

6652

MARLOW, A. N.

1954

A. N. MARLOW

Hinduism and Buddhism in Greek Philosophy

THE PARALLELS between Greek and Indian literature, mythology, and philosophy have been stressed often since the days of Sir William Jones, who drew an elaborate and forced comparison between the Hindu philosophical systems and their supposed counterparts in the Greek schools,¹ and the days of Colebrooke, who also had some concise remarks to make on the subject.² Recent scholars have restated some of the evidence, notably S. Radhakrishnan,³ and attention is being increasingly directed to the channels by which Indian influence reached Greece. The purpose of this paper is merely to cite a few of the parallels between the two literatures, and particularly between Hinduism and much of the thought of Plato, so as to indicate their affinity of type more than their identity of origin. Radhakrishnan, as his subject demands, is naturally more concerned with the religious aspects of the question.

There seems to have been an early and common stock of primitive beliefs about the heavenly bodies and the face of Nature generally. For example, in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* there is a passage describing the nocturnal journey of the Sun back to its starting point,⁴ which may contain in primitive form the legend which appears in Stesichorus⁵ and Mimnermus of the Sun's traveling over the ocean in a cup. Mimnermus says: "For a delightful hollow couch bears him over the wave, a couch forged by the hand of Hephaistus, made of precious gold, winged, which bears him sleeping over the water's surface, hurrying him back from the land of the Hesperides to the land of the Ethiopians."⁶ Here Athenaeus says that by "couch" Mimnermus meant cup.⁷

¹Sir William Jones, *Works*, Vol. I (London: for John Stockdale, 1807), pp. 360-361. Jones compares Gautama with Aristotle, Kaṇāda with Thales, Jaimini with Socrates, Vyāsa with Plato, Kapila with Pythagoras, and Patañjali with Zeno.

²H. T. Colebrooke, *Miscellaneous Essays*, Vol. I (London: Williams and Norgate, 1837), pp. 436 ff.

³*Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), especially Chaps. V-VII.

⁴III. 44.

⁵See C. M. Bowra, *Greek Lyric Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), pp. 86-88.

⁶Fr. 10 Diehl, *Anthologia Lyrica Graeca* (3d ed.; Leipzig: 1949). See also Stesichorus Fr. 6 Diehl.

⁷II. 470a.

A. N. MARLOW

Hinduism and Buddhism in Greek Philosophy

THE PARALLELS between Greek and Indian literature, mythology, and philosophy have been stressed often since the days of Sir William Jones, who drew an elaborate and forced comparison between the Hindu philosophical systems and their supposed counterparts in the Greek schools,¹ and the days of Colebrooke, who also had some concise remarks to make on the subject.² Recent scholars have restated some of the evidence, notably S. Radhakrishnan,³ and attention is being increasingly directed to the channels by which Indian influence reached Greece. The purpose of this paper is merely to cite a few of the parallels between the two literatures, and particularly between Hinduism and much of the thought of Plato, so as to indicate their affinity of type more than their identity of origin. Radhakrishnan, as his subject demands, is naturally more concerned with the religious aspects of the question.

There seems to have been an early and common stock of primitive beliefs about the heavenly bodies and the face of Nature generally. For example, in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* there is a passage describing the nocturnal journey of the Sun back to its starting point,⁴ which may contain in primitive form the legend which appears in Stesichorus⁵ and Mimnermus of the Sun's traveling over the ocean in a cup. Mimnermus says: "For a delightful hollow couch bears him over the wave, a couch forged by the hand of Hephaistus, made of precious gold, winged, which bears him sleeping over the water's surface, hurrying him back from the land of the Hesperides to the land of the Ethiopians."⁶ Here Athenaeus says that by "couch" Mimnermus meant cup.⁷

¹Sir William Jones, *Works*, Vol. I (London: for John Stockdale, 1807), pp. 360-361. Jones compares Gautama with Aristotle, Kaṇāda with Thales, Jaimini with Socrates, Vyāsa with Plato, Kapila with Pythagoras, and Patañjali with Zeno.

