

COMPARATIVE HINDU AND PRE-SOCRATIC PHILOSOPHY

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This paper aims to synthesize two equally impressive systems of thought—Indian philosophy in the East and Pre-Socratic philosophy in the West—which have been separated not only by space and time but also by our prejudices. It attempts to show the universality of philosophy by exploring the parallelisms and similarities, clarifying contrasts, and highlighting the common themes that are emphasized and de-emphasized in them. The study does not intend to give a complete account of the early Greek and Hindu thoughts. The discussion of Hindu thoughts focuses on the Upanishads, the main source of Hinduism. We will use for our primary source the following texts which majority of Indologists consider as the most authoritative: Aiteriya, Kaushitaki, Taittiriya, Chandogya, Brihadharanyaka, Katha, Mandukya, Maitriyani, Svetasvatara, Isa, and Kena. On the side of Pre-Socratic philosophy are included such major philosophers as Thales Anaximander, Anaximenes, Heraclitus, Pythagoras, Parmenides, Anaxagoras, and Empedocles.

INTRODUCTION

Philosophy¹ was born in the East as evidenced by the fact that the growth and systematization of philosophical ideas go hand in hand with the development of civilization, and Asian civilizations antedate the West by several centuries. It was the anonymous sages of the Gangetic plain who first speculated on the nature and origin of the world. Centuries later, Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes and others, collectively called the Pre-Socratics, started philosophy in the West. Ionia, the birthplace of wisdom in the West, is described by historians as a place that had a special opportunity for contact with other cultures. Located in this city was a seaport that might have served as the meeting ground of different races not only commercially but also intellectually. Ports usually functioned during those times as channels for the influx of foreign ideas. Supporting this contention was the presence of a number of Oriental influences in Greek pottery, mathematics, mythology, and astrology. It can likewise be noted that almost all the Pre-Socratic philosophers were reported to have traveled to the East.

An intellectual continuity between East and West could have been possible.

However, historians of thought are divided on this issue. Some are open to the possibility that the Greeks could have borrowed certain philosophical tenets from the Orient while others dismiss this claim due to lack of sufficient material evidence. Still, the absence of a direct link between the two philosophic currents is not to the disadvantage of any researcher working on comparative philosophy because this gives one an opportunity to do a comparative analysis on a purely philosophic level.

This paper is pursued with a view of discovering the first light of human speculation: Indian philosophy in the East and Pre-Socratic philosophy in the West are two equally impressive systems of thought separated not only by space and time but also by our own scholarly prejudices and ethnological indifference. It is an attempt to demonstrate the universality of philosophy by showing the parallelisms and similarities, clarifying contrasts, and highlighting the common themes that are emphasized and de-emphasized in what are generally considered as two poles of thought. At the outset, this study may seem unworkable for the Hindu and Greek minds are usually considered miles apart, the first being psychocentric and spiritualistic while the second being geocentric and materialistic. But these are mere labeling done hastily, simplifications in order to ease our comprehension of the history of philosophy.

Almost the same conditions triggered the rise of different philosophical systems in both the East and the West. The political stabilization in Greece and the revolt against the supremacy of the Brahmin Caste and the stiffening of class distinctions in India were some of the factors that motivated the first philosophers to search for novel ways of explaining the world and legitimizing the new world order. The old (mythological) worldview was deemed insufficient to explain the present because of the sociopolitical changes taking place in their respective environments. Religion likewise played a crucial role in this transformation. The primitive religions of India and Greece were not a body of doctrines but a collection of myths and rituals which a worshipper can interpret freely. They did not *per se* hamper the human reason to assert itself against blind faith and authoritarianism that accompanied most superstitious beliefs. Both Greeks and Hindus also observed tolerance in the expression and practice of one's ideas or ideals. Religious and philosophical thought in India enjoyed almost absolute freedom. On the side of the Greeks, freedom of expression was part of their democratic spirit. Of course, every culture changes and the condition being described here may have been altered depending on certain expediencies. What we simply like to accentuate is the role played by these factors in the development of philosophy. In Greece, for example, it is known that they exiled some leaders or thinkers who failed to get favorable approval from the citizens of the *polis* but most of these cases, according to Nakamura (1986: 187), were "purely political and had nothing to do with the censorship of ideas."

This study does not intend to give a complete account of the early Greek and Hindu thoughts. Hindu philosophy, e.g., is impossible to comprehend in its entirety given the time and resources at our disposal.

