

Cultural aspects of metaphor scenarios

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Abstract

The functions of metaphors are not solely stylistic; they are also cognitive. It is argued that metaphor scenarios in particular play an important role in the constitution and transfer of cultural constructs like, for instance, in the narrative of transcendent justice. Three examples of this narrative in three different cultures and ages are discussed, outlining the differences but also the similarities of the constituting metaphor scenarios. To conclude, the thesis of a cultural influence between the three narratives is discussed.

Keywords: *Metaphors, cognitive linguistics, transcendent justice, Last Judgement, death tribunal*

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1 Metaphor scenarios

As a rhetorical figure of speech, metaphors have been part of philosophical text analysis since Aristotle and Plato. The Greek term “metaphorá” literally means “carrying something somewhere else” and Aristotle defines the metaphor accordingly as a “transference of a word”.¹ Since that time the use of the notion “metaphor” has varied throughout disciplines and its definitions are as manifold as its uses. They extend from a simple description as a “substitution of words” to complex definitions in philosophy as, for instance, in the metaphorology of Hans Blumenberg.² However, metaphors are not limited to stylistic functions. In our opinion, *cognitive metaphor theories* are best suited to investigate the impact metaphors can have over a longer period of time. Metaphor, therefore, is understood here as a conceptualisation that has been transferred between different semantic domains.

The cognitive theory of metaphor was developed by Lakoff/Johnson,³ Johnson/Lakoff⁴ and Lakoff⁵ and was embedded into cognitive theory by Lakoff/Johnson.⁶ The concept of metaphor used in this article is based on their work, but differs in some points: we also consider metaphors to be the product of cognitive mappings from one semantic domain to another. That means that a word used in a specific context known as a “semantic domain” is transferred to a new context where its meaning is not yet defined. To constitute a meaning in the new context, some semantic aspects of the former context are transferred unchanged, while others are modified or dropped. For instance, the well-known expression *Trojan horse* marks a mapping from the domain of animals to the domain of sculptural constructions. With a *horse* it shares the shape of its body but not its dimension or materiality. In the new (target) domain the expression contains some new semantic aspects like standing on a platform with wheels or having a hollow body to hide something.

In opposition to Lakoff and Johnson we do not understand metaphors to be models including fixed equations like “horse = fast”. We consider semantic

¹ Aristoteles, *Die Poetik*, p. 59

² H. Blumenberg, *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie*.

³ G. Lakoff & M. Johnson, *Metaphors we live by*.

⁴ M. Johnson & G. Lakoff, *Metaphor and Communication*, Linguistic Agency.

⁵ G. Lakoff, *Woman, Fire and Dangerous Things. What Categories Reveal about the Mind*.

⁶ G. Lakoff & M. Johnson, *Philosophy in the flesh. The embodied mind and its challenge to western thought*.



aspects of metaphors to be too complex to be fixed in an equation as they can vary depending on cultures, societies, groups and even individuals. In addition, lexical meaning may change from context to context.⁷ Mechanisms of relevance regulate which semantic aspects of the concept are important for its actual use in a conversation.⁸

Instead of fixed models (ICMs) we use *schemata* as the cognitive background. Schemata have been used successfully in the investigation of long-term knowledge like prejudice or concepts of racism.⁹ We prefer the concept of *scenarios* for modelling the cognitive background of metaphors – a special kind of schema¹⁰ as they are quite flexible in representing knowledge. Like *frames*¹¹ scenarios are schemata that contain slots for persons and objects that can be instantiated in accordance with the actual context. Unlike frames, scenarios allow the representation of not only static but also dynamic objects like actions and events. Scenarios can represent different kinds of schematic information like semantic formulas, symbols or even narratives. In short we consider metaphors as scenarios that are the result of a mapping between semantic contexts. *Metaphor scenarios* are represented linguistically by lexical metaphors, but are not tied to them. Depending on the culture and language, the same metaphor scenario is represented by different lexical items with varying lexical meaning but constituting the same scenario. For this reason, characteristic metaphor scenarios are a genuine means to investigate metaphoric concepts throughout different cultures and ages.¹²

With regards to the dimension of time, metaphors are not stable units without change: They are created by individuals and become known to a broader audience through specific discourses – especially through media discourses. After a period of intensive use they fall into oblivion and end up as *dead metaphors*. Paul Ricoeur, for example, referred to our lexical knowledge as “Friedhof ausgelöschter, aufgehobener, ‘toter’ Metaphern”.¹³ Friedrich

⁷ Cf. F. Wagner, *Text im Kontext. Sprachliche Indikatoren des Kontextbezugs*.

