

THE SOUL AND THE AFTERWORLD IN HAWAIIAN MYTH
AND IN OTHER POLYNESIAN CULTURES

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PREFACE

The study reported here was undertaken to answer questions in which I have long had an interest: (1) How accurately do Hawaiian myths and legends portray ancient Hawaiian beliefs about the soul and the afterworld? (2) If the myths accurately represent the beliefs, what accounts for the ambiguities and inconsistencies? (3) Do the inconsistencies and beliefs suggested by the myths extend to other Polynesian cultures?

To find answers I had hoped to study not only the observations of writers who have looked closely at old Polynesian cultures, but also to look for the patterns of Hawaiian legends in the mythology of those other peoples. Unfortunately, time has permitted examination only of the former.

What has resulted for me is a much improved understanding and appreciation of Hawaiian mythology, especially in its relationship to the culture, and of Polynesian religion as reflected in the four groups I have studied. Limiting to three the number of cultures to be compared to the Hawaiian was made necessary by considerations of time. I considered geographical distribution and geographical distance from non-Polynesian groups; hence, the selection of the Maori, Society Islanders, and Samoans.

There is a wealth of material on this subject, much of which, of course, could neither be examined nor presented,

given the scope of this project. Substantial overlap and repetition in the material I have examined, however, suggests that my major points and conclusions would have remained largely unchanged had all the available material been analyzed and included.

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Introduction

Hawaiian mythology is a literature of patterns--of motifs such as the transfiguration of man into animal and geological forms, of youth to age and the reverse; it is replete with heroes of supernatural birth and supernatural skill, like Maui, who lassoes the sun and lifts the sky off the earth. But perhaps the most pervasive, the dominant of these patterns are themes of the human spirit or soul and the afterworld.

For purposes of this discussion and in keeping with the uses of writers discussing this topic, the terms soul and spirit will be considered nearly synonymous. The finer distinctions which could be made have little significance from the perspective of the ancient Polynesian. The term afterworld is something of a problem in that characters in Hawaiian myths journey to what might be called "other-worlds" and return to earth. All the discussion I have found about religious beliefs of the Samoans, the Society Islanders, and the Maori, however, refers to worlds of the dead, to what indeed might be called "afterworlds."

Numerous Hawaiian myths and legends contain incidents involving the soul or other worlds in one way or another--for the most part consistent and comprehensible, but also to

a degree inconsistent and confusing. The confusion occurs particularly in methods of entering after- or other-worlds and in the nature of those places, especially in their respective locations in relation to earth. The half-dozen Hawaiian myths partially summarized below illustrate variations in these aspects of setting and present a unique concept of the soul. The summaries contain only those aspects of the story line which are applicable to this discussion; they do not necessarily give a balanced picture of the entire legend.

Pele and Hi'ika

The richest body of Hawaiian mythology is that centered in the goddess Pele. Mary Kawena Puku'i and Alfonse Korn asserted that after the fall of the Hawaiian monarchy "for many Hawaiians...it was the chief surviving symbol of old Hawaiian civilization...." (1970, xiv) N.B. Emerson called it "a mine of inexhaustible wealth." (1965, 7) It vividly represents a number of Hawaiian beliefs and viewpoints, and the richest of this source material is the story of Pele and Lohi'au, which N.B. Emerson (1915) compiled in a book-length version as Pele and Hi'iaka.

Pele falls asleep near her home in Kilauea Volcano, and her spirit leaves her body, travelling to Kaua'i, where in human form it meets and spends several love-filled days with the handsome chief Lohi'au. When, after that brief period, the Pele spirit leaves Lohi'au, in love-smitten desperation he hangs himself with his malo. Later, at Kilauea, Pele pines

for Lohi'au and sends her youngest sister Hi'iaka to bring him to the volcano. Hi'iaka reaches Kaua'i after having braved many dangers and asserted her Pele-given powers in such ways as destroying the king of Maui by crushing his fluttering spirit against a rock. Finding Lohi'au's spirit fluttering near his body, she captures it and with appropriate prayer and ritual pushes it into his body through an eye socket, thus reviving him. All of this takes quite some time. Returning to Kilauea with Lohi'au, Hi'iaka discovers that Pele in a fit of jealous rage over her long absence has burned a friend to death and destroyed her lehua groves. In retaliation Hi'iaka caresses Lohi'au in front of the goddess. Pele responds by destroying Lohi'au with lava. Subsequently, Hi'iaka journeys to the underworld in a fruitless search for Lohi'au's departed spirit. She returns to the world of the living to discover that Pele's brother has encountered Lohi'au's spirit flitting over the ocean and, reconstituting his body, has put the spirit back into it and revived him again. The misunderstandings of the past are resolved, and harmony returns to the Pele family.