BASIC ELEMENTS

Certain physical elements are considered by the Pre-Socratics and the Upanishadic writers as primary realities. The cosmological speculation of the

Indian *risis* has led to the identification of the ultimate reality with natural elements, namely water, earth (food), fire, air or breath (*prana*), and ether. "We see that the word 'ether' did not mean a mere empty space or a limited element, but an undifferentiated one; it could therefore be called the foundation" (Nakamura 1986: 86). This concept is analogous to the *Apeiron* of Anaximander. Thales said that the world came from water. Similarly, *Chandogya* (1.8.4-5) states that "It is just Water solidified that is this earth, that is the atmosphere, that is the sky, that is Gods and men, beasts and birds, grass and trees, animals together with worms, flies and ants; all these are just Water solidified." Air or breath has always been associated with life or soul since time immemorial. Air (*prana*) understood both in the cosmic (wind) and psychic sense (breath) is one of the most important designations of Brahman in the Upanishads (*Brih.* 5.1.1). An often repeated story in the texts is the rivalry of the organs (*Pramasamvada*) where the human body collapses and revives through *Prahna* which shows its supremacy over other human senses, including mind (*Chand.* 5.1; *Kaush.* 2. 14; *Ait.* 2.1). In fact, the word "Atman," which is employed as a synonym for Brahman to designate the ultimate reality, is related to the Sanskrit "*an*" which means to breathe. The four-element theory of Empedocles includes the same elements except ether. Fire, which is the *Arche* of Heraclitus, also figured prominently in the Upanishads. "As the one fire has entered the world/ And becomes corresponding in form to every form/ So the Inner Soul of all things/ Is corresponding in form to every form, and yet is outside" (*Katha* 5.9). All these elements were regarded as divinities during the pre-Upanishadic era. In the attempt to reconcile the old and the new ideas, these elements became the symbols of Brahman. The elements were the sensible representations of the universal principle. When the Indians and the Greeks identified these elements with Brahman or the *Arche*, what they identified were not the elements themselves in their physical manifestation but the outstanding qualities they possess such as mobility, indefiniteness, importance to life, imperceptibility, dominance, abundance, flexibility, and homogeneity. When Thales mentioned that water is the source of all things or when later, water was replaced by other elements, it is not exactly water which is affirmed as such for it is evident to us and most probably evident to them that not everything is water. The Pre-Socratics and the Hindus are not offering a physical source that has to be distinguishable in things but a metaphysical one, a primordial reality which goes beyond sense perception. Perhaps, being aware of the difficulty of conveying the nature of the Ultimate, the ancient philosophers made use of symbols in order to concretize what is beyond human imagination. "Symbols belong to an order of reality different from that of the true Reality they symbolize. They are used to make the truth intelligible, to make the unheard audible. They are meant to be used as tangible supports for contemplation. They help us to reach awareness of the symbolized reality" (Radhakrishnan 1956: 138).

ULTIMATE REALITY

"Philosophy started in the faith that beneath this apparent chaos, there exists a hidden permanence and unity, discernible, if not by the senses, then by

the mind" (Guthrie 1975: 24). There is a common recognition among the Hindus and the Pre-Socratics that an essential nature of all things exists, without which the whole structure of knowledge and human experience crumbles into pieces. When they pronounced that all is one or all is Brahman, it is not an identity or a composition statement but an affirmation that there is an order of things which is beyond ordinary human experience. It is the explanation of all else, though in itself, remains unexplained. The progression of speculation from Thales to Anaxagoras shows a sequence of refinements in the conception of the *Arche*. From a mere life principle, the Pre-Socratics delved deeper to bring to light something more basic than life as the explanation of reality. The *Arche* became the unlimited, infinite, producer of all things—the *nomizer*—the sole reality, all encompassing, immutable, perfect, complete, and harmonizer of opposites. In the case of Empedocles and Anaxagoras, the *Arche* is not the four elements nor the homoeomeric particles but the original mixture itself where everything comes from, an initial state of unity. On the other hand, the Hindus, by discovering the power of meditation, went a step further in investigating the common bond that unites all things. They were able to identify it with Being, Consciousness, and Bliss. The ultimate principle became Saccidananda—the unity of all these qualities, the realization of which is possible only through a direct, ecstatic, intuitive experience where one discovers the Being within the self (atman). It is the efficient, material, formal, and final cause of all things for everything will return to Brahman (see *Svet.* 5.5; *Brih.* 4.4.13; *Chand.* 8.4.1; *Maitri* 6.17). It can only be described in an analogical or negative way. But in the final analysis, it is unknowable for it goes beyond the limits of human reason. It is immanent and at the same time transcendent (*Katha* 5.9. See also *Isa* 5).

NON-DUALISM

The earliest Greek philosophers did not distinguish the material from the spiritual. Hence it would be anachronistic to label them as physicalist or materialist. A materialist in the ordinary usage stands for one who has made a conscious choice for matter over spirit. To express the Greek way of thinking, we propose the term non-dualism which is distinct from monism. Non-dualism expresses the continuity of reality and the unity of matter and spirit, which are not entities opposed to each other but are like two ends of a long chain.

In the same manner, the metaphysics of the Upanishads is non-dualistic. The common impression is that Hinduism is idealistic. On the contrary, Co (1976: 48) argues that the "Eastern thinkers live far too close to nature to make this mistake: nature is most real for them." There are indeed idealistic passages in the Upanishads but these are counterbalanced by realistic passages. In the texts, we can discern the attempt of the writers to turn back to realism every now and then. For instance, the doctrine of creation in the Upanishads was formulated to refute idealism. The present life is important because man's emancipation depends on this. Hindu spiritualism never despises the flesh and the things of this world. It teaches that instead of treating the world as an object of possession, it should be considered as an object of contemplation. The goal of the former is to have more, the latter, to be more.

