



Week 14

3. Lope de Vega, Punishment Without Revenge in Three Major Plays  
(Gwynne Edwards trans., Oxford World's Classics)
4. Buddhist texts from the Dhammapada, the Dīgha-Nikāya (Sutta 22),  
and the Majjhima-Nikāya (Sutta 26)

Study questions for Genesis Chapters 1-11 and Plato's Timaeus

1. In both Genesis and Timaeus, the Creator is called 'father'. Why not 'mother'?
2. Plato says that the world we live in -- the changing, mortal world of becoming (ἡ γεννητὴ κόσμος) -- is a copy (ἡ ἀληθινή) of the perfect, unchanging world of perfect being (ἡ ἀθάνατος). Is there anything equivalent in Genesis?
3. Do you see a parallel between Plato's "primitive chaos" (Section 21, p. 72) and the "formless void" (ἡ ἀσχηματισμένη κενότητα, literally "formlessness and emptiness") of Genesis 1:2?
4. In the first account of the creation of human beings in Gen. 1:26-27, God creates man and woman "in his image" (1:26-27). In the second account, He creates a man (Adam) out of the dust of the earth (Gen. 2:7), the birds and animals out of the earth (Gen. 2:7), and woman (Eve) out of the rib of a man (Gen. 2:19-23). How does this compare to Plato's account in Timaeus Sections 10, p. 58, and 49, pp. 123?
5. Why do you think Genesis tell stories about specific people and places (Eden, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Cain and Seth's descendants, Noah and his sons and their offspring, the Tower of Babel) and Timaeus does not?
6. What is the significance of the genealogical chapters of Genesis (No. 5, 10, and 11), and why is there nothing equivalent in Timaeus?
7. Why do you think Genesis provides no description of the form and ratios of the human body similar to Timaeus Sections 12-14 and 37-48? Also, does Genesis have anything to say about the nature of the soul?
8. Consider Plato's definition of good as opposed to evil actions in Timaeus Sections 10-11 (p. 58 and 60). According to him, what causes people to make bad choices, and what is their consequence (see also Section 49, p. 123)? How does this compare to good and evil in Genesis 1-11?
9. How would you characterize the relationship between the Creator and human beings in both texts?
10. If you were required *under pain of death!* to accept one or the other of these accounts of the origin of the world, which one would you choose?

Study questions for Gospel texts and Pico's Heptapplus  
(15 questions)

1. Why is the beginning of the Gospel According to Luke (1:1-4) about the author's writing technique? How is this different from the beginning of the Gospel according to John--that is, what do you think are the authors' different purposes?
2. What similarities do you find between God's treatment of Mary, Zechariah, and Jesus in the first chapters of Luke and His treatment of Adam, Eve, Cain, and Noah in Genesis?
3. What do you think Plato would have thought about the Incarnation, that is, the belief that Jesus was the divine son of God by a human mother? What would Moses or the authors of Genesis have thought?
4. Why does John give so much attention to John the Baptist in the first chapter of his Gospel, while Luke dedicates only six verses to him (1:15-20)?
5. The Renaissance practice of reconciling the teachings of different traditions goes by the name of *syncretism*. How many traditions are reconciled in the Heptapplus?
6. What are Pico's "three worlds" and how are they related to Genesis and Timaeus?
7. What does Pico mean by an allegorical interpretation (last paragraph p. 78, top of p. 79)? Why does he find it necessary to develop a theory of interpretation, when the other authors we have read do not?
8. How does Pico incorporate Christ into the Mosaic-Platonic teaching about the creation of the world? Refer to his statement that the suffering and death of Christ opened "the way to the supercelestial world, to communion with the angels" (p. 77). See also p. 105, last paragraph.
9. Pico says that "the perfection of all good in men is derived from Christ as a man" (p. 93). How does this compare to the origin of good according to Genesis and Timaeus?
10. What is the point of the multiplication of triads in the discussion of the three worlds in Heptapplus, pp. 77-78? Can you diagram the mathematical structure of the second paragraph on p. 78 (hint: look for  $3\_ + 3\_ + 3\_$ )?
11. On p. 107, Pico characterizes God in Pythagorean terms ("Let us apply these notions...)? Do you think Moses or the authors of Genesis would accept this? What about Luke and John?

12. Pico adopts the view, articulated by Neo-Platonic philosophers in the third to fifth centuries A.D., that causes and their effects reflect each other mutually: "Whatever is in the lower world is also in the higher ones... likewise, whatever is the higher ones is also seen in the lowest" (p. 77). Do you think this idea is consistent with the view of Jesus as the Son of God and the Word?

13. Pico speaks of ideas that are "foreign to the truth of the Gospels" and in the Seventh Exposition makes it clear that his aim is to convert people to Christianity. Is this in contradiction to syncretism?

14. In the last chapter, "Exposition of the First Phrase..." (pp. 170-172), Pico uses the kabbalistic technique of gematria (letter combination) to read a Christian meaning into Genesis 1:1. Do you think this is legitimate?

15. How does the understanding of causality in the Visuddhi-Magga compare with Pico's?