²H. T. Colebrooke, *Miscellaneous Essays*, Vol. I (London: Williams and Norgate, 1837), pp. 436 ff.

³*Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), especially Chaps. V-VII.

⁴III. 44.

⁵See C. M. Bowra, *Greek Lyric Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), pp. 86-88.

⁶Fr. 10 Diehl, *Anthologia Lyrica Graeca* (3d ed.; Leipzig: 1949). See also Stesichorus Fr. 6 Diehl.

⁷II. 470a.

The Hindu pantheon, of course, shows great affinities with that of the early Greeks, since both are derived from a common source, and the Vedas contain the earliest expression of that worship of the heavenly bodies which persists right down to the time of the Stoics.⁸ The legend of Earth and Heaven as the parents of the gods, the earliest Greek form of which is in Hesiod,⁹ is common in the *R̥g Veda*. In *R̥g Veda* X.190 and X.168 water is the primary principle, which develops into the world through time, *samvatsara* (year), *kāma* (desire), *puruṣa* (intelligence), and *tapas* (warmth); and in X.190 water is pictured or assumed as the first principle. Similar confused attempts to picture the first principle are found in *Iliad* XIV.201 and 246, where Oceanus is the "origin of the gods" and the "origin of all the gods"; and in the Orphic poems, where night is the most ancient goddess, a bird with black wings.¹⁰ Hesiod inclines more to the Orphic view,¹¹ but there is a similar confusion in the Greek and Vedic accounts of the beginnings, and the confusion lies between the same claimants to the title of first god.

Many of the gods are the same: Dyaus is Zeus, Varuna becomes Ouranos, Uṣas becomes Eos, and Agni is the primitive god of fire, who does not emerge in Greek but has a shadowy personification as the Latin Ignis. The Aśvins, "horsemen," inseparable twins, bright lords of brilliance and lustre, protectors of mankind, who are referred to in many hymns, are the Dioscuri, whose principal later function was that of protecting gods, *theoi soterēs*, mighty helpers of man, delighters in steeds, princes, *Anakes* or *Anaktes*.¹² The Hindu conception of *R̥ta*, the law of Nature, or "course of things," has the same scope as the Greek *dike*,¹³ and a saying of Heraclitus, "The sun shall not transgress its bounds,"¹⁴ might have been written with *R̥g Veda* I.24.8 and I.160.1 in mind.

The Hindus have their Prometheus in Matariśvan,¹⁵ who stole fire from the sky and entrusted it to the keeping of the Bhrigus, a warlike clan. Their god, Soma, upon whom Whittier wrote a poem ("The Brewing of Soma"), part of which has become a popular hymn ("Dear Lord and Father of man-

⁸ Cf. Chrysippus, Fr. 1076 (Arnim): "He thinks the sun and moon and other stars to be gods."

⁹ *Theogony* 126 ff.

¹⁰ Otto Kern, *Orphicorum Fragmenta*, 2470 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1922).

¹¹ *Theogony* 116 ff.

¹² Plutarch, *Theseus* 33; Strabo V. 232; Aelian, V.H. I. 30; IV. 5; Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* 1301; Pausanias I. 31. 1, VIII. 21 *fin*.

¹³ Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1923), pp. 78-80; F. R. Earp, *The Way of the Greeks* (London: Oxford University Press, 1930), *passim*.

¹⁴ B94 Diels-Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Verlagbuchhandlung, 1951).

¹⁵ *R̥g Veda* I. 60.

kind, Forgive our foolish ways . . .”), has the same characteristics as Dionysus. In both Greek and Hindu poetry rivers are constantly personified as gods, and the form of sacrifice prescribed in the *R̥g Veda* is very similar to the simple ritual of Homer—prayer, sprinkling of grain, burnt offering, tasting of flesh, and dedication to the gods. “These agreements,” writes Radhakrishnan, “indicate that the two peoples must have been in contact at some early period, but neither possessed any recollection of those times and they met as strangers within the Persian Empire.”¹⁶

