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Grief Reimagined: A Comparative Analysis of Vergil's *Aeneid* and St. Augustine's *Confessions*

Abstract:

This essay intends to comparatively analyze Vergil's *Aeneid* and Saint Augustine's *Confessions* to examine the shifting perspectives of grief throughout the ancient Mediterranean as the official Roman religion transitioned from Roman Paganism to Christianity following the Edict of Milan in 313 AD. Funerary customs and traditions presented in both the *Aeneid* and the *Confessions* provide one mode of insight to explain how expressions of grief evolved over time. The other direction offered in these primary texts includes depictions of the afterlife itself. Vergil and Saint Augustine both served as heralds of their respective eras—the Augustan and Christian eras—and can therefore serve as representatives for the viewpoints within their communities. I deduce that the novel Christian eschatological beliefs, reduced Christian interest in worldly desire, and newfound Christian hope in reunification with one sole Divinity and loved ones in the afterlife proved especially influential in accounting for the shifting disposition and expression of grief throughout the ancient Mediterranean.

Introduction:

As Roman culture in the ancient Mediterranean shifted from Pagan to Christian religion following the Edict of Milan in 313¹, eschatological beliefs simultaneously pivoted. Where Romans had once viewed the afterlife as desolate, Christians now envisioned as prosperous. This

¹ Betten, Francis S, "The Milan Decree of A.D. 313: Translation and Comment," (*The Catholic Historical Review*, 1922), 191.

newfound Christian belief in the afterlife, and what awaited someone following their death, altered grieving processes regarding the departure of both loved ones and oneself from the temporal world. Likewise, Christian doctrine surrounding reduced interest in worldly desire, along with the possibility for reunification with departed loved ones, ultimately affected how one was expected to grieve within the Christian tradition, as opposed to how Roman Pagans were originally taught to grieve.

This particular essay will examine how early Christianity reshaped preconceived notions of grief throughout the ancient Mediterranean juxtaposed to Pagan tradition through the contextual examination of Saint Augustine's *Confessions* and Vergil's *Aeneid*. Both Vergil and Saint Augustine were heralds of new eras—Vergil of the Augustan age and Augustine of the Christian age.² Therefore, these two primary sources provide grounds for a comparative analysis of their Pagan and Christian beliefs regarding grief as the official Roman religion evolved.

Through analyzing emotions present in cultures throughout antiquity, one can gain a better understanding of the culture's moral values and societal norms during that time. Simultaneously in doing so within a modern context, one can gain perspective into why traditions exist how they do today, and why this development over time has provided grounds for their continued importance, readaptation, or dismissal. Particularly in relation to grief, one can learn the value that both Christians and Pagans respectively placed in the divine and in their loved ones, along with hopes and fears attributed to death and dying.

This essay intends to argue, through the contextual analysis of Vergil's *Aeneid* and Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, that early Christianity altered the grieving process of previous Roman Pagan communities throughout the ancient Mediterranean due to their newfound faith in a

² O'Meara, John, "Virgil and Augustine: The 'Aeneid' in the 'Confessions,'" (*The Maynooth*, 1988), 33.

fruitful and eternal afterlife, reduced interest in worldly desire, and the hope of reunification with both God and loved ones in the afterlife.

Previous Scholarly Research:

The study of grief within antiquity, especially regarding the shift to Christianity as the official religion in Rome, is still an emerging field of study with ample room for further scholarship and analysis. Past scholarly research has focused on three main areas related to my particular area of study: 1) Roman laws, eschatology, and customs surrounding the treatment and honoring of the dead during Pagan times; 2) early Christian laws, eschatology, and customs surrounding the treatment and honoring of the dead; 3) and the connection between Vergil and Saint Augustine.

Notable scholars that have focused particularly on Roman laws, eschatology, and customs regarding the treatment and honoring of the dead in Pagan times are Stephen C. Barton, E.L. Harrison, Urania Molyviati-Toptsis, Jeremiah Mutie, Christine Schenk, and Alan F. Segal. Their previous work has provided my scholarship with background information regarding the correlation between Roman Pagan funerary customs and emotions. With this knowledge, I was further equipped to compare Roman Pagan customs with Christian customs, and the role this shift played in grieving processes within each respective tradition. Urania Molyviati-Toptsis studied particularly the Vergilian Underworld and its place within Roman Pagan tradition, which was especially beneficial in gaining a broader historical context of Pagan views on the afterlife in the *Aeneid* for comparison with the *Confessions*.

Past scholarship regarding Christian eschatology includes the respective work of Peter Brown, Terence Penelhum, and Alan F. Segal. These scholars analyzed influential early Christian leaders and their beliefs regarding reward and punishment in the afterlife based on

one's morality while on Earth. I used their scholarship to guide my own in accounting for how these differing eschatological beliefs could have the capability to alter one's grieving process in antiquity, allowing me to look with a particular lens to similar patterns exhibited in Saint Augustine's *Confessions*.

Many scholars—such as Michael C. McCarthy, John O'Meara, William Werpehowski, and Eric J. Ziolkowski—studied the correlation that Vergil and Saint Augustine had to one another. Particularly, they discussed the influence that Vergil had on Saint Augustine's writing from his classical education. This scholarship informed my own in providing me reason to comparatively analyze both Vergil and Saint Augustine when accounting for grief associated with the shift from Pagan to Christian religion in Rome.

