

To understand the Christian perspective, we must first look at the pagan and secular perspective. To see how the Judeo-Christian theology has changed the way the world thinks about life and death, we must first go back in time to see what the worldview was *before* the Hebrews and Christians changed the world. The Judeo-Christian worldview affirms that all life is valuable, and all life has meaning. Dying and death are therefore sacred events. Each human, male or female, Greek or Jew, slave or free, will one day stand alone before the Throne to answer for their choices. The secular worldview *measures* life – some life is more valuable than others – quality of life is *measured* against changing arbitrary societal standards. The secular worldview sees only life on earth. The seen and unseen worlds of Francis Schaeffer's theology are the worlds that we will address.

Our society races to slow down the effects of aging, to erase gray hair and wrinkles. We avoid talk of death. We avoid those who are dying. Emmanuel Hospital in Portland sees this daily. Our four year old son was in Emmanuel for a major reconstructive surgery of his entire chest in 1984. They break every bone and rewire it back together to make room for your heart and lungs to function. We noticed that the kids who were getting well had lots of visitors, while the terminal kids received few. The nurses told us very matter-of-factly that that is how parents cope with the coming loss. They visit less and less, to prepare themselves for the separation. They don't even realize what they are doing. We should be different!

There is an intricate relationship between sin, death and redemption in the Judeo-Christian religions. Sin, death, and redemption are inseparable in our worldview. In the pagan worldview, sin is whatever offended the gods, redemption was unheard of, and death was to cease to exist, or it was the beginning of an unknown, darker existence. In the secular worldview, sin is relative, redemption is not understood, and death is simply inevitable – something you try not to think about until it is forced upon you. And, in secular thought, death is whatever you want it to be – wish it hard enough and hope it will turn out that way.

Since your syllabus does not list any pagan works, I would like to introduce you to some that express that particular worldview. Imaginative writers of all ages have sought to perpetuate or solidify their own worldview through their writing. Immortality, resurrection, sin, death, hell, heaven, and judgment, are some of the most common themes found in literature. Creation, the Passion of Christ, the human condition, conversion, dying, the problem of evil, and coping with death all find themselves recreated endlessly in the literature of each generation. All the writers who ever write about death and loss never seem to think it's fair.

Death demands a response. We respond with art, science, ritual, humor, memorials ... and confrontation. We try to demand answers or to defy God. Deity provides us with purpose, life value, and a will to live. This is why we have offered human sacrifice – life is valuable. This is why we will only die for an ultimate cause – life is valuable. This is why Christians would rather die than deny their faith – eternal life is even more valuable than this life. Living life with eternity in view, or in focus, is what Randy Alcorn calls the 'eternal perspective.'

Greeks: The people of Greece were most probably descended from Japheth and are known in the OT as "Javan." For the line of Japheth see Ge. 1:5-7. The Israelites descend from Shem, thus 'Semitic' refers to Shem's descendants. While Tertullian and Augustine were anti-Platonic, both Origen and Clement were pro Greek education. Like Daniel, we can use our knowledge of pagan literature to further the purposes of God. Classical theology offers three options: chaos, determinism, or totalitarianism. Christianity, on the other hand, offers a good creation, a fall by rebellion, which incurs a curse, with a redeemer who overcomes, and offers a future hope. We must remember that the devil cannot create, he can only distort. In the pagan literatures of the past, we see repeated corruptions of biblical accounts. The hope of life after death is turned

into hopeless darkness and uncertainty. Compare Job to his pagan contemporaries, when he says, [Job 19:25] "As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, And at the last He will take His stand on the earth."

We observe these Greek worldview options as expressed through Homer, Hesiod, Herodotus, and the tragedians (Aeschylus, Sophocles, & Euripides). By the way, tragedies are basically Fall stories, comedies are redemptive.