In dealing with pre-Socratic thought, we constantly find ourselves in an atmosphere more akin to that of the Orient than to that of the West. As the late Professor F. H. Smith pointed out,¹⁷ the *apeiron* of Anaximander is almost exactly the Hindu *nirvikalpa*, the nameless and formless, called *Aditi*, the unlimited, in the *R̥g Veda*. Moreover, this *Aditi*, which is *nirvikalpa*, is ordered by the immanent *Rta* or *dharma*,¹⁸ just as in Anaximander an immanent *dike* ensures that all things shall eventually return to the *apeiron* whence they came: “From which all things take their rise, and by necessity they are destroyed into these; for all things render just atonement to one another for their injustice according to the due ordering of time.”¹⁹

In the more imaginative view of the Upaniṣads, we find that a personal god, *Prajāpati* (“lord of creatures”), draws forth from himself all existing things, or, in another passage,²⁰ divides himself into male and female and produces all creatures by this self-division. One might adduce here the similar Chinese doctrine of *yang* and *yin*, the principles of expansion and contraction by which the world is formed from chaos. Empedocles seems to be expressing a similar idea, or, rather, combining it with the equally ancient doctrine of primordial strife, also found in the Upaniṣads:

“I will tell you a twofold truth: at one time it increased so as to be one out of many and at another it parted so as to produce many from one. For twofold is the creation of mortals and twofold their decline. The union of all things causes the birth and destruction of the one, and the other is nurtured and flies asunder as the elements grow apart. And these elements never cease to be continually exchanged, coming together at times under the influence of love so as to become one, and being separated at other times through the force of strife.”²¹

Heraclitus shares two fundamental doctrines with the early schools of Buddhism—that fire is the primary element and that all things are momen-

¹⁶ *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 118.

¹⁸ *R̥g Veda* IV.23.9.

²⁰ *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* I. ii. 4; I. iv. 3–4.

¹⁷ *Religion*, Sept. 1950, p. 81.

¹⁹ Diels, B 1.

²¹ Diels, B 17.

tary and pass away. It seems almost too great a coincidence to imagine that two such striking and radical doctrines should have arisen independently in two places at about the same time. Here the confusion of Indian chronology and the obscurity surrounding the life of Heraclitus are great obstacles, but it is quite certain that the *floruit* of the Buddha was in the latter part of the sixth century, and that he adopted many ideas from earlier schools. Traces of the belief in fire as the primordial element occur as early as the *Rg Veda*,²² and are treated philosophically in the Upaniṣads. The Buddha, like Heraclitus, chooses fire as the most mutable of the elements to represent his metaphysical principle of becoming, and has a long discourse in which he compares the existence of beings to the candle flame that is renewed every instant.²³ Here one thinks of Empedocles, Fr. B62 (Diels): "Hear now how fire when separated sent up the night-produced shoots of men and lamenting women," and of Heraclitus, Fr. B30 (Diels): "No god nor man ever created this world which is the same for all, but it was and is and ever will be everlasting fire." Again, the Buddha uses in the same discourse²⁴ the analogy of the river which is never the same for two moments but is sustained by ever-new waters, a sentiment echoed in Heraclitus, Fr. B91 (Diels): "Ever different is the water for those who step into the same rivers," and by the famous saying quoted by Aristotle, "It is not possible to step into the same river twice."²⁵ Probably Fr. B6 (Diels) refers to the same belief in the momentariness of existence, "The sun . . . is new every day."

For the Buddha, the fundamental principle of existence was the immutable *dharma* (law) which decreed that every smallest action and word earned its reward, not an ounce more or less. This principle obviously dates back to the Upaniṣads or earlier, but the Buddha was the first to enthrone it as the ruling power in the universe, a universe completely free from the tyranny of gods. Heraclitus may be thinking of *dharma* in Fr. B2 (Diels): "So we must follow the common principle, for that is shared by all," for obviously this common principle must be a universal law. We meet it again in Fr. B41 (Diels): "For wisdom consists in one thing, to know the principle by which all things are steered through all things" (or "on all occasions"). These opinions of Heraclitus are expressed in short, pithy, and difficult sayings which remind us very much of *sūtras*.

