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Imagining the Afterlife in Greek Religion

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CHAPTER 37

IMAGINING THE AFTERLIFE

RADCLIFFE G. EDMONDS III

INTRODUCTION

THE question of what happens after the moment of death has always fascinated humanity—at one moment there is a living person, the next only a corpse; where did the person go? Different ways of imagining the afterlife appear in every culture, but scholarly accounts of Greek ideas of the afterlife from Erwin Rohde (1925) onwards have assumed a developmental trajectory, with the drab afterlife of Homer slowly being replaced by forms of afterlife where the dead are more active, closer to Christian ideas. While Rohde's ideas of historical evolution arising from Eastern influences and the internal decadence of the Greek spirit have rightly been rejected, afterlife ideas are still represented as a chronological development by scholars, even those, such as Johnston (2004), who reject Rohde's premises. Jan Bremmer (2002) provides a survey of the 'rise and fall of the afterlife' that positions the Greeks as a preliminary to the Christian development of an afterlife. Albinus (2000) provides a more nuanced picture of two currents of thought interacting within Greek culture, but it remains a story of the replacement of the Homeric view with an 'Orphic' one. I would argue that the dynamic would be better described as an ongoing contest of differing views in which the ideas appear more or less prominently in different contexts and elaborated by different individuals. Moreover, different versions and ideas should be understood as jostling for authority in particular situations, rather than simply authorizing a single canonical version.

The epics of Homer provide vivid images of a bleak and shadowy afterlife, but, although this grim afterlife is often taken to be the standard Greek vision, it is hardly the only way in which the ancient Greeks imagined life after death. In many sources, life after death is a lively extension of the life of the living, either a continuation of its activities and social forms, or a compensation for its problems. This is neither a marginal vision of eccentric religious groups nor a later development of the intellectual and cultural maturity of the late Classical period. On the contrary, varying visions

of a lively afterlife appear in sources starting with the earliest literature, and form the underlying ideology of funerary and other ritual practices in all periods.

Two forms of imagining the afterlife in Greek religion may be distinguished: simpler images based on memories of particular people who have died, and more elaborate visions that reflect upon life itself. Memory survival may be personal, limited to imagining a relative persisting in familiar activities and habits, focused upon maintaining a relationship with them. Communities too, however, preserve the memories of significant individuals, through stories, monuments, and rituals. The Greek poetic traditions, especially the epics, provide a means of preserving memories of important heroes (real or imagined) within communities. This imperishable fame remains one of the most significant forms of afterlife survival in the Greek tradition.

More elaborate visions of the afterlife may arise from systematic thinkers who envision the afterlife as part of the larger nature of a world that includes both the living and the dead. Such visions tend to be more elaborate, corresponding in various ways to life in the world of the living; the afterlife may have a geography, a social structure and hierarchy, and a specified relationship with the world of the living. The nature of that relationship varies with the contexts in which these visions are produced. The philosopher Plato envisions an unseen world of the dead that fits within a rational order with the visible world of the living, while a social commentator like the comedy writer Aristophanes imagines the afterlife as a carnivalesque reflection of the normal world, turning familiar social structures topsy-turvy. These and other imaginings of the afterlife in the Greek religious tradition provide models of the world as their authors understand it, as well as models (positive or negative) for behaviour within it, whether the afterlife imagined is the simple persistence of a remembered loved one or an elaborate vision of the workings of the cosmos.

MEMORY SURVIVAL

Personal Relations and Public Memorials

Imagining the deceased as continuing, in afterlife, as they did during life is the most basic form of imagining the afterlife. For the ancient Greeks, afterlife resembles life, with parallel forms of activity, environment, and even social structures. The memories of what a person did or how that person acted during life provide the material for creating images of what that person might be like after death, and how they might relate to people after they have died: gifts or other tokens of respect are imagined to be just as welcome, while insults or neglect are imagined to merit the resentment of the dead. The dead are thus thought to have feelings and emotions, as well as to continue with their most characteristic activities from life. This imagined life after life of the dead, based on the persisting memories of the dead, is, of course, rather limited, since it tends not to include all the aspects of life for the living. This process of simplification increases the

longer the person has been dead, as only the most memorable aspects are preserved in memory. Of course, memories survive only as long as those who have them are still living, although stories that perpetuate the memory of an individual can prolong the process, even if the stories further simplify the memory of the person—preserving (and perhaps embellishing) only the most salient details.

