The connections between conceptions of metempsychosis in the philosophical traditions of ancient Greece and India

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Abstract

Metempsychosis is a philosophical and religious tradition that spans multiple cultures. The fundamental belief is that the soul goes through cycles of death and rebirth, reincarnating in different bodies and forms. The traditions that emerged in the regions of ancient Greece and India share many similarities in their texts and discourses. The key literature associated with metempsychosis in ancient Greece derives from the early Greek philosophers of the 6th century BCE such as Pherecydes, Pythagoras and the authors of Orphic poetry. In ancient India however, there is no singular teacher of the doctrinal beliefs regarding metempsychosis, rather scattered pieces of evidence referencing the belief in and or practice of metempsychosis can be found in the Vedic texts of Hinduism and Pali texts of Buddhism. Specific references are also made in some of the twelve principal *Upanishads*, which date from c. 600 to 300 BCE. In the Buddhist tradition references to ideas associated with metempsychosis can be found in the Pali Canon which teach the discourses of Buddha, who lived during the 6th or 5th centuries BCE. The confluence of these ideas and how they were transmitted are, to a great extent, shrouded in mystery. Although there may not be a direct correlation between the Indian and Greek understandings of metempsychosis, there are definite similarities and points of contact between these traditions. Importantly, there are also indications of borrowings from Eastern traditions such as Persian Zoroastrianism that exist on both the Greek and Indian sides. This suggests the possibility of a direct connection and sharing of ideas. The Persian Empire during this period may have been the middle ground in which both the Indians in the East and the Greeks in West were able to share and transfer knowledge. This was the period where philosophical and metaphysical ideas were fostered, and the Persian Empire may have been a conduit through which these ideas were shared and transferred.

Contents

Chapter 1. Introduction: an 'Axial Age'

Chapter 2. Philosophical Foundations in ancient Greece

2.1 Overview of the key philosophical thinkers in ancient Greece and their contributions

2.1.1 Pherecydes

2.1.2 Pythagoras

2.1.3 Orpheus

Chapter 3. Philosophical Foundations in ancient India

3.1. Hinduism:
- 3.1.1. Introduction
- 3.1.2. Background Context of the *Vedas*
- 3.1.3. Schools of Philosophy & Inherent Religious Framework
- 3.1.4. The *Upanishads* and their key concepts

3.2. Buddhism:
- 3.2.1. Introduction & Background Context on Early Buddhism & its Texts
- 3.2.2. The Four Noble Truths & The Eight-Fold Path
- 3.2.3. *Karma*, *Nirvana* & *Samsara*

3.3. Connections and Parallels between both traditions

Chapter 4. The interactions and influences between both traditions

4.1 Zoroastrianism & the Influence of the Persian Empire

4.2 Connections with India

4.3 Connections with Greece

4.4 Position of the Persian Empire & Conclusion

Bibliography

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Chapter 1. Introduction: an 'Axial Age'

The concept of metempsychosis in the traditions of ancient Greece and India is said to have come about during the 8th to the 6th centuries BCE. It is a philosophical and religious doctrine spanning multiple cultures. The fundamental belief is that the soul goes through cycles of death and rebirth, reincarnating in different bodies and forms. An important element of this belief is the idea that the soul can attain liberation or release from this cycle. This period where these ideas date back to has been described as an 'Axial Age'. According to Karl Jaspers, who introduced the term, occurred between the 8th and 3rd centuries BCE,[1] a period of history where new philosophical and religious ideas emerged in different regions, namely, India, Greece, Palestine, China and Persia.[2] The focus of this thesis lies in Greece and India, where the doctrinal beliefs relating to metempsychosis first appear to have emerged. The proposed research aims to identify and explore how these ideas and beliefs initially came about and whether there were any points of contact, superficial or not, between these two regions along with other possible impactful locations.

This thesis will investigate the philosophical and religious elements which underpin the belief system of metempsychosis, but will not argue for a direct connection between the two traditions. It will rather identify and analyse important conceptual similarities and differences while considering wider cultural and historical frameworks. Through the use of textual evidence this thesis will focus on the significant philosophical and religious aspects of each tradition. Additionally, the role played by the Persian Empire in serving as a conduit for the cross-cultural exchange of the philosophical and religious ideas between Greece and India will be considered. I aim to identify specific areas of overlap between the two traditions in order to suggest possible cultural exchange through the Persian Empire. Through this comparative analysis, this thesis aims to highlight the possible similarities and differences between each individual interpretation of the doctrinal beliefs related to metempsychosis.

The methodology employed in this thesis is a combination of textual analysis of primary texts. It takes a historical-geographical approach to explore the possibility for cross-cultural exchange between the three regions under study. This thesis will be conducted using a comparative study of both regions and traditions as well as how they may have crossed over through the

[1] Jaspers, 1953: 1.
[2] Jaspers, 1953: 2.

intermediary role of the third region. The analysis will result in cross-cultural connections to be brought forward so that parallels and or differences can be identified.

Karl Jaspers' theory of the Axial Age presents a pivotal moment in human intellectual and spiritual history. In this period there were profound transformations across diverse civilizations like those in India, Greece, and Persia. It gave rise to new ways of thinking that shaped subsequent cultural and philosophical developments. Jaspers identifies this era as a historical turning point where humanity, across the different regions of China, India, Greece, and Persia, independently experienced a fundamental shift in consciousness.[3]

India and Greece emerged as central to this transformation, producing philosophical traditions that bear striking similarities yet diverge in significant ways. The doctrines of reincarnation and the immortality of the soul occur in both traditions. The question of whether these similarities are genuine or superficial remains critical. If there were direct influences or contacts between these traditions, it is necessary to explore the means through which such interactions could have occurred. Jaspers describes the Axial Age as a period in which "man becomes conscious of Being as a whole, of himself and his limitations".[4] This 'awakening' led to the questioning of established traditions, the development of rational inquiry, and the emergence of universal ethical frameworks. In both India and Greece, this intellectual revolution produced philosophical discourses that sought to transcend mythological worldviews. The ethical standpoint is evident in the teachings found in Indian thought, particularly as seen in the *Upanishads* and the teachings of the Buddha, emphasized metaphysical speculation, self-realization, and the ultimate liberation from the cycle of existence. Similarly, Greek philosophy, with figures such as Pherecydes, Pythagoras, and the Orphics, pursued rational, as well as religious, explanations for the nature of reality, the cosmos, and the human condition. Both traditions, despite their geographic separation, display a movement from myth to reason, from inherited belief to critical reflection. The striking parallels between Indian and Greek thought raise the question of whether these traditions independently arrived at similar conclusions or whether underlying historical connections influenced their development. Jaspers acknowledges that "everything implied by these names developed during these few centuries almost simultaneously in China, India, and the West,

[3] Jaspers, 1953: 2.
[4] Jaspers, 1953: 2.

without anyone of these regions knowing of the others".[5] This statement suggests that the similarities arose not through direct contact but through shared existential inquiries. Both traditions grappled with the nature of being, the structure of the cosmos, and the role of reason in human life. The concept of an eternal, underlying principle is central to both traditions: the *Brahman-Atman* doctrine in the *Upanishads* and the notion of the *arche* in Milesian philosophy reflect analogous attempts to define a fundamental reality behind the world of appearances. Despite these similarities, substantial differences distinguish Greek and Indian thought. Greek philosophy, particularly in its early form, was deeply engaged with natural philosophy and cosmology. The early presocratic Greek philosophers, such as Thales and Anaximander, sought to explain the origins of the universe through elemental principles like water or the 'Boundless' (*apeiron*). Pythagoras, who may have built on Pherecydes' framework, had introduced belief systems around the immortality of the soul, its transmigration into another body. This was achieved through ascetic practices with the desire and possible outcome of escaping from the system of death and rebirth. There was a moral and ethical consideration in how the individual life was to be lived, with a conditional rule of purity attached to future rebirths. The Orphic tradition, on the other hand, placed more emphasis on the purification of the soul and transmigration. It mirrored certain Indian concepts of karma and rebirth. It has been argued that the concept of an 'original sin' was present in the *Rhapsodic Theogony* within Orphic literature.

In contrast, Indian philosophical traditions often relied on meditative insight and spiritual frameworks. The Upanishadic gurus emphasized direct experiential knowledge through prayer and ritual traditions rather than purely rational discourse. Whereas, within the Buddhist tradition some schools and thinkers within preferred to use reason and debate to further the means to understanding the cycle of existence and reincarnation. Furthermore, while Greek philosophy tended toward secular speculation, Indian thought remained deeply interwoven with religious and spiritual dimensions. A further distinction lies in their respective understandings of self and reality. Greek philosophy generally conceived of an external reality governed by rational principles. Anaximenes posited air as the fundamental principle, while Anaximander makes *apeiron*, the 'Boundless' his fundamental principle. In contrast, Indian philosophy removes the distinction between subject and object, asserting that ultimate reality, *Brahman*, is beyond conceptualization.

[5] Jaspers, 1953: 2.

The question of whether these intellectual traditions influenced one another remains open to debate. Jaspers asserts that "to begin with, several roads seem to lead from disparate origins toward the same goal".[6] This observation suggests that, while the similarities are significant, they may be the result of independent but parallel developments rather than direct transmission. However, historical evidence points to possible points of contact. The expansion of the Persian Empire under Darius I created a vast network connecting the Greek world with India. Greek settlements in Bactria and the presence of Indian scholars at Achaemenid courts could have facilitated intellectual exchanges. Later, trade routes also served as conduits for cultural exchange. The overland and maritime trade routes linking the Mediterranean with the Indian subcontinent allowed the movement of goods, ideas, and people. These historical interactions suggest that, while the core philosophical developments of the Axial Age were independent, subsequent encounters may have led to cross-fertilization of ideas. Jaspers' Axial Age theory provides a framework for understanding the profound transformations that shaped both Indian and Greek traditions with the Persians serving as the conduit. The similarities between these traditions are not merely coincidental but stem from a shared existential engagement with fundamental questions about reality, self, and knowledge. The fundamental questioning which Jaspers argues these separate cultures decided to explore all at one point in time cannot be understated. However, the differences in their approaches to reason, metaphysics, and selfhood highlight the unique trajectories of each tradition. While Jaspers maintains that "the essential thing here is this common element, which does not stem from all over the earth, wherever man as such exists, but historically speaking solely from these three origins".[7] The possibility of cultural contact and intellectual exchange should not be overlooked. The interaction between Greek and Indian thought, the strategic geographical positioning of the Persian empire, and the overall sharing and transmission of idea which could have been facilitated through trade, whether through direct contact or parallel development, remains a crucial area of inquiry in understanding the broader intellectual landscape of the Axial Age. It possibility of a connection between these two traditions, and the role a third played in facilitating it, cannot be discounted.

This thesis is structured to systematically examine and compare the two individual philosophical and religious traditions in Greece and India. Beginning with the Greek tradition, Chapter 2 explores the foundational texts and associated principles, historical contexts and contributions of key figures in early Greek philosophy. Chapter 3 follows the same approach

[6] Jaspers, 1953: 11.
[7] Jaspers, 1953: 9.

exploring the Indian traditions of metempsychosis within Hinduism and Buddhism respectively. The final chapter synthesizes the insights from both traditions, critically analysing their similarities and differences, as well as potential connections. Within this comparative framework, the tradition in Persian Zoroastrianism emerges as a point of contact. This tradition is analysed in order to establish whether it is possible to bridge the gap between those in Greece and India. This structure allows for all aspects to be considered as well as bring forth any sort of interplay between these regional traditions.

Chapter 2. Philosophical Foundations in Ancient Greece

2.1 Overview of the key philosophical thinkers in ancient Greece and their contributions

The 6th century BCE was a pivotal era in the development of philosophical thought, witnessing the emergence of several influential thinkers whose ideas became the cornerstone of Western philosophy. The tradition of metempsychosis, deeply rooted in ancient Greek philosophy, revolves around the belief in the transmigration of the soul. This doctrine puts forward the notion that the soul is immortal and undergoes a series of incarnations in different bodies. This cycle continues until the soul achieves purification and ultimate liberation. This chapter will explore the foundational ideas which surround the concept of metempsychosis, highlighting the contributions of key figures in ancient Greek thought: Pherecydes, Pythagoras, Empedocles and 'Orpheus'. They all have contributed their own unique insights, positions, and explanations which ultimately shaped the discourse around the traditions of metempsychosis and the immortality of the soul. The early Greek philosophers were not isolated figures but part of a broader intellectual and cultural milieu that fostered exchanges of ideas and influences. The emergence of shared ideas and evidence of cross-cultural influences form part of the rich intellectual and cultural environment of the 6th century BCE. Pherecydes' mythical cosmogony, for instance, shares thematic elements with the Pythagorean understanding of similar ideas surrounding metempsychosis. It drew upon numerous philosophical concepts, including elements from the Milesian cosmogony as well as being possibly influenced by Eastern cultures at the time, such as the Egyptian and Babylonian traditions. An examination into how this concept is understood and conceptualized within the Pythagorean tradition as well as the Orphic one will provide an insight and understanding of the ancient Greek texts which refer to metempsychosis.

It was claimed that Pherecydes was the first to have introduced this framework and thought process to the ancient Greek mindset. This can be found in an fragmentary extract from Theopompus (4th c. BCE) cited by Diogenes Laertius, who attests that he the first to invoke the gods in his philosophies. Theopompus identified Pherecydes' philosophies as one which associated physical or 'natural' elements with the gods themselves.

> Theopompus says that he was the first to write for the Greeks about nature and the gods.[8]

[8] Diog. Laert. 1.116 (Pher. D2 Laks–Most)

This helps to establish Pherecydes' role and position as the originator of these doctrinal ideas around the soul and its immortality. Through this naturalistic interpretation of the gods his framework allowed for his ideas about creation and the role of the divine come to light.

Pherecydes lived during the 6th century BCE and according to later tradition he was the first to have taught about the immortality of the soul. As the primary sources for Pherecydes' ideas are fragmentary and second-hand, putting these fragments of Pherecydes' philosophical contributions into a singular coherent picture is quite difficult. These surviving fragments from Pherecydes are what has been said to be the starting point from which discourses around metempsychosis and other related soul doctrines came about. What is known is that the writings of Pherecydes' focused on the philosophy of cosmology and theogony, however. Cosmology, the study of the physical universe, in the form in which Pherecydes presented it, was the first of its kind.[9] He was also later thought to be the original teacher of these concepts to other philosophers such as Pythagoras. According to Schibli, it is reasonable to suppose further that Pherecydes' book had an influence on early Pythagoreans about the teachings on the soul.[10] The Pythagoreans who learnt this from Pherecydes are considered by later philosophers and scholars to be the first to have introduced the doctrine of metempsychosis to ancient Greek religion.

The most significant source for understanding Pherecydes' initial ideas about the soul is 'Pherecydes' book'. This 'book' was a collection of writings which according to some was the first work of Greek literature to be written in prose. The possible reason why it was written down is arguably because these thoughts and ideas of Pherecydes' could be recorded. His thoughts and spoken words as teachings needed to be written down and preserved. West says that prose books at the time were records of the spoken word and that this the reason why early writers like Pherecydes refer to their works as discourses and that specific phrasing was used throughout. "… to particular statements in it with phrases like 'as I have said', 'this is what I say on the matter', 'I shall speak of this later'…"[11]

These fragments from his book that remain contain cosmological myths and theogonic speculations. They shed light on Pherecydes' view of the universe's origin and divine principles. Scholars interpret Pherecydes' cosmogony as a blend of mythological narratives

[9] Schibli, 1990: 12.
[10] Schibli, 1990: 12.
[11] West, 1971: 5.

and early philosophical inquiries. West states that the ideas which Pherecydes' put forth were based on the function of the world, the function of the gods as well as the fate of souls after death.[12] The fate of the soul is of particular interest. It is the first instance where souls are discussed in this manner in ancient Greece. The fate of the soul was also of interest to the Pythagoreans and this resulted in the doctrine of metempsychosis being brought forward by them. West states this and is the one who suggest that the Pythagoreans were the ones most interested in Pherecydes' 'book'.[13] West believes that: "It is only among them that we find significant echoes of his peculiar conceptions".[14]

This 'book' of Pherecydes laid the foundation of the later soul doctrines that came out of Greece in later tradition. These writings were groundbreaking for its time and paved the way forward for individuals like Pythagoras and possibly Orpheus among others to build their own views. Of which saw the rise of metempsychosis as a belief in ancient Greece. This chapter will discuss the contents of what has survived from Pherecydes' book in terms of the soul and how he perceived it. It will also look at how this in turn was received by the Pythagoreans and how it fits into the overall narrative found in the Greek tradition.

2.1.1 Pherecydes

The primary evidence in relation to his 'book' has been pieced together from mainly the surviving fragments. It begins with Pherecydes' explaining how the world and the gods were created as well as their involvement in the process. Schibli outlines a seven-step breakdown of Pherecydes' theogony. It starts with the existence from all eternity of three primary gods or deities: Zas (Zeus), Chronos, and Chthonie. According to Schibli, this simply presents the first three eternal gods of Pherecydes' cosmology.[15] Both Maximus of Tyre and Diogenes Laertius mention this:

> [. . .] the book [. . .] its beginning is: Zas [i.e. Zeus] and Chronos were always, and Chthonie was. But the name of Chthonie became Earth when Zas gave her the earth as a present.[16]

[12] West, 1971: 6.
[13] West, 1971: 7.
[14] West, 1971: 7.
[15] Schibli, 1990: 15.
[16] Max. Tyr. *Diss.* 4.4.5 (Pher. D3 Laks–Most).

> Consider also the poetry of the man from Syros:
> Zeus, Chthonie, Eros who is among them, the birth of Ophioneus, the battle of the gods, the tree, and the robe.[17]

These gods were to be the first generation also were made up of the primary elements. These next steps outline what can be considered the first creation. It is both cosmic and theogonic creation as from here it is Chronos who produces from his own seed the three elements which are fire, breath or wind, and water and through this process the gods are born. These three elements are then distributed in five nooks or realms. Eudemus, cited by Damascius, supports this:

> Pherecydes of Syros [scil. says] [. . .] that Chronos made out of his own seed fire, breath, and water [. . .] out of which, when they had been distributed in five nooks, was created another numerous generation of gods, called "the five-nook" one [. . .].[18]

These nooks are the pre-existing places within the universe before even the cosmos is created which these elements were able to be distributed to. Without them creation would not have been able to be facilitated. The elements which are in these places then come to form a second generation of gods. According to Schibli, this second generation of gods do not come into existence as a result of these nooks but rather from the elements which in turn came from the seed of Chronos. These five places according to Schibli, constitute five birthplaces where gods were born and not five gods coming from five different places.[19] Schibli put forward the idea that these nooks could serve as appropriate spots for where the housing and mingling of the elements produced from the seed of Chronos could be developed.[20] This represents the beginning of the creation of Pherecydes' cosmos from the divine elements which saw the birth and rise of subsequent gods. They all assume a reality which sees specific areas of the cosmos being assigned to each god. Porphyry takes this a step further especially with regards to five-nook aspect. He attributes this structural component as prescribed by Pherecydes and offers an alternative explanation that connects with the concept of the soul.

> [. . .] and Pherecydes of Syros, who speaks of nooks, of hollows, of caves, of doors, of gates, and means by these

[17] Diog. Laert. 1.116 (Pher. D2 Laks–Most)
[18] Damasc. *Princ.* 124b (Eudem. fr. 117 Wehrli) (Pher. D6 Laks–Most).
[19] Schibli, 1990: 21.
[20] Schibli, 1990: 22.

terms allegorically the births and departures of the souls.[21]

This cosmos is built up further as the gods further interact with each other. Zas and Chthonie marry. He gifts his new bride a robe. It is given to her on third day of marriage and by this her name changes to Ge. This is important as it signifies the union of the sky and the earth creating more of the cosmos and reality. According to West, "the decoration of the robe comprises the earth and its surroundings, namely Ogenos and the Mansions of Ogenos."[22] Ge, herself and Ogenos (Okeanos) are physically embroidered on it. Proclus, and the Grenfell Papyrus, describe and depict the wedding scene between the Zas and Chthonie:

> [. . .] Pherecydes of Syros said that when Zeus was about to begin his work of creation, he transformed himself into Eros [. . .].[23]

> [Col. l] . . . for him [i.e. Zas] they make buildings, many and great; and when they had finished them all, the objects, male servants, female servants, and everything else that is necessary, when then everything is ready, they perform the wedding. And when the third day of the wedding comes, then Zas makes a robe, great and beautiful, and on it he embroiders Earth, Ogenos [i.e. Ocean], and the houses of Ogenos
>
> [Col. 2] [Zeus speaks to Chthonie:] . . . "since I want this marriage to be yours, it is you that I honor with this. But you, receive my greeting and be my wife." They say that these were the first *anakalypteria* that were performed, and from this time this custom has existed, for both gods and men. And she answers him, receiving the robe from him . . . [24]

This cosmogonical framework provided a backdrop from which metempsychosis is understood and realized in later tradition. The idea of an eternal cycle of life, death, and rebirth all in unity and ordered by the cosmos is key in this regard. Pherecydes merged the divine and the material aspects. This suggests an early contemplation of the soul's journey beyond its physical existence. The soul's journey and transformation within this cosmological structure suggest an early form of the doctrine of metempsychosis, where the soul undergoes a series of

[21] Porph. *Antr.* 31 (Pher. R26 Laks–Most).
[22] West, 1971: 18.
[23] Procl. *In Tim.* 3 *ad* 32c (Pher. D8 Laks–Most).
[24] P. Grenf. 2.11 (Pher. D9 Laks–Most).

incarnations. Pherecydes according to the primary evidence by both Cicero, Apollonius, and in the *Suda* was the first individual within ancient Greece to have mentioned this:

> [. . .] to judge from written records, Pherecydes of Syros
> was the first to say that the souls of humans are eternal
> [. . .] . His disciple Pythagoras strongly supported this view.[25]

> [. . .] [Scil. Some report that] he was the first to introduce
> the idea of metempsychosis.[26]

> [. . .] They say that a certain Pherecydes, before all others,
> taught his students the doctrine that the soul of man is
> immortal and that it is the life of the body, and he believed
> on the one hand that it is breathed into us from heaven
> and on the other that it is supplied by earthly seeds[27]

This marriage between the earth and sky can be seen as causal to the connection with the soul and the body. The earth makes up the body as it dwells in the material world whereas the soul comes from the sky as it is the realm of the heavens. This could possibly be the link which allows for such a doctrine of the immortality of the soul to exist. The gods themselves are and so should be the soul as well. It can also be linked with the later doctrine of metempsychosis attributed to Pythagoras as well. The souls of man can very easily be linked with that of the seeds of the earth which through the creation of Chronos came into existence.

Here again, as with Zas being Zeus, Pherecydes has changed the name of the god. Ogenos is more commonly known as Okeanos, who is presentative of the waters or ocean. Ogenos is key as he represents part of the robe which is gifted to Ge. It is indicative of the union and fills out the universe created by Pherecydes. West claims that this robe is representative of the terrestrial world. It consists of the great divisions of the world: earth, ocean, and possibly sky.[28] This here indicates the role in which Ogenos has to play within both the theogony and cosmology of Pherecydes' philosophy. According to Schibli, this represents the second creation as well as the creation of the earth and the waters which surround it.[29] This further entrenching the idea around cosmic creation.

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[25] Cic. *Tusc.* 1.16.38 (Pher. R14 Laks–Most).
[26] *Suda* Φ.214 (Pher. R15 Laks–Most).
[27] Appon. 5.23 (Pher. R16 Laks–Most).
[28] West, 1971: 19.
[29] Schibli, 1990: 16.

The depiction of Chronos indicates a role which sees him as the one responsible for cosmic creation. This reveals that Chronos according to Schibli, has existed forever but then steps out to create in effect the next generation of gods. Schibli states: "With the creation of the cosmic nooks, involving a notion of sequential ordering, the time-principle becomes actual, measured time".[30] This is indicative of a transitional phase in Greek thought. It attempts to take mythological traditions to then rationalize the creation of the natural world. West argues that they serve as 'matrices' which the new gods develop from.[31] This is true as he uses this pre-existing structure within itself to facilitate the different stages of the creation process. This is essentially a cosmological framework in which he attempts to create a cosmic order through the seed of Chronos according to which all things that exist can be explained and how the cosmos itself was constructed.

After order has established through the union of earth and sky in Pherecydes' writings comes the first challenger against Chronos and Zas. Without going into much detail a battle between Kronos and Ophion and the Ophionids ensues. This theomachy sees Chronos the time and creator god shift toward a warring archetype. He is pitted against Ophioneus, a snake-like god, wages war against the gods. The victor retaining their sovereignty and the loser falls into the Ocean. This testimony by Philo of Byblos further indicates the influence of Near Eastern traditions on Pherecydes' cosmological and theogonic framework and how me may have possibly borrowed elements from Phoenician mythology to build his explanations.

> Pherecydes, taking his starting point from the Phoenicians, expressed theological doctrines about the god that he calls Ophion and the Ophionids […][32]

This quotation is another example of the impact of and borrowing from Phoenician cosmology and mythology by Pherecydes. He uses these sources to entrench his beliefs regarding the theomachy he built. The god named Ophion is serpent-like deity who as we know fought against Kronos for control over the heavens and sovereignty over the gods. It relates to primordial cosmogonic myths about the structure and origin of the world. Ophion has been typically linked with the chaos and creation of the universe and is seen to challenge Kronos. Celsus in Origen depicts this battle:

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[30] Schibli, 1990: 29.
[31] West, 1971: 14.
[32] Eus. *PE* 1.10.50 (= Ph. Bybl. *FHG* III fr. 9) (Pher. P7 Laks–Most).