The Upanishads recognize matter as the basis of life and divinity. "The God who is in fire, who is in water, who has entered into the whole world, who is in

plants, who is in trees—to that God [we bestow our] adoration!” (*Svet.* 2.17. See also *Tait.* 1.1; *Kaush.* 2.5-8). It is elaborated in *Aiteriya* how Atman developed gradually from matter until its final manifestation in man through man’s realization of the Atman. The Atman is not a distinct and separate entity that comes out from the process of evolution. “There is hardly any suggestion in the Upanishads that the entire universe of change is a baseless fabric of fancy, a mere phenomenal show or a world of shadows” (Radhakrishnan 1996, 1: 186). It does not follow that if Brahman is real, everything else is unreal. The world is not unreal for the world is Brahman. Though the texts fail to state categorically how the universe and Brahman are related, what is clear is that they are not unrelated.

The term monism cannot do justice to the vision of reality expressed by the Upanishads which recognize the incontrovertible fact of human experience being constituted by two poles of thought: subject and object, finite and infinite, relative and absolute, matter and spirit. However, this type of thought is not dualistic for the dualism experienced by man is never considered final and irreconcilable. Duality is never absolute but a mere appearance. The transcendent reality is the ground or explanation for all forms of dualism, including matter and spirit. “The dualistic aspects of matter and spirit can be reduced without residuum into Brahman” (Safaya 1976: 24. See *Brih.* 2.4.13).

Non-dualism is the search for unity between all forms of duality. Matter is related to spirit and spirit is equally related to matter. The same thing goes between subject and object, finite and infinite, relative and absolute. This is the same conclusion reached by Heraclitus who said that opposites cannot exist without each other. But “When it is said that duality is not all, that duality is not final, it does not mean that there is no duality at all, that there is no distinction or variety” (Radhakrishnan 1996, 1: 195). Though the distinction apparently exists between matter and spirit, finite and infinite, or subject and object, the infinite is reached in the finite, the spirit in matter, the absolute in the relative. “Behind every error is a Truth/ Behind every appearance is a Reality/ Behind every atman is Brahman” (Villaba 1988: 517).

Hinduism is never bothered by the unity-in-duality view of man which has always posed a problem to Western psychology since the Socratic era. The Upanishads view man as a whole with his physical and mental activities not detached from his total life. Man is one self, he is matter (*Annamayatman*), life (*Pranamayatman*), will (*Manamayatman*), mind (*Vijnamayatman*), bliss (*Annandamayatman*) rolled into one. The atman is not the equivalent of soul in Thomistic psychology. The mind and the will are just two of the several coverings or sheets (*kosas*) of the real Atman, not its faculties. The real Atman is beyond the body and mind distinction. Like the *Nous* of Anaxagoras, the mind for the Hindus is not immaterial. “It is simply the higher form of matter, the subtlest form, converted into energy” (Safaya, 1976: 24).

DYNAMISM

Hinduism and Pre-Socraticism consider the ultimate reality as intrinsically dynamic. This dynamism is seen as the essence of life, its most

obvious indication is movement, and its perfect idealization is the Divine. The majority of Pre-Socratics agreed that the *Arche* is divine and in perpetual motion. Parmenides said that what *Is* can never perish. Although the four roots of Empedocles are inert by themselves, his universe is essentially dynamic, undergoing a continual process of change as it passes from one extreme to another by virtue of the two antithetical forces operating in it: Love and Strife. The Upanishads declare the entire universe as ensouled, “That which is the finest essence—this whole world has that as its soul. That is Reality. That is Atman” (*Chand.* 15.3). In *Taittiriya* (2.1), matter is presented as evolving from the Atman—the universal Self, and from matter evolves the individual self. “From this Soul (Atman), verily, space (*akasa*) arose; from space, wind; from wind, fire; from fire, water; from water, the earth; from earth, herbs; from herbs, food; from food, semen; from semen, the person.”

Life is a state of dynamism. The cosmos is seen as a living organism which exhibits growth and evolution. Rest is not a state of radical inertness but one of dynamic equilibrium resulting from the harmony of opposing forces. Matter and life, body and spirit, are inseparable. Hinduism believes in the existence of a subtle body that makes possible the transmigration of the soul from one form of organism to another. When someone dies, his body is cremated and his spirit (atman) either goes to the flame (this is the *Devayana* or the Way of the Gods where one does not suffer rebirth) or to the smoke (*Pitryana* or the Way of the Father / the Way of Rebirth) where the spirit, after enjoying temporarily the fruits of his action, becomes air, then mist, cloud, rain, and food successively until the food is eaten by man and becomes the semen (*Kaush.* 1.2). Thus, there is no point in time when the soul exists apart from any physical body.

The difference between living and non-living, self-conscious and mere-conscious, mere-conscious and unconscious is the degree of life’s manifestation. It is for this reason that the need to discover the primary cause of movement was not a major problem of the ancient philosophers. The *Nous* of Anaxagoras was devised as a sort of *deus ex-machina*, an arbitrary construct in order to explain what cannot be explained by the logical import of his system. But at any rate, Anaxagoras would try to explain everything else without any reference to it. He came up with a notion of prime mover but only made use of it when he was at a loss for the ultimate explanation.

