

THE MYTH OF ER: between Homer and Orpheus *

One of the most remarkable features of Plato's dialogues is the use of numerous similes, allegories, and myths with the intent of completing his philosophical explanations. Their abundance and diversity suggests that Plato used them as a complement of the dialectic method, to the point that the combination of meticulous reasoning with the description of rich and evocative images, aiming to confer his discourse a greater solidness and argument credibility, constitutes one of his style's most conspicuous traits.

This argument is especially evident when Plato tries to describe the philosophical consequences of the theory that postulates the soul's immortality. Indeed, it is on such occasions that Plato, knowing the limits of philosophical language, resorts to the elaboration of a vast repertoire of images, aimed at explaining a world that would, otherwise, be almost impossible to describe. Hence, tales bringing scenes to mind that would be difficult to explain using conventional language abound in Plato's work. These include, to mention some of the most significant ones, the cycle traversed by the soul from the moment it falls into this world, its transitory pass through the afterlife on its way back to earthly life, as well as its desire to return to its origin, the divine, eternal, and supra-sensitive world where the ideal Forms dwell.

It is worth making reference, in this context, to the so-called "eschatological myths", which Plato used to stage the soul's passing through Hades, and with which he ended three of his most prominent dialogues: the *Phaedo*, the *Gorgias*, and the *Republic*¹. In fact, the ending position of those myths in each of these dialogues is, by no means, fortuitous. On the contrary, they aim to crown Plato's epistemological, ethical, and political arguments, and warn about the consequences that await those who disregard them in the afterlife.

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1. For an approach to the eschatological myths in Plato, see M. INWOOD (2009).

However, it is surprising that in his descriptions of the afterlife, Plato relied on arguments and descriptions afforded by other known poetic myths. In this sense, it can be said that Plato's creative and innovative capacity is, to a large extent, the result of his talent for incorporating many of these mythical narratives and recreate them within his own work, putting them to the service of his own philosophical interests. In essence, Plato applied what A. Diès called the technique of "transposition". This involves transferring fabulous myths, which are not originally related to his philosophy, and conveniently transforming them to carry the main nucleus of Platonic discourse.

In fact, Plato demonstrated that he was well aware of the existence of these myths when admitting that "the tales that are told of the world below and how the men who have done wrong here must pay the penalty there, though he may have laughed them down hitherto, then begin to torture his soul with the doubt that there may be some truth in them"². This acknowledgement suggests, as we will attempt to demonstrate next, that he kept in mind the well-known model offered by the two only poets that had described the world of Hades: Homer and Orpheus. Especially the Book 11 of the *Odyssey* which describes the descent of Odysseus to the Underworld and the story of Orpheus who went down into Hades itself to bring back his wife Euridice.

It is worth noting, however, that by acting in such a manner, Plato contravened his own mandate. In the *Republic* he had ordered to dispense with poets, to the point of banishing them from his ideal state. This was precisely because in their poems they used images that were nothing more than degraded imitations of reality they represented³. That is to say, Plato incurred in a clear and striking contradiction by resorting to the poets' vivid and expressive images when he felt limited by philosophical language⁴.

2. Οἱ τε γὰρ λεγόμενοι μῦθοι περὶ τῶν ἐν Ἅιδου, ὡς τὸν ἐνθάδε ἀδικήσαντα δεῖ ἐκεῖ δίδόναι δίκην καταγελόμενοι τέως τότε δὴ στρέφουσιν αὐτοῦ τὴν ψυχὴν μὴ ἀληθεῖς ὄσιν, *Pl., R.*, 330d (translated by J. Adam).

3. Cf. *Pl., R.*, 595a-609a. "Plato is critical of images and likenesses on the grounds that they are inferior to truth and reality but when he is unable to give a direct account of various objects or concepts, he uses images to tell what the objects or concepts are like, clearly believing this to be a worthwhile exercise", Elizabeth E. PENDER (2003), p. 60.

