Classical/medieval views of the happy afterlife

Ad Vanden Ekart

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CLASSICAL/MEDIEVAL VIEWS OF THE
HAPPY AFTERLIFE

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State College,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
with a
Special Major

by
Ad Vanden Ekart
June 1977
CLASSICAL/MEDIEVAL VIEWS OF THE HAPPY AFTERLIFE

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Approved by:

[Signature]
Chairman
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In his treatise *On the Soul* Aristotle states that:

We regard all knowledge as beautiful and valuable, but one kind more so than another, either in virtue of its accuracy, or because it relates to higher and more wonderful things. On both these counts it is reasonable to regard the inquiry concerning the soul as of the first importance.

I agree with this statement, therefore this inquiry into the state of the soul after death. Such a question naturally involves a number of beliefs, which have been best illustrated by a good imagination throughout the ages. It is an involved subject, too broad to do complete justice in such a short study. Thus I will restrict myself to one facet of the total question: the optimistic view of the afterlife. I chose to examine this side of the question, not only because of our inclination to look on the bright side of things, but also because of the relative lack of documentation concerning the happy afterlife as opposed to the often more dramatic views of Hades or Hell.

This question of the happy afterlife proved to be an interesting subject, to myself, and hopefully, also to the reader. It sheds new light on the ancient beliefs of the Greeks, Romans, and the Medieval beliefs. A greater
sense of one's own heritage will be gained from this study, showing a definite link between the present and the past.

When setting out on this inquiry, I expected to illustrate the various beliefs of the early Greeks, Virgil, and Dante. What I found was a development of the concept from one generation to the next, an idea growing more complex as society itself grew more complex. The relatively simple early Greek view of Elysium grew more complex, achieving its heights in the thought of Plato. Virgil adopted and built upon these Greek ideas just as the Roman world built upon the Greek world. The various Greek ideas Virgil adopted into his thought were the summation of the pagan view of a happy afterlife.

Christianity replaced paganism, initiating some important changes in the concept of the afterlife. Building upon the groundwork laid down by the classical authors, Dante exemplifies these changes and presents us with the medieval Christian view. It is such a complete view that it has prevailed down to our own day.

Throughout this study the reader is enabled to focus his attention upon the changes the concept of the happy afterlife has undergone. For the ancient Greeks it was only this life on earth which held any value, the inevitability of death was the most horrid thing imaginable to them. They yearned for immortality which could be fulfilled only by the begetting of sons who would keep their memory
alive on earth. From such beliefs, which did not actually satisfy, what I shall call the "inner spiritual yearning" of the human soul, the Greek hoped that there just possibly might be something better after all.

Elysium was imagined, as a place where immortality could be found in a setting of earthly pleasures and beauty. This concept then developed into Paradise, the perfection of both the spiritual and the earthly life. From a happy afterlife achieved by mere chance, the process of development has determined that this happy afterlife has to be earned. The most significant idea to remember in this whole process of change is the new emphasis placed upon the future life as containing all importance.

Thus, this thesis will examine the various changes in concept and try to interrelate the various beliefs while presenting a picture of the happy afterlife as conceived by the Greeks, the Romans (Virgil), and Dante, the medieval man. One result I hope to achieve is the showing that, in various degrees, one generation is dependent upon the previous generations for the continued advancement of civilization.
CHAPTER II

GREEK

The Greek view of the afterlife is a bleak one at best. The Homeric concept of shades flitting about like bats in Hades seems cruel, for which an inquiring Greek could compensate with a belief that there had to be more than such a shadowy existence after death.

From the time of Homer, and throughout later Greek thought and religion, there came to be a growing belief in immortality. At first for a select few only, this belief eventually grew into the concept of a blessed afterlife, possibly attainable by all.

But what was the Greek idea of a happy afterlife? A continuation of this earthly life after death, preferably without its attendant pains, was the beginning of a tradition which grew into the happy afterlife as the reward of a just life with its moral implications lived here on earth.

The Greek instinct for reasoning and quest for knowledge exerted tremendous force upon Western civilization. They emerged from a world of mystery and magic into the dawn of a new civilization, their genius changing a "world of fear into a world of beauty."1
The early peoples, who came to be known as the Greeks, came from the North in waves of migrations during the second millenium B.C. They settled the Peloponnessus, the Aegean islands, and the coast of Asia Minor, in the process absorbing the indigenous population. Like all primitive people, the Greeks lived at the mercy of the unfriendly elements, but it was in this that the brilliant Greek mind differed from that of other people, for "they tried to reason from experience." The Greeks questioned the daily occurrences of nature in the universe, and man's relationship to the forces of nature. From explanations of these forces myths evolved which attempted to explain the workings of natural phenomena. The Greeks believed there were magical, unseen beings, or gods, who were responsible for the storms which buffeted man throughout his existence. Out of these explanations the Greek religion was formed and set down, first, in verse, and later in prose. The gods were assigned responsibility for what happened in the universe, heroes being the men able to rise by divine assistance above the ordinary level of mankind.

Every power of nature was conceived of as a spiritual being. There were the gods of the sky, thunder, sea, water, storms, and the spirits of the trees, caves, and mountains. They gradually acquired names, such as Zeus the thunderer, Apollo, the god of the sun, or
Poseidon, the god of horses and of the sea. The vivid imagination of the Greeks pictured these gods in the likeness of human shape, but glorious beyond the level of ordinary man. In the Greek concept of the anthropomorphic gods was the beginning of the later, more complex Greek religion. With the early migrations many cults and deities were brought into Greece mingling with the local deities. Often the same gods, under different names, were worshipped at many shrines, with pre-historic heroes sometimes also having shrines established in their honour.

Homer, who may or may not have been a historical figure, is the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. He flourished sometime during the ninth or tenth century B.C., the first extant figure in Greek literature, coming at the end of one era and the beginning of the next. He gathered the old traditions, blended it with the new, and reworked it into the classic epics of Greek literature.

The Homeric epic is in part a story of gods and men, in part a history of early civilizations in the Eastern Mediterranean. In telling the story, Homer has gathered a multitude of customs and beliefs, recording his pantheon of Olympian gods. These gods formed the basis of the traditional Greek religion.

The Homeric world is peopled with a multitude of deities, but individuals in the fullest sense of the word, "free and independent, except in so far as their liberty
is circumscribed by Zeus and Fate." The gods were much like man, with all his faults and emotions, except for the one thing that man had always desired, immortality.

The gods could be beneficent deities pleased with the ways of man, or they could rail against him with the full force of their divine hatred. There was division among the gods, as among men, each having his own favorite human. Man was always at their complete mercy:

Yet all the gods had pitied Lord Odysseus all but Poseidon, raging cold and rough against the brave king. . . .

To gain divine favors sacrificial offerings were presented to the necessary god or goddess. No emotion, except fear was necessary for religious worship; it was primarily a matter between the worshipper and his gods.

Homer draws from the store of early myths to show this favoritism of the gods for earthlings. He tells of Ganymede who became cupbearer to Zeus on Olympus because of his beauty:

... and Ganymedes handsomest of mortals, whom the gods caught up to pour out drink for Zeus and live amid immortals for his beauty's sake.

Orion, a mighty hunter, was placed in the sky as a constellation, as were also the twin brothers, Castor and Polydeuces, as the constellation Gemini. One of the greatest Greek heroes, Heracles, gained the distinction of being both in the underworld where he was a mere "phantom," while the real Heracles, up to Olympus
This story indicates that immortality seemed a possibility, at least for certain individuals. Actually, the idea of immortality had a long history behind it, which the Greeks, according to Herodotus, had derived from the Egyptians, the first to accept this theory.

The ancient myths allowed for the idea of immortality, which Homer adopted in his epic. Throughout the battle scenes of the Iliad, very often some god's favorite hero might be needing the aid of his favorite god or goddess. Very often this aid consisted of the deity "translating" the hero from the scene of battle to a safe place.

... but Apollo He whisked away Agenor, hid him in a mist, and quietly removed him from the war.

Also Zeus wonders:

shall I catch up Tarpedon out of the mortal fight with all its woes and put him down alive in Lykia, in that rich land?

The desire of a god "to pluck a man he loves out of the battle" leads naturally to the idea of taking men to a place of ease and comfort. Such a place Homer foresaw in his Elysion, where Menelaus was to spend his eternal life.

... prince Menelaus, you shall not die in the bluegrass land of Argos; rather the gods intend you for Elysion.

Menelaus, son-in-law of Zeus, was granted this special privilege of continued life in spite of having done
nothing to deserve it. In fact, moral goodness was not a pre-requisite to Elysion, for Menelaus even neglected the customary sacrifices upon embarking for home from Troy. As a punishment for this sacrilege his ship was blown off course to the shores of Egypt. Yet, Elysion remained his destiny.

Homer is the first to mention such a place as Elysion, the genesis of an idea which, to the inquiring mind of the early Greek, offered an alternative to the pessimistic view of Hades after death. Here is a ray of hope for the Greeks, which was to develop, through the ages, into a place of pure happiness attainable by all. But how did Homer conceive this Elysion? By contrasting it with his views of death, and Hades in general, we are able to get a fair picture.

"Though as for death, of course all men must suffer it,"19 and this cessation of life has always aroused man's astonishment, "believing that if it is not due to visible forces, then some invisible magic must have caused it."20 For Homer, at death, the soul, or psyche, (a word related to the words "breath" or "wind") left the body, generally through the mouth or the opening of a wound, flowing out with the blood: "so he extracted life and blade together."21 A burial of the body was then necessary so that the phantom could cross the River Styx in all haste, to find its final rest in the underworld. The ghost
of Patroclus begs of Achilles to bury his body:

In all haste: let me pass the gates of Death. Shades that are images of used-up men motion me away, will not receive me among their hosts beyond the river, I wander about the wide gates and the hall of Death.22

In the Homeric world death was most hateful. Achilles, who had power even among the dead, would rather that he yet had life.

Better, I say, to break sod as a farm hand for some poor country man, on iron rations, than lord it over all the exhausted dead.23

This is the Homeric view of the shadow-life existence, the invisible counterpart of the visible life on earth. The shadowy hosts of souls are pictured in the dank halls of Hades, flitting about like bats, showing no emotion or intelligence, though

A wisp of life remains in the undergloom of Death, a visible form, though no heart beats within it.24

James Adam attempts to explain such existence, saying, "But though alive enough to feel they are dead, they are hardly dead enough to forget they are alive."25 This must be the utmost horror in the Hades of Homer, the existence as a mere shade.

There were no rewards or punishments in this afterlife for the ordinary shades of mankind, though from ancient times there have been, in the wastes of Hades, such sufferings as Sisyphus or Tantalus endure. Tortures are the result of some offense against the gods themselves,
for which the offender suffers eternal torment. This is the realm of Hades who "received the dark mist at the world's end." Generally believed to be underneath the earth, the "sunless underworld" is the abode of the dead.

With Hades beneath the earth, where then is Elysion? Many theories have been put forward, many tending to place it on a Western isle, beyond the reach of mortal man. Homer places it "at the world's end," generally believed to be past the Pillars of Heracles, somewhere out in the Atlantic Ocean. This is later to give rise to the myth of Atlantis, which Plato describes so well in his *Timaeus*.

The view of Hades does not hold much hope for a happy afterlife, but Elysion does. It is a place for immortals, at first restricted to those directly chosen by the gods to be placed there, such as Menelaus. But in time Elysion was to become a place where all Greeks could hope to go. It was a place of happiness where life would be or could continue without the usual human pains and sorrows, a place far removed from Hades. From the belief that there is nothing after death, except a seemingly bleak existence, the Greek mind has advanced to a belief of the possibility of a happy afterlife by imagining that there actually is such a place as Elysion. Homer's description of Elysion is like the abode of the gods, Olympus, itself:
Elysion... where all existence is a dream of ease. Snow fall is never known there, neither long frost of winter, nor torrential rain, but only mild and lulling airs' from Ocean bearing refreshment for the souls of men—the West Wind always blowing.

Compare the description of Elysion with the description of Olympus, and one can readily see the resemblance:

... in the fastness of Olympos. Never a tremor of wind, or a splash of rain, no errant snowflake comes to stain the heaven, so calm, so vaporless, the world of light. Here where the gay gods live their days of pleasure.

To be like the gods themselves has often been a desire of man, and a life of ease, without the toils and uncertainties of earthly existence, certainly closely approaches the life of a god. In Homer's Elysion there is the possibility of such an existence, though only for a select few. But Homer, in realizing that there must be a place removed from his Hades, has given a ray of hope to the Greeks, and to all of the future Western civilization.

This concept of a happy afterlife proved to be readily acceptable to the clear intellect of the Greek artist, Homer's near-contemporary, Hesiod, a farmer-poet from Boeotia, continuing what Homer had initially started. Hesiod's gods are the gods of Homer. They live a life of ease on Mount Olympus while freely mingling with mortal man on earth:

... those deathless ones who lay with mortal men and bare children like unto gods.

The history of these god-like children is what he tells
of in his *Works and Days*. Hesiod tells of the five ages of man and of how evil came to be, the symbol of Pandora's box opening all evils on the world, allowing for hope to keep up man's struggle for life in the face of all adversity.

Before the creation of womankind Hesiod conceives the world as perfection, with man living in complete harmony with the gods, "For ere this the tribes of men lived on earth remote and free from ills and hard toil and heavy sicknesses," in a place not unlike what we know as the Garden of Eden.

Hesiod envisions five great ages of man. First came the golden race of men who lived, when Cronus reigned in heaven, "like gods without sorrow of heart, remote and free from toil and grief: miserable age rested not on them." This race of men was untouched by evil and were happy in all things. After a life of ease and pleasure they were to die, for they were mortal, after all. But when they died:

... it was as though they were overcome with sleep, and they had all good things; for the fruitful earth unforced bare them fruit abundantly and without stint. They dwelt in ease and peace upon their lands with many good things, rich in flocks and loved by the blessed gods.

After death they remained to "roam everywhere over the earth, clothed in mist" as "daimones," spirits comparable to the guardian angels of later Christianity. Hesiod
believed them to lead a conscious existence after death, a concept not specifically mentioned by Homer. But these daimones are from an ancient pre-historic era, to whom it may not seem unreasonable to attribute qualities of minor gods or protecting spirits, with them, in time, becoming identified as deities themselves. Erwin Rohde believes that this proves that in the distant Greek past there was a belief in a continued conscious existence of the psyche after its separation from the body. This may be a belief which has survived in some of the more remote areas of the Greek peninsula, of which Hesiod may have had some knowledge.39

Besides living a life of ease, the daimones of the golden age were to watch over a new race of man:

... a second generation which was of silver and less noble by far.40

It was during this generation that evil entered the world and doomed mankind. Under the influence of this evil, man gradually lost his close relationship with the gods, so Zeus, the son of Cronus, who now ruled in heaven:

... was angry and put them away, because they would not give honour to the blessed gods who live on Olympus.41

Hesiod meant this as a warning to future ages of man, for them to pay their just dues to the gods. But the warning went largely undeeded, and this race, as all races, was doomed to die. And yet, since they were of the silver
race, honor attended them, and they were called "blessed spirits of the underworld."42

The degeneracy of mankind continued with the third race of mortal men who were in no way equal to the silver race. They loved the works of Ares, the god of war, and all deeds of violence. They used implements of bronze with which they destroyed themselves. Being ruled by evil there was, for them, no possibility of ever gaining immortality. They were too much unlike the gods. At death they passed:

. . . to the dank house of chill Hades, and left no name: . . . black Death seized them, and they left the bright light of the sun.43

The fourth generation of man was "a god-like race of hero-men who are called demi-gods."44 These were the famous heroes who fought at Thebes and Troy, those heroes of whom we hear so much in the epics. Death claimed many of these heroes and sent them down into the realm of Hades. Homer had given us a belief in the possibility of immortality for a few select heroes. Hesiod follows this tradition but develops it by being more readily willing to place his heroes in a Elysion,45 where:

Zeus, the son of Cronos, gave a living and an abode apart from men, and made them dwell at the ends of the earth. And they live untouched by sorrow in the islands of the blessed along the shore of deep swirling Ocean, happy heroes for whom the grain-giving earth bears honey-sweet fruit flourishing thrice a year, far from the deathless gods, and Cronos rules over them.46

Here, as with Homer, Elysion is placed at the "ends of the
earth, "far removed from the reach of mortal man, where life is an existence of ease and plenty.

