

**THE THEORY OF REINCARNATION AND THE JOURNEY OF THE SOUL: A  
COMPARISON BETWEEN ANCIENT GREEK AND INDIAN BELIEF**

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## PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

This dissertation is submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, in the Graduate Programme in Classics, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College Campus, and South Africa.

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences: School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other University.

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I would also like to dedicate this Masters dissertation to my late father Preadeepkumur (Prea) Banwari, whose passing led me to this topic.

*“I went,  
to the shores of the sleepless sea,  
to witness . . . the end of day.  
And found to my joy and delight,  
that the hour of separation  
is indeed the moment of meeting.  
How strange my affliction,  
this empty pain and desolation  
of parting.”*

Prea Banwari (1983)

## **ABSTRACT**

The objective of this dissertation is to demonstrate that, although contemporary Hinduism and ancient Greek philosophy are far removed from each other by time and geography, the ancient Greeks and Indians nevertheless shared similar ideas with regard to the soul and reincarnation.

To place this research within a scholarly context, the dissertation begins with some general observations about the concept of reincarnation in human beliefs across the world. It then continues with an overview of research into the idea of the soul and reincarnation in these two cultures to find a connection between them. It then proceeds to trace the evolution and origins of the idea of the soul and its possible reincarnation in ancient Greek literature. This will be done by an examination of selected ancient Greek sources to establish a chronological timeline of the development of these ideas/theories. For the Indian part of this dissertation the idea of the soul and reincarnation will be determined through an in-depth analysis of Hindu scriptures written in Sanskrit, as well as by investigating other scholars' analysis of the Hindu scriptures.

A comparison between the two cultures and their roles within their respective cultural and religious systems will then be undertaken in order to deduce if there was a pre-Hellenistic (Indo-European period) exchange between the cultures. This dissertation seeks to expand on and deepen existing comparative studies in respect of the ancient Greek and Indian cultures.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: DEFINING THE SOUL AND REINCARNATION

One of life's greatest and most intriguing questions is what awaits us when we die. Over the years, there have been many philosophers, poets and artists who have shared with the world their accounts of the journey of the soul in the after-life. This dissertation will try to analyze a few of them.

Many religions use the after-life to speak of the ultimate reward of good and the punishment of evil. Most people know, even as children, about heaven and hell, and some even believe in the theory of reincarnation.<sup>1</sup> There are many religions around the world that share this belief. This chapter will look briefly at some of them, but the main focus of this dissertation is the unique reincarnation theories shared by the ancient Greeks and Indians. Some ancient Greek authors, philosophers and Indians (Hindus) believed in similar theories with regard to the soul and the journey it takes after death.<sup>2</sup> In the various stories about the after-life, the main theme is the journey to the realm of the dead and, in some cases, the journey into a new life. Some of the most detailed descriptions of the after-life come from ancient Greek philosophers such as Pythagoras and Plato. With regard to the Indians we have teachings in the *Bhagavad Gita*, a holy book like the Christian Bible, and the various other sacred books and teachings of holy men such 'Brahmins' and 'Swamis'. This dissertation will look at these ideas about reincarnation and the journey the soul takes after death, examining and comparing the various theories of the ancient Greeks and the Indians on this subject.

### 1.1. Research Questions

The questions and research problems that this dissertation will attempt to address are the following. Where did the belief in reincarnation originate? Is there a common background to this notion that is shared by the ancient Greeks and Indians? Who are the Hindu wise men, and how are they best referred to? (The term *Brahmin*<sup>3</sup> is

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<sup>1</sup> This dissertation will not be looking into case studies or evidence for actual instances of reincarnation.

<sup>2</sup> Since this investigation only concerns India in the first millennium BCE, it will not be necessary to discriminate between Hindu, Muslim and Christian Indians, as Islam and Christianity did not exist at this time. Throughout the dissertation the term Indian refers to Hindus.

<sup>3</sup> These sages taught in many different languages such as Hindi, Vedic, Sanskrit, and Tamil. This dissertation will be specifically looking at rituals and customs concerning the soul from the Hindi linguistic group.

sometimes used but there are also objections to its use because it derives from the traditional caste structure of Indian society.) What is the theory of reincarnation and what happens to the soul after death in Hindu belief? What is the connection between reincarnation and *karma*? How are reincarnation and resurrection distinct from each other?

The concept of *karma* is a broad belief that all of life is ruled by a system of cause and effect, action and reaction, much like the laws of physics, in which one's deeds have consequent effect on the future of one's soul. How did the theory of reincarnation of the soul in ancient Greek philosophy come into being? Did Socrates have this idea that the soul is immortal or did it come from Plato?<sup>4</sup> What is Plato's view of reincarnation and what did other Greek philosophers think about reincarnation? Could there be a common Indo-European connection between these two cultures with regard to this belief? This would mean that the idea of reincarnation was formulated prior to the migration of Indians to India and the Greeks to Greece in the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC. These are a few of the questions that this dissertation will attempt to answer.

## **1.2. Terminology and Methodology**

To help prepare for this dissertation the works of Bassnett (1993), with regard to the methodology of comparative literature,<sup>5</sup> and Csapo<sup>6</sup> (2005), with respect to the comparative mythology, were consulted, for one must take into account many aspects when doing a comparison between two cultures. This is important because any comparative work can be influenced by the subjectivity of the individual examining the text and in a sense, this will become incorporated into the findings.

Comparative research is the act of comparing two or more things with a view to discovering something new about one or all of the things being compared. This comparative technique often utilizes multiple disciplines in one study. The multi-disciplinary approach is good for the flexibility it offers. This dissertation will use the

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<sup>4</sup> The idea of the soul being immortal was not standard or orthodox in Ancient Greece. It was a revolutionary idea.

<sup>5</sup> Bassnett states that 'comparative literature is the study of texts across cultures, that it is interdisciplinary, and it is concerned with patterns of connection in literature' (Bassnett 1993: 1).

<sup>6</sup> Csapo states that there are many definitions of myth and that the definition would have to change in perspective with the challenges and would have to be supplemented. He also says that one must be aware of definitions that are mere compilations of empirical and often trivial distinctions (Csapo 2005: 2).

comparative method in trying to find a connection between the ancient Greeks and the Indians (Hindus) in respect of the doctrine of reincarnation. To help find the connection between these two cultures it is important that this dissertation briefly look at other disciplines of study such Linguistics, Sociology, and Religion, keeping in mind that this dissertation is primarily a Classics dissertation.

### 1.3. Concepts of the Soul

There are certain terms and phrases that need to be defined and explained before the theories on reincarnation can be examined. The Greeks refer to the soul as ψυχή, a word with many meanings, such as ‘breath’, ‘soul’ or ‘spirit’. The fact that ψυχή in the time of Homer (eighth century BC) had a connection with breath or life breath, does not necessarily mean that it had the same meaning in the works of Plato in the fourth, as will be discussed in Chapter 3. The meaning of the word can only properly be derived from the context.<sup>7</sup> Plato argues that the soul is immortal, but the modern thinker would either question its existence in the first instance or consider immortality to belong to it by definition.<sup>8</sup>

The definition of reincarnation has to do with being born again in another body or form, or being embodied again in flesh – in other words the transmigration of the soul. The most common abstract words in any language frequently defy exact translation.<sup>9</sup> For example, the Greek term μετεμψύχωσις (*metempsychōsis*) can be employed in the sense of reincarnation, but it often refers to the supposed passage of the soul after death into the body of another being. This is sometimes referred to as *transmigration* in some religions. It also presupposes that the soul transfers into another body after death. These are some of the synonyms to describe the passage of the soul and its movement after death into another body. It should be noted that most of the actual usages of the term μετεμψύχωσις (*metempsychōsis*) occur in Late Greek, specifically Neoplatonic sources and so are not relevant to this dissertation, which focuses mainly on the Greek Archaic and Classical periods.

Having defined the terms ‘reincarnation’ and the ‘soul’, one needs to find out the origins of those theories. Grube states in his book *Plato’s Thought* that:

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<sup>7</sup> Bremmer 1983: 5

<sup>8</sup> Grube 1935: 12

<sup>9</sup> Grube 1935: 120

‘The conception of the soul as the highest part of man seems to have been imported into Greece by those mystical teachers and prophets who are usually somewhat summarily lumped together as the Orphics. Their doctrines came from the East; they seem to have taught an immortality that was no longer a pale reflection of earthly life, but a release from the body and a deliverance. The body to them was the prison or tomb of the soul . . . man then aims at the purification of this soul, and after many incarnations rises to perfection and is absorbed, or reabsorbed, into the divine.’ (Grube 1935: 121).

The Orphic beliefs about the soul will be looked at in more detail in a subsequent chapter. While considering the concepts of the soul, one must look at the various ideas linked to the immortality of the soul and one such idea that is the resurrection. It is however important to point out the difference between reincarnation and resurrection, so one does not link or confuse the two.

#### **1.4. How are reincarnation and resurrection distinct from each other?**

To clear things up somewhat the definition of term ‘reincarnation’ comes from Latin *re* = again + *incarnare* = ‘to make flesh’. In Indian belief, reincarnation is the continuous transmigration of the soul together with its material body from one body to another according to its individual *karma*. Reincarnation is thus a process governed by the law of *karma*.

Reincarnation must be distinguished from other forms of rebirth. Resurrection is defined as the process of being brought to life again after death. It is very different from reincarnation; resurrection is the coming to life again of the same being – it does not change form. Reincarnation is a rebirth into a new form of existence that may be completely dissimilar from the first form of life. For example, a human could be reincarnated as an animal or plant. It is clear that an animal is very a different form of life than a human. In resurrection, the human comes to life again either in physical form or as a ‘soul’ – there is no cross-species resurrection. The soul of the person does not move into another human or non-human form.

The Christian concept of resurrection involves a transformation of the body into an immortal form of being, but there is some relationship between the physical body

that dies and the body that is physically raised to immortality. The body that dies is usually the same body that is raised to life again.

There are a few passages in the New Testament Bible that speak of this kind of physical resurrection. In the Bible after his resurrection, Jesus said: ‘See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have’.<sup>10</sup> In this passage, Jesus clearly confirmed the physical nature of his resurrected body. His body was identical to the body that had been killed. Jesus's spirit/soul did not inhabit another object or body but the very same body, which was put to death. The apostle Paul taught a doctrine of the resurrection of a spiritual counterpart of the physical body in 1 Corinthians 15, stating:

‘So is it with the resurrection (*anastasis*) of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body’ (1 Corinthians 15: 42-44 RSV).

It can be seen here that there is a direct relationship concerning the material body in the grave and the transformed, resurrected, spiritual one. There are other passages in the Bible that talk about resurrection of the body. One such passage, concerning King David’s prophecy of Christ’s immortality, can be found in Acts 2.31 (RSV):

‘Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne, he (David) foresaw and spoke of the resurrection (*anastasis*) of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.’

In addition, also with reference to Christ, there is the following: ‘But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it’.<sup>11</sup>

The resurrection is basically the idea that the body and the soul are reanimated as one. This idea is different from reincarnation where the soul is transferred into

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<sup>10</sup> Luke. 24: 39 RSV (Holy Bible the Revised Standard Version).

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

another vessel whether it is human or animal. This is the main distinction between the two.

## **1.5. Reincarnation around the World**

This dissertation will not be investigating all forms of reincarnation. Its primary focus falls on the ancient Greek and Hindus. It will, however, note the existence of this idea of reincarnation among some of the numerous cultures from around the world.<sup>12</sup>

### **1.5.1. Buddhism**

Buddhism shares some of the same notions with Hinduism due to the fact that it developed out of it, but there are some significant differences in their views with regards to incarnation. One group of Buddhists, the Theravada Buddhists, believes that when a person dies the personality of that person passes into a new being. This concept is explained by the metaphor of how the flame of a dying candle can light the flame of another candle. Kramer explains this idea as follows:

‘ . . . a lit candle is touched to the wick of an unlighted one and the light is carried from one candle to another, the actual flame of the first candle does not pass over, but it remains with the first but the light does transfer This way rebirth is seen as an ongoing process of the transmission of the entire evolutionary process in all its possibilities and probabilities’ (Kramer 1988: 51).

In Hinduism, it is *karma* that governs the condition of future lives. There is continuity between personas but not a persistence of individuality. Therefore, the Theravada Buddhists favor the term ‘rebirth’ rather than ‘reincarnation’. In Buddhism, *karma* is seen to be a natural idea, similar to the laws of physics. Therefore, conditions surrounding rebirths are not seen by the Buddhist as rewards or penalties but merely as the natural outcome of many moral actions and immoral actions. The series of rebirths involve numerous lives throughout numerous years, involving both males and females,

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<sup>12</sup> Reincarnation around the world is not limited by geography or time. Head & Cranstone (1961) compiled a collection of quotes regarding reincarnation from various regions from around the world.

passing into the form of non-humans in other realms. It includes unavoidable misery and lasts until every craving is gone and *nirvana* is reached.<sup>13</sup>

### 1.5.2. Shiite Muslims

Shiite Muslims in western Asia believe in reincarnation, though they do not believe in the concept of *karma*. In its place, they believe that a divine being or God assigns a certain number of lives, each with altered situations that are usually detached from each other until the ultimate Day of Judgment. It is on that day that God will judge them and either sends them to hell or heaven based on the moral assessment of their actions and deeds from their many reincarnations.<sup>14</sup> In his research into reincarnation in Christianity MacGregor found that the teaching of notions of transmigration inevitably appeared within a culture which at first may seem inhospitable to them. ‘In the teaching of the Sufis, who claimed to know the esoteric teaching behind the Qur’ān, reincarnation had a prominent place.’<sup>15</sup>

### 1.5.3. Judaism and Christianity

Though reincarnation is not a mainstream belief in Judaism and Christianity, some of the groups within these religions believe in some form of reincarnation. MacGregor states that some Christians believe in the doctrine of resurrection, and less commonly in reincarnation, he also speaks of the ‘immortality’ doctrine in which, he concedes, is more compatible with reincarnation.

‘Resurrection is to a new *sōma* (body), a ‘glorified’ body. Why should not this be another incarnation, on this planet or some other far off in outer space? Reincarnation, whatever else it may be, means resurrection of some kind . . . the fact that the reincarnation myth can sit with either of these two historic understandings of the nature of human destiny does not mean that either or both must entail. It does mean that those who reject it should have good reason for doing so.’ (MacGregor 1989: 7)

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<sup>13</sup> Kastenbaum 2003: 705.

<sup>14</sup> Kastenbaum 2003: 706

<sup>15</sup> MacGregor 1989: 46

MacGregor make a good point in his investigation into reincarnation in Christianity. In Judaism, the *Kabbalah* is a body of teaching founded on an enigmatic explanation of Hebrew texts and some Hasidic Jews believe in the theory of reincarnation. In Christianity, there was an early group of Christians who believed in reincarnation, they were known as Gnostic Christians. There are still some modern Christians who believe in the idea of reincarnation,<sup>16</sup> and as I have pointed out earlier in this chapter, there are passages from the New Testament book of Matthew, where Jesus seems to imply that John the Baptist was the reincarnated prophet Elijah, to help support the theory. MacGregor discovered that Judaism, Christianity and Islam have a reincarnational understanding of human destiny.<sup>17</sup>

#### **1.5.4. West Africa**

In West Africa, the theory of reincarnation or rebirth is shared amongst the many tribes. One such tribe from Nigeria the Igbo tribe, believe in reincarnation, though they do not have a concept that is in anyway or form like the Hindu doctrine of *karma*.<sup>18</sup> These West African tribes believe that reincarnation or rebirth is good, unlike the Hindus and Buddhists. They think that it is better to return to earth than to remain in the disembodied state of limbo. They also believe that people are commonly reborn into the same family and that their souls could undergo numerous reincarnations at the same time. There are also some groups who believe that the souls can inhabit non-human (animal) forms.<sup>19</sup> The Igbo tribe believes that good conduct in life would lead to a better or higher placing in the disembodied realm, as well as a higher status in their next life, and that it is best that souls are reincarnated and are not trapped in limbo in the disembodied world. This idea is very similar to the Hindu doctrine of reincarnation.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Kastenbaum 2003: 706

<sup>17</sup> MacGregor 1989: 46

<sup>18</sup> Stevenson 1985: 13

<sup>19</sup> Kastenbaum 2003: 706

<sup>20</sup> Stevenson 1985:16

### 1.5.5. Native Americans and Inuit

The Native Americans and the Inuits, especially those from the most northern and northwestern parts of America, believe in transmigration / reincarnation. The particulars of the theory tend to be different among the various groups. Mills states that concepts of reincarnation among Amerindians and the Inuits are difficult to summarize or isolate due to the numerous groups, and that these concepts are embedded in a whole constellation of other complex concepts about the spiritual nature of humans, animals, trees, birds, and spirits – both guardian spirits and other.<sup>21</sup> A few Amerindians groups essentially assume that not every person will be reborn, but in its place, they focus on persons who have had untimely deaths, such as dead children being born again into the same family. Another example would be warriors who have died in battle or from their wounds. They would be reborn with birthmarks representing their wounds. Some Native Americans believe in human to non-human reincarnation as well as cross-sex reincarnation.

‘The ethics of people with ‘ethicized eschatologies’ are based on the premise of the equality of human consciousness with that of other species of animals, fish, and fowl. This relates to the most universal aspect of reincarnation belief, the premise that it is necessary for humans to conduct themselves so that those beings whose lives they take in order to live – the fish, fowl and animals – will choose to reincarnate, to give themselves once again to be the sustenance of human beings.’ (Mills & Slobodin 1994: 17)

This idea, that one should respect all forms of life, is shared with the Hindus, for one does not know what their next life would be like. In this regard, both the Amerindians and the Hindus are firm believers that all life is connected. There are some Amerindians from the Northwest Coast who believe that it is possible for an individual to be born into several different people at the same time, or multiple simultaneous reincarnations.<sup>22</sup> According to Varner, there are some Native American cultures that believe in reincarnation. This belief was modified in that only certain people were believed to be reborn – normally the disabled or deformed who had not been able to live a normal life

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<sup>21</sup> Mills & Slobodin 1994: 7

<sup>22</sup> Mills & Slobodin 1994: 28

previously. The Yuman tribes not only believed that the deformed would be reborn but also twins. Reportedly, twins and the deformed were born on earth as ‘visitors.’ These individuals, after death, did not journey on to the land of the dead but returned to their village until they were reborn yet again.

Varner goes on to say that some Canadian Indians also believed that both animals and humans are reincarnated. The physical features of a newborn child are always referred to those of some dead ancestor. Every child is thus a reincarnation of a previous existence.<sup>23</sup>

### **1.6. The Indo-European language connection between Greece and India.**

This section is focused on the possibility of an Indo-European connection between ancient Greeks and Indians. The aim is to find a possible common link in language and / or origin between the ancient Greeks and the Indians.

This section will begin with defining the term Indo-European. It will then try to find a common root to either prove or disprove the link between the ancient Greeks and Indians. If there was a common link, it could help explain the similarities, which exist in some cultural aspects between these two cultures. Certain European scholars who found great similarities among hundreds of languages and dialects spread over Europe, and Asia (mainly Indian and European languages) coined the term ‘Indo-European’. For the purpose of this dissertation, I will only be looking at one connection in the Indo-European language debate due to the fact that it belongs to a very large linguistic field of study. I will be focusing on the Sanskrit and Greek connection only.

The ancient languages of India and Pakistan are usually called Indo-Aryan. Indo-Aryan languages are considered a branch of the Indo-Iranian language family, which is a branch of the Indo-European family of languages. Because of the negative connotation of the term ‘Aryan’, Indic often replaces it with Indo-Aryan, so you might see Indic listed as a branch of the Indo-Iranian language family. There are many Indo-Aryan or Indic languages. The oldest Indic languages are Sanskrit,<sup>24</sup> Prakrit, Pali, and Apabhramsa. A family of languages including most of the languages spoken in Europe, India, and Iran descended from a common tongue spoken in the third millennium BC. by an agricultural people originating in southeastern Europe.

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<sup>23</sup> Varner 2010: 77, 78.

<sup>24</sup> The ancestor of most modern Indo-Aryan / Indic languages Bryant (2001).

The theory that languages as diverse as Sanskrit and Greek had a common ancestor was proposed by Jones in his address to the Asiatic Society:

‘The Sanskrit language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure, more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologist could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists. There is a similar reason, though not quite so forcible, for supposing that both the Gothic and the Celtic, though blended with a very different idiom, had the same origin with the Sanskrit, and the old Persian might be added to this family, if this were the place for discussing any question concerning the antiquities of Persia.’ (Jones 1786: 21)

### 1.6.1. The Sanskrit Connection

William Jones, who was stationed in India in 1780, first made the discovery of the Indo-European family of languages. Jones felt that he needed to familiarize himself with native Indian law codes, several of which were penned in the Sanskrit script, before he introduced British law to the region. Jones was astonished to discover a systematic pattern of likenesses between ancient Sanskrit words and ancient words in classical Western languages such as ancient Greek and Latin. Here are some examples:

Meaning:	Sanskrit	Latin:
‘three’	<i>trayas</i>	<i>tres</i>
‘seven’	<i>sapta</i>	<i>septem</i>
‘nine’	<i>nava</i>	<i>novem</i>
‘snake’	<i>sarpa</i>	<i>serpens</i>
‘king’	<i>raja</i>	<i>regem</i>
‘god’	<i>devas</i>	<i>divus</i> (‘divine’) <sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> This table is based on Mocktar’s (1995) dissertation.

There were other numerous Sanskrit words that were discovered to be alike or related to ancient Greek and Latin terms, for example the Greek word *trias* which is ‘three’ is close to *trayas* and *tres* in Latin as seen in the table above. The Greek word *pentē* ‘five’ is also close to Sanskrit *panca* ‘five’. Jones began methodically recording the similarities, discovering numerous similarities between Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin. In 1786, Jones gave a paper on his discoveries to the Asiatic Society in Calcutta. He stated confidently that Sanskrit had a stronger resemblance to Greek and that its form and resemblance could not have been coincidental. He stated that it was so convincing that no philologist could assess all three languages without thinking that they may have originated from some mutual source, which possibly no longer exists in its original form today.