The epistemology of Empedocles presents several features which resemble those to be found in the Upaniṣads or in the various Hindu systems. For instance, according to the Sāṃkhya doctrine, the world as the object of per-

²² See e.g., i.67.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, i. 123.

²³ *Mahavagga* i. 121.

²⁵ Diels, B91.

ception has the five *tanmatras* (roughly, "subtle elements"), and each of these is perceived by something corresponding to it in ourselves,²⁶ which is Empedocles' own doctrine, he being in fact the first Greek to propound a thorough theory of sense perception: "For by earth we perceive earth, by water water, by air divine air and by fire destructive fire."²⁷

Anyone who studies the Hindu theories of perception and cognition as set forth in the Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, and Sāṃkhya systems and then turns to the fragments of Empedocles cannot but be struck by the similarity of their theories.

Empedocles is keenly conscious of a sort of "fall of man" and affects to remember past births as plant and animal, boy and girl.²⁸ The way by which the original bliss may be gained, from which he is now an exile,²⁹ is by asceticism, the Hindu method. He advises meditation, for by this means all truth shall be revealed and even supernormal powers attained.³⁰ In the end, the soul of the righteous ascetic regains its divinity—a counterpart of the Hindu belief in reincarnation and *mokṣa*. See, in particular, Empedocles, B.146 (Diels): "At the end they became seers and bards and chiefs and physicians among mortal men, and finally they blossom forth as gods highest in honor."

There may even be an echo of the monism of the Upaniṣads in Empedocles, which, like many other features of his philosophy, seems to have been mediated through Orphism. In the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* I.7 we find a list of the qualities of the One, which has resemblances to Fr. B17 (Diels) of Empedocles as quoted above.

A distinct tradition of mysticism runs through Orphism, Pythagoras, and Plato which is as unlike anything in Greek thought as it is like the Hindu mysticism of the Upaniṣads. There is a distinct break with rationalist humanism and with the healthy unreflecting extraversion of the seventh and sixth centuries. Instead of Homer's "Themselves he made a prey to dogs,"³¹ we have a complete shifting of emphasis from the physical to the spiritual, from the temporal to the eternal. Reality is not now what is perceived by the senses but what lies beyond them. The soul lives an independent life and is in itself the only true reality.

Orphism and Hinduism have much in common. Just as the *Brahmins* kept the belief of the shamans or medicine men of the Vedas that man could become a god, but attempted to achieve this union not by drinking the intoxi-

²⁶ A doctrine based on *Praśna Upaniṣad*, IV.8.

²⁸ Diels, B117.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, B110, B111.

²⁷ Diels, B109.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, B119.

³¹ II. i.4.

cating *soma* but by abstinence and ascetic practices, so Orpheus purified the old Dionysiac religion and substituted asceticism for drunkenness.³² The aim of Orphism seems to be the liberation of the soul from the chains of the body, and this is to be achieved by asceticism, but man must pass through many lives before he achieves final freedom. This is very far, indeed, from genuine Greek religion of any period,³³ but almost exactly the predominant view of the Upaniṣads. Even the metaphors in which this conception is clothed are the stock Hindu and Buddhist metaphors—the wheel of life in the Upaniṣads appears as the “sorrowful weary wheel” of Orpheus.³⁴ It has been remarked that the aim of Orphism, the realization by man of his identity with God, would have appeared blasphemous insolence to a sixth-century Athenian.

In the details of Orphic abstinence we again come across familiar practice. The avoidance of flesh and fish is due to the doctrine of transmigration, and in the Orphic abstinence from animal sacrifice there seem to be traces of the primitive taboo which, according to the latest evidence,³⁵ gave rise to the caste system and to the doctrine of *ahimsā* (non-injury or reverence for life). Indeed, it is a striking feature of Orphism that it inculcates friendliness to all creatures and not man alone. Again, the Orphic cosmogony is different from that of Homer and Hesiod. Instead of having Ocean as the origin of all things, we have a world-egg, an idea common in the Vedas;³⁶ we also have the soul's journey after death toward final purification. The evidence here is very tentative, since chronology often fails as a guide, but once again the parallels are highly suggestive.