Hesiod himself belongs to the fifth race of man, the race of iron. He does not hold much hope of anyone of this age ever gaining a blessed immortality, for there is no help left against the evil. He laments his fate, wishing rather:

... that I were not among the men of the fifth generation, but either had died before or been born afterwards. 47

The years immediately following Homer and Hesiod proved to be an age pessimistic about a future life of any happiness, at least as illustrated in the literature of this era. The poets continued to be greatly influenced by the beliefs of Homer, the afterlife remaining as a "dark and dolorous" land where the shades "will move obscure in the house of Death, and flit to and fro...." 48

Theognis, a poet who flourished c. 525 B.C., sums up the pessimism of his day quite adequately, saying:

Not to be born at all is the happiest lot for mortal, Never to open eyelids on the bright shaft of the sun: Or, born, as soon as may be to pass beyond Death's portal, To draw earth's heavy mantle above him, and have done. 49

Life, nor death, was of much interest to him, preferring the end of life as quickly as possible, and be done with all existence.

Homer and Hesiod had at least given the Greeks a
hope of immortality, but their immediate successors tended to disregard this. It was left to a new fervor of Greek religious revival to open the gateway to a blessed after-life attainable by all men. Where previously it had been the gods who determined immortality, now, the common man, by becoming an initiate with a more personal relationship with the gods, could determine his own state of future existence.

Up to now man had firmly believed in the gods as pictured by the ancient artists, gods made in their own image. But these Olympians were only the playthings of a happy Greek childhood having outlived their usefulness to explain the ways of nature. The gods were losing touch with life and reality in a changing and evolving society. Thus, a new religious impulse was able to penetrate into new areas of Greek life and thought.

The Greeks had been accustomed to personify the forces of nature, and out of this experience they also clothed such things as the changing seasons of the year, the decay and revival of vegetation, in the myths of ancient fertility gods. The old magical theory of the seasons they gradually supplemented by a religious theory. They personified vegetation as a god who annually died and rose again from the dead. Cults arose, such as those of Adonis or Hyacinth, gods whose death and resurrection was a dramatic representation of the decay and revival of plant
life. It is probable that these Greek cults were ultimately derived from the Egyptian cult of Osiris, the god whose death and resurrection was annually celebrated with alternate lamentation and rejoicing. 52

The myth of Demeter and Persephone is one such story of a goddess of vegetation. Demeter is the goddess of the corn, whose daughter Persephone is carried away to the underworld by Hades, there to reign with him part of the year, as queen of the dead, due to her mistake of eating some pomegranate seeds. Demeter mourns the loss of her daughter, who personifies vegetation, and is rejoiced at the return of her daughter to the upper air in the springtime. So happy is Demeter that she:

... straightway made fruit to spring up from the rich lands, so that the whole wide earth was laden with leaves and flowers. 53

To ensure an abundant harvest, the Eleusinian Mysteries, in honor of Demeter, were instituted. The worshippers would come to Eleusis to share in a ritual-drama imitating the sorrows of Demeter. The crowning ceremony was the "visions," scenes representing Demeter's joy in the recovery of her daughter, the triumph of life over death. 54 Only the initiated were allowed to participate in these ceremonies, receiving this blessing at the close of the ceremonies:

Happy is he among men upon earth who has seen these mysteries; but he who is uninitiated and who has no part in them, never has lot of like good things once
he is dead, down in the darkness and gloom.55

The Eleusinian mysteries promised a happy lot in the hereafter to the religious initiates who maintained a close contact with the gods during life.56 The happy afterlife was promised to only those who had been initiated, which allowed them the privilege of participating in the ceremonies.

From Thrace, to the North, came another ancient god of vegetation, whom Homer calls the "joy of men."57 This is the cult of Dionysus, the god of the fruit of the vine, who originally was a god of the dead, or those living in the hereafter.58 His cult started as a simple peasant worship of the god of the vine, which grew into a religious revival of the whole Greek world. Dionysus (the Roman Bacchus), as the god of wine gave to his followers the "passion to transcend the limitations of human existence, which is at the bottom of the mystic element in all religions."59 The followers called Maenads, would, in drunken revelry:

rove wild
O'er wooded hills, in dances honouring
Dionysus. . . .
And midst each revel-rout the wine bowls stand.60

For many people the cult of Dionysus was a crude religion61 of orgiastic rites and thus not acceptable to those believers of the more traditional Greek religion. But a saviour appeared who raised the cult from the state
of drunken revelry to an honored place in the Greek world.

Orpheus, the mythical Greek flute player, who went down to Hades to rescue his wife Euridyce, received from Dionysus himself, in gratitude of past favors, instructions in the rites of the cult.

Orpheus, being a man gifted by nature and highly trained above all others, made many modifications in the orgiastic rites.62

The followers of Dionysus initiated the Orphic rites, taking an ancient superstition and giving it new spiritual significance.63 The modifications ascribed to Orpheus, of the old Bacchic faith was that a union with the godhead was sought not by physical intoxication but by a spiritual ecstasy. He discarded drunkenness, and initiated the rites of purification.64 With these new rites of purification, and the introduction of Iacchus, a young Dionysus, into the Eleusinian Mysteries, Orphism had become acceptable for many as part of the religion of the Greeks.

Musaeus and his son Eumolpus were legendary poets concerned with the doctrines of Orphism and the rewards promised to the righteous. They pictured the blessed in heaven as provided:

... with a banquet of the Blest, where they sit for all time carousing with garlands on their heads.65

But very little literature remains concerning the Orphic beliefs. Very little would be known about the Orphic religion if it were not for references by Euripides and
Plato. This lack of literary documentation makes the so-called "Orphic Tablets" an important source of information concerning beliefs about the Orphic afterlife. These tablets are a series of eight very thin gold tablets with engraved instructions for the soul's conduct in the world below. Though they are somewhat later than the sixth century B.C., they do tell us what some of those Orphic beliefs must have been, and give us a picture of the underworld upon the arrival of the soul. After drinking of the cold water from the "holy well-spring" the souls are to say:

I am a child of Earth and of Starry Heaven;
But my race is of Heaven.66

This is to acknowledge the dual nature of mankind, the material and earthly nature of the body and the divine nature of the soul. At death this soul comes as a

... suppliant to Holy Phersephoneia
That of her grace she receive me to the seats of the Hallowed--
Happy and Blessed One, thou shalt be God instead of Mortal.67

The Homeric fear of death was largely removed for the Orphic initiate, who looked gladly towards the future, for death had become an escape from this prison, the body, the divine soul now ultimately able to rejoin the society of the gods.

To the Orphics the soul was divine, a part of the god Zagreus.68 The belief that the soul was of the heavenly race initiated an important new idea into the consciousness
of the Greek mind, an important point to remember in the continued evolvement of the concept of attaining a happy afterlife. For the first time all men now had the possibility of gaining immortality due to the soul being divine. The idea of a happy afterlife, an Elysium, had already been established, which now came to be regarded, not just as a place for the favorites of the gods, but as the true home of all souls after their sojourn on earth. The soul was sent down to earth as prisoner in the body in payment for the crimes of the Titans. At death this body was to be completely destroyed for the complete freedom of the soul. To gain the release of the soul from the body initiation into the mysteries was necessary, along with living a moral and upright life in the earthly existence. This life on earth became necessary as the place of atonement for those crimes which had originally sent the soul down from heaven. Only when the soul had been purified, weakening those bonds which held it prisoner in the body, could the soul expect to enter into a blessed afterlife. It was through the ceremonies of the mysteries that one would receive the secrets of becoming one with the gods:

... those who share this initiation, have sweet hopes both for the end of life and for all future time.69

The Orphics, believing in reincarnation, or a series of rebirths which purified the soul, could expect to enter, eventually, into a state of blissful consciousness in which
the soul, no longer imprisoned by the body, was to lead
an existence as a god in company with the gods.\textsuperscript{70}

The popularity of Orphism continued to grow
because of the hope it gave to the common man concerning
a real existence after death. Greek philosophy later
adopted many of these Orphic ideas.

Pythagoras and his teachings were greatly indebted
to the Orphic beliefs concerning the soul. For the Orphic
eschatology, Pythagoras substituted a philosophic conception
of the world as controlled by number and harmony. Plato,
some centuries later, explained this theory of the soul as
follows:

\ldots the body is held together at a certain tension
between the extremes of hot and cold, and dry and
wet, and so on, and our soul is a temperament of
adjustment of these same extremes, when they are
combined in just the right proportion.\textsuperscript{71}

The mystery religions did much to free man from
the fear of death by promising him a better life in the
hereafter. But the traditional Greek religion still very
much depended upon the anthropomorphic gods of myth and
epic. Pindar considered the myths as sacred history to be
used as a vehicle for greater spiritual truths.\textsuperscript{72} He sees
the need for purifying the traditional theology of Greece
by speaking only of the noble aspects of the gods "since
to speak evil of the gods is a skill that is hateful."\textsuperscript{73}

Pindar's poetry seeks to pay tribute to those
attributes of physical and spiritual perfection of both
the gods and of man. He wrote his odes in honor of the
heroes of the four great festivals of ancient Greece. His
heroes are of his own age whose success Pindar compares to
an appropriate myth illustrating an ideal worthy to be
imitated. 74

Most heroes in Greek literature are direct descen­
dants of the gods, but the games also produced heroes.
To be a hero certain qualities were necessary. The true
hero must possess an innate quality of virtue and talent,
and he must make the personal effort for success. Along
with this it was also absolutely necessary to have the
blessing of heaven:

For from thee, O Zeus, do mighty merits attend
upon mortals. 75

Pindar's noble gods are the dispensers of all benefits to
mankind, dispensing rewards or punishments as they see fit:

God fulfilleth every purpose, even as he desireth,
. . . and bendeth many a proud mortal beneath his
sway, while to others he giveth glory that knoweth
no eld. 76

The gods pass judgment upon man's life, both on earth and
in the afterlife:

--and the sins committed in the realm of Zeus
are judged by One who passeth sentence stern
and inevitable; while the good, having the sun
shining for evermore, . . . receive the boon of
a life of lightened toil. 77

Pindar believes in an everlasting existence, either
good or bad, for, as he states:
... the body of all men is subject to over-mastering death, an image of life (the soul) remaineth alive, for it alone commeth from the gods. 78

Homer's ray of hope has grown in brilliance, immortality not being just a divine favor from the gods, but because of the divine origin of the soul. The mystery religions, especially Orphism, greatly influenced Pindar's beliefs concerning the soul. Yet his belief in the traditional religion of Greece did not allow him to accept the conclusion of the Orphics that the soul can become a god itself. His gods are on a level beyond the reach of man, for: "One is the race of men, one is the race of gods." 79

He advises man not to strive for something reserved for the gods only. "Strive not to be a Zeus ... Mortal aims befit mortal men." 80

Though man cannot become a god, a good life does insure immortality for all. Where before only heroes were to be so honored now a moral existence could also secure immortality 81 for all men. Pindar's belief is that after the death of the body the soul is judged in Hades. Here, if judged guilty, there are suitable punishments which serve as warnings to others. If the soul is judged to be guiltless in its life on earth, its moral attributes allow it to pass to Elysion, here a part of the underworld of Hades, but where:

For them the sun shineth in his strength, in the world below, while here 'tis night; and,
in meadows red with roses, the space before
their city is shaded by the incense-tree, and
is laden with golden fruits. . . .\textsuperscript{82}

The soul must, however, return twice again to earth to live
a mortal's existence, and, consequently suffer death two
more times. Persephone then releases the soul from this
revolving wheel of existence and the soul passes over, to
remain forever in the Islands of the Blessed.

But they who endure trice over in the world
beyond to keep their souls from all sin have
gone God's way to the tower of Kronos; there
winds sweep from the Ocean across the island
of the Blessed. Gold flowers to flame on
land in the glory of trees; it is fed in the
water, whence they bind bracelets to their
arms and go chapleted.\textsuperscript{83}

Pindar's Elysion, and the Island of the Blessed,
are places of beauty and ease of life. Though Orphic
influences allow for the possibility of all souls to enter
here after a series of rebirths, it is the heroic life
which ensures the passage, there to continue their heroic
existence:

Some of them delight themselves with horses
and with wrestling; others with draughts,
and with lyres; while beside them bloometh
the fair flower of perfect bliss. And o'er
that lovely land fragrance is ever shed,
while they mingle all manner of incense with
the far-shining fire on the altars of the gods. \textsuperscript{84}

The blessed afterlife remained a place far beyond
the borders of the known world, beyond the reach of daily
existence, a land of myth, and legend. Pindar compares the
land of the Hyperboreans\textsuperscript{85} to that blessed race in Elysion,
both being a race of "chosen people." Compare the descrip-
of Elysion in Dirge 130 (above) and the description of the
land of the Hyperboreans, where

the dances of the maidens and the sounds of the
lyre and the notes of the flute are ever circling;
and with their hair crowned with golden bay-leaves,
they hold glad revelry; and neither sickness nor
baneful eld minglet among that chosen people; but
aloof from toil and conflict, they dwell afar from
the wrath of Nemesis. 86

Pindar's knowledge of that happy race of men, the Hyperbore-
eans, is used to illustrate what can be expected in the
afterlife, the best of the earthly existence becoming the
happy afterlife, something always hoped for by man.