Jones had in effect uncovered a lost mother tongue, which existed in the *Proto-Indo-European* period – a single ancient, prehistoric language that led to the development of many languages in Europe, India, Russia, and the Middle East. It took almost ninety years of comparative linguistics to find a way to fill in all the holes. What amazed linguists was that Sanskrit had connections to more than just ancient Latin and Greek. Philologists also discovered that Dutch, German, Old Norse, Gothic, Old Slavic, and Old Irish had comparable forms of words with Sanskrit. These connections correlated very well and they also sounded alike to each other either in relations of vowels or consonants or, in some cases, both. Having looked at some of the similarities in words and terms that other scholar have found between Sanskrit and Greek, I decided to see if there were any words that were similar to the soul or were related to it. In my search, the word *atman*-‘breath’ and ‘soul’ in Sanskrit sounded like the Greek ἄσθμα (*asthma* = ‘breath’). Breath in the time of Homer meant life, so could this indicate it was connected with the concept of ‘soul’. Could this have been a possible word that originally had other meanings like the word ψυχή, a word with many meanings, such as ‘breath’, ‘soul’ or ‘spirit’, and that later only retained one of its meanings over time?

Unfortunately, this theory has been met with doubt and criticism, due to the lack of decisive evidence to support it. Over the years, there have been scholars who have tried to prove that Jones was right. One such scholar was Lockwood, whose book on *Indo-European Philology* (1969) looks at the foundations and development of Indo-

European philology. On the other hand, there have been others who have tried, and are still trying to prove or disprove Jones's theory. But then there are some who seem to be on the fence. One of the scholars who support Jones' theory is Benjamin Fortson (2004). Although he has doubts about the evidence, he nevertheless looks into the theory of a common ancestor for the Indo-European languages.

'The ancestor of all the IE languages is called *Proto-Indo-European*, or PIE for short. Since no documents in reconstructed PIE are preserved or can reasonably hope to be found, the structure of this hypothesized language will always be somewhat controversial . . . . The Proto-Europeans lived before the dawn of recorded human history, and it is a testament to the power of the comparative method that we know as much about them as we do.' (Fortson 2004: 13)

The Proto-Indo-European language (PIE) is the reconstructed common ancestor of the Indo-European languages, spoken by the Proto-Indo-Europeans. PIE was the first proposed proto-language to be widely proposed by linguists. Far more work has gone into reconstructing it than any other proto-language, and it is by far the best understood of all proto-languages. During the 19th century, the vast majority of linguistic work was devoted to reconstruction of Proto-Indo-European or of daughter proto-languages.<sup>26</sup>

As mentioned before there is no written evidence of Proto-Indo-European, so all knowledge of the language is derived by reconstruction from later languages using linguistic techniques. West states that there are standards that need to be applied when trying to indicate a historical connection between cultures, and that the parallels used must be specific and detailed.<sup>27</sup> Not all historical connections share common descent from primeval times, most are likely horizontal transmission, due to the fact that the Indo-Europeans did not divide into separate peoples and develop in isolation from each other, but rather most of them communicated with their neighbors. West used the doctrine of *metempsychōsis* between the Greeks and the Indians as an example:

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<sup>26</sup> Fortson 2009: 13-14

<sup>27</sup> West 2007:21

‘The Greek and Indian doctrine must be historically connected, because they correspond point for point. Souls pass into the body of a higher or lower creature according to their conduct in their previous incarnation; this cyclical process continues over thousands of years; pure conduct will eventually lead to the divine state; the eating of meat is to be avoided. Such a system is not reliably attested for any other people. But we cannot regard it as Greco-Aryan heritage, because it is absent from the earliest stratum of Indian and Greek literature . . . It appears as it were from nowhere, in both cultures at about the same time, around the sixth century BCE . . . ’ (West 2007: 22)

In his study of poetry and myth, West (2007) discovered that the Greeks and the Indians share common links in language and culture. Just by looking at poetry and how it was created with regards to patterned verses and metre. One of the clearest relationships between Greek and Vedic is shown in their similar metre systems, ‘the governing principles of prosody and versification are essentially identical in Vedic and early Greek’.<sup>28</sup>

As pointed out by West in *Indo-European Poetry and Myth*, two of three commonest species of verse used in the *Rig-Veda* are matched exactly in Greek verse as shown below:

- i) an eleven-syllable line with a caesura after four or five syllables and cadence, used in four-line stanzas or to conclude a song in twelve-syllable lines. The second, fourth, and eighth syllables tend to be long, and the two syllables following the caesura short.
- ii) A twelve-syllable line, also used in four-line stanzas, resembling the eleven-syllable except that it has an extra short syllable in the cadence, instead of a long syllable. (West 2007: 46)

The similarity between these two languages does not just extend to metre, and systemic parallels in their grammatical foundations. There are similar traits with regards to their words and terminologies used to describe everyday things.

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<sup>28</sup> West 2007:46

## 1.7. Indo-European Religion and Mythology

It is important to establish what we mean by ‘myth’ in the context of this dissertation and how important it is to the Indo-European connection. The best explanation of what mythology is, is that it is a collection of narratives about the gods or supernatural beings used by people or ethnic communities to interpret the meaning of their experiences and their world. Such narratives may describe the creation of the world or the origins of death.<sup>29</sup> What do mythology and religion have to do with the Indo-Europeans? In the case of this dissertation, it is an important instrument in finding the connection between the ancient Greeks and Indians and their shared notions of reincarnation. Mallory states in *In Search of the Indo-Europeans* (1989), that the only convincing explanation as to why half the earth’s population speaks in languages clearly related to each other is due to a common ancestral language, which we now know as Indo-European. ‘This requires the assumption that at some time and some place in Eurasia there existed a population which spoke a language directly ancestral to all of those we now recognize as Indo-European’.<sup>30</sup> This idea is very similar to that of Jones. Whereas Jones focused on the language connection only, Mallory takes this theory one step further by looking at other aspects of the Indo-European connection such as religion and culture. In his chapter on Indo-European religion, he discusses the connection of cultures through ritual behavior and the structure of Proto-Indo-European society. By using linguistic reconstruction, he found similarities between Sanskrit (sky- *dyaus*, father- *pita*) and Greek (sky- *zeu*, father- *pater*) terms used to represent ‘Father Sky’. This one example of the similarities stated by Mallory:

‘Some, for example, could point to the possible linguistic similarity between Kerberos, the guardian dog of the Greek Hades, and the epithet *sabala* ‘spotted, varicolored’ (*kerbero?*), the standard epithet of one of the dogs of Yama, the Indic god of the dead. And even after more force than the comparative method in linguistics will normally allow, all one gains by postulating such a correspondence is the somewhat incongruous image of Proto-Indo-European canine guard of the realm of the dead who answered to the name of ‘Spot’ (Mallory 1989:

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<sup>29</sup> Larson 1974: 1

<sup>30</sup> Mallory 1989: 22

129).

Mallory states that the evidence and links between Indo-European languages and religion are have gaps and differences in them. And that in the languages and the cultures themselves changes have taken place. These differences are due to the constancy of language, which is always changing, due to many individuals over a period of time that are constantly accommodating continual changes in culture.<sup>31</sup>

Another similarity in religion and culture pointed out by Mallory is ‘tripartition’. Mallory states that the tripartite division is seen throughout the mythologies of the Indo-European peoples. The example he uses looks at the division in society in Vedic India into the division of the *Brahminas* ‘priests’, *ksatriyas* ‘warriors’ and *vaisyas* ‘herder-cultivators’. This division is also seen among the Greeks according to Mallory, the division into priests and magistrates, the warriors, and the labourers.<sup>32</sup> Mallory uses Dumézil’s argument that the evidence for tripartition goes far back into Indo-European religion. Dumézil states that the underlying system is one where society is encapsulated in three basic elements or functions.<sup>33</sup>

Benveniste’s chapter on religion, in *Indo-European Language and Society* (1973), discusses the various words shared among the Indo-Europeans. One such word that was used was *libato*. This word among many others was used in the vocabulary of religious institutions. There is a word in Greek *leibō* and its verb *leibein* which means ‘to offer a libation’, ‘to pour’, but this is the general meaning of the word and, in Homer is exclusively linked with wine. Benveniste states that on closer examination it is not as simple.

‘If *leibein* simply meant ‘to pour’, we should have to ask what is its relation to another verb, which also has this same meaning and also has a religious sense: *kheō*, with a corresponding noun *kheō*. We know the importance of this operation, especially in the funeral rite of pouring a *khoe* on the tomb. This verb *g’heu-* is one of the best-established items of the Indo-European vocabulary. It is represented in the Indo-Iranian by Sanskrit *hav-(ho)* ‘to make a liquid offering’,

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<sup>31</sup> Mallory 1989: 22

<sup>32</sup> Mallory 1989: 131

<sup>33</sup> Mallory 1989: 132

a central rite in Vedic ritual.’ (Benveniste 1973: 476)

As Benveniste has pointed out in the above quote, there are a number of linguistic links between religion and language among the Indo-European societies. These similarities in language that cross over into culture and religion are very important in establishing a connection between Greece and India in the Indo-European period. These similarities could have led to two cultures sharing philosophical ideas later in their development.

It is important to note that all religions share and teach knowledge through myths. These myths can be the foundation of ideas and philosophical teachings. In Puhvel’s *Myth and Law among the Indo-Europeans* (1970), there is an article by Donald Ward that looks at the Divine Twins in Indo-European myth. The myth of twins begotten by two different fathers is seen not only in Greek mythology but also in Vedic/Indian mythology. The best examples of this can be seen in the extract below from Ward’s article:

‘Among the mythological traditions of Indo-European peoples, various pairs of twins were reported to have been begotten by separate fathers. According to Pindar (*Nemean Odes*, 10.150), Polydeukes was begotten by Zeus, while Kastor was fathered by Tyndareos. Similarly, the twins Amphion (musician), was fathered by Zeus, whereas Zethos (hunter) was fathered by the mortal Epopeus. Moreover, Zeus begot Herakles, whereas the mortal Amphitryon begot his twin brother, Iphikles. A parallel to the Greek tradition is encountered in Vedic religion. The twins Asvins, like Dioscuri, are both called *Divo Napātā*, ‘Sons of God’ (*Rig-Veda* 1.117.12), yet they are likewise reported to have different fathers. One of the twins is the blessed offspring of the sky, while the other is the son of the mortal Sumakha (*Rig-Veda* 1.181.4).’ (Puhvel 1970: 196-197)

There are a number of myths and concepts that are similar among the Indo-European society. It is not only the ancient Greeks and Hindus that share these similarities. It should be noted that the later development of these two cultures was strongly based on the Indo-European period. Not only were there similar origins for the root of the formation of their languages but also for their culture and religious backgrounds.

Another notion that is shared between the ancient Greek and Hindus is the desire for a reunion with the dead. There are different expressions in the extensive annual festivals at which the souls of the dead, more especially dead ancestors are supposed to return to the world of the living for one day or in some cases a few days usually at the beginning of winter or at its end. During this time on the living realm, they are given food and drinks, when the allotted time is over the dead are told to leave. In India this festival is called *pindapitryajnam*, but it is more commonly known today by Hindus as *Pitru Paksha*. It is a ritual in which food is prepared for the dead and is laid outside by a male family member of the deceased who would pray ‘come you fathers, you friends of Soma, on your deep old paths, give us here good property, wealth.’ Once the ritual is completed he would say ‘go, you fathers, you friends of Soma, on your deep old paths’.<sup>34</sup> This festival or ritual usually lasts fifteen days, the dates for this festival change according to the lunar calendar but usually at the beginning of winter in the northern hemisphere and the end of winter in the southern hemisphere. This festival is similar to a festival held at Athens called *Chytio*, which occupies the third day of the *Anthestēria*<sup>35</sup> at the end of winter. At its conclusion the ghost were expelled with θύραζε Κῆρες οὐκετ’ Ἀνθεστρήια ‘out with you, spirits of death, the Anthesteria is over’.<sup>36</sup>

### **1.8. Funeral Rites and the soul**

The concepts of the immortality of the soul and reincarnation are connected with the practice of funeral rites. For example, it is believed by the Hindus that the burial of the body sets into motion the journey of the soul to the various realms and its subsequent rebirth. For some of the ancient Greeks and the Hindus certain practices had to be carried out when a person dies. Their family or whoever was responsible for taking care of the body had to carry out important rites to ensure that the soul of the deceased would rest in peace. This is the same for both cultures; if the dead are not laid to rest in the proper manner the dead will remain in turmoil.

In *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul* Bremmer states that the connection between the lack of burial and the refusal of admittance into Hades was a contributing

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<sup>34</sup> West 2007: 394

<sup>35</sup> An Athenian festival held in the honour of the god Dionysus.

<sup>36</sup> West 2007: 394

factor to the ancient Greek fear of death at sea, and that throwing bodies of criminals and enemies of the state into the sea denied those souls admittance into Hades and the after-life. Thus they were punished for eternity.<sup>37</sup> Bremmer also states that ‘in the Archaic period a funeral was not simply the burial or cremation of the body; there were a series of rites that were thought to aid the dead soul in its passage from the world of the living to the world of the dead’.<sup>38</sup> He bases his claim on the evidence of Homer’s *Iliad*.

The burial practices of some of the ancient Greeks were as follows: the laying out of the body (*prothesis*), its conveyance to the place of cremation or burial (*ekphora*), and the correct disposition and treatment of the deceased, with regards to the cremation or burial of the remains. Prayers were offered to the chthonic deities so that the soul would be received kindly in the realm of the dead which is the Underworld also known to as the realm of the god of death Hades.<sup>39</sup>

The Hindus also considered funeral practices to be very important. After the death, the relatives of the deceased prepare the body for cremation and undertake a procession to the cremation site. There, the closest male relative of the deceased, usually the eldest son, administers the final rites and lights the funeral pyre. After a cremation, ashes and fragments of bone are collected and then are scattered into a holy river. One special feature of the Hindu ritual is the making of rice balls (*pindas*) that are offered to the spirit of the dead person. In part, these ceremonies are undertaken in honour of the deceased, but they also pacify the soul so that it will not stay in this world as a spirit but will pass through the realm of *Yama*, the god of death.<sup>40</sup> The main function of funeral rites is to facilitate the transition of the soul from the world of the living, to the world of the dead, which lies between the past and future lives of the soul. This is believed by some of the ancient Greeks as well as the Hindus.

## **1.9. The Oral Tradition**

The oral tradition plays a big part in how societies work and survive. It helps pass down traditions and customs to future generations. This is important for if it were not for the oral tradition we would not have the rich history we have today. It is important

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<sup>37</sup> Bremmer 1983: 90

<sup>38</sup> Bremmer 1987: 89

<sup>39</sup> Segal 2004: 209

<sup>40</sup> Lipner 2010:44

to note that the oral tradition led to the development of language thus leading to further developments in society. The best way to move forward would be to first explain what the oral tradition is and why it is important. The next step would be to look at how it applies to the ancient Greeks and the Indians.

The simplest definition of the oral tradition is the spreading or passing on of information by word of mouth. Original works were once shared with large audiences only by recitation, singing, chanting and memory rather than in the written form. Many folk tales, fables, proverbs, and songs and religious traditions were first the property of common people who repeated or sang them, altering them by accident or on purpose, and taught them to the next generation who would in turn pass on the information to the subsequent generations. One could say that an oral tradition is usually the product of an illiterate or semi-literate society. This is the earliest of all forms of poetry since it preceded written poetry and is still alive in many parts of the world. The oral tradition made it possible for many societies to transmit knowledge over many years without a writing system. It is also different from the study of orality, which can be described as a way of thinking in societies where the majority of the populace are unacquainted with the tools of literacy, particularly writing.

The founders of the study of oral tradition are Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord. It is due to them that we owe the multi-faceted subject that is now known as the oral tradition. Thanks to their inspired analysis of Homeric verse and later comparative fieldwork with the South Slavic oral traditions, the Oral-Formulaic Theory emerged. Parry and Lord were themselves inheritors of much of what was later combined to form the theory, although it was not until Parry integrated these components into a coherent system that the theory gained a measure of acceptance. Oral-Formulaic Theory was constructed after a long history of Homeric studies as well as from ethnographic fieldwork with oral traditions. There have been many scholars who have built on the theories of others. Walter Ong's interest in the cultural character of oral societies looked past the verbal, and paid attention to the action of the composer. His work holds importance and helped to shape the later works of Foley.

Foley (1988) traces the development of the scholarship that would eventually take shape as the Parry-Lord Theory. To have a proper scope, I will briefly outline the Parry-Lord Theory and other scholars who have explored the oral tradition.

‘Once they both exist, orality and literacy are never independent of each

other. There are traces of oral composition in written and printed texts, and written structures appear constantly in oral speech. The detection of oral influence in written texts and of written forms in oral texts require a precise sense and of what constitutes “the oral” and “the written”. Making the distinction and applying it to special cases reveals cultural trends previously unnoticed.’ (Swiderski 1988: 122)

The key idea of the Parry-Lord theory is that poets have a store of formulas, that is ‘. . . a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea’<sup>41</sup> and that by linking these in conventionalized ways, they can rapidly compose verses. For example in Homeric verse, phrases like οἴνοπα πόντον ‘wine-dark sea’ there resides a certain musical repetition that fits, in a linked way, into the six-footed Greek dactylic hexameter.

In Parry's view, formulas were not individual and idiosyncratic devices of particular artists, but the shared inheritance of a tradition of singers. They were easily remembered, making it possible for the singer to execute an improvisational composition-in-performance. This idea was met with immediate resistance. The Parry-Lord theory proposed that the formula is a direct expression of a traditional theme, thus the formula is not simply a repeated phrase, which is repeated for its metrical effectiveness, but rather it is the repetition of a traditional theme.

‘. . . The formulas in any poetry are due, as far as their ideas go, to the theme, their rhythm is fixed by the verse-form, but their art is that of the poets who made them and of the poets who keep them.’ (Parry 1971: 272)

Foley is another scholar who has made a big contribution to the study of oral tradition. He wrote a string of papers based on his personal research on South Slavic oral genres, highlighting the subtleties of entertainers and spectators. Foley essentially combined the oral tradition as an academic field when he published *Oral-Formulaic Theory and Research* in 1985. In this book, he gives a summary of the discoveries researchers made in assessing oral tradition, and this included a list of all related scholarly articles

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<sup>41</sup> Parry 1971: 272

involving the theory of Oral-Formulaic Composition. Foley advanced oral theory further than the rather mechanical concepts presented in previous forms of Oral-Formulaic Theory, by taking notice of cultural characters of oral societies past the verbal, by giving attention to the work of the composer / poet and by defining how oral traditions shows significance.

The oral tradition played a big role in the ancient world. Some of the greatest stories ever told were passed down orally, such as Homer's epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In 1962, Geoffrey Kirk published *The Songs of Homer*, in which he argued that the Homeric epics were performed under a structure that provided the reciter with additional liberty to choose verses and passages to get to the same conclusion rather than merely a reproduction of the original poem. Soon afterwards, Eric Havelock published *Preface to Plato* which transformed how academics viewed the Homeric epics and later literature by debating not only that it was the creation of an oral tradition, but also that the oral-formulas enclosed in them helped the ancient Greeks to preserve cultural information through many different generations.

This pre-Platonic or Homeric state of mind was organized in rhythmic units of meaning, which linked the episodes, which created a greater whole. This argument is built upon the work of Parry and Lord, especially their understanding of the composition of larger epic poems from the smaller ones, semi-independent units of formula and theme. It seems that this shift from oral to written allowed for the birth of Platonic philosophy and the subsequent development of Western civilization as a whole.

The concepts of orality and literacy, which have been briefly discussed above with regards to ancient Greek culture can also be applied to the Indian culture. Such evidence of oral transmission can be seen in the *Bhagavad-Gita*. It must be noted that the *Bhagavad-Gita* is an important part of the *Mahabhārata*, which as an epic is full of themes, which are similar to those of ancient Greece. It has been suggested that there was interaction between India and Greece before the days of Alexander the Great, and that it was indirect by nature but Greece had no extensive direct communication with India. It is consequently curious that these two cultures show many points of resemblance in the evolution of their culture from oral to literate.

## **1.10. Conclusion**

This chapter has looked at ideas about reincarnation from other parts of the world. It has also demonstrated how important the Indo-European connection was, and how it led to the development of both language and culture independently in Greece and India. It has also looked at Jones' theory on the origins of language and the discovery of similar characteristics in Greek and Sanskrit. It then moved on to examine myth and religion in relation to Indo-Europeans and the development of culture. Having looked at Indo-Europeans, the section moved on to concepts of orality and literacy. Furthermore, this chapter has also introduced the main questions that this dissertation intends to answer. It has explained the terminology for this dissertation as well as the importance of it. It has additionally emphasized the importance of funerals and burials as implicit testimony to belief in the soul's continued journey after death in India and Greece. The chapter then looked at the possibility of an Indo-European connection between Greeks and Indians in respect of reincarnation as well as the importance of the oral tradition, and how it could have been the source and link between the ancient Greeks and Indians. The aim from this point on is to look at the different views of the soul and ideas about the possible reincarnation of the soul by the ancient Greeks and the Indians. To do this it will look at ancient texts from both sides as well as modern scholarship related to this topic that has been published over the years.

A review of relevant literature follows, looking at what other scholars have discovered about the theory of reincarnation in the ancient Greek world and if it was influenced by other civilizations such as the Indians. It will then look at the ancient Greek view of the soul and will try to explain how over the years the concept of the soul and its after-life, when it departs from the body, changed over time. The dissertation will mainly be looking at Plato's view of the soul and reincarnation but it will however also look at other Greek philosophers and their ideas of the soul and reincarnation. Having discussed the ancient Greek view of the soul, the dissertation will then move on to the Hindu idea of the soul and their beliefs about reincarnation. This dissertation will then conclude by looking at the similarities and differences between the ancient Greeks and Indians in respect of reincarnation.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

My aim in this literature review is to provide an overview of existing research into the concept of reincarnation in Indian and ancient Greek thought. Over the years there have been many studies examining the connection between India and Greece. Not all of them, however, focus solely on the idea of reincarnation in these two cultures. I will discuss the work of scholars going back to Rawlinson (1916) and Banerjee (1920), because these authors have also looked at the possible transmission of culture between India and Greece in the Classical and the Hellenistic periods, but the emphasis in this literature review will fall mainly on two authors, namely Jean Sedlar (1980) and Richard Seaford (unpublished paper 2012).

Many of these authors have explored various other aspects of life in ancient India and Greece such as architecture, astronomy, mathematics, literature, religion and philosophy. However I will only be focusing on the research they have done which refers to reincarnation and the treatment of the soul after death. I will also look briefly at other articles.<sup>42</sup> Although some of these are dated, they do look at reincarnation in the ancient Greek world and I feel that they should be considered in order to gain a better understanding of what other scholars have learnt about other aspects of reincarnation in the ancient Greek world.

