

The Academic Synopticon

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Part Two.

Sage Literature and Academics

The origins of the academic disciplines lie in literature, which depended on writing, scribes, literary texts, and scholars. Nine conditions in all were responsible for producing Academia, permitting the Eight Academic Disciplines. In conceptual and chronological order, they are: (1) twelve praxis disciplines, (2) writing surfaces, (3) scribes, (4) logo-phonetic writing, (5) writing forms, (6) the activities of Scholia, (7) Sage, Occult, & Technical Literature, (8) the Twenty Disciplines, and (9) the components of Academia.

In Academic literature, discourse and dialogue becomes more pedagogical, reflexive, discursive, historically-aware, and somewhat philosophical. The accumulation of literary works from the past means that one's new discourse or treatise has to selectively incorporate and address their salient views. Discerning and accounting for divergence or disagreement from one's "sources" is the academic author's responsibility, so a more dialectical and logical mode is required. In Sage Literature, dialogue can adopt the forms of paired declamation or partner disputation. For Academia, dialogue develops into "didactics", and then into "dialectics" as a method useful for deliberations, to clarify conceptual distinctions and contrast contradictory theses.

1. Sage Literature: Mythology

"It is the privilege of antiquity to mingle divine things with human."
Livy, *History of Rome*, Book 1, 7.

Much of ancient wisdom literature about the mystical, magical, and mythical was retained and developed for Sage Mythology and then (later on) academic Theology. Some degree of awareness that multiple religious ideas (within one tradition, or between neighboring traditions) merit deliberation and discussion supplies the motivation for scholarly interest. Hence, this disciplined literature is "ecumenical" and represents a necessary stage prior to academic theology. Some examples can be discussed, proceeding from the three components to any religion: the mystical, the magical, and the mythical. They interfuse, but basically, the magical is *how* to engage the sacred, the mystical is *what* to experience from the sacred, and the mythical answers *why* the sacred must be revered in those ways.

Mysticism. Beyond perennial elaborations upon the theme of "the experience surpasses all description", inherent to this genre no matter the religion, mystical literature still finds words to convey how non-conceptual or trans-conceptual these mystic episodes can be. Informative episodes fall into the different genre of meditative/transcendental/revelatory episodes. Mysticism literature includes comparative studies about criteria for genuine mystical states and reputable mystics.

Magic. Like the mystical, people were participating in magical practices long before academia caught an interest, far back into the Stone Age. No brief list of kinds of magic could convey the broad range of ways that humans have tried to engage with powers seen and unseen around them. Occult literature preserves magical traditions left behind by Iron Age worldviews from Axial philosophies and religions.

Myth. Cumulative legends and narratives recount godly origins and divine deeds that were responsible for the world and humans. Myth is far older than "mythology" because the grounds of mythic imagination surely go back to early stone age humans using proto-language before grammatical

speech. Mythology becomes possible after mythography (the study of many myths) and sagely revisions that blend and improve myth.

Sage Literature about religion spans the transition from myth to mythology and on towards to the beginnings of Academic Theology. Mythology coordinates Origin myth with Mediation myth: by what powers did the Cosmos come to be, and how should Humanity engage with such power? Humans long for community with the cosmos. To commune with the Ultimate, informative mythology must mediate.

Mythological Sage Literature arose during the late Bronze Age across many civilizations where complex pantheons needed reasonable mergers and reorganizations, and this kind of literature extended into the early Iron Age as Axial phases got underway. In each region, the inauguration of an Axial world-system (e.g. monotheistic Judaism, Brahmanic Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism) witnessed a contrast between older Sage mythology and newer philosophical-theological worldviews.

As Sage Mythology gradually transitioned into Axial theology after the Bronze Age, each world-system remained inherently connected to a far older mythic ideal.

In Mediterranean (Egypt, Crete, Greece, Rome) mythology, the fundamental engagement between humanity and divinity is The Command. Legitimate authority is founded upon the *kingly divine* that installs earthly representatives. Secular Europe substituted the supreme will of the masses (democracy). The essential task for human beings is justice: to respect lawful orders from the Ultimate sovereignty.

In Levantine (Middle East) mythology, the fundamental engagement between humanity and divinity is The Prophecy. Judgments upon humanity from the *truly divine* are conveyed through a demi-god or holy prophet who can mediate with the divine on behalf of humanity. The essential task for human beings is fidelity: to follow the mediator's example of compliance with the Ultimate providence.

In Indian mythology, the fundamental engagement between humanity and divinity is The Sacrifice. Even the gods originate from sacrifice to the *insightful divine*, and they sustain their powers by performing sacrifices, as humans do. The essential task for human beings is self-sacrifice: to shed one's selfish persona in order to perpetually regenerate with the Ultimate consciousness.

In Chinese mythology, the fundamental relationship between humanity and divinity is The Divination. The rituals of divination reveal how to coordinate the structure of worldly affairs with the *orderly divine* as directed by the high ancestors or the wise Way (Dao) of all things. The essential task for human beings is to continually harmonize with this Ultimate community.

Mythology. "Religion" is not the same as myth (stories of the gods) or mythology (reasoned accounts of divine-earth relationships). The conception of "religion" must be academic, not scholarly, and comes even later than the idea of mythology after academic theology arises. For example, among well-educated Greeks of Plato's day, thinkers grasped how their society had a different mythology than other cultures, but the notion of "religion" as a universal praxis across humanity was absent. A mythology exhibits a generous polytheism, legitimating many gods by interrelationships and respective responsibilities. Poets are content to repeat these basic mythologies (such as Homer) but intellectuals adjust them due to concerns about Cosmodicy and Theogony, which in turn lead to Sage thinkers postulating their versions of Cosmogony.

Cosmodicy Literature. A justification of the fundamental goodness of the universe, especially in regard to the existence of evil and suffering in the world; assumes that nature is basically, or overall, good and beneficial. Cosmodicy may be dissolved away with the view that the cosmos is fundamentally neutral, either chaotically

so, or harmoniously balanced. A kind of mythic primordial naturism (not “naturalism”) resolves issues of cosmody. For a mythic worldview revolving around gods, the ways and plans of deities yield answers for cosmody, making the gods responsible, but that leads to theodicy. A manifestation of Axial world-stems, theodicies offer justifications for the fundamental goodness/righteousness of all creation, especially in regard to the existence of evil and suffering in the world, by assuming that God or Ultimate Reality is inherently good and beneficent.

Theogony Literature. After a scholarly class has developed a cognizance of mythology across cultural differences, the problems of cosmody and theodicy congealed around henotheism: a supreme deity among many related gods. Political conveniences to coupling and consolidating deities from rival power centers were also at work. Religious thinking at this stage seeks *genealogies* among gods. To account for the relationships among deities, two gods are identified as the same god or related within the same family, replete with conjugality, parenting, and so on. A supreme deity (known by whatever name) is involved with the cosmos’s beginning and overall design, while other gods generated from this primeval deity, much like an extended family, are responsible for complexities to the cosmos. Some gods formed aspects of the cosmos and our world; other gods are powers active here in our world around us. Monarchs assigned divinity due to their royal/divine parentage, like Egypt’s Pharaoh, usually receive that honor after death, or perhaps during one’s reign. If the early divine ruler is a revered heroic ancestor of legend, that figure is a “Thearch” who bestows royal legitimacy on rightful heirs to the throne. This cosmic/divine family of theogony binds together and organizes the cosmos. Like any family, alliances and conflicts ensue, helping to explain the travails and troubles of humanity. Divining the wills of the gods, submitting to their plans, and appeasing them with good deeds, occupies much religious devotion.

Cosmogony Literature. Cosmogony is inspired by the “reproductive” metaphor from cosmogony and theogony, but conceives deities less as willful agents and more as directing powers. The supreme deity, responsible for the variety of cosmic powers, retains little character beyond its generative capacity and supreme authority. Likewise, the other gods of the world, while generated from the ultimate, themselves become identified with the world’s powers and ways which in turn generate all the things on earth. Religious thinking at this stage seeks *homologies* among realms, between the cosmic and the worldly, and on to political and bodily domains. A religion with a cosmogony projects its gods as the world’s only gods, so that other gods are only different by name. The discipline of Theology labels this intellectual remodeling of universal gods as *syncretism*. This three-stage or three-level model of cosmogony largely removes willful and fickle minds from the highest cosmic powers. A religion with a core cosmogony still venerates and propitiates the gods, but the supreme deity is remote from ordinary human affairs, either as the cosmic creator long ago, or the supervisor of cosmic order in general.

Cosmogony Literature. In *cosmogony*, divine personalities and narratives recount the god pairings, parentages, and pursuits, hence making their exploits interesting; in *cosmogony*, one god arises from another to undertake its duty according to their related cosmic functions, thus making them intelligible. For example, instead of a High God deciding to fashion the earth in a certain way, a cosmogony simply makes Earth a High God. In a cosmogonic religion, humanity deals with divine powers in a more transactional manner than a personal relationship. For the masses, the gods remain personalized and approachable, but a cosmogonic religion understands them as dependent manifestations of the Ultimate only taking imagistic form for human appreciation. This culminating stage of syncretism offers political conveniences, especially if the capital city of an empire encourages monolatry towards that city’s patron deity. Earlier and local deities are just manifestations of the Ultimate god while no lesser god’s image can get identified with the Ultimate’s imageless essence. If the Ultimate is entirely de-personalized, its mysterious nature lies beyond good and evil, so to speak, dissolving the problem of theodicy. However, if the Ultimate remains cognizant of humanity and responsible for goodness, as monotheism would have it, then the problem of theodicy persists. For example,

Christianity and Islam's gods require theodicy, but Hinduism's Brahman and China's Dao only require cosmody.

Cosmogony can lead on towards Cosmology if the Ultimate is no longer conceived with any sentience (having its own ideas) and agency (having its own will and deeds). The Ultimate merits its cosmic supremacy due to its top ontological priority (the most explanatory) rather than its highest sacred supremacy (the most revelatory). The supreme, for Cosmology, is at most an impersonal "Arche" and entirely natural as a fundamental ground and rational principle, not a deity. But this transition from religion to Cosmology marks an entryway to Philosophy, the first academic discipline. If the god(s) are retained instead, Cosmogony also opens another path on towards academic Theology.

Sage Mythology anticipates both Philosophy and Theology with its pairing of Cosmogony with Orthopraxy. Philosophy's main areas of Cosmology and Orthology are the elaborated academic versions of that pairing.

Theogony (all dates are approximations)

In the Levant and Egypt before 3000 BCE, where the first agricultural settlements were next to fresh water outlets (the Euphrates, the Nile) to their seas, early origin stories credited the waters with generating land and life. Nun-ki (later called En-ki) was the watery god of Eridu, the first city of Sumer (started c. 5300 BCE). Nu (also Nun/Nin) names the primordial abyss mentioned in Egyptian Old Kingdom hymns. Second and third generation deities – such as Enlil, Marduk, Atum, and Amon – descend from this watery origin or a pairing of sky and water gods.

c.2400-2200

Sumerian Temple Myth

The princely one, the princely one came forth from the house. Enlil, the princely one, came forth from the house. The princely one came forth royally from the house. Enlil lifted his glance over all the lands, and the lands raised themselves to Enlil. The four corners of heaven became green for Enlil like a garden.

Keš was positioned there for him with head uplifted, and as Keš lifted its head among all the lands, Enlil spoke the praises of Keš. ...

House, great enclosure, reaching to the heavens, great, true house, reaching to the heavens! House, great crown reaching to the heavens, house, rainbow reaching to the heavens! House whose platform extends into the midst of the heavens, whose foundations are fixed in the Abzu, whose shade covers all lands! House founded by An, praised by Enlil, given an oracle by mother Nintud! House Keš, green in its fruit! Will anyone else bring forth something as great as Kes? Will any other mother ever give birth to someone as great as its hero Ašgi? Who has ever seen anyone as great as its lady Nintud?

[“The Keš Temple Hymn” in Black, *The Literature of Ancient Literature*, 326-7.]

c.2500-2200

Egyptian Old Kingdom

Atum (or Atem, later Ra-Atem) is the oldest recorded Egyptian god, who was self-created by emerging out of Nun (nothingness of watery chaos), and who begat the other the other primary deities (the Ennead). According to Eric Hornung, “Atum, the earliest creator god for whom we have evidence, also seems to have a similar self-explanatory name, which is, however, more difficult to interpret. The verb tm, of which the name is a participial formation, can mean ‘not to be’ or alternatively ‘to be complete’. ... Atum is the god who ‘in the beginning was everything,’ complete in the sense of being an

undifferentiated unity and at the same time nonexistent, because existence is impossible before his work of creation.” [Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt, pp. 66-67]

Pyramid Text

Atum Beetle! You became high, as the hill; you rose as the benben in the Benben Compound in Heliopolis. You sneezed Shu and spat Tefnut. You put your arms around them as ka-arms so that your ka might be in them. Atum, put your arms around me as ka-arms, so that my ka might be in me, firm for the course of eternity.

Ho, Atum! May you extend protection over me, over this my pyramid and this my work, and prevent anything bad from happening to it for the course of eternity, like you extended protection over Shu and Tefnut.

Ho, Big Ennead in Heliopolis—Atum, Shu, Tefnut, Geb, Nut, Osiris, Isis, Seth, and Nephthys, Atum’s children! My mind is stretched for my children, in your identity of the Nine Bows. Let there be none of you who will turn his back to Atum as he tends me, as he tends this my pyramid, as he tends this my work from all the gods and from all the dead, as he prevents anything bad from happening to it for the course of eternity. [The Pyramid Texts, no. 600, ed. Allen, p. 265.]

c.2000-1400 BCE Indo-Aryan Vedic Culture

4. When you, Indra, smashed the first-born of serpents and then beguiled the wiles of the wily ones, then, giving birth to the sun, the heaven, and the dawn, since that time you have surely never found a rival.

5. Indra smashed Vṛtra [/Obstacle] the very great obstacle, whose shoulders were spread apart, with his mace, his great weapon. Like logs hewn apart by an axe, the serpent would lie, embracing the earth [/soaking the earth (with his blood)].

6. For, like a drunken non-warrior, he challenged the hard-pressing great hero whose is the silvery drink [=soma]. (Vṛtra) did not withstand the attack of his weapons. His mouth destroyed by the shattering blow, he whose rival was Indra was completely crushed.

7. Handless and footless, he gave battle to Indra. (Indra) smashed his mace upon his back. A steer who tried to be the measure of a bull, Vṛtra lay there, flung apart in many places.

8. Delivering themselves to Manu, the waters go over him like a split reed—lying in that way. Those very ones whom Vṛtra in his greatness once surrounded—at their feet lay the serpent. [Rigveda I.32]

c.1400-800 BCE Traditional Chinese Mythology

The elder spirit is called Qing-[. . . 6]—gan (Green-?-Pillar), the second is Zhucidan (Red-Four-?), the third is Liuhuangnan (?-Yellow-?), and the fourth is [. . . 1]—mogan (?-Black-Pillar). After hundreds and thousands of years, the sun and the moon were finally born, (but) the Nine Continents were not level so the mountains [. . . 2 (collapsed?)]. Therefore the gods created [. . . 1] to cover (the Nine Continents). When the skydome shook, they used green, red, yellow, white, and black trees as supporting poles. Yan Di thereupon ordered Zhu Rong to make the four gods descend to set up the Three Heavens and with [. . . 2] distribute the four poles. He said: “If it is not a case of the Nine Heavens crashing down, do not disturb(?) the heavenly powers.” The God then finally made the movement of the sun and the moon. [Chu Silk Manuscript Chapter 2, Section B]

Cosmogony

c1800-1600 BCE. Sumerian Mythology of the Anunnaki

When skies above were not yet named
Nor earth below pronounced by name,
Apsu, the first one, their begetter
And maker Tiamat, who bore them all,
Had mixed their waters together,
But had not formed pastures, nor discovered reed-beds;
When yet no gods were manifest,
Nor names pronounced, nor destinies decreed,
Then gods were born within them.
Lahmu (and) Lahamu emerged, their names pronounced.
As soon as they matured, were fully formed,
Anshar (and) Kishar were born, surpassing them.
They passed the days at length, they added to the years.
Anu their first-born son rivalled his forefathers:
Anshar made his son Anu like himself ...
[“Enuma Elis” Creation Epic, in Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, p. 233]

c1700-1400 BCE.

