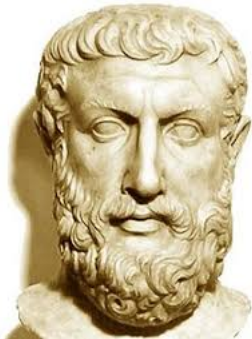


Metaphysical Influence on Egyptian Funerary Thought and Writings.
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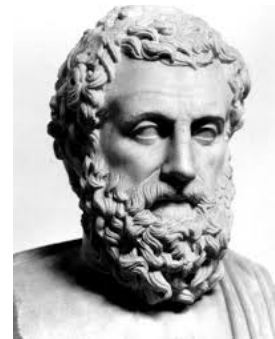
Metaphysical concept in the ancient world was not always expressed in language and ways that we might find convenient for our purposes today, but the myth, the symbol, the rite involved are made manifest to us through the means proper to them. We necessarily must take the time and trouble to dig into the true meaning of the ancient myth and symbol, where it may be seen that this expresses a certain understanding of the cosmos that implies a metaphysical understanding which until rather recent times was not considered in Western philosophy. To be sure, the ideas originated, as so much has, with the Greeks as far back as Parmenides, Plato and Aristotle. Thoughts such as were expressed by these Greek philosophers have been addressed to us in writings of the 18th century of our times by thinkers and philosophers like Rene Descartes and Immanuel Kant. Later, into the 20th century, people such as Karl Jung and Joseph Campbell have advanced a more popular awareness of these ideas. The substance of metaphysics as being the philosophical study whose object it is to determine the *real* nature of things – to understand the meaning, structure and principles of whatever is, inasmuch as, it is, has been one of the characterizations of the field; therefore, being concerned with *reality* as a whole. To this end it may be helpful for us to examine, albeit briefly, some thoughts of those noble ancients already mentioned. In no way is this intended to be exhaustive of this line of inquiry, but perhaps an entry point for further development.

Aristotle following Plato, had outlined two directions for the philosopher. The first being to investigate the properties and nature of what makes up the natural or *sensible* world. The second task as we may say, was to examine the characteristics of *being* as it were. His concern was with, as he put it, the substance that is free from movement, the most real of all things. The study of this intelligible reality on which everything in nature was thought to be dependent is the focus of his “second philosophy” which he called his *Metaphysica*. This second philosophy is concerned with that which is eternal, free of movement and separately existent so as to be more remote from any form of empirical “test” that may be applied. The notion of empirical proofs would have been more in line with Aristotle’s “first philosophy”, that referred to as the *Physica*, being that it deals with objects

of the senses. Aristotle himself referred to these objects as “sensible substance.”



Parmenides



Aristotle

Plato, Knowledge and “First Principles.”

Directing our examination to Plato, who followed the early Greek philosopher Parmenides, called by some the father of metaphysics, and was first to express the idea of distinguishing belief from knowledge. Belief was seen for Parmenides as opinion and for Plato it was a form of observation that was unclear and shifting in nature. Objects of perception were therefore unstable. Plato thought of knowledge as being entirely lucid in nature, and were eternally what they were, exempt from change. They were free from the ability to appear as that which they were not. His objects of opinion were called *phenomena* or appearances, and so objects of knowledge he termed *noumena*, or objects of intelligence. As such, the Platonic philosopher was taught to observe the contradictions in appearances and to look only on the realities that are behind them. These realities Plato called Forms or Ideas. These would form a set of higher realities which ordinary men ignored. That such realities exist or there was at least a case to be made for thinking that there was, becomes a fundamental tenet in the study of what later became known as metaphysics. This of course leaves open the question that if this line of philosophical inquiry is rejected, is there some alternative footing which the metaphysician can develop.

Previous writings without particular historical references as they are quite available to the person who would delve deeper into the characterization of metaphysics to be presented here, must be addressed prior to our consideration of the application to Egyptian writings and thought. Again I would state that *if* the Ancient Egyptians were indeed aware of these

modes of philosophical thought, they have left us little or no indication other than what can be observed in their approach to the funerary philosophical evidence left behind and now available to us in their so called books that address the journey of the dead through the afterlife. Nowhere in any other ancient literature is there to be found such a richly developed concept of what lies beyond our veil of existence and description of how to navigate the obstacles put before the traveler. Their writings demonstrate an understanding of what constitutes metaphysical concepts that have seemingly few if any historical antecedents in the ancient world. The conceptual inquiry and development of these truths or “first principals” as we have come to label them, is remarkable in the depth and scope achieved by the ancient Egyptians. I will return to a consideration of these philosophies and thoughts’ later, but first must be a brief examination of metaphysical characteristics’ as have developed in attempting to draw a clear line between the metaphysician’s aim and those of the more empirical sciences.