- Timé – honor, the treasures you accumulate on earth to prove your value and position Aeneid 5.978-80. Honor is more valuable than life.
- Kleos – glory, what people say about you after you are dead – this is what lives on after you.
- Whim of the gods - fate makes the future precarious and uncertain-when the Fates weave, measure, and cut the thread of your life, it is out of anyone's control
- Hospitality Code: you give gifts to me and I give gifts to you, xenia Aeneid 1.737, 1.998, 3.87, hospitality is the mark of civilization for the Greeks.
- Women are a curse from the gods (Pandora, per Hesiod , Aeneid 4.791-2)
- Evil the result of fate and whims of gods: Aeneid 2.76. The gods entertain themselves at your expense. If your patron god is elsewhere, you are out of luck!
- The body a curse, Aeneid 3.4.955-62. This is developed further in Plato.
- Reincarnation Aeneid 6.983-1008
- Death is experienced as a shade, a shadow of void wandering in the underworld. A shade can recognize visitors if they are given blood to drink. The Greek underworld is the most bleak picture of the afterlife expressed in any literature.
- Hopelessness

Hebrews

- The heart (cf. I Sam. 16:7)
- Providential plan - is "supremely personal and suprarational"ⁱ
- Purpose of each man or woman
- Xenia practiced in NT differently, Xenia - hospitality
- Character of God has been revealed(cf. Ex. 34:6)
- Eve was God's last, best gift to Adam (as per Milton's PL)
- Evil the result of Man's sin and necessity of free will
- Death is the passing from the seen to the unseen, or real, world.
- Grief is comforted by hope.

The Greeks fought for glory and honor. They could receive honor from their reputations, what men said about them. This honor is all that can escape the grave, Hades, where their souls are fated to wander after the death of the body. "In the house of Hades there is left something, a soul and an image, but there is no real heart of life in it."(Iliad 23.103,104) In the *Odyssey*, we accompany Odysseus to Hades and vicariously experience the underworld of lost life and lost hope. It was believed that burial was necessary for the soul to enter Hades. Thus, in Greek literature, there is always a supreme effort to recover bodies of the dead for burial.

In the *Iliad*, 1.5, Homer refers to "the will of Zeus." As Hesiod laments in *Works and Days*, "there is no way to escape the will of Zeus."ⁱⁱ The theological options for interpreting events were rather dismal for the Greek soldiers in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. They must believe that the immortal, squabbling gods are constantly engaged in a tug-of-war with one another to control events on earth, or that there is no personal king of heaven – events just happen arbitrarily.

Violence is simply part of that picture. There is no omnipotent, omniscient, merciful, and just Father in heaven, no hoped-for Redeemer, they have never heard those prophecies that provided hope for the Hebrews. God had even described Himself to the Hebrews in Exodus 34:6,7.

Throughout the Iliad and Odyssey the action of life is presented on two planes: the human and the divine. The gods serve to emphasize the limitations of man, how short his life is, and how ultimately meaningless human affairs are. Here, "brawling among the gods" paints the picture of the gods and goddesses in heaven as spoiled Über-humans, or bored sports heroes attempting to entertain themselves with the plights of the pathetic mortal creatures on earth.

*"The Egyptians likewise discovered to which of the gods each month and day is sacred; and found out from the day of a man's birth what he will meet with in the course of his life, and how he will end his days, and what sort of man he will be - discoveries whereof the Greeks engaged in poetry have made a use."*ⁱⁱⁱ Herodotus

Homer is reflecting the pagan society to us at a time when the Hebrew kings were required to write their own copy of the law and read it before the people (read Deut.17:18-20). The separation between the two sets of Wisdom Literature is unbridgeable. The Hebrew literature represents centuries of one peoples' understanding of God and His character, His Creation, man's purpose, man's sinful nature, repentance and forgiveness. The Greeks had only poets, not prophets, to explain the universe, suffering, and death. The Greeks had only leftover stories from Creation, nothing absolute, like the Hebrews.

Plato: The Phaedo

The doctrine of the immortality of the soul was not new to the Greeks in the age of Socrates, but, like the unity of God, had a foundation in popular belief. The old Homeric conception of a shade-type of ghost flitting away to Hades; or of a few illustrious heroes enjoying the isles of the blest; or of an existence divided between the two; or the Hesiodic, of righteous spirits, who become guardian angels,--had given place in the mysteries and the Orphic poets to representations, partly fanciful, of a future state of rewards and punishments. The Greeks may have developed this from their contacts with eastern religious thought. As the unity of God was more distinctly acknowledged, the conception of the human soul became more developed. The succession, or Eastern belief in transmigration (i.e., Pythagoras) defined the sense of individuality for the Greeks, but was not based on anything solid.

Living in an age when logic was beginning to shape human thought, Plato naturally shaped his belief in immortality into a logical form. We might say that Plato was more certain of the existence of God than of the immortality of the soul, but was led by the belief in the one to a belief in the other. None of the dialogs offer us any reason to believe that Plato was a 'Christian before Christ,' like Abraham or other OT figures.