Rawlinson (1916) wrote briefly on the *metempsychōsis* of the soul and the possible connection between India and Greece. He mentions Orphism and Pythagoras, and the supposed connection between Pythagoras and India. Rawlinson states that these ideas, though similar, developed parallel to each other and he maintains that there was not, and could not have been, any interaction between the Indians and the ancient Greeks in the Classical period. Rawlinson thinks that the idea came through Thrace and indirectly from India. He says that if there were any interaction during the Classical period it would not have been on the level where they would have shared philosophical ideas. It was only in the time of Alexander the Great that any proper interaction took place.

Banerjee wrote, very briefly on the *metempsychōsis* of the soul in his *Hellenism in Ancient India* (1920). In this short passage he talks about Pythagoras and his

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<sup>42</sup> I will not be looking at papers or articles written in languages other than English in this dissertation. I will, however, be using some ancient Greek texts with translations in this dissertation as I have two years of knowledge in ancient Greek at university level. However, I will only be using translations of the Sanskrit texts, though I do have some high school level knowledge of the language.

supposed connection to India through the Egyptians, this account was supported by his reference to Herodotus:

‘Pythagorean philosophy had reference solely to the doctrine of the metempsychosis – of which Herodotus gave it as his opinion that it originally came from Egypt. Herodotus proceeds on the supposition that the Egyptians were the first who taught of the soul's immortality. . . . Fr. Schlegel . . . says. . . “in this way we find in the Pythagorean doctrine, the notion of the metempsychosis, with all its oriental accessories, affording certain proof that it is not of Greek origin.” Now, assuredly no one of those who make the Greeks receive everything from the East will go the length of maintaining that the moral sentiment too was transplanted from the former to the latter. Besides Fr. Schlegel is not bold enough to bring Pythagoras himself into India, but holds on the other hand that the metempsychosis came to Greece from India by way of Egypt.’ (Banerjee 1920: 221)

The above extract puts forward another theory of how the doctrine of reincarnation came to the ancient Greeks – that is it was related to the Greeks by the Egyptians, who in turn got the idea from India. This theory of Egypt being the link between Greece and India is not very plausible, there may have been some trade between the three civilizations, but I don't believe that it was frequent enough for the exchange of philosophic ideas. Banerjee also does not think that this interchange was very likely.

Rich (1957) states in ‘Reincarnation in Plotinus’ (1957) that there is a tendency among writer on Plotinus (204-270 A.D) to minimize the importance of the doctrine of reincarnation that appears in the *Enneads*. This is due to the tone in which Plotinus explains the doctrine. Rich claims that the tone is playful with references to similar vocabulary used by Plato in his *Phaedo*. Other writers, according to Rich, claim that Plotinus himself did not fully believe in reincarnation and that he was simply adopting the ideas of Plato. Rich on the other hand believes that Plotinus did believe in reincarnation and that it is evident in his writings. Plotinus believed that the soul was incapable of sin and that it was the body that caused the sin that tainted the soul, which resulted in its reincarnation:

‘Perhaps the most cogent reason for assuming that Plotinus took the doctrine seriously is the fact that he is at such pains to explain away its apparent incompatibility with one of his own fundamental tenets, namely that the soul considered in itself is incapable of sin.’ (Rich 1957: 233)

Rich (1957) furthermore states that if Plotinus did not believe in a literal transmigration his writings on the soul would have been pointless. Therefore, he concludes that though Plotinus uses Plato’s ideas and may sometimes use his vocabulary he did in fact believe in reincarnation and had his own ideas of the soul.<sup>43</sup>

Bluck (1958) investigated in his article ‘The *Phaedrus* and Reincarnation: the myth of the Winged Soul’ (1958) the myth about the soul and the ten thousand year cycle (three thousand for those who had chosen a philosophic life three times over) that it undergoes to reach the celestial region. One of the questions he asks in his paper is, once the souls reach the celestial region do they ever return? He goes on to answer this question by saying that the souls do not stay winged forever. They do return, for it is essential to Plato’s doctrine of caring for the soul that a journey to the celestial region after a ten thousand year cycle should not imply immunity from any further reincarnation, and that the ‘falls’ described in the myth are not meant to be ‘original’ falls. Bluck (1958) states that:

‘A ten thousand year cycle does not, for Plato, necessarily constitute the whole period of a soul’s wanderings, and that the ‘falls’ described in the *Phaedrus* are not meant to be original ‘falls’. What that contention explains, I submit, is how Plato could suggest that the soul will inevitably go to the celestial region at the end of a ten thousand year cycle, while at the same time insisting on the necessity of a philosophic virtue for the attainment of eternal bliss.’ (Bluck: 1958, 164)

Bluck (1958) goes on to look at other myths by Plato that concern the soul and its possible reincarnation. He looks at the *Phaedo* in which Plato treats incarnation as a sort of punishment for the soul’s past sinful deeds. He also looks at the *Timaeus*, and

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<sup>43</sup> Though Plotinus has his own ideas of reincarnation and goes on to explain them, they will not be discussed in this thesis, due to the late time frame in which he lived and wrote.

the mythical description of the making of the human souls, as well as the idea of original sin contained in the legend of the origin of mankind from the Titans. Bluck concludes his paper by saying that the ten thousand year cycle does not mean that the soul will not return but that it may and does return after its ten thousand year journey because the ‘falls’ described in the *Phaedrus* are due to bad training of the different parts of the soul. Therefore, the soul will continue on the path of reincarnation until it can gain complete control of all parts of its soul.

Comito in ‘Exile and Return in the Greek Romances’ (1975) looks at ideas about the reincarnation of the soul in the Greek romances. The paper focuses mainly on the romances and their influence through the ages up to Shakespeare. Comito (1975) does very briefly look at the soul and the attachments the soul makes with another soul, in other words its mate or soul mate. He also looks at the soul’s ability to recognize one’s soul mate on earth as if they had known each other before, perhaps in other lives. Comito states in his paper while looking at a passage by Heliodorus (3.5.4) where the couple in question looks at each other as if they or their souls recognized each other from some other life.<sup>44</sup> This is very interesting as the mutual recognition of the couple’s souls implies some form of awareness of reincarnation. However, in this dissertation I will be focussing mainly on philosophical theories about the soul and its possible reincarnation.

### **2.1. Sedlar’s *India and the Greek World* (1980)**

In this book, Sedlar (1980) discusses the theory of reincarnation under the chapter entitled ‘Soul Wandering’. In this chapter, Sedlar states that the idea that the spirit or the souls of the deceased individuals could reside within animals or plants. This idea according to Sedlar is far-reaching amongst both the ancient and current peoples across many parts of the world. The idea that the life-force or soul of a person moves from one life to another life, residing in a changed material form in each life, is not as popular.<sup>45</sup> Sedlar refers to this concept as *metempsychōsis* or transmigration of souls, which are other terms used in the place of reincarnation. Sedlar (1980) states that this concept is only found in the ancient world of India and Greece in an established form i.e. that it had laws/rules and structures that it followed.

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<sup>44</sup> Hilton (1998: *ad loc.*) discusses this passage in Heliodorus in detail in his 1998 thesis *A Commentary on Book 3 and 4 of Heliodorus’ Aethiopia*.

<sup>45</sup> Sedlar 1980: 20

*Metempsychōsis* or reincarnation emerges in its basic form in the *Upanishads* (6<sup>th</sup> century BCE), and consecutively became combined into the moral instruction of all the main Indian belief structures right up to today.<sup>46</sup> Sedlar states that even though the concept is immensely more important in India than it was in Greece it was nevertheless recognized as early as the a 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, and performed an important part in Orphism and Pythagorean thought.<sup>47</sup>

Sedlar goes on to say that Plato in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE was already referring to it as ‘an ancient tradition’. The first recognized reference of *metempsychōsis* in India in any existing source, or form occurs in a verse of the *Upanishads*, which probably dates from the 7<sup>th</sup> or the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, however a prior mention of *metempsychōsis* is seen in the *Rig Veda*. The expansion of this concept in India is seemingly linked with the growth of monistic inclinations in religions. In the period that produced the ritualistic Brahmin literature moved into that of the more philosophical *Upanishads*, and then it moved to the spiritual *Bhagavad-Gita*. There are many gods and goddess in the older Vedic chants all of which were progressively brought together into a solitary structure, with each being recognized with one another, until finally they were all reflection of the manifestation of *Brahmin*-the world soul or essence.<sup>48</sup> This is how every mortal being came to be connected through the idea of the wandering soul or the reincarnation of souls. Sedlar further states that in the limited examples where reincarnation is stated in the *Upanishads* it is not related to any concept of ethics. The scripts are rather clear on the point that soul of an individual is liberated from additional reincarnations only with spiritual enlightenment, not with ‘actions’ or deeds of any kind.

In Greece and India, reincarnation and its characteristics in its development was assertively a moral principle. The current status of all living beings – whether human or non-human, male or female, upper or lower caste, content or unhappy – was believed to be a direct outcome of the kind of behavior they had committed in their past earthly lives. There are certain mystery cults in Greece that seemingly believed the soul would only become pure after a series of successive births or reincarnations. In India, the theory of reincarnation was thought to be a moral principle by many different

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<sup>46</sup> Sedlar 1980: 20

<sup>47</sup> Sedlar 1980: 20

<sup>48</sup> Sedlar 1980: 20

groups of philosophers, and by the practitioners of *Yoga* because it was linked to *karma*.<sup>49</sup>

Sedlar's view on *karma* is that it was a formulation in ethical *metempsychōsis* / reincarnation that served to support traditional ideals. It is in this perspective that *karma* was suppose to function as some kind of natural law, which did not require any personalized forms of deities. Jainism<sup>50</sup> was the earliest Indian religion in which *karma* was known to have had a central place within the religion. The Jain doctrine according to Sedlar,

‘ . . . teaches that each living creature possesses a material soul which is originally pure and colorless, but through the activities of life becomes contaminated by *karmic* matter. Every act committed by man or beast is believed to produce *karmic* coloring on the soul – light colors for virtuous deeds, medium tones for minor offenses, with the darkest shades being reserved for serious transgressions. Since dark-colored stains are supposed to weigh down the soul, while lighter ones allow it to rise, the light-colored souls will be reborn correspondingly as gods or humans, the darker ones as animals or plants, or as inhabitants of Hell.’ (Sedlar 1980: 23)

Sedlar then goes on to explain the Buddhist metaphysical theory and how it changed over time. The Buddhist concept early on declared all earthly phenomena to be in a state of permanent change, and denied the existence of any eternal being whatsoever. According to the Buddhist concept of soul is in itself contradictory – the view, which should denied the notion of *karma*, because there is no soul or subtle physical form to deliver stability from this life in to the next. However, we can only judge from the existing texts, the initial Buddhists had not been overly bothered by this difficulty. Only several centuries later a branch of Buddhism attempted to reunite the concept of *karma* and universal change. This branch of Buddhism defends *karma* as some kind of spiritual energy, not a physical attachment to the soul. *Karma* is transmitted from one persons' life to its next life, through the sequence of 'dependent origination' that

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<sup>49</sup> Sedlar 1980: 21

<sup>50</sup> Jainism like Buddhism developed out of Hinduism.

controls the mechanisms of the universe / cosmos.<sup>51</sup> This variant of reincarnation was explained and taught by the *Sankhya*<sup>52</sup> philosophy, many groups of which were known to have thrived in India in the first half-millennium A.D. *Sankhya* in some form or another according to Sedlar may have actually been older than even Buddhism:

‘...though as a dualist and atheist system the earliest known exposition of it the *Sankhya-karika*<sup>53</sup> dates only from about the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Like Jainism, *Sankhya* assumes the existence of a plurality of souls but it differs by its assertion that the soul is a purely spiritual entity, incapable of being affected by material qualities such as color. In spite of this, the *Sankhya* notion of *karma* remains materialistic.’ (Sedlar 1980: 24).

Having examined the Indian (Hindu) perspective, Sedlar then moves on to the Greek idea of *metempsychōsis* / reincarnation. *Metempsychōsis* is not clearly verified by any Greek sources prior to Plato, though its presence at an earlier date was probably coincidental incidental. The concept is linked to Orphism; we hear of ‘Orphic’ holy men who roamed about looking for supporters and lead religious rituals, nevertheless it is uncertain as to what their teaching were exactly. The Orphics were vegetarians; they rejected animal sacrifices and used only bloodless offerings at their rituals, probably on the belief human souls could be transferred into non-humans (animals and plants).<sup>54</sup> Orphic rituals, according to Sedlar, were intended to cleanse the offender of guilt, to appease the wrath of the deities, to treat illness, and to smooth the soul's journey into the next realm after death. Most sources agree on the significance and importance the Orphics devoted to the written word. Sedlar says that Plato may have been referring to the Orphics, when he mention the people who associate the body as a prison or tomb of the soul, which is experiencing chastisement for some reason. The Orphics claimed that the soul is immortal/undying and will be reincarnated, and that all human beings on earth must lead righteous lives. Sedlar stated that the origins of Orphism were obscured in myth. Orpheus was seen in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, as a person both detached

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<sup>51</sup> Sedlar 1980: 24

<sup>52</sup> *Sankhya* philosophy comes from one of the six schools of Hindu philosophy. It is a form of dualistic realism as it combines the realistic (*sankhya*) with the idealistic (*vandanta*).

<sup>53</sup> A text used in *Sankhya* philosophy.

<sup>54</sup> Sedlar 1980: 24

in time and one whose origin is difficult to place. He lived in Thrace. Supposedly, Orpheus was a great classical poet who was an equivalent to Homer. Numerous verses spread in his name. However, sceptics disagreed on his compositions.<sup>55</sup>

‘According to legend Orpheus had been a gentle lyre-player who could charm the most fearsome beasts by his music, and had initiated the mystic ceremonies conducted in his name. Allegedly, he had once visited the underworld seeking the soul of his dead wife, Eurydice, and afterward returned to earth’ (Sedlar 1980: 25)

As stated by Sedlar Orphism continued as an ambiguous kind of religious underground following in Greece, which was hard to connect with any specific persons or dates. Its most well known concept/theory – i.e., *metempsychōsis* – was indeed imparted by numerous people in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.<sup>56</sup>

Pythagoras (6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) explained the wandering soul as well. He also supposedly could recall four of his own former lives. Pythagoras believed in a spiritual link between all forms of life, stating that even his own soul was regularly passing into plants and animals. He also claimed to have visited Hades.<sup>57</sup> Sedlar claims that Pythagoras is connected to Orpheus in numerous classical sources, which agree on retaining the two side by side. His supporters shared many characteristics of the Orphic way of life, particularly the omission of eating flesh and the use of mystical rituals to cleanse the soul. Music also established an additional connection between the two; Orpheus' music allegedly could calm even the three-headed guard dog of Hades, whereas Pythagoras apparently had discovered a mathematical relation of the notes on the musical scale.<sup>58</sup> The variances concerning Orphics and Pythagoreans according to Sedlar apparently fall in the realm of cult and social rank, rather than the concept itself.

‘Pythagoreans were aristocratic, Orphics usually not; Pythagoreans honored Apollo, the Orphics, Dionysus. Finally, Orphic doctrine remained on a mythological plane, interpreting the universe in terms of personalized deities and procreation while the Pythagoreans developed in the direction

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<sup>55</sup> Sedlar 1980: 25

<sup>56</sup> Sedlar 1980: 25

<sup>57</sup> Sedlar 1980: 28

<sup>58</sup> Sedlar 1980: 28

of rationalism. They became philosophers and mathematicians; their number-philosophy is an important source for Plato's theory of Ideas' (Sedlar 1980: 28).

Sedlar then moves on to Plato and his theory of *metempsychōsis*. Plato relates the myth of Er, a hero who died in battle; his soul passed into the underworld where he saw the judgments of souls and the allotment of future lives. After twelve days, his soul returned to earth to account what it had seen while Er's body still rested on his funeral pyre. There are other comparable myths, which were recorded in classic Greek literature. While they are not uncharacteristic of Greek religion in a whole, they are not wholly unusual. Sedlar states that:

‘Such stories of soul wandering lead by a rather small conceptual step to a full-fledged doctrine of ethical metempsychosis. A soul that can leave its body and travel about at will; can rationally be expected to choose its own situation. Thus in Plato's myth, Er observes how Fate directs the souls in the mysterious Beyond to select their own future lives. Various patterns of lives are laid out on the ground: human as well as animal ones. The soul makes its choice; henceforth it must cleave by necessity to the life it has selected. Though legendary in form, this is clearly a doctrine of ethical metempsychosis’ (Sedlar 1980: 29).

Sedlar notes that this view presumably represents an older mythological and philosophical tradition. Plato, apart from the myth of Er, mentions *metempsychōsis* / reincarnation in several of his dialogues. In his works, he states that there are ‘some people’ who think that the body is a prison or tomb for the soul. It is in the *Phaedo*, where he defines *metempsychōsis*, but not as if he thought of it himself, but rather as a moral optimism or virtuous desideratum.<sup>59</sup> Plato put forth concepts in the form of myths, or speculations, while saying at the same time that he finds no ethical opposition to it. Sedlar claims that surely the concept synchronizes well with Plato's dualistic concept of the universe, with regard to his partition of the human being into mortal the body and the immortal soul, and his partition of the universe into the realm of the

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<sup>59</sup> Sedlar 1980: 29

senses and the realm of 'Ideas'. This is much like the Jains from India. Plato defines malevolence as a corporal mass or addition upon the immortal soul. The soul, which is untainted from departure of the body, draws no physical taint, he says, while the physical body is troublesome, bulky, and earthly. Such souls are weighed down by this and are pulled back into the visible realm. Moreover, the corporeal is the product of sensual desire.<sup>60</sup> An outlook, which is similar to that of the Indian concept that purity needs the pacifying of bodily desires.<sup>61</sup> Sedlar says that,

'Plato's concept of metempsychosis agrees with the Indian doctrine in its inclusion of all living beings, not merely human ones. Thus, his thought that men who had indulged in gluttony, violence and drunkenness might pass into the bodies of donkeys. Persons who had chosen injustice, tyranny and robbery could become wolves and hawks, while those who had chosen moderation and justice might become social animals like bees or wasps, or even human beings once more.' (Sedlar 1980: 30).

Sedlar states that though widely discussed, the notion of *metempsychōsis* offered difficulties for the classical Greeks, as they would have felt that the concept was too strange. Therefore, they debated its potential place of origins. However, Pythagoras' supposed connection with India is doubtful. The surviving reports that he had visited India remain unconfirmed by any dependable proof.<sup>62</sup> It is only in the late Hellenistic period that the ancient Greeks were made aware of the Indian *Brahmins* who believed in reincarnation / *metempsychōsis*, so their deduction was that Pythagoras had acquired his notions of reincarnation from India. 'The intellectual fashion of the day undoubtedly played a role here; it was common in the Hellenistic period to attribute Greek ideas to remote and exotic sources'.<sup>63</sup> The statement that Pythagoras in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE went to India is improbable in the extreme. It would be probably safe in attributing this curious notion of transmission of culture to the Hellenistic period but absolutely not the Classical period of Greece.<sup>64</sup> Another possible source for the

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<sup>60</sup> Website 5 accessed 5/12/2013.

<sup>61</sup> Sedlar 1980: 30

<sup>62</sup> Sedlar 1980: 31

<sup>63</sup> Sedlar 1980: 31

<sup>64</sup> Sedlar 1980: 31

*metempsychōsis*-idea put forward by Sedlar was Thrace, which was the wild region north of the Aegean, which was occupied by a number of different tribes. There are many suggestions that point to Thrace with connections to *metempsychōsis* / reincarnation, Pythagoras was also linked with Thrace. However, according to Sedlar, the source of the idea of *metempsychōsis* is still a much-debated subject. The fragmented sources from the pre-classical period may be hard to place definitively.

## **2.2. Richard Seaford (2012)**

Seaford's 2012 unpublished seminar paper on 'Reincarnation in ancient India and ancient Greece: a historical perspective',<sup>65</sup> contains five subtopics: the first is an overview of the relationship between India and Greece, the second the transformation of lineage reincarnation, the third money, cosmos, and soul, the fourth *karma*, and the fifth, why the Greeks did not invent the idea of *karma*.

Seaford begins his paper by stating that there is an enormous group of cultures around the world in which the system of reincarnation exists. He goes on to explain the different types of reincarnation. The first system of reincarnation focuses on the deceased and the inheritance of the name within the family or clan. The individual is born with his name and his social functions. The number of individuals, names, souls, and roles are limited within the clan, and the line of the clan is merely a collection of rebirths and deaths of individuals who are always the same. He calls this type of reincarnation 'lineage reincarnation'. Seaford then explains that other kinds of reincarnation (non-lineage reincarnation) are found only in India and in ancient Greece. Seaford notes that in these cultures reincarnation has three features that make it different from lineage reincarnation. These features are as follows:

‘Firstly, it is ethicized (determined by the behaviour of the individual). Secondly, it is indiscriminate: reincarnation is not necessarily into the same kinship group, gender, or location. Thirdly, it takes the form of a painful cycle, from which permanent escape is desirable. I will call this ‘ethicised indiscriminate reincarnation’ (Seaford 2012: 2)

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<sup>65</sup> I am very grateful to Professor Seaford for allowing me to read his article prior to publication.