"Kahalaopuna, the Legend of Mānoa"

Another popular legend containing the detached soul motif and the revival-of-the-dead theme is "Kahalaopuna, the Legend of Mānoa." (Kalākaua, 1972, 481-497) Although beautiful Kahalaopuna and Chief Kauhi of Kailua have been betrothed since childhood, they have never seen each other. Kauhi

hears a false report that she has been unfaithful to him and persuades her to accompany him in a walk along the mountain-side, where he kills her with a hala cone. The spirit of her grandmother in the form of an owl revives her, and she follows Kauhi, only to be similarly killed and revived three more times. Kauhi kills her a fifth time and buries her under the roots of a tree, from which the owl cannot extricate her body. However, her spirit leaves her body and attracts young chief Mahana, who is walking by. He uncovers her body and takes it home, where his spirit sisters return Kahalaopuna's spirit to her body and revive her.

In a subsequent trial of Kauhi, Kahalaopuna proves that she is alive by tearing ape leaves spread on the ground for her to walk on to determine whether she is human or spirit. Kauhi's doubting seer Ka'ea is persuaded to look into a calabash of water, where Kahalaopuna's grandfather sees his reflected spirit and crushes it, killing him. Kauhi is burned to death in an imu, but the spirit of one of his ancestors, an 'aumakua', brings a heavy storm which washes his bones out to sea, where it reincarnates him as a shark. This denizen eventually captures and destroys Kahalaopuna, who cannot be revived again because the sharks have devoured her body.

"Hiku and Kawela"

Hi'iaka's feat in the Pele myth of journeying to the afterworld and returning is repeated in other legends. In the story of Hiku and Kawela, (J. S. Emerson, 1883, 36-39)

for example, Kawela dies and Hiku goes to Milu, the underworld, to bring her spirit back. Using a long rope made of vines, he lowers himself to Milu deep in the ocean. Enticing Kawela's spirit to join him in swinging on the rope, Hiku then signals his friends, who raise him and the spirit to the surface, where he forces the spirit back into the body of his loved one, thus reviving her.

"Daughter of the King of Kuaihelani"

Journeying to an unearthly- if not an after-world also is protagonist Laukiamanu in Padraic Colum's "Daughter of the King of Kuaihelani." (1973, 142ff.) To reach Kuaihelani, the Country that Supports the Heavens, she climbs a bamboo stalk which then proceeds to grow rapidly upward and then to reach over in a horizontal direction to deposit her in that distant place.

"Rolling Island"

"Rolling Island" involves not only a journey to an upper world, but also an example of what some writers have called a "floating island." In this story (Ibid., 131ff.) Chief Kaeweaho is rescued from drowning at sea, where jealous subordinates have isolated him, when the god Ku, looking down from the Country that Supports the Heavens, sees his plight and pushes Uluka'a, Rolling Island, to him. Later, when Ku's granddaughter Anelike needs to travel from Uluka'a to the Country that Supports the Heavens to ask his permission to

marry Kaeweaohe, she seats herself among the branches of a newly planted coconut tree, which shoots up and bends over, like the bamboo shoot, to set her down in the country of her destination. Ku himself helps her return to Uluka'a: "holding her hands, he lets his own arms stretch out, stretch down until Anelike is once more on the ground." (Ibid., 136) The Country that Supports the Heavens seems to be at both a horizontal and a vertical distance from Uluka'a. In subsequent incidents, Kaeweaohe, Anelike, and their son make separate canoe journeys between Uluka'a and Hawai'i. Clearly, Uluka'a in this legend lies on the same sea, the same horizontal plane, as Hawai'i.

La'ieikawai

In 1863 Hawaiian writer S. N. Hale'ole published the romance La'ieikawai for the purpose, he said, of "depicting the customs of the [Hawaiian] people, for fear lest otherwise we lose some of their...traditions...." (Beckwith, 1919, 342) Among the many traditions he portrays is a series of journeys between earth and different unearthly realms. On one of these trips, one of the two principal women characters, Kahalaomapuana, travels for four months and ten days across the sea on the tongue of a mo'o, a giant lizard, to reach Kealohilani, the Land of the Shining Heavens. Hale'ole apparently sees no contradiction in the location of a heaven at sea level. Kahalaomapuana's two uncles subsequently call down an ancestral spider web, which she climbs to reach another country,

Kahakahaka'ea. (Ibid., 554) From this level, Kahalaomapuana's mother--whom she meets here--calls Hālulu, the bird guardian, which flies the two of them up to a third level, Awakea, where the girl's brother resides in "the taboo house at the borders of Tahiti." (Ibid., 564) Hale'ole gives no indication that locating Tahiti in the third level of heaven is in any way unusual.

As I have noted, Kahalaomapuana travels first to Kealohilani in the mouth of the giant lizard. Later, however, when her brother is about to send her to Kealohilani to get her out of the way while he has an affair with his wife's sister, "a rainbow is let down from above the earth" (Ibid., 588) on which she presumably ascends to Kealohilani. Hale'ole seems confused as to whether Kealohilani is on a plane level with, or above, the earth.