I think it will become observable as we proceed that the lines of inquiry are not strongly distinct from one another and indeed they all may play into a definition of how to define the discipline as a whole. The first of the outlined views would be an inquiry into what exists. We may ask ourselves if dream objects are real in the same way that, say, a table or a path are real. Are numbers real or simply just abstractions? Are the dimensions of a house a reality or are they no more than an aspect of something more concrete, perhaps a quality that is observed rather than having a substantial nature and would not exist except as attributed to something else. The idea of substance incorporates the notions of quality and relation. The problem here is that if we assume a house qualifies as substance, it has qualities and stands in relations to something else. However, no qualities could be real: the dimensions of the house would not exist unless the house exists. The notion of substance of being or what really exists is that of a thing which exists by itself apart from any attributes. The notion of a substance in this metaphysical construct is that of a thing with its own existence devoid of any attributes it may just happen to possess. This is fine, but how do we apply this? We can say that any concrete thing selected as an example of the notion of substance must answer to a certain description, and this means that it cannot be referred to apart from its attributes. We conclude then that substances are no more primary beings than are qualities and relations. Without one there is not the other.

Now, there is an alternative way of understanding this idea of substances: not as that which is the subject of something else, but as what persists through change. And so, the question of what is ultimately real is a question of the ultimate being of which the universe is made. The difficulty here is that it sets the philosophy of metaphysics in direct opposition with the notion of science in an empirical sense. As an afterthought we might examine the notion of monads as put forward by Gottfried Leibniz which states that it is *monads* which are the real indivisible particles of nature (i.e. elementary, unextended, indivisible, spiritual substances) and not material particles. Those familiar with certain aspects of Egyptology may recognize the *Monad* principal as a source for the diverse number of gods and their cosmological relationship in ancient Egyptian religion. The idea expressed is that of many deities or gods emanating from a single source which is termed the Monad and is central to Egyptian religious beliefs as seen in the Ennead of the Pyramid Texts, or the Ogdoad of Hermopolitian beliefs expressed in the Coffin Texts.

Appearance and Reality

The difference between appearance and reality, or what constitutes true reality from mere appearance is central. We may refer to this as the nature of ultimate reality. One of the easiest ways to give example of this is by using the idea of color and how it can change depending upon conditions. Objects exhibit what we might call their "real color" when seen under standard conditions but when conditions deviate from what we judge as standard, they can take on an entirely new appearance. One is reminded of the Moody Blues song "*Nights in White Satin*," that states "*cold hearted orb that rules the night, removes the color from our sight. Red is grey and yellow white, but we decide which is right and which is an illusion.*" There appear to be at least three parts in the conception of reality regarding metaphysics; reality is genuine as opposed to deceptive, exempt from change and so the stable objects of knowledge. This is ultimate truth as opposed to merely appearance. Next we posit that reality is genuine as opposed to being derivative, not dependent on something else. Rene Descartes for instance would define substance as that which can be explained through itself alone. and stated that it is the goal of metaphysics to find and characterize these things (substances) which must be understood in this sense. Finally, appearances are deceptive and derivative, things cannot be explained properly if viewed within a context of what might be called "common sense." So, the task of metaphysics is

defined so that it must try to give direction to the claim that usual ways of thinking will not be sufficient for a complete explanation of that which is experienced.

Here we may additionally introduce the notion of the “string theory,” which puts forth the idea of many dimensions existing side by side. This could lead us to the world of quarks and quantum mechanics, with numerous realities in a sort of co-equal existence. The writings of Stephen Hawking and others have focused some light in this area and we would be introduced to a theoretical content that is lacking in normal experience on an everyday level. In so doing reveal intelligible aspects of the world that otherwise might seem opaque when considered alone. Ultimately, we can argue that what is real must be completely transcendent of objects of this world and exist in a realm that is accessible only to the most sublime intellect of those who would attempt to understand the world as a whole in a different way. This opens us to our next consideration; that being the world as a whole.

