Platonic Mysteries

The Orphic Seeds of Plato's Philosophy

Cristiana Sessini

Oriel College

University of Oxford

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Abstract

This thesis provides an in-depth analysis of Plato's engagement with ancient Greek mystery religion, which I consider collectively under the traditional umbrella term of 'Orphism'. By comparing key passages from the Platonic dialogues with ancient Orphic texts, such as the Derveni papyrus and the gold tablets, and other Orphic material, I show how Plato adopted (and adapted) from the Orphic tradition certain core themes and ideas, which provided the foundation for his mature philosophical views: that is to say, above all, the belief in the primacy of the soul over the body, and the devaluation of the material world in favour of the invisible realm. The result is a new interpretative approach to the work of Plato, based on a radical re-evaluation of the mystic and religious aspects of his thought. Such an approach not only allows for a deeper and more well-rounded understanding of Plato's writings and philosophy but also offers new important insights on early Orphism and on its role in Greek intellectual history. Therefore, this study will be of interest to students of ancient religion, as well as Plato scholars.

The first part of the thesis is dedicated to defining 'Orphism': Chapter 1 contains a brief history of the scholarship, followed by a discussion of the methodological challenges inherent to the study of Orphism and a survey of the evidence pertaining to early Orphism; Chapter 2 examines the interrelationships between the Bacchic mysteries, the Eleusinian mysteries, early Pythagoreanism, and the Orphic cult (which I consider all as different manifestations of the same religious phenomenon), and provides a working definition of 'Orphism' based on a careful review of the ancient evidence. Part II is dedicated to analysing the Orphic elements in Platonic eschatology, metaphysics, and cosmology, highlighting the paradigm-shifting potential inherent in the Orphic movement and fully realised in Plato's 'Two Worlds' theory. Chapter 3 examines Plato's reception of Orphic

ideas about the human soul and the afterlife, with an extensive focus on the eschatological myths of the *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, and *Republic*. Chapter 4 analyses the Platonic theory of recollection and its links to the Orphic tradition. Chapter 5 examines the parallels between Orphic dualism and Plato's theory of Forms and offers a novel analysis of the allegory of the Cave. Chapter 6 examines the influence of the Orphic theogony and anthropogony on the creation story of the *Timaeus*, highlighting the affinities between the Platonic Demiurge and the Orphic creator god(s); the final section of Ch. 6 analyses the myth of the *Statesman* and its Hesiodic and Orphic precedents, arguing in favour of a Platonic theory of cosmic cycles.

Texts, translations, and abbreviations

Orphic fragments and testimonies are quoted according to Bernabé's Teubner edition (2004-2007), cited as *OF*. Passages from the Derveni papyrus are cited according to the first complete edition by Kouremenos, Parássoglou, and Tsantsanoglou (2006), abbreviated as KPT; quotations follow the most recent edition by Kotwick (2017), unless otherwise stated. Passages from Plato and other ancient authors not included in *OF* are quoted according to the editions of the Oxford Classical Texts. All translations are my own, unless otherwise stated. Greek authors are cited according to the abbreviations in Liddell and Scott's *Greek-English Lexicon*. Abbreviations of journal titles follow those of *l'Année philologique*. Common abbreviations of modern collections of fragments and journals not included in the list of *l'Année philologique* are as follows.

AAAN	*Atti della Reale Accademia di Archeologia, Lettere e Belle Arti di Napoli*.
ARG	*Archiv für Religionsgeschichte*.
BNJ	Worthington, I., et al., eds (2007-), *Brill's New Jacoby* (Leiden).
DELG	Chantraine, P. (1980), *Dictionnaire etymologique de la langue grecque* (Paris).
DK	Diels, H., and W. Kranz (1961), Die Fragment der Vorsokratiker, 2 vols, 10th edn (Berlin).
DNP	Cancik, H., H. Schneider, B. Egger, J. Derlien, et al., eds (1996-2010), *Der Neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike*, 16 vols (Stuttgart and Weimar).
FgrHist	Jacoby, F., et al., eds (1923-), *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, 4 vols (Berlin and Leiden).
FZPhTh	*Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie*.

HSCP	*Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*.
IG	*Inscriptiones Graecae* (Berlin, 1873-).
IGASMG III	Arena, R., ed. (1994), *Iscrizioni greche arcaiche di Sicilia e Magna Grecia*, Vol. 3 (Pisa).
KA	Kassel, R., and C. Austin, eds (2001), *Poetae comici Graeci*, Vol. 1 (Berlin and New York).
LIMC	Ackermann, H.C., J.-R. Gisler, and L. Kahil, eds (1981-1997), *Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae*, 8 vols (Zurich).
LM	Laks, A., and G.W. Most, eds (2016), *Early Greek Philosophy*, 9 vols (Cambridge, MA and London).
PMG	Page, D.L., ed. (1962), *Poetae melici Graeci* (Oxford).
PMGF	Davies, M., ed. (1991), *Poetarum melicorum Graecorum fragmenta*, Vol. 1 (Oxford).
RE	Pauly, A.F., von, and G. Wissowa, eds (1894-1978), *Real-Encylopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (Stuttgart).
SM	Snell, B., and H. Maehler, eds (1987-1989), *Pindari carmina cum fragmentis*, 2 vols (Leipzig).
SVF	Arnim, H. v., ed. (1903-1905), *Stoicorum veterum* fragmenta, 3 vols (Stuttgart).
TAPA	*Transactions of the American Philological Association*.
TrGF	Snell, B., et al., eds (1971-2004), *Tragicorum Graecorum fragmenta*, 5 vols (Göttingen).
ZfGW	*Zeitschrift für das Gymnasialwesen*.

Introduction

πανταχοῦ γὰρ ὁ Πλάτων παρῳδεῖ τὰ τοῦ Ὀρφέως

Everywhere, indeed, Plato borrows from Orpheus

Olympiodorus, *in Phaedonem* 10.3

The original impetus for the research which produced this thesis was born, many years ago, from a single sentence in a commentary on Plato's *Symposium*, a passing remark on the "Orphic doctrine" of the cosmic egg.[1] I was thus drawn to the study of the Orphic theogonies and, subsequently, of Orphic eschatology, which led me to realise that there was a lot more 'Orphism' in Plato beyond the parody of cosmogonic motifs in the speech of Aristophanes. In the myths of the afterlife, I discovered a side of Plato which was completely antithetical to the rationalist and ironist caricature which contemporary secularised scholarship, with some notable exceptions, tends to project on the founder of Western philosophy.[2] The more I read of Plato and of what remains of the Orphic texts which are referenced in his writings, the more I became convinced that Plato's indebtedness to Orphism was far deeper than a mere borrowing of mythical imagery and tropes. It also became clear to me that the eschatological passages in Plato's dialogues could not simply be ignored or minimised without undermining the philosophical arguments to which they are intimately tied: these include not only arguments about the nature of the soul but also about the possibility of acquiring knowledge through the recollection of the Forms – in

[1] Reale 2001, 198 *ad* Pl. *Smp*. 190d-e.

[2] Whitehead's (1929, 39) characterisation of European philosophy as "a series of footnotes to Plato" is well known. Similar views have also been expressed by contemporary scholars (cf. Kraut 1992, 1: "Plato […] stands at the head of the Western philosophical tradition, the first to write on a wide range of topics still discussed by philosophers today […]. He may in this sense be said to have invented philosophy as a distinct subject"). On Plato's 'invention' of philosophy, see Nightingale 1995, 13-59.

short, some of the fundamental aspects of Plato's mature philosophy. Hence, the research question that I set out to answer was not only whether a particular passage or motif in Plato's work was influenced by (or related, in some way, to) Orphism – for there already existed several scholarly contributions on that subject – but also, and more importantly, whether Plato's use of Orphic language and imagery reflected a deeper ideological affinity with the Orphic tradition: in other words, what role did Orphism play in the development of Plato's thought, and how should this knowledge affect our understanding of his works and of his philosophy as a whole? The answer to these questions, which will be articulated over the course of this thesis, is my original contribution to the scholarship on Plato and on the history of ideas in ancient Greece.

0.1 Background

The influence of Orphism and mystery religion on Plato's thought was generally recognised by scholars until the early 1940s,[3] when the scepticism generated by the publication of Wilamowitz's *Glaube der Hellenen* (1931-1932) effectively banished any talk of an early Orphic movement from scholarly discourse for the next four decades. It was only relatively recently, after the existence of an Orphic cult in pre-Hellenistic Greece was unequivocally confirmed by new archaeological finds published in the late 1970s and early 1980s,[4] that scholars began to reconsider the question of Plato's relationship with Orphism. Aside from Feibleman's 1959 book, *Religious Platonism*, which dedicates a chapter to 'The influence of Orphism' on Plato, and Guthrie's two volumes on Plato (1975; 1978), which contain

[3] See Rohde 1894, 555-586; Dieterich 1893, 108-136; Weber 1899; Windelband 1900, 125-149; Cornford 1903; Stewart 1905, 64-71; More 1921, 155, 190, 303; Diès 1927, II, 438-449; Frutiger 1930, 249-265; Guthrie 1952, 238-244; Boyancé 1942; Solmsen 1942, 123-127.
[4] On the Derveni papyrus and the other discoveries which revolutionised the study of Orphism in the second half of the twentieth century, see below §§1.1; 1.3.2.

numerous references to Orphism and Pythagoreanism, no major studies were published on the subject until the late 1980s. The first chapter in Riedweg's 1987 study, *Mysterienterminologie bei Platon, Philon und Klemens von Alexandrien* – originally written as a dissertation under the supervision of Walter Burkert – examines Plato's use of Orphic and Eleusinian mystery terminology in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*. Masaracchia's 1993 paper, titled 'Orfeo e gli orfici in Platone', analyses the Platonic testimonies on Orpheus and the Orphics, focusing especially on the negative ones, from which the author infers that Plato had a critical or even adversarial attitude towards Orphism. A similar approach was taken by Bernabé in his 1998 paper on Plato and Orphism ('Platone e l'orfismo'), later expanded into a book.

To this day, Bernabé's *Platón y el orfismo* (2011) is the only full-length study on Plato's reception of Orphism. In this indispensable book, Bernabé – one of the foremost living experts on Orphism, on which he has written and edited an outstanding number of works – collates and examines all the Orphic testimonies in Plato's work: Part I looks at the Platonic testimonies on Orpheus and his followers; Part II analyses the Platonic passages which reference or echo Orphic doctrines and ideas (including the cosmogonic myths, the immortality of soul, the soul/body dichotomy, the myth of Dionysus and the Titans, and the visions of the afterlife); Part III examines Plato's methods of Orphic 'transposition', following the approach set out by Diès in a now classic book (1927); Part IV contains a synthesis of the previous three parts, as well as a brief discussion on the reception of Orphism by authors earlier than Plato. Bernabé's conclusion, which I will partially challenge, is that Plato was drawn to certain ideas expressed in the Orphic texts but held a negative opinion of Orpheus and his cult, which is why he avoided mentioning Orpheus explicitly in connection with those ideas which he adopted as his own.[5]

[5] Bernabé 2011, 250-253, 261.

The past thirty years or so have seen several contributions on Plato's reception of Orphism and other mystery cults, mostly focusing on Plato's appropriation of mystic imagery and lexicon, as well as his use of Orphic mythic motifs.[6] Two recent publications are especially worth mentioning. Betegh's essay in the second edition of *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, titled 'Plato on Philosophy and the Mysteries', focuses especially on the use of Eleusinian motifs in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* and on the Orphic elements of the Platonic myths of the afterlife, arguing that "Plato's engagement" with mystery religion "can help to illuminate such centrally important topics as his conception of the philosophical life, its relation to the human good, the role of memory in the knowledge of the Forms, and the soul's kinship to the divine".[7] A similar view is defended by Nightingale in her latest book, *Philosophy and Religion in Plato's Dialogues* (2021): this much needed monograph examines the religious and theological dimension of Plato's psychology, ontology, epistemology, and cosmology, focusing specifically on the *Symposium*, *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, and *Timaeus*. In addition to highlighting Plato's use of Orphic and Eleusinian language in his description of philosophy as mystery initiation and his depiction of the noetic vision of the Forms as a divine epiphany or sacred spectacle, Nightingale identifies a number of "divinity-markers" which Plato applies to the Forms and the (rational) soul. Her conclusion, which partly anticipates my own, is that the mystic language used by Plato in the discussion of his most important theories is not mere window-dressing but rather an expression of his conception of philosophy as the study of the eternal, divine principles which inform reality.

[6] Bernabé 1995; 1999; 2007a; 2013a; 2013b; 2016a; 2018; Mancini 1999; Casadesús 2000; 2008a; 2015; 2016a; Edmonds 2004, 159-220; 2014; Bussanich 2013; Bergomi 2014; Wasmuth 2015; Gómez Iglesias 2016; Rodríguez 2016; Santamaría 2016a; Corsino 2019; Kotwick 2019; Dinkelaar 2020; Nightingale 2021, 64-167; Betegh 2022.
[7] Betegh 2022, 233.

These recent contributions by Nightingale (2021) and Betegh (2022) will hopefully stimulate a renewed attention in contemporary scholarship towards the religious components of Plato's philosophy, beyond the level of linguistic and literary analysis; for it is impossible, in my view, to understand the work of Plato without a proper appreciation of its theological dimension. Only by understanding the divine nature of those highest principles known as Platonic Forms, for example, can one properly assess (and reject) such erroneous interpretations as those which ascribe to Plato the belief in the existence of the 'Form of mud' or the 'ideal Bed'.[8] Moreover, one cannot fully comprehend the ascetic and soteriological themes which pervade Plato's writings – and which inform his very definition of philosophy – if one ignores the role of the mystic and Orphic religious tradition in Plato's philosophical development. I hope, therefore, that the present study will contribute to a re-evaluation of the religious and mystic elements in Plato's thought, but this is not its only aim. Indeed, the argument which will take shape over the following chapters leads to a more radical conclusion, with wide-ranging implications not only for Platonic scholarship but also for the history of ancient religion and of Western thought, more broadly. I will speak more in detail later about the aims and content of the thesis, but first I must say a few words on the interpretive and methodological issues raised by my research.

0.2 Method

My thesis will inquire into the relationship between Plato's philosophy and Orphism by analysing key passages from the dialogues in connection with a range of Orphic (and non-

[8] The existence of Forms of "hair, mud, or dirt" is posited as a *reductio ad absurdum* in the *Parmenides* (130c-d), while the famous example of the 'three beds' from *Republic* X (596a-597e) is, as Halliwell (1988, 110 *ad* 596b3) puts it, merely "an *ad hoc* adaptation of Plato's theory of Forms", where the existence of Forms of concrete particulars is required by the critique of figurative art, which in turn serves as a premise for the subsequent attack against imitative poetry.

Orphic) sources. In so doing, I will favour, as much as possible, Orphic texts and testimonies dating up to the fourth century BC, to avoid projecting the features of an already Platonised Orphism on the Orphic tradition known to Plato. As there is still no unanimous consensus among scholars on what criteria should be used to identify a particular text or idea as 'Orphic' – aside, of course, from an explicit attribution – I will provide my own working definition of 'Orphism' in the first part of the thesis, where I will also give an overview of the Orphic debate up to the present day.

In my analysis of Plato's reception of Orphism, I will use a number of key terms and concepts, which I will now briefly define, starting with 'reception' itself. I understand the term 'reception' as encompassing any and all ways in which an author – in this case, Plato – interacts with material from another author or tradition: these range from simple quotations and allusions to more elaborate echoes, which often involve a significant reinterpretation and/or re-elaboration of the source material.[9] I use the term 'reference' and its cognate verbs in a similar sense, to describe any instance where another source is cited, paraphrased, or echoed, regardless of the level of elaboration. To describe the active and creative component of Plato's reception of Orphic material and ideas, I use the term '(philosophical) transposition', which I adopted from Bernabé (2011, 233-246) and Diès (1927, II, 400-449): this is the process by which Plato transfers images and concepts from the realm of mystery religion to that of philosophical inquiry. A prime example of this technique is Plato's use of mystery initiation as a metaphor for philosophy,[10] which I reference in the title of my thesis. I argue, however, that Plato's transposition of Orphism goes beyond the level of metaphor and symbolism and involves the very foundation of his

[9] Cf. Hardwick and Stray 2011, 1: "By 'receptions' we mean the ways in which Greek and Roman material has been transmitted, translated, excerpted, interpreted, rewritten, re-imaged and represented". Recently, Baker et al. (2019, 3f.) have proposed to replace the term 'reception', which suggests passivity and unidirectionality, with 'transformation', which emphasises the active role of the receiving author or tradition.
[10] See, e.g., Pl. *Men.* 76e, *Phd.* 69c-d = *OF* 434iii, 576i, 80e, *Phdr*. 249c-d, *Smp.* 209e, *Tht*. 155e.

thought. The second part of my thesis will thus trace the influence of Orphism in Plato's core philosophical theories, highlighting the transformative process which allowed the Orphic 'seeds' to bloom and grow into the luxuriant tree of Plato's mature thought.

I will now finally discuss my approach to a few key interpretive questions pertaining to the study of Plato, which will become relevant over the course of the thesis. My approach to Plato is based on the literary, linguistic, and historical analysis of his work; my analysis will have, however, significant implications for the interpretation of Plato's philosophy. Indeed, as most scholars recognise, it is impossible to gain an accurate understanding of Plato's writings – and of the ideas expressed therein – without analysing them against their historical and cultural context. This, of course, is a necessary but far from sufficient condition, as the dialogical form of Plato's works carries with it its own interpretive problems. First and foremost, are we justified in attributing to Plato the views expressed by certain characters – most notably Socrates, but also other characters, such as Parmenides, Timaeus, and the Athenian Stranger, who replace Socrates as the main speaker in some of Plato's later dialogues?[11] To what degree are the opinions voiced by the character Socrates representative of the historical Socrates, and does this change over the course of Plato's writing career? More generally, is it possible to derive a coherent account of Plato's philosophical theories from the dialogues, or should these be treated as self-standing literary works? More recent scholarship has given more attention to the literary and dialogic aspects of Plato's works, grounding the philosophical interpretation of the arguments which they contain in the analysis of their dramatic framing;[12] most scholars combine this 'literary' approach with elements of the traditional 'dogmatic' approach, which sought to reconstruct the content and/or development of Plato's philosophical doctrine based on the dialogues

[11] On the question of Plato's anonymity, see Press 2000. On the characters in Plato's dialogues, see the monographs written by Blondell (2002) and Nails (2002).
[12] For further discussion of the current trends in Platonic scholarship, see Press 2018.

and, in some cases, on the testimonies of other sources, chiefly Aristotle. My approach is broadly aligned with this 'new' consensus. As I said earlier, I believe that a holistic interpretation of the Platonic texts – one that takes into account their textual and contextual aspects and considers their literary and dialogic form as intimately connected to their philosophical message – should be the basis for any serious inquiry into Plato's philosophy. I also believe that such inquiry is possible and legitimate, at least as far as Plato's 'exoteric' doctrines are concerned.[13] The critique of writing contained in the *Phaedrus* (274e-278b) and in the controversial *Seventh Letter* (340b-341e) does not, in my view, invalidate this effort, as its object is not writing per se but rather the belief that the written word could be a substitute for live discourse: this is perfectly consistent with the practice of Plato, who wrote not comprehensive treatises or manuals, but works of literature which mirrored and complemented his teaching at the Academy.

With regard to the so-called Socratic problem, I believe, as most scholars do, that the Socrates of the middle-period dialogues is essentially a spokesman for Plato's own ideas, whereas the early dialogues offer a more faithful representation of the real Socrates, in line with the testimonies of other ancient sources.[14] That said, the task of disentangling the views of the historical Socrates from those of Plato is not a straightforward one; therefore, whenever I speak of 'Socrates' throughout this thesis, I am referring – unless otherwise specified – to the character created by Plato, and to whom Plato assigns his own views and theories. While it is reasonable to assume, as it is generally agreed, that the main speaker in any given dialogue, be it Socrates or someone else, embodies the author's

[13] This is not to say that the efforts of scholars from the 'Tübingen School' (along with a few others) to reconstruct Plato's unwritten doctrines are not legitimate or worthwhile, but their theories, admittedly, stand on much less firm ground. On the 'esoteric' Plato, see most recently Nikulin 2012.

[14] The ancient testimonies on Socrates are collected in Giannantoni 1990, I. For an account of the thought and method of the historical Socrates based on Plato's early dialogues, see the classic study by Vlastos (1991). Vlastos' influential interpretation has recently come under criticism: on this, see Dorion 2011, which reviews the "rise and fall of the Socratic problem".

perspective, the views expressed by other characters, especially in the case of real, historical people, should be considered representative of those characters' beliefs and personalities, regardless of whether Plato might have agreed with them. Although each dialogue is constructed as a self-contained literary work, with a beginning, a middle, and an end,[15] and its own specific focus, there are nonetheless recurring themes and common threads which invite the reader to connect and compare the dialogues with one another. Likewise, despite some occasional inconsistencies, which may or may not reflect an actual evolution in Plato's views over the course of his career, I believe that it is possible to identify a set of core principles from which Plato never deviated. This moderate approach, adopted for example by Kahn (1996) and Rowe (2007), overcomes the old divide between unitarianism and developmentalism, incorporating insights from both interpretations. Another question which has divided interpreters of Plato has to do with the role of myths and images in the Platonic *corpus*. This topic has received increased attention in recent years, leading to a more nuanced assessment of Plato's use of mythical and metaphorical language.[16] The new emerging consensus, with which my approach is aligned, recognises the importance of myth and metaphor within Plato's philosophical project and rejects the traditional dichotomy between metaphorical and literal interpretation.

Finally, I must say a few words about the scope of the present study and, more specifically, about what has been left out due to space constraints. The aim of my thesis is not to provide a comprehensive survey of all the Orphic references in Plato's writings,[17] nor to offer an account of Plato's religious and theological views,[18] but rather to assess Orphism's contribution to Plato's philosophy. The breadth of Plato's work has forced me to be selective in my treatment, focusing exclusively on the areas of his philosophy in which

[15] Cf. Pl. *Phdr*. 264c.
[16] See, for instance, the essays in Collobert et al. 2012 and Destrée and Edmonds 2017.
[17] This important work, as I mentioned earlier, has already been done by Bernabé (2011).
[18] On Plato's philosophical theology, see esp. Dombrowski 2005 and Nightingale 2022.

Orphic influence is most pervasive – namely, eschatology, cosmology, and metaphysics. The selection of dialogues which are referenced through the course of the thesis is therefore also necessarily partial. Lastly, I have had to forgo discussing other influences on Plato's thinking, particularly certain Presocratic philosophers – such as Parmenides and Empedocles, among others – who might have acted as mediators of Orphic ideas for Plato. This is an important and complex topic, which deserves its own separate study. Thus, for the purpose of this thesis, I will limit myself to noting any possible such instance of Presocratic mediation, referring the reader to existing literature for further discussion. Similarly, I will only comment in passing on the possible influence of early Pythagorean philosophy on Plato,[19] focusing primarily on the religious side of Pythagoreanism, which I regard as part of the same 'Orphic' milieu – broadly defined – to which the Eleusinian and Bacchic mystery cults also belong.

0.3 Plan

The central argument of this thesis is that the essence of Platonism – that is, the belief in a higher plane of existence beyond the material realm and the consequent devaluation of the latter in favour of the former – has its origin in the alternative worldview propagated by the tradition of the mysteries, which I consider collectively under the umbrella term of 'Orphism'. By comparing relevant passages from the dialogues with the extant Orphic sources, I will show how Plato appropriated, philosophically transposing them, the core ideas expressed in the Orphic tradition by means of myths and symbols – most notably, the belief in the immortality (and divinity) of the human soul and the idea of the universe as the product of a purposeful act of creation – and developed around them a new coherent

[19] For a detailed study of Plato's relationship with Pythagoreanism, see Horky 2013.

thought system. I will also show that Plato's use of mystic imagery and vocabulary, far from being a mere rhetorical flourish, stems from his adoption of certain (Orphic) religious attitudes and beliefs, which provide the spiritual foundation for his entire philosophical project.

The thesis is divided into two parts. Part One is dedicated to defining Orphism, particularly in relation to the other major mystery cults of ancient Greece. Chapter 1 contains a brief history of the scholarship on Orphism (§1.1), followed by a discussion of the methodological challenges inherent to the study of Orphism, which stem primarily from the fragmentary nature and relative scarcity of ancient sources with explicit Orphic attribution (§1.2). The final section of the first chapter describes how the mythical figure of Orpheus, originally associated with Apollo, came to be regarded as the founder of the mysteries (§1.3.1) and provides a survey of the most important epigraphic and literary evidence pertaining to early Orphism (§1.3.2-3). The sources listed in the final section of the first chapter form the basis for the comparative analysis of Platonic and Orphic doctrines which will be conducted in the (much longer) second part of the thesis; this foundation will be occasionally supplemented with late-Hellenistic or even late-antique sources – which, as the discovery of the Derveni papyrus has proven, can preserve much earlier material. Chapter 2 examines the links between Orphism and other ancient Greek mystery cults: namely, the Bacchic mysteries (§2.1), the Eleusinian mysteries (§2.2), and Pythagoreanism (§2.3). Following Nilsson (1935) and Burkert (1977), I argue that all these cults should be regarded as different manifestations of the same religious phenomenon, characterised by the belief in the immortality of the soul and by a special concern for its post-mortem fate. In the final section of Chapter 2 (§2.4), I provide my own working definition of Orphism based on the survey of the evidence and the methodological considerations presented in the first two chapters.

Part Two of the thesis is dedicated to analysing the Orphic elements in Plato's eschatology, epistemology, metaphysics, and cosmology. Chapter 3 examines Plato's reception of Orphic ideas about the human soul and the afterlife. I begin by comparing Plato's psychological paradigm with the Homeric and Orphic conceptions of the human soul, showing how Plato drew upon both to produce a nuanced theory of the nature of the soul and of its relationship with the body (§3.1). I then analyse how the immortal nature of the soul, presented by the Orphics as a truth of religion, is defended by Plato through logical argumentation (§3.2). I conclude by examining the eschatological myths of the *Gorgias* (§3.3.1), *Phaedo* (§3.3.2), *Phaedrus* (§3.3.3), and *Republic* (§3.3.4), highlighting their Orphic affinities. Chapter 4 deals with Plato's epistemology, with special attention to the theory of recollection and its links to the Orphic tradition. Chapter 5 explains how the dualistic worldview espoused by the Orphics was applied by Plato not just to the individual but to the whole of reality, with his theory of Forms. Section 1 examines the Orphic precedent for Plato's use of pairs of opposites in his discussion of the Forms, while Section 2 analyses the Orphic subtext in the allegory of the Cave and advances a novel interpretation of the epistemology of *Republic* VI-VII. The sixth and final chapter analyses the influence of the Orphic cosmo-theogonic tradition on Plato's cosmology, highlighting the similarities between the creation of the universe in the Orphic theogony and the creation story of the *Timaeus* (§6.1); Section 2 compares the Orphic anthropogony with the creation of mankind in the *Timaeus* myth, while Section 3 makes the case for a Platonic theory of cosmic cycles, based chiefly on the comparative analysis of the myth of the *Statesman* and its Hesiodic and Orphic sources.

In the Conclusion, I address the contradiction, highlighted by Bernabé (2011) and others, between Plato's adoption of Orphic ideas and mythical imagery and his apparent antipathy towards the character of Orpheus, the Orphic priests, and their clientele. I argue,

to the contrary, that most of the references to Orpheus and his followers in Plato's dialogues are either positive or neutral, and that the only 'Orphics' whom Plato truly despises are the itinerant charlatan priests who (mis)use the Orphic texts and rituals for monetary gain. The fact that most of the Orphic references in Plato's writings are implicit should not be interpreted as a sign of his supposed disdain for Orpheus or the Orphics but rather as an example of what Diès (1927) calls 'Platonic transposition': that is to say, the process by which Plato appropriates and transforms certain ideas and themes, thereby making them his own. I then summarise the key findings of each individual chapter and bring them together to paint a coherent picture of Plato's interactions with the Orphic tradition: this will amount to a radical re-evaluation of the mystic and religious elements of Plato's thought, as well as a substantial reinterpretation of the essence (and origin) of Platonism, based on the recognition of the fundamental role played by Orphism in the development of Plato's most distinctive and revolutionary theories, from the "twin pillars"[20] of the theory of Forms and the immortality of the soul to the idea of the cosmos as the product of a purposeful act of creation carried out by a rational and benevolent supreme deity.

[20] Cornford 1941, xxv.

PART I

Orphism in the Classical Age

1. Defining 'Orphism'

Although a great deal of progress has been made over the past century in the scholarship on Orphism, the mention of anything 'Orphic' is still often met with a mix of confusion and scepticism. As I will show in the first two chapters of this thesis, the so-called Orphic question, which gave rise to "one of the most impassioned debates in the history of Classical Studies",[1] is, in large part, a question of definitions. If this is so, one might ask, why not adopt a less problematic label, such as 'mystery religion'? My reasons are threefold. Firstly, Plato specifically mentions Orpheus and his followers and quotes directly from Orphic literature. Secondly, the use of the term 'Orphism' is legitimised by its long-established history in scholarship and to replace it would mean to needlessly break from the scholarly tradition. Finally, abandoning the 'Orphic' label would not solve the difficulties concerning the dating and reconstruction of the evidence, which, as we shall see, plague the study of Orphism and ancient mystery religion more broadly. Consequently, before I can proceed with my analysis of the Platonic texts, I must first clarify what I mean exactly by 'Orphism' and 'Orphic'. I will start with a brief overview of the history of Orphic studies, which will highlight the different approaches and frames of reference employed by scholars over the past two centuries. I will then provide my own working definition of 'Orphism', along with a survey of the evidence selected in accordance with my methodological approach.

[1] Herrero 2010a, 14.

1.1 A history of the scholarship

Nineteenth and early twentieth-century scholarship tended to project the model of the early Christian Church on the Orphic mysteries, due in part to the numerous similarities, uncovered by the newly established field of *Religionswissenschaft*, between Christianity and Greek mystery religion. Thus, up until the first half of the twentieth century, Orphism was generally understood as an organised religious movement which hailed Orpheus as its prophet and founder and shared a coherent set of practices and beliefs codified in a body of sacred texts attributed to Orpheus himself. Even Christian August Lobeck, who is widely regarded as the father of modern Orphic scholarship, was firmly steeped in the Christian frame of reference, comparing, for example, the Orphic priests to the Jesuits, whom he both saw as charlatans and peddlers of vulgar superstition.[2] Unlike his teacher, Gottfried Hermann, who had published an edition of the three extant Orphic texts (*Hymns*, *Argonautica*, and *Lithica*),[3] Lobeck chose to focus his attention on the ancient testimonies surrounding the Orphic mysteries, which are meticulously collected and analysed in the second volume of his *Aglaophamus sive de theologiae mysticae Graecorum causis* (1829). This monumental work of rigorous philological scholarship was written in response to the claims made by members of the Romantic school, chief among them Friedrich Creuzer, who in his highly influential – and controversial – book on ancient mythology, *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen* (1810-1812), argued that the religions of ancient Greece, Persia, Egypt, and Phoenicia all stemmed from a prehistoric

[2] Lobeck 1829, 964. On the ways in which the *Kulturkampf* between Protestants and Catholics influenced the early scholarship on Orphism and Greek mystery religion, see Smith 1990.
[3] Hermann 1805. The eighty-seven *Orphic Hymns* that have been handed down by the manuscript tradition together with the hymns of Homer, Callimachus, and Proclus were probably composed by a single author between the second and third century AD, while the *Argonautica* and the *Lithica* – two hexameter poems which deal, respectively, with Orpheus' adventures with the Argonauts and with the magical properties of twenty-nine stones – hardly predate the fourth century AD (see West 1983a, 28f., 36f.).

monotheistic religion spread around the world by itinerant priests from the mountainous regions of India. According to Creuzer, this ancient wisdom was expressed by the Orphics – and, later, by the Neoplatonists – in symbolic form, and by Homer and Hesiod in mythical form.

The rivalry between Lobeck and Creuzer foreshadows the divide between ‘minimalists’ (or ‘Orpheo-sceptics’) and ‘maximalists’ (or ‘pan-Orphics’), which has characterised the scholarly debate around Orphism since the 1920s. The former group has endeavoured to reconstruct a historically accurate image of early Orphism, free from any Hellenistic or Neoplatonic elaboration, whereas the latter has sought to investigate any reference or connection to the Orphic tradition throughout antiquity, leading to a broader and more inclusive definition of Orphism. Both approaches have their own merits, and, as I shall outline in the following paragraphs, have produced equally important works, many of which remain fundamental to this day. A first turning point in the history of Orphic scholarship occurred towards the end of the nineteenth century with the discovery of five gold tablets in the necropolis of Thurii (*OF* 487-490, 492), first published in 1879-1880 by Domenico Comparetti. By comparing the content of the tablets with Pindar’s *Second Olympian* (vv. 56-72 = *OF* 445) and with Olympiodorus’ account of the Orphic myth of Dionysus (*in Phd*. 1.3 [41 Westerink] = *OF* 320i), the Italian scholar concluded that both the Thurii tablets and a similar tablet previously found in Petelia (*OF* 476) must have belonged to initiates of the Orphic-Bacchic mysteries. Comparetti’s interpretation of the gold tablets as *Totenpässe* containing verses from an Orphic eschatological poem was adopted by Dieterich (1893) and Rohde (1894) and, partly thanks to their influence, became canonical shortly thereafter, as evidenced by the fact that the Thurii tablets were included in Diels’ *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (1903) – where Orpheus figures as the first Presocratic thinker – and in Kern’s *Orphicorum fragmenta* (1922).

As was hinted above, the relationship between Christianity and Orphism was one of the chief concerns of early Orphic scholarship. Albrecht Dieterich highlighted many striking parallels between the early Christian view of the afterlife and that of the Orphics in his *Nekyia: Beiträge zur Erklärung der neuentdeckten Petrusapokalypse* (1893), but Vittorio Macchioro (*Zagreus: Studi intorno all'orfismo*, 1920; 2nd edn, 1930), arguably the most extreme representative of the maximalist position, went considerably further, postulating a direct influence of Orphic mythology – especially the Orphic myth of Dionysus, with its soteriological implications – on Pauline Christianity. Not surprisingly, this theory attracted many critics, first and foremost André Boulanger, who provided a lucid refutation of Macchioro's claims in his *Orphée: Rapports de l'orphisme et du christianisme* (1925). While Boulanger's reaction against the distorted picture painted by Macchioro was certainly justified, it paved the way for a wave of scepticism that would effectively banish Orphism from scholarly discourse for nearly half a century, until new archaeological finds unequivocally confirmed the existence of an Orphic movement in pre-Hellenistic Greece.

The event that sealed this radical shift in attitude towards Orphism was the posthumous publication of Wilamowitz's last work, *Der Glaube der Hellenen* (1931-1932), in which the *princeps philologorum* denied the Orphic nature of the gold tablets – which he regarded as the expression of an alien spirituality, possibly Egyptian in origin – and even the very existence of the Orphic mysteries.[4] Despite holding radically opposing views on Orphism, Wilamowitz and his contemporaries on the maximalist side shared the same underlying assumptions about Classical Greece, which led them to identify as foreign

[4] Wilamowitz 1932, 190-207. It is worth noting that Wilamowitz initially subscribed to the *communis opinio* on Orphism and explicitly acknowledged its influence on Greek culture: in the *Homerische Untersuchungen* (1884, 199f.), for example, he attributed the interpolation of *Od*. 11.566-631 to the Athenian chresmologue Onomacritus, who is mentioned as an author of Orphic poems by various ancient sources (*OF* 1109-1119), and in the first volume of his *Platon* (1919, 338) he recognised the impact of Orphic and Pythagorean doctrines on Platonic eschatology. The reason for such a radical change of heart is not entirely clear, but as Graf (2013a, 57) suggests, Wilamowitz's rivalry with Nietzsche and his friend Rohde could help explain it, at least in part.

anything that did not conform to the Winkelmannian ideal.[5] Thus, in his *Psyche: Seelencult und Unsterblichkeitsglaube der Griechen* (1894, 396f.) – a book whose influence on the study of Greek religion can hardly be overestimated – Erwin Rohde posited that the Orphic mysteries were founded in reaction to the Hellenization of the Thracian cult of Dionysus by a group of worshippers who wanted to restore it to its original purity.

The theory of the Thracian origin of Orphism was also defended by Jane Harrison, who in her *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (1903, 462), described Orpheus as a follower of Apollo-Helios and a puritan reformer, who was justly punished by the Maenads for usurping and corrupting the primitive cult of Dionysus. In a seminal article published in 1935 in the *Harvard Theological Review*, titled ‘Early Orphism and Kindred Religious Movements’, Martin Nilsson, building upon Harrison’s analysis, highlighted the contrast between the rational, masculine nature of Orphism and Apollinism and the emotional, feminine nature of the primitive cult of Dionysus, remarking that “the cleavage of the Dionysiac cult involved cleavage according to sex”.[6] Unlike Harrison, though, who appeared to believe in the historicity of Orpheus, Nilsson considered him to be a mythical figure, or a projection of the Orphic community, as suggested by Kern (1920). Like their contemporaries, both scholars looked at Orphism through Christian lenses: thus, Harrison compared its relationship with Dionysism to that between Protestantism and Catholicism, while Nilsson compared Orphism to Christianity and Dionysism to Judaism. Nilsson, however, had a much more nuanced view of Orphism compared to most other Orphic scholars of the time; in particular, he emphasised the connections between Orphism and other contemporary religious movements, such as the Dionysian cult, the Eleusinian mysteries, and Pythagoreanism, and argued that its originality lay not in the ideas

[5] Herrero 2010a, 8.
[6] Nilsson 1935, 190 n. 34.

themselves, but in the ways in which they were brought together and refashioned by the founders of the new cult.[7]

On the maximalist side of the debate, the most balanced and comprehensive account of the Orphic religion was presented by William Keith Guthrie in his *Orpheus and Greek Religion*, first published in 1935 and revised in 1952. The main reason why this work is still relevant today, almost ninety years after its original publication, is to be found in its methodological approach. Rather than applying the modern, Christian mould to the religious landscape of ancient Greece – which led other scholars to search in vain for evidence of an ‘Orphic Church’ with a coherent doctrine and a unified liturgy – Guthrie defined Orphism as an attitude with different manifestations and modes of expression:[8] these included peculiar beliefs about the afterlife and religious taboos, but also, most notably, a sacred literature which repurposed and gave new meaning to old myths. Like Nilsson, Guthrie (1952, 41-48) also recognised the tension between the Apolline and Dionysian elements embedded in Orphism, which he saw as a reformation of the original cult of Dionysus through the infusion of the rational principle embodied by Apollo, with whom the character of Orpheus was originally associated.

If Guthrie can be defined as the most authoritative proponent of the maximalist position in the first half of the twentieth century, his counterpart on the minimalist side was undoubtedly Ivan Mortimer Linforth, author of *The Arts of Orpheus* (1941). This work remains an invaluable resource for the student of Orphism, thanks to the careful and detailed analysis of the ancient material, although Linforth’s conclusions, arguably undermined by a flawed methodological approach, did not hold up as well as Guthrie’s in the face of subsequent discoveries. Like Wilamowitz, Linforth (1941, xiii) chose to exclude from his

[7] Nilsson 1935, 228f. This view was later adopted by Burkert (1977, 7), who suggested that the relationship between Orphism and the other ancient mystery cults would be best represented by a Venn diagram.
[8] A similar approach has been adopted, in more recent times, by Detienne (1975), Alderink (1981, 4f.), and – albeit with very different results – Edmonds (2013).

investigation sources such as the gold tablets, which are not “plainly sealed with Orpheus’ name”: given the scanty and fragmentary nature of the evidence, it is hardly surprising that the American scholar, just as his German colleague before him, ended up denying that anything like an Orphic religion – defined as “a comprehensive and unified institution […], with creed, ritual, clergy, and adherents”[9] – ever existed. Furthermore, Linforth (1941, 173) argued that, at most, the term ‘Orphism’ could be used to denote mystery religion as a whole, of which Orpheus was considered the founder, but was otherwise void of any true meaning or substance.

The success of *The Arts of Orpheus* helped seal the victory of the minimalist side, and Eric Dodds, in *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951), explicitly credited Linforth – along with Wilamowitz, Festugière (1935; 1936), and Thomas (1938) – for his ‘loss of knowledge’ regarding Orphism.[10] While maintaining a sceptical stance on the existence of an Orphic community in the Classical age, Dodds (1951, 139f.) sought to explain the emergence of the “new religious pattern” to which Orphism belonged: this new “puritanical” attitude, based on the idea of a soul/body dichotomy, must have originated outside of Greece and specifically from the shamanistic culture of Thrace.[11] By a curious coincidence, the same year that *The Greeks and the Irrational* was published also saw the discovery of the Olbia bone tablets (*OF* 463-465; *ed. pr.* Rusjaeva 1978), which would definitively prove the existence of an Orphic cult in the Classical Greek world, as well as its connection with the cult of Dionysus. A decade later, in 1962, another sensational discovery was made at Derveni, in Thessaly: a fourth-century BC papyrus containing part

[9] Linforth 1941, 291.
[10] Dodds 1951, 147: “I know very little about early Orphism, and the more I read about it the more my knowledge diminishes. Twenty years ago, I could have said quite a lot about it (we all could at that time). Since then, I have lost a great deal of knowledge; for this loss I am indebted to Wilamowitz, Festugière, Thomas, and not least to a distinguished member of the University of California, Professor Linforth”.
[11] The theory of the shamanistic roots of Orphism – also defended by Burkert (1972, 163f.) and West (1983a, 5-7) – and, more generally, of the pervasive shamanistic influences in Greek religion is no longer widely accepted (see Bremmer 2016, 67-71).

of a commentary on an ancient Orphic cosmogonical poem, with extensive quotations. Despite the delayed publication of its *editio princeps* (Kouremenos et al. 2006), the discovery of the Derveni papyrus rekindled the debate around Orphism and prompted new research on the Orphic theogonies.[12] Finally, another decade later, a new golden tablet was found in the necropolis of Hipponion (*OF* 474; *ed. pr.* Pugliese Carratelli 1974): the reference to “the other initiates and *bacchoi*” confirmed the Bacchic character of the tablets – still denied by Zuntz in his *Persephone* (1971) – which was further proven by the mention of Dionysus (Βάκχιος) in the two gold tablets from Pelinna (*OF* 485-486; *ed. pr.* Tsantsanoglou and Parássoglou 1987).

Martin West’s *The Orphic Poems*, published in 1983, attempted to make sense of the fragmentary evidence on the Orphic theogonies, including the Derveni papyrus. In this important study, West presents a detailed review of the “hubbub of books”[13] that was Orphic literature and endeavours to reconstruct each individual theogony, as well as a stemma. Although some of its conclusions have since been called into question,[14] *The Orphic Poems* is still an indispensable book for those approaching the study of Orphic literature, if only for its comprehensiveness. While West (1983a, 3), a firm proponent of the minimalist stance, denied the existence of an Orphic doctrine, however loosely defined, and argued that “the only definite meaning that can be given to the term [‘Orphism’] is ‘the fashion for claiming Orpheus as an authority’”,[15] many of his contemporaries adopted a

[12] See the bibliography by Funghi in Laks and Most 1997; for more recent studies, see Santamaría 2012a and the bibliographies in Kotwick 2017 and Santamaría 2019.
[13] The first chapter of the book, titled ‘A Hubbub of Books’, is a reference to a famous passage in Plato’s *Republic* (2.364e-365a = *OF* 573).
[14] See Brisson 1985; Calame 1991, 229; Edmonds 2013, 149-159; Meisner 2018, 13-18.
[15] Cf. West 1983a, 2: “I speak of Orphic literature, not of Orphism or the Orphics. Much of the fog which beset the subject in the past (and of which wisps still linger) arose from the confusion of these concepts. It was Wilamowitz, whose clear old sceptical gaze falls upon me from my study wall as I write these words, who first saw through it. His insight was developed by I.M. Linforth in his excellent book *The Arts of Orpheus*. These two scholars emphasized the fact that while ancient authors frequently refer to poems by Orpheus or attributed to Orpheus, they seldom refer to Orphics, except in the sense of authors of Orphic books, and never to ‘Orphism’”.

more moderate position, which recognised the importance of Orphism in the ancient world, without positing the existence of a structured, internally coherent system of beliefs, much less an ‘Orphic Church’. This new shift in the scholarship was accompanied by a great proliferation of research, among which the works of Fritz Graf (1974) and Walter Burkert (1977; 1987) on the relationship between Orphism and other mystery cults, Luc Brisson’s studies on Orphism in the Imperial period (1990; 1995), and Robert Parker’s influential essay on ‘Early Orphism’ (1995) are especially worth mentioning.

The first decade of the twenty-first century saw the publication of two monumental works by Alberto Bernabé: a new three-volume edition of the Orphic fragments (2004a; 2005; 2007b), containing almost all the texts previously collected by Kern, in addition to all the material discovered after 1922 – such as the Derveni papyrus and most of the Orphic tablets – followed by an impressive collection of essays, in two volumes, edited together with Francesc Casadesús (*Orfeo y la tradición órfica: Un reencuentro*, 2008). Bernabé’s approach to the Orphic question can be characterised as a moderate version of the maximalist position which dominated scholarship up until the 1930s, in accordance with the picture painted by Guthrie in his *Orpheus and Greek Religion*. While rejecting the idea of an organised Orphic religion, Bernabé (2005, 224) maintains that it is nonetheless possible to identify a set of core beliefs held by those who called themselves ‘Orphics’: namely, the immortality of the soul and its need to atone for an ancestral guilt by undergoing a series of reincarnations, from which it could be freed only by observing particular religious taboos and performing certain rites involving the use of sacred texts ascribed to Orpheus. Not included in Bernabe’s collection, for obvious reasons, are the newly discovered Orphic fragments uncovered by Giulia Rossetto in a palimpsest from the library of the Monastery of Saint Catherine in Sinai (Sin. ar. NF 66; *ed. pr*. Rossetto 2021): the underlying Greek hexameters, likely belonging to a lost Orphic poem from the Hellenistic

period,[16] recount details of the early life of Dionysus, previously only known through allusions in some of the early Christian apologists and in the *Orphic Hymns*. This most recent find further corroborated what the Derveni papyrus – as well as numerous ancient testimonies – had already shown, namely, that the Orphic fragments preserved in late antique sources originate from a mythical and literary tradition which is much more ancient and widespread than the Orpheo-sceptics believed.

Although most contemporary scholars tend to side with the ‘reformed’ maximalism advocated by Bernabé, there are still some who gravitate towards toward a more sceptic approach, whose staunchest supporter is currently Radcliffe Edmonds. In a recent book, titled *Redefining Ancient Orphism: A Study in Greek Religion*, Edmonds (2013, 68-71) argues that any attempt at defining Orphism on the basis of doctrine relies on “the implicit model of doctrinal Christianity” and must therefore be rejected; instead, he proposes to adopt a “polythetic” definition, “relying on a loose collection of features, none of which are necessary or sufficient”: these include “claims to extra-ordinary purity or sanctity […], claims to special divine connection or extreme antiquity”, and “features of extra-ordinary strangeness, perversity, or alien nature”. Adopting a polythetic definition can certainly be a valid and useful approach – as demonstrated by Alderink in his 1981 study, *Creation and Salvation in Ancient Orphism*[17] – but to deny outright that any specific belief or idea could legitimately be called ‘Orphic’ is no less a distortion of the ancient evidence than the projection of a modern, “Christianocentric” paradigm of doctrinal religion, which Edmonds vehemently denounces.[18]

[16] Rossetto 2021, 43.
[17] Cf. Alderink 1981, 20-23: “The value of adopting this definitional approach to Orphism is that we need not take any one or all of the 12 possible referents of the word ‘Orphism’ as the strict condition for the application of the word […]. We are not searching for a ‘unique Orphism’ but rather the features of a current of thought or a mood or a spirit found in those documents and characterized by a monistic tendency, an inclination to view the world as a created reality, and a disposition towards soteriological ideas of *post-mortem* existence”.
[18] See, e.g., Edmonds 2013, 8, 70, 89-92, 96, 100f.

1.2 Methodological considerations

As the history of scholarship outlined in the previous section has hopefully illustrated, our understanding of Orphism is largely dependent on the boundaries that we decide to draw around it. If, for example, we take the name of Orpheus to be the necessary and sufficient condition for counting a source or testimony as ‘Orphic’, we are then forced to include obscure texts like the *Orphic Lithica* – which, aside from being ascribed to Orpheus, have little to do with what is commonly understood as Orphism – and discard relevant evidence which contains no explicit reference to Orpheus or the Orphics, such as the gold tablets; this, as we have seen, was the criterion adopted by Linforth and West, both of whom, as a result, denied the existence of an Orphic religion.[19] If, on the other hand, we follow the approach laid out by Edmonds (2013, 5) – who believes the ancient label ‘Orphic’ to be associated not with specific doctrines or rites, but rather with “a set of ideas loosely defined by their distance from mainstream religious activity”, not unlike the contemporary term ‘new age’ – we end up grouping under the same category such a broad and heterogeneous range of material that the category itself becomes effectively meaningless. In my estimation, the most sensible strategy for determining what should be included under the label ‘Orphic’ is to start from those testimonies – preferably dating no later than the early Hellenistic period – which are explicitly linked to Orphism and derive from them a set of criteria by which to evaluate the sources that do not mention Orpheus or the Orphics. In so doing, we should not expect absolute consistency across our sources due to the lack of uniformity inherent to Orphism. On the contrary, we can reasonably assume that the

[19] Linforth 1941, 291f.: “The things associated with the name of Orpheus are so miscellaneous and so disparate that we cannot recognize a comprehensive and unified institution, however loosely organized, with creed, ritual, clergy, and adherents […]. Every item in the evidence […] denies an Orphic religion”. Cf. West 1983a, 3: “It is a fallacy to suppose that all ‘Orphic’ poems and rituals are related to each other or that they are to be interpreted as different manifestations of a single religious movement […]. A poem becomes Orphic simply by being ascribed to Orpheus”.

absence of a central authority would have led to the development of various strands and traditions within the Orphic movement, which would differ on one or more points despite sharing some defining traits; other factors, such as chronology, geography, and socio-economic status, should also be considered, to avoid making unwarranted generalisations. Eidinow and Kindt duly emphasise this plurality in their approach to Greek religion, which argues, against the “pragmatic turn” of the second half of the twentieth century, that the ritual practices of the ancient Greeks were underlaid with complex belief structures, or “theologies”.[20]

My approach neither implies nor excludes the existence of Orphic communities with a unified set of doctrines and rites and distinct places of worship; rather, my focus is on the ideas which were put forth under the umbrella of Orphism, regardless of whether there existed organised communities of worshippers who espoused all (or some) of those beliefs. In this context, Alderink’s definition of Orphism as a “mood” or a “current of thought” (1981, 16, 23) is particularly useful – and, indeed, most contemporary scholars use the term in a similar sense. The objection against the rehabilitation of the term ‘Orphism’ voiced by the likes of Edmonds (2013, 4, 8) and Calame (2002) – namely, that ‘Orphism’, like any ‘-ism’, is a modern construct which distorts the ancient evidence – does not ultimately hold up to scrutiny. First, the use of the Greek equivalent, Ὀρφικά, is attested since Herodotus (2.81 = *OF* 650), and even if it could be argued that “the ancient definition emphasises more than the modern ‘-ism’ the open character of a bundle of elements”,[21] the modern concept of ‘Orphism’ has changed significantly since the heyday of ‘pan-Orphist’ scholarship and is much closer to the ancient definition. Moreover, as Chrysanthou (2020, 4) points out, if the use of the suffix ‘-ism’ is considered legitimate in the case of other

[20] On the concept of ‘theology’ in modern scholarship on Greek religion, see Kindt’s contribution to the collection of essays edited by Eidinow et al. (2016). See also Kindt 2012 and Eidinow and Kindt 2015.
[21] Herrero 2010a, 80.

ancient religious or philosophical movements, like Pythagoreanism, it is unclear why Orphism should not be granted the same legitimacy.

To sum up, then, we may aptly employ the term ‘Orphism’ to designate the collection of religious and cultural phenomena associated with Orpheus, which is to say, “the entire religion of teletae and mysteries with their magical ritual, the poems of Orpheus and others in which their sacred myths are told, and the ideas concerning god and man which were inherent in poems and ritual”.[22] Based on this very broad definition, the examination of the Orphic evidence which will follow in the next pages will also include testimonies that are not strictly associated with Orphism but pertain to the general sphere of mystery religion or to similar phenomena within that sphere, such as Pythagoreanism or the Eleusinian mysteries. At the end of this survey – which, for the sake of brevity, will not be exhaustive – I will provide a narrower definition of Orphism, based on the unique features that distinguish it from other strands of mystery religion.

1.3 A survey of the evidence

In terms of content, the extant evidence on ancient Orphism can be divided into three groups: fragments of Orphic poetry, attestations of Orphic rituals and beliefs, and testimonies about Orpheus. Although the first two groups are by far the most relevant to the present study, as they provide information on the practices and beliefs associated with Orphism, it is nonetheless useful to examine what the ancient sources say about the mythical founder of this cult: after all, the name of Orpheus is the common denominator holding together the heterogeneous collection of material – ranging from cosmological

[22] Linforth 1941, 173.

poems to oracles and incantations – designated as Ὀρφικά by the Greeks. Therefore, it is only fitting that our survey should start from Orpheus himself.

1.3.1 Orpheus “of famous name”

A fragment of the lyric poet Ibycus of Rhegium (*PMGF* 306 = *OF* 864ii), in which Orpheus is described as ὀνομάκλυτος, attests that his name was already well known in the sixth century BC. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the reason for Orpheus’ fame in the archaic period was the same as in the time of Aristophanes, who, like his contemporaries, knew Orpheus as the poet who introduced the mysteries (τελεταί) in Greece.[23] Indeed, as we shall see, there is reason to believe that Orpheus’ existence as a figure of Greek mythology long predated the advent of Orphism. A first clue comes from the name itself, which belongs to an old type, common in heroic names (e.g., Ὀδυσσεύς, Ἀχιλλεύς, Πηλεύς, Νηλεύς, Ἀτρεύς, Θησεύς, Περσεύς) and well attested in Mycenaean Greek. While the suffix -εύς (*-ηυς) remained productive in the formation of common nouns throughout the history of the Greek language, personal names of this type were no longer being created in the historical period.[24]

The earliest known literary reference to Orpheus, found in a fragment of the epic poet Eumelus of Corinth (8th/7th cent. BC),[25] names him as one of the Argonauts; he appears in the same capacity in a sculpted metope (*OF* 865) found in the foundations of the Treasury of the Sicyonians at Delphi and dating from the sixth century BC.[26] Around the

[23] Ar. *Ra*. 1032 = *OF* 510 Ὀρφεὺς μὲν γὰρ τελετάς θ᾽ ἡμῖν κατέδειξε. Cf. [Eur.] *Rh*. 943-947: 943f. = *OF* 511 μυστηρίων τε τῶν ἀπορρήτων φανὰς / ἔδειξεν Ὀρφεύς, [Dem.] 25.11 = *OF* 512 ὁ τὰς ἁγιωτάτας ἡμῖν τελετὰς καταδεῖξας Ὀρφεύς, Palaeph. 33 = *OF* 500 ὁ δὲ (*sc*. Ὀρφεὺς) θυσάμενος τῷ Διονύσῳ ὄργια κατάγει αὐτὰς βακχευούσας κιθαρίζων.
[24] West 2010, 21f. The case for a Mycenaean origin of Orpheus has been made by Böhme (1953; 1970).
[25] Eumel. fr. 8 Bernabé (22 West) *ap*. Favorin. *Cor*. 14 (305.17 Barigazzi) = *OF* 1012i.
[26] See Olmos 2008, 144-146.

same time, the lyric poet Simonides of Ceos (*PMG* 567 = *OF* 943) portrays him in the act of charming birds and fish with his song; the context of this fragment, too, seems to be the voyage of the Argonauts, as suggested by the marine setting.[27] The magical quality of Orpheus' song, capable of charming not only animals but also plants and inanimate objects, is well attested in both literary and iconographic sources from an early stage,[28] and was almost certainly one of his original attributes – as well as the reason for his inclusion among the Argonauts.[29]

Magic, as Guthrie (1952, 39) writes, was "closely allied with music in the Greek mind", and Orpheus was first and foremost a musician,[30] a lyre-player, to be specific. The lyre, which accompanies him in virtually all artistic depictions, was, of course, one of Apollo's traditional attributes,[31] and Orpheus' connection with the god is strongly emphasised by Pindar (*Py*. 4.176f. = *OF* 1006), who describes him as the "lyre-player, father of songs […] from Apollo" (ἐξ Ἀπόλλωνος … φορμιγκτὰς ἀοιδᾶν πατήρ). The ambivalence of the phrase ἐξ Ἀπόλλωνος, which could be interpreted to mean either "son of Apollo" or "by grace of Apollo",[32] allows Pindar to introduce the idea of Orpheus' Apolline parentage without stating it explicitly, possibly with the intention of preserving the symmetry of the passage, which contains a list of the heroes – all offspring of gods – who accompanied Jason in his quest.[33] Elsewhere Pindar (fr. 128c SM 11f. = *OF* 912i) refers to Orpheus as the son of Oeagrus – as do most ancient sources – but still alludes to

[27] Gildersleeve 1890, 296.
[28] *OF* 943-948. For possible depictions of Orpheus with the animals dating from the Mycenaean period, see Olmos 2008, 139-143.
[29] Herodor. *FGrHist* 31 F 42 *ap. schol.* Apoll. Rhod. 1.23-25a (8.22 Wendel) = *OF* 1010ii ζητεῖται δέ, διὰ τί Ὀρφεὺς ἀσθενὴς ὢν συνέπλει τοῖς ἥρωσιν· ὅτι μάντις ὢν ὁ Χείρων ἔχρησε δύνασθαι καὶ τὰς Σειρῆνας παρελθεῖν αὐτοὺς Ὀρφέως συμπλέοντος. Early iconographic evidence for the episode of Orpheus and the Sirens can perhaps be found in an Attic black-figure *lekythos*, dated around 570 BC, depicting a lyre-player among two Sirens (see Olmos 2008, 146f.). On Orpheus' role in the Argonaut saga, see esp. West 2010.
[30] Orpheus is said to be the son of a Muse, most often Calliope, in all extant sources (*OF* 902-911).
[31] Apollo, like Orpheus, was also said to charm wild animals with his music: see, e.g., Eur. *Alc*. 579-586.
[32] *Schol.* Pi. *Py*. 4.313a (II 139.15 Drachmann) = *OF* 899ii.
[33] Linforth 1941, 4f.

his special connection with Apollo through the use of the Apolline epithet χρυσάωρ (“with golden instrument”).[34]

According to a tradition first attested in Ps.-Eratosthenes (*Catast*. 24 [140 Robert] = *OF* 536i, 1033i), but possibly dating back to Aeschylus, Orpheus’ connection with Apollo played a role in the hero’s violent death:

> ⌊διὰ δὲ τὴν γυναῖκα εἰς Ἅιδου καταβὰς καὶ ἰδὼν τὰ ἐκεῖ οἷα ἦν⌋ τὸν μὲν Διόνυσον οὐκ⌊έτι⌋ ἐτίμα, ⌊ὑφ’ οὗ ἦν δεδοξασμένος,⌋ τὸν δὲ Ἥλιον μέγιστον τῶν θεῶν ἐνόμιζεν εἶναι, ὃν καὶ Ἀπόλλωνα προσηγόρευσεν … ὅθεν ὁ Διόνυσος ὀργισθεὶς αὐτῷ ἔπεμψε τὰς Βασσαρίδας, ὥς φησιν Αἰσχύλος … αἳ διέσπασαν αὐτὸν καὶ τὰ μέλη διέρριψαν χωρὶς ἕκαστον.
>
> After descending to Hades for his wife and seeing what things were like down there, [Orpheus] no longer honoured Dionysus, through whom he had achieved glory, and instead regarded Helios, whom he also called Apollo, as the greatest among the gods […]. Angered by this, Dionysus, as Aeschylus says […], sent after him the Bassarids, who dismembered him and scattered his limbs far away from each other.[35]

It is impossible to know exactly how much of the narrative related in the *Catasterisms* comes from Aeschylus’ lost play, beyond the statement that Orpheus was killed by the Bassarids sent by Dionysus, but most scholars agree that the plot must have at least included the motif of Orpheus’ devotion to Apollo-Helios and neglect of Dionysus, without which the god’s resentment would make little sense.[36] Even if one rejects West’s textual integrations – and there are strong grounds for doing so[37] – the importance of this testimony for the study of early Orphism cannot be underestimated. Firstly, it attests to the perceived connection between Orpheus and Apollo, in accordance with the earliest Orphic evidence.

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[34] See, e.g., *Il*. 5.509, 15.256, *h. Ap*. 123, Hes. *Op*. 771, Pi. *Py*. 5.104. On the epithet χρυσάωρ, which was originally associated with Zeus, see Cook 1925, I, 714-722.
[35] I include the textual integrations from *Vat. gr*. 1087 in half brackets (see West 1983b, 65).
[36] See Kern 1920, 6; Guthrie 1952, 32; West 1983b; Graf 1987, 85f.; Di Marco 1993; Santamaría 2008a, 113-116; Tortorelli Ghidini 2013, 149-156. *Contra* Linforth 1931, 11-17; 1941, 10. On the hypothesis that the identification of Apollo with the sun – which is attested in Parmenides (fr. 28 A 20 DK) and Empedocles (fr. 31 A 23 DK) and appears to be implied in Aeschylus’ *Septem* (vv. 859f.) and, possibly, *Suppliants* (vv. 213f.) – originated from Orphic-Pythagorean mysticism, see Boyancé 1966 and Seaford 2005.
[37] See Di Marco 1993, 117-124.

Furthermore, it documents the conflict (as well as the connection) between Orpheus and Dionysus, which is to say between the new Orphic religion and the cult of Dionysus[38] – more on this later. Lastly, it provides the oldest literary reference to the myth of Orpheus' death at the hands of the Maenads.

When Aeschylus wrote the *Bassarids*, probably around 465 BC,[39] the death of Orpheus was already a popular theme in Attic vase-painting;[40] however, in these early depictions, dating from the beginning of the fifth century BC, the perpetrators are not Maenads but regular women, and Orpheus is never shown as being torn to pieces. Although this version of the myth, in which Dionysus and his followers are completely absent, is only related by post-Classical sources – the earliest of which is the Hellenistic elegist Phanocles (3rd cent. BC) – the fact that the Maenads are never mentioned in connection with Orpheus' death by any ancient author before the Christian Era, except for Aeschylus, indicates that the variant attested in early fifth-century vase-painting was likely the original one and, as such, remained current long after the first performance of the *Bassarids*.[41]

The reason given for the women's rage in the earlier version of Orpheus' death sheds more light on the nature of this mythical figure before he became co-opted by the religious movement which bears his name. According to Phanocles (fr. 1 Powell = *OF* 1004i, 1038, 1054i) and Pausanias (9.30.5 = *OF* 1040), the women of Thrace were jealous of Orpheus because their husbands, who had become followers of his, neglected them;[42] according to Conon (*FGrHist* 26 F 1.45.4-6 *ap*. Phot. *Bibl*. 186.140a31 = *OF* 1039, 1061), a

[38] Nilsson 1935, 203f.; Di Marco 1993, 150.
[39] West 1983b, 71; Di Marco 1993, 148.
[40] See *LIMC* Orpheus 32-51.
[41] Cf. Pl. *Smp.* 179d = *OF* 983, *R.* 10.620a = *OF* 1077i. Isocrates (*Bus.* 39 = *OF* 1041) and Conon (*FGrHist* 26 F 1.45.4-6 *ap*. Phot. *Bibl.* 186.140a31 = *OF* 1039, 1061) mention that Orpheus was torn to pieces, but do not name the Maenads. It is worth noting that in the version related by Pausanias (9.30.5 = *OF* 1040) the women carry out their murderous plan only after getting drunk, which can be interpreted as a reference to the role played by Dionysus in the alternative version of the myth.
[42] The homosexual subtext is made explicit by Phanocles, who credits Orpheus with introducing pederasty to Thrace (πρῶτος ἔδειξεν ἐνὶ θρήκεσσιν ἔρωτας ἄρρενας). Graf (1987, 92) believes in the antiquity of this tradition; *contra* Bremmer 1991, 21.

mythographer of the Augustan period, they resented him for being excluded from his cult. These accounts are consistent with the iconography of fifth-century Attic vases, in which Orpheus is often surrounded by armed men, who appear to be charmed by his music.[43] This evidence seems to place the origin of Orpheus' myth within the context of "archaic initiatory rituals – more specifically, the initiation of aristocratic warriors".[44] At first glance, this picture appears at odds with the familiar image of a chthonic, Dionysian Orpheus presented by (relatively) later sources: how did Orpheus, "the lyre-player sent by Apollo", become the founder of a Bacchic cult? Before venturing to answer this question, we must first look at the other two major episodes of Orpheus' legend, namely his descent to the underworld and the myth of his severed head.

The earliest literary attestation of the story of the decapitated, singing head is found in Phanocles (fr. 1.15-22 = *OF* 1054i), who relates that the Thracian women cut off Orpheus' head and threw it in the river Hebros together with his lyre; the head and the lyre floated across the sea to the island of Lesbos, all the while not ceasing from their song. Philostratus (3rd cent. AD) adds that the head uttered oracles from a cleft in the ground, until Apollo, envious of Orpheus' fame, put a stop to his prophesying:[45] this is the only literary source which mentions Orpheus' prophesying head, but the myth is attested in ancient art as early as the middle of the fifth century BC.[46] A red-figured *kylix* (*LIMC* Orpheus 70), dated around 420-410 BC, depicts the head of Orpheus with parted lips facing a young scribe; to its right stands Apollo, holding a bay branch in his left hand and stretching his right arm over Orpheus' head. This scene has often been interpreted, in light of Philostratus' account, as Apollo stopping the head from giving oracles,[47] but some

[43] See *LIMC* Orpheus 7-21; Olmos 2008, 152-157.
[44] Graf 1987, 95-101: 98. On Apollo's role in archaic male initiation rites, see Graf 2009, 84-97.
[45] Philostr. *Her*. 28.8 = *OF* 1056i, *VA* 4.14 = *OF* 1057, 1079.
[46] See Faraone 2004, 8-12; Olmos 2008, 159-166.
[47] Robert 1917; Kern 1920, 9; Guthrie 1952, 36.

scholars, such as Linforth (1941, 132f.), have rightly noted that nothing in the picture suggests that the god's gesture is hostile. Whether Apollo is forbidding Orpheus' head from speaking or, rather, commanding the youth to write down its words,[48] the painting testifies to the existence of some form of Orphic literature – possibly oracular poetry[49] – in the second half of the fifth century BC.

I will now turn to what is arguably the most important episode in Orpheus' mythical biography, namely, his descent to Hades. One of Polygnotus' paintings in the Cnidian Lesche at Delphi – which, according to Pausanias (10.30.6 = *OF* 1001i), depicted Orpheus holding his lyre, sitting in what could be identified as the grove of Persephone[50] – has been interpreted as a testament to the popularity of Orpheus' *katabasis* in the first half of the fifth century BC,[51] but another possible explanation is that Orpheus was just one of the many dead heroes whom the painter chose to include by virtue of their fame.[52] This is not to say, however, that the myth was not already popular when Polygnotus painted his *Nekyia*. Euripides alludes to it, albeit implicitly, in his *Alcestis* (vv. 357-362 = *OF* 980), where Admetus bemoans the fact that he does not possess "the voice and song of Orpheus", which would enable him to bring his wife back from the dead. This has led some scholars to believe that Euripides must have known a version of the myth in which Orpheus was successful[53] – a hypothesis which seems to be supported by a passage from Isocrates' *Busiris* (8 = *OF* 982), where Orpheus is said to have brought back the dead from Hades.[54]

[48] Nilsson 1935, 193f.; Schmidt 1972, 131; Graf 1987, 93f.
[49] Graf 1987, 94: "In his *Alcestis*, Euripides speaks of the tablets (*sanides*) on which the voice of Orpheus (*Orpheia gērys*) has written down medicines as strong as those which Apollo had given to the sons of Asclepius (966-71) […]. The tablets, then, contain magical recipes for healing. This is not very far from oracles: oracles are, among other things, concerned with the healing of illness, both private and epidemic. Apollo is the healer as well as the oracle-giver".
[50] Olmos 2008, 154-157.
[51] Guthrie 1952, 30.
[52] Linforth 1941, 31.
[53] Linforth 1941, 16f., 21; Bowra 1952, 119f.; Guthrie 1952, 31. *Contra* Graf 1987, 81.
[54] We need not assume that Isocrates knew of more than one instance in which Orpheus rescued someone from Hades, since "the dead" (τοὺς τεθνεῶτας) could easily be interpreted as a generalising plural.

If such a version did indeed exist, the competing narrative, ending in Orpheus' failure, was already adopted by Plato (*Smp.* 179d = *OF* 983).[55] Regardless of the outcome, the story of Orpheus' descent to Hades to retrieve his wife is attested in the second half of the fifth century BC – not only in literary sources, but also in a relief from the altar of the Twelve Gods in the Athenian Agora (c. 420 BC)[56] – although the complete, 'canonical' version appears much later, towards the end of the first century BC.[57]

The myths of Orpheus' *katabasis* and of his decapitated head have been interpreted by some scholars as evidence that the legend of Orpheus originated from – or was at least influenced by – northern (i.e., Scythian or Thracian) shamanism.[58] I tend to agree with Bremmer (1991, 27), who regards these myths as a logical extension of Orpheus' magical power from the world of the living to the beyond. Orpheus' power, as we have seen, came from his music, which is Apolline in nature, and from his connection with Apollo came also his prophetic abilities. Sometime in the sixth century BC, Orpheus was appropriated as patron by the members of a chthonic, Dionysian cult:[59] hence, we can reasonably presume that the story of his quest to bring his wife back from the dead was invented as a means of explaining his newly established connection with the underworld.[60] It is possible that Orpheus' *katabasis* was narrated in a pseudepigraphic poem dating from the late sixth or early fifth century BC (*OF* 707-711);[61] soon thereafter, Orpheus' fame as the mythical

[55] According to Nilsson (1935, 189), the innovation of the unhappy ending is "an outcome of the Greek idea of the irresistible power of death […] and comes from the addition of the wide-spread motif of the punishment of curiosity".
[56] See Thompson 1952; Harrison 1964; Lee 1964; Olmos 2008, 171-173.
[57] Verg. *Georg.* 4.453-463 = *OF* 979i, Ov. *Met.* 10.11-17, 40-52 = *OF* 994, 10.72-77 = *OF* 996.
[58] Meuli 1935, 88; Dodds 1951, 146f.; Eliade 1964, 391; Burkert 1972, 162-165; West 1983a, 4-7; Fiore 1993.
[59] This is not an isolated case, as other mythical figures originating in the context of male initiation rites, such as the Dioscuri, also became associated with chthonic mystery cults (see Burkert 1985, 212f.).
[60] Guthrie 1952, 29.
[61] Martin 2001.

lyre-player who sailed with the Argonauts would be overshadowed by his new identity as a divinely inspired poet and religious founder.[62]

1.3.2 Orphic literature

With the exception of three relatively late works,[63] none of the “many books” [64] that the ancients ascribed to Orpheus has been preserved by the manuscript tradition. We can get an idea of the breadth and variety of early Orphic literature from the list compiled by one Epigenes,[65] which served as the main source for the catalogues of Orphic authors preserved by Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 1.21.131.3 = *OF* 1018iii) and by the *Suda* (*s.v.* Ὀρφεύς [o 654 Adler] = *OF* 1018iv). The titles cited can be grouped into three main categories: eschatological poems (*Katabasis*), theogonies (*Hieros logos*), and allegorical poems dealing with cosmological subjects (*Krater*, *Net*, *Robe*).[66] Until the second half of the twentieth century, our knowledge of these texts depended almost exclusively on secondary sources, dating mostly from the post-Classical era, such as the Neoplatonists and the Christian apologists.

Our main source of information on the Orphic theogonies is the last scholarch of the Neoplatonic Academy, Damascius (*fl.* c. 500 AD), who in his treatise *On the First*

[62] In the ancient tradition, these two identities appear as separate and self-sufficient, to the point that the late fifth-century historian Herodorus (*FGrHist* 31 F 42 *ap. schol.* Apoll. Rhod. 1.23-25a [8.22 Wendel] = *OF* 867) considers Orpheus the poet and Orpheus the Argonaut as two different persons (see Linforth 1941, 37f., 157f.).
[63] See n. 3.
[64] Eur. *Hipp.* 948-957: 952-954 = *OF* 627 ἤδη νυν αὔχει καὶ δι᾽ ἀψύχου βορᾶς / σίτοις καπήλευ᾽ Ὀρφέα τ᾽ ἄνακτ᾽ ἔχων / βάκχευε πολλῶν γραμμάτων τιμῶν καπνούς. Cf. Pl. *R.* 2.364e = *OF* 573i, Arist. *Gen. an.* 734a16 = *OF* 404, Alex. fr. 140 KA = *OF* 1018i.
[65] Very little is known about this figure: Harpocration (*s.v.* Ἴων [138 Keaney] = *OF* 1128iii) attests that he was earlier than Callimachus; Linforth (1941, 117f.) identifies him with the homonymous disciple of Socrates mentioned by Plato and Xenophon, but this cannot be proved.
[66] For a detailed survey of these works, see West 1983a, 7-15 and Chrysanthou 2020, 70-84.

