

Origins of Monotheistic Religion: Two Models

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In this course we use a **cumulative case** approach in making the argument for a Creator. No single line of reasoning for the existence of God is conclusive in itself. Therefore, using the principle of **abduction – inference to the best explanation** – we assess the case for a Creator based on the most reasonable assessment of all the evidence that we have derived from biblical theology, philosophy, science, anthropology, archaeology, history, and even psychology.

1. The Secular Theory of Religion A Progressive/Evolutionary Model¹

Beginning in the late 19th century, many scholars and intellectuals, influenced by Darwinian evolutionary theory, adopted a progressive view of religion. In keeping with the times, these scholars assumed that religion had evolved along with the rest of human physical, mental, and social development. All of these theoreticians were religious skeptics, and all assumed that religion was an attempt by desperate and superstitious people to make sense of the world around them.

In his book, *Natural Atheism* (2004), David Eller contends that atheism is actually the natural order of things and that belief in God is merely a cultural contrivance.

I was born an atheist. All humans are born atheists. No baby born into the world arrives with specific religious beliefs or knowledge. Such beliefs and knowledge must be acquired, which means that they must first exist before and apart from the new life and that they must be presented to and impressed on the new suggestible mind – one that has no critical apparatus and no alternative views of its own. Human infants are like sponges, soaking up (not completely uncritically, but eagerly and effectively) whatever is there to be soaked up

from their social environment. Small children in particular instinctively imitate the models that they observe in their childhood, but I was not compelled to attend or practice any particular religion, and as I grew I never saw any reason to ‘convert’ to any particular religion. I have thus been an atheist all my life. I am a natural atheist.... “Theists do not want to admit that they were once atheists too and that they gave it up not by any choice they made but by the forces imposed on them by a religious world. [David Eller, *Natural Atheism* (American Atheist Press, 2004), quoted in a review in *American Atheist*, Spring 2004; Internet, <http://www.atheists.org>.]

In other words, according to Eller, atheists such as himself are the only people who have been raised right.[!] Eller contends God does not really exist – we invent him out of our need for a father figure or an authority figure. People are naturally insecure – they desperately want to believe that Someone is in charge – otherwise, this world is too frightening to endure.

Eller is wrong on at least 2 points: (1) Babies are not born “atheists,” but they *are* born “agnostics.” They merely haven’t matured to the point that they can conceive of God, just as they have no awareness of their own individual identity. (2) No one can force (or “impose”) beliefs on anyone else. Responsible parents,

¹¹ For an extended treatment of religious anthropology, see: Andrew Lang, *The Making of Religion* (1898); and Wilhelm Schmidt, *The Origin of Religion: Facts and Theories* (1931) and *Primitive Revelation* (1939). Regarding more recent scholarship, see Winfried Corduan, *A Tapestry of Faiths: The Common Threads Between Christianity and World Religions* (2002); *In the Beginning God: A Fresh Look at the Case for Original Monotheism* (2013); and *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions* (1998).

however, do try to influence their children in positive ways for the better.²

The German philosopher **Ludwig Feuerbach** (1804-72) was a major influence on modern atheism. In *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), Feuerbach argued that religion is a human invention. Man is alienated from himself, and God is a projection of human potentiality. As he put it, “The divine being is nothing else but... the human being purified.” Superstitious people are desperate to appease or manipulate powerful supernatural forces that they believe control their lives.

Similarly, **Karl Marx**, who in his early years was an ardent follower of Feuerbach, dismissed religion as “the opiate of the people” – i.e., religion clouds our perception of reality. **Sigmund Freud** agreed: “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.” [*Future of an Illusion* (1927), p.30]

The American psychologist **Abraham Maslow** compared belief in God to “the childish looking for a big Daddy in the sky,” while the Oxford evolutionary biologist **Richard Dawkins** calls religion a virus of the mind – a kind of genetic defect in human biological evolution. According to this view, 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.

Wish fulfillment might explain some religious ideas about God, but not the God of the Bible. Theologian **R. C. Sproul** questioned why human beings would invent a God who is perfect, holy and righteous – a moral Judge even more powerful and terrifying than the forces of nature that provoked them to invent God in the first place? Wish fulfillment might explain belief in heaven, but certainly not hell!³

Not surprisingly, modern liberal theologians have often bought into the thesis that religion is a manmade construct. According to Joseph Hough, a former president 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. [*Christian Research Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 1, p. 9.]

Three Evolutionary Stages?

Although most contemporary scholars have abandoned any universal theory of religious evolution that encompasses all religions, most continue to argue that individual religions have undergone their own evolutionary process. For example, Robert Wright’s *The Evolution of God* (2009) argues that the conceptions of God in “the three Abrahamic faiths” have grown more sophisticated as world societies have become more complex.

Early anthropologists held that religion underwent three evolutionary stages:

(1) **Primitive Animism and Pantheism** is the belief that all things in nature are inhabited by supernatural spirits or a mystical “life force” (**manaism**). In his popular book, *The Golden Bough* (1890), Sir J. G. Frazer contended that religion evolved from magic – an attempt to explain metaphysical anomalies in life.⁴

The English evolutionist **Herbert Spencer** (1820-1903) speculated that religion began with the veneration of deceased human beings. Spencer, a proponent of Darwinian evolutionary theory, originated the expression “survival of the fittest” in his book, *Principles of Biology* (1864). He developed a comprehensive conception of evolution as the progressive development of the physical world, biological organisms, the human mind, human culture, and morality and ethics.

In the late 1800s, the English anthropologist E. B. Tylor promoted the theory that primitive religion was animistic, involving the veneration of ancestor spirits

² “Natural atheism” was the thesis of Antony Flew’s book, *The Presumption of Atheism* (1976) – a position he later rejected in *There Is a God: How the World’s Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind* (2007).

³ *The Holiness of God* (1985), p. 53

⁴ For a critique of *The Golden Bough*, see Theodore Gaster’s review and Winfried Corduan’s book, *In the Beginning God* (2013).

and nature spirits which inhabit not only people and animals but also all vegetation and even rocks.⁵

(2) **Polytheism** is the belief in powerful supernatural deities, gods and goddesses that controlled powerful natural phenomena. The concept sought to explain both “good” natural phenomena (rainfall, sunshine, fertility, crop growth, etc.) and “bad” (lightning, thunder, earthquakes, floods, volcanic eruptions, etc.). Certain gods and goddesses were accorded special status and elevated to positions of worship in ancient societies. These deities were usually conceived of in anthropomorphic terms – i.e., ascribing to the gods human-like characteristics (eyes, arms, etc.) and emotions (love, kindness, jealousy, hatred, etc.). As John Calvin once noted, the human mind is a veritable factory for idols!

(3) **Monotheism.** Eventually, the concept of one supreme creator-God was accepted by some civilizations – such as the ancient Hebrews. They conceived of God as the source of all goodness, love, justice, and morality. They either considered this God to be supreme over all other gods, or the only true God. All other supernatural forces were demi-gods: angels, evil spirits, etc. Monotheistic religions (Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Islam, Baha’i, Mormonism) have sacred scriptures which the adherents believe were divinely inspired. There was usually a strong moral/ethical element associated with monotheistic religions. In terms of their view of history, monotheistic religions usually believed that God is actively involved in history. [NOTE: The primary exception would be the Enlightenment-influenced religion of Deism.]

Although widely held, it is important to note that none of these evolutionary stages in religion have ever been observed in a specific culture. For the most part, the theoreticians have been guilty of allowing their pet theory to dictate the data, as Winfried Corduan observes: “Many of the theories in question had more of a philosophical or sociological background than an observational one.”⁶

2. The Case for Biblical Theism

Evidence for Original Monotheism⁷

Interestingly, the best evidence argues against the prevailing theory of religious evolution. According to the Bible, all people are descendants of Noah and his family (Gen. 9:18-19). Data collected by missionaries, anthropologists and explorers indicate that early cultures worldwide were originally monotheistic. Apparently, most of the world’s folk religions derived from monotheistic beliefs in a “Sky God” or a “King of the gods.” Even more startling was the fact that the attributes of this God often resembled the God of the major monotheistic religions. This God was eternal, infinite, omnipotent, omniscient, good, loving, etc.

