The Early History of Man — Part 6. Creationism in the Pagan World

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ABSTRACT

Most do not realize that for the greater part of mankind's history, Creationism held unchallenged sway over political thought, philosophy and science in every literate culture of the world. It was not until only a few centuries before Christ that certain Greek philosophers challenged it, seeking to replace it with the concept that the universe was godless and had either come into existence naturally or had always existed. This is the story of that challenge, and it reveals that early pagan man had a far more profound understanding of the Creator and of the scientific issues involved than we have been led to believe. Together with early man's recorded but extra-biblical knowledge of certain patriarchs and events that are known to us through Genesis (see the previous articles in this series), it tells us a great deal about the true historicity of the Genesis account.

INTRODUCTION

'Stranger than the strangest concepts and theories of science is the appearance of God on the intellectual horizon of late twentieth-century science . . . . Einstein once said "I want to know how God created this world" . . . . And astrophysicist Robert Jastrow begins God and the Astronomers, his celebrated survey of modern cosmology, with a remarkable observation, "For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountain of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; [and] *as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries."* '[1]

Creationism, it seems, is the idea that won't go away. In spite of many claims to the contrary on the part of certain modern philosophers and educationalists, it still perplexes the scientific and academic worlds with its insistence that no matter what ingenious theory is invoked to account for the existence of the universe, there has to be a point where it all began. There has to have been a Beginner, a Creator, a First Cause, a Prime Mover. This concept is nothing new. It is a conclusion that has been reached by thinkers throughout the centuries and from cultures across the world. Today it has simply returned to haunt, as it has always haunted, the minds of some of the world's most eminent and capable men of science. The remarkable thing is that Creationism is no invention of latter-day Christian evangelicals, as is commonly claimed or assumed. And neither is the controversy that currently rages between creationists and evolutionists something that has merely sprung up since the days of Darwin and Huxley. It is much more ancient than that.

We have seen in previous articles in this series how early pre-Christian peoples traced their descent through carefully preserved genealogies to patriarchs that are known to us through the book of Genesis, and how this knowledge was preserved and added to even when those peoples can have had no contact whatever with either the Jewish or Christian churches. As an extension to that, I would like to offer for consideration the following material which shows that the extra-biblical knowledge of God that was preserved amongst the early pagan nations often surfaced to oppose attempts to denigrate that knowledge and attribute the creation of the universe to purely material forces and causes, and man's origins to a purely animal ancestry.

We shall consider first the question of the apparently unchallenged sway that Creationism held over thought, philosophy and science in the ancient world; its appearance in all literate early cultures, each society's creation model sharing recognisable features with those of others; its even-

tual challenge at the hands of certain early Greek philosophers, and the battle between Creationism and materialism that was ignited then and which has taxed the greatest minds amongst scientists and philosophers ever since.

Certain Greeks challenged the creation model of their day on the alleged grounds of logic, reason and science, and it was upon those grounds that Creationism had to defend itself and turn itself from being merely a religiously held (and sometimes legally enforced) point of faith into a scientific model of origins. That it is not fatigued or worn out at the present day, even after the unremitting onslaughts of Darwinism and other modern philosophies have been added to the long and weary battle, and the fact that it has not only survived but is actively growing in worldwide influence where most of its historical contestants have long since gone to the proverbial wall, says something for the vigour and resilience of the model and the seriousness with which it needs to be approached by today's historian of ideas.

IN THE BEGINNING . . .

On Thursday March 4, 1875, George Smith, the Assyriologist, wrote in **The Daily Telegraph** of certain clay tablets that he had unearthed from the ruins of Kouyunjik — ancient Nineveh. Under the auspices **of The Daily Telegraph,** he had mounted an expedition to Assyria (present-day Iraq), the purpose of which was to retrieve and decipher any tablets whose contents might touch upon that greatest of mysteries, the Creation. His efforts, and their investment, were well rewarded. The tablets that he brought back to England not only touched upon the subject of the Creation, they also went into the matter in great and explicit detail. And their contents were far older than the clay tablets upon which they were now preserved. In a cosmological framework that must have seemed bizarre to the mid-Victorian mind, the tablets told the story of how the universe came into existence under the hand of Anu and a veritable college of lesser gods. But importantly for our enquiry, the existence of the tablets and the story that they told awoke the consciousness of certain post-Darwinian Victorians to the fact that Creationism was a subject that was by no means confined to the book of Genesis or the Jewish or Christian churches. Just as the new Darwinian creed was paralleled in ancient times by materialist philosophers and poets, Lucretius and so on, so Genesis and thus Creationism could now claim an equally ancient pedigree, an equally august body of witnesses to speak of its universality — if not its truth. Naturally, Smith's discovery caused great interest and excitement on both sides of the debate:

> *'In my lecture on the Chaldean Account of the Deluge, which I delivered on Dec. 3, 1872, I stated my conviction that all the earlier narratives of Genesis would receive new light from the inscriptions . . . . With respect to these Genesis narratives a furious strife has existed for many years; every word has been scanned by eager scholars, and every possible meaning which the various passages could bear has been suggested; while the age and authenticity of the narratives have been discussed on all sides.'*[2]

And little wonder, for just as the new Darwinian creed was beginning to oust Genesis from its entrenched position in Victorian scientific thinking, the Assyrian records were seen to lend their voice to Genesis by accrediting the existence of the universe to the unthinkable — the will of a living being, living before physical life was created and therefore independent of and superior to the physical creation; a divine and immaterial cause which was necessarily greater than its material effect. This of course is the prime ingredient of the creation model of origins, the base upon which all else is constructed, and as we progress in our study we shall see that there are certain well established components that are essential to the creation model and common to the many variations on the theme that are encountered across every major culture. The value of the Assyrian tablets lies in the fact that these common components were, to the horror of some and the delight of others, seemingly being revealed for the first time.

