

PROLEGOMENA TO THE STUDY OF THE ANCIENT GREEK TEACHINGS OF REINCARNATION

A study of the eschatological doctrines into which the belief in reincarnation flowered in Greece will always remain one of the most fascinating ventures into the Classical field. Even so, it is a study that can never be satisfactorily accomplished in the present state of our knowledge and must at best remain superficial and incomplete.

The reason for this is the fragmentary and cryptic nature of the evidence, the Greek teachings based on this belief being largely material of mystery religion, in which they were vouchsafed only to the initiate, and transmission was in secret or in symbol. As a result the better portion of them has passed irrevocably into oblivion, while what survives are the scraps and details of doctrine which had reached the ears of the *profanum vulgus* through a leakage of some sort, or belonged to the broad general pattern of the teachings which was public knowledge anyhow.

In the instance of Plato too, in whose case the material of the reincarnation teaching is fuller, there is reason for thinking that there underlies a certain amount of symbolic meaning that is not readily understood by the uninitiate; Socrates himself remarks in the *Phaedo* the existence of certain teachings that were even 'unutterable' (ἄρητα), among which was the reason he advances there as to why it is wrongful for a philosopher to set himself free from life by suicide.¹

The nature and state of the evidence has, as a result, led to two different approaches to the subject; the one, philological and setting out to discover the form which the various reincarnation eschatologies had assumed, by a process of sifting the evidence and distinguishing the early

1. 62b. Socrates calls this particular teaching a great teaching and one which is not easy to comprehend (μέγας τὲ τίς μοι φαίνεται καὶ οὐ ῥάδιος διιδεῖν.)

from the late, the genuine from the spurious; the other, largely interpretative and venturing to pierce the superficial meaning and discover the hidden significance of these obviously mystical doctrines. If the former has often failed to do justice to the suggestivity and rich appeal of these religious teachings from a fear of reading too much in the evidence, the latter has as often erred on the other extreme, making excessive inferences upon the evidence, even where it is obviously plain and straightforward.

Rebirth doctrines of the Classical period confine themselves to the teachings of the religious teachers and philosophers from Orpheus to Plato, with whom such a belief has been prominently associated. While making the main concern of the task the reconstruction of these teachings from a sifting and collation of the extant evidence, a certain amount of interpretation is inevitable of the various features and details of these teaching in the light of one another and the comparable teachings of other nations, if the study is to be of any worth. There existed no recent work on this subject as such that is both critical and exhaustive before I undertook my own researches in the subject.² H.S. Long's *A Study of the Doctrine of Metempsychosis in Greece from Pythagoras to Plato*,³ which covered this ground, is unfortunately too brief to do justice to the subject, though he does find opportunity to throw new light on many points of interest. What is also regrettable

2. 'Ancient Greek Notions of the Reincarnation of the Soul', Ph.D. thesis presented to Queen Mary College, University of London, 1963 (unpublished), of which this article is a slightly revised version of the Introduction. The study left out consideration of Orpheus and the Orphic Tablets, since I was then of the view that the early evidence of the former had no indication of reincarnation to justify drawing on the latter, while the latter was of uncertain date and reference to be used to supplement the former.

3. N. Jersey. (1948).

in his dismissal of Orphism and much that could safely be added to the teaching of Pythagoras by a stringency that exceeds the need of caution. It is true that Linforth's notable study of the evidence on Orphism before 300 B.C., in his *The Arts of Orpheus*,⁴ does not turn up any direct proof for early Orphism of a teaching of reincarnation, but there do exist two or three good indications of the presence of such a thing, together with the features of an eschatology based upon it.⁵ As for the expedient adopted in the case of Pythagoras of falling back upon the earliest evidence alone on the score that much of the late evidence is suspect, it certainly saves the labour but on that account also loses the fruit of it.

In general the tendency has been, in the case of Orphism and Pythagoras, one of indiscriminate use of the evidence, both early and late, with little or no regard for historical development or the existence of a large quantity of spurious material. More often than not the study of these doctrines has been confused by the assumption, without substantial proof, that those features of the belief which appear in the writings of Pindar, Empedocles and Plato derive from Orphism and Pythagoreanism, and sometimes, that the teachings of Pythagoras themselves derive from Orphism, or vice versa.

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4. Berkeley, California. (1941)
 5. Notably the story of Orpheus' journey to the underworld to bring back his wife, Eurydice, in which I see a conflation of two things - a descent to Hades (κατάβασις ἐς Ἅδου) and a return of souls (ἀνοδος τῶν ψυχῶν) i.e. rebirth. The evidence of Euripides' *Alcestis* (vs. 357-362) is that he succeeded; and this we find supported by the *Rhesus* (vs. 398-945). On the other hand Plato *Symp.* 179d thinks he failed, being deluded by a phantom. There is again the evidence of Aristophanes' *Frogs* (vs. 1030-1036) that Orpheus taught men 'to desist from killing', which, taken together with the regimen of vegetarianism which characterized the 'Orphic life' (Eur. *Hipp.* vs. 952-954; Plato *Laws* 782c) must imply that Aristophanes' Φούων ἀπέχεσθαι went beyond killing of human beings to a general doctrine of *ahimsa*.

This notion of a succession of teachers (διδασχῆ: the Hindu *gurunparampara* chain) is by no means recent in the study. For instance Proclus,⁶ who writes: "The whole theology of the Greeks is the child of Orphic mystagogy; Pythagoras, being the first, taught the 'orgies' of the gods ('orgies' signifying 'burstings forth' or 'emanations', from οργῶν) by Aglaophamus, and next Plato, receiving the perfect science concerning such things from the Pythagorean and Orphic writings". Ficinus⁷ improves upon this by deriving Orphism itself from the teachings of Hermes Trismegistus, the head of the Egyptian priesthood, and *his* teachings in turn from Zoroaster.

There can be no doubt that the reincarnation doctrines found in Pindar, Empedocles and Plato were influenced by, if not actually derived from, Orphism and Pythagoreanism, and perhaps they in turn from similar teachings outside Greece. But derivation cannot be established with any degree of certainty by the extant evidence in the case of any of these; and even of influence, it is difficult to discover the nature and extent. Writers advancing such hypotheses have had little more to go on than certain similarities of features in the respective teachings or some geographical or historical affinity which makes it probable. Even the ancients do not seem to have been in a better position than ourselves on this question, even when they put forward we 'successions' with the confidence of Proclus and Ficinus.

6. Quoted by C.A. Lobeck *Aglaophamus, sive de Theologiae Mysticae Graecorum* Königsberg (1829) p. 723.

7. See *De Immort. Anim.* xvii.i.386: "In things pertaining to theology there were in former times six great teachers expounding similar doctrines. The first was Zoroaster, the chief of the Magi; the second Hermes Trismegistus, the head of the Egyptian priesthood; Orpheus succeeded Hermes; Aglaophamus was initiated into the sacred mysteries of Orpheus; Pythagoras was initiated into theology by Aglaophamus, and Plato by Pythagoras. Plato summed up the whole of their wisdom in his letters."

In the circumstances it appears the best course to treat the several Greek reincarnation eschatologies as independent formulations, merely adverting to comparable features in other such teachings in Greece itself and elsewhere when they might prove illuminative or significant in any way. The evidence itself needs critical examination, both the evidence of the Classical and post-Classical writers as well as the doxographical testimonia, if this study is to be of worth.