"For I am quite ready to admit, Simmias and Cebes, that I ought to be grieved at death, if I were not persuaded in the first place that I am going to other gods who are wise and good (of which I am as certain as I can be of any such matters), and secondly (though I am not so sure of this last) to men departed, better than those whom I leave behind; and therefore I do not grieve as I might have done, for I have good hope that there is yet something remaining for the dead, and as has been said of old, some far better thing for the good than for the evil."^[63] . . . I desire to prove to you that the real philosopher has reason to be of good cheer when he is about to die, and that after death he may hope to obtain the greatest good in the other world. And how this may be, Simmias and Cebes, I will endeavour to explain. For I deem that the true votary of philosophy is likely to be misunderstood by other men; they do not perceive that he is always

pursuing death and dying; and if this be so, and he has had the desire of death all his life long, why when his time comes should he repine at that which he has been always pursuing and desiring? [64] . . . 'Have we not found,' they will say, 'a path of thought which seems to bring us and our argument to the conclusion, that while we are in the body, and while the soul is infected with the evils of the body, our desire will not be satisfied? and our desire is of the truth. For the body is a source of endless trouble to us by reason of the mere requirement of food; and is liable also to diseases which overtake and impede us in the search after true being: it fills us full of loves, and lusts, and fears, and fancies of all kinds, and endless foolery, and in fact, as men say, takes away from us the power of thinking at all. Whence come wars, and fightings, and factions? whence but from the body and the lusts of the body? wars are occasioned by the love of money, and money has to be acquired for the sake and in the service of the body; and by reason of all these impediments we have no time to give to philosophy; and, last and worst of all, even if we are at leisure and betake ourselves to some speculation, the body is always breaking in upon us, causing turmoil and confusion in our enquiries, and so amazing us that we are prevented from seeing the truth. It has been proved to us by experience that if we would have pure knowledge of anything we must be quit of the body--the soul in herself must behold things in themselves: and then we shall attain the wisdom which we desire, and of which we say that we are lovers, not while we live, but after death; for if while in company with the body, the soul cannot have pure knowledge, one of two things follows--either knowledge is not to be attained at all, or, if at all, after death. For then, and not till then, the soul will be parted from the body and exist in herself alone. In this present life, I reckon that we make the nearest approach to knowledge when we have the least possible intercourse or communion with the body, and are not surfeited with the bodily nature, but keep ourselves pure until the hour when God himself is pleased to release us. And thus having got rid of the foolishness of the body we shall be pure and hold converse with the pure, and know of ourselves the clear light everywhere, which is no other than the light of truth.' [66]

The Aeneid

Vergil wrote Roman propaganda to reinforce the claim to power of Augustus Caesar, the first of the emperors, and the emperor of Luke 2. The description of Vergil's Underworld, not always consistent in its parts and its conception, includes two passages extremely important for the Aeneid as a whole: Anchises' explanation of reincarnation and the soul's progress, but is full of mystery. Note both the entrance (The Golden Bough) and exit (Twin Gates of Sleep) to the Underworld are magical and enigmatic.

Moving forward in time nearly 400 years, we next encounter Augustine. At this time, just before the fall of the Western Roman Empire, those who have "turned the world upside down," [Ac 17:6] have changed the worldview of much of the empire.

Confessions, written about AD 400, in Latin by Augustine, a theologian who has survived to today. It is through Augustine's writings that much of the Catholic doctrine is formed. His personal experiences shape the doctrine of millions of people living today. His experience with sexual sin have left us with doctrine that supports intimacy for procreation only, rather than intimacy for the solidification of the marriage covenant, AND for procreation. His views on baptism, connecting it directly with salvation, are still taught. Many concepts picked up and expounded by later theologians, for example, Thomas Aquinas, have their roots in Augustine's *Confessions* and *City of God*, and *Christian Doctrine* (book 1, ch. 8).

- Death of his father barely mentioned
- Death of his friend affected him immensely, he was overcome with grief, and moved from Thagaste to Carthage.
- Death of his mother is the most detailed account.

City of God addresses death with extensive exegesis in Book 13, chapters one and two. Aside from the early Church Fathers, this is our first theology of death.

Argument—In this book it is taught that death is penal, and had its origin in Adam’s sin.

