

## The Soul as Second Self before Plato\*

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### Abstract

Erwin Rhode believes that ancient Greeks regarded the soul as an “image” (ειδωλον) that constitutes a second Self by reflecting the visible Self. When Otto Rank borrows the idea of the soul as Second Self and contrasts primitive soul-belief with modern literature of the Double, he simplifies (and probably idealizes) the primitive Double as “a guardian angel, assuring immortal survival to the self,” which later degenerated into “a reminder of the individual’s mortality” in modern civilization. Rank attributes this decisive change of emphasis to “the Christian doctrine of immortality as interpreted by the church.” Since then the Double has assumed the grim visage of the Devil, who threatens to divest men of their immortal soul.

A problem with this choice of watershed between the positive and negative aspects of the Double is that, even before Plato, the continuity of human existence beyond physical death was not necessarily seen as idyllic, and the soul was not

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automatically linked with the conception of immortality. The immortal soul striving to detach itself from the prison of the body is a moralistic interpretation of Plato's, probably developed from Pythagoreanism, which was influenced by shamanistic and Orphic beliefs. This puritanical strain is more directly connected to Gnosticism and Manicheism than to New Testament theology.

Following an overview of the mercurial primitive soul, this paper will study the eligibility of the soul as man's second self, and go on to examine the ambiguous character of two second-self figures present in literature before Plato, from the Gilgamesh Cycle and Euripides' *Bacchae* respectively. The study shows that depicting the ancient soul as the immortal self may prove to be a projection of the modern imagination.

**Key Words:** the soul, the Second Self (the Double), the Homeric Epics, the Gilgamesh Cycle, *The Bacchae*