One of the questions Seaford tries to answer is how we can explain the similarity of this doctrine that is found in both India and Greece but nowhere else. Before answering the question, he notes that it is not the only unusual belief shared by these two cultures at the same period. For instance, the doctrine of substrate monism that everything that exists is simply a form of a single substance is found in both in the *Upanishads* which is generally dated to the seventh or sixth century BCE and in Pre-Socratic philosophy of the sixth century BCE. Considering the similarities, one would come to think that there could have been some influence between the two cultures, whether from India on Greece or from Greece on India. There are not any reliable reports of there being any Greeks beyond the Indus, or Indians in Greece, before Alexander crossed the Indus in 326 BCE. It is significant that even at the end of the fifth century India was largely unknown even by Greeks who published on the subject. We can conclude that the assertions that have been made are contrary. The possibility of serious ideas passing between India and Greece before the fourth century BCE was small, and may well have remained small until Alexander crossed the Indus. Seaford proposes therefore that the similarities in doctrines between India and Greece in the sixth and fifth centuries are a result not of influence but of parallel autonomous development.<sup>66</sup>

Seaford then moves on to lineage reincarnation, which happens to be found all over the world even in regions unconnected with each other. Using Obeyesekere's hypothesis, Seaford suggests that there is perhaps a trace of lineage reincarnation in the ancient Greek practice, which was still followed by some, of naming sons after their grandparents, who were said in antiquity to be winds, to whom prayer and sacrifice were offered 'for the birth of children', and whose names seem to refer to forefathers three generations back. Thus they may derive from ancestors' souls carried on the wind and so perhaps reincarnated, for Aristotle attests the Orphic belief that soul is carried on the wind and breathed in. Seaford states that perhaps in Greece lineage reincarnation was a factor in the development of ethicised indiscriminate reincarnation.<sup>67</sup>

Seaford proposes that commercialization and monetization promoted the individualism that favoured the development of the idea of ethicised indiscriminate reincarnation. He suggests, further that monetization provided not only a stimulus for ethicised indiscriminate reincarnation but also a cosmic model for it. In lineage

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<sup>66</sup> Seaford 2012: 2-3

<sup>67</sup> Seaford 2012: 2-3

reincarnation, the affinity of the individual to other members of his lineage is envisaged as corporeal.<sup>68</sup> Seaford claims that in ethical indiscriminate reincarnation, the person can be reborn into any person, any animal, or even a plant. There is in principle no corporeal link or resemblance between the person and the foreign body into which he/she is reincarnated. In moving from one body to another he/she is unlikely to be imagined as bringing anything corporeal with him/her, more likely to be imagined as incorporeal or abstract, a soul in contrast to a body.<sup>69</sup>

Seaford makes the suggestion that money was not only a cause of ethical indiscriminate reincarnation but also a model for it. He attempts to demonstrate that this was true for Greece, but not for India. Souls, which are in a sense composed of fire, are engaged in a cycle of transformations into other cosmic elements, which is also a process of death and rebirth. In this way, the concept of the cyclical passage of the soul is influenced by the cyclical exchange of money. It is accordingly significant that the loss of the soul at death is in many Greek texts of this period imagined as an economic transaction. He also shows how the Greeks acquire the idea of an invisible unitary site of individual consciousness (or soul) that unites various sensations, thought and emotions, and is a source of action. A model for this new idea of the unitary invisible soul is provided by the invisible monetary value that seems to unite various goods and is a source of action. Money tends to isolate the individual, and provides a model for the individual consciousness.<sup>70</sup> Each individual soul, as it passes through the cycle, is immortal in the sense that it is composed of fire, which is transformed into other elements without ever being destroyed. This is not reincarnation but related to it, and is roughly contemporary with the earliest Greek evidence that we do have for reincarnation, which is also influenced by the universal power of the cycle of monetized exchange.<sup>71</sup>

In the next section of his paper, Seaford gives his own explanation of the nature of *karma*, which is important to various Indian schools of thought. The basic meaning of Sanskrit *karma* is 'action'. In its earliest occurrences *karma* referred to actions that follow ritual prescriptions. Seaford states that there was a transformation of the meaning of what we call *karma*, which followed on social changes – notably commercialization, urbanization and monetization, which produced new spheres of social power

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<sup>68</sup> Seaford 2012: 9

<sup>69</sup> Seaford 2012: 10

<sup>70</sup> Seaford 2012: 11

<sup>71</sup> Seaford 2012: 12

and prosperity that did not depend on the ancient sacrificial rituals of Brahminism. In other words, Seaford states that power and prosperity came to depend less on ritual and more on commerce, with the result that the social significance traditionally denoted by *karma* was no longer dominated by ritual.<sup>72</sup> Seaford claims that *karma* is both objective and subjective; it seems both concrete and abstract. It is entity, process, power, and principle. This wide range of variation is not merely a result of variations in the idea over space and time. There is a complex correlation between *karma* and money, which he then attempts to explain. Money is valuable only in payment or exchange, but is possessed only by being withheld from payment and exchange. It is money by virtue of being transformed into all goods, but also by virtue of maintaining its identity. Both these opposed features of money seem essential to it. It seems therefore to be both a process or flow and an entity.<sup>73</sup> Seaford goes on to say that there is the same ambivalence in the idea of *karma*. Further, in being withheld from payment and exchange, money is like *karma* an entity that is accumulated and stored. Ancient and modern descriptions of *karma* use the terminology of money or wealth. Seaford states that:

‘None of this is meant to imply that the idea of *karma* is merely a metaphysical projection of money. Nevertheless, it is often influenced by ideas from agriculture. In addition, of course a fundamental difference between money and *karma* is that money, although its exchange may embody the ethical value of reciprocity, embodies economic not ethical value. It is therefore not inherently just, and may often be regarded as creating injustice. The just ruler of the cosmos is an ethicised cosmic projection of the powerful but morally neutral human institution of monarchy. Similarly, *karma* is an ethicised cosmic projection of the powerful but morally neutral human institution of money, dissolving the distinction between economic and ethical value.’ (Seaford 2012: 15-16).

Seaford maintains that what is fundamental is not ethicisation but rather monetization. Monetization promotes individualization, which in turn requires the process of ethicized indiscriminate reincarnation. How is this cosmic process to occur? By being

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<sup>72</sup> Seaford 2012: 13

<sup>73</sup> Seaford 2012: 14

enforced by a universal power, entity, or principle, namely *karma*, for which the model is provided by the new power behind individualization, namely money.<sup>74</sup>

In the last section of his paper, Seaford argues that ethicised indiscriminate reincarnation was produced by money transcending and tending to dissolve traditional lineages. He also states that in India the tension between lineage and money persisted, and gave rise to the power of ethicised money (*karma*) to transcend lineage through reincarnation. Seaford comes to the conclusion that what may at first seem like the transmission of ideas turns out to be parallel autonomous development between the two cultures and that working out how the parallels and the differences were produced provides an instructive example of the relationship between metaphysics and socio-economic formation. This also leads to the many similarities between Indian and Greek society.<sup>75</sup>

I would have to disagree with Seaford in his theory that money was the source for the development of the idea of reincarnation. In my view money could not have been the catalyst for the development of the idea of the reincarnation of the soul, because it appears only in the developing culture of Greece in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Though the theory of the transmigrating/reincarnating soul only comes to light in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE Plato refers to it as an ‘ancient theory’. How can Plato refer to a theory that was formed in the 7<sup>th</sup> century as an ancient theory? Was there enough time for this concept to take root and become known throughout the ancient world? This dissertation will argue in a subsequent chapter that the idea of the souls’ reincarnation goes back much earlier into the Indo-European period.

### **2.3. Conclusion**

The theory of reincarnation seems to captivate the attention of scholars continually. Over many years, there has been a considerable amount of scholarship written regarding reincarnation, some of which has been focussed on the connection between India and Greece. One of the questions most scholars have tried to answer is: Was there any contact between the ancient Greeks and Indians before the Hellenistic period and could this contact be the origins of reincarnation? In attempting to resolve this question, we are faced with two possible answers – the first, and the one I would have

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<sup>74</sup> Seaford 2012: 16-17

<sup>75</sup> Seaford 2012: 17-21

to agree with, is Sedlar's, who says that this connection between the two cultures will always be shrouded in uncertainty. This is due to the lack of evidence. Even without solid evidence, Greece and India shared a special relationship, with regards to the development of their culture and civilization, and in other respects also, besides the idea of reincarnation. It can be seen from Sedlar's writing on India and Greece that they share ideas on many points. I agree with Sedlar on much of this. It is also still up for debate whether this relationship was established in the Indo-European phase or not. It is however evident that these two cultures shared a unique and special view of the soul, which had developed separately but shared very similar ideas. On the other hand, Seaford states that the catalyzing factor behind the origins of reincarnation in Greece was money.

## CHAPTER 3: ANCIENT GREEK THEORIES ABOUT REINCARNATION

This chapter aims to look at ancient Greek ideas about the soul and its possible reincarnation. I will start with the ‘soul’ and what this term meant to those who used Classical Greek on a daily basis. I will next look at several Pre-Socratic philosophers, and their philosophical concepts, although our main concern will be the doctrines of Plato. I will take a brief look at the most fully developed concepts of the soul in ancient Greek philosophy.

### 3.1. The Early Greek Theories of the Soul

As mentioned in Chapter 1 the Greeks refer to the soul as ψυχή, a word with many meanings, such as ‘breath’, ‘soul’ or ‘spirit’. The fact that ψυχή in the time of Homer (8<sup>th</sup> century BC) had a connection with breath or life-breath does not necessarily mean that it had the same meaning in the works of Plato, which we will look at in more detail in this chapter. After becoming acquainted with the use of the term ‘soul’, we can then look at the ways in which it is connected to a person’s life force.

In the time of Homer, the soul was considered to be something a person could put in peril. There is a moment in the *Iliad* when Achilles had refused to fight, and the Greek army was in need of his skills. When the Greek army asked Achilles to resume fighting he replied by saying that he was continuously risking his soul every time he goes into battle αἰεὶ ἐμὴν ψυχὴν παραβαλλόμενος πολεμίζειν – ‘forever setting my life on the hazard of battle’.<sup>76</sup> Another warrior by the name of Agenor states that Achilles has only one soul just like any other mortal man.

Lorenz argues that in the fifth century BCE Greece, having a soul is simply being alive, and that the occurrence, at about this time, of the term ἐμψυχωμένος ‘ensouled’ as the standard word meaning ‘alive’, was applied not just to human beings, but to other living things as well.<sup>77</sup> However, it ought to be pointed out that in Homer’s *Odyssey* human beings are the only ones thought to have souls. This is verified in the *Odyssey* Book 11, in which Odysseus journeys to the underworld, where he engages with the souls of the dead. Homer does not refer to spirits or souls of beings that are not human in his version of the underworld. This would suggest that the apparent

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<sup>76</sup> *Iliad* 9.322, tr. Lattimore 1951

<sup>77</sup> Lorenz 2009: 1.

relationship between the soul and life was very specific. It was actually not thought to be linked with life in general, but rather with the life of a specific human being.

Unlike our current views on death, the ancient Greeks believed that when the soul leaves the individual's body and journeys to the underworld it is said to have a more or less a miserable existence as a ghost or as an image of the dead individual. In any case, once a person's soul has departed for good, the person is dead. The presence of a soul therefore distinguishes a living human body from a corpse. The soul / *psychē* in Homer can be identified with the free soul.<sup>78</sup> The soul or *psychē* in Homer is only mentioned when one's life is at risk or thought to be at risk by the individual himself or by others.

In the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, some noteworthy advances happened in Greek thought which changed their view of the soul. These queries concerning the soul were formulated and discussed in the works of Plato and Aristotle and to some degree came from the need for the integration of these queries into the development of Greek philosophical thought. One element that is of essential significance is the slow loss of the Homeric notion of the free soul – the idea that a person cannot survive without their *psychē*<sup>79</sup>.

### **3.2. Pre-Socratic Thinking about the Soul**

The development of the concept of the soul in the sixth and fifth centuries is reflected in the philosophical works of the time. At this time, it became normal to talk about the soul as what differentiates the living from the dead, rather than something that is limited only to an individual person. It is clear that ensouled beings are not only restricted to animals, but also include plants. Empedocles, and apparently, Pythagoras believed that even plants have souls and that human soul can come into plants and animate them<sup>80</sup>.

#### **3.2.1. Pythagoras**

Pythagoras, who was the son of a merchant, is thought to have lived in the sixth century BC. Although we do not have any complete texts by Pythagoras himself, we

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<sup>78</sup> Bremmer 1983: 15

<sup>79</sup> Bremmer 1987: 14-15

<sup>80</sup> Bremmer 1983: 125

do have historical records from other philosophers and poets, such as Xenophanes, Heraclitus and Empedocles that help place Pythagoras into the context of the sixth century BC.<sup>81</sup> To help date Pythagoras one could look at some of the fragments of Heraclitus (500 BC), such as fragment T1 and fragment T2 in which he condemns Pythagoras and Xenophanes and their form of methodology.<sup>82</sup> Xenophanes (530 BCE), who lived around the same time as Pythagoras, is known to have said in one of his surviving fragments on Pythagoras:

‘Once, they say, he was passing by when a puppy was being thrashed, and he took pity on it and spoke the following words: ‘Stop! Do not beat the dog! It is, in fact, the soul of a friend of mine. I recognized it when I heard its voice.’<sup>83</sup>

This statement clearly implies a belief in reincarnation and Pythagoras supposedly could remember four of his past lives. His teaching and philosophy led to the development of Pythagorean theory in the beginning of the mid-sixth century, which in turn contributed to the expansion of the idea of the soul. His followers, who were known as Pythagoreans, were concerned with the purification and the redemption of the soul from the stigma of its physical existence, the prison of the body, and its reunion with the divine, among other things. The Pythagoreans, like Pythagoras himself, did not eat meat and any kind of beans for they believed that they contained the souls of people.<sup>84</sup> Empedocles (450 BC) who also had a strong belief in reincarnation like Pythagoras advised against eating meat and beans because this apparently was to show sanctity of human life this can be seen in some of his surviving fragments F3, F35, F36, F37, and F38.<sup>85</sup>

Not only must we be aware that Pythagoras wrote nothing, but we must also remember that the Pythagoreans were suppressed by political authorities and the thought of writing down their teaching happened only after this suppression ended.

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<sup>81</sup> Huffman (2009)

<sup>82</sup> Testimonia T 1, T2. Cf. Robin Waterfield 2000 for translations of 22B89, 22B49 from H. Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*.

<sup>83</sup> Fragment F20. Cf. Robin Waterfield 2000 for a translation of 21B17 from H. Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*.

<sup>84</sup> Bertholet, 1909: 43

<sup>85</sup> Fragment F3, F35, F36, F37, F38: Robin Waterfield 2000- translation of 31B146, 31B115, 31B124, 31B137, 31B141 from H. Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 3 vols., ed. W. Kranz, 6<sup>th</sup> edn.

Though much was lost, we must look to that which is left behind by the Pythagoreans themselves, such as the idea of the monochord, the doctrine of transmigration, and so on. Testimony must also be gathered from related sources so as to set forth an interpretation with the sufficient depth to do ‘justice’ to Pythagorean teaching. The majority of Pythagoras’ teachings were conveyed to others in the form of *logoi* (myths or stories).

At the same time, however, we will be forced to rely on testimony that has been deemed unreliable in an attempt to fill the void of evidence. This question becomes complex in that we are not only trying to give an account of a 6th century BC philosopher, but are at once obliged to consider the historical archive of interpretations and treatments of this subject – the belief that Pythagoras was known to be very knowledgeable of the destiny of our soul once it departed the body at death.

Herodotus (4.94-95) tells the story of Zalmoxis, a Thracian, who explained to his followers that they would not die but would instead go to a realm where they would forever have good results.<sup>86</sup> Among the Greeks, the convention appeared that Zalmoxis had been a slave of Pythagoras. However, Herodotus thought that Zalmoxis had lived long before Pythagoras. Nevertheless, the Greeks’ disposition to depict Zalmoxis as the slave of Pythagoras indicates that they believed that Pythagoras was the expert, and that Zalmoxis had copied his teachings.<sup>87</sup> It is known that Pythagoras held to the belief of *metempsychōsis* or reincarnation, according to which human souls could be incarnated into non-human forms after death. Pythagoras also states in his most well known theories that the soul is immortal and that it can be incarnated into various animals. Regrettably, however, little more can be said about the details surrounding Pythagoras’ conception of *metempsychōsis* / reincarnation.

According to Herodotus (2.123), the ancient Egyptians believed that the soul was reborn as various kinds of animals before it returned to human form, which happened only after 3000 years.<sup>88</sup> The passage in Herodotus is as follows:

Πρῶτοι δὲ καὶ τόνδε τὸν λόγον Αἰγύπτιοί εἰσι οἱ εἰπόντες, ὡς ἀνθρώπου ψυχὴ ἀθάνατος ἐστὶ, τοῦ σώματος δὲ καταφθίνοντος ἐς ἄλλο ζῷον αἰεὶ γινόμενον ἐσδύεται· ἐπεὰν δὲ πάντα περιέλθῃ τὰ χερσαῖα καὶ τὰ θαλάσσια καὶ τὰ πετεινά,

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<sup>86</sup>Sedlar 1980: 32

<sup>87</sup>Sedlar 1980: 32

<sup>88</sup>Sedlar 1980: 31

αὐτίς ἐς ἀνθρώπου σῶμα γινόμενον ἐσδύνειν· τὴν περιήλυσιν δὲ αὐτῇ γίνεσθαι ἐν τρισχιλίοισι ἔτεσι.

‘They [the Egyptians] were also the first to broach the opinion that the soul of man is immortal and that, when the body dies, it enters into the form of an animal which is born at the moment, thence passing on from one animal into another, until it has circled through the forms of all the creatures which tenant the earth, the water, and the air, after which it enters again into a human frame, and is born anew. The whole period of the transmigration is (they say) three thousand years.’ (tr. Rawlinson).

Herodotus goes on to say that ‘some Greek writers’ borrowed this account from the Egyptians, but he does not name them, although he claims to know who they were. So, without identifying exactly who they are, Herodotus claims that some Greeks both past and later accepted this concept of *metempsychōsis*; it would seem that this is most probably a reference to Pythagoras. There are many doubts about Herodotus’ assignment of *metempsychōsis* to the ancient Egyptians, because there is no evidence that we have to support his claim of the ancient Egyptian belief in *metempsychōsis*.<sup>89</sup> The commentary by Asheri et al. (2007, *ad loc.*) states that ‘the doctrine of transmigration of souls was certainly not Egyptian’. On the other hand, in the fourth century, several authors report that Pythagoras remembered his previous human incarnations, but the accounts do not agree on the details.

It is unclear as to how Pythagoras originally envisioned the nature of the transmigrating / wandering soul, however there are a few cautious deductions that can be theorized. Transmigration does not demand that the soul be eternally immortal; the soul may go through numerous rebirths before expiring. Pythagoras viewed the soul as immortal, this agrees with Herodotus’ account of Zalmoxis’ opinion. It is most probable that he used the Greek term *psychē* to indicate the wandering soul or transmigration of the soul, because this was the term used by most sources explaining this view. It would seem probable that Pythagoras also viewed the transmigration of *psychē* in this way.

It is vital to acknowledge that most Greeks followed Homer in his belief that

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<sup>89</sup> Sedlar 1980: 31

the soul was an insubstantial shadow, which lived in ghostly reality in Hades after the death of the body – a life so miserable that Achilles famously declared that he would ‘rather be the lowest mortal on earth than king of the dead’.<sup>90</sup> Pythagoras' teachings that the soul is immortal, and that it would have other corporal incarnations and could possibly live a happy life after the death of its current body, were striking innovations that must have had substantial appeal in contrast to Homer's view of the soul. With regard to the immortality of the soul and reincarnation, Pythagoras believed that after certain periods of time, the things that have happened once happen again and nothing is absolutely new. Lloyd also mentions this idea of recurrence. According to Lloyd in his commentary on Herodotus Book 2:

‘The belief in transmigration seems to have developed independently in many parts of the world and there is no reason to believe that it was a foreign import into Greece where it maintained itself in some form until the establishment of Christianity. During, and before, the time of Herodotus it was particularly associated with Pythagoras, Empedocles and the Orphics. Pythagoras and his followers taught that the soul of men could be reincarnated in animals, a doctrine which presumably arose from the conviction of the kinship of all living things. Pythagoreans appear to have believed that the process operated on a cyclic principle according to which the same events periodically recurred in the same form, though the length of the cycle is not indicated in any surviving text.’ (Lloyd 1993: 2.59-60)

The doctrine of transmigration according to Pythagoras therefore seems to have been stretched to contain the concept that we and certainly the entire world will be reincarnated into lives that are precisely identical with those we are living and have already lived.

### **3.2.2. Empedocles**

Empedocles (494-434 B.C)<sup>91</sup>, was a native of Acragas in Sicily. He was a poet,

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<sup>90</sup> Homer, *Odyssey* 11.489

<sup>91</sup> Wright (1981:6)

statesman, physician and a philosopher. Philosophically, he believed that the four elements – earth, air, fire and water – were the basic components of all life. He also thought that love and strife were the cause of motion and change. Empedocles had some conceptions of reincarnation, which he discusses in connection with the spirit-like beings the Greeks knew as *daimones*.<sup>92</sup> Empedocles states that those who have shed blood are punished by exile from the other gods, and they are reincarnated into various lives until they are released and become gods. In connection with his own life, Empedocles claimed that ‘he has taken on a series of mortal forms and has lived in one element after another, while, like the man who has committed homicide or perjury, he is abhorrent to these elements.’<sup>93</sup> The idea of punishment and reward for actions and deeds committed by a person is seen in later theories of reincarnation by Plato, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Another common idea that is shared among them is the avoidance of meat. The eating of meat is likened to cannibalism therefore it is avoided; this idea was accepted not only by Empedocles but also by other believers of the theory of reincarnation.

### 3.2.3. Orphism

The Orphics or Orphism originated in the sixth and fifth centuries BC from the myth of Orpheus, which also seems to share similar ideas of reincarnation with the Pythagoreans. The Orphics took their name from a mythical figure of Orpheus who was both poet and musician who supposedly visited the Hades looking for the soul of his deceased wife. Having seen her and failed to rescue her, he returned to the world of the living. This made Orpheus a mystic figure, very much like a shaman<sup>94</sup> (a person who is able to connect with souls of the dead, and has the ability to separate his soul from his body during trances). On his return to the world of the living he told of the knowledge, he had learnt of in the underworld. This knowledge accrued in the underworld by Orpheus was said to justify the Orphics’ doctrine. The doctrine was mainly founded on the mythology rather than a real/ factual person or event.

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<sup>92</sup> Inwood (2009: 71-86).

<sup>93</sup> Wright (1981: 69).

<sup>94</sup> Dodds (1951: 140) refers to a shaman as, ‘a person who is psychically unstable who has received a call to the religious life. As a result of his call, he undergoes a period of rigorous training, which commonly involves solitude when he emerges from his religious ‘retreat’ he is supposedly able to part his soul from his body and travel to distant parts of the spirit world.’

