

ASTRONOMY 9: HISTORY OF COSMOLOGY

Handout #5

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Origin Myths: India, China, Japan

- Many are not overtly theistic
- Advent of cosmological philosophy

I. Japan (indigenous)

- Creation by supreme being
 - A) Ainu: *In the Beginning the World Was Slush*
 - Creator (remote, sky-bound) makes a helper Bird to make Earth
 - Islands stamped out of “dismal slush” by treading and tail-wagging
 - cf. Native American cosmologies

II. India

- Creation through Divine Sacrifice
 - A) Rig-Veda X, xc: *Sacrifice of Primal Man*
 - Very anthropomorphic, Primal Man is central to the universe (1/4 worldly beings, 3/4 immortal heavens)
 - “Man is this greatness”
 - Body of Primal Man \Rightarrow natural elements, cardinal directions, human class structure, religious order
- Creation from the Unknown
 - A) Rig-Veda X, cxxix: *In the Beginning*
 - Recognizes ground of being must transcend Being / Not-Being
 - Unique admission of myth’s conceptual limitations
 - “Who knows truly?” “Whatever was ...”
 - God may not even comprehend the origin
 - Heat as generative
 - B) *Kena Upanishad*
 - Brahman is beyond the senses, beyond comprehension
 - Warns against common idolatry
 - Focus on ground of being
- The Cosmic Egg
 - A) Brahmanas: *Creation from an Egg*
 - Animistic primal waters \Rightarrow heat \Rightarrow egg \Rightarrow Prajapati
 - One-year incubation (cf. childbirth, nature), 1000-year life
 - Creates good / evil duality
 - B) *Chandogya Upanishad*
 - Origin from Not-Being (i) or from Being (ii – can Being arise from Not-Being?)
 - One-year egg (i), parts create the world:
 - Gold/silver \Rightarrow Sky/earth; Inner/outer \Rightarrow Cloud/mountains; Veins/fluid \Rightarrow Rivers/oceans
 - Brahma is the Sun
 - Being (ii) \Rightarrow heat \Rightarrow water (sweat, tears) \Rightarrow food (as from rain)
 - C) *Laws of Manu*
 - Self-created Brahman, creation out of thought
 - Creates 1-year egg out of watery chaos for own birth
 - Unifies cause/result, father/son, creator/man
- The Eternal Universe
 - A) Jinasena: *There Is No Creator*

- World ordered into heaven/earth/hell
- If created, what was before?
- Can't form material out of immaterial
- God's will = "silly stuff"
- If God is already perfect, why bother with creation?
- If imperfect, can't create everything
- Why does evil exist?
- Believers "maddened by evil doctrine"
- The Rhythmic (Cyclic) Universe
 - A) Buddha: *How the World Evolved*
 - Cyclic rebirth/suffering/mortality
 - Universal expansion/contraction is unaffected by any gods, no creator
 - Punctures Brahman myth: delusion of beings who first leave the heavenly realm during each cycle
 - B) Other Indian Myths
 - Kalpa (Day of Brahma): 4.32×10^9 years (cf. 15 billion years since the Big Bang!) = 1 cycle
 - Gradual deterioration of man, then rebirth
 - Dancing Shiva

III. China

- Creation from "Chaos"
 - A) *Creation Out of Chaos*
 - Chaos \Rightarrow light (sky) / dark (earth) \Rightarrow "10,000 creations"
 - *Yin*: male, bright, active, strength, force, fire
 - *Yang*: female, dark, passive, soft, tranquil, water
 - Mixture \Rightarrow 5 elements (wood, fire, earth, metal, water) \Rightarrow "Old Emperor"
 - Asks questions of the divine, who explains cosmic order
 - Earth floats on sea, heaven supported by 8 poles and central mountain
 - "Great in the small and small in the great"
 - B) *The Myth of P'an Ku* (4 versions)
 1. Chaos
 - Chaos and time \Rightarrow "something" \Rightarrow male/female, P'an Ku (creator) and primal man
 2. Cosmic Egg
 - Inner chaos, P'an Ku as embryo
 - Fashions world, chisels earth/sky, places sun/moon/stars
 - Teaches and orders man
 3. Sacrifice
 - Sacrifice perfects the world
 - Skull / flesh \Rightarrow sky dome / soil
 - Man from vermin on skin!
 - Blood \Rightarrow rivers, seas
 - C) Lao Tzu: *Tao te Ching*
 - Philosophical meditation (cf. story of creation)
 - Tao = oneness, the "Way", no thing, no duality, ground of being
 - Tao \Rightarrow the One \Rightarrow Two (yin/yang) \Rightarrow Three \Rightarrow myriad creatures
 - Man modeled on earth, earth on heaven, heaven on Tao
 - Beyond power of speech/naming
 - Glimpse only by ridding of ego, desires (= manifestations)
 - Non-action as accord with nature
 - D) *Huai-nan Tzu: Creation of the Universe*
 - Chaos leads to emptiness, the universe, and force
 - Clear, light goes up to heaven; heavy, turbid goes down to earth (cf. Aristotle)
 - Elements as mix of yin/yang

- True man is reunited with Oneness, returns to Formless
- E) Kuo Hsiang: *Nature and Non-existence*
 - Argues Being can't change to Not-Being and vice versa
 - No First Cause
 - All is spontaneous, by nature, no divine creation
 - Non-action leads to power