ETHICS

In contrast to the variety of ethical theories that emerged in the modern and contemporary periods, ethics never occupied a pre-eminent role in ancient philosophy. For the Pre-Socratics, aside from certain prescriptions on some conducts necessary for one’s liberation and prohibition of eating meat and harming animals, they did not come up with any basis of morality to serve as the universal source of moral law. The only philosophy among them that can be considered to have “ethical tendencies” is Pythagoreanism. But its treatment of virtues is purely mathematical, not ethical. Due to this, Zeller’s (1890: 56) assessment is that “the contribution of Pythagorean philosophy to the scientific

treatment of ethical questions was but meager." On the other side, the emphasis of Hinduism is *dharma* or duty. The Upanishads made mention of certain *dharmas* that are relative to the state of the individual such as learning, meditation, austerity, control of the senses, and a few general *dharmas* like truthfulness and non-injury. But we find no attempt, even in the *Mimamsa*, the renown ethical school of Hinduism, to systematize these duties to discover their basis. Neither was there any undertaking to defend morality from immorality. Only a minimum attention was given to what we would call theoretical moral issues. Retribution for an offense committed is in accordance with the inexorable law of karma that excuses no one. One has to reap the fruit of his acts whether they are intentional or not.

Could this lack of emphasis on ethics mean that the ancient philosophers found the topic not worthy of philosophizing or could it be because they had nothing to say about it at all? Our theory is that this is the consequence of minimizing the value of freedom and individuality. Freedom is the *sine qua non* of ethics for the degree of one's imputability depends on how voluntary the act is. But for them, individual freedom in the sense of complete independence is an illusion; it has neither content nor meaning. Man cannot act otherwise than in harmony with nature. Paradoxically, his being not free to act against nature is the very root of man's authentic freedom. Hence, the intrinsic freedom of man is not negated entirely. Philosophers from both currents were unanimous in affirming that man is the cause of his own suffering; consequently, he is also capable of working out his own salvation and no other agent can procure this for him. "The meaning of this contrast is evident, as sharers in the continuity of nature we are, like it, subject to necessity; but we are free from it as soon as, by virtue of the knowledge of our identity with the Atman, we are set free from this continuity of nature" (Deussen 1966: 209). When man becomes one with the Absolute not only intellectually but with regard to his total being, his acting in conformity with nature becomes free—natural and without any restraint. Despite the absolute necessity of our acts, we become free once we come to identify ourselves with Brahman. What is willed by necessity becomes my own willing. To quote *Brihadharanyaka* (4.4.23), "He who knows this [absolute necessity] is tranquil, subdued, resigned, patient and self-controlled. He sees the Self only in himself, he regards everything as the Self. Evil does not overcome him, he overcomes all evil . . . free from evil, free from suffering, and free from doubt, he becomes Brahman, he whose universe Brahman is" (see also *Tait.* 3.1). He who knows himself as the Atman realizes that his individuality is an illusion, he lives in communion with the entire universe. This does not imply the abolition of self, but on the contrary, it is the expansion of one's ego, the illumination of his intellect through the realization of one's infinity and absoluteness. This form of release is summarized in the Upanishads as *Tat Tvam Asi* (Thou art That).

For the Hindus, the doctrine of Atman already implies an ethical ideal, hence, any ethical theory is superfluous. "Since it is the Universal Self which we love in each individual, so love for all creatures wells up from the recognition of the fundamental Self" (Nakamura 1986: 138). If morality is significant for the Hindus, it is so merely as a means and not as an end. It is only a stepping-stone to attain one's liberation. "Ethics was oriented to the goal of liberation by absorption in the Absolute, rather than to action in this World and the betterment of society"

(Copleston 1982: 31). As the intellect must be transcended by intuition, morality must be transcended by liberation. For one who has already reached the highest level of consciousness, all distinctions, including good and evil, moral and immoral disappear. "Such a one, verily, the thought does not torment: 'Why have I not done the good (*sadhu*)? Why have I done the evil (*papa*)?'" (*Taitt.* 2.9). This does not purport that a *mukti* becomes immoral, it only means that morality becomes irrelevant once the person realizes his divine nature. It is not anymore his finite self that does what is good but the Ultimate Self. Law is proper only for those imprisoned in their limited ego. Once liberated, one becomes the law to himself.

NON-CREATION

The basis of causation in both Eastern and Western traditions is synonymy. "Causation is by synonyms; he who breeds fat oxen must himself be fat. The fire warms me only if it is itself warm." (Barnes 1982: 119). Simply put, the cause cannot give what it does not have for there is a certain affinity between the cause and its effect. For example, if the world is intrinsically alive, then the ultimate cause itself must have life. The implication of this is that the effect pre-existed in the cause. The cause and the effect are fundamentally the same (in Hinduism, this is called the Satkaryavada Theory of causation) since the cause cannot produce an effect that is not related to it at all. The effect is not a new entity or a creation from nothing but it is already present somehow in the cause. Nothing comes from nothing, there is no transition from non-being to being nor the other way around.

