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5 ESCHATOLOGY AND SOTERIOLOGY IN GREEK REBIRTH

METHODOLOGICAL REMARKS

I will now bring to bear on my imaginary experiment the traditions of thought in ancient Greece, conveniently labeled "Pythagorean," that also contained multiple theories of rebirth. Most of the doctrines of rebirth discussed earlier have both historical and contemporary relevance, but for Greece one has no choice but to deal exclusively with the historical traditions, beginning with the figure most associated with rebirth doctrines, Pythagoras. Pythagoras, like similar figures in religious history, is simultaneously a historical and mythic persona such that it makes little sense to differentiate the two. Myth is history for those who believe in it. To complicate matters, there is no information on Pythagoras from contemporary or near-contemporary records. All early records are very fragmentary, at least until we reach the third and fourth centuries C.E., when two detailed Neoplatonic texts on the life of Pythagoras became available, one by Porphyry and the other, a more interesting account, by his student, the Neoplatonist Iamblichus. This lack of contemporary data poses a huge methodological problem: how does one use this interesting yet patently late information for the study of early (or for that matter late) Pythagoreanism? Virtually every classical scholar, even those skeptical of the Neoplatonic writers, does in fact use this data, but it is not clear on what bases. From my point of view there is a justification to use later texts because information about

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Pythagoras, whether mythic or no, went down into later Greek tradition. Porphyry and Iamblichus did not self-consciously fabricate these accounts but simply put down in writing existing information about Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism. One can therefore say that Pythagoras, as he appears in later texts, is a construction of Pythagoreanism, that is, the tradition of thought built on the work of a mythic founder. Although we know that traditions are being constantly invented, it is also the case that some ideational forms, or epistemes, show remarkable consistency over time, good examples being Buddhist ideas of karma, samsara, nirvana, and so forth. Otherwise no idea of enduring structures makes sense. Even a radical thinker such as Michel Foucault dealt with the remarkable persistence of epistemes in Western civilization through time, effectively showing that the great poststructuralist remains a structuralist after all! Further, when traditions or epistemic forms are being invented, they are rarely invented *de novo*. Thus, there is justification for using later works as part of an ongoing tradition of Pythagoreanism or as a depository of that tradition. Iamblichus's Pythagoras may not be the real Pythagoras (if ever there was such a being), but his is a legitimate version of Pythagoras that some persons, including Iamblichus, believed in. He is a figure of the Greek imagination as the Buddha is of the Indian.

Let me justify my approach by sketching those elements of the Pythagorean tradition that constituted, according to earlier fragments and late accounts, epistemes of the long run in the imagination of the Greeks. I will spell them out schematically and then deal with them at length; this will enable others to disagree with me. As one goes down the following list one moves from the fairly certain to the fairly speculative.

1. There does not seem to be the slightest doubt that Pythagoras (hereafter meaning the figure of the Greek imagination) believed in reincarnation, and I will demonstrate that the Pythagoreans had several models of it.
2. Early as well as late references indicate that this rebirth eschatology entailed animal rebirths, which therefore explains the strong injunction against consuming flesh. Associated with this is also a doctrine of species sentence.
3. The tradition of a vegetarian diet was also pronounced although some accommodations were made to the popular Greek cuisine of the sacrifice.

4. Pythagoras was sometimes depicted as a ridiculous figure by mainline Greek thinkers and as a divine, semidivine, or superhuman being by believers, followers, and intellectual admirers.
5. Among his miraculous powers was the power of retrocognition, such that he could recollect past lives, although up to a limited period only.
6. On the other hand, Pythagoras was considered the founder of Greek mathematics and a "philosopher." I think it wrong to extrapolate Pythagoras's philosophical thought and label it as "real" to contrast with the mythic elements; both are inextricably part of the imagined Pythagoras.
7. There were almost certainly early Pythagorean communities that espoused secret doctrines and adopted formulas of a highly symbolic sort. The details of the lifeways of these communities are in later accounts such as Iamblichus's; many accounts, early and late, portray them as given to "silence."
8. Although the outlines of Pythagorean eschatologies are easy to figure out, the details are difficult. Hence, formulations of such phenomena as ethicization must be speculative although they are derived from and reinforced by the models constructed earlier and by the comparative material.
9. The same is true of the Pythagorean soteriologies, although it is virtually certain that Pythagoras himself was concerned with the emancipation from the rebirth cycle.
10. This is because there is considerable evidence that Pythagoreans shared with some Orphic communities an understanding of the body as a prison of the soul; hence the need for the soul's release.

What then is the task of the historian or ethnographer? All he or she can do is weave a narrative, or "story," incorporating these hypothesized features of Pythagoreanism. Plato, that great storyteller, honestly recognized this function of narrative whenever he or his Socrates spoke of a "probable mythos" or when he asserted that the facts need not be "exactly as I have described them" but that "something very like it is a true account."¹ Even the most erudite of classical scholars must adopt this kind of strategy in respect to fragmentary material scattered through a long his-

torical period, although few would be willing to admit it. The historian or ethnographer is a special type of storyteller, the history teller (or *histor*), who weaves "facts" into the fabric of a narrative. Therefore, historical accounts have to be justified by evidence or admitted as speculative and, in the latter instance, defended with good reasoning. This concern with evidence and the logical justification of speculation is what gives "truth-value" to historical and ethnographic descriptions as against fiction and other purely invented genres. Hence the paradox: verisimilitude is simply impossible in history or ethnography, but it is entirely possible in fictional narratives, where the messiness of "truth" is no impediment to storytelling.²

PYTHAGORAS AND PYTHAGOREANISM: A PROBABLE MYTHOS

Pythagoras apparently was born on the island of Samos and lived there during the time of the tyrant Polycrates, who came into power c. 540 B.C.E. According to most accounts Pythagoras left Samos, perhaps because of political opposition to Polycrates, and went west after traveling in foreign lands. According to some sources he sojourned in Egypt and even visited Zoroaster. Ultimately he settled in Croton, in southern Italy, around age forty and there formulated his doctrines of salvation, perhaps influenced by the prevailing mystery religions and varieties of Orphic soteriology that had taken root in this region.³

Pythagoras is thought to have been the great founder of Greek mathematics and of a religious-cum-philosophical creed that had reincarnation as the central tenet along with strict dietary prohibitions pertaining to the consumption of meat and some select vegetable substances. Some think that the reincarnation eschatology was formulated before Pythagoras by an older contemporary, Pherekydes, Pythagoras's teacher, but for our purposes it is convenient to start with Pythagoras himself.⁴ We know that the Pythagoreans had schools, sodalities, or orders whose origins were not in Greece proper but in Magna Graecia, that is, outside of the Greek mainland, in what is now southern Italy and Sicily. This region was also the home of the most famous of the later Pythagoreans, Empedocles, who lived around the middle of the fifth century B.C.E.

Let me begin with Herodotus, who, writing in the mid-fifth century, clearly refers to rebirth doctrines among Greeks:

The Egyptians are the first to have told the story also, that the soul of man is immortal and that, when the body dies, the soul creeps into some other living thing then coming to birth; and when it has gone through all things,

of land and sea and air, it creeps again into a human body at its birth. The cycle for the soul is, they say, three thousand years. There are some Greeks who have used this story, some earlier and some later, as though it were something of their own. I know their names but will not write them down.⁵

H. S. Long suggests that because Herodotus's account did not fit the rebirth eschatologies of Pindar, Empedocles, and Plato, he must have referred to the only other leading contender, Pythagoras.⁶ But this assumes that in Herodotus's time there were no rebirth theories other than Pythagoras's, which is most unlikely, particularly given that Herodotus suggests in a discussion of burial customs that other groups believed in rebirth:

[The Egyptians] wear linen tunics, with fringes about their legs which they call "calasiris," and they wear white woolen mantles on top of these again. But they never bring into the temple anything of wool, nor may they be buried in such. That contravenes their religion. In this they agree with those rites that are called Orphic and Bacchic but are in fact Egyptian and Pythagorean. For in the case of these rites, too, whoever has a share in them may not be buried in woolen garments. There is a holy tale about this.⁷

Herodotus's reference to the taboo on wool makes sense in terms of what we know to be a common practice among virtually all Greek believers in rebirth, namely, a symbolic affirmation of purity. Wool, after all, comes from animals that will be killed (for the sacrifice). The taboo is therefore analogous to the orthodox Brahmin's refusal to wear leather shoes.

Herodotus seems to refer to a specific doctrine of rebirth with which he was familiar, one that had a fixed cycle of three thousand years during which the soul gets reincarnated in land, sea, and air creatures, a set of predetermined births that end up in a human reincarnation, thus completing the full cycle. There is no mention of a doctrine of salvation, and it is unlikely to be Pythagoras's own doctrine, unless the missing reference is simply an omission. The length of the cycle itself is based on formal key numbers: ten (the perfect number for Pythagoreans) and three (representing for Pythagoreans the idea of beginning, middle, and end). These numbers were subsequently used by all Greek rebirth theorists, including Plato. Regarding the taboo on wool Herodotus's statement hints at Pythagorean *acusmata* (oral instruction) or at special ritual and other injunctions that members of the order had to observe.

Because those in Greece proper had little patience with either reincarnation or strict asceticism, the Pythagoreans were ridiculed by Greek

satirists. Thus Xenophanes (a near contemporary) laughs at Pythagoras who, seeing a dog being maltreated, cried out in pity:

And once he passed a puppy that was being whipped
They say he took pity on it and made this remark:
"Stop, do not beat it; for it is a soul of a dear friend—
I recognized it when I heard the voice."⁸

But as Peris and others have shown, the satire does indicate evidence for the form of rebirth I have called cross-reincarnation.⁹ Xenophanes' sarcasm aside, there is also an implicit notion linking the idea of species sentience with that of reincarnation: one must have sympathy for animals because a former known human spirit might have been resident in it.¹⁰

A less mechanical notion of the rebirth cycle and of memory emerges from Heraclides, a student of Plato and a member of the academy who speaks of Pythagoras's previous lives, ostensibly on the authority of the master himself:

He was once Aethalides, who, when his father Hermes offered him any gift except immortality, chose to retain both in life and in death the memory of what happened to him. Later he became the Homeric hero Euphorbus, wounded in battle by Menelaus, who was wont to recount the wanderings of his soul in animals and *plants as well as human bodies*, and tell of the fate of souls in Hades. Next his soul entered Hermodotus, who authenticated the story of his previous life by identifying the rotting shield of Menelaus in the temple of Apollo at Branchidae. It then became a Delian fisherman named Pyrrhus, and finally Pythagoras, carrying with it still the memory of its previous phases of existence.¹¹

In this eschatology one can be reborn as an animal without having to go through a complete cycle, as in Herodotus's account. It also contains the idea, missing in Herodotus, that one can be incarnated in a plant. The reference to Pythagoras's recollection of past lives is not through a special asceticism but by a boon given by Hermes in an early incarnation. There is also the vindication of past memory by reference to "proofs," such as the rotting shield of Menelaus. In addition to Pythagorean vegetarianism, Heraclides also refers to the strong taboo on beans. "Heraclides explains the Pythagorean ban on beans by the curious superstition that if a bean is laid in a new tomb and covered with dung for forty days, it takes on the appearance of a man."¹² This may not make sense to us, but it was surely embedded in a larger text, part of the secret *acusmata* of the sect and its esoteric symbolism, communicated to its selected membership as *paradosis*, as *rabasyam*.

Now for the final set of references: Porphyry, in his *Life of Pythagoras*, attributes to Empedocles a saying that, in all likelihood, referred to Pythagoras himself. "There was among them a man of surpassing knowledge, who possessed vast wealth of understanding, capable of all kinds of cunning acts; for when he exerted himself with all his understanding, easily did he see every one of all the things that are, in ten and twenty human lives."¹³ And Iamblichus refers to this supeman, who "knew his own previous lives, and began his training of others by awakening their memory of an earlier existence."¹⁴ Memory is a key feature in rebirth eschatologies, so it is not surprising that Iamblichus can say that in Pythagorean training disciples were expected to "set great store by memory" because "nothing has more effect on knowledge, experience and understanding than the ability to remember."¹⁵ The tradition was strong that Pythagoras possessed the faculty of retrocognition based on some unspecified forms of spiritual asceticism. But unlike the Buddha's retrocognition, Pythagoras's was for ten or twenty human lives, once again based on the number ten. Porphyry also has a neat and cautious account of Pythagoras's rebirth doctrine imagined at this late date. After mentioning that many men and women joined Pythagoras, and the silence he observed, he adds this key passage:

But especially well known among all were first that they said that the soul was immortal, next, that it went across to other kinds of animals, and in addition to these, that what had once taken place takes place again according to certain cycles [*periodous*], but that nothing is altogether [*(h)aplos*] new and that it is necessary to consider all existing living things [*empsychai*] to be kin [*homogenei*]. For it appears that the first to bring this teaching to Greece was Pythagoras.¹⁶

It seems to me that the preceding accounts of Greek rebirth suggest two models, the first by Herodotus and Porphyry and the second by Heraclides. Both may be seen as variations of the rebirth topography sketched in figure 3. Consider the model mentioned by Herodotus; in it the soul wanders through a fixed cycle, automatically going through a round of all the land, sea, and air creatures and then coming back to the human body in a cycle that takes three thousand years. One would have hesitated to take Herodotus seriously but for the fact that his model is both logically and empirically feasible, and it also shows a similarity to the *Āyurika* rebirth schema. That virtually the same scheme was attested by Porphyry indicates that the Herodotus model continued into later times as an episteme of the long run. Further, it is also of the sort that Lee Guem-

ple has labeled "continuous incarnation," in which the soul keeps incarnating in different human or other forms, as in the case of the Qiqigamiut Inuit and the Trobrianders. Because the same soul incarnates in different kinds of bodies, it is not likely that the same *person* is being continuously reincarnated. It is hard to believe that the Greeks thought that there was no *person* difference between, let us say, a human incarnation and a fish incarnation! The absence of reference to rebirth as a plant need not be seen as an oversight because we do know that such rebirth is rarely mentioned in the cross-cultural record. Nevertheless, there is a difference between the Herodotus and Porphyry models: the latter assumes periodic cycles with events repeating themselves, something that is structurally difficult if not impossible in Buddhism, where, in general, events are conditioned by karma. Yet even in Buddhism all Buddhas follow an identical life pattern—but then they are karma-free beings. That the Greek idea of an eternal return is an episteme of the long run is evident from the more forceful (and more simplistic) statement attributed to Eudemus (c. mid-fourth century B.C.E.), a student of Aristotle's: "If anyone were to believe the Pythagoreans that things will repeat themselves individually, and I shall be talking to you holding my stick as you sit here, and everything will be as it is now, it is reasonable to say that time repeats itself."¹⁷

I think it reasonable to say that there were multiple models of rebirth circulating in Greece, especially in Magna Graecia, and the fragmentary record outlines a few of them. As in the Amerindian cases, the rebirth doctrine is closely associated with the kinship of all living beings. And this, rather than an abstract idea like the Buddhist *ahimsā*, accounts for the vegetarian diet. These ethics of species sentence go right down to Plato, who says in *Meno* that "the whole of nature is akin."¹⁸ As already noted, this doctrine, when associated with cross-reincarnation, could produce the idea that eating an animal is in effect eating an ancestor and tantamount to endoanthropophagy. I came to this conclusion via the Kwakiutl data and before I had access to the Greek. Because the Greek evidence is unequivocal in this regard, it provides indirect substantiation of our interpretation of the Kwakiutl cannibal dance as a catharsis or purification of the taint of endoanthropophagy; and the Kwakiutl data in turn throw light on both the Greek phobia of endoanthropophagy and the peculiar Upanishadic "water doctrine" in a circular hermeneutical logic of validation. The difference between the Kwakiutl and the Greek is that in the former a vegetarian solution to the aporia of eating one's ancestor is impossible to envision, given Kwakiutl dependence on, and high cultural valuation of, meat eating. In Greece, owing to the agrar-

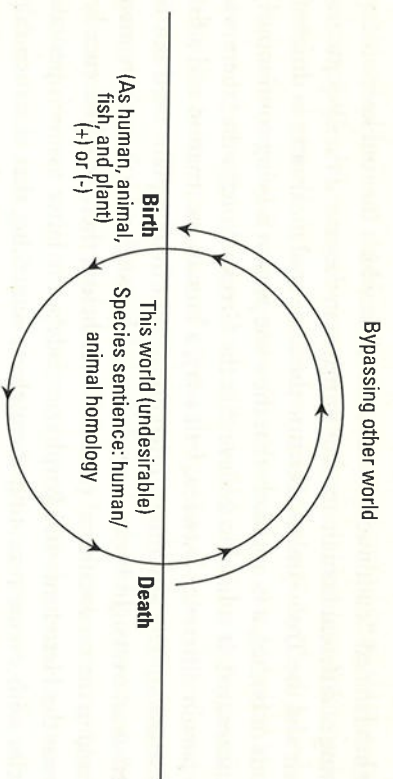


Figure 8. Pythagorean rebirth (after Herodotus, Porphyry, Heraclides). In this system, the process of rebirth is metemesis. The duration of rebirth cycles is 3,000 years. Salvation is outside the rebirth cycle. Rebirth memories are possible only for extraordinary individuals. The ideal food is vegetarian.

ian economy in which they operated, Pythagoreans (like Buddhists, Jains, and Hindus) could and often did practice vegetarianism. If, however, the soul gets incarnated in a plant, then that plant also cannot be eaten or destroyed.

