

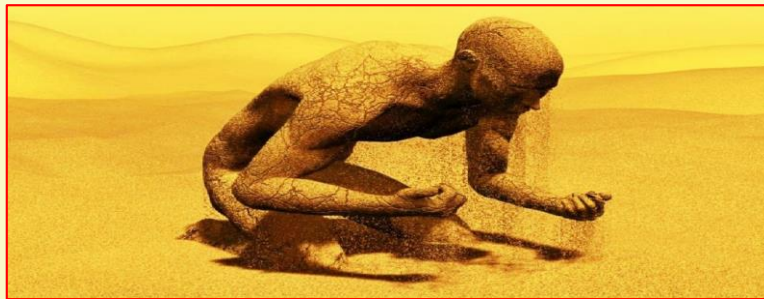
Disappointed Souls, 1892
Ferdinand Hodler

**Intersections of Religion,
Art and Science
Whither**

Death comes to everyone:

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. We have already seen one of his sketches of his mistress Valentine Godé-Darel as she was slowly dying from cancer. This earlier 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.



In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground;
for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.
(*Genesis 3:19*)

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 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.

Boris Karloff gave this reading of Maugham's story as part of the 1968 movie *Targets* (Peter Bogdanovich's first commercial film)

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

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

The Somerset Maugham story 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.

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 the 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

Epicurus (341-270 BC)

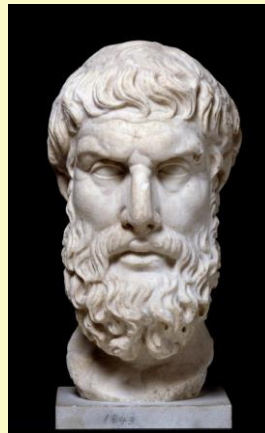
Epicurus believed neither in God

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).



2nd 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.



The Epicurean view sometimes seems to miss the fact the death is indeed a tragedy. Basically it is the end of the person – the end of one particular point of view, 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. The sequel to this movie has just opened. 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 the 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 ceases to exist when the body dies. 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 the book *Proof of Heaven*. Recently there have been many books of “heaven tourism.” Two are by children – *The Boy Who Came Back from Heaven* (2010), and *Heaven is for Real* (2010). The first has been disavowed by its author. The second has been made into a movie. Many Christians dispute the authenticity of the books since the heaven they describe is not like what it is supposed to be.

Scientists such as Susan Blackmore have tried to explain these experiences as what might happen in a brain that is suffering from lack of oxygen. One should also consider that what one remembers when coming out of coma is a like trying to make reasonable sense of a bizarre dream.

Reports of near-death interpretations are highly culture-sensitive. Near-death experiences in Hindus differ from those in Christians just like the afterlives described in their scriptures.

These ideas of the soul, of immortality and of heaven are common in many religions. Where might they come from?

Some Side Effects of Evolution

Agency Detection: Over thousands of years the human brain has evolved to be a sensitive detector of the intentions of others. This “agency detector” facilitates social interaction and preserves us from harm. If the process becomes hyper-sensitive, we posit agents that control natural events: gods of the storm and of the earthquake. Ultimately we might propose an omnipotent God as an agent controlling the whole universe.

Sense of Self: We also 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.

Evolutionary psychology can provide us with some explanations for why we believe in God and in our own immortality. Human have evolved the ability to detect the intentions of others and to maintain a sense of self. These two cognitive processes are inter-related. They are both often considered under the idea of “theory of mind.” We have a theory of mind if we understand that others may have intentions just like us. Both develop at about the same age in young children – at about 3-4 years.

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.



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

The human sense of justice is strong. When 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.

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



As well as Epicurus, many other Greek philosophers considered death and immortality. This is Jacques-Louis David's 1787 painting of *The Death of Socrates*, as recounted in Plato's *Phaedo*. Socrates was condemned to death for impiety towards the Gods and for corruption of the youth of Athens.

Crito is the person holding onto Socrates' thigh. Prior to taking the hemlock, Socrates made a request to Crito "I owe a cock to Asclepius; will you remember to pay the debt?" The usual interpretation is that Socrates wished to thank Asclepius, the god of healing, for curing him of the disease of life. The fact that Socrates last words dealt with fulfilling a religious obligation is ironic in the context of his execution for impiety. A different meaning might be that Socrates was offering himself as a scapegoat whose death might allow Asclepius to purify Athenian society of its ills. The recently restored democracy in Athens was indeed "ready to murder" anyone who questioned its politics. Socrates had taught both Alcibiades, who betrayed Athens to Sparta, and Critias, one of the Thirty who conducted a reign of terror in Athens after the Peloponnesian War.