⁸ Cf. D. Sperber & D. Wilson, *Relevance. Communication and cognition*.

⁹ Cf. M. Galliker, M. Huerkamp & F. Wagner, *The social perception and judgement of foreigners*.

¹⁰ Cf. M. Minsky, *A Framework for Representing Knowledge*.

¹¹ Cf. C. J. Fillmore, *Frames and the semantics of understanding*.

¹² A. David (*Ancient Egyptian Forensic Metaphors and Categories*) for instance analysed the legal categories and concepts of the ancient Egyptian world using the cognitive metaphor conception of Johnson and Lakoff.

¹³ P. Ricoeur, *Die lebendige Metapher. Originalausgabe: La métaphore vive*; “A cemetery of extinct, expired, dead metaphors”.



Nietzsche defines truth as “Heer von Metaphern, die abgenutzt und sinnlich kraftlos geworden sind”.¹⁴ In this sense, metaphors have a sort of “career” and different “ages of life” can be identified.¹⁵ But even if they are not actually in use anymore, dead metaphors in general are still known to many speakers of a language. For this reason, the lexical expression can be reused combining it with a new meaning. This *remotivation of a metaphor* also occurred in the example used above: the metaphor “Trojan horse” is today also used to designate a special kind of computer virus (another metaphor). Here the use of this expression is not motivated by the shape of a horse but by its ability to transport hidden content that may cause damage when it becomes activated.

2 Text and normativity

As an example we will examine the cultural elaboration of the *metaphor scenarios of the procedure of judgement* in three different ages. The conceptualisation of justice depends on the actual social, moral, religious and legal norms of a society and on the rules and procedures to sanction their observation. The focus of this article lies on the cultural founding and conceptualisation of judgement in the metaphor scenarios of the procedure of the Last Judgement. On a concrete level the evolution of norms is related closely to texts, as texts establish and transport norms throughout times and cultures. Texts can be defined in different ways and may have manifold forms.¹⁶ Today they are often fixed on paper or electronic media using written characters, but texts can also exist in oral form. In our example above, the myth of the Trojan Horse was first distributed orally by the *Rhapsodes*.¹⁷ Later it was literally fixed in the *Epic Cycle*¹⁸ and in the *Odyssey* attributed to Homer and readapted in the

¹⁴ F. Nietzsche, *Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinne. Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*; “Army of metaphors that has become worn-out and without sensuous power”.

¹⁵ Cf. F. Wagner, *Haben Metaphern ein Lebensalter?*

¹⁶ F. Wagner, (ed.) (in print), *Was ist Text? Aspekte einer interdisziplinären Texttheorie*.

¹⁷ Rhapsodes: Greek professional performers of epic poetry in the 4th and 5th centuries BC.

¹⁸ Collection of Ancient Greek epic poems on the story of Trojan War based on an oral tradition of hero cults.



Aeneid,¹⁹ the *Posthomeric*²⁰ and the *Iliou Halosis*,²¹ for example.

On a more abstract level, text and normativity are correlated in three respects. (1) Texts are normative texts if they express normative contents. (2) Texts possess normative power if authority is ascribed to them. (3) The handling of texts is regulated normatively. In addition, functional differences have to be taken into consideration since the (communicative) function of a text affects both the normative content and the normative power of the text as well as its norms for handling. Texts are written in a specific historic socio-cultural context, but they are read and interpreted in a context different from the original one. In this sense, each text includes its individual reception history during which it is affected by several forms of normativity that transform the text and also its metaphorical structure. On a linguistic level, primary lexical, syntactical and pragmatic norms, and also norms of linguistic variations and stylistic-rhetorical forms of linguistic conventions all have a changing impact. Like language use in general, texts are always embedded in social contexts. Thus, linguistic utterances cannot be seen as isolated products of fixed norms and rules but have to be interpreted as parts of specific social contexts and cultural practices.