Pindar's view of the gods had done much to bring
some semblance of order and moral goodness to the heavenly
hierarchy. He reflected a purer more spiritual religion
of the Greeks. As an artist in the capacity of a prophet
he "ever directed the popular thought to higher and truer
religious conceptions." 87

Tragedy is one of the most profound and beautiful
ways through which the artist is able to give an interpreta-
tion of life as Milton's vow "to justify the ways of God
to man." Drama originated at the great religious festivals
of Athens to give honor to Dionysus. Aeschylus is the first
great dramatist of Greek tragedy. He believed in the
Olympian gods, whose hands he saw at work everywhere. He
penetrated deeply into the mysteries of the relationship
between the gods and man. He looks beyond the myths of a
multitude of different gods, beyond the many to the one. Polytheism was slowly being encroached upon by a monotheism, a belief in one supreme deity.\textsuperscript{88} Aeschylus attributed to Zeus all properties:

\begin{quote}
Zeus is air, Zeus is earth, Zeus is heaven, yea, Zeus is all things and whatsoever transcendeth them.\textsuperscript{89}
\end{quote}

Aeschylus, deeply religious in the traditional Greek sense, asserts "that there is a supreme power, that is to say, there is a unity in things, some direction in events, which imply a supreme power. This he identifies with Zeus,"\textsuperscript{90} the traditional Greek king of the gods and of men:

\begin{quote}
He doth not sit upon his throne by mandate of another and hold his dominion beneath a mightier. None there is who sitteth above him whose power he holdeth in awe. He speaketh and it is done—he hasteneth to execute whatsoever his counselling mind conceiveth.\textsuperscript{91}
\end{quote}

The multitude of gods have become mere figures of abstract forces under the direct command of Zeus from whom all things come: "For what is brought to pass for mortal men save by will of Zeus?"\textsuperscript{92} Zeus conceives Athena, and Justice, daughter of Zeus, the dispenser of his will:

\begin{quote}
Zeus . . . with balance poised impartially, apportioning, as is due, unto the wicked their wrongdoing and to the godly their works of righteousness.\textsuperscript{93}
\end{quote}

Justice is now one of the qualities of Zeus upon which mankind can depend. Trust in the justice of one's god was a necessary quality for man to be fully able to believe that his good life would lead to a blessed afterlife. A
just Zeus rewards the good and has the wicked suffer for the expiation of their sins, sin being overweening pride or insolence towards the gods. The Persian army's defeat, and Xerxes' suffering, is a good example: "Zeus, of a truth, is a chastiser of overweening pride." Suffering is a way to expiate one's sins, which for Aeschylus is the way of God to lead men to knowledge, for "wisdom cometh by suffering." There is justice in this suffering of man, for "she guideth all things to their proper end."

This "proper end" to all is, for Aeschylus, still very much in the Homeric tradition, especially when he advises to "give joyance to your souls while today is yours . . . (for death) . . . profiteth no joy," it being the end of all things. He refers to the underworld by such various epiteths as "sunless gloom and dark abyss of Tartarus" where the soul is but "a shadow of thyself." It is a place where "the consciousness of the dead is not quelled by fire's ravening jaw." He enables Darius to retain some of his earthly power in the world below, which allows him to appear at his tomb: "Yet, seeing I have some power among them, lo, I am here."

In the afterlife he does not acknowledge any rewards, but he does tell of punishments inflicted after death because of crimes committed in the earthly life. Thus Clytemnestra rails against her fate in the afterlife:
'Tis due to you that I am thus dishonoured among the other dead; because of my deeds of blood the dead never cease reviling me, and I wander in disgrace.102

This above quotation does seem to argue for a belief that there are those souls of the dead who are not dishonored, and consequently do enjoy some sort of bliss, though Aeschylus does not deem it necessary to show us what this bliss could possibly be.

Whatever the case may be, it is the justice of Zeus which determines the fate of the soul in the afterlife, something in which Aeschylus fully trusts. If he is looking for any sort of reward it is death itself;

that some fate, free from excess of suffering, nor yet with lingering bed of pain, might come full soon and bring to us everlasting and endless sleep.103

With a growing trust in the gods death need not be feared anymore, it could even be anticipated peacefully, Aeschylus has come a long way from the kind of death against which Achilles so railed.

Aeschylus fully trusted in the divine justice of Zeus, which Sophocles imagined as the moral order or law governing the universe, deriving its sanction from the divine:

To follow still those laws ordained on high Whose birthplace is the bright ethereal sky. No mortal birth they own, Olympus their progenitor alone: . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . The god in them is strong and grows not old.104
These laws are divine for they are derived from Olympus itself, containing within them the strength of the gods. Therefore they must be firmly adhered to, over which man's laws should not be allowed to take precedence:

Nor did I deem that thou, a mortal man,
Could'st by a breath annul and override
The immutable unwritten laws of Heaven. 105

Antigone, the heroine of Sophocles' play of the same name, realizes this in her heart, that she must contrive the burial of her brother Polyneices and thereby obey the natural law of God, which overrides the human law of Cleon. Sophocles' belief in divinely-appointed law is to play a large part in the later theology of St. Paul, where such law is known from the heart.

The authority of Zeus now being supreme, Sophocles' religion has taken some important steps since the early days of Homer, when conflict reigned among the gods. For Sophocles the gods are just and of one accord, who inspire new hope and courage:

Take heart, my child, Zeus still in heaven is King, And orders everything;
... . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
His will is ever best. 107

From such ideas man is able to take heart and believe in justice, if not in this life then surely after death:

And yet good hope is mine that I shall find
A welcome from my sire, a welcome too,
From thee, my mother, and my brother dear. 108

Sophocles did not believe death to be an end to
all existence. He denounces the Homeric Hades, saying that if such a place was possible then his whole reverence for his divine law must have been folly:

For if to dust and nothingness the dead
Are doomed, nor blood for blood be shed,
Farewell to sanctities of law,
Farewell to reverence and awe. 109

Though Sophocles does not present us with any descriptions of meadows and flowers, or any such descriptions (and neither does Aeschylus), he does argue for an existence after death, better than this life on earth, for he says:

Therefore wait to see life's ending ere
thou count one mortal blest;
Wait till free from pain and sorrow he
has gained his final rest. 110

Sophocles knows that this life is often full of pain and sorrow but he does not profess to know exactly what will happen at the point of death:

There is an old-world saying current still,
"Of no man canst thou judge the destiny
To call it good or evil, till he die!" 111

Euripides flourished during an age when faith in the old myths and legends lost ground to a new critical age. He lived in an era when the old values were being questioned and a search for new values initiated. 112 Euripides certainly was a part of this age. He was able to draw from divergent sources, asking all the fundamental questions which have interested the mind of man. He could never hope to find all the answers, 113 especially not in the traditional beliefs of Greece.
Protagoras, a sceptic who struck the imagination of fifth century B.C. Athens, was one of the influences on Euripides, questioning the very existence of the gods. Euripides was not the first to cast doubt on what concerned the gods but he did go farther than many of his predecessors:

Doth any say that there are gods in heaven?
Nay there are none.

For Euripides, moral goodness was a prerequisite of the divine nature, and this the Greek pantheon simply did not possess. As opposed to those gods of Pindar who are seen only in a favorable light, Euripides' gods are often seen in an unfavorable light, as when he pictures Apollo as a liar and a deceiver.

... Phoebus--what ails him? He ravisheth Maids, and forsakes; begetteth babes by stealth, And heeds not, though they die.

Such gods Euripides rejects, for if the gods do allow for anything base they are not gods at all:

If deeds of shame gods do,
No gods are they.

Euripides questioned the traditional beliefs of Greece not storing much faith in the gods. He preferred the company of man in this earthly existence, for here justice could be found:

... Nay Justice self
Is here, is somewhere nigh, if thou wilt look.

He utilizes various ideas in his concept of the afterlife, some reminiscent of the Homeric idea of death
and the afterlife. Compare Achilles' speech to Odysseus, (Odyssey, Book XI, 495-498) with these lines of Euripides:

Death is but nothingness! Who prays to die
Is mad. Ill life o'erpasseth glorious death. 120

But the new philosophical trends also played a large part in the thought of Euripides, and he fuses philosophy and poetry to come up with a hope that death may not be the end of all things after all. Diogenes of Apollonia identified the air, or "aether," with a godhead, and Euripides suggests that the soul at death returns to this godhead:

And each part, whence it came forth to the light,
Thither return, the breath unto the air,
To earth the body;

Euripides does not seem to profess an individual immortality, but the universal soul or mind accepts man's reason, which thus retains some form of consciousness:

... No separate life
Have dead men's souls, yet deathless consciousness
Still have they when in deathless aether merged. 122

Such a cosmic immortality did not offer much satisfaction to the individual's hope of a happy afterlife, 123 but it was a foreshadowing of Aristotle and the Stoics, who also professed a belief in such a universal immortality.

Like Pindar, who professed that the soul should pass through life three times and be purified, Euripides expressed the belief that those of true heart should be allowed to return to earth a second time, life being better than death:
... from the grave
To the sun's light again should climb,
To run their course a second time.124

But in any case, Euripides realized the inevitability of death, for we only have this body:

In fee, but only to pass life therein;
Then she which fostered it must take it back.125

The only thing which hindered the acceptance of death was fear of the unknown:

If better life beyond be found,
The darkness veils, clouds wrap it round;
Therefore infatuate-fond to this
We cling—this earth's poor sunshine-gleam:
Naught know we of the life to come, 126
There speak no voices from the tomb.

But since death was inevitable, it being a natural law of the universe, why not look without regret to mankind's end upon this earth.

Never was a man born but to toil and pain.
He burieth children, getteth him new babes,
And dies himself: yet men are grieved hereat,
When dust to dust they bear! Needs must it be
That death like corn-shocks garner lives of men,
That this man be, that be no more. Now why
Mourn what all by Nature's law pass through?
There is no horror in the inevitable.127

One of Euripides' last plays is the Bacchae, a play in praise of Dionysus. Here Euripides is writing in the Macedonian Mountains, the original home of Dionysus, and he becomes reborn in the spirit of this god, of nature, and of man.128 There are poems of revelry and joy throughout this play, where even death does not bother him anymore. He has become an initiate, or at least a follower of
Dionysus and of the joy this god exudes. Euripides can now rejoice in the belief that: "O happy to whom is the blessedness given." 129

Hope grows eternal, and is one of the principles which one can trace in the Greek belief concerning the afterlife. Euripides held on to such a hope, for "Who knows if death be life, and life be death." 130

The age of Euripides had seen all the traditional values of Greece being questioned, and much had changed in a short time. With the ascendancy of Athens to a position of supreme power, she had largely lost contact with her past. By the time of Aristophanes the old religion was no longer held in awe. Those stories of gods and heroes had become mere stories. Those gods who, just recently, were held in such deep respect are now approached by a Trygaeus riding on the back of a beetle. 131 Heracles' descent to the realm of Hades has become a mere comic trip by Dionysus, presented as a fool trying to pass himself off as the real Heracles. 132 The anthropomorphic gods have become even more human than ever thought possible. Those old and ancient powers of the gods have been taken from them and replaced by a new set of scientific theories. Zeus, the god of thunder, is no more: "Zeus indeed! there's no Zeus: don't you be so obtuse." 133 The old myths have lost much of their meaning under the onslaught of scientific reasoning.
In turn this leads to the complete undermining of the traditional Greek beliefs and traditions.

The conservative Aristophanes rejects much of the new trends in learning, and wishes for a return of those ideals which shaped such heroes as fought at Marathon, those men who fought for state and god. He sees what this new age has brought about, being concerned with the state of affairs which have led to the decline of Athens. Aristophanes, in his function as poet of comedy, aimed his skills towards a possible cure of the ills and disputes of his city.

"War has immured her (Peace) in a deep pit," and the whole of Greece was embroiled in conflict. Affairs were in such a state of confusion that even the gods have seemingly deserted city and country:

But they themselves have settled up aloft,
As high as they can go; that they no more
May see your fightings or receive your prayers.

This really describes Hesiod's fifth age of man, yet there remains a hope, if only man would return to those values of earlier days. Therefore Aristophanes tries to raise Aeschylus up from Hades with the purpose of leading the city back to a pious worship of the gods.

Aristophanes looks to the afterlife as holding the truth of existence. He goes down to Hades where he comes across a chorus of frogs who are the Blessed Mystics, those who had led a holy and virtuous life on earth. They sing their praises to Persephone, Demeter, and Dionysus.
while wandering from one meadow to another, where:

... the breath of flute will float around you
And glorious sunshine, such as ours, you'll see,
And myrtle groves and happy bands who clap
Their hands in triumph, men and women too. 138

In another passage, where the throng departs for the
Thriasian Plain, Aristophanes' view of the afterlife
closely resembles Pindar's description of Elysion (Olympian
Ode II):

Now haste we to the roses,
And the meadows full of posies,
Now haste we to the meadows
In our own old way,
In choral dances blending,
In dances never ending,
Which only for the holy
The Destinies array.
O, happy mystic chorus,
The blessed sunshine o'er us
On us alone is smiling
In its soft sweet light. 139

These descriptions of holy and just men living a life of
ease, singing praises of glories never ending is the exact
reverse of what has happened to Athens above ground. By
contrasting the differences between the realm of Hades and
that of Athens, Aristophanes attempted to show to what real
depths Athens had sunk, when even the underworld was the
more glorious place of the two.

The brilliant age of Athens was inevitably dimmed
when in the year 399 B.C. Socrates was sentenced to die.
He was judged guilty of being a philosopher who "inquires
into things below the earth and in the sky." 140 He was
convicted of undermining the traditional beliefs of the
Greeks. But this process had long ago started, with Thales in the early sixth century, he being one of the first Greek philosophers.

The Greek philosophers investigated various ideas about the nature of the gods, ideas often in direct conflict with the concept of anthropomorphic gods. Anaximander replaced Zeus with his theory of Justice as ruling the universe, which Xenophanes proposed to be Intellect, saying:

God is one, among gods and men the greatest, not at all like mortal men in body or in mind. He sets everything in motion by the thought of His mind."

Heraclitus called this supreme being the Logos, defined as "a creative Force, the intelligent governor of an intelligible universe and the fount of all energy and life."

Anaxagoras, a contemporary of Socrates, was a great influence in his age. He believed that the creation of the universe was brought about by the "Nous" (meaning Mind or Intellect), his concept of God. This intellectual Force was partly understood by man because the human intellect is a portion of this original Force. The scientific philosophers gradually came to see this Force as responsible only for the movement and ordered arrangement of the physical universe. Democritus was the first to speak of a soul, which, like everything else, he believed to be a combination of atoms which at death dissipated and rejoined the other atoms.

How much influence these early philosophers had
upon Socrates cannot be determined with any accuracy, for even the figure of Socrates himself presents us with some problems, for he left no written records. We derive most of our knowledge concerning him from his pupil, Plato, who recorded the life and teachings of Socrates in his dialogues.

Socrates' teaching of the immortality of the soul was an attempt to dispel many of the fears surrounding death. By having faith in some divine presence, such as the gods who looked after mankind as one of their possessions, one need not fear death anymore. It was only the duty of man to live a good life and nothing could harm him, either in this life or the next. In fact, death could bring the greatest blessings possible to a good man:

> I have a firm hope that there is something in store for those who have died, something much better for the good than for the wicked.

After death each soul was to endure its judgement to determine its proper place:

> When any man dies, his own guardian spirit which was given charge over him in his life, tries to bring him to a certain place where all must assemble, and from which after submitting their several cases to judgement, they must set out for the next world.

The incurable sinners, like the Titans of old, are hurled into Tartarus, but those who have lived a philosophic life, meaning a life of goodness and virtue, and have undergone purification
are released and set free from confinement in these regions of the earth, and passing upward to their pure abode, make their dwelling upon the earth's surface. And of these such as have purified themselves sufficiently by philosophy live thereafter altogether without bodies, and reach habitations even more beautiful.

Socrates, having lived the philosophic life, could drink the hemlock in peace, knowing that forever he would enjoy an existence in a place where the soul would find on its arrival, happiness awaits it, and release from uncertainty and folly, from fears and uncontrolled desires, and all other human evils."

