

Ix11 – Changing Ideas about “Life after Death”

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

Ideas about “the afterlife” are of course contained in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, in Homer’s *Odyssey*, and in the Bible, but 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), 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 show you soon, it seems 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 some later cleric.

To start to provide you with some evidence to support the statements of the previous paragraph, let me show 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!

Here, I'll just mention a few lines from a myth recorded in Ancient Sumer about 5,000 years ago – but that may have been around from multi-thousand of years earlier, i.e., created during the Age of Gemini (or the Age of Adam and Eve). You can find a translation of this myth from an ancient Sumerian clay tablet at many websites, including at the wonderful web site: “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”, she had to agree to the 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 the change in seasons (from growth to dormancy of vegetation).

In fact, similar myths about 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 such “explanations” aside, the point that I wanted to make was the early ideas about death (or “the nether world”) that the Inanna-Damuzi or Isis-Osiris or Adonis-Persephone myths reveal: in such views, in death, 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 let me mention two points from the Inanna-Damuzi myth. One point deals with why

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Damuzi had to trade places with Inanna in the nether world. Thus, most of the other gods wouldn't help her, stating: "Who, having got to that place, 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 said to her: "If I show you where your man is, what will be my reward?" And although her total response has been lost, enough of it remains to get the picture [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 OT story about Adam and Eve).

But pushing such silliness aside, let me 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. 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, even for the gods), 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 it has been assumed to be the case 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, 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 upon, 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...”

Now, let me show you another translation.¹

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. 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...”

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

“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!

Now, 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 his 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.

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”!]. “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 it 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 about the possibility of a happy “afterlife” in Tablet XII are obviously very different from the ideas about “the horror-filled house of

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death” in Tablet VII. But as maybe you saw on the internet, there are many unanswered questions about Tablet XII. Certainly it’s out of order – because the start of the description of Enkidu’s dream about death is on Tablet VII; so, why would the rest of that “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 and East had swept across all of Mesopotamia and taken control of at least the northern portion of Egypt; the 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 and use of the 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 or not 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 stupidity) 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, there is their *Book of the Dead* (and its forerunner, *The Pyramid Texts*). As you 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

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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 they’re extensive. Yet, they are significant to you, because the Mormon “profit” Joseph Smith passed off a part of the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* [or their *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, let me just say that by 2000 BCE, it seems that most Egyptians were convinced not only that there was an “afterlife” 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”.

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 Plato polluted the Greeks with ideas from Egypt and Mesopotamia, Pythagoras (c. 582–500 BCE) polluted the Greeks with the idea of re-incarnation (an idea that possibly he 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.

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*

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Proserpine left his understanding even in death, but the other ghosts flit about aimlessly”...

And though I’ve just begun to quote Homer, Dear, let me apologize to you for the interruption 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 description of the House of Hades! Nonetheless, this movie 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, 3,000 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 (also 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 the god 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; therefore, 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 (their two seasons of) summer and winter, 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! Let me 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 out 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 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

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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 over 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 tell 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 one the most famous summaries 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) so that a person could 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 concept (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 (c. 428–348 BCE). Plato was a student of Socrates (469–399 BCE), and that Socrates continued to be a "realist" is well illustrated by the following (stunning!) statement (to which

* Go to other chapters *via*

I've added the italics) that Socrates made at his trial, in his “defense”, with his student Plato in an attendance.²

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.

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

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

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 made by any agnostic (i.e., with $a =$ ‘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 it was constructed centuries earlier by the Egyptians and by Persian and Chaldean astrologers) but for pouring the concrete for Christianity (and therefore, for Islam and Mormonism).

Which again puts me in a quandary. To adequately support that 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 chapter (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 death 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

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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] 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.

