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IMPERMANENT ETERNITIES: EGYPT, SUMER, AND BABYLON, ANCIENT ISRAEL, GREECE, AND ROME

I have always taken a particular Pleasure in examining the Opinions which Men of different Religions, different Ages, and different Countries, have entertained concerning the Immortality of the Soul, and the State of Happiness which they promise themselves in another World.

—JOSEPH ADDISON, *SPECTATOR*

[I]n origin the major continuing religious traditions, both East and West, had no belief that there would be a worthwhile existence after death. They could not deny that in some sense there is a trace of the dead, in memory and dreams, or in the resemblance of offspring to ancestors; but whatever state the dead may be in, it is a condition of extreme weakness. . . . [G]radually both traditions came to realize that there may be about us that which does endure through the process of time and therefore perhaps through the event of death.

"AFTERLIFE," *THE OXFORD DICTIONARY OF WORLD RELIGIONS*

O Gilgameš, where are you wandering?
You cannot find the life that you seek:
when the gods created mankind,
for mankind they established death,
life they kept for themselves.
You, Gilgameš, let your belly be full,

keep enjoying yourself, day and night!
Every day make merry,
dance and play day and night!
Let your clothes be clean!
Let your head be washed, may you be bathed in water!
Gaze on the little one who holds your hand!
Let a wife enjoy your repeated embrace!
Such is the destiny [*of mortal men*].

—SIDURI, ALEWIFE GODDESS, TO GILGAMESH[1]

Happy ever afterlives required inventing. When Joseph Addison trusted that men the world over promised themselves eternal happiness in another life, he had 1700 years of Christian doctrine supporting him, and he forgot about hell. To Addison and to us the morally inflected, compensatory afterlives we now enjoy seem eternal. Gilgamesh knew better. The gods kept life for themselves and gave mankind death. Digging up dead afterlives reveals how grim ancient afterlives were, how inextricable body and soul, and how remote moral considerations. It also reveals how changeable they were. Of the four principal coexisting and ultimately intersecting western afterlives that Christianity displaced—Egypt, Sumer/Babylon, Israel, Greece/Rome—each underwent significant transformations, tending to both public purposes and private anxieties, the private imbricated in the public. Discontented with their first responses to questions about death, our ancestors corrected the answers on the quiz.

Literary materials represent a late stage in the development of afterlife concepts, but it is possible to tease out earlier views already being modified in the earliest texts. No matter how permanent an afterlife seems to be—the great model is Egypt (or Christianity)—its surviving texts reveal continuing transformation, responsive to environmental influences, political changes, ideological shifts. In Egypt, Sumer, Babylon, Judea, Greece, and Rome, priests, philosophers, and poets quarreled bitterly about persistence through death and the conditions to be encountered in the grave. They revised their views of the next world in response to their ideas about this one, marking ideological and sociological rifts, as they adopted or scorned the inventions of their neighbors. Afterlives have been evolving since they were first imagined. Visibly in time, they democratize, they

terrorize, they provide new hopes, and they provoke skepticism. They are even, as in ancient Judea, repressed on religious grounds.

Where the story we know best usually begins, this chapter ends: on the brink of Christianity and the triumph of the moralized afterlife in the monotheistic religions. Christianity originates in the middle of first-century Jewish debates about the dead and resurrection (discussed below). Its afterlife concepts have undergone multiple transformations, the last—or most recent—during the enlightenment (chapter 4, below). In turn, Christianity reshaped Judaism's take on the afterlife, while Islam's paradise reinforced the other religions of the book that preceded it. The Christian and Muslim traditions have prospered by proposing in their sacred texts doctrinally required beliefs about an afterlife, promising salvation and threatening damnation.[2] For a period, even Jews were persuaded. The Mishnah, in a self-fulfilling paradox as witty as Pascal's wager, excludes from "the World to come" those who say, "There is no resurrection of the dead" (Sanh.11).[3] In the twelfth century, Maimonides included resurrection among his Thirteen Principles of Faith fundamental to Jewish belief.[4] Since then, without textual support in the Torah and prophets, afterlife has reverted to the margins, as an option, but not a requirement, in Judaism. Those embracing the option usually consider it a requirement. Others rejoice in alternatives. As one rabbi responded when asked about Judaism's position on the afterlife, "Ask two Jews, and you'll get three answers."[5]

These familiar afterlives have long obscured their antecedents. From annihilation to reincarnation, from dreary sleep under the earth to agonizing punishments and blissful rewards, the ancients rang changes on the possibilities. They blurred the line between what they believed or feared really happened and what they clearly understood as afterlife fictions, mythic embellishments serving a philosophical or practical or satirical purpose. Sometimes, as in Plato, the afterlife is modified and improved on explicitly ideological grounds. Elsewhere, among Sumerians and Egyptians, the afterlife improves in ways that have evident ideological implications, although no author survives like Plato to explain why these changes are necessary. Israel flaunted its prohibition of once flourishing contact with the dead in its theo-ideological shift to monotheism.[6] Erased, the underworld gods left traces in prohibitions and poetic imagery, and YHWH'S dead stayed imprisoned, unconscious, silenced, below the ground.

Egypt and Sumer, Greece and Rome, Judea with its claim of Egyptian experience and actual Mesopotamian connections: these represent only a few views west of the Tigris and Euphrates, spread through writing in major urban centers. Views in the suburbs and back alleys of empire were still more various and idiosyncratic, as attest the traces they have left in the ground as artifacts and in mysterious textual references (e.g., the Gospel Matthew's binding curses). Everywhere, from cities to wilderness, flourished magical practices, numerologies, demonologies, spells, incantations, offerings, curses, fortunetelling, prophecies, and oracles. Others have detailed such popular practices,[7] and much remains to be discovered about the beliefs and practices of the ancestors. Yet texts still provide the clearest evidence of change. The ancients recorded their afterlives in some remarkable literary works very much worth knowing as they imagined realms the living can never see—the land where the dead live. By the time those texts appear, the afterlife has been conquered and colonized, but it never stays still.

JUSTICE IN EGYPT, NILOTIC DISCIPLINE

Four thousand years of Egyptian difference; probable environmental and socio-political factors; the afterlife pharaoh escapes, followed by others; enhancing social controls; tomb-robbers and the emergence of skepticism; spread of Egyptian cults in Europe

Among the ancients, the Egyptians were the only people to invent an afterlife worth having—or dying for. Their moralized afterlife provided eternal life, justice, and happiness in another world, with punishments for those who deserved them. The care they lavished on their dead is familiar to every museum visitor and child passionate for pyramids. They have been called "obsessed with death," "obsessed with the afterlife," and more justly by Salina Ikram "obsessed with life and its continuation."[8] As a recent Field Museum wall text (2013) avers, the Egyptian project was to reproduce a life close to this one, but better, in the next world. Elaborated very early, their resilient and dynamic system lasted a long time. It will be another two thousand years before Christian imaginings surpass the duration of Egypt's.[9]

The Egyptians, then, would seem to cast serious doubt on claims that blissful afterlives require invention, that afterlives develop over time, originating in identification with the body, and that morality and justice are a late addition to afterlives and not always present. Happily, the generous labors of Egyptologists have uncovered such transformations, charted in Egyptian mortuary and literary texts, or inferable from them. The process is already complete in outline by the time the first documents appear. Although a *New Yorker* writer laments "that it wasn't until the Middle Kingdom (2010–1630 BC) that average Egyptians even dared to hope for the promise of an afterlife,"[10] an afterlife that seems a "promise" rather than a threat is Egypt's invention. How Egypt devised so early an expectation of eternal happiness continues to puzzle and fascinate Egyptologists.[11] Two factors seem critical.

Among the earliest large-scale complex societies, the ancient Egyptians succeeded better than their neighbors in controlling their environment, and that control they extended to the next world. Social discipline mastered and exploited the Nile in prehistoric times, enabling kings to unify and tax a settled, productive population and supporting the priestly magical sciences that made Egypt fabled in the ancient world. When Moses and Aaron defeated the Egyptian magicians, who saw in action the finger of God (Exod. 8:19), they accomplished a far greater feat than crossing the Red Sea dry shod. The Nile was erratic, sometimes with too much water, sometimes too little, and famine periodically threatened the enlarged population that the river made possible, yet a disciplined social organization freed Egypt from the arbitrary vagaries of rainfall and erratic flooding. In certain temples, priests maintained instruments and records that tracked the Nile's flooding patterns, the famous "Nilometers," invented in pharaonic times and further systematized under Islam.[12] Such routine predictability through the disciplining of nature, coupled with anxiety since nature can never be entirely disciplined, informs the Egyptian extension of control from life into death.[13] A divinized pharaoh, demanding to join the gods, benefited from a priestly and technological class empowered to ensure he succeeded, and continuously improving their methods. Ultimately their *Books of Going Forth by Day* (a.k.a. *of the Dead*) map the journey through the next world with a precision that will not be seen again until Virgil and Dante.

As crucial to the Egyptian difference was another environmental factor. Bodies buried in desert sand dry up and shrivel, but do not rot. A body preserved is a self visibly preserved: something remains. From the possibility of preserving the body proceeds its desirability. What cannot be imagined is difficult to desire. The earliest Egyptian burial dates from 55,000 BP (before the present).[14] Naturally mummified, desert-buried bodies with grave goods, food, drink, weapons, and ornaments appear around 4500–3300 BCE. Bodies buried in coffins, safely out of reach of the sand, putrefied, as loathsome as rotting bodies elsewhere. Eventually someone, doubtless collaboratively, devised artificial embalming and succeeded in re-creating eternity. According to John Taylor, around 2600 BCE extraction of the inner organs permitted successful artificial mummification, with techniques continuing to improve until they reached a peak about 1000 BCE.[15]

As Egyptians theorized the afterlife, the physical body was necessary to support its multiple souls, the *ka*, requiring nourishment and staying with the body, and the *ba*, winged for flying to the stars. The body preserved as mummy was a divine being, and so was the heart, center of morality, intellect, and conscience, "the god which is in man."[16] Empathy with the body is enabled by its preservation, and the souls are at once still with the preserved body and departed from it to other realms.

When the first afterlife texts appear (the Pyramid Texts, c. 2350 BCE), Egyptians had enjoyed 300 years of successfully mummifying bodies, and pharaohs had distinguished themselves from other dead by building the pyramids that were a wonder of the ancient world. The texts on the walls of Unis's small pyramid confirm V. Gordon Childe's finding that as societies become richer, their material investment in grave goods diminishes.[17] At first, with its cultural investment in burials, Egypt seems an exception, but the great pyramids are almost the earliest pyramids. Completed by 2525 BCE, some 175 years before the Pyramid Texts, Khufu's great pyramid at Giza remained, Toby Wilkinson observes, the tallest building in the world until 1889, when the Eiffel Tower surpassed it. Khufu's son Khafra completed the Giza complex with the Sphinx and a pyramid on a higher elevation than his father's.[18] From 2450 BCE, after the intergenerational competition of Khufu, his father, and his sons, Egyptian pyramids diminish in size. The great era of pyramid building was over. As the pyramids

shrink, Pyramid Texts abruptly appear on the walls of the burial chamber, guiding pharaoh (Unis d. 2345 BCE) symbolically to Osiris and Ra.[19] Later periods will witness grave goods peaking, then turning mass produced and shoddy, as a new fashion arises.

Egypt's four thousand–year afterlife is usually regarded as confined to Egypt and immobile as its pyramids. Yet as Stephen Quirke, John Taylor, and others demonstrate, within Egypt it was a fluid, constantly developing tradition, intensely responsive to political changes. Even pyramids saw fashionable revivals. After Khufu, one king put pyramids in every town, and the Twelfth and Seventeenth dynasties saw revivals, almost a thousand years later, 1938–1755 and 1650–1550.[20] Funerary texts disappear sometimes for several centuries, especially in periods of foreign invasion and social unrest, and then become a way to reassert national identity when the invaders are repelled. So in the seventh, fifth, and first centuries BCE, new texts and very ancient ones were brought together, sometimes deliberately archaized.[21] Saving souls depended on a highly specialized treatment of the body by a cadre of experts, who mastered a literature of spells, meaningful decoration, and ritual procedures. The preserved body preserved the souls, and around the Mediterranean Egypt monopolized that technology of the body. Outside Egypt, from the fourth century BCE, perhaps winged by new Greek theories, its promise of eternal life spread, freed from the body.

Some chronological markers may be helpful, between the first Egyptian burials found, about fifty thousand years ago, and the seventh century CE, when Islam displaced Christianity as Egypt's official and dominant religion. The first burials with grave goods date from 4500–3300 BCE, suggesting some conceptual system. A thousand years later, pyramids rise for Old Kingdom pharaohs (2686–2181 BCE). After the completion of the Giza complex (2450), the Pyramid Texts suddenly accompany Unis, who had no son (2345 BCE). Through known dangers that hem the dead, only pharaoh goes to the stars. That changes in the sixth, and last so-called, of the Pyramid Texts. Neith, the half-sister and queen of Pepi II (c. 2260–2175 BCE), appropriates pharaoh's spells. With no accommodation for gender, she is sent off in precisely the terms used for pharaoh. The texts spread to priests, officials, nobles in their tombs: democratization has begun.[22] Old Kingdom burial becomes so valued that the official Sabni travels to sub-Saharan Africa to bring back his father Mekhu's body to preserve his

father's life.[23] Without the body, life vanishes. In the tale of Sinuhe, the self-exiled traveler is lured back to Egypt: "Think of your corpse, come back!"[24] By 2000 BCE in the Middle Kingdom, spells multiply from 800 to 1200, and the Coffin Texts appear, written on coffins, rather than pyramid walls.[25] One no longer needs a pyramid of one's own. A coffin will do.

In the New Kingdom (1580–1090), the so-called Books of the Dead appear, rolled papyri placed beside the mummy in coffins, rather than written on the coffin, and the scene of judgment takes place before the gods.[26] This period, especially between 1550 and 1300 BCE, sees a new emphasis on morality and judgment, annihilation vying with increasingly hideous punishments, as Osiris's enemies are decapitated or plunged into the darkness of an eternal pit.[27] As the afterlife becomes ever more desirable and ever more accessible to persons of different social classes, the terrors and dangers of the journey sharpen. Nor did technological innovation cease. By 1000 BCE with mummification techniques perfected, bodies no longer had to be hollowed out, stomach, lungs, liver, and intestines placed in separate jars, each protected by a different god. Canopic jars become symbolic.

Conquered by Persia in the sixth century BCE (c. 525 BCE, expelled 402 BCE), Egypt gained the camel, the first Suez Canal, and Herodotus as reporter of its traditional burials.[28] Happily, the Persian presence justified Herodotus's fascinated excursus on Egypt in his *Persian Wars*, Book II. About 430 BCE, Herodotus reports the full commercialization of the afterlife, as descending Egyptian classes laid claim to eternity. Access was equally available to bodies treated at very different prices. Herodotus reports three classes of treatment, three price categories, and precisely detailed procedures for removing the brain with hooks, draining, stuffing, and submerging the body in natrum. The cheapest bodies are just "given to those who come to fetch [them] away." More expensively treated bodies are encased and propped in a tomb.[29]

As Alexander invaded Egypt, Isis invaded Europe: a temple opened in Piraeus, near Athens, about 333 BCE. Osiris was the murdered god the dead aspired to; jackal-headed Anubis oversaw the judgment of the dead, but Isis was the sister-mother goddess who had gathered Osiris's scattered parts and revived him to father Horus with her. Isis cults spread through the Mediterranean and beyond, reaching Rome in the second century BCE.[30] Ending native Egyptian rule, Alexander the Great consulted the

bull god Apis and the oracle of Amun to confirm his divinity as he named after himself a city of the Nile delta (331 BCE). His successors, the syncretistic, adaptive, library-building Ptolemies, integrated Greek science and Egyptian belief (323–30 BCE) and were displaced in turn by the Romans (31 BCE, Actium).

In the Roman period, from the first to the fourth century CE, the quality of mummification declined, as realistic portraits displaced the god's image on the coffins of Hellenized Egyptians intermarried with Greeks.[31] The Fayyum mummy portraits combine Greco-Roman portrait painting with Egyptian burial preparation: modern eclecticism. From Hawara in the first or second century CE, on a funeral shroud a bearded man in Roman dress looks out; he is surrounded by Egyptian deities, architecture, and imagery, including falcons with the double crowns of upper and lower Egypt. From the same time and place, a beautiful female portrait mummy's wrappings form diamond shapes with a brass boss at the center of each, and no Egyptian iconography at all, apart from the fact of a mummy.[32] Marking a shift from the body to its representation, the decorative canopic jars used from about 1000 BCE disappear. Funeral papyri shrink to passports and then disappear after the second century CE.[33] As late as the fourth century CE, elaborate mummies with coffins and portraits survive.[34] Then the Christians came to power. Surviving third-century Roman persecution, Christianity turned shrines to Isis into altar bases and temples of Amun into chapels, looted Alexandrian temples of Serapis, and murdered their priests, as well as Hypatia, the female Neoplatonic philosopher.[35] In the seventh century, Arab conquest oversaw mosques built in the angles of temples. In the nineteenth century, Lucie Duff Gordon marveled at the past's traces, a Muslim saint as patron of crocodiles, Osiris's festivals under a new name, birth and burial ceremonies that were not Muslim but ancient Egyptian.[36]

At the heart of the system, and equally the source of modernity's continued fascination with Egypt's ancient practices, is the preserved body.[37] The spells chant body parts, the souls are defined by their relationship to the body, the aspects of personhood to be preserved are parts of the body. Images, too, had power. In early tombs, dangerous animals are often pictured mutilated or incomplete, missing the parts that would threaten the tomb's inhabitant.[38] Modern filmmakers imitate ancient fears when they reanimate mummies disturbed within their tombs.

In the Pyramid Texts a horrific vision of life among the dead motivates pharaoh's escape to the stars. Stephen Quirke proposes that the Pyramid Texts are the afterlife of chants that hymned the gods, celebrated feast days, and protected the living from such dangers as insects and snakes. Turned liturgies to accompany the burial of dead kings, they finally appear on the walls of the king's tomb.[39] In their new place within a tomb, they reveal pervasive anxieties about death, the body, and judgment. They sketch an obsession with death's leveling powers and even pharaoh's potential vulnerability to the judgment of others. Egyptians, they suggest, well knew a dismal and terrifying afterlife.

The first pharaoh protected by texts, Unis flew effortlessly to the sky, his own misdeeds erased. What he escapes, however, what does not happen to him, reveals the conditions of the other dead. Osiris protects him from "the wrath of the dead."[40] "The Great Lake's wrath has missed him" (p. 47, #172). He will not eat excrement and urine; he will not suffer hunger and thirst (p. 30, #143, 144). The apes who sever heads will leave him in peace, for his head is tied on his neck, and his neck is on his torso (p. 44, #165). Heads separate from their decaying bodies at the top of the spine, the verses recognize. He will not travel in darkness; he will not see those who are upside down, i.e., those in the underworld (p. 47, #170). The dark place of the dead reverses the physical order of the world above. Significantly, a judicial process is adumbrated from which he is exempt. *Maat* [justice] is with him, and he will "not sit (to be judged) in the god's court"; there are no accusations against him (p. 47, #170; p. 46, #169; p. 50, #177); he will not be given to the fire (p. 47, #170). There is no case against him, there is no guilty verdict against him; he is not at the head of the gods of disturbance, but at the head of the Sun's followers (p. 56, #207; p. 50, #179). He has destroyed "the one against (his) ascending to the sky" (p. 56, #207). He is also lord of semen, who takes women from their husbands as it pleases him (p. 60, #222).

Somewhere, then, there is a place of judgment that reverses life's norms, except for judgment. People are upside down and travel in darkness, not light; they hunger and thirst and eat excrement and urine; accusations are made and the gods sit in judgment. Troublemakers, disturbers of the peace are abhorrent. None of this has anything to do with pharaoh, and he escapes it all, but it is clearly waiting for someone. Social control extends beyond the grave to create a chamber of horrors more disturbing than

anything in Mesopotamian or early Greek imaginings. Pharaoh escapes a world darker and more grotesque than even the dreary Sumerian afterlife finding literary form at the same period (c. 2100 BCE). Perhaps because pharaoh escapes: Sumerian kings enter their afterlife along with the common dead.

Pepi I, in the third and longest of all the Pyramid Texts, required more encouragement than his predecessors. He had to be told repeatedly to "Live! Live—you have not really died!" He had to be promised that his body would not decompose, his decay would not ooze, his smell would not be bad. Early mummification was still imperfect. He had to be promised that he would not be made a king among the dead (the fate of Gilgamesh and Ur-Namma in Sumer), but would rise to the gods. He had to be assured that he would not be accused, arrested or taken before officials or found guilty, and his opponents would not be justified.[41] By exempting him from what others anticipated, the priests and scribes responsible for the texts, inadvertently or purposely, assimilated the pharaoh to the judicial system affecting others. As access to the afterlife reached down the social ladder, the judicial process changed its character. Instead of answering the voices of individual accusers, as in a village council, a king's court or durbar, or other open forum, the soul endures an objective judgment before the gods. The Coffin Texts balance the two forms of judgment; the later Books of the Dead emphasize the gods' judgment in a full scale judicial review.[42] Who is watching shifts from the community or court to the high gods.[43]

The Field of Reeds, mirror of Egypt, a destination alternative to the stars and gods, also appears for the first time in the Pyramid Text of Pepi I (pp. 105–07, #31). Unis passes by the Marsh of Offerings (p. 30, #143). Pharaoh might escape to the stars, but a destination in a world that looked more like Egypt came to be favored.

Negotiating the transition from pharaoh's wishful afterlife to everyman's, the great Egyptian poem variously titled "Dispute between a Man and his Ba," "A Sufferer and his Soul," dates from the Middle Kingdom sometime between 2050 and 1800 BCE, the period of the earlier Coffin Texts. The sufferer is confident, his Ba skeptical about the sufferer's access to justice. Like Job, the sufferer demands a hearing, but he knows those who hear him and what they will do. Unlike poor Job, he has great

confidence in the outcome, and the gods do not undermine that confidence by silencing him out of a whirlwind, though his own soul tries:

> Let Thoth, the divine judge, hear my case,
> Let Khonsu, guardian of pharaohs, protect me.
> Let Ra, the divine boatman, judge me,
> Let Isis . . . defend me.[44]

The sufferer knows who will look out for him: he names the names. The soul mocks this claim as pretentious, struggling against a democratizing afterlife: "It is so foolish for an ordinary human like you/ To want the funeral of a pharaoh." The sufferer insists that his heir will bury him properly and the soul had best let him die: "If you continue to oppose my death,/ You will never find rest in the land of the dead./Trust me, my soul, my companion . . ."

The sufferer laments his own miserable personal situation, his literally stinking life, like "bird drop on a hot day . . . rotten fish in the full sun . . . the breath of a crocodile," his reputation abused, worse than "accusing a faithful woman of adultery, calling a legitimate child a bastard, plotting to overthrow the government." General social conditions are worst of all: the just perish, fools thrive, everyone chooses evil and rejects good, crimes outrage no one, and sins make everyone laugh. Contrasted with current social conditions is the beauty of death: health to the sick, freedom to the prisoner, home to the traveler, his native land to an exile. Scented like myrrh, death is a soldier returning home, clear skies after rain. It offers justice, wealth, and wisdom:

> Surely whoever goes to the land of the dead
> Will live with the divine assembly,
> Will judge the sins of the wicked.
> Surely whoever goes to the land of the dead
> Will ride in the Barque of the Sun,
> Will collect gifts offered at temples.
> Surely whoever goes to the land of the dead
> Will be wise,
> Will have a hearing before Ra the creator.

To this paean, the soul can only give way, urging the sufferer once again to stop thinking about dying, and promising the outcome the sufferer desires, but not yet:

> When it is time for you to die,
> When your body returns to the earth,
> Then I will travel with you,
> Then we shall live together forever.

Curiously, the soul, not the sufferer, wants to stay above ground, as if life insists on staying in the light, no matter the sufferings endured by the body or the knowledge that somewhere else is better.

Other Egyptian works also figure death as a relief: "Death long-desired arrives like water for the thirsty/ . . . like the first drop of milk on a baby's tongue."[45] Contemplating death, we know, keeps people alive and lively. So, too, the miserable and powerless soul entertaining suicide gains power over its situation. The intolerable need not be endured, and that thought enables endurance of the unendurable. Time enough, there will be "time for you to die,/When your body returns to the earth."

In the Coffin Texts, the outline sketched in the Pyramid Texts is filled in, codified, and developed. Proposing a subterranean mirror of Egypt or a celestial destination among the stars, the Coffin Texts promise reunion with loved ones in the Field of Reeds. "A man does what he wishes in the land of the dead," proclaims one coffin from about 2000 BCE.[46] The Coffin Texts provide maps of the route to the afterlife, supply passwords for critical junctures and instructions on how to walk upside down.[47] They tell the sun's path, the division of hours, the solar boat.[48] The judicial element expands: more demons threaten the soul, and a hippo-crocodile-lion monster gapes to swallow up the wicked.[49] Justice also opens a moral system, what one should do, and what one must not, most fully elaborated in the scrolls of the Books of Going Forth by Day.

From those books unrolls a lively picture of ancient personality types, stepping out from the walls of their tombs or rising up in their coffins. In the judgment before Osiris, Egypt integrated social and moral codes with the treatment of the dead. The deceased, male or female, stands before Osiris and forty-two judges who represent an aspect of cosmic balance or *maat.* She must name the judges and declare innocence as her heart is

weighed against the feather of *maat*. If the heart is heavier than the feather, the deceased is consumed by Ammit, the waiting monster of annihilation. If the heart is light with conscious innocence, she proceeds into the afterlife. The deceased makes his "negative confession": he has "*not* lied, borne false witness, stolen, cheated, or robbed."[50] Nor, with a stunning thoroughness, quite beyond the Ten Commandments, has he "sulked, stolen the bread ration, instilled fear in another, sexually abused a young boy, been abusive of another, been too hasty, said too much, committed treason, bathed in water reserved for drinking, raised my voice, cursed the divine assembly, been boastful."[51] An ideally submissive, social personality emerges, entwined with anticipated, dreaded deviations—the loud boastful bully and the fearful subordinate, the assertive, rebellious individual and the conciliating honest man, the traitor-blasphemer and the loyal, pious citizen. The Egyptian facing judgment cannot claim he was never warned.[52] If only the dead read these rules, the living transcribed them, at length and often, and they seem to be drawn from the life.

