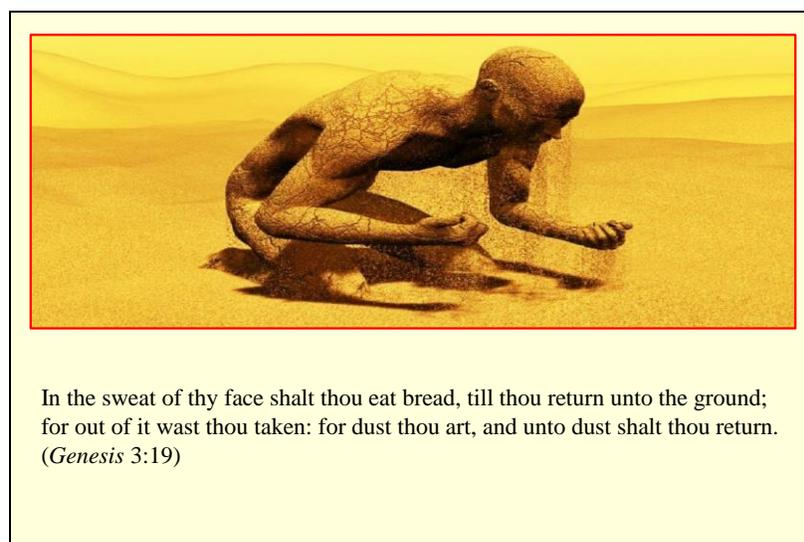


Death comes to us all. The preacher rues the inevitability of death, but does not call it by its name:

All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath.  
(Ecclesiastes 9:2)

For many the thought of death conveys terror. Hodler was deeply concerned with death. This early painting shows five men in various stages of despair. There is a solemn symmetry to the group who progress from the periphery to the center - from awareness through despair to complete grief.



I am not sure where the striking photograph originally comes from. (I found it at an Islamic site).

The quotation is from God as he sends Adam out of Eden. Adam was made out of dust – God molded him and then breathed life into him. Now he is to be returned to dust.

Though this is from the first book in the Torah of Judaism and the Bible of Christianity, it is a view that is very similar to that of most modern scientists. We are made of atoms. At our death the atoms that were in us so wondrously organized begin slowly to disperse. Dust we are and unto dust shall we return.



Modern human beings began to bury their dead over 40,000 years ago. The act of burial may have begun simply as a means to stop attacks by scavenging animals or to prevent contamination from the decaying corpse. However, burial soon became an intensely social act. It recognized the individuality of the person who was no more; it demonstrated the relations of that person to the community; it created a memorial both in the mind of the mourners and in the objective world; it suggested that the person might continue in some form.

The illustration shows the *Pentre Ifan Dolmen* in Pembrokeshire, Southwest Wales. The monument dates to about 3500 BCE. This and similar structures were probably used either as tombs or as a memorials to the dead.

### Appointment in Samarra

There was a merchant in Baghdad who sent his servant to market to buy provisions and in a little while the servant came back, white and trembling, and said, Master, just now when I was in the marketplace I was jostled by a woman in the crowd and when I turned I saw it was Death that jostled me...



told by Boris Karloff



adapted by Donald Justice



W. Somerset Maugham  
(1874-1965)

Death comes to us all. Often when we least expect it. This combination of certainty and unpredictability is the basis of much human art. This story by Somerset Maugham was first told in his 1933 play *Sheppey*. John O'Hara used the story as an epigraph to his 1934 novel *Appointment in Samarra*. Samarra is a city in Iraq with a famous mosque.

Boris Karloff (1887-1969) gave this reading of Maugham's story as part of the 1968 movie *Targets* (Peter Bogdanovich's first commercial film). He does not use the exact wording of the Maugham story. Such is the prerogative of an aging actor.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lu9ZIRB79xk>

In the movie Karloff plays an aging horror-film icon. While discussing an upcoming promotional appearance, he tells the those involved in the film that they do not understand the subtlety of true horror and recites the Somerset Maugham story. See also

<http://creatureandcreator.ca/?p=737>

The story begun on the slide continues:

She looked at me and made a threatening gesture; now, lend me your horse, and I will ride away from this city and avoid my fate. I will go to Samarra and there Death will not find me. The merchant lent him his horse, and the servant mounted it, and he dug his spurs in its flanks and as fast as the horse could gallop he went. Then the merchant went down to the market-place and he saw me standing in the crowd and he came to me and said, Why did you make a threatening gesture to my servant when you saw him this morning? That was not a threatening gesture, I said, it was only a start of surprise. I was astonished to see him in Baghdad, for I had an appointment with him tonight in Samarra.

Stories change in their retelling. Donald Justice' 1967 poem *Incident in a Rose Garden* provides a variation on the original story

The gardener came running,  
An old man, out of breath.  
Fear had given him legs.

*Sir, I encountered Death  
 Just now among our roses.  
 Thin as a scythe he stood there.  
 I knew him by his pictures.  
 He had his black coat on,  
 Black gloves, a broad black hat.  
 I think he would have spoken,  
 Seeing his mouth stood open.  
 Big it was, with white teeth.  
 As soon as he beckoned, I ran.  
 I ran until I found you.  
 Sir, I am quitting my job.  
 I want to see my sons  
 Once more before I die.  
 I want to see California.*

We shook hands; he was off.

And there stood Death in the garden,  
 Dressed like a Spanish waiter.  
 He had the air of someone  
 Who, because he likes arriving  
 At all appointments early,  
 Learns to think himself patient.  
 I watched him pinch one bloom off  
 And hold it to his nose—  
 A connoisseur of roses—  
 One bloom and then another.  
 They strewed the earth around him.

*Sir, you must be that stranger  
 Who threatened my gardener.  
 This is my property, sir.  
 I welcome only friends here.*

Death grinned, and his eyes lit up  
 With the pale glow of those lanterns  
 That workmen carry sometimes  
 To light their way through the dusk.  
 Now with great care he slid  
 The glove from his right hand  
 And held that out in greeting,  
 A little cage of bone.