In the case of the early Pythagorean teachings, a large part of the post-Aristotelian evidence will be seen to be unacceptable. Often they have nothing new to add to what the earlier evidence has yielded. But, seeing that they continue to be used without much ado by writers in their treatment of Pythagoras, it is advisable to examine some of the more important of them, even where the examination would lead to a rejection. In the case of Orphism, where too the scantiness of the evidence from the Classical sources might lead one to consider the later evidence, one may consider the material reviewed by Linforth as going as far as it was worth going, but look at it in the light of the doctrine of reincarnation which one finds so firmly associated with the Orphics in later evidence. This may be supplemented with the evidence of the so-called 'Orphic tablets', which, in my opinion and the consensus of opinion of scholars since their discovery, are rightly so-called. But, as doubt still exists in the minds of a few as to the religion of the dead in whose possession they were found, and at the same time, since the great weight of the argument for their being Orphic is that there is nothing in them that is contrary to Orphic belief, it is too presumptuous to use them freely and unreservedly as supplementing the evidence on Orphism itself, and it is accordingly advisable to treat them separately, thus permitting a general idea of what can be known of the Orphic teaching of reincarnation with them as well as without them.

Before passing on to consider the Greek notions of reincarnation, it would be worthwhile reviewing the nature of the belief in general and its more important implications. The popular definition of reincarnation is the belief that upon death the soul passes into another body.

The soul is presumed to be immortal while the implications of mortality are those which arise from its association with body. As Plato puts it in the *Meno* (81b), "The soul of man is immortal and at one time comes to an end, which is called 'dying', at another time comes into being, but never completely perishes." What perishes at death is the body and the association of the soul with that body; what happens to the soul then is that it takes on another body.

This taking of new bodies by the soul, which is the notion of reincarnation, is expressed in a simile drawn from the perishable body itself in the *Bhagavad Gita* (iii. 13) to the effect that, "as the soul passes in this body through childhood, youth and old age, even so is the taking of another body." In more recent times it has been briefly but neatly expressed by John Masefield in his poem, *A Creed*, though perhaps with his own special conception of it, as the last two verses here show:

"I held that when a person dies,
His soul returns again to earth;
Arrayed in some new flesh-disguise
Another mother gives him birth.
With sturdier limbs and brighter brain,
The old soul takes the road again."

The popular definition of reincarnation entails certain things. Firstly, that which was just remarked, that while 'end' and 'coming into being', or 'death' and 'birth', are applicable to the association of soul with body which makes the individual, they are not applicable to the soul *per se*. Soul is immortal and at every incarnate existence it is 'the old soul' which takes the road again. Among the various images which have been used to describe the soul's assumption of new bodies not the least interesting is that of a man changing shirts, or, as Empedocles (fr.126)⁸ would have it,

8. *Vors.* (31.B.126). Abbreviation *Vors.* will be used throughout this essay for H. Diels and W. Kranz *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (Greek and German) 6th ed. Berlin. (1951-52), and fragments of the Presocratic philosophers will, unless otherwise qualified, follow the numbering therein. On the shirt-simile among the Nassairi see n. 40 below. Cp. also *The Institutes of Vishnu* 50: (contd.)

'alien tunics', and that of a man shifting from one house to another.⁹

Secondly, between the plurality of bodies soul is the 'transmigrant entity', and with it it carries identity, and through it personality may be said to continue. Thus, to take cases from Pythagoreanism,¹⁰ Mullias of Croton is no other than Midas, the son of Gordias, who died before he was conceived, and Pythagoras himself the same as Euphorbus who died in the Trojan War - all because there was that which passed from the one to the other as a 'self' or 'transmigrant entity', namely, a soul.¹¹

"As a man puts on new clothes in this world, throwing aside those which he formerly wore, even so the self of man puts on new bodies, which are in accordance with his acts in a former life." See also 49. For the interesting simile of a tinker and his coat, see Plato *Phaedo* 87c-d.

9. See the graphic metaphor used by the Buddha in *Dhammapada* xi.153-154, which compares the bodies of the cycle of rebirth to houses and *karma* to the builder of such houses: "Countless are the births wherein I have circled and run, striving to find but never finding the builder of the house; ill is this being born again and again! Now thou art seen, O thou builder of the house; never again shalt thou build for me! All the rafters are broken, the roof-plate shattered; my heart is freed from all constructions; the waning out of thirst has been attained." See also *Jat.* 1.76 and *Theragatha* 183-184.
10. *Vors.* I p. 99 - fr. 191 (Rose).
11. The Buddhist teaching is, however, not of reincarnation in the ordinary sense; there is no soul to reincarnate. That which gives rise to a new physical existence is the *karma* a man kindles in his lifetime; *Abhidharmakosa* iii. 24; see also *Questions of Milinda* ii.2.6 and iv.8.23. See S. Radhakrishna *Indian Philosophy*. London. (1923) vol. I.p.444. In its influence on the popular mind, however, it amounts to much the same thing.

Often there is assumed in reincarnation religions some sort of 'relinking consciousness' or memory of past existence (μνήμη)¹² which, in the case of those who are able to draw upon it, yield recollections of experiences in those existences. It was this that Plato made the basis of his epistemology, in turn using the possibility of knowledge to demonstrate the immortality of the soul.

Thirdly, reincarnation must be in and through a body biologically evolved, just as the old body from which the soul disincarnated was left to its biological disintegration. It is no reincarnation, as the word is generally used, when the soul returns to the selfsame body that it had quit, as in the instances of Christ himself or Lazarus, whom he brought back to life, or for that matter that remarkable man of whom Herodotus (iv. 13-14) narrates, Aristeias of Marmora. It is a return to the same body that we find experienced by Er, the son of Armenius, in the *Republic* myth (614b-621) and by Thespesius and Timarchus in the eschatological myths in Plutarch,¹³ and in all such 'descents to Hades' (the so-called καταβασις ες Ἅδου) or temporary absences from the body that one encounters in this study. One must also exclude that curious belief connected with shamanism that the soul of a dead shaman could invest a living shaman and thus reinforce the power of his soul.¹⁴

The old body can of course figure in reincarnation by being the material from which the new body is reconstituted. The soul could be thought to gather together at its new incarnation the identical particles of matter which had constituted its former body and from them rebuild, as a bird its nest, a new body. Among the primitives soul and body

12. See my 'Pythagoras, Birth Rememberer' *Univ. of Ceylon Rev.* vol. no.2 (1963) p. 186-212.

13, *De Sera Num. Vin.* 22 (=563b.f): *De Gen. Socr.* 21.f. (=589f.f). A power of resurrecting the dead is probably what Empedocles promises his followers in fr. 111 vs. 9: ἄξεις δ' ἐξ Ἄϊδαο καταφθιμένου μένος ἄνδρος. ("You shall bring back from Hades a dead man restored to strength.")

14. See sources cited by E.R. Dodds *The Greeks and the Irrational* Berkeley, California. (1951)p.165.n.56.

would hardly have been distinguished in the reappearance, through reincarnation, of departed ancestors - though the implications then were in any case never pondered.