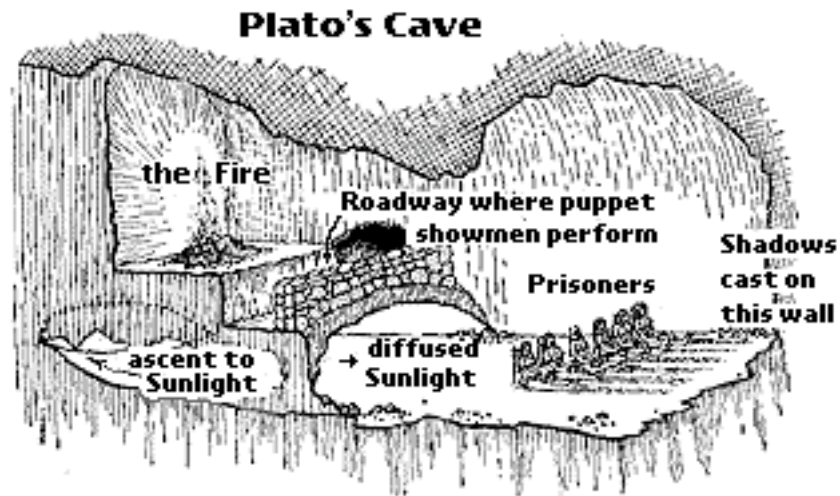
You have shown me a strange image, and they are strange prisoners.

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) – although there is 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.³

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 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] 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*

³ Copied from <http://www.elopos.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.

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 (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 Hellenistic Judaism: an odd concoction of Judaism mixed in with Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Persian, and Greek mythology.

Now, 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, again I must ask for your patience and here give you only a brief outline. Thus, here I just want to sketch that there are indications, also, of substantial changes in the Hebrew ideas of "the afterlife" – as shown in the Bible. Already, though, there is a major complications (compared with the cases of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and Homer's books), in 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-

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conspirators”, because 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 on the Ancient Hebrews for all their stupidities), there are indications in the Bible that at least some Ancient Hebrews had a much more reasonable (even modern!) view of death, uncontaminated by Egyptian pollution about “the afterlife”. Now, 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, let me give you 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 of the 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:

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 is contradicted by the author of *Ecclesiastes!*), but which was more likely written by a Greek-born author (or a Hebrew author strongly influenced by a Greek philosopher) 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.

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

Now 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. Here, to try to give you at least an overview of the subject, let me first quote the following from the recent, online book by Graham Lawrence entitled *The Fallible Gospels*:⁴

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 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 Nebuchanezzar'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 Zoroaster, possibly from 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.”

⁴ Available at <http://freespace.virgin.net/graham.lawrence/gospelintro.htm>.

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 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 essentially overrun the entire New Testament, describing them and their possible causes is an enormous undertaking, which as I already stated, I’ll deter until the (massive!) excursions **Qx** and **Yx**. In an abbreviated summary, the principal culprits in the stupidity seem to be Zoroaster, Pythagoras, Plato, Philo of Alexandria, and “Saint” Paul (and then later, Muhammad and various “bit players” such as Sidney Rigdon and Joseph Smith of Mormon infamy). You might notice that I didn’t include Jesus in this list of “culprits”, for reasons that I’ll get to later. From all of which, Dear, I’d like to suggest (and then outline) two ideas for your consideration.

One idea is that (obviously) there are different “schools of thought” about what happens to people when they die, and the other idea is that, these different “schools of thought” have very long histories. As a “first cut”, maybe only two schools of thought should be identified, which I’ll label as “southern” vs. “northern”. Representative of “northern” ideas about “the afterlife” are the ideas of the Sumerians, the earlier Greeks, and to some extent the Jews (especially those who were later called “the Sadducees”); representative of the “southern” ideas about “the afterlife” are those of the Egyptians, Indians, Jews who were later labeled “Pharisees” and “Essenes”, and then later the Christians (the original ones of course being Jews), Muslims, and Mormons.

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For “the northerners”, life was most important. Illustrative is the statement by the ghost of Achilles:

Say not a word...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...

Similar gruesome pictures of “the afterlife” were painted in the myths of your more-easily-identified ancestors from northern Europe.

