

FOUNDATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN FAITH



1. Bibliology

2. Christian History

3. Apologetics Foundations

4. Alternative Universes: Comparative Worldviews

5. The Theodicy Issue: The Problem of God and Evil

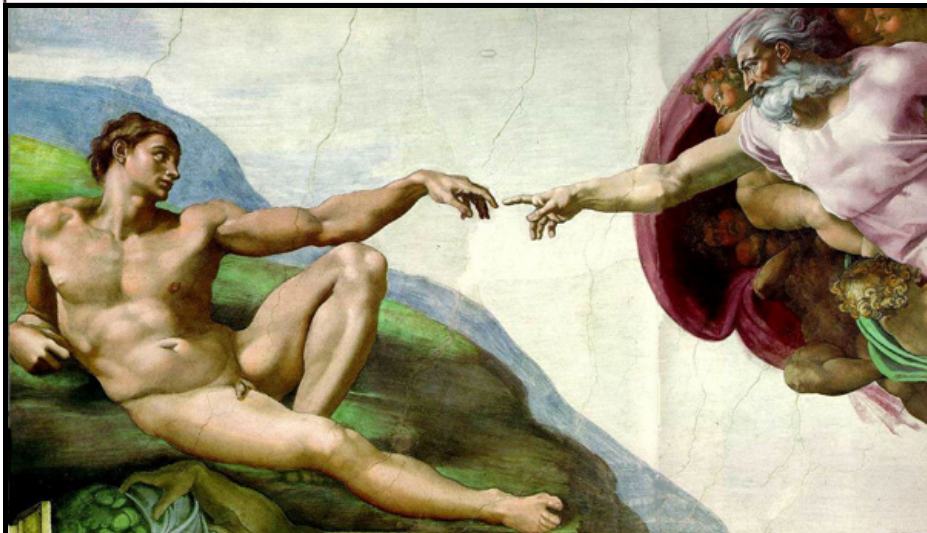
6. The Historical Quest for the Real Jesus

7. Special Topics: Other Religions, the Afterlife, etc.

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Origins of Religion: Two Models

A Seminar Preface

A Cumulative Case Approach.

- The principle of abduction (inference to the best explanation).
- Sources: Philosophy, biblical theology, science, anthropology, archaeology, history, psychology.

1. The Secular View of Religion*

A Progressive/Evolutionary Model.

- A basic assumptions:
 - Religion has evolved along with the rest of human physical and mental development.
 - Religion is an attempt by desperate and superstitious people to make sense of our world.
- David Eller, *Natural Atheism* (2004).
 - Atheism is the natural order of things, and belief in God is a cultural contrivance.
 - God does not really exist; we invent him out of our need for a father figure.
- Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (1841)
 - Religion is a human invention.
 - Man is alienated from himself, and God is a projection of human potentiality.
 - “The divine being is nothing else but... the human being purified.”
- Atheist presumptions:
 - Superstitious people are desperate to appease or manipulate powerful supernatural forces that they believe control their lives.
 - **Karl Marx**: Religion is “the opiate of the people.”
 - **Sigmund Freud**: “Religious ideas have arisen... from the necessity of defending oneself against the crushing force of nature”.... Religious beliefs are “illusions, fulfillments of the oldest, strongest and most urgent wishes of mankind.... The benevolent rule of a divine Providence allays our fear of the dangers of life.”

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* For an extended treatment of religious anthropology, see:

- Andrew Lang, *The Making of Religion* (1898).
- Wilhelm Schmidt, *The Origin of Religion: Facts and Theories* (1931) and *Primitive Revelation* (1939).
- Winfried Corduan, *A Tapestry of Faiths: The Common Threads Between Christianity and World Religions* (2002); *In the Beginning God: The Case for Original Monotheism* (B&H Academic, 2013).

- ▶ **Richard Dawkins:** Religion is a virus of the mind and a kind of genetic defect in human biological evolution.
- ▶ God did not create people in his own image – people create God in their own image.
- ▶ Belief in God is weak and infantile – a failure to courageously confront reality.