> Pherecydes, who is much more ancient than Heraclitus, invented the myth of one army set in order against another army, gave the command of the one to Cronus and of the other to Ophioneus, and recounted their challenges and combats, and that they made an accord according to which whichever ones of them fell into Ogenos would be defeated, while those who expelled them and defeated them would possess the heavens.[33]

This construction of the world and cosmogonic teachings Schibli claims may derive from non-Greek sources.[34] West states that time-gods may have possibly been established in early Eastern thought: "by the sixth century BCE: the Sidonian pre-existent triad of Chronos, Pothos, and Omichle, the Indian Kala, and particularly the Iranian Zurvan. All of these initiated creation through an autosexual act."[35] According to West, "Here at Sidon, then, we have not just a god Time, but a creator god Time who, like Pherecydes' Chronos, produces his materials by self-directed sexual activity."[36] Whereas in the Iranian Zurvan he too is a time concept god in around the 6th century BCE.[37] West further stating: "in the beginning nothing existed except Zurvan, that is, Time, conceived as a divine agent. He had sexual union with himself and produced the twin brothers Ohrmazd and Ahriman. Ahriman created the demons and all that is evil, while Ohrmazd created heaven and earth and all that is fair."[38] This dualism present between good and bad, light and dark, is synonymous with the Zoroastrian Iranian tradition and it finds its way into the works of Pherecydes too. There is arguably a connection here with that of eastern sources finding influence in the writings of Pherecydes. According to West, "We have found the god Time at Sidon, in Iran, and in India, and we have found him behaving with remarkable consistency. In each case he creates out of his seed, without a consort; at Sidon and in Iran he is explicitly said to have had intercourse with himself. In each case he is not himself the builder of the material world, but the progenitor of a divine demiurge."[39] West claims that in both Greece and possibly in India both of which is creates out of his own seed, however, it is unknown how this happens. These concepts emerge in the 6th century BCE. By the 4th century at the latest it is firmly established in Iran and Sidon. In all locations it appears in a strikingly similar form.

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[33] Orig. *Cels.* 6.42 (Pher. D11 Laks–Most).
[34] Schibli, 1990: 37.
[35] Schibli: 1990: 37-8.
[36] West, 1971: 29.
[37] West, 1971: 31.
[38] West, 1971: 30.
[39] West, 1971: 34.

This emphasis of eastern sources on these philosophies creations of Pherecydes cannot be understated. It is however difficult to pinpoint exactly where and how he got these ideas and concepts from. It has been alleged that Pherecydes did not have a teacher. Clement of Alexandria states this:

> No teacher is recorded for him [i.e. Thales], just as there is none for Pherecydes of Syros either, with whom Pythagoras studied.[40]

He was seen to have developed these original ideas by himself or the other possibility being that he was taught or learnt this from near Eastern sources and traditions. During the period in which he lived that there was indeed cross-cultural exchange with other traditions. The Byzantine *Suda* claims this exact idea:

> [. . .] he did not have a teacher himself, but he trained himself after he had acquired the secret books of the Phoenicians.[41]

This quotation implies that he was self-taught, but that he was imbued with 'secret' esoteric knowledge from books obtained from the Phoenicians. This is important as it is seen in the example above that this was the case. It is also indicative that he might possibly be the first Greek to have brought forth ideas foreign to the Greeks blending it with the tradition of his own. This claim makes some degree of sense as during this period it was the tradition for the early Greek thinkers to have been portrayed as independent and self-taught. However, he was to some extent influenced by these foreign Phoenician sources as the above suggests. This possible and or likely explanations of how these ideas and stories were transmitted are unknown. The fact that this extract comes from the *Suda* also underpins the nature of cross cultural influences and communication with other groups of peoples and traditions. It shows that these mythological stories were known outside of the places they originated. The interconnectedness of the cultures in the Mediterranean as well as the transmission of ideas across the different regions at the time shows this to be the case. The contents of these books could have been of a mythological, cosmological, or religious perspective regarding the nature of the soul and or the cosmos. Additionally, the fact that it has been noted that these books were possibly 'secret' knowledge further entrenches the idea that it was something never to

[40] Clem. Alex. *Strom,* 1.62.4 (Pher. R12 Laks–Most).
[41] *Suda* Φ.214 (Pher. P6 Laks–Most).

have happened previously and that Pherecydes' was the first to do so. It could be considered these secret things he learnt in terms of doctrinal knowledge were never to be shared.

The dualism that is present in this battle pits good against evil. I consider this to be something which was new in the Greek understanding. Pherecydes' is the one who brings this out in his writings. The cosmological emphasis that this has is seen in how he is able to use the knowledge he is attested to gained from the Phoenicians to reinforce the cosmic harmony and unity needed for his cosmogonic and theological frameworks to make sense. There is another reference to the Near Eastern influence on the doctrinal beliefs of Pherecydes. Flavius Josephus states:

> But as for [. . .] Pherecydes of Syros, Pythagoras, and Thales, everyone agrees that they were students of the Egyptians and Chaldaeans [. . .].[42]

This extract again reinforces the beliefs that the ancients had regarding early Greek philosophy being heavily influenced by near Eastern traditions. Josephus in this instance attributes the influence on Pherecydes' philosophy to that of the Egyptians and Chaldaeans, further entrenching the notion that the Greeks did not initiate this knowledge but rather inherited and adapted this from other older traditions and civilizations. As the extract states, this knowledge came from the Egyptians and the Chaldaeans. The same influence can be attributed to the Chaldaeans, or Babylonians. They too according to Josephus were likely notable contributors to the early developments in the philosophies of Pherecydes in Greece.

The type of cosmogony that Pherecydes had built was the first of its kind in that he aimed to explain 'nature' as a whole. He identified its key elements with specific gods. The primary evidence supports this claim. In the Suda this is referenced

> These are all of his writings: *The Seven Nooks* or *Mixture of the Gods* or *Theogony*. It is a theology comprising the birth and successions of the gods.[43]

There is reference indicates that Pherecydes was the first to have done this from the early Greek thinkers. Diogenes Laertius who is citing Theopompus (4th c. BCE) attests that he the first to invoke the gods in his philosophies, further reinforcing the importance of Pherecydes' access

[42] Flav. Jos. *Apion.* 1.14 (Pher. P8 Laks–Most).
[43] *Suda* Φ.214 (Pher. D1 Laks–Most).

to knowledge not native to Greece. Josephus repeats this sentiment and attributes Pherecydes as the one who is first among the Greeks to invoke the gods in his writings.

> But as for those who were the first among the Greeks to philosophize about celestial phenomena and divine matters, like Pherecydes of Syros [. . .].[44]

This extract indicates the shared belief in the same doctrinal beliefs regarding the soul between Pherecydes and Pythagoras. Pherecydes was the individual who introduced this concept and Pythagoras the individual who was taught by the former and built upon this framework.

> [. . .] so that among the ancients, those who most align themselves with the doctrines of Pythagoras and his successors as well as with those of Pherecydes were concerned with this nature [i.e. the One] [. . .].[45]

As previously mentioned, Pherecydes, in his work, suggests that the soul undergoes a cyclical journey of reincarnation. This sort of concept challenged the traditional views of mortality and the afterlife at the time. He in turn influenced many other subgroups which also have elements of reincarnation attached to it, namely the Pythagorean understanding of metempsychosis, as well as the theogonies associated with Orpheus. It should be noted that many stories and connections which have been ascribed to Pherecydes tie him to the origins of both religious sects. Pythagoras in particular shares close connections with Pherecydes' and it also has been noted that he was a student of Pherecydes. The *Suda* repeats this:

> There is a report that Pythagoras was taught by him[46]

Another reference which shows the close relationship between the two philosophers is from around the time when Pythagoras was informed that Pherecydes was sick and on his deathbed. Both Diodorus Siculus and Heraclides Lembus mention:

> When Pythagoras found out that Pherecydes, who had become his tutor, was sick in Delos and finally was near death, he sailed from Italy to Delos. There he took care of the old man for a considerable time and applied all his efforts to save him from his illness. But when Pherecydes has been defeated by old age and the seriousness of his illness, he wrapped up his body carefully and after he had

[44] Flav. Jos. *Apion.* 1.14 (Pher. D4 Laks–Most).
[45] Plot. 5.1.9.28-30 (Pher. R17 Laks–Most).
[46] *Suda* Φ.214 (Pher. P9 Laks–Most).

> honored him with the traditional rites, like a son for his father, he returned once again to Italy.[47]
>
> Heraclides says in his *Epitome of Satyrus' Lives* that he [i.e. Pythagoras] returned to Italy after he had buried Pherecydes in Delos.[48]

As the primary evidence states there was almost a father-son type of relationship between Pherecydes and Pythagoras. However, this relationship is contested. There is fragmentary evidence which suggests that they might be. However, it is also possible that this relationship was invented to try and explain the doctrinal parallels between the two philosophers. It went much further than just the teacher and the student. The extracts indicate a far more nuanced and deeper connection between the two philosophers. Pherecydes was revolutionary in what he achieved and brought forward to the those who were receptive to his doctrinal beliefs. Pythagoras took this a step even further. He built and expanded the same doctrine regarding the immortality of the soul to embrace ethical and moral practices. He also took the cosmic harmony and order aspects of Pherecydes' early philosophical thought and expounded it into the later tradition which brought him even more influence.

Both of these traditions had placed great emphasis on the immortality of the soul and its ability to transcend 'physical' death through successive cycles of death and rebirth. Pherecydes' contribution lies in hypothesizing metempsychosis as a philosophical concept. He was able to explore the implications which concerned the nature of oneself as well as that of the universe as a whole. This is the shift which made Pherecydes different when comparing the style and manner of what was thought previously. Pherecydes was instrumental in shaping the early philosophical discourse on metempsychosis in ancient Greece. His contributions laid the groundwork for the later Pythagorean and Orphic developments within the philosophy of reincarnation, with Pythagoras already having learnt much from his teacher Pherecydes. The practices and beliefs around the soul were where the concept of reincarnation and the immortality of the soul continued to be explored and refined. Through their insights, these early thinkers underscored the interconnected nature of the individual soul with the cosmic order. The shift towards a fully encompassing cosmic consideration offered profound reflections on the nature of existence, consciousness, and the aspiration of spiritual enlightenment. The Pythagorean emphasis on the soul's immortality and ethical purification can be traced all the

[47] Diod. Sic. 10.3.4 (Pher. P15 Laks–Most).
[48] Heracl. Lemb. in Diog. Laet. 8.40 (Pher. P16 Laks–Most).

way back to Pherecydes' pioneering theories. On the other hand, the Orphic tradition that sprung up in ancient Greece also reflects Pherecydes' deep impact. The focus on the divine origin of the soul, its journey through numerous unending lives, all with the chance that it can attain its ultimate and final liberation from the cycle of rebirth are key factors in this tradition. All of this aligns with Pherecydes' earlier cosmology. The contributions of Pherecydes represent critical moments in the development of Greek philosophical thought in relation to metempsychosis and the nature of the soul and afterlife. His ideas paved the way for the ensuing philosophical questioning into the nature of reality, the cosmos, and the human condition, all of which shaped the later trajectory of Western philosophy.

2.1.2 Pythagoras

Pythagoras, another influential figure in ancient Greek philosophy, further developed the concept of metempsychosis within the context of his broader metaphysical and cosmological theories. Pythagoras lived in the 6th and 5th centuries BCE. According to the later testimony of the 'Lives' by Diogenes, Iamblichus and Porphyry: Pythagoras' early life on the island of Samos was marked by his intellectual pursuits and travels, which allegedly took him to Egypt and possibly Babylon, where he absorbed a variety of mystical and philosophical teachings. Central to Pythagorean thought is the belief in the harmony and order of the cosmos, he viewed metempsychosis as part of a cosmic order, where souls undergo a series of reincarnations. There are similarities between Pythagorean metempsychosis and Pherecydes' earlier teachings. This doctrinal belief is a key tenet to Pythagorean thought, reflecting a deep concern with the immortality and purification of the soul. Purity of the soul, and the process which one must go through in order to become purified, were central to Pythagoras' philosophical framework.

This framework is somewhat connected with that of Orphic beliefs. It is uncertain whether which tradition came first or if both traditions derived independently from Pherecydes. One tradition claims that Pythagoras wrote as 'Orpheus' and that there were Pythagorean 'Orphic' poems. The ancient sources attest to this and deem it to be the start point of Pythagoras theology and cosmology. According to Iamblichus:

> So it can no longer be doubted that it was by taking his starting point from Orpheus that Pythagoras composed his discourse about the gods [. . .]. [49]

Further information regarding the relationship that Pythagoras had with the Orphism and how it developed is given by Proclus:

> [. . .] Pythagoras being the first to have been taught by Aglaophamus[50] about the divine rites [. . .].[51]

> [. . .] he had learned some things from the Orphics, others from the Egyptian priests, others from Chaldaeans and Magi, still others from the initiations performed at Eleusis, Imbros, Samothrace, and Lemnos, and everything else there might be from the Etruscans, and again among the Celts and in Iberia.[52]

Again there are references to Orphism and the Orphics from whom Pythagoras learned the early beliefs in reference to the immortality of the soul: esoteric knowledge maintained with strict discipline as well as the inherent ethical purity one ascribes to in order for the soul to remain in its immortal form. Pythagoras' interactions with contemporary philosophers likely influenced the development of his doctrines, although this doctrine of the immortal soul was nothing new in regard to other traditions and cultures, which shared similar frameworks and notions. According to Porphyry, Pythagoras was without question the first to have introduced it to Greece. However, references from Porphyry should be seen as somewhat untrustworthy as this was written much after the time of Pythagoras. It must be considered that in this later period a vast amount of legendary material grew around the mythical nature of Pythagoras. He was attributed to things which might be fiction rather than fact. If Pherecydes, Pythagoras' teacher, was the author, Pythagoras was definitely the messenger who spread this doctrine across Greece. At a time where Pherecydes did not write much, and Pythagoras wrote nothing. He also kept his teachings secret. Later Pythagoreans had to bring these ideas all over the Mediterranean.

> What has become best known of all is first that he said that the soul is immortal; then that it passes into other species of animals; and also that what is born is born again sometime after determinate periods of time; and that there is absolutely nothing new; and that it must be thought that things that are born ensouled belong to the

[49] Iambl. *VP* 146 (Pyth. P17a Laks–Most).
[50] The man who supposedly initiated Pythagoras into the Orphic Mysteries.
[51] Procl. *Theol.* 1.5, p. 25 (Pyth. P17b Laks–Most).
[52] Iambl. *VP* 151 (Pyth. P22 Laks–Most).

> same race. For Pythagoras seems to have been the first to have introduced these doctrines into Greece.[53]

Early Greek philosophers were almost definitely shaped by their encounters with Eastern thought. Pythagoras' teacher Pherecydes had been influenced by near Eastern traditions around the cosmos and structure of material and temporal worlds, and one can argue that the same was true for Pythagoras. He too subscribed to the teachings of Pherecydes and as such built out the framework in which he implemented into his followers. The exchange of ideas through travel and trade facilitated the incorporation of Eastern metaphysical concepts into Greek philosophy.[54] Burkert argues that the cross-cultural exchanges between Greece and the Near East played a crucial role in shaping early Greek philosophical and religious ideas, including those of Pythagoras. This is further supported by the ancient sources of Isocrates and Iamblichus who describe his travels to foreign lands.

> [. . .] after he went to Egypt and became their [i.e. the Egyptians'] student, he was the first to bring to the Greeks philosophy in general and in particular he practiced more conspicuously than the others the sacrifices and rites in the temples [. . .].[55]

> [. . .] it is reported that when Cambyses took Egypt [= 525 BC], he [i.e. Pythagoras] was taken prisoner by him too while he was spending time with the priests, and that he then went on to Babylon and was initiated into the barbarian mysteries [. . .].[56]

There are two traditions which Pythagoras engages with which are of particular interest. The Phoenicians and Chaldaeans, specifically, are two cultures which his teacher Pherecydes also appears to have learned from. He, as mentioned above, obtained esoteric knowledge from which he built his novel cosmology. This is particularly interesting as there is a consistent stream of information from which early Greek thinkers borrow from. According to Porphyry:

> Regarding his education, most people say that he learned what belongs to what are called the mathematical sciences from the Egyptians, the Chaldaeans, and the Phoenicians. For the Egyptians have cultivated geometry since ancient times, the Phoenicians arithmetic and calculation, and the Chaldaeans the observation of the heavens. As for the rituals of the gods and the other practices re-

[53] Porph. *VP* 19 (Pyth. D5 Laks–Most).
[54] Burkert, 1962: 56.
[55] Isocr. *Bus.* 28 (Pyth. P18 Laks–Most).
[56] Ps.-Iambl. *Theol.* P. 53.1-3 (Pyth. P19 Laks–Most).

> garding life, they say that he studied and took them over from the Magi.[57]

The reference to Magi is to the religious priests of Persian Zoroastrianism in this instance.

> Pythagoras traveled to the Egyptians, he [i.e. Antonius Diogenes] says, the Arabs, the Chaldaeans, and the Hebrews, among whom he perfected his knowledge of dreams.[58]

This extract is crucial as it references the Persians at a time which was also a region which had beliefs and traditions similar to those Pherecydes and Pythagoras built their doctrinal understanding upon concerning the soul and its immortality. Another extract from Hippolytus takes this the step further. It is important as names Zoroaster:

> Diodorus of Eretria and Aristoxenus the writer on music say that Pythagoras went to see Zaratas [i.e. Zoroaster] the Chaldaean.[59]

As much as the Chaldaean link is interesting and the emphasis of Orphic tradition being influential on the Pythagorean framework surrounding the immortality of the soul. The Egyptians are the oldest and have much closer links to Pythagoras. However this is the only reference to the Egyptians having a belief in metempsychosis. It is assumed in this case that he means Pythagoras here. According to Herodotus:

> The Egyptians are the first to have said the following too: that a human's soul is immortal, and when the body has been destroyed it enters each time into another living being that is being born; and after it has gone through all the animals, terrestrial, marine, and winged, it enters once again into a human body that is being born (it completes this cycle in three thousand years) . There are some Greeks who have professed this doctrine, some of them earlier, others later, as though it were their own. I know their names but I do not write them down.[60]

The interaction between Pythagoreanism and other pre-Socratic schools of thought underscores the syncretic nature of early Greek philosophy, characterized by a blending of early Greek and other Eastern intellectual traditions. The primary evidence which discusses the doctrinal beliefs of Pythagoras, and his teachings are similar to that of Pherecydes, as there are fragmentary

[57] Porph. *VP* 6 (Pyth. P20a Laks–Most).
[58] Porph. *VP* 11 (Pyth. P20b Laks–Most).
[59] Hippol. *Ref.* 1.2.12 (Pyth. P21 Laks–Most).
[60] Hdt. 2.123 (Pyth. D4 Laks–Most).

accounts which have survived with the rest bring mostly second-hand accounts from later periods. Much of what we have come to know about him is from later authors, namely, Diogenes Laertius, Iamblichus, and Porphyry all of whom wrote around the 3rd century CE. Diogenes Laertius in particular emphasizes in his account of Pythagoras' teachings were the immortality of the soul and the ethical practices necessary for its purification. This followed on later in his life. It has been said that he founded a religious and philosophical community in Croton, Magna Graecia. It was based around the ideals and philosophies which he became famous for. This group of followers were known as the Pythagoreans. They were to follow and adhere to a strict ethical code. The Pythagorean way of life was characterized by asceticism, religious practice and ritual. An additional requirement which Pythagoreans had to follow was to maintain the esoteric secret nature of the tradition and doctrine itself. Iamblichus, in the *Life of Pythagoras*, describes the levels these followers took in protecting this 'special' knowledge from outsiders deemed unworthy.

> They say that the first man who revealed the nature of commensurability and incommensurability to those who were not worthy to share in these doctrines was so abhorred that not only was he banished from the community and their way of life, but also a tomb was erected for him, since he who had once been their companion had now departed far from the life of men. But others say that the divinity too took vengeance on those who made Pythagoras' doctrines public. For the man who revealed that the figure with twenty angles (that is, the dodecahedron, one of the five figures called solid) could be inscribed within a sphere, died at sea for his sacrilege. And some said that it was the man who had divulged irrationality and incommensurability who suffered this fate.[61]

These doctrinal beliefs of Pythagoreans, just as during the period when Pherecydes had first written his philosophies regarding the immortality of soul, were not the mainstream value system at the time. This arguably could have prompted such secrecy and silence by the followers within the Pythagorean community. Iamblichus states periods where this was the case:

> There were some who waged war against these men [i.e. the Pythagoreans] and rebelled against them. Everyone agrees that the conspiracy took place while Pythagoras was absent, but they disagree about the details of his voyage at that time. Some say that Pythagoras had gone to Pherecydes of Syros, others to Metapontum. As for the

[61] Iambl. *VP*. 246-7 (Pyth. T20 Laks–Most).

> causes of the conspiracy, there are a number of different reports. According to one of them, it was brought about by the men called Cylonians: Cylon, a man of Craton, one of the first citizens by birth, reputation, and wealth, but otherwise of a difficult character, violent, turbulent, and tyrannical, had conceived a great desire to participate in the Pythagorean way of life; he had come to see Pythagoras himself, who was already old, but he had been rejected for the reasons I have just mentioned. When this happened, he and his friends began a violent war against Pythagoras and his companions, and the rivalry of Cylon and his allies was so fierce and absolute that it extended to the very last Pythagoreans. This is the reason why Pythagoras left for Metapontum, and he is said to have died there. But the so-called Cylonians continued to rebel against the Pythagoreans and to manifest a total hostility against them. But all the same, for a certain time the Pythagoreans' virtue and valor and the will of the cities themselves had the upper hand, so that they wished to be governed by them. But in the end they went so far in their conspiracy against these men that they set on fire the house of Milon in Croton, where the Pythagoreans had gathered to deliberate about political matters, and burned alive all the men except for two, Archippus and Lysis.[62]

Polybius also references similar anti-Pythagorean revolts in Magna Graecia. This was a collection of Greek colonies in southern Italy where many Pythagoreans resided. The above extract where a large revolt also happened.

> At that time [ca. 455], in the part of Italy then called Magna Graecia the meeting places of the Pythagoreans were burned down, after which there was a general upheaval in the political regimes, as was to be expected, given that the first men of each city had been killed so unexpectedly; and it came about that the Greek cities in those parts were filled with murder, civil strife, and all kinds of turmoil.[63]

Pythagoreans believed that the soul could become entangled in the material world and that this entanglement could lead to suffering. This is comparable with the doctrinal beliefs of Buddhism and specifically what was taught by the Buddha himself. The quest to end suffering by result of craving or desire for material things is key in achieving liberation from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Without the consistent maintaining of ethical responsibility and also, most crucially, purity of the soul, one cannot achieve the desired outcome of liberation from the mortal world. The quality of one's next life was thought by Pythagoras and his followers,

[62] Iambl. *VP*. 248-9(Pyth. T25 Laks–Most).
[63] Polyb. 2.39 (Pyth. T26 Laks–Most).

the Pythagoreans, to be determined by one's moral behavior in previous lives. The belief that living beings can transmigrate from body to body continuing and living multiple lives is characteristic of the doctrine of Pythagoras. Heraclides attests to this where he says that Pythagoras describes the lives he himself lived:

> Heraclides of Pontus says that he [i.e. Pythagoras] used to say about himself that he had once been Aethalides and was considered to be Hermes' son; and that Hermes had said to him that he could choose whatever he wanted except immortality. So he had asked to preserve, both living and dead, a memory of what happened. So he remembered all things during his lifetime; and when he died, he preserved the same memory. Later in time he entered into Euphorbus and was wounded by Menelaus. And Euphorbus said that he had once been Aethalides and that he had received from Hermes this gift and the wandering of the soul, how it had wandered and all the plants and animals it had been in and everything that his soul had experienced in Hades and that the other souls endure there. And when Euphorbus died, his soul passed into Hermotimus [. . .]. And when Hermotimus died, he became Pyrrhus, the Delian fisherman; and once again he remembered everything, how he had formerly been Aethalides, then Euphorbus, then Hermotimus, then Pyrrhus. And when Pyrrhus died, he became Pythagoras and remembered everything I have mentioned.[64]

Porphyry in his *Life of Pythagoras* adds to this further explaining the lives which leading up to the final and current life as Pythagoras himself.

> He himself traced himself back to people who had lived earlier, saying that first he had been Euphorbus, second Athalides, third Hermotimus, fourth Pyrrhus, and now Pythagoras, and in this way he showed that the soul is immortal and that in those who are pure it succeeds in remembering its earlier life.[65]

Another example of the belief in metempsychosis comes from a contemporary of Pythagoras. Xenophanes makes a joke which claims that Pythagoras recognized a dog as the reincarnation of a friend. This is the strongest evidence which indicates that metempsychosis was part of the Pythagorean doctrine at the earliest period.

> And they say that when he was once passing by
> A puppy that was being mistreated,
> He took pity and said these words:

[64] Diog. Laert. 8.4-5 (Pyth. P37 Laks–Most).
[65] Porph. *VP* 45 (Pyth. P38 Laks–Most).