Principles mentions three different versions: the one recorded by the Peripatetic Eudemus,[67] the one current according to Hieronymus and Hellanicus,[68] and the one circulating in his time under the title of *Rhapsodies*.[69] This is most likely the same work which is listed in the *Suda* as *Sacred Discourses* (ἱεροὶ λόγοι) *in Twenty-four Rhapsodies* and attributed to Theognetus the Thessalian or Cercops the Pythagorean.[70] The title suggests a comparison with the Homeric poems, which were arranged into twenty-four books (or rhapsodies) by the Alexandrian grammarians, but it is unclear whether the Orphic *Rhapsodies* were a single poem divided in twenty-four books or, rather, twenty-four separate poems. The latter option seems more likely, as the theogonic narrative could hardly have filled twenty-four books, unless they were considerably shorter than the average Homeric rhapsody.[71] The fact that Clement of Alexandria (*Strom*. 1.21.131.3 = *OF* 1018iii, 6.2.26.2 = *OF* 223) refers to one section of the *Rhapsodies* as "the theogony" also favours this hypothesis.[72] Besides, the title *Hieroi logoi* fits a collection of poems better than a single poem spanning multiple books – for which the singular would be more appropriate – and, in fact, *hieroi logoi* seems to have been a general term used to designate the whole of Orphic poetry, not just theogonies.[73]

It is generally accepted that the Orphic *Rhapsodies* were compiled from earlier Orphic material sometime between the first century BC and the second century AD.[74] Older editions of the *Orphica* were eventually replaced by this collection, from which most of the

[67] Dam. *Pr*. 124 (III 162.19 Westerink) = *OF* 20i ἡ δὲ παρὰ τῷ περιπατητικῷ Εὐδήμῳ ἀναγεγραμμένη ὡς τοῦ Ὀρφέως οὖσα θεολογία.
[68] Dam. *Pr*. 123 bis (III 160.17 Westerink) = *OF* 69 ἡ δὲ κατὰ τὸν Ἱερώνυμον φερομένη καὶ Ἑλλάνικον.
[69] Dam. *Pr*. 123 (III 159.17 Westerink) = *OF* 96 ἐν μὲν τοίνυν ταῖς φερομέναις ταύταις ραψωιδίαις Ὀρφικαῖς ... τοιαύτη μὲν ἡ συνήθης Ὀρφικὴ θεολογία.
[70] *Suid*. o 654 Adler = *OF* 1018iv. The lexicographer evidently confused this later work with the *Hieros logos* which, according to Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 1.21.131.3 = *OF* 1018iii), was ascribed by Epigenes to Cercops the Pythagorean.
[71] West 1983a, 249; Edmonds 2013, 149f.; Meisner 2018, 167; Chrysanthou 2020, 280.
[72] West 1983a, 68; Chrysanthou 2020, 227.
[73] Henrichs 2003, 214f.
[74] Colli 1977, 423f. *ad* 4 B 73; West 1983a, 247-251; Brisson 1995, 169-172; Edmonds 2013, 147.

fragments preserved by the Neoplatonists and other late antique authors derive.[75] It is, of course, virtually impossible to determine with absolute certainty which of the material preserved by these sources should be traced back to ancient Orphic writings and which should be regarded instead as a later addition. The discovery of the Derveni papyrus, which contains a late fifth-century commentary on an Orphic theogonic poem,[76] has proved incredibly useful to scholars, confirming not only that this kind of works dates back at least to the Classical age, but also that Hellenistic and late antique sources, such as the Neoplatonic commentaries, can contain much early Orphic material.[77] Nevertheless, due to the fragmentary nature of this document many questions regarding the ancient Orphic theogony have yet to find a definite answer. Various attempts have been made to reconstruct its content in relation to the later versions, with varying results.[78] The most elaborate reconstruction of the content and genealogy of the Orphic theogonies has been put forth by West, who identified six different versions: (1) the *Protogonos Theogony* (c. 500 BC), of which (2) the *Derveni Theogony* (c. 400 BC) is an abridged version,[79] served as an archetype for (3) the *Hieronyman* and (4) the *Cyclic Theogonies* (c. 200 BC);[80] (5) the *Eudemian Theogony* (c. 400 BC), independent from the *Protogonos Theogony*, was used

[75] West 1983a, 227; Edmonds 2013, 148. For a detailed reconstruction and analysis of the content of the *Rhapsodies*, see Chrysanthou 2020, 286-369.
[76] Based on paleographical criteria, the papyrus can be dated to the third quarter of the fourth century BC, but the work itself was probably composed around 400 BC, based on its linguistic and stylistic features (see Tsantsanoglou 2006, 9f.); it is thus reasonable to assume that the Orphic poem commented on by the author dates back at least to the turn of the fifth century BC (see West 1983a, 108-110). On the Derveni papyrus, see West 1983a, 75-115; Laks and Most 1997; Betegh 2004; Burkert 2005; Kouremenos et al. 2006; Tortorelli Ghidini 2006, 163-254; Papadopoulou and Muellner 2014; Piano 2016; Kotwick 2017; Meisner 2018, 51-85; Santamaría 2019; Chrysanthou 2020, 205-264; Most 2022; Hladký 2024.
[77] Compare, for instance, the following verses from the Derveni papyrus with the corresponding verses from Proclus’ commentary on the *Timaeus*. *P.Derv.* 16.3-6 KPT = §49 Kotwick ‘πρωτογόνου βασιλέως αἰδοίου· τῷ δ’ ἄρα πάντες / ἀθάνατοι προσέφυν μάκαρες θεοὶ ἠδὲ θέαιναι / καὶ ποταμοὶ καὶ κρῆναι ἐπήρατοι ἄλλα τε πάντα, / ὅσσα τότ’ ἦν γεγαῶτ’· αὐτὸς δ’ ἄρα μοῦνος ἔγεντο’. Cf. Procl. *in Ti.* I 313.2 Diehl = *OF* 241.8-11 καὶ ποταμοὶ καὶ πόντος ἀπείριτος ἄλλα τε πάντα / πάντες τ’ ἀθάνατοι μάκαρες θεοὶ ἠδὲ θέαιναι / ὅσσα τ’ ἔην γεγαῶτα καὶ ὕστερον ὀππόσ’ ἔμελλεν / ἐνγένετο, Ζηνὸς δ’ ἐνὶ γαστέρι σύρρα πεφύκει.
[78] See West 1983a, 68-264; Brisson 1995, 389-420; Bernabé 2002a; 2008a, esp. pp. 297-303; Betegh 2004, 92-131; Kouremenos et al. 2006, 21-28; Janko 2016; Meisner 2018, esp. pp. 65-85; Almqvist 2022, 73-97; Currie 2024.
[79] West 1983a, 108.
[80] West 1983a, 128f., 223.

by the compilers of the *Cyclic* and (6) *Rhapsodic Theogonies*;[81] finally, the compiler of the *Rhapsodic Theogony* (c. 100 BC) consulted the *Eudemian*, *Hieronyman*, and *Cyclic Theogonies* in order to produce a coherent account which would combine (and replace) the earlier traditions, while also introducing "some material of his own".[82] West's work has received some legitimate criticisms – for example, for introducing additional versions of the Orphic theogony without sufficient evidence,[83] and for employing a strict stemmatological approach[84] – but his reconstruction of the archetype appears overall well founded.[85]

Based on the comparison between the fragments preserved by the indirect tradition and the verses quoted in the Derveni papyrus, we are able to reconstruct with a reasonable degree of certainty the main episodes of the ancient Orphic theogonic myth. It should be noted, however, that these episodes were not necessarily narrated in a single poem and that different versions of this narrative probably existed already in the Classical age;[86] for these reasons, any reconstruction of the ancient Orphic theogony is bound to be speculative and somewhat arbitrary. First, there was Night, "nurse of the gods";[87] she gave birth to an egg, out of which sprang Eros, or the Firstborn (Πρωτόγονος), "carrying the seeds of all the gods". [88] What follows is the usual succession myth of Uranus-Cronus-Zeus, although it is possible that Oceanus and Tethys were inserted between Uranus and Cronus in one version of the theogony.[89] In order to consolidate his power, the lastborn Zeus swallowed the

[81] West 1983a, 128, 246.
[82] West 1983a, 246-248. For a stemma of the Orphic theogonies, see West 1983a, 264.
[83] Brisson 1995, 398-406.
[84] Edmonds 2013, 149-151; Meisner 2018, 14f.
[85] See West 1983a, 100f.
[86] Meisner 2018, 34f.: "Orphic theogonies could have circulated in the form of collections of shorter poems, each of which concentrated on a particular deity or cluster of deities […]. The Derveni Papyrus makes a particularly useful case study […], since here we have, in only one text, the fragments of a short poem with theogonic content, which seems to concentrate on the actions of one deity in particular: Zeus".
[87] *P.Derv.* 10.11 KPT, Arist. *Metaph.* 1071b26 = *OF* 20ii, Dam. *Pr.* 124 (III 162.19 Westerink) = *OF* 20i.
[88] Ar. *Av.* 690-702 = *OF* 64, Dam. *Pr.* 111 (III 111.1 Westerink) = *OF* 140vii.
[89] Pl. *Ti.* 40d-e = *OF* 21, 24.

Firstborn and, by extension, creation itself,[90] thus becoming at once “beginning, middle, and end”.[91] After creating the universe and the previous generations of gods anew,[92] Zeus impregnated his mother, Rhea-Demeter, who, as a result, gave birth to Kore (i.e., Persephone);[93] Zeus then mated with his daughter, and from this union Dionysus was born.[94] The theogony ended with the sixth generation,[95] to which Dionysus belonged.

While the exegesis of Orphic verses – twenty-nine hexameters quoted in full or in part – occupies the largest and best-preserved portion of the Derveni papyrus (cols 7-19, 21-26 KPT), it is not the only subject matter that is discussed in the text. The remaining columns (1-6, 20 KPT) deal with seemingly unrelated questions pertaining to eschatology and ritual practice: this part of the text has received less attention from scholars,[96] but it is absolutely essential for understanding the nature and purpose of the entire work. The eschatological significance of the Derveni papyrus is also supported by the context of its discovery. The carbonised roll was found among the debris of the funeral pyre of one of the six tombs in the funerary complex built in the pass of Derveni, around ten kilometres to the north of Thessaloniki.[97] The discovery of other valuable objects in the remains of the pyre suggests that the papyrus had a function in the funerary ritual and was not simply scrap paper used to light the pyre.[98] The Orphic custom of equipping the dead with ritual texts is well known – the gold tablets being the most famous example – and the tomb’s proximity

[90] *P.Derv.* 13.3, 16.1-4 KPT, Procl. *in Ti*. I 324.14 Diehl = *OF* 241i, I 314.22 Diehl = *OF* 240vii. Not all scholars recognise a reference to the swallowing of Protogonos in the Derveni papyrus: for a summary of the debate, see Meisner 2018, 69-71, 81-83 and Chrysanthou 2020, 241-245.
[91] *P.Derv.* 17.6-19.10 KPT, [Arist.] *de Mun.* 401a25 = *OF* 31, Procl. *in Ti*. I 313.17 Diehl = *OF* 243iii.
[92] *Theosoph. Tubing*. 50 (411 Erbse[2]) = *OF* 245i.
[93] *P.Derv.* 25.13, 26.1 KPT.
[94] D.S. 5.75.4 = *OF* 283i.
[95] Pl. *Phlb.* 66c = *OF* 25i.
[96] This is due, at least in part, to the fact that the first seven columns, not included in the first two partial editions of the Derveni papyrus, remained unpublished until 1997. On these opening columns, see esp. Janko 2008 and Sedley 2019. On the editorial history of the Derveni papyrus, see Chrysanthou 2020, 206-208.
[97] The nearest ancient settlement was Lete, but it is unclear whether the tombs were connected with the city. For a detailed description of the location and contents of the tombs, see Betegh 2004, 56-59 and Tsantsanoglou 2006, 1-4.
[98] Betegh 2004, 68. *Contra* Janko 1997, 62.

to the shrine of Demeter and Kore,[99] as well as the presence of objects relating to the cult of Dionysus in the nearby graves, indicates that the deceased was likely an Orphic initiate.[100]

Unlike with the Derveni papyrus, the Orphic attribution of the gold tablets (also called ‘leaves’, or ‘lamellae’) has been the subject of a long-lasting debate, due to the absence of any explicit reference to Orpheus; this, however, is not a problem if one adopts an inclusive definition of ‘Orphism’, as I have put forth earlier in this chapter. Besides, as most contemporary scholars recognise, Orphism is the only known religious movement to which these documents can plausibly be assigned.[101] Around forty of these small pieces of gold foil, dating from the fourth century BC to the second century AD, have been published so far. They were found in burial sites all over Greece – in places like Thessaly, Macedonia, Crete, Lesbos, and southern Italy – some of them placed on the mouth or the chest of the deceased, others folded inside cases. They are engraved with short hexametric texts, sometimes mixed with rhythmical prose, and often riddled with metrical and grammatical mistakes.[102]

Despite varying significantly in terms of dating and geographical origin, the Orphic gold tablets are remarkably homogeneous with regard to content, so much so that they can

[99] On the relationship between Orphism and the Eleusinian mysteries, see below §2.2.
[100] Betegh 2004, 68-73; Tsantsanoglou 2006, 4.
[101] Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2011, 100f.: “The features of the supposed author, the geographical distribution of the leaves, the references to initiation […], the phraseology, symbols, and details which other texts link to Orphism, the *hieros logos* from which they seem to proceed, the identification of purity and justice, the relation of Persephone and Dionysus, plus the idea of liberation from a cycle […] all these arguments form a mass of evidence which can neither be associated with any other known religious movement, nor be arbitrarily segmented. On the contrary, it agrees perfectly with the image that we have nowadays of Ophism”. Even a sceptic like Edmonds (2013, 193) accepts the Orphic attribution of the gold tablets, albeit on different grounds: “Although these gold tablets have been linked by modern scholars to Orphism since their discovery in 1879, those links have been made largely on fallacious grounds, and it is rather the emphasis on purity and special privilege that mark these tablets as the sort of thing that might well have been categorized with the Orphic label by the ancients”. On the Orphic gold tablets, see Zuntz 1971; Pugliese Carratelli 2001; Tortorelli Ghidini 2006, 25-148; Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008; Tzifopoulos 2010; Edmonds 2011; Graf and Johnston 2013; Chrysanthou 2020, 113-198.
[102] This seems to indicate that the engravers of the tablets came from a modest social background, which would be in accordance with Plato’s description of the Orphic priests as “wandering beggars” in the *Republic* (2.364b-e = *OF* 573i; cf. Plut. *Apophth. Lac.* 224d-e = *OF* 653).

be neatly divided into two main groups. The first group, which includes the tablets from Hipponion, Petelia, Pharsalus, and Entella (*OF* 474-477), addresses the deceased in the second person singular and contains instructions on what to do upon arriving in the underworld – specifically, which path to take, which lake to drink from, and what to say to the guardians:

> Εὑρήσ{σ}εις δ’ Ἀΐδαο δόμων ἐπ’ ἀριστερὰ κρήνην,
> πὰρ δ’ αὐτῆι λευκὴν ἑστηκυῖαν κυπάρισσον.
> ταύτης τῆς κρήνης μηδὲ σχεδὸν ἐμπελάσειας.
> εὑρήσεις δ’ ἑτέραν, τῆς Μνημοσύνης ἀπὸ λίμνης
> ψυχρὸν ὕδωρ προρέον· φύλακες δ’ ἐπίπροσθεν ἔασιν. 5
>
> You will find in the house of Hades, on the left, a spring, and standing by it a white cypress. Do not even go near this spring! You will find another, cold water flowing from the Lake of Memory; there are guards before it.[103]

Some tablets in this group, such as the Malibu tablet (*OF* 484) and the ones from Crete (*OF* 478-483, 484a), only contain the dialogue between the deceased and the guardians:

> δίψᾳ αὖος ἐγὼ καὶ ἀπόλλυμαι
> …
> τίς δ’ ἐσσί; πῶ[104] δ’ ἐσσί; Γᾶς υἱός ἠμι καὶ Ὠρανῶ ἀστερόεντος.
>
> ‘I am parched with thirst and am dying’ […]. ‘Who are you? Where do you come from?’ ‘I am a son of Earth and starry Heaven’.[105]

The texts of the second group describe the encounter between the deceased and Persephone. In the tablets from the Timpone Piccolo in Thurii (*OF* 488-490) the deceased speaks in the first person singular:

> ἔρχομαι ἐ<κ> καθαρῶ<ν> καθ<αρὰ χθ>ο<νίων> βασίλ<ει>α
> …
> ποινὰν <δ’> ἀνταπέτε<ισ’> ἔργω<ν ἕνεκ’> ο<ὕ>τι δικα<ί>ων.

[103] *OF* 476.1-5.
[104] The use of πῶ for πόθεν is attested, e.g., in Aeschylus (*Ag*. 150) and Sophron (fr. 125 KA).
[105] *OF* 478.

> I come from the pure, pure queen of the chthonian ones […]. I have paid the penalty for unjust deeds.[106]

The Pelinna tablets (*OF* 485f.), on the other hand, address the deceased in the second person: “Tell Persephone that Bacchus himself released you” (*OF* 485.2 εἰπεῖν Φερσεφόνᾳ σ᾽ ὅτι Β<άκ>χιος αὐτὸς ἔλυσε). The tablet found in Rome (*OF* 491), dating from the second century AD, can also be included in this group, as it contains an abbreviated version of the text of the Thurii tablets. It should be noted that this classification is purely descriptive and is not meant to be definitive, as future finds could bring to light new texts; it is also entirely possible for a text to belong to both groups, as is the case with the smaller tablet from the Timpone Grande (*OF* 487).[107]

Because the textual similarities between the tablets transcend both geographical and chronological borders, it seems probable that they could all derive from a common source, whether it be written or orally transmitted: this source, at least for the hexametric sections, could have been an Orphic *Katabasis*.[108] The un-metrical formulas, on the other hand, are clearly of a ritual nature and were possibly recited by the initiate during the *telete* and repeated by the priest during the funeral. While the presence of errors and variations in the tablets suggests that at least some of them were inscribed from memory, it is not inconceivable that the Orphic priests had access to a sort of breviary containing a mixture

[106] *OF* 490.1-4. My choice of punctuation is based on the persuasive arguments presented by Scullion (2018, 86-100).

[107] There is a number of tablets which fall outside of this classification: the larger tablet from the Timpone Grande in Thurii (*OF* 492), which contains a mixture of meaningful words – mostly names of deities – and nonsensical letter groups; two tablets from Pherae, one containing a series of passwords (*OF* 493) and another containing two hexameters (*ed. pr.* Parker and Stamatopoulou 2007); and a number of tablets inscribed with very short texts, such as a dedication to the gods of the underworld (*OF* 494-495) or the name of the deceased (*OF* 496).

[108] See Comparetti 1882; Dieterich 1893, 128; Guthrie 1952, 172; West 1975; Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008, 232f.; Graf and Johnston 2013, 176. For a reconstruction of this poem based on the content of the gold tablets, see Riedweg 2002; 2011 and Janko 2016. For a speculative argument that the Orphic *Katabasis* was in the rhapsodic repertoire from at least the sixth century BC, see Martin 2001.

of ritual formulas and hexameter lines taken from an Orphic eschatological poem.[109] Another possible archetype for the gold tablets has been advocated by Edmonds (2011, 257-270: 265), who argues that an oracular poem "fits better with the model of itinerant ritual specialists adapting their materials to serve a varied clientele, and a number of such texts, devised by craftsmen in different areas, would better explain the variety of types of texts among the corpus of tablets".[110] Although oracular texts ascribed to Orpheus or to his disciple Musaeus – which is to say the same thing[111] – certainly existed during the Classical age,[112] the content of the gold tablets seems more compatible with a longer poem describing the journey to the underworld, rather than with an oracle or series of oracles: for this and other reasons, such as the references to *mystai* and *bacchoi*, an Orphic eschatological poem seems to be the most likely source for the metrical sections of the gold tablets.

1.3.3 The 'Orphics'

We have seen how central a role literature played in the Orphic movement, especially in relation to ritual practice. No scholar, even the most sceptic, denies the existence of Orphic priests and Orphic rituals – or, at least, of priests who performed rites which involved the use of Orphic texts – which is well attested in the Classical age. Plato (*R.* 2.364b-e = *OF* 573i) famously criticises the "begging priests and diviners" (ἀγύρται καὶ μάντεις) who use the books of Orpheus in their rituals and who offer to their clientele the purification of sins,

[109] An example of this type of text can be found in the Gurob papyrus (*P.Gurob* 1 = *OF* 578), which dates to the third century BC and contains a mixture of ritual instructions and hexameter verses. On the Gurob papyrus, see Tortorelli Ghidini 2006, 258-277; Graf 2013b, 150-155; Chrysanthou 2020, 264-272.
[110] Cf. Tzifopoulos 2010, 133f.
[111] Musaeus was traditionally regarded as Orpheus' disciple (Musae. frr. 1-4, 21-22 Bernabé) or, less frequently, his son (Musae. fr. 10 Bernabé) and was thought to have transcribed verses and oracles under Orpheus' dictation (see Martínez Nieto 2008, 552-559).
[112] *Khresmoi* are mentioned by Clement of Alexandria and by the *Suda* in their catalogues of Orphic literature (*OF* 1018iii-iv) and Herodotus (7.6.2 = *OF* 1109) tells the story of the Athenian chresmologue Onomacritus, who compiled the oracles of Musaeus and, accused of forgery, was banished from the city by Pisistratus' son Hipparchus.

for both themselves and their relatives, in exchange for money. A similar critique of those who make a profession (τέχνη) of the holy rites is also voiced by the author of the Derveni papyrus (20.3f. KPT), while the proverbial poverty of the mystery priests is exploited for comedic effect in an anecdote related by Plutarch (*Apophth. Lac.* 224d = *OF* 653) about the encounter between the Spartan king Leotychidas (6th/5th cent. BC) and an "utterly destitute" (παντελῶς πτωχός) *Orpheotelestes*.

Overall, it appears that the Orphic priests had a rather negative reputation in ancient times, even among people who were otherwise sympathetic to Orphism, like the Derveni author;[113] as we will see, this was also true of the Orphic initiates. Theophrastus' description of the superstitious man (*Char.* 16.11-13 = *OF* 654), for instance, highlights his monthly visits to the Orphic priest;[114] this, however, is a rather benign caricature compared to the picture painted by the following testimony. In Euripides' *Hippolytus* (948-957 = *OF* 627),[115] Theseus accuses his son of feigning purity and moral superiority while secretly desiring his stepmother:

> Are you then so superior that you are the companion of the gods? Chaste and untouched by evil? I would never believe your boasts, never be so foolish as to impute folly to the gods. Go ahead and boast, peddle a meatless (ἀψύχου) diet, perform the Bacchic rites (βάκχευε), having Orpheus as your lord and worshipping the worthless vapouring of many books (πολλῶν γραμμάτων … καπνούς):[116] for you have been found out. I warn all to avoid such individuals: they prey on you with their holy-sounding words, while they plan their shameful deeds.

[113] Most scholars agree that the Derveni author was himself either an *Orpheotelestes* (Edmonds 2008a, 31-36; Laks 1997, 123; Most 1997a, 121; Obbink 1997, 52) or some sort of religious specialist (Tsantsanoglou 1997, 99; West 1997, 83; Betegh 2004, 78-83). *Contra* Casadio 1987, 386 and Janko 2010, 180.
[114] This was, presumably, not a common practice but rather something that a highly superstitious man would do.
[115] For a detailed analysis of this passage, see Linforth 1941, 50-59.
[116] Betegh (2004, 68) suggests that this could be a play on words referencing the practice of burning religious texts – such as the one found at Derveni – on the funeral pyre.

The hunter Hippolytus is obviously neither a vegetarian nor an Orphic, but, like the Orphics, he is perceived as a self-righteous hypocrite, worthy of suspicion. Whether or not the Orphic initiates practised sexual abstinence like Hippolytus, by abstaining from meat they relegated themselves to the margins of society, for if vegetarianism can be socially isolating even in modern times, in ancient Greece it meant being excluded from public religion, which involved animal sacrifice.[117] The use of written texts in religious ritual was also met with distrust in a largely oral society such as fifth-century Greece,[118] as the following passage from Demosthenes' speech *On the Crown* (18.259 = *OF* 577i) attests:

> Once you became a man, you used to read out the books for your mother as she performed the initiation (τελούσῃ), and you also helped with the rest of the ritual: at night you poured the wine, clothed the initiates (τοὺς τελουμένους) in fawn skins, purified them, and scrubbed them down with clay and bran; after the cleansing (καθαρμοῦ), you raised them up and led the hymn: 'I escaped evil, I found better', proud of yourself because no one ever shrieked so loudly.[119]

Despite the ample evidence for Orphic rites in the fifth and fourth centuries BC, sceptics like Edmonds (2013, 196) argue that "participation in such religious activities neither marked an Orphic identity nor indicated belief in particular doctrines": consequently, one should not speak of 'Orphics' as a "self-identifying group" of believers, adhering to a certain set of precepts, but only of Orphic initiates, Orphic priests, and Orphic authors. Some scholars, like West (1983a, 3), acknowledge the existence of specific Orphic

[117] As is the case with celibacy, it is unlikely that vegetarianism was practised by the average initiate, although it is usually regarded as a core tenet of Orphism (see Ar. *Ra.* 1032 = *OF* 510, Pl. *L.* 6.782c-d = *OF* 625i, Plut. *Sept. sap. conv.* 16.159c = *OF* 629).
[118] Bremmer 2014, 68.
[119] On this passage, see esp. Martin 2009, 104-115.

sects, such as the Olbian[120] or Cumaean Orphics,[121] but condemn the use of the term in a general sense. This approach seems excessively cautious. The followers of Orpheus were certainly not a monolithic group, but neither were the early (or later) Christians, for instance. We can conjecture that some, indeed most, attended the rites to secure a privileged place for their soul in the afterlife, without much attention to the doctrine, while others, a minority, were truly ideologically committed: all, nonetheless, can be called Christians (or Orphics), insofar as they were initiated into the Christian (or Orphic) cult. Likewise, there is also a big difference between the average Christian (or Orphic) priest and someone like Eusebius of Caesarea (or the Derveni author), even though they both belong to the general category of Christian (or Orphic) priests. We may, thus, speak of ‘Orphics’ in general when it is convenient to do so, just as we speak of Christians, Jews, etc., without implying complete homogeneity. To answer Parker’s (1995, 484) question, Orphics, meaning “persons permanently devoted in some sense to Orphic ideals”, undoubtedly existed, though they may not necessarily have been part of formally organised communities and may not have always adhered to every precept of the cult.

[120] One of the small bone tablets (Lam. Olbiae 1 = *OF* 463) found in the sanctuary area of the ancient Milesian colony of Olbia on the Black Sea and dating from the fifth century BC has the words Διό(νυσος) Ὀρφικ[..] inscribed at the bottom. The last two letters are illegible: West (1982, 21f.) reads -ωι or -ων, while others have suggested -οι or -ον (see Bernabé 2004a, 391 and Graf and Johnston 2013, 214). Regardless of which reading we choose, this inscription confirms what is related by Herodotus (4.78f. = *OF* 563) about the presence of a Bacchic cult at Borysthenes (the ancient name of Olbia), of which the Scythian king Scyles was supposedly an initiate (see West 1983a, 17). On the Olbia tablets, see Tortorelli Ghidini 2006, 149-161; Bernabé 2008b; Chrysanthou 2020, 198-203; for a reproduction of the tablets, see Graf and Johnston 2013, 215.

[121] A fifth-century BC inscription from Cumae in southern Italy (*IGASMG* III 15 = *OF* 652) reads: “It is not lawful for anyone to be buried here unless he has been initiated to Bacchus”. For an in-depth discussion, see Turcan 1986.

2. Orphism and Kindred Religious Movements

Martin Nilsson was one of the first scholars to question the theory of 'Orphic exceptionalism', which, in the words of one of its proponents, saw Orphism as "ein fremder Blutstropfen im griechischen Blute".[1] Nilsson, on the contrary, argued that Orphism originated from ancient Greek ideas and beliefs and was "not isolated but closely connected with contemporary movements":[2] consequently, he believed that "Orphism can only be rightly understood if taken in connection with the whole of the stream of religious ideas in the archaic age".[3] Leaving aside the question of the origin(s) of Orphism, which is not essential to the present study, it is important to examine this religious movement within the larger context of ancient Greek mystery religion, especially since the ancients saw no sharp distinction between what we might refer to as Orphic mysteries in a strict sense and other mystery cults. In fact, by the turn of the fourth century BC, Orpheus is largely considered as the founder of the mysteries at large,[4] and he and his followers are routinely mentioned in connection with Pythagoreanism, Dionysism, and the Eleusinian mysteries.[5] The relationship between Orphism and these other movements was aptly illustrated by Burkert (1977, 7) by means of a Venn diagram, in which the areas of overlap between the superimposed circles represent the set of traits shared by each movement. Despite its overall soundness, Burkert's model could be misleading if taken too literally, as it might give the impression that each of the entities represented by the overlapping circles had clearly defined borders. In reality, these movements were so closely related that, especially with

[1] Rohde 1895, 27.
[2] Nilsson 1935, 228.
[3] Nilsson 1935, 185.
[4] See Ch. 1 n. 23.
[5] See, e.g., Hdt. 2.81 = *OF* 650, Io Chius fr. 116ii Leurini *ap*. D.L. 8.8 = *OF* 506i, *Marmor Parium* (*IG* XII/5 444) 15 = *OF* 1096i.

regard to the Orphic, Dionysian (or Bacchic), and Eleusinian mysteries, it would perhaps be more accurate to consider them as different expressions of the same religious outlook, rather than completely separate cults, each with their own set of doctrines, rites, and practices. In what follows, I will compare Orphism with Dionysism, the Eleusinian cult, and Pythagoreanism,[6] identifying in each case the traits which set these movements apart and, most importantly, the similarities which they shared. I will not endeavour to determine where a shared idea or practice originated, as this is not my primary concern. For the purpose of this study – and in accordance with the methodological approach outlined in Chapter 1 – it will be enough to say that the ancient Greeks associated a certain idea or practice with more than one of the aforementioned categories, regardless of where it originally came from. By way of these comparisons, I will refine the broad characterisation which I presented in the previous chapter and paint a more nuanced picture of the Orphic movement, both broadly and narrowly defined.

2.1 The Bacchic mysteries

Contrary to the image painted by the mainstream tradition, represented, most notably, by the three *Homeric hymns* to Dionysus and by Euripides' *Bacchae*, and generally accepted by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholarship,[7] the cult of Dionysus was not a new phenomenon within Greek religion but went back at least as far as the end of the second millennium BC, as attested by recent archaeological finds.[8] Even before the god's name

[6] For reasons of space, I will limit my analysis to these three movements, as they are often linked to Orphism by the extant sources and, as we shall see, have far more similarities with Orphism than differences. Other mystery cults, such as the cult of Samothrace or the mysteries of Cybele, would certainly merit consideration in a study exclusively devoted to Orphism and the history of Greek religion but are less relevant in the present context, where the focus is on Plato and his philosophical reception of the Greek mystery tradition.
[7] See, e.g., Rohde 1894, II, 1-55; Harrison 1903, 364-374; Nilsson 1955, 564-568.
[8] On the evidence for a cult of Dionysus in the Mycenaean age, see Bernabé 2013c.

was discovered in two Linear B tablets from Pylos, the thesis of Dionysus' foreign (Thracian) origin and of his late arrival in Greece had already been rejected by Walter Otto, who in his 1933 study *Dionysos: Mythos und Kultus* argued that the 'resistance myths' which are at the centre of mainstream Dionysian lore do not reflect a historical reality but rather symbolise the irresistible power and transgressive – one might even say 'revolutionary' – nature of the god.[9] Perhaps uncoincidentally, Dionysus' rise to prominence within both private and public religion coincided with great social and political turmoil:[10] think, for instance, of the introduction of tragedy in Athens, as part of Pisistratus' (re)founding of the Great Dionysia. Alongside public festivals, private Bacchic mysteries are also attested around the turn of the fifth century BC, with the earliest testimony being a fragment of Heraclitus: in it, the philosopher condemns "night-wanderers (νυκτιπόλοι),[11] Magi, Bacchants, Maenads, and initiates (μύσται)" to a fiery punishment in the afterlife because, as he says, "they are initiated impiously into the mysteries (μυστήρια)[12] which are common among men".[13] Despite the absence of any reference to Orpheus, it is not unreasonable to suppose that Heraclitus' criticism was directed, at least in part, to the initiation rites performed by those itinerant priests – or, as Plato (*R.* 2.364b-e = *OF* 573i)

[9] Otto 1933, 71-75.
[10] Burkert 1985, 290.
[11] Cf. Eur. *Cret.* fr. 472 Kannicht = *OF* 567, v. 11 καὶ νυκτιπόλου Ζαγρέως βούτης (see p. 54). Graf (1997, 247 n. 9) interprets the Heraclitean νυκτιπόλοις as an adjective qualifying the following nouns.
[12] *Mysteria* was the name of the Attic festival of Demeter and Kore in Eleusis; although for Athenians the Eleusinian mysteries remained τὰ μυστήρια *par excellence*, the term was extended to all secret cults of this kind, as the Heraclitean fragment attests. The etymology of μύστης and μυστήρια is not entirely clear, but the verbal root my(s)- (cf. Gr. μυέω) seems to be attested in Mycenean Greek for the initiation of an official (PY Un 2.1). Mystery rites were also commonly referred to as τελεταί, 'initiations', and ὄργια, 'rituals'; the notion of secrecy, inherent in the modern word 'mystery', was conveyed by the adjectives ἄρρητος ('unspeakable') and ἀπόρρητος ('forbidden'), which were often used to characterise the mysteries. A detailed discussion of the Greek terminology can be found in Burkert 1987, 7-11.
[13] Heraclit. 14 DK = *OF* 587 τίσι δὴ μαντεύεται Ἡράκλειτος ὁ Ἐφέσιος; νυκτιπόλοις, μάγοις, βάκχοις, λήναις, μύσταις· τούτοις ἀπειλεῖ τὰ μετὰ θάνατον, τούτοις μαντεύεται τὸ πῦρ· τὰ γὰρ νομιζόμενα κατ' ἀνθρώπους μυστήρια ἀνιερωστὶ μυεῦνται. The authenticity of this fragment (or part of it) has been questioned by Marcovich (1967, 464-467), Lloyd (1979, 12 n. 18), and Henrichs (1991, 190f.). *Contra* Conche 1986, 167; Burkert 1999, 94; Bremmer 2002, 19; Betegh 2004, 81; Gemelli Marciano 2009, 104-109.

calls them, "begging priests and diviners" – who claimed Orpheus as an authority.[14] This hypothesis seems to be supported by a passage from the Derveni papyrus (6.1-9 KPT), which speaks of μάγοι and μύσται who perform sacrifices to appease the souls of the dead and the "*daimones* who are in the way" (δαίμονες ἐμποδών), an expertise which was also claimed, according to Plato, by the *Orpheotelestai*.[15] There can be little doubt, in any case, that the μάγοι mentioned by Heraclitus and by the Derveni author, like the ἀγύρται καὶ μάντεις chastised by Plato, were itinerant religious professionals who offered their services to private individuals, and that, by the fifth century BC, the term had gained a pejorative connotation: this is confirmed, for instance, by a passage from Sophocles' *Oedipus rex* (vv. 387f.), in which the seer Tiresias is accused of being a "scheming warlock" (μάγος μηχανορράφος) and a "crafty beggar (δόλιος ἀγύρτης), who has eyes only on profit".[16]

Alongside the private initiations performed by wandering *magoi*, Orphic-Bacchic *thiasoi* are also attested in the fifth century BC, in places like Olbia and Cumae.[17] From the fifth century onwards, the evidence linking Orphism with the Bacchic mysteries increases exponentially.[18] The two are already considered by Herodotus[19] and Euripides[20] as being intimately connected – if not effectively identical – while Orpheus is explicitly credited by the mythographer Palaephatus (late 4th cent. BC) with the founding of the Dionysian mysteries.[21] Diodorus Siculus says that Orpheus relayed through the mysteries the dismemberment of Dionysus by the Titans,[22] and that the Dionysian mysteries are also

[14] If Heraclitus is indeed referring to Orphic priests, his condemnation need not necessarily extend to the sacred texts used in their rituals or to Orphic doctrine in general.
[15] Pl. *R.* 2.364b-c, 364e-365a. See Betegh 2004, 81-83.
[16] See Graf 1997, 22.
[17] See Ch. 1 nn. 120f.
[18] For an extensive survey of the evidence, see Linforth 1941, 206-232.
[19] Hdt. 2.81.2 = *OF* 650 ὁμολογέει δὲ ταῦτα τοῖσι Ὀρφικοῖσι καλεομένοισι καὶ Βακχικοῖσι, ἐοῦσι δὲ Αἰγυπτίοισι καὶ Πυθαγορείοισι (quoted in full below, p. 66).
[20] Eur. *Hipp.* 948-957: 953f. = *OF* 627 Ὀρφέα τ᾽ ἄνακτ᾽ ἔχων / βάκχευε (see p. 44).
[21] Palaeph. 33 = *OF* 500 ὁ δὲ θυσάμενος τῷ Διονύσῳ ὄργια κατάγει αὐτὰς βακχευούσας κιθαρίζων.
[22] D.S. 5.75.4 = *OF* 283i ὃν (*sc.* Διόνυσον) Ὀρφεὺς κατὰ τὰς τελετὰς παρέδωκε διασπώμενον ὑπὸ τῶν Τιτάνων. The antiquity of the story of Dionysus' death, once regarded by scholars as the "cardinal Orphic myth" (Nilsson 1935, 223), has been brought into question due to the absence of any explicit evidence prior

called 'Orphic' due to the changes introduced by Orpheus.[23] In later sources, Orpheus is mentioned as the author of hymns and *logoi* on Dionysus,[24] or *Bacchica*.[25] Whether the story of Dionysus' dismemberment was told in any of these texts,[26] or was handed down orally by way of ritual performances,[27] there is reason to believe that its inception was intimately linked with the founding of the Orphic cult. According to Pausanias (8.37.5 = *OF* 39), the chresmologue Onomacritus, who lived in Athens at the court of Pisistratus and was apparently tasked with compiling the oracles of Musaeus,[28] "instituted secret rites

to the Hellenistic period (on the earliest explicit attestations of the myth, see Henrichs 2011; for a collection of all the relevant testimonies, see Bernabé 2004a, 50-54 [*OF* 34-39], 64-68 [*OF* 57-59], 246-273 [*OF* 301-331], with extensive bibliography). According to the account given by Olympiodorus (*in Phd.* 1.3 [41 Westerink] = *OF* 304i, 313ii, 318iii, 320i), the infant Dionysus, born of the incestuous union between Zeus and his daughter Persephone, was abducted by the Titans, who cut him into pieces, which they then boiled, roasted, and consumed; upon discovering their crime, Zeus struck the Titans with his lightning-bolts; finally, Dionysus was resurrected from the still-beating heart rescued by Athena, and mankind was born from the Titans' ashes, thus inheriting the guilt for their ancestors' crime (on the idea of inherited guilt in ancient Greece, see the comprehensive study by Gagné [2013]). The connection between the dismemberment of Dionysus and the origin of mankind, with its eschatological and soteriological implications, has been dismissed by some scholars as a Neoplatonic innovation (see esp. Brisson 1992a; Edmonds 1999; 2008b; 2013, 296-391), but a number of pre-Hellenistic sources, alluding to a crime for which humans must atone and which may only be forgiven by Persephone or Dionysus, seem to presuppose it (see esp. Bernabé 2002b; 2008c; Johnston 2013a; Hütwohl 2023. For a summary of the debate, see Chrysanthou 2020, 85-112). Aside from the implicit references found in Plato, Pindar, and other ancient authors, an additional argument in favour of the antiquity of the Orphic anthropogony is the Near Eastern parallel in *Enuma Elish* VI, where mankind is created from the blood of the fallen god Qingu, sacrificed as a scapegoat to atone for the rebellion of the primeval gods. A recently discovered palimpsest (Sin. ar. NF 66; *ed. pr*. Rossetto 2021) containing fragments from a lost Orphic poem (perhaps the *Rhapsodies*), possibly dating back to the Hellenistic period, has shed new light on the earlier part of the myth, relating to Dionysus' childhood and the Titans' attempt to lure him away, but none of the preserved hexametric fragments make any reference to the anthropogonic conclusion (for further commentary on the Sinai palimpsest, see Edmonds 2022 and Kayachev 2022). A possible reason for this silence might be the religious taboo against divulging the content of the mysteries to non-initiates (Bernabé 2007c, 62).

[23] D.S. 3.65.6 = *OF* 502 τὰς ἐν τοῖς μυστηρίοις παραδεδομένας τελετάς, ἃς ὕστερον Ὀρφέα τὸν Οἰάγρου μαθόντα παρὰ τοῦ πατρός … πολλὰ μεταθεῖναι τῶν ἐν τοῖς ὀργίοις· διὸ καὶ τὰς ὑπὸ τοῦ Διονύσου γενομένας τελετὰς Ὀρφικὰς προσαγορευθῆναι.

[24] Aristid. *Or*. 41.2 Keil = *OF* 684.

[25] Hippol. *Ref*. 5.20.4 = *OF* 532.

[26] Barigazzi 1963.

[27] Valdés and Martínez Nieto 2005.

[28] This is attested by Herodotus (7.6.3 = *OF* 1109), who also informs us that Onomacritus was eventually exiled from Athens for interpolating an oracle; Tzetzes (*Proll. Com*. 1.147 [I A 30 Koster] = *OF* 1104ii) lists him as one of four men who worked on the edition of Homer commissioned by Pisistratus – along with one Orpheus of Croton and Zopyrus of Heraclea, who is mentioned in the *Suda* (o 654 Adler = *OF* 1018iv) as the author of an Orphic poem titled *Krater* – but this is almost certainly a late invention (the existence of a 'Pisistratean recension' of the Homeric poems is itself highly controversial: for two opposing views, see Merkelbach 1952 and Nagy 1996); finally, the *Suda* lists him among the authors of Orphic poems, ascribing to him *Oracles* and *Initiations* (*Τελεταί*), and some writers from the Roman age, like Pausanias, treat him as the author of Orphic poetry in general. On Onomacritus, see Martínez 2011; for an annotated edition of the extant fragments and *testimonia*, see D'Agostino 2007.

(ὄργια) in honour of Dionysus and made the Titans responsible for the god's sufferings, having taken the name of the Titans from Homer". Even if the historical accuracy of Pausanias' testimony may rightly be called into question, the overall evidence seems to suggest that sometime in the late sixth or early fifth century BC – whether in Athens or somewhere else in Greece, perhaps in Magna Graecia[29] – some religious expert(s) created a new mystery cult by combining and adapting various elements of traditional religion and mythology.[30] The rather marginal role occupied by Dionysus in Panhellenic religion arguably granted mythmakers and religious founders a greater degree of freedom, so it is not surprising that the early Orphics opted to centre their new cult around him.[31] On the other hand, it might seem counterintuitive that an offshoot of the cult of Dionysus should pick a figure like Orpheus as its mythical founder, given his prominent association with Apollo;[32] however, it could be argued that his fame as a divinely inspired poet, more ancient than Homer and Hesiod,[33] made him an attractive choice for anyone wishing to give an air of prestige to a new religious movement. As a result of Orpheus being co-opted by this new Dionysian cult, his legend came to resemble that of Dionysus in a few key ways: both are

[29] Jeanmaire 1951, 382; Guthrie 1952, 314.
[30] Some scholars have linked the emergence of Orphism to the societal changes which took place in Greece around the turn of the fifth century BC. According to an interesting hypothesis put forth by Bremmer (2014, 80), the old aristocratic elite, no longer in power due to the rise of tyrannical and democratic regimes, sought to regain their privileged status in the afterlife, by participating in special rites which promised to save them from the miserable fate of the uninitiated masses. Other scholars (e.g., Detienne 1975) see the Orphic-Bacchic mysteries as a 'democratic' phenomenon, originating from the lower strata of society.
[31] Faraone 2013, 122.
[32] There is evidence to suggest that the two gods were worshipped together at Delphi as early as the sixth century BC: could this be a precedent for the merging of Apolline and Dionysian elements in the Orphic cult? On this, see Guthrie 1952, 43; Colli 1977, 23-27; Detienne 2001; Suárez 2013.
[33] *OF* 879-884.

said to be of Thracian origin,[34] they both travel to the underworld to rescue a woman,[35] and, most importantly, they are both torn to pieces.

It has been suggested that the story of Orpheus' dismemberment by the Maenads reflects the conflict between the followers of the old cult of Dionysus and the members of the new Orphic-Bacchic cult. Nilsson (1935, 203f.) considered it as "the mythical vengeance" of the non-Orphic worshippers of Dionysus, who resented the Orphics for turning the central ritual of Maenadic worship – namely, the dismemberment (σπαραγμός) of a live animal, representing the god himself, and the consumption of its raw flesh (ὠμοφαγία) – into the primeval crime for which humans need to atone in the myth of Dionysus and the Titans;[36] Detienne (1977, 88-90), on the other hand, interpreted it as another denunciation of the savagery of Maenadism by the Orphics. Although the evidence for ritual dismemberment and omophagy in historical Maenadism is tenuous at best,[37] the commonly accepted idea of Orphism as a 'sanitised' version of Dionysian worship finds support in a verse from Aristophanes' *Frogs*, which says that Orpheus "taught us to abstain from killing",[38] and in a passage from Euripides' *Hippolytus*, which attests to the non-violent and puritanical nature of the Orphic-Bacchic cult.[39] However, a fragment from

[34] *OF* 919-922. There is some evidence linking Orpheus to a Thracian oracle of Dionysus (Hdt. 7.111, *schol*. Eur. *Alc*. 967; on Orphism in Thrace, see Fol 2008), but it should be noted that in the earliest vase paintings he is always depicted as a Greek (see Linforth 1941, 13). Another possible explanation for Orpheus' 'Thracianness' has to do with his connection with the Muses, who, according to tradition, were born in Thracian Pieria (see Graf 1987, 99-101).

[35] Dionysus' descent to the underworld to rescue his mother was portrayed in a tragedy by Sophocles' son Iophon (*TrGF* 22 F 3); see also D.S. 4.25.4 = *OF* 984, where the episode is mentioned in connection with Orpheus' *katabasis*. It is unclear whether the latter was inspired by the former or the other way around.

[36] Among the theories which have been advanced to explain the origin of the myth of Dionysus and the Titans, this is one of the most popular, though most scholars, unlike Nilsson, do not ascribe any polemical intent to the Orphic mythmaker(s): see, e.g., Linforth 1941, 355; Seaford 1994a, 292; Albinus 2000, 112f. Another popular theory views the myth as a symbolic representation of an initiation ritual – an ancient coming-of-age ritual (Jeanmaire 1951, 390; Guthrie 1952, 123-126), a death and rebirth ritual (Sorel 1995, 72), or even a shamanistic initiation (West 1983a, 144-146).

[37] Jeanmaire 1951, 82-85; Henrichs 1978; Bremmer 1984; Halm-Tisserant 2004; Porres 2013, 178-181.

[38] Ar. *Ra*. 1032 = *OF* 547 Ὀρφεὺς μὲν γὰρ τελετάς θ᾽ ἡμῖν κατέδειξε φόνων τ᾽ ἀπέχεσθαι.

[39] Eur. *Hipp*. 948-957 = *OF* 627 σὺ δὴ θεοῖσιν ὡς περισσὸς ὢν ἀνὴρ / ξύνει; σὺ σώφρων καὶ κακῶν ἀκήρατος; … ἤδη νυν αὔχει καὶ δι᾽ ἀψύχου βορᾶς / †σίτοις† καπήλευ᾽ Ὀρφέα τ᾽ ἄνακτ᾽ ἔχων / βάκχευε κτλ (see p. 44).

Euripides' *Cretans* (fr. 472 Kannicht = *OF* 567, vv. 9-19)[40] associates the consumption of raw meat with the cult of Zagreus, a Cretan god who came to be identified with the Orphic Dionysus:[41]

> We lead a pure life since I became an initiate (μύστης) of Idaean Zeus, and after celebrating the thunder (βροντάς)[42] of night-wandering (νυκτιπόλου) Zagreus and the raw feast (ὠμοφάγους δαῖτας) and raising torches to the Mountain Mother with[43] the Curetes, I was sanctified and named *bacchos*. Wearing all white clothes, I avoid the birth of mortals and the resting places of the dead, and I keep myself from eating food which had a soul (ἐμψύχων).

Leading a "pure" (ἁγνός) life,[44] wearing white clothing,[45] avoiding contact with births and deaths,[46] and abstaining from meat were all part of the Orphic way of life (ὀρφικὸς βίος),[47] which separated the *bacchoi* from the other worshippers of Dionysus:[48] this, along with the mention of Zagreus, has led to the inclusion of the passage in both Kern's and Bernabé's editions of the Orphic fragments, despite the absence of any explicit reference to Orpheus. To explain the apparent contradiction between the ritual practice of

[40] On this highly discussed passage, see Bernabé 2004b with ample bibliography.
[41] This identification is first attested in a fragment of Callimachus (fr. 43.117 Pfeiffer) quoted in the *Etymologicum Magnum* (406.46 *s.v.* Ζαγρεύς = *OF* 34), but it was likely already in place in Euripides' time (Tortorelli Ghidini 2013, 146f.). For a theory of the Cretan origin of the Orphic myth of Dionysus, see Guthrie 1952, 107-120. On Zagreus, see *LIMC* VIII.1 (1997) 305f. and *DNP* XII.2 (2002) 665f., *s.v.*
[42] βροντάς is the reading of the manuscripts, accepted by Bernabé. Other editors have proposed a number of emendations, among which βούτας (Diels) or βούτης (Wilamowitz) is the most compelling – presumably a title bestowed on certain initiates of Dionysus-Zagreus, similar to the attested βουκόλος (Cozzoli 1993, 161 n. 35, 163 n. 38).
[43] μετά is Wilamowitz's conjecture; the manuscripts have καί.
[44] A possible reference to sexual abstinence (see Casadio 1990, 282).
[45] Apparently, the excavators of the main tomb of Timpone Grande in Thurii, which yielded two gold tablets (*OF* 487, 492), found a white (likely, linen) sheet over the cremated remains of the deceased (see Zuntz 1971, 290). It is known that the Pythagoreans – and, according to Aelian (*VH* 12.32), Pythagoras himself – dressed in white clothes, and that both Orphics and Pythagoreans were buried in linen, as wearing wool was considered taboo (Hdt. 2.81.2 = *OF* 650).
[46] Cf. Theophr. *Char*. 16.9-12 καὶ οὔτε ἐπιβῆναι μνήματι οὔτ᾽ ἐπὶ νεκρὸν οὔτ᾽ ἐπὶ λεχὼ ἐλθεῖν ἐθελῆσαι … καὶ τελεσθησόμενος πρὸς τοὺς Ὀρφεοτελεστὰς κατὰ μῆνα πορεύεσθαι. Contact with birth and death was widely regarded as a source of pollution in ancient Greece (see Parker 1983, 33f.).
[47] Cf. Pl. *L*. 6.782c-d = *OF* 625i.
[48] This seems to be the meaning of the (likely) Orphic verse quoted by Plato in the *Phaedo* (69c = *OF* 576i πολλοὶ μὲν ναρθηκοφόροι, παῦροι δέ τε βάκχοι): many are initiated into the mysteries of Dionysus, but only a few earn the title of βάκχος, which belongs to those who reach true communion with the god by following the precepts of the Orphic way of life. On this fragment and on the use of the terms βάκχ(ι)ος and βακχεύω in the Orphic context, see Jiménez San Cristóbal 2009.

omophagy and the Orphic prohibition against eating meat, some scholars argue that Euripides was referencing various mystery cults and, thus, mixing together Orphic and non-Orphic elements,[49] but it appears that a certain degree of syncretism was inherent in the Orphic movement from an early stage – the Mountain Mother and the Curetes, for instance, appear in two Orphic texts from the early Hellenistic period, namely a gold tablet from Pherae, Thessaly (late 4th cent. BC),[50] and the Gurob papyrus (3rd cent. BC).[51] On the other hand, González Merino (2010) has argued that the term ὠμοφάγος and cognates should be interpreted as relating to the consumption of raw vegetables rather than raw meat, at least when they occur in an Orphic context; this, however, does not seem very likely. For one thing, the ritual described in the Gurob papyrus clearly involves animal sacrifice,[52] so we must conclude that the Orphics practised some form of blood sacrifice – though not necessarily omophagy – as part of their initiation ritual, which, for the initiate, marked the beginning of a new life, characterised by abstinence from meat.[53] This is consistent with the testimony of Heraclitus (fr. 5 DK), who denounces the absurdity of seeking purification by means of blood sacrifice:

> They purify themselves (καθαίρονται), in vain, with blood, all the while being polluted (μιαινόμενοι) [by blood], just as if someone who had stepped into mud cleaned himself with mud; if anyone observed him doing this, he would think that he was mad (μαίνεσθαι).

[49] Guthrie 1952, 199f.; Burkert 1985, 280f.; Casadio 1990, 283; Herrero 2010a, 27f. n. 59; Bremmer 2014, 66.
[50] *OF* 493a πέμπε με πρὸς μύστων θιάσους· ἔχω ὄργια [βάκχου] / Δήμητρος Χθονίας <τε> τέλη καὶ Μητρὸς ὀρεί[ας].
[51] *P.Gurob* (*OF* 578) 1.5-7 σῷσόν με Βριμὼ με[γάλη / Δημήτηρ τε Ῥέα [ ] / Κουρήτες τ' {ε} ἔνοπλοι.
[52] *P.Gurob* (*OF* 578) 1.1-3 [ἕκ]αστα ἕ[χ]ων ἃ εὕρῃ / [τὰ] ὠμὰ δὲ συνλεγέ[τω] / [ ] διὰ τὴν τελετήν, 1.9-11 ἵ]να ποιῶμεν ἱερὰ καλά / [ ] νῃ κριός τε τράγος τε / [ ] ἀπερ<ε>ίσια δῶρα, 1.13f. λαμβ]άνων τοῦ τράγου / [ ] τὰ δὲ λοιπὰ κρέα ἐσθιέτω, 1.16 [ ]χου ἀναθεὶς εἰς τὸ ἀνῃρε.
[53] Albinus 2000, 115.

It is unclear whether Heraclitus' criticism was specifically directed at the Orphics,[54] but the reference to mud seems to indicate that it was.[55] Like in fr. 14 DK, discussed at the beginning of this section, Heraclitus avers that the rites in which the (Orphic-Bacchic?) initiates partake produce the opposite of the desired outcome: by performing blood sacrifices, they bring upon themselves the pollution that they intended to wash away, thus ensuring that they will incur in the same afterlife punishments which they believe to be reserved for the uninitiated. This brings us to the main difference between the Orphic-Bacchic cult and other forms of Dionysian worship: unlike the participants in non-Orphic Dionysian rites, who sought a temporary release from the troubles of ordinary life by reaching a state of ecstasy, the Orphic initiates believed that, by participating in the mysteries, they had achieved a new, privileged status, which would grant them eternal bliss in the afterlife.[56] In order to maintain such status, the initiates had to set themselves apart from the rest of society by abstaining from animal sacrifice and meat consumption – the two pillars on which the Greek socio-political order was founded and which marked the distinction between gods and humans.[57] Maenadic ecstasy and (assuming it was ever practised) omophagy and Orphic vegetarianism are all acts of self-differentiation, but whereas the first two are confined to the ritual, abstinence from meat is a permanent choice which sets the Orphic initiate apart from the rest of humanity and brings him closer to the gods.[58]

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[54] Compare, for instance, a similar passage from Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (vv. 449f. ἔστ᾽ ἂν πρὸς ἀνδρὸς αἵματος καθαρσίου / σφαγαὶ καθαιμάξωσι νεοθήλου βοτοῦ), which has no relation to Orphism.

[55] Albinus 2000, 117. According to Orphic doctrine, the uninitiated were destined to lie in the mud in the afterlife, as punishment for not purifying themselves while they were alive (see, e.g., Pl. *R.* 2.363d = *OF* 434i).

[56] Lam. Hipp. (*OF* 474) 15f. καὶ δὴ καὶ σὺ πιὼν ὁδὸν ἔρχεα<ι> ἄν τε καὶ ἄλλοι / μύσται καὶ βάχχοι ἱερὰν στείχωσι κλεινοί, Lam. Petel. (*OF* 476) 11 καὶ τότ᾽ ἔπειτ᾽ ἄ[λλοισι μεθ᾽] ἡρώεσσιν ἀνάξει[ς], Lam. Pelinn. (*OF* 485) 7 κἀπιμένει σ᾽ ὑπὸ γῆν τέλεα ἅσσαπερ ὄλβιοι ἄλλοι, Lam. Thur. (*OF* 487) 4-6 θεὸς ἐγένου ἐξ ἀνθρώπου … / χαῖρ<ε>, χαῖρε· δεξιὰν ὁδοιπόρ<ει> / λειμῶνάς θ᾽{ε} ἱεροὺς καὶ ἄλσεα Φερσεφονείας, Lam. Pher. (*OF* 493) 3-5 εἴσιθ<ι> / ἱερὸν λειμῶνα· ἅποινος / γὰρ ὁ μύστης.

[57] Detienne 1975, 57f.; Sabbatucci 1979, 78-80.

[58] A possible precedent for the Orphics' obsession with ritual purity – an obsession which, as we shall see below (§2.3), was also shared by the Pythagoreans – can be found in a passage of Hesiod's *Works and Days*

2.2 The cult of Eleusis

Of all the mystery cults that existed in ancient Greece, the Eleusinian mysteries are the most widely documented, thanks, no doubt, to Athens' cultural hegemony in the Classical period and beyond. Although cultic activity is attested at Eleusis as far back as the early Bronze age,[59] the Eleusinian cult only assumed its final form as a Panhellenic institution after coming under Athenian control. Towards the end of the seventh century BC, the sanctuary underwent major architectural restructuring, indicative of significant changes in the nature of the cult: it was probably around this time that the Eleusinian cult acquired its soteriological character,[60] which is already attested in the oldest literary record of the Eleusinian mysteries, namely, the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*. The hymn, dated by scholars between 650 and 550 BC, tells of Demeter's search for her daughter Persephone, following her abduction by Hades, and ends with the founding of the Eleusinian mysteries, establishing an aetiological connection between ritual and myth.[61] As the poet says, those who are initiated into the mysteries shall benefit not only in this life but also in the next, while the uninitiated will be punished for failing to pay due reverence to the queen of the underworld:

> Blessed (ὄλβιος) is he among the earth-dwelling men who has seen these rites; but the uninitiate (ἀτελὴς) who has no share in them never has the same lot once he is dead, down in the gloomy darkness […]. Most blessed (μέγ' ὄλβιος) is he among the earth-dwelling men whom they (*sc*. Demeter and Kore) earnestly love, for soon they will send to the hearth of his great house Plutus, who bestows riches on mortal men.[62]

(vv. 724-759) which contains a list of rules of conduct, akin to the Pythagorean ἀκούσματα, for the θεῖος ἀνήρ (see Parker 1983, 291-294 and Currie 2007).

[59] Cosmopoulos 2015, 43-47.

[60] Sourvinou-Inwood 1997.

[61] On the *Hymn to Demeter*, see the commentaries by Richardson (1974) and Foley (1994).

[62] *HH* 2.480-489; cf. vv. 367-369 τῶν δ' ἀδικησάντων τίσις ἔσσεται ἤματα πάντα, / οἵ κεν μὴ θυσίῃσι τεὸν μένος ἱλάσκωνται / εὐαγέως ἔρδοντες, ἐναίσιμα δῶρα τελοῦντες.

This is the earliest known reference to afterlife punishments and rewards for ordinary people, as opposed to mythical characters who had personally incurred Zeus' anger – like the three 'sinners' punished in Tartarus according to the Homeric *Nekyia* (*Od.* 11.582-600)[63] – or favour – like Menelaus, who, according to *Od.* 4.561-569, was destined to go to the Elysian Plain instead of Hades by virtue of being Zeus' son-in-law.

The promise of a better lot in the afterlife was the main draw behind the success of the Orphic mysteries, but fear of otherworldly punishments must have also played a role in attracting members to the new cult. Much the same can be said for the Eleusinian mysteries. Although the *Hymn to Demeter* is deliberately vague as to the exact nature of these punishments and rewards, other sources provide us with more information. With regard to the punishments envisioned for the uninitiated, Pausanias (10.31.9 = *OF* 434v) reports that in the large picture of the underworld painted by Polygnotus (5th cent. BC) on the wall of the Cnidian Lesche in Delphi, a group of people labelled as "uninitiated" (ἀμύητοι) were depicted in the act of "carrying water in broken pitchers" and pouring it in a jar.[64] The water-carriers are identified by Pausanias (10.31.11) as people who had not been initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries; this is confirmed by Plato (*R.* 2.363c-d = *OF* 431i, 434i), who associates the punishment of carrying water in a sieve with Eumolpus, the mythical progenitor of the clan of the Eumolpidae, who conducted the initiation rites at Eleusis. Plato, however, does not simply mention Eumolpus by name but speaks instead of "Musaeus and his son",[65] referencing the Orphic and the Eleusinian tradition in the same breath.[66] Elsewhere (*Grg.* 493a-b = *OF* 434ii), Plato associates the same punishment with

[63] On Tityos, Tantalos, and Sisyphos in the *Nekyia*, see esp. Sourvinou-Inwood 1986 and Burkert 2009, 152-155.
[64] For a reconstruction of Polygnotus' *Nekyia*, see Stansbury-O'Donnell 1990. On the scene of the water-carriers, see most recently Mugione 2017.
[65] Eumolpus was considered by some sources as Musaeus' son (*Marmor Parium* [*IG* XII/5 444] 15 = *OF* 1096i, *schol.* Aeschin. *in Ctesiph.* 3.18 [82 Dindorf] = Musae. fr. 18i Bernabé). On Musaeus' relationship with Orpheus, see Ch. 1 n. 111.
[66] Graf 1974, 94-98; West 1983a, 23f.

"a clever man, perhaps a Sicilian or an Italian",[67] a likely reference to the Orphic-Pythagorean tradition which produced the sort of allegorical and eschatological texts mentioned in the *Suda* (ο 654 Adler = *OF* 1018iv) among the literary works attributed to Orpheus.[68] In addition to carrying water in a sieve, Plato (*Phd.* 69c = *OF* 434iii, *R.* 2.363d = *OF* 434i, 7.533d) mentions another afterlife punishment associated with the Orphic-Eleusinian tradition, according to which the souls of the uninitiated would be made to lie in the mud.[69] Both punishments are clearly related to the idea of ritual purification,[70] which was of crucial importance in both the Orphic and the Eleusinian mysteries: with regard to the former, the proclamation of purity voiced by the initiate in the Thurii gold tablets (*OF* 488-490.1 ἔρχομαι ἐκ καθαρῶν κτλ) reveals the emphasis placed by the Orphics on becoming and remaining pure, an objective which they achieved, as we saw in the previous section, by observing religious taboos and leading an ascetic life. The Eleusinian initiands were also required to undergo a period of fasting and purification before becoming initiated, and they could only partake in the mysteries if they had not committed murder.[71] Once initiated, they were apparently required to abstain from meat,[72] but, as far as we know, they were not expected to avoid sexual intercourse or contact with births and deaths like the Orphic initiates were.

Having spoken about the punishments for the uninitiated, let us now turn to the rewards which awaited the initiated in the afterlife. The *Hymn to Demeter* promises material gain in this lifetime to those who partake in the mysteries and a miserable afterlife for those who do not; the clear implication is that, conversely, the posthumous existence of the

[67] The identity of the κομψὸς ἀνήρ has been the subject of speculation since antiquity: Olympiodorus (*in Grg.* 157.15-17 Westerink) identified him with Empedocles, but most modern scholars believe him to be either an Orphic (Guthrie 1952, 161f.; Bernabé 2011, 69-71) or a Pythagorean (Burkert 1972, 248 n. 48). On this passage, see further below §3.1.
[68] Burkert 1972, 125-133; Graf 1974, 92-94; West 1983a, 7-15; Kingsley 1995, 115.
[69] Cf. Ar. *Ra.* 145f., 273, Plut. fr. 178 Sandbach = *OF* 594, D.L. 6.39 = *OF* 435ii.
[70] Albinus 2000, 138f.; Fabiano 2010.
[71] Parker 1983, 283-286.
[72] Xenocr. fr. 98 Heinze *ap.* Porph. *Abst.* 4.22.

initiated will be blissful and free of toil. This is confirmed by Isocrates, who in his *Panegyricus* (28) alludes to the "sweeter hopes regarding both the end of life and all eternity" which Demeter imparts to those who partake in her mysteries. Other authors from the Classical period, such as Pindar and Sophocles, speak of special privileges in the afterlife which are bestowed upon the initiated, although they do not mention the Eleusinian mysteries explicitly:

> ὄλβιος ὅστις ἰδὼν κεῖν' εἶσ' ὑπὸ χθόν'·
> οἶδε μὲν βίου τελευτάν,
> οἶδεν δὲ διόσδοτον ἀρχάν
>
> Happy is he who knowing those things will go beneath the earth: for he knows the end of life but also the beginning given by Zeus.[73]
>
> ὡς τρισόλβιοι
> κεῖνοι βροτῶν, οἳ ταῦτα δερχθέντες τέλη
> μόλωσ' ἐς Ἅιδου· τοῖσδε γὰρ μόνοις ἐκεῖ
> ζῆν ἔστι, τοῖς δ' ἄλλοισι πάντ' ἔχειν κακά
>
> Thrice blessed among the mortals are those who go to Hades having seen these sacred rites: for them alone there is life down there, whereas the others suffer every evil.[74]

Phrases like "those who have seen these rites" appear to refer specifically to the Eleusinian mysteries, in which 'seeing' and 'showing' played a fundamental role – with the highest

[73] Pi. fr. 137 SM = *OF* 444i. This fragment, belonging to one of Pindar's *Dirges* (Cannatà Fera 1990, 92, 204-209) or *Dithyrambs* (Lavecchia 2000, 40, 212-214), was preserved by Clement of Alexandria, who relates it to the Eleusinian mysteries (Clem. Al. *Strom.* 3.3.17 Πίνδαρος περὶ τῶν ἐν Ἐλευσῖνι μυστηρίων λέγων ἐπιφέρει). Modern scholars tend to agree with this attribution, but the parallels found in Orphic ritual texts show that the two cults overlapped significantly (cf., e.g., *OF* 463 βίος, θάνατος, βίος / ἀλήθεια, 485.1, 486.1 νῦν ἔθανες καὶ νῦν ἐγένου, τρισόλβιε, ἄματι τῷδε). The reference to Zeus – unless διόσδοτος is used generically to mean 'god-given' (Currie 2005, 32) or 'heaven-sent' – might itself be indicative of Orphic influence, considering the prominent role given to Zeus in the Orphic cosmogony (see below §6.1). Given the soteriological context, one might even speculate whether διόσδοτος could be an allusion to the Dionysian origin of the human soul (see below §6.2), which grants the initiates the right to gain entry to the realm of the gods: in this sense, the new "beginning" (i.e., the initiate's rebirth as an immortal god) is "given by Zeus" because Zeus is the father of Dionysus – but this is admittedly all very speculative.

[74] Soph. fr. 837 Radt = *OF* 444ii. On this and other references to the mysteries in Sophocles, see Seaford 1994b.

degree of initiation being referred to as the 'viewing' (ἐποπτεία).[75] The use of the term ὄλβιος could be another hint at Eleusis,[76] although Orphic sources, such as the gold tablets, also address the initiates with the same epithet – and, most importantly, with the rare variant τρισόλβιος.[77] In any case, the Orphic and Eleusinian mysteries seem to share much of the same beliefs with regard to eschatology, to the extent that most testimonies about the fate of the initiated and uninitiated in the afterlife can reasonably be applied to both cults. In the Orphic gold tablets, for example, the death of the initiate is celebrated as the beginning of a new, eternal life. The smaller tablet from the Timpone Grande in Thurii, dating from the fourth century BC, proclaims that the initiate has become "a god instead of a mortal" and will "travel on the right-hand road to the holy meadows and groves of Persephone".[78] The Pelinna tablet, dating from the late fourth century BC, addresses the initiate in a similar manner: "Now you have died and now you have come into being, thrice blessed, on this day" (*OF* 485.1 νῦν ἔθανες καὶ νῦν ἐγένου, τρισόλβιε, ἄματι τῷδε). This verse bears a striking resemblance to the above-cited Sophoclean fragment (fr. 837 Radt = *OF* 444ii), which also addresses the initiates as "thrice blessed" (τρισόλβιοι), stating that only for them there will be life after death.

That immortality – or, rather, divinity[79] – was the prize which the Eleusinian initiates looked forward to seems to be confirmed by the anecdote related by an ancient

[75] Cf. *HH* 2.480 ὄλβιος, ὃς τάδ' ὄπωπεν ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων. On the importance of 'showing' and 'viewing' at Eleusis, see Petridou 2013, which discusses both Pi. fr. 137 and Soph. fr. 837, along with *HH* 2 and other sources.

[76] Cf. *HH* 2.480 ὄλβιος, ὃς τάδ' ὄπωπεν ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων, 486f. μέγ' ὄλβιος, ὅν τιν' ἐκεῖναι / προφρονέως φίλωνται ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων.

[77] Lam. Pelinn. (*OF* 485) 1 νῦν ἔθανες καὶ νῦν ἐγένου, τρισόλβιε, ἄματι τῷδε, 7 κἀπιμένει σ' ὑπὸ γῆν τέλεα ἅσσαπερ ὄλβιοι ἄλλοι, Lam. Thur. (*OF* 488) 9 ὄλβιε καὶ μακαριστέ, θεὸς δ' ἔσῃ ἀντὶ βροτοῖο.

[78] Lam. Thur. (*OF* 487) 4-6 θεὸς ἐγένου ἐξ ἀνθρώπου … / … δεξιὰν ὁδοιπόρ<ει> / λειμῶνάς θ'{ε} ἱεροὺς καὶ ἄλσεα Φερσεφονείας. Cf. Lam. Thur. (*OF* 488) 9 θεὸς δ' ἔσῃ ἀντὶ βροτοῖο, Lam. Rom. (*OF* 491) 4 Καικιλία Σεκουνδεῖνα, νόμῳ ἴθι δῖα γεγῶσα.

[79] In the mind of the ancient Greeks, to be immortal meant to be godlike: hence, in Homer, the gods are 'the immortals', οἱ ἀθάνατοι, as opposed to 'the mortals', οἱ βροτοί – i.e., humans (on this see, most recently, Long 2019, 8-14 and Meister 2019, 1-5). Mere survival after death does not equal immortality, especially in the case of the Homeric afterlife, where what survives is but a shadow, a lifeless image, without any consciousness or memory (see, e.g., *Od.* 11.475f. νεκροὶ / ἀφραδέες ναίουσι, βροτῶν εἴδωλα καμόντων): this

commentator on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (145.23 Heylbut), according to which Aeschylus was apparently accused of profaning the Eleusinian mysteries with his play on Sisyphus, who was famous for (almost) cheating death.[80] The experience of the initiates in the afterlife likely entailed a continuation of the same collective rites and activities in which they used to partake while they were alive. This seems to be the meaning of the following line from the Pelinna tablet: "And below the earth await you the same rites as the other blessed ones" (*OF* 485.7 κἀπιμένει σ' ὑπὸ γῆν τέλεα ἅσσαπερ ὄλβιοι ἄλλοι).[81] On the precise nature of these rites, we can only speculate, but we know for certain that wine consumption played a significant role, as evidenced by the previous line in the same tablet: "You have wine as your fortunate honour" (*OF* 485.6 οἶνον ἔχεις εὐδαίμονα τιμήν). Further confirmation is provided by Plato, who mockingly describes the reward promised by "Musaeus and his son" to the deceased initiates as "a symposium of the saints, where, reclining on couches and crowned with wreaths, they spend eternity drinking wine, as if the best reward for virtue were a perpetual state of drunkenness".[82] The place which the deceased initiates will inhabit is referred to in the gold tablets as a "sacred meadow",[83] a *locus amoenus* that, while still located in Hades, is only accessible to those who can demonstrate their privileged status to the guardians who preside over it. This is a significant departure from the Homeric vision of the afterlife, according to which all humans, after they die, go to the same "musty and horrible dwelling",[84] and only a select number of heroes

was likely the sort of existence which was envisioned for the uninitiated in Hades, which is why, in Sophocles' words (fr. 837 Radt), "only for [the initiates] there is life down there".

[80] On Sisyphus, see *LIMC* VII.1 (1994) 781-787, *s.v.*; on Aeschylus' eponymous play(s), see Pietruczuk 2011.

[81] Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal (2008, 62, 90f.), following Luppe (1989), read καὶ σὺ μὲν εἶς ὑπὸ γῆν τελέσας ἅπερ ὄλβιοι ἄλλοι ("And you will go under the earth, once you have accomplished the same rites as the other happy ones").

[82] Pl. *R.* 2.363c-d = *OF* 431i Μουσαῖος δὲ τούτων νεανικώτερα τἀγαθὰ καὶ ὁ ὑὸς αὐτοῦ παρὰ θεῶν διδόασιν τοῖς δικαίοις· εἰς Ἅιδου γὰρ ἀγαγόντες τῷ λόγῳ καὶ κατακλίναντες καὶ συμπόσιον τῶν ὁσίων κατασκευάσαντες ἐστεφανωμένους ποιοῦσιν τὸν ἅπαντα χρόνον ἤδη διάγειν μεθύοντας, ἡγησάμενοι κάλλιστον ἀρετῆς μισθὸν μέθην αἰώνιον.

[83] Lam Thur. (*OF* 487) 5f. δεξιὰν ὁδοιπόρ<ει> / λειμῶνάς θ' {ε} ἱεροὺς καὶ ἄλσεα Φερσεφονείας, Lam. Pher. (*OF* 493) 2 εἴσιθ<ι> ἱερὸν λειμῶνα.

[84] *Od*. 20.63f. ἢ ἔπειτα μ᾽ ἀναρπάξασα θύελλα / οἴχοιτο προφέρουσα κατ᾽ ἠερόεντα κέλευθα.

are allowed to spend eternity in the "Elysian plain at the edge of the world […], where life is easiest for men".[85] A similar view is found in Hesiod (*Op.* 166-173), who relays that the survivors of the battle of Thebes and the Trojan war were transported by Zeus to the "Isles of the Blessed along the shore of deep-swirling Ocean", where they live "without sorrow". Although located on the surface of the earth and inhabited by living, breathing beings, the Blessed Isles, like their Homeric equivalent, are still technically an otherworldly place, since they lie beyond the river Ocean.[86] Owing at least in part to this ambiguity, the eternal abode of heroes and demi-gods eventually became accessible to ordinary people. Perhaps not coincidentally, the first instance of a mortal – not a hero of myth, like Menelaus – being admitted to the Isles of the Blessed is recorded in a sixth-century drinking song addressed to Harmodius, the killer of the Pisistratid Hipparchus:

> Dearest Harmodius, surely you are not dead. Instead, they say, you live in the Isles of the Blessed, where swift-footed Achilles and Tydeus' son, the noble Diomedes, are said to dwell.[87]

This brings us back to late sixth-century Athens. The tyrant Pisistratus presided over some major innovations in the cult of Dionysus, as well as in the cult of Eleusis: not only was the building of the Telesterion increased in size and magnificence, likely in response to an increase in the number of worshippers,[88] but a new cult was established in the Athenian suburb of Agrae, which during the Classical age served as a preparation – rather than a formal prerequisite – for the annual initiation festival at Eleusis and was thus referred to as 'Lesser Mysteries'.[89] According to tradition, the Lesser Mysteries were founded by

[85] *Od.* 4.563-565 ἀλλά σ' ἐς Ἠλύσιον πεδίον καὶ πείρατα γαίης / ἀθάνατοι πέμψουσιν, ὅθι ξανθὸς Ῥαδάμανθυς, / τῇ περ ῥηίστη βιοτὴ πέλει ἀνθρώποισιν.
[86] It is worth noting that, in the *Odyssey* (10.508-512), the entrance to Hades is located beyond the river Ocean, in the groves of Persephone (cf. Lam Thur. *OF* 487.6).
[87] *PMG* 894. On the significance of this drinking song in the 'democratisation' of the Isles of the Blessed, see Santamaría 2006, esp. pp. 8f.
[88] Sourvinou-Inwood 1997, 138f.
[89] Participation at the Lesser Mysteries of Agrae was separate and distinct from the two phases of initiation into the Greater Mysteries of Eleusis, known as μύησις (and, later, τελετή) and ἐποπτεία (on this, see esp.

