

## CHAPTER 5

### Eschatology in the New Testament Period

#### 5.1 Introduction

At the Last Supper, Jesus is still expecting the Kingdom and promising his disciples a part in this glorious future: elements in his teaching which seem to speak of the Kingdom as present are references to the sign that God is about to fulfil the promise of old in the immediate future.

(Perrin 1963, 20-1)

Perrin's remarks, summarising Weiss's analysis of the Supper, encapsulate a number of ideas which have already intruded in the previous chapters. At a number of points in the description of meal types and themes concerned with sacrifice, eschatological themes have been seen. Sacrifice is concerned with the things of heaven, and of the future. Meals may share in these concerns. Schweitzer's outstanding contribution to the discussion of the Last Supper texts was the rediscovery of the eschatological element. Thus it is appropriate that eschatological imagery and themes should form part of any examination of these accounts in their historical and theological context.

Yet eschatology is an incredibly wide heading and the examination of particular phrases and images are worth monographs in themselves. Thus Beale has devoted an entire monograph to tracing the symbolism of the Temple and its eschatological functions (2004). It would, thus, seem appropriate to focus this study on such images as use meal or food terminology, expanding beyond these categories only as necessary.

If eschatology is the last theme to be examined this is not because it is the least important. Rather it seems to be one which, at least in some meal traditions, underpins areas already examined. As the examination of meal types broadened out into themes of sacrifice, so it seems appropriate to set that discussion in a wider theme, namely, of eschatology. For, certainly within the Jewish and Christian traditions, it is the hope of receiving a future reward or relationship with God which makes sense of sacrifice and meals. And that hope is intimately connected with the stuff of eschatology<sup>1</sup>.

In addition to this, meal imagery is used to describe the Kingdom. Need these images necessarily describe the reality of the Kingdom? If we consider that the feast imagery is analogous with the Kingdom, a correspondence will exist between the two: they need not be totally different, nor completely identical, but will share a degree of correspondence. The feast as *symbol* can also be connected and compared to the Kingdom. Symbols are not a random description:

As an emblem [German: *Sinnbild* = “meaning-image”], it is suited in advance, by virtue of its inner structure, to entering into certain relationships; for example, “sun” and “light” in relation to intellectual clarity. H.R.Schlette therefore defines any symbol as “any being...that implicitly refers to another being in and through some inherent similarity”.

(Hauke 1986, 122)

Thus, the Messianic Banquet is not just a random cipher for the Kingdom: it implicitly shares its reality.

## **5.2. Judaic Eschatology**

Space does not permit a detailed examination of eschatology in the Old Testament. We can, however, note dominant two trends.

### *5.2.1. National and Individual Hopes*

In the first, eschatological hope is focussed on the nation, in the second on the individual. It might be tempting to conclude that the nationalistic trend was earlier, and gradually diminished as Israel was increasingly subjugated by neighbouring powers. Correspondingly, hope in the salvation of the individual might be thought to develop as the national hope diminished. This is not the case. The two strands are not mutually exclusive. Both hopes may co-exist. Traces of doctrines about the continued post-mortem existence of the individual are found in texts which are often assumed to focus exclusively on nationalistic hopes (Orr 1915, 2). It is helpful to adopt Grant’s description, and see the national trend as “horizontal-eschatological” and, the personal as a “vertical-eschatological” centred on spirituality. They may exist in tandem.

Both trends underwent refinement. These are drawn out in both prophetic and apocalyptic writings. The national view shifted from a concept of an earthly Kingdom, with a Davidic King taking a key role, to a more otherworldly conception. Political events shaped this process: the first was the introduction of kingship (Hanson 1979, 15), the second was the collapse of that kingship in 587 BCE:

After 587 the picture changes. Israel's political identity as a nation comes to an end. The office of kingship ends. The prophets no longer have the events of a nation's history into which they can translate the terms of Yahweh's cosmic will. Hence the successors of the prophets, the visionaries, continue to have visions, but they increasingly abdicate the other dimension of the prophetic office, the translation into historical events. At that point we enter the period of transition from prophetic into apocalyptic eschatology.

(16)

In this the rule of God, or the Messiah, would see the institution of a Kingdom or nation governed by God, or by the Messiah, brought about by direct heavenly intervention.

### *5.2.2. The Presence of God*

At the heart of this lies an idea familiar from our study of sacrificial language: the presence of God. For the rule of God and institution of the Kingdom both demand the presence of God. Nor was this separate from cultic worship (Jer 33:11, 17-18). Ezekiel's prophetic visions include a focus on the Temple and its cult (Ezek 8:14-11:25, 40:1-46:24; cf. Barker 2003, 277-8). The eschatological hope of presence with God, meshed with cult imagery is perhaps best seen in the following verses:

<sup>26</sup>I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary among them forevermore. <sup>27</sup>My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>28</sup>Then the nations shall know that I the LORD sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary is among them forevermore.

(Ezek 37:26-28, NRSV)

Connected to this progression towards the rule of God was the Day of Yahweh (already outlined in Joel 3; Amos 9:11-15; Zech 14; Isa 2:2-5).

### *5.2.3. God and The Messiah*

Dan 7:9-14 provides an example of the role of both God and the Messiah in the end days: God gives dominion to the "one like a son of man". Whilst the Messiah is often expected to come at some point in the future, other thinking was possible. The identification of the Messiah with the Teacher of Righteousness in the Qumran/Essene axis (O'Neill 1995b, 61-3) might have led some of the sectarians to believe that the Messiah had already come (Vermes 1987, 54).

However, there were other opinions, too. For some, the final promise of kingship was not limited to God or the Messiah. In a democratised understanding, divine kingship was recognised in the faithful people of God: the whole nation (and more) would be transformed:

In Zechariah 14 the prophet expands on his description in 12:1-6 of the final battle, transforming Ezekiel's allegory of **Gog** of Magog (Ezekiel 38-39) and incorporating the warning in Zech 13:7-9. Before there is any victory there will be purging and spoliation (14:1-2; cf. Ezek 39:10). The victory will be God's; he will come as "Yahweh the God of all the holy ones who are with you" (Zech 14:5). These "holy ones" are the faithful of Judah, the "holy people" of Isa 62:12,<sup>38</sup> who will fight with Yahweh, their king, in Jerusalem (14:14). The final result will be that all those who have come through the refining fires of faith will be able to celebrate a truly universal Feast of Booths in which the survivors of all the nations join them in acknowledging the only king, Yahweh of hosts (14:16). There is no room for royal messianism here. The priesthood will no longer be able to exclude foreigners and others, for the nations too will become part of God's covenantal people (cf. Isa 56:1-8). Nor is "holiness" an exclusive right of the priesthood (cf. Ezek 44:23); all God's faithful people will be holy, as "priests of Yahweh," and "ministers of our God" (14:19-21; cf. Isa 61:6; 66:18-21; Exod 19:6).<sup>39</sup> “

(Leske 2000, 677)

Leske's interpretation of this final battle is also a reminder that eschatological and covenantal themes should not be treated as mutually exclusive, but

coincide in the person of God's chosen people. It is apparent that there were a number of different communal or nationalist hopes which changed with the passing of the years.

#### 5.2.4. "Life after Death"

Parallel with this comes a development of thinking about the post-mortem existence of the individual<sup>2</sup>. Such an existence was long envisioned: we can note, for example, such ideas about existence in Sheol (Ps 63:9, 86:13, Ezek 26:20, 31:14, 32:18,24). Increasingly, speculative detail is added to ideas of post-mortem existence. Resurrection is used to express hopes of a new life (Ezek 37:1-14). This earlier understanding of resurrection as a strong communal dimension: it is the resurrection of a people or nation. The two cannot always be easily distinguished: the Suffering Servant (*Ebed Yahweh*) of Isa 52-53 may refer either to a group (collective) or an individual (Rowley 1951, 149-151). However, the decline of national hope brought about by historical experience meant that such beliefs were given an increasingly individualistic understanding. By the first century CE, it appears possible that an individual interpretation of *Ebed Yahweh* was acceptable (Acts 8:34; Rowley 1951, 149). Hellenistic thinking appears to have increasingly influenced thought about individual post-mortem existence<sup>3</sup>. Such influences can be seen where terms such as ἀθανασία and ἀφθαρσία appear within the Wisdom and Inter-testamental writings (Barr 1994, 73). The hope of resurrection is also found in apocryphal and pseudepigraphical writings such as 2 Macc, 2 Bar. and 4 Ezra (Perkins 1985, 39). It was not universally held. Neither Jubilees nor Enoch contain such thinking: their writers prefer terms such as "vindication of the righteous" (41-7).

#### 5.2.5. National and Individual Hopes in the First Century CE

Both trends, the communal and individual, remained strong in the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE. Nationalist hope had been boosted by the restoration of the Hasmonean dynasty. Although Israel's political independence was short-lived, hopes for its return remained strong among some sectarians (Zeitlin 1962, 5-6). A number

of Zealot factions subscribed to such hopes, sometimes in tandem with Messianic hopes (Cohen 1987, 31; Rowland 1985, 97-101). Such hopes, whilst severely damaged, persisted after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE (104-8). The Bar-Kochba revolts of the second century CE marked a resurgence of such expectations, which were (again) cruelly shattered (Dunn 1999, 259). Such views persisted within later Judaism, and were not unconnected to Zionism (Halpern 1998, 43-4). Other groups refined this nationalist trend and made it refer to a specific group rather than a nation state. Thus the sectarians of the Dead Sea Scrolls abrogated and limited this claim to their own members (Kee 1992, 115-7). Their writings contain a few remarks about individual post-mortem existence. This seems closer to an immortal soul than a resurrection body (Pryke 1969, 57; cf. Black 1969, 106). Immortality was linked to the status which had been achieved on entry to the Qumran/Essene community (Vermes 1987, 56).

Whilst there might have been opportunity for speculation about immortality or the resurrection of the faithful, this was distinct from messianic thinking:

Though there were scattered indications in the Old Testament of a germinating faith in the resurrection and though important segments of Judaism did maintain this conviction, neither in the Old Testament nor in contemporary Jewish tradition was there a belief in the resurrection of the Messiah.

(Yamauchi 1974, np)

Hope in the continued existence of the individual did, however, remain strong. There was speculation about resurrection and what it might entail. Acts 23:8 suggests that Pharisaic thought included speculation on whether one might be resurrected as an angel or a spirit<sup>4</sup>.

#### *5.2.6. Eschatology: Prophecy and Apocalyptic*

Eschatology manifests itself particularly in two bodies of writing: prophetic and apocalyptic. In prophetic accounts, eschatology is imminent, connected to an open expectation of history and linked to known named individuals (Theissen & Merz 1998, 249). Prophetic accounts may view the Kingdom as present or

timeless (250-2). The believer participates through worship: “what has still to come in reality is experienced and believed in as already present” (252).

In contrast, apocalyptic holds out a transcendent eschatology, a deterministic view of history and is pseudonymous (249; Dunn 1993, 312; Rowland 1985, 58-9). It is often a response to moments of crisis (Dunn 1993, 312). Apocalyptic appears to include the confidence that God has spoken directly to the visionary (58), even if this does sometimes manifest signs of literary conventions (Russell 1971, 166).

Thus, by the first century CE, eschatological writings increased in number and embraced a number of images and themes, drawn from both the prophetic and apocalyptic strands. It is worth recapitulating them as follows:

- The new age of God will experience ‘birth pangs’ or be preceded by a period of suffering and woes, which need to be completed before the era of the kingdom, of justice and of peace (Rowland 1985, 88).
- The new age is modelled on God’s creation. For some this took on this worldly features (e.g., 2 *Bar.* 24-30), and for others it included elements of political rebellion against Rome (Rowland 1985, 90). For others, including the Dead Sea sectarians, it took on features of the Temple (Beale 2004, 103).
- Salvation may be universal, but there is a special role for Israel (Rowland 1985, 90-1; Sanders 1985, 95-8).
- A general resurrection of the dead or expectation of individual post-mortem existence( p. 203, ¶ 5.2.4).
- The Messiah will lead the Jewish people in the last days and prepare the new age. An extended description of this is found, for example, in *Pss. Sol.* 17:33- 44 (cf. pp. 202-3, ¶ 5.2.3.)
- A dualism between God and Satan (*T.Dan.* 5:10-13; *As.Mos.* 10:1; cf. Theissen & Merz 1998, 249-50)
- A cosmic judgment in which the just will be vindicated (*Sib.Or.* 3:669-731; Sanders 1985, 113-4). The threat of judgement may be an incentive to reform behaviour (Dunn 1993, 312)

The imagery and beliefs vary in detail, but one in particular is of interest for this thesis: the role that eating plays in the new age and in the company of the Messiah.

### 5.2.7. *The Heavenly Feast*

The heavenly Feast makes its first appearance in Isa 54:12-14, which, as a portion of deutero-Isaiah, dates from the time of the Exile (Soggin 1976, 310-12). Post-exilic passages continue the theme in Isa 24-27. Isa 25:6-9 shows that a future feast held in the presence of God, on his holy mountain, will be the culmination of a number of hopes: no more death, nor reproach; a day of salvation and rejoicing. In tritro-Isaiah (336-7), Isa 62:8-9 adds a cultic dimension: eating and drinking takes place in the “in my holy courts” (NRSV), that is, a cipher for the Temple. At some points, God is identified as the author of the feast (Isa 49:9 [cf. 48:21]; Ezek 34:14; 25-7 [Shepherd imagery]), at others, David (Ezek 34:23 [shepherd imagery]). Zech 9:15 draws together themes of battle and slaughter (cf. Isa 34:6; Jer 46:10; Zeph 1:7), sovereignty and eating, whose origins appear to reach back to fertility cults:

In celebration of the victory and in acknowledgement of the universal sovereignty of the Divine warrior and King, a bloody sacrifice-banquet, is held. This is an essential element in the mythic pattern with which we are dealing, and betrays the original fertility function of the ancient cult.

(Hanson 1979, 322)<sup>5</sup>

Such an analysis also suggests that the connection of eschatological, sacrificial and meal themes does not do violence to the structures of Hebrew thought which might have informed the thinking of Jesus and the evangelists.

### 5.2.8. *Manna*

Manna imagery, familiar from both meal and sacrificial traditions, is also found in descriptions of the heavenly banquet. *2 Bar.* 29:8 describes manna coming from heaven:

And it shall come to pass at that selfsame time that the treasury of manna shall again descend from on high, and they will eat of it in those years, because these are they who have come to the consummation of time

(quoted in Wainwright 2003, 26)

Manna also remained a feature of eschatological expectation in later rabbinic tradition (Dodd 1953, 335). A later text from the Midrash attributes this gift to the Messiah<sup>6</sup>.

*Jos.Asen.* without demanding a specifically eschatological locus for the meal it describes, gives manna similar associations, since, in eating it, Aseneth gains the benefits of immortality (Lieber 2004, 68). She is not merely converted, but transformed:

Her conversion is not merely a *metanoia*, a change of mind, but a radical transformation of her ontic condition. Indeed, it appears that Aseneth in her conversion is herself transformed into an angelic object of vision, and perhaps eternal nourishment.