Funeral rituals and cultural expectations regarding the tendance of tombs make clear that the ancient Greeks generally assumed that the dead retained some sentience in their afterlife, and that their reciprocal relations of care and respect with the living persisted (Johnston 1999: 43). Sufficiently respectful performance of funeral rituals was a characteristic of the virtuous man, and Athenian legal speeches show that tendance of family tombs was a significant marker of proper family behaviour (Isae. 2.10, 37, 6.65, 8.38–39; cf. Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 55; Xen. *Mem.* 2.2.13). Maintaining positive relationships with the dead could be as important as maintaining such relations with the living—or even more so. Properly satisfied dead could bring benefits to the family or the polis, while the unsatisfied dead could become a source of trouble—disease, madness, drought, and so on. While the evidence for these ongoing relationships with the dead is relatively scarce, there is no reason to believe that it is either a later development or a primitive superstition the Greeks outgrew, since the earliest evidence appears in the earliest texts and continues through to late antiquity. The *Erinyes* in Homer personify the anger of the dissatisfied dead, as they do in Classical tragedy, and Odysseus, while he is performing libations and sacrifices to the dead at the entrance to the underworld, even makes an elaborate promise to perform further rituals upon his return to Ithaca for the satisfaction of the dead (*Od.* 11. 29–33, cf. *Od.* 10.521–6). Homer's audience, in whatever era, would have understood such rituals not as pointless mummery vainly trying to attract the witless dead, but rather as a meaningful attempt to influence conscious entities who could make a substantive response.

The afterlife of the departed is not imagined only through the personal memories of individuals who knew the deceased, but also through various forms of public memorialization. The epitaphs that enjoin the passer-by to stop and remember the deceased bring the living into conversation with the dead, while larger-scale public monuments, like that for the Marathon war dead, maintain the memory of the individual for more people for even longer.

Individuals who provided benefits for the community might continue to be honoured with cult activity after death. Pindar describes how Battos, the founder of Kyrene, was given a tomb in the public *agora* and honoured after his death, while Herodotos describes the sacrifices and athletic festivals performed in honour of Miltiades at Cardia in recognition of his leadership (Pind. *Pyth.* 5.93–5; Hdt. 6.38; on *oikist* cult, see, in this volume, Shepherd, Chapter 38). The inhabitants of Amphipolis, Thucydides relates (5.11.1), turned the tomb of the Spartan general Brasidas into a hero shrine and held annual festivals with sacrifices and athletic games in honour of the man who had done so much for them against the Athenians. Going beyond the passive presence of a monument, a festival provides an active way for a community to maintain a relationship with a person who has died. The deceased lives on in the afterlife as a

hero who appreciates the honours and offerings of the community, even if there is little concern for the precise nature of his afterlife existence. While some Athenian drinking songs imagine Harmodios the tyrant slayer living on in the Isles of the Blessed (*Carmina Convivialia* PMG fr. 11), little evidence survives of where or in what conditions *oikists* or other community heroes were imagined to live out their afterlives. For the purposes of the ritual, it was sufficient to know that they would bring good fortune to the community that honoured them.

The Epic Tradition

While ritual celebrations honouring a hero are perhaps the ultimate way of preserving someone's memory, to have one's deeds celebrated in epic remains one of the most significant modes of afterlife within the Greek tradition. There can be no doubt that such poetic immortality was indeed valued, and sought after, by the audiences of Homeric and other epic poetry from the Archaic Age onwards. Such survival in memory was particularly sought after by the aristocrats, who competed for honour and recognition in games and in war, in the assemblies and in the symposia. The fifth-century epinician poet, Pindar, and his like, provide a similar sort of immortality for the victors in the Panhellenic contests, while Simonides' poems on the 479 BCE victory at Plataia show this competition for epic glory continuing into the time of the Persian Wars (both the poem on the battle, the so-called 'new Simonides', on which see Boedeker and Sider 2001, and his epigram 7.251 on those who fell at Plataia).

