

COSMOLOGY without HEADACHES

(Lecture Series)

(compiling, transcribing, researching, editing always in progress)

LECTURE VIII: Christianity, Faith or Fad? St. Paul Interprets ‘The Way’; Old Testament Cosmology & Hellenic Astronomy; Augustine & Pagan Philosophy



The One God: Out of Judaism came **Jehovah** or **Yahweh**. Whether he was indeed the only God in the Old Testament (i.e., whether he had competition) or whether he is but the chief god over lesser deities has been debated. But it is generally assumed that Judaism is monotheistic, and that God, if not alone, is at least the one and only god of the Jews and the creator of their Universe. Pagan gods may have been false from Judaic perspective. Nonetheless, they were real enough to their adherents. But with **Jesus**, the Biblical God becomes available to the world—not just as a supplement to the pagan pantheon, but as the pantheon’s replacement. This is a critical step in the direction of the brotherhood of man, which may have been Jesus’ greatest legacy. Universal recognition of a single source of the world and of humanity might be the only way to achieve that goal—presuming it is possible (and, if possible, that it is actually desirable).

This ‘God of everyone’ idea was not as revolutionary as some may think. The ‘one god’ idea had been advanced previously, but not near so effectively as with this unexpected derivative and extension of Judaism. We have discussed the sun god of Ikhnoton (whereby *Re*, the sun, shines equally everywhere and on every type of human). We also recall across-the-board, non-racial, trans-cultural Zoroastrianism (despite being confined mainly to Persia and twisted into a warlike creed whereby one had to be an active soldier in the army of light [Ahura Mazda] or be considered an enemy as a partisan of darkness [Ahriman]). *Re* and Ahura Mazda were unattractive gods, being neither loving nor compassionate, but sheer unpopularity should not have led to their failure. Such attributes were not expected of gods in the ancient world, though that attitude did not prevent weeping and wailing around the temples during crises—enough to rouse pity even in gods of stone.

There is also the example of Alexander as a world-god himself. His desire to unify the world included the merging of human bloodlines into a sort of master race, he was, in some ways, a prototype of NAZIism, except that, instead of preserving racial purity, the idea here was to join racial strengths (eugenics, nonetheless—and note that there was a distinct facet of NAZI Germany that saw itself as a kind of Hellenic or Alexandrian renaissance, illustrated by its intended revival of ancient Greece and a modern sort of paganism and in the neoclassicism of its monumental architecture). In Alexander's case the great number and variety of gods in ancient times may have been an advantage, in that the classical world thought of their gods as territorial and somewhat limited by location. So, different folk had different gods. It was no disrespect to one's local gods if one were to pay tribute to other gods (or, apparently, with Alexander, even to become a god oneself) while vacationing in other territories (hence the famous adage, 'when in Rome...'). It could also be—though we tend to view the emergence of monotheism as progressive, or a revolutionary advancement—that the opposite possibility has not been sufficiently considered: that the world-god idea may actually present an impediment to world peace and a hindrance to global unification.

In the multi-deity ancient world there was no fault or shame (in fact, there was admittedly good logic) behind trying to appease whichever god(s) would be most likely to serve you in your particular quest of the moment—even in arranging certain gods in opposition to one another. After all, the gods themselves were capricious. That understanding was a large factor, correlated with the doubting aspect pervading at the zenith of Greek thought, in pushing Tyche (Goddess of Fortune) to the fore in the minds of many thoughtful men as the ultimate determining deity in world affairs. Warfare, nonetheless violent, vicious, and vindictive, was not faith-based in ancient days. Gods were surely begged for help before a campaign, and thanked profusely with more sacrifices (as if sufficient blood had not been shed during battle) after a victory for what ever they might have done to assure it (or not done to prevent it). Losers in war, however, if they were allowed to live, were not usually required to submit to the beliefs of their conquerors. In fact we have seen that conquerors often accepted the gods of the vanquished territory, sometimes 'worshiping' at their shrines (after securing the loot, naturally), sacrificing animals, and even consulting their oracles.

It seems clear, then, that the polytheistic ancients long ago beat us to the idea of multi-culturalism. Alexander burned palaces, sure, and slaughtered populations (often depending on how they comported themselves when faced with his invasions), but he did not, generally, deface or disrespect the pagan gods of the vanquished—as opposed to Muslims, for instance, in their destruction of the icons of those forced by the sword to submit to Allah, or Christians in their crusades and conquests, and even during the tumultuous Protestant Reformation in the despoiling of eachothers' churches, relics, and sacred objects of what were seen to be heretical sects of their own brother Christians.

In the monotheistic world there is only the One God, thus making all other gods false; even an abomination before the true God. His worshipers, then, are also His soldiers, committed to His final and complete triumph over all other gods and the demons thereof (including all heretical variations of Himself). So there can be no peace and no universal government until *all* anti-God traditions are eradicated. Furthermore, universal agreement must be reached about Him in every detail. What is the likelihood of that? However low that may be, continued population growth will make it ever *less* likely.

Having failed for over 25 centuries in pursuit of universal agreement concerning God, we moderns now seem to be deflecting our course. [*With the term 'modern' I will always be referring to Western Euro-culture. Other cultures (despite their later adoption of science; increased use of new technology; partaking in global economics; and even experimenting with pseudo-Marxism), have experienced neither of the pre-conditions for modernity: a Western-style religious reformation, whereby faith adjusts to science (or attempts a separation from politics); nor a philosophical enlightenment, whereby reason creates a sphere of influence apart from revelation.*] Increasingly we are considering 'multi-culturalism' as the means to 'the' global culture (despite the paradox implied). We have come to this view, almost unwittingly and certainly irrationally with the spread and acceptance of two irreconcilable though not directly opposing ideas: *liberty* and *equality*.