In Pythagoras, too, there are many parallels to Hinduism, but the evidence has been differently interpreted by different scholars. All I can attempt is a brief recapitulation of the evidence. A fundamental doctrine was that “we are strangers in this world and the body is the tomb of the soul, and yet that we are not to escape by self-murder; for we are the chattels of God who is our herdsman, and without his command we have no right to make our escape.”³⁷ The belief in transmigration is mistakenly attributed by Herodotus to the Egyptians, and was apparently taken over by Pythagoras from an Oriental source; along with this came the prohibition of the slaughter

³² Albert Schweitzer, *Indian Thought and its Development*, Mrs. Charles E. B. Russell, trans. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1936), pp. 21–23. J. E. Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), p. 477.

³³ See on this W. K. C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion* (London: Methuen, 1935), pp. 236–237.

³⁴ Kern, *op. cit.*, Fr. 36 (c) line 6.

³⁵ See J. H. Hutton, *Caste in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1946), pp. 62–79.

³⁶ E.g., *Rg Veda* X. 82. 5–6.

³⁷ J. Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy* (4th ed., London: A. & C. Black, 1930), p. 98.

of animals and the vegetarian diet. The doctrine of purification by ascetic practices and by *theoria* (contemplation) seems familiar. Even the secrecy of the doctrine and the refusal to commit it to writing reminds us of the very meaning of the word "Upaniṣad," a "confidential communication." And the separation of the disciples into two grades, the *mathematikoi* (inner circle) and the *akousmatikoi* (outer ring of listeners),³⁸ reminds us of the two stages of instruction given by the Vedas and the Upaniṣads, in the latter of which was found the esoteric doctrine of becoming one with the Supra-sensuous Being imparted by the *Brahmin* teacher to his pupil—not a sentence of this secret doctrine must be uttered before members of lower castes.

Incidentally, bearing in mind these similarities between the *Brahmin* teaching, Orphism, and Pythagoreanism, one can hardly resist the speculation that in the Upaniṣads and in the doctrines and practices based on them we may have a clue to the Greek mysteries. Did they originally inculcate simply the attainment of immortality by ecstasy in contemplation?

It is interesting to find attributed to Pythagoras³⁹ the distinction of the three lives, the apolaustic, the practical, and the theoretic, used by Aristotle in his *Ethics*, and the attempt to base these three on the predominance of one or other element in human nature. This is the very core of Hindu speculation on the caste system, which bases the pleas for its efficacy on the correspondence of the three castes to the three constituents of the human soul, *sattva* (that which gives the highest bliss), *rajas* (that which impels to activity), and *tamas* (the earthly, represented by the appetites).

No one can read any of Plato's dialogues without being struck by his frequent stress on the complete independence of soul and body and his equally significant insistence on the fact that the soul does not come into its own until the body is quiescent. His view of reality is not the ordinary Greek view; the philosopher has supersensual vision and recalls the beatific vision of former innocence when it was itself pure and not enshrined in the *empsychos taphos* (living tomb) of the body, like an oyster in its shell.⁴⁰ The soul becomes truly itself only when it is troubled by no pain or pleasure but is in so far as possible alone and takes leave of the body; for when it avoids contact with the body it can reach out toward reality and attain truth.⁴¹ Having attained this transcendent calm, it dwells immortal and changeless,

³⁸ Aristotle seems to treat these as opposing sects, and it may be that I have read too much into the Greek terms.

³⁹ By Heraclitus; see Burnet, *op. cit.*, p. 98 (though serious doubts are thrown by Jaeger on this reference to Pythagoras).

⁴⁰ *Phaedrus* 250. *Phaedo* 65–67, *Cratylus* 400C.