While some poems do imagine specific places and features of the afterlife, the poetic tradition—and Homeric epic in particular—emphasizes memory survival through song over any other form of afterlife. The Homeric poet repeatedly drives home the message that only the kind of poetic immortality he can provide is valuable; all other things that one might desire in life are secondary. At the heart of the *Iliad* is the choice of Achilles—immortal fame rather than a safe homecoming—and other Homeric heroes also make choices so that they may become a subject of song for men in time to come (Hom. *Il.* 9.410–16; cf. *Il.* 2.119, 3.287, 3.460, 6.358, 22.305; *Od.* 3.204, 8.580, 11.76, 21.255, 24.433).

To sustain such an idea, the primary image of afterlife in the Homeric epics is exceedingly bleak and unappealing. In a few crucial scenes where the characters reflect upon the nature of life after death, the message is hammered home that there is nothing there to look forward to. When the shade of Patroklos appears to Achilles, he refers to the other ghosts as phantom souls of the worn out (*Il.* 23.72). Achilles too laments the wretched condition of the souls of the dead, as does Odysseus when he tries to embrace the shade of his mother in the underworld (*Il.* 23.103–4; *Od.* 11.218–222; on the development of the idea of the soul, see Claus 1981, Clarke 1999, and, in this volume, Voutiras, Chapter 27). This bleak vision is fundamental to the Homeric idea of the hero's choice—only in life is there any meaningful existence, so the hero must choose to do glorious deeds. Since death is inevitable, Sarpedon points out (*Il.* 12.322–8), the hero should not try to avoid it but go out into the front of the battle and win honour

and glory. Such glory (*kleos*) is the only thing that really is imperishable (*aphthiton*), the only meaningful form of immortality.

While the *Iliad* centres on Achilles' choice of deaths (glorious death in battle or ignominious death at home), the *Odyssey* frames the issue as a choice of immortalities. Odysseus rejects the immortality offered by Kalypso because, whatever its attractions, it would result in his own story, his poetic immortality, becoming lost (cf. Crane 1988). Odysseus' famous journey to the underworld reinforces the importance of epic memory as the only meaningful form of immortality, not just through his pathetic encounter with his mother, but through the parade of famous dead whom he meets—and whose memories he evokes for the audience of his story. These heroes and heroines live on vividly in epic poetry, even if their afterlife existence in Hades is merely a dim shadow. Achilles, who chose to die young and glorious, would, of course, rather be alive again than remain among the dead, but he does not repudiate his earlier choice. Moreover, after his characteristic complaining, he is delighted to hear that his son, Neoptolemos, is securing himself immortality through his glorious deeds (*Od.* 11. 486–540).

The force and artistry with which this message is put forth in the Homeric poems have led some scholars to suppose that it was a standard belief for all Greeks at the time of the poems' composition, with alternatives being imagined only later. However, even within the Homeric poems, the uniformly dreary afterlife is not the only vision presented, as commentators since antiquity have noticed. Outside the few passages that emphasize the helplessness of the shades, the Homeric references to life after death provide a much livelier picture of the afterlife (Sourvinou-Inwood 1995: 79). The pursuits of the dead mirror the world of the living, and the social hierarchies of the living world persist in some form after death.

