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- D. Polanyi and Austin

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Foreword

When the first volume of Professor Richard Gamble's projected trilogy *The Whole Counsel of God* was published in 2009, most readers would have shared my own twofold reaction.

First, and most importantly, it was impossible not to admire and commend the vision that gave birth to the project. The first volume, with its subtitle, *God's Mighty Acts in the Old Testament*, announced a program whose goal was to set forth the fullness of the Christian faith through the carefully crafted lenses of what we might call *trinoculars*.

Trinocular vision (to continue the coinage) views the faith of the church through three lenses: biblical theology, systematic theology, and historical theology. The genius of this perspective is that, in one sense, it is simply the extension of the prayer of the apostle Paul that the church "may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:18–19). Even if Paul's focus here is on one particular divine attribute, love, the burden of his prayer applies to all the divine attributes, to all the divine acts, and indeed to all that constitutes our theology.

Intuitively it is this massive apostolic prayer-vision that *The Whole Counsel of God* seeks to answer and fulfill, not least because it is a work that has been pursued in the fullest sense "with all the saints." Hence the first two volumes had their foundation in biblical theology and in the unfolding of the biblical account of the progress of revelation in God's mighty acts in history interpreted by his reliable Word.

But Dr. Gamble was not deceived into thinking that biblical theology as an account of the historical progression of revelation is the omega point of the theological enterprise. Indeed, despite the naive and un-self-critical perspectives of some "biblical" theologians, he recognized that as soon as we move from simply describing the prog-

ress of revelation from passage to passage and begin *to collate* and *to compare* and *to draw conclusions*, we have shifted gears from the historically descriptive to the normative by that process of internally coherent and logical deduction that is characteristic of system-thinking. In a word, we have already begun to do *systematic* theology.

What takes place in the hands of the systematic theologian, therefore, is but a development of the process already present in the work of the biblical theologian. The systematician simply extends the process a stage further. He seeks to utilize this biblical theology in a way that is sensitive to it and at the same time completes its trajectory by viewing the whole from the perspective of the completed canon of Scripture. The result is an exposition of the biblical message *as a whole*, in a logical and often topical fashion, and with an eye to communicating this message to the contemporary world. The responsibility to do this is already implicit in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18–20. That commission, given originally and directly to only eleven men, in itself necessitated both the writing of the New Testament (otherwise, how could eleven men reach all men and women?) and its translation into the languages of the nations (otherwise, how could the message be understood?). But it also necessitated the further task of interpreting and communicating the unchanging gospel to what Tate and Brady called "all the changing scenes of life." Only thus could the theology speak into the life situations of men and women and societies in different times and places.

If one thing is obvious, it is the demands that this task makes on the learning and intellectual facility of anyone who attempts the project. A theologian may have his areas of specialization, but the discipline of systematic theology as a whole calls for the generalist rather than the specialist. The breadth of learning required to expound one topic in a biblical-theological-systematic fashion is considerable; the ability to do this over the entire range of topics in the dogmatic encyclopedia is exceptional.

In volumes 1 and 2 of *The Whole Counsel of God*, Rick Gamble impressively pursued and fulfilled this goal. In and of itself, this would have earned him more plaudits than most of us might dream of amassing in a lifetime. But now in volume 3, as was promised from the beginning, he has gone a third mile.

To "comprehend with all the saints" means doing theology in concert with the church from Adam to the apostle John, from Genesis 1 through Revelation 22. But it also means engaging with the way in which the church of God has received the "*whole* counsel of God." In *written form*, that *whole* has been available to all the saints only since the ink dried on the final benediction of Revelation 22:21. And so to the exposition of biblical theology and the formulation of systematic theology in volumes 1 and 2, Dr. Gamble now comes in this culminating volume to an exposition of historical theology. He thus builds into his project the three lenses—biblical, systematic, historical—that help us to reflect on and to grasp "the breadth and length and height and depth" of the *whole* of "the whole counsel of God." In doing so, he alerts us to the enormous benefits that contemporary Christians have received from two thousand years of reflection on the revelation given to us in Scripture.

A knowledge of the history of theology is a major weakness of, but a great desideratum for, life in the contemporary church. George Santayana's aphorism is perhaps truer of the church today than at any other time since the Reformation, that "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it"—and, alas, especially its mistakes and missteps. This applies to both our theology and our practice, not least because the two are ultimately inseparable. This third volume, therefore, is not only a wonderful survey of the development of doctrine and the history of theology and theologians, but a work of enormous pastoral and practical usefulness as well as of strictly historical and theological value.

But I mentioned earlier a *twofold* reaction to the original announcement of this trilogy. If the first was *admiration*, the second came in the form of a question mark! Would Dr. Gamble have the fortitude, the perseverance, and the mental and physical energy to complete such a monumental project? One can only assume that the publishers were so keen to publish it that they refrained from asking, "Are you sure that you will live long enough to complete such a prodigious piece of work?" The compilation of the immense bibliography at the end of this volume alone must have constituted a daunting task; how much more the almost one thousand pages and nearly 500,000 words that precede it. One only has to reflect momentarily on the time and effort

required to read these volumes, far less research, think through, write, reread, check, and then proofread them, to realize what an achievement in diligence *The Whole Counsel of God* represents.

Now that the trilogy has reached the stage of a foreword being written for it, perhaps one may also be allowed a moment of personal privilege. My friendship with Rick Gamble began in the early 1980s, when we were young colleagues together at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. The publication now of his magnum opus reminds me of some words that issued from another friendship forged at the same seminary fifty years earlier. In writing his editorial preface to Professor John Murray's commentary *The Epistle to the Romans*, Ned B. Stonehouse wrote of his "sense of elation" at the publication of his colleague's work and his "enthusiastic appraisal of the author . . . as well as a warm affection for him personally." He also noted, "A measure of restraint must be observed, however, considering especially my intimate relationships with the author over a period of nearly thirty-five years."

I echo these sentiments and hope I act as the mouthpiece for many in expressing a deep sense of gratitude to the author for producing this library of theological learning. It is bound to stimulate, instruct, and challenge a whole range of readers—from Christians who are simply seeking to grow in their understanding of the faith to students and scholars seeking to further hone their theology. And with this sense of gratitude there is a corresponding thankfulness to God for giving Rick Gamble the strength and perseverance that have surely been needed to carry the burden and fulfill the vision that first launched *The Whole Counsel of God*.

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Introduction to *God's People in the Western World*

VOLUMES 1 AND 2 of this series endeavored to present the pearl of great price—the contents of the written Word of God, where God graciously disclosed himself to sinful men and women. The church has been entrusted with a precious gift in the Scriptures, the whole counsel of God.

This third volume traces the church's handling of this priceless pearl through two thousand years of unfolding history. This volume entertains two major goals. First, the hope is that readers will be confident that they have understood the development of theology in its context since the time of the canon's close. Second, with that knowledge, readers should feel equipped to defend and declare this precious theology in the midst of a hostile world.

To aid in the second goal, part of this volume's task is to demonstrate past ways in which theology declined, thereby resulting in a cry of warning to the church not to tread similar paths. All theologians are sinners living in a particular age and era and as thinkers are influenced by their own culture and context. The mark of an excellent theologian is one who can stand, to the best of his or her ability, above culture and judge that culture's thinking based on a biblical philosophy of reality.[1]

The earliest Christian apologists faced the problem of defending Christianity against external attacks while unconsciously operating under many of the same philosophical presuppositions as their opponents. Sadly, this problem is not limited to the early apologists.[2] "The

1. See Richard C. Gamble, *The Whole Counsel of God*, vol. 2, *The Full Revelation of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018) (*WCG2*), 949–80.

2. Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), 85: "The question for them was how thy could protect the deposit of faith against those who were real heretics while they were themselves so largely controlled in their thinking by false modes of thought."

Christian, as did Tertullian," said Van Til, "must contest the very principles of his opponent's position."[3] Proper Christian apologetics will always endeavor to stand above cultural presuppositions.

Contemporary theologians must develop a standard by which to judge past and present thinkers. The task of the theologian is to ascertain the depths of how the thinking and contributions of past theologians have been influenced by their cultural milieus. Did a theologian attempt to baptize paganism and maneuver it into Christian thought? Theologians are given the responsibility not merely to explain the past but also to weigh it on the scales of biblical fidelity. The church would benefit if Christians would remember that it is proper—even necessary—to make value judgments concerning theological faithfulness to the written Word of God. It is this author's hope that the exercise of moving from one generation to the next in an evaluation of past theology will better equip readers to critique their own culture and, more importantly, to present systematic theology in a fashion that is radically and refreshingly biblical.

Bridge Builders and Burners. Theologian Douglas Kelly implements a helpful model in analyzing theological method as it relates to non-Christian philosophy. He separates thinkers into two categories: *bridge builders*—those who in some measure seek to benefit from non-biblical philosophical models—and *bridge burners*—those who reject such non-biblical models.

While bridge builders of the early church affirmed that pagan philosophy was theologically insufficient, they still recognized glimmers of God's truth within these philosophical systems.[4] The early church still admired the thinking of pagans because they believed that even paganism contained the "seed of reason."

Then there were the bridge burners. These apologists presented Christianity as the only true philosophy—one that was set in deep and abiding competition with Greek thought. They viewed Greek speculative thinking as the chief enemy of Christian belief. The two worldviews stood as opposites. This group included men such as Irenaeus. He

3. Cornelius Van Til, as cited by Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings & Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1998), 730.

4. Douglas F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *The God Who Is the Holy Trinity* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2008), 188.

articulated the difference between Greek philosophical theories of the logos and the Christian understanding of the Logos by detailing how the philosophical usage had to be modified in the light of Scripture's teaching.[5] In his famous quotations, "What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" and "Away with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic, and Dialectic composition," Tertullian revealed his identity as a bridge burner.[6]

In continuity with the two previous volumes, this third volume includes a study of apologetics and sections of practical application as an integral component of the whole counsel of God. In reference to application, it is the author's deepest prayer that the reader, after having studied these three volumes, will be better equipped to proclaim the holy Word of God.

Biblical Theme. One of the prominent themes of the Bible involves understanding how God has painted the landscape of his developing kingdom throughout human history. The apostle John was pulled into the heavens and there saw a scroll.[7] The scroll was covered in writing both inside and out, but no one could read it. John wept over this sealed treasure. But the Lion of Judah and Lamb of God took and opened the scroll. In that scroll was the unfolding history of Christ's church.[8] It is the intention of this author that readers realize that the history of Christ's church is their history, and that it is brimming with value and insight.

The proper presentation of history, whether focusing on its intellectual or social aspects, requires a specific set of contents. To comprehend the life and contributions of a past theologian, the student must understand the historical, social, and intellectual context of that theologian's time, in addition to the doctrine that he presents.

5. Douglas F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, *The Beauty of Christ—A Trinitarian Vision* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2014), 206.

6. De praescriptione haereticorum 7, as cited by Kelly, *Systematic Theology*, 1:191.

7. Revelation 5:1–5: "Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?' And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. And one of the elders said to me, 'Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."

8. Thanks to colleague Dr. David Whitla for this insight. See on this theme his inaugural lecture, "Lord of History," in *RPTJ* 6, no. 2 (Spring 2020): 4–9.

Scope of the Volume. The introduction to the first volume, written now more than a decade ago, noted that all books are written within a specific historical, theological, and biographical context. The trajectory of this author's thinking has remained consistent with those first words all those years ago: this volume is written from the perspective of a Reformed Presbyterian minister. My years of teaching historical and systematic theology have concentrated exclusively on the Western church and her rich tradition; thus this book is limited to this perspective by both providence and necessity. The treatment of the Reformation, Scottish Presbyterianism, and twentieth-century American Presbyterianism will be more thorough than other topics if for no other reason than that these are pivotal and cherished sections of the church's story.

Other Texts. There are a number of reliable one-volume church histories.[9] There are also several dependable one-volume historical theologies.[10] John M. Frame wrote an excellent one-volume history of Western philosophy and theology.[11] In terms of historical method or type, his text is strong in intellectual history. It is the hope of this author that this third volume contains all the content and explanations

9. Williston Walker's *A History of the Christian Church* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1959) is the standard. It was revised and expanded in 1985. A more recent and popular text is Diarmaid MacCulloch's *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (New York: Viking, 2010). MacCulloch's work is written from a nonbelieving standpoint. John D. Woodbridge and Frank A. James III, have penned a biblically faithful two-volume work, *Church History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), complete with a video series.