Plato certainly was deeply influenced by his master, Socrates, and it is difficult to determine where Plato strikes out on his own. But it is Plato who recorded these writings, so we must assume it is also Plato speaking. With Plato we realize the fulfillment of the various Greek ideas which were so important in the development of the Greek concept of a happy afterlife. He builds upon those ideas initiated by previous generations, leaning heavily upon the Orphic doctrines. But true to his genius, and so very important to the entire development of the Greek happy afterlife, Plato incorporates the original ideas into his philosophy, the high point of the ancient but brilliant Greek mind.

Plato has completely removed himself from the traditional anthropomorphic gods. God has become the wholly Good, "Arete," who creates only what is like Himself, wholly good, such as the soul. In the Phaedrus
Plato gives us a description of the soul composed of three parts, a "composite nature of a pair of winged horses and a charioteer" with Mind, or Reasoning, being the highest element of the soul. He defines the soul as being self-moving, which proves its immortality: 

For that which is ever moving is immortal . . . only that which moves itself . . . never ceases to move . . . Thus that which moves itself must be the beginning of motion. And this can neither be destroyed nor generated . . . this self-motion is the essence and the very idea of the soul."

Plato was concerned with true knowledge which was attainable only through Reason, though certain truths were not even accessible by mere scientific or philosophical reasoning. Poetry was sometimes necessary to give meaning to these higher truths, especially those concerned with creation and the fate of the soul in the afterlife. Plato attempted to illustrate these higher truths through the use of his myths.

The poetical Plato shines in his Myth of Er where the soul of a dead soldier returns to the body to tell what happens after death. In poetical language and philosophical imagery, Plato is often reminiscent of Pindar and of the beliefs of the Orphics, especially in the idea of reincarnation. His imagery is full of traditional Greek mythological characters, but they are there only to explain his philosophic views, his doctrines of justice, free will and choice, rewards, and punishments in this journey of the soul:
... he journeyed ... to a marvellous place where there were two openings ... the just take the way upwards through the sky ... the unjust the downward road ... souls were coming out of the earth travel-stained, or down from the sky clean and bright ... [which] ... spoke of the joys of heaven and sights of inconceivable beauty.  

The souls then spend seven days in a Meadow, and on the eighth day they journey on till they see the shaft of light that binds the heavens. They then come to the three Fates, the daughters of Necessity, and approach Lachesis where:

... shall begin a new round of earthly life, to end in death ... you shall choose your own destiny ... the blame is his who chooses: Heaven is blameless.

It is one's sense of morals which determines the afterlife of the soul, a real departure from the previous necessity of initiation or a god's favor. Thus the soul is faced with the prospect of having to choose a new life which is able to give knowledge in distinguishing the good life from the evil life. After the souls have all chosen their new life they return to Lachesis who gives each into the charge of a guardian genius who will escort him through life.

This genius then leads the soul to Clotho, and next to Atropos, and on:

... to the Plain of Lethe through terrible stifling heat; for the plain is bare of trees and of all plants that grow on earth ... they camped beside the River of Unmindfulness ... Every man as he drinks forgets everything. When they had fallen asleep, there was thunder and an earthquake, and in a moment they were carried up to their birth, like shooting stars.
These souls returned to the earth, which Plato saw as full of evils, but which, if the soul had made the right choice, it would be able to avoid as much as possible. Thus:

... we ought to try to escape from earth to the dwelling of the gods as quickly as we can; and to escape is to become like God, so far as this is possible; and to become like God is to become righteous and holy and wise.¹²

Here is the completion of the Orphic idea that a life of moral worthiness is necessary for a happy afterlife. Morality is the quality of man which distinguishes the evil soul from the god-like soul. But since the earth is full of evils, man has a hard time living a just and holy life, but what man chooses in the life is ultimately his choice for the afterlife.

Whatever sort of bodily appearance a man had acquired in life, that is manifest also after his death ... the same is the case with the soul too.¹³

That is true justice, the law concerning mankind, that each chooses his own destiny. After living a life of one's own choice the three judges, of Greek mythology, Minos, Rhadamanthus, and Aeacus give judgement, such:

... that every man who has passed a just and holy life departs after his decease to the Isles of the Blest, and dwells in all happiness apart from ill; but whoever has lived unjustly and impiously goes to the dungeon of requital and penance which, you know, they call Tartarus.¹⁴

Plato's pupil, Aristotle, also looms large in the philosophic tradition of Western Civilization. His idea
of universal immortality, where the individual soul is absorbed into the One, didn't help the individual much in his longing for a continued existence and happiness in the afterlife. It was Plato who had summed up the hopes and aspirations of the classical Greek world concerning happiness in the afterlife.

During the Hellenistic period Alexander the Great destroyed the autonomous Greek city-state and created the Greek, or Macedonian Empire, encompassing much of the known world at the time. With this empire many precious traditions had been destroyed and the entire Greek outlook changed. From being a citizen of his 'polis' the Greek had now become, in a sense, a citizen of the world. With such a radical change of political boundaries individual isolation and insecurity naturally followed.

The new Hellenistic philosophies attempted to define this new relationship of the individual to the state, and his place in the universe. Two new schools of philosophy arose; the Epicurean and the Stoic. The Epicureans attempted to do away completely with the gods because they believed the gods induced fear. They saw no need for any gods, for tranquillity was attainable by man himself, without the arbitrary interference of any gods. Homer had at least conceived of a Hades where all souls gathered after death, but the Epicurean did not allow for even this much. Their only concern with life was the maximum of happiness
attainable here on earth, disbelieving in an afterlife because the soul completely dissipated at death.

Death concerns us not at all. Life holds no terrors for him who realizes that there are none in death.  

The Stoic's philosophy was to ascertain the correct conduct of man in a universe which they believed to be God himself. Those gods of ancient mythology they believed to be mere manifestations of the Supreme Power, a god not necessarily concerned with the doings of man. Between life and death the Stoic saw no difference, death being but another form of life. Thus the Stoic saw no reason against suicide when the proportion of undesirable circumstances in life were greater than the desirable circumstances. Anyway, he would be restored, as all things were at the beginning of the next new cycle of the universe. Though this was not an entirely new idea, it was the Stoics who put their faith in this and lived according to such a belief.

The whole Greek world had advanced much concerning the belief of a future happiness of the soul. From the simple primitive belief that happiness after death required the mere burial of the body, the Greeks advanced to that theory of Plato where it is this life which determines the future life of the soul. Happiness in the afterlife has become a definite possibility for all of mankind. Why this change had been able to evolve is tied in with many of the questions besetting the Greek world throughout its glorious
history.

It is no wonder that death was the most hateful thing to the Greeks. They had nothing to look forward to after this life on earth. There were a few, the favorites of the gods, who had attained immortality, but this offered no hope to the mass of mankind. It was Homer's great step, that out of practically nothing he conceived of Elysium, a place of happiness in the afterlife. Homer had initiated what would in time lead to a belief in happiness for all men after death.

It was the arrival of the mystery religions and their belief in the divine origin of the soul, that the Greek religion finally took into consideration the lot of all mankind in regard to a blessed afterlife. Initiation became the way towards immortality, though this as yet paid no heed to any form of living a moral life which was to be so important in the later beliefs. Pindar initiated such thought, that if one wished to attain a blessed afterlife he must live the life of a hero, but it is only something closely approaching the idea of living a good life.

With the changes being advanced by the philosophers and reflected by the dramatists, of the concept of God as one Supreme Being, things took a great step forward. Justice entered the picture, with the gods being necessarily just, both in this life and the next, or they were no gods at all. With this ability of man to trust in his Supreme
Being he could look with trust to a life of rewards after death.

Plato really completes the Greek picture of the afterlife. Justice truly reigns on earth and in heaven, both in this life and the next. Man, having a divine and immortal soul, is destined for an afterlife, an afterlife which he freely chooses. It is his life on earth which determines his future existence. Thus, if he desires to attain to a blessed afterlife it is within his capability, if only he will reach out for it by living a moral and upright life.

Plato's philosophy was really unique for his age, for he actually points towards future beliefs. But, even more than that, he being a pagan, his thought actually points towards the Christian beliefs of justice, free will, rewards, and punishments. Of course it took the central belief of Christianity, the death and resurrection of Christ, to fulfill what Plato had merely pointed towards.
Footnotes


3 "The Greeks, the greatest artists of antiquity, had a vivid and pictorial imagination. The objects of their worship appeared to their mind's eye as clearly defined figures, human in shape but glorious above the level of humanity, and as individual as any actual men or women." H. J. Rose, Ancient Roman Religion (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1948), p. 10.

4 "... myths had either caused these cults to arise, or myths were invented to explain a religious practice." Arthur Fairbanks, Greek Religion (New York: American Book Company, 1910), p. 21.

5 Throughout this paper, when referring to the author (or authors) of the Iliad and the Odyssey I will use the name Homer. 'Homer' probably is the name given to an early tradition, various theories either believing Homer to be one author or a number of authors.


7 Homer Odyssey 1. 22-24. Here Poseidon rages against Odysseus, while Athena is Odysseus' special protector. Also, Hera favors the Greeks while Apollo is for the Trojans.


9 Homer Iliad 20. 234-37.

10 Orion was a mighty hunter, also a companion of Artemis. He was shot by an arrow of Artemis due to the treachery of Apollo. "Artemis then set Orion's image among the stars." (41d). Castor and Polydeuces were twin brothers of whom one was fated to die. But Polydeuces refused immortality unless Castor might share in it. Zeus therefore allowed them to spend their days alternately in the upper air and under the earth. Because of their brotherly love Zeus "set their images among the stars as the Twins." (74j).


12Homer Odyssey 11. 605-06.

13"The Egyptians were the first to teach that the human soul is immortal, and at the death of the body enters into some other living thing then coming to birth." Herodotus Histories 2. 123.

14Erwin Rohde gives the word 'translation' for this concept of removal from one place to another. "... some few favourites of the gods might be 'translated' without the psyche being separated from its body and descending to Hades." Erwin Rohde, Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality Among the Greeks, trans. W. B. Hillis (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1950), p. 56.


16Homer Iliad 16. 440-43.

17Homer Iliad 16. 453.

18Homer Odyssey 4. 559-61.

19Homer Odyssey 3. 236.


21Homer Iliad 16. 510.

22Homer Iliad 23. 70-74.

23Homer Odyssey 11. 495-98.

24Homer Iliad 23. 100-02.


26Homer Iliad 15. 190.
... for in front of the mouth which you Greeks call, as you say, 'the pillars of Heracles', there lay an island... Now in this island of Atlantis there existed a confederation of kings, of great and marvellous power,..." Plato *Timaeus* 25A.

Homer *Odyssey* 4. 561-69.

Homer *Odyssey* 6. 41-45.

Hesiod *Theogony* 974.


Hesiod *Works and Days* 90-91.


Hesiod *Works and Days* 115-20.

Hesiod *Works and Days* 124-25.


Hesiod *Works and Days* 128.

Hesiod *Works and Days* 137-38.

Hesiod *Works and Days* 141.

Hesiod *Works and Days* 151-53.
The unknown authors of the epic cycle are also more readily willing to place the heroes in Elysion. There is the story of how Achilles is picked up from his funeral pyre by his mother, Thetis, and the Muses, and carried to the White Island.

Hesiod Works and Days 162-75.

Hesiod Works and Days 176-77.

Sappho Fragment 71.

Theognis. (Note here the similarity between Theognis and these lines from the Contest of Homer and Hesiod, of doubtful authorship, where Homer, answering the question of what is best for mortal man, answers: "For men on earth 'tis best never to be born at all." And when asked what men mean by happiness, Homer answers: "Death after a life of least pain and greatest pleasure.

"These perfect Olympians . . . they are lovely dreams, they are playthings of his happy childhood, and when full-grown he comes to face realities . . ." Jane Harrison, Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion (New York: Meridian Books Inc., 1960), p. 363.

"Thus the old magical theory of the seasons was displaced, or rather supplemented, by a religious theory . . . Under the names of Osiris, Tammus, Adonis, and Attis, the peoples . . . represented the yearly decay and revival of life, especially of vegetable life, which they personified as a god who annually died and rose again from the dead." Sir James Frazer, The Golden Bough, 1 vol., abridged edition (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1945), pp. 324-25.

"In ancient Egypt the god whose death and resurrection were annually celebrated with alternate sorrow and joy was Osiris, the most popular of all Egyptian deities; and there are good grounds for classing him in one of his aspects with Adonis and Attis as a personification of the great yearly vicissitudes of nature." Sir James Frazer, The Golden Bough, 1 vol., abridged edition (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1945), p. 362.

Homeric Hymn to Demeter 471-73.

The mysteries at Eleusis were comparable to: "the thought of the seed buried in the earth in order to
spring up to new and higher life readily suggested a comparison with human destiny, and strengthened the hope that for man too the grave may be but the beginning of a better and happier existence in some brighter world un-known."

55 *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 480-83.

56 "The Eleusinian faith maintained that the mortal could secure a happy immortality by entering into the close contact during life with the powers of death, not that the mortal could become, himself, a god."

57 *Homer Iliad* 14. 324.

58 "In Thrace he was a god of the dead, or rather of the living in the world beyond."


60 *Euripides Bacchae* 218-21.

61 "Dionysus was, in a word, a crude popular religion, which served as a refuge for the masses seeking happiness."

62 *Diodorus 3*. 65.

63 "Orpheus had taken an ancient superstition, deep-rooted in the savage ritual of Dionysus, and lent to it a new spiritual significance."

64 "The great step that Orpheus took was that, while he kept the old Bacchic faith that man might become a god, he altered the conception of what a god was, and he sought to obtain that godhead by wholly different means. The grace he sought was not physical intoxication but spiritual ecstasy, the means he adopted not drunkenness but abstinence and rites of purification."
65 Plato Republic 2. 363 C.
66 Petelia Tablet.
67 Campagno Tablet.
68 "The Titans . . . were destroyed by the thunderbolt of Zeus and their ashes scattered over the world. These ashes were the source of the double nature of man, who were divine, for the life-power of Zagreus was in them; evil, for the Titans had destroyed Zagreus." Arthur Fairbanks, Greek Religion (New York: American Book Company, 1910), p. 245.
69 Isocrates 4. 28.
71 Plato Phaedo 86 B.
72 "For Aeschylus, as for Pindar, myth is a sacred history which the poet uses as a vehicle for great spiritual truths. He freely modifies myth with this end in view." Arthur Fairbanks, Greek Religion (New York: American Book Company, 1910), p. 258.
73 Pindar Olympian Ode 9. 48.
74 "His heroes are contemporary, living and struggling men. He sets them in the mythical world . . . a world of ideal patterns, whose lustre beams over them and whose renown will as they strive to exalt them to similar heights and arouse their best powers." G. Norwood, Pindar (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1956), p. 47.
75 Pindar Isthmian Ode 3. 5.
76 Pindar Pythian Ode 2. 49-53.
77 Pindar Olympian Ode 2. 58-62.
78 Pindar Dirge 131.
79 Pindar Nemean Ode 6. 1.
80 Pindar Isthmian Ode 5. 14.

Pindar Dirge 129.

Pindar Olympian Ode 2. 68-74.

Pindar Dirge 130.

Hyperboreans—a race of men living at the northern limit of the world. "Neither by ships nor by land canst thou find the wondrous road to the trysting-place of the Hyperboreans." Pindar Pythian Ode 10. 30.

Pindar Pythian Ode 10. 38-43.