Egypt: Middle Kingdom

Turn your face gentle upon us, Osiris! Lord of the life eternal, king of the gods,
Unnumbered the names of his protean nature, holy his manifold visible forms,
hidden his rites in the temples. ...
His tale endures in the mouths of men: god of the elder time, Belonging to all mankind—
he gave earth food, Finest of the Great Nine, most fruitful among the divinities. ...
First-ranked of his brothers, the gods, noblest of the Great Nine, He made order the length of the
Riverbank, set a son at last on his throne, Pride of his father, Geb, beloved of Nut, his mother.
With strength of the leopard he threw down the rebel, with powerful arm slew his opponent,
put fear on his fallen enemy, Reached the far borders of evil, uprooted, unflinching, set foot on his foe.
He inherited earth from his father, earned the Two Lands as their king.
[The Stela of Amenmose, in Foster, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, pp. 103-5]

Mythology at Heliopolis

Adoration of Amon-Re, the Bull Residing in Heliopolis, chief of all gods,
the good god, the beloved, who gives life to all that is warm and to all good cattle.
Hail to thee, Amon-Re, Lord of the Thrones of the Two Lands, Presiding over Karnak,
Bull of His Mother, Presiding over His Fields! Far-reaching of stride, presiding over Upper Egypt,
Lord of the Madjoi and ruler of Punt, Eldest of heaven, first-born of earth, Lord of what is, enduring in
all things, enduring in all things.
Unique in His nature like the fluid of the gods, The goodly bull of the Ennead, chief of all gods,
The lord of truth and father of the gods. Who made mankind and created the beasts, Lord of what is,
who created the fruit tree, Made herbage, and gave life to cattle.
The goodly daemon whom Ptah made, The goodly beloved youth to whom the gods give praise,
Who made what is below and what is above, Who illuminates the Two Lands
And crosses the heavens in peace...
[Papyrus Boulaq 17, in Pritchard ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, p. 365.]

Pyramid Texts for Pharaohs eventually had company. During the era of the Middle Kingdom, funerary
texts with illustrations began to appear on the inner and outer surfaces of elaborate coffins for
wealthy courtiers and elites besides the royal family. These Coffin Texts mark what has been called the

“democratization of the afterlife” and standard forms and formats of hymns and incantations became widely used. The Book of the Dead (assembled in many versions) first developed in Thebes and then spread widely across Egypt.

c1200-800 BCE

Late Vedic Era

1. A thousand heads hath Purusa, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet.
On every side pervading earth he fills a space ten fingers wide.
2. This Purusa is all that yet hath been and all that is to be;
The Lord of Immortality which waxes greater still by food.
3. So mighty is his greatness; yea, greater than this is Purusa.
All creatures are one-fourth of him, three-fourths eternal life in heaven.
4. With three-fourths Purusa went up: one fourth of him again was here.
Thence he strode out to every side over what cats not and what cats.
5. From him Viraj was born; again Purusa from Viraj was born.
As soon as he was born he spread eastward and westward o'er the earth.
6. When Gods prepared the sacrifice with Purusa as their offering,
Its oil was spring, the holy gift was autumn; summer was the wood.
7. They balm'd as victim on the grass Purusa born in earliest time.
With him the Deities and all Sadhyas and Rsis sacrificed.
8. From that great general sacrifice the dripping fat was gathered up.
He formed the creatures of-the air, and animals both wild and tame.
9. From that great general sacrifice Rcas and Sama-hymns were born:
Therefrom were spells and charms produced; the Yajus had its birth from it.
10. From it were horses born, from it all cattle with two rows of teeth:
From it were generated kine, from it the goats and sheep were born.
11. When they divided Purusa how many portions did they make?
What do they call his mouth, his arms? What do they call his thighs and feet?
12. The Brahman was his mouth, of both his arms was the Rajanya made.
His thighs became the Vaisya, from his feet the Sudra was produced.
13. The Moon was gendered from his mind, and from his eye the Sun had birth;
Indra and Agni from his mouth were born, and Vayu from his breath.
14. Forth from his navel came mid-air the sky was fashioned from his head
Earth from his feet, and from his car the regions. Thus they formed the worlds.
15. Seven fencing-sticks had he, thrice seven layers of fuel were prepared,
When the Gods, offering sacrifice, bound, as their victim, Purusa.
16. Gods, sacrificing, sacrificed the victim these were the earliest holy ordinances.
The Mighty Ones attained the height of heaven, there where the Sidhyas, Gods of old, are dwelling.
[Rig Veda Book 10, chap. 90]

c1400-900 BCE.

China: The Celestial Ancestors Emperors

The supreme ancestral deities remained the heads of their clans and states, and their approval or disapproval could not be disregarded by wise rulers. Scholar Li Zehou recounts the late Bronze Age religion of China:

From the earliest times to the Shang (ca. 1600 BCE–ca. 1046 BCE) and Zhou (ca. 1046 BCE–256 BCE) dynasties, ancestor worship was integrated with worship of Shangdi 上帝 (High God). Although the accounts given by historians regarding the relationship between a supreme spirit and ancestral spirits vary, and despite the variety of forms which such integration took, the close relation of the two is

accepted by almost all scholars. For example, Wang Guowei sees Di Ku 帝嚳 as the progenitor of the Shang dynasty, who was “the Di 帝 (High God) from which the Shang people arose, so the Shang people made the di 禘 sacrifice to him.” Guo Moruo states, “The ‘Di’ 帝 in [Shang] oracle inscriptions was the great ancestor Nao 嚳”; “The supreme god ‘Di’ was also their progenitor at the same time.” ... Xu Fuguan tells us, “The religiousness of the Shang people was dominated principally by ancestor spirits. The people’s relationship with the High God was mediated by these ancestors. This was also the situation of the people of the Zhou dynasty.” Zhang Guangzhi believes the character shang 商 itself connotes ancestor worship, because “in the worldview of the Shang people, the distinction between the world of divine spirits and that of their ancestors was so minimal as to be inconsequential.” Many other scholars hold similar views. When alive, ancestors were people, and once dead they became spirits, or half divine and still living in a sense. Alive or dead, these ancestors (primarily the ancestors of clan leaders) protected the clan-state and helped safeguard the survival of the clan, tribe, or state. Here we find a direct link between human and deity, our world and the divine world, human achievement and the work of the spirits, which were mutually affective and unified into a single body. The Record of Rites (Liji 禮記) tells us, “When King Wen made sacrifices, his serving the dead was equivalent to serving the living.” [Li Zehou, *The Origins of Chinese Thought*, pp. 13-14.]

Cosmogony

c.1350-1200 BCE.

Egypt: New Kingdom

The mythic pantheon of the Nine Gods (the Ennead) received some reorganization and consolidation after the Canaanite occupations of the Second Intermediate Period. The striking consolidation of cosmogonic power under the sun God Aten (as much a political move as a mythic shift) by Akhenaten made Aten solely responsible for creating and controlling all particular cosmic features and forces, eliminating other gods from their traditional tasks.

Pharaoh Akhenaten’s Hymn to Aten, the One God (c.1340 BCE)

How many are your deeds, Though hidden from sight, O Sole God, beside whom there is none! You made the earth as you wished, you alone, All peoples, herds, and flocks, All upon earth that walk on legs, All on high that fly on wings, The lands of Khor [Syria] and Kush [Nubia], The land of Egypt. You set every man in his place, You supply their needs, Everyone has his food, His lifetime is counted.

....

Lord of all lands who shines for them, Aten of daytime, great in glory! All distant lands, you make them live,

....

Your rays nurse all fields, When you shine they live, they grow for you; You made the seasons to foster all that you made, Winter to cool them, heat that they taste you. You made the far sky to shine therein, To behold all that you made; You alone, shining in your form of living Aten. Risen, radiant, distant, near. You made millions of forms from yourself alone, Towns, Villages, fields, the river’s course; All eyes observe you upon them, For you are the Aten of daytime on high.

....

You are in my heart, There is no other who knows you,
Only your son, *Neferkheprure, Sole-one-of-Re* [Akhenaten],
Whom you have taught your ways and your might.
[Those on] Earth come from your hand as you made them,
When you have dawned they live, When you set they die;
You yourself are lifetime, one lives by you.
All eyes are on [your] beauty until you set. ...
[*Ancient Egyptian Literature* vol. 2, ed. M. Lichtheim (University of California Press, 1976), pp. 98-99].

After the restoration of the pantheon under Amun-Ra, a solar cosmotheology was developed to credit Amun with immanently manifesting the entire heavens and earth in all its particular forms.

Amun-Ra at Thebes (c. 1100 BCE)

Secret of transformations and sparkling of appearances, marvellous god, rich in forms
All gods boast of him
to make themselves greater with his beauty to the extent of his divinity
Re himself is united with his body
He is the Great One in Heliopolis
He is called Tatenen
Amun, who comes out of the primeval waters to lead the “faces”.
Another of his forms is the Ogdoad
primeval one of the primeval ones, begetter of Re
He completed himself as Atum, being of one body with him
He is Universal Lord, who initiated that which exists.
His ba, it is said, is the one who is in heaven
it is he, the one who is in the underworld, who rules the east
His ba is in heaven, his body in the west
his image is in the southern Heliopolis and wears his diadem.
One is Amun, who keeps himself concealed from them
who hides himself from the gods, no one knowing his nature
He is more remote than heaven
he is deeper than the underworld.
None of the gods knows his true form
his image is not unfolded in books
nothing certain is testified about him.
He is too secretive for his majesty to be revealed
he is too great to be enquired after
too powerful to be known.
[P. Leiden 350 #200, in J. Assman, *Egyptian Solar Religion in the New Kingdom*, pp. 138-9]

Four centuries later, as Egypt recovered some political unity after the Third Interregnum, the Kushite king Shabaka of the Twenty-fifth Dynasty (c.710 BCE) occupied the capital city of Memphis to center his political legitimacy. Recomposing the mythic-political history of Egypt to justify his new dynasty, its “Memphite” theology recast Atum’s cosmotheism as Ptah’s transcendent sovereignty.

The Memphite Theology of Ptah (c.700 BCE)

(3) --- [King of Upper and Lower Egypt] is this Ptah, who is called by the great name: [Ta-te]nen [South-of-his-Wall, Lord of eternity] ---. (4) --- [the joiner] of Upper and Lower Egypt is he,

this uniter who arose as king of Upper Egypt and arose as king of Lower Egypt. (5) ----- (6) --- "self-begotten," so says Atum: "who created the Nine Gods." ...

(48) The gods who came into being in Ptah: [a pantheon list] ...

(53) There took shape in the heart, there took shape on the tongue the form of Atum. For the very great one is Ptah, who gave [life] to all the gods and their kas through this heart and through this tongue, (54) in which Horus had taken shape as Ptah, in which Thoth had taken shape as Ptah. Thus heart and tongue rule over all the limbs in accordance with the teaching that it (the heart, OT: he, Ptah) is in every body and it (the tongue, or: he, Ptah) is in every mouth of all gods, all men, all cattle, all creeping things, whatever lives, thinking whatever it (or: he) wishes and commanding whatever it (or: he) wishes.

(55) His (Ptah's) Ennead is before him as teeth and lips. They are the semen and the hands of Atum. For the Ennead of Atum came into being through his semen and his fingers. But the Ennead is the teeth and lips in this mouth which pronounced the name of every thing, from which Shu and Tefnut came forth, (56) and which gave birth to the Ennead. Sight, hearing, breathing-they report to the heart, and it makes every understanding come forth. As to the tongue, it repeats what the heart has devised. Thus all the gods were born and his Ennead was completed. For every word of the god came about through what the heart devised and the tongue commanded.

(57) Thus all the faculties were made and all the qualities determined, they that make all foods and all provisions, through this word. (Thus justice is done) to him who does what is loved, (and punishment) to him who does what is hated. Thus life is given to the peaceful, death is given to the criminal. Thus all labor, all crafts are made, the action of the hands, the motion of the legs, (58) the movements of all the limbs. according to this command which is devised by the heart and comes forth on the tongue and creates the performance of every thing. Thus it is said of Ptah: "He who made all and created the gods." And he is Ta-tenen, who gave birth to the gods, and from whom every thing came forth, foods, provisions, divine offerings, all good things. Thus it is recognized and understood that he is the mightiest of the gods. Thus Ptah was satisfied after he had made all things and all divine words.

(59) He gave birth to the gods, He made the towns. He established the nomes. He placed the gods in their (60) shrines, He settled their offerings, He established their shrines, He made their bodies according to their wishes. Thus the gods entered into their bodies, of every wood, every stone, every clay, every thing that grows upon him (61) in which they came to be. Thus were gathered to him all the gods and their kas, content, united with the Lord of the Two Lands.

[*Ancient Egyptian Literature* vol. 1, ed. M. Lichtheim (University of California Press, 1973), pp. 52-55].

c.1300-1000 BCE.

Canaan: Phoenician Mythology

Influenced both by Mesopotamian and Egyptian mythology, the Phoenician pantheon was led by a kingly Baal (Lord) who protects cities. One surviving source, Sanchuniathon, as repeated by Eusebius through Philo, relays a cosmogonic account bearing similarities with the Hebrew Genesis story.

Eusebius, *Praeparatio* 1.10.1-5:

As the beginning of all things he posits dark, windy air, or a wind of dark air, and turbid, gloomy chaos; these were unbounded, and for long ages found no terminus. But when the wind fell in love with its own beginnings and a blending took place, that entanglement was called Desire. This was the beginning of the foundation of everything, yet it did not recognize its own foundation. And from its self-entanglement - the wind's - came Mot. Some say this was mud, some say the ooze from a watery mixture. And from this came the whole seed of creation and the genesis of all things. And there were certain living things that were without perception, from which came others with perception, and they were called Zophe shamin, that is, Watchers of the Sky. And it was formed like the shape of an egg. And there shone out from Mot sun and moon, stars and 'great stars'. ... And when the air became

distinct as a result of heating, and the sea and the earth, there arose winds and cloud and huge precipitations of the celestial waters. And when it divided out and became separated from its own location through being heated by the sun, and then everything met and collided together again in an instant, thunder and lightning were produced. And at the claps of thunder the afore-mentioned percipient creatures woke up, and they trembled at the noise, and male and female were stirred on land and sea.

[West, M.L. "Ab Ovo: Orpheus, Sanchuniathon, and the Origins of the Ionian World Model." *Classical Quarterly* 44 (1994) 289-307, at 295-296]

The only other report of cosmological speculation from Canaan of this period comes down to us through Posidonius the Stoic, who mentions that Mochus "the Phoenician" defended material atomism. If accurate, that idea would pre-date even Leucippus in Greece.

c.1200-900 BCE.

Canaan: Hebrew Mythology

The Hebrew Genesis creation myth starts with a chaotic Water element and a maker who divided Water to create the celestial realm, and then separated the lower waters to make land. Like the Mesopotamian god Marduk's division of the primordial Water god Tiamat, Yahweh also made the lights in the sky along the way. The Hebrew word for the "deeps" or abyss is *tehom*, akin to the Babylonian *tiham-at*. The Hindu Rigveda similarly credited Indra/Vishnu with defeating the water deity (Vritra), securing the separation of sky above earth, and making the sun and stars (Rigveda 1.32, 7.99).

<p>In the beginning Yahweh created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep (<i>tehom</i> תְהוֹם – the deeps) and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day. And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water." So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. God called the vault "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day. And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas."</p>	<p>Bēl (Marduk) rested, surveying the corpse, [of Tiāmat=primordial waters] In order to divide the lump by a clever scheme. He split her into two like a dried fish: One half of her he set up and stretched out as the heavens. He stretched the skin and appointed a watch with the instruction not to let her waters escape. He crossed over the heavens, surveyed the celestial parts, and adjusted them to match the Apsû, Nudimmud's abode. Bēl measured the shape of the Apsû And set up Ešarra, a replica of Ešgalla. In Ešgalla, Ešarra which he had built, and the heavens, He settled in their shrines Anu, Enlil, and Ea. ... He fashioned heavenly stations for the great gods, and set up constellations, the patterns of the stars. He appointed the year, marked off divisions, and set up three stars each for the twelve months. After he had organized the year, he established the heavenly station of Nēberu to fix the stars' intervals. That none should transgress or be slothful.</p>
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[Genesis Chap. 1, NIV]	<p>He fixed the heavenly stations of Enlil and Ea with it. Gates he opened on both sides, and put strong bolts at the left and the right.</p> <p>He placed the heights (of heaven) in her (Tiāmat's) belly, He created Nannar, entrusting to him the night.</p> <p>[Enūma Eliš, in Lambert, <i>Babylonian Creation Myths</i>, pp. 95, 99.]</p>
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The Rigveda, in a section dating from around 1000 BCE, also describes a “genesis” from a chaotic beginning of emptiness, darkness, wateriness, and One spirit of “breath”–

1. The non-existent did not exist, nor did the existent exist at that time. There existed neither the midspace nor the heaven beyond. What stirred? From where and in whose protection? Did water exist, a deep depth?

2. Death did not exist nor deathlessness then. There existed no sign of night nor of day. That One breathed without wind through its inherent force. There existed nothing else beyond that.

3. Darkness existed, hidden by darkness, in the beginning. All this was a signless ocean. When the thing coming into being was concealed by emptiness, then was the One born by the power of heat.

[RV 10.129. Translation by Joel Brereton, 1999]

c.800-650 BCE.

Greece

Hesiod's cosmogony leads off his *Theogony*.