Despite past scholarship in avenues similar to my own, extensive scholarship still has yet to be done regarding the evolution of grief from Pagan to Christian tradition with a particular eye to the differing religious doctrine that could account for this shift. This is where my scholarship fits in. My scholarship combines the analysis of both Pagan and Christian traditions, within the lens of both Vergil and Saint Augustine, to explain how Christian doctrine accounted for shifting grieving processes in the ancient Mediterranean.

Saint Augustine's Connection to Vergil:

Saint Augustine studied Vergil extensively during his classical education, and he often cites passages from the *Aeneid* in his *Confessions*. For instance, in book one of the *Confessions*, Augustine quotes: "Truly now, the song was annoying to me: one and one is two, two and two is four. The sweetest spectacle of deception was the wooden horse filled with soldiers, the burning of Troy, and the shade of Creusa herself."³ Here, Augustine articulates that in his youth, he was

³ Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.22: *Iam vero unum et unum duo, duo et duo quattuor odiosa cantio mihi erat et dulcissimum spectaculum vanitatis equus ligneus plenus armaris et Troiae incendium atque ipsius umbra Creusae.*

very fond of Vergil and his work of the *Aeneid*; so much so that the emotion evoked from reading such an epic was his favorite part of his education. This citation of Vergil in a work where Augustine reflects upon his own faith journey indicates that some of Vergil's ideas were influential in Augustine's own self-discovery of his Christian faith. Eric J. Ziolkowski offers that, "He [Saint Augustine] does not hesitate to draw figuratively upon the *Aeneid* for his own theological purposes in the *Confessions*, a text suffused with 'metaphoricity.'"⁴ Augustine's familiarity and interaction with Vergilian ideas provides grounds for the comparative study of grief within each work and era.

Augustine and Vergil were both influential within their own times. John O'Mera asserts that: "Both Virgil and Augustine were conscious of being the heralds of new eras—the new Augustan age on the one hand, the Christian era on the other."⁵ Since Augustine and Vergil each served as heralds of new eras, they similarly both represent the views of their respective communities. Therefore, this paper intends to analyze the *Confessions* and the *Aeneid* to explain the shift in grieving processes as Roman eschatological views evolved from Roman Pagan to Christian tradition.

The Afterlife and Funerary Customs:

The afterlife was a concept that elicited both intrigue and fear amongst Romans, and many attempts to deduce what the afterlife consisted of were a means of both protecting the living and preparing the dying for what, if anything, might follow their death.⁶ As a result, the afterlife was a common debate in antiquity, and many different variations circulated to describe

The Latin text is from Carolyn J.B. Hammond (editor), *Augustine: Confessions*, vol.1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014). All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

⁴ Ziolkowski, Eric J, "St. Augustine: Aeneas' Antitype, Monica's Boy," (*Oxford University Press*, 1995), 4.

⁵ O'Meara, 33.

⁶ Mutie, Jeremiah, "Treatment of the Dead in the Second Century," in *Death in Second Century Christian Thought*, (Cambridge, MA: The Lutterworth Press, 2015), 158.

what it might entail.⁷ It is nearly impossible to completely capture what everyone within antiquity might have believed regarding the afterlife, but one can gain significant insight through the written word that remains. For the purpose of understanding the evolving expressions of grief as Roman religion shifted from Pagan to Christian, a brief synopsis of the afterlife and funerary customs available during this time is valuable.

Roman Paganism had strict funerary customs, yet a very fluid understanding of the afterlife and what might await someone following their death. Within Roman Paganism, strict rules were set in place regarding the expected grieving process of community members following the death and burial of a societal member. Barton explains: “Threat of public sanction is imposed on mourning deemed excessive, where propriety and therefore moral-social value are calibrated according to the age of the deceased and the affinal or consanguinal [sic] proximity of the dead to the living. The status of the deceased was a factor also.”⁸ Here, one can see that Romans were limited to the amount of time they were allowed to outwardly grieve for, and that they were publicly reprimanded if they refused to abide by these rules.

Roman Pagan beliefs in the afterlife differed tremendously, but one widespread belief throughout the ancient Mediterranean was the idea that if anything awaited one after death, there would be one sole resting place for all in Tartarus.⁹ Another widespread belief was the fear of the dead. Various precautions were therefore set in place to ensure that there was minimal contact with the dead after burial, yet persistent veneration to keep the dead happy. Christine Schenk offers one example: “In Roman religious belief, a corpse had to be hidden from the light of day

⁷ Barton, 581.

⁸ Barton, 582.

⁹ Segal, Alan F, *Life After Death*, (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2004), 211.

or the living would suffer dire consequences.”¹⁰ Hiding the corpse from the daylight was done out of fear and to ensure that the soul would not come back to haunt the living for maltreatment of the corpse. However, this was also out of veneration for the dead body. Other forms of venerating the dead were also common, such as bringing food to the grave, to keep the dead from conspiring against the living.¹¹ The dead were often seen as acquiring divine powers following their departure from the temporal world, which could negatively affect the living if they were to offend the departed.¹² Therefore, many funerary customs in antiquity involved venerating the dead to avoid later shortcomings.

Within Roman Paganism, many beliefs of the afterlife came from philosophical understanding, of which there were two main groups: Epicurean and Platonist. Barton explains: “On one view (the Epicurean), death means personal annihilation; on another, (the Platonist), it is the liberation of the soul from the body. Either way it is not a reason for sorrow—and certainly not sorrow in excess.”¹³ Both viewpoints are quite broad, which provides grounds for elaboration amongst different religious groups as time continues on. Both Vergil and Saint Augustine draw upon these philosophical ideas in their own depictions and explanations of the afterlife.