Where the new body assumed by the soul in reincarnation was created from the material of the old, however, this invariably took place through the biological process of birth. This precludes such concepts as the Christian 'resurrection of the dead' from being considered reincarnation in the sense in which the term is popularly used. On the other hand any doctrine which holds that that which is common to a series of bodies is not the soul but the material component or anything else not identified with the 'self', hardly warrants being called reincarnation. An interesting sample of the sort of thing is the relation of potter and pot in Fitzgerald's translation of the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (esp. xxxv and the *Kuza-Nama*) or Hamlet's ruminations on the possibility of Alexander and imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay, blocking a hole to keep the wind away. The strange interpretation of Empedocles' teaching by Irhouius, which is followed by Sturz,¹⁵ that what transmigrated was not a soul or 'daimon' but the material which constituted the body, would *ipso facto* render it something else than a doctrine of reincarnation.

Where the new body does not originate biologically, it is usually a transformation of the old body; and when the soul is found to persist in this transformed body, the person is said to have undergone 'metamorphosis'. There is the classic case of Proteus in Greek mythology, also the transformations the god-infant Dionysius-Zagreus went through to escape dismemberment at the hands of the Titans.

Metamorphosis is an event all too familiar to the Greeks, as the numerous myths, most of which are collected by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*, would indicate. But there is always something miraculous or magical about it, since such changes of form did not take place between one life and another, when reality standards could not be applied, but within a single life itself. It always remained the privilege of gods and magicians to undergo or inflict upon others, and for obvious reasons lost credence with the evolution of the mind from its mythopoeic infancy.

15. *Empedocles Agrigentinus*. Lipsae. (1805) p. 471. f.

Lastly, reincarnation is viewed as largely taking place on this earth and in a body of flesh. Where places other than this earth are posited where the soul is thought able to reincarnate, these other places with their forms of existence recede to the background of concern or are treated as extensions of reincarnation upon this earth. For, after all, has not the belief originated and flourished from man's attempt to understand this very existence upon this very earth?

It is indeed a remarkable feature of reincarnation religion that Heaven and Hell themselves often appear as existences within the scheme of reincarnation. As Ninian Smart¹⁶ writes: "The colourful descriptions of heaven sometimes given in the Christian tradition suggest to the Hindu that heaven is part, even though an elevated part, of the empirical cosmos". But Heaven and Hell have been so treated by the reincarnation religions of India as well as Greece long before the advent of Christianity. As we may see, Pindar¹⁷ even assumes the possibility of moral conduct in Hades in the context of a doctrine of reincarnation which he adumbrates in one of his odes.

It might also be remarked here that the reincarnation religions do sometimes envisage existences of the soul other than in bodies of flesh, so that the term 'reincarnation', when applied with etymological accuracy in the context of these religions, must perforce be of limited denotation. Let alone existences such as those of 'devas' and hell-beings, Indian teaching holds that the human soul can, in-between incarnations, assume a subtle body and appear as a 'preta' or a 'gandharva' for a shorter or longer duration. The notion of subtle bodies assumed by the soul in its disincarnate state is common to other reincarnation religions

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16. 'Reincarnation and Eastern Attitudes' *The Listener* (Aug. 9th. 1962) p.203.
17. *Ol.* ii. 68-70 'But those who dared to keep their souls free from all wrongfulness three times on either side have gone the road of Zeus to the Tower of Cronos.' See also vs. 57-60: "... that straightaway the wicked souls of the dead pay penalty here, but for the sins done in this kingdom of Zeus there is one who judges beneath the earth and gives sentence in unfriendly necessity."

and teachings as well. Apart from Plato, whose soul-chariots of the *Phaedrus* may suggest astral-bodies as the material informed by soul in that 'region beyond heaven' (ὑπερουράνιος τόπος), Plotinus (*En.* iv.9) talks of aerian or igneous bodies, saying: "There are two modes of a soul entering a body, one when the soul, being already in a body, undergoes metempsychosis, that is to say, passes from an aerian or igneous into a physical body....; the other, when a soul passes from an incorporeal state into a body of a certain kind".

If we are to judge from the extant evidence, the Greeks down to and including Plato, who talked of reincarnation, seem to have managed quite well without the use of a single fixed term to express the notion. And equally strangely 'palingenesis' (παλιγγένεσις), the word at the tip of their tongues, when it did come to be used, did not fit the notion adequately.¹⁸ On the other hand, 'palingenesis' was better expressive of spiritual regeneration or initiation into a new life, where the initiate was metaphorically, not literally, 'born again'. Similarly the English equivalent 'rebirth' is well used to denote the spiritual transformation that is claimed to take place in the life of an individual, whereat the individual himself was qualified to be called 'twice born'.¹⁹

The word most commonly used in English writings on the subject, that is, 'metempsychosis' (μετεμψύχωσις) is precisely the least common among the Greeks; its etymological inaccuracy was appreciated by the ancient themselves.

18. [ἀί ψυχαί] πόλιν γίνονται ἐκ τῶν τεθνεωτῶν ; see Plato *Phaedo* 70c. Servius (*Aen.* iii.68) says: "Pythagoras non μετεμψύχωσιν sed παλιγγενεσ(αν) esse dicit". See E. Rhode *Psyche* (transl. into English by W.B. Hillis) London (1930) p. 93 n.2.

19. Thus Angulimala, the robber, is in Buddhist scripture said to have been 'born with a spiritual birth' on being converted by the Buddha and becoming a saint. In a similar sense Jesus tells Nicodemus that unless he be born again he cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Some Neoplatonists and Christian apologists corrected it to 'metempsychosis' (μετενσωμάτῳσις), which was accurate enough but rather cumbersome.²⁰ For the most part reincarnation was expressed by the Greeks with suitable modifications of the verb 'to be born' (γίγνεσθαι) in combination with 'again' (πάλιν) or some other such adverb, while the cycle of births and deaths was simply described as the κύκλος τῆς γενέσεως.

In English the term 'transmigration' is as popular as the term 'metempsychosis', but both have been used with the implication that the soul could, or did, invest animal bodies. 'Reincarnation', on the other hand, is still not quite specific as to the range of bodies the soul may occupy, but rather underlines the event. As was observed before, however, its strict etymology implies that such bodies must be of flesh.

As a magical belief reincarnation is widespread among primitive peoples in many parts of the world.²¹ With them it does not rest with the more sophisticated assumption of the immortality of the soul, but (which is in effect not otherwise) on the recognition of death as no more than a temporary relinquishing of corporeal existence or a transition from one corporeal habitat to another. Usually the soul, or rather the spirit, is thought to inhabit spots marked by rocks, trees or pools - the *okanikilla* of the Arunta Blackfellows - until such time as it can enter the womb of some

20. For those who use the word μετεμψύχῳσις, see Rodhe *loc. cit.* See also Olympod. *In Phaed.* p. 54.25 (Norvin). τῆν μετεμψύχῳσιν ἦτοι τῆν μετενσωμάτῳσιν, διότι οὐ πολλαὶ ψυχαὶ ἐν σώμα εἰδοποιοῦσιν, ἐπεὶ αὐτῆ μετεμψύχῳσις ἦν, ἀλλὰ μία ψυχὴ διάφορα σώματα μεταμπίχεται.

