few lines from a myth recorded in ancient Sumer about 5,000 years ago – but that may have been around for multi-thousands of years still earlier. You can find a translation of this myth from an ancient Sumerian clay tablet at many websites, including at the wonderful website: “The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature” of The Oriental Institute, University of Oxford, <http://www-etcs1.orient.ox.ac.uk/>. The creators of this website have entitled the translation: “Inana's [or Inanna's] descent to the nether world.” The myth is long and complicated, finally giving an “explanation” for different seasons: to get Inanna out of “the nether world” (the “underworld”), she had to agree to periodic death of her lover, Damuzi (or Dumuzi), the shepherd king (called Tammuz in the OT). In turn, every six months, he allegedly trades places with his sister, Geshtinanna, and this trade-off is the claimed cause of seasonal changes (from growth to dormancy of vegetation).

Similar myths “explaining” why the seasons occur were told in ancient Egypt (about Isis and Osiris) and in ancient Greece and Rome. For example, notice the following, copied from Frank E. Smitha's *Antiquity on Line*, which you can find at <http://fsmitha.com/h1/>:

Where growing seasons passed, people saw their fertility god as having died, and when the growing season returned they saw their god as having been resurrected – the beginning of resurrection as a concept. [And therefore, the alleged “resurrection” of Jesus on “Easter”.] One such god worshipped by the Greeks was Adonis. Adonis was believed to spend his annual death with the goddess Persephone in Hades – otherwise known as Hell. Each year when the growing season returned he [Adonis] was seen to have been resurrected, and he was believed to be living in blissful union with the fertility goddess of love, Aphrodite.

But setting aside such “explanations” of the seasons, what I wanted to call to your attention is what the Inanna-Damuzi myth reveals about early ideas about death (or “life” in “the nether world”), namely, that even the queen of heaven (Inanna) was “turned into a corpse. And the corpse was hung on a hook.” I'll skip details about how Inanna's corpse was revived, but I want to mention two points from the Inanna-Damuzi myth.

My first point deals with why Damuzi had to trade places with Inanna. The other gods wouldn't help her, stating: “Who, having got to that place [“life after death” in “the netherworld”], could then expect to come up again?” In the case of Inanna, however, the queen of the nether world (namely, Irkalla, Inanna's sister) relented on condition: “If Inana [Inanna] is to ascend from the underworld, let her provide a substitute for herself.”

And my second point is really useful information! [And yes, Dear, I'm being sarcastic.] After Damuzi's death, when Inanna started searching for him (I guess for his exact location in the nether world), a fly asked her: “If I show you where your man is, what will be my reward?” [In those days, doncha know, flies could talk.] And although Inanna's total response has been lost, enough of it remains to get the idea [especially if I fill in some blanks with guesses, which I've added in brackets]:

Holy Inana answered the fly: “If you show me where my man is, I will give you this gift: I will cover...” The fly helped (?) holy Inana. The young lady Inana decreed the destiny of the fly: “In the beer-house, may [you find all the food you desire, in...] bronze vessels [may you find plentiful beer] for you. You will live (?) like the sons of the wise.” Now Inana decreed this fate [for the fly] and thus it came to be.

And so, Dear, maybe you see what I meant by “useful information”: not only why the seasons occur (namely, Damuzi trading places in “the nether world” with his sister) but also why there are so many flies around! And if you think that this demonstrates that flies are really smart, then consider this: subsequently, “true enough”, they've been living off the fat of the land and guzzling lots of beer, but meanwhile, obviously they lost their ability to talk – just as snake did (if you “believe” the Bible's story about Adam and Eve).

But pushing such silliness aside, I'll now move on to showing you that the description of “the afterlife” on Tablet VII of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is fairly consistent with what seems to have been the ancient Sumerian view, illustrated above with the myth about Inanna in the netherworld. Below, I'll quote two versions of the Babylonian text of Tablet VII. First, though, recall the setting: after Gilgamesh rejects Inanna's request to be her next lover (she was called Ishtar by the Babylonians), she convinces her father (Anu) to unleash the Bull of Heaven (the symbol of fertility and the constellation the Greeks called Taurus the bull), which Enkidu and Gilgamesh subsequently kill (perhaps symbolizing both Gilga's conquering his own sexual extravagances and the overthrow of the fertility goddess). But just as has

been assumed for the subsequent 4,000-plus years, it was considered to be a “sin” to offend the gods – even a goddess whose “authority” seemed to be waning! Thus (according to Kovacs’ translation):

[The gods] Anu, Enlil, and Shamash held a council, and Anu [the father of the gods] spoke to Enlil: “Because they killed the Bull of Heaven and have also slain Humbaba [the forest god], the one of them who pulled up the Cedar of the Mountain must die!”

Enlil [god of earth and “the savage arts of soldiers”] said: “Let Enkidu [the man of nature] die, but Gilgamesh [the soldier] must not die!”

But the Sun God of Heaven [Shamash, also god of justice] replied to valiant Enlil: “Was it not at my command that they killed the Bull of Heaven and Humbaba? Should now innocent Enkidu die?”

Then Enlil became angry at Shamash, saying: “It is you who are responsible, because you traveled daily with them as their friend” [as the Sun, the god who can’t be looked at, travels daily with everyone!].

After this conversation (and, I suppose, after the tape recording of it became available!), Enkidu died – and the second half of the story begins.

With these last words the dying Enkidu did pray and say to his beloved companion [Gilgamesh]: “In dreams last night the heavens and the earth poured out great groans while I alone stood facing devastation. Some fierce and threatening creature flew down at me and pushed me with its talons toward *the horror-filled house of death* [italics added], wherein Irkalla, queen of shades, stands in command. There is darkness which lets no person again see light of day. There is a road leading away from bright and lively life. There dwell those who eat dry dust and have no cooling water to quench their awful thirst. As I stood there I saw all those who’ve died and even kings among those darkened souls have none of their remote and former glory. All earthly greatness was forfeit, and I entered then into the house of death...”

Below is another translation (possibly from a different clay tablet).<sup>1</sup>

Enkidu’s innards were churning, lying there so alone. He spoke everything he felt, saying to his friend: “Listen, my friend, to the dream that I had last night. The heavens cried out and the earth replied, and I was standing between them. There appeared a man of dark visage – his face resembled the Anzu, his hands were the paws of a lion, his nails the talons of an eagle! – he seized me by my hair and overpowered me. I struck him a blow, but he skipped about like a jump rope, and then he struck me and capsized me like a raft, and trampled on me like a wild bull.

<sup>1</sup> Copied from <http://groups.msn.com/agodfightforallreligions/gilgameshsummerianepic.msnw>.

He encircled my whole body in a clamp. ‘Help me, my friend’ (I cried), but you did not rescue me, you were afraid and did not...

“Then he... and turned me into a dove, so that my arms were feathered like a bird. Seizing me, he led me down to the House of Darkness, the dwelling of Irkalla, to the house where those who enter do not come out, along the road of no return, to the house where those who dwell, do without light, where dirt is their drink, their food is of clay, where, like a bird, they wear garments of feathers, and light cannot be seen, they dwell in the dark, and upon the door and bolt, there lies dust.”

I trust you agree, Dear, that the “horror-filled house of death”, the “house where those who enter do not come out, along the road of no return” is a place that you’d prefer to avoid!

### LATER MESOPOTAMIAN IDEAS ABOUT “THE AFTERLIFE”

For contrast to the above ideas about “the afterlife” from Tablet VII of *The Epic*, consider the ideas in Tablet XII – allegedly of the same story! In Tablet XII, in his sorrow over the death of his friend (Enkidu), Gilgamesh first seeks help from three of the gods (first the god of war, Enlil, then the moon god, Sin, and then the god of fresh water, Ea):

So the great son of Ninsun, proud Gilgamesh, cried for his beloved friend and went to the temple of Enlil, the savage god of soldiers, to say: “My god, when death called for me, my best friend [Enkidu] went in my place and he is now no longer living.” But the savage god of soldiers, Enlil, was mute [as all gods have always been!].

So Gilgamesh turned next to one who flies alone, and to the Moon he said: “My god, when death called for me, my best friend went in my place and he is now no longer living.” But the Moon, who flies alone, was also mute.

So he went next to Ea, whose waters fill the desert oasis even when no rain falls. “My god,” he cried, “when death called for me, my best friend went in my place and he is now no longer living.”

And Ea, whose waters keep us alive as we journey over desert sands, said this to Nergal, great soldier in arms [apparently one of Ea’s “henchmen” or “hench gods”]; apparently, Ea also said nothing to Gilgamesh]. “Go now, mighty follower; free Enkidu to speak once to kin and show this Gilgamesh how to descend halfway to Hell through the bowels of earth.” And Nergal, accustomed to absurd orders, obeyed as soldiers do. [That’s quite an indictment of all soldiers!] He freed Enkidu to speak once to kin and showed Gilgamesh how to descend halfway to Hell through the bowels of earth.

Enkidu's shadow rose slowly toward the living [and notice, Dear, that only Enkidu's shadow "rose"!], and the brothers, tearful and weak, tried to hug, tried to speak, tried and failed to do anything but sob.

"Speak to me please, dear brother," whispered Gilgamesh. "Tell me of death and where you are."

"Not willingly do I speak of death," said Enkidu in slow reply. "But if you wish to sit for a brief time, I will describe where I do stay."

"Yes," his brother said in early [earnest?] grief.

"All my skin and all my bones are dead now. All my skin and all my bones are now dead."

"Oh no," cried Gilgamesh without relief. "Oh no," sobbed one enclosed by grief.

"Did you see there a man who never fathered any child?"

