Week 22

The World View of the Greek Philosophers

I. What is the Greek World View as Explained by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle?

A. Their view of the Gods.

1. Socrates and Plato both acknowledged the Greek Pantheon. They believed however that the gods were good, just and full of virtue or they would not be gods. Socrates often mentions “the god”. This is always a reference to the god Apollo.

2. Plato elaborates on his view. In addition to the Greek Pantheon, He believes there is one god that is the Ideal God. All gods emanate from this god. One of these lesser gods is called the Demiurge. This god is responsible for the creation of the physical world and the rest of the Greek gods.

3. Aristotle believed in only one god. His god was impersonal and was referred to as the prime mover or the unmoved mover. All that is good and true in the world emanates from this god. This god was responsible for setting the preexisting matter of the universe into motion. The existence of this god keeps the universe in motion.

B. What is the nature of the universe – its origin and structure?

1. Socrates states that he does not care and to wonder about such things is a waste of time. He felt man should use his reason to discover truth about himself not the physical world.

2. Plato was a dualist. He believed in a physical world that was essentially evil, and an ideal world that was good. Every thing in the ideal world contains the Forms or the ultimate reality of all the things in the physical world. The ideal world was immaterial and accessible only with man’s reason. A lesser god called the demiurge created the physical world. Every thing in the physical world is a shadow of the Forms in the Ideal world.

3. Aristotle believed that matter was eternal. The entire universe was made up of spherical shaped objects that revolved around god. God, to Aristotle was the unmoved mover that set the universe in motion. The material world was made up of four elements, Earth, Water, Air, and Fire. There was a fifth element called Aether that held the stars moon and sun in place as they rotated around the earth.

C. Their views of the Nature of Man.
1. All three Philosophers believe that man is basically good.

2. All three basically saw man as unique and set apart from the rest of the universe by his reason.

D. Their views on the Basis of Morality and Ethics.

1. Socrates believed that “the god” was goodness and justice and therefore there was an absolute standard for right and wrong. The goal of man is to use his reason to discover this standard. Once man knows what is right he will never chose to do wrong.

2. Plato basically agrees with the distinction that absolute good is only found in the realm of the Ideal. Absolute good can never be realized in the physical world because the physical world is evil.

3. Aristotle believed that in all of man’s actions and appetites, moderation was the highest good. Good and virtue ultimately came from the unmoved mover and could only be derived by reason. When man used his reason to understand himself and these virtues, it was called self realization.

4. All three Philosophers believed that man’s cumulative reason codified in the laws of the state should be the basis of all social law.

E. What is the cause of Evil and Suffering?

1. All three Philosophers are going to ultimately agree that Man’s ignorance is what causes Evil and Suffering.

2. Plato also argues that the realm of the physical is evil. Therefore living in the physical world is to experience evil and suffering. This can only be over come with reason and knowledge of the ideal world.

F. What happens to man at death?

1. Socrates said that there is no reason to fear death. There is no logical reason to fear what we don’t know. But he reasons that there are only two possibilities:

   a. Man would sleep an eternal sleep and be oblivious to all.

   b. Man’s soul would live on and be able to interact with all who had lived before him.

2. Plato believed that man’s soul was immortal. Upon death, the soul entered the ideal world. He believed in a system of reward and punishment for restoring the soul to perfection. In the ideal world, the soul had full
knowledge of the perfect world. It stayed there until it was time to be reincarnated. At birth man lost all knowledge of the perfect world. Man’s goal in life is to remember that knowledge by using his reason.

3. Aristotle believed that all living things, plants animals and man, had souls. The body could not live without a soul and the soul could not live without a body. Man’s soul was different form all other souls. Man’s soul had two parts, the material part and the rational part. The material part gives man his personality and holds his memories. When the body dies this part of the soul dies also and that individual ceases to exist. The rational part of the soul is that unique spark form god that gives man that ability to reason. Upon death that spark returns to god.

G. What is the meaning of history?

1. All of three of the Greek philosophers are going to agree that the accumulation of knowledge is the meaning and purpose of history.

2. For Socrates it is to accumulate knowledge of himself. This will make man happier with himself and to make him a better citizen.

3. For Plato to accumulate knowledge of the Ideal can only make this physical world a better place to live.

4. For Aristotle, the accumulation of knowledge about the physical world was what is important.

II. Compare and contrast the Philosophers view with Homer’s view.

A. Their view of the Gods.

1. Socrates and Plato agreed with Homer as to the existence of the Greek Pantheon. They disagreed as to the nature of the gods.

2. Aristotle rejected Homer’s ideas altogether.

B. What is the nature of the universe – its origin and structure?

1. Socrates and Homer believed in the traditional Greek mythological explanations for the origins of the universe.

2. Plato and Aristotle rejected Homer’s ideas for their own explanations. (see above)

C. Their views of the Nature of Man

1. All three Philosophers agreed with Homer in believing Man’s essential nature to be Good.
2. They all recognized that Man had his problems for various different reasons but his essential nature was good.

D. Their views on the Basis of Morality and Ethics.
   1. Homer believed that the will and desires of the gods was the basis of all morality and ethics.
   2. The only area of agreement here is that they all relate morality and ethics back to the gods some how. But it is for very different reasons.

E. What is the cause of Evil and Suffering?
   1. All three Philosophers are going to agree with each other that Man’s ignorance is what causes Evil and Suffering.
   2. Homer believes that the actions of the gods are what cause evil and suffering in the lives of men.

F. What happens to man at death?
   1. Homers view of Hades as described in the Odyssey is man’s only destiny after death.
   2. Socrates saw this a possibility but he did not imagine it as dismal or gloomy as Homer did. Socrates looked forward to it whereas Homer dreaded it.
   3. Plato not only disagreed with Homer here, but he thought Homer’s view should be banned and censored.

G. What is the meaning of history?
   1. The philosophers believed man was to accumulate knowledge throughout history.
   2. Homer believed man was to accumulate Glory throughout history.

III. You can use the other outlines to compare the philosopher’s views with the Bible.