4. "[sc. The eschatological myths of the *Republic*, *Phaedo* and *Gorgias*] illustrate the second purpose of myth in Plato, which is to provide some sort of account of regions into which the methods of dialectical reasoning can not follow. [...] It is a part of his greatness to have confessed that there are certain ultimate truths which it is beyond the powers of human reason to demonstrate scientifically. Yet we know them to be true and have to explain them the best we can. The value of myth is that it provides a way of doing this", W. K. C. GUTHRIE (1952²), p. 239.

For this reason, the Athenian philosopher alternated the names of his accounts of the afterlife, referred to indistinctively as a λόγος or μῦθος. Thus, before Socrates begins his narration in the *Gorgias*, he exhorts Callicles to “give ear to a right fine story, λόγος, which you will regard as a fable, μῦθος, I fancy, but I as an actual account, λόγος”⁵. However, when he ended his description of Hades in the *Phaedo*, Socrates has no qualms in referring to it as a μῦθος. Although this is improper of a sensible man, he deserves to be believed, given its trustworthiness⁶. A similar observation can be made regarding his account of Er in the *Republic*, after his return from Hades, which is initially referred to as a “tale”, *apologos*⁷, and that is later referred to as a μῦθος⁸.

Eschatological myths in Plato or the fusion of two opposite models

The paradox raised by platonic eschatological myths is that, in order to make them credible, he had to follow the guidelines that Homer had set in the Book 11 of the *Odyssey*. This way, Odysseus’ *katábasis* served as the base on which to accommodate his particular conception on the destiny of souls, derived from the novel notion of the soul’s immortality, which has an Orphic-Pythagorean origin. In other words, Plato’s audacity was to graft the shoot of Orphic doctrine onto the trunk of the Homeric tradition, adding many of his own touches.

Indeed, Plato masterly intertwined several levels in his eschatological myths. First, the general framework that circumscribes the whole set evokes the most traditional image of Hades, the Homeric one, known to all Greeks. Second, many of the details that are included in this general framework and that affect the destiny that awaits souls are a mixture of his own contributions with strokes and touches from other descriptions of Hades, taken mostly from the Orphic-Pythagorean doctrine originated from the story of Orpheus and his *katábasis* to the Underworld. Plato freely adapted the latter, much more unknown than the Homeric description, to his own conception of the world of the afterlife⁹.

5. Ἄκουε δὴ, φασί, μάλα καλοῦ λόγου, ὃν σὺ μὲν ἠγήσῃ μῦθον, ὡς ἐγὼ οἶμαι, ἐγὼ δὲ λόγον· ὡς ἀληθῆ γάρ ὄντα σοι λέξω ἃ μέλλω λέγειν, Pl., *Grg.*, 523a (translated by W. R. M. Lamb).

6. Pl., *Phd.*, 114d.

7. Pl., *R.*, 614b.

8. Pl., *R.*, 621b.

9. “Plato makes free use of the Orphic myths”, W. K. C. GUTHRIE (1952²), p. 239.

Direct references of Homer and Orpheus

Plato himself explicitly acknowledged he used Homer and Orpheus as patterns for his eschatological tales by citing them by name in two key moments of his narrations. He referred to Homer to explain who the god dominating the afterlife is, right at the beginning of the narration of the myth of the *Gorgias*, and when recalling that “by Homer’s account, Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades divided the sovereignty amongst them when they took it over from their father”¹⁰. He mentioned Orpheus in the myth of the *Republic*, for the first time, when Er begins telling about the reincarnations chosen by the souls of diverse characters for their next lives¹¹. The moment Plato chose to refer to both poets does not seem casual at all. He cited Homer in the *Gorgias* to introduce and frame the general context of his description of Hades. He cited Orpheus, in the *Republic*, when Er is about to illustrate how, in Hades, souls have the chance of acquiring a new earthly life, either in animal or human form. That is to say, each of these references performs a specific function in a specific moment of the narrative: Homer provides guarantees and truthfulness of his detailed descriptions of the interior of Hades and of the souls that wander in it; Orpheus provides the insight that all souls, given their immortality, have the chance of leaving the afterlife conveniently reincarnated.