⁴¹ *Phaedo* 65A.

having ceased from its long cycle of wanderings; thus, the truth is always in our soul, which is immortal and has been reborn many times.⁴² So, concrete existence is a phantom of reality, and the ordinary man is not truly awake but is like a somnambulist in pursuit of phantoms.⁴³ Or, we have the tremendous simile of the cave in the *Republic*, which is a pictorial form of the Hindu doctrine of *māyā* (illusion), though in a dualistic system such as Plato's the idea of *māyā* is replaced by that of mere appearance.

As in the Upaniṣads, we find in Plato the Absolute Principle, which appears as the Idea of the Good in the *Republic*, and as the Demiurgus, the personal God and creator or soul of the universe, in the *Timaeus*, and these two ideas exist side by side. Again, in the *Republic* we find the principles of *logistikón*, *thymos*, *epithymia*, reason, spirit, and appetite, as the basis of the whole structure, and these are bodied forth in the classes of society which are worked out with a rigidity that cannot fail to remind one of the Indian caste system. There the *Brahmins*, or priests, were supreme, by virtue, curiously enough, of their possessing magic formulae which enabled them to achieve union with the Absolute, but originally they had strict duties to other classes. Being enlightened, more was asked of them and they were expected to give guidance in all branches of life. Then came the *kṣatriyas* (warriors), then the *vaiśyas* (businessmen), and finally the *sūdras* (artisans). Of course, Plato had no room for outcastes, but he keeps the order of precedence of philosopher, warrior, and artisan. In the *Republic*, as in Hindu society, caste and class are rigid—it was difficult for the Greek and impossible for the Hindu to change from one to another.

In the *Republic* the guardians perch uneasily on their pinnacles, fenced round by diverse prohibitions, and it would explain a good deal of the artificiality of the fourth book if Plato were trying to introduce a form of caste system about which he had heard or read. Probably the Hindu caste system originally came into being for the reasons which Plato professes, namely, stability and eugenics.

Thus, it was natural that for Plato as for the *Brahmins* philosophy should be a meditation on death, and the trial of Socrates is, of course, ideal for the communication of this conviction. It is strongest in the *Phaedo*, as for example in 64A: "It seems to be that they who are the true votaries of knowledge have escaped the notice of the rest, namely, that they practice nothing else but how to die or meet death." Again, in 66E, pure knowledge is held to be the exclusive right of those who have passed beyond this life: "If pure

⁴² *Ibid.*, 79D.

⁴³ *Meno* 80E.

knowledge is not possible in the body, then one of two things follows, either knowledge is not to be obtained at all, or, if at all, after death."

The complete man for Plato must leave behind him children's children to perpetuate the race, e.g., *Laws* 773E, where the striving for eternal life is most illuminatingly and naturally mentioned with the leaving of descendants. These two actions are corollaries, as in the Upaniṣads. There is no suggestion of scholastic or monastic celibacy in either. The resemblance of Plato's ideal to that of the Upaniṣads is best brought out by contrasting both with the Buddhist ideal of the *arhant*, the truly enlightened man who, like Ibsen, sees the world as a colossal shipwreck and conceives his first duty to be the saving of his own soul.

Immortality in the Upaniṣads seems to have the same connotation as *athanasia* in the *Symposium*, 207D–208A, where physical birth and death are shown as inseparably connected, and the mortal puts on immortality just in so far as he dwells in the spiritual world and sees the value of true knowledge. Compare with this teaching *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa* II.ii.2, 14 and *Bhagavad-gītā* II.27.

The ideal every wise man puts before himself is a quiet tranquillity of soul,⁴⁴ a phrase which aptly sums up the ideal of the *yogi*. So, he must be above the infatuation which results from the "power of appearance" (like the Hindu *rūpa*, form), for it is this power which leads men astray.⁴⁵ To be overcome by pleasure is ignorance in the highest degree,⁴⁶ and self-control is true wisdom. So, we find the metaphor of the charioteer in the *Phaedrus*, which verbally and in detail resembles a metaphor in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (Valli 3), which may be translated thus: "Know the self or *Ātman* as the Lord who sits in the chariot called the body; *buddhi* (intelligence) is the charioteer; mind the reins, the senses are the horses, and the objects are the roads. The self is the controller and enjoyer. But he who has no understanding, but is weak in mind, his senses run riot like the vicious horses of a charioteer. He who has understanding and is strong-minded, his senses are well controlled like the good horses of a charioteer."