"I saw there a no-man who died." [That is, if a man had no children, then he was "a no-man".]

"Did you see there a man whose one son died?"

"I saw him sobbing all alone in open fields."

"Did you see there a man with two grown sons?"

"I did indeed and he smiles all day long."

"Did you see there a man with three of his own boys?"

"I did, I did; and his heart's full of joys."

"Did you there see a king with four full kids?"

"I did see one whose pleasure is supreme."

"Did you see there anyone with five children?"

"Oh yes, they go about with laughs and shouts."

"And could you find a man with six or seven boys?"

"You could and they are treated as the gods."

“Have you seen one who died too soon?”

“Oh yes; that one sips water fair and rests each night upon a couch.”

“Have you seen one who died in War?”

“Oh yes; his aged father weeps and his young widow visits graves.”

“Have you seen one buried poor, with other homeless nomads?”

“Oh yes; that one knows rest that is not sure, far from the proper place.”

“Have you seen a brother crying among relatives who chose to ignore his prayers?”

“Oh yes; he brings bread to the hungry from the dumps of those who feed their dogs with food they keep from people, and he eats trash that no other man would want.”

Now, Dear, I don't want to belabor this (much more!), but because it's part of the world's first recorded story, it can be useful to try to determine what the story can tell us about the people who listened to it. Therefore, I'd like to call your attention to “something weird” that happened between Tablet VII (which described the “horror-filled house of death”) and the above-quoted Tablet XII.

In this Tablet XII of *The Epic*, in contrast to Tablet VII, the possibility of a “happy ever-aftering” is suggested, provided that you:

- Die young – which is generally a bad idea! (But you might recall the consistent and famous line from Menander, the fourth century BCE Greek playwright: “Those whom the gods love, die young”),
- Pray to the gods – which is definitely an unwise idea (!), and
- Have as many male children as possible – and this stupidity still pollutes many cultures (who want warriors, or men to work in the fields, or men to look after their ageing parents).

But the main point that I hope you'll notice is the change that occurred between Tablet VII and Tablet XII, a change that may have occurred during more than a thousand years. The change is in the people's ideas about the “afterlife”: from “the horror-filled house of death” to cases of individual dead men (no comments about dead women!) who “[smile] all day long”, “[whose] heart [is] full of joys”, “whose pleasure is supreme”, and even those “[who] go about with laughs and shouts”, “treated as the gods.”

These ideas in Tablet XII about the possibility of a happy “afterlife” are obviously very different from the ideas in Tablet VII about “the horror-filled house of death”, but as maybe you saw on the internet, there are many unanswered questions about Tablet XII. Certainly it’s out of order: the start of the description of Enkidu’s dream about death is on Tablet VII; so, why would the rest of the “episode” be back on Tablet XII? Also, as historians point out and as I tried to illustrate with the myth about Inanna and Damuzi, the ideas in Tablet XII are quite different from ideas that the Sumerians were known to have about death, which are similar to ideas contained in Tablet VII. As a result, there are suggestions that Tablet XII was “an addendum” to the original myth, possibly added a thousand-or-so years after the original myth was fairly well established.

As I’ll sketch in subsequent chapters (e.g., in the excursion Yx), during the ~1,000 years from when Gilgamesh lived to when Sin-leqe-unnini recorded his version of *The Epic* (perhaps in about 1600 BCE), plus another 1,000 years to when the clay tablets were stored (in about 600 BCE), there were huge “sloshings” of people in this region of the world, undoubtedly causing substantial mixings of ideas. Thus, by about 1800 BCE, warriors from the North, West, and East had swept across all of Mesopotamia and taken control of at least the northern portion of Egypt; some Hebrews (a word that seems to have meant “outsiders”), who were originally from Mesopotamia, may have traveled to Egypt in the wake of this “Hyksos” invasion of Egypt. Subsequently, when the Egyptians learned how to make chariots used by the invaders, the Egyptians conquered much of the Near East, including Mesopotamia. Centuries later, Egypt was again conquered by Easterners! As a result, almost certainly, most Mesopotamians became familiar with Egyptian ideas about “life after death”, which then may explain the change in the ideas from Tablet VII to Tablet XII of *The Epic*.

But whether such (data-less) ideas diffused out of Egypt (or were “home grown” or came from farther east) is apparently unknown. Yet, as I’ll show you later, there’s evidence that at least the Greeks (possibly starting with Pythagoras and then culminating in Plato’s nonsense) imported similar ideas from Egypt (and possibly from as far away as India). Meanwhile, that the Egyptians subscribed to the oxymoronic idea of “life after death” (or stated maybe better, that they were consumed by the idea) is attested to by their pyramids, built ~2,500 BCE; in addition, as I’ll show you in later chapters, there is their *Book of the Dead* (and its forerunner, *The Pyramid Texts*). As

\* Go to other chapters via

you probably know, the pyramids were to provide “stairways to the stars” – but only for the pharaohs, who already claimed to be “gods on Earth”! Yet, as I’ll show you in later chapters (especially in the excursion **Yx**), by ~2,000 BCE, after the people revolted, the wily Egyptian priests “granted” potential “eternal life in paradise” to all Egyptians.

But, Dear, at this time, I don’t want to go into details about the Egyptian ideas: they’re complicated and extensive. Yet, they’re significant to you, because the Mormon “prophet” Joseph Smith passed off a portion of the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* (namely, the *Book of Breathing*) as what he called the (Mormon) *Book of Abraham* – demonstrating that he had zero ability to use his “seer stone” to translate old manuscripts. Therefore, I want to delay digging into such details until the excursion **Yx** (dealing with “Your Indoctrination in the Mountainous God Lie”). Here, I’ll just state that, by 2000 BCE, it seems that most Egyptians were convinced not only that “life after death” was possible (even if illogical!) but also that, to get a good one, the dead person would need to demonstrate (to the “judge of the dead”, i.e., the Egyptian god Osiris) that the applicant had lived a “pure life”.

### HOMER’S IDEAS ABOUT “THE AFTERLIFE”

Similar shifts in ideas about “the afterlife” can be seen in Greek myths and literature, e.g., the shift from what’s written in Homer’s *Odyssey* (written in about 700 BCE (about 2,000 years after the time of King Gilgamesh) to what’s written by Plato (428–348 BCE). In fact, although I’ll not show you details until a later chapter (in **Yx**), even earlier than when Plato polluted the Greeks with ideas from Egypt and Mesopotamia, Pythagoras (c. 582–500 BCE) polluted them with the idea of re-incarnation (an idea that he possibly picked up during a trip to India). No one, however, polluted the minds of the ancient Greeks (and subsequently, all Christians, Muslims, and Mormons) more than Plato.

To show you ancient Greek ideas about “the afterlife”, below I’ll quote extensively from Homer’s description in Books (or Chapters) X and XI of *The Odyssey*. In what follows, I’ve put some phrases in italics for emphasis and I’ve added a few comments in brackets. In advance, I should apologize for quoting so much – and somewhat as an aside, let me ask you to notice that, while in Sin-leqe-unnini’s description of death he made reference to shadows, Homer makes reference to dreams.

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And the goddess [Circe, with whom Ulysses and his crew had stayed for a year] answered, “Ulysses, noble son of Laertes, you shall none of you stay here any longer if you do not want to, but there is another journey which you have got to take before you can sail homewards. You must go to the house of [the god] Hades [i.e., Hell] and of dread Proserpine [the Greek goddess Persephone] to consult the ghost of the blind Theban prophet Teiresias whose reason is still unshaken. *To him alone has Proserpine left his understanding even in death, but the other ghosts flit about aimlessly*”...

Although I’ve just begun to quote Homer, Dear, I want to interrupt your reading to add some more-extensive notes. For one, I wonder if you’ve ever seen that rather horrible movie entitled *Platoon*. I rather hope not: it contains too much violence – similar to Homer’s descriptions of the Trojan War and the House of Hades! Nonetheless, the movie *Platoon* did contain what for me was a memorable line: “Hell is a place where reason doesn’t stand a chance” – and in the paragraph quoted above, it’s seen that Homer said essentially the same thing, ~2700 years earlier: “*To him alone has Proserpine left his understanding even in death, but the other ghosts flit about aimlessly.*”

And as a second note, maybe I should add some comments about some characters in Homer’s story, relating them to characters in other stories with which you’re more familiar. In Homer’s Greece, the god who ruled “Hell” or “the House of Hades” was Hades (called Pluto, by the Romans). He’s somewhat similar to the Egyptian god Osiris (who ruled the Egyptian “underworld”) and he’s somewhat similar to the (comic-book!) character you “know” as Satan, but not quite. Thus, Hades wasn’t assumed to be a “bad god”, it was just that there was a rotten job to do (ruling the underworld), and somebody had to do it! And actually (although I don’t recall that Homer stated this), in ancient Greece it wasn’t assumed that just one “god” decided the fate of the dead (such as Osiris for the Egyptians, Mithras for the Persians, Jesus for the Christians, or Muhammad for the Muslims) but in characteristically more judicial Greece, there was a panel of three “judges”, including the “father god” Zeus, his son Minos, and Hades.