A number of concepts appear with sufficient frequency in these tales to suggest that they represent more than a myth maker's creative invention: the soul separated from the body in death, revival of the dead by restoring the soul to the body, separation of the soul from the body during sleep, and mixed conceptions of the location of the afterworld as being above, below, or at a horizontal distance from the living world. Another characteristic of otherworlds is their frequent association with older relatives or ancestors of the young person making a journey to them. Laukiamanu is guided to Kuaihelani by her grandaunt and her grandmother and once arrived

watched over and protected by the former. Kahalaomapuana is guided by two of her mother's brothers to the ancestral spiderweb in Kealohilani, and is further assisted by her grandmother in the form of an owl...this occurring, however, in an earthly setting. These associations are basic, as I will later explain, to understanding the sources of some of the confusion; these concepts occur often enough to suggest that they may have been significant elements in the ancient Hawaiian system of beliefs. Anthropologists and other serious observers of Hawaiian and other Polynesian cultures have given considerable attention to these ideas, a dominant one being the conceptualization of the soul or spirit.

SOUL OR SPIRIT: VITALITY OF POLYNESIAN BELIEFS

According to Martha Beckwith, Hawaiians had well-defined concepts of ghosts or spirits.

...practically every body is afraid of a lapu or invisible form of a dead person. It has a human shape and speaks in the same form as in life, but has the power of enlarging and contracting at will...The dead may enter an object, especially a bone and hence it is that Hawaiians fear to disturb human bones or to speak of sacred things lest they anger these spirits of the dead, who will then work them mischief. (1971, 144)

A special form of spirits previously mentioned were those of dead relatives, called 'aumākua or po'e o ka pō, people in the night, therefore "invisible people." But 'aumākua could assume visible, tangible forms because of their ability to make kino lau, many bodies. (Puku'i et al, 1972, 36) "For

the early Hawaiians, the 'aumākua as invisible force or intangible form were ever present, permeating thought and action." (Ibid., 37)

Another Polynesian group, the Samoans, similarly respected and feared spirits of the dead. Because of their fear they took great pains to propitiate the dying with presents, especially persons they had injured, because they had much to fear from their ghosts. (Frazer, 1922, 217) Samoans greatly feared the spirits of the unburied dead, believing that they haunted their relatives day and night, crying in doleful tones, "Oh, how cold! oh, how cold!" (Stair, 1897, 184) So the relative of a kinsman killed in battle or lost at sea came to the battlefield or the shore of the sea where he had been lost and spread a cloth on the ground, praying to a family god, "oh be kind to us; let us obtain without difficulty the spirit of the young man!" After that the first thing that lighted on the cloth--butterfly, ant, spider, whatever--was supposed to be the spirit of the dead. The family wrapped it up and took it home where with proper ceremony they buried it. (Ibid., 184)

Various Samoan places were believed to be the haunts of spirits or Aitu. "On the road leading from Falelatai to the Fangā there is a gap in a mountain top washed by the rains... which was said to have been formed by repeated blows from the club of a vindictive spirit.../which/ was continually assaulting travelling parties as they passed." (Ibid., 46) Sometimes people left a bit of food or another offering such

as a tree branch at places like this to placate the spirit.
(Ibid., 46)

The Society Islanders had varied and sometimes conflicting beliefs about the soul. Some thought that "when it is all over the soul ascends and mixes with or...is eaten by the deity." (James Cook, Voyages, V, 150 in Frazer, 1922, 298) Others believed that it entered one of the small wooden images about eighteen inches high which were placed around the burial site. (Frazer, 1922, 313)

When Tahitians died violent deaths, their spirits did not leave in the way of those of persons dying naturally. "They remained at the places where fatal accidents occurred, rendering these places sacred or dreaded. Such places as marae and battlefields were believed haunted by spirits of the dead." (Henry, 1928, 200)

An individual's spirit reflect^ed his image and could be raised to identify a person who had committed a crime. When a man had been robbed, he might call in a priest to ascertain the identity of the robber. The priest would have him dig a hole in the floor and fill it with water. Praying to his god, the priest would hold a plantain over the water. "The image of a spirit was, according to their account, reflected in the water, and the priest was thus able to identify the thief. According to Captain Cook, 'They maintain that not only all other animals, but trees, fruit, and even stones, have souls...'" (in Frazer, 1922, 297) "Thus, people believed they lived in

a world of spirits which surrounded them night and day, watching every action of their lives and ready to revenge the smallest slight or the least disobedience to their injunctions...." (Ibid., 304-5) Like the Hawaiians, the Society Islanders feared and respected the remains of their ancestors. They would not consider even visiting the caves where their ancestors' bones were secreted. This fear continued after they were Christianized. (Ibid., 304-5)