[NOTE: Wish fulfillment might explain some religious ideas about God, but not the God of the Bible. Why would human beings want to invent a God who is a perfect, holy, and righteousness moral Judge? Wish fulfillment might explain belief in heaven, but not hell.]

- Many modern liberal theologians agree that religion is a manmade construct.
 - ▶ Joseph Hough of Union Theological Seminary: “Religion is something that we human beings put together in our effort to give some cultural form to our faith. Religion, our rituals, our music, even our theology, is a human attempt to express what we have experienced.... Therefore we want to be careful about claiming that one religious form is the only one that is authentic or real.”

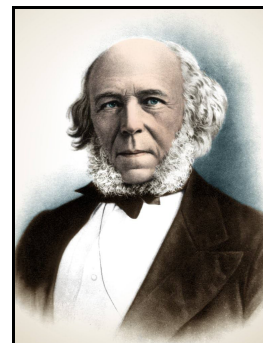
Three Evolutionary Stages?

(1) Primitive Animism and Pantheism.

- ▶ Manaism: Belief that all of nature is inhabited by supernatural spirits or a “life force.”
- ▶ **J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (1890):** Religion evolved from magic.
- ▶ **Herbert Spencer (1820-1903):** Religion began with the veneration of deceased ancestors.
 - Progressive evolution and “survival of the fittest.”
- ▶ **E. B. Tylor (1832-1917):** Primitive religion was animistic.

(2) Polytheism.

- ▶ Powerful supernatural deities, gods and goddesses control all natural phenomena.
- ▶ Certain anthropomorphized gods and goddesses were accorded special attention and elevated to positions of worship.



Herbert Spencer

(3) Monotheism.

- ▶ Eventually, the concept of one supreme creator-God was accepted by some civilizations.
- ▶ Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Deism, Islam, Baha'i, Mormonism.
- ▶ God as the source of all goodness, love, justice and morality.
- ▶ God is either be supreme over all other gods, or the only true God.
 - All other supernatural forces are demi-gods: angels or evil spirits).
- Sacred scriptures are revered as divinely inspired.
- Strong moral/ethical doctrines.
- God is actively involved in history.

[NOTE: R. C. Sproul: Why would human beings invent a God even more powerful and terrifying than the forces of nature that provoked them to invent God in the first place?]

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- Annual sacrifices in the Temple of Heaven.
- The Mandate of Heaven.
- Shangdi and YHWH.
- Christian missionary efforts.
 - ▶ Matteo Ricci (1552-1610).
 - ▶ Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) China Inland Mission.
 - ▶ James Legge (1815-97).
 - ▶ William Henry Medhurst (1796-1857).
- Chan Kei Thong, *Faith of Our Fathers: Finding God in Ancient China* (2018).
 - ▶ The characteristics of Shang Di.
 - ▶ An ongoing debate.
- Philosophy and the Dao.
 - ▶ The absorption of religion into philosophy.
- **Laozi** (Lao-Tzu) and the ***Dao De Jing*** (“*The Way of Life*”).
- **Confucianism**.
 - ▶ Confucius (Kung-fu-tze, c. 551-479 BC) and the *Analects*.
 - ▶ Practical agnosticism.
 - ▶ A philosophical moralist.
 - The “Silver Rule.”
- **Mohism**.
 - ▶ Mozi (Mo Di, or Mo Tzu, c. 470-390 BC).
 - ▶ An ethic of universal love.
 - ▶ “Heaven” as a personal God who embodies goodness and justice.
 - ▶ Pragmatic ethics.

India.