First it was Chaos, and next broad-bosomed Earth, ever secure seat of all the immortals, who inhabit the peaks of snow-capped Olympus, and dark dim Tartaros in a recess of Earth having-broad-ways, and Eros, who is most beautiful among immortal gods, Eros that relaxes the limbs, and in the breasts of all gods and all men, subdues their reason and prudent counsel. But from Chaos were born Erebus and black Night; and from Night again sprang forth Aether and Day, whom she bore after having conceived, by union with Erebus in love. And Earth bore first like to herself in size starry Sky, that he might shelter her around on all sides, that so she might be ever a secure seat for the blessed gods; and she brought forth vast mountains, lovely haunts of deities, the Nymphs who dwell along the woodland hills. She too bore also the barren Sea, rushing with swollen stream, the Pontos, I mean, without delightful love; but afterward, having bedded with Sky, she bore deep-eddying Okeanos, Koios and Kreios, Hyperion and Iapetos, Thea and Rhea, Themis, Mnemosyne, and Phoebe with golden coronet, and lovely Tethys. And after these was born, youngest, wily Kronos, most savage of their children; and he hated his vigor-giving father.

The Greek pantheon, under philosophical influence, shaped deities into functionaries determined more by their proper cosmic roles than their fickle wills. As Plato has Socrates exclaim “What would a man not give to engage in conversation with Orpheus and Musaeus and Hesiod and Homer?” (The Apology).

Dealing with gods as high powers responsive to patronage made good political sense to the Romans. As their worldly empire enlarged, why should their gods halt at some arbitrary territorial bound? In 173 BCE the Roman Senate voiced this pan-cosmogony: “the immortal gods are the same everywhere” (*iidem ubique di immortales* (Livy, *The History of Rome*, 42.3.9).

Table 1. Generations of gods in the Greek and Near Eastern sources.

Hesiod <i>Theogony</i>	Philon of Byblos <i>Phoenician History</i>	Hebrew Bible	Ugaritic deity lists	Hurrite-Hittite <i>Song of Kumarbi</i>	Babylonian <i>Enuma Elish</i>
Chaos (plus Gaia, Tartaros, Eros)	Dark and windy air, chaos, Elioun (Hypsistos, "the highest")	<i>Tohu-wa-wohu</i> (formlessness and void)	<i>Ilu-ibi</i> (father god)	Alalu	Apsu, Tiamat (sweet and salty waters)
Gaia/Ge, Ouranos (Earth and Heaven)	Ge, Ouranos (Earth and Heaven)	<i>Shamaim (wa) Arz</i> (Heaven and Earth)	<i>Arzu-wa-Shamuma</i> (Earth and Heaven)	Anu (Sky God)	Anu (Sky God)
Kronos (astute god; Grain God?)	Elos (= Kronos)		<i>Ilu</i> (El, "God")	Kumarbi (Grain God) (blood of Alalu, not of Anu; creates monster Ullikummi)	Ea (wise god, fights Apsu)
castrates Ouranos	<p>fights and castrates Ouranos</p> <p>Seven daughters of El</p> <p>Dagon (Grain God)</p>		<p><i>Kotharatu</i> (seven goddesses)</p> <p>Dagon (Grain God)</p>	castrates Anu	
Zeus (Storm God)	Demarous (= Zeus, Adodos) (son of Ouranos but adopted by Dagon)		<p><i>Baal Halbi</i> (Storm God)</p> <p><i>Baal Zaphni</i> (Baal Zaphon) (son of Dagon, attested title Dimaranu)</p>	Teshub (Storm God) (Anu's biological son but born from Kumarbi)	Marduk (Storm God)
fights Typhon	fights Pontos		Baal fights Yam and Mot in the <i>Baal Cycle</i>	fights Ullikummi	fights Tiamat
	Zeus Belos				

Source: Carolina López-Ruiz, *When the Gods Were Born: Greek Cosmogonies and the Near East* (Harvard UP, 2010), p. 88.

c.900-400 BCE

India: Kuru Kingdom, Mahajanapadas, Buddhism

Brahmanas of the Vedas

Now this Person Pragâpati desired, 'May I be more (than one), may I be reproduced!' He toiled, he practised austerity. Being worn out with toil and austerity, he created first of all the Brahman (neut.), the triple science. It became to him a foundation: hence they say, 'the Brahman (Veda) is the foundation of everything here.' Wherefore, having studied (the Veda) one rests on a foundation; for this, to wit, the Veda, is his foundation. Resting on that foundation, he (again) practised austerity. He created the waters out of Vâk (speech, that is) the world; for speech belonged to it: that was created (set free). It pervaded everything here; and because it pervaded (âp) whatsoever there was here, therefore (it is called) water (âpah); and because it covered (var), therefore also it (is called) water (vâr). He desired, 'May I be reproduced from these waters!' He entered the waters with that triple science. Thence an egg arose. He touched it. 'Let it exist! let it exist and multiply!' so he said. From it the Brahman (neut.) was first created, the triple science. Hence they say, 'The Brahman (n.) is the first-born of this All.' For even before that Person the Brahman was created: it was created as his mouth. Hence they say of him who has studied the Veda, that 'he is like Agni;' for it, the Brahman (Veda), is Agni's mouth... He desired, 'May I generate, this (earth) from these waters!' He compressed it and threw it into the water. The juice which flowed from it became a tortoise; and that which was spirted upwards (became) what is produced above here over the wafers. This whole (earth) dissolved itself all over the water: all this (universe) appeared as one form only, namely, water. [Satapatha Brahmnana (kanda 6.1.1) of the Yajurveda, trans. J. Eggeling (1900)]

Upanishads of Brahmanic Hinduism (600-400 BCE)

In the beginning, Ātman, verily, one only, was here—no other blinking thing whatever. He bethought himself: 'Let me now create worlds.' He created these worlds: water, light-rays, death, the waters. You is the water, above the heaven; the heaven is its support. The light-rays are the atmosphere; death, the earth; what is underneath, the waters. He bethought himself: 'Here now are worlds. Let me now

create world-guardians.’ Right from the waters he drew forth and shaped a person. Upon him he brooded. When he had been brooded upon, his mouth was separated out, egg-like; from the mouth, speech; from speech, Agni (Fire). Nostrils were separated out; from the nostrils, breath (prāṇa); from breath, Vāyu (Wind). Eyes were separated out; from the eyes, sight; from sight, Āditya (the Sun). Ears were separated out; from the ears, hearing; from hearing, the quarters of heaven. Skin was separated out; from the skin, hairs; from the hairs, plants and trees. A heart was separated out; from the heart, mind; from mind, the moon. A navel was separated out; from the navel, the out-breath; from the out-breath, death. A virile member was separated out; from the virile member, semen; from the semen, water.

[Aitareya Upanishad 1, 1]

The Origin of the World in the Digha Nikaya of the Buddhist Pali Canon

There comes a time when, Vāsetṭha, after a very long period has passed, this cosmos contracts. As the cosmos contracts, sentient beings are mostly headed for the realm of streaming radiance. There they are mind-made, feeding on rapture, self-luminous, moving through the sky, steadily glorious, and they remain like that for a very long time. There comes a time when, after a very long period has passed, this cosmos expands. As the cosmos expands, sentient beings mostly pass away from that host of radiant deities and come back to this realm. Here they are mind-made, feeding on rapture, self-luminous, moving through the sky, steadily glorious, and they remain like that for a very long time. But the single mass of water at that time was utterly dark. The moon and sun were not found, nor were stars and constellations, day and night, months and fortnights, years and seasons, or male and female. Beings were simply known as ‘beings’. After a very long period had passed, the earth’s nectar curdled in the water. It appeared just like the curd on top of hot milk-rice as it cools. It was beautiful, fragrant, and delicious, like ghee or butter. And it was as sweet as pure dwarf-bee honey. Now, one of those beings was reckless. Thinking, ‘Oh my, what might this be?’ they tasted the earth’s nectar with their finger. They enjoyed it, and craving was born in them. And other beings, following that being’s example, tasted the earth’s nectar with their fingers. They too enjoyed it, and craving was born in them. Then those beings started to eat the earth’s nectar, breaking it into lumps. But when they did this their luminosity vanished. And with the vanishing of their luminosity the moon and sun appeared, stars and constellations appeared, days and nights were distinguished, and so were months and fortnights, and years and seasons. So far had the world evolved once more. Then those beings eating the earth’s nectar, with that as their food and nourishment, remained for a very long time. But so long as they ate that earth’s nectar, their bodies became more solid and they diverged in appearance; some beautiful, some ugly.

[Aggaññasutta DN 27, PTS 3.80–3.98, suttacentral.net/dn27/en/sujato?lang=en]

c.900-800 BCE. China: Chunqiu Era

Sarah Allan’s translation of the Bin Gong Xu inscription on a bronze vessel (during King Xiao):

Sky/heaven commanded Yu to spread out the earth, follow along the mountains, and make channels for the rivers. Then, [it commanded that he] select land and establish a government, descend among the people and inspect their virtue. Then, it made a [ritual] counterpart to itself, to give feast for the people, and become [their] father and mother. [Sky/ heaven] begat a king for us and made [a court of] ministers [for him]. What they valued was de-virtue. The people loved the luminous virtue, and docile was the world below. By means of this transmitted goodness, they expanded (?) the perfect de-virtue; peaceful in mind, in nothing did they not strive. Filial and amicable, great and luminous, constant and regular, they were pious in making offerings; with no shame in their mind/hearts, they loved virtue; harmonious were their marriages. Sky/ heaven gave them long life and the spirits returned with blessings, that they might be at peace forever. Bin (Sui?) Gong said: If the people can only use this

virtue and not be slack! [quoted in Chen Shu, "Collected Interpretations of the X Gong Xu" Early China 35/36 (2012-13): 135-155.]

The oldest hymns in The Book of Songs (Shi-Jing) are "Eulogies of Zhou". Two hymns:

It is the Mandate of Heaven (wei tian zhi ming), How majestic and not ending!
Ah, greatly illustrious—How pure the virtuous power of King Wen!
[His] fine blessings flow to us in abundance, May we receive them!
[He who] grandly gives us favors is King Wen— [His] distant descendants will strengthen them.

The brilliant and cultured [ancestral] lords and rulers have bestowed [on us] these blessings and favors.

[Their] kindness to us has been without limits—Sons and grandsons will preserve it.
There are no fiefs that are not in your land, It is the king who shall be honoring them.
Remember these great accomplishments [of the past].

[The Books of Songs, trans. M. Kern, in Lagerway and Kalinowsky eds *Early Chinese Religion Part One*, p. 165.]

2. Sage Literature: Philosophical

Sage literature in prose or poetry displays some measure of philosophical depth, along with religious, historical, or political dimensions as well. Proverbial writings, from a one-line adage or maxim to a miniature scenario or a series of precepts, convey advice about life's typical situations or life in general. Moralistic writings are usually brief as well, urging conformity with righteousness and virtue while warning about dire consequences for deviancy and vice. Didactic texts are focused on instructional guidance crafted for those holding skilled roles or positions of responsibility, as from a father to a son, a master to a protegee, or a counselor to a leader.

When assembled into longer texts and organized for coherence, these sorts of writings get expanded to the length of an extended discourse. Whether prosaic or poetic in style, the content reaches for the broad perspectives across the powers and compelling ends that surround and infuse humanity. Cognizance of those greater ways allows wisdom: the improvement of the human condition and human destiny.

There is no bright line dividing philosophical and religious sage literature; indeed their overlap restrains sage speculation from proceeding on to the division between philosophy and theology as academic disciplines. As sage literature, philosophical texts are less concerned with devotions to sentient uber-agents (gods) of one religion or another, and more interested in explications seeking credibility for any reasonable mind.

Most exemplars of this genre were preserved because they were extensively copied and recopied in scribal schools over centuries and millennia. As safe instructional materials for youth, their content is usually traditional and conservative. There are exceptions; lamentations about calamities and regrets over human vanities offer an existential and skeptical perspective on the fragility and brevity of life. A few texts reach for that self-reflective mountaintop to survey the travails of even the wisest, who are surrounded by conformity and mediocrity. This Egyptian scholar has an honest dialogue with his own heart:

Would that I had unknown speeches, erudite phrases in new language which has not yet been used, free from (the usual) repetitions, not the phrases of past speech / which (our) forefathers spoke. I shall drain myself for something in it giving free rein to all that I shall say. For indeed whatever has been

said has been repeated, while what has (once) been said has been said. There should be no boasting about the literature of the men of former times / or what their descendants discovered!
(c.1600-1500 BCE, Khakheperreseneb r. 2–4) [Simpson 2003, p. 212]

c.2400-1800 BCE

Egypt

Old Kingdom: “Instruction of Ptahhotep” (c.2350 BCE)

1. Follow your heart as long as you live, do no more than is required...
Don't waste time on daily cares beyond providing for your household;
When wealth has come, follow your heart, wealth does no good if one is glum!

. . .

16. As ill will comes from opposition, so goodwill increases love...
17. Know your helpers, then you prosper,
Don't be mean toward your friends, they are one's watered field,
And greater than one's riches, for what belongs to one belongs to another.
The character of a son of man is profit to him; good nature is a memorial.
[Ancient Egyptian Literature vol. 1, ed. M. Lichtheim (University of California Press, 1973).

First Intermediate Period and Middle Kingdom: “Instructions to Merikare”

May you be justified before the god, That a man may say [even in] your [absence] That you punish in accordance [with the crime]. Good nature is a man's heaven, The cursing of the [furious] is painful. If you are skilled in speech, you will win, The tongue is [a king's] sword;
Speaking is stronger than all fighting, The skillful is not overcome....

The wise is a [school] to the nobles. Those who know that he knows will not attack him, No [crime] occurs when he is near; Justice comes to him distilled, Shaped in the sayings of the ancestors. Copy your fathers, your ancestors...

It is good to work for the future, One respects the life of the foresighted, While he who trusts fails. Make people come [to you] through your good nature, A wretch is who desires the land [of his neighbor], A fool is who covets what others possess. Life on earth passes, it is not long, Happy is he who is remembered, A million men do not avail the Lord of the Two Lands. Is there [a man] who lives forever? He who comes with Osiris passes, Just as he leaves who indulged himself. ...

Do justice, then you endure on earth; Calm the weeper, don't oppress the widow, Don't expel a man from his father's property, Don't reduce the nobles in their possessions. Beware of punishing wrongfully, Do not kill, it does not serve you. Punish with beatings, with detention, Thus will the land be well-ordered...

[Ancient Egyptian Literature vol. 1, ed. M. Lichtheim (University of California Press, 1973). pp. 99-100.]

Other examples of Middle Kingdom sage literature:

“The Dispute between a Man and His Ba” (c.1900 BCE) [Allen 2011]

“The Loyalist Instruction” (c.1800 BCE)

Late Kingdom Literature:

“The Instruction of Any” (c.1500 BCE)

"The Teaching of Amenemope" (c.1400-1200 BCE)

"The Immortality of Writers" (c.1200 BCE)

2600-600 BCE

Mesopotamia

2600-1900 BCE

Sumerian Culture

"Instructions of Shuruppak"

"Code of Urukagina"

"Enheduanna's Hymns"

"Epic of Gilgamesh"

"Curse of Agade"

"Debate between Bird and Fish"

"Lament for Ur"

"Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta"

1900-1600 BCE.

The Old Babylonian Empire

"Dialogue between a Man and His God"

"Poem of the Righteous Sufferer"

"A Dialogue between Šūpê-amēli and His Father" (Šimâ milka).

"The Ballad of the Early Rulers"

"Nothing is of Value"

(C1) Nothing is of value, but life itself should be sweet-tasting.

(C2) Whenever a man does not own some piece of property, that man owns some property.

(C3) Death is the share of man.

(C4) The consequences of his destiny, no man can escape them.

(D5) Above is his elevated house;

(D6) below is his everlasting house.

(D7) Let the strong one strive;

(D8) Let his heart's desires become reality;

(D9) (but,) whatever a man possesses is given by his god as a gift.

....

(D21) The good life, let it be defiled in joy!

(D22) A man's good house is the house in which he has to live!

[in Alster, *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer*, p. 273, 277, 279.]

Interregnum: Catastrophe and Calamity

The Iron Age arrived in West Asia, then India, and next China. Within one or two hundred years of iron's arrival in a region, that ending of the Bronze Age witnessed vast calamities.

1200-800 BCE West: Late Bronze Age collapse and Dark Ages. Most regions of the eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East, Iran, and Bactria suffered political, economic, and cultural collapse. Droughts, natural disasters, resource failures, migrations, and wars were rampant. Many prominent cities from Greece, Crete and Egypt to Canaan, Anatolia, and Mesopotamia were either destroyed, partially abandoned, or impoverished. During the 8th century BCE, national revivals and cultural innovations sprung back up.

900-700 BCE India: Kuru Decline and Era of Janapadas. The greatest cultural and political center in Northern India, the Kuru state depicted in the epic Mahabharata, was conquered and severely weakened. Numerous small kingdoms carried on during a major dark period of history until the “second wave of urbanization” began during the 7th century BCE.