These modern ideas were derived through a re-adjustment of the lens of history via modern political thought, by which we now generally mean 'political science'—or 'political theory.' Multi-culturalism demands tolerance, as did ancient polytheism, to a point. But now we must tolerate *all* social organizations and religious creeds. *All* must now be free in their beliefs; *free* of coercion; *free* to worship openly; *free* (according to our concept of free speech) even to proselytize. But in the spirit of *equality*, to which we have also committed ourselves, all religious beliefs and cultural traditions are to be understood as equally *valid* (or, from the viewpoint of atheists, equally *invalid*). Since we admit that there are indeed *differences* in cultures, but *no inequalities* between them, what is valid for some is, therefore, not necessarily valid for others. Yet we are told it is wrong to judge one sort to be any better or any worse than any other. After all, aren't all values relative to circumstance: the timing and situation and historical era, etc.? It is this conundrum that has recommended that we do the impossible: suspend moral judgment.

E.g.: 'Wouldn't you do the same thing if you were in his situation?' 'Wouldn't you have shot him if he did that to you?' 'Wouldn't you be in favor of torture if you saw him behead your dog?—your friend?—how about your mother or your wife, and after raping your daughter?—all six of your daughters—and gouging out your grandmother's eyes?'

You see how things change with the intensifying savagery of the perpetrator?—and all due to allowing emotion into these calculations instead of acting according to the logic or 'science' of ethics. For is that not what we post-moderns seek today—a science of morals? Individuals and organizations promoting science are now even claiming a 'great separation' ought to be recognized between politics and science, whereby they would not interact—in the same spirit as the separation between church and state. What they are really saying is that science qualifies as a kind of religion: a form of belief in the purity of logic that must not be restricted or directed by government.

This science-politics separation idea might be discussed briefly at this point. Then, later in the course or lecture series, when we are discussing our 21st century atmosphere, the concept might be recalled and made the subject of a short 'opinion paper'.

Our ethics, then, would not actually change situationally. The only change would be the degree to which our ethics-based rules or laws are likely to be violated. The flame of anger ignited in the observer-victim in the aforementioned scenario might well consume a lifetime of ethical training. But the question to moderns is: What is actually the goal of such training? Can we determine scientifically, i.e., without making moral judgments, how folks *ought* to behave? To make such a determination requires a moral code. The code, it seems, is part of our culture. If we attempt to transcend our culture and

create new universal values scientifically, what will be our guide? What, in fact, is the end? It can't just be peace. 'Peace' is an inert term. It must be modified in attaching it to life as only the dead are at peace—and we're not so sure even of that. Thus the question boils down to: Can science determine our end (other than our termination)—meaning the purpose of existence; the goal for which humans are to strive; the meaning of life?

This was Nietzsche's major problem with the superman. *Übermenschen* are not irrepressible caped crusaders who fight for truth, justice, and the philosophic way, but 'overmen': 'beyond-good-and-evil men.' A mighty spirit grows in a culturally unstained man, something like Wagner's Siegfried, with no preconceived notion of right and wrong. Such a being creates its own values. But Siegfried, with no preformed moralistic guidance system, miserably fails at life. He has no concept of dishonesty or guile or how ill will and power-seeking can complicate and corrupt social intercourse (along with his equally naïve companion, Brunhilde, who, having just awakened to mortality herself, is also without a clue concerning human behavior) and thus he is made the *superfool*.

Discuss this briefly to see what the class members actually know about this opera story and let them inform each other somewhat, while recommending Bernard Shaw's *Perfect Wagnerite* as recreational reading.

Left on his own, without the pulling and tugging of false religions, misleading mythology, and outdated and baffling traditions, a superman is expected to arrive at those values 'naturally'. This was the core of Nietzsche's admiration for the ancient Greeks. He saw them as children of nature rather than creatures of God. Values, at last (or once again, considering the relatively recent 'death' of God), would not be bound by preconceived or 'revealed' notions of good and evil. A sort of table of values, it seems, would simply auto-emerge out of the 'will to power'. Would these values be chosen or ordered by reason, do you suppose—or by emotion? Would various supermen not arrive at different and conflicting values?—and how would that solve anything? And what then becomes of present cultures that would certainly conflict with these new value systems? Nietzsche's prophet, Zarathustra, is not much help in this as his business is to herald the coming and to prepare the path for the superman by rationally shredding all prior belief systems (at which Nietzsche was particularly adept), while proposing nothing or merely serendipity as a replacement.

Nietzsche of course knew he had led us into the endless woods. More writings were planned, expecting to solve this problem and to guide us through the wilderness, but insanity intervened and he remained lost along with his hopeful followers (if any)—or was the insanity brought on by the impossibility of divining or controlling or even guessing what might lie 'beyond good and evil'. Furthermore, if he were to have pronounced an answer; given us directions; provided a moral compass, as it were, how would that have differed from revelation? Would Nietzsche, thus, have been simply be substituting his mythical Zarathustra for Moses, and recommending himself as a replacement for the late great God?—or at least proposing his writings as new scripture?

If vacillating emotions cannot be depended upon in determining universal rules; or if the new absolutely rational rules turn out to be destructive (introducing even greater agony than if we were to continue grappling with the relatively confusing rules we have now); and if moral philosophy fails in the attempt to establish or even define justice, can science, then, or mathematics—pure logic, perhaps—discover such a code? That is the new trail being blazed by modernity.