In contrast to the gruesome pictures of “life after death” painted by “the northerners (including the early Mesopotamians, Greeks, and Romans), early people “from the South” (particularly from Egypt and India) proposed much more prosperous fates for their souls – subject, of course, to some conditions on one’s behavior during life! Unfortunately, though, it will take me many chapters to suggest how these “southern people” developed their speculations and how these speculations were manipulated by such “northerners” as Zoroaster, Pythagoras, Plato, Philo, “Saint” Paul, and many others, to incorporate the “southern ideas” into northern religions. Consequently, here I’ll just outline some ideas that I hope you’ll consider.

I suspect that the shifts in both Mesopotamian concepts of “the afterlife” (as revealed in the strange mixture of ideas in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*) and similarly in Greek concepts (e.g., as revealed in Homer’s books) almost certainly were a result of exposure to Egyptian ideas. The principal idea about “the afterlife” that came out of Egypt and eventually spread through Europe via Christianity was not Achilles’ idea that “the good” was to be found in this life, but that “the good” was to be found in the next life. Certainly this weird idea was useful for leaders to sell to the downtrodden (including slaves) – but it’s so sad that, in this wonderful time in which we live, certain beautiful and brilliant grandchildren have been indoctrinated with such a pessimistic attitude on life – especially since, in all the thousands and thousand of years of such stupidity, not even the smallest crumb of data has ever been found to support the weird and ridiculous speculations about souls and “life-after-death!

Surely you would agree that it’s strange. First, obviously nobody (whosoever!) has ever had any data (whatsoever!) dealing with “life after death”. Consequently, all speculations about “life after death” – all beliefs about “life after death” – all opinions about “life after death” – all

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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 ignorantiam*). 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 have stimulated people’s thoughts to take off in “flights of fancy”!

In an earlier chapter in this excursion (e.g., in **Ix2**), I suggested that such fanciful thoughts first appeared in the remote past, perhaps tens of thousands of years ago. Possibly from experiences with their dreams, their shadows, and their images (e.g., in pools of water), people apparently became convinced that they possessed “souls” that “continued” after their bodies “gave up the ghost”. Evidence suggesting such a conclusion includes various objects buried with the dead, such as red ochreous powder. But unless some future archaeologist discovers some evidence for writing from tens of thousands of years ago, and unless there’s some writing found with red ochreous powder that states “Just add water”, we can only speculate about what primitive people were thinking. Who knows, it may be as your grandmother suggested (probably just to cause me trouble!): “Maybe ancient people buried people’s belongings with them, so that their would-be heirs wouldn’t fight over inheritances.”

In any event, imagine how it must have been before people learned something about how the brain works. No doubt essentially everyone had some idea about his or her own individuality (and uniqueness), as well as a huge number of other ideas. Also, I presume that people “knew” that somehow their ideas were “in their heads”, because I assume that, even in prehistoric times, people got headaches – which have a tendency to interfere with other ideas! Yet, maybe that’s incorrect: I recall reading that, although the ancient Egyptians went to amazing efforts to preserve the organs of dead people, they threw away the dead person’s brain – presumably because they couldn’t figure out its purpose!

In any case, surely prehistoric people obtained hints that all was not as it first seemed to be. They saw their own shadows, which would mysteriously move as they moved and which would usually vanish at night. They also saw their reflections in pools of water, and these “images” (as in the word “imagination”!) would mysteriously appear and disappear. And almost

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certainly the people had dreams when sleeping – and amazingly, in their dreams the people could “be elsewhere”, even though their companions would say that the dreamers’ bodies didn’t leave.

Actually, as I’ve remarked before, the link between dreams or other “altered states of consciousness” (e.g., as induced by meditation or by hallucinogens) and “the spirit world” seems to have been (and continues to be) fundamental to all “mysticism” and associated mystical religions, including Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, and Mormonism. Most Hindus chant, many Christians repeat mind-numbing phrases, Muslims frequently fast (which can alter brain activity), and most Mormons are kept so busy with “church activities” that they have no time to think for themselves. As even more dramatic examples, recall the identification by prehistoric Australian Aborigines of the ancient *alchera* or “dream time”, the use by Native Americans of drums, chants, and various hallucinogens, the use by Ancient Egyptian, Persian, and followers of various Mid-Eastern “mystery religions” of other hallucinogens (e.g., from “the tree of knowledge”), the possible use of narcotics by Greek mystics such as Pythagoras and Plato... through to the widespread use of a variety of hallucinatory drugs by so many people during the 20th Century and their subsequent adoption of a variety of mystical, “new-age” religions (as well as Zen Buddhism, Evangelical Christianity, Islam, and Mormonism), thereby replacing one “drug habit” with another.