> "Stop beating it, since this is truly the soul
> Of a dear friend whom I recognised on
> Hearing him cry out.[66]

The Pythagorean doctrine around the soul and metempsychosis was not just a purely metaphysical theory but also carried significant ethical and eschatological connotations. The eschatological aspect of metempsychosis refers to the destiny of the individual soul after death. This eschatological hope provided a powerful incentive for ethical behavior and spiritual discipline. The belief in transmigration of the soul influenced Pythagorean ethics as it promoted a lifestyle which took aim at the purification of the soul and how to do so. Specific ritual practices and traditions were followed in order to maintain the purity of the soul. Many Pythagoreans followed a strict vegetarian diet, and, on an ethical and moral basis, Pythagoras preached that animals were not to be harmed. Aristotle reinforces this statement where he states:

> Aristotle says that the Pythagoreans abstain from the womb, the heart, the sea anemone, and some other things of this sort, but that they eat the others.[67]

> Above all he prohibited them from eating sea bream
> and the blacktail fish (?), and he ordered them to abstain
> from the heart and beans; Aristotle says also from the
> womb and red mullet sometimes.[68]

Diogenes Laertius states:

> Some say it was a certain trainer named Pythagoras who
> instituted this diet, and not our Pythagoras, who
> forbade even the killing, let alone the eating, of
> animals which share with us the privilege of having
> a soul.[69]

The above quote is indicative of the belief Pythagoras had in the immortality of the soul and how that in turn affected the dietary consumption of animal flesh. The belief that all living things having a soul informed the practices of vegetarianism through abstinence. If it were believed by Pythagoras to prevent the ingestion of reincarnated souls by being vegetarian this shows it. He also believed that they too had souls and that humans could be reincarnated as animals. Betegh states, "The ethical implications of metempsychosis were profound,

[66] Diog. Laert. 8.36 (Xen. D64 Laks–Most).
[67] Arist. in Aul. Gell. *Noct.* 4.11 (Pyth. T4a Laks–Most).
[68] Diog. Laert. 8.19 (Pyth. T4b Laks–Most).
[69] Diog. Laert. 8.12-4.

compelling adherents to live in a manner that ensured the soul's advancement in future incarnations."[70] Porphyry also has accounts which mentions similar doctrinal beliefs.

> He told them to abstain, among the sacrificial parts, from the loins, the testicles, the genitals, the marrow, the feet, and the head. [. . .] So too, he advised them to abstain from beans as though from human flesh [. . .]. And he advised them to abstain from other things too, like the womb, the small red mullet, and the sea anemone, and from almost all creatures of the sea.[71]

Pythagorean ethical practices, particularly vegetarianism and non-violence, are deeply intertwined with their metaphysical beliefs. The prohibition against consuming animal flesh stems from the doctrine of metempsychosis, which posits that human souls can reincarnate in animal bodies. This belief necessitates a lifestyle that respects all living beings, as harming animals could result in harming an incarnated soul.

Pythagorean vegetarianism is also rooted in the idea of maintaining bodily purity to facilitate the soul's spiritual ascent. It also the concept that the soul is immortal which made Pythagoreans refrain from animal products. Diogenes Laertius states that the belief was:

> Soul is distinct from
> life ; it is immortal, since that from which it is
> detached is immortal. Living creatures are repro-
> duced from one another by germination ; there is
> no such thing as spontaneous generation from earth.[72]

Consuming flesh was thought to pollute the body and, by extension, the soul, hindering its journey toward purification. This ethical stance is reflected in the ascetic practices among the Pythagoreans were aimed at achieving bodily and spiritual purity. These practices included dietary restrictions, physical exercise, and mental disciplines such as meditation and contemplation. The underlying philosophical justification for asceticism lies in the belief that the body is a temporary vessel for the soul. By disciplining the body, Pythagoreans sought to minimize its influence and allow the soul to attain a higher state of purity and wisdom.

[70] Betegh, 2004: 105.
[71] Porph. *VP* 43, 45 (Pyth. T4c Laks–Most).
[72] Diog. Laert 8.27-9.

2.1.3 Orpheus

The concept of metempsychosis inhabits a crucial place in ancient Greek philosophical and religious thought. Orphism, a semi mystic-religious movement rooted in poetry attributed to the mythical bard Orpheus, contributed to this concept. The mythology behind the reasoning around Orphism being linked to metempsychosis and a doctrine of the soul is evident in the tale of Orpheus. His descent into the underworld to fetch his beloved Eurydice arguably serves as a powerful metaphor for the soul's descent into the material world and its struggle to return to the divine realm. Orphic rituals and teachings can be found in the four Orphic theogonies all of which only survive in fragments. These are the 'Derveni Theogony', a poem in which found in the Derveni Papyrus dating back to the 4th century BCE;[73] the 'Eudemian Theogony', named after a student of Aristotle, who was called Eudemus who wrote and made references to an Orphic theogony in write philosophical writing, dates back to the 5th century BCE;[74] the 'Hieronyman Theogony', dated slightly later, around the 2nd century BCE, is named after two ambiguous authors called Hieronymus and Hellanicus;[75] and lastly, the 'Rhapsodic Theogony', the longest, which dates to around the first century BCE.[76] It is assumed that these theogonies all were cosmological narratives which discussed the nature and current state of the cosmic structure of the universe. According to Meisner, they may have been used in rituals and are shorter in length. They served as hymns to the god much like the *Homeric Hymn*s in which they reference their individual characteristics within their spheres of influence.[77] References to beliefs in the immortality of the soul and the afterlife appear in some of these Orphic texts, most evidently in the *Rhapsodic Theogony*.

The *Rhapsodic Theogony* was a collection of poems or songs which were characterized by narratives and invocations of various gods. It was synthesized from the fragments found in earlier Orphic myths into a more cohesive narrative and highlighted the importance of purification of the soul through practices which show reverence for the divine. The poem brought attention to the interconnectedness of the soul with the universe as a whole, as well as with the divine. It described the journey the soul takes down to the Underworld, as well as explaining why this is the case in the first place. It effectively reinforced the importance of living a virtuous life so that the individual can be able to achieve spiritual liberation. The

[73] Meisner, 2018: 1.
[74] Meisner, 2018: 1.
[75] Meisner, 2018 2.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.

Rhapsodic Theogony reveals the intricate interplay between myth and philosophy in Orphic thought. The *Rhapsodic Theogony* was explicitly composed for use in religious rituals, as were the *Orphic Hymns*. This is evidenced by the invocations and prayers within the hymns, which call upon the gods for favors, protection, and blessings. These hymns offer extremely useful insights into the worship practices and images of the gods within the polytheistic nature of ancient Greece religion at the time they were written. The exact and practical nature of these hymns provides a rare and direct link to the lived religious experiences of ancient Greeks. The *Rhapsodic Theogony* not only gives us a look into the religious practices in ancient Greece but also reflect upon the wider cosmological views contained within the Orphic theogony. This account is essentially a genealogy of the gods, and it presents a different version of the standard Greek myths that we know of. It emphasizes the primordial role of deities such as Chronos who creates the gods and the cosmos and Phanes, the latter often identified as the first-born god who emerged from the cosmic egg. These elements of the Orphic tradition bring to light the distinctive contributions of Orphic thought to Greek religious and philosophical ideas. These texts depict the creation of the cosmos and the divine hierarchy within the gods, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all beings and the cyclical nature of existence. It highlights the esoteric and initiatory aspects of Orphic worship, which frequently included the mysteries and rites of purification aimed at achieving a blessed afterlife. The similarities are evident here with Pythagoras and Pythagoreans beliefs. There are sections within the Rhapsodic Theogony which reference metempsychosis as well as the afterlife. The references to metempsychosis are evident in fragments 425 and 426.

> "The soul of all men is immortal, but their bodies are mortal."[78]

> "The soul is immortal, ageless and from Zeus."[79]

This is seen in the belief in the immortality of the soul which these two fragments confirm as well as its cyclical journey and nature through numerous lives underscores the transformative power of divine knowledge and the ultimate goal of returning to the divine source. The Orphics were far more interested in the rites and practices of maintaining their tradition. The teachings found in the texts and rites emphasize the journey of the soul through multiple lives with the

[78] Diog. Laert. 3.44 (OF 425) [Translations of the relevant Orphic Fragments have been supplied by Dr D. Malamis.]
[79] Vett. Val. 317, 19 Pingree (OF 426).

ultimate goal being that to aspire for purity and the eventual release from the cycle of death and rebirth. The purity aspect is very important within the framework of the Orphic tradition. At death the souls of the deceased travel down to Hades. This is exactly like the journey the mythical 'Orpheus' allegedly took when trying to retrieve his wife from the Underworld. The teachings around Orphism can be found in the sacred texts and rites, some of these texts emphasize the journey of the soul through multiple lives with the ultimate goal being that to aspire for purity and the eventual release from the cycle of death and rebirth. The purity aspect is very important within the framework of the Orphic tradition. At death the souls of the deceased travel down to Hades. In this time period these souls are punished and purified of their sins before their eventual return to the material world to be reborn once again. There are indications in the surviving fragments that soul is carried by 'wind' until breathed in, however, this might only be the case for non-human souls. Proclus cites the following verses:

> The souls of beasts and winged birds
> When they flit and the holy life leaves them,
> No one guides the souls of these to the house of Hades,
> But here it floats idly, until another should
> Snatch it randomly on the breaths of the wind:
> But when a human leaves the light of the sun,
> Kyllenian Hermes leads immortal souls down
> Into the earth's monstrous hollow[80]

By this, the poet means that human souls are sent to the underworld for purification, chastisement, and confinement in places of punishment, while the souls of animals remain in the air until they are reincarnated into new bodies. However, if the souls of animals originated solely from human souls, he would have had to assert that Hermes guides all souls down to Hades, whether for purification or punishment. There is a definite distinction between human and non-human but what is more striking is that the soul is referenced as immortal and that it does indeed after death go down into Underworld. Reincarnation too occurs in another fragment, which states that souls from human can transfer to non-human forms. It emphasizes that souls can exchange lives.

[80] Procl. *In Remp. II* 339 (OF 339).

Wherefore the soul of men, exchanged, in cycles of time
Migrates to animals, from one to another:
Sometimes a horse, then it becomes [ ]
Sometimes a sheep, then a bird, terrible to behold,
Sometimes the body of a dog and a deep voice,
And the race of cold serpents creeps on the divine earth.[81]

This journey is not merely a physical transition but rather a deeply spiritual one. It places great importance on the individual soul and its quest for divine sacred knowledge and ultimate liberation. This search for knowledge, in my opinion, is the main driver behind why these practices and beliefs appeared in the first place. The same can be said about Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans as they have a very similar approach which aligns closely with their framework around the immortality of the soul and its progression through various lifetimes. They also have the same desire as the Orphics as they also sought to attain a state of purity and divine wisdom. There is great importance on Orphic rituals and teachings. They helped in shaping Greek ideas about the afterlife and soul transmigration. The Orphic Mysteries provided a detailed narrative of the soul's journey and emphasized purification as essential for escaping the cycle of rebirth. These beliefs significantly influenced Pythagorean doctrines, particularly the ethical and eschatological aspects of metempsychosis. The ethical dimensions of Orphism are pivotal in attempting to understand the impact it has had on Pythagorean thought. Orphic ethics emphasized the importance of living a life of purity and righteousness to ensure the soul's progress towards liberation. The emphasis on ethical living and spiritual purification within Orphic beliefs had a deep impact with Pythagorean teachings, which also subscribes to the idea of a disciplined lifestyle aimed at the soul's ultimate liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth. This all stems from the dismemberment of Dionysos who is murdered and eaten by the Titans. This is depicted in the *Rhapsodic Theogony* where the soon to be 6th king of the gods nearly meets his end.

The infant Dionysus is received from Zeus' thigh by Hipta, who puts him in a winnowing-basket on her head with a snake wound round it and hurries to Mount Ida and the mother of the

[81] Procl. *In Remp,* II 338 (OF 338).

gods (*OF* 199 Kern). There he is guarded by the dancing Kouretes (*OF* 34, 151 Kern), probably for five years. Young as he is, Zeus sets him on his throne, puts the sceptre in his hands, and announces to the gods that this is their new king (*OF* 207-8 Kern, cf. 107, 218, Nonn. *D*. 6.165 ff.). The Titans, moved by jealousy, or prompted by the jealous Hera (*OF* 210, 214, 216c, 220 Kern), whiten their faces with gypsum (Nonn. *D.* 6.169) and deceive him with a mirror made by Hephaestus, which he follows, apples from the Hesperides, a pine-cone (?), a bull-roarer, a ball, knucklebones, wool, and puppets; they also give him a narthex (*OF* 34, 209 Kern, Procl. *In Hes. Op.* 52). Then they slash him into seven pieces, which they boil, roast, and taste (*OF* 34, 35, 210b, 214, 220 Kern). But Athena preserves the heart, which is still palpitating, and takes it to Zeus in a casket; there is lamentation (*OF* 35, 210, 214 Kern). The Titans are blasted with […] The smoke from the blasted Titans deposits a soot from which Zeus creates a new race of mortals (*OF* 140, 220, 224 Kern). There had been a golden race of men created by Phanes, and a silver race under Kronos that enjoyed as long a life as the date-palm (*OF* 140-2, 225 Kern). Zeus now creates animals, birds, and a foolish human race that does not know good and evil (*OF* 233 Kern).[82]

These Orphic teachings place emphasis on the soul and its immortal nature, its purification through ascetic practices, and its ultimate goal of achieving physical and spiritual harmony within the universe. The Pythagoreans adopted many Orphic rites and symbols, integrating them into their own philosophical framework to create an all-encompassing doctrine of metempsychosis. This fusion of Orphic and Pythagorean thought underpins the huge impact of Orphism on the development of Greek philosophical and religious traditions regarding the belief in the immortality of the soul as well as the aspects surrounding purity of the soul. This can be found in Plutarch (1st c. CE) who is quoting what Empedocles had to say regarding the dismemberment of Dionysos:

> Empedocles allegorizes that human souls are imprisoned in mortal bodies as a punishment for murder, the eating of animal, and cannibalism. This doctrine, however, seems to be even older, for the stories told about the sufferings and dismemberment of Dionysos, and the outrageous assaults of the Titans upon him, and their punishment and blasting by thunderbolt after they had tasted blood - all this is a myth which in its inner meaning has to do with reincarnation. For to that faculty in us which is irrational, violent and disordered, and does not come from the

[82] West, 1983: 74.

> gods, but evil spirits, the ancients gave the name Titans, that is to say those that are punished and pay the penalty.[83]

It is the original sin of all human beings, according to the *Rhapsodic Theogony*, that is the reason why the suffering takes place and gives one the required knowledge when trying to look into and understand the nature of the soul and its journey to higher planes. This concept of a crime committed, and the subsequent punishment, is key in the understanding of the immortality of the soul within the Orphic tradition. Aristotle is quoted saying: "All of us are from the very beginning (as they say in the initiation rites) shaped by nature as though for punishment"[84] This perception from the Greek Orphic lens is key in that humans as a race are inherently flawed from the start due to the actions of the Titans of whom we are descended from. Dio Chrysostom repeats this idea: "we humans are all of the blood of the Titans, and as they were the enemies of the gods, nor are the gods' friends, but are punished by them and born into punishment, being in a prison in life for as long as we live… And this place that we call the cosmos is a jail wrought for us by the gods, harsh and ill-ventilated."[85]

It is however not all bad. There is a chance for atonement. In the verses of the *Rhapsodic Theogony* it reads:

> And men shall send perfect hecatombs
> In each biennial season, and perform the rites (*orgia*)
> Seeking release from their lawless ancestors
> But you (Zeus tells Dionysos), having power over them, shall release
> Those you wish to from hard pains and limitless frenzy.[86]

To be able to atone for this original sin of the Titans the human race ought to learn the rites. These rites are to be learnt and observed in order us to reincarnate and no longer endure the suffering. Both Sophocles and Euripides attest to this:

> …Send to the light the souls of the dead,
> For those who wish to learn the rites,
> Whence they are sprung, what is the root of evils,
> Whom of the gods they must atone to
> To find repose from toils.[87]

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[83] Plut. *De esu carn.* 996b (OF 318 II).
[84] Arist. fr. 60 Rose (Iambl. *Protr.* 77 (OF 440 v).
[85] Dio Chrys. 30.10 (OF 429 iii).
[86] Damasc. *In Plat. Phaed.* 1.11 (OF 350).
[87] Eur. *Cret*. fr. 7 Jouan–Van Looy (OF 458).

Thrice-blessed are those mortals who come to Hades

Having seen these rites. For them alone is there

Like there; for the others there is every ill.[88]

The afterlife is also a concept which is importance as it is arguably the reason why one would want to no longer need to toil and essential live a 'sinful' life. Both Pindar and Plato reference this: It is a realm much like most other 'heavenly' abodes are considered.

For those whom the might of the sun
Shines below when it is night here,
Whose city is in fields of purple roses,
And…of shady incense trees.
And loaded with god-fruited trees.
Some delight in horses and athletics, some in games
Some in lyres, and every blessing is in bloom for them
A lovely fragrance spreads through the land
And incense mingles with far-shining fire on the gods' altars.[89]

But those who had good courage, three times

On the other side of death to keep their hearts

Untarnished of all wrong, these travel

Along the road of Zeus to Kronos' tower.

There, round the islands of the blest, the winds

Of ocean play and golden blossoms burn…[90]

According to the poem, this release from the wheel of suffering, can only happen once Zeus institutes the rites in his honour. The lamellae, in particular the Thurii lamellae, claim that the initiate into the rites have been escaped from the 'circle' or 'wheel'. The lamellae found in Thurii, Calabria are rectangular golden tablets. They were folded and found in the graves next to the right hand of the deceased.

I come pure from the pure, Queen of the Chthonian Ones,

Eucles, Euboleus and the other immortal gods

[88] Soph. fr. 837 Radt (OF 444 ii).
[89] Pind. fr. 129 (OF 439).
[90] Pind. *Ol*. 2.56-72 (OF 445).

For I also claim to be of your happy race.

But Moira overcame me and the other immortal gods

And the star-flinger with lightning.

I have flown out of the heavy, difficult circle,

I have approached the longed-for crown with swift feet,

I have sunk beneath the breast of the Lady, the Cthonian Queen,

I have approached the long- for crown with swift feet.

Happy and blessed, you will be a god instead of mortal.

A kid I fell into milk.[91]

I come pure from the pure, Queen of the Chthonian Ones,

Eucles, Euboleus and the other gods - as many *daimones* (as do exist).

For I also claim to be of your happy race.

I have paid the penalty for unrighteousness deeds.

Either Moira overcame me or star-flinger with lightning.

Now I come, come as a suppliant (feminine) to Persephone,

So that she may kindly send me to the seats of the pure.[92]

This tablet also folded was found again found next to the right hand of the deceased.

The *Derveni Papyrus*, on the other hand, offers a more philosophical explanation of Orphic beliefs. The *Derveni Papyrus* is one of the most meaningful archaeological finds for the study of ancient Greek religion and philosophy. This manuscript, dating to the late 4th century BCE, offers an incomparable glimpse into the religious and philosophical thought of the time. It is effectively a commentary on an Orphic poem that interprets theogonic and cosmological beliefs, fusing traditional myth with early philosophical speculation. It blends mythological narratives with philosophical discourse with the text while at the same investigating the nature of the universe as well as the role of the divine and the position the soul has within this tradition. This in my opinion is what gives the substructure in which Orphic metempsychosis is understood. The Pythagoreans adopted many Orphic rites and symbols, integrating them into

[91] Thurii lam. No 3 (5 Graf–Johnston).
[92] Thurii lam. No 4 (6 Graf–Johnston).

their own philosophical framework to create an all-encompassing doctrine of metempsychosis. This fusion of Orphic and Pythagorean thought underpins the huge impact of Orphism on the development of Greek philosophical and religious traditions. The *Derveni Papyrus* is most known not only for its subject matter but also for its context. It provides direct evidence of the interplay between literary and religious traditions in ancient Greece. The commentary in the *Derveni Papyrus* focuses on an Orphic theogony. It also offers a cosmological framework that intertwines with the ritual practices of Orphic worship. The papyrus therefore serves as a critical connection between religious ritual and philosophical inquiry. This further demonstrating how ancient Greeks sought to understand the divine and the cosmos through a blend of myth, ritual, and reason.

This is evident in the similar nature shared amongst the two traditions. Moreover, this adaptability can be seen in the way Orphic teachings were blended into the broader Greek understanding of the soul and metempsychosis. Orphic beliefs about metempsychosis were regularly reinterpreted in order to add new contexts into the already existing framework. The comprehensive portrayal and symbolic characterization within the Orphic lore, as well as the structured and cosmogonic approach of Pythagoreanism, provide an in-depth and united vision of the soul and the journey that it takes into the afterlife. It speaks to the inherent spirituality and overall exploration around metaphysics. The integration of Orphic and Pythagorean elements in the concept of metempsychosis highlights the dynamic and evolving nature of Greek philosophical and religious thought. This synthesis reflects a continuous process of reinterpretation and adaptation, ensuring the relevance and vitality of these beliefs across different historical and intellectual contexts.

The Orphic cosmogony and theogonies, which detail the origins and relationships of the gods, arguably provide a symbolic framework for understanding the journey that the individual soul goes on and also the overall pursuit for divine knowledge. These myths around the stories which were full of symbolism and allegory depict the soul's descent into the physical world and its ensuing ascent to the divine world. This cosmic drama as it is described in the Orphic fragments arguably serves as a metaphor for the soul's personal journey through cycles of birth, death, and rebirth. All of this is seen through the lens of placing the soul's journey within the larger mythological context of the texts. The Orphic tradition provides a profound and complete vision of metempsychosis that reverberates within the larger Greek religious and philosophical environment. The assimilation of Orphic and Pythagorean thought provides a nuanced

understanding of metempsychosis within ancient Greek philosophy. Both traditions emphasize the immortality of the soul through multiple lives, yet they approach this concept from different perspectives. Orphism, with its prolific mythological and ritualistic framework, places the main focus on soul purification and its eventual return to the divine. Pythagoreanism, on the other hand, incorporates structural and cosmological principles to provide a sensible and methodical explanation for the soul's transmigration from one plane to another. This union of mythological and philosophical elements creates a multifaceted and enduring doctrine of metempsychosis that profoundly influenced Greek thought. These texts emphasize the eternal nature of the soul as well as the almost never-ending journey it takes through the numerous forms of existence, human or not. As it has been established the Pythagorean teachings advocate for a disciplined life. This is distinguished by the ascetic practice of vegetarianism which was seen as a means of purifying the soul and preparing it for its eventual return to the divine source. This holistic approach to spiritual growth and evolution demonstrates the integration of Orphic and Pythagorean elements. The integration of Orphic elements into Pythagoreanism is just one example of how these teachings were adapted to fit new intellectual frameworks.

The integration of Orphic and Pythagorean thought provides a nuanced understanding of metempsychosis within ancient Greek philosophy. Both traditions emphasize the soul's immortality and its journey through multiple lives, yet they approach this concept from different perspectives. Orphism, with its rich mythological and ritualistic framework, focuses on the soul's purification and its return to the divine source. Pythagoreanism, on the other hand, incorporates mathematical and cosmological principles to provide a rational and systematic explanation for the soul's transmigration. This synthesis of mythological and philosophical elements creates a multifaceted and enduring doctrine of metempsychosis that profoundly influenced Greek thought. Moreover, the influence of Orphic and Pythagorean beliefs on later philosophical developments underscores the enduring legacy of these traditions. In critically analyzing the primary texts and secondary sources, it becomes evident that the concept of metempsychosis in Orphic and Pythagorean thought is not merely a theological or philosophical abstraction but a profound expression of the Greek understanding of the soul and its relationship to the cosmos. The detailed narratives and symbolic representations within Orphic tradition, as well as the rational and systematic approach of Pythagoreanism, provide a comprehensive and cohesive vision of the soul's journey that continues to resonate with contemporary explorations of spirituality and metaphysics.

The combination of Orphic and Pythagorean elements in the concept of metempsychosis highlights the dynamic and evolving nature of Greek philosophical and religious thought. This synthesis reflects a continuous process of reinterpretation and adaptation, ensuring the relevance and vitality of these beliefs across different historical and intellectual contexts. By examining the rich and diverse tapestry of Orphic and Pythagorean thought, we gain a deeper understanding of the enduring quest for knowledge, purity, and liberation that defines the human experience and its eternal journey through the cycles of existence. The combination of Orphic and Pythagorean thought represents a significant development in Greek philosophical and religious traditions. This integration demonstrates a dynamic interplay between myth and philosophy, ritual and reason, and spiritual and intellectual pursuits. The enduring legacy of these traditions underscores the profound impact of Orphic and Pythagorean beliefs on the development of Greek thought and their continued relevance in contemporary explorations of spirituality and metaphysics. In conclusion, the concept of metempsychosis in Orphic and Pythagorean thought represents a profound and enduring expression of the Greek understanding of the soul and its relationship to the cosmos. The integration of mythological, ritualistic, and philosophical elements within these traditions provides a comprehensive and cohesive vision of the soul's journey, emphasizing the importance of moral and spiritual purity in achieving liberation. By critically analyzing primary texts and secondary sources, we gain a deeper understanding of the dynamic and evolving nature of Greek philosophical and religious thought and the enduring quest for knowledge, purity, and liberation that defines the human experience and its eternal journey through the cycles of existence.

Chapter 3. Philosophical Foundations in Ancient India

3.1. Hinduism

3.1.1. Introduction

This chapter examines the background context, foundational texts and within them the key interpretations of both Hinduism and Buddhism. The concept of reincarnation, soul purity, and the afterlife are deeply interconnected and are integral to the conception of the religious philosophies within Hinduism and Buddhism. The complex philosophical and ethical framework that it has resulted in is discussed and comprehensively built upon in the ancient texts of both traditions. This chapter will also compare the findings herein.

Hinduism is one of the oldest traditions that mention, theorize and explain these ideas in great depth. Fundamental to understanding the tradition within the Hindu tradition are the concepts of *samsara*, the cycle of birth and rebirth; *karma*, the idea and concept that one's actions have equal consequences effectively a form of moral cause and effect; and *moksha*, liberation from the cycle of rebirth. Bodewitz attaches the concept of rebirth or transmigration (*samsara*) to both concepts of *karma* and with *moksha*.[93] He does not regard the cycle of birth and rebirth as a singular phenomenon rather as mentioned above as a combination of different aspects which inform the cycle and progression of lives. This overarching explanation of life and death can also on a metaphysical level be compared to a cosmic process that connects the soul to a continuous journey until the soul is able to liberate itself from the cycle of rebirth, thus attaining *moksha*.[94] The concept of reincarnation in Hinduism shows a deeply ingrained view of moral decision-making as well as spiritual evolution and overcoming theorised hurdles. This is where the individual soul is meant to progress to higher planes as directed by *karma* through ethical actions and consequences which can span several lifetimes.[95]

The primary objective of this chapter is to shed light on the metaphysical and ethical connotations in Hindu thought. One popular belief is that reincarnation is merely a cyclical

[93] Bodewitz, 2019: 4.