(77; cf. Ch.4, p.144-5, ¶ 4.2.8. – 4.2.8.1.)

Thus eschatological motifs may be developed by locating meals in the end-times, or associating them with the transformation of the individual in the present.

### 5.2.9. *The Messianic Banquet*

The Inter-testamental writings also begin to identify the feast more closely with the Messiah. Thus, *1 En.* 62:14-15 describes a meal in the company of the Son of Man. In this context, a heavenly understanding of the term “Son of Man” (similar to that in Dan 7) may safely be assumed. These traditions were ripe for ascription to Jesus as he was considered to be the Messiah. As Fletcher-Louis notes:

by the first century A.D. there was a well established belief that, as Daniel 7:13 predicted, there would come a SM figure who as (*sic*) both human and heavenly. In one tradition at least, he was identified with the historical figure of Enoch. It is possible that in the early stages of the tradition that (*sic*) he has a strongly priestly characterisation.

(1998, np)

An even fuller description is found in the 2 *Bar.* 29: 3-8, where Leviathan and Behemoth become food for the (faithful) survivors (Russell 1971, 124-5; 294-5). A number of texts (1 *En* 25: 4-5, 32:3-6; Ezra 7:123; Ezek 47:7-12) share motifs about Leviathan, Behemoth and the trees of paradise which also serve as food (Schweitzer 1998, 238). Lieber suggests that these motifs may be a “mythic transformation” of cultic sacrifice. The later midrashic expositions of such texts consider God to be a participant at the meal, eating with the righteous (2004, 76).

#### 5.2.10. *Eating with the Messiah: The Qumran/Essene Meal*

The significance of the meals recorded in the Dead Sea Scrolls is still debated. Whilst there seems to be a consensus that the focus of the meal is eschatological, scholars are divided as to whether the meal was an anticipation, perhaps even sacramental, of the Messianic Banquet held at the end of the ages (Kuhn) or merely eschatological (Priest)<sup>7</sup>. Given the eschatological significance of the meal, the presence of Messianic language and imagery in the wider context of the meal texts further suggests some Messianic significance (Kugler 2002, 138, fn. 31; Smith 2002, 156-7; Vermes 1987, 100). It is unclear from the primary literature whether the meal was sacramental in nature. The Dead Sea Scrolls (1QSa 1:1; 2:17-21) make a connection between ritual meals and the Last Things. The exact nature of the connection, as we have seen, is disputed (Ch. 3, p. 103, ¶ 3.3.6.1.; Russell 1971, 44). However, it seems that the behaviour of the community matched their eschatological expectations. Their commensality prefigured the age to come:

...the meal table was an eschatological symbol, an enacted conviction, commitment and promise.

(Dunn 1992, 263)

This picture supports the sectarians’ understanding of themselves as the covenant community which anticipates the eschatological age. Their “sacrificialisation” of the Temple cultus had an eschatological dimension (Ch. 4, pp. 146-8, ¶ 4.2. 9.).

Whilst the imagery of food and eating provides the link to the discussion of Supper narratives, they also provoke interest in the key figure of the Messiah. Commensality has already appeared significant. Thus the question arises: why is it important to eat with the Messiah? The answer comes from an understanding of the links which are expressed when people eat together. They show a common purpose, a common set of values, lifestyle and end. They also show the acceptance of the people by God:

For the Dead Sea group, partaking in this meal was a sign of their having found acceptance through conformity to the purity requirements

(Kee 1992, 117)

In *Jos.Asen.* 8:11 and 15:5, which we have examined within the Qumran/Essene axis, eating is linked to personal eschatological hopes: a firm link is established between a ritual meal and a promise of immortality.

#### 5.2.11. *Philo and Rabbinic Tradition*

The Messianic Banquet should not readily be associated with literal eating. In Philo, for example, eating takes on a specifically spiritual dimension (*Fug.* 137-9; *Mut.* 259-60)<sup>8</sup>. Thus, manna, a divine food, feeds the soul, just as bread sustains the body:

*Mannah* (*sic*) has a mediating quality in Philo – the food mediates between the angelic/cognitive realm and the human realm of the senses. *Mannah* is identified with both Logos and Torah, and even with Moses himself in some cases. This is an intriguing tradition, as both Moses and the heavenly bread perform mediating activities. Similarly, that the vision of God's form nourishes like *mannah* suggests an identification between *mannah* and God's image.

(Lieber 2004, 72-3)

In later rabbinic tradition, the vision of the *shekinah* (God's presence) was considered to nourish those who looked on it (*Rab. Lev.* 20.10). This could be compared to looking at fellow-participant in a meal, suggesting that the *shekinah* is not only a participant, but also gives sustenance (Lieber 2004, 73-4).

### *5.2.11. Judaic Eschatology: Concluding Remarks*

This brief survey reveals the wide spectrum of Jewish beliefs across the ages. It suggests that a number of features and symbols encountered in our earlier discussions (e.g., meals, manna, and sacrifice) have a visible eschatological, and sometimes Messianic, dimension.

Further, Jewish beliefs were not “pure” but could be influenced by contact with other cultures: the increasing development of hopes for individual post-mortem existence and resurrection are cases in point. Yet eschatological hopes did not shrink and become confined to individual existence: hopes in a national or communal existence also persisted. Images which expressed this hope included Heavenly or Messianic banquets, promising that God’s faithful people would eat at table with God himself, or in a place prepared by him or his representative, the Messiah. These hopes came, for some, to be expressed in rituals and meals. Such meals might not just express a hope that, at some stage in the future, the participants would eat with God, but might indicate that, even in the present, they were acceptable to him. Thus they would signify that the participant was in a right covenant relationship with God.

### **5.3. Graeco-Roman Eschatology**

What can be termed “eschatology” in Graeco-Roman religion and philosophy covers a number of themes from death and the after-life (with a focus on the fate of the individual) to cosmic destruction and renewal:

Hellenistic eschatology includes beliefs about the fate of the individual both in this world and the next, including death (as the separation of the soul from the body), and varied conceptions of the afterlife, optionally including some form of post-mortem judgment, the possibility in some traditions of metempsychosis, and the eternal state of existence of the inner person, normally designated as the ψυχή (“soul”) or νοῦς (“mind”). The primary form of dualism in Hellenistic eschatology is the distinction between mortality (characteristic of humans) and immortality (characteristic of the gods), though through time a happy afterlife became an increasingly common possibility for the ordinary dead.

(Aune 2001, 217)

This dualism could be expressed using other vocabulary: πνεῦμα might be used for heavenly matter, and σάρξ for earthly (Kasemann 1964, 115).

### 5.3.1. *Immortality*

Belief in immortality goes back to ancient times (Aristotle, *De Anima*, 1.2)<sup>9</sup>. Such traditions were known to later Jewish writers such as Philo (Mitchell 2001, 207). Whilst there appears to have been a concept of a period of perfection (Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 110-120)<sup>10</sup>, this varied: for Greeks the focus was on a Golden Race, for the Romans, on occasion, A Golden Age (Clausen 1995, 119, fn.3). It was sometimes considered past, and unattainable, “a mythical paradise irretrievably lost” (121). At others, “paradise” appears to be a counterpart to the earthly realm: they exist side by side. The living die, and pass to the other.

### 5.3.2. *The Place of the Dead*

Thus, eschatological language sometimes took a geographical turn. Descriptions of the Isles of the Blest, or Elysium, describe the post-mortem reward for the virtuous<sup>11</sup>. The texts focus on the way in which the blessed ones rest from their labour rather than a heavenly meal. However, the rest given to heroes such as Menelaus was exceptional (Aune 2001, 227-8). The dead were more commonly supposed to go to Hades, the shadowy underground realm named after one of the gods of the dead. One of the more detailed accounts of Hades (Lat. *Avernus*) occurs in the 6<sup>th</sup> book of Vergil's *Aeneid*<sup>12</sup>. The descent begins in line 192, and the description of the underworld, its different regions, and the characters Aeneas encounters take up almost the rest of the book. The topography of the Underworld derives from Orphic doctrine and The Myth of Er (Plato, *Republic*, X)<sup>13</sup>, but reflects later Roman concerns about politics and world-order (Feldherr 1999). Aeneas' journey takes him past the monsters at the entrance to Hades, and he meets characters from the past, as well as the future heroes of Rome. The Elysian Fields, or Groves of the Blessed, are part of the Underworld. Nowhere in

Vergil's extensive account is there any description of eating or drinking in the realm of the dead. Sacrifice is offered only in Aeneas' preparations for the descent. None of the dead, in any realm of the underworld, engage in such activities. Vergil stands in a common tradition, by placing the dead underground. In fact, his decent narrative has strong similarities to the descent of Odysseus into Hades which is recorded in the *Odyssey*, 11<sup>14</sup>. The location of the realm of the dead was not, however, universally fixed.

### 5.3.3. *Death and the Mysteries*

Post-mortem existence was held out as a hope for initiates of the mysteries. The Cynic philosopher, Diogenes (412-323 BCE) opposed a commonly held view that initiation into the Mysteries guaranteed a pleasant post-mortem existence (Fraser 1998, 28)<sup>15</sup>. However, this was not a universally held opinion: the modern commentator Zielinski notes that the wicked participated in the rites "to their own spiritual destruction" (quoted on 29). The Mysteries did not hold out a commonly accepted view of post-mortem existence: views varied from cult to cult.

Commentators have described a number of these hopes using the term "resurrection". These are often detailed by descriptions of the post-mortem existence of a "dying-and-rising" god. It is debatable whether the terminology is really accurate<sup>16</sup>. "Resurrection" may be the wrong modality. Plotinus (204-270 CE) related the ideas of life after death and re-incarnation to the cycles of plant life<sup>17</sup>. This may testify to the persistence of such language which is often reflected by the agricultural mythologies which accompany the Mysteries (e.g., Ch.5, pp. 243-4, fn. 18, 19, 23)

#### 5.3.3.1. Eleusis

Participation in Mysteries at Eleusis was considered to give blessings. The initiate had hope for life after death, and contributed to the stability of the community. The hopes are not, however, spelled out in great detail<sup>18</sup>.

### 5.3.3.2. Tammuz-Attis-Adonis

It is sometimes claimed that Tammuz-Dumuzi was raised (resurrected) by the goddess Innana-Ishatar. However the poem "The Death of Dumuzi" rather suggests that she sent Dumuzi to the Underworld as a substitute<sup>19</sup>. Kramer dismisses the idea that the Tammuz myth was originally about resurrection (1961, 10). Conflation of the Tammuz and Attis-Adonis myths was axiomatic by the time of late antiquity (Halperin 1983, 186, cf. Reed 2000, 320)<sup>20</sup>. Texts used to illustrate the "resurrection of Attis" are comparatively late. Tripolitis notes that the Attis traditions were first incorporated into the rites of Cybele in the time of Claudius (2002, 34): detailed accounts come from the time of Antoninus Pius (138-161 CE)<sup>21</sup>. Details also suggest a qualitative difference from Christian understanding, as it seems rather that his body is preserved. The subsequent return to life is symbolised not by a raised body, but by a tree<sup>22</sup>. Tripolitis says of the Attis rites:

The March rituals, as developed and practised by the Romans, show no evidence of any mystery rites as found in the mystery cults. Rather, they are rituals commemorating the annual alteration of the seasons, the withering of the earth's vegetation in the winter and its return in the spring. There is no indication of a dying and rising god, of an initiation and purification rite of the worshippers, participation in the life of the deity or hope of immortality. A cult initiation rite is not attested until the 4<sup>th</sup> century C.E.

( 34-5)

In the swirl of deities from Tammuz-Dumuzi onwards, Attis does not appear to offer evidence of thinking about resurrection.

### 5.3.3.3. Osiris

Earlier, in Ptolemaic and Roman times, the Attis-Adonis myth was also conflated with that of Osiris (Reed 2000, 328). This would date such accounts more closely to the New Testament period. There, the figure of Osiris is described as undergoing a two-fold resurrection, with different treatments of body and soul, in Plutarch's *de Iside et Osiride*:

It is not, therefore, out of keeping that they have a legend that the soul of Osiris is everlasting and imperishable, but that his body Typhon oftentimes dismembers and causes to disappear, and that Isis wanders hither and yon

in her search for it, and fits it together again; for that which really is and is perceptible and good is superior to destruction and change. The images from it with which the sensible and corporeal is impressed, and the relations, forms, and likenesses which this take upon itself, like impressions of seals in wax, are not permanently lasting, but disorder and disturbance overtakes them, being driven hither from the upper reaches, and fighting against Horus, whom Isis brings forth, beholden of all, as the image of the perceptible world.

(*Ibid.*, § 54 , from Babbitt 1936, np )

This seems to reflect a different understanding from the Attis myth and, indeed, Christian understandings of resurrection. It certainly appears to deal with post-mortem existence. However, the different treatments of soul and body differ from Christian understandings which stress rather the common fate of body and soul (1 Cor 15:44). The picture given by Plutarch may reflect Egyptian influence on the cult<sup>23</sup>. That Osiris is always presented in mummified form adds a further difference:

What is meant of Osiris being "raised to life"? Simply that, thanks to the ministrations of Isis, he is able to lead a life beyond the tomb which is an almost perfect replica of earthly existence. But he will never again come among the living and will reign only over the dead.... This revived god is in reality a "mummy" god.

(De Vaux 1971, 236)

It is also questionable whether later understandings of Osiris included an interest in post-mortem issues. Reed notes the use of mythic narratives about Osiris and Adonis in the *Aeneid* (1998). At no point does the notion of resurrection intrude.

#### 5.3.3.4. Mithras

Mithraism did not depend on a dying and rising god (Ch.4, pp. 157-8, ¶ 4.3.4.4.). This also has consequences for their understanding of post-mortem existence. Perkins is equally dismissive of the value of so-called "dying/rising" cults (e.g., Mithraism and the Attis and Isis cults) arguing that their focus is principally on benefits in this life. This does not completely eliminate post-mortem hopes, but does limit them:

the best one can get from these cults is a vague idea of ritual purity that would make for an agreeable afterlife.

(Perkins 1985, 60)

It is a moot point whether such a degree of analogy is useful in identifying the origins of Christian thought: this really is a lowest common denominator. That said, the study of Mithraism may give helpful insights into the inter-relationship between early Christianity and the other mystery cults:

As Smith amply demonstrates, the practice of comparing Christianity to the mystery cults (and vice-versa) was vitiated from the outset by partisan confessional agendas, predominantly those of Protestant theologians seeking to discredit the Roman Church by portraying it as corrupted from Christianity's pristine origins by the mystery cults. Above all, Smith argues, we have to escape the thoroughly compromised comparison of a supposedly fundamental Christian soteriology of 'dying and rising with Christ' with an imagined mystery soteriology of salvation through the death and resurrection of the cult deity.

One of the advantages of bringing new *Mithraic* evidence into play is that it necessarily moves the issue away from that distracting soteriological pattern. One may accept (or not) Smith's demonstration that utopian soteriologies of a dying and rising god, and thus their expression in ritual, were minor and marginal among early Christianities and late or non-existent in, e.g., the Attis cult.