- The Aryan invasion (c. 1500).
- **The Vedas:** The foundational scriptures of Hinduism.
 - The *rishis* and Sanskrit texts (*shruti*).
 - **The Rig-Veda** (“Royal Veda,” c. 1500-1000 BC).
- Indian polytheism.
 - **Dyaus Pita** (“Sky Father” or “Heavenly Father”) – “King of the gods.”
- **The Upanishads** (Vedanda, or Advaita).
 - Commentaries on the Vedas and Hinduism’s primary religious texts.
 - Core message: “There is no joy in the finite; there is joy only in the infinite.”
 - Humanity’s greatest problem is ignorance.
 - The key to spirituality is self-realization through asceticism and contemplation.
- **The Shvetashvatara Upanishad** (circa 5th century BC).
 - Monotheistic musings based on *Saguna* Brahman.
 - “This is the highest mystical teaching” and “the goal of all knowledge.”
 - Correlations with biblical theology:
What is the cause of the cosmos? Is it Brahman? [Ultimate Reality]
From where do we come? By what [do we] live?
Where shall we find peace at last?
What power governs the duality
Of pleasure and pain by which we are driven?
Time, nature, necessity, accident,
Elements, energy, intelligence –
None of these can be the First Cause;
They are [only] effects, whose only purpose is
To help the self rise above pleasure and pain.
In the depths of meditation, sages
Saw within themselves the Lord of Love [!]
Who dwells in the heart of every creature.... [!]
He is One, He it is [!]
Who rules over time, space, causality.... [!]
He is the eternal Reality and the ground of existence.... [!]
The Lord of Love holds in his hand the world....
All is change in the world of the senses,
But changeless is the supreme Lord of Love.... [!]
The Lord of Love, supreme Reality,
Who is the goal of all knowledge....
Great is the glory of the Lord of Life,
Infinite, omnipresent, all-knowing. [!]
He is known by the wise who meditate
And conserve their vital energy.
Hear, O children of immortal bliss,
You are born to be united with the Lord.
Follow the path of the illumined ones....

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Dedicate yourself to the Lord of Life
Who is the cause of the cosmos.
He will remove the cause of all your suffering [!]
And free you from the bondage of karma.... [!]
Let us adore the Lord of Life...
He was before creation.... [!]
The Lord of Love is one. [!]
There is indeed no other..... [!]
O Lord, in whom alone we can find peace.
May we see your divine Self and be freed
From all impure thoughts and all fear....
You are the supreme Brahman... [!]
He fills the cosmos, yet he transcends it.... [!]
He is the supreme Lord, who through his grace
Moves us to seek him in our own hearts.... [!]
He is the master of the universe, of animate and inanimate....
May the Lord of Love, who projects himself
Into this universe of myriad form, grant us the grace of wisdom....
He has no beginning, he has no end.... [!]
He is the bestower of all blessings,
And his grace fills the heart with profound peace.... [!]
Know him to be the supreme guardian of the cosmos.... [!]
Know him to be the primal source of life.... [!]
Know him to be the supreme Lord of lords, King of kings,
God of gods, ruler of all....
Know him to be the cause without a cause.... [!]
He is the maker of the universe,
Self-existent, omniscient, destroyer of death....
The lord is my refuge....
The Lord is the bridge from death to immortality.... [!]

► **The Katha Upanishad:**

Perennial joy or passing pleasure?
This is the choice one is to make always....
[T]urn your back on the way of the world
Which makes mankind forget the goal of life. [!] [Katha Upanishad 2:2, 3]

• **Pantheism, Panentheism, and Christianity.**

- Pantheism: God is everything.
- Panentheism: God is in everything.
- The biblical doctrine of divine transcendence.
- What accounts for the monotheistic declarations in the Shvetashvatara?
- Some irreconcilable contrasts.
 - Contrasting views on Reality.
 - Contrasting views on sin and salvation.
 - Contrasting views on reincarnation.