Vergil depicts the Underworld in the *Aeneid* as containing various locations dependent on a soul’s moral integrity, in which this paper will further elaborate on in later sections. Important to note for now is that Alan F. Segal asserts: “Vergil’s depiction of the Underworld is remarkable in that it involves the kind of reward and punishment characteristic of the Platonic worldview.”¹⁴ Due to Vergil's revolutionary thinking in the moral implication regarding one’s placement in the

¹⁰ Schenk, Christine, “Commemorating the Dead: Roman Funerary Customs and Practices,” in *Crispina and Her Sisters: Women and Authority in Early Christianity*, (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 2017), 164.

¹¹ Mutie, 167.

¹² Mutie, 158.

¹³ Barton, 583.

¹⁴ Segal, 242.

afterlife, and the reward and punishment associated with one's temporal and eternal life, scholars have since regarded Vergil as a natural Christian.¹⁵ Despite Vergil not belonging to the Christian denomination, the very idea that the *Aeneid* aligns closely in theory to some Christian beliefs, while also simultaneously remaining consistent with various traditional Pagan beliefs, provides fascinating grounds for understanding the connection between grief expression and eschatological belief.

Within Christianity, the religion that Saint Augustine converted to, beliefs were far more rigid than within Roman Pagan tradition. Despite not fully knowing what might come after death, Christians operated under the assumption that there was an afterlife where God awaited their arrival following Judgement Day. This rigid belief, therefore, had more to do with faith and trusting in God's promise for eternal happiness, should one live a morally virtuous life, than in previous Roman Pagan tradition. The entire idea of the Christian afterlife was grounded in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Terence Penelhum explains: "Resurrection from the dead, a prediction guaranteed for us by the resurrection of Christ."¹⁶ Therefore, Christians believe in reunification with both God and past loved ones in the afterlife, for Jesus demonstrated this during His own Resurrection.

Happy vs. Desolate Afterlife

In general, Pagans believed in either a desolate or non-existent afterlife; whereas, Christians had hope in a fruitful afterlife filled with happiness and unity. This separation in belief regarding where one might end up following their death can explain why Pagans grieved in despairing lamentation compared to a Christian's more optimistic approach to loss.

¹⁵ O'Meara, John, "Virgil and Augustine: The 'Aeneid' in the 'Confessions,'" (*The Maynooth Review*, 1988), 34.

¹⁶ Penelhum, Terence, "Christianity," In *Life After Death in World Religions*, edited by Harold Coward, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 35.

The evidence regarding the belief of a desolate afterlife is further supported through Vergil's *Aeneid*. A soul's future happiness lied solely in reincarnation into the material world, as the temporal world was seen as better than the afterlife. Urania Molyviati-Toptsis asserts that there are two groups of morally superior souls—those that re-enter the world [those who cross the Lethe] and those who are so pure that they are deified and receive a permanent spot in Elysium [*sedes beatae*].¹⁷ The custom of deification is something practiced frequently in the Roman world, particularly in deifying emperors. However, this reward is not possible for many souls, and therefore is not something that the average Pagan could expect or look forward to in the afterlife. For the average soul, the only hope in some form of happiness was to be reincarnated into the real world after serving their punishment for a thousand years.

Vergil expresses this process through Anchises:

“‘Thereafter, we are sent to spacious Elysium where few of us hold the happy fields. Once these people roll the wheel for a thousand years, the god summons them to the Lethe river in a great stream, evidently forgetful of this world, so that they may revisit the overarching world again, and they may begin to wish to return into their bodies.’”¹⁸

To the average folk, this avenue of reincarnation was the only way for the average soul to attain some form of happiness, for the rest of the Underworld was described as incredibly desolate and marked by punishment.

¹⁷ Molyviati-Toptsis, Urania, “Vergil’s Elysium and the Orphic-Pythagorean Ideas of After-Life,” (*Mnemosyne*, 1994), 39.

¹⁸ Virgil, *Aeneid*, 6.743-751: “*Exinde per amplum mittimur Elysium et pauci laeta arva tenemus. Has omnis, ubi mille rotam volvere per annos, Lethaeum ad fluvium deus evocat agmine magno, scilicet immemores supera ut convexa revisant rursus, et incipiant in corpora velle reverti.*” The Latin text is from H.R. Fairclough, *Vergil: Aeneid* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

At various points throughout Aeneas' journey to the Underworld in book six, Vergil describes the barren atmosphere amongst the impure souls. Vergil initially describes their journey as dark, empty, and gloomy:

Secretly, they [Aeneas and the Sibyl] were going, in the lonely night, through shadow, vacant houses of death, and empty kingdoms, as if it was a journey in the woods by uncertain moon and under malicious light, where Juppiter plunged the sky in shadow, and the dark night withdrew color from the world.¹⁹

The adjectives used to describe the Underworld before Aeneas and the Sibyl even enter the realm portray the atmosphere as all the more frightening and eerie. This description justifies the fear felt by the Pagans regarding their and their loved ones' deaths, for the afterlife that awaited them was daunting.