Chapter 1.—Of the Fall of the First Man, Through Which Mortality Has Been Contracted.

Having disposed of the very difficult questions concerning the origin of our world and the beginning of the human race, the natural order requires that we now discuss the fall of the first man (we may say of the first men), and of the origin and propagation of human death. For God had not made man like the angels, in such a condition that, even though they had sinned, they could none the more die. He had so made them, that if they discharged the obligations of obedience, an angelic immortality and a blessed eternity might ensue, without the intervention of death; but if they disobeyed, death should be visited on them with just sentence—which, too, has been spoken to in the preceding book.

Chapter 2.—Of that Death Which Can Affect an Immortal Soul, and of that to Which the Body is Subject.

But I see I must speak a little more carefully of the nature of death. For although the human soul is truly affirmed to be immortal, yet it also has a certain death of its own. For it is therefore called immortal, because, in a sense, it does not cease to live and to feel; while the body is called mortal, because it can be forsaken of all life, and cannot by itself live at all. The death, then, of the soul takes place when God forsakes it, as the death of the body when the soul forsakes it. Therefore the death of both—that is, of the whole man—occurs when the soul, forsaken by God, forsakes the body. For, in this case, neither is God the life of the soul, nor the soul the life of the body. And this death of the whole man is followed by that which, on the authority of the divine oracles, we call the second death. This the Saviour referred to when He said, “Fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” And since this does not happen before the soul is so joined to its body that they cannot be separated at all, it may be matter of wonder how the body can be said to be killed by that death in which it is not forsaken by the soul, but, being animated and rendered sensitive by it, is tormented. For in that penal and everlasting punishment, of which in its own place we are to speak more at large, the soul is justly said to die, because it does not live in connection with God; but how can we say that the body is dead, seeing that it lives by the soul? For it could not otherwise feel the bodily torments, which are to follow the resurrection. Is it because life of every kind is good, and pain an evil, that we decline to say that that body lives, in which the soul is the cause, not of life, but of pain? The soul, then, lives by God when it lives well, for it cannot live well unless by God working in it what is good; and the body lives by the soul when the soul lives in the body, whether itself be living by God or no. For the wicked man’s life in the body is a life not of the soul, but of the body, which even dead souls—that is, souls forsaken of God—can confer upon bodies, how little so-ever of their own proper life, by which they are immortal, they retain. But in the last damnation, though man does not cease to feel, yet because this feeling of his is neither sweet with pleasure nor wholesome with repose, but painfully penal, it is not without reason called death rather than life. And it is called the second death because it follows the first, which sunders the two cohering essences, whether these be God and the soul, or the soul and the body. Of the first and bodily death, then, we may say that to the good it is good, and evil to the evil. But, doubtless, the second, as it happens to none of the good, so it can be good for none.

Pilgrim’s Progress, John Bunyan (1628-1688) a book about overcoming the fear of death through faith, was written about 1678, “Next to the Bible, the book that I value most is John Bunyan’s

Pilgrim's Progress. I believe I have read it through at least a hundred times. It is a volume of which I never seem to tire..."

—Charles Spurgeon

THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS IN THE SIMILITUDE OF A DREAM

Chapter 1

In a dream, Bunyan sees a man with a burden on his back.
Christian meets Evangelist
Christian runs from the City of Destruction.
Christian and Pliable on the Plain
The Slough of Despond

Chapter 2

Christian is turned aside towards Legality.
Evangelist directs Christian back towards the Wicket-Gate.

Chapter 3

Christian arrives at the Wicket-Gate.
The House of the Interpreter

Chapter 4

Christian's Salvation
The Hill Difficulty
Another Trial of Christian's Faith — The Lions

Chapter 5

The Palace called "Beautiful"

Chapter 6

The Valley of Humiliation
The Valley of The Shadow of Death

Chapter 7

Christian finds a companion to travel with.

Chapter 8

They meet a man with no fruit of Salvation.

Chapter 9

Evangelist rejoins Christian and Faithful for a short time.
Vanity Fair

Chapter 10

Christian is joined by Hopeful a new Pilgrim of The Way.
A Hill called Lucre

Chapter 11

A Mysterious Monument at the End of a Plain
A Refreshing River provided by The King
By-Path Meadow and Vain-confidence
Giant Despair at Doubting Castle

Chapter 12

With The Shepherds on The Delectable Mountains (The Hill Error, Mt. Caution, and a High Hill called Clear)

Chapter 13

The Pilgrims meet a man from the country of Conceit.
Christian tells Hopeful what happened to a man called Little-faith.
A Flatterer traps the Pilgrims in a net!