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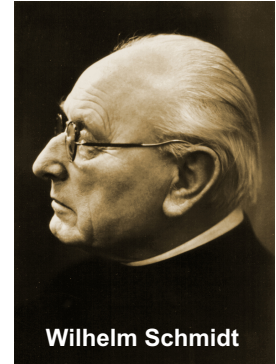
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- **Andrew Lang, *The Making of Religion* (1898).**
 - ▶ Two observations regarding the religions of primitive societies:
 - (1) Belief in the eternal, infinite, powerful, omniscient, and moral Father/God who is the judge of all mankind; and
 - (2) Belief in an afterlife.
- **Wilhelm Schmidt, *The Idea of the Origin of God* (1912).**
 - ▶ A pioneer in the field of “ethnohistory” (cultural anthropology).
 - ▶ Archaic societies held to a primitive monotheism: belief in one Supreme God who was the First Cause (Creator) of all things.
 - ▶ Romans 1:18-20.
 - ▶ The characteristics of a monotheistic God.
 - ▶ As various cultures became more advanced, there was more emphasis on magic, ritual, and the veneration of spirits.
 - ▶ Over time, the Sky God was virtually forgotten.
- Karen Armstrong: Gradually, this God faded from human consciousness and was replaced by the more accessible gods of the pagan pantheons.
- The growing consensus:
 - ▶ William Dyrness: “Scholars of comparative religions are beginning to think that belief in one God was the original view, obscured and overlaid in the course of time by magic, animism, and polytheism.”
 - ▶ Winfried Corduan: “To a large extent, [Schmidt] continues to be correct.”

A black and white profile photograph of Wilhelm Schmidt, an elderly man with glasses, looking to the left. The name "Wilhelm Schmidt" is printed in white text at the bottom of the image.



- Primordial societies often claimed that their understanding of God came by revelation either directly from God or through mystics, sages, or prophets.
 - ▶ Winfried Corduan: “The data indicate that this monotheism is the earliest form of religion. Since there is no evidence of cultures slowly working their way up through various preliminary stages to more advanced stages, and since the only extant evidence exhibits the total package of traditional theism, and since similar beliefs are found in the earliest cultures all around the globe, there is good reason to believe that these theistic beliefs are based on a form of revelation.”
- Two options: general revelation based in nature, or special revelation based on God’s disclosure in Scripture and history.
 - ▶ Winfried Corduan: “It would seem that special revelation is immediately ruled out since these people definitely did not have access to Scripture the Old Testament or the New Testament.... Nor could one say that... these people were a part of the stream of God’s working in history as explicitly recorded in Scripture.”

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- Oral tradition and residual monotheism.
 - ▶ Winfried Corduan: “Since there is good reason to believe in the common descent of all human beings from the original pair, both on revelatory and scientific grounds, it is logical that the monotheistic religions practiced by preliterate tribes... derive from the same monotheistic beliefs attributed to the earliest humans in special revelation.”
 - ▶ After Noah’s flood, a rudimentary knowledge of God was retained to some extent in the collective memory of post-diluvian humanity.
 - ▶ This residual monotheism was reinforced by general revelation.
- Ray Clendenen: “The Uniqueness of Israel’s Religion.”
 - ▶ “Paganism is a corruption of an earlier, pure religion. The worship of the only true God did not develop from animism to ethical monotheism according to an evolutionary scheme, as modernists claim. The Bible teaches that paganism began to develop when sin corrupted the worship of the true God (Rom. 1:18-23). Thus some of the similarities between paganism and biblical faith could result from a common memory of early events and an earlier legitimate worship that lingers in human personality and culture.
“... [W]hile the *forms* of Israel’s faith shared many elements with their pagan neighbors, the *substance* or heart of Yahweh worship could diverge drastically.”

The Strange Story of Melchizedek.

- The story of Melchizedek implies that God has worked outside of Hebrew history to reveal himself to mankind. [Ref. Gen.14:18-20; Ps. 110:4; Heb. 5:5; 7:1, 3, 4, 11, 16; 8:7; 13:10]
- God originally revealed himself to Abraham as YHWH.
- Abraham’s encounter with Melchizedek.
 - ▶ Melchizedek (*Melchi* – king; *Zadok* – righteousness), the lugal (priest-king) of Salem and priest of El Elyon (“the Most High God”).
 - ▶ Melchizedek: “Blessed be Abram by [El Elyon], Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be [El Elyon], who delivered your enemies into your hand.” [Gen. 14:19-20]
- ▶ The author of Hebrews implies that Melchizedek was an archetype of Christ:
 - ▶ As such, he was an earthly representative of YHWH (i.e., or El Elyon).
 - ▶ Hebrews 7:4-10 – “Just think how great [Melchizedek] was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the plunder.”
 - ▶ Melchizedek’s priesthood is superior to the Hebrew’s own Levitical priesthood.
- Psalm 110:4 – The coming Messiah will be “a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.”
 - The implication: The Messiah – the Christ – is not a priest of a particular ethnic lineage, but a priest of the universal God.