The World as a Whole: First Principles and Ultimate Truth

The argument here is that there is a need for a coordination of scientific results due to the specialized nature of scientific research and the necessity to be aware of what is happening in fields other than ones' specialization. Is this then a role for metaphysics as some sort of contact vehicle for summing up and synthesizing the results of the various sciences? Certainly, Plato thought that a philosopher should have a synoptic view, as opposed to individuals who seem to know more and more about less and less! This is not the function of metaphysics and indeed only a scientist could really fill this kind of role. Rather metaphysics can address the idea that there is a need to know not only what a scientist may make of the world but also what is the significance of this. We experience the world at differing levels and in different ways. Man is a many faceted being and needs to examine and understand the universe in differing experiences and ways of thought. It is a function of metaphysics to give an account of the world or, as an experience of it, as a whole and to see what is ultimate reality inherent in what is known and perhaps not what is transcendent, beyond the limits of our experience. This view has often been used to connect the field of metaphysics with the occult. To this one can only say that there are a wide variety of ways of taking in the world as

a whole and that this depends upon the experience of the individual as regards their own beliefs.

Next we must mention the study of what is termed “first principles” or ultimate irrefutable truths. This comes to us from the Greek word “archai,” and refers to a starting point for a discussion of the idea of things that exist. In our case as concerns the ancient funerary beliefs and practices the reference is to the archetypes used to model this action. Here is the idea of an ultimate presupposition and the basis from which all other developments should proceed. For instance, a mathematician will hypothesize something as being true and then move forward from that point without further examination of the validity of his starting point. Contrary to this, a dialectician will proceed backward from this starting point and look to ground it in an arche (archetype) not hypothesized at all. The former makes no attempt to validate the common argument and proceeds forward and there is nothing amiss with this. However, in the field of metaphysics there are no unjustified assumptions and it is the goal to describe and justify these ultimate assumptions. The basis for this lies in the well know Cartesian example, “*cogito, ergo sum*” (“I think, therefore I am”) which is self-reinstating. One can deny that one thinks, but in so doing, one thinks. If one denies they exist, that very fact is proof that one does exist. Ultimately, metaphysics relies on the results of other sciences and even within its own area it works with traditions set by those masters before it rather than to begin from scratch with everything. Metaphysics then is the study of the first principle (archetypes) and the idea that these are unable to be avoided in the sense that they operate in their own denial. For the ancient Egyptian the idea that there would be a truth beyond the senses is a given, an archetype that could not be questioned or denied in their belief system. That this is of necessity metaphysical in nature is our point of departure.



Descartes

The Afterworld in Egyptian Thought

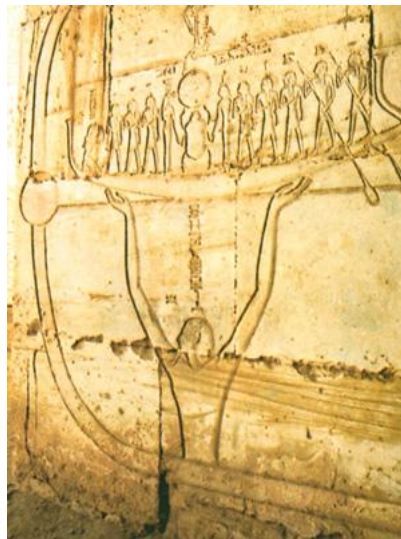
Let us now turn our attention to the aspects of the underworld journey of the dead as seen in the Egyptian writings. Just how do these metaphysical ideas and notions fit into our consideration of this corpus of religious writings? To this point we should focus on the three major writings, the so called "books" that make up the most famous collection of material concerning the underworld. In general, these follow the course of the sun from evening sunset to the sunrise the following day. These writings are rightly termed "books" in that they comprise the first known examples of a true literary style that can be called a book; they have a beginning, a middle and an end which most previous writings before New Kingdom times do not. We have previously outlined some thoughts and ideas that go into the field metaphysics, and have indeed listed four distinct areas that can be applied to our examination. The focus of our inquiry will be whether all areas apply, only some, or perhaps just one? It should be kept in mind however, that even if it is the case that only one or two or perhaps none of these apply directly, the overall ideas may well still apply and it in no way affects the validity of the hypothesis. Through these writings do the Egyptians attempt to show us true reality as expressed in a metaphysical construct?

Archetypes, Sleepers and Dreamers: Underworld Books

It is fair to say that the Egyptians were the among the first, if not the first, to adopt the Jungian idea of archetypes and to recognize the power to restore and heal that is contained in the depths of the unconscious mind. Sleepers and dreamers enter the world of the "Nun," defined here as the primeval ocean.