The Maori had a practice of killing wives and slaves to be buried with the deceased person of status, and of placing food beside the body. Frazer (Ibid., 24) interprets these practices as evidence that the Maori believed the souls of the dead to out-live their bodies and to have the power to do good or evil to the living. They classified the spirit medium, the material object which represents the spirit, into two types: human, called waka or kaupapa, and animal or other object called aria. The latter included such things as dogs, birds, rainbows, lightning, and certain kinds of stone. The lizard was a favored form of aria. (Best, 1924, 137)

Some Maori spirits, like the Hawaiian 'aumākua, served as watchful guardians over the lives and welfare of their human mediums. But these atua would protest in this way only so long as the medium made proper offerings and in other ways behaved appropriately. "...any mistake...in the recital of ritual matters...would assuredly be followed by unpleasant consequences." (Ibid., 132) Many Taranaki district people thought

that the soul stayed near the body and that hence "the sacred grove in which the remains were buried was full of disembodied spirits...." (Ibid., 26) In general, Maori feared spirits of dead relatives more than their gods, and were therefore especially careful in reciting genealogies. (Ibid., 33) If they feared atua less, though, they did associate them with pain and unpleasantness--with wars, murder, and lusts--rarely with good.

It is apparent that Hawaiians, Samoans, Tahitians, and Maori had a strong sense of the presence of souls of the dead and that they made a number of adjustments in their lives to accommodate that felt presence. Some of these related to the belief that the soul could separate from and return to the body.

SEPARATION OF THE SOUL FROM THE BODY
AT THE MOMENT OF DEATH OR FALLING ASLEEP

The idea that the soul ('uhane) left the body (kino) during sleep was, according to Martha Beckwith, a widely held belief of Hawaiians. "The spirit may wander away from the living body, leaving it asleep or merely listless and drowsy, and visit another in a dream or as an apparition (hihi'o) while the other is awake." (1970,144)

Samoans as well believed that the soul departs the body temporarily in faints and dreams. The soul of the dreamer, they also thought, really visited the places and people he saw in his dreams. At the moment of death people sometimes tried to drive the apparition away by shouting and firing guns. (Frazer, 1922,205) "Some people professed to see the departed

soul when it had quitted its mortal body and was about to take flight to the nether region." (Ibid., 205) And when a man was dying, "they believed that his bed was surrounded by spirits waiting to bear off the soul; hence people were afraid to go out at night, lest they should be carried off by these spirits...." (Williamson, 1933, 321)

Tahitians, too, believed that dreams involved the absence of the soul. And they thought, according to Captain James Cook, that the soul keeps fluttering about the lips of the dying. (in Frazer, 1922, 298) When a person actually died, they said his soul was "fled away, hārre pō, gone to night." (Ibid., 297) However, according to writer Teuira Henry (1928, 200) some believed that the Tahitian soul did not leave immediately but stayed by the body for three days. Some of these people, she notes, said that they could see such a spirit.

The Maori soul also "is free to quit the bodily mansion... and return to it without prejudice to...life and health...." (Frazer, 1922, 12) But at death the Maori were known to take special precautions to insure a proper separation. The body was placed with the feet pointing north (the direction of the Maori leaping-place for souls) and surrounded by all blood relatives. The priest chanted two incantations, the second of which was supposed to assist the soul to heaven. Later, flaxen cords were attached to a tassel on the mat enshrouding the body, and at a signal a boy and a girl who were holding the cords gave a jerk "to disconnect the soul from the body, lest it

should remain and afflict the relatives." (Ibid., 25) When a chief was killed and his body eaten, his departed spirit entered the stones of the oven in which his body had been cooked. His friends and relatives chanted their most powerful spells to draw the spirit home to the sacred grove of spirits. (Ibid., 26)

The Maori said, too, that the soul of a dreamer had left his body and rambled away. "Hence, no well-bred Maori would waken a sleeper suddenly by shaking him or calling out to him in a loud voice." (Ibid., 12) He must wake the sleeper gradually to give the soul time to return. Because Maori believed in the ability of the soul to detach from the body during sleep, they placed much credence in dreams as a means gods took to warn them. (Ibid., 12)

Beliefs about the separation of the soul from the body during sleep appear to have been nearly uniform among the four Polynesian groups considered here. Theories about the soul at the moment of death, on the other hand, varied. Some believed that it departed immediately for the land of the spirits, others that it stayed near the body for a time or entered images placed nearby for that purpose.