[NOTE: The fact that the writer of Genesis does not explain who Melchizedek was or where he came from implies that the author did not find it unusual that a person like Melchizedek should be found among the “heathen” Canaanites.

Nor should we be surprised to discover that God has revealed himself throughout human history to people in diverse cultures around the world.]

Monotheism in Classical Greek Culture

Classical Greek Religion.

- Traditional Greek Polytheism and animism.
- The nature of the gods.
 - The chief gods were portrayed in anthropomorphic terms.
 - The gods were created beings.
 - The gods were not omnipotent.
 - The gods were not omniscient.
 - The gods were not omni-present.
 - Although the gods were immortal, they were also amoral.
 - The gods demanded sacrifice on the part of human beings.
- **Homer** and **Hesiod** defined the Greek pantheon.
- Each Greek *polis* was a sacralistic state.
 - Patron gods and goddesses.
 - Mark McPherran: “As long as a state or individual scrupulously observed [all the rites and rituals associated with the worship of the gods], it could expect a measure of physical protection from those deities.”

Socrates (c. 470-399 BC)

The Founder of Western Philosophy.

- An Athenian philosopher and the founder of Western moral philosophy.
- Socrates’ principle goal: to undermine sophistry and moral relativism.
- A “proto-philosopher” and a “philosophical gadfly.”
 - The key: defining key terms and concepts.
 - Louis Markos: “Socrates set philosophy on the road to Truth.”
- The connection between Reason (i.e, **Logos**) and supra-rational revelation.
- An inner voice (or *daimonion*).
 - The *daimonian* as a gift from the gods.
 - Socrates: “I have been commanded to philosophize by God through oracles and dreams and by every other means by which divinity commands anyone to do anything.”



A Greek Theist?

- Socratic religion:
 - He rejected the naturalistic view of the universe that was popular among atheistic philosophers.
 - He rejected the traditional myths and concepts of the gods as foolish and immoral.
- There is a God – a divine Mind – who is the source of the moral order of the universe.
- “The gods” are multiple manifestations of one supreme God.

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- The attributes of God:
 - God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and omnipresent.
 - God is the source of all that is good, just, loving, rational, and moral.
- God requires that human beings act justly and piously.
- God cares about humanity – he is not indifferent.
 - God guides those whose hearts are pure through extra-rational (supernatural) means.
 - Men can purify their minds and hearts through the conscientious application of Reason.
 - Socrates: “Nothing can harm a good man either in life or after death; and his fortunes are not a matter of indifference to the gods.”
- A teleological view of history:
 - The universe is purposeful – the product of a God who “coordinates and holds together the entire cosmos.”
 - God is guiding human history toward a good final end.
- The connection between Socrates’ moral philosophy and theology:
 - J. Adam: “One who consistently preached the rule of Reason in the individual and the state might well conceive of God as the Reason [or *Logos*] that rules the world.”
- Socrates in *Timaieus*:
 - Arthur Herman: “It is a universe that we perceive as multiform and constantly changing, but which is, in the clear light of reason, actually eternal and One.
“And presiding over this complete and ordered cosmos is a God unlike any that has appeared in Greek thought, or indeed anywhere in history. It is a God who is a rational, beneficent Creator, who is pure spirit and pure mind. He is a Creator who occupies no existence in space yet presides over all things that occur in space and time. He is a God who demands from us not worship through ritual and sacrifice, but our minds’ assent to the laws and principles he has laid out for his creation.”