(Beck 2000, 174-5)

However, care needs to be taken that all mystery religions are not equated with Mithraism and the soteriological pattern of a variety of cults assessed according to this one particular model. For the mystery religions were pluriform, and should be treated as such. Nonetheless, the evidence which would support strong similarities between the bulk of these cults and Christianity in the New Testament period has taken a severe knock.

#### *5.3.4. Death and the Philosophers*

Post-mortem speculation was not confined to the Mysteries. There are large overlaps between the theories of the cults, the mysteries and the philosophical schools. A passage from Plato's *Republic* depicting Adeimantus

talking about the Mysteries (*Republic* 2.364d-e) shows that, if nothing else, a dramatic character could hold beliefs from all three camps<sup>24</sup>. Yet Plato's thinking developed the language of the Mysteries so that it could also refer to trained philosophers and what they might attain:

Since they (the philosophers who believe) have gone through a particular training, and have now become changed, able to have communion with the gods, they are now given salvation from the blemishes and evils, the "taint of the prison house which now we are encompassed withal, and call a body, first bound therein as an oyster in its shell".

(Fraser 1998, 34)

This summary sheds light, thus, not only on what might be expected by initiates in the Mysteries as well as the philosophers.

#### 5.3.4.1. Body, Soul and Death

The variety of philosophical schools meant that, as in the case of the Mysteries, a number of different beliefs were held. Cicero in his *Tusculan Disputations* 1 sums up the diversity of views in Graeco-Roman philosophy:

Cicero begins in section 18 by distinguishing those who hold that death is a separation of body and soul from those who hold that body and soul perish together, the soul in the body. Of those who believe that the soul leaves the body, some hold that it is immediately dissipated, some that it persists for a long time, some that it exists forever.

(Jones 1923, 204)<sup>25</sup>

#### 5.3.4.2. Death and Ethics

Cicero's *Dream of Scipio* 6:12-26 uses a celestial journey to make both ethical and metaphysical points. The soul is portrayed as immortal (6:26)<sup>26</sup>, but this does not mean that the speculation is futurist. There is a locative and ethical dimension:

Philosophic and cosmological speculation is used to provide a comprehensive vision of the true reality of the earth and human vanity. The vision is to unmask the false views of the masses that might have led the young Scipio to flee the dangers of public life. Thus, the dialogue is not seeking to answer the question of the soul's survival out of a simple pleasure in philosophical dogmatism. The question is more pressing: Can the ideal of public service that had shaped the ethos of the aristocracy under the old

republic with its feel for family honor and tradition hold out in the imperial age?

(Perkins 1985, 59-60)

Metaphysical speculation includes ethical reflection, a trait which can be seen in more cosmological myths.

#### 5.3.4.3. Death and Metaphysics

Greek thinkers engaged in considerable speculation about the nature of the soul, often identifying it with a particular organ of the body, or elements (Jones 1923, 204).

During and after the Hellenistic period, Greek and Roman thought tended to adopt a three-tiered cosmology. Belief in mythical hell was possible for a variety of philosophers, including Pherecydes, Pythagoras and Plato. Even Stoics such as Chrysippus might admit them (209). Souls might be considered to rise, after the pattern of fire and air (209-10). In mythical heavens they might rise as far as the moon or higher heavenly spheres (210-2, 227). There appears to have been a

conventional theory that the souls of the dead maintain an individual existence for a term in the region of the moon.

(Jones 1932, 116)

There might be a connection to punishment and reward, with the souls of both the good and the righteous floating upward (Aune 2001, 228): the souls of the unrighteous head downwards. Some accounts suggest that dead heroes or monarchs might be transformed into gods or even stars (Wright 2003, 55-60)<sup>27</sup>. Accounts of heavenly journeys detail these cosmologies. Such accounts are sometimes titled “The Flight of the Mind”. This was a philosophical commonplace, possibly with Egyptian origins (Jones 1926, 98-101). The myth of Er, despite its appropriation by Vergil for an underground journey, and the *9<sup>th</sup> Oration*<sup>28</sup> of Maximus of Tyre both indicate a heavenly location. All focus more on the language of peace and tranquillity rather than meal imagery.

Philosophical speculation is not purely other-worldly or fanciful: myth overlaps with philosophy. It also fulfils a purpose in explaining the human condition,

perhaps, even why people are the way they are. Thus, the Platonic Myth of Er functions in the following way:

However, no simple 'be just and/or philosophical in your (one) life and eternal bliss shall be your reward' eschatology could suffice for anyone who believed in the transmigration of *psuchai*, was a moral philosopher, and took seriously the characteristics of the human beings among whom he lived...

He thus, it seems, gives an explanation why many admirably just and self-controlled persons are not philosophers, or even fortunate in their lives, why persons differ in intelligence, why it is so difficult for the moralist to influence whether by suasion or argument the persons who seem hell-bent for ruin from their earliest years, or to have much influence on the larger number of persons who seem to be capable of limited improvement only.

(Adkins 1990, 120)

This need not only be deterministic:

an eschatology is not a contract in law, but an imaginative picture, designed...to shape attitudes and behavior here and now.

(Parker 1995, 500-1)

Eschatological explorations allow for the possibility of super-human knowledge, and of allowing rewards and retribution beyond this life. This thinking in turn is shaped by the view taken of matter and physics (cf. Trépanier 2003, 129).

Many of the philosophical accounts are also highly individualistic, focussing on the afterlife and the fate of the individual. Plutarch's *De Genio Socratis* provides an example of such thought, almost contemporary with the New Testament. In it, the role of the δαίμων (in this case, the soul of one already in the heavenly realm) in assisting another soul to its place in heaven is described:

So also those who have retired from life's contests and become daimones through their souls' virtue do not entirely disdain human affairs and thoughts and interest, but feel a friendly concern for those still practising for the same goal. They enthusiastically encourage them, and urge them on in their struggle for virtue, when they see that the race is bringing them within touching-distance of their hopes. For these daimones do not aid all and sundry. They are like people standing on the beach, who watch silently as they see swimmers far out at sea, but run down and wade into the water as

soon as they come close, hauling them to safety, and helping them with hands and voices. Such, my friends, is the way of daimones. While we are swamped by the world, changing from body to body---from one boat to another, as it were--- struggling and enduring in the effort to save ourselves by our own virtue and reach harbour safely, they let us alone. But once a soul has run the long race well and heartily through many births and is at the end of its cycle, enduring the risks, sweat, and effort of landing in the upper regions, then god is not indignant if that soul's own daimon goes to its aid; indeed, he gives it permission to do so if it so wishes.

(Plutarch, *De Genio Socratis*, 593-4 in Russell 1993, 112)

#### 5.3.4.4. Stoic Views of Death

Stoic cosmology considered both the fate of the individual and the world. Change was seen as inevitable and necessary. The cosmos was also subject to change. A cyclic view predominated in which the world was created by fire, and then destroyed again in a similar conflagration:

Always remember the saying of Heraclitus, that the death of earth is to become water, and the death of water is to become air, and the death of air is to become fire, and reversely.

(Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 4.29)<sup>29</sup>

Differences can be seen in the respective theories of Stoicism's founders. For the most part, Stoics thought that the soul survived the body for a long time (Jones 1923, 203-4):

Dying is not the end of a person's existence, according to the Stoics. Once the soul has separated from the body it maintains its own cohesion for a period of time. Chrysippus and Cleanthes disagreed regarding the fate of the soul after death. Cleanthes held that the souls of all men could survive until the conflagration, a time in which the divine fire totally consumes all matter. Chrysippus, on the other hand, held that only the souls of the wise are able to endure. The souls of the unwise will exist for a limited time before they are destroyed or reabsorbed into the cosmic *pneuma*. The souls of irrational beasts are destroyed with their bodies. In no case is there any indication that the survival of the soul after death had any direct benefit to the individual or that the Stoics used this as a motivator toward ethical or intellectual behavior. There is no heaven or hell in Stoicism; the time to live one's life and to perfect one's virtues is in the present.

(Rubarth 2002, np)

In individual terms, death was the separation of the body from the soul. Stoics differed precisely over the ultimate fate of the soul,

but the main belief was that although it might exist as a separate entity for a short while, it will then diffuse and become part of the great soul of the universe, God, or Nature.

(Roots 2000, np)

Roots finds evidence for the beliefs he outlines in the letter which Servius Sulpicius wrote to Cicero on the death of his daughter (Cicero, *Letters*, IV.5). Whilst the letter dwells on the transitory nature of human life, signs of these Stoic beliefs are not evident. If anything, 4.5.6 suggests that Cicero should exhibit a Stoic indifference to the inevitability of death, and an agnosticism about post-mortem existence<sup>30</sup>. A good summary of Stoic beliefs is found in Marcus Aurelius:

If souls survive death, how can the air hold them from all eternity? How, we reply, does earth hold the bodies of generation after generation committed to the grave? Just as on earth, after a certain term of survival, change and dissolution of substance makes room for other dead bodies, so too the souls transmuted into air, after a period of survival, change by processes of diffusion and of ignition, and are resumed into the seminal principle of the universe, and in this way make room for others to take up their habitation in their stead. Such is the natural answer, assuming the survival of souls.

(M. Aurelius, *Meditations*, 4.21)

Such a description seems to focus on metaphysics. Edelstein (1936, 300) argues that the only Stoic philosopher who supported the immortality of the soul was Cleanthes. Other writers stressed the ethical dimension. Posidonius (135-51 BCE), whose writings developed Stoicism through a dialectic with Platonism, and might be considered, in classic Stoic terms, heterodox or heretical, set his views more within the realm of ethics:

Although the surviving fragments of Posidonius' extensive writings do not permit a firm judgement, it seems that Posidonius found the idea of personal immortality absurd. Since the evil daimon is innate to the individual soul and absent from the World-Soul, the soul cannot become immortal by freeing itself of wrongdoing, for the individual soul as a whole cannot join the World-Soul. But the individual can through right ethics place the superior daimon in charge of all aspects of soul, subordinate the passional tendencies by

withdrawing from the lower daimon, and thus engage in a microcosmic version of ceaselessly reducing chaos to kosmos. By assimilating the action of the higher daimonic aspect of soul to the celestial motion of the World-Soul, the individual merges the immortal part of the soul with the governing principle of the universe. The wise man does not seek immortality, for he knows there is that in him which is immortal. Perhaps Posidonius found in this standpoint the possibility of self-conscious, though not personal, immortality through cultivation of the highest in the individual.

(Hall 2000, np)

Posidonius based his views on a tradition which included, among others, Aristotle and Panaetius. Edelstein notes that there is no proof that Posidonius attributed any eschatological significance (i.e., immortality) to his ethical thinking (1936, 315). Jones (1926, 100) suggests that Seneca's *Cons. ad Marciam* 18.2 describes cosmic visions of souls which cannot be ascribed to a period of pre-existence or post-mortem existence, but rather have an ethical significance:

"You are about to enter a city," I should say, "shared by gods and men - a city that embraces the universe, that is bound by fixed and eternal laws, that holds the celestial bodies as they whirl through their unwearied rounds. You will see there the gleaming of countless stars, you will see one star flooding everything with his light - the sun that marks off the spaces of day and night in his daily course, and in his annual course distributes even more equably the periods of summer and winter. You will see the moon taking his place by night, who as she meets her brother borrows from him a pale, reflected light, now quite hidden, now overhanging the earth with her whole face exposed, ever changing as she waxes and wanes, ever different from her last appearance."<sup>31</sup>

As with the Mysteries, care must be taken to discern whether mythical writing has a metaphysical, speculative or ethical focus.

#### 5.3.4.5. Epicurean Views of Death

Epicureanism was markedly different in its use of speculative theory. Epicurus evolved a school of thought which was essentially materialistic. Unusually, he seems to have given little or no place to the role of the gods. His critics described his philosophy as atheistic. This was refuted by Epicurus and his

followers who held that gods might live in the void between worlds, but had absolutely no involvement in the worlds themselves<sup>32</sup>.

Epicurus' understanding of death is often summed up as saying that death is nothing, involves no pain or disorder, and therefore is nothing to worry about (Tomlin 1997, 59-60)<sup>33</sup>. Such a view implies that there is no post-mortem existence. This has been the prevalent understanding. There is, however, a second possibility: if there were such a thing as post-mortem existence, the post-mortem being would not feel sensation, pleasure or pain. The crucial text for both interpretations is recorded in Diogenes Laertius:

It is on that account that, when the soul departs, the body is no longer possessed of sensation; for it has not this power, (namely that of sensation) in itself; but on the other hand, this power can only manifest itself in the soul through the medium of the body. The soul, reflecting the manifestations which are accomplished in the substance which environs it, realizes in itself, in a virtue or power which belongs to it, the sensible affections, and immediately communicates them to the body in virtue of the reciprocal bonds of sympathy which unite it to the body; that is the reason why the destruction of a part of the body does not few after it a cessation of all feeling in the soul while it resides in the body, provided that the senses still preserve some energy; although, nevertheless, the dissolution of the corporeal covering, or even of any one of it portions, may sometimes bring on with it the destruction of the soul.

The rest of the body, on the other hand, even when it remains, either as a whole, or in any part, loses all feeling by the dispersion of that aggregate of atoms, whatever it may be, that forms the soul. When the entire combination of the body is dissolved, then the soul too is dissolved, and ceases to retain those faculties which were previously inherent in it, and especially the power of motion; so that sensation perishes equally as far as the soul is concerned; for it is impossible to imagine that it still feels, from the moment when it is no longer in the same conditions of existence, and no longer possesses the same movements of existence in reference to the same organic system; from the moment, in short, when the things which cover and surround it are no longer such, that it retains in them the same movements as before.

(D.L., X. XXIV, trans. Yonge (1853))

Both interpretations are possible because Epicurus does not make clear whether the dissolution of the soul is co-terminus with the death of the body.

This speculation is not his primary concern. He is more interested in the practical consequences which are a direct consequence of his materialist thinking. Either way, the upshot is the same: whatever happens after death is an irrelevance because the absence of sensation means that the person is able to experience neither pleasure nor pain. Epicurus thus offered his followers a radically different way of looking at the world from the other philosophical schools, especially Pythagoreanism and Platonism. This legacy is summed up in Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* 1:62-79 and 3:14-27<sup>34</sup>:

[Lucretius] will praise his Athenian mentor as Pythagoras and Plato were commended by the most eminent of their disciples; he and Epicurus will join the Giants in pulling down the insubstantial universe of Plato and Aristotle; conquering the fear of death in one case, and religion itself in the other, they will show themselves to be wiser than the Pythagoreans, who dream of looking down on humankind from the flaming ramparts of eternity. In fact it was man before whose eyes lay life itself, prostrated by religion: when Epicurus raises his eyes to slay this celestial prodigy, he enabled his disciples to look down (though only in metaphor) on those who, like the Pythagoreans, pursue the fatuous quest of immortality within the mortal fabric of the world.

