

“Myths are a product of a specific time and place”. Discuss the extent to which this statement is valid in relation to your own reading of one of the texts you have studied on this module.

Myths are a testament of time, highlighting stories from a wide variety of cultures. However, the question of whether Myths are a product of a specific time and place, has been raised frequently over the years. As one may wonder whether myths can still hold truth and meaning in modern day society. I will be discussing this question in this essay, from a religious and philosophical point of view, with reference to both classical theism and the Yoruba religion.

The story of how the world came to be, how humanity was created and who created our very existence is a vital part of almost every religion. It lies as a testament of the omnipotence of an almighty entity in many of the world religions. Is this common myth a sign that religions were once more interconnected than we thought? Despite there being some differences between each variation of creation, there are a wide abundance of similarities. Afterall, “Creation myths are the foundational stories that explain the origins of the world, humanity, and the cosmos. They serve not only as narratives of beginnings but also as frameworks through which cultures understand their existence and place in the universe. These myths are integral to human culture and psychology, providing insights into the values, beliefs, and moral systems of different societies.” (Mythology WorldWide). Meaning that logically there must be some similarities between religions, if there were not, then we would all abide by different moral systems, which would end in an unethical war. This is what I will be discussing in depth in this essay, whilst looking at two creation stories, that of classical theism and the Yoruba religion, to see how both creation stories differentiate as well as how they do have similarities in regards to the way they impact the lives of the believers.

Culture impacts everyone and everything in our existence, it is what drives our morals, creates our beliefs and is even what gives society structure, instructing us on how we should live our lives. Therefore, it is unsurprising that culture has such a considerable impact upon religion however religion can also impact culture. Despite the creation of the earth happening eons ago, the myth of creation still holds surprisingly strong significance today. One common argument is that since the myths are old there is no conceivable way that they could hold truth in the twenty first century however this is not the case. “Creation myths are not static; they evolve with societies. Historical events, cultural exchanges, and advancements in knowledge can reshape these narratives, integrating new elements while retaining core themes.” (Mythology WorldWide). This quote links back to the previous point that culture not only shapes religion but religion also shapes culture.

They come hand in hand, whether an individual is religious or not, religion would have impacted their culture to some degree. This notion can also be further extended, turning into the argument of, if religion can impact culture and vice versa, does that mean that other religions can impact one another? I will be exploring this idea later in this essay.

The most commonly known and accepted myth of creation in western theology is that of Christianity which depicts the notion that an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent and omnipresent God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. The myth of the Christian creation goes as follows; "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. On the first day, He commanded, "Let there be light," and light appeared. God separated the light from the darkness, naming them Day and Night. In subsequent days, God created the sky, dry land, seas, and vegetation. He made the sun to govern the day and the moon and stars to govern the night. On the fifth day, He created creatures in the sea and birds in the sky. On the sixth day, God created animals on land and humans in His own image. He placed them in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it." ("Summary of the Book of Genesis - How It All Began"). Despite this being one of only and main accounts of creation in Christianity, this myth can be interpreted many different types of ways depending on the denomination and how the believer interprets the myth. One could argue that this myth is a product of a specific time as it is a part of the old testament and has barely changed since its original telling, and therefore since being a product of a specific time it has little to no relevance in modern society. However this is far from the truth. Since the creation myth is a part of the bible it is therefore scripture, holding significance to all Christians. Unlike most myths it seemingly has no morals or hidden message which is supposed to either educate or warn the reader. But this is not the case, one could interpret that since Genesis is the first book, and therefore the opening to the bible it is pivotal. As it is the believers first introduction to God and his omnipotence. Even though Gods full character is revealed later, the story of creation stands as a demonstration of God's omnipotence via the sheer power to create the heavens and earth from nothing, and his omnibenevolence, through the love he shows towards the creation of Adam, Eve and all living beings.

In regards to the Yoruba myth of creation, it would seem that the Christian and Yoruba notions of Creation differ greatly. As "Indigenous narratives...often involve the Earth and nature as central elements, emphasizing a deep connection to the land and its resources."(Mythology WorldWide). Even though there are some mentions of nature in the Classical theistic version, the Yoruba myth has the gods/deities more involved and interconnected with the nature around them, as well as the depictions of nature being more vivid in description which contrasts christianity's brief description of nature being created.

