

Draft Study Guide for Ancient Greece and Rome  
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*N.B.: This study guide has been paraphrased and drawn upon from Dr. Hanneken's Reading Guide for this week's content.*

## **Ancient Greece**

Our notions of our body, soul, and spirit are similar to those of Ancient Greece. Our current view of Eschatology is rooted more in Ancient Greece than it is in Ancient Israel. There are three texts that are important in understanding Greek eschatology: Homer's *The Odyssey*, Hesiod's *Theogony*, and Plato's *Gorgias*.

It's important to note that the concept of the intermediate state (a construct where a soul goes after death but before judgement) does not appear in Greek Eschatology.

In reading Homer's *Odyssey*, especially in Book 11, we learn that death is still a universal phenomenon that is miserable for everyone, but there is little reward or punishment. Death is fairly close to non-existence, and whatever existence is evident is depressing, at best. We learn that the dead are for the most part, powerless, and can be equated to non-sensible zombies. The only time that the dead are capable of recognition and speech is after they feed upon the blood of sacrifices. They cling onto the grudges that they had from when they were living, and desperately crave for news of their children. Very few are judged in *The Odyssey*, as Orion is the only figure that is rewarded with a pleasant afterlife, and a few of those who commit offenses against the gods are punished with eternal torment.

Hesiod's *Theogony* is significant due to Tartarus, a place of confinement allotted for enemy gods. It is described as the most depressing of prisons, but not as a torture chamber. It is far lower than Hades and is a major step in the development of the idea of hell which gets explored later in the course.

Plato's *Gorgias* is a foundational text which has a large amount of influence on western civilization. It's important to note that the ideas presented were done so around 380 BCE. Here are some major themes:

1. A person consists of two parts, a body and soul, which are separated at death.
2. Each soul is judged fairly based on the character that it had and developed in life.
3. The souls of the just are rewarded, the souls of the godless are punished.
4. Reformation or purgation exists for those who do not fit either of those extreme categories (incurably wicked, righteous)
5. The joys of the living world do not really count, and sometimes can be detrimental to the health of one's soul, which is what really matters.

It is important to note that Plato's extremely negative view of the body has problems, some of which we are still dealing with today.

## **Ancient Rome**

Vergil was a very influential figure in medieval Europe, which will arise later in the semester when we read from Dante. In Book 6 of the *Aeneid*, Aeneas descends into the underworld, where he is shown the

fates of the wicked in Tartarus and is warned by the Sibyl to obey the Gods. He is then brought to Elysium, where he is able to speak with the Spirit of his father.

Philo of Alexandria was an older contemporary of Jesus and Paul. A wealthy Jewish Philosopher living in Alexandria, Egypt, Philo sought to weave Greek and Jewish ideas together. He does so by portraying Plato as a good philosopher who learned all of his good ideas from Moses. Philo of Alexandria was able to connect the Pentateuch to Greek Philosophy through allegorical interpretation.

**Testable Questions:**

1. According to Plato, what are the three categories of souls in the afterlife?
  - a. The Righteous, the incurably wicked, and those in between who require purgation.
2. What historical figure was most influential in articulating a dualism of body and soul, in which the soul is the true self and the body is a superficial shell?
  - a. Plato advocated that the soul is one true's self, and the body is a useless, superficial shell.
3. How does Vergil understand the cycle of the spirit and reincarnation?
  - a. Souls are disciplined and pay the price of their transgressions (line 739-740); and undergoes purgation by fire and water (line 742) and when they have circled through a thousand years, God calls them all into one rank to Lethe, to send them back forgetful to the sky's vault, with a desire to go back into bodies. (line 747-751)