But putting drug use and mysticism aside for now, it seems obvious that at some time in the remote past (before writing became available), the human brain developed sufficiently for people to realize that they would die. (Animals apparently don’t realize that they will die – for otherwise, for example, surely cattle wouldn’t so be so docile when being herded to be slaughtered.) Certainly ancient people must have had extensive experience with death – far more experience than the vast majority of modern people. For example, as old as I am, I’ve never yet seen a dead person. Yet, I’ve had experience with dead animals – but again, surely not so much experience as ancient people. Thereby, imagine what people must have thought about death – especially their own death and beyond the obvious thought that, whatever death was, their own was to be avoided: corpses didn’t appear to be comfortable and their odor was horrible.

Once people realized that they would die, then as with all animals that are afraid of the unknown, no doubt they became afraid. Even for the vast majority of “modern people”, they can’t seem to cope with the idea that,

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when a person dies, when blood stops flowing to the brain, when the activity of all neurons stops, all ideas just disappear: not “pop goes the weasel” but “poof” goes all ideas. For many people, apparently it isn’t a happy thought that, after all those years of cramming ideas into one’s brain, after all that mental activity and with all those memories, they’ll just go “poof.” No wonder that the oxymoron “life after death” has such appeal; no wonder that the Hindus, Christians, Moslems, ... Mormons cling to their religions so strenuously!

And actually, to me it’s rather amazing that so many Jewish people continued to cling to their religion so long, even though (as I sketched above and will show you in detail in later chapters), in it’s “unpolluted” form (unpolluted by Egyptian and Persian speculations about “life-after-death”), Judaism makes no claims about knowledge of what happens to people when they die. On the other hand, maybe those who are so dumb as to “think” that they’re “God’s chosen people” also “think” that whatever happens after death, they’ll get first choice! Yet, I doubt that the majority of Jewish people still “believe” such silliness. More likely, I suspect, is that the majority of Jewish people have wisely “come to terms” with their own finite-duration existence, leading them to what I recently heard one say (on TV): “No one loves life as much as the Jews.” In contrast is the idiocy I recently heard espoused by a Muslim suicide bomber: “We love death.”

But also setting that aside for a while, let me continue speculating about ancient ideas about death. Without any data about “life after death”, a huge number of speculations about what happened to people after they died undoubtedly developed – and these ideas have been more-or-less “preserved” in a huge variety of “death myths”. Essentially all of these myths basically reject the possibility that “life” ends with death, no doubt in part because it’s much more pleasant to imagine otherwise. Yet, perhaps people rejected the idea of termination of their own existence, because they had substantial data about renewal and rebirth: if something as apparently so stupid as grass and trees can be “reborn”, then why can’t people?!

Many more examples were obvious. Thus, although the sun [god] “died” every day, it re-appeared the next. Similarly, the moon [god] went through its phases, and then, amazingly, once every (what was later called a) month, the moon was reborn, after being “dead” (i.e., invisible) for three days – just as was later claimed for many other gods and demi-gods, such as Jonah and Jesus. And for those people who didn’t sleep well at night (and didn’t have

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any television to watch!), not only could they see essentially the same pattern of stars, night after night, but for those who watched the stars with sufficient diligence (and kept records, for example, of the “pictures” that they imagined they could see in the stars), then every once and awhile (later to be known as “once a year”), the whole pattern of stars would be “reborn” – with the exception of a few “stars” (later identified as planets) that seemed to wander where they pleased, never reappearing in the same place relative to the other stars, and therefore never needing to be “reborn”. Later, the five visible planets (along with the moon and sun) were therefore identified to be the seven “immortal” gods. Obviously, also, all the stars were “immortal” – each of which (some people thought) was “the soul” of some “departed soul.” For example, as Andrew Benson wrote:⁵

An Egyptian pyramid inscription addressed to King Pepi I (he ruled during the 6th dynasty, c. 2345 – 2182 BCE), reads, “O Pepi, you have gone away [died] to become a spirit, to become powerful as a god... among the spirits, the Imperishable Stars.”