21. See J.G. Frazer *The Belief in Immortality*. London. (1913) vol.I.p.29; p. 270. He observes that the belief in some form of reincarnation is universally present in all the simple food-gathering and fishing-hunting civilisations. See also E.B. Taylor *Primitive Culture*. London. (1929) vol.II.p.1-9 esp. and for a list of such primitive tribes, see J. Head and S.L. Cranston *Reincarnation: an East West Anthology*, New York. (1961) p. 71-73.

passing woman and be mothered back to the tribe as a new member. Such a form of primitive belief is often accompanied by the practice of attempting to discover which ancestor's spirit it was that had taken rebirth in the tribe and of naming the new-born after him.²²

Such a primitive conception of reincarnation seems to have existed in Greece at some time in its prehistory, to judge from the practise come down to Classical times of naming new-born children after their grandparents and the association of 'Tritopatores' (τριτοπάτορες) with their birth, these Tritopatores, or 'third forefathers', being in fact the spirits of dead ancestors inhabiting the air and drawn into the new-born at birth, before they came to be considered wind-spirits granting prayers for children. The

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22. Among a Florida tribe the child was held over the face of the mother who had died in child-birth, so that it might breathe in her soul. Algonquin Indians used to bury dead children on the roadside for their souls to re-enter passing women. For the same reason Calabaris of the African slave-coast buried their dead in their houses. In Tibet the Dalai Lama was thought to reincarnate in a child born nine months after his death. The Khonds of India examined their new-born to discover which ancestors had reincarnated in them. In New Zealand the names of the ancestors were rattled off to the new-born till it acknowledged one with a cry. Among the Australian Arunta search is made in the *okanikilla* for a stone or wooden slab which the incarnating ancestor leaves behind, and from the discovery of this the ancestor is recognized and the child named after him. See Tylor *op.cit.* p.3-5 for numerous other examples. See also the fragment, sometimes given to the Orphics, sometimes to Heraclitus: οἱ δ' αὐτοὶ πατέρες τε καὶ υἱέες ἐν μεγάροισιν (πολλάκις) ἦδ' ἄλοχοι σεμναὶ κεδναὶ τε θυγατέρες.... γίγνοντι' ἀλλήλων μεταμειβομένησι γενέθλαις.

See G.S. Kirk *Heraclitus: The Cosmic Fragments* p. 147 on fr. 88 and 62, where he suggests some such popular belief as underlying these. See also n. 101 below.

teaching attributed to the Orphics that the soul was inhaled with the breath,²³ and the teaching attributed to the Pythagoreans that the air was full of souls called 'daimones' and 'heroes' (δαίμονες καὶ ἥρωες)²⁴ may reflect this ancient belief found in the older folk religion.

The notion of the continuance of the *gens* by the recurrence of the dead appears to have been ensured to a great extent by the vegetation-cycle. Even Voltaire remarks the parallel here observed between human life and nature, when he writes: "It is not more remarkable to be born twice than once; everything in nature is resurrection". Early traces of this are to be seen in the Cretan mythology of the death and resurrection of Galucus, and in the Cretan seals and rings which depict the pithos-burial of a child and the decay and regrowth of vegetation.²⁵ The significance of the chthonic deities in the return of vegetation as well and the return of the dead must point to the association of the one with the other in the mystery-cults in which both these ideas were fostered and flourished.

The belief in the transmigration of the soul into animals is often viewed as an extension of the belief that it reincarnated in human bodies alone. On the contrary, however, no violent distinction seems to have been made between man and beast in the primitive form of the belief. Rather, the evidence goes to prove that inter-transmigration between men and

23. Aristot, *De Anima* 1.5.410b27 refers to the 'so-called Orphic poems' and gives the belief that the soul "comes into us from space as we breathe, borne by the winds". The Attic *Tritopatores* found a place in an Orphic poem as 'doorkeepers and guardians of the winds' (Suid. s.v. *Tritopatores*.) The theory of wind-impregnation was accepted by Aristotle (*Hist. Animal.* 6.2.560a6) and was probably dissociated in his mind from the other sort.

24. Alex. Polyhist. ap. Diog. viii.32.

25. For a study of the Glaucus-myth in connection with the Cretan seals, see A.W. Persson *The Religion of Greece in Prehistoric Times*. Berkeley, California. (1942).

animals was the form in which even the great reincarnation religions of the world appear to have adopted reincarnation when they did. To the primitive mind in the dawn of human thought there appears to have been no generic difference between the spirits, any more than there was between the bodies, of men and animals or birds, which it tended to describe as composed of tribes or clans similar to those of men and as gifted with speech and capable of union in marriage with men. When a bear or wolf was thought of, it was thought of as a creature which scarcely differed from man, which had the same instincts and which reasoned in much the same way; and equally, the spirit of such a creature was seen as hardly different from that of a man.²⁶

J.A. Stewart²⁷ puts forward the suggestion that the inclusion of animals within the range of bodies that the soul could invest, was the result of a 'contamination' by each other of the two originally independent beliefs of metempsychosis and metamorphosis. The former, he observes, is the belief in the reappearance, in human bodies, of departed human souls - the normal generative process by which the human race is maintained on earth; the latter, the belief in the sudden bodily transformation, by magic or some other cause, of men into beasts and beasts into men - an exceptional occurrence. He adds: "Metamorphosis, which is properly the supernatural bodily transformation of a man into a beast or a beast into a man, reappears as rebirth, in due natural course, of a beast as a man, or a man as a beast: metamorphosis has insinuated itself into the place occupied by metempsychosis, and has become a sort of metempsychosis; while metempsychosis, originally a kind of re-birth of departed human beings, now includes the notion of departed human beings reappearing in new births as beasts, and beasts as human beings".

Long²⁸ goes further when he thinks that metamorphosis played a role similar to fetishism in preparing for the belief

26. For further examples of the primitive beliefs in transmigration of the soul into animal bodies, see Tylor. *op.cit* p. 609.

27. *The Myths of Plato*. London.(1905) p. 302-304.

28. *op.cit* p.3.

in metempsychosis as a whole. He is of course thinking of the appearance of metempsychosis in Greece, and also restricting himself to the literary evidence.

The case of Tuan MacCairill of Irish legend, pointed to by Stewart²⁹ is, just like the other instances in Irish saga, a good example of metamorphosis, metempsychosis and also something between the two, a woman swallowing Tuan as a salmon and giving birth to him in a human form. But there is nothing here to suggest that metempsychosis was extended to include animals through a contamination of any kind. Nor does Stewart establish his argument that metempsychosis was in its pristine form restricted to human beings. We are not even able to prove the priority of metamorphosis to metempsychosis so as to think of it as having played a role similar to fetishism, as Long supposed. The mental condition which expresses itself in the beast-fable, in which men and beasts talk and act together; in which the transformation of men into beasts and vice-verse is taken as a matter of course; in which beasts, in short, are at once men and beasts, and which Stewart thinks gave rise to metamorphosis, is itself more primitive than that which discriminated between man and beast and could equally contemplate metempsychosis as animals as metamorphosis into animals.

If anything, then, the notion of reincarnation in which the soul only obtains rebirth in human bodies must be the modification of indiscriminate reincarnation. Such a restricted form not only presupposes the growth of a distinction between man and beast but also the growth of tribalism - though even at that a residual token of animal-incarnation sometimes manifests itself in the institution of 'totemism'.