The inference most readily drawn by some Victorians over the discovery of the tablets was that the Assyrian creation epic vindicated to some degree the book of Genesis. The evangelicals naturally proclaimed it, whilst the modernist critics denounced Genesis as nothing more than an admittedly nobler version of the Assyrian account, something that vindicated rather than challenged their own assertions. But both sides, it appears, had missed the true relevance of what had been discovered. The discoverer himself, George Smith, was a little more reticent than either side, confining his remarks whilst describing the tablets to such observations as:

> *'The fragment of the obverse, broken as it is, is precious as giving the description of the chaos or desolate void before the Creation of the world, and the first movement of creation. This corresponds to the first two verses of the first chapter of Genesis.'*[3]

Further, Smith went on to tell us that he had recovered a particular series of eight tablets (known today as the *Enuma elish),* the first seven tablets each recounting one of the seven days of creation, as recorded in Genesis. Smith laid them out thus for simple comparison:

> *'Genesis, Chap. 1.*
> *V. 1 and 2 agree with Tablet 1.*
> *V. 3 to 5 1st day probably with Tablet 2.*
> *V. 6 to 8 2nd day probably with Tablet 3.*
> *V. 9 to 13 3rd day probably with Tablet 4.*
> *V. 14 to 19 4th day probably with Tablet 5.*
> *V. 20 to 23 5th day probably with Tablet 6.*
> *V. 24 and 25 6th day probably with Tablet 7.*
> *V. 26 and following, 6th and 7th days, probably with Tablet 8.'*[4]

The sixth tablet depicts the creation by Marduk of man

himself, who is called Adam, as in the Bible:

> *'Blood to blood, I join blood to bone. I make an original thing. Its name is Man* [— adamu]*!'*[5]

These striking similarities, for all the differences that existed between the Genesis and Assyrian accounts, could not be ignored. But if one, the Assyrian, were truly not an historical vindication of the other, Genesis, then what was it? Of course, the modernists couldn't possibly accept that the Assyrian account vindicated Genesis, so they had to maintain their own theories that Genesis was borrowed. However, the names of its strange gods notwithstanding, in its description of the physical universe at the very point of creation, the Assyrian account follows Genesis almost exactly. *Mummu* is the deep — the chaotic waters of Genesis; *tehuta* is likewise the uninhabited emptiness — the unformed and unfilled earth of Genesis; whilst *tamtu* is the waters of the deep — again a familiar component of the Genesis account. The wind (or *spirit*) of Genesis is paralleled also, as is the creation and dividing of the upper expanse (the heavens) from the lower. Then the stars, the sun and the moon (only in reverse order to Genesis), all follow in their turn along with the subsequent creation of

> *'strong monsters . . . beasts of the field . . . creeping things . . .',*

and so on, until comparison becomes superfluous, so exactly parallel are the two accounts.

Whatever this may tell us of the historicity of the book of Genesis, we are compelled to acknowledge that here we are presented with striking and easily recognisable components that are certainly common to two distinct accounts, or rather models, of creation. These accounts have arisen from two distinct and often mutually antagonistic cultures of the ancient world, the one a monotheistic culture and the other polytheistic. Even when allowing for a certain unavoidable element of cultural exchange between these respective societies, and especially if we ignore altogether the question of the historical vindication of either account, then the degree of similarity is one that compels the conclusion that any account that attributes the origins of the universe to a divine or supernatural principle, must contain at least some if not all of these components. In other words, the prediction is that if there truly exists such a thing as a viable and historical creation model of origins, then it will be composed of basically the same elements no matter in which culture it may be encountered or to what point in history it may be attributed.

It could be, and doubtless was, argued that given that some of the peoples of Mesopotamia were of the same Semitic stock as the writer of Genesis, then it may not be so surprising that the two accounts offer such striking degrees of similarity. But whilst the Victorian scene was still reverberating with the impact of Smith's discoveries in Assyria, there was at the same time emerging an account of the Creation from another ancient culture altogether, that of Egypt. Public sensibilities, no doubt, ensured that the details of the Egyptian account of the Creation did not receive anything like the limelight that was brought to bear upon the Assyrian account, for reasons that are obvious to any who have cared to read it. Yet the Egyptian model clearly owes nothing to either the Mesopotamian or Genesis accounts.

Whilst this is hardly the place to examine the impossibly complex theogony of the Egyptians, or even seek to explain it, we note an important aspect of the Egyptian creation account in a particular text from Heliopolis,[6] in which we meet with an important diversion from either Genesis, where the creation was *spoken* into being, or the Mesopotamian account where the *conflict of opposites* gave rise to the creation, inasmuch as the Egyptian account perceives the universe as having begun to materialise through an act of divine onanism. The original, pre-existent creator, Khepera, placed his own seed into his mouth from whence emerged the first two lesser gods, Shu and Tefnut. Thus, Khepera became three gods rather than one, and it was from these three that the universe emerged from the 'watery mass' as a created and divinely sustained entity. Ever the masters in the art of symbolism, the Egyptians were evidently attempting to convey the idea of the life-giving, procreative power of the divine word as the medium through which the material and living universe came into existence — not such a crude idea philosophically speaking, but hardly one that could be openly discussed by Victorian ladies in the British Museum tearooms:

> *'The words of Nebertcher . . . I am he who came into being in the form of Khepera. I am the creator of all things that exist . . . that came forth from my mouth. Heaven and earth did not exist, nor had been created the herbs of the ground nor the creeping things. I raised them out of the primeval abyss from a state of non-being . . .'*[7]

It is difficult for us to imagine the sheer force of the Egyptian cosmogony. So strongly did the Egyptians embrace their model of origins that not an hour of the day was thought to be governed by chance or neglected by the presiding gods of each hour. For the Egyptian, it was inconceivable that the universe may have come into being through any unconscious agency or was governed by unthinking natural laws, for not only was design evident in the visible creation, but so also was the continual divine governance of its every detail. There simply does not appear to have arisen amongst the Egyptians any thinker, philosopher or scientist of the atomist or materialist persuasion. There were indeed other types of heretic and dissident, notably the pharaoh Akhnaten[8] who attempted to bring all Egypt under the persuasion that there was but one god. But none (on record at any rate) who were ready to deny altogether the concept of the divine or supernatural origin of the universe.