Thus, once writing was invented, we can begin to learn what ancient people thought about death.

From such writings, it appears that by 5,000 years ago, three principal “schools of thought” had developed (each of which developed into associated religions, clinging to the speculated ideas about life-after-death, and each, of course, based on zero data).

- 1) Maybe the original idea of prehistoric people (remnants of which can be seen in ancient Sumerian, Greek, and Roman writings, as well as hints of it in earlier parts of the Old Testament): basically, that death was just something to be avoided, but since (in the end) it couldn't be, then one might as well take along various “odds and ends” that might be essential, such as red ochreous powder, maybe some beads and similar, and one's most trustworthy weapon – just in case!
- 2) The Egyptian and subsequently Persian (Zoroastrian), later Greek and Jewish, Christian (subsequently copied into Mormonism), and Muslim schemes: basically that, after people died, their lives would be judged by various gods, and “appropriate” justice would be meted out to one's surviving “soul”. And

⁵ Copied from his book “The Origins of Christianity and the Bible” at <http://www.religious-studies.info/>.

- 3) In some ways the best of the three schemes, concocted by the first Hindus: that “cause and effect” (which they still call ‘karma’) reigns supreme. In this fanciful scheme, no judgmental god is needed; instead, after your current life, your “soul” moves on to another home – to some lower life-form if you didn’t behave well in this life (bad karma) or to a higher life-form if you did behave well (good karma); a sort of “What goes around, comes around” – for eternity!

And let me add that I described the Hindu scheme with the qualifier “in some ways the best of the three schemes”, because on the one hand, it puts the responsibility on each person to try to do better in this life (so that in the next reincarnation, one’s “soul” will be better off), but on the other hand, data show that it has been the worst of the three schemes.

That is, the horrible aspect of the Hindu scheme is derived in large measure from an idea associated with karma called “dharma”, which means “fulfilling one’s duty in life”. Taken together, karma and dharma instill in each individual a terrible fatalism: you are what you are in this life as a result of your behavior in your prior lives; in particular, your “social station” in this life is a result of how you behaved in your prior life; so, don’t complain about your condition, don’t try to climb out of the hole you find yourself in, don’t fight the social structure, do your duty, do your duty well, and you’ll be better off next time around. As a result, the horrible “caste system” in India has been perpetuated by their clerics for thousands of years, and continues today – of course with the clerics being at the top of the pyramid scheme, because of how well they behaved in prior lives. As Bill Cosby would say: Riiiiiiiiight.

But whereas I don’t expect that you’ll become a Hindu (not because it’s any stupider than any other religion, but solely because, as a child, you weren’t indoctrinated in its teachings), I therefore don’t plan to show you much about Hinduism. Instead, in the remainder of this chapter, I want to show you some data that suggest how, during the ~2,000 years from about 2500 BCE to 500 BCE, Egyptian and Indian stupidities about “life after death” seem to have oozed out of Egypt and India (like some insidious pollution) to contaminate the entire Mediterranean Basin and Near East – and eventually to spread throughout Europe and the Americas. And my reason for emphasizing this spread of Egyptian pollution is that (believe it or not!) about one quarter of the ancient source of Mormonism (and Christianity and Islam) seems to be from Ancient Mesopotamia (or the Neanderthals!), about

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one quarter seems to be from Ancient India, while about half is from Ancient Egypt. Before getting underway, however, I'd like to mention a major "aside".