On the Soul.

- The dual nature of mankind: body and soul.
- The soul is a spiritual reality – “a fallen divinity in the tomb of the body.”
 - It is our true essence and our real self – the center of personality and self-consciousness.
 - It is what makes us human (in contrast to animals).
- The soul is the essence of our moral consciousness: It is “that in us, whatever it may be, that has to do with justice and injustice.”
- Reincarnation and the pre-existence of the soul.
- Morality is intuitive, and knowledge is a process of recollection.

On the Afterlife.

- The immortality of the soul.
- The soul, separated from the body at death, migrates “to another place.”
- Divine judges reward just souls with an eternally pleasant afterlife in the Isles of the Blessed.
 - Conversely, unjust souls are punished in Tartarus.

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- In the *Apology* Socrates admitted that no one really knows what fate awaits us after death.
 - (1) Soul sleep – an eternity of dreamless sleep without perception; or
 - (2) A migration of the conscious soul to another place.

A Proto-Christian?

- Some Christian philosophers regarded Socrates as a proto-Christian.
- **Justin Martyr** (c. 100-165) credited Socrates for exposing the foolishness in pagan religion.
 - He also considered Socrates to be a link between Greek rational philosophy and the revealed truths of Christianity.
- Some Christian philosophers (including **Augustine**) lauded Socrates as a “righteous pagan.”
- Correlations between Socratic theology and biblical theology.
 - Arthur Herman: “Socrates talked a lot about God and the gods. He even told his jurors that ‘God orders me to fulfill the philosopher’s mission of examining myself and other men,’ and he seems to have believed that his inner voice that urged him to ask questions and seek knowledge was indeed the voice of God. Ironically, one of the charges against Socrates was atheism.... But the fact remains that Socrates’ God was clearly very different from the ones ordinary Athenians were used to....
“The God that Socrates presented to his disciples stood above and beyond the familiar myths and rituals. Socrates’ God shares the same transcendent immortality as the soul and lies beyond all material space and time....
“[Socrates’] vision resembles later Christian accounts of heaven and hell.”
- Socrates taught many truths compatible with the Christian faith.
 - EX: “I know in my conscious that I am wise in nothing.... [O]nly the god is wise, and... human wisdom is worth little or nothing.”
 - Ref. I Cor. 1-2.
 - EX: “One must not do wrong even when one is wronged.”
 - Ref. Matt. 5:38-39.
 - Ref. Matt. 7:12 – Jesus’ “Golden Rule.”
 - EX: “Gentlemen,... I will obey the god rather than you, and as long as I have breath in me, and remain able to do it, I will never cease being a philosopher, and exhorting you.... In view of all this, I would say, gentlemen, either let me go free or do not let me go free, but I will never do anything else, even if I am to die many deaths.”
 - Ref. Acts 5:29-31.
 - EX: “You are wrong, my friend, if you think a man with a spark of decency in him ought to calculate life or death. The only thing he ought to consider is whether he does right or wrong....”
 - Ref. Matt. 6:31-33.
 - EX: “Something divine and spiritual comes to me.... This has been about me since my boyhood – a voice, which when it comes always turns me away from doing something I am intending to do, but never urges me on....

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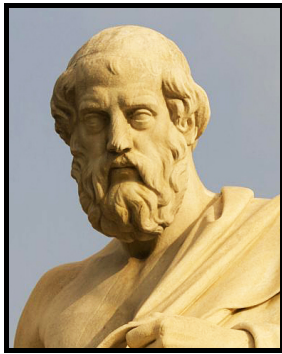
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“I maintain that I have been commanded by the god to do this, through oracles and dreams and in every way in which some divine influence or other has ever commanded a man to do anything.”

- ▶ EX: “No evil can happen to a good man, either in this life or in death.”
 - Ref. Rom. 8:28.
- Socrates’ trial, his *apologia* (defense) and execution for religious heresy was a prototype for later Christian martyrs.
- Plato in the closing line of *Phaedo* (“On the Soul”): Socrates was “the best, the wisest, and most righteous of all the men whom I have ever known.”