Reappearance of the dead in the form of animals, where it is found among primitive peoples, need not always be a manifestation of a belief in reincarnation. In archaic Greece the dead hero appears as a snake and is often so depicted together with his human representation in grave-stelai. The snake in such a case is not the soul of the hero incarnate in a snake body, but the hero, body and soul; or again and more

29. *op.cit.* p. 304. n.1.

probably, the snake is the soul itself. For, as J.G. Frazer³⁰ remarks on the thinking of primitive people, "If a man lives and moves, it can only be because he has a little man or animal inside who moves him. The animal inside the animal, the man inside the man, is the soul. The prevalence of the belief that the human soul has the form of an animal such as a mouse or snake is also observed by W.H. Schomerus.³¹ Tylor³² refers to the snake in primitive belief as "a creature whose change of skin has so often been associated with the thought of resurrection and immortality"; but Gardner³³ is closer to the truth in considering the Greek belief to have arisen from the fact that the snake appears from underground.

Notwithstanding that what we have here is not reincarnation, it is worth observing that the Greeks were not altogether strangers to such beliefs as the reappearance of the dead as corporeal creatures on earth, and more than that, in the form of lower creatures, long before Pythagoras recognized the rebirth of a friend of his as a dog and foresaw another destined to be reborn as a white eagle.

The religions of the civilized world which accept the tenet of the reincarnation of the soul invariably accept the possibility of the soul assuming animal bodies, this being recognized by them as the mode of degradation of souls that

30. *Taboo and Perils of the Soul*. London. (1917) p. 26.

31. 'Der Seelenwanderungsgedanke im Glauben der Volker' *Zeitschr. fur syst. Th.* vol. VI (1928) p. 217 n. The snake is the dead man's spirit in another form, as P. Gardner puts it; see *Sculptured Tombs of Hellas*. (1886) p. 82. It is what Prof. Murray refers to as the "old superhuman snake, who appears so ubiquitously throughout Greece, the regular symbol of the underworld powers, especially the hero or dead ancestors"; see his *Four Stages of Greek Religion*. N. York. (1912) p. 33. (The most notable of these reliefs are those from Sparta discussed by Gardner. *op.cit.* p. 82-86).

32. *op.cit.* p. 8.

33. *op.cit.* p. 82.

have lived contrary to the precepts. This is the basis of the doctrine of non-violence (*ahimsa*) and compassion (*maitri*) for all living creatures that is prominently associated with such religions as Buddhism and Hinduism.

Despite the fact that his sort of belief in the kinship of living things (συγγένησις τῶν ζῴων) is in accord with the theory of evolution - a thing which modern Buddhists are all too eager to remark - there are those who contribute to the belief in reincarnation, particularly Western scholars, who find the idea of rebirth as animals impossible psychologically, disturbing ethically, or simply uncomfortable to their personal prejudices. The question of how, as he puts it, "a chance soul can occupy a chance body" was raised by Aristotle³⁴ with respect to the Pythagorean teaching of transmigration long before the problem faced those who received it in the Oriental religions. The difficulty has often been explained as having arisen from a misconception of what it was that these religions recognized as the transmigrant entity that passed from one body into another, and where it could be called a 'soul', from imputing psychological attributes to it which it did not possess in their conception of it.

Many and interesting are the attempts that writers on mystic religion have made to reconcile the human soul with animal nature when they encounter irrefutable testimony of transmigration in the scriptures. The 'illumination' of Anna Kingsford³⁵ on the matter is a good example. She writes: "Now, the metals have no soul: therefore they are not individuals. And not being individuals they cannot transmigrate. But plants and animals have souls. They are individuals, and do transmigrate and progress. And man has also a spirit; and so long as he is a man - that is, truly human - he cannot re-descend into the body of an animal, or of any creature in the sphere beneath him, since that would be an indignity to the spirit. But if he lose his spirit, and become again animal, he may descend, yea, he may become altogether gross and horrible, and a creep-

34. *De Anima* A3. 407b20.

35. *Clothed with the Sun* London (1937) p. 31; see also Kingsford and Maitland *The Perfect Way* London (1923) p. 46-47.

ing and detestable thing, begotten of filth and corruption. This is the end of persistently evil men".

Another attempt she makes goes like this: "In the extreme case of a man returning to re-birth, who by vicious appetite or otherwise, has formed a very strong link with any type of animal, he may be linked by magnetic affinity to the astral body of the animal whose qualities she has encouraged, and be chained as a prisoner to the animal's physical body. Thus chained he cannot go onward to re-birth: he is conscious in the astral world, has his human faculties, but cannot control the brute body with which he is connected, nor express himself through that body on the physical plane. The animal organism is thus a jailor, rather than a vehicle. The animal soul is not ejected, but remains as the proper tenant and controller of its own body." She adds, "Such an imprisonment is not reincarnation, though it is easy to see that cases of this nature explain at least partially the belief often found in Oriental countries that man may under certain circumstances reincarnate in an animal body".

Popularly, however, supporters of the exclusive form of reincarnation set about the evidence of reincarnation as animals by giving it an esoteric interpretation whereby the various animals are taken to be merely symbolic of types of human beings. Thus, the rebirth as a pig simply means rebirth as a human being with the nature of a pig, that is, greedy and sottish; an ass may stand for a human being who is foolish and stubborn, a bee for one who is industrious, and so on.³⁶ Sometimes, and by a somewhat more superficial rendition, the animal characteristics may be considered physical, as witness the human 'monsters' who in appearance are sometimes repulsively animal-like, pig-faced, dog-faced, and so on. Such interpretations are often even resorted to where the context makes it quite clear that what is meant is just what is said and no more, i.e. that rebirth as animals is literally

36. See for instance W.Y. Evans-Wentz in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* 2nd ed. London (1949) intro. p. 49 f. See also the animal instances in Semonides' poem on women, which may easily evoke this sort of identification.

rebirth as animals.³⁷

If the Irish legends show anything quite clearly, it is that the belief in transmigration, to whatever extent it is found in them, could and did figure in a society that was by no means primitive, without a suggestion of punishment (κόλασις) or purification (κάθαρσις). Similarly, there is no trace of moral determination about the reincarnation cycle which Herodotus³⁸ presents as Egyptian, in which the soul is said to incarnate in the bodies of all manner of creatures for a period of three thousand years before it can return once again to a human body. If in fact this pattern, which he describes, reflects a prevalent Greek teaching, it may perhaps be the non-ethical prototype which the earliest Greek teachers of reincarnation developed into a profound and meaningful religious doctrine of sin, suffering, and liberation from suffering.

Outside ancient Greece belief in reincarnation is a predominant feature of Indian thought at the popular as well as philosophical level. It is central to all the ancient religions of India, Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, also to Ajivikism, and through the spread of Buddhism into most of Asia, it has dominated the thought of nearly the whole of the Oriental world. On the other hand, in the European tradition, which ultimately derives from the Greek in many respects though significantly not in respect of religion, the absence of this belief is one of the features which chiefly differentiates European civilization and culture from that of the Oriental world as a whole.