However, since the late 1800s Darwinian evolutionary theory has impacted the thinking in the social sciences just as it has in the natural sciences. In fact, rather than *evolving* from animism to polytheism to monotheism, the evidence indicates that ancient folk religions *devolved* from monotheism to polytheism to animism. The “Sky-god” was considered too remote and obscure, so people turned their attention toward more immediate concerns and the “gods” or forces that directly manipulated events here on earth.

China

Shangdi

In China, traditional religion was polytheistic and generally amoral. Humans tried to placate and manipulate the gods through sacrifices and rituals, hoping the gods would respond favorably. However, there is evidence of an ancient belief in a “Supreme Deity” in classical texts: **Shangdi** (Shang Ti). “Shangdi” implies the “Highest Deity,” “Primordial Deity,” or “First Deity” – i.e., the ultimate spiritual power of the universe. Shandi was thought to control victory in battle, weather conditions (including the success or failure of harvests), natural conditions such as the flooding of the Yellow River, and the ultimate fate of the kingdom itself. For many centuries the ruler

⁵ E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art and Custom* (1871).

⁶ *A Tapestry of Faiths*, p. 35

⁷ Ref. Daniel Cote, “Is There Evidence for the God of the Bible in Ancient Cultures?”

(<https://reasons.org/explore/blogs/voices/is-there-evidence-for-the-god-of-the-bible-in-ancient-cultures>) and Daniel Cote, “Evidence for Original Monotheism in Ancient China (<https://reasons.org/explore/blogs/voices/evidence-for-original-monotheism-in-ancient-china?>).

of China would make an annual sacrifice to Shandi at the Temple of Heaven in the imperial capital. During the ritual, a healthy bull would be slaughtered and presented as a blood sacrifice to Shangdi. Shangdi was regarded as more transcendent than immanent. He was considered too distant and remote to be worshiped directly by ordinary mortals. Therefore, Shangdi ruled through a hierarchy of other “gods” who directly controlled the forces of nature as well as the fate of deceased spirits. Later Chinese kings and emperors claimed that Shangdi ruled through them and their ancestors. The earliest references to Shangdi are found in oracle bone inscriptions of the Shang Dynasty (c. 1600-1046 BC).

In the later Shang and Zhou dynasties (1046-256 BC), Shangdi was conflated with the concept of the **Mandate of Heaven**. If rulers governed wisely and fairly, they earned Shandi’s favor. If not, they inevitably would be overthrown and replaced by a rival dynasty. All of the Confucian classics included the worship of Shangdi. However, by the time of the Han dynasty (202 BC - 220 AD), Confucian scholars were associating “Shangdi” more with the more abstract and impersonal concept of “Heaven” – i.e., Providential Fate. This was a more philosophical – and less religious – concept of Ultimate Reality.

In modern times, Christian missionaries to China often associated Shangdi with YHWH – the God of the Bible. The Italian Jesuit priest Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) first arrived at the Portuguese settlement of Macau in 1582 to begin his missionary work in China, and in 1601 he became the first European to enter the Forbidden City of Beijing. Ricci sought to connect Catholicism with ancient Chinese culture, arguing that Christianity was simply the completion of their faith. However, instead of trying to associate YHWH with Shangdi, he borrowed an unusual Chinese term, **Tiānzh** (“Lord of Heaven”), to describe the God of Abraham despite the term’s association with the traditional Chinese worship of Heaven.

Later, in the 19th century, Protestant missionaries including Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) began arriving in China. Taylor was the founder of China Inland Mission. Taylor and other Protestant missionaries sought to make the connection between Shangdi and YHWH, but with mixed results. Chinese Confucian scholars rejected this association, pointing out that

traditionally Shangdi had been regarded as the supreme “Governor” of the world but not the Creator.

In the 19th century, James Legge (1815-97), a Scottish missionary to China and the first Oxford University professor of Chinese studies, translated the Chinese classics into English. Legge was convinced that Shang Di was synonymous with the God of the Bible. Shangdi was regarded as self-existent and eternal, and as Legge noted, “The Chinese know Him who is the Creator, the Preserver, and the Governor of the Universe.” Likewise, William Henry Medhurst (1796-1857) concluded that Shang Di was originally believed to be the Supreme Ruler of the universe, but whose name was later corrupted and applied to other lesser deities. Medhurst was a Chinese scholar and English Congregationalist missionary to China who compiled the first English/Chinese dictionary. He was also one of the first scholars to translate the Bible into Chinese.

In his book, *Faith of Our Fathers: Finding God in Ancient China* (2018), Chan Kei Thong argues that the original form of worship in China was monotheistic and similar to that in the book of Genesis. The Chinese language itself reflects knowledge of the first events of human history as recorded in the book of Genesis. The annual prayers and sacrifices at the Temple of Heaven are analogous to the blood covenants in the Old Testament. Chinese emperors, who were called the “Sons of Heaven,” were regarded as intermediaries between Shang Di and the Chinese people. Shang Di was regarded in ancient texts as eternal, infinite, immutable, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and sovereign. Shang Di was also described as a God of love, holiness, goodness, love, grace, mercy, compassion, and justice.⁸ Thong writes:

Many of the modern translations of ancient Chinese texts have excised the passages that mention Shang Di. This is one reason why so many Chinese themselves, even scholars of these texts, are ignorant of the truth... and the dominance of the belief in Shang Di in ancient times. [*Faith of Our Fathers*, p. 102]

The *Book of Documents*, attributed to **Confucius**, includes references to sacrifices to Shang Di. Likewise, **Sima Qian** (145-86 BC), China’s first historian, records the sacrifice of the first emperor of Qin (259-210 BC) to “the Supreme God.”

⁸ *Faith of Our Fathers*, p. 118

Daniel Cote notes in “Evidence of Original Monotheism in Ancient China”: “While some critics have argued that Shang Di is not the God of the Bible, the striking similarity seems hard to ignore and is just as expected if all nations of the Earth traced their heritage back to Noah.”⁹

Philosophy and the Dao

In the 6th century BC, Chinese religion was absorbed into philosophy. Centuries earlier, the Zhou had seized power from the previous Shang Dynasty. To justify their seizure of power, the Zhou conceived the “**Mandate of Heaven**” concept – a kind of “divine right to rule.” In this sense, “Heaven” referred not so much to the traditional Chinese deity **Shang Di** as to “Providence” – an impersonal, metaphysical law of nature (or Fate?). According to the Mandate of Heaven theory, Heaven chose the reigning monarch (the “Son of Heaven”) to rule because of his ability and virtue. A dynasty enjoyed Heaven’s blessing so long as it governed according to “The Way” (or *Dao*) – i.e., according to the natural order. A ruler was responsible to provide good government. He should be a man of integrity and rule wisely, benevolently, and justly. If he became lazy, incompetent, corrupt, or cruel, Heaven withdrew its mandate and all sorts of problems ensued – natural disasters, crop failures, social unrest, foreign invasions, etc.

Practically-speaking, Chinese religion and philosophy centered around the concept of the *Dao* – “the Way” (or “the Way of Life”). Sometime in the 6th century BC, the semi-legendary philosopher **Laozi** (**Lao-Tzu**) is acknowledged as having compiled the various oral (and written?) traditions that comprise the **Dao De Jing** (Tao Te Ching – “The Way of Life”). The collection, full of cryptic comments and paradoxes, included hymns, proverbs, poetic fragments, and philosophical instructions. In reality, the various authors were probably reclusive mystics whose musings were essentially poetic protests against status quo values. The collection was eventually compiled in its present form some time after the 3rd century BC.

Basic concepts of The Dao included the following:

- Intuition, not reason, is the source of true knowledge.
- There is a divinely-ordained, cosmic order to the universe.

- Happiness comes through living spontaneously and in harmony with the Way.
- Live simply, practice humility and contentment.
- Renounce selfish ambitions and pleasures, wealth, and materialism.
- Practice passivity, reject honors and positions of responsibility.
- *Wei wu wei*: Do without doing, and act without action – i.e., let nature work through you, let God be God in you.
- Mental anguish comes through trying to control or manipulate one's destiny.

Daoists generally regard books as “the dregs and refuse of the ancients” – other than their own, of course.