This aside, dealing with Southern vs. Northern Ideas about Death, contains many ideas that are essentially pure speculation on my part. While searching on the internet I've found some statements that support the speculations that follow (although I'll not provide you with many references, since should you be interested, you can dig into the topic on your own), but I've not seen compelling data (e.g., from DNA analysis) that might change the designation from "speculations" to "hypotheses". And assuming that you don't have a clue about what I'm "getting at", let me introduce the topic by questioning why the data-less concept of "life after death" seems to have first taken root in southern regions (Egypt and India) and still seems to be most persistent in southern regions – across Africa, across the Mid-East through southern Asia, and even to "the Bible Belt" of the U.S. If there's a single cause, is it genetic, climatic, cultural, political – or something else?

That there were differences between "southern" (e.g., Ancient Egyptian) vs. "northern" (e.g., Ancient Mesopotamian) ideas about "life after death" is illustrated by the following quotation.⁶

Comparisons in politics, culture, economics, and society suggest civilizations that varied substantially because of largely separate origins and environments. The distinction in overall tone was striking, with Egypt being more stable and cheerful than Mesopotamia not only in beliefs about gods and the afterlife but in the colorful and lively pictures the Egyptians emphasized in their decorative art. Also striking was the distinction in internal history, with Egyptian civilization far less marked by disruption than its Mesopotamian counterpart.

No doubt Egypt was a special case, both because of its rich agricultural area and because it was fairly well protected, geographically, from invasion (being protected by the desert on the West and the Red Sea on the East, and even invasion from the North wasn't easy).

As for the cause(s) of differences in ideas about "life after death", it's easy to speculate. For example, perhaps life in Ancient Egypt and India was

⁶ Copied from http://ragz-international.com/egypt_and_mesopotamia_compared.htm, in turn from Peter N. Stearns "Egypt and Mesopotamia Compared: The Origins Of Civilizations, The Rise Of Civilization In The Middle East And Africa", 1992.

generally so easy (once people learned how to deal with the annual river-valley floods, which rejuvenated the soil) that they thought that such a pleasant life should continue forever. In contrast, maybe life for “northerners” (e.g., in Northern Europe) was so brutal that they looked forward to an end of their struggles, i.e., to death and oblivion, with some satisfaction. Simultaneously, over thousands of years, maybe some genetic changes “hard wired” attitudes in people’s brains: maybe being “a realist” had no significant survival advantages in southern river valleys, whereas maybe mystical tendencies were soon “weeded out” from northern genes. After people emigrated from Africa, maybe a “realistic gene” became established in Northern Europe (perhaps in the Caucasus Mountain region), and later these “realists” migrated south (as Sumerians, Acadians, and Mycenaean Greeks), defeating the mystical inhabitants. Is that what’s meant in the Mesopotamian myths by ruling the “black-headed people” (from the South)? Does the heat endured by most “modern” Muslims ensure their continued “belief” in the stupidities of Islam – or will air conditioning break their clerics’ stranglehold on the people? Or are Southern people more prone to mysticism?

On the other hand, maybe southern ideas about “life after death” were derived not from a climatic and associated genetic effect but represent a cultural (or social) phenomenon. I suspect that, because of their climate, most “northerners” spent their days and nights somewhat similar to how most of us live ours today: during the days, they were awake and going about their business (e.g., hunting, fishing, and gathering), and during the (cold and frequently cloudy) nights, they gladly slept. In contrast, maybe people in Ancient Egypt and India (and similarly in Ancient Mexico), without air conditioning (!), found it too hot during most days to do much other than sleep in the shade – and then spent many cooler, more enjoyable nights gazing at the stars. From their stargazing and from their greater reliance on agriculture (than was true for northern people), maybe southerners became more aware of cycles and re-birth, whereas maybe northerners became more aware of death and destruction (e.g., of what they hunted). Thereby, maybe differences in ideas about “life after death” can be traced to when different cultures made the transition from hunting and gathering to herding and agriculture (i.e., “husbandry”).