[94] Moksha is the liberation that the soul eventually hopes to achieve through good moral actions.

[95] *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 4.4.5 & 4.4.6 (this extract explains the concept of *karma* and how it facilitates the ascendance to higher planes as well as the impact on the progression of the individual soul. The ethical actions of each individual influences whether or not soul rises or falls and whether the actions are morally pure or not). Also the *Chandogya Upanishad* 5.10.7 (additionally in this verse underlines the same ethical and spiritual procedures which directs each individual soul to higher planes / realms. In this regard karma is demonstrated as the regulatory force driving and directing the journey of the soul again either positively or negatively).

concept which ends with death. Rather it should be interpreted as an opportunity for the purification of the soul progressing through as many lives as it takes to achieve the ultimate goal. It can be argued that each life lived is seen as a catalyst for growth. This is achieved in a manner whereby the soul, under the influence of its *karma*, undergoes changes through improvements and enhancements, tweaking and fine-tuning until it is at the stage where it can attain *moksha*. It is all about making the right choices at the right times, trying in your own way to be the best version of one's self in accordance to the collective belief systems.[96]

3.1.2. Introduction & Background Context of the *Vedas*

In Hinduism, reincarnation is a foundation of cosmology and philosophical thought. It is rooted in the teachings found in the *Vedas*. The original language of early ancient texts is Sanskrit, and it is a common understanding within the religion / traditions that they should be appreciated through speech rather than the written word. The later texts were the opposite. So, it important to make the distinction between the two categories of texts found within the tradition. The two categories are the revealed texts, *shruti,*[97] and remembered texts, *smriti.*[98] The revealed texts were not written by human hands but revealed directly by the gods to ancient sages who then memorised them. These sages / authors were called *rishis*. The 'remembered' texts were written much later by religious scholars and sages. The *Vedas* comprise four separate pieces of scripture, namely, the *Rigveda*, *Samaveda, Yajurveda*, and the *Atharvaveda*. All of these contain hymns, mantras (chants), as well as rituals primarily used in sacrificial ceremonies. The *Rigveda* is fundamentally a religious text. It places great emphasis on hymns, which prominently discuss cosmology and the gods, for whom they are composed. The hymns serve as rites which are needed to secure the favour of the gods, as well as praising and worshipping. These Vedic hymns describe the gods as protectors and sustainers. It is the responsibility of humans to maintain good relations with the gods. This is achieved through ritual offerings and sacrifice. This creates a clearer image as to why Vedic texts are essential for ritual purposes;

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[96] *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 4.3.36 ("One becomes virtuous by virtuous acts, and evil by evil acts. Knowledge and discipline lead the soul to immortality"). This verse demonstrates the good and the bad through an ethical and moralistic lens. It informs the manner in which one must conduct themselves and how as a result it affects the final outcome. Also *Chandogya Upanishad* 8.3.38–8.3.4 ("When the soul is purified through virtuous deeds and self-restraint, it becomes free of desires and attains Brahman"). This verse furthermore shows that this is what will happen if good karma is followed and that these deeds are what is required to do so. Desire is not a good thing and that in order to reach those higher planes (which to become one with Brahman) it has to be followed. The converse will happen if the soul remains impure.

[97] 'What is heard'.

[98] 'What is remembered'.

they were needed to appease the gods so that humans could secure wealth, prosperity divine favour, and fundamentally preserve the cosmic order. The dating of these texts is somewhat controversial and uncertain. As Dalal suggests, there is no clear evidence to suggest any sort of specific date and estimations vary from 11000 BCE – 1000 BCE.[99] Of the four Vedas linguistic analysis shows that the *Rigveda* is the earliest and is the foundation upon which the rest are built.[100] The *Samaveda* is the *Veda* of melodies and chants. The collection is comprised of all the musical verses which accompany the hymns of the *Rigveda*. According to Dalal, the *Samaveda* is typically the third in the list of *Vedas* but is deemed second in importance to the *Rigveda*. The main purpose is to teach the musical method of chanting the verses particularly for the sacrifice. The *Samaveda* is more closely connected with the *Rigveda* than the other two.[101] It is widely accepted that the *Samaveda* is much later than the *Rigveda* because of the vast sections of verse which are reconstituted and added parts from the earlier *Rigveda*.[102] It is important to note that in the *Rigveda* ritual practice as we know it from later texts was not firmly established. So, the aspects which predate this do not fit into the chronology. The *Yajurveda* includes both verse and prose mantras written for worship rituals. It is a collection of ritual formulas to be recited as offerings / are made to the fire by both the priest and the individual participating. The *Atharvaveda* comprises a collection of spells, charms, and practical knowledge surrounding other similar mystical elements.[103] The hymns found in this *Veda* include a variety of subjects which range from prayer and chants to incantations and spells. Overall, the text deals with health, prosperity, and the daily concerns of people, and not with grand sacrifices. Furthermore, there are hymns and chants which discuss the philosophical aspects and touch upon creation as a whole and the origins of the world and the universe.[104]

Each *Veda* is further broken down into four subdivisions. The Samhitas, the *Brahmanas,* the *Aranyakas,* and the *Upanishads.* The *Samhitas* are collections of hymns, mantras which involve ritual chanting and prayers. The name translated literally means to ‘to be put together’ and is fundamentally a meticulous compilation of texts and verses. The *Brahmanas* are texts attached to the *Samhitas* and offer detailed descriptions on ritual practices as well as guidance for the priests when conducting sacrificial rituals. These scriptures focus on the rationalization of the rituals and hymns mentioned in the *Samhitas*. The contents of the *Brahmanas* can be further

[99] Dalal, 2014: 18.
[100] Dalal, 2014: 18.
[101] Dalal, 2014: 36.
[102] Dalal, 2014: 38-9.
[103] Dalal, 2014: 47.
[104] Dalal, 2014: 47.

divided into two main topics of *vidhi* (rules) and *arthavada* (explanations).[105] As Dalal suggests, the rules for conducting a sacrifice are accompanied by an analysis on aspects linked with the sacrifice, including stories and legends used to further support the point. They do not explain everything about the sacrifices but provide some details.[106] They form the basis of how the people at the time were able to make sense of what they were being taught. They explain the reality of the situation within itself and also explain exactly why the rituals take place in the previous scriptures. They explore the meanings behind the rituals and what can be learnt from them. They are, collectively, an effective framework that can be used to understand why the teachings around the rituals and prayers are important and why they are being done in the first place. These texts are in general dated to between 1000 BCE and 600 BCE, but they could be earlier.[107]

Attached to the *Brahmanas* are the *Aranyakas* and *Upanishads*. These texts focus on asceticism, knowledge and inquiry.[108] According to Dalal, the *Aranyakas* bridge the gap between the *Brahmanas* and the *Upanishads*.[109] Dalal further explains this linking function in that "they include descriptions of special sacrifices, along with comments on the mystical symbolism of sacrifices. There are philosophical sections as well as techniques of focusing on various symbols in order to attain the Absolute. The *Aranyakas* are closely linked with the *Upanishads*."[110] The *Aranyakas* continue the contextualisation of these texts being largely made up of a series of philosophical interpretations of rituals. They are often referred to as the 'forest' or 'wilderness' texts, as the word *Aranyaka* translated means to be "produced, born, related to a forest" or "belonging to the wilderness", the word '*aranya*' meaning wilderness. There is a clear continuity between these collections of texts. Each build upon the ideas put forth in the previous and clearly explains why each is the case. The last of these scriptures are the *Upanishads*. The etymology of the word '*Upanishad*' somewhat informs the key concepts and framework in which the *Upanishads* are understood and what they represent. According to Dalal, "The word *upanishad* is said to mean 'sitting near the feet of a master' from *upa* or 'near' and *nishad* or 'sitting down'. Another interpretation takes *shad* as 'destruction' and *upanishad* as 'that which destroys ignorance'. The original meaning, however, was 'secret doctrine'".[111]

[105] Dalal, 2014: 60.
[106] Dalal, 2014: 60.
[107] Dalal, 2014: 60.
[108] Dalal, 2014: 68.
[109] Dalal, 2014: 68.
[110] Dalal, 2014: 68.
[111] Dalal, 2014: 70.

The *Upanishads* offer spiritual and mystical knowledge which ties together all that has been stated and theorised in the three previous collections of texts. This specific collection of texts holds most of the information regarding reincarnation and the importance of the soul. It handles the interconnected ideas around maintaining its purity alongside the concept of reincarnation. The twelve principal *Upanishads* are essential to understanding the Eastern perspectives as well as their approach and understanding of reincarnation and the soul. The earliest *Upanishads* in their current iteration can be dated back to approximately the 6th or 7th centuries BCE. The rest have been dated to before the 3rd century BCE. The earliest are said to be the *Aitareya, Kaushitaki, Taittiriya, Brihadaranyaka, Chandogya* and *Kena Upanishads*. The *Kathaka, Shvetashvatara, Mahanarayana, Isha, Mundaka, Prashna, Maitrayaniya*, and *Mandukya Upanishads* are slightly later.[112] Dalal further indicates that majority of the early *Upanishads* speak to external forms of worship with the ultimate goal being able to gain the ultimate knowledge as a result of exploring these ideas and concepts.[113] It is arguably a 'spiritual quest' for knowledge which all humans regardless of social class undertake. These four sections map out a route which starts with simple practices of worship alongside prayers, rituals and sacrifices, with that being further expanded and explored as to why these traditions are carried out and for what reason. This is done through a religious and philosophical lens which offers explanations to everything related to inward thought and the major philosophical elements of spirituality. This is arguably the reason why these texts were produced in the first place. It was a methodology in which one was able to find ways to rationalize human existence and answer questions through a manner of introspective thinking; a framework which navigated the complex ideas associated with the cycle of life, death, and rebirth. The chronology of these texts largely somewhat contested. They seem clear enough but for a few factors they have been debated. These include the lack of concrete evidence, the inherent complexity of the texts themselves, as well as the period in which these texts have been written spanning many centuries. The suggested dates and the sections within each *Veda* are all disputed. The *Rigveda* is believed to have been composed between 1500BCE and 1200 BCE, based on linguistic and cultural clues. But there have been divergent theories which claim that the text might be even older. The dates given here go back to 2000BCE. There are also suggestions which say the *Rigveda* could be even later placing their composition at 1000 BCE. The other three *Vedas* who

[112] Dalal, 2014: 70-1.
[113] Dalal, 2014: 71.

are much later, with the *Atharvaveda* being the youngest, have been suggested to be composed around 1000 BCE to 800 BCE.

3.1.3. Schools of Philosophy & Inherent Religious Framework

The six orthodox systems of philosophy namely, *Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa,* and *Vedanta*. All of which were developing around the same time that the early *Upanishads* were composed, or just a little later. All six systems uphold the sanctity of the *Vedas*.[114] The specific school which is of interest is the *Samkhya* system. Samkhya is said to have been founded by the sage Kapila. Elements of the *Samkhya* philosophy are found in the *Upanishads*. *Samkhya* philosophy sees the world because of two principles, *Purusha* and *Prakriti*. *Prakriti* is the active principle, the potentiality of all nature, through which the material and psychic world comes into being.[115] *Purusha* can be translated as both the individual and universal soul. In each living being, there is a *Purusha* yet, essentially, all purushas are the same. The empirical self is the union of the free spirit, *Purusha*, and of *Prakriti*. Purusha is the knower, and the known is *Prakriti*. The purpose of *Samkhya* is to free the knower from the known. What is interesting in this regard are the similarities between *Brahman* and *Purusha* as a concept and how they interact with each other. This is inherently linked with the religious systems that were being built at the time in the *Vedas*. Dalal states that religion is the most important aspect of the Vedic texts. She further suggests that,

> The earliest strand in Vedic religion is represented in the *Rigveda*, which has several types of hymns. In some of them, there are references to various theories of creation. According to early hymns, creation was a result of a cosmic battle or of the cosmic separation of heaven and earth. Later hymns include the theory that all creation emerged from the sacrifice of *Purusha* (primeval man) or from some other form of sacrifice…
>
> In early texts, there is no clear concept of a supreme creator. In some verses in the *Rigveda, Indra* is seen as the ruler of all; in others it is *Varuna*. In the late hymns of the Rig, there is *Prajapati*, often identified with *Brahma. Prajapati* was the primeval man or *Purusha*.[116]

[114] Dalal, 2014: 86-7
[115] Dalal, 2014: 89-90.
[116] Dalal, 2014: 301.

The roles of the gods in these religious rituals and practices cannot be understated. They are inherently tied to the traditions and practices that come from these Vedic texts as they were ones who were being worshipped by the people at the time.

3.1.4 The *Upanishads* and their key concepts

The *Upanishads* delve into the nature of the *atman*[117] and *Brahman.*[118] They query in great detail the nature of existence and the relationship between the individual and the cosmic beyond. The *Upanishads* introduce the doctrine of reincarnation through the concept of *samsara*. This belief is interlinked with the concept of *karma*, where individual actions have equal consequences that shape one's future incarnations. According to Bodewitz, in the doctrine of transmigration it is supposed that actions have results for life after death on earth.[119] This ethical aspect is characteristic of the *Upanishads* and through good actions one becomes good and the same for bad actions and inherent badness. In the *Upanishads*, metempsychosis is framed not as punishment but as a cycle from which the soul can attain liberation (*moksha*). Bodewitz suggested that ethically good karma is definite in that it ensures a place in the heavenly abode whereas the bad karma seems to end up with punishment in hell.[120] The references to rebirth and the transmigration of the soul is not as explicit in older Vedic literature. The earliest references are found in the *Upanishads*. Bodewitz indicates that the concepts of rebirth and release occur together here for the first time.[121] This is important within the tradition of Hinduism as whole and the beliefs in rebirth and release from the material world. Moksha is the release from the results of karma. According to Bodewitz, the concept of moksha is based on a doctrinal belief in salvation.[122] It is the desire to obtain a life after death in heaven. This inextricably links moksha with the concepts of samsara and of karma. The endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth and the consequences of good and bad action. Karma which serves as a gateway to allow for one to enter higher planes or not as well as being eligible to attain release from the material world. It was also the longing to be freed from the cycle of samsara.[123]

[117] One's self.
[118] The ultimate reality.
[119] Bodewitz, 2019: 7.
[120] Bodewitz, 2019: 9.
[121] Bodewitz, 2019: 15.
[122] Bodewitz, 2019: 12.
[123] Witzel, 2003: 85.

This methodology to reincarnation is indicative of Eastern philosophical conceptions and thought, where the journey of the soul is ruled by ethical and moral undertones. It is achievable through one's own actions and personal growth, rather than divine judgment. Oldenberg describes it as: "Now the soul of the deceased is understood as entering directly a new existence like a caterpillar, when it has come to the end of a blade of grass, shrinking into itself and entering a new path…"[124] The view presented in the *Upanishads* shows reincarnation in a way which puts the soul within a never-ending cycle which is ultimately controlled by one's actions and decisions. This as a result can and will shape any future births and fundamentally decides whether or not your individual soul has the capacity and capability to reach the final step of liberation and release from the physical world. This specific understanding of reincarnation is indicative of a style which allows for growth and gradual spiritual enhancement. It is important to not look at each rebirth as a failure but rather another opportunity to try again and move towards self-realisation and unity with Brahman. There is a level of perseverance that is needed and serves as a good reminder that it is not an escape from life but rather the recognition that one is intrinsically and forever more linked with the cosmos.

There are three Upanishads that I have chosen which mention and explore the concepts around reincarnation within the tradition. Namely, the *Brihādaranyaka Upanishad*, the *Chāndogya Upanishad*, which are the oldest Vedic texts,[125] and the *Katha Upanishad*.[126] The *Brihādaranyaka and Katha Upanishad*s can be found in the *Yajurveda* whereas the *Chāndogya Upanishad* is found in the *Samaveda*. Most of this analysis centres on these two oldest *Upanishads*. The hymns and chants and ritualistic traditions in these sections are strewn with references to the concepts of *samsara, karma, atman*, and *Brahman*, which encompass the doctrine of reincarnation. The *Upanishads* are generally seen as divine wisdom which transcends the normal understanding of the nature of the cosmic structure.

There are numerous references to the key terminology around *atman,*[127] *brahman,*[128] *moksha,*[129] *samsara,*[130] and *karma*.[131] *Atman*, the individual soul, is mentioned in numerous cases, which will be explored and expounded. The other elements will also be further developed

[124] Oldenberg, 1991: 63.
[125] Dating to between 8th to the 6th centuries CE.
[126] This date is heavily contested. It is estimated to date to between the 5th and 1st centuries BCE.
[127] The nature of the individual soul.
[128] Nature if the ultimate reality.
[129] Return to Brahman; liberation from the physical world.
[130] Cycle of existence; 'both intertwine'.
[131] Action-based moral causation.

into a framework further explaining this approach. There is an interplay among some elements which inform each other and, in a larger context, all mesh together. The journey which the soul undertakes is evident in the understandings of *karma, samsara*, and *moksha*. It is almost a three-tier process which each individual soul has to travel through. The first stage is maintaining good moral actions in accordance with the processes of *karma*. The second stage is essentially the journey of life. It is the continuous cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. This cyclical nature is what exemplifies *samsara*. The third stage is where *moksha* is attained. It is the end point of the journey as the individual soul yearns to reunite with the ultimate reality. However, this depends on whether the two previous conditions are met so that liberation out of this physical reality can be facilitated. Throughout this journey the *atman* is ever present as it is unending and fixed. This, and *Brahman*, work together in order to attain unity and peace with one's self and with the cosmic universe as a whole. The identity balances between the individual soul and the ultimate reality of the universe work together setting out the structure in which the attainment of *moksha* can be realised. *Karma* also fits in here as it is the moral law which dictates whether the individual soul has been morally 'good' or 'bad' and whatever that outcome is dictates if *moksha* can be achieved or whether rebirth is tenable. *Karma* is the deciding factor whether or not the cycle of death and rebirth can be broken or not. The manner in which these early *Upanishads* deal with these terms and knowledge learnt is seen in how unity is achieved between *atman* and *Brahman*. But it is also achieved through physical practices such as rituals and prayers. There is great emphasis placed on *jnana*[132], especially in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* as this is this the knowledge which is learnt from these texts which allows for individuals to transcend the cycle of life and rebirth.[133] These ritual practices and traditions which stem from the *Upanishads* are seen as pathways which the individual soul can walk upon to realize the unity between *atman* and *Brahman*, which in turn sees them achieve the ultimate liberation as the final goal. This importance of knowledge is evident in how without this information nothing would be possible and that the cycle would be never-ending. This knowledge was passed down by the gods to the *rishis* and then when they were eventually written down were learnt by everyone else.

[132] Knowledge.
[133] The two other considered *Upanishads* also have fragments which speak to this as well.

Atman

The first reference selected from the *Upanishads* as quoted below demonstrate the nature of the individual soul and how it fits into the larger context of reincarnation and soul moving from the physical to cosmic worlds.

> Where one's mind is attached - the inner self.
>
> Goes thereto with action, being attached to it alone.
>
> Obtaining the end of his action,
>
> Whatever he does in this world,
>
> He comes again from that world.
>
> To this world of action.
>
> Now the man who does not desire.
>
> He who is without desire, who is freed from desire, whose desire is satisfied, whose desire is the Soul - his breaths do not depart.
>
> Being very Brahma, he goes to Brahma.[134]

This extract demonstrates the nature in which the *atman* is ever present. It allows for a dualistic approach to understanding the causation of the human life. Every action has an equal reaction or in this case a consequence. What makes this particularly interesting is that in the Vedic tradition 'desire' as a concept is key. This is achieved through the ultimate goal in mind, as it is important when studying the *Upanishads*, or the entire corpus of primary texts in India, that everything works together. There are no stand-alone doctrines independent of each other, rather they are all interconnected. This is curious as it mirrors real life as well. The cyclical nature of existence takes this same approach. From the start point which through creation to the final stages where one passes on to the next plane of existence. It all works and is blended together to inform whether you can or cannot sustain the soul in order to be freed from the cycle. The last line 'being very Brahma, he goes to Brahma' is key as it suggests that the *atman* needs to essentially be like the gods as instructed by them in these texts. These ritual practices from the earlier texts serve as a vehicle in which the ultimate reality can be achieved. You need to be like god to be able to get to god, and the desire to be freed from this cycle is paramount in being able to do so. The soul has to endure in order to reach the next stage.

[134] *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 4.4.6.

If a person knew the Soul (*atman*),

With the thought "I am he!"

With what desire, for love of what Would he cling unto the body?[135]

This shorter extract indicates that the soul is far more important than the physical form of one's body. This is fundamental in reinforcing the idea that soul is the key in understanding why it is immortal and why the body should not be of any concern in comparison. It is clear that the soul is one which transcends the physical world and thus it needs to be nourished and sustained. The desire to attain release from the cyclical nature of the physical world is paramount in unity with the ultimate reality which is Brahman. These in conjunction are what is needed in order to achieve liberation with these texts being the knowledge needed to do so.

He who has found and has awakened to the Soul.

That has entered this conglomerate abode –

He is the maker of everything, for he is the creator of all;

The world is his: indeed, he is the world itself.[136]

This extract demonstrates the importance of the ultimate reality, which is *Brahman*. It additionally reinforces the duality of the soul and the ultimate reality as well as exemplifying the unity between two. It is key in the Upanishadic framework which posits the soul being connected to the ultimate reality of the cosmic *Brahman*, which in turn allows for release from the cycle to be attained. Everything flows through this structure and as such it omnipotent in its power and in its reach across all realms.

Verily, he is the great, unborn Soul, who is this [person] consisting of knowledge among the senses.

In the space within the heart lies the ruler of all, the lord of all, the king of all.

He does not become greater by good action nor inferior by bad action.

He is the lord of all, the overlord of beings, the protector of beings.

He is the separating dam for keeping these worlds apart.

[135] *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 4.4.12.
[136] *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 4.4.13.

> Such a one the Brahmans desire to know by repetition of the Vedas, by sacrifices, by offerings, by penance, by fasting.
>
> On knowing him, in truth, one becomes an ascetic (*muni*). Desiring him only as their home, mendicants wander forth.[137]

This extract demonstrates, as mentioned above, the meaning behind the *Vedas* and how these texts are effectively serve as a guide to reach the afterlife. This can be achieved through a multitude of ways and are usually facilitated by a priest or religious practitioner. The ways in which this can be done is through ritual and traditional practices with offerings, sacrifices to the *yajna*[138] as well as through fasting and also by religious atonement and repentance. It is also important to note that in becoming 'enlightened' with said truths the individual who partakes in these rituals and practices transforms into a wandering ascetic as a result.

> He who consists of mind, whose body is life (*prana*),
> whose form is light, whose conception is truth, whose soul (*atman*) is space,
> containing all works, containing all desires, containing all odours, containing all tastes,
> encompassing this whole world, the unspeaking, the unconcerned… [139]

This extract further emphasises the fact that the *atman* takes on a role which allows for all things to come to light. It indicates that it is the world but at the same time is a part of it as well. The important thing to note however that one needs to be right in their mind, right in their body as well as being truthful taking into consideration everything in the material world. This further reinforces the interconnectedness that is a hallmark trait of the teachings and knowledge found in the *Vedas*.

> this Soul of mine within the heart is smaller than a grain of rice,
> or a barley-corn, or a mustard-seed, or a grain of millet, or the kernel of a grain of millet;
> this Soul of mine within the heart is greater than the earth, greater than the atmosphere,
> greater than the sky, greater than these worlds.[140]

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[137] *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 4.4.22.
[138] Ritual fires which are essential to the Vedic sacrificial tradition.
[139] *Chandogya Upanishad* 3.14.2.
[140] *Chandogya Upanishad* 3.14.3.

This extract contextualizes the symbolic importance of the individual soul. It suggests that it is both the smallest thing in the universe as well as being the largest and most vital as well. It further entrenches the fact that this specific tradition is dualistic in nature, in reference to both the individual soul and the ultimate reality i.e. the world soul. The *atman* and *brahman* once combined and finally unified signify something which transcends all forms of reality regardless of how big or small it might be. It shows how much value can be attributed to this understanding of what is needed in order to achieve that release and to be able to attain liberation from this plane.

> Now, the Soul (*atman*) is the bridge [or, dam], the separation for keeping these worlds apart.
>
> Over that bridge [or, dam] there cross neither day, nor night, nor old age, nor death, nor sorrow, nor well-doing, nor evil-doing.[141]

This extract depicts the separation that exists between the two worlds maintaining that dual aspect which is characteristic of this tradition. It also explains that the two worlds are connected by the *atman*. These two worlds are firstly the material world which we all live in and the latter being where the individual soul spends its immortal life in the temporal world. This serves as a cosmic bridge which the individual soul needs to cross over from the physical one to the cosmic one. This in some forms is seen as the ultimate reality where everything is in harmony with one another. As the second sentence in the extract explains, the neutrality and unified togetherness that exists on the other side is arguably the result of *Brahma* being ever-present and all knowing.

> The wise one [i.e. the soul, the *atman*, the self] is not born, nor dies.
>
> This one has not come from anywhere, has not become anyone.
>
> Unborn, constant, eternal, primeval, this one. Is not slain when the body is slain.[142]

This extract demonstrates the fundamental existence of the *atman*. It has always existed and is the basis in which these *Upanishads* are built upon. It also goes into the details around its characteristics which reinforces the idea that it has always been here and that it is inherently linked with the cosmos and how then it can be seen as such a powerful force. The identity of the individual soul is made clear in this regard. The last sentence is critical and here it states

[141] *Chandogya Upanishad* 8.4.1.
[142] *Katha Upanishad* 2.18.

that the soul is essentially immortal. It does not cease to existence when the body is killed or dies. This is arguably one of the earliest references to the reincarnation, though indirect. The fact that the soul does not die with the body, as well as the fact that it transcends this initial physical world and crosses its own bridge to the afterlife, or cosmic ultimate reality. Both are key factors and identifiers in the understanding of the transmigration of the soul.