What might account for the absence of ethicization in the early Pythagorean eschatology? It seems that although Pythagoras and his followers were clearly involved in the world, they were not involved in the conversion of ordinary citizens into their sodalities. And because of the strict, exclusive nature of the order, the Pythagoreans would find it impossible to be so. Their numbers were small, and they were interested only in their own personal salvation, very much like the Upanishadic virtuosos.

This was not the situation in the religions of the Ganges valley of a slightly later period, when doctrines of salvation were publicly aired and monks were actively involved in converting lay folk into larger religious congregations. Like Pythagoreans, Buddhist monks and nuns belonged to an order whose goal was nirvana. But Buddhism did provide for the laity the secondary compensations of a happy afterlife, punishment for the wicked, and the possibility of a distant achievement of nirvana. Rulers in India, as well as large sectors of the population such as the merchant orders and ordinary folk, subscribed to the new doctrines. But no such inclusion took place in early Pythagoreanism. Hence the paradoxical nature of their life situation: on the one hand they followed tradition by being involved in the political life (perhaps necessary for their survival as a sodality); on the other hand they had to isolate themselves from the

world outside, engaged in their own salvation quest. Little reference to ethicization exists in later Pythagoreanism either, if we take Iamblichus's *De Vita Pythagorica* as a test case. Iamblichus extensively documents Pythagoras's concern with everyday social morality for his followers but nowhere does Iamblichus's Pythagoras indicate that conformity to or violation of this morality will lead to rewards or punishments in the afterworld or in another rebirth.¹⁹

In the preceding account I considered two Pythagorean models: the Herodotus-Porphyry model, in which the soul goes through a predetermined cycle, and the Heraclides model, in which it does not, although one has to be reborn as an animal or plant at some time or other. One could include as a third Aristotle's snide comment that according to "Pythagorean stories" it was possible "for any soul to be clothed in any body."²⁰ None of these models can be dismissed because all are nomologically adequate and objectively possible, which means, to restate, they possess a coherent internal logic, and they present features that do not contradict norms found in clearly documented examples from the empirical record. Moreover, even if one assumes for the moment that these models were not those of early Pythagoreans but were invented by Herodotus, Porphyry, and Aristotle, they illustrate the proposition that invention does not take place *de novo* but in relation to existing ideas; and these existing ideas must surely derive from traditions of Pythagoreanism; further, all three rebirth models must logically and reductively circulate around the elementary model of rebirth sketched earlier (see fig. 1).

It is also virtually certain that all Pythagorean theories entail rebirth into nonhuman forms of sentient existence. In this context one can, I think, reinterpret the well-known statements attributed to the Pythagoreans and "Orphics" that the "body is the prison or the tomb of the soul." Contrary to modern interpretations influenced by Christian "prejudices," reference here to the body as the soul's prison does not refer to the human body in one's present existence but to the body's incarceration of the soul in the total rebirth cycle. It implies an eschatology in which the preexistent soul gets "continuously incarnated" in the bodies of four-legged animals, birds, fish, and some plants. Therefore, from a logical point of view the soul is imprisoned in various bodies. But the soul's imprisonment cannot be separated from a doctrine that deals with its release from that prison. Thus, from a soteriological point of view the question posed by all Pythagorean eschatologies is this: how can the soul be released from the prison of the body? And this question implies the release from the rebirth cycle itself given that continuous embodiment is

intrinsically associated with that cycle. That release, it seems, could only be obtained in a human birth, as the examples of both Pythagoras and Empedocles illustrate (see fig. 8).

HISTORY TELLING CONTINUED:

PYTHAGOREAN BEGINNINGS AND LIFEWAYS

Classical scholars, like their Indian counterparts, have raised the issue of the origins of their rebirth eschatologies. Consider the obvious pre-suppositions: that rebirth was invented by the Greeks *de novo* or that it was diffused from India or vice versa. The diffusion hypothesis is certainly possible, although no one has convincingly argued how this could have occurred either way. This hypothesis depends not only on rebirth theories but also on the striking similarity between the mathematical ideas of Pythagoras and the thought of Sāṃkhya and other philosophies in India.²¹ Yet it is not clear whether the Indian mathematics antedated or postdated Pythagoras. As for rebirth doctrines it is certain that Pythagoras antedated the Buddha, although we know from the Upanishadic references that these ideas were probably prevalent in India on the popular level much earlier. I am sympathetic to that hypothesis for the Greeks also, although the evidence is lacking.

E. R. Dodds made a case for a different kind of diffusion in his influential work *The Greeks and the Irrational*. He is rightly critical of M. P. Nilsson and others who thought that "the doctrine of rebirth is a product of 'pure logic,' and that the Greeks invented it because they were 'pure logicians.'"²² Alternatively, he proposes a popular shamanic source for Greek rebirth: the shaman, as psychopomp, can recollect his past births through ecstatic journeyings of the soul. Interestingly, Dodds argues that shamanism was the model that the Greeks developed "for a deliberate *askesis*, a conscious training of the psychic powers through abstinence and spiritual exercises." The shaman uses his experience of past births to enhance his power, but unfortunately this "original Greek point of view" took a beating "when rebirth was attributed to *all* human souls. . . . [I]t became a burden instead of a privilege, and was used to explain the inequalities of our earthly portion and to show that, in the words of a Pythagorean poet, man's sufferings are self-incurred."²³ Thus, in Dodds's conception shamanic rebirth became generalized later as a popular eschatological one, and although some contemporary scholars subscribe to this theory, it seems to me quite untenable on the basis of our current knowledge.

Shamanism is associated with ascetic practices and with rebirth theories in the Trobriander, Inuit, and Amerindian cases but less so in West Africa, and the evidence is not clear for some of the Siberian societies themselves. One can have shamanism in societies without rebirth doctrines; in the rare instances where shamans recollect their former lives, as with the brilliant Winnebago shaman Thunder Cloud, it is because they live in a society dominated by these ideas and not because they have invented them.²⁴ Dodds's knowledge of rebirth comes from James Frazer, whereas we are fortunate to have more clearly documented cases of rebirth eschatologies existing independently of the contemporary or historical practice of shamanism. Although Dodds was wrong in assuming that Pythagoras was a Siberian kind of shaman and that shamanism was at the root of Greek rebirth, he was, I think, correct to postulate the prevalence in Greece of multiple forms of popular religion that showed a wide distribution in Eurasia. This has been amply confirmed in recent research.²⁵

The background of the Greek states in Magna Graecia has been discussed in detail by such scholars as T. J. Dunbabin and Edwin Minar, and I refer the reader to their work.²⁶ In brief the social and economic conditions of the Western Greeks were quite different from those of small-scale societies such as the Amerindians and also those of the Ganges valley in the time of the Buddha. There were a multitude of small independent republican states modeled on mainland Greek city-states, many of them warring with each other and competing for control of the maritime trade in the Mediterranean and North Africa. As a result of increasing wealth there was considerable internal stratification and the rise of wealthy classes. In other words Western Greeks were living in a world rapidly expanding culturally and economically through trade networks that in turn facilitated the diffusion of ideas from North and West Africa into southern Italy. However, unlike the situation in India of the same period, none of the city-states of Magna Graecia showed the beginnings of grand empires like that of Kosala and Magadha, which were swallowing up the small independent republics of the time. I think social change helps to expand the intellectual horizons of both ordinary citizens and thinkers, but, as with the Indic material, I resist formulating a direct causal tie-in between social change and eschatological and soteriological beliefs.

Many ancient authors mention the political control that early Pythagoreans exercised in Croton and other cities. It is impossible to know the exact nature of Pythagorean political influence. It is almost certain that, like the Orphics, Pythagoreans had exclusive religious communities in

various parts of Magna Graecia, probably held together as translocal communities by the founder or by his teachings.²⁷ And although Pythagoreans could, and probably did, exert political influence, they were also politically vulnerable for precisely the same reason. Several early accounts mention Pythagoras's activities in Croton in Italy, where he apparently emigrated; there, with his three hundred pupils constituting a "secret band of conspirators," he was able to control and administer the affairs of state.²⁸ It should not surprise us, therefore, that according to some accounts Crotonites rose in revolt against him and he withdrew to the neighboring city of Metapontum, where he died.²⁹ However, other accounts propose that although Pythagoreans were politically influential, there was nothing like a "Pythagorean rule" in southern Italy, although everywhere Pythagorean influence was moral and exemplary.³⁰

The numbers that formed these Pythagorean sodalities cannot be easily determined because, as in India, they have been fused into formal numerology. Thus the tradition coming from the fourth-century B.C.E. Sicilian thinker Timaeus and preserved by Iamblichus simply multiplies the earlier number by two. Although the number is doubtful, the account does say that Pythagoras won disciples through "preaching," that people accepted his "philosophy," and that his followers lived as "philosophers" in "what is called the common life, according to his command."³¹ Forms of such "common life" were known throughout the Greek world at that time and later as *thiasoi*, *koina*, and *hetairiai* and during Roman times as *collegia* or *sodalitates*.³² What is unusual is the Pythagorean form of such associations: those who belonged to a Pythagorean sodality maintained an extraordinary silence (for long periods according to some accounts) and a secretiveness regarding their "philosophical" beliefs, which were generally expressed through an esoteric symbolism, the *acusmata*, some of which Iamblichus has preserved in his *Protrepticus*.³³ Pythagorean silence must not be conflated with the penitentiary vows of silence taken by some Christian orders; silence probably indicated an attitude to the world in respect to Pythagorean teaching like the *rahasyam* (secret knowledge) of the Upanishads. Perhaps the silence was also associated with the practice of religious concentration or meditative asceticism.

Edwin Minar has summarized some of the features of Pythagorean sodalities from Iamblichus's account. Members apparently applied to join and were put through a series of rigid tests. For example, the opinions of parents and others regarding a candidate's character were solicited. According to Pythagorean beliefs external appearance indicated internal character; hence they observed the "candidate's features, his manner of

walking, and other purely external traits," perhaps implying that, like the Buddhists, they stressed decorum and personal demeanor. If candidates passed the preliminary examination, they entered into a three-year apprenticeship in which "they were tested for firmness of spirit, love of wisdom and contempt for worldly honor."³⁴ Women were included, but their exact status in the overall organization is not clear. If Iamblichus's account of Pythagoras's followers has any relevance to the past, there were 218 men but only 17 women—still a very significant amount considering the fact that women in ancient Greece were not generally included in the philosophic life.³⁵

During the next five years they became active members, giving their goods over to the common stock and entering into a regimen of silence. They underwent various purificatory rites and were initiated into certain of the mysteries of the society. This tested their fitness to be entrusted with the deepest secrets of the society. The fortunate ones . . . were admitted "behind the veil," and from thenceforth they not only heard but saw the divine Pythagoras as he performed the mystic rites.³⁶

We do not know the nature of these "mystic rites." If they existed they must surely have been influenced by the mystery religions of the time. Those who failed the Pythagorean tests were considered "dead."³⁷

Let me now consider the fantastic powers of Pythagoras. Greek scholars find it convenient to dismiss the "miracles" attributed to Pythagoras by later doxographers and commentators. For Burkert, following Dodds, all this indicates the power of the "shamanistic" tradition.³⁸ It is the case that some of the miracles attributed to Pythagoras much later were modeled on the shamanic retrieval of the soul exemplified in Orpheus's *Descent to Hades*. Although I do not deny the importance of shamanism on forms of Greek religion, I doubt that it can explain the fantastic powers of the legendary Pythagoras. By that token Jesus would also be a shaman; so would Moses and virtually every religious virtuoso in Buddhism. "Miracles" are not unique to shamanism, nor could they be simply subsumed under the dubious label of "magic." Here our comparison with Buddhism is instructive: Buddhist asceticism is essentially contemplative, analogous to the Greek *theoria*, and although it displaced shamanism (and spirit possession), it was also influenced by it. Further, Burkert compiles two lists of the miracles attributed to Pythagoras, one containing thirteen and the other four.³⁹ None involves shamanic or any other form of ecstasy. Most of them are predictions and although shamans also prophesy, this propensity is not their exclusive preserve. Jesus and the Buddha made similar predictions; so do today's palm read-

ers and newspaper astrologers. In one "miracle" Pythagoras was present at "Metapontum in Italy, and Tauromenium in Sicily, and discoursed in common with his disciples in both places," which is again a capacity that Buddhist arahants claimed by virtue of their contemplative powers.⁴⁰ Iamblichus mentions Pythagoras showing his "golden thigh to the Hy-poborean Abaris," but this is no more than the Buddha presenting to an interlocutor the thirty-two marks of the Great Man (including showing the wondrous organ encased in a sheath, with a wonderful irony missed by uptight translators).⁴¹ Finally, if Pythagoras was called the "Hyperborean Apollo" by the people of Croton, this means he was what Nietzsche would have termed an Apollonian rather than a shamanic Dionysian figure, if one were to recognize that Apollonian thought does not necessarily exclude emotion, although it does eschew "excess."⁴²

I noted that early accounts emphasize the Pythagorean vegetarian diet. Let us now see how this episteme is woven into later ones. Iamblichus says that Pythagoras "taught his disciples abstinence from all animal flesh and also from certain foods, which are a hindrance to alert and pure reasoning," along with abstinence from wine and moderation in eating.⁴³ Nevertheless, after his discussion of ordinary (or later) Pythagoreans, he refers to Pythagoras's followers and their nonvegetarian regimen. Having bathed in the evening and walked in groups of two or three, they assembled not more than ten at a time for supper, which they finished before the setting of the sun. They were permitted wine and barley and vegetables and the "flesh of sacrificial animals," although eating fish was discouraged. Animals that were "harmless by nature to the human race" should not be harmed or destroyed. As expected, hunting was not approved of. Again, Iamblichus continued, Pythagoras forbade "the most contemplative group of philosophers, especially those at the highest level, the use of superfluous and ill-gotten foods, by instructing them never to eat anything animate and never to drink wine; neither to sacrifice living beings to the gods nor to harm them in any way." These injunctions were relaxed for those whose life "was not entirely purified, holy and philosophic." The latter were expected to observe periods of abstinence, but they were not permitted to eat the heart or the brain on both practical and religious grounds.⁴⁴ So it was with mallows and, of course, beans. Iamblichus also gives clear expression to species sentence in the idea found in virtually every form of Pythagorean-influenced thought that "animals are akin to us."⁴⁵ Greeks of this period employed the term *empsychon* to designate the idea of nature permeated with *psyche*, or soul, bring-

ing Greek thought in line with that of the small-scale societies discussed in the previous chapter.⁴⁶

Iamblichus permits two reasonable interpretations. First, it seems that there were different classes of ordinary followers, as well as specialists or philosophers, following appropriate life-forms in accordance with their spiritual accomplishments. Second, the strict rules of early Pythagoreanism were modified later on, as was the case with similar groups, including Buddhists, and these modifications were noted in early and late accounts. Thus Aristotle refers to a Pythagorean belief that "purity is achieved by cleansing rites and . . . abstaining from meat and flesh of animals that have died, mullet, blacktail, eggs and oviparous animals, [and] beans."⁴⁷ Now consider a crucial qualification in the injunction against meat eating: several sources say that the Pythagoreans permitted the eating of sacrificed animals, which, according to our previous analysis, was confined either to ordinary followers of Pythagoras or to later Pythagoreans or both. Porphyry: "Of sacrificed animals he bade them not to eat the loin, testicles and privy parts, marrow, feet or head." Porphyry adds that these parts were given symbolic interpretation by Pythagoras; they were the parts that signified the foundation, genesis, growth, beginning, and end of the body.⁴⁸ A similar symbolic meaning was perhaps attached, according to Aristotle, to white cocks because they are sacred to the lunar god and further because white represents good and black evil. Iamblichus not only reiterates these but also says that "the soul of man alone does not enter into these animals. Hence it is proper to eat those animals alone which it is fit to slay, but no other animal whatever."⁴⁹ By contrast fish seems to have been taboo even for lay followers of Pythagoras, perhaps because the soul of a human being can enter fish.