THE SOUL AND ILLNESS

One of the effects the soul or the spirit of the dead had upon the living was to cause illness. An incident involving Milu, mythical ruler of their underworld illustrates the Hawaiian belief. In ancient times, before he went to the nether-

world, Milu incurred the wrath of Ka'ala-e-nui-a-hina, who, with his foreign party newly arrived in Hawai'i, tried to kill Milu. Through the evil work of this party, Milu became sick. Lonopuha, a healer, came to Milu, said chants, and put on wet leaf poultices, causing Milu to get well. For "one whole moon," however, Milu had to rest in a house built of evil-repressing ti leaves. (Alpers, 1970, 258)

That illness can be caused by sorcery and cured by mystical means seems to have been a common Polynesian belief. The Samoans thought that the souls of the dead could return to the land of the living by night and cause disease and death by entering the bodies of either their friends or their enemies. (Frazer, 1922, 217) Sometimes Samoans attributed disease and death to the anger of a god. Epilepsy, delerium, and mania, for example, were explained in this manner. (Ibid., 206) When a chief was dying from an illness, people gathered in front of his house and beat their heads and bodies with rocks till blood flowed. Not only was this an offering of sympathy and affection for their friend or lord; it was an appeasement to the spirit which was causing his affliction. If that did not work, they began to threaten and upbraid: "O thou shameless spirit, could I but grasp you, I would tear your skull to pieces." (Stair, 1897, 181)

To cure illness, the Samoan relied not on medicine but exorcism. "Sometimes a near relative of the sick person would go around the house brandishing a spear and striking the walls

to drive away the spirit that was causing the sickness." (Frazer, 1922, 206-7)

The Maori had views that differed only in detail. "The only cause from which sickness is ever imagined to originate is spirits who have entered the body of the sufferer. Their belief is that all neglect or infringement of the law of tapu... moves the atua of the family to anger, who punishes the offender by sending some infant spirit to feed on a part of his body...." (Shortland, 1856, 114) Atua kahu, the spirits of still born children, were believed particularly malignant, causing disease and so forth. Burial by an expert who knew how to render the spirit harmless was necessary to prevent extensive mischief. "These malignant spirits were numerous in Maori belief, and were ever disposed to attack man, hence the Maori considered himself always in danger of attack from them." (Best, 1924, 128) Sometimes sick persons were advised to move to another locality to escape the spirits afflicting them. (Ibid., 128)

The Maori employed a unique cure. When a person became ill, usually the father visited the matakate or seer of the family to learn the cause. Having learned, usually, that it was an avenging spirit, the father told a tohunga, who then worked at discovering the road by which the spirit came to earth. Going to a river or seaside, he dipped his head in water until he was able to report that he had seen the path. Usually he said that the spirit had risen from below through a flax bush or the stem of a toetoe because the inner shoots of these plants are

generally thought to be spirit paths. The tohunga then set out to find the specific plant, pulled it up, and hung it in the sick man's house over his head. "Then the spirit relented, and seeing a path close at hand prepared for his return to the lower regions, he departed and straightway the sick man was convalescent." (Shortland, 1856, 125-128)

According to Frazer, (1922, 301) the Society Islanders also thought most cases of illness attributable to the displeasure of deified spirits of the dead. Like the Samoans, when a friend died, they gashed and battered themselves, offering their blood to the soul of the departed. (Ibid., 304)

In fact, the spirit possession-illness relationship has had many adherents worldwide. "People of the lower culture stages have/ever believed that all sickness and disease are caused by malignant powers, and in many cases that such evil spirits actually enter and abide in the body of the afflicted person...." (Best, 1924, 128) This same belief, Best said, appears in the Bible and in Catholicism and is manifest in the laying on of hands to cure disease, which is essentially an Asian belief. "Thus, possession by evil spirits is a belief that has been world wide until recent times, from New Zealand right across the world to Ireland." (Ibid., 128)

ENTRANCE TO THE AFTERWORLD

Though the Polynesians had a strong sense of spirits' presence on earth, they also visualized them in a world or

worlds of the dead and had rather specific ideas regarding the means by which they arrived there. The Hawaiians call the place from which souls leap into eternity a leina, a short form of leina-a-ke-akua or leina-a-ka-'uhane. The leina were located on certain cliffs or precipices on each island. (Puku'i et al, 1972, 131) Beckwith says that this leaping-off place on O'ahu--two, actually: one at Ka'ena Point and another at Pu'uloa--had connection "with a branching tree as a roadway of the soul." (1970, 154) 'Aumākua protected the soul and led it to its 'aumakua world. Beckwith gives two versions of the tree's function. The spirit either grasped a branch to avoid being thrown into pō or leaped from the tree for quicker entry. (Ibid., 156-7) Thrum notes several other entrances to the underworld in the Hawaiian Islands. "In the myth of Hiku and Kawela, the entrance to the Lua of Milu is placed out to sea opposite Holualoa and a few miles south of Kailua, [Hawai'i]." (1901, 48) The more common one, though, was at the mouth of the great valley of Waipi'o. There were also precipices from which ghosts were believed to leap into the "region of woe" located at the northern extremity of Hawai'i and the western end of Maui. (Ibid., 50)