Similarly, Aeneas is seen as pitying the tormented souls once he is in the Underworld and amongst the dead: "And he [Aeneas] pitied with his heart their unfavorable fate."²⁰ The very idea that Aeneas felt the need to pity the dead insinuates that this is a place that makes even the strongest warriors tremble. Similarly, Aeneas calls their fate unfavorable, which is the fate that, in this depiction and understanding of the Underworld, most Pagans would end up experiencing themselves until some day they are able to re-enter the world above that is full of imperfections, yet more pleasing than the Underworld.

In fact, many departed souls are described by Vergil as yearning for the temporal world: "How they would wish now for bright air in the world above and to endure poverty and hard

¹⁹ Virgil, 6.268-272: *Ibant obscuri sola sub nocte per umbram perque domos Ditis vacuas et inania regna, quale per incertam lunam sub luce maligna est iter in silvis, ubi caelum condidit umbra Iuppiter, et rebus nox abstulit atra colorem.*

²⁰ Virgil, 6.332: *Sortemque animo miseratus iniquam.*

labors!”²¹ This quote emphasizes that the Underworld is clearly far worse than one’s worldly life, for the dead actually wish to be living again to escape the hardships they are forced to endure. Therefore, Pagans were far more likely to outwardly grieve the departure of their loved ones, for they anticipated an unsavory eternity. Not only were the departed gone from the world that the living were still forced to endure without them, but the departed also awaited an eternity of displeasure until they were lucky enough to one day be reincarnated.

Christians, on the other hand, had less of a reason to outwardly grieve due to their staple belief in a fruitful and eternal afterlife. Augustine expresses this through the juxtaposition of his Pagan vs. converted Christian self, emphasizing that anyone who does not know the true Christian God is destined to grieve more extensively, for they fear a ghastly afterlife.

In book 4 of the *Confessions*, Augustine loses a dear friend and grieves extensively, similar to how grief was seen in the *Aeneid*, for he had no Christian hope in a fruitful afterlife for his friend. Augustine expresses that: “This grief darkened my heart, and everything that I was beholding was death.”²² In this particular context, death is seen as negative, and grieving was Augustine’s response to losing his friend whom he had no hope would experience joy in the afterlife. Similarly, this quote indicates a lack of hope altogether, for Augustine did not yet know God and therefore had no hope that God would save those who trusted in Him.

When Augustine’s mother dies in book 9 of the *Confessions*, Augustine has already converted to Christianity. He expresses that because he has found God, he now has hope in a joyful afterlife, and he therefore feels no reason to grieve out of pity for the departed. This is seen when Augustine expresses how his family decided to mourn the passing of his mother, Monica, who was incredibly devout in her faith:

²¹ Virgil, 6.436-437: *Quam vellent aethere in alto nunc et pauperiem et duros perferre labores!*

²² Augustine, *Confessions*, 4.9: *Quo dolore contenebratum est cor meum, et quidquid aspiciebam mors erat.*

And truly we thought it improper to celebrate her death with tearful complaints and lamentations, because often a certain misery of dying—allegedly a total extinction—is customarily mourned in this way.²³

Augustine and his family decided that to mourn Monica with the usual lamentations and despair demonstrated by those who did not know the true God, such as those within Pagan traditions, was a misrepresentation to the pious life she lived. Similarly, doing so showed a lack of belief in God and His ability to provide a prosperous afterlife for those who believed in Him. This is further indicated when Augustine expresses that to lament someone's passing signifies a belief in total extinction rather than union with God.

Monica herself was an influential role model for Augustine and advocated frequently for his conversion. In her final days, she expressed the agony that she felt in continuing to live in the mortal world while knowing that the afterlife would be far more robust. This is seen when Augustine expresses: “She was speaking on a certain day about her scorn for life and the goodness of death.”²⁴ Through this quote, it is apparent that Monica had a great appreciation and hope for life after death. Since she craved the afterlife more than she did the temporal world, one can assume that Christians as a whole deemed the afterlife a desirable place to be, and it therefore served as incentive to live a life dedicated to God in order to one day reach prosperity in the afterlife.

This Christian belief in a fruitful afterlife comes from God's promise to exalt His creation at the end of time. Augustine expresses this idea through Monica's expression: “‘Nothing,’ she

²³ Augustine, *Confessions*, 4.10: *Neque enim decere arbitrabamur funus illud questibus lacrimosis gemitibusque celebrare, quia his plerumque solet deplorari quaedam miseria morientium aut quasi omnimoda extinctio.*

²⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, 9.28: *Conloquebatur quodam die de contemptu vitae huius et bono mortis.* The Latin text is from Carolyn J. B. Hammond (editor), *Augustine: Confessions*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016). All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

[Monica] said ‘is distant from [God], and it is not to be feared that He should not acknowledge me at the end of the age when He should raise me up.’”²⁵ Here, one can see that faith alone is what drives Monica to grieve her own inevitable death effectively, which does not involve mourning, but rather, it involves embracing the life that is to come. Through Monica’s words and faith, her family, too, is faced with the hope that she will enter a happier place following her death, which allows them the opportunity to veer from helpless lamentations.

