

HUMA 3457 Gnosticism

Sept. 25: Religious Landscapes

Read for Today: Denzey Lewis ch. 3; Martin, *Myths of the Ancient Greeks* ([PDF](#)); Plato, excerpts from *The Republic* ([PDF](#)) and *Timaeus* ([PDF](#)); Plotinus, *Enneads* ([PDF](#)); Denzey Lewis ch. 4; Genesis 1-9; Mark 1; Acts 9:1-31; John 1; 1 Corinthians 1-3, 8-9, 12; 2 Corinthians 10-12; Colossians 2; 1 Timothy; 1 John (from the Bible).
Online Resources: is the Bible more gnostic than it appears? Read these two articles from the Gnostic Wisdom Network on Changes Made to the Bible to Make it Less Gnostic ([part 1](#); [part 2](#)).

A. Creation Stories

1. Genesis

- Hebrew epic narrative formed by the various peoples who populated the eastern Mediterranean land of Palestine; draws from and transforms stories of their neighbours
- the Pentateuch: the first five books of the Hebrew Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy); attributed to Moses
- “problems” in Genesis: multiple sources, anthropomorphism of God, dubious behaviour of God, polytheism?
- other notable features:
 - Seth (the *other* son of Adam and Eve)
 - *1 Enoch* (comp. 200-160 BCE) and *Jubilees* (comp. 160-140 BCE) on the “Watchers”
 - Noah and the Deluge

2. Greco-Roman Myths

- Homer (the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*) and Hesiod (*Theogony*) both ca. 8th c. BCE
- Bring stories of the Greek gods together and arrange them in a family of 12 Olympian gods—e.g., Zeus, (a sky god and thunder god), Poseidon (the ocean), Hades (the underworld), Hera (Earth), etc.
- much variety in the tales; no authoritative version; told more for entertainment than as scripture

3. Plato (429-347 BCE)

- born in Athens, student of Socrates
- Socrates believed in the existence of eternal and absolute rules for what was right or wrong; Plato expands this notion to look at both what was eternal and immutable in nature and what is eternal and immutable as regards morals and society
- the metaphor of the cave (from *the Republic*)
- in the *Republic* Plato sets out a division between two realms: the realm of ideas above and its poor imitation in the earthly world below
- more cosmogonic speculation in *Timaeus* (see diagram)

- Neo-Platonism rearticulates Plato's ideas in response to problems of Hellenistic Period: sought a solution to the problem of human destiny and salvation through a philosophical understanding of the universe
- Plotinus (204-70 CE) developed a 'mystical' or religious Platonism; composed the *Enneads*

4. Hellenistic Judaism

- Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE): passion to unite the Greek peoples against Persian power; spread Greek culture wherever he went (=Hellenization)
- interest in Hellenism in Judea: a gymnasium was built in Jerusalem, adopted Greek styles of dress and Greek names
- not all were happy with these changes; two results: apocalyptic literature (e.g., Daniel) and revolt (the Maccabean Revolt 167-164 BCE)
- 142 BCE all Judea back under Jewish control
- 63 BCE Rome takes possession of Judea
- 66-70 CE the Jewish War
- Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE-45CE); interested in reconciling Jewish traditions with Greco-Roman philosophy; composed *The Creation of the World*

B. Christian Origins

1. Jesus of Nazareth

- sources: canonical gospels (attributed to followers of Jesus; written ca. 70-100 CE), non-canonical gospels (also attributed to followers of Jesus and some could be as early as or earlier than the canonical), Roman historians (tell us more about early Christianity), Jewish writers (Josephus)
- "assured results" of scholarship:
 - birth before 4 BCE, likely in the small village of Nazareth in Galilee
 - association with apocalyptic preacher John the Baptist
 - parables as vehicles of teaching
 - arrest due to "temple tantrum"
 - crucifixion under Pontius Pilate on the charge of being "King of the Jews"
 - resurrection (?)

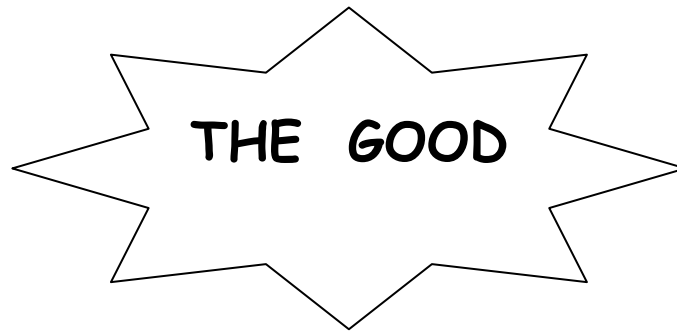
2. Gospels

- the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Luke, Mark) vs. John
- John's "Christology" (ch. 1)
- Mark's "Christology" (ch. 1); "docetism," "adoptionism"

3. Paul

- ardent missionary for Christianity but never met Jesus; responsible for Christianity becoming primarily Gentile
- sources: Acts and the "undisputed letters"; hints of diversity in the letters of Paul (1 Corinthians 1-3, 8-9, 12; 2 Corinthians 10-12; Colossians 2; 1 Timothy)
- the opponents of 1 John

Platonic Cosmogony

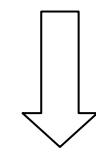
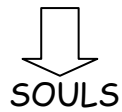
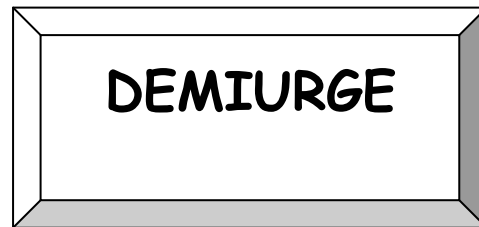


WORLD OF FORMS

* THE PARADEIGMA (MODEL) *

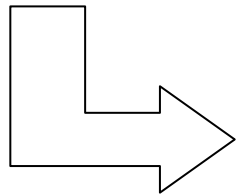
HEAVENLY WORLD

EARTHLY WORLD

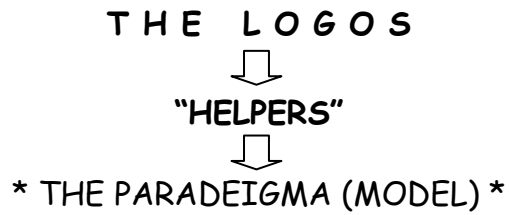
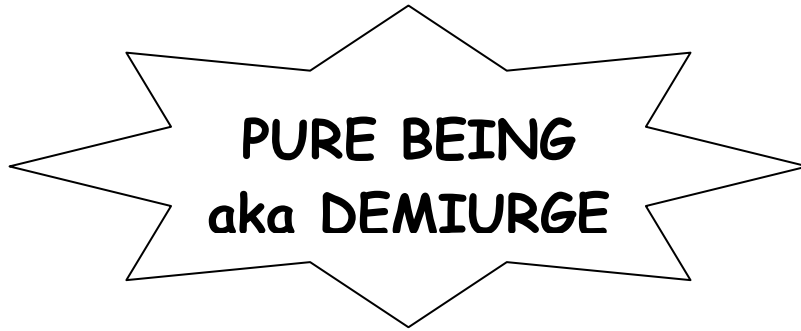


The Gods

The Spheres



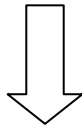
Philonic Cosmology



HEAVENLY WORLD

EARTHLY WORLD

Angels (Souls)



+ Bodies