One of the Tahitian entrances to the netherlands was an extinct crater called Te Mehani, in the island of Ra'iatea, near Tahiti. A sailor by the name of Perkins once descended into the pit and entered one of the many passages leading from it. Inside he heard the fall and rush of a mighty stream of

water. (Henry, 1901, 51) Another version of the Tahitian entrance is that the spirit went to Tata'a Hill at Puna'auia, the meeting place for disembodied souls. If it alighted on the ofai-ora, stone of life, it could if powerfully attracted return to its body; if it alighted on the ofai-pohe, stone of death, it was forever separated from the mortal remains. (Henry, 1928, 200)

Descriptions of Samoan entrances to the afterworld are varied and explicit. The main entrance, O le Fafā, was located to the westward of Savai'i. Souls departing from the islands to the east leaped off westward points, swam to the next island to the west, crossed the island, once more leaped into the ocean and continued til they reached O le Fafā. Upolu has a leaping stone on a narrow rocky point on the west end of the island from which all spirits were said to leap into the sea on their journey to the Fafā. This was a weird, much dreaded spot. O le Fafā had two separate lua or holes, O le loto o tau fanua, or deep hole of the common people on their way to Le Nu'uononoa, and O le lua loto ali'i, for chiefs on their way to Puloa. (Stair, 1896, 38-9) Frazer (1922, 215) says that the Samoan entrance, like the Hawaiian, had a tree nearby--a coconut tree. If a soul collided against it, it returned to its body. Thus, if a man recovered from a deep swoon, his friends supposed that his soul had collided with that tree. They said, "He has come back from the tree of the watcher."

Another means by which at one time Samoans--as well as

Niueans and Fijians--were believed to journey to the after-world was by canoe. "...a body would be rudely embalmed and set adrift in a canoe...The use of a canoe in embalming ritual in Samoa, where it supports the platforms on which the body lies, and in New Zealand, as the frame on which the corpse is dissipated...is probably a survival of this custom...." (Moss, 1925,10)

The canoe image appears in another, somewhat modified form. "In Samoa, New Zealand, and Fiji the soul is paddled across to the spirit-land by a ferryman, in certain parts of Vanau Levu a canoe-shaped island being pointed out as the ship of the dead, and the canoe-coffin in the Lau Islands [a] supposed [means of taking] the chief to his ancestral home...." (Ibid., 9-10) Sources consulted here do not indicate whether these canoe journeys were always to the west, but the idea of rejoining ancestors remains a key factor in the soul's travel.

NATURE OF THE AFTERWORLD

The Hawaiian perception of the afterworld, as the legend summaries near the beginning of this discussion illustrate, is multi-faceted, including as it does an unpleasant nether world of Milu and another sometimes pleasant one of Pō, a series of floating islands or hidden lands of Kane, a distant land somewhere beyond the horizon, and heaven or the upper world, which is divided into several levels.

Puku'i's depiction of Pō, except for its location in the nether world, makes it about as close to the Christian ideal

as one could conceive.

There is a sea of time, so vast man cannot know its boundaries, so fathomless man cannot plumb its depth. Into this dark sea plunge the spirits of men released from their heavenly bodies. The sea becomes one with the sky and the land and the fiery surgings that rise from deep in the restless earth. For this is the measureless expanse of all space. This is the timelessness of all time. This is eternity. This is Pō.

(1972, 35)

The spirits of mortals who had offended their 'aumakua in life, called 'ao kuewa', were denied a place in the happier eternity of Pō and doomed to wander certain areas forever, "chasing moths and grasshoppers in a vain effort to appease hunger." (Ibid., 35) Puku'i includes no references to other afterworlds in this source. But Bryan (in Moss, 1925, 45-6) identified an ancestral home at Wakea, which some souls, probably those of commoners, could not enter. These went down to an abode of misery far below from a leaping-off place on the coast. This netherworld seems linked with depressing Milu rather than Puku'i's pleasant, peaceful Pō. Bryan noted that the Hawaiian netherworld seemed to have become confused with Pō, but said that accounts on the subject were not all that clear. (Moss, 1925, 46)

Rice saw the floating concept such as appears in Colum's "Rolling Island" as a significant dimension of Hawaiian other-worlds.

In myth Kane and Kanaloa are represented as gods living in...an unearthly paradise...in a floating cloudland or other sacred and remote spot.... Often this land is located upon one of the twelve sacred islands under the control of Kane believed to be off the Hawaiian group within easy reach and having frequent intercourse with it.... At sunrise they may still be seen on the distant horizon, sometimes touched by a reddish light. They may lie under the sea or upon its surface, approach close to land, or be raised and float in the air according to the will of the gods. They are sacred and must not be pointed at.