Both Vergil and Augustine express grief that occurred within their respective communities, but both had different approaches for how to grieve the loss of a loved one as a result of their faith. In Vergil’s more Pagan and philosophical approach, the afterlife is desolate and lonely for the majority of the population. Only the lucky and pure ones are granted eternal pleasure, and the best life that one could have the opportunity to live would be through reincarnation back into the material world. The idea that if there was life after death, it would be far worse than the life people were used to living, was grounds for despairing grief; one did not wish for their loved ones nor for themselves to live a life of detriment and fear. Christianity, on the other hand, exhibited less of a reason to outwardly grieve, or if one were to grieve, less of a reason to do so in a distressed nature. This is due to their principal belief in a life of prosperity following their departure from the material world. Not only did Christians believe in life after death, but they believed that the afterlife would be far better than the life they had lived on Earth. Therefore, they had less of a reason to outwardly grieve, and doing so in a despondent way could be regarded as blasphemous for doubting God’s ability to provide for His creation and follow through on His promises.

Worldly Desire:

²⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, 9.28: “*Nihil*” inquit “*longe est de, neque timendum est, ne ille non agnoscat in fine saeculi unde me resuscitet.*”

Worldly desire was commended by the Pagans and reprimanded by the Christians, which, in turn, separated how each respective religion viewed and expressed grief. This idea is represented in both the *Aeneid*, which explains how Pagans idolized temporal longing, and the *Confessions*, which emphasizes the dangers that Christianity associates with desiring the material world. Christians viewed worldly desire as impious, for it involved idolizing something or someone other than God. Whereas, since Pagans believed in many different gods and cared greatly for leaving an impression on the material world, they had no reason to avoid striving for worldly desire.

Countless times throughout the *Aeneid*, Vergil conveys that achieving worldly desire is the ultimate end goal that will result in happiness. For instance, in book two of the *Aeneid*, Creusa's shade expresses to Aeneas: "There, happy things, a kingdom, and a queen and wife are given to you. Dispel your tears for beloved Creusa."²⁶ Here, Creusa attempts to console Aeneas, who has just discovered that Creusa died and will not be joining him to found Rome. The way that Creusa chooses to do so is by reminding Aeneas of the material possessions and attributes that he will acquire once he founds Rome. The idea that material possessions or attributes, such as honor and legacy, can cure sadness or even elicit happiness is practiced throughout much of the ancient Mediterranean.

As the *Aeneid* continues on, more characters become entrapped with worldly desire, and it eventually leads to their downfall. The most significant example is Dido, who loved Aeneas, a man that did not have the ability to love her as she wished to be loved and as God could have. The beginning of the book expresses: "But the queen, too long wounded by the heavy concern, nurses the wound in her veins, and she is consumed by the blind fire [in her heart]."²⁷ Here,

²⁶ Virgil, 2.783-784: "*Illic res laetae regnumque et regina coniunx parta tibi. Lacrimas dilectae pelle Creusae.*"

²⁷ Virgil, 4.1-2: *At regina gravi iam dudum saucia cura vulnus alit venis et caeco carpitur igni.*

Vergil even compares Dido's grief to a wound, fully emphasizing the agony associated with the grieving process. Dido grieves her lost love so extensively, for she has chosen to invest in something that is destined to end, as all material things and ideas are.

Dido also esteems the temporal value of honor, and she is agonized when she loses it. Dido expresses to Aeneas: “All because of you, my sense of honor has been extinguished, and my former fame, by which I alone was approaching the stars.”²⁸ When Dido fell in love with Aeneas, she rejected her sense of honor. Now that Aeneas has abandoned her, she feels that she has nothing else to fall back on that will make her happy with her honor already lost. Due to Dido's attachment with worldly desire, she is far more prone to grief, for she has fully invested in that which is only temporary.

Not only does Vergil associate worldly desire as prominent amongst the living, but he similarly depicts its importance within the Underworld, too. This is seen when Aeneas converses with Deiphobus in the Underworld, a Trojan soldier that was ruthlessly betrayed and murdered during the sack of Troy. Deiphobus says: “Gods, if I ask for vengeance with a pious mouth, take such vengeance on the Greeks.”²⁹ The idea that worldly desire is not only valued in the temporal world, but that Pagans believed it would still be relevant in the afterlife, provides explanation for why they would continue to strive for it during their time alive. In their eyes, the “temporal” was not truly temporal, for it was transferable to the afterlife and relevant even in death. However, attaching to something that has the ability to inevitably let one down, due to the imperfection of the worldly, still has the potential to leave someone grieving for what once was or what could have been. In this regard, attaching to worldly desire as extensively as Pagans did

²⁸ Virgil, 4.321-323: “*Te propter eundem extinctus pudor et, qua sola sidera adibam, fama prior.*”

²⁹ Virgil, 4.529-530: “*Di, talia Grais instaurate, pio si poenas ore reposco.*”

is grounds for their excessive outpouring of grief following the departure of a loved one that they loved as if eternal.

Adversely, the danger of entrapment with worldly desire is a common theme in Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, for he insists that dependence on anything temporal and other than God is blasphemous and illogical. As a result, Augustine expresses that grief is unnecessary if one truly places their affection in only God, for He is both eternal and omnipotent. However, Augustine also understands that as mortal beings, humans are wired to grieve change and loss, but it needs to be done in moderation. As William Wepewhowski phrases it: "He [Augustine] seeks a tranquility in the midst of grief, not an insensitivity that would deprive grief of its point."³⁰ In other words, Augustine realizes that grief is necessary, for losing a loved one even for a little amount of time before seeing them again, is difficult, especially since God is in every person.