One of the stories that were told by Orpheus was that of Dionysus and the origins of humans. This myth of Dionysus tells of his birth, death and rebirth, all of which led to the creation of humans. The myth goes as follows: While Dionysus was an infant; he was distracted and led away by the Titans who tore him limb from limb. Having torn Dionysus into pieces, they boiled his limbs, roasted them and consumed them. Zeus having discovered what the Titans had done blasted them with a thunderbolt. Zeus then had the remaining parts of Dionysus buried and later reborn. Zeus later created humans from the ashes of the Titans and so human nature is evil, however the Titans had consumed the flesh of Dionysus, which gave humans a divine Dionysian spark. On the outside, humans are encased in a Titanic body, but within humans are divine. Thus the goal of striving should be to free the immortal soul from its bodily prison. This myth gave rise to the Orphic saying *σῶμα / σῆμα (sōma/ sēma)* – the body is a tomb.<sup>95</sup>

The Orphic belief is that the soul is divine, immortal, and aspires to freedom, which is only achieved when the soul has completed its allotted lives in its spiral ascent. The reason for numerous lives or reincarnations was to purify the soul and remove imperfections so that the soul could join the gods. The body holds it in like in a prison. The release occurs at death but that is only for a short while before the soul is joined to another body. The only true release is when the soul has completed its spiral ascent to the gods.<sup>96</sup>

The idea of avoiding meat is also found in Orphic philosophy and some would go so far as to link Pythagorean philosophical ideals with that of Orphic philosophy but they are different. The difference between these two is that the Orphic doctrine continued on a mythical realm – reading the universe in its relations of deities and procreation, while the Pythagoreans advanced in the direction of rationalism. The Pythagoreans were philosophers and mathematicians.<sup>97</sup> It is clear that against the Homeric background, ‘soul’ was a very suitable expression to use so as to signify the person that continued to endure after death; there was, after all, the common Homeric use of ‘soul’ as that which endures in the realm of Hades after a person's death.<sup>98</sup> To make the continued survival of this soul noteworthy as a continuous existence of the person who

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<sup>95</sup> Powell 2004: 303-305

<sup>96</sup> Majeed 2013: 120

<sup>97</sup> Sedlar 1980: 28

<sup>98</sup> Lorenz 2009: 2

died, at least some of the likeness, activities, and operations that seemed decisive to the individuality of the person had to be credited to the soul.

### 3.2.4. Pindar

Pindar (522-443 BC), a lyric poet from Thebes, wrote about the soul and the possibility of its reincarnation. Pindar was of noble birth and most of his poems remained on the margins of political trends. His poetry conservatively adheres to his aristocratic values. This can be seen in a number of his works in which he makes use of his mythological heritage to convey his message (i.e. he measures the victors' achievements against legends from mythology).<sup>99</sup>

The best example we have of this idea of reincarnation from Pindar can be seen in his second *Olympian* ode. *Olympian II* is an ode to the victory of Theron of Akragas in a chariot race, the poem opens with a priamel, which ultimately praises Theron for his recent victory as well as his hospitality to foreigners. A prayer is made to Zeus so that their progeny may inherit the land. The ode then goes on to give reflections of the past and things that have passed from bad fortune to good as well as a look into Theron's ancestors, which is then followed by more praise for Theron, the poem then moves in a different direction. Pindar gives an account of the afterlife and his idea of transmigration. The poem concludes with more praises of the deeds of Theron.<sup>100</sup>

The most interesting part of this poem, Pindar speaks of the punishment and rewards of souls as well as how many times the soul returns to earth in lines 56-78:

. . . If one has it [sc. wealth] and knows the future,  
that the helpless spirits  
    of those who have died on earth immediately  
pay the penalty – and upon sins committed here  
in Zeus' realm, a judge beneath the earth  
pronounces sentence with hateful necessity;  
  
but forever having sunshine in equal nights  
and in equal days, good men

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<sup>99</sup> Race, 1997: 2, 3

<sup>100</sup> Race, 1997: 61

receive a life of less toil,  
for they do not vex the earth  
or the water of the sea with the strength of their hands  
to earn a paltry living. No, in company with the honored  
gods, those who joyfully kept their oaths  
spend a tearless  
existence, whereas the others endure pain too terrible to behold.

But those with the courage to have lived  
three times in either realm (ἔστρις ἑκατέρωθι), while keeping their souls  
free from all unjust deeds, travel the road of Zeus  
to the tower of Kronos, where the ocean breezes  
blow round  
the Isle of the Blessed, and flowers of gold are ablaze,  
some from radiant trees on land, while the water  
nurtures others; while these they weave  
garlands for the hands and crowns for their heads,  
  
in obedience to the just counsels of Rhadamanthys,  
whom the great father keeps ever seated at his side,  
the husband of Rhea, she who has  
the highest throne of all. (tr. Race 1997).

Von Fritz<sup>101</sup> looks at the rewards and punishments of the souls in detail paying important attention to how many times the souls are allotted in each realm. Von Fritz<sup>102</sup> discusses Professor H. S. Long's theory regarding ἔστρις ἑκατέρωθι (line 69: 'up to three times in each place/ three times in either realm') and its possible meanings in its relation to the reincarnation of the soul. Von Fritz states that Long put forth the arguments that ἔστρις ἑκατέρωθι 'means three times in this world and three times in the other or twice in this world and once in the other'.<sup>103</sup> Though Von Fritz looks at both of Long's theories, the one that seems to make the most since to Von Fritz is the

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<sup>101</sup> Von Fritz, 1957: 85

<sup>102</sup> Von Fritz, 1957: 85

<sup>103</sup> Von Fritz, 1957: 85

one that implies that the soul stayed three times on either side. One of the main reasons for this deduction was due to the superstitions regarding the number three and religious beliefs that are linked to it. The other reason for Von Fritz's belief in the first theory was that one couldn't earn merit in Hades,<sup>104</sup> though the soul may be purified there by punishments.

The notion of staying/visiting a realm three times before the soul can gain access to the islands of the blessed brings to mind a passage in Plato's *Phaedrus* 249a, in which it is stated that only those who become true philosophers may return after a three periods of one thousand years, i.e., that they have chosen the life of a philosopher three times in succession. This idea of the soul living three lives, would lead one to the theory that Pindar meant that the soul would live three times in each realm. These connecting ideas of the soul living more than one life are clearly a reference to reincarnation. As Von Fritz says: 'those parts of the second *Olympian* ... that bring in the doctrine of reincarnation, if correctly interpreted, turn out to be so very close to a passage in Plato's *Phaedrus*'.<sup>105</sup>

### 3.3. Plato

Plato (427 –346 BC), was born in Athens, he came from a family who had a history in politics, and Plato was very much destined to continue with family tradition, for most of his works are based on the function of society and how it is governed. Plato, like the Orphics, believed that the soul was immortal and that the physical body was what housed the soul on its time on earth, which he (Plato) referred to as  $\sigma\tilde{\omega}\mu\alpha$  /  $\sigma\tilde{\eta}\mu\alpha$  (*sōma/sēma*) that the body is the prison of the soul. And that vegetarianism should be an essential rule of life, and that unpleasant consequences of sin, both in this world and in the next, can be washed away by ritual means.<sup>106</sup> In order to understand Plato's theory of reincarnation, a brief summary of his theory of the soul as seen in his dialogues, as well as an analysis of them, are needed. The dialogues in which the Plato puts forward his theory of the immortality of the soul and its possible reincarnation, are in the *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, *Republic*, the *Phaedrus*, and the *Timaeus*. In these dialogues, Socrates is the main speaker. He was one of the main influences on Plato's beliefs,

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<sup>104</sup> Von Fritz, 1957: 86

<sup>105</sup> Von Fritz 1957: 89

<sup>106</sup> Dodds 1951: 149

which is evident in many of his works. I will begin with brief look at Plato's 'forms' – another theory, which explains the immortality of the soul. Followed by the *Phaedo*, to show that Plato believed that the soul was immortal, I will then look at the *Gorgias*, which deals with the judgment of souls, followed by the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus*.

### 3.3.1. Plato's Forms

Another theory or theme that can be seen in the works of Plato that helps to explain the immortality of the soul is the theory of the 'forms'. He states that all sensible objects are referable to a certain 'idea', of which they are likenesses. These forms must be known to us before we can refer objects to them, and therefore we cannot have seen or learned of these ideas in this life and so we must have seen them before this life. Thus, knowledge is reminiscence of knowledge gained before our birth into this life.

The main point is that the doctrine of the real existence of ideas as the sole objects of knowledge is pre-existing and it shows that doctrine of reincarnation is needed for human existence, because it serves to prove that the soul is immortal. This concept can be seen in the *Phaedrus* (246a-257a) in which the nature and the destiny of the soul are revealed. The soul of a man is compared to that of a charioteer who drives two horses, one good and the other bad. Before incarnation into the next life, the soul travels in the heavens gazing on true reality. Depending on the conduct of the two horses, the soul will either see much, little or nothing of the 'forms'. These 'forms' are the true forms of all the things in the world. The soul is not a 'form' itself but it belongs in the same realm of the 'forms'. Below is a summary of the Winged Soul from the *Phaedrus* 247b-d.

Plato describes the soul as an organic whole made up of a charioteer and his team of horses. While the horses and charioteers of gods are always completely good, those of everyone else are a mixture. Although our inner ruler drives a pair of horses, only one of his horses is totally noble and good, while the other is completely the opposite. This inevitably makes driving, in our case, difficult and disagreeable.

The way is steep, but the gods' chariots make light work of the journey, since they are well balanced and easy to handle, but the other chariots find it hard, because the troublesome horse weighs them down. Any charioteer who has trained this horse inadequately finds that it pulls him down towards the earth and holds him back, and this is the point at which a soul faces the worst suffering and the hardest struggle.

When the soul, which we call immortal, reaches the rim, it makes its way to the outside and stands on the outer edge of heaven, and as it stands there, the revolution carries it around, while it gazes outward from heaven. The region beyond heaven has not yet been adequately described by any of our earthly poets, nor shall it ever be. But Plato makes a courageous attempt to speak the truth, or what he believes to be the truth. This region is filled with true being. True being has no colour or form; it is intangible and visible only to intelligence, the soul's guide. True being is the province of everything that counts as true knowledge.

Eric J. Roberts states in *Plato's View of the Soul* (1905), that the comment of Socrates in the *Phaedrus* (270c) ψυχῆς οὐδὲν φύσιν ἀξίως λόγου κατανοῆσαι οἶει δυνατόν εἶναι ἄνευ τῆς τοῦ ὅλου φύσεως; is represented as maintaining that it is impossible 'to comprehend satisfactorily the nature of the soul without comprehending the nature of the whole (universe, τοῦ ὅλου)'. Similarly we may say that in order to get a correct understanding of 'Plato's conception of the soul it is necessary to consider it in relation to his scheme of existence'.<sup>107</sup> In other words we have to look at the bigger picture to find where we fit in, and a better understanding we have of this world, will help aid us to make better judgements in the next life, or give us better control of the various parts of the soul. This thought of control and discipline / order as put forward to everyone by Plato in *Gorgias*, *Republic* and *Phaedrus*, should be imposed in everyday life, to insure that when the soul has to be judged it will not be distorted in anyway and will insure that its destiny is that of the blessed and not of the punished therefore resulting in a better destiny of the soul.

### 3.3.2. *Phaedo*

Plato often used Socrates as a mouthpiece to express his ideas. Plato believed that the souls of the dead must return to earth, where in new lives they must wear out or atone for the previous actions committed on earth in their previous existences, receiving rewards for the worthy ones and punishments for the unworthy ones. This idea can be seen in the myths of the *Phaedo*, *Republic* and the *Phaedrus* all of which combine the idea of reward and punishment with that of reincarnation.<sup>108</sup> With these penalties and repeated experiences, the soul will raise step-by-step toward the divine, keeping in

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<sup>107</sup> Roberts 1905: 371-72

<sup>108</sup> Ferrari, 2007: 191

mind that this rarely happened. Plato also taught that the reincarnated soul has reminiscences of its former lives and also instincts and intuitions gained from previous experiences. This is explained in his dialogue *Phaedo*, where he tries to prove that the soul is immortal, that it pre-existed before birth, and that it will exist after death. As seen in the passage below from the *Phaedo*:

εἰ γὰρ ἔστιν μὲν ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ πρότερον, ἀνάγκη δὲ αὐτῇ εἰς τὸ ζῆν ἰούση τε καὶ γιγνομένη μηδαμόθεν ἄλλοθεν ἢ ἐκ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ τεθνάναι γίγνεσθαι, πῶς οὐκ ἀνάγκη αὐτὴν καὶ ἐπειδὴν ἀποθάνη εἶναι, ἐπειδὴ γε δεῖ αὐθις αὐτὴν γίγνεσθαι;

‘For if the soul exists before birth, and, when it comes into life and is born, cannot be born from anything else than death and a state of death, must it not also exist after dying, since it must be born again?’

(Plato, *Phaedo* 77d, tr. H.N. Flower)

In the *Phaedo*, the soul is conceived as something that reasons, more or less well depending on the extent to which it is troubled or distracted by the body and the senses, something that regulates and controls the body and its desires and affections, ‘of all the parts that make up man, do you think any is ruler except the soul especially if it be a wise one (soul)’ -- *Phaedo* 94b. Nevertheless, it should be clear that the soul, as it is conceived here, is not simply the mind, as we understand it. Plato clearly retains the traditional concept of soul as showing the difference between the living and the dead.<sup>109</sup> The two points of the argument for the immortality of the soul rely on the familiar connection between soul and life. In Plato’s argument for the immortality of the soul, most notably seen in the *Phaedo*, at the beginning of the discussion the speakers are not convinced of the idea. Independently from the question of immortality, there is the additional question whether the soul, has some form of being after the body of the person has died. Socrates states, for example: ὥς ἔστι τε ψυχὴ ἀποθανόντος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ τινα δύναμιν ἔχει καὶ φρόνησιν ‘that the soul of the dead person has some kind of power and ability to think’ -- *Phaedo* 70b. Answering both questions, Plato says, or rather he has Socrates say, that not only is the soul

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<sup>109</sup> Roberts 1905: 372

immortal, but also that it contemplates truths after its separation from the body at the time of death.

This argument addresses the concern that the soul dies at or soon after the death of its body and that it is broken up into its constituent elements. Plato distinguishes between two kinds of things: on the one hand, things that are material, made up of bits that are destined to decay and dissolve; on the other hand, things that are not material, but intelligible, not made up of parts, and not destined to decay and dissolve. According to the recurring argument in the *Phaedo* 70c-72d, being alive in general is preceded by, just as it proceeds from, being dead.<sup>110</sup> Socrates looks at this and shows us that a being's death includes the continual existence of the soul in question, which persists through a period of departure from body, and then returns to give life to another body in a change that is the equivalent of the previous change, which was dying.

Pakaluk (2003) explains the separation of the soul as ‘the soul fares poorly to the extent that it is joined, and that it flourishes to the extent that it becomes separated, would seem to indicate that the soul is independent and distinct...’.<sup>111</sup> This would suggest that the soul is capable of existing when the body is destroyed, and that it goes through repeated cycles of incarnation. According to the argument that Socrates states in the *Phaedo*, that the soul is immortal because it lives is the same way that fire gives off heat. In other words fire and heat go hand in hand, much like the soul being immortal. It is plain that both of these arguments apply to the souls of all living things, including plants.<sup>112</sup> The final argument put forth by Socrates explicitly appeals to the idea that it is the soul that gives life to the body of a living thing: ἀποκρίνουν δὴ, ἢ δ’ ὅς, ᾧ ἂν τί ἐγγένηται σώματι ζῶν ἔσται; ᾧ ἂν ψυχῇ, εφη ‘Answer me, he said, what is it that, when present in a body, makes it living? – A soul’ - Plato, *Phaedo*, 105 c.

The argument attempts to prove that death involves the continued existence of the soul, which persists through a period of separation from the body, and then returns to bring another body to life in a way that corresponds to the previous change, i.e. dying. Another point that is made in the argument in the *Phaedo* is that the soul is immortal because it has life in the same way that fire gives off heat and ice cools. It can be seen that both of these arguments for the immortality of the soul apply to the

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<sup>110</sup> Inwood, 2009: 35

<sup>111</sup> Pakaluk, 2003:108

<sup>112</sup> Lorenz 2009: 10

souls of all living things. These arguments clearly appeal to the idea that it is the soul that animates the body of a living thing. Plato goes on to say in the *Phaedo* that the soul and the body are joined together, and that nature directs one to serve and be ruled while the other to rule and be master. Plato is clear in his description as to which is master, the soul rules due to it being divine, the body cannot exist without the soul.

### 3.3.3. *Gorgias*

Plato also explains the state of the soul in the *Gorgias*. Socrates tells the myth of the judgment of souls in *Gorgias* to Callicles. In the dialogue, Socrates tries to reinforce the idea that justice is the sure route to happiness. He states that there are divinely appointed judges who judge men and send them either to Tartarus or to a place sanctioned by the law of god which would be the Isles of the Blessed. He states that in the time of Cronus, the judges made mistakes in their judgment of the souls. These mistakes were due to the outward appearances of the souls who were clothed when they were judged. Zeus fixed this by decreeing that all souls are to be judged naked, by naked judges, in other words the soul is tested and any wounds due to unjust actions would be laid bare before the judges, who cannot be fooled or impressed by the soul's former life and wealth or title. This can be seen in the *Gorgias*: 523b-524a.<sup>113</sup> It is important to note that the judgment of naked souls would have made the judgments fair, in that kings and commoners would have been judged the same, 'the soul will bear the makers of the immoral or noble acts the person performed, but nothing else'.<sup>114</sup>

In the past when Cronus ruled, and in the relatively recent past during Zeus' reign, living judges dealt with living people and passed judgment upon them on the day of their impending death; this made the administration of justice poor. Hades and the supervisors of the Isles of the Blessed noticed this and told Zeus that the wrong kinds of people were getting through to both places. Zeus was not pleased about this and said that he would put an end to it. The reason the administration of justice was poor at the time was due to people being assessed with their clothes on, in the sense that they came before the court during their lifetimes, and plenty of people with corrupt souls were dressed in attractive bodies, noble birth, and wealth. So, when it was their turn to be judged, a lot of witnesses came forth and testified to the exemplary lives these people

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<sup>113</sup> The summary of the *Gorgias* and the *Republic* was constructed using the translations in the Oxford World Classics series.

<sup>114</sup> Inwood, 2009: 28

had led. All this impressed the judges and this led to incorrect judgments. A new way of judging souls was put into place by Zeus to ensure that the souls were going to the right places.

If the assessment was to be fair, the judges had better be naked as well as the dead, so that with an unhampered soul they could scrutinize the unhampered soul of a freshly dead individual who isn't surrounded by his friends and relatives. The judges were Minos and Rhadamanthys from Asia, and Aeacus from Europe. After their death, they had set up court in the meadow, at the junction where the two roads branch off towards the Isles of the Blessed and Tartarus respectively. Those who went to Tartarus were taught that being evil and committing bad deeds will result in punishment.

Some would say that the *Gorgias* does not deal with reincarnation. However I disagree. One reason for this is that the souls are punished and are shown as examples for those who lived unjust lives. How can these lessons benefit the dead they are already in Tartarus how do they employ what they have learnt? The only explanation is that the time spent in the after-life is not permanent and that the souls will return to the living world in another form, so that they may live their lives correctly. Inwood<sup>115</sup> states in order for the myth to persuade one to improve one's earthly life, the souls would have to have some memory of their earthly lives. Another reason for the idea of judgment after death as stated by Annas is that 'the trial after death will reverse wrong judgments made in the trials of this life'.<sup>116</sup> You could say the *Gorgias* myth gives us a second chance and that even if we are judged unfairly in this world we will be judged correctly in the after-life which will lead to a better next life.

### **3.3.4. Republic**

In the *Republic* Plato puts forward one of his theories on the soul, which involves the claim that the embodied human soul has three parts, namely reason (νοῦς), courage θυμός (*thymos*) and desire ἐπιθυμία (*epithymia*).<sup>117</sup> Reason is 'the part of the soul which is of its own nature attached to knowledge and truth. It is informed by wisdom and takes into consideration the concerns of each of the parts separately and the soul as a whole'<sup>118</sup> whose concerns include a person's bodily needs, presumably through the

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<sup>115</sup> Inwood 2009: 33-34

<sup>116</sup> Annas 1982: 122

<sup>117</sup> Roberts 1905: 374

<sup>118</sup> Sedley 2009 :145-146

concerns of desire. Desire is primarily concerned with food, drink and sex. It gives rise to wants for these and other such things which in each case are based on the thought that obtaining the relevant object of desire would be pleasant. The courage of a person is devoted to the achievements of success and reputation. This is an inspiring force which generally accounts for self-assertion and ambition. When its desires are not fulfilled, it gives rise to emotional responses such as anger and resentment and to behavior that expresses and naturally flows from such responses.<sup>119</sup>

In other words the *Republic* puts forward a theory of soul, which includes the claim that the embodied human soul has at least three parts or aspects, namely reason, spirit and desires (appetite). Socrates puts forth the argument for this claim, by stating a principle to the effect that conflicting actions, affections and states cannot be allotted to one thing in respect of the same part of it, in relation to the same object, at the same time.<sup>120</sup> It is then agreed that desiring and being averse are contraries, and that desiring to do something and being averse to doing that same thing are opposites in relation to the same object. Socrates also points out that this happens, for example, when a person is thirsty and on that basis wants to drink, but at the same time wishes not to drink, on the basis of some deliberation, and in fact succeeds in abstaining from drinking, though they are thirsty.<sup>121</sup> Having identified reason and appetite as distinct parts of the soul, Socrates draws attention to other kinds of conflict between desires, which are meant to bring to light, spirit, the third part of the soul.<sup>122</sup> Plato presents the idea of the three-part soul at the beginning of the *Republic*, he then tries to explain in the Myth of Er, what happens to the soul once it has departed from its material body. Not only does he show the soul's journey but also how it is judged, rewarded or punished and eventually reincarnated.

In Plato's *Republic*, the judgment of the soul of Er journey into the Other World, where the souls must be judged before they are sorted into the realms. These realms lead towards the sky (οὐρανός, which would symbolize a heaven-like-realm) or downwards into the earth (γῆ, which would symbolize a hell-like realm) is in some way similar to the judgments, which can be seen later in the *Phaedrus*. In Er's journey into the Other World, the souls are judged and are sent into chasms, which are situated on either side of the judges. There are two chasms on the right, which led up to the sky,

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<sup>119</sup> Roberts 1905: 375

<sup>120</sup> Grube 1935: 130

<sup>121</sup> Grube 1935: 131

<sup>122</sup> Lorenz 2009: 10

and two on the left, which led downwards into the earth. Er's journey is described in the *Republic* 614 b-c.

Er said that his soul had left his body and went on a journey with lots of other souls as his companions. They came to an awe-inspiring place, where they found two openings next to each other in the earth, and two others directly opposite them up in the sky. There he sees judges sitting between the openings, who were making their assessments and instructing the moral souls to take the right-hand route which led up and through the sky. This is a reward for living a good and just life, and souls were given tokens to wear on their fronts to show what behavior they had been assessed for. The immoral souls were told to take the left-hand, downward route. This is a punishment for all the bad deeds the person committed in their life. These people also had tokens, but they were placed on their backs to show all their past deeds. This sorting of the souls is important; the past deeds are taken into account and are what divides the good from the bad.