In fact, Plato cites Homer on three occasions to scaffold important aspects of his eschatological tales. In the *Gorgias*, he is mentioned twice: once, to clarify that even the most illustrious governors, if they commit impious acts, are punished without mercy in Hades, as is the case of Tityus, Tantalus and Sisypus, mentioned in Book 11 of the *Odyssey*¹²; and again, when explaining how the judgment of souls is performed, he recalls that the names of the judges are three, Rhadamanthus, Aeacus and Minos, and cites, literally in this case, the verse from the *Odyssey* that underscores how, indeed, Minos “sits with his golden sceptre in his hand judging the dead”¹³. Likewise, when, in the *Phaedo*, Plato is in the midst of a detailed description of the abysmal depths of the Tartarus, he again resorts to Homer to recall the verse of the *Iliad* in which he had emphasized the depth of its abysses¹⁴.

Note that the three appeals to the authority of Homer’s testimony are related with essential aspects of platonic descriptions: the existence of the Tartarus; the merciless punishments inflicted on the impious, and the corre-

10. Pl., *Grg.*, 523a.

11. Pl., *R.*, 620a.

12. *Od.*, XI, 576-600.

13. Pl., *Grg.*, 526d; *Od.*, XI, 569.

14. Pl., *Phd.*, 112a; *Il.*, VIII, 14.

sponding judgments of souls made by the most renowned judges. Hence, Plato resorts to Homer's testimony to underscore a fundamental aspect of his narration: that in Hades, as had already been sketched in Book 11 of the *Odyssey*, Minos judges the dead and that the souls of the great impious such as Tityus, Tantalus and Sisyphus are condemned to suffer eternal punishments. This interest probably owed to an elaborate narrative strategy aimed at facilitating and softening the transition from the Homeric model, which everyone knew, to the Orphic-Pythagorean doctrine, much more unknown and strange because of the postulation of the immortality of souls and their consequent reincarnations¹⁵.

To put it another way: Plato did not feel the need to justify the most important aspect of his story, that the souls of the dead are actually judged in the afterlife and, if appropriate, condemned, because this reality had already been clearly expressed by Homer. Hence, Plato could easily graft the new sap of the Orphic-Pythagorean conception that postulated that souls could return to life reincarnated as all kinds of beings, both human and animal, on the Homeric trunk¹⁶.

The myth of Er and the reincarnation of souls

The blending of both visions is especially relevant in the description expressed in Er's words in the *Republic*. Thus, in the last part of his tale, Er tells about the diverse reincarnations chosen by diverse characters and the subsequent process that would lead them to their rebirth in a new life. He does this after presenting the complex mechanism of the spindle of Necessity and the function that corresponds to each of his Moirae daughters, Lachesis, Clotho and Atropos, in great detail. Throughout that whole part of the narration, Orphic scenes are overlaid on the Homeric description of the world of afterlife, producing a novel and singular representation. The result is Plato's own description of Hades, a product of his masterly capacity to intertwine such opposite conceptions and adapt them to his own ethical and epistemological notions.

In line with this, in order to exemplify how each of the souls chose its next way of life determined for the most part by the habits of their former lives, Er proceeds to successively explain how Orpheus, Thamyras, Ajax,

15. For an approach to the concept of transmigration and reincarnation in *Orphism* and Pythagoreanism, see F. CASADESÚS (2008).

16. "It is noticeable, too, that in these eschatological myths Socrates seems to be combining two beliefs which come from different quarters, the belief in a life after death in 'another world', and the very different belief that a ψυχή at death passes into a human or animal body, which, of course, belongs to this world", A. E. TAYLOR (1928), p. 641.

Agamemnon, Atalanta, Epeius, Thersites and Odysseus chose theirs. It is striking that five of these souls correspond to meaningful Homeric characters, and that they are mentioned after Orpheus, who heads the list. His presence at the beginning, choosing the life of a swan, suggests that Plato wanted to show that his combination of both models, the Orphic and the Homeric, in his own description of the afterlife was intentional¹⁷. This is similar to what is observed in the passage of the *Apology* in which Socrates appears calm when faced with death. There, after arguing that if death is a simple migration to the afterlife, he asserted that he himself would reunite with Orpheus, Musaeus, Hesiod, and Homer, as well as other Homeric heroes, such as Palamedes, Ajax, Odysseus, or Sisyphus. The mixing of such poets and characters confirms that Plato fused Orphic and Homeric iconography of Hades¹⁸.