Augustine expresses his issue with worldly desire in book four when he articulates: "I was pitiful, and every soul is pitiful that has been bound by friendship of mortal things, and is torn to pieces when he loses them."³¹ Here, one can see that, according to Augustine, investment in friendship will always end in pain, for humans were not created to live forever; God is the only immortal being. When one emotionally invests in something that will end, they set themselves up for pain. Augustine experienced this type of loss firsthand when he lost his friend in book four of the *Confessions*, prior to his conversion. Augustine states that: "I was truly astonished that the remaining humans lived, because he, whom I had loved as if he were not

³⁰ Wepewhowski, William, "Weeping at the Death of Dido: Sorrow, Virtue, and Augustine's 'Confessions,'" (*The Journal of Religious Ethics*, 1991), 184.

³¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, 4.11: *Miser eram, et miser est omnis animus vincit amicitia rerum mortalium, et dilaniatur cum eas amittit.*

about to die, had died.”³² Again, Augustine articulates here that the reason he was so distressed and grieved so extensively following his friend’s death was because he had loved him as though he would always be with him. However, as is inevitable with any human, his friend died, which left Augustine wounded. As Augustine explains, if he would have placed his trust in the eternal God at this point, he would not have grieved so extensively.

Juxtaposed with Augustine’s grieving process in book four, while in his unconverted state, is his grieving process over his mother’s death once he has converted to Christianity in book nine. Here, Augustine states that although he missed his mother, he more-so grieved that he would have to wait before seeing her again, rather than grieved over their lost relationship. Even so, Augustine expresses that he was still deeply embarrassed and ashamed that even in his converted state, he was grieving someone who was not God.³³ Right before Monica passed, Augustine conversed with her at Ostia, and they came to the conclusion here that worldly desire is detrimental and not worth considering when comparing that to God and all that He has to offer in his embrace. Augustine says: “Every time the conversation led to this conclusion: that the great delight of carnal perception, in the great light of the body, seemed worthy not of comparison, nor even of remembrance, because of the pleasantness of that life.”³⁴ Here, Augustine conveys that both him and Monica have come to the divine realization that desiring only the worldly is ignorant and foolish, for God offers so much more if one puts their hope and trust directly in Him instead.

³² Augustine, *Confessions*, 4.11: *Mirabar enim ceteros mortales vivere, quia ille, quem quasi non moriturum dilexeram, mortuus erat.*

³³ Augustine, *Confessions*, 9.33.

³⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, 9.24: *Cumque ad eum finem sermo perduceretur, ut carnalium sensuum delectatio quantalibet, in quantalibet luce corporea, prae illius vitae iucunditate non comparatione sed ne commemoratione quidem digna videretur.*

In book four, Augustine expresses that he felt alone and that he had no comfort for his grief. In book nine, after Augustine converts to Christianity, he acknowledges that grief is part of humanity's imperfection and bound to happen. However, he also notes that by lamenting to God instead of to His creation, one is more apt to find peace amongst the grief compared to uncontrollable tears that Augustine experienced in book four of the *Confessions*.³⁵ Augustine articulates his grieving process in his converted state:

And it was pleasing to weep before you about her and for her, about myself and for myself. And I released those tears that I was repressing, so that they were flowing as they wished, scattering them from my heart. And it [my heart] took comfort in them [the tears], for they were your ears there, not those of some human who would explain my grieving in an arrogant way.³⁶

Through this quote, Augustine explains that by grieving to God about his lost friendship, he was able to find peace rather than crying to himself out of pity. In this regard, Augustine expresses that grief is a natural response to friendship, but that ultimately, this grief is all the more impenetrable when one does not allow God to soothe their aching heart. Therefore, in Augustine's eyes, worldly desire is the culprit of excessive grief. However, as humans, one cannot fully escape this when living within the temporal world. As an alternative, a moral human being, who is determined to find true happiness, should put God above all worldly desires and depend on Him alone when this inevitably becomes difficult.

Vergil and Augustine both use their respective works, the *Aeneid* and the *Confessions*, to articulate opposite ideas regarding worldly desire. Vergil discusses the importance that worldly

³⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, 4.11.

³⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, 9.33: *Et libuit flere in conspectu tuo de illa et pro illa, de me et pro me. Et dimisi lacrimas quas continebam, ut effluerent quantum vellent, substernens eas cordi meo. Et requievit in eis, quoniam ibi erant aures tuae, non cuiusquam hominis superbe interpretantis ploratum meum.*

desire holds within many of his characters, and how this attachment often leads to heartbreak and grief. Augustine discusses the dismay he has for this worldly desire and how it often leads to unnecessary heartache and grief, along with how it often portrays impiety in the devotion to something or someone other than to God. These contrary viewpoints account for the different expressions of grief within each respective community and era. In Pagan tradition, outward expressions of lamentations were especially common, for one was grieving the deceased, whom they had often loved above scarce else. In Christian tradition, however, one grieves the departed far less, for they place their devotion in God alone, who will never die and who is all-powerful.

Reunification (or Lack Thereof) with Loved Ones in the Afterlife:

Those within the Pagan faith believed that one would see loved ones again in the afterlife, but only for a short amount of time during the punishment stage of their journey. Even then, they would not be able to truly enjoy their presence, for they would be enduring agony during this time. When the souls would finally overcome their punishments, they would be required to drink from the Lethe to forget everything about their previous lives. There is the rare occasion that a soul might reach the *sedes beatae*, but this field is mainly reserved for heroes of the world or deified souls. In other words, most Pagans could not long for this eternal bliss, and even if they were worthy, they would not be joined by all their friends and family in this location. In this regard, grieving departed loved ones was more common in Pagan tradition, for this most likely marked the last time they would ever interact with them or possibly even remember them.