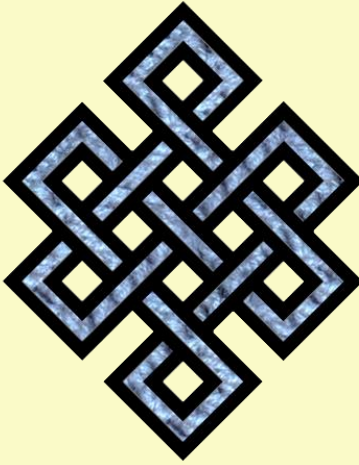
The man weeping in the hall is Apollodorus. Socrates had criticized his grief. The old man at the foot of the bed is Plato. However, at the time of Socrates' death, Plato was a young man. Furthermore he was actually not present at the death scene. The old Plato is simply thinking back on the importance of the event.

Just before his death, Socrates assures his followers that the soul is immortal. His arguments are based on his theory of the eternal forms from which reality makes transient instantiations. The arguments are not very convincing. They require that one accept the idea of eternal forms, something just as difficult as the idea of immortality. Socrates may have proposed these arguments more to assure his young students that they should not grieve his death than to prove that he would survive it.



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 told of 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.”



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.

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.

Bhavacakra

The “wheel of existence” is held by Yama.

The hub of the wheel shows the pig the rooster and the snake, symbols of ignorance, craving and hatred.

The next circle shows *karma*.

Then the 6 levels of *samsara*: gods, demons, human, animals, hungry ghosts, hell.

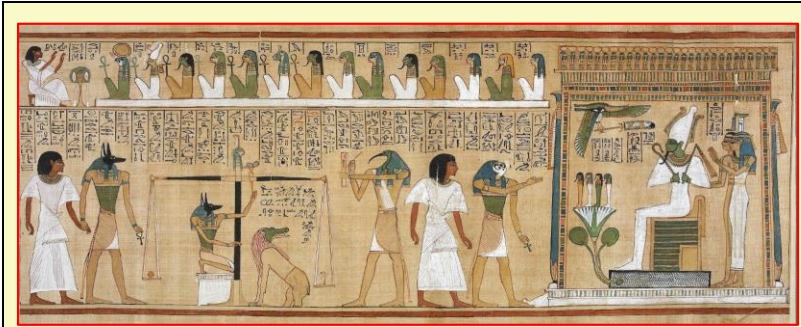
The outer circle shows the 12 chain-links (*nidanas*) that bind the wheel together.



This wheel is common in Tibetan Buddhism.



Above is the level of the gods, to the left are human beings, to the right are demons. Below can be seen animals (left) and ghosts (right).



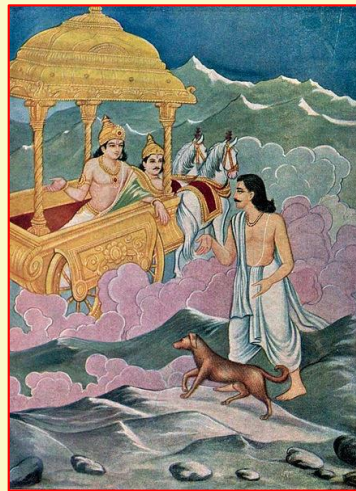
The Book of the Dead

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 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.

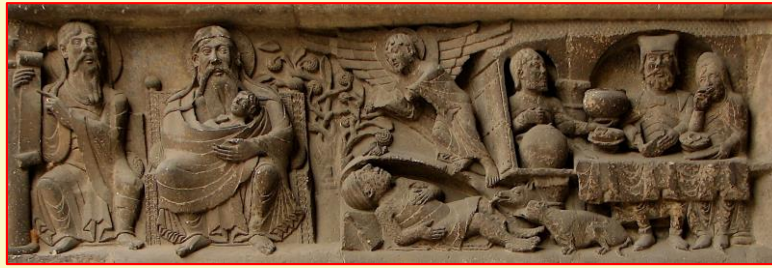


Judge Emma. Japanese, late 16th century CE. Dallas Museum of Art.