10. A popular text was Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Historical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978). Much better is the more recent one by Greg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine—A Companion to Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011). Wayne Grudem and Gregg Allison determined that Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan: 1994) needed a companion volume of historical theology to parallel and supplement Grudem's work. Allison relied on abundant primary source quotations, sometimes with his own Latin translations, which was a great plus. While the book contains a helpful glossary of major church leaders, however, many names are simply mentioned in the text without giving context or even birth and death dates so as to relate the name and context of the cited theologian. For example, in the medieval section Allison cites William of Anidanis, John of Turecremata, Gerald of Bologna, William of Waterford, and Thomas Netter Waldensis, but the reader does not know when these men lived, what they did, or why they are worth mentioning. A Heinrich Totting von Oyta is cited, but his name, despite being interesting, does not appear in the glossary or even the index. For some strange reason, Allison's text has only three references to Peter Lombard but mentions countless little-known figures of much less importance.

11. John M. Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015) (*HWPT*).

found in church histories and historical theologies but also cradles the narrative in its vibrant historical setting.

Historical theology does not develop in a chronological, cultural, or social vacuum. While primary quotations are helpful, they are insufficient. A proper analysis of the development of doctrine requires a more robust presentation, which is the endeavor of this text. This author's goal consisted in being fair and charitable to the topic at hand, but at times this author could not or did not deem it beneficial to restrain his position in the shadows.[12]

The method of *The Whole Counsel of God* volumes 1–3 reflects in some fashion the method of the great Scottish Free Church systematician James Buchanan of Edinburgh. Buchanan's definitive book *Justification* began analysis with the OT, moved to the NT, then to the ancient church and scholastics, proceeded to the Reformation, the Roman church after the Reformation, and then developed the doctrine to his own day.[13] In many ways, this series has been organized according this work and others like it.

The Whole Counsel of God volume 3 endeavors to provide historical and systematic analysis within the doctrine's historical background. For those preparing for ministerial exams, chapters 3, 7, 10, and 15 summarize historical theology in the patristic, medieval, and Reformational periods. Chapter 23 summarizes modern theology.

12. For example, Allison acknowledges that the ancient and medieval churches held to infant baptism—but given his own theological commitments he laments their choice.

13. James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification: An Outline of Its History in the Church and of Its Exposition from Scripture* (1984; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991). Carl R. Trueman wrote a helpful historical background for that work: "A Tract for the Times: James Buchanan's *The Doctrine of Justification in Historical and Theological Context*," in *The Faith Once Delivered*, ed. Anthony Selvagio (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 33–42.

Abbreviations

CCSL 50a	Rita Beyers et al., eds., *Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina*, 226 vols. (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1953–)
CVT	John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1995)
ECT	Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium
ET	English Translation
HWPT	John M. Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015)
Institutes	John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960)
IST	Cornelius Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007)
LCC	Library of Christian Classics
LXX	Septuagint
NIV	New International Version
NT	New Testament
OPC	Orthodox Presbyterian Church
OT	Old Testament
RD	Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006)
RPTJ	*Reformed Presbyterian Theological Journal*
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith
WCF	*Westminster Confession of Faith* (Atlanta: Committee for Christian Education and Publications, Presbyterian Church in America, 1986); published together with the Westminster Larger Catechism (WLC), the Westminster Shorter Catechism (WSC), and proof texts

WCG1	Richard C. Gamble, *The Whole Counsel of God*, vol. 1, *God's Mighty Acts in the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009)
WCG2	Richard C. Gamble, *The Whole Counsel of God*, vol. 2, *The Full Revelation of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018)
WCG3	Richard C. Gamble, *The Whole Counsel of God*, vol. 3, *God's People in the Western World* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2021)
WLC	Westminster Larger Catechism
WSC	Westminster Shorter Catechism
WS–C	Westminster Seminary California
WTJ	*Westminster Theological Journal*

Part 1

The Church under the Cross

1

Philosophical Backgrounds and Persecution of the Church

At the end of the first century, Christianity was a geographically and numerically limited movement. Yet by the year A.D. 350, it had grown from its small beginnings to constitute more than 50 percent of the population. By the time of Emperor Charlemagne's reign in the eighth century, Christianity permeated Western Europe.

Early Christian thought did not develop in a vacuum. Two cultural phenomena in particular heavily shaped and informed the church's nascent theology: Greek philosophy and the reality of persecution. Christian thinkers were steeped in Greek thought, so it is impossible to understand their formulation of theology without at least a cursory examination of pagan philosophy. And while the church battled the encroachment of philosophy, she also faced the terror of the sword at the hands of the authorities. This era was one of heresy and persecution, of abdication and corruption; but in the midst of this darkness, Christ was upholding and maturing his bride, the church.

The reader will be rewarded by a careful examination of this chapter because Greek thought was influential throughout the early church period and into the Middle Ages. Even today, various mutations of ancient philosophical ideas permeate our society. As believers, we are called to be able to give an account for our hope to those around us, so there is great value in deeply studying the history of pagan thought to be the most effective we can be in our calling.

MILESIAN THINKING

General Characteristics of the Group. Philosophy asks questions about who we are, how we got here, and the nature of the world around us. In general, the Milesian thinkers attempted to find an underlying unity amid the great diversity of life. Their search for unity was a quest for understanding the world, a desire to present a cohesive account of the seeming randomness of life. The question of how human beings understand things forces the philosopher to address the problem of "the one and the many." This question is not limited to ancient Greek thinking—it is just as important today. To understand the entire universe, which is "the many," the philosopher reduces the world's complexity to some type of unity, known as "the one." Earliest Greek philosophical thought conceived some type of "beginning principle" to explain that unity. The task of the beginning principle was to provide an explanation of the efficient cause of all things, and from that principle the notion of "time" could begin. The questions that the earliest thinkers asked were important. They wanted to determine what was fundamental to reality, from where that reality arose, and how the universe arrived at its present state.[1]

Milesian thought was exemplified by Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes, three philosophers from the Ionian town of Miletus. They believed that the universe consisted of four elements: earth, air, fire, and water. They wanted to find out which of these four was the most basic, the one element that constituted and explained the universe. They accounted for the reality around them based on the assumption of a single, living, corporeal substance or "stuff." The Milesians argued that this stuff of the universe was everlasting. It had no beginning. The world around them—nature—filled all space. Nature itself, in its vast expanse, was the source of all worlds.

The Milesians used the theory of *hylozoism*, from *hylo*, meaning "matter," and *zoism*, meaning "life," to explain the phenomena of motion by arguing that all matter was alive.[2] With this theory, the

1. John M. Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015) (*HWPT*), 52.

2. Gordon H. Clark, *Thales to Dewey: A History of Philosophy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), 14. For information on hylozoism, see Eduard Zeller, *Outlines of the History of Greek*

Milesians began what we term a scientific rather than religious attitude toward all nature. They interpreted the phenomenon of nature as something that had a natural rather than a supernatural cause. In other words, the Milesians were not satisfied with the notion of a god moving the stars in massive chariots.[3]

Thales (624–546 B.C.).[4] Thales was one of the three main philosophers associated with the Milesian school. He was the first person to predict the solar eclipse that occurred in 585 B.C. While such a prediction is a common practice today, it was quite remarkable for his time. Even more important than the actual prediction was the method Thales used to produce this prediction. Long before Thales's time, data had been gathered concerning the stars and various events related to them. What Thales did was to gather those various pieces of information into an organized system and, based on that system, establish the ability to project laws. Some textbooks call the result of Thales's work the birth of philosophy because he reduced the multiplicity of information into a unity.

Thales applied his method of reducing multiplicity into unity not only to the stars but also to everything in life. He asked whether the vast diversity of life could come from one eternal, elemental "stuff." Thales thought that there was, in fact, an elemental stuff. For him, "the one" of "the one and the many" was water. Thales could understand the whole universe through the lens of this one elemental stuff. He was convinced that the earth floats on top of water. To verify that fact, he thought, all one needed to do was dig a well—eventually the digger would find water.[5] For Thales, the air was evaporated water, and the earth was hardened water.[6]

While water may be a naive choice for the one unifying principle, that choice is understandable based on Thales's limited information.

Philosophy (New York: Meridian Books, 1960), 43. See also Francis Nigel Lee, *A Christian Introduction to the History of Philosophy* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1969), 74. This theory "regarded all living beings as having evolved from lifeless being, and even attempted to reduce all being to one materialistic essence in which the Greek matter motive dominated the Greek form motive."

3. See Seymour G. Martin, *A History of Philosophy* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1941), 12–14.

4. See G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 74–98.

5. Zeller, *Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy*, 42.

6. Lee, *Christian Introduction to Philosophy*, 74.

Before quantum theory, chemists taught that ninety-four elements made up the entire world. Now students are told that the universe is composed of some type of energy or field of force. We now know that water is not the correct answer to the question of what makes the universe—but is a more modern concept of *energy* necessarily a better option?

Thales's notion was not far off from reality. In fact, the human body is made up mostly of water. Specifically, "life" is found in the liquid blood of humanity. There is also more water covering the earth than there is land. And a relationship between water and fire is found in lightning storms. By means of evaporation, water can transform into air. Furthermore, water is "alive" and can animate all things. So for Thales, all things were alive because they were animated by water—even things that we would today call inanimate.[7]

While based on experience in some sense, Thales's proposal that water was the basic element of the universe went beyond sensory experience alone. His theory represented an example of extreme rationalism, a use of reason that exceeded its limits. It can thus legitimately be criticized from within: for instance, if all is water, then are the gods water? If even the gods are water, they must be controlled by water and thus not truly be gods. Is the human mind also water?[8]

Anaximander (610–545 B.C.).[9] Philosophy is a record of the next generation of thinkers' interacting with their predecessors. Anaximander, one of Thales's followers, was unsatisfied with Thales's explanation that water was the single element or material cause of the universe. Water could not provide the answer to the question of the one and the many for one simple reason: water extinguishes fire and cannot possibly create it.

To improve on the thinking of his teacher, Anaximander posited an element that he called the *boundless*, also known as the *unlimited* or the *infinite*, as the single source.[10] This element perhaps meant

7. Clark, *Thales to Dewey*, 9; Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977), 25.

8. *HWPT*, 54.

9. Kirk and Raven, *Presocratic Philosophers*, 99–142.

10. Clark, *Thales to Dewey*, 11: "To him water seemed to be on a level with earth, air, and fire: these are all the results of natural processes, the developed things and not the source from which things come. The source cannot be any one of them, but must somehow contain them or at least contain the qualities from which they can be developed."

"unlimited space" or some infinite quality that had no beginning or end. The boundless had no qualitatives, such as wetness or heat, but it contained all the basic qualities.

Ultimately Thales was wrong, according to Anaximander, and for one simple reason—Thales was incoherent. Thales's propositions did not "stick together"—he admitted that all consisted of water but also acknowledged the existence of fire, water's antithesis. For Anaximander, the proof for truth was systematic coherence or internal coherence.[11]

Yet despite this incoherence, Anaximander's own system could not prove that it was impossible for all to come from water because no necessarily evident deduction demonstrates that water is *not* the source of all things. So it was left to Anaximander's follower Anaximenes to improve on his theory about how to answer the problem of the one and the many.

Anaximenes (d. 528 B.C.).[12] Anaximenes thought it was unreasonable to assert some type of unperceived "boundless." He was convinced that there had to be an empirical or seeable substance. If the substance was not water, why should it not be air?[13] If someone dies, it is not because water has left him, but rather because air has left him; a person can have water in him, but if he does not have breath, he is dead. Anaximenes was convinced that there was a connection between temperature and a body's density, and he was the first to posit that the moon derived its light from the sun.[14]

Criticism of the Milesians. The Milesian school held to the philosophical presupposition that the source and origin for all reality was some type of corporeal or physical unity, whether water or the boundless. Later philosophy would assert the idea of an incorporeal unity to explain the origin of all things. Yet positing either an incorporeal unity or a corporeal unity excludes the idea of a creating God. Of course, Thales and his followers talked about "gods," but we do not

11. Edward J. Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 107.

12. Kirk and Raven, *Presocratic Philosophers*, 143–62; Lee, *Christian Introduction to Philosophy*, 74: "Anaximenes, however, was a partial universalist (who distinguished a human microcosm as well as a cosmic macrocosm); and Anaximander was in fact an objectivist (who sought the cosmic laws objectively outside the things subjected to those laws)."

13. Clark, *Thales to Dewey*, 12.

14. Zeller, *Outlines*, 46.

see evidence of interaction between the Milesian understanding of the origin of the universe and the Hebraic and biblical notion of an almighty, personal God's creation of the universe.

Inherent in the Milesian conception, and necessary to it, was an inability to account for the peculiarities of the world around us. The Milesians made sense of "being" in their abstract yet somehow corporeal universal notion that could not be further divided for comprehension.[15]

Their concept of the origin of all things was intellectually possible, for they thought of it! Nevertheless, there can be no *proof* for the actual existence of such a universal concept. No one can actually know, or demonstrate to someone else, that there is any type of "primordial origin."