We encounter the same notable absence of atheism or materialism in Mesopotamia and early Israel, where records make virtually no mention of any materialist thinker

even by way of condemnation or refutation, save perhaps the solitary biblical observation that,

'the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God!' (Psalm 14:1).

This, of course, presupposes the existence of such fools at the time the statement was written (ca 1000 bc), yet not even the shadow of a controversy has come down to us that so much as hints that the prevailing cosmogony was ever challenged or even questioned. And that is a notable fact that no one, to my knowledge, has ever sought to examine.[9] In every early major culture around the world of which we have any record, the consensus was that the universe had been created by often a single and usually supreme divine entity (even in notoriously polytheistic cultures) with not a hint of that view being challenged. Was Creationism really so universally held to in those days that not a single voice was ever raised against it?

Something of the universality of the creationist concept can be seen amongst the Taoist sages of ancient China where in the sixth-century bc the following was penned, showing that the concept of a beginning and a Creator was not something peculiar to the Semitic or Near Eastern mind, but had been assimilated by certain otherwise (and presumably) non-creationist Taoists from perhaps an earlier school of thought within ancient Chinese philosophy:

'Before time, and throughout time, there has been a self-existing being, eternal, infinite, complete, omnipresent . . . . Outside this being, before the beginning, there was nothing.'[10]

There were, of course, certain later philosophers amongst the Taoists who did question the certainty of a Creator at all. Witness *Kuo-Hsiang:*

'I venture to ask whether the creator is or is not. If he is not, how can he create things? . . . . The creating of things has no Lord; everything creates itself.'[11]

. . . but whether this ever burgeoned into a lively debate between directly opposing factions within the Taoist school seems doubtful. It is certainly unlikely, for to question the existence of God on a philosophical level of possibilities is not at all the same thing as to deny outright his existence as a religious principle. But if it did become a contest among the Taoists, then that contest left virtually no trace of itself, and was necessarily to have little or no effect in any case upon the coming philosophical battles in the West where, unlike Taoist China, absolutes were concepts that were readily recognised and revered in either camp.

As for those Taoists who did refrain from questioning the doctrine of a divinely created universe, they refrained also from putting a name to the Creator because so ineffable was he that he was himself unnameable. Logically, he existed before there was anything else, even names, so it was only reasonable for them to suppose that he himself therefore was nameless and they perceived him instead as a Principle, an anonymous First Cause or Prime Mover. Importantly, matter was not considered eternal by the Taoists. Matter, the universe, had a beginning, as did time itself, and both matter and time owed their existence to the conscious will of the divine Principle in the act of creation.

Whilst in China, we encounter in the story *of Huang-lao*[12] some more of the common components of the creation model that we have already encountered in Genesis and the Mesopotamian and Egyptian models. There was a beginning, and there was chaos, and from this chaos came light. Adding to this, the *later Huai-Nan Tzu* account (compiled during the Han period 206 bc–220 ad) describes the Principle who created the universe as the Great Oneness, the unifying principle of the cosmos. Indeed, modern physicists, creationist or otherwise, would find little to argue with in the notions set out in this account:

'Before heaven and earth had taken form all was vague and amorphous. Therefore it was called the Great Beginning . . . . The universe produced material force which had limits. That which was clear and light drifted up to heaven, while that which was heavy and turbid solidified to become earth. Therefore heaven was completed first and earth assumed shape after . . . .'[13]

Added then to the concepts of a beginning, chaos and light, was the idea of vagueness and the amorphous condition of matter immediately following the initial act of creation. Or as Genesis would have it, the earth was without form and void. And even these four components of the model are added to in the creation accounts of other cultures altogether, specifically the element of water with the earth, or the primordial creation emerging from it. The universality of this concept is seen in the creation account contained in the **Aitareya Upanishad** of the Hindus,[14] and is found also at Eridu in early Mesopotamia, dating from the neo-Babylonian period (ca 600 bc), in which appears one of the earliest surviving extra-biblical references to record the agency of water:

'No reed had sprung up, no tree had been created . . . . No holy house, no house for the gods . . . had been made. All the lands were sea.'[15]

And this, as we see upon comparison, is almost exactly paralleled in the records of another culture altogether, the Lipan (Amerindian) account:

'In the beginning nothing was here where the world now stands; there was no ground, no earth — nothing but Darkness, Water and Cyclone . . . . There were no people living . . . . no fishes, no living things.'[16]

But it would be tedious and unnecessary to include yet more examples from around the world that share these common elements of the creation concept. They virtually all share them, and all are well-documented. But again, whilst we have before us in such abundance the various models of creation that appear in all the ancient cultures, we are still faced with a real dearth of reports that the creationist account was ever seriously challenged in the ancient world, until, that is, the arrival of the early Greek

philosophers on the scene.

GREECE AND THE BIRTH OF THE STOIC/EPICUREAN CONTROVERSY

By no means all of them of course, but certainly some of the early Greek philosophers appear to have offered the first real challenges to the concept of a divinely inspired creation, and proposed in its place an entirely materialistic scenario where the universe brought itself into being through the unconscious operation of natural law.