During the first phase, norms are coded into texts. Publishing a text means placing it within a special frame: the choice of media, publisher and communication form equates to the selection of a specific audience and can affect its expectations and the way it reads. A text may be linked and published together with other texts in a compendium or a canon.²² It can also be used regularly in conjunction with certain acts and so become part of a ritual or even of a sacralisation. As discussed above, a text can be represented in different kinds of media: it can be performed orally as part of a theatrical play, for instance, or published in written form on paper or in electronic media. Depending on the actual frame, by performing or publishing a text, authority or legitimation are ascribed to it.²³ When individuals read a text, it is finally

¹⁹ Latin epic poem about the flight of Aeneas from Troja to Latium, written by Vergil between 29 and 19 BC.

²⁰ Greek epic poem by Quintus Smyrnaeus (c. 3th century AC) that continues the narration of the Trojan War.

²¹ *Excidium Illii* [lat.]: epic poem by the Egyptian Triphiodorus (c. 3/4th century AC) on "The Sack of Troy".

²² K. Kollmar-Paulenz, N. Linder, M. Luminati, W. W. Müller & E. Rudolph (eds), *Kanon und Kanonisierung*.

²³ Cf. P. Becchi, N. Linder, M. Luminati, W. W. Müller & E. Rudolph (eds), *Texte und Autoritäten*,



interpreted and evaluated.²⁴ This constitutes a test of whether the authority ascribed holds in practice, or if it undergoes a further phase of encoding, authorisation and evaluation.

3 Metaphoric constructions of the concept of justice

In the following text, beginning with the notion of the Last Judgement in Abrahamic religions, we will cursorily discuss three examples of narratives of justice in order to compare their cognitive construction through metaphor scenarios. In many cultures, the concept of *justice* is often linked not only to equality of treatment, but also to a good and virtuous conduct of life. Virtuousness is grounded on ethical or moral norms that may be founded in religious norms or in natural law principles.²⁵ Dworkin,²⁶ for example, tried to define religion on the base of two fundamental human values, from which he derives that everybody has the duty to “lead a good life”. In his words:

Each person has an innate and inescapable responsibility to try to make his life a successful one: that means living well, accepting ethical responsibilities to oneself as well as moral responsibilities to others [...].²⁷

Justice in this sense is not only a social but also an individual phenomenon, including ethical and moral norms. In European cultures, ethical and moral norms are strongly influenced by the Christian concept of a “good life” fixed literally in the texts of the bible in metaphorical myths, allegories and parables.

Most interesting for the concept of justice is the myth of the *Last Judgement* (also Day of Judgement), which is part of the eschatological base concepts of all Abrahamic religions. In the Abrahamic theologies there are some differences in the details of the conception, which shall be listed below in a very short (and cursory) manner as it is not our aim to look at theological differences but at the differences in the metaphoric framing of the concept.

Autorität der Texte.

²⁴ M. Luminati, W. W. Müller, E. Rudolph & N. Linder (eds), *Spielräume und Grenzen der Interpretation. Philosophie, Theologie und Rechtswissenschaft im Gespräch.*

²⁵ J. Finnis, *Natural law and natural rights.*

²⁶ R. Dworkin, *Religion without god.*

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 10.



4 Transcendent justice in Abrahamic religions

In *Christian theology* the “final” or also “eternal” judgement by God is literally described in the Old Testament in the canonical gospels,²⁸ where it is referred to as the “Day of the Lord”, and in the Greek New Testament in the “Parousia”, describing the second coming of Christ as Judge of the world.²⁹ In Catholicism, each soul undergoes a particular judgement by the Lord immediately upon death: depending on the state of the soul it goes to purgatory or directly to heaven or hell. After the “resurrection of the dead” and the reuniting of one’s soul with its own physical body, the *Last Judgement* will occur. At that time, those in purgatory will be released into heaven, and those in heaven and hell will remain where they are: Those believing in Christ and those ignoring Christ’s teaching but saved through Christ’s atonement will go to eternal bliss; those who reject Christ will go to everlasting damnation. Matthew described the judgement metaphorically as the shepherd separating the sheep from the goats:

When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, “Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”; [...] Then he will say to those at his left hand, “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels”; [...] (Matthew 25:31–34; *The Revised Standard Version*).