(Edwards 1990, 469)

### 5.3.5. *Death and the Individual*

Common to the various schools of thought, religious or philosophical, is the focus on the individual rather than on the community. The post-mortem focus of attention is the soul. The communal element appears to be restricted to the city or state only in this realm (cf. Isocrates, *Panegyricus* 28-29 [Ch.5, pp.213-4, fn. 18], cf. Hoffmann 1997, 57-8). Graeco-Roman eschatological thought differs from its Jewish counterpart in its focus on the individual. Jewish eschatological thought included both individual and communal dimensions (see above, pp. 200-1, ¶ 5.2.1.; pp. 203-4, ¶ 5.2.5.) in the post-mortem realm.

The lack of such “communal” elements may explain why meal imagery does not feature strongly in descriptions of the afterlife. A fragment from the *Miners* of Pherekrates (c.420 BCE, cf. Ehrenberg 1943, 290; Lever 1956, 76) gives,

it seems, the most prominence to the place of food in the afterlife in a rich description of a landscape sculpted from foodstuffs<sup>35</sup>.

Even this makes little reference to the communal nature of meals. It is not helpful to be overly literalistic in considering such passages. More evidence is found when vase-paintings and other depictions of death and the afterlife are considered. Afterlife meals and funerary ritual appear to overlap. Much depends on the way in which funeral meals are interpreted.

### 5.3.6. *Cults of the Dead*

Cults of the dead performed different functions. These varied at different periods. When Athenian art shows the deceased eating at a banquet, three interpretations are possible:

- The dead enjoy table-fellowship
- The dead enjoy a happy afterlife
- The dead is shown in an idealised form of his earthly life

In some Greek thought, the prominence of the first two motifs can be queried. It was believed that the dead could not share in the pleasures of the living. However, the evidence is not uniform<sup>36</sup>. An Epicurean meal, for example, would have been primarily a memorial, and considered unlikely to have any effects on a post-mortem existence, which was either a false concept or bereft of sensation (above, pp. 221-3, ¶ 5.3.4.5.): actual involvement of the dead would be impossible. For others, eating, or not eating, might show the new status of the dead:

The point of doing these things was to ensure that the dead were well and truly sent on their way to the next world, rather than returning to haunt this one. Furthermore, it appears that at least some meals at the tomb were put there only for the dead, with the living being prohibited from partaking, serving to confirm the new status of the dead person; that is why is why the appropriate emotion for participants in such practices was grief.

(Wright 2003, 62)

Roman beliefs were different: there was a stronger belief that the dead might share with the living. Roman thinking was more generally optimistic about post-mortem existence:

belief in the survival after death of personal individuality prevailed and views on the nature of the life that awaited the soul beyond the grave were, in the main, optimistic. Both literature (to some extent) and funerary art (to a high degree) do, in fact, reveal that there was in this age a deepening conviction that the terror and power of death could be overcome and that a richer, happier and more godlike life than that experienced here was attainable hereafter, under certain conditions, by the souls of the departed.

(Toynbee 1996, 38)

Funeral practices consoled the bereaved, and provided comfort for the deceased (61-2). A variety of functions can be identified. In Roman funerary meals, the dead could be considered to share food. Archaeological evidence for such beliefs includes pipes or holes leading into graves through which food or drink (Lat.- *profusio*) could be passed (37,50-2). Such evidence in itself does not guarantee that such meals were considered sacramental (Kennedy 1987, 235-6). In some instances, it is possible that items, including food, were not actually used by the dead, but placed in tombs to give a semblance of daily life (Toynbee 1996, 40-1). Rituals also had social functions: they indicated the dead were part of a clan<sup>37</sup>, and pointed out changes in status caused by the death (61-2). This allows, perhaps, a more communal understanding of the rituals, but with different goals for the participants. The εἰδωλοθύτων was brought to the tomb for

the well-being of the ancestral gods and the gratification of the living

(Kennedy 1987, 234)

If there is an eschatological dimension, it is that such meals signify

in some sense the proleptic enjoyment of the eschatological banquet in the afterlife.

(Smith 2003, 170)

Such an eschatological understanding need not apply to all funerary meals; it may be that only select groups held these views<sup>38</sup>.

### 5.3.7. *A Messianic Figure?*

One element from Jewish eschatology is so far conspicuously absent: the Messiah. Christian scholars have, in some periods, identified such thought in Vergil's 4<sup>th</sup> *Eclogue*<sup>39</sup>. However, classical commentators have shown that such claims are often the triumph of hope over exegesis, and that the "Messianic" claims may refer to the more mundane arena of Roman politics (thus, Clausen 1995, 119-129, esp. 127-9 for the invalidity of the Christian interpretation; Curchin 1988). That said, although the poem does not refer to Jesus, it nonetheless may show the influence of Jewish thought within the Graeco-Roman world:

In other words, the potent idea of the return of the primeval golden age, with the miraculous birth of a boy, was known to be typical of the beliefs of the Jewish people, and was available to be borrowed by a Roman poet in the first century BC.

(O'Neill 1995b, 38)

### 5.3.8. *Life after Death: A Summary*

Whilst there remain differences with regard to particular metaphysical and theological speculations, it is possible to draw the following tentative conclusions. The most common ground is found in speculation about post-mortem existence: a wide variety of cults and philosophical schools held such beliefs. The primary focus of their myths was the post-mortem existence of the individual. The most commonly held beliefs were variants on the theme of *metempsychosis*, the continued existence of the soul. Communal benefits tend to be limited to groups or societies in this realm: communal post-mortem speculation is very limited. The loudest dissent from this pattern is found within Epicureanism which really viewed both as irrelevant.

However, the teaching of philosophical schools such as Stoicism warns against assuming that the myths only have a literal, other-worldly meaning. Many of them held that this life was used as a preparation for the life to come: post-mortem rewards, if any, depended on ethics. It is possible that ethical concerns may really be more important than the mythological.

Mystery religions, on the other hand, offered firmer hopes of rewards, now or in the future, on the basis of participation in their rituals. The cosmic dimension of eschatology offers a greater variety: these are invariably connected to the cosmology of the group. Clearly defined cosmologies include theories of decline (Hesiod), of cyclic regeneration (Stoicism), or of random chance (Epicureanism).

Graeco-Roman religious and philosophical traditions provide a wide and varied mixture of theories (particularly individualistic and cosmic) with which Christian eschatology might engage both in its formation and apologetics, especially regarding individual post-mortem existence, cosmology and ethics.

#### **5.4. Early Christian Eschatology**

New Testament teaching about eschatology is not easy to classify. The continued existence of the individual is described primarily in terms of Resurrection. Yet the individual never stands in isolation, and is part of a community. Community hopes are found in teaching about the Kingdom of God, particularly in parabolic imagery which uses meal and eating imagery.

##### *5.4.1. Resurrection*

This is a blanket term and a number of different understandings or emphases can be discerned<sup>40</sup>. A variety of understandings can be drawn from the New Testament literature. A key difference is whether there is continuity between this life and the life to come. Some views appear to admit a gap of non-existence between earthly death and a day of resurrection (1 Thess 4:13-18, cf. Morris 1991, 135); others admit a continuous post-mortem existence (2 Cor 5, cf. Rowland 1985, 206). In a definitive passage, Paul notes that the post-mortem existence of the soul is not like Greek *metempsychosis* in which only the soul continues to exist. The resurrected person is a spiritual body, and this incorporates the three elements of body, spirit and soul (1 Cor 15:44, cf. Perkins 1985, 299-301). Thus, one of the main hopes of early Christianity, based on faith in the resurrection of Jesus himself, was a belief in the continued post-mortem existence of the individual. What exactly this entailed

remained a matter for debate, particularly in relation to its nature and timing. This debate, even in a predominantly Christian environment, shows interaction with the current theories of the day, for these are themes which have already become apparent in both Jewish and Graeco-Roman reflection. Both had addressed the nature of post-mortem existence. Issues of timing are less obvious but can be seen in the way in which religious and philosophical thought addressed both locative and utopian theories.

However, Christian eschatology is not exhausted by considerations of post-mortem existence of the individual. Other images are widely used. These widen out Christian reflection on the last things: a cosmic element appears (what is the τέλος [end-point] for the world?), and the timing of such events is considered (when will the dead be raised? When will the τέλος be reached?). Much reflection on these questions surfaces in the discussion of the “Kingdom of God”. What follows is not a complete analysis of the Kingdom, but a selection of issues and themes which seem pertinent to the analysis of the Supper Narratives<sup>41</sup>.

#### *5.4.2. The Kingdom of God*

The idea of the “kingdom of God” is taken up from the Old Testament, and is variously defined as the “Kingdom”, “Kingdom of God”, or the “Kingdom of my Father”. The Kingdom of Christian thought differs from previous Jewish thinking, inasmuch as it is connected to Jesus. More precisely it is connected to the Incarnation:

In Jewish thought there were two Ages: הצולם הזה (This Age) and הבא הצולם (The Age To Come). The former was evil, sorrowful, etc., but the latter would be the opposite, and with God’s reign fully established. This is precisely the point at which the Christian differentia comes into the picture. Through the Incarnation, the Age to Come has intercepted This Age. Christian Eschatology becomes, therefore, fundamentally a Christological phenomenon.

(Mbiti 1971, 32)

Also, Christian writings develop the idea that the Kingdom will “come”. This may reflect another eschatological line of thinking: the idea that Jesus would

come again. Thus Christian thinking involved a modification of Jewish Messianic expectation: the Messiah *had come* and *would return*. The coming of the Messiah would involve the institution of the Kingdom.

#### 5.4.3. When *Will the Kingdom Come*?

The problem comes in the detail, specifically *how* and *when*<sup>42</sup>. This debate has been complicated by interpretations of the Kingdom which attempt to strip the term of any spatial or territorial dimension. This begins with Dalman's dictum that:

There can be no doubt whatever that in the Old Testament and Jewish literature the word מלכות when applied to God always means "kingly rule" and never means "kingdom", as if to suggest the territory ruled by him.

(Dalman, translated in O'Neill 1993, 130 )

However, as O'Neill points out,

The important thing to note, which Dalman tries to deny, is that the reign is over a realm.

(131)

This is backed up both by the use of βασιλεία and related terms<sup>43</sup>, but also by the manifold descriptions of the Kingdom as "house", "city" or "land"<sup>44</sup>. Jesus accepted the common understanding of the Kingdom which can be summarised as:

(I) the kingdom is like a delectable house or city or territory which people long to be able to enter when it comes; (II) people can talk about the kingdom; and (III) people can prepare to enter the kingdom by taking its yoke upon themselves now.

(131-5 *passim*, quote from 134)

That much would appear common given the wealth of textual support<sup>45</sup>. However, the timing of the Kingdom has provoked a wealth of scholarly debate.

#### 5.4.4. “Thorough-going Eschatology”

Schweitzer opened this up in the modern period with his “Konsequente Eschatologie” (“Thorough-going Eschatology”)<sup>46</sup>. This was the thesis that Jesus understood that his own death would bring about the coming of the Kingdom, and that it would come quickly. The Kingdom is a future event, and the Messiah seems to have two personalities, earthly and heavenly, the Messiah for the present, and for the age to come (Mbiti 1971, 34). Ethical teaching is geared towards showing what is necessary for repentance, in the short time before the Kingdom comes, an *Interimsethik* (Perrin 1963, 30). Critics also query whether this does justice to Jesus’ ethical teaching (Mbiti 1971, 34).

Schweitzer’s radical re-interpretation of eschatology altered the shape of future study on the subject (Perrin 1963, 28-9). Yet his conclusions were not widely accepted. Firstly, he was open to the accusation of not considering the full spectrum of New Testament texts on eschatology. He focussed mainly on Synoptic and Pauline material, finding ways of ruling as inadmissible texts which appeared contrary to his thesis (Mbiti 1971, 33). Synoptic material that does not fit the theory, and the Johannine writings, are accorded no place. Critics also note that the thesis appears to dominate the study of the text, rather than the study leading to the thesis (Perrin 1963, 33). Yet it is also possible to query the internal logic of Schweitzer’s position. How could his Jesus, to whom he accords great spiritual acuity, be so right about his Messiahship and the details of the Kingdom, yet so wrong about its timing? There seems to be an inconsistency here.

The first reaction to Schweitzer’s thesis came in Dobschütz’s “Transmuted Eschatology”. In this, the Kingdom is seen as present, inasmuch as it arrives in Jesus’ lifetime. It is transmuted because it is an inward rather than an external change (Mbiti 1971, 35). The Kingdom is both present and future:

The main emphasis is upon the Kingdom as a present experience of unbroken communion with God, and not upon the Kingdom as a purely future hope.

(Perrin 1963, 39)

Thus, instead of a purely future Kingdom, Dobschütz suggested a Kingdom which had both future and present elements.

#### 5.4.5. *Realised Eschatology*

Other critics went even further. The “realised eschatology” popularised by Dodd put even more of a stress on the idea of the Kingdom as present. In this, Dodd viewed the terms ἐγγίξειν and φθάνειν as implying that the Kingdom was already a reality. His argument was not universally accepted, and there was a bitter controversy with J.Y. Campbell over this interpretation<sup>47</sup>. A major objection to Dodd’s thesis comes in the interpretation of *Mark* 9:1, which he interpreted as meaning that the Kingdom had already come in the ministry of Jesus (Dodd 1980, 43, esp. fn.23). Campbell argued that such events had to refer to a future event, rather than a state of affairs which was already existent (1936, 93-4). Dodd later modified his position, basing his interpretation on the Resurrection, Pentecost and the new era which followed (1951, 13, summary in Perrin 1963, 67). Manson brought decisive arguments against Dodd’s later position: people in the early church did not identify themselves as living in the new era (Manson 1935, 281). Criticism of those who believed that they lived in the Last Age, that the Kingdom had come in all its glory, could be sharp. A trenchant example of this is found in 1 Cor 4:8:

There are deluded people who think that the Kingdom has come already, who believe that they are full and rich and reigning; Paul wishes they were right, for then he would be reigning too, and his troubles would be over (1 Cor 4:8; cf. 2 Tim 2:18). These people held exactly the same view of the Kingdom as did everyone else at the time; they differed only in their perception of the state of the world.

(O’Neill 1993, 135)<sup>48</sup>

Within the Corinthian literature such issues intrude into understandings of “holy food”: the example of the Israelites in the wilderness shows that those who ate the manna in the wilderness could not assume that they were guaranteed salvation. By implication a similar warning is extended to those who consume the eucharist (Oropeza 1999, 84-5). This is part of a wider

criticism of “realised” eschatology in Corinth (Barrett 1971, 39; Thiselton 2000, 98-105; 357-65) which may have arisen due to Epicurean influence (Tomlin 1997, 57-9). It surfaces further in Paul’s remarks about the failure to discern the Body when participating in the congregation’s ritual meals (Ch.8., pp. 391-7, ¶ 8.5).

In John, the ambiguity of timing is found, using revelatory language, in the Farewell Discourses: Jesus has revealed much, but not all. Those “who struggle to rise from the things of this world” will discover more when the Spirit of truth comes to lead them to complete truth (John 16:13; Brodie 1997, 498-500).