Demeter to allow Heracles to purify himself in order to undergo initiation at Eleusis in preparation for his final labour,[90] and, at least according to a late antique source, they included "a reenactment of things concerning Dionysus".[91] An ancient commentator to Aristophanes informs us that the Lesser Mysteries belonged to Persephone,[92] so a dramatization of the birth and death of Dionysus – who, according to Orphic lore, was the son of Zeus and Persephone – would not have been out of place there.[93] In conclusion, it appears that sometime between the sixth and fifth century BC the Eleusinian cult underwent significant changes due to the influence of the new religious movement which we call Orphism: this is reflected in the tradition which makes Musaeus the father of Eumolpus.[94] If what I have put forth regarding the development of the Eleusinian (and the Bacchic) mysteries is correct, then Albinus' (2000, 159) definition of Orphism as "a Panhellenic movement of intervention in old traditions which were susceptible to being turned into eschatologically oriented rituals" appears to be remarkably accurate. Of course, it would be wrong to assume that every feature associated with Orphism was also shared by the Eleusinian mysteries, or vice versa. For example, whereas the Orphics saw the afterlife that was promised to them as being markedly better than their present life,[95] there is no evidence to suggest that the same negative perception of the material world was also linked to the Eleusinian cult. Another difference is highlighted by the importance placed on 'hearing'

Dowden 1980 and Simms 1990). On the connection between the Lesser Mysteries and Pisistratus, see Boardman 1975.

[90] D.S. 4.14.3. Elsewhere, Diodorus Siculus (4.25.1 = *OF* 713ii) relates that Heracles was initiated at Eleusis "at the time when Musaeus presided over the cult". The story of Heracles' initiation prior to his descent to Hades to retrieve Cerberus is attested as early as the fifth century BC (Eur. *Her*. 613) and might have been told in an Orphic poem about Heracles' *katabasis*, ascribed to Eumolpus or Musaeus or Orpheus himself (see Graf 1974, 146f.).

[91] St. Byz. *s.v.* Ἄγρα.

[92] *Schol.* Ar. *Pl*. 845.

[93] On the possible Orphic elements in the Lesser Mysteries and the role of Orphism in the development of the cults of Dionysus and of Demeter and Kore in Pisistratean Athens, see Valdés and Martínez Nieto 2005.

[94] See n. 65.

[95] See n. 119.

and 'understanding' in the Derveni papyrus and other Orphic sources,[96] as opposed to the pre-eminence of 'viewing' and 'experiencing' in the Eleusinian mysteries[97] – although sacred texts and formulas were likely recited in the 'spoken' portion of the Eleusinian ritual (λεγόμενα).[98] Eventually, however, the overlap between Orphism and the Eleusinian mysteries became so significant that the two cults came to be regarded as virtually equivalent:[99] to borrow Bernabé's (2009a, 98) metaphor, we could say that "Orpheus was in possession of the 'patent' of the mysteries in general, and that Eumolpus was running a 'franchise' in Eleusis".[100]

2.3 Pythagoreanism

The study of Pythagoreanism is plagued by many of the same issues with which students of Orphism are confronted, such as the dearth of early sources and the difficulty of separating early Pythagorean doctrine from Platonic influence.[101] This is hardly surprising, considering the close relationship that existed between Orphism and Pythagoreanism in the early stages of their development. Herodotus (2.81 = *OF* 650), who provides the earliest literary testimony on the Orphic cult, attests to this connection in a famous (and controversial) passage:

[96] *OF* 101 ἀείσω ξυνετοῖσι. θύρας δ' ἐπίθεσθε, βέβηλοι, *P.Derv*. 7.8-11 KPT = §21 Kotwick '˹θ˺ύρας' γὰρ 'ἐπιθέ˹σθα˺ι' ὁ κελεύσας τοῖ[ς ὡσὶ]ν αὐτ[οὺς μὴ θεοὺς ἀ]σεβεῖν φη[σιν] το[ῖ]ς πολλοῖς [. . . . . τὴ]ν ἀκοὴν [διατηρο]ῦντας καθ[αρήν . . . . .], 20.2-8 KPT = §§66f. Kotwick οὐ γὰρ οἷόν τε ἀκοῦσαι ὁμοῦ καὶ μαθεῖν τὰ λεγόμενα … [δ]οκοῦντες πρότερον ἢ ἐπιτελέσαι εἰδήσειν, ἀπέρχονται ἐπιτελέσαντες πρὶν εἰδέναι, οὐδ' ἐπανερόμενοι, {ὥσπερ} ὡς εἰδότες τέων εἶδον ἢ ἤκουσαν ἢ ἔμαθον.

[97] Aristot. fr. 15 Ross καθάπερ Ἀριστοτέλης ἀξιοῖ τοὺς τελουμένους οὐ μαθεῖν τι δεῖν ἀλλὰ παθεῖν καὶ διατεθῆναι, δηλονότι γενομένους ἐπιτηδείους.

[98] Mylonas 1961, 272f.

[99] See, e.g., Paus. 1.37.4 = *OF* 649i ὅστις δὲ ἤδη τελετὴν Ἐλευσῖνι εἶδεν ἢ τὰ καλούμενα Ὀρφικὰ ἐπελέξατο, οἶδεν ὃ λέγω. This equivalence was likely already established by the time that Musaeus came to be regarded as Eumolpus' father, a tradition which is first attested (implicitly) by Plato (*R*. 2.363c-d = *OF* 431i, 434i).

[100] This, incidentally, might be the reason why no gold tablets have been found in Attica (see Burkert 1999, 64).

[101] For a history of modern criticism on Pythagoreanism, see Cornelli 2013, 7-51.

> οὐ μέντοι ἔς γε τὰ ἱρὰ ἐσφέρεται εἰρίνεα οὐδὲ συγκαταθάπτεταί σφι· οὐ γὰρ ὅσιον. ὁμολογέει δὲ ταῦτα τοῖσι Ὀρφικοῖσι καλεομένοισι καὶ Βακχικοῖσι, ἐοῦσι δὲ Αἰγυπτίοισι καὶ Πυθαγορείοισι· οὐδὲ γὰρ τούτων τῶν ὀργίων μετέχοντα ὅσιον ἐστὶ ἐν εἰρινέοισι εἵμασι θαφθῆναι. ἔστι δὲ περὶ αὐτῶν ἱρὸς λόγος λεγόμενος.
>
> Nothing woollen is brought into the temples or buried with them (*sc*. the Egyptians), for that is unholy. This is in accordance with practices that are called Orphic and Bacchic but are in fact Egyptian and Pythagorean: for it is also unholy for someone who partakes in these rites to be buried in woollen garments. There is a sacred story that is told about these things.[102]

The prohibition against wearing wool is one of many taboos which the followers of Orpheus and Pythagoras were expected to observe: dietary habits and sexual behaviour were especially restricted, although complete abstinence from meat or sexual intercourse does not seem to have been a requirement for the Pythagoreans, as it apparently was for the Orphics. Diogenes Laërtius (8.9) ascribes complete celibacy to Pythagoras, but this is contradicted by other sources which mention his wife and children.[103] According to Philostratus (*VA* 1.13) and Iamblichus (*VP* 48, 50), Pythagoras enforced strict marital fidelity on his followers, and this would be congruent with a Pythagorean maxim (ἄκουσμα) reported by Iamblichus (*VP* 86) and possibly referenced by Plato (*L*. 6.773e), which proclaims that humans have a duty to procreate, to leave behind someone to worship the gods. Reports about the dietary habits of Pythagoras and his followers are equally conflicting: some sources assert that Pythagoras was not only a vegetarian but also avoided any contact with butchers and hunters,[104] while others attest that only certain animals – namely, those that could not be sacrificed – or certain parts of the animal were considered

[102] One family of manuscripts reads ὁμολογέουσι δὲ ταῦτα τοῖσι Ὀρφικοῖσι καλεομένοισι καὶ Πυθαγορείοισι, but the longer version, which preserves the datives as neuter – for it is natural that ταῦτα, which is the subject in this version, should be compared to 'things' (Ὀρφικὰ καὶ Βακχικὰ κτλ) and not groups of people (Ὀρφικοὶ κτλ) – seems to be supported by the reference to ὄργια in the following sentence (Burkert 1972, 127f.). For a defence of the shorter reading, see Linforth 1941, 39-47. For further discussion, see the extensive bibliography in Bernabé 2005, 219 *ad l*.
[103] See Burkert 1972, 114 nn. 28, 32f.
[104] Eudox. fr. 36 Gisinger *ap*. Porph. *VP* 7.

taboo.[105] A possible explanation might be that early Pythagoreans allowed animal sacrifice and meat consumption for political reasons, but began to advocate a strict vegetarian diet after their collapse as a political force.[106] The prohibitions against eating meat and wearing wool seem like a natural corollary of the doctrine of reincarnation,[107] which, as we shall see shortly, is associated with Pythagoras from the earliest evidence. The famous taboo on eating broad beans is also connected with this doctrine according to various testimonies. As a scholium on the *Iliad* (13.589 III 513 Erbse) attests, it was believed that the souls of the dead returned to earth from the underworld through bean blossoms, which could help explain Aristotle's (fr. 195 Rose = D.L. 8.34) statement that broad beans are like the "gates of Hades"; the Orphic-Pythagorean verse which states that eating broad beans is like eating the heads of our ancestors also seems to hint at this belief.[108] The taboo on broad beans is also mentioned by Herodotus in his discussion of Egyptian religious customs, along with the belief in reincarnation, but modern scholars recognise this as a projection of Greek (Orphic-Pythagorean) ritual practices on the ancient Egyptians.[109]

These are only some of the many prohibitions and regulations which are ascribed to the Pythagoreans in the ancient tradition; many of them deal with matters of ritual – such as the correct way to pour libations, which animals should not be sacrificed, how one should enter the temple, and so on – but some of the rules regarding daily life are rather obscure – one should put on the right shoe first, one should help a person to load up but not to unload, one should not frequent public baths, to cite but a few examples – so much so, in fact, that

[105] Arist. fr. 194 Rose, Iamb. *VP* 85.
[106] Burkert 1972, 182.
[107] If the ἱερὸς λόγος mentioned by Herodotus (2.81 = *OF* 650) in connection with the taboo on wool is indeed Orphic-Pythagorean and not Egyptian (the text admits both interpretations), it was probably an eschatological poem which described the soul's journey through the cycle of rebirths. For the evidence attesting the existence of this kind of literature, see below.
[108] *OF* 648 ἶσόν τοι κυάμους τε φαγεῖν κεφαλάς τε τοκήων. Some sources ascribe the verse to Pythagoras (Luc. *Gal*. 4, Lyd. *Mens*. 4.2, Clem. Al. *Strom*. 3.3.24.1, Elias *in* Porph. *Is*. 14.30 Busse), others to Orpheus (*Geop*. 2.35.8, Greg. Naz. *Or*. 27.10); Plutarch (*Quaest. conv*. 635e) speaks of "Orphic or Pythagorean doctrines".
[109] Burkert 1972, 126-128, 158; Riedweg 2005, 56f.

many ancient interpreters regarded them as αἰνίγματα, riddles to be deciphered, rather than rules meant to be followed literally.[110] In addition to these rules, members of early Pythagorean communities had to observe an oath of secrecy:[111] this is another trait which the Pythagoreans shared with the Orphic initiates, who were forbidden from divulging the content of the rites to the uninitiated.[112] It is worth noting, however, that, unlike the Orphics, the early Pythagoreans were a formally structured sect with political ambitions.[113] Their focus on building tight-knit communities with shared ideals and goals led them to develop a much larger body of rules and 'shibboleths' in comparison to the Orphics, who lacked a strong collective identity and whose motivations – avoiding punishment in the afterlife and escaping the cycle of reincarnations – appear to have been markedly individualistic.[114]

I mentioned the belief in reincarnation as a possible reason behind certain Pythagorean taboos; unlike vegetarianism, this belief is associated with Pythagoreanism since the earliest times.[115] In the oldest testimony regarding Pythagoras, Xenophanes relates a humorous anecdote, according to which the Samian once came across someone beating a puppy and said: "Stop, don't hit it! For it is the soul of a friend which I recognised hearing its whining".[116] Heraclides Ponticus (fr. 89 Wehrli = D.L. 8.4f.), a disciple of Plato who wrote a number of dialogues featuring Pythagoras and other Pythagoreans, represented him as being able to remember all seven of his previous incarnations.[117] Around the same time,

[110] See Burkert 1972, 171-174.
[111] Iambl. *VP* 73f.
[112] Ps.-Euripides (*Rhes.* 943f. = *OF* 511) speaks of the "secret rites" (μυστηρίων τε τῶν ἀπορρήτων) revealed by Orpheus, and the opening verse to an ancient Orphic theogony, quoted in full by Plutarch (*E ap. Delph.* 391d = *OF* 1iii ἀείσω ξυνετοῖσι· θύρας δ᾽ἐπίθεσθε βέβηλοι) and paraphrased by the Derveni author (*P.Derv.* 7.8-11 KPT), bars the "profane" from listening to Orpheus' song (on this verse, see Bremmer 2011).
[113] Alex. Polyh. *FGrHist* 273 F 93 *ap*. D.L. 8.33 = *OF* 628i.
[114] Detienne 1975, 55.
[115] See, most recently, Cornelli 2016 and Horky 2021.
[116] Xenoph. fr. 7 DK = D.L. 8.36 ὃ δὲ (*sc.* Ξενοφάνης) περὶ αὐτοῦ φησιν, οὕτως ἔχει· καί ποτέ μιν στυφελιζομένου σκύλακος παριόντα φασὶν ἐποικτῖραι καὶ τόδε φάσθαι ἔπος· 'παῦσαι μηδὲ ῥάπιζ', ἐπεὶ ἦ φίλου ἀνέρος ἐστὶ ψυχή, τὴν ἔγνων φθεγξαμένης ἀΐων'.
[117] Continued memory is a proxy for immortality. On the connection between memory and metempsychosis in Pythagoreanism and Orphism, see Pugliese Carratelli 2001, 17-29; Riedweg 2005, 33f.; Cornelli 2013, 119f.

Aristotle speaks of "the Pythagorean myths" according to which any soul can be incarnated in any body.[118] The belief in reincarnation is also associated, though not explicitly, with early Orphism,[119] and later sources ascribe it systematically to both Orphics and Pythagoreans.[120] Herodotus (2.123 = *OF* 423), who tends to ascribe Orphic practices and ideas to the ancient Egyptians, states that the theory of reincarnation was adopted by "certain Greeks, some earlier and some later, who presented it as their own". Different hypotheses have been proposed regarding the identity of these Greeks,[121] whom Herodotus refuses to name,[122] but it seems reasonable to assume that the Orphics and the Pythagoreans – possibly considered as one single group[123] – were included among the Greek proponents of the theory of reincarnation in Herodotus' mind. Modern scholars debate which of the two movements should be credited with introducing this theory in Greece;[124] however, the early histories of Orphism and Pythagoreanism seem to overlap to such a degree that it is virtually impossible to determine with certainty where the theory originated. Herodotus is not the only ancient author who testifies to an original kinship between Orphism and Pythagoreanism: his contemporary Ion of Chios (fr. 2 DK *ap*. D.L. 8.8 = *OF* 506i)

[118] Arist. *de An*. 407b23 ὥσπερ ἐνδεχόμενον κατὰ τοὺς Πυθαγορικοὺς μύθους τὴν τυχοῦσαν ψυχὴν εἰς τὸ τυχὸν ἐνδύεσθαι σῶμα.

[119] An Orphic gold tablet from the fourth century BC celebrates the initiate's escape from the "heavy and painful cycle" (Lam. Thur. *OF* 488.5 κύκλου … βαρυπενθέος ἀργαλέοιο), which most scholars interpret as a reference to the cycle of rebirths (κύκλος γενέσεως): see Zuntz 1971, 320-322; Casadio 1991, 135f.; Albinus 2000, 146; Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008, 117-121; Graf and Johnston 2013, 127. For a comprehensive survey of the evidence, see Bernabé's and Casadesús' contributions to the collection of essays edited by Cornelli et al. (2013). On Orphism and Pythagoreanism, see also Betegh 2014; Bernabé 2016b; Brisson 2016a; Casadesús 2016b.

[120] Diog. Oen. fr. 40 Smith, Dam. *in. Phd.* 1.203 (123 Westerink) = *OF* 428iii, Olymp. *in Phd*. 10.6 (145 Westerink) = *OF* 428ii.

[121] The possible candidates are the Orphics, Pythagoras, and Empedocles, in the following combinations: Orphics and Pythagoras (Nilsson 1955, 702; Morrison 1956, 137; Casadio 1991, 128f.; Zhmud 1997, 118f.), Orphics and Empedocles (Rathmann 1933, 48-55 – not excluding the first possibility), Pythagoras and Empedocles (Long 1948, 22), Pythagoreans and Orphics (considered as one and the same) and Empedocles (Burkert 1972, 126 n. 38; Bernabé 2013d, 129f.).

[122] Hdt. 2.123.3 = *OF* 423 τῶν ἐγὼ εἰδὼς τὰ οὐνόματα οὐ γράφω. Bernabé (2013d, 130) relates Herodotus' reticence to the "practice of silence enjoined on initiates who must not reveal what is said at the mysteries".

[123] Cf. Hdt. 2.81 = *OF* 650 (quoted above, p. 66).

[124] Most scholars believe that the theory of reincarnation originated with the Orphics and was later adopted by the Pythagoreans (see, e.g., Nilsson 1935, 212; Jaeger 1947, 105; Guthrie 1952, 216-221; Casadio 1991, 128; Cornelli 2013, 86-136). For the opposite opinion, see, e.g., Wilamowitz 1932, 185; Festugière 1936, 307; Bremmer 2002, 24.

reportedly wrote in the *Triagmoi* that several poems attributed to Orpheus were actually composed by Pythagoras. Epigenes, an otherwise unknown author, plausibly dated to the early fourth century BC,[125] wrote a treatise titled *On works attributed to Orpheus*, in which he discussed the authorship of the *Katabasis*, *Hieros logos*, *Peplos*, and *Physika*, ascribing them to two Pythagoreans – the first two to Cercops, and the other two to Brontinus.[126] The same tradition is also attested by Cicero (*Nat. deor.* 1.107 = *OF* 889i), who relates that, according to the Pythagoreans, the Orphic poem current at the time was the work of "a certain Cercops". In late antiquity, the affinity between Orphism and Pythagoreanism was epitomised by the story of Aglaophamus, the mythical *Orpheotelestes* who was said to have initiated Pythagoras into the Orphic mysteries.[127]

Despite the many commonalities which unite Orphism and Pythagoreanism, the two are, of course, not identical. The main difference between them seems to lie in their attitude towards the material world: the Orphics, at least in principle, rejected it completely, while the Pythagoreans chose to engage with it by actively participating in political life – and it was for this reason, perhaps, that the early Pythagoreans did not prohibit meat consumption and animal sacrifice. This is congruent with the fact that the early Pythagoreans did not, as far as we know, share the Orphic view of (re)incarnation as a misfortune and a punishment:[128] for them, reincarnation was simply the logical consequence of the immortality of the soul, a natural process which is inherently neither good nor bad. The contrast between the worldview of the Orphics and that of the early Pythagoreans is also reflected in their patron gods: the chthonic Dionysus for the former, and the solar Apollo, god of harmony and order, for the latter.[129] Some scholars have argued that Pythagoreanism

[125] See Ch. 1 n. 65.
[126] Clem. Al. *Strom.* 1.21.131.3 = *OF* 1018iii.
[127] This tradition is not attested before Iamblichus (*VP* 28.146 = *OF* 1144iii), who may very well have invented it, as hypothesised by Brisson (2002a, 421).
[128] Bremmer 2002, 24; Bernabé 2013d, 136; Casadesús 2013, 173f.; Pellò 2018.
[129] Note, however, the early connection between Orpheus and Apollo (see above §1.3.1).

served to "Apollinise",[130] or "intellectualise" Orphism,[131] constructing a theory of the universe from the rationalistic interpretation of Orphic poetry.[132] Although this is somewhat of an oversimplification, it could perhaps be said that early Pythagoreanism developed from Orphism as its philosophical branch: they both shared the same fundamental premises – namely, the belief in reincarnation and in the immortality of the soul – although the former lacked the notion of guilt and expiation which the latter associated with the cycle of rebirths.

2.4 Concluding remarks

As we reach the end of our survey of early Orphism and related cults, it is finally time to provide a serviceable working definition of the terms 'Orphic' and 'Orphism'. This will not be a particularly original or unorthodox definition, but one that combines insights from the work of previous scholars – including scholars with opposing views – to best reflect the current state of the evidence. In its most general sense, I employ 'Orphism' as an umbrella term for the entire spectrum of ancient Greek mystery religion and associated beliefs, with all their different ritual and literary manifestations.[133] As we have seen, this broad definition is based on the ancient tradition which ascribed to Orpheus the founding of the *teletai*, but it is also justified by the significant overlap between Orphism proper and the other main mystery cults of Classical Greece – most notably, the Bacchic mysteries, the mysteries of Eleusis, and Pythagoreanism – which are often connected to Orphism by the sources. It would be wrong, however, to think of Orphism as simply the sum of all the different elements which it shared with these other cults, for it also had a series of defining traits

[130] Ciaceri 1931-1932.
[131] Burkert 1972, 132f.
[132] Riedweg 2005, 74f.
[133] A similar definition was adopted, albeit somewhat polemically, by Linforth (1941, 173); see above §1.2.

which set it apart from any other religious movement: namely, a negative view of the body and the belief that incarnation is a punishment inflicted on the soul due to an ancestral guilt;[134] the use of written texts during rituals and the proliferation of pseudepigraphal literary works,[135] including a *Theogony* which attributed to Zeus the creation of the universe;[136] an emphasis on possessing and 'understanding' secret knowledge, such as the hidden meaning of certain words, myths, or rituals.[137] A narrower definition of Orphism will be based on these traits, but will also include features shared by other cults, such as the belief in reincarnation and in post-mortem punishments and rewards, the pursuit of ritual purity, and the claim to a special connection with the gods. In the following chapters, I will mostly use the terms 'Orphism' and 'Orphic' in a narrow sense – meaning (something pertaining to) the religious and literary movement hailing Orpheus as its founder and focused primarily on eschatological and cosmological matters – occasionally referring to 'Orphic-Bacchic', 'Orphic-Eleusinian', or 'Orphic-Pythagorean' elements when relevant. I will also occasionally speak of Orphism and Orphic traits broadly defined, often using the equivalent terms 'mystery religion' and 'mystic(al)'.

[134] Bernabé 2005, 224.
[135] Bernabé 2005, 224; cf. West 1983a, 3.
[136] Alderink 1981, 89f.
[137] Edmonds 2013, 80f.

PART II

Orphic Influences in Plato's Philosophy

3. The Theory of the Soul

It can be argued that no ancient philosopher gave greater priority to the study of the soul than Plato; it is only appropriate, then, to begin our investigation into Plato's philosophy and its links to Orphism by analysing his psychological doctrine. In the Platonic corpus, the term 'soul' (ψυχή) is used over 1,140 times; the highest occurrence is found in the 'middle' and 'late' dialogues, with the *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and *Laws* at the top of the list, but even early works, such as the *Apology* and the *Gorgias*, contain references to the main tenets of Platonic psychology – namely, the soul's immortality and its primacy over the body – proving that the nature and well-being of the human soul have been a constant concern for Plato throughout his philosophical career. The importance of the theory of the soul within Plato's philosophical project can hardly be overstated, for it extends beyond the realm of ethics and 'practical' philosophy to that of metaphysics and epistemology: indeed, the human soul, by virtue of its affinity with those perfect and immutable entities which Plato calls Forms,[1] is able to bridge the gap between the world of Forms and the sensible world in which the Forms are instantiated – without this affinity, all knowledge would be inaccessible to humans. As one might expect, throughout Plato's works, the topic of the soul is approached from a variety of perspectives depending on the theme of each particular dialogue, or the purpose of a particular section within a dialogue. The perceived inconsistencies resulting from this variety have led some scholars to contest the notion of a coherent Platonic psychology,[2] especially in view of Plato's apparent fluctuation between different conceptions of 'soul' – namely, an indivisible, immortal soul in the *Phaedo* and a

[1] I translate Plato's εἴδη/ἰδέαι as 'Forms' – capitalised to reflect the ontological primacy which Plato assigned to them, as well as to avoid ambiguity – rather than 'Ideas', as the latter term is commonly used, both in general parlance and in modern philosophical discourse, to describe something which exists only in one's mind.

[2] See, e.g., Robinson 1995, ix f.; Long 2005, 173; Trabattoni 2007, 307f.

tripartite soul in the *Republic* and the *Timaeus*, where immortality is confined solely to the rational part.[3] I believe that most of the difficulties presented by Platonic psychology can be resolved by considering the complex cultural background which influenced the development of Plato's theories on the soul: I am referring in particular to two conflicting paradigms, one which we may call 'traditional', or 'Homeric', and another, which stands in opposition to the former, which we may call 'Orphic'. Over the course of this chapter, I will compare the Homeric and Orphic conceptions of 'soul' with Plato's, highlighting which elements he adopted and which ones he rejected, and how he combined them with his own insights to produce a new psychological paradigm which influenced the future development of psychology and philosophy of mind up to the modern era.

3.1 Soul/body dichotomy

The idea that human beings are made up of two distinct components – that is to say, a visible, tangible part, called 'body', through which we interact with the physical world, and an invisible, intangible part, called 'mind' or 'soul', which generates consciousness and thought – may seem rather mundane to us, due to its prevalence in the Western religious and philosophical tradition,[4] but this was not the case for the early Greeks. Before the fifth century BC, as far as the evidence suggests, mainstream Greek culture did not consider body and soul as two fundamentally distinct entities. In fact, Homeric Greek lacks the very words which would be required to express such distinction: namely, the words 'body' and

[3] This is only explicitly stated in the *Timaeus* (41a-d, 69b-72d), although it is heavily implied in the *Republic* (10. 611b-612a); in the *Phaedrus*, on the other hand, the soul is ostensibly described as essentially tripartite *and* immortal (see below §§3.2; 3.3.3).

[4] This has changed in more recent times, as several works in the fields of philosophy, psychology, cognitive linguistics, and cognitive neuroscience have challenged the dualist model (see, e.g., Lakoff and Johnson 1980; 1999; Damasio 1994; Shapiro 2010). On the other hand, mind-body dualism remains, for obvious reasons, the dominant (albeit not uncontested: see, e.g., Loftin and Farris 2017) paradigm in contemporary Christian theological discourse.

'soul' as they are defined in English and other modern European languages. The words which came to signify the concepts of 'body' and 'soul' in fifth-century Greek did not have the same meaning in the Homeric texts: σῶμα, when it refers to a human, always means 'corpse',[5] and ψυχή is only ever used in a context where permanent or temporary loss of consciousness (i.e., death or swooning) is described or implied.[6] This is not to say, of course, that Homer had no words to describe the body and soul of the living, only that he did not conceive of them as two separate entities. For Homer, in other words, the body and soul of a living human being are inextricably intertwined; when they become separated, at the moment of death, their nature is fundamentally altered, and they are hence referred to by different names. This is further confirmed by the variety of terms used to describe the psychic apparatus in Homeric Greek: almost all of them denote either parts of the body (e.g., φρένες, 'chest', κῆρ/κραδίη, ἦτορ, 'heart') or the products of physiological processes (e.g., θυμός, 'breath', or 'spirit')[7] – νόος, 'mind', being the notable exception. For Homer – and, presumably, for his contemporaries[8] – the body and the mind function as an indivisible whole, which defines a person's identity: the Homeric man does not *have* a body, in the same way as he does not *have* a soul or a mind, because the body, the mind, and the self are all essentially one and the same.[9]

[5] See Aristarch. *ap*. Apollon. *Lex. Hom.* 254; Snell 1953, 5f.; Clarke 1999, 116-119.
[6] See Bremmer 1983, 74f.; Clarke 1999, 55-60; Albinus 2000, 49-52.
[7] The term θυμός, a cognate of the Latin *fumus*, 'smoke' (see *DELG* 446, *s.v.* θυμός), originally denoted the air which is breathed into the lungs, "billowing gaseous breath" (Clarke 1999, 79), as opposed to the exhalation which is breathed out when someone faints or dies – this was the original meaning of ψυχή (see *DELG* 1294f., *s.v.*).
[8] It should be noted that relying on Homer as a source for the cultural and spiritual beliefs of the archaic Greeks is, in some respects, problematic. For our purposes it will suffice to say that, overall, the ideas expressed in the Homeric poems must have been reasonably close to their audience's worldview to resonate with them.
[9] Clarke 1999, 115. Despite certain inconsistencies in Clarke's argumentation (see Cairns 2003), his core thesis, which builds upon an intuition developed by Snell in a controversial study (1953, 16f.) – namely, that the idea of a (living) soul as separate and distinct from the (living) body is absent in the Homeric texts – appears to be well founded.

In the fifth century BC, we notice a radical change in the language around the self and its mental and physical aspects: σῶμα and ψυχή are now used to refer to the body and soul of a living person – evidently perceived as two separate entities – and man's identity, no longer tied to the body-soul unity, comes to be identified with his consciousness, or his soul. Early evidence of this shift can be found in Heraclitus (fr. 107 DK), who defines men who are deceived by their senses as having "barbarian souls" (βαρβάρους ψυχάς), and, to cite but one more example, in the Attic orator Antiphon (5.93), who says of a defendant that, even though his body may fail him, his soul (ψυχή) will endure, strengthened by the knowledge of its innocence. The contrast between soul and body is even more pronounced in Plato: not only are body and soul two distinct entities, each with different properties and functions, they have outright opposite natures and inclinations, which make them fundamentally at odds with one another. This view, already discernible in the *Apology* (29e-30b), where the care for the soul is contrasted with the care for the body and for material possessions, is taken to its extreme conclusions in the *Phaedo*, which introduces the idea that philosophy is none other than the "practice of death" (μελέτη θανάτου):

> If [the soul] becomes separated (*sc.* from the body) while pure (καθαρὰ), dragging nothing of the body with it, since it did not willingly associate with it during life, but shunned it, gathered together alone into itself, since it always cultivated this, which means nothing other than that it practised philosophy correctly (ὀρθῶς φιλοσοφοῦσα) and truly prepared to die easily – or would this not be the cultivation of death (μελέτη θανάτου)? […] If it is in this state, does it not depart towards that which is like itself, towards the invisible (τὸ ἀιδὲς), divine, immortal (τὸ θεῖόν τε καὶ ἀθάνατον), and wise; and when it arrives there, is it not happy, freed from error and folly (ἀνοίας) and fears and wild lusts and all other human ills, and as is said of the initiated (τῶν μεμυημένων), does it not in truth pass the rest of time with the gods?[10]

[10] Pl. *Phd*. 80e-81a; cf. 64a, 67c-e.

Here are condensed some of the main tenets of Plato's theory of the soul. Death is but the separation of soul and body,[11] which are fundamentally distinct from each other. Man's identity resides with the soul,[12] whereas the body is a mere container.[13] The soul, immortal and godlike in nature, continues to exist outside the body, and, if it is sufficiently pure, it ascends to heaven and spends the rest of eternity among the gods.[14] Finally, the only way for man to achieve purity of soul is to lead a philosophic life and avoid, as much as humanly possible, all things to do with the body – which is at best a hindrance and at worst a source of evil for the soul.[15] While some of these ideas, like the distinction between the soul and the body, were commonly accepted in Plato's time, the same cannot be said of the radical devaluation of the body in relation to the soul. It is safe to assume that not many among the fifth or early fourth-century Greeks would have agreed with Plato in viewing the body, or the human condition, as something to overcome, but if there was anyone who

[11] Cf. Pl. *Grg.* 524b ὁ θάνατος τυγχάνει ὤν, ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ, οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἢ δυοῖν πραγμάτοιν διάλυσις, τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ τοῦ σώματος, ἀπ᾽ ἀλλήλοιν, *R.* 5.469d ἀνελεύθερον δὲ οὐ δοκεῖ καὶ φιλοχρήματον νεκρὸν συλᾶν, καὶ γυναικείας τε καὶ σμικρᾶς διανοίας τὸ πολέμιον νομίζειν τὸ σῶμα τοῦ τεθνεῶτος ἀποπταμένου τοῦ ἐχθροῦ, λελοιπότος δὲ ᾧ ἐπολέμει;

[12] Cf. Pl. *Alc.* 1 130a-c 'μὴ οὐ τριῶν ἕν γέ τι εἶναι τὸν ἄνθρωπον'. 'τίνων;' 'ψυχὴν ἢ σῶμα ἢ συναμφότερον, τὸ ὅλον τοῦτο'. 'τί μήν;' ἀλλὰ μὴν αὐτό γε τὸ τοῦ σώματος ἄρχον ὡμολογήσαμεν ἄνθρωπον εἶναι;' 'ὡμολογήσαμεν'. 'ἆρ᾽ οὖν σῶμα αὐτὸ αὑτοῦ ἄρχει;' 'οὐδαμῶς'. 'ἄρχεσθαι γὰρ αὐτὸ εἴπομεν'. 'ναί' … 'ἀλλ᾽ ἄρα τὸ συναμφότερον τοῦ σώματος ἄρχει, καὶ ἔστι δὴ τοῦτο ἄνθρωπος;' 'ἴσως δῆτα'. 'πάντων γε ἥκιστα· μὴ γὰρ συνάρχοντος τοῦ ἑτέρου οὐδεμία που μηχανὴ τὸ συναμφότερον ἄρχειν'. 'ὀρθῶς'. 'ἐπειδὴ δ᾽ οὔτε σῶμα οὔτε τὸ συναμφότερόν ἐστιν ἄνθρωπος, λείπεται οἶμαι ἢ μηδὲν αὖτ᾽ εἶναι, ἢ εἴπερ τί ἐστι, μηδὲν ἄλλο τὸν ἄνθρωπον συμβαίνειν ἢ ψυχήν'. 'κομιδῇ μὲν οὖν'. 'ἔτι οὖν τι σαφέστερον δεῖ ἀποδειχθῆναί σοι ὅτι ἡ ψυχή ἐστιν ἄνθρωπος;'

[13] Cf. Pl. *Cra.* 400c = *OF* 430i τοῦτον (*sc.* σῶμα) δὲ περίβολον [τὴν ψυχήν] ἔχειν, ἵνα σῴζηται, δεσμωτηρίου εἰκόνα, *Ti.* 69c οἱ δὲ (*sc.* οἱ θεοί) [τὸν Δημιουργόν] μιμούμενοι, παραλαβόντες ἀρχὴν ψυχῆς ἀθάνατον, τὸ μετὰ τοῦτο θνητὸν σῶμα αὐτῇ περιετόρνευσαν ὄχημά κτλ.

[14] Cf. Pl. *L.* 12.959a-b ἐν αὐτῷ τε τῷ βίῳ τὸ παρεχόμενον ἡμῶν ἕκαστον τοῦτ᾽ εἶναι μηδὲν ἀλλ᾽ ἢ τὴν ψυχήν, τὸ δὲ σῶμα ἰνδαλλόμενον ἡμῶν ἑκάστοις ἔπεσθαι, καὶ τελευτησάντων λέγεσθαι καλῶς εἴδωλα εἶναι τὰ τῶν νεκρῶν σώματα, τὸν δὲ ὄντα ἡμῶν ἕκαστον ὄντως, ἀθάνατον εἶναι ψυχὴν ἐπονομαζόμενον, παρὰ θεοὺς ἄλλους ἀπιέναι κτλ. On the immortality of the soul and its fate after death, see below §§3.2-3.

[15] The radically pessimistic view of the body embedded in the *Phaedo* seems to clash with passages from other dialogues where the body is presented as a morally neutral instrument (Pl. *Ly.* 217b), and which advocate for the proper care of the body by means of physical exercise and a healthy diet (Pl. *R.* 3.410a-c, *L.* 7.796a-d). The contrast is only apparent, for these more optimistic passages apply either to the youth or to the human condition in general, as opposed to the extremely niche demographic of 'true philosophers': for them, even a healthy body – though preferable to an unhealthy one – is still a hindrance, because it interferes with the pursuit of knowledge (Pl. *Phd.* 66b-c, *Ti.* 63e-67d).

would have been sympathetic to such an idea, it was the followers of the religious movement which we call Orphism.

In a famous passage from the *Cratylus* (400c = *OF* 430i),[16] Socrates states that "some" (τινες) among his contemporaries regarded the body (σῶμα) as the "tomb of the soul" (σῆμα τῆς ψυχῆς), adding that

> δοκοῦσι μέντοι μοι μάλιστα θέσθαι οἱ ἀμφὶ Ὀρφέα τοῦτο τὸ ὄνομα, ὡς δίκην διδούσης τῆς ψυχῆς ὧν δὴ ἕνεκα δίδωσιν, τοῦτον δὲ περίβολον ἔχειν, ἵνα σῴζηται, δεσμωτηρίου εἰκόνα.
>
> Above all, the followers of Orpheus gave [the body] this name (*sc*. σῶμα) on the reasoning that the soul is paying the penalty for a crime and has the body as an enclosure so that it may be saved/preserved,[17] like a prison.

The identity of those τινες has long been debated by scholars: some identify them with οἱ ἀμφὶ Ὀρφέα mentioned in the following sentence,[18] while others believe that Plato was referring to the Pythagoreans.[19] Those who identify τινες with the Pythagoreans usually base their interpretation on a fragment of the Pythagorean philosopher Philolaus of Croton (fr. 14 DK = *OF* 430iii), which states that "the ancient theologians and seers also testify that the soul is bound to the body because it suffers certain punishments and is buried in it as in a tomb". However, there is no reason to believe that the παλαιοὶ θεολόγοι τε καὶ μάντιες referenced by Philolaus were other Pythagoreans and not ancient Orphic poets, which seems far more likely given what we know about their respective worldviews.[20] Furthermore, there is ample evidence connecting the notion of the body as tomb of the soul to the Orphics, including a fragment of Aristotle (fr. 60 Rose = *OF* 430v), which states that,

[16] Cf. Pl. *Grg*. 493a-c = *OF* 434ii, *Phd.* 62b = *OF* 429i, *Phdr*. 250c.
[17] The Greek σῴζω means both 'to save' and 'to keep safe', or 'to preserve'; the context (τοῦτον δὲ περίβολον ἔχειν) would naturally suggest the second meaning (cf. Pl. *Ti*. 74a), but Plato likely exploited this ambivalence to hint at the soteriological implications of the Orphic doctrine.
[18] Rohde 1894, II, 130 n. 2; Nilsson 1935, 205-207; Guthrie 1952, 156f.; Casadio 1991, 123-125; Bernabé 1995; Sorel 1995, 81f.; Casadesús 2008a, 1268; Edmonds 2013, 269-272.
[19] Wilamowitz 1932, 199; Boyancé 1941, 160; Moulinier 1955, 24-32; Alderink 1981, 61; Baxter 1992, 101f.
[20] See above §2.3 and Ferwerda 1985, 270f.

according to the doctrine of the mysteries, the state of the incarnate soul is akin to that of the victims of the Tyrrhenian pirates, who tie their prisoners to dead bodies as a form of torture. The objection that the body-tomb and the body-prison metaphors cannot be ascribed to the same group because they are, supposedly, mutually exclusive[21] is refuted by the ancient testimonies which mention them together, including the aforementioned fragments of Aristote and Philolaus, as well as two other Platonic passages (*Phd.* 62b = *OF* 429i, *Phdr.* 250c). Finally, the Platonic text itself, despite its ambiguity, seems to support the attribution of both metaphors to the Orphics, as a phrase like μάλιστα θέσθαι οἱ ἀμφὶ Ὀρφέα τοῦτο τὸ ὄνομα ὡς κτλ implies that Orpheus' followers had more than one interpretation for the term σῶμα, and it is very plausible that one of them was the body-tomb etymology mentioned in the previous sentence.[22] But let us now put this question aside to analyse what Plato says about οἱ ἀμφὶ Ὀρφέα.

First, it should be noted that, in Attic prose, the phrase οἱ ἀμφί τινα is commonly used to refer to a person's entourage,[23] which means that Plato is here referring to the 'original Orphics' – that is to say, the founders of the Orphic cult and the authors of the ancient Orphic poems. According to Plato, these Orphic founders gave the body the name σῶμα primarily due to its role as an enclosure, or prison, which allows the soul to pay the penalty for its crimes, so that it may be saved in the afterlife. Leaving aside, for now, its eschatological implications, let us consider an important piece of information contained within this passage, which has caused perplexity in some commentators:[24] namely, that the use of the word σῶμα to designate the body originated from the early Orphics (δοκοῦσι … θέσθαι οἱ ἀμφὶ Ὀρφέα τοῦτο τὸ ὄνομα). If we take this claim seriously, as I think we

[21] Linforth 1944, 296.
[22] Bernabé 1995, 214.
[23] Cf., e.g., Pl. *Tht.* 170c οἱ ἀμφὶ Πρωταγόραν, "the school of Protagoras", or "Protagoras and his followers".
[24] See, e.g., Boyancé 1941, 160.

should,[25] it would appear to support a theory which has been tentatively put forth by some scholars,[26] regarding the influence of the Orphic movement on the semantic shift undergone by the terms σῶμα and ψυχή between the time of Homer and the fifth century BC. Plato's claim, of course, does not prove that the use of σῶμα to refer to the living body was actually an Orphic invention,[27] but merely that he regarded it as such – unless we assume that he did not seriously mean it and that he made up the Orphic attribution of the σῶμα etymologies out of whole cloth, like the tongue-in-cheek foisting of hexameter verses on "some of the Homeridae" in the *Phaedrus* (252b). I do not believe that to be the case, for the simple reason that Plato usually avoids referencing Orpheus or the Orphics explicitly when discussing ideas which are closely aligned with his own,[28] like in this instance, so if he went out of his way to name them when he had no need to, that would be a significant departure from his normal practice. Regardless, as Bernabé (1995, 210) points out, it would have been natural for the Orphics to apply the term σῶμα, which originally meant 'corpse', to the living body, since they regarded life on earth as equal to death and the death of the body as the beginning of true life, the eternal life of the soul – at least for the initiated. Like Plato, in fact, the Orphics believed that their identity lay with their soul, which was divine and immortal, rather than with their mortal body.[29] The same semantic shift would have applied

[25] The case for taking the etymological section of the *Cratylus* seriously has been persuasively argued by Sedley (2003, 25-50).
[26] See, e.g., Clarke 1999, 288.
[27] The use of σῶμα to describe a living human body is indeed sparsely attested before the time when most scholars date the emergence of Orphism, namely, the late sixth century BC (Hes. *Op.* 540, Archil. fr. 196a.51 West, Thgn. 650). If the Orphics did not invent the use, they were likely among the first to adopt it consistently, possibly helping to spread and legitimise it through their literature.
[28] The possible reasons for this reticence will be discussed in the Conclusion.
[29] These beliefs are attested in some of the earliest Orphic texts, such as the Olbia bone tablets, from the fifth century BC (*OF* 465 [ψεῦδος] ἀλήθεια / σῶμα ψυχή), and the gold tablets from Pelinna and Thurii, dating from the fourth century BC (*OF* 485.1, 486.1 νῦν ἔθανες καὶ νῦν ἐγένου, τρισόλβιε, ἄματι τῷδε, 488.9 ὄλβιε καὶ μακαριστέ, θεὸς δ' ἔσῃ ἀντὶ βροτοῖο). Compare also the following lines from Pindar, who was himself heavily influenced by Orphism (see Santamaría 2008b and Hütwohl 2015): σῶμα μὲν πάντων ἔπεται θανάτῳ περισθενεῖ, / ζωὸν δ' ἔτι λείπεται αἰῶνος εἴδωλον· / τὸ γάρ ἐστι μόνον / ἐκ θεῶν κτλ (Pi. fr. 131b SM = *OF* 442, vv. 1-4). On this fragment, see Brillante 1987; Cannatà Fera 1990, 204-209; Ciampa 2023.

to ψυχή. Its use, no longer limited to the context of death, was extended to the embodied soul of the living, leading to the identification of ψυχή with the bearer of life.

If we reread *Cra*. 400c in light of these considerations, it becomes clear that Plato is following his usual *modus operandi* in referring to the Orphics of his time with the vague designation of τινες but is then forced to mention Orpheus' name when he needs to speak about the early Orphics specifically.[30] It is also clear, in my opinion, that the σῶμα-σῴζω etymology is the result of Plato's transposition of the Orphic body-prison metaphor, not because it is in any way incompatible with the Orphic creed, but because Plato himself presents it as such through a careful choice of words. In fact, δοκοῦσι μέντοι μοι ("but it seems to me") implies that what follows is Plato's subjective interpretation of the main reason (μάλιστα) why the Orphics called the body σῶμα, as shown by the comparison with a very similar passage from the same dialogue.[31] To sum up, Plato inherited from the Orphics a dualistic view of man, according to which the soul – the bearer of man's true essence – is trapped inside the body like in a prison, or even a tomb.[32] To permanently free one's soul from the shackles of the body, one must purify oneself by becoming initiated into the mysteries or, according to Plato, by practising philosophy; both the initiate and the philosopher are expected to prepare for death by engaging in certain ritual or ascetic practices whose purpose is to shield the soul, as much as possible, from the pollution of the body – what Plato calls μελέτη θανάτου.

[30] Elsewhere in the dialogues, Plato refers to the Orphics of his day with vague phrases such as "wise men" (cf. *Grg*. 493a = *OF* 430ii, 434ii) and "priests" (cf. *Men*. 81a = *OF* 424, *Phd*. 69c = *OF* 434iii, 576i, *R*. 2.363c = *OF* 431i).

[31] Cf. Pl. *Cra*. 398a τοῦτο τοίνυν παντὸς μᾶλλον λέγει (*sc*. Ἡσίοδος), ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ, τοὺς δαίμονας κτλ.

[32] Cf. Guthrie 1950, 311 n. 3: "[body-tomb and body-prison] are only two equally natural metaphors to express the same doctrine, that the soul is alien to the body, which hinders and represses it, and longs to be set free". Similarly, Casadio (1991, 124) observes that the two metaphors "esprimono con gradazione diversa lo stesso concetto".

Whereas the soul's supremacy over the body is a principle that remains constant throughout the dialogues,[33] Plato seems to falter in regard to the precise nature of the soul and its relationship with the body. Before the *Republic*, the soul is generally described as a single entity, able to exist independently of the body, and defined in opposition to it, but in the later dialogues the dichotomy between soul and body is redefined in terms of an internal conflict between different 'parts' of the soul. An anticipation of the psychological model put forth in the *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, and *Timaeus* can arguably be found in a well-known passage from the *Gorgias* (493a-c = *OF* 434ii), in which the soul of a man who is a slave to his desires is compared to a leaky jar:

> ἤδη γάρ του ἔγωγε καὶ ἤκουσα τῶν σοφῶν ὡς νῦν ἡμεῖς τέθναμεν καὶ τὸ μὲν σῶμά ἐστιν ἡμῖν σῆμα, τῆς δὲ ψυχῆς τοῦτο ἐν ᾧ ἐπιθυμίαι εἰσὶ τυγχάνει ὂν οἷον ἀναπείθεσθαι καὶ μεταπίπτειν ἄνω κάτω, καὶ τοῦτο ἄρα τις μυθολογῶν κομψὸς ἀνήρ, ἴσως Σικελός τις ἢ Ἰταλικός, παράγων[34] τῷ ὀνόματι διὰ τὸ πιθανόν τε καὶ πειστικὸν[35] ὠνόμασε πίθον, τοὺς δὲ ἀνοήτους ἀμυήτους, [493b] τῶν δ' ἀνοήτων τοῦτο τῆς ψυχῆς οὗ αἱ ἐπιθυμίαι εἰσί, τὸ ἀκόλαστον αὐτοῦ καὶ οὐ στεγανόν, ὡς τετρημένος εἴη πίθος, διὰ τὴν ἀπληστίαν ἀπεικάσας … οὗτος … ἐνδείκνυται ὡς τῶν ἐν Ἅιδου – τὸ ἀιδὲς δὴ λέγων – οὗτοι ἀθλιώτατοι ἂν εἶεν, οἱ ἀμύητοι, καὶ φοροῖεν εἰς τὸν τετρημένον πίθον ὕδωρ ἑτέρῳ τοιούτῳ τετρημένῳ κοσκίνῳ. τὸ δὲ κόσκινον ἄρα λέγει, ὡς ἔφη ὁ πρὸς ἐμὲ [493c] λέγων, τὴν ψυχὴν εἶναι· τὴν δὲ ψυχὴν κοσκίνῳ ἀπῄκασεν τὴν τῶν ἀνοήτων ὡς τετρημένην, ἅτε οὐ δυναμένην στέγειν δι' ἀπιστίαν τε καὶ λήθην.
>
> For I also heard from some wise man that we are now dead, and the body is our tomb, and that the part of the soul where the appetites are is liable to be swayed and to vacillate back and forth. A clever man, perhaps a Sicilian or an Italian, who told this myth, played on the name and called [this part of the soul] a jar (πίθον), due to its being persuadable (πιθανόν) and impressionable, and the mindless (ἀνοήτους) the uninitiated (ἀμυήτους); and

[33] To cite but a few examples, in the *Charmides* (156d-157a), one of Plato's earliest dialogues, the mythical Thracian god-king Zalmoxis (see Hdt. 4.94-97 on his alleged resurrection and his connection with Pythagoras), quoted by Socrates, proclaims that curing the soul should take precedence over curing the body; in the *Protagoras* (313b), Socrates posits that the soul should be valued more highly than the body; likewise, in the *Laws* (5.727a), the Athenian proclaims that men should honour their souls the most, after the gods.

[34] Here, as pointed out by Kingsley (1995, 169) and, more recently, by Kotwick (2019, 189f.), παράγω has the primary meaning of 'deriving' a word from another through the etymological method of allegorical interpretation: in this sense, it is also used by Plato in the *Cratylus* (400c, 407c, 416b, 419d) and by the Derveni author (cf. *P.Derv*. 23.1 KPT = §80 Kotwick τοῦτο τὸ ἔπος πα[ρα]γωγὸν πεπόηται κτλ).

[35] Because in Attic Greek πιθανός is not normally used in the passive sense ('persuadable'), Dodds (1959, 301 *ad l.*) believes that Plato added another adjective (πειστικός) to clarify the intended meaning; because the second adjective is also generally used in the active sense, he proposes to emend πειστικόν to πειστόν.

> he called the part of the soul with the appetites in mindless men, the licentious and insatiable part, a leaky jar, to symbolise its insatiability. This man shows […] that of all who are in Hades – meaning the invisible (ἀιδές) – these are the most wretched, the uninitiated, and that they carry water to the leaky jar with another leaky thing, a sieve. And by the sieve – so the man who told me said – he means the soul: he likened the soul of the mindless to a sieve because it is leaky and cannot hold anything, from its disbelief and forgetfulness.[36]

Let us begin by pointing out a few notable parallels between this passage and *Cra*. 400c. First, both passages make reference to the Orphic idea of the body as the tomb of the soul, albeit without explicitly ascribing it to the Orphics. Moreover, they both distinguish between an older (possibly written) source – a "clever Sicilian or Italian" and the "followers of Orpheus" – and an unspecified contemporary, oral source – "one of the wise men" (του … τῶν σοφῶν) and "some people" (τινες). Finally, both passages employ the same method of allegorical interpretation, based on (par)etymology (e.g., Ἅιδης-ἀιδές,[37] σῶμα-σῴζω) and paronomasia (e.g., ἀνόητος-ἀμύητος, σῶμα-σῆμα) – which, incidentally, is also the method used by the author of the Derveni papyrus in his commentary of the Orphic theogonic poem.[38] The Orphic connotation of the *Gorgias* passage is also evidenced by the reference to the Orphic-Eleusinian myth of the water-carriers,[39] on which the leaky jar allegory is based. This has prompted some scholars to hypothesise that the source from which Plato derived the allegory might have been an allegorical commentary on an ancient

[36] The appetitive part of the soul of the mindless man hinders his rational faculties by drawing him towards the pleasures of the senses and away from the pursuit of philosophy: his disbelief (cf. *P.Derv*. col. 5 KPT) prevents him from caring for his soul while he is alive, and his forgetfulness prevents him from retaining anything that he might learn in the afterlife – more on this below (§3.3.4). On the role of memory in Plato and Orphism, see Ch. 4.

[37] Cf. *Il*. 5.844f. αὐτὰρ Ἀθήνη / δῦν' Ἄϊδος κυνέην, μή μιν ἴδοι ὄβριμος Ἄρης. The same etymology is also referenced by Plato in the *Phaedo* (80d, 81c-d) and, again, in the *Cratylus* (403a, 404b), where it is rejected in favour of a new derivation from the verb εἶδον ('to know').

[38] For an in-depth analysis of the parallels between *Grg*. 493a-c and the Derveni papyrus, see Kotwick 2019. For a comparison between the etymologies in the *Cratylus* and the allegorical interpretation of the Derveni author, see Bergomi 2014.

[39] See above §2.2.

Orphic poem, like the Derveni papyrus.[40] Although this theory, supported by a number of suggestive parallels between the Derveni commentary and the Platonic text,[41] is entirely plausible – even compelling – it is more likely, in my opinion, that Plato came up with the allegory himself but chose to ascribe it, in a roundabout way, to the author of the Orphic myth about the punishment of the water-carriers,[42] as he would later do in the *Cratylus* with the σῶμα-σῴζω etymology. The main reason why I believe this to be the case is that Plato attributes to his supposed source certain ideas about the nature of the soul which are clearly his own – namely, the belief that the appetites are the domain of a specific part[43] of the human soul and that this part is a hindrance to the pursuit of wisdom. It is impossible to know whether Plato, at the time of writing the *Gorgias*, already envisioned a tripartite psychological model, but it is safe to say, in my opinion, that he was at least moving towards it.

Let us now turn to what is generally regarded as Plato's main contribution to the field of psychology, namely the theory of the tripartite soul. First introduced in Book IV of the *Republic* (438d-441c), Plato's theory of tripartition posits, as is well known, that the human soul is made up of three 'parts'[44] – the rational (τὸ λογιστικόν), the 'spirited' (τὸ

[40] Bernabé 2011, 70; Kotwick 2019, 192f. The identification of the "clever man" with Empedocles, put forth by the Neoplatonist Olympiodorus (*in Grg.* 157.15-17 Westerink), should be rejected not only due to its incompatibility with the title of 'mythologer' (μυθολογῶν, see Dodds 1959, 297) but also because the phrase ἴσως Σικελός τις ἢ Ἰταλικός suggests that Plato did not have a specific person in mind – or, if he did, it was an anonymous Magno-Graecian writer, like the authors of the Orphic-Pythagorean texts listed in the catalogue of Orphic literature preserved in the *Suda* (o 654 Adler = *OF* 1018iv).

[41] Aside from using the same method of allegorical interpretation, both Plato and the Derveni author draw on the myths about the punishments in Hades to instil a sense of urgency in the reader (cf. *P.Derv.* 5.1-8 KPT); furthermore, they both relate foolishness, or ignorance, to the pursuit of pleasure (cf. *P.Derv.* 5.6-10 KPT) and identify the ignorant with the uninitiated (true initiation implies knowledge: cf. *P.Derv.* col. 20 KPT).

[42] See Bernabé 2004a, 365 *ad l.*

[43] Although a term like μέρος is not used in the *Gorgias* passage, the spatial language (τοῦτο τῆς ψυχῆς οὗ αἱ ἐπιθυμίαι εἰσί) suggests that Plato is already thinking about distinct 'parts' within the human soul; *contra* Dodds (1959, 300 *ad l.*), who cites Aesch. *Pers.* 767 and Thgn. 731 in support of his claim that Plato is merely referencing a "popular distinction between reason and impulse".

[44] It should be noted that 'part' (μέρος) is only one of the terms used by Plato to describe the three components of the human soul in the *Republic*, together with 'form' (εἶδος), 'kind' (γένος), 'mode' (τρόπος), and similar phrases. This ambiguity is probably rooted in Plato's reluctance to present the soul as a composite (on the unity of the soul in the *Republic*, see Brown 2012).

θυμοειδές), and the appetitive (τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν) – which correspond to the three social classes of the ideal State – rulers, warriors, and workers. The rational part, located in the head,[45] is drawn towards knowledge and truth and is tasked with controlling the other two parts. The so-called spirited part, heritor of the Homeric θυμός, is located in the chest and harbours a broad scope of human emotions, ranging from anger and rage to courage and ambition;[46] its natural role is to aid reason in taming the appetitive part, "lest it be corrupted by evil nurture".[47] The appetitive part, as the name suggests, is the seat of desire (ἐπιθυμία): located in the abdomen,[48] it is entirely concerned with the pursuit of bodily pleasure and material gain. This theory has long been a subject of controversy among scholars of Plato. Some have suggested that Plato was merely echoing a Pythagorean 'theory of three lives' (Cic. *Tusc*. 5.3, D.L. *pr*. 12, 8.8),[49] while others have argued that he was forced to add an elusive third element to the (supposedly) popular distinction between reason and appetite for the sake of the city-soul analogy.[50] A minority of scholars consider the theory to be inherently flawed,[51] but most defend it as an integral part of Plato's mature philosophy.[52] That the theory of tripartition is not merely contingent on the political analogy which constitutes the premise for the *Republic* is suggested by the fact that it also features prominently in the *Phaedrus* (246a-248b) and the *Timaeus* (41d-44d, 69a-72d). To be sure, this is not to say that the tripartite structure of the ideal State could not have originally inspired Plato to ascribe the same tripartition to the human soul, only that his commitment to this tripartite psychological model extended beyond its immediate application in the city-soul analogy. Regarding the possibility of a Pythagorean precedent for the theory of

[45] Pl. *Ti*. 44d.
[46] Pl. *Ti*. 70a-b.
[47] Pl. *R*. 4.441a.
[48] Pl. *Ti*. 70d-e.
[49] Burnet 1914, 33; 1920, 98; Stocks 1915; Taylor 1928, 516.
[50] Williams 1973; Robinson 1995, 41-46.
[51] Ryle 1947; Annas 1981, 124-151.
[52] See, most recently, Burnyeat 2006; Shields 2010; Kamtekar 2017, 129-157.

tripartition, the lack of pre-Platonic evidence makes it impossible to know whether the so-called theory of three lives influenced Plato's theory of the tripartite soul or vice versa. We also know from Proclus (*in R*. 2.74.26 Kroll = *OF* 159, 216i, 320ii, *in* Hes. *Op*. 127-129 [54.15-55.3 Pertusi] = *OF* 216ii) that the Orphics told a myth about the three races of man, which could have conceivably played a role in inspiring Plato's theory.[53] However, much like in the case of the theory of three lives, the absence of any early testimonies regarding this myth prevents us from making any conclusive claims.

What I believe to be more likely is that Plato combined the Homeric notion of the embodied soul as an aggregate of different psychological faculties with the dualist model which he inherited from Orphism. As we have seen, the dichotomy between body and soul was a deeply ingrained belief among the Orphics, but the body-prison metaphor suggests a more nuanced theory, which recognises the presence of a flawed, if not evil, element in the human soul, alongside the divine element with which the Orphic initiates identified – for if the soul were wholly pure and divine, its imprisonment in a mortal body would make little sense. I will come back to this question in my discussion of the Orphic anthropogony;[54] for now, I will merely suggest that the bipartite division between the rational (immortal) and the irrational (mortal) part of the soul which we find in Plato (e.g., *Ti*. 41a-d, 69b-72d) might have a precedent in the Orphic myth of the origin of mankind – or at least in a particular interpretation of that myth. In any case, the bipartite condition of the Platonic soul stems from the fundamental dichotomy between body and (pure) soul: in fact, the irrational, mortal part is not inherent to the soul's true nature but is rather contingent on its coming into contact with the material world by virtue of being incarnated; hence, the embodied soul is comparable to the sea-god Glaucus, whose real nature is obscured by

[53] See below §6.3.
[54] See below §6.2.

"accretions of shells, seaweed, and rocks".[55] By introducing a further division within the irrational part of the soul, between appetite and spirit, Plato took advantage of the wide semantic range associated with the Homeric θυμός to add to his psychic model a third element, able to bridge the gap between the appetitive and rational parts of the soul, thus covering every aspect of human psychology.

3.2 The immortality of the soul

The belief in the immortality of the soul has been aptly described by Cornford (1941, xxv) as one of the "twin pillars" of Platonic philosophy – the other being, of course, the theory of Forms. Although the belief in the soul's survival after death is referenced in earlier dialogues, the first formal argument in favour of the immortality of the soul is put forth in the *Meno* (82b-86b: 85d-86b), in relation to the so-called theory of recollection – which will be discussed in depth in the next chapter. In response to the epistemological challenge posed by his interlocutor, who casts doubt on the possibility of inquiry when that which one seeks to discover is completely unknown – what is generally referred to as 'Meno's paradox' – Socrates argues that what men call learning is actually the recollection of the latent, innate knowledge which we already possess.[56] To demonstrate this, he leads one of Meno's slaves to solve a geometrical problem by asking him a series of questions; since the slave, as Meno attests, had not received any education in geometry, he must have learned what he knows "when he was not a human being" (86a ὅτ᾽ οὐκ ἦν ἄνθρωπος) or, in other words, before his soul entered his body, which means that his soul must be immortal (86b ἀθάνατος). Commentators have largely ignored this argument for immortality, generally

[55] Pl. *R.* 10.611c-612a.
[56] Some scholars dispute that what is innate in the human soul is 'knowledge' (see Ch. 4 n. 7).

regarded as philosophically flawed,[57] or as an unnecessary digression from the main focus of the dialogue.[58] Whatever one thinks of the quality of the argument itself, the immortality of the soul, though it receives here but a cursory treatment compared to later dialogues, appears to have been a deeply held belief for Plato, with profound religious, moral, and epistemological implications.

The religious significance of the entire passage, as duly noted by Scott (2006, 92-94, 112), is underlined by Socrates in what we might call the preamble to the argument of recollection:

> ἀκήκοα γὰρ ἀνδρῶν τε καὶ γυναικῶν σοφῶν περὶ τὰ θεῖα πράγματα … οἱ μὲν λέγοντές εἰσι τῶν ἱερέων τε καὶ τῶν ἱερειῶν ὅσοις μεμέληκε περὶ ὧν μεταχειρίζονται λόγον οἵοις τ᾽ εἶναι [81b] διδόναι· λέγει δὲ καὶ Πίνδαρος καὶ ἄλλοι πολλοὶ τῶν ποιητῶν ὅσοι θεῖοί εἰσιν. ἃ δὲ λέγουσιν, ταυτί ἐστιν· ἀλλὰ σκόπει εἴ σοι δοκοῦσιν ἀληθῆ λέγειν. φασὶ γὰρ τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εἶναι ἀθάνατον, καὶ τοτὲ μὲν τελευτᾶν – ὃ δὴ ἀποθνήσκειν καλοῦσι – τοτὲ δὲ πάλιν γίγνεσθαι, ἀπόλλυσθαι δ᾽ οὐδέποτε· δεῖν δὴ διὰ ταῦτα ὡς ὁσιώτατα διαβιῶναι τὸν βίον.
>
> I have heard from both men and women who are wise about divine matters […]. Those who say it are those priests and priestesses who have taken care to be able to give an account of their practices. Pindar also says it, and many other poets who are divine. What they say is this – see whether you think it is true. They say that the human soul is immortal, and at one time it meets its end – which is called dying – and at another time it is born again, but it never perishes. And they say that, because of this, we should live our whole life in the most holy way possible.[59]

Right from the start, we are reminded of a similar passage from the *Gorgias* (493a-c = *OF* 434ii; quoted above, p. 83), which also begins with Socrates relating what he heard from "one of the wise men" (ἤδη γάρ του ἔγωγε καὶ ἤκουσα τῶν σοφῶν ὡς κτλ). Some scholars, comparing these passages with other Platonic *loci* where οἱ σοφοί are mentioned, have suggested that this was Plato's way of referring to a certain group – either the Orphics[60] or

[57] Robinson 1995, 18.
[58] Thompson 1901, 142-144.
[59] Pl. *Men.* 81a-b = *OF* 424.
[60] Bernabé 2011, 41f., 67f.

the Pythagoreans,[61] or both[62] – without mentioning them by name. While it may be argued that a generic designation such as οἱ σοφοί could apply to any authority whom Plato did not wish to name,[63] there are other reasons to believe that the "men and women who are wise about divine matters" cited in the *Meno* belonged to the same Orphic milieu as the "wise man" mentioned in the *Gorgias*. Alongside the belief in the immortality of the soul and the cycle of rebirths, espoused by both Orphics and Pythagoreans,[64] Plato ascribes to these experts the ability to "give an account of their practices" (περὶ ὧν μεταχειρίζονται λόγον … διδόναι). Bernabé (2011, 67) cites in comparison a well-known passage from the *Republic* (2.364e), in which Adeimantus denounces certain wandering charlatans who "produce a hubbub of books (βίβλων δὲ ὅμαδον παρέχονται) of Musaeus and Orpheus" so as to prove the legitimacy of their practice: this is consistent with the extant evidence on Orphism, which attests to the central role played by sacred (written) texts (ἱεροὶ λόγοι) in the Orphic cult.[65] A closer comparison, as suggested by Betegh (2004, 351), can be drawn with the author of the Derveni papyrus, who takes pride in being able to explain the true meaning of the Orphic text and, more importantly, of the rites performed by the Orphic priests.[66] The fact that Plato mentions both wise men and women has been adduced by some as proof that these sages were of a Pythagorean persuasion,[67] since the Pythagoreans famously admitted female members into their circles;[68] however, the designation of "priests and priestesses", hardly applicable to Pythagorean philosophers, is much more fitting to an Orphic context.[69] Although the existence of Orphic priestesses is not explicitly attested –

[61] Dodds 1959, 297.
[62] Adam 1902, II, 379.
[63] Bluck 1961, 275.
[64] See above §2.3.
[65] See, e.g., Eur. *Hipp*. 948-957: 953f. = *OF* 627 and Dem. 18.259 = *OF* 577i (discussed above, §1.3.3). On the significance of the written word to the Orphic mysteries, see esp. Calame 2005.
[66] *P.Derv*. cols 1-6, 20 KPT.
[67] Long 1948, 68f.
[68] See, most recently, Dutsch 2020 and Pellò 2022; 2024, with references to earlier literature.
[69] Perhaps Plato envisioned Diotima as one of those priestesses. On the speech of Diotima in the *Symposium*, see the comprehensive study by Sier (1997).

which in itself, as noted by Bluck (1961, 276), is not particularly meaningful, given the general dearth of evidence surrounding early Orphism – we know from the gold tablets that women made up a significant portion of those who were initiated into the Orphic mysteries.

In the *Meno*, the theory of the immortal soul is introduced as a "truth of religion",[70] supported by the authority of wise priests and priestesses and divinely inspired poets, such as Pindar and, presumably, Orpheus and Musaeus;[71] this truth, which Socrates wholeheartedly endorses,[72] is then corroborated by means of an empirical demonstration,[73] which provides evidence for the theory of recollection, followed by the formal argument for immortality. Likewise, in the *Phaedo*, the series of arguments in support of the immortality of the soul, which take up most of the dialogue (69e-107b), is preceded by several references to Orphic doctrine. The first comes in response to Cebes' confusion as to why it would be wrong for a philosopher to end his own life, if for him death is supposedly desirable:

> 'Then why in the world do they say that it is not allowed to kill oneself, Socrates? For […] I did hear (ἤκουσα) from Philolaus, when he was living in our city, and from some other people too (ἄλλων τινῶν), that one should not do this' […]. 'Now the doctrine that is taught in the mysteries (ὁ μὲν οὖν ἐν ἀπορρήτοις λεγόμενος … λόγος) about these matters, that we humans are in a sort of prison (ἔν τινι φρουρᾷ) and that one must not release oneself from it or run away, that seems to me a weighty saying and one that is not easy to understand. But this at least, Cebes, strikes me as well said, that the gods are our guardians (ἐπιμελουμένους) and that we humans are one of the gods' possessions'.[74]

Because the Pythagorean philosopher Philolaus (5th cent. BC) is mentioned among those who say that "it is not allowed (οὐ θεμιτόν) to kill oneself", the prohibition against suicide

[70] Robinson 1995, 131.
[71] Cf. Pl. *Ion* 536a-b = *OF* 1140.
[72] Pl. *Men.* 81a ἀκήκοα γὰρ ἀνδρῶν τε καὶ γυναικῶν σοφῶν … ἀληθῆ, ἔμοιγε δοκεῖν, καὶ καλόν.
[73] Pl. *Men.* 82a-b ἀλλά μοι προσκάλεσον τῶν πολλῶν ἀκολούθων τουτωνὶ τῶν σαυτοῦ ἕνα … ἵνα ἐν τούτῳ σοι ἐπιδείξωμαι.
[74] Pl. *Phd*. 61e-62b (cf. *OF* 429i, 669iv).

has been ascribed by some commentators, either primarily or exclusively, to the Pythagoreans.[75] More recent scholarship,[76] however, has identified the Orphics – implicitly referenced in the Platonic text as "some others" (ἄλλων τινῶν) – as the main proponents of this tenet, which, as Plato attests, is closely linked to the "mystic" (ἐν ἀπορρήτοις λεγόμενος)[77] doctrine of the body as the "prison" (φρουρά)[78] of the soul, explicitly attributed to "the followers of Orpheus" in the *Cratylus* (400c). Like in the *Cratylus* passage, Plato offers his own interpretation of the Orphic tenet, giving it a more positive spin. Instead of focusing on the punitive nature of man's earthly existence – which, according to the secret teaching of the Orphics, is the punishment for the crime committed by the Titans, man's ancestors, against the infant Dionysus[79] – Plato decides to highlight the benevolent role played by the gods as the guardians of humanity, who have only their

[75] E.g., Burnet 1911, 23f. *ad* 62b4.
[76] E.g., Strachan 1970; Mancini 1999.
[77] As argued by Bernabé (2011, 133) and others (Burnet 1911, 22 *ad* 62b3; Robin 1952, 24 n. 1; Strachan 1970, 218-220; Rowe 1993, 128 *ad l.*), this expression likely alludes to the Orphic mysteries (cf. [Eur.] *Rhes.* 943f. = *OF* 511 μυστηρίων τε τῶν ἀπορρήτων φανάς / ἔδειξεν Ὀρφεύς) or, more precisely, to the esoteric doctrine of the Orphics: this was the myth of the killing and dismemberment of Dionysus, whose divulgement was likely forbidden by a religious taboo (see Ch. 2 n. 22).
[78] The meaning of φρουρά has been much discussed (for a summary of the scholarship, see Mancini 1999, 154-156). The term (from πρό and ὁράω) usually means 'guard-duty', although the passive meaning of 'place of custody', or 'prison', is also attested in Plato's *Gorgias* (525a). It is unclear why Plato chose this rather unusual term, instead of the more common δεσμωτήριον (cf. *Cra.* 400c); perhaps he did so to emphasise the custodial role of the gods, who assign men to their carnal prison, but this, admittedly, does not necessarily explain the use of φρουρά in the *Gorgias* passage, where it refers to the otherworldly place where unjust souls atone for their sins. It could be argued, however, that this otherworldly prison serves the same soteriological function as the body, in that it allows the soul to pay the penalty and purify itself, so that it may eventually be saved. Note also the use of ἄνθρωποι to mean 'human souls' (ἔν τινι φρουρᾷ ἐσμεν οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ οὐ δεῖ δὴ ἑαυτὸν ἐκ ταύτης λύειν), attesting to the Orphics' (and Plato's) identification with the soul as opposed to the body (or the compound of body plus soul).
[79] The Orphics, then, forbade suicide on the reasoning that one should not seek to evade punishment for their crimes: only to those who atone for the "ancient wrong" by performing the proper rites will the gods – more specifically, Dionysus (cf. Lam. Pelinn. [*OF* 485] 2 σ᾽ ὅτι Βάκχιος αὐτὸς ἔλυσε) or his mother Persephone (cf. Pi. fr. 133 SM [*OF* 443] 1f. οἷσί κε Φερσεφόνα ποινὰν παλαιοῦ πένθεος / δέξεται) – grant permanent freedom, upon death, from the prison of the flesh. However, according to the Neoplatonist Olympiodorus (*in Phd.* 1.3 [41 Westerink] = *OF* 320i), there was yet another reason for the Orphic taboo against suicide: because mankind was born from the ashes of the Titans, who had consumed the flesh of Dionysus, "our body is Dionysian"; therefore, in a way, by killing ourselves, we would be repeating the crime committed by our ancestors. Legitimate doubts have been raised over the antiquity of this belief (see, e.g., Brisson 1992a), but if it could be proven to date back to the early Orphics, it would be indicative of a much more nuanced view of the body than is normally attributed to them (more on this below, §6.2).

subjects' best interests in mind;[80] a wise man, Plato argues, would not want to leave the service of the best masters in the world, unless they themselves willed it. The philosopher, therefore, will not seek to bring death upon himself but will readily accept it when his time comes, trusting that he will join the company of "other wise and benevolent gods" and of "men who have died and who are better than those here".[81] In order to achieve this outcome, we must endeavour to purify ourselves – or, rather, our souls – from the contamination of the body by avoiding, as much as possible, all bodily pleasures and desires, for the body is a hindrance to the pursuit of philosophy. Thus, since death is but the separation of the soul from the body,[82] Plato asserts that "those who correctly engage in philosophy pursue nothing other than dying and being dead".[83] Plato's definition of the philosophic life as the 'practice' or 'exercise' of death (μελέτη θανάτου) is very much in line with what we know about the beliefs and practices of the Orphics – their disdain for the body, their ascetic lifestyle, their death rituals[84] – and this is confirmed a little later by another Orphic reference:

> καὶ κινδυνεύουσι καὶ οἱ τὰς τελετὰς ἡμῖν οὗτοι καταστήσαντες οὐ φαῦλοί τινες εἶναι, ἀλλὰ τῷ ὄντι πάλαι αἰνίττεσθαι ὅτι ὃς ἂν ἀμύητος καὶ ἀτέλεστος[85] εἰς Ἅιδου ἀφίκηται ἐν βορβόρῳ κείσεται, ὁ δὲ κεκαθαρμένος τε καὶ τετελεσμένος ἐκεῖσε ἀφικόμενος μετὰ θεῶν οἰκήσει. εἰσὶν γὰρ δή, ὥς φασιν οἱ περὶ τὰς τελετάς, ναρθηκοφόροι [69d] μὲν πολλοί, βάκχοι δέ τε παῦροι· οὗτοι δ᾽ εἰσὶν κατὰ τὴν ἐμὴν δόξαν οὐκ ἄλλοι ἢ οἱ πεφιλοσοφηκότες ὀρθῶς.
>
> So, it seems that those men who introduced the mysteries to us were not simple-minded but were actually speaking in riddles when they said, long ago, that whoever arrives in Hades without being initiated will lie in the mire, but he who

[80] Cf. Pl. *Ap*. 41c-d ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑμᾶς χρή, ὦ ἄνδρες δικασταί, εὐέλπιδας εἶναι πρὸς τὸν θάνατον, καὶ ἕν τι τοῦτο διανοεῖσθαι ἀληθές, ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἀνδρὶ ἀγαθῷ κακὸν οὐδὲν οὔτε ζῶντι οὔτε τελευτήσαντι, οὐδὲ ἀμελεῖται ὑπὸ θεῶν τὰ τούτου πράγματα.