In any case, by assigning the corresponding reincarnation to each of the Homeric characters, Plato clearly transgressed the limits imposed by the religious conception represented in Homer's work, which in no way contemplated such a possibility. In this context, it is striking that the souls of two of them, Ajax and Agamemnon, also appear in the Homeric Hades, described in Book 11 of the *Odyssey*. In the case of Ajax, who, "unwilling to become a man", was reincarnated as a lion because "it remembered the adjudication of the arms of Achilles"¹⁹, Plato seems to evoke that, according to Homer's narration, when the hero's soul met Odysseus it shunned him and avoided speaking with him, showing his rejection for participating in the hand out of Achilles' weapons²⁰. The Athenian philosopher interpreted such an elusive attitude as a manifestation of misanthropy. His reincarnation as a lion is in accordance with Ajax's fierceness in combat.

Er clarified, likewise, that Agamemnon's reincarnation in another animal, an eagle, was due to the hate that his soul felt towards the human race because of its sufferings. This explanation also coincides with the one offered to Odysseus in Book 11 of the *Odyssey*, when telling him about his death at the hands of Aegisthus, incited by his wife Clytemnestra²¹. His reincarnation as an eagle could symbolize his earlier condition as leader of Achaean troops.

17. "It is curious that the myth of Er, that owes so much to Orphism, ends by mentioning Orpheus and refers to the issue of transmigration", A. BERNABÉ (1998), p. 43.

18. Pl., *Ap.*, 40b-41c.

19. Είναι δὲ τὴν [sc. ψυχὴν] Αἴαντος τοῦ Τελαμωνίου, φεύγουσαν ἄνθρωπον γενέσθαι, μεμνημένην τῆς τῶν ὀπλῶν κρίσεως, Pl., *R.*, 620a.

20. *Od.*, XI, 543-564.

21. *Od.*, XI, 405-434.

Next, Plato draws a comparison between the highest leader of the Achaean army and the vilest and lowest warrior, the “buffoon” Thersites, when noting that he reincarnated in the form of a monkey. The reincarnation as such an animal fits with Thersites’ description in Book 2 of the *Iliad* as a repugnantly ugly hateful man, who dared to criticise the leader Agamemnon²².

Alternatively, Epeius, author of the Trojan horse²³, and a hero who does not stand out for his valour in the *Iliad*, and whose performance on the discus throw was ridiculous²⁴, is reincarnated as a female artisan²⁵.

Finally, the soul of Odysseus, tired of all the efforts of war and his return to Ithaca, chose to be reincarnated as an ordinary and anonymous man, removed from political matters. This choice could allude to Odysseus’ desire to hide, to the point of dressing up as a humble and poor beggar on his return to Ithaca.

In addition to these reincarnations of Homeric heroes, it is worth noting the musician Thamyras’ reincarnation, who came back as a nightingale, and the very agile and fast huntress Atalanta, who chose to return to earthly life in the form of a renowned athlete.

After this list Er adds that, during his visit to Hades, he saw how animals entered into men, such as the case of the swan that reincarnated as a human²⁶, or other animals, “the unjust into wild creatures, the just transformed to tame, and there was every kind of mixture and combination”²⁷.

Thus, all the possible combinations of soul transmigration are finally produced: from men to men, from men to animals, from animals to men, from animals to animals, from men to women, and from women to men, as detailed in the reincarnation scale established in the *Phaedo* and the *Timaeus*, of strong Orphic-Pythagorean influence²⁸.

22. *Il.*, II, 212-242. In the *Gorgias* (525d), Plato again refers to Thersites, after recalling the punishments inflicted on such important kings as Tantalus, Tityus and Sisyphus, to underscore that, given the scarce and mediocre relevance of their evil, it was not the object of the same severe punishment in Hades.