#### *5.4.6. The Kingdom: “Now” and “Not Yet”*

The debate about the “timing” of the eschaton highlights two different patterns: texts which suggest a future coming, and those which suggest that the Kingdom is present, or has already arrived. Different writers or texts may highlight one or the other (Fitzmyer 1985, 231-5). A single writer may include pericopes of both kinds. Both patterns, for example, can be seen in John 6 where vv.27, 37 demand a realised eschatology, v.39 a “future”, and v.40 combines both aspects (Brown 1988, 259, 276).

A developed understanding of eschatology needs, it seems, to incorporate both elements. Indeed, both are present within the meal imagery used in the eschatological passages in the New Testament. Less controversial, but omnipresent, is the “past” element for both Judaism and Christianity involve a definitive orientation to the past, focussing on their respective “founding fathers” (Russell 2004, 93).

#### *5.4.7. The Heavenly Meal*

The New Testament uses meal imagery to describe the Last Things. Rev includes several references to the Messianic Banquet (3:20; 7:16-17; 19:7,9; cf. Boring 1989, 6, 90, 96, 200). These need not be late writings influenced by a later Christian practice: a strong case can be made for the dating of Rev to

the late 60s CE (King 2000, 9-19; Scobie 1993; Slater 2003). By this dating, Rev is more or less contemporary with the earliest of our Gospel accounts. Rev also picks up the eschatological hope that God will be present with his people. Thus Rev 21:3 quotes from Ezek 37:27. An important distinction must be made between Rev and the prophet: Rev expects neither the historical Temple nor patterns of its worship in the Heavenly city (Rev 11:19; 21:22; cf. Boring 1989, 218). This is not because of a disagreement about the aims, ends or value of the Temple or worship. The difference is one of timing. At this stage, intermediary rituals, which are how the Temple rites are viewed, are now redundant. Put in the covenant language that sets the context for the understanding of Temple ritual: rituals which repair or renew the covenant are no longer needed when the covenant can no longer be damaged. Put in terms of presence: there is no need for rituals which encourage the presence of God, when God is permanently and eternally present (King 2000, 147-5; 268: Preston & Hanson 1951, 139-41 ).

#### *5.4.8. Miracles and the Heavenly Meal*

Other events within the Synoptic traditions signify this heavenly meal tradition, most notably the feeding miracles at Gennesaret (Purinton 1961, 204; Schweitzer 1998, 107; 237). Schweitzer develops the parallels between the Gennesaret meal and the Last Supper: they share both ritual actions (Mk 6:41, 14:22) and a “solemn act of distribution” (1985, 103-6; quote from 104). Both meals are eschatological in nature:

The gathering at the feast is of an eschatological character. The people that gathered about him by the seaside were awaiting with him the dawn of the Kingdom...

The supper by the seaside and the supper at Jerusalem therefore correspond completely...The cultus-meal was the same: a foretaste of the messianic banquet in the circle of the fellowship of the believers in the Kingdom.

(105-6)

This is heightened by cross-reference to Old Testament precedents: manna in the wilderness (Exod 16) and Elisha's feeding of one hundred men (2 Kgs 4:42-44, cf. Yao 2001, 28).

The Feeding of the Four Thousand in Matt 15:29-39 is sometimes thought to be an event shared with Gentiles (Cousland 1999, 6-8). However, the evidence is not conclusive and a case can be made for the Feeding involving Jewish participants (8-23). This seems to be a further manifestation of the way in which Matt sees the ministry of the incarnate Jesus as limited to the Jews, but containing within itself the potential for expansion after his death and resurrection:

The evangelist is certainly aware of the coming mission to the Gentiles, but has Jesus do what he says he will do. Thus Jesus engages in a particularist mission to the Jewish people, and his disciples do the same. The feeding and healing of the four thousand, therefore, are designed to reflect the covenantal relationship between Jesus and his people, with Jesus figuring as its culmination. It is only after his death and resurrection that he will enjoin the universal mission on his disciples, so that all nations may join in the praise of the God of Israel as well.

(23)<sup>49</sup>

As such, the account of the miracle performs a distinct function at a particular point in Jesus' ministry and should not be considered definitive of the full nature of the Messianic Banquet. It would be erroneous to judge that table-fellowship in the Kingdom was limited to the Jewish people on account of it. In fact, a further miraculous feeding (Matt 15:32-39) indicates this. Those who receive food include the lame, crippled, blind and dumb (Matt 15:30) who might normally be excluded from "heavenly meals" on the grounds of purity (Yao 2001, 29). Matt also appears to have given the meal a Messianic setting by locating it on a mountain (Matt 15:29, cf. Exod 24:9-11; Isa 25:6-7; cf. Amos 2002, 28-31).

The Synoptic accounts are not alone in giving an eschatological dimension to meal traditions: in John, all three of the feeding miracle, the eucharist and the Wedding at Cana share such concerns (Lindars 1972, 239).

#### 5.4.9. *Parables and the Heavenly Meal*

The Kingdom is also described using parables: Rowland (1985, 103-6) outlines the major themes which they address as the contrast of the old and new (e.g., Mk 2:18-22) the significance of what is being offered (e.g., Matt 44-6), the challenge involved (Matt 24:37-44), the need to be and not complacent ready (e.g. Luke 12:35-40; 14:15-24). The Kingdom's growth is described like that of seeds (Mk 4:3-9, 26-32) The parables also spell out the response needed from the disciple: acknowledgement of sinfulness and dependence on God's mercy (Luke 18:9-14, cf. 19:1-9). Luke 15 stresses the quality of God's mercy (cf. Luke 18:2-8) and its inclusive nature: none are excluded automatically (Mk 2:17; Matt 21:28-32) and all are treated equally (Matt 20:1-16). Yet entry to the Kingdom depends, as has been seen, on the response of the individual, and an incorrect response has devastating consequences (Matt 18:23-35; 22:1-14). Thus the Kingdom parables in early Christian literature maintain the preoccupations of apocalyptic writings about the eschatological judgement and the behaviour which it demands.

Some of the parabolic imagery of the Kingdom describes these themes using images of meals and eating, a continuation of imagery related to the Messianic banquet. Thus the blessed sit and eat with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Matt 8:11-12, cf. Luke 13:29) and the Kingdom is described as a marriage feast (Matt 22: 1-14). However, correct eating and drinking in themselves do not constitute adequate grounds for entering the Kingdom (Rom 14:17-18, cf. O'Neill 1993, 134). Matt 22: 11-13 suggests that certain conditions, probably associated with righteousness, must be met before one can share in the feast (Hultgren 2000, 347-8). Further, several of these heavenly meal parables specifically indicate that the table (and, by implication, the criterion of being righteous) is open to either to Gentiles or to those who would normally be excluded from table-fellowship (thus, Luke 14: 16-24, cf. Hultgren 2000, 338-9).

#### 5.4.10. *Parables and the Ethics of the Heavenly Meal*

In Luke, eating is given an ethical dimension. This includes criticism of luxury (Luke 12:16-21), and of bad behaviour (Luke 12:42-6; 17:26-9, 21:34; 6:24-5). The parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man shows a reversal of fortunes between what happens on earth and in heaven. When themes such as luxury are used positively they stress the joy of heaven as a reward for being judged favourably by God (Luke 14:15). These themes are picked up in the spoken material which Luke inserts into the Supper Narrative (Luke 22:16,18, 28-30; cf. Mk 14:25; Matt 26:29, see below, Ch.7, pp.338-45, ¶ 7.4.). These themes are significant, however, not only in the context of meals and eating. They appear to underpin the whole of Luke's theological programme:

Thus, in the parable of the great banquet, those who finally attend are identified with terminology that is highly significant in Luke's Gospel: here Jesus' table companions at the messianic banquet are defined as "the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame" (14:21).

This same symbolism is also utilized in Luke's version of the Sermon on the Plain. Notice that it is the poor, the hungry, the mournful, and the excluded who are singled out for blessing; the rich, the well-fed, the joyful and the socially accepted are singled out for woes. As in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus so also here: roles will be reversed, and those who suffer now will receive the kingdom, characterized by satisfaction of hunger, joyfulness, and acceptance into fellowship with God; in short, all of the blessings of the messianic banquet.

(Smith 2003, 270)

When comparing the early Christian meals with Graeco-Roman meals for the dead, it is also worth considering the emotion which dominated the different rites. Whilst Graeco-Roman meals were characterised by grief (above, Ch.3, p. 81-2, ¶ 3.2.7), the early Christian meals were notable for being joyous celebrations. This suggests a difference in the presuppositions about life and death that lay behind each.

#### 5.4.11. *Ethics, Eschatology and the Meal in the Didache*

The extra-canonical writings share the eschatological focus seen in the NT texts. The connection of early Christian meals and eschatology is most clearly seen in the *Did.* Ch. 10:6 explicitly connects the “breaking of bread” and the eucharist with the hope that Christ will come (*Maranatha*, cf. 1 Cor 16:22, Rev. 22:20)<sup>50</sup>. *Did.* 9:4 and 10:5 both set the meal in the context of the Kingdom. This is especially significant given the lack of such details elsewhere in the book:

Throughout the detailed ethical exhortations there is no explicit mention of an ultimate sanction or life beyond death. Only when we reach the instructions relating to the eucharist do we find, in two prayers, a mention of the eventual goal....

(Wright 2003, 488)

The writer has either accepted and incorporated this traditional concept, or has introduced the idea to the meal. Either scenario shows the importance of such thinking in relation to the eucharist. This eschatological perspective also allows an “ontic” character to be given to the sacramental elements (Betz 1996, 272).

#### 5.4.12. *The Christian Meal in Heaven: A Summary*

The writings of Early Christianity reveal a concern for eschatology in relation to its teaching about meals and ritual. The texts reveal concerns both for eschatological hopes as well as contemporary ethics. The meal is a frequently used symbol for the life of the Kingdom, and, by extension, the life of the community. The meals of the Kingdom have both “realised” and “future”, “locative” and “utopian” elements. The Kingdom meals reveal the rewards that await the faithful and give practical lessons on how the faithful should behave. The central function of eating, since no one is ever depicted as eating alone, reinforces a communitarian dimension of life which goes far beyond mere hopes for the continued post-mortem existence of the individual (Morris 1991, 135-7).

## **5.5. Concluding Remarks**

Influence from Graeco-Roman thought led to Jewish and early Christian eschatology both assimilating Hellenistic ideas and expressions (Aune 2001, 217-8)<sup>51</sup>. However, Graeco-Roman eschatology contains less meal and “communal” imagery: its focus is on the individual (218). Graeco-Roman religion provides less developed examples of meal traditions. Those few that appear are found primarily in older writings, and may have dropped from the currency of religious thought by the first century CE. Meal imagery with communal eschatological implications is more clearly evident in the Jewish context which helped to shape the first Christian writers. Such communitarian eschatological themes coalesce around the Messianic Feast before spiralling out again in new directions. The theme of the Messianic Banquet or Feast appears in both parables and miracles in the Gospels, as well as constituting part of the symbolic landscape of writings such as Rev. Early Christian thought explicitly connected rituals with expectations of the return of the Messiah and further made an identification with the risen Jesus.

Meal imagery that appears to have affinities with Graeco-Roman culture share their meal traditions rather than their eschatology.

Thus, in turning to examine Christian texts, we may provisionally suggest that communal eschatological characteristics originate rather in Jewish thought and expression including the communitarian Messianic Banquet.

We can also note that the presence of both communal and individualistic imagery shows the influence of both Jewish and Graeco-Roman traditions on emerging Christian thought. Whilst hopes of post-mortem existence of the individual are expressed in very different language (e.g., resurrection in Judaic writings and *metempsychosis*, or the immortality of the soul, in Graeco-Roman sources) it should not be assumed that these indicate a major conceptual dichotomy. Expressions of anthropological duality, of an “inner person” separated from an “outer person” are common to both Judaic and Graeco-Roman explorations of death (Aune 2003, 239).

## Notes

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1 This is true not just of the Judaeo-Christian tradition:

The terms eschatology and apocalyptic we often hear used as if they were synonymous. This is a source of confusion. If we hold strictly by etymology every religion which teaches that salvation can only be realised or achieved in a life beyond, would have to be described as eschatological. The term is generally used in a narrower sense and applied to conceptions which link the fate of the individual to that of the world and the attainment of salvation to the establishment of a new cosmic order and in addition are distinguished by the belief that the arrival of this new world is imminent. Apocalyptic adds to these elements the idea that it is possible to know in advance at what time the cosmic drama will be unfolded and the timetable which it will follow.

(Goguel 1957, 271)

2 For an overview, see Mendenhall 1992, 67-80.

3 For the variety and development of beliefs in the Old Testament and post-Biblical Judaism, see Perkins 1985, 37-69 and Wright 2003, 85-206.

4 It seems more likely that this is at the root of Paul's remark than the understanding that Sadducees did not believe in angels, which, after all, do make several appearances in the Pentateuch (e.g., Gen 3:24; 6:2,4; 19:1; 28:10-15). See also Viviano & Taylor (1992) and Daube (1990).

5 Ezek 39:17-20 also uses images of slaughter, but these are consumed by the birds and wild beasts, not the faithful who have been protected by God during the carnage (Wainwright 2003, 25). Note that the translation of this verse is open to question:

- and the LORD Almighty will shield them. They will destroy and overcome with slingstones. They will drink and roar as with wine; they will be full like a bowl used for sprinkling the corners of the altar.

Footnotes 9:15 Or *bowl, / like* (NIV)

- The LORD of hosts will defend them. And they will devour and trample on the sling stones; And they will drink and be boisterous as with wine; And they will be filled like a sacrificial basin, Drenched like the corners of the altar. (NASB)
- The LORD of hosts shall defend them; and they shall devour, and subdue with sling stones; and they shall drink, and make a noise as through wine; and they shall be filled like bowls, and as the corners of the altar. (KJV)
- Jehovah of hosts will defend them; and they shall devour, and shall tread down the sling-stones; and they shall drink, and make a noise as through wine; and they shall be filled like bowls, like the corners of the altar. (ASV)
- They will trample sling stones underfoot, they will drink blood like wine, they will be soaked in it like the horns of an altar.

Note: Text corr. Following Greek: Heb., "they will drink, they will be turbulent like wine" (Jerusalem)

7

Just as the former deliverer [Moses] made manna descend...so also the latter deliverer [the messiah] will make manna descend.

(*Midr Qoh* 1.9, quoted in Wainwright 2003, 26-7)

See also Brown 1988, 265; Hoskyns & Davey 1947, 293-4; Lindars 1972, 255; Morris 1995, 321, esp. fn. 88.

See May (1932) for imagery related to Ancient Near Eastern fertility cults in Hos. Such claims must be balanced by more recent scholarship that questions the description of many Ancient Near Eastern practices as fertility cults (see further ref.s in fn. 17).

7 Badia (1979, 14-17) provides an overview of the breadth of scholarly opinion. Some believe that the meal descriptions refer only to the Last Days, others that they refer to daily meals (14-15). Commentators holding the latter disagree about their sacramental, symbolic or Messianic significance (15). Further speculation holds that the meal might be a liturgical anticipation of the Messianic meal, or have a special religious significance (15-16). Sacramental interpretations may stem from Christian understandings (16-17).