*Sir, I knew your father,  
 And we were friends at the end.  
 As for your gardener,  
 I did not threaten him.  
 Old men mistake my gestures.*

*I only meant to ask him  
To show me to his master.  
I take it you are he?*



As in Somerset Maugham's story, we often personify the process of death. During medieval times Death was often seen as a dark-robed figure carrying a scythe. This clip from Ingmar Bergman's 1957 film *The Seventh Seal* shows the first meeting between the Knight played by Max von Sydow and Death played by Bengt Ekerot. As death appears, the sound of the waves disappears. The knight challenges Death to a game of chess. This derives from a painting in a Swedish Church from around 1490 by Albertus Pictor. The original painting is at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death\\_playing\\_chess](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_playing_chess)

### **Epicurus (341-270 BC)**

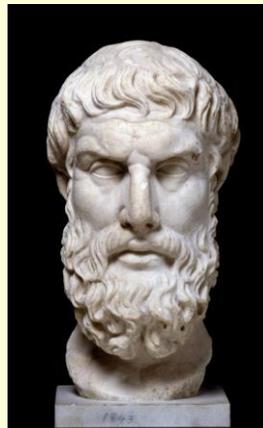
Epicurus believed neither in God

Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able?  
Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not  
willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both  
able and willing? Whence then is evil?

nor in any life after death

Death, therefore, the most awful of evils,  
is nothing to us, seeing that, when we are,  
death is not come, and, when death is  
come, we are not.

The common Epicurean epitaph was *Non  
fui, fui, non sum, non curo* (I was not, I was,  
I am not, I care not).



2<sup>nd</sup> Century BCE Roman  
copy of Greek original

Epicureans believed that human life was limited to the period between birth and death. We should not care about before or after. Life itself should be enjoyed since it is all we have. Most scientists are Epicureans. They believe neither in God nor in immortality. In the US believers make up about 80% of the general population, about 40% of scientists in general and less than 10% of scientists in the National Academy of Science.

More discussion of the Epicureans and their ideas about death is at <http://creatureandcreator.ca/?p=2470>

Yet is death really nothing to us?



The Epicurean view that death is nothing to us, however, misses the fact the death is indeed a tragedy. Basically it is the end of the person – the termination of one particular point of view, the loss of one set of memories and experiences that others will never have.

To illustrate this I have chosen a clip from the 1982 movie *Blade Runner*, directed by Ridley Scott. This particular scene shows the death of a replicant – a robot and not a true human being. But the loss of one particular individual experience is the same for man or robot. Harrison Ford plays Rick Deckard whose duty is to find and kill rogue androids. Rutger Hauer plays Roy Batty one of these replicants. Though stronger and smarter than Deckard, Batty is dying because he has been programmed not to live forever. As he dies, he remembers events that no other being, human or replicant, has ever experienced or can ever experience:

I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate. All these moments will be lost in time like tears in the rain. Time to die.

The speech was created by the actor Rutger Hauer from a longer version in the script by David Peoples. The allusions have no definite meaning. Orion is the constellation named after the hunter. Perhaps the C-beams are related to I-beams and used in off-world construction, or

perhaps they are a new form of laser beam. The Tannhäuser Gate suggests the escape from Venusberg in Wagner's opera, though no actual gate is mentioned in the libretto.

### Near Death Experience

"The light got closer and closer, spinning around and around and generating those filaments of pure white light that I now saw were tinged, here and there, with hints of gold." (Eben Alexander, 2012)

Susan Blackmore has suggested that the light represents random activity in a visual cortex deprived of oxygen. As the inhibitory connections start to fail and the neurons begin to discharge randomly. Since more neurons represent the center of the visual field than the periphery, this activity may begin as a central light. As the disinhibition progresses, the neuronal discharges (and the perceived light) may expand to fill the visual field.

*Visions of the Hereafter*  
Hieronymus Bosch, 1500 CE

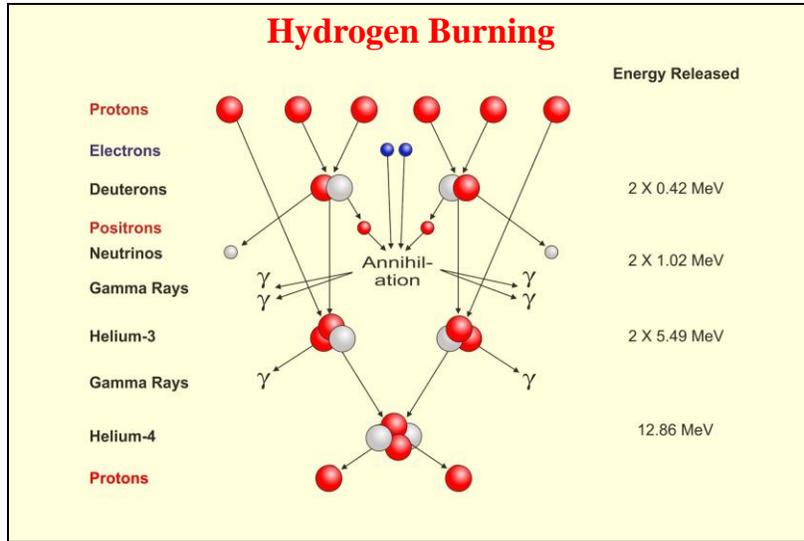


Unfortunately there is little scientific evidence about what happens to the soul or mind at the time of death. No one we know has come back to tell us. The afterlife has no reviews on TripAdvisor. The general scientific consensus is that the soul – the seat of our consciousness – ceases to exist when the body dies.

However we often feel that we shall persist. Over our lives we have become aware of ourselves as agents who can act on the world, who can remember the outcomes of previous actions, who can plan for the future. Constructing a self and an autobiographical memory is of no use unless the self somehow stays the same from day to day. When we wake up after sleep, we may not be initially aware of where we are or when, but we are immediately aware of ourselves. This daily resurrection of the person may lead us to believe that we persist past death.

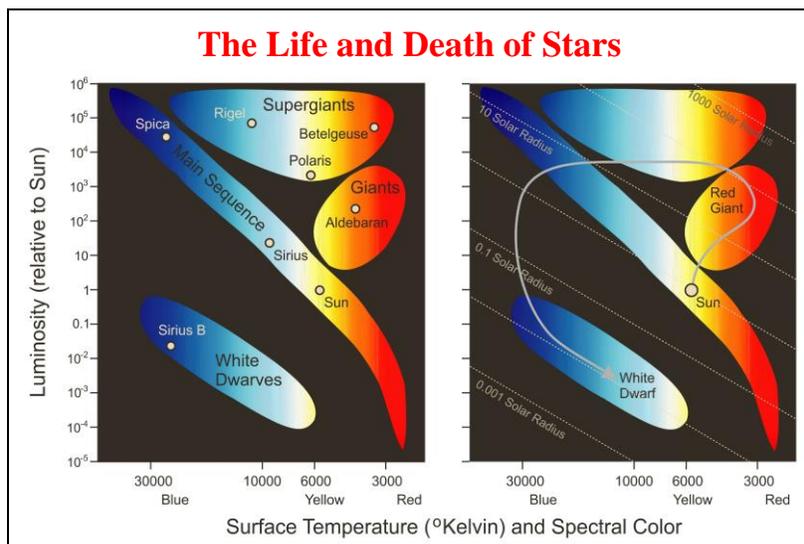
However, some patients who have been near death have reported going to and then being sent back from a place that seemed like Heaven. They have traveled toward a light, much as is described in the Bosch painting. The initial quotation is from a neurosurgeon who came out of a prolonged coma from meningitis. His book is called *Proof of Heaven*. A critical commentary by Luke Dittrich was published in Esquire

<https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/interviews/a23248/the-prophet/>



We have considered the death of human beings. Nothing is for ever. Does the world we live in also die?