Further, in Greek “theogony” (i.e., genealogy of the gods), which as I’ll be showing you was (in the main) copied from the Egyptians, there are more generations of gods than in the case of Christianity. In Egyptian theogony, Ra (the Sun at noon and similar to the Greek grandfather-god Cronus or the Roman grandfather-god Saturn) was the father of Osiris, who in turn was the father of the son-god (and Sun-god!) Horus (who was born via “immaculate

conception” of Isis). Similarly, in Greek theogony, Minos was son of Zeus (called Jove or Jupiter by the Romans) who in turn was son of “the father (or grandfather!) god” Cronus (or Kronus; the Roman god Saturn). That is, the Greek’s assumed-god Zeus was somewhat similar to the Christian’s assumed-god Jesus (who was also considered to be the planet Jupiter) and who in turn was assumed to be son of “the father god” Yahweh (or “El” or “just plain God”, who was also considered to be the planet Saturn). Sorry if that’s confusing; I can, however, offer you a major consolation: in later chapters, it’s gonna get a lot worse!

In additional contrast to the Christian-Islamic-Mormon version of Hell, the ruler of Homer’s hell (Hades) was married – to the Greek goddess Persephone (the Roman goddess Proserpine), the daughter of the goddess of agriculture, Demeter (the Roman goddess Ceres). For fun, you might want to read the myth (which you can find on the internet) about how Persephone became “queen” of Hell (similar to the Mesopotamian goddess Irkalla, “queen of shades”). The Greek story (in briefest outline!) tells how Hades kidnapped Persephone, her mother Demeter searched for her in vain and without help, and thereby, she became so angry that she stopped crops from growing. Concerned about the crop failures, Zeus intervened to free Persephone from Hades – provided she hadn’t eaten anything in the underworld. But unfortunately she had, so Zeus ruled that, forever more, Persephone could reside only six months per year above ground and was forced to reside for the other six months per year in the House of Hades – which for the ancient Greeks “explained” the cause of the two seasons of growth and dormancy, just as the similar story of Damuzi and Inanna “explained” the cause of the seasons for the Sumerians and a similar story about Osiris and Isis “explained” the seasons for the Egyptians!

But enough of that! I’ll now get back to Homer – who, I should add, doesn’t seem to explain why, during Ulysses’ visit, Persephone (or Proserpine) was the sole ruler of the dead. Maybe Hades was busy, collecting more bodies! Anyway, back to Homer – now telling about when Ulysses arrived at the entrance to the house of Hades:

When I [Ulysses] had prayed sufficiently to the dead, I cut the throats of the two sheep and let the blood run into the trench, whereon the ghosts came trooping up from Erebus [the entrance to the house of Hades] – brides, young bachelors, old men worn out with toil, maids who had been crossed in love, and brave men who had been killed in battle, with their armor still smirched with blood; they came from every quarter and flitted round the trench with a strange kind of screaming sound that made

\* Go to other chapters *via*

me turn pale with fear. When I saw them coming, I told the men to be quick and flay the carcasses of the two dead sheep and make burnt offerings of them, and at the same time to repeat prayers to Hades and to Proserpine; but I sat where I was with my sword drawn and would not let the poor feckless ghosts come near the blood [the ghosts wanted to drink the blood!] till Teiresias should have answered my questions... [Homer fails to mention how Ulysses could stop the ghosts with a mere sword!]

Then came the ghost of my dead mother Anticlea.... I had left her alive when I set out for Troy and was moved to tears when I saw her, but even so, for all my sorrow I would not let her come near the blood till I had asked my questions of Teiresias [the prophet, to whom “alone has Proserpine left his understanding even in death...”]. Then came also the ghost of Theban Teiresias, with his golden sceptre in his hand. He knew me and said, “Ulysses, noble son of Laertes, why, poor man, have you left the light of day and come down to visit the dead in this sad place? Stand back from the trench and withdraw your sword that I may drink of the blood and answer your questions truly.”

So I drew back, and sheathed my sword, whereon, when he had drank of the blood, he began with his prophecy... [I'll skip the prophecy.]

On this, the ghost of Teiresias went back to the house of Hades, for his prophesying had now been spoken, but I sat still where I was until my mother came up and tasted the blood. [That is, Dear, the dead are proposed to be dead even to death until they drink blood!] Then she knew me at once and spoke fondly to me, saying, “My son, how did you come down to this abode of darkness while you are still alive? It is a hard thing for the living to see these places, for between us and them there are great and terrible waters, and there is Oceanus, which no man can cross on foot, but he must have a good ship to take him. [How she managed to know all this, when she was “dead to knowledge”, Homer doesn't explain!] Are you all this time trying to find your way home from Troy, and have you never yet got back to Ithaca nor seen your wife in your own house?”

“Mother,” said I, “I was forced to come here to consult the ghost of the Theban prophet Teiresias. I have never yet been near the Achaean land nor set foot on my native country, and I have had nothing but one long series of misfortunes from the very first day that I set out with Agamemnon for Ilius, the land of noble steeds, to fight the Trojans. But tell me, and tell me true, in what way did you die? Did you have a long illness, or did heaven vouchsafe you a gentle easy passage to eternity?...

[His mother answered] “As for my own end it was in this wise [or “this way”]: heaven did not take me swiftly and painlessly in my own house, nor was I attacked by any illness such as those that generally wear people out and kill them, but my longing to know what you were doing and the force of my affection for you – this it was that was the death of me.” [Poor old Ulysses: did he really want to know that his mother

died pining for him? Did she really? – or was she just laying another “guilt trip” on him, as many mothers seem to want to do, I assume to gain control!]

Then I tried to find some way of embracing my mother’s ghost. Thrice I sprang towards her and tried to clasp her in my arms, but each time she flitted from my embrace *as it were a dream* or phantom, and being touched to the quick I said to her, “Mother, why do you not stay still when I would embrace you? If we could throw our arms around one another we might find sad comfort in the sharing of our sorrows even in the house of Hades. Does Proserpine want to lay a still further load of grief upon me by mocking me with a phantom only?”

“My son,” she answered, “most ill-fated of all mankind, it is not Proserpine that is beguiling you, but all people are like this when they are dead. The sinews no longer hold the flesh and bones together; these perish in the fierceness of consuming fire as soon as life has left the body, and the soul flits away *as though it were a dream*. Now, however, go back to the light of day as soon as you can, and note all these things that you may tell them to your wife hereafter.” [Notice, Dear, that the listeners of this story had no problems either with the idea that people had “immortal souls” or with the idea that, after death, “the soul flits away as though it were a dream.”]

Thus did we converse, and anon Proserpine sent up the ghosts of the wives and daughters of all the most famous men. They gathered in crowds about the blood, and I considered how I might question them severally. In the end I deemed that it would be best to draw the keen blade that hung by my sturdy thigh, and keep them from all drinking the blood at once. [Again, Homer neglects to inform us why that procedure would work: why would a ghost be worried about a sword, why would it want to drink blood, and even if it wanted to, how could it?!] So they came up one after the other, and each one as I questioned her told me her race and lineage.

[After Ulysses met with the spirits of these women, he then met with the spirits of some men.] As we two [Ulysses and the ghost of Agamemnon] sat weeping and talking thus sadly with one another, the ghost of Achilles came up to us with Patroclus, Antilochus, and Ajax who was the finest and goodliest man of all the Danaans after the son of Peleus. The fleet descendant of Aeacus [i.e., Achilles] knew me and spoke piteously, saying, “Ulysses, noble son of Laertes, what deed of daring will you undertake next, that you venture down to the house of Hades among us silly dead, who are but the ghosts of them that can labor no more?”

And I said, “Achilles, son of Peleus, foremost champion of the Achaeans, I came to consult Teiresias, and see if he could advise me about my return home to Ithaca, for I have never yet been able to get near the Achaean land, nor to set foot in my own country, but have been in trouble all the time. As for you, Achilles, no one was ever yet so fortunate as you have been, nor ever will be, for you were adored by all us Argives as long as you were alive, and now that you are here you are a great prince among the dead. Do not, therefore, take it so much to heart even if you are dead.”

*“Say not a word,” he answered, “in death’s favor; I would rather be a paid servant in a poor man’s house and be above ground than king of kings among the dead...”*  
[which, Dear, is probably the most famous summary of the ancient Greeks’ view of death].

I’m sorry to have quoted so much, Dear. I guess I should admit that I’m rather hooked on Homer! Meanwhile, no doubt you got the message early in the reading: Homer’s House of Hades wasn’t a place you’d want to visit!

Yet, as much as I’m “hooked on Homer”, I probably should add some criticisms. For example, as I already mentioned, he neglects to inform the reader why the ghosts of the dead would be afraid of Ulysses’ sword. Also, whereas there are many suggestions that “only the gods are immortal”, yet on the other hand, Homer has the house of Hades filled with essentially everyone (including Ulysses’ mother); that is, if only the gods were immortal, it seems inconsistent that everyone’s soul or spirit continued its existence after its body’s death! Further, Homer describes that, in the house of Hades, some of the “gods” (e.g., Prometheus) and “semi-gods” (e.g., Achilles, whose mother was claimed to be the goddess Thetas, daughter of Neptune) were constrained to dwell and even be “punished” – for eternity!

Homer also describes a special case:

*And I saw Leda the wife of Tyndarus, who bore him two famous sons, Castor breaker of horses, and Pollux the mighty boxer. Both these heroes are lying under the earth, though they are still alive [!], for by a special dispensation of Jove, they die and come to life again, each one of them every other day throughout all time, and they have the rank of gods.*

So, Dear, according to Homer, “special dispensation” could be arranged by Zeus (overruling Hades and his son Minos), permitting a person to come to life again, at least every other day! Homer, however, never got around to explaining how the person would overcome the stated problem that one’s “sinews no longer hold the flesh and bones together.” A good editor might have caused Homer quite a bit of trouble, since he left so many concepts (and corpses) dangling! But more to the point, a shift in Greek ideas about “the afterlife” [similar to the shift in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (between Tablets VII and XII) and similar to the shift that can be seen in the Bible] can be seen by comparing ideas in Homer’s books with ideas especially of Plato.