There is an important and fundamental error in their conception. While philosophers may have conceived such an eternal mover or ultimate being, their notion confused the relationship between the thought or conception of the "stuff" and the "being" of that stuff. In other words, thinking about something does not mean that it exists. For example, one can read about unicorns in a novel and, while reading the book, can see the unicorns running and jumping with the mind's eye. Yet unicorns do not exist in reality.[16] More specifically, differentiating between what can be conceived in the mind and the physical reality of that notion is proved from the study of geometry, which was beginning at that time.[17]

Philosophical presuppositions are foundational to all thinking, and the early Greeks' attempt to explain the world's origin, based on their false premise of a corporeal universal—one thing—was inherently doomed to failure. It could not adequately explain the world around them. Through time, thinkers realized the inadequacy of Milesian

15. Herman Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 41–42: "all the peculiarities which actuality presents to our view have been eliminated, and nothing is left except the notion of universal, abstract being, which is not capable of any further definition."

16. Wouldn't it be wonderful if by imagining we had money in the bank, that conception became reality?

17. Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 41–42: "In geometry points are conceived as occupying no space, but it does not follow that such points can exist anywhere objectively in the real world. Real space and real time are always finite, but this does not prevent the attribution to them in thought of infinite extension and duration."

thought and attempted to tackle the big philosophical questions of being and existence in their own way.

The Eleatics and Heraclitus

Xenophanes of Colophon (d. 475 B.C.). Born before 590 B.C., Xenophanes was a contemporary of the mathematician Pythagoras.[18] While some historians dismiss him as more a poet than a philosopher, he wrestled with the philosophical problems of the one and the many, the nature of being and becoming, and rest and motion.[19]

Xenophanes contributed to what we would now term a philosophy of religion.[20] He attacked the Greek poets' propensity to anthropomorphize the gods. The Greek poets ascribed to the gods all mortal sins, such as lying and stealing, and fashioned the gods after their own image.[21] Xenophanes, on the other hand, understood "god" to be an unchangeable being bearing no resemblance to human nature. Xenophanes's one god was his universal, unchanging unity that made sense of the plurality of the world. And for him, there was an inseparable connection between this unchangeable being and the world around us. This thinking made him one of the earliest pantheists.[22]

Xenophanes was important because he gave abstract thinking preference to unreliable sensory experience. He was one of the earliest persons to argue that one could not have certain knowledge about anything, only true belief, which must be supported by reason and conviction.[23] His views comprised an important precursor to modern ideas of skepticism and agnosticism.

Heraclitus (ca. 530–472 B.C.).[24] Moving away geographically but not far in terms of ideas or time is Heraclitus, who lived in Ephesus. Because he saw philosophy as a distinct discipline, some say that he

18. Kirk and Raven, *Presocratic Philosophers*, 163–81.

19. Martin, *History of Philosophy*, 18, 20. Xenophanes noted that the black-skinned god of the Africans and the white-skinned god of the Thracians indicated that the "true god" must be quite different. See also Lee, *Christian Introduction to Philosophy*, 76.

20. Zeller, *Outlines*, 59.

21. Martin, *History of Philosophy*, 19.

22. But from monism, how can a person account for multiplicity?

23. Zeller, *Outlines*, 59–60.

24. Ibid., 60; Martin, *History of Philosophy*, 31; Clark, *Thales to Dewey*, 17.

was the first philosopher.[25] Heraclitus wrote a work titled *Concerning Nature*, from which fragments are found in other writers. Like Xenophanes, he was critical of contemporary polytheism.

Heraclitus's philosophical starting point was the observation of nature. He thought that nature was a uniform whole that neither came into being nor would ever pass away. He rejected water, as well as air, as the one basic reality. He identified fire as the basic material stuff of the universe, the single original element.[26] Perhaps he chose fire because it was the swiftest of the elements and could help him explain the origin of motion and change.[27] Heraclitus held that motion was necessary for the world itself, and fire, since it is necessarily dynamic, was the embodiment of motion.[28] When fire stops changing, it stops being fire.

Heraclitus held that all things in the world change constantly.[29] There was, according to him, a repeating cosmic cycle. Everything, everywhere, must change—he even believed that a new sun was created every day.[30] For him, if something appeared to be permanent, that appearance was merely an illusion.

One of his most famous statements was, "You cannot step twice into the same river." On a first hearing, the phrase does not seem to make sense—we normally think of a river as something that remains, something that does not change. If you fish, perhaps you enjoy a fishing hole that your father showed you and his father showed him. The river is the "same" for you as it was for your grandfather decades ago. But Heraclitus was correct when he said that the river had changed. The water in which your grandfather fished is no longer there. Furthermore, you are a different person when you step into the river for a second time. You are, at the very least, older than you were even moments ago.

When analyzing Heraclitus's views, one discovers an epistemological problem with his claim that everything is in flux. If everything

25. Martin, *History of Philosophy*, 31.

26. Ibid., 35–37.

27. Clark, *Thales to Dewey*, 17.

28. Martin, *History of Philosophy*, 36. It is the very "incarnation" of change.

29. Zeller, *Outlines*, 61. See also Martin, *History of Philosophy*, 33–35.

30. Martin, *History of Philosophy*, 33; J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: Black, 1977), 121: Heraclitus's universal monad "comprised in itself mutually contradictory qualities, being at once divisible and indivisible, created and uncreated, mortal and immortal."

changes, then how can something receive a name? For example, if there were an animal standing in front of me, it could be named a "lion." But if that (hypothetical) animal is changing, then it is no longer a lion today in the same sense that it was a lion yesterday. Since the lion that is in front of me today will not be the same lion tomorrow, how can people know the nature of "lionness"? What will "it" change into tomorrow? Will the lion stop being carnivorous and suddenly want to eat a peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich? Ultimately with this type of thinking, nothing can be named or truly known.

When a person says that something exists, that person usually thinks the existent object is real and is not in a great state of change. Modeling clay can be manipulated into different shapes, but throughout the process the various shapes remain clay. If the clay itself changed when it was molded into various shapes—for instance, from clay to glass to water to gold—and it continued to change constantly, we would not say that the material is clay.

What kind of material constantly changes? The answer is that it must be nothing—it cannot be real. If all things are always changing, and thus unreal, there is nothing to be known, nothing to be named.

Heraclitus was aware of his massive epistemological problem and attempted to solve it. He saw the conflict of opposite forces swirling about the world—forces such as life and death, hot and cold—as working in some type of balance. It was clearly an uneven balance, he thought, for if it were perfectly even, then everything in the visible world would be "frozen."[31]

According to Heraclitus, for a person to possess knowledge, knowledge must somehow be correlated to the immutable or unchanging. But if everything is constantly changing, what is immutable? The answer is change itself. Change is the one thing, or law, that does not change. The constant is the uneven flow of change. This flow is best exemplified in the patterns of day and night, the four seasons, and human waking and sleeping.

To use another example, Heraclitus might say that the cup of coffee on your desk is different now from what it was when you started to read about Heraclitus. It has been in flux. But it did not turn into

31. Martin, *History of Philosophy*, 37.

prune juice. It is still coffee, although now it is cold because it took you so long to read through this section on Heraclitus. Your coffee's reduction in temperature is part of the nature of the change. It is in flux, but there are boundaries beyond which the coffee will not change.

Heraclitus's law of "imperfect balance" has been called by later philosophers the "doctrine of nature's rhythm."[32] This statement is the first articulation of what today we call a *natural law*.[33] Heraclitus considered this constant, uneven change in the world to be both natural and just.[34] He confirmed the presence and fusion of opposites as "normal."[35] In a sense, the normal was paradoxical. There was an identity of opposites.[36]

As believers thinking through Heraclitus's teaching, we know that God, the possessor of all wisdom, had Adam name the animals. God himself guaranteed that the apex of his creation had epistemological certainty, not flux. To have knowledge—and this is perhaps the most important aspect of Western philosophical thought for the Christian—it must be a correlate of the immutable or unchanging.

Parmenides (540–470 B.C.).[37] Parmenides is considered by many historians to be the greatest thinker before Socrates. Most of his work dates to around 475 B.C.[38] He was convinced that there was a unity within the universe. If the world is rational, there should be a rational explanation of it.

The views of Parmenides represented an antithesis to Heraclitus's philosophy, and he criticized previous philosophers for what he believed were their nonsensical ideas.[39] He asserted that Thales's notion that

32. Ibid., 38–39. Martin speculates that Heraclitus held to a rhythm that included many worlds.

33. Ibid., 39.

34. Ibid., 40–41.

35. Although not given by Heraclitus, an example of this type of strife could be the interaction between a horse and rider. The rider wants to harness the horse's power. He wants to control the horse's strength for his own needs. Yet the horse yearns to be free. This situation is one of "natural" conflict. In time, however, the horse learns that the rider will give him a sweet apple after riding, and it is "worth" it to the horse to give up his freedom temporarily.

36. Ibid., 42: "This fusion of opposites is the deepest paradox of the conception of Nature as a process. Heraclitus . . . at least made this notable advance in perceiving that the real import of change lies in this paradox of the identity of opposites."

37. Ibid., 46–51.

38. Clark, *Thales to Dewey*, 26.

39. Zeller, *Outlines*, 65. Parmenides stood against Heraclitus's notion of eternal flux (see Lee, *Christian Introduction to Philosophy*, 76).

the principal substance was water and Heraclitus's thought that the principal element was fire were both wrong. Water and fire cancel each other out; they cannot coexist, so both Thales and Heraclitus were misguided.

Parmenides simply denied the existence of change.[40] Change cannot be real—it must be an illusion. Something cannot change from being to nonbeing; therefore, nonbeing does not exist. But Parmenides's worldview is also removed from common sense.

Concluding that the world of flux was illusory, Parmenides turned to a different philosophical starting point. For him, only that which is eternal and changeless, that is, the realm of coherent truth, is what is truly real.

Parmenides was convinced that polytheism was intellectually stupid. Basically, Greek polytheists thought of their gods as powerful human beings who were born and who could die. Parmenides said that anyone who asserted that the gods were born must necessarily claim that they will die. And to assert that the gods were born is to assert that there was a time when the gods did not exist.[41]

The notions of change or becoming that were so important to earlier thinkers were to him a mere illusion.[42] Being could not have had a beginning, for being was unchangeable, immovable, and indestructible. If at any time it was nonbeing, then it necessarily had a beginning. Being was timeless, simple, and perfect. It was identical with thought.[43]

For Parmenides, this being was an infinitely extended sphere, a solid, impenetrable atom. Parmenides's concept of being as one and infinite, a sphere, would be picked up by later thinkers and called the One with a capital *O*. In the Christian period, the One will be postulated as an alternative to our God.

40. John M. Frame, "Greeks Bearing Gifts," in *Revolutions in Worldview: Understanding the Flow of Western Thought*, ed. W. Andrew Hoffecker (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 10.

41. See Reginald E. Allen, ed., *Greek Philosophy, Thales to Aristotle* (New York: Free Press, 1991).

42. Clark, *Thales to Dewey*, 26; Zeller, *Outlines*, 65.

43. Cornelius Van Til, *Who Do You Say That I Am*? (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1975), 68: "All reality was one changeless block of being, he had committed his individuality to a similar complete fusion with fate, and when Heraclitus had alleged all to be flux, he had consigned his individuality to a similarly total blending with chance."

Atomists. Some Greek thinkers went beyond the early arguments of the pre-Socratics. They did not hold to one fundamental element of the universe; instead, they thought it was composed of many elements. The atomists (adherents of atomism) held that the universe consisted of countless numbers of indivisible and constantly moving atoms. But these atoms were not the cause of motion.[44]

Epicurus (341–270 B.C.) held that the atoms had weight and fell in a cosmic parallel line "down."[45] Sometimes in their descent they would swerve, however. That swerving caused objects to form. That the atoms in the human body also sometimes swerved accounted for human free choice. The indeterminacy of the atoms was then supposedly the basis for human moral responsibility.[46]

Epicurus is known for his innovations in ethics. He connected moral responsibility with human freedom from causal compulsion. While this idea is philosophically respectable, the random swerving of atoms in a person's body certainly does not make that person's acts morally responsible. In fact, it should be argued that since the person does not cause the atoms to swerve, he should not be considered responsible for the consequences of the swerving.

Epicurus is better known for his ethic that people should avoid pain and seek the absence of pain, called *pleasure*. This philosophy is called *hedonism*. The most pleasurable life, he thought, is that of quiet contemplation.

Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans[47]

This important philosophical school located in southern Italy represented a change in Greek thinking.[48] The Pythagoreans were dualists instead of monists and were scientific but had religious interests as

44. Frame, "Greeks Bearing Gifts," 12, 14.

45. *WCG* 2:952–54, 975–76, 980, 1010.

46. *HWPT*, 57–58.