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8

(137) Those also who have inquired what it is that nourishes the soul, for as Moses says, "They knew not what it was," learnt at last and found that it was the word of God and the divine reason, from which flows all kinds of instinctive and everlasting wisdom. This is the heavenly nourishment which the holy scripture indicates, saying, in the character of the cause of all things, "Behold I rain upon you bread from Heaven;" (138) for in real truth it is God who showers down heavenly wisdom from above upon all the intellects which are properly disposed for the reception of it, and which are fond of contemplation. But those who have seen and tasted it, are exceedingly delighted with it, and understand indeed what they feel, but do not know what the cause is which has affected them; and on this account they inquire, "What is this which is sweeter than honey and whiter than snow?" And they will be taught by the interpreter of the divine will, that "This is the bread which the Lord has given them to Eat." (139) What then is this bread? Tell us. "This," says he, "is the word which the Lord has appointed." This divine appointment at the same time both illuminates and sweetens the soul, which is endowed with sight, shining upon it with the beams of truth, and sweetening with the sweet virtue of persuasion those who thirst and hunger after excellence.

(Philo, *Fug.*, 137-9, trans. Yonge (1854-90). On-line at <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/yonge/book19.html>)

(259) And men occupied in agriculture co-operate to produce the food from the earth; but God, the only cause and giver, rains down the food from heaven without the cooperation of any other being. And, indeed, we read in the scriptures, "Behold, I rain upon you bread from Heaven." Now what nourishment can the scriptures properly say is rained down, except heavenly wisdom? (260) which God sends from above upon those souls which have a longing for virtue, God who possesses a great abundance and exceeding treasure of wisdom, and who irrigates the universe, and especially so on the sacred seventh day which he calls the sabbath; for then, he says, that there is an influx of spontaneous good things, not rising from any kind of art, but shooting up by their own spontaneous and self-perfecting nature, and bearing appropriate fruit.

(Philo, *Mut. Nom.*, 259-60, trans. Yonge (1854-90), on-line at <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/yonge/book20.html>)

9

Alcmaeon also seems to have held a similar view about soul; he says that it is immortal because it resembles 'the immortals,' and that this immortality belongs to it in virtue of its ceaseless movement; for all the 'things divine,' moon, sun, the planets, and the whole heavens, are in perpetual movement.

(Aristotle, *De Anima*, 1.2. Trans. Smith (1941). On-line at [http://members.aol.com/elvers/dean1\\_2.html](http://members.aol.com/elvers/dean1_2.html))

10

First of all [110] the deathless gods who dwell on Olympus made a golden race of mortal men who lived in the time of Cronos when he was reigning in heaven. And they lived like gods [115] without sorrow of heart, remote and free from toil and grief: miserable age rested not on them; but with legs and arms never failing they made merry with feasting beyond the reach of all evils. When they died, it was as though they were overcome with sleep, and they had all good things; for the fruitful earth unforced bare them fruit abundantly and without stint. They dwelt in ease and peace upon their lands with many good things, [120] rich in flocks and loved by the blessed gods.

(Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 109-20. Trans. Evelyn-White (1914). On-line at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?lookup=Hes.+WD+109>)

10

But for thyself, Menelaus, fostered of Zeus, it is not ordained that thou shouldst die and meet thy fate in horse-pasturing Argos, but to the Elysian plain and the bounds of the earth will the immortals convey thee, where dwells fair-haired Rhadamanthus, [565] and where life is easiest for men. No snow is there, nor heavy storm, nor ever rain, but ever does Ocean send up blasts of the shrill-blowing West Wind that they may give cooling to men;

(Homer, *Odyssey* 4.561-569. Trans. Murray (1919). On-line at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?lookup=Hom.+Od.+4.554>)

But to the others father Zeus the son of Cronos gave a living and an abode apart from men, and made them dwell at the ends of earth. And they live untouched by sorrow in the islands of the blessed along the shore of deep swirling Ocean, happy heroes for whom the grain-giving earth bears honey-sweet fruit flourishing thrice a year, far from the deathless gods, and Cronos rules over them (5); for the father of men and gods released him from his bonds. And these last equally have honour and glory.;

(Hesiod, *Works and Days* 167-173. Evelyn-White (1914). Trans on-line at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?lookup=Hes.+WD+11>)

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But having the sun always in equal nights and equal days, the good receive a life free from toil, not scraping with the strength of their arms the earth, nor the water of the sea, [65] for the sake of a poor sustenance. But in the presence of the honored gods, those who gladly kept their oaths enjoy a life without tears, while the others undergo a toil that is unbearable to look at.

[ant. 4]

Those who have persevered three times, on either side, to keep their souls free from all wrongdoing, [70] follow Zeus' road to the end, to the tower of Cronus, where ocean breezes blow around the island of the blessed, and flowers of gold are blazing, some from splendid trees on land, while water nurtures others. With these wreaths and garlands of flowers they entwine their hands

[epode 4]

[75] according to the righteous counsels of Rhadamanthys, whom the great father, the husband of Rhea whose throne is above all others, keeps close beside him as his partner. Peleus and Cadmus are counted among them, and Achilles who was brought there by his mother, when she had [80] persuaded the heart of Zeus with her prayers--

(Pindar, *Olympian Ode*, 2.61-83. Trans in Pindar (1990). On-line at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?lookup=Pind.+O.+2.1>)

For the "happy Otherworld", see further in Coulter 1925, 37-41. Wright (2000, 112-6) provides a summary of Graeco-Roman views of the afterlife. Persian views appear to have similarities to the Platonic and Pythagorean, and may have influenced these. They do not appear to include meal traditions, inasmuch as these are absent from the accounts (108-9). For more on the afterlife in Tragedy and Plato, see North 1992, 49-63.

12 Dryden's translation of Aeneid 6 can be found online at <http://classics.mit.edu/Virgil/aeneid.6.vi.html>

Selections from the Latin text can be found at:

<http://boston.k12.ma.us/BLA/studentprojects/APlatin/text.html#BOOKVI>

[Http://www2.tlct.ttu.edu/george/33301010for101200.htm](http://www2.tlct.ttu.edu/george/33301010for101200.htm) contains a number of resources and artistic representations of Vergil's narrative from different periods. The "Map of the Underworld" is particularly helpful to visualise the description.

12 The text can be found at:

<http://www.davidson.edu/academic/classics/oneill/CLA350/ErMyth.html>

or

[http://www.nmhschool.org/tthornton/myth\\_of\\_er.htm](http://www.nmhschool.org/tthornton/myth_of_er.htm)

14. Butler's translation can be found online at:

<http://classics.mit.edu/Homer/odyssey.11.xi.html>

15 The relevant chreia is found in Diogenes Laertius V:

When the Athenians entreated him to be initiated in the Eleusinian mysteries, and said that in the shades below the initiated had the best seats; "It will," he replied, "be an absurd thing if Aegeus and Epaminondas are to live in the mud, and some miserable wretches, who have been initiated, are to be in the islands of the blest."

[On-line at <http://classicpersuasion.org/pw/diogenes/dldiogenes.htm>]

16 The ways in which terms such as "dying-and-rising" reveal a number of different methodological approaches. Nash exemplifies the approach which wishes to make exact, detailed correspondences:

The best way to evaluate the alleged dependence of early Christian beliefs about Christ's death and resurrection on the pagan myths of a dying and rising savior-god is to examine carefully the supposed parallels. The death of Jesus differs from the deaths of the pagan gods in at least six ways:

(1) None of the so-called savior-gods died for someone else. The notion of the Son of God dying in place of His creatures is unique to Christianity.<sup>13</sup>

(2) Only Jesus died for sin. As Günter Wagner observes, to none of the pagan gods "has the intention of helping men been attributed. The sort of death that they died is quite different (hunting accident, self-emasculation, etc.)."<sup>14</sup>

(3) Jesus died once and for all (Heb. 7:27; 9:25-28; 10:10-14). In contrast, the mystery gods were vegetation deities whose repeated deaths and resuscitations depict the annual cycle of nature.

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(4) Jesus' death was an actual event in history. The death of the mystery god appears in a mythical drama with no historical ties; its continued rehearsal celebrates the recurring death and rebirth of nature. The incontestable fact that the early church believed that its proclamation of Jesus' death and resurrection was grounded in an actual historical event makes absurd any attempt to derive this belief from the mythical, nonhistorical stories of the pagan cults.<sup>15</sup>

(5) Unlike the mystery gods, Jesus died voluntarily. Nothing like this appears even implicitly in the mysteries.

(6) And finally, Jesus' death was not a defeat but a triumph. Christianity stands entirely apart from the pagan mysteries in that its report of Jesus' death is a message of triumph. Even as Jesus was experiencing the pain and humiliation of the cross, He was the victor. The New Testament's mood of exultation contrasts sharply with that of the mystery religions, whose followers wept and mourned for the terrible fate that overtook their gods.<sup>16</sup>

#### The Risen Christ and the "Rising Savior-Gods"

Which mystery gods actually experienced a resurrection from the dead? Certainly no early texts refer to any resurrection of Attis. Nor is the case for a resurrection of Osiris any stronger. One can speak of a "resurrection" in the stories of Osiris, Attis, and Adonis only in the most extended of senses.<sup>17</sup> For example, after Isis gathered together the pieces of Osiris's dismembered body, Osiris became "Lord of the Underworld." This is a poor substitute for a resurrection like that of Jesus Christ. And, no claim can be made that Mithras was a dying and rising god. The tide of scholarly opinion has turned dramatically against attempts to make early Christianity dependent on the so-called dying and rising gods of Hellenistic paganism.<sup>18</sup> Any unbiased examination of the evidence shows that such claims must be rejected.

(Nash 1994, np)

See also Metzger (1968, 8-11; 17-24) and Princeton (1914), essentially summarising criticisms made by Schweitzer in his *Paul and his Interpreters*, and Wright (2003, 80-1) for the differences between Christian beliefs and those of the "dying –and –rising" gods:

...when the Christians spoke of the resurrection of Jesus they did not suppose it was something which happened every year, with the sowing of seed and the harvesting of crops. They could use the image of sowing and harvesting to talk about it; they could celebrate Jesus' death by breaking bread; but to confuse this with the world of the dying and rising gods would be a serious mistake. The early Christians did not engage in the relevant praxis; they only tangentially employed the same symbols (bread, we should note, is not the same thing as corn); and they told a very different story from those of Adonis Attis and the rest. Their answers to the worldview questions were radically different. And the set of beliefs aims that were generated from within their worldview were simply not on the same map. It is of course quite possible that, when people in the wider world heard what the early Christians were saying, they attempted to fit the strange message to the worldview of cults they already knew. But the evidence suggests that they were more likely to be puzzled, or to mock. When Paul preached in Athens, nobody said, "Ah, yes, a new version of Osiris and such like". The Homeric assumption remained in force. Whatever the gods- or the crops- might do, humans did not rise again from the dead.

(Wright 2003, 81)

Price (1996) gives a more generalised account in which family resemblances are highlighted.

One question which seems to be ignored in much of the discussion is very general: is the emphasis on the "dying", or the "rising" of the deity? :

The focus of myth and ritual is characteristically the death- i.e., the sacrifice- whereas the "resurrection" is seldom explicit: cf. Dumuzi/Attis and Adonis/Osiris...

(Burkert 1983, 76, n.12)

Burkert concludes this note with a comment that is much more debatable: "Even in the Gospels, the reports of the resurrection are mere appendices to the Passion".

Other research further questions the links between Christianity and the "dying-and-rising" gods. Casadio (2003, 233-5) notes the decline of the "dying-and-rising" pattern in modern scholarship, and suggests a focus rather on emasculation and death. Such a change in focus makes these myths so different in character from Christian mythology that Casadio does not even include references to it in his research.

17

If the earth transmits the generative soul to growing things - or retains it while allowing a vestige of it to constitute the vegetal principle in them - at once the earth is ensouled, as our flesh is, and any generative power possessed by the plant world is of its bestowing: this phase of the soul is immanent in the body of the growing thing, and transmits to it that better element by which it differs from the broken off part no longer a thing of growth but a mere lump of material.

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But does the entire body of the earth similarly receive anything from the soul? Yes: for we must recognize that earthly material broken off from the main body differs from the same remaining continuously attached; thus stones increase as long as they are embedded, and from the moment they are separated, stop at the size attained.

We must conclude, then, that every part and member of the earth carries its vestige of this principle of growth, an under-phase of that entire principle which belongs not to this or that member but to the earth as a whole: next in order is the nature —the soul-phase, concerned with sensation, this not interfused —like the vegetal principle but in contact from above: then the higher soul and the Intellectual Principle, constituting together the being known as Hestia — Earth-Mind and Demeter —Earth-Soul - a nomenclature indicating the human intuition of these truths, asserted in the attribution of a divine name and nature.

(Plotinus, *Fourth Ennead* IV, 27. Trans. McKenna and Page (1917-30). On-line at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/plotenn/enn346.htm>)

18

When Demeter came to our land, in her wandering after the rape of Kore, and, being moved to kindness towards our ancestors by services which may not be told save to her initiates, gave these two gifts, the greatest in the world - the fruits of the earth, which have enabled us to rise above the life of the beasts, and the holy rite which inspires in those who partake of it sweeter hopes regarding both the end of life and all eternity, - our city was not only so beloved of the gods but also so devoted to mankind that, having been endowed with these great blessings, she did not begrudge them to the rest of the world, but shared with all men what she had received. The mystic rite we continue even now, each year, to reveal to the initiates; as for the fruits of the earth, our city has, in a word, instructed the world, in their uses, their cultivation, and the benefits derived from them.

(Isocrates, *Panegyricus*, 4.28-29. Trans. Norlin (1980). On-line at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?lookup=Isoc.+4+27>)

For more on the blessings given by the mysteries, note

Thrice happy are those of mortals, who having seen those rites depart for Hades; for to them alone is it granted to have true life there; to the rest all there is evil.—Sophocles *Fragment* 719

It was the common belief in Athens that whoever had been taught the Mysteries would, when he died, be deemed worthy of divine glory. Hence all were eager for initiation.

Scholiast on Aristophanes *The Frogs* 158

Blessed is he who has seen these things before he goes beneath the earth; for he understands the end of mortal life, and the beginning —of a new life given of god.

Pindar, *Fragment* 102

These and the quotations from Isocrates, Plotinus and Plutarch all from <http://www.san.beck.org/Eleusis-5.htm>.

There is also an inscription from Eleusis:

Beautiful indeed is the Mystery given us by the blessed gods: death is for mortals no longer an evil, but a blessing.

—Translation in Angus (1925, 140)

Also at <http://www.san.beck.org/Eleusis-Intro.html>

19 The poem describes how Inanna descends to the underworld, but is tricked and killed by Erishkigal. Inanna's servant Ninshubur petitions various of the gods to help rescue her, but only Enki agrees to help. The Anunna, judges of the underworld, agree that Inanna may be released, but only if someone is found to take her place. Inanna returns to the upper world, and her husband Dumuzi agrees to be her substitute. Later his sister, Geshtinanna, agrees to take Dumuzi's place for part of the year.