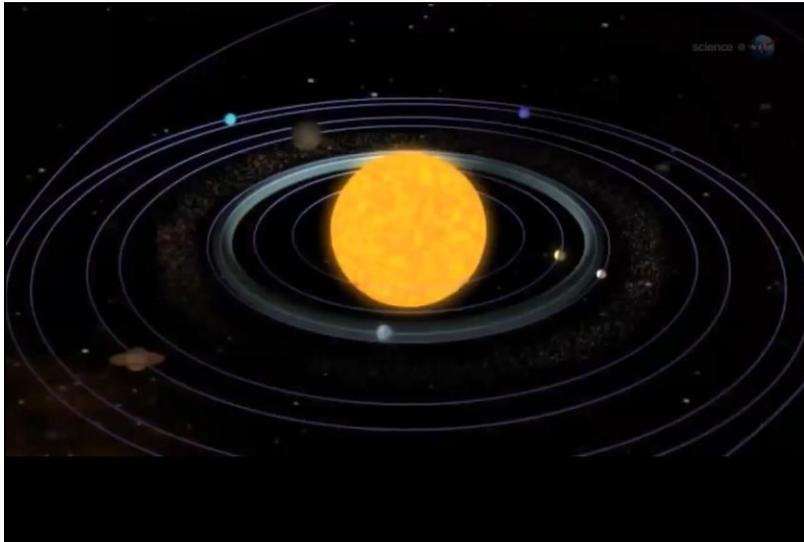
With the new discoveries in atomic physics that occurred in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, scientists began to consider the processes that occur in stars. In 1920, Arthur Eddington proposed that stars generated energy from the fusion of hydrogen to form helium. Within a star the gravitational attraction was sufficient to overcome the electrostatic repulsion between protons (the nuclei of hydrogen atoms) and bring them close together. Once close enough, another force binds them together to form helium. The fusion releases tremendous amounts of energy. This becomes kinetic energy in the particles and radiation. In most stars the kinetic energy of the particles and atoms counteracts the gravitational forces that bring them together. However, this does not last forever. The hydrogen will slowly burn up. If the balance tilts toward the burning the star will expand, if it tilts toward gravity it will contract.



These diagrams represent the relations between the size of a star, its luminosity and its temperature. These diagrams were initially created in 1910 by Ejnar Hertzsprung and Henry Norris Russell and are often called Hertzsprung-Russell diagrams. Most observed stars, and our own sun, fit in the area called the “Main Sequence.” Larger stars burn at higher temperatures to balance out the increased gravitational attraction.

As the years go by, the core of the star comes to have more and more helium nuclei. This helium then begins to fuse into larger elements such as carbon (atomic number 6) nitrogen (7) and oxygen (8). Even more energy is created, the shell expands, and the star becomes a red giant. The shell may then explode as a “nova,” scattering matter into space to give a planetary nebula, and leaving the core to collapse into a white dwarf star. This possible evolution is tracked in the right graph.

Other evolutions are possible. Instead of becoming a white dwarf, a star may collapse into a neutron star or into a black hole.



Both history and science can help us to predict the future. Our present idea of how the Earth will end is excerpted from a NASA video:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_18ubTIfYbo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_18ubTIfYbo)

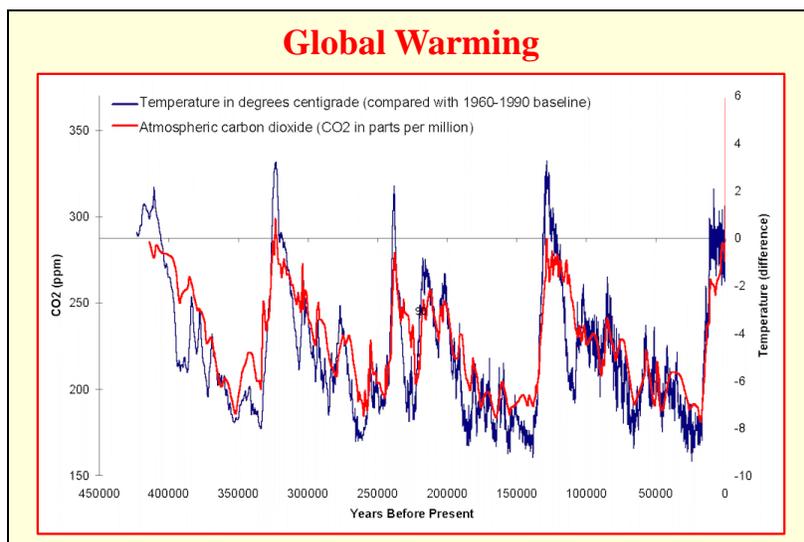
As our sun expands to become a red giant, its diameter will finally reach earth’s orbit. The earth may thus be engulfed by its sun. However, by then the earth may have moved out to a more distant orbit under the force of the increased flow of particles coming from the red giant. This solar wind will also have stripped the earth of its atmosphere. The combined effects of the solar wind and the gravitational attraction of the earth will likely have caused the moon to disintegrate. Our original home in space will have become be a planet sans life, sans moon, sans everything. Where will humanity be? We may have long ceased to exist, having ruined the atmosphere through burning fossil fuels, succumbed to disease, destroyed ourselves by war, or surrendered to

a technology beyond our control. Or we may have survived and somehow moved to another home in the universe long before our planet's demise. Earth's biosphere will be rendered sterile by the increased radiation from our expanding sun within 3.5 billion years from now, long before the estimated 7 billion years when the planet will finally be engulfed by a red giant sun.