Iamblichus himself mentions three groups of Pythagoreans: the highly accomplished contemplative thinkers known as the *Mathematici*, who sacrificed to the gods with millet, cakes, honeycombs, and incense and abstained from animal sacrifices; the lesser *Acusmatici*; and the *Politici*. The latter two groups were permitted to sacrifice select animals "such as a cock, or a lamb, or some other animal recently born, but not frequently."⁵⁰ But these distinctions of grade, as Iamblichus himself seemed to have realized, developed much later.

The Pythagorean injunction against eating the meat of sacrificed animals meant in effect abstention from meat eating in general because for Greeks, according to Marcel Detienne and his colleagues, every act of meat eating was a sacrifice, and every sacrifice entailed meat eating.⁵¹

The rationale for abstention from meat eating was cogently argued by Porphyry in his treatise *De Abstinentia*. Porphyry's argument, based on species sentience, is that all animals have souls, reason, and sense and that, consequently, they share the same spiritual nature as humans. Hence "brutes are rational animals"; they possess *dianoia*, "the discursive energy of reason."⁵² This is not to say that all animals have these virtues in the same proportion or quality because there are spiritual differences among different kinds of animals, as there are between humans and animals and humans and gods.⁵³ But because all animal life shares the same spiritual essence, it is rational to abstain from eating flesh.

De Abstinentia is written as an epistle to a friend who had given up vegetarianism and adopted Christianity; it is also addressed to those who believed neither in vegetarianism nor in reincarnation. The style is sober, detached, and unemotional. Yet the text indirectly implies that Pythagoreans had strong views on this subject. For example, "the plebians and the vulgar" condemn vegetarians by using the argument of endoanthropophagy (*PA*, 30). Porphyry's plebeians say that Pythagoras thought it "was an equal crime [for humans] to devour each other, and to eat the flesh of oxen and swine." They sarcastically add that Pythagoras and his followers were "anthropophagites" (*PA*, 30, 35).⁵⁴ There is little discussion in Porphyry or Iamblichus regarding the relation between rebirth theory and vegetarianism. However, Porphyry mentions his opponents, the Stoics and the Peripatetics, who mention it. "For indeed, what greater injury does he do, who cuts the throat of an ox or a sheep, than he who cuts down a fir tree or an oak? Since, from the doctrine of transmigration, a soul is also implanted in these" (*PA*, 24). The plebeians, not to be outdone, further argued: "But, if as they [the Pythagoreans] say, plants also have a soul, what will become of our life if we neither destroy animals or plants? If, therefore, he is impious who cuts off plants, neither will he be who kills animals" (*PA*, 33). Thus Porphyry's own reference to men and animals having "kindred natures" might have a deeper significance when seen through the arguments of his opponents. One might reasonably conclude that even in Porphyry's time (the mid-third century C.E.) the tradition was strong regarding the following Pythagorean rebirth beliefs: all animate nature (including some plants) were kin; they possessed souls that reincarnated; therefore, destroying them was tantamount to endoanthropophagy.

To sum up: in these several injunctions the basic principle underlying the prohibition against killing animals and an ideal vegetarian diet is affirmed; namely, humans have a soul, and because this soul could eas-

ily enter an animal as a result of reincarnation, one cannot kill it. But killing an animal is permitted when it does not have a soul. These qualifications must surely have been an accommodation to popular Greek religiosity. In some instances there might well have been ritual techniques for the elimination of the soul from the body of the sacrificial animal, permitting the slaying of the creature.

Now we can return to an important issue that arises from species sentience, namely, the major injunction of the Pythagoreans against the eating of beans. The examples from Buddhism and Jainism may give us a clue to the reasons underlying this prohibition; certain kinds of seeds capable of germination and plants with bulbous roots are believed to possess sentience and, for early Upanishadic thinkers and later Jains, even souls. The idea that beans contain a life principle is again implicit in an injunction reported by Porphyry that Pythagoreans must abstain from eating beans as they do from eating human flesh. And there was a Pythagorean saying attributed to Orpheus that eating beans is like eating the heads of one's parents, perhaps a reference to an ancestral life force contained in the head.⁵⁵

This overvaluation of beans is based on a stronger version of species sentience than that found in any of our rebirth eschatologies and much stronger than the Buddhist view that some plants have a single center of consciousness, or *ekindriya*. One can dismiss Guthrie's naive idea that species sentience is based on sympathetic magic alien to the "civilized mind" and accept his more reasoned view that there is "a connexion between beans and life, death or the soul."⁵⁶ To conclude: the root belief pertaining to beans is related to species sentience, as in Amerindian rebirth eschatologies, but elaborated in Pythagorean thought and symbolism to an extreme degree.

PYTHAGOREAN SOTERIOLOGY

Most recent interpreters of Pythagoreanism would agree that "religion and science were, to Pythagoras, not two separate departments between which there was not contact, but rather the two inseparable factors in a single way of life."⁵⁷ Because the distinction between science and philosophy did not exist at that time, it would seem that what one nowadays understands by science, philosophy, and religion did not make sense to early Pythagoreans either. Yet even those who wish to blur these distinctions continue to compartmentalize these three domains separately. What we lack is an accounting of the unified worldview of these thinkers

for whom science and philosophy are in the service of their soteriology. However, these thinkers have their own take on the three key notions that Greeks of this period and later strongly believed in: *kosmos*, or the orderliness in the arrangement of the universe; *theoria*, or contemplation; and *katharsis*, or purification.⁵⁸

For my argument it is necessary to stress the conceptual imperative that guides Pythagorean thought, just as in the case of Buddhism and Greek thinking in general. This conceptual imperative emerges from Aristotle's view of Pythagoreanism, and some scholars think that it partially reflects the thought of Philolaus, an early Pythagorean (born c. 474 B.C.E.).⁵⁹ This worldview is rooted in a fundamental dualism that governs the universe, namely that of the limited (*peras*) and the unlimited (*apeiron*). These cosmological first principles, or *archai*, are themselves apparently made on the basis of the discovery (some think by the founder himself) of musical harmony, namely, "that the chief musical intervals are expressible in simple numerical ratios between the first four integers."⁶⁰ As Aristotle put it: "since, then, all other things seemed in the whole of nature to be modelled after numbers, and numbers seemed to be the first things in the whole of nature, they supposed the elements of numbers to be the elements of all things, and the whole heaven to be an attunement and a number."⁶¹ To put it simply: in the musical scale a mathematical pattern lies hidden, and this hidden pattern can be found everywhere, including the very constitution of the universe. Moreover, because the first four integers add up to ten, that number is perfection itself. The numbers were arranged visually with pebbles or dots in the shape of an equilateral triangle and venerated as the Tetractys of the Decad, thus:

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Much as the geometrical *yantras* and *mandalas* were for the Indians, the *tetractys* was the primary sacred symbol for the Greeks and was used for the swearing of oaths in which the founder himself was recognized: "By him who handed down to us the tetractys, source and root of everlasting nature."⁶²

Once again it is Aristotle on whom we have to depend for the further elaboration of the theory of numbers. "The elements of number are the

even and the odd, and of these the latter is limited and the former unlimited. The One is composed of both of these (for it is both even and odd) and number springs from the One; and numbers, as I have said, constitute the whole universe."⁶³ The starting point of the whole scheme is the unit (that is, the One) because the zero was unknown at this time and the first true odd number is three, which, as I have noted, had considerable significance for the Pythagoreans, representing for them things that have a beginning, middle, and end.⁶⁴ When odd numbers are graphically represented in dots in the form of *gnomons* (right-angle forms), the resulting figure is a square; but when even numbers are represented in the same way, the result is infinitely variable, as figures 9 and 10 illustrate. Figures 9 and 10 can be extended *ad infinitum*. However, figure 9 has the gnomon placed under the One (unit); when this is extended by placing more gnomons, the figure still remains a square (nonvariable), whereas when gnomons are arranged under the two (as in figure 10), the result is infinitely variable.⁶⁵ It is therefore to be expected that the perfection of the square will be associated with the limited and the imperfection of the oblong with the unlimited.⁶⁶ What does not emerge from Aristotle is the manner in which the number theory is implicated in ethics and soteriology.

The derivation of the cosmogony from numbers is not clear, and I refer the reader to the work of Francis Cornford and others.⁶⁷ Fortunately for us the Pythagorean cosmology is more relevant for soteriology than is the cosmogony, although one should bear in mind that this kind of abstract cosmology is not generally associated with forms of passionate or Dionysian religiosity or with mystery religions in general, Greek or otherwise. Again the information comes from Aristotle, who shows that the Pythagorean (read Philolaic) reification of the number ten was extended to include the number of planets. But because only nine planets (including the sun) were observable, Philolaus apparently introduced the critical notion of the "counter earth." "Most people say that the earth lies at the center of the Universe . . . but the Italian philosophers known as Pythagoreans take a contrary view. At the centre, they say, is fire, and the earth is one of the stars, creating night and day by its circular motion about the centre. They further construct another earth in opposition to ours to which they give the name counter-earth."⁶⁸ Although this is a bold and imaginative theory, it is not a heliocentric one, as some imagine it. The fire at the center, also known as the "Guard-house of Zeus," is invisible because we live on a side of the earth that is turned away from it. In a further leap of the imagination, some thought, says Aëtius, that

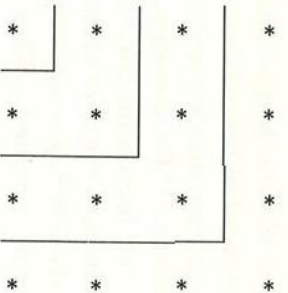


Figure 9. Odd numbers: The limited.

the moon is a world "inhabited like our own, with living creatures and plants that are bigger and fairer than ours. Indeed the animals on it are fifteen times as powerful and do not excrete, and the day is correspondingly long."⁶⁹ Parallel with the Philolaic speculations others held a geocentric model with a fire at the earth's center.⁷⁰

Now we can get to that part of the Pythagorean cosmology that is directly relevant for soterialogy, namely, the doctrine of the harmony of the spheres, as Aristotle neatly formulates it, and which Kahn thinks could be reasonably viewed as "an invention of the superhuman prophet of archaic times," that is, the imagined Pythagoras.⁷¹

From all this it is clear that the theory that the movement of the stars produces a harmony, because the sounds they make are concordant. . . . Some thinkers suppose that the motion of bodies of that size must produce a noise, since on our earth the motion of bodies far inferior in size and in speed of movement has that effect. Also, when the sun and the moon, they say, and all the stars, so great in number and in size, are moving with so rapid a motion, how should they not produce a sound immensely great? Starting from this argument and from the hypothesis that their speeds, as measured by their distances, are in the same ratios as musical concordances, they assert that the sound given forth by the circular movement of the stars is a harmony. Since, however, it appears unaccountable that we should not hear this music, they explain this by saying that the sound is in our ears from the very moment of birth and is thus indistinguishable from its contrary silence, since sound and silence are discriminated by mutual contrast. What happens to men, then, is just what happens to coppersmiths, who are so accustomed to the noise of the smithy that it makes no difference to them.⁷²

In an admittedly speculative manner I will now pin down the soterialogy in terms of its intrinsic connection with Pythagorean conceptual thought or "science," that is, with number and harmony culminating in the doctrine of the "harmony of the spheres." The idea that seemingly

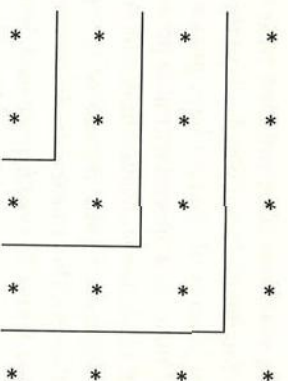


Figure 10. Even numbers: The unlimited.

abstract conceptions such as the limited and unlimited have spatial form and magnitude should not blind us to the "conceptualist imperative" that underlies their formulation. Number and harmony are mathematical notions, even if they are neither technically fully abstract nor located outside space.

Let me begin my examination of the soterialogy with an account from later Graeco-Roman times, when Cicero, in his *Dream of Scipio*, has his protagonist, Scipio Aemilianus, fall into a deep sleep and meet Scipio Africanus, his adoptive grandfather, who, among other things, speaks of the movement of the planets. Scipio Aemilianus then experiences the music of the spheres in his dream vision:

I looked at these things in amazement; then I collected myself and said, "What is this loud and sweet sound that now fills my ears?" "That," he said, "is the sound that is made by these very spheres, as they move and are driven onwards, producing varied harmonies smoothly by mixing high and low notes; it is composed of a series of unequal intervals which are nevertheless marked off from each other in strict proportion. For it is not possible for such great movements to be produced in silence; and it is ordained by nature that the furthest parts at one extreme should sound at a high pitch, while the other extreme sounds at a low pitch. Thus the highest orbit, that of Heaven, carrying the stars, since its revolution is faster, moves with a high and lively note; the lunar sphere, the lowest, sounds the lowest note; for the earth, the ninth in order, remains immovable and is held constantly in one position, containing within itself the central point of the universe."⁷³

In Scipio's case the experience occurred in a dream, that is, when there had been a suspension of discursive thought. Although the music is an experienced reality, "this sound, caused by the extremely rapid circular motion of the whole universe, is so great that the ears of men cannot perceive it." Yet Cicero adds that Scipio's is not the only way of apprehending

that reality: "All this, wise men have imitated with strings and voices, and have opened up for themselves a way back to this place, along with those who with great powers of intellect have pursued divine studies in human life."⁷⁴ Thus music of a special sort also presumably produces a similar suspension of the active consciousness and permits one to enter into this region and experience the harmony of the spheres through the harmony of music. Further, this musical tradition comes from those engaged in divine studies. It should not surprise us if the imagined Pythagoras could himself hear that divine music, as Porphyry claims: "He himself heard and understood the harmony of the universe, the universal harmony of the spheres and the stars that move them, which we do not hear because of our puny natures."⁷⁵ Or as Iamblichus puts it: "It seemed as if he alone could hear and understand the universal harmony and music of the spheres and of the stars which move within them, uttering a song more complete and satisfying than any human melody, composed of subtly varied sounds of motion and speeds and sizes and positions, organized in a logical and harmonious relation to each other, and achieving a melodious circuit of subtle and exceptional beauty."⁷⁶ According to Iamblichus, however, Pythagoras experienced this state not through musical instruments but through mental concentration, focusing his mind on hearing it.⁷⁷

Now I can present another feature of Pythagoreanism that aligns itself with Indic religions, assuming that hearing the music of the spheres is at least a primary goal (if not the only goal) of the soteriological experience. As with Indic soteriologies, this supreme experience can be apprehended *while one is living in the world* of becoming; consequently the reality to be experienced is associated with the world of being because the Pythagorean cosmic harmony is a transcendental and unchanging condition. It is the soul that permits the resting consciousness to grasp this transcendental reality while living in the mundane world of becoming.