"Hence they (the Greeks) developed a highly abstract, largely monotheistic theology and read it into the traditional practices of their ancestral religion." H. J. Rose, Ancient Roman Religion (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1948), p. 9.

Aeschylus Fragment 34.


Aeschylus Suppliants 595-99.

Aeschylus Agamemnon 1488.

Aeschylus Suppliants 404-06.

Aeschylus Persians 829.

Aeschylus Agamemnon 173.

Aeschylus Agamemnon 780.

Aeschylus Persians 840.

Aeschylus Prometheus Bound 1029.

Aeschylus Euminides 302.

Aeschylus Libation Bearers 323.
They show that the demands of the law are written in their hearts. Their conscience bears witness together with that law . . .” Romans 2:15 (New American Bible).


Gilbert Murray quotes Protagoras as professing the belief that: "About the gods, I have no means of knowing either that they are or are not. For the hindrances to knowledge are many, the darkness of the subject and the shortness of man's life." Gilbert Murray, Euripides and His Age (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 25.

118 Euripides Fragment of his Bellerophon.
119 Euripides Fragment from his Melanippe Bound.
120 Euripides Iphigeneia at Aulis 1251-52.
121 Euripides Suppliants 532-34.
122 Euripides Helen 1013-15.


124 Euripides Madness of Hercules 659-61.
125 Euripides Suppliants 534-35.
126 Euripides Hippolytus 192-97.
127 Euripides Fragment from his Hippsipyle.


129 Euripides Bacchae 72.
130 Euripides quoted by Aristophanes in Frogs 1478.
131 As described in The Peace of Aristophanes.
132 As described in The Frogs of Aristophanes.
133 Aristophanes The Clouds 367.


135 Aristophanes The Peace 223.
136 Aristophanes The Peace 207-09.

Aristophanes The Frogs 154-57.
Aristophanes The Frogs 450-58.
Plato Apology 19 D.
Xenophanes Fragment

His concept of God was as: "of an intellectual Force which created the world by initiating a revolution in space . . . partly understood by the human intellect which is a portion of the original Force." Kathleen Freeman, God, Man and State: Greek Concepts (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1970), p. 34.

"The theories of the scientific philosophers, being chiefly concerned with the creation of the visible universe, had tended more and more towards the elimination of the concept of God except as a Force responsible for the movement and ordered arrangement of material substances." Kathleen Freeman, God, Man and State: Greek Concepts (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1970), p. 35.

"... the gods are our keepers, and we men are one of their possessions." Plato Phaedo 62 C.
"... nothing can harm a good man either in life or after death." Plato Apology 41 C.
Plato Phaedo 63 B.
Plato Phaedo 108 A.
Compare these souls with those 'daimones' of Hesiod's Golden Age.
Plato Phaedo 114 B.
Plato Phaedo 80 B.
"God is wholly Good, and being free from envy, wished to create only what was like Himself; . . . Intelligence . . . Soul; . . . the Universe . . . a living entity endowed with Soul and with true Intelligence, through the providence and goodness of God." Kathleen Freeman, God, Man and State: Greek Concepts (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1970), p. 53.
"We will liken the soul to the composite nature
of a pair of winged horses and a charioteer. Now the horses and charioteer of the gods are all good and of good descent, but those of other races are mixed; and first the charioteer of the human soul drives a pair, and secondly one of the horses is noble and of noble breed, but the other quite the opposite in breed and character. Therefore in our case the driving is necessarily difficult and troublesome." Plato Phaedrus 246 B.

154 Plato Phaedrus 245 D.

155 "Plato was alive to the fact that there are certain truths, and these the highest of all, which are not accessible to scientific or philosophical reasoning, but can only be attained by some sort of direct religious experience or mystical vision." G. C. Fields, The Philosophy of Plato (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 154.


157 There are three Fates: Clotho, the spinner, who spins the thread of life; Lachesis, the disposer of lots, who assigned to each man his destiny; Atropos, who cut the thread of life at death.


159 This guardian genius compares to the 'daimones' of Hesiod.

160 See the Orphic Tablets, where each soul must drink of the spring of deep water.


162 Plato Theaetetus 176 A.

163 Plato Gorgias 524 D.

164 Plato Gorgias 523 B.

165 Epicurus Fragment
CHAPTER III

VIRGIL

The Greek age was superseded by the Roman age in the year 191 B.C. when Greece became one of the Roman provinces, but Greek thought and ideals continued to influence the world around her.

The whole of the Mediterranean Sea became a Roman lake with Rome as the center of the new world order. How Rome adapted herself to her position of leadership was to prove the essence of her genius. She brought all her conquests under one system of Roman law and justice, creating order out of turmoil. She didn't destroy what she conquered, but made place for many different ideas within her system, something even Alexander the Great had been unable to accomplish in his empire. The Greek historian, Polybius, commended the character of the conquering Romans who were able to discern and adopt the best qualities of whatever culture they came into contact with.

The Romans . . . for this too is one of their virtues, that no people are so ready to adopt new fashions and imitate what they see is better in others.¹

Rome's contact with Greece proved to be the single most important step in the history of Roman thought. Though influential, this contact did not completely overwhelm the
Roman character. The abstract thoughts and ideas she came into contact with she put into practice, a process which established the identity of Rome as a civilization learning from the past and creating something new.

Virgil, the master of Latin literature, is a strong representative of the Roman character, his views illustrating beliefs current in the Rome of his time. He represents (to me at least) and important link in the tradition of a happy afterlife in Western Civilization, as a conduit carrying the learning of ancient Greece and the practice of ancient Rome, and passing it on to the future.

In the Aeneid, his greatest achievement, Virgil honors the customs and traditions of Roman history, and exemplifies the Roman character through Aeneas, "famed for piety," or 'pietas'. This is the quality which exemplifies the best of the Roman character, entailing a sense of duty, out of affection and loyalty, to one's family, country, and the gods.

Loyalty to the gods had always been important, and reverence for the gods was necessary for the well-being of the state. The legalistically inclined Roman conceived of religion as a formal contract between man and god with both sides expected to live up to the bargain. Emotion was not a necessary part of religious ceremony, but strict adherence to form was essential. Though the Greeks had come to see this as an outmoded belief, the Romans continued to
see this as the way of maintaining their 'Pax Deorum' (Peace of the Gods) which enabled Rome to prosper, as the greatness of the Roman state illustrated.

Virgil sees Rome and the whole of the universe as a divine creation controlled by laws of a physical and moral nature, under the guidance of the beneficent gods honored by the state. His idea of such divine powers is represented in the figures of anthropomorphic gods, many adopted from Greece. The all-powerful Zeus of Greek mythology has become the Roman god Jupiter, now the one supreme god in the heavens:

O you who, with eternal rule, command and govern the events of gods and men.

The Olympian gods of Greece had already become assimilated with the Latin deities, and these are the gods of Virgil's Aeneid, but the representation of such supernatural powers in art does not necessarily entail a firm conviction of belief in those gods. Virgil borrowed from various sources what he saw as beautiful and necessary to his art.

Rather than in the ancient gods, Virgil put more faith in philosophy, deriving much of his knowledge from those philosophies of Hellenistic Greece, especially from the Epicurean and Stoic schools of thought. Yet, among all these foreign ideas, Virgil does not forget the simple traditions of the early Roman state, those qualities which
built the Roman Republic. It seemed to be his special skill to be able to create from such a wide and varied field of material a unique, thoroughly Roman epic.

The **Aeneid** is patterned after the Greek epics of Homer, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, one of the similarities being Aeneas' and Odysseus' descents to the underworld in the sixth book of the *Aeneid* and in the eleventh book of the *Odyssey* respectively. Virgil's view of the underworld is a composite of Greek mythology and philosophy with Roman beliefs of the survival of the dead. His is the ultimate classical view regarding the afterlife.

All early civilizations had some kind of belief in an afterworld where the spirits dwell, and the ancient Romans were no exception. They believed in the survival of the dead, who were called 'the good people' or 'manes', representing the dead in general. In time, these manes became identified with a particular individual, an ancestor or a hero of the state. But their pictures of the afterworld remained rudimentary until those stories of the Greeks became more prevalent throughout Italy. By Virgil's time Homer's shadowy view of Hades could be developed into an entirely new and more profound vision, illustrating the process of the Roman genius of adopting previous knowledge and putting it to use to create something entirely new.

Virgil does echo the Homeric concept of shadowy
shades which inhabit a dreary place beneath the earth:

... thin lives that glide without a body in the
hollow semblance of a form.\[14\]

But Virgil's Homeric descriptions of the underworld are
often a necessary adherence to such a tradition popular in
the arts, and he was, after all, producing a work of art.

Virgil's description of Elysium is in direct
descent of those Greek descriptions as a place of relaxed
beauty, as pictured by Pindar and Hesiod.

They came upon the lands of gladness, glades
of gentleness, the Groves of Blessedness--
a gracious place. The air is generous;
the plains wear dazzling light; they have their very
own sun and their own stars. Some exercise
their limbs along the green gymnasiums
or grapple on the golden sand, compete
in sport, and some keep time with moving feet
to dance and chant.\[15\]

But the Greek Elysium has been transformed somewhat by
Virgil, who removes Elysium from the gloom and darkness of
Hades and sets it off apart, in the light of its own sun
and stars. It continues to be the place of refined earthly
existence where the souls could sport and sing. The Greeks
had been able to conceive of only heroes and men of higher
stature as indulging in the Elysian activities, but Virgil's
Elysium is more heavily populated by the souls of all worthy
men from every station of life. It is also the place from
which all the souls yet to be born are sent to earth. It
is a region of purity and innocence, reserved for all
blessed men, those:
... whose merits won the memory of men: all these were crowned with snow-white garlands.\textsuperscript{16}

Among those who now reside in Elysium, Virgil includes the priests and the "pious poets,"\textsuperscript{17} in general all those who have lived a life of achievement. Pindar had called such men heroes but Virgil applied a new idea as necessary for the attainment of Elysium. Moral worthiness was the prerequisite for a blessed existence in Elysium. Gone were those days when Elysium was a reward from the gods to their favorites, or the result of one's blindly following a set of mechanical processes which didn't take into consideration the moral worth of the individual. Elysium could only be reached by practicing during this life those values which constitute a moral and virtuous life. Those ancient Latins whom Virgil so admired as the best of the Roman character seemed to possess the necessary qualities for admittance to Elysium:

\begin{quote}
The Latins are a race of Saturn, needing no laws and no restraint for righteousness; they hold themselves in check by their own will and by the customs of their ancient god.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

It was those ancient days of mankind which, to Virgil, represented that 'golden age', an idea harking back to Hesiod. Though that age is past, hope is eternal, for who knows that yet there may be a return to such a golden age. Hesiod offered such a hope, as did Virgil (see Virgil's Eclogue 4).

Rome greatly admired the beauty and learning of Greek art, and Greek philosophy really struck the mind of
thinking Romans. Epicureanism and Stoicism were able to flourish in Italy at a time when the ancient religion of Rome and the anthropomorphic gods of Greece became, to these thinking men, merely something beautiful, as adornments in art, but actually having outlived their usefulness. It seems that with one's expansion in the world and a rise to power criticism of the old values and traditions sets in. This had happened in the Athens of Eupides, and even as early as Ennius the Romans were questioning the usefulness of the gods.

There are gods; granted; but they do not care what man does; else good men would have a good time, and bad men a bad time, which is not the case. Such ideas flourished prior to the time of Virgil. But he could not accept such ideas, rather trusting in divine providence and attempting to show the fallacy of these early thoughts. Such an attitude had been possible only because of the concern with this life and which did not take into consideration any form of a future life. It was only custom and tradition which continued the practice of man's worship of these gods; "offerings made for ancient custom's sake," there being no real reason left for sustaining these customs. How could it be otherwise, with no trust in the gods and no sense of morals in their worship?

Epicurus was the first who dared to take a stand against religion and the fables of the gods, who were only "threatening mortals from on high."
In *De Rerum Natura* Lucretius interpreted this Hellenistic Greek belief of gods who did not have any need, nor care, for man, and consequently man could have no need for any such gods. Knowledge was the prize to be sought by every man, for it alone could show "how each thing has its powers defined," including those powers of men and gods. By the study of the universe, man, with the aid of his divine reason, could dispel all terrors from his mind, especially his fear of death:

This terror, therefore, and darkness of the mind must be dispersed, not by rays of the sun nor the bright shafts of daylight, but by the aspect and law of nature.

Virgil admired this work of Lucretius, who had opened up for him a world of exploration and discovery, but he could not accept the Epicurean philosophy of man's non-relationship with the gods. Just as we can call upon God, so Virgil could call upon his spiritual power and ask for help:

O Jupiter, all-able one, if you are moved by any prayers, look on us. if by our goodness we merit it, then, Father, grant to us your help.

While the Epicureans denied that the gods cared anything at all for mankind, the Stoics believed that the nature of man was a part of the universal nature in the care of the gods. This Stoic theory certainly was of greater benefit to mankind, and more in conformity with the beliefs of Virgil. Cicero's book, *De Natura Deorum,*
states this Stoic belief that:

... the gods care for all human beings everywhere in every coast and region of the lands ... between the sunrise and the sunset. 28

It is not an entirely new idea for Plato had also spoken of this, that man is a possession of the gods in their care (see Phaedo 62C), but it is an idea which has greatly advanced since the time of Homer when the gods did not care at all for the general mass of mankind. The gods were concerned only with their own favorites, most often their own divine offspring. But why would the gods care for mankind? It was because man "was granted the divine gift of the soul ... generated in us by God" 29 himself, that the gods were concerned for mankind. Virgil recognizes this fact, for the soul is a "... fiery energy/ ... their source is heavenly." 30

Virgil has come to reject the limitations imposed by the Epicurean doctrine of the atoms and the materialism of the universe. Instead he has accepted the divine providence theory of the Stoics and Plato's belief in the immortality of the soul, 31 a belief he shares with Cicero.

Just as the eternal God moves the universe, which is in part mortal, so does an everlasting soul move the corruptible body. 32

As in the Orphic belief that the soul was but a prisoner of the body during this earthly life, Virgil believed that the soul could not realize its divine potential until after its release from the body at death:
... but they are dulled by harmful bodies, blunted by their own earthly limbs, their mortal members. Because of these, they fear and long, and sorrow and joy, they do not see the light of heaven; they are dungeoned in their darkness and blind prison.  

Here we have an important development in the thought of Virgil. There is a change in direction from a concern of just this life to a concern about the future life. This was an important new concept towards the final realization of the destiny of a divine and immortal soul. The soul came from heaven and there it was destined to return. To expidite this journey life here on earth should not interfere with the final release of the soul from the body. Only a moral and righteous life could aid in this escape of the soul from this earth to the next. The most ideal existence came to be found, not here on earth anymore, but in the afterlife.

The Greeks had ventured to describe the happy afterlife in terms of an ideal earthly existence. Virgil continues such a tradition of an afterlife existence where:

... the very same delight that once was theirs in life—in arms and chariots and care to pasture their sleek steeds—has followed to this underearth. And here to right and left he can see others: some feasting on the lawns; and some chanting glad choral paeans in a fragrant laurel grove ...  

The best of the earthly existence is to be continued in the afterlife. But more than a mere gift of the gods, such an afterlife has to be earned by a moral and righteous life lived on earth.
Your first and fairest prize will come from gods and out of your own conduct. 