685-202 BCE China: Hegemon Contests and Warring States Period. An era of cultural turbulence during the late Spring and Autumn Period to the Partition of Jin and the ensuing Warring States period. Confucius stood nearly alone, attempting to preserve the refined traditions of earlier political stability. The arrival of the Han dynasty allowed academics to flourish, with appreciations for philosophical schools, comprehensive histories, and encyclopedias.

c.900-600 BCE Neo-Assyrian Empire

After the late Bronze Age collapse, Assyrian kings re-built the empire. Tukulti-Ninurta II (r.890– 884 BCE) was the first king said to employ a head palace scholar, by name Gabbu-ilani-ereš. King Ashurbanipal (r.669-631 BCE) established the largest library in the world at that time at the ancient capitol city of Ninevah.

“Babylonian Theodicy” (c.1000 BCE)

70. Those who neglect the god go the way of prosperity,
71. While those who pray to the goddess are impoverished and dispossessed.
72. In my youth I sought the will of my god;
73. With prostration and prayer I followed my goddess.
74. But I was bearing a profitless corvée as a yoke.
75. My god decreed instead of wealth destitution.
76. A cripple is my superior, a lunatic outstrips me.
77. The rogue has been promoted, but I have been brought low.
[W.G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, 2nd edn, ed. W.G. Lambert (Eisenbrauns 1996), 63-89.]

“Dialogue of Pessimism” (c.900 BCE)

“Poem of Erra” (c.700 BCE)

“The Story of Ahikar (Aḫīqar)” (c.600 BCE)

Nineveh was destroyed by war in 612 BCE. Other libraries dating from the early Iron Age were mostly destroyed. Little literature from the Persian Empire of Achaemenid Iran survived the destruction of government centers at the hands of conquerors, such as the burning of the library at Persepolis in 330 BCE by the army of Alexander the Great.

c.700-400 BCE. Greek Wisdom Literature

Hesiod, Works and Days c.700 BCE

Aeschylus, Prometheus Bound c.450 BCE

c.600-200 BCE. Jewish Wisdom Literature

The didactic wisdom literature of ancient Israel consists of the Old Testament books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes (Qohelet), Wisdom of Solomon, and Song of Songs. Other wisdom books from the Hellenistic period include Sirach (Book of Ecclesiasticus) by Ben Sira.

Qohelet (c.300 BCE)

1:12 I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 I applied my mind to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under the heavens. What a heavy burden God has laid on mankind! 14 I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind. 15 What is crooked cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted. 16 I said to myself, "Look, I have increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge." 17 Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind. 18 For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief. [Ecclesiastes, New International Version]

The *Pirkei Avot* belongs to the Mishnah (the Oral Torah) and dates from 200 BCE to 200 CE. It presents Jewish religious ethics in a didactic manner separately from the halakha (laws).

1000-100 BCE.

India: Rig Veda and Vedanta

The most unusual hymn in the Rig Veda is found in Mandala 10, probably composed around 1000 BCE.

1. The non-existent did not exist, nor did the existent exist at that time. There existed neither the midspace nor the heaven beyond. What stirred? From where and in whose protection? Did water exist, a deep depth?
 2. Death did not exist nor deathlessness then. There existed no sign of night nor of day. That One breathed without wind through its inherent force. There existed nothing else beyond that.
 3. Darkness existed, hidden by darkness, in the beginning. All this was a signless ocean. When the thing coming into being was concealed by emptiness, then was the One born by the power of heat.
 4. Then, in the beginning, from thought developed desire, Which existed as the primal semen. Searching in their hearts through inspired thinking, Poets found the connection of the existence in the non-existent.
 5. Their cord was stretched across: Did something exist below it? Did something exist above? There were places of semen and there were powers. There was inherent force below, offering above.
 6. Who really knows? Who shall here proclaim it? From where was it born, from where this creation? The gods are on this side of the creation of this world. So then who does know from where it came to be?
 7. This creation—from where it came to be, If it was produced or if not—He who is the overseer of this world in the highest heaven, He surely knows. Or if he does not know ...?
- [RV 10.129. Translation by Joel Brereton, 1999]

From the same Rig Veda Mandala 10 come the brief "cosmogonic" verses.

Their translators comment: "This hymn presents a cosmogony with *tápas* 'ascetic heat, fervor' as the ultimate origin of everything. The entities created and the order and source of their creation are curious and thought-provoking, but unlike the famous cosmogonic hymn X.129, there are no puzzles to decode."

Michael Witzel further comments as follows:

“A word that denotes this all-powerful time-eternity in the R̥gveda is the year (*saṃvatsara*). In one of the cosmogonic hymns of the 10th maṇḍala (RV 10.190) it is stated that “the Year (*saṃvatsara*) that dispenses days and nights” was produced “out of the foaming ocean”. It is clear from the hymn that this foaming or undulating ocean is, in fact, *cosmic ocean* that symbolizes the universe in its unordered and chaotic state (thus, according to Schayer, the year is “the first product out of Cosmic Waters”). Before the cosmic ocean there was only “the kindled heat” (*tapas*) that gave birth to the Cosmic Order (*ṛta*) and Truth/Reality (*satya*), and then “the night (*rātri*) was born”. From the night the cosmic ocean is produced, and then—the year. The night here is not simply a period of day but rather the impenetrable primordial darkness before creation. The Year in this hymn is called “the Lord of everything that blinks”, i.e., of the living. After the year is born, the universe changes its state from chaotic into organized. It becomes ordered; elements of creation—the sun and the moon, heaven and earth, interspace (*antarikṣa*) and sunlight appear and become properly arranged “according to the order” by someone who is called “the Arranger” (*dhātr*). This Arranger might be the Year itself or an epithet of one of the Vedic deities, such as Prajāpati, however, it is clear that only with the creation of the year there appears a force that organizes the universe and, functionally, creates it.” [2017 Witzel “Time and Space in Ancient India - Pre-philosophical Period”, p. 24]

1. Both truth and reality were born from heat when it was kindled. From that, night was born, and from that the undulating sea.
 2. From the undulating sea was born the year, which distributes the days and nights and exerts its will over everyone who blinks [=mortals].
 3. The Ordainer arranged, according to their proper order, sun and moon, heaven and earth, midspace and sunlight.
- [RV 10:190, trans. Jamison and Brereton, *The Rigveda* (2014), p. 1660.]

The Atharvaveda (composed c.1000 BCE after most of the Rig Veda) offers cosmogonic speculations about ultimate reality. Book 10, Hymn 7 includes these verses about Skambha (the Pillar or Fulcrum of all existence):

- 7 Who out of many, tell me, is that Skambha, On whom Prajāpati set up and firmly established all the worlds?
- 8 That universe which Prajāpati created, wearing all forms, the highest, midmost, lowest, How far did Skambha penetrate within it? What portion did he leave unpenetrated?
- 9 How far within the past hath Skambha entered? How much of him hath reached into the future? That one part which he set in thousand places,—how far did Skambha penetrate within it?
- 10 Who out of many, tell me, is that Skambha in whom men recognize the Waters, Brahma, In whom they know the worlds and their enclosures, in whom are non-existence and existence?
- 11 Declare that. Skambha, who is he of many, In whom, exerting every power, Fervour maintains her loftiest vow; In whom are comprehended Law, Waters, Devotion and Belief?
- 12 Who out of many, tell me, is that Skambha, On whom as their foundation earth and firmament and sky are set; In whom as their appointed place rest Fire and Moon and Sun and Wind?
- 13 Who out of many, tell me, is that Skambha, He in whose body are contained all three-and-thirty Deities?
- 21 Men count as 'twere a thing supreme nonentity's conspicuous branch; And lower man who serve thy branch regard it as an entity.
- 22 Who out of many, tell me, is that Skambha, In whom Ādityas dwell, in whom Rudras and Vasus are contained, In whom the future and the past and all the worlds are firmly set;

23 Whose secret treasure evermore the three-and thirty Gods protect? Who knoweth now the treasure which, O Deities ye watch and guard?

24 Where the Gods, versed in Sacred Lore, worship the loftiest Power Divine, The priest who knows them face to face may be a sage who knows the truth.

25 Great, verily, are those Gods who sprang from non-existence into life. Further, men say that that one part of Skambha is nonentity.

26 Where Skambha generating gave the Ancient World its shape and form, They recognized that single part of Skambha as the Ancient World,

27 The three-and-thirty Gods within his body were disposed as limbs: Some, deeply versed in Holy Lore, some know those three-and-thirty Gods.

28 Men know Hiranyagarbha as supreme and inexpressible: In the beginning, in the midst of the world, Skambha poured that gold.

29 On Skambha Fervour rests, the worlds and Holy Law repose on him. Skambha, I clearly know that all of thee on Indra is imposed.

30 On Indra Fervour rests, on him the worlds and Holy Law recline. Indra, I clearly know that all of thee on Skambha findeth rest.

31 Ere sun and dawn man calls and calls one Deity by the other's name. When the Unborn first sprang into existence he reached that independent sovran lordship; than which aught higher never hath arisen.

[Hymns of the Atharva-Veda, 2nd edn, trans. Ralph T.H. Griffith (Benares: EJ Lazarus, 1917), pp. 27-32.]

Vedanta Hinduism: Sandilya (fl.700-600? BCE)

1. All this is Brahman. From It the universe comes forth, in It the universe merges and in It the universe breathes. Therefore a man should meditate on Brahman with a calm mind. Now, verily, a man consists of will. As he wills in this world, so does he become when he has departed hence. Let him with this knowledge in mind form his will.

2-3. He who consists of the mind, whose body is subtle, whose form is light, whose thoughts are true, whose nature is like the akasa, whose creation in this universe, who cherishes all righteous desires, who contains all pleasant odours, who is endowed with all tastes, who embraces all this, who never speaks and who is without longing— He is my Self within the heart, smaller than a grain of rice, smaller than a grain of barley, smaller than a mustard seed, smaller than a grain of millet; He is my Self within the heart, greater than the earth, greater than the mid—region, greater than heaven, greater than all these worlds.

4. He whose creation is this universe, who cherishes all desires, who contains all odours, who is endowed with all tastes, who embraces all this, who never speaks and who is without longing—He is my Self within the heart, He is that Brahman. When I shall have departed hence I shall certainly reach Him: one who has this faith and has no doubt will certainly attain to that Godhead. Thus said Sandilya, yea, thus he said.

[Chandogya Upanishad III.xiv.1-4]

Bhagavad Gita of the epic *Mahabharata* (300-100 BCE.)

The Lord Krishna said,

Partha, behold my hundreds and thousands of shapes, of many kinds, divine, in manifold colors and figures. Behold the Adityas, Vasus, Rudras, Asvins, Maruts; behold, Bharata, many marvels that have never been witnessed before. Behold the entire universe with standing and moving creatures centered here in this body of mine and whatever else you desire to see. But you shall not be able to look upon me with just your ordinary eyes: I shall give you divine sight: behold my sovereign Yoga!

Samjaya said:

Having thus spoken, Hari, the great sovereign of Yoga, revealed to the Partha his supreme supernal form, with countless mouths and eyes, displaying multitudes of marvels, wearing numbers of divine ornaments, and raising divine weapons beyond count. And this form wore celestial garlands and robes, it was anointed with the perfumes of the Gods – it was God himself, infinite and universal, containing all miracles. If in the sky the light of a thousand suns were to rise at once, it would be the likeness of the light of that great-spirited One. In that body of the God of Gods the Pandava saw the entire universe centered, in its infinite differentiations. [*The Bhagavadgita*, trans. Buitenen, p. 113.]

500-300 BCE.

India: Buddhism

The Udana Sutta, in the Khuddaka Nikāya of the Pali Canon, contains the Chapter with the Pāṭali Villagers, Udana 8.3 “Tatiya nibbana paṭisaṃyuttasutta” or “The Third Discourse about Nibbāna”:

Thus I heard: At one time the Gracious One was dwelling near Sāvattthī, in Jeta’s Wood, at Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. Then at that time the Gracious One was instructing, rousing, enthusing, and cheering the monks with a Dhamma talk connected with Emancipation. Those monks, after making it their goal, applying their minds, considering it with all their mind, were listening to Dhamma with an attentive ear. Then the Gracious One, having understood the significance of it, on that occasion uttered this exalted utterance: “There is, monks, an unborn, unbecome, unmade, unconditioned. If, monks there were not that unborn, unbecome, unmade, unconditioned, you could not know an escape here from the born, become, made, and conditioned. But because there is an unborn, unbecome, unmade, unconditioned, therefore you do know an escape from the born, become, made, and conditioned.”

surpassing him. As far as anyone who hated inhumaneness is concerned, in his practice of humaneness he would not let the inhumane come near his person. Does there exist anyone who is capable of devoting his energies to humaneness for a single day? I have never come across anyone whose energies were inadequate. Surely such people exist, but I have never come across them.'

8. The Master said: 'If one has heard the Way in the morning, it is all right to die in the evening.'

13. The Master said: 'If one can run a country by making use of the deferential attitudes induced by ritual, what difficulty will there be? But if one cannot run a country by making use of the deferential attitudes induced by ritual, then what point is there in ritual?'

15. The Master said: 'Can, by one single thread is my Way bound together.' Master Zeng said: 'Yes.'

When the Master went out the disciples asked: 'What did he mean?' Master Zeng said: 'Our Master's Way simply consists of loyalty and reciprocity.'

[Confucius, *Analects* chap. 4, trans. R. Dawson (Oxford, 1993), p. 13-14.]

Mozi

Mozi defended the ancient ways and customs of reverence towards the celestial ancestors above (Tian) and the spirits here on earth [guishen], on the ethical grounds that such rituals are done for our own welfare.

Is this not a great blessing? If the guishen [spirits/ghosts] who are entreated do not exist, then it would seem to be [wastefully] spending wealth on the sacrificial fermented liquor and sweet wine as well as brimful of sacrificial grains. As an expense as it is, it is not like throwing [the wealth] into the ditch and gully and discarding them. Those from the family and clan and those outside [the family and clan] in the towns and villages can all come to the feast to eat and drink. Even if the guishen who are entreated do not exist, such [sacrificial offerings] can still unite the joy, gather the multitude, and solicit closeness among the people in the towns and villages.

[Mozi]

The Transition to Philosophy

Only three ancient cultures developed its original academia and discipline of philosophy: Greece, India, and China, and all of them around 600 to 200 BC. Neither Egypt, Judea, Mesopotamia, nor Mesoamerica (nor anywhere else for lack of scribal activity), surpassed Sage Literature on their own in ancient times, although some of their original literary activity was surely philosophical in spirit.

Sage Philosophers, not School Philosophers

Greece: Thales (fl.570 BCE) only sayings survive; Pythagoras (fl. 540?) only attestations survive

Egypt: Ankhsheshonq (c.300 BCE) "Instruction of Ankhsheshonq"

Judea: Qohelet (fl 400 BCE?) "Ecclesiastes"

India: Sandilya (fl.700-600? BCE) "Chandogya Upanishad" (portions)

China: Confucius (fl.500 BCE) "Analects"; Laozi (legendary, fl.500? BCE) "Dao Te Ching"

The distinction between Sage and School Philosophers resolves the paradox of accounting for the invention of philosophy: it was never invented whole. Continuities of thought prevail across the transition, although

intellectual techniques shift considerably. There is no “chicken-and the-egg” problem, such as “If one becomes a philosopher by digesting philosophy, there could be no first philosopher!” There was ample philosophical thought and writing before organized philosophy schools and academies were organized. Much of Sage Literature was getting more philosophical during the Bronze Age, and the techniques of valid discourse and debate were developing right along with philosophical issues explored. Academics is an emergent product of that development, but it is as much an institutional invention as an intellectual innovation.

Sage Philosophy long pre-dated School Philosophy. Academics gets inaugurated where a standing corpus of sage texts are examined together with the intellectual purpose of enhancing their joint clarity, consistency, and consequence, resulting in original texts prepared for further examination. Mere repetition or re-confirmation out of felt devotion or duty is not academic in spirit or substance. Where there is no library of subject texts to consult, there is no academic discipline; where there is disciplined discourse but no composition of original texts, there is no academic discipline. The Philosophical Sages remained sages mainly because they were not surrounded by a scholarly library or community during their own lifetimes, although they may have had a hand in inspiring and/or establishing those matters.

Thales could consult Egyptian and Babylonia wisdom, but he had no peer philosophers; his proteges inaugurated the discipline of philosophy in Ionian Greece. Similarly, Pythagoras’s reputation as a sage was perpetuated by a school of Pythagoreans who assembled an academic philosophy. In India, the semi-legendary rishis, such as Sandilya, were inspiring the Brahmanas and Upanishads and leading clusters of Brahmanic adepts memorizing and teaching revered hymns, sayings, and discourses. Later branches of philosophical and theological Hinduism, perhaps stimulated by philosophical schools of Buddhism after 400 BCE, emerged from examinations and elaborations of the vast Vedanta corpus as it began to be recorded in writing. In China, Confucius and Laozi at most taught just the core ideas of the works subsequently attributed to them by later generations of their followers. The fifth century to the late third century BCE beheld “many masters and a hundred schools” (zhuzi baijia 諸子百家) that assembled and amended texts attributed to earlier sages. The oldest portions to the Analects or the Dao De Jing are sagely philosophical but only suggestive of the academic philosophies that congealed a century or two after their demises.