> This Soul (*atman*) is not to be obtained by instruction,
>
> Nor by intellect, nor by much learning.
>
> He is to be obtained only by the one whom
>
> He chooses: To such a one that Soul (*atman*) reveals his own person.[143]

Here the soul is shown to be given through divine or cosmic means. It is not inherently assumed to be a part of *Brahma*. We are all revealed as part of him and that we have always had this from the beginning till the end of times. It is He who chooses and not us the vessels that embody the individual soul. It cannot be studied, it cannot naturally come to you through inherent brainpower, nor to be told how to get it by an external source. This is key as it emphasizes the innate and built-in power and reach of *Brahma* and that Him and *atman* will and forever be intertwined with one another.

Brahman

> Verily, this soul is Brahma, made of knowledge, of mind, of breath, of seeing, of hearing, of earth, of water, of wind, of space, of energy and of non-energy, of desire and of non-desire, of anger and of non-anger, of virtuousness and of non- virtuousness.
>
> It is made of everything. This is what is meant by the saying 'made of this, made of that.'
>
> According as one acts, according as one conducts himself, so does he become.
>
> The doer of good becomes good.
>
> The doer of evil becomes evil.
>
> One becomes virtuous by virtuous action, bad by bad action.
>
> But people say: 'A person is made [not of acts, but] of desires only.' [In reply to this I say:]
>
> As is his desire, such is his resolve; as is his resolve, such the action he performs; what action (karma) he performs, that he procures for himself.[144]

[143] *Katha Upanishad* 2.23.
[144] *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 4.4.5.

This extract demonstrates not only aspects relating to the individual soul but also provides an insight into understanding *Brahma*. Specifically, it refers to the world-soul or ultimate reality. Additionally, it is indicative of the manner in which there needs to be balance in the viewpoint put forward by this extract. There are always two sides which need to work together in a sense of unity - '… of desire and of non-desire, of anger and of non-anger, of virtuousness and of non-virtuousness'. This quote exemplifies this two-sided outlook which needs to become one unified force in order to reach the level required and stated in the text. It is all about the behaviour of the individual soul either positive or negative which in conjunction with action again either positive or negative that allows for transcendence to be achieved. This links with the concept of *karma* which in this instance is the action that one takes and with that the consequences are what is informs further decisions, as well as what is needed to attain that next step towards unity.

> Verily, this whole world is Brahma, Tranquil, let one worship It as that from which he came forth, as that into which he will be dissolved, as that in which he breathes…[145]

This extract explains the fact that the individual soul is always at one with *Brahma*. It starts and ends with it. As long as air is in your *lungs Brahma* is there. It depicts the ever-present and infallible nature which typifies *Brahma* as the ultimate and universal reality of existence and without it the *atman* does not exist. Therefore, in order to be able to be allowed into the latter stages of enlightenment in this regard great care and diligence is required from the individual soul for this to materialize. It shows a different view but repeats the same message which identifies *Brahma* as the sole most important element in which the *Vedas* explain their cosmological and theological framework.

> Containing all works, containing all desires, containing all odours, containing all tastes, encompassing this whole world, the unspeaking, the unconcerned -
>
> this is the Soul of mine within the heart, this is Brahma.
>
> Into him I shall enter on departing hence…[146]

[145] *Chandogya Upanishad* 3.14.1.
[146] *Chandogya Upanishad* 3.14.4.

This extract again shows the link that exists between the *atman* and *Brahma*. They are inherently tied together and ultimately can be argued that they are one and the same. This is reflected in the phrase 'this is the Soul of mine within the heart, this is Brahma'. It is what the entirety of existence depends and relies upon and links back to the point which denotes *Brahma* being ever-present and omnipotent. It begins and ends with the divine reality, and this is pinpointed in the last line of the selected section, 'into him I shall enter on departing hence'. Your *atman* is never by itself even though it might feel as such, it is in your heart, it is in your mind, it is even the universe itself and all things which form part of it too.

Karma

> As a goldsmith, taking a piece of gold, reduces it to another newer and more beautiful form, just so this soul, striking down this body and dispelling its ignorance, makes for itself another newer and more beautiful form…[147]

This extract from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* links reincarnation with *karma* as stated above. The text suggests that one's current life is a result and a direct consequence of one's past actions, as well as successive lives which too will be at the mercy of one's own *karma*. This is an important point which relates what we know today within the framework around the individual alongside the ultimate reality of *Brahma*. That in turn enforces the karmic beliefs which are based on an action-based approach to living one's life.

> Not he who has not ceased from bad conduct,
> Not he who is not tranquil, not he who is not composed,
> Not he who is not of peaceful mind.
> Can obtain Him by intelligence.[148]

This extract demonstrates similarly to the one above that the conduct of the individual is what allows them to become united with *Brahma* in the afterlife. It further states that through good behaviour and good moral actions one is able to obtain Him which is *Brahma*. If this is not the case and he who is not composed and not of peaceful mind cannot and will not be able to reach

[147] *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 4.4.4.
[148] *Katha Upanishad* 2.24.

the next step and ultimately fail to unify within the cosmic reality in which the *Vedas* are built upon.

> He, however, who has not understanding, Who is unmindful and ever impure, Reaches not the goal, But goes on to transmigration (*samsara*).[149]

This extract here now demonstrates what happens to the *atman* which does not follow a morally good way of life. It explicitly states that this is where reincarnation / transmigration / samsara takes place. This reinforces the cyclical nature of existence within the Vedic understanding but also displays the link between *karma* and *samsara*. It is one's *karma* that then decides whether *samsara* is possible or not. To meet the expectation, and what the *Upanishads* essentially want you to do, is to avoid *samsara*. By being morally good and maintaining the correct way of living one ascends up and is not reincarnated back into the cycle of lives. It is never-ending and as such the ultimate goal is not *samsara* but rather having and maintaining good *karma* at the time of the death of your body. The unity between *atman* and *Brahma* is the pivotal point in this regard.

> If a person knew the Soul (*atman*),
> With the thought "I am he!"
> With what desire, for love of what
> Would he cling unto the body?[150]

This passage is critical in that it shows the intrinsic weakness which is the human body. It asks why would one latch onto something like this? It indirectly says that the *atman* is not this and should be the thing that you cling to and not the mortal body which is prone to die.

Moksha

> Joyless are those worlds called, Covered with blind darkness.

[149] *Katha Upanishad* 3.7.
[150] *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 4.4.12.

> To them after death go those.
>
> People that have not knowledge, that are not awakened.[151]

This extract explains how the worlds differ for those who are able and unable to attain liberation, *moksha*, from the physical world. The ability for the *atman* to transcend toward *Brahma* is directly linked to *moksha*. The ability to obtain that liberation from the physical world, to cross that threshold, is linked to one's moral conduct. Those that are able to attain the requisite knowledge around the cosmos, and understand how the *atman* fits into that framework, may achieve *moksha*. This 'awakening' which takes place is key to reaching this next stage and without it the cyclical nature of rebirth continues until that individual soul is able to learn and thus rise above.

> Containing all works, containing all desires, containing all odours, containing all tastes, encompassing this whole world, the unspeaking, the unconcerned -
>
> this is the Soul of mine within the heart, this is Brahma.
>
> Into him I shall enter on departing hence…[152]

This extract has elements which refer to the element of *moksha* alongside *Brahma.* It goes into specifics apart from the existing link between *atman* and *Brahma*. This transcendence toward the ultimate reality and truth that is *Brahma* is also part of the process which involves *moksha*. This is because of the liberation from one world to the next, which is characteristic of the *moksha*. It suggests that the ultimate reality and the existence of all things living are embodied with an individual soul. This process within itself is seen and expounded by *moksha* and the assumed knowledge throughout one's life. It has always been a part of each individual. It is just whether or not you listen to it and act accordingly.

> All evils turn back therefrom, for that Brahma-world is freed from evil.
>
> Therefore, verily, upon crossing that bridge, if one is blind, he becomes no longer blind; if he is sick, he becomes no longer sick.

[151] *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 4.4.11.
[152] *Chandogya Upanishad* 3.14.4.

> Therefore, verily, upon crossing that bridge, the night appears even as the day, for that Brahma-world is ever illumined.[153]

This extract demonstrates two key principles of *Brahma* as a whole but also regarding *moksha* as well. The text suggests that all evil / morally bad individuals in conjunction with their bad *karma* are not welcome in the *Brahma*-world. This is obvious as the basis upon which judgement is passed is purely grounded in morals and values relating to being inherently good and acting in accordance with a virtuous nature. Therefore, evil has no place in this world. The second part concerning *moksha* in this section is vital. It further emphasizes the immense power and influence which is within *Brahma* and the cosmic world as a whole. It may also suggest that this is the place you should aspire to reach as any and all issues relating to being sick and or blind will cease to be the case. This is two-fold as it will help the individual soul while at the same time promoting *Brahma's* vast control and benevolent nature.

> But only they who find that Brahma-world through the chaste life of a student of sacred knowledge (brahmacharya) - only they possess that Brahma-world.
>
> In all worlds they possess unlimited freedom.[154]

This extract further illustrates the importance of attaining the knowledge which is inherent within *moksha*. It exemplifies the life after death as well as shining a light on the path that one needs to travel in order to reach there. The knowledge in this instance is crucial to reaching this place as well as noting the never-ending freedom which seemingly only exists in this plane.

> He, however, who has understanding,
>
> Who is mindful and ever pure,
>
> Reaches the goal.
>
> From which he is born no more.[155]

Again, this extract reinforces the need for this knowledge from *moksha* as it purifies and awakens the individual soul to reach their ultimate goal within the finite existence of the human

[153] *Chandogya Upanishad* 8.4.2.
[154] *Chandogya Upanishad* 8.4.3.
[155] *Katha Upanishad* 3.8.

body. *Atman* here is what drives us to this place whereas the last line suggests you are to be born again no more. You have completed it and now are able to enjoy this time and be at peace alongside *Brahma*.

> What is soundless, touchless, formless, imperishable,
> Likewise tasteless, constant, odourless,
> Without beginning, without end, higher than the great, stable –
> By discerning That, one is liberated from the mouth of death.[156]

This extract arguably explains the key elements within the knowledge which you attain through moksha. It is as the text says unlike nothing else. It is divine and that it also is effectively the answer to immortality. The soul yearns for this liberation from death and through good morals and behaviour, which is virtuous and kind, one can find this in the afterlife.

3.2. Buddhism

3.2.1. Introduction & Background Context on Early Buddhism & its Texts

Buddhism, alongside the early Vedic Hinduism is another tradition that developed within the sub-continent. Early Vedic Hinduism was controlled by the priesthood of Brahmins. The social and class structure within India during this period had the Brahmin priests at the top. The *Kshatriyas* were next and they were secular rulers and warriors. The *Vaishya*, the rung below, were farmers and merchants, and lastly were the *Shudra*, labourers and servants. The manner in which the Brahmin priests operated religious practices and tradition, along with the overall teachings of the *Vedas*, was not popular among all during the middle of the 1st millennium BCE. This ultimately led to the emergence and creation of the *sramana* movement along the northeastern plains of India.[157] Whereas in the majority of the north of India had been dominated by the Vedic Brahminism tradition, it had been divided into sixteen independent states, known as the *Mahajanapadas*.[158] Brahminism was strong in the Northwest whereas in the Northeast support was much weaker. This is where the *sramana* movement took hold.

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[156] *Katha Upanishad* 3.15.
[157] The Sramana Movement was a religious and philosophical movement characterized by asceticism, meditation, ethical living, and a wandering lifestyle. Within the early Buddhist context it was important as it provided an alternative to the dominant Vedic Brahminism as it made spiritual liberation accessible to those of all castes.
[158] Translates to 'the great realms' or 'great kingdoms', of which there were sixteen in ancient India. These existed from the 6th to the 4th centuries BCE.

Sramanas were individuals who actively chose to drop out of society with the idea instead to live a simpler life which focused on spiritual development. This ultimately culminated in a schism. It saw groups being divided between those who accepted the *Vedas* and those who did not. Buddhism was one such group which did not accept the *Vedas*, which ultimately persevered and grew. As a result early Buddhist beliefs centred around the rejection of Vedic Brahminist foundations. According to Varma, "[Buddha] rejected the ritualism and ceremonialism of the day, he found unsatisfying the path of the ascetics who insisted on physical austerities and he maintained silence regarding the metaphysical doctrines of unity with the Brahman."[159] Buddha did not belong to the tradition of the *Vedas*, *Brahmanas* and the *Upanishads*, he leant towards a more critical anti-Vedic tradition.[160]

The early Buddhist doctrine stems from its founder *Siddhartha Gautama*. He was a wandering ascetic, philosopher, and most importantly the founder and religious teacher of the faith. He was born in a place called Lumbini in modern-day Nepal around the sixth century BCE. He is said to have been a prince belonging to the Shakya clan. Later in his life he grew disenchanted with the world. He saw suffering everywhere and as a result decided to renounce his old life. At the age of twenty-nine he left his family to become a *sramana*. He embarked on a quest to achieve 'spiritual enlightenment' in an attempt to find answers to the pain and suffering he encountered outside the palace walls. Initially this could only be achieved in a way he thought to be the only option, which was through extreme asceticism. He fasted for days at a time, only accepting food given to him as alms by others, and practiced continuous and consistent meditation day and night. He did this for quite some time without any sort of breakthrough. One night when he was around the age of thirty-five, he decided to sit under a tree in Bodh Gaya and meditate. His goal was to attain that spiritual enlightenment which he craved. He was tested while doing this by numerous distractions but he persevered and ultimately he reached the final destination and attained spiritual awakening. Apart from attaining *nirvana*, this is also the moment when he becomes the Buddha. As Varma states, "Buddha said that he had attained supreme enlightenment (bodhi) by his own efforts. Hence in his teachings he constantly stressed self-culture, personal endeavours and self-development…"[161] From that point onwards the extreme approach he followed was abandoned. It was futile and he started to eat again and focussed more on the mind and meditation. This was also the point where started to the preach

[159] Varma, 1973: 16.
[160] Varma, 1973: 83.
[161] Varma, 1973: 16.

about The Middle Way. He also at this time established and created the *dharma*.[162] As Varma explains, Buddha's aim was to indicate the moral and mystical path of emancipation for tormented humanity:[163]

> Buddha was a great teacher of the ethical way. His basic problem was to obtain emancipation from the entanglements of the world because these are infected with transitoriness. There is no anchor or place of safety and refuge against the elemental sway of the primordial dark powers of total destruction and negation.[164]

These teachings entailed the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. From this point on during his travels across the eastern parts of Northern India he built and grew his early monastic group, the *sangha*. This became a cornerstone to his new way of life and the means by which Buddhism was able to grow and spread his teachings across India and subsequently across South Asia. The Buddha himself, alongside the *dharma* and the *sangha*, is what is referred to as the 'triple gem'. This is fundamental to the Buddhist tradition. The teachings of the Buddha were transmitted orally like those of the early Vedic texts. For a long period the sermons were memorised via chanting and only later written down. The major texts of Buddhism were compiled by the Buddhist community years after his death. According to the tradition, the Buddha died at around eighty years of age in 480 BCE. The First Buddhist Council was held at this time, which 500 of his *sangha* attended. The purpose was to ensure that all the teachings of the Buddha and the rules created for the *sangha* were remembered. One of the more prominent members of Buddha's *sangha*, Ananda, had recited all the teachings known as the *sutra*. Another prominent member, Upali, had recited all the rules for the *sangha* known as the *vinaya*. The Second Buddhist Council took place many years later in around 380 BCE. This is where many disagreements took place in relation to the rules for the *sangha*. This ultimately led to the first Buddhist schism, between the Mahasangika and Sthaviravada groups. Further division occurred, and by the time of Ashoka the Great of Maghada, the third ruler of the Mauryan Empire, there were three preeminent groups: the *Vibhajyavada*, *Pudgalavada*, and the *Sarvastivada* schools. Around this time Ashoka converted to Buddhism. He was a major proponent in promoting and facilitating missionary efforts. According to the Buddhist tradition, he was the one who helped spread Buddhism to other lands. His son *Mahinda* became a

[162] It refers to the teachings of the Buddha specifically noted by some as Buddhist 'law' which guides the individual to live a moral, mindful, and enlightened life. It is a central concept within Buddhism and is foundational within the practice and understanding of the tradition. It is also one of the 'triple gem' in Buddhism alongside the Buddha himself, and the Sangha.
[163] Varma, 1973: 29.
[164] Varma, 1973: 33.

Buddhist monk and was tasked to take the *dharma* to Sri Lanka, where he founded what became known as the *Tamrashtiya* school. More importantly it was also here in Sri Lanka where the Pali Canon was produced which today is the oldest surviving complete set of Buddhist scriptures. Apart from Sri Lanka, what is now known as the Theravada School of Buddhism also spread to lands such as Burma, Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand. This are also known as the 'School of the Elders'. Theravada is the Pali version of the Sanskrit word *Sthaviravada* which was one the dissenting schools back the first schism took place. This is the reason why this school sees itself as following the original version of Buddhism.

The full set of Pali scriptures known as the Pali Canon is called the *Tripitaka* in the Pali language. It translates to 'the three baskets'. The *Tripitakas*, as the name suggests, consists of three collections, the *Vinaya Pitaka*, *Sutta Pitaka* and *Abhidhamma Pitaka*, all of which make up different divisions within the Theravada Buddhist tradition. The translations for each sub-division in English are 'The Basket of Discipline', 'The Basket of Discourse', and 'The Basket of Higher Doctrine'. This helps one understand what the predominant emphasis of each collection entails. The *Vinaya Pitaka*, 'The Basket of Discipline', is made up of rules and guidelines for the monastic order within Buddhism. To be a disciple one has to have the required discipline to be able to follow through and be able and willing to want to attain the wisdom inherent in the teachings. It is effectively the textbook as well as the code of conduct required for training those who have decided to join the monastic order. This collection of texts date from after the Buddha's death: as the monastic cohort started to grow the need for a code of conduct for the newer recruits became extremely important and necessary. The *Sutta Pitaka* on the other hand is made up of teachings by the Buddha, written down around the time of his death. It is divided into five further parts called the *Nikayas* meaning 'volumes'. These again can be broken down even further into smaller books. Of these smaller books the most notable is the *Dhammapada* which is located in the *Khuddaka Nikaya*. The *Dhammapada* translates to the 'path or foot of *Dhamma'*. The reason why it so famous can be attributed to a number of factors. The fact that the teachings of the Buddha within the text itself have been described as both succinct as well as easy to read and understand. It also covers majority the core teachings of the Buddha which include ethical behaviour, mindfulness, knowledge attainment, as well as, and most importantly, the path to liberation. This makes it extremely popular and also lends towards the reason why it is seen as extremely accessible for people. It is a part of Buddhist literature that new-comers can read and use effectively without having to delve into the technical and philosophical aspects which are quite common in the other texts within the

Buddhist tradition. It is a very good starting point for someone who is new to Buddhist thought. The *Abhidhamma Pitaka* is made of scholarly and systematic approaches taken towards the doctrinal elements which make up Buddhism as a whole. It also has been divided into seven parts. This particular collection, which is made up of commentaries as well as sacred scripture, has been dated much later than other two, from the third century BCE onwards. These texts developed out of the early Buddhist understanding of the key teaching elements within the tradition.

The origins of *Mahayana* Buddhism are unclear. It developed out the *Mahasangika* school, the other dissenting school back when the first schism took place. According to Olson, the development of *Mahayana* Buddhism occurred around five to six hundred years after the death of the Buddha, when disciples and sub-groups within the school felt pressure to explain their literature and where it came from.[165] They claimed that this literature represented the true and secret message of the Buddha, which only came to light much later as a result of people not being fully prepared to interpret these divine teachings.[166] These exoteric teachings are known as the *Mahayana Suttas*. The corpus of *Mahayana* literature is vast and contains texts written in India, China, Tibet, Japan, and Korea.[167] These *suttas* or texts are divided into four collections, namely the *Prajnaparamita*, *Maha-ratnakuta*, *Buddhavatamsaka*, and the *Maha-samnipata*.[168] Olson further emphasizes that not much is known about the context of these texts. The *Prajnaparamita* collection, or 'Perfection of Wisdom', was initially written around 100 BCE and continued to be expanded until its completion in the twelfth century CE. The style and structure of these texts follows a continuous dialogue between the Buddha and a number of gods, disciples and men. The most famous text from this collection is the *Heart Sutta*, which goes into detail discussing the context and purpose of reality. It teaches ways in which one should look at the *dharma* in the context of it being essential to liberation.[169] This *sutta* emphasizes the *bodhisattva* path[170] as well as the existence of *bodhisattvas*.[171] In *Mahayana* Buddhism the concept of Buddhahood is extremely prominent. This concept as the universal

[165] Olson, 2005: 145.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Olson, 2005: 146.
[170] The *bodhisattva* path is the journey taken by a *bodhisattva* in order to attain full enlightenment and become a fully awakened Buddha.
[171] Mahayana Sutras are a collection of manuscripts written and preserved in Sanskrit. A few hundred have survived with some Chinese and Tibetan translations. Modern scholarship dates them as first appearing between the 1st century BCE & the 1st century CE. The reason and explanation for their later existence was that it was bodhisattvas themselves who wrote and preached around these texts.

goal for the school's followers, which entails one striving to become a Buddha oneself. This is done in order to benefit and liberate all sentient beings from the continuous cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

One of the main teachings in the *Mahayana* tradition is underpinned by the concept that all paths to enlightenment lead to the one *bodhisattva* path. This notion dates back to at least the second century BCE. A *bodhisattva* literally means 'enlightened being'. The *Mahayana* Buddhist belief in achieving enlightenment has three different paths to attaining the freedom one desires from the continuous cycle of birth, death and rebirth, resulting in *nirvana*. The first and the most common one is the *Sravaka Yana.*[172] In this path they are taught by a Buddha and will eventually become an *arhat*.[173] This is achieved through strict discipline and once an individual becomes an *arhat* they cease to reborn, which the ultimate goal. The second path is called the *Pratekyabuddha Yana*.[174] The manner in which you achieve 'enlightenment' in this path is through solitary action, and once it has been achieved the individual is not allowed to teach this practice to anybody. It is forbidden as they have done so without a teacher so they cannot themselves become teachers. From the *Mahayana* perspective the view on the two paths mentioned above is that they are selfish and narrow-minded.[175] An *arhat* is an individual who works for themselves and their own personal liberation from the continuous cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. According to the *Srimaladevi Simhanada Sutra arhats* and *pratyekabuddhas* could and should be considered as fearful, impure and not having fully attained the karma needed to achieve enlightenment.[176] This is the understanding within *Mahayana* Buddhism, which sees the followers of these two paths as egotistical and self-centred. The third path is the *Bodhisattva Yana.*[177] This is the path that *Mahayana* Buddhists claim that Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, also undertook, and which they appreciate, in contrast to the two other paths. This path entails the individual achieving 'enlightenment' alone by themselves, as in the *Pratekyabuddha Yana*. However they are able to teach this path to others. It is important to note that this particular Buddhist tradition also accepts many more *bodhisattvas* compared to others. The reason why the *bodhisattva* path is deeply revered is that even though the individual is about to attain *nirvana* they stop themselves. They deny themselves full emancipation from the

[172] The student path.
[173] A person who has achieved a high level of spiritual attainment and liberation from *samsara*. The word itself means worthy or perfected one which in turn signifies an individual who attained nirvana through the eradication of bad things to avoid within the eightfold path.
[174] The Solitary Buddha Path within the *Mahayana* tradition.
[175] Olson, 2005: 150.
[176] *Srimaladevi Simhanada Sutra* (transl. Wayman & Wayman 1974: 80).
[177] The 'Full Buddha Path' within the *Mahayana* tradition.

continuous cycle because they are committed to work for the welfare of others. The inherent goal is and has always been to help everyone to reach *nirvana* and not just themselves.[178] The tradition claims about twenty-seven Buddhas by name who lived before the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, with the three most recent being *Kakusandha*, *Konagamana*, and *Kassapa*.[179] These figures are therefore revered and are seen as the ones who taught and were selfless. They delayed their enlightenment in order to help anyone and everyone achieve those goals. This is a fundamental core of the Buddhist framework in the service of others. This evidence is found in the *Pali Canon*. It is embedded within the *Sutta Pitaka*, in a minor collection called the *Khuddaka Nikaya*. The text describes the lives, teachings and virtues of the twenty seven Buddhas. Each Buddha is said to have lived in a different era and achieved enlightenment under various unique circumstances. It also emphasizes similarities in the methods of each one's enlightenment and their teachings of *dharma*. The significance of the text is in how continuity of the teachings can be seen and reinforced within the tradition. It is also indicative of the idea that if these great individuals could and did attain *nirvana* then the individual can now follow path they followed as well. In *Theravada* Buddhism *bodhisattvas* are extremely rare, with many who chose to become monks taking the *arhat* path towards enlightenment, whereas in *Mahayana* Buddhism the first two paths are, as stated, seen as inferior. The importance placed on *bodhisattvas* is evident here, as well as the need for so many to have existed. Many *Mahayana* Buddhists actually pray to *bodhisattvas* and ask for help within their own lives. The introduction and expansion of ideas relating to *bodhisattvas* gave Buddhism a new paradigm. It allowed for a greater role for the everyday person within the tradition and as it spread north to Tibet and eastward to Korea and Japan an explosion of the culture into new contexts and cultures took place.[180] *Mahayana* Buddhism sparked profound cultural transformations in regions beyond India, absorbing elements from local traditions while simultaneously evolving in response to these intercultural exchanges. By retaining core teachings from earlier Buddhist traditions while embracing innovation, the *Mahayana* tradition exemplifies Buddhism's inherent adaptability, affirming it as a living, evolving tradition rather than a fixed doctrine.