Where does reincarnation fit in with regards to the soul and judgment / justice? Plausibly, reincarnation offered a more satisfactory solution of divine justice or after death punishment in another world. As for after death punishment, that explained well enough why the gods appeared to tolerate the acts of the wicked, and the new teaching in fact exploited it to the full, using the device of the 'underworld journey' to make the horrors of Hades real and vivid to the imagination. But the after death punishment did not explain why the gods tolerated so much human suffering, and in particular the unmerited suffering of the innocent. Reincarnation did. In that view, no human soul was innocent, all were paying, in various degrees, for crimes of varying evil committed in former lives. And all that horrid mass of suffering, whether in this world or in another, was but a part of the soul's long education – an education that would culminate at last in its release from the cycle of birth and return to its divine origin.<sup>123</sup>

The above-mentioned explanation of the judgment and sorting of souls is illustrated in a diagrammatic form (in the diagram A in the Appendix). Plato's account of the after-life in the *Republic* with the description of the different paths and destinations of the souls of the just and the unjust as can be seen in the *Republic* 614 d-615a.

From where Er was, he could see souls leaving, once they had been judged, by one or the other of the two openings in the sky and the earth, and he noticed souls,

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<sup>123</sup> Dodds 1951: 149-150

covered in grime and dust, rise out of the earth, while the other souls which came down out of the sky were clean. Here we see the difference between those who were sent through the sky and those who went through the earth. They arrived periodically, and he gained the impression that it had taken a long journey for them to get there. They were grateful to turn aside into the meadow and find a place to settle down. Once they have had their allotted times of reward or punishment they have a short time to rest before the next step of their journey. The next step would be to choose a new life, but before the souls relate to one another, what they saw in their journey so far. Those who had come out of the earth asked those from the heavens what had happened to them there and were asked the same questions in return. The tales of the group from the earth were accompanied by groans and tears, as they recalled all the awful things they had experienced and seen in the course of their underworld journey which had taken a thousand years, while the soul from heaven had only wonderful experiences and incredibly beautiful sights to relate.

Plato shows the journey the of souls through the underworld, or after-life, before the souls journey to the river of Lethe where they drink of the water, and as a result they forget their journey in the after-life, and are reborn into the lives they picked out during the allotment phase. Having chosen an allotment, which would be their next life, a guardian spirit who will help to guide them through that life is appointed. The choice of the next life is one of the main differences between the ancient Greek and Indian (Hindu) concepts of reincarnation. The only choice regarding the next life that is allowed in the Indian concept is possible choice of the next womb, rather than the ancient Greek choice of next life. It is here we see the diverse views on how reincarnation works within both Indian and ancient Greek thought, which ‘at first sight may seem small, but has large ethical implications’.<sup>124</sup> This choice of next life could be the reason why Plato does not have the concept of *karma* in his teachings. For the choice of the next life, makes the laws of *karma* seem inconsequential.

The myth of Er is what you would call a traditional tale focusing on the philosophical and intellectual reorganizing of ancient traditional tale of life after death and of the underworld to teach that the soul is immortal and the moral laws govern the world. Plato’s teachings are very similar to that of Orphic practices and teachings and his understanding of moral law, and his belief of purification of the soul before it

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<sup>124</sup> Sorabji 2007:55

returned to another human life. The main focus of this myth is to convey the importance of justice.

### 3.3.5. *Phaedrus*

The *Republic* and *Phaedrus* both mention the judgment of souls, but they do not fully explain the state of the soul during the judgment phase. In the *Phaedrus* Plato describes the judgment of souls according to the way in which they lived their human life; whoever lives justly obtains a better lot, and whoever lives unjustly receives a worse lot. As with the myth of Er from the *Republic*, the *Phaedrus* 248c-d looks at the various lives the soul could be born into, and the downward cycle that it could follow due to its own faults. From *Phaedrus* 249 a-c, we are shown the process of the judgment of these souls.

For souls who have fallen to returns to the place from where it fell from it must wait for ten thousand years, for according to Plato it takes that long for wings to grow again, with the exception of the soul of a man who had practiced philosophy with sincerity or combined his love for a boy with the practice of philosophy. At the completion of the third thousand-year circuit, if these souls have chosen the philosophical life three times in succession, they regain their wings and in the three thousandth year, they return. The idea of a three thousand year cycle for the souls' journey is also mentioned by Herodotus (2.123) with his reference to the Egyptians,<sup>125</sup> Obeyesekere further explains that, 'the doctrine of rebirth is a fixed cycle of three thousand years during which the soul gets reincarnated into land, sea and air creatures, as a result of a set predetermined births that end up in a human reincarnation, thus completing the full cycle'.<sup>126</sup> But all other souls were judged after the end of their first life, and once they had been judged they either go to prisons in the underworld where they are punished, or are raised aloft by Justice to a certain place in the heavens and live as they deserve, depending on how they lived when they were in human form.

In the thousandth year, both groups of souls come for the allotment and choice of their second life and each of them chooses the life it likes. This is the point at which a human soul can be reincarnated as an animal, and someone who was formerly human can be reborn as a human being once again, instead of being an animal. Plato says that a

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<sup>125</sup> As seen in the quote on p. 53.

<sup>126</sup> Obeyesekere 2002: 194

soul which has never seen the truth cannot enter into human form, because a man must understand the impressions he receives by reference to classes, he draws on the plurality of perceptions to combine them by reasoning into a single class. This is recollection of the things which our soul once saw during their journey as companions to a god, when they saw beyond the things we now say 'exist' and poked their heads up into reality which would be the true form of everything that we have here on earth.

It can be seen that Plato believed that man has a physical body which is subject to several continuous changes, and cannot avoid death and disintegration, and that the soul is immaterial and unchangeable and indestructible and similar to the divine. At death the soul was disconnected from its material body and ascended to the upper regions where it presented an account of itself and had its future selected. Before the allotment of the soul, the souls had to be judged; this is where the past deeds of the soul are brought forth and are either rewarded or punished accordingly. In the passage, Plato gives the impression that reincarnation is present for the purpose of discipline, to purify the soul by means of punishment and reward. One of the concepts of Plato was the reward of the pure soul, which can be seen in the *Gorgias* 526c.

If a soul was discovered to be adequately righteous and unpolluted by the difficulty of material life it was considered to be fit and it would be given entrance to the Isles of the Blessed. Those souls who were found to be extremely guilty are made to endure a phase of punishment or purgation to the level that they may be expunged and purified of the guilt before being allowed to make another trial for perfection.<sup>127</sup> It can be seen in the *Republic*, and in the *Phaedrus* with regards to the judgment of the soul, that a grim punishment awaits the wicked, where the curable benefit, but where the incurable do not. This can be taken as a warning to others. Only a few souls who have lived lives beyond reproach can hope to be judged innocent and sent to Isles of the Blessed (Elysium). According to Homer, souls went to the underworld which is recognizably a place that is divided into various districts, whose inhabitants are classified according to either the natures of the deaths they suffered or the kinds of lives they lived. While the accounts of Homer about the soul are unique and original, the ancient Greeks nevertheless shared with him an inherent belief of the destiny of the soul in Hades. Plato believed that the souls of the dead must return to earth, where in new lives they must wear out the old deeds committed on earth and receive benefits for

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<sup>127</sup> Atkinson 1908: 46

the worthy ones and penalties for the unworthy ones. With these penalties and repeated experiences, the soul will rise step by step toward the divine.

### 3.3.6. *Timaeus*

In the *Timaeus*, we have the descriptions of the soul's fate after death, which is not merely a way of compensating for mistakes in the allowance of reward and punishment in the human world, but somewhat reflects a fundamental tendency of souls towards irrationality. I will focus in particular in the *Timaeus*, on the passage where Plato intensely depicts the soul's struggle against irrationality, especially in 41d-47e. These passages suggest that a soul's success or failure in struggling against this tendency has immediate consequences in its current life, regardless of what happens after death. The fact that human souls can be reincarnated in animal bodies further emphasizes the extent to which humans can fail to exercise their natural capacity for reason. Before I explore the text, a brief summary of the *Timaeus* is needed to get a better understanding of the passages and its contexts. The *Timaeus* is structured as follows:

1. The creation and creator (29d-31b)
2. The body of the world (31b-34b) Four primary bodies (31b-c), wholeness (32b-c), sphere (33b-34a), central soul (34b)
3. The World-Soul (35a-39e). Composition: being, becoming, same, and different.
4. The four kinds of living creature (39e-40b): heavenly gods, winged things, water creatures, creatures of the land; the earth's rotation other heavenly bodies too complicated to describe here
5. Human soul (40d-44d): the traditional gods, their creation and destruction (40d-41a), composition of human souls (41d-42d), with each soul assigned to a star; destiny, incarnation, and reincarnation (42d-44d).

Plato thinks that all or everything in the world is either 'Being', 'Becoming', or 'Space'. The rational/physical world is in a state of 'Becoming', strung throughout with soul like string in a stationary state of 'Being' – therefore the stars do not appear to move or change. The substance of the rational world is shaped by various mixtures of earth, wind fire and water a notion we also encounter in Indian writings of Buddhism and Hinduism. For all forms are comprised of all four elements, it is only at

death when these elements depart or leave the form or body that we return to earth. There is nothing physical that emerges or vanishes; it only changes its composition or makeup.

In what way does the soul, which is known as ‘Being’, make objects in the rational world of ‘Becoming’? The *Timaeus* proposes that the world has a ‘repository of becoming’, into which descriptions of the everlasting forms/ objects are imprinted. Therefore, material objects are nothing more than artificial reproductions of the everlasting forms, and so the consequence is that these reproductions are frequently deteriorating. The realization of true forms comes only from education and the belief of rational things. Having explained how the world soul was created, he then moves on to explain how the souls of mankind were created.

ταῦτ' εἶπε, καὶ πάλιν ἐπὶ τὸν πρότερον κρατῆρα, ἐν ᾧ τὴν τοῦ παντὸς ψυχὴν κεραννὺς ἔμισγεν, τὰ τῶν πρόσθεν ὑπόλοιπα κατεχεῖτο μίσγων τρόπον μὲν τινα τὸν αὐτόν, ἀκήρατα δὲ οὐκέτι κατὰ ταῦτ' ὡσαύτως, ἀλλὰ δεύτερα καὶ τρίτα. συστήσας δὲ τὸ πᾶν διεῖλεν ψυχὰς ἰσαρίθμους τοῖς ἄστροις,

‘After this speech, he turned once more to the bowl he had used previously to mix and blend the soul of the universe. He poured into it what was left of the ingredients he had used before and mixed them in the same way, with the only difference being that they were no longer as unfailingly pure as before, but were a grade or two lower in the scale of purity. Once he had a complete mixture, he divided it up into many souls as there are stars and he assigned each soul to a star.’ (Plato: *Timaeus* 41d, tr. R. Waterfield)

The souls of men were created with the same ingredients used to create the universe. Unlike the soul of the universe, the souls of men were not as pure. This imperfection is one of the reasons for many reincarnations. For only the pure soul can be truly part of the universal soul. To make up for the imperfection each soul is given a chariot in which it will make many journeys though the universe, as seen in the passage above. In the passage below, he explains the laws of and the nature of the

universe, and how every soul's destiny is governed by laws and that the first incarnation will be the same for every soul, so as not to disadvantage any of them.

. . . τὴν τοῦ παντὸς φύσιν ἔδειξεν, νόμους τε τοὺς εἰμαρμένους εἶπεν αὐταῖς, ὅτι γένεσις πρώτη μὲν ἔσοιτο τεταγμένη μία πᾶσιν, ἵνα μή τις ἐλαττοῖτο ὑπ' αὐτοῦ, δέοι δὲ σπαρείσας αὐτὰς εἰς τὰ προσήκοντα ἐκάσταις ἕκαστα ὄργανα χρόνων φῦναι ζώων τὸ θεοσεβέστατον . . .

‘ . . . He showed it the nature of the universe. He told them the laws of their destinies – how it was ordained that the first incarnation they would undergo would be the same for all of them, so that none of them would suffer any disadvantage at his hands, and how, after he had planted each of them in the appropriate instrument of time, they were to grow into the most god-fearing of living creatures . . . ’ (Plato *Timaeus* 41e, tr. R. Waterfield)

In the *Timaeus*, there are two kinds of soul. The first and superior kind is known as male. The second is not seen in this passage but in the subsequent passages, it is female. This would be the first incarnation of the souls who have fallen or have not lived their lives according to the laws explained in earlier passage. The passage also talks about the necessary consequences for the soul. They are perception, desire mixed with pain and pleasure, and fear and passion. These the soul must keep in line, in order to return to the star that it had been paired with at the beginning. The soul that failed to do this would be incarnated as a woman, and if the soul still failed to take control of its desires passions and perceptions, its subsequent incarnation would be animal to reflect its past wickedness.

However, Plato's route through Becoming, led him to the idea of cultural degeneration. We are made up of both soul and body. Plato believed that there was/is reincarnation, much like the passages from the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the beliefs of the Pythagoreans. One of the beliefs that Plato adhered to was that if all men live righteous lives, they should be able to reach heavenly immortality on their appointed star in the celestial realm. Though if men live unjust and immoral lives, they are to be reincarnated as a woman, and if one is a woman they would be reincarnated as an animal. The eternal soul is confined to a body, in which it is subject to decay and change. The soul

is also exposed to feelings and emotions, which can and will mislead the soul. The only way to fix the 'irrational' feature of incarnation is with education. According to Plato, philosophy was seen to be intelligent, and non-sensory. This will correct the 'irrational' aspects of the embodiment of the soul thus freeing it.

### **3.4. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have looked at the various ideas of the soul and its reincarnation. I have looked at how the soul was viewed in the time of Homer, where the soul was seen as something a person risks when they go into battle or as the life breath that leaves the body to either wander the world as a shade or go to the underworld known as Hades. This view of the soul and its after-life paints a very dull and depressing view of death. This view of death changed in the sixth and fifth centuries, with the teaching of Pythagoras and his followers known as Pythagoreans. There were also Orpheus and his followers, the Orphic religious teachers who taught Orphism, as well as Empedocles and Pindar. Both the Pythagoreans and Orphics believed in reincarnation of the soul, they both saw the soul as immortal. This is a big change from the Homeric idea of the soul. This new way of thinking that the soul was immortal and that it lives many lives through reincarnations, led to the inspiration of many other ancient Greek philosophers.

One of these philosophers was Plato, who wrote many myths concerning the nature of the soul and its reincarnation. Plato explains the nature and the immortality of the soul in the *Phaedo*. It is in the *Phaedo* that Plato argues that the soul is immortal and that it gives life to the body, without the soul the body cannot live, but the soul can exist without the body. This idea of the immortality of the soul is applied to all living things. To help explain the immortality of the soul Plato came up with a theory, which came to be known as the theory of 'forms'. He states that all sensible objects are referable to a certain 'idea' of which they are likeness. We must know these ideas / forms before we can refer objects to them, and therefore we could not have seen or learned these ideas in this life, so we must have seen them before this life. Plato has many myths concerning the nature of the soul, such as the *Gorgias* in which we see the nature and judgment of souls in the after-life.

But the myth where Plato clearly shows the theory of reincarnation comes from the *Republic* and the myth of Er. In this myth, we are told of the judgment of souls and

the paths that the souls take as well as the soul's journey into other lives. The *Phaedrus* tells of the cycle of reincarnation and the duration of time in between reincarnations. The *Timaeus* tells of the creation of the immortal soul, and the cycle of reincarnation. From these myths by Plato, we can see that he did believe in the theory of reincarnation, which was in many ways similar to the Pythagoreans and the Orphics teaching. The interest in the soul and what happens to the soul after it parts from the at death did not stop in the classical period but continued into the Hellenistic period where once again the way the soul was seen changed.

It must be noted that all these philosophers do at one-stage share similar ideas of the soul and its immortality these ideas are very similar to the Indian idea of the soul and reincarnation. It is interesting to note that most of these philosophers were from noble birth, and in some ways expressed their ideas of continuity in their doctrines of reincarnation. Pindar uses conservative ways of linking the transmigration of the souls of his victors with his aristocratic ideas of order and social standing, for all his poems were written for and paid for by the wealthy. Pindar was not the only one to express his aristocratic ideals in his writings. Empedocles, Pythagoras and the Orphics tend to look at the lives and deeds of the elite social classes, and they also seem to show them in a better light. As can be seen in Plato's works he uses examples of noble reincarnations thought some are not as fortunate in all of their incarnations. Perhaps the idea of reincarnation came about to comfort the aristocratic society that there was some form of higher justice that would insure that the noble lines did not die out and that it was possible to come back to the social standing one has currently. This may have being the reason for the creation of the theory of reincarnation. It is possible that the reason the social elite were more inclined to believe in reincarnation was due to their pride. One would seek to find a way to ensure that the power and wealth stayed in the hands of the few, and what better way to ensure this then by claiming that it was once theirs in a past life.

## CHAPTER 4: INDIAN BELIEFS ABOUT REINCARNATION

The idea that the soul does not perish, but continues to exist after the death of the body, is one that has been passed down through many cultures, especially in India. In this chapter, I will examine the ancient Indian belief in reincarnation, and their ancient texts, such as the *Bhagavad-Gita*, and other books such as the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* and the *Puranas*, used by the Hindus to inspire and teach. The idea or belief in the repeated rebirth or reincarnation of the soul is one of the many foundations of the Hindu religion. Questions that need to be answered in this chapter are: Where did the belief in reincarnation originate and is there a common background to this notion shared with other cultures around the world? Who are the Indian wise men, and how are they best referred to? What is the theory of reincarnation and what happens to the soul after death in Indian belief? How are reincarnation and resurrection distinct from each other? What is the connection between reincarnation and *karma*? This chapter will also attempt to show how the Indians (Hindus- specifically the Hindi linguistic group) and ancient Greeks are similar in their thinking with regards to the soul and reincarnation.

### **4.1. Where did the Indian belief of reincarnation originate?**

The common form of the reincarnation principle was devised in India, not before the 9th century BCE, when the Brahmin texts were written. Later the *Upanishads* plainly described the idea during the 7th to the 5th century BCE. It was also accepted by the other significant Eastern religions that it was in India that Buddhism and Jain ideas about reincarnation originated. It was the spread of Buddhism throughout Asia, that led Chinese Taoism to embrace the concept of reincarnation, but this was no earlier than the 3rd century BCE.

## 4.2. Reincarnation in Hinduism

The concept of *samsara*<sup>128</sup> should be attributed to Hinduism and its definitive texts. It could not have emerged before the 9th century BCE because it is not mentioned in the Vedic hymns, which are one of the foundational scriptures of Hinduism. Therefore, a brief examination of the expansion of the notion of the immortality of the soul in the main Hindu texts is needed. I will commence with the *Vedas* and then the *Upanishads*, followed by the *Bhagavad-Gita* and then the *Puranas*.

### 4.2.1. The *Vedas*

The *Vedas* ('wisdom' texts) are a body of orally transmitted texts. Their origins are ambiguous, some scholars attribute them to the Indus-Valley civilization and others to the Indo-European 'Aryans' ('noble ones' in Sanskrit) who migrated into the Indus valley where they either destroyed or merged with the local inhabitants of the Indus Valley.<sup>129</sup> The *Vedas* are concerned with ritual and sacrifices to propitiate the gods and goddesses. Brahmin members belonging to the priestly castes performed these rituals and sacrifices. The *Vedas* also gave descriptions of the gods and goddesses and explained the different types of sacrifices to be made to each of the deities. Some rituals linked the body and the universe with the sacrifices.<sup>130</sup>

### 4.2.2. The *Upanishads*

The *Upanishads* are a collection of philosophical texts, which form the theoretical basis for the Hindu religion. They are also known as *Vedanta* ('the end of the *Vedas*'). They are considered by Hindus to contain revealed truths concerning the nature of ultimate reality and describing the character and form of human salvation (*moksha*). The *Upanishads* introduce the first text in which the place of one's second death moves from the heaven-like plane to an earthly one and which considers an appropriate explanation to be the awareness of the *atman*-Brahmin individuality. The origins of one's true self (*atman* = one's inner-self) initiates *karma* – the law of cause and effect.

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<sup>128</sup> *Samsara* is the flow of existence, represented by the cycle of *karma* and rebirth, without beginning or end.

<sup>129</sup> Sarma 2008: 5

<sup>130</sup> Sarma 2008: 5

We can thus observe an important change in the meaning of after-life from the Vedic viewpoint. The *Upanishads* abandoned the objective of having a relationship with deities, as seen in the *Vedas*, by making good sacrifices and receiving a reward, but came to consider man's final destiny to be the fusion of *atman* with the Super-soul (God). It was this new context of *karma* and reincarnation that were key elements that helped outline most of the advances in Hinduism.<sup>131</sup>

#### **4.2.3. The *Bhagavad-Gita***

This scripture contains a conversation between Pandava prince Arjuna and his guide Lord Krishna on a variety of theological and philosophical issues. Faced with a fratricidal war, a despairing Arjuna turns to his charioteer Krishna for counsel on the battlefield.<sup>132</sup> Krishna, throughout the course of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, imparts to Arjuna wisdom, the path to devotion, and the doctrine of selfless action and its impact on the soul. The *Bhagavad-Gita* is discussed in more detail later on in this chapter.

#### **4.2.4. The *Puranas***

The *Puranas* are ancient Hindu texts praising various deities. The *Puranas* may also be described as a genre of important Hindu religious texts, notably consisting of narratives of the history of the universe from creation to destruction, genealogies of kings, heroes, sages, and demigods, and descriptions of Hindu cosmology, philosophy, and geography.<sup>133</sup>

### **4.3. The Indian wise men, and what term is most appropriate for them**

There are a few terms one could use when defining the Indian wise men such as *guru* (sage) and *rishi*, but the most popular would be Brahmins. Under the Indian caste system, a Brahmin is considered to belong to the highest caste. Priests and scholars were categorized as Brahmins. Members of this caste were considered to be figures of admiration and reverence. The high-ranking caste traditionally holds a great deal of

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<sup>131</sup> Sarma 2008: 24, 25

<sup>132</sup> Sarma 2008: 121,122

<sup>133</sup> Sarma 2008: 172,173

power in Indian society, controlling social norms and introducing laws (in other words it is an aristocratic social ladder, and the Brahmins are at the top). The caste system in India was, and is still, described in a collection of Hindu texts, which are known as the *Vedas*. According to the *Vedas* a person's place in society was determined by their *varna* or caste. Supposedly, the *varnas* characterize different characteristics of God, and each *varna* was divided up into several *jati* or communities.<sup>134</sup> The Brahmins comprise two main *jatis*, one representing North and one representing South India, along with a variety of minor groups. Historically all Brahmins are specially trained for the preserving and maintain their religion.<sup>135</sup> Initially, a person's caste was based on his or her life and religious education. As time changed, the caste system evolved and the caste system became hereditary. There were members of the Brahmin caste, who supported this change in Indian society, this brought about part of the trend.