37. For instance in Plato's *Laws* 9043 the manner in which doer is made to suffer next birth is by a reversal of roles (ἀντιπενορθός) with absolute silence about migration in animal bodies. But see *Rep.* 602d and *Phaedrus* 249b - not only are men said to become animals but animals are said to become men, and in *Phaedrus* 249 b-e human birth is reckoned a special blessing. The same is found in *Timæus* 42a-d, with a contrast being struck between human and animal incarnation. The whole teaching of the avoidance of killing animals and vegetarianism in other Greek teachings suggested clearly the kinship of animals and men in such teachings.

But this must remain only a general assertion about Europe as of the Orient. Even if we except Hellenistic Greece, where the Classical Greek teachings about reincarnation received the sublimest religious expression in the writings of Plotinus and lesser Neopythagorean and Neoplatonic teachers and scholars, the belief was not unknown in pre-Christianized folk religion; indeed it is thought to have been rather widespread, particularly among peoples of Celtic origin. So also it was seen as a fundamental tenet of a number of primitive Christian sects themselves which claimed to possess the esoteric teachings of Christ. It appears to have been known in some form to the Jews³⁹ and, among the Islamic sects, at least held by the Druses, Nassairi and the Sufis.⁴⁰ In recent times it has been professed by a number of scholars, poets and philosophers of the West, and for a number of different reasons, and there are bound to be others in the future who will find in this ancient belief concerning the soul the most satisfactory explanation of their own individual experiences or problems or the most satisfactory answer to the predicament of human life.

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39. See the evidence referred to under 'Transmigration' in Hastings' *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* Edin. (1921) (vol. XIII, p. 435-440). The migration or 'rolling on' (*gilgul*) of souls was taken up by the Kabbalists in later Jewish philosophy. Souls were thought to enter bodies of wild animals and birds and vermin, for is not Jehovah 'the Lord of the spirits of all flesh'? Much else in the Bible was interpreted in terms of this belief; see also Tylor *op.cit.* p. 14.
40. Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela (12th cent.) writes of the Druses of Mount Hermon: "They say that the soul of a virtuous man is transferred to the body of a new-born child, whereas that of a vicious transmigrates into a dog, or some other animal." Among the Nassairi also transmigration is viewed as a penance and purification, unbelievers becoming camels, asses, dogs, or sheep, the disobedient Nassairi becoming Jews, Sunnis, or Christians, and the faithful returning in a new body to their own people, and after a few such changes of 'shirt', entering Paradise or becoming stars. For both Druses and Nassairi see the ref. cited by Tylor *op.cit.* p. 15 n.1 and 2.

The existence of the belief among the Celts of Gaul about the first century B.C. is evidenced by Julius Caesar,⁴¹ who, it may be thought, should have known a great deal about them, since Divitiacus, friend and ally of the Roman people, was no less than a Druid himself. Evidence of it is again discovered for the Celts of Ireland and Britain in the primitive folk-religion of 'Fairies', these Fairies being - as is shown by their association with rocks, trees and lakes - spirits of the dead seeking rebirth.⁴²

Among the Irish a tradition existed that divine personages and national heroes, who were members of the Tuatha De Danaan or Sidhe race or who were otherwise celebrated or honoured, underwent reincarnation. If a more particular examination is made of the Cuchulainn or 'Red Branch' cycle of Irish saga, it will appear that practically all its principal figures were regarded as reincarnations of the earlier gods and heroes of that race and that the tales which narrate their births indicate this more or less clearly. Cuchulainn, the Ulster warrior, was the incarnation of the God Lugh and in *The Wooing of Emer* narrative he is urged "that his rebirth would be of himself". Likewise the hero Finn-nae-Coul was reborn after two hundred years as Mongan, king of Ulster, and recalled the incident in that earlier birth of the killing of Fothad Airgdech, a king of Ireland, by Cailte. And in the Irish-Christian redaction of the legend of Tuan, Tuan informs Finnen that he was a stag, a bear, a vulture (or eagle) and a fish before he was born as the human being he was.⁴³

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41. *Bel. Gal.* vi. 14.3. Writing on the Druids he says:
In primis hoc volumi perveniunt non interitu animarum,
sed ab aliis post mortem transire ad alios, atque hoc
maxima ad virtutem excitant patet non moriis neglecto.
42. See Lewis Spence *British Fairy Origins*. London. (1946)
 p. 192.
43. The chief sources are *Leabhar na h-Eidhre*, *The Book of Leinster*, *Four Ancient Books of Wales*, *Mabinogion Sioned Gadelica*, *Barðdas* (a collection of Welsh manuscripts made about 1560) and the *Annals of the Four Masters*, compiled in the first half of the seventeenth century. The most notable study of the doctrine is Alfred (contd.)

Most of the instances in Irish saga are not instances of reincarnation, it is true, but amidst the other modes of shape-shifting found in the accounts of these people there occurs, and prominently, shape-shifting through reincarnation. Even then this is not reincarnation in the usual form, for, as in the example of the woman swallowing Tuan as a salmon and giving birth to him as a human being, there is no desertion of the former body by the soul nor a reincarnating of the soul in the new body. Rather, the new body is no other than the old body, and what has taken place within the woman who swallowed Tuan as a salmon, is merely a shape-shift. Thus, while we need not contribute to Stewart's view that metamorphosis gave rise to metempsychosis, we may note here an interesting form of metamorphosis i.e. through the channel of metempsychosis. As regards the Classical references to the existence of the belief among the Celts, we may review them when discussing the source of the Greek teaching.

Nutt's 'Essay upon the Irish Vision of the Happy Otherworld and the Celtic Doctrine of Re-birth' in Kuno Meyer's *The Voyage of Bran*. London. (1897): see also W.Y. Evans Wentz's chapter on 'The Celtic Doctrine of Re-birth' (p. 358-396) in his *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries*. Oxford. (1911). In his *Buddhism in Pre-Christian Britain*, London and Glasgow. (1928) p. 96 and 43, Donald A. Mackenzie finds the Celtic doctrine more like the Buddhist than the Greek and suggests that it had been carried westward through Europe by Buddhist missionaries, pilgrims and local converts. Among the evidence he uses (p. 39) is the Thirteenth Edict of Asoka, in which the king claims to have sent missionaries to the land of the Seleucid monarch, Antiochus II, and to have achieved conquests, not by the sword but by the *dharma* "in the realms of the kings of Syria, Egypt, Macedonia, Epirus and Cyrene" as well as in South India and Ceylon: and (p.42) Origen's statement in his *Commentary on Ezekiel* that "The Island (Britain) has long been predisposed to it (Christianity) through the doctrines of the Druids and the Buddhists, who had already inculcated the doctrine of the unity of the Godhead".

The first centuries of Christianity found reincarnation a flourishing creed propagated by Neophythagoreanism and Neoplatonism and as attractive to mankind as the doctrine of the soul as taught by the Church. At the same time the efforts of Philo to demonstrate a substantial similarity between Greek and Jewish doctrines had already introduced the Platonic teachings concerning the soul to those upon which Christianity was fostered. Consequently many of the early Church Fathers seem to have accepted reincarnation as a ready explanation of the fall of man and the mystery of life and preached it as the only means of reconciling the existence of suffering with the idea of a merciful God.

Among the early Christian sects which acknowledged reincarnation were the Gnostics, that school of eclectics which became conspicuous amidst the chaotic vortex of religions in Alexandria during the first century. Apart from them, the belief in reincarnation was held in the past by the Manichaeans, Mandeans, Coptics, Priscillians, the Italian Cathari and many other sects, and in recent times, for instance, by the Rosicrucians, Free Masons and Theosophists. Libellus X accepts the doctrine as a teaching of the *Corpus Hermeticum*.