Confucianism

The most influential ancient Chinese philosopher was **Confucius** (Kung-fu-tze, c. 551-479 BC). His writings indicate that he was probably agnostic with a detached and somewhat skeptical view of the supernatural. He disavowed knowing anything of the supernatural or the afterlife, and refused to speculate about things he knew nothing about. He wrote in the *Analects* (“*Collected Sayings*”):

We don't know yet how to serve men – how can we know about serving the spirits? We don't yet know about life – how can we know about death?

However, Confucius reasoned that if there was a God and an afterlife and divine justice, the righteous person would be rewarded. Therefore – just to be safe – he advised people to revere the gods and ancestral spirits.

At heart, Confucius was a philosophical moralist who emphasized honorable behavior. In contrast to conventional religious thinking that was full of superstition and ritual, he simply taught that one should live a simple, upright life of integrity. Confucius implied that human nature was fundamentally good, men were naturally virtuous and cooperative, and all were expected to conduct themselves appropriately in all situations in keeping with the *Dao* – the “Way”. To assure that people lived according to the Dao, Confucius put forth a detailed moral code. An integral part of the Confucian concept of Dao was “honorable behavior” – i.e., propriety, or

⁹ <https://reasons.org/explore/blogs/voices/evidence-for-original-monotheism-in-ancient-china?>

correct deportment. Foremost among his sayings was the “**Silver Rule**”: Tsu-king [a disciple] asked saying, “Is there any single saying that one can act upon all day and every day?” The Master replied, “Perhaps the saying about consideration: *‘Never do to others what you would not want them to do to you.’*” Above all else, one should not bring shame on himself or his family.

The *Analects* set forth some 3,300 specific rules of conduct that regulated everything from breathing to body posture and the proper position when one lies down to sleep.

Mohism

In the years after Confucius, **Mozi** (Mo Di or Mo Tzu, c. 470-390 BC) emerged as a moral philosopher whose influence rivaled that of Confucius for two centuries. Mo Di taught an ethos based on universal love. He interpreted “Heaven” as a personal God who embodies goodness and justice – not a vague metaphysical force. This God rewards the good and punishes the wicked. Mo Di’s love ethic was based as much on pragmatic self-interest as Divine revelation: “Those who love others will be loved in return. Do good to others and others will do good to you. Hate people and they will hate you. Hurt them and they will hurt you.”

To an extent Mo Di was also a social critic. He criticized aggressive warfare, extravagant living (including the royal family), and popular music, which he believed undermined the morality of the empire. Following the collapse of the Zhou dynasty in 3rd century BC, Mo Di’s teachings were banned by Qin (Ch’in) rulers and eventually forgotten.

India

Aryan Religion

Our knowledge of ancient Indus civilization is based almost exclusively on archaeological ruins. There was an early civilization that dates from about 2500 to 1700 BC, but its script has never been deciphered. From 1500-500 BC there was virtually no written literature. After 500 BC an extensive body of literature was recorded, but it is mainly religious (and mytho-legendary) and is historically unreliable. Beginning about 1500 BC, Aryans (literally, “the Noble Ones”) began filtering into NW India. Over a period of 500 years, the Aryans slowly migrated

eastward across northern India into the Ganges area [NOTE: Hitler and the Nazi use of the term “Aryan” to denote a Teutonic master race of Europeans has no historical connection to ancient Aryans.]

Historians speculate that the Aryans probably originated in the southern steppe region of Russia or the Ukraine and were part of a large-scale migration of Indo-European tribes at the time. Other branches of Indo-Europeans migrated westward, eventually settling in Greece and Italy. The Aryans spoke **Sanskrit**, an Indo-European language. Philologists point out the similarities between Sanskrit and Greek and Latin. Religiously, the gods of the Aryans were similar to those of the Greeks. Aryans were an aggressive and war-like people, and after several centuries of invasion or infiltration, the Aryans subdued the indigenous *dasa* (or *dasyu*) population who spoke a Dravidian language. Early oral tradition (later written down) refers to Aryans conquering the smaller, darker, “snub-nosed” and “ugly” *dasa*.

Unfortunately, the early literature provides little historical information about this period. Most of what we “know” about Indian history comes from the **Vedas** (literally: “Knowledge”), the foundational scriptures of **Hinduism**. Regarded as sacred texts, they were compiled by ancient seers (*rishis*) and transmitted orally for centuries until finally written down in Sanskrit sometime in the 6th century BC. The Vedas, which are still cited in religious texts and incorporated into rituals to the present time, are regarded as *shruti* – divinely-inspired. Therefore, Hindus regard the *rishis* not so much as the authors of the Vedas but merely as the channels through which the holy scriptures were transmitted.

The Rig-Veda

The Rig-Veda (or “Royal Veda” – c. 1500-1000 BC), the oldest and most influential of the Vedas, is a collection of ten books and more than a thousand hymns to the Aryan gods – the Shining Devas. Included in the texts are sacred *mantras* – Sanskrit words that were thought to have special spiritual powers. Compiled between 1500-1000 BC, the Rig-Veda provides a fragmentary “history” (mostly legendary) of the early Aryans. One of the Rig-Veda hymns is a creation hymn.

Early Aryans were polytheistic and worshiped anthropomorphic gods of nature: the sun, sky, thunder,

fire, etc. **Dyaus Pita** (lit.: “Sky Father” or “Heavenly Father”) was king of the gods – similar perhaps to the Greek god Zeus. His consort was Prithvi, the earth goddess, and together they are the archetypal parents in the Rig-Veda. Apparently regarded as too remote, Aryans paid little attention to Dyaus Pita and focused on other gods more in touch with everyday life.

Indra, the war god, was the most popular god among the Aryans. A rowdy deity, he loved to eat, drink and fight. Indra was the Aryan equivalent of Mars, the Greek war god. He was often depicted carrying a thunderbolt or a great bow while riding in a war chariot (similar to the Norse god Thor). He was also the lord of storms and the *monsoon*.

Agni was the god of fire and sacrifice. He was the messenger god who carried the sacrifice between earth and sky. Every morning, Agni was born again – likewise, whenever a fire was lit. Poetically, Agni was considered the divine spark within every human being.

Varuna, the Lord of Consciousness, was the god of justice and morality. Varuna was associated with Rita, who guarded the cosmic order and punished evil doers. Sinners prayed to Varuna for forgiveness. Eventually, Varuna evolved into the god Vishnu, the preserver of life.

Mitra was the god of light and love who leads his devotees to the truth. Rudra was the enforcer god. Aryans feared him and were constantly imploring him to not hurt them. Later on, he was subsumed into the great god Shiva. Yama was the god of the dead.

Soma was the god of the hallucinogenic soma plant. Soma, which was drunk with water and milk, was the main plant used in sacrifices. Also, the *rishis* drank soma to help induce a spirit of ecstasy when they sang the sacred Vedas. There is a thread of revealed truth that runs through the Vedic writings and tradition. However, this truth is often buried in the midst of panentheistic and polytheistic confusion.

The Upanishads

In traditional Hinduism, the Upanishads were commentaries of the Vedas that set forth the defining philosophical tenets of Hinduism. Also called the **Vedanta** (or **Advaita**), more than 250 Upanishads were written by various Brahmin and Kshatriyan *rishis* from about 800-400 BC – of which 108 have been preserved. Over time, these writings became the primary religious texts for Hinduism. Although the

Upanishads are full of contradictions, they consistently put forth an existential/mystical spirituality. The authors – *rishis* – sought to build “the fire in the heart” in order to develop a mystical union with the divine. The Upanishads also contain philosophical speculations on the nature of reality and the purpose of life.

The core message is that, “There is no [ultimate] joy in the finite; there is joy only in the infinite.” According to the Vedanta, humanity’s greatest problem is ignorance – not sin.[!] “Ignorance” isn’t merely a lack of knowledge, but a lack of *interest* in knowledge – i.e., spiritual laziness. The key to spirituality is self-realization through asceticism and contemplation – not ritual or serving the gods. Through asceticism and contemplation one can transcend the material world to achieve enlightenment and bliss. Eventually, asceticism evolved into the spiritual discipline of **yoga**.