The Yoruba myth consists of; “Olorun lived in the sky with the orishas, and the goddess Olokun was the ruler of all of the water below ... Obatala asked Olorun for permission to create dry land for other creatures to live upon. Obatala took a bag and filled it with a sand-filled snail shell, a white hen, a black cat, and a palm nut. He threw the bag over his shoulder and began to climb down from the heavens on a long gold chain. When he ran out of chain, he poured the sand out beneath him and released the hen, who began pecking at the sand and began spreading it around to create the hills and valleys. He then planted the palm nut, which grew into a tree and multiplied.” (Wigington). Straight away it becomes clear that this version of creation is very different to Christianity and this is the same case for the Yoruba version of the creation of humans. “One day, after drinking a bit of palm wine, Obatala got bored and lonely and fashioned creatures out of clay, many of which were flawed and imperfect. In his drunken stupor, he called out to Olorun to breathe life into the figures, and thus mankind was created.” (Wigington). This version of the creation of humankind is very different then that of christianity as Obatala created Humans as ‘flawed and imperfect’. Whereas the God from Christianity created humans in his own image. “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” (Genesis 1:27). Meaning that God created humans to be flawless, we only gained flaws when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate the apple. This is an interesting difference, as each one puts the blame of the flaws of humankind on either party, Yoruba putting the blame upon Obatala for creating humans to be flawed, whereas Christianity puts the blame upon humankind for disobeying God. This is a significant difference, and also gives the believers an insight into the deities in which they worship.

One of the main differences between the creation stories of both Christianity and Yoruba is the creators themselves. Since christianity is a monotheistic religion there is only one God who encompasses all immortal qualities, whereas the Yoruba religion upholds a polytheistic belief system, having many gods who encompass certain attributes and qualities that are dependent on both their character and role. However, the main similarity between the two is the importance of the story of creation, as both stand as a representation, an introduction even to the power in which the deities of each religion hold, and the characteristics in which they possess. But not only is the demonstration of power and characteristics important, but the myth of the creation of the universe and life itself is also incredibly important. Even if the myths are different, the importance of believers having a belief of how everything came into existence is vital, since without some personal belief of how or why we exist we can find ourselves experiencing an existential dilemma, with no answer too turn too. “Creation myths serve as frameworks for individuals to grapple with existential questions about life, purpose, and the nature of reality. They provide narratives that help people make sense of their experiences and the world around them.” (Mythology WorldWide). Therefore despite there being many differences between religions, all world

religions have one thing in common, they provide the believer with something to turn too, something to put hope in when facing such a dilemma.

However, with some similarities between christianity and Yoruba, it is important to make note that the western influence on the Yoruba religion is evident at some points “as a result of syncretism, the blending of African religions with Catholicism during the colonial period.” (“Who Is Yemaya the Water Goddess: Exploring the Deity’s Significance and Legends in Afro-Caribbean Traditions - Old World Gods”). One such example of syncretism is the comparison between Yemaya the water Goddess, and the Virgin Mary with such similarities being “their maternal roles and associations with water...” which “ allowed for a seamless integration of the two figures in religious practices” (“Who Is Yemaya the Water Goddess: Exploring the Deity’s Significance and Legends in Afro-Caribbean Traditions - Old World Gods”). Despite this not being directly involved with the myth of creation, it is an excellent example of how religions can relate and influence one another. As we are often led to believe that all religions are different, due to their different versions/variations of God/gods and moral values/beliefs. However, upon deeper inspection it has become clearer that there are more similarities below the surface even if it is miniscule similarities such as the characteristics between the likes of Yemaya and the virgin Mary, it still provides evidence of the connections between religions.

Now, to bring back the focus of this essay to the subject at hand. How true is the statement that “myths are a product of a specific time and place”? As I have mentioned thus far, the myths of creation do still hold significance as they serve as a representation of the omnipotence of deities and serve as a guide, an answer even to turn to when facing existential dilemmas.

Furthermore, the statement “Myths are a product of a specific time and place” does hold some truth as myths stand as an attestation of the beliefs of a specific time. However, despite some myths dating back eons ago, they still hold high significance to this very day. The myth of creation in both Christianity and Yoruba both hold significance as they demonstrate the power of an almighty deity/deities, which serve as the point of authority in said religions as well as providing a comfort to believers, as both myths give a reason to our existence. Hence, I do agree with this statement to some extent however, I do believe that some myths such as the creation ones do continue and grow throughout time as they are vital to certain cultures and societies.