Though often very difficult to live a good life, man had to learn to mend his ways. "Be warned, learn justice, do not scorn the gods!" Virgil advises his audience, as Hesiod had done many centuries earlier. To live a moral life would be of immense benefit at death, for "not all the plagues of body," those sins committed in this life, are completely omitted from the soul by death. Purification becomes necessary, an idea of immense importance to the common man. Here was a chance for man, though having lived a life in sin and evil, to regain some hope of attaining a happy afterlife through a process of purification. Though basically thought of as a Christian idea it was not unknown in the ancient world. It was an idea which was of great benefit in the transition from the pagan to the Christian world, an idea we will again encounter in Dante.

In this question of the journey of the soul from the moment of death to its fate in the afterlife Virgil was heavily indebted to the Greek idea of a judgement after death, an idea which the Greeks had never fully developed. But Virgil takes full advantage of this idea and completely reworks the ideas of purification and of rewards and punishments. This judgement in the underworld assigns to the souls a form of purification in a degree appropriate to the condition of the soul:
Therefore they are schooled by punishment and pay with torments for their old misdeeds: some there are purified by air, suspended and stretched before the empty winds; for some the stain of guilt is washed away beneath a mighty whirlpool or consumed by fire.  

This is a most important development in the thought of Virgil, which will be even more fully developed by Dante. But Virgil had initiated such thoughts and applied it, particularly, to his ideas of punishment. Just as there is a degree of purification, Virgil also separates into different areas, according to the crimes they had committed, those souls which had been doomed to Hades. Therefore we see the souls of infants, of suicides, or those whose life was consumed by bitter love, all wandering in their own particular area of Hades. Such a degree of punishment is an important development of the pagan world readily adaptable into the Christian beliefs.

The topography of Virgil's underworld, so well described in his sixth book of the _Aeneid_, is reminiscent at times of Plato's _Myth of Er_. Upon arrival in the underworld the soul must, of course, first cross the River Acheron to the place where:

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... the road divides in two directions: on the right it runs beneath the ramparts of great Dis, this is our highway to Elysium; the wicked are punished on the left—that path leads down to godless Tartarus.  
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It is the righteous soul which may travel the road leading to Elysium, where it may, for a time:
... live in shady groves and settle on soft riverbanks and meadows where fresh streams flow. . . .

Here they may rest only for a while, for their complete cycle of existence has not yet fully run its course.

Plato's idea of reincarnation, ultimately traceable back to Pindar and the Orphics, was an important influence upon Virgil, as was Ennius, who, subscribing to the Pythagorean doctrine of transmigration of souls, believed himself to be the reincarnated Homer. It was from such theories that Virgil derived his idea of the purified souls returning again to earth for another round of earthly existence.

Virgil brilliantly pictures this idea with his procession of the souls in Elysium waiting to be born again, and his prophecy of the future heroes and greatness of Rome. But these souls, before being allowed to take up another body, must be completely purified, a process which takes one thousand years, or:

... until the finished cycle of the ages, with lapse of days, annuls the ancient stain and leaves the power of ether pure in us, the fire of spirit simple and unsoiled.

These are those spirits:

... to whom fate owes a second body, and they drink the waters of the river Lethe, the care-less drafts of long forgetfulness.

When all stains of previous crimes have been fully eradicated and all memory of previous existence wiped away, then these purified souls:
are summoned by the god to Lethe in a great assembly that, free from memory, they may return beneath the curve of the upper world, that they may once again begin to wish for bodies. And yet, there are some whose life on earth was a model of piety and worthiness, such that they have been excused from this cycle of rebirths, something which these very "few of us will gain the Fields of Gladness--," the final end for all purified souls. Anchises, the father of Aeneas, is one of those few souls which has found its final reward. Though Anchises was a worthy person who perhaps deserved a final rest from all his worldly toils and troubles, I suspect that his being the husband of Venus was a factor of enough importance to admit him to this final reward.

With Rome's expansion into the East many of the Eastern astrological religions entered Italy. Posidonius had introduced into the doctrine of the Stoics the philosophical and religious beliefs of the Pythagoreans, who had come to believe in a celestial immortality. Virgil professed some knowledge of such theory in Eclogue 5. The shepherd, Daphnis, has gained such a celestial immortality due to his great beauty and his love for the countryside, which endeared him to the nymphs and the muses.

Daphnis, in radiant beauty, marvels at Heaven's unfamiliar threshold, and beneath his feet beholds the clouds and the stars.

The close relationship between astrology and Stoicism resulted in the growing belief that the true abode of the worthy soul was in the upper heavens. A celestial
immortality proved to be a popular concept, with many people coming to believe that a life of true worth "Opens a path to heaven." Virgil had already removed his Elysium from the darkness of Hades and had ascribed to it a glorious light of its own. This, coupled with the new ideas of a celestial immortality, made it easier for many people to combine the two thoughts and put all their hope in a happy afterlife somewhere beyond the stars. The new emphasis upon the future life also allowed many to conceive of this happy afterlife outside of the usual descriptions of earthly existence. Ovid hoped that:

When it will, let that day come which has no power save over this mortal frame . . . in my better part I shall be borne immortal far beyond the lofty stars and I shall have an undying name.

The age of Virgil was a cosmopolitan age when many different opinions concerning the afterlife circulated among the thinkers, poets, and the general population. Old beliefs lingered while new ideas vied for acceptance. Virgil reflected many of these views and attempted to draw a unifying picture of the happy afterlife. In composing this view Virgil was able to draw from a wealth of knowledge, from the Greeks and from his own Roman world. With this wealth of learning Virgil was able to build the Greek idea of Elysium into a more profound view of the happy afterlife.

Significant to the whole idea of Virgil's happy afterlife is his de-emphasizing of this earthly life,
believing that the future life holds more promise for the mass of mankind. Elysium is that place where all souls are capable of finding happiness. Here is to be found that idyllic earthly existence, for which all men yearn, an idea he borrowed from the Greeks.

But more than just borrow, Virgil often improved upon what he accepted and used it in his quest for fuller knowledge. Elysium has become a place separated from the torments of Hades, a place with the glorious light of its own sun and stars. By separating the worlds of reward and punishment Virgil seems to be making the added emphasis that Elysium is a unique place removed from the bonds of the everyday world. His idea of celestial immortality perfectly complements this idea, a concept which was to be the accepted view during the Middle Ages.

Wherever Elysium is to be found, there is only one true way to get there, and that is by leading a moral life. Only those who, due to a life of achievement, deserved to be remembered for their service to the gods and mankind could hope to gain Elysium as their reward for a moral life. Gone are those ideas of divine favoritism, it is left up to man himself, with the help of the gods, to live as best he can.

This can often be difficult in a world full of evils and man being so frail. Purification becomes necessary before the soul can abide in Elysium. This is a
process done to the soul, which erases all memory from the soul. Though an automatic process (as opposed to the later Christian belief of purification) Virgil does recognize that there is a differing degree of the condition of man which subsequently requires a varying degree of purification before the soul is completely cleansed. Such a complete purification is a necessary process for the thought of Virgil who believed that the souls must go through a series of rebirths. Reincarnation was necessary, as Virgil saw it, for it was from these souls in Elysium that the future generations were to come. After this series of rebirths the soul could look forward to its final rest in the Fields of Gladness, a more renowned part of Elysium itself.

As I have shown, Virgil really admired the learning of ancient Greece and Rome, but he was also a part of the procession of history and saw the body of knowledge continually growing. And this is what I so admire about Virgil, his ability to perceive what is beautiful and somehow adopt and adapt it into his own scheme of things. He didn't repudiate what he had learned previously, but built upon this in his search for higher truths. The beautiful Greek idea of Elysium he takes and transforms into a concept closely approaching the Christian sense of a happy afterlife. Yes, Virgil, whether knowingly or by chance, often points towards the future, easing the transition from a
pagan to a Christian world.

Virgil had professed some interest in a celestial immortality, where the just spirits rise through the heavens to the Supreme Being beyond the fixed stars. This is an idea which grew stronger from the time of the Roman Empire through the Middle Ages. The place of purification came to be conceived of as a purgatory, somewhere between heaven and hell, with the wicked being cast into the depths of the earth. This cosmology of a three-fold division of the universe, which was undoubtedly much influenced by Christian thinking, ultimately became accepted by Dante.
Footnotes

1 Polybius 6. 25 11.
2 Virgil Aeneid 6. 532.
3 "... as part of the tradition in which he was brought up a feeling of reverence for the gods and a sense that the well-being of the state was bound up with the due performance of their rites." M. L. Clarke, The Roman Mind (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 4.
4 "... Roman religion was hard, formal, and contractual with no claim on emotion ... only an insistence on the strict discharge of obligations ..." W. F. Jackson Knight, Roman Vergil (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1944), p. 22.
5 "For one, I trow, may pay the sacrifice/Of thousands, if his heart leal and true." Sophocles Oedipus at Colonus 498-99.
6 "Vergil believed in a universe divinely created and divinely controlled according to laws, both physical and moral." W. F. Jackson Knight, Roman Vergil (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1944), p. 326.

7 The Olympian gods:

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8 Virgil Aeneid 1. 320-21.
10 "... the old arguments, Epicurean and Stoic, which once filled Vergil's young thoughts, occur. They have gone to control and give symbols to his feeling." W. F. Jackson Knight, Roman Vergil (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1944), p. 145.
11 "An excellent example of this composite method is afforded by the Descent into Hell in Book VI, modelled

12"But generally, the lower world was thought of as the home of the Manes, or Di manes, the 'good folk' or 'good gods'." H. J. Rose, Ancient Roman Religion (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1948), p. 82.

13"The Romans were a people of little imagination, and their infernal mythology remained rudimentary until . . . they borrowed from the Greeks the picturesque stories . . ." Frenz Cumont, After Life in Roman Paganism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923), p. 72.

15Virgil Aeneid 6. 846-54.
16Virgil Aeneid 6. 880-81.
17Virgil Aeneid 6. 877.
18Virgil Aeneid 7. 268-71.

19"When the ancient rural religion of Rome had become a thing outworn in the eyes of thinking men and the anthropomorphism of Greece was beginning to pall, people sought a resting place for their souls in Greek philosophy." T. J. Haarhoff, Vergil the Universal (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1949), p. 30.

20Ennius Fragment of his Tragedy: The Telamo.
21Catullus Poem 5.
22Lucretius De Rerum Natura 1. 63.
23Lucretius De Rerum Natura 1. 78.
24"For as soon as thy reasoning born of a divine intelligence begins to proclaim the nature of things, away flee the mind's terrors . . ." Lucretius De Rerum Natura 3. 14.

25Lucretius De Rerum Natura 3. 91-93.
26"Lucretius . . . opened up to Virgil a vaster world than any known before . . . He has thrilled him with the romance of unending exploration and discovery." F. J. H. Letters, Virgil (London: Sheed and Ward, 1946), p. 76.
27 Virgil Aeneid 2. 933-37.
28 Cicero De Natura Deorum 2. 165.
29 Cicero Laws 1. 24.
30 Virgil Aeneid 6. 963-64.

31 "But as his thought develops he discards the limitations of Epicurean materialism and the doctrine of the 'fortuitous concourse of atoms'. He comes to accept the Stoic view of Providence and the Platonic doctrine of the immortality of the soul, with all its implications." T. J. Haarhoff, Vergil the Universal (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1949), p. 6.

32 Cicero Scipio's Dream p. 168.
33 Virgil Aeneid 6. 965-69.
34 Virgil Aeneid 6. 865-72.
36 Virgil Aeneid 6. 823.
37 Virgil Aeneid 6. 971-72.
38 Virgil Aeneid 6. 975-80.
40 Virgil Aeneid 6. 891-93.


42 Virgil Aeneid 6. 984-87.
43 Virgil Aeneid 6. 941-43.
44 Virgil Aeneid 6. 989-93.
45 Virgil Aeneid 6. 983.

46 "The belief in a celestial immortality which was thus propagated by the half philosophical, half religious sect of the Pythagoreans was to find a powerful interpreter in . . . Posidonius." Franz Cumont, After Life in Roman

47. Virgil Eclogue 5. 56-57.

48. "Astrology came into close relation with Stoicism . . . one result of all this speculation was the development of a belief that the home of the soul was . . . in the upper spaces of the firmament." J. F. D'Alton, Horace and His Age (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1962), p. 228.

49. Horace Odes 3. 11, 23.

50. Ovid Metamorphoses 15. 872-74.

51. " . . . it is clear from inscriptions what great variety of beliefs regarding the dead continued to prevail at Rome . . ." J. F. D'Alton, Horace and His Age (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1962), p. 239.

52. In Elysium there are: "they who have earned their reward not merely by innocence but by achievement, warriors and priests and poets and inventors, all who have deserved by their services to be remembered by mankind." W. A. Camps, An Introduction to Virgil's Aeneid (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 87.

53. " . . . immaterial spirits of the just rising through the planetary spheres to the Supreme Being . . . above . . . fixed stars; the posthumous purification of those whom life had sullied in a purgatory intermediary between heaven and hell; the descent of the wicked into the depths of the earth where they suffered eternal chastisement." Franz Cumont, After Life in Roman Paganism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923), p. 43.
CHAPTER IV

DANTE

It was sometime during the fourth century A.D. that the Roman Empire was divided in two: the Eastern half with its capital at Constantinople, and the Western half with its capital at Rome. The Eastern half, eventually to be called the Byzantine Empire, survived until the fall of Constantinople in the year 1453, but the Western half suffered its decline much earlier. With the number and the strength of the barbarian invasions from the North constantly increasing, Rome fell to the invaders in the year 476. With the fall of Rome, Western Europe lost its main unifying force of government and its sense of order.

There remained one force throughout the old Western empire which retained some sort of control over these areas. This was the Catholic Church, with the Pope as its head, and it came to be regarded as the new power of Europe. Secular power was superseded by the spiritual realm of the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church inherited the ancient culture of Rome, but inevitably replaced many of the pagan aspects with the cloak of Christianity. Such early writers and thinkers as St. Paul, St. Augustine, and Boethius had done
much to transform the ancient learning of the pagan world into conformity with the early teachings of the Church, meanwhile giving to the early Church a sense of its own identity. Much of the previous culture influenced the new thought, but the ancient wisdom of the Jewish nation came to play the leading role in Christian thought. The Judaic concept of one God was of striking importance, and had found some adherents in the classical world. Virgil had pointed to such a concept in picturing Jupiter as the all-powerful, and much earlier the Greeks had dedicated an altar to a single 'Unknown God'. Those early ideas of a Supreme Being or Mind which through its actions moved the universe, evolved, through the Jewish concept of Yaweh, into the Christian God who is the one and only power to control the universe. This God controls and is involved with all beings throughout all time, watching over His creation, not just putting all things in motion and leaving it to chance, the old pagan idea of a Supreme Deity.