## SOCRATES' IDEAS ABOUT "THE AFTERLIFE"

Plato (c. 428–348 BCE) was a student of Socrates (469–399 BCE). That Socrates continued to be a “realist” (in contrast to Plato’s mysticism) is well illustrated by the following (stunning!) statement (to which I’ve added the italics). This statement (recorded by Plato) was made by Socrates at his trial, in his “defense”, with his student Plato in attendance.<sup>2</sup>

Someone will say: And are you not ashamed, Socrates, of a course of life which is likely to bring you to an untimely end? To him I may fairly answer: There you are mistaken: a man who is good for anything ought not to calculate the chance of living or dying; he ought only to consider whether in doing anything he is doing right or wrong – acting the part of a good man or of a bad. Whereas, according to your view, the heroes who fell at Troy were not good for much, and the son of Thetis [Achilles] above all, who altogether despised danger in comparison with disgrace; and when his goddess mother said to him, in his eagerness to slay Hector, that if he avenged his companion Patroclus, and slew Hector, he would die himself – “Fate,” as she said, “waits upon you next after Hector”; he, hearing this, utterly despised danger and death, and instead of fearing them, feared rather to live in dishonor, and not to avenge his friend. “Let me die next,” he replies, “and be avenged of my enemy, rather than abide here by the beaked ships, a scorn and a burden of the earth.” Had Achilles any thought of death and danger? For wherever a man’s place is, whether the place which he has chosen or that in which he has been placed by a commander, there he ought to remain in the hour of danger; he should not think of death or of anything, but of disgrace. And this, O men of Athens, is a true saying.

Strange, indeed, would be my conduct, O men of Athens, if I who, when I was ordered by the generals whom you chose to command me at Potidaea and Amphipolis and Delium, remained where they placed me, like any other man, facing death; if, I say, now, when, as I conceive and imagine, God orders me to fulfill the philosopher’s mission of searching into myself and other men, I were to desert my post through fear of death, or any other fear; that would indeed be strange, and I might justly be arraigned in court for denying the existence of the gods, if I disobeyed the oracle because I was afraid of death: then I should be fancying that I was wise when I was not wise. *For this fear of death is indeed the pretence of wisdom, and not real wisdom, being the appearance of knowing the unknown; since no one knows whether death, which they in their fear apprehend to be the greatest evil, may not be the greatest good. Is there not here conceit of knowledge, which is a disgraceful sort of ignorance?*

Then, after the jury condemned Socrates to death, Plato reports that Socrates responded as follows.

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<sup>2</sup> From Plato’s **Apology**, translated by Benjamin Jowett, available, e.g., at <http://classics.mit.edu>.

Not much time will be gained, O Athenians, in return for the evil name which you will get from the detractors of the city, who will say that you killed Socrates, a wise man; for they will call me wise even though I am not wise when they want to reproach you. If you had waited a little while, your desire would have been fulfilled in the course of nature. For I am far advanced in years, as you may perceive, and not far from death. I am speaking now only to those of you who have condemned me to death.

And I have another thing to say to them: You think that I was convicted through deficiency of words – I mean, that if I had thought fit to leave nothing undone, nothing unsaid, I might have gained an acquittal. Not so; the deficiency which led to my conviction was not of words – certainly not. But I had not the boldness or impudence or inclination to address you as you would have liked me to address you, weeping and wailing and lamenting, and saying and doing many things which you have been accustomed to hear from others, and which, as I say, are unworthy of me. But I thought that I ought not to do anything common or mean in the hour of danger: nor do I now repent of the manner of my defense, and I would rather die having spoken after my manner, than speak in your manner and live. *For neither in war nor yet at law ought any man to use every way of escaping death.* For often in battle there is no doubt that if a man will throw away his arms, and fall on his knees before his pursuers, he may escape death; and in other dangers there are other ways of escaping death, if a man is willing to say and do anything.

The difficulty, my friends, is not in avoiding death, but in avoiding unrighteousness; for that runs faster than death. I am old and move slowly, and the slower runner has overtaken me, and my accusers are keen and quick, and the faster runner, who is unrighteousness, has overtaken them. And now I depart hence condemned by you to suffer the penalty of death, and they, too, go their ways condemned by the truth to suffer the penalty of villainy and wrong; and I must abide by my award – let them abide by theirs. I suppose that these things may be regarded as fated – and I think that they are well.

And now, O men who have condemned me, I would fain prophesy to you; for I am about to die, and that is the hour in which men are gifted with prophetic power. And I prophesy to you who are my murderers, that immediately after my death punishment far heavier than you have inflicted on me will surely await you. Me you have killed because you wanted to escape the accuser, and not to give an account of your lives. But that will not be as you suppose: far otherwise. For I say that there will be more accusers of you than there are now; accusers whom hitherto I have restrained: and as they are younger they will be more severe with you, and you will be more offended at them. For if you think that by killing men you can avoid the accuser censuring your lives, you are mistaken; that is not a way of escape which is either possible or honorable; *the easiest and noblest way is not to be crushing others, but to be improving yourselves.* This is the prophecy which I utter before my departure, to the judges who have condemned me.

Friends, who would have acquitted me, I would like also to talk with you about this thing which has happened, while the magistrates are busy, and before I go to the place at which I must die. Stay then awhile, for we may as well talk with one another while there is time. You are my friends, and I should like to show you the meaning of this event which has happened to me. O my judges – for you I may truly call judges – I should like to tell you of a wonderful circumstance. Hitherto the familiar oracle within me has constantly been in the habit of opposing me even about trifles, if I was going to make a slip or error about anything; and now as you see there has come upon me that which may be thought, and is generally believed to be, the last and worst evil. But the oracle made no sign of opposition, either as I was leaving my house and going out in the morning, or when I was going up into this court, or while I was speaking, at anything which I was going to say; and yet I have often been stopped in the middle of a speech; but now in nothing I either said or did touching this matter has the oracle opposed me. What do I take to be the explanation of this? I will tell you. I regard this as a proof that what has happened to me is a good, and that those of us who think that death is an evil are in error. This is a great proof to me of what I am saying, for the customary sign would surely have opposed me had I been going to evil and not to good.

*Let us reflect in another way, and we shall see that there is great reason to hope that death is a good, for one of two things: either death is a state of nothingness and utter unconsciousness, or, as men say, there is a change and migration of the soul from this world to another. Now if you suppose that there is no consciousness, but a sleep like the sleep of him who is undisturbed even by the sight of dreams, death will be an unspeakable gain. For if a person were to select the night in which his sleep was undisturbed even by dreams, and were to compare with this the other days and nights of his life, and then were to tell us how many days and nights he had passed in the course of his life better and more pleasantly than this one, I think that any man, I will not say a private man, but even the great king, will not find many such days or nights, when compared with the others. Now if death is like this, I say that to die is gain; for eternity is then only a single night.*

But if death is the journey to another place, and there, as men say, all the dead are, [then] what good, O my friends and judges, can be greater than this? If indeed when the pilgrim arrives in the world below, he is delivered from the professors of justice in this world, and finds the true judges who are said to give judgment there, Minos and Rhadamanthus and Aeacus and Triptolemus, and other sons of God who were righteous in their own life, that pilgrimage will be worth making. What would not a man give if he might converse with Orpheus and Musaeus and Hesiod and Homer? Nay, if this be true, let me die again and again! I, too, shall have a wonderful interest in a place where I can converse with Palamedes, and Ajax the son of Telamon, and other heroes of old, who have suffered death through an unjust judgment; and there will be no small pleasure, as I think, in comparing my own sufferings with theirs. *Above all, I shall be able to continue my search into true and false knowledge; as in this world, so also in that; I shall find out who is wise, and who pretends to be wise, and is not.* What would not a man give, O judges, to be able to examine the leader of

the great Trojan expedition; or Odysseus or Sisyphus, or numberless others, men and women too! What infinite delight would there be in conversing with them and asking them questions! For in that world they do not put a man to death for this; certainly not. For besides being happier in that world than in this, they will be immortal, if what is said is true.

Wherefore, O judges, be of good cheer about death, and know this of a truth – that no evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death. He and his are not neglected by the gods; nor has my own approaching end happened by mere chance. But I see clearly that to die and be released was better for me; and therefore the oracle gave no sign. For which reason also, I am not angry with my accusers, or my condemners; they have done me no harm, although neither of them meant to do me any good; and for this I may gently blame them.

Still I have a favor to ask of them. When my sons are grown up, I would ask you, O my friends, to punish them; and I would have you trouble them, as I have troubled you, if they seem to care about riches, or anything, more than about virtue; or if they pretend to be something when they are really nothing – then reprove them, as I have reproved you, for not caring about that for which they ought to care, and thinking that they are something when they are really nothing. And if you do this, I and my sons will have received justice at your hands.

*The hour of departure has arrived, and we go our ways – I to die, and you to live. Which is better God only knows.*

And thus, Dear, you have just finished reading probably the greatest statement about “the afterlife” made by any agnostic (i.e., with  $a = \text{‘no’}$  or ‘not’ and *gnostic* = ‘knowledge’ or ‘knowing’, then ‘agnostic’ means “not knowing” or “no knowledge”). On the other hand, surely Socrates would judge his student Plato harshly for claiming he knew what he didn’t – thereby, not building the foundation for Christianity (for it was constructed centuries earlier by the Egyptians and by Persian and Chaldean astrologers), but for setting it (and Islam and Mormonism) in concrete.