[81] Pl. *Phd*. 63b ἐγὼ γάρ, ἔφη, ὦ Σιμμία τε καὶ Κέβης, εἰ μὲν μὴ ᾤμην ἥξειν πρῶτον μὲν παρὰ θεοὺς ἄλλους σοφούς τε καὶ ἀγαθούς, ἔπειτα καὶ παρ᾽ ἀνθρώπους τετελευτηκότας ἀμείνους τῶν ἐνθάδε, ἠδίκουν ἂν οὐκ ἀγανακτῶν τῷ θανάτῳ.

[82] Pl. *Phd*. 67d.

[83] Pl. *Phd*. 64a κινδυνεύουσι γὰρ ὅσοι τυγχάνουσιν ὀρθῶς ἁπτόμενοι φιλοσοφίας λεληθέναι τοὺς ἄλλους ὅτι οὐδὲν ἄλλο αὐτοὶ ἐπιτηδεύουσιν ἢ ἀποθνῄσκειν τε καὶ τεθνάναι.

[84] On the simulation of death in Greek initiation rites, see Martín Hernández 2005.

[85] The two terms are effectively synonymous and can both be translated as 'uninitiated'; in the Eleusinian context, they referred specifically to the first phase of initiation (see Dowden 1980, 413-417).

> arrives there purified and initiated will dwell with the gods. For, as those involved in the mysteries put it, 'many are the thyrsus-bearers, but the *bacchoi* few' – and these, in my opinion, are none other than those who have practised philosophy correctly.[86]

We know from Plato (*R.* 2.363d = *OF* 434i) and other ancient sources that lying in mud was one of the afterlife punishments reserved for the non-initiates in the Orphic-Eleusinian tradition; we also know that Orpheus, at least from the late fifth century onwards, was credited with introducing the mysteries in Greece.[87] There can be little doubt, therefore, that "those who established the mysteries" (οἱ τὰς τελετὰς … καταστήσαντες) are the founders of the Orphic cult. This is confirmed by the Neoplatonist commentators,[88] who say that Plato is here quoting – or rather appropriating (παρῳδεῖ) – an Orphic poem.[89] The meaning of the Orphic saying "many are the thyrsus-bearers, but few are the *bacchoi*" has been discussed since antiquity.[90] According to a probable interpretation,[91] the *bacchoi* were the few initiates who were able to achieve – and maintain through a set of ascetic practices – a true state of communion with Dionysus, as opposed to the multitude of initiates who merely attended the mystery rites, without any real commitment or understanding. This

[86] Pl. *Phd*. 69c-d = *OF* 434iii, 576i.
[87] See Ch. 1 n. 23.
[88] Dam. *in Phd.* 1.170 (105 Westerink) = *OF* 576xiii, Olympiod. *in Phd.* 8.7 (123 Westerink) = *OF* 576v.
[89] The famous Orphic line is quoted by Olympiodorus (*in Phd.* 8.7 [123 Westerink] = *OF* 576v) in what was presumably its original (hexametric) form: πολλοὶ μὲν ναρθηκοφόροι, παῦροι δέ τε βάκχοι. It is unclear, however, why Plato would have chosen to alter the verse so as to obscure its metrical structure. Perhaps, then, this was not a line from an Orphic poem but simply a motto that was uttered by the Orphics, possibly in a ritual context (see Jiménez San Cristóbal 2009, 48).
[90] In his commentary to the *Phaedo*, Damascius (*in Phd.* 1.170 [105 Westerink] = *OF* 576xiii) argues that because in the Orphic myth the Titans present Dionysus with the thyrsus, they were named 'thyrsus-bearers' (cf. Procl. *in Hes. Op.* 52 [33.20 Pertusi] = *OF* 307i); thus, by being called 'thyrsus-bearers', the many (which is to say, the uninitiated) were equated with the Titans. This interpretation, likely influenced by another Platonic passage (*L.* 3.701c = *OF* 37i), which describes certain men as "imitating the so-called ancient Titanic nature", is rightly rejected by most modern scholars, who argue that the ναρθηκοφόροι and the βάκχοι are both initiates, but of different kinds. Some, like Nilsson (1935) and, more recently, Tortorelli Ghidini (2013), posit that the phrase was coined by the Orphics, who considered themselves as the only true βάκχοι, in order to distinguish themselves from the multitude of 'thyrsus-bearers', which is to say the non-Orphic worshippers of Dionysus. Others, like West (1983a, 159 n. 68), believe that the terms refer to different degrees of initiation, with βάκχος being the highest level, equivalent to the Eleusinian ἐπόπτης. According to another group of scholars (see the following footnote), what set the βάκχοι apart from the ναρθηκοφόροι was not so much their partaking in certain rituals as their subjective identification with a group of specially blessed initiates who shared a special bond with Dionysus.
[91] See Jiménez San Cristóbal 2009; Bernabé 2016a, 84f.; Casadesús 2016a, 189.

reading fits well with the context of the citation, which is the contrast between the true philosophers and those who purport to be lovers of wisdom but are actually lovers of the body: only the former, who overcome their passions through a complete disdain for the body and strive to purify themselves from its negative influence, are able to face death with glee, knowing that they will reap the rewards of their virtuous conduct, whereas the latter, who abstain from certain pleasures only "for fear of being denied other pleasures, which they desire", are troubled by the thought of death, because their souls are impure and, thus, drawn to the material world.[92] The purification envisioned by Plato is, of course, quite different from what the Orphics prescribed – the former being of a moral and intellectual nature, whereas the latter was achieved primarily through ritual means[93] – but the end goal is the same: restoring one's soul to its divine status and reuniting with the gods.[94] Both Plato and the Orphics rejected the traditional distinction between gods and humans, believing the latter to be made up of two parts, a mortal vessel and an immortal soul, with which they identified; since, for the ancient Greeks, immortality and divinity are effectively one and the same,[95] it is not a stretch to say that the Orphics – and, to some extent,[96] Plato – saw themselves as fallen gods, striving to transcend their mortal condition and reclaim their rightful place among the other gods and heroes.[97] Therefore, the comparison between

[92] Cf. Pl. *Phd*. 67e-69a.
[93] See Bernabé 2011, 187.
[94] Cf. Lam. Thur. (*OF* 487) 4 θεὸς ἐγένου ἐξ ἀνθρώπου, Lam. Thur. (*OF* 488) 9 θεὸς δ' ἔσῃ ἀντὶ βροτοῖο, Lam. Rom. (*OF* 491) 4 νόμῳ ἴθι δῖα γεγῶσα.
[95] See Ch. 2 n. 79.
[96] Rather than outright identification with the divine (cf. Emp. fr. 112 DK = *OF* 447, 4 ἐγὼ δ' ὑμῖν θεὸς ἄμβροτος, οὐκέτι θνητός), Plato speaks of affinity and subordination (*Phd*. 62b), and when discussing the subject of immortality, he usually avoids calling the human soul (especially in its incarnate state) divine, favouring 'godlike' or similar periphrases instead (e.g., *Phd*. 80b τῷ μὲν θείῳ καὶ ἀθανάτῳ … ὁμοιότατον, 95c τί … θεοειδὲς).
[97] In the ritual texts inscribed on the Orphic gold tablets, the initiates boast of belonging to the "same race" as the gods: Lam. Petel. (*OF* 476) 6f. Γῆς παῖς εἰμι καὶ Οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος (on the meaning of this formula, see Johnston 2013b, 113-116) / αὐτὰρ ἐμοὶ γένος οὐράνιον, Lam. Thur. (*OF* 488) 3 καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ ὑμῶν γένος εὔχομαι εἶναι ὄλβιον). This kinship entitles them to claim access to a special place in Hades, away from all the other souls: Lam. Hipp. (*OF* 474) 15f. ὁδὸν ἔρχεα<ι> ἄν τε καὶ ἄλλοι / μύσται καὶ βάχχοι ἱερὰν στείχωσι κλεινοί, Lam. Petel. (*OF* 476) 11 καὶ τότ' ἔπειτ' ἄ[λλοισι μεθ'] ἡρώεσσιν ἀνάξει[ς], Lam. Thur. (*OF* 487) 5f. δεξιὰν ὁδοιπόρ<ει> / λειμῶνάς θ'{ε} ἱεροὺς καὶ ἄλσεα Φερσεφονείας, Lam. Pher. (*OF* 493) 3f. εἴσιθ<ι> / ἱερὸν λειμῶνα.

philosophy and the mysteries, which often recurs in the dialogues,[98] is not merely a rhetorical device but rather an expression of Plato's affinity with the Orphic worldview. In fact, much of Plato's thought, as I argue, can ultimately be boiled down to the philosophical transposition of Orphic ideas, and the central part of the *Phaedo*, which contains a lengthy dialectical demonstration of the immortality of the soul, provides a perfect example of this process. To analyse each of the *Phaedo*'s arguments for immortality in detail would go well beyond the scope of this chapter; therefore, I will only give a brief summary of the four arguments, while highlighting the Orphic references found therein.

The first two arguments of the *Phaedo* revisit the themes of the *Meno* argument, namely, the cognate theories of reincarnation and recollection. The so-called cyclical argument (70c-72e) provides a philosophical justification for the "ancient tradition" (παλαιὸς λόγος)[99] which states that the souls of the dead are not dispersed "like breath or smoke" (70a ὥσπερ πνεῦμα ἢ καπνός)[100] but continue their existence in Hades, whence they eventually come back to earth in a never-ending cycle: this cycle of rebirths is here presented as a manifestation of a universal principle, according to which things give rise to their opposites (e.g., life to death and death to life). The generation of opposites from opposites was theorised by Heraclitus, whom Plato seems to reference,[101] as part of his 'doctrine of flux',[102] but pairs of opposites also prominently featured in Orphic sources, such as the Olbia bone tablets, dating to the fifth century BC.[103] The so-called argument

[98] See Intr. n. 10.
[99] Pl. *Phd*. 70c = *OF* 428i.
[100] Cf. *Il*. 23.100f. ψυχὴ δὲ κατὰ χθονὸς ἠΰτε καπνὸς / ὤχετο κτλ.
[101] Pl. *Phd*. 71c τῷ ζῆν ἐστί τι ἐναντίον, ὥσπερ τῷ ἐγρηγορέναι τὸ καθεύδειν; … τὸ τεθνάναι, ἔφη. οὐκοῦν ἐξ ἀλλήλων τε γίγνεται ταῦτα, εἴπερ ἐναντία ἐστιν κτλ (cf. Heraclit. fr. 88 DK = *OF* 454 ταὐτό τ' ἔνι ζῶν καὶ τεθνηκὸς καὶ τὸ ἐγρηγορὸς καὶ καθεῦδον καὶ νέον καὶ γηραιόν· τάδε γὰρ μεταπεσόντα ἐκεῖνά ἐστι κἀκεῖνα πάλιν μεταπεσόντα ταῦτα).
[102] However, the main focus of Heraclitus' flux theory seems to have been the unity (or identity) of opposites: on this subject, see esp. Emlyn-Jones 1976 and O'Brien 1990. On Plato's reception of Heraclitus, particularly in regard to the theory of flux and the unity of opposites, see Kahn 1985, 251-258; Sassi 1996; Colvin 2007; Rowett 2017.
[103] See below §5.1.

from recollection (72e-77b) reinforces the first argument by adducing the existence of certain innate ideas as further proof that our soul must have existed before we were born. The third argument, known as the argument from affinity (78b-80c), argues that the soul has far more in common with the Forms than with its physical container and can thus be expected to resemble the former in their indestructibility. At this point, Socrates interrupts the argumentation to give a "plausible" (εἰκός)[104] description of what happens to the souls of the dead after they depart from the body (80d-82c): a soul that "departs in a state of purity" will logically go to the invisible realm, where it will dwell, "as it is said of the initiated", in the company of the gods for the rest of time; conversely, a soul that "departs polluted" and is thus drawn to the physical realm will attach itself to another body, which will reflect the type of character that the soul displayed in its previous life – gluttonous souls will be reincarnated as donkeys, tyrannical souls as wolves, virtuous but unphilosophic souls as bees and, eventually, "moderate men" (ἄνδρας μετρίους).[105] The fourth and final argument (102a-107b) employs the principle of non-contradiction to demonstrate that the soul is intrinsically immortal: because a soul always brings life to the body it inhabits, it follows that 'aliveness' is an essential property of the soul; therefore, a soul can never be dead, since two mutually exclusive opposites cannot coexist in the same subject.

On the surface, the account of the soul given in the *Phaedo* seems hardly reconcilable with the views expressed in later dialogues, especially regarding the existence of different 'parts' to the human soul – a possibility which appears to be categorically

[104] The repeated use of this word, as noted by Hackforth (1955, 91), indicates that the passage, though it certainly contains elements of truth (at least according to Plato), is not to be taken as a "matter of certain knowledge".

[105] The belief that human souls could transmigrate into animals – and possibly plants (Emp. fr. 117 DK = *OF* 451) – was a well-known feature of the Orphic-Pythagorean tradition (see above §2.3); unlike in the *Phaedo* passage, however, the kind of life-form that a soul would end up inhabiting was apparently dictated by chance, at least according to the extant sources.

rejected in the *Phaedo*, where the soul's indestructability is explicitly linked to its non-compositeness.[106] Upon closer inspection, however, we discover that there is a significant degree of overlap between the two. In the *Phaedo*, for example, we find a hint at the theory of tripartition in the 'mythical' digression between the third and fourth arguments, where Socrates associates different animals with each of the three human characters which result from the dominance of one part of the soul over the other two – donkeys with the appetitive type; wolves, hawks, and kites with the spirited type; bees, wasps, and ants with the rational type.[107] The lack of any explicit reference to the three parts of the soul, as they will come to be described in the *Republic*, might be a sign that the theory was still in its infancy, but it is clear that a distinction between λογιστικόν, θυμοειδές, and ἐπιθυμητικόν – though perhaps not yet conceptualised in terms of 'parts' – was already ingrained in Plato's mind. Another point of contact between the *Phaedo* and later dialogues can be found in the last argument for the immortality of the soul, which is closely connected with the 'argument from motion' in the *Phaedrus* (245c-246a).[108] The latter states that "all soul" (ψυχὴ πᾶσα) is immortal because it is the source of movement in all moving things and is itself always moving, and what is always in motion is by definition immortal. As noted by Hackforth (1952, 68) and others, the passage in the *Phaedrus* translates "an argument about the relations of words and concepts into one based on observed physical fact" – for what is movement if not the empirical sign of the presence of life?[109] The exact meaning of ψυχὴ πᾶσα has been heavily discussed since antiquity: Posidonius interpreted it in a collective sense, relating it to the World-Soul of the *Timaeus*, whereas Harpocration interpreted it in a distributive sense to mean 'every (individual) soul', including the souls of animals;

[106] Pl. *Phd*. 78c-d.
[107] Pl. *Phd*. 81e-82b; cf. *Ti*. 91d-92c.
[108] For a thorough analysis of this passage and its textual and interpretive problems, see Blyth 1997.
[109] A similar argument is presented in Book X of the *Laws* (896a-d), where 'Soul' is identified as the cosmic principle of all movement and activity (see, e.g., Robinson 1995, 145-155; Parry 2002; Marinescu 2021).

finally, Hermias (*in Phdr*. 102), who recorded these interpretations in his commentary on the dialogue, took the phrase to mean 'all rational soul', based on what Plato says in the previous sentence about needing to "learn the truth […] about the nature of the soul, both human and divine".[110] Among modern scholars, Hackforth (1952, 64f.) dismisses the distinction between collective and distributive senses as largely irrelevant, reading ψυχὴ πᾶσα to mean "soul in general", as opposed to πᾶν σῶμα at 245e; Robinson (1995, 111), following Hermias, argues that the phrase must refer solely to the rational soul, as "the θεῖόν τι common to gods and men", while Blyth (1997, 186) interprets it as "some common aspect of all living things". While it is true that the main purpose of this section of the *Phaedrus*, including the following eschatological myth, is to demonstrate the common nature of human and divine souls, restricting the meaning of ψυχὴ πᾶσα to the rational soul would undermine the validity of the argument, since animals, which only partake in the irrational soul,[111] are also capable of movement. However, including the irrational part of the soul in ψυχὴ πᾶσα and extending to it the label of immortality (ἀθάνατος) would seemingly contradict what is said elsewhere about its 'mortal' nature.

The proof of immortality in Book X of the *Republic* (608c-612a) offers some clarification with respect to the nature of the irrational soul. Observing that "practically everything has its own congenital evil" (609a σύμφυτον κακόν) and that everything, except the soul, is destroyed by its congenital evil, Socrates concludes that the soul, whose evil is "injustice, licentiousness, cowardice, and ignorance" (609b-c ἀδικία τε καὶ ἀκολασία καὶ δειλία καὶ ἀμαθία), must be immortal. There can be little doubt that the soul of which Plato speaks here is the human soul in its tripartite form, since its "congenital evils" are the opposites of the four cardinal virtues which are explained in terms of the tripartite

[110] Pl. *Phdr*. 245c δεῖ οὖν πρῶτον ψυχῆς φύσεως πέρι θείας τε καὶ ἀνθρωπίνης ἰδόντα πάθη τε καὶ ἔργα τἀληθὲς νοῆσαι· ἀρχὴ δὲ ἀποδείξεως ἥδε. ψυχὴ πᾶσα ἀθάνατος.
[111] Pl. *Phdr*. 248c-d, *R*. 4.441b.

psychology in Book IV (434d-444e). That said, not all parts of the human soul partake in the same degree of immortality. As Socrates admits a little later,

> It is not easy […] for a thing which is composed (σύνθετόν) of many elements to be eternal (ἀίδιον), especially one that is not put together in the best way, as the soul appeared to us just now […]. This and our other arguments would force us to recognise the soul as immortal (ἀθάνατον). But the soul's true nature cannot be apprehended when it is corrupted by its association with the body and other evils, as we now see it; instead, we must contemplate through the eye of reason (λογισμῷ διαθεατέον) what it is like when it becomes pure […]. Though we have stated the truth about its present appearance, its condition as we have contemplated it resembles that of the sea-god Glaucus, whose original form can hardly be discerned by looking at him, because parts of his body have been broken off, crushed, and altogether marred by the waves, and other parts – shells, sea-weed, and rocks – have attached themselves to him, so that he resembles any wild beast more than what he was by nature: such is the state of the soul as we see it, marred by countless evils.[112]

As the comparison with the barnacle-covered Glaucus vividly conveys, the irrational parts of the soul (θυμοειδές and ἐπιθυμητικόν) do not reflect the soul's true nature, which is embodied by the pure rational part (λογιστικόν), but rather resemble external accretions acquired by the soul from coming into contact with the physical world, through incarnation. Although the entire soul, with all its parts, is immune from death, only the rational soul, purified from its mortal accretions, is truly immortal and divine. This distinction is emphasised in the *Timaeus* (41a-d, 69b-72d), where the creation of the human soul is divided between the Demiurge, who is personally responsible for creating the rational (immortal) soul, and the younger gods, who are responsible for creating the spirited and appetitive parts (i.e., the mortal soul).[113] In the *Phaedo*, where the chief focus is on the nature of the human soul in its purest state, which the philosopher strives to achieve, the arguments for immortality are firmly rooted in the dichotomy between soul and body.

[112] Pl. *R.* 10.611b-d; cf. 6.485d-486a, 7.519a-b.
[113] More on this below, §6.2.

Problems arise, however, when an argument designed to prove the immortality of the human soul is extended to "all soul(s)" without further qualification, as in the case of the argument from motion in the *Phaedrus*. I believe, with Ferrari (1987, 124f.), that the ambiguity of ψυχὴ πᾶσα is very much intentional on Plato's part, who uses it to overcome the inadequacy of a purely impersonal view of the soul in the context of Socrates' second speech. This overriding concern for the human soul and its immortal (i.e., divine) nature, which pervades the dialogues of the transitional and middle periods, can ultimately be traced back to the influence of the Orphic tradition on Plato's philosophical development – an influence which becomes even more apparent when one considers the central role of eschatology in Plato's mature thought.

3.3 Life after death

Eschatology is without doubt the area of Plato's thought in which the influence of Orphism and mystery religion is strongest and most apparent. This is hardly surprising, if we consider the impact of Orphic myths and ideas on the ancient Greeks' conception of the afterlife, as evidenced not only by the works of Pindar and the dramatic poets,[114] but also by popular art forms like vase paintings.[115] While most scholars acknowledge Plato's debt to the Orphic tradition with regard to the vision of the afterlife that is presented in his writings, the significance of the eschatological passages in Plato's dialogues is the subject of a longstanding debate. Because the passages which describe the soul's fate after death are usually mythical in nature, they are discounted by some scholars as mere literary exercises,

[114] On the reception of Orphic ideas in Greek tragedy and comedy, see Macías Otero 2008 and Bernabé 2008d, respectively. On Pindar and Orphism, see n. 29.
[115] See Schmidt 1975.

decorative in function and devoid of any philosophical substance;[116] at best, they are seen as an aid meant for readers untrained in philosophy, who are supposedly unable to follow pure dialectical argumentation.[117] Some scholars, on the other hand, believe that Plato resorts to myth when the subject matter transcends the scope of dialectic,[118] which many see as a shortcoming on the philosopher's part.[119] Recent scholarship, however, has adopted a more nuanced approach, which overcomes the modern dichotomy between *mythos* and *logos*[120] and recognises Plato's use of myth as "an integral […] part of philosophical discourse".[121] Since the basic assumptions on which Plato's eschatological vision is founded – namely, that the human soul is immortal and undergoes a series of reincarnations – are proven through logical arguments, most notably in the *Phaedo*, but also in other dialogues, the purpose of the eschatological myths must not be to patch over a fallacy in Plato's dialectic argumentation, but rather to strengthen it by leveraging the persuasive power of mythical imagery.[122] By appropriating the language of traditional and, especially, Orphic mythology, Plato is able to bypass the strict standards of dialectic – which is to say, to go beyond what is logically falsifiable – and provide a detailed and vivid description of what awaits the soul after it leaves the body, which serves as a final incentive for the reader to adopt a philosophic life. It is no coincidence, then, that three of the four great Platonic myths about the afterlife occur in what is arguably the most important part of any written work, which is to say the conclusion. In what follows, I will analyse the eschatological myths of the *Gorgias* (523a-527a), the *Phaedo* (107c-114c), the *Phaedrus* (246a-250c), and the *Republic* (10. 614b-621b) and highlight how Plato manipulates Orphic tropes and ideas

[116] E.g., Crombie 1962, 154.
[117] E.g., Schuhl 1968, 26; Brisson 1998, 11.
[118] Stewart 1905, 49f.; Friedländer 1969, I, 176; Elias 1984, 81.
[119] E.g., Zeller 1888, 162f.
[120] For a survey of the scholarship (and the criticisms) of the *mythos*/*logos* distinction, see Buxton 1999, 1-21; Most 1999; Morgan 2000, 15-45; Wians 2009, 1-10; Fowler 2011.
[121] Collobert et al. 2012, 1. See also Murray 1999 and Morgan 2000, 155-184.
[122] E.g., Edmonds 2004, 166f.

to create a coherent theory of the afterlife that is consistent with his ethical and metaphysical views.

3.3.1 The myth of the final judgement in the *Gorgias*

The myth of the *Gorgias* (523a-527a) is the shortest and the oldest in order of composition of Plato's eschatological myths. Unlike the eschatological myths of the *Phaedo, Phaedrus*, and *Republic*, it lacks any explicit reference to reincarnation. The reason for this omission will become clear once we analyse the myth in relation to its context and function within the dialogue. Having failed to convince the young Callicles to pursue the good of the soul by means of dialectic, Socrates attempts to persuade him emotionally, by recounting a myth about the judgement of the dead, which will demonstrate that "to arrive in Hades with a soul full of crimes (ἀδικημάτων) is the worst of all evils".[123] Although this account (λόγος), as Socrates himself admits, has the semblance of a folktale (μῦθος), he nonetheless professes to trust its veracity and repeatedly encourages Callicles to do the same.[124] Therefore, the fact that the myth is presented as something which Socrates has heard from an unspecified source is not, *pace* Dodds (1959, 373), "a device to avoid making Socrates responsible for opinions which he did not in fact hold", but rather a form of Platonic transposition: indeed, as shown by Bernabé (2011, 234f.), the most common way in which Plato incorporates Orphic material into his work is by referring to the source in a roundabout

[123] Pl. *Grg*. 522e.

[124] Pl. *Grg*. 523a ἄκουε δή … μάλα καλοῦ λόγου, ὃν σὺ μὲν ἡγήσῃ μῦθον, ὡς ἐγὼ οἶμαι, ἐγὼ δὲ λόγον· ὡς ἀληθῆ γὰρ ὄντα σοι λέξω ἃ μέλλω λέγειν, 524a-b ταῦτ' ἔστιν … ἃ ἐγὼ ἀκηκοὼς πιστεύω ἀληθῆ εἶναι, 526d ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν … ὑπό τε τούτων τῶν λόγων πέπεισμαι. Bernabé (2011, 158) argues, I believe correctly, that the use of the term λόγος in this context is a covert allusion to the Orphic ἱεροὶ λόγοι.

manner, with such periphrases as "ancient (or sacred) discourse",[125] or "story told in the mysteries".[126]

The myth starts off by describing the state of things at the time of Cronus, when men were judged on the day of their death by other living men, while they were still alive, and many witnesses could appear to testify in their favour. After their death, those who were deemed to have led a "just and holy life" were sent to the Isles of the Blessed, whereas those who had lived "unjustly and impiously" were confined to "the dungeon of vengeance and punishment" which is called Tartarus.[127] The judges, however, were far from infallible and often sent unworthy souls to the abode of the blessed and righteous souls to Tartarus. In order to put a stop to these faulty practices, Zeus decreed that, under his rule, men should no longer know in advance the day of their death and that, once dead, their souls should be judged naked – that is to say, stripped from their bodies – by naked judges, so that the body may not interfere with the judgement.[128] From then on, the souls of the dead were judged in the meadow at the entrance of Hades, whence the roads to the Isles of the Blessed and to Tartarus depart, by three judges: Rhadamanthus for those coming from Asia, Aeacus for those coming from Europe, and Minos for those about whom the other two were undecided.[129]

Plato alludes several times in his work to the kingdom of Cronus, painting it as a sort of lost paradise, in which humans lived free from all toil and suffering, including the pain of childbirth,[130] and were governed by "beings of a nobler and more divine race", called *daimones*.[131] This mythologem, as stated by Socrates himself in the *Cratylus* (397e-

[125] Pl. *Phd*. 70c = *OF* 428i, *L*. 4.715e = *OF* 31iii, *Ep*. 7.335a = *OF* 433i.
[126] Pl. *Phd*. 62b = *OF* 429i, 69c = *OF* 434iii.
[127] Pl. *Grg*. 523a-b.
[128] For the notion of the body as a hindrance to knowledge, see, e.g., Pl. *Phd.* 66a-67a.
[129] Pl. *Grg*. 523b-524a.
[130] Cf. Pl. *Plt.* 271e-272a.
[131] Pl. *L*. 4.713d; cf. Pl. *Cra*. 398b-c ἐπειδάν τις ἀγαθὸς ὢν τελευτήσῃ, μεγάλην μοῖραν καὶ τιμὴν ἔχει καὶ γίγνεται δαίμων κατὰ τὴν τῆς φρονήσεως ἐπωνυμίαν. ταύτῃ οὖν τίθεμαι καὶ ἐγὼ τὸν δαήμονα πάντ᾽ ἄνδρα

398a), stems from Hesiod (*Op*. 109-126), who tells of a "golden race" of men who lived at the time of Cronus, to which belong the pure and benign spirits who roam the earth and watch over mortals. Hesiod's *Works and Days* (vv. 170-173) also contain the earliest known mention of the Isles of the Blessed,[132] the place where the semidivine heroes who survived the Theban and Trojan wars live free from worry under Cronus' rule. This version of the myth, in which Cronus is not permanently imprisoned in Tartarus like in Hesiod's *Theogony* (vv. 715-721) and in the *Iliad* (8.479-481, 14.274, 279), is probably referenced by Pindar in a passage of the *Second Olympian* (vv. 56-72 = *OF* 445) which shows an "unmistakable affinity" with Orphic thought:[133]

θανόντων μὲν ἐνθάδ᾽ αὐτίκ᾽ ἀπάλαμνοι φρένες
ποινὰς ἔτισαν, τὰ δ᾽ ἐν τᾷδε Διὸς ἀρχᾷ
ἀλιτρὰ κατὰ γᾶς δικάζει τις ἐχθρᾷ
λόγον φράσαις ἀνάγκᾳ·[134]
…
ἀπονέστερον
ἐσλοὶ δέκονται βίοτον
…
τοὶ δ᾽ ἀπροσόρατον ὀκχέοντι πόνον.
ὅσοι δ᾽ ἐτόλμασαν ἐστρὶς
ἑκατέρωθι μείναντες ἀπὸ πάμπαν ἀδίκων ἔχειν
ψυχάν, ἔτειλαν Διὸς ὁδὸν παρὰ Κρόνου τύρσιν· ἔνθα μακάρων
νᾶσον ὠκεανίδες
αὖραι περιπνέοισιν.

[T]he helpless spirits of those who die pay the penalty here immediately, but for the crimes committed in this realm of Zeus a judge beneath the earth gives the sentence, speaking with hateful necessity […]. Good men receive a life of less toil […], whereas the others endure pain too terrible to behold. But those who managed to live three times on both sides, while keeping their

ὃς ἂν ἀγαθὸς ᾖ, δαιμόνιον εἶναι καὶ ζῶντα καὶ τελευτήσαντα, καὶ ὀρθῶς δαίμονα καλεῖσθαι. For further discussion of the references to the reign of Cronus and to the *daimones* in Plato's work, see below §6.3.

[132] On the textual problems involving this passage, see West 1978, 193-195, *ad l.*

[133] Lloyd-Jones 1985, 247.

[134] The meaning of these lines has been debated since antiquity (see Willcock 1995, 154f. *ad l.*). I believe that Pindar is alluding here to the ancestral crime of the Titans, for which the penalty is incarnation: hence, the souls of those who have died are said to have paid the penalty "right then and there" (this, however, does not mean that they are cleansed of their "ancient guilt"; in order for that to happen, Persephone must accept their atonement: cf. Pi. fr. 133 SM = *OF* 443); their personal crimes, on the other hand, will be judged and atoned for in the afterlife. Lloyd-Jones (1985, 245) adopts the same translation, but with a different explanation: "The sense must be that when men die here, their feeble minds at once pay the penalty; the penalty consists in their minds becoming feeble, that is to say, in death".

> souls completely free from injustice, travel the road of Zeus to the tower of Cronus, where Oceanic breezes blow around the Isle of the Blessed.

The eschatological vision presented by Pindar shares many similarities with the *Gorgias* myth: the judgement of the dead, punishments for the wicked, and a pleasant existence for the righteous.[135] As we have seen, the belief in post-mortem punishments and rewards was also a fundamental feature of the Orphic (and Eleusinian) cult, although the degree to which personal conduct in the present life was deemed to affect one's lot in the afterlife is not entirely clear. The extant sources tend to focus on one's initiation status as the determining factor: this is the case, most notably, with the gold tablets, where identifying oneself as an initiate is, ostensibly, the only condition for gaining access to the abode of the blessed.[136] It is possible, however, that the lack of reference to the judgement of the soul was dictated by the ritual nature of these texts, which were meant to serve as memory aids or identity tokens (*symbola*) for the deceased initiates, to help them reach their lawful destination in the underworld. Indeed, the complaint voiced by the Derveni author against those who disbelieve in the "horrors (δεινά) of Hades"[137] would make little sense without the notion that unjust deeds committed (and not atoned for) during one's life are liable to be punished in the afterlife – for the punishments envisioned for the uninitiated, though certainly unpleasant, can hardly be described as 'horrors'. Elsewhere, Plato himself attests that priests who used the texts of Orpheus and Musaeus in their rituals convinced

[135] The same themes are also referenced in a fragment from Pindar's *Dirges* (fr. 131b SM = *OF* 442; quoted below, n. 137), which mentions the "approaching judgement of things pleasant and painful" (τερπνῶν ἐφέρποισαν χαλεπῶν τε κρίσιν). On this fragment, see the bibliography cited in n. 29.

[136] On the gold tablets, see above §1.3.2.

[137] *P.Derv*. 5.4-8 KPT = §§14f. Kotwick αὐτοῖς πάριμεν [εἰς τὸ μα]ντεῖον ἐπερ[ω]τήσοντες, τῶν μαντευομέν[ων ἕ]νεκεν, εἰ θεμί[τ' ἐσ]τὶν καὶ [τὰ] ἐν Ἅιδου δεινά. τί ἀ[πισ]τοῦσι; οὐ γινώσ[κ]οντες `[ὁ]ρῶ[ντες]΄ ἐνύπνια οὐδὲ τῶν ἄλλων π[ρα]γμάτων ἕκασ[τον], {πα} ποῖον ἂν παραδειγμάτων π[ι]στεύοιεν κτλ. Cf. Pi. fr. 131b SM = *OF* 442 σῶμα μὲν πάντων ἕπεται θανάτῳ περισθενεῖ, / ζωὸν δ' ἔτι λείπεται αἰῶνος εἴδωλον· / τὸ γάρ ἐστι μόνον / ἐκ θεῶν· εὕδει δὲ πρασσόντων μελέων, ἀτὰρ εὐδόντεσσιν / ἐν πολλοῖς ὀνείροις / δείκνυσι τερπνῶν ἐφέρποισαν χαλεπῶν τε κρίσιν.

"not only individuals but also cities"[138] that unjust acts (ἀδικήματα) can be atoned for by means of sacrifices while one is alive and that "there are also special rites for the deceased, which they call *teletai*, that deliver us from evils in the otherworld, while horrible things (δεινά) await those who have neglected to sacrifice".[139] In light of this, it seems plausible that the Orphics envisioned varying degrees of punishment in the afterlife: on one hand, those who had neglected to atone for the ancestral crime of the killing of Dionysus by performing the appropriate rites (i.e., the uninitiated) but who had not personally committed any specially unjust deed would be punished by being made to lie in the mud or carry water in broken pitchers; on the other hand, the souls of unjust men would be punished according to the severity of their crimes, with more inveterate sinners being subjected to horrible suffering.

According to Pindar, virtuous souls also received a treatment which was commensurate with their good deeds. Those who had lived "free from all wrongdoing" three consecutive times "in both places" (ἑκατέρωθι)[140] were allowed to travel the road to the "tower of Cronus" and live forever in the Isle of the Blessed. As we will see shortly, the alternation of earthly and otherworldly lives, though not explicitly mentioned in the *Gorgias*, is a key element of Plato's vision of the afterlife. Since it is also included in the eschatological section of Pindar's *Second Olympian*, it is reasonable to assume that it was a feature of Orphic eschatology, which both Plato and Pindar drew upon[141] – a hypothesis which is corroborated by a passage in the *Laws* (9.870d-e), where Plato ascribes to mystery

[138] Athens, with the Eleusinian mysteries, was most likely included among those cities (see, e.g., West 1983a, 23).

[139] Pl. *R.* 2.364e-365a = *OF* 573i βίβλων δὲ ὅμαδον παρέχονται Μουσαίου καὶ Ὀρφέως, Σελήνης τε καὶ Μουσῶν ἐκγόνων, ὥς φασι, καθ᾽ ἃς θυηπολοῦσιν, πείθοντες οὐ μόνον ἰδιώτας ἀλλὰ καὶ πόλεις, ὡς ἄρα λύσεις τε καὶ καθαρμοὶ ἀδικημάτων διὰ θυσιῶν καὶ παιδιᾶς ἡδονῶν εἰσι μὲν ἔτι ζῶσιν, εἰσὶ δὲ καὶ τελευτήσασιν, ἃς δὴ τελετὰς καλοῦσιν, αἳ τῶν ἐκεῖ κακῶν ἀπολύουσιν ἡμᾶς, μὴ θύσαντας δὲ δεινὰ περιμένει.

[140] Despite the efforts of some scholars to argue otherwise, the natural meaning of ἐστρὶς ἑκατέρωθι, which is to say, "three times on each side" (i.e., three times on earth and three times in Hades), is in fact the correct one: see, e.g., Fritz 1957 and McGibbon 1964.

[141] See Catenacci 2014-2015. On the eschatology of Pindar's *Second Olympian*, see also Hampe 1952; Gianotti 1971; Lloyd-Jones 1985; Nisetich 1988.

priests (τῶν ἐν ταῖς τελεταῖς περὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα ἐσπουδακότων) the idea that unjust individuals pay the penalty twice: first in Hades and secondly in their next incarnation. A (rather minor) point on which Pindar's and Plato's visions of the afterlife seem to differ from that of the Orphics is the location of the abode of the blessed. The "sacred road" which the "initiates and *bacchoi*" are said to travel in the gold tablets (*OF* 474.15f., 487.5f.) leads not to the Isles of the Blessed, but to the "holy meadows and groves of Persephone". Granted, this may be a difference without a distinction: indeed, in the Homeric descriptions of the afterlife (*Od*. 4.563-568, 10.508-512), the Elysian plain, where Menelaus and Helen live free of toil for all eternity, and the groves of Persephone, where the entrance to Hades is located, both lie "at the edge of the world", beyond the river Ocean, so it is very possible that these were all different names for the same place.

If the idea of otherworldly punishments and rewards – albeit for few exceptional cases – can be said to have a precedent in the epic tradition, the judgement of the dead, on the other hand, seems to be entirely foreign to (or else ignored by) Homer, according to whom all mortals – with few exceptions – share the same fate, irrespective of their conduct on earth.[142] The earliest reference to judgement in the afterlife appears in Pindar's *Second Olympian* (vv. 58f.), though the identity of the judge is left unspecified. A few years later, Aeschylus refers to the infernal judge as "another Zeus" in the *Suppliants* and as Hades in the *Eumenides*.[143] Minos appears as judge of the dead in the Homeric *Nekyia* (*Od*. 11.568-575), but this is merely a reference to the continuation of his royal duty in the afterlife – which involved the resolution of disputes between infernal tenants – and need not imply

[142] The 'exemplary sinners' mentioned in the Homeric *Nekyia* (*Od.* 11.582-600) are mythical figures who were punished by Zeus for challenging his authority and are thus not comparable to ordinary mortals any more than Menelaus and the other heroes of the golden race to whom Zeus granted immortality (see *Od*. 4.561-569, Hes. *Op*. 156-173). With respect to Hesiod, however, Currie (2007, 167-171) has argued that a vision of post-mortem reward and non-reward is already implicit in the myth of the races.

[143] Aesch. *Supp*. 230f. κἀκεῖ δικάζει τἀπλακήμαθ', ὡς λόγος, / Ζεὺς ἄλλος ἐν καμοῦσιν ὑστάτας δίκας, *Eu.* 273 μέγας γὰρ Ἅιδης ἐστὶν εὔθυνος βροτῶν.

the notion of a judgement of the souls upon their arrival in Hades. No source prior to Plato mentions Rhadamanthus and Aeacus in the role of infernal judges, although the former appears as an example of honesty in Euripides' *Cyclops*,[144] and the latter is said to judge disputes between the gods in Pindar's *Eighth Isthmian*.[145] Pindar also mentions Rhadamanthus in his *Second Olympian* (v. 75), where the virtuous souls in the Isle of the Blessed are said to weave wreaths of flowers "according to the righteous counsels of Rhadamanthus". The fact that Socrates mentions Minos, Rhadamanthus, and Aeacus, together with Triptolemus, at the end of his final speech before the jury in the *Apology* (41a) seems to suggest that their role as infernal judges was already sufficiently well known;[146] given that the idea of the judgement of the dead is very closely linked with the notion of a differentiated afterlife, which is a distinctive feature of the Orphic tradition, it seems plausible that the source of this mythologem could have been an eschatological poem ascribed to Orpheus or Musaeus. Although the only extant Orphic source which explicitly mentions the judgement of souls is a text from the Imperial age,[147] a passage from the

[144] Eur. *Cyc*. 273f. ἔγωγε τῷδε τοῦ Ῥαδαμάνθυος / μᾶλλον πέποιθα καὶ δικαιότερον λέγω.
[145] Pi. *I.* 8.23f. Αἰακὸν … ὃ καὶ / δαιμόνεσσι δίκας ἐπείραινε κτλ.
[146] The inclusion of Triptolemus might suggest that the idea of post-mortem judgement was connected, at least for the Athenians, with the Eleusinian mysteries (see Graf 1974, 121-126). The pseudo-Platonic *Axiochus* (371c), usually dated in the first century BC, mentions a special place in Hades reserved for those who have successfully passed Minos' and Rhadamanthus' interrogation about their conduct in life (on the Orphic eschatology of the *Axiochus*, see Bernabé 2013a, 126-130; see also the recent edition and commentary by Beghini [2020]). Rhadamanthus, Aeacus, and Triptolemus are mentioned in a lacunose epitaph by Posidippus of Pella (3rd cent. BC), where the deceased is said to have arrived "to the abode of the blessed, to the sacred rites of the initiates, and to the pure fire before the house of Triptolemus" (AB 43 ἦλθεν ἐπ᾽ εὐσεβέων Νικοστράτη ἱερὰ μυστῶν / ὄργια καὶ καθαρὸν πῦρ ἐπὶ Τριπτολέ[μου.] / ἣν ἀψ ἡ φ..[…..]… Ῥαδαμάνθυος [] / Αἰακὸς ε[……]. δῶμα πύλας τ᾽{ε} Ἀΐδεω κτλ). Radamanthus is also mentioned in another poem by Posidippus, where the author expresses the wish to "travel the mystic path to Radamanthus" in his old age (*SH* 705.21-23 μηδέ τις οὖν χεύαι δάκρυν. αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ / γήρᾳ μυστικὸν οἶμον ἐπὶ Ῥαδάμανθυν ἰκοίμην / δήμῳ καὶ λαῷ παντὶ ποθεινὸς ἐών). In addition to the content of his poems, a possible connection with the Posidippus (perhaps a grandfather?) mentioned in an Orphic gold tablet from Pella (*OF* 496b; late 4th cent. BC) makes it extremely plausible that the poet was himself an (Orphic?) initiate (see Dickie 1998, 65-77; Dignas 2004; Bremmer 2006).
[147] The Bologna papyrus (*P.Bonon*. 4 = *OF* 717; *ed. pr.* Montevecchi and Pighi 1947), which contains parts of a hexametric poem dating from Roman times (see Lloyd-Jones and Parsons 1978, 88-108), mentions the judgement of the dead, among other things. However, due to its late date of composition, it is possible that this text was influenced by Pindar's and Plato's descriptions of the afterlife (Bernabé 2013a, 110).

Seventh Epistle (335a = *OF* 433i),[148] which alludes to "the ancient and sacred discourses" (τοῖς παλαιοῖς τε καὶ ἱεροῖς λόγοις) on the immortality of the soul, the judgement of the dead, and the existence of afterlife punishments, lends further support to this hypothesis.

The dichotomy between body and soul, epitomised in the *Gorgias* myth by the discrepancy between a person's outward appearance and their moral character, is a distinctively Orphic idea, attested in Orphic ritual texts such as the fifth-century bone tablets from Olbia.[149] The same idea is also implied in the metaphors of the body as tomb and as prison of the soul, which recur in several Platonic passages with an 'Orphic' connotation.[150] The belief that a dead person's soul retains not only their physical features but also the wounds that the person sustained during life is already attested in the *Odyssey* (11.40f.),[151] but Plato applies this concept to the spiritual wounds, caused by vice and injustice, which become exposed once the soul is no longer hidden by the body, giving it a completely different meaning.[152] As Socrates explains to Polus in the first part of the dialogue, the only cure for the spiritual sickness which derives from committing a crime consists in receiving just punishment: thus, not paying the penalty for one's wrongdoings is the worst of all evils, worse than being unjustly punished, even if such punishment should lead to death.[153] Behind this belief lies the Orphic view of life on earth as a place of atonement from which

[148] Although the general consensus has been to consider the *Seventh Letter* as authentic or as the work of one of Plato's immediate disciples (in favour of authenticity, see, e.g., Brisson 1993a and Politis 2020), recent scholarship in the Anglophone sphere has cast this view into doubt (see, e.g., Annas 1999, 74-77; Schofield 2006, 13-30; Burnyeat and Frede 2015); for this reason, I only refer tangentially to the *Seventh Letter* over the course of this study.
[149] See n. 29.
[150] Pl. *Grg*. 493a-c = *OF* 434ii, *Cra.* 400c = *OF* 430i, *Phd.* 62b = *OF* 429i, *Phdr*. 250c.
[151] It should be noted that the term ψυχαί, used in the *Odyssey* passage, means something different in the Homeric texts to Plato's idea of 'soul' (see above §3.1).
[152] On the *topos* of 'moulding' and 'imprinting' in Plato and the gold tablets, see Horky 2006.
[153] Pl. *Grg*. 472e-474b, 477c-481a.

it is forbidden to escape,[154] for he who fails duly to purify himself during this life will face punishment in the next.

For both Plato and the Orphics, who believed that true happiness can only be achieved in the afterlife, the overwhelming concern is the good of the soul. According to Plato, however, not all souls can be cured of their spiritual sickness: as he explains in the *Gorgias* myth, the souls of 'incurable sinners', whose crimes are too great to be atoned for, endure eternal punishment in Tartarus and serve as a cautionary example to the other wrongdoers.[155] Dodds (1959, 381) has pointed out, rightly in my view, that the presence of exemplary sinners in the eschatology of the *Gorgias* implies a belief in reincarnation, for if the 'curable sinners' were not destined to be reincarnated, it is unclear why they would need to be dissuaded from future wrongdoing. Irwin (1979, 246 *ad l.*) and Annas (1982, 124f.), on the other hand, have argued that the 'therapeutic' effect which the sight of the exemplary sinners has on the other souls is enough to justify their inclusion in the myth and, thus, no theory of reincarnation need be assumed. Another possible solution would be to posit a notion of 'internal mobility' in the afterlife, which, as we shall see presently, is actually a feature of the eschatological vision presented in the *Phaedo*. Ultimately, there is no need to choose one explanation over the others, as they can all be true at the same time, but I contend that Dodds' interpretation should not be easily dismissed, especially given that the theory of reincarnation is explicitly referenced in the roughly contemporary *Meno* (81a-c = *OF* 424; quoted above, p. 89).[156] Besides, Plato had a perfectly good reason to omit this aspect of his eschatological theory from the final myth of the *Gorgias*, since its purpose

[154] Cf. Pl. *Phd.* 62b = *OF* 429i ὁ μὲν οὖν ἐν ἀπορρήτοις λεγόμενος περὶ αὐτῶν λόγος, ὡς ἔν τινι φρουρᾷ ἐσμεν οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ οὐ δεῖ δὴ ἑαυτὸν ἐκ ταύτης λύειν οὐδ' ἀποδιδράσκειν, μέγας τέ τίς μοι φαίνεται καὶ οὐ ῥᾴδιος διιδεῖν.

[155] Pl. *Grg.* 525c οἳ δ' ἂν τὰ ἔσχατα ἀδικήσωσι καὶ διὰ τὰ τοιαῦτα ἀδικήματα ἀνίατοι γένωνται, ἐκ τούτων τὰ παραδείγματα γίγνεται, καὶ οὗτοι αὐτοὶ μὲν οὐκέτι ὀνίνανται οὐδέν, ἅτε ἀνίατοι ὄντες, ἄλλοι δὲ ὀνίνανται οἱ τούτους ὁρῶντες διὰ τὰς ἁμαρτίας τὰ μέγιστα καὶ ὀδυνηρότατα καὶ φοβερώτατα πάθη πάσχοντας τὸν ἀεὶ χρόνον, ἀτεχνῶς παραδείγματα ἀνηρτημένους ἐκεῖ ἐν Ἅιδου ἐν τῷ δεσμωτηρίῳ, τοῖς ἀεὶ τῶν ἀδίκων ἀφικνουμένοις θεάματα καὶ νουθετήματα (cf. *Phd*. 113e, *R.* 10.615c).

[156] For arguments in favour of dating the *Meno* before the *Gorgias*, see Scott 2006, 194-208.

within the dialogue is to instil a sense of urgency in Callicles and persuade him to care for his soul by pursuing philosophy instead of his political aspirations. In fact, as Socrates says, it is extremely rare to find good men among those in power, which is why "tyrants, kings, dynasts", and politicians make up the majority of the incurable sinners who suffer eternal punishment in Tartarus.[157] Only the philosopher, who lives his life in the pursuit of truth and virtue, is guaranteed a place among the blessed in the afterlife.[158] Mentioning the cycle of reincarnations in this context would arguably diminish the finality of the argument, thus detracting from Socrates' objective of instilling the fear of post-mortem judgement in his antagonistic interlocutor as a means of dissuading him from his erroneous beliefs.[159]

3.3.2 The final myth of the *Phaedo*

The eschatological myth at the end of the *Phaedo* (107c-114c) follows a series of logical arguments in support of the immortality of the soul and serves a similar function to the final myth in the *Gorgias*, but whereas the latter was aimed at scaring Socrates' interlocutor into pursuing philosophy, the *Phaedo* myth is intended to reassure Socrates' disciples about the future that awaits the philosopher's soul after death. After leaving the body, as the myth describes, the soul is led by its *daimon* to the place where the dead await judgement, namely, the meadow at the entrance of Hades described at *Grg*. 524a. After receiving the sentence, "the guide (ἡγεμών) whose job it is to bring to Hades those who come from this world" leads the soul to the place of punishment or reward, depending on its past conduct; once the appointed time expires, another guide leads it back to the meadow whence it first

[157] Pl. *Grg*. 525d.
[158] Pl. *Grg*. 526c.
[159] I agree with Annas' (1982, 124f.) analysis on this point, although I reject her claim that the myth does not presuppose reincarnation. On the ethical function of the *Gorgias* myth, see most recently Baima 2024.

departed.[160] Socrates remarks that the road to Hades appears to him to be "neither simple nor single" (οὔτε ἁπλῆ οὔτε μία), since there would be no need for guides otherwise.[161] A similar vision of the afterlife is presented in the Orphic gold tablets, some of which, like the one from Hipponion (*OF* 474), contain detailed instructions on how to reach the special place reserved for the initiates:

> ἔστ' ἐπὶ δ<ε>ξιὰ κρήνα,
> πὰρ δ' αὐτὰν ἑστακῦα λευκὰ κυπάρισ⟨σ⟩ος·
> …
> ταύτας τᾶς κράνας μηδὲ σχεδὸν ἐγγύθεν ἔλθηις.
> πρόσθεν δὲ ἑυρήσεις τᾶς Μναμοσύνας ἀπὸ λίμνας
> ψυχρὸν ὕδωρ προρέον·
> …
> καὶ δὴ καὶ σὺ πιὼν ὁδὸν ἔρχεα<ι>, ἅν τε καὶ ἄλλοι
> μύσται καὶ βάκχοι ἱερὰν στείχουσι κλε⟨ε⟩ινοί.
>
> There is a spring on the right and standing next to it a white cypress […]. Do not even go near this spring! Ahead you will find cold water pouring forth from the Lake of Memory […]. And you, too, having drunk, will walk down the sacred path on which other glorious initiates and *bacchoi* travel.

A possible parallel for the *daimones* that lead the souls from the world of the living to that of the dead may be found in the eschatological section of the Derveni papyrus, which seems to contain a reference to the idea that "everyone is assigned a *daimon*".[162] The Derveni author appears to distinguish between good *daimones* (the Eumenides?) and harmful ones: these are identified by the author with a particular category of souls – perhaps the souls of those who died a violent death – which can hinder the newly deceased from reaching the happy abode of the initiates. According to a suggestive interpretation of the first columns of the Derveni papyrus, tentatively proposed by Johnston (2014), these impeding *daimones*, whom the author possibly identified with the Erinyes, turned into

[160] Pl. *Phd*. 107d-e.
[161] Pl. *Phd*. 108a.
[162] *P.Derv*. 3.4 KPT [δαίμ]ων γίνετα[ι ἑκά]στῳ. Bernabé (2007b, 185) accepts Tsantsanoglou and Parássoglou's text; Janko (2008, 9) and Kotwick (2017, 70 [§8]) have . . . . .(.)]ων γίνετα[ι. . . . .(.)].

Eumenides after the *magoi* – or other religious experts using the techniques which were purportedly invented by the *magoi* – paid the penalty (ποινὴν ἀποδιδόντες) on behalf of the initiates.[163] The main precedent for Plato's spirit-guides – and possibly for the 'personal *daimones*' in the Derveni papyrus, if the reading is correct – seems to be the folk belief in the existence of tutelary spirits (γενέθλιοι δαίμονες) that accompany men from birth to death – not unlike the guardian angels of Christian tradition – which is well attested in ancient sources.[164]

The judgement of the dead, which was the focus of the eschatological myth of the *Gorgias*, is only mentioned in passing in the *Phaedo* myth, which provides instead a detailed description of the otherworld, included within a larger 'geographical *excursus*' (108c-113c) on the "nature and size" of the earth and its "many marvellous (θαυμαστοί) regions". Contrary to popular belief, says Socrates, men do not live on the earth's circumference but inside its cavities, while the heavenly place on the surface, the "true earth" (ἡ ὡς ἀληθῶς γῆ), is inhabited by gods and righteous souls. However, only the hollows which are nearer to the surface are inhabited by men. The largest and deepest among the earth's cavities is indeed what the poets call Tartarus, where the souls of the wicked pay the penalty for their crimes; all the subterranean rivers – most notably, Oceanus, Acheron, Pyriphlegethon, and Cocytus – flow together into this chasm.[165] The names of the four infernal rivers are mentioned in the *Odyssey* (10.513f.), but given the extreme brevity of the Homeric passage, it is likely that Plato relied on a different source for his detailed

[163] *P.Derv.* 3.5-7 KPT = §§8f. Kotwick [τοὺς] μὴ ἐξώλεας [τιμῶσι χ]οαὶ σταγόσιν Ἐρινύω[ν. οἱ] δὲ [δ]αίμονες, οἳ κατὰ [τοὺς μ]άγους τιμὰς [ἀ]ξουσι [τῶν] θεῶν ὑπηρέται δ[ίκης κτλ, 6.1-10 KPT = §§17f. Kotwick δω]ρεαὶ καὶ θυσ[ί]αι μ[ειλ]ίσσουσι τὰ[ς ψυχάς. ἐπ[αοιδὴ δ]ὲ `τ⟨ῶν⟩´ μάγων δύν[α]ται δαίμονας ἐμ[ποδὼν] γ[ινομένου]ς μεθιστάναι. δαίμονες ἐμπο[δὼν ὄντες] ψ[υχαὶ νοητ]έοι· τὴν θυσί[η]ν τούτου ἕνεκε[ν] π[οιοῦσιν] οἱ μά[γο]ι, ὡ[σ]περεὶ ποινὴ[ν] ἀποδιδόντες … μύσται Εὐμενίσι προθύουσι κ[ατὰ τ]αὐτὰ μάγοις· Εὐμενίδες γὰρ ψυχαί εἰσιν. On *daimones*, Eumenides, and Erinyes in the Derveni papyrus, see also Betegh 2004, 85-89; Janko 2008, 45-47; Bernabé 2014; Piano 2016, 138-190; 2022; Kotwick 2017, 112-118; Betegh and Piano 2022.

[164] See Hackforth 1955, 167 n. 1; Bernabé 2013a, 114f.; Sfameni Gasparro 2015.

[165] On the symbolism of Plato's fluvial descriptions in the eschatological myths of the *Phaedo* and *Republic*, see Suárez 2019.

description. The resemblance between a particular phrase used by Plato in this section of the *Phaedo* and an Orphic verse repeatedly quoted by the Neoplatonists[166] suggests that this source, to which Socrates alludes with the usual vagueness,[167] might have been an Orphic eschatological poem.[168] Because the subterranean cavities described in the *Phaedo* myth are compared to mixing bowls (111d ὥσπερ εἰς κρατῆρας), West (1983a, 11f.) proposed to identify Plato's source with the *Krater*, a lost Orphic-Pythagorean poem mentioned in the catalogues of Orphic literature preserved by Clement of Alexandria (*Strom*. 1.21.131.3 = *OF* 1018iii) and by the *Suda* (o 654 Adler = *OF* 1018iv). Of course, since no known fragments from this poem survive, any hypothesis regarding its content is purely speculative.

A difference between Homeric and Orphic eschatology on the one hand and Platonic eschatology on the other is the location of the abode of the blessed. In the Homeric and Orphic traditions, it is a place on earth, located either on or below the surface, whereas the *Phaedo* myth (111a) describes it as islands "surrounded by air" – for what is water in the underground hollows which humans inhabit corresponds to air in the true earth above the surface. The imperfect nature of the visible world compels Plato to place the virtuous souls on a higher plane than the one inhabited by the impure souls; as a result, the world of the living ends up being on the same level as Hades, where impure souls receive punishment: this idea, which might seem odd at first, reflects the Orphic view according to which human souls are incarnated in a body to atone for their ancestral guilt and life on earth is

[166] Pl. *Phd.* 112b πυθμένα οὐκ ἔχει οὐδὲ βάσιν. Cf. *OF* 111.3 οὐδέ τι πεῖραρ ὑπῆν, οὐ πυθμήν, οὐδέ τις ἕδρα.
[167] Pl. *Phd*. 108c ὡς ἐγὼ ὑπό τινος πέπεισμαι.
[168] See Kingsley 1995, 127: "The parallelism […] is striking: the same word for 'bottom' (πυθμήν), the two synonyms for a fixed or set base (βάσις, ἕδρα), the same double negative construction. The two synonyms are in fact so exact that in his commentary on the *Phaedo* passage Aristotle [*Mete.* 355b32 = *OF* 27ii] substitutes the word found in the Orphic verse (ἕδρα) for the word used by Plato (βάσις). The argument that these parallels could just be so many coincidences loses all its force when we note that, in both cases, the subject in question is the same: a 'vast, gigantic chasm' in the Orphic verse (μέγα χάσμα πελώριον) and 'the vastest of all chasms' in the *Phaedo* (ἕν τι τῶν χασμάτων μέγιστον)".

comparable to imprisonment or death.[169] Clearly, the picture painted in the eschatological section of the *Phaedo* has ramifications that go beyond the myth itself: this is why Plato, as Hackforth (1955, 174f.) explains, dedicates such a large portion of it to the description of the earth, whose metaphysical implications will be thoroughly explored in the Cave allegory (*R*. 7.514b-520a; see below §5.2), where the subterranean cavity represents sensible reality, and the world above represents the intelligible realm.[170]

After this long digression, Socrates goes on to describe what happens to the souls once they have been judged. In addition to the distinction between righteous and unjust souls, already outlined in the *Gorgias*, Plato introduces another category of souls, comprising those who have neither been particularly wicked nor particularly virtuous, who dwell in a sort of purgatory in the Acherusian lake. Their condition is reminiscent of the uninitiated in the Orphic vision of the afterlife, who are said to lie in the mire,[171] although, according to Plato, the punishment that the souls receive is commensurate with each soul's wrongdoings.[172] As already explained in the *Gorgias* (525b-526b), wicked souls are divided between curable and incurable: both serve out their sentence in Tartarus, but the latter – among whom Plato includes "those who have committed many great deeds of sacrilege or wicked and abominable murders" – remain there for all time, while the former are transferred to the Acherusian lake after a year, on condition that they convince their victims to accept them.[173] Righteous souls are also divided in two groups: those "who have duly

[169] See n. 150 and §3.1, *passim*.
[170] The model, as Hackforth (1955, 175) points out, is complicated by the fact that the eschatological myth of the *Phaedo* posits a further distinction within the intelligible world, between the place where the righteous souls dwell before being reincarnated and the "even more beautiful abodes" where the souls of those "who have duly purified themselves through philosophy" live forever "without bodies": "It must be these ["even more beautiful abodes" (*Phd*. 114c)], and not the habitations on the true earth, that may properly be identified with the νοητὸς τόπος of the Cave allegory […]. This confusion, such as it is, is the price which Plato has to pay for his attempt to run together the 'two-world' metaphysical antithesis (ὁρατὸς τόπος and νοητὸς τόπος) with the 'four-world' scheme of eschatology (earthly existence, Elysian, Tartarean and celestial)".
[171] Pl. *Phd*. 69c = *OF* 434iii, *R.* 2.363d = *OF* 434i.
[172] Pl. *Phd*. 113d-e.
[173] Pl. *Phd*. 113e-114b.

purified themselves through philosophy" and those who have led a virtuous life without practising philosophy; the latter dwell in the Isles of the Blessed for a period of time, before eventually returning to earth in a new body, while the former "live forever without bodies" in "even more beautiful abodes".[174] The nature of these dwellings will be described in the eschatological section of the *Phaedrus*, which I will analyse next.

3.3.3 The eschatological myth of the *Phaedrus*

If there is a Platonic dialogue that can rival the *Phaedo* with regard to the number of Orphic references, it is undoubtedly the *Phaedrus*. The Orphic influence is especially apparent in the central part of the dialogue, which contains a mythical telling of the fall of the soul (246a-249d). In this myth, as is well known, the human soul is symbolised by "a winged chariot and charioteer"; of the two horses pulling the chariot, one is "of noble breed and character and the other the opposite".[175] The correspondence between the charioteer and the two horses on the one hand and the three parts of the soul – namely, the rational (τὸ λογιστικόν), the spirited (τὸ θυμοειδές), and the appetitive (τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν) – on the other is so obvious that it would be barely worth mentioning, if not for the fact that applying this tripartite structure to the pure soul, which has yet to attach itself to a body, contradicts the theory put forth in the *Phaedo* (78b-81e) and the *Republic* (10.611b-612a), according to which the imperfect nature of the human soul is a consequence of its coming into contact with the body. Because of this, some scholars, like Nussbaum (1982, 106f.), posit a radical development in Plato's psychology. This theory, however, is contradicted by the *Timaeus*

[174] Pl. *Phd*. 114c τούτων δὲ αὐτῶν οἱ φιλοσοφίᾳ ἱκανῶς καθηράμενοι ἄνευ τε σωμάτων ζῶσι τὸ παράπαν εἰς τὸν ἔπειτα χρόνον, καὶ εἰς οἰκήσεις ἔτι τούτων καλλίους ἀφικνοῦνται.
[175] Pl. *Phdr*. 246a-b ἐοικέτω δὴ συμφύτῳ δυνάμει ὑποπτέρου ζεύγους τε καὶ ἡνιόχου … καὶ πρῶτον μὲν ἡμῶν ὁ ἄρχων συνωρίδος ἡνιοχεῖ, εἶτα τῶν ἵππων ὁ μὲν αὐτῷ καλός τε καὶ ἀγαθὸς καὶ ἐκ τοιούτων, ὁ δ᾽ ἐξ ἐναντίων τε καὶ ἐναντίος.

(42d-e, 69c-d), where the spirited and appetitive parts of the human soul are again described as 'appendages', added on to the rational soul to support its existence within a physical body, first and foremost by promoting the indispensable functions related to the preservation of life. The comparison between the account of the *Timaeus* and the eschatological myth of the *Phaedrus* is encouraged by Plato himself, who references the procession of the soul-chariots at *Ti*. 41d-e:

> And when [the Demiurge] had compounded the whole (*sc*. the World-Soul), he divided it into souls in equal number to the stars and assigned each soul to its respective star. Mounting them there as it were in chariots (ὡς ἐς ὄχημα), he showed them the nature of the universe (τὴν τοῦ παντὸς φύσιν) and declared to them the laws of destiny (νόμους … τοὺς εἱμαρμένους).

One way to solve this apparent contradiction would be to assume that the Chariot myth does not describe the original fall of the soul but a subsequent one.[176] Yet, this interpretation is difficult to reconcile with what is said by Socrates at the end of the *Phaedo* myth (114c), namely, that "all those who have duly purified themselves through philosophy live forever without bodies" in a place which is "even more beautiful" than the Blessed Isles. Since Socrates says at *Phdr.* 249c that only the soul of the philosopher can regain its wings and fly back to the heavenly abodes whence it originally came, it follows that the souls that reach those "even more beautiful abodes" will not be subjected to a second fall. Another solution would be to regard the *Phaedrus* myth as presenting an alternative eschatology, which is ultimately incompatible with the vision reflected by the other myths of the afterlife.[177] However, as we shall see shortly, the similarities which the eschatological myth of the *Phaedrus* displays with those of the *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, and *Republic* make a strong argument against this position. At the end of my analysis, I will advance what I believe to

[176] For a thorough defence of this interpretation, see Bluck 1958a; 1958b.
[177] Bernabé 2011, 155; 2013a, 101f.

be the most likely explanation for this inconsistency; but first let us go back to the Chariot myth.

As long as the human soul is able to retain its wings, it dwells with the gods in the sky, joining them, to the best of its ability, in the contemplation of true Being, which, being the object of true knowledge, is only visible to the mind (νοῦς), "the pilot (κυβερνήτης) of the soul", and which provides nourishment to the gods and to "every soul which is capable of receiving that which befits it".[178] The degree to which the human soul is capable of sharing in the vision of true Being is determined by its ability to control the two horses, that is to say, the parts of the soul which are susceptible to earthly passions and desires: if "through some mischance" (τινὶ συντυχίᾳ) the soul becomes filled with "evil and forgetfulness" (λήθης τε καὶ κακίας) and grows heavy, it loses its wings and falls to earth.[179] The mention of 'forgetfulness' as the cause for the soul's inability to follow the procession of the gods calls attention to the etymological meaning of the name of the Plain of Truth (248b τὸ ἀληθείας πεδίον), where the Forms are found; as we will see, the theme of memory and forgetfulness, which features prominently in the Orphic gold tablets,[180] plays a crucial role in the eschatological myth of the *Republic* (10.614b-621b: 621a), where the otherworldly Plain of Forgetfulness (τὸ τῆς λήθης πεδίον) is introduced.

The fallen soul is first incarnated in a human body but can take on animal form in subsequent incarnations, as described in the *Phaedo* (81e-82b) and the *Timaeus* (91d-92c). The belief in reincarnation was a core tenet of the Orphic-Pythagorean tradition, but Plato gives it his own inflection by establishing a particular hierarchy, according to which human souls who 'misbehave' in their first life on earth are punished by being reincarnated in a lower life-form. Similarly, Plato assigns newly incarnated souls to different kinds of lives

[178] Pl. *Phdr.* 247c-d.
[179] Pl. *Phdr.* 248c.
[180] *OF* 474.1, 476.12 Μναμοσύνας τόδε ἔργον (cf. *OF* 491.3), 474.6f. εὑρήσεις τᾶς Μναμοσύνας ἀπὸ λίμνας / ψυχρὸν ὕδωρ προρέον (cf. *OF* 475.8f., 476.4f., 477.4f.).

based on each soul's knowledge of true Being: those who have spent the most time contemplating the Forms will become philosophers, while those who have spent the least will become tyrants. The series of lives listed at *Phdr*. 248d-e is not to be understood as a ladder which souls climb up or down depending on their merit but rather as the mythical representation of Plato's social and moral hierarchy: at the top is, of course, the philosopher, followed by lawful kings and warlike rulers, statesmen and businessmen, athletes, mystery priests, poets, craftsmen, sophists and demagogues, and, finally, tyrants.[181] That Plato should rank lawful kings immediately below the "lovers of wisdom and beauty" is hardly surprising, but it is nonetheless worth noting the resemblance with the Pindaric fragment quoted at *Men*. 81b-c (fr. 133 SM = *OF* 443), according to which those from whom Persephone accepts atonement for the "ancient wrong" will be reborn as "glorious kings" and "men of surpassing wisdom":

> οἷσί κε Φερσεφόνα ποινὰν παλαιοῦ πένθεος
> δέξεται,[182] ἐς τὸν ὕπερθεν ἅλιον κείνων ἐνάτῳ ἔτεϊ
> ἀνδιδοῖ ψυχὰς πάλιν, ἐκ τᾶν βασιλῆες ἀγαυοὶ
> καὶ σθένει κραιπνοὶ σοφίᾳ τε μέγιστοι
> ἄνδρες αὔξοντ'.[183] ἐς δὲ τὸν λοιπὸν χρόνον ἥρωες
> ἁγνοὶ πρὸς ἀνθρώπων καλεῦνται.
>
> Those from whom Persephone shall accept atonement for the ancient wrong, she sends their souls back to the sun above in the ninth year: from them arise glorious kings and men of rushing strength and surpassing wisdom, and for the rest of time they are called holy heroes by men.

The Orphic affinities of this fragment are evidenced by the mention of the "ancient crime" from which humans must seek absolution, which is most likely a reference to the ancestral

[181] One might be surprised to see athletes ranked higher than μάντεις and τελεσταί; however, these are not the divinely inspired prophets praised by Socrates at *Phdr*. 244a-e, but the ἀγύρται καὶ μάντεις which Adeimantus speaks about, in a rather unflattering manner, at *R*. 2.364b = *OF* 573. Likewise, while the figure of the divinely inspired poet is deemed worthy of the highest praise (cf. *Phdr*. 245a), ordinary poets are considered by Plato to be barely superior to artisans.

[182] Cf. *OF* 485.2, 486.2 εἰπεῖν Φερσεφόνᾳ σ' ὅτι Βάκχιος αὐτὸς ἔλυσε, 489.4, 490.4 ποινὰν δ' ἀνταπέτεισ' ἔργων ἕνεκ' οὔτι δικαίων.

[183] Compare also the "men of rushing strength" in Pindar's fragment with the athletes who occupy the third rank in Plato's hierarchy, after philosophers and lawful kings.

guilt inherited from the Titans, who, according to the Orphic myth, murdered Persephone's son, Dionysus, and ate his flesh.[184] It is hard to say whether the promise of being reborn as a king comes from the Orphic mysteries or from Pindar himself, but we find an interesting parallel in a line from the Petelia tablet (*OF* 476.11) – which dates from the fourth century BC – where it is said that the initiate "will rule among the other heroes" (ἄ[λλοισι μεθ'] ἡρώεσσιν ἀνάξει[ς]), after having drunk from the Lake of Memory.

After their life on earth has come to an end, the souls are brought to judgement and sent either to the "places of punishment under the earth" (τὰ ὑπὸ γῆς δικαιωτήρια) or to "some heavenly region" (τοὐρανοῦ τις τόπος),[185] according to their deeds. No reference is made to the incurable sinners who are said to suffer eternally in Tartarus in the other eschatological myths.[186] This, however, is of little importance, since Plato often omits details that are not deemed essential in the immediate context – as is also the case, I believe, in the final myth of the *Gorgias* with regard to the lack of reference to the cycle of rebirths. Once a thousand years have passed since their incarnation, it is time for the souls to choose their next life.[187] The cycle continues until the soul is finally able to regain its wings, which under normal circumstances can only happen after a minimum of ten incarnations, or 10,000 years after the soul's original fall from heaven; an exception is made for the souls of those who have lived on earth as philosophers three times in a row, as they are able to regain their wings after 'just' 3,000 years.[188]

The Orphic connotation of *Phdr.* 248c-249a (= *OF* 459) is, *pace* West (1983a, 265), undeniable. The eschatology presented here by Plato is akin to that of Pindar's *Second*

[184] See Holzhausen 2004. For further bibliography on the Orphic myth of Dionysus and the Titans, see Ch. 2 n. 22.
[185] Pl. *Phdr.* 249a; cf. *Phd.* 111a-b, *R.* 10.614c = *OF* 461.
[186] Pl. *Grg.* 525b-c, *Phd.* 113e, *R.* 10.615c.
[187] Pl. *Phdr.* 249b. This process, here only briefly mentioned, is described at length in the eschatological myth at the end of the *Republic* (10.614b-621b: 617e).
[188] Pl. *Phdr.* 248e-249a.

Olympian (vv. 56-72 = *OF* 445; quoted above, p. 105), in that both are based on the alternation between earthly incarnations and periods of punishment or reward in the afterlife. Another reference to Orphic-Pythagorean doctrine is discernible in the recurrence of the number three and its square:[189] there are nine levels in the hierarchy of human incarnations and 9,000 is the minimum number of years – divided in ten non-consecutive intervals of at least 900 years each – that the soul spends in the otherworld before it can regain its wings; only for the philosopher is this number reduced to 3,000 years – three lives on earth of approximately 100 years each and three lives in the abode of the blessed, each lasting a minimum of 900 years. Similarly, according to Pindar (*O*. 2.68-70), a soul is delivered from the cycle of reincarnations after it has lived without fault three times "in both places" (ἑκατέρωθι) – that is, on earth and in Hades. Elsewhere (fr. 133 SM = *OF* 443), as we have seen, Pindar says that those who are pardoned by Persephone return to earth as "glorious kings" after nine years. It is not obvious that a year in Hades should be equal to a year on earth,[190] but if that is the case, then we must either conclude that Plato took the nine number from Pindar and multiplied it by 1,000 or, more likely, that Pindar took the 9,000 number from an Orphic source and reduced it to nine.[191] According to Empedocles (fr. 115 DK = *OF* 449, v. 6), whose affinity with Orphism is well known,[192]

[189] See Albinus 2000, 127f. According to Aristotle (*Cael*. 268a) and Porphyry (*VP* 51), the number three was considered a perfect number by the Pythagoreans because it contains the beginning, the middle, and the end (cf. *P.Derv*. 17.12 KPT [§55 Kotwick] = *OF* 14 Ζεὺς κεφαⱡλή, Ζεὺς μέσⱡσα, Διὸς δ' ἐκ ⱡπⱡάντα τέτⱡυκταιⱡ, Pl. *L*. 4.715e-716a = *OF* 31iii ὁ μὲν δὴ θεός, ὥσπερ καὶ ὁ παλαιὸς λόγος, ἀρχήν τε καὶ τελευτὴν καὶ μέσα τῶν ὄντων ἁπάντων ἔχων).

[190] It is not impossible that, in Pindar's fragment, ἔτεϊ refers to a 'great year', so that the soul's stay in Hades should be understood as lasting 9,000 years instead of nine (McGibbon 1964, 11); this use, however, as Bluck (1961, 281) points out, is not otherwise attested.