Early Monotheistic Themes

One Upanishad in particular – the **Shvetashvatara** – contains monotheistic musings based on its emphasis on *Saguna* Brahman – i.e., the personal attributes of Brahman as a self-conscious Supreme Being rather than an impersonal Cosmic Force. This theistic Upanishad also declares: “*This is the highest mystical teaching*” and “*the goal of all knowledge*” (1:16). Dated circa 5th century BC, the Shvetashvatara Upanishad is named for its reputed author, the “sage” Shvetashvatara. Inexplicably, many statements in the Shvetashvatara correlate with monotheistic biblical theology. For example, the Shvetasvatara Upanishad emphasizes **Brahman** as **Purusha** – literally, a “cosmic person.”

He is the one God, hidden in all beings, all-pervading, the Self within all beings,

Watching over the world, the witness, the knower, the only one....

Let us know that supreme great Lord of lords, the supreme God of gods,

The supreme Ruler of rulers, the adorable, the transcendent, the Lord of the universe.

In Hindu mythology, at the beginning of time Purusha is sacrificed and his limbs scattered over the world. In the ritual sacrifice Purusha is gathered together and becomes one again. Likewise, in the Bible Jesus is described as “the Lamb who was slain before the foundation of the world.” Conversely, the

Vedas and the Upanishads in general are rooted in **pantheistic monism**, not biblical theism.

A fundamental fallacy in Eastern religion is the belief that “*Atman is Brahman*” – i.e., the human soul is one with, and indistinguishable from, the Universal Soul (God). Nothing in these writings acknowledges that humanity, although created in the image of God, has an endemic sin nature. Furthermore, the Vedas and Upanishads teach the doctrine of reincarnation.

Nonetheless, the Shvetashvatara Upanishad is curiously fascinating as it opens with metaphysical musings on the primal cause of all existence – its origin, its purpose and goal – and what role time, nature, necessity, chance, and the spirit had as the primal cause of all things.

— I —

*What is the cause of the cosmos?
Is it Brahman [i.e., 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....*

— II —

*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....
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...*

— III —

*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....*

— IV —

*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....*

— VI —

*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.
[Shvetashvatara Upanishad 1:1ff]*

And this from 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.¹⁰
[Ref. Rom. 12:2]*

Pantheism, Panentheism, and Christianity

In the Vedic tradition, there is the belief that God (Brahman) pervades all of creation. This is either **pantheism** (“God is everything”) or **panentheism** (“God is *in* everything”). Conversely, the Judeo-Christian tradition begins with the **transcendence** of

¹⁰ Katha Upanishad 2:2, 3

God. God is infinite and above his creation, but he condescends to relate to mankind through the divine revelation of his Word, through the prophets, through Jesus, and through the Holy Spirit.

Those who understand Vedic Hinduism as exclusively pantheistic, panentheistic or polytheistic find the monotheism of the Shvetashvatara perplexing. In the Shvetashvatara, God is the Supreme Reality and the Lord of Life whose characteristics in some respects reflect those of the biblical YHWH. He is infinite, omnipotent, omniscient, omni-present, immutable, transcendent, and immanent: “*The Lord of Love is One*” (3:2) echoes the seminal profession of the Jewish **Shema**: “*Hear, o Israel, the Lord our God is One*” (Deut. 6:4).

The description of the One as “the Light that shines forever” complements John’s description of Jesus as the preexistent and eternal “Light of the world” (John 1:4-5). Furthermore, the One is the Source of all grace and love, and the ultimate goal of life who offers immortality to those who experience him personally. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Although the Shvetashvatara was among the last of the twelve principal Upanishads to be written, Christians who are familiar with the case for original monotheism find it noteworthy that the text appears to retain elements of an original monotheism – perhaps rooted in the ancient belief in Dyaus Pita that presents a higher, more mature, and more wholistic understanding of true reality. Another possibility is that the monotheistic themes in the book, which was probably written just a few centuries before Christ, might possibly have been influenced by Judaism and/or Zoroastrianism.¹¹

Although the Vedic tradition focuses on the **immanence** of God, it doesn’t totally ignore his transcendence. As the Shvetashvatara proclaims, “He fills the cosmos, yet he transcends it.”¹²

According to the Catholic priest and Benedictine monk Bede Griffiths (1906-93), although Christianity and the Vedic tradition start from different perspectives, they both incorporate the dual dimensionality of God: “Just as the Christian, starting

from above, discovers the Holy Spirit as immanent and realizes the presence of God in the whole creation around him, so the Hindu, starting with the immanence of God in the creation, in the human heart, rises to the idea of God beyond the creation and beyond humanity.”

There are two ways in which we can approach [the divine] mystery. We can look out on the world around us and recognize behind all the phenomena an underlying mystery... Or, alternately, we can look within ourselves and ask, ‘What is the source of my being?’...

Whether we take the Semitic religions – Judaism, Islam, and Christianity – or the Oriental religions – Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism – we see two hemispheres, two totally different approaches to God, to Reality, to the ultimate Truth. And my conviction is that they are complementary. [Bede Griffiths, *The Cosmic Revelation: The Hindu Way to God*]

In both Christianity and Vedic religion, “salvation” (i.e., spiritual transformation) comes via divine grace. As the Shvetashvatara states, “*He is the supreme Lord who through his grace moves us to seek him in our own hearts.*”¹³

Irreconcilable Contrasts

Despite these similarities, Christianity and the Vedas put forth two contrasting views of Reality and are not ultimately complementary. Major points of contention can be seen in the following areas:

On the **soul**: To an extent, the Vedic concept of *Atman* corresponds to the Christian view of Spirit. *Atman* is *not* the psyche or the ego (i.e., the false self), but the immortal soul – the true Self. Bede Griffiths wrote that this was “the great discovery of the Upanishads.” Likewise, Christians believe the soul is the true self – not the personality, the persona, or the ego. However, the Vedas also teach monism: “All is one” and “*Atman is Brahman*” – i.e., humanity is innately spiritual, good, and part of “Godness.” In the words of John Lennon’s song, “I Am the Walrus”: “*I am he as you are he as you are me and we are all together.*” Conversely, Christianity teaches that God is “holy” – separate from and metaphysically distinct from his creation. There is nothing in Vedic religion

¹¹ Jefrey D. Breshears, “Excerpts from the Shvetashvatara Upanishad.”

¹² Shvet. Upan. 3:10

¹³ Shvet. Upan. 3:12

that deals with the inherent sin problem of our soul and our need for transcendent spiritual salvation.

On the **Trinity**: Some try to correlate the Hindu trinity (Brahma-Vishnu-Shiva) as a remote analogy of the Christian Trinity. Although this may in some respects reflect the triune character of God, the Christian Trinity all share the same divine nature and character.

On **personal salvation**: In Christianity, humanity is fundamentally flawed by an inherent sin nature. Sin is rebellion against God – i.e., the assertion of individual will, egoism and selfishness in contrast to humble submission before our Creator and Sustainer. As C. S. Lewis put it, human beings are not basically good people who merely require fine-tuning, but obstinate “rebels against God.” In the Vedic tradition, sin is conceived as attachment – to one’s ego, to things, to pleasures, etc. In Christianity, God is love and has provided the solution to humanity’s sin problem. Through faith in Jesus Christ and following his teachings, one surrenders to the transforming power of God through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. In other words: An external, transcendent God becomes immanent within the heart of the believer through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

In the Vedic tradition, God is love and conversion is possible. “*In the depths of meditation, sages saw within themselves the Lord of Love...*”¹⁴ However, conversion comes through strict self-discipline as one focuses on the imminent presence of God within. In Christianity, salvation comes exclusively through supernatural grace by way of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.

On **reincarnation**: Reincarnation is fundamentally incompatible with Christian theology. As Hebrews 9:27 declares, “Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.” Note also Jesus’s promise to the repentant thief on the cross: “Today, you will be with me in paradise” [Luke 23:43]. Biblical theology is unequivocal that each human life – body and soul – is unique. As living souls, we have a definite beginning at conception – we are born, we develop, and then our physical bodies die. Our souls live forever.