For both the Greeks and the Hindus, creation ex-nihilo is totally incomprehensible. Brahman is both the efficient and the material cause of the universe. He created the universe out of Himself. "He desired: Would that I were many! Let me procreate myself! He performed austerity. Having performed austerity he created this whole world, whatever there is here. Having created it, into it, indeed he entered" (*Taitt.* 2.6). In *Aiteriya*, we find the story of the primeval Self who created the four worlds (water, light, death and earth), the cosmic powers and the cosmic person from His own Self. The different parts of His body were transformed into different psychic powers and then metamorphosed into different cosmic elements. All the Pre-Socratics agreed that the *Arche*, where everything comes from, is eternal and not created. In an almost tautological manner, Parmenides said, "What Is, is." It is never "was" nor "will be." Since everything comes from the *Arche*, it must contain as much as possible the qualities which these philosophers considered as present in everything. This hypothesis is necessary because if the qualities which all things have in common did not come from the *Arche*, then, it would come from what is not the *Arche* which is nothing. No Greek thinker ever entertained this idea. By the use of deductive reasoning, Parmenides demonstrated what seems to be a self-evident truth for his predecessors, that there can be no transition from being to non-being nor vice versa. Empedocles modified the position of Parmenides in order to maintain the validity of sense experience. He explained the phenomenon of change, which is perceived by our senses, in terms of combination and dissolution of four basic elements but the basic elements themselves are not created. Parmenides' descriptions of "Is" would still apply to them. Anaxagoras is

unequivocal in his conviction that everything comes from everything, not from nothing. Thus, he tried to demonstrate that there is a portion of everything in everything.

THE MAYA CONCEPT

The notion that the world as phenomenally conceived is not ultimately real is integral in Indian philosophy. This does not imply that the world is simply an illusion, it is real but our way of looking at it from the natural standpoint will not unveil its true nature which is Brahman. The world is Brahman appearing (Maya) not as Brahman but as world.

The assumption that reality is not immediately given, that it transcends sense appearance and empirical construct is the very essence of philosophy as contrasted with empirical science. Philosophy begins with an initial inspiration that the ultimate reality cannot be found in things at face value. We must go beyond the realm of sense experience and be dissatisfied with mere empirical data to discover the very essence of things. The concept of Maya is a recognition of the limitation of man to comprehend at once the ultimate reality. Paradoxically, this recognition is also the source of man's eternally unsatisfied quest for wisdom and the urge to transcend sense experience to discover the unity of knowledge. Maya is the "margin of freedom" between reality and human cognition that makes understanding a voluntary act, not something compelled by force of evidence. This may not be evident when we deal with lower levels of cognition but it is experienced most in the philosophic level.

The gap between appearance and the hypothesized reality constituted the central thread of philosophical speculation in the Hellenic world. From the time of the Milesians, we could already notice the attempt to go beyond the realm of sense perception. This is the very reason why the Milesians were looking for an explanation for the unity of things. They wanted to distinguish Reality from ordinary appearances. They were aware, openly or tacitly, that the world as ordinary people perceive it is different from their understanding of it. Heraclitus tried to explain that the essence of reality is not that which is attested by sense experience (change and stability) but by contrariety. Parmenides made a capital distinction between the way of truth (where reality can be found for it is the one taken by the intellect) and the way of mortal opinion (the way of appearance which leads to contradiction). The four roots of Empedocles cannot be perceptually distinguished neither in the original mixture nor in compound things. The inadequacy of the senses to reach the truth is also incipient in the writings of Anaxagoras. Sensation does not reveal that there is a portion of everything in everything. Instead, it only distinguishes what is dominant.

REINCARNATION

The belief in the transmigration of the soul is a widespread view in almost all ancient cultures, including Greek and Hindu. Its origin can be traced back to the age of myths when the soul of the departed is believed to be capable of returning to the company of the living by entering other human bodies. It clearly

suggests the immortality of the soul. The immortality of the soul is a postulate for the ancient philosophers. Annihilation of the soul after death is "in conflict not only with man's self-love, but with the innate certainty more deeply rooted than all knowledge of our metaphysical being as subject to no birth or dissolution" (Deussen 1966: 314). It is totally unthinkable for it contradicts not just our love for life and self-preservation but our natural longing for eternal existence. However, what is missing in this superstitious belief in transmigration which is present in the philosophic version is the notion of recompense for the good and evil works committed. The essence of transmigration in philosophy is retribution, it acquired a moral connotation because it became a means for one to suffer the consequences of his actions and purify himself in order to attain liberation. Chaos and injustice will result if good is not rewarded and evil is left unpunished. Hence, the concept of reincarnation is instrumental in instituting social order. In fact, in both India and Greece, the concept is but a part of the general law which governs not only the life and destiny of individuals but even the order and arrangement of the physical world. It is the application of the law of cause and effect commonly observed in the natural world because one's present condition is molded by his past and his present life will shape his future. Because the cycle of transmigration is repeated for an indefinite period of time until the person has been purified, it is always accused of being deterministic. Nonetheless, it does not totally negate one's freedom. One is still free to act but once the act is committed, its effect or consequence cannot be annulled.