#### **4.4. What is the theory of reincarnation and what happens the soul after death in Indian belief?**

Soul is described in Sanskrit as *jiva* or *atma*, they are sometimes connected into one to form – *jivatma*. Scientists say that life is nothing more than a combination of material elements, if that is so then one, would be able to reanimate a dead body by simply adding the missing chemicals that caused death. It should also be possible to create artificial life in a lab. There have been many efforts to create artificial life but these have so far been unsuccessful.<sup>136</sup> The reason for this could only be that life comes from life and that life cannot possibly come from dead matter. *Bhagavad-Gita* (2.17-18) describes the difference between the living body and the dead is the presence of a soul, and as soon as the soul departs the body, we may consider the body dead. It is in the second chapter of the *Bhagavad-Gita* (2.20-25) that we find a description of the characteristics of the soul.<sup>137</sup>

‘For the soul there is neither birth nor death. It has not come into being, does not come into being, and will not come into being. It is unborn,

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<sup>134</sup> Sarma 2008: 6

<sup>135</sup> Lipner 2010: 13

<sup>136</sup> I would not consider ‘cloned’ species as artificial life, due to the fact that an embryo is fertilized with DNA from an existing living being.

<sup>137</sup> All translations from the *Bhagavad-Gita* are from Bhakitedanta A.C Swami Prabhupada (1991).

eternal, ever existing and primeval. It is not slain when the body is slain. O Pārtha, how can a person know that the soul is indestructible, eternal, unborn and immutable, kill anyone or cause anyone to kill? As a person puts on new garments, giving up old ones, the soul similarly accepts new material bodies, giving up the old and useless ones. The soul can never be cut to pieces by any weapon, nor burned by fire, nor moistened by water, nor withered by the wind. This individual soul is unbreakable and insoluble, and can be neither burned nor dried. It is everlasting, present everywhere, unchangeable, immovable and eternally the same. It is said that the soul is invisible, inconceivable and immutable. Knowing this, you should not grieve for the body.’

(*Bhagavad-Gita* tr. Prabhupada 1991: 2.20-25)

Death is seen as a normal part of life, and there are many classic myths and holy texts that guide and help define the purpose of death’s presence, as well as the ceremonies that must or should be done surrounding the death of the body and the numerous potential destinations of the soul once it leaves its current body or form. While the ultimate objective is to surpass the need to return to life on this earthly plane, many Hindus believe that their souls are immortal and will be reincarnated into future lives that are founded mainly on their past judgments and deeds. Most Hindus believe in the sequence of birth, death, and rebirth. This idea that the soul is immortal comes from the *Bhagavad-Gita*.

‘Those who are seers of the truth have concluded that of the non-existent (the material body) there is no endurance and of the eternal (the soul) there is no change. This they have concluded by studying the nature of both. That which pervades the entire body you should know to be indestructible. No one is able to destroy that imperishable soul. The material body of the indestructible, immeasurable and eternal living entity is sure to come to an end; there, fight, O descendant of Bharata. Neither he who thinks the living entity the slayer nor he who thinks it slain is in knowledge, for the self slays not nor is slain. For the soul, there is neither birth nor death at any time. He has not come into being, does not come into being, and will not come into being. He is unborn, eternal, ever existing and primeval. He

is not slain when the body is slain. O Pārtha, how can a person who knows that the soul is indestructible, eternal, unborn and immutable kill anyone or cause anyone to kill?’

(*Bhagavad-Gita* tr. Prabhupada 1991: 2.16-21)

The above passage plainly clarifies the true nature of the soul, which is dispersed through the entire body. From this it can be understood that the soul is present in all parts of the body and could therefore be considered its consciousness. The body is continuously changing all the time by the actions and reactions within all its different cells. Therefore, evolution and growth are taking place all the time within the body. But, the soul endures endlessly, remaining unchanged despite all the changes within the body and mind. That is the difference between the material and the soul. It is a fact of nature that the body is ever changing, but the soul is immortal it does not change.

Every being is aware of the pain and pleasure within the body whether it is in part or as a whole. This dispersal of awareness is limited to one’s own body. Another cannot know the pain and pleasure of one’s body. Thus, everyone is the expression of a distinct and individual soul, and according to the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the indication of the soul’s existence is evident as an individual’s consciousness. The material body is described as fragile. It may even expire straightaway, or it may last many years before it expires – it is only a matter of time. There is no way of preserving it forever. But the soul is so small it cannot be seen and no one can have any idea how to measure its dimensions. So, from both viewpoints there is no cause for mourning, because the living entity (soul) as he is cannot be killed nor can the material body be saved for any length of time or permanently protected. If the body of the embodied living entity (soul) happens to be fatally injured, that living entity (soul) which is housed in the body cannot be killed. The soul is so small that it is impossible to be killed by any physical weapon. This is evident in subsequent passages in the *Bhagavad-Gita*. It is only the body that can be killed.

A few commonly asked questions about the soul regarding life and death are: What happens to the soul at the death of its current material body? In other words what happens when we die and where will our souls go? Do we have any choice in the matter, and are we able to choose our next life? Though we may not find the true answers to these questions, there are however speculation put forth in the sacred texts. In *Bhagavad-Gita* (2.13) we are told that the body continuously changes, as the body

grows. The soul also goes through similar changes when it moves to a new body after the death of its present one this is expressed in the below passage from the *Bhagavad-Gita*:

‘As the embodied soul continuously passes, in this body, from boyhood to youth to old age, the soul similarly passes into another body at death. A sober person is not bewildered by such a change.’

(*Bhagavad-Gita* tr. Prabhupada 1991: 2.13)

Every living being has an individual soul, which is part of an ever-changing body, a body that at one time was a child then a youth, and then as an old man at the end of his life. However, the same soul remains within the body unchanging. The soul only changes its body at the time of the death of its current one and transmigrates to another body. Because it is likely to have another body in its next birth, whether it is another material embodiment or a spiritual one, there is no reason to mourn on the account of death. The *Bhagavad-Gita* furthermore explains that the state of consciousness in the grave instant at the point of death is important for the choice of a new life:

‘Whatever state of being one remembers when he quits his present body, in his next life he will attain to that state without fail.’

(*Bhagavad-Gita* tr. Prabhupada 1991: 8.6)

The course of altering one’s nature at the right moment of death is explained in the above passage from the *Bhagavad-Gita*. A person who, at the end of his life, leaves his body thinking of god attains the transcendental nature of the Super-soul. At the moment of death, the soul leaves the body. It is in our bodies where all our desires and thoughts are imprinted, they are recalled at the moment of death and it is these thoughts and desires that decide the next destination of our soul. This wandering of the soul from one body into another is called reincarnation (*samsara* or *samsriti* in Sanskrit). *Srimad Bhagavatam (Bhagavata Purana)* 5.11.5-7 states that the mind is captivated by the sense of pleasure, pure or impure. Therefore, it is subject to the three modes of material nature, which leads to corresponding births into many kinds of forms. Consequently, the soul endures either physical misery or it enjoys physical contentment because of the mind. Therefore, the mind under the influence of illusions creates

additional actions either good or bad and their *karma* and the soul becomes trained by them.

There are many chapters that deal with the soul in the *Bhagavad-Gita* but it is in the eighth chapter that deals with the subject of life after death. The *Bhagavad-Gita* is not the only Indian text that deals with the soul and its life once it has left its body. The *Puranas*, the *Upanishads* and the *Yoga Vasishtha*, comprise of several varieties of explanations describing the state of the soul once it leaves the body. The *Puranas*, specifically, go into a detailed explanation of the state of the soul, particularly if it did not have any merits, or if the merits it did have were insignificant, for all the wrong deeds committed overshadow the good deeds or were they on an even level.<sup>138</sup>

*Garuda Purana* is one of the *Puranas*,<sup>139</sup> which are part of the Hindu body of texts known as *smriti*.<sup>140</sup> It is a *Vaishnava Purana*<sup>141</sup> and its first part contains a dialogue between Vishnu and Garuda, the King of Birds. The second half contains details of life after death, funeral rites and the metaphysics of reincarnation. Thus it is often recited at funerals. The following is a summary of the *Garuda Purana*. It is much like a guidebook as to what one should do for the dead, it is also a warning to sinners, much like the *Myth of Er* told by Plato in Chapter 3. The second part of the *Garuda Purana* gives detailed descriptions of what happens when the soul departs from its body.

When a soul leaves its body in the case of the lesser, unclean and irreligious souls, they are taken away by the watchmen or guardians of Yama the Lord of death and judgment. Yama will then ask the soul, ‘What have you done?’ Typically, the soul has no memory of its life. This is because the shock of the separation from its body causes the soul to lose its memory. Therefore, the soul cannot recall what it has done in its past life. To help the soul remember its past life Yama places a hot rod, which is called a *yamadanda*, on its head, and instantly the soul can recall its past life. It remembers every action it made in its past life whether good or bad. The soul will claim to have done good and may have also made mistakes in its life. Yama then questions the soul on the mistakes it has made and asks what does it (soul) have to say about them. The soul would reply by saying that it has relatives and that they will make amends on his behalf. They will conduct *yajnas* (spiritual rituals), offerings, reverence,

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<sup>138</sup> Website 1

<sup>139</sup> *Puranas* are ancient Hindu texts.

<sup>140</sup> *Smriti* means ‘that which is remembered’ it refers to a body of Hindu religious scriptures.

<sup>141</sup> The *Vaishnava Purana* are a collection of ancient Hindu texts regarding the soul and the god Vishnu.

*sankirtans* (devotional chanting), *bhajans* (devotional song or prayer) and prayers in the name of the dead person and free its soul from the effects of its past sins which were made as well as the mistakes it has made. Yama, then sends the soul to see that its relatives do the rituals as they were meant to do.<sup>142</sup>

Theoretically, it may take ten or more days for the soul to return to its relatives. Therefore ceremonies according to Hindu tradition are typically made on the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> day after the funeral. Well the soul lingers about, witnessing the rituals performed by its relatives. The soul however does not return alone, Yama's watchmen or guardians stand next to or behind the soul, making sure that they witness everything is done accordingly. If expiatory rituals are made in the name of the soul, such as *Bhagavat Saptaha*, *Rudra Yaga*, *Narayana Bali* and *Vishnu Yajna* as well as an assortment of offerings that includes all the things that had been dear to the soul are given as gifts, the results of these good deeds are credited to the account of the soul and it is acquitted to an extent.<sup>143</sup>

What happens when these rituals are not performed as in today's society, in which the relatives of the dead do not believe in the after-life, and there is no offering made on the behalf of the soul. This is a time in which the relatives of the dead behave as though nothing has happened, or as if they do not believe that things need to be done for the soul of the deceased after death. In these cases, the soul will be dragged back to Yama. When the watchmen recognize that a soul is guilty of all mistakes and misdeeds, and if this is confirmed by the lack of rituals done on behalf of the deceased, they deal with the guilty soul extremely harshly. If the soul is innocent and they know that, it will be released and no hardships will be placed on it.

The watchmen are not bothered much about the innocent souls. It is certain that the soul will be chastised, if its relatives do nothing for the deceased, for one year the soul will be dragged back to Yama the Lord of death and judgment. Within the first ten days the soul was brought back, due to the need to find out what was happening in the world of the living that might aid the soul after death. When the watchmen are sure that the soul is going to be punished, they do what ever it takes to make sure that the soul is beaten and is in a state of misery. However, at the end of the first year<sup>144</sup> of the death, a

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<sup>142</sup> Website 2

<sup>143</sup> Expiatory rituals are done in order to offset soul's *karma* in favour of the soul. *Bhagavat Saptaha*, *Rudra Yaga*, *Narayana Bali* and *Vishnu Yajna* are rituals in the form of prayer made in the name of the departed soul.

<sup>144</sup> The Hindu year is made up of 10 months.

ritual is performed, for it takes one year for the soul to return to the realm of Yama. The *varshika* (yearly) or annual ritual is essential. Especially if nothing had been done in the period of the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> day of the soul's passing, this ensures that Yama can grant some mercy to the soul before its sentence is passed on it.<sup>145</sup>

The soul will be sent to the realm of punishment, if it has no merits whatsoever, it has to reap its punishment whatever it may be. The *Srimad Bhagavita* and *Garuda Purana*, explain in gory detail the various types of punishments and exertions the soul must undergo so that one would never want to go there. After the soul is purged of all its errors through suffering in the prisons of Yama's realm, it is released. It is then sent to *Vaikuntha* (the supreme abode), so that *Vishnu Yagna* (spiritual ritual) can be completed. After a great many years, the soul can reach *moksha*. This is the process in which a bad person's soul is cleansed in an extremely excruciating fashion. It then can finally attain sanctity. If the soul still has a great affection for associations and fortune (in other words if the soul is still attached to material things), it will be reborn into this world.

The *Bhagavad-Gita* depicts a much more magnificent pathway to the upper regions. The lower kingdom, which is called *Chandraloka*, is for those souls who are not completely spiritually awakened but have done many virtuous deeds. The lower kingdom was referred to as the realm of the moon. The souls stayed there, where they enjoyed the rewards for their good deeds. Once they had exhausted the allotment for their deeds they would return to this world. The path is different for those people who are spiritually awakened and are not just good people: they join the Super-soul-Brahmin in the upper kingdom.

#### **4.5. What is the connection between reincarnation and *karma*?**

The phrase *karma* is strongly linked with reincarnation. Whilst attempting to comprehend the process of reincarnation in Indian belief we cannot avoid the term *karma*. *Karma* is a Sanskrit word that means 'action, activity and work'. It is hard to find a word for it in other languages because they do not have the right synonyms to express its entire meaning. Therefore, it would be almost impossible to translate it. Having been introduced to *karma* and the effects it has on the soul, one would wonder about

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<sup>145</sup> Website 2

the relationship of free will to *karma*. *Karma* is frequently understood as predestination, which it is not. Krishna<sup>146</sup> (God) controls everything but he does not control our free will. His interference with free will would cause us to be very much like robots or puppets. His interference of free will, would rule out accountability and love, which is the foundation of our eternal relationship with God. *Karma* and free will work together. They do not exclude one another but rather run parallel on the same track. According to Indian philosophy all living individuals that are being transmigrated in the physical world moving from one body into another, are given free will to live and act out its their desires and thoughts. When Krishna related the *Bhagavad-Gita* to Arjuna, in one of the last passages of the *Bhagavad-Gita* he says:

‘Thus I have explained to you knowledge still more confidential.  
Deliberate on this fully, and then do what you wish to do.’

(*Bhagavad-Gita* tr. Prabhupada 1991: 18.63)

Vedic texts talk about want or desires as the predecessor of contemplation and contemplation as the forbear of actions. Desires initially come from the soul, contemplation or thought comes from the mind or body and actions from the controlling sense organs of the entire body. All existing organisms have free will, although they are restricted with regards to their field of action. Vedic philosophy holds that free will and destiny or fate are factors that are interrelated with one another. We perform our current action or deeds out of our own free will and in this way, we construct our forthcoming *karmic* responses. At the same time, we reap the consequences of the past deeds committed in our past lives. Our fortune or fate is not a form of chastisement from some divine source that makes life unfair and difficult for those who seem to be innocent – the divine powers have nothing to do with these results. This is very similar to the rules of a game, which has strict rules, which synchronizes desires and shared interactions between different living organisms, and which rules the universe or the cosmos. Accordingly, everything and everyone acquires precisely the amount it earns – nothing more or less than it deserves.

In the *Bhagavad-Gita* (2.70) the uninterrupted flow of yearnings which come from the minds of all living organisms is comparable to countless streams which all

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<sup>146</sup> Krishna (God) is considered to be one of the many manifestations of the ultimate reality.

come together into one river that leads into a cosmic ocean. These are the beginning of an eternally complicated multi-faceted network of actions and reactions, and no-one could not comprehend the complexity of it all. It is obvious that there is some form or kind of influence from some divine power who is always present: the Super-soul (*paramatma*), which is with all souls during their many reincarnations through numerous forms (*Bhagavad-Gita*: 1986. 158). *Bhagavad-Gita* defines this characteristic of God:

‘Yet in this body there is another, a transcendental enjoyer, who is the Lord, the supreme proprietor, who exists as the overseer and permitted, and who is known as the Super-soul.’

(*Bhagavad-Gita* tr. Prabhupada 1991: 13.23)

The function of the Super-soul therefore is to record innumerable desires of each living being and to arrange for their fulfillment as well as to observe the activities of living beings and to grant them corresponding reactions. This directing hand of God is called the law of *karma*.

Looking at *karma* from the action point of view, the Vedic scriptures contain exact information as to which actions we have to perform if we wish to achieve certain results or reactions. If a person in this life has been very prosperous, well-off, knowledgeable, important or attractive, we could conclude that from it that he/she must have been in a former life worthy, hardworking, and virtuous and now only gains outcomes from his former actions. As to what this person will do now with these rewards in their present life is another issue – it all comes down to his free will. Thus, we see that not every well-off and influential person acts appropriately.<sup>147</sup>

‘A man’s past *karma* determines the field, the environment, in which he is born, but it is left to him to build up his new *karma* within the limits of his environment. One has to bear in mind that *karma* is a two-edged theory: it is an effect and it is also a cause.’ (Wadia 1965: 151)

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<sup>147</sup>*Bhagavad-Gita* tr. Prabhupada 1991: 668

One must also look at *karma*, from the point of view of reaction. For looking at *karma* from the other side we have to admit that whatever happens to us in this life is nothing other than a reaction to our actions in this or some former life. As stated by Wadia *karma* is a two-edged theory it has to be looked at from both ends. Wadia states that for there to be free will, there has to be responsibility and responsibility comes from morality. Morality cannot exist with blind fatalism and that the two edged-theory of *karma* implies free will. Therefore, it is not a matter of unknown coincidences but only a result of the actions we choose to do out of our own free will that allows us to develop and build up our new *karma*.<sup>148</sup>

Nonetheless, it sometimes happens that people who live very virtuous and respectable lives are still unprotected from all kinds of miseries. It can be concluded that in the past they must or may have acted incorrectly. Most times, they learn from their mistakes and choose to live appropriately in their current life. Those whose lives are full of victories gain the fruit of their actions.

In the material world a series of actions and reactions are inseparable. It is like a long movie of actions and reactions and the length of one life is initially vast and extensive.<sup>149</sup> When a person is born, his current body can be understood as a beginning of another series of actions leading to his death as an old man. It is somewhat clear as to why someone, due to different reactions from past deeds, is born into a well-off family and someone else into a underprivileged family although they were born at the same time at the same place and under same conditions, or 'why one man with an incurable disease would linger on in life while a healthy one dies in the prime of his life. It is this unequal division of fortune that brings to mind the various aspects of *karma*'.<sup>150</sup> He who carries along with him virtuous results (good *karma*) will get a chance to be born in a well-off or virtuous family and he who is burdened by the results of non-virtuous actions (bad *karma*) will be born into a low class and underprivileged family.

There are four phases of *karma*. Vedic philosophy (*Padma Purana*) explains that *karmic* reactions are established in four different phases, which can be likened to the stages of a plants' growth.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Wadia 1965: 151

<sup>149</sup> Website 2

<sup>150</sup> Wadia 1965: 147

<sup>151</sup> The following explanation of *karma* and its different phases are taken from Website 2.

1. *Bija* (seed). Our yearnings and intentions already exist in delicate form and only later will they become established in activities. Therefore, to avoid disagreeable *karmic* reactions or suffering we must pay attention to our unexpressed physical wants before the seeds of actions start to grow.
2. *Kuta-stha* (sprouting) – Reactions established after a choice to perform a deed. They are physical wants, which have already started to grow.
3. *Phalonmukha* (fructifying) – Reactions which are already bearing fruits (*phala*). As soon as we perform a physical action, whether it is good or bad, it is only a matter of time before they establish reactions or fruit in the form of joy or misery.
4. *Prarabdha* (harvest) – Reactions which are already fulfilled at our birth; family, which will define our socio-economic situation, nationality, race, physical and psychic dispositions and so forth.<sup>152</sup>

The previous three phases are in Sanskrit covered by the phrase *aprarabdha* or reactions that have not yet become fully established, either into possible joy or misery. The fourth phase, *prarabdha-karma*, is what is commonly called *karma*. The *Upanishads* describe these categories of *karma* as:

1. *sancita* (stored)
  - 1.1. *anarabdha* (not yet established) = *aprarabdha*
  - 1.2. *prarabdha* (already established)
2. *kriyamana* (newly created)

There are three kinds of *karma* according to the *Bhagavad-Gita*, which can be seen in the passage below:

‘The intricacies of action are very hard to understand. Therefore, one should know properly what action is, what forbidden action is, and what inaction is. One, who sees inaction in action, and action in inaction, is intelligent among men, and he is in the transcendental position, although engaged in all sorts of activities.’

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<sup>152</sup> Website 3: accessed 5/12/2013.