Within the *Mahayana* Buddhist tradition there is the 'Pure Land' school and the *T'ien-Tai* school. There references in both schools to concepts surrounding rebirth, as well as an

[178] Olson, 2005: 150; but also found in the *Vimalkirti-Nirdesa Sutra* which affirms that the *bodhisattva* can choose to reincarnate at their own will.
[179] *Buddhavamsa, Khuddaka Nikaya*, within the *Sutta Nikaya*.
[180] Olson, 2005: 162.

understanding of the need to achieve enlightenment. Both place emphasis on moralistic and ethical practices in one's current life, which then determine the eventual outcome of breaking the continuous cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

In *T'ien-tai* Buddhism the focus stems from the *Lotus Sutra*. This is an independent text within the Chinese Canon. Many movements within the Chinese Buddhist tradition have drawn on the teachings within it that proclaim universal salvation.[181] The *Lotus Sutra* prescribes faith as the main means to achieving salvation. It also claims that it alone is the one true teaching with the rest being all spurious. It attests that Buddha protects those who keep this text from bad things, and at the same time allows for good things to happen to them.[182] Therefore the implicit emphasis is to keep it with you at all times and ensure you know and understand it. There are also the supposed earthly benefits an individual might encounter by doing the above, as well as desiring less in life and being able to attain enlightenment. According to Olson, the text turns into an object of worship rather than the Buddha being that object. This practice stems from the first chapter of the text which claims that buddhas come and go whereas the teachings are eternal.[183]

In 'Pure Land Buddhism', as the name suggests, there is a place of purity and bliss which individuals are reborn into. As Olson describes it:

> Imagine that you awaken in a rich and fertile land, filled with gods and humans who are without evil or pain. There are fragrant odours, various beautiful and exotic birds, sweet sounds, and many lotus flowers. This land is also filled with jewels. There are jewel trees and diamond bodies all over the place. The message of the Buddha is heard everywhere. If you get hungry, you simply wish for a meal. If you get thirsty, you can for a glass of hot or cold water. You can also wish for pleasant odours and sounds, and they will be there. If you awaken in such a place, you are located in the Pure Land.[184]

This practice within the *Mahayana* tradition places great emphasis on being reborn in a special purified place. In this space the ability to achieve enlightenment is much easier compared to anywhere else. It is a place where people can practice their *dharma* in a far more accessible manner. It is also a path which is available to all people. This promise of rebirth is assured with the motivation that if one is able to act with spiritual certainly and devotional motivation they

[181] Olson, 2005: 148.
[182] *Ibid.*
[183] *Ibid.*
[184] Olson, 2005: 184; Sukhavati ('land of bliss')

can achieve it as such. It is important to note however that the 'Pure Land' is not the same as *nirvana*. It is an intermediary realm in which individuals can fix their *karma* and train to become *bodhisattvas* and or buddhas. Being born into this realm ensures that one can continue their journey toward enlightenment without halting their progress.

The 'Pure Land' as mentioned above is a paradise. Around 100 CE it became a desirable destination for faithful *Mahayana* Buddhists. According to tradition, *bodhisattvas* who have taken the path to perfection perform many good deeds that result in the creation of an infinite supply of merit. From this excess merit, the *bodhisattva* creates a Buddha land in which such a being can reside.[185] To be able to reborn in this place as a devotee can be realised when the *bodhisattva* himself transfers some of his accumulated good merit to said devotee. The individual who is now reborn in this land of bliss is there able to practice and understand the teachings of Buddhism itself, which enables them to achieve *nirvana*. This quest for enlightenment regardless of the realm is still paramount to all Buddhists across all schools and traditions. The key scripture for Pure Land Buddhists is the *Sukhavativyuha Sutra* (The Pure Land Sutra). The text goes into detail regarding the nature of being born into the 'Pure Land' and how one is able to do so. This is achieved as a result of meritorious deeds as well as faith and devotion to the Buddha *Amitabha*. According to tradition, the narrative recounts the trajectory of a king who, after embracing Buddhism, renounced his position to adopt a monastic way of life under the name *Dharmakara*. He followed rigorous engagement with the foundational Buddhist doctrines, and articulated forty-eight aspirational vows, deferring his own complete enlightenment until he could actualize a purified Buddha-land capable of accommodating all aspirants seeking rebirth within its transcendent realm.[186] He surveyed all existing lands across the multiple universes noting down their virtues. He was able to do this over many aeons, through good deeds for others and as a result he become *Amitabha Buddha*. In *Mahayana* iconographic representations, *Amitabha* is depicted enthroned upon a lotus, emanating golden rays of light symbolizing wisdom and compassion. His corporeal form, adorned with eighty-four thousand auspicious marks, serves as a material embodiment of his accrued virtues, reflecting the doctrinal synthesis of merit and transcendental attributes in Buddhist rebirth.[187]

[185] Olson, 2005: 184.
[186] Olson, 2005: 185.
[187] Olson, 2005, 185.

‘Pure Land Buddhism’ emerged as a source of internal aspirations and emancipation, offering an accessible alternative to practices like meditation, which many deemed impractical for everyday life. Unlike meditative traditions that demanded intense discipline, renunciation of worldly ties, and solitary retreats, ‘Pure Land Buddhism’ centred on faith as a direct and immediate means to spiritual liberation. This resonated deeply with everyday individuals who sought out a path of Buddhism which did not require ascetic rigor or withdrawal from society. The movement’s emphasis on devotion rather than monastic commitment or arduous self-cultivation provided a way to live virtuously within the world while still actively pursuing enlightenment. By prioritizing inclusivity and simplicity, ‘Pure Land Buddhism’ democratized spiritual practice, making it attainable for all, regardless of social status or lifestyle.

Regardless of the school these Buddhist canons were vitally important when it came to bringing the teachings of the Buddha out of India and to other places in Southeast Asia and the Far East as a whole. The importance on carrying out the practices and adhering to the original teachings of the Buddha is of great importance to all Buddhists. The main collection of texts, the *Tripitakas*, are tantamount to the tradition as a whole, with the translated versions prominent in other regions but all containing similar teachings and formats. The dating, as with majority of the Buddhist corpus, is unclear. This can be put down to the oral tradition present in the region with the texts being memorized and only being written down centuries later.

3.2.2. The Four Noble Truths & The Eightfold Path

The Four Noble Truths

The Four Noble Truths are as follows. The first truth addresses the reality of suffering or *dukkha*, an inherent and unwelcome aspect of sentient existence. This is evident in the Buddha’s early teachings. It explores suffering in its various forms, ranging from physical pain to intricate psychological states of mind, all of which is intrinsically tied to attachment, aversion, and loss.[188] It can be seen in terms of a medical diagnosis as a means of contextualizing the Truths in which *dukkha* is the symptom.

The second truth identifies two primary causes of suffering. The first is craving, which manifests as a desire for pleasure, the continuation of existence (for oneself and loved ones),

[188] Finnigan, 2022: 4.

and the cessation of what one dislikes. According to the Buddha, craving fosters attachment, which in turn leads to suffering when faced with change or loss. The second cause is ignorance. In Buddhism, ignorance is not merely a lack of knowledge but a collection of false beliefs, particularly the failure to recognize that all phenomena arise dependently. Nothing exists independently; everything relies on causes and conditions. Since these causes and conditions are subject to change, all things are impermanent. This impermanence extends to the self and others. The Buddha rejected the notion of a permanent unchanging self. Rather, he taught that the self is a composition of transient physical and mental elements, which are ones beliefs, desires and memories, each dependent on other elements for its existence. Being able to understand this, as the Buddha argued, can and should eliminate the basis for craving and subsequently the root of all suffering.[189] Continuing with the medical diagnosis metaphor, craving is seen to be the cause of the symptom of suffering.

The third truth asserts that suffering can cease in one's life. It is possible to transition from a state of pervasive suffering to one of happiness and overall well-being. This state is commonly known as *nirvana*. The Buddha believed this was achievable because all things are impermanent and depend on causes and conditions. By altering these causes and conditions, one can effect change, including psychological transformation.[190] The third truth, which is in reference to the cessation of suffering, can be regarded as the prognosis in terms of a medical diagnosis. This is evident in whether or not there is a cure for the diagnosis shown in the first truth. The answer is yes, as the suffering can end.

The fourth truth presents an eightfold path to achieve this state of well-being, outlining the components of an enlightened way of life. These elements are grouped into three categories: wisdom (right view, right intention), ethical conduct (right action, right speech, right livelihood), and meditation (right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration). Together, they provide a comprehensive framework for overcoming suffering and attaining lasting peace.[191] Now that it has been established that there is a cure, in that the suffering can end, the treatment for the ailment from the first truth can be found within the eightfold path, as mentioned above.

The Four Noble Truths have an undercurrent which links the morals of good and bad thoughts, deeds, and actions to the condition of human suffering. This is evident in how through pure

[189] Finnigan, 2022: 4.
[190] Finnigan, 2022: 5.
[191] Finnigan, 2022: 5.

and moral correctness one can end the suffering endured. This is another way of depicting the doctrine and laws of *karma*. It also inextricably links actions with consequences with the punishment of bad action being suffering which every single living being having to go through.

Within the Buddhist textual corpus evidence of the Four Noble Truths can be found in many sections. One such example reinforces the main concern of the Buddha and his desire to eliminate pain and sorrow. This cessation of suffering can be seen in his exhortation to Malunkyaputta:

> Suppose Malunkyaputta, a man were wounded by an arrow thickly smeared with poison, and his friends and companions, his kinsmen and relatives, brought a surgeon to treat him. The man would say: 'I will not let the surgeon pull out this arrow until I know whether the man who wounded me was a noble or a brahmin or a merchant or a worker.' And he would say: 'I will not let the surgeon pull out this arrow until I know the name and clan of the man who wounded me;…until I know whether the man who wounded me was tall or short or of middle height;… until I know whether the man who wounded me was dark or brown or golden-skinned;…until I know whether the man who wounded me lives in such a village or town or city;…until I know whether the bow that wounded me was a long bow or a cross-bow; …until I know whether the bowstring that wounded me was fiber or reed or sinew or hemp or bark;…until I know whether the shaft that wounded me was wild or cultivated;… until I know with what kind of feathers the shaft that wounded me was fitted - whether those of a vulture or a heron or a hawk or a peacock or a stork;…until I know with what kind of sinew the shaft that wounded me was bound - whether that of an ox or a buffalo or a deer or a monkey;…until I know what kind of arrowhead it was that wounded me - whether spiked or razor-tipped or curved or barbed or calf-toothed or lancet-shaped.' All this would still not be known of that man and meanwhile he would die.[192]

Later in this *sutta* he breaks down this discussion with his thoughts and teachings surrounding suffering and how it affects every living being. Social standing means nothing in this regard and as such everyone should be cognizant of this fact. This further emphasizes what he mentions above in that it does not matter if he is a noble, priest, farmer or worker. The Buddha declares that this is suffering and that no one can escape it. He also declares its origins, as well as the fact that it can end. The reason for this is that the cessation leads to peace of mind as well as to enlightenment for all who wish to end this cycle.

[192] *Culamalunkya Sutta* 5.

> "And what have I declared? 'This is suffering' - I have declared. 'This is the origin of suffering' - I have declared. 'This is the cessation of suffering' - I have declared. 'This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering' - I have declared."[193]
>
> "Why have I declared that? Because it is beneficial, it belongs to the fundamentals of the holy life, it leads to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna. That is why I have declared it."[194]

Another reference can be found in the *Samyutta Nikaya*, embedded in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*. The context behind this specific extract is after the Buddha initially achieved enlightenment, specifically at the time where he delivers his first sermon. It is a foundational text for the Four Noble Truths. The responses of the Buddha are his explanations of the Four Noble Truths and how he contextualizes them. This is the first instance where he teaches this to the *bhikkhus* (Buddhist monks or devotees).

> "This, monks, is the Noble Truth of Suffering (*dukkha*): birth is suffering, aging is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering; union with what is displeasing is suffering; separation from what is pleasing is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering; in brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering."[195]
>
> "This, monks, is the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering: it is craving (*tanha*) which leads to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for existence, and craving for non-existence."[196]
>
> "This, monks, is the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering: it is the remainderless fading away and cessation of that same craving, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, non-reliance on it."[197]
>
> "This, monks, is the Noble Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering: it is the Noble Eightfold Path; that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration."[198]

This is fundamental to the Buddhist tradition. It exemplifies the key concept of suffering and how the Buddha himself was able to overcome the suffering that is prevalent within this world. It is also important in that this was the breakthrough that he had at the time he attained *nirvana* under the Bodhi Tree.

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[193] *Culamalunkya Sutta*, 9.
[194] *Culamalunkya Sutta*, 10.
[195] *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, 56. 11.
[196] *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, 56. 11.
[197] *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, 56. 11.
[198] *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, 56. 11.

The Noble Eightfold Path

These elements are grouped into three categories: wisdom (right view, right intention), ethical conduct (right action, right speech, right livelihood), and meditation (right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration).

In the *Saccavibhanga Sutta* the Buddha addresses a group of *bhikkhus* where he goes into a discussion / lesson about the truths surrounding suffering. He begins with discussing the causes of suffering, what is the cause of suffering, how to fix the suffering in one's life, and finally the means to stop it. This is the eightfold path.

> "and what, friends, is the noble truth of suffering? Birth is suffering; ageing is suffering; death is suffering; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are suffering; not to obtain what one wants is suffering…"[199]

Buddha continues to explain instance of suffering and how it affects you as an individual. He furthermore breaks down the Four Noble Truths and at the last truth is the introduction of the Eightfold Path.

> "And what, friends, is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering? It is just this Noble Eightfold Path; that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration."[200]
>
> "And what, friends, is right view? Knowledge of suffering, knowledge of the origin of suffering, knowledge of the cessation of suffering, and knowledge of the way leading to the cessation of suffering - this is called right view."
>
> "And what, friends, is right intention? Intention of renunciation, intention of non-ill will, and intention of non-cruelty - this is called right intention."[201]
>
> "And what, friends, is right speech? Abstaining from false speech, abstaining from malicious speech, abstaining from harsh speech, and abstaining from idle chatter - this is called right speech."[202]

[199] *Saccavibhanga Sutta*, 10.
[200] *Saccavibhanga Sutta*, 23.
[201] *Saccavibhanga Sutta*, 25.
[202] *Saccavibhanga Sutta*, 26.

"And what, friends, is right action? Abstaining from killing living beings, abstaining from taking what is not given, and abstaining from misconduct in sensual pleasures - this is called right action."[203]

"And what, friends, is right livelihood? Here a noble disciple, having abandoned wrong livelihood, earns his living by right livelihood - this is called right livelihood."[204]

"And what, friends, is right effort? Here a bhikkhu awakens zeal for the non-arising of unarisen evil unwholesome states, and he makes effort, arouses energy, exerts his mind, and strives. He awakens zeal for the abandoning of arisen evil unwholesome states, and he makes effort, arouses energy, exerts his mind, and strives. He awakens zeal for the arising of unarisen wholesome states, and he makes effort, arouses energy, exerts his mind, and strives. He awakens zeal for the continuance, non-disappearance, strengthening, increase, and fulfilment by development of arisen wholesome states, and he makes effort, arouses energy, exerts his mind, and strives. This is called right effort."[205]

"And what, friends, is right mindfulness? Here a bhikkhu abides contemplating the body as a body, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. He abides contemplating feelings as feelings, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. He abides contemplating mind as mind, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. He abides contemplating mind-objects as mind-objects, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. He abides contemplating mind-objects as mind-objects, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. This is called right mindfulness."[206]

"And what, friends, is right concentration? Here, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of seclusion. With the stilling of applied and sustained thought, he enters upon and abides in the second jhāna, which has self-confidence and singleness of mind without applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of concentration. With the fading away as well of rapture, he abides in equanimity, and mindful and fully aware, still feeling pleasure with the body, he enters upon and abides in the third jhāna, on account of which noble ones announce: 'He has a pleasant abiding who has equanimity and is mindful.' With the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and

[203] *Saccavibhanga Sutta*, 27.
[204] *Saccavibhanga Sutta*, 28.
[205] *Saccavibhanga Sutta*, 29.
[206] *Saccavibhanga Sutta*, 30.

with the previous disappearance of joy and grief, he enters upon and abides in the fourth jhāna, which has neither-pain-nor-pleasure and purity of mindfulness due to equanimity. This is called right concentration.

This is called the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering".[207]

This breakdown of all the steps in the Noble Eightfold Path is indicative of what guidelines need to be followed in order for one to be able to break that cycle of suffering which all living beings have to endure. The framework which is set out by the path enables a freeing experience for the individual, destroying the cravings of world pleasures and all attachments which one might have. This is the true meaning of *nirvana* which is the ultimate peace that anyone could ever feel.

3.2.3 *Karma*, *Nirvana* & *Samsara*

The doctrine of *karma* is the foundation of Buddhist ethics. The doctrine of *karma* is fundamentally the law of causality. The cause and effort of one's actions are extremely important within the tradition as a whole.[208] Every action generates consequences not only in the eternal world but also leaves an imprint on the inner being of the one who acts. These imprints, inescapable and enduring, shape the individual's future state of existence, binding them to the karmic trajectory they themselves have set in motion. The links here with rebirth in the tradition is also important to note. There are consequences for the individual action and those can be both good and evil actions, right or wrong actions, just and unjust actions. It is all dependent on the intention behind the individual. It ascribes personal responsibility to the person committing the action further reinforcing the action and consequence element within the doctrine of karma. According to Tenzing, "Karma is supposed to have no beginning, but it can have an end. The means of attaining that end, of the destroying the working karma is the eightfold path."[209] It is the driving force of good and bad action, and if one leans either way there are set ways in which one's life can benefit or struggle. The main goal in this doctrinal idea is that suffering is a part of every single being's life. It maintains that the entire world is subject to the same kind of uniform law and that it recognizes the rule of law both within and

[207] *Saccavibhanga Sutta*, 31.
[208] Tenzing, 1996: 13.
[209] Tenzing, 1996: 13.

outside in inner life as well as in outward nature.[210] The theory of rebirth posits that all sentient beings possess an enduring consciousness that transmigrates upon death into a new existence. This process is governed by the built-up karma that remains unresolved or unfulfilled, guiding the trajectory of each successive life. This is evident in the *Culakammavibhanga Sutta* in the discourses between a student and the Buddha. The student asks:

> "Master Gotama, what is the cause and condition why human beings are seen to be inferior and superior? For people are seen to be short-lived and long-lived, sickly and healthy, ugly and beautiful, uninfluential and influential, poor and wealthy, low-born and high-born, stupid and wise. What is the cause and condition, Master Gotama, why human beings are seen to be inferior and superior?"[211]

The Buddha replies:

> "Student, beings are owners of their actions, heirs of their actions; they originate from their actions, are bound to their actions, have their actions as their refuge. It is action that distinguishes beings as inferior and superior."[212]

Further elaborating to the student he states:

> "Here, student, some man or woman kills living beings and is murderous, bloody-handed, given to blows and violence, merciless to living beings. Because of performing and undertaking such action, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in a state of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, even in hell. But if on the dissolution of the body, after death, he does not reappear in a state of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, in hell, but instead comes back to the human state, then wherever he is reborn he is short-lived. This is the way, student, that leads to short life, namely, one kills living beings and is murderous, bloody-handed, given to blows and violence, merciless to living beings."[213]
>
> "But here, student, some man or woman, abandoning the killing of living beings, abstains from killing living beings; with rod and weapon laid aside, gentle and kindly, he abides compassionate to all living beings. Because of performing and undertaking such action, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in a happy destination, even in the heavenly world. But if on the dissolution of the body, after death, he does not reappear in a happy destination, in the heavenly world, but instead comes back to the human state, then wherever he is reborn he is long-lived. This is the way, student, that leads to long life, namely, abandoning

[210] Tenzing, 1996: 13.
[211] *Culakammavibhanga Sutta*, 3.
[212] *Culakammavibhanga Sutta*, 4.
[213] *Culakammavibhanga Sutta*, 5.

> the killing of living beings, one abstains from killing living beings; with rod and weapon laid aside, gentle and kindly, one abides compassionate to all living beings."[214]

The Buddha goes into more detail regarding why good action and bad action affect people in different circumstances. In the end he sums it up by repeating the same thing he said at the beginning. This excerpt from the *Majjhima Nikaya* brilliantly explains the manner in which *karma* can be seen and used as an ethical tool. It is the action of an individual which ultimately gives them long life or not. It is also what allows them to be reborn into better surroundings or revert back to worse conditions. It is the fundamental law that pervades the world: the cause-and-effect process excludes no one. The good *karma* built up within one's life through good actions and deeds is what determines the kind of existence that one will have in their next life, and which may cause either auspicious or inauspicious events to occur as well. [215]

Nirvana within the Buddhist framework is regarded as the highest goal of the endeavors of a Buddhist scholar. It can certainly be regarded as the core theme in Buddhist religion and philosophy. According to Varma, *nirvana* has two significant consequences. It implies the destruction of pain and sorrow both physical and emotional. This neutralization of sorrow and egoistic indulgences and gratifications is constructed by the deep inner thought which the individual can gain by the interconnectedness of the forces which manufacture pain.[216] As Varma suggests, "*Nirvana* implies the stoppage of the wheel of rebirth. Rebirth is brought about by the potency of clinging and the lust to become."[217] The *Sutta Nipata* refers to *nirvana* as the end of the wheel of birth and death. These questions that are asked by Kappa are what the Buddha is able to answer in order to help him attain *nirvana*. It is a good example of how one should go about doing so. He uses the metaphor of the island and compares it to *nirvana* itself. He explains why this is so crucial to the individual themselves but also crucial to ending the vicious continuous cycle of *samsara* and inherent suffering.

> "For those standing in the midst of the stream," (said the Venerable Kappa),
>
> "when a perilous flood has arisen,
> for those oppressed by old age and death, declare an island, dear sir.
> Explain to me the island
> so this might occur no more." [218]

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[214] *Culakammavibhanga Sutta*, 6.
[215] Finnegan, 2022: 2.
[216] Varma, 197: 245.
[217] Varma, 1973: 251.
[218] The *Suttanipata*, *Questions to Kappa*: 1092.

> "For those standing in the midst of the stream, (Kappa," said the Blessed One),
>
> "when a perilous flood has arisen,
> for those oppressed by old age and death, let me declare an island to you."[219]
>
> "Owning nothing, taking nothing: this is the island with nothing further.
> I call this 'nibbāna,'
> the extinction of old age and death." [220]

Abandoning the worldly possessions, desires, and cravings is key in the approach towards attaining *nirvana*. Arguably, it is not possible without having to let go of a lot of personal baggage, especially when looking at what one is required to relinquish when reading and understanding the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. The primary sources here also further reinforce this idea of the abandonment of craving. desire, and lust. In the *Suttanipata* this is evident, specifically in verses 204, 1086, and 1108-09. The *Vijaya Sutta* further emphasizes the release of one's inner desires that will always lead to suffering, which counteracts the drive and need to attain inner peace and liberation from the cycle of *samsara*:

> "That bhikkhu possessing wisdom here who has expunged desire and lust
> has attained the deathless, peace,
> the imperishable state of nibbana."[221]

This concept is further evident in the *Questions of Hemaka to the Blessed One* where the teachings of the Buddha are stated. Questions are asked regarding craving and attachment to the world. This is what must be destroyed in order for *nirvana* to be achieved. This is an instance where Buddha reinforces his teachings so that the individual is also able to find and attain that release from *samsara*.

> "Declare to me the Dhamma,
> O muni, the destruction of craving,
> having understood which, living mindfully, one can cross over attachment to the world."[222]
>
> "The dispelling of desire and lust, Hemaka, for things here seen, heard, sensed, and cognized
> - for whatever has a pleasing nature -
> is the state of nibbāna, the imperishable.[223]

[219] The *Suttanipata*, *Questions to Kappa*: 1093.
[220] The *Suttanipata*, *Questions to Kappa*: 1094.
[221] The *Suttanipata*, *Vijaya Sutta*: 204.
[222] *Suttanipata*, *The Questions of Hemaka*: 1085.
[223] *Suttanipata*, *The Questions of Hemaka*: 1086.

> "Having understood this, those mindful ones are quenched in this very life.
> And always peaceful, they have crossed over attachment to the world."[224]

These extracts clearly demonstrate the need for *nirvana* to be attained within this lifetime. It is needed in order to end the suffering which all living beings endure. This concept of *samsara* is and should be destroyed and this must be the goal for everyone to achieve in time.

3.3 Connections and Parallels between both traditions

The traditions of both Vedic Hinduism and Buddhism indeed share some connections as well as parallels with each other. Buddhism was borne out of the shortcomings that Siddhartha Gautama found in Vedic Hinduism at the time. The formation of the ideas and beliefs central to the Buddhist tradition stemmed from and grew in opposition from notions and ideals that the Buddha himself found exclusionary. He saw that the Vedic Brahminic tradition disregard certain individuals. He did not agree with the teachings found within the *Vedas* as well as the control and power which the Brahmin priests held and maintained. The *Sramana* movement itself was a reaction against the current system of religious belief and thought. Buddhism was created through this schism which came about between those who accepted the *Vedas* as the universal truth and those that did not. He also viewed the social class system present in India at the time as unequal. The upper-class social elitism prevalent in Vedic Brahminic Hinduism perpetuated by the priest-centric practitioners dominated religious thought in India during this period. This in turn informed his decision to embark on his ascetic journey. It motivated the Buddha to go out and find the answers for suffering and solutions to effectively remedy this ailment of *dukkha* in his travels and practices, which enabled him to become 'enlightened' and attain Buddhahood. His charismatic persona and his ability to both lead and teach furthered his goal to spread his message to people allowing him to help so many. The *dharma* of the Buddha is evident in this regard.