[191] We can safely assume that the prospect of being rewarded after nine-thousand years would not have sounded particularly enticing to Pindar's audience, hence the reduction of the 'waiting period' to nine years. It is also possible, however, that Pindar took the number nine from a different (non-Orphic) source, such as Hesiod's *Theogony* (vv. 793-806), where it is said that gods who foreswear by the Styx are exiled for nine years (see Bluck 1958a, 161 n. 4). Incidentally, the same anecdote is referenced in his commentary on Vergil's *Aeneid* (6.565 [II 79.14 Thilo-Hagen] = *OF* 345) by Servius (*fl*. c. 400 AD), who ascribes it not to Hesiod but to Orpheus (see Holzhausen 2004, 35 n. 72): this should not surprise us, considering that Orphic literature borrowed heavily from the earlier poetic tradition.

[192] See Megino 2005; 2008. On Empedocles and the Pythagorean tradition, see Kingsley 1995.

the fallen souls must wander away from their heavenly abode for 30,000 seasons, which is to say, 10,000 years:[193] this is the minimum time after which, according to Plato, the souls of non-philosophers are allowed to escape the cycle of rebirths. Finally, we may compare a passage from Herodotus' *Histories* (2.123 = *OF* 423) on the "Egyptian" doctrine of reincarnation, according to which a complete incarnation cycle takes 3,000 years. Herodotus attests that this theory was also adopted by "certain Greeks", whom he does not name. As discussed earlier (§2.3), this is most likely a reference to the Orphics (and the Pythagoreans), a reading which is supported, among other things, by the testimony of fourth-century BC historian Hecataeus of Abdera (*BNJ* 264 F 25 = *OF* 48iii), who states that Orpheus imported the mysteries of Dionysus from Egypt.[194]

Turning back to the *Phaedrus* myth, another Orphic reference might be hidden in the name by which Plato refers to the hierarchy of incarnations: the "law of Adrasteia" (248c θεσμός Ἀδραστείας). We know that Empedocles (fr. 115.1 DK) refers to the law which regulates the cycle of rebirths as the "decree of Necessity" (Ἀνάγκης χρῆμα). The identification of Ananke with Adrasteia, who was equated with Nemesis in the fifth century BC,[195] was current among the Stoics at least since the third century BC[196] and seems to be implied by Plato, who in the myth of Er (*R.* 10.620d-e) assigns to Ananke the role of presiding over the process of reincarnation. Arius Didymus (*SVF* II 169.34), a Stoic philosopher from the first century BC, interprets the name Adrasteia as an adjective meaning 'inevitable', derived from the verb διδράσκω, 'to run away'. Even though the identification of Adrasteia with Ananke is not explicitly attested in Orphic sources before late antiquity,[197] it is not inconceivable that this etymology could have originated from an

[193] The number of seasons (ὧραι) according to the ancient Greeks was most commonly three (see, e.g., Aesch. *Pr*. 454f., Hdt. 8.12, Paus. 5.11.7): spring (ἔαρ), summer (θέρος), and winter (χειμών).
[194] See Casadio 1991, 128f.; Casertano 2000, 205.
[195] West 1983a, 195.
[196] See, e.g., Chrysipp. *SVF* II 292.15.
[197] Dam. *Pr*. 123bis (III 161.8 Westerink) = *OF* 77.

ancient Orphic source – perhaps an allegorical commentary like the one preserved by the Derveni papyrus – with which both Empedocles and Plato were familiar.

A final confirmation of the Orphic character of the *Phaedrus* myth is found in the close, where Socrates compares philosophy, which ultimately consist in the recollection of the Forms, with initiation into the mysteries:

> διὸ δὴ δικαίως μόνη πτεροῦται ἡ τοῦ φιλοσόφου διάνοια· πρὸς γὰρ ἐκείνοις ἀεί ἐστιν μνήμῃ κατὰ δύναμιν, πρὸς οἷσπερ θεὸς ὢν θεῖός ἐστιν. τοῖς δὲ δὴ τοιούτοις ἀνὴρ ὑπομνήμασιν ὀρθῶς χρώμενος, τελέους ἀεὶ τελετὰς τελούμενος, τέλεος ὄντως μόνος γίγνεται.
>
> Therefore, it is just that only the mind of the philosopher grows wings, for he is always, to the best of his ability, in communion through memory with those things the communion with which causes God to be divine. Thus, a man who makes proper use of such reminders is always being initiated into perfect mysteries, and he alone becomes truly perfect.[198]

The elaborate *figura etymologica* (τελέους ... τελετὰς τελούμενος, τέλεος ... γίγνεται) is worth analysing in detail. The adjective τέλε(ι)ος (*τελεσ-joς), meaning 'perfect', and the verb τελέω (*τελεσ-jω), meaning 'to fulfil' or 'to perform', both derive from the noun τέλος, meaning 'end' or 'fulfilment',[199] from which τελετή – meaning 'mystery rite' or 'initiation' – is also derived. The repetition of τέλεος, used first to describe the internal object (τελετάς) and then the subject (ἀνήρ) of τελούμενος, emphasises the idea of perfection, with which the term τελετή was, as Plato seems to suggest, inextricably linked. By using the present tense (τελούμενος ... γίγνεται), Plato calls attention to the continuous and progressive nature of philosophical initiation, which lasts throughout one's lifetime and

[198] Pl. *Phdr*. 249c.

[199] The term τέλος combines two closely related spheres of meaning, one centred around the idea of 'limit' and expressed by the root *k^{w}el- (cf. πέλομαι, τέλομαι, πόλος) and one centred around the idea of 'fulfilment' and 'payment' and expressed by the root *tel-ə$_2$- (cf. τέλλω, τλάω, ἀνατολή): see *DELG* 1103, *s.v.* τέλος.

beyond: true perfection, in fact, is only achieved by the pure, rational soul, once it is finally able to break free from the cycle of reincarnations.[200]

Plato continues the comparison between philosophy and the mysteries with the description of the vision of true Beauty experienced by the souls in the hyperuranion:

> κάλλος δὲ τότ᾽ ἦν ἰδεῖν λαμπρόν … καὶ ἐτελοῦντο τῶν τελετῶν ἣν θέμις λέγειν [250c] μακαριωτάτην, ἣν ὠργιάζομεν ὁλόκληροι μὲν αὐτοὶ ὄντες καὶ ἀπαθεῖς κακῶν ὅσα ἡμᾶς ἐν ὑστέρῳ χρόνῳ ὑπέμενεν, ὁλόκληρα δὲ καὶ ἁπλᾶ καὶ ἀτρεμῆ καὶ εὐδαίμονα φάσματα μυούμενοί τε καὶ ἐποπτεύοντες ἐν αὐγῇ καθαρᾷ, καθαροὶ ὄντες καὶ ἀσήμαντοι τούτου ὃ νῦν δὴ σῶμα περιφέροντες ὀνομάζομεν, ὀστρέου τρόπον δεδεσμευμένοι.
>
> At that time, they could see Beauty in its splendour […]. And they were initiated into what it is right to call the most blessed mysteries, which we celebrated when we were whole (i.e., winged) and untouched by the evils which awaited us later, reaching the highest level of initiation by contemplating the whole, simple, unchanging, and blessed visions in a pure light, being pure ourselves and not entombed in this thing which we now carry around with us and call body, imprisoned like oysters.[201]

The mystic (more specifically, Eleusinian) subtext is signalled by the emphasis on light and vision, as well as the use of technical terms like μυέω and ἐποπτεύω, which referred to the two levels of initiation in the Eleusinian cult.[202] The stress on purity (cf. *OF* 488-490.1 ἔρχομαι ἐκ καθαρῶν κτλ) and the idea that the soul is entombed or imprisoned in the body are clear Orphic references, which often recur in Plato's dialogues. Here the metaphor of the body as tomb or prison is accompanied by the image of the oyster in the shell, where the shell represents the protective function assigned by Plato to the body,[203] while the oyster, mentioned at *Phlb*. 21c as an example of an animal with no memory, symbolises the human soul, whose memory of the Forms has been suppressed.

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[200] It was perhaps for a similar reason that the Orphics, as Plato implies in a well-known passage from the *Republic* (2.364e-365a = *OF* 573i εἰσὶ δὲ καὶ τελευτήσασιν, ἃς δὴ τελετὰς καλοῦσιν, αἳ τῶν ἐκεῖ κακῶν ἀπολύουσιν ἡμᾶς), stressed the link between τελετή and τελευτή.
[201] Pl. *Phdr*. 250b-c.
[202] See Ch. 2 n. 89 and §2.2, *passim*.
[203] Cf. Pl. *Cra*. 400c = *OF* 430i.

Although every human soul has buried within itself some memory of the Forms, few men are able to attain sufficient recollection of them: only they are allowed, after choosing the path of philosophy for three consecutive incarnations, to return to the place where the gods and the other pure souls dwell. This is consistent with the Orphic creed, according to which only the *bacchoi* – which is to say, those who are initiated into the Orphic mysteries and live according to the tenets of the Orphic life – will be admitted to the seats of the blessed and freed from the cycle of rebirths. That Plato adopted a similar view is made apparent by the following passage from the *Phaedo* (69c = *OF* 434iii, 576i; further quoted above, p. 93), where we also find the comparison between philosophy and the mysteries:

> ὁ δὲ κεκαθαρμένος τε καὶ τετελεσμένος ἐκεῖσε ἀφικόμενος μετὰ θεῶν οἰκήσει. εἰσὶν γὰρ δή, ὥς φασιν οἱ περὶ τὰς τελετάς, 'ναρθηκοφόροι μὲν πολλοί, βάκχοι δέ τε παῦροι'· οὗτοι δ' εἰσὶν κατὰ τὴν ἐμὴν δόξαν οὐκ ἄλλοι ἢ οἱ πεφιλοσοφηκότες ὀρθῶς.
>
> But he who arrives there (*sc*. in Hades) purified and initiated will dwell with the gods. For, as those involved in the mysteries put it, 'many are the thyrsus-bearers, but the *bacchoi* few' – and these, in my opinion, are none other than those who have practiced philosophy correctly.

In light of this, the generally accepted interpretation that, according to the *Phaedrus* myth, all souls regain their wings after 10,000 years, regardless of their 'purity status', seems to be fundamentally untenable. If human souls need to achieve a certain level of purity to return to their heavenly home, as Plato implies,[204] it is reasonable to assume that they will not be subjected to a second fall, as the *Phaedo* (114c) states in no uncertain terms.[205] However, if we accept that the Chariot myth is meant to describe an 'original fall', this

[204] Pl. *Phdr*. 249c διὸ δὴ δικαίως μόνη πτεροῦται ἡ τοῦ φιλοσόφου διάνοια κτλ.
[205] This could admittedly lead to a different problem, namely, the (theoretical) possibility that all human souls could eventually purify themselves through philosophy and escape the cycle of reincarnations, which in the absence of newly created souls (cf. Pl. *R*. 10.611a) would cause mankind to go extinct. A potential solution to this problem will be discussed in the final section of Ch. 6.

raises serious problems with regard to Plato's theory of the soul, for it implies that the tripartite structure of the incarnate soul should be applied to a soul that has never entered a body. If we take the myth at face value, this seems to be the obvious conclusion, since the souls of gods are also described as having three parts – the only difference being that all three parts of a divine soul are equally perfect. No one, I think, would disagree with the notion that, in the *Phaedrus* myth, divine souls are described as tripartite simply because the Chariot allegory requires it, so why can the same not be said about the human soul? If we compare other passages where Plato speaks about the soul, it is clear that he considered the composite nature of the human soul to be a function of incarnation, as is explicitly stated in the *Timaeus* (69c-d):

> Imitating [the Demiurge], having received from him the immortal principle of soul (ἀρχὴν ψυχῆς ἀθάνατον), they (*sc*. the created gods) proceeded to fashion a mortal body around it and gave it the whole body as its vehicle (ὄχημά); and they also housed within the body another kind of soul, the mortal [kind] (τὸ θνητόν), which has within it terrible yet necessary[206] passions (δεινὰ καὶ ἀναγκαῖα … παθήματα).

Whereas in the *Timaeus* the soul's first incarnation is presented as part of the Demiurge's creative design, without any negative moral connotation, in the eschatological context of the *Phaedrus* myth, according to which (re)incarnation is a punishment, or at best an undesirable outcome, the 'fall' of the soul must be caused by some sort of error or fault on the soul's part. Why, then, is Plato deliberately silent on the exact nature of this "mischance" (συντυχία)?[207] A possible explanation could be that he did not need to invent a reason, for there already existed a mythical account of this original fall – which his audience is likely to have been familiar with – in the Orphic tradition: according to the

[206] This is also, most likely, a reference to the cosmic principle of Necessity (Ἀνάγκη), which presides over incarnation and everything to do with matter: see n. 233 and §3.3.4, *passim.*
[207] Pl. *Phdr.* 248c.

"cardinal myth" of Orphism,[208] humans were created from the ashes of the Titans, who were incinerated by Zeus for murdering and devouring the infant Dionysus; due to this ancestral guilt, human souls are condemned to the cycle of generation (κύκλος γενέσεως), from which they can escape only by purifying themselves through the appropriate initiation rites. Another explanation, not necessarily alternative to the former, could be that Plato did not conceptualise the original fall of the soul as the consequence of a moral wrong but rather as a necessary step in the creation of the universe – this, at least, is what we can surmise from the *Timaeus*. In any case, the analysis of the Orphic subtext of the *Phaedrus* myth has shown that the vision of the afterlife portrayed therein is perfectly compatible with what is presented in the other eschatological myths, including the myth of Er, which I will discuss next.

3.3.4 The myth of Er

The final myth of the *Republic* (10.614b-621b) can rightly be defined as the culmination of Plato's descriptions of the afterlife.[209] It is also, at least in Plato's mind, the culmination of a long and laborious argument, spanning over ten books, on why justice is always preferable to injustice. In this capacity, however, the myth has attracted the criticism of many scholars, who find its relationship with the rest of the dialogue to be problematic on many levels. A balanced critique – which dismisses some of the more superficial claims about the perceived inconsistencies between this section and what precedes it – has been formulated by Annas (1982), who considers the ending of the *Republic* deeply unsatisfactory and

[208] Nilsson 1935, 223.
[209] Bernabé 2013a, 126.

poorly harmonised, though not in principle incompatible, with the rest of the work.[210] I will not argue over the artistic merit or the moral appeal of the myth, as these judgements are largely dependent on one's personal sensibilities; I will, however, address Annas' claims regarding the meaning of the myth and its relationship with the other major eschatological passages in the Platonic corpus – particularly the one in the *Gorgias* – which I believe to be partly misguided. More broadly, I will show how the myth of the *Republic* fits within the same Orphic framework which defines the eschatologies of the *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, and *Phaedrus*. Finally, I will argue that the vision presented in this final myth, far from being at odds with the views expressed in earlier parts of the dialogue, represents the climax and synthesis of the several argumentative threads developed over the course of all ten books.

The myth of Er tells the story of the eponymous Pamphylian soldier who, like Orpheus, was able to come back from the land of the dead and recount his experience: this, as the myth implies, was the will of the gods.[211] After Er's death on the battlefield, his soul arrives at a "marvellous place" (τόπος δαιμόνιος) – later referred to as a "meadow" (λειμών) – with two openings side by side in the earth and two others above them in the sky: there, between the two holes in the ground, sit the infernal judges.[212] Virtuous souls are sent up and to the right to the heavenly abode of the blessed, while the wicked are sent down and

[210] Annas (1982, 121), for example, rightly recognises that the attacks levelled against traditional Greek myths in Books II and III of the *Republic* (377b-389a) concern the content of those particular stories, which Plato deems morally reprehensible, and do not apply to the myth-form per se. She also concedes that, since justice is assigned to the class of goods which are desirable both in themselves and for their consequences (2.357b-358a), a consequentialist defence of justice, which the final eschatological myth could be seen to present, does not invalidate the demonstration of the intrinsic value of justice, which spans over the previous nine books. To this point, I would add that the final myth, insofar as it describes the life of the disembodied soul in the otherworld, is needed to complete the defence of justice for its own sake and for the effect that it has on the soul (2.358b), which until then had focused solely on the embodied soul.

[211] Pl. *R.* 10.614d.

[212] Pl. *R.* 10.614b-c = *OF* 461. The marvellous place where the souls await judgement, described as a meadow at *R.* 10.614e, 616b, and at *Grg.* 524a, is likely located, as Adam (1902, II, 435) suggests, in what Socrates refers to in the *Phaedo* (110a) as "true earth" (ἡ ὡς ἀληθῶς γῆ), which is to say, the world above the surface of the earth, as opposed to the underground, where – according to the mythical topography of the *Phaedo* – humans live.

to the left to Tartarus.[213] At the end of the thousand-year interval between one birth and the next,[214] the souls that are destined to be reincarnated return to the meadow through the opening opposite the one through which they came – presumably, in order not to obstruct the flow of incoming souls. There, they wait for seven days, and on the eighth day, they start their journey to the place where they will choose their next life. On the fourth day of their journey, they see ahead a pillar of light "similar to the rainbow, but brighter and purer" (τῇ ἴριδι προσφερῆ, λαμπρότερον δὲ καὶ καθαρώτερον): this is none other than the axis around which the universe revolves, and inside it hangs the spindle of Necessity (Ἀνάγκη).[215] The structure of the universe – or rather of the hemisphere that the souls are able to see – is comparable to a spindle with eight concentric whorls instead of one: the shaft passes through the earth's poles, while the whorls correspond to the celestial hemispheres. Inside the whorls' rims are set the fixed stars, the five known planets, the sun, and the moon; on each of the rims sits a Siren, singing a note of an octave. After one more day, the souls finally reach the column of light where Necessity sits, turning her spindle; around her, at equal intervals, sit her daughters, the white-robed Fates (Μοῖραι λευχειμονούσας),[216] who sing in unison with the Sirens and help to turn the spindle.

The time between the soul's return from the place of punishment or reward and its arrival at the presence of Necessity – which corresponds to the duration of Er's journey in the otherworld – amounts to a total of twelve days, divided into three intervals of seven, four, and one day respectively. These numbers undoubtedly carry symbolic significance – otherwise Plato would not have mentioned them – but their meaning in the context of the

[213] In the Orphic gold tablets (*OF* 474.2-6, 475.4-8, 477.1-4, 487.2), the path leading to the abode of the blessed is also on the right. It should be noted, however, that all Indo-European languages associate the idea of 'right' with that of 'good' and 'proper' (see, e.g., Hertz 1960 [1907], 99f.; 1973 [1909]). On the right/left dichotomy in ancient Greek thought, see Lloyd 1962 and Giannakis 2019.
[214] Pl. *R.* 10.615a; cf. *Phdr.* 248e-249a.
[215] Pl. *R.* 10.616b-c.
[216] The Moirae were also called "white-robed" (λευκοστόλους) in an Orphic poem known to Epigenes (Clem. Al. *Strom.* 5.8.49.3 = *OF* 407i).

myth is not entirely clear. The number twelve could be a reference to the twelve labours of Heracles, whose descent to Hades was possibly narrated in an ancient Orphic poem.[217] We know that Stoic allegory compared the labours of Heracles to the twelve signs of the zodiac and his death on the funeral pyre to the cosmic *ecpyrosis*.[218] The similarity with the story of Er, who comes back to life twelve days after his death, as his body is placed on the cremation pyre, seems too striking to be unintentional. It is possible, therefore, that Plato and the Stoics drew from the same source, either an Orphic-Pythagorean poem or an allegorical commentary. The affinity between Er and Heracles was also noted by the Christian apologist Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 5.14.103) – himself heavily indebted to Platonism and Stoicism[219] – who connects the length of Er's journey through the underworld to "the fact that the soul's path to ascension lies through the twelve signs of the zodiac", adding that the same journey, "after which the soul obtains release from this universe", is also symbolised by the twelve labours of Heracles.[220] A little later (*Strom.* 5.14.106.1-107.2), Clement relates the seven-day period which the souls spend in the meadow to "each motion of the seven planets" and the four days which the souls spend traveling from the meadow to the place whence they first see the pillar of light to "the

[217] See Graf 1974, 158-181, 139-150.

[218] Sen. *Ben.* 4.7.2-8.1 Hunc (*sc.* Iovem/Fatum) et Liberum patrem et Herculem ac Mercurium nostri putant … Herculem, quia vis eius invicta sit quandoque lassata fuerit operibus editis, in ignem recessura, Clem. *Strom.* 5.14.103.5 ταύτῃ ὑπολῃπτέον καὶ τα τοῦ Ἡρακλέους ἆθλα γενέσθαι δώδεκα, μεθ' ἃ τῆς ἀπαλλαγῆς παντὸς τοῦ κόσμου τοῦδε τυγχάνει ἡ ψυχή (cf. Nem. 309.5-311.2 = *SVF* 2.625).

[219] See, e.g., Reydams-Schils 2020.

[220] In the same passage (*Strom.* 5.14.103.2-4), Clement of Alexandria identifies Er with the Persian prophet Zoroaster – an identification which, according to Proclus' testimony (*in R.* 2.109.8-16 Kroll), dates back as early as the time of Colotes the Epicurean (*fl.* 310-260 BC) – citing the opening words of the pseudepigraphic work *On Nature*: "This was composed by Zoroaster the son of Armenius, a Pamphylian, after I died in battle and went to Hades; it contains all I learned there from the gods" (Bidez and Cumont 1938, II, 158; see also Beck 1991, 518f., 528-530). While there is little doubt that the author of this work plagiarised Plato's myth and that no connection between Er and Zoroaster was intended on Plato's part (see Halliwell 1988, 171), some scholars (Kingsley 1995, 199-207; Bivar 1998, 86f.; Beck 2002) have suggested that Plato himself might have drawn inspiration from an ancient Persian source; if this was indeed the case, an Orphic mediation seems highly likely, given the connections between early Orphism and the cult of the Magi (on the *magoi* in the Derveni papyrus, see Edmonds 2008a; on Zoroastrianism and Orphism more generally, see Álvarez-Pedrosa 2008). On the Greeks' relationship with Zoroastrianism, see West 2015, with references to earlier bibliography.

passage through the four elements", citing the following verse from a passage in the *Works and Days*, where Hesiod lists the days that come from Zeus: "To start with, the first, the fourth, and the seventh, a holy day".[221] Perhaps even more significant, in this case, are the numbers which Plato does not mention: namely, the pair of threes hidden in the difference between seven and four and four and one. Though this might look like a rather trivial detail at first, the parallel with the eschatologies of the *Phaedrus* (249a) and of Pindar's *Second Olympian* (vv. 56-72: 68-70 = *OF* 445), where virtuous souls are said to be rewarded after three consecutive lives "in both places" (i.e., on earth and in the otherworld), and the mystical significance of the number three seem to indicate otherwise. Finally, the number twelve might also be connected to the length of the Orphic Great Year, which, according to Censorinus (*Die nat*. 18.11 = *OF* 726), was set at 120,000 years.[222] Given the cosmological and eschatological significance of the myth of Er, it would not be surprising if Plato had all these references in mind. In any case, it is reasonable to suppose that the emphasis placed by Plato on certain numbers and proportions was also at least partly influenced by Pythagorean number theory, especially considering the marked Pythagorean colouring of this section of the myth (616c-617c), evidenced, for instance, by the reference to the Pythagorean doctrine of cosmic harmony (617b).[223] For reasons of space, I will not discuss here the numerology underlying the arrangement of the planets with respect to their velocities and relative distances, but it is worth noting that it is centred around the number nine,[224] whose significance in the context of Orphic eschatology has already been remarked.

The process by which the souls pick their next incarnation, only briefly mentioned in the eschatological myth of the *Phaedrus* (249b), is described here (*R.* 10.617d-620e) in

[221] Hes. *Op*. 770 πρῶτον ἔνη τετράς τε καὶ ἑβδόμη ἱερὸν ἦμαρ.
[222] See below §6.3.
[223] Brumbaugh 1954, 161-208; McClain 1978, 41-55. On the Pythagorean theory of the 'harmony of the spheres', see Meyer-Baer 1970 and Burkert 1972, 350-357.
[224] See Cook Wilson 1902; Adam 1902, II, 472-479; Thompson 1910. On the colours of the planets, see Bidez 1945, 1-18; Burkert 1972, 301 n. 9; Martijn 2022.

a detailed manner, with numerous references to famous figures from the epic tradition. Not surprisingly, the first reference is to Orpheus, who, unwilling to be conceived by a woman, since women were responsible for his violent death, chooses the life of a swan.[225] Given that the swan is an Apolline symbol, this is likely a reference to Orpheus' decision to honour Apollo-Helios over Dionysus, which prompted the jealous deity to unleash the rage of his followers on him.[226] There is no hint of sarcasm here, *pace* Bernabé (2011, 174f.); rather, if we compare a passage from the *Phaedo*, where Socrates praises the swan as a prophetic animal and declares himself as a fellow servant of Apollo, we may discern a covert comparison between Orpheus and Plato's Socrates.[227] Each soul, according to an order determined by lot, is called to choose its next life from a number of predetermined options which is far greater than the number of souls, so as to give all of them a fair chance. Here lies, in fact, the greatest danger for the human soul, as it is easy for non-philosophers – especially if they have not experienced the punishments of Tartarus – to be fooled by the prospect of wealth and power into choosing a life of vice, perhaps even the life of a tyrant, which would result in eternal damnation.[228]

Upon first impression, it seems difficult to reconcile the choice of lives in the myth of Er with the theory of reincarnation presented in other dialogues, such as the *Phaedo* (81e-82b) and the *Timaeus* (42b-c, 90e-91c), where a soul's next incarnation is said to be determined by its conduct in the previous life. I argue, however, that the picture painted by the myth of Er is not only perfectly compatible with Plato's other eschatological passages but also equally, if not more, deterministic, despite the emphasis on choice and personal

[225] Pl. *R.* 10.620a = *OF* 1077i.
[226] [Eratosth.] *Cat.* 24 = *OF* 1033i (quoted above, p. 30).
[227] Pl. *Phd.* 84e-85b ἐγὼ δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς ἡγοῦμαι ὁμόδουλός τε εἶναι τῶν κύκνων καὶ ἱερὸς τοῦ αὐτοῦ θεοῦ. Compare also the story of Socrates' premonitory dream, related by Diogenes Laërtius in his *Life of Plato* (3.5), according to which Socrates was visited by Plato in the form of a swan before they met for the first time; since Diogenes cites Aristotle's disciple Dicaearchus as one of his sources, it is very possible that the story of Socrates' dream could date back to the early Academy.
[228] Pl. *R.* 10.615c; cf. *Grg*. 525b-c, *Phd*. 113e.

responsibility. Indeed, the myth describes in explicit terms just how much influence a soul's experiences – not only in its previous incarnation but also in the otherworld – have on the choice of the next life; only the souls that have practised philosophy are able to choose rationally every time, without succumbing to material desires or ambition.[229] This interpretation is corroborated by the eschatological myth of the *Phaedrus*, where the main focus is on knowledge and memory: a soul's first incarnation is determined, according to the law of Adrasteia (248c-e), by the length of time which a soul has spent in contemplation of the Forms, and it is heavily implied that the choice of the next incarnation, mentioned in passing at 249b, will similarly be influenced by the degree to which the soul is able to recollect the knowledge gained from that contemplation.[230] Turning again to the myth of Er, the announcement that precedes the choice of lives – the "word of Lachesis" – which states that the souls are not only responsible for choosing their own fate but are also able, at any point, to "have a greater or lesser share of Virtue, by honouring or dishonouring her", seems less like a celebration of free will and more like a sombre reminder that man is solely responsible for any evil which befalls him – for, in the words of Plato, "the guilt lies with him who chooses: God is blameless".[231]

[229] Pl. *R*. 10.618a-620a.

[230] Pl. *Phdr*. 249c-250b. Plato seems to vacillate between different explanations for the fact that only a select few are capable of becoming philosophers (e.g., *Phd*. 69c-d). In the *Republic* (3.414b-415d), innate human differences are explained in quasi-biological terms, with the idea that God created different psychological types (gold, silver, and iron and brass) which are, to a large degree, heritable. While it would be a mistake to interpret the myth of metals too literally, and even if the myth itself leaves room for exceptions, a notion of biological determinism is nonetheless strongly apparent. In the *Phaedrus*, individual (intellectual) differences are ascribed to the amount of time spent by the soul in the contemplation of the Forms, which is said to be different for each individual soul – this is made possible by the ambiguity of the Chariot myth, since it is unclear whether it describes the original fall of the soul or a subsequent one. The creation story in the *Timaeus* (41d-44c) makes clear that all human souls experienced their first incarnation at the same time and started off with the same knowledge, meaning that individual differences are not determined by God but by the conduct of each soul over the course of several lives.

[231] Pl. *R*. 10.617d-e Ἀνάγκης θυγατρὸς κόρης Λαχέσεως λόγος. ψυχαὶ ἐφήμεροι, ἀρχὴ ἄλλης περιόδου θνητοῦ γένους θανατηφόρου. οὐχ ὑμᾶς δαίμων λήξεται, ἀλλ' ὑμεῖς δαίμονα αἱρήσεσθε. πρῶτος δ' ὁ λαχὼν πρῶτος αἱρείσθω βίον ᾧ συνέσται ἐξ ἀνάγκης. ἀρετὴ δὲ ἀδέσποτον, ἣν τιμῶν καὶ ἀτιμάζων πλέον καὶ ἔλαττον αὐτῆς ἕκαστος ἕξει. αἰτία ἑλομένου· θεὸς ἀναίτιος (cf. *Ti*. 42d-e).

After choosing its next incarnation and being assigned a *daimon* as guardian (φύλακα) and fulfiller of its chosen life path,[232] the soul seals its fate by passing under the throne of Necessity:[233] this imagery, which symbolises the soul's (re)entry into the sensible world, is reminiscent of the rite of rebirth celebrated in the Orphic mysteries and referenced in one of the gold tablets from Thurii, where the initiate claims to have "plunged beneath the lap" of Persephone.[234] Once all the souls have made their choice, they go together to the Plain of Lethe, where they are overcome by a "terrible and suffocating heat".[235] The souls are then made to drink from the River of Forgetfulness (621a τὸν Ἀμέλητα ποταμόν), "whose water no vessel can hold". This is reminiscent of a passage from the *Gorgias* (493a-c = *OF* 434ii; quoted above, p. 83) in which the soul of the mindless (ἀνόητοι), or uninitiated (ἀμύητοι), is equated with a leaky jar due to the former's inability to hold anything from its disbelief and forgetfulness (δι᾽ ἀπιστίαν τε καὶ λήθην). According to this allegory – itself based on the Orphic myth of the water-carriers, according to which the souls of the uninitiated, who failed to purify themselves through the mysteries, spend their time in the underworld performing the Sisyphean task of carrying water in broken pitchers[236] – the water of the River Amelete can be said to turn every soul that drinks from it into a leaky jar, since it fills the soul with forgetfulness. No soul, not even the soul of the philosopher, is immune; no vessel, Plato says allegorically, can hold the water of Forgetfulness. The wisest souls drink as little as possible, but the vast majority, overcome

[232] Compare the guardians (φύλακες) who regulate access to the Lake of Memory in the Orphic gold tablets (*OF* 474.7, 475.9, 476.5, 477.5). On *daimones* and spirit-guides in Orphism and ancient Greek folklore, see pp. 113f. and nn. 163f.

[233] The term ἀνάγκη was already used by the Presocratics to refer to the cosmic principle of natural necessity and appeared personified as a deity first in Parmenides (frr. 8.34, 10.6 DK) and then in Empedocles (fr. 115.1 DK); Plato identifies it with the chaotic (irrational) principle associated with matter (e.g., *Ti.* 47e-48e; see below §6.1). Ananke, identified with Adrasteia, is also attested as one of the primordial deities in the *Hieronyman* and *Rhapsodic Theogonies* (*OF* 77, 82, 110).

[234] Pl. *R.* 10.620e-621a = *OF* 462 ἀμεταστρεπτὶ ὑπὸ τὸν τῆς Ἀνάγκης ἰέναι θρόνον, καὶ δι᾽ ἐκείνου διεξελθόντα (cf. *OF* 488.7 δεσ{σ}ποίνας δ᾽ {ε} ὑπὸ κόλπον ἔδυν χθόνιας βασιλείας). See Burkert 1975, 96-98; Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008, 129-132.

[235] Pl. *R.* 10.621a πορεύεσθαι ἅπαντας εἰς τὸ τῆς Λήθης πεδίον διὰ καύματός τε καὶ πνίγους δεινοῦ.

[236] See above §2.2.

by thirst, drink without restraint. Once all the souls are asleep, they are suddenly "taken up" to their birth like shooting stars.[237] Only Er, who was forbidden from drinking, is able to remember what happened upon reawaking in his old body.[238]

As a comparison with the texts of the gold tablets reveals, this final section of the myth is filled with Orphic imagery, from the heat-induced thirst that afflicts the souls,[239] to the water of Forgetfulness, whose existence, though not explicitly stated in the tablets, is clearly implied by the recommendation that the initiates avoid the first spring they encounter and drink instead from the Lake of Memory.[240] The comparison between the souls that return to earth to be reincarnated and shooting stars might likewise bear an Orphic connotation, given the affinity with a line from the Pharsalus tablet, where the initiate introduces himself as "Starry".[241] At any rate, the most significant parallel between the myth of Er and the eschatology of the gold tablets is, without doubt, the central role played by memory in the salvation of the soul. The Orphic gold tablets are "the work" or "the gift of Memory":[242] their purpose is to help the souls of the initiates reach the abode of the

[237] Pl. *R.* 10.621b ἐπειδὴ δὲ κοιμηθῆναι καὶ μέσας νύκτας γενέσθαι, βροντήν τε καὶ σεισμὸν γενέσθαι, καὶ ἐντεῦθεν ἐξαπίνης ἄλλον ἄλλῃ φέρεσθαι ἄνω εἰς τὴν γένεσιν, ᾄττοντας ὥσπερ ἀστέρας. Adam (1902, II, 462 *ad l.*) takes φέρεσθαι ἄνω to mean that "the souls just before their reincarnation are underground", but this is not necessary, for the phrase, as Halliwell (1988, 192 *ad l.*) suggests, could simply allude to the fact that the souls are "carried up and away" from the ground on which they sleep. With regard to the thunder which announces the souls' departure from Hades, there are two possible Orphic parallels: a line from one of the Thurii tablets (*OF* 488.4b), where it is said that the initiate has been overcome by Zeus' lightning, and a zigzag shape carved on one of the bone tablets from Olbia (*OF* 463), possibly representing a lightning bolt (West 1982, 19). Based on parallels from traditional mythology – including a version of Heracles' myth in which his funeral pyre, from which he rose to Olympus, was ignited by Zeus' lightning bolt (D.S. 4.38.4f., Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.7.7) – Johnston (2013b, 126) suggests that being struck by lightning was thought to be a way of "joining the gods and the heroes". In the context of Plato's myth, however, where the thunder precedes reincarnation, another interpretation, which points to the Orphic myth of the Titans, seems more fitting: for this and other possible interpretations, see Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008, 111-114 and Johnston 2013b, 125-127, with references to earlier scholarship.

[238] Pl. *R.* 10.621a-b.

[239] *OF* 474.11, 475.13, 476.8, 478.1-484.1 δίψᾳ δ' εἰμ' αὖος καὶ πόλλυμαι.

[240] *OF* 474-477. The Plain of Λήθη is explicitly mentioned in Aristophanes' *Frogs* (v. 186), along with other elements of Orphic eschatology (see Bernabé 2008d, 1225-1227).

[241] *OF* 477.9 Ἀστέριος (*sc.* μοι) ὄνομα (cf. *OF* 476.7, 484.4 ἐμοὶ γένος οὐράνιον). It is unclear whether *OF* 477.9 alludes to the catasterism of the soul (cf. Pl. *Ti.* 42b καὶ ὁ μὲν εὖ τὸν προσήκοντα χρόνον βιούς, πάλιν εἰς τὴν τοῦ συννόμου πορευθεὶς οἴκησιν ἄστρου, βίον εὐδαίμονα καὶ συνήθη ἔξοι) or, more plainly, to the fact that the initiate associates his identity with the heavenly part of his lineage (see Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008, 44f.).

[242] *OF* 474.1, 476.12 Μναμοσύνας τόδε ἔργον, *OF* 491.3 Μνημοσύνης τόδε δῶρον.

blessed, by reminding them of the formulas and passwords which they will need to recite to the guardians and the infernal gods. For Plato, that purpose is served by philosophy: only the correct practice of philosophy – which involves distancing oneself from the body and cultivating the memory of the Forms – can keep the soul safe from evil, both on earth and in Hades, and eventually allow it to escape the cycle of reincarnations. Somewhat less clear is the exact purpose of the Lake of Memory in the eschatology of the gold tablets. A possible function could be to ensure that the souls of the initiates retain their sense of self[243] – which would inevitably be lost without any memory of one's past experiences – or, more simply, to allow them to maintain the mental faculties without which they would not be able to enjoy their blissful existence in the afterlife – for, according to Homeric eschatology, the souls of the dead which inhabit Hades lack any remnants of consciousness.[244] Conversely, drinking from the water of Forgetfulness would condemn the soul to the same fate of the uninitiated; likewise in the myth of Er, the water of Forgetfulness ensures that souls forget what they experienced in the afterlife and in their previous incarnation before moving on to the next, but the wisest among the souls are able to restrain themselves and drink as little as possible, so as to preserve as much knowledge as they can – including, presumably, the knowledge of the Forms which they acquired in the hyperuranion before the original fall.

As my analysis has shown, the myth of Er represents the most detailed and complete illustration of Plato's vision of the afterlife, the final synthesis of all his earlier eschatological accounts: it combines the judgement of the soul from the *Gorgias* (523a-527a), the geography of the *Phaedo* (107c-114c), and the theory of reincarnation from the *Phaedrus* (246a-250c) with the previously unexplored theme of the choice of life, which is not only the central theme of the myth, but also the underlying premise of the whole

[243] Pugliese Carratelli 1983, 75.
[244] See, e.g., *Od.* 11.475f. νεκροὶ / ἀφραδέες ναίουσι, βροτῶν εἴδωλα καμόντων. Only the prophet Tiresias retained his mental faculties after death (*Od.* 10.492f. Τειρεσίαο, / μάντηος ἀλαοῦ, τοῦ τε φρένες ἔμπεδοί εἰσι).

dialogue.[245] In fact, it can be argued that all the main thematic threads of the *Republic* come together – or are referenced in some way – in the myth of Er. The story of Gyges, which exemplified the choice between the perfectly just and the perfectly unjust life in Book II (359b-362c), is explicitly referenced by Socrates in the introduction to the myth, along with Homer and Hesiod,[246] who were the principal subjects of the critique of traditional poetry put forth in Books II and III (376e-392c) and reprised in the first half of Book X (598d-608b). It is precisely the dismissal of the traditional stories about the afterlife which compels Plato to provide his own *katabasis*, not a "tale of Alcinous",[247] but a philosophical myth steeped in Orphic imagery.[248] This final eschatological myth is foreshadowed at crucial points in the dialogue, starting with the very opening words (κατέβην χθὲς εἰς Πειραιᾶ κτλ) – which, according to tradition, Plato kept rewriting up until his death.[249] The entire discussion about the nature of justice is indeed sparked by Cephalus' comments regarding old age and the fear of afterlife punishment, which prompts honest men to pay their debts in full to both gods and humans.[250] The allegory of the Cave, which is rightly regarded as the central 'myth' of the *Republic*, is itself a reverse *katabasis*, with clear echoes to the eschatological geography of the myth of the *Phaedo* (107c-114c).[251]

In short, the whole of the *Republic* builds up to the vision of cosmic justice presented in the myth of Er, where virtue is always rewarded, and tyrannical souls are punished with eternal damnation: whereas the justice of man is subject to error, thus creating the illusion that criminal behaviour, so long as it goes undetected, is more profitable than virtue, divine

[245] On this I completely agree with Larivée (2012).
[246] Pl. *R.* 10.612b.
[247] Pl. *R.* 10.614b ἀλλ᾽ οὐ μέντοι σοι … Ἀλκίνου γε ἀπόλογον ἐρῶ. This is a reference to the *Nekyia* of *Odyssey* XI, which is part of the stories narrated by Odysseus at the court of Alcinous in Books IX-XII.
[248] There is no contradiction between Plato's adoption of Orphic imagery and ideas and the scathing critique of the *Orpheotelestai* in Book II (Pl. *R.* 2.364b = *OF* 573), as the latter condemns the misuse of Orpheus' authority for monetary gain, rather than the Orphic texts themselves.
[249] D.H. *Comp.* 25.209, Quint. 8.6.64, D.L. 3.37. On ring-composition in the *Republic*, see Barney 2010.
[250] Pl. *R.* 1.330d-331b.
[251] See below §5.2.

justice never fails. Yet, as the myth illustrates, virtuous behaviour is not enough to guarantee a good outcome in the long term: indeed, habit without philosophy cannot prevent the soul from succumbing to the nefarious influence of the passions, which often leads conventionally virtuous individuals to choose a life of vice. This warning serves not only to reinforce the need properly to care for the soul through philosophy, but also to absolve the gods from any blame for allowing bad things to happen to virtuous men. Though man can decide at any time to honour Virtue – and for this his soul will benefit immediately *and* after death – he must nonetheless face the consequences of his previous choice. While this vision of cosmic justice can undoubtedly be described as "uncompromising", I cannot agree with Annas' (1982, 135) claim that it is "horrifyingly indifferent to individuals' moral achievements". The gods always reward moral behaviour, even if temporarily, and they ensure that every individual soul has a fair chance in the choice of the next life; furthermore, anyone is (in principle) free to pursue virtue and philosophy, ensuring that they will have a better lot in the next life – the only exception being tyrants and other supremely unjust individuals. The fact that the prospect of permanent release from the cycle of reincarnations is not mentioned in the myth of Er can easily be explained by considering the framing of the story as a personal account told from the perspective of the protagonist, who would have no way of knowing that certain souls, who have completed three life-cycles in the pursuit of philosophy, do not come back down from heaven to be reincarnated. Besides, it is not uncharacteristic of Plato to leave out details that are not immediately relevant to the main focus of a passage, which in the case of the myth of Er is the question of personal choice within the cycle of reincarnations. This view, then, is no more pessimistic than that which underlies the other eschatological myths, especially that of the *Gorgias* (523a-527a), where the absence of any reference to reincarnation gives an impression of finality to the

punishment of all unjust souls, regardless of the gravity of their crimes.[252] In conclusion, the vision presented by Plato in his eschatological myths provides the spiritual foundation for his entire philosophical project, based on the primacy of the invisible over the sensible; the uncompromising – even deterministic – nature of Plato's cosmos is balanced by the benevolent nature of the gods, who allow humans the chance to improve their lot – and eventually escape the cycle of rebirths – by becoming initiated into the "perfect mysteries" of philosophy.

[252] For my critique of Annas' (1982, 124) claim that reincarnation is neither implied in nor compatible with the myth of the *Gorgias*, see above §3.3.1.

4. Plato's Theory of Knowledge

The quest for objective knowledge is a constant theme throughout Plato's work, from the relentless questioning of definitions in the early, so-called Socratic dialogues to the search for a definition of knowledge itself in the *Theaetetus*. Like his teacher Socrates, Plato considered knowledge to be the foundation of a truly happy and just life, going so far as to tie the pursuit of wisdom (φιλοσοφία) to the salvation of the soul, as is made clear in the eschatological myths. Hence, the need to find a secure and stable basis for knowledge, capable of overcoming not only the relativism of the Sophists but also the epistemic challenge posed by Heraclitean flux theory on one hand and Parmenidean monism on the other, became for Plato an ethical imperative. His solution was to limit the scope of 'knowledge' strictly speaking (ἐπιστήμη) to the non-sensible realm, demoting all forms of empirical knowledge to the rank of 'opinion' (δόξα),[1] on the reasoning that the objects of absolute knowledge must likewise be perfect, unchanging, and absolute: these purely intelligible objects are what Plato calls 'things in themselves' (ὄντα ἀυτὰ καθ' αὐτά) or 'Forms' (εἴδη, ἰδέαι).[2] But how can these non-empirical entities be knowable to humans? First, Plato maintains that the Forms, while being independent from the sensible world, are not entirely separate from it but are rather reflected, or instantiated, in the perceptibles.[3]

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[1] Cf., e.g., Parm. fr. 1 DK, vv. 29f.

[2] Cf. Findlay 1974, 31: "Eide, in fact, are for Plato the heritors of Eleatic being: they are the true self-constant things which make discourse and judgment possible". The view that ἐπιστήμη and δόξα are defined by their respective (ontologically distinct) objects, often referred to as 'Two Worlds epistemology', is the traditional interpretation of Plato's theory of knowledge. Over the past fifty or so years, this reading has been called into question by several scholars, who allow for some overlap between the objects of ἐπιστήμη and δόξα (e.g., Gosling 1968; Fine 1990; Baltzly 1997; Smith 2000; 2012; 2019; Szaif 2007; Kamtekar 2009; Vogt 2012; Harte 2017). I find myself siding with those scholars (e.g., Gonzalez 1996; Vlastos 1981; Kahn 1996; Gerson 2003; 2009; Sedley 2007a; Carpenter 2013; Woolf 2013; Schwab 2016; Moss 2021) who defend either a complete 'distinct objects' reading or the restriction of ἐπιστήμη to the Forms, which I regard as the defining trait of Platonic epistemology. For a detailed survey of the debate, see Moss 2021, 1-49.

[3] The relationship between particulars and Forms is conceptualised by Plato in terms of 'resemblance', or 'imitation' (μίμησις), and 'participation' (μέθεξις). The fact that Plato uses both metaphors throughout his work (see, e.g., *Phd.* 100c-d, *R.* 5.475e-476b, 10.596b-597e, *Smp.* 211b, 212a, *Prm.* 132c-d), without acknowledging any contradiction between them, has puzzled modern scholars, who tend to interpret μίμησις

Furthermore, as Plato puts forth in the *Phaedo* (78b-80c), the soul shares a special kinship with the Forms: not only is it similar to the Forms, by virtue of being invisible (and immortal), but "being akin to them, it is always in their company, whenever it is allowed to be by itself".[4] Here, as it seems to me, Plato is alluding to the time when the rational soul, purified from its mortal accretions, will be released from the cycle of rebirths and allowed to return to its original dwelling place in the heavens, where it lived in communion with the gods and the Forms before becoming incarnated.[5] Thanks to its natural affinity and previous acquaintance with the Forms, the human mind is able to use the stimuli from the sensible world to rouse the latent memories of those pure, immutable beings, so that even while we are confined within the prison of the body, we can partake in that wisdom, albeit to a limited degree.[6] This, in a nutshell, is the theory of recollection (ἀνάμνησις), which provides the foundation for Plato's middle-period epistemology. In this chapter, I will analyse how Plato came to develop this theory through his engagement with the Orphic tradition, by philosophically transposing certain key religious and mythical motifs. I will also briefly address some common criticisms concerning the unity of the theory of recollection and its place within Platonic epistemology.

The notion put forth by Plato that there is a kind of non-empirical knowledge already present within us at birth, buried in the depths of our mind, is arguably the first theory of innate ideas,[7] cited by Descartes and Leibniz as inspiration for their own innatist theories.

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and μέθεξις as two alternative models or theories, one implying the transcendence of the Forms, the other their immanence (see, e.g., Prior 1985, 33-45; *contra* Perl 1999). This controversy is linked to the debate on the so-called Two Worlds theory, on which see Ch. 5 n. 45.

[4] Pl. *Phd.* 79d ὡς συγγενὴς οὖσα αὐτοῦ (*sc.* τὸ καθαρόν τε καὶ ἀεὶ ὂν κτλ) ἀεὶ μετ᾽ ἐκείνου τε γίγνεται, ὅταν περ αὐτὴ καθ᾽ αὑτὴν γένηται καὶ ἐξῇ αὐτῇ κτλ.

[5] Pl. *Phdr.* 246d-248c, 250b-c; cf. *Ti.* 41d-e.

[6] There is some debate on whether Plato believed that everyone is able to recollect. For my part, I tend to agree with Kahn's (2006, 126) reading of Platonic recollection as "a matter of degree", with a "weak" version applying to all human cognition and a "strong" version applying only to philosophers.

[7] I use the term in its most general sense. The dominant interpretation ascribes to Plato the view that human souls possess latent innate states of knowledge, which Fine (1992; 2007; 2014) calls 'cognitive condition innatism' (see, e.g., Bluck 1961, 9; Brown 1991; Dimas 1996; Scott 2006, 107-120; Woolf 2015). Alternative interpretations have been presented by Fine (2014, 152), who argues that Plato was a 'prenatalist' rather than

Given the philosophical relevance of this theory, then, the question of its origin becomes all the more important. The idea that man already possesses within himself, in the form of latent memories, the knowledge that he seeks – meaning that learning is actually remembering – makes its first appearance in the *Meno*, where it is introduced to overcome the impasse posed by Meno's challenge. How can one inquire about an unknown subject, if one does not know what to look for to begin with? And even if one stumbled upon it by chance, how would one be able to recognise it as the object of his inquiry? Instead of presenting logical counter-arguments, Socrates appeals to the authority of divinely inspired poets and religious experts:

> ἀκήκοα γὰρ ἀνδρῶν τε καὶ γυναικῶν σοφῶν περὶ τὰ θεῖα πράγματα … τῶν ἱερέων τε καὶ τῶν ἱερειῶν ὅσοις μεμέληκε περὶ ὧν μεταχειρίζονται λόγον οἵοις τ᾽ εἶναι [81b] διδόναι· λέγει δὲ καὶ Πίνδαρος καὶ ἄλλοι πολλοὶ τῶν ποιητῶν ὅσοι θεῖοί εἰσιν … φασὶ γὰρ τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εἶναι ἀθάνατον, καὶ τοτὲ μὲν τελευτᾶν – ὃ δὴ ἀποθνῄσκειν καλοῦσι – τοτὲ δὲ πάλιν γίγνεσθαι, ἀπόλλυσθαι δ᾽ οὐδέποτε … [81c] ἅτε οὖν ἡ ψυχὴ ἀθάνατός τε οὖσα καὶ πολλάκις γεγονυῖα, καὶ ἑωρακυῖα καὶ τὰ ἐνθάδε καὶ τὰ ἐν Ἅιδου καὶ πάντα χρήματα, οὐκ ἔστιν ὅτι οὐ μεμάθηκεν· ὥστε οὐδὲν θαυμαστὸν καὶ περὶ ἀρετῆς καὶ περὶ ἄλλων οἷόν τ᾽ εἶναι αὐτὴν ἀναμνησθῆναι, ἅ γε καὶ πρότερον ἠπίστατο. ἅτε γὰρ τῆς φύσεως [81d] ἁπάσης συγγενοῦς οὔσης, καὶ μεμαθηκυίας τῆς ψυχῆς ἅπαντα, οὐδὲν κωλύει ἓν μόνον ἀναμνησθέντα – ὃ δὴ μάθησιν καλοῦσιν ἄνθρωποι – τἆλλα πάντα αὐτὸν ἀνευρεῖν, ἐάν τις ἀνδρεῖος ᾖ καὶ μὴ ἀποκάμνῃ ζητῶν· τὸ γὰρ ζητεῖν ἄρα καὶ τὸ μανθάνειν ἀνάμνησις ὅλον ἐστίν.
>
> I have heard from both men and women who are wise about divine matters […] those priests and priestesses who have taken care to be able to give an account of their practices. Pindar also says it, and many other poets who are divine […]. They say that the human soul is immortal, and at one time it meets its end – which is called dying – and at another time it is born again, but it never perishes […]. Thus, since the soul is immortal and has been born many times and has seen both what is here and what is in Hades, and in fact all things, there is nothing that it has not learned. So, it is no wonder that it is possible for the soul to recollect about virtue and other things which it knew previously. For since all nature is akin and the soul has learned

an innatist (human souls lose their prenatal knowledge upon incarnation but retain a "disposition to reacquire [that] knowledge", or "a disposition to favour truths over falsehoods"), and by Bronstein and Schwab (2019, 394), who argue in favour of 'content innatism' ("human embodied souls innately possess truths that can be the contents of states of knowledge but do not exist innately in the soul as the contents of such states"). For a discussion of the different varieties of innatism in relation to Plato, see Scott 1995, 91-95; Cowie 1999, 3-26; Fine 2014, 141-146.

> everything, there is no reason why someone who has recollected – which is what men call 'learning' – one thing should not discover everything else, so long as one is brave and does not give up on the search. For inquiring and learning are wholly recollection.[8]

As we saw in the previous chapter (§3.2), the theory of recollection is inextricably linked with the belief in the immortality of the soul – here initially presupposed – for which it is taken as evidence;[9] because these theories are presented as religious truths, the so-called slave boy demonstration is added to prove the theory of recollection. However, scholars have expressed serious doubts over the legitimacy of this proof, which even Plato himself did not, ostensibly, consider definitive.[10] First, it could be objected that Socrates is purposefully wording his questions in a way that inevitably leads the slave to the correct answers.[11] Even if one assumes the verisimilitude of the experiment, one could still come up with a different explanation, which does not require a belief in innate ideas or in the (pre)existence of the soul[12] – one such explanation could be that our brain structure is responsible for certain tendencies or patterns in our thinking (i.e., biological determinism). Finally, even if we concede that the demonstration successfully proves the slave's ability to recollect, its results cannot be extended to all humans *qua* humans. Therefore, the true foundation of the theory of recollection must lie in the religious beliefs which Plato adopted (and adapted) from the priests and poets whom he cites at the beginning of the passage – which is to say, from the Orphic tradition. Plato himself signals this by presenting the theory with the same mixture of hope and hesitation that we find in his eschatological passages.[13] But how exactly did Plato arrive at his theory of recollection and how much of it did he

[8] Pl. *Men.* 81a-d (cf. *OF* 424, 443; quoted above, pp. 89, 120).
[9] Pl. *Men.* 85d-86b, *Phd.* 72e-77b.
[10] Pl. *Men*. 86b-c καὶ τὰ μέν γε ἄλλα οὐκ ἂν πάνυ ὑπὲρ τοῦ λόγου διισχυρισαίμην· ὅτι δ᾽ οἰόμενοι δεῖν ζητεῖν ἃ μή τις οἶδεν βελτίους ἂν εἶμεν καὶ ἀνδρικώτεροι καὶ ἧττον ἀργοὶ ἢ εἰ οἰοίμεθα ἃ μὴ ἐπιστάμεθα μηδὲ δυνατὸν εἶναι εὑρεῖν μηδὲ δεῖν ζητεῖν, περὶ τούτου πάνυ ἂν διαμαχοίμην, εἰ οἷός τε εἴην, καὶ λόγῳ καὶ ἔργῳ.
[11] E.g., Weiss 2001, 94-99.
[12] E.g., Nehamas 1985, 21f.
[13] E.g., Pl. *Grg.* 527a, *Phd.* 63b-c, 69c-d, 114c-d, *R.* 10. 621b-c.

borrow from his sources? Before venturing to answer these questions, let us first examine the other Platonic passages in which recollection is explicitly discussed, to have a comprehensive view of what the theory entails.

The most extensive discussion of the theory of recollection occurs in the *Phaedo* (72e-77a) as part of a larger discussion in defence of the immortality of the soul. After hearing Socrates' first argument for immortality (70c-72e), which used the Heraclitean principle of the generation of opposites to prove the "ancient doctrine" of reincarnation, Cebes mentions another theory (λόγος), "often" referenced by Socrates, which, "if true", would lend credence to the belief that our souls existed before we were born: the theory "that our learning is nothing but recollection", which implies that our souls must have learned in a previous existence what we are now recollecting.[14] Questioned by Simmias as to how this theory was proved, Cebes recalls the practical demonstration given by Socrates in the *Meno*, which shows that when people are questioned properly (καλῶς), especially with the help of "mathematical diagrams (διαγράμματα) or other things of this sort",[15] "they are able to answer correctly of their own accord".[16] However, the theoretical demonstration provided by Socrates in response to Simmias' questioning, far from being a mere rehashing of the *Meno* argument, reflects a more advanced stage in Plato's philosophical development, one in which the theory of recollection is firmly and explicitly bound to the theory of Forms.[17] Having established the conditions for 'recollection' with regard to

[14] Pl. *Phd*. 72e καὶ μήν, ἔφη ὁ Κέβης ὑπολαβών, καὶ κατ᾽ ἐκεῖνόν γε τὸν λόγον, ὦ Σώκρατες, εἰ ἀληθής ἐστιν, ὃν σὺ εἴωθας θαμὰ λέγειν, ὅτι ἡμῖν ἡ μάθησις οὐκ ἄλλο τι ἢ ἀνάμνησις τυγχάνει οὖσα, καὶ κατὰ τοῦτον ἀνάγκη που ἡμᾶς ἐν προτέρῳ τινὶ χρόνῳ μεμαθηκέναι ἃ νῦν ἀναμιμνησκόμεθα.

[15] It is worth noting how Socrates' use of geometry to 'induce' recollection in the slave boy example, here referenced, foreshadows the preparatory role assigned to arithmetic and geometry in the *Republic* (7.511a-e, 537b-d), where Socrates prescribes a ten-year period of training in mathematics for the future philosopher-rulers, before they can engage in dialectic.

[16] Pl. *Phd*. 73a-b.

[17] This is not to say that, at the time of writing the *Meno*, Plato had yet no conception of the Forms, since both the *Meno* (71e-72e) and the *Euthyphro* (5d, 6d-e, 11a) contain non-committal references to the 'substance' (οὐσία) or the 'form' (εἶδος) of x, but it is possible – even likely, perhaps – that he had not yet developed a fully fledged theory of Forms, such as is later found in the *Phaedo* (see Dancy 2004, 10f., 42-47, 209-241).

perceptibles – which occurs, for example, when one is reminded of someone one knows by seeing their likeness in a portrait or an object which belongs to them (73c-74a) – Socrates argues that the same cognitive act is performed, for instance, when one comes to think of the Equal itself (αὐτὸ τὸ ἴσον) as a result of seeing particular equal things (74a-d). Since one can only recollect what one already knows – or previously knew – one must have known the Form of the Equal prior to performing that cognitive act (74d-75a); because no two physical objects are ever perfectly equal, the knowledge of abstract, absolute Equality cannot derive from sense perception but must instead have been acquired before birth (75a-76c). Based on these premises, Socrates concludes that if we accept the existence of the Equal itself and the other perfect entities which we call Forms, we must necessarily admit that our souls existed – and possessed knowledge of the Forms – in a disembodied state before we were born (76c-d). As far as the *Phaedo* is concerned, then, the two pillars of mature Platonic philosophy – the theory of the immortal soul, with the corollary doctrine of recollection, and the theory of Forms – stand or fall together.[18]

How our souls originally acquired the knowledge which is the object of our recollecting is described mythically in the *Phaedrus* (247c-e), in the context of the famous Chariot allegory. Here Plato presents a mythical account of the prenatal existence of the soul and its original fall from heaven.[19] Before becoming incarnated, human souls lived in heaven among the gods and followed their procession to the "place above the sky" (ὑπερουράνιος τόπος), which is the realm of "true Being" (οὐσία ὄντως οὖσα). As long as a soul was able to join the gods in their contemplation of the Forms – whence the mind (διάνοια) of both divine and human souls derives its nourishment – it remained in heaven, but when "through some mischance" (τινι συντυχίᾳ χρησαμένη) it became "filled with

[18] Cornford 1939, 74f.
[19] For my reasoning in support of the 'original fall' interpretation, see above §3.3.3.

forgetfulness and evil" (λήθης τε καὶ κακίας πλησθεῖσα) and was unable to follow the divine procession, it grew heavy and fell to earth, where it attached itself to a human body (248c). According to the law of Adrasteia, no soul shall return "to the place whence it came" before ten thousand years, except for the souls of philosophers, which are able to regrow their wings and fly to heaven after three consecutive lives spent in the pursuit of philosophy – for to practise philosophy is to be "in communion through memory (μνήμῃ) with those things the communion with which causes God to be divine" (248e-249c).[20]

The *Phaedrus* also provides a more detailed account of how recollection occurs. At *Phdr*. 249d-250d, Plato explains how the perception of physical beauty and the process of falling in love can act as a gateway to accessing the latent metaphysical knowledge which the human soul originally acquired during its prenatal existence and subsequently forgot upon entering the physical realm. Unlike the instances of Justice and other moral Forms, the concrete manifestations of Beauty are easily perceived by humans, due to their visual nature. Thus, when a man sets his sight on a beautiful body or face, he is reminded of the true essence of Beauty, which his soul beheld before entering the cycle of incarnations – provided, of course, that his soul is not overly corrupted. Because the Forms are all related to one another,[21] the "true lover", which is to say, the philosopher, is able to recollect other Forms besides Beauty. When such a man falls in love, then, we can say that his soul starts to regrow its wings[22] – or, metaphors aside, that his mind begins the ascent from the realm of perception to the realm of abstract reasoning. It should be noted, however, that what is described in this section of the *Phaedrus* is not just a journey toward intellectual

[20] Pl. *Phdr*. 249c διὸ δὴ δικαίως μόνη πτεροῦται ἡ τοῦ φιλοσόφου διάνοια· πρὸς γὰρ ἐκείνοις ἀεί ἐστιν μνήμῃ κατὰ δύναμιν, πρὸς οἷσπερ θεὸς ὢν θεῖός ἐστιν (further quoted above, p. 124).
[21] Cf. Pl. *R*. 6.502c-7.535a. The interrelatedness of the Forms and the participation of the perceptibles in the Forms are perhaps anticipated in the idea, put forth in the *Meno* (81c-d), that "all nature is akin" (τῆς φύσεως ἁπάσης συγγενοῦς οὔσης), which seems to imply a conception of knowledge as a systematic whole.
[22] Pl. *Phdr*. 251a-d.

enlightenment but also a process of spiritual cleansing, for what is ultimately at stake is the salvation – or damnation – of the soul, as Plato reminds us at the end of the palinode:

> So, if the better elements of the mind (τὰ βελτίω τῆς διανοίας), which lead to a well-ordered life and to philosophy, prevail, they (*sc*. the lovers) live a life of happiness and harmony here on earth […] and when they die, having become light and winged, they will have won one of the three rounds[23] in that truly Olympic contest […]. But the affection of the non-lover […] will cause the soul to be a wanderer upon the earth and witless (ἄνουν) below the earth for nine thousand years.[24]

This brings us back to the religious background of the theory of recollection, to which Plato explicitly alludes in the *Meno*, where the concept is first introduced. There, the belief that the soul never dies but simply travels back and forth between earth and the otherworld, and has thus seen everything that exists, is ascribed to "men and women who are wise about divine matters".[25] As we have seen, these were most likely Orphic mystery priests and religious experts:[26] not the vagrant charlatans who preyed upon the superstitious, chastised in the *Republic* (2.364b-e = *OF* 573i) and the *Laws* (10.908d-909b = *OF* 573iii-iv), but the repositories of a profound 'mysteriosophical' wisdom, to use Bianchi's term.[27] Plato himself seemingly hints at this when he specifies that these priests and priestesses are able to "give an account" (λόγον … δοῦναι) of their practices, for these are the same words he uses elsewhere to define the practitioners of dialectic, which is for him the highest form of inquiry.[28] At the same time, Plato was likely alluding to the use of sacred texts (ἱεροὶ

[23] Cf. Pl. *Phdr*. 249a.
[24] Pl. *Phdr*. 256a-257a.
[25] See n. 8.
[26] This identification is supported, among other things, by the Pindaric fragment quoted in the passage (Pi. fr. 133 SM = *OF* 443), which contains an (almost certain) allusion to the Orphic myth of ancestral guilt (see pp. 120f. and n. 184).
[27] Bianchi 1976, 6; 1992, 274-277. These Orphic wisemen are often referenced by Plato, usually implicitly, in relation to matters of eschatological import (e.g., *Grg*. 493a = *OF* 430ii, *Phd*. 69c-d = *OF* 434iii, 567i, *Cra*. 400c = *OF* 430).
[28] E.g., Pl. *Prt*. 336c, *Phd.* 78c-d, 95d, *R*. 7.534b, *Tht.* 202c, 175c, 183d, *Sph*. 230a, *Plt.* 286a.

λόγοι) in the Orphic mysteries, which, as the Derveni author attests,[29] placed an emphasis on hearing and understanding.

How much, then, of Plato's theory of recollection can we trace back to Orphic sources? If we strip the theory of recollection of its distinctly Platonic traits – namely, its ties to the theory of Forms and the theory of philosophic love – what we are left with is essentially the version of recollection which is ascribed to the priests and poets in the *Meno*: because the soul is immortal and has lived many lives, "both in this world and in Hades", there is nothing, so to speak, that it has not seen. Humans, of course, do not normally remember experiences from past lives,[30] but there were some exceptional individuals, like Pythagoras and Empedocles[31] – and perhaps others in the Orphic milieu – who claimed to possess such an ability. Related to the theory of reincarnation is the idea of the kinship of all living beings, espoused both by Empedocles (frr. 130, 136-140 DK) and by the early Pythagoreans,[32] but this is hardly what Plato has in mind when he says that "all nature is akin" (τῆς φύσεως ἁπάσης συγγενοῦς οὔσης).[33] A closer parallel might be found in the Empedoclean notion of cosmic harmony (frr. 27, 96 DK) and the Pythagorean idea that "all is number",[34] which some scholars have identified as a possible influence on Plato's theory of Forms.[35] It is possible that a similar idea was also found in the Orphic-Pythagorean

[29] *P.Derv*. 7.8-11 KPT = §21 Kotwick '˹ι˺θ˹ύ˺ρας' γὰρ 'ἐπιθέ˹ι˺σθα˹ι˺' ὁ κελεύσας τοῖ[ς ὡσὶ]ν αὐτ[οὺς μὴ θεοὺς ἀ]σεβεῖν φη[σιν] το[ῖ]ς πολλοῖς [. . . . . τὴ]ν ἀκοὴν [διατηρο]ῦντας καθ[αρήν . . . . .] (cf. Plut. *Quaest. conv*. 636d = *OF* 101i ἀείσω ξυνετοῖσι κτλ), 20.2-8 KPT = §§66f. Kotwick οὐ γὰρ οἷόν τε ἀκοῦσαι ὁμοῦ καὶ μαθεῖν τὰ λεγόμενα … [δ]οκοῦντες πρότερον ἢ ἐπιτελέσαι εἰδήσειν, ἀπέρχονται ἐπιτελέσαντες πρὶν εἰδέναι, οὐδ' ἐπανερόμενοι, {ὥσπερ} ὡς εἰδότες τέων εἶδον ἢ ἤκουσαν ἢ ἔμαθον.

[30] The explanation given by the Orphic mythologers probably involved the soul drinking from the water of Forgetfulness (Λήθη) at some point before being reincarnated, similarly to what is described by Plato in the myth of Er (*R*. 10.621a).

[31] Emp. frr. 117, 129 DK = *OF* 451, Heraclid. Pont. fr. 89 Wehrli = D.L. 8.4f.

[32] Pythag. fr. 8a DK = Porph. *VP* 18f. μάλιστα μέντοι γνώριμα παρὰ πᾶσιν ἐγένετο πρῶτον μὲν ὡς ἀθάνατον εἶναί φησι τὴν ψυχήν, εἶτα μεταβάλλουσαν εἰς ἄλλα γένη ζῴων, πρὸς δὲ τούτοις ὅτι κατὰ περιόδους τινὰς τὰ γινόμενά ποτε πάλιν γίνεται, νέον δ' οὐδὲν ἁπλῶς ἔστι κτλ.

[33] Pl. *Men*. 81c.

[34] Philol. frr. 1-6 DK, Arist. *Metaph*. 1.6.987b7-18, fr. 191 Rose, Xenocr. fr. 87 Isnardi Parente, Aristox. fr. 23 Wehrli, Eud. fr. 133 Wehrli.

[35] Burnet 1920, 354-356; Taylor 1937, 385f.; Bostock 1986, 13; Horky 2013, 145-199.

poems listed by Epigenes,[36] or perhaps in an allegorical commentary of the kind of the Derveni papyrus. The (par)etymological interpretation of Hades as 'the invisible' (τὸ ἀιδές) – which Plato references in the leaky jar allegory of the *Gorgias* (493b) and, again, in the *Phaedo* (80d, 81c-d) and in the etymological section of the *Cratylus* (403a, 404b) – would not have been out of place in such a text.[37] In any case, if Plato, as seems very likely, interpreted "the things in Hades" (τὰ ἐν Ἅιδου) in the *Meno* passage in this metaphorical sense, the Ἅιδης-ἀιδές etymology would appear to represent a key step in the early development of Plato's 'Two Worlds' metaphysics.[38]

As we have seen, memory plays a fundamental role in the Orphic gold tablets, many of which contain explicit references to the water of Mnemosyne, or to the goddess herself.[39] The reasons for this prominence are manifold. Memory is, first and foremost, an instrument of spiritual salvation, as the newly deceased initiate will need to remember the instructions contained in the tablet in order to avoid the bleak fate which awaits most human souls after death. More specifically, he will need to stay away from the first spring he encounters – which, although the tablets do not mention it explicitly, we can safely assume to be the fountain of Forgetfulness – and go down the path which leads to the lake of Memory; he will also need to remember the correct formulae to recite to the guards, in order to be

[36] See above §§1.3.2; 2.3.
[37] It should be noted that the Ἅιδης-ἀιδές etymology is seemingly implied in a passage from the *Iliad* (5.844f.), and in the *Cratylus* (403a-404b), where Plato proposes an alternative derivation from εἶδον ('to know'), it is presented as 'traditional', or at least commonly accepted (403a ὁ δὲ Ἅιδης, οἱ πολλοὶ μέν μοι δοκοῦσιν ὑπολαμβάνειν τὸ ἀειδὲς προσειρῆσθαι τῷ ὀνόματι τούτῳ). The association between the 'invisible' and the 'intelligible' is obviously at the heart of Plato's epistemological theory, so it is not so much the interpretation of Hades as 'the invisible realm' which Plato rejects in the *Cratylus*, but rather the fears and false beliefs which accompany that interpretation in the minds of most people (403b πολλαχῇ ἔμοιγε δοκοῦσιν ἄνθρωποι διημαρτηκέναι περὶ τούτου τοῦ θεοῦ τῆς δυνάμεως καὶ φοβεῖσθαι αὐτὸν οὐκ ἄξιον ὄν).
[38] See Ionescu 2006, 162f.: "For the Plato of the *Phaedo* (and of the dialogues following it) Hades is the realm of the 'unseen' [*Phaedo* 80d, 81c], the realm of pure objects of thought, i.e., Forms that cannot be made visible to our sense organs […]. [T]he conclusion that Plato's Socrates derives, namely that recollection enables us in principle to achieve knowledge about all things (81d3-4), requires that recollection has Forms as its objects in the *Meno* as well […]. The only solution left is to interpret non-literally both 'the things in Hades' (Forms in themselves) and 'the things here' (Forms as instantiated). There are then no longer two heterogeneous classes, but just one class of things regarded from two standpoints: in themselves and for us".
[39] See Ch. 3 n. 180.

allowed to drink from the water of Memory,[40] and/or to the queen of the underworld, Persephone, in order to be admitted to the seats of the blessed.[41] Furthermore, drinking from the water of Memory will (presumably) allow the deceased to retain his personal memories and, with them, his individual identity. This will enable him to reap the full benefits reserved for the initiates, most importantly individual immortality, for which continuity of consciousness is a necessary condition – which is why, incidentally, the existence of the souls of the dead in the Homeric afterlife does not imply immortality, since they are merely ghosts stripped of any and all mental faculties.[42]

What role, if any, did reincarnation play in this picture? The gold tablets make no mention of it, save perhaps for one of the Thurii tablets, dating from the fourth century BC, in which the initiate, speaking in the first person, claims to have "flown out of the heavy and painful cycle",[43] a probable reference to the initiate's release from the cycle of rebirths.[44] On the other hand, Plato, quoting Pindar (fr. 133 M. = *OF* 443; quoted above, p. 120), informs us that the initiates ("those from whom Persephone accepts atonement for the ancient grief") are supposedly rewarded by being reincarnated as "glorious kings and men of rushing strength and surpassing wisdom".[45] Elsewhere (*O.* 2.56-72 = *OF* 445; quoted above, p. 105), Pindar says that, in order for one's soul to be admitted to the abode of the blessed, one must live free from all wrong-doing thrice, in this world and in Hades – which, as I noted in the previous chapter (§3.3.3), resembles what Plato says about the souls of

[40] E.g., Lam. Hipp. (*OF* 474) 10-12 εἶπον· 'Γῆς παῖ<ς> εἰμι καὶ Οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος· / δίψαι δ' εἰμ' αὖος καὶ ἀπόλλυμαι· ἀλ<λ>ὰ δότ' ὦκα / ψυχρὸν ὕδωρ πιέναι τῆς Μνημοσύνης ἀπὸ λίμ<ν>ης'.
[41] E.g., Lam. Thur. (*OF* 488) 1-3 Ἔρχομαι ἐκ κοθαρῶ<ν> κοθαρά χθονί<ων> βασίλεια, / Εὐκλῆς Εὐβο<υ>λεύς τε καὶ ἀθάνατοι θεοὶ ἄλλοι· / καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼν ὑμῶν γένος ὄλβιον εὔχομαι εἶμεν.
[42] E.g., *Il.* 23.103f. ὦ πόποι ἦ ῥά τίς ἐστι καὶ εἰν Ἀΐδαο δόμοισι / ψυχὴ καὶ εἴδωλον, ἀτὰρ φρένες οὐκ ἔνι πάμπαν.
[43] *OF* 488.5 κύκλο<υ> δ' ἐξέπταν βαρυπενθέος ἀργαλέοιο. For the scholarship on this verse, see Ch. 2 n. 119.
[44] Cf., e.g., Emp. fr. 137.4f. DK οὕνεκ' ἀμειβομένη ψυχὴ κατὰ κύκλα χρόνοιο / ανθρώπων ζώιοισι μετέρχεται ἄλλοθεν ἄλλοις,
[45] A comparison with a fragment of the roughly contemporary Empedocles (fr. 146 DK = *OF* 448) suggests that this might have been the penultimate incarnation before the final apotheosis: "And in the end they come into existence among men on earth as prophets, minstrels, physicians, and leaders (μάντεις τε καὶ ὑμνοπόλοι καὶ ἰητροὶ καὶ πρόμοι), and from these they rise as gods, highest in honour".

philosophers in the *Phaedrus* (249a). It is most certainly possible, as Johnston (2013b, 119) suggests, that the geographically dispersed nature of the Orphic cult, coupled with the absence of a single, central authority, allowed for a certain degree of heterodoxy, so it is not at all inconceivable that, at some point in the early history of the cult, certain mystery priests, in order to attract a larger clientele, started to claim that initiation would guarantee immediate deliverance from the cycle of reincarnations – and this tradition, as far as we can tell, ultimately became prevalent. If, indeed, the earlier Orphic tradition contemplated a more complex eschatology, of the kind which we find in both Plato and Pindar, then the injunction to drink from the water of Memory and stay clear of the fountain of Forgetfulness would have had the additional purpose of preserving one's memories and individual identity across multiple incarnations,[46] like Empedocles and Pythagoras were purportedly able to do. Logically, it follows that someone who possessed (or claimed to possess) such an ability would be closer to achieving eternal salvation than someone who did not. Thus, Empedocles (fr. 112 DK = *OF* 447, vv. 4f.) could enthusiastically declare himself "an immortal god, no longer mortal" (θεὸς ἄμβροτος, οὐκέτι θνητός), trusting, like the Orphic initiates,[47] that he would be allowed to join the company of the gods in the next life.