47. P. Merlan, "Greek Philosophy from Plato to Plotinus," in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 84–106. Besides the authentic writings of Moderatus, Nicomachus, and Numenius, the Pythagorean corpus includes anonymous and spurious works. See also Frame, "Greeks Bearing Gifts," 14.

48. Zeller, *Outlines*, 47.

well. The technical term *philosophy*, as a longing for wisdom, seems to have been first used by this group.[49]

Pythagoras of Croton (572–500 B.C.). Pythagoras was a historical contemporary of Anaximenes.[50] While we do not know much about him, we can surmise that he landed in about 530 B.C. in western Greece and founded his school in southern Italy—at Croton, which was already well known for its medical learning. We know three things about Pythagoras: he held to the transmigration of souls, or reincarnation, he pursued science, and he founded a society that had ethical and religious principles.[51]

The School and Its Teachers. Members of Pythagoras's group were perhaps influenced by the poet Homer and the mystery religions or Orphic teaching.[52] They wanted to enter the divine state of bliss.[53] To accomplish their goal, they followed a strict code of morality that denied any excess and sensuality. They did not eat meat, and they promoted the study of music and medicine.[54] Supposedly, medicine purged the body and music purged the soul.[55] They invented number theory and the study of geometry because math, for them, was the ultimate reality. Pythagoras himself developed what is known as the Pythagorean Theorem.[56] For the Pythagoreans, mathematics became the key to cosmology itself.[57] In the end, the Pythagoreans were persecuted for their beliefs and expelled from Italy.[58]

49. Martin, *History of Philosophy*, 23–24: thinkers in this school embodied the "Pythagorean envisagement of the 'lover of wisdom' as a 'spectator' at the game of life, whose very contemplative detachment from the active struggle liberates and purifies his soul." This statement is similar to what Aristotle will say later.

50. Zeller, *Outlines*, 47. Even though two biographies were written about him and Aristotle wrote *On the Pythagoreans*, the best sources of information probably come from his critics Xenophanes and Heraclitus.

51. Martin, *History of Philosophy*, 20.

52. Ibid., 21. They agreed with the Orphics that the soul is in a "prison house" when located in the body. Frame, "Greeks Bearing Gifts," 14: "our souls are divine because they are rational; so salvation comes through knowledge."

53. Clark, *Thales to Dewey*, 22.

54. Zeller, *Outlines*, 49.

55. Martin, *History of Philosophy*, 22: "The most effective means of purifying man's soul is the cultivation and exercise of the intellect in the pursuit of knowledge and science."

56. The square of the hypotenuse of a right triangle is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides.

57. Clark, *Thales to Dewey*, 24.

58. Martin, *History of Philosophy*, 29.

Conclusion. Concluding our analysis of earliest Greek thought, we see that Greek isolation from the God of the Bible led the Greeks to promote an understanding of the world that contained no reference to a creator in their cosmology, morality, or ethics. They had no notion of reducing the vast complexity of the universe to an almighty and personal God's creative act.[59] The concept of a sovereign *ex nihilo* ("out of nothing") creation was simply foreign to them. They had never thought of such an idea. A proper system of ethics requires a vertical referent, a divine lawgiver, but earliest Greek ethical thought demonstrated its sad isolation from biblical thinking.[60] We will now turn our attention to some well-known names in Greek thinking.

Socrates of Athens (469–399 b.c.) and the Sophists

A hallmark of a great philosopher is the challenging of epistemological assumptions of the day. Such intellectual challenging produces shifts in patterns of thought. Socrates was one of those great philosophers.[61] But he did more than simply challenge the past—he provided paths to the future that anticipated many of the great forthcoming movements.[62]

Starting Point. The ancient temple of Apollo in Delphi has an inscription that reads, "Know Thyself." Socrates understood that admonition as an instruction to know the nature of the inner self. He thought that an unexamined life is not worth living and that when someone carefully examines himself, he finds that his own nature provides his guide for morality and so that he knows right from wrong. The knowledge of the self is, for Socrates, true wisdom.

Socrates took as his philosophical starting point his own perceived epistemological inabilities. He professed that he knew little, and his claim actually made him wiser than those who thought that they knew

59. Clark, *Thales to Dewey*, 14.

60. Martin, *History of Philosophy*, 80; Clark, *Thales to Dewey*, 57.

61. See A. E. Taylor, *Socrates* (New York: Appleton, 1933).

62. Greg L. Bahnsen, "The Reformation of Christian Apologetics," in *Foundations of Christian Scholarship*, ed. Gary North (Vallecito, CA: Ross House, 1979), 195. Socrates is credited with foreshadowing the spirit of the Renaissance, Kant's emphasis on epistemic subjectivity, the modern spirit of autonomy, idealism, pragmatism, existentialism, and even linguistic analysis!

a lot![63] Specifically, Socrates held that the human intellect was virtuous and that, in fact, no man knowingly does evil.[64] His method was to convince his interlocutor that though he thought he knew something, he did not. Socrates's mission was to convince people of their ignorance and to show that knowledge was possible. His notion of philosophy was the common search for an ideal of knowledge that had not yet been attained. We can summarize his philosophical contributions as promoting an attitude of mind or humility and the assumption that no one does wrong willingly—or stated another way, vice comes from ignorance.[65]

Socrates wanted to present a religious apologetic because he thought of himself as divinely commissioned to raise questions and challenge the philosophers in Athens. In fact, Socrates literally based his life on this supposedly divine commission by choosing to drink the cup of death instead of enduring exile.[66] Philosophy for him was not an academic pursuit but much more—it was a way of life, even a means of salvation for the purified soul from perpetual reincarnations.[67]

Philosophical Method. When Socrates wanted to define an idea or a principle, for example, the concept of *virtue*, he would gather as much information on the topic as was then possible. One of the ways in which he assembled his information was through a question-and-answer style of inquiry, which supposedly helped the inquirer gain clear thinking. When a person comes to know something, thought Socrates, he is in fact simply recollecting something that he knew previously.[68] Eventually his approach became known as the Socratic method.

Socrates also used induction and general definition. By using induction, he moved from the many to the one. He also tried to see general principles that stemmed from the many. In other words, he believed the

63. Lee, *Christian Introduction to Philosophy*, 82.

64. Bahnsen, "Reformation of Christian Apologetics," 198.

65. Frame, "Greeks Bearing Gifts," 16–17. Socrates refuted the rationalism of the Sophists or showed that it is self-refuting.

66. See Socrates's *Apology* 30a, as cited by Bahnsen, "Reformation of Christian Apologetics," 196.

67. Bahnsen, "Reformation of Christian Apologetics," 197–200; 198: "All of life and every thought had to be brought under obedience to the lordship of man's reason."

68. Ibid., 199.

use of induction led to providing a general or single definition.[69] The general definition was the "form" of something—its essential nature.[70]

***Nous* as Foundational for Knowledge.** At the root of the world was what Socrates termed a *nous*. The philosopher's task is to contemplate this *nous*, or "knowledge." When the philosopher could somehow "capture" this true *nous*, a divine power from the *nous* would come within the thinker, enlighten his human soul, and keep it from evil.[71] Thus there is a spark of divine wisdom in each mind or soul.[72] In other words, Socrates believed that the temporal was mixed with the eternal in man himself.[73]

He was convinced that sensory perception is an inadequate source of knowledge. Sensory perception is in flux, as Heraclitus had earlier taught. Thus to know something combines the static, which is human judgment, and the changing, which is sensory perception. Also, true knowledge, according to Socrates, requires the knower to give the grounds for the answer. Mere opinion, without knowing the grounds for the opinion, is not knowledge.[74] Perhaps at this point a Christian student could object that being forced to take tests is a syncretistic accommodation to foreign philosophy!

Sophists. Sweeping changes confronted Greek culture in the fifth century B.C.[75] There were conflicts within Greece and hostility against the Persians. King Cyrus the Great led his powerful Persian Empire and was succeeded by King Darius. Athens aided the Greek cities in Asia Minor when they revolted, unsuccessfully, against Darius. Darius then determined to punish Athens, and as the story goes, the Greeks around Athens rallied together and defeated the Persians. That victory was good for Athens, but the city-states that supported Athens now found themselves under strenuous Athenian power. Those oppressed by Athens appealed to Sparta, Athens's enemy, for aid against Athens. A long struggle ensued—the Peloponnesian War, which ended with

69. Frame, "Greeks Bearing Gifts," 17.
70. Bahnsen, "Reformation of Christian Apologetics," 199.
71. Lee, *Christian Introduction to Philosophy*, 82–83.
72. Bahnsen, "Reformation of Christian Apologetics," 197.
73. Ibid., 198. This view is the beginning of the religion of "immanent reason."
74. Ibid., 199–200.
75. Thomas H. Greer, *A Brief History of the Western World*, 4th ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 39.

Athens's defeat in 404 B.C. This conflict brought social, political, and economic disruption and drove philosophical thought into creative directions. Philosophers were no longer solely concerned with the structure of the natural world but turned their attention to human nature and society.[76]

One of the important changes in Greek society concerned the nature and theory of law. Law seemed to change rapidly and almost arbitrarily with the rotation of forceful leaders and the shifting desires of an evolving society. Philosophers noticed this phenomenon and began to ask, "If law is arbitrary, then why does it need to be obeyed?" and "Are laws sacred and immovable, or simply grounded in the whims of society and rulers?" In this crisis, a group of educators established themselves in Greece to meet the needs of the time. They were called the Sophists, from the Greek word meaning "wisdom," because they considered themselves to be wise men. These educators taught in a manner that was much different from that of earlier teachers—and they instructed in a "new virtue." That new virtue stressed social effectiveness and an integrated personality.[77] They saw that life was to be lived and that philosophers and thinkers had to be "practical" people.

Protagoras, a contemporary of Socrates, was a Sophist who was famous for holding that "man is the measure of all things."[78] By this statement, Protagoras apparently meant that the only standard or criterion for truth is the perception(s) of each individual.[79]

Plato of Athens (427–347 B.C.)

Plato was a student of Socrates, and he critiqued the Sophists.[80] Philosophers quip that the history of philosophy is a series of footnotes

76. Clark, *Thales to Dewey*, 46–48; Frame, "Greeks Bearing Gifts," 15.

77. That statement is also a nice way of saying that they taught their students all the dirty political tricks that were necessary for them to survive in politics during those trying days.

78. Lee, *Christian Introduction to Philosophy*, 80. This phrase means that man is not a cold, bare intellect but has an active, living will. Life is a matter of willing a goal, and wisdom is measured by the standard of success. See also Clark, *Thales to Dewey*, 49.

79. Carnell, *Christian Apologetics*, 35: "For Protagoras, then, knowledge *is* sensation."

80. *CVT*, 234: "Plato was able to show that their skepticism was itself a dogmatic assertion, offered as a sure, universal truth. Others, like Parmenides, sought to understand everything in terms of timeless logic, but he needed to resort to mythology to explain the 'illusions' that did

to Plato. He and Aristotle are counted as the two greatest minds in Western philosophical history.[81]

Two Worlds. Plato knew that the world of senses and feelings can deceive a person. Our eyes can be deceived by an illusion, and our heart can be broken when we wrongly think that someone loves us who does not. Thus what is truly real is that which does not fool us. This "real" world is the world of ideas. The world of sense is real, but it is not the *most* real world. The world of ideas cannot be known by the senses; it must be known through contemplation by the mind.

One of Plato's writings was titled *Symposium*. In this dialogue, a certain woman was permitted to come back to the earth from the world of Hades because of deeds she performed. From this story, it would seem that eternal life on earth is one of the highest rewards one could receive. But although eternal life on earth, according to the Greek mind, would be the best imaginable fate for the average person, apparently there was an even higher reality—immortality itself.

In *Symposium*, there even appears to be a type of person or a group of persons who were in their own nature immortal. Of course for Plato, the philosophers are those special people. For them, living a life continually on the earth would be no reward at all, but rather a punishment. Even while they live on the earth, they have their eyes held high to the beauty of beauty itself. The philosopher desires to be united with the beauty and truth he sees while he is on the earth, though he does not see them as clearly as he could.

Plato's great philosophical contribution was teaching that two very different worlds exist.[82] Thereby, he was able to unite some of Parmenides's thinking, namely, that being is changeless, and Heraclitus's notion that elements are in constant change.[83]

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not cohere with his rationalistic worldview. The irrationalistic Sophists were also rationalists; the rationalistic Parmenides was also an irrationalist."

81. Frame, "Greeks Bearing Gifts," in "*Revolutions in Worldview: Understanding the Flow of Western Thought*, ed. W. Andrew Hoffecker (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 18.

82. Martin noted that the theory of forms is also integral to understanding certain conceptions in the writings of both Augustine and Aquinas. See Martin, *History of Philosophy*, 106.