### PLATO’S IDEAS ABOUT “THE AFTERLIFE”

Dear: To adequately support the above indictment of Plato, to try to show you how he influenced the creation of Christianity, thereby dramatically influencing the lives of certain grandchildren, would require digging into many details. In subsequent chapters (especially in **Yx**), I’ll show you some details about Plato’s life (or, at least, what little is known about it) and about his (mystic) philosophy. Here, I’ll provide only a brief outline.

There are suggestions that, after the execution of Socrates, Plato (then about 30 years old) left Athens (probably in fear of those who unjustly condemned Socrates), spending time first with the mathematician Euclid and then with the followers of the mathematician Pythagoras (in Italy). Whether he spent time also in Egypt is unclear. In any event, from his studying mathematics (which seemed to him to be “pure”) and from his studying in the Pythagorean school [with Pythagoras having learned his mathematics from the Egyptian and Mesopotamians (who had used what we call “Pythagoras’ theorem” for more than 2,000 years!) and with Pythagoras having obtained his ideas about re-incarnation of the “soul” possibly from the Hindus], Plato developed his own version of mysticism (his “Theory of Forms”), complete with firm conviction of the idea mentioned by both Homer and Socrates that everyone possessed an “eternal soul”.

Illustrative of Plato’s theory of forms is his cave analogy (from Book VII of *The Republic*), which was written as a “Socratic dialogue” (i.e., an assumed conversation between Socrates and, in this case, Glaucon). Plato’s cave analogy may be the most frequently referenced analogy (or allegory) in all of Western literature (e.g., in Google, “Plato’s cave”, alone, yields 115,000 “hits”). In the following text, I’ve inserted a sketch of Plato’s cave, which I’ve taken from <http://faculty.washington.edu/smcohen/320/cave.htm> and which in turn is from p. 316 of *Great Dialogues of Plato: Complete Texts of the Republic, Apology, Crito Phaido, Ion, and Meno, Vol. I* (Warmington and Rouse, eds., New York, Signet Classics: 1999).

AND now, I [Socrates, according to Plato – but it seems to be Plato’s method of conveying his own ideas, pretending that the ideas were espoused by Socrates] said, let me show in a figure how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened: Behold! Human beings living in a underground den, which has a mouth open towards the light and reaching all along the den; here they have been from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them, being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads. Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way; and you will see, if you look, a low wall built along the way, like the screen which marionette players have in front of them, over which they show the puppets.

I [Glaucon] see.

And do you see, I said, men passing along the wall carrying all sorts of vessels, and statues and figures of animals made of wood and stone and various materials, which appear over the wall? Some of them are talking, others silent.

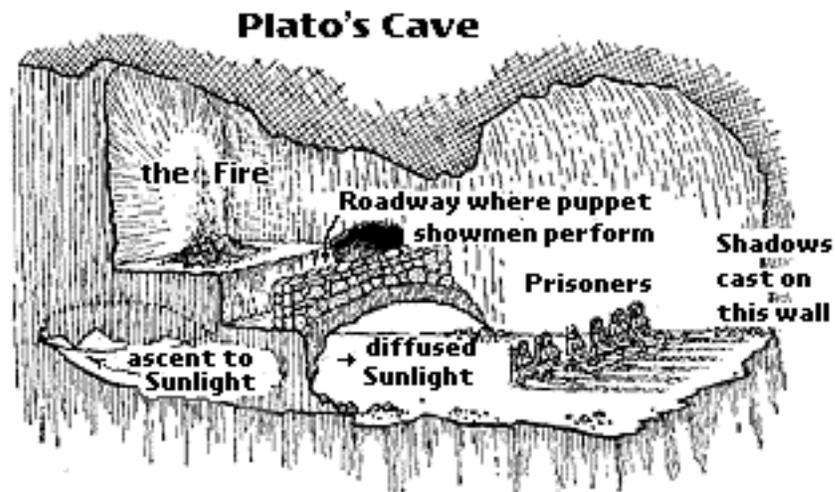
You have shown me a strange image, and they are strange prisoners.

Like ourselves, I replied; and they see only their own shadows, or the shadows of one another, which the fire throws on the opposite wall of the cave?

True, he said; how could they see anything but the shadows if they were never allowed to move their heads?

And of the objects which are being carried in like manner they would only see the shadows?

Yes, he said.



And if they were able to converse with one another, would they not suppose that they were naming what was actually before them?

Very true.

And suppose further that the prison had an echo which came from the other side, would they not be sure to fancy when one of the passers-by spoke that the voice which they heard came from the passing shadow?

No question, he replied.

To them, I said, the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images.

That is certain.

And now look again, and see what will naturally follow if the prisoners are released and disabused of their error. At first, when any of them is liberated and compelled

suddenly to stand up and turn his neck round and walk and look towards the light, he will suffer sharp pains; the glare will distress him, and he will be unable to see the realities of which in his former state he had seen the shadows; and then conceive someone saying to him, that what he saw before was an illusion, but that now, when he is approaching nearer to being and his eye is turned towards more real existence, he has a clearer vision – what will be his reply? And you may further imagine that his instructor is pointing to the objects as they pass and requiring him to name them – will he not be perplexed? Will he not fancy that the shadows which he formerly saw are truer than the objects which are now shown to him?

Far truer.

And if he is compelled to look straight at the light, will he not have a pain in his eyes which will make him turn away to take in the objects of vision which he is able to see without pain, and which he will conceive to be in reality clearer than the things which are now being shown to him?

True...

And suppose once more, that he is reluctantly dragged up a steep and rugged ascent, and held fast until he's forced into the presence of the sun himself, is he not likely to be pained and irritated? When he approaches the light his eyes will be dazzled, and he will not be able to see anything at all of what are now called realities.

Not all in a moment, he said.

He will require to grow accustomed to the sight of the upper world. And first he will see the shadows best, next the reflections of men and other objects in the water, and then the objects themselves; then he will gaze upon the light of the moon and the stars and the spangled heaven; and he will see the sky and the stars by night better than the sun or the light of the sun by day?

Certainly.

Last of he will be able to see the sun, and not mere reflections of him in the water, but he will see him in his own proper place, and not in another; and he will contemplate him as he is.

Certainly.

He will then proceed to argue that this is he who gives the season and the years, and is the guardian of all that is in the visible world, and in a certain way the cause of all things which he and his fellows have been accustomed to behold?

Clearly, he said, he would first see the sun and then reason about him.

And when he remembered his old habitation, and the wisdom of the den and his fellow-prisoners, do you not suppose that he would felicitate himself on the change, and pity them?

Certainly, he would.

And if they were in the habit of conferring honors among themselves on those who were quickest to observe the passing shadows and to remark which of them went before, and which followed after, and which were together; and who were therefore best able to draw conclusions as to the future, do you think that he would care for such honors and glories, or envy the possessors of them? Would he not say with Homer: “Better to be the poor servant of a poor master, and to endure anything, rather than think as they do and live after their manner”?

Yes, he said, I think that he would rather suffer anything than entertain these false notions and live in this miserable manner.

Imagine once more, I said, such a one coming suddenly out of the sun to be replaced in his old situation; would he not be certain to have his eyes full of darkness?

To be sure, he said.

And if there were a contest, and he had to compete in measuring the shadows with the prisoners who had never moved out of the den, while his sight was still weak, and before his eyes had become steady (and the time which would be needed to acquire this new habit of sight might be very considerable) would he not be ridiculous? Men would say of him that up he went and down he came without his eyes; and that it was better not even to think of ascending; and if any one tried to loose another and lead him up to the light, let them only catch the offender, and they would put him to death.

No question, he said.

This entire allegory, I said, you may now append, dear Glaucon, to the previous argument; the prison-house is the world of sight, the light of the fire is the sun, and you will not misapprehend me if you interpret the journey upwards to be the ascent of the soul into the intellectual world according to my poor belief, which, at your desire, I have expressed whether rightly or wrongly God knows. But, whether true or false, my opinion is that in the world of knowledge the idea of good appears last of all, and is seen only with an effort; and, when seen, is also inferred to be the universal author of all things beautiful and right [viz., God]; parent of light and of the lord of light in this visible world, and the immediate source of reason and truth in the intellectual; and that this is the power upon which he who would act rationally, either in public or private life must have his eye fixed.

I agree, he said, as far as I am able to understand you.

Moreover, I said, you must not wonder that those who attain to this beatific vision are unwilling to descend to human affairs; for their souls are ever hastening into the upper world where they desire to dwell; which desire of theirs is very natural, if our allegory may be trusted.

Yes, very natural.

And is there anything surprising in one who passes from divine contemplations to the evil state of man, misbehaving himself in a ridiculous manner; if, while his eyes are blinking and before he has become accustomed to the surrounding darkness, he is compelled to fight in courts of law, or in other places, about the images or the shadows of images of justice, and is endeavoring to meet the conceptions of those who have never yet seen absolute justice?

Anything but surprising, he replied.

Anyone who has common sense will remember that the bewilderments of the eyes are of two kinds, and arise from two causes, either from coming out of the light or from going into the light, which is true of the mind's eye, quite as much as of the bodily eye; and he who remembers this when he sees any one whose vision is perplexed and weak, will not be too ready to laugh; he will first ask whether that soul of man has come out of the brighter light, and is unable to see because unaccustomed to the dark, or having turned from darkness to the day is dazzled by excess of light. And he will count the one happy in his condition and state of being, and he will pity the other; or, if he have a mind to laugh at the soul which comes from below into the light, there will be more reason in this than in the laugh which greets him who returns from above out of the light into the den.

That, he said, is a very just distinction.

But then, if I am right, certain professors of education must be wrong when they say that they can put a knowledge into the soul which was not there before, like sight into blind eyes.