All this, needless to say, in no way approaches the depth and complexity of the Platonic theory of recollection; nevertheless, its fundamental premises – without which Plato would have likely never come up with the theory in the first place – are already present in the Orphic tradition, if not in letter, certainly in spirit. The importance of memory in the context of Platonic philosophy seems to have a precedent in the Pythagorean school, whose

[46] A similar reasoning seems to be at play in the Platonic myth of Er, where it is said that wiser souls drink only the required amount from the water of Forgetfulness, before being sent back to earth (*R.* 10.621a). The purpose is, ostensibly, to allow individuals to retain some of the knowledge which they acquired (or recovered) in their time on earth and in the otherworld, so that they may progress in their upward journey towards enlightenment over multiple lives.
[47] See Ch. 3 n. 97.

members were known to place great emphasis on memory training.[48] Moreover, the role assigned by Plato to written texts, including presumably his own works,[49] can be likened to the function served by the gold tablets within the context of the Orphic cult, which is to say, that of facilitating the recollection of previously acquired knowledge, as opposed to conveying (or 'teaching') new information to an uninitiated audience.[50] Indeed, it does not seem coincidental that Plato's only extended discussion on the 'technology' of writing is found in the *Phaedrus* (274b-278b), which out of all the dialogues is the one where memory and recollection are given the most attention. It is also fitting that this discussion should be introduced by a myth (274c-275b) – this time, one which Plato likely invented out of whole cloth[51] – in which the ancient god-king of Egypt Thamus voices Plato's critique of writing as a substitute for memory. The passage is worth quoting in full:

> τοῦτο γὰρ τῶν μαθόντων λήθην μὲν ἐν ψυχαῖς παρέξει μνήμης ἀμελετησίᾳ, ἅτε διὰ πίστιν γραφῆς ἔξωθεν ὑπ᾽ ἀλλοτρίων τύπων, οὐκ ἔνδοθεν αὐτοὺς ὑφ᾽ αὑτῶν ἀναμιμνῃσκομένους· οὔκουν μνήμης ἀλλὰ ὑπομνήσεως φάρμακον ηὗρες. σοφίας δὲ τοῖς μαθηταῖς δόξαν, οὐκ ἀλήθειαν πορίζεις· πολυήκοοι γάρ σοι γενόμενοι ἄνευ διδαχῆς πολυγνώμονες [275b] εἶναι δόξουσιν, ἀγνώμονες ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πλῆθος ὄντες, καὶ χαλεποὶ συνεῖναι, δοξόσοφοι γεγονότες ἀντὶ σοφῶν.
>
> For this (*sc*. the invention of writing) will produce forgetfulness in the souls of those who learn to use it, because they will neglect to exercise their memory. Because of their trust in writing, they will recall things from external characters, which exist outside of themselves, rather than from within, through the use of their own memory: indeed, you have not invented a cure for memory but for reminding. What you offer your disciples is not true wisdom but the appearance of wisdom: for having heard many things from you without being taught, they will appear to know many things, while being for the most part ignorant, and they will be difficult to get along with, because they have acquired not wisdom but the conceit of wisdom.[52]

[48] See, e.g., Iambl. *VP* 164 ᾤοντο δὲ δεῖν κατέχειν καὶ διασῴζειν ἐν τῇ μνήμῃ πάντα τὰ διδασκόμενά τε καὶ φραζόμενα … ἐτίμων γοῦν σφόδρα τὴν μνήμην.
[49] Pl. *Ep*. 7.341c-e.
[50] The ritual texts inscribed on the tablets were most likely recited (or read out loud) during the initiation ceremony, which was possibly re-enacted (in part or in full) during the funeral (Graf 2013b, 139).
[51] Pl. *Phdr*. 275b-c.
[52] Pl. *Phdr*. 275a-b.

Plato's condemnation of those who believe that they have learned without having been taught, thus possessing only the conceit of wisdom without any true knowledge or understanding, is strikingly reminiscent of a passage from the Derveni papyrus,[53] where the author criticises the initiates who believe they have learned simply by attending the mysteries with other people in the cities,[54] or by participating in the private initiation rites offered by professional mystery priests without asking any questions. Both Plato and the Derveni author objected to the notion that mindlessly performing a ritual or reciting a formula was enough to produce a lasting effect on an individual's soul: for them, true initiation required understanding, which could only be acquired under the guidance of a true expert.

At any rate, the biggest proof of the Orphic underpinning of the theory of recollection is to be found, as mentioned before, in the soteriological role assigned to memory by both Plato and the Orphics. Memory – whom the initiates invoked to help them remember the passwords needed to access their special place in the afterlife – allowed the Orphics to transcend their own humanity and return to the divine state from which their soul had once fallen: the knowledge (or, perhaps, the memory) of this original fall and of their true identity as fallen gods is what separated the Orphics from regular mortals, destined, through ignorance (or disbelief) and forgetfulness,[55] to remain stuck in the cycle of rebirths. Similarly, in Plato's *Phaedrus*, recollection is what enables a philosopher's soul to regrow its wings and eventually "fly out of the painful cycle", to use an Orphic

[53] *P.Derv*. col. 20 KPT = §§66-68 Kotwick ἀνθρώπω[ν ἐν] πόλεσιν ἐπιτελέσαντες [τὰ ἱ]ερὰ εἶδον, ἔλασσόν σφᾶς θαυμάζω μὴ γινώσκειν· οὐ γὰρ οἷόν τε ἀκοῦσαι ὁμοῦ καὶ μαθεῖν τὰ λεγόμενα. ὅσοι δὲ παρὰ τοῦ τέχνην ποιουμένου τὰ ἱερά, οὗτοι ἄξιοι θαυμάζεσθαι καὶ οἰκτε[ί]ρεσθαι, θαυμάζεσθαι μὲν, ὅτι, [δ]οκοῦντες πρότερον ἢ ἐπιτελέσαι εἰδήσειν, ἀπέρχονται ἐπιτελέσαντες πρὶν εἰδέναι, οὐδ' ἐπανερόμενοι, {ὥσπερ} ὡς εἰδότες τέων εἶδον ἢ ἤκουσαν ἢ ἔμαθον· [ο]ἰκτε<ί>ρεσθαι δὲ, ὅτι οὐκ ἀρκεῖ σφιν τὴν δαπάνην προανηλῶσθαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ, τῆς γνώμης στερόμενοι πρὸς, ἀπέρχονται. πρὶν μὲν τὰ [ἱ]ερὰ ἐπιτελέσαι, ἐλπίζον[τε]ς εἰδήσειν, ἐπ[ιτελέσ]αντ[ες] δὲ, στερηθέντες κα[ὶ τῆς] ἐλπί[δος] ἀπέρχονται (cf. Heracl. fr. 34 DK).

[54] Here the Derveni author is probably referring to the Eleusinian mysteries (cf. Pl. *R*. 2.364e-365a = *OF* 573i).

[55] *P.Derv*. 5.10f. KPT; cf. Pl. *Grg*. 493c.

expression. Outside the metaphor of the winged chariot, Plato repeatedly stresses, throughout his work, that the only sure way to live well, both in this life and the next, is through the correct practice of philosophy, which consists in separating oneself as much as possible from all things related to the body – including sense perception – and turning inwards, to the latent knowledge buried within one's soul – memories from when it existed in its pure, divine state, untarnished by matter, in the realm of Forms. Of course, the kind of immortality envisioned by Plato is quite different from what the Orphic initiates hoped to achieve: the latter being personal immortality, as opposed to the direct contemplation of eternal truths which Plato envisioned as the natural state of the divine, rational part of the human soul – meaning that such a state can only be achieved by the pure intellect, completely detached from the body and from any vestiges of materiality, which is to say, completely depersonalised. Although the link between recollection and the immortality of the soul is already firmly established in the *Meno*, it is only in the *Phaedo* and the *Phaedrus* that the soteriological implications of the theory are fully uncovered. It is difficult to tell whether this is due to contextual reasons or to the fact that, at the time of writing the *Meno*, Plato had not yet fully developed the ramifications of recollection within the larger context of his philosophy. Regardless, there can be no doubt that the account of recollection which we find in the *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus* is entirely Platonic, which is to say that, whatever he owed to the Orphics for inspiration, Plato had completely transformed it and made it his own, as evidenced by the fact the theory is no longer presented as something which Socrates has heard from another source, as it was in the *Meno*.

If recollection is, apparently, so important within Plato's philosophy, one might ask why it is only discussed explicitly in three middle-period (or, in the case of the *Meno*, transitional) dialogues. Scholars have long pondered this question, reaching conflicting conclusions: some emphasise the aspects of continuity between the epistemological

theories of the middle and late-period dialogues,[56] while others believe that Plato eventually abandoned recollection in favour of a different epistemological model,[57] with a minority of scholars outright rejecting the notion of Platonic recollection as a serious epistemological theory on the basis of supposed inconsistencies between the accounts in the *Meno*, *Phaedo*, and *Phaedrus*.[58]

The first approach seems to me by far the most reasonable, not only in light of the absence, in the later dialogues, of any statement which could be considered incompatible with recollection, but also due to the number of passages, in both middle and late-period dialogues, which seem to reference it implicitly or, at the very least, presuppose it in some way. For example, we find striking similarities in both the *Symposium* (209e-212a) – in Diotima's speech – and the *Republic* (7.514b-520a) – in the allegory of the Cave[59] – with the description of the soul's vision of true Being and recollection of the Form of Beauty in the *Phaedrus* (247c-e, 249d-250d) – passages which are all imbued with mystical imagery and terminology. Another reference to the *Phaedrus* myth can be found in the *Timaeus* (41d-e; see p. 118), where the newly created human souls are each set in a star, "as it were in a chariot", and shown "the nature of the universe" (τὴν τοῦ παντὸς φύσιν) before being sent to earth to be incarnated.[60] Even in the *Theaetetus*, which contains no reference to the theory of recollection, nor indeed any positive theory of knowledge, one can still find links to dialogues where recollection plays a fundamental role – such as the *Phaedo* and the *Phaedrus* – in its staunch critique of sense perception as a basis for any kind of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) or opinion (δόξα). This was, after all, what prompted Plato to develop his theory of recollection to begin with: the necessity to replace empirical theories of knowledge, such

[56] E.g., Gulley 1962, 108-168; Scott 1995, 80-85; Kahn 2006, 126-132.
[57] E.g., Robin 1935, 89f.; Vanhoutte 1956, 36-38; Franklin 2005, 309 n. 34.
[58] Weiss 2001, 185-202; Rawson 2006.
[59] See below §5.2.
[60] Cf. Pl. *R.* 10.621b.

as Protagorean relativism and Heraclitean flux theory, with a more stable and reliable mode of inquiry which need not rely on the senses. The only possible foundation for such a method, at least as far as Plato is concerned, is, of course, the theory of Forms. Since there is no other way for the human intellect, in its embodied state, to obtain any knowledge of the Forms aside from recollection,[61] by rejecting recollection, one also rejects the theory of Forms – and with it the better part of Plato's mature philosophy.[62]

Although the theory of recollection – like the theory of Forms – is ultimately "the product of Plato's genius and of his alone",[63] it would not have been possible without the precedent set by the Orphics with their ideas on memory, immortality, and soul/body dualism.[64] The fact that this philosophical theory is fundamentally based on religious belief might offend our modern sensibilities, given its incompatibility with the current view of philosophy as a discipline guided by strict logical principles, but this would not necessarily have been the case for Plato and his contemporaries, whose ideas about what a philosopher (σοφός) was supposed to be were modelled on the standard set by figures like Parmenides and Empedocles, who wrote 'philosophical' poems steeped in religious and mystical imagery. Hence, if we wish to understand the true meaning and origin of Plato's doctrines, I believe that we must try, as far as possible, to analyse them through the lenses of the author and of his fourth-century audience.

[61] Even though the Forms are instantiated in sensible reality, the human intellect would hardly be capable of recognising them – especially in the case of moral Forms – without any inbuilt 'frame of reference', meaning that some form of innatism (or prenatalism) is needed for the theory of Forms to be epistemologically viable.
[62] See Allen 1959, 174, quoting Cornford (1941, xxv): "This new philosophy rests, in F. M. Cornford's metaphor, on twin pillars: the immortality and divinity of the rational soul, and the reality and indestructibility of the objects of its knowledge. The architrave of these pillars is the doctrine of Anamnesis, Recollection".
[63] Vlastos 1965a, 163.
[64] It is not too difficult to imagine how a dualistic worldview which placed the body and life on earth on the side of evil and falsehood, and the soul and the afterlife on the side of goodness and truth, could lead someone like Plato to associate forgetfulness and ignorance with the present life, and memory and wisdom with something beyond the human condition and its reliance on sense perception (more on this below, §5.1).

5. The Theory of Forms

Explaining the nature of the Forms, as well as their relationship with the phenomenal world and with each other, is one of the main objectives of Plato's intellectual project, at least since his early maturity. Because Plato deliberately refused to write a systematic account (σύγγραμμα) of his most important doctrines,[1] there is no single dialogue or passage that contains a comprehensive discussion of the Forms; rather, different dialogues discuss different facets of the theory, depending on their specific focus. This has led some scholars to conclude that Plato never actually developed a systematic theory of Forms,[2] or that his thoughts on the subject changed fundamentally over time.[3] A related debate concerns the extent to which Plato remained committed to the Forms in his later years: scholars who argue that Plato eventually renounced his middle-period views on the Forms appeal especially to the criticisms contained in the *Parmenides*,[4] while those who defend the unity of Platonic metaphysics point to the presence of the Forms in later dialogues, most prominently the *Timaeus*.[5] Another major controversy concerns the existence of a body of 'unwritten doctrines' and its relationship to the metaphysical theories espoused in the dialogues.[6] These and other important questions relating to the development and meaning of the theory of Forms far exceed the scope of the present study, so I will not attempt to

[1] Pl. *Ep*. 7.341b-c.
[2] E.g., Annas 1981, 233-236; Sayre 1993; 2002; Gonzalez 2002; Hyland 2002; Williams 2006 [1998], 148-186.
[3] E.g., Kraut 1992, 8; Gerson 2002a, 98-103.
[4] E.g., Vlastos 1954. *Contra*, e.g., Ross (1951, 83-101), Findlay (1974, 229-254), Miller (1986), and Politis (2021, 179-201), who maintain that the criticisms of the *Parmenides* are aimed at correcting misconceptions or imprecise statements about the theory of Forms rather than at demolishing the theory itself.
[5] Hence, for example, Owen's (1953) attempt to prove that the *Timaeus* was composed before the 'critical' dialogues; for a detailed refutation, see Cherniss 1957.
[6] The esotericist interpretation, developed by the so-called Tübingen-Milan School (e.g., Gaiser 1959; 1969; 2004; Krämer 1959; Szlezák 1985; Reale 1994; see also Findlay 1974), argues that Plato's most important doctrines, which he did not commit to writing, consisted in a mathematised version of the theory of Forms, which can be reconstructed on the basis of indirect testimonies from Aristotle and other later sources. This approach has attracted the criticism of many scholars (e.g., Cherniss 1945; Brisson 1993b; 2002b).

discuss them in detail. As in previous chapters, my aim will be to analyse Plato's transposition of Orphic ideas and mythical imagery to enhance our understanding of his body of work. In what follows, I will focus in particular on the theme of binary opposition in Plato's treatment of the Forms and on the famous (and equally problematic) allegory of the Cave.

5.1 Pairs of opposites

When discussing the Forms, Plato rarely provides simple, straightforward definitions; more often, he explains what a Form is by describing what it is not, either by contrasting Forms with particulars, or by juxtaposing a specific Form (or its instances) with (instances of) its opposite. It could be argued that this approach stems from the very limitations of human cognition, which – in most cases – necessitate that inquiry start from the concrete and the particular; because the world of particulars is characterised by multiplicity and contradiction, it is easier to define something by contrasting it with something different. On a deeper level, however, this 'method of opposites' is rooted in the dualistic paradigm which Plato adopted from the Orphic tradition – both directly and via the mediation of earlier thinkers, chief among them Parmenides[7] – and on which Platonic metaphysics is ultimately founded. Pairs of opposites feature prominently in places where Plato speaks at length about the Forms, such as the following passage from the *Republic* (5.475e-476a), where Socrates explains the difference between the "lovers of sounds and sights" (φιλήκοοι καὶ φιλοθεάμονες) and the "lover of the spectacle of truth" (τῆς ἀληθείας φιλοθεάμων), which is to say, the philosopher.

[7] On Plato's reception of Parmenides, see Rist 1970; Palmer 1999; O'Brien 2000; 2013; Kahn 2002; Bossi 2013.

> σὲ δὲ οἶμαι ὁμολογήσειν μοι τὸ τοιόνδε … ἐπειδή ἐστιν ἐναντίον καλὸν αἰσχρῷ, δύο αὐτὼ εἶναι … οὐκοῦν ἐπειδὴ δύο, καὶ ἓν ἑκάτερον … καὶ περὶ δὴ δικαίου καὶ ἀδίκου καὶ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ κακοῦ καὶ πάντων τῶν εἰδῶν πέρι ὁ αὐτὸς λόγος, αὐτὸ μὲν ἓν ἕκαστον εἶναι, τῇ δὲ τῶν πράξεων καὶ σωμάτων καὶ ἀλλήλων κοινωνίᾳ πανταχοῦ φανταζόμενα πολλὰ φαίνεσθαι ἕκαστον.
>
> I think you will agree […] that since Beauty is the opposite of ugliness,[8] they are two […]. And since they are two, each of them is one […]. And with regard to Justice and injustice, Good and evil, and all the Forms, the same reasoning applies: they are each one in themselves but appear everywhere in a multiplicity of manifestations through the communion with actions and bodies and with each other.

Unlike the "lovers of sounds and sights", the philosopher is able to discern that each of the many beautiful perceptibles participates in the Form of Beauty and that, therefore, the manifold nature of phenomenal reality is merely an illusion: only the philosopher is "awake", whereas everyone else is living, as it were, in a dream-like state,[9] because they "mistake semblances for the real thing which they resemble".[10] This truth, as Socrates admits, is not easy to explain to someone who is not already conscious of it, hence the need for concrete examples. In this context, pairs of opposites are especially useful, because they allow one easily to conceptualise pure, unmixed qualities – such as the Beautiful itself, or the Just itself – by contrasting them with their negation.

Although in the sensible world different and even opposite qualities often coexist with each other, and the same qualities manifest themselves in different ways, each Form is a single, distinct entity that exists in and of itself. For example, the Form of Beauty, being the opposite of ugliness, must be a single entity, because something cannot have more than one opposite; furthermore, it is entirely distinct from ugliness, because something cannot

[8] Throughout this work, names of moral Forms are capitalised to signify their superior ontological status (compared to mathematical and value-neutral Forms); for a similar reason, the word 'God' is also capitalised when referring to the Platonic deity. Accordingly, negations of Forms (evil, injustice, ugliness, etc.) are not capitalised. On the question of negative Forms in Plato's ontology, see most recently Nails 2013 (for) and Alican 2017 (against).
[9] Cf. Heracl. frr. 1, 89 DK, Pl. *Phd.* 71c.
[10] Pl. *R.* 5.476c.

be itself and the opposite of itself at the same time.[11] The latter point is discussed at greater length in a passage from the *Phaedo* (102a-103a: 102d-103a), in which Socrates uses height comparison to explain the relationship between greatness and smallness. Because Simmias is taller than Socrates and shorter than Phaedo, he can be called both tall and short, relatively to Socrates and Phaedo respectively, but although Simmias participates in both greatness and smallness, these two opposite qualities always remain separate and distinct from one another.

> For it seems to me not only that greatness itself (αὐτὸ τὸ μέγεθος) will never be great and small at the same time, but that the greatness in us will never admit the small (τὸ σμικρὸν) or allow itself to be exceeded […]. Similarly, the smallness in us will never become or be great, nor will any other opposite, as long as it remains what it was, ever become or be simultaneously its own opposite: it either goes away or perishes in the change (ἐν τούτῳ τῷ παθήματι).

This, as Socrates explains, does not contradict what was said earlier in the dialogue (70c-72e) regarding the generation of opposites from opposites, because that argument only applies to concrete things "which possess opposite qualities and are named after them", whereas the qualities themselves – that is to say, the Forms – can never be or become their own opposite.[12] The principle of non-contradiction applies not only to Forms and their opposites but also to Forms and the opposites of other Forms to which they are fundamentally tied: the Form of fire, for instance, will never admit cold within itself, because it contains the Form of heat; similarly, the number three, as well as any other odd number, will never admit the idea of evenness, despite not being the opposite of even.[13] This is the reason why the soul, which always brings life to anything it inhabits, can never admit the idea of death and is thus, by its very nature, immortal.[14]

[11] On the principle of non-contradiction in Plato's *Republic*, see Bloom 2017 and Campbell 2021.
[12] Pl. *Phd*. 103a-c.
[13] Pl. *Phd*. 103c-105b.
[14] This concludes the *Phaedo*'s 'final argument' for the immortality of the soul (102a-107b: 105b-107b).

Binary opposition plays a prominent role in the philosophy of many Presocratic thinkers, chief among them Heraclitus, whose doctrine had a profound impact on Plato's philosophical development.[15] Many of his fragments deal with what is generally termed the 'unity of opposites':[16] this principle, interpreted in the context of the doctrine of flux, states that opposite things constantly transform into one another, in a never-ending cycle of change. As we have seen, Plato presents this argument in the *Phaedo* (70c-72e: 71c-d) as one of the proofs for the immortality of the soul:

> 'Is there anything which is the opposite of living (τῷ ζῆν), like sleeping is of being awake (ὥσπερ τῷ ἐγρηγορέναι τὸ καθεύδειν)?' […] 'Being dead (τὸ τεθνάναι)' […]. 'If they are opposites, then they are generated from each other, and since they are two, the processes of generation (αἱ γενέσεις) between them are also two […]. Being awake is generated from sleeping and sleeping from being awake, and the processes of generation are, in the latter case, falling asleep and, in the former, waking up […]. Do you not say that being dead is the opposite of being alive?' 'I do'. 'And that they are generated from each other?' 'Yes'.

Of the many pairs of opposites which are mentioned in the passage (καλόν-αἰσχρόν, δίκαιον- ἄδικον, μεῖζον-ἔλαττον, ἰσχυρότερον-ἀσθενέστερον, βραδύτερον-θᾶττον, ἄμεινον-χεῖρον, δικαιότερον-ἀδικότερον), the last two (ἐγρηγορέναι-καθεύδειν, ζῆν-τεθνάναι), which are most relevant to the argument, are mentioned by Heraclitus (fr. 88 DK = *OF* 454) in a fragment which shows traces of Orphic influence:[17]

> ταὐτό τ' ἔνι ζῶν καὶ τεθνηκὸς καὶ τὸ ἐγρηγορὸς καὶ καθεῦδον καὶ νέον καὶ γηραιόν· τάδε γὰρ μεταπεσόντα ἐκεῖνά ἐστι κἀκεῖνα πάλιν μεταπεσόντα ταῦτα.
>
> The same is within what is living and what is dead, what is awake and what is asleep, the young and the old. For these, changing, are those, and those, changing in turn, are these.[18]

[15] See, e.g., Irwin 1977a; Kahn 1985.
[16] See Ch. 3 n. 102.
[17] See Casadesús 2008b.
[18] According to Laks and Most (2016, III.2, 171), the last phrase probably belongs to Ps.-Plutarch (*Cons. Ap.* 10.106e), who preserved the fragment.

It is, I believe, no coincidence that the section of the *Phaedo* in which this Heraclitean fragment is echoed begins with the mention of an "ancient discourse" (παλαιὸς λόγος) according to which "the souls of men who have died" go from the world of the living to the world of the dead and, again, back to earth and "are born from the dead"[19] – a clear reference to Orphic doctrine.[20]

Empedocles, who is perhaps the most 'Orphic' of the Presocratic philosophers,[21] based his cosmology on the cyclical action of two opposite forces – namely, Love (φιλία) and Strife (νεῖκος) – on four elements or "roots" (ῥιζώματα),[22] some of which he associated with certain pairs of opposites: specifically, he described the sun (i.e., fire) as bright and hot and the rain (i.e., water) as dark and cold.[23] The cosmology of Parmenides, another philosopher with strong Orphic affinities,[24] is also based on the action of opposite principles. In his *Doxa,* Parmenides identifies two opposite principles which are responsible for the origin of the visible world: fire, or light, and night.[25] Finally, Aristotle (*Metaph.* 986a22-b2) tells us that the Pythagoreans identified ten pairs of opposites as the principles of reality: limit and unlimited, odd and even, one and multitude, right and left, male and female, rest and motion, straight and crooked, light and darkness, good and bad, square and oblong. Although some scholars have argued that this table of opposites – or at least the version attested by Aristotle – is likely a product of the early Academy rather than of the

[19] Pl. *Phd*. 70c = *OF* 428i.
[20] The phrase παλαιὸς λόγος (cf. Pl. *L*. 4.715e = *OF* 31iii, *Ep*. 7.335a = *OF* 433i) is one of the ways in which Plato implicitly references Orphic material (Bernabé 2011, 234f.).
[21] See Ch. 3 n. 192.
[22] Emp. frr. 16-36 DK. On Empedocles' cosmic cycle, see O'Brien 1969; Trépanier 2003; Gregory 2007, 78-101. Against the dominant symmetrical interpretation, see Cerri 2004 and Sedley 2007b, 31-74.
[23] Emp. fr. 21.3-5 DK; cf. Anaxag. fr. 15 DK.
[24] See Bernabé 2008e, 1149-1156; Ferella 2019. On Parmenides' relationship with Pythagoreanism, see Cornford 1939, 1-52 and Burkert 2013.
[25] Parm. frr. 8.57-63, 9 DK.

early Pythagoreans,[26] it is undeniable that binary opposition was one of the main features of Presocratic cosmology, at least since the time of Heraclitus.[27]

Pairs of opposites appear frequently in Orphic sources, starting with the fifth-century BC tablets from Olbia. The lines inscribed in the upper half of the recto of tablet 2 (*OF* 464), which read "peace war / truth falsehood" (εἰρήνη πόλεμος / ἀλήθεια ψεῦδος), immediately remind us of a well-known Heraclitean fragment: "The god is day night, winter summer, war peace, satiety hunger" (fr. 67 DK ὁ θεὸς ἡμέρη εὐφρόνη, χειμὼν θέρος, πόλεμος εἰρήνη, κόρος λιμός κτλ). At a closer look, however, the two texts appear to have a markedly different meaning. Heraclitus' fragment focuses on unity: unlike in the Orphic text, the members in each pair of opposites are not arranged according to the good/bad distinction, because what matters is that they are all one in the deity. The Orphic text, on the other hand, focuses on duality: truth and falsehood are associated, respectively, with peace and war, which invites comparison with Empedocles' theory of Love and Strife.[28] If it is not too far-fetched to interpret εἰρήνη πόλεμος in tablet 2 as a reference to opposite cosmic principles,[29] we may understand the inscription as an expression, however enigmatic, of a dualistic worldview which regards generation and life on earth – which stem from division – as being not only an illusion but also evil, while truth and goodness are identified with the immaterial and the otherworldly. According to this worldview, one's true identity lies not in one's body but in one's soul, which is immortal.

[26] Frank 1923, 254f.; Burkert 1972, 52; Zhmud 2012 [1994], 451f. *Contra* Goldin 2015.
[27] There is some evidence to suggest that pairs of opposite elements already featured in the cosmology of Anaximander (Naddaf 1998, 3).
[28] Emp. R63 LM = Plut. *Soll. anim.* 7.964d-e ἐπεὶ τό γε μὴ παντάπασι καθαρεύειν ἀδικίας τὸν ἄνθρωπον οὕτω τὰ ζῷα μεταχειριζόμενον Ἐμπεδοκλῆς καὶ Ἡράκλειτος ὡς ἀληθὲς προσδέχονται, πολλάκις ὀδυρόμενοι καὶ λοιδοροῦντες τὴν φύσιν, ὡς ἀνάγκην καὶ πόλεμον οὖσαν … ὅπου καὶ τὴν γένεσιν αὐτὴν ἐξ ἀδικίας συντυγχάνειν λέγουσι, R89 LM = Hipp. *Haer*. 7.29.8f. ἡ μὲν φιλία εἰρήνη τίς ἐστι καὶ ὁμόνοια καὶ στοργή, ἕνα τέλειον <καὶ> κατηρτισμένον εἶναι προαιρουμένη τὸν κόσμον· τὸ δὲ νεῖκος ἀεὶ διασπᾷ τὸ ἓν καὶ κατακερματίζει καὶ ἀπεργάζεται ἐξ ἑνὸς πολλά. ἔστι μὲν οὖν τὸ μὲν νεῖκος αἴτιον τῆς κτίσεως πάσης.
[29] Bernabé 2008b, 540.

These beliefs are expressed in an equally succinct and cryptic manner in tablets 1 (*OF* 463) and 3 (*OF* 465). The latter contains the following pairs of opposites, "[falsehood] truth / body soul" ([ψεῦδος] ἀλήθεια / σῶμα ψυχή), symbolising the soul's primacy over the body and the inferiority of the mortal (i.e., temporary), embodied condition, which obscures the true immortal, divine nature of the initiate, which is expressed by the soul. One might even be inclined to read here a suggestion that the body apprehends only falsehood, through sense perception, whereas the soul apprehends truth, perhaps through Dionysian *ecstasis* or mystic revelation (through cognition) – which would be a very Platonic (and Parmenidean) sentiment – but this is perhaps too far in the realm of speculation. The first tablet (*OF* 463) reads "life death life / truth" (βίος θάνατος βίος / ἀλήθεια), a reference to the belief in the soul's immortality.[30] Given the eschatological and soteriological significance of memory in the Orphic context, it is possible that ἀλήθεια, as suggested by Tortorelli Ghidini (2006, 157) and Bernabé (2008b, 539), is meant here in the etymological sense of 'lack of forgetfulness' (λήθη): in this case, the formula would not only be a proclamation of the mystic truth that, for the initiate, there is life after death, but would also allude to the role which memory plays in securing this post-mortem existence.

Pairs of opposites also appear in the 'great tablet' from Thurii (*OF* 492; 4th/3rd cent. BC), whose enigmatic text has puzzled scholars since its discovery in 1897.[31] The following sequence of vocatives, found in line 5 intermixed with meaningless letter groups, "air […] fire […] Mother […] Nestis […] night […] day" (ἀέρ … πῦρ … Μᾶτερ … Νῆστι … νύξ … ἡμέρα), invites comparison with similar noun sequences from other Orphic texts,

[30] Graf 2011, 56: "'[F]rom life to death to life: this is the Truth'. Life leads to death, but again to new life. As a recent text has it, a gold tablet in the form of an ivy leaf from Pelinna in Thessaly dated about a century later [*OF* 485.1]: 'Now you have died and now, thrice happy one, you have been born, on this very day'" (cf. Burkert 1998, 395; Tortorelli Ghidini 2006, 156; Bernabé 2008b, 538). A reference to the cycle of reincarnation is less likely in this context, given the negative connotation that it had for the Orphics.
[31] A brief history of the scholarship can be found in Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008, 138f.

namely, the so-called *Orphic Hymn to Zeus* (*OF* 243.7f.)[32] and the '*Orphic Oath*' (*OF* 619) quoted by Theon of Smyrna (*fl.* 100 AD).

> ἓν δὲ δέμας βασίλειον, ἐν ᾧ τάδε πάντα κυκλεῖται,
> πῦρ καὶ ὕδωρ καὶ γαῖα καὶ αἰθὴρ νύξ τε καὶ ἦμαρ
>
> One kingly body, encircling all these things, fire and water, earth and ether, night and day.[33]
>
> ναὶ μὴν ἀθανάτων γεννήτορας αἰὲν ἐόντων
> πῦρ καὶ ὕδωρ γαῖάν τε καὶ οὐρανὸν ἠδὲ σελήνην
> ἠέλιόν τε Φάνη τε μέγαν καὶ Νύκτα μέλαιναν
>
> Verily, by the ancestors of the immortals, who exist forever, Fire and Water, Earth and Sky, Moon and Sun, the great Phanes and black Night.[34]

The author of the *Hymn to Zeus* explains that the god contains the entire universe within himself, by listing the physical and temporal elements on which reality is founded; like in the *Orphic Oath*, these elements are arranged in couples of opposites: fire and water, earth and air, night and day. These same elements are invoked in the same order by the author of the *Orphic Oath*, with a few differences: air is replaced with sky,[35] and night and day are represented by two equivalent couples, namely, moon and sun, and, in inverted order, Phanes[36] and Night.

If we look back at line 5 of the 'great tablet', some of the aforementioned elements – air, fire, night, day – are immediately recognisable, while others – earth and water – are hidden behind names of deities. Mother is the usual epithet of the goddess Earth, who is

[32] This is the title given to a short hexametric poem celebrating Zeus as the (re-)creator of the universe (see below §6.1): the longest version appeared in the *Orphic Rhapsodies* (*OF* 243), but a shorter version was already included in the *Derveni Theogony* (*OF* 14). On the *Orphic Hymn to Zeus*, see esp. Bernabé 2009b.
[33] *OF* 243.7f.
[34] *OF* 619.
[35] Cf. Emp. fr. 22.2 DK.
[36] This is one of the many names given to the 'firstborn' deity responsible for the creation of the universe according to the Orphic theogonic myth; as the name implies, he was considered the source of daylight and eventually came to be identified with the sun (Apio *ap.* Ps.-Clem. *Rom. Hom.* 6.5.4 = *OF* 127ii ὃν Φάνητα Ὀρφεὺς καλεῖ, ὅτι αὐτοῦ φανέντος τὸ πᾶν ἐξ αὐτοῦ ἔλαμψεν, τῷ φέγγει τοῦ διαπρεπεστάτου τῶν στοιχείων πυρὸς ἐν τῷ ὑγρῷ τελεσφορουμένου).

mentioned explicitly in the first line of the text (Γᾷ ματρί). It is only logical, then, to identify the last member of the list, Nestis, with the missing element, water. This interpretation is supported by a fragment of Empedocles (fr. 6 DK), which has been adduced for comparison with *OF* 492.5 by Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal (2008, 145f.):

> τέσσαρα τῶν πάντων ῥιζώματα πρῶτον ἄκουε·
> Ζεὺς ἀργὴς Ἥρη τε φερέσβιος ἠδ' Ἀιδωνεύς
> Νῆστίς θ', ἣ δακρύοις τέγγει κρούνωμα βρότειον
>
> Hear first the four roots of all things: bright Zeus, life-giving Hera, Aidoneus,
> and Nestis, who moistens the mortal fountain with tears.

Here, each of the four elements is identified with a deity; ancient commentators disagree on whether Hera should be identified with earth and Aidoneus (i.e., Hades) with air or the other way around,[37] but they all interpret Zeus as fire and Nestis as water – the latter being clearly described as such in the text. Based on the comparison with Empedocles' fragment, Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal advance a possible further interpretation for *OF* 492.5, on which air and fire represent Zeus and Dionysus-Helios, respectively, and Mother Earth and Nestis are alternative names for Demeter and Persephone: these, together with the primordial deities Night and Phanes[38] (i.e., day), are arguably the most important gods in the Orphic pantheon.[39] Regardless of whether this interpretation is correct, the author of the 'great tablet' appears to be echoing cosmological doctrines which closely resemble those of Empedocles and of the Derveni commentator[40] – which might be the reason why the four

[37] The first interpretation is found in Diogenes Laërtius (8.76), Hippolytus (*Haer*. 7.29.5), and Stobaeus (*Ecl*. 1.10.11b p. 121 Wachsmuth), the other in Aëtius (1.3.20).
[38] Cf. *OF* 492.3.
[39] Night was the primordial deity in at least one version of the ancient Orphic theogony (*OF* 20) and plays a fundamental role in the *Derveni Theogony* as Zeus' counsellor (*P.Derv*. cols 10-12 KPT = *OF* 6). Phanes is the first creator of the universe in the *Rhapsodies* (*OF* 103-106) and likely figured in the same capacity in the *Derveni Theogony* (West 1983a, 86-88; Kouremenos 2006, 23-25; Santamaría 2016b). Zeus was hailed as the ruler and (second) creator of the universe in the *Derveni Theogony* and other Orphic texts (*OF* 13-17, 31, 226-249). Finally, Persephone and Demeter were revered by the Orphics as the mother and grandmother, respectively, of their patron god Dionysus (*OF* 379-402).
[40] Betegh (2004, 275) argues that the Derveni author, whose cosmological theory is centred around air and fire, identified these two elements with the Night-Aether pair at the beginning of the *Orphic Theogony*:

elements are not arranged in pairs of opposites, like in the *Hymn to Zeus* and the *Orphic Oath*: rather, the lighter elements (i.e., air and fire), identified with Olympian deities, are mentioned first, followed by the heavier elements (i.e., earth and water), identified with chthonic deities.

One might object that the sort of binary thinking that I have described is hardly an exclusive feature of the Orphics or of certain ancient Greek philosophers, but is instead something that seems to be intrinsic to the human mind.[41] Even if we admit that humans are inherently predisposed to think in terms of binaries due to our brain structure, we cannot deny that the degree to which this tendency is emphasised is widely dependent on cultural factors. In ancient Greece, the cultural shift taking place roughly around the turn of the fifth century BC gave rise to a dualistic view of the individual, which, in its most extreme form, culminated in the Orphic idea of the soul/body dichotomy, where the body – in a complete reversal of traditional morality – is an evil to be overcome.[42] In the Orphic context, binary opposition is more than just a hermeneutic device which enables man to make sense of a chaotic reality by organising it into a set of mutually exclusive categories. Formulas like 'ψεῦδος ἀλήθεια' and 'σῶμα ψυχή' encapsulate the essence of the Orphic worldview, founded upon the distinction between the illusion of mortal existence and the true, eternal life which the initiate seeks to attain after death; as such, they possess a religious and metaphysical significance that is peculiar to Orphism.

"Night's superior importance in the poem is reflected by air's preponderance over fire in the author's theory. We have also seen that the author's cosmogony may have started with air and fire, and the other forms of matter developed later from these two. On this interpretation, we get remarkably close to the scheme that Diodorus of Eritrea and Aristoxenus (*ap.* Hippolytus *Ref.* 1.2.12) say Pythagoras received from Zaratas (Zoroaster). According to this dualistic scheme […], the sexual distinction (father-mother) is further expressed in terms of the light-dark opposition, and thus corresponds to the Aither-Night pair, but represents also the fundamental physical pairs of opposites (hot-cold, dry-moist, light-heavy, swift-slow)".

[41] On this subject, see esp. the seminal work of Robert Hertz (1960 [1907]; 1973 [1909]), who pioneered the study of dualistic thought as an anthropological phenomenon.

[42] See above §3.1. On the 'vilification' of the body in the context of the Orphic anthropogony, see below §6.2. On the possible Zoroastrian influence on the rise of dualism in fifth-century Greece, see Burkert 2004, 99-124.

As I argued in the previous chapters, Plato internalised the dualistic worldview espoused by the Orphics and made it the foundation for his theories about human nature and cognition, based on the dichotomy between the rational, immortal, and divine principle, which is drawn upwards to the realm of eternal and absolute Truth, and the chaotic, mortal, material principle, which pulls in the opposite direction, towards baseness, mindlessness, and falsehood. With his theory of Forms, Plato applied this dualistic model to the nature of the universe, in the context of a general symmetry between micro and macrocosm which informs his thinking. According to Platonic ontology – and contrary to all previous schools of thought, save perhaps Pythagoreanism[43] – sensible reality derives its essence not from material principles, but from eternal, unchanging substances (οὐσίαι) which are instantiated in the phenomena and yet exist independently from them. These entities, which are referred to by Plato as "things in themselves" (τὰ μὲν αὐτὰ καθ' αὑτά) or Forms (εἴδη/ἰδέαι), are the objects of true knowledge, which, contrary to popular belief, is not acquired from experience, through the senses, but is instead recovered from latent memories which can be awakened by external stimuli: such process of recollection (ἀνάμνησις) is made possible by the affinity which exists between the human soul and those perfect and immutable entities which are the true causes of the phenomena.

As previously discussed with regard to the theory of the soul, there was a great deal of nuance in Plato's dualism. This is also the case with Plato's ontology. In the *Phaedo* and *Republic*, binary opposition is used as a tool for explaining the nature of the Forms, but the two sides of each binary do not hold the same ontological status: in binaries like 'Good and evil', 'Justice and injustice', 'Beauty and ugliness', etc. only the first element has full ontological status, while the other exists parasitically, so to speak, as the negation of the

[43] Arist. *Metaph.* 987b7-18. On the possible influence of mathematical Pythagoreanism on Plato's theory of Forms, see Horky 2013 (esp. pp. 145-199). For a more sceptical account, see Burkert 1972, 83-96; Zhmud 2012 [1994], 421-432; 2016; Huffman 2013.

former.[44] The phenomena also derive their existence from the Forms, thus falling somewhere between Being and non-Being, in the realm of becoming. On the one hand, then, Plato's mature ontology can be described as dualistic in the sense that it posits a fundamental distinction between the Forms and their instances; on the other hand, however, the very criterion on which this distinction is based – namely, that the Forms alone exist in the full sense of the word (i.e., absolutely), whereas the phenomena only exist in a 'weaker', derivative sense – reveals that Plato's philosophy was not dualistic in the way that, for example, Zoroastrianism was.[45] Here, we may discern a key similarity between Plato and the Orphics. For the Orphics, too, the dichotomy between the spiritual and the material, the immortal and the mortal, corresponds to the dichotomy between truth and falsehood: truth, goodness, and knowledge (i.e., memory) belong to the realm of the gods and of the purified souls, whereas evil, appearance, and ignorance (i.e., forgetfulness) belong to the material realm which the impure souls are forced to inhabit.

5.2 The allegory of the Cave

Analogy is one of the methods most frequently employed by Plato in his writings for discussing the theory of Forms: indeed, the dialogues contain countless examples of similes,

[44] Some scholars (e.g., Guthrie 1978, 97-100; Alican and Thesleff 2013, 31) argue that Plato not only denied the existence of Forms of negations and evil or base things, but also of Forms of artefacts and trivialities (cf. Pl. *Prm*. 130b-c). This view, with which I agree myself, is based chiefly on the testimony of Aristotle (*Metaph*. 990b-1080a), who was himself highly critical of the theory of Forms; on this, see the seminal works of Cherniss (1944) and Fine (1993).

[45] I thus find myself in agreement, albeit on very different grounds, with scholars like Nails (2013, 77-87) and others, who deny the 'Two Worlds' ontology that is traditionally ascribed to Plato: there exists, *stricto sensu*, only one 'world' according to Plato's mature philosophy, and that is the world of Forms, which exist both in themselves and in their instances (see, e.g., Findlay 1972, 235f.). I do not rule out the possibility that Plato might have moved towards a more properly dualistic conception of reality later in his career, as the theory of two cosmic principles in the *Timaeus* (and, potentially, the unwritten doctrine of the One and the Indefinite Dyad) would seem to suggest, but this is a topic for a different study. For a more detailed discussion of Plato's supposed dualism, see De Vogel 1986 and Alican 2021.

metaphors, and analogies, usually drawn from the field of human activities.[46] The *Republic*, in particular, is especially rich in such examples. The famous analogies of the Sun, Divided Line, and Cave, which occupy the long section spanning from the end of Book VI (506b) to the beginning of Book VII (521b), constitute some of the most studied passages in the Platonic corpus, as they are central to our understanding of Plato's metaphysical and epistemological doctrine.[47] Among them, the allegory of the Cave stands out as one of the most famous passages in the entire Platonic corpus, which, as Annas (1981, 252) points out, is somewhat unfortunate, since it is also one of the most disputed – not only due to the interpretive problems posed by the allegory itself, but also to the difficulty of harmonising its meaning with the analogies of the Sun and the Line. Since Plato himself advises us to interpret the Cave allegory in connection with the previous two images,[48] I will briefly summarise the content of the analogies of the Sun (*R.* 6.504a-509c) and the Divided Line (6.509d-511e) before delving into the Cave.

The purpose of the Sun analogy is to illustrate the nature of the Good, the "greatest object of study" (6.505a μέγιστον μάθημα) against which all things just and proper ought to be measured. Naturally, a subject of such gravity and complexity cannot be approached directly, especially given the limitations of the written medium. Hence, Socrates refuses to discuss the Good itself and only agrees to speak, after much hesitation, about "what appears

[46] On Plato's use of analogy and metaphor, see the monographs by Louis (1945) and Grenet (1948) and, more recently, the collection of essays edited by Destrée and Edmonds (2017), with ample bibliography.
[47] The bibliography on this section of the *Republic* is far too vast to be adequately represented in the short space of a footnote. The following is thus an inevitably partial list: Shorey 1895; Ferguson 1921; 1922; 1934; Cornford 1932a; 1932b; Murphy 1932; Hackforth 1942; Joseph 1948; Raven 1953; Crombie 1962, 111-127; 163, 70-104; Malcolm 1962; 1981; Cross and Woozley 1964, 196-230; Rose 1966; Krämer 1969; 2011 [1997]; Fogelin 1971; White 1976, 89-115; Wilson 1976; Morrison 1977; Bedu-Addo 1978; Santas 1980; 2002; Sillitti 1980; Annas 1981, 242-271; Ferber 1981; 1989 [1984]; Smith 1981; 1996; 1997; Mohr 1984; Strang 1986; Karasmanis 1988; Fine 1990; 1999; Dixsaut 1991; Benitez 1995; Baltzly 1996; Baltes 1997; Ferrari 2002; 2003; Gerson 2002b; Press 2002; Seifert 2002; Calabi 2003; Campese 2003; Repellini 2003; Vegetti 2003, 13-33, 253-286; Dorter 2004; Rosen 2005, 255-301; Bailey 2006; Ferejohn 2006; Denyer 2007; Lisi 2007a; Foley 2008; Shields 2008; Benson 2010; Szlezák 2011 [1997]; Destrée 2012; El Murr 2014; Ferber and Damschen 2015; Rowett 2018, 142-166; Hosle 2020; Broadie 2021; Storey 2022.
[48] Pl. *R.* 7.517a-b. The three analogies are so closely intertwined that some scholars have referred to them collectively as a single extended "simile of light" (Ferguson 1921; 1922; 1934; Murphy 1932).

to be the offspring (ἔκγονος) of the Good and the thing which most closely resembles it":[49] that is to say, the sun. Reprising the metaphor of knowledge as vision,[50] Socrates draws attention to the peculiar nature of eyesight, which, unlike the other senses, requires a "third thing" that enables the sense organ to perceive its object, namely light.[51] The sun, being the source of light, can thus be considered the cause of vision. Just as the sun makes sensible objects visible to the eye by illuminating them with its light, so too the Good makes the objects of knowledge, which is to say the Forms, intelligible to the soul by infusing them with "truth and being" (ἀλήθειά τε καὶ τὸ ὄν).[52] However, just as light and vision should not be considered identical with the sun, even though they are similar to it and caused by it, truth and knowledge should also be considered distinct from the Good:

> αἰτίαν δ᾽ ἐπιστήμης οὖσαν καὶ ἀληθείας, ὡς γιγνωσκομένης μὲν διανοοῦ, οὕτω δὲ καλῶν ἀμφοτέρων ὄντων, γνώσεώς τε καὶ ἀληθείας, ἄλλο καὶ κάλλιον ἔτι τούτων ἡγούμενος αὐτὸ ὀρθῶς ἡγήσῃ.
>
> Since [the Good] is the cause of Knowledge and Truth, you must regard it as knowable, but on the other hand, as beautiful as they both are, Knowledge and Truth, you will be right in thinking that it is something different and even more beautiful than these.[53]

Fogelin (1971, 372) identifies two possible readings of this passage. The weak reading, which is the one generally adopted by scholars, amounts to saying that "whereas it is perfectly correct to treat Goodness as an object of knowledge, we must also keep in mind its special status midst other objects of knowledge". The strong reading, on the other hand, amounts to saying that although one might, "rather superficially", regard the Form of

[49] Pl. *R.* 6.506e.
[50] Cf. Pl. *R.* 6.484c, 506c, *Phdr.* 270e.
[51] As noted by modern commentators (Adam 1902, II, 57 *ad* 507c20; Chambry 1933, 136-138 n. 1; Cornford 1941, 213 n. 2; Adorno 1953, I, 537f. n. 3; Vegetti 2003, 87 n. 129), Plato acknowledges elsewhere (*Ti.* 67b) that hearing also requires a medium, namely air, which enables sound to travel and reach the ear; however, in the context of the Sun analogy, where the focus is not on sense perception per se, scientific accuracy can be sacrificed in favour of rhetorical efficacy.
[52] Pl. *R.* 6.508d.
[53] Pl. *R.* 6.508e.

the Good as an object of knowledge, one "ought instead to view it as something quite transcending knowledge". While this interpretation is certainly controversial, I cannot help but agree with Fogelin that it is likely one which Plato intentionally implied, especially given the broad structural parallel between this passage and the one immediately following:

> τὸν ἥλιον τοῖς ὁρωμένοις οὐ μόνον οἶμαι τὴν τοῦ ὁρᾶσθαι δύναμιν παρέχειν φήσεις, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν γένεσιν καὶ αὔξην καὶ τροφήν, οὐ γένεσιν αὐτὸν ὄντα … καὶ τοῖς γιγνωσκομένοις τοίνυν μὴ μόνον τὸ γιγνώσκεσθαι φάναι ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ παρεῖναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ εἶναί τε καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν ὑπ᾽ ἐκείνου αὐτοῖς προσεῖναι, οὐκ οὐσίας ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ἀλλ᾽ ἔτι ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβείᾳ καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος.
>
> The sun, I believe you will say, not only gives visible objects the power of visibility but is also their source of nourishment, growth, and existence, though it is not itself existence […]. Then, you must also say that intelligible objects receive from the Good not only their knowability but also their being and essence, even though the Good itself is not Essence but is even beyond Essence, surpassing it in dignity and power.[54]

Further evidence in support of the strong reading can be found in Socrates' admission to merely having "opinions" about the Good but not (true) knowledge, hence the need to employ metaphor and allegory.[55] Granted, this statement, in and of itself, does not preclude the possibility that someone else, such as the philosopher-rulers of an ideal city, could in principle achieve such knowledge, but it should at the very least discourage the reader from being overly optimistic. At any rate, it is not difficult to understand why Plato might have hesitated to state the following equivalence explicitly: that just as the Good is the source of Essence, while being at the same time beyond Essence, so Knowledge and Truth proceed from the Good, although the Good transcends them both. Even if the practical unknowability of the Good is very much implicit in the analogy with the sun – which, though visible, cannot be looked at directly in the same way that any other object can,

[54] Pl. *R.* 6.509b.
[55] Pl. *R.* 6.506c-e.

making it effectively 'beyond' human vision[56] – to call attention to it would undermine the purpose which the analogies of the Sun, Line, and Cave are meant to serve in the discussion of Books VI-VII and, more broadly, within the wider context of the dialogue. More on this later.

Setting aside for now any unconventional interpretations, the basic meaning of the Sun analogy is quite straightforward. The sun serves as a convenient term of comparison to illustrate the position occupied by the Good relative to the Forms: the Good gives the Forms their Essence and makes them intelligible to the human intellect, just as the sun makes life on earth possible and allows the eye to see physical objects. The statement which concludes the analogy, however, has long been the subject of debate.[57] Indeed, the obscurity of Socrates' description of the Good as being "beyond Essence" (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας) is clearly intentional, as it prompts Glaucon to seek further clarification: upon his request, Socrates expands on the comparison between the Good and the sun by introducing a visual representation of the relationship between their respective domains. Given a line divided into two unequal segments, representing different degrees of clarity and truth, the shorter segment (AC) will correspond to the visible world and the longer one (CB) to the intelligible realm.[58] If we divide each segment according to the same proportion, the longer subsection of the shorter segment (DC) will represent the objects of the visible world and the shorter subsection (AD) shadows and reflections (i.e., images of visible things); similarly, the longer subsection of the longer segment (EB) will represent the purely intelligible objects (i.e., Forms), and the shorter subsection (CE) the mental images

[56] Cf. Pl. *Phd*. 99d-100a, *L*. 10.897d-e.
[57] See, among others, Krämer 1969; 2011 [1997]; Fogelin 1971; Santas 1980; Sillitti 1980; Ferber 1984; Dixsaut 1991; Baltes 1997; Ferrari 2002; 2003; Vegetti 2003, 253-286; Szlezák 2011 [1997]; Ferber and Damschen 2015.
[58] Pl. *R*. 6.509d. That the longer segment should represent the intelligible world and the shorter the world of appearances is determined by the criterion on which the division is based, which is to say, the difference in truth (ἀλήθεια) and clarity (σαφήνεια) between the two domains. For further discussion of the construction of the line, including a survey of the differing interpretations offered by scholars, see Smith 1996.

employed by "students of geometry, arithmetic, and the like".[59] As Socrates makes clear at the end of the passage, the focus of the Line analogy is chiefly epistemological. To each of the four subsections correspond the following cognitive states, each having "a degree of clearness corresponding to the degree to which their objects participate in reality": the highest level is called 'intelligence' (νόησις), the second 'thinking' (διάνοια), the third 'belief' (πίστις), and the fourth 'illusion' (εἰκασία).[60] How one may reach the highest degree of enlightenment, after ascending through the different levels of cognition, is the subject of the allegory of the Cave (*R.* 7.514a-518b).

Plato encourages the reader to imagine a group of prisoners who have spent their entire lives chained inside a subterranean cave with their backs facing the entrance, unable to move or turn their heads; higher up, behind them, burns a flame, which projects the shadows of the objects located between it and the prisoners onto the cave wall. Behind the prisoners, a group of men, hidden by a parapet, carry above their heads various artificial objects, performing a puppet-show for their captive audience. If one of these prisoners were set free and made to look at the puppets, he would initially regard them as less real than the shadows which he is accustomed to seeing, and if he were dragged out of the cave into the sunlight, he would be temporarily blinded by the sun's brightness. Until his eyes could adjust to daylight, he would be forced to look at shadows and reflections; eventually, his eyes would be able to bear the sight of real objects, including the sun itself. The freed prisoner would then realise that what he previously regarded as true – namely, the shadows

[59] Pl. *R.* 6.510c. The fact that this proportion results in the two middle subsections of the line (DC and CE) being equal has puzzled scholars, as one would expect to have segments of increasing length corresponding to the increasing truth of the objects that they represent; some (e.g., Ross 1951, 45; Raven 1965, 145) consider this feature of the Line to be unintentional, while others (e.g., Fogelin 1971; Morrison 1977; Karasmanis 1988; Storey 2022) see it as indicating an equivalence between διάνοια and πίστις. Scholars disagree on the object of CE: some believe it to be mathematical Forms (e.g., Hackforth 1942), or, alternatively, mental images of (mathematical) Forms (e.g., Mohr 1984; Smith 1981; 1996); others believe it to be mathematical objects, intermediate between Forms and visible objects (e.g., Crombie 1962, 126; 1963, 76; Denyer 2007). According to yet another interpretation, CE and EB symbolise two different cognitive processes having the same object, namely, Forms (e.g., Cross and Woozley 1964, 230).
[60] Pl. *R.* 6.511d-e.

inside the cave – were mere images – indeed, images of images – of what exists outside the cave. The basic interpretation of the allegory should be beyond question, as it is given by Socrates towards the end of the passage:

> Every feature of this image […] should be applied to what has been said before. The prison represents the region which appears to us through sight and the firelight within it the power of the sun. And if you regard the ascent (τὴν δὲ ἄνω ἀνάβασιν) and the contemplation of the things above as the soul's ascension to the intelligible realm (τὴν εἰς τὸν νοητὸν τόπον τῆς ψυχῆς ἄνοδον), you will not misunderstand my conjecture.[61]

If the correspondence between the cave and the lower section of the divided line, representing the visible realm, and between the outside world and the upper section of the line, representing the intelligible realm, is all but uncontroversial, problems arise when we focus our attention on the finer details. A major point of contention is whether each of the four cognitive states described in the Line analogy has an exact parallel in the allegory of the Cave. The traditional interpretation equates the original state of the prisoners with εἰκασία, the freed prisoner's turning to the statues with πίστις, looking at the shadows and reflections of objects outside the cave with διάνοια, and looking directly at real objects with νόησις.[62] However, the difficulty of identifying the objects of cognition of the lower line with those of the first two stages in the Cave,[63] among other things, has led some scholars to reject the parallelism.[64] Other questions centre around the significance of specific elements of the Cave allegory, such as the puppeteers and, most importantly, the prisoners:

[61] Pl. *R.* 7.517a-b.
[62] This interpretation is defended by Adam (1902, II, 156-163), Malcolm (1962; 1981), Irwin (1977b, 221), White (1979, 184), Annas (1981, 254-256), Karasmanis (1988), Fine (1990), Wilberding (2004), Szlezák (2011 [1997]), and Hosle (2020).
[63] Morrison 1977, 212 n. 2: "Whereas it is generally thought that the contents of the upper subsection of the lower section of the Line are actual objects of sense perception and the contents of the lower subsection there are their actual shadows and reflections, the shadows of the Cave are thought (because Plato says so) to be all that the ordinary uneducated man perceives, and the puppets which throw these shadows to be the general concepts reached by the ordinary man in the first stage of his education".
[64] Ferguson (1921; 1922), Murphy (1932), Joseph (1948, 43), Raven (1953), Morrison (1977), Ferber (1981), and Strang (1986).

much ink has been spilt over the meaning of Socrates' claim that the prisoners in the cave are "like us" (515a ὁμοίους ἡμῖν), for much of the interpretation of the passage rests on our understanding of these very words. While some of the interpretative problems regarding the allegory of the Cave arguably derive from the flawed assumption that allegorical language should be held to the same standards of accuracy and preciseness as philosophical language, others have to do with the symbology itself, which can easily be misinterpreted.[65] My goal, then, is to analyse the origins of the Cave image, in order better to understand the message that Plato wanted to convey.

In the case of such a complex and evocative image as the Cave, I believe we must distinguish between two different levels of interpretation: the exoteric, accessible to the average (educated) Athenian, and the esoteric, which might have only been accessible to Plato's closest disciples. With regard to the former, scholars have suggested a number of famous caves which could have provided the inspiration for the setting of the Cave allegory.[66] The most salient parallel, in my view, is to be found in the cave of Trophonius at Lebadeia in Boeotia, which was one of the major oracular sites in ancient Greece.[67] According to the testimony of Pausanias (9.39.2-14), who wrote from personal experience, the consultant, after undergoing ritual purification and offering preliminary sacrifices, was first made to drink the water of Forgetfulness (Λήθη),[68] to clear his mind of every thought, and then the water of Memory (Μνημοσύνη), to help him remember what he was to witness during the consultation; he then descended to the cave and lay down on the ground, holding

[65] Ferguson 1921, 132: "In interpreting these similes we fall into error, which engenders in turn more errors, from the moment that the symbols become more than symbols and take on a certain reality of their own. This I believe to be the cause of all our perplexities and disputes. It is therefore important to determine how Socrates arrives at his symbolism".
[66] Wright (1906, 138-142) listed the cave of Vari in Attica, the Corycian cave at Delphi, and the quarry grottoes in Syracuse. The caves of the Athenian Acropolis, which served as religious shrines (see Camp 2001, 119-121) have been proposed, more recently, by Corcoran (2016, 183f. n. 4).
[67] On the cult of Trophonius, see the comprehensive study by Bonnechere (2003a). On the practice of mystic incubation in ancient Greece, see Kingsley 1999, 77-86.
[68] Cf. Pl. *R.* 10.621a = *OF* 462.

honey cakes in his hands.[69] What followed was "a kind of 'psychedelic' experience"[70] which, at least according to Plutarch's description in his *De Genio Socratis* (589f-592e), resembled Er's vision of the universe as told by Plato in the final myth of the *Republic*. Pausanias' mention of the waters of Lethe and Mnemosyne, which also figure in the Orphic vision of the afterlife, as attested in the gold tablets (*OF* 474-477), makes clear that the *katabasis* to Trophonius' cave, as it was commonly referred to,[71] was more akin to a death and rebirth ritual than an oracular consultation and may thus be compared to the initiation rites of the Orphic and Eleusinian mysteries.[72]

Another source of inspiration for the Cave allegory, which Plato's audience would have easily recognised, were undoubtedly the Orphic and Eleusinian mysteries, where light, as the evidence attests,[73] played a fundamental role: torchlight processions were a prominent feature of the Eleusinian rites, and the showing of a great light marked the culmination of the initiation ritual in both Eleusis and Samothrace.[74] Therefore, Cornford's (1903, 436) theory that the procession of images in the firelit cave was inspired by the showing of sacred objects in the torchlit initiation ceremony at Eleusis does not seem at all unreasonable. If in the context of the mysteries, as Seaford (2005, 603) suggests, fire and torchlight were associated with sunlight, the hypothesis of an Orphic-Eleusinian (or broadly mystic) influence on the allegory becomes all the more probable, as the fire in the cave is

[69] Cf. Ar. *Nu*. 506-508.
[70] Clark 1968, 74.
[71] Schachter 1984, 260 n. 11.
[72] Bernabé 2016b, 28: "In celebrating the mysteries, initiates experienced some suffering and also, subsequently, intensely positive feelings. Somehow, they were exposed to an extreme situation (terror, foresight of death) and then released from it. On many occasions, it was indeed a sort of *imitatio mortis* in which they 'rehearsed' the transit to the netherworld […] as a kind of preparatory treatment against the real experience of death". On the links between the Eleusinian mysteries and the cult of Trophonius, see Bonnechere 2003b.
[73] Soph. *OC* 1048-1053, Ar. *Ra*. 447f., 455-459, Dio Chrys. 12.33 = *OF* 603, Plut. fr. 178 Sandbach = *OF* 594.
[74] See Burkert 1983a, 276f.; Clinton 2004; Bremmer 2014, 33. Torches were also used in the festival of Bendis, alluded to at the very beginning of the *Republic* (1.328a), during which a mounted torch-race was performed in honour of the goddess (see Sekunda 2016).

meant to represent the sun. Furthermore, seeing as Plato uses mystery initiation as a metaphor for philosophy,[75] it is only logical that the *epopteia* should serve as a symbol for the first step in the soul's ascent to the intelligible realm – which, in the narrative of the Cave, occurs when the prisoner is shown the artificial objects in the firelight. Of course, the mysteries are not the only aspect of Athenian culture that is alluded to in the Cave allegory: the puppet show, representing the lowest level of cognition, is clearly a reference to theatre, and the image-bearers, if they are not a mere piece of "mythological machinery",[76] almost certainly symbolise the producers of culture, most notably the poets.[77]

So far, I have not veered from the general consensus in my analysis of the Cave image, but the arguments which I will present below will be more controversial. Before delving into the esoteric interpretation of the Cave, let us first draw some interim conclusions. Whereas the analogies of the Sun and the Line have a chiefly ontological and epistemological focus, the Cave allegory is mainly concerned with social and political matters. Its stated purpose is to illustrate the condition of ignorance – or, more precisely, "lack of education" (ἀπαιδευσία) – in which Plato's fellow citizens find themselves and the process through which they might be brought out of such a pitiful state.[78] This process is comparable to mystic initiation: it produces bewilderment and requires one to reject comfort and conventions. The first step consists in relinquishing traditional (i.e., second-hand) opinions on such matters as justice and the like,[79] in favour of correct (first-hand) opinions: this is the state of 'belief' (πίστις), whose objects are the instances of Forms, rather than the reflection or appearance of those instances – found, for example, in mimetic poetry – with

[75] See Intr. n. 10.
[76] Shorey 1895, 237.
[77] Joseph 1948, 39; Ferber 1981, 406; Destrée 2012, 119. Other scholars have proposed to identify them with the politicians (e.g., Ferguson 1922, 23) or the sophists (e.g., Cornford 1903, 436).
[78] This, indeed, is probably what Plato meant when he said that the prisoners in the cave are "like us" (see, e.g., Ferguson 1922, 21).
[79] Pl. *R.* 7.515d τῶν τοῦ δικαίου σκιῶν.

which the state of *eikasia* is concerned.[80] The next step involves leaving the world of opinion (i.e., the sensible world) for the intelligible world: this transition is accomplished through the study of mathematics, which is a necessary prerequisite to the study of moral truths (i.e., the higher Forms). The final step is the study of the Good itself. The metaphorical return to the cave is as arduous and painful as the ascent: the philosopher, being attuned to abstract thinking, will seem inept or crazy to his fellow citizens, and if he tries to convert them to philosophy, he may provoke their anger and end up being put to death – an obvious allusion to Socrates' fate.

Despite this anticlimactic conclusion, the Cave allegory is still, in the words of Annas (1981, 254), "Plato's most optimistic and beautiful picture of the power of philosophy", so much so, in fact, that it seemingly contradicts statements made elsewhere by Plato (e.g., *Phd*. 66e-67b), in which he denies – or is at least doubtful – that the human soul could ever attain full knowledge of the Forms so long as it remains imprisoned in the body. In order to explain this apparent inconsistency, it is necessary to analyse the deeper, esoteric layer of the Cave allegory. Scholars like Destrée (2012, 119) have already made a step in this direction by pointing out the otherworldly nature of the Cave. The parallel with Hades, already suggested by the subterranean setting, is underscored by Socrates when, quoting the famous words spoken by the ghost of Achilles in the Homeric *Nekyia*,[81] he compares life inside the cave to death:

> Do you think that [the released prisoner] […] would agree with Homer and greatly prefer 'to be the serf of a landless man' or suffer anything rather than go back to his old beliefs and live in the old way?[82]

[80] This interpretation was originally put forth by Nettleship (1901, 238-293) and adopted, among others, by Raven (1953) and Cross and Woozley (1964, 217-230). *Contra*, e.g., Ferguson 1921; 1922; Wilson 1976; Karasmanis 1988. A very similar reading has been defended recently by Hosle (2020, 67-76).
[81] *Od*. 11.489-491 βουλοίμην κ᾽ ἐπάρουρος ἐὼν θητευέμεν ἄλλῳ, / ἀνδρὶ παρ᾽ ἀκλήρῳ, ᾧ μὴ βίοτος πολὺς εἴη, / ἢ πᾶσιν νεκύεσσι καταφθιμένοισιν ἀνάσσειν.
[82] Pl. *R*. 7.516d.

If the cave in Plato's allegory is comparable to the underworld, then the experience of the released prisoner can be thought of as an *anabasis* or *anodos*,[83] that is to say, an 'anti-*katabasis*'. Stories of journeys into the underworld were told of gods and heroes – such as Dionysus, Heracles, and Theseus – and even mortals – like Pythagoras and Zalmoxis[84] – but, after the Homeric *Nekyia*, the most famous *katabasis* in ancient Greek literature was that of Orpheus, who, according to Ps.-Eratosthenes' testimony on the content of Aeschylus' *Bassaridae* (fr. 82 Mette = Ps.-Eratosth. *Catast*. 24), underwent a conversion after coming back from the underworld and became a worshipper of Apollo-Helios.[85] The experience of the freed prisoner in the Cave allegory can also be described as a conversion, which brings him to see the Good – symbolised by the sun in Plato's analogy – as the "cause for […] all that is right and beautiful, and […] the real source of truth and reason".[86] The Cave allegory may also be seen as foreshadowing the myth of Er at the end of the dialogue. The parallels between the two passages have been highlighted in a recent study by Hosle (2020, 76f.), who compares Er's vision of the heavenly bodies with the experience of the escaped prisoner who is finally able to look directly at the stars, the moon, and the sun; Er's resurrection at the end of the myth also has an analogue in the Cave allegory, in the prisoner's return to the cave. Like Er, then, the freed prisoner has a mission: to reveal what

[83] See Pl. *R*. 7.517b (see p. 176).

[84] The two are connected in the account of Herodotus (4.94-97), who reports that, according to the Greeks who lived on the Hellespont and the Black Sea, Zalmoxis was not a god, as the Getae believed, but a mortal, who had been a slave of Pythagoras in Samos before coming back to Thrace; there, he was honoured as a *daimon* after staging his own death and resurrection by retreating to an underground chamber and reappearing three years later, a trick that he had apparently learned from his old master. A similar exploit is attributed to Pythagoras by the Peripatetic Hermippus of Smyrna (*FGrHist* 1026 F 24 = D.L. 8.41), who lived in the third century BC, but there are grounds for believing that the story of Pythagoras' *katabasis* is at least as old as that of Zalmoxis, if not older (Burkert 1972, 155-161; Riedweg 2005, 56f.).

[85] It is unclear how much of the narrative related in the *Catasterisms* should be attributed to Aeschylus' lost play, but most scholars agree that the plot must have at least included the death of Orpheus at the hands of the Bassarids and the motif of Orpheus' devotion to Apollo-Helios as the reason behind Dionysus' anger (see pp. 30f.). The story of Orpheus' descent to Hades was already popular in the second half of the fifth century BC – when it is referenced by Euripides in his *Alcestis* (357-362 = *OF* 980) in a manner which presupposes the audience's familiarity with the myth – and it was possibly narrated in a pseudepigraphic poem dating from the late sixth or early fifth century BC (West 1983a, 5-13; Martin 2001; Edmonds 2015).

[86] Pl. *R*. 7.517c πάντων αὕτη ὀρθῶν τε καὶ καλῶν αἰτία … ἔν τε νοητῷ αὐτὴ κυρία ἀλήθειαν καὶ νοῦν παρασχομένη.

he has seen in the world above to the other prisoners and, if possible, to release them from their bonds and lead them out of the cave – for anything would be preferable to the life they lead.

The message which underlies the Cave allegory – namely, that life in the world of opinion (i.e., the physical world) is akin to death – is precisely what the Orphics believed, as attested by several Platonic passages, as well as Orphic ritual texts.[87] A famous passage from the *Cratylus* (400c = *OF* 430i), which I discussed at length in Chapter 3, references the Orphic idea of the body as tomb of the soul, which recurs in two other Platonic passages with clear Orphic connotation: namely, *Grg*. 493a-c (*OF* 434ii; quoted above, p. 83), where it is associated with the Orphic myth of the water-carriers,[88] and *Phdr*. 250c, which also references the idea of the body as a prison. The two images of the body as tomb and prison of the soul, which the Cave allegory combines in one, are the expression of a worldview which devalues one's present existence against the prospect of a better, truer life after death – the eternal life of the pure, divine soul – as opposed to the false life of the body: this is what was promised to the Orphic initiate, for whom death was not something to be dreaded but rather something to look forward to. This rather pessimistic view of life on earth as equal to captivity or even death is mirrored in Plato's belief in the inferiority of the visible, physical world compared to the invisible world of Forms, which underpins all aspects of his philosophy.

Given that the Cave image has such a profound significance for Plato, we should inquire whether it is referenced anywhere else in his works. As a matter of fact, there is, *pace* Wright (1906, 137), another Platonic passage in which the world of the living is

[87] E.g., *OF* 463 βίος, θάνατος, βίος / ἀλήθεια, 465 [ψεῦδος] ἀλήθεια / σῶμα ψυχή, 485.1, 486.1 νῦν ἔθανες καὶ νῦν ἐγένου, τρισόλβιε, ἄματι τῷδε. For further discussion, see above §3.1.

[88] Being made to carry water in broken pitchers was one of the two punishments reserved for the uninitiated in the afterlife according to the Orphic-Eleusinian tradition (see above §2.2); the other, lying in mud, is referenced later in Book VII (533c-d) as a metaphor for the condition of non-philosophers.

depicted as a cave, and it occurs, unsurprisingly, in one of Plato's eschatological myths, namely, the final myth of the *Phaedo* (107c-114c; see above §3.3.2). After describing the underground hollow where humans live and contrasting it with the world above, Plato remarks that there are many other cavities buried within the depths of the earth, which constitute different regions of the underworld:

> All around [the earth], in its hollows, there are many regions, some deeper and wider than the one we live in, some deeper but with a narrower opening than ours (τοὺς δὲ βαθυτέρους ὄντας τὸ χάσμα αὐτοὺς ἔλαττον ἔχειν τοῦ παρ' ἡμῖν τόπου), and some which are wider but less deep.[89]

It is impossible not to see a resemblance between the "long entrance" (εἴσοδος μακρά)[90] of the cave in the allegory and the "deeper [hollows] with a narrower opening than ours" mentioned in this passage of the *Phaedo*.[91] Even if we suppose that the reference was not intentional on Plato's part, the fact that his eschatological imagery is largely consistent across different dialogues invites us to compare the description of the underworld in the *Phaedo* with the Cave allegory in the *Republic* – which, as discussed above, has an underlying eschatological connotation. It is thus perfectly reasonable to assume that the main source of inspiration for these two passages was the same. A possible candidate, according to a theory put forth by West (1983a, 11f.), is the lost Orphic-Pythagorean allegorical poem titled *Krater*,[92] which may have also inspired a fragment of Empedocles,[93] where we find the same metaphor of the material world as a cave.[94] In short, there are solid

[89] Pl. *Phd*. 111c-d.
[90] Pl. *R*. 7.514a.
[91] It could be objected that, if a parallel is to be found between the two passages, the cave in the *Republic* should be the same as "our cave" in the *Phaedo*. I do not see this as affecting my argument, because I do not believe that Plato intended to draw a perfect equivalence between the *Phaedo* myth and the Cave: while the condition of the prisoners is said to resemble ours, it is ultimately an exaggerated representation, which makes the cave in the *Republic* much more 'otherworldly' than "our cave" in the *Phaedo* is meant to be. With this in mind, then, it seems quite fitting that the cave of the allegory should be deeper than the ones where humans are said to live in the *Phaedo* myth.
[92] See p. 115 and nn. 166, 168.
[93] Emp. fr. 120 DK ἠλύθομεν τόδ' ὑπ' ἄντρον ὑπόστεγον.
[94] See Wright 1906, 134-137.

grounds for thinking that the imagery for the Cave allegory came, either directly or through Empedocles, from an Orphic eschatological poem, since it is representative of the Orphic worldview, according to which life on earth is equivalent to being dead, and only the initiate is able to attain true life after the death of the body.