Molyviati-Toptsis explains this separation between the souls in Elysium: “Vergil has divided Elysium into different locations as he has done with other regions of the Underworld... He [Vergil] presents it as a larger region containing two different abodes of reward for morally pure souls: the *sedes beatae* populated by semi-divine souls which have escaped the cycle of rebirth;

and the *nitentes campi* containing the souls destined to transmigrate to new bodies (*inclusas animas superumque ad lumen ituras*).³⁷ Regardless, the *sedes beatae* is incredibly difficult for the average soul to reach, so most Pagans operated under the assumption that they would not see their loved one again following their death.

In the *Aeneid*, various stages of a soul's afterlife are depicted: those who are in the stage of paying their punishments for their lifestyles lived on Earth and those within Elysium, emphasizing particularly those who are to be reincarnated into the world above. Aeneas interacts with Dido while amongst the agonized souls, and after talking with her, or rather at her, Vergil says: "Finally, she [Dido] seized herself and fled with hostility into the shady grove where her former spouse, Sychaeus, answers her concerns and matches her love."³⁸ Dido is amongst the punished souls, serving her punishment for killing herself out of love, and she is described as being reunited with her husband, Sychaeus. Despite this reunification with her husband, she is not depicted as happy. She flees in a skittish manner and lurks in shady groves. In this way, the reunification, which will not be forever, is filled with pain. Once both have paid their punishments, they will most likely be separated and forget the other ever existed.

Vergil then depicts the reincarnation cycle through Anchises' description to Aeneas. Aeneas and the Sibyl first find Anchises watching the entire process unfold: "But father Anchises was contemplating deep within and examining with enthusiasm the souls confined to the green valley that were about to proceed to the light of the world above."³⁹ Here, Vergil indicates that the souls who are in the flourishing ravine, which is the Lethe River, are to join the

³⁷ Molyviati-Toptsis, 35.

³⁸ Virgil, 4.472-474: *Tandem corripuit sese atque inimica refugit in nemus umbriferum, coniunx ubi pristinus illi respondet curis aequatque Sychaeus amorem.*

³⁹ Virgil, 4.679-681: *At pater Anchises penitus convalle virenti inclusas animas superumque ad lumen ituras lustrabat studio recolens.*

temporal world again. Anchises himself has taken on the fatherly role to ensure that the souls whom he cared about during his Trojan years are or will be re-entering the world above. Many of the souls who are to be reincarnated, in specifically the *Aeneid*, will be future Roman rulers. Nevertheless, this quote indicates that many souls within Elysium are reincarnated after entering the Lethe River.

Later, Anchises expresses that the souls who drink from the Lethe River forget their previous lives. However, drinking from the Lethe is mandatory before re-entering the world above. Anchises says: “Souls, to whom are owed second bodies by fate, drink the carefree springs and vast forgetfulness at the water of the Lethe's stream.”⁴⁰ Since the souls forget their previous lives, this leaves further grounds for those still living to grieve their departed. They will be given new memories and new bodies, so that they are no longer the person that they once were. In a sense, this process in the afterlife consists of punishment to pay for past offenses while alive, which is directly followed by complete erasure of memories before re-entry to the world above as a completely new individual. Therefore, death for the average Pagan was filled with torture before essentially erasure from existence. They are no longer the person they were before, for they no longer have their memories nor their bodies. This accounts for the desperate lamentations on behalf of family and friends in Pagan tradition, who lost loved ones that they truly believed they would never see again, and if they did see again, they would never see again happy in their same form.

Christians, on the other hand, believed that they would see their loved ones again in the afterlife. In fact, reunification with both God and loved ones at the end of time is a staple of the Christian faith. Barton emphasizes this point: “Those who have died are reincorporated with the

⁴⁰ Virgil, 4.713-715: “*Animae, quibus altera fato corpora debentur, Lethaei ad fluminis undam securos latices et longa obliviam potant.*”

living in a great eschatological drama inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Christ in time past, soon to reach its climax with his parousia in time future.”⁴¹ Here, Barton states that all God’s creation is reunited at the end of time, which was demonstrated for the first time by Christ’s own death and Resurrection. Because Christians believed that they would see their loved ones again in the afterlife, they were far less likely to lament in a despairing way.

Augustine expresses the novel Christian concept in both reunification with loved ones and pleasure in the afterlife, unlike many other traditions believed, particularly Pagan tradition. Augustine describes his life before his conversion: “And truly I was not expecting that he would come back to life, nor was I begging for this with my tears, but I was grieving and lamenting so much.”⁴² Here, Augustine states that because he did not know God yet, he did not believe that he would ever see his friend again, nor that his friend might come back to life through the afterlife. Augustine’s pre-conversion belief in lack of reunification with his friend caused him to lament far more, and in a far more despairing manner, than he felt the need to do following his mother’s death in book nine following his conversion.

After Augustine’s conversion, he expresses at various points, particularly in the discussion of death in book nine, the hope that reunification with both God and loved ones gave him following the passing of his mother. Augustine explains: “Therefore, may she rest in peace with her husband.”⁴³ Augustine communicates through this point that Monica will be reunited with her husband at the end of time, for both of them were baptized before their death and both of them lived a life dedicated to God, especially in their final days. Augustine believes that not only will Monica be at peace in the afterlife, but she will also be reunited with her husband. This,

⁴¹ Barton, 588.