This afterlife was not imagined to be uniform for all; those who had angered the gods continued their punishments in the afterlife, while those who had won their favour continued to enjoy its benefits. In this vision, the dead were imagined to have feelings and emotions, memories of their lives in the sun, and the ability to know of and even interfere in the world of the living. They were thought to appreciate the attentions paid to them by the living, not simply burial and funeral rituals, but also offerings made subsequently at the tomb. Although this differentiated afterlife is in direct conflict with the uniformly dreary one that underscores the importance of heroic glory, it appears even in the epics as the default version underlying the epic vision of poetic immortality. Outside the epics a lively afterlife is also taken for granted as the basis for funerary ritual, the cult of important figures, and other ritual practices that involve the dead.

THINKING WITH THE AFTERLIFE

Ritual has little room for elaborated imaginations of the afterlife, but these do appear in the literary and mythic tradition from Homer onwards. The afterlife is endlessly 'good to think with', and many authors from different periods make use of the Greek

mythic tradition to imagine the afterlife, crafting their visions to express their own ideas. While all of these imaginings make use of a common set of images, names, and story patterns that derive from the shared Greek mythic tradition, the particular texts themselves are the products of *bricolage*, that is, patched together according to the intentions of a particular author (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 16–36). Some of these picture the world reflected through the world of the dead, while others use the contrast between the worlds of the living and the dead to point to how the world should be. Because they all use traditional mythic pieces, each imagining makes sense to its audience, gaining authority from its use of familiar images and elements. Nevertheless, there is no single way in which the afterlife was understood or imagined by all the Greeks at any time, much less at all times.

Continuation vs. Compensation

The simplest way to imagine the afterlife is as a reflection of life, albeit less vivid and colourful. Such a simple vision appears in the underworld scene of the *Odyssey*: the legendary hunter Orion continues to chase game over the asphodel meadows; the famous king Minos continues to fill the kingly duty of judging lawsuits. That the dead continue to engage in legal disputes after death is perhaps the best indicator of this continuity (*Od.* 11.568–75). Similarly, vase paintings depict the dead engaged in a variety of pleasant pursuits, games like *pestoi* or dice, while Pindar (fr. 130) has the dead engaging in horsemanship, gymnastics, and lyre-playing. These are the activities of aristocrats, for life's social stratifications remain in place in the afterlife.

Such an image of the afterlife requires the least modification of memories of the dead: they persist in the same patterns as before death, even if their features are reduced to only the most salient and their activities to only their best known. This image of the afterlife appears as a default, when there is no reason to do any more than evoke the memories of famous people. It does not lend itself to extended development: even in Homer it appears only in the background of the epic vision articulated in the crucial scenes.

In many texts, however, the rupture between life and afterlife is the significant feature; the dead are gone and inaccessible to those left behind in life. In the mythic imagination, this rupture is often represented by some barrier or obstacle that separates the worlds of the living and the dead. The afterlife takes place in the underworld or perhaps off in the uttermost west, beyond where the sun goes down at the farthest shore of the encircling river Ocean. In Homer, Kirke describes the rivers of the underworld as Acheron, Pyriphlegethon, Kokytos, and Styx (*Od.* 10.514), and Patroklos complains to Achilles that he cannot cross the river into Hades until his body has received burial (*Il.* 23.72–4). Although he does not appear in Homeric epic, in other sources Charon brings the dead across the river to their new world and new life in the afterlife, and graves from the late Classical and Hellenistic period often include coins to pay the infernal ferryman. While Charon, like the psychopomp Hermes, enables the dead to

reach the underworld, leading them past the barriers that stand in the way of the living, other barriers ensure that the dead stay in the afterlife. The gates of Hades are proverbial for the finality of death, while the monstrous hound Kerberos stands guard over the entryway (Hes. *Theog.* 770–5). All these boundaries mark the separation of afterlife from life, highlighting the differences between life and death.