The *Eastern Orthodox Church* differs from the Catholic in the notion of purgatory: at the time of death for all individuals, God will decide where their soul will have to await the Second Coming of Christ – either in heaven or hell. At the time of the Second Coming the “Final Judgement” will take place.

In *Islam*, the concept of “Yawm al-Qiyāmah” (Day of Resurrection) or “Yawm ad-Din” (Day of Judgement) stands for the final assessment of humanity by Allah, consisting in the annihilation of life, resurrection and the

²⁸ Cf. for instance Joel 2:31, Ezekiel 13:5 and Isaiah 2:12.

²⁹ Cf. For instance Matthew 24:27, 25:31 and the preachings and writings of the Apostles.



judgement of all sentient creatures. The belief in the Day of Judgement is part of the “six articles of faith” (Arkān al-īmān) but the exact time of these events is unknown. All humans are believed to be judged according to their deeds. The details of the trials are described in the Qur’an and the Hadith, as well as in the commentaries of the Islamic expositors and scholarly authorities.

In *Judaism*, the Day of Judgement happens every year on “Rosh Hashanah” (Jewish New Year); therefore beliefs vary on the date of the Last Judgement for all mankind ranging from the day when one dies to the resurrection of the dead. The belief in the end of days and accompanying events is literally fixed essentially in the Tanakh (Hebrew bible). But in Judaism a place like hell, where punishment takes place, did not exist before the exile of the Jewish people. There was only the “Sheol”, a deserted underworld, in which everyone had to descend after death, the just as well as the unjust. In the Hellenistic period, a place of punishment, called *Gehenna*³⁰ was added.

In all the Abrahamic religions mentioned we have similar metaphor scenarios of the Last Judgement, including the concepts of “transcendence into a life after death in heaven or hell”, of “resurrection” and of “God as final judge”. But there are also differences such as the concept of “purgatory” or the fact that in Judaism the notions “heaven” and “hell” were integrated only at a later period.

5 Plato’s myth of Er

After describing notions of justice that are still present in today’s knowledge, we will turn now to forgotten metaphoric descriptions of transcendent justice. In Ancient Greece, 400 years before the birth of Christianity, the notion already existed of justice occurring in a trial after death. In his book “The Republic” Plato³¹ declared that “the idea of good is the highest knowledge”³² and that participating in this idea is the highest aim of man’s soul. According to this doctrine Plato founded the virtues: the virtues are based on justice and justice is based on the idea of good. This holds for both the individuals and the state. For individuals following the virtues has the additional benefit of a better state after death. In order to illustrate this benefit, Plato invented

³⁰ Also Gehinnom: in the Hellenistic period the name of a canyon in the prophetic texts was transferred to a realm of the dead where punishment took place.

³¹ Plato, *The Republic*, [www 01] (date of access: 14.03.2016).

³² *Ibidem*, p. 356.



the *Myth of Er*, the son of Armenius, who died in battle but returned to life after twelve days and narrated what he had seen in the other world:

He said that when his soul left the body he went on a journey with a great company, and that they came to a mysterious place at which there were two openings in the earth; they were near together, and over against them were two other openings in the heaven above. In the intermediate space there were judges seated, who commanded the just, after they had given judgement on them and had bound their sentences in front of them, to ascend by the heavenly way on the right hand; and in like manner the unjust were bidden by them to descend by the lower way on the left hand; these also bore the symbols of their deeds, but fastened on their backs.³³

Like in the Abrahamic religions, Plato invents a final sentence passed by judges after death, where souls are also sentenced according to their deeds. As a metaphoric detail they have their sentences bound on their front or on their backs, which is a sign for their “ascent by the heavenly way” or their “descent by the lower way”. The metaphoric field “up – ascending – high” is associated with “heaven” and in opposition the field “down – descending – low” is connected with the “lower way”, which isn’t named explicitly but described metaphorically as follows:

And they told one another of what had happened by the way, those from below weeping and sorrowing at the remembrance of the things which they had endured and seen in their journey beneath the earth (now the journey lasted a thousand years), while those from above were describing heavenly delights and visions of inconceivable beauty.³⁴

In addition to this metaphoric description there is also a detailed enumeration of the degree of punishment or beneficence, respectively:

He said that for every wrong which they had done to any one they suffered tenfold; or once in a hundred years – such being reckoned to be the length of man’s life, and the penalty being

³³ Ibidem, p. 443.