For pre-moderns (and, still, today, for sincere theists), morality was based on the word (or on the implication of a command) of a god or an oracle of some sort, which, over time, became traditional—if only mythological in origin. How we go about our lives and how we treat each other in the Western oriented societies (that is to say, ‘how we *ought* to behave’) has been borrowed from the Judaic God’s commands (or needs, or whims). If that god is old fashioned (or, according to Nietzsche, defunct), and if the foundation He provided (and/or as adjusted by His Son) must be replaced now by the products of reason (especially political *equality* and [in decline] individual *liberty* seem to be the generally accepted products at this historical moment), we must expect that the various and conflicting ‘cultures’ that have been based on some form of revelation will now break down, or that they, at least, will be seriously diluted into merely colorful ‘traditions’ instead of steadfast creeds, and that we will exercise our ‘freedom of religion’ only ceremonially: in hollow memorials like traditional-costume dance parties instead of serious rituals and earnest sacrifices. In other words, we will be mutually tolerant only of each other’s severely blunted and equally meaningless versions of old, decayed but once earnest and viable cultures. Otherwise, if we take diversity seriously, there will be unending conflict over ‘the way’ (even over the meaning of the very non-complementary ideas of *equality* and *liberty*—neither of which can reach full realization without fatally wounding the other, thus restricting all ‘ways’ to something far short of realization).

Discuss here how *equality* and *liberty* are not conducive each to the others completion.

The dream of global oneness, then, cannot be realized, though some nightmarish global empire may be inevitable. With that global empire will come global oppression, disputation, corruption, favoritism, and rebellion, no less—perhaps, via progress in technology, even more—than what was exhibited by ancient Rome. And if a political quasi-oneness *were* somehow to be realized, it would be the opposite of diverse—‘Oneness’ cannot be diverse. Such a ‘union,’ with nothing more to resist and nothing to overcome, would be so bland as to be spiritually indistinguishable from death and would, itself, split into factions. But this is a modern problem, to which we will return later.

Previously we were discussing religion as contained in, or as an inseparable part of the world of politics, particularly in the case of Christianity. But there is nothing of political equality or freedom intrinsic in the teaching of Jesus. No new philosophical system was presented, nor was there a call for political revolution, nor any promise of resolving the political problem—not even a plea for abolition of slavery. All of these things have been seen only later as *implied* in the idea of universal brotherhood and the mandate to love our neighbors—but as *individuals*. Such was not presented as a *political* doctrine. The harsh inequities of the world were to be endured, according to Christ. The faithful were to spread the good news and offer conversion, but not all our ‘brothers’ were expected to recognize us as kin. Only the coming of the Kingdom of God would finally resolve political turmoil, whereby heaven would be established on earth.

Later, as that Coming seemed less imminent, it became transcendent: far beyond the temporal world—a kind of afterlife improvement on Hades. In accessing that nether kingdom, how one directly had treated his fellows in life might well be of importance (at least as an indication of the state of his soul), but mere faith, hope, and love would be sufficient to gain him heavenly citizenship—love of God and love of one’s neighbor. But perhaps more important, by living in faith, hope, and love—i.e., in the Christian version

of virtue—one's quality of life is elevated beyond brutishness and savagery, past the miseries of the temporal world, to a level attainable only by humans who have come to understand or who have been trained in the proper attitudes and priorities [as now we have 'political correctness' shaping the new morality].

Could it really be so simple? Isn't it also necessary, in order to be a Christian, to believe that Jesus was actually God, Himself, or some anthropic manifestation of the Logos?—or that there were three persons in one God, and that the wine shared at the mass is *actually* His blood and the wafer His flesh?—or that the world was created in six days around 4,000 B.C.?—or that the pope is the infallible vicar of Christ?—or heretics must be stretched on the rack and witches purified by fire or drowned to save their souls? And aren't these exactly the sort of complexities and contradictions and confusing directives that had risen in the *pre-Christian* world to cloud the *Old Testament*?—due, perhaps, to too many contributions to that book: an excess of prophetic inspiration. Or maybe that was purposefully done by clever (or perhaps malicious) authors to make scripture increasingly indecipherable except through the informed interpretation of the rabbis (especially easy to accomplish if the general population happens to be illiterate), so that a priesthood might thus exert and increase political control. And, indeed, the *Old Testament* *is* political—perhaps to a fault. At least it must have seemed so to Jesus. And it is just those muddled complications that he tried to excise by ignoring them and by emphasizing the parental side of God, and urging us to love our heavenly Father and to respect his creation, including maintaining the integrity of our own character and purity of soul—as His; as part of Him.

Fact or fiction, it is actually through Jesus, and thus through Christianity, that we have come to understand the idea of a separation between church and state:

- church:** the congregation of a merciful and forgiving Father waiting to emigrate to heaven in spite of our sins (but all too often usurping political authority so as to save all other humans—even those disinterested: the agnostic, the ignorant, the atheist, the Satanist, even long dead pagans) [*What if a pope acquired 'the bomb'—as the imams are about to do?*];
- state:** various imperfect attempts at orderly, large-scale social order—according to, or in spite of nature (the state often associating itself closely with, or coercing or promoting a particular religion to help tighten its political control).

So it seems we still haven't understood this separation idea very clearly. And the Jewish leaders at the time of Jesus could not very well forego their *Old Testament* political authority (already openly compromised by the overlords of Rome). Fearing that not only would morals decline but that Judaism itself might dissipate without their inspired leadership, they could not accept the teachings of Jesus.

They may have been right. By extending the hand of Jehovah too easily to the gentile, Jews, as a people, might have been lost in history, along with other ancient types: the original Egyptians, the real Persians, the Dorians, Ionians, and Minoans. Are there any real Romans today in Italy? What about Etruscans? And where are the Phoenicians; the Chaldeans; the Ostrogoths and Visigoths; the Huns and the Vandals; the Vikings? But by living spiritually *and* politically in accord with their ancient book, the Jews, due in great part to their unusual combination of blood and belief; a people without a land,

despised and mercilessly persecuted in practically every era of their many centuries of dispersal—even despite having been targeted for extermination—have brought their nation and their god through all the vicissitudes of human history. That feat alone may be a miracle sufficient for believing in Jehovah as God.