The form of Pythagorean soteriology I have isolated above poses two problems. First, under certain conditions the soul can apprehend the music of the spheres. This capacity could be cultivated by Pythagorean virtuosos in special circumstances in their closed communities. But Pythagoreans were also active in the world of politics; it is therefore not likely that access to this "region" was available to them most of the time. Second, what happens to the soul at death? Clearly it continues to be reborn in various human and animal existences. However, I have shown that, according to the inexorable logic of any rebirth eschatology, there can be no salvation or state of transcendental bliss within the rebirth

cycle. Consequently, one might expect to achieve automatic salvation at the end of a finite cycle, or salvation simply will not be available to anyone in this scheme.

The latter seems an extremely plausible scenario for Pythagoreans. Many of them lived among people whose orthodox beliefs for the most part did not tolerate rebirth doctrines. But Pythagoreans surely did not think that only believers were reborn; rebirth was a natural process that applied to all sentient existence, and this included nonbelievers. Thus a doctrine of nonsalvation within the rebirth cycle for the many would be consonant with the realities the Pythagoreans had to face. It therefore would make sense for them to ensure their own salvation by living in socialities. Isolated from the unsympathetic world around them, they could engage in spiritual exercises that permitted them to purify their souls and experience the music of the spheres. This could be experienced at various levels depending on the purity or soteriological status of the aspirant, for example, through suspension of discursive thought or through music or, in the ideal represented by Pythagoras himself, through intense concentration. In this conception music, which provided the original theory of harmony, becomes significant in everyday life. Thus, Iamblichus again tells us that Pythagoreans used songs and music to "enchant" themselves to sleep and dream good dreams; and sometimes "they healed emotions and certain sicknesses" by singing and incantation.⁷⁸

But then the question remains: What happens after death? The *expectable* soteriological answer is that the transcendental experience of the music of the spheres cannot be something temporary. At death the soul must *permanently* experience it. If so, the spiritual goal of Pythagoreanism (or an important component of it) is twofold: to occasionally, and sometimes imperfectly, experience the harmony of the spheres while living in the world and to permanently experience it at death, when the soul, material or not, is released from the body and the harmony of the soul and the harmony of the spheres are in perfect concordance. In this scheme there is no attempt to convert the generality of nonbelievers; it is a soteriological ideal for a small intellectual elite.

What then are the soteriological solutions that are *not* expectable in early Pythagoreanism? There is not the slightest evidence that salvation entailed a mystical identity of the soul with the Divine. It is true that, according to Aristotle, the Pythagoreans thought the unit to be a divinity, but mystical identity with the number one seems improbable for a variety of reasons. The unit itself is not the ultimate reality; unity is generated from the limited and unlimited, two conceptual principles that are

not subsumed under a larger unitary order. And although the world is a conflict (and sometimes an interchange) between these two entities, there is nothing to suggest that one can identify with the limited, however divine it may be, because the times (in which the Pythagoreans lived) are characterized by conflict between the two principles, hardly a situation that makes identification appealing. It is true that the universe is a living thing according to some Pythagoreans, and as such it possesses a soul. If so, one's own soul at death can merge with the universal soul, which is how Guthrie formulates the issue.⁷⁹ But this virtually identifies Pythagoreanism with the Brahman of Upanishadic soteriology. It cannot bring into the soteriological picture what we have asserted about Pythagoreanism, namely, the doctrine of the harmony of the spheres. The spheres themselves are part of the universe; identifying with the soul of the universe would be in effect to identify with the spheres rather than to engage in experiencing the harmony of the spheres. To make sense of this harmony as a soteriological condition, the soul must exist separately, not in union with some form of the "divine."

What about the idea, clearly formulated in Platonic soteriology, that the purified soul becomes a god at death? There is little evidence for this in early Pythagoreanism although it is an entirely plausible interpretation. But this line of reasoning is not to be confused with the details of Plato's theory, which states that the soul at death becomes a star (a god in Greek thought). This notion of "astral immortality" has been criticized by Burkert, who shows that although the idea was well known in Ionian thought, it was uncharacteristic of early Pythagoreanism. Yet these astral ideas, he says, have been at some time or other ascribed to Pythagoras. "But in Pin-dar's exposition of metempsychosis there is no more trace of astral motifs than in Empedocles' theory of the fallen *daimon* exiled to earth. . . . In the monuments of southern Italian eschatology, there is no reliable, early evidence for belief in astral immortality."⁸⁰ Burkert may be right, but one cannot ignore the fact that astral ideas have been ascribed to the imagined Pythagoras. Moreover, the harmony of the spheres is itself a kind of "astral immortality." Thus, once again it is important to recognize not only multiple forms of rebirth but perhaps also several soteriological forms showing family resemblances *within* the Greek Pythagorean tradition.

ETHICIZATION AND SOTERIOLOGY IN EMPEDOCLES

It is impossible to consider Greek rebirth without reference to Empedocles because there is more extant information about the man and his

works than for virtually any other Presocratic Greek thinker. Most accounts say that he was born into an aristocratic family c. 492 B.C.E. in Acragas, Sicily, during the reign of the tyrant Theron. His father, Metron, apparently took an important role in his opposition to tyranny in the turmoil that followed Theron's death, and Empedocles himself has been credited with the breakup of an oligarchical organization known as the Thousand. According to Aristotle he was offered the kingship of Acragas, which he refused, and he emerges as the great champion of democracy in political myths constructed 150 years after his death. Apparently, during his absence abroad his enemies opposed his return, and he died in exile in the Peloponnese.⁸¹

Empedocles' thought is expressed in two great poems, *On Nature* (Physics) and *Purifications* (Katharmoi), originally containing two thousand and three thousand verses respectively. Only about a fifth of the first poem is extant, and the crucial soteriological poem is even more fragmentary, rendering impossible any definitive statement of Empedocles' religious thought.⁸² The splitting of Empedocles' thought into the rational and mystical has bedeviled Greek scholarship, as classicists such as John Burnet have noted.⁸³ But as Guthrie says, it is the "union of rational thought with mystical exaltation, that Empedocles sums up and personifies the spirit of his age and race."⁸⁴ Unfortunately, Guthrie follows others in treating the politics of Empedocles as if they were empirically true and the "miracles" that were associated with him as having no basis in reality, a position that does not make ethnographic sense, as we have already seen.⁸⁵ Like the Buddha and Pythagoras Empedocles appears as a mythic persona. Further, because Empedocles was a charismatic healer and prophet drawing large crowds, he was the kind of person easily subject to multiple mythicizations. It also seems likely that his democratic politics and political popularity rested on his popular public persona as a healer and miracle worker. This public popularity might have resulted in his unpopularity with the political establishment, as was the case with Pythagoras.

The assumption that the two poems are unrelated, with *On Nature* dealing with the scientific or philosophical and *Purifications* with the mystical, has forced scholars to assign the available fragments to one or the other poem, thus in effect helping to reinvent these lost poems.⁸⁶ Assuming for the moment that there are two, one notices a critical distinction between the beginning and end of the two poems that seems to violate our contemporary commonsense assumptions regarding the public nature of science and the private, inner-oriented nature of mysticism.

Let me therefore begin with this issue, which in turn should take us to the heart of Empedocles' thought.

The "scientific" poem *On Nature* is addressed to Empedocles' favorite pupil, Pausanias, whom he enjoins to secrecy, urging him "to keep within thy dumb heart [the contents of the poem]." By contrast *Purifications* is "almost shouted from the rooftops":⁸⁷ "My friends who live in the tawny town of Akragas, on the city's citadel, who care for good deeds (haven of kindness for strangers, men ignorant of misfortune), greetings!"⁸⁸ It seems to me that it is the "scientific" or "mathematical" aspects of Empedocles' thought, rather than his doctrine of rebirth, that are jealously guarded, as was probably the case with Pythagoras.⁸⁹ In early Pythagoreanism itself there was probably no soterialogical distinction between the *mathematici* and the *acusmatici* because both branches of knowledge were geared to the goal of self-discovery and salvation. So is it with Buddhist logic: the abstract doctrine of "dependent origination" (or "dependent co-arising"), which showed that the world is enmeshed in causality, was formulated in a soterialogical context dealing with the nature of existence itself. For Empedocles natural science is in the service of his religious thought, including its doctrine of salvation. As with Pythagoras, it was necessary for him to understand the nature and constitution of the cosmos for soterialogical reasons rather than for purely "philosophical" ones. Galen thought that Empedocles was the founder of Greek medical science based on the doctrine of the four elements. But unlike Galen Empedocles was not only interested in curing ordinary bodily afflictions; he also dealt with the most unusual of medical practices. Hence we have the fascinating and poetic conclusion of the "scientific" treatise (which some think should properly be at the beginning):⁹⁰

You [Pausanias] will learn remedies for ills against old age, since for you alone shall I accomplish all these things. You will check the force of tireless winds, which sweep over land and destroy fields with their blasts; and again, if you wish, you will restore compensating breezes. After black rain you will bring dry weather in season for men, and too after summer dryness you will bring tree-nourishing showers (which live in air), and you will lead from Hades the life-force of a dead man.⁹¹

Not only is science at the service of soterialogy, but also the soterialogy is not part of publicly available knowledge. Consequently, one should expect "science" to share soterialogy's private character. Empedocles himself never made *On Nature* available to the public. Whoever made it public (some speculate it was Pausanias himself) refused to divulge the esoteric doctrine. For example, there is nothing in the extant scientific

text that tells people how to control the winds or make rain or bring back the life essence of a dead person even though the conclusion of the text indicates that is what Pausanias will eventually know. What the text gives is the scientific or philosophical or "mathematical" basis for that knowledge in, among other things, the doctrine of the four elements and the two grand dualisms, Love and Strife. *On Nature* was probably that part of the esoteric knowledge that could be eventually divulged to the public after the death of the master without violating the core of esoteric or *acusmatic* knowledge.

How does one reconcile the previous argument with Empedocles' public declamation at the commencement of the *Purifications* after he greeted the people of Acragas? "I tell you I travel up and down as an immortal god, mortal no longer, honored by all as it seems, crowned with ribbons and fresh garlands. Whenever I enter prospering towns I am revered by both men and women. They follow me in countless numbers, to ask where their advantage lies, some seeking prophecies, others, long pierced by harsh pains, ask to hear the word of healing for all kinds of illnesses."⁹² In this crucial statement Empedocles makes a public proclamation, but it is *not* the proclamation of a soterialogical message. Let me deliberately skew my perspective and look at him from an Indological perspective. Once a mortal, Empedocles claims he is no longer one; like his contemporaries in India he claims to be a *jñan mukta*, one who has achieved salvation while living in the world. Possession by deities was familiar to Greeks from their popular religion (as it was to Buddhists), and the specialists of the mystery cults believed that one can become a god *after* death. Empedocles' case is different: he *is* a deity incarnate. This is implied in other fragments also, for example, in 105 (113): "But why do I lay stress on this, as if it were some great achievement of mine, if I am superior to many-times-dying mortal men?" Empedocles is a god among men, one who has achieved salvation or a god status while living in the world, whereas ordinary people are "many-times-dying," that is, born and reborn. No wonder this charismatic person attracts throngs of people as he goes from place to place lending power and authenticity to his public role as a healer and prophet. In his healing role Empedocles is an *iatriomantis*, a combination of physician and seer, a title given to Apollo and Asclepius.

Later in this poem Empedocles refers to both rebirth and the sin of eating meat. But neither rebirth nor vegetarianism is part of the *esoteric* doctrine of Empedocles or Pythagoras or the Orphics. It was information that could scarcely be hidden from public scrutiny. Further, there is nothing unusual in talking about rebirth in Sicily (Acragas), and Magna

Graecia generally, because such doctrines were apparently well known there and accepted by at least some of the populace. Even in Athens and the mainland Pythagorean rebirth was known, although lampooned as un-Greek. What was unique about Empedocles and the early Pythagoreans was not their rebirth theories but their doctrines of salvation, which taught followers to break the rebirth cycle and achieve release from it through esoteric knowledge, including "mathematical" knowledge, a difficult symbology, or *acusmata*, and forms of spiritual asceticism. This knowledge and asceticism were never publicly proclaimed. In this sense Empedoclean thought and Pythagoreanism share an affinity with the Orphic mysteries without being one of them.

Charles H. Kahn has demonstrated that the very foundational principles of Empedoclean science illustrate its mystical and revelatory nature and that "the physical poem is also a religious work."⁹³ Empedocles' thought has raised a considerable controversy recently, and it would be foolhardy for me to formulate a definitive position. Instead, let me present his thought for the nonspecialist readers of this book, focusing for the most part on his rebirth theory and its implications for the problem of structural transformations.

For Empedocles the material basis of all things consists of the four elements—fire, air, earth, and water—and in the history of Greek thought he was first to systematize them. Here I rather suspect Indian "influence" because such systematization had already occurred in India in Buddhist monasteries even though classical scholars think that these were Empedocles' reformulations of prior Greek ideas.⁹⁴ If in the Pythagorean oath the tetractys "contains the springs and root of everlasting nature," so did the four elements for Empedocles. They are the "four roots of all things," personified and identified with "bright Zeus and life-bringing Hera and Aidoneus and Nestis whose tears are the source of mortal streams."⁹⁵ As "roots" the elements nourish and bring forth physical and sentient life. The elements cannot be divorced from the two great Empedoclean dualisms, Love and Strife, which give life and movement to them, starting the process of continuous world formation, continuity, and destruction and leading to the creation of living forms and their inevitable destruction. To put it differently: the four elements, the building blocks of the universe, are made pregnant with the sentence brought about by Love and Strife:

with its radiant appearance and pervading warmth, heavenly bodies bathed in heat and shining light, rain everywhere dark and chill, and from earth issue firmly rooted solids. Under Strife they have different forms and are all separate, but they come together in Love and are desired by one another. From them comes all that was and is and will be hereafter—trees have sprung from them, and men and women, and animals and birds and water-nourished fish, and long-lived gods too, highest in honor. For these are the only real things, and as they run through each other they assume different shapes, for the mixing interchanges them.⁹⁶

Thus Love is the life-affirming principle that brings about a creative and harmonious unity among the elements, whereas Strife tears them apart and thus brings about disintegration of the Sphere. Empedocles' somewhat unclear vision of the cosmos.⁹⁷ The interaction of the two dualisms in relation to the elements sets in motion the formation of life and the Sphere. For purposes of convenience one can formulate the issue thus: the interplay between Love and Strife, their "mixing," brings about the varieties of sentient existence, including the gods. But this interaction or mixing is regulated: Love is the creative principle and is personified by Aphrodite, whereas "mad Strife" brings about the scattering of the elements and the process of world dissolution. If either Love or Strife were to exist on its own (which one can envisage only theoretically), no form of sentient life would be possible.