As judgment developed more details, the journey more hazards, and the destination more similarity to Egypt, one concern that had not occurred to pharaoh emerged (post 1990 BCE): the horrid possibility of eternal labor in the Field of Reeds. Reflecting their hierarchical and bureaucratic social structure, Egyptians delegated. They avoided labor in the Field of Reeds through *shabtis* (a doll substitute or slave for the person) and magic formulae. Originally a stick substitute for the mummy itself, a place for ka and ba in case of damage, shabtis lose their mummiform shape when they go to work.[53] The first *shabti* spell appeared between 1990 and 1780 BCE (Dynasty XII, Spell 472 of the Coffin Texts), becoming chapter 6 of the Book of the Dead in Dynasty XVII (1650–1550 BCE). Chapter 5 bears the title "The Chapter of Not Allowing the Deceased to Do Work in the Underworld," followed by chapter 6, "The Chapter of Making *Ushabti* Figures Do Work for a Man in the Underworld."[54] In Ikram's summary, the spells show a clear knowledge of the organized and meticulous labor Egyptian fields required and an equally deep desire to evade that labor: "O *shabti*, if [the deceased] is commanded to do any work in the realm of the dead: to prepare the fields, to irrigate the land or to convey sand from east to west; 'Here I am' you shall say."[55] Life was not easy for *shabti*. One tomb contained 401 *shabtis*: one for every day of the year and 36 overseers, identified by their more elaborate costumes and whips.[56] *Shabtis*

sometimes had their own coffins, where they rested the other 364 days. By 1000 BCE, *shabtis*, now called *ushabtis* ("ushabti" to answer, "here I am" being the answer anticipated), were mass produced, crude, and plentiful. They answered the call to work with the reliability of Abraham or Samuel or Mary replying to God, and they enabled an easeful afterlife. No one intended any longer to convey sand from east to west or to begin doing so for the first time in another world. Men carouse, eat, drink, plow, and reap, and the individual need have no fear. He expects justice and knows the names of his gods.

Yet however determined elite and lower status Egyptians were on their easeful eternity and their names' survival, other Egyptians often failed to accord them due respect, and skepticism flourished beside belief. Tombs and coffins were recycled; mummifying materials embezzled; grave goods palmed, by those in positions of authority and with access. Tomb-robbers plundered tombs, blithely preferring the goods of the present to others' eternal welfare. Those who robbed tombs were often those entrusted with building and guarding them, such as the Chief Doorkeeper of the Temple of Amun, Djehuty-hotep, brought before Pharoah.[57] The punishment for tomb robbers was severe: erasure of individual identity, now and eternally. "Five cuts" removed the facial features: nose, ears, lips. The living person was impaled, and the name was expunged, removing the person from the worlds of the living and the dead.[58] Only pharaoh could impose death or mutilation.[59] The first evidence of capital punishment in Egypt appears as a tomb inscription setting out punishment for tomb violations.[60] Bribery saved the tomb-robber stone-mason Amenpnufer to return to his practice and be caught again. When human police failed, curses invoked the gods for enforcement.[61] Natural anxiety over death transferred itself to anxiety over one's tomb and its security, as problems deriving from status and class differentials continued into eternity.

The intrepid continued to look out for their interests in this world, regardless of consequences in this life or the next. Something like skepticism, as well as greed and desire, may have animated the breakers of tombs. Certainly, class resentment at ontological difference moved some. Robbers took the gold and jewels from the body "of this god" and looted household stuffs and silver wrapping from the singers of Amun Re. Some enjoyed disrupting the afterlife of these gods, schadenfreude with profits. Amenpnufer set fire to the coffins of the mummy of this god and his

queen and boasted the city's complicity.[62] Setting fire to the mummy-body destroyed the souls; burning meant annihilation. Actively hostile, from others' harm they did themselves some good, making merry with what they gathered riskily from others' tombs.

Skepticism emerges within the tombs of the New Kingdom (1580–1090 BCE), ironic mummies engaging confident ones. The songs of the Harpers flourish in the New Kingdom, advising the dead to make merry, feast, and drink, because generation succeeds generation, men are forgotten, their walls crumble, their places know them no more, their property passes to others, and no one returns from the dead. Often called "heretical" for representing the fate of the dead as "dubious," the songs engage a dialectic of life and death in which life dominates but death is not deprecated.[63] Addressing the Osiris within the tomb, the dead person as god, the songs advise him, happy in death with wife, child, feasting, and pyramid, to enjoy life while he lives it. That curious double time recognizes that in many cases the tomb's future occupant selected the songs' advice to live now that would accompany him when he was dead. So, too, survivors visiting the tomb to feed the dead found themselves advised how to live in the shadow of death.

Miriam Lichtheim argued that the first Middle Kingdom harper's song of Antef, surviving in two New Kingdom copies and inspiring a genre, was a secular poem transferred to a funerary context.[64] Except for one phrase in some songs, "the land that loveth silence," the songs suggest no apprehension about the fate of the dead. Their skeptical empiricism concerns this life. However fundamental it may be to Christianity, returning from the dead was never an Egyptian expectation. Grave goods are recognized as symbolic. Still, the original is chilling:

> Make holiday, and weary not therein!
> Behold, it is not given to a man to take his property with him.
> Behold, there is not one who departs who comes back again![65]

Only in the Ptolemaic period does the harper theme explicitly reject the traditional Egyptian afterlife. In a unique funerary stele for the wife of a high priest of Ptah, dying at the age of 30 in 42 BCE, every expectation of consciousness, pleasure, and familial reunions characteristic of Egypt vanishes, replaced by a land where one lies unconscious in the dark,

wrapped in eternal sleep. Dead, Taimouthes advises her surviving spouse in the familiar terms of the harper songs: "Cease not to drink, to eat, to get drunk, to enjoy sex, to make the day joyful, to follow your inclination day and night; do not allow grief to enter your heart." Suddenly, however, she seems to have returned from the dead to report a mistake: "The West land is a land of sleep and of darkness, a place whose inhabitants lie still. Sleeping in their form of mummies, they do not wake to see their brothers; they are conscious neither of their father nor their mother; their heart forgets their wives and children."[66] The afterlife in the West land and the mummified body mark the stele as traditionally Egyptian, and the forgetful heart has a terrible poignancy as the seat of consciousness closes down.

That the stele should be a priest's wife's is curious. It could scarcely be erected without priestly complicity, and it praises "Apis-Osiris-Khentamenti, King of Gods,/ Lord of eternity, ruler of everlastingness." Yet, like some other inscriptions, especially for those dying young, it finds darkness where others expected glad justice.[67] Wilkinson regards the stele as signaling a new fear of death, but Taimouthes, or her spouse, seems more sadly resigned than fearful.[68] Death's certainty enhances life's precarious pleasures and brings to mind what is most dear, getting drunk or fathers and mothers, wives and children, but in depreciating the West land, something has been lost. A priest so enlightened may reflect the waning moral and political significance of the priesthood in Ptolemaic Egypt, reduced to marginality in a political-intellectual world where power is located elsewhere. Or he may indicate a priestly family negotiating two worlds, integrating the heterogeneous views circulating in contemporaneous Epicurean Greek and Roman thought.[69] First-century Egypt belonged to the Mediterranean.

Egyptian beliefs also traveled. As Greece and Rome redesigned their afterlives in the fourth century, Egypt's hopeful divinities participated, when they were anthropomorphic. Marking a fundamental revolution in the afterlife, immortality broke loose from the mummified body. In Egypt itself, that break is marked by the disappearance of canopic jars and the shoddy mummification of the Roman period, the image of the person replacing the preserved body in importance. Proliferating after 333 BCE, Isis cults spread through Greece to Rome and beyond to the Danube, Spain, and Britain, scattering as evidence the occasional temple, scarabs, amulets, faithful ushabtis, and, more rarely, mummy.[70]

In Gaul, homemade *ushabtis* and amulets scrambled the hieroglyphics, showing that neither the maker nor the buyer could read the Egyptian script, though both trusted its efficacy. Nîmes, now immortal for the term *denim* (de Nîmes), once had a temple of Isis and still boasts, along with its emblematic crocodile beneath a palm tree, the Tour Magne (c. 16 BCE) modeled on the lighthouse of Alexandria. There a Roman legion settled, granted lands after service in Egypt, and the legionnaires brought along customs and beliefs they did not want to leave behind. Ushabtis have turned up in Orange and Avignon, not far from the palace of the popes.

Traveling through the Mediterranean to control the afterlife, Isis and Osiris absorbed preexisting regional imagery and magical practices and lost some of their own.[71] Apuleius was an initiate and priest of Isis; his underworld offers opportunities for worship, but the Field of Reeds has vanished for him. His goddess gleams in darkness through subterranean Elysian Fields. Syncretism was already visible in Herodotus (485–424 BCE). Ignoring zoomorphic deities, he identified Isis and Osiris with Demeter and Dionysus, assimilating pantheons. Specifying which animals were sacred to which gods, he regarded as trespassing on the domain of the sacred. In Rome, temples to Isis and Serapis were destroyed in 53 BCE, rebuilt in 43 BCE, and so popular they required regulation in 21 BCE.[72] In an aristocratic Roman household related by marriage to Nero, Osiris's image was placed among the Roman *lares*, or household gods. At the same period, Nero embalmed his murdered wife Poppaea with spices in "the style of the eastern kings."[73] In Ovid and in Apuleius, Isis is a heroine, performing a sex-change in Ovid and restoring a donkey to human form in Apuleius. The zoomorphic gods were not so readily received.

Alexander the Great had consulted the bull god Apis and the oracle of Amun to confirm his divinity (331 BCE). His successors the Ptolemies turned Apis the bull god into Serapis, a human image combining Apis and Osiris, whose worship they promoted.[74] Religious stelae represent Augustus performing sacrifice to animals, although as emperor he claimed to scorn it.[75] By the turn of the eras (first century BCE into CE), contempt for gods in animal form emerges, increasingly vicious as Egypt subsided into a Roman province, until it contaminated the mummy's immortality.

Commemorating Cleopatra and Antony's defeat by Octavian, Virgil set against Neptune, Venus, and Minerva, Egypt's "monstrous gods of every form and barking Anubis": "omnigenumque deum monstra et latrator

Anubis" (*Aeneid*, VIII, 698).[76] The Alexandrian Jew who wrote the Wisdom of Solomon (c. 38 CE [30 BCE-70 CE]) sneered that the Egyptians accepted "as gods those animals that even their enemies despised; they were deceived like foolish infants." Nor did they even choose animals wisely: "most foolish . . . they worship even the most hateful animals, which are worse than all others when judged by their lack of intelligence; and even as animals they are not so beautiful in appearance that one would desire them" (WS 12.24; 15.14, 18–19). A little later, Paul (fl. 50–64 CE) pitied those who exchanged "the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles" (Rom. 1:23, c. 60 CE). Egyptians and Greeks were equally wrongheaded to a Jew turned Christian. Plutarch (46–post 119) inveighed against the animal cults (*De Iside et Osiride*). Cicero anticipated Juvenal's hostility to "demented" Egypt: "Who does not know the custom of the Egyptians? Their minds are infected with degraded superstitions. . . ."[77] For Juvenal (60–100 CE) eternal life was more than counterbalanced by an anthropocentric aversion to gods in animal shapes: "Who knows not, O Bithynian Volusius, what monsters demented Egypt worships?" (Satire XV, ll.1–2). They prefer crocodiles, ibis, long-tailed apes, cats, and dogs to Diana.

Egyptians flaunted animal worship as a sign of cultural distinctiveness and national identity. The second-century satirist Lucian (c. 125–c. 192) mounted a sort of defense. In Hades, Egyptians were better preserved than other people because of their embalming.[78] In *Parliament of the Gods* (*Thea Ekklesia*), Momus mocks the Egyptian dog and bull gods for their barks and snorts, accompanied by ibis and crocodiles, but Zeus defends their mystic significance.[79] So, too, in the *Dialogues of the Sea-Gods* (*Enalioi Dialogoi*), the South Wind is troubled by Hermes' "giv[ing] up his own fine face for that of a dog." Io, once a heifer, has changed back to a woman in Egypt to become Isis, but Hermes, her guide, has turned dog-faced Anubis. The West Wind accepts cultural differences among the gods, "Let's not be inquisitive. He knows his business better than we do."[80] Lucian's contemporary, Apuleius (c. 125–c.180) apologizes to readers of his *Golden Ass* "put off by the Egyptian story-telling convention which allows humans to be changed into animals and . . . restored."[81] He does not mention gods' looking like animals.

By the third century CE, Cassio Dio links the absurdity of animal worship with mummification, tinged with resentment at the mummy's claim

to overcome death. Octavian, centuries earlier, he affirms, stirred up his troops before Actium: Egyptians "worship reptiles and beasts as gods [and] embalm their own bodies to give them the semblance of immortality."[82] Their immortality is only seeming. By this time, Christianity was flourishing alongside Jews, Greco-Roman pagan philosophers, and traditional Egyptian beliefs. Egyptians were early adopters of Christianity, the inventors of monasticism and the original hermits, and the old creed anticipated the new in first promulgating the golden rule.[83]

Neither Christianity nor Islam cost Egyptians their immortality or their bodies, now to be resurrected entire and whole. Well before the modern religions to which Egyptians converted, Egypt had developed an afterlife that fulfilled pharaoh's wishes, consoled the living and the dying in their separation, promised reunions, integrated morality with a life to come, attempted to control minds and behavior by promises of afterlife rewards and punishments, and generated considerable anxiety to accompany its promises. "May existence always follow death!" say the late Ptolemaic "Instructions of Ankhsheshonq."[84]

Among the features that mark these conceptions as very early is their thorough embodiment. Body and soul are separable, but souls depend on the body. The body in turn is dependent on a technology of preservation (all mummification continues to be fascinating). The initial challenge to afterlife ascents is personal complaints of others against the dead, rather than a judicial process between the gods and the heart. Formal judicial process develops when others besides pharaoh and his closest associates make the ascent. The Pyramid Texts testify to a well-established system of judicial accusation, appeal, and arrest that becomes more formalized in the later Coffin Texts and Books of Going Forth by Day. The court or open space of accusation in the presence of local authorities comes to resemble a court of justice where elevated judges preside. Annihilation awaits the decay of the body, as the promise to Pepi I intimates: "[H]e will not decay, he will not rot, he will not be ended."[85] Burning terrified, for it turned those burned "into ones who do not exist."[86] That in the earliest texts pharaoh ascends to the stars, avoiding the land of the dead, discloses the early, abhorrent realm overlaid by later conceptions, reintegrated by judicial punishment. Among the dead, life was reversed: instead of excreting urine, one drank it, in darkness, not light. The realm of the gods was sunlight, and to that realm this god the mummy aspired.

The Books of Going Forth by Day guided through dangers reversing this life before a life like this one could be attained.

According to puzzled Greeks, conscious of their own aversion to looking at or touching the dead, Egyptians kept the dead as mummies in their houses and used them as security for debts.[87] Even the famed Scythian practice of eating the dead seemed preferable. For Egyptians death continued as controllable as the Nile, at once predictable and challenging, requiring expertise, technological skill, and more than a little magic. As Sobek the crocodile god murmurs in the Pyramid Texts, "I have come to my waterways which are in the bank of the flood of the Great Inundation, to the place of contentment, green of fields . . . green the herbage. . . ."[88] Another Nile at flood, death is a life-giving danger to be traversed by the boat of the sun, with a map certified by the scribes.

RESISTANCE IN SUMER AND BABYLON

Empathy with the body; social panic and grave goods; resisting death and intensifying its terrors; absence of morality; independence of legal codes; improving conditions for the dead; the transformations of Gilgamesh; the death of the city

Their contemporaries in Sumer and Babylon were not so fortunate. Their river at flood made the deluge that wiped out all mankind, save one family and some craftsmen.[89] Death was grim for kings, gods, and people. Sumer and Babylon embraced the rotting body underground that the Egyptian system deliberately prevented. Adepts of legal codes for this life, they failed to provide the justice that Egyptians looked for in the next, but they also imposed no judicial challenges to overcome. Morality and law remained independent of death. Yet they did not leave death altogether unimproved and hopeless. They invented, oddly and desperately, some hope for the man with many sons, and they looked to their gods and their families for clear water. Sumerians also took excellent care of dead infants, the best on record, comparable only to the Mesoamerican festival of *muertecitos*.[90] If Egypt imagined death as a continuation of life, Sumer and Babylon imagined the dead as if they were alive, thirsty, deprived of light, requiring the ritual care of the living.[91] Dreadful as death was, annihilation was worse.

To mark the contrast with Egypt, we look first at Sumerian afterlife representations, for their horror of the body and the state of the dead, the absence of explicit moral considerations regarding the dead, and the consolations they proposed for themselves in community solidarity, both before and after death. Then we turn to the great Babylonian/Akkadian poem *Gilgamesh*, derived from Sumerian sources and legend, and its desperate, failed challenge to death's inevitability. The song of mortality salience, *Gilgamesh* was revised by its later editors from individualist epic into corporate statement, adding in a twelfth tablet the best promises about the afterlife that Sumerian culture had produced. While Assyriologists are often unhappy about that appendage, it haunted the composer Bohuslav Martinů (1890–1959), whose choral *Epic of Gilgamesh* (1954–55) concludes with that tablet's vision of the state of the dead, Christianized or modernized only slightly, and perhaps unconsciously.

In Sumer, Babylon, and Assyria, death's definitive rupture lacked Egypt's pleasures and consolations. Even the gods of the underworld sat in the dark, lamenting their bitter bread and brackish water. Their theodicies were cheerless. "A Sufferer and a Friend in Babylon" finds the world as unjust and corrupt as the Egyptian, but makes no promises of justice in the next world. "People fill the storehouse of the wicked with gold, / While they steal a beggar's bowl." The gods permit behavior humans disapprove, deception and oppression, but no one understands why: "The way of your divine patrons is beyond human understanding . . . Though one may witness the will of one's divine patrons, / No one can understand it." All the sufferer can do is plead for a change of heart now, at once, soon: "May the divine patrons, who abandoned me, / Now have mercy on me . . . May Shamash, the good shepherd, / Once again shepherd his people as he should."[92] As in ancient Israel, when Sumerians and Babylonians attributed justice to their gods, they expected it in this life.[93] Their vision of the afterlife promised no atonement for injustice suffered in this world, no intervention by Ra, Thoth, or Isis. At best, the gods of the netherworld might allow the dead fresh food.[94]

Compared to Egypt, what strikes modern readers about Sumerian (c. 2100 BCE) and later Babylonian afterlives (c. 1750 BCE and later) is their unrelieved misery. So Alexander Heidel exclaims, "total annihilation would have been an incomparably better lot."[95] Yet there are no hideous torments like those in Christian, Muslim, or Buddhist hells. No Greek

vultures rend livers, no rocks roll endlessly downhill. No Egyptian monster gapes to swallow the heavy-souled sinner. As with the Egyptians first and Christians later, those who improve afterlife prospects traditionally—and strategically—taint the promise with penalties. (Penalty-free heavens triumph only in the twentieth century.) The source of Heidel's dismay is the way the Mesopotamian afterlife empathizes with the dead.

The dead, lamenting, lie down, "never to rise again, never to rise again, never to rise again," the refrain insists. On a road from which no one returns, the dead reach a land of darkness, where the water is brackish and bread bitter; they feed on clay and dust. Bodies turn verminous and vile; the worm seizes them, crawls through their nostrils, and drops out; genitals dissolve into slime.[96] In a "Lament for Ur" around 2000 BCE, the city chokes with corpses, and "The flesh of the dead, like lard left in the sun, melts from their bodies."[97] Sumerians observed what happens to corpses in their marshy, riverine terrain—corpses they made no fruitless attempt to mummify—and they represented the afterlife in terms of what it would be like to be a corpse put underground, yet retaining some consciousness under the earth. They thought themselves into a body thrust out of the sunlight into the dark, immobile but conscious as they themselves were conscious. Death corrupts the body and deprives the person of everything the living desire. Heidel senses that this afterlife is very close to being buried alive and feeling oneself rot.

Death as life's inescapable antithesis Sumerians made central to their poetry. Egyptians showed what they valued by what they took with them into the next life; the Sumerians by what death took from them. Poem after poem takes up the lament: "Ninjiczida's Journey to the Netherworld," "The Death of Bilgameš," "The Death of Ur-Namma," "Bilgameš, Enkidu, and the Netherworld," "Dumuzid's Dream," "*Balbale* to Ninĝišida," "An *ululumama* to Suen for Ibbi-Suen," "A *šir-namursaĝa* to Inana for Iddin-Dagan," "A *šir-namšub* to Utu," and "The Descent of Inana."[98] Inana herself, goddess of love and war, descends from heaven to the world of the dead, passes through the seven gates, where she is stripped of her crown, her necklace, her breast adornments, her ring, her lapis measuring rod and line (insignia of power), and her robe. Death equalizes. Naked, mere body, the goddess hangs on a hook on the wall in the palace of Ereshkigal, goddess of death: dead meat. Revived by flies' bringing life-giving water and plant, she cannot leave her hook without a

replacement. The rhythmic chant, mind-numbingly repeated by netherworld demons, ends in a chilling threat—death never lets go: " 'Who has ever ascended from the Underworld, has ascended unscathed from the Underworld? If Inana is to ascend from the Underworld, let her provide a substitute for herself."[99]

Taking away everything in which life recognizes itself, death's demons silhouette Sumerian self-concept and values. Not every dead Sumerian possessed a lapis measuring rod and line to give up, but the living knew the value of what the demons lack. Leveling death takes away what life enjoys: light, children, wives, gifts (celebration, family, sociality), sex, drink, fish, and garlic. The demons "know no food, know no drink, eat no flour offering and drink no libation. They accept no pleasant gifts. They never enjoy the pleasures of the marital embrace, never have any sweet children to kiss. They tear away the wife from a man's embrace. They snatch the son from a man's knee. They make the bride leave the house of her father-in-law."[100]

Bodily pleasures include the social bonds created by accepting gifts and the multi-generational ties of family, recognizing both men's and women's point of view. In "Dumuzid's Dream" the demons "who do not enjoy a wife's embraces, who never kiss dear little children" suffer missed culinary moments: "They never chew sharp-tasting garlic, . . . eat no fish, . . . eat no leeks."[101] So in the wilderness that would become death to them, resentful Hebrew slaves long for the Egypt they escaped: they want fish, cucumbers, melons, garlic, onions, and leeks (Num. 11:5). A land without fish and garlic is a land of the dead.

Although two Sumerian poems turn their dying kings (Bilgameš, Ur-Namma) into judges in the underworld, neither king is at all pleased with his assignment. Pharaoh, it will be remembered, had been promised precisely that becoming king among the dead would not happen to him. Advised not to go to the grave with his heart "knotted in anger" ("Death of Bilgameš"), the sighing, lamenting Bilgameš goes to the grave accompanied by human sacrifices, his wives and his "entourage."[102] Ur-Namma carries rich grave goods for the gods, not himself. The gifts he brings will not return to him the life he once led (a common assumption about grave goods), but, like the presents brought by petitioners to living kings, will persuade the gods under the earth to receive him kindly rather than threateningly.[103]

As actual grave goods, Ur-Namma's luxurious gifts to the gods of the underworld made a rich hoard: a bow with quiver and arrows, an artful dagger, a multicolored leather hip bag (Nergal); a spear, a leather bag for a saddle-hook, a lion-headed mace, a shield, a battle-axe (Gilgamesh); a bowl filled with oil, a long-fleeced robe (Ereshkigal); a sheep, a golden scepter (Dumuzid); a golden ring, cornelian jewelry (Namtar, fate); a lapis-handled box, a silver hair clasp adorned with lapis, a comb (Hušbišag, Namtar's wife); a golden-wheeled chariot, donkeys, horses (Ningišzida, the serpent, lord of the tree of life); a lapis seal, a gold and silver toggle with a bison's head (Dimpimekug); a headdress with alabaster ear pieces, a stylus, a line and measuring rod (Ninazimua, the scribe and wife of Ningišzida).[104]

Giving gifts to living kings is rational. Lavishing gifts on a dead king so he may conciliate the gods underground seems less so. Social panic motivates such generosity. In the poem, at the death of Ur-Namma, the world shatters. Cities are in ruins, canals broken, building projects halted; fertility ceases, in grass and cows. Moments of succession are dangerous, the people exposed and vulnerable. Magical thinking gives gifts to stave off pending disaster.

As judges in the underworld, neither Bilgameš nor Ur-Namma assesses the lived morality of the dead. No particular moral behaviors are demanded, no judicial process imposed on the dead, as in Egyptian guide books. Sumerians did not lack for laws. They first codified their moral behavior as laws under Ur-Namma (2112–2095 BCE; later texts allude to Urukagina's code, c. 2350 BCE), but law does not transfer to the dead. Addressing homicide, rape, adultery, slave marriage, divorce, false witness, fugitive slaves, physical injuries to noses, bones, teeth, slave women who curse and strike, misappropriated property,[105] law is a realm of disputes and settlements, of cases and resolutions, of conditions and consequences, if/when—then, rather than ultimate justice. It concerns the living, not the dead. As divine surrogate, the king is responsible for justice in this life, not the next.

Most tellingly, the next world is not even exploited for curses against those who tamper with the stelae bearing the laws and the name of the king. Lipit-Ishtar (reigned 1934–25) concluded with two columns of curses against anyone who alters his image or his name, but the curses all happen in this life—obliteration, childlessness, ruined cities, a land

without a king. In Babylonian texts that shifts, slightly. The Babylonian Hammurabi's code (c. 1750 BCE) multiplies columns of curses—rebellion, obliteration, famine, darkness, sudden death, blotted out memory, life force spilled like water, no children for him or his people, rivers dried up, carbuncles breaking out on his body. One faint line lost somewhere in the middle looks to the next world—his ghost will lack water.[106] Lacking water means no children supply it. If Sumerians did not link their laws with the next world at all, the Babylonians also failed to take much advantage of an invisible world. Life's common disasters, war, disease, climate variability, insurrection, were evil enough. The next world did not figure as a useful threat, and not because it was too far off, as Aphra Behn's African hero Oroonoko thought (1689 CE).