Anthropology and Original Monotheism

Andrew Lang and Wilhelm Schmidt

In modern times, the theory of original monotheism was first advanced by **Andrew Lang** (1844-1912) in *The Making of Religion* (1898). Originally a protege of the anthropologist E. B. Tylor and the animistic theory of religion, Lang concluded from his own research that the evidence pointed to an original knowledge of a single creator God.¹⁵ For example, he made the case that the supreme God among Australian tribes was characterized as immortal, “all-seeing, all-knowing, and good” (i.e., moral) creator of everything. One tribe that he investigated believed that their God (“Our Father”) once destroyed the earth by water and then ascended to the sky. Based on his research, Lang concluded that (nearly) all religions believed two things: (1) There is an eternal, infinite, powerful, omniscient, and moral Father/God who is the Judge of all mankind; and (2) The existence of an afterlife.

Following Lang, **Wilhelm Schmidt** (1868-1954) developed similar arguments in *The Idea of the Origin of God* (1912). Schmidt was a German-Austrian Catholic priest, ethnologist and anthropologist whose most significant contribution was the development of a methodology for deciding the question of the relative age of a culture, which he termed **ethnohistory** – later known as **cultural anthropology**. Schmidt based his research on the beliefs of various tribes and people groups worldwide that are geographically isolated and have the oldest, least materially-developed culture such as the “Bushmen” of Southern Africa, the indigenous people of the Arctic Circle, the Algonquin and Sioux of North America, remote Australian tribes, and others. His theory was that those with the most ancient human culture are most likely to have retained the most ancient beliefs regarding God and religion. Schmidt concluded that most archaic societies held to a primitive monotheism that generally comported with the God of the Bible. God had revealed himself in the distant past, and his memory had been transmitted orally through the millennia.

In Romans 1:18-20 the apostle Paul essentially confirms this premise: “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and

¹⁴ Shvet. Upan. 1:3

¹⁵ <https://www.giffordlectures.org/lectures/making-religion>

wickedness of those who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.”

Typically, these ancient cultures believed in one Supreme God who was the First Cause (Creator) of all things. This God is a Heavenly Father who lives not on earth but in the celestial realms as the Sky God. God is an active Ruler over his creation. God is omniscient, omnipotent, and the source of goodness and justice. Regular sacrifices were offered to this God. An afterlife exists for those who have died – including (usually) some kind of paradise and hell. However – and ironically – as various cultures became more “advanced” there was more emphasis placed on magic, ritual, and the veneration of spirits to the point that over time the Sky God was virtually forgotten. As Karen Armstrong noted in her popular work on comparative religions, *A History of God* (1993), this God gradually faded from human consciousness and was replaced by the more accessible “gods” of the pagan pantheons.

Most secular anthropologists, however, rejected Schmidt's ethnohistorical theory. They continued to speculate that religion evolved within each society according to its own unique matrix of sociological, cultural, and political factors. Perhaps most notably, the influential Italian archaeologist and anthropologist Raffaele Pettazoni contended that Schmidt's conclusions were overly generalized and too dependent upon a strictly historicist interpretation of the evidence. According to Pettazoni, ancient cultures had a general awareness of a supreme being, but it was a deistic-type God who had no direct interaction with human beings.¹⁶ In response, Schmidt criticized Pettazoni and most other anthropologists for placing philosophical commitments ahead of anthropological evidence. Regarding their theories, he wrote, “However dogmatically they may be expressed, all these statements are nothing more than mere opinion.”

Nonetheless, Schmidt's counter-theory continues to influence modern scholarship in comparative religions.

As William Dyrness writes in *Christian Apologetics in a World Community*, “Scholars of comparative religions are beginning to think that belief in one God was the original view, obscured and overladen in the course of time by magic, animism, and polytheism.”

Winfried Corduan

Likewise, other contemporary scholars such as **Winfried Corduan**, a highly-respected theologian and longtime professor of philosopher of religion at Taylor University, have no doubt that original monotheism was the product of divine revelation. Corduan has written that “To a large extent, Wilhelm Schmidt continues to be correct.” Primordial societies often claimed that their understanding of God came by revelation either directly from God or through mystics, sages, or prophets, and “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.... The question remains as to the nature of this revelation.”

There are two options: (1) general revelation based in nature, and (2) special revelation based on God's disclosure in Scripture and history. “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; in fact, these are completely preliterate cultures.... Nor could one say that... these people were a part of the stream of God's working in history as explicitly recorded in Scripture.”¹⁷

One alternative regarding special revelation is that God in fact revealed specific aspects of divine truth to mystics and prophets throughout pre-history, long before the calling of Abraham and God's covenant with the Hebrew race. This would correlate with many of the oral traditions of antiquity. Wilhelm Schmidt believed original monotheism came to ancient cultures via general revelation, and that their theistic theology developed as they looked at the world around them and asked the obvious question, “Who made this?”

¹⁶ Raffaele Pettazoni, *Essays on the History of Religion* (1954).

¹⁷ Winfried Corduan, *A Tapestry of Faiths*, p. 40ff

Similarly, Winfried Corduan believes that the answer came “in the form of the monotheistic hypothesis.” It is certainly possible that primitive monotheism derived from original contact between God and the first generation of humanity, and that it survived in oral traditions down through the ages. After all, according to Genesis, all of human history began with the creation of human beings who had a direct relationship with God. As Corduan notes:

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 do, in fact, derive from the same monotheistic beliefs and practices attributed to the earliest humans in special revelation. [*A Tapestry of Faiths*, pp. 41-42.]

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 then reinforced by general revelation.

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. According to the Bible, 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 (however faulty) of early events and an earlier form of legitimate worship that lingered in human personality and culture. As the Bible scholar Ray Clendenen concludes: “[W]hen God began revealing to the patriarchs and early generations of Israel how He was to be worshiped, it was only reasonable that He would employ forms that would have some meaning to them. That would mean using familiar events, symbols, and practices that could be redirected and filled with new meaning. Thus, while the *forms* of Israel’s faith shared many elements with their pagan neighbors, the *substance* or heart of Yahweh worship could diverge drastically. [*The Apologetics Study Bible* (Holman Bible Publishers, 2007), p. 126-7.]

The Strange Story of Melchizedek

In the Old Testament, the curious story of Melchizedek implies that God has certainly revealed himself to mankind outside the confines of Hebrew history.¹⁸ Apparently, Abraham was not the only one of his generation who knew and served the one true God.

When God originally revealed himself to Abram, he revealed himself as **YHWH** (Yahweh, or “Jehovah”). When Abram left Ur and traveled to Canaan, his caravan passed by the city of Salem (later Jerusalem) in which the *lugal* (priest-king) was a man named **Melchizedek** (literally: *Melchi* – king; *Zadok* – righteousness). Several years later, Abram returned to Salem following a raid in which he rescued his nephew Lot from the king of Elam. In the Valley of Shaveh, Abram met with Melchizedek. (The Valley of Shaveh – or “the King’s Valley” – is the confluence of the Hinnon and Kidron valleys, immediately below the south wall of the old city of Jerusalem.) Melchizedek brought out bread and wine to honor his guest. Melchizedek was the priest of **El Elyon** – a Canaanite name for “the Most High God.” (Later Hebrews would incorporate *El* into various sacred names: **Elohim** – a plural form of “God;” **El Shaddai** – “God Almighty;” **Bethel** – “the house of God;” etc.)

When they met, Melchizedek pronounced a blessing on Abram: “Blessed be Abram by [El Elyon], Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be [El Elyon], who delivered your enemies into your hand.”¹⁹ Abram, who recognized God by the name YHWH, accepted the fact that his and Melchizedek’s God, El Elyon, was one and the same. In fact, he paid Melchizedek a tithe – 10% of everything he had recovered in the rescue operation.

In the New Testament, the author of Hebrews implies that Melchizedek, the priest of El Elyon, was an archetype of Christ. As such, he was an earthly representative of YHWH (or El Elyon). According to the text: “Just think how great [Melchizedek] was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave [him] a tenth of the plunder.” The author goes on to declare that Melchizedek’s priesthood is superior to the Hebrew’s own Levitical priesthood, since “Levi paid the tithe [to Melchizedek] through Abraham, because when

¹⁸ Gen. 14:18-20; Ps. 110:4; Heb. 5:5; 7:1, 3, 4, 11, 16; 8:7; 13:10

¹⁹ Gen. 14:19-20

Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor [Abraham].” [Heb. 7:4-10]

In Psalm 110 – a prophetic psalm – King David refers to the coming Messiah as “a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.” [Ps. 110:4] Note that David does not refer to the Messiah as a priest “in the order of Levi” – the official Jewish priesthood – but “in the order of Melchizedek.” In other words, the Messiah – the Christ – is not a priest of a particular ethnic lineage, but a priest of the universal God. 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 Greece

Classical Greek Religion

As is commonly understood, traditional Greek religion focused as much on human self-fulfillment as on pleasing “the gods”. In that regard, Greek religion was essentially amoral. It was a religion devoid of commandments, doctrines, and any ultimate authority. It had no authoritative scriptures, no real concept of sin or salvation, divine justice and judgment, heaven and hell. Greek religion was polytheistic, including an entire pantheon of gods and goddesses. Greek religion was also animistic: spirits inhabited all of nature, including every field, mountain, forest and river.