83. Douglas F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *The God Who Is the Holy Trinity* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2008), 38–39: Plato attempted "to establish a realist epistemology (i.e., how knowing is related to being). Against the nominalistic (i.e., 'names' or words do not take one to objective reality) Sophists and against the relativism that ensues from the constant 'flux' of Heraclitus." See also Frame, "Greeks Bearing Gifts," 18.

One of Plato's two worlds is that in which objects can be seen, smelled, and tasted. Plato described that world or reality as the "sensible" world, the "changeable" world, the "material" world, or the "visible" world. If you and I were to take a walk in a colorful, fragrant rose garden, we would behold beauty. But Plato's idea of beauty has a referent beyond this part or piece of beauty, namely, the *idea* of beauty. The rose and its beauty are concrete abstractions of this real beauty and not nearly as beautiful as beauty itself. The rose is just a shadow of the real beauty.

A major characteristic of the visible world is that it is in a state of becoming. Since the world is becoming, following earlier Greek thought, it was considered to be nonbeing and not strictly knowable.[84] This present, sensible world is an imperfect copy of yet another world.

The second sphere is one that cannot be seen. This world is the real world, not the earth where we live. This other world is invisible, in contrast to the material world. The invisible world is a place of pure ideas, known as *forms*. This world contains the prototypes of the objects seen in the sensible world and is called "the ideal sphere," "the intelligible world," "the invisible world," "the world of forms," "the world of pure ideas," and "the form world."[85] Perhaps Plato borrowed parts of this notion from Pythagorean thinking.[86] While this form world is invisible, it can nevertheless somehow be known. To know this place is the philosophical goal of all human life.

Sadly, according to Plato, most people wrongly think that the changeable or sensible world is the real world. But instead, it is the place of nonbeing, the world of becoming. The sensible world is modeled on the form world, and the forms make it possible to know their visible imitation.[87]

84. Frame, "Greeks Bearing Gifts," 20.

85. Merlan, "Greek Philosophy," 20: "When Plato says that the ideas are truly being, he always implies that they are changeless (unmoved)."

86. The *Euthyphro* was the first dialogue in which the Greek words *idea* and *eidos* (both meaning "to see") appear. Geometric *pattern*, or *figure*, was apparently an important concept in the origin of these words. David Ross (*Plato's Theory of Ideas* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1951], 14) says that there are differing judgments on the subject. The words mean "visible form" to C. M. Gillespie, and according to H. C. Belding, "as a principle of Plato's metaphysic they are a fusion of Socrates's construction concerning moral values with the Pythagorean teaching of number patterns."

87. Frame, "Greeks Bearing Gifts," 19.

Creation by the Artificer. In the *Timaeus*, Plato proposed that a semipowerful god, called the *artificer* or *demiurge*, decided to create a world.[88] This god, using a model of animated being found in preexisting chaos, formed the realm of existing matter into particular instances of the eternal prototypes.[89] From looking at animated being, the artificer made an image of it; the image was then called *space* or the *receptacle*. For this created world to be both intelligent and animated, it required a cosmic soul—it needed a soul simply to exist. The artificer built the world from the preexisting chaos and then apparently wrapped the cosmic soul around it.[90] Plato's creative proposal was an advance over the thoughts of previous philosophers.[91]

World of Forms as Answer to "One and Many" Problem. Plato wrote a number of early dialogues, each one of which asked questions about abstract concepts—for example, about temperance, courage, piety, and beauty.[92] Plato thought that the questions about the concepts implied that only a single "thing" was represented by each of the abstract qualities or concepts. For example, the many human experiences of the concept of equality must relate to one universal concept.

This single thing that each abstract quality or concept represents was termed the *form* of the thing. The forms are the universal, invisible, unchanging ideas behind the changing realities that exist on earth. The beauty of a rose communicates its beauty whether it is a yellow or a red rose, since it corresponds to the unchanging form of what the essence of beauty is. Plato's forms constituted "the one" in the problem of "the one and the many."[93] There was an ultimate and supreme "Form of the Good," which was the highest form. It was also termed the *nous*, the "mind"—a word that had already been used by Socrates.[94]

88. Ibid.: The demiurge "is subordinate to the Forms and limited by the nature of the matter."

89. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings & Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1983), 18n111.

90. Merlan, "Greek Philosophy," 23.

91. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 18n111.

92. Some of those minor Socratic dialogues are the *Charmides, Laches*, and *Hippias Major*. For more information, see A. E. Taylor, *Plato*, *The Man and His Work* (London: Methuen, 1955), 23–102.

93. Frame, "Greeks Bearing Gifts," 18.

94. Merlan, "Greek Philosophy," 20. There are five fundamental qualities of the ideas: being, movement, rest, identity, and diversity.

Plato's concept of the forms appeared in his later and more famous writing, *Phaedo*. He posed the question, "What put the idea of 'just' or 'equal' in the human mind? When someone picks up two sticks, he observes that the sticks can be equal but are never perfectly equal. The sticks, due to their imperfection, cannot give the examiners the mathematical notion of equality, that is, perfect or absolute equality. Plato therefore proposed that the ideas of "just" and "equal," which were never actually observed in life, were *suggested* to us by the apparent equality of the two sticks. The person knows, by seeing inequality, that a true equality exists in the universal form of equality.

In *Phaedo*, Plato writes Socrates's words and proposes that sensory experience has reminded people of things that were not "sensibly" experienced from the beginning of human life. No one has experienced perfect equality between two supposedly equal sticks; therefore, understanding these abstract concepts must be immediately acquired at birth (the most likely option) or come from before birth. This type of knowledge is actually not something learned at school but is rather a recollection of the notion of equality that arrived in the person's mind before birth.[95] If abstract notions or forms such as equality existed somewhere before a person's birth and the person learned them before birth, then his soul also existed, was intelligent, and was able to learn before his birth.[96]

People recollect the forms in two ways. The first way is by resemblances. A picture of someone is a resemblance of the person photographed. So as one grows and lives life, he or she is reminded of the forms as their resemblances are observed on earth. The second way is by contiguity or the association of an object with the object's owner.[97] For example, when I see a professor's briefcase on a table, I associate that briefcase with the professor.

95. *Phaedo* in Plato, *The Trial and Death of Socrates: Being the Euthyphron, Apology, Crito, and Phaedo of Plato*, trans. F. J. Church (London: Macmillan, 1927), 139: "Socrates said: 'It [recollection] cannot have been after we were born men.' Simmias replied, 'No, certainly not.' Socrates asked, 'then it was before?' 'Yes.'"

96. Taylor, *Plato*, 188. Taylor insists that the theory does justice to the dictum that "precepts without concepts are blind, concepts without precepts are empty." Martin, *History of Philosophy*, 102: "The analysis of these physical theories in the *Phaedo* conspires with the refutation of epistemological theories in the *Theatetus* to prove the need of supersensible realities." Some scholars hold that the theory of anamnesis found in *Phaedo* is intimately connected to knowledge of the forms. See Ross, *Plato's Theory*.

97. Ross, *Plato's Theory*, 22.

It is not difficult to be critical of Plato's notion of the world of forms. First, Plato had no ground to say that the form world is more real than the sensible world. He simply assumed that there were degrees of reality. Plato admitted that he could not solve this problem.[98] Second, the forms cannot provide an account for the diversity of qualities in the sensible world. For example, there is no form of imperfection because the forms are, by definition, perfection. Thus the form world cannot account for this experience in the sensible world.[99] Third, the forms themselves require explanation. Neither that which is imperfect or imperfection as a category, nor change, both of which are observable in the visible world, need a rational explanation that is not found in the world of forms. Thus the visible world is somehow unnatural or irrational.[100]

Form of the Good. The "Form of the Good" is represented in Plato's *Symposium* as "the goal of the pilgrimage of the philosophic lover."[101] There is a relationship between the forms and the Form of the Good. Neither the forms in themselves nor knowledge of the forms can be identified with the unique Form of the Good,[102] which is the form that allows the thinker to realize the other forms. The other forms ultimately derive from the Form of the Good.

The Form of the Good is called the "significance of being," which implies that the forms are causally dependent on the Form of the Good. The forms are dependent on the Form of the Good because they are partial expressions of a unity that is found in the total economy of the Form of the Good.[103]

Some scholars say that the relationship between the forms and the Form of the Good is similar to the relationship between the genus and the species. The species come before the genus and are understandable only in reference to the species.[104] The Form of the Good is the

98. Frame, "Greeks Bearing Gifts," 23.

99. Ibid., 22.

100. Ibid., 23: "He is rationalistic about the forms and irrationalistic about the sense-world. For him, reason is totally competent to understand the forms but not competent to make sense of the changing world of experience. Yet he tries to analyze the changing world by means of changeless forms—an irrational world by a rationalistic principle."

101. Taylor, *Plato*, 287.

102. Robert E. Cushman, *Therapeia: Plato's Conception of Philosophy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1958).

103. Ibid., 152.

104. Ibid.

cause of being in respect to the forms, namely, as the cause of their intelligibility.

One problem with the Form of the Good is that it transcends the empirical world. Thus every predicate concerning the Form of the Good properly belonged to some of its effects, not actually to the Form of the Good. The philosopher could make a connection with the Form of the Good only analogically. That analogy was certainly not an exact duplicate of the Form of the Good itself. Philosophers' knowledge of the details of the universe adds to and enriches their concepts of the source of reality, that is, the Form of the Good, yet they can never comprehend that source itself.[105]

Plato's "god," or demiurge, was the self-moving principle of the universe. Some famous secular philosophers have wrongly identified *Phaedo*'s Form of the Good with the God of Christianity.[106] They have done so because Socrates shows that the distinction between existence and essence falls away in the Form of the Good. In fact, Socrates maintained that the Form of the Good cannot properly be called one of the forms since it transcends even the forms themselves.[107]

Perhaps Socrates and Plato were not fully aware of the significance of their own thought when they spoke of a god or demiurge. This god was on a lower level of reality than the more ultimate Form of the Good. Socrates's and Plato's conception of theism perhaps became necessary because, though they did not explicitly say so, they were still haunted by a feeling that the good was, after all, some type of value or something essential, and it needed an intermediate link to connect it with the hierarchy of realities or existents.[108]

Types of Human Knowing. Plato made a number of assumptions to account for epistemology. He granted that there was a world of

105. Taylor, *Plato*, 354–58.

106. Ibid., 191–92: "The ideal of Socrates (from the *Phaedo*) and the Christian ideal are fundamentally identical." Ibid., 289: "Thus, metaphysically the Form of Good is what Christian philosophy has meant by God, and nothing else."

107. Merlan, "Greek Philosophy," 32–34.

108. Taylor, *Plato*, 289. Others firmly disagree with this position and argue that there is no warrant for identifying the demiurge with any of the forms. Theism became part of Plato's philosophy at a later period than the time of the composition of the *Republic*. Certainly it depends on what one means by the word *theism*. Merlan ("Greek Philosophy," 32) said: "from the beginning to the end of Plato's literary activity, the world of gods plays a prominent role in very many of his dialogues." Demonology also played an important role (see ibid., 33–35).

ideas, an artificer or demiurge, as well as a time-space "receptacle."[109] He also held that knowledge did not come primarily from the human senses. Knowledge came via the rational ability to go beyond sensory experience and find truth.[110]

According to Plato, there is opinion, and there is knowledge. Opinion has two parts, as does knowledge. Humans have information, which comes from sensory perception and imagination. That information is conjecture because it is the experience of the particulars, which are only partly real because they are necessarily constantly changing. Since time and space are changing, opinions that are based on sensory experience alone are therefore imperfect and do not qualify as true knowledge. Better than conjecture is belief, which distinguishes between the images of the objects and the actual objects.

It is the human soul that enables a person supposedly to know the unseen world of pure ideas. The soul somehow knows that world by remembering it, since the soul existed eternally in the pure world of ideas before it was imprisoned in the human body at birth.[111]

Thus human knowledge is actually remembering what was previously learned in the form world. This epistemological theory supposedly accounts, for example, for how a slave boy with no formal education can know about the complicated nature of a perfect triangle.[112] Such knowledge did not come from the boy's sensory experience or formal education, so it must be prenatal.