These verses define three types of *karma*. Here *karma* does not mean reaction but action and activity. Narahari states that in the *Mahabharata* the idea of *karma* is much more complicated in that ‘it is possible to transfer longevity from one to another, and that against the usual rule there are cases where an individual can benefit by the merit of others or secure remittance for a part of his evil *karma*’.<sup>153</sup> This idea of transferring of merits however does not seem to work outside of family members. The notion of transmitting sins and evil throughout one’s family is rather similar to that of Plutarch and the punishment of souls in that the soul is allowed to punish those in its family that have been wicked during their time on earth (*On Divine Vengeance* 565a-b). The *Mahabharata* also speaks of the inheritance of *karma* by one’s descendants, but it later contradicts itself. It is hard to place a solid foundation for the working of *karma* from the its numerous sources, but it regardless of work its works are represented in text the one remaining factor that does not change it its role in the reincarnation of souls. Below are the three types of *karma* from the *Bhagavad-Gita*, each briefly covering the various actions and reactions:

1. *karma*: Activities in harmony with higher laws of nature (*dharma*), which are also described in Vedic scriptures. This positive action brings positive reactions in the form of happiness and enjoyment.
2. *vikarma*: forbidden activities because they are in conflict with *dharma*. These negative actions bring corresponding reactions distress and suffering, i.e. bad *karma*.
3. *akarma*: Activities of higher nature, which are not subjected to material laws of nature and therefore are called ‘inactions’. They do not bring any reactions, either positive or negative, and thus they bring reincarnation to an end. This conclusion will occur when our ‘*karmic* account’ at the end of life is zero. Once that is achieved, one has reached *Moksha*.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Narahari 1946: 107

<sup>154</sup> Website 2

The meaning of *moksha* is ‘liberation or freedom’.<sup>155</sup> Hinduism comes in many forms, but there is the main notion to live a respectable life so that your next life will be a better one. Eventually, though, the aim of life in Hinduism is to get off the ‘wheel of *karma*’ meaning that circle of activity of life, which is full of desire and pain, reward and loss and constant transformation, and return to the source of being with a fully developed and comprehended form. The likeness is that the life we live here on earth is like a dream that one must ultimately wake from. *Moksha* is the final aim of every soul in the cosmos, and the Hindus presume the soul is bound to pursue this.<sup>156</sup> The Hindus believe that reaching liberation from the cycle of birth and death is the ultimate aim of every soul. They also believe that the body is nothing but clothing for the soul. Whatever the current aim in life is, the final aim of our cosmic life remains the same – the attainment of *moksha*. Achieving the state of *moksha* is reaching freedom the highest of the physical-manifest life forms there is nothing past *moksha*. It is compulsory and must be reached in this life. *Moksha* is that juncture in the life of all human beings when one breaks all the restraints from the senses and the mind. If one cannot gain complete power over the five senses and the mind, one cannot reach *moksha* in this life.

To summarize everything, according to the principle of reincarnation, variations between persons, even the time of their birth are due to their past *karma* i.e. actions or deeds made in the previous life. To simplify things I have split the types of *karma* into two i.e. good *karma* and bad *karma*. Those who believe in this theory reason that since all deeds or actions may not bear rewards or punishments in this life, there has to be another life for facing or reaping the penalties of one’s deeds and actions. In other words, *karma* is the law of cause and effect that is applied to the soul, the law where one reaps what is sown. The concept of *karma* is the broader principle that all of life is governed by a system of cause and effect, action and reaction, in which one’s deeds have corresponding effects on the future of one’s soul. *Karma* is thus a way of explaining evil and misfortune in the world, even for those who do not appear to deserve it in their lives. Their misfortune must be due to wrong actions committed in their previous life. *Karma* is regarded as a fundamental law of nature that is automatic and mechanical. It is not something that is imposed by God as a system of

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<sup>155</sup> *Moksha* is very much like the Buddhism concept of *Nirvana*, which is referred to as ‘the highest happiness’ and is the goal of the Buddhist path.

<sup>156</sup> Sivananda 2001: 137

punishment or reward, nor something that the God can interfere with. The word *karma* is sometimes referred to primarily as ‘bad *karma*’ – that which is accumulated as a result of wrong actions. Bad *karma* binds a person's soul to the cycle of rebirth and leads to misfortune in this life and poor conditions in the next<sup>157</sup>. To help understand *karma* better it must be noted that most Hindus believe that everything is related to each other and that ‘there is a universally recognized ‘good’ to which all humanity must strive, and that ‘evil must be accepted’.<sup>158</sup> If one looks at it logically good can only be measured against evil, and must be like light and dark – there may be varying degrees of each but you can only tell the difference when they are at odds with each other.

Death, according to Hinduism, is a sequence of transformations through which a person's soul passes through the various realms or planes to a new body. Hinduism tells of the four paths that man must follow after death. The first path is called *Devayana*, the path of light. This is followed by spiritually enlightened souls who led an exceedingly uncontaminated life, dedicating themselves to wholehearted contemplation, but they unfortunately have not yet succeeded in achieving total self-knowledge before death. They appear to *Brahmaloka*, in the uppermost heaven, and from there in due time attain *Moksha*, liberation.<sup>159</sup>

The second path, known as *Pitriyana*, is the path of the ancestors or the path of darkness, which is followed by ritualistic followers and philanthropists who have valued a yearning for the results of their charity, sobriety, vows, and worship. Following this path, they appear to *Chandraloka*, on the lunar sphere, and experience great joy there, as a reward for their good deeds, but unfortunately, they have to return to earth because they still have earthly cravings.<sup>160</sup>

The third path leads to punishment or *Naraka*,<sup>161</sup> which is followed by those who led a tainted or evil life, those who committed deeds that had been forbidden by the scriptures. They are born into sub-human species<sup>162</sup>.<sup>163</sup> After expiating their evil actions, they are reborn on earth in human bodies.

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<sup>157</sup> Website 2

<sup>158</sup> Gachter 1998: 402

<sup>159</sup> Sivananda 2001: 36

<sup>160</sup> Sivananda 2001:37

<sup>161</sup> This is a hell-like realm.

<sup>162</sup> Sivananda 2001: 83

<sup>163</sup> This means that the soul could be born either an animal or a plant.

The fourth path is for those who are extremely vile in their thoughts and actions. They are reborn again and again as insignificant creatures such as snakes and insects. Eventually, after the expiration of their evil actions, they too return to human bodies on earth. When a soul assumes a human body, it takes up the thread of spiritual evolution of its previous human birth and continues to evolve toward self-knowledge. These paths are determined by the person's past sins. Having been punished for their sins on their journey down the allocated pathways, they eventually return to human bodies on earth. In the *Srimad Bhagavatam* there are twenty-nine regions,<sup>164</sup> where souls are to be placed according to their *karmas*.<sup>165</sup> Here are but a few of them. There is *Tamisra* (darkness); those who lay their hands on other's wealth, children and wives are placed in this region. There the soul experiences great pain. It receives no food or drink and is beaten by clubs. The region *Andha Tamisra* (blinding darkness) is for those souls who have deceived their spouses. These souls are cast into this realm where they lose all understanding and sense through extreme pain. All those who grossly identify themselves with this physical body and regard wealth of the world as their own, are sent to a region known as *Raurava*, where they are tormented by poisonous worms known as *Rurus*. The region of *Maharaurava* is reserved for those who indulge in excessive passion and are eaten by carnivorous animals. In the region called *Kumbhipaka*, is where all those who have cooked and consumed meat are boiled by fiends (a beast or evil being). The above descriptions of hell-like realms come from the *Srimad Bhagavatam*.

The myths from some of the ancient Greeks show that their underworld is also made up of various parts such as the fields of Elysium (a paradise / heaven-like place) or *Tartarus* (a hell-like place) where souls are either rewarded or punished. To illustrate this I have drawn a diagram of Plato's underworld in the *Republic*, which can be seen in the Appendix A. When a soul dons the form of a human, it takes up the path of spiritual growth of with its previous human incarnations it continues to grow in self-knowledge. According to Hinduism, all souls will eventually achieve self-knowledge and thus *moksha*.

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<sup>164</sup> The twenty-nine regions: *Tāmisra*, *Andhatāmisra*, *Raurava*, *Mahāraurava*, *Kumbhīpāka*, *Kālasūtra*, *Asi-patravana*, *Sūkaramukha*, *Andhakūpa*, *Kṛmibhojana*, *Sandaṁśa*, *Taptasūrmi*, *Vajrakaṇṭaka-sālmālī*, *Vaitaraṇī*, *Pūyoda*, *Prānarodha*, *Viśasana*, *Lālābhakṣa*, *Sārameyādana*, *Avīci*, *Ayahpāna*, *Kṣārakardama*, *Rakṣogaṇa-bhojana*, *Śūlaprota*, *Dandaśūka*, *Avāṭa-nirodhana*, *Paryāvartana* and *Sūcīmukha*. All these regions are meant for punishment the guilty souls.

<sup>165</sup> A holy scripture similar to the *Bhagavad-Gita*.

#### 4.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the origins of reincarnation, reincarnation in Hinduism, the nature of the soul and its reincarnation in Indian (Hindu) belief, its connection with *karma* and the difference between reincarnation and resurrection. Reincarnation is one of the core beliefs of Hinduism that is generally accepted by many of its practitioners. Reincarnation is regarded as the natural process of birth, death and rebirth. Hindus believe that the *Jiva* or *Atman* (soul) is intrinsically pure. However, because the body taints this pure soul, the soul goes through numerous transmigration / reincarnations in its series of births and deaths. Death extinguishes the material form, but the immortal soul remains unaffected by the death of its material form. The soul is immortal. The soul may take on a different forms particular to its *karma* or deeds committed in that life or a past life. All *karma* creates consequences, which must and will be felt either in this life or some forthcoming life. If the soul is enclosed and unaware of its ignorance for an extended period, it will continue to be trapped by its physical wants and will thus be subjected to many series of births and deaths. There is no heaven or hell in Hinduism that is everlasting, as I have stated in the chapter concerning Indian belief in reincarnation.

After service in the after-life, the soul enters the rebirth system controlled by *karma*. The soul can be reborn as a human, an animal or a divinity. These continued rebirths; will last until *moksha*, the ultimate freedom, is acquired. Much as the body sheds worn-out garments, worn-out bodies are shed by the soul who resides within the body. New bodies are donned by the soul, like new garments. This idea of shedding the body like an old garment is similar to the Orphic idea that the body is a tomb for the soul and as the soul leaves one it is free for a short time before it is sent back to a body for its next life. Much like the Greeks, the Indians also have an aristocratic view of things. This can be seen in the way in which they divided the castes, the Brahmins being at the top. As mention before in the Greek chapter the idea of reincarnation originates in the upper class, to give them some form of reassurance of their continuity, to ensure that, by means of their virtue they stay control of affairs in the state.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

To help prepare for this dissertation I read the works of Csapo (2005) and Basnett (1993), whose research into comparative approaches have guided my work. For one must take into account many aspects when doing a comparison between two cultures. This is important because any comparative work can be influenced by the subjectivity of the individual examining the text and in a sense this will become incorporated into the findings. Comparative research is the act of comparing two or more things with a view to discovering something new about one or all of the things being compared. This comparative technique often utilizes multiple disciplines in one study. The multi-disciplinary approach is good for the flexibility it offers. I have used the comparative method in trying to find a connection between the ancient Greeks and the Indians. I have briefly compared their languages, looking for a common link between them. I have also looked at the important phenomenon of orality and how both these cultures have used the oral tradition to pass on knowledge to future generations.

The theory of reincarnation still seems to captivate the interest of scholars. Over the years, there has been a fair amount of scholarship written regarding reincarnation. As I have tried to point out in this dissertation, some scholarship has been focused on the unique connection between India and Greece. One of the questions most of the scholars have tried to answer is: Was there any contact between the ancient Greeks and Indians before the Hellenistic period and could this contact be the origins of belief in the idea of reincarnation in both cultures? In answer to this question, as I have stated before, I would have to agree with Sedlar (1980:31), who says that this connection between the two cultures will always be shrouded in uncertainty. This is due to the lack of evidence.

In this dissertation, I began by stating the topic and the main questions that I intended to try and answer. I explained the terminology for this paper as well as its importance. I stated the importance of funerals and burials with regard to the soul's journey.

To sum up what I have achieved in this dissertation, my aim was to look at the different views of the soul and the similarities / differences between Greek and Indian belief in the possible reincarnation of the soul. To do this I looked at ancient texts from the Greek and Indian sides of the question as well as the modern scholarship related to the topic that has been published over the years.

In Chapter 1, I looked at the Indo-European connection and oral tradition. I have tried to explain the possible Indo-European connection as well as touching on the theory of oral transmission of culture. I have included these very broad topics to help establish a timeline and possible origin of the theory of reincarnation.

In Chapter 2, I conducted a literature review, in which I summarized what other scholars had discovered about the theory of reincarnation in the ancient Greek world and investigated whether there was any influence on it by other civilizations such as the Indians, focusing especially on Sedlar and Seaford.

Chapter 3 then looked at the ancient Greek view of the soul. In the ancient Greek view of the soul, I tried to explain how over the years the concept of the soul changed, as well as belief in the idea of the soul's after-life when it departed from the body. Chapter 3 investigated the ancient Greek theories on the soul and reincarnation, I looked at how the soul was viewed in the time of Homer, where the soul was seen as something a person risks when they go into battle or as the life breath that leaves the body to either wander the world as a shade or goes to Hades. This Homeric view of the soul and its after-life painted a very dull and depressing view of death.

This depressing view of death changed in the sixth and fifth centuries, with the teaching of the Pythagoreans. There were also the Orphic religious teachers who taught the doctrine of Orphism. Both the Pythagoreans and Orphics believed in reincarnation of the soul, they both saw the soul as immortal. This was a big change from the Homeric idea of the soul. That new way of thinking about the soul and its immortality and its many lives and reincarnations, led to the inspiration of many other ancient Greek philosophers and poets, such as Pindar and Plato, who wrote myths and poems concerning the nature of the soul and its reincarnation.

Pindar wrote in his *Olympian 2* about the possible reincarnation on the soul, drawing attention to the punishment and rewards of the soul as well as the number of lives/times the soul returns to earth.

In the *Phaedo*, Plato argues that the soul is immortal and that it gives life to the body, without the soul the body cannot live, but the soul can exist without the body. This idea of the immortality of the soul is applied to all living things. To help explain the immortality of the soul Plato came up with a theory, which came to be known as the theory of 'forms'. He states that all sensible objects are referable to a certain 'idea' of which they are a likeness. We must know these forms before we can refer objects to them. We could not have seen or learned these ideas in this life, so we must have seen

them before this life. Plato does make a good point about knowledge and how we identify objects even if we have not seen them before.

Plato has many myths concerning the nature of the soul, such as the *Gorgias* in which we are shown the nature and judgment of souls in the after-life. The one myth that Plato clearly shows the theory of reincarnation comes from the *Republic* and the myth of Er. In this myth, we are told of the judgment of souls and the paths that the souls take as well as the soul's journey into other lives. The *Phaedrus* tells of the cycle of reincarnation and the duration of time in between reincarnations. The *Timaeus* tells of the creation of the immortal soul, and the cycle of reincarnation.

From Plato's works, we can conclude that he believed in the theory of reincarnation, which was in many ways similar to the Pythagoreans and the Orphic teaching. The interest in the soul and what happens to the soul after it parts from the body at death did not stop in the classical period but continued into the Hellenistic period with the Stoics and Epicureans.

In Chapter 4, having summed-up my findings about reincarnation in the ancient Greek view, I then moved on to the Indian belief in the nature of the soul and its reincarnation, its connection with *karma*. It is known that reincarnation was and remains today to be one of the main principles of Hinduism it is commonly recognized as extremely important by its followers. To those who believe in reincarnation, it is regarded as the natural process of birth, death and rebirth. Many Hindus believe that the *jiva* or *atman* (soul) is intrinsically pure. However, if the soul is pure it must be due to the body that causes the soul to become tainted.

The soul goes through numerous transmigrations / reincarnations in its series of births and deaths. Death extinguishes the material form, but the immortal soul remains unaffected by the death of its material form. The soul is immortal. The soul may take on a different forms particular to its *karma* or deeds committed in that life or a past life. All *karma* creates consequences, which must and will be felt either in this life or some forthcoming life. If the soul is enclosed and unaware of its ignorance for an extended period, it will continue be trapped to its physical wants and will thus be subjected to many series of births and deaths.

There is no heaven or hell in Hinduism that is everlasting, as I have stated in the chapter concerning Indian belief in reincarnation. After service in the after-life, the soul enters the rebirth system controlled by *karma*; the soul can be reborn as a human, an animal or a divinity. This continues rebirths; will last until *moksha*, the ultimate

freedom be acquired. As worn-out garments are shed by the body, worn-out bodies are shed by the soul, which resides within the body. New bodies are donned by the soul, like new garments. This idea of shedding the body like an old garment is similar to the Orphic idea that the body is a tomb for the soul and as the soul leaves one body it is free for a short time before it is sent back to a new body for its next life.

The questions to be summarised and answered in this conclusion are: What are the similarities between the ancient Greek theory of reincarnation and the Indians? What are the main differences between them? Was there a common link between these two cultures during the Indo-European period when these ideas developed? What makes the relationship between the ancient Greeks and Indians theory of reincarnation special and different to other reincarnation theories?

There are a few similarities between the ancient Greek theory of reincarnation and the Indians, such as the judging of the souls which is done in a state of nakedness where all the sins and good deeds of the soul can clearly be seen. The long journey the soul must undertake after it leaves the body. The punishments and rewards it receives for its behaviour. One of the most important factors in both theories of reincarnation is that the soul is immortal and that when the physical body is harmed or killed the soul stays intact and unharmed in any way. This belief of the immortal soul stems from the *Bhagavad Gita* in Chapter 2 passages 16 to 21, where the soul is described as invisible, indestructible and eternal. Plato also states that the soul is immortal. This is explained in his dialogue *Phaedo* 77d-e, where he tries to prove that the soul is immortal and that it pre-existed before birth and that it will exist after death. This idea that the soul is immortal has become such a big part of society that even in modern fiction this idea that the soul is not harmed when the body is the following is a quote from one of the characters from J.K. Rowling's books: 'Look, if I picked up a sword right now, Ron, and ran you through with it, I wouldn't damage your soul at all . . . my point is that whatever happens to your body, your soul will survive untouched'.<sup>166</sup>

One of the main differences between the ancient Greeks and the Indians belief of reincarnation is the concept of *karma* in Indian thought. This concept is not seen in the ancient Greek theory. The souls are punished or rewarded accordingly but there is no carrying over of past deeds, whereas with the Indian this concept is the basis of their theory of reincarnation.

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<sup>166</sup> Rowling 2007: 90

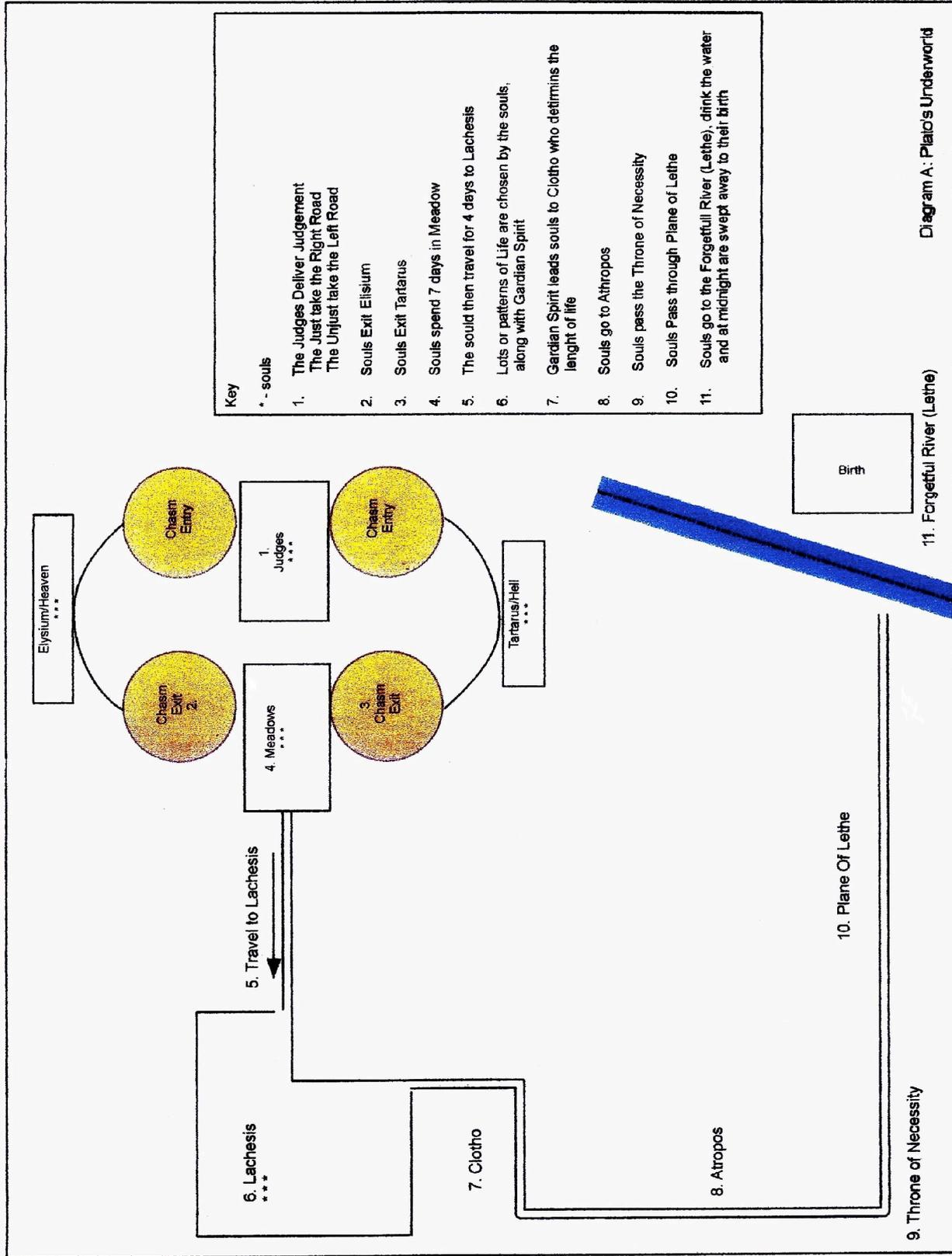
The next question looked at was whether there was any interaction between these two cultures in the Classical period. Though these two cultures share similar philosophies, I do not think that they had much interaction and if they did at the time it would not have been much. The early schools of Greek and Indian philosophy seem to have had more or less the same contents, but they presented it in a different combination and style.<sup>167</sup> Another possible answer to this question of interaction between Greece and India, one would have to look back further into Indo-European period to find evidence of this.

The last question is: What makes the ancient Greek and Indian theory of reincarnation special and different to other reincarnation theories? It can be said that both the Indian and the ancient Greeks believe that the actions of the living soul have an impact on the soul once it departs the material body.. This is very much like the laws of physics, where every action has a reaction. This rule can be applied to the soul in that every wrong deed when committed is punished accordingly in the journey of the soul into a new life. It is evident that the ancient Greeks and Indians share the idea that the soul is immortal and that it is subject to reincarnation. The ideas of reincarnation and the journey of the soul through the after-life seem to be common between them. It is important to note the both of these societies had been governed by an aristocratic system, and it is this system that led to the separate but similar evolution of ideas. I believe that these aristocratic systems had a large role in the evolution and the conception of the notion of reincarnation the soul, as a way to appease the social hierarchy and give them some form of comfort in the idea that they would some how find a way to over come death. Where fundamental differences do emerge, these may be attributed to the social and cultural environment within which the ancient Greeks and Indian lived and worked.

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<sup>167</sup> McEvelley 2002: 143

# Appendix A



Drawn By Siobhan Banwari

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