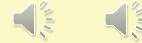
In the temple of Hoshakuji (near Kyoto), Enma was accompanied by assistant judges, a scribe to record the evidence, and a reader to pronounce the judgment.

The Parable of Dives and Lazarus



Abbaye Saint Pierre
Moissac, France

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.



Martin Simpson

The Lazarus of this parable is not the Lazarus that Jesus later raised from the dead. Their shared 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.”



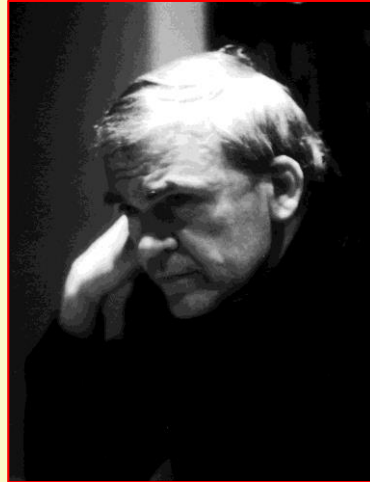
This is The Last Judgment (1471) by Hans Memling. It shows the resurrection of the dead, the judgment, the ascent of the elect to heaven and the descent of the damned to hell.

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)

Heaven

In Milan Kundera's 1990 novel *Immortality*, Agnes imagines that she and her husband are visited by an emissary from another world, who tells them that after death they will be taken to a better place, where each person becomes his or her own creation. The messenger presents them with the options of living together for eternity or never seeing each other again. How does one answer? Particularly in front of one's spouse. Agnes loves her husband, but she opts for freedom



Among the many problems with the concept of heaven is the question of what will be done by the multitudes of the saved. Poets and mystics might enjoy the eternal contemplation of God's goodness, but the rest of us might find it overwhelmingly boring. Eternal erotic enjoyment might be more interesting: the sexual mysticism of Emanuel Swedenborg's vision of heaven has intrigued many. But even this might pale after a while.

Hell is far easier to portray. The details of the burning fire and the incessant torture that await those who have done wrong fascinate our imagination. But heaven is hard to conjure.



This is Arnold Böcklin's 1883 representation of Ulysses and Calypso. The beautiful nymph Calypso promises Ulysses immortality and eternal youth if he will stay with her on her magic island. Ulysses decides to return to his mortal life and go home to his aging wife.

Douglas Adams presents a more facetious description of why we might not wish to chose immortality in his 1982 novel *Life, the Universe and Everything* wherein he describes the state of mind of the character Wowbagger who had become immortal by accident:

To begin with it was fun, he had a ball, living dangerously, taking risks, cleaning up on long term high-yield investments, and just generally outliving the hell of everybody. In the end, it was the Sunday afternoons he couldn't cope with, and that terrible listlessness which starts to set in at about 2:55, when you know that you've had all the baths you can usefully have that day, that however hard you stare at any given paragraph in the papers you will never actually read it, or use the revolutionary new pruning technique it describes, and that as you stare at the clock the hands will move relentlessly on to four o'clock, and you will enter the long dark teatime of the soul.

In his recent book on *Immortality* (2012), Stephen Cave quotes Wowbagger, and points to the two problems of immortality:

On the one hand, the boredom and apathy that would result from having done and seen everything there is to do – that is, from having already lived a very long time – and on the other hand, the paralysis that would result from having an infinite future in which to do any further things.



There is another problem with the idea of resurrection. Will the person who is resurrected be me or just a replica of me?

This clip is from a 1996 BBC documentary *Brainspotting* put together by Ken Campbell. He interviewed several philosophers about the nature of the soul and its relation to personal memory. This is from his interview with Derek Parfit. He has considered 4 possible ideas of personal identity, as related to the body, the brain, the soul or an individual's memories. In this clip he discusses whether someone teleported to another place with the same body, brain and memories as me would actually be me. He imagines a teleporting device that malfunctions – the person is

transported to Mars but the original is not destroyed. His heart is damaged and he will soon die. Who is the person on Mars?

One may similarly ask: Who is the person that is resurrected in Heaven?