Corollary to the concept of reincarnation is the prohibition of animal killing and eating of meat which can be found in both ancient India and Greece. Since the souls of our departed relatives could be present in these animals, killing them would mean murder while eating their flesh is tantamount to cannibalism. Hence, what is wrong to men is also true to animals. There is no separate rule for human and animal killing. In Thomism, we ascribe to man certain rights on account of his rational nature which is his specific difference from brutes and the root of his dignity. But from the ancient point of view, both man and animal have an identical right to live. What is being affirmed here is kinship with nature; man and animal as well as the rest of living things have a certain affinity. Like a plant that germinates, grows, then dies and decomposes while its seeds survive and grow once more, the seeds of our deeds (*karman*) give rise to a new existence in exact correspondence with our character. This principle (kinship with nature), which is a logical consequence of the notion of the *Arche*/Brahman, explains why man's soul can transfer from one life form to another. Looking at this from our perspective, it is the capacity to suffer, the sentient faculty in the Aristotelian sense, which is common to both man and animal that makes killing or injury wrong and gives the being a title for moral consideration. Furthermore, metempsychosis gives us a clear notion of psyche in the ancient world. Metempsychosis implies the personal survival of man after the death of his body. It is not just the transmigration of soul but the transmigration of the self who owns the fruits of his deeds. Thus, the psyche is the self, it is the seat of personality. "[A] man's psyche is whatever makes him the person he is, whatever is responsible for his particular personality. Metempsychosis is the doctrine of the transcorporation of the self; and the psyche is the self" (Barnes 1982: 106). Like in Hinduism, the Greek psyche is not

the body. However, it is not totally immaterial for it is still composed of subtle matter. Common in both cultures is the belief in the presence of a *subtle body* (that constitutes the soul) which makes transmigration possible. The subtle body does not perish like the gross one but it is incapable of experiencing without the latter. Thus, the common objection against reincarnation—that the soul cannot exist outside the body, is defective. It presupposes a “gap” between the previous life form and the new one to be assumed. The account of transmigration in the Upanishads clearly shows that there is no point in time when the soul exists apart from any physical body. Moreover, the notion of a subtle body indicates that the psyche is always with a body, until it is united with the *Arche/Brahman* when the selfhood or individuality is dissolved in the infinity of totality.

LIBERATION

The need for man to be liberated from his present existence is emphasized. The rationale behind the attempt of the Pre-Socratics and the Indian *risis* to unite man with the ultimate principle is not to save him from annihilation. For them immortality is an “unargued” proposition. From the very beginning, man’s nature is one with the *Arche*. But one will not profit from it unless he discovers this identity, otherwise, he will be imprisoned in the cycle of birth and rebirth. Salvation lies in the knowledge of the true reality, bondage is rooted in ignorance. Blind performance of religious rituals will earn the performer temporal rewards but not the final release. The Upanishads categorically assert that one who worships Brahman and offers sacrifices to Him as if He is “totally other” will not gain salvation. Identity with the very Principle of reality entails that the individual be released from his own personality and absorbed in the boundlessness of the universe. In the Upanishads, one has to realize his true essence to experience *moksha*, and his essence is that his self (atman) is the Atman, the Universal Self. This identity between man and the Absolute should take place not only in the level of theory but it must be reflected in one’s actions. He has to refrain from doing acts motivated by inordinate love for himself. For some, it seems lamentable that the ancient concept of liberation does not promise the continued existence of man as an individual. But if one were to understand fully the essence of ancient humanism, he would realize that selfishness is seen as the root of all evils and sufferings in this world. Liberation should never be desired for the sake of oneself. It is by the expansion of oneself, the setting aside of one’s ego, the transcendence of his individuality that man becomes one with All. This is an expression of a more mature religious consciousness where the supreme function of existence is attained not through rituals and other externalities but through an internal transformation of the self (*metanoia*).

RELIGION

The Upanishads tried to reconcile the different philosophical and religious standpoints which were prevalent during the time of its composition. From the initial attempt to criticize the idolatry, polytheism, ritualism, and the emphasis on temporal rewards and punishments of the Vedic religion, a

total religious revolution did not occur. The new worldview was harmonized with the old as the Upanishads were incorporated with the Vedas. The tolerance and non-exclusivism of the Hindu mind which emanated from the honest recognition of the Indian sages regarding the limitation of the human intellect to comprehend the Absolute Truth made possible the growth of widely divergent perspectives within the same tradition. The worship of different Vedic divinities was still permitted as a help for contemplation, but its rewards are only temporary and even inferior. “These are, assuredly, the foremost forms of the supreme, the immortal; the bodiless Brahman. To whichever one each man is attached here, in its world he rejoices indeed” (*Maitri* 4.6). The cosmic deities such as wind, sun, earth, etc. became the symbols of the Absolute. Vedic rituals were given novel interpretations to suit the monotheistic teachings of the Upanishads. In the later Upanishads such as *Svetasvatara*, what became prominent is not the transcendent and impersonal Brahman but Isvara, His personal manifestation. Isvara is the aspect of God with whom one enters into a personal relationship through prayer, worship, and other forms of devotion.