(in Beckwith, 1971, 67)

Kuaihelani or Supporting Heaven, Beckwith says, (Ibid., 78-79) "is the name of the cloudland adjoining earth and is the land most commonly named in visits to the heavens or to lands distant from Hawai'i" (Ibid., 79)--as "The Daughter of the King of Kuaihelani" and "Rolling Island" illustrate. Above Kuaihelani, Beckwith notes (and as Hale'ole depicts in La'ieikawai), lies Nu'umealani, the land in the clouds, where live numerous deities. "Accustomed as they are to dividing up the universe according to rank, Hawaiians easily think in terms of above and below, drawing an invisible line in space between Kuaihelani and Nu'umealani, between Lewa-lani, that region of air which lies next to the heavens of the gods, and Lewa-nu'u, which lies below, next to the tree tops" (1971, 80)

The observations of the above writers do as much to confirm a previously recognized fact that the Hawaiian cosmos is complex as to untangle the complexity. Relationships between the concepts of the Hawaiian and those of other Polynesians, though, give some help in clarifying the Hawaiian viewpoint.

The Samoans appear to have had a clear, consistent picture of an afterworld. It reflects their consciousness, like the Hawaiians, of rank and position, of putting every person in his proper place. As indicated earlier, they had three places associated with the dead, all of which were important in their mythology: O le Fafā, a general entrance and a kind of Hades, which was alike the entrance to Sa le Fa'a, the Samoan Tartarus or dread place of punishment, and to Pulotu, the place of the blessed. As noted before, chiefs went to the latter and commoners to the former. The commoners' place was also known as Le Nu'uononoa, the land of the bound. (Stair, 1896, 38) Nonoa, according to Moss (1925, 45), means "of no account" and was an abode commoners much dreaded.

The underworld of Pulotu was conceived as a model of our upper world, with heavens, earth, sea, fruits, and flowers, with planting, cooking, and marriage. (Frazer, 1922, 216) In it "the deified spirits of chiefs appear to have comprised another order of spiritual beings, the more exalted of whom were supposed to become posts in the temple of the gods at Pulotu." (Stair, 1896, 36) This temple was the royal house of assembly of Saveosiuleo, Saveo the Echo, king of Pulotu, whose upper body was human but "the lower part like that of a fish [which] stretched away to the sea." (Frazer, 1922, 217) On earth "the embalmed bodies of chiefs of rank...were...renowned under the name of Tupua, which name also...appears to have applied to blocks of stone and other objects...into

which certain chiefs were supposed to have changed at their death." (Stair, 1896, 36)

Samoans would seem to have had one world of the dead located in one agreed-upon place. But Frazer (1922, 214), presents other views. According to a Dr. Brown, he reports, there was no distinction between the souls of the nobility and those of the commoners. He notes also that American ethnologist Horatio Hale (1846, 27, in Frazer, 1922, 214) stated that though the souls of chiefs went to Pulotu, those of the commoners perished with their bodies. Another view, Frazer says, was that the souls of the dead lived in a subterranean world where they were devoured by the gods.

The Society Islanders seem to have left the concept of an afterworld--which like the Hawaiians they called Pō--vague and indefinite. They did not think of it as some western isle which to reach souls had to cross an expanse of sea--as western Polynesians did. (Ibid., 316) Like the Samoans, they preserved some concept of class, believing that spirits were assigned places of dwelling different in degrees of happiness or misery--these dependent on the rank they had held on earth. They did not think that good or bad action in life had any bearing on the life after. (Ibid., 318) Leeward Islanders, especially, believed that some souls were destined for a kind of heaven or paradise, a place full of flowers, pure air, every sort of delight. Only chiefs, though, were thought to have this prospect. (Ibid., 319)

As illustrated earlier (p. 11), the Maori, too, saw afterlife as a continuation of that on earth, a chief being accompanied in death by one or more of his wives and some of his slaves. This view is indicated also by the fact that a warrior was surrounded by his weapons so that he could "fight his battles in spirit land." (Ibid., 20) The Maori had a complex concept of Honoawairua, the place where the souls of the dead congregated. It was manned by numerous guardians who performed such functions as protecting Ranginui, the sky parent who controlled movements of the sea, the winds, snow, rain, clouds, and the like. The guardians, in addition, controlled disease and sickness, regulated the length of summer and winter, and acted as preservers of occult knowledge. (Best, 1924, 65) The underworld of Pō, into which the souls of commoners leaped from Te Reinga on North Cape, was the darkness out of which life and light were created. (Frazer, 1922, 27)

Against this definitive picture is set Frazer's statement that the Maori had unclear, inconsistent accounts.