Greek gods were portrayed in anthropomorphic terms. They were created beings who were not omnipotent. They did not create the cosmos, nor did they create humanity. The gods were not omniscient, nor were they omni-present – although they often busied themselves by intervening in human affairs. Although the gods were immortal, they were also amoral. They were treacherous, duplicitous, lustful, and violent. Nonetheless, the gods demanded sacrifice on the part of human beings.

Ancient poets such as **Homer** (8th century BC?) and **Hesiod** (c. 750-650 BC) essentially defined the Greek pantheon. Each Greek *polis* (city-state) was a sacralistic (i.e., theocratic) state. There was no distinction between Greek religion and Greek culture.

Citizens were expected to observe the ancestral traditions of the state, and each *polis* had a patron god or goddess (such as Athena for Athens). As Mark McPherran notes, “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.”²⁰

In the case of Athens in particular, citizens were expected to acknowledge twelve gods: Zeus, Poseidon, Demeter, Hera, Ares, Aphrodite, Artemis, Apollo, Athena, Hermes, Dionysus, and Hephaistos. (Hestia and Hades sometimes replaced Ares and Dionysus.)

Socrates (c. 470-399 BC)

The Founder of Western Philosophy

Socrates was an Athenian philosopher who is generally regarded as the founder of Western philosophy and, in particular, moral philosophy. Most of what we “know” about Socrates comes through the various dialogues of his pupil **Plato**. Socrates’ principal goal in life was to undermine **sophistry** and **relativism** – the belief that there are no absolute truths and standards regarding reality in general and morality in particular. Typically, he focused on issues related to right and wrong, good and evil, virtue and vice. Some regard him as more of a “proto-philosopher” and a philosophical gadfly who was more adept at asking probing questions than providing answers, but his contributions were nonetheless immense. In particular, he focused on definitions of key terms and concepts as a precursor for serious discussion and debate. The classical Christian scholar Louis Markos notes that Socrates may have baited and teased his opponents at times, “but only as a way of exposing relativism” and “pointing back toward a center of meaning and truth” -- and in that regard, Socrates “set philosophy on the road to Truth.”²¹

As portrayed by Plato, Socrates was a profoundly spiritual person. He was one of the first – or perhaps *the* first – to reconcile Reason (i.e. **Logos**) and supra-rational revelation. As a mystic, Socrates claimed to be guided by an inner voice – a **daimonion**. He contended that this inner voice compelled him to philosophize and warned him not to say and do certain things. In the dialogue *Phaedrus*, Socrates believed his *daimonion*

²⁰ *The Religion of Socrates*, p. 21.

²¹ Louis Markos, *From Plato to Christ* (IVP, 2021), pp. 12, 6

to be a gift from the gods – such as Muses which inspired poetry and mystical love. According to the sources, he sometimes fell into spellbound trances. In his words, Socrates proclaimed that “I have been commanded to philosophize... by God through oracles and dreams and by every other means by which divinity has ever commanded anyone to do anything.”²² But in another sense, Socrates was *not* a mystic as he did not conceive of the human soul being united with the divine.

A Greek Theist?

In addition to being a rationalist and moral philosopher, Socrates contributed to the reformation of Greek religion. On the one hand, he rejected the naturalistic view of the universe that was popular among atheistic philosophers. Yet he also rejected the traditional myths and concepts of the gods as foolish and immoral. He was contemptuous of Homeric legends and other absurd “lies of the poets.” Although he saw through a glass dimly, Socrates presented a concept of God that was quasi-theistic. Raised in a culture of that recognized amoral and contentious gods who meddled (sometimes sadistically) in the affairs of humanity, Socrates presented a wholly different concept of God as a just Heavenly Father and an immanent divine Spirit. He resolutely declared that there is a God – a divine Mind – who is the source of the moral order of the universe.

Confusingly – and like some other philosophers of his day – Socrates seemed to use both the singular and plural forms for the deity interchangeably. Yet some argue that he regarded “the gods” as manifestations of a singular supreme Spirit.²³

According to Socrates, the attributes of God are that He is all-powerful, all-knowing, and omnipresent. God is the source of all that is good, just, loving, rational, and moral. God expects human beings to act justly and piously. God cares about humanity – he is not indifferent (as in the religion of Deism). God guides those whose hearts are pure through extra-rational (supernatural) means by means of the *Logos* – the divine principle of Reason. Men can purify their minds and hearts through the conscientious application of Reason and resolution. In *The Apology*, Socrates

furthermore declares that “nothing can harm a good man either in life or after death; and his fortunes are not a matter of indifference to the gods.”

Presenting a **teleological** view of history in Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* and *Symposium*, Socrates argues that the universe is purposeful – the product of a God who “coordinates and holds together the entire cosmos.” Furthermore, God is guiding human history toward a good final end. And although Socrates never articulated the distinction between “natural” and “revealed” theology, he seemed to recognize the basic difference. Although he conceded that most men are capable of discerning right and wrong, he declared that he/himself possessed a personal spirit that guided his behavior. The connection between Socrates’ moral philosophy and theology was consistent. As one scholar has observed, “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.”²⁴

Plato’s dialogue, *Timaeus*, includes Socrates’ most comprehensive statement on God and the cosmos. As Arthur Herman interprets Socratic cosmology, “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.” [*The Light and the Cave*, p. 36.]

On the Soul...

Socrates might have been one of the first Greek thinkers to conceive of the dual nature of man as both body and soul. Therefore, Reality has a dual nature: a physical and a spiritual component. In *Phaedo* (“On the Soul”), he argued that the soul is a spiritual reality – “a fallen divinity in the tomb of the body.” For

²² Plato, *Apology*

²³ Mark L. McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates*, p. 278.

²⁴ J. Adam, *The Religious Teachers of Greece*.

Socrates, the soul (or *psyche*) is our true essence and our real self – the center of personality and self-consciousness. It is what makes us distinctly human (since all other life-forms are only physical). The soul is also the essence of one's moral consciousness: It is "that in us, whatever it may be, that has to do with justice and injustice."²⁵

Mark McPherran writes that "Socrates greatest contribution [to Greek religious thought] is his continual insistence on the importance of the soul and his systematic integration of it into his moral psychology."²⁶ A believer in reincarnation and the pre-existence of the soul, he contended that morality is intuitive and knowledge is a process of recollection. Prior to being incarnated, the soul existed in the realm of "Ideas" (Plato's concept of eternal "Forms") where it experienced and understood Reality as it truly is – in contrast to the pale shadows and imitations here on earth.²⁷ Therefore, when the rational soul reflects, it is merely remembering what it knew in that other (previous) realm.

On the Afterlife...

Unlike most Greeks who believed in the postmortem annihilation of the soul, Socrates seemed to believe in the immortality of the soul. He speculated that the soul, separated from the body at death, migrates "to another place."²⁸ Divine judges reward just souls with eternal bliss in the **Isles of the Blessed** where one associates with the great people and heroes of the past such as Homer, Hesiod, Agamemnon, Odysseus, and Ajax. Conversely, unjust souls are punished in Tartarus – the Greek concept of Hell and the region below Hades where the Titans were confined.²⁹ However, in Socrates' *Apology* he admitted that neither he nor anyone else knows for certain what fate awaits us after death. It could be soul sleep – an eternity of dreamless sleep without perception; or perhaps a migration of the conscious soul to another place.

A Proto-Christian?