As to Egyptian-style reunions with loved ones, Ur-Namma recognizes Bilgameš in the netherworld, but not his own family. In a recently discovered fragment, Bilgameš is promised that his mother, sister, and friend Enkidu are waiting for him and will come to him, but the promise has as yet appeared nowhere else, down the social scale:

> Your mother, your sister, your *siblings*,
> Your precious friend, your little brother,
> Your friend Enkidu, the young man your companion [await you]. . . .
> From the sister's house the sister will come to you,
> From the *sibling's* house the *sibling* will come to you,
> Your own one will come to you, your precious one will come to you.[107]

Yet Sumerians were not willing to let the next world remain so grim, so demystified. Valuing fertility and social solidarity within the city state, they improved the condition of some of the dead, not as in Egypt according to vice and virtue, loyalty to the gods or blasphemous defiance, but according to how fertile one had been and how one died. Sacrifices and libations for the dead reaffirmed the bonds across generations between the living and the dead, fostering communally supportive behaviors. Lipit-Ishtar, in the prologue to his laws, proudly claimed, "I made the father support his children. I made the child support his father. I made the father stand by his children. I made the child stand by his father."[108] Social bonds were crucial

to Sumerian afterlife success. Only the living can make good their wishes for the dead: "May good beer never cease in your libation tube."[109]

Apart from a few elegies for named individuals, the only surviving Sumerian poem that promises happiness for common people in the underworld, "Bilgameš, Enkidu and the Netherworld" (*BEN)* spread widely. Often copied, it was excerpted, translated, and, when the Old Babylonian *Gilgamesh* was revised into the Standard Version, appended as a disconnected, but essential Twelfth Tablet.[110] In "Bilgameš, Enkidu and the Netherworld" death remains loathsome. The body crawls with vermin; what was once lovingly touched now disgusts. As in Egypt, the customs of the dead reverse those of the living. The dead have no oils, perfumes, sandals, games, no love or hate for wife and child. Yet even as social distinctions vanish, this afterlife builds a graded hierarchy resembling, as Dina Katz observes, a subterranean city-state.[111] How a person fares depends on how many sons he leaves behind, how he died, and whether anyone performs funerary rites for him. Starting from one son, then two sons, up to seven, the dead rise from weeping and sitting on bricks to yoking asses and ploughing, until the last, the man with seven sons, sits as with the gods giving judgment. With five sons, a man is as happy as a scribe in the palace of a prince.[112] Death is answered with a construction—built brick by brick—that proposes social solidarity, responsibility, and fecundity as a way of warding off loss.

Marking the sociality of such beliefs, their role in sustaining intergenerational solidarity, one version from the city of Girsu links the poem with funerary rites for mother and father. Told that his parents drink muddy water, Bilgameš resolves "O my father and my mother, I will have you drink clear water!" At the "Bank of Bilgameš" the rulers of Girsu performed the rites for their ancestors.[113] In moralized contexts, the father does not appear without the mother: both parents are fully recognized.[114]

Not all fates in the poem are fortunate. The infertile weep, male and female for unconsummated marriages: he weeps over a phallic rope, she weeps over a flat reed mat. The useless eunuch mourns propped against a wall, a dead stick; the childless woman, a defective pot. The man who has no funerary offerings survives on scraps and crumbs in the street. The abandoned dead are the scavenging homeless of the city of the dead.[115] Unexpectedly, the most purely pleasurable fate belongs to stillborn infants or children who did not long survive. "They play at a table of silver and

gold, laden with honey and ghee." Placed almost at the end of the poem, dead children, women's interests, assume a socio-cultural importance deleted in the Greco-Roman literary tradition. (Plato dismisses dead infants, Virgil lets them keep crying.)

Two lines later the poem ends abruptly in annihilation by fire. The last, terrifying place goes to the man not to be found—whose soul has disappeared, who no longer exists at all: "'Did you see him who was set on fire?'/ 'I did not see him. His spirit is not about. His smoke went up to the sky.' " [116] Lost in the emptiness of the air, the soul vanishes, a fate worse, it seems, than weeping underground. Underlining the arbitrariness of the sign, other systems will prefer burning to burial, but the Sumerians, like the Egyptians, seem to have abhorred it. It annihilated the body on which even the miserable existence of ghosts depended.

There is little moral assessment here; no assignment of places on the basis of virtue or vice, scant insistence on obedience to the god, none on violation of their shrines. Although gods are often said to be principally moralists, the Sumerian gods were not.[117] Of some sixty-six surviving manuscripts of "Bilgameš," only three refer to behaviors we would regard as moral, two from Ur and one of unknown provenance now in a private Norwegian collection. The morality they propose is familial or divine: relations with parents or one's god (the fifth and third of the Ten Commandments given to Abraham of Ur's descendants). The man who did not respect the word of his father and mother never gets enough water; the man cursed by his mother and father is deprived of an heir and his ghost roams; the man who made light of the name of his god has a ghost that eats bitter bread, drinks bitter water.[118] A single manuscript concerns itself with the "one who cheated a god and swore an oath": in what survives, he is at the top where water libations are offered; another, at the place of sighs of his father and mother, is afflicted by Amorites he cannot push off or charge down.[119]

Rewards are few, but the principal punishments seem to be regret, hunger, thirst, and memories of pain. The man eaten by a lion "cries out 'oh my hands, oh my legs.' "[120] Searching for a moral lesson, one learns it is better not to be eaten by a lion. Bodies should be whole and entire, or they will miss their parts forever. It is wonderful to have five sons, even better to have seven, but only heartbreakingly sad to have none. The little explicit moralizing that does appear regulates familial relationships,

affirming morality's evolutionary foundation in social solidarity, but also testifying to a continuing struggle between generations when childhood is left behind.[121]

Like burial, the Sumerian afterlife hinges on the dependence of the dead on the living, those to whom they gave birth and those who will care for them after death. No one can bury himself, and no one can provide herself funerary offerings, pouring beer in the libation tube. For such assistance, the dead must rely on the good will of those they leave behind. More than a contract between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are yet to be born, fertility and social bonds constitute happiness in life and provide whatever protection there is in death and whatever morality there is in a Sumerian afterlife.

Taking up the Sumerian tales, the imperial Babylonians made matters worse, death grimmer and the gods and men more helpless. Nowhere is the process clearer than in the evolution of *Gilgamesh.* Translating and reworking existing shorter Sumerian poems about the adventures and death of the eponymous hero-king and underworld judge Bilgameš, the Babylonian *Gilgamesh* has a textual history that extends over a thousand years, beginning around 1700 BCE, seeing considerable activity in the period 1200–1000 BCE, and fixed by 700 BCE. In the Old Babylonian Version (OBV) the impossible attempt to elude death and find immortality constitutes the long falling action of the adventures of a pair of heroes, two-thirds god Gilgamesh and the natural man Enkidu, who together have overcome every other challenge that gods or monsters present.

Much more than the simple fusion of scattered poems that Jack Goody suggests,[122] the first or Old Babylonian *Gilgamesh* poet put an existing Sumerian hero whose adventures were scattered through many poems, into a new, unified action in which he tried, and failed, to escape death. Sumerian Bilgameš had risked death in his combat with Huwawa (Akkadian "Humbaba"); he had given advice to his servant Enkidu about visiting the netherworld; he had found Ziusudra who survived the flood; he had defeated the bull of heaven and Aga of Kish, and he had died.[123] Death angered him, but no poem centered on an attempt to escape death or to find eternal life.[124] That, however, was precisely the futile exploit the Babylonian author invented for his hero. Over time, other scribes added additional adventures.[125] The last hand, probably the named author Sin-leqi-unninni, reshaped the opening and ending into the twelve-tablet

Standard Babylonian Version (SBV or SV).[126] Doing so, he created a ring poem that accepted death's inevitability and dangled from it afterlife expectations, the pendant twelfth tablet.

In one variant of ring structure, the beginning of a poem is echoed at the end, and then a second ending follows. Mary Douglas calls the second ending a "latch," setting "the text as a whole in a larger context, less parochial, more humanist, or even metaphysical."[127] The most familiar example is the biblical book Ecclesiastes. "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity, saith the Preacher," in chapters 1 and 12, shutting down his circuit from unsatisfying life to death. Then another voice enters. A scribe adds an inconsistent, but pious conclusion lamenting the making of long books and advising the reader to fear God and keep his commandments. The disturbing work closed in a ring, another voice enters with a consolatory, conformist purpose. The *Gilgamesh* Twelfth-Tablet latch scandalizes the literary sensibilities of many modern readers, but for Babylonians it closed death down.

Akkadian literature made more of death, and liked it even less, than did the Sumerian originals of the flood story and Inana's descent to the land of the dead. In both languages, the flood occurs shortly after the creation of man. The surviving Sumerian fragments do not say whether the Sumerian gods created men to do their work for them, digging canals and irrigating the lands, as the tired Babylonian gods do (and as the Lord does in Genesis, making a garden for the man to till and keep, not Him). The Sumerian gods hope men will build brick cities, and four gods create "the black headed people" and the animals to multiply everywhere. That benign opening contrasts markedly with the Babylonian version.

In Babylon's *Atrahasis* human life originates in death. The gods murder one of their own, and his blood is mixed with clay, molded by the goddess Nintu. When the flood is over, and Nintu has hung her lapis jewels in the sky, a rainbow to remember the episode, the gods determine, still intent on population control, that one-third of women shall give birth unsuccessfully and others will have their babies snatched from their laps.[128] The conclusion of the Sumerian flood story is missing, so we cannot know if it too ended by highlighting women's roles, but the distress of childbearing is not its physical pain (as in Genesis), but its losses, the deaths of children. Those losses must be explained as an arbitrary act of the gods themselves, so unnatural and so wrong is it to fail at the birth. Dead gods and dead children bracket the Babylonian flood story.

As Dina Katz observes, Babylonians' richer detail of the underworld made it even more disagreeable.[129] Sumerian Inana's descent from heaven was unpleasant, but she traveled to the otherworld beyond the mountain. Babylonian Ishtar descended into a subterranean grave, where even the grave goods decayed, the beer turned muddy, and the water soured.[130] Inana had gone "On the road where traveling is one-way only," but Ishtar arrives "To the house where those who enter are deprived of light." Conditions worsen, reproducing the body's return to earth, imagining a body in the ground filling with dust, its mouth filling up with clay: "Where dust is their food, clay their bread./They see no light, they dwell in darkness,/ They are clothed like birds, with feathers." Darkness and helplessness settle upon the inhabitants, winged, but not for Egyptian journeys to the stars. The dead become dangerous, cannibals of the living. Ishtar threatens to smash the gates: "I shall raise up the dead and they shall eat the living;/ The dead shall outnumber the living." Ereshkigal, the goddess of death, feels sorry for herself and the aborted families she creates: "I eat clay for bread, I drink muddy water for beer./ I have to weep for young men forced to abandon sweethearts./ I have to weep for girls wrenched from their lovers' laps./ For the infant child I have to weep, expelled before its time."[131] In the underworld, gods and men, goddesses and women suffer alike. Even the presiding goddess wishes she were elsewhere, otherwise engaged. This darkening perspective motivates the resistance of Gilgamesh.

As his original auditors doubtless expected, the Old Babylonian Gilgamesh failed both himself and us in his quest for immortality. The text took off. Traveling up through Turkey and over to Palestine (where a copy was found in Megiddo[132]), it was translated into many languages, perhaps adapted for dramatic presentation,[133] re-worked by the traditional author Sin-leqi-unninni (probably between 1200 and 1000 BCE), and stabilized by the eighth century, Homer's and Hesiod's time, as the Twelve Tablet or Standard Version (SV, sometimes SBV for Standard Babylonian Version to differentiate it from OBV, the Old Babylonian Version).[134] Multiple copies were recovered from Ashurbanipal's palace in Nineveh (destroyed 612 BCE), and every currently available fragment of the epic has been translated and sketched and commented in A.R. George's heroic *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* (2 vols. 2003). Copies later than the seventh century follow those made, as the tablets say, for Ashurbanipal, "king of

the world." The latest copy carrying a date is from about 130 BCE, when the Ptolemies ruled Egypt, the Hasmoneans Judea, and the Romans Greece.

The narrative casts a long shadow over Homer's *Odyssey* and the biblical Genesis. To *Gilgamesh* we almost certainly owe the kind of hero Odysseus is, a traveling, tale-telling hero who learns the manners of men and visits the land of the dead, where so many other western adventurers follow him. Genesis is shot through with memories of the Mesopotamian literary tradition. Knowing a woman makes a man like a god in seven days of love-making. She introduces him to clothing and beer. A wily serpent cheats mankind of eternal youth and knows the secret of the tree of life.[135] A flood sent by the gods to destroy mankind ends with birds, a sweet-smelling sacrifice, a goddess hanging the rainbow in the sky as a memorial, and a few survivors collected by the forewarned builder of an ark.[136] Gods differ, but the early history of mankind is made of borrowed, retold episodes.

After Alexander's Greeks swept through the near east in the fourth century BCE, cuneiform literature began to lose its regional political and cultural dominance, a story Assyriologists have just begun to popularize.[137] Berossus's *Babyloniaca* (early 3rd cent. BCE) represented Babylonian history and culture to the Greek conquerors. Only fragments survive.[138] The last cuneiform inscriptions date from the first century CE. At the end of the second-century CE Lucian of Samosata sent Menippus to Babylon to investigate the underworld, but Gilgamesh and all the ancient regional gods had disappeared: Lucian knew nothing of them. His afterlife, like his language, is Greek. Sumerian and Babylonian literature had been buried by—and in—Greco-Roman, Jewish, and Arabian tales, to disappear for almost two thousand years until the nineteenth-century excavations brilliantly related in David Damrosch's *The Buried Book* (2007).

Now that it has become our book and almost always a composite, *Gilgamesh* has even more variants than it had already acquired three thousand years ago. Modern redactors cannot bear to let go bits earlier Babylonian editors dropped, and sometimes reject what they added in Babylon. Specifically, mortality salience lurking behind the curtain, they cannot bear to omit Siduri's advice on how to live in the face of death, and they have little use for the futile afterlife consolations of the Twelfth Tablet. Thus an eleven-tablet *Gilgamesh* triumphs, a new text for new readers.

Gilgamesh initially accepts death as inescapable, attacking Humbaba, "whose breath is death":

> Who is there, my friend, that can climb to the sky?
> Only the gods have [dwelled] forever in sunlight.
> As for man, his days are numbered,
> Whatever he may do, it is but wind.[139]

Fame is the hero's recompense: "If I fall, I should have made my name" (George, I, 201, tab. iv, l. 148). Both Gilgamesh and Enkidu know death, expect death, so as the plot twists to escape death, it seeks to escape something they both know has always been already there, waiting.

Represented not as an inevitable natural phenomenon, but as the gods' arbitrary will in response to an irresistible cause, death comes from outside—in a dream. For killing the bull of heaven someone must die, Enkidu dreams, and the gods choose Enkidu. Raging against death, Enkidu curses his life, his name, and the harlot, to annihilation. From the triumphal door brought from Humbaba's cedar forest, of any king or god, "May he remove my name and set up his own!" (George, I, 637, vii, 63). Only the description of his funeral, his statue, the mourning of Gilgamesh and the city reconciles him to having lived, if he must die. As with Sinuhe, fantasying being present at one's own funeral is evidently very ancient. Enkidu moves toward acceptance, sensing the imminence of his own death. But then he tells another dream, a dream of death that seems to be what kills him, in twelve days, the number of solar months: "The day he saw the dream [his *strength]* was exhausted" (George, I, 647, vii, 254).

That dream terrifies. Powerless, suffocating, dragged into darkness, Enkidu trembles sick at heart. Threatening disembowelment and ripping flesh, the lion claws and eagle talons of an Anzu-bird-faced creature seize him by the hair, "capsize [him] like a raft," trample him "[l]ike a mighty wild bull," turn him "into a dove . . . [binding his] arms like (the wings of) a bird." (George, I, 643–45, vii, 169–183). A dove caught in the Anzu-bird's apotropaic talons, the warrior's mighty arms shrink to helpless, flightless wings. As in so many victory stelae, he is led captive to the house of Irkalla:

> to the house which those who enter cannot leave,
> on the journey whose way cannot be retraced;

to the house whose residents are deprived of light,
  where dust is their sustenance, their food clay.
They are clad like birds in coats of feathers,
  And they cannot see light but dwell in darkness.
On the door [and bolt the dust lies thick,]
  On the House [(of Dust) a deathly quiet is poured.]

(George I, 645, vii, 185–92)

Here useless crowns are heaped up, abandoned. Souls clothed with feathers, like birds, enact the "flight" of the soul or breath from the body; soul as *ba* or a bird occurs in Egypt and Greece, but here it does not fly.[140] Dead kings, purification priests sit with Etana, the king of Kish who flew to the heavens, now imprisoned in the dark, Shakkan, the god of the wild herds among whom Enkidu was raised, and Ereshkigal, Queen of Earth. Belet-seri, her scribe, holds a tablet, raises her head, looks at Enkidu, and says, "Who brought this man?" In most translations, Enkidu awakes in terror, because nothing can be made of the remaining fragments. But the scene goes on, the fragments themselves terrifying:

Before her [i.e., Ereshkigal] was squatting [Bēlet]-sēri, the scribe
  of the Netherworld,
  Holding [a tablet] and reading aloud in her presence.
[She raised] her head, she saw me:
  "[Who was] it fetched this man here?
[Who was it] brought [*this fellow*] here?
  [. . . .] made ready,
[. . . .] tomb.' "
A short lacuna.
'[. . . .] me,
  [. . . .] Ereškigal.
[. . . .] the deluge.'
Another short lacuna
'[. . . . I] saw his person.' A longer lacuna . . . about thirty lines.

(George, I, 645–47, vii, 204–21)

When the text resumes, Enkidu is speaking to Gilgamesh in the present, no longer of the dream.

The realm is female, ruled by the Queen of Earth, ordered by her scribe, also a woman, as in a queen's household. When Belet-seri looks up from her tablet (an item later associated with judgment or fate), she creates a moment of encounter sidestepped by Ur-Namma, when he gave the great feast and gifts to the gods assembled. George suggests Belet-seri's question and Enkidu's terror mark his having arrived in this realm without the expected gifts to placate the gods (II, 852n209–10). Nothing good happens here. Within the poem proper, this is the only description of the realm of the dead. Whether or not the OBV contained anything comparable is, at present, impossible to say. That tablet is dust indeed.

If the dream is indeed a Middle Babylonian or later addition (post 1400 BCE), death has again been made more fearsome, undoing the first dream's acceptance. George is certain Enkidu told Gilgamesh more about the ways of the underworld. Leaning on the line about seeing someone's "person," he suggests Enkidu might have seen famous individuals as Odysseus and Aeneas do on their later trips (George, I, 52, 483). But whatever Enkidu told Gilgamesh, it was not reassuring to either. No compensation to make death worthwhile has been promised, nothing to reconcile either man to the fate awaiting them both, a fate once so blithely dared for the sake of a name.

In the OBV, the moral of the story belongs to Siduri, goddess of taverns, the alewife. Hers is a curiously unheroic moral that links the individual to generation and the generations. Šamaš, the sun god, had warned Gilgamesh he would not find the life he seeks, and Gilgamesh cried out only for the light of the sun. There is more to life than light, Siduri assures Gilgamesh. Death she attributes to the gods' selfishness, and she advises a life of pleasure that is not solitary, but social. Eat, drink, and be merry, but also dance and play in fresh clothes, with a clean head, hold a child by the hand and embrace a wife. Feasts suppose guests; dancing and playing take partners; child and wife promise deep entanglement with another, even to the linking of bodies and generations:

> O Gilgameš, where are you wandering?
> You cannot find the life that you seek:
> when the gods created mankind,
> for mankind they established death,
> life they kept for themselves.

You, Gilgameš, let your belly be full,
keep enjoying yourself, day and night!
Every day make merry,
dance and play day and night!
Let your clothes be clean!
Let your head be washed, may you be bathed in water!
Gaze on the little one who holds your hand!
Let a wife enjoy your repeated embrace!
Such is the destiny [*of mortal men,]*

(George, I, 279, OBV col.iii, 1–14).

As in Ecclesiastes (though neither the Harper nor St. Paul), recommended pleasures entail creating another generation and embed the dying in continuing life, if not precisely his own. There is no recuperation of work (as in Ecclesiastes, "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" [9:10, KJV, emphasis added]). Only the privileged can dance day *and* night. Yet this demotic and accessible ideology finds no one alone in her pleasures, but deeply engaged with others in activities that strengthen social bonds.

The Standard Version (SV) does something quite surprising and almost always obscured in the composite texts prepared for modern readers. It shifts the moral of the poem from private to public, transferred from a goddess to an immortal man, the goddess feminized and disempowered. Creating a corporate, communal text out of an individualist, heroic poem, the SV replaces Siduri as the poem's moralist with Ūta-napišti, adds episodes (n. 125 below), and imposes the ring structure. As George observes, Gilgamesh brings back from his travels "the profound wisdom that underpins the proper, divinely ordained basis of human government and society" (I, 445). That wisdom is of course patriarchal. Elevating the city over the king, the permanent over the transitory, the poem glimpses the realm of the dead and threatens the living with invasion by the dead, but it also puts death in its place when the poem ends in the Twelfth Tablet. That tablet looks beyond the king to the people of the city and promises the continued care of the dead by the living, in a gesture to the community, to the city and its people. Yet it also concludes with a threat, reminding the living what will befall them if they fail to make good connections in life. There is danger in isolation in death.

Transferring as well as transforming his moral from private pleasures to public duties, the author of the SV erased Siduri's life-affirming advice and reduced her beyond recognition. Modern readers do not know that, because modern translations cannot bear to let her go. Once the poem's dominatrix moralist, she is still, for us, its heart. In the SV, however, the goddess at the sea's edge who challenged Gilgamesh and whose face he saw, now veils her face, frightened at his coming, and locks herself in her house. Once free-thinking and self-expressing, with an interest in supplying feasts with beer, Siduri turns into a veiled, timid exponent of hopelessness. She is not entirely silent, but she no longer advises and is not even certain about Gilgamesh's next move. Rather than giving counsel we all should follow, she underestimates Gilgamesh's prowess. No one, she advises, crosses this ocean to the Waters of Death except Shamash, but there is a boatman: "if [it may be] done, cross with him,/ if it may not be done, turn around (and go) back!" (George, I, 683–85, x, 81–84). Siduri has turned GPS, only a signaler of directions to the hero, and she is not even right about those.

Siduri's life-affirming simple pleasures, Ūta-napišti replaces with a philosophic moral that recognizes the hierarchy of kings and fools, the king's responsibilities to the gods (George, I, 445), and death's dominance over life. Death, Ūta-napišti assures Gilgamesh, is inevitable "both for Gilgamesh and for a fool" (Dalley, Tablet X, 107). In life the fool has dregs and rubbish, the king butter and advice. Death is equal, life is not. Ūta-napišti's fragmentary phrases, the gods "Sin and Bel," "the temples of the gods," "the holy shrines" (Dalley, 108), suggest the king has more to do than feast and play with his wife and child. When Ūta-napišti concludes with the impermanence of all things and the invisible power of Death, his imagery abandons individual desire for social and corporate relationships, houses, families, brothers:

> You are exhausting [*yourself* with] ceaseless toil,
> you are filling your sinews with pain,
> bringing nearer the end of your life. [n. lit. 'your distant days']
> Man is one whose progeny is snapped off like a reed in the
> canebrake:
> the comely young man, the pretty young woman,
> *all [too soon in]* their very [*prime*] death abducts (them).

No one sees death,
  no one sees the face [of death,]
no one [hears] the voice of death:
  (yet) savage death is the one who hacks man down.
At some time we build a household,
  at some time we start a family,
at some time the brothers divide,
  at some time feuds arise in *the land.*
At some time the river rose (and) brought the flood,
  the mayfly floating on the river.
Its countenance was gazing on the face of the sun,
  then all of a sudden nothing was there!
The abducted and the dead, how alike they are!
  They cannot draw the picture of death.
  The dead do not greet man in the land.
  [alt. mss. reading: Mortal man is imprisoned. . . .]

(George, I, 697, x, 298–318).

Death has gained in power and significance, but it is also part of human corporate activity, building houses, filling them, inheriting them, disputing over them in feuds. If Siduri looked to life, Ūta-napišti meditates on death, elusive and inescapable.

In what remains of the poem, Ūta-napišti tells Gilgamesh the story of the flood that destroyed mankind and mocks him with a test. If Gilgamesh can stay awake seven days, immortality is his. Gilgamesh fails, and Ūta-napišti's wife proposes a consolation prize. Gilgamesh is advised to dive for a magic plant of eternal youth. (Otherwise unattested in Sumerian and Babylonian literature, the magic plant resembles the Soma that keeps the Vedic gods immortal and young.[141]) At last succeeding, he resolves to take the plant back to Uruk to test on an old man, but he loses it to a serpent. (Some readings find Gilgamesh at last selfless rather than merely cautious when he plans to share.) As Gilgamesh bathes at a pool, a snake steals the magic plant, confirming the subtlety of snakes, explaining their long lives with shiny youthful skins, and inaugurating their ability to trick mankind out of what humans most desire. All that remains for Gilgamesh is to return to contemplate his city, and so he does. The poem concludes as it began, addressed now to Ur-shanabi rather than the reader, affirming

the grandeur of the city, its dimensions and its orchards, its temple and its clay-pits, within which the life of the people continues under the gaze of the king.

> Go up on to the wall of Uruk, [Ur-shanabi,] and walk around,
> Inspect the foundation platform and scrutinize the brickwork!
> Testify that its bricks are baked bricks,
> And that the Seven Counsellors must have laid its foundations!
> One square mile is city, one square mile is orchards, one square mile is claypits,
> as well as the open ground of Ishtar's temple.
> Three square miles and the open ground comprise Uruk.
>
> (Dalley, 120, 50)

The city holds its people, the orchards feed them, the clay-pits supply a technology of bricks and pottery, the temple climbs to the divine, and the narrative ends naming the city. Gilgamesh alive, repeats these lines to Ur-shanabi, knowing he cannot escape death, praising his living city.

Then the editor adds the Twelfth Tablet, a version of "Bilgameš, Enkidu, and the Netherworld," despised by Assyriologists but loved by at least one modern composer and the culture that created the poem. George, who dislikes the Twelfth Tablet, is exceptionally eloquent on Gilgamesh's last lines: "For the Babylonians the city was the one institution without which civilization was impossible. It was also eternal, built by the gods and inhabited by men, more ancient than memory and enduring into an unknown future. Uruk, vast in expanse and manifestly ancient, is a symbol of the archetypal Babylonian city. The fourfold division . . . is pregnant with meaning . . . the four areas of activity that most preoccupy human life on earth. The city proper . . . denotes the built-up areas, the domestic dwellings where men establish their households and raise their families; the date-groves . . . represent with their archetypal crop the agricultural activity and produce that nourish the human race; the clay-pits . . ., whence came the clay for making mud bricks and modeling rough terracotta figurines and plaques, symbolize man's creativity as builder and craftsman; and the great temple precinct of Ishtar stands for man's spiritual and intellectual endeavours. These four activities express the whole of human life: procreation, food production, manufacturing

and mental activity. All are enclosed within the great city's walls. . . . [G]aze on the city, consider the generations that surround you and learn that human life, in all its activities, is collective and not individual" (I, 527).