Most cultures around the world never had the resources or opportunities to inaugurate academics, or they may have but another civilization’s academics arrived to occupy that intellectual space first. Egypt’s intellectual centers were obsessed with conserving the nation’s cultural heritage while enduring repeated collapses and conquests after 1100 BCE. Judean scholars similarly focused on the preservation of Hebrew religion and culture despite political subjugations and the Hellenistic milieu. After Persia extinguished the stirrings of Babylonian philosophy, its own philosophical voice was attuned to Greek philosophy.

By the rise of Rome, which similarly absorbed Greek academics, there would only be Greek Philosophy and its lexicon for the rest of the Iron Age from Spain to Iran. Schismatically adopting Latin allowed European Catholic Christianity to later divide away from Levantine Greek Christianity. Only Hindu-Buddhist philosophy dominated South Asia from Afghanistan to Java, while Daoist-Confucian philosophy (with some Buddhist flavoring) was the paradigm philosophy for East Asia. By 600 AD the globe’s four philosophical paradigms aligned with the four primary regions of civilization.

Philosophers Walter Watson and David Dilworth devised a schema for classifying ways of thinking philosophically, so that any philosophical text can be categorized in relation to any other.

Their scheme looks like this:

Perspective	Reality	Method	Principle
Personal	Existential	Agonistic	Creative
Objective	Substrative	Logistic	Elemental
Diaphanic	Noumenal	Dialectic	Comprehensive
Disciplinary	Essential	Problematic	Reflexive

This schema applies well to any scholarly text of academic philosophy, as they explained, but its applicability extends farther, to any oral or written literature offering Sage philosophy.

Any philosophical text has a Perspective: the 'voice' of the text as authorizing, self-validating justification

Personal: subjective, idiocentric, self-referent

Objective: impersonal, normal, unexceptional, cognitively realistic

Diaphanic: religious, revelatory of higher view, mystical

Disciplinary: schooled, expert, competent, universally referent

Any philosophical text is about a Reality: what the text takes to be ultimately real, not just apparent.

Existential: vivid experience, immediately lived, contingently experiential

Substrative: material particles or fundamental forces, underlying, recondite, cryptic, suppressed

Noumenal: transcending appearances, transphenomenal, supersensibly general and ideal

Essential: historically general and ideal, patterns, functions and values in nature and experience

Any philosophical text utilizes a Method: the logical or conceptual form of the text.

Agonistic: paradoxical, contrasting concepts, adversarial

Logistic: computational, relating discrete (simple) units, mechanical

Dialectical: sublational, synthetic unity of opposites, contrasts or multiplicities, emerging wholes

Synoptic: whole and parts seen together as form and matter of the same holistic function

Any philosophical text possesses a Principle: the motivating and integrating intention of the text.

Creative: volitional, making a difference in which the new replaces the old

Elemental: identity, simple, self-same, repetitious of the same element, nature, or essence

Comprehensive: totalistic, hierarchically encompassing, perfect form of the whole

Reflexive: thought thinking about itself too, to account for its contributory activity

Dilworth's classification for a variety of Greek, Indian, and Chinese texts:

I Ching	diaphanic	essential	dialectical	comprehensive
Hinduism	diaphanic	noumenal	dialectical	elemental
Upanishads	diaphanic	noumenal	dialectical	elemental
Homer	diaphanic	substrative	agonistic	elemental
Jainism	diaphanic	noumenal	agonistic	elemental
Carvaka school	objective	substrative	agonistic	elemental
Buddhism	diaphanic	existential	agonistic	elemental

Judaism	diaphanic	essential	dialectical	creative
Thales	objective	substrative	logistic	creative
Anaximander	objective	substrative	agonistic	comprehensive
Anaximenes	objective	substrative	logistic	elemental
Pythagoras	diaphanic	substrative	dialectical	comprehensive
Xenophanes	personal	essential	agonistic	reflexive
Confucius	diaphanic	essential	agonistic	comprehensive
Heraclitus	diaphanic	substrative	agonistic	comprehensive
Parmenides	diaphanic	noumenal	logistic	elemental
Anaxagoras	objective	substrative	logistic	reflexive
Empedocles	diaphanic	substrative	agonistic	elemental
Socrates	diaphanic	essential	agonistic	comprehensive
Dao De Ching	diaphanic	substrative	dialectical	elemental
Laozi (Lao Tzu)	diaphanic	substrative	dialectical	elemental
Taoism	diaphanic	substrative	dialectical	elemental
Mozi (Mo Tzu)	personal	substrative	logistic	comprehensive
Hippocrates	disciplinary	substrative	synoptic	reflexive
Sophistic	personal	existential	agonistic	creative
Democritean	objective	substrative	logistic	elemental
Platonic	diaphanic	noumenal	dialectical	comprehensive
Aristotelian	disciplinary	essential	synoptic	reflexive
Chuang Tzu	diaphanic	substrative	agonistic	elemental
Mencius	diaphanic	essential	agonistic	elemental
Yang Chu	personal	substrative	logistic	elemental
Zhuangzi	diaphanic	substrative	agonistic	elemental

3. Sage Literature: Social History

“One of the deepest impulses in man is the impulse to record, to scratch a drawing on a tusk or keep a diary... The enduring value of the past is, one might say, the very basis of civilisation.” – John Jay Chapman

Before the emergence of academic scholarship during the early iron Age (thus before c.400 BCE), History and Social Theory were not separated. Sage Literature instead composed social history: annals and narratives about great figures and their deeds, along with their families and peoples, in the course of major events (e.g. disaster, war, migration, prosperity, famine) that happened in a land or nation. Sage social history is not distinguishable from lore, legend, half-myth, propaganda, and politics: social history was only memorable and recorded for posterity from those sorts of motivations. One civilization’s social history may mostly consist of kingly pronouncements etched on monuments; another civilization may have only preserved oral mythic legend that once was inspired from real events long forgotten.

Today’s scholars complain that one or another civilization “had no history” because precise chronologies or factual records are rare, but that complaint unfairly forgets how Bronze Age societies at most were capable of social history for their own pragmatic purposes. Nevertheless, sifting through scribal remnants can yield glimpses into “true” history, with educated guessing.

A society’s scribes are able to record events – with reports, accounts, annals, chronicles – of what has happened and what is happening. Under the scrutiny of teachers and administrators, no scribe was personally choosing what to record or how to record it. During the Bronze Age and early Iron Age, the notion of a rogue scribe trying to record events over years and decades from an private perspective isolated from power centers was literally unthinkable as well as practically impossible. Before the invention of academic discourse and independent groups of scholars, everything treated with historical merit meets the needs and values of those in authority concerned about the present and future.

Although oral legends and written records were nominally about what can be remembered, and hence their content is of the past, their point and purpose is about the future. History at its basic level is about the future: what needs to be remembered and acknowledged into the near-future, for the utility of people (even if only oneself) in the future, and potentially for the control of future social conditions. Thinking that history is just about the past is the privilege of academic historiography. Today, any initial data collected and collated still has that future-oriented character of prospective value. Does the meaning of computer record or captured image lie entirely the past? What could be “just the past” had to be intellectually and academically constructed. Oral cultures and early literate societies knew nothing of “just the past” – anything so salient worthy of repeated recollection would remain realizable and relevant. The past is never just past; past matters still crowd the present and craft the future.

The construction of “past history” was gradually developed as scholarly skills progressed. At the direction of the ruling administration (kingly/priestly overseers) scribes may be able to attain a scholarly level of historical narrative, attempting chronological consistency and narration coherence among many sources. That degree of accuracy could be appreciated by those in power for internal consultation, resulting in official secret archives. However, before the emergence of historiography among a culture’s scholars, anything recorded by scribes that reaches public view will typically have the approval (or at least toleration) of those in power. The “historical” account presented to external view will be legendary, mythical, and ideological to some degree or another. If not quite “propaganda” in a full sense, history as represented will be favorable to those in power (and unfavorable history will get revised or erased).

“The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”
– William Faulkner

In each civilization, social history mostly consisted of legendary history. Not until Herodotus’s *Histories* in Greece (c.440 BC) and Sima Qian’s *Records of the Grand Historian* in China (c.100 BC) could a scholar achieve academic historiography with some degree of independence from government control. Of course, independence does not imply neutrality; any historian may incorporate their own political partisanship. Even Thucydides and Polybius relied on their political connections and prejudices. However, academic historiography is far more realistic than any legendary history. Myth, miracle, and legend now plays a minimal role; leaders great and small have their faults and foibles; and investigative access to events, sources, and archives takes top priority.

Legendary history does not attain the academic level of historiography. Legends, replete with mythic and miraculous events, provide idealizations and fictionalizations of whatever has been long-recalled from past eras. Authorities about the past are trusted and themselves polished up for idolization. Narration is crafted around what is now memorable and mesmerizing: what the elites *need* to believe and what the masses *would* and *should* believe.

Legendary history is not just about “deception” because the difference between historical truth and falsity had to await the academic disciplines. However, legendary social history typically did have to be about “legitimization” – attestations to the justified ruling status held by current authorities over political, religious, and cultural life. For example, Bronze Age historical texts often revolve around continuous lineages: ruling leadership inherited from earlier rulers back through founding dynasties and maybe to the first gods; religious leadership passed from the earliest holy men down through succeeding generations of holy men; and cultural leadership bestowed from deified inventors bestowing the customs and crafts for society. Any disruption or break to that “official” lineage also required legitimization: usurping kings needed a manufactured genealogy or godly approval; reforming priests composed emendations and additions to scriptures; newly wealthy classes invented beneficent legends to soothe distrust towards social innovations.

Historical writings – revealing an heightened awareness of the difference between the past, present, and the future – were so mythically-oriented partly because they competed with the oral culture in which that literacy was immersed. Pre-literate societies surely had a robust historical sensibility, on display on the oral preservation of traditional lore, tales, and myths. The past had to be supremely important, since that was where the entire culture’s knowledge-base and legacy resided. Writing profoundly altered that sensibility, since someone reading a text dated from the past may be hearing something that no one at present could or would say. After writing becomes established, reliance on oral narrative lessens; people still want spoken performances from a text, hearing something they no longer bother to recall themselves.

“Those who cannot remember the past
are condemned to repeat it.”
– George Santayana, 1905

A literate society has a different historical sensibility than an oral culture; the past is more about what has been recorded by the few rather than what can be recalled by the many. Oral cultures have their common histories without an interest in *historicity*: preserving impersonal information for the future that may never be personally memorable. A pre-literate society cannot imagine how future members will be interested in the past, other than knowing just what is known now they way it is known now. After all, for an oral culture, the not-yet-born could only possibly know what they are directly told. The notion that future people could know the past differently from how it is known now could not enter anyone’s mind. This is a matter of “first order” social intentionality: what we know now must be what anybody at any time knows. By contrast, a literate

society (or at least a literate class within an ancient society) can understand – with “second order” social intentionality – how future readers could and should have somewhat different knowledge (and perhaps better knowledge) of the past than is available at present.

After a scholarly class emerges, so too does the opportunity to assist the future’s understanding of the past and present, with a sense of *historicality*: the “third order” social intentionality able to promote (and manipulate) how the future comprehends its past. This opportunity for historicality could go unfulfilled. What counts as “history” could be held static, or manufactured. Static history is the result of a fairly secure ruling class. A ruling class determined to uphold its everlasting legitimacy (Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, eg.) may control history so tightly that hardly any historical accounts get produced and preserved, for century after century. The few historical texts which are permitted – approved myths, legends, genealogies, ruler lists, annals, and chronicles – hardly alter except to tack current rulers on the end. Except for origin stories about primal god-human interactions, nothing of the course of human history is remarkable except for its stability, so those societies do not seem historically minded. On the other hand, manufactured history is the result of an insecure or out-of-power ruling class offering wish-fulfillment as the true history.

After academia is added to a society’s institutions then “fourth order” social intentionality arrives, permitting the methodical inquiries of *historiography*. The disciplines encourage intellectuals to view current society in terms of the judgments, negative and positive, likely passed by wiser future societies.

“If you don’t know history, it’s as if you were born yesterday.
If you were born yesterday then any leader can tell you
anything.” – Howard Zinn, American historian

History is never uncontentious. Harmonization is more easily attainable through imaginative mythicity rather than tedious accuracy. In a scribal society, it becomes apparent how what gets *recorded* and what has been *remembered* could come into conflict more easily than coincide. The evident solution, to only permit the recording of time-honored and customary tales and accounts, characterizes the first writing civilizations. As for fresh events worth broadcasting and commemorating, such as royal achievements, they were composed to reinforce consistency with the past. Rulers knowing how they would soon join the great ancestors wanted to be remembered as worthy alongside them. Ancient kings sometimes built their own tombs complete with laudatory obituaries. Innovation and independence (much less impartial accuracy) in historical writing would have amounted to treachery.

Jan Assmann points how some societies replete with scholars try to resist historicity, deliberately avoiding opportunities to revise their understandings of the past, and hence of the present. They fail to produce many historical texts beyond official inscriptions and half-fictional legends, and nothing academic is able to congeal around the missing goal of upgrading accurate knowledge of the past.

Egyptian History

Recording major events and chronicling eras on surfaces of stone and papyrus was an Egyptian scribal proclivity practically from the rise of the first cities. The only historiography achieved in Egypt awaited the Hellenic age, however. The priestly scribe Manetho (fl. 280 BCE) composed his “*Aegyptiaca*” (History of Egypt) in Greek for an international readership curious about Egypt’s antiquity. His access to sacred temples and archives was unparalleled in his own day and never equaled since. Subsequent ravages of time reduced much to dust except for sturdy steles and walls. A few historical texts did survive, notably the Palermo Stone (c.2600 BCE) and the Turin Papyrus (c.1200 BCE).

Mesopotamia History

Sumerian scribes detailed myths about the first gods, who were patron deities for the Sumerian cities, and the kings of those cities who ruled in the name of city gods. The earliest city of Eridu was the city of Enki, “Lord earth” (later known as Ea in Akkadian), who was the god of fresh water and craft. Ur’s patron deity was Nanna (Sin) of the moon. The largest early city was Uruk, home to two deities, An and Inanna (Istar). A city god literally lived in the city, within the temple and close to the palace of the king, who was also regarded as a high priest responsible for appeasing the city god. Rewards of divine favor – good crops, military victory, regional domination – brought ample sacrifices (bounty and taxes) to the temple for redistribution by the king’s court.

By around 2900 there are portraits of individual kings in addition to the city deities, with inscriptions about individual kingly dictates and accomplishments. Politics and religion, as in Egypt, were a unified enterprise: triumphs of kings were triumphs of city gods, and vice versa. By 2500 there are inscriptions making pronouncements about the causes and results of inter-city (inter-deity) conflicts and treaties as the various cities contended for regional control and the Sumerian state began to coalesce. By 2300, new city kings from non-royal origins were proudly explaining their own humbler origins as the “outsider” and “reformer”. Challenges to elites called for proud individualism and prouder historical “accounts” to confirm them. Records of even brief kingships that provide personal names and specific regnant dates, rather than legendary names attached to times of mythic significance, shows how Sumeria took history seriously. The re-writing of myths, rearranging the cosmogony so that powerful cities had their gods placed high in the pantheon, elevated “newer” gods over older gods. Mythic history paralleled political history as coordinated propaganda.

From the rise of Sargon (fl.2300 BCE) and his dynasty onwards, hundreds of thousands of documents about admin matters and official actions are recorded on tablets, wall inscriptions, pottery, and cylinder seals. Scribal archives and libraries are flourishing and scholarly practices have been established in major cities. Political history can be roughly assembled from so much information, after allowances are made for the propagandist purposes behind much-copied myths, legends, and chronicles. For example, the Narām-Sîn Epic, one of the narratives purportedly recounting the exploits of Naram-Sin of Akkad (fl.2230 BCE), yields glimpses into actual historical events behind the legendary exaggerations.

The Sumerian King List (c.2100 in earliest version) is the earliest work displaying historicity of any civilization. It exemplifies Legendary History with its combination of mythic, legendary, and partially documented lore put together for political purposes, such as legitimating a dynastic rulership. The first lines display that combination, by correctly identifying Eridu as the first Sumer city, acknowledging how Sumerian kingship was thought to be bestowed by the gods, and imagining how the first kinds lived semi-divine lives.

When the kingship was lowered from heaven
the kingship was in Eridu(g)
(In) Eridu(g) A-lulim(ak) (became) king
and reigned 28,800 years ...
[*Sumerian King List*, ed. T. Jacobsen (Chicago, 1965), p. 71.]