23. *Od.*, VIII, 492-493; XI, 523.

24. *Il.*, XXIII, 839-840.

25. *Pl., R.*, 620c.

26. *Pl., R.*, 620a.

27. *Pl., R.*, 620d.

28. *Pl., Phdr.*, 248d-e; *Ti.*, 90b-92c. For a detailed analysis of these passages, see F. CASADESÚS (2013).

The myth of Er and the Plain of Oblivion

After the detailed explanation of how these reincarnations took place, Er then describes their return to earthly life. It is in this description that the most specifically Orphic elements surface and provide novelty to the Platonic narration. Thus – Er continues his tale – once each of the souls has chosen its corresponding reincarnation, these are turned to the Moirai Lachesis, Clotho, and Atropos, in charge of confirming each of the new destinies chosen by them. Er goes on to inform that, after choosing their new lives, souls march through a terrible and suffocating heat, towards the Plain of Oblivion (τὸ τῆς Λήθης πεδίων). There, they camp next to the River of Forgetfulness (τὸν Ἀμέλητα ποταμόν) “whose waters no vessel can contain”, and from which they are forced to drink. This is why they forget everything they have seen in Hades before they reincarnate.

This reference to oblivion is reminiscent of the text of the Orphic tablets, which speak of a path to the left leading to a fountain, besides which there is a white cypress, a path that should not be followed. There is also reference, towards the other side, of the lake of memory, Mnemosyne, with guards on its shores. These guards ask the thirsty souls why they wander through the darkness of Hades, to which they should reply:

I am the son of Earth and starry Heaven, but my race is heavenly: know this you too. I am dry with thirst and dying. Give me quickly then water from that which flows fresh from the lake of Mnemosyne.

Despite differences between the description in the tablets and the Platonic version²⁹, it is true that, besides certain details, the main notion, the salvation or condemnation of souls as a result of the chosen path, and the possibility of drinking from the waters of memory or oblivion, connects what is read in Platonic eschatological myths with what is suggested on the tablets. And precisely this opposition between memory and forgetfulness³⁰ is what must have attracted Plato, who adapted it with complete freedom to his own system.

Indeed, the tablets underscore that the thirsty soul wishes to drink from the water of the fountain of memory. The fountain of oblivion is not mentioned by name, though it is easy to imagine that it is the one on the left, recognizable for the proximity of the white cypress³¹. The order is unequivocal.

29. As underscored by A. BERNABÉ, Ana Isabel JIMÉNEZ SAN CRISTÓBAL (2001), p. 81-82.

30. For this question, see R. JANKO (1984).

31. A text by Pausanias (IX, 39, 7) mentions the two waters from which the visitor must drink, in a description of the oracular cave of Trophonius, which imitates Hades: “It is led there by priests, not directly to the sanctuary, but to the fountains of the river that are very close to each other. There it required to drink from the water of the so-

ocal: drinking that water must be avoided, because it would lead to what the purified soul of the initiate wants to avoid at all cost – falling into oblivion and reincarnating again. The other fountain, that of Memory, is much more inaccessible, given that it is cared for by guards who interrogate the soul, which must answer the aforementioned formula, as if it were a password.

Plato, however, chooses another approach, and focuses the attention on the moment when the souls have already been judged and, condemned to reincarnate again, must assemble at the Plain of Oblivion (τὸ τῆς Λήθης πεδῖον) and drink water from the River of Forgetfulness³². Moreover, it should not be discarded that Plato transformed the controlling function of the tablets' unnamed guardians into the presence of the noblest judges that judge the souls and decide the path they must follow, as Er himself tells at the beginning of his narration:

When his soul went forth from his body he journeyed with a great company and that they came to a mysterious region where there were two openings side by side in the earth [...] and that judges were sitting between these, and that after every judgement they bade the righteous journey to the right and upwards [...] and the unjust to take the road to the left and downward³³.