Whole tracts of Indian thought are given to theories of knowledge. Their thinkers speculate endlessly on perception and cognition, on what happens when we see a rope and imagine it to be a snake, or a shell and imagine it to be silver. Is it something in the shell? Is our cognition of it erroneous? How can one cognition destroy another without infinite regress? Are all qualities of things imaginary? In short, what is error and what truth? Unlike

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 471D.

⁴⁵ *Protagoras* 358C.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 357E.

jesting Pilate, the Hindu pandits never depart, even though they wait a lifetime and are not answered. The *Theaetetus* is full of such speculations, cut short and purged of hair-splitting, but unmistakably reminiscent. The doctrine of relativity, for instance, to which all Hindu thinking tended, is there in 152D: "I will tell you a doctrine of no commonplace kind. Nothing exists singly and by itself, and you cannot call anything of itself by any name; but if you speak of it as great, it will seem under other conditions to be small; if heavy also light; and so with everything else, on the ground of there being no *single* existence either as a thing or as a quality." Again, 153E: "With respect to sight, that which you call white does not exist *per se* as something external to your eyes, nor is it *in* your eyes. Do not, therefore, assign any place to it at all." It is thinking of this kind which leads, on the one hand, to the nihilism of the Buddhists and, on the other, to the theory of relative states of reality, which Plato shares with the loftiest Hindu thought. In common with Indian philosophers, he is unable to give any consistent account of how the universal is embodied in the particular. This very deficiency is one of the most striking resemblances between Plato and Hinduism.

Hindu philosophy is absorbed in the relative reality of various states of consciousness. First comes dreamless sleep which approaches nearest to *nirvāṇa*, then sleep itself, and then the waking state, but the Upaniṣads refuse to ascribe more than a relative reality even to waking consciousness, for who knows when it may be sublated into something which bears the same relation to it as it does to dreams? Hence, their important doctrine of *māyā* (illusion). We find this in the *Theaetetus*:⁴⁷ "Nay, I go further, and say that if we are half of our lives asleep, and the other half awake, in each of these periods our minds are convinced that whatever opinions present themselves to us, these are really and certainly true; so we insist on the truth of both alike."

In the *Cratylus* the theory of the origin of language presents many similarities to that of the Nyāya system of logic. Briefly, Plato's theory is that the true etymology of a word goes back to the individual letters of which it is composed⁴⁸ and that we must take a word "syllable by syllable, nay letter by letter" (this is Ruskin, who follows Plato in *Sesame and Lilies*). Primary names are constructed out of rudimentary sounds, which, by the actions of the organ producing them, are naturally suitable for reproducing processes and states.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus rationalizes this process,⁴⁹ but, as Plato expounds it, it is strange. The Hindus likewise reduce the meaning of a word

⁴⁷ 158D.

⁴⁸ 424 C-E.

⁴⁹ *De Compositione Verborum*, W. R. Roberts, ed. (London: Macmillan, 1910), Chap. 14.

to the significance of its letters, which are pronounced and perish one after the other: c, o, w. They have a term called *sphota*, which is roughly the essential sound of a word as revealed in the sound of its letters pronounced one after the other. Although Plato has no word for this, he certainly employs the idea.

These coincidences of thought and language, each small in itself, amount to quite a formidable total. As to the problem of the way by which Indian influence reached Greece I have no new solution to offer and fall back with others on Persia as the intermediary. Of course, after the time of Alexander the way lay so open to Oriental influence that parallels become more frequent and less remarkable.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ I have drawn my examples largely from those Upaniṣads which Hindu scholars agree in considering the earliest and which must have been in existence before the fifth century, as they are quoted in writings demonstrably of that date or earlier.