³⁴ Ibidem, p. 443–444.



thus paid ten times in a thousand years. If, for example, there were any who had been the cause of many deaths, or had betrayed or enslaved cities or armies, or been guilty of any other evil behaviour, for each and all of their offences they received punishment ten times over, and the rewards of beneficence and justice and holiness were in the same proportion.³⁵

In the myth of Er Plato describes the scenario of a final sentence after death based on one's human deeds which has astonishing similarities with the notions of the Last Day in the Abrahamic religions mentioned above. To lead a good life in respect of virtues has a twofold reward: first a benefit with regard to the community as the soul is in harmony with the religious norms and second a personal one as the soul goes the "heavenly way" and avoids all punishments of the "lower way". According to the gravity of the crimes committed there are several rounds of punishment that may even last forever. But in general after a number of rounds the souls continue their journey until they begin a new cycle of life and mortality. A second sentence doesn't take place – in Plato's myth, life has a circular rather than a linear structure. Despite the many similarities with the Christian concept of the judgement after death it is not clear whether Plato's myth was known at the time of the birth of Christianity and whether it could have influenced it. The only thing we know is that through the writings of Plotin³⁶ Plato's ideas had a great influence on the Church Father Augustine.³⁷

6 Afterlife Judgement in Ancient Egypt

The first source of transcendent justice has been found in funerary texts of the Old Kingdom of Egypt,³⁸ in the so-called *Pyramid Texts*. The first occurrence of these texts is documented in the Pyramid of King Unas³⁹ written on the walls of the burial chamber in an especially pictorial hieroglyphic style. In the Old Kingdom, only the Pharaoh and his confidants were allowed

³⁵ Ibidem, p. 444.

³⁶ Neoplatonic philosopher who lived c. 205–270.

³⁷ Augustinus Hipponensis, Christian theologian and philosopher, born in 354 in the town Thagaste in Numidia.

³⁸ About 2680–2180 BC.

³⁹ Lived in the 5th dynasty, c. 2355–2325 BC.



to appeal to the divine judges whereas in the Middle Kingdom private persons were also allowed. The purpose of the Pyramid Texts was to help the Pharaoh to take his place among the gods. Other sources of our knowledge of the Ancient Egyptian notion of transcendental justice are the *Books of the Dead* that were part of the later⁴⁰ funeral texts including illustrations of the dead person's journey through the *underworld*⁴¹ into the afterlife. In the New Kingdom the Last Judgement was modified and expanded with canonical prescriptions and precise conditions of judgement, establishing binding norms of justice for everyone that also provided an orientation to life before death. So the concept of justice in ancient Egypt developed over 1500 years and thus includes numerous procedures, norms and metaphoric details.⁴²

The scenario of the Last Judgement was metaphorically conceptualised as a tribunal followed by a journey: After death one entered the underworld, where the tribunal, led by Osiris⁴³ and assisted by 42 further gods, decided which Ba-Souls⁴⁴ were allowed to go to the other world. The dead person was allowed to justify his life by reciting all the sins he had not committed. The criterion of judgement was the ability to refrain from sin rather than the state of one's innocence. The judgement was carried out by Anubis⁴⁵ by weighing the Ba-soul on a scale against the feather of *Ma'at*.⁴⁶ The procedure was inspected by Horus⁴⁷ and the result notated by Thoth.⁴⁸ If the Ba-soul was heavier than the feather, then it was more wicked than good and would be devoured by Ammut,⁴⁹ which meant that it would have to proceed into the *darkness*.⁵⁰ If the feather and the soul had the same weight, the deeds of the deceased owner during lifetime were in accordance with the *Ma'at* and the

⁴⁰ First found in Thebes in the beginning of the Second Intermediate Period, around 1700 BC.