We have considered the end of the Earth. What about the end of the universe:  
<https://www.businessinsider.com/how-and-when-our-universe-will-end-2017-8>

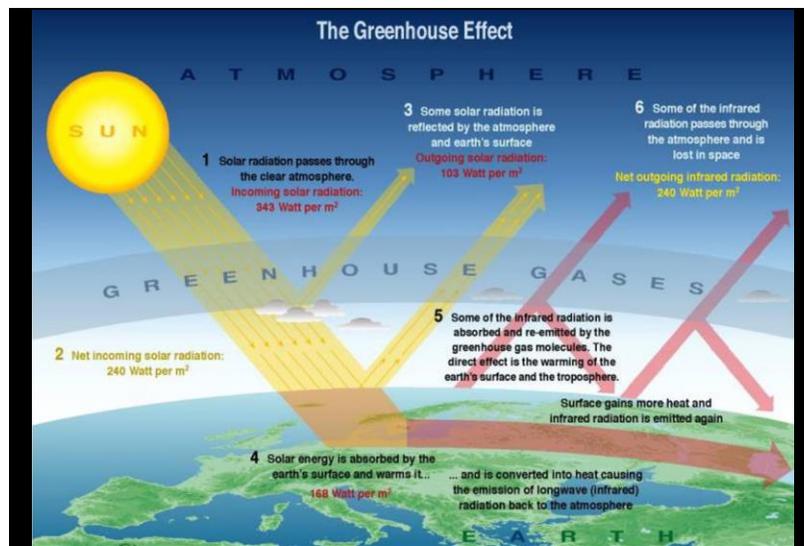
No one really understands the force that is causing the universe to expand. One intriguing thing is that we are living at a time when we can observe other galaxies. If we lived many million years in the future we would not be aware that there was a universe beyond our own galaxy.



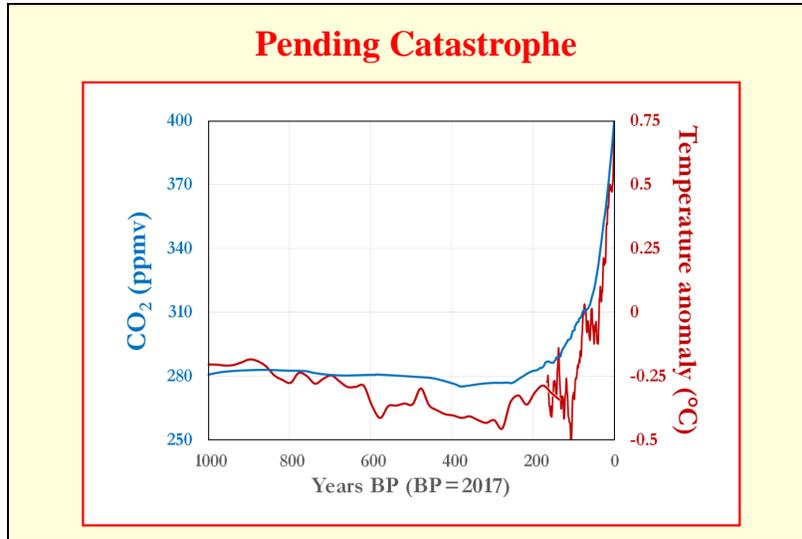
We need not look so far into the future to see the end of human life on earth. The Earth will become unfit for human habitation long before the Sun begins to change to a red giant. And this will be our fault. The amount of CO<sub>2</sub> in the earth's atmosphere changes with many things. It is naturally increased by fires and by volcanic activity. Most importantly green plants decrease its concentration through photosynthesis. Over the past 500000 years most of the change has been related to small variations in the Earth's orbit around the sun (Milankovitch cycles). Studies of glacial ice-core can give an indication of the CO<sub>2</sub> concentration and of the temperature (through the ratio of different oxygen isotopes – O<sub>16</sub> and O<sub>18</sub> – in water molecules). Lighter water molecules condense from vapor into rain more slowly at higher temperatures).

The temperature of the world follows the changes in atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>. The effects are interrelated but the main causal relationship is from CO<sub>2</sub> to temperature.

In recent years, due to the industrial revolution and the burning of fossil fuels, the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> has increased beyond any level found in the last 500,000 years.



CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere acts like the glass in a greenhouse. It lets the high energy radiation from the sun enter but prevents some of the infra-red radiation of the earth from exiting. Other gases like methane and nitrous oxide act in the same way.

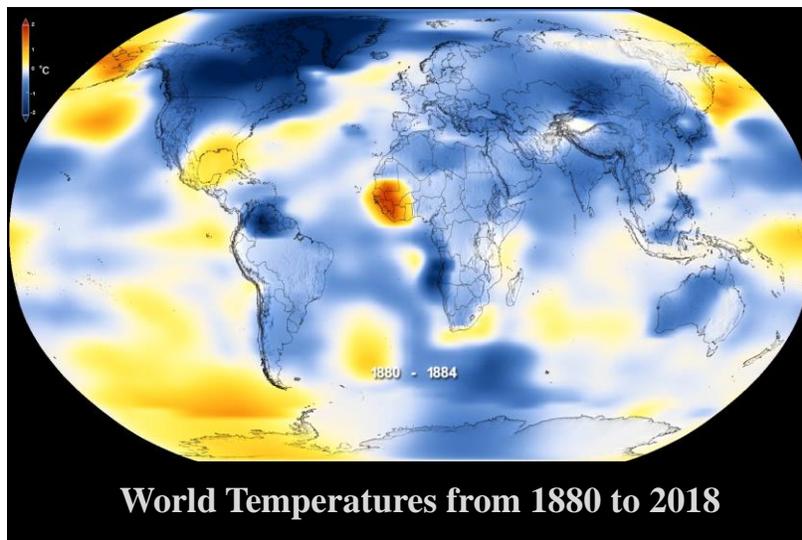


The current level of CO<sub>2</sub> is above 400 ppm – 415 ppm May 2019. This is significantly above the maximum of 350 ppm over the past 2 million years. See <https://www.nature.com/articles/ncomms14845/figures/4>

Main causes for the recent increase in greenhouse gases:

- Burning of fossil fuels
- Deforestation
- Methane production from livestock

The temperature is also the highest it has been since we have been recording temperatures.



This shows the world's temperature since 1880. The world is becoming too hot for human habitation. Video from <https://svs.gsfc.nasa.gov/4626>

## Justice

Human beings have evolved as highly social beings. We do good for others and expect to be appropriately rewarded. However, this is not always the case:

I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. (*Ecclesiastes* 9: 11)

We therefore postulate some over-riding principle of justice. Those that do evil, though they may profit in this life, will be punished in the life to come. In Eastern religions this principle is *karma*; in the monotheistic religions God judges who goes to heaven and who to hell.



The human sense of justice is strong. If we are treated unjustly in our mortal life, we might imagine an afterlife where justice prevails and the evils of the present life are rectified. The idea of immortality is the only way that we can reconcile the cruelty of the world to the fairness that we perceive as necessary for the universe. Most religions propose some judgment at the end of a life to rectify the injustice during life.