They undoubtedly say this, he replied.

Whereas, our argument shows that the power and capacity of learning exists in the soul already; and that just as the eye was unable to turn from darkness to light without the whole body, so too the instrument of knowledge can only by the movement of the whole soul be turned from the world of becoming into that of being, and learn by degrees to endure the sight of being, and of the brightest and best of being, or in other words, of the good.

From which, it can be deduced, that the pompous Plato considered himself to be standing outside the cave, in “the light of truth” (probably first shown to him by followers of the mystic mathematician Pythagoras), allowing him

to see that souls are immortal and possess all knowledge, gained during previous “lives” (or obtained directly from God). There is, however, the slight problem (which apparently neither Plato nor Pythagoras before him considered): it’s all silly speculation, without a shred of data to support it!

More completely, the following by W.K.C. Guthrie (from which I’ve omitted the author’s references and added a few notes in brackets) is a good summary of Plato’s ideas on such subjects as souls, gods, and immortality.<sup>3</sup>

The account of the Pythagoreans in the first volume [of Guthrie’s book] showed how difficult it is to separate their philosophy from Plato’s. The very word *philosophic* as Plato uses it is a link between them and his interpretation of philosophic understanding in terms of religious purification and salvation, his passion for mathematics as a glimpse of eternal truth, his talk of the kinship of all nature, of reincarnation and immortality, and of the body as the temporary tomb or prison of the soul, his choice of musical terminology to describe the state of the soul, and especially the mathematico-musical account of the composition of the world-soul... and finally his adoption of the doctrine of the music of the spheres... – all these are evidence of a close affinity between the two in which Plato must have been a debtor. In fact he turned to the Pythagoreans for help in solving the two most serious problems which faced him in his attempt to set the predominantly moral teaching of Socrates on a secure philosophical base.

The search for ethical standards had led Socrates to demand universal definitions; but universal definitions could have no application in a world subject to Heraclitean flux. If Socrates [were] right, then, there must exist unchanging realities outside the world of ordinary sensible experience. The two questions which this raised were, first, was there any evidence for the existence of such changeless truths? Second, if they did exist, how could we ever have any trustworthy knowledge of their nature? How is it possible for the mind to reach beyond the confines of experience and bridge the gap between the world of change and the changeless, eternal Forms?

The answer to the first question lay for Plato in the realm of mathematical truth which had been so largely revealed by the Pythagoreans and, through the discovery of its application to music, was regarded by them as the prime cause of order and *harmonia* in the universe. In mathematics, therefore, as then understood, Plato had an example before his eyes of the existence of truth outside the empirical world. The statement that a triangle consists of three straight lines is true, yet it is not true of any triangle drawn by man, for a line has by definition length but no breadth and is therefore invisible. The triangles of experience only approximate to the truth, as a just action

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<sup>3</sup> Copied from <http://www.ellopos.net/elpenor/greek-texts/ancient-greece/guthrie-plato.asp>, from W.K.C. Guthrie’s “Life of Plato and philosophical influences”, in turn from *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. IV, “Plato: the man and his dialogues, earlier period,” Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 8-38.

on earth approximates to the eternal Form of justice. The modern explanation of mathematical truth as analytic or tautologous [or dealing only with a closed system, as I'll explain in detail in Chapters T1 & T2, dealing with "truth"] was not a possible one for Plato or any thinker of his time.

The second question was answered by a development of the Pythagorean theory of reincarnation [possibly "borrowed" from the Hindus]. As he explains in the *Meno* and *Phaedrus*, our souls are immortal but subject to a cycle of births in mortal bodies. They spend more time out of the body than in it, and in the disembodied state have the opportunity of seeing the Forms direct and clear. The experience of birth and contamination with the body causes forgetfulness, but the imperfect sensible approximations to the Forms may stimulate recollection of the Forms themselves. To see things – whether moral actions, circles and triangles or instances of physical beauty – which are all imperfect, could never of itself, in Plato's view, implant in our minds the knowledge of perfection, nor could we abstract from them a standard by which to discriminate between them; but [Plato assumed, one's "soul" can recall such perfection from its previous experiences].

Of course, not all subsequent Greek philosophers agreed with Plato's silliness – and with his arrogance that he (unlike Socrates) knew "the Truth". For example, as I'll be showing you, both Aristotle and Epicurus recognized and criticized such ideas for being the data-less speculations that they were. Yet, especially after Alexander ("the Great") established the city of Alexandria in Egypt, where scholars congregated and the great library had copies (or originals) of all the world's literature, the Egyptians, Chaldeans, Zoroastrians, various Jewish sects (especially the Essenes and the Pharisees), and later Greek philosophers (especially the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria, who lived at approximately the same time as Jesus allegedly lived and whose writings are almost simply interpretations of the Old Testament using Pythagorean mathematical ideas, Stoic allegories, and Plato's analogies) gorged themselves on Plato's ideas – and defecated out the essence of Christianity. That is, Christianity (and therefore Mormonism) is little more than an odd concoction of Judaism mixed in with ideas of the Egyptians, Mesopotamians, Persians, and Greeks.

### HEBREW IDEAS ABOUT "THE AFTERLIFE"

To substantiate the statements in the previous paragraph will require an enormous effort – the bulk of which I've pushed back to the excursion Yx. Consequently, Dear, again I must ask for your patience and here give you only a brief outline. Thus, here I want just to sketch that there are

\* Go to other chapters *via*

indications, also, of substantial changes in the Hebrew ideas of “the afterlife” – as shown in the Bible.

With the Bible, however, compared with the cases of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and Homer’s books, there’s a major complication. It’s source is that the Bible is much more complicated, in part because it’s so long (more than 1,000 pages), in part because it’s the product of hundreds (?) of “original” authors, and in part because portions of it were recorded perhaps as long ago as 1000 BCE – but then all the parts were “mashed together” and edited (or “redacted”), during the period from about 450 – 400 BCE, when the Jews were in Babylon (with the editing/ mashing / rewriting / redacting probably led by Ezra and “co-conspirators”). And I use the derogatory term “co-conspirators”, because for reasons that I’ll present in later chapters, my conclusion is that the prime goal of Ezra *et al.* was to foist off a new, Persian-approved religion on the Hebrews.

But be that as it may be (and in contrast to the evidence from Mesopotamia quoted above – and, in fact, also in contrast to the substantial criticism that I’ll be levying against the ancient Hebrews), there are indications in the Bible that most ancient Hebrews had a much more reasonable (even modern!) view of death, uncontaminated by Egyptian pollution about “the afterlife”. I “tempered” that praise of the Hebrews, because for many reasons (details of which I’ll show you in later chapters), it’s difficult to determine the ideas of the Hebrews, since it’s difficult to know which if any parts of the Bible can be trusted to even hint at their history. In particular, as I’ll be showing you in later chapters: 1) many statements in the Bible are contradicted by other statements in the Bible, 2) many statements in the Bible are modifications by later priests of unknown earlier statements, and 3) many statements in the Bible are from non-Hebrew sources. But ignoring such (major!) complications for now, below I’ll provide a couple of quotations from the Bible (from the King James Version), quotations that may give you at least some indication of what at least some ancient Hebrews apparently thought of death.

One of the Old Testament’s descriptions of death (or the grave or “Sheol”) is in *Book of Job* (which I’ll return to in a later chapter, which is of unknown age and authorship, but which I expect was written either by a Persian-born author sometime after Zoroaster or by a Greek-born author sometime after about 500 BCE). In particular, at *Job 7, 9–10* there is:

\* Go to other chapters *via*

As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away, so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more. He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more.

Stated in “less flowery language”, this author’s proposal is that, when people die, they’re dead!

Another example is from *Ecclesiastes* (which is the Greek word for ‘Teacher’), whose authorship Jewish tradition assigns to King Solomon (an assignment that’s contradicted even by the author of *Ecclesiastes*!), but which was more likely written by a Greek-born author (or a Hebrew author strongly influenced by Greek philosophers) sometime after Alexander the Great (~350 BCE). Thus at *Ecclesiastes* 9, 10 is found:

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.

If again the English is simplified, this statement’s description of death is that, when people die, they’re dead!

Now, Dear, again I want to “beg off” showing you details about “changing ideas of life after death” contained in the Bible. I’ll show you some details in subsequent chapters (in **J1** and especially in the excursions **Qx** and **Yx**), but in total, it’s a huge undertaking. Also, you can find many articles on the internet dealing with the topic, as well as large portions of many books (e.g., see the 2004 book by Alan F. Segal entitled *Life after Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion*). Here, to try to give you at least an overview of the subject, I’ll first quote the following from the recent, online book by Graham Lawrence entitled *The Fallible Gospels*:<sup>4</sup>

Originally, Judaism had no concepts of resurrection and an afterlife. There was no justification for such ideas in the earliest documents, and no hint of an idea such as the immortality of the soul. The original Israelite view of death was gloomy rather than comforting, an eternal sleep in the shadowy realm known as Sheol. In *I Samuel* 28, 7–21, the dead prophet Samuel is summoned back from Sheol by the Witch of Endor, giving us a rare reference to ancient traditions related to this subject.

The Sadducees did not believe in survival beyond death, and they rejected the idea of the resurrection of the dead as a popular superstition, a novelty that was not

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<sup>4</sup> Formerly available at <http://freespace.virgin.net/graham.lawrence/gospelintro.htm>; most unfortunately, the book seems to be no longer available on the internet.

authorized by the Torah. As far as they were concerned, the relationship of a Jew with his God had to be worked out in this world.

