Different understandings about what happens to us at death embody and promote different views about what we consider to be the ultimate reality of life, what it is that we think — at the deepest level of our being — provides meaning for our existence and makes sense of the world we encounter while still breathing.

I have given four examples from the ancient world. Each of them portrays a different sense of ultimate reality, of one thing, in each case, that establishes, determines, and directs everything that finally matters for human existence in general – for all people who have ever lived – and for our specific existence in particular. All four involve trips to the realms of the dead, in order to see what happens for those who are no longer living. Each is meant to show what we should live for now, based on what the ultimate meaning of life is, what the very root and fabric of human existence consist of. In this post I’ll talk about two of them.

When Odysseus travels to the underworld in Homer’s *Odyssey* book 11, he finds that virtually everyone who has ever lived for all eternity (he sees four, count them, four exceptions) has exactly the same fate. Death is the great Equalizer. It comes to everyone and after it happens, all differences are leveled out. At death there is no more life. Nothing to enjoy. Nothing to look forward to. The past doesn’t matter. The future doesn’t happen. There is no pleasure and no pain, and there never will be. At that point, it is entirely over. Forever and ever and ever and ever.

Homer imagines that the soul of the person does continue to exist, in some sense. But it can’t be said that they still “live.” There is nothing there for them. They are “shades” or “shadows” of those who once lived.

This is comparable to the view that many people – an increasing number of people – continue to have in our world today, although ...

Each of us has to decide what we value in life. Do we value the meaning of life and death? Join the blog!

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