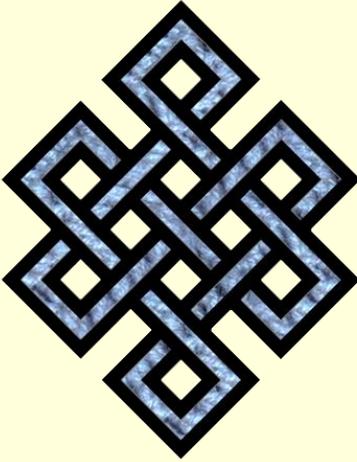
Human survival has benefited from our ability to detect external agents, our concept of self on which to hang the memories of a life, and our sense of what is just. As well as promoting survival, these characteristics may have led to our ideas of God, immortality and judgment.

Most statues of justice show a blindfolded lady with a sword and a set of balances. The illustrated statue at the Supreme Court of Canada simply has a sword.



This illustration shows cremation on a funeral pyre. Cremation was and is practiced by many cultures. In ancient Greece a warrior who had died in battle was cremated on a funeral pyre. At the end of *The Republic* Plato tells the story of a warrior called Er who was thought dead after a battle. When a few days later his body was prepared for cremation he woke up and told of his visit to the afterlife. He described a place where all souls came after death. From there they could be sent to the blessed regions (*Elysium*) or to hell (*Tartarus*) depending on what they had done during their mortal life. From this strange waiting-room, souls could also be sent back to the world and reincarnated into various life forms. Some choice was available. Orpheus, who had been torn to pieces by the women of Thrace in a Dionysiac frenzy, decided to return as a swan and not a human being, so that he would not run the risk of a second such terrible death.

The idea of the transmigration of souls from one living being to another is widespread in the Eastern religions. This concept may have spread from the East to the mystical sects of the Greeks – those that conducted the ceremonies known as the “mysteries.” We briefly discussed these in the second presentation of this course.



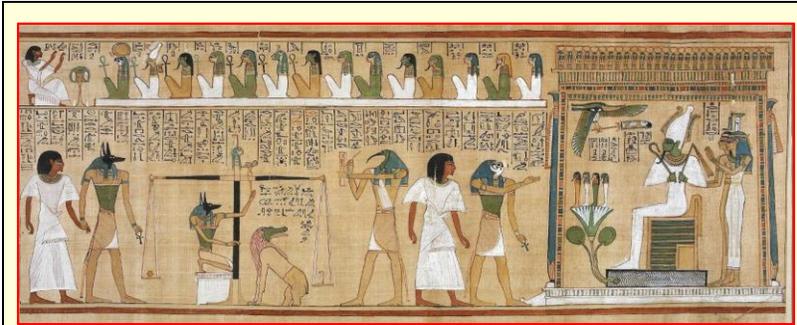
### Samsara

Indian religions all share the idea that after death the soul is reincarnated into another life. The level of the next life depends upon the process of *karma* which is based on the accumulated virtues and vices of previous lives.

The symbols of *samsara* are the endless knot or the wheel of suffering.

The goal of Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism is to escape this endless cycle and to attain union with the absolute and eternal.

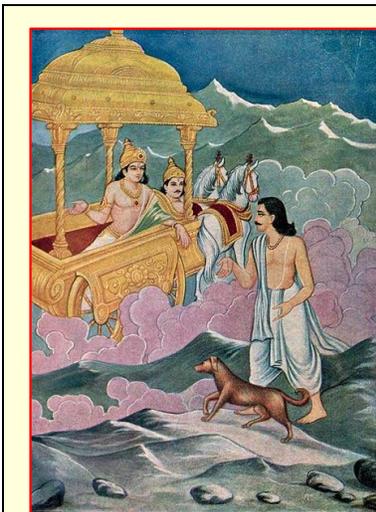
*Samsara*, the endless cycle of death and rebirth, is a Sanskrit word for “wandering.” One advantage of the ideas of *samsara* and *karma* is that they attenuate the wrong we feel when we suffer unduly. When bad things happen to good people it is because they were bad in their previous lives.



### **The Book of the Dead**

At his death, Hunefer is conducted by Anubis, the dog-headed guardian of the underworld, to where his heart is weighed against a feather on the scales of Maat (Justice). If his heart is heavy, the Demon Ammut will devour it. If the heart is light, ibis-headed Thoth records the judgment, and falcon-headed Horus brings Hunefer to Osiris, king of the underworld.

Human beings have long believed in Judgment. This Egyptian papyrus dates to 1275 BCE. The upper section shows that Hunefer worshipped the Gods during his life. Ammut is a combination of crocodile, lion and hippopotamus. Horus is the son of Osiris. Osiris carries the crook (authority) and flail (regeneration). He is flanked by the goddesses Isis and Nephthys.



### **Yudisthira and his Dog**

At the end of the *Mahabharata*, Prince Yudisthira renounces the world and seeks heaven. Indra meets him in his chariot. He agrees to admit Yudisthira to heaven, but only if he leaves his dog behind.

Yudisthira refuses to abandon his dog. Indra then reveals that this was just a test. And the dog assumes his true form as Lord Dharma.

Justice is more important than immortality.

Yudisthira's statement is

I shall not abandon this dog today from desire of my happiness! Even this is my vow steadily pursued – that I never give up a person that is terrified, nor one that is devoted to me, nor one that seeks my protection, saying, that he is destitute, nor one that is afflicted, nor one that has come to me, nor one that is weak in protecting oneself, nor one that is solicitous of life

### Yama/Imra/Emma

In the religions that derived from India, Yama is the great judge who examines those who die.

Some have suggested that Yama was the first man to die and thus assumed dominion over the afterlife because no one else was there. His fearsome features may be related to the changes in a corpse after death.



*Judge Emma.* Japanese, late 16th century CE. Dallas Museum of Art.



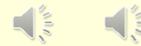
In the temple of Hoshakuji (near Kyoto), Enma is accompanied by assistant judges, a scribe to record the evidence, and a reader to pronounce the judgment.

### The Parable of Dives and Lazarus



During his life the rich man Dives enjoyed his luxury and took no notice of Lazarus (whose name is derived from the Hebrew *Eleazar* or “God is my help.” After death, Lazarus was taken to Abraham’s bosom whereas Dives went to hell.

Abbaye Saint Pierre  
Moissac, France



Martin Simpson

The Lazarus of this parable is not the Lazarus that Jesus later raised from the dead. Their common name is just coincidence.

The right side of the carving at Abbaye Saint Pierre shows Dives eating a sumptuous meal. He pays no heed to Lazarus, who lies on the ground in the lower center part of the panel, beset by dogs. At his death Lazarus is taken by the angel to the bosom of Abraham. At the far left is a representation of the law. The fate of Dives is played out in a separate carving lower down on the wall (not illustrated). Devils take both his soul and his accumulated riches. Like Dives, this carving has not survived well.

At the end of the English folksong that tells this tale, Dives cries out to Lazarus for a drop of water to quench his flaming thirst. Ralph Vaughan-Williams composed *Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus* based on the folk tune.