Chapter 14

The Pilgrims meet Atheist
The Enchanted Ground (Hopeful tells Christian How he became a Believer.)

Chapter 15

Hopeful and Christian strike up a conversation with Ignorance.

The Pilgrims examine the condition of Ignorance and others like him.
Chapter 16
The Country of Beulah
The River of Death
The Gate to the Celestial City

The Pilgrim's Progress - Chapter 6: The Pilgrim Goes Through Valleys

Christian now enters a second valley, the Valley of the Shadow of Death, which actually presents more danger to him than the previous encounter with Apollyon. As Christian enters the valley, two men come back warning him of grave dangers ahead, dangers they are not willing to face. They describe the valley as dark, with a continual howling and yelling coming from the pit, as of people under unutterable misery. Satyrs, hobgoblins, and dragons are about. Clouds of confusion hang over the valley, and death spreads its wings over it. It is a completely dreadful place. They are abandoning their pilgrimage, just as Fearful and Mistrust abandoned theirs due to the lions. Christian ponders what he is getting himself into, but decides that the danger of turning back is greater and proceeds, sword drawn.

Christian proceeds down the path, which becomes very narrow in the valley. On his right is a ditch, into which the blind lead the blind; on his left is a quagmire, into which, if one falls, there is no bottom for one's foot to stand on. Christian walks on in the dark, unsure of his footing. To make matters worse, the Mouth of Hell is in the pit, and flames and sparks come out of it in such abundance that Christian is forced to put up his Sword and resort to prayer, "Oh, Lord, save me!"

Soon Christian hears the voices of fiends approaching him. He again ponders turning back but resolves to go forward. When the voices are almost upon him, he says, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God." The voices back off and come no farther. Christian is confused in the valley, and Wicked Ones (evil spirits) approach Christian from behind, whispering blasphemies in his ear. Christian's state of confusion is such that he cannot tell the difference between his own thoughts and the whisperings of the spirits. He continues in this condition for a considerable time, and then hears a voice ahead saying, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me." Then he is glad for he realizes that there are others in the valley who also fear God as well as himself, also that God was with them even in that dark and dismal condition, and also that he hoped to be able to catch up with them and have fellowship with them.

Soon Day breaks, and Christian is able to turn around and see what he has just passed through. He sees the Ditch and Quagmire on the sides of the path he has just traversed. He also sees the Dragons, Hobgoblins, and Satyrs of the pit. He is much affected by his deliverance from these dangers, but there is more to come. The sun rising at this time is a mercy to Christian, for the path becomes "full of snares, traps, and nets up here" and "pits, pitfalls, deep holes, and ledges down there." In this light, Christian finally comes to the end of the valley.

At the end of the valley, Christian sees laying there the blood, bones, ashes, and mangled bodies of Pilgrims who had gone this way earlier. A short distance away, he sees a cave where two giants lived in days past. Their names were Pope and Pagan, and it is by their power and tyranny that those Pilgrims had been put to death. Pagan has been dead a long time, but Pope is now a senile old man who is no threat. Christian passes by and is not harmed.

Paradise Lost, Milton's 1667 work after the Interregnum of 1649-1660. Milton clearly identifies his work as meant to "justify the ways of God to man." Some critics argue that Satan, Sin and Death are forming an un-holy trinity to oppose the holy trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. My reading is from Book Two. Satan is meeting his daughter, and discovers the result of their incestuous affair – death.