Or as still another possibility, maybe the cause can be traced to politics. In Egypt, in particular, tyrannical rule – with a hierarchal bureaucracy, which they invented (like the pyramids, which they built) – seems to have been

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established thousand of years earlier than in other nations. In such a political climate, maybe the hapless cogs near the bottom of such a machine (who, when not working their farms were kept busy building pyramids) required the fictitious grease of an “afterlife” in order to keep going. Thereby, is belief in an “afterlife” caught in vicious cycle (or Catch-22): stimulated by tyranny, does such a belief then support tyrannical authority of the gods, the clerics, and the rulers? Is this why Islam is so persistent in autocratic Muslim nations? And in contrast, is this why such beliefs generally seem to disappear as people learn how to rule themselves?

But setting aside the original cause of the difference between southern vs. northern ideas of death (without answering all those questions!), let me turn to the question: How did the “mystical pollution” (about an “afterlife”) spread from the South to the North? The answer seems to be a combination of greed, gullibility, and gruesomeness – mixed in with varying amounts of northern mysticism. How much mysticism was added seems to have depended on special circumstances and particular people: a Pythagoras and a Plato here (polluting Greek minds), a Philo of Alexandria and “Saint” Paul there (destroying Roman and later European minds), a Muhammad somewhere else (destroying the minds first of the Arabs and then the minds of people from Morocco to Malaysia), and his own little way, a Sidney Rigdon even here in the U.S. (concocting Mormonism) – each one of them, each being somewhere between being a mystic and a lunatic, had an amazing amount of influence on a lot of ignorant people.

As for the greed and gullibility, again it varied in different times and locations, but there were commonalties. 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 the people into believing in their data-less speculations, while the people’s greed was for eternal life in paradise, simply by obeying the clerics. In fact, it can be somewhat amusing (if it weren’t so sad) to see that, over the centuries, the cost of “eternal life in paradise” has been steadily decreasing, while “the accommodations”, there, have been steadily improving! Thus, in Egypt in ~2500 BCE, only the pharaohs could afford the trip; for the believing Greeks of Plato’s time (~400 BCE), to have a happy eternity, people would basically need to be heroes; by the time of Philo of Alexandria and “Saint” Paul, for believing Christians, basically all that was needed was to demonstrate that you believed (e.g., by being a “loving person”); the merchant Muhammad offered still more for less (each man would have 72 virgins in Paradise, if

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only he'd abide by a few simple rules, such as praying five times a day); and offering still more for even less, the con-artist Joseph Smith promised obeying Mormon men that in their "after-life" they'd be gods.

And actually, maybe some credit is due Smith (and I expect that the idea is Smith's and not Rigdon's) – "credit" because, if nothing else, at least the scheme is logically consistent. Thus, if a person possesses an immortal soul, then "obviously" the person is essentially "immortal" – which is the fundamental definition of a god! It's then but a small step to assume that a good Mormon man, or at least his "immortal soul", as a god, will spend eternity ruling his own world. There is, however, the slight difficulty with Smith's conclusion, namely, it rests on a premiss (the existence of one's "immortal soul") that's supported by zero data, relying solely on the speculations of the likes of "Saint" Paul, Philo of Alexandria, Plato, Pythagoras, Zoroaster, Ancient Egyptians, and other primitive savages.

As for the gruesomeness – the cruelty – the monstrosities of how such pollution spread northward out of Ancient Egypt (and India), it followed when "realists" refused to become mystics, refusing to buy into the clerics' con game. In particular, when the clerics got control of a country's military, they literally forced their hogwash down people's throats (as done by, e.g., the Roman Christian clerics in Northern Europe and by the Islamic clerics across Africa and to points as far east as Indonesia and Malaysia). If the people refused to swallow the clerics' hogwash, the clerics had their henchmen cut the "heathen's" and "infidel's" throats. But I'll set aside details of such horrors until a later excursion (namely, **Yx**, dealing with "Your Indoctrination in the Mountainous God Lie").