⁴¹ The Duat, the realm of the dead and residence of the god Osiris and of other gods and supernatural beings.

⁴² J. Spiegel, *Die Idee vom Totengericht in der ägyptischen Religion*; already described procedures of transcendent justice in ancient Egypt connected with the German notion "Totengericht".

⁴³ Osiris, god of death and rebirth.

⁴⁴ In Egyptian mythology the soul "Ba" is considered to have a personality based on the person it belongs to.

⁴⁵ Anubis, god of funerals and of the afterlife, also protector of the dead and embalming.

⁴⁶ *Ma'at*, goddess of order, justice and truth.

⁴⁷ Horus, god of the sun.

⁴⁸ Thoth, god of knowledge.

⁴⁹ Ammut, female crocodile-headed daemon with one body half of a leopard and the other of a hippopotamus.

⁵⁰ Dark underworld of the Duat, cf. 15.



soul was guided by Horus to the throne of Osiris, where it received its sentence upon which it was allowed to continue its journey through the *lightful place*⁵¹ with the aim of reaching the paradise of Aaru.⁵² There it would be able to continue his/her life re-united with its body, assisted by its personal Ushabtis⁵³ that would do all the work for him/her. The souls not admitted to heaven were punished in the underworld for their sins by serpents that annihilated them, ending their existence definitively.

The central part in the Egyptian judgement procedure, the weighing of the soul against the feather of Ma'at, isn't solely an act of individual justice. As the soul is only accepted in heaven if its weight is equal to that of the feather, it is also a collective act to restore the accordance with the principle of Ma'at. As Assmann⁵⁴ points out, Ma'at stands for truth, justice and order and is thus one of the central concepts of Ancient Egypt's culture. It integrates human actions into the cosmic order, providing a common base for right, moral and statal order and for a religious view of life. In this sense, Ma'at is the immanent order of creation that serves as an orientation for man, and he must constitute it in his secular orders. Besides this, as Assman⁵⁵ argues, Ma'at also represents the principle of social and ethical justice. In his view, the concept "Ma'at" outlines the program of a political order that not only constitutes social justice but also unites the human and transcendent realms to keep the world going. Thus, Ma'at also has dynamic aspects like action, communication and will. In order to gain justice, the individual will has to be subordinated to the common will (*Gemeinwille*). For this reason, Assmann⁵⁶ interprets Ma'at with reference to Sigmund Freud as the central *principle of culture* in the sense of a theory about the art of living together.

7 Conclusion

In this article we have discussed three different notions of transcendent justice from three different cultures and ages. Despite many differences in the narra-

⁵¹ Sechet-iaru: lightful region of the Duat.

⁵² Aaru, the heaven, was located in the far east, where the sun rises, and described as eternal reed fields.

⁵³ Ushabti, funerary figurine, servants of the deceased in the afterlife.

⁵⁴ J. Assmann, *Ma'at: Gerechtigkeit und Unsterblichkeit im Alten Ägypten*, p. 15f.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 33f.

⁵⁶ *Idem*, *Ma'at, Konfuzius, Goethe: Drei Lehren für das richtige Leben*, p. 64f.



tive representation of the judgment procedure, they have some central elements in common – for instance, a judge that tries the conformity of one's life with holy norms and imposes punishment in hell or relief in heaven. Reducing the narratives to their central elements reveals contrasts in the conceptualisation of the procedures. In the Catholic religion, an initial judgement takes place after death that decides whether the souls begins a journey to purgatory, hell or heaven. The criteria of judgement are the good and bad deeds as well as a true belief in Christ. During the second judgement, the sinners get a chance to escape from purgatory through the mercy of Christ. In Plato's myth of Er, the judge assesses the earthly deeds of the souls and sentences them also to a journey to heaven or hell. However, in general this journey ends after a number of "rounds" and then the soul begins a new life. So Plato's conception of life is not linear as in the Christian religion but cyclic. In the Egyptian tribunal of the gods the criterion of judgement is the accordance with Ma'at and the aim is an everlasting life in the eternal reed fields. This includes the restoration of celestial harmony, as Assmann⁵⁷ argues, so the tribunals task was not only to retribute individual but also collective justice.