Some verses of the song by Martin Simpson:

As it fell out upon one day,  
Rich Divès made a feast,  
And he invited all his friends,  
And gentry of the best.

Then Lazarus laid him down and down  
And down at Divès’ door:  
“Some meat and drink, brother, Diverus,  
Bestow upon the poor.”

“Thou’rt none of my brothers, Lazarus,  
That liest begging at my door;  
No meat, nor drink will I give thee,  
Nor bestow upon the poor.”

...

As it fell out upon one day,  
Rich Divès sickened and died;  
There came two serpents out of hell,  
His soul therein to guide.

“Rise up! rise up! brother Diverus,  
And come along with me;  
There is a place provided in hell  
For wicked men like thee.”

Then Divès looked up with his eyes  
And saw poor Lazarus blest;  
“Give me one drop of water, brother Lazarus,  
To quench my flaming thirst.”

However, there is no pity for Dives. Aquinas argued that  
“Whoever pities another shares somewhat in his unhappiness. But the blessed cannot share in any unhappiness. Therefore they do not pity the afflictions of the damned.”



This is *The Last Judgment* (1471) by Hans Memling. It shows the resurrection of the dead, the judgment, the ascent of the elect to heaven and the descent of the damned to hell:

And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

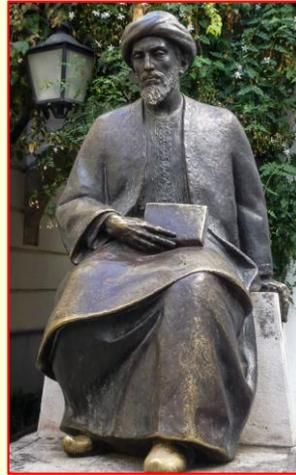
And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

(Matthew 24: 30-31)

### The Coming of the Messiah

The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. (Isaiah 11: 6)

The Messianic Era is a timeframe in which the kingdom shall return to Israel, and the people of Israel will return to the Land of Israel, and the king who shall stand-up will establish the place of his kingdom in Zion, whose name shall be extolled and it will reach unto the ends of the earth, being greater than Solomon's kingdom, and the nations will enter a covenant of peace with him. (Maimonides, Mishnah commentary).



Statue of Maimonides, Cordoba

As well as proposing a judgment, many religions believe in a Messiah. One of the principles of faith in Judaism is that a Messiah will come to restore the kingdom of Israel to its previous glory and to bring peace to the world. The Messiah was foretold by many of the prophets. Christians believed that Jesus was the Messiah described by the prophets.

Maimonides (1135-1204) was born in Cordoba. After being exiled from Cordoba after the Berber conquest in 1148, he spent time in Morocco and Israel before moving to Egypt.



### Maitreya

Many branches of Buddhism believe that in the future, when the teachings of Gautama Buddha – the *dharma* – will have been forgotten by most of the people of the earth, a new Buddha will appear. Maitreya will usher in a society of tolerance and love. His name derives from the Sanskrit for “loving kindness.”

*Maitreya in Meditation*  
Korea 7<sup>th</sup> Century CE

The idea of Maitreya is prominent in Korean Buddhism. This statue shows him quietly waiting for the time of his coming. Many different people have claimed to be or have been proposed as the Maitreya.

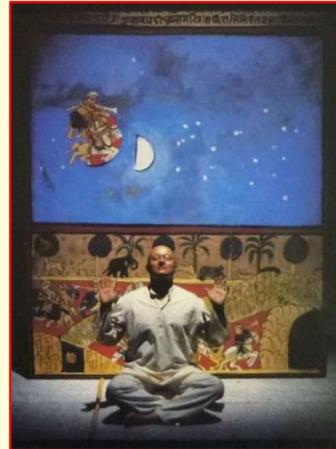
## Vishnu

For whenever  
the law of righteousness  
withers away  
and lawlessness arises,  
then do I generate  
myself on earth.



Douglas  
Perry

I come into being  
age after age  
and take a visible shape  
and move a man with men  
for the protection of good,  
thrusting the evil back  
and setting virtue on her seat again.



*Satyagraha*, Philip Glass, 1980

This is from the ending of Philip Glass' opera *Satyagraha*. The opera tells the story of how the idea of non-violent resistance came about. *Satya* means truth and *agraha* means holding firmly onto. At the end of the opera, before leading the non-violent March of the Newcastle Miners in South Africa, Gandhi meditates on the great poem of Hinduism, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and on what Vishnu's avatar Krishna explained to Prince Arjuna in the poem. The aria is in Sanskrit. The music sets verses from Chapter IV of the poem.

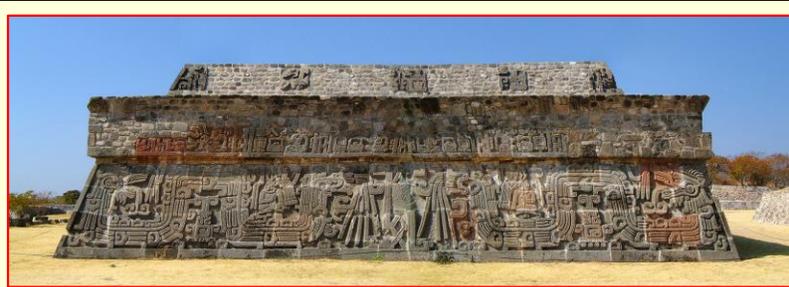
## Le Morte d'Arthur

Yet some men say in many parts of  
England that King Arthur is not dead,  
but had by the will of our Lord Jesu  
into another place; and men say that  
he shall come again, and he shall win  
the holy cross. I will not say it shall be  
so, but rather I will say: here in this  
world he changed his life. But many  
men say that there is written upon his  
tomb this verse: *Hic jacet Arthurus,  
Rex quondam, Rexque futurus.*

Illustration for  
Tennyson's *Morte d'Arthur*  
by Alberto Sangorski, 1912



The death of King Arthur was recounted in Thomas Malory's *le Morte d'Arthur* (1485). Tennyson retold it in a poem in *Idylls of the King* (1859). When King Arthur was dying, he asked the knight Bedivere to throw his sword Excalibur into the lake. As it fell toward the water a hand came out of the lake and caught it. Bedivere then carried Arthur to the shore where a boat tended by three queens lay waiting. Arthur was transported away to Avalon. The hope is that he will return – as the once and future king. The quotation is from Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*.