There George prefers the poem to end: open-ended, eternal, the proud hero and his city evading the closure that the poem describes for all. The Norton Critical Edition ends at the eleventh tablet, omitting any reference to the twelfth. N.K. Sandars disagreed; she thought Gilgamesh should die, like Beowulf, so her justly popular translation ends with another Sumerian poem, "The Death of Bilgameš," that no Babylonian before her ever thought to attach to the end of the poem.

The Babylonian scribes who created a ring poem had in view the purpose George teases from the last lines on the city walls, and they achieved it by translating, altering, and appending the second half of the Sumerian "Bilgameš, Enkidu, and the Netherworld." The infamously problematic Twelfth Tablet violates every Aristotelian narrative rule and makes modern critics shudder, but it ensures that we no longer take Gilgamesh's tale as applying only to an individual, but to all the men of the city who die.

At the bottom of Tablet XI an anguished catchline comes from nowhere and another poem: "If only I had left the *pukku* in the carpenter's house today!" (Dalley, 120, XII, co. vi; George, I, 725, 729, XII, 1: "Today, had I only left the ball in the carpenter's workshop!"). From that abrupt turn, the Twelfth Tablet dangles. The poem turns from the exceptional hero to the situation of the ordinary inhabitants of the city, telling them what their deaths will be like, what they can do to improve their situation under the ground, and what will happen to them if they fail to leave behind anyone to make offerings for their dead spirits. At its simplest, the poem argues that if Gilgamesh cannot escape death, who are you to complain? Live all you can, said Siduri, but that advice is now gone. In *BEN* and as added here, an imagined afterlife finally does what popular conceptions say they do—it provides comfort in the face of anguish, tells the individual what to do and what to expect, and unites the community in death and around the dead. It was also thought efficacious. A surviving eighth-century copy of the tablet explains that it was copied for use at the funerals of a king who had died on the battlefield, one of the categories of dead it names.

The Twelfth Tablet is an Aristotelian catastrophe. It fits neither as an ending nor as a continuation of the action of the poem. Scandalously, Enkidu, whose death motivates the poem just ended, is alive again; his

relationship to Gilgamesh changes from friend to servant, and he does not die, but is captured by the earth when he goes looking for Gilgamesh's *pukku*. Absurdly, Gilgamesh advises him on how to behave in the netherworld so as to be able to emerge from it: no oil, no sandals, no games, no embracing the wife you love or beating the child you hate, i.e., act dead. Where does this knowledge come from? Ancient Sumer, where Gilgamesh has long been an underworld deity, but not the poem the auditor has just heard, except for a brief allusion by Ninsun, "[Will he] not dwell in the Land-of-No-Return with Ningišzida?" (George, I, 581, iii, 106).[142]

Even worse, the continuity was salvageable. The author/editor could have made his point by beginning at a later moment in *BEN*. This narrative disaster need not have happened. The meddling scribes could simply have begun from the moment a god lets Enkidu up out of the ground to tell Gilgamesh what death is like. In that alternate structure, Gilgamesh, still mourning, returns to his city, boasts of it, seeks the gods' help, and learns from the risen Enkidu about the death Enkidu has found. No awkwardness, no discontinuity, and the audience learn about death, just as they do from the discontinuous tablet now before them. The join between the poems would be seamless, and the episode would continue the action. Instead, the join occurs so as to violate every narrative expectation.

It is possible that late Babylonian editors were simply very stupid and did not understand the literary effect of their addition. It is more probable, as the translation's alterations of the original suggest, that they knew what they were doing. The awkwardness of the join allows the redactor to deliver his tablet on death with no danger that it will be mistaken for a continuation of the narrative. With a continuous narrative, the story remains focused on Gilgamesh, whose last move is not toward his city, but from his city back to mourning. Gilgamesh also changes from a man defeated by death, like other men, to a shaman-priest who can bring the dead up, with the gods' help. Given Gilgamesh's prominent role throughout the period in exorcisms and the netherworld—as judge, boatman, figurine—that would have been an easy move to make (George, I, 132–35). Instead, as appended, the Twelfth Tablet starts over. Gilgamesh is left as a living hero overlooking a living city, but that city is juxtaposed with the city underground that needs offerings from the city of the living. The ring structure seems to exist for two reasons: to shift attention from the hero to the city and to make the tablet dangle. By adding an appendage to the

ring, the scribes made certain their auditors recognized the abruptness of the turn away from the principal narrative to the concerns of the city's inhabitants, understood though not named in the salute to the city.

The catch line itself carries significant emotional weight: "If only I had left the *pukku* in the carpenter's house today!" (Dalley, 120). The line creates suspense and evokes longing and loss, the eternal "if only" that would have changed everything. George's translation begins "Today," creating the tension of immediacy, the now, breaking into the reader's present. The pendant Tablet makes twelve, not an insignificant number in the ancient Middle East suggesting that the flood story may have been added to make a seven- or ten-tablet OBV into eleven, to which a twelfth could be added. Eleven has never counted for much, lying between the meaningful 10, the number of digits, and 12, the number of lunar months and of double-hours of the path of the sun that Gilgamesh traverses (George, I, 495; 671, ix, 82). Although the tablet is often dismissed as merely a translation of the Sumerian original, there are slight but significant alterations, especially at the end.

Those alterations to the Sumerian original comfort, reconcile, and warn those who attended to the story of Gilgamesh and Enkidu. As in *BEN*, once the pair finish sitting and weeping, the rewards begin for the man with two sons. The father of one still weeps, but the father of two eats bread, and the father of five enters the palace like a scribe, as of right. Yet the children disappear from their prominent place in the Sumerian ending. One hopes they have been moved to an earlier position in lost lines, but, as with Siduri's veiling, they may have been removed by a society interested less in women's investments than in manly ideology.

In the Sumerian original, the man killed in battle does *not* have his father and mother hold his head, while his wife weeps.[143] That negative is unimaginable. No society known to us fails to reinforce the desirability of young men's dying on behalf of the state. The society that produced Tablet XII "corrects" the error, providing the man killed in battle with his father and mother to honor him, as well as his weeping wife. He is then contrasted with the man whose corpse lies abandoned in open country, on the plain (George, I, 735, xii, 150). To be left to the dogs and birds was common for those who fell on the losing side in battle, their bodies unrecovered. Finally, the last line warns against isolation in death with an abruptness equal to the Sumerian poem's soul going up in smoke.

Rather than fearing fire, however, this poem fears solitude and demands relationships:

> "Did you see the one who [died] a natural death?" [lit. "the death of his god"] "I [saw (him).]
> He lies drinking clear water on the bed of the [gods]."
> "Did you see the one who was killed in battle?" "I [saw (him).]
> His father and mother honour his memory [lit. hold up his head] and his wife [weeps] over [(him).]"
> "Did you see the one whose corpse was left lying in the open countryside?" "I saw (him).
> His ghost does not lie at rest in the Netherworld."
> "Did you see the one whose ghost has no provider [providers in some mss] of funerary offerings?" "I saw (him).
> He eats the scrapings from the pot (and) crusts of bread that are thrown away in the street."
>
> (George, I, 735, xii, 146–53)

Unlike the Egyptians, judged by their deeds, swearing their innocence, these ghosts are measured only by how they died, how many descendants they left, and whether those descendants supply them. No higher-order, abstract system intervenes between the dead, their offerings, and their gods. Morality, the be-all and end-all of afterlives from the modern point of view, remains conspicuously absent. Only at two points are there intimations of better company: the man who dies "the death of his god" has clear water and a bed, perhaps with his god, just as the man with seven sons sits as with the gods giving judgment. These motifs, being with god and giving judgment, appear in the psalms, and are often read as anticipations of blissful afterlives. They may be relics of these most hopeful instants in Mesopotamia; certainly, they are equally undeveloped.

Engaging descendants and forbears, the system reinforces an incentive to "be fruitful and multiply" even in unpropitious or dangerous times. Curiously, it also defies the gods who sought to diminish the human population in the flood and who denied humankind immortality, keeping that for themselves. Human fertility becomes creative resistance to the gods' plan to silence humanity and abort its (re)productivity. Embracing mortal pleasures, human beings subvert the gods' imposition of mortality.

Sumerians felt death's horrors, but not for their own deaths. Elegies for Nannaya (him) and Nawirtum (her) wish them clear water and light and the gods' pity, but Nannaya's progeny will multiply and beer fill his libation tube. What horrified, was the death of the city. Then storm and fire and enemies turned the ziggurat to a ruined mound, husbands abandoned wives and mothers their children, and the corpses piled in the streets. "How long will the brickwork strain its eyes upwards in tears and lamentations?"[144] The laments for the destroyed cities of Sumer, for Urim, Nibru, Unug, and Larsam, time makes only more painful.

Although ancient Mesopotamia may have had its skeptics, "the fool who has said in his heart" that there is no afterlife, neither the Sumerian poems nor their Babylonian successors imagine such skeptics, nor do they punish them. They do divert the Euphrates over body, entourage, and grave goods in the "Death of Bilgameš," hiding the tomb from violators, a problem when grave goods are rich and the poor not superstitious.[145] Their demystified accounts of death and its putrefying processes are rational, real, and depressing enough to satisfy any empiricist who credited only the evidence of her senses. No skeptic scavenges among the outcasts unless she should have been hardy enough to forbid funeral offerings or so unpleasant as to alienate his offspring.

As libretto for *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Bohuslav Martinů chose Ūta-napišti over Siduri for his choruses, and allowed the soprano only to ask Gilgamesh a question.[146] Friendship, death, and rising from the dead are the moments Martinů isolates. Calling on Ea to let Enkidu up, the music swells, eager, hopeful, expansive, edgy. But as Gilgamesh asks after the man who died suddenly, who rests on his bed, drinking cool water; the wife weeping for the man who died honorably; the restless spirits of the unburied, Enkidu answers only "I saw him." Modally based orchestral themes, long-spanned rhythmic ostinatos, and phrases chanted by a bass soloist on a single note: the living already know as much as the dead will tell them.[147] Gilgamesh's last question he never asked before—not of the isolated soul of Babylon or the annihilated soul of Sumer, but a spirit unknown to either, a gift from Egyptian or later inventions: "the spirit . . . for ever in torment." Sumerians wept their infertility or groaned their loss of limbs or groveled for scraps, but torment? For ever? These are the gift of the Christian tradition. Enkidu saw him, too, and the once percussive music does not protest, but subsides.

Babylonians and Egyptians shared practices that strengthen a culture through the threat death represents. They democratized death rites and afterlife beliefs, mastering death's rupture through recourse to survivors and to magic. Both dramatized the dependence of the dead on the living and identified the soul's fate with the body's. Burning the body destroyed the soul. Ashurbanipal forced his Elamite captives to grind up the bones of their ancestors.[148] The differences are more striking. The Babylonians embraced the body's mortification, neglected moralizing rewards and punishments, and had minimalist expectations for cuisine—clear water and rarely beer, rather than roast meats. Their grave goods were not for their own use, but to propitiate the gods. The Egyptian promises of self-delighting food, drink, play, and justice were simply not on offer, nor would they be until Virgil. Plato, privileging justice, dropped the food and drink as insufficiently philosophic. Virgil brought back feasts and war games. Most significantly, in Sumer and Babylon, as in Greece, moral and legal codes functioned independently of afterlife beliefs. That independence underlies the striking innovation of Israel-Judah, erasing any afterlife benefits in favor of life lived by a God-given legal code.

JERUSALEM AND ATHENS: JEWS, GREEKS, AND ROMANS

Dismal popular systems; the mysteries' improvements; philosophers and poets remodel popular beliefs in Greece and Rome; theological reform in Judea erases communication with the dead; paradoxical emergence of eternal life

In both Judea and Greece, the earliest surviving literary afterlives resemble the dismal pit of Sumer and Babylon, shades huddled together in the mindless dark. Both traditions send a few great heroes somewhere else—Hercules to Olympus, in-laws of gods to the Blessed Isles; Enoch and Elijah to walk with God or be whirled up by his chariot.[149] But no such destinations were posited for ordinary people, no Field of Reeds where justice was done and life continued. Conditions could have been worse. No one eats excrement upside down, as once in Egypt; nor is anyone annihilated or swallowed by a waiting monster. In Greece, a vague judgment

occurs somewhere in the middle distance, and a few traditional offenders against the gods are tortured in ingenious, hideous ways. In Israel, the drowsing dead rouse themselves to mock great fallen kings joining them amidst the worms. There is nothing to look forward to, and no gods to keep company.

In Greece, Homer and Hesiod disseminated popular beliefs, and some philosophers, most influentially Plato, irritably recast Homer to improve the afterlife's social and moral effectiveness. Determined to liberate others from the fear of death, some, including Epicurus, denied there was any afterlife at all. From the fourth to the first century BCE, philosophers quarreled and poets invented, while mystery cults spread from east to west, including Isis's. Two thousand years after the Pyramid Texts, Greeks and Romans laid purely psychic claims to the bodily-based, technologically grounded immortality of the Egyptians. Greek immortal souls survived burning, retained their rages, if they died angry, fled to Hades guided by Hermes, and remained accessible at their burial or dying sites to receive libations or hear prayers, in the spooky action-at-a-distance the dead are so skilled in. In sum, the dead both went away and stayed around, as they do.

Greek multiplicity, philosophic free play, and self-conscious modification for didactic and moral purposes (e.g., Aristophanes, Plato, Lucian) anticipate modern literary and cinematic afterlives. Coexisting with traditional received beliefs, ancient or contemporaneous, such texts are fictions in which no one believes and which no one disbelieves. They do not represent reality, explain the unknown, or provide the truth. Instead, they play with what might be or what ought to be, self-consciously exploiting the residual familiarity of traditional views to generate new possibilities more satisfying to the philosophic or artistic or moral imagination. These afterlives instruct the living in how they should think about life and how little they know about death. The afterlife is invented, denied, mused over, elaborated, or mocked. Death is imbricated in life, and only the scientific materialists who deny any afterlife exists (e.g., Lucretius) are seriously concerned about empirical truth.

In Judea, something even more interesting happened. Other peoples' promising, integrated afterlives were rejected, and a lively commerce with the dead eliminated by determined theologians on ideological grounds.[150] That the Mesopotamian tradition had not moralized its afterlives

simplified rejection. Paradoxically, this profoundly theistic move indicates why godless, atheistic societies need not undergo moral collapse in the absence of an afterlife promising rewards and threatening punishments. All that is required is a powerful alternative ideology. Judaism created (or was created by) such an ideology in the law of Moses, an all-encompassing moral system that governed the living, not the dead, and was predicated on the people's release from the social death of slavery in Egypt.

Fusing family, obedience, prosperity, life, and light, the law pushed death, disobedience, suffering, childlessness, and other evils into the dark. The binary thinking that divided animals into clean and unclean, men into circumcised and uncircumcised, God's image into male and female, was not insensitive to the binary living/dead. Separate as day and night were life and death, good and evil, light and dark. On the side of life, good, and light was the law: I set before you "this day life and good, and death and evil;. . . . [C]hoose life" (Deut. 30:15, 19, KJV). God guaranteed the law and life. With death he had nothing to do.[151] Afterlife there was none, apart from drowsing in the dark with other corpses.

Yet from this tradition emerges a promise of eternal life that has shaped western thinking for two thousand years: how did that happen? Within a few hundred years of the Torah's completion (c. 450–400 BCE), that law-defined community, deprived of the national independence promised in the founding traditions, faced persecution, division, and annihilation not for disobeying God's laws, but for obeying them (c. 175 BCE).[152] Judea's prophets had correctly foretold the destruction of a disobedient people and the restoration of an obedient one. That had happened already: the Temple destroyed in 587/86 BCE was rebuilt c. 515 BCE. God had once set things right and would again. If this world was awry, he would not leave his people without succor. About what would happen when God intervened again, opinion differed. He might be content with the people's obedience to the law and leave things as they were. He might restore the throne of David and the nation's independence (promised in the prophets); he might institute a universal reign of justice (promised in the prophets), with life restored even to the righteous dead (promised in the writings, Dan. 12:2–3). When one victim, crucified for preaching the approaching kingdom of God, appeared alive after his death in Jerusalem, many believed that his return as Lord was imminent (Dan. 7:13), and they began to wait, eagerly.

SILENCING THE DEAD: JUDEA ACT 1/ACT 2: MY DEAD BODIES SHALL ARISE

The cult of the dead in ancient Judea suppressed by religious reformers from the seventh century BCE; emergence of a doctrine of resurrection by the second century BCE; vestiges and extirpation of older beliefs; condition of the dead; moral and textual consequences of afterlife obliteration

Ancient Israel supplies the only known example of a society-wide, religiously motivated erasure of afterlife beliefs. In the modern era, from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, in France, Mexico, and Russia, the afterlife suffered collateral damage when proponents of secular ideologies attacked established religions and their imbrication in structures of power. New truth targeted an older, compensatory belief to discredit it. When God died, his afterlife usually went with him, chased away as deceptive folly by Marx, Freud, and Christopher Hitchens. The religious assault on the afterlife was equally ideological. It monopolized writing and elicited no articulate defense. Stamped out were local variants of the mummy's quasi-divine status as "this god" and the divinatory powers that raised Enkidu. Afterlife extirpation purified the universal monotheism developing in seventh-century BCE Judah. The Bible preserves the struggle over afterlife's erasure and its sudden re-appearance in a new concept, resurrection.

"Preposterous piffle, utterly absurd." So might bluster many modern Jews and Christians who believe in an afterlife and are firmly persuaded that such a promise is made in the Bible or in the Old Testament as well as the New. Once in place, belief can be read into passages where it is initially absent, as confirmation bias guarantees. The OT promises "life" at every turn. One need only insert a bracketed [eternal] to establish the eternal life Christianity prided itself on initiating when Jesus rose. Yet if eternal life were already there, how could Jesus have "abolished death, and . . . brought life and immortality to light," as the New Testament proclaims? (2 Tim. 1:10).[153] Before he turned from persecuting to proselytizing for Jesus, how could Paul be sure death reigned, yet as a Pharisee already believe in "resurrection" (Acts 23:6, 23:8)?

Jesus rose not only from the dead but also in mid-first-century Judaism. Eternal life had come to be expected, but it was not there yet. The book of Daniel, the latest book received as Hebrew scripture, was written

c. 165 BCE during an ultimately successful revolutionary upheaval against pagan Greek overlords. It promised one "like the son of Man" who would receive an everlasting dominion never to pass away (7:13, KJV). Terrible end times climaxed in resurrection, the only moment the Jewish Bible promises a life after this one:

> And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. *And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake*, some to *everlasting life*, and some to shame and *everlasting contempt*. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.
>
> (Dan. 12.1–3, KJV, emphasis added)

Before this surreptitious emergence of the shiny new promise of resurrection, cached among the Writings in the last division of the Jewish Bible, the Jewish Bible records in the Torah and Prophets (c. 650–250 BCE) the struggle against traditional Canaanite afterlife beliefs and the rupture of the old communication with the dead.

Gilgamesh was still being copied in the seventh century BCE beside Tigris and Euphrates, two great rivers girding Eden in Genesis, when Jerusalem's rising religious orthodoxy prohibited and marginalized a lively commerce with the dead and the ancestors. In 621 BCE (a decade before Ashurbanipal's library was buried, with its multiple editions of *Gilgamesh*), a "book of the law" was discovered in the Temple at Jerusalem—the core of Deuteronomy, now the last book of the Torah or Pentateuch (the five books with which every Bible begins), but the first of the five to be received or written. Its authenticity certified by the prophetess Huldah (2 Kings 22:13–20), the text continued Hezekiah's reforms (715–687/6 BCE) and motivated a new series of reforms under Josiah (640–09 BCE).[154] The material accretion of statues and images in and around the Temple was done away with, and mediums and their afterlife contacts went, too (2 Kings 23:24; Deut. 18:10–14).

The historic importance of the Temple discovery of the first of the Books of Moses can scarcely be overstated.[155] It made the religion of Judea

a religion of the book just before the eternal kingdom promised to David's son Solomon, the Temple builder (2 Sam. 7:2–16), was annihilated forever. Only the book found in the Temple, and Cyrus the Persian's intervention, prevented YHWH from going the way of the gods of "Hamath and Arpad. Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah?" (2 Kings 18:33–34). Where, indeed. Within a generation of the book's claim to authority, Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar, 597 BCE. Ten years later, Jewish resistance prompted the Babylonians to destroy the Temple and city walls and deport Jerusalem's leading inhabitants to Babylon (587 BCE). The prophet Jeremiah urged submission and is last seen being carried toward Egypt, challenged by women who sulk that nothing bad had happened as long as they served cakes to the Queen of Heaven (Jer. 44:15–30). Fifty years later the Babylonian Exile ended (538 BCE). Cyrus the Persian, antiquity's great exponent of imperial toleration, permitted Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple and city walls. As to the ark holding the stone tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments, some Greek-speaking Jews wondered what had happened to it when the Temple was destroyed. As they told the story, on that flight toward Egypt, Jeremiah had carried the ark and the tent to the mount of God and sealed them in a cave (2 Macc. 2:1–8). Under the Hasmoneans, straddling Greek and Roman rule (c. 163 BCE–63 BCE), Jews enjoyed their single century of independence before 1948 and the establishment of a modern Jewish state. Never again would a king of Davidic descent occupy the throne of Judea, but no one knew that yet.

The prophetic and Deuteronomist reading of history emerged reenergized, revitalized, and re-motivated by the cycle of Babylonian destruction and Persian restoration to Jerusalem. As the city fell, Jeremiah prophesied that the people would return in seventy years.[156] They made it back two decades ahead of schedule, armed with a book written before the event, Deuteronomy, assuring them that prosperity hinged on loyalty to YHWH. In the half millennium during (597/87–538 BCE) and after the Babylonian exile (538 BCE–70 CE), the Torah was compiled, the prophets collected, edited, and added to, the psalms and other writings accumulated until the Hebrew canon was closed shortly after the Temple was destroyed—again, this time by Romans—in 70 CE, during the rise of Christianity.

What these events mean for the afterlife is that the Bible was compiled by a religious orthodoxy hostile to communication with the dead out of older

texts that contained traces of the earlier popular cult. The Hebrew Bible bubbles with Babylonian afterlife imagery and knows something of Egyptian practices, but the god-filled underworld of Babylon has vanished, replaced by a generic pit, *sheol*, into which the spirits of all the dead pass. There, under the earth, the dead lie, finding no justice, raising no prayers, enjoying no pleasures, communing with no god. As Karel van der Toorn argues, this dim, dreary account emerged from a full-scale attack on an earlier family religion that cared for the dead as in the cults of Babylon and Assyria.[157] Modern scholars who attempt to read resurrection into texts before Daniel can never be entirely sure whether they have found an early reference to the later concept or a late reference to an earlier cult of the dead.[158]

Storm and sky gods, like Baal, Zeus, Ishtar, and YHWH, were always differentiated from the gods of the dead, as far apart as the heavens and the grave. (Sun gods differ, since they pass half the day in a netherworld.[159]) The Bible knows the architecture of the afterlife, the gates and halls familiar from Egyptian and Babylonian texts: "Have the gates of death been opened unto thee? Or hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death?" (Job 38:17, KJV), God asks Job. No underworld pantheon ever appears inside those gates, but in Hebrew grammar a few shades flit past of earlier conceptions. *Sheol*, the place where the dead go, is a feminine noun in Hebrew and cognate with Shuwela, the goddess of death, a Syrian variant of Ereshkigal.[160] *Mot*, past tense of the Hebrew verb to die, is also the name of the Ugaritic god of death, who defeats Baal and is then defeated by him. Hebrew "death," מות, *maret*, can also be written *mot*.[161] So when death and *sheol* are personified, as they often are in the biblical text, they verge on the gods of death known to neighboring peoples. There is, however, no mythology associated with them, no history, no character. They have been emptied of personality. They do not speak. They certainly do not judge.

So too the Bible presents YHWH as possessed of absolute dominion over death and the dead, a characteristic that contrasts him with Baal, his principal pre-exilic competitor in the Elijah sequence for the people's affections. Like YHWH a warrior sky god, Baal was a son of El, chief god of the Canaanite pantheon (identified by Isra-*el* with YHWH, Exod. 6:3) who displaced his father El (by contrast, YHWH absorbs El). As a dying and reviving vegetation god, Baal's adventure with death resembles Ishtar's and Dumuzi's (or Tammuz, Ezek. 8:14). In Ugaritic myth, Baal, swallowed up by Mot, the God of Death, descends to the underworld, like

Ishtar. His sister (remembering Ishtar and perhaps Isis) threatens Mot, and Baal is resurrected to the cry, "Baal lives!" In later combat he defeats Mot, but cannot destroy him.[162] For his festival, Baal arrives in his house (temple) from the netherworld on the third day.[163] Rising on the third day reminds Christians of Jesus, but ancient Israelites know such revivals are pagan, not of YHWH. The prophet Hosea mocks enthusiasm for a third-day rising and healing (Hosea 6:2) in a passage early Christians never cite as a proof text.[164]

In Hosea's contemptuous eighth-century account, the people of Israel, returning to the Lord, mingle knowledge of the Lord's power with expectations of being revived with Baal: "Come, let us return to the LORD; for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck down, and he will bind us up. *After two days, he will revive us; on the third day, he will raise us up, that we may live before him*. Let us know, let us press on to know the LORD; his appearing is as sure as the dawn; he will come to us like the showers, like the spring rains that water the earth" (Hosea 6:1–3, emphasis added). To this mélange of power, fertility cult, and natural cycles, Hosea expostulates, "What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah?" (Hosea 6:4).

That Christian exegesis failed to cite the passage as a proof text suggests that early and late Christian interpreters still understood Hosea's passage as critical. Interpreting YHWH as a vegetation deity offended him. The Gospels prefer for Jesus's resurrection the unnatural "sign of the prophet Jonah," belched from the belly of a fish after three days (Jon. 1:17, Matt. 12:38). Whether Hosea or Jonah is the passage Paul has in mind when he says Christ rose in three days, "according to the scriptures" (1. Cor. 15:4), he avoids quoting any scriptural passage.

YHWH rejects cyclical compromises. Mocking third-day revivalism (Hosea 6:1–4), Hosea sets YHWH over death, undefeated: "O death, I will be thy plagues; o grave, I will be thy destruction" (Hosea 13:14, KJV). Like Baal, YHWH destroys Leviathan, sea monsters and dragons (Ps. 74:13–14; Isa. 27:1), but if he ever submits to a contest with death, it is he who swallows death, not the other way around: "He will swallow up death in victory" (Isa. 25:8, KJV). That seems merely a joyous metaphor, echoed by Paul who quotes liberally when passages suit him (1 Cor. 15:54, 15:55), but it figures death in terms derived from Canaanite myths. Death was organic, a giant maw that swallows up the living, and insatiable (Hab. 2:5, Prov. 30:16).