Centuries later, some Christian philosophers regarded Socrates as a proto-Christian. Justin Martyr (c. 100-165) credited Socrates for exposing the foolishness in pagan religion and considered him to be a link between Greek rational philosophy and the revealed truths of Christianity. Other Christian philosophers including Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215), Origen (c. 185-253), Lactantius (c. 250-325) and Augustine (c. 354-430) lauded Socrates as a "righteous pagan." Conversely, Tertullian (c. 155-220) dismissed him as a pagan who was guided by a demonic "familiar spirit."

There are fascinating correlations between Socratic theology and biblical theology. In *The Light and the Cave*, Arthur Herman observes:

Socrates talked a lot about God and the gods. [In the *Apology of Socrates*] 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: Zeus, Apollo, and the other deities of the classical pantheon with their superhuman powers and more than human appetites and foibles....

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....

It is striking how much [Socrates'] vision resembles later Christian accounts of heaven and hell.... [*The Light and the Cave*, p. 29.]

In I Cor. 1-2 the apostle Paul wrote: "Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ... For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom." In the *Apology*, Socrates is quoted as saying: "I know in my conscious that I am

²⁵ *Symposium*

²⁶ *The Religion of Socrates*, p. 251ff

²⁷ *Meno*

²⁸ *Apology*

²⁹ Plato, *Gorgias* 522c-527e

wise in nothing... [Only the god is wise, and... human wisdom is worth little or nothing.]

In Matthew 5:38-39 Jesus declares: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” In Matthew 7:12 Jesus delivers the “Golden Rule”: “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you” In *Crito*, Socrates proclaims that “One must not do wrong even when one is wronged.”

In Acts 5:29-31 Peter and the other apostles inform the Sanhedrin that ‘We must obey God rather than men! The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead.... We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.’” Similarly, in the *Apology* Socrates states: “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.” Later, he adds: “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....”

In Matthew 6:31-33 Jesus instructs his followers: “So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans are obsessed with these things, and your Heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first the kingdom [of God] and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” Once again in the *Apology*, Socrates informs his interrogators: “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.... “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.”

In Romans 8:28 we read: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” Socrates expressed a similar moral theme when he declared, “No evil can happen to a good man, either in this life or in death.”

Socrates’ trial, his *apologia* (defense), and his execution for religious heresy was a prototype for later Christian martyrs. Like Socrates, many Christian martyrs were convicted of “atheism” – i.e., refusing to worship the official gods of the state.

Phaedo, set in the last hours prior to Socrates’ death, is one of Plato’s best-known dialogues. The theme is the immortality of the soul, and Plato concludes by venerating Socrates as “The best, the wisest, and most righteous of all the men whom I have ever known.”

Plato (c. 425-348 BC)

The philosopher Plato was born into one of Athens’ most distinguished families. As a young man, he aspired to be a poet before turning to philosophy and becoming a disciple of Socrates at age 20. In 388 BC he founded the **Academy**, named for the garden of Academus in the suburbs of Athens where Plato and his students met to discuss and debate the great issues of life. A prolific writer, he authored 26 philosophical discussions.

Along with his protégé and successor, **Aristotle**, Plato is regarded as a founder of “classical realism.” There is a real world, independent of human subjective thought, that can be known (at least in part) through Reason. Like Socrates, Plato was concerned primarily with the nature of justice, truth and beauty, and the meaning of life. Like his mentor, he rejected moral relativism and hedonism. Good cannot be equated with pleasure or utilitarian usefulness. His theory of “**Recollection**” states that honest men know intuitively what is right and good. The Bible also teaches that we have an innate sense of morality because we were created in the *imago Dei* – the image of God. As a rationalist, he believed true virtue was based on knowledge. However, knowledge derived exclusively from the five senses is limited and imperfect. Therefore, true virtue is attained through a rational understanding of the eternal Ideals of Goodness and Justice. As a dualist, he believed the physical body is a hindrance to the mind (i.e., the soul) and that physical emotions and desires should therefore be carefully controlled – i.e., Reason and Logic must rule feelings and emotions.

The Greatest Philosopher?

Plato can be read on two levels: (1) A philosopher who laid a foundation for logic, reason, and natural moral law; and (2) One whose writings prepared the ancient world for the coming of Christ and the inspired apostolic writings of the New Testament. The *telos* (purpose and goal) of philosophy is to reach the ultimate **First Principle**, the **Essential Origin**, the **Transcendent Truth**.³⁰

For Plato, philosophy was all about the search for **Wisdom** – “that one and eternal Truth that transcends our ever-shifting world, that abides and endures.” As the Christian classical scholar Louis Markos has written, “Plato, in my mind, is the greatest of all philosophers.... Plato was a genius, a vessel through whom much beauty, goodness and truth was ushered into our world...” and whose “dialogues seem to prepare the way for the fuller revelation of Christ and the New Testament.”

Plato understood that philosophy “should lead to a higher and greater end – the contemplation of the Good” – or what 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....” According to Markos, 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 Solomon or [the apostles] John or Paul.” As the student of, and successor to, Socrates, Plato took philosophy to the next level.

Markos writes that “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 achieved this clearing and cleansing by means of a vigorous question-and-answer dialectic.” In that regard, “Socrates played the more ‘negative’ role of demolishing false [arguments] while Plato played the more ‘positive’ role of constructing true systems and definitions.” As Christian philosophers such as Justin Martyr, Origen and Augustine to Thomas Aquinas, Blaise Pascal and many others have understood, some ancient thinkers were able (undoubtedly by the grace of God) to gain insights into Reality that transcended their pagan culture.

The “Divided Line”

Unlike many of his acclaimed predecessors (Anaxagoras, Parmenides, Pythagoras, Heraclitus, *et al.*), Plato came to the realization that Reality is binary. It is neither exclusively materialistic nor “spiritual”.

(1) According to Plato, 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. He called this the “**World of Becoming**.” This lower realm is that of all physical/material objects – including plants, animals, and human beings – and all human ideals (including colors, proportion, beliefs, values, morality, etc.). These objects and ideals are mere “shadows” of true Reality. This is the realm of which most of humanity is aware through their five senses. And although the lower realm is insufficient in terms of a full grasp of reality, it can certainly hint at a higher truth.

(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**.” This is the realm of the “One,” the “Essence,” and that of “**Forms**” (or Ideals). For everything that exists – Goodness, Beauty, Truth, material objects, plants, animals, and human beings – there is an Ideal Form. Knowledge and understanding of the upper realm can only be attained through *Logos* – Reason and contemplation.

Whereas Christians believe that God has revealed true Reality through his written Word, the Bible (the divine *Logos*), and through the internal witness of the Holy Spirit, Plato had a low view of imagination (including artistic creativity), regarding it as the lowest level of thinking.

³⁰ Louis Markos, *From Plato to Christ* (InterVarsity Press, 2021).

Louis Markos notes that according to Plato, “[t]o perceive the Truth that resides in the invisible world, our mind’s eye must be able to move from imagination and belief to understanding and reason.” This process takes us into the realm of the “Beatific Vision” of the True, the Good, and the Beautiful.

The Allegory of the Cave

In Plato’s most famous work, *Republic*, he describes a group of people who have lived chained to the wall of a cave all their lives, facing a blank wall. Their legs and necks are fixed so they cannot move or swivel, forcing them to stare straight ahead. The people sit and watch distorted and flickering shadows projected on the wall from objects passing in front of a fire behind them. The prisoners cannot see what is happening behind them, but they see the shadows of rocks, trees, animals, and people – and they hear the sounds of people talking – which they assume to be sounds coming from the shadows in front of them. The shadows, although distorted, are the prisoners’ perceived “reality” – but of course they are not accurate representations of the real world at all.

In the allegory, Socrates explains how the true philosopher is like a person who is freed from his chains, exits the cave, and is exposed to sunlight for the first time. At first, he finds it painful – but as his eyes slowly adjust, he realizes that the world outside the cave is the higher realm of reality, and that the shadows on the cave wall are distortions of reality. However, the other inmates in the cave have no interest in escaping and experiencing a higher level of consciousness. They are quite content continuing to live within the safe confines of the cave because they know nothing better. Out of fear or laziness, they have no real interest in experiencing reality.

The moral of the story is that the shadows on the cave wall are like the arts: distorted imitations of reality. Once the sojourner leaves the cave, he crosses the great divide from the “World of Becoming” to the “World of Being.”