Plato (c. 425-348 BC)

Bio:



- Born into one of Athens’ most distinguished families.
- He became a disciple of Socrates at age 20.
- In 388 BC he founded the **Academy** in 388 BC.
- Author of 26 philosophical discussions.
- Like Socrates, Plato was concerned primarily with the nature of justice, truth and beauty, and with the meaning of life.
- Like his mentor, he rejected moral relativism and hedonism.
 - ▶ Good cannot be equated with pleasure or utilitarian usefulness.
- The theory of “Recollection”: honest men know intuitively what is right and good.
- As a rationalist, he believed true virtue was based on knowledge.
 - ▶ Knowledge derived exclusively from the five senses is limited and imperfect.
 - ▶ Virtue is attained through a rational understanding of the eternal Ideals of Goodness.
- As a dualist, he believed the physical body is a hindrance to the mind (or soul).
 - ▶ Physical emotions and desires should be carefully controlled by the mind (soul).

The Greatest of All Philosophers?

- Plato can be read on two levels:
 - (1) A philosophical genius who laid a foundation for logic, reason, and natural law; and
 - (2) One whose writings prepared the ancient world for the coming of Christ.
- The *telos* (purpose and goal) of philosophy is to reach the ultimate First Principle.
 - ▶ Philosophy is all about the search for Wisdom – “that one and eternal Truth that transcends our ever-shifting world, that abides and endures.”
 - ▶ Louis Markos: “Plato, in my mind, is the greatest of all philosophers.... Plato was a vessel through whom much beauty, goodness and truth was ushered into our world...” and whose “dialogues prepared the way for the fuller revelation of Christ and the New Testament.”

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- Louis Markos: Philosophy “should lead to a higher and greater end – the contemplation of what he called the Good and later Christian theologians called the **Beatific Vision**.”

Plato was “the culmination of the best of (pre-Christian) wisdom.... Though he lacked the direct (special) revelation afforded to [Moses, Paul, and other biblical writers], Plato was nevertheless inspired by something beyond the confines of our natural world....”

He “glimpsed deep mysteries about the nature of God and man, the earth and the heavens, history and eternity, virtue and vice, love and death, that point forward to the fullness of the Judeo-Christian worldview....”

“Though Plato the pre-Christian did not know that Truth is ultimately a Person (ref. John 14:6), he sought it as tenaciously and passionately.”

- As the student of, and successor to, Socrates, Plato took philosophy to the next level.
 - Louis Markos: “Socrates set as his limited, humble philosophical goal, not the reaching of that capital ‘T’ Truth to which Plato dedicated his life, but the clearing away of all those sophistical, small ‘t’ truths that make it impossible... to catch even a faint glimpse of Truth....”

“[By contrast,] It was, I believe, Plato’s lifelong mission to lift our vision from the small ‘t’ truth of our shadowy world to the capital ‘T’ Truth that dwells beyond, on the other side of the door.... Socrates prepared the way for Plato by clearing away the accretion of false idols and notions that prevent us from apprehending Truth....”

“Socrates played the more ‘negative’ role of demolishing false [arguments] while Plato played the more ‘positive’ role of constructing true systems and definitions.”

The “Divided Line.”

- (1) In the lower realm of reality – the physical, natural, and material world – everything is relative and in a constant state of change, flux and decay.
 - ▶ This is the “**World of Becoming**.”
 - ▶ These are mere “shadows” of true Reality.
 - ▶ This is the realm that most of humanity is conscious of through the five senses.
- (2) In the upper realm of reality – the non-physical realm of reality – everything is perfect, changeless and eternal.
 - ▶ This is the “**World of Being**.”
 - ▶ The realm of the “One,” the “Essence,” and that of “**Forms**” (or Ideals).
 - ▶ Knowledge and understanding of the upper realm can only be attained through *Logos* – Reason and contemplation.
 - ▶ The realm of the “**Beatific Vision**”: The True, the Good, and the Beautiful.