True knowledge first consists in understanding, which comes when the thinker sees this world's "things" as instances of general concepts.[113] Pure knowledge can only be of the ideal, the fully real. It is the fourth stage of the intuitive vision of the forms.[114] Such knowledge can be stated without qualification. Those knowable objects, which are real, are stable, universal. They are not known through sensory experience. This type of knowledge is innate, recollected, or intuited from before the soul was imprisoned in the body. The particulars of this sensory

109. Carnell, *Christian Apologetics*, 95.

110. Frame, "Greeks Bearing Gifts," 18.

111. Plato's *Theaetetus* discusses epistemology. See Martin, *History of Philosophy*, 98–100.

112. Plato used the slave boy as an illustration in *The Meno* (see Martin, *History of Philosophy*, 81).

113. Frame, "Greeks Bearing Gifts," 20.

114. Ibid.

world participate in the idea of which they are an instance—like different actors participate by playing a role in a stage play. Finally, the notion of heavenly ideas, as propounded by Plato, stands in opposition to the Heraclitean doctrine of universal flux insofar as such ideas are "non-sensible" things not subject to change.[115]

Plato's teaching has an application for apologetics. For Plato, the ever-changing world of Heraclitus produced intellectual terror. Plato sought something stable on which to build his philosophical ideas—if everything was in flux, the only way forward was intellectual suicide, since there could be no certainty of anything. Plato found stability in his understanding of the forms. But Plato hit on something that is true and useful: unless one can find intellectual certainty, there is little hope in life. The Christian apologist can push this point with the unbeliever—does the unbeliever believe that there is something that is absolutely certain in this life? If he answers affirmatively, then the apologist can ask why the unbeliever believes what he believes. What is his intellectual foundation? Maybe he has certainty because of science or because of his parents or simply because he has had a specific experience on which he is basing his thoughts. But none of these answers provides an adequate foundation. Science and parents and experience can be false! If the unbeliever answers that he believes that all is in flux, that there is no certainty, then no language is meaningful. A word could mean one thing at one moment and at the next moment mean something completely opposite.

Body and Soul. Plato's doctrine of the soul set the standard for Greek thought on the matter. Drawing some points from his predecessors Thales and Heraclitus, both of whom held to the high importance of corporeality—they made little distinction between the soul that is in humanity and the soul of the universe. In other words, there is little distinction between the body/soul's relationship to the corporeal universe. In Christian thought, a soul can exist separately from the body—but that idea was not a primary emphasis in Greek thought.

Phaedo forwards a formal argument for the immortality of the soul. The argument runs this way: That which is always in motion

115. Ross, *Plato's Theory*, 19. Plato nuanced his view of knowledge when he discussed beautiful objects in the *Phaedrus*. While controlled by the intellect, the passions also contribute (Frame, "Greeks Bearing Gifts," 20). Sadly, the object discussed is the (sexual) beauty of a boy.

is immortal. That which moves itself, the source of all motion, cannot come into being. That source of all motion is imperishable. That which moves itself is immortal—it is the soul. The soul, therefore, is immortal.[116] By being self-moved, the soul is the source of all motion.[117] The human soul, which is the intellect, is the self-mover of man.[118]

In *Phaedo*, Socrates said that one had to be prepared for life after death.[119] There is perhaps a connection, almost a parallel, between this pagan doctrine and the biblical doctrine of heaven and hell. Plato taught that when someone was purified, he was permitted to dwell with god, and if someone was not purified, he must lie in the mire of hell.

Plato believed in the reincarnation of immortal souls that had a prior intelligent existence.[120] Only very few people in society fit this category—primarily the philosophers. For Plato, not every soul is actually immortal. What is immortal is the thing that Plato calls the "all-soul." In comparison to the soul, the body is relatively unimportant.[121] The most important parts of human life are the pursuit of philosophy and the activities of the soul.[122]

Ethical Life. Plato's major interest was not abstract metaphysics or complicated epistemology but rather instruction on how to live well, including his ethics and political theory.[123] Part of the reason for that interest came from Plato's living in a time of political turmoil. He wanted to develop an ideal civil society based on the Socratic principle of inwardness.[124]

116. Taylor, *Plato*, 183–85. See Merlan, "Greek Philosophy," 28–29.

117. Merlan, "Greek Philosophy," 25–26.

118. Lee, *Christian Introduction to Philosophy*, 84. Frame ("Greeks Bearing Gifts," 20–21) mentions that Plato divided the soul into the appetitive, the spirited, and the rational.

119. Socrates, *Phaedo*, 150: "True virtue in reality is a kind of purifying from all these things; and temperance and justice and courage and wisdom itself are the purification. Whosoever comes to Hades uninitiated and profane will be in the mire, while he that has been purified and initiated shall dwell with the gods."

120. See Frame, "Greeks Bearing Gifts," 20.

121. Socrates (*Phaedo*, 29) stated: "the soul and the body are united, and nature ordains the one to be a slave and to be ruled, and the other to be a master and to rule."

122. Lee, *Christian Introduction to Philosophy*, 85. Lee criticized Plato's "theology." His god was not the God of the Bible. His god was not even personal. The "other world" was opposed to this (material) world. His views, through his followers Aristotle and Aquinas, "have so often paralyzed some Christians from living lives fully relevant to Christ this side of the grave."

123. Frame, "Greeks Bearing Gifts," 21.

124. Van Til, *Who Do You Say That I Am?*, 67.

His doctrine of the state was connected to his anthropology. He believed that there was a hierarchy of human beings. For example, peasants, he thought, were governed by what he termed the *appetitive soul*, soldiers were governed by the spirited soul, and rulers were governed by the highest soul—the rational soul. Thus the best type of ruler or king would be a "philosopher-king."

The best state would be a totalitarian one, run by philosophers, in which the upper class would share their women communally and the rulers would raise the children. Art would not play an important role because it is necessarily only shadowy conjecture.[125] It is in the political state that humanity supposedly reaches its highest expression. The state is the highest form of human development, and all should be subject to it.[126]

Plato's ethics were founded on an incorrect notion of right and wrong. He argued that wrong is always done out of ignorance. When someone knows what is right, he will do it.[127] If Plato is correct on that point, then the world has been covered in ignorance for millennia!

In summary, Plato was one of the most influential thinkers of all time. His ideas shaped human thought for centuries, and they still do. His forms were an attempt to find unity and meaning in a chaotic world. Many theologians find Plato's philosophy useful and have tried to integrate it with a biblical understanding of the world as they, too, have sought answers to the problem of the one and the many. But as we will continue to see throughout the centuries of church history, attempting to synthesize and integrate a biblical worldview with pagan philosophy will always end up distorting the biblical message.

Aristotle (384–322 b.c.)

Introduction. Plato's philosophy was important for the theological development of the early church until around A.D. 600. Then Aristotle became paramount in the Middle Ages. Aristotle's philosophy is still

125. Frame, "Greeks Bearing Gifts," 21.
126. Lee, *Christian Introduction to Philosophy*, 87.
127. Frame, "Greeks Bearing Gifts," 21.

dominant in Catholicism today and in some sectors of Protestant Christianity.

Aristotle was born a physician's son near the border of Macedonia in northern Greece in a city known as Stagira. He made his way to Athens and was a student of Plato at the Academy. Aristotle spent about twenty years there and then with Xenocrates established his own, more scientifically oriented school, the Lyceum. Aristotle was appointed tutor to the son of King Philip of Macedonia—Alexander, who would later conquer the known world and be designated Alexander the Great.

Aristotle apparently agreed with Plato for a time, but there was a clear break between the two great thinkers by the year 353 B.C. Aristotle believed that philosophy's task was to explain the natural world. He viewed Plato's notion of two worlds as an exercise in poetic metaphor. Aristotle rejected the existence of Plato's form world because Plato could not account for the cause of the world of ideas.[128] In contrast, Aristotle asserted that there was no separate world of forms; rather, the form of an object existed in each object.[129]

By rejecting Plato's world of ideas, however, Aristotle encountered a number of his own philosophical problems. One of them was the challenge of changing phenomena. To answer that unsolved problem, one needs to understand how Aristotle viewed the world.

Visible World. Instead of positing two realms, as Plato did, Aristotle argued that the material universe consists of both form and matter.[130] All substances in the universe—the entire known world, all reality—had these separate qualities of form and of matter within them.[131] Aristotle was thus a philosophical dualist.

Aristotle contended that animals possess matter, which is their body, and they possess form, which is their ability to sense and move. The purpose and definition of an object are located in its form. The form is the same in all the species of a given being. Inanimate objects also possess form and matter. Aristotle gave the example of a ship to distinguish between form and matter. When a ship is at anchor, it is

128. Lee, *Christian Introduction to Philosophy*, 86; Frame, "Greeks Bearing Gifts," 23.

129. Kelly, *Systematic Theology*, 1:39.

130. One of Aristotle's best-known theories is called *hylomorphism*, from *hyle*, meaning "matter," and *morphé*, meaning "form."

131. Frame, "Greeks Bearing Gifts," 23.

matter. When it is moving, sailing on the water, doing what it was created for, it exhibits its form. The sailing is the form of the ship. Thus Aristotle did not deny Plato's notion of forms altogether, but he disagreed about their location.[132]

The two thinkers also disagreed about the nature of matter. Matter was not necessarily some type of physical stuff. Matter was rather the individuating principle of an object. More precisely, the terms *matter* and *form* relate to the concepts of individual and potential. This potential was Aristotle's idea of the universal. His notion of the universal became a suprapersonal spirit of thought or potential, which he termed the *nous*.

Having learned something about the terms *form*, *matter*, *individual*, and *potential*, we can see how individual human beings are also composed of both form and matter. For example, in that they are both men, the essence and specific nature of Plato and Aristotle were the same—therefore, they have the same form. For Aristotle the form is also called the *soul*.

Accordingly, the purpose of human beings is to think, or to express fully their rationality. Hence the form of a man is his thinking, rational soul.[133] The body and soul are not exactly the same for Aristotle. The soul may be defined as the life of an animal or the form or actuality of that body.[134] Simply stated, the body is the organic matter of the person. The organic matter is apparently the instrument through which a part of life or soul expresses itself.[135]

Against Plato's opinion, Aristotle rejected the notion of the preexistence of the soul.[136] For him, when a person dies, he is simply laid in the grave. His matter has reached its final goal. He will not be reincarnated as another person. Thus he rejected Plato's anthropological dualism, the notion that the body is the "prison house" of the soul. Yet he still held to a distinction between body and soul. He saw duality within overall unity.

132. Aristotle's discussion of form and matter will be foundational for the later medieval understanding of the sacraments.

133. Ibid.

134. W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Greek Philosophers from Thales to Aristotle* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 144.

135. Ibid., 143.

136. Merlan, "Greek Philosophy," 39.

While Aristotle denied the soul's immortality, he did not want to face annihilation. He believed that the soul was not in its own right a complete substance, but apparently he was not as interested in contemplating another world outside the present one as Plato was. So Aristotle thought that a part of the soul, called the *nous*, or "intellect," was immortal and thus actually divine.[137]

It is the *nous* that activates the form—the rational soul—of a person in his thinking. All humans have the potential to think and contemplate. Yet clearly some people think more than do others. The reason for this difference among people is found in the *nous*. By thinking, a person realizes his potential. Aristotle's *nous*, the highest manifestation of the reasoning faculty, was different from the other vital principles. The *nous* was probably a separate substance capable of survival after the body's demise.

If the *nous* alone was capable of independent existence and therefore imperishable, then certain implications followed. Aristotle, at the end of the *Ethics*, exhorted his readers to the life of pure thought, which resembled the activity of the "prime mover." He argued that the reward after death was the absorption of one's mind into the "incorporeal mind." There was no personal survival of individuals.[138] We need further to investigate Aristotle's notion of the prime or unmoved mover.

Unmoved Mover. Aristotle believed that neither form nor matter ever existed by itself—with one exception. That exception was called the *one* or *pure form* or the *unmoved mover*. The unmoved mover, or first principle, was necessary to Aristotle's universe. Supposedly, it had an ether or an uppermost heaven where this divine changeless being dwelled.[139]

This unmoved mover was also called *intelligence* and was the supreme principle of the universe, or god.[140] An impersonal pure reason, the prime or unmoved mover engaged in eternal thoughts

137. Lee, *Christian Introduction to Philosophy*, 86.

138. Guthrie, *Greek Philosophers*, 87, 95. Frederick C. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 1, *Greece and Rome from the Pre-Socratics to Plotinus* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1962), 1:378, comments that given the resurrection of the soul and the close union of the soul and body, the soul's resurrection suggests that the resurrection of the body is demanded by the soul.

139. Merlan, "Greek Philosophy," 40.

140. Ibid., 42–43.

and was pure thought eternally thinking only about itself. The prime mover could be conceptualized as subsistent thought that cogitates on itself.[141]

For Aristotle, the existence of a god or unmoved mover hinged completely on the philosophical problem of the existence of motion. Aristotle was deeply concerned to explain the nature of change or motion. He believed that every movement required something to act on it—an external moving cause or stimulus. Since he presupposed an eternal framework for the universe, he believed the cause of the universe must also be eternal.[142]

The prime mover gives motion to the world by drawing the world to itself, the prime mover.[143] The stars move, as does the world, by their attraction to the changeless changer.[144] Being eternal, the first mover is not restricted to the progression from potency to actuality, nor can it be. The unmoved mover is the pure, actual form that is the origin of motion and proceeds from matter toward form as its goal.[145] The unmoved mover is the final cause of all things.