In retrospect, however, from the Jewish perspective, the Crucifixion might not have been such a good idea. The perpetrators badly misjudged the situation. They thought, no doubt, that the end of Jesus would be also the end of Christ. They did not foresee the continuance of a Christian brotherhood. They could hardly have foretold the conversion and reverse zealotry of one of their best anti-Jesus agents, Saul of Tarsus. They had not learned the lesson (or they thought perhaps it wouldn't apply in this case) that *persecution* (anything short of complete extermination, that is) *nourishes a true faith*. And how could they have foreseen the power and the resistance of this new peaceful and non-political religion—this kind of anti-world cult in an occupied and depressed land? One wonders, though: Might they actually have been successful at barricading 'the way,' had it not been for the miraculous conversion to Jesus of his one-time greatest enemy?

St. Paul (orig. the tentmaker,
Saul of Tarsus) [5-67 A.D.]

Saul found the necessary conditions and sufficient kindling for ignition by the spark of Christ. Saul had not known Jesus personally, and had done his best to help block 'the Way' while Jesus was alive and teaching. But shortly after the Crucifixion the power of this new idea of a world faith seems suddenly to have struck him. More thoroughly than any of the true Apostles, with their itinerant preaching and their personal anecdotes in spreading the good



Byzantine, 6th Cent.

news, St. Paul managed to pave 'the way' to Christ. By extraordinary energy and sacrifice, and by his profound personal faith, he somehow made Christianity flower in the pagan West, where it seemed most unlikely; while in the East, where it was born, even among the followers of the Old Testament, out of which it had emerged, it struggled for acceptance.

To Greeks and Romans—to Hellenes, generally—the confusing crowd of pagan deities may have been growing boring (except perhaps for those who joined orgiastic cults such as those of Diana and Dionysus). By the time of Julius Caesar (though he publicly paid respect and maintained his supposed ancestry to Venus) the gods, for those who had leisure to consider such, must have seemed more remote and insensitive than ever—which had much to do with rising cynicism.



Facial reconstruction of Paul by experts of the LKA NRW, Germany

As Rome, following eroding Athens, took to Stoicism and Epicureanism, the idea of a new god might have seemed appealing, at least to the less fortunate. And this was a god of salvation, promising an after-life for which, out of the wretchedness and hopelessness of the temporal world, many must have ached, especially slaves and the dispossessed and despondent. Not only that, this new faith preached a second coming of Christ (expected any day—at least in a generation or two), whereby human misery and fear and awful oppression would be supplanted by a reign of perfect justice, tranquility, and eternal contentment right here on Earth.

In light of this, and since pagan gods didn't really seem dependent on one's belief in them—nor did they seem to care much if you worshipped other gods now and then, the conversions went pretty smoothly at first, especially in Greece. Soon Christianity demonstrated its appeal to plebeians and slaves in Rome, though mostly in the *virtu-*bereft cities. But this new God had some strange ideas. Once you know Him, for instance, you can not turn away again—or you will be damned. That's how it is with the One God. Not only that, you could no longer pay respects to the *old* gods—like gods of the City or the Empire. This was about to cause painful problems for Christians.

Few pagans cared very much that these 'Jews' worshipped another god. Rome was filled with folks from all over the known world, some from unknown parts, who worshipped all kinds of gods. But, 'when in Rome...' And that is just what the Christians (and Jews) were *forbidden* to do by their new god—*The* God. When they did not (*could* not) pay respect to gods of the City, they publicly implied their disrespect of Rome. It is likely that such was not officially recognized at first, though surely many people began to be informally ostracized. As conversions mounted, however, the increasing disrespect for Rome became problematic for the authorities.

Some Christians, for example, decided they had no military obligation. In fact, a significant number of people were exempting themselves altogether from civil authority. That, in itself, must have considerably boosted the appeal of the new religion, and it had to be stopped—thus the persecution. It was not because Rome feared God or hated Jews and Christians (for a while no distinction was made between them, all of them considered Jews)—she just wanted some respect (and obeisance) from her citizens. Increasing ordinances were increasingly disobeyed. A few executions and smatterings of torture seemed ineffective. In fact, conversions soared. Soon there were multiple Crucifixions and some folks were surrendered to the teeth of wild beasts or subjected to the agonies of ordeals that ought to have been unimaginable for human beings created in the image of God—until Nero was lighting his games with Christians on burning crosses. Even their chief Apostle, Peter, was crucified (upside down, history says, per his request).

Jehovah seemed not to mind these terrors. At least there was no observable retaliation—no deluge or instances of fire and brimstone. In fact, the Christians seemed to believe it was wrong to retaliate. At times persecutions would increase, then, savagery perhaps exhausted or the stench of accumulating corpses becoming unbearable, they would be interrupted only to surge again as the Empire continued its decline, its leaders seeking to blame hard times on other than their greed and corruption or their negligence and/or incompetence. At the height of its barbarism, old Rome outdid the Spanish Inquisition (which thought to redeem itself by its higher purpose: saving the immortal souls of the tortured). In the creativity of brutality Rome surpassed even the holocaust of the NAZIs, except in sheer number of deaths due to the latter's more modern technology.

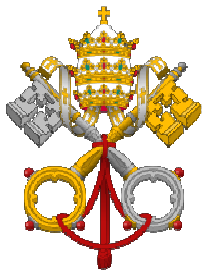
But why? Christians had not promoted the Mediterranean pirates; nor inflated the population with slaves, making it impossible for working classes to earn a living wage; nor had they encouraged the slaves in their several revolts; nor invited the barbarian hordes to pillage Italy, sacking even the city of Rome itself. The city must have been an incredible mess, then; so much so that, when the empire was eventually split in two,



Diocletian took for himself the eastern portion, thus escaping from Rome to establish a new capital in Byzantium. Even the western capital, in fact, was moved to Ravenna. And when the new emperor **Constantine** [272-337 A.D.]

took power in the east and reconnected the empire by re-conquering Rome, under a semi-Christian banner [*In hoc signo vinces*], he kept his capital in the east, founding Constantinople [330 A.D.]. Eventually, with Emperor Theodosius, a burgeoning Christianity overcame all earlier odds and was made the religion of the state.