The clip is at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uS-46k0ncIs>

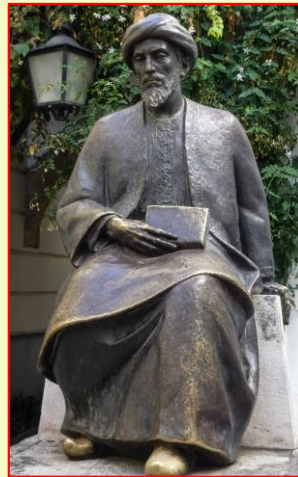
The ideas are discussed more fully in Parfit's 1984 book *Reasons and Persons*

Fans of the *Star Trek Voyager* series will remember that Vice-Admiral Kathryn Janeway (Kate Mulgrew) refused to travel by transportation.

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

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 7th Century CE

The idea of Maitreya is prominent in Korean Buddhism. This statue shows him quietly waiting for the time of his coming.

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 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

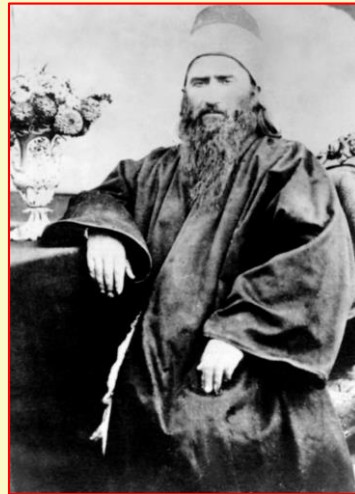
Quetzlcoatl

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.

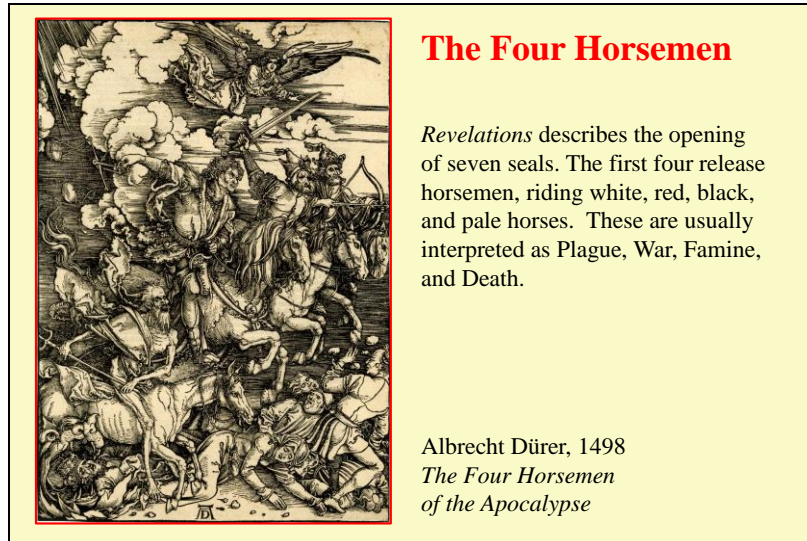
The head of the god is at the right. Two priests are seen riding upon his coils.

Bahá'u'lláh (Glory of God)

Mirza Huysan ali Nuri (1817-1892) founded the Baha'i faith in 1863. He claimed to be the "Manifestation of God," the person who fulfilled the eschatological promises of all the world's religions. He was the Jewish Messiah, the Christ of the Second Coming, the incarnation of Vishnu as Kalki, and the Maitreya Buddha.



Many different people have claimed to be the Messiah. Many of these have established their own religions.



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.

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>



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 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.

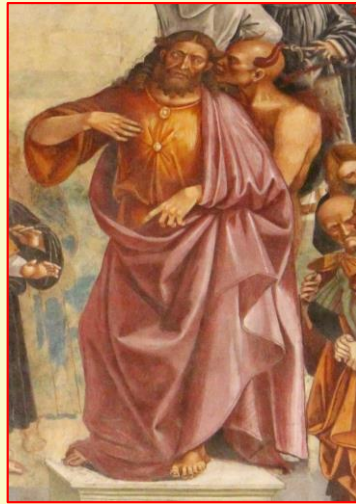
Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

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



The Antichrist looks like Christ but he is the tool of Satan.



This 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 shall end this session 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. These are usually considered an inferior form of rhyming, but in this poem their very simplicity gives it 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.