Most of the accounts of the afterlife in the Greek tradition stress not the continuity of afterlife with life, but rather the ways in which the afterlife compensates for the injustices of life. Those who have done wrong without visible retribution receive the punishments they deserve, while those who lived well without visible compensation find their reward. The heroes of epic, like the virtuous in Pindar, go to the Isles of the Blessed, where they enjoy a life of pleasure without toil (Hes. *Op.* 168–73; cf. Hom. *Od.* 4.561–9). Evildoers, on the other hand, suffer in the black pit of Tartaros. The geographical separation of the dead in the afterlife appears in a variety of the evidence, from the marginal gold tablets to the myths of Plato, to the Athenian drinking song that puts Harmodios in the Isles of the Blessed—and the nature of its topography varies in turn. Darkness and mud characterize an unhappy afterlife in a variety of sources, in contrast to light and air for the happy, who dwell in a place of pleasant conditions, with sunlight, shade, cool breezes, surrounded by flowers and meadows, near cool, running water. A good afterlife is full of the things that make for a good life, which is to say the life of a nobleman or other privileged type.

Although Pindar describes the fortunate dead as engaged in aristocratic pursuits like riding and hunting, the most popular aristocratic activity for the afterlife (as in life) seems to be the symposium. Hundreds of funeral reliefs depict the deceased reclining on a symposiastic couch, often with cup in hand and sometimes even with a woman at the foot of the couch (Thönges-Stringaris 1965). The best afterlife is often imagined as an everlasting festival, one of the best experiences of life, and numerous funerary inscriptions attest to the idea of choral dancing in the afterlife (e.g. 151.5, 189.6, 218.16, 411.4, 506.8 in Kaibel 1878). Such testimonies indicate how widespread, and indeed commonplace, it was to imagine that one's recently departed relative would enjoy a happy afterlife.

Afterlife Judgement

In many sources, the separation of the good and bad seems to happen automatically, but others put emphasis on the process. Perhaps the earliest extant reference to a process of judgement comes in Pindar's second *Olympian Ode* (58–60), where an unspecified judge assigns recompense for the deeds of life, a blissful existence without toil for the good, unbearable toil for the bad. Other sources specify the judges as underworld divinities—Hades or a Zeus below the earth—or as particular semi-divine figures, Minos, Rhadamanthys, Aiakos, and even Triptolemos (Aesch. *Eum.* 273–4; cf. *Supp.* 230–1 and Pl. *Grg.* 524a, *Ap.* 41a). This idea of afterlife judgement is common enough for Plato, in his *Republic*, to depict the old man Cephalos as starting to imagine that

perhaps he might have something to worry about after death (Pl. *Resp.* 330d–331a). Kephalos refers to myths he has heard—not special doctrines, but familiar traditional tales—which assign punishment in the afterlife for injustices committed in life. While he had not taken them seriously while younger, he says that the approach of death causes people to examine their lives to see if they will have any penalties to pay. Those who discover crimes they have not paid for get anxious, while those who can't think of any wrongs they have done are buoyed up by hope. Plato's depiction of this old man captures the important role played by personal circumstances in the way people or groups imagined the afterlife.

Although Homer's epic depicts a few exceptional figures like Tantalos and Sisyphos receiving punishment in the underworld (*Od.* 11. 576–600), elaborate descriptions of underworld retributions come mostly from later sources, causing some scholars to suppose that a compensatory afterlife is a later invention. However, not only does such compensation appear in our earliest textual source, but Pausanias (10.28.4–6) tells us of the great painting of the underworld by the fifth-century BCE painter Polygnotos, which included such depictions. Many of the figures in the painting were merely famous people continuing the actions for which they were famous in life—Agamemnon holding a sceptre, Orpheus playing his lyre, Eriphyle holding a necklace, even Actaion with a deerskin—but some are depicted suffering punishments for their actions in life. A man who treated his father unjustly is being throttled by him, while another who plundered a temple is being tormented by a female skilled in poisons. Pausanias comments that the Greeks in Polygnotos' time thought that failing to respect parents and the gods were the worst of crimes, and that is why Polygnotos has illustrated these cases. Polygnotos' painting, while exceptional in size and scope, is not exceptional in its subject matter: numerous vase paintings show scenes of underworld reward or punishment, and a Demosthenic speech mentions paintings depicting the afterlife torments of the impious as a familiar trope for his audience ([*Dem.*] 25.53).