Throughout the decaying empire, up to this point, the Christians had laid an effective administrative network of bishops, priests, and laity to solidify the church. The Bishop of Rome claimed the inheritance of the Martyred saint:



The Apostle Peter [1 B.C. to 67 A.D.]:

Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

[Matt.: xvi, 18]

Among those keys to heaven was apparently one that also managed to lock in place the western version of the Roman Empire. Those historians may not be quite correct who have claimed that Christianity was the downfall of the Empire. Still, “Rome died in giving birth to the Church; the Church matured by inheriting and accepting the responsibilities of Rome” [Durant: Caesar and Christ, XXVIII; p.619].

In feeding on the corpse of Rome, which they helped kill but did not destroy on their own, the scavenging barbarians devoured the tapeworm of Christianity: the parasite that would, gradually, over the next several centuries, weaken them, tame them, alter them. Then, having finally developed sufficient resistance to the exotic cocktail of infections: Epicurianism; Roman stoicism; Judaic monotheism; Christian communism; Ptolemaic mechanics; Lucretian atomism; barbarism; Augustinian bent Neoplatonism; eventually combined with the Thomas Aquinas version of Aristotle (Thomism), these twisted and mutated conceptual vines bloomed with renewed vigor—producing flowers of unanticipated beauty, radically new in color and character though the shape of their leaves revealed unmistakable evidence of Hellenic roots. But again, we’re getting ahead of our story. Before we can fully appreciate the development of those blossoms, we must return to our much too brief examination of the roots and branches.

In the east, at Constantinople, the Emperor chose the Patriarch of what would be known as the Eastern Orthodox or Byzantine Church. In the west, the Roman Catholic Church selected its popes and bishops. The great British historian, Arnold Toynbee, believed this difference to be critical in the long term development of the Western World

and Western mentality out of ancient Rome (in contradistinction to the ultimate failure and stagnation of the Byzantine Empire—even though the initial situation seemed clearly to favor the east). In the west, popes were not officially part of government. Papal rule was theological rather than political, though the bishops were increasingly utilized in administering justice. Toynbee points out the advantage the popes held in spreading Christianity via missionaries in advance of the spread of political control. Barbarians, not only those in Italy, but on the frontiers of the old empire and beyond, were free to accept the appealing new religion without placing themselves under the thumb of the political regime—coming, then, to see each other as brothers in Christ first, thus paving the way for later political association under kingdoms and the eventual formation of nation-states.

In the east, on the other hand, the patriarch was seen as a pawn of the emperor, and conversion to Christianity meant loss of autonomy as a tribe or loss of sovereignty (by their ruler) to the emperor. So the barbarian leaders themselves resisted the faith that would turn them from kings into vassals, and hindered as much as possible any Christian missionaries. When that became a lost cause, the king of the Bulgars finally joined the Eastern Church. But then, in order to prevent his *de facto* demotion to no more than a servant of the emperor; merely the governor of the territory of which he was formerly king, he made a move to become the emperor himself. Failing in that unlikely enterprise, he once again declared Bulgaria to be a separate entity, and named his own patriarch. Naturally that loss of what was so recently gained was now intolerable to the real emperor at Constantinople. He saw that it would be necessary to re-conquer the Bulgars. Thus, in bringing the rest of the Bulgars into the Christian fold, their king also brought death to a substantial number of them and the curse of senseless and ruthless warfare, all due to the church being fused to the would-be universal state.

[from Toynbee: A STUDY OF HISTORY, Ch.24.; Barnes & Noble; republished 1995, by permission of Oxford, © 1972]

Back in the west, in the late 4th century, from Carthage came a Manichee to Rome (Manichaeism: heretical Christian sect begun by Mani. Claiming to be the Paraclete or Holy Spirit appearing as the returned Jesus, he incorporated Zoroastrian dualism and claimed that man is born of Satan [as a tool, one supposes, to torment God], yet he has traces of divine light within). Once in Rome, influenced by Polybius, this newcomer switched faiths, to Neoplatonism (another heresy: from ‘The One’ emanates Divine Mind, from which is derived the World Soul, which contemplates and comprehends the visible world. Man, partaking of this soul, ideally attempts to rise up to merge with The One).

Augustine of Hippo [354-430]

Augustine finally confessed his failings (lustful libido and astrological leanings) to Ambrose, Bishop of Milan [Augustine: CONFESSIONS, 387-401 A.D.], and took to the ‘true’ (locally accepted) Way of Christ. Later, back in Africa, as Bishop of Hippo, he made himself one of Christianity’s great theologians, managing the amazing feat of hitching pagan philosophy to Christian theology, such that reason might become a tool of the Church instead of its enemy. In his important *DE CIVITATE DEI*, he proposed seeing the world as two cities: one Christian, based on theology and revelation (City of God); the other (the city of man) based on politics and reason—and possibly a place for philosophy.



The cities of man—i.e., kingdoms of the world—are only gigantic larcenies. He finds Rome only temporarily great as its motives were worldly and selfish. While Rome was ‘heroic,’ the “heroism of antiquity is eclipsed by Christ’s martyrdom”, so martyrdom replaces heroism in the Christian view. It is Augustine who is chiefly responsible for the disparagement of Rome, the hallmark of Christianity, at least until the Renaissance. He pointed out that philosophy has failed to find either ‘the good’ or even the best political regime, and that is because the city of man can never achieve the ideal state: the political philosopher’s unattainable goal. For one thing, philosophers are few. So, even if they were successful in discovering truth (and he admitted that a few pagan philosophers could come to know God without the Gospel, though they could not know salvation without the intercession of Christ), the multitude would never know ‘the good’; whereas, through Christian revelation, *all* men can come to know God.