The unmoved mover has no matter and, as pure act, is the final cause toward which all actualization or potentiality is moving. Aristotle's unmoved mover, or god, was the final step in a chain of reasoning that ended in the conclusion that it is impossibile for anything to be self-moved. *Dynamis* was an important term in this theory; it identified the tendency toward and capacity for change and development in a particular direction.[146]

As a Greek philosopher, Aristotle did not maintain that the first mover was a creator god. There was no logical necessity for the first mover to create the world it acted on. The world had existed from all eternity—it was not created at any time.

The first mover, being immaterial, certainly does not and cannot perform any physical, bodily action; therefore, its operation must be

141. Lee, *Christian Introduction to Philosophy*, 86.

142. Guthrie, *Greek Philosophers*, 132, 138.

143. Frederick C. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 5, *British Philosophy Hobbes to Hume* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1968), 5:314.

144. Merlan, "Greek Philosophy," 39.

145. Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, vol. 1, *The Necessary Presuppositions of Philosophy*, trans. David Freeman and William Young (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1953), 182.

146. Guthrie, *Greek Philosophers*, 135.

entirely spiritual or intellectual.[147] Thus Aristotle's god is cognizant only of himself.[148] He, or it, is intelligence "intelligizing" itself and is pure form.[149] This notion is the opposite of the personal and absolute God of the Bible.[150]

We have briefly investigated Aristotle's notions of the visible world, humans in that world, and the unmoved mover beyond that world. Next we will investigate Aristotle's understanding of how humans comprehend that world.

Epistemology. Aristotle recognized that not all people have the same amount of knowledge. Some people understand things in only a simplistic way, gained through experience, while others know on a higher plane. People with true knowledge know certain universals—for example, that medicine is good for the body—while the simpler person knows only that the medicine he took worked but does not know the general, universal goodness of medicine itself. The person with true knowledge may be likened to an artist, who is aware of universals and so wants to produce beauty.

Aristotle thought that knowledge is derived from sensory experience and further reflection on that experience. The consequences of his epistemology are at least twofold. First, he rejected Plato's notion of innate ideas in that, by definition, an idea from sensory experience is not innate. Second, he rejected any theory of divine illumination. Divine illumination may be equivalent to the natural light of the intellect, and Aristotle rejected the possibility of the intellect's concurring with God.[151] In other words, Aristotle believed that knowledge was possible, and further, that it must be known of the form of the thing, not of its matter.

The true explanation of things was to be sought in their end, that is, in their teleology.[152] In part Aristotle came to this position through his interaction with Empedocles (495–435 B.C.). Empedocles pro-

147. Ibid. Guthrie calls immateriality pure actuality or *energia*—"the unimpeded flow of activity made possible once actuality has been acquired."

148. *HWPT*, 48: "But this god did not reveal his thoughts to Aristotle. Rather, it is a hypothesis of Aristotle's own reason and thus an idol."

149. Merlan, "Greek Philosophy," 42–43.

150. Dooyeweerd, *New Critique*, 1:180; *HWPT*, 48.

151. Frederick C. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 2, *Medieval Philosophy Augustine to Scotus* (London: Burns and Oates and Washbourne, 1950), 2:147.

152. Guthrie, *Greek Philosophers*, 126.

pounded a doctrine that denied the existence of final causes in nature, and Aristotle, in opposition, tried to prove the existence of teleology in nature. He thought that each object had potentiality, an actual *telos* or "end." There must be an absolute standard of reference for this *telos*, and that standard was provided by its god.

Logic. Aristotle is perhaps best known for his logic. He was convinced that logic is the foundation on which the principles of all true judgment depend. For Aristotle, logic is not just the formal science of thinking. The laws of logic help the thinker understand the relationship between truth and reality. Truth must be connected to reality, so the laws of logic, because they uncover the relationship between truth and reality, transcend the laws of thought and reflect the laws of reality itself.[153]

It is impossible to be mistaken about the law of contradiction (sometimes called the "law of noncontradiction"). It is not only a law of thought but also of being.[154] The law of contradiction goes something like this: The same attribute cannot attach and not attach to the same thing in the same respect—contrary attributes cannot belong to the same subject at the same time.[155] When we were children, perhaps our mothers asked us whether we ate any of her freshly baked chocolate chip cookies. When with chocolate smeared all over our lips we heartily denied that we had done so, our mothers knew that the law of contradiction was there at work. Either our denial was false, or she did not see the chocolate on our lips. Certainly, both things could not be true at the same time. The law of contradiction is as plain a part of reality as the chocolate on a child's face!

If anyone objected to the law of contradiction and asserted that contrary attributes attach to the same thing, it would be necessary to conclude that we cannot believe what that person says. For example, it is plain that the number "three" cannot be both odd and even. No one can actually think that the number three is both odd and even at the same time, even if he makes the assertion verbally. To make such

153. Clark, *Thales to Dewey*, 97. For the importance of studying logic, see Vern S. Poythress, *Logic*: *A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 27–28.

154. Poythress (*Logic*, 570–71) rightly reminds us that none of the laws of logic is "basic" in itself or independent of God.

155. Ibid., 62: "something cannot both have a property and not have the same property at the same time and in the same way."

an assertion is to pretend that contrary attributes attach to the same subject or to claim two contrary opinions at the same time.

Comprehending Aristotle is essential to grasping Western thought in general and much of Christian thinking in particular. Aristotle was "rediscovered" during the Middle Ages, and his rules of logic and scientific categorization completely revolutionized not only how people thought about the world but also how theologians conceived the God of the Bible. By the time of the Reformation, using an Aristotelian method was the undisputed way of doing theology. To understand the development of doctrine, we need to know about two more pagan philosophical schools: Stoicism and Gnosticism.

Stoicism and Gnosticism

Stoic World. Stoicism was operative at the time of the NT. The Stoic world comprised a broad conception of matter in which even something intangible, such as virtue or the soul, was material. This philosophy held that the universe is governed by a "world soul" that rules by law.[156]

Stoic thinkers believed they knew about themselves and their world through self-authenticating sensation. The goal of human life, they said, is to live in accord with the world's fixed laws or reason, laws that they could know. Thus the good life is one that follows reason and is lived according to nature and society's universal structures.[157]

The Stoics stood against the Platonic differentiation of a transcendent world of ideas and an ordinary world. For them, all that exists must be material.[158] The universe consists of unformed matter, without quality, that is organized by dynamic reason or a plan, called the *logos*. This logos is material—it is a spirit or fiery vapor. It permeates all reality, and they called it *god* or *providence*—the soul that fills the universe. Since all events happen according to this logos, it is advantageous to submit to it; such submission to the logos's providence is the heart of the Stoic ethic.[159] Ultimately, a conflagration will reabsorb

156. *WCG2* briefly introduces Stoicism. See *WCG* 2:952n21, 953n29, 954.
157. *WCG* 2:1024.
158. Kelly, *Doctrines*, 17.
159. Ibid., 18.

all the unformed matter into the logos. To put Stoic teaching another way, "the universe is, at bottom, a living fire."[160]

The Soul. Relative to human nature, the human soul was conceived by the Stoics as a portion of the divine fire, which is the logos. It gives the body its form and character. The soul is material and will survive the body, but only until a time when all will be burned up by fire. The soul has an immanent logos, which is internally present reason, and an expressed logos, which reason makes known by means of speech or self-expression.[161]

Gnostic Origins. The final pagan philosophy important for understanding the development of Christian doctrine is Gnosticism. Research concerning Gnosticism's origins has developed over the years. Older scholarship maintained that Gnosticism was a Christian heresy, a Greek mythology mixed with biblical concepts. This view can be traced to the church fathers, who thought that it was the church's arch enemy and worse than Greek philosophy itself.[162]

A change to that opinion came via the famous German church historian Adolf von Harnack in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century. He argued that, in contrast to the gradual erosion of orthodoxy by Greek thinking, Gnosticism achieved an immediate takeover.[163] R. M. Grant claimed that Gnosticism was a Jewish phenomenon that rose out of the Jews' discontent with God, especially after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. God had let them down—he is therefore the evil god of Gnosticism.[164] Bultmann argued that Gnosticism began prior to Christ with a group called the "Mandeans of Iran." The Mandeans then influenced Christianity. Some sectors of Christianity were attracted to Gnosticism, while others were repelled.[165] Bultmann theorized that humanity at the time of early Christianity felt an estrangement from the world and was consumed with existential angst. This angst then

160. William Edgar and K. Scott Oliphint, *Christian Apologetics Past and Present: A Primary Source Reader* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 1:39.

161. Stoicism as a philosophy was complex. See Kelly, *Doctrines*, 18–19.

162. Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Hippolytus each mentioned it.

163. Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans. Neil Buchanan (Boston: Little, Brown, 1902), 1:223–66.

164. Robert M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).

165. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, 5 Aufl. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1965), 162–83.

sparked a desire for the mystic religion of Gnosticism. Bultmann's theory was the standard interpretation in the middle and latter half of the twentieth century, but recently, support for it has eroded even among critical scholars.[166]

Gnostic Themes. Certain themes ran throughout the various gnostic systems.[167] Gnosticism claimed to mediate a *gnosis*, or "knowledge," that would bring salvation. Gnosticism, while demonstrating diversity in detail, affirmed the antithesis of spirit and matter. The supreme deity always remained in the sphere of the spirit, but this deity sent a type of savior or original man who helped obtain release for those who are captive in the sphere of matter. The knowledge that brings salvation is comprehending that deliverance to the realm of the spirit, which comes somehow through this savior.

We see the philosophical schools continuing to develop as we move closer in time to the NT period. For a brief introduction to the philosophical schools of the apostolic age, see *WCG2*.[168] We will now move from reviewing pagan contemplation to the world of biblically informed thinking.

Philo (25 b.c.–a.d. 45/50)

Teaching. Philo was a hellenized Jew who maintained that the Greek translation of the OT, the Septuagint, was divinely inspired in its translation and contained the infallibly revealed will of God in the Mosaic law. To interpret the Scriptures, he employed an allegorical method that had been implemented earlier by Greek philosophers. His theological work was a synthesis of the OT and Greek philosophy. He

166. This thesis was originally published by Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*, 2nd rev. ed. (Boston: Beacon, 1963); *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist: Erster Teil, Die mythologische Gnosis*, 3rd ed., Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments 33 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964); and to include for the first time Jonas's discussion of Plotinus, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist: Zweiter Teil, Von der Mythologie zur mystischen Philosophie: Erste und zweite Hälfte*, 3rd ed., ed. Kurt Rudolph, Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments 159 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993).

167. See *WCG* 2:955; Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1969), 45–50, for more information regarding Gnosticism.

168. For the Stoics and Epicurians, see *WCG* 2:952–54; for modified Platonism, see *WCG* 2:954–55. For more information on Stoicism's impact on theology, see the analysis in chapter 6.

thought Moses used an outward form of myth, history, and ceremonial law that expressed an inward, spiritual meaning that was in accord with the best Greek theology.[169]

Philo maintained that God is immutable and that humankind's purpose in the universe is at least in part to serve God. The human mind is made in the image of the divine reason or logos and can therefore contemplate reality beyond time and space. General education prepares the mind for the study of philosophy, which also helps in the study of religion. Theology, however, cannot be understood without divine revelation, and that revelation is found in the Scriptures.[170]

God, for Philo, was the God of his father Abraham and a personal God who loves his creatures even though they err. God's thoughts are higher than human thoughts. God's world and all creation are continually dependent on him. But Philo fused his doctrine of God with the theology of Platonism.[171]

One problem of Philo's theology is a problem with language in relation to God. He thought that there was no creaturely language that was adequate to express the transcendent creator's being. Since the material world is not eternal and is therefore dependent, language is also incapable of expressing the eternality of the transcendent creator.[172] Because of God's great transcendence, Philo believed that what he termed the *logos* performed two functions: the logos helps God in creation and helps people's minds to apprehend God. Philo did not hold that the logos is the sole agent of creation—that thought came later. Philo, as a Jew, had to assert that it was God who created, but the logos helped God in that creation.[173]

Influence. Philo never converted to Christianity, yet his teaching was influential in the formation of early Christian theology because he bridged the gap between Greek philosophy and some biblical teachings. For instance, Philo's doctrine of a sovereign creator God is embraced

169. Henry Chadwick, "Philo and the Beginnings of Christian Thought," in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 137–38.

170. Ibid., 139–40.

171. Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), 73.

172. Chadwick, "Christian Thought," 142.

173. Kelly, *Doctrines*, 10.

in Christianity, and his doctrine of the logos could also be—and was—adapted to apply to Jesus of Nazareth. Philo also conceived a triad of divine beings that could perhaps be interpreted as a trinity. He said that to the contemplative soul, God appears like a triad, which consists of himself with his two chief powers, creative goodness and kingly power, symbolized by the angels. While this thought is far from a mature doctrine of the Trinity, in the pathways of early Christian thought Philo's theory was adapted in part by Christian theologians.[174]

Persecution of God's People

In addition to understanding the various philosophies surrounding the early church, it is essential to grasp the context of persecution in which the postbiblical church grew.