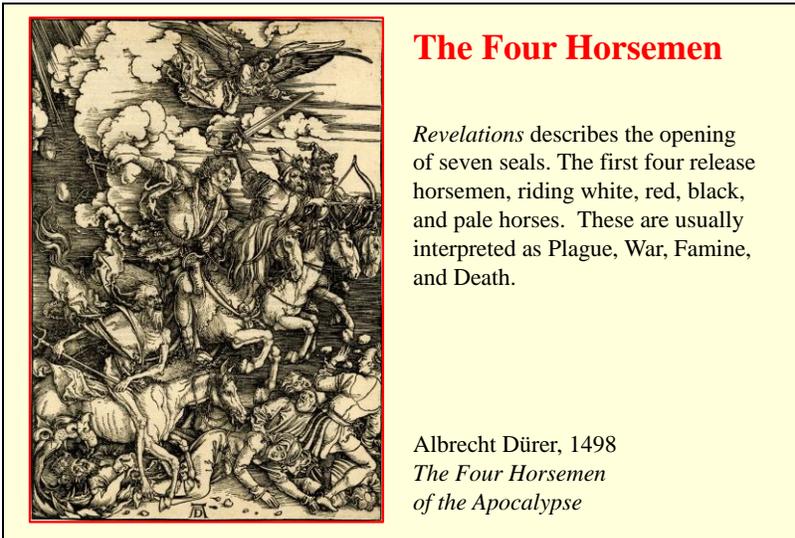


Pyramid of the Plumed Serpent, Xochicalco

## Quetzlcoatl

In Meso-America the gods changed over long cycles. Quetzlcoatl, the plumed-serpent god of the wind, was predicted to return in the year 1519. Some have suggested that Hernan Cortes' conquest of Mexico was facilitated by a belief that he was the returning Quetzlcoatl.

There are two versions of the serpent with the heads on the outside. Two priests are seen riding upon the coils.



## The Four Horsemen

*Revelations* describes the opening of seven seals. The first four release horsemen, riding white, red, black, and pale horses. These are usually interpreted as Plague, War, Famine, and Death.

Albrecht Dürer, 1498  
*The Four Horsemen  
of the Apocalypse*

The Messiah may bring peace and goodness. But his arrival may lead to terrible things. Many Christians believe in the imminent Second Coming. Many of their beliefs stem from *Revelations*, last book in the New Testament, which foretells the end of the world. The Greek *apocalypse* means revelations. The second coming of Christ is preceded by plague, war, famine and death.

In a survey taken in 2011 by the Pew Foundation, 54 % of Protestants and 32% of Catholics believed that Christ would return to earth before 2050.

<http://www.people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/625.pdf>

In 2007 four renowned atheists– Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett – met to discuss the end of religion. They called themselves the *Four Horsemen of Atheism*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNP4MUWWSVw>



Before the end of the world the elect will be taken away to heaven in the *Rapture*. The idea derives from Matthew 24: 40-42

Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

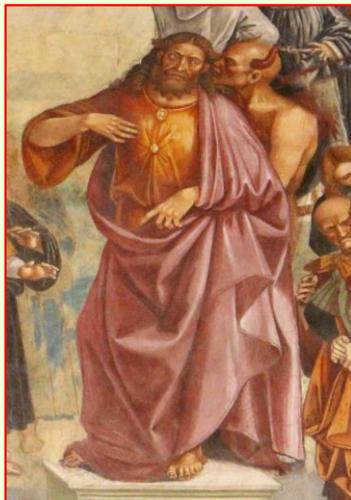
This is a clip from the movie 2005 movie *Left Behind*. This was based on the first of a series of novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins. This scene occurs in a plane. Several of the passengers disappear in the Rapture, leaving only their clothes behind.

## The Antichrist

Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not.

For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. (Matthew 24:23-24)

Orvieto Cathedral  
Luca Signorelli, 1504



During the end of the world the Antichrist will claim to be the Messiah and will pretend to save the world. The Antichrist looks like Christ but he is the tool of Satan.



This second clip from the movie *Left Behind* shows how the Antichrist Nicolae Carpathia, played by Gordon Currie, assumes power at a meeting in the United Nations building. He frees himself from those who wanted to use him for their own ends. The movie is very bad, but it has its moments of bizarre insight: “We made you Nicolae – you’re our creation!”



We cannot end this session with the apocalypse. We need to have some understanding of death and of how best to die. We shall therefore end with a poem by Donald Justice (1925-2004) that was written near the end of his life. It is his farewell to art and poetry. The poem is profoundly simple. It has three stanzas: the first concerns painting, the second music and the third theatre. Justice uses identical rhymes. This is usually considered an inferior form of rhyming, but in this poem its very simplicity gives it tremendous power.

### I

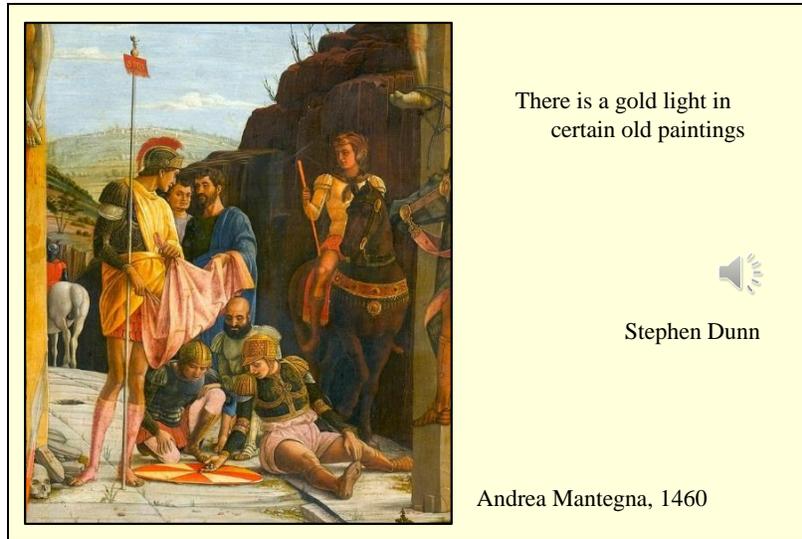
There is a gold light in certain old paintings  
 That represents a diffusion of sunlight.  
 It is like happiness, when we are happy.  
 It comes from everywhere and from nowhere at once, this light,  
 And the poor soldiers sprawled at the foot of the cross  
 Share in its charity equally with the cross.