The failure of classical political philosophy is not that it is irreligious, but that it has a false conception of the Divinity, which is revealed in polytheism. Therefore much of his *CITY OF GOD* is a critique of polytheism and mythology. Augustine saw pagan theology as tripartite:

- (1) The mystical aspect for the multitude, as sung by the poets suggesting means by which the deities can be manipulated for temporal advantage.
- (2) The natural or philosophical aspect or the theology of the wise, who had a more nearly true monotheistic notion of God. But that was inaccessible to the many so it could not be of benefit to society—and it was in fact restricted so that it might not corrupt their simpler beliefs.
- (3) The civil aspect, whereby the state describes what gods to worship and how, pretending concern for individual afterlife. Ideally, though the gods are false, the attempt is right, for it is concerned with the soul. But actually the state is only interested in orderly behavior of its citizens and slaves.

In any case, Augustine explained that the city of man is still necessary for providing the temporal needs of human societies, thus to promote, indirectly, the good of the soul. But Christians, by partaking also in the City of God, seek a higher truth, unattainable by reason or pagan philosophy and civil society.

That doesn’t mean (even should Christians manage somehow to make the idea of the City of God universal) that they will find lasting peace in an imperfect world. Many of the Church’s early thinkers did expect Christ’s kingdom to be an earthly one, lasting for a thousand years—until the Last Judgment—and that this peaceful earthly kingdom would come into being by the conversion of the whole world to Christ. But for Augustine the final City of God is a heavenly city, found only beyond the troubles of the world. The brotherhood of Christianity, then, is more like a *pre-city* of God: a preparation of the soul for the heavenly city—and the citizens are more like pilgrims. As far as the world is concerned, war and strife are inevitable. *The power of reason, however, is God-given, and therefore should not be denied simply because revelation is superior and provides a completely sufficient truth.* Philosophy, then, was not destroyed or even banned, but was to be used to attain higher understanding of what had been revealed. Not only that, it could be used as a defensive weapon, giving educated Christians the ability to defend themselves against heathen doubts as well as to contend on the pagans’ own ground for their conversion to the true faith.

“We are, perhaps, so ready”, says Daniel N. Robinson, “to note the Augustinian emphasis upon faith and upon forces of an utterly transcendental nature that we forget his central philosophical maxim: ‘Reason should be master in human life’. ... Augustine labored to know the truth and to free people through its power. This power was reason itself: that which separates not only man from beast, but the fool from the wise” [*from AN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF PSYCHOLOGY*, 3rd ed.; Univ. of Wisconsin, 1995; p.82; *from St. Augustine; ON FREE CHOICE OF THE WILL; Book I, ch.8 & 9; per BASIC WRITINGS OF ST. AUGUSTINE*, 2 vol.; Whitney Oates, ed.; Random House, NY, 1948]. This was a great and rare gift to the future: a strong ‘No!’ to book burning. Art and literature of the past (even though in part anathema) could be thus preserved as something of value—if carefully used and properly interpreted—instead of being eradicated as dangerous. Thus the Church confidently protected seeds of its own possible destruction. For this, alone, St. Augustine deserves not only his canonization but the honor of standing among the greatest heroes of Western civilization. By dominating philosophy, in accordance with Augustine’s teaching (and in keeping with its own doctrine of mercy and forgiveness), Christian theology kept reasoning alive: salvaged philosophy, albeit in weakened condition, and forwarded it through time to help establish the modern world.

The Church has never come close to universal agreement with Augustine on these ideas. Ambrose and Eusebius, and others who were Augustine’s contemporaries, considered that converting the whole world would be necessary in order to prepare the way for Christ’s return and the prophesied reign of world peace. But they were not convinced that saving philosophy from limbo would be helpful in that task. Some (heretics, of course, which were many and of varied sorts) even considered the Second Coming as a metaphor for world conversion: the bringing about of heaven on earth. “The basic cause of [Roman] cultural regression,” offers Will Durant, “was not Christianity but barbarism; not religion but war.” Still,

Christianity offered supernatural explanations for historical events, and thereby passively discouraged the investigation of natural causes; many of the advances made by Greek science through seven centuries were sacrificed to the cosmology and biology of Genesis.

.....
Not till wealth and pride should return in the Renaissance would reason reject faith, and abandon heaven for utopia. But if, thereafter, reason should fail, and science should find no answers, but should multiply knowledge and power without improving conscience or purpose; if all utopias should brutally collapse in the changeless abuse of the weak by the strong; then men would understand why once their ancestors, in the barbarism of those early Christian centuries, turned from science, knowledge, power, and pride, and took refuge for a thousand years in humble faith, hope, and charity.

[Durant: THE AGE OF FAITH, ch.III; pp.78-79]

Hand out copies of following chart.