In spite of the differences discussed, there are also striking similarities between the three examples, a fact all the more astonishing when one takes into account that the first and the last example are separated by a period of almost 2500 years. If we do not believe that these are mere coincidences, we have to find a rational explanation for the fact that this knowledge could be kept across cultures and throughout ages. A quite plausible one would be that there had been contact comprising a transition of narratives between the cultures mentioned.⁵⁸ But how can we account for the persistence through time? It is also plausible to assume that the narratives of transcendent justice were well known to many people in order to persist over such a long period. The fact that all three examples were fixed literally was certainly helpful in terms of conserving them in their original form – at least for the scientists who were able to decipher hieroglyphs. However, in Ancient Egypt the techniques of reading and writing were initially restricted to the elites⁵⁹ and

⁵⁷ Ibidem.

⁵⁸ J. D. Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament*; discussed selected examples of the interrelation of ancient Egypt and Old Testament that unfortunately did not include the theme of transcendent justice.

⁵⁹ Except in the village Deir el-Medina, home of the artisans who worked on the tombs in the Valley of the Kings during the 18th to 20th dynasties of the New Kingdom period (ca. 1550–1080 BC) (cf. A. Dorn & T. Hofmann (eds), *Living and writing in Deir el-Medine: Socio-*



the assumption that many Greeks were familiar with hieroglyphs before the conquest of Egypt is not very plausible. Our modern knowledge of Egyptian writings started only after the decoding of the Rosetta Stone⁶⁰ in 1822. How was it possible then, that the notion of transcendent justice could have been known by so many people that it has transcended cultural borders? One must conclude that there also must have been some oral traditions that conserved the knowledge of transcendent justice – most presumably in memorable narratives consisting of figurative speech such as metaphors amongst other devices. Metaphor scenarios could have played an important role in fitting things together in a comprehensive narrative frame that could be remembered more easily by professional narrators like the Rhapsodes.

Concerning the “career” of the notion of transcendent justice throughout time, there are still many open questions. The metaphoric concept of ancient Egypt developed over the course of 1500 years and is thus very elaborate. It is not known whether it directly influenced the notion of the Last Judgement of the Abrahamic religions. There are, however, some indicators that there could have been an indirect influence through the Greek culture. The Egyptian notion of *heaven* and *hell*, for instance, was very similar to the Christian one, but in Judaism – the earliest of the Abrahamic religions – a place like hell did not exist before the exile of the Jewish people. It was only in the *Hellenistic period* that a place of punishment, called *Gehenna*,⁶¹ was integrated. This could be an indication that the Greek culture influenced the Abrahamic religions. We only know of Herodotus’⁶² visit to Giza in 450 BC – a period before Plato’s birth⁶³ and that on his first journey to Sicily, Plato visited Egypt.⁶⁴ Later on, the Hellenistic period began with Alexander the Great of Macedonia conquering Egypt,⁶⁵ some years after Plato’s death. So some evidence pointing to the influence of Egypt on Plato and the influence of Plato on the

historical embodiment of Deir el-Medine texts).

⁶⁰ Rosetta Stone: a stele from Memphis inscribed in 196 BC on behalf of King Ptolemy V with a decree in three scripts in parallel – Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, Demotic script and Ancient Greek – discovered in 1799.

⁶¹ Also Gehinnom: in the Hellenistic period the name of a canyon in the prophetic texts was transferred to the realm of the dead where punishment took place.

⁶² Greek Historian, who lived about 484–425 BC.

⁶³ About 428–348 BC.

⁶⁴ About 390–388 BC as described in the *Seventh Letter*, an epistle that has been ascribed to Plato (cf. M. Liatsi, *Die semiotische Erkenntnistheorie Platons im Siebten Brief. Eine Einführung in den sogenannten philosophischen Exkurs*).

⁶⁵ About 332–331 BC.



Abrahamic religions in the Hellenistic period can be found. However, this should be the focus of further research.

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