Later versions of Sumerian King Lists were evidently redacted and amended by scholars to reflect rival lists of supposed kings in order to fit well with then-current political regimes. The Assyrian empire carried on this reliance upon scholars:

... during the Middle Assyrian period the title ‘scribe of the king’ was the predecessor for the title ‘scholar’ (ummānu) of the king, which is attested for the first time under Ašarēd-apil-Ekur (1075–1074 BCE). Although it is a historiographic text, the Tukultī Ninurta Epic, celebrating the king’s victory over Babylon, mentions collections of tablets brought back from the libraries of Babylonia and thus supports the impression conveyed by the sparse evidence mentioned above for the active building of

collections of cultural texts. The first archaeological evidence for such Middle Assyrian libraries stems from various find spots located in the Aššur temple and the Anu-Adad temple. Their value as cultural texts is highlighted by the fact that those found in the Aššur temple were mixed with tablets from a Neo-Assyrian library, indicating a clear interest in preserving collections that might originally have been put together by various different experts. [Pongratz-Leisten, *Religion and Ideology in Assyria* (2015), p. 33.]

Israel-Judah Jewish History

Like the neighboring civilizations of Egypt and Babylonia, the Iron Age kingdoms of Israel and Judah regarded mythic history and human history as a single subject. A patron deity of the tribes/nation – whether originally named Elohim (Lord Gods) or Eloh (Lord God), or El Shaddai (God Almighty) as known to Abraham, or later as Yahweh as known to Moses – originated the people and inaugurated their nation. The history of their God was the history of their nation, and vice-versa. It is debatable whether much scribal activity could occur outside the main cities, but the recording of oral narratives into Old Hebrew script could have been fostered by the priestly class of the temples.

The need for written preservation would have grown during the political and military chaos of 1200-800 BCE, labeled as the “Bronze Age Collapse.” A loosely federated Kingdom of Israel emerged out of that disruption but soon split into the northern (Israel) and southern (Judah) kingdoms. Chronicles serving both as religious documentation and political propaganda became highly useful.

It is in this context that David rose to power as the Israelite king in Hebron (c. 1010-1003 B.C.E.) and Jerusalem (c. 1003-970 B.C.E.). Some versions of this story, told in the books of Samuel, were probably first composed by a descendant of Shiloh’s Elide priesthood, Abiathar, or a scribe of his circle. This scribe has been rightly called Israel’s “first historian.” The antiquity of the story, however, does not mean that it presents a balanced and critical view, what we today call “history.” The account of David’s rise to power is largely propaganda, designed to present him as the legitimate king of all Israel even though he did not descend from Saul. Among the numerous political assassinations that David supposedly ordered and the various dynastic marriages he is said to have entered, one aspect of these stories probably has a historical basis: David was a supporter of YHWH. This was useful to him when he was recognized as king by the elders of Israel in Hebron (2 Samuel 5:1-3). YHWH “was with him” (1 Samuel 16:12,13, 17:37, 18:12,28, 20:13) because David led the “YHWH wars” (1 Samuel 18:17, 25:28). The fact that David was a passionate supporter of YHWH explains why his reign was marked by a significant expansion of Yahwism.

[Lemaire, *The Birth of Monotheism: The Rise and Disappearance of Yahwism*, p. 36]

Israel might have dissolved into the Philistine hegemony with Saul’s death, but the upstart king David ensured its survival. Israel was conquered later c.720 BCE by the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Judah’s status as a client state lasted until the Neo-Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II destroyed it in 586 BCE and deported the elites to Babylon.

The post-exile founding of the Second Temple (c.516 BCE) to govern the Yehud province of the Jews occasioned the necessity for merging of older traditions: the Jahwist myths (about Yahweh), Deuteronomistic collection (about Eloh), and the Priestly annals (about the Laws). Although the Deuteronomistic histories from Joshua to Kings reflect scribal expertise, scholarly Jewish historiography effectively starts with Chronicles and Ezra–Nehemiah (possibly the original work of as few as two or three authors). These texts were re-written and redacted along with the older books during the 5th and 4th centuries BCE as Jerusalem’s leadership attempted to culturally and religiously re-unify the region.

Indian History

The historical sensibility of ancient India was cyclical *and* genealogical, rather than linear and chronological. Anything particular (an actual human or a specific event) could be important and memorable only insofar as it repeats or re-manifests some type of sacred or heroic exemplar. History is heritage, history is heritage: what lacks a proper ancestry could not be authentic or true. It is untrue and unfair to say that ancient Indians lacked a conception of the past – but for them, the past is always the present. So long as the lowest standard of history is applied, having an interest in the past and remembering it further, India always shared in the basic historical sensibility that every culture, literate or non-literate, possesses. India understood the idea of past eras of antiquity. The academic question is whether an understanding of historicity eluded ancient India, and why.

Like ancient Indian literature, Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Chinese texts from ancient times reflect an abiding interest in legitimating current events by relating them to earlier paragons, divine or semi-divine. All the same, the Indian mythic mentality almost never diluted its idealized re-creations of sacred origins with such a mundane matter as chronology. Dating events with any precision would obscure their meaning, so nothing like annals or chronicles were composed before the classical period, or if any were assembled, they were not preserved. One looks in vain for even an innocuous phrase like, “In the year eight of the reign of King ____ ...” or “Fourteen years after terrible flooding, the calamity of plague hit the city ____ ...” that can be taken literally and factually. The very existence of that king, or that city, is usually left in doubt for lack of solid confirmations. Even among the occasional references to what look like specific datings or locations, inconsistencies and contradictions abound. No attempt appears to be made to amend or reconcile texts for historical consistency. Only in astrological and astronomical records do something like calendrical annals appear, but figuring out which years were getting recorded is problematic because no political, historical, or genealogical *chronologies* are available for correlations. (The troublesome Egyptian chronologies of early dynasties look like stacks of New York Times newspapers by comparison.)

Aside from scattered inscriptions on stone, copper plates, and coins, ancient Sanskrit literati followed the example of Vedic priests to scorn writing and avoid utilizing a more permanent substrate for script than palm leaves. Complaining about climate adversities is pointless; other civilizations worried about water, fire, and decomposition, and they did something about it. The spoken language of Sanskrit had no written script of its own during ancient times; the Devanagari script was eventually coopted.

The genre of prashasti (praise poems) are plentiful but they do not date before the first century BCE. The very scarce inscriptions before the times of emperor Aśoka (3rd c. BCE) are nearly impossible to correlate with anything else, because so little else from that ancient period was dated either. The oft-heard excuse that much Indian history was eradicated by iconoclastic Muslim invaders after the 1200s hardly explains why nothing historical was extensively recopied, engraved, buried, entombed, or otherwise preserved before then. Every civilization has seen destructive wars, iconoclastic crusades, and genocidal migrations; only India had practically nothing to lose historically.

Scholarly collections of religious texts did emerge only after 400 BCE as the Hindu revulsion towards script subsided with the waning of priestly power, the rise of courtly administrators, and the examples of Buddhist scribes. Still, the notion of an archive or a library within India proper (e.g. not Kashmir, Nepal, Ceylon, and so on) remained unknown until early medieval India. The fact that nearly every surviving text from before 800 CE from dramatic epics to yogic discourses to popular songs are all basically religious texts is able to illustrate the Indian mentality about historicity. There can be no such thing as religious innovation, and, as all history is religion, there can be no historical innovation; it's all been done before. This is especially evident in the way that any rishi, swami, or guru would never explain their doctrines except as enlargements on Vedic themes or as commentaries on texts left by earlier avatars, while scrupulously avoiding the appearance of an original

exposition like an author. When one picks up a theological work from the 16th century, for example, it is a commentary on a commentary that is commenting on an much earlier commentary which commented upon a portion of the Upanishads which itself was a commentary on some point made in the Rigveda. The Hindu insistence that the authenticity of a religious experience does not “imitate” but essentially duplicates the original sacred identity of the Ultimate and the Soul (Brahman and Atman) gets reflected in all other literary productivity. A narration within an ancient Sanskrit text portrays a remembrance of that original type as much as it presents concrete matters. Memory is rememorialization. Nothing especially novel could possibly happen, if an account was worth passing down to posterity; posterity would only respect what is legendary for its legacy back to primordial illuminations.

The most innovative texts about legendary dramas or philosophical wisdom, found among the Puranas (3rd to 12th cent. CE) for example, are compelled to dress most everything in plots and characters drawn from far older Vedic and Vedanta literature, or from the Mahābhārata or Rāmāyana from centuries earlier (which themselves draw on Vedic plots). Only later vernacular scripts, such as Bengali or Tamil literature, preserves contemporary recollections. The other exemplar of a text reaching for historicity, the political treatise Arthashastra of Kautilya, only reflects the governmental and military lore of the Gujarat province after around 100 BCE. When a present-day historian of India provides a ancient dating for anything particular or individual, it typically has to be prefaced as, “the traditional date given for ___ is ...” since no non-legendary dating is extant.

Even a staunch apologist for ancient Indian history, Michael Witzel, admits how that era never attained the level of historicity and remained essentially mythic.

The ancient “historical” tradition of India, as found in the Mahābhārata and the Purānas, thus is flawed from the beginnings: It is not history but the bardic reworking of an old Epic tradition, often based on Vedic tradition itself. [Michael Witzel, “On Indian Historical Writing: The Role of Varhiavalis,” *Journal of the Japanese Association of South Asian Studies* 2 (1990):1-57. See also Arvind Sharma, “Did the Hindus Lack a Sense of History?” *Numen* 50.2 (2003):190-227.]

Witzel, along with Sharma, admits that later medieval histories about India were only composed and preserved on the peripheries of the Indian subcontinent, bordering other lands. The first historiographer of India was not Indian – Megasthenes (350 BCE– c.290 BCE) was a Greek explorer and historian who authored a treatise titled *Indica* (now lost). Subsequent historians of India were Chinese, Muslim, and Christian. One of the first native historiographers was Kalhana, author of the Kashmir history titled *Rajatarangini* (12th c. CE). The eventual rise of the medieval maharajas of medieval India did at last foster historical literature fulfilling the historicity and historiography of scholarly history.

Chinese History

The ancient Chinese reliance on divination and prophecy rather than meditation and illumination to commune with the divine ensured that the Chinese sense of both history and historicity was as potent as any other early civilization. Practically the first written inscriptions from the 3rd millennium BCE already display a concern to accurate date and chronicle important events and kingly actions. No responsible king failed to ensure the bureaucratic archiving of portents, prophecies, deeds, and outcomes, along with texts for priestly rituals and royal genealogies. Even the largely legendary rulers from the Shang dynasty can be occasionally verified.

There is hardly a significant preserved text from ancient China, whether religious or political in spirit, that omits discourses among putative actual historical personages such as kings, lords, royal advisors, sage counselors, and the like. The literati of ancient China wanted credit for their intellectual contributions to concrete social, cultural, and political eras, and their texts reflected that priority. No Chinese thinker, save for

vagrant recluses seeking longevity in the mountains (and even they often could read and write too), failed to take credit for imitating revered ancestral paragons, but they always took credit for doing it in their own way in their own voice. The Chinese human individual is already fully present at the very start of recorded history.

Many of the most important literary works from ancient China are either partly historical or substantially historiographical, from the early works titled as Book of Odes (Shi Jing), Book of Documents (Shūjīng or Shang Shu), Book of Rites (Liji), the Spring and Autumn Annals (Chunqiu) and the Zuo Zhuan, to the Guoyu (Discourses of the States), the Han-era Zhan Guo Ce (Strategies of the Warring States), and the Bamboo Annals. With Sima Qian's Records of the Grand Historian (c.90 BCE), the tradition of academic historiography in China was firmly established.

The text from ancient China c.500-400s BCE titled the *Guo Yu* (国语 – also known as the Kuo yu or Guoyu), usually translated as *Discourses of the States*, relates conversations among ruler and courtiers from the “Spring and Autumn” era.

King Zhao of Chu asked Guan Shefu: “What does the *Book of Zhou* mean by saying Zhong and Li caused communication between heaven and earth to be broken? Had that not happened, would people be able to ascend to heaven?” He responded: “That is not what was meant. In the past, humans and gods did not mix. Of old, the gods descended into those whose spirit was focused, who were at once poised and centered, who knew how to ascend and descend and make comparisons, whose saintliness shed its light abroad, whose vision illumined matters, and whose hearing penetrated them. Men of this kind were called *xi*, women *wu*. They knew how to manage the hierarchical order and placements of the gods and to select the sacrificial victims, vessels, and seasonal colors. They brought glory to the descendants of the former kings and knew the names of the mountains and rivers, the centrality of the founding ancestor, the rites of the ancestral temple, the order of alternate generations, profound reverence, appropriate rituals, model protocols, correct demeanor, the value of loyalty and trustworthiness, pure vestments for the sacrifices, reverence for the bright gods, and how to pray to them. They

enabled the descendants of illustrious names to know the produce of the four seasons, the sacrificial objects, the jade and silk, the rites to be used, the capacity of the vessels, the distances between primary and secondary seats, the use of screens to set off primary seats, the altar sites, superior and inferior gods, and the origins of clans and surnames. The person who knew the ancient classics by heart was put in charge of sacrifices. Th us there came to be officials for the classification of things: heaven and earth, gods and humans. These were the so-called five officers (wuguan), each in charge of his own affairs and not interfering with the others. Because of this the people were able to be loyal and trustworthy and the gods brightly virtuous. The gods and the people had each its own activities. People were reverent without being obsequious, and so the gods sent down good things. The people enjoyed life, disasters did not happen, and they lacked for nothing.

Then came the decadence of Shaohao, when the Nine Li disrupted government; people and gods commingled, and things no longer stayed true to category. Everyone made sacrifice, there were shamans (wu) and scribes (shi) in every family, and there was no sincerity. Although people exhausted themselves in sacrifice, they had no wellbeing. Sacrifices were not measured, and gods and people occupied the same positions. People recklessly made sworn alliances that were utterly without authority. The gods imitated the people and had no measure in their behavior. Good things did not descend, and there was nothing to offer in sacrifice. Catastrophes multiplied, and no one lived out his life. When Zhuangxiu received the Mandate, he ordered the southern rector Zhong to take charge of heaven in order to organize the gods, and he ordered the northern rector Li to take charge of earth in order to organize the people. He made all return to the ancient norm, when there was no mutual intrusion. This is what is meant by breaking off communication between earth and heaven.

Thereafter, the Three Miao renewed the rebellion of the Nine Li, and Yao again favored the descendants of Zhong and Li. He did not forget the old system but put them in charge again. Right down to the Xia and the Shang, the clans of Zhong and Li ordered heaven and earth for generations, with each being in charge of his own domain. Under the Zhou, Xiufu, count of Cheng, was their descendant, but in the time of King Xuan, he lost his position and became minister of war. He exalted his ancestors as gods in order to gain authority over the people,

saying: 'Zhong raised up the heavens, while Li held the earth down.' Because it was a time of disorder, no one could prevent (the propagation of these fables). Were it not so, were heaven and earth perfect and unchanging, what comparisons could be made?"

[Trans. by Fu-Shi Lin, "The Image and Status of Shamans" in *Early Chinese Religion, Part One: Shang through Han (1250 BC-220 AD)*, vol. 1, pp. 401-3.]

History as a discipline is neighbored by Social Theory, bonded by their joint labor surveying the same lands. History as an accomplishment is wedded with Political Theory, for the significance of history is political, and the impact of politics is historical.

"A historian ought to be exact, sincere and impartial, free from passion, unbiased by interest, fear, resentment or affection. And faithful to the truth, which is the mother of history, the preserver of great actions, the enemy of oblivion, the witness of the past, the director of the future." – B. R. Ambedkar, Indian politician

"Perhaps nobody has changed the course of history as much as the historians." – Franklin P. Jones, American journalist

"Every age is bound, in spite of itself, to make the dead perform whatever tricks it finds necessary for its own peace of mind." – Carl Becker, American historian

"Losers make the best historians. Nothing...can sharpen the historian's mind like defeat." Eric Hobsbawm, English historian

"Historians are themselves the products of history." – Paul Conkin and Roland Stromberg, American historians

"Study the historian before you begin to study the facts." – Edward Hallett Carr, British historian

"The historian must serve two masters: the past and the present." – Fritz Stern, German-American historian

"A generation which ignores history has no past and no future." – Robert Heinlein, American author

"Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it." – George Santayana, American philosopher

"What experience and history teach is that nations and governments have never learned anything from history, or acted upon any lessons they might have drawn from it." – Georg Hegel, German philosopher

"Study history, study history. In history lies all the secrets of statecraft." – Confucius, Chinese philosopher.