What is the relationship between the dualisms as they create life and the world? British classicists following John Burnet have formulated Empedocles' thought as four cosmic cycles, which according to some are related to parallel stages of evolution. Such a formal schema can be presented as follows:

COSMIC PERIODS (OR FLOWS)	ASSOCIATED EVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS OR "STAGES"
Period One: Love alone, Strife dormant	No sentient life-forms
Period Two: Love and Strife	"Stages" 3 and 4: whole-natured forms (extinct) and current life-forms
Period Three: Strife alone, Love dormant	No sentient life-forms
Period Four: Strife and Love	"Stages" 1 and 2: disjointed limbs and monstrous forms

But come, if the form of my preceding argument was in any way incomplete, take note of the witnesses of these to what I have said before: sun

Because this schema, as well as similar ones, has been subjected to recent criticism as not being Empedocles' own but an imposition from the outside, I will use it only advisedly, although no one can avoid imposing his or her own vision on the fragmentary material available to us.⁹⁸

There are many tropes in the literature that describe the movements of the dualisms, but the one I favor is the waxing and waning of Love and Strife in a single circular movement on a horizontal plane (as in a potter's wheel), which could be contrasted to the rebirth cycle, which moves on a vertical plane (as in a spinning wheel). The logic of the system is such that when the two dualisms are farthest apart, they do not produce creativity, an idea that makes good psychological sense. This insight is common to both Empedocles and Freud. Love cannot create life by itself;⁹⁹ it can do so only in conjunction with Strife, and the forms of creation depend on the closeness or distance of the relationship as these forces wax and wane. And Strife without Love, or with a minimum of it, will only produce a Hobbesian state of chaos. Fragment 50 illustrates the situation when Strife is the dominant force and when Love is on the wane: "Here [on earth] many heads sprang up without necks, bare arms were wandering without shoulders, and eyes needing foreheads strayed singly."¹⁰⁰ The disappointed body parts, incapable of reproducing themselves, are created by Strife without the active participation of Love. The composite creatures that emerge as Strife begins to interact more closely with Love are described in fragment 52 (61): "Many creatures with a face and breasts on both sides were produced, man-faced bulls arose and again bull-headed men, (others) with male and female nature combined, and the bodies they had were dark ("shadowed," according to some translations)."¹⁰¹ As is expectable in a situation where Strife is the dominant force, heterosexual reproduction cannot occur at this time either; some monsters are probably neuters, whereas others possess male and female natures that possibly make them capable of "autoreproduction," as with trees, although no details are available.

Although conceptions of free-floating limbs may have seemed crazy to Aristotle, they ought to be more intelligible to those of us familiar with Balinese fantasy and myth and their formulations in the contemporary art of that nation. In this art body parts and limbs are sometimes represented as if existing on their own, in limbo as it were. Similar conceptions of hell and torture chambers, in which limbs are severed from whole bodies, are found in the world's historical religions, as are popular fantasies of the body being cut up in cannibalism or the practices of quartering the body in premodern Europe. The ways in which these images

are represented seem to tap what Lacan (following Melanie Klein) has with great insight called the "imagos of the fragmented body," a product of the infant's perception of its imperfect body and absence of "ego" (moi) in the pre-mirror stage of psychosexual development and before linguistic capacity develops.¹⁰² "This fragmented body . . . usually manifests itself in dreams . . . [and] then appears in the form of disjointed limbs, or of those organs represented in exoscopy" and immortalized by the visionary Hieronymus Bosch and the elder Breughel; in later life they continue to give the ego its phantasmal and unstable character.¹⁰³ They are then put together, says Lacan, into a totality that he calls "orthopaedic," which fits nicely with Empedocles' composite creatures—found in virtually all mythological traditions in their representations of monsters. Both stages are preoedipal; hence there is no notion yet of heterosexual procreation.

A form of sexual autoreproduction reappears but in a completely different guise when Love emerges as the dominant force, initially producing "whole-natured forms," of which we know very little. Fragment 53.62 describes them arising from the earth as a result of the primary elements, fire and water.¹⁰⁴ Aëtius, a later doxographer, puts it thus:

Empedocles says that trees were the first living things to grow out of the earth, before the sun was spread around and day and night were distinguished. Owing to the matching of the elements in their mixture, they combined the formula for male and female. They grow by being pushed up by the heat in the earth, so that they are parts of the earth just as embryos in the belly are parts of the womb.¹⁰⁵

Whole-natured forms produced under the domination of Love are near-perfect acts of creation. These forms resulted initially from the actions of the elements (in conjunction with Love and Strife), but it is not clear how they reproduced. If trees were the first instance of "whole-natured forms," then one could say that they were also capable of sexual "autoreproduction" rather than heterosexual reproduction, for in fragment 65 (79) Empedocles says that "tall trees produce olive eggs first," implying, according to Aristotle, that the fruit is analogous to an egg and that therefore plants are bisexual in nature, that is, given to autoreproduction. In my interpretation "whole-natured" refers to those life-forms (from trees to mushrooms) that are capable of reproducing themselves unmediated by conventional heterosexual intercourse. It thus seems reasonable for Empedocles to say that whole-natured forms "did not yet display the desirable form of limbs nor voice, which is the part proper to men."¹⁰⁶

The situation changes when Love and Strife have moved closer to each other to produce fishes, birds, and land animals that depend on heterosexual reproduction. When Love is dominant in its partnership with Strife, a critical break in the evolution of life has occurred: under the aegis of Love life can now reproduce itself without direct assistance from the four elements.¹⁰⁷ This must be true of whole-natured ones also, but, says Aëtius, those life-forms as we know them were capable of sexual reproduction animated by libidinal urges. Finally, when biological reproduction emerges, human life recycles or re-creates itself through the processes of reincarnation. It is the case that a human being (or, rather, his or her *daimon*) may be reincarnated in an animal or plant, but it is not clear whether an animal can achieve reincarnation on its own, as in the case of Buddhism. If it cannot, then it would mean that Empedocles also had a theory similar to that of "continuous incarnation" discussed earlier.

Now let me pose a difficult and probably insoluble problem regarding the identity of the entity that gets reincarnated. If in other Greek thinkers the word for soul is *psyche*, not so for Empedocles, who uses that word only once, more or less as "mind."¹⁰⁸ The critical word is *daimon*; little is known about the Empedoclean *daimon*, although it seems that Empedocles is using the older Greek term in a very specific technical sense. Let me present two Empedoclean views of *daimon* and then see whether they are reconcilable.

Many later commentators, particularly Plutarch and Plotinus, have associated *daimon* with the old idea of the soul.¹⁰⁹ Following this tradition Charles Kahn has defined *daimon* as the "deified human soul," although he tries to divest the specific Neoplatonist notion of soul from that of Empedocles' more fluid concept.¹¹⁰ However, for Empedocles the "soul" reincarnates in a variety of sentient forms; hence *daimon* can be glossed more like the fluid Buddhist concept of "the rebirth-seeking entity." One might ask why Empedocles chose the word *daimon*, with its conventional Greek notions of being "alive." Here again the comparative material might help because we know that the "rebirth-seeking entity" in Buddhism and the soul in some Amerindian societies (Inuit, for example) are endowed with some of the characteristics they possessed while on earth, indeed sometimes more refined than earthly characteristics. Empedocles' *daimon* fuses the traditional Greek idea of *psyche* with that of *daimon*; not so much a "deified human soul" but a "soul" possessing certain features of vision, consciousness, and will.

Now consider a more technical meaning of the term *daimon*, found in one of the most important fragments:

There is a decree of necessity, ratified long ago by gods, eternal and sealed by broad oaths, that whenever one in error, from fear, (de)files his own limbs, having by his error made false the oath he swore—*daimons* to whom life long-lasting is apportioned—he wanders from the blessed ones for three times countless [most readings, "ten thousand"] years, being born throughout the time as all sorts of mortal forms, exchanging one hard way of life for another. For the force of the air pursues him into sea, and sea spits him out onto earth's surface, earth casts him into the rays of blazing sun, and sun into the eddies of the air; one takes him from another, and all abhor him. I too am now one of these, an exile from the gods and a wanderer, having put my trust in raving [mad] Strife.¹¹¹

This fragment has troubled later Greek commentators because for many of them the soul is a pure and immortal entity and could not be "sinful" or "polluted" in Empedocles' sense. Yet in interpreting this fragment we must recognize that Empedocles' usage makes sense in the context of his rebirth eschatology. We are in the world as we now know it, that is, where Love is waxing in the cosmic scheme and where Ananke, or Necessity, reigns along with Chance. In this situation where do human beings stand? It seems that in Empedocles, as in Plato, there is the idea of choice; one must choose between Love and Strife, which exist both in the world outside and within us. Choice is hard because, as Plato recognized, it is easy to make the wrong choice in the world of Necessity, where power and scarcity reign. That Empedocles himself once made the wrong choice and paid for it is clear from the fragment quoted above.

What kind of choice must one make though? The ancient decree of the gods enjoins the *daimon*, the spiritual agency within oneself, to refrain from two heinous acts: shedding blood and uttering a false oath. It seems from the subsequent fragments that the first was the more serious sin, whereas the second was a very common preoccupation in Greece and the ancient world in general. It is of course possible that "false oath" ought to be related to the first injunction itself, namely, the violation of a primordial oath against bloodshed. The universality of the latter emerges from fragment 121 (135): "the law for all extends throughout the wide-ruling air and measureless sunlight." This inherent law sealed by an ancient compact is violated when a person chooses Strife rather than Love, for although Love and Strife are both necessary for the world's continuity, it is Strife that is associated with violence and bloodshed. The consequence of choosing "mad Strife," as Empedocles once did, also emerges in the text: one continues to be born and reborn in various mortal forms up to "thrice ten thousand seasons," and one is punished by the elements. Although some think that "there is no evidence to sub-

stantiate the conjecture" that this refers to the rebirth cycle, the evidence of Plato's *Phaedrus* suggests that it is the case.¹¹² Punishment occurs for the most part during the processes of rebirth, or metacosmesis, rather than through anything like a karmic agency. For example, when one is being reborn, one gets buffeted by the elements of ocean (water), air, earth, and fire.

There are further problems with the above fragment. The term *daimon*, which commentators have glossed as "soul," is plural. It is not clear from the text whether *daimon* refers to Love and Strife or to the "soul" seeking reincarnation or to two daimons within the person, a refraction of the cosmic dualisms, for it does make psychological sense.¹¹³ If *daimon* is "soul" and a single entity, then it would seem that *the daimon is constituted of both Love and Strife, and the struggle in the cosmos is reflected in the individual's daimon, in the homology between macrocosm and microcosm.*¹¹⁴

This in turn leads us to a critical question of motivation or intent: who is it that makes the choice, the individual person or the daimon within? Following our previous argument one might say that the daimon is the entity that achieves "continuous incarnation," and insofar as it is a complex entity that exists in conjunction with the psyche (mind), it can, once lodged in the consciousness of a person, make intentional decisions, such as seeking mad strife or shedding blood. Wrongful intentional action means that the daimon remains imprisoned in the fleshy garment of the body through various rebirths and cannot achieve salvation. The path to salvation must unfold when a person chooses Love and abjures the original guilt of killing. In the context of mainline Greek thought this is an extraordinarily difficult task because killing and eating an animal always occur with the sacrifice, the central feature of Greek religion.

The question remains: Why is Empedocles an exile from the gods if he is himself a "god immortal"? I think the several references to his own "guilt" might help elucidate the issue. "Alas, that the pitiless day did not destroy me first, before I devised for my lips the cruel deed of eating flesh."¹¹⁵

It should now be apparent that this crucial issue of endoanthropophagy is central to my thesis. Here is Empedocles' violation of the oath, in all likelihood in a previous existence. The oath itself pertains to the fundamental feature of species sentience and beyond that, in the logic of cross-species reincarnation, to eating one's own ancestor or kinsperson or fellow citizen. "The father will lift up his dear son in a changed form, and, blind fool, as he prays he will slay him, and those who take part in

the sacrifice ?bring (the victim) as he pleads. But the father, deaf to his cries, slays him in his house and prepares an evil feast. In the same way son seizes father, and children their mother, and having betrayed them of life devour the flesh of those they love."¹¹⁶ The sacrificial animal, like other sentient beings, must surely possess a daimon of a previous human being, which is why it can pathetically ask for mercy. Unlike some Pythagoreans, Empedocles makes no concession to the popular religiosity of the sacrifice.¹¹⁷

He rails against the killers who violate the universal law pertaining to the taking of animal life. "Will you not cease from this ill-sounding slaughter? See ye not that ye are devouring one another in the thoughtlessness of your hearts?"¹¹⁸ The emotional reaction associated with eating meat is sometimes displaced to a species of bean or laurel when a daimon enters it.¹¹⁹ Yet Empedocles' moral law is not an *abstract* ethical ideal, like Buddhism's ahimsā, but one directly grounded in a theory of cross-reincarnation and eventual rebirth in one's own group. This ideal poses the dilemma of "endoanthropophagy" that we examined in previous cases also. In the Greek case older kin groups and lineages were probably being eroded by the expanding commerce of the city-states. Hence eating meat is eating a fellow *citizen*; but Empedocles also resurrects powerful familial values, perhaps tapping an older tradition to underscore the general idea that eating an animal is effectively eating one's own close familial kin. Yet Empedoclean ethics is not karmic ethics; the latter disrupts the idea that one could be reborn into the same kin or communal group (including one's own city) and converts the primordial idea of endoanthropophagy into the abstract ethics of ahimsā.

To get back to Empedocles' own guilt and suffering for the crime of eating flesh: Empedocles has been born and reborn in different forms, and there is no escape from this cycle, which in its relentless inevitability reminds one of the Ājivika eschatology. "For before now I have been at some time boy and girl, bush [laurel], bird and a mute fish in the sea."¹²⁰ He describes what must surely be the entrance to the earth, the rebirth orifice, as in the myth of Askadut and also, we shall soon see, according to Plato's myth of Er. "We have come under this roofed cave."¹²¹ Then, as some commentators have noted, comes the actual birth as an infant in a particular rebirth followed by a very pessimistic view of metacosmesis and human existence. "I wept and wailed on seeing an unfamiliar place [or land]."¹²² This trauma of birth is apparently the condition of all humans. "Alas, poor unhappy race of mortal creatures, from what strifes and lamentations were you born."¹²³ This is followed by what

seems like another rebirth in a very specific and unpleasant place: "(a joyless place) where (there are) slaughter and hatred and hordes of other violent deaths (and parching fevers and consumptions and ?dropsy) . . . they wander in darkness over the fields of Ate [Doom]."124 And then a more realistic and complex assessment of the human world governed by Necessity, where, under the aegis of Love and Strife, both good and bad prevail, personified as nymphs who, according to Burnet, are based on a catalog of Nymphs in the *Iliad*.125 Empedocles creates in the dualisms and their movement a nonteleological and discontinuous world of becoming over which the goddess Ananke, or Necessity, reigns.

Now we can return to fragment 115, which finds Empedocles in exile, a wanderer from the gods. How can we reconcile this condition with the exalted beginning of the *Purifications*, where he claims he is a god incarnate? In the absence of a fuller context one can only make an informed guess. It is very likely, although by no means self-evident, that Empedocles, like Pythagoras, remembers his former lives. Fragment 115 must therefore refer to a past existence of his when, as a punishment for shedding blood and endoanthrophagy, he is buffeted by the elements as he continues to be reborn in the world of suffering and want. This interpretation seems vindicated in the conventional numbering of the fragments that follow, all of which refer to past existences. It might therefore seem that the "now" in the text refers to a past state that he retrocognizes and, not unnaturally, describes in presentist terms. Empedocles seems to have been alienated from the gods as a consequence of primal guilt, but at the point of writing *Purifications* this alienation is abolished because he is a god, a mortal no more. Somehow he has escaped from the cycle of existence defined by him (in the same fragment) as the constant change from "one toilsome path to another."

Although several ancient and contemporary interpreters of Empedocles have argued for a scale of rebirths with forms of human existence on top and a bush at the lowest, there is little in the extant fragments that suggests a clear-cut status hierarchy. For example, in fragment 108 (117) Empedocles' birth as a bush comes immediately after his birth as a girl and before his birth as a bird and a dumb fish of the sea. In another fragment there is a suggestion that some animal and tree incarnations might even be desirable. "Among animals they are born as lions that make their lairs in the hills and bed on the ground; and among fair-leaved trees as laurels."126 Perhaps one can agree with Aelian that "the best move is into a man, but if his lot transfer him to a beast, then a lion, or if a plant, a bay [laurel]"127 Empedocles nowhere rails against par-

ticular forms of rebirth in a way that even vaguely parallels the intensity of his reaction to killing. As far as the rebirth cycle is concerned, his emotional reaction pertains to the "toil" and misery associated with the *processes* of being reborn, or metacosmesis, and the dreariness of the rebirth cycle itself, which imprisons the daimon.