The same theistic tendencies can be found in varying degrees among the predecessors of Socrates. Though many of them were explicitly against the popular religion which gives high premium to rituals and ceremonies, none of them made a bold departure from the mythological view of the world. “[I]f the Pre-Socratics reject the blank assertions of piety and poetry, that rejection by no means entails the repudiation of all things divine and superhuman” (Barnes 1982: 4). They made use of mythological images in many cases to explain their point. They believed that the universe is ensouled and that the *Arche* is divine. “Much like Homer, these earliest philosophers perceived nature and divinity as yet intertwined, they also maintained something of the old Homeric sense of a moral order governing the cosmos, an impersonal fate that preserved the world’s equilibrium amidst all its changes” (Tarnas 1993: 19). The Pythagorean school combined philosophic truths with religious teachings. Parmenides attributed his enlightenment to a divine favor. Between Greek mythology and philosophy, there is no either/or dichotomy. Such is not only arbitrary but even ahistorical for both are related thematically and chronologically.

As a rule, both Oriental and Occidental thinkers of the ancient period gradually strove to achieve independence from religion. But such did not take place as a rejection of religious belief *per se* but as a reaction to the institutionalized and cult-oriented religions that tend to substitute blind authority for reason and emphasize fear and self-satisfaction (e.g., self-redemption). Such a religion is an obstacle to the exercise of rationality and personal growth. The outcome of this reaction was a synthesis between religion and philosophy, between faith and reason. But this was done not in a confused manner. Our first philosophers did not present their tenets as supernatural truths to be accepted by blind faith, but as reasoned conclusions that are open for criticisms and counter-arguments. It was not a return to the original religion but a genesis of a “superior” religion which does not obstruct rational thought. “Philosophy, then is not so much ordered to expunging religion as it is meant to purify it by its rationally defensible statements about the gods and rites which would not demean man

in his worship of the gods" (McInerny 1963: 4). Religious practices were criticized from the point of view of those who were ignorant of the true meaning of rituals, treating them as some sort of magic by which to manipulate the ultimate power.

What could be the reason that propelled these thinkers to turn back to the religious tradition in their search for the truth? Nobody can give a precise solution to this problem. It could be by virtue of the strength of established tradition or the lack of due effort on the part of these philosophers to push for a radical shift in outlook. It could be by reason of the fact that religious interpretation cannot be easily given up. It is deeply rooted in man's psyche so that it is not possible to throw them overboard without creating trouble. "Compromise between the philosophic faith of the few and the fancied superstition of the crowd is the only possible reconciliation; we cannot abolish the old forms, for that would be to ignore the fundamental nature of humanity as well as patent differences in the moral and intellectual states of believers who were not capable of acquiring at once the highest wisdom" (Radhakrishnan 1996, 1: 145).

It should also be taken into account that during the ancient times, in view of the lack of technology to facilitate exchange of information, ideological changes happened gradually. There was enough time for the new idea to be synthesized with the old. Every culture moves towards integration and harmony. This does not mean that tension or dysfunction does not arise, but such things happen temporarily. Being an adaptive mechanism, culture finds a way to bring its various components into harmony so that it can avoid disruption and can function effectively. Moreover, the non-anthropomorphic God (Brahman) in the early Upanishads who stands aloof seems so alien and out of reach by ordinary mortals. Somehow, He must remain within the level of human experience so that man can establish a personal relationship with Him.

MAN

Another common denominator between the ancient philosophies of East and West is no other than man himself. The preoccupation of these philosophies with the Absolute and their lack of emphasis on the individual did not make them totally indifferent to human reality *per se*. On the contrary, we see in them the attempt to nomize/structure a world of meaning where man himself is a part. Their philosophizing is not an impersonal, dispassionate, objective, and leisurely inquiry motivated by mere curiosity but it reflects man's search for his identity and his locus in the vast universe.

For the ancient thinkers, the Absolute is not something far away from man. All of them have the insight that the Absolute must be sought within the very depth of man's being. This justifies why ancient philosophy tends to be mystical for it ends with the recognition of man's transcendent nature. "Greek philosophy is based on the faith that reality is divine, and that the one thing needful is for the soul, which is akin to the divine to enter into communion with it" (Burnet 1914: 12). For the Hindu philosophers, there is no God distinct from man. "The Divine which they meant was the Divine

in man, and what they wanted was reconciliation between the Divine within and the Divine without" (Muller 1919: 53).