Resurrection, along with many other popular ideas at that time, had originated with the Babylonian Exile [i.e., when some of the Hebrews were captured and forcefully moved to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar's troops] [and] were not just with the prophets of that time but also with the exposure of the Jews to the influence of Persian religious concepts and attitudes. These included a more optimistic view of an afterlife, a Last Judgment, and a war between powers of good and evil [which was the Persian idea, as concocted by Zarathustra, possibly from his exposure to Egyptian or Indian ideas]. The resurrection of the dead for a Last Judgment, to reward the blessed and punish the damned, was established in the *Book of Isaiah* (26, 19). Isaiah mentioned the Day of the Lord in Chapter 2, and later chapters go on at some length about judgment and salvation as well as the destruction of earthly powers or the old world order. These ideas were later reinforced by the *Book of Daniel* (12, 2) [which was written centuries later]:

Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.

As for heaven, for the Jews this was the domain of God, not of the souls of the dead. The idea that the souls of the righteous went to heaven after death grew up with Christianity, although it co-existed with rather than replaced the hope of resurrection. This was a bit silly, really. If the righteous are already in Paradise at the right hand of God, there would not be an awful lot of point in bringing them back from the dead as well. If you are going to Heaven rather than Sheol when you die, why should you need to look forward to the establishment of a Kingdom of God on Earth?

In summary – and unfortunately for certain grandchildren – the shift in Hebrew concepts of “the afterlife” (from the realistic views illustrated by the above quotes from *Job* and *Ecclesiastes* to the possibility of “happy ever-aftering”) appears to have been primarily caused by the Hebrews' exposure to the ideas of the Persians (who in turn may have been influenced both by the Indians and the Egyptians) and to the ideas of the Greeks (at least, those Greeks who were influenced by Pythagoras and Plato).

As for the major shift in “Biblical ideas” about “the afterlife” [from the earlier ideas in the Old Testament, to ideas that first appear in the Book of Daniel (which wasn't written, as claimed, when the Jews were in Babylon, but ~300 years later) and then to the ideas that dominate the New Testament], describing them and their possible causes is an enormous undertaking, which as I already stated, I'll deter until the excursions **Qx** and **Yx**. For now, instead, I'll begin termination of both this “excursion” (**Ix**) and this “Part 2” of this book.

## CLOSING COMMENTS ON THIS “PART 2”

You might remember, Dear, that my analogy for this Part 2 was walking with you on one of my southern trails, down and then back up the hill (where, you might recall, you wanted to take an excursion from “the beaten path” to see those bleached animal bones). And here, as when walking on that hill, it might be good to stop for a few minutes, to take a break, have a look at the view, check what’s already been traveled, and consider how far there’s yet to go.

In Part 2 of this book, my goal was to begin to respond to a certain four-year-old’s question: “Why don’t you believe in God?” My succinct answer is: “Because belief in god (any god) is bad science and even worse policy.” And what I tried to do in this Part 2 is to explain what I mean by saying that belief in God is “bad science”; in the next part of this book, Part 3, I’ll try to show you what I mean by the second clause of my indictment, i.e., belief in god (any god) is “even worse policy”.

Although a certain four-year old didn’t know it, her question (rephrased as “Why don’t you believe in the *existence* of God?”) was an “ontological question”, where ‘ontology’ literally means “existence theory”. For the past 2500 years or so, such ontological questions have caused an enormous number of very intelligent people enormous difficulties. And what I tried to show you at the beginning of this Part 2 was, that all these very intelligent people were basically wasting their time, making a mountain out of what is actually little more than a proverbial mole hill, because the existence of anything can be addressed only phenomenologically; that is, by performing experiments, i.e., by application of the scientific method.

Stated differently, the fundamental question is not one of ontology (the study of existence) but of epistemology (the study of knowledge). Meanwhile, during the most recent 500-or-so years, perhaps humanity’s major achievement has been widespread appreciation that knowledge of Nature is derived *via* the scientific method. Consistently, to explain why I describe belief in any god as bad science, I first tried to outline for you what “good science” is, namely, careful application of the scientific method: collect and analyze data, succinctly summarize the data with a hypothesis that’s consistent with well-established scientific principles (such as those of logic) and that has testable predictions, perform experiments that test those

predictions, collect and analyze the data from those experiments, and continue – without end. I then tried to show you that “the God hypothesis” (or more generally, any speculation about anything “supernatural”) fails miserably to meet such requirements.

Subsequently in the **I**-chapters, I tried to show you that even the concept of ‘belief’ (and similarly, ‘faith’) reveals mental slothfulness, usually derived from unwisely transferred confidence and trust (e.g., in parents). Instead of adopting a belief in anything, associated probabilities should be evaluated. As a case in point, I suggested that the probability of the existence of God is the smallest number I’ve ever encountered, namely, somewhere in the range from about 1 chance in  $10^{200}$  to one chance in  $10^{1000}$ ! That your parents, your Church, and your society indoctrinated you to believe in something with such an almost unimaginably small probability of existing is, itself, almost unimaginable – save for the understandable gullibility of children, the cupidity of clerics, and the power mongering of politicians, which are topics that I’ll get to in the next part of this book, dealing with the second clause of my indictment: “belief in god is bad science and even worse policy.”

In this “excursion” **Ix**, now being concluded, I tried to show you at least a little about what seems to have been the origins of “the god idea”, as well as the origins of ideas about “spirits”, “immortal souls”, and other weird stuff (such as “heaven” and “hell”) none of which has the tiniest crumb of evidential support. That is, all ideas about anything “supernatural” are “mere speculations”, and therefore, such ideas definitely reflect “bad science”.

In particular, as I tried to show you, archaeological and anthropological evidence suggest that first ideas about “the supernatural” seem to have been speculations that people had “souls” (or “spirits” or “second selves”) that continued to exist after bodies died. Archaeological data suggest that this “soul theory” is at least 100,000 years old. Anthropological data suggest that our ancient ancestors concocted this “soul theory” to “explain” their shadows, their optical reflections (e.g., in pools of water), their dreams, and their hallucinations (some of which were probably induced by ingesting mind-warping chemicals from various plants).

I also showed you at least a few of the huge number of myths concocted by primitive people and suggested that the origin of the “god idea” was probably the commendable twin goals of primitive people: (i) to identify

\* Go to other chapters *via*

causes of the huge number of observed but unexplained effects and (ii) to attempt to gain, if not control, then at least influence on these powerful causes. I then at least tried to outline some of the “wild and wooly” tales (some derived from observations of the stars) that have led to the crazy concoctions of religions that still pollute the minds of so many humans.

To be sure, credit is due our ancient ancestors for concocting their “soul theory”, well described by the world’s first anthropology professor (Edward Burnett Tylor, 1832–1917) as “the world’s first metaphysical theory”. In fact, not only does it appear to be the world’s first metaphysical theory, it’s probably the world’s most widespread and widely adopted metaphysical theory: it’s lasted for ~100,000 years, and today, the majority of people still seem to believe it! The slight problem with the theory, however (as I began to show you in **If**), is that it’s wrong: not only do no data directly support the “soul theory”, speculations from indirect evidence (which led to the “soul theory”) are incorrect.

Yet (and again), I readily admit that credit is due the primitive people who concocted both “the soul theory” and “the god theory”. Both sets of speculations are so “deliciously simple” that even children (and those with childish minds) readily understand the theories and willingly adopt them as “true”. Superficially, these “theories” appear to be amazingly simple, complete, and capable of “explaining” a huge range of phenomena. Unfortunately, though, such appearances are entirely superficial; in fact, they’re deceptive.

To explain why I describe “the soul theory” and “the god theory” as “deceptive” is another major undertaking. Here, I’ll just summarize with the following points, each of which I’ll try to explain in later chapters.

- Not only are these theories not “simple”, they’re the antithesis of simplicity. In information theory, the concept of ‘simplicity’ can be related (elegantly, accurately, and practically) to the size of the most compact computer-code able to provide complete description of the process or phenomenon. And although the words ‘soul’ and ‘god’ certainly seem to be simple (they’re even just one-syllable words!), yet I dare you, Dear, to try to write a computer code to describe them. (Actually, though, I recommend that you don’t accept that challenge, Dear, because the task would devour the rest of your life: a computer code to describe God, for example, would make the million-or-so lines of this word processor’s computer code look like child’s play!)
- Not only are these theories not complete, practically speaking, they’re so incomplete as to be completely useless – except when parents want to terminate questions from

inquisitive children (e.g., with “Because God wants you to do it!”) and when clerics want to establish con games (fleecing people, to avoid working for a living). For example, the theories are incapable of answering relevant questions such as: “Where did God come from?”, “What does God want?”, and “If God is omnipotent, how can we still want anything?” In fact, the theories explain nothing; they simply use the words ‘God’ and ‘soul’ in place of the more honest expression: “I dunno”.

- In addition, “the soul theory” and “the god theory” aren’t “true” in the “open system” known as ‘reality’. Instead, they’re merely assumptions or premisses adopted in “closed systems”, similar to arbitrary assumptions made in games [such as the assumption that “three strikes and you’re out” in the game called ‘baseball’, the assumption that “ $1 + 2 = 3$ ” in the game called “pure mathematics” (whereas, for example, if you add one mole of oxygen to two moles of hydrogen, then in reality, you get not three but only two moles of water, i.e.,  $1 + 2 = 2$ ), the assumption that “Jesus is the son of God” in the (word) games called ‘Christianity’ and ‘Mormonism’, and the assumption that “the angel Gabriel conveyed messages from Allah to Muhammad” in the (word) game called ‘Islam’].