Thales of Miletus is usually credited with being the first such materialist to challenge the creationist view, but this is doubtful. All that we know of Thales comes to us through later writers, Aristotle the most notable amongst them, who simply described him as the 'founder of natural philosophy',[17] and it is upon little more than the strength of this one remark that the case of Thales presenting the first challenge to Creationism rests. And against that must be set the aphorisms that are attributed by others to Thales, such as:

> *'Of existing things, God is the oldest — for he is ungenerated. The world is the most beautiful, for it is God's creation . . . Mind is the swiftest, for it runs through everything . . .',*[18]

and so on, which are, of course, classic creationist sentiments. They have very little to do with real materialism. So it is to his pupil, Anaximander, that we must look for the first recorded challenge from the materialist camp. But there are some intriguing aspects even to Anaximander's challenge, for the view held by Anaximander was fully evolutionary. From Plutarch's pen we hear Anaximander propounding that

> *'. . . originally, humans were born from animals of a different kind . . .'*[19],

and so on, the creative principle that brought the universe into existence being held to be entirely impersonal and 'natural'. But even here we need to be careful in our assumptions, for it is somewhat unlikely that Anaximander had no predecessors from whom he had developed or culled his ideas. From his pen, as it were, materialism bounds onto the stage fully fledged and there can be few theories or ideas in history which are that original. So we may assume for lack of recorded evidence to the contrary that prior to Anaximander there was at least some kind of materialist challenge to Creationism developing perhaps even underground amongst certain thinkers. The fact that none of the surviving historical records make any mention of them before Anaximander's time might be due either to the common accidents of time — or even to the designs and efficiency of contemporary censorship, a much more likely case. Lending weight to this possibility are the one or two clues that have survived that together suggest that the challenge from materialism was more serious than the dearth of records would suggest, that this was recognised by the powers that then prevailed, and that some sort of effort at least was made to counter its claims. These clues lie in the laws of the time.

Plato,[20] discussing in depth exactly how the 'impious' may be legislated against, begins with something of an understatement, the classic λιτοτεδ of the Greek philosopher:

> *'Some people, I believe, account for all things which have come to exist, all things which are coming into existence now, and all things which will do so in the future, by attributing them either to nature, art, or chance.'*[21]

. . . going on to tell us how these thinkers define the gods as '*artificial concepts*' and '*legal fictions*'. He names it for what he thought it to be, a '*pernicious doctrine*' that

> *'must be the ruin of the younger generation, both in the state at large and in private families.'*[22]

Unfortunately, Plato names no specific thinker or thinkers against whom he is contending or who he thinks is responsible for the onset of these ideas. But this in turn only suggests the more strongly that the ideas were more generally and anciently held than the records would lead us to believe. If Anaximander or any other single thinker were held to be responsible for the then recent introduction of a single radical, not to say morally ruinous idea, as Darwin has been scapegoated since the mid-nineteenth century for example, then surely Plato would have named the culprit and not have spoken so generally about an idea that so seriously challenged or threatened to undermine the moral order of the day. Plato was to supply his own creationist answer to these radical thinkers, and it is of great interest to note that he did this not by perpetuating the view that had prevailed amongst creationists before his day, but by offering his own carefully thought out and decidedly more 'scientific' model of origins.

Before Plato, perhaps the one thinker who was most representative of creationist thought amongst the early Greeks was Hesiod (ca. eighth century bc), who, according to one authority, lived in an age '*innocent of philosophy*',[23] which again suggests the current absence of challenge from the materialist school in those early days. Hesiod used all the ingredients of the creation model that we have encountered in other cultures:

> *'First of all the Void came into being . . . next Earth . . . . Out* of [the] *Void came Darkness . . . and out of Night came Light and Day . . ,'.*[24]

. . . and so on. But Hesiod's account of the Creation contained flaws that the later materialists were to exploit in their ridicule of so many presiding, not to say clumsy and vexatious, gods whom no sane man could honestly respect, and it seems to be this weakness that Plato sought to eradicate in his own more scientific model of origins. The theology of Hesiod had already been ennobled somewhat before Plato's day by Xenophanes, who criticised Hesiod's model in the following terms:

> *'Homer and Hesiod attributed to the gods all the things which among men are shameful and blame-*

worthy — theft and adultery and mutual deception . . . . There is one god, [however, who is] *greatest among gods and men, similar to mortals neither in shape nor in thought . . . . he sees as a whole, he thinks as a whole, he hears as a whole . . . . Always he remains in the same state, changing not at all . . . . But far from toil he governs everything with his mind.'*[25]

The theological model for Plato's Creator therefore would seem not to have been entirely Plato's own invention. It is in the *Timaeus*[26] that we find the nub of Plato's model, which far exceeds that of Hesiod and the other classical Greek creationists both in its profundity and in its more 'scientific', that is, explanatory, approach to the origins of the universe:

'Let us therefore state the reason why the framer of this universe of change framed it at all. He was good, and what is good has no particle of envy in it; being therefore without envy he wished all things to be as like himself as possible. This is as valid a principle for the origin of the world of change as we shall discover from the wisdom of men . . . .'[27]

Dare we detect here the merest hint of a confession that what Plato was telling us was not entirely original to himself, but that what he was presenting to us had been gathered, in part at least, from other thinkers who had gone before him but of whom we can now know little or nothing — Xenophanes for example? Maybe. But one of the most important aspects of Plato's argument is the fact that he had attempted, and with considerable success, to reduce an almost universally held — not to say legally compelled — belief in the Creation to the terms of a rational and scientific model of origins. Gone forever from the (classical) Greek model of creation was the concept of divine capriciousness, with the universe being perceived as some kind of divine accident or even playground of the gods. Plato's model was of a higher concept altogether. For him, the Creator turned chaos into order simply because it was his good nature, and good pleasure, so to do. He loved order rather than chaos, and to ensure the maintenance of that order everything he created was created according to an eternal and flawless pattern, Plato's justly famous Theory of Forms. Perhaps the strangest aspect of Plato's model of creation, however, is that Plato makes no attempt to identify his Creator. He is not equated with any of the gods in the Greek pantheon, not even with Zeus. Neither is he elevated in such a way as to make him an object of worship. He in fact is subject to the same limitations of the material universe that he is shaping from seemingly pre-existent material. In that regard, Plato's Creator cannot be identified with the Creator in Genesis, for example, who created the universe *ex nihilo* using powers of supreme omnipotence.