Philosophy	Revelation	Revelation & Philosophy
<p>Ancient pagans, though they had their many gods, saw what we might call the One God as a force: remote intelligence behind motion; not exactly the Prime Mover, but the cause of all motion. The world is machine-like, but animated by God/Idea/Logos. Civil society invents justice and virtue and makes laws to coerce men to comply. Philosophy seeks true and eternal justice—primal justice, but it cannot prove what it finds, nor can it convince the non-philosophical, so eternal law has no power of compulsion. Gods and an afterlife are needed for that. Thus we have civil theology. The civil gods are a practical invention; a political device. The God of Motion or Spirit of the Universe is not involved in political things, nor does ‘He’ care about morals and men. Civil oversight of local worship puts politics over theology, and the cosmos becomes mechanical. God is thus remote, so the Hellenic concept of Universe understands that man is simply natural (not evil). Here we have a POLITICAL THEOLOGY</p>	<p>With Judaism, God is the Creator AND lawgiver. According to Old Testament, <i>Genesis</i>, God is both in the world and beyond it (immanent and remote) not only causing continuing motion and existence, but He now cares about his creation, including humanity (especially about a certain people with whom he makes a covenant). Disobedience is punished in the world, with bad fortune; disease; famine; even fire and brimstone, by a harsh & demanding but just God. The world then is a continual miracle, and humans, through the corruption of sin, have become a faulty part—separated through misbehavior made possible by God’s most precious gift of free will. God has not been happy, but is willing to try again with the Hebrews. For Jews, then, the law or ‘the way’ of things has been directly revealed, which makes philosophy unnecessary. While there is civil law, to govern daily life, it is based entirely on divine law as given directly to Moses, and through various prophets. Thus we have THEOLOGICAL POLITICS</p>	<p>With Jesus comes a new view of God as parental. Just, but also merciful and forgiving. Though he still can be wrathful, should he so choose, he generally remains apart from human affairs. He retains his reputation for justice, but he might be moved now and then by pity borne up by prayer and true confession. He has laid down the law in the Old Testament and (though he still expects obedience) rewards and punishments (with a few exceptions) are to be dished out in the afterlife, so the age of miracles has passed. Christianity accepts <i>Genesis</i> and original sin, but now Mankind is redeemable; forgiven through Christ’s sacrifice. The complicated and outmoded Divine Law of the Old Testament, if not eradicated, is at least simplified: the new demands being satisfied by the ‘golden rule’ plus a sincere love of God and belief in Jesus as the Redeemer. Humans thus occupy two realms: the civil (city of man), and the spiritual (city of God), thus making possible the (theoretical) SEPARATION OF POLITICS AND RELIGION</p>
<p>Natural unthinking cosmos (<i>God as a process</i>)</p>	<p>+ God of Genesis (<i>Man is important to world creator</i>)</p>	<p>= Anthropocentric Universe (<i>created by God for Man</i>)</p>

With philosophy came Hellenic science, likely including versions of Aristotle's concentric spheres: a geocentric system with heavenly orbs, but now being moved by the Will of God rather than pushed around by a brigade of celestial divinities. But since Diometian banished all philosophers (mostly Greek slaves) from Italy at the end of the 1st century, A.D., Ptolemy's cosmic mechanics, published in Alexandria and written in Greek, was probably little known at the end of the Roman Empire. During the difficult years of cultural decline, out of deference to sheer subsistence, it is likely little attention was paid to the workings of the cosmos or the question, 'What is reality?'—unless some lonely anchorite, between conceiving of ever deeper deprivations in his desert lair or perched in some crumbling ruin (some for years) atop a narrow column, might have been struck by the majesty of his demanding God's creation and might have utilized the otherwise empty and crawling passage of time to contemplate its subtle organization. Nor was the Ptolemaic planetary system debated in the West until the full blossoming of the medieval period. Though a summary in Latin was made by Boethius, early in the 6th century, the cosmic system, along with much of the science and wisdom of the classical age, was hoarded by a few scholars, taught selectively, and preserved in monasteries. Books were scarce and very few could read or write, even among ecclesiastics. Schools were rare and only a fortunate few benefited from private tutors. While *ALMAGEST* was translated into Arabic in the Middle East in 828, a complete Latin translation had to wait till the 12th century—and during all this time Lucretius was hardly mentioned.

The geocentric understanding blended so well with Old Testament *Genesis* that the Church would later defend it against the heliocentric geometry of Copernicus,' almost as if the Ptolemaic universe were part of scripture. The clergy was as adamant about geocentrism as the Greeks had been about keeping planetary orbits circular. But this was just *anthropocentrism*. Man, as the object of creation, simply *had* to be in the middle. Wasn't it for us that God made the world? Besides, the Church (always on the lookout for heresy) was generally wary of science and mathematics. Paradoxically, those most interested in how nature worked and the seductive mysteries of ancient philosophy—and even astrology—were ecclesiastics, as the clergy (or quasi-clergy), as a class, was by far the best educated. Or was it that the best educated became ecclesiastics to support and sustain a significantly elevated intellectual existence? Later, the better of the philosopher-theologians would attain fame and have fabulous public debates, with one another and with students, over what now seem absurd trivialities, often accusing each other of heresy. Sometimes the charges stuck. But, despite the West's descent into near-barbarism, the physical persecution of heretics did not begin in earnest until 1012 in Germany—and was generally driven more by the people (orthodox believers) than by the clergy.

What might cosmology have been like in the West between forgetting Eudoxus, Hipparchus, Archimedes, Eratosthenes, *et al* (including most of Hellenic cosmic mechanics) and the recovery of the apogee of ancient views: Ptolemy's *ALMAGEST*? It was probably something like that of earlier Rome, where few thought much about it at all. The Julian calendar continued in use; beyond that it may not have been thought necessary or even possible to know the how and why of such things—though astrology was not forgotten. Even Ptolemy did not pretend, for the most part, to understand the how and why of his complex system. It was only a working diagram for prediction of cosmic events; a hypothesis (or mixture of hypotheses, some of which he may have thought true) that 'saved the phenomena.' Zeno and Epicurus, though looking inward and emphasizing

self-control, had not dismissed nature or physics entirely from their philosophies. Still, despite Lucretius' extraordinary expression of Epicurean cosmology, it was the inner life and one's attitude whereby 'the good' was to be found. Contemporary with *De rerum naturae* was the much more influential approach of Epictetus.



Epictetus [55-135 A.D.]

“What do I care,” he asks pragmatically (in a preserved fragment, perhaps responding to Lucretius):

whether all things are composed of atoms, or of similar parts of fire and earth, for is it not enough to know the nature of the good and the evil, and the measures of the desires and the aversions, and also the movements toward things and from them; and using these as rules to administer the affairs of life, but not to trouble ourselves about the things above us? For these things are perhaps incomprehensible to the human mind: and if any man should even suppose them to be in the highest degree comprehensible, what then is the profit of them, if they are comprehended? And must we not say that those men have needless trouble who assign these things as necessary to the philosopher's discourse? . . .