Attempts have been made to force a reincarnation interpretation into certain statements in the Bible, but with no success. If anything, the one undoubted reference to the doctrine, which is in the question asked of Christ on the blindness of a blind man in *John ix.2* shows that he was acquainted with it but by his reply thereto also shows that he clearly rejected it. The sects that attributed such a teaching to him usually claimed it to be a secret teaching of his; and later, when the propagation of it was declared heretical, it was imparted in secrecy.

In the *Pistis Sophia*,⁴⁴ an ancient Gnostic-Christian work, the doctrine of reincarnation is given as a teaching of Christ which applied not only to particular personages but as an universal law to the lives of all mankind. Here

44. Refer G.R.S. Mead's transl. (with introduction) of Schwartze's parallel Latin version, London. (1896). The ms. is in the British Mus. Add. 5114 (vellum) and in the dialect of Upper Egypt, dated about the end of the fourth century. See bk.i. 12-13.

it is said that "the Saviour answered and said unto his disciples: 'Preach ye unto the world, saying unto men, 'Strive together that ye may receive the Mysteries of Light in this time of stress, and enter into the Kingdom of Light. Put not off from day to day, and from cycle to cycle, in the belief that ye will succeed in obtaining the Mysteries when ye return to the world in another cycle'." And again,⁴⁵ "At that time, then, the Faith shall show itself more and more, and also the Mysteries in those days. And many souls shall pass through the cycles of transmigration of body and come back into the world in those days; and among them shall be some who are now alive and hear me teach concerning the consummation of the number of perfect souls; they shall find the Mysteries of Light, and shall receive them". The doctrine also figures prominently in the death-masses of the Manichaeans, as in the Parthian *Angad Rosnan* and *Hrwidagman*, and in comparable books of the Coptics and other like Christian sects.

Among individual Christian philosophers and theologians a belief in reincarnation was attributed, and sometimes carelessly, to Origen of Alexandria, Nemesius, Synesius (Bishop of Ptolemais), to Hilarius, Boethius, Psellus of Andros and a few others. Often they subscribed to the belief in reincarnation as a corollary to the tenet of pre-existence, which they invariably held to account for the fall of man, but as often they only preached the latter. Exegesies of the fall from grace and the return to grace, with reincarnation providing a fall back for those still not ready to recover the lost estate, were variations played upon the Platonic theme. That such a doctrine did have a strong appeal to Christian thinkers until growing Western influences frowned upon it, is to be inferred from the out and out declaration of the teaching of pre-existence (generally linked with the doctrine of reincarnation in the Platonic tradition) as anathema by the Fifth Ecumenical Council, the Second Council of Constantinople, in 553 A.D. Five years later Justinian was to support this anathema with one of his own, declaring: "Whosoever says and thinks that human souls pre-existed - i.e. that they had previously been spirits and holy powers, but that satiated with the vision of God, had turned to evil, and in this way love in

them had died out and that they had therefore become souls and had been condemned to punishment in bodies - shall be anathema".

In comparatively recent times the belief in the reincarnation of the soul has found acceptance in Europe and America, as in ancient Greece and Rome, chiefly among the intelligensia. It was particularly popular with the German scholars of the eighteenth century, not to mention Henry More and other Cambridge Platonists round the seventeenth century. E.D. Walker's *Reincarnation : a Study of Forgotten Truth*⁴⁶ and Head and Cranston⁴⁷ will be found to include a wide and varied collection of passages from a number of European and American writers of celebrity, who appear to have been partial to the belief. Among these, Hume, for instance, found reincarnation the only conception of immortality that philosophy can harken to; Swedenborg evolved the idea that man becomes after death what the deeds of his present life approximate him to; Goethe was inclined to explain sympathy between people, as between himself and his wife, as due to acquaintance in an earlier life; the feeling of having lived before is strong in Wordsworth's *Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*; so, Lichtenburg says, "I cannot avoid the idea that I died before I was born". On the other hand Lessing defended reincarnation on the ground that perfection could not be attained in a single life, and there was no reason why there should only be one life; and Schopenhaur, while resting his belief upon vague memory or an amnesis-feeling, accepted a palingenesis of the will alone.

Of the more recent thinkers, the Cambridge philosophers, the Professors John MacTaggart, James Ward and C.D. Broad have upheld the belief. Most noteworthy, however, is the growing interest in the reincarnation hypothesis among Western psychologists today as a result of the number of accounts of spontaneous or hypnotically induced recollections of past lives, published in recent times by investi-

46. N. York (1965)

47. *op.cit.* p. 77-275, also 279 f. They quote from or cite over four hundred Western thinkers.

gators in the field.⁴⁸ This in itself is not anything startlingly new, since Jung⁴⁹ had entertained a notion of 'soul' or 'mind' as something with frontiers far beyond those recognized in his day and criticized Freud for "a justifiable fear of metaphysics" which, he believes, prevented him from venturing beyond intra-uterine experiences.

The belief in reincarnation has had a considerable effect on other religious beliefs and attitudes. This is evident in the case of Greek religion too, where the beliefs and attitudes of the reincarnation teachings stand in clear contrast to those of traditional Homeric religion. For instance, the idea that living beings are constantly being reborn and that they have been experiencing this in the past as well, gives one not merely a notion of the cyclical nature of human existence but of an immensity of time as well. A single cycle in the account referred to by Herodotus

48. Some of the more interesting works are M. Bernstein's *The Search for Bridey Murphy* Pocket Bks Inc. (1956) and F.L. Marcus *A Scientific Report on the Search for Bridey Murphy*. N. York. (1956), H. Blythe, *The Three Lives of Naomi Henry*. London. (1956), D.A. Bloxham *Who was Ann Ockenden?* London. (1958), A Rochas *Les Vies Successives*. Paris. (1911), T. Flourney *Des Indes a la Planete Mars*. Geneva (1899), A Cannon *The Power Within*. London. (1950), C.J. Ducasse *A Critical Examination of the Belief in a Life after Death*, Illinois (1961), I. Stevenson *Evidence from Survival for Claimed Memories of Former Incarnations*. England. (1961) E.S. Zolik 'An Experimental Investigation of the Psychodynamic Implications of the Hypnotic 'Previous Existence' Fantasy *J. Clin. Psychol.* vol. XLV (1958) and J. Rodney *Explorations of a Hypnotist*. London. (1959).