Having thus established the legitimacy of connecting the Cave allegory with the *Phaedo* myth, we should see if we can find any other parallels between the two passages. If we regard the cave as one of the subterranean cavities mentioned in the *Phaedo*, then it should follow that the outside world in the Cave allegory corresponds to the "true earth" of the *Phaedo* myth (110a ἡ ὡς ἀληθῶς γῆ) – that is to say, the place where virtuous souls dwell between incarnations:

> We inhabit a hollow of the earth but think we live on its surface; we call the air 'sky' and think it is the sky in which the stars move […]. But if one were to come to the top [of the air] […] and if his nature were strong enough to bear the sight (εἰ ἡ φύσις ἱκανὴ εἴη ἀνασχέσθαι θεωροῦσα), he would recognise that that is the real sky and the real light and the real earth (ἡ ὡς ἀληθῶς γῆ).[95]

The phrase "if his nature were strong enough to bear the sight" reminds us of the freed prisoner, who, upon exiting the cave, is initially unable to look at the objects in the outside world due to being blinded by the sun's brightness. This parallel confirms, once again, that the geographies described in the two passages are the same.[96] Besides, Plato himself ostensibly implies that the world outside the cave represents the place of afterlife reward when he says that "men who have been permitted to linger in the pursuit of knowledge […], believing that while still living they have been transported to the Isles of the Blessed", will

[95] Pl. *Phd*. 109d-110a.

[96] Other scholars (Hackforth 1955, 81; Szlezák 2011 [1997], 155; Corcoran 2016, 157-164) have remarked on the affinities between the Cave allegory and the *Phaedo* myth, but no one, to my knowledge, has taken the connection to what I believe to be its logical conclusion – which, as I will illustrate shortly, has serious implication for Plato's theory of knowledge and education.

never be able to properly govern a State.[97] This should not come as a surprise to anyone familiar with the central myth of the *Phaedrus* (246a-250c), where the equivalence between heaven and the world of Forms is made explicit:

> ἡ γὰρ ἀχρώματός τε καὶ ἀσχημάτιστος καὶ ἀναφὴς οὐσία ὄντως οὖσα, ψυχῆς κυβερνήτῃ μόνῳ θεατὴ νῷ, περὶ ἣν τὸ τῆς ἀληθοῦς ἐπιστήμης γένος, τοῦτον ἔχει [247d] τὸν [ὑπερουράνιον] τόπον. ἅτ᾽ οὖν θεοῦ διάνοια νῷ τε καὶ ἐπιστήμῃ ἀκηράτῳ τρεφομένη … θεωροῦσα τἀληθῆ τρέφεται καὶ εὐπαθεῖ, ἕως ἂν κύκλῳ ἡ περιφορὰ εἰς ταὐτὸν περιενέγκῃ. ἐν δὲ τῇ περιόδῳ καθορᾷ μὲν αὐτὴν δικαιοσύνην, καθορᾷ δὲ σωφροσύνην, καθορᾷ δὲ ἐπιστήμην … [247e] δῦσα πάλιν εἰς τὸ εἴσω τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, οἴκαδε ἦλθεν … [248a] καὶ οὗτος μὲν θεῶν βίος.
>
> The colourless, shapeless, and intangible truly existing Essence – with which true Knowledge is concerned, and which is only visible to the intellect, the pilot of the soul – holds this region [above the sky]. Now, the divine intelligence, which feeds on Reason and pure Knowledge […], by contemplating the Truth is nourished and made happy until the revolution brings it again to the same place. In the revolution it beholds absolute Justice, Temperance, and Knowledge […], and passing down again within the sky, it goes home […]. This is the life of the gods.[98]

While the "place above the sky", where the higher Forms are, is only accessible to the gods and to human souls who have completely shed their mortal vestiges, the lower part of heaven (the "true earth" of the *Phaedo* myth) is where virtuous individuals – including philosophers who have not yet lived through three full incarnation cycles[99] – go after they die:

> The other [souls], when they have completed their first life, receive judgment and, after being judged, some go to the places of punishment under the earth (εἰς τὰ ὑπὸ γῆς δικαιωτήρια) and pay their penalty (δίκην ἐκτίνουσιν), while the others, made light and carried by Justice to a place in the sky (εἰς τοὐρανοῦ τινα τόπον), live in a manner worthy of the life that they led in human form.[100]

[97] Pl. *R*. 7.519c.
[98] Pl. *Phdr*. 247c-248a.
[99] Pl. *Phdr*. 249a.
[100] Pl. *Phdr*. 249a-b.

If we (re)read the Cave allegory in light of the passages quoted above, its apparent optimism regarding man's ability to attain knowledge of the Good and of the higher Forms is noticeably curtailed. In fact, if Plato's statement that the ascent from the cave represents "the soul's ascension to the intelligible realm"[101] is to be taken seriously, then we are to conclude that the journey towards enlightenment transcends the limits of human existence.[102] Even if one interprets the above statement in a purely figurative way – as is entirely legitimate – as a reference to the study of abstract Forms by means of mathematics and dialectic, the setting and imagery of the Cave allegory nonetheless frame the entire discussion in a mystical and eschatological context. In this context, the first transition from shadows to objects is symbolised by the initiation rite – whose purpose, as mentioned above, was to prepare the individual for death – and the second transition, from the sensible to the intelligible realm, is symbolised by death. This, however, is nothing new. Plato's use of mystery terminology and ideas to define his personal conception of philosophy has been highlighted by several scholars,[103] including Cornford (1903, 439), whose description of the philosopher's education, as symbolised by the allegory of the Cave, is worth citing verbatim:

> We are to understand that education in the highest sense is an initiation; it involves deliverance from the prison of the senses, a vision purified to apprehend truth, a death into life, an exaltation of man's spirit to unity with the divine.

[101] Pl. *R.* 7.517b.
[102] A similar view is arguably expressed in Parmenides' Proem (fr. 1 DK), which, like the allegory of the Cave, is filled with Orphic and mystic imagery, and can be interpreted as describing a journey to the otherworld (see Burkert 1969; Feyerabend 1984; Kingsley 1999, 61-76; Gemelli Marciano 2008; Bernabé 2013e).
[103] See, most recently, Bernabé 2011, 211-230; 2016; Wasmuth 2015; Casadesús 2016; Dinkelaar 2020; Nightingale 2021, 88-113, 148-167, 189-212; Betegh 2022.

This is what Plato means when he defines philosophy as an "exercise of death" (μελέτη θανάτου):[104] given that pure knowledge, which derives from contemplation of the Forms, is only accessible to pure, disembodied souls, a man will be closest to attaining it, while he is still alive, by avoiding "communion with the body" as far as humanly possible.[105] It could even be argued that the Orphic-inspired idea of philosophy as μελέτη θανάτου is reflected in the very structure of the *Republic*, which begins and ends with a *katabasis*: the descent to the Piraeus at the beginning of Book I and the myth of Er at the end of Book X effectively frame the philosopher's pursuit of (true) knowledge as an otherworldly endeavour – a framing reinforced by the allegory of the Cave, which may rightly be regarded as the central myth of the dialogue.[106]

Given these premises, if we interpret the image of the Cave in light of its Orphic subtext and understand the ascent from the cave as symbolising the soul's escape from the body-prison (i.e., death) – and we take this equivalence seriously – then we must consider the following implications. Firstly, the journey towards enlightenment is one which spans across multiple lifetimes. By awakening the latent memories of the Forms which are buried within our rational soul, we are able to habituate ourselves to abstract thinking through the study of mathematics and, in due course, engage in the philosophical study of moral Forms by means of dialectic. This ensures that when our soul eventually departs from our body, it will go to a place which is higher and purer than earth, where it will be able to apprehend intelligible objects directly. If we are careful to choose our next incarnation wisely and to drink as little as possible from the water of Forgetfulness, we can hope to retain some of the knowledge gained during our past lives on earth and in the invisible realm, so that we may progress on our journey of enlightenment, until our soul will finally be pure enough to

[104] Pl. *Phd*. 81a.
[105] Pl. *Phd*. 66e-67a.
[106] On the chthonic connotation of the opening section of the *Republic* and its connection with the myth of Er and the Cave allegory, see Voegelin 1957, 53f.; O'Connor 2007, 59-63; Corcoran 2016, 24.

return to the heavenly place whence it originally came. This third and final transition from the lower section of the intelligible realm (i.e., the "true earth" of the *Phaedo*) to heaven and beyond (i.e., the dwelling places of the gods and the disembodied souls in the *Phaedrus*), coinciding with the permanent release from the cycle of reincarnations, is necessarily absent from the allegory of the Cave, since the latter describes the experience of someone who adopts philosophy for the first time. Such a person, then, if we accept the parallel between the Cave and the afterlife myths, would be able, for a period of time, to look at the higher Forms (and even the Good itself) from a distance before being reincarnated.[107] While this is not equivalent to the contemplation in which the pure souls engage in the hyperuranion, it is still enough to refresh the memory, so to speak, of the philosophic soul, giving it an advantage over non-philosophic souls.[108] Yet, no matter how close one gets to comprehending the nature of the Forms and their relationship with the Good and with each other, one would still fall short of attaining true knowledge, in the full sense of the word, as that is ultimately withheld from humans due to the constraints imposed on us by our mortal nature.

Secondly, we must also accept that this process of enlightenment and purification is not entirely within our control. If the transition between the sensible and the intelligible realm corresponds to death, then it is not – or should not be, at least according to Plato[109] – something that we choose ourselves but rather something that is bestowed upon us by God. Even the first step in the Cave allegory – the release of the bonds and the reorienting of the prisoner away from the shadows and towards the opposite direction – is said to be brought

[107] Cf. Pl. *Phd*. 111a ἐκφανῆ γὰρ αὐτὰ πεφυκέναι, ὄντα πολλὰ πλήθει καὶ μεγάλα καὶ πανταχοῦ τῆς γῆς, ὥστε αὐτὴν ἰδεῖν εἶναι θέαμα εὐδαιμόνων θεατῶν, *R*. 10.615a τὰς δ᾽ αὖ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ εὐπαθείας διηγεῖσθαι καὶ θέας ἀμηχάνους τὸ κάλλος.
[108] This, incidentally, would be consistent with what is said in the *Phaedrus* (250e-251a) about the greater ease with which a soul that has recently contemplated the Forms is able to recollect them once in an embodied state, compared to other souls whose contemplation is less recent.
[109] Cf. Pl. *Phd*. 61e-62b (see p. 91).

about by the intervention of an unnamed liberator. This mysterious figure, as Crombie (1962, 114 n. 1) tentatively suggests, symbolises the role played by "divine chance" or, more accurately, divine inspiration, indicated by Plato at the end of the *Meno* (99e-100b) as the source of the virtue of many eminent Athenians,[110] and again, in the *Phaedrus* (249d-253c), as the condition which allows for the regrowing of the soul's wings. Despite our general propensity to dismiss this kind of discourse as ironic or metaphorical, if we consider what sort of knowledge Plato's philosopher strives towards, the appeal to some form of divine intervention will not seem so out of place; rather, it will perhaps appear as a necessary admission of humility.

If we define the Good, as Plato does, as the "unhypothetical principle" (*R.* 6.510b ἀρχὴ ἀνυπόθετος) from which all knowledge and truth derive, to claim that one can come to possess true knowledge (not merely correct opinion) of the Good within one's lifetime would be to imply that one's mortal condition can be transcended in this life, for to be all-knowing is to be essentially godlike – but this, of course, is not what Plato claims. On the contrary, he emphasises, both in the *Republic* and in other dialogues,[111] that the study of philosophy is a life-long pursuit, implying that, however close one might come to grasping the nature of true Being, human knowledge can never be definitive. This, I believe, is the context within which the three analogies of Books VI-VII should be read. Now, it is easy to see why Plato might not have wanted to make explicit the covert 'pessimism' inherent in the eschatological subtext of the Cave allegory. Stating outright that the educational program outlined in the *Republic*, which is supposed to lead the future philosopher-kings to the knowledge of the Good, is not actually feasible, unless in a very limited capacity, would undermine the case for the practical viability of Plato's ideal State – and, perhaps,

[110] On divine dispensation in the ending of the *Meno*, see esp. Reuter 2001.
[111] E.g., Pl. *Phdr*. 249c-d, *R.* 7.540a-b

even challenge the very legitimacy of the philosophers' rule. The function of the three analogies within the dialogue dictates that these considerations should be hidden in the background, away, so to speak, from the eyes of the uninitiated.

6. The Origin of the Universe

The search for a rational explanation of how the world first came into being was the central question occupying the minds of the early Greek philosophers, from Thales to Diogenes of Apollonia. Contrary to his predecessors, Plato abstained from this topic for the better part of his career, waiting until his old age to give 'his own' account of the universe's origin in a long mythical narrative told by the fictional character Timaeus in the dialogue of the same name. It is perhaps ironic, then, that this late dialogue, the first in an unfinished trilogy,[1] would prove to be the most influential of all of Plato's works, being the only Platonic text to survive through the Middle Ages, in Latin translation, in the Latin-speaking West.[2] In modern times, however, the philosophical significance of the *Timaeus* was called into question due to its apparent inconsistency with the views espoused by Plato in other late-period dialogues, such as *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*, and *Sophist*. Consequently, some scholars adopted the view, first presented by Owen (1953), that the *Timaeus* was not a late dialogue at all and should rather be dated to Plato's middle period,[3] while Taylor (1928, 10f.), in his otherwise excellent commentary on the text, went so far as to argue that the cosmology of the *Timaeus* should not be deemed to reflect the thinking of the author but rather the views of the speaker, whom he regarded as a real, historical representative of the Pythagorean – or, more broadly, Western – school of philosophy.[4] Another point of controversy surrounding the *Timaeus* is the long-standing debate between two interpretive

[1] The original plan, briefly hinted at in the beginning of *Timaeus* (17a-b, 20a-d), included a second speech by Critias on prehistoric Athens and a third one by Hermocrates on an unspecified subject. The *Critias* was left incomplete and the *Hermocrates* was never written, although it is possible that the material intended for this abandoned project came to form Book III of the *Laws*, which describes the reemergence of civilisation after a natural disaster – such as the flood in Critias' story – and examines the merits of different kinds of constitutions (Raeder 1905, 379; Cornford 1937, 7f.).
[2] On the cultural influence of the *Timaeus* from late antiquity to the Renaissance, see Reydams-Schils 2003.
[3] For a refutation of Owen's influential article, see Cherniss 1957.
[4] *Contra* Cornford 1937, vi-x.

approaches: the metaphorical, prevalent among the ancient commentators and championed in more recent times by eminent Platonists, such as Taylor (1928), Cornford (1935), and Cherniss (1944, 392-457); and the literal, supported most notably by Vlastos (1939; 1965b), Hackforth (1959), and Robinson (1986), and defended more recently by Mohr (2005) and Broadie (2011). Those who favour a metaphorical interpretation usually do so to resolve the apparent difficulties produced by the literal reading, whereas the proponents of the literal approach tend to attribute any blatant contradictions between the *Timaeus* and other dialogues to an evolution in Plato's beliefs.[5] I am not concerned here with the philosophical intricacies of the interpretation of the *Timaeus*, which fall outside the scope of this study and do not fundamentally affect my main line of argument. I will focus instead on the origin of Timaeus' creation story, analysing it against its mythological and literary background and showing how its most innovative elements can be traced back to the Orphic theogonic tradition. I will then apply the same analysis to another important cosmological passage in Plato's work, namely, the myth of Cronus in the *Statesman*, and assess its compatibility with the cosmological vision presented in the *Timaeus*.

6.1 Intelligent creation

The question of the origin of the world engaged the ancient Greeks since the dawn of their

[5] Almost all disagreements concerning the interpretation of the dialogue can be traced back to the debate over the 'status' of Timaeus' speech as a "plausible story" (εἰκὼς μῦθος/λόγος), whether it should be taken (mostly) at face value or interpreted metaphorically. The main points of contention include: the identity of the Demiurge and his relation to the universe on the one hand and the cosmic paradigm or model on the other (see, e.g., Perl 1998; Mohr 2005; Broadie 2011, 7-26; Brisson 2016b; Lisi 2023); the meaning of the "receptacle" (χώρα) and the problem of pre-cosmic movement (see, e.g., Zeyl 2010; Sattler 2012; Karfík 2020; Ilievski 2023a); the creation of time and the notion of a 'time before time' (see, e.g., Carone 2004; Seissl 2022; Vázquez 2022); and the apparent incompatibility between Timaeus' description of the soul as created and composite and the account of the soul presented in other Platonic dialogues (see, e.g., Lisi 2007b; Brisson 2020; Betegh 2021a). A succinct survey of the debates can be found in Zeyl's introduction to his translation of Plato's *Timaeus* (2000, xx-xxv). On the ancient interpretations of the *Timaeus*, see the comprehensive study by Baltes (1976-1978) and the edited volume by Sharples and Sheppard (2003).

civilisation, with Hesiod's *Theogony* setting the standard for all subsequent cosmogonies, whether 'mythical' or 'philosophical'.[6] Plato's *Timaeus* stands out in this long tradition as the first cosmogonical account to describe the creation of the universe as the product of an intelligent design, carried out by a benevolent, omnipotent deity.[7] The striking affinity between this account and the creation story of *Genesis*,[8] which earned the *Timaeus* unparalleled recognition from the early and medieval Christian theologians, has been a cause for embarrassment for some classical scholars, who perceive the monotheistic tendencies of Plato's late dialogue as fundamentally un-Greek. While certain key elements of the *Timaeus* myth are undeniably heterodox when compared to the mainstream Greek cosmogonic tradition, they are not, however, entirely without precedent. In what follows, I will highlight the main features which distinguish the *Timaeus* cosmogony from the traditional Hesiodic model and argue that, rather than being invented out of whole cloth by Plato, they were already present (in some form) in the cosmogonic myths of the Orphic tradition.

Within the Greek mythical tradition, there existed a variety of theogonic and cosmogonic tales, alternative to Hesiod's *Theogony*, which are mostly known to us through

[6] It should be noted that, in the early stages of Greek thought, the boundary between 'mythical' and 'rational' or 'philosophical' thinking was not as defined as some modern scholars have made it out to be (on this topic see, e.g., Fowler 2011). For a comprehensive study of the ancient Greek cosmogonic tradition, see Gregory 2007. On the reception of Hesiod's *Theogony* in ancient Greek literature, see Scully 2015, 69-121.

[7] The omnipotence of the Demiurge is a matter of debate (see, most recently, Ilievski 2020; Hall and Jelinek 2022; MacFarlane 2023). There is no question that the Platonic God is not omnipotent in the sense that his Judeo-Christian counterpart is: he does not create *ex nihilo* but simply imposes his creative will on pre-existing matter – although, strictly speaking, pure matter does not 'exist' in Plato's system. With this caveat, scholars who argue that the Demiurge is all-powerful in designing and controlling the natural world have to confront the problem of theodicy – that is to say, essentially, why would an all-powerful, benevolent deity allow evil to exist in the world that he chose to create? On the other hand, those who argue that the Demiurge is constrained by Necessity have to defend the markedly un-Platonic idea that matter can have power over divinity. For my purposes, it will be sufficient to say that the Platonic Demiurge, if not technically 'omnipotent', is virtually all-powerful when compared with the traditional (Homeric and Hesiodic) gods.

[8] Jowett (1892, III, 342) famously referred to these affinities as a "misunderstanding" on the part of the Christian and Neoplatonist commentators: on the history of this "misunderstanding", see Pelikan 1997. A systematic comparison between the *Timaeus* and the Biblical creation accounts can be found in a recent study by Gmirkin (2022), which argues for a Platonic influence on *Genesis* 1-3.

fragments preserved by later authors.[9] Among these lost cosmo-theogonic texts are a number of hexametric poems ascribed to Orpheus and Musaeus to which Plato alludes several times,[10] including once in the *Timaeus* itself (40d-e = *OF* 21), where the eponymous speaker invokes – with a degree of irony – the authority of the "descendants of gods" who related an account about the origin of their divine forefathers.[11] These theogonic poems shared many commonalities with the 'standard' Hesiodic version but also included several features not found in Hesiod, which caused them to be viewed as unconventional or even strange.[12] Though by no means obscure or secret, these texts had come to be regarded, at least by Plato's time, as outside the mainstream and, thus, of lesser importance in the eyes of the general public – which is why Hesiod's poem has been preserved in full and the Orphic theogonies, along with the other non-Hesiodic theogonies,[13] have not. I will not attempt here to reconstruct the history and precise content of each of these texts, nor to trace the influence of Near Eastern sources on their composition – both questions merit a book-length study of their own and many such studies already exist.[14] I will instead focus on specific elements of the Orphic cosmo-theogonic tradition and their reception by Plato, without necessarily deciding whether they belonged to the same text or trying to place them within a single, coherent narrative.[15]

Turning now to Plato's *Timaeus*, the greatest departure of the *Timaeus* cosmogony from the Hesiodic model of biological creation on one hand and the Presocratic model of mechanical causation on the other is, as hinted earlier, the role of an intelligent cause –

[9] Note, however, the alternative theogony beginning with Ocean and Tethys, attested in the *Iliad* (14.201, 246).
[10] E.g., Pl. *Ion* 536b = *OF* 1140, *R.* 2.364e = *OF* 573i.
[11] According to tradition, as attested by Plato himself (*R.* 2.364e = *OF* 573i), Orpheus and Musaeus were both the sons of divine mothers: namely, the Muse Calliope and the moon goddess Selene.
[12] Edmonds 2013, 80f.
[13] On the theogonies of Epimenides, Pherecydes, Acusilaus, and other early Greek mythographers, see the fragments and commentary in Fowler's two-volume collection (2000; 2013).
[14] See esp. West 1983a; López-Ruiz 2010; Meisner 2018.
[15] If, as seems to be the case, more than one such Orphic text existed in Plato's time, then it is possible – even likely – that they contradicted each other in some way (see Meisner 2018, 87f., 116f.).

represented by the Demiurge – as the primary driver of the creative process. According to the *Phaedo* (96a-99c), the omission of intelligence (νοῦς) as a principle of universal causation by the Presocratic physicists is precisely what had steered the young Socrates (read Plato)[16] away from natural philosophy; even Anaxagoras, who made Nous his first principle, failed, in his eyes, to account properly for its workings:[17]

> As I went on reading, I saw the man (*sc*. Anaxagoras) making no use of Intelligence, ascribing to it no causality with respect to the ordering of things (εἰς τὸ διακοσμεῖν τὰ πράγματα) and assigning it instead to air, aether, and water, along with many other absurdities.[18]

According to Plato, Anaxagoras and the other natural philosophers made the fundamental mistake of confusing "the real cause" (99b τὸ αἴτιον τῷ ὄντι) – which is to say, the final cause – with "that without which the cause could never be a cause" (ἐκεῖνο ἄνευ οὗ τὸ αἴτιον οὐκ ἄν ποτ᾽ εἴη αἴτιον) – which is to say, the material or mechanical cause. What was lacking in the Presocratics – namely, a teleological theory of the universe, able to explain what is best for each and all things that exist (98b) – would be accomplished by Plato in the *Timaeus*, many years after writing the *Phaedo*.

The *Timaeus*, as is often noted, is a strange dialogue. Its better part is taken up by a mythical discourse on the origin of the physical world, but the introduction reveals that this was only the first of three planned speeches to be delivered by each of Socrates' interlocutors – either in three separate works or, as Sedley (2007b, 95f. and n. 6) believes, as part of a single dialogue. The impetus for this discussion has little to do with cosmology per se but comes, rather, from a speech previously delivered by Socrates on the nature of

[16] It is clear, in my opinion, that this account reflects Plato's own experience, as it serves to explain how the speaker came to develop his personal theory of causality, based on the Platonic concept of 'Form'. That said, it is likely that the historical Socrates had also expressed a similar dissatisfaction with Anaxagoras, so that such an account would not have seemed out of place in his mouth (cf. Xen. *Mem*. 4.7.6).
[17] Sedley (2007b, 87-89) doubts whether this assessment of the philosophy of Anaxagoras is entirely accurate; unfortunately, the fragmentary state of the evidence does not allow us to verify Plato's account.
[18] Pl. *Phd*. 98b-c.

the ideal State. This account, Socrates says, is lacking in that it depicts the ideal city at rest, whereas he would like to see it engaged "in a contest with other cities, competing for those prizes for which cities typically compete with each other".[19] Since he is, by his own admission, unable to paint such a picture, Socrates invokes the help of his three interlocutors, who belong to the only class that, in his opinion, is properly suited for this task, namely, that of men who are well versed in both politics and philosophy.[20] Critias – the infamous leader of the pro-Spartan government installed in Athens at the end of the Peloponnesian War, or rather his grandfather[21] – was to tell the story of how the Athens of nine thousand years ago had repelled the invasion of Atlantis,[22] while Hermocrates – if he is indeed to be identified with the Syracusan general who defeated the Athenians during the Sicilian expedition – might have talked about the process of degeneration which every city inevitably undergoes and the fallen state of contemporary Athens, which ended up resembling its ancient adversary.[23] But before Critias can tell his full story in detail, the Locrian statesman and astronomer Timaeus is called upon to describe "the nature of the universe […], beginning with the origin of the cosmos and ending with the birth of mankind".[24]

The political framing of the *Timaeus* myth might seem odd at first, but it makes perfect sense within Plato's worldview. For him, cosmology and political theory are both bound to the same teleological (and theological) frame, where the ultimate goal is the purification and well-being of the human soul. In this context, the role played by statesmen and lawgivers can be compared to the role of the divine intellect: the latter is responsible

[19] Pl. *Ti.* 19c.
[20] Pl. *Ti.* 19d-20b.
[21] The identity of the speaker in *Timaeus* and *Critias* remains contested to this day; for a survey of the scholarly debate, see Brisson 1994 and Nails 2002, 106-108.
[22] Pl. *Ti.* 25a-c.
[23] See Lampert and Planeaux 1998, 100-107; Nails 2002, 161f.; Gill 2015, 35-42.
[24] Pl. *Ti.* 27a.

for giving order to the universe and creating the best possible environment for the human soul to thrive and better itself, while the former are tasked with establishing (and/or maintaining) these same conditions within the smaller scope of a single city or State. Given these premises, it is entirely pertinent for Plato to combine cosmological and political discourses, as he does not only in the *Timaeus* but also in the *Statesman*, in Book X of the *Laws*, and, to some extent, in the final book of the *Republic* with the myth of Er. Because cosmology, like the adjacent field of eschatology, eludes the strict logical parameters of dialectic, Plato often resorts to mythical modes of expression when discussing this subject. The motivation behind this choice is explained at length in the 'methodological' section at the beginning of Timaeus' speech (27d-29d):

> The accounts we give are akin to the things which they explain. Thus, accounts of what is stable and fixed and clearly discernible (μετὰ νοῦ καταφανοῦς) through intellect are themselves stable and unchanging – and in so far as it is possible and fitting for any account to be irrefutable and invincible, they must not fall short thereof in any way – but the accounts of that which is copied after that [model] and is itself a likeness (ὄντος δὲ εἰκόνος), since they are accounts of a likeness, are themselves likely (εἰκότας): for what being is to becoming, truth is to belief (ὅτιπερ πρὸς γένεσιν οὐσία, τοῦτο πρὸς πίστιν ἀλήθεια). Therefore, Socrates […], do not be surprised if we prove unable to give accounts that are completely self-consistent and accurate in all respects; but we must be content if we can produce accounts that are no less likely than any other, keeping in mind that both I, the speaker, and you, the judges, are only human (φύσιν ἀνθρωπίνην ἔχομεν).[25]

The reason why any account about the nature of the universe and its origin can be "plausible" (εἰκώς) at best is that its subject matter is itself merely an approximation, an imperfect "likeness" (εἰκών) of a perfect model: as is made clear in the famous Line analogy in Book VI of the *Republic* (509d-511e), only of the latter (i.e., the Forms, or "the things that truly are") can there be knowledge in the true sense of the word, whereas the former

[25] Pl. *Ti*. 29b-d.

falls under the domain of 'belief', or 'persuasion' (πίστις). Besides, our own limited mental faculties would preclude us humans from obtaining a perfect understanding and producing a perfect account of these matters, such as a divine and omniscient being might be able to produce, at least as far as the "works of Nous" are concerned.[26] Hence, regarding questions of cosmology and natural science, we should not seek an explanation that is perfectly coherent and irrefutable, but merely one that is "no less plausible than any other".[27] A similar sentiment is expressed by Socrates at the end of the eschatological myth of the *Phaedo*:

> Now it does not befit a man of intellect to insist that these things are such as I have described them; however, to insist that either what I have said or something like it is true concerning our souls and their dwelling places […] is both fitting and worth the risk – for fair is the risk (καλὸς γὰρ ὁ κίνδυνος).[28]

Evidently, Plato believes that these mythical accounts are still worthy of serious consideration even if, due to the nebulous nature of their subject matter, they should not be held to the same standards of accuracy which purely philosophical (i.e., dialectical) reasoning needs to uphold. Although this might seem like a limitation to those seeking a strict 'logical' or 'scientific' explanation, Plato takes full advantage of the expressive freedom which this approach allows to create a poetically compelling narrative capable of challenging not only the theories of the Presocratic natural philosophers but also Hesiod's mythical cosmogony. To this end, Plato combines his own philosophical theories, along

[26] As Johansen (2004, 61) rightly points out in his commentary on this passage, "god might have access to accounts that are more likely, but as human beings we should be content as long as we can present an account to a human audience no one else can better". The same limitations apply, of course, to man's understanding of the Forms, but in that case, as Timaeus says, we are obliged by the nature of the subject matter to do our very best to make our accounts as "irrefutable and invincible" as humanly feasible (29b).
[27] Much has been written about the status of the *Timaeus* story and its designation as an εἰκὼς μῦθος or εἰκὼς λόγος (29c-d): see, among others, Cornford 1935, 28-32; Vlastos 1965b; Johansen 2004, 48-68; Burnyeat 2005; Betegh 2010; Mourelatos 2010; Broadie 2011, 27-59; Bryan 2012, 114-195.
[28] Pl. *Phd*. 114d.

with select principles derived from his predecessors and contemporaries,[29] with elements from the Orphic mythical tradition, which, as we have seen, provided the foundation for Plato's eschatological accounts and inspired much of his thinking about human nature and the soul.

The *Timaeus* myth revolves around the actions of a divine maker, whom Plato refers to as ὁ δημιουργός (29a).[30] Like any other craftsman, the Demiurge does not create *ex nihilo* but rather moulds pre-existing material according to his own design. In keeping with the craftsman metaphor, the divine Demiurge bases his design upon a model (παράδειγμα), which can only be eternal and unchanging, because "of all the things that have come into existence, this universe is the most beautiful".[31] The existence of a creator god – and of the material and the model needed for his creation – is here presented as virtually self-evident:[32] "everything that comes to be (τὸ γιγνόμενον) must necessarily come to be through the agency of some cause (ὑπ᾽ αἰτίου τινός)",[33] and this cause, according to Plato, can only be an intelligent being. This, however, was not a commonly accepted view at the time, as it contradicted both the materialism of the atomists and of earlier natural philosophers and the traditional Hesiodic cosmogony, based on the principle of biological reproduction. The only known precedent for the idea of an intelligent creator in ancient Greek thought is found in the Orphic writers,[34] whose work is frequently referenced by Neoplatonist philosophers in support of their own interpretation of Plato's cosmology.

[29] On the relationship between Platonic and Presocratic cosmology, see Vlastos' classic study (1975), along with more recent contributions by Menn (2010) and Wright (2021).
[30] Cf. Pl. *R.* 7.530a, *Sph.* 265c, *Plt.* 270a, *Phlb.* 27b, *L.* 10.902e.
[31] Pl. *Ti.* 29a.
[32] In fairness, it could be argued that, since the *Timaeus* is concerned with the realm of becoming, Plato was not compelled to justify the existence of the Demiurge or his eternal model, which belong to the realm of Being.
[33] Pl. *Ti.* 28a.
[34] Could they be among those "men of wisdom" (ἄνδρες φρόνιμοι) who, as Timaeus says (29e-30a), maintained that "the most preeminent reason for the universe's coming into being" was that "God wanted everything to be good" like himself?

A distinctive feature of the Orphic accounts of the origin of the cosmos was the combination of two different models of creation: the 'biomorphic' model, in which the universe comes into existence as a result of the copulation of gods and goddesses over multiple generations, like in Hesiod's *Theogony*, and the 'technomorphic' model, in which the universe is deliberately created by a divine maker acting as a craftsman, like in the Babylonian *Enuma Elish* or in the *Book of Genesis*.[35] In the *Rhapsodic Theogony* – the most recent and best documented of the Orphic theogonies – the Firstborn god, called Protogonos and Phanes, among other names (*OF* 138-143), is born biomorphically from an egg "fashioned" from Aether by Chronus,[36] and is himself engaged in a process of technomorphic creation:

> ἔκτισεν ἀθανάτοις δόμον ἄφθιτον
> …
> μήσατο δ' ἄλλην γαῖαν ἀπείριτον, ἥν τε σελήνην
> ἀθάνατοι κλείζουσιν, ἐπιχθόνιοι δέ τε μήνην
> …
> (Ἥλιον)
> καὶ φύλακ' αὐτὸν ἔτευξε κέλευσέ τε πᾶσιν ἀνάσσειν.
>
> He built for the immortals an eternal home […]. And he created another earth, which is inaccessible and which the immortals call Selene and the people living on earth Mene […]. And he created [the Sun] as a guardian and ordered him to rule over everything.[37]

Phanes' creation of the cosmos out of the primordial Chaos (*OF* 96-100, 111, 122, 144-164) anticipates a second creation carried out by Zeus, the fifth and final ruler of the universe according to the Orphic theogony: this was a central myth in the Orphic tradition, and, as such, it became the subject matter of several poems over the centuries, including the Orphic poem quoted in the Derveni papyrus and the so-called *Hymn to Zeus* preserved in the pseudo-Aristotelian *De Mundo*, an expanded version of which was included in the

[35] See Burkert 2004, 63; Meisner 2018, 24.
[36] *OF* 114 ἔπειτα δ' ἔτευξε μέγας Χρόνος Αἰθέρι δίῳ / ὤεον ἀργύφεον.
[37] *OF* 152, 155.1f., 158.

Rhapsodies. According to the narrative contained in the *Rhapsodies*, Zeus, following Night's counsel (*OF* 237), swallowed Phanes and with him his entire creation (*OF* 241), whose seeds he carried within himself (*OF* 140):

> τοὔνεκα σὺν τῷ (sc. Πρωτογόνῳ) πάντα Διὸς πάλιν ἐντὸς ἐτύχθη
> …
> ὅσσα τ' ἔην γεγαῶτα καὶ ὕστερον ὁπόσσ' ἔμελλεν,
> ἓν γένετο, Ζηνὸς δ' ἐνὶ γαστέρι σύρρα πεφύκει.
>
> Hence, with him (*sc*. Protogonos) everything was created anew inside Zeus […] and all that had already come into being and would come to be in the future simply became one in the belly of Zeus.[38]

Having assimilated Phanes and the entire universe along with him, Zeus, who was the last to rule, also became the first, and within him beginning, middle, and end all became one. This is the meaning of the famous Orphic verse referenced by Plato in a passage from the *Laws*, in which the Athenian mentions a god "who, according to the ancient doctrine, holds the beginning, the end, and the middle of all that exists".[39] An ancient scholiast reveals the Orphic provenance of the verse in question, which he also quotes in full: "Zeus the beginning, Zeus the middle, and from Zeus everything is created".[40] A slightly different version of this verse appeared not only in the *Rhapsodies* but also in the poem quoted in the Derveni papyrus;[41] hence, it is reasonable to assume that Phanes and his first creation featured in some form in the Orphic theogonies which were current in the time of Plato and the Derveni author, even though they are only explicitly attested in late antique sources.

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[38] *OF* 241.4, 10f.
[39] Pl. *L*. 4.715e-716a = *OF* 31iii ὁ μὲν δὴ θεός, ὥσπερ καὶ ὁ παλαιὸς λόγος, ἀρχήν τε καὶ τελευτὴν καὶ μέσα τῶν ὄντων ἁπάντων ἔχων.
[40] *Schol.* Pl. *L*. 4.715e [317 Greene] = *OF* 31iv Ζεὺς ἀρχή, Ζεὺς μέσσα, Διὸς δ' ἐκ πάντα τέτυκται.
[41] *P.Derv*. 17.12 KPT = *OF* 14.2 (cf. *OF* 243.2) Ζεὺς κεφα[λή, Ζεὺς μέσ]σα, Διὸς δ' ἐκ [π]άντα τέτ[υκται]. The variant preserved in the Platonic scholium, which substitutes ἀρχή for κεφαλή, might have been influenced by two verses preserved in a Florence papyrus (P. Soc. Ital. XV 1476 = *OF* 688a vv. 1, 5 [Ζεὺς] πάντων ἀρχή, Ζεὺς [μέσσα, Ζεὺς δὲ τε]λευτή / … / [πά]ντα κύκλῳ φαίνων, [Ζεὺς ἀρχή, μέσσα,] τ[ε]λευτή), which are much closer to Plato's citation.

There are many similarities between the actions of Phanes and Zeus in the Orphic theogonies and the activity of the Demiurge in the *Timaeus*. First and foremost, all three deities carry out purposeful acts of creation,[42] described with a mixture of biomorphic and technomorphic language.[43] Additionally, they all create from pre-existing matter: Phanes from the primordial elements (*OF* 103-106), Zeus from Phanes' creation, and the Platonic Demiurge from the so-called "receptacle" (χώρα), a chaotic material substratum which "has always existed and cannot be destroyed".[44] Finally, the retreat of the Demiurge after the birth of the created gods, whom he tasks with the creation of living beings,[45] can be seen to parallel the narrative of the Orphic *Rhapsodies*, where Phanes is said to retire after creating the cosmos, passing the sceptre to his daughter Night (*OF* 171-173).[46] These affinities, as I mentioned earlier, did not go unnoticed by the Neoplatonic commentators, who endeavoured to find even more parallels between the Orphic cosmogony and Plato's.[47] Chronus, the primordial god of the *Rhapsodies*, was equated with the Platonic One, the first principle from which everything that exists proceeds;[48] Aether and Chaos (or Chasm: cf.

[42] As pointed out in a recent article by Santamaría (2016a, 224 n. 72), the authors of the Derveni poem and the *Rhapsodies* use the same term (μήσατο) to describe the intellectual planning of Zeus and Phanes, respectively: *OF* 16.1f. [μήσατο δ' αὖ] (*sc*. Ζεύς) Γαῖάν [τε καὶ] Οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν [ὕπερθεν], / μήσατο δ' Ὠκεανοῖο μέγα σθένος εὐρὺ ῥέοντος, 18.1 [αὐτ]ὰρ [ἐ]πεὶ δ[ὴ πάν]τα Διὸ[ς φρὴν μή]σατ[ο ἔ]ργα, 155.1 μήσατο δ' ἄλλην γαῖαν ἀπείριτον (*sc*. Φάνης). With regard to the Demiurge, the rationality and intentionality of his creation are repeatedly emphasised throughout the *Timaeus*: e.g., 30b-c δεῖ λέγειν τόνδε τὸν κόσμον … διὰ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ γενέσθαι πρόνοιαν, 47e τὰ μὲν οὖν παρεληλυθότα τῶν εἰρημένων … ἐπιδέδεικται τὰ διὰ νοῦ δεδημιουργημένα.

[43] *OF* 14.2 Διὸς δ' ἐκ πάντα τέτυκται, 152 ἔκτισεν ἀθανάτοις δόμον ἄφθιτον (*sc*. Φάνης), 158 καὶ φύλακ' αὐτὸν ἔτευξε (*sc*. Φάνης), 163 ταῦτα πατὴρ (*sc*. Φάνης) ποίησε κατὰ σπέος ἠεροειδές, 241.4, 10f. σὺν τῷ (*sc*. *Φάνητι) πάντα Διὸς πάλιν ἐντὸς ἐτύχθη / … / ὅσσα τ' ἔην γεγαῶτα … / ἓν γένετο, Ζηνὸς δ' ἐνὶ γαστέρι σύρρα πεφύκει. Even the Platonic Demiurge, who embodies the technomorphic metaphor, is sometimes referred to as 'father' (*Ti*. 28c τὸν μὲν οὖν ποιητὴν καὶ πατέρα τοῦδε τοῦ παντὸς, 37c ὁ γεννήσας πατήρ, 41a δημιουργὸς πατήρ τε ἔργων).

[44] Pl. *Ti*. 52a-b; cf. 30a. The exact meaning of the "receptacle" in Plato's *Timaeus* has been debated since antiquity; rather than choosing between the two predominant interpretations (i.e., 'stuff' and 'space'), I believe that the best approach is to view them as complementary: see Zeyl 2000, lxii-lxiv; 2010, 117-130; Johansen 2004, 117-136.

[45] Pl. *Ti*. 41c-d.

[46] See Classen 1962, 17; Santamaría 2016a, 225.

[47] On the Neoplatonists' allegorical interpretation of the Orphic theogony, see Brisson 1995, 43-103 (on Proclus), 157-209 (on Damascius); 2009 (on Syrianus).

[48] Syrian. *in Arist. Met*. 43.31 Kroll = *OF* 109vii, Procl. *in Cra.* 59.17 Pasquali = *OF* 109i, *in Prm.* 1224.32 Cousin = *OF* 109iii, Dam. *Pr*. 123 (3.159.17 Westerink) = *OF* 109viii.

OF 111), generated by Chronus, were identified with Limit (πέρας) and Unlimited (ἄπειρον), respectively,[49] and the cosmic egg, created from Aether and Chaos, was seen as a metaphor for the Intelligible Being (τὸ νοητόν):

> For as in [the egg] all the parts are undifferentiated (ἀδιάκριτα) and there is not a head here and a foot there, so also in the Intelligible Being all the Forms are undifferentiated, being unified with one another (ἡνωμένα ἀλλήλοις).[50]

Phanes, who is born from the egg, was seen to represent the Living Being (τὸ ζῷον), which serves as the model for the Demiurge's creation in Plato's *Timaeus* (30c-31b).[51] The physical attributes ascribed to Phanes in the *Rhapsodies* (*OF* 130-136) were also interpreted allegorically: most notably, his hermaphroditism was thought to signify that the Living Being contains the "seeds" of the division of the sexes, while being itself united – or, in other words, that the Living Being contains multiplicity within unity.[52] Finally, the Orphic Zeus, who swallows Phanes and his creation, was identified with the Platonic Demiurge, who becomes filled with the Forms by contemplating the model:

> Orpheus tells us that all things came to be in Zeus after the swallowing of Phanes, because although the cause of all things in the cosmos appeared first and in a unified form (πρώτως καὶ ἡνωμένως) in [Phanes], they appear secondarily and in a differentiated form (δευτέρως δὲ καὶ διακεκριμένως) in the Demiurge.[53]

For the most part, the allegorical interpretations of the Neoplatonists have not found favour with modern scholars, but, whatever value we assign to their philosophical contributions, it cannot be denied that their use of Orphic mythology to illustrate Platonic metaphysics (or, rather, their interpretation of it) is at least partly legitimised by Plato's own

[49] Cf. Herm. *in Phdr*. 138.14 Couvr. = *OF* 111xv, Procl. *in Ti.* 1.385.17 Diehl = *OF* 111viii, 114ix, Dam. *Pr.* 50 (2.24.6-8 Westerink) = *OF* 111iv.
[50] Olymp. *in Phd.* 4.4 (81 Westerink) = *OF* 114vi.
[51] Procl. *in Ti.* 1.428.15 Diehl = *OF* 121v.
[52] Procl. *in Ti.* 1.429.28 Diehl = *OF* 134i, *Theol. Plat.* 4.28 (4.81.20 Saffrey-Westerink) = *OF* 134iii.
[53] Procl. *in Prm.* 799.27 Cousin = *OF* 241iv.

practice of borrowing from the Orphics. In the case of the *Timaeus* myth, the obvious similarities between the Demiurge on the one hand and the Orphic Zeus and Phanes on the other are rendered even more compelling by the absence of any known alternative precedent in ancient Greek culture for the notion of a purposeful divine creator. Other similarities are admittedly less persuasive: for example, the parallel between the spherical shape and circular movement of the cosmic egg in the *Rhapsodies* (*OF* 114-119) and the cosmos (and its eternal model) in the *Timaeus* (33b, 34a) is arguably weakened by the existence of other potential sources of influence, including Parmenides' Being and Empedocles' Sphairos.[54] Another possible sign of Orphic influence on the *Timaeus*, namely, the presence of Necessity (Ἀνάγκη) among the primordial deities of the *Hieronyman* and *Rhapsodic theogonies* (*OF* 77, 82, 110),[55] is unfortunately not explicitly attested in any early source. Nevertheless, I believe that the overall picture which I have painted thus far indicates that Plato was not only familiar with the Orphic cosmo-theogonic tradition but was profoundly influenced by it; this is evidenced, above all, by a deep philosophical affinity which goes beyond the mere borrowing of mythical tropes.

Both Plato and the Orphic mythologers sought to provide an adequate solution to the question which had dominated the philosophical landscape of sixth and fifth-century Greece, namely, the problem of the One and the Many. In stark contrast to the natural philosophers, who endeavoured to solve the problem by relying on purely mechanistic explanations, Plato and the Orphics offered a mythical, or rather, theological answer, centred on the role of a single, intelligent, divine principle from which everything derives its existence. It was natural for the Orphic *bricoleurs* to identify this principle with Zeus, the supreme deity of the Greek pantheon; this, however, created a significant discrepancy

[54] See Ballew 1974 and Hladký 2015.
[55] Cf. Pl. *Ti*. 47e-48a μεμειγμένη γὰρ οὖν ἡ τοῦδε τοῦ κόσμου γένεσις ἐξ ἀνάγκης τε καὶ νοῦ συστάσεως ἐγεννήθη.

with the established cosmogonic narrative, in which Zeus rules over the cosmos and the other gods but does not create (all of) them. To solve this contradiction, the Orphics invented a new primordial deity who embodied the role of creator, namely, Phanes, the Firstborn (Πρωτόγονος). Using the familiar mythical trope of the ingestion of a god (or a god's body part) by another god,[56] they devised the central episode of their cosmogony, the swallowing of Phanes (or his phallus) by Zeus,[57] who therefore combines within himself the two distinct roles of ruler and creator of the universe.[58] As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the connection between these two roles was not lost on Plato, who planned to embed his own cosmogony in a broader discourse on the ideal State in action. In another dialogue of the same period, we find an elaborate cosmological myth about God's intervention on the course of the universe, embedded in the main discussion on the nature of the statesman (πολιτικός). Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, the image of a single god, who at one time contained the entire universe in his belly, provided a powerful

[56] There exist several ingestion myths both within the Greek and the Near Eastern tradition (see López-Ruiz 2010, 89-94, 136-144; Meisner 2018, 76-78), but the closest parallel to the swallowing of Phanes – if we suppose that the early version(s) of the Orphic cosmogony contained the same episode which is narrated in the *Rhapsodies* – is found in Hesiod's *Theogony* (vv. 886-900), where Zeus is said to ingest the goddess of wisdom, Metis, with whom Phanes is identified in the *Rhapsodic Theogony* (*OF* 140f.).

[57] In his commentary of the Orphic theogony, the author of the Derveni papyrus gives his own allegorical interpretation of the central episode of the poem, on which the act of swallowing carried out by Zeus is meant to represent the harnessing of the sun's power by the divine intellect. To support this interpretation, he draws on the ambiguity of the adjective αἰδοῖον ('venerable'), which can be used as a neuter substantive to mean 'genitals' or 'phallus'– the neuter plural form, more common, is already attested in Homer (*Il.* 13.568); the singular, on the other hand, first documented in the fifth century BC (Hipp. *Aer.* 9, Hdt. 2.30, 48), is never used in poetry. Orpheus, as the Derveni commentator argues, called the god "who first sprang into the aether" (i.e., Protogonos) αἰδοῖον because he wanted to liken (εἰκάζω) him – and, by extension, the sun, with which he is identified – to a phallus, seeing as men consider generation (γένεσις) to be caused by the genitals (τὰ αἰδοῖα). This reading is defended, among others, by West (1983a, 84-90), Casadesús (1996, 80-86), Brisson (2003), Kouremenos (2006, 23-28), and Santamaría (2012b; 2016b). Other scholars (e.g., Burkert 1980, 32; Bernabé 2002a, 105-112; Betegh 2004, 111-123) believe that the Orphic verse quoted at *P.Derv*. 13.4 KPT (*OF* 8 αἰδοῖον κατέπινεν, ὃς αἰθέρα ἔχθορε πρῶτος) refers to Zeus swallowing an actual phallus, likely Uranus', and that πρωτόγονος at 16.3 KPT (*OF* 12.1 πρωτογόνου βασιλέως αιδοίου κτλ) is not the name of the Orphic primordial deity but an epithet of the god whose severed member Zeus ingests. An ingenious solution, which incorporates elements of both opposing theories, has recently been proposed by Currie (2024), who accepts the reading of αἰδοῖον at 8.4 KPT as neuter singular meaning "phallus", referring to Uranus' severed member, but argues that the swallower must be Cronus, not Zeus, due to the implausible chronological gap between castration and swallowing; on Currie's interpretation, Cronus' act of swallowing prefigures Zeus' swallowing of Phanes, referenced at 16.3-6 KPT, where πρωτογόνου βασιλέως αιδοίου means "of the venerable firstborn king" (i.e., Phanes-Protogonos).

[58] The novelty of the Orphic idea that the god who rules the universe should also be responsible for its creation was first highlighted by Guthrie (1950, 319).

metaphor for the synthesis of unity and multiplicity, a concept expressed by Plato through the notion of the Cosmic Soul (*Ti*. 34b-36d), "the all-embracing […], ordering Principle"[59] which connects the worlds of Being and becoming.

6.2 The birth of mankind

Unlike in the case of cosmogony, there was no single account about the birth of mankind that was considered 'standard' in classical Greece; instead, local anthropogonic myths, such as the Theban and Athenian myths of autochthony,[60] coexisted alongside Panhellenic ones, like Hesiod's myth of the five races of man, without any overarching narrative.[61] Plato himself attests to this variety by including in his dialogues multiple (mutually incompatible) myths about the origin of humans, which make use of popular figures and motifs within the Greek anthropogonic tradition(s).[62] In addition to these different myths, however, Plato also provides a universal account of the origin of humanity as part of the larger cosmological narrative of the *Timaeus*, and it is clear that if any of these myths is to be taken seriously, it is the one presented in this late dialogue.[63] The basic features of this anthropogony are not

[59] Findlay 1974, 297.
[60] Apollod. *Bibliot*. 3.4.1, 3.14.6.
[61] The reason why there is no Greek equivalent of the story of Adam and Eve has likely to do with the fragmented political landscape of archaic and classical Greece, where city-states and ruling families sought to bolster their legitimacy and prestige through their own foundation myths (Loraux 2000, 9f.). Even Hesiod's myths of the first woman and of the five races (*Op*. 60-105, 109-201) are not so much concerned with explaining the origin of human beings per se as with justifying certain aspects of the current human condition, such as the institution of marriage, or the transition from a society of warriors to a society of farmers (Vernant 2006, 25-51, 168-185).
[62] The myth of autochthony, for example, is referenced at *Mnx*. 237b-c, *R*. 3.415a-d, *Smp*. 191b, and *Plt*. 269b, 271a-c, while the Titans Prometheus and Epimetheus (cf. Hes. *Th*. 507-616, *Op*. 54-104) feature prominently in the anthropogonic myth told by Protagoras in the eponymous dialogue (320c-322a). On Plato's reception of Hesiod's anthropogony, see Van Noorden 2015, 89-167.
[63] The speeches in *Menexenus*, *Protagoras*, and *Symposium*, delivered by Aspasia, Protagoras, and Aristophanes respectively, are literary exercises intended to reflect the personality and motivations of the speaker, not without certain elements of parody. The myth of metals in the *Republic*, on the other hand, despite containing an important kernel of truth, is explicitly characterised as fictional (cf. Pl. *L*. 2.663d-e). On the myth of the *Statesman*, see below §6.3.

themselves new: like in the story of Pandora,[64] the gods engage in a technomorphic process, moulding (πλάττειν) human bodies from the four cosmic elements of fire, air, water, and earth;[65] furthermore, the creation is carried out by the younger (generated) gods according to the Demiurge's directives, similarly to how, in Hesiod's myth, Zeus tasks his children with the creation of the first woman, rather than doing it himself.[66] Nonetheless, at its core, the *Timaeus* myth differs substantially from traditional anthropogonies in ways which will become apparent by the end of this section.

The most obvious difference between the *Timaeus* anthropogony and, for example, the myth of Pandora, is that the former describes human nature as essentially composite and its components – namely, the immortal soul on one hand and the body and the mortal soul on the other – as having separate origins, whereas no such distinction between body and soul is present in any of the traditional anthropogonic myths. This should come as no surprise, given that the idea of the soul as a separate entity, distinct and independent from the body, was a relatively recent innovation, which, as we saw above (§3.1), coincided with the emergence of Orphism. With this in mind, then, we should ask whether such an idea can be found in the Orphic myth of the birth of mankind.[67] As previously mentioned,[68] the antiquity – if not the very existence – of the Orphic anthropogony is, to this day, a highly debated topic among scholars due to the late date of the only surviving testimony which relates the myth in its entirety. The passage in question comes from the commentary on

[64] Hes. *Th*. 570-591, *Op*. 57-105.
[65] Cf. Pl. *Ti*. 42d-43a.
[66] It is unlikely, however, that Hesiod assigned to this detail the same significance as Plato, who wanted to avoid making the Demiurge directly responsible for man's mortal condition (*Ti*. 41a-c, 42d); in fact, in the myth of the races, Hesiod ascribes to Zeus the creation of the third, fourth, and fifth races of man, while the first two are said to be created by an anonymous group of gods under the reign of Cronus.
[67] An alternative anthropogonic (and cosmogonic) narrative was possibly relayed in the Orphic poem known as *Physica* (*OF* 800-802) or *Peri Physeos* (*OF* 803): according to a theory proposed by Gagné (2007), this hexametric poem contained a version of the ancient Orphic theogony in which the Titans were presumably absent and the Tritopatores played a prominent role; it seemingly combined a theory of the soul with elements of Presocratic physical doctrine, which supports a late fifth century dating.
[68] See Ch. 2 n. 22.

Plato's *Phaedo* written by the Neoplatonist Olympiodorus (6th cent. AD), who mentions the Orphic tale of Dionysus and the Titans in relation to the prohibition against suicide referenced at 61c:

> [The Orphics] say that through Hera's scheming, Dionysus was torn to pieces by his attendants, the Titans, who ate of his flesh. Zeus, raging with anger, struck them with his thunderbolts, and from the soot coming from the vapours that emanated from them originated the matter out of which mankind was created. Therefore, we must not kill ourselves, not because, as the text appears to say, we are in the body as in a sort of prison (διότι ἔν τινι δεσμῷ ἐσμεν τῷ σώματι) – for that is obvious, and [Plato] would not have referred to it as a secret doctrine (ἀπόρρητον) – but we must not kill ourselves because our bodies are Dionysian: we are, in fact, a part of him, if indeed we come from the soot of the Titans who ate his flesh.[69]

Olympiodorus distinguishes here between two layers of interpretation: the "obvious", exoteric explanation for the Orphic taboo against suicide is the belief, often referenced by Plato,[70] that the soul is imprisoned in the body as a form of punishment and that it is therefore unlawful for us to seek premature escape by way of self-inflicted death; the "secret", esoteric explanation has to do with the original reason for the soul's imprisonment, which is to say, "the story told in the mysteries" about the killing of Dionysus at the hands of the Titans.[71] The seal of secrecy which protected the myth is likely the reason why no pre-Hellenistic sources refer to it explicitly, although multiple ancient authors, including Plato, appear to be familiar with it.[72] Because of this, it is impossible to know for certain how much of Olympiodorus' testimony is based on early Orphic material and how much reflects his own interpretation of the Orphic myth. On one hand, the basic narrative outlined in the first part of the passage, which relates man's mortal condition to the crime committed by the Titans against the young Dionysus, is attested by several earlier

[69] Olympiod. *in Phd.* 1.3 (41 Westerink) = *OF* 304i, 313ii, 318iii, 320i.
[70] Pl. *Cra.* 400c = *OF* 430i, *Phd.* 62b = *OF* 429i, *Phdr.* 250c.
[71] Pl. *Phd*. 62b = *OF* 429i, 69c = *OF* 434iii.
[72] See, e.g., Hdt. 2.61.1, 2.132.2, 2.170.1 = *OF* 57i-iii, Pl. *L.* 3.701c, 9.854b = *OF* 37i-ii.

writers – such as Proclus (*in R.* 2.338.10 Kroll = *OF* 338i), Plutarch (*Esu carn.* 1.7 996b-c = *OF* 318ii), and possibly Dio Chrysostom (30.10 = *OF* 320vii, 429iii) – and is ostensibly implied by a well-known Pindaric fragment preserved by Plato,[73] which, to all but the most sceptical among Orphic scholars,[74] constitutes sufficient evidence for an early dating of the myth. On the other hand, the latter part of the testimony offers a peculiar interpretation of the Orphic anthropogony which, to my knowledge, is not found in any other source: namely, that because the Titans consumed the flesh of Dionysus, the human body, which is made of the matter derived from the Titans' incineration, is not wholly Titanic but also (partly) Dionysian.

Olympiodorus' interpretation of the Orphic prohibition against suicide presupposes (and corrects) what seems to have been the 'standard' reading of the Orphic anthropogony. On this reading, mankind partakes of two separate and opposite natures: the mortal, which pertains to the body and is inherently evil, and the divine, which pertains to the soul and is inherently good; the latter comes from Dionysus, the former from the Titans who devoured him. Such a reading is explicitly referenced by Olympiodorus in a later passage of his *Phaedo* commentary, as well as by other Neoplatonic commentators,[75] but goes back at least to the time of Xenocrates, who is quoted as saying that the body-prison (φρουρά)[76] is Titanic and "culminates" (ἀποκορυφοῦται) in Dionysus.[77] Plato's testimony is a bit more ambiguous. In a much-discussed passage of the *Laws* (3.701c = *OF* 37i), he describes those who are guilty of the worst kind of insubordination – namely, those who transgress against divine law – as displaying "the fabled ancient Titanic nature" (τὴν λεγομένην παλαιὰν

[73] Pi. fr. 133 SM *ap.* Pl. *Men.* 81b-c = *OF* 443 οἷσί κε Φερσεφόνα ποινὰν παλαιοῦ πένθεος / δέξεται, ἐς τὸν ὕπερθεν ἅλιον κείνων ἐνάτῳ ἔτεϊ / ἀνδιδοῖ ψυχὰς πάλιν κτλ (quoted in full above, p. 120).
[74] Brisson 1992a; Edmonds 2013, 296-391.
[75] Procl. *in Cra.* 77.24 Pasquali, Dam. *in Phd.* 1.8 (33 Westerink), 1.11 (35 W.) = *OF* 320iv, 350, Olympiod. *in Phd.* 8.7 (123 Westerink) = *OF* 320iii.
[76] Cf. Pl. *Phd.* 62b = *OF* 429i.
[77] Xenocr. fr. 219 Isnardi-Parente *ap.* Dam. *in Phd.* 1.2 = *OF* 38i.

Τιτανικὴν φύσιν). This expression has traditionally been understood as an allusion to the Orphic myth of Dionysus and the Titans,[78] but some scholars have pointed out that the rebellious and violent nature of these ancient gods was already a common trope in the mainstream mythical canon, as evidenced most notably by the story of the Titanomachy in Hesiod's *Theogony* (vv. 617-735).[79] Recently, the traditional interpretation has been defended by Bernabé (2011, 149-152), who cites a similar passage from the *Laws* (9.854b = *OF* 37ii) in support of his reading:

> My good man, the evil (κακὸν) that now prompts you to go temple-robbing is neither of human nor of divine origin (οὐκ ἀνθρώπινόν … οὐδὲ θεῖον), but it is an innate impulse bred into men from ancient wrongs unexpiated (οἶστρος … τις ἐμφυόμενος ἐκ παλαιῶν καὶ ἀκαθάρτων τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἀδικημάτων).

For his part, Edmonds (2013, 331f.) has argued that the supposed Orphic references in this passage ("the evil […] neither human nor divine" which forces one to commit impious acts, the "innate impulse bred into men from ancient wrongs unexpiated") can also be explained on the basis of traditional mythic ideas, such as "the Erinyes or other agents of the gods who drive men to terrible acts because of unexpiated crimes in the past". The Erinyes, he claims, would equally fall into the category of the 'daemonic', "neither human nor divine", so that an allusion to the Titans' crime(s) need not be posited.[80] However, if Plato wanted to refer to the Erinyes specifically, he would have had no reason not to do so explicitly – unlike in the case of the Orphic myth of the Titans, whose divulgement outside the mysteries was almost certainly prohibited by a religious taboo. In my view, the most plausible explanation for the two passages from the *Laws* is that Plato was alluding to both

[78] Kern 1920, 44; Guthrie 1952, 156; Nilsson 1935, 202; Ziegler 1942, 1354; Dodds 1951, 156, 176f. n. 132, 177 n. 133; Bianchi 1977, 132; Colli 1977, 398; Sorel 1995, 82f.
[79] Linforth 1941, 343-345; Edmonds 2013, 326-329, 333.
[80] Both the Titans and the Erinyes, like the *daimones*, were thought to occupy an intermediate position between gods and men (see, e.g., Burkert 1985, 179-182).

mainstream and Orphic mythic ideas at the same time, since his audience would in all likelihood have been familiar with both.

At any rate, if we are correct in relating these two passages to the Orphic anthropogony, they do not attest explicitly to either of these interpretations – namely, the 'standard' Orphic view of human existence as the imprisonment of the Dionysian soul in a Titanic body, and the 'alternative' interpretation which sees human souls and bodies as partaking both in the Dionysian and in the Titanic. What these passages testify to, if nothing else, is the Titans' proverbial wickedness, which the Orphics took to the extreme. Let us take a moment to appreciate the ingenuity of the Orphic *bricoleurs*. Mainstream mythic and cultic tradition emphasised the divide between gods and men in the present time, while also asserting that they "originated from the same source",[81] without providing a clear reason for man's fallen state. The Orphic mythmakers took the Titans, who were already associated in some capacity with the origin of mankind,[82] and made them responsible for the worst conceivable crime, namely, the ritualistic murder and cannibalisation of the infant son and heir of the king of the gods. Humanity, then, is not the defective creation of a god or gods, like in Hesiod's myth of the races, but the offspring of an unnatural union between two opposite natures: the heavenly nature of the Olympian Dionysus and the base and chaotic nature of the chthonian Titans. From the latter, humans inherited the guilt of deicide, for which they were rightly punished by being banished from the home of the gods. Nevertheless, on account of their kinship with Dionysus and the other Olympians, humans are given the chance to atone for their ancestral crime through purificatory rituals and can thus aspire to return to their heavenly abode after they die. On this account, the Orphics viewed themselves as fallen or exiled gods: as the gold tablets attest, they proudly identified

[81] Hes. *Op*. 108 ὡς ὁμόθεν γεγάασι θεοὶ θνητοί τ᾽ ἄνθρωποι.
[82] The *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, for instance, refers to the Titans as the ancestors of "both gods and men" (*HH* 3.336f.).

with the heavenly (Dionysian) side of their lineage,[83] believing that they would be reborn as their true (divine) selves in the afterlife, having cleansed themselves of their Titanic guilt by becoming initiated into the mysteries.[84]

So much for the 'standard' version of the Orphic anthropogony. Turning our attention back to Olympiodorus' interpretation, his claim that the body contains an element of divinity is striking in many respects. On the one hand, it runs counter to the Neoplatonists' disdain for the body, which the Orphics famously shared. On the other hand, the opposite side of the argument – namely, that the soul contains a Titanic element – is consistent with the Platonic view of the human soul as comprising a mortal, irrational element along with the immortal, rational element which defines its essence. To be sure, this is not stated in Olympiodorus' testimony, but it is heavily implied in a passage from Plutarch's *De esu carnium* (1.7 996b = *OF* 318ii), where the author etymologises the name 'Titans' (Τιτᾶνες) as "those who pay the penalty" (δίκην τίνειν):[85]

> Here [Empedocles] is saying allegorically (ἀλληγορεῖ) that human souls are imprisoned in mortal bodies to pay the penalty (δίκην τίνουσαι) for murder, the eating of animal flesh, and cannibalism. This doctrine, however, seems to be even older, for the stories told about the dismemberment of Dionysus and the shameless acts perpetrated against him by the Titans, and their punishment and blasting by thunderbolt after they had tasted his blood – all this is a myth whose inner meaning is about reincarnation. For to that which is irrational (ἄλογον), disordered, and violent within us and is not divine but daemonic (οὐ θεῖον ἀλλὰ δαιμονικὸν), the ancients gave the name of 'Titans' (Τιτᾶνας), which is to say, that which is punished and pays the penalty (δίκην διδόντος).

[83] E.g., Lam. Petel. (*OF* 476) 6f. εἰπεῖν· 'Γῆς παῖς εἰμι καὶ Οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος / αὐτὰρ ἐμοὶ γένος οὐράνιον· τάδε δ' ἴστε καὶ αὐτοί, Lam. Thur. (*OF* 488) 3 καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼν ὑμῶν γένος ὄλβιον εὔχομαι εἶμεν.

[84] E.g., Lam. Thur. (*OF* 490) 4 ποινὰν <δ'> ἀνταπέτε<ισ'> ἔργω<ν ἕνεκ'> ο<ὕ>τι δικα<ί>ων, Lam. Thur. (*OF* 488) 5, 9 κύκλο<υ> δ' ἐξέπταν βαρυπενθέος ἀργαλέοιο … 'ὄλβιε και μακαριστέ, θεὸς δ' ἔσῃ ἀντὶ βροτοῖο', Lam. Pelinn. (*OF* 485) 1f. νῦν ἔθανες καὶ νῦν ἐγένου, τρισόλβιε, ἄματι τῷδε. / εἰπεῖν Φερσεφόνᾳ σ' ὅτι Βάκχιος αὐτὸς ἔλυσε.

[85] Cf. Hes. *Th*. 207-210 τοὺς δὲ πατὴρ Τιτῆνας ἐπίκλησιν καλέεσκε / παῖδας νεικείων μέγας Οὐρανός, οὓς τέκεν αὐτός· / φάσκε δὲ τιταίνοντας ἀτασθαλίῃ μέγα ῥέξαι / ἔργον, τοῖο δ' ἔπειτα τίσιν μετόπισθεν ἔσεσθαι.

Here, Plutarch seems to be projecting on the Orphic mythologers a theory of the human soul as containing an irrational, daemonic (οὐ θεῖον ἀλλὰ δαιμονικὸν) element,[86] on account of which the soul is imprisoned in a body. Such a theory is, of course, founded on Platonic psychology, but if it could be demonstrated that some early Orphics indeed held similar views, this would be strong evidence of an Orphic influence on Plato's theory of the composite soul. Although soul/body dualism was undoubtedly the dominant paradigm within the Orphic tradition, the notion that the human soul could contain a Titanic element as a result of the Titans' crime is arguably supported by the Orphic view of the body as a prison – for how could the soul be worthy of punishment if it were entirely pure and divine (i.e., Dionysian)? On the other hand, Olympiodorus' theory that the body contains a divine, Dionysian element due to the Titans digesting Dionysus' flesh seems entirely foreign to both Platonic and Orphic doctrine, which is probably why Olympiodorus felt the need to qualify it as a "secret".

To sum up, Plato's anthropogony, as presented in the *Timaeus*, and the Orphic myth of the origin of man differ substantially from traditional anthropogonic accounts in that they both conceive of human nature as being composite and of its components – a divine and morally good part and a material, evil part – as having separate origins. According to both Plato and the Orphics, the mortal part of man is not engendered directly by the creator god, although the latter's involvement in the process varies significantly between the two accounts. In the Orphic myth, the creation of man is ostensibly accidental. Whereas the creation of the universe was carried out by Zeus in accordance with a preordained plan, the birth of mankind seems to be but an unintended consequence of his punishing the Titans for the killing of his son; in other words, Zeus is only directly responsible for the creation

[86] Cf. Pl. *L.* 9.854b = *OF* 37ii οὐκ ἀνθρώπινόν … κακὸν οὐδὲ θεῖον (see p. 210).

of the human soul, which proceeds from his son Dionysus,[87] but only incidentally for creating the human body by blasting the Titans,[88] who bear responsibility for the evil which created the conditions (or, rather, the necessity) for incarnation. In the *Timaeus* myth, on the other hand, the creation of a race of mortal men is part of a deliberate plan which necessitates the existence of all kinds of living creatures, since the universe could not be considered perfect without them – and, as Plato stresses at the beginning, the Demiurge, being good and without jealousy, wants his creation to be, as far as possible, perfect, like himself.[89] Because everything that the Demiurge creates is imperishable and cannot be destroyed by anything other than its maker, the creation of the human body and the mortal parts of the soul is delegated to the created gods, while the Demiurge is directly responsible for creating the immortal soul.[90] Without necessarily ascribing the same motivations to the Orphics,[91] we may still recognise in their anthropogony a symbolic expression of the idea, central to the *Timaeus*, that the immortal and the mortal parts of human nature must be regarded as separate entities with different origins and creators. Thus, if we accept an early

[87] This was also the interpretation of the Neoplatonists (e.g., Plot. 4.3.12 = *OF* 309i, Procl. *in Ti*. 2.146.9 Diehl = *OF* 311i), who equated the Orphic Dionysus with the Cosmic Soul in Plato's *Timaeus* and his dismemberment with the fragmentation and distribution of the Cosmic Soul throughout the physical universe and into physical human bodies. As Meisner (2018, 259) points out, the Neoplatonic interpretation likely goes back to a Stoic allegoresis applied by Plutarch (*E ap. Delph*. 9.388e-389a = *OF* 613ii).

[88] This, at least, according to the version of the myth related by Damascius (*in Phd*. 1.8 [33 Westerink] = *OF* 320iv) and Olympiodorus (*in Phd*. 1.3 [41 Westerink] = *OF* 320i) and, possibly, the variant attested in a Sibylline oracle inscribed at Perinthos, dating to the second century AD (*Epigr. Gr*. 1036a = *OF* 320xi). In another version, attested in a few post-Hellenistic sources, humans are born from the blood which the Titans – or the Giants (the two were often confused since the Hellenistic period: see Vian 1952, 171; West 1983a, 165 n. 88; Meisner 2018, 172) – spilled on the earth, presumably during their battle against the gods (see Dio Chrys. 30.10 = *OF* 320vii, Oppian *Hal*. 4-6, 9f. = *OF* 320xiv, Julian *Ep*. 89b292 [159.19 Bidez] = *OF* 320ix, Orph. *Arg*. 17-20 = *OF* 320v). In his commentary on Plato's *Republic* (*in R*. 2.74.26 Kroll = *OF* 320ii), Proclus relates yet another variation of the Orphic anthropogony, according to which Zeus "put together" (συστήσασθαι) the current race of humans out of the Titans' dismembered limbs. Although in the *Rhapsodies* (*OF* 159-160, 216-218, 320ii), the previous two races of humans were created intentionally – by Phanes and Cronus, respectively (see below §6.3) – Proclus' account is likely an adaptation of the Orphic myth based on the creation story of the *Timaeus*, where the same verb for 'putting together' (συνίστημι) is used to describe the activity of the Demiurge (see Johnston 2013a, 88-90).

[89] Pl. *Ti*. 29d-30d.

[90] Pl. *Ti*. 41a-d.

[91] Clearly, the Orphic mythographers did not share Plato's reservations against attributing ill intent to the gods, since they made Hera the instigator of Dionysus' murder, but perhaps the idea that the creator and ruler of the universe should not be ascribed any kind of fault or shortcoming was already at play.

dating for the Orphic myth, as I think we should, it is not unreasonable to think that Plato could have been inspired by it in this regard.

Before concluding, I ought to mention another important parallel between the Orphic anthropogony and Plato's: namely, their close connection with eschatology.[92] As I have shown, Plato and the Orphics viewed human beings as, essentially, defective gods; accordingly, their respective doctrines were centred around the ultimate goal of transcending the mortal condition and becoming immortal, which is to say, divine. In both Platonic and Orphic doctrine, the solution to the problem of incarnation is embedded in the circumstances of man's creation. In the Orphic tradition, Dionysus, from whom humans inherit the divine element in their souls, gives men the opportunity to redeem themselves by becoming initiated in his mysteries. In Plato's *Timaeus*, the Demiurge equips the souls that are destined to be incarnated with the knowledge which will allow them to live a life in pursuit of the Good – that is to say, a philosophic life – and eventually become pure enough to escape the cycle of reincarnations:

> Once he had compounded the whole, he divided it into as many souls as there are stars and assigned each of them to a star. And, setting them each as it were in a chariot, he showed them the nature of the universe and declared to them the laws of destiny […]. And he who has lived his appointed time well shall return to his home in his native star and live a life that is blessed and congenial to his character.[93]

The message presented here and reiterated at the end of the *Timaeus* (89d-92c) is consistent with the ideas expressed in earlier dialogues regarding the soul's fate in the

[92] Within the Orphic tradition, an example of the connection between cosmogony (of which anthropogony may be considered a subset) and eschatology can be found in the Derveni papyrus, which was discovered in a burial context and whose text combines discussion of ritual practices with cosmological allegoresis (see Most 1997a; Betegh 2004, 325-348; Piano 2016, 273f.).

[93] Pl. *Ti.* 41d-42b. It is possible that the imagery of the mixing bowl (κρατήρ) used by the Demiurge to create the mixture from which the Cosmic Soul and the rational part of the human soul are made was inspired by the Orphic allegorical poem titled *Krater*, already mentioned as a possible source for the eschatological myth of the *Phaedo* and the allegory of the Cave (see above §§3.3.2; 5.2).

afterlife,[94] particularly the *Phaedrus*. This section of the *Timaeus* (41a-42e; see p. 118), where the Chariot allegory is explicitly alluded to (41e), can arguably be considered as a prologue to the eschatological myth in the *Phaedrus* (246a-250c), which describes the procession of the souls in the hyperuranion, the fall of the human souls due to their imperfect nature, and their subsequent fate according to the "law of Adrasteia" (248c). The solution to the problem posed by the *Phaedrus* myth, which ostensibly depicts the human soul's original fall without adequately accounting for its cause, is indeed laid out by Timaeus in his creation story, which reveals that human souls were created by design to be sent to earth and live (for a period of time) inside physical bodies. Herein lies an important difference between Plato's worldview – at least at the time of writing the *Timaeus* – and the Orphics': whereas the Orphics saw the soul's first incarnation as a punishment, Plato regarded it as an indispensable part of God's plan for the cosmos. This, of course, is not to deny that Plato, like the Orphics, had an overall negative view of incarnation and of anything which has to do with the body; rather, he acknowledged it as a necessary evil, which the benevolent creator of the universe does everything in his power to mitigate.[95]

6.3 Cosmic cyclicity

After bringing the universe into being and instructing the lesser gods to create all the mortal creatures which populate the earth, including human beings, the god of the *Timaeus* relinquishes control of his creation and continues to "abide by the wont of his own nature" (42e ἔμενεν ἐν τῷ ἑαυτοῦ κατὰ τρόπον ἤθει).[96] The expression at *Ti.* 42e is not easy to

[94] On the Orphic elements in Plato's eschatological vision, see above §3.3.
[95] Pl. *Ti.* 42d-e; cf. *R.* 10.617d-e. On the subject of Plato's theodicy, see the recent study by Ilievski (2023b).
[96] Tr. Cornford 1935, 147.

understand,[97] but the general sense seems to be that the Demiurge leaves the creation of mortal beings in the hands of the younger gods and does not intervene any further.[98] Accordingly, for the remainder of the *Timaeus*, the Demiurge is only mentioned in reference to the "works of Reason" (47e τὰ διὰ Νοῦ δεδημιουργημένα) described in the first part of the dialogue,[99] which include the instructions given to the younger gods regarding the creation of mortal bodies.[100] Given that many of the authors who influenced Plato, such as Hesiod, Heraclitus, and Empedocles, subscribed to some theory of cyclicality,[101] it is worth asking whether Plato himself considered the universe to be eternal, in which case the creation story of the *Timaeus* would have to be entirely metaphorical, or whether he envisioned the Demiurge intervening at definite times to bring an end to the universe and start the process over.[102] Although neither of these views is explicitly advocated by Plato in any of his works, there are several hints which point to the latter as the likelier alternative.