"If you don't know history, it's as if you were born yesterday. If you were born yesterday then any leader can tell you anything." – Howard Zinn, American historian

"History is the study of all the world's crime." – Voltaire, French philosopher

“History is a set of lies, agreed upon.” – Napoleon Bonaparte, French Emperor

4. Sage Literature: Political

Ancient states from Egypt and Mesopotamia to India and China agreed on one top political priority: ritual. Ruler had to maintain the ritualized performances of visible authority to demonstrate legitimacy: consistent continuity with the mythic founding order. There is a reason why the founding of human society consisted, according to myth, of ritualistic deeds that constitute correct conduct. To deviate from ritualized power is to abandon the natural order and invite disorder and chaos. The earliest city-states and kingdom nations amplified this cosmo-orthology into a political ideology for stratified societies. Ancient Egypt used the all-important word “ma’at” to mean truth and justness, and cosmic harmony. In ancient Sumerian, the word for true, correct, honest, righteous, and justness is the same word, “zid”. European languages inherited the word “right” from the Proto-Indo-European word “reg” for putting right, and its Ancient Sanskrit version “ṛta” to mean the truth or the right way. That heritage descended to Old Persian (rasta-), Greek (orektos), Latin (rectus), Old Norse (rettr), and German (recht). Sage wisdom traditions in ancient China, visible in Daoist, Confucian, and Mohists schools, emphasize rightness or propriety (yi 義) fitting with heaven (tiān 天) and worldly order (li 理).

Any sensible ruler, from hereditary monarch to upstart revolutionary or invading conqueror, legitimated their rule by appealing to their devotion to the cosmic order, which implied divine approval. Any administrative or constitutional modification had to be publicly disguised as somewhat traditional or as reform to restore tradition. Sage literature having a political focus was typically historicist (looking to coherence with the past) and propagandist (advocating for one sort of regime or another).

The academic discipline of political theory was inaugurated after this period of sage literature about politics, exemplified by Plato’s Republic in Greece, Kautilya’s Arthashastra in India, and Sun Zsu’s The Art of War in China, all composed c.400-200 BCE.

2040-1782 BCE. Egypt: Middle Kingdom

No law codes are known from the Old or Middle Kingdoms. The Pharaoh was the chief lawmaker.

Prophecy of Neferti (c.1980 BCE)

... Then a king will come from the South, Ameny, the justified, by name,
Son of a woman of Ta-Seti, child of Upper Egypt.
He will take the white crown, He will wear the red crown;
He will join the Two Mighty Ones, He will please the Two Lords with what they wish,
With field-circler in his fist, oar in his grasp.
Rejoice, O people of his time, The son of man will make his name for all eternity!
The evil-minded, the treason-plotters, They suppress their speech in fear of him;
Asiatics will fall to his sword, Libyans will fall to his flame,
Rebels to his wrath, traitors to his might, As the serpent on his brow subdues the rebels for him.
One will build the Wall-of-the-Ruler, To bar Asiatics from entering Egypt;
They shall beg water as supplicants, So as to let their cattle drink.
Then Order [Maat] will return to its seat, While Chaos [Isfet] is driven away.
[*Ancient Egyptian Literature* vol. 1, ed. M. Lichtheim (University of California Press, 1973), pp. 143-4.].

c.2050-1750 BCE. Mesopotamia: Ur III Period

The oldest existing laws in the world came from the Sumerian rulers of Ur who united southern and northern Mesopotamia. This prologue from the Laws of Ur-Namma and Shulgi (c.2100 BCE) outlines expectations about economic and legal administration in the name of justice.

At that time. (I) Ur-Namma, mighty warrior, lord of the city of Ur, king of the lands of Sumer and Akkad, by the might of the god Nanna, my lord, I established justice in the land. ... I returned. I established freedom for the Akkadians and foreigners(?) in the lands of Sumer and Akkad, for those conducting foreign maritime trade (free from) the sea-captains, for the herdsmen (free from) those who appropriate(?) oxen, sheep, and donkeys. At that time, by the might of Nanna, my lord, I liberated Akshak, Marad, Girkal. Kazallu, and their settlements, and Usarum, whatever (territories) were under the subjugation of Anshan.

I made the copper bariga-measure and standardized it at 60 silas. I made the copper seah-measure, and standardized it at 10 silas. I made the normal king's copper seah-measure, and standardized it at 5 silas. I standardized (all) the stone weights (from?) the pure 1-shekel (weight) to the 1-mina (weight). I made the bronze 1-sila measure and standardized it at 1 mina. At that time, [I regulated] the riverboat traffic on the banks of the Tigris River, on the banks of the Euphrates River, on the banks of all rivers. [I secured safe roads for] the couriers(?); I built the (roadside) house. I planted the orchard, the king placed a gardener in charge of them.

I did not deliver the orphan to the rich. I did not deliver the widow to the mighty. I did not deliver the man with but one shekel to the man with one mina (i.e., 60 shekels). I did not deliver the man with but one sheep to the man with one ox. I settled (in independent settlements) my generals, my mothers, my brothers, and their families; I did not accept their instructions(?), I did not impose orders. I eliminated enmity, violence, and cries for justice. I established justice in the land. [A set of laws follow.]

[“Laws of Ur-Namma” in M. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, pp. 15-17.]

c.1900-1850 BCE Mesopotamia: A King's Instructions from His God.

When the days of yore had come to an end, after nights had been become far remote from those distant nights, after years had become remote from remote years, after the flood had swept the land, the one given wisdom by Enki, the one ... by Nisaba, the one who takes counsel with ... Inanna, in order to organize the plans of Sumer, in order to abolish wickedness, to implement righteousness, in order to let the people return to their dwelling places, in order to consolidate the foundation of Ur-Ninurta's shepherdship.

On that day, Ninurta, the lord of Esumesia, installed the one born in Nippur (= UrNinurta), the one chosen in his heart by Suen,... he installed him for long days to last, eternally among the people, in order not to terminate his sovereignty of the land.

He who knows how to respect religious affairs, who voluntarily pleases his god, who performs the rites, to whom the name of his god is dear, who keeps away from swearing, he goes straight to the place of worship, what he has lost is restored to him. Days will be added to his days. Years will be plenty in addition to the years he (already) has. His descendants will experience good health. His heir will pour water libations for him. His god will look favorably upon him. He will pay attention to him ... His is chosen in his eyes.

But the man who does not fear the affairs of his god, who does not voluntarily please his god, to whom prayers are not dear, who does not keep away from swearing, to whom the name of his god is not dear, the days when he lives will not be right. His descendants will not experience good health. His heir will not pour water libations for him. His descendants will not experience long lasting health. A man who does not respect his god, who has ever seen ...

These are instructions of a god.

...

A man should by himself know submission. He should know how to fear the lord of his city! He should know how to bow down in submission, he should know how to kiss the ground. He should know how to be humble, he should know how to stand in attention, he should not know how to wait for orders! He who is in charge should not be covered ... The man who gives orders at the gate of the palace, he should know how to stir people.

[simplified, "Instructions of Ur-Ninurta and Counsels of Wisdom" in Alster, *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer*, pp. 227-235.]

c.1750 BCE Mesopotamia: First Babylon Dynasty

The epilogue of Hammurabi's Laws proclaims his righteousness and justice due to wisdom from the sun god Shamash (Utu), the god of morality and truth. The rest of epilogue threatens any future king with godly retribution for ignoring these laws.

May any king who will appear in the land in the future, at any time, observe the pronouncements of justice that I inscribed upon my stela. May he not alter the judgments that I rendered and the verdicts that I gave, nor remove my engraved image. If that man has discernment, and is capable of providing just ways for his land, may he heed the pronouncements I have inscribed upon my stela, may that stela reveal for him the traditions, the proper conduct, the judgments of the land that I rendered, the verdicts of the land that I gave and may he, too, provide just ways for all humankind in his care. May he render their judgments, may he give their verdicts. may he eradicate the wicked and the evil from his land, may he enhance the wellbeing of his people.

I am Hammurabi, king of justice, to whom the god Shamash has granted (insight into) the truth. My pronouncements are choice, and my achievements are unrivaled; they are meaningless only to the fool, but to the wise they are praiseworthy. If that man (a future ruler) heeds my pronouncements which I have inscribed upon my stela, and does not reject my judgments, change my pronouncements, or alter my engraved image, then may the god Shamash lengthen his reign, just as (he has done) for me, the king of justice, and so may he shepherd his people with justice.

["Laws of Hammurabi" in M. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, pp. 135-6.]

1600 BCE Anatolia: The Hittite Laws

Also known as the Code of the Nesilim, this body of law compares well with The Code of Assura and the Code of Hammurabi This codification of two hundred laws was widely influential in the Levant and Canaan, including the later Mosaic Law.

1000-700 BCE. Mesopotamia: a Babylonian King

If a king does not heed justice, his people will be thrown into chaos and his land will be devastated. If he does not heed the justice of his land, Ea (Enki), king of destinies, will alter his destiny and he will not cease from hostilely pursuing him. If he does not heed his nobles, his life will be cut short. If he does not heed his adviser, his land will rebel against him. If he heeds a rogue, the status quo in his land will change. If he heeds a trick of Ea, the great gods in unison and in their just ways will not cease from prosecuting him. If he improperly convicts a citizen of Sippar, but acquits a foreigner, Shamash, judge of heaven and earth will set up a foreign justice in his land, where the princes and judges will not heed justice. If citizens of Nippur are brought to him for judgment, but he accepts a present and improperly convicts them, Enlil, lord of the lands, will bring a foreign army against him to slaughter his army, whose prince and chief officers will roam his streets like fighting-cocks. If he takes silver of the citizens of Babylon and adds it to his own coffers, or if he hears a lawsuit involving men of Babylon but treats it

frivolously, Marduk, lord of Heaven and earth, will set his foes upon him, and will give his property and wealth to his enemy. If he imposes a fine on the citizens of Nippur, Sippar or Babylon, or if he puts them in prison, the city where the fine was imposed will be completely overturned, and a foreign enemy will make his way into the prison in which they were put. If he mobilized the whole of Sippar, Nippur and Babylon, and imposed forced labor on the people, exacting from them a corvée at the herald's proclamation, Marduk, the sage of the gods, the prince, the counselor, will turn his land over to his enemy so that the troops of his land will do forced labor for his enemy, for Anu, Enlil and Ea (Enki), the great gods, who dwell in heaven and earth, in their assembly affirmed the freedom of those people from such obligations.

[“Advice to a Prince” in Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, p. 113.]

c.700-350 BCE. India: Mahājanapadas Era

The Shanti Parva (part 12) of the Mahabharata probably does not date earlier than the Arthashastra (c.300 BCE) which accounts for its detailed and explicit theories about good governance and law. The Laws of Manu date from after them both.

Before them all, some Brahmanas of the Vedas and a couple of the Dharmashastras, such as the Dharmasūtra of Āpastamba, discuss legitimate kingship. Among the Brahmanas from this Mahājanapadas era, the Aitareya and Shatapatha Brahmanas inspired political thought.

c.600-300 BCE. China: Late Zhou Dynasty and Warring States Period

Sage Literature in China always had a political interest or focus. Even the I Ching offered divination prognostications with various political implications for consulting kings. During the Spring and Autumn (Chunqiu) period c722-481BCE of the Zhou regime (founded c.1050 BCE), the surviving books of ritual, music, chronicles, and the like revolved around ideologies legitimating the Zhou overthrowing the previous Shang dynasty. A religious revolution was conjoined with a revolution of political thought. The climax of the Zhou-period of Sage political literature, outlined below by Du Lun, was Confucius's core sayings from his lifetime, which display that characteristic merging of ethical, political, philosophical, and religious theses.

After their victory over the Shang, the Zhou needed to establish a new highest deity, and this was Heaven. The Zhou tried to convince themselves and the remaining Shang officers that Heaven does not favour a particular person or group of people, but rather helps those who have virtue. ... This innovation corresponds with the process of a religion evolving from a “natural religion” (*ziran zongjiao* 自然宗教) to a “moral religion” (*lunli zongjiao* 伦理宗教). In contrast to the Shang, the Zhou have then to pay more attention to their moral behaviour in order to get help from the highest deity, in this case Heaven. In Chinese we say we say: “to prove through virtue to be worthy towards Heaven” (以德配天). The term *de* 德 (virtue) plays a central role in the process of the so-called “growing ethicization of religion” (宗教伦理化).

Although the word *de* was already used in Shang times, it probably did not mean “virtue” and its use was not connected with the highest deity. In the “inscriptions on bones or tortoise shells of the Shang Dynasty” (甲骨文) for example, the word is used with the meaning “to win, to get”, like the homonym *de* (得), or to refer to a sacrifice. Maybe the Zhou used the original meaning of *de*, namely “to go straight on to the goal” (ibid.), to create a new meaning, “virtue”. Yu Jiyuan (2009, 47–50), who compares the word *de* with the Greek word “aretē” and English word “virtue”, states that *de* refers to the internal power of an individual to influence others, and primarily the ability of a ruler to control

the ruled without the use of violence. At the same time the ruling class of the Zhou Dynasty connected this word with Heaven. As such, through *de* people can get the assistance of Heaven, the highest deity. [Du Lun, “The early Zhou period: origin of the idea of political legitimacy and the political philosophy of Confucianism” (2017), p. 72.]

After the times of Confucius and Mozi, the academic discipline of political theory became distinct (while reliant on) older traditions of sage literature, especially by the time of the Han Dynasty. The Rites of Zhou (Zhouguan) is an example of governance theory, along with The Art of War by Sun Tsu and the Guanzi, which all date from the late Warring States period. Before then, much of texts of the Analects and the Mozi are exemplars of politically sage wisdom. In that category we can also place passages from Shang Shu (Book of Documents) and the Spring and Autumn Annals (Chunqiu).

The pre-Han search for a return to civil order amidst political and military upheaval shared one ideological core. The celestial order (Tien – “heaven”) of supreme ancestors maintains earthly order through compliant Sage kings who follow “the mandate of heaven”, such as the legendary Yellow Emperor and the kings mentioned in the Mozi:

That it is the Son of Heaven who brings about correctness among the ‘Three Dukes’, the feudal lords, generals and great officers, officers and the common people was something that the world’s officers and gentlemen certainly knew quite clearly. That it is Heaven that brings about correctness in the Son of Heaven was something that the ordinary people of the world did not clearly know. This is why the sage kings of the Three Dynasties, Yu, Tang, Wen and Wu, in their wish for Heaven to bring correctness to the Son of Heaven, made it perfectly clear to the ordinary people of the world that none should fail to prepare fodder for oxen and sheep, feed grain to dogs and pigs, and make pure the offerings of grain and wine in order to sacrifice to the Supreme Lord, ghosts and spirits, and seek and pray for good fortune from Heaven. ... Further, one who complies with Heaven’s intention, and who practises universal mutual love and exchange of mutual benefit is certainly rewarded [whereas] one who opposes Heaven’s intention, who practises discriminatory mutual dislike and exchange of mutual harm is certainly punished. ... Formerly, there were the sage kings of the Three Dynasties, Yu, Tang, Wen and Wu. These were men who complied with Heaven’s intention and were rewarded. Formerly, there were the tyrannical kings of the Three Dynasties, Jie, Zhou, You and Li. These were men who opposed Heaven’s intention and were punished. [The Mozi, trans. I. Johnston, p. 237.]

c.450 BCE Greece: Golden Age of Athens

The Old Oligarch: “The Political Regime of the Athenians”. The earliest example of Athenian literary prose.

5. Academic Philosophy

Whether Sage Literature is focused on reasoned religion, cosmology, knowledge, beauty, or justice (and so on), a handful of fundamental issues take root and irresistibly stimulate further philosophizing. The Problem of One and Many, the quest for Cosmodicy, the contest between Monism and Pluralism, and the search for Methodical Truth lure reasoning ever onwards. Academic Philosophy therefore has two primary areas and four main sub-areas: cosmology (metaphysics and epistemology) and orthology (axiology and ethics).

In Greece, the first academic philosophers offering a developed cosmology were Anaximander (fl.560 BCE), followed by Heraclitus and Parmenides (they fl.500). None sustained a “school” or movement by themselves, nor did the philosophers that next followed them. The Presocratic sophists such as Protagoras and Gorgias (fl.440) avoided cosmology while advocating skepticism and relativism towards truth and value. The first Greek philosophers assembling a cosmology with an orthology were Anaxagoras (fl.450), Democritus (fl.430), and Socrates (fl.420-400). Only Democritus (atomism) and Plato (formism) inspired lasting philosophical movements coming after them. In the West, those alternatives of conceptual materialism (pluralism) and conceptual idealism (monism) dominate philosophical debate.

Cosmology

Greek, Hindu, Buddhist, and Daoist philosophers all confronted the intellectual problem of “The One and the Many” in one form or another. From a singular fundamental reality, why did the multiplicity of things come into being? This question marks one of the transitions taken within an Axial Phase.

The older theogonies and cosmogonies from mythology and Sage literature instead dealt with the venerable problem of “The Many and the One”: how did many deities cooperate to arrange the one orderly cosmos now in existence today? When an Axial Phase began for a civilization, that venerable question no longer seemed to be relevant, as belonging to a past age, and no longer worth answering.