This rejection of Vedic Hindu practices by the Buddha can be seen in how the two traditions viewed and emphasized their position and understanding of rebirth, specifically in the rejection by the Buddha of anything relating to the dual nature of cosmic forces as mentioned in the *Vedas*. Within the Buddhist tradition there is rarely any reference or adherence to the concept

[224] *Suttanipata*, *The Questions of Hemaka*: 1087.

of a universal soul. Instead rebirth is taught and understood as the means to end suffering. The goal of the individual during his lifetime is to live holistically through this understanding and to not be tied down by an overarching cosmic rule in order to find inner peace. In contrast, Vedic Hindu belief attests that everything revolves around *brahman* and that unity between the *atman* and *brahman* is paramount for achieving rebirth.

These differences between the two traditions still culminate in the same result. Both traditions see individuals actively living in accordance with an ethical and moral code, but with differing importance placed on the facilitating force. Hinduism sees the unifying of the individual soul with the universal one as the ultimate result. It is a cosmic force which facilitates this shift from the material world to the final destination. Buddhism, on the other hand, sees it as a means to an end which results in the same release from the material world, with the sole aim being to end the suffering which is linked to the material world and to not become one with the universe. In spite of this major distinction both traditions still accept and view reincarnation as the outcome of choice and maintain that morally and ethically good action is the way in which this should be attained.

There are indeed elements in both traditions which have similar doctrinal conceptions. The 'law' of *karma*, and the ethical and moral connotations which accompany it dominate both religious philosophies. They are almost identical in this regard. The notion that good action or behavior will grant you good *karma*, and that bad action or behavior will give you bad *karma* is true in both traditions. Through either good or bad it will result in both sufferings as well as the inability to find the release or liberation from this material world. The notion of *samsara* is the same. Both traditions believe in rebirth but fundamentally view it as something that is not a good thing. The ability to be reborn is something which should not continue and be stopped. This vicious cycle of birth, death, and rebirth has an end in both traditions but have different ways of doing so. In the Buddhist tradition across the different schools the way to stop the unending cycle of lives is through attaining *nirvana*. This form of release can take place by knowing, learning, and understanding the Four Noble Truths. This encompasses the notion of suffering, understanding it and learning how to overcome it as well as all cravings and desires. This is achieved by following the Noble Eightfold Path. Whereas in Vedic Hinduism the manner in which one attains release from the material world is through attaining *moksha*. This form of release assumes the same emphasis on moral and ethical good behavior but without the framework which Buddhism is characterized by. It does this not to end suffering per say

but rather so that the individual soul, the *atman*, can be reunited with the universal reality, the *Brahman*. The emphasis on singular chief God who dwells in the cosmic void is why *moksha* is deemed so important. The belief in rebirth as well as concepts of nirvana and moksha as a release from this material world are the same but the processes to get there and the reason why one would set out to achieve it as well as what happens to each individual differ for both traditions.

Chapter 4. The interactions and influences between both traditions

4.1 Zoroastrianism & the Influence of the Persian Empire

The traditions present in both ancient Greece and India may draw on influences that stem from similar origins. There appear to have been notable borrowings from the Persians in particular, geographically located between Greece and India. Greeks such as Pherecydes and Pythagoras who developed these teachings both built their philosophical frameworks from ideas learnt from Near Eastern cultures. It has been previously stated that the concepts of the soul and its transmigration from one life to the next are often associated with Eastern philosophical traditions. Ancient scholarship attributes this to a couple of traditions, namely the Persians as well as the Greeks who have been said to have learnt or taught these doctrinal beliefs from the Near East.

The Indian context is less clear, but cultural links and connections do exist between the two traditions. The Indo-Iranian connection is of great importance, with language and ancient texts having strong similarities. Language itself is an important connection, with Indo-Iranian stemming from the Indo-European language group.[225] Iranian and Indo-Aryan languages also are thought to have been developed from this proto-language. The ancient texts from both traditions, the *Gathas* and specifically the *Rigveda*, show similarities among various lines. This is exemplified in the deities of both Vedic and Zoroastrian traditions, discussed below. Scholarship presumes that the Indians and Iranians were once a common people who originated from a shared homeland.[226] According to Dalal, the most accepted theory is that after the Proto-Indo-European language had emerged, and possibly after the first Proto-Indo-European speakers began to move out of their original homeland, the Indo-Iranian group lived alongside each other for a period of time before the eventual split.[227] According to Boyce, the end of the second millennium BCE saw the Iranian tribes native to the Steppes move southward. Boyce believes that the practices and beliefs of the Old Iranian and Vedic religions were clearly influenced by the shared physical and social environment of the Indo-Iranian peoples. From approximately 5000 to 2000 BCE, they existed as a cohesive group, forming part of the broader Indo-European family of nations. Their homeland is believed to have been the south Russian steppes, located east of the Volga River, where they lived as pastoralists, herding cattle on

[225] Dalal, 2014: 92.
[226] Dalal, 2014: 112.
[227] Dalal, 2014: 112.

foot.[228] The vastness of the steppes encouraged the Indo-Iranians to conceive of their gods as cosmic, not local, divinities; and they apprehended a universal principle of what ought to be. This 'order' or 'universal truth' is a principle which governs everything, from the nature of all human 'laws' to the conduct of humans and their immediate surroundings.[229] This concept is known as '*asha*' within the Zoroastrian tradition and is protected and ensured by the deities or lords. They are known as '*ahura*' of which Ahura Mazda, the 'Lord of Wisdom', is most prominent. As these people were pastoralists with no fixed location, they did not build any temples. As a result, worship was performed in open spaces without any idols or altars. Prayers and ritualistic expression such as sacrifice, and offerings of food were far more common.[230] These offerings were made to open fires and sources of flowing water with both the people and the priests performing them.

The Indo-Iranians conquered and settled the lands now known as Iran.[231] Eastern Iranians clearly spread Zoroastrianism as they migrated, and over time, the western Iranians, including the Medes and Persians, embraced the faith as well. It became the dominant religion of the Persian Achaemenian Empire, which was the largest empire in the ancient world, and religious themes are evident in their inscriptions. However, the *Avesta*, in both content and language, remained rooted in eastern Iranian traditions, with no mention of western Iranians, despite the Medo-Persian magi gaining prominence as the most renowned Zoroastrian priests. Zoroastrianism was popularized by Cyrus as the national religion of the Persian Achaemenids in the mid-6th century BCE, further growing through the establishment of the temple cult of the fire by Artaxerxes II, following which many fire temples were constructed. Greek writers from this era and the period following Alexander the Great's conquest of the Achaemenian Empire also document numerous references to the 'Persian religion'. As the dominant religion of the Persian empire, sustained by the Achaemenid kings, the tradition prospered for two centuries, until the conquest by Alexander in 330 BCE.

Alexander's conquest seems to have significantly disrupted the preservation of Avestan texts, particularly due to the killing of priests.[232] Zarathushtra is frequently described as a religious reformer, though this characterization applies in the same way it does to other great founders of world religions. That is, he appears to have embraced much of the faith he was born into but

[228] Boyce, 1990: 9.
[229] Boyce, 1990: 9.
[230] Boyce, 1990: 9.
[231] Boyce, 1990: 7.
[232] Boyce, 1990: 8.

reshaped it through his innovative teachings.[233] He taught around the idea that to be seen by the divine as acceptable a threefold framework needed to be followed. Right intention, truly spoken words, and correctly performed rituals. This concept is repeatedly mentioned in the *Gathas*. The ethical nature behind thought, word, and act are fundamental to the religion. The Old Iranian faith can be partially reconstructed by comparing it with closely related Vedic texts and the Brahmanic traditions of India, as well as by identifying elements within Zarathushtra's own revelations. All of the three aspects outlined above share similar qualities with the Vedic beliefs in India.

Old and Younger Avestan are the languages from which the Avestan texts are written in. These foundational texts form part of the religion of Zoroastrianism. According to Mary Boyce, the term probably means 'the injunction' (of the prophet Zarathushtra). She further emphasises the numerous similarities between Avestan and Vedic sources, in terms of both the language and textual evidence. These parallels are present in the earliest Avestan text, the *Gathas*, one of the many scriptures attributed to the Zoroastrian tradition. West states that only perhaps a quarter of it now remains, with some of it existing in fragments.[234] The major components of the *Avesta* that now remain are the *Yasna*, the *Yashts*, and the *Videvat* or *Vendidad*. The *Yasna*, which translates to 'worship', is a liturgical series of texts which were recited by priests who were in divine service. The *Yashts* are hymns of praise to the various gods and divine beings.[235] Boyce states that the *Gathas* were piously preserved by being made part of the liturgy of the *Yasna*. They were arranged formally in five groups, according to their five metres. The *Yasna* is compiled into seventy-two chapters and includes seventeen hymns. They are further divided into five *Gathas* with each having their own individual theme. These five *Gathas* are the *Gatha Ahunavati*, the Gatha of Free Choice (Yasna 28-34); *Gatha Ushtavati*, the Gathas of Bliss and Enlightenment (Yasna 43-46); *Gatha Spenta Mainyu*, the Gatha of the Holy Spirit (Yasna 47-50); *Gatha Vohu Khshathra*, the Gatha of Sovereignty or the Good Kingdom (Yasna 51) & *Gatha Vahishtoishti*, the Gatha of the Highest Wish or Fulfilment (Yasna 53).[236]

The central core of the *Yasna* (28-53) consists of a series of more ancient texts according to West. Specifically, *Yasna* 35 through to 41 are what is called the 'Seven Chapters'. This composition was created within the earliest communities in the tradition and composed not

[233] Boyce, 1990: 8.
[234] West, 2010: 13.
[235] West, 2010: 13.
[236] Dalal, 2014: 117.

long after the prophet's death.[237] As mentioned above the *Gathas* form part of the *Yasna* and are a collection of praise poetry and songs, seventeen in total, traditionally held to have been written by Zarathushtra himself.[238] They are among the earliest elements of the overall corpus of Zoroastrian scriptures and are indeed also the oldest texts in the Iranian language. West affirms that the *Gathas* and the *Seven Chapters* are in a different dialect compared to the rest of the Avestan corpus. These are much older than the rest and West argues that the dialect variance is due to Zarathushtra having lived in a different region from that where these later Avestan texts were composed.[239] Very much like the *Vedas*, these texts were conveyed for hundreds of years through oral tradition until they written down.[240] The date of the *Gathas* is inherently linked to that of the date of Zarathushtra himself. However, this date is controversial with some traditional sources dating his existence as far back as the 7th century BCE, and others referring to him around the 6th century. More recently, Boyce has proposed an earlier date, placing Zarathushtra some time between 14000 BCE and 12000 BCE.[241] Zarathushtra may have been the first to preach a religion centred around a single God. He also introduced the concept of good and evil, underpinning the importance of ethical living, this being the way in one retains their inherent 'goodness'. This singular God is Ahura Mazda. He is mentioned in the *Gathas* and represents the cosmic order of the universe as well as 'truth' as a whole. Ahura Mazda creates twin spirits, known as *Spenta Mainyu* and *Angra Mainyu*, representing good and bad respectively. He gives everyone the ability and freedom to choose between either of them. It is important to note the responsibility to make the right choice in each situation and in turn take part in the creation of the idealized world according to *Ahura Mazda*. Zarathushtra believed that God was *Ahura Mazda* and, in his teachings, created the world through his Holy Spirit, *Spenta Mainyu*. Another important aspect within the teachings of Zarathushtra was that God had made this world sevenfold due to the help of seven lesser divinities whom He brought into this world for this exact purpose. These 'Holy Immortals' are known as the great *Amesha Spentas* and are what make up the divine *Heptad* within the Zoroastrian tradition.[242] These six divinities are commonly used to refer to the six aspects of God's own nature and Zarathushtra describes and depicts them in the Gathas as well as other scriptures like the *Yasna* and the *Yashts* where hymns and rituals call upon and praise the *Amesha Spentas*. They are celebrated

[237] West, 2010: 13.
[238] West, 2010: 13.
[239] West, 2010: 14.
[240] Dalal, 2014: 116.
[241] Boyce, 1990: 22.
[242] Boyce, 1990: 12.

for bringing about and maintaining the cosmic order as well as guiding humanity toward the truth of Ahura Mazda. Boyce explains this further regarding the Holy Immortals and their individual functions:

> The doctrine of the six Holy Immortals is fundamental to Zoroaster's teachings, and has far-reaching spiritual and ethical consequences, since these Beings hypostatize qualities or attributes of *Ahura Mazda* himself, and can in their turn (if rightly sought and venerated) bestow these upon men. For every individual, as for the prophet himself, the Immortal who leads the way to all the rest is *Vohu Manah*, 'Good Purpose'; and his closest confederate is *Asha Vahishta*, 'Best Righteousness' - the divinity personifying the mighty principle of *asha*, whom Zoroaster names in the *Gathas* more often than any other of the six. Then there is *Spenta Armaiti*, 'Holy Devotion', embodying the dedication to what is good and just; and *Khshathra Vairya*, 'Desirable Dominion', who represents both the power which each person should properly exert for righteousness in this life, and also the power and the kingdom of God. The final pair are *Haurvatat* and *Ameretat*, 'Health' and 'Long Life'.[243]

Zarathushtra is seen to be the only man who can understand and conceptualize these teachings of *Ahura Mazda*. This is evident in the first *Gatha*, specifically in *Yasna* 28. Zarathushtra has been sent to the material world to lead people down the right path. He is seen as priest as well as one who has been endowed with visionary insight.[244] According to Boyce, the word 'gatha' (which exists also in Sanskrit) is variously rendered as hymn, poem, or psalm. Zarathushtra's *Gathas* are short verse texts, cast largely in the form of utterances addressed by him to *Ahura Mazda*; and they convey, through inspired poetry, visions of God and his purposes, and prophecies of things to come, here and hereafter.[245]

The society in which the *Gathas* are set had a social hierarchy. This was twofold: the priests and the rest of the people, who were likely simple peasant farmers. The society in which Zarathushtra lived in was pastoral. According to Dalal, each peasant could also act as a warrior. Later interpretations see them primarily as pastoralists, with a focus on cattle, and some elements of farming.[246] As a result, the cow and its products have an important place within it. The peaceful existence of the farmer, specifically, is under threat by violent intrusions. This is evident in *Yasna* 29 where Zarathushtra represents the soul of the cow as one which complains to the divine about the cruelty she has endured. However, it is not the herdsman who is to blame

[243] Boyce, 1990: 22.
[244] Yasna 31.5-10.
[245] Boyce, 1990: 1.
[246] Dalal, 2014: 134.

for this. She claims it is the priests under the guise of a false religion who wish to drive her off and condemn her to a sacrificial end.[247]

4.2 Connections with India

The connection between the Iranian and Indian traditions is based on shared Indo-European origins. This is evident in the numerous parallels between the textual corpora of both cultures. The first example of this is in the language itself. Both traditions grew out of the Indo-European language group. Sanskrit and Avestan, specifically the form which is found in the religious texts, are closely related languages. Both traditions possessed texts which originated and passed down through oral traditions for hundreds of years until they were later written down. Neither texts served as a religious handbook, but rather consisted of ritual-based poetry, focused on the significance of worship and sacrifice. The word *yasna*, the section of the *Avesta* which the *Gathas* form part of, has the Sanskrit equivalent *yajna*. *Yajna* translates to 'sacrifice' or 'ritual', while *yasna* translates roughly to 'worship' or 'ritual' as well.[248] It is also interesting that the textual collection of *Yasnas* contains various invocations and prayers which understandably follows a similar trend to the *Vedas*. This is evidenced by Dalal who states that, "the similarity is so marked that there can be no doubt the two languages were once closely connected. In fact, minor changes enable one to 'translate' or transpose much of the text into Sanskrit."[249] West further reinforces this connection between the two traditions through the gods and deities in both the *Gathas* and the *Rigveda*:

> Some of the same gods appear in both Iran and India. One of the more prominent Vedic deities, *Mitra* the god of contracts, was also worshipped in Iran (as *Mithra*) and is the subject of a major hymn in the Avesta (*Yasht* 10).[250]

Mitra or Mithra in particular have shared elements on both sides as well as being seen as counterparts of each other. According to Dalal, "the Avestan noun *Mithra* equals 'pact', 'contract', or 'covenant'. In the *yasht*, he oversees all covenants and judges. But, in Sanskrit, *mitra* equals 'friend', hence some feel that *Mithra* too must have that meaning."[251] There are not only Vedic verses dedicated to this deity, but the Avestan *Yashts* also honour him. He

[247] West, 2010: 18 & 45-7
[248] Dalal, 2014: 119.
[249] Dalal, 2014: 114.
[250] West, 2010: 19.
[251] Dalal, 2014: 140.

continues to be a deeply cherished divinity among Zoroastrians, resulting in a rich collection of ancient and modern materials about his cult and worship. Additionally, the common noun *Mithra* in Avestan and *Mitra* in Sanskrit offer crucial insights for unravelling the ancient mysteries surrounding him.[252] The Vedic Mitra became known to the Western world before the Avestan Mithra. In the Roman soldiers' practice of Mithraism, a religion with mixed origins, the Iranian god was revered as a deity connected to the sun. Early scholars of the *Vedas* viewed the Indian faith as primitive, interpreting its gods primarily as personifications of natural forces or phenomena. Consequently, Mitra was initially regarded as a solar deity. Similarly, the Avestan Mithra is linked to the sun, leading scholars of Iranian religion to also consider this as the god's central concept. One of the most notable aspects of his role is his dedication to upholding the great Indo-Iranian principle of *rta* or *asha*. Boyce expands on this by referencing the lesser *Ahuras*, Varuna and Mithra. They both have roots within the Vedic tradition but also served as guardians of the oath and covenant, embodying truth and loyalty while carrying out his will within the Zoroastrian tradition. These two deities appear to be divine reflections of tribal chieftains who were *ashavan*, meaning 'possessing *asha*,' or just upholders of the law. Varuna, as the lord of the truly spoken word, was especially revered as a creator-god. However, his name was not spoken in the known Iranian tradition, where he was invoked only through cult epithets. Another powerful deity, Indra, was worshipped as the divine counterpart of the warrior, an amoral figure called upon for strength, courage, and victory in battle. The Indo-Iranians also honoured 'nature' and cult gods. They generally viewed divine beings as benevolent, attributing evil primarily to earthly devils, sorcerers, and similar malevolent forces.[253]

"In other *Yashts* there are references to the wind god Vayu and to the mysterious deity known as the 'Grandson of the Waters'; these too are familiar from the *Rigveda*. Two further Vedic divinities, Aryaman and Narāsamsa, appear elsewhere in the *Avesta* as objects of reverence. Others again such as Nasatya, and Sarva are named in the Videvat as demons, evidently still respected in parts of Iran but rejected by pious Zoroastrians."[254] He mentions the names attributed to the collections of deities and how they have been classified in either tradition.

> The traditional gods were known in India as devas, from an ancient Indo-European word *deiwos* meaning 'celestial one'. Another honorific title, applied in India to a secondary group of deities,

[252] Boyce, 1996: 24.
[253] Boyce, 1990: 9.
[254] West, 2010: 19.

> was *asura*, 'lord'. Both terms were current in pre-Zoroastrian Iran too, where they appeared respectively as *daēva* and *ahura*. Zoroaster promoted a new set of beings as the proper object of worship. It was not appropriate to call them daēvas, as they did not belong to the traditional pantheon of 'celestials'. So he classified them as *ahuras* and, with the bold decisiveness of the true revolutionary, relegated the entire category of *daēvas* to the status of demons unworthy of worship.[255]

The cosmological similarities between Indian and Persian beliefs focus around cosmic order. In both traditions this order is seen to be the main driving force which maintains balance between the material and cosmic worlds. According to West, the Avestan concept of 'asha' is etymologically identical with the Vedic 'rta'. It is a divine principle that governs the natural world, for example the course of the sun, as well as representing truth or rightness in the human sphere.[256] The concepts of *asha* and *rta* in both the Zoroastrian & Vedic traditions are both concerned with sustaining the cosmic harmony in the universe. Boyce furthers this discussion regarding the importance of the sun in that it was common for the Indo-Iranians in particular.

> The Indo-Iranians held that there was a natural law which ensured that the sun would thus maintain its regular movement, the seasons change, and existence continue in an orderly way. This law was known to the Indians as 'rta', to the Avestan people by the corresponding word 'asha'[257]

West also finds other shared associations along the lines of worship and rituals between both traditions. The fire being seen as sacred and that it was used in both traditions for priestly duties The 'cult' of the fire is evident in India and in Persia. "There were cultic personnel in both countries with similar titles: the fire-priest, the libation-priest, the eulogist and the poet-seer. In the cults of both countries the cow was highly esteemed, and importance was attached in both to the holy utterance."[258] *Agni* was the sacred fire in the *Vedas* and has its own Avestan counterpart named *Atar* or *Atash*.[259] Dalal further reinforces the connection between both traditions.

> As seen earlier, in the *Gathas*, Zarathustra was referred to as a *zaotar,* '*hotr*'; *erishi,* '*rishi*', and *manthran* (teacher of mantras, or the sacred word). All these words are familiar from the *Vedas*. The Younger Avestan text *Visperad* lists eight priests who conducted rituals. Eight priests are

[255] West, 2010: 20.
[256] West, 2010: 21.
[257] Boyce, 1979: 7-8.
[258] West, 2010: 19.
[259] Dalal, 2014: 143.

> also listed in the *Rigveda*, though the names are different there. *Athravans*, descendants of *Athravan* (Vedic Atharvan), are mentioned several times in the *Yashts* and later texts. *Athravans* are said to have travelled to preach the religion. In the *Vedas*, *Athravans* are connected with the composition of *Atharvaveda*.[260]

The belief in life after death is also a shared element with both traditions. According to the tradition it was a realm where the souls of the deceased wandered and lived for eternity. According to Boyce,

> There was belief in life after death for the individual, and according to its earliest form the disembodied spirit, the 'urvan', lingered on earth for three days before departing downward to a subterranean kingdom of the dead, ruled over by Yima (Sanskrit Yama) who had been the first king to rule on earth and the first man to die.[261]

The importance of ancestor worship is extremely important as the dead were dependent on those still living to satiate their hunger and to clothe them in the afterlife. Ritual offerings and funerary rites were common in this regard so these things could be realised and that the souls of the deceased could be protected against the evil powers that lurk in the underworld. In the Zoroastrian tradition this place was known to be a dangerous place. Boyce explains this:

> There seems to have been an old concept of some dangerous place, perhaps a ford or ferry over a dark river, which the soul must cross in order to arrive there. This was called in Avestan the 'Chinvato Peretu', though to mean the 'Crossing of the Separator'.[262]

There was also the belief that this crossing in the underworld doubled as a bridge. A bridge which took each individual soul up to heaven. The hope was that they could be able to join the gods in heaven. However, it was only available to those souls who were worthy as a result of their living relatives consistently performing the correct rites and rituals. Those that were deemed unworthy would fall off the bridge back down to the underworld into the kingdom of Yima. The teachings of Zarathushtra show this in that he envisions the 'Bridge of the Separator' becoming a place of moral judgement where each soul must rely upon its own ethical achievements. Boyce explains the procedures which follow the judgement passed by the gods allowing each soul to pass on up to the heavens or not here:

> Here Mithra presides over the tribunal, flanked by Sraosha and by Rashnu, who holds the scales of justice. In these are weighed the soul's thoughts, words and deeds, the good on one side, the

[260] Dalal, 2014: 143-4.
[261] Boyce, 1990: 12-3.
[262] Boyce, 1990: 13.

> bad on the other. If the good are heavier, the soul is judged worthy of Paradise; and it is led by a beautiful maiden, the personification of its own conscience across the broad bridge and upon high. If the scales sink on the bad side, the bridge contracts to the width of a blade-edge, and a horrid hag, meeting the soul as it tries to cross, seizes it in her arms and plunges with it down to hell, the dwelling place of Worst Purpose.[263]

This is evident in the scriptures as well. The concept of the hell in a Zoroastrian context is found in the *Yasna* 32.13. It explains why the need to remain pure and to choose the side of best action over that of what Angra Mainyu presides over. The soul which is of good repute and is upright in its belief in Best Thought is what will allow one to live in Paradise. It is seen to be the place where the 'enlightened one' resides and should be the place one should aspire to be in.

> The dominion by which the glutton bids to stand in the house of the Worst Thought:
> The destroyers of this existence, and those, Mindful One, who decry in their lust
> Thy prophet's message, (the lust) that will keep them from the sight of Right.[264]

These next two extracts from the same *Yasna* show the dualism as well as the distinct separation of good and bad within the Zoroastrian tradition. It also provides the framework which all need to follow so that one does not fall into the wrong places.

> To them the Mindful Lord, united with Good Thought
> answers as befits his authority, as the good friend of Right the sunlit,
> 'Your liberal piety, as it is good, We adopt: it shall be Ours!'[265]

> But ye Daevas are all spawned from Evil Thought,
> As is the grandee who worships you, and from Wrong and Contempt;
> Your duplicitous deeds too, from which ye have become renowned in earth's
> seventh part.[266]

Also, in *Yasna* 31.20 it explains moralistic nature of how one should live their life. The idea that bad personal action leads to bad things in the afterlife and not being able to ascend up to

[263] Boyce, 1990: 27.
[264] *Yasna* 32.13.
[265] *Yasna* 32.2.
[266] *Yasna* 32.3.

the heavens. The opposite is the case for those who follow and continue the trend in which he aims all to follow.