In any case, for moralizing reasons, Plato was much more interested in describing the punishments that awaited the impious and unjust with greater detail. The tablets, on the other hand, were used, like passports or talismans, by the Orphic initiates that aspired to regain their divine condition following the instructions they contained: avoiding to drink from the fountain on the left and responding correctly to the guardians. Thus, Plato transformed the simple ritual indications on the tablets into stringent ethical considerations³⁴.

called Oblivion, so it is overcome with forgetfulness of all things it thought before. After it must drink from the other, that of Memory, by which it will recall what it has seen while descending.”

32. G. PUGLIESE CARRATELLI (2003, p. 47-48) underlines that, indeed, the situation described by Plato in the Republic, where souls destined to be reincarnated are required to assemble at the plain of Oblivion and drink water from the river of Forgetfulness, “is opposed to the fate reserved for the initiates in the Orphic eschatology (known to Plato), that related Memory with the liberation from the repetition of limited and distressing existences”.

33. Pl., *R.*, 614b. In the *Gorgias* (524a), these judges, who are identified by name, Minos, Rhadamanthys and Aeacus, judge the deceased in a prairie, at the crossroads from where the two paths originate, one leading towards the Islands of the Blessed, and the other towards the Tartarus.

34. “In the Platonic text, a higher instance values the soul’s moral behavior during its worldly existence, in the tablets a ritual declaration on behalf of the deceased seems to suffice”, A. BERNABÉ, Ana Isabel JIMÉNEZ SAN CRISTÓBAL (2001), p. 82.

Hence, in the *Republic*, the meaning of drinking from the river of Forgetfulness and Oblivion for souls is completely opposite to drinking water from the fountain of Memory for the tablets' initiates: The return to a body to reinitiate the reincarnation cycle, following the model of a *katábasis*. In this sense, it is very illustrative that Plato had defined that river's waters as "waters which no vessel can contain". This was a way of evoking the punishment of the souls of the fools mentioned in the *Gorgias* which, "by reason of its unbelief and forgetfulness", are forced to use a sieve to carry water to a leaky jar. It is worth noting that the impossibility of retaining water symbolizes, according to the Platonic interpretation, the inability of the uninitiated or ignorant of retaining their memory³⁵.

Plato, however, did not just offer this negative vision. In the *Phaedrus*, he describes an opposite geography to the Plain of Oblivion (τὸ τῆς Λήθης πεδίου), when explaining that the philosopher wishes to return to the Plain of Truth (τὸ ἀληθείας πεδίου)³⁶. In their celestial procession, the souls were only able to see this flatland on the first travel on the winged chariot, before beginning the reincarnation cycle. Thus, the Plain of Truth lies, geographically and conceptually, in opposition to the Plain of Oblivion. It is worth stressing that such contraposition is implicit in the etymological meaning of the Greek word ἀλήθεια, "truth", and which is explained as ἀ-λήθεια, literally "non-oblivion". It is thus very meaningful that the Pharsalus tablet³⁷ instructs the initiate's soul:

Tell them the whole *truth* (ἀληθείην) straight out

when encountering the guardians that protect the fountain of Memory (Μνημοσύνη). This might be a hidden etymological word game in which truth, ἀλήθεια, is understood as "non-oblivion". This game takes place at a crucial moment for the initiated, right before speaking the password to the guardians, who will grant access to the fountain of Memory. Likewise, Plato also seems to insinuate that he is well aware of the etymological meaning of truth as non-oblivion (ἀ-λήθεια) when underlining that the adequate food for souls is found at the prairie of the Plain of Truth, (τὸ ἀληθείας πεδίου)³⁸.

Additionally, we need to recall that the whole of the soul's cycle, as well as the game of opposites so beautifully expressed by Plato, is read with synthetic concision in some of the terminological opposites engraved in the bone tablets discovered at Olbia. They refer to the Orphics and Dionysus,

35. Pl., *Grg.*, 493a-d.

36. In *Phd.*, 95c, there is also an allusion to the philosopher's belief in reaching this eternal and divine place after death.

37. *OF* 477.

38. Pl., *Phdr.*, 248b-c.

the reincarnation cycle, life-death-life, and a relation is established between lie-falsehood/body-soul by opposing them.