All of which is something of a moot point however, for the real importance of Plato's model for our enquiry is that it seemingly and effectually silenced the materialist school at least for the next fifty years or so, that is until the time when Epicurus was to lay down his own counter-challenge to Creationism. Aristotle had evidently already attempted to find some middle ground between the idealist Plato and his materialist opponents, but this did little or nothing to modify the sheer philosophical provocation of what Plato had proposed. Epicurus felt bound to oppose it, which he accomplished at around the close of the fourth century BC, and the effects of his cosmology were to reverberate, throughout the coming Roman world at least, for many centuries to come. Indeed, it still survives in the elements of several modern philosophies.

The challenge issued by Plato's model of origins was met by Epicurus at every point (even on matters that had to do with the state and law). In particular, Epicurus argued, it was insufficient to contend for the creation of the universe from the assumption of a well-ordered cosmos, simply because the cosmos in his view was not well-ordered.[28] It had culminated from a long, perhaps infinite, series of accidents resulting from the random jostling of atoms. But then Epicurus shrewdly shifted the ground a little so that any counter-challenge from the creationist camp would need to take on board an added complication and consequently be more difficult to propound — Epicurus acknowledged the existence of the gods! He relegated them to a place of complete ineffectuality and disinterest in the cosmos, but he avoided a total denial of their existence. Apart from the fact that he had to beware of the laws of the time against impiety and blasphemy, Epicurus knew that outright atheism is easily refuted by any philosopher with an eye for controversy, and the fact that few men in any age are outright atheists anyway would ensure scant support for his views. But if the existence of the gods is acknowledged at the same time in which the divine creation of the universe is denied, then the arguments become infinitely more complex with the materialist's subsequent ability to change ground at will. This was entirely in keeping with the habit of Epicurus, who was justly criticised for such philosophical deviousness on more than one occasion:

'Epicurus himself used to do the same thing. For instance, he saw that if those atoms of his were always falling downwards by their own weight, their motion would be fixed and predetermined, and there would be no room for free will in the world. So casting about for a way to avoid this determinism, which Democritus had apparently overlooked, he said that the atoms, as they fell, just swerved a little!'[29]

However, the acknowledgment of the existence of the gods did have the advantage of imparting to Epicurus control of the field and the ability to state the terms under which any ensuing controversy might be fought. Or so he vainly hoped, for far from seeing Creationism off the proverbial field, Epicureanism merely served to rally the creationist camp towards a better definition of its own views and a more profound clarification of the terms involved.

And the school of thought that raised itself to meet the challenge of Epicurean materialism was the Stoic school. This was founded by Zeno ca 308 bc and entered the arena of controversy at virtually the very moment in time when Epicurus was throwing down his challenge to Creationism. It is almost as if that challenge had been anticipated, so remarkable is the timing between the advents of the two opposing views. But however that may be, Stoicism proved to be a very effective challenge indeed in the pagan world to materialism in any guise or form.

Stoicism provided that challenge by a most significant development, namely a far more profound concept of the Creator than had hitherto prevailed in Greek thought. No longer was the Creator portrayed as a Hesiodic, capricious being only a step or two higher than man in the natural order of things, not to mention a step or two lower than man in the moral order. The incipient and lightly veiled atheism implied by Epicurus in his philosophy, albeit he conceded an ineffectual existence of the gods, was answered by the Stoics in the most forceful and profound terms, with Chrysippus, developing Xenophanes' teachings of one Deity no doubt, giving it perhaps its most compelling voice:

> *'If there is anything in nature which the human mind, which human intelligence, energy and power could not create, then the creator of such things must be a being superior to man. But the heavenly bodies in their eternal orbits could not be created by man. They must therefore be created by a being greater than man . . . . Only an arrogant fool would imagine that there was nothing in the whole world greater than himself. Therefore there must be something greater than Man. And that something must be God.'*[30]

Such endearingly plain though lofty logic is hard to refute with even the most ingenious of arguments, and possesses the added virtue of being very easily embraced by the layman who was (as ever) typically not in sympathy with a thoroughly atheistic point of view and who was to provide the grassroots support for this newly refined model of origins. But how did the model come to be so refined? What processes of thought could conceivably have led from the somewhat grotesque parodies of human corruption that one sees in the older creation model of the Greeks amongst beings that passed for 'gods', to the majestic and undeniably profound concept of a supreme and omniscient Deity voiced by Chrysippus and his colleagues?[31] The Christian faith had yet to be born, its influence on Greek thought still lying some centuries in the future. So was it perhaps through the agency of the recently Hellenised Jews who, albeit they horrified the orthodox of their faith by mingling much of Judaism with Greek thought and practices, unwittingly carried with them into the Greek camp an inherent knowledge of the God of Genesis in a kind of theological Trojan horse? This is possible on the one hand, but most improbable on the other.

The Greeks, it appears, first made contact with Judaism as early as the year 587 bc, when Greek mercenaries assisted the armies of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in the investing and destruction of Jerusalem.[32] Along with the mercenaries, of course, would have come a smaller army of civil servants, spies and so on, many of whom during the long and enforced hours of idleness could have imbibed something at least of Jewish thought, and could even perhaps have exercised their bored but educated minds on its complexities. That is one thing, but the suggestion that they might subsequently have considered Jewish thought to be on such a higher plane than their own that they took some of it on board and mingled it with their philosophies to the extent of transforming Greek philosophy in general is quite another. The Jews were viewed with a poorly-disguised contempt by the Greeks in all spheres of life throughout their centuries of contact with one another, to the extent that many of the Jews found it necessary to become Greek — Hellenised — in order to survive at all.[33] The persecution of the Jews under Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–163 bc) is perhaps the most telling episode regarding the often mutual hostility that existed between the orthodox of either side — especially considering the all-out attempt by Antiochus to expunge the Jewish faith altogether.