There is, however, one preferred form of rebirth: human. This is perhaps obvious insofar as one can only become a god if one is a human being. Thus, there is a gradation of human reincarnations, culminating in the final and most desirable rebirth "among men on earth as prophets, minstrels, physicians and leaders; and from these they arise as gods highest in honour." And the next fragment: "With other immortals they share hearth and table, having no part in human sorrows, unwearied."128 Although not explicitly stated, it is very likely that this culminating rebirth must apply to those who chose Love, abjuring bloodshed. Yet, surely, Empedocles must know that there are false prophets, bad doctors and bards, and evil princes. If so, he must refer to those who, at some point in the rebirth cycle, had made the right ethical choice. Or he must refer to those with a spiritual inclination to join followers of Empedocles who, engaging in forms of spiritual exercises or ascetics, will be purified of the guilt of bloodshed. When they die they become gods and comport with other immortal beings like them, sharing their hearth and table, a powerful idea in traditional Greek eschatology that I will examine in Pindar's second Olympian Ode. It therefore seems that the Empedoclean soteriology entails a person's eventually becoming a god and living and sharing food and fellowship with other gods.

There is, however, one striking exception: the introductory verses of *Purifications* make clear that Empedocles himself has become a god while actually living in the world. There is nothing unusual in this. The entity being reborn is a daimon enveloped in an external fleshy vestment, as with the Pythagoreans in general and some Orphic groups. Thus: "(The goddess) clothing them with a strange garment of flesh," refers, according to Porphyry, to a goddess Heimarmene (Fate), who is in charge of metacosmesis.129 It does make logical sense that special individuals can have access to powerful modes of asceticism that can fully purify the daimon of primal guilt and either restore its godly nature or effect a conversion of daimon into god. If so, someone such as Empedocles (or Pythagoras) could become a god while still being swathed in a garment of flesh. The famed apotheoses of these two redoubtable persons make logical sense within their own scheme of things, which I have argued is also consonant with the Indic.

My discussion of the Empedoclean rebirth eschatology is not complete without considering those fragments that deal with an idealized age prior to what some have called a "fall." Virtually every scholar has noted its affinity with Hesiod's "golden age of mortal men" who "lived in the reign of Kronos, king of heaven."¹³⁰ But for Empedocles the ideal age existed *before* Kronos, when Aphrodite, a female deity, reigned:

They did not have Ares as god or Kydoimos, not king Zeus nor Kronos nor Poseidon, but queen Kypris [Aphrodite]. Her they propitiated with holy images and painted animal figures, with perfumes of subtle fragrance and offerings of distilled myrrh and sweet-smelling frankincense, and pouring on the earth libations of golden honey. Their altar was not drenched by the (?unspeakable) slaughter of bulls, but this was the greatest defilement among men—to bereave of life and eat noble limbs.¹³¹

It seems to me that this fragment is not simply based on Hesiod's myth *Works and Days* but is a deliberate reversal of it. As Detienne and his colleagues have shown, the "cuisine of sacrifice" central to Greek religion is given a detailed cosmological grounding in Hesiod's *Theogony*.¹³² For Empedocles the golden age is not the Hesiodic one but a prior time, when the cuisine of sacrifice did not exist. With this audacious restatement of the golden age Empedocles introduces another unorthodox Greek idea, vegetarianism, the inferior cuisine (one that is on occasion associated with the women of Demeter).¹³³ This inferior food is reified as the superior one and a female deity (Kypris or Aphrodite or Love) presides over the ideal age. The older idea that the bull (the sacrificial animal) is "pure" because his meat is blessed by the gods and consumed by men is given different ethical and symbolic meaning, as with the Buddhist myth of Kūṭadanta (see pp. 179–80). The sacrificial animal is also a sacred creature in the Empedoclean scheme simply because it is, or could be, an ancestor reborn, perhaps producing qualms of conscience among actual or potential followers and even creating anxiety among ordinary Greeks who revered their ancestors.¹³⁴

The idea of a golden age has further significance at two levels: as a charter, in Malinowski's sense, for Empedocles' present-day followers and as an actual condition of primal innocence in the past. As charter the ideal age contrasts with the present degenerate one and becomes a model for followers to emulate. The reference to bulls and men indicates that, as an actual occurrence, the ideal age emerges when Love holds unquestioned dominion. The fact that the age of peace, innocence, and harmony, as well as the arising of sentient life as we know it and the commencement of the rebirth cycle, occurred during this cosmic flow suggests

the enormity of the duration of these movements for Empedocles, as it does for his Indian counterparts. To sum up: for Empedocles there was a period when people lived in harmony, worshipping Kypris, Love apotheosized, and avoiding the shedding of the blood of sacrificial bulls. "For all creatures, both animals and birds, were tame and gentle to men, and bright was the flame of their friendship."¹³⁵ What is implied here is that this innocence was lost in Hesiodic times with the "cuisine of sacrifice." Meat eating, which is eating one's own kind, has occurred: if so, Empedocles' own guilt in eating flesh is the guilt of Everyman.

In this context fragment 111 (119) bears reinterpretation: "From what honor and from what great extent of happiness [have I fallen]."¹³⁶ The conventional reading coming from Plutarch suggests that Empedocles has fallen among mortals from a prior unspecified state of bliss.¹³⁷ But what state of bliss? For me a reasonable interpretation would be a fall from the ideal age under Aphrodite, and the fall must surely result from the eating of flesh, the sin of anthropophagy.

Where do the gods come into the picture? This is more problematic. Fragment 14 (21) puts it thus:

Under Strife they have different forms and are all separate, but they come together in Love and are desired by one another. From them [Love and Strife] comes all that was or is and will be hereafter—trees that have sprung from them, and men and women, and animals and birds and water nourished fish, and long-lived gods too, highest in honor. For these are the only real things, and as they run through each other they assume different shapes, for the mixing interchanges them.¹³⁸

The very next fragment uses the analogy of mixing paints to describe the same interplay of dualisms and says that not only trees, animals, and humans but also gods were created in that manner. Because there is no question that the gods were also created through the intermixing of Love and Strife, the question one must ask is: When were the gods created? The existing fragments do not provide an answer, but one might infer an answer from Empedocles' thought.

It is obvious that gods existed before human beings, animals, or fish, and unlike fish, flesh, and fowl they are perfect acts of creation and in this respect similar to whole-natured forms. Therefore one might infer that they came forth either before or after the creation of whole-natured forms and prior to the creation of human and other animate life. Whole-natured forms, including the gods, occur when Strife's influence on Love is minimal. A further problematic arises now: what happened to the gods after they were created? One of two things must have occurred: either

they evolved through further mixing of the dualisms into human beings or their prototypes; or, more likely, they continued to exist in the realms of the blessed, later sharing a hearth and home with those human beings who have escaped from the rebirth cycle.

In conclusion let me sum up features of Empedoclean eschatology that can be tied to the general argument of this book. Empedoclean rebirth confirms the logic of expectations arising from the rebirth eschatology: where there is species sentence and kinship with nature in conjunction with animal reincarnation, one would expect the eating of an animal to be associated with a strong affect based on the idea that the animal was once a human being. Although this association is also characteristic of Pythagorean thought in general, Empedoclean rebirth is the most powerful example of it in the ethnographic record anywhere. Empedocles' passionate rejection of meat eating and the cuisine of the sacrifice also has significance for his conscience, as is evident from his feelings of guilt, repentance, and punishment. Punishment is through the actual processes of rebirth, or metacosmesis, and further through being born and reborn in the rebirth cycle. Remorse of conscience for the primal crime is also linked to the two dualisms such that one must (through the agency of one's daimon) at a certain point in one's rebirth career opt for Love rather than "mad Strife," which is associated with violence and killing, also endemic in our species' existence. In this sense, for Empedocles as well as for the later Freud, these dualisms are both cosmic and ethical principles evident in the smallest particles of life.¹³⁹ It should now be clear that the "philosophy" of *On Nature* cannot be divorced from the eschatology of *Purifications*.

However, the idea that rebirth itself is propelled by the ethics of flesh eating and anthropophagy defies our logic of expectations, although it makes sense within the frame of Empedoclean thought. This idea has its corollary in the extremely pessimistic view of species life in the rebirth cycle—what Buddhists call *samsara*. It seems there is no give or hope in Empedoclean *samsara*; consequently, it is unlikely that Empedocles' religious thought could possibly have become popular, quite unlike the Orphic mysteries or the kind of religion represented in Pindar's poems. As a matter of fact one might say that Empedoclean eschatology is not simply a continuation of the Pythagorean traditions. Its uniqueness comes from a double reaction: against the popular sacrifice in mainline Greek religion and against a popular and humane rebirth eschatology in Acragas itself and represented in Pindar (to be dealt with presently). In this harsh scheme of things the one hope for human beings is to make the

correct choice: refrain from the eating of flesh and the wanton slaughter of the sacrifice. Only then can one be born as minstrel, physician, and so forth and eventually comport with the gods. The only other way out is the example of Empedocles himself, that is, to become a god while living in the world very much like the Indian *jivan mukta*. Ordinary folk must continue to live without hope and, as that wonderful phrase puts it, continuing forever as "many-times-dying mortal men."

Now let me address the crucial issue of ethicization. It seems to me that Empedocles' passionate message could appeal to only a very few, perhaps those of a small group of followers inspired by his message and personal charisma. His is primarily an intense personal vision of life and salvation rather than a communal one. At best it might contain a soteriology for an elite, and there is little indication that Empedocles was interested in converting the general Greek population, even those living anywhere in Magna Graecia. There is no evidence for enduring Empedoclean spiritual communities either. If, as I have argued, ethicization occurs in relation to the soteriological welfare of the group, then one cannot expect Empedoclean rebirth to be concerned with ethicization. Ethics does operate in soteriology, in its doctrine of ethical choice, but it does not produce ethicized heavens and hells, as one expects from our model. There is a limited ethicization, though, in respect to the generality of human beings. The many who have committed the sin of eating flesh (and those who continue to do so) will be punished in endless rebirths in entirely undesirable forms of animate existence; only those who have made the right ethical choice will be redeemed at death. There is no indication of rebirth rewards and punishments in "hells." Indeed such arenas of ethical compensation cannot exist in Empedoclean thought because rebirth *rewards* would contradict the ethical stance that life on earth is an arena of punishment; and rebirth punishment in Tartarus or in a similar hell is similarly redundant because ordinary folk who are punished in being reborn need not be punished again in hell. It is therefore an eschatology in which the soul, or daimon, is at death immediately reborn into the human world without a temporary stay in some other world, which is the case with Pythagorean rebirth in general.

The Empedoclean rebirth theory is in itself an interesting variation of "continuous incarnation." One might more appropriately call it *discontinuous* incarnation because although the soul continues to be reborn in various forms of animate life, there does not seem to be a systematic and regular form of reincarnation. For example, in the *Āyivika* scheme of things the soul undergoes reincarnation in every form of species un-

til it achieves final release. Not so with Empedocles, who at some time was born as a boy, a girl, a bush, a bird, and a mute fish of the sea, whereas those who are to be saved are born finally as minstrels, physicians, prophets, and leaders. Although the latter category makes soteriological sense, the former seem to indicate purely fortuitous rebirths. This is not surprising given that the two cosmic dualisms themselves bring about discontinuous and disjunctive movements: hence, rebirth itself, which is part of that larger process, must reflect such disjunctions.

Finally, let me briefly note that one of the expectations from either the rebirth or the karmic eschatology is that logically there is no way to achieve salvation except outside the rebirth cycle. Is our logic of expectations disconfirmed because there is no indication whatever in *Purifications* that salvation (comporting with the gods) is in effect the cessation of rebirth? No Greek scholar or commentator in the long history of Greek thought has mentioned it either. But this is precisely the strength of the model; it helps us to fill lacunae in these texts. Thus the souls of those who have made the right ethical choice are reborn as good people, and after death they will share board and lodging with the deities. As Empedocles himself says, that divine abode is a place without "sorrows," whereas the human world is an utterly awful and sorrowful place. It is impossible for the Empedoclean daimon to be reborn on earth after a sojourn in the divine world. Were that to happen, the realm of the gods to which the good soul ascends must be temporary; and ephemeral bliss is not salvation. If it were, the world of the gods would simply become a way station for the good, and Empedoclean eschatology could not possess a doctrine of salvation. But surely that is not the case?

ETHICIZATION STEP 1: POPULAR RELIGIOSITY IN PINDAR

Early Pythagoreans, I have suggested, constituted small sodalities that contained individuals interested in personal salvation rather than in the conversion of the Greek populace. This, as Burkert suggests, is true even of the mystery religions; people who were attracted to them were selectively initiated. None produced "congregations" in the manner of Buddhists or Christians (and perhaps some Bacchic communities).¹⁴⁰ Moreover, I think the eschatologies attributed to Pythagoras by near contemporaries as well as later writers seem to have two salient features that mark out what one could for convenience' sake label "Pythagoreanism." First, Pythagoreanism postulates a cyclical theory of continuity in which the individual is reborn on earth without an intermediate sojourn in a heaven

or a hell. Second, this meant that it did not incorporate much of mainline Greek ideas of Hades, Tartarus, or the Abodes of the Blessed (or at best only nominally incorporated them), lending plausibility to the view that their rebirth theories came from the "outside" and were given special eschatological development and meaning by Pythagoreans. The exceptions are few: for example, the statement attributed to Heraclides that Pythagoras could "tell of the fate of souls in Hades," although this could be a way of saying that he could tell what happened to people after their deaths. Empedocles tried to incorporate mainline Greek ideas more systematically, but in this he was perhaps influenced by the mystery religions and the tradition represented by Pindar. Hence he tells Pausanias that if Pausanias learns about Empedocles' knowledge of drugs, he will have the capacity to bring back the dead or recover their spiritual essences from Hades. This could mean, as Kingsley suggests, the claimed capacity to actually go to Hades and bring the dead back; or, in my thinking, it promises Pausanias the capacity to bring back a dead person or that person's life essence through spiritual techniques and drugs. The drugs need not be part of physical medicine as in the Galenic or Indian Ayurvedic systems. Any ethnographer who has worked with South Asian virtuosos, or with shamans anywhere, knows that such medicines are given by the gods or obtained through a variety of spiritual techniques. And we already know, from Inuit and Northwest Coast Indians, that a shaman has the capacity to send his own soul to retrieve a person's soul lost in the underworld or one that has escaped from a sick person's body owing to illness. This does not convert Empedocles into a shamanic figure; as with the Buddha the case of Empedocles only illustrates the influence of shamanism on his ascesis.

Yet it is in Acragas itself that one can find evidence for the incorporation of mainline Greek ideas into the rebirth eschatology and with clear reference to the first step of ethicization. In *Meno* Plato gives a succinct account of a rebirth theory attributed to Pindar and other poets:

They say that the human soul is immortal; at times it comes to an end, which they call dying, at times it is reborn, but it is never destroyed, and one must live one's life piously as possible:

*Persephone will return to the sun above in the ninth year
the souls of those for whom
she will extract punishment for old miseries,
and from these will come noble kings,
mighty in strength and greatest in wisdom,
and for the rest of time men will call them sacred heroes.*

As the soul is immortal, has been born often and has seen all things here and in the underworld, there is nothing which it has not learned; so it is in no way surprising that it can recollect the things it knew before, both about virtue and other things. (81b-d)

A section of a poem by Pindar (518-438 B.C.E.), no longer extant, is wedged between Plato's own comments where he outlines a rebirth eschatology but adds the importance of ethical (pious) living. Further, Plato thinks that no new knowledge arises and the soul can recollect what it had known in previous rebirths. I deal with Plato's theory of memory later; however, the capacity for the soul to recognize the past in this manner is neither Pythagorean nor Empedoclean. For the latter, retrocognition is the gift of those who practice special forms of asceticism. Both would be astonished to know that Meno's slave could passively recollect the past, as Plato describes in *Meno* 82-85. The sandwiched quotation is even more interesting. Although the details are obscure, the general meaning is reasonably clear, as Long suggests in his commentary: "After a life upon earth, some souls continue in the realm of Persephone for eight years atoning for sins they committed while in this world. In the ninth year, Persephone sends them up to the region of sunlight and they assume various of the more desirable forms of human existence. After they 'die' the second time, they become heroes for evermore."¹⁴¹ There is a clear and unequivocal indication of punishment for immorality but with a promise of eventual salvation.