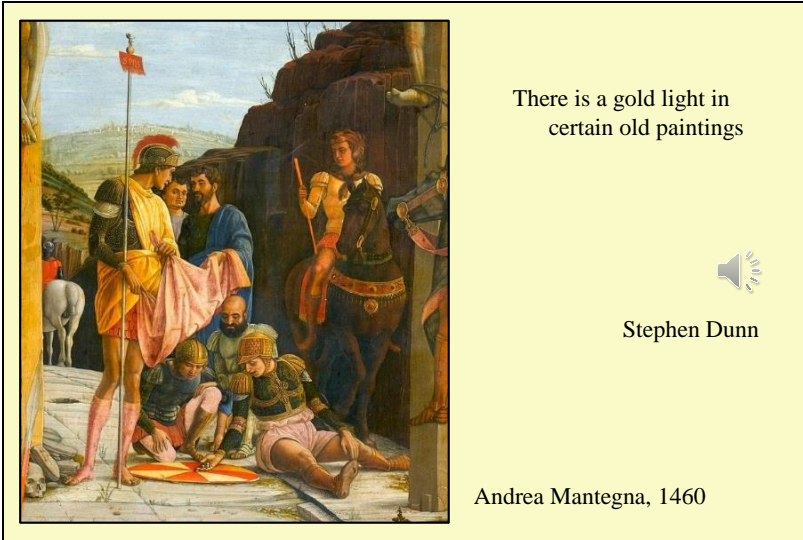
II

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.

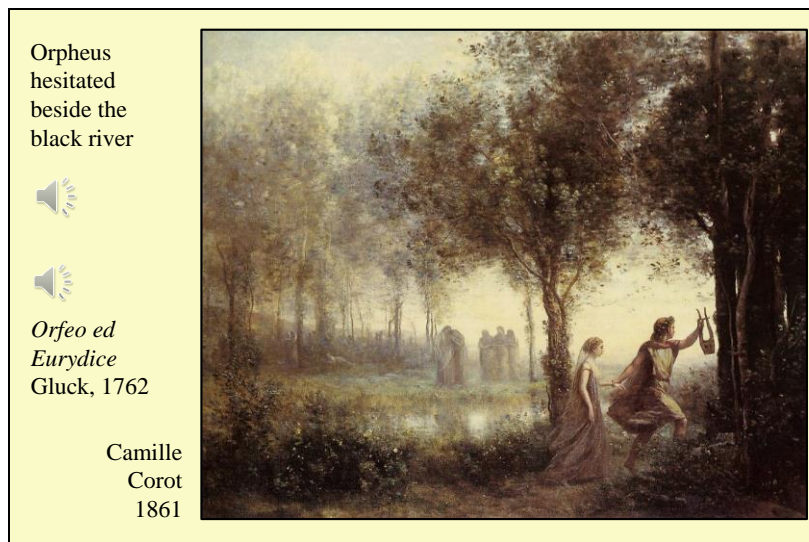
III

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

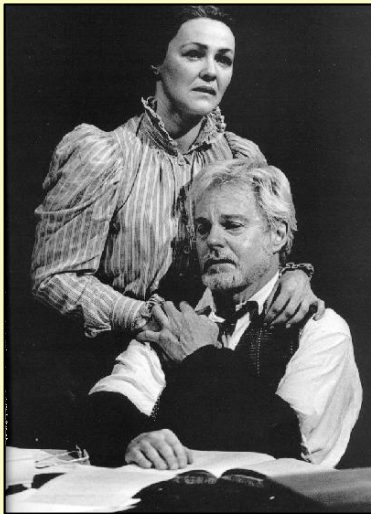
What will I do without Euridice?
Where will I go without my beloved?
Euridice, oh God, answer me!
Yet I still belong to you faithfully.
Euridice! Ah, no help comes to me anymore,
No hope anymore,
Neither from this world, nor from heaven.

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.

	<p>The world is very dusty, uncle. Let us work.</p>
<p>Derek Jacobi and Frances Barber Chekhov, <i>Uncle Vanya</i>, 1996</p>	

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 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 42nd Street*. Brooke Smith plays Sonya and Wallace Shawn plays Uncle Vanya. The visitors have left. 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 greatness of the speech 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.

Intersections of Religion, Art and Science: Whither

*Lake
Geneva
Early
Morning*
Ferdinand
Hodler
1918



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."