But to complicate the picture slightly, we should also bring into our consideration at least one other important event that occurred some seventy-five years before that persecution took place, and seventeen years before Chrysippus became head of the Stoic school in 233 bc, namely the translation of the Jewish Torah (which includes Genesis of course) into Greek in the year 250 bc.[34] Before Antiochus, the Greek version of Genesis had had seventy-five virtually uninterrupted years in which to be assimilated to some extent at least into Greek thought, and we cannot exclude the possibility — indeed the likelihood — that it had had some sort of effect upon those Greek thinkers, Chrysippus amongst them, who were during those seventy-five years seeking to elucidate and expand upon their own creation model. And yet, as we have seen, Stoicism had risen against the materialistic Epicurean creed considerably earlier (308 bc) than the earliest translation of Genesis into the Greek language. So it would appear by final analysis that the Stoic philosophers had already reached their now more refined creationist conclusions quite independently of Genesis and of any later Jewish influence on Greek thought, and the philosophical path that they trod in order to arrive at their conclusions must, because it is otherwise unrecorded, remain something of a mystery to us.

CICERO AND THE STOIC SCHOOL

But apart from such a lofty concept of the Deity who had created the universe, as voiced by Xenophanes, Plato and Chrysippus, another concept was to enter the mind of the Stoic school that was to develop this simple logic still

further, and was to lend the teaching of Chrysippus and his colleagues an almost irresistible authority. It was the idea of 'evidence from design', an evidence for divine intent and purpose that was observable for the Stoic both throughout the natural world, and throughout the universe. It is this evidence more than anything else that convinced the Stoic (as it convinces the creationist of today) of the scientific and philosophical correctness of his model. Refined and brilliantly expressed by Paley in the last century, the importance of evidence from design was not lost on earlier classical theorists who were quick to give it its permanent setting in the idea of Creationism, Cicero perhaps giving it its highest expression in pre-Christian Rome. His words are worth quoting at a little length:

> *'In the heavens there is nothing accidental, nothing arbitrary, nothing out of order, nothing erratic. Everywhere is order, truth, reason, constancy . . . . When you see a sundial or a water-clock, you see that it tells the time by design and not by chance. How then can you imagine that the universe as a whole is devoid of purpose and intelligence when it embraces everything, including these artifacts themselves and their artificers? Our friend Posidonius as you know has recently made a globe which in its revolution shows the movements of the sun and stars and planets, by day and night, just as they appear in the sky. Now if someone were to take this globe and show it to the people of Britain or Scythia would a single one of those barbarians fail to see that it was the product of a conscious intelligence?'*[35]

With these words Cicero gives expression to an idea that had flourished at least in embryo amongst the Stoics since their founder's day, and that even today is still perhaps the most difficult for the materialist to refute, for it is indeed exceedingly difficult to explain away convincingly any part of the universe, and especially the sheer complexity of living organisms, as the product of blind chance and accident. But with Cicero's view, we also encounter a philosophical question which was not to be either fully developed or explored until the eighteenth century under Hume, but which is plainly evident even in these early years of the creationist/materialist debate, namely the trustworthiness or otherwise of the eyes — the value of the senses, in other words, and the extent to which we can trust them to inform us correctly about the things that we observe around us.

In Cicero's day, the Epicurean view of a materialistic universe was given its fullest expression by Lucretius (ca 100–55 bc) in his poem **On the Nature of Things,** which Cicero mentions in a letter to his brother Quintus written in February 54 bc. There Cicero credits Lucretius (who had only recently died) with having written the poem

'*with many highlights of genius, but with much art*',[36]

and it appears that Cicero wrote his dialogue **On the Nature of the Gods,** some ten years later specifically as a rebuttal of Lucretius' ideas. The weak point of Lucretius' (and hence the Epicurean) argument was, to the Stoic at any rate, the declared inability to trust one's senses when inferring the existence of a Creator from the design that is evident in the universe. Or as Lucretius would have it:

> *'The nature of phenomena cannot be understood by the eyes.'*[37]

Lucretius said this, not because he believed the eyes themselves to be defective, but because it was a fault rather of the mind and its ability — or rather its inability — to perceive things correctly, and one for which the eyes could not be blamed.[38] In fairness to Lucretius, he did go on to qualify this statement, recognising that this dictum could not usefully be translated into everyday experience, for:

> *'This is to attack belief at its very roots — to tear up the entire foundation on which the maintenance of life is built. If you did not dare trust your senses so as to keep clear of precipices and other such things to be avoided and make for their opposites, there would be a speedy end to life itself.'*[39]

But such a qualification was to cut no ice with the Stoic Cicero. If mistrust of the senses was applicable to the universe and the world around us when it came to questions of either a divine or accidental origin of the universe, then it was surely applicable to the everyday life of mankind whose days were necessarily spent in the work-a-day material world. And conversely, if one really *could* ultimately trust one's senses in the work-a-day world, then one could trust them equally well when it came to pondering the design that was everywhere evident in the universe, and which spoke so eloquently of a great designer — the Creator of that universe. As a creationist and a Stoic, Cicero simply could not grasp the intellectual standpoint of the Epicurean:

> *'I cannot understand this regularity in the stars, this harmony of time and motion in their various orbits through all eternity, except as the expression of reason, mind and purpose . . . Their constant and eternal motion, wonderful and mysterious in its regularity, declares the indwelling power of a divine intelligence. If any man cannot feel the power of God when he looks upon the stars, then I doubt whether he is capable of any feeling at all.'*[40]

To the Stoic, it was one of the greatest ironies that an Epicurean thinker who bleated most about the inherent powers of physical matter to create and arrange itself into an ordered existence without any divine aid or guidance, found himself unable to trust that matter when it came to perceiving or even explaining this fact! And even the Epicurean concerned, Lucretius, was compelled by this inherent weakness in his own argument to ask:

> *'What then are we to pronounce more trustworthy than the senses? Can reason derived from the deceitful senses be invoked to contradict them, when it is itself wholly derived from the senses? If they* [the senses] *are not true, then reason in its entirety is equally false.'*[41]