There is no evidence that Pindar belonged to a sodality. Plato seems to think that he personally believed in reincarnation, but whether he did or not is irrelevant to the significance of the poem. Pindar's poems celebrate public occasions, and the ode that contains a more detailed account of reincarnation, *Olympian* 2, was dedicated to the tyrant Theron of Acragas (the home of Empedocles) on his victory in the four-horse chariot race in the Olympic games of 476 B.C.E. Here are the relevant lines from Frank Nisetich's translation:

And wealth, uplifted by nobility,
gives scope for actions of every kind,
kindling the heart with zeal for achievement,
a star far-seen, a man's truest beacon-light.
And if, possessing it, one knows what must befall—
that of those who die here, the arrogant
are punished without delay,
for someone under the earth

weighs transgressions in this realm of Zeus,
and there is iron compulsion in his word.

But with equal nights
and equal days,

possessing the sun forever,
the noble enjoy an easy existence, troubling
neither earth nor the sea's waters
in might of hand

for an empty living,
but with the gods they honored, all
who delighted in oath-keeping
abide free of affliction, while the others
go through pain not to be looked at.

And those who have endured
three times in either realm
to keep their souls untaunted
by any injustice, travel

Zeus' road to the tower of Kronos,
where ocean-born breezes blow around
the island of the blest
and sprays of gold flower
from the earth and from the sea—
with these they breathe their hands
and crown their heads,

obeying the high decrees of Rhadamanthys,
who sits a ready companion, beside
the great Father, consort of Rhea throned on high.

Among them dwell the heroes of Peleus and Kadmos.¹⁴²

Once again, although the details are unclear, there is not the slightest doubt that we are dealing with an ethicized eschatology of a specific sort: the wicked, and this includes not only humans but gods who have perjured themselves, straightaway pay the penalty imposed by some judge in the underworld.¹⁴³ Apparently, having been judged by the lawgiver Rhadamanthys, the redeemed soul of both gods and humans sits with Zeus, the "great Father" himself, along with the heroes of the past.¹⁴⁴ The text, like others of its class discussed previously, does not make reference to a karma-like system of rewards and punishments in the next rebirth.

This Pindaric ode has further implications that I must now explore with my characteristic imprudence. Because this poem praises the person who is honored therein, it could not possibly have expressed religious sentiments offensive to Theron. And because Pindar is not a sociological innovator, his poem suggests that, in addition to Theron, there

were ordinary people in this city who believed in rebirth theories containing a system of afterlife rewards and punishments and, most impressively, a realistic goal of salvation rather than one exclusively reserved for an elite. A popularization of a rebirth eschatology seems to have taken place in Acragas, probably fostered by the incorporation of older Greek eschatological concepts into the theory of the rebirth cycle. To put it differently: *there seems to have been an open congregation of believers in rebirth and, parallel with this, step 1 of ethicization*. However, there is no evidence that ethicization extended to the human rebirth.

Let me reiterate the rationality of this model. In every society with or without a theory of rebirth people are punished here on earth (by secular authorities or by deities) for wrongs. But with ethicization step 1 they continue to be punished or rewarded in some hell or heaven. If they have been punished and rewarded then there is no reason for them to suffer or be rewarded in the next reincarnation (step 2). This is everywhere the Greek model. But it does produce an aporia specific to that model. What happens when a person is reincarnated once again on earth? Consider the Pindaric scheme: those who have led bad lives, and especially those who have violated oaths (and this might even include some of the gods), are punished in an underworld; those who have led good lives go to a happy place free of labor and, for those who have honored their oaths, to a pleasant existence with the gods. Presumably, they are reborn and the cycle continues. But those who have led good lives keeping their souls pure for three rebirths enter the Isles of the Blessed, where they live forever. It is implied that in this salvific state they cease to be reborn. Ethicization step 2 hardly occurs here, and one might add that given this Greek model it is impossible to produce systematic ethicization of the human rebirth. The thinker, and the larger tradition of Greek thought, cannot escape from the cultural episteme created with the rational termination of ethicization at step 1.

Yet Pindar reflects a clear epistemic break in the tradition of Greek rebirth eschatologies discussed earlier. Pythagorean forms of reincarnation, including Empedocles', had no reference to an intermediate stay in heaven. What Pindar has inherited is a doctrine wherein older Greek ideas of Tartarus and the realm of the Blessed have been ethicized.

ORPHIC REINCARNATION: A BRIEF ASIDE

Several authors have suggested that the Pindaric form of reincarnation could be related to a much wider movement of popular religion reflected

in the eschatology of the Orphic poems and that of the famed gold leaf inscriptions found in southern Italy, both perhaps traceable in their earliest forms to at least the fifth century B.C.E. M. L. West's persuasive analysis of the genealogy of the Orphic poems gives me a chance to deal with what seems a form of reincarnation theory associated with initiation into Bacchic mystery religions and, for present purposes, with a form of ethicization that shows structural affinity, but not identity, with the Pindaric one. This affinity suggests that multiple forms of reincarnation with ethicized heavens and hells and doctrines of salvation were circulating in Greece during the fifth century B.C.E. and that the Pindaric and "Orphic" forms were simply representatives of a larger class. The doctrines of release or salvation are fundamentally different in the Pindaric and the Orphic. To me it is methodologically fallacious to fuse them into a single coherent "tradition," as scholars such as Keith Guthrie and Gunter Zuntz do in their opposed ways.

West's main thrust is to debunk the idea of a unitary Orphic religion and theology associated with a doctrine of salvation through initiation into the mysteries. This thesis has been the subject of older scholarship, exemplified in Guthrie's *Orpheus and Greek Religion*. Rather, echoing I. M. Linforth's *Arts of Orpheus* and Zuntz's *Persephone*, West makes the case that Orpheus was a mythic founder of a variety of poetic, mythic, and ritual traditions that need not have any substantive connections with each other.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, West examines a series of Orphic theogonies that show an identifiable genealogy going back to a prototype poem, the Protoponos Theogony, which he constructs primarily from the extant fragments of the oldest theogony, the Derveni Theogony, and from the most complex and detailed of the Orphic theogonies composed in the late Hellenistic period, the Rhapsodic Theogony.¹⁴⁶ Although these theogonies exhibit a single "genealogy," they do not constitute a single "tradition"—using my terms rather than West's. That is, although they all share family resemblances, they do not constitute a coherent religion or theology, even though most of them are associated with the cult of Dionysus. Thus, not all share a doctrine of reincarnation: the cases that do are the Rhapsodic, the Derveni, and the original (reconstructed) Protoponos Theogony, although the absence of reference to reincarnation in the extant fragments of the others does not necessarily imply the absence of reincarnation.

Because the Protoponos Theogony is West's hypothetical construction, it makes sense to start with the Derveni Theogony, which West has neatly summarized:

In a brief proem Orpheus announced that he would sing, for those with insight, of the wondrous works of Zeus and the gods born from him. His narrative began at the moment where Zeus was due to assume power and took advice from Night. Zeus swallowed Protoponos ["first born"]; at this point the poet worked in a mention of the outstanding events of earlier ages, Protoponos' first appearance, the genealogy of Protoponos/Night—Uranos—Kronos, the castration of Uranos, the kingship succession Uranos—Kronos—Zeus. With the swallowing of Protoponos everything became one in Zeus, whose universality was celebrated in a hymn-like section.

Then Zeus began to bring the gods forth again from his mouth; ejaculated seed which became Aphrodite; and created anew earth, heaven, rivers, and luminaries, among which the moon claimed the poet's particular interest. Once the world was restored Zeus conceived a desire for his mother, Rhea who was also Demeter. They mated as snakes, and Rhea gave birth to Kore. Still (or again) in the form of a snake Zeus impregnated Kore, and she gave birth to Dionysus, whom the nurse Hipa carried away in a winnowing-basket with a snake wound round it.

Kore and Dionysus both perhaps received instruction about their future destinies, Kore from her mother, Dionysus from Night. Kore was to bear the Eumenides in union with Apollo (and, no doubt, to reign in the lower world, supervising the treatment administered there to souls). Dionysus was to rule in the upper world, receiving sacrifices from initiates and rewarding them with salvation.

This is the third race of men, this one that lives under Zeus' dispensation. There was a golden race under Protoponos, and a silver one under Kronos. The soul is immortal, and passes through different human and animal bodies. After a human incarnation it stands trial, and the good and the wicked go separate ways. Tartarus, where the wicked go, also accommodates gods who have sworn falsely on the water of Stryx [echoing the Pindaric]. After 300 years the souls are reincarnated. Such are the hardships from which Dionysus is able to deliver men. (And perhaps all this was set out in the revelation he received from Night.) (*OP*, 100–101)

It is the doctrine of reincarnation that is relevant to my argument. There is not the slightest doubt that ethicization step 1 has occurred in the *Derveni*, the Rhapsodic and the Protoponos theogonies according to the information supplied by West. Further, there is the doctrine of reincarnation through "animal bodies"; how this occurs is not clear from the text, and there is little to suggest whether animals were degraded. Again one can reasonably assume that ethicization step 2 did not take place here; there is no hint of it in any of the theogonies (or in the later gold leaf tablets), and its absence certainly fits the general Greek pattern sketched earlier. However, ideas of punishments and rewards in another world (ethicization step 1) would mean, according to my analysis, that the Orphic priestly thinkers, unlike Pythagoras (or the early Pythagorean

thinkers), were interested not only in the salvation of the individual but also in the common welfare of Bacchic or Dionysian communities that met as "congregations."

These Bacchic communities were around in many parts of Greece, although West thinks they originated in Ionia around 500 B.C.E. They had a "gospel of salvation by Dionysus," but like other Bacchic cults they were probably given to forms of ecstatic or passionate religiosity and most certainly to initiation rituals that guaranteed them salvation from the "wheel" of existence. According to the Rhapsodic Theogony (which develops the previous theogonies) Zeus mates with Kore in Crete in the guise of a snake; Kore gives birth to Dionysus, who is killed and dismembered by the Titans (who are painted with gypsum); he is restored to life and becomes Kore's own partner, "helping men to escape from the cycle of reincarnation" (*OP*, 95). Not only is Dionysus cut up and eaten, but the "story of the gypsum-painted Titans with their mirror, bull-roarer, and so forth, is likely enough, a frightening charade enacted round a candidate for initiation and signifying his mock death" (*OP*, 160).

Although some of these Bacchic cults practiced vegetarianism, the internal evidence of the Orphic theogonies suggests that many celebrated the dismemberment of Dionysus and his resurrection in public festivities and, more important, in the sacrifice of animals, which were cut up and eaten, sometimes cooked and sometimes raw (omophagia). The animal might have been a stand-in for a human at the moment he or she was about to be killed. "This sort of arrangement perhaps lies behind certain Greek myths which account for animal victims, particularly in cults of Dionysus, as surrogates for original human victims. More than one author says that the Bacchic practice of tearing a live animal limb from limb commemorates what was done to Dionysus himself" (*OP*, 160). In some rituals a special place was given to the heart of the victim; this commemorates Athena, who saved Dionysus's living heart, from which he was later reconstituted. Athena herself was probably represented in some initiation sequences; the animal's heart was removed and placed in a casket. In other sequences, West speculates, the heart was put back into a human effigy; this ritual action could only refer to the "reanimation of the candidate [for initiation] who was supposedly dead" (*OP*, 162–63).¹⁴⁷

These Bacchic mysteries associated with the Orphic theogonies pose problems for the obsessive position taken by some scholars (including West) that "Orpheus" was a shamanic figure. Shamanism can only account for the incorporation of such elements into a cult that transcended its origins; in this sense it is no different from the Buddhist tradition. I

noted earlier that shamanic rituals primarily pertain to healing and divination; I know not a single instance of their association with a doctrine of salvation. The ritual ingestion of the body of Dionysus is closer to the Christian mystery of transubstantiation than to anything in shamanism, however uncomfortable the latter idea might be to many classical scholars repelled by the "bizarre" Dionysian myth of origins and Dionysian ritual "excess." Likewise is the scholarly use of Asia as a scapegoat for all sorts of "irrational" practices, such as that of animal reincarnation, omphagia, and other nasty elements in Bacchic initiation and myth. "Influences," whether shamanic or Asiatic, are obviously important for historical reconstruction but not as *explanations* of Bacchic practice. What is important is West's showing us how these diverse influences have been incorporated into a system of beliefs and practices, a cult, associated with initiatory rituals and a powerful ethic, theology, and doctrine of salvation with its own inner logic and integrity—and "Greekness."

BRIDGING MULTIPLE WORLDS: PLATO AND THE MYTH OF ER

In chapter 6 I will present Plato's speculative soteriology based on Reason and the implications thereof, but here I am going to take liberties with textual chronology and discuss his narration of Er's experiences, which connects nicely with the preceding arguments. The myth of Er concludes the tenth and final chapter of the *Republic*. Although Plato's individualistic soteriology comes from a variety of sources, the evidence of *Meno*, already presented, suggests that one such source was the tradition represented in Pindar.

Long argues that a critical break occurs between the *Gorgias*, which does not contain references to reincarnation, and *Meno*, which does. This, he says, is because of Plato's temporary exile in Sicily, where he picked up Pythagorean ideas. This is possible, although the *Gorgias* itself has a somewhat sympathetic view of Pythagoreanism and Orphism: "Our body is the tomb in which we are buried, and the part of the soul in which our appetites reside is liable by reason of its gullibility to be carried in the most contrary directions."¹⁴⁸ If Plato was already sympathetic to rebirth ideas, his visits to Italy could have been, among other things, spiritual journeys to the home of Pythagorean and Orphic thought.¹⁴⁹

One can identify the immediate sources of Plato's ideas. First, Plato was influenced both by Pythagorean and by mainline Greek cosmological and eschatological conceptions. Second, his texts on rebirth also deal

with step 1 of ethicization. Both suggest that Plato developed a popular tradition of the sort that existed in Acragas, according to my analysis of the Pindaric fragments. Nevertheless, the Sicilian influence was but one component in his complex and innovative soteriology. Further, Plato himself did not belong to, or create, any sodality or soteriological school.¹⁵⁰ Rather reincarnation seemed almost a personal belief that became more and more important in later texts like *Timaeus*.

The Er narrative, in my reading, is based on the shamanic model of the soul's journey to the otherworld well known in Greece and structurally similar to the Tlingit narrative of 'Askadut. In both, the soul of the dead person goes to the otherworld in order to come back and describe the nature of that world to the denizens living on earth. Plato imposes his own (or Socrates') ideas on this familiar narrative. The story itself, if not its ethics, owing to its striking resemblance to shamanic journeyings, need not have been Plato's invention as most scholars surmise. At the very least it was one that Plato or Socrates picked up from a prior shamanic or Orphic tradition. Yet unlike shamanic narratives the Platonic one, like the Pindaric, is strongly permeated with ethics.