IMAGES OF AFTERLIFE

Special Treatment for Special People

Polygnotos' painting adorned the walls of the Knidian Lesche (Clubhouse) at Delphi, alongside other images from the Trojan War and other familiar mythic tales. The Lesche was not just used by Knidians: visitors could come in and marvel at the images on the walls. Polygnotos' image of the afterlife was therefore aimed at a common audience, evoking familiar myths and shared ideas. By contrast, the images of the underworld found on the so-called 'Orphic' gold tablets were designed for a very private audience, perhaps only the individuals in whose graves they were placed (see Edmonds 2004: 64–82, as well as the texts and essays in Edmonds 2011). Some of these texts refer to rewards in the afterlife for the exceptionally pure or those well-favoured by the gods.

Two tablets ask Persephone to send the bearer to the seats of the blessed (Tablets A2 and A3 = OF 489 and 490B), while others refer to celebrations of festivals beneath the earth, where the deceased will receive wine (D1 and D2 = OF 485 and 496B).

The deceased claims to be pure and from the pure or to have been specially liberated by Dionysos Bacchios, and such claims may reflect the special relationship with the divine produced by rituals known as *teletai*. Often misleadingly translated as 'initiations', such rituals provide not an entry into an organized group, but rather a closer relation with the god to whom the rite is directed—by paying special honour to the god, the mortal receives special favour. Such favours can extend beyond one's lifetime into the afterlife; the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (480–2) promises that those who honour Persephone in the mysteries will receive a favourable place in the underworld. While the Eleusinian mysteries had the greatest reputation, particularly within the culture sphere of Athens, participation in such rituals was widely recognized as a means of securing a better afterlife: the neglect of such rituals could doom one to an unhappy afterlife without the favour of the gods (Ar. *Pax* 371; Pind. fr. 137; Soph. fr. 837; Isoc. 4.28; Paus. 10.31.9, 11).

By promising a special place in the seats of the blessed or among the chorus of *mystai* ('ritual celebrants'), the gold tablets offer a reward of favourable status in the afterlife that will compensate for any lack during life. The graves in which the tablets have been found are, for the most part, commonplace and unremarkable. The tablets presumably provide a means of asserting the special identity of the deceased that transcends the usual categories of polis, *genos*, and family. They provide instructions for the deceased to make her way into the underworld, telling her what path to choose or what to say in order to achieve a successful transition from life to afterlife, making use of familiar motifs from the mythic tradition to create an image of the afterlife in which the deceased is among the most happy and fortunate. Some tablets envisage an encounter with Persephone, Queen of the underworld, while others describe a white cypress tree shining in the gloom of Hades that marks the path leading to the spring of Memory (or Forgetfulness). The deceased must either proclaim her ritual purity or her special connection with the family of the gods, and it is this claim of identity, rather than a description of the favourable afterlife, that is the central concern of the tablets. Indeed, the results of the successful transition are mere allusions to familiar rewards, like the company of the blessed dead. These tablets are designed to emphasize the process of transition rather than the state of existence after death; the image of the afterlife fits the intended function of the text.

A Comic Turn

In Aristophanes' *Frogs*, a play with a chorus of *mystai*, the focus is upon the contrasting fates of the happy and unhappy dead, as the comedian takes aim at various prominent figures in Athens, a city which, in the final months of the Peloponnesian War, has gone *eis korakas*, 'to the crows' or, simply, straight to Hell (Ar. *Ran.* 1477–8, cf. 188–9). The tag from Euripides, 'Who knows if life be death or death life?', is a running joke throughout the play, and the world below, the afterlife, is very much a reflection of the