What Lucretius had encountered, and what Cicero and every creationist since his day was to make of, was the self-referential paradox that is inherent on rather more than just a philosophical level, within materialism.[42] It can be no coincidence that Lucretius, following the line of his mentor Epicurus, held (admittedly with certain qualifications) the same distrust of the senses and the powers of reason to interpret the senses correctly that later materialists such as Hume were also compelled to hold. Working within the materialist paradigm, Kant, the inheritor of Hume's mantle, once painfully lamented that:

> *'. . . it remains a scandal to philosophy and to human reason in general that the existence of things outside us . . . must be accepted merely on faith, and that if anyone thinks good to doubt their existence, we are unable to counter his doubts by any satisfactory proof.'*[43]

Such a criticism of the materialist's dilemma should rightly have been voiced by a creationist, but coming as it does from the materialist school it highlights an element in the controversy which has ensured throughout history that Creationism would always hold the higher ground when it came to the expression of simple logic. It is one of the keys to creationism's durability, and one which materialists have found so exasperating down through the ages. It matters not, it seems, how eloquently one may fulminate against Creationism, charging it with every superstition under the sun, if one then declares in the same breath that the reasoning powers of him who so fulminates cannot be trusted. Whether expressed in ancient times or in modern, it is still a case of shooting oneself in the philosophical foot, and it has provided Creationism not only with a rather big stick with which to beat the materialist down through the centuries, but also with the guarantee that the battle will go on no matter what new and ingenious idea has been invoked to account for the universe in purely materialistic terms. It is one of the strangest and most enduring phenomena in the history of ideas.

THE CREATOR

One of the most remarkable things to emerge from the Stoic Cicero's pen, however, is the sheer profundity of his concept of the Creator as an almighty being of supreme authority and power, and the thoroughly nonsensical stance of those who would deny His reality. Indeed, one could say that Cicero's logical deduction of God's existence, nature and power is as close to the truth as it is humanly possible to get without the force of direct revelation. Cicero who, in common with most Romans, was certainly contemptuous of Jews in general and of orthodox Jews in particular, and would thus seem to have been ignorant of Genesis, nevertheless held a view that is remarkably in agreement with what Genesis teaches about the Creator. Ovid likewise, who was born in the very year of Cicero's death (43 bc), possessed a very detailed knowledge of the divine creation of the universe by a single omnipotent deity, and yet his account, following closely as it does the book of Genesis, is demonstrably not of that source. If Book 1 of Ovid's **Metamorphoses** was indeed merely a borrowed rendering of Genesis filched from the Jews of his day, then why does it not follow Genesis more closely? Like Cicero before him, had Ovid possessed the least respect for the Jewish faith, then he would not only have been an exceedingly rare phenomenon amongst the Romans, but his account would have been more faithful than it is to the Genesis original. And the same goes for Cicero's concept. Indeed, Cicero and Ovid between them seem to give expression to a very firm body of knowledge that survived amongst the Latin races, in spite of centuries of pagan corruption, of those events that Genesis describes so concisely — a knowledge that we have already encountered in some depth amongst those early and distinctly pagan genealogies that trace the descent of various European peoples (the Latins amongst them) from the patriarchs listed in the tenth and eleventh chapters of Genesis — the Table of Nations.

But to return to the ancient controversy. The materialist then, as today, protested that only the evidence of the eyes is acceptable, and as God cannot be seen, then man is not obliged to accept His reality. To which Cicero replies:

> *'. . . if you see some great and beautiful building, would you infer, because the architect is not immediately visible, that it must have been built by mice and weasels? . . . Can anyone among us be so mad as to imagine that we can claim to be the lords and masters of these dwelling-places of almighty God?*
>
> *. . . But even from our own natural wit, such as it is, we may infer the existence of some divine intelligence more powerful than our own.'*[44]

Lacking the assistance of direct revelation, and relying entirely upon his 'own natural wit, such as it is', it is inevitable that Cicero should have gone astray in one or two areas of thought, notably in his concept of the universe as essentially pantheistic — God is part of everything, and everything is part of God. And yet throughout his natural and perfectly understandable misconceptions, there runs the doctrine of the supremacy of a God who is above and beyond the powers and limitations of the almost infinite universe that He has created:

> *'God is not subject to obey the laws of nature. It is nature that is subject to the laws of God.'*[45]

Cicero could not have declared this if he were a thorough-going pantheist. It is also noteworthy that Cicero employed arguments against the materialists that have changed little if at all down to the present day:

> *'Is it not a wonder that anyone can bring himself to believe that a number of solid and separate particles by their chance collisions and moved only by the force of their own weight could bring into being so marvellous and beautiful a world? If anybody thinks that this is possible, I do not see why he should not think*

that if an infinite number of examples of the twenty-one letters of the alphabet, made of gold or what you will, were shaken together and poured out on the ground, it would be possible for them to fall so as to spell out, say, the whole text of the Annals of Ennius. In fact I doubt whether chance would permit them to spell out a single verse!'[46]

Now where have we heard *that* analogy before? This argument, which was the Roman equivalent of today's monkeys and typewriters tapping out the works of Shakespeare, has endured simply because it has always proved to be unanswerable by the materialist in any but the most strained and unlikely terms. However, even this argument was hardly new in Cicero's day, but seems to have been merely part and parcel of the already ancient creationist armoury of vexing philosophical questions that the materialist could never satisfactorily answer. Nevertheless, the Epicurean school, through Lucretius, did attempt to wreak a vengeance of sorts, for Lucretius went on to specify an idea that conversely threatened at any rate to provide a stumbling-block to classical (that is, pagan) Creationism. If the materialist's perception of the universe was rendered somehow untrustworthy by the inherent inability of reason to judge or perceive correctly and reliably the material world, then Creationism likewise proved to have a philosophical chink in its armour when it came to the earth's place in the universe (or so Lucretius thought). The classical perception of the universe amongst the Greeks was that it was geocentric. This was the view of the materialist — Anaximander of all people,[47] and it seems never to have been questioned by the creationists. The fact that Xenophanes, whose views on the Deity were to be developed by the Stoics, seemingly held the geocentric view[48] doubtless accounts for its adoption amongst them, as well as the fact that Parmenides, Xenophanes' pupil, was credited with being the first to state emphatically that the earth was the centre of the universe.[49] Hence, geocentricity was enshrined in the Stoic's creationist view, and was to remain so enshrined amongst creationists of all hues until the sixteenth-century and the advent of Copernicus.