[Epictetus: ENCHIRIDION (George Long, trans.); Dover, NY, 2004, p.56]

It is, he says, the ‘precept which is written at Delphi...Know thyself’, which is of prime importance to philosophy and to humanity.

The cosmos: the ‘whole’, for Christians, was God's province, and He looked after all the movements in the heavens and on Earth—except (debatable) the souls of men, which he had left free to sin or to imitate Jesus. It was not physics, but metaphysics that dominated Western minds for several hundred years. In fact, in light of the above discussion of God's constant involvement and omnipresence, there *was* no physics proper. *Everything* was metaphysical. During the western reign of Gothic emperors Odoacer and Theodoric a few educated men like Cassiodorus and Boethius attempted to revive classical education, re-instituting the *trivium* [grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric] and *quadrivium* [arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music] as subject matter, and tried to bridge the gap between pagans and Christians. After him, however, “until about the year 1000, the *quadrivium* was in eclipse and, of the *trivium*, grammar (which included what Latin literature could be found) and rhetoric were the primary disciplines.”

[PHILOSOPHY IN THE MIDDLE AGES, Arthur Hyman & James J Walsh, ed.; Hackett; Indianapolis, 1973]

What did they study and teach?

As far as mathematics and science were concerned, the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries of Western history “are singularly barren of interest;” says W.W. Rouse Ball, “and indeed it would be strange if we found science or mathematics studied by those who lived in a condition of perpetual war.” Furthermore, “the science usually taught was confined to the use of the abacus, the method of keeping accounts, and a knowledge of the rule by which the date of Easter could be determined (a vestige of the old lunar

calendar).” The monks, having renounced the world, were not interested in learning science, so “the traditions of Greek and Alexandrian learning gradually died away.” He *mentions* Boethius, Cassiodorus, and Isidorus as men who formed a “connecting link between classical and medieval times [since they wrote the text books that were used for several centuries in teaching the rare students who showed interest], but it should be understood that this is the only reason for doing so; they showed no special mathematical ability.”

[A SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE HISTORY OF MATHEMATICS (ch.IX); Dover, 1960]

While in prison, having fallen out of favor with powerful forces in the Senate, Boethius wrote his influential *De consolazione philosophiae*, the last known work of pagan philosophy, in 524—the date some historians cite as the end of ancient Rome. Others, such points being arbitrary, take that to be 526 with the death of Theodoric (or perhaps 476, when Odoacer took the throne as the first Goth emperor). The eastern empire was soon to surge to greater heights with the advent of Justinian (527-565).

As the western empire lost mastery over its provinces and struggled even to maintain stability in Italy, Christian influenced Gaul was relieved of the Roman burden and showed signs of a cultural development of its own. But all too soon barbarian hordes resumed their movements and interpenetrations. Gaul had been left in peace just long enough to lose its resistance to conquest, and Europe slipped into the Dark Age.

As the various tribes continued influencing or destroying or assimilating one another, the general effect across Europe was chaotic. Expectations of imminent warfare invariably overwhelm tendencies toward cultural progress. Though these were hard times for the conquered, the administrative web of the Church (with its priests and bishops, the growing number of monasteries, and the non-threatening aspect of the faith) encouraged some barbarian leaders (some already influenced by Christianity) to leave this peaceful religion in place and even to use its clergy to their advantage in controlling the newly conquered territory. In some cases, a barbarian leader’s respect for the wisdom of an educated bishop gave the church an advantage. In many cases, as the conquerors inevitably experienced their own internecine difficulties, they used the bishops as counselors, emissaries, or even as arbitrators. And often barbarian leaders were converted—if only tenuously—along with their followers. But it was hardly a climate in which one would expect new ideas to surface for measuring the volume of the moon or the distance to Venus or even whether angels were incorporeal and liable to violate the Pauli principle.

Some other dates in the interest of improving perspective:

Mohammed’s vision on Mt.Hira, 610 A.D. – Mohammed marries 10-year-old Aisha, daughter of Abu Bekr, 624, and begins to dictate the Koran, 625 – Arabs rediscover the library at Alexandria with its 300,000 scrolls in 640 and they destroy the book copying industry, and end the school and the center of Western culture (at least the Hellenic side). Islam pretty much replaces Zoroastrianism by 641 – the Byzantine fleet recaptures Alexandria in 646, but the Moslem fleet in turn destroys the Byzantine fleet at Lycia, 655 – Arabs attack in North Africa, 670; Arabs arrive at Indus River, 674; Arabs defeat Justinian II at Sebastopolis, 693; Arabs overrun Armenia, 694; Arabs destroy Carthage, 697; Arabs conquer Algiers, and Christianity in North Africa is practically exterminated by 700 [while Easter eggs come into use among Christians]; Arabs occupy Samarkand and learn to make paper; Seville conquered by Arabs; a Moslem state is

established in Sind [India], 712; Moslem empire extends from the Pyrenees to China by 715; Arabs conquer Lisbon, 716; Moslems settle in Sardinia and cross the Pyrenees into France, seizing Narbonne, 720; Arabs ravage southern France, 725; Charles “The Hammer” Martel defeats Arabs at the Battle of Tours and Poitiers to turn the tide.

Next session we will discuss this rise of the Arabs.

Hand out for assigned reading:

from *MEDIEVAL POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY: A Sourcebook*; Ralph Lerner & Muhsin Mahdi, ed.; Cornell, Ithaca NY, 1963:

Part I, ‘Political Philosophy in Islam’ (ch.9), **Ibn Tufayl** (d.1189): *Hayy the Son of Yaqzan* (condensed); pp.134-162; Geo. N. Atiyeh, trans.