According to one, heavens increase in beauty as they ascend one above the other, while lower regions increase in darkness and horror as they descend, each one being darker and worse than the one above it till in the lowest of all complete darkness reigns. There the souls, deprived alike of light and food, wasted away and ultimately ceased to exist; or according to another account they assumed the shape of worms and in that guise returned to earth, where they died a second death and so finally perished. (Ibid., 29)

Moss agrees that the fate of the Maori soul was somber--"on the whole an undesirable one (although some natives deny this),

leading to loss of faculties and to final disintegration." (1925, 135) And then, ironically in the light of what Frazer and Best have described, she says, "...but all is vague, and the Maori--like most Polynesians--displayed a lack of interest in the whole subject." (Ibid., 135)

CONCLUSIONS

Given the range of Polynesian religious beliefs, it is not strange that outsiders sometimes disagreed about what these beliefs were. The ancient Hawaiian had varied and confused conceptions of the afterworld, and so in differing degrees did the Samoans, the Society Islanders, and the Maori. In Hawaiian mythology a person journeying to other worlds sometimes traversed great horizontal distances, sometimes climbed upwards by several levels, and at others descended below the sea. Kahiki or Tahiti, legendary home from which they had emigrated, was in some cases depicted as being located in the heavens, as was Kuaihelani, the Country that Supports the Heavens; and Kealohilani, the Shining Heavens, was pictured as lying at sea level. The land of Pō deep in the sea or below the earth is shown variously as a place of peace and fulfillment and as a place of darkness and horror.

The soul was believed at once to inhabit the land of the dead and to infuse the world of the living with both a supportive and a recriminatory presence. It leaped from a rock into the sea, where it followed the path of the setting sun and plunged beneath the ocean. It descended through the opening

of a volcano or a pit in the sea, drifted off across the ocean to the land of spirits, and rose immediately to heaven.

Perhaps contributing to the general ambiguity was ambiguity of terminology. Havaiki, Hawaiki, Avaiki, Hawai'i, and Savai'i are different pronunciations for a universal--and hence very old--name which became synonymous with "spirit land." The confusion over whether this land was below or to the west may result from a confusion of the term raro, lalo, or a'o, which meant "below" but also "west" to all central Pacific Polynesians. "In all cases the spirit, while passing to the westward, was said to go downwards, i.e., to dive into the sea, and then pass along to the sunset. It was in this manner that Hawaiki had come to be used for the place of departed spirits. (Williamson, 1933, 318) Hale (1846, 22) said that in all the islands except New Zealand the words "below," "lee-ward," and "westward" were synonymous. He also felt that this overlap in meaning contributed to the differences in conceptions of Havaiki's location. Williamson warned that because of the ambiguity of these terms and the variability of native beliefs, interpretation and coordination of evidence about the nature of the Polynesian soul and afterlife are difficult and often impossible. (1933, 318)

Out of the variations, nevertheless, emerge several significant patterns which lend themselves to generalization. One is that in each of the four cultures discussed here, to the living the spirits of the dead had a vivid, almost pal-

pable presence. Examples can be seen in the ideas that the soul departed the body during sleep and returned on the awakening, that the dead could be revived by the return of the soul to the body, and to the numerous manifestations of the soul's presence among the living in causing illness. It is apparent that the sense of that presence gave life a stronger religious tone and exerted considerable control over individual behavior.

All four groups had a Te Reinga, a leaping place from which the soul departed the world of the living, and for the Hawaiians, Samoans, and Maori this place was located on either a western or a northern promontory--usually pointing in the direction from which the original island inhabitants had emigrated. All except the Hawaiians appear at one time to have used canoe burial rites, in which the body--and, presumably, the soul--was set adrift to return to some ancestral land.

And on each of the four island groups the world of the dead was dominated by and associated with adult ancestors. Although the existence of this ancestral influence seems implicit in the very concept of such a world, it is clear at least from the Hawaiian legends cited that Polynesians had a much stronger ancestor sense than do Westerners.

If the soul was to return to the land of the dead, where was it to go? On the one hand, there was the sky world, the land of Tangaroa and Kane, mythical creators of the human race. And then there was Kahiki, land of origin which was

itself so far in the past as to be only a vaguely distant tribal memory. "...its actual locality is so remote in space and time that it now has become a mythical island in the far west, or even a region under the sea...." (Moss, 1925, 9)

Kahiki or Hawaiki "for most of central and eastern Polynesia was both a land of the spirits--someplace located in the sky--and an ancestral home in the west. (Poignant, 1967, 22-23)

The Polynesians and their ancestors had migrated in the general direction of west to east. They placed their leaping-off places for souls mostly on western points of their islands so that the spirits could return to the home of their ancestors. But they also had long traditions which placed the land of the dead in the sky or deep in the sea. These places, too, were associated with ancestral spirits. Gradually, the three places must have merged in the Polynesian memory so that the afterworld was in all three places, sometimes as separately perceived locales, and sometimes blended.

The ambiguity in Hawaiian myths about the location of afterworlds, then, is explainable partly in terms of tribal history: images of the afterworld connect with the history of migration. The ambiguity reflects overlapping images of ancestors associated sometimes with the land of origin, sometimes with a place in the heavens, sometimes with the world of the deep. The Western mind would prefer to keep these images distinct and separate, but the Polynesian apparently was content to let them alternately separate and fuse.

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