The philosophical problem of the One and the Many has four dimensions – The Real, the True, the Good, and the Beautiful. The basic starting points to this problem are easy to express:

If Reality is ONE, how are the many also real? Tentative answer = Contexts.

If Truth is ONE, how are the many also known? Tentative answer = Perspectives.

If Beauty is ONE, how are the many also beautiful? Tentative answer = Harmonies.

If Goodness is ONE, how are the many also good? Tentative answer = Means.

This One & Many problem leads to the next problem: “Ontological Priority”. What is (verily) the most Real, the most True, the most Good, the most Beautiful? Solving an Ontological Priority problem calls for Methodology – the Problem of the Criterion, or the “Methodological Principle” problem.

Whether a criterion or principle, a stark dilemma stands next. Either (a) insist that the parts are truly as ideal as the whole despite appearances, or (b) invite a standpoint where partiality is inherently needed for the whole. Option A invites timeless rationalism. Option B invites temporal empiricism. Four examples for temporal empiricism:

Reality cosmodicy = The Real is what survives change. Finitudes are necessary as means to elaborating the whole Reality.

Truth cosmodycy = The Truth is what survives error. Errors are necessary as means for discerning the whole Truth.

Goodness cosmodycy = The Good is what survives wrongness. Wrongs are necessary as means to appreciating the whole Good.

Aesthetic cosmodycy = The Beautiful is what survives corruption. Imperfections are necessary as means for constructing the whole Beauty.

What is most or truly real cannot cease to be real. What is real does not participate in nothingness, although it can be responsible for the emergence and demergence of finite things.

For, anything that comes to be or cease to be is something existing due to the responsibility of something else (for only nothing comes from nothing).

Either there is a web/cycle of real things all co-dependent on each other, or one singular reality is unbounded (apeiron) and unlimited (absolute). The former is Pluralism, the second is Monism.

Cosmology easily presumes that what is most *real* is most responsible for the *cosmos*. The Real need not be identified with the Cosmos – but the order to the cosmos requires explanation, and the Real is a reasonable candidate. Possibilities:

- A. the Real is Order and the Real is Cosmos so the Cosmos is always ordered.
- B. the Real is Order and generates the cosmos, so the Cosmos is dependently ordered.
- C. the Real is Order and once made the cosmos, so the Cosmos is mostly ordered.
- D. the Real is not Order but a person-like Ruler made the cosmos, so the Cosmos is mostly order.
- E. the Real is not Order while impersonally generating the cosmos, so the cosmos is mostly disorder.
- F. there is no “Real” but only Cosmos, which obviously has partial order.

Monism may select any of A-E, but Pluralism leans towards D, E, F. Too much order lessens genuine pluralism, which requires ample contingency.

Monism cannot avoid a dilemma: Order implies “this-rather-than-that” – definite structure. The cosmos obviously has some structure, and the Real is supposed to explain it, because structure requires explanation. If the Real is Order, and Order is structure, then the Real also requires further explanation (Uber-Reality?). The logical problem with an infinite regress is that it unreasonably avoids a genuine explanation, which is the original point of Monist cosmology. To be explanatory, then, the Real must either (1) be Order but not definite structure so it embodies all contrasts (the Real is this *and* not-this); (2) be Order in potentiality, allowing the emergence of structure (the Real is “not-this and not-that”), or (3) just be utter one-ness without any inherent differentiation (the Real is neither “not-this” nor “not-that”). These three options can rescue Monism only through elaborate metaphysics. Option (1) just repeats the original cosmological problem – why cosmos from the Real? – so a two-level metaphysics for Monism type B has to justify that duplication, or just retreat to Monism type A so no explanation is required. Option (2) must elaborate upon Monism type B or C so that the emergence of structure has a fully rational basis, or else just admit that a willful Creator decided to make the cosmos and accept Pluralism instead. Option (3) also requires a fully rational metaphysics in order to avoid Pluralism, but the generation of somethingness from seeming nothingness is a great challenge for rationality.

All these metaphysical difficulties make type E seem far more sensible, especially when combined with mysticism. Monist metaphysics often resorts to a two-level metaphysics with Monism for the Real and Pluralism for the cosmos, especially if the urgent aim is to avoid materialism. This two-level metaphysics is

Dualism, which unsteadily leans one way or the other, and essentially fails to answer, “Why Cosmos from the Real?” by just repeating the question. For example, Descartes cannot explain the mind-body relationship, and Kant cannot explain how pure categories apply schematically for such a contingent phenomenal world.

In the East, Hinduism has explored Monism type B with options 2 and 3, and it might be more sensibly categorized with type E except for the way that Hinduism insists on unitary Reality. Likewise, Buddhism insists on Monism so that its mysticism explores options 2 and 3 as well. Daoism as a Monism type B usually takes option 1, although it has explored 2 and 3 in some ancient texts. Chinese Ch’en and Japanese Zen similarly explore options 2 and 3.

In the West, type A is adopted by classical Stoicism and Hegel; type B (opt. 2) is Kant; type B (opt. 3) is Schelling; type C is Big Bang cosmology; type D is monotheism. Type E is Peirce and Whitehead; Type F is James and Dewey.

Both Monism and Pluralism struggle with cosmologies, in very different ways with different resources. Monism can deny the reality of error, wrong, and corruption, but they seem stubbornly salient. If Monism takes option C then something other than the Real is responsible for disorder, something like a second primordial order that threatens Monism with Dualism. That is why most (pre-philosophical) myths take option C or D and accept some pluralism (eg the creator gods are powerful but none are omnipotent). Pluralism affirms partiality, unable to guarantee that a culminating whole will prevail. By preferring option D or E, Pluralism makes cosmology more like a venturing quest.

Philosophy: COSMOLOGY

600-530 BCE. The Greek Milesians (Anaximander, Anaximenes)

Theophrastus reports on the Arche (ἀρχή) proposed in Anaximander’s book *On Nature*: Anaximander, the son of Praxiades, of Miletus, the successor and student of Thales, said the source and element of existing things was the boundless (τὸ ἄπειρον), being the first one to apply this term to the source. And he says it is neither water nor any other of the so-called elements, but some other boundless nature (ἑτέραν τινὰ φύσιν ἄπειρον), from which come to be all the heavens and the worlds in them: Whence things have their origin, thence also their destruction happens, as is the order of things; for they execute the sentence upon one another – the condemnation for the crime – in conformity with the ordinance of time.

Another Pre-Socratic, Heraclitus, promulgated a cosmos of ceaseless change.

This world-order, the same of all, no god nor man did create, but it ever was and is and will be: everliving fire, kindling in measures and being quenched in measures. (Fragment DK22B30)
We must recognize that war is common and strife is justice, and all things happen according to strife and necessity. (Fragment DK22B80)
War is the father of all and king of all, who manifested some as gods and some as men, who made some slaves and some freemen. (Fragment DK22B53)
Of soul thou shalt never find boundaries, not if thou trackest it on every path; so deep is its cause.
ψυχῆς πείρατα ἰὼν οὐκ ἂν ἐξεύροιο, πᾶσαν ἐπιτορευόμενος ὁδόν· οὕτω βαθὺν λόγον ἔχει.
(Fragment 45 = D.L. 9.1.7)

700-500 BCE. The Early Upanisads

The Brhadaranyaka Upaniṣad

In the beginning this world was only *brahman*, and it knew only itself (*ātman*), thinking: "I am *brahman*." As a result, it became the Whole. Among the gods, likewise, whosoever realized this, only they became the Whole. It was the same also among the seers and among humans. Upon seeing this very point, the seer Vamadeva proclaimed: "I was Manu, and I was the sun." This is true even now. If a man knows "I am *brahman*" in this way, he becomes this whole world. Not even the gods are able to prevent it, for he becomes their very self (*ātman*). [Brhadaranyaka verse 4.10]

Śāṅḍilya in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad

Brahman, you see, is this whole world. With inner tranquillity, one should venerate it as *jalān*. Now, then, man is undoubtedly made of resolve. What a man becomes on departing from here after death is in accordance with his resolve in this world. So he should make this resolve:

"This self (atman) of mine that lies deep within my heart—it is made of mind; the vital functions (prana) are its physical form; luminous is its appearance; the real is its intention; space is its essence (atman); it contains all actions, all desires, all smells, and all tastes; it has captured this whole world; it neither speaks nor pays any heed.

"This self (atman) of mine that lies deep within my heart—it is smaller than a grain of rice or barley, smaller than a mustard seed, smaller even than a millet grain or a millet kernel; but it is larger than the earth, larger than the intermediate region, larger than the sky, larger even than all these worlds put together.

"This self (atman) of mine that lies deep within my heart—it contains all actions, all desires, all smells, and all tastes; it has captured this whole world; it neither speaks nor pays any heed. "It is brahman. On departing from here after death, I will become that." A man who has this resolve is never beset at all with doubts. This is what Sandilya used to say.

[Chāndogya Upaniṣad verse 3.14.1-4. In *The Early Upanishads*, 2nd edn, trans. P. Olivelle (Oxford 1998), p. 209.]

The Brahma Sūtra (c.200 BCE – 100 CE), attributed to Bādarāyaṇa, is the oldest philosophical elaboration upon the Upaniṣads.

300-100 BCE. The Chinese Daoists

Like the Confucians who specialized in ethics, the Daoists accumulated their cosmic ideas under the cover of their founding book, the Dao De Jing, attributed to their "Old Master", the philosophical sage Laozi. This finalized work is a philosophical treatise by 300 BCE, but Laozi himself was no academic philosopher.

Laozi: the Dao De Jing

There was something undifferentiated and yet complete,
Born before Heaven and Earth, Soundless and formless,
Independent and unchanging. Revolving endlessly,
It may be thought of as the Mother of all under Heaven.
I do not know its name; So I just call it Dao, And arbitrarily name it Great.
To be Great means to move on and on;

To move on and on means to go far and wide;
To go far and wide means to return.
Thus, Dao is great; Heaven is great; Earth is great; Man is also great.
The universe has four great ones, And Man is one of them.
Man follows the ways of Earth; Earth follows the ways of Heaven;
Heaven follows the ways of Dao; Dao follows its own ways.
[Daodejing 24 in *Thus Spoke Laozi*, trans. C.Q. Wu (Hawaii, 2016), pp. 57-8.]

Another translation of the same stanza serves to illustrate the elusiveness of the Dao.

Manifesting material in form unshaped, Born before heaven and earth themselves,
Unseen, unheard, above, apart, Standing alone ever true to itself,
Swinging in cycles that never fail, Mother of heaven and earth, it seems,
But I know not how to give it names. Pressed, I shall dub it the moving Way,
Or call it by name the all-supreme, All-supreme and passing-beyond,
Passing-beyond and reaching-far, Reaching-far and reverting-back.
Indeed the Way is all-supreme, And heaven too, and earth, and man—
The four things in this world supreme, And among them one is man,
Who is bound to follow the rule of earth, As earth must follow heaven's rule,
And heaven the rule of the Way itself; And the moving Way is following
The self-momentum of all becoming.
[Dao De Jing, trans. M. Roberts (UC Press, 2001), stanza 25, p. 72.]

The Daoist Zhuangzi (fl. 320 BCE) and his students compiled teachings collected under his name, during the same era as Lao Tzu. Zhuangzi is surely philosophical, and one section of cosmogony gets closer to the philosophical cosmology of the Dao De Ching, but through a more mystical route.

The Master said: The Way covers and bears up the ten thousand things—vast, vast is its greatness! The gentleman must pluck out his mind! To act through inaction is called Heaven. To speak through inaction is called Virtue. To love men and bring profit to things is called benevolence. ...
In the Great Beginning, there was nonbeing; there was no being, no name. Out of it arose One; there was One, but it had no form. Things got hold of it and it came to life, and it was called Virtue. Before things had forms, they had their allotments; these were of many kinds but not cut off from one another, and they were called fates. Out of the flow and flux, things were born, and as they grew, they developed distinctive shapes; these were called forms. The forms and bodies held within them spirits, each with its own characteristics and limitations, and this was called the inborn nature. If the nature is trained, you may return to Virtue, and Virtue at its highest peak is identical with the Beginning. Being identical, you will be empty; being empty, you will be great.
[*The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, trans. B. Watson, pp. 88-89.]

The Hengxian 恆先 (Primordial State of Constancy) is a bamboo-strip text dating from around 300 BCE.

In the primordial state of Constancy, there is no material existence. There is simplicity, stillness, and emptiness. Simplicity is Great Simplicity; stillness is Great Stillness; emptiness is Great Emptiness. It fulfills itself without repressing itself. Space arises. Once there is space, there is qi; once there is qi, there is material existence; once there is material existence, there is a beginning; once there is a beginning, there is the passage of time. There is not yet Heaven and Earth; there is not yet arising, progression, emergence, or engendering. Empty, still, and as though one. Muddled and murky! All is still and homogeneous. There is not yet light, not yet teeming life.

Qi is self-generating; Constancy categorically does not engender qi. Qi is self-generating and self-arising. The engendering of Constant Qi does not happen in isolation; there is something that takes part [in the process]. Space and Constancy are present. The same can be said of the process during which space is engendered.

Dusky and disquiet, seeking that which engenders them: difference engenders difference, returning engenders returning, divergence engenders opposition, opposition engenders divergence, and dependence engenders dependence. [Things] seek, desiring to reproduce of their own accord.

Reproduction is the process of engendering life.

Turbid qi engenders Earth; clear qi engenders Heaven. Qi is truly numinous! [Things] proliferate and engender each other, stretching to fill Heaven and Earth.

[E. Brindley et al, "A Philosophical Translation of the Heng Xian" *Dao* 12 (2013), pp. 146-7.]

Noble and scholar Liu An (fl. 140 BCE) composed his *Huainanzi*, offering another variant cosmology for the fundamental elements and origins of everything:

Before heaven and earth were differentiated, there was turbulent nothingness. This state of affairs was called Taiji (the Great Monad). Taiji produced heaven and earth. These two systems originated in the nebulous void. The nebulous void produced the cosmos. In its midst was qi (matter-energy). Qi divided into the clear and the turbid. Between the two was a shoreline that took shape as a boundary. The clear and pure qi, shapeless and formless, rolled up and ascended to form heaven; this was called the Way of Heaven. The turbid and heavy qi whirled down to form earth, known as the Instruments of Earth. The Way of Heaven and the Instruments of Earth mutually conditioned and modified each other. Their smoothly rolling movements produced everything. Heaven rotated to the left, while earth rotated to the right. [quoted in He Nu, "Longshan Culture Issues: Taosi and Cosmology," in Oxford. Handbook of Early China (2020), p. 141.]

Zhang Heng 張衡 (78–139 CE), an astronomer of the Han Dynasty (c.100 AD) continued this tradition of syncretic cosmological speculation. In the words of JeeLoo Liu:

Apparently influenced by the *Huainanzi*, Zhang Heng depicts the emergence of something from nothing as the development of qi. For Zhang Heng, there was only a dark abyss at the beginning. Not only were there no form and no light, there was also no primordial qi. He calls this initial state "the Grand Obscurity" (Mingxing 冥溟). The Grand Obscurity may have existed since time immemorial. Inside it there was vacuity (xu 虛), and outside it there was only nothingness (wu 無). It was a deep, dark formless abyss and a complete lightless void. In the second stage, something came out of nothingness, and the primordial matter, which he calls "the Great Element" (Taisu 太素) began to germinate. This primitive matter is primordial qi, which was initially homogeneous and undifferentiated. At this stage, qi is merged into one and there is no differentiation of qi's quality. Zhang Heng sees this stage as what the *Daodejing* refers to as the undifferentiated something. This second stage is called "Grand Chaos" (Panghong 龐鴻) and it also lasted an indefinitely long period of time. Finally, the undifferentiated primordial qi was divided and qi developed various qualities, such as magnitudes of force and degrees of purity. Heaven and earth were separated, and the myriad things began to take shape and to be divided into different kinds. This stage is called the Heaven's Origination (Tianyuan 天元).

[JeeLoo Liu, "In defense of Chinese qi-naturalism" in *Chinese Metaphysics and Its Problems*, p. 45.]

Philosophy: ETHICS

Ethics as a branch of academic philosophy marks the transition from the preoccupation with “orthopraxy” in Sage Literature to the “orthology” of universal rightness.

Greece. The early Socratic dialogues of Plato (c.428-348 BCE) are the first works of ethics in Greek, followed by Plato’s later dialogues (especially the Republic) and Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics.

India. The era of the Maurya-Shunga empires produced the Dharmasutras – Apastamba, Gautam, Baudhayana, and Vasistha – dating from around 500 to 100 BCE. The early Buddhist canon during 400-200 BCE included philosophical ethics in addition to moralistic prescriptions.

China. The finalized text of the Analects (c.400 BCE) under the name of Confucius represents Chinese ethical theory, along with the Confucian Mencius (c.371–289 BCE). Subsequent Mohist (from Mozi) and Legalist (from Han Fei) movements countered Confucianism with rival ethical ethics.