



Civilization Sequence 110

AUB
Ist Semester 2002-03

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FINAL INTERPRETATION EXERCISE

Answer ONE question ONLY:

I. Father/Son relationship among creators

- 1. Analyze briefly this relationship in one of our assignments (e.g. enuma Illich).
2. Compare critically with the Maori myth of creation, with particular mention of: love, hate, rebellion, jealousy, and the consequences.
3. What are the effects of the relationship on "creation" in each case.
4. Draw your conclusions on whether this relationship affects/reflects the culture that produced it.

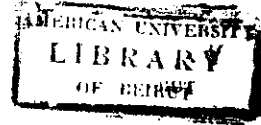
OR II. Male/Female

- 1. Analyze the role and function of male and female "creators" in one of our assignments (Geb & Nut; or Gaia & Uranos; or Ranji & Papa). Specify clearly their relationship: love, hate, union, separation, rebellion, and conspiracy. How does this relationship affect creation?
2. Comment on the above from the point of view of the Chinese myth of Phan Ku and the Yin-Yang "great principles", with particular observation of the superiority/inferiority/equality relationship.
3. Evaluate and state your opinion as to the more convincing "vision".

OR III. Our Picture of the Universe

- 1. Where did the universe come from? Did it have a beginning? What is it & how did it come to be?
2. Is there a satisfying "universal" answer to the above questions? Why or why not? (You may like to consult Hawking's annexed excerpts)
3. In the light of your answer to the above questions, evaluate your experience in reading C.S. 110 assignments. What did it teach us vis-à-vis our "picture of the universe" and our own self-understanding?

GOOD LUCK!



C.S.110

OUR PICTURE OF THE UNIVERSE

A well-known scientist (some say it was Bertrand Russell) once gave a public lecture on astronomy. He described how the earth orbits around the sun and how the sun, in turn, orbits around the center of a vast collection of stars called our galaxy. At the end of the lecture, a little old lady at the back of the room got up and said: "What you have told us is rubbish. The world is really a flat plate supported on the back of a giant tortoise." The scientist gave a superior smile before replying, "What is the tortoise standing on?" "You're very clever, young man, very clever," said the old lady. "But it's turtles all the way down!"

Most people would find the picture of our universe as an infinite tower of tortoises rather ridiculous, but why do we think we know better? What do we know about the universe, and how do we know it? Where did the universe come from, and where is it going? Did the universe have a beginning, and if so, what happened *before* then? What is the nature of time? Will it ever come to an end? Recent breakthroughs in physics, made possible in part by fantastic new technologies, suggest answers to some of these longstanding questions. Someday these answers may seem as obvious to us as the earth orbiting the sun – or perhaps as ridiculous as a tower of tortoises. Only time (whatever that may be) will tell.

Conclusion

We find ourselves in a bewildering world. We want to make sense of what we see around us and to ask: What is the nature of the universe? What is our place in it and where did it and we come from? Why is it the way it is?

To try to answer these questions we adopt some "world picture." Just as an infinite tower of tortoises supporting the flat earth is such a picture, so is the theory of superstrings. Both are theories of the universe, though the latter is much more mathematical and precise than the former. Both theories lack observational evidence: no one has ever seen a giant tortoise with the earth on its back, but then, no one has seen a superstring either. However, the tortoise theory fails to be a good scientific theory because it predicts that people should be able to fall off the edge of the world. This has not been found to agree with experience, unless that turns out to be the explanation for the people who are supposed to have disappeared in the Bermuda Triangle!

The earliest theoretical attempts to describe and explain the universe involved the idea that events and natural phenomena were controlled by spirits with human emotions who acted in a very humanlike, and unpredictable manner. These spirits inhabited natural objects, like rivers and mountains, including celestial bodies, like the sun and moon. They had to be placated and their favors sought in order to ensure the fertility of the soil and the rotation of the seasons. Gradually, however, it must have been noticed that there were certain regularities: the sun always rose in the east and set in the west, whether or not a sacrifice had been made to the sun god. Further, the sun, the moon, and the planets followed precise paths across the sky that could be predicted in advance with considerable accuracy. The sun and the moon might still be gods, but they were gods who obeyed strict laws, apparently without any exceptions, if one discounts stories like that of the sun stopping for Joshua.

At first, these regularities and laws were obvious only in astronomy and a few other situations. However, as civilization developed, and particularly in the last 300 years, more and more regularities and laws were discovered. The success of these laws led Laplace at the beginning of the nineteenth century to postulate scientific determinism, that is, he suggested that there would be a set of laws that would determine the evolution of the universe precisely, given its configuration at one time.