Timaeus

In his dialogue, *Timaeus* (c. 360 BC), Plato put forth a remarkable account of creation that correlates in some respects to that of Genesis. This is in sharp contrast to that of Plato’s renowned pupil, **Aristotle**, who believed that both God and the universe are eternal.³¹ Although there is no evidence that Plato had access to the Hebrew Scriptures, portions of *Timaeus* read like a commentary on the Genesis creation story. As Louis Markos observes, “Aside from Genesis, *Timaeus* is the only ancient book to posit a Creator who [is eternal and] predates matter...” [NOTE: Actually, this is incorrect: reference the discussion of the Shevetashvatara Upanishad earlier in this article.]

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).

In contrast to the Greek myths, Plato believed that it was a personal God, whom he refers to as our “Father,” who created all that exists. Unlike the “gods” of ancient mythology who evolved out of primal matter, the Creator God is transcendent, eternal, and infinite. Plato deduced this by observing the physical and moral complexity of the world – i.e., the “intelligent design” of the universe and our innate sense of right and wrong. Although he did not specifically claim that this Demiurge created the world *ex nihilo* (“out of nothing”), he implies it. In that regard, he was the only non-Jewish ancient writer to suggest that God is the absolute origin of all things physical *and* spiritual, temporal, *and* eternal.

In *Timaeus*, Plato emphasizes that “the past and future are created species of time,” but God is eternal. Markos writes that “Plato claims that God dwells in the timeless present of eternity. The gods of Homer

³¹ See Lee Strobel, *The Case for a Creator*, p. 97.

and Hesiod may be immortal in the sense that they cannot die, but they are certainly not eternal. They were born out of primal matter.... Only in the Bible and in *Timaeus* do we have a God who simply is.” This correlates to YHWH’s self-proclamation to Moses in Exodus 3:14: “**I AM Who I AM.**” Plato also believed that we live in an ordered cosmos. In using the word *cosmos*, he implied that the universe is balanced, beautiful, and harmonious. The heavens are the ornament – the cosmetic – of the Creator who designed it. Furthermore, our world is the only world that is. According to Plato, when God created the cosmos, he literally used up all the matter – all the earth, air, fire and water – that exists.

God also created time itself. In Plato’s words: “When the father creator saw the [universe] which he had made moving and living, the created image of the eternal gods, he rejoiced, and in his joy determined to make the copy still more like the original; and as this was eternal, he sought to make the universe eternal.... Now the nature of the ideal being [God] was everlasting, but to bestow this attribute in its fulness upon a creature was impossible. Wherefore he resolved to have a moving image of eternity.... For there were no days and nights and months and years before the heaven was created, but when he constructed the heaven he created [time] also.” Just as the World of Becoming is an imitation of the World of Being, so time is an imitation of eternity.

As Louis Markos observes, “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 world had a beginning and that initiating event, known 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. Interestingly, Hebrews 8:5 declares that the earthly temple in which the priests served was but “a shadow [or imitation] of heavenly things” revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai (ref. Heb. 9:23-24). In other words: the temple in Jerusalem, with all its intricate symbolism, was simply an earthly copy of the eternal throne room of God.

Furthermore, this personal Creator is a God of love: God does more than simply exist and set the cosmos in motion. 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. Therefore, “Let me tell you then why the creator made this world of generation. He was good... [and] he declared that all things should be as like himself as they could be. This is in the truest sense the origin of creation and of the world.... God desired that all things should be good and nothing bad, so far as this was attainable.”

Likewise, the Bible presents creation as an act of divine love. As Markos notes, “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?” Unfortunately, the later **Neoplatonism** of the 3rd and 4th centuries A.D. distorted Plato’s binary division between the upper and lower levels of Reality by insisting that the physical/material world was artificial, base, corrupt – and unspiritual.

In *Timaeus*, Plato argued that the natural world (including the human body) was created “good” by a good God. In fact, biblical prophecy promises that the earth will ultimately be redeemed and transformed into a New Earth – even as our bodies will be transformed into glorious resurrection bodies such as that of Christ. According to Plato, human beings have both a physical body and a non-physical soul. However, the soul must control the body. The faculties of mind – logic, reason, and factual evidence – must control our feelings, impulses and emotions. As human beings, we stand upright, with our head (the center of our mind and soul) pointed upward toward the heavens. By contrast, “beasts live with their heads close to the ground – a fitting sign for how their lives are controlled completely by their belly and the impulses of the flesh.”

Also note that in the *Republic*, Plato addresses the afterlife and the prospects of reward and punishment based on virtuous or vicious behavior in this life – the moral of which reminds one of what the medievals called *memento mori* – “**remember that you must die.**”

***Timaeus*: Cosmological and Theological Fallacies**

Plato's writings were not "divinely-inspired." Although generally wise by human standards, Plato was not inspired by the Holy Spirit in the sense that Moses, David, the Old Testament prophets, Jesus, and the New Testament apostolic writers were inspired. He merely "saw through a glass darkly" and used human reasoning and common observations to arrive at his conclusions. However, like all human beings, he was a self-centered egoist whose thinking was conditioned (and limited) by the society and culture in which he lived. He did, however, sense that our human nature is flawed. Unlike most people in his day (and ours), he deduced that God created us for a higher kind of life but that something in our nature pulls us down and dulls our desire for union with God. As the apostle Paul later wrote, we are not created to gratify our impulses and the "lusts of the flesh." Indulgence corrupts our soul and reduces us to the level of a pig or a donkey.

The Christian psychologist M. Scott Peck puts it bluntly: "Human nature is to [urinate and defecate] in your pants.... The child who struggles through potty training is doing something that, at first, seems very unnatural. Only once he has attained the dignity of controlling his bowels will the process of restraining his urges seem natural."³² Likewise, if we have previously learned to control the lusts and impulses of the flesh, and if we have already learned to discipline our mind so as to think thoughtfully and rationally prior to becoming a Christian, it greatly accelerates our spiritual growth and development post-conversion.

The essential flaw in Platonic philosophy, according to Louis Markos, is its denigration of everything physical and material. This renders any belief in the incarnation – that Jesus was fully divine and fully human, metaphysically impossible and logically unthinkable. Therefore, Plato contributed to the later heresy of **Docetism** in its abhorrence of all things physical and material. As he writes, "Docetism, a form of **Gnosticism** that was influenced by Platonism, simply could not [accept the thought] that divinity would [interact] with inherently fallen matter and flesh." Just as problematic, Plato's concept of God as a totally spiritual Being untainted by any association with the material world "cannot be

reconciled with the biblical revelation of a merciful Savior God who so loves humanity that he willingly... takes upon himself the 'prison' of human flesh and suffers a very physical and bloody death. For a Platonist, the thought that the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent God would deign to take on human form would have been nonsensical. And the same goes for the Christian teaching that Christ rose bodily from the dead, the first fruits of a [general] resurrection that we ourselves will someday share..... Indeed, when Paul spoke in Athens before the Platonic-minded Stoics and Epicureans, they listened patiently until he mentioned the resurrection; it was then that most of them sneered and stopped listening (Act 17:32)."

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." Plato described planets and stars [and moons?] as "divine and eternal animals." Plato insisted that human beings were created before animals – contrary to the Bible and the conclusions of modern science. Plato also believed in reincarnation and did not understand the Judeo-Christian principle of incarnation. Our body is not a prison for the soul – it is a gift of God. According to I Corinthians 15, we will receive resurrection bodies for all of eternity.

Lastly, but not leastly, Plato was an unabashed chauvinist. He clearly believed that men are superior to women because men are (supposedly) more rational by nature, whereas women are more emotional. Near the end of *Timaeus*, Plato argues that men were created first, but "those who were cowards or lived unrighteous lives" were reborn in the next generation as women. In succeeding generations, men and women who were foolish or evil devolved into irrational animals. The Bible, of course, does not concur.

The Summa

Despite his human and cultural limitations, Plato's philosophy can in many ways prepare the soil of our heart for the seed of the gospel. Therefore, it can be considered, in a sense, as *praeparatio evangelica* – preparation for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

³² M. Scott Peck, *Further Along the Road Less Traveled* (Touchstone, 1998), p. 115 & 129.