> Whoso comes to the righteous one, radiance is his to possess hereafter;
> (but) a long age of darkness, foul food, cries of woes by way of speech,
> That is the existence to which, ye wrongful, through your own actions your
> Morality will bring you.[267]
> These things are clear for the well-doer even as he apprehends them in his mind:
> He with good command holds on to Right in word and deed.
> He, O Mindful Lord, shall be Thy most welcome house-guest.[268]

However, the point still stands that action-based living from a dualistic lens of good versus bad still figures. The ethical nature evident in the *Gathas,* especially when it comes to the afterlife and the conduct one needs to follow, is somewhat similar to that which is present in India. This can somewhat explain the purity laws characteristic of both groups of people, though more similarities lie with Hinduism than with the Buddhists. The similarities between the Hindus and the Zoroastrians can be seen in the fight to achieve cosmic order which both traditions are known for. The idea that the soul will be judged at death is also another shared aspect between both traditions. This is granted by Ahura Mazda in Zoroastrianism and with Brahman in Hinduism. The goal to be a morally and ethically good person is evident in both the Vedic and Buddhist understanding, where release can be achieved through good behaviour. It is a quest for spiritual salvation through one's own actions and the desire to be a 'good' person rather than the opposite. This aim to attain salvation through moral action and through ethical practices is also evident in Zoroastrianism.

Noticeably there is no explicit mention or reference to metempsychosis present in the Zoroastrian tradition, although, as mentioned above, there are similarities in other aspects of the Persian and Indian traditions. These can be seen in the understanding of both tradition relating to good *versus* evil, the cosmic order and the role of the gods in maintaining this order, as well as the judgement of the soul at death. But importantly there is no cyclical return of the individual soul in Zoroastrianism, in which it may return to another body. There is however enough evidence to speculate that some form of cross-cultural contact took place between the

[267] *Yasna* 31.20
[268] *Yasna* 31.22.

two belief systems. An indirect influence is likely, especially with the Achaemenid Empire being prevalent during this period. The sheer size of the region under the control of the Achaemenids would have allowed contact between the different religious and cultural groups within it. This might be the place where cross cultural philosophical and religious exchange might have taken place: a metaphorical bridge where knowledge from other ends of the world might have been shared, and a point which could have seen these ideas cross over from the West into the regions in the East, where Hinduism and Buddhism may have initially come into contact with said doctrinal beliefs. It may have come from the Greeks, where metempsychosis has been found, with a likely indirect influence on the Persians, which could in turn have been transferred to the Indians; but equally the current of ideas may have flowed in the opposite direction. The Persian Achaemenid Empire seemingly fostered a society which saw complex cultural exchanges, with religious traditions from the East coming into contact with the more philosophical metaphysical traditions of Greece in the West. The two traditions borrowed from each other, with Persia serving as the conduit between the two. The Achaemenid Empire would have been the vehicle which allowed for these different groups and cultures to interact.

4.3 Connections with Greece

The Greek tradition within metempsychosis has its influence brought from foreign lands, particularly, from the Near East. One of the larger influences came from the Persian Empire. The strategic position it held, and the existence of cultures within it which had possible influence, is of great importance. The ideas around the immortality of the soul, the transmigration from one body to another, as well as the escape from the wheel of life and death are encountered across traditions from the Near East such as Persia and India. This threefold conception forms the basis of the Greek understanding of metempsychosis, embodied in the doctrines of the philosophers Pherecydes and Pythagoras. The idea of rebirth in ancient Greece existed on a pre-philosophical and philosophical level, but, as West argues, it was not characteristic of Greek thought, which aimed at enjoying this life, after which comes inevitable death and nothingness.[269] The only other place where similar conceptions were found is India. These ideas were not foreign to Greek minds during this time period and it has been argued

[269] West, 1971: 62.

that the idea of metempsychosis was originally imported from the mystical Orphic cult, and later developed into a philosophical doctrine by Pherecydes and Pythagoras.[270] As Kokic states:

> although there are different phases of the teaching of reincarnation in India, and the general belief is that in Greek there are only nuances in the development of the idea of metempsychosis, there is no evidence that the origin could be Indian. Both traditions have in common the belief in the immortality of the soul, its transmigration into another body, the morally conditioned legality of future rebirths, ascetic practices and the desirability and possibility of escaping from the wheel of dying and rebirth.[271]

There does appear to be a connection between the two traditions, but there is very little evidence during this period to show that they borrowed and influenced one another.

The evidence for a connection between Greece and India can be traced back to the Proto-Indo-European speakers who became the Greeks and the Vedic Indians, and were about to enter regions where they would be influenced by Near Eastern communities. As West says, "[T]he Aegean world into which the first 'Greek' speakers penetrated … had already absorbed many cultural elements of West Asiatic origin". The same could be said of the northwest Indian world into which the first 'Sanskrit' speakers penetrated at about the same time".[272] West further states that, "the layer of Indo-European cultural likeness in both Greece and India was overlaid with another layer of influences from the Fertile Crescent. The graves in the group known as Grave Circle A at Mycenae contains goods that originated in Mesopotamia, Syria, Egypt, Nubia, Anatolia, northern Europe and Afghanistan."[273] Sedlar also claims that when trying to investigate the Indian influence on the Greek doctrine of metempsychosis one should go further back in time to the ancient Mesopotamians, and the ancient trade routes from the Mediterranean across to east and southeast Asia:

> In the pre-classical period, Greek contacts with Mesopotamia - probably conducted through intermediaries from Mycenae, Crete and Phoenicia - undoubtedly provided an important stimulus in the development of Greek culture. The question then arises whether Mesopotamian

[270] Kokic, 2020: 179.
[271] Kokic, 2020: 179.
[272] West, 1997: 5.
[273] West, 1997: 5.

civilization was indebted in any way to India, an if so, whether Indian influences may have travelled to Greece via Mesopotamia.[274]

It was during this time that the Phoenician trade networks were bustling with numerous cultural influences. According to McEvilley this was the period in which the Greeks had underwent a new period of intensive Near Eastern influence. "the 'Orientalizing Period', c. 7th century BCE, which saw Greek merchants, mercenary soldiers, and tourists traveling widely again after centuries of sedentary isolation. Increased mixing, both familial and cultural, marked the period. Thales of Miletus, for example, was the son of Examyes, evidently a Carian, and is said by Herodotus and others to have been ultimately of Phoenician lineage; similarly, Pherecydes of Syros was the son of one Babys - again an Anatolian name. Both, true to these Asian lineages, introduced "exotic eastern motifs into Greek mythical philosophy."[275] However, this is difficult to corroborate as the evidence either does not exist or has been lost.

There are archaeological finds which indicate that trade between Mesopotamia and India existed. According to Sedlar, "by the end of that millennium [the 3rd], trade between Mesopotamia and the Indus civilization was at least sporadic. A variety of cylinder seals, carneol beads, typical Harappa inlay-work, and other objects of unquestionably Indian origin have been discovered in deposits dating ca. 2300-2000 BCE on the sites of ancient Sumerian cities: Eshnunna, Kish, Lagash and Ur."[276] Casson also states that the first regular international maritime trade between the Indians and the Mesopotamians were merchants who sailed between the Persian Gulf and the northwestern coast of India around the 3rd millennium BCE.[277] It is important to note however that the trade that took place between these civilizations was most likely indirect. Sedlar mentions that majority of these indirect commercial exchanges resulted in goods passing through multiple intermediaries along the trade routes. Trade through seafaring seems to be the likeliest option. Casson mentions that from as early as the middle of the fourth millennium BCE, merchants of Mesopotamian origin were either trading directly or were dealing with those who did trade directly themselves.[278] Evidence of such trade has been found and Casson explains that, "from the East, but also featured luxuries such as ivory, precious stones, and rare woods. In third millennium Mesopotamians sites "excavators have unearthed certain large conchs with a snow-white shell… examples of the Indian conch, which

[274] Sedlar, 1980: 3.
[275] McEvilley, 2008: 5.
[276] Sedlar, 1980: 3.
[277] Casson, 1991: 4.
[278] Casson, 1991: 8.

is found only in the coastal waters of India and Ceylon."[279] The journey from Mesopotamia to India may have followed overland paths through the Himalayan passes, as well as river and sea routes.[280]

By this stage the Persian empire had incorporated many other regions as their own, Persian influence was now present in the transmission of ideas through contact with both the Indians on its Eastern borders and with the Greeks on the western point. These trade routes which initially might have spread these ideas were now controlled by the Persians. This may have been the conduit which Indian ideas about the nature of the soul reached Greece by way of the Persia. The Persians in this regard served as the middle ground where wisdom, ideas, knowledge and most obviously trade had initially come in contact with each other. McEvilley supports this theory:

> Instead of Greeks living in India or Indians living in Greece, the evidence indicates contacts taking place between them in the intermediary culture of Persia. There, surely, Greeks and Indians lived side by side over extended periods of time and could communicate.[281]

The vastness of the empire which was built by the Persians cannot be understated. It's sheer size enabled it to be a melting pot of cultures, languages, and religions. Importantly, unified under a centralized administration. Cyrus, who founded of the Persian empire, did so through expansion campaigns in every direction. This was continued by the kings who succeeded him. There was a clear expansionist ideology firmly in the Persian nobility. The empire stretched as far as India in the east and close to Greece in the west.

> King Cyrus, the founder of the Persian Empire and the Achaemenid dynasty (reigned 559–530 BCE), expanded his realm to include the region of Gandhara, located south of the Hindu Kush mountains. Around 518–515 BCE Darius I further extended Persian control southward, reaching as far as the Indus River. This conquest established the Indus as the easternmost frontier of the vast Persian Empire, which stretched across western Asia and, after 546 BCE, encompassed most of the Greek cities along the coast of Asia Minor."[282]
>
> The empire which rose from the ashes of the Assyrian Empire saw Cyrus the Great set the stage by conquering the Median capital of Ecbatana in 550 BCE, the Lydian capital of Sardis in 546

[279] Casson, 1991: 8.
[280] Sedlar 1980: 4.
[281] McEvilley, 2008: 14.
[282] Sedlar, 1980: 8.

> BCE, and finally Babylon in 539 BCE.[283] His son, Cambyses II, continued the expansion by capturing Egypt in 525 BCE. Almost immediately, the Persian kings, eager to stretch their empire in all directions, launched campaigns to conquer territories bordering Greece to the west and India to the southeast.[284]

These conquests brought Greek and Indian cultures into closer contact, fostering exchanges that would shape both civilizations.

The Persian Empire, spanning from the 6th century BCE to the 7th century CE, served as a crucial intermediary for the transmission of ideas, including those surrounding rebirth and the transmigration of the soul. Burkert shows this in how Persian ideas around the soul during the 6th century had an influence on Greek thought.

> The sequence of stars, moon, and sun in Anaximander's 'wheels,' in flagrant contrast to our scientific knowledge, agrees with the Iranian ascent to heaven. Zarathushtra's religion taught that the human soul, after death, rises to a realm of light in heaven, and variants of such ideas show up in the thinking of the Presocratics.[285]

The Greeks took these initial concepts and ideas from these other Eastern cultures to then build them within their framework. An example of this can be found in Anaximander's cosmogony which was also built out of originally Zoroastrian themes. Burkert mentions that "Anaximander's original step was to assign three categories of heavenly bodies - stars, moon and sun - to the three heavens."[286] The concept relating to the three heavens and being individual celestial bodies is inherently a Zoroastrian belief as referenced by Burkert. As mentioned previously the philosophies brought forward by the Greeks were hypothesized to be not an original invention. Rather that they were learnt or copied from much older Eastern ideas. These philosophies were learnt from numerous Eastern cultures, namely, the Egyptians, Chaldaeans, Iranian magi including Zoroaster, Indian gurus, among a few more.[287]

The fall of the city Sardis to Persian rule is a crucial point in that it allowed for cross-cultural idea transmission to take place. The link between the two cultures according to Burkert can be

[283] McEvilley, 2008: 6.
[284] McEvilley, 2008: 7
[285] Burkert, 2007: 66.
[286] Burkert, 2007: 68.
[287] Burkert, 2007: 50.

found in the Anatolian kingdom of Lydia. The influence of Greek culture can be found in these near Eastern cities by way of dress, art and sculpture either adopted or imitated.[288]

> It is true that at that time, about 547 BCE., the Greeks had already arrived at a unique level of civilization. All the many Mediterranean peoples, and some beyond, had begun to adopt and to imitate Greek products and Greek fashion, be it sculpture, ceramics in black- and red-figure style, or the mythology illustrated in the vase paintings; but also the use of wine and the culture of the symposium in general.[289]

This empire, with its vast territorial expanse and multicultural ethos, facilitated the exchange of philosophical and religious concepts between the Greeks and the Indians. The role of the Persian Empire in this intellectual exchange is often overlooked, yet it was crucial in shaping the philosophical and religious landscapes of both civilizations. The transmission of ideas concerning rebirth and the transmigration of the soul can be traced through various channels, including trade routes, diplomatic exchanges, and the movement of scholars and religious figures. These ideas, which were deeply rooted in the religious and philosophical traditions of the Persians, found receptive audiences among the Greeks and the Indians, who adapted and integrated them into their own systems of thought.

It can be argued that various ideas and knowledge, influenced by interactions with the Persians and potentially discovered by the Greeks themselves, may have shaped their thinking. It is possibly here is where doctrinal beliefs regarding the immortality of the soul and its transmigration from one body to another was learnt by Pherecydes. Sedlar claims that the Indians and the Greeks at about the same time-period drew conclusions which in many respects were similar.[290] There might be similarities between the ideas brought forth regarding doctrinal beliefs which came about during similar time periods but there is little to no evidence of actual knowledge sharing between peoples from both traditions. Rather, the Persian Empire was the middle ground which worked as an in-between space through which such philosophical ideas could be transferred. He evidences this connection by stating: “Greek philosophers in Ionia (Asia Minor) in the 6th century BCE arrived at concepts which resemble in many ways the dominant attitude of the Upanishads - those ancient Indian philosophical texts (ca. 700-100 BCE) which constitute the final layer of the sacred *Vedas*. Unless actual contacts between the two peoples can be demonstrated, the similarity proves nothing about Indian influence upon

[288] Burkert, 2007: 100.
[289] Burkert, 2007: 100.
[290] Sedlar, 1980: 16.

the Greeks or the reverse."[291] It is clear that Persia, especially from the 6th century onward, was perfectly situated to directly influence both Greek and Indian cultures. There is no doubt that this influence happened. On the Indian side, traces of Persian thought can be seen in key principal *Upanishads.* Meanwhile, in Greece, Persian ideas left their mark on the early Greek philosophers such as Pherecydes, Anaximander and Anaximenes. These connections highlight how Persia served as a cultural bridge, shaping the philosophical and intellectual landscapes of both regions.

The philosophies born out of both regions also share similarities. In the *Upanishads* there is an overarching interpretation of the cosmic and material world in a monist lens. The understanding is that all phenomena occurring in the universe can be brought down to a singular world-essence, namely, *Brahman*. In the Upanishads there is the belief that the world in its entirety is *Brahman*. Everything that has existed and that currently exist has come from It and at some stage later down the line will return back to It. In this regard *Brahman* is eternal and infinite in Its nature, it is both formed and formless, indestructible and inconceivable. It exists within everything and everyone. The Greek philosophers brought forth ideas and concepts which are similar to the Indian approach. The thinkers of the 6th century BCE, as mentioned by Sedlar, also believed that a single world-principle or essence lies at the foundation of all existence:

> This basic essence was the starting point and the cause of all Being, as well as of its own changes. The 6th century BCE Greek speculations as to the nature of *arche* are associated above all with the names of three great philosophers of Miletus: Thales, Anaximenes, Anaximander. Their conclusions revealed a continued attachment to mythological formulations, but also a genuinely scientific effort to explain the world rationally and to describe world-processes as obeying laws of nature rather than arbitrary will of divine personages.[292]

Thales declares *arche* to be water, whereas Anaximenes identifies it as air. In contrast however, Anaximander refuses to attribute any material substance as the primary essence. He rather prescribes *arche* as the 'Boundless' or 'Infinite'. Sedlar states that Anaximander envisioned the 'Boundless' as having no beginning or end, being eternal, inexhaustible, and indestructible. It is also the supreme focus of religious devotion. The 'Boundless' is perpetually in motion, and through this motion, countless worlds are created and eventually perish.[293] In this regard,

[291] Sedlar, 1980: 16.
[292] Sedlar, 1980: 17.
[293] Sedlar, 1980: 17.

Anaximander is likely the closest to that of the Upanishadic philosophers regarding the cosmological framework which they created. While his perspective leans more toward science and less toward myth compared to the other Greek thinkers, he describes a vision of the cosmos that feels deeply connected to the ideas in the Upanishads. He suggests that countless worlds spring from the Infinite. A concept that takes on different names, like *Brahman*, space, or the highest Self, reflecting its vast and timeless nature. Sedlar finds a connection between the Indian texts and the philosophy of Pherecydes. Both attribute the sole cosmic creator being prescribed to an abstract Time being or concept. Pherecydes himself believed that the Time-god, Chronos, creates life and his lineage from his own seed. This is the same in one of the Orphic theogonies, namely, the *Rhapsodic Theogony*. It places Chronos as the creator like how Pherecydes does. The *Rhapsodic Theogony* has Chronos emerging as the first of the gods as well as being the creator of all life both divine and human. The *Rhapsodic Theogony* describes the succession mythology which sees six generations of gods ascend to the throne. It first starts with a primordial mass which predates the existence of all gods.[294] From out this mass Chronos emerges and he himself gives birth to Chaos.[295] Chronos next forms the cosmic egg from the preexisting materials that gave birth to him.[296] From this egg emerges Phanes, the firstborn deity, also called Protogonos. Phanes is depicted with having animal heads, multiple eyes, and wings, as well as having multiple names.[297] He creates the first gods, including Night, who becomes both his daughter and his wife. Through his union with Night, Phanes brings forth the universe and populates the earth with the first humans, the golden race.[298] Phanes ascends as the first king of the gods, crafting a sceptre twenty-four measures long to symbolize his royal authority.[299] He later passes the sceptre to Night, who becomes the second ruler.[300] Night then gives birth to Ouranos (Sky) and Gaia (Earth), the first divine couple to marry. Ouranos then becomes the third ruler of the gods, continuing the lineage of divine power. This is just the first three generations of succession of the throne within the Orphic pantheon. It continues for a further three more with Kronos, Zeus, and lastly Dionysus whom Zeus sets to become the sixth king of the gods.[301]

[294] OF 103–108.
[295] OF 109–113.
[296] OF 114–119.
[297] OF 120–143.
[298] OF 144–164.
[299] OF 165–167.
[300] OF 168–171.
[301] OF 318–331.

Similarly, the early Greek philosophers thought that the world originated from fundamental elements like Water, Air, Fire, or the Boundless. The Greeks, it must be said, came closer than the Indians to what we might now consider a scientific understanding of the universe, as their explanations were less tied to mythology. Another extant fragment which shows the sharing of ideas between the Greeks and the Persians and how they could have influenced the philosophical frameworks is by Aristoxenus. Burkert writes:

> Another relevant fourth-century text, preserved as a fragment, is by Aristoxenus.[302] He writes that Pythagoras went to Zaratas the Chaldaean, who explained that "from the beginning there are two causes for everything, a father and a mother: Father is light, Mother is darkness. The constituent parts of the light are hot, dry, light, and swift; particles of darkness are cold, wet, heavy, and slow. Out of these the entire cosmos is composed, female and male."[303]

4.4 Position of Persian Empire, Conclusion

Although direct evidence is lacking, it appears that the Persian Empire acted as a bridge for the transmission of these ideas, evident in the historical exchanges between Persians, Greeks, and Indians. The Persian Achaemenid Empire ruled by Cyrus the Great and his successors, created an extensive network of trade routes linking the Mediterranean world with South Asia. These routes, known as the Royal Road, not only enabled the movement of goods but also fostered the exchange of intellectual and cultural ideas. Although the exact scope of Pythagoras' travels remains debated, there is little question that he was influenced by Indian concepts, especially those related to the immortality of the soul and its potential for rebirth. Pythagoras' teachings on metempsychosis regarding the idea that the soul is eternal and undergoes successive reincarnations closely mirror Zoroastrian beliefs, as well as the duality that exists between good vs bad. This dualism is seen the ethical considerations Pythagoras placed on his followers in relation to ascetic practices and dietary restrictions which stemmed from the purity-based ideology that Pythagoras subscribed to. Aristotle in his *Metaphysics* claimed that Pythagoreans viewed the world as a balance of dualities.[304] Examples of this are limit / unlimit, one / many, light / dark. In all cases there are good sides and bad sides. Burkert backs this up:

[302] Aristoxenus fr. 13 Wehrli (Pyth. P21 Laks–Most).
[303] Burkert, 2007: 115.
[304] Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 986a.

> Iranian influence in fifth-century Greece may be sought in two areas of religious development: the idea of "heavenly immortality" together with a system of three heavenly tiers, and the principle of dualism in a universal world construct. The message that the dead will "ascend to heaven"… It first becomes dominant in Iranian religion and appears occasionally in fifth-century Greece.[305]

The conception of ascent to heaven as mentioned above is a key principle in the Zoroastrian tradition. This shifts through the empire and allows for it to come into the Greek consciousness. Burkert posits that the idea of a heavenly dwelling for the *pneuma* or soul, which gained traction during the fifth century, has been widely documented and analysed. This development has sometimes been referred to as a 'Pythagorean revolution', a concept that could align with potential Iranian influences.[306]

This parallel suggests that Pythagoras may have incorporated Persian ideas into the development of his own philosophical framework. The impact of Persian thought on Indian philosophy, while less direct, is equally noteworthy. The easternmost territories of the Persian Empire bordered the Indian subcontinent, and there is evidence of cultural and intellectual interaction between the two regions. Under Darius the Great, the Achaemenid Empire expanded its influence into the Indus Valley, creating satrapies in areas that are now part of modern-day Pakistan. This political presence enabled the exchange of ideas between Persia and India, particularly in the realms of religion and philosophy. Though the concept of rebirth is foundational to Indian religious traditions, there are indications of Persian influence shaping its development evident in the beliefs around the soul's ascent up to the heavens. Burkert further states an additional third party in how the transmission of ideas with the Persian empire serving as the middle-ground. They are the Egyptians and according to Herodotus, the notion of reincarnation and the immortality of the soul is taught to Pythagoras by them. Burkert instead attributes it to the Indians:

> The definite rising of a soul to heaven is closer to the Iranian than to the Egyptian paradigm. Likewise, the teachings of transmigration, normally credited to Pythagoras, were falsely attributed to the Egyptians by Herodotus; these most likely came from India, which was part of

[305] Burkert, 2007: 110.
[306] Burkert, 2007: 112.

> the Persian empire beginning with Darius. The Presocratic elements, on the other hand, the aither concept and the return to origins, could be typically Greek.[307]

The Persian Empire's dominion over the Indus Valley fostered direct contact with Indian religious and philosophical systems, leading to a cross-tradition of ideas. This may have resonated in regions like Gandhara, which remained under Persian rule for centuries. Gandhara emerged as a vibrant cultural node, blending Persian, Indian, and Greek influences. This synthesis underscores the region's role as a melting pot where diverse traditions intersected. Regions like this is where these ideas could have possibly stemmed from. This is likely the way in which doctrinal beliefs and overall ideas associated with philosophy could have transferred to Greece by way of the Persian empire and the belief systems of Zoroastrianism which was prevalent in this intermediary region.

By way of conclusion, it could be argued that the geopolitical reach of Persian empire, which spanned vast territories from the eastern Mediterranean to the Indus Valley, allowed for a socio-cultural framework which facilitated the transmission of ideas across diverse regions. The multicultural society of the Persian empire enabled it to act as a 'bridge' for transmitting and fostering radical ideas. Through this it was able to create an unprecedented environment where intellectual traditions could intersect, merge, and evolve. I argue that this convergence of cultures under Persian rule served as a transformative intermediary, enabling the transmission of philosophical, religious, and ethical concepts between civilizations that might otherwise have remained isolated. Greek philosophy absorbed Zoroastrian-inspired concepts such as the duality of cosmic forces and the immortality of the soul, and the notion of metempsychosis itself may have been introduced from the same direction. This marks a crucial moment in the development of early Greek philosophical thought. Similarly, the shared concepts of moral order, ritual tradition and practice prevalent in the Persian Zoroastrian framework deeply influenced the existing Indian traditions of Vedic Hinduism and later Buddhism. Although these common themes were conceived and applied through distinct cultural lenses, they reveal a recurring preoccupation with the soul's eternal nature and its cyclical journey through existence. They underpin an intangible connection that transcends both geographical and linguistic borders. The foundational ideas standard within Vedic Hinduism, and later critiqued and adapted to fit within Buddhism, have evident markers in Persian Zoroastrianism. The

[307] Burkert, 2007: 113.

concept of this ‘bridge’, with Persia strategically placed in the middle, saw philosophical and religious ideologies and traditions indirectly shared. From the Greeks to the Indians, ideas were shared and developed from one another, an exchange facilitated by the Persian Empire. Conversely, the Persians had their own distinct traditions which were shared with both the Greeks and Indians.

The empire’s legacy as a mediator and conduit of ideas further accentuates the fundamental role of cross-cultural interaction in furthering human thought. Its strategic positioning at the crossroads of both trade networks not only allowed for the Persian Empire transport goods but also to exchange philosophical and religious ideas. This profoundly shaped the theological and metaphysical trajectories of the civilizations at its margins, allowing for a constant flow of ideas. Greek thinkers engaged with Persian Magi, while Indian ascetics encountered Zoroastrian priests, each interaction refining and reimagining inherited beliefs. The theological and philosophical trajectories of both eastern and western civilizations were indelibly marked by this amalgamation, allowing disparate civilizations to borrow, adapt, and innovate upon shared intellectual foundations. This cements the Persian Empire’s position as a cornerstone in the intellectual and philosophical history of the ancient world.

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Abbreviations:

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