world above, although Aristophanes naturally shows it through a distorted funhouse mirror, rather providing a simple reflection (see Edmonds 2004: 121). The chorus of *mystai* revel in the sunlight, enjoying pleasures that recall the delights of the Eleusinian festivals during life. They ban from their company—with a parody of the Eleusinian *prorrhesis* barring murders and barbarians—all those who are detrimental to the welfare of the city, especially politicians who stir up factionalism or otherwise exploit the city's troubles for their own profit (Ar. *Ran.* 353–71). Such folk are not deserving of the happy afterlife of the chorus; they instead belong in the great muck and ever-flowing excrement to which the unworthy are doomed (Ar. *Ran.* 145–51, 274–6). Aristophanes uses the traditional images of afterlife compensation in his comic social commentary, presenting the afterlife as a carnivalesque reflection of contemporary life. The troubles of life are rectified in the afterlife: the Athenian people, enduring the last phases of the war, are represented in the play by the blissful chorus of Eleusinian *mystai*, while those profiting from Athens' troubles suffer torments and humiliations.

The Spell of Plato

Some of the most powerful and influential imaginings of the afterlife in Greek religion appear in the myths that Plato incorporates into his dialogues. Plato carefully manipulates traditional motifs to provide images of the afterlife that not only correlate with and illustrate the philosophical discussions in a particular dialogue, but also set out a vision that coheres with his ideas of life and the order of the cosmos. Plato uses the afterlife 'to think with', adapting traditional images and ideas with an artistry that influenced imaginings of the afterlife for millennia.

One of his themes is the role of self-examination, and the importance of reflection. The myth in the *Phaedo*, with its complex geography, illustrates the perils facing someone who relies entirely on the visible world of the senses instead of the invisible world of thought (see Edmonds 2004: 159–220). In the *Gorgias*, Socrates explicitly discusses his methods of argumentation through the *elenchos*, in contrast with those of his rhetorical interlocutors—and his description of the process of afterlife judgement provides an illustration of this contrast: the vivid picture of the soul stripped naked and revealing all its deformities and scars to the expert eye of the judge is an image of the Socratic *elenchos* (cf. Edmonds 2012). At the end of the *Republic*, in the myth of Er, Plato also makes use of traditional mythic images of a judgement of the soul, along with some less familiar ideas, like reincarnation, to highlight the critical role of self-examination. The peculiar double process of determining one's lot after death reflects the distinction, made throughout the dialogue, between the extrinsic recompense for justice and its intrinsic worth. The first judgement, which sends the deceased to a thousand years of bliss or torment, is compensatory for the life lived, precisely the kind of extrinsic reward or punishment for justice that Socrates and his interlocutors dismiss at the start of the discussion as an insufficient defence of the true value of philosophic justice (Pl. *Resp.* 614c–d, 615a–b). After the thousand years, however, the souls return to the place

of judgement for the selection of the next life. Here, despite the lottery that determines the order of choosing, the new fate of the soul depends entirely on its ability to examine itself and make the appropriate judgement. The soul with the first choice, having lived a basically good life in a good city, never developed the ability to correct itself and so tragically chooses wrongly, taking the life of a tyrant with unlimited power, doomed to eat his own children and other typical misfortunes of tyrants (619b–d). By contrast, the soul of Odysseus, having learned from his long suffering how to curb his impulses, makes the good choice of a just and philosophic life. Here, only the inherently just soul, philosophically trained to examine and govern its impulses and appetites, can make the right kind of choice when a really important crisis comes (600b). Again, by transposing the judgement of an external judge into a personal choice, Plato uses the traditional mythic elements to illustrate the processes of philosophic thought, self-examination, and judgement discussed in the dialogues.