Lucretius supposed that the strength of the geocentric model for the creationists of the day lay in the fact that it gave a fixed point of reference in the universe, a point upon which all other teachings could be safely constructed — absolutes amongst them — and all other creationist theories devised. And if the earth were thus the most important place in the universe, being its very centre, then man must surely be the most important creature in the universe, he being lord of the earth. As a rational, that is reasoning, creature, man was surely made in the very image of that Deity who had created the universe and whose rationality was everywhere in such striking evidence. Thus far, the Stoics' ideas rested firmly upon a finite universe whose outer bounds were equidistant from the earth, and this is the view that Lucretius was to challenge so hopefully, if misguidedly. I cannot find any predecessor for Lucretius in what had to be one of the greatest challenges to Creationism ever put forward in the ancient world, and given the lack of surprise (or shock) that has come down to us from the creationist camp of the day, it is worth examining why Lucretius was so ineffective in what he was about to propose.

Lucretius' challenge was this: recognising that the Stoics looked to a finite creation, he countered their view by averring the opposite, that the universe was in fact infinite:

'It is a matter of observation that one thing is limited by another. The hills are demarcated by air, and air by the hills. Land sets bound to sea, and sea to every land. But the universe has nothing outside to limit it.'[50]

He then shrewdly went on to make his point that, if the universe were indeed infinite, then that demolishes forever the creationist's case, for:

'There can be no centre in infinity.'[51]

In this ludicrously simply statement, Lucretius had put forward a single idea that was truly revolutionary, but for which he has since received scant acknowledgment from historians of any hue. He did not develop the idea into a strictly heliocentric universe as Copernicus was later to do, but he certainly appears to have been the first to put forward the one proposal that he hoped might have knocked the proverbial feet out from under the creationist movement of his day — an infinite universe with neither limit, circumference nor centre! With such a universe as Lucretius proposed, so he thought, all absolutes are done away. Everything becomes relative. There is no fixed point in the universe, and hence no divinely-inspired order. In short, Lucretius, by his revolutionary proposal, hoped to rob the creationist school of the day of the finest weapon in its armoury — the argument for an ordered and hence designed universe. So why did it have no apparent effect on his contemporaries? And why, especially, did not a single creationist apparently raise his voice against it?[52]

The answer is doubly ironic, for it seems that Lucretius' own school of thought, the Epicurean, was itself a staunch subscriber to the idea of a geocentric universe. The arch-materialist Anaximander certainly taught it as did seemingly all his successors. Lucretius' proposal, it would seem, was too radical even for his peers. Furthermore, and before this idea of Lucretius had had time to have any effect upon the outside world, astronomy as a science was to find its champion in the person and teachings of Ptolemy (ca a d 100–170), and the Ptolemaic theory of a geocentric universe was to hold absolute sway over the sciences for the next one and a half thousand years. With added irony, this had nothing at all to do with either ignorance or superstition. On the contrary, Ptolemy's theory had all the backing of that most admired of scientific faculties — empirical observation! The universe was **observed,** from earth at any rate, to revolve around the earth. The earth

was **seen** to be stationary, and so on. There was not a single scientific fact or observation of the day to speak against it. Indeed, few theories in science have ever enjoyed such overwhelming and indisputably empirical 'proof' as that which once graced geocentrism, and that, in this present age that virtually worships the concept of empiricism, has to be one of the greatest ironies of all. Moreover, and contrary to all expectations in the materialist camp, when the Copernican revolution finally arrived in the sixteenth century, it did not mean the end of Creationism for a very good and simple reason. In creationist terms, it matters not a jot whether the earth revolves around the sun or vice versa, for whichever model of the universe is the correct one, the question still remains — Who created it? How did it all come into existence, and whence came its astonishing degree of order and complexity? These are questions that have been asked by men since the beginning of time itself, and Lucilius, according to Cicero, was one of the many down the ages who have, without any assistance from either the Jewish or Christian churches, and without so much as a copy of Genesis to guide him, logically deduced the answer for himself, attributing the design, the creation and the maintenance of the universe to that Creator who:

> '*. . . is, as Ennius says, "the father both of gods and men", a present and a mighty God. If anyone doubts this, then so far as I can see he might just as well doubt the existence of the sun. For the one is as plain as the other. And if this were not clearly known and manifest to our intelligence, the faith of men would not have remained so constant, would not have deepened with the lapse of time, and taken ever firmer root throughout the ages and the generations of mankind.*'[53]

CONCLUSION

And it is with Lucilius's profound observation that our study draws to a close. What Lucilius was referring to is the fact that alongside the very worst aspects of paganism in the ancient world, there was preserved in spite of that paganism a definite knowledge of the events that Genesis records so succinctly. Its value lies in the fact that this knowledge existed (and still exists) quite independently of Genesis amidst cultures that were and are entirely antagonistic towards the concept of one God, the Creator of all things. We have seen this knowledge in the early genealogies and historical records of the early pagan nations, and we see it here also in its almost involuntary conflict conducted in pagan times with the man-made notions of a Godless, materially-produced and evolving universe — a conflict that was born long before Darwin came along. Considering all that has been said by the modernist school in the last century or so concerning the allegedly mythical and ultimately meaningless nature of the biblical record, this testimony is unexpected to say the least and must surely tell us more about the true historicity of the book of Genesis than a thousand commentaries. And alongside the question of how did the universe come into existence, must be asked the question — who told these pagan men that the universe owes its existence to a supreme and omnipotent God?

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