⁴² Augustine, *Confessions*, 4.10: *Neque enim sperabam revivescere illum aut hoc petebam lacrimis, sed tantum dolebam et flebam.*

⁴³ Augustine, *Confessions*, 9.37: *Sit ergo in pace cum viro.*

in turn, gives Augustine hope that he will also be reunited with his mother and other deceased loved ones at the end of time. Therefore, Augustine feels less of a reason to outwardly grieve, particularly in an inconsolable way, for he will see his loved ones again. Not only will he see his loved ones again, but he will see them in a happier place alongside the Lord, who is the best of all His creation.

Augustine also discusses the pleasure that comes from being reunited with the Lord, for this is one's end goal of their respective worldly journey. Augustine remarks: "Because truly you did not strongly seek out our faults, we confidently hope for some place with you."⁴⁴ This statement serves a two-fold representation of the Christian tradition. The first is that Augustine expresses the hope that comes with knowing a prosperous afterlife exists for those who follow in God's path. This, therefore, serves as an incentive to encourage God's creation to follow His instruction, so that they can reach Heaven. Similarly, this serves as the second representation of Christianity, which reflects the human condition. Humanity is inevitably flawed as a result of Original Sin, yet God does not focus only on the bad, but He allows one to confess their sins to purify their souls, providing opportunity for all to seek a fortunate afterlife. This newfound idea of reunification with God at the end of time provides less of a reason for Christians to outwardly grieve, for they believe that they will live in unity with both their loved ones and God at the end of time. In that regard, death is merely a temporary goodbye, rather than the complete extinction of an individual.

Vergil and Augustine both represent the state of the afterlife regarding reunification in both the Pagan and Christian religions, or lack thereof, that contributes to the grieving processes in each respective tradition. Vergil elaborates that the ultimate end goal that most Pagans believe

⁴⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, 9.34: *Quia vero non exquiris delicta vehementer, fiducialiter speramus aliquem apud te locum.*

will ensue for them involves reincarnation, which requires crossing the Lethe River to forget their previous lives before they re-enter the temporal world. Before reunification, the souls are forced to undergo a series of punishments to purify their souls. During this time, they might have the opportunity to interact with past loved ones, but the agonizing state of their punishments do not allow much for Pagans to look forward to in the afterlife. All this combined added to the hopeless lamentations experienced by Pagans following a loved one's passing. In Pagan tradition, the departed will spend a thousand years of pain before forgetting their previous lives and everyone in it. In this regard, Pagans believed there was much to grieve and not much to look forward to in the afterlife, unless one was a remarkable hero who was destined for the *sedes beatae* and therefore would escape reincarnation. Juxtaposed to this idea of forgetfulness is Augustine's Christian belief in reunification, where a pure and baptized Christian has the ability to enter Heaven to meet again both loved ones and God Himself. In this regard, Christians felt less of a need to helplessly mourn the departed, for they held hope that they would see them again if they followed God's instructions while on Earth. This would secure their place in a prosperous afterlife filled with both loved ones and God's presence.

Conclusion:

Vergil's *Aeneid* and Saint Augustine's *Confessions* provide insight into how early Christian doctrine reshaped preconceived notions of grief throughout the ancient Mediterranean as the legal Roman religion shifted from Pagan to Christian. The newfound Christian belief in a prosperous afterlife, reduced interest in worldly desire, and hope in reunification with both loved ones and God in the afterlife provided Christians with less reason to outwardly grieve juxtaposed to Pagans, who regarded the afterlife as desolate for the average mortal, prized worldly desire,

and believed that they would lose their memories of loved ones after escaping punishment in the Underworld and re-entering the world above.

Important to note within this analysis is that Roman Pagan tradition was relatively fluid throughout the ancient Mediterranean. There is evidence to suggest that not all Pagans believed in the exact same afterlife, which is not unlike how religions of today, even within denominations themselves, have conflicting views regarding the afterlife. However, the Roman Pagan viewpoints described in this essay do provide a general account for what majority of Roman Pagans did believe during this time. Regardless, it is important to note the dangers of overgeneralization, thus providing grounds for further research into this topic regarding the extent of eschatological diversity amongst Roman Pagans and how this impacted their influence on tradition and emotion.

Similarly, not all early Christians necessarily believed in the same afterlife, either, despite their doctrine being more rigid. This could be due to the relative novelty of the religion. As time continued on and further denominations branched from Christianity, views of the afterlife continued to evolve. Some denominations turned their beliefs towards a Purgatory, while others believed in only two designated places for someone following their death: Heaven or Hell. This concept, too, allows for further scholarship into the continued development of the Christian religion and whether their views on eschatology, worldly desire, and reunification with God and loved ones in the afterlife continually affected their grieving processes.

In a modern context, understanding shifting religious beliefs throughout antiquity helps one to understand the development of their own beliefs today and also humanity as a whole. Dependence on religion throughout time, regardless of the divinity attached, shows humanity's innate desire for both knowledge and happiness. Grief is a result of desiring happiness for both

loved ones and oneself, which religion provides a vehicle for. Religion allows for hope and an explanation for how the world exists as it does, along with why death is a necessary part of it. The diversity of religious beliefs throughout time, such as Roman Paganism and Christianity, represent humanity's constant desire for knowledge to find truth, along with the role that emotions play in uniting and/or dividing a people.

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