In Proverbs, murderous robbers identify themselves with death as they prey upon the living: "Let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit" (Prov. 1:12, KJV). The grave and the pit, where the body meets the worm, are devouring mouths. They swallow bodies whole, corpses entire (a view consistent with resurrection of the whole body, when that view developed). But the only gods found there are the dead themselves.

For ancient Israel did have, rather than an erased pantheon of underworld gods, a lively commerce with the dead themselves as divinities. Israel shared its material culture with the surrounding Canaanite groups and, before the Babylonian exile, practiced, if the Bible is to be believed and as excavations indicate, a highly syncretic religion that accommodated grave goods, mediums, male temple prostitutes, and Asherah, the Queen of Heaven. Her popular images have been identified by modern archeologists as YHWH's wife.[165] Before Josiah's reforms, the Temple itself housed goods consecrated to Baal and the host of heaven (2 Kings 23:4–15). The dead were fed by the living, regarded as "divine beings" in a form of ancestor worship associated with household gods (like those Rachel carried away from Laban, Gen. 31:30, and Jacob buried, Gen. 35:2–4. A narrative of appropriation and repudiation, Rachel sits on those gods while she claims to be menstruating, a humiliating situation for gods. Jacob curses with death anyone with whom they are found, and Rachel dies shortly thereafter.) Rattles and bracelets were buried with infants, and scarabs with young and old.[166]

The dead were also consulted about the future. Before the exile, the art of divining seems to have been shared between prophets and necromancers ("dead diviners": *necro-*: "dead"; *-mancy*, "mantis": diviner, prophet). Like Babylon's divining priests, necromancers consulted the dead relative to future events. The prophetic tradition, from the eighth century, regards such divination as problematic, but not false. The Bible preserves the paradigmatic story (set c. 1000 BCE) of the wise woman of Endor who conflates the religion of Israel and traditional necromancy when she calls up a dead prophet, Samuel, to prophesy Saul's future (I Sam. 28, 31). Saul, Samuel says, will die in battle the next day, the host of Israel defeated by Philistines, and so it happens: "to morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me" (1 Sam. 28:19, KJV). Marking the competition between the living god and the dead as authoritative consultants, the woman's activity has been

prohibited on pain of death by Saul (and will be prohibited in legislation recorded in Leviticus, Exodus, and Deuteronomy, Lev. 20:6, 27; Ex. 22:18 [Tanakh Ex. 22:17]; Deut. 18:11–14). But she is no false prophet and produces no false prophecy: her method works.[167]

Everyone knew what ghosts sounded like—they twittered from underground (Isa. 8:19–22; 29:4). Mediums mumbled, and like many ancient peoples, Israel addressed the dead as gods, ancestors, to be fed, propitiated, and consulted.[168] The eighth-century prophet Isaiah of Jerusalem, complicit in Hezekiah's reforms, disliked mediums and their clients, regarded them as consulting alternative gods in the dead, and prophesied for them darkness without dawn (Isa. 8:19–22). He knows very well what the dead sound like—they "chirp and mutter" (Isa. 8:19)—and whence they speak: "from the earth . . . from low in the dust . . . from the ground like the voice of a ghost" (Isa. 29:4). The mediums' advocates, arguing for consulting the dead, call the dead "gods," a conventional designation shared with Sumer, Babylon, and Egypt's mummies.[169] "[S]hould not a people consult their gods, the dead on behalf of the living, for teaching and instruction?' " the benighted Israelites ask, to Isaiah's horror (Isa. 8:19–20; Tanakh: "a people may inquire of its divine beings—of the dead on behalf of the living—for instruction and message"[170]). The translators of the KJV twist the knife in their version: "should not a people seek unto their God, for the living to the dead?" The dead become the singular God whom the people seek or look to. The locution occurs in 1 Samuel. When the woman of Endor calls up the dead, she sees "gods ascending" (KJV) or "a divine being" coming up, revealed to be Samuel (1 Sam. 28:13).

Neither Isaiah nor the author of 1 Samuel denies that the dead speak, mutter, and respond to consultations. The dead do those things, but the living should not ask them to do so. After the exile, in Trito-Isaiah, consulting the dead is as abhorrent as sacrificing to idols or eating swine's flesh. This people "sacrifice in gardens . . . sit inside tombs, and spend the night in secret places; [and] eat swine's flesh" (Isa. 65:3–4). The Chronicler rewrote Saul's story, probably in the fourth century BCE. Saul, who in Samuel sought the woman only because the Lord was not answering him, died because he consulted a medium: "moreover, he had consulted a medium, seeking guidance, and did not seek guidance from the LORD. Therefore the LORD put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse" (1 Chron. 10:13–14). Had Saul not

consulted the medium, he might have won the battle and Jonathan ruled after him.

Food offerings were made to the dead, but not of the tenth sanctified to the Lord (Deut. 26:14). The dead might be fed, or at least have food given to them, but such offerings to the dead were to be separated from offerings to YHWH. Kindness to the dead over time migrates from making offerings to performing burials. Jesus, son of Sirach (Sirach, c. 200–180 BCE) counsels kindness to the dead, and mourning with those who mourn ("Give graciously to all the living; do not withhold kindness even from the dead" [7:33]), but he also uses offerings to the dead to define futility: "good things poured out upon a mouth that is closed are like offerings upon a grave" (Sirach 30:18). The simile suggests that such offerings continued to be made. He also cautions against mourning the dead more than two days, "Do not forget, there is no coming back; you do the dead no good, and you injure yourself' (Sirach 38:21). In Tobit, burying abandoned, executed bodies is an exceptionally pious act that endangers the hero (Tobit 1:17–19). Burial is also a duty to parents (6:15, 12:12, 14:12–13). Tobit advises his son, "Place your bread on the grave of the righteous" (4:17). Today, stones are placed.

Death itself was defiling, dead bodies polluting. Priests of the Lord are forbidden to approach the dead, except for their nearest blood relatives (father, mother, son, daughter, brother, and virgin sister). The high priest is forbidden to approach corpses even of his mother or father (Lev. 21:1–4, 21:11). Hence in Luke's parable of the good Samaritan the priest and the Levite avoid the injured man, who looks dead (Luke 10:30–32). Animals that die of themselves are not to be eaten, though they may be sold or given away to foreigners in the community (Deut. 14:21). The dead are separated from the living, cut off, and more especially cut off from the priestly class. They are also cut off from YHWH.

When the dead go underground, out of the sun, they disappear from YHWH's sight. Job knows the gloomy pit under the ground, *sheol*, where kings and slaves, the wicked and the weary, lie down together, as if they had never been. "For now I should have lain still and been quiet . . . With kings and counselors of the earth which built desolate palaces for themselves . . . as an hidden untimely birth I had not been, as infants which never saw light" (Job 3:13–16, KJV). Death releases from trouble, but provides no access to God or to wisdom. In death, God loses sight of man.

"For now shall I sleep in the dust; and thou shalt seek me in the morning, but I shall not be" (Job 7:21, KJV). In the dust or the pit (Ps. 143:7, Ps. 28.1) the dead are silent, neither praising nor remembering God. Only the living praise a living God (Isa. 38:18–19). "The dead do not praise the LORD, nor do any that go down into silence" (Ps. 115:17). "In death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who can give you praise?" (Psalm 6:5; KJV: "For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?").

Indeed, the worshipper sometimes seems to be putting God on notice. If he dies, he leaves God's presence, and where then will God be? God loses his audience: "Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise thee? Selah. Shall thy loving kindness be declared in the grave, or thy faithfulness in destruction? Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? And thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?" (Ps. 88:10–12, KJV). To receive prayer and praise, God must keep his people alive. He depends on them as much as they on him.[171] Unlike the legal prohibitions, such views show real defeat for cults of the dead, divinities of the dead, rituals for the dead, and mediations through the dead. At the very least, they indicate at the heart of the Jahwist tradition, within piety itself, a repudiation of any hopefulness about what lies beyond death.

Neither Egyptian virtues nor Sumerian sons give anyone anything to look forward to after death. In the story of Saul, Samuel, and the woman of Endor, there is no privilege associated with having been the Lord's favored prophet: Saul and his sons join Samuel tomorrow. Death does not distinguish the beloved prophet from the rejected king. There is no reward for virtuous Samuel, no punishment for naughty Saul. The bones of Elisha may bring a dead man back to life, but Elisha remains just bones (2 Kings 13:20–21). When the child he begot in adultery on Bathsheba dies, David stops praying, rises, and orders dinner, explaining to his astonished servants: "Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me" (2 Sam. 12:23). To suffering Job, God promises no otherworldly compensations from the whirlwind. Like the model Sumerian god of "A man and his god" (ETCSL t.5.2.4), he restores Job's goods and family in this life. Justice is nowhere if not here.

That justice's absence is one of Ecclesiastes' concerns. The race is not to the swift, he reminds us. "Time and chance" happen to all men caught, like animals, in the snare of an evil time (Cf. "Elegy for Nawirtum": "Upon

the fledgling overstepping its nest, a net has . . .”[172]). The spirit returns to God that gave it, but who knows whether the spirit of man goes up and of beasts goes down? The same fate happens to all (Eccles. 3:19–21; 9:2–6). The best advice is that Siduri gave to Gilgamesh and Egyptians harped:

> Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. Whatsover 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.
>
> (Eccles. 9:7–10, KJV)

The spirit returns to God who gave it, but there is no place there. Jesus, son of Sirach, sees the spirit’s departing, but not to anywhere: “Do not forget, there is no coming back. . . . Remember his fate, for yours is like it; yesterday it was his, and today it is yours. When the dead is at rest, let his remembrance rest too, and be comforted for him when his spirit has departed” (Sirach, 38:21–23). As the wise woman of Tekoa observes, “We must all die; we are like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up” (2 Sam. 14:14). Such is the fate of the faithful.

As to Israel’s enemies, the dead stir to greet them, but only to celebrate the powerlessness of their rotting bodies: “Sheol beneath is stirred up to meet you when you come; it rouses the shades to greet you. . . . ‘You too have become as weak as we! You have become like us!’ Your pomp is brought down to Sheol . . . maggots are the bed beneath you, and worms are your covering” (Isa. 14:9–11). Death is the only punishment, and it is punishment enough.

The OT has been scoured for possible references to an afterlife and occasionally emended to create such references when beliefs changed. Even the Masoretic text punctuates the question out of Ecclesiastes’ query about the spirits of beasts’ going down and men upward.[173] A few psalms suggest a refuge in God that seems to go beyond the usual clear expectation that the speaker hopes for safety right now, in time. Psalm 49 mocks those who seek to take their goods with them into the grave and

concludes with the cheerful promise that the rich "will go to the company of their ancestors, who will never again see the light. Mortals cannot abide in their pomp; they are like the animals that perish" (Ps. 49:19–20). Like Ecclesiastes, the psalm assures its auditor that "the wise, they die; fool and dolt perish together." Yet one verse seems to promise being with God and escaping the grave. Death shepherds fools to Sheol (replacing God as shepherd), "But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me" (Ps. 49:15; Tanakh: But God will redeem my life from the clutches of Sheol, for He will take me"). Being "received" by God recurs in Psalm 73: "You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me with honor [alt. to glory]" (Ps. 73:24; Tanakh, "You guided me by Your counsel and led me toward honor"; a note designates as unacceptable the common alternate reading, "And afterward receive me with glory"). Whether these phrases look forward to immortality, or back to the Mesopotamian protection by one's God in the afterlife, or refer to this life only, is uncertain.[174]

The afterlife has not been sought in dietary prohibitions, but the rejection of other peoples' immortal longings may explain the cryptic prohibition "thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk" (Ex. 23:19, 34:26, Deut. 14:21, KJV). Maimonides was confident it referred to some pagan practice, but biblical scholars have not located any such pagan rite in Canaan.[175] A possible origin is the Greek mysteries, where imagery of a kid and milk fulfilled the serpent's promise to Eve: "Tush, you shall not surely die. For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, ye shall be as gods" (Gen. 3:4–5, Tyndale's translation). Inscribed gold leaves found in grave mounds from fifth-century-BCE southern Italy associate a kid falling into milk with attaining immortality, becoming a god instead of a mortal. One leaf promises "happy and blessed one, god will you be instead of a mortal. Kid I fell in the milk." Another assures the dead man: "A god you have become from a man. Kid you fell in the milk."[176] The prohibition appears in Exodus not with the dietary laws but with sacrifice, amid the blood, fat, and first fruits brought to the Lord. In Deuteronomy, it ends the dietary rules, but follows death, namely the prohibition on eating animals that die of themselves, which may be sold or given to aliens. Prohibiting magical attempts at immortality would be consistent with the text's attitudes towards divining and the dead. The Orphic tablets say nothing about boiling or mothers, and the geographic and cultural distance between biblical

prohibitions and golden burial hopes has no visible bridges. A coincidence in search of evidence, the tablets supply, unlike other interpretations, "a *Sitz im Leben* which really fits the passage."[177]

Whatever shadowy vision of the grave ancient Israel entertained, it imagined no rewards or punishments in another life. That absence had repercussions producing discomfort—and sometimes detestation—in modern readers. God often threatens his stiff-necked people with destruction, disaster, and famines in which mothers eat their own children and other people's. In both versions of the Ten Commandments God insists that he punishes children for the crimes of their parents to three and four generations (Ex. 20:5–6; Deut. 5:9). "Suffer, little children!" some readers gasp, Christopher Hitchens repeatedly.[178] They are equally outraged when God answers Job's anguish with mocking questions. Out of a whirlwind, no less, like the one that swept away Elijah, Leviathan's creator affirms his own unimaginable, murderous power. Who does he think he is—God?

If we think to remember that there is no afterlife, God's behavior—and morality—make better sense. With this world the only one, justice must be done here and, if not now, in the next few generations. The prophetic tradition begins not with the suffering of the innocent, as Job might lead us to expect, but with the complacence of the guilty, the serene happiness of the selfish. That tradition originates in the desire to punish those who enjoy doing wrongs they do not recognize, to pierce the self-satisfaction of the always justified self. Put more positively, prophecy demands social justice. Making that demand does not, as we well know, create social justice. It does not even make social injustice uncomfortable for the socially unjust, but it registers the concept. Israel was not the only society to moralize,[179] but hers is a large collection of texts frequently reprinted.

In the eighth century (c. 750 BCE), the prophet Amos created a meme. The day of the Lord would be a day of wrath, the *dies irae* of every Christian requiem. The events that justified Amos came later: the exile of the northern kingdom Israel from Samaria (721 BCE) and, after Deuteronomy's publication (621 BCE), the exile of the southern kingdom Judah (597 BCE). Outside any prophetic lineage, a herdsman and pruner of sycamore trees (7:14), Amos, like Israel, knows the day of the Lord as a day desired, a festival of lights and rejoicing. Amos turns it into a day of dread. That day he who forms the mountains and creates the winds (Amos 4:13) will bring wailing upon the highways and the vineyards: "Woe unto you

that desire the day of the LORD! To what end is it for you? The day of the LORD is darkness and not light. As if a man did flee from a lion and a bear met him; . . . Shall not the day of the LORD be darkness, and not light? Even very dark, and no brightness in it" (Amos 5:18–20, KJV).

Amos's day of the Lord turns into the spectacular Christian day(s) of judgment in Revelation, but Amos is not imagining the end of the world. He attacks the rich who lie upon ivory beds and couches, who follow the advice of Siduri and Ecclesiastes. They eat the lambs from the flock, chant songs, drink wine, anoint themselves—and think about the poor and needy only to sell them for a pair of shoes (Amos 6:4–6, 2:6–8). Required is justice to the poor and before God: "Seek good, and not evil, that you may live. . . . Hate evil, and love good, and establish judgment in the gate . . . Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness as an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:14, 15, 24). This great motif runs through the prophets—like water, as a mighty stream. Warfare, famine, captivity, earthquake, the uncontrollable evils of human life are in God's hands, not man's.

Such prophetic threatening has given the Hebrew Bible a bad reputation, its just but angry God well traded in for the softer, merciful, loving Jesus of the NT. Readers forget that the OT God lets wicked and just alike sleep in the grave, while the forgiving NT God thrusts most believers and all nonbelievers into eternal hellfire. The angry God gets over it; the merciful one bears a grudge that lasts forever. Both meet the demand for ultimate justice, collective or individual. The day the Lord returns, justice, now deferred or partial, will be complete. Israel (the northern kingdom) earned its destruction (721 BCE) by cultic infidelity, and Judah did not turn in time to ward off the consequences of violated law (597/587 BCE). Whenever justice is enacted in this world, the Lord has returned and made it happen, and that includes the destruction of his own temple.

Such collective justice is individualized in vengeance exacted on the children. Other-worldly postmortem punishments are unnecessary when what one loves best is threatened in this life. Punished after death is the only part of a person that survives death—her children. The prosperity of the wicked is illusory. Justice will be done in the next generation, or the next, but it will come. The threat is exceptionally canny. It exploits natural fears for one's children, and it knows that unseen terrors are more dreadful than almost any that actually occur. The ancients found this threat as unbearable as do moderns.

Challenged by Ezekiel and Jeremiah, the argument is significantly absent from Job, though it still appears later than might be expected. Herodotus reports that Croesus was defeated by Cyrus as retribution for the misdeed of a usurping ancestor five generations earlier.[180] As late as the first century CE, the offspring of the ungodly are "evil . . . accursed" in the Wisdom of Solomon (3:12–13). Yet for all the arguments Job's friends make to justify his suffering, they neglect the surest and most obvious explanation, if this rule were operational. Job's boils and dead children must be his father's or great-grandfather's fault, something they did that he knows nothing about and had nothing to do with. He is atoning for someone else's guilt. That folk karma crosses no one's mind. Ezekiel's and Jeremiah's rejection of the concept prevailed. They opposed what they called a proverb (not a phrase in the law): "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezekiel 18:2, KJV; Jer. 31:29–30). Each person, they insist, is to live or die by his own righteousness or wickedness.

Yet why would any culture consent to so little in the way of an afterlife and persist in the erasure for so long? Israel in Egypt ought to have been well acquainted with the benefits an afterlife could offer. Both Jacob and Joseph were embalmed in the Egyptian fashion (Gen. 50:2, 26). Scarabs have turned up in Israelite burials. If Egyptians, Sumerians, and Babylonians could invent a better afterlife, take the initiative and improve their lot underground, why did Israel show so little imagination and urgency about death? Ultimately, Judah patched together bodily resurrection to judgment (Daniel) and the Greeks' immortal soul (Wisdom of Solomon), a process repeated in Christianity. Yet from a self-absorbed modern perspective, how did they love and serve a God who did not provide eternal life, who let them molder in the ground? What, to put it bluntly, was in it for them?

The skeptical Ecclesiastes gives one answer. "[W]henever a man does eat and drink and get enjoyment out of all his wealth, it is a gift of God" (Eccl. 3:13, Tanakh). God gives life and puts himself in the minds and hearts of men. That is enough. But God also gave something else to join the generations of the living. God gave the law, and men made the Torah, and a woman certified the first volume.

Some modern Christians and Jews find the law an intolerable burden, about as attractive as punishing children for the crimes of their

grandparents. Martin Nilsson calls it "fetters [fastened] on the whole of man's life."[181] Kafka's parable shows a door that any man can enter, a door always open for him, but Kafka's hapless hero does not enter. The Psalms tell another story: "Blessed is the man [whose] delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night" (Ps. 1:1–2, KJV). The law provides meaning—all action takes place under the eye of God, the creator and ultimate repository of value. It defines and promises justice, and it establishes an eternal community across the generations. In the *Shema*, Deuteronomy expresses both communal belief ("our") and individual allegiance ("thy," singular): "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." The next verses penetrate the heart, cross the generations, infiltrate daily life, and mark time, the house, the body: "And these words, which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes, And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house and on thy gates" (Deut. 6:4–9, KJV). In Deuteronomy's fiction of origin, individual and communal identities are linked in the moment when the Lord frees the people from the social death of slavery in Egypt to life in a land promised. In Deuteronomy's reforming reality "these words" constitute a communal ideology that overcomes death and time, extending back to Moses and forward into future uncertainties. It also takes a form, law, not associated with afterlife mythology in Mesopotamia.

Within the law is the cosmos; outside annihilating isolation. Like Hammurabi's ratios in the epilogue to his much earlier code, Deuteronomy promises fourteen verses of blessings on kine and store (Deut. 28:1–14) and fifty-three of curses on crops, bodies, and the land: blight, famine, invasion, siege, cannibalism, defeat, exile. Common vicissitudes in the ancient world, reviving in our own, death or enslavement to one's enemies might seem the worst of punishments, or eating one's newborn baby (Deut. 28:55–57). The Deuteronomist knows something still worse. The last curse of Deuteronomy is solitude: "And the LORD shall bring thee into Egypt again with ships, by the way whereof I spake unto thee,

Thou shalt see it no more again: and there ye shall be sold unto your enemies for bondmen and bondwomen, and no man shall buy *you*" (Deut. 28:68, KJV). A slave whom no one will buy: such a person has no place between heaven and earth. He is a wandering ghost that has not yet died.

This new role for the law is realized in the structure of the Torah, and its dramatic situation. The five books of Moses place at their center three books that are principally law (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers) and end with a book that recapitulates the law (Deuteronomy). At the heart is Leviticus, a book that at once remembers the temple and rejects narrative for holiness consecrated to the Lord. Laws are justified by the Lord and enslavement in Egypt: "Thou shalt love [the stranger] as thyself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" (Lev. 19:34, KJV). The liberating narrative is retold in Deuteronomy.

On the way to the law, death is situated as the consequence of the first act of disobedience, in the beginning. Unique in representing death as humanity's own fault, the Jewish Bible never again refers to the story of Adam and Eve, their expulsion and death's arrival.[182] The prohibitions that matter come through Moses. Yet as prologue to the law, Eve and Adam perch as paradigm. They bring death and other evils—pain in childbirth, wifely subordination, clothing, and agricultural tillage—on themselves, and their descendants, through their own action. More ominously, but also comically, if the Lord utters a prohibition, it will be transgressed. On the side of obedience lie life and good, on the other death and evil, and God over all. Traditional Near Eastern thought had supplied an afterlife without explicit morality. Ancient Jewish thought, embracing explicit morality, the law, as all-encompassing, could let the afterlife go.

Only when history jeopardized the correlation between life and the law did afterlife as resurrection develop. "[B]lessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the LORD your God . . . Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out" (Deut. 28:2–6). History broke the link between blessings and obedience and forged a new link with martyrdom. When obeying the law meant incurring death in the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes IV, the door opened to resurrection.

ACT 2: MY DEAD BODIES SHALL ARISE *(ISA. 26:19)*

Resurrection as necessary for Christianity's emergence; origins within Judaism; the problem of Mark

"Don't say afterlives make nothing happen. . . ."

When an afterlife emerges in Judaism, it arrives as a solution to the problem of martyrdom almost five hundred years after the ancestral ghosts were quieted. It takes two forms, only the first of which enters the Tanakh: a resurrected body, raised by God at the end time (Daniel c. 165 BCE), and an immortal soul, borrowed from the Greeks (Wisdom of Solomon c. 30 BCE–70 CE; Philo, c. 20 BCE–45 CE). The new afterlife promise responds not to innocent suffering like Job's, but to suffering chosen specifically on behalf of the good and God, for obeying the law. In violation of the fundamental promise of Deuteronomy, suffering is incurred not for covenant breaking, but for covenant keeping. God promised life to those who obeyed him; now obedience means being killed for God. Where then was the life he promised? Confirming that the concept has been added to an already complete interpretation of life, resurrection belongs not to the ordinary cycle of life and death and law, but to a unique transformative moment at the end of this world and instauration of another. As Abraham Neuman puts it, "[The idea of immortality] in Judaism arose not to appease man but to vindicate God."[183]

Without that development, Jesus could never have been raised from the dead. Or, if he had been, no other Jews would have believed it.

Resurrection to life begins as a single verse at the end of Daniel, a writing not included among "the law and the prophets," as Jesus refers to the scriptures, but fundamental to Jesus's expectations of the coming son of Man.[184] In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Daniel's vision of "one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven" (7:13) appears often (Matt. 24:30, 26:64; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Luke 21:27). Ostensibly in Babylon during the exile (597/87–538 BCE), Daniel allegorizes Jewish suffering and resistance under the Hellenizing Seleucids in the period just before the Maccabees purified the temple in 164 BCE.

Moral tales of obedience and resistance find martyrdom thwarted by divine intervention. Daniel and his friends observe the dietary laws and

worship only God. His three friends are tossed into a fiery furnace, he into the lions' den. They are saved and their persecutors destroyed, incinerated or ripped apart by lions. Those inspiring stories yield to mysterious visions that describe political struggles through 165 BCE with miraculous precision and then lose the thread, when prediction replaces coded history. Telling Daniel what will happen at the end time, one in human form predicts a happy ending for those who endure: "There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. *Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.* Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever" (Dan. 12:1–3, emphasis added). This awakening is not universal: "Many. . .who sleep," not all. The promise of life to the faithful now includes those who do not survive the lion's mouth.[185]

About forty years later, a Jewish historical account of the period, written in Greek, makes resurrection a current expectation (2 Maccabees, outside the Jewish canon, c. 124 BCE; Catholic and Orthodox canon, Protestant Apocrypha). Of seven brothers tortured by Antiochus, three and their mother insist martyrdom ensures their resurrection. The third brother introduces this new idea as well established (emphases added): "You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will *raise us up* to an everlasting renewal of life, *because we have died for his laws*" (2 Macc. 7:9). The fourth repeats his hope, adding his persecutors' exclusion from life: "One cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope God gives of being *raised again* by him. But for you *there will be no resurrection to life*!" (2 Macc. 7:14). The fifth promises retribution in this life against the persecutors' children: "Keep on, and see how his mighty power will torture *you and your descendants*" (2 Macc. 7:17). No resurrection to torture has yet been imagined; it is God's promise of life that continues.

The sixth assures the tyrant the brothers are dying for their own sins, but the seventh, urged by his mother, also identifies the brothers as suffering for the nation, not unlike Isaiah's suffering servant. His mother gives to get back: she trusts the Creator "will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves *for the sake of his laws*"

(2 Macc. 7:23). She urges her seventh to "Accept death, so that in God's mercy *I may get you back again* along with your brothers" (2 Macc. 7:29, emphases added). Having "drunk of ever-flowing life under God's covenant" (2 Macc. 7:36), the brothers will "bring to an end the wrath of the Almighty that has justly fallen on our whole nation" (2 Macc. 7:39). Woven together are resurrection to life and breath for the law-keepers, reconciliation between an angered God and his people, and punishment for the wicked here and now and their progeny in the future. Daniel's resurrection to "shame and contempt" (not fire and pain), may point, Greenspoon suggests, to Hellenizing Jews who preferred new Greek practices to the fathers' law.[186] A century later, introducing the very different Greek concept of an immortal soul "in the hand of God," the Wisdom of Solomon (30 BCE–50/70 CE; canonicity like 2 Macc.) also connects the immortality of the righteous with their suffering at the hands of the wicked (1.14–5).