It was the scholars, men living in the monasteries, the new centers of learning, who kept the ancient wisdom alive and preserved it during the long centuries. The fact that the language of the Church was the language of the Roman Empire was one of the main reasons for any continuing study of the ancient writers at all. Virgil, as an able representative of the Latin language, consequently became an important contributor, to the Christian writers.
In this way the classical learning influenced the thought of the early Church leaders. This, in conjunction with the teachings of the Bible, formed the Catholic religion of the Middle Ages, the religion of Dante.²

Throughout the Middle Ages the Church grew in power and influence, and was well established by the time of Dante in the thirteenth century. Although the Church was recognized as the supreme power throughout Western Europe, political divisions did exist, with each area gradually gaining a sense of its own identity. Dante admired his own city of Florence, as well as Italy, the same land which had produced that greatest of Latin poets, Virgil. As the national poet of ancient Italy, he was highly regarded by Dante, the national poet of medieval Italy.³

... Thou art my master, and my author thou
From thee alone I learned the singing strain
The noble style, that does me honour now.⁴

Here we find one of those all-important links that connect one generation to the next, and advance the march of civilization.

Dante was more than just a national poet, he was poet of the whole Medieval world, for "The whole of the Middle Ages moves before us in Dante's thumbnail sketches."⁵ This makes him a worthy representative of his age, an ideal subject for tracing the Medieval view of the happy after-life. In examining Dante's beliefs, I will attempt to show
that they are in part a development of those concepts espoused by the ancient Greeks and developed by Virgil and greatly influenced by Christian teachings. The development of thought which suggested to Dante his picture of Limbo was a direct result of the ancient pagan view of Elysium. Dante's accent of the Mount of Purgatory can be found in similar beliefs in Plato and Virgil, but with some important variations necessitated by the new Christian faith. Where before, purification was only a mere process to be endured, it now has become a joy unto itself. Dante's Earthly Paradise has become the place of the golden age of mankind of which the Greeks and Romans had only dreamed. Where previously there had been merely a hope, Dante showed how mankind was now finally able to believe in another golden age. Dante's Paradise, though unique, is similar to Graeco-Roman thoughts of what constitutes happiness in the afterlife. Such descriptions find their origin in the imagination of man himself, presented in pictures the author is most familiar with. In this, Dante is exactly the same as Virgil, Pindar, Hesiod, and all those who expressed some knowledge of what constitutes happiness in the afterlife. It is just that Dante gives his picture of the happy afterlife by firmly taking into consideration the new theories of light, order, and hierarchy of the medieval world.

Dante's view of Hell is a natural development from
Virgil's sixth book of the *Aeneid*, which in turn is a development of Homer's eleventh book of the *Odyssey*. The Greek mythological characters constitute the connecting elements throughout these three works. Of course, belief in these characters, such as those of the underworld, has changed through the ages, but this does not diminish their value as elements in works of art.

The *Divine Comedy* masterfully brings together both pagan and Christian views regarding the afterlife, and Dante's brilliant "drama of the soul's choice,"\(^6\) shows three states of life after death: Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise (Heaven).\(^7\) It is a Christian afterlife in design, judged by Christian standards, but illustrated by various ideas ranging from those mythological characters of ancient Greece through the philosophical ideas of Plato, St. Thomas Aquinas, Medieval philosophy and Catholic theology. It is peopled by characters who disclose in a single act the individual choice of the soul for its particular existence in the afterlife.\(^8\) In Dante's afterlife "we have what we choose, in the way which we choose to have it,"\(^9\) or, as Plato would say, it is this life which determines our existence in the next (Gorgias 524 D).

Dante adheres to the Ptolemaic system of the universe, which places the earth at its center, as the scheme of his afterlife. His *Inferno* is in the depths of the earth, Purgatory is a mountain rising above the surface
of the earth, and Heaven is beyond the spheres encircling the earth. It is left up to the soul to choose where to spend eternity, either to sink to the depths of Hell, or to rise up to the Heavens.

The question of an afterlife had intrigued the minds of Greece and Rome, but this life had always been of supreme importance to them. Dante, as a firm Catholic, believed that man had been created for the life to come, a striking new idea putting the focus on the future life. The whole of the *Divine Comedy*, as a journey of the soul in search of its creator, amply illustrates this belief.

By the Middle Ages immortality had become the sure destiny of all men. Plato had, many centuries earlier, shown the immortality of the soul as a part of the divine nature of a Supreme Being. The Catholic Church also taught that the soul was divine, and consequently, immortal, a belief Dante firmly believed in. The soul was created by God, "Not to increase His good, which cannot be," but out of the eternal goodness of God to share in His glorious immortality. Where, previously, man had been thought of as the product of mere chance with a soul immortal as part of divine nature, there was now a new emphasis upon the divine origin of the soul, as a deliberate creation of God:

... the First Mover...
... inbreathes a rare New Spirit, filled with virtue to constrain To its own substance whatso active there It finds, and make one single soul complete Alive and sensitive, and self-aware.
Man was created and placed in the Garden of Eden, an earthly Paradise. But man had also been created with a free will with which he chose not to recognize his creator. A large segment of mankind lost all knowledge of God and their faith in the Supreme Being. Though they possibly were worthy men, the so-called pagans had no faith and thus could not hope for a blessed afterlife. God's justice could not allow them to enter into Heaven, for:

... None ever soared
To this high realm that had not faith in Christ.  

Faith was necessary for all souls desiring to enter Heaven. Innocent and righteous souls not baptized in the true faith were restricted, instead, to that part of Hell, called Limbo.

They sinned not; yet their merit lacked its chiefest Fulfilment, lacking baptism, which is
The gateway to the faith which thou believest;  

This is the home of those many virtuous, but pagan, souls, Virgil among them, who here "without hope ... ever live, and long," and in their existence "nor grief nor joy displayed." It is a place far removed from the brightness of Heaven, situated before the gates of Hell, a region:

Made sad by darkness only, not by pain,
And where no shrieks resound, but only sighs;  

Here they reside in darkness, in absence of the knowledge of God, just as they had not known Him in life. The ancient writers imaginations had discovered the happy afterlife in Elysium which they here found transformed by Dante into a
Christian Limbo. Dante draws similarities between his Limbo and the ancient descriptions of Elysium. Here is the one region of Hell where there were "fresh green meadows"\textsuperscript{19} under quiet airs. The souls exist as they had upon earth but suffer no toils or pains. By relegating these souls to Limbo, Dante at once achieves the desired result of staying within the dogma of the Church while at the same time relegating his famous heroes, the ancients, to the kind of afterlife they had always hoped for.

Not just Limbo, but the whole of Hell is a panorama of the Christian abode of the damned, illustrated by scenes from Greek mythology and the underworld of Virgil's \textit{Aeneid}. Hell is that place of everlasting punishment for the sin of rejecting God. Souls are in Hell because they willingly chose evil and their punishment consists of an endless life spent in the sin of their earthly existence.\textsuperscript{20} Such is the perfect justice of God.

Dante's emergence from Hell was due to his faith in Christ. But having been in Hell, the abode of sin, purgation was necessary to cleanse the soul. That leads to the second realm:

\begin{quote}
Where human spirits purge themselves, and train
To leap up into joy celestial.\textsuperscript{21}
\end{quote}

Purgatory is the place where, through suffering, the souls are purged of their sins. Though there is suffering, there is joy here also, for the souls know that
there will be an end to their suffering and that they are on their way to see God. The suffering in Hell is everlasting with no hope of ever gaining release, but here the souls suffer purgation gladly for the sins of their life. Plato, in his *Myth of Er*, and Virgil also, had spoken of purgation as being necessary for the soul before entering into its new life, but for them purgation was a mere mechanical act, without emotion, accomplished in a set amount of time, usually a thousand years. For Dante, purgation and purification of the soul is a process of the heart and mind, done in steps, while scaling the Mount of Purgatory. It takes as long as the souls themselves deem it necessary, and is accomplished only by the will of the soul itself.\(^2^2\)

The will itself attests its own purgation;
Amazed, the soul that's free to change its inn
Finds its mere will suffice for liberation.\(^2^3\)

True repentance of one's sins can come about only from within, when the soul, of its own choice "is quick to spill his own sin forth."\(^2^4\) The pagan process of mechanical purgation has gained the force of moral sense which determines the ascent of the soul up the mountain for "nothing can force it."\(^2^5\) It is the true justice of God which rules in Purgatory, as throughout the entire universe, for it was man who chose sin and it is left up to him to acknowledge this sin, the necessary first step towards purification.
With the confession of sin forgiveness follows and the arduous climb up the mountain nears its end. The soul passes through a last purifying ring of fire and enters into the Earthly Paradise, the uppermost point of the Mount of Purgatory. The soul has now returned to the place for which it was originally created before the fall of man, and it is a place of refreshing beauty:

Where all the soil breathes out a fragrant scent. A delicate air, that no inconstancies Knows in its motion.26

When man had first been created he had been given possession of this Earthly Paradise where he lived in a direct relationship with God, innocent and happy in all things. Hesiod had written of such an early age of mankind, which he called the golden age27 and which Dante identifies with the age of creation.

Here was the innocent root of all man's seed; Here spring is endless, here all fruits are, here The nectar is, which runs in all their rede.28

Both pagan and Christian agreed that man had originated in a state of perfection. Yet this did not seem enough and man fell into the snare of sin only to lose all earthly abundance and, what is more important, his privileged relationship with God.

Hesiod had illustrated this origin of evil with his story of 'Pandora's Box' which doomed all mankind. This is a concept equal to the Christian teachings of the fall of man and the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, here called
the Earthly Paradise. But Hesiod clung to the hope that someday man could return to Paradise, as did Virgil, who alluded to the birth of a baby who would initiate a new golden age. For the Christian believer such a return is possible only when the soul has been completely purified of all stains of sin.

If man had not fallen, he would never have known Hell or been required to climb the Mount of Purgatory. Instead he would have lived in this Paradise until such a time as he felt ready to ascend directly into Heaven, according to the original plan of creation.

With the purification of the soul almost completed there yet remained for the soul to have all memory of sin completely expunged. Plato, and Virgil, had spoken of such a process, referring to the River of Forgetfulness, that place where all memory of the previous existence was washed away. In Dante's parallel the soul has to cross a body of water to have all memory of sin erased, but for him this was a necessary part of the process of final purification of the soul. For the ancient authors the process did not restore good deeds to the memory of the soul, as Dante here professes:

This side blots all man's sins from memory;
That side to memory all good deeds restores;
Lethe this side, and that side Eunoë.  

With all memory of sin completely erased, and the memory of good deeds restored, the soul is now ready to enter Heaven.
For this, after all, the soul had been created, something which the soul had never been able to forget;

That which is born in us and cannot die,
Thirst for the godlike realm,...

Paradise is the 'golden realm' where the soul is to enjoy the rewards of a good earthly life and its faith in God. Dante divides his Paradise into the ten spheres of Heaven suggested by the medieval hierarchy, order, and purpose throughout the universe. It is through this systematic order of Paradise that the soul will rise, "Till to the Infinite Good it last has won." 

Dante's whole concept of Heaven is based on a theory of light, God, the original source of all light that illuminates the universe:

For God's rays penetrate with shafts so keen
Through all the universe, in due degree.

The universe and all of creation reflect this light in its own degree of intensity. Hell is the abode of darkness, in direct opposition to Heaven, the source of light. Light grows brighter and "purer as they mount" through the spheres of Heaven, and "produces every kind of goodness and justice and truth," illustrating the conditions necessary for eternal life. In this light man can come to know God Himself. With such a light and its changing colors, Dante provides for a sense of variety in this Heaven, and against such a background the souls, as a "white-robed company," appear to Dante, themselves
radiating light, joy, and life eternal:

And every shade approaching us appeared
Glad through and through, so luminously shone
Its flooding joy before it as it neared.39

And what is it that allows these souls to radiate with so much happiness? It is a simple reason:

Brother, our love has laid our wills to rest,
Making us long only for what is ours, 40
And by no other thirst to be possessed.

This complete satisfaction of the will, leaving no room for any ambition at all, is what makes this Heaven the perfect happy afterlife. It is the love of God which allows that; "Each thing becomes that which it really is;" residing in its own particular niche in Heaven. Though there is a hierarchy in Heaven, there is no possible jangling of the individual will with the will of God. The perfect goodness and justice of God knows each soul's particular place in the hierarchy of Heaven.

If we could wish to bide in loftier bowers,
Our wish would jangle with that will of His
Which hath assigned our proper place and powers; . . . 42

It does not matter to the souls themselves where each one appears to be, in which sphere of Heaven, for it is part of the one heavenly family:

And each share one sweet life, diversified
As each feels more or less the eternal breath.
They're shown thee here, not that they here reside,
Alotted to this sphere; their heavenly mansion,
Being least exalted, is thus signified.43

The souls reside in the upper part of Heaven, and it is only for the purpose of showing the varying degrees of
blessedness that they are shown in their state of bliss which each had been able to achieve, and willingly accepted.

Dante's (and the soul's) journey through the spheres of Heaven is due to the beneficent power of God "who draws them with His love." And so "from light to light we slip through Heav'n" towards God, the "Primal Good" who through:

His goodness, which draws home
To this high world the world of lower kind.

In this manner all souls are drawn to the highest Heaven, the Empyrean, to God himself, "the final source of bliss and light."

And so the souls ascent:

Within that heaven which is pure light alone:
Pure intellectual light, fulfilled with love,
Love of the true Good, filled with all delight,
Transcending sweet delight, all sweets above.

Here, in this highest Heaven, Dante describes brilliant scenes of pure light in an "eternal never-fading Spring," a garden where the:

Light I beheld which as a river flowed,
Fulgid with splendour; and on either shore
The colours of a wondrous springtime showed.

In such a place is to be found that supreme satisfaction of the individual soul, to be made perfect in the company of the Supreme Being:

For everything the will has ever sought
Is gathered there, and there is every quest
Made perfect, which apart from it falls short.

Only here, in the true knowledge of God has man been ful-
filled, and he can now live in perfect peace and happiness in the company of God and all the other blessed souls. The individual souls radiate perfect peace and contentment, for here:

... these Substances enjoyed the bliss
Of gazing on God's face, wherein are seen
All things . . .53

This is the reward for such a long and arduous journey, the soul now able to look upon the face of God, a prospect which Dante can now fully appreciate. His whole journey up the spheres of Heaven, through light grown more brilliant, has prepared him for this glimpse of God, the holy Trinity:

That light supreme, within its fathomless
Clear substance, showed to me three spheres, which bare
Three hues distinct, and occupied one space;54

But the sight so overwhelms him, and the feeling of happiness it produces is so great, that the poetic skill of Dante here fails (he seems to feel) to do justice to what all souls can expect to experience:

Were I endowed with wealth of words to say
All I imagine, yet I dared not try
The least part of their gladness to convey.55

Though Dante may have felt his own shortcomings of poetic skill, I can detect no such thing. It is just in this hesitation of Dante to describe the utmost glory of God and the happiness of the souls that he does it the most worthy honor. He leaves it up to each soul to see God as he himself will experience it. After all, this is Dante's
own view of what he imagines Heaven and God to be. It is his remarkable skill which is able to universalize his own experience and belief and to lead other souls in their vision of God, where they also will understand:

So deep the eternal light to search and sound
That my whole vision was therein consumed!
In that abyss I saw how love held bound
Into one volume all the leaves whose flight
Is scattered through the universe around.\(^56\)

With this vision of God Dante's pilgrimage is complete, and so closes the *Divine Comedy*. But each of us has travelled along with Dante, each on his own journey, hopefully to attain the vision which he was so privileged to observe. With such a bright and happy place as Heaven awaiting us all we can actually look forward to the day when we shall be there. Death need not be feared anymore, being only the portal to the next life.