The Allegory of the Cave.

- Plato’s *Republic*.
- The purely material (and illusory) world of perceived reality.
- The moral: Crossing the great divide from the “World of Becoming” to the “World of Being.”

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Timaeus (c. 360 BC).

- A remarkable account of creation that correlates in some respects to that of Genesis.
 - Louis Markos: “Aside from Genesis, *Timaeus* is the only ancient book to posit a Creator who [is eternal and] predates matter....”
 - “Plato, working through general rather than special revelation, came close to discovering truths that would not be revealed in full until 400 years after this death.
 - “It was, I believe, God’s plan – and God’s grace – to use the writings of Plato to prepare the Greco-Roman world for that greater revelation to come, so that when it came, they would recognize it as the fulfillment of what they had already learned from Plato. Such is the thesis of the sermon that Paul preached to the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers at the Areopagus in Athens [when he declared regarding “the Unknown God”]: ‘Whom you therefore worship in ignorance, I proclaim him to you’” (Acts 17:23).
- A personal God (our “Father”) created all that exists.
- The Creator God is transcendent, eternal and infinite.
 - Plato’s understanding of the “intelligent design” of the universe and our innate sense of right and wrong.
 - God is the absolute origin of all things physical *and* spiritual, temporal *and* eternal.
 - God is eternal.
 - YHWH’s self proclamation to Moses: “I AM who I AM” – Exodus 3:14.
- Our world is an ordered *cosmos*.
- God created time itself.
 - Louis Markos: “It is only in the Bible and *Timaeus* that we find expressed in philosophical and theological terms a great truth about our world that modern science has only recently discovered: that our had a beginning and that initiating event, know as the Big Bang, created in a single moment [all] matter, space and time.”
- Plato inferred that our world is a copy (or imitation) of a higher, more perfect model.
 - Ref. Hebrews 8:5 and 9:23-24.

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- This personal Creator is a God of love:
 - ▶ Unlike the God of deism who is remote and uninvolved in human affairs, Plato's God is, like the God of the Bible, good – and he desires to bless his creation.
 - ▶ Louis Markos: "Unlike the petty, selfish, narcissistic gods of Homer and Hesiod, whom Plato rejects so strongly,... the God of the Bible (and of *Timaeus*) yearns to shower goodness on his world and his creatures. In that sense, the incarnation is the greatest of all acts of love, for, through it, God moved out of Plato's World of Being to become a flesh-and-blood man in Plato's World of Becoming. That degree of divine love is beyond the comprehension even of the author of *Timaeus*, and yet, Plato's depiction of god makes such an unfathomable act of love seem almost fathomable. Where else in the non-Jewish world is it even suggested that God... desires to bless and not destroy [his creation], that he wills that we should bear his image?"
- Human beings have both a physical body and a non-physical soul.
 - ▶ Plato: "He who has been earnest in the love of knowledge and of true wisdom... must have thoughts immortal and divine, if he attain truth, and in so far as human nature is capable of sharing in immortality, he must altogether be immortal; and since he is ever cherishing the divine power, and has the divinity within him in perfect order, he will be perfectly happy."
 - ▶ The soul must control the body.
- *Timaeus*: Some cosmological and theological fallacies:
 - ▶ Although generally wise by human standards, Plato was not inspired by the Holy Spirit.
 - ▶ To his credit, he understood that human nature is flawed.
 - God created us for a higher purpose – but something in our nature pulls us down.
 - ▶ Platonic docetism:
 - The denigration of everything physical and material.
 - A form of Gnosticism.
 - An implicit denial of the incarnation (and resurrection) of Christ.
 - ▶ Although Plato referred to "the gods," they do not share the same absolute eternal existence as the Creator, who alone is the great "I AM."
 - ▶ Planets and stars [and moons?] are "divine and eternal animals."
 - ▶ Human beings were created before animals – contrary to the Bible and modern science.
 - ▶ The theory of reincarnation.
 - ▶ Platonic male chauvinism.

[illegible]