Stunningly, however, the older, traditional view has been not just abandoned, but turned actively evil. Absence of belief now belongs to the wicked, motivates malevolence, and engenders persecution. Wrenched into a twist worthy of Nietzsche and mingled with classical lyric motifs, Ecclesiastes' beautiful language of evanescence turns casually cruel. The turn has been italicized:

> For we were born by mere chance, and hereafter we shall be as though we had never been. . . . Our name will be forgotten in time, and no one will remember our works; our life will pass away like the traces of a cloud, and be scattered like mist. . . . Come, therefore, let us enjoy the good things that exist, and make use of the creation to the full as in youth. . . . Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they wither. Let none of us fail to share in our revelry; everywhere let us leave signs of enjoyment, *because this is our portion, and this our lot. Let us oppress the righteous poor man; let us not spare the widow* or regard the gray hairs of the aged. But *let our might be our law of right*, for what is weak proves itself to be useless. . . . (WS 2:1–11, emphasis added)

These first-century Leopolds and Loebs are motivated by the hatred and contempt the righteous express towards them, opposing their actions, reproaching them for sins against the law. Suggesting a civil war within Judaism, the young are pitted against the old, Hellenistic (and Ecclesiastes')

imagery against morality, but in service of a concept that is not traditional.[187] What follows eerily anticipates Mark's passion sequence:

"Let us lie in wait for the righteous man . . . he avoids our ways as unclean; he calls the last end of the righteous happy, and boasts that God is his father . . . let us test what will happen at the end of his life; for if the righteous man is God's child, he will help him, and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries. Let us test him with insult and torture, so that we may find out how gentle he is, and make trial of his forbearance. Let us condemn him to a shameful death, for, according to what he says, he will be protected" (WS 2:12–20).

Isaiah's suffering servant echoes here, along with the language cast at Jesus on the cross, the mockery and whipping at the trial. What is to be believed about the afterlife has become a locus of ideological struggle.

The final judgment imagined by WS pits the dead righteous against the living ungodly. The ungodly quake, finally understanding their error, and vanish like thistledown, a light frost, smoke, a guest who stays only a day (WS 4:16; 5:2–14; cf. 4:18–19). The righteous, whose "hope is full of immortality," receive a crown, a diadem, and reign forever in the shelter of the Lord's arm as he destroys his enemies (WS 3:4, 7–9; 5:15–23). Notably absent are the fiery pits and eternal tortures that play such a conspicuous part in New Testament promises. Those appear in 4 Maccabees and 2 Esdras 9:12, writings contemporaneous with the Gospels (c. 50–125 CE and after 70 CE, respectively). Outside of Egypt and India, the history of hell is just beginning.[188]

WS's debts to contemporary Greek thought are transparent. Still obscure—and contested—is how Israel developed its concept of resurrection, the event in which Christianity originates. The concept, a body raised from the grave, life and breath restored, at the end of time, nineteenth-century scholarship attributed to Persian Zoroastrianism, as do McDannell and Lang's *Heaven: A History* and Alan Segal's *Life After Death*.[189] More recent scholarship argues that the concept proceeds from a repurposing and reinterpreting, a metamorphosis, of the revival and restoration prophecies in the exilic prophets.[190] A later analogy might be the repurposing of Isaiah and the Psalms to produce a crucified Messiah in Jesus of Nazareth.[191]

Certainly, there was contact with Persian culture from the sixth century, attested in Cyrus's decree of 538 BCE, loan words, Esther's name (Astarte)

and Persian setting (c. 4th cent. BCE). When Daniel was written (2nd cent. BCE), Zoroastrianism was, like Judaism, gathering up its old traditions against the Hellenizing pressure of Alexander's successors. The surviving Zoroastrian documents are, however, later than the biblical texts, so there is no evidence of resurrection in Persian thought that pre-dates its appearance in Jewish thought. (Nor does it appear in Plutarch [45–125 CE]'s account of Zoroastrianism in *On Isis and Osiris*.) Zoroastrian influence remains perfectly possible, even likely, but so far not demonstrable. Had Alexander the Great not burned the greater library at Persepolis, our information would be better.[192]

What is clear is that a resurrection first appears in the prophets Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah, allegorizing the revival of the whole Israelite community, lost in exile. It refers not to raising individuals at an end time but to reviving an entire community here and soon. Cognate with the miracles of the ninth-century prophets Elijah and Elisha (and Jesus in the NT, excepting his own), resurrection is to this life here, not an eternal life elsewhere. Elijah and Elisha resurrect newly dead children; Ezekiel performs on a field of very dry bones in a valley, fleshless relics of ancient battle.

"Can these bones live?" asks the Lord, and commands Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones. "[A] noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone," with sinews and flesh, but no breath. "Prophesy to the breath," and the bodies stand on their feet, living, "the whole house of Israel" (37:1–11). The two-stage process recapitulates Adam's creation from clay and breath. The Lord explicates his allegory: "I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel" (Ezek. 37:22). Nor is the prophecy complete until Israel and Judah reunite, the dispersed gather from among the nations, a Davidic king is installed, land and sanctuary restored, and the ordinances and statutes observed faithfully, forever (Ezek. 37:21–28). By the second century, in Dead Sea fragments from Daniel's time, Ezekiel had been reinterpreted as promising an individual resurrection.[193] Now, for everyone, at the Last Judgment, "rattling bones together fly/ From the four corners of the sky" (John Dryden, *To the Pious Memory of . . . Mrs. Anne Killigrew*, 1685).

Celebrating the end of exile after 538 BCE, Isaiah also sees a community revive.[194] Israel's enemies will die, says Isaiah, but Israel will live: "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake

and sing, ye that dwell in the dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead" (KJV, Isa. 26:19; NRSV: "Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a radiant dew, and the earth will give birth to those long dead," literally, "birth to the shades." Tanakh: "Oh, let Your dead revive!/ Let corpses [grammar of Heb. unclear] arise!/ Awake and shout for joy, / You who dwell in the dust!—For Your dew is like the dew on fresh growth;/ You make the land of the shades 'come to life' [meaning of Heb. uncertain]"). Her enemies, however, are done for: "They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise: therefore hast thou visited and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish" (26:14; NRSV suggests the fate of the wicked is the usual lot: "The dead do not live; shades do not rise—because you have punished and destroyed them, and wiped out all memory of them"). Isaiah may be adapting cyclical Baalist imagery (as Day proposes), or anticipating Christian resurrection (as Greenspoon argues), but celebrated is miraculously restored communal life after suffering, in particular the suffering of an innocent servant (Isa. 49, 50:4–11, 52:13–15, 53). The New Testament alludes to these revival passages in the opened graves that give up their dead saints in Matthew (Matt. 27:52–53).

The resurrection of Jesus was read by his early followers not as the solitary salvific act of the son of God on behalf of individuals, but as the first act in the arrival of the kingdom of God, when he would return to restore the community. Jesus himself, if Mark has it right, after being baptized by John preached repentance, for "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15, KJV). These words had many meanings then, and they have even more now, but they indicate that Jesus expected God's kingdom soon, perhaps restoring the (Davidic) kingdom to Israel, perhaps drawing the gentile nations under his wing (in Paul's later interpretation and the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman). Whether the man named Joshua from Nazareth expected his own crucifixion to bring that kingdom, any more than John's beheading, is uncertain. That crucifixion, according to the Gospels written by the next generation of believers, disconcerted his first followers. Their belief was redirected or reconfirmed when he appeared alive to them, raised from the dead.

The New Testament narratives (Gospels and Acts) and Josephus make very clear that Jewish opinion around 30 CE, and certainly by 90 CE, when the Gospels were written, divided over eternal life. Resurrection

distinguished skeptical Sadducees from believing Pharisees, Essenes, and followers of Judas the Galilaean.[195] Writing in Greek to a Greco-Roman audience, Josephus attributes belief in an immortal soul, followed by resurrection "in the revolution of the ages," to three of four Jewish philosophies. Only the Sadducees, a priestly minority party, believe soul dies with the body, a strict Torah reading they shared with the Samaritan priestly party.[196] Without counting Christians, the ratio suggests that resurrection had already carried the day, especially when Jews frequently named their children "Anastasia/us/os," risen/raised up.[197] Among the views Josephus attributes to the Pharisees are rewards and punishments "under the earth," as in Virgil's *Aeneid*, and eternal imprisonment for the wicked (no tortures described).[198] As in WS, the souls of righteous men are "allotted the most holy place in heaven, whence in the revolution of the ages, they return to find in chaste bodies a new habitation."[199] Return to a "new habitation" has been taken for metempsychosis, but the same verb is used for resurrection in 2 Macc. 7:9. Imagined is soul restored from heaven to body on the revived and reanimated earth sung by the prophets.

For the earliest Christian writer, resurrection was fundamental, well understood, and known to be contentious. At his arrest, according to Acts, Paul could appeal to Pharisees for support, claiming to be a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees, and "on trial concerning the hope of the resurrection of the dead" (Acts 23:6, c. 90 CE). His device worked: the gathered, accusing Jews began quarreling with each other. To his Corinthian congregation, happy to be Christ's for this life only, Paul struggled to explain that the dead must rise or the Corinthians' faith is vain: "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (1 Cor. 15:19). For Paul, Jesus is the "first fruits of them that slept," of the dead. Paul expects Jesus's return in his own lifetime to restore the kingdom of God, to rouse the sleeping dead, and to transform earthly bodies into spiritual ones (Cor. 15; 1 Thess. 4:13–18). Jesus' form is "a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45, "quickening," KJV), appearing to many: "[H]e appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died [lit. fallen asleep]. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me" (1 Cor. 15:5–8). Though Paul never met Jesus in this world, experiencing the risen Jesus has taught him what to expect, however undefined life in

that future world remains, beyond judging the angels and rejoicing with the prophets.

The Gospels' view of resurrection is similarly disembodied twenty to fifty years later (c. 70–100 CE). Jesus opposes, McDannell and Lang suggest, a current embodied view of resurrection as Israel restored on earth to its vine and fig trees, deriving from prophetic visions of return from exile.[200] In the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke), the Sadducees quiz Jesus about a widow's seven husbands: to which will she married "in the resurrection"? (Luke 20:27–40; Matt. 22:23–33; Mark 12:18–27). The raised, alas, neither marry nor are given in marriage. To be raised from the dead is to be alive right now, in the present, as a continuous spirit: "And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the story about the bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is God not of the dead, but of the living" (Mark 12:26–27). Abraham and Isaac are in some way now alive, to God but not to us, their state unspecified.

In Luke Jesus adds that resurrection is not for everyone, and he does not seem to imagine resurrection to damnation: "they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage. Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God being the children of the resurrection" (Luke 20:35–36 KJV). As to the resurrected Jesus, he is and is not fully embodied: he eats (Luke 24:41–43) and his wounds can be fingered (John 20:27; Luke 24:40). In neither case is anyone said actually to touch the wounds offered. He also passes through walls (John 20:19, 26), disappears instantaneously (Luke 24:31), and cannot be recognized by his most devoted followers, Mary Magdalene (John 20:14–15) or the disciples en route to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35).

The Gospel of John makes "eternal life" its dominant theme and permits no one to question it. The inquisitive, mocking Sadducees vanish. Meticulous on how to obtain eternal life—believe in Jesus, drink his blood, eat his body—it describes that state not at all, anticipating whatever illumination is needed in Jesus's imminent return. A verbal construct, eternal life is an unconsidered, unanalyzed desire embedded within a preaching practice. The beloved disciple unique to John who was expected still to be alive when Jesus returned, has recently died—and the Gospel carefully explains that Jesus did not say that disciple would not die, but only "if I

will that he tarry until I come," a distinction some may find without much difference (John 21:23). In Matthew, the graves open at Jesus's resurrection, Isaiah's earth ejecting its dead. In Revelation, the martyred dead in heaven, under the throne, await the end of this world and the instauration of a new. "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20, KJV).

Within the NT, the concept of resurrection is fluid: what is resurrected, what the state is like, when it will be. Nowhere is that fluidity more striking than in the contrast between the miracles of resurrection Jesus performs, modeled on Elijah and Elisha, and the meaning of his own resurrection, augury of the end. Jesus's revivals of Lazarus, Jairus's daughter, and others anticipate his resurrection, yet those individuals are returned to life on this earth, not to a renovated world. While modern theologians insist on the difference between "resuscitation" and "resurrection," the Gospels' Greek makes no such distinction. It uses the same word for Jesus's rising as for his raisings.[201] That failure to distinguish makes perfect sense if those Jesus has restored to life are Christ's at his coming (1 Cor. 15:23), whether they are dead or alive (1 Thess. 4:16–17), and if his coming is imminent.

On a preexisting belief in resurrection, Christianity depends—or once depended. Thus it has long troubled scholars that the earliest of the Gospels, Mark, not only recounts no post-resurrection appearances by Jesus, but also fails to attest anyone's belief in the resurrection. The resurrection is announced to some women, who say nothing to anyone. Written c. 70 CE, plundered as a source by Luke and Matthew (80–90 CE; the holy ghost as plagiaries), the earliest manuscripts of Mark end when three women find Jesus's tomb empty on the third day and flee terrified from a young man clothed in white. He tells them, "Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you" (Mark 16:6–7). The women go out, fast enough, amazed and trembling, but they tell no one, "for they were afraid" (Mark 16:8). And there Mark stops.

That ending has puzzled interpreters for centuries, including dissatisfied early Christians who pasted on resurrection appearances filched from other gospels (16:9–20).[202] Mark, however, knew exactly what he has doing. What he did not realize was that by simultaneously and accidentally creating the literary genre "gospel" (literally, "good news") as a biography

of Jesus, he would obscure his intention. Mark's narrative opens, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1). Mark's own text is not "the gospel," but its "beginning": an account of what led up to the gospel, the good news, that is, the resurrection. For Mark, as for Paul, beheaded before any "gospels" were written, the good news/gospel is that "he is risen" and "ye shall see him." Mark's favored literary device has long been recognized as the intercalated episode, in which one episode is set inside another: the death of John the Baptist inside the sending out of the disciples, the woman with the issue inside the raising of Jairus's daughter, and many others. Mark's narrative is itself an intercalated episode within the gospel of Resurrection.

Luke, Matthew, and John understood. None begins his book by referring to the "gospel." Instead, they add new openings to Mark (birth stories in Matthew and Luke, a hymn to the Word in John) and resurrection appearances at the end. Mark stops when the "beginning" ends and the gospel arrives.

In time, the expectation of Jesus's imminent return dies away (2 Peter, c. 150 CE), to revive where it began, at the margins, in every generation. What remains in place of the restored kingdom is the relationship with Jesus established through the gospels and the tradition they preserved. Supplements to an existing faith, written within it, the gospels and epistles constitute an ideology for living in end times that do not end. They are always with us, criticizing the ordinary ways we live now. The Corinthians knew what they were about when they were contented with Jesus's message for this life only—it was enough, all they really needed.

When Paul's living spirit fuses with the immortal Greek "soul" of which WS spoke so confidently, there will be generated a new concept, the resurrection "of the body." The scriptures lack the phrase, for Jesus's resurrection is of the dead, whole persons. Soul and body become independent entities in scholastic thought.[203] Once body and soul separate, soul requires disposal. In the Catholic tradition, soul lives with God (or burns in purgatory or hell) while the body sleeps, awaiting resurrection and reunion with soul at the Last Judgment. Protestants, annihilating purgatory, were forced to decide whether the soul slept unconscious until the resurrection to Judgment at the last day, as scripture suggested, or was judged twice, once at death and again at the Last Judgment in the body. Calvin solved the problem of double judgments with God's foreknowledge.

All this travels far from the Wisdom of Solomon, but shared is the immortality that brings one to God and confidence in justice: "The beginning of wisdom is the most sincere desire for instruction, and concern for instruction is love of her, and love of her is the keeping of her laws, and giving heed to her laws is assurance of immortality, and immortality brings one near to God" (WS 6.17–19). The move to immortality is very easy to make—only one term needs to be inserted between the laws that always brought one near to God and God. "Immortality" often meant merely long life, one not ended prematurely.[204] Long life was always God's gift, and now it lasts longer. Seemingly inevitable, the move astonishes only in that it was not there from the beginning. But it is also clear that the move remains unnecessary.

Whether or not justice is administered to individuals in a next life, what matters is that God is there, standing behind justice and standing for justice. Should God depart, no one need notice. The community still stands if God is constructed, as Deuteronomy and Jeremiah tell us he should be, from within, from the circumcised heart. Immortality is perhaps a useless distraction, intervening between the laws of life and the God who gave both.

GREEKS BEARING GIFTS ONTO ROMAN ROADS

Dismal afterlife origins in Homer and Hesiod, improved without moralizing in the mysteries, popularly moralized in Aristophanes, philosophically in Plato, and contested in a stew of possibilities and purposes, Aristotle, Epicurus, Stoics; then the Romans: Lucretius, Cicero, Virgil: clearance, roundabout, and highway.

The Greeks did nothing so original as the Jews, save in one respect. Israel knew the fool who said in his heart, "there is no God." Greece knew a philosopher who said to anyone who cared to listen, "there is no afterlife." Epicurus's is a late fourth-century contesting of common opinion (Epicurus, 341–270 BCE), powerfully restated under the Roman republic by Lucretius (c. 96–55 BCE) in *De Rerum Natura*. Jews had found a new truth. Transforming the structure of their traditional afterlife, they left *sheol* and *mot* unimproved behind, and leaped up to God, claiming a

new life on or above the earth, propelled by prophetic imagery of rebirth. Among the Greeks, only Hercules joined the gods in such an ascent.

The Greeks made their improvements underground, retaining the original grim structure, but brightening it in the mysteries. Pre-Socratic philosophers turned death over, mulling possibilities. Socrates took no interest in death; Plato did. Plato multiplied afterlives, inspiring, useful, and moral, if implausible to such natural philosophers as Aristotle and Epicurus. Greece and Rome make visible a tradition of self-conscious afterlife improvement that leaves belief behind, except for the materialist afterlife deniers. The afterlife was then what it wants to become in our own time: the crown of a coherent understanding of life's meanings and purposes within a public space.

By the sixth century BCE, the mysteries had redeemed the initiated from the dismal *sheol*-like murk in Homer and Hesiod (eighth century BCE) to a blissful afterlife, while everyone else endured the expected miry darkness. The mysteries required only initiation into a new group identity, no moralizing, reciting of virtues, or rejecting of vices. Justice for the pre-Socratic philosophers and Socrates remains an affair of this life. Popular culture wanted more. Aristophanes (450–388 BCE) shows wrongdoers punished in the other world for violating moral rules in this. Exploiting that fluid popular space, Plato (428–348 BCE) rejected Homer's afterlife and probably Socrates's. Entertaining multiple possible afterlives in a half dozen dialogues, he seals his *Republic* with a well policed and psychologically astute afterlife. Aristotle rejected Homer and Plato on the afterlife, but made no issue of it. Describing the process of death, he considered what a "soul" might be, as if facts spoke for themselves. So many afterlives facilitated, in the name of truth and science, Epicurus's and Lucretius's disputing all afterlife threats and blandishments. Virgil, stifling his early Lucretian sympathies, challenges Plato (as well as Homer) with a syncretic afterlife epitomizing his own literary and politico-ideological ambitions. How they handle metempsychosis is the clue to their differences. In this trajectory, the afterlife turns from grim inevitability, imagined through the body, into popular consolation, improving literature, tool of ideology, and, for Lucretius, derided police-procedural fiction. As in our own time, what comes after does not erase what came before, but coexists with it, casting doubts on certainties, and creating certainty to combat doubts' multitudes.

Homer and Hesiod provide the earliest Greek accounts of the afterlife, even as they jockey for position as Greece's earliest author.[205] No more satisfying than Israel's *sheol* or Gilgamesh's netherworld, their eighth-century accounts are roughly contemporaneous with Amos, Isaiah, and the Standard Version of *Gilgamesh.* Greeks practiced both burial (*Antigone, The Libation Bearers*) and burning (*Iliad, Odyssey*), alien to the bodily based immortality of Egypt and Sumer. They made offerings to their dead and celebrated their return at the festival of the Anthesteria.[206] In Hesiod's genealogy of the gods, Death is the fatherless child of Night, the pitiless, iron god hateful even to the immortals, deathless gods, *a-thanatoi* (*Theogony*, ll. 212, 758–66, 807–10).[207] Several hundred years later, Aristotle approvingly quotes Sappho: even the gods hate death, she explains, because they did not choose it for themselves. Between them, Hesiod and Homer assemble the architecture of the classical afterlife that philosophers challenge.

In Hesiod's *Theogony* only defeated divinities, not dead humans, appear. Tartarus, the source and limits of earth, sea, and skies, lies a nine days' fall from earth, among the dank, distressful things "which even the gods hate" (*Theogony*, ll. 720, 807–10). Cerberus the fifty-headed dog guards the marble gates, fawns on arrivals and devours those who try to escape (*Theo*. 311, 767–74). Hades and Persephone rule (*Theo*. 767–74, 912) beneath the earth (*Theo*. 455), with Styx (*Theo*. 775), duplicating the original "Chasm" or chaotic void, terrible and dark (*Theo*. 736f.). Punishing semi-divine beings, Zeus hurled Menoetius into Erebus, for his defiance (*Theo*. 515), and attached Prometheus to a pillar, an eagle feasting on his ever-growing liver, until Hercules released him (*Theo*. 520–34). The Titans plunged down after their epic battle with Zeus (*Theo*. 729), and Medusa, the mortal Gorgon, is the first to die and descend.

Geographically distinct, lying to the sunny west, are the blessed isles, reminiscent of the immortal Ūta-napišti's dwelling across the waters from the garden of the gods. Of the demigods or heroes who fought at Thebes or Troy, death took some, but others Zeus sent to "the Islands of the Blessed beside deep-eddying Ocean—happy heroes, for whom the grain-giving field bears honey-sweet fruit flourishing three times a year" (Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 166–73).

As to justice, for men there is none to be found among the shades. The justice Hesiod expects happens in this world. Sometimes Zeus's justice,

like YHWH's, destroys a whole city, through famine or pestilence, war, shipwreck or infertility (*WD*, 238–47). Everywhere, immortal guardians watch, advise, judge (*WD*, 248–73). To the just they give wealth (*WD*, 280); to evildoers, loss (*WD*, 320–34). Giving is good, but grabbing gives death (*WD*, 356). Hesiod's iron age inverts justice. Men will not honor their parents for their rearing, and violence triumphs: "Their hands will be their justice, and one man will destroy the other's city" (*WD*, 187–89). Justice is an affair between living men, and funerals are unlucky.

Hesiod's details supplement the vaguer, internally contradictory geography of Homer's afterlife. The *Iliad* does not agree with the *Odyssey*, nor the *Odyssey* with itself. The *Odyssey* cobbles four inconsistent sources, Hesiod's pleasant western island, now excluding heroes and restricted to relatives of gods (Book 4), a cold, gloomy land to the far north for equal, mindless, insubstantial shades (Book 11), a setting for hideous tortures of men who offended the gods (Book 11), a place where Hermes leads twittering, bat-like shades who tell their stories on arrival to those already there, greeting and greeted (Book 24). Only the last returns in Plato.

The *Iliad* sends many heroes to "*Pluto's* gloomy reign" (I,3), where "Infernal *Pluto* sways the Shades below" (XV,213).[208] As in Hesiod, but not the *Odyssey*, Tartarus lies "Low in the dark . . . With burning Chains fix'd to the Brazen Floors,/And lock'd by Hell's inexorable Doors;/As deep beneath th'Infernal Centre hurl'd,/As from the Center to th'Æthereal World" (VIII, 16–20; Virgil recycles that geographical detail, *Aeneid* VI, 577–79). An almost bottomless pit, the living plunge towards it, but no mortal inhabitant is seen inside it. Zeus threatens only other gods with sun-less, wind-less confinement there.

The *Odyssey's* land of the dead is not under the earth, but at the world's end. So the Sumerians located their afterlife sometimes underground, sometimes in the mountains. Across the waters, it is far to the north, dark, bleak, and cold, but located where Odysseus, like Gilgamesh before him, by skillful sailing can reach it. The blessed western islands, snow free, with balmy breezes, ruled by Rhadamanthus, Homer allows only to Menelaos, not as a hero but as a son-in-law of Zeus (*Odyssey*, 4). Menelaos teases classical scholars, since, like Hesiod's heroes (and Ūta-napišti), he seems to be promised an escape from death, but he is not referred to again. Everyone else, including Odysseus, goes to Erebus, darkness (Book 11).

No one rots or crawls with vermin among Odysseus's shades. Burning prevents that, but unlike Enkidu and Gilgamesh, Odysseus cannot embrace his mother, his origin, when he finds her unexpectedly among the dead. Anticleia explains: once human bodies burn to ash, they become substance-less, life-longing, blood-desiring shades. Only blood, the life, enables them to communicate with the living.

By contrast, Book 24 supposes talkative shades recognizing each other and telling their stories on arrival among the dead. Contradicting the conditions of Book 11, that supposition lets Homer re-tell Penelope's shroud trick and the suitors' slaughter as a shorter set piece, for an abbreviated evening's entertainment. The condition of the dead bends to the artist's desire to interpolate an (extractable) episode. As to justice, the virtuous mingle with the vicious. Achilles and Ajax are no better off than Eriphyle, who betrayed her husband, and Iocaste, who bedded her son and hanged herself. The great heroes seem more miserable in the dark than the wicked women, boasting their identities to Odysseus. Odysseus assures Achilles he must be a king among the dead, Ur-Namma's and Gilgamesh's fate and the one Pharaoh hoped to avoid. Achilles treats Odysseus's assurance with contempt. He would abandon himself to see the sunlight in a line Plato strikes from the poem: "I would rather be slave to a hired man than reign as king of the dead" (11). Dead men thrill at news of their sons; dead women boast of their sons, but no one expects to see them or be nurtured by them, not even Agamemnon, thirsting for revenge, not libations.