In fact, as I’ll address later in this book (starting in Part 3), not only are these theories (better, “speculations”) deceptive, they’re dangerous, because of resulting personal and public policies that have followed from them. And actually, that such speculations yield “even worse policy” should be expected, since they’re based on ignorance (of natural causes, camouflaging such ignorance with the words ‘God’ and ‘soul’), on fear (of unknowns, especially fear of death), and on greed. The prime greed was (and still is) to get something for essentially nothing: the clerics sought pay, prestige, and power at a cost of just conning people into believing in the clerics’ data-less speculations, while the people’s greed was for eternal life in paradise, simply by obeying the clerics.

Which leads me to comment on what strange animals we humans are! In this part of the universe, as far as is known, we’re the only animals that get so hung-up on ideas. Sometimes, such hang-ups are great: when our ideas conform to reality, they can be not only important but even critical for our survival. Other times, however, when our ideas are mere speculations, they can lead us astoundingly and dangerously astray, not only threatening our survival but even leading to our extermination.

I know that the above comments are trivially obvious, Dear, but please think about them for a minute. To begin, think about the obvious fact that, in our long history, humans have had a huge number of ideas (e.g., about how to start a fire, how to make hunting tools, how to grow crops, how to use

wheels and an axle to move things, etc.), and so long as tests of the ideas yielded hypothesized results (i.e., so long as the scientific method was applied, i.e., “guess, test, and re-assess”), the idea (usually) led to valuable results.

For example, some people may have thought to implore Zeus (or Prometheus) for fire, but the brilliant human who tested the idea that fire could be started by rubbing two sticks together or by creating sparks using flint is the one whose idea provided the rest of us with so many benefits. In stunning contrast are the consequences of adopting so many ideas so totally divorced from reality, i.e., either with no data supporting their formulation or with no new data obtained to test associated predictions of the hypothesis. They’re simply guesses!

I agree that some animals can learn some ideas and do behave as if the ideas were important. For example, every German shepherd in whose company I’ve been “blessed” has responded “gleefully” when I asked: “Do ya wanna go for a walk?” Of course, it would take few times of my asking that question, and demonstrating what it meant (by taking my dog for a walk), before the dog learned what it meant; that is, before the dog associated my question with something that was “real”. In contrast, think of how many thousands of times religious people are asked (in effect): “Do you wanna go to Heaven?” Similar to my German shepherds, religious people respond gleefully to that question, but there is a huge difference: never once has any person obtained confirmation that the word ‘heaven’ is anything more than just a word!

Surely you agree that it’s strange. First, obviously nobody (whosoever!) has ever had any data (whatsoever!) dealing with “life after death”. Therefore, all speculations about “life after death” – all beliefs about “life after death” – all opinions about “life after death” – all arguments about “life after death” – have been based (and continue to be based) on absolutely zero data. Thereby, surely all resulting (religious) arguments about “the afterlife”, about Heaven and Hell, etc., have been (and continue to be) the world’s greatest, most blatant examples of arguing from ignorance (*argumentum ad ignorantium*). Equally obvious, however, is that the lack of data didn’t (and doesn’t) stop primitive people from speculating on “what happens after you die”. Instead, the lack of data seems to stimulate people’s thoughts to take off in “flights of fancy” – again revealing the dangers of letting other people control your imagination.

The Russian scientist Ivan Pavlov (1849–1936, winner of the 1904 Nobel Prize in Physiology) famously found that dogs, fed simultaneously with various stimuli (ringing of a bell, whistles, electric shocks, visual stimuli, etc.), would soon “learn” to begin salivating in response to just the stimuli. Religious people, in contrast, apparently don’t need confirmation with real reward to be trained: they begin salivating just by hearing Church bells ring, hearing the *adhan* recited by the *muezzin* from a Muslim *minaret*, and similar. “Eternal life in Paradise” – drool, drool, drool.

One might wonder: who in their right minds would behave in such a manner? Who would adopt ideas based on zero data? Who in their right minds would live their lives based on guesses? And the answer, of course, is that no one in his or her “right mind” would adopt ideas totally divorced from reality! Most unfortunately, however, the majority of people in the world are apparently not “in their right minds”, because although there’s not a single shred of data supporting the concept, they’ve adopted the idea that they’ll experience “life after death”. For example, according to data from a 2008 survey,<sup>5</sup> three quarters of all Americans “believe” in “life after death” – even though, as I’ve reviewed in these **Ix**-chapters, the concept is nothing but wishful “thinking”, originally concocted by savages.

But setting such behaviors aside, I should again acknowledge that, in this “excursion”, I didn’t complete my diggings into trying to understand the changes in ideas about gods and souls that have occurred during the past 5,000-or-so years. One reason is because deciphering such changes is enormously complex and convoluted, some of which I’ll try to show you in the “excursion” **Yx**. Nonetheless, here (and partially for the fun on it!), I’ll at least mention that, over the centuries, the cost of “eternal life in paradise” has been steadily decreasing, while the alleged accommodations, there, have been steadily improving! Thus, in Egypt in ~2500 BCE, only the pharaohs could afford the trip; for the believing ancient Greeks, to have a happy eternity, people would basically need to be heroes; by the time of “Saint” Paul, basically all that was needed for “believing Christians” was to demonstrate belief in the Christian myth; the merchant Muhammad offered still more for less (each man would have 72 virgins in Paradise, if only he’d abide by a few simple rules, such as praying five times a day); and offering still more for even less, Joseph Smith promised obeying Mormon men that,

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<sup>5</sup> Available at <http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/report2religious-landscape-study-key-findings.pdf>.

in their “after-life”, they’d be gods! Surely it won’t be long before some con-artist clerics offer absolutely everything for totally nothing – save, of course, for paying the con artists to continue selling their snake oil.

Another reason (why I didn’t complete my diggings into trying to understand the changes in ideas about gods and souls) is because, first, I want to address a question that a certain grandchild might already be asking, namely, “Who cares?” If you were to ask such a question, Dear, my response would be: I think everyone should “care”, because one’s outlook on death can influence – even dominate – one’s perception of one’s life. That is, I think that a compelling argument can be made that, for many people, their most important idea is about what happens after they die – because it dictates how they live.

As contrasting examples, consider first the opinion about death shared by essentially all Humanists. As I quoted in an earlier chapter, the Greek philosopher Epicurus (341–270 BCE) described it well:

[It follows that] death is nothing to us. For all good and evil consist in sensation, but death is deprivation of sensation. And therefore a right understanding that death is nothing to us makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not because it adds to it an infinite span of time, but because it takes away the craving for immortality. For there is nothing terrible in life for the man who has truly comprehended that there is nothing terrible in not living... [Death should not] concern either the living or the dead, since for the former it is not, and the latter are no more.

That is, in my own words (as I wrote in an earlier chapter): *Death, you’ll find, you’ll never know; you can’t be aware of a lack of awareness.* For Humanists, consequently, dismissing concerns about what happens after we die permits us to live this (our only) life as fully and as meaningfully as we can. For contrast, consider terrorist “suicide bombers”: they blow themselves up for their jihad, firm in their belief (their “wish to be”) that they’ll then proceed directly to paradise.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> And now, Dear, in this revision of this chapter, I can add what for you is an even more poignant example of how ideas about “the afterlife” can influence (even dominate) ideas about this, one’s only life. Thus, consider your mother. As far as I can make it out, she divorced your father in large part because, now that he rejects Mormonism, she believes what her mother told her: that he’s “no longer any use” to her, since he’ll no longer be available to whisper her secret name to her, which she has been indoctrinated to believe she needs to enter into her imagined “celestial heaven” in her imagined “afterlife”. I therefore recommend, Dear, that you never underestimate either the power of childhood indoctrination or the influence that thoughts about death can have on a person’s life (and on the lives of members of the person’s family).

And I want to add: all of it seems both so very sad and so very strange. What to me is sad is that belief in the oxymoronic idea of “life after death” seems to be an especially “fatal attraction” for downtrodden people (those who are subjugated, oppressed, demoralized, despondent...). Maybe that explains why so many downtrodden women whole-heartedly embrace even the male-chauvinist Christian, Muslim, and Mormon religions and why such religions commonly thrive during times of seemingly hopeless personal problems, demoralizing economic conditions, and/or oppressive political regimes (e.g., as currently common in many Islamic nations).

And what to me is so strange is that the people who embrace the oxymoronic belief in “life after death” are primarily the blockheads of the world (the least intelligent, the least educated, and those with the biggest egos). That such people are firmly convinced that they’ll live forever in paradise and that their god wants their company for eternity, I can understand. But why would any god want the company of such ignorant, arrogant people?!

And another reason (why I didn’t complete my diggings into trying to understand the changes in ideas about gods and souls that have occurred during the past 5,000-or-so years) is because the changes can’t be adequately understood without simultaneously appreciating the quest of all clerics to gain and maintain their control over the people (and their money). As an illustration of clerical greed and power mongering, consider the murder of individuals from Socrates to John Lennon and the slaughter of so many people (from the people the Bible claims the Israelites massacred as they emerged from Egypt to the people who were killed in the bombing of the World Trade Center, as part of an Islamic Jihad).

In subsequent chapters, I’ll try to fill in some of the gaps I’ve left in describing the evolution of ideas about gods and souls, describe the “policy part” of my statement that “Belief in god (any god) is bad science and even worse policy”, and show you some of the evils perpetrated by various priesthoods. First, however, I want to show you some fundamental ideas about ‘good’ vs. ‘evil’, ‘justice’, ‘kindness’, ‘love’, ‘morality’, and so on. That’s my goal for the next part (Part 3) of this book (in chapters **J** through **P**). Meanwhile, I hope your immediate goal is to get some more exercise!