Hence, Plato modified the Orphic initiation and soteriological scheme to adapt it to his own ethical and epistemological system. Here it is the philosopher's soul the one that has the opportunity, by virtue of his memory and wisdom, of returning to the divine procession mentioned in the *Phaedrus*. On the other hand, the soul of the Orphic initiated aspires to regain his divine condition that, as can be deduced from the myth of the Titans, consists in recovering the Dionysian purity. Knowing its situation, the soul wishes to return to its celestial condition, as can be read in some tablets:

I am the son of Earth and starry Heaven, but my race is heavenly³⁹.

You have been born a god, from the man that you were⁴⁰.

Happy and fortunate, you will be god, from mortal that you were⁴¹.

To achieve such a goal it is essential that it drinks water from the fountain of memory, moving away from Oblivion. This sublime moment crowns the initiation process, as suggested in the final invocation of the Orphic hymn dedicated to Mnemosyne:

Blessed Goddess, awaken for the initiates the memory
of the sacred rite, and ward off forgetfulness from them⁴².

The destiny of philosophers

Come to this point, it is convenient to recapitulate Plato's intention when recreating his eschatological myths, modelled from the homeric *katábasis* and the Orphic doctrine. On the one hand, he wished to evoke a credible image of Hades with the incorporation of essential elements from the Homeric narrative. On the other hand, he wished to introduce conveniently re-elaborated essential aspects of the Orphic conception. In this sense, it should be said that Plato used the transposition technique to transform the religious assumptions inherent to the Homeric and Orphic description of Hades into other new ones with philosophical intent, which finally conformed his own conception of the Afterworld.

The most evident aspect of this strategy is Plato's introduction of philosophy as the guiding principle that must govern the souls in all their process, like a *katábasis*, of coming and going to Hades during their corre-

39. *OF* 476.6 & ff., cf. 475.12 and 15.

40. *OF* 487.2

41. *OF* 488.9

42. *OH* 77.9 & ff.

sponding reincarnations. For this reason, before Er describes the reincarnations chosen by each of the eight aforementioned characters, Plato has him recall that souls could definitively free themselves from the whole cumbersome process of reincarnation if they had been devoted to philosophy:

if at each return to the life of this world a man loved philosophy sanely, and the lot of his choice did not fall out among the last, we may venture to affirm, from what was reported thence, that not only will he be happy here but that the path of his journey thither and the return to this world will not be underground and rough but smooth and through the heavens⁴³.

Likewise, it is very clarifying that Plato explained in the *Phaedrus* that only the soul of the philosopher is winged, “for he is always, so far as he is able, in communion through memory with those things the communion with which causes God to be divine”. In this context, Plato crowns the cycle linking the philosopher’s capacity to remember with the most perfect initiations. To do so he uses a strongly Orphic flavored terminology:

a man who employs such memories rightly is always being initiated into perfect mysteries and he alone becomes truly perfect⁴⁴.

And the prize for the blessed soul of the philosopher will be, like the initiated in the Orphic tablets, the restoration of his divine condition. In the Thurian tablet, the initiate’s soul proudly asserts:

Pure I come from the pure, Queen of those below the earth,
and Eukles and Eubuleus and the other immortal gods;
For I claim that I am of your blessed race⁴⁵.

Thus, mixing Homeric and Orphic elements and using the *katábasis* of Er as a pretext, Plato constructed his own notion of his world of afterlife, where souls had to go cyclically. An afterlife, in the Platonic recreation, which only philosophers could escape, because they are the only ones that surpass all Homeric heroes and Orphic initiated in purity and wisdom. In doing so finally the philosophers are the only humans who are able to convert the *katábasis* of the souls to the Hades into a liberating *anábasis* to the heavenly gods.

Francesc CASADESÚS BORDOY
University of Balearic Islands
fran.casadesus@uib.es

43. Pl., *R.*, 619d-e (translated by J. Adam). Cf. *Phd.*, 82b; 95c.

44. Pl., *Phdr.*, 249c (translated by Harold N. Fowler).

45. *OF* 489-490.1-3. Translated by R. G. EDMONDS III (2004).

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