

A JAIN MYTH

Jinasena: There Is No Creator A very ancient tradition, Jainism was refounded by Mahavira ("the great hero") in the latter half of the sixth century B.C. Mahavira was considered by his followers to be the twenty-fourth in a series of Tirthankaras ("one who makes a ford" across the river of existence). Parsva, the twenty-third Tirthankara, probably lived in the ninth or eighth century B.C., but there is doubt as to the historicity of his twenty-two predecessors.

Jainism (from *jina*, "victor") rejects both scripture and divine revelation and, although it admits of a hierarchy of gods residing in various heavens, considers them inferior to the Tirthankaras and thus denies them relevance and genuine divinity; for this reason, Jainism is usually considered atheistic. Essentially, it is Jainism's goal to free the innately immaterial soul from the karmic matter that accrues to it by involvement with and attachment to the world. Asceticism, both internal and external, is the method adopted for this purpose, and if it is complete the individual *jiva* (soul) is released from the cycle of rebirth to a state of isolated, eternal, and omniscient inactivity.

The Jains hold that no god created the universe, that it is in fact uncreated and indestructible, maintained and changing according to natural principles. This selection from the *Mahapurana* (The Great Legend) was written by the teacher Jinasena in the ninth century A.D. and is modeled on the passages and philosophical discourses of the Hindu *Puranas*.

SOME FOOLISH MEN declare that Creator made the world.
The doctrine that the world was created is ill-advised, and should be rejected.

If God created the world, where was he before creation?
If you say he was transcendent then, and needed no support, where is he now?

No single being had the skill to make this world—
For how can an immaterial god create that which is material?

How could God have made the world without any raw material?
If you say he made this first, and then the world, you are faced with an endless regression.

If you declare that this raw material arose naturally you fall into another fallacy,
For the whole universe might thus have been its own creator, and have arisen
equally naturally.

If God created the world by an act of his own will, without any raw material,
Then it is just his will and nothing else—and who will believe this silly stuff?
If he is ever perfect and complete, how could the will to create have arisen in
him?

If, on the other hand, he is not perfect, he could no more create the universe than
a potter could.

If he is formless, actionless, and all-embracing, how could he have created the
world?
Such a soul, devoid of all modality, would have no desire to create anything.

If he is perfect, he does not strive for the three aims of man,
So what advantage would he gain by creating the universe?

If you say that he created to no purpose, because it was his nature to do so, then
God is pointless.

If he created in some kind of sport, it was the sport of a foolish child, leading to
trouble.

If he created because of the karma of embodied beings [acquired in a previous
creation]
He is not the Almighty Lord, but subordinate to something else. . . .

If out of love for living things and need of them he made the world,
Why did he not make creation wholly blissful, free from misfortune?

If he were transcendent he would not create, for he would be free;
Nor if involved in transmigration, for then he would not be almighty.

Thus the doctrine that the world was created by God
Makes no sense at all.

And God commits great sin in slaying the children whom he himself created.
If you say that he slays only to destroy evil beings, why did he create such beings
in the first place? . . .

Good men should combat the believer in divine creation, maddened by an evil
doctrine.

Know that the world is uncreated, as time itself is, without beginning and end,
And is based on the principles, life and the rest.

Uncreated and indestructible, it endures under the compulsion of its own nature,
Divided into three sections—hell, earth, and heaven.