### II

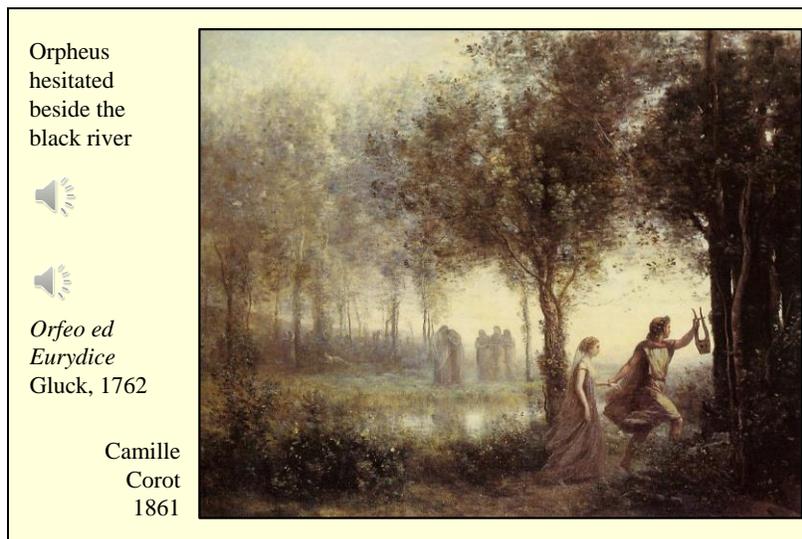
Orpheus hesitated beside the black river.  
 With so much to look forward to he looked back.  
 We think he sang then, but the song is lost.  
 At least he had seen once more the beloved back.  
 I say the song went this way: *O prolong*  
*Now the sorrow if that is all there is to prolong.*

### III

The world is very dusty, uncle. Let us work.  
 One day the sickness shall pass from the earth for good.  
 The orchard will bloom; someone will play the guitar.  
 Our work will be seen as strong and clean and good.  
 And all that we suffered through having existed  
 Shall be forgotten as though it had never existed.



The first stanza describes the gold light in old paintings and likens it to divine love. Like the love of Christ which descended upon even the Roman soldiers who cast lots for his garments. The poem is recited by Stephen Dunn, another poet.



The second stanza considers the music of Orpheus. After he looks backward and Eurydice is taken back to the Underworld, Orpheus laments. In Gluck's opera Orpheus' lament is

Che farò senza Euridice?  
Dove andrò senza il mio ben?  
Euridice, o Dio, rispondi!  
Io son pure il tuo fedele.  
Euridice! Ah, non m'avanza  
più soccorso, più speranza  
ne dal mondo, ne dal ciel.

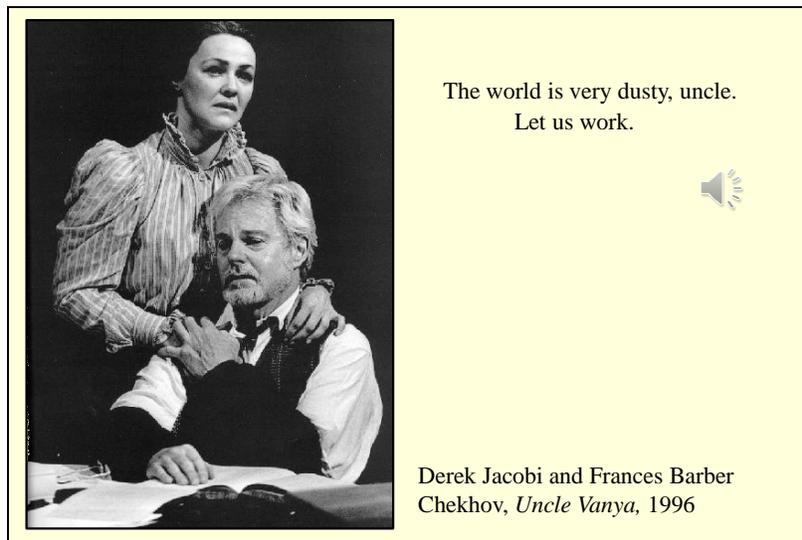
## Translation

What will I do without Euridice?  
Where will I go without my beloved?  
Euridice, oh God, answer me!  
Yet I still belong to you faithfully.  
Euridice! Ah, no help comes to me anymore,  
No hope anymore,  
Neither from this world, nor from heaven.

Justice thinks the song would be different:

*O prolong  
Now the sorrow if that is all there is to prolong.*

Orpheus wishes never to lose his thoughts of Eurydice even if these thoughts are painful.



The final stanza refers to the ending of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*. The idea is life will go on. There will be suffering. But ultimately those who work hard perhaps will be rewarded.



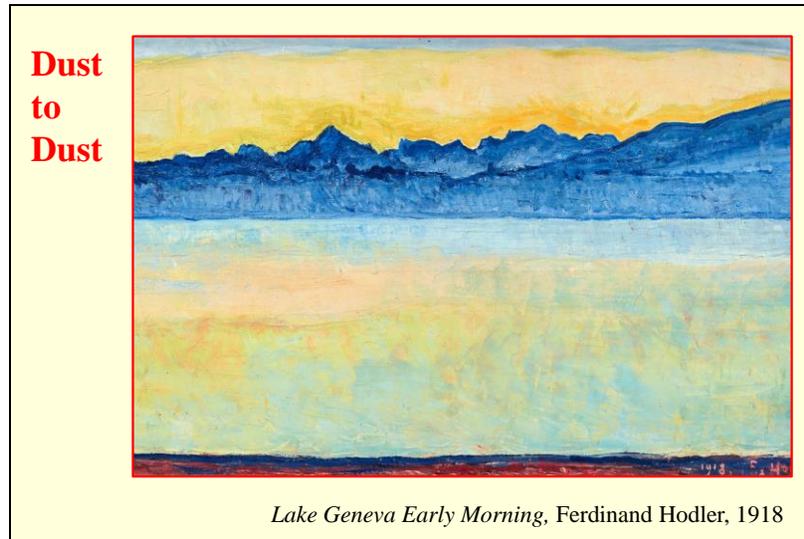
This is the ending to *Uncle Vanya* (1897) by Anton Chekhov. The clip is from Louis Malle's 1994 film *Uncle Vanya on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street*. Brooke Smith plays Sonya and Wallace Shawn plays Uncle Vanya. Great passions have been played out and finally abandoned. Sonya has realized that the doctor cannot love her. Uncle Vanya has tried to shoot the professor and failed. The professor and his wife have left. They will continue to drain funds from the estate to support their life in Moscow. Sonya and Vanya will continue to manage the estate.

In this final speech Sonya becomes reconciled to her life – they will work and they will suffer but when they die they will be rewarded in heaven. The wonder of the speech – one of the greatest in all theatre – lies in trying to determine how much Sonya believes what she is saying and how much she is just pretending, and the main question is whether it really matters.

The clip is available on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nDbESHU4MBg>

The idea that we shall work is similar to the advice given in *Ecclesiastes* 9:10  
Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.



We end with one of Hodler's paintings of the mountains. He began these landscapes during the terrible time that his mistress was dying. Mountains are an essential part of religion. Prince Yudisthira sought for truth in the mountains. Moses went up to God on Mount Sinai. Psalm 121 begins "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help."