"T' whom thus the Portress of Hell Gate reply'd;
 Hast thou forgot me then, and do I seem
 Now in thine eye so foul, once deem'd so fair
 In Heav'n, when at th' Assembly, and in sight
 Of all the Seraphim with thee combin'd
 In bold conspiracy against Heav'ns King,
 All on a sudden miserable pain
 Surpris'd thee, dim thine eyes, and dizzie swumm
 In darkness, while thy head flames thick and fast
 Threw forth, till on the left side op'ning wide,
 Likest to thee in shape and count'nance bright,
 Then shining heav'nly fair, a Goddess arm'd
 Out of thy head I sprung: amazement seis'd
 All th' Host of Heav'n; back they recoild affraid
 At first, and call'd me SIN, and for a Sign
 Portentous held me; but familiar grown,
 I pleas'd, and with attractive graces won
 The most averse, thee chiefly, who full oft
 Thy self in me thy perfect image viewing
 Becam'st enamour'd, and such joy thou took'st
 With me in secret, that my womb conceiv'd
 A growing burden. Mean while Warr arose,
 And fields were fought in Heav'n; wherein remaind
 (For what could else) to our Almighty Foe
 Cleer Victory, to our part loss and rout
 Through all the Empyrean: down they fell
 Driv'n headlong from the Pitch of Heaven, down
 Into this Deep, and in the general fall
 I also; at which time this powerful Key
 Into my hand was giv'n, with charge to keep
 These Gates for ever shut, which none can pass
 Without my op'ning. Pensive here I sat
 Alone, but long I sat not, till my womb
 Pregnant by thee, and now excessive grown
 Prodigious motion felt and rueful throes.
 At last this odious offspring whom thou seest
 Thine own begotten, breaking violent way
 Tore through my entrails, that with fear and pain
 Distorted, all my nether shape thus grew
 Transform'd: but he my inbred enemy
 Forth issu'd, brandishing his fatal Dart
 Made to destroy: I fled, and cry'd out DEATH;
 Hell trembl'd at the hideous Name, and sigh'd
 From all her Caves, and back resounded DEATH.
 I fled, but he pursu'd (though more, it seems,
 Inflam'd with lust then rage) and swifter far,
 Me overtook his mother all dismay'd,
 And in embraces forcible and foule
 Ingendring with me, of that rape begot
 These yelling Monsters that with ceaseless cry
 Surround me, as thou sawst, hourly conceiv'd

And hourly born, with sorrow infinite
 To me, for when they list into the womb
 That bred them they return, and howle and gnaw
 My Bowels, their repast; then bursting forth
 Afresh with conscious terrours vex me round,
 That rest or intermission none I find.
 Before mine eyes in opposition sits
 Grim DEATH my Son and foe, who sets them on,
 And me his Parent would full soon devour
 For want of other prey, but that he knows
 His end with mine involvd; and knows that I
 Should prove a bitter Morsel, and his bane,
 When ever that shall be; so Fate pronounc'd.
 But thou O Father, I forewarn thee, shun
 His deadly arrow; neither vainly hope
 To be invulnerable in those bright Arms,
 Though temper'd heav'nly, for that mortal dint,
 Save he who reigns above, none can resist."

John Donne (1572-1631)

Death Be Not Proud
by John Donne

DEATH be not proud, though some have called thee
 Mighty and dreadfull, for, thou art not so,
 For, those, whom thou think'st, thou dost overthrow,
 Die not, poore death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
 From rest and sleepe, which but thy pictures bee,
 Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,
 And soonest our best men with thee doe goe,
 Rest of their bones, and soules deliverie.
 Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, kings, and desperate men,
 And dost with poyson, warre, and sicknesse dwell,
 And poppie, or charmes can make us sleepe as well,
 And better then thy stroake; why swell'st thou then;
 One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally,
 And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die.

Obsessed with the idea of death, Donne preached what was called his own funeral sermon, "Death's Duel" just a few weeks before he died in London on March 31, 1631. By the time Deaths Duel was written, Donnes mother, wife, and six of his twelve children were already dead.

Donne's works are full of apprehensions about death, "when one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language."

William Shakespeare, Hamlet the grave seems a poor finality for so noble a creature as man.

HAMLET, 1.4. ?

"Why, what should be the fear?
 I do not set my life in a pin's fee;

And for my soul, what can it do to that,
Being a thing immortal as itself?
It waves me forth again: I'll follow it."

The main themes in Hamlet are judgment, revenge, love, death. It is important to recognize that revenge is the central theme. Death is another important aspect since there are no less than nine deaths in the play. If you had time to read this, you will remember that by the last scene, all of the main characters will be dead, dying from poison, or stabbing one another with swords.