Plato's own concern with ethicization is explicit in Er's story, which illustrates "the things that await the just man and unjust man after death" (*Rep.* 10.614a).¹⁵¹ The story is told to Socrates by Er himself, and we have no reason to doubt the veracity, if not the empirical truth, of the core narrative any more than 'Askadut's story. I think it wrong to inject our contemporary standards of rationality into this account and treat it simply as allegory of the sort depicted in *Phaedrus*. It is close to the ethical spirit of *Gorgias*, where Socrates literally believes, as Pindar does, that the good will go to the Isles of the Blessed and the wicked to a place of retribution. There he tells Callicles "a story that proves this" and adds: "Give ear then as they say, to a very fine story, which will, I suppose, seem fiction to you but is fact to me; what I am going to tell you I tell you as the truth."¹⁵² So is it with Er: in fact Socrates says that his story is quite unlike Odysseus's recital of his adventures to Alcinous, king of Phaeacia. The latter is an overlong account dealing with, among other things, Odysseus's journey to the realms of the dead; it would have been rejected by Plato, says Cornford, as a "misleading picture of the after-life."¹⁵³

Let me begin with Socrates' narration of Er's own narrative. "He was killed in battle, and when the dead were taken up on the tenth day the rest were already decomposing, but he was still quite sound; he was taken home and was to be buried on the twelfth day, and was lying on the funeral pyre, when he came to life again and told the story of what he had

seen in the other-world."¹⁵⁴ Like Askadut and Pythagoras himself in a previous birth, Er dies on the field of battle, which implies that this is a privileged way of dying. I do not know the significance of some interesting ethnographic facts in this myth, such as why those who died in battle are taken up on the tenth day or Er's own cremation on the twelfth, although both are standard numbers. There is, however, a structural reason for the preservation of Er's corpse. Unlike Askadut, who is reborn in a human womb soon after he leaves the otherworld, Er has to come back to his own corpse, which must therefore be in a state of preservation:

He said that when his soul left his body it travelled in company with many others till they came to a wonderfully strange place, where there were, close to each other, two gaping chasms in the earth, and opposite and above them two other chasms in the sky. Between the chasms sat judges, who having delivered judgment, ordered the just to take the right-hand road that led up through the sky, and fastened the evidence for the judgment in front of them, while they ordered the unjust, who also carried the evidence of all that they had done behind them, to take the left-hand road that led downwards. When Er came before them, they said that he was to be a messenger to men about the other-world, and ordered him to listen to and watch all that went on in that place. He then saw the souls, when judgment had been passed on them, departing some by one of the heavenly and some by one of the earthly chasms; while by the other chasms some souls rose out of the earth, stained with the dust of travel, and others descended from heaven, pure and clean. (*Rep.*, 10.614b-e)¹⁵⁵

Thus, there are two sets of travelers here. The first set comprises the arrivals from earth; the judges will decide who will take the road to heaven and who will take the underground road of suffering and punishment. The other set depicts what the first will eventually achieve: having received the rewards of heaven or the punishments of the world under the earth, they now await reincarnation in the human world.

The idea of judgment implies a strong ethical component, already noted for the Pindaric and Orphic eschatologies. For example, as far as the new arrivals are concerned, the good souls take the rightful right path, the bad the devalued left path. Plato's Socrates describes an eschatology derived from his "informant," Er, in which step 1 of the ethicization process has already taken place.

Socrates goes on to describe Er's experiences, this time focusing exclusively on those souls who have already been rewarded or punished. Those coming from the under-earth meet the souls coming from heaven in a meadow, where they greet each other in festive mood and recount each other's experiences. "And those from [under the] earth told theirs

with sorrow and tears, as they recalled all they had suffered and seen on their underground journey, which lasted a thousand years, while the others told of the delights of heaven and of the wonderful beauty of what they had seen" (*Rep.*, 10.614e-15a). Then Socrates goes on to describe otherworldly punishments and rewards entailed by ethicization.

For every wrong he has done to anyone a man must pay the penalty in turn, ten times for each, that is to say, once every hundred years, this being reckoned as the span of a man's life. He pays, therefore tenfold retribution for each crime, and so for instance those who have been responsible for many deaths, by betraying state or army, or have cast others into slavery, or had a hand in any other crime, must pay tenfold in suffering for each offence. And correspondingly those who have done good and been just and god-fearing are rewarded in the same proportion." (*Rep.*, 10.615a-b)

Yet because wrongdoers have been punished and the good rewarded, they are all free souls now and can meet in the meadow and talk and socialize among themselves as moral equals. The only exceptions are especially cruel tyrants, who cannot ascend the chasm or enter the orifice that leads to rebirth. Er overhears one soul tell another the punishments meted out to tyrants and the very wicked.

For this is one of the terrible things we saw. We were near the mouth of the chasm and about to go up through it after all our sufferings when we suddenly saw him [Ardiaeus, the tyrant] and others, most of them tyrants, though there were a few who had behaved very wickedly in private life, whom the mouth [of the chasm] would not receive when they thought they were going to pass through. . . . There were some fierce and fiery-looking men standing by, who . . . seized some and led them away, while others like Ardiaeus they bound hand and foot and neck, flung them down and flayed them, and then impaled them on thorns by the roadside; and they told the passers-by the reason why this was done and said they were to be flung into Tartarus. (*Rep.*, 10.615e-16a)

Socrates concludes this part of the narrative: "These, then, are the punishments and penalties and the corresponding rewards of the other world" (*Rep.*, 10.616e).

The souls awaiting reentry into the human world have gathered in the meadow, where they spend seven days. They catch sight of a pillar of light that connects the heavens and the earth—an *axis mundi* familiar again in the shamanic traditions. Er has a beautiful description of this *axis mundi*, describing it as huge whorls of a spindle nesting on each other like bowls and supporting the planets and the stars. The whorls are under the control of Ananke, or Necessity. Ananke's daughters are the three

Fates, each one singing of things past, present, and future and turning the spindles that whirl the whorls, causing the movement of the heavenly spheres. I will skip the details and get to the judgment made by one of the Fates, the goddess Lachesis, assisted by an Interpreter.

The souls awaiting reincarnation assemble in groups before her and take numbered lots and also a multiplicity of life-forms of the sort found in our imperfect human world. The goddess tells them that they "must begin another round of mortal life whose end is death" (*Rep.*, 10.617d). No guardian spirit (*daimon*) is to be allotted to them; instead, they must choose their own. Each soul picks the lot that falls nearest it and then, on the basis of the numbered lots, begins to choose its next earthly life-form. "Then the Interpreter set before them on the ground the different patterns of life, far more in number than the souls who were to choose them. They were of every conceivable kind, animal and human. For there were tyrannies among them, some life-long, some falling in mid-career and ending in poverty, exile and beggary" (*Rep.*, 10.618a). There also were many good lives and bad both for men and for women to choose from. "There was no choice of quality of character since of necessity each soul must assume a character appropriate to its choice; but wealth and poverty, health and disease were all mixed in varying degrees in the lives to be chosen" (*Rep.*, 10.618b). Now Socrates, rather than Er, interrupts and exhorts us to choose wisely because the decision is a free one; we should be unmoved by the temptation of wealth and other evils and choose a middle course, specially avoiding "falling into the life of a tyrant or other evil doer and perpetrating unbearable evil" (*Rep.*, 10.619a).

The Interpreter then exhorts everyone to choose wisely because even the person with the last number has some choices left. In fact, the person who picked the first lot chose to be a tyrant owing to his "folly and greed" and lack of reflection. He did not realize that "it was his fate to eat his children and suffer other horrors; when he examined it at leisure, he beat his breast and bewailed his choice . . . and forgot that his misfortunes were his own fault" (*Rep.*, 10.619c).

What is striking about these rebirth choices is that souls who make the *wrong* choices came from heaven because they lacked "the discipline of suffering, while those who came from earth had suffered themselves and seen others suffer and were not so hasty with their choice" (*Rep.*, 10.619d). Here again Socrates intervenes and reveals the paradox in this situation: those who go back to earth and lead good lives will at death avoid the stony ground of the underworld (the region of punishment) and move instead along the smooth road of heaven. Yet those very people

in heaven, because of their lack of acquaintance with suffering, will end up by making bad rebirth choices. Ethicization step 2 associated with the karmic eschatology seems to be missing here.

The other rebirth choices that people make provoke pity, wonder, and laughter, says Er.

For the most part they followed the habits of their former life. And so he saw the soul that once had been Orpheus choose the life of a swan; it was unwilling to be born of a woman because it hated all women after its death at their hands . . . and he saw a swan and other singing birds choose the life of a man . . . Agamemnon who also because of his sufferings hated humanity chose to be an eagle . . . And there were many other changes from beast to man and beast to beast, the unjust changing into wild animals and the just into tame in every kind of interchange. (*Rep.*, 10.620a-d).

It seems there is an eschatological feature that is not explicitly spelled out in the text: in addition to the humans there are animals and birds assembled here, but it is not clear whether they all had free choice.

Once the souls have made their choices, they come back to Lachesis, who allocates each its chosen guardian spirit to guide it through life according to the choices the souls have made; Clotho ratifies the decision, and Atropos makes it irreversible. Then all the souls come to the throne of Ananke, or Necessity. The world into which they are about to be reborn is governed by scarcity, want, and lack of order, and it is appropriate that Ananke should be the one to see them off. From there to the barren plain of Lethe "through a terrible and stifling heat; for the land was without trees or any vegetation" (*Rep.*, 10.621a).

The climax of the story takes place when Er gets back into his own undecomposed corpse.

In the evening they encamped by the Forgetful River [Lethē] whose water no pitcher can hold. And all were compelled to drink a certain measure of its water; and those who had no wisdom to save them drank more than the measure. And as each man drank he forgot everything. They then went to sleep and when midnight came there was an earthquake and thunder, and like shooting stars they were all swept suddenly up and away, this way and that, to their birth. (*Rep.*, 10.621a-b).

Er alone is not required to drink from the river. According to the logic of the story, he cannot be permitted to drink the waters of forgetfulness because he must get back to his own body and report his experiences. He did not have Askadur's choice of being reborn in his sister's womb and retrocognizing his recent sojourn in the otherworld. "Er himself was forbidden to drink, and could not tell by what manner of means he re-

turned to his body; but suddenly he opened his eyes and it was dawn and he was lying on the pyre" (*Rep.*, 10.621b).

Let me now compare the eschatology underlying the myth of Er with the rebirth and karmic eschatologies and the preceding Greek ones. Insofar as animal rebirths are intrinsic to the Platonic eschatology of the myth of Er, it is, on the one hand, close to the Amerindian ones. Nevertheless, as in Buddhism, there is a strong development of judgmental ethics, although exclusively in respect to the otherworld (heaven and hell). We are back to the aporetic dilemma highlighted in respect to the Pin-daric eschatology; namely, *if people are punished and rewarded in the other world for what they have done on earth, then each person's slate has been wiped clean so that there is no need for rewards and punishments in the next human rebirth.* A similar dilemma is recognized by the Indian sage Vasistha when he says that "men who have committed offenses and have received from kings the punishment (due to them), go pure to heaven, and (become) as holy as the virtuous."¹⁵⁶ This dilemma is one that Buddhism ignores.

Let me consider how Plato tackles this problem. Those who have been good have gone to heaven and now are assembled at the meadow, where they meet those who have traveled underground for a thousand years undergoing suffering in the process. The latter have been immoral while on earth and have had to expiate their sins. Now they have a chance to be reborn once again on earth but without experiencing the joys of heaven; that prospect is available if they lead moral lives during their next rebirth. For now virtually everyone has reaped rewards or paid penalties, except for those whose sins have been so great that they are denied reentry into the human world. These extreme sinners suffer terribly in underworld hells like Tartarus. This issue is developed at length in Plato's earlier text *Phaedo*. Aside from these doomed ones, there is now a logical problem of how to dispose of the rest assembled at the rebirth orifice or, to put it less facetiously, how to put them back into the human world. Plato thus confronts the same problem that any rebirth eschatology must resolve.

Let me examine Plato's solution, beginning with what he does *not* do. He does not, and cannot, adopt the Amerindian solution in which the dead person is circled back into the same kin group. Plato lived in a society where such kinship ties made little sense. Moreover, having adopted a stern social morality at step 1 of the ethicization process, he cannot drop ethics in respect to the human rebirth. Instead Plato postulates a different kind of ethics: *because those who are seeking rebirth have fully*

expended their load of sin and merit, they now are given the freedom to choose what they want to be in their next incarnation. This freedom of choice is extended to the selection of a guardian spirit, or daimon. This is a logically impeccable solution and, given Athenian (democratic) values, a very reasonable one. However, "free choice" can produce its own dilemmas, which Plato does not mention: what if most people decide to be born as kings or as rich folk or as handsome ones? Indeed such choices would be motivationally expectable, yet most of us know that only a few kings or rich or handsome people live among us. This is apparently because Ananke and her daughters reign over the world of suffering and want. Hence Plato's unique solution: it is only the very few with a philosophical bent who can retain "an iron grip" at this critical juncture when "everything is at stake" and make truly reasoned choices. Most do not make reasoned choices because they are greedy or, more frequently, "because they followed the habits of their former life."¹⁵⁷ Moreover, once the choice has been made, there is no way it can be reversed, and the soul's fate on earth is sealed by Atropos.

However unique Plato's vision, the core of the Er eschatology then seems to be another logical way in which the rebirth eschatology is transformed. Considered in terms of that model, the entry to the otherworld is *conditioned* by the moral quality of one's life in this world. In the otherworld sin and merit are given appropriate punishments and rewards but with a finality that permits no carryover into the next human incarnation. A karma theory cannot emerge here because the conditionality of reward stops at step 1 of ethicization. Although this eschatology does not permit rebirth in the same kin group as in the Amerindian, its idea of species sentence is closer to the latter because it does not downgrade all animal rebirths as karmic eschatologies do. It does say, however, that those with evil dispositions will be born as wild animals and those with good dispositions as tame ones and yet others as befits their previous-life persona—but more of this in other Platonic myths. The myth of Er also ignores plants in its scheme of sentence, although this theme is picked up in the *Timaeus*. Finally, the Er eschatology, unlike the karma theory, is not a logic-tight system of ethical causality. Unlike Pindar's more humane and perhaps more representative popular vision, the myth of Er has a cynical view of human motivation. Free choice does not do much good for ordinary humanity because people will do what they have always done.

Although Plato's thesis might be true of much of human behavior, its motivational system of free choice cannot explain soteriologically why

people are born maimed, blind, or crippled; why the just suffer and evil flourishes like the green bay tree; or why infants die prematurely. In fact Er himself is much more sensitive to the last issue than Socrates. Er "told me too about infants who died as soon as they were born or who lived only a short time, but what he said is not worth recalling" (*Rep.*, 10.615c). In my view there is an ethical lack here: Plato's Socrates is not primarily interested in the fate of those ordinary persons trapped in the prison of the body. He is more concerned with the philosopher, who, as the true embodiment of wisdom and virtue, cultivates the soul and disregards the body. This aspect of Plato's thought is well known, and I will deal briefly with it in the next part of this book.

6 REBIRTH AND REASON

METACOSMESIS IN THE *PHAEDO*

Where does Plato come into our scheme of things? With him we are dealing with a thinker who carefully worked out a cosmology and eschatology of rebirth. I doubt that he would have done so had he not personally believed in its truth, and, for me, it is senseless to convert figures like the Buddha and Plato into figures of the European Enlightenment or, as some do, into modern and postmodern thinkers. Plato was not interested in conversion, but he addressed his message to those willing to listen, which for the most part meant the members of his academy. Nevertheless, like us he had to persuade his listeners and interlocutors to agree with him, and, like the Buddha, he did it through a form of dialogical discourse with *dramatis personae* who acted as strategic interlocutors. But unlike those of any other thinker that we have dealt with, Plato's doctrines of rebirth derived their force through the human faculty of Reason. I want to contrast this apotheosized Reason of the Greek Enlightenment with the "Buddhist Enlightenment," in which reason is only given secondary place. All forms of Buddhism subscribe to the distinction between conventional and ultimate truths (Pali, *sammutṭi sacca* and *paramatṭha sacca*); ultimate truths are apprehended through penetration (*paññedha*), that is, through meditational asceticism and not through reason.

Socrates' retelling of Er's death and return is prefaced by a discussion of the evidences for the immortality of the soul, a well-known Platonic