Justice appears only as a panorama suddenly materializing in front of Odysseus, punishments for crimes against the gods, not men, contradicting the geography already established.. Odysseus has been standing on the seashore before a trench filled with the blood of a sacrifice, the dead slurping the blood to speak. Now abruptly and inexplicably, judgment and tortures unfold before his eyes. That awkwardly joined set piece elaborates Hesiod's tortures and introduces piety to Homer's otherwise morality-free zone. At a distance Minos is seen judging, a king among the dead, like Gilgamesh and Ur-Namma. Whom or what he judges is not revealed. Odysseus sees Hesiod's Prometheus covered by vultures, not released by Hercules; Ixion is on his wheel; Sisyphus toils up his hill. Except for Tityos's rape of Zeus's mistress, the tortures are unexplained. In the traditional tales that Homer does not repeat, these malefactors committed offences against the gods, not against their fellow men. Under

the earth, the gods see to justice only for themselves, as in a few Sumerian fragments (p. 55 above).

Human justice is still done only in the world. So Agamemnon enquires after his son Orestes, for justice on his murdering wife and her lover. Their punishment will be only death, like Agamemnon's. (Surely no husband ever deserved murder more than Agamemnon? May his rage continue forever, its own helpless punishment.) So, too, the suitors, the youth of Ithaca, will die, slaughtered with a mighty bow like that of Hercules, stained with blood, Odysseus's last interview. Fleeing the whispering dead, Odysseus fears that the netherworld will seize him (as Enkidu was seized)—that Persephone will send up the gorgon's head to fix him, forever.[209] No translation catches the sense of release better than Pope's, or perhaps Broome's, where the ominous shrouds let us go and the reader leans into the wind:

> Swift o'er the waves we fly; the fresh'ning gales
> Sing thro' the shrouds, and stretch the swelling sails.
>
> (Pope, XI, 793–94)

The Greeks began brightening their gloomy dead through the mysteries and philosophic schemes just as Judea was breaking off communication with her dead. A sixth-century Hymn to Demeter, mother of Persephone, is the first textual evidence for the mysteries' improvements: "Blessed is he of men on earth who has beheld them, whereas he that is uninitiated in the rites, or he that has had no part in them, never *enjoys a similar lot* down in the musty dark when he is dead" (emphasis added).[210] The pre-Socratic philosophers considered death as part of natural processes. Anaximander (c. 610–c. 547 BCE) had proposed that "Things of necessity are resolved at death into the same elements out of which they had their birth; for they do justice and make recompense to one another according to the ordinances of time" (Guthrie, 222–23). For Herakleitos (c. 540–480 BCE), death is momentary stasis within constant change, "the way up and down" (fr. 69, Guthrie 252) that is life: "Fire lives the death of air, and air lives the death of fire; water lives the death of earth, earth that of water" (fr. 25, Guthrie, 252). "All things we see when awake are death" (fr. 64, Guthrie 226), and most obscurely of all: "Immortal mortals, mortal immortals, living the death of the one, dying the life of the other" (fr. 67,

Guthrie, 228), "The living and the dead are the same" (fr. 78, Guthrie, 229). Whatever death is, it cannot be left alone but enters every process and transformation. More immediately comprehensible, but no more descriptive: "when men die there awaits them what they do not expect or think" (Guthrie, 229).[211]

Aeschylus (525–456 BCE) and Pindar (c. 522–c.438 BCE) split the Homeric difference between darkness and light in the fifth century. In *The Libation Bearers/Choephoroe*, Orestes and Electra pour libations to Agamemnon, calling up his spirit's anger. Like Homer's Agamemnon and Ajax, his fury still works under the ground, at his burial place. In *Persians* desperate mages arouse Darius from Hades only to hear their doom. Pindar, by contrast, embroiders Hesiod's and Homer's happier state in the Second Olympian Ode (476 BCE). Justice is done under the earth, lawless spirits are punished, souls transmigrate through states of being, and those tested three times waft off to the Islands of the Blessed, where Peleus, Cadmus, and at last Achilles are to be found, released from Homer's dark.[212]

Sophocles (496–406 BCE) and Euripides (484–406 BCE) supply no consoling images of a life beyond death. Oedipus is content to feel the sun's rays for the last time, as he moves into the invisible other world of tombless darkness (*Oedipus at Colonnus*). Antigone expects her father, mother, and brother to welcome her to Persephone's mansions, but beyond recognition there is no gladness in the dark, even for one performing the burial obligation (*Antigone*). A fragment from *Triptolemus* endorses the mysteries, but the uninitiated share Oedipus's and Antigone's fates: "Thrice blessed are those mortals who have seen these rites and thus enter into Hades: for them alone there is life, for the others all is misery." Sophocles helped introduce the cult of Asclepius, god of healing, to Athens in 420 BCE, suggesting more interest in this life than the next. [213]

That surviving tragedies neglect the mysteries' consolations marks the mysteries' limits. Euripides wonders, "Who knows if life be death, and death be thought life in the other world?" (Guthrie, 237). Echoing Herakleitos, the question supposes a way of thinking death quite remote from Homer. Death has become a concept to turn over, to play with, not to accept as a given. By this time, the afterlife has acquired a history, sign of an important topic without immediate urgency. Herodotus (484–430/20 BCE) charges his countrymen with intellectual theft for claiming as their own Egyptian ideas of a transmigrating and immortal soul (Burkert and

others credit India, not Egypt). But he declines to finger the plagiarists: "I know their names but do not write them."[214]

Greek unwillingness to be left in the dark emerges most clearly in the works of Aristophanes (445–385/75 BCE) and Plato (428–348 BCE). Treating what is evidently now the traditional mythology no more solemnly than Lucian in 125 CE or Offenbach in 1870, Aristophanes mocks mystery initiations (*The Clouds)* and revisits the realm of Persephone and Hades, after Hercules, to adjudicate the claims to literary excellence of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides (*The Frogs*, 405 BCE). He unveils a terrain stocked with clichés, Charon and Cerberus, Echidna and Gorgon, where popular culture has at last imposed human justice on Homer's afterlife. Visibly for the first time, wrongdoers are punished for traditionally serious crimes against humankind (betrayal of guests, abuse of parents), but also for bad taste and cheating a prostitute. Mystery initiates rejoice in a happy region, without claiming any particular merits or superior virtue. Buried in filth, in streams of dung, are

> Whoso has wronged the stranger here on earth,
> Or robbed his boylove of the promised pay,
> Or swinged his mother, or profanely smitten
> His father's cheek, or sworn an oath forsworn,
> Or copied out a speech of Morsimus.

Meanwhile, beyond the mire, are flute music, brilliant light, myrtle groves, and blissful throngs of men and women clapping their hands for joy, "[t]he happy mystic bands."[215] When Dionysus leaves Euripides behind and takes Aeschylus, he cites Euripides on death as representative nonsense: "Who knows if death be life, and life be death,/And breath be mutton broth, and sleep a sheepskin?" (433). Comedy makes visible the repairs popular culture had made to the traditional darkness of Homer and Hesiod, still glooming the tragic poets. Brought to light, the mysteries promise bliss in imagery Virgil adopts. Second-century Roman emperors Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius had themselves initiated.

Among the philosophers, the soul and its migrations after death became a lively topic, a homunculus miniaturizing entire philosophic projects. For the natural philosophers, Democritus, Aristotle, Epicurus, and some sophists, the gods retreated, the soul dispersed, and the

afterlife vanished. To Plato, as to Aristophanes (attacking sophists in *The Clouds*) and the Stoics, such accounts were intolerable. In Plato, the afterlife evolves from the *Apology*, which may approach what Socrates actually thought, through multiple rational defenses of the soul's immortality in *Gorgias, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, to the *Republic*. There Plato chooses to end his account of justice in this world by imagining a visit to the next in "The Myth of Er."

Facing death in the *Apology*, Socrates recognizes annihilation as a possibility, but argues for the immortality of the soul and the safety of the good soul. Fantasying a chatty, discursive reunion underground with the great spirits of antiquity, he improves Homer along the lines of *Odyssey*, Book 24. Thereafter, Plato persistently invents. *Gorgias* expects judgment and requires that souls be naked, lest justice be perverted; *Phaedo* imagines the soul released from the prison of the body, and *Phaedrus* borrows terms from the mysteries.[216] Reincarnation, an "ancient doctrine," carries no moral weight, but proves immortality; souls reborn from other souls in Hades must continue to exist. Souls heavy with corporeal stain will be reborn as appropriate animals.[217] In *Phaedrus* the soul is immortal because self-moving. Originally winged, fallen from heaven, it cycles for ten thousand years before returning to heaven and regaining its wings.[218] Of his hypotheses, Plato observes, it is "not fitting to say something like this is true, but fit to say something ought to be like it" (*Phaedo*, 114de). In *The Republic* he does it all: concocts a cosmology, administers justice, teaches how to choose like a philosopher, and satirizes the choices people actually make, exposing their hopelessly habit-driven, non-philosophical selves. Plato's object is not truth, but to form philosophers, and he prepares his ground in the *Republic* by attacking the popular imagery purveyed by the poets.

Plato disliked Homer's representation of a dreary, gloomy afterlife where virtuous, just souls squeaked in the gloom among nefarious malefactors and booby heroes. He objects not to the truth or falsity of doctrine, but its utility. Free men must not fear death, and the better such passages are as poetry, the worse they are as example. The poets must submit:

> The poets must be told to speak well of that other world. The gloomy descriptions they now give must be forbidden, not only as untrue, but as injurious to our future warriors. We shall strike out all lines like these:

> I would rather be on earth as the hired servant of another, in the house of a landless man with little to live on, than be king over all the dead; [Achilles, *Odyssey* xi]
>
> Or these:
>
> Alack, there is, then, even in the house of Death a spirit or a shade; but the wits dwell in it no more. [Achilles, *Iliad*, xxiii]
>
> We shall ask Homer and the poets in general not to mind if we cross out all passages of this sort. If most people enjoy them as good poetry, that is all the more reason for keeping them from children or grown men who are to be free. . . .[219]

Shuddery references to "loathsome Styx" and "infernal spirits" must also vanish.

Plato practiced what the *Republic* preaches: he always spoke well of "that other world." Aestheticized, that world projects a glorious vision of the harmony of the cosmos. Totalized, it comprehends all beings from birth to death and around again within a self-sustaining system with no way out, not even for the popular festival of the returning dead at the Anthesteria. Although his afterlife offers justice, rewards for the good, punishments for the evil, retribution is not Plato's principal objective, but right thinking and right choices.

The Myth of Er is not a necessary ending to the *Republic*. Socrates has just persuaded his interlocutor that this world punishes the wicked and makes prosperous the good, a view as traditional as Hesiod or Deuteronomy or the Buddha (or philosophical optimism or evolutionary psychology). Justice has been affirmed as the order of things. The Myth of Er rivets that affirmation. External judgments impose rewards and punishments, while people's own judgments determine their future lives, beyond reward and punishment.

Er's is a "mythos," a deliberately fictive account of a vision of the next world that reveals what ought to be true. Er dies, but his body does not change. For ten days, his people wait. Then placed on the funeral pyre, he revives from his near-death experience to tell what he saw in the land of the dead. The genre is still popular. Er's report could not be further from the dank and drear Hades of Hesiod or Homer or the busy Charon and barking Cerberus of Aristophanes. Only the mysteries leave traces.

Rapt by the radiant beauty of the cosmos, Er sees the spindle on which the universe turns and hears the music of the spheres. Moving

up, not down, he finds himself in a meadow where souls are gathering, returned from their thousand-year journey above—in the beauties of a paradise, their good actions and justice rewarded—or their thousand-year journey below, where they expiated their evil deeds ten times over, in physical tortures. While Er had much to say "concerning infants who die at birth or live but a short time," Socrates found them "not worthy of mention."[220] (Other Greeks paid dead infants attention: at the Anthesteria, little wine jugs, painted with scenes of food offerings, were placed in their graves, along with toys and playthings, "to make up for what [they] had missed."[221])

Some evils too heinous for atonement incur eternal punishment. A tyrant, scourged with thorns a thousand years, approaches the light only to be pulled back down into the darkness, disappearing forever. Murder is added to the usual crimes of dishonoring gods or parents. Judges dispatch souls up to paradise or down to torture, but the traditional judges Minos, Aeacus, and Rhadamanthus named in *Gorgias* (523e), are not named here. Plato demythologizes. Judgment is only a stage in what interests him more—thinking philosophically.

After their thousand years of bliss or woe, souls choose another life. In *Phaedrus* and *Phaedo*, metempsychosis, the soul's change of place, is part of matter's endless, mindless transmutations. In *Phaedrus* the wingless soul grasps anything solid. In Ovid's demoralized account of Pythagoras, the soul recycles itself, like all other things, unconsciously:

> Thus all things are but alter'd, nothing dies;
> And here and there th' unbodied spirit flies,
> By time, or force, or sickness dispossess'd,
> And lodges where it lights, in man or beast;
> Or hunts without, till ready limbs it find,
> And actuates those according to their kind;
> From tenement to tenement is toss'd;
> The soul is still the same, the figure only lost.
>
> (Dryden, ll. 239–46)[222]

Moralized, metempsychosis assigns the soul a new place based on the cumulative character of earlier actions. Earlier Socrates explains that the good enjoy all blessings "save perhaps for some suffering entailed by offences in a former life."[223] In the seductive new Platonic twist, what one

becomes is one's own choice, a rational, philosophic, self-expressive, and conscious move.

Scattered before the souls are the "lives of all living creatures, [and] all conditions of men," taken from the lap of Lachesis, daughter of necessity, mingling beauty, riches, power, sickness, poverty, good, and evil. Socrates advises the wise to calculate what the choice will do to the soul: "calling a life worse or better according as it leads to the soul becoming more unjust or more just. All else he will leave out of account" (Cornford, 356). Responsibility removes from heaven to the self: whatever happens in one's next life, one chose it. "Heaven is blameless" (Cornford, 355).

Having explained how we should choose, Plato shows what we do choose. Er's story concludes with the sad or comical choices people actually make. An anonymous good man, having snatched despotism, howls as he realizes what evils he will bring on himself and others. Choices reflect frustrated desires and old habits. Atalanta, seeing the prizes to be won, becomes a male athlete, recognized at last, caught by other apples. The artisan who made the Trojan horse turns craftswoman, eager to explore crafts forbidden him as a man. Orpheus becomes a swan from pure misogyny; hating women, he will not be born of one. The singing creatures become human. Ajax becomes a lion, Agamemnon an eagle, apt emblems for heroes, ominous for men.

Choices across the species barrier surely liberate. Another consciousness, another mode of being surprises and delights: to be a fly, a snake, a butterfly, to see through a thousand eyes, to glide, to flutter. And to forget Socrates' lesson: a beast is no longer a man, possessed of reason, responsible to harmony, capable of justice. Ajax and Agamemnon are heroically brawny and brainless. Thersites did better turning ape. Crafty Odysseus chooses a humble private life, neither inspiring nor brutish, but with access to virtue. Plato has imagined an afterlife that has nothing to do with death. The condition of his Er is emblematic. Er was not dead, but alive, and the message he brings back from the dead is for the living soul.

Other philosophical schools were equally impatient of Aristophanes' mythology and Plato's. For Aristotle the soul is the form of the body; empirically it requires heat. In death, bodies cool down and lose their form. Theoretically either all souls, animal and human, survive, or none do. If all dogs go to heaven, so does everything else. If they don't, no one does. For Stoics and Epicureans, the body resolves to its material

components, for Epicureans atoms, for Stoics fire. Epicurean atoms separate, recombine; the soul disperses; self and personality end.

For Stoics, an immortal spark within human beings returns to the primordial Mind-Fire that ultimately constitutes all things. For some, souls live on in the upper air until the final conflagration destroys the world and begins it anew. This earliest view Cleanthes taught, and Marcus Aurelius may have held. For the Stoic Chrysippus, only just souls preserve their identities; the bad are reabsorbed at once. Others held that all souls are at once reabsorbed, and still others that there is a period of purgation, as Virgil suggests, before the soul rejoins the primordial fire.[224] Meditating on death, Marcus Aurelius moves from Epicurean dispersion to Stoic transmutation, briefly regrets the absence of rebirth for the most virtuous souls, but acquiesces in Nature's ceaseless renewal and the uncertainty of what comes after death, insensibility or another life.[225] No such hesitation marks the Epicureans. The soul is as mortal as the body, they have no doubt, and they will prove it to you. Nowhere did the contest among these differing views engage itself more fiercely than in Rome. They had intellectual gladiators there. Romans, staging a battle to the death over how to live, fought it out in the afterlife.

ROMAN ROADS: LUCRETIUS'S CLEARANCE, CICERO'S ROUNDABOUT, AND VIRGIL'S HIGHWAY

In Rome, the conflict played out between philosopher-poets Lucretius (c. 96–55 BCE) and Virgil (c. 70–19 BCE). Cicero (c. 106–43 BCE) mediated with prejudice. Rome had a dazzling variety of hopes and customs relating to the dead, reaching out to other cultures to import Isis or Osiris or to secure initiation into the Eleusinian mysteries. The neighboring Etruscans celebrated a banquet of the dead atop their cineraria. Roman funerary practice often supposed a shadow life in and near the tomb, where survivors came to share meals at Parentalia, the main festival for the dead ancestors, 13–21 February. In May at Lemuria graves were again visited for a meal for kinless hungry ghosts, and at Rosalia, flowers were laid.[226] Some expected to mingle with the earth as flowers; others anticipated reunions with husbands, children, friends.[227] Ovid observed in the *Fasti* 2.547–56

that spirits turn nasty if neglected.[228] Some Romans were not in their tombs at all (NF NS NC, non fui non sum non curo), but others insisted on continuing to drink, and pipes sent down libations. From Narbonne in southern Gaul, Lucius Runnius Pollo still claims, "I drink continuously all the more eagerly in this monument of mine because I must sleep and remain here forever."[229] The logic of simultaneous sleeping and drinking need not be pressed, but Lucretius sneers at those for whom death is endless thirst.

Amidst all these possibilities, Cicero and Virgil gang up against Lucretius's Epicurean skepticism. Through fictive afterlives that materialism derides as illogical, narcissistic folly, they enforce a commitment to public life from which the Epicurean withdraws. Who won? Cicero lost, but Lucretius and Virgil continue to make powerful claims on the imagination, whether to the sense of reality, or the obligation to aspire.

In his six-book philosophical poem, *De Rerum Natura (On the Nature of Things/DRN*, c. 55 BCE), Lucretius (c. 96–55), a poet of the Republic, denied every afterlife myth with Epicurus as his muse. Venus reigned as goddess, mother of the Aeneadae, fertility, and love (I.1), instigator of the natural processes through which men and animals come into being. All things, Lucretius held, are made of atoms, combining and recombining in the void; the gods exist but are indifferent to man; the highest good is the study of natural causes—the nature of things—disdaining ambition's tormented pursuits of power, wealth, fame. Death is mere dispersal of atoms, nothing to fear.

Cicero (c. 106–43 BCE), pleader, consul, author, *novus homo* ambitious of power and fame, wanted something better than dispersal for souls of manly virtue. His brother admired Lucretius's work; Cicero shied tactfully off. He detested Epicureans' cocky withdrawal from public affairs and rewrote Plato's *Republic* for Rome, replacing Er's myth with Scipio's dream.[230] He ended murdered on Mark Antony's orders, his head and hands set up in the Forum where he often spoke. Point to Lucretius.

Virgil (c. 70–19 BCE), child of civil war, shifted allegiance from Epicurean withdrawal to heroic action as the favored poet of Augustus. A decade after Cicero's murder, Augustus destroyed Mark Antony, Cleopatra, and Caesarion, Julius Caesar's son. Echoing Lucretius in his early eclogues and georgics, Virgil turns apostate in the *Aeneid.*[231] His friend Horace (65–8 BCE) called himself "good for a laugh, a hog from Epicurus's herd" (*Epistles* I. 4, l.16) and disclaimed addressing Caesar or painting bristling

war (*Sat*. 2.1). Those grander topics Virgil yearned after in his pastorals (*Eclogue* 6) and seized in the *Aeneid.* In Book 6 Aeneas travels through the underworld at the center of Virgil's challenge to Greek epic hegemony and Epicurean ideology. Dazzlingly, Virgil synthesizes popular traditions, psychological interpretation, rational adjustments to traditional views, poetic revisioning, philosophical seriousness, historical highlights, and political commentary. No afterlife quite covers the bases the way Virgil's does, and without the challenge presented by Lucretius and the Epicureans, Virgil might not have been so thorough. Going well beyond Plato, he provides an afterlife Christians could find comfortable and correct in most points, saving the gods. When Dante chose Virgil for his guide, he chose the poet who had already mapped the underworld and transformed it into an ethical, philosophical, historical, and political space.

More surprising now than Lucretius's system is that Cicero and Virgil felt impelled to answer it and to erect an alternative. Epicurus's thirty-six volumes of writings had not yet been mislaid by the Christian tradition, nor had Plato and Aristotle acquired their subsequent dominance within that tradition. NF NS NC was inscribed on tombs, to be collected among Latin inscriptions and disparaged by modern Christian scholars.[232] If popular superstition maintained its hold, so did popular skepticism, the "practical atheism" Plato attributed to most people.[233] One public-spirited Epicurean of the second century CE, Diogenes of Oinoanda, inscribed his Epicurean tenets in thousands of words on an 80-foot wall in the center of his obscure town in Asia Minor, southwestern Turkey.[234] Cicero's brash Epicurean Velleius often leads off dialogues, the better to be disputed later (speaking first, Cicero knew, was a disadvantage). "[A]s is usual with that school," Cicero sighs, "Velleius," the Epicurean spokesman, always displays "no lack of confidence."[235] In the second century CE, even the Stoic Marcus Aurelius never managed to shake off the suspicion that chance and atoms might rule. He could not determine whether he would be transmuted by death or dispersed and returned to atoms, to be recombined.

The simplicity and logic of Epicurean atomism were seductive. In death things clearly break apart, creating new life, as maggots wriggle out of a corpse. Easier to challenge was the atomist doctrine of creation by atoms' combining. From Cicero through Savonarola to Thomas Creech, Lucretius's seventeenth-century translator, that idea seemed patently ridiculous: "An Opinion so absurd, that even the bare mentioning of it

confutes it."[236] Like most of Epicurus, Lucretius was mislaid in the Christian era, but the Renaissance saw *DRN* rise. Atomic theory had the same exhilarating effect on early natural scientists that it had had on Lucretius himself, awed by his sense of piercing through "the walls of the world" to ultimate reality. Stephen Greenblatt's *The Swerve*, the story of Lucretius's recovery, testifies to Lucretius's enduring power to liberate. Of his views on death—the absurdity of concern for burial, the futility of life spent half asleep, the vacancy of the period before one's birth, as after death—many were transmitted, less scandalously, in Pliny's *Natural History*, Book 7, chap. LV, "Man." Telling tales of souls' travel outside the body, Pliny mocks a future life, but without the sting of Lucretius's insistence that the soul dies, just like the body. Lucretius jabs the unthinkable in the eye:

> What has this bugbear, death, to frighten man,
> If souls can die as well as bodies can?
>
> (Dryden, ll. 1–2; *DRN* III.830–31: Nil igitur mors est ad nos neque pertinet hilum, quandoquidem natura animi mortalis habetur.)

So dangerous was the idea of a dead soul that Dante literally put a lid on it.

Cicero Dante places with the virtuous pagans, Lucretius he does not know, but Epicurus "and his followers"—who make the soul die with the body—he places in gaping tombs that will be sealed at the Last Judgment, their bodies joining their souls beyond the last death (*Inferno*, x. 14–15: "con Epicuro tutt'i suoi seguaci,/ che l'anima col corpo morta fanno"). They will spend eternity buried alive.

At Dante's threat, Lucretius laughs. Death ends the third book of *DRN*, the midpoint of Lucretius's six, where Homer and later Virgil also set their *katabasis*. Lucretius knows that he does not know what "soul" is. It ought not to be immortal, since coupling an immortal with a mortal thing defies logic (*DRN* III, 800–805). It is palpably bodily, sickening and fretting and recovering along with the body. Soul and body make the self that death annihilates by separating them, each dying its own death:

> we are only we
> While souls and bodies in one frame agree.

Should the dance of atoms reconstitute that body, bringing precisely those atoms back together, that body is a different self. You, cloned, would not be

you. (Nor would your mind running on another computer be you, somewhere in the cloud.) Identity requires memory of the union of body and soul. Death creates "a gaping space . . . where memory lies dead" (ll. 17–26, 38–39, 47; *DRN* III, 839–42, 847–51, 860). Should soul migrate from one body to another, its animating a new body creates a new being with no connection to the earlier embodied self. Body is dominant over soul, yet it is soul that is conscious of the bodily self. We feel no concern for those preexisting selves (Lucretius does not address Shirley MacLaine or Pythagoras). This life, then, is the only one any self has. It should be improved by natural study and frank pleasures (W. B. Yeats thought Dryden's translation of Book 4, on love, the finest description of sexual intercourse ever written). The common pursuits of wealth, honor, and power are better avoided for learning and simple "undisturb'd delight" (Dryden, "Beginning of the Second Book," l. 21). Disengaged and uninvolved, one regards from afar, on shore, ships caught in tempests at sea, or troops on the march, engaged in "the brutal business of the war" (Dryden, "Beginning of the First Book," l. 41). Death is nothing to fear, but part of a necessary and natural cycle. Life is something given to us, through which we pass, and then it passes on to others:

> All things, like thee, have time to rise and rot,
> And from each other's ruin are begot,
> For life is not confin'd to him or thee;
> 'Tis giv'n to all for use, to none for property.
>
> (ll. 171–75; *DRN* III, 964–71)

The Etruscan banquet of the dead, the Roman funerary meals among the graves at Parentalia and Lemuria, Lucretius recognizes as the living remembering the dead, and his personified Nature appropriates. She tells us, clinging to life, that life is a feast and feasting has rules. Guests never stay forever, nor gracious guests too long. Henry Fielding praised the "good supper" he had in Lisbon when he said farewell to his life and his readers in *A Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon* (1754). Dryden makes Nature's speech on limits a challenge to limits. Her cornucopia and his couplet overflow:

> For if thy life were pleasant heretofore,
> If all the bounteous blessings, I could give,
> Thou hast enjoy'd; if thou hast known to live,

> And pleasure not leak'd thro' thee like a sieve;
> Why dost thou not give thanks as at a plenteous feast,
> Cramm'd to the throat with life, and rise and take thy rest?
>
> (Dryden, III, 126–31)

So much has Nature given us, that Dryden's usual five-beat, ten-syllable couplet spills over to a third line—sign both of nature's generosity, overwhelming the couplet, and our leakiness, dribbling over. The next couplet thrusts in two extra syllables and crams a trochee down our throats: the lines are longer than they should be, a pair of six-beat, twelve-syllable Alexandrines. The heroic couplet, overstuffed, bursts with life's good things in every dimension.