This is most directly seen in the Egyptian writings already referenced, but most directly seen in the final (12th) "hour" or division of the Book of Gates. In this tableau the Nun is represented by a god lifting the solar boat of Re with attendant deities up and out of the waters, handing them off to the sky goddess to begin the daily journey across the heavens. The attendant caption states "*these arms come out of the water-they lift up this god.*" But this is just one aspect of the cosmogony or creation myth. In the Ogdoad of Heliopolis pairs, male and female, represent heaven, the endless waters of the underworld, the eternal darkness of the Nun, referred to as "Kuk"

along with Huh, representing endlessness and boundlessness, and Amun, representing “air.” These basic forces of the universe go to make up this Ogdoad or group of eight primeval deities. As we can see these are what can be termed “primary forces” or the first principles indicated above. They relate to the archetypes and ultimate presuppositions that metaphysics seeks to reveal as unknown truths that are beyond our senses. Other books of the Egyptians will show different descriptions but they are all complementary representations of the same journey through the depths of the underworld. Here the traveler is both threatened and intimately regenerated.



“Book of Gates” 12th Hour

Two other books to be considered in addition to the Book of Gates are the Book of Am-Duat (What is in the Netherworld), and the Book of Caverns (Querrets). These writings will only be found in the tombs of kings and they all provide information from the perspective of the sun god, concerning the underworld, its inhabitants and landscape in pictorial and written form. These writings attempt to show a theory of the world in all its aspects and attempt to explain what really exists beyond what is available to our limited senses. This is a “science” of reality and not one of appearance. The included texts are occult, that is to say contain knowledge that is “hidden” from the average person and esoteric in the sense that it is knowledge only to be obtained by an elite few, usually priests who by means of a dialectic philosophy are able to deconstruct the observable world and reveal the primary truths behind that which really exists. This is the absolute end sought through the metaphysical inquiry. The goal here is to help the

Egyptian by expanding knowledge concerning the “other side.” These are the first writings to attempt to map that which is beyond human sensory ability. They follow the sun from sunset to sunrise along a course that flows backward through time and space in exactly the same way as a metaphysician would proceed in an approach to discover the truth, or rather what constitutes it, in a reductive manner.

A Journey of Space and Time: An Archetypal Rebirth

In general, this journey of the god through the underworld is shown to us the form of three registers of images along with text; the god being always shown in the middle register. This however, becomes less rigid in later compositions. The story enacted in these representations show the first three hours as a transition between this world and the underworld, as a sort of preparation of the mind for what is to be next encountered. These hours or divisions foreshadow a change in the perception of what reality appears to what reality truly is. This is the beginning of the truth that is beyond the senses and may be similar to a mystic beginning to enter a trance like state in order to separate from this world of profane time and enter into a primordial reality in sacred time, or as St. Thomas Aquinas relates, “to become as like as possible to God;” to experience the world “*ab origine*” (at the beginning of time), where this all takes place.

The next six hours of the underworld are spent in a slow descent towards the complete death of the god identified as “the flesh of Re” and a movement towards the deepest part of the underworld in the fifth division of the night, here to experience the ultimate deconstructive state thus to begin an archetypal rebirth. The final three hours are devoted to a return to the world of the living similar to the process that a shaman or magician must pass through to safely re-enter this world of profane time. The entire underworld journey has been conducted in sacred time, i.e., removed from the constraints of what our senses relate to us and in a place of truth that is beyond experience when living in profane time. The ancient mind sees only this sacred time as being of importance and capable of expressing the true reality of existence. Anything occurring in profane time has no real meaning and therefore creates no archetypes to follow. The metaphysician in perhaps a more philosophical way, attempts, through a process of moving backward from the known facts, to reveal what is unknown and discover the ultimate presupposition or primary premise. The inquiry here

is not to explain that which appears to us to exist but rather an inquiry into the true nature of reality; that which really exists and not what appears to exist. This was the goal of the early metaphysical philosophers (Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle) and the later proponents such as Descartes and Kant.



“ Book of Gates” 2nd Hour

Practical Metaphysical Theology

Similar journeys are undertaken in both the Book of the Am-Duat and the Book of Gates, with the main difference being that the Am-Duat is a writing that concentrates on knowledge (*gnosis*) of what is to be encountered in the underworld journey whereas the Book of Gates is one of “*praxis*,” (instruction) or how to navigate the underworld and contains the necessary spells, incantations or offering formulae to accomplish the journey. These writings may well be thought of as works of “practical metaphysical theology” in which the main force of the work is the objective of gaining knowledge of the netherworld beings and their activities. That these books are meant possibly to be used by the practitioner, perhaps a magician-priest, while still quite alive, is made evident by looking at the text following many of the descriptions. They clearly state that the user is said to be “*tp-ta*” “upon earth,” and not “*m-ta*” “*in the earth*,” or underworld. This would be clearly a case of wanting to experience what reality truly exists and not merely the appearance of such which may or may not represent truth. The Book of Caverns, perhaps the most graphic, addresses the punishment that awaits those who would not follow the archetypal order or course set for mankind. This is represented in six divisions as the god Re walks through these caverns. No boat is observed. Here demons (perhaps the *creatures from the Id*, as Sigmund Freud termed the most