While ideas of judgement and differentiated fates for the good and the bad are familiar motifs in the evidence for Greek imaginings of a compensatory afterlife, the idea of reincarnation that appears in the *Republic* myth is an unusual one, appearing only in a limited range of philosophical sources in connection with certain cosmological ideas (see Edmonds 2013). For Plato, the idea that souls return to other bodies appropriate to their natures illustrates the inherent rational order and justice in the cosmos. This ethicized version of reincarnation does not appear before Plato, even though Pythagoras is the figure traditionally credited with the idea of transmigration (Xenophanes fr. 7 = Diog. Laert. 8.36). The Pythagoreans, as Aristotle complains, imagine transmigration of any soul to any body, regardless of the suitability of the soul for the body, and the most substantive early evidence, Empedokles' list of incarnations—a boy, a girl, a bird, a plant, and a fish—baffles any attempt to find the reasons behind his change of lives (Arist. *De an.* 407b20; Empedokles fr. 117 = Hippol. *Haer.* 1.3.2.3–4 = Diog. Laert. 8.77). Empedokles' idea of such random reincarnations is perhaps more plausibly linked to his theory of basic elements that combine and recombine to make all things than to a Platonic notion of cosmic justice. The return to life through a series of reincarnations is a peculiar form of afterlife, which may be combined, as in Plato, with other modes of afterlife, or stand on its own as part of a vision of the workings of the cosmos.

While reincarnation is generally marked as an extra-ordinary idea whenever it appears in the evidence, the idea that most surprises Socrates' interlocutors in the *Republic* is the notion that the soul is actually immortal (608d2–6). The image of a soul persisting after death, even being judged and experiencing rewards and punishments, is familiar from the mythic tradition, but the idea that all souls are immortal, the same kind of thing as the gods, is shocking. Previously the idea was that only a few exceptional figures, the heroes of myth or the greatest founders and benefactors of society, achieve this status that Plato assigns to all soul by nature (Empedokles fr. 112 = Diog. Laert. 8.62). Plato makes use of images and ideas from his philosophical predecessors speculating about the nature of the soul and the cosmos just as much as he uses ideas from the mythic tradition, reshaping them all and weaving them into his own imaginings of the afterlife to serve his own philosophical agenda.

CONCLUSION: NEITHER SINGLE NOR SIMPLE

From simple visions of the deceased continuing after death as they were best remembered in life, to elaborate literary and philosophical imaginings of an afterlife that support complex ethical and cosmological ideas, the images of afterlife in the Greek religious tradition make use of familiar mythic elements to articulate their ideas. Underworld denizens such as Kerberos or Persephone continue to appear in literature from Homer to Plato, along with geographic features such as the river Styx, the Elysian Field, or the pit of Tartaros. These traditional features were combined and recombined in different ways by different authors, and no single vision ever prevailed. Even though Homer's epic vision of poetic immortality, as preferable to a bleak and shadowy existence in Hades, remained influential within the poetic literary tradition, ritual practices such as funerary cult attest that other ideas of a more lively afterlife were widespread, and not merely the province of marginal religious groups or avant-garde philosophers.

The form in which the afterlife is imagined depends on the one doing the imagining, and their ideas and intentions. Shaped by the familiar tropes of the Greek mythic tradition, the specific features of each account arise from the *bricolage* performed by the one imagining the afterlife. Individuals, families, and even whole communities would transform their memories of the living into a vision of afterlife existence. This kind of memory survival maintains the relationships between the living and the dead, while preserving important models of exemplary behaviour (or its opposite). As these models are elaborated, in poetic form or philosophical argument, they help to shape models of the way the cosmos works, how life and death are intertwined, how the elements of the world combine and recombine into new forms, or even how balance and justice ultimately prevail in a cosmos governed by rationality. The ancient Greek imagining of the afterlife is, as Plato says of the path to Hades (*Phd.* 108a), neither single nor simple, but as rich and complex as any other aspect of the Greek mythic and religious tradition.

SUGGESTED READING

Garland 1985 and Vermeule 1979 remain excellent basic introductions to the topic, while Johnston 2004 sums up the material concisely. Sourvinou-Inwood 1995 provides a dense and complicated look at the ideas of death and afterlife in the Greek tradition, and Johnston 1999 examines ideas of afterlife through an analysis of the problematic dead. References to nearly all the relevant evidence can be found in Rohde 1925, even though his nineteenth-century interpretive framework distorts its significance. The studies of Albinus 2000 and Bremmer 2002 likewise provide good coverage of the evidence, but their interpretive frames are also, at times, problematic. Edmonds (2014) provides a more detailed treatment of many of these themes.

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