[97] Brisson (1992b, 136 and n. 257), for example, interprets it literally as μένω + locative: "il resta dans le lieu où il séjournait habituellement". Some, like Tarán (2001, 318), see the phrase as "a reference to the doctrine that God is unchangeable" (cf. Pl. *R.* 2.381b-c), which raises the question: if creating is part of God's ἦθος, is the cessation of such activity not a violation of the principle of God's immutability? Tarán's solution, with which I tend to agree, is to "interpret the Demiurge as a mythical figure and as […] a symbol of intelligent causation" (320): see also Cherniss 1944, 425-428; *contra* Vlastos 1965b, 406.

[98] According to Santamaría (2016a, 225), the Demiurge's 'retirement' "finds a parallel in the *Rhapsodies*, when Phanes, having created the world, yields the power to his daughter Night" (*OF* 171-173). In the *Rhapsodies*, however, Phanes creates the first of three races of humans before retiring (*OF* 159-160). If we assume that the race created by Phanes was analogous to the golden race of Hesiod (*Op*. 109-126), whose name it shared, we may discern a further parallel with the *Timaeus*, insofar as Phanes' race of semi-divine humans can be compared to the rational part of the human soul, which the Demiurge is directly responsible for creating. More on this later.

[99] Pl. *Ti*. 69b-c.

[100] Pl. *Ti*. 71d-e.

[101] On Heraclitus' theory of cosmic cycles, see Finkelberg's recent book (2017), esp. Chapters 2-3. On Hesiod and Empedocles, see below.

[102] A third option would be to think of the universe as having a beginning but no end, meaning that it would be everlasting but not eternal. This, however, is ruled out by Timaeus in the prelude to his speech, when he establishes that the cosmos, being visible and tangible, necessarily belongs to the realm of becoming, meaning that it is generated and (presumably) perishable (28b-c). Later, Timaeus explains that, because it is impossible for a generated thing to be eternal, the Demiurge, who wanted the cosmos to resemble as much as possible its eternal model, created a "moving likeness of eternity" alongside it – namely, time – within the confines of which the universe could be eternal (37c-d, 39d-e); but time itself, as Plato seems to suggest, may not be eternal (38b-c).

Within the *Timaeus* itself, the destruction of the universe is presented as a possibility at least on two separate occasions,[103] while in another instance God is defined by his ability "to blend the many into one and to dissolve again the one into many",[104] which seems to be a reference to the two opposite and complementary processes of creation and destruction.[105] Furthermore, the discussion of what Plato calls the "perfect year" (*Ti*. 39d τέλεος ἐνιαυτός),[106] a period of time which reaches its completion when all the planets return to the same relative position, as measured by "the revolution of the Same and Similarly-moving", raises the question of whether the end of the planetary cycle will bring about the end of time itself and, thus, the destruction of the universe, since the two were created together.[107] Although Plato does not ostensibly associate the completion of this "perfect year" with a cosmic cataclysm, this sort of belief is attested, according to Seneca, at the beginning of the third century BC in the work of the Babylonian priest and astronomer Berossus, who is mentioned in the *Naturales Quaestiones* (3.29.1f.) as a source for the Stoic idea of identical, eternally recurring cosmic cycles, punctuated by eternally recurring cosmic conflagrations.[108] In particular, what Seneca ascribes to Berossus is a doctrine of recurrence and counter-recurrence, which is somewhat reminiscent of the two-cycle theory

[103] Pl. *Ti*. 38b χρόνος δ᾽ οὖν μετ᾽ οὐρανοῦ γέγονεν, ἵνα ἅμα γεννηθέντες ἅμα καὶ λυθῶσιν, ἄν ποτε λύσις τις αὐτῶν γίγνηται, 41a θεοὶ θεῶν, ὧν ἐγὼ δημιουργὸς πατήρ τε ἔργων, δι᾽ ἐμοῦ γενόμενα ἄλυτα ἐμοῦ γε μὴ ἐθέλοντος.

[104] Pl. *Ti*. 68d θεὸς μὲν τὰ πολλὰ εἰς ἓν συγκεραννύναι καὶ πάλιν ἐξ ἑνὸς εἰς πολλὰ διαλύειν ἱκανῶς ἐπιστάμενος ἅμα καὶ δυνατός, ἀνθρώπων δὲ οὐδεὶς οὐδέτερα τούτων ἱκανὸς οὔτε ἔστι νῦν οὔτε εἰς αὖθίς ποτε ἔσται.

[105] One is reminded of Empedocles' theory of the universe coming together under the influence of Love and apart under Strife (see, e.g., Emp. fr. 17.1f. DK δίπλ᾽ ἐρέω· τοτὲ μὲν γὰρ ἓν ηὐξήθη μόνον εἶναι / ἐκ πλεόνων, τοτὲ δ᾽ αὖ διέφυ πλέον᾽ ἐξ ἑνὸς εἶναι), but a closer parallel, in my view, can be found in the Orphic myth of Zeus (e.g., *OF* 241), who "contained all things in the hollow of his belly" (many to one) and created the universe anew (one to many): cf. D.L. *pr*. 3 Λανθάνουσι δ᾽ αὐτοὺς τὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων κατορθώματα, ἀφ᾽ ὧν μὴ ὅτι γε φιλοσοφία, ἀλλὰ καὶ γένος ἀνθρώπων ἦρξε, βαρβάροις προσάπτοντες. ἰδοὺ γοῦν παρὰ μὲν Ἀθηναίοις γέγονε Μουσαῖος … καὶ τὸν μὲν Εὐμόλπου παῖδά φασι, ποιῆσαι δὲ Θεογονίαν καὶ Σφαῖραν πρῶτον· φάναι τε ἐξ ἑνὸς τὰ πάντα γίνεσθαι καὶ εἰς ταὐτὸν ἀναλύεσθαι.

[106] Cf. Pl. *R*. 8.546b.

[107] Cf. Pl. *Ti*. 38b χρόνος δ᾽ οὖν μετ᾽ οὐρανοῦ γέγονεν, ἵνα ἅμα γεννηθέντες ἅμα καὶ λυθῶσιν, ἄν ποτε λύσις τις αὐτῶν γίγνηται.

[108] Cf. Nemesius 309.5-311.2 = *SVF* 2.625. For further evidence and commentary on the Stoic doctrine of eternal recurrence, see Long and Sedley 1987, 308-313; Salles 2005, 19-19; Long 2006, 256-282. On Berossus, see Stevens 2019, 94-119.

put forth by Plato in the myth of the *Statesman*.[109] While there is ultimately no conclusive evidence in Plato's own writings to support the notion of a Platonic theory of eternal recurrence, the existence of such a theory in Plato was nonetheless upheld by late antique authors like Eusebius of Caesarea (*PE* 11.34f.), who cited the myth of Cronus in the *Statesman* as proof for his claim.[110] This is the only passage in Plato's corpus where a theory of cosmic cyclicity is discussed at length, so it is worth analysing it in detail.

The cosmological myth in the *Statesman* (268d-274e) presents a peculiar account of divine intervention on the direction of the universe's rotation, which has given rise to several scholarly controversies.[111] The current state – in which the universe rotates on its axis from east to west and things on earth are subject to degeneration and decay – results "by necessity" (269d ἐξ ἀνάγκης) from the influence of the "corporeal element of the mixture" (273b τὸ σωματοειδὲς τῆς συγκράσεως) from which the universe is made, whose natural predisposition is towards "disorder" (ἀταξία). At (presumably) set intervals,[112] God takes direct control of the universe and steers its rotation in the opposite direction; this, according to tradition, happened during the reign of Cronus and, again, at the time of Atreus.

[109] Sen. *NQ* 3.29.1f. Berosos, qui Belum interpretatus est, ait ista cursu siderum fieri. Adeo quidem affirmat ut conflagrationi atque diluvio tempus assignet. Arsura enim terrena contendit, quandoque omnia sidera quae nunc diversos agunt cursus in Cancrum convenerint, sic sub eodem posita vestigio ut recta linea exire per orbes omnium possit; inundationem futuram, cum eadem siderum turba in Capricornum convenerit. Illic solstitium, hic bruma conficitur; magnae potentiae signa, quando in ipsa mutatione anni momenta sunt. Quidam existimant terram quoque concuti et dirupto solo nova fluminum capita detegere, quae amplius ut e pleno profundant. Et istas ego receperim causas – neque enim ex uno est tanta pernicies.

[110] As we will see, the *Statesman* myth could, in theory, lend itself to such an interpretation, albeit (seemingly) unintentionally on Plato's part. A possible argument in favour of this reading is the idea, articulated in the *Timaeus* (31a-b), that the world created by the Demiurge is the best of all possible worlds and, therefore, "one and unique". In my view, the erratic nature of the material element would not allow for an eternal recurrence of the same events, down to the last detail, but it is not inconceivable that some ancient interpreters could have inferred such a theory based on this premise. In any case, my main question here is simply whether or not we can plausibly assign to Plato a theory of cosmic cycles, regardless of whether these cycles are identical in every respect or merely similar.

[111] The main points of controversy concern the number and nature of the cosmic rotation cycles, the literalness of the myth, and the extent to which it is compatible with the cosmology of the *Timaeus*. For a detailed survey of the debates and a cogent defence of the traditional two-cycle interpretation, see the excellent papers by Verlinsky (2008; 2009) and Gartner and Yau (2020). On the myth of the *Statesman* and its function in the dialogue, see El Murr 2014b, 143-188 and Betegh 2021b.

[112] Pl. *Plt.* 269c.

Because the passage of time, as the *Timaeus* explains at length,[113] is tied to the motion of the heavenly bodies, a reversal of the latter necessarily produces a reversal of the former:

> First the age of each living being, whatever it was at the moment, stood still, and every mortal creature stopped growing older in appearance and, changing back in the opposite direction, became, as it were, younger and more tender; the white hairs of old men turned dark, and bearded cheeks became smooth again, returning their possessors to their bygone youth, and the bodies of young men grew smoother and smaller with each day and night, reverting to the form of newborn children, which they resembled both in mind and in body; and finally they wasted away until they disappeared entirely […]. It is a natural consequence of the return of the old to childhood that those who are dead and lying in the ground should take shape and come to life again, since the process of birth is reversed along with the direction of the world's revolution; and since, for this reason, they are by necessity earth-born, hence derives their name and the tradition about them.[114]

It is not difficult to see how a Christian author like Eusebius – and perhaps even those Stoics who developed a theory of eternal recurrence – could have inferred the infinite repetition, backwards and forwards, of the same events from the (ostensibly) infinite alternation between opposite cosmic rotation cycles described in the *Statesman* myth. I do not intend to argue that this is what Plato meant to imply, nor is the correctness of this reading instrumental to the present discussion. However, the fact that such a reading is even attested indicates that the 'weaker' theory of non-identical macro-cycles, punctuated by cosmic cataclysms,[115] was not considered alien to Plato by most ancient interpreters – and this weaker version of cosmic cyclicity is, as I will argue, something which can be plausibly ascribed to Plato. That said, the *Statesman* myth raises several problems. First of all, is it merely a parody of traditional mythic tropes – such as the myth of autochthony or the idea

[113] Pl. *Ti.* 37e-39e.
[114] Pl. *Plt.* 270d -271c.
[115] Cf. Censor. *Die nat*. 18.11 Est praeterea annus, quem Aristoteles maximum potius, quam magnum appellat: quem solis et lunae vagarumque quinque stellarum orbes conficiunt, cum ad idem signum, ubi quondam simul fuerunt, una referuntur; cuius anni hiemps summa est cataclysmos, quam nostri diluvionem vocant, aestas autem ecpyrosis, quod est mundi incendium: nam his alternis temporibus mundus tum exignescere tum exaquescere videtur.

of a 'golden age' – or is it meant to be taken seriously? And if the latter, how literal should our interpretation be? Furthermore, how does the myth of the *Statesman* relate to other cosmological passages in Plato's dialogues, chief among them the creation myth of the *Timaeus*? Should they even be compared in the first place? To answer these questions, we need to understand the origin of the myth of Cronus, as well as its function within the *Statesman* – and, possibly, within the wider context of Plato's body of work.

Let us then take a step back and consider the context of the *Statesman* myth. As is often the case in Plato's dialogues, the myth is introduced at an impasse in the argument, although its significance, as will shortly become clear, extends beyond the immediate purpose of advancing towards a suitable definition of 'statesmanship'. This is hinted at by the Eleatic Stranger at the beginning of the section, when he introduces the myth as a "great story, a large part of which should be used [in the present discussion]".[116] The μέγας μῦθος of which the Stranger speaks turns out to be a combination of different traditional myths; some, like the story of Atreus and Thyestes and the Greek myths of autochthony, are referenced explicitly, while others are woven seamlessly into the narrative. The latter group includes, of course, Hesiod's myth of the races (*Op.* 106-201),[117] which is possibly the earliest attestation in Greek literature of the idea of cosmic or historical cycles. This interpretation of Hesiod's myth is admittedly controversial, but I believe that there are – as I hope to show in the following paragraphs – reasonable grounds to support it. On this reading, the first three races[118] – which, as the names imply, get progressively worse – make up the first cycle. The golden and silver races were created by the Olympians under the

[116] Pl. *Plt.* 268d.
[117] On Plato's reception of Hesiod, see the edited volume by Boys-Stones and Haubold (2010), especially El Murr's (2010) and Rowe's (2010) contributions on the myth of the *Statesman*. See also Ch. 3 of Van Noorden's recent book (2015), on Plato's reception of the myth of the races in the *Protagoras*, *Republic*, and *Statesman*.
[118] I use the traditional terms 'race' and 'age', as appropriate, to translate the Greek γένος (e.g., γ. χρύσεον), although the cognate 'generation' might be a better compromise. On the meaning of γένος, particularly in the context of Hesiod's myth, see Rosenmeyer 1957, 266; Fontenrose 1974, 1; Calame 2004, 67f.; Currie 2012, 41f.

reign of Cronus,[119] while the bronze race was created by Zeus alone.[120] The men of the golden age lived like gods, "free from sorrow" (112 ἀκηδέα θυμὸν ἔχοντες), and for them "the fruitful earth bore fruit spontaneously" (117f. καρπὸν δ᾽ ἔφερε ζείδωρος ἄρουρα / αὐτομάτη): this idea, itself based on an separate tradition,[121] is clearly referenced by Plato in his description of the age of Cronus, not only in the *Statesman* (271c-d ὃ δ᾽ ἦρου περὶ τοῦ πάντα αὐτόματα γίγνεσθαι τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, κτλ), but in other dialogues as well. The second cycle begins with the "godlike race of heroes" (159 ἀνδρῶν ἡρώων θεῖον γένος): these are the warriors who, as tradition had it, fought in the Theban and Trojan wars. According to Hesiod, these heroes were transported by Zeus to the Isles of the Blessed,[122] where they live "free from sorrow" (170 ἀκηδέα θυμὸν ἔχοντες) under the rule of Cronus, in a renewed golden age.[123] Following the same pattern of degeneration which defined the previous cycle, the heroic race is replaced by the inferior iron race, to which Hesiod and his contemporaries belong. Despite its flaws, however, Hesiod's generation still has "some good mingled with [its] evils" (179 ἀλλ᾽ ἔμπης καὶ τοῖσι μεμείξεται ἐσθλὰ κακοῖσιν), for an even worse generation will come after his, the third and final phase in the second cycle.[124] "[W]hen [the men of this race] will be born with grey hair on their temples" (181

[119] Hes. *Op*. 110f., 127f.
[120] Hes. *Op*. 144.
[121] Baldry 1952; West 1978, 179.
[122] Hes. *Op*. 166-173. Some scholars interpret these lines to mean that only some heroes were sent to the Isles of the Blessed (e.g., Bianchi 1963, 179f.; West 1978, 192f.; Verdenius 1985, 101f.), but a comparison with fr. 204 of the *Catalogue*, which clearly references this passage from the *Works*, suggests that the entire race of heroes was rewarded in such manner (Koenen 1994, 5, 26-33). On the other hand, Cerutti (1998, 163f.) notes, correctly, that translation to the Isles of the Blessed was originally seen as an alternative to death, not as a post-mortem reward, as it later came to be regarded (see above §2.2). It is possible that the *Catalogue* – if it was indeed composed in the sixth century BC, as most scholars now believe (e.g., West 1985, 168-171; a survey of the debate can be found in Hirschberger 2004, 42-51) – reflects this later stage in the development of the myth.
[123] The idea of Cronus as ruler of the Isles of the Blessed, which is an extension of his role as ruler during the golden age (see West 1978, 195), is also referenced in Pindar's 'Orphic' *Second Olympian* (vv. 56-72 = *OF* 445; quoted above, p. 105).
[124] Hes. *Op*. 181-201. This interpretation, advanced by Martin (1943) and Vernant (1960; 1966) and defended more recently by Westra and Nikolic (2006), is not unanimously accepted; for a different reading, see, e.g., West 1978, 319; Verdenius 1985, 105; Koenen 1994; Most 1997b.

εὖτ᾽ ἂν γεινόμενοι πολιοκρόταφοι τελέθωσιν), Zeus will destroy them:[125] then, as Hesiod implies, a new golden age will commence – and with it a new cycle.[126] Another poem traditionally attributed to Hesiod, known as the *Catalogue of Women*, presents an abridged version of this scheme, detailing the transition from the age of heroes, when gods and mortals intermingled and interbred freely, to the current age of men.[127] Unlike the myth of the races in the *Works and Days*, the passage in the *Catalogue* does not foreshadow an eventual return to the conditions of the heroic age, though nothing in the text precludes this interpretation. In any case, it is worth repeating that the interpretation of Hesiod's myth of the races as presupposing a notion of cyclicity is itself controversial: some scholars interpret the wish expressed by Hesiod towards the end of the passage (*Op*. 174f.), that he had "either died earlier or been born later" instead of being born in the fifth generation, as an allusion to a future renewal of the cycle,[128] while others interpret Hesiod's statement as merely rhetorical.[129]

Hesiod is not the only pre-Platonic source for the notion of cosmic ages or cycles. Empedocles is well known for his theory of infinitely alternating cosmic phases, one dominated by increasing Love (Φιλία, or Ἀφροδίτη), which creates unity from division, and the other by increasing Strife (Νεῖκος), which leads the opposite process of differentiation.[130] The binary structure of Empedocles' theory of cosmic cycles is strikingly reminiscent of the cosmological model put forth by Plato in the *Statesman*, insomuch as they both envision an (ostensibly) infinitely recurring cycle made up of two opposite stages, one dominated by a rational, creative force, which generates growth and harmony, the other

[125] It is unclear whether *Op*. 180f. refers to Hesiod's own generation or the following (or both), but this ambiguity does not affect the overall interpretation of the myth to any significant degree.
[126] Hes. *Op*. 174f. μηκέτ᾽ ἔπειτ᾽ ὤφελλον ἐγὼ πέμπτοισι μετεῖναι / ἀνδράσιν, ἀλλ᾽ ἢ πρόσθε θανεῖν ἢ ἔπειτα γενέσθαι.
[127] Hes. fr. 204.96-103. On the relationship between this passage and the myth of the races, see Koenen 1994, 26-33; Clay 2005; González 2010.
[128] E.g., Vernant 1960; Hunt 1981.
[129] E.g., Rosenmeyer 1957, 275f.; Verdenius 1985, 104f.
[130] See Ch. 5 n. 22.

dominated by chaos and destruction.[131] The influence of the Empedoclean theory of Love and Strife on the *Statesman* myth is arguably confirmed by a passage in the *Sophist* (242d-243a), the middle dialogue in the *Theaetetus-Sophist-Statesman* trilogy, where the Eleatic Stranger lists the proponents of different cosmological theories, including a "certain Sicilian Muse", according to whom "the cosmos is at one time one and friendly, under the influence of Aphrodite (ὑπ᾽ Ἀφροδίτης), and at another time many and hostile towards itself due to some sort of strife (διὰ νεῖκός τι)". Earlier in the same passage (242c-d), the Stranger references two anonymous sources: "one says there are three principles […] and another says there are two – wet and dry, or hot and cold – which he couples together and unites in marriage". The former has been identified with Pherecydes of Samos[132] – a sixth-century mythographer and philosopher with connections to Orphism and Pythagoreanism,[133] who began his cosmogony with three primordial deities (Chronos, Chthonie, and Zas)[134] – while the latter has been interpreted as an allusion "to the prominent part played by the antitheses of hot, cold, wet, dry, in some of the cosmologies which go back ultimately to Anaximenes".[135] In my view, however, the reference to myths and children's stories in the previous sentence[136] points rather to the author of a mythical cosmogony, such as one of the *Theogonies* ascribed to Orpheus. An Orphic theogony beginning with "water and mud"

[131] An important difference is that while in Empedocles' model Love and Strife take turns in shaping the cosmos as two opposite but equal forces, in the Platonic myth the degenerative cycle is caused by the absence of divine intervention, rather than by another divine force opposed to Cronus (see *Plt*. 269e-270a).
[132] See Campbell 1867, 103f. and Taylor 1961, 136, *ad l.*
[133] See West 1963, 157-172; Schibli 1990; Granger 2007.
[134] Pherecyd. fr. 1 DK. Perhaps worth mentioning here is the testimony of the Byzantine antiquarian John Lydus (*Mens*. 2.8 [26.1 Wünsch] = *OF* 20v), who relates that "according to Orpheus, three first principles of generation (πρῶται … ἀρχαὶ τῆς γενέσεως) were produced: Night, Earth, and Uranus; and three races of generated gods (θεῶν δὲ τῶν ἐν γενέσει τρία γένη): celestial, terrestrial, and that which is in between (οὐράνιον καὶ ἐπίγειον καὶ τὸ μεταξὺ τούτων)". Needless to say, the late date of this testimony should invite caution, though it is possible that John Lydus derived his information from a much earlier source. The apparent parallelism with the three Orphic races of humans (golden under Phanes, silver under Cronus, and Titanic under Zeus) mentioned by Proclus (*in R*. 2.74.26 Kroll = *OF* 159, 216i, 320ii; see below) is unfortunately of little help, as the antiquity of Proclus' source(s) is equally dubious.
[135] Taylor 1961, 136.
[136] Pl. *Sph*. 242c μῦθόν τινα ἕκαστος φαίνεταί μοι διηγεῖσθαι παισὶν ὡς οὖσιν ἡμῖν, ὁ μὲν ὡς τρία τὰ ὄντα, κτλ.

(or "water and the matter from which earth was coagulated"), known as the *Hieronyman Theogony*, is in fact attested in late antique sources;[137] the dating of the poem is debated, but parallels with Near Eastern mythology suggest that the original version could date back to as early as the sixth century BC.[138]

What is relevant for the present discussion is the existence of two distinct patterns within the Orphic (or Orphic-adjacent) mythical tradition: one based on the number three and another based on binary opposition (including the dichotomy between One and Many).[139] The foremost expression of the binary pattern is, of course, the idea of the continuous alternation of life and death, embodied by the belief in the cycle of reincarnations. The prominence of the tripartite pattern within the Orphic tradition is exemplified, within the context of cosmology, by the identification of the tripartite division of time with Zeus, who is thus defined as the god "who holds the beginning, the end, and the middle".[140] Another instance of the tripartite pattern can be seen in the myth of the three races of man, which, like much of the content of the Orphic theogonies, is known to us almost exclusively through a Neoplatonic source. According to Proclus' account,

> The theologian (θεολόγος) Orpheus has transmitted three races (γένη) of humans: the very first is the golden race, which he says was created by Phanes; second the silver race, which he says mighty Cronus ruled over; and third the Titanic race, which he says was formed by Zeus from the limbs of the Titans; understanding that every Form of human life (πᾶν εἶδος

[137] *OF* 69-89. On the *Hieronyman Theogony*, see West 1983a, 176-226; Meisner 2018, 119-157; Edmonds 2019.
[138] This, at least, is what some scholars at the turn of the twentieth century believed (see Gruppe 1887, 632-661; Guthrie 1952, 74-88, 103-105).
[139] In the *Eudemian* and *Rhapsodic Theogonies*, for example, the universe (i.e., the many) originates from one primordial deity (Night and Time, respectively): see *OF* 20, 96f. On binary opposition in Orphism and Plato, see above §5.1.
[140] Pl. *L*. 4.715e-716a = *OF* 31iii (quoted above, n. 39). At the same time, we can discern a tendency towards the overcoming of these cyclical patterns, both in the idea of Zeus' reign as encompassing eternity (i.e., beginning [past], middle [present], and end [future]), and in the belief in the soul's ability to transcend the cycle of reincarnations. It would be interesting to explore how this trend – and the accompanying monistic tendencies – influenced the development of early Christian thought, through the medium of (Neo-)Platonism, but this is a topic for another study.

> … τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ζωῆς) is included in these three terms (ἐν τρισὶν ὅροις τούτοις).[141]

Given the late date of this testimony and the obvious similarities with Hesiod's myth of the five races, one would be inclined to conclude that the Orphic poet took the first three races from Hesiod's account, put Phanes in charge of the golden race instead of Cronus, and changed the name of the bronze race to identify it with the current race of humans – which, according to the Orphic anthropogony, originates from the Titans.[142] There is, however, an alternative explanation, which could help make sense of some of the inconsistencies in Hesiod's account: namely, that both Hesiod and the author of the Orphic myth of the races were drawing upon an earlier tradition – based, perhaps, on pre-Greek or non-Greek motifs[143] – which followed a three-based model of cyclical history.[144] Three metallic races (gold, silver, and bronze) are attested in Aratus' *Phainomena* (100-136), but this is likely an abridged version of Hesiod's myth. It is possible, however, that an alternative tradition, independent from Hesiod, was preserved by Babrius (1st/2nd cent. AD) in the Prologue to his collection of *Aesopic Fables in Iambics* (1-13), which contains a version of the myth with a golden, silver, and iron race.[145]

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[141] Procl. *in R.* 2.74.26 Kroll = *OF* 159, 216i, 320ii.

[142] One could also suppose, with West (1983a, 107), that the Orphic *bricoleur* took the third, fourth, and fifth races of Hesiod's story – which are all created by Zeus – and combined them into one, forgoing the traditional metallic label. On the (inter)relationship between the Hesiodic and Orphic traditions, see Currie 2007.

[143] In his commentary on the *Works and Days*, West (1978, 174-177) discusses four oriental parallels for Hesiod's myth: the *Avesta*, the *Book of Daniel*, the *Laws of Manu*, and the Sumerian and Babylonian king-lists; Koenen (1994) focuses on Zoroastrian, Akkadian, and, most importantly, Egyptian parallels. On the influence of Near Eastern traditions on Hesiod, see Walcot 1966 and West 1997.

[144] The three-part model hypothesis was popular among earlier scholars (e.g., Friedländer 1912; Wilamowitz 1928, 139f.), whereas more recent scholarship has favoured an original four-part model (e.g., Walcot 1961; West 1978, 174-177; Burkert 1983b; Collins 1993, 162; Koenen 1994; Perrin and Stuckenbruck 2021), originally defended by Reizenstein (1924/1925) on the basis of similarities to Zoroastrian and Jewish myths. For criticisms of the comparative approach applied to the study of Hesiod's myth of races, see Most 1997 and Calame 2009, 59-103.

[145] Oldfather (1949) argues for the motival priority of Babrius' account to Hesiod's; *contra* Gatz 1967, 84 n. 55. On Babrius, see the long introduction to Holzberg's recent edition of the *Fables* (2019); a comprehensive bibliography up to 2018 can be found on the author's website (niklasholzberg.com).

If we assume that a myth of three races (or ages) named after metals was already known in Greece at the time when Hesiod and the Orphic author(s) were composing their texts, then it is easy to see how they each might have adapted this basic three-phase structure to suit their purposes.[146] Hesiod adopted the basic tripartite structure and extended it to include the generation of heroes from Greek heroic tradition and the current generation of humans, for which he adopted a metallic label that would reflect its degenerate state;[147] in keeping with his pessimistic tendencies, he left room for an unnamed sixth generation, which was destined to be even more wretched than his own. The Orphic poet, on the other hand, simply integrated the tripartite structure into the framework of the Orphic cosmology by making Phanes, the first creator of the universe, responsible for creating the golden race and identifying the bronze race with present-day humans, born from the Titans' ashes. More details on the Orphic silver age are provided by Proclus in a passage from his *Platonic Theology* (5.10 = *OF* 231i), where an Orphic fragment about Cronus is cited in connection with the cosmological myth in Plato's *Statesman*:

> τῶν δὲ θεολόγων τὸ ἀγήρων τῇ τάξει ταύτῃ (*sc*. τῇ Κρονίᾳ) προσήκειν λεγόντων, ὡς οἵ τε βάρβαροί φασι, καὶ ὁ τῶν Ἑλλήνων θεωλόγος Ὀρφεύς – καὶ γὰρ οὗτος ἀεὶ μελαίνας τὰς τοῦ Κρονίου προσώπου τρίχας μυστικῶς λέγει, καὶ μηδαμῶς γίγνεσθαι πολιὰς – θαυμάζω τὸν τοῦ Πλάτωνος ἔνθεον νοῦν … ἐν γὰρ τῇ Κρονίᾳ περιόδῳ τὸ γῆρας ἀφιέναι φησὶ τὰς ψυχάς, ἐπὶ δὲ τὸ νέον ἀνακάμπτειν … τῶν γὰρ πρεσβυτέρων αἱ λευκαὶ τρίχες ἐμελαίνοντο … ταῦτα μὲν ὁ Ἐλεάτης ξένος. ὁ δέ γε Ὀρφεὺς τὰ τούτοις ὅμοια περὶ τοῦ θεοῦ (*sc*. Κρόνου) διατάττεται·
>
> ὑπὸ Ζηνὶ Κρονίωνι
> ἀθάνατόν <τ'> αἰῶνα λαχεῖν, καθαροῖο γενείου
> <οὐ> διερὰς χαίτας εὐώδεας οὐδὲ <κάρητος
> γήραος ἠ>πεδανοῖο μιγήμεναι ἄνθεϊ λευκῷ,
> ἀλλὰ <περὶ κροτάφοισιν ἔχειν> ἐριθηλέα λάχνην. 5

[146] This is, of course, only one of many possible theories about the origin of the Greek myth of the races of man, and my arguments about Plato's use of the myth do not hinge on the validity of this hypothesis. It is also not meant to discount the (highly likely) possibility of a Hesiodic influence on the Orphic myth.

[147] I agree with Koenen (1994, 24f. and n. 59) that the naming of the iron race must date back to a time when iron had become easier to obtain and, thus, less valuable – which is to say, no earlier than the eight century BC. I do not agree, however, that the fact that Hesiod denied a metallic identifier to the heroic race means that the naming of the iron race must necessarily predate him.

> But since the theologians assert that agelessness pertains to this (*sc*. Cronus') order, as the barbarians say and Orpheus too, the theologian of the Greeks – for he mystically says that the hairs on Cronus' face are always black and never become grey – I admire the divinely inspired intellect of Plato […]. For he says that in the cycle of Cronus souls abandon old age and return to youth, and […] the white hairs of the more elderly become black […]. This is what is relayed by the Eleatic Stranger. Similar things are said by Orpheus about this god (*sc*. Cronus):
>
> > Under Zeus son of Cronus, [he] obtained immortal life: the flowing and fragrant hair growing from his pure chin and from his head was not mixed with the white flower of weak old age, but around his temples he had luxuriant woolly hair.[148]

Although the original meaning and context of these verses are not entirely clear, Proclus seems to imply that Plato extended the attributes which in the Orphic *Theogony* are ascribed to Cronus to the humans who live under his rule. West (1983a, 98), following Kern's edition (1922, 187 fr. 142), believes that Proclus "possibly […] misconstrued a pronoun which really referred not to Kronos himself but to his silver race".[149] Whether one accepts Proclus' interpretation, or whether one adopts West and Kern's reconstruction of the Orphic fragment, it is not unreasonable to suppose that these verses, if they originate from an early Orphic poem, might have inspired Plato's description of men aging in reverse in the *Statesman* myth, especially since the only passage in Hesiod which could have provided a basis for this concept is a single cryptic line towards the end of the myth of races, which prophesies that Zeus will once again destroy humanity when men will be born "with grey hair on their temples".[150]

So much for the sources of the *Statesman* myth. Let us now consider the place of the myth within the dialogue and, more broadly, within Plato's thought. It is important to

[148] Cf. *schol*. Hes. *Op*. 113-115 = *OF* 231ii.
[149] *Contra* Bernabé 2005, 194 *ad l.* It would be indeed extraordinary for an ancient Greek text to speak of the ageing of a god, who are formulaically deathless and ageless – think, for example, of the myth of Eos and Tithonus (*HH* 5.218-238).
[150] Hes. *Op*. 181.

note that the Eleatic Stranger prefaces the discussion of the age of Cronus and the reversal of the cosmic cycle by emphasising its mythical and playful nature.[151] With this, Plato seems to indicate that the myth should not be interpreted literally, as a serious cosmological theory, but rather as a metaphor intended, first and foremost, to illustrate the nature of the true statesman – this, at least, is its stated purpose.[152] In reality, the only conclusion which the Young Socrates and the Eleatic Stranger reach by way of this lengthy mythical digression is that mortal kings, who rule over other human beings, differ from gods, who watch over an inferior species like humans tend to cattle, meaning that only the activity of a divine ruler can properly be compared to that of a shepherd.[153] Admittedly, this relatively self-evident statement can hardly justify such a lengthy and elaborate 'aetiological' myth, which, as Rowe (1995, 11) points out, appears to be told almost entirely for its own sake; in light of this fact, the initial remarks about the playful elements of the story can be seen as a way of excusing the seeming lack of relevance to the main argumentative line of the dialogue. All that having been said, the question of what significance should be attributed to the myth of the *Statesman* still remains. To venture an answer, we must look at the other passages in Plato's work where the idea of the age of Cronus, or 'golden age', is referenced.

The first instance occurs in the eschatological myth at the end of the *Gorgias* (523a-527a: 523a-b), which describes the origin of the post-mortem judgement of souls. According to the myth, during the reign of Cronus, men were allowed to know in advance the time of their death and were judged just before dying, by other living men. At first, these advantageous conditions persisted under the reign of Zeus, but since men abused them to escape punishment, the son of Cronus decided that souls should be judged after death by divine judges. This picture is consistent with the narrative presented in the *Statesman* myth,

[151] Pl. *Plt.* 268d-e σχεδὸν παιδιὰν ἐγκερασαμένους … ἀλλὰ δὴ τῷ μύθῳ μου πάνυ πρόσεχε τὸν νοῦν, καθάπερ οἱ παῖδες· πάντως οὐ πολλὰ ἐκφεύγεις παιδιὰς ἔτη.
[152] Pl. *Plt.* 269c, 237e, 274e, 275b, 277b.
[153] Pl. *Plt.* 271e, 274e-275c.

where life in the age of Cronus is described as easier and more just, due to the direct control exercised on the world by the gods.[154] In the *Statesman* and the *Gorgias* myth alike, the idyllic conditions of the previous age continue into the age of Zeus, until the degeneration caused by the material element starts to set in[155] – or, in the case of the *Gorgias* myth, until the inferior race of men starts to engage in deception.[156] The myth of the superior golden race receives an allegorical interpretation in the *Cratylus* (397e-398c), where the term δαίμονες – which, according to Hesiod (*Op*. 121f.), was the name given to the men of the golden race after they died – is etymologised as δαήμονες, 'knowing' or 'wise'. This etymology is consistent with the image of Cronus as a personification of νοῦς put forth by the Derveni commentator, who etymologises Cronus' name as "striking mind" (κρούων νοῦς).[157] This method of allegorical interpretation allowed the author to purify the original text from the unsavoury elements which taint the image of the gods,[158] a concern which was famously at the forefront of Plato's mind.[159] Earlier in the *Cratylus* (396a-c), Socrates, inspired by the 'mystic' Euthyphro, etymologises the names of Uranus, Cronus, and Zeus in a markedly similar way: here Cronus is described as a "great intellect" (μεγάλη διάνοια) and his name is said to signify the purity of his mind.[160] If it is true, as Proclus claims (*Theol. Plat*. 5.10 = *OF* 231i; quoted above, p. 227), that Plato applied Cronus' agelessness to the humans over whom he rules, then it would have been natural for him to extend Cronus' wisdom to the *daimones*.[161] Perhaps this association was already present in the Orphic tradition: compare, for instance, the Pindaric fragment quoted by Plato in the *Meno*,[162] where it is said that those who purify themselves from the ancient guilt will be

[154] Pl. *Plt*. 271d-e.
[155] Pl. *Plt*. 273c.
[156] Pl. *Grg*. 523b.
[157] *P.Derv*. 14.2-4, 7 KPT.
[158] E.g., *P.Derv*. 13.5ff., 26.8ff. KPT.
[159] E.g., Pl. *R*. 2.380a-c.
[160] Pl. *Cra*. 396b κόρον γὰρ σημαίνει οὐ παῖδα, ἀλλὰ τὸ καθαρὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀκήρατον τοῦ νοῦ.
[161] Cf. Pl. *L*. 4.713a. On the role of the δαίμονες in Hesiod, Plato, and the Derveni papyrus, see Piano 2022.
[162] Pi. fr. 133 SM *ap*. Pl. *Men*. 81b-c = *OF* 443 (quoted above, p. 120).

reborn as "glorious kings" and "men of surpassing wisdom". Turning back to the *Cratylus* passage (397e-398c), here Plato cites not only Hesiod but also "many other poets, who say that when a good man dies, he has a great fate and honour and becomes a *daimon*".[163] Among these poets are, in all probability, the anonymous authors of Orphic ritual texts, such as those inscribed on the gold tablets, which allude to the deification of the deceased initiates.[164] Orphic-adjacent authors, like Pindar and Empedocles, are also likely referenced here: the latter famously professed to be a fallen *daimon*, exiled from the abode of the blessed for 30,000 seasons to atone for a crime,[165] while the former claimed that the souls of those who have lived righteously, both on earth and in Hades, for three consecutive times will follow the road "to the tower of Cronus, where ocean breezes blow around the Isle of the Blessed".[166] Given that in Plato's work mystery initiation often serves as a metaphor for philosophy, the etymologization of *daimon* as 'wise' (δαήμων) makes perfect sense. This also adds another layer of meaning to a passage towards the end of the myth of the *Statesman* (273c), where the degradation which occurs once God is no longer directing the cosmic cycle is linked to forgetfulness: in a worldview like that of Plato and the Orphics, in which virtue and spiritual salvation are achieved through knowledge, loss of memory leads to inevitable ruin.

As these passages show, the mythologem of the age of Cronus carries a deep religious significance for Plato, who uses it to symbolise an ideal reality in which the destructive force of the material element is kept at bay, and sin and suffering do not exist. This 'heaven on earth' only exists as a poetic idea[167] or thought experiment, like in the oft-

[163] Pl. *Cra.* 398b-c; cf. Heracl. fr. 63 DK.
[164] E.g., *OF* 487.4, 488.9.
[165] Emp. fr. 115 DK = *OF* 449.
[166] Pi. *O.* 2.56-72 = *OF* 445 (quoted above, p. 105). We may see a possible allusion to Cronus' tower at *Plt.* 272e, where "the helmsman of the universe" (i.e., Cronus) is said to retire "to his watch-tower" (τοῦ παντὸς ὁ μὲν κυβερνήτης … εἰς τὴν αὐτοῦ περιωπὴν ἀπέστη); compare this to the vague turn of phrase used in the *Timaeus* (42e ὁ μὲν δὴ … ἔμενεν ἐν τῷ ἑαυτοῦ κατὰ τρόπον ἤθει), where the identification with Cronus is absent.
[167] Compare also Hesiod's depiction of the Just City in the diptych (*Op.* 225-247).

misunderstood "city of pigs" in Book II of the *Republic* (369a-372d),[168] or – which is essentially the same thing[169] – in the memories of a distant past, like in a passage from the *Laws* (6.782c-d = *OF* 625i), where a bygone age when vegetarianism was the norm and everyone lived an "Orphic life"[170] is contrasted with a time when agriculture did not exist and men turned to other living beings, including other humans, for sustenance. Though these idyllic conditions cannot be attained in the present world, but only in the afterlife by a select few, they remain an ideal which the true statesman (or philosopher-king) should strive to replicate, as far as possible. This is explicitly stated in another passage from the *Laws* (4.713a-e: 713c-e), which should be read in conjunction with the myth of the *Statesman*. Here, the Athenian tells the story of a "most blessed government" (ἀρχή τε καὶ οἴκησις … μάλ᾽ εὐδαίμων), which existed under the reign of Cronus, and on which the best current polities are modelled:

> Tradition (φήμην) tells us of the blissful life of men in that age (τῆς τῶν τότε μακαρίας ζωῆς), how everything was plentiful and of spontaneous growth. And this is said to have been the cause: Cronus […] appointed as kings and rulers of our cities not men but beings of a more divine and nobler race (οὐκ ἀνθρώπους ἀλλὰ γένους θειοτέρου τε καὶ ἀμείνονος) – namely, *daimones* – just as we now do with sheep and any herds of tame animals: we do not set oxen to rule over oxen, or goats over goats, but we, who are of a nobler race than them, ourselves rule over them. Similarly, the god, in his love for humanity, set over us at that time the nobler race of *daimones* who, with much comfort to themselves and much to us, looked over (ἐπιμελούμενον) us and gave us peace, modesty, order, and justice in abundance, and made the races of men free from discord and happy (ἀστασίαστα καὶ εὐδαίμονα).

As explained in the *Statesman* (271d-e), the blissful conditions which humans and other living beings enjoyed in the time of Cronus were the result of the close supervision

[168] The utopian nature of the *Republic*'s first city was correctly identified by Adam in his commentary on the dialogue (1902, I, 93); in more recent times, most scholars, with a few notable exceptions (Morrison 2007; Rowe 2017), have either dismissed it as irrelevant (e.g., Crombie 1962, I, 89f.; Annas 1981, 78), or as a *suggestio falsi* and an exercise in irony (e.g., Barney 2002).
[169] Pl. *R.* 2.382d.
[170] On the taboo against meat-eating in early Orphism, see above §1.3.3.

exercised on the world by perfectly good and rational rulers, namely, gods and *daimones*. For this reason, any State which is ruled by mortals is bound to be plagued by some degree of hardship and injustice. Nevertheless, good statesmen and lawgivers ought to follow, as far as humanly possible, the example set by these divine rulers and "order [their] homes and States in accordance with the immortal element within [them]".[171] Indeed, as Plato reveals in the myth of metals (*R*. 3.414c- 415d), the rulers of the ideal State will be the members of a new golden race,[172] and, as discussed in a later passage of the *Republic* (5.468e-469a), those who die a glorious death in battle will be honoured as *daimones*, and their graves will become a place of worship. As originally noted by Cornford (1903, 434), the comparison between this passage and the etymological equivalence δαίμονες-δαήμονες put forth in the *Cratylus* (397e-398c), where a slightly altered version of Hes. *Op*. 121-123 is cited,[173] suggests that Plato must have had in mind the 'guardian spirits' of mythology when he named the rulers of Callipolis – which is to say, the golden-souled men of the myth of metals – 'guardians' (φύλακες).[174] It is worth mentioning that the distinction between the guardians proper and the auxiliaries (ἐπίκουροι) is first introduced towards the end of *Republic* III (414b), just before the myth of metals: such a distinction is, in fact, needed to preserve the parallel between the social classes of Callipolis and the metallic races of Hesiod's myth – the brazen and iron races being combined into one, to preserve the analogy with the tripartite soul. Nevertheless, throughout the dialogue, the term φύλακες continues to be used in both senses, to refer to the military and ruling elite as a whole and to designate the philosopher-kings exclusively, depending on the context.

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[171] Pl. *L*. 4.713e-714a.

[172] It is worth noting that the concept of autochthony – in the literal sense of being born from the earth – is also referenced in both myths: cf. Pl. *R*. 3.414d-e ἐπιχειρήσω πρῶτον μὲν αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἄρχοντας πείθειν καὶ τοὺς στρατιώτας, ἔπειτα δὲ καὶ τὴν ἄλλην πόλιν, ὡς … ἦσαν δὲ τότε τῇ ἀληθείᾳ ὑπὸ γῆς ἐντὸς πλαττόμενοι καὶ τρεφόμενοι καὶ αὐτοὶ καὶ τὰ ὅπλα αὐτῶν καὶ ἡ ἄλλη σκευὴ δημιουργουμένη, ἐπειδὴ δὲ παντελῶς ἐξειργασμένοι ἦσαν, καὶ ἡ γῆ αὐτοὺς μήτηρ οὖσα ἀνῆκεν.

[173] Pl. *Cra.* 397e-398c αὐτὰρ ἐπειδὴ τοῦτο γένος (*sc*. χρύσεον) κατὰ μοῖρ᾽ ἐκάλυψεν, / οἱ μὲν δαίμονες ἁγνοὶ ὑποχθόνιοι καλέονται, / ἐσθλοί, ἀλεξίκακοι, φύλακες θνητῶν ἀνθρώπων.

[174] Cf. Pl. *Plt*. 274b-c αὐτοὶ δὲ ἀσθενεῖς ἄνθρωποι καὶ ἀφύλακτοι γεγονότες διηρπάζοντο ὑπ᾽ αὐτῶν.

The close connection between the golden and silver classes – which arguably strains the analogy with the three parts of the soul, where the subdivision is between the rational part on one hand and the spirited and appetitive parts on the other – has a parallel in the Orphic myth of the races, where the silver race was depicted in a much more positive light compared to Hesiod's version, at least based on Proclus' testimony. In his commentary on Hesiod's *Works and Days,* the Neoplatonic philosopher writes that, according to Orpheus, "Cronus reigns over the silver race, and those who live in conformity with pure reason (καθαρὸν λόγον) are called silver, while those who live in conformity with intellect only (νοῦν μόνον) are called golden".[175] Without necessarily projecting Proclus' allegorical interpretation – which is obviously heavily dependent on Plato – onto his Orphic source(s), it is tempting to draw a connection between Plato's city-soul analogy and the Orphic myth of the three races of humans. If the antiquity of this myth could be proven, a strong argument could be made in favour of its influence, at the very least, on the Platonic theme of the age of Cronus, which appears to combine Hesiod's vision of the golden age with elements from the Orphic silver age.

It should be clear by now that the story of Cronus in the *Statesman* is not a frivolous diversion from the serious, philosophical investigation into the nature of the *politikos,* but rather a mythical representation of the fundamental principle which undergirds Plato's political and ethical theory: namely, that in a well-functioning organism – be it a State, an individual, or indeed the entire universe – the divine, rational element must control what is by nature irrational and chaotic. But what should we make of the cosmological side of the myth? While the reversal of the planetary motion is (almost certainly) merely a device to embed the story within the established mythical tradition, by linking it to the Atreus saga

[175] Procl. *ad* Hes. *Op*. 127-129 (54.15-55.3 Pertusi) = *OF* 216ii; cf. Pl. *Cra*. 396b κόρον (i.e., Κρόνος) γὰρ σημαίνει οὐ παῖδα, ἀλλὰ τὸ καθαρὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀκήρατον τοῦ νοῦ.

and the Greek myths of autochthony, the idea of eternally recurring cosmic cycles is entirely compatible with Plato's worldview. Indeed, throughout Plato's work, cyclicality is presented as a universal law which applies to virtually all aspects of life: the most notable example of this can be found in the *Phaedo* (70c-72e), where Socrates introduces the 'cyclical argument' to support his belief in the cycle of reincarnation and the immortality of the soul. The cycle of growth and decay which all living beings experience also applies at the societal level, as evidenced by the accounts of civilisational collapse detailed in the *Timaeus* (21e-25d) and *Laws* (6.781e-782c). Since the universe is itself a physical, living being,[176] it is only logical that it should also be subject to decay,[177] but because God created it in the image of the eternal model, only he can destroy it.[178] As the *Statesman* myth explains, the inexorable tendency towards degradation and disorder inherent to the cosmos due to its material component requires that God intervene, at regular intervals, to dissolve and renew his creation. The existence of this cosmic cycle – which, incidentally, solves the problem posed by the ability for virtuous (and incurably wicked) souls to permanently escape reincarnation[179] – is hinted in the *Timaeus* (39d), where the notion of a "perfect year" is mentioned. This is likely the same περίοδος mentioned in a notoriously obscure passage of the *Republic*, where Plato speaks of "a period for divine engendering, encompassed by a perfect number".[180] The actual value of this number has been debated since antiquity. A note in a second-century papyrus (*P.Oxy*. XV 1808 i.4) identifies it with Heraclitus' Great Year of 10,800 years; the same figure, attributed to Heraclitus, also

[176] E.g., Pl. *Ti*. 30b.
[177] Cf., e.g., Pl. *R*. 8.546a γενομένῳ παντὶ φθορά ἐστιν.
[178] Pl. *Ti*. 41a.
[179] See above §3.3.2-4 *passim.*
[180] Pl. *R*. 8.546b ἔστι δὲ θείῳ μὲν γεννητῷ περίοδος ἣν ἀριθμὸς περιλαμβάνει τέλειος. I interpret θείῳ μὲν γεννητῷ as referring to the entirety of God's creation. This reading is attested in the marginal comments in *P.Oxy.* XV 1808, which contains the oldest extant copy of *R*. 8.546b-d (see McNamee and Jacovides 2003).

appears in Censorinus (*Die nat*. 18.11 = *OF* 726), who lists different values for "what Aristotle calls *maximus annus*", including one of 120,000 years attributed to Orpheus.[181]

How long Plato believed this "perfect year" to be is impossible to know with certainty. It seems clear, however, that Plato was drawing on an ancient tradition of cosmic cyclicity, ultimately tracing back to the Orphic milieu.[182] Through a detailed analysis of the myth of the *Statesman* and its wider significance within the Platonic corpus, I have shown that the core ideas expressed therein, concerning the relationship between God and the physical world and the cyclical nature of time, should not only be taken seriously but regarded as the culmination of a series of religious and philosophical themes which recur throughout Plato's work. I have also emphasised the connection between cosmology and politics, which is based on the analogy between macrocosm and microcosm, and which informs Plato's cosmological speculation not only in the *Statesman*, but also in the *Laws* and, as discussed earlier, in the *Timaeus*.[183] Indeed, these late dialogues, to borrow Carone's words (2005, 22), contain "a great cosmological vision", which has largely remained "underrated or unnoticed".

[181] On the Orphic Great Year, see Waerden 1953.
[182] On the Oriental parallels, see West 1971, 67 n. 2, 190-192.
[183] On this topic, see the recent study by O'Meara (2017).

Conclusion

I opened the thesis with a line from the Neoplatonist Olympiodorus stating that "Plato borrows everywhere from Orpheus".[1] In light of the survey of Orphic references in Plato's dialogues presented over the previous chapters, I trust that this claim will appear a lot less hyperbolic than it might have initially. Although this survey has not been exhaustive, it has nonetheless shown the persistence of Orphic references and influences throughout Plato's writing career, from the *Apology* and other early dialogues to his very last work. It has also shown that these references are not only ubiquitous but, in the majority of cases, deeply significant: they feature predominantly in the discussion of all matters relating to the soul – its immortal nature, its post-mortem fate, its need for purification – but they also occur in passages dealing with epistemological and ontological matters – like the allegory of the Cave in *Republic* VII and the various places where the theory of recollection is discussed – as well as in multiple myths, including the creation myth of the *Timaeus*. Moreover, philosophy itself is conceptualised by Plato in terms of mystery initiation, with Orphic ideas and formulas. This presents an apparent contradiction, since some of the passages which explicitly mention Orpheus or his followers paint them in a less than favourable light. Some scholars have surmised that Plato's opinion of Orpheus and the Orphic mysteries was overwhelmingly negative, even though he appropriated from them certain ideas and myths which appealed to his worldview; this, as Bernabé (2011, 43-47) argues, is why Plato alludes to the Orphics only implicitly when the reference is philosophically significant and deeply embedded in the discussion. In what follows, I will challenge this view and provide my own assessment of Plato's opinion of Orpheus and Orphism.

[1] Olymp. *in Phd.* 10.3 (141 Westerink) = *OF* 338ii.

Conclusion

Plato is the ancient author who preserves the largest number of Orphic fragments, which in Bernabé's edition (2004a; 2005; 2007b) exceed those transmitted by Pindar, Empedocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes put together; they include a small number of literal quotations[2] and a much greater quantity of implicit allusions to Orphic doctrine. Within the dialogues, Orpheus is mentioned fourteen times,[3] sixteen including implicit references.[4] The picture which emerges from these passages reflects the traditional image of Orpheus as the lyre-player with a magical voice,[5] born of a Muse and a mortal,[6] who lived before the Trojan War[7] and introduced the mysteries to the Greeks;[8] the main episodes of his legend – namely, his descent into the underworld to retrieve his wife and his death at the hands of Thracian maenads – are also referenced.[9] Although most of the Platonic testimonies on Orpheus or his followers are either neutral or positive in tone, the attention of scholars has mostly focused on a small number of passages which paint them in a critical light. Out of these, only one passage speaks of Orpheus in a truly negative manner, and it occurs in the *Symposium* (179d = *OF* 983), in Phaedrus' speech: here, the young rhetorician highlights Orpheus' effeteness by comparing his failure to save his wife with the bravery of Alcestis, "who alone was willing to die for her husband";[10] the gods rewarded her sacrifice and restored her to life, but Orpheus, who lacked the courage to die for his loved one, was not only prevented from recovering his wife but was subsequently punished by the gods, who caused him to die at the hands of women.[11] The negative example embodied

[2] Pl. *Cra.* 402b-c = *OF* 22i, *Phd.* 69c-d = *OF* 576i, *Phlb.* = *OF* 845, *L.* 4.715e-716a = *OF* 31iii.
[3] Pl. *Ap.* 41a = *OF* 1076i, *Ion* 533b = *OF* 973, 536b = *OF* 1140, *Prt.* 315a = *OF* 949i, 316d = *OF* 549i, *Cra.* 400c = *OF* 430i, 402b = *OF* 22i, *R.* 2.364e = *OF* 910i, 10.620a = *OF* 1077i, *Smp.* 179d = *OF* 983, *Phlb.* 66c = *OF* 25i, *L.* 2.669d = *OF* 845, 3.677d = *OF* 1017, 8.829d-e = *OF* 681.
[4] Pl. *R.* 2.366a-b = *OF* 574, *Ti.* 40d = *OF* 21.
[5] Pl. *Prt.* 315a-b = *OF* 949i, *L.* 8.829d-e = *OF* 681.
[6] Pl. *R.* 2.364e = *OF* 573i, *Smp.* 179d = *OF* 983.
[7] Pl. *L.* 3.677d = *OF* 1017.
[8] Pl. *Prt.* 316d = *OF* 549i.
[9] Pl. *R.* 10.620a = *OF* 1077i, *Smp.* 179d = *OF* 983.
[10] Pl. *Smp.* 179b.
[11] The comparison with the story of Alcestis was likely suggested to Plato, as observed by Bernabé (2011, 28), by the eponymous Euripidean play (*Alc.* 357-362 = *OF* 980), where Alcestis' husband, Admetus, wishes

by Orpheus is then contrasted with another famous story of a lover's sacrifice: namely, that of Achilles, who slew Hector to avenge the death of Patroclus,[12] knowing that it would lead to his own demise, as prophesied by his own mother; for his bravery, he was honoured by the gods and sent to the Isles of the Blessed. The previous unfavourable comparison with Alcestis serves to make the contrast between Orpheus and Achilles even starker: on the one hand Orpheus, here representing heterosexual love, is made out to be even more cowardly than a woman; on the other hand, Achilles, the paragon of heroic courage, is put forth as the foremost example of the superiority of homosexual love. The reason why Orpheus was chosen as the example of cowardly lover instead of Admetus, who would have been the obvious choice, might have to do with Phaedrus' disdain for the tradition of the *teletai*, if he is indeed the same Phaedrus listed by Andocides (1.15) among those who were accused, along with Alcibiades, of profaning the mysteries in 415 BC. I do not see any basis for ascribing Phaedrus' views to Plato, especially since they conflict with the overwhelmingly positive image of Orpheus which emerges from the comments of Socrates and other characters in Plato's dialogues.[13]

Regarding the Orphics, the situation is a bit more complex. The "followers of Orpheus" are mentioned explicitly two times: once in the *Protagoras* (316d = *OF* 549i), where the eponymous character mentions "Orpheus and Musaeus and their followers" (τοὺς ἀμφί τε Ὀρφέα καὶ Μουσαῖον) among the first sophists, along with Homer, Hesiod, and

that he had "the voice and music of Orpheus" so that he may charm the gods of the underworld and rescue his wife from the dead.

[12] The motif of Achilles and Patroclus' homosexual relationship, to which the Homeric text makes no explicit reference, was popularised – if not outright invented – by Aeschylus (frr. 135f. Radt), who is in fact mentioned by Phaedrus in his speech (Pl. *Smp.* 180a).

[13] In the *Protagoras* (315a-b = *OF* 949i), the eponymous character is compared to Orpheus for his ability to enchant the listeners with his speech; later, Protagoras himself, praising the antiquity of the sophistic art, names Orpheus among his predecessors (316d = *OF* 549). Orpheus' poetic talent is referenced in the *Ion* (533b-c = *OF* 973, 536b = *OF* 1140) and the *Laws* (8.829d-e = *OF* 681), while his name is mentioned in another passage of the *Laws* (3.677d = *OF* 1017) among a list of mythical inventors. Finally, the *Apology* (41a = *OF* 1076i) contains arguably the most flattering mention of Orpheus, who is named by Socrates as one of the eminent men and women whom he looks forward to meeting in the afterlife.

Simonides, and other famous figures; and once in the *Cratylus* (400c = *OF* 430i), where the Orphics (οἱ ἀμφὶ Ὀρφέα) are ascribed a particular etymology for the term σῶμα.[14] In both cases, the Orphics in question are the ancient Orphic poets and myth-makers: that is to say, the founders of the Orphic cult. The Orphics of Plato's time – or, at least, a particular type of *Orpheotelestai* – are painted in a much less favourable light in a famous passage from *Republic* II (364b-e = *OF* 573i, 693, 910), where Adeimantus condemns the vagrant mystery priests who use the authority of Orpheus and Musaeus to convince their clients that they can obtain deliverance from their sins "through pleasurable festivals" (μεθ᾽ ἡδονῶν τε καὶ ἑορτῶν).[15] Although we can safely assume that Plato shared in the criticisms expressed by his brother Adeimantus, it would be wrong to conclude that Plato's view of the Orphic mysteries was overall negative; in fact, as I have previously remarked, the same contempt towards these fake religious experts and their ignorant clients is expressed by the Derveni author,[16] who, like Plato, believed that the Orphic myths and rituals carried a deeper meaning, accessible only to a select few who possessed true knowledge and understanding. Someone like the Derveni author, then, would not have been the target of Plato's criticism; on the contrary, he would have probably been considered among "those priests and priestesses who have taken care to be able to give an account of their practices",[17] even if Plato may have disagreed with (parts of) his interpretation.

Based on a comprehensive and contextualised assessment of the evidence, Bernabé's and others' view of Plato as holding Orpheus and the Orphics as a whole in very little regard turns out to be largely inaccurate. Even Bernabé acknowledges that most of the references to Orpheus in the dialogues express some degree of praise or admiration, but he attributes this to the influence of Socrates, on the account that these positive comments are

[14] See above §3.1.
[15] Cf. Pl. *L.* 2.666b, 10.908d-909b = *OF* 573iii, iv.
[16] Cf. *P.Derv.* col. 20 KPT.
[17] Pl. *Men.* 81a-c = *OF* 424.

concentrated in the early dialogues. This explanation, however, does not account for the fact that the *Laws* contain the highest number of explicit Orphic references compared to any other dialogue, two of which mention Orpheus in a markedly positive light.[18] The reason why most of the Orphic references in Plato's dialogues are implicit is not that Plato wanted to hide the Orphic provenance of those myths and ideas which played a significant role in his philosophical arguments, but rather that the Orphic material used by Plato underwent a process of philosophical transposition and acquired new meanings that could not be ascribed to the original source. Plato's audience, moreover, would have likely had no difficulty recognising most, if not all, of these implicit Orphic references, including famous Orphic formulas and verses;[19] however, when quoting a lesser-known verse,[20] or when the context otherwise demands it,[21] Plato does not hesitate to mention Orpheus by name. Thus, there is no reason to assume that Plato had a negative opinion of Orpheus. He does, however, appear to have doubted the veracity of his legend, given the irony with which he alludes to Orpheus' divine lineage in a passage from the *Timaeus* (40d); nevertheless, he regarded the texts which were composed under his name – and the unwritten doctrines of the mysteries – as possessing a deep religious wisdom.

As I have shown in the second part of the thesis, Plato appropriated the language and doctrine of the Orphic mysteries, moulding them to fit his philosophic ideal and infusing them, so to speak, with new life. By this I mean that whatever he drew from his source material acquired through him a new significance which it did not have before, or which was not yet fully expressed. The Orphic belief in the primacy of the soul over the

[18] Pl. *L.* 3.677d = *OF* 1017, 8.829d-e = *OF* 681.
[19] An educated Athenian of Plato's day, whether or not he had personally been initiated in the Eleusinian (or any other) mysteries, must have been at least somewhat familiar with Orphic literature and lore, given the popularity of the *pseudepigrapha* of Orpheus and Musaeus in the Classical Age (see, e.g., Alex. fr. 140 KA *ap.* Athen. 4.164b-c = *OF* 1018i).
[20] Pl. *Cra.* 402b-c = *OF* 22i, *Phlb.* 66c = *OF* 25i, *L.* 2.669d = *OF* 845.
[21] Pl. *Cra.* 400c = *OF* 430i.

body, with the subsequent devaluation of the material world in favour of the afterlife, provided Plato with the foundation for his mature metaphysical and epistemological doctrine. Man's true essence was to be found not in his physical form but in his soul, which is immortal and divine in origin and contains within itself the principle of life: indeed, as we saw in Chapter 3, it is all but certain that the emergence of this new meaning of ψυχή was tied in some way to the emergence of Orphism. The body, on the other hand, was but a mere container, a prison at best and a tomb at worst; for Plato, this meant that the body and the senses were an obstacle which prevented the human intellect from achieving its full potential. By conceptualising philosophy in terms of mystery initiation – and applying the principles of the Orphic life to the life of the philosopher – Plato combined the mystic pursuit of immortality with the intellectual pursuit of knowledge and wisdom. Consequently, for Plato, the ultimate reward which awaited the soul of the philosopher in the afterlife was the direct contemplation of true Being. Indeed, as we saw in Chapters 3 and 5, the "place above the sky", to which only gods and pure (rational) souls have access, is also the metaphorical seat of the eternal, unchanging, and divine beings known as 'Forms', which are for Plato the object of true knowledge and the only things which truly exist.

According to Platonic ontology – and contrary to all previous schools of thought, save perhaps for Pythagoreanism – sensible reality derives its essence not from physical elements, but from eternal, incorporeal, and purely intelligible principles, which are instantiated in the phenomena and yet exist independently from them. Experience and sense perception are, then, doubly unreliable: firstly, due to the imperfect nature of the senses, and secondly, because the physical world is itself an imperfect 'copy' of the perfect world of Forms. This 'Two Worlds' theory would not have been conceivable without the Orphic

revolution, as one might call it, which put the invisible above the visible.[22] As we saw, the soul/body dichotomy central to Orphism carried a profound moral and epistemic significance, being equivalent not only to the dichotomy between good and evil, but also to that between truth and falsehood. Plato adopted this dualistic worldview from the Orphics and developed it to its logical conclusion, making the invisible and divine Forms, with which the rational soul shares a special kinship, the only things that exist and are knowable to the fullest degree. As we saw in Chapter 4, Plato also found inspiration in the Orphic tradition for his theory of recollection, which enabled him to bridge the epistemic gap between the realm of true knowledge and the realm of appearance: while the Orphics (and early Pythagoreans) were concerned with preserving one's personal memories beyond death – that is to say, in the afterlife and/or in subsequent incarnations – the goal of Platonic recollection was to awaken the latent memories of the Forms, which the rational part of the soul contemplated in the hyperuranion before entering the cycle of rebirths. To recover as much of that latent knowledge as humanly possible, Plato believed that the lover of wisdom should use the external stimuli which are perceived through the senses only as "reminders",[23] while otherwise distancing himself, to the best of his abilities, from all material pursuits, instead turning his attention towards the divine,[24] striving to transcend the constraints imposed by the body through a life-long "practice of death".[25] Indeed, death, as Plato and the Orphics saw it, was something to celebrate and look forward to, as the beginning of a new and better life, free from the prison of the body – provided, of course, that one had duly purified oneself.

[22] This is not meant to discount the influence of Parmenides' 'two ways' on Plato's ontology and epistemology, but I argue that Parmenides' philosophy was itself born out of the radical paradigm shift enacted by Orphism.
[23] Pl. *Phdr*. 249c-d.
[24] Pl. *Phdr*. 249d.
[25] Pl. *Phd*. 80e-81a; cf. 64a, 67c-e.

Finally, Chapter 6 has highlighted another area of Plato's thought on which the Orphic tradition had a decisive impact: namely, that of cosmology. Like the Orphic theogony – and unlike any other cosmo-theogonic account within the ancient Greek tradition – the cosmological account of the *Timaeus* presents the universe as the result of an intelligent design; this is in stark contrast to both the Presocratic tradition, which sought to explain the universe through physical principles and mechanical causation, and to Hesiod's mythical cosmogony, which described the birth of the gods and the universe in terms of biological reproduction, without any clear plan or direction. The Orphic myth of creation planted the seed for Plato's account of the origin of the universe as the work of Reason, personified by the divine Demiurge. With this account, Plato applied his teleological metaphysics to the study of the natural world, solving the strict dichotomy between Being and non-Being (or Truth and Opinion) theorised by Parmenides – who was also likely influenced by Orphic dualism, though to an even larger degree than Plato. I argue that, unlike Parmenides, Plato took to heart the creation story of the Orphic theogony, where the current universe is brought into being through the agency of Zeus, in accordance with the prophecies of Night.[26] Since, in Plato's view, no evil or falsehood can ever come from God, it follows that the physical world cannot belong (entirely) to the realm of non-Being, but must instead participate in the Essence and Truth which define "what always is", albeit within the limits imposed by matter. Regarding Plato's view of God, I argue that the religious syncretism displayed in the Orphic theogonies and hymns[27] was instrumental in inspiring him to develop his theological doctrine, which reconciled the belief in traditional gods with a more sophisticated understanding of divinity through the notion of a rational and benevolent supreme deity, from whom all other gods originate. In this and other

[26] *P.Derv.* 11.1-3, 13.1-4 KPT.
[27] See Herrero 2010b.

contexts, Plato used mythical language to transcend the limitations inherent to dialectical reasoning and express certain religious truths – for example, about God and his role in the creation of universe, but also about the Forms, the human soul, and the afterlife – without needing to sacrifice the ambiguity between literal and metaphorical language.

Before concluding, I would like to address two potential objections to the present work. The first is mostly semantic in nature and has to do with my use of the term 'Orphic' as opposed to 'mystic', 'Pythagorean', 'Eleusinian', and so on. If one wished to replace the term 'Orphism' with 'mystery religion', whenever the former is used in a general sense, throughout this thesis, one could do so without affecting my argument in any way. If, for whatever reason, one wanted to speak exclusively of 'Pythagorean' or 'Eleusinian' influences, instead of 'Orphic', one would have to omit or misrepresent a nontrivial portion of the evidence which attests to Plato's engagement with Orphism specifically, but to the extent that Pythagoreanism, the Eleusinian mysteries, and other mystery cults can all be grouped under the general umbrella-term of 'Orphism', as I explain in the first part of the thesis, the main substance of my argument would still be largely unaffected. Ultimately, I believe that my use of the term 'Orphism', both in a general and in a specific sense, is supported by the evidence, but if that were the only reason preventing an otherwise sympathetic reader from considering my argument, then I would not object to someone substituting an equivalent term of their choosing.

The second objection may be phrased as follows: let us take as proven that Plato was influenced by Orphism to a meaningful degree; what difference does it make for our understanding of his philosophy and body of work? First, I would say that, while it is certainly possible to have a basic understanding of a text or a thought system without knowing anything about their author(s) or the historical and cultural context which produced them, in order to truly know something, one needs to know its origin. For

example, few would make the argument that Aristotle's relationship to Plato and to the Academy is irrelevant to understanding his own philosophical system. The same can be said for Plato's relationship with Socrates, and I contend that Orphism had just as much influence on Plato's philosophical development as Socrates did, if not more.[28] Secondly, I would argue that certain central aspect of Plato's thought, such as his pervasive focus on eschatology, his profound disdain for the body and the material realm, his preoccupation with moral purity and the salvation of the soul, and his definition of philosophy as an "exercise of death", cannot be properly understood outside of the Orphic framework in which they are rooted. Therefore, ignoring the religious and, specifically, mystic foundation of Plato's thought can only yield a distorted and reductive image of his contribution to philosophy. Thirdly, I would call attention to the specific problems and inconsistencies in Plato's work which my approach has helped to solve. One such problem is the contradiction between the Chariot myth in the *Phaedrus* (246a-249d), which, if taken at face value, appears to describe human souls before their first incarnation as tripartite, and what is stated in other dialogues, both earlier and later than the *Phaedrus*, regarding the incomposite nature of the human soul in its pure, pre-incarnate state. By comparing Plato's account of the fall of the soul with the Orphic myth of the origin of mankind, I have demonstrated that the ambiguity in the *Phaedrus* myth was intentionally exploited by Plato to avoid explaining the "mischance" (248c συντυχία) which caused the 'original fall'. The reason for this omission was probably twofold: on the one hand, the Orphic myth of the killing of Dionysus, of which a good part of the audience would certainly be reminded, could not be mentioned explicitly due to the religious taboo which surrounded it; on the other hand, Plato was not content with simply repeating the Orphic story, but would later provide his own

[28] As explained in the Introduction, I have intentionally avoided any discussion of the historical Socrates and his teachings throughout this thesis, but I suspect that Burnet (1916) was correct in positing an Orphic influence on the "Socratic doctrine of the soul". In any case, a dedicated study on Socrates' relationship with the mysteries would be a valuable supplement to the present work.

account of the origin of humanity. Indeed, the creation story in the *Timaeus* maintains the fundamental distinction between the pure, divine (Dionysian, in Orphic terms) element, which defines the nature of the soul, and the base, mortal (Titanic) element, which is tied to incarnation, but describes the first incarnation as a necessary part of God's plan rather than as punishment for an 'original sin'.

Other examples of how this interpretive approach has helped to elucidate certain aspects of Plato's thought include my reading of the allegory of the Cave (*R*. 7.514a-518b), which uncovers the Orphic subtext linking the Cave image to the myth of the *Phaedo* and the other eschatological myths, showing that, for Plato, the intellectual journey towards enlightenment transcends this current lifetime and coincides with the soul's pursuit of eternal salvation from the cycle of reincarnations. Moreover, my analysis of the myth of Cronus in the *Statesman* (268d-274e) in conjunction with its Orphic (and Hesiodic) precedents has shed light on a neglected issue in Plato's philosophy, namely, Plato's theory of cosmic cycles, hinted at in two difficult passages in the *Republic* (8.546b) and the *Timaeus* (39d). Finally, the survey of Orphic references in Plato's dialogues spanning the last four chapters of the thesis has highlighted the fundamental continuity throughout Plato's philosophical career: indeed, Orphism provided Plato with certain core ideas about the soul and the universe which he developed and refined over the course of his career but never abandoned. This consistency justifies adopting a moderate unitarian approach, which, in my view, provides the best framework for understanding Plato's body of work.

My analysis of Plato's text has also provided new insights into early Orphism. In particular, my reading of *Cra*. 400c (= *OF* 430i) has lent support to the theory of an Orphic involvement in the semantic shift of the terms σῶμα and ψυχή, which by the fifth century BC were consistently used to refer to the body and soul of the living. Furthermore, my analysis of the use of binary opposition in Plato (and some Presocratics) has helped to

elucidate a number of Orphic fragments, such as the cryptic Olbia tablets (*OF* 463-465), which also contain pairs of opposites. The most striking example is the formula inscribed on Lam. Olbiae 3 (*OF* 465), which reads [ψεῦδος] ἀλήθεια / σῶμα ψυχή. Interpreting this fragment in light of Plato's metaphysical and epistemological theories allows us to see in it the germs of those very same ideas: namely, the fundamental opposition between the material and the spiritual realm, the former being the realm of falsehood and illusion, and the latter the realm of truth. Lastly, my analysis of the cultural background of the creation story of the *Timaeus* has highlighted the revolutionary nature of the Orphic cosmogonic and anthropogonic myths, which, for the first time in the history of Greek thought, described the present world as a product of (divine) intelligent design,[29] and human nature as essentially composite, originating from the union of two distinct and opposite principles.

Over the course of this study, I have presented a substantial reinterpretation of the development and substance of Plato's thought, one which leads to a richer understanding of the Platonic *corpus*, as well as to a re-evaluation of the role of Orphism in the history of ancient religion and philosophy. With regard to the latter, however, much work still remains to be done. An area of research which, in my view, deserves further investigation is the relationship between Orphism and Presocratic philosophy. As I mention throughout the thesis, there are several instances in which Presocratic thinkers, such as Parmenides and Empedocles, among others, might have acted as mediators of Orphic ideas for Plato. I had originally planned to address these instances in an appendix, but I quickly realised that the breadth and depth of the subject matter far exceeded the scope and size of the present work. A full-length study on Orphism and the Presocratics is therefore needed not only to refine our understanding of Plato's philosophical development but also to provide a new

[29] See, e.g., *P.Derv.* 25.13 KPT (§92 Kotwick) = *OF* 18.1 [αὐτ]ὰρ [ἐ]πεὶ δ[ὴ πά]ντα Διὸ[ς φρὴν μή]σατ[ο ἔ]ργα.

interpretive approach to early Greek philosophy, one which properly accounts for the role of myth and religion – and mystery religion in particular – in the emergence of philosophy in Greece

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