primitive part of the mind), prepare the condemned for the state of non-being, a non-existence in the profane world and a removal from the sight of the sun, the ultimate source of being. Separate caldrons are heated by snakes and prepared for the condemned corporal bodies and for their souls' destruction. It would appear that this is a condemnation in both apparent and true reality! This is similar to certain motives seen in Christian art of the Middle Ages. As regards the early Christian, this may count as a sense of reality and not appearances but perhaps not the most advisable way to determine this.



“Book of the Caverns”. 1st Hour

Unchanging Ultimate Truth, Time, and the “*Sp-Tpy*,”

A final question to be considered here relates to the idea that asks then does man become like unto a god and participate in the ritual practices of death and renewal as outlined in these writings? Surely there are metaphysical implications for the purposes of Egyptian magical beliefs and practices that relate to the nature of just exactly how one experiences what really exists. Here now we must take into account the Egyptian concept of time. This may give us some clues into this metaphysical understanding

and application as to how the notion of reality may play into the overcoming of time that was of importance to their belief in the nature of archetypes and participation and observation of their establishment.

The Egyptian concept of time is of one that is cyclical and not linear. This presumes that any discrete point along the great circle of time may return again or may be accessed by the ability of an adept to move along this continuum. The knowledge as contained in the underworld writings may provide such knowledge. The concern would be with bringing the past into the present now and to be able to observe the creator god or gods, in the actual act of creation. If so, then the individual would be able to gain first-hand knowledge of the primary premise or what constitutes ultimate truth beyond normal abilities of our senses. Here the realities of death and movement into the netherworld with its attendant rebirth could be genuinely experienced. This then could be attained in this life without incurring the limitations imposed by the barrier of time. Here one overcomes chronological time and experiences the time when these events truly took place for the first time "*in illo tempore*" ("in those days," by gods, ancestors or heroes), or what the Egyptian called the "*sp-tpy*" the "*first occasion*." The already mentioned Book of the Am-Duat may actually hold the best representation of the "triumph over time" contained in any of the writings, although individual divisions or "hours" may be pointed out with references to such. The final division of the Book of Gates for instance exhibits something of this nature and in the sixth division we see time represented as a twisted rope being pulled from the throat of a deity identified as Aqen. Through the middle register of many of these divisions in both the Books of Am-Duat and Gates the boat containing the sun god, identified simply as "flesh," is pulled along a river that we might call the "river of time" (an underground Nile) as the god moves from hour to hour along its course.

As regards our purposes here however, perhaps the division of most interest is the twelfth or final hour of the Book of the Am-Duat. It contains three registers with various activities and deities shown. Here we are present at the rebirth of the sun god and a concomitant repetition of original creation. The upper register shows twelve goddesses with serpents spitting fire to drive away the evil Apep (Apophis) snake one last time. This is accomplished with the help of the oarsmen shown in the lower register. The main event is happening in the middle register with the arrival of the suns' boat towed by twelve gods and thirteen goddesses. The boat contains the sun god and "millions" of blessed dead and will now be pulled

through the body of the large snake seen in front of the boat. This is done from tail to head, the backward direction, to indicate the necessary reversal of time. The caption explains that all these beings enter the snake's tail old and weakened by time and exit the mouth as newborn. Inside the snake Re sheds his corporal body, the underworld manifestation, and is reborn as Khepri the beetle of "coming into being." At the bottom of the lower register is the mummiform body which is labeled as the "image of flesh" and can be identified with Osiris, all the dead fall back into the sleep of death to await the next coming of the god Re, in the first hour of the next nights journey. Re has shed his body as a snake sheds his skin and for the god death is only a doorway or procession to new life. Here then for the metaphysician is an example of the sought after "archai" or archetype; the science of reality and inquiry of what really exists insofar as the ancient Egyptian would have philosophized it. This would be their first principal and the truth which lays beyond the senses ability of discover it; the ultimate presupposition.



"Book of the Am-Duat" 12th Hour

"It is done, from beginning to end, as it was found in writing by this scribe"