In order to give substance to this unity between man and God, they employed two complementary and inseparable processes. The first is to bring the Divine closer to man by making the latter's nature akin to that of the former. Like the seed of the fig tree or the salt dissolved in water, the fundamental reality becomes immanent and inherent in all things. God ceases to be the "totally other" but one which enters human experience. But as the metaphors suggest, the inherence of the Divine is not immediately discernible. It is present but concealed, the experience of which is possible but not yet actualized. Thus, the second course becomes necessary. To become aware of the Divine presence, man has to purify himself. "The means of rising to his condition was philosophy, the contemplation of the cosmos in which God was contained or embodied" (Mourelatos 1993: 140). Thus, the divinization of man which is the essence of ancient humanism is not to make him the absolute master. The realization of his godly nature lies in understanding and conformity with a greater reality is only possible after the state of liberation, not before it. Philosophy is a way of life, a means of purification, the end of which is liberation while its absence leads to reincarnation. To be reincarnated means to suffer death and rebirth all over again, it means to be *mortal* again, imprisoned within the contingencies of space and time. For the ancient thinkers, to prove the reality of God is unnecessary. Man's experience of transcendence during his inspired moments is already a manifestation of his supernatural nature. If man would only penetrate the very depth of his being, he would discover the Divine within.

Man is not just a mere fraction of reality but the exact replica of the whole of it. He is a microcosm, a universe in miniature. Conversely, the universe is a *makranthropos*. It seems impossible for ancient philosophers to explain the phenomenal world as completely as possible without referring to human reality. The world is deemed as an organism which is ensouled. Cosmic realities and processes find their complete expressions in human experience. The Pre-Socratics used familiar features of human existence in conceptualizing cosmic processes such as justice, love and strife, birth, growth, nutrition, and mind (*nous*). They were one in affirming that man and the universe came from the same principle. Human experiences were used to demonstrate their arguments like respiration, digestion, waking and sleeping, life and death. Anaxagoras proved his main thesis—there is a portion of everything in everything—by citing human nutrition as an example. The four-element theory of Empedocles states that the human person consists of four substances, just as other material things in the world. In Pythagoreanism, "the soul is akin to the world as a whole, and therefore to be explained via the application of the same mathematical conceptions to make the world intelligible" (Taylor 1997: 3).

In the Upanishads, the different faculties of man find their equivalence in the different cosmic elements such as human breath for wind, mind for ether, eye for the sun, semen for water, gross body for soil, etc. The *Kaushitaki* presents a progressive conception of Brahman by relating Him first with cosmic elements and then with human faculties. *Aiteriya* (1.4) depicts the world as being generated from the body of the primeval man. The essence of all these

passages is that the atman of man is the Atman of the world.

ETERNAL CYCLE

Hinduism and Pre-Socraticism conceived the ultimate principle not only as the source or origin of all things but also their final end; everything returns to its beginning. *Taittiriya* Upanishad declares, "That from whence these beings are born, that by which when born, they live, that into which they enter at their death" (*Taitt.* 6.3. See also *Chand.* 6.9-12). The doctrine of Brahman begins with Brahman and ends with Him. He is the creator (*Brahma*), preserver (*Vishnu*), and destroyer (*Shiva*) of all things. Emanation is followed by dissolution which is not an annihilation but a return to the original state. "The universe created by Brahman persists through an entire world-period (*kalpa*) after which it returns into Brahman, only to issue again from him" (Deussen 1966: 220). This notion of eternal cycle is a way to reconcile the creation stories in the Upanishads and the eternity of the world. "According to credible testimony, Anaximenes agreed with Anaximander in maintaining an alternate construction and destruction of the world" (Zeller 1890: 43). For Heraclitus (McKirahan 1994: 124), the world is an "ever-living fire, being kindled in measures and extinguished in measures." Parmenides (McKirahan 1994: 152) said that "For me, where I am to begin from is the same for me to go; there I will come back again." The universe is continuously being created and destroyed by the opposing forces of Love and Strife, according to Empedocles.

What is being emphasized here is the supremacy of the ultimate principle. All things depend on it in terms of their beginning and end. The *Arche* of the universe did not disintegrate after the production of things but remains, though imperceptibly, as the permanent base of all things. It is also the consequence of the Parmenidean principle which has its counterpart in the *Bhagavad-Gita*—there is no transition from being to non-being nor vice versa. Every beginning implies an antecedent non-existence and every end, a consequent non-existence. But what does not exist in the beginning and in the end does not necessarily exist in the middle. The repercussion of this is that all existing things at the moment will not have a sufficient reason to exist. The only way to solve this difficulty is to say that the world is created periodically, it has no beginning nor end. Every existence will have a pre-existence, consequently no existence could be first. There is no need to justify why things started to exist since they have always been existing after all. However, it must be carefully thought about that eternal recurrence is true only from a lower standpoint. It is concerned with how things emanate/evolve or separate from the ultimate principle (this is often referred to as secondary creation). But how the ultimate principle or the *Arche*/Brahman came to be is out of the question since it is not created. From the ultimate standpoint, there is neither creation nor dissolution, emanation nor annihilation, birth nor death, bondage nor liberation.

NOTE

1. Guthrie (1962, 2:417) theorizes that the word "philosophy" was coined by the Greeks to distinguish it from *historie*—a mere factual knowledge concerning the external nature of things, and *polymathie*—knowledge obtained from the study of the poets. The essence of philosophy lies in self-search, i.e., to know oneself.

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