Life is given to all for use, but Lucretius's ground is the privileged individualism of the body. The body is within a community, but it no longer needs that community in its death: burial does nothing for the dead. The embodied mind, its memories, insights, and activity, understands and should not be perturbed by its own always pending dissolution. Empathic identification with the body underground or abandoned above ground, Lucretius understands as psychological process. Dryden's rhymes make utterly contemptible such concern for "[t]he lifeless lump uncoupled from the mind" (Dryden, III, 10). Anyone trembling

> That after death his mould'ring limbs shall rot,
> Or flames, or jaws of beasts devour his mass,
> Know he's an unsincere, unthinking ass . . .
> The fool is to his own cast offals kind.
>
> (Dryden, III,50–55)

Bodily empathy makes traditional funerary customs equally horrifying: embalming is "to be at once preserv'd and chok'd"; tombs asphyxiate; sculptures crush, Dryden's baroque addition: "Or crowded in a tomb to be oppress'd/ With monumental marble on thy breast?" (Dryden, III, 71, 74–75). Dante anticipated that one.

Plato detested poets' "dismal tales" (Dryden, III,. 183) as terrorizing. Lucretius understands their psychological resonance, but overthrows them as simply false. Gone is the elaborate stage set of the afterlife, the tortures, flames, and rivers that Hesiod displayed, popular tradition

elaborated, and Aristophanes parodied. Those underground torture chambers do not exist and never have:

> As for the Dog, the Furies, and their snakes,
> The gloomy caverns, and the burning lakes,
> And all the vain infernal trumpery,
> They neither are, nor were, nor e'er can be.
>
> (Dryden, III, 221–24)

The familiar punishments Lucretius decodes as allegory. The rock impending over Tantalus's head is fear of chance or the irrational punishments of imaginary gods (Dryden's embellishment). Tityus's nine-acre, regrowing liver stabbed by vultures is anyone tormented by passion, regrowing in his vitals. Rolling that stone, Sisyphus is an unsuccessful politician, sweating to please the crowd, straining to secure his place. The fifty foolish virgins carrying water in sieves embody unfulfilled desire, hopelessly questing new pleasures, aimlessly seeking satisfaction.

Yet without post-mortem torture chambers, how is morality to be enforced? Plato argues metaphysics and myth: retribution works itself out in this life's justice, and a thousand-year torture chamber lies down and off to the left. Lucretius responds with social institutions. Positive law, the actual arrangements men make, enforces behavior through penalties inflicted on the bodies of wrongdoers:

> But here on earth the guilty have in view
> The mighty pains to mighty mischiefs due;
> Racks, prisons, poisons, the Tarpeian rock,
> Stripes, hangmen, pitch, and suffocating smoke.
>
> (Dryden, III, 226–29)

A surviving precept of Epicurus observes that until the guilty are dead—when they know nothing—they cannot know that they will not be caught.[237] Fear of detection dogs them always, making life the hell others anticipate. For Lucretius, the guilty project their fears forward into eternity's imagined afterlives.

Yet if our lives are merely a point between a past we did not experience and a future that stretches to eternity without us, what did our being here

mean? Curiously, Lucretius never considers an afterlife a source of hope. Unlike Pliny, he does not even ridicule consolatory folly.[238] Those we most admire have died before us: how should we be exempt?

> Consider Ancus great and good is dead;
> Ancus, thy better far, was born to die,
> And thou, dost thou bewail mortality?
>
> (Dryden, III, 236–39)

This argument even Lucretius's admirers rarely repeat, though perhaps better than any other it reconciles us to our own mortality. After Ancus follow Xerxes, Scipio Africanus, Homer, Democritus, and finally the master. Here alone Lucretius names Epicurus, invoked in every book. Naming the name, Lucretius presents a sign of the thought that enabled his own. Why should we be alive when those who created our lives' meanings are dead? Why begrudge the only thing we share with them? Most of us are half dead anyway, lives snored or trafficked away in trivialities and twittering.

For Lucretius, life's project is to understand life, to "study Nature well, and Nature's laws" (Dryden, III, 296), to search for the causes of things. Analyst of endless desire, he recognizes—and sketches—the motor of human insatiability that made Rome a great city, rich, prosperous, crammed with poor people and slaves, wealth and corruption, law and crime. While others crave the thick of things, the Epicurean condemns participation in favor of contemplation, withdrawal from the pursuits that animate the common run of men, in favor of philosophic enlightenment. Superstition and fear vanish before Epicurus and reason. Lucretius dedicates his poem to Venus, the "delight of humankind, and gods," parent of Rome, who breeds all things born, bringing life wherever life exists. To the goddess of love, he brings a devotion that loves life back ("Beginning of the First Book," ll. 1–6). All the meaning anyone needs is found looking through the cosmos to what the world is, understanding one's momentary part in the continuously recombining whole.

Yet for all his brilliance, Lucretius continues to terrify some readers, beginning with Cicero. He shows why we should not fear death—and we agree. He shows traditional tales are fables—and we learn more about human psychology. He shows that the desire for eternal life is part of human insatiability and discontent of spirit, never contented with the

present, always desiring the absent—and we understand ourselves better for it. He spiritedly mocks the identification with the body that underlies funerary ritual and afterlife imaginings. But I am not sure we change; I do not think desire ceases; it may even increase under Lucretius's ministrations. Certainly the terror of the open vowel, long, lonely, unending, has never echoed more powerfully than in Dryden's last lines.[239] Nor has the "length of death" ever seemed longer than that assonance makes it. These lines end Dryden's translation as the thought ends Lucretius's Book III; but who ever read them without turning the page to see, surely, if there is not just a little more?

> Nor, by the longest life we can attain,
> One moment from the length of death we gain,
> For all behind belongs to his eternal reign.
> When once the Fates have cut the mortal thread,
> The man as much to all intents is dead
> Who dies today, and will as long be so,
> As he who died a thousand years ago.

Cicero could not bear it, and he was not one for silence. In 54 BCE he replied to his brother Quintus's praise for *DRN* carefully: "The poetry of Lucretius is, *as you say* in your letter, rich in brilliant genius, yet highly artistic" (emphasis added).[240] That compliment accommodated to someone else's praise, Cicero never repeats, and he never again names Lucretius.[241] Cicero claimed—in both voices in one dialogue—to prefer to go wrong with Plato than right with anyone else. In his *Tusculan Disputations* "A," unlike Socrates, considers death evil, but asked if he fears Cerberus and Acheron, "A" sneers. He fears no three-headed dogs in hell; nobody believes such things.[242] His opponent "M" then jeers those famous philosophers who preen themselves on discovering the falsity of what nobody believes. They also fail to address what people do fear about death—ceasing to exist or the suffering that may accompany death. Cicero almost certainly has Lucretius in view, and his poisonous point is sharp.

Self-consciously Romanizing Plato's myth of Er to end his own *Republic*, Cicero aimed a *Dream of Scipio* against Epicureans' deriding the immortal soul as incredible fables.[243] As a dream, Cicero's lacks the

reality claim of Er's near-death experience, but appropriates the liminal space between this world and the other. Less egalitarian, more historical, aggressively heroic, it adopts the perspective of a privileged spectator far above the earth, viewing the Milky Way, mapping the cosmos. Personal and familial identities, the city and the heavens confirm each other, simultaneously aggrandizing and diminishing individuals.

After a long day's journey and an evening's conversation about his grandfather Scipio Africanus (237–183 BCE), victor in the second Punic War, the younger Scipio Aemilianus Africanus (185–129 BCE) dreams his grandfather, resembling his bust, speaking.[244] He learns his own history: that the Carthage his grandfather defeated under Hannibal, he himself will burn to the ground, triumphing in the third Punic War. He will save Rome from the Gracchi and die assassinated. Reunited with his father Paulus, Scipio embraces and kisses him, not eluded by a shade. They share a vision of the cosmos, giant stars and Milky Way, the earth barely visible, the spheres making music, the stars returning upon themselves in the cosmic year. Among the stars, looking down at earth, Scipio learns that his immortal soul derives from the eternal fires of the constellations, much as we are now told that we are made of stardust. City-preserving souls come from and return to heaven. Small as the earth is, across its banded zones the inhabitants forget or never learn of each other: Scipio's fame will not reach the Ganges.

From Plato's *Phaedrus* Cicero argues soul's immortality from its motion. Since soul makes body move, soul is god to the body and so immortal. Souls given to sensual pursuits and pleasures are tossed to and fro (like Epicurean atoms) for ages of banishment before they return heavenward. Punitively, Epicurean "hog[s]" grovel, close to earth, denied the sublime vision granted Scipio, preserver of his country. Cicero had not yet learned that they also escape the assassination of a Scipio or a Cicero.

Like Cicero, Virgil knew nonexistence would never do. Seventeen years old when Lucretius died, Virgil knew Lucretius's poem well. Bernard Knox calls Virgil a "devotee" of Epicurean philosophy; Philip Hardie has shown how Lucretius permeates not only the deliberately Epicurean *Eclogues* and *Georgics*, but also the anti-Epicurean *Aeneid*. Henri Bergson saw Lucretius's phrases playing everywhere in Augustan literature, though least in Horace, a softer avowed Epicurean.[245] Virgil's second Georgic sounds the distinctive Lucretian note—ambitious to search out nature's laws while indifferent

to fortune or fate. Desired are natural knowledge and "a soft secure inglorious life."[246] The first book of the *Aeneid* ends with Iopas's Epicurean song celebrating natural knowledge and the origins of things. Twenty-seven when Cicero was assassinated, Virgil matured during the murderous chaos of Rome's republic-destroying civil wars. Stability imposed by Augustus, Virgil shifted to the active engagement represented in Cicero's *Dream of Scipio.* When Aeneas, puzzlingly, leaves the underworld through the gate of false dreams after hearing a history of Rome, Virgil gestures to Cicero's *Dream of Scipio* as well as Ennius's "Dream of Homer."[247]

Aeneas's underworld travel occurs at the poem's center. It is the pivot where the action turns, the womb from which the history of Rome emerges, spilling over the limits of Aeneas's era into the living present of Virgil, Augustus, and the already dead Marcellus, once Augustus's heir. On it, Virgil lavishes reason, invention and philosophy to transform Homer's infantine afterlife into a powerful machine of Roman propaganda and ideology.

The surest sign of cognitive control, Virgil's afterlife can be mapped.[248] At entry crowd the causes of death: sickness, grief, famine, war, and strife. Beyond looms the great elm of terrifying dreams and premonitions. (Scipio's dream predicted assassination by his relations.) Aeneas boats with Charon over the river to Cerberus, walks past the Mourning Lovers and the Warriors, where the road forks left to Tartarus and right to the Fields of the Blessed. The direction "to the right, to the sacred meadows and groves of Persephone" occurs in mystery initiation texts from Thuroi, associated with the kid in the milk.[249] Making no blood sacrifice or first-fruits offering, Aeneas bears a sacred golden bough to Persephone's groves. Otherwise, Virgil's afterlife is thoroughly rationalized. Like Odysseus, Aeneas draws his sword to slash at terrifying chimeras, but he is advised by the Sibyl to put up his useless sword, for these are only phantoms. Bodiless shades no longer shy from weapons they cannot feel. Longing for burial (Odysseus's Elpenor) is mathematized and motivated (Aeneas's Palinurus). The unburied must wander a hundred years before finally resting in the underworld. R. G. Austin finds no source for Virgil's hundred-year figure. The round number arousing and allaying anxiety over the body may be the poet's invention.[250]

Twitting the enlightened, Virgil makes a place for every belief Cicero and Lucretius scorned. The Sibyl throws a sop to Cerberus as the erstwhile

Epicurean loads up "the Dog, the Furies, and their snakes,/The gloomy caverns, and the burning lakes,/And all the vain infernal trumpery." Not one item is left out of the familiar catalogue.

As Aeneas makes his way through the underworld, every encounter transforms and intensifies a Homeric moment. Homer's parade of beautiful women, mothers of heroes and lovers of gods, becomes a domain of lovelorn, passionate victims of their own intense sexual desires, Virgil's Fields of Mourning. There Dido mimes the hero Ajax's fury (and Cleopatra's defeat). As Odysseus's dead Greek heroes followed the famous women, so Aeneas next encounters gender-segregated warriors. Mutilated Deiphobus reimagines Agamemnon's murder, victims of guilty sisters (Helen and Clytemnestra), who abandoned one man and took another. In Tartarus's torture chamber, Virgil shows off: Tityos's vultures celebrate Rome's superior grisliness. Homer's vultures flock in a long shot over the recumbent body. Virgil moves into the body cavity where a single vulture gropes, beak and talons inside pulling at the liver (6.595–600).

Aeneas meets Anchises, his father, the goal and end of his journey, inverting Odysseus's unexpected, unwished encounter with Anticleia, his mother, at his beginning. Homer's bodily pathos recurs in the parent's elusive shade. Virgil's narrative then turns: a philosophical statement on the nature of being flows effortlessly into history and the present. Odysseus's story of Achilles' son becomes the pageant of Aeneas's descendants. Odysseus's encounter with Hercules augurs his personal destiny, the terrible bow he will wield against the suitors. Virgil's stories about the dead become the story of the future, not as in Homer the heroic individual's future, but the state's.

Virgil's new metaphysic makes space for more than Homeric imitation and popular folklore. Improving on the mysteries, he inscribes justice from multiple perspectives. Entering the underworld, Aeneas encounters the untimely dead: wailing infants, those unjustly condemned in human courts, and suicides. The children are remembered, but not consoled. The silent condemned are judged again by Minos. The suicides echo Achilles: they long for poverty and hard labor if only they could view the sun again ("nunc et pauperiem et duros perferre labores!" 6.437). Rethinking Plato's orders, Virgil does not strike the line but reassigns it. No longer Achilles' experience as best of the dead, aching for the life thrown away now persuades against suicide, a hostility shared with Cicero (and Plautus).[251]

Cultivating death's terrors, unlike Cicero, Virgil amplifies Plato's retributive punishments and casts a slyly sardonic glance at Lucretius's prisons.

Homer's and Hesiod's Tartarus, yawning twice as far below the earth as earth from the sky (*Aeneid* 6.577–79), Virgil turns into a gigantic prison, specialized as a place of punishment. Racks and wheels and iron scourges, groans, lashes, and dragging chains echo dismally, too horrid for description. No longer restricted to god-defying heroes, punishment strikes crimes in Rome, against one's fellow men, in a list far longer than Plato's. Yet most of the crimes Virgil enumerates are not punishable by law. Lucretius's "Racks, prisons, poisons, the Tarpeian rock" could not touch them.

Adding to Homer, Virgil catalogues the usual god-defying suspects: the Titans, Salmoneus, twin sons of Aloeus, Tityos, the Lapithae Ixion and Pirithous, with a rock hanging over their heads, and forbidden laden tables. To them he adds behaviors Romans wanted to control: those who hated their brothers, struck their fathers, defrauded a client, failed to share wealth with relatives (huge numbers of those); those slain for adultery, those who warred against their own country and betrayed their lords. Some sold their country for gold, others foisted a tyrant on the people, some passed or repealed laws for money, others raped their daughters (6.608–24). A sociology of the city and a glancing rebuttal of Lucretius, most of these acts, antisocial though they are, are not crimes amenable to law. No legal sanction punishes those who fail to share wealth with relatives or hate their brothers, and men killed for adultery are already dead.[252] Implicitly, Virgil addresses Lucretius's criticism that all we need is law, by pointing to behaviors, moving from wrong to unimaginably monstrous, "immane nefas" (6.624), that the law does not address. Justice for these wrongs takes place only in another world.

Virgil also encourages specific good behaviors. Leaving tortures behind, Aeneas and the sibyl arrive at the realm of reward, the "Blissful Groves" ("Fortunatorum Nemorum," 6.639) or "Elysium" (6. 744). A sun and stars appear. Wrestling, games, grappling, dancing, and singing occupy the happy, while Orpheus plays his lyre amid traces of his mysteries. Horses browse, unyoked for a while from the nearby chariots, lances stuck in the earth. Nor is feasting forgotten, and a chant rises within a fragrant laurel grove. Enjoying these happy exercises of the body are Trojan ancestors and those whose behaviors deserve praise and should

provoke emulation: men who suffered wounds for their country (they did not need even to die); holy priests, poets worthy Apollo; those who discovered truths useful to mankind, and those who served their fellows through acts of beneficence. Warfare, religion, song, science, arts, philosophy, and service: all support the state and its purposes among the famed and the anonymous. The freedom of movement characteristic of earlier afterlives finds spaces worth moving through, groves, meadows, streams (6.672–75). In just such terrain Dante places his virtuous pagans, including the Muslims Averroes and Avicenna.

So superior in design is Virgil's underworld that it induces critics to fault its arrangements: why is Dido not among the suicides? Why is Sychaeus, her husband, with her in the field of mourning lovers, since he died beloved and faithful to the end? Why are the Trojan warriors not among those who incurred wounds for their country in Elysium with Teucer's line? Spatial fluidity characterized Homer's and other afterlives. Once across the river, shades not tied down to tortures could be found anywhere. Outside the rarely visited court of Hades and Persephone, the geography recapitulated the random gathering of shades at the brink, tumbling pell-mell from life. When Virgil imposes order on his underworld, moments that violate the design stand out. The text systematizes traditional received ideas, integrating them with grander concepts, reshaping the present to control the future, too successfully. A tribute to the rationalizing impulse the text creates in the reader, the reader arriving from the future demands more rigor.

Once Aeneas meets Anchises and the shade flits thrice through the living arms that would embrace it, the Homeric underworld, with its moralized Platonic additions, is finished. Poor Anticleia explained no more than the soul's flying as the body burns to ash. Anchises explains the nature of the universe, in terms of the Stoic doctrine of *anima mundi*, the world spirit or mind from which all things come, to which all things go, and in which all things participate. Transposing Anticleia's pathetic vision of a wasted, weakened soul fleeing the fire, Anchises rears before the mind's eye a vision of the universe as fire.

> Know, first, that heav'n and earth's compacted frame,
> And flowing waters, and the starry flame,
> And both the radiant lights, one common soul

Inspires and feeds, and animates the whole.
This active mind, infus'd thro' all the space,
Unites and mingles with the mighty mass.
Hence men and beasts the breath of life obtain,
And birds of air, and monsters of the main.
Th'ethereal vigor is in all the same,
And every soul is fill'd with equal flame.

(Dryden, 6. 980–89)

Father for mother and philosophical transcendence for acceptance of common fate: Virgil systematically trades up elements. Against Lucretius's atoms, swerving in the void, Virgil raises a philosophic alternative in Stoic-Ciceronian fire that consumes those atoms, denies their difference, and subtends them.

With philosophy transcending the popular fables he has just retold, Virgil launches into Roman history, politics, and purpose. Nothing could be further from Epicurean withdrawal than this energetic account. Rejected are the seductive ethics of contemplative disengagement for an ideology of action in history, the progress of the Roman art of empire. From Aeneas's earliest descendants through Augustus himself, from Romulus and Numa to the tragic civil war between Caesar and Pompey, Virgil rewrites Cicero's history of Rome and its heroes to end in his own present, with Marcellus. The dead heir of Augustus and Livia is wept as Aeneas weeps when he sees the story of Troy on Dido's walls, "sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt" (1.462; [here too] are tears for things and mortal sufferings touch the mind).

Cicero's Scipio had been advised that the Ganges will never hear his name, nor the rising or the setting sun. Fame lasts barely a year in mortal minds, and Cicero recalls Lucretius's evocation of the eons before one's birth, "of what importance is it to you to be talked of by those who are born after you, when you were never mentioned by those who lived before you."[253] Cicero, for once, is judged too modest. To Augustus Virgil promises an empire and fame past Africans and Indians, "Garamantas et Indos" (6.794), beyond the stars and solar year of Scipio's dream (6.795–96). Left far behind is Epicurean contempt for public life. Fame is desirable, widespread, and as enduring as the imperial justification Virgil creates for Rome and every Latin-reading empire since:

tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento
(hae tibi erunt artes) pacique imponere morem,
parcere subiectis et debellare superbos.
6.851–53

(You rule by command the peoples, Roman, remember /(these will be your arts)
peace and custom to impose,/ to spare the subjugated and to break the proud.)

This Pax Romana, the imperial credo, the civilizing mission rejects utterly the Lucretius who mocked sweating Sisyphus as the active politician of the Roman republic.

Not content with reversing values, Virgil jabs at what Lucretius explicitly valued. Virgil's attack on Ancus has puzzled numerous commentators, who suspect Virgil may have confused one king or Ancus with another.[254] Ancus, the fourth king of Rome, is routinely praised, his paternity questioned, by Cicero (*Republic* II, xviii, 33, p.141). Horace linked Ancus with Numa, as a casualty of death like ourselves. The Forum may see you now, but you will have to go where Numa and Ancus have gone: "ire tamen restat Numa quo devenit et Ancus" (*Epistles* I.6.27). In Lucretius, Ancus holds a privileged position: he begins the list of worthy dead that Epicurus will end. As a public, political character he is followed by the doomed, unnamed Xerxes who paved the seas to his own destruction, and so figures ironically, and then by the "son of the Scipios," thunderbolt of Carthage, as predictable as those who follow him: Homer, Democritus, and Epicurus. The praise of Ancus is generous:

Consider Ancus great and good is dead;
Ancus, thy better far, was born to die,
And thou, dost thou bewail mortality?

(Dryden, 236–39)

As rare as Lucretius's praise is Virgil's condemnation. Uniquely among the Roman fathers, he charges "bragging Ancus" with panting after the popularity Lucretius scorns in Sisyphus:

Whom Ancus follows, with a fawning air,
But vain within, and proudly popular.

(Dryden, 6.1115–16)

quem iuxta sequitur iactantior Ancus,
nunc quoque iam nimium gaudens popularibus auris.

(6.815–16)

Virgil mocks in Epicurean satiric terms, as vain, petty, and would-be popular, a figure the Epicureans Lucretius and Horace conspicuously and persistently praise. Ancus, Cicero notes, had divided among the citizens the lands he conquered. He also made the forests of the sea coast, his conquests, public property.[255] Respect for public things clung to his memory. There may be some other secret reason for Virgil's unique depreciation of a Roman father, but the jab marks Virgil's contesting Lucretius's history and Ancus's public donations, before there was a republic, before Augustus's principate. Perhaps only Horace, another Epicurean, would have noticed.

With Virgil, the afterlife has acquired the characteristics and structure that Christianity will absorb when its time comes, in less than a century. Augustus, son of a God (the deified Julius Caesar), will restore the golden age ("Augustus Caesar, Divi genus, aurea condet/saecula" 6.792–93). Suicides chastised, infants in limbo, punishment, reward, purgation, and rebirth of souls: all eventually enter Christian doctrines and fantasies. Revelation's heavenly city is remote from Virgil's pastoral fields, nor does Virgil envision the destruction of his Rome, "Babylon, that great city" that rules the world from her seven hills (Rev. 17.5, 9, 18). Yet Virgil maps the underworld that later medieval writers will revisit, as they follow his trajectory through myth to transcendence.[256] Dante knew whom he needed for a guide.

Did Virgil believe any of it? Of an afterlife so clearly constructed from others' bits and pieces, one should probably follow one of Virgil's sources. To repeat Plato's observation in *Phaedo*, it is "not fitting to say something like this is true, but fit to say something ought to be like it" (114de). Facing the dead Marcellus, Virgil has only an "unavailing gift" (Dryden, 6. 1226), "inani/ munere" (6.885–86), less than the "tristi munere" Catullus offered his brother (*Carmen,* 101). The monsters and chimeras flocking the entry to the underworld fade before this unborn image of a man already dead. So, too, to John Jortin's dismay, Aeneas leaves the underworld through the gate of false dreams.

An episode commenced by invoking the gods to "let me tell what I have heard" and reveal the secrets of the depths (6.264–67) shifts from

represented action to mere dream, and a false dream rather than a true one. As Edward Gibbon observed before he became Rome's historian, many think the ivory gate wrecks Book 6: "the common opinion, that by six unlucky lines, Virgil is destroying the beautiful System, which it had cost him eight hundred to raise. [Jortin] explains too this preposterous conduct, by the usual expedient of the Poet's Epicureism. I only differ from him in attributing to haste and indiscretion, what he considers as the result of design."[257] Tactfully, the skeptical Gibbon lets the cleric Jortin conclude Virgil at heart an Epicurean. As to others' belief in Virgil's system, a modern student of Roman death and burial finds echoes only in poetic epitaphs, not in prose or funerary art.[258] Like Lucretius, propagandizing for the study of nature as Virgil for civic action, Virgil seems to care enough about truth as matter of fact to mark his vision false, even though it has told many truths.

Lightly presented here, running across several millennia, is the human imagination working over and developing its conceptions of what happens after death, responding to social change, generating new ideologies in reimagined spaces of the dead. Most of the work is anonymous, and much of it popular, but from Homer to Virgil the luck of literary survivals lets us see purposeful bricolage in action. Justice, long absent, is vigorously stitched in, and such imaginary afterlives as Plato's and Virgil's are manifestly intended to shape the behavior of the living, regardless of the dead. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thinkers, wriggling free of a thousand years of Christian hegemony, blamed priests for successful mind control; they did not think to blame their beloved poets and philosophers.

Of two enlightenment revolutions in the afterlife, one followed Lucretius and denied an afterlife on rationalist, materialist principles, a position associated with David Hume, Edward Gibbon, and some deists. The second revolution is perhaps more interesting: the afterlife was undermined from within by the desire to improve it, to create a happier and better future state than was currently on offer, even in Christianity. When an afterlife is predicated upon its being empirical fact, as the Christian afterlife is, can it both change and remain true at the same time?

That afterlives originate in the human mind and serve social purposes is, of course, no proof of their falsity, any more than religion's origins and development disprove God. Any God worth believing can surely oversee

the evolution of appropriately worshipful creatures, and countless other beings both indifferent and inimical to man, as He informs Job. So, too, the Christian's delayed *parousia* demands a concept of progressive revelation. The world having not come to its promised end, God adapts and is adapted to changes in human psychology and society, taking on the ideal configuration of the changing human face. (Or, with Christopher Hitchens, its diabolism.) In the British enlightenment, the afterlife came to originate in the mind, serve social purposes, and reflect the human image, all without disturbing orthodoxy. A good God, his benevolence unchallenged, would not give people false ideas.

Before eternity takes this final twist, however, let us follow Scipio's gaze towards the Ganges. What afterlife or lives could he expect there? Related but alternative logics flourish in a vast, cyclically generating and self-destroying cosmos, where no eternity is permanent, except the flame of a blown-out candle.