

Physics and Religious Studies 43
Origins: A Dialogue between Scientists and Humanists
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Is the Earth a Special or Unique Place?

Perhaps one of the most fundamental questions that humans have asked over and over again is where did our world come from. Is it special, is it unique, and what is our place in this world?

The Book of Genesis in the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament.

“The Five Books of Moses” or Torah

Genesis	<i>Bereshit</i>
Exodus	<i>Shemot</i>
Leviticus	<i>Vayikra</i>
Numbers	<i>Bamidbar</i>
Deuteronomy	<i>Devarim</i>

How scholars attempt to date the Book of Genesis

The so-called “Documentary Hypothesis”

There are at least four different layers of tradition in the Torah

The “J” [Jehovah] Tradition always uses the name Yahweh one of names of God in the Hebrew Bible. This is always translated as “The Lord”

The “E” Tradition – it uses the name *elohim* as the proper name of God

Both the J and E traditions have their origins in the reigns of King David and King Solomon between 1010 to 900 BCE. In addition to its presence in the Torah, they are also present in I and II Samuel and I and II Kings.

The “D” Tradition – is confined to the Book of Deuteronomy and in other texts of the Hebrew Bible outside of the Torah (e.g., the Book of Jeremiah; the I and II Books of Chronicles). It is usually dated between 622 and 587 BCE.

The “P” or Priestly Tradition. It is dated between 538 and 470 BCE. It synthesizes the earlier traditions; it will use *elohim* (God) or *yahweh elohim* (the Lord God).

Its concerns are the concerns of a priesthood which stands at the center of a theocracy – rituals, genealogies, pure and impure, clean and unclean, and most importantly understanding that history points to them.

To which tradition does Genesis 1 belong?

The Babylonian Exile (587/586 BCE) and the return to Jerusalem under Cyrus the King of Persia (538 BCE).

Emphasis upon time – six days of creation and the Sabbath

Genesis 1:14 – “God said, ‘Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night; they shall serve as signs for the set times (*ulemo’adim*)

Clear division of the spaces of creation

Dry land and the animals of the land

Water and the animals of the water

Air and the animals of the air

The idea of rulership – vs. 26 – “They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle of the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on the earth.”

You are reading the translation and commentary of Genesis 1 and the question that might interest us is whether or not one can understand Genesis 1 without an extended commentary as we have here?

Genesis 1:1 is usually translated as “In the beginning God created the heaven and earth.”

Is the earth created *ex nihilo*?

The verb to create (*bara’*) in Genesis 1:1

tohu ve-vohu (1:2) and *tehom*.

“and a wind from God sweeping over the water” (1:2) vs “and the spirit of God floated over the water”

Evening and morning

The use of *memshelet* throughout the account of the creation

Genesis 2:21 – the *taninim gedolim*

The creation of the first human 1:26 – “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” What does this mean and is there a difference between image and likeness?

Meaning of “and it was good.”

Are we familiar with this Genesis account or is it now after commentary a very different text.

Scripture and Commentary Tradition are necessary to understand

Genesis as a myth

mythos and *logos*

Myth as a form of symbolic communication

myth (cosmogonic myth)

etiological narrative

legend

epic and saga

fairy tale

Scholars on myth:

Roger Caillois' *Man and the Sacred* (1939).

Joseph Campbell' s *A Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949)

The “monomyth” of the hero

“Myth is depersonalized dream and dream is personalized myth”

Mircea Eliade' s *Myth and Reality* (1965)

Characteristics of true myth

1. Myth is always true and its truth claims are self-referential.
2. The authority of myth is always implicit.
3. Myth is always about creation or cosmogony.
4. Myth is always set in a very special time; the fabulous times of the beginnings.

Its language is always “at the beginning” or “in the beginning” or “*in principio*” or “*in illo tempore*”

Marker that distinguishes true myth from other forms of symbolic communication. How does a fairy tale begin?

“Once upon a time....”

5. The actors in myth are always the gods, semi-divine beings, and the ancestors who made us what we are.
6. Myth is the *magna carta* of reality. It is used ritually to recreate the world as it was in the beginning.
7. Myth reveals an ontology or what constitutes being.

Different types of cosmogonic myths:

Creation by speech or word – The Io myth

The cosmic egg – the Polynesian myth of Ta'aroa

The earth-diver – Maidu of California

Creation through battle or conflict – The Enuma Elish – Tiamat, Kingu, and Marduk

Creation through thought

World parents

Creation through sacrifice – Hainuwele and “creative murder”

A.E. Jensen collected this work on the island of Ceram

Dema-beings

Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology* (1959)

Two ways of understanding the myth:

A cosmogonic myth that describes how the dema were transformed

A myth of rectification

The “cargo situation”

Charles H. Long, *Alpha: The Myths of Creation* (1963)

Myths are authoritative narratives which establish the world.

Myths are always true for those who hold them.

The truth of myths are always implicit.

The clash of cosmogonies.

Contemporary myths

The myth of self-liberation

psychoanalysis and psychotherapy

Is science understood to be one of our contemporary myths?