The text can be found in Kramer (1972, 85-97). For resurrection as a theme in the myth, see Kramer (1981, 154-167), which includes the text. He further speculates on the Dumuzi myth as a possible prototype for Christian resurrection, noting that the descriptive similarities are outweighed by theological and spiritual differences:

Dumuzi was no self-sacrificing Messiah preaching the kingdom of God on earth.

(324, cf. 322-4))

Dobson (1992, 51) interprets the myth as an affirmation of the agricultural, cyclic order, and the need to be receptive to change.

20 It has been suggested that the myths of Tammuz-Dumuzi, Osiris and Adonis share common origins, see Barton 1915, 222-23. He considers Tammuz and Osiris:

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special independent survivals and manifestations of a primitive cult once common to both Hamites and Semites.

(223)

Such connections have since been questioned. Connection of the Tammuz and Adonis myths stems, in principle, from J.G. Frazer's work. However, despite the width of scholarly opinion, there appear historical and typological similarities between the different myths (Halperin 1983, 186-7). Halperin's essay explores further the thematic and narrative parallels between the different myths and postulates possible routes of transmission.

For some, syncretism went further. From the time of Herodotus, some accounts appear to syncretise Adonis and Dionysus (Reed 2000, 341-2).

For Tammuz myths and rituals in Hebrew writing, see, *inter alia*, May 1932, Meek 1922, Schmidt 1926, Staples 1938, 45-7.

21

Pierre Lambrechts maintains that in the case of the alleged resurrection of Adonis no evidence exists, either in the early texts or in the pictorial representations. The texts which refer to a resurrection are quite late, from the second to the fourth centuries A.D.. He reveals that for Attis there is no evidence that he was a resurrected god until after 150 A.D.. In the case of Adonis, there is a lapse of at least 700 years.

(Ankerberg & Weldon 2004, 2)

22

The presuppositions of the interpreter tend to determine the language used to describe what followed Attis's death. Many writers refer carelessly to the "resurrection of Attis." But surely this is an exaggeration. There is no mention of anything resembling a resurrection in the myth, which suggests that Cybele could only preserve Attis's dead body. Beyond this, there is mention of the body's hair continuing to grow, along with some movement of his little finger. In some versions of the myth, Attis's return to life took the form of his being changed into an evergreen tree. Since the basic idea underlying the myth was the annual vegetation cycle, any resemblance to the bodily resurrection of Christ is greatly exaggerated. It was only during the later Roman celebrations (after A.D. 300) of the spring festival that anything remotely connected with a "resurrection" appears. The pine tree symbolizing Attis was cut down and then carried corpse-like into the sanctuary. Later in the prolonged festival, the tree was buried while the initiates worked themselves into a frenzy that included gashing themselves with knives. The next night, the "grave" of the tree was opened and the "resurrection of Attis" was celebrated. But the language of these late sources is highly ambiguous. In truth, no clear-cut, unambiguous reference to the supposed "resurrection" of Attis appears, even in the very late literature from the fourth century after Christ.

(Nash 1994. On-line at <http://www.megspace.com/religion/muselfof/influence.html>)

23 On-line at

[http://www.ukans.edu/history/index/europe/ancient\\_rome/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Isis\\_and\\_Osiris\\*/D.html](http://www.ukans.edu/history/index/europe/ancient_rome/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Isis_and_Osiris*/D.html)

Yamauchi considers that Plutarch's account reflects Egyptian concepts:

His account seems to accord with statements made in the early Egyptian texts. After the New Kingdom (from 1570 B.C. on) even ordinary men aspired to identification with Osiris as one who had triumphed over death.

But it is a cardinal misconception to equate the Egyptian view of the afterlife with the "resurrection" of Hebrew-Christian traditions. In order to achieve immortality the Egyptian had to fulfill three conditions: (1) His body had to be preserved, hence mummification. (2) Nourishment had to be provided either by the actual offering of daily bread and beer, or by the magical depiction of food on the walls of the tomb. (3) Magical spells had to be interred with the dead-Pyramid Texts in the Old Kingdom, Coffin Texts in the Middle Kingdom, and the Book of the Dead in the New Kingdom. Moreover, the Egyptian did not rise from the dead; separate entities of his personality such as his Ba and his Ka continued to hover about his body.

(Yamauchi 1974, np)

24

The gods themselves are moved by prayers,  
And men by sacrifice and soothing vows,

[364e] And incense and libation turn their wills  
Praying, whenever they have sinned and made transgression.

Hom. *Iliad*, 9.497.

And they produce a bushel of books of Musaeus and Orpheus, the offspring of the Moon and of the Muses, as they affirm, and these books they use in their ritual, and make not only ordinary men but states believe that there really are remissions of sins and purifications for deeds of injustice, by means of sacrifice and pleasant sport for the living, [365a] and that there are also

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special rites for the defunct, which they call functions, that deliver us from evils in that other world, while terrible things await those who have neglected to sacrifice.

(Plato, *Republic*, 2.364d-365a. Trans. Shorey (1969). On-line at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?lookup=Plat.+Rep.+2.364d>)

Note, too, that even an Epicurean philosopher could be portrayed as participating in the Eleusinian Mysteries (Plutarch, *Moralia*, 635, cf. Tomlin 1997, 70, fn. 100).

25

Mors igitur ipsa, quae videtur notissima res esse, quid sit, primum est videndum. sunt enim qui discessum animi a corpore putent esse mortem; sunt qui nullum censeant fieri discessum, sed una animum et corpus occidere, animumque in corpore extingui. qui discedere animum censent, alii statim dissipari, alii diu permanere, alii semper.

(Cicero, *Disp. Tusc.*, 1.18)

(On-line at <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/cicero/tusc1.shtml>)

For an overview of such theories from Xenocrates onwards see Schibli (1993) which includes (156-159) an analysis of the following account:

The result of soul and body commingled is the irrational or the affective factor, whereas of mind and soul the conjunction produces reason; of these the former is source of pleasure and pain, the latter of virtue and vice. In the composition of these three factors earth furnishes the body, the moon the soul, and the sun furnishes mind to man for the purpose of his generation even as it furnishes light to the moon herself. As to the death we die, one death reduces man from three factors to two and another reduces him from two to one; the former takes place in the earth that belongs to Demeter —wherefore "to make an end" is called "to render one's life to her" and Athenians used in olden times to call the dead "Demetrians", the latter in the moon that belongs to Persephone, and associated with the former is Hermes the terrestrial, with the latter Hermes the celestial. While the goddess here dissociates the soul from the body swiftly and violently, Persephone gently and by slow degrees detaches the mind from the soul and has therefore been called "single-born" because the best part of man is "born single" when separated off by her. Each of the two separations naturally occurs in this fashion: All soul, whether without mind or with it, when it has issued from the body is destined to wander in the region between earth and moon but not for an equal time. Unjust and licentious souls pay penalties for their offenses; but the good soul must in the gentlest part of the air, which they call "the meads of Hades," pass a certain set time sufficient to purge and blow away the pollution contracted from the body as from an evil odor. Then, as if brought home from banishment abroad, they savor joy most like that of initiates, which attended by glad expectation is mingled with confusion and excitement. For many, even as they are in the act of clinging to the moon, she thrusts off and sweeps away; some of those souls too that are on the moon they see turning upside down as if sinking again into the deep. Those that have got up, however, and have found a firm footing first go about like victors crowned with wreaths of feathers called wreaths of steadfastness, because in life they had made the irrational or affective element of the soul orderly and tolerably tractable to reason; secondly, in appearance resembling a ray of light but in respect of their nature, which in the upper region is buoyant as it is here in ours, resembling the ether about the moon, they get from it both tension and strength as edged instruments get a temper, for what laxness and diffuseness they still have is strengthened and becomes firm and translucent. In consequence they are nourished by any exhalation that reaches them, and Heraclitus was right in saying: "Souls employ the sense of smell in Hades."

(Plutarch, *The Face of the Moon*, 28. On-line at <http://www.san.beck.org/Eleusis-5.html>)

26

As, therefore, it is plain that what is moved by itself must be eternal, who will deny that this is the general condition and nature of minds? For, as everything is inanimate which is moved by an impulse exterior to itself, so what is animated is moved by an interior impulse of its own; for this is the peculiar nature and power of mind. And if that alone has the power of self-motion it can neither have had a beginning, nor can it have an end.

Do you, therefore, exercise this mind of yours in the best pursuits. And the best pursuits are those which consist in promoting the good of your country. Such employments will speed the flight of your mind to this its proper abode; and its flight will be still more rapid, if, even while it is enclosed in the body, it will look abroad, and disengage itself as much as possible from its bodily dwelling, by the contemplation of things which are external to itself.

This it should do to the utmost of its power. For the minds of those who have given themselves up to the pleasures of the body, paying as it were a servile obedience to their lustful impulses, have violated the laws of God and man; and therefore, when they are separated from their bodies, flutter continually round the earth on which they lived, and are not allowed to return to this celestial region, till they have been purified by the revolution of many ages.

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(Cicero, *Dream of Scipio*, 6:12-26. On-line at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/cicero-republic6.html>)

27 Care however should be taken in reading such texts. The emperor Vespasian was reported to have said on his death-bed, "Oh, dear, I think I am becoming a god" (Suetonius, *Vespasian*, 23). Wright (2003, 55) takes this at face value, others place the dying emperor's tongue firmly in his cheek (Beard 1998, 210; Ferguson 1970, 91). Discerning the reality may be more difficult (Price 1980, 43)

28.

Such is the difference between earth and the heavens: the heavens are peaceful, full of the singing and the dances of the gods; the earth is pervaded with tumult and toil and discord.

(Maximus of Tyre, 9<sup>th</sup> *Oration*, 66, Trans. Trapp (1997), on-line at <http://maple.cc.kcl.ac.uk/socrates/text/maxor08-09.html>)

29 Although Marcus Aurelius wrote the *Meditations* after the New Testament period, circa 167 CE, his writings on this point encapsulate earlier Stoic thinking based, in turn, on the pre-Socratic writer, Heraclitus, from the late 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Trans. Long (1991), np, on-line at <http://classics.mit.edu/Antoninus/meditations.4.four.html>.

30

*But if there is any consciousness still existing in the world below*, such was her love for you and her dutiful affection for all her family, that she certainly does not wish you to act as you are acting.

(Italics mine. Translation on-line at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?lookup=Cic%2e+Fam%2e+4%2e5%2e6> )

A full English translation of the letter can be found on-line at

<http://www.bartleby.com/9/3/27.html>

[http://www.textkit.com/learn/ID/72/author\\_id/33/](http://www.textkit.com/learn/ID/72/author_id/33/)

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0022%3Aid%3Ds554>

Latin text online at

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?doc=Perseus:text:1999.02.0009:book=4:letter=5>

31 Basore (1928-35), on-line at [http://www.stoics.com/seneca\\_essays\\_book\\_2.html#MARCIAM1](http://www.stoics.com/seneca_essays_book_2.html#MARCIAM1)

The Stoics differed from other schools in the degree of diversity they allowed, see Kidd (1955, 182-4), but nonetheless seem to have exhibited a fundamental unity in their thinking about their ethical End or *summum bonum*, namely, "Life lived in harmony with Nature [Principle of Growth]" (191).

32

Despite this, Epicurus says that there are gods, but these gods are quite different from the popular conception of gods. We have a conception of the gods, says Epicurus, as supremely blessed and happy beings. Troubling oneself about the miseries of the world, or trying to administer the world, would be inconsistent with a life of tranquility, says Epicurus, so the gods have no concern for us. In fact, they are unaware of our existence, and live eternally in the intermundia, the space between the cosmos. For Epicurus, the gods function mainly as ethical ideals, whose lives we can strive to emulate, but whose wrath we need not fear.

Ancient critics thought the Epicurean gods were a thin smoke-screen to hide Epicurus' atheism, and difficulties with a literal interpretation of Epicurus' sayings on the nature of the gods (for instance, it appears inconsistent with Epicurus' atomic theory to hold that any compound body, even a god, could be immortal) have led some scholars to conjecture that Epicurus' 'gods' are thought-constructs, and exist *only* in human minds as idealizations, i.e., the gods exist, but only as projections of what the most blessed life would be.

(O'Keefe 2001, np)

Cf. Tomlin (1997, 60;65): the central issue is not the existence of the gods, but their ability to intervene in human affairs.

33 Compare the following contemporary summary of Epicureanism:

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Belief that death is painful. Life is sensation and feeling. Since we stop feeling when we die, death is nothing except the release of soul atoms from the body. Death is the end of sensation, the absence of life. It is not painful and not to be feared. It may even be welcomed as the end of bodily pain. Good = pleasure and bad = pain. Both come to an end with death. Contemplation of our mortality brings peace -- as the irrational craving for immortality causes pain. The anticipation of death is painful; the reality is not.

(Ziniewicz 1996, np)

34

Whilst human kind  
Throughout the lands lay miserably crushed  
Before all eyes beneath Religion- who  
Would show her head along the region skies,  
Glowering on mortals with her hideous face-  
A Greek it was who first opposing dared  
Raise mortal eyes that terror to withstand,  
Whom nor the fame of Gods nor lightning's stroke  
Nor threatening thunder of the ominous sky  
Abashed; but rather chafed to angry zest  
His dauntless heart to be the first to rend  
The crossbars at the gates of Nature old.  
And thus his will and hardy wisdom won;  
And forward thus he fared afar, beyond  
The flaming ramparts of the world, until  
He wandered the unmeasurable All.  
Whence he to us, a conqueror, reports  
What things can rise to being, what cannot,  
And by what law to each its scope prescribed,  
Its boundary stone that clings so deep in Time.  
Wherefore Religion now is under foot,  
And us his victory now exalts to heaven.

(Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 1:62-79. Trans. Leonard (1916), on-line at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?lookup=Lucr.+1.62>)

For soon as ever thy planning thought that sprang  
From god-like mind begins its loud proclaim  
Of nature's courses, terrors of the brain  
Asunder flee, the ramparts of the world  
Dispart away, and through the void entire  
I see the movements of the universe.  
Rises to vision the majesty of gods,  
And their abodes of everlasting calm  
Which neither wind may shake nor rain-cloud splash,  
Nor snow, congealed by sharp frosts, may harm  
With its white downfall: ever, unclouded sky  
O'er roofs, and laughs with far-diffused light.  
And nature gives to them their all, nor aught  
May ever pluck their peace of mind away.  
But nowhere to my vision rise no more  
The vaults of Acheron, though the broad earth  
Bars me no more from gazing down o'er all  
Which under our feet is going on below  
Along the void.