For the complete realization of this eternal happy afterlife, Christianity taught a belief completely new to the consciousness of man. Earlier the body of man had been seen as doomed to everlasting death. Christianity taught the resurrection of this body, a belief finding evidence in the person of the resurrected Christ, and of Mary, both of whom were taken up to Heaven in both body and soul:

Two only straightway to Heaven did mount
... in both robes are clad.\(^57\)

This is how it will be for all souls at the end of the world, at "the last loud angelic trumpet's
At the general resurrection and the final judgement, the body will be rejoined to the soul, and this new body will outshine all else:

The lustre which already swathes us round
Shall be outlustred by the flesh, which long
Day after day now moulders underground.

This will be the final completeness, the end result of creation. For now the body and soul are rejoined and shall never again be subject to death.

Those judged worthy . . . They become like angels and are no longer liable to death. Sons of the resurrection, they are sons of God.

It is a new and glorious body and soul, now truly worthy to be called a son of God.

And when we put completeness on afresh,
All the more gracious shall our person be,
Reclothed in the holy and glorious flesh.

The body was not the prison of the soul anymore. It was an important part of the total human being to be rewarded for having carried the soul through its life on earth. Now for all eternity shall the glorious body and soul spend its life in a Heaven of brilliant lights. To gaze upon the face of God was for Dante the highest expression of love and devotion in the afterlife. It was an idea Dante had derived from his knowledge of the Bible where he read:

A thirst is my soul for God, the living god.
When shall I go and behold the face of God?

Dante answered this question with his Divine Comedy. It is
for God that he yearns and his whole life is a journey to this end. He paints his odyssey through the world of the afterlife in pictures borrowed from the ancients molded to the contemporary beliefs of his Catholic Church.

Thus we have those similarities between the medieval and the classical beliefs. But Dante strikes out on his own, with the backing of the Catholic religion, and presents us with a Heaven more beautiful than anything before imaginable. Happiness does not consist merely of a satisfaction of the physical senses in a world of meadows overgrown with flowers. Happiness consists of the full satisfaction of the spirit of man for he has now gained full knowledge in the light of God. Nothing remains hidden anymore and the soul is completely satisfied and in total harmony with its new existence.

Dante's view of the happy afterlife has endured the centuries and is still the accepted view for many of us today. This is because he presented us with an idea which completely fulfills the hope of mankind that there may be something better after death. It was the Catholic teachings of death and eternal life which enabled Dante to look forward to the next life with so much hope. It is this complete trust which separates Dante from the pagan authors. For Dante it is life after death which holds all values.

Yet, travelling by his path Dante arrived at many of the same results as did the pagans, although they
travelled by a different path. Many of the pagan ideas, such as Elysium, Dante transforms into conformity with his Christian religion. He learns from the past and utilizing this knowledge he builds for the future.

Dante's happy afterlife is within the reach of all souls if they so wish. There is nothing that can keep them from their just rewards except their own will, a radical departure from those pagan ideas where there were various forces which determined which souls would be rewarded.

An important step in the realization of this final reward is Dante's development of Virgil's process of purification which becomes the way of souls to lose all bonds with sin while all good deeds are restored to the soul. It is this memory which allows the soul to be completely happy in Heaven, where all souls have gained complete understanding.

Dante's Heaven is the complete realization of the hope which mankind has carried for so long. Here he will spend his eternal life in the presence of God, having no desire for anything else. There is no more need for the continuance of any earthly activities, man now made complete in his new-found understanding of all things. Heaven is completely beyond any reminders of earth, beyond the farthest stars. Here in a world of light the souls will continue an eternal existence reflecting light themselves
showing their own glory while giving honor to the glory of God.
Footnotes

1"... Vergil's fame continued bright, merely altering its colour according to the taste of the time...

2"The oppositions must be fused together, the Platonic and the Evangelical... united in one. This task is accomplished in the Catholic religion of the Middle Ages—in Dante's religion." Karl Vossler, Medieval Culture, 2 vols., trans. William C. Lawton (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929), vol. 1, p. 36.

3"Now this strong national feeling was one of the chief reasons for Dante's sympathy with and predilection for Vergil... Dante regarded Vergil as an eminently national poet." Domenico Comparetti, Vergil in the Middle Ages, trans. E. F. M. Benecke (New York: G. E. Stechert and Company (Alfred Hafner), 1929), p. 203.

4Dante Hell 1. 85-87.

5Dorothy Sayers, from 'Introduction' to Hell, p. 65.

6Dorothy Sayers, from 'Introduction' to Hell, p. 11.

7"Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven are not the fiction invented to carry the allegory, but a true picture of the three states of the life after death." Dorothy Sayers, from 'Introduction' to Hell, p. 13.

8"... the situation and attitude of the souls in the other world is in every way individual and in keeping with their former acts and sufferings on earth." Erich Auerbach, Dante: Poet of the Secular World, trans. Ralph Manheim (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 88.


11"Therefore, since it is the Creator of the
universe who shapes each man's beginning, as he brings about the origin of everything, he, in his mercy, will give you back both breath and life." 2 Maccabees 7:23 (New American Bible).

12 Dante Paradise 29. 13.
13 Dante Purgatory 25. 70-75
14 Dante Paradise 19. 103-04.
15 Dante Hell 4. 34-36.
16 Dante Hell 4. 42.
17 Dante Hell 4. 84.
18 Dante Purgatory 7. 29-30.
19 Dante Hell 4. 111.
20 "In Hell . . . there is only the static monotony of the soul's fixed choice of its own darling sin." Dorothy Sayers, Introductory Papers on Dante (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), p. 108.
21 Dante Purgatory 1. 5-6.
22 "... Dante is still following St. Thomas; and in making the soul's own sense of freedom the signal of release from the torment . . . " Dorothy Sayers, Introductory Papers on Dante (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), p. 89.
23 Dante Purgatory 21. 61-63.
25 Dante Paradise 4. 76.
26 Dante Purgatory 28. 6-8.
27 "Those men of yore who sang the golden time/And all its happy state—maybe indeed/They on Parnassus dreamed of this fair clime." Dante Purgatory 28. 139-41.
28 Dante Purgatory 28. 142-44.
29 "... The Earthly Paradise, the place of Man's innocence . . . It is from here that, if Man had not fallen, he would have entered upon the life of Perfection,
in this world and the next." Dorothy Sayers, from 'Introduction' to Purgatory, p. 68.


31 Dante Paradise 2. 19-20.


33 Dante Paradise 33. 81.

34 Dante Paradise 31. 22-23.

35 Dante Paradise 14. 139.

36 Ephesians 5:9 (New American Bible).

37 "All the variety is provided by the changing colour and intensity of the lights and by the abstract patterns which they trace against a background, itself of pure light." Barbara Reynolds, from 'Introduction' to Paradise, p. 17.

38 Dante Paradise 30. 129.

39 Dante Paradise 5. 106-08.

40 Dante Paradise 3. 70-72.

41 Dante Paradise 20. 78.

42 Dante Paradise 3. 73-75.

43 Dante Paradise 4. 35-39.

44 Dante Paradise 18. 99.

45 Dante Paradise 17. 115-16.

46 Dante Paradise 7. 142.

47 Dante Paradise 9. 107-08.

48 Dante Paradise 33. 27.

49 Dante Paradise 30. 39-42.

51 Dante Paradise 30. 61-63.
52 Dante Paradise 33. 103-05.
53 Dante Paradise 29. 76-78.
54 Dante Paradise 33. 115-17.
55 Dante Paradise 31. 136-38.
56 Dante Paradise 33. 83-87.
58 Dante Hell 6. 95.
59 Dante Paradise 14. 55-57.
61 Dante Paradise 14. 43-45.
62 Psalm 42:3 (New American Library).
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Fear of the unknown has always produced a good amount of anxiety in the mind of man, especially the great unknown beyond death. But death is inevitable, for man as for the whole of nature. Yet man is more than the rest of nature, he has the ability to reason. He reasons about creation and his place in the universe. He is also the only earthly creature able to reason about death.

Man's reason carried him beyond death, imagining places where life might yet be continued. Immortality is what he dreamed of, an existence even better than this earthly life.

This is the topic I have examined in this thesis, spanning the ages from Homer to Dante. It is a subject able to offer many insights into the mind of man; of how he conceives and illustrates his perception of the afterlife. I have been able to examine much, and hopefully, have been able to communicate some of this to my reader, for a greater understanding of man and his heritage.

Beginning in Greece I found that it was the earthly life which held all answers and all hopes for happiness. The most hateful thing they could imagine was
death when all souls were relegated to the dark and dank halls of Hades, somewhere beneath the earth away from the sun. But to the inquiring mind of the Greeks such an idea proved to be inadequate. Why should death put a virtual end to all existence, they inquired. Why couldn't man at least share in the immortality which he saw around him: the rebirth of the sun every morning, the renewal of vegetative life in the spring, or, as according to the early myths and stories, why couldn't man be like the gods themselves. On occasion this happened, when a few heroic souls were allowed to live in the company of the gods, there to lead an idyllic existence. In time a place was set apart for these blessed souls, an area called Elysium. It was virtually another earth where all the pleasures of life could be pursued without any toils or pains. For a people so much involved with life this was the best they were able to imagine.

When the belief that all men possessed a divine soul gained acceptance, it became necessary to allow for the return of this soul to its divine origins. By coming into a closer relationship with those gods of death, the soul could learn the secrets necessary for immortality. With this new knowledge the soul could return to its origins, the aether or fiery energy of the universe. Here was a new theory, immortality for all of mankind.

Divine favoritism was replaced by the idea that
there had to be some justification for man's entry into Elysium. Someone had to judge the soul worthy of such an ambition, something impossible by the indifferent gods of Olympus. When this pantheon came to be superseded by one just Divine Being man could place his trust in such a Supreme Deity and be dealt with in accordance with true justice, both in this life and the next.

It became increasingly necessary for man not to squander his existence here on earth. It was this life which decided the fate of the soul in the next life. Man was required to live a honorable life: the heroic life of Pindar, the philosophic life of Socrates, or a life of achievement as Plato, and Virgil, suggested. This meant that man must live a moral and righteous life here on earth to gain his reward.

The Greeks certainly had made some great advances in their thought concerning the happy afterlife. Elysium had become the privilege, not of just a few, but for many. The way to get there was not a mere mechanical process but the road of moral worthiness as judged by a trustworthy Supreme Being. This whole process was possible because it came to be regarded that man was more than just a mortal human being, he also possessed an immortal soul, a spark of the Divine Being.

History moved on and the glory of Greece was but a memory, but her lofty ideas had survived and found one of
its greatest admirers in Virgil. He adopted much Greek learning into his own works and used it to further his knowledge. Virgil's Elysium was like that Greek Elysium, a place reserved for all those men who, through their achievements of life, deserved to be remembered. For this life in Elysium all earthly taints had to be erased, necessitating the process of purification. This process of purification, adopted from Plato, was to be commensurate with the degree of sinfulness acquired during the life on earth, an idea pointing in the direction of Christian thought. Through Virgil's poetical genius much of the ancient Greek and Roman learning concerning the soul was preserved for later generations. Dante called him his master from whom he borrowed much guidance.

But a new religious force, Christianity, played the leading role in Dante's thought. Catholic teaching gave Dante the philosophical reasoning behind his *Divine Comedy*, which he was able to illustrate by what he had inherited from the classical age. Those ideas, which Greece had initiated and Virgil had adopted, found great favor with Dante, which he used as integral parts of his afterlife. By adapting what he borrowed, he was able to make much of the pagan ideas acceptable in a Christian world.

This is what really excited me in the findings of this thesis. Here was a Christian thinker whose ideas of the afterlife were in such close resemblance to those
classical ideas of the afterlife. I believe this to be more than a mere coincidence. I found pagan and Christian ideas to be virtually the same in many of the important aspects of a future life. Could this be due to the fact that the soul of man has always remained the same divine creation that it is, and has always yearned to return to its true home? It is only man's imperfect knowledge which falls short in his ability to describe this eternal home of the soul.

The Greeks had initiated the search for a happy afterlife, and here it could be found in the Paradise of Dante. I believe that Christianity fulfilled many of the aspirations of the ancient people, confirming their belief that there actually is a better life than this life on earth. The ancients lacked only one important aspect in their belief: faith in the one true God. They only dared hope of such an idyllic place as Elysium, a return to that golden age of mankind. Christianity promised such a return, and more.

For this lack of faith the pagan souls, deemed worthy, are relegated to Limbo, actually a Christian Elysium, for this is the best that they had dared hope for in the future existence. Those with faith in God can now journey to the Earthly Paradise, the golden age of man, and from there ascend through the Heavens and achieve that celestial immortality of which Virgil had spoken.
With the premise that all knowledge and learning is a continued search for the truth, a truth which does not change, I believe that Elysium and Heaven are not so very widely divergent as one might tend to believe. It is only the means used to arrive at this truth and the ways of man to describe it that changes. Both Elysium and Heaven are attained in much the same way, by leading a worthy life. Both are idyllic places of existence where all wants and desires are satisfied. In Elysium it is the worldly desires for peace and knowledge in the sight of God. This is only natural, Elysium being the end result for a people placing the emphasis upon this life, which becomes perfected in the next life. Heaven is the end result for a people placing a greater emphasis upon the future life, a new and entirely different life. The earthly peace and plenty of Elysium has become the spiritual peace and plenty gained in the fulfillment of knowledge of Heaven.

When the Catholic Church taught the new dogma of the resurrection of the body, this opened up new possibilities for a happy afterlife. Dante says that this new body, when rejoined with the glorious soul, will be even more glorious than anything ever before conceived. He says that they will together reside in a world of brilliant light, his picture of Heaven.

In his Divine Comedy Dante says that all of creation reflects this light of God, each in its own degree of
capability. I believe that when the body is resurrected at the end of the world, the entire creation of God will be renewed, more glorious than ever before. I can imagine a place where all worthy souls exist, always in the light of God but in a place much like the ancient descriptions of Elysium. The classical authors were not so far off after all. They only lacked the light gained by knowledge of God and this made their concept of Elysium incomplete. In fact, the source of light for the blessed souls continued to trouble them throughout their evolvement of Elysium. It is Christianity which answers this ancient question of light in the afterlife by firmly establishing God to be this source of light. I am now able to picture an elysian Heaven of green meadows and trees, a place of perfected nature, where all souls can happily wander in full knowledge in the brightest light possible, which is God Himself.

One can readily see from this thesis that I did gain some valuable knowledge. I have gained a greater awareness of the continuity of mankind throughout the ages. The essence of man remains the same, it is only his concept of his surroundings and his ability to describe this that changes and evolves. Our hope of a happy afterlife is not really that much different from that hope of the previous generations, we only building upon those ideas initiated in the classical age. This should be enough proof for everyone to dispel those ideas that the Greek view of
the afterlife was only a bleak view. For me, at least, such a view is not true anymore.

In their quest for truth the Greeks utilized the means of beauty in all things, including their descriptions of the afterlife. Such a beautiful view has always been worthy of imitation, by Virgil or Dante, and even by myself, who is now able to make use of this Elysium to picture yet another idea of what future happiness could possibly consist of.
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Virgil

A: Primary Sources


B: Secondary Sources


Dante

**A: Primary Sources**


**B: Secondary Sources**


## APPENDIX

### CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

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<td>518-438</td>
<td>Xerxes, Persian king defeated by the Greeks.</td>
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<tr>
<td>c.500-465</td>
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