General Characteristics. Christianity was a persecuted religion until the year of A.D. 312.[175] The persecution of Christians came first from the Jews, then from the Gentiles—accounts of which appear as early as the Gospels and Acts. After the close of the biblical canon, persecution continued, though not uninterruptedly, for more than two hundred years. By A.D. 180, Christianity had spread through the countries of the Mediterranean and continued even farther into the provinces.

Classifying and counting the number of organized persecutions proves difficult. Augustine in the *City of God* put the number of persecutions at ten. Lactantius cited six, while other ancient writers have suggested nine. The exact number of them is not important to remember—we need to investigate the various background elements that provide a unified structure to all the persecutions of the ancient church. After we have finished our investigation, we will seek to interpret the causes of these persecutions.[176]

Persecution under the Jews. During the famous Bar Cochba conflict (A.D. 132–135), when Jewish leaders attempted to revolt against

174. Chadwick, "Christian Thought," 145.

175. See Richard C. Gamble, "Christianity from the Early Fathers to Charlemagne," in *Revolutions in Worldview: Understanding the Flow of Western Thought*, ed. W. Andrew Hoffecker (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 109–12.

176. Karl Heussi, *Kompendium der Kirchengeschichte* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1971), 47.

Rome, the leader of the insurrection forced all Christians either to join him or be murdered. The rebellion failed, and the Roman government nearly destroyed Judaism. The Jewish historian Josephus recounted the horrific loss of Jewish life—he estimated that 1.1 million Jews were killed in the fighting and ninety-seven thousand taken captive, then sold into slavery or put to death for sport in Roman arenas.[177]

Palestinian Jewish Christians abstained from participating in the conflict in obedience to their interpretation of Jesus's words in Luke 21:20–24. They left Judea before the serious fighting began.[178] But their refusal to help in the revolt made them traitors in the eyes of the non-Christian Jews. After the war, the Pharisees placed an official curse on all Christians in the Jewish liturgy, thus making it impossible for Jewish Christians to worship in the synagogue. The Pharisees reestablished their own Sanhedrin and rallied the shattered forces of Judaism around their strict interpretation of the OT and the Mosaic law.

The fall of Jerusalem to Rome also meant that both Jews and Christians lost their spiritual home. Jerusalem ceased to have any importance in the life of the early church for the next three hundred years. This geographical separation of the early Christians from Christianity's Palestinian roots quickened the church's drift away from a Jewish membership to a Gentile one and from a Hebrew and Aramaic mindset to a Greek one.

Persecution under the Roman Government. The Roman state had generally been tolerant of religions; it classified groups as "permitted" or "non-permitted." Once it became clear that Christianity was no longer part of a Jewish sect, it lost permitted status.

The Roman Empire was polytheistic and syncretistic, meaning that Romans worshipped a plethora of Roman gods as well as the gods of other peoples. The worship of many gods was accepted. Most importantly, however, everyone was required to worship the Roman emperor as god and lord.

The persecution of Christians arose because of their exclusive truth claims. Christianity stood against the fundamentally polytheistic aspects of Roman culture and society. Christians claimed that there

177. Nicholas R. Needham, *2,000 Years of Christ's Power*, vol. 1, *The Age of the Early Church Fathers* (London: Grace Publications, 1997), 51.

178. Ibid., 52.

was only one true God, and the great Christian confession that there was one Lord, his son Jesus Christ, amounted to a political offense, a treasonable act against the emperor. Governors began to test suspected Christians to see whether they were "true" Romans by demanding that they worship Caesar and proclaim, "Caesar is Lord." Christians would refuse, because for them Jesus is the Lord, not Caesar.[179]

Christians were also perceived by the general Roman public to be killjoys or sticks-in-the-mud. We know this to be the case in part because of the account found in the *Epistle to Diognetus* (ca. A.D. 130), which reports, "the world hates the Christians, though it receives no wrong from them, because they set themselves against its pleasures."[180] Further, in the text from *Octavius*, by Minucius Felix (ca. 180), a pagan disputant complains that Christians abstain from the pleasures of a gentleman[181]—that is, the theater and the gladiatorial games.

The Christians were blamed for their lack of interest in public affairs, for their choice to remain separate from the rest of society and from pagan social duties.[182] Christians were charged with eating human flesh, rumored to be done in the Lord's Supper, and with incestuous relationships, since Christians greeted each other with a holy kiss or married a "sister" in Christ.[183] Their religion as a whole was so unpopular that Tacitus, who died after 117, said that the Christians were a class of people loathed for their vices. In *A Life of Nero*, Suetonius called the religion a new and baneful superstition.[184]

Christians were charged with being atheists, since they worshipped no visible gods. The charge of atheism, however, was not understood then as it is now. Atheism as defined in Roman culture was the indifference of a citizen to his duties, political or social, as well as disloyalty to the state. Emperor Domitian (A.D. 81–96) condemned many Christians to death under the charge of atheism.

179. See Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

180. Clayton N. Jefford, *The Epistle to Diognetus (with the Fragment of Quadratus): Introduction, Text and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 208.

181. Cornelius Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, trans. and intro. by Michael Grant (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1959).

182. Louis Duchesne, *Early History of the Christian Church: From Its Foundation to the End of the Fifth Century* (London: John Murray, 1965), 1:146.

183. Edgar and Oliphint, *Christian Apologetics*, 1:37–38.

184. See Seutonius, *Lives of the Twelve Caesars* (Charles River Editors, 2018), Atla Epub.

Christianity was an illegal religion from the time of Emperor Trajan (A.D. 98–117), who first pronounced Christianity forbidden.[185] He prohibited all secret societies or clubs by reviving a law that was already on the books. Trajan's policy regulated the treatment of Christians for more than a century. It was under Emperor Trajan that Ignatius of Antioch was torn to shreds by beasts in Rome.[186]

Under Antonius Pius (A.D. 138–161), Polycarp of Smyrna suffered martyrdom in A.D. 156. The philosopher-ruler Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 161–180) passed a statute that punished those who endeavored to persuade people to fear God. This law was probably aimed at Christianity. Under his rulership, the famous apologist Justin Martyr received his name after being put to death in about A.D. 166. During the reign of Septimus Severus (A.D. 193–211) persecution continued. Clement of Alexandria provides some details of life during his reign: "Many martyrs are daily burned, confined, or beheaded, before our eyes."[187]

Persecution became widespread under emperors Decius (A.D. 250/51) and Diocletian (A.D. 303–313).[188] Decius led the cruelest persecutions yet, and they continued under his successor, Gallus (A.D. 251–253). Emperor Valerian came to power in A.D. 253, and persecution during his reign produced more martyrs than died under any other emperor.[189] The slaughter rested on a series of legal edicts that prohibited all Christian meetings; attendance at such a meeting was punishable by death.[190] During Valerian's reign, Cyprian was martyred.[191]

A period of relative rest followed during the reign of Valerian's son Gallienus (A.D. 260–268). He chose not to enforce his father's edicts, though neither did he give Christianity permitted status. A similar rest from persecution occurred under Emperor Aurelian (A.D. 270–275).[192]

The Diocletian persecution, noted above, exceeded all previous official outbursts in its intensity. Edicts grew progressively worse by ordering the destruction of church buildings, the burning of Bibles,

185. Needham, *2,000 Years*, 1:80.

186. Heussi, *Kompendium*, 44.

187. From Clement's *Stromata*, as cited by W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 353–55.

188. Needham, *2,000 Years*, 1:144, 149–51.

189. Ibid., 44.

190. Ibid., 45. The earlier persecution edict had been established in A.D. 250.

191. Ibid.

192. Ibid.

and the removal of all Christians from public office and by demanding, on pain of death, that Christians sacrifice to the gods.

Eusebius, the famous church historian, witnessed the persecutions in Egypt and other areas. He related accounts of church buildings torn to the ground, Bibles burned at marketplaces, and the hunting down, capture, and torture of pastors. Death frequently came at the fangs of wild beasts. It was so terrible and bloody that Eusebius reports that even the beasts got tired of their frequent attacks on the innocent Christians. Finally, edicts of toleration were issued in A.D. 311 under Galerius. This development does not end the story of Christian persecution, but it does end the tale of woe suffered by the ancient church.

Analysis of the Persecutions. In general, persecutions of the second century were sporadic and prompted by the mob. The average Roman citizen could not understand and did not like this novel religion, with its supposed barbarian origins and lack of patriotism for the empire—a religion whose gloomy adherents held to a blind and irrational faith. At that time, average Christians appear to have had neither sophisticated culture nor high social standing and were usually economically poor.

In the third century, however, persecution was directed in large measure by the state and was universal. The government had by then come to fear the threat of the church.[193] One of the reasons for this fear was the suspicion that Christianity was an illicit cult or a vulgar innovation whose religious aspect was probably a mere facade concealing something far worse.[194] The Roman government was always suspect of clubs, and Christianity could have appeared to be dangerously antisocial. It was not on the list of approved societies, so the government had to ban it.

For the ancient believer, persecution was an ever-present reality. Believers knew that persecution would occur either in their lifetime or their children's lifetime. Such an understanding of the world would necessarily create a sense of urgency and importance for their profession of faith. Professing Christ was a matter of life and death. While the early church had to discuss what to do with the "lapsed"—those who had capitulated in some way to pagan worship to escape perse-

193. B. J. Kidd, *A History of the Christian Church to AD 461* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1922), 233.

194. F. F. Bruce, *The Growing Day: The Progress of Christianity from the Fall of Jerusalem to the Accession of Constantine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 15.

cution—in general, when Christianity comes with a high price, only the strong in faith are willing to endure. This testing produces a purer Christianity. As believers today, we wonder whether God would give us the strength to withstand under torture. We could ask ourselves what it would be like always to have to worship in secret, or to have all our property confiscated. I wonder whether I could stand to see the persecution of my loved ones or bear the insults that were commonplace for Christians for so many years.

When thinking through how to interpret persecution, it is good to remember that God is in control of all events on earth—his sovereign mercy ordains everything that happens. Further, God's blessing on his people does not always mean that he is going to bless them financially or physically. Early Christians, with few exceptions, were not rich people. Yet God greatly blessed the ancient church.

Despite enduring persecution, Christianity maintained an outward face that critiqued the surrounding pagan culture. One example consists in the church's stance against abortions, which were very common and accepted. Finally, the fact that the church is not suffering persecution in all parts of the world today should result in praise to God in our hearts and prayer that he keeps us faithful.[195] Remembering that persecution was the backdrop of all the theological advances during these centuries, the next chapter will examine the theologians who lived in this context. They are known as the "apostolic fathers" and the "apologists."

Key Terms

Milesian thinking
beginning principle
hylozoism
atomists
Pythagoreans
Sophists
world of forms
form and matter

195. See Peter Leithart, *Against Christianity* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003).

law of contradiction
unmoved mover
Gnosticism
apostolic fathers
apologists

Study Questions

1. What is the proper method for studying the developing doctrine of Christ's church?
2. What are some of the benefits of studying the history of Christ's church?
3. What are some of the main characteristics of Milesian thinking?
4. What is the philosophical question of "the one and the many," and why is knowing it important?
5. What are some of the main lines of Socrates's thinking?
6. What are some of the differences between Plato's two worlds?
7. What are some of the types of human knowing, and why is human knowing important?
8. Why did Aristotle reject Plato's two worlds?
9. Does knowing about persecution in the ancient church make an impact on your thinking about the contemporary church's witness to the world?
10. What were some of the weaknesses of the interpretation of Scripture during this period?

Resources for Further Study

Coxe, A. Cleveland, ed. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*. Vol. 2, *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria*. Vol. 3, *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian I. Apologetic; II. Anti-Marcion; III. Ethical*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988. Helpful introductions and complete texts of many of the writings from this time period, despite the translations not being contemporary.

Frame, John M. "Greeks Bearing Gifts." In *Revolutions in Worldview: Understanding the Flow of Western Thought*, edited by W. Andrew Hoffecker,

1–36. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007. An excellent summary of Greek philosophical thought written from a distinctly Christian vantage point by an excellent communicator.

Kelly, J. N. D. *Early Christian Doctrines*. London: Black, 1977. An expertly written textbook that has been the gold standard in patristics for decades.

Needham, Nicholas R. *2,000 Years of Christ's Power*. Vol. 1, *The Age of the Early Church Fathers*. London: Grace Publications, 1997. A very readable text that is accurate and dependable.

Walker, Williston. *A History of the Christian Church*. New York: Scribner's Sons, 1959. A standard college and seminary one-volume textbook that has been revised over the decades since its first publication.