(3:14-27. Trans. Leonard (1916), on-line at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?lookup=Lucr.+3.1>)

35

All things in the world yonder were mixed with wealth and fashioned with every blessing in every way. Rivers full of porridge and black broth flowed babbling through the channels spoons and all, and lumps of cheesecake too. Hence the morsel could slip easily and oilily of its own accord down the throats of the dead. Blood-puddings there were, and hot slices of sausage lay scattered by the riverbanks just like shells. Yes and there were roasted fillets nicely dressed with all sorts of spiced sauces. Close at hand, too, on platters, were whole hams with shin and all, most tender . . . Roast thrushes (...) flew round our mouths entreating us to swallow them as we lay stretched among the myrtles and anemones. And the apples! (...) Girls in silk shawls, just reaching the flower of youth, and shorn of the hair on their bodies, drew through a funnel full cups of red wine with fine bouquet for all who wished to drink. And whenever one had eaten

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or drunk of these things, straightaway there came forth once more twice as much again (fr. 113 Kassel-Austin, tr. C.B. Gulick, Loeb).

(quoted in Bremmer 1994, 104)

This description need not be taken at face-value. It may be an Old Comedy pastiche of contemporary beliefs which blows some elements out of all proportion. See Ehrenberg (1943, 185-189) for Old Comedy's treatment of cult, and Lever (1956, 108, n.8) on irreverence, Aristophanes, and, by implication, Old Comedy.

The fragmentary nature of the passage adds further complications: it is difficult to ascertain "literalness" from an isolated fragment.

Meal traditions were found in the earlier history of other Mediterranean cultures. Egyptian accounts from the *Book of the Dead* mention gods and goddesses (such as Osiris) who became part of the Graeco-Roman pantheon. Meal references are included. The following are extracted from "A Hymn of Praise to Ra when he Riseth in the Eastern part of Heaven":

Hail, O all ye gods of the House of the Soul, who weigh heaven and earth in a balance, and who give celestial food [to the dead]. Let meals from the sepulchral offerings be given to me in the presence [of Osiris], as to those who are in the following of Horus...

And there, in the celestial mansions of heaven which my divine father Tem hath established, let my hands lay hold upon the wheat and the barley which shall be given unto me therein in abundant measure, and may the son of mine own body make [ready] for me my food therein. And grant ye unto me therein sepulchral meals, and incense, and wax, and all the beautiful and pure things wereon the god liveth...

RUBRIC: [If] this Chapter [be known by the deceased], he shall come forth pure by day after his death, and he shall perform every transformation which his soul desireth to make. He shall be among the Followers of Un-Nefer, and he shall satisfy himself with the food of Osiris, and with sepulchral meals.

The following "Vignette" also refers to meals:

Vignette (From the Papyrus of Nu, Sheet 24)

The steward of the overseer of the seal, Nu, whose word is truth, begotten of the steward of the overseer of the seal, Amen-hetep, whose word is truth, saith:- Hail, ye Four Apes who sit in the bows of the Boat of Ra, who convey truth to Nebertcher, who sit in judgment on the oppressed man and on [his] oppressor, *who make the gods to be contented by means of the flame of your mouths, who offer holy offerings to the gods, and sepulchral meals to the Spirit-souls*, who live upon truth, and who feed upon truth of heart, who are without deceit and fraud, and to whom wickedness is an abomination, do ye away with my evil deeds, and put ye away my sins [which deserved stripes upon earth, and destroy ye every evil thing which appertaineth to me], and let there be no obstacle whatsoever on my part towards you. *O grant ye that I may make my way through the Amehet, let me enter into Rasta, let me pass through the hidden pylons of Ament. O grant that there may be given unto me shens cakes, and ale, and persen cakes, even as to the living Spirit-souls, and grant that I may enter into and come forth from Rasta.*

Both translations are taken from Budge (1960) and are available on-line at

[http://www.sas.upenn.edu/African\\_Studies/Books/Papyrus\\_Ani.html](http://www.sas.upenn.edu/African_Studies/Books/Papyrus_Ani.html)

Care must be taken in using the *Book of the Dead* which dates from the New Kingdom period (1550-1080 BCE, thus Milde 1994, 16) because of the gap between its writing and the New Testament period. The later cults which focussed on the Egyptian gods and goddesses might well have had a different theology of the afterlife. Even if the meal imagery remains "live", the focus is purely on the heavenly existence of the individual. The description of many as "sepulchral meals" suggests a shared interest with Graeco-Roman religion: the funerary meal. Egyptian beliefs can be usefully summarised as follows:

Food was provided for the deceased and should the expected regular offerings of the descendants cease, food depicted on the walls of the tomb would be magically transformed to supply the needs of the dead.

Images here include a triangular shaped piece of bread (part of the food offerings from a tomb) along with two tomb scenes. The latter contain representations of food items which the tomb owner would have eaten in his lifetime and hoped to eat in the after-life. The two tomb scenes show the tomb owners sitting in front of offering tables piled high with bread. The representations of food, along with the accompanying prayers were thought to supply the tomb owner once the actual food offerings stopped.

(O'Brien 1996-9, np)

Hittite funeral stelae of the first millennium also include some scenes of eating and drinking meals (van den Hout 1994, 64). Royal funerals also included a great meal (62).

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36 The initial thesis appears to be supported by Theognis:

Nobody, when the earth once covers him and he descends to the darkness, the abode of Persephone, can rejoice in either hearing the lyre or the flute-player, or be gladdened by the gifts of Dionysus. Knowing this, I follow my heart's desire while my limbs are yet nimble and I bear my head unshaken

Theognis 973-8 (Greek text in West 1980, 235; English translation in Smith 2003, 41).

An allusion in Aristophanes' *Heroes* (cf. Diogenes Laertius 8.34; Suidas Πυθαγόρα τὰ σύμβολα) suggests that ghosts might be considered present at meals. Note also the possibility of food for the living and the dead being differentiated in Pythagoreanism:

He also forbade his disciples to pick up what fell from the table, for the sake of accustoming them not to eat immoderately, or else because such things belong to the dead.

(Diogenes Laertius 8.19, on-line at <http://classicspersuasion.org/pw/diogenes/dlpythagoras.htm>)

Some considered that ghosts were present in the meals held on the third night of the Anthesteria (Halliday 1929, 154). A detailed description of this part of the feast is found in Hoffmann (1997, 57-8):

The third and last day of Anthesteria, the *Khytroi*, a day dedicated to mortuary ritual, was markedly different from the two days preceding. The dead were entertained by the living and fed from special dishes. The *khytroi* that give their name to this final feast were made of clay (from *ta khytreia*--pottery, or earthenware. One of the *Totenspeisen* (food[s] for the dead) was a ritual bread whose preparation is shown on Attic vases. Another was the *panspermia*, a gruel made of various grains. As at funerals there was now the danger of being polluted by contact with the dead. The day, and the Anthesteria, ended with the cathartic expulsion of the dead with shouts of *Thuraze Keres, ouketi Anthesteria!* ('Get out you ghosts, the Anthesteria are over').

The question why the Athenians should have invited ghosts to a celebration connected with the return of Dionysos has been partially answered by Louis Gernetboth. Dionysos and the dead were thought of as guaranteeing the city's fertility and material prosperity. 'From the dead comes all nourishment, belief and seed' ( Hippokrates, *Regimen* 4. 92). But beyond the feast's regenerative function Anthesteria also served another need. Popular religion tends to be ecstatic, and ecstasy in all societies opens a channel to supernatural powers.

The guarantee of the city's fertility shows, as did the Eleusinian Mysteries, a social element to the rites.

Note also *Phaedo* 69 c:

from all these things, and self-restraint and justice and courage and wisdom itself are a kind of purification. And I fancy that those men who established the mysteries were not unenlightened, but in reality had a hidden meaning when they said long ago that whoever goes uninitiated and unsanctified to the other world will lie in the mire, but he who arrives there initiated and purified will dwell with the gods. For as they say in the mysteries, 'the thyrsus-bearers are many, but the mystics few';

(on-line at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0170&layout=&loc=Phaedo+69c>)

and Plutarch, *Consolatio ad Uxorem*, 611d, 612a:

You hear others say -- many are convinced by them -- that there is no evil or pain anywhere for the one who "suffered dissolution." But I know that the traditional doctrines and the mystic tokens of the rites of Dionysus, known to us who share them, prevent you from believing this. You should think of the soul as immortal, and as like a captive bird. If it is reared a long time in the body and domesticated in this life by all its affairs and by long habit, then it comes back again into the world and does not cease from its involvement in passions and accidents in its successive births. Do not imagine that old age is abused and reviled for its wrinkles and gray hair and physical weakness; the worst of it is that it makes the soul stale in its recollection of the world beyond and anxious to hold on to this world, and so cramps and oppresses it, so that it retains the form that it was given in the body when it shared its fortunes. But a soul which <does not stay here long> in captivity leaps up towards its natural home . . . If you put out a fire and then rekindle it at once, it is soon fanned to flame and quickly takes hold . . . <And so those souls fare best whose fortune it is> "soonest to pass the gate of Hades' house," before they have acquired a deep love of this world and are drugged, as it were, into a state of softness and fusion with the body. The truth about these things is made even clearer by our ancient, traditional laws and customs. People do not pour libations over dead infants, nor do they perform any other of the normal rites of the dead for them. Infants have no part in earth or earthly things. Nor do people tarry at the burial or the tomb or the wake, or sit a long time beside the body. The law forbids this in the case of small children, holding it wrong <to show grief thus> towards those who have passed to a better and holier land and lot. But as disbelief is harder than belief in these things, let us fulfill our outward observances as the law directs, but keep our inner health even more pure and undefiled and chaste.

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(Trans. in Pomeroy 1999, 62-3)

37 However, Rose (1930, 133) points out that Latin was lacking in words to describe post-mortem existence:

...the remarkable fact that there is no known word of pre-Augustan date which definitely and unambiguously signifies the phantom, shade or ghost of a dead person, or his spirit living in some other state of being

This would suggest that such beliefs might originate or develop due to interaction with Greek thought. He further notes that there was little fear of the dead in Republican Rome and that any reverence towards the dead stemmed from a view that spirits belonged to the clan (134-5).

38 Edwards (1996, 125) describes a second or third century CE inscription which suggests the dead might negotiate between the dead and the living. However, the bulk of references to the dead stress social and familial obligations (124-8).

39 On-line at <http://classics.mit.edu/Virgil/eclogue.4.iv.html>

40 The literature is extensive. See, *inter alia*, Keck 1992, 83-95, Lampe & MacKinnon 1966, O'Collins 1983, Perkins 1985, Wright 2003. For the difference between Christian and Hellenistic views of life after death, see Cullmann 1956.

41 For an overview of the Kingdom, see Rowland (1985, 133-154) and Theissen & Merz (1998, 257-80).

42 For the view that the Kingdom will come, see, *inter alia*, Mk 9:1;10:15,3;13:30; 14:25; Luke 6:20; 11:2; 13:28, 14:15; Matt 5:3-6,20; 6:10;7:21; 8:11;21:31. For the idea that the Kingdom is already present, see Mk 2:18-23; Matt 11:9,11, 12; 12:41; 13:16; Luke 7:28; 10:23; 16:16; 17:21.

43 Thus, *inter alia*, Matt 3:2; 4:17, 23; 5:3,10, 19, 20; 6:33; 7:21;9:35;10:15; 12:28; 13:11,41,43; 18:1,3,4; 19:23; 21:31,43; 23:13; 24:14; 25:34; 26:29; Mk 1:15; 4:11, 26, 30; 10:23-5; 11:10; Luke 4:43; 6:20; 7:28; 8:1; 9:60,62; 12:31; 24:26.

44 The relevant texts are cited in O'Neill 1993, 134-5.

44 See O'Neill (1993, 138) for criticism of theories which based alternate understandings on fewer and more obscure references.

46 Sanders (1986, 2) prefers to follow Cadbury's translation "consistent eschatology".

47 Campbell's criticism of Dodd in his 1936 article ("The Kingdom of God has Come", *Expository Times*, XLVIII, 91-4) provoked an extreme reaction from Dodd in which he impugned Campbell's scholarly abilities. I am grateful to the late Prof. J.C. O'Neill for this detail. Against Dodd's understanding of φθάνειν, compare:

The verb used, ἔφθασεν, is commonly used to refer to the pronouncing in advance of an event that is to come; in 1 Thess. 2:16, for example, the wrath of God is said to have come upon the Judaeans who put Jesus and the prophets to death, who persecuted the apostles and who tried to prevent them preaching to the Gentiles. The words do not mean that the wrath had finally been executed, but that the wrath is laid up for them if they do not repent.

(O'Neill 1993, 139, cf. further O'Neill 1984, 14-18)

48 Tomlin (1997, 56-9) suggests that the "over-realised" eschatology of some Christians may reflect Epicurean thinking.

49 For the wider pattern of a limited mission in Jesus' lifetime as a theme in Matt, see King 2002, 20-22. Hoskyns and Davies make a similar point, noting that the essentially Jewish actions and setting of the feeding miracle in John 6 "have a counterpart in pagan thought and pagan practice" (Hoskyns & Davies 1947, 281).

50 Sweet (1990, 319) takes the use of *Maran atha* as implying that Rev was read in the early Eucharistic rites of the church. He further (437) suggests both texts were used in a eucharistic context. He also points out a difference in translation. Chrysostom suggested that *Maranatha* referred to the Incarnation. However, Sendegeya's translation of Chrysostom's view (1999, 437), using the Kiswahili *Amekuja*, suggests a past continuous, (i.e., that the action has taken place and continues to take place). Christ has come, and continues to come. The implication being that, in a eucharistic context, Christ is somehow present with his people.

A futurist interpretation, that Christ will come again, is more commonly understood. This seems to hold good no matter how the term is transliterated. Two transliterations are possible: Μαράνα θά would be an imperative (our Lord, come!), Μαράν ἄθᾶ an indicative (our Lord comes). Both would support a reference to the Parousia rather than the eucharist, as even a perfect meaning may have a future significance as a "prophetic perfect" (Thiselton 2000, 887, 1349-51). See also Betz 1996, 271-2.

I am grateful to Fr William Mndolwa of St. Mark's College, Dar es Salaam for confirming my remarks about Kiswahili grammar.

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51 Tronier (2001) argues that Graeco–Roman philosophy, as expressed in philosophical idealism and Jewish apocalyptic, shares a common foundation in notions of transcendence. Philo, *de Spec. Leg.* 1.32 ff uses the Graeco-Roman philosophical commonplace of the “flight of the mind” (Jones 1926, 104-5) which shows the interpenetration of Greek descriptions of transcendence into Judaism even if Philo is not, strictly speaking, apocalyptic:

(37) And the witnesses of this fact are those who have not merely tasted philosophy with their outermost lips, but who have abundantly feasted on its reasonings and its doctrines; for the reasoning of these men, being raised on high far above the earth, roams in the air, and soaring aloft with the sun, and moon, and all the firmament of heaven, being eager to behold all the things that exist therein, finds its power of vision somewhat indistinct from a vast quantity of unalloyed light being poured over it, so that the eye of his soul becomes dazzled and confused by the splendour.

(Yonge (1854-90). On-line at <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/yonge/book27.html>)

Tronier argues that both Graeco-Roman and Judaic traditions find a place in Paul's Corinthian correspondence.