During Shakespeare's lifetime Catholics (the majority of Europeans) believed that there were four places a soul could go once it had left the body: Heaven, Hell, Limbo, and Purgatory. Dante had developed this thoroughly in the Divine Comedy. Purgatory is where souls would go if they hadn't confessed recently and cleared themselves of sin. This is why Hamlet refuses to kill the murderer, Claudius, while Claudius is praying. It would not satisfy Hamlet's revenge: it would reward Claudius like a gift, sending him straight to heaven. Since Hamlet wants his wicked uncle to suffer in Purgatory like his own father is, he must wait for another opportunity. After executing his revenge, death is the only available solution for Hamlet.

Macbeth, 5.5.?

"The queen, my lord, is dead.
MACBETH
She should have died hereafter;
There would have been a time for such a word.
To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing."

2 Henry VI, 2.3.1591 death as proof of guilt!
Take hence that traitor from our sight,
For, by his death, we do perceive his guilt.

Richard III, 1.4.177

Clarence: "Are you drawn forth among a world of men
To slay the innocent? What is my offense?
Where is the evidence that doth accuse me?
What lawful quest have given their verdict up
Unto the frowning judge? Or who pronounced
The bitter sentence of poor Clarence' death
Before I be convict by course of law?
To threaten me with death is most unlawful:
I charge you, as you hope to have redemption
By Christ's dear blood shed for our grievous sins,
That you depart, and lay no hands on me.
The deed you undertake is damnable.
First Murderer: What we will do, we do upon command."

Second Murderer: And he that hath commanded is our king.
Clarence: Erroneous vassals! The great King of kings
Hath in the tables of his law commanded
That thou shalt do no murder. Will you then
Spurn at his edict, and fulfill a man's?
Take heed; for he holds vengeance in his hand
To hurl upon their heads that break his law.”

In Shakespeare, we see the best of both medieval movements: the Renaissance and the Reformation. He exemplifies the creativity of the renaissance with the morality of the reformation. Bad guys die off stage. Some repent and are absolved just before their deaths. The medieval hierarchy conception is in full bloom in Shakespeare's works. Evil can shake up the world, but good will always triumph.

European society's concepts of suffering and death begin to fall into a standard biblical model during this period. The Elizabethan world picture undergoes major revisions through the renaissance and reformation. This is one of the reasons why Shakespeare is called the Bard of the Bible. Playgoers in the late 14th century could learn the King's English while being entertained. They could then read the KJV of the Bible when it was authorized by James in 1611.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Faust a perverse reversal of the medieval idea of spiritual preparation for death.

Alexander Pope (1688-1744) sees death as the "great teacher" (Essay on Man)
A philosophical poem, written and published between 1732 and 1734.

ESSAY ON MAN (1732), *By Alexander Pope*

Pope, the central figure of the Augustan Age, intended this essay to be an ethical treatise in poetic form, but was unable to complete it before his death. Milton had attempted to vindicate “the ways of God to Man,” and Pope is here attempting the same feat; warning man that he is not the center of all things, but only a piece in God's grand scheme.

The student will find Pope making the assumption that man is fallen from grace and must seek salvation. In his four epistles he will present 1) the nature of man with respect to the universe 2) the nature of man with respect to himself 3) man with respect to society and 4) man with respect to human happiness. The theme of the work is best expressed in Epistle one (page 46 in the Dover edition),

“Laugh where we must, be candid where we can;
But vindicate the ways of God to man.”

The epistles are addressed to Lord Bolingbroke, who expressed deism in his philosophical writings. The objective of this work seems to be that of proving that the scheme of the universe is the best possible scheme. If we fail to see the perfection, it is because we are limited in our understanding.

“All Nature is but art, unknown to thee
All chance, direction, which thou canst not see;
All discord, harmony not understood;
All partial evil, universal good:

Genesis 3

By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

Psalms 39

Each man's life is but a breath.

Psalms 116

Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.

Ecclesiastes 3

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:

a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,
a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,
a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,
a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain,
a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,
a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,
a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

Romans 5

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned

Romans 6

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,
neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1 Corinthians 15

We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed--

in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Philippians 1

I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know!

I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith,

so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

Hebrews 2

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil--and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

Hebrews 9

Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

James 2

the body without the spirit is dead

James 4

What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

1 John 3

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death.

Revelation 14

Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."

ⁱ Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, Elwell, p.407.

ⁱⁱ Hesiod, Works and Days, line 104, Loeb edition.

ⁱⁱⁱ Herodotus, Herodotus, Thucydides, (Britannica Great Books, 1952), vol.6:p.65c.

^{iv} Candide, by Voltaire: Norton Critical Edition, p.75.