Meanwhile though, and through all of it, there was (and there continues to be) a fourth "school of thought", although its historical record is poorly represented (almost certainly because essentially all records were controlled by the clerics of all cultures) and although no associated "religion" was established – unless humanism is considered to be a religion. I'll show you a number of examples about this "fourth school" in later chapters, throughout the book. In this "fourth school", the basic idea about death is: "Who knows? Who cares? What's important is life!" This fourth school of thought was represented, to varying degrees, by various "budding humanists", such as "priest" Sin-leqe-unnini in Mesopotamia, the Greek poet Homer, the two "agnostics" Confucius in China and the Buddha in India, some of the authors of the Old Testament, the Greek philosophers Socrates

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and Epicurus, as well as others, including the Roman “poet” Lucretius and the “philosopher-emperor” Marcus Aurelius.

An example from ~2000 BCE of this agnostic view of death is contained on Tablet X of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, where the “Sumerian Noah”, Utnapishtim, is reported as saying the following to Gilgamesh.

“[Why (?)] have you exerted yourself? What have you achieved (?)? You have made yourself weary for lack of sleep; you only fill your flesh with grief; you only bring the distant days (of reckoning) closer. Mankind’s fame is cut down like reeds in a reed-bed. A fine young man, a fine girl, (...) of Death. Nobody sees Death; nobody sees the face of Death; nobody hears the voice of Death. Savage Death just cuts mankind down. Sometimes we build a house, sometimes we make a nest, but then brothers divide it upon inheritance. Sometimes there is hostility in (the land), but then the river rises and brings flood-water. Dragonflies drift on the river, their faces look upon the face of the Sun, (but then) suddenly there is nothing.”

The Greek philosopher Epicurus (341–270 BCE), however, probably said it best (as I’ve quoted before):

[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.*

And if a certain grandchild were to ask “Who cares?”, then my response would be that I think everyone should “care”, because one’s outlook on death influences – even dominates – one’s perception of one’s life. That is, I think that a compelling argument can be made that the most significant idea that anyone can have is one’s idea about what happens after one dies – because it can dictate how one lives one’s life. As a case in point, 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.

And now, as a postscript, I can add what for you is an even more poignant example. Consider your mother. As far as I can make it out, she divorced your father primarily because, now that he rejects Mormonism, she believes

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what her mother told her: that he's "no longer any use" to her, since he will 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 would like to add that all of it seems both so very sad and so very strange. What to me is so 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, that their god wants their company for eternity, I can understand; why their gods would want their company, I can't!

Anyway, Dear, that brings me to the end of this book's Part 2. 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, to check what's already been traveled, and to 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 short answer (e.g., to your grandmother) would be: "Because it's bad science and even worse policy." What I tried to do in this Part 2 is 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., the 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 (since the time of the Ancient Greeks), such ontological questions have caused an enormous number of very intelligent people an enormous amount of difficulty. What I've tried to show you is 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, one of the major achievements of humanity 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 better, any speculation about anything "supernatural") fails miserably to meet such requirements.

Finally for these I-chapters, I tried to show you that even the concepts of 'belief' (and similarly, 'faith') reveal mental slothfulness, usually derived from unwisely transferred confidence and trust (e.g., in parents). Instead of adopting a belief in anything, people should evaluate associated probabilities. 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 10^{-200} to 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 stupidity and cupidity of clerics, and the power mongering of politicians – topics that I'll get to in the next part of this book, dealing with the second

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clause of my indictment that “belief in god is bad science and even worse policy.”

In this excursion **Ix**, now being concluded, I tried to make at least a little progress on the huge task of identifying the origins and subsequent changes of ideas about “the supernatural”. I spent some effort trying to show you some 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 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.

In this excursion, for two prime reasons, 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, and the other reason is because they can’t be adequately understood without simultaneously appreciating the quest of all clerics to gain and maintain their control over the people (and especially the people’s purse strings). As an illustration of the complexity, let me just state that you have been indoctrinated to believe in Jesus (i.e., Jupiter), because even from its name, Jupiter means “soul of the world”. And 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 that the Bible tell us 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 later excursions (especially in **Yx**, dealing with the “Your Indoctrination in the Mountainous God Lie”), I’ll try both to fill in some of the gaps I’ve left in describing the evolution of ideas about gods and souls and to 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**).