49. In his psychological commentary to the Tibetan *Bardo Thodol* transl. from *Das Tibetanische Totenbuch* by R.F.C. Hull and included in Evans Wentz *op.cit.* p. xxxv-ly; see p. xli-xly, esp. xly.

takes as much as three thousand years; in Empedocles it is 'thrice ten thousand seasons', while Plato talks of successive cycles of ten thousand years each. In Indian mythological cosmology, however, this is much longer, yielding a cycle of three hundred million years; and then, after a period when Brahma and the Universe are absorbed in the Absolute, the whole business begins once more.⁵⁰

With the belief in the possibility of the soul incarnating in animal bodies, the doctrine re-establishes the sense of community with the animal world which man lost with his evolution from primitive life. In the ancient world, which was so much nearer to primitive times than our own, the nature and relationship of man to animal exercised the minds of some of the best thinkers. A few of them established a kinship of the two by attributing a common origin to both or propounding some theory of biological evolution, doing so more than two thousand years before Charles Darwin startled a mistaught public by reviving this age-old hypothesis. Notable among these was that of the Milesian philosopher, Anaximander,⁵¹ who taught that the first men were originally contained in certain fish-like creatures, and this, together with his observation that the evolution of living creatures as a whole began in the sea before moving on to land,⁵² constitute a brilliant anticipation of the Darwinian line of thought. Soon afterwards the notion of a common origin of man and the lesser creatures was supported by Empedocles,⁵³ the famous teacher of reincarnation and abstinence from flesh, with a theory which, though bizaire and crude, conformed with the belief in the possibility of the soul's transmigration into animal bodies. At the same

50. *Bhagavad Gita* viii. 17-19. By human calculation a thousand ages taken together make a day of Brahma, and a thousand a night. An age is equal to 4,300,000 years. Thirty such days make a month, and twelve such months a year. After one hundred such years Brahma dies - and then is born again in another millenium. At his death all is annihilated, to be manifested again with his rebirth.

51. Censorin. 4.7. Plut. *Symp.* viii. 8.4. = *Vors.* I. p.88-89.

52. *Aet.*v.19.4 = *Vors.* I. p. 88.

53. *Emped.* fr. 60-62 and the doxography, in *Vors.* I.p. 334-335.

time he provided through it a basis in reality for the numerous composite creatures such as satyrs, sirens, centaurs, harpies and sphinxes which fill the mythology of the Greeks as well as of other peoples and which he took to be the substance of (what Jung would call) our 'collective unconscious' acquired of a time of experimentation by the evolutionary forces in nature. In later times the Neoplatonist Porphyry,⁵⁴ while a firm believer in metempsychosis, argued for humanity towards beasts on the grounds that they are our natural brothers, that they are endowed with life as we are, that they have the same principle of life, the same feelings, the same ideas, memory and industry as we, though only lacking human speech.

Even when mankind was viewed as part of the community of living creatures and this fact recognized by the belief in transmigration, man's evident superiority to animals could not be overlooked. In the context of reincarnation religions, therefore, we find a recognition of him as a superior class of animal rather than a special creation. On the other hand, the notion of man as a fallen divinity (δαίμων) - a notion which was popular in Greek reincarnation teachings and flourished in some Christian sects in the first centuries of the religion - resulted in the gradations of lives in the scheme of incarnations which, with plants thrown in as a lowest grade, corresponded neatly to the classic Greek distinction of the parts of the soul. Thus⁵⁵

	<u>Parts of soul</u>		<u>Grades of Being</u>
Reason	Speculative	—	Gods
	Calculative	—	Men
Feeling	—————		Animals
Vegetative	—————		Plants

54. In his *De Abst.* esp. bk. iii

55. Following Aristotle, *Ethics* 1.1102a26-1103a2 and 6.1139a3-31. Plato's tripartition of the soul, in *Rep.* 436a-441a, had observed a roughly similar exposition of three types of motive or impulse (contd.)

The doctrine concerning these grades of existence within the scheme of incarnations in reincarnation religion is expressed in the teachings of the great Neoplatonist Plotinus⁵⁶ as well. "Humanity", he taught, "is poised mid-way between gods and beasts and inclines now to the one order, now to the other; some men grow like to the divine, others to the brute, the greatest number stand neutral..... When the life principle leaves the body, it is what it is, what it most intensely lived..... Those that have maintained the human level are men once more. Those that lived wholly to sense become animals..... Those who in their pleasures have gone their way in torpid grossness become mere growing things, for only or mainly the vegetative principle was active in them; and such men have been busy be-treering themselves." Variations of more or less subtlety in one or more details are of course found within the individual religions, but the recognition of animals as fellow-beings involved in the great predicament of existence, only worse off than man, is more or less universal to them.

In Greece too, as in the East, the thought that animals and men belonged to the same race (ὁμογενή) led to an increasing practise of compassion towards animals and an avoidance of flesh eating. In later times of course the latter appears to have become a fad with certain sophisticated people and the reasons adduced more or less independent of the belief in transmigration.⁵⁷ Avoidance of killing, which is attested for in the earliest evidence on the earliest

in the mind: Reason, the faculty that calculates and decides; second, a type of motive covering such characteristics as pugnacity, enterprise ambition and indignation, which are often in conflict with unthinking impulse; and thirdly, desire and appetition, the sense of bare physical and instinctive craving. The subdivision of Reason itself is not made by Plato here.

56. *Enneads* iii.2.8.

57. Porphyry *op.cit.* and Plutarch *De Esu Carn.* will be found rallying most of these in their defence of vegetarianism.

reincarnationist sect of Greece. The Hindus, however, became mixed in thought with cannibalism and a form of what is an almost neurotic revulsion of the flesh. ⁵⁸ Krishna was depicted as befriended by animals ⁵⁹ and Pythagoras, on visiting a smitten cow. ⁶⁰ Far apart from these and impudacious strident appeals to desist from killing and flesh-eating, there is little evidence in the Christian period of anything like the positive attitude of respect for all living things that is characteristic of Jainism and Buddhism. In Hellenistic times concern seems to have arisen, more particularly with the teaching of the Neoplatonists and Neopythagoreans, at length being Propertius ⁶¹ to write his excellent treatise on the abstinence from flesh in defence of the practice, a treatise addressed to his friend Firmus Castricius, who had become a Christian and abstained without animal food.

By contrast the Semitic religions have seen man as lord over beast and have lent impetus to the continuance of that belief, in which mankind had a vested interest, that all that is in this world was made for exploitation by the human species. Even when the notion of the kinship of all living creatures, implicit in the ancient mysteries as well as in the idealist philosophy of the ancient West, became explicit in nineteenth century scientific thought with the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, ⁶² the lethargy of the human mind, which hates to have to rethink its metaphysical position, has failed to be noticeably disturbed. On the other extreme the Hindu teaching that sacrificed animals and plants thereby obtained through rebirth a higher plane of existence proves, if anything, the ingenuity of religion in reconciling the irreconcilable.

58. Refer fr. 136, 137, 138, 139

59. Simon, fr. 40, Aesch. *Op. fr.* n°28-1630; Eur. *ibid.* 560-562; *ibid.* 1211-1213 and later writers evidence. The attraction of his song was surely in what he sang than the beauty of his melody alone.

60. *Wyd.* 21.9.7 - *Diog. vit.* 38, see p. 81 and n. 100.

61. *Op. fr.*

Closely associated with the belief in reincarnation, where it has flowered into a religion involving moral or sometimes magical purification, is the attitude to incarnate existence as a predicament of the soul from which it cannot be too quick to escape. This is summed up in the Indian teachings in the single term *samsara*, in which worldly existence is equated with transitoriness and suffering (*dukkha*). A similar attitude to the world is found in the Greek in the notion of body as a 'tomb' or 'prison' of the soul or, alternately, of the incarnate being himself in the world as in some sort of guard-house or dismal abode.⁶² And with this tendency is allied the tendency towards regarding final salvation as coequal with the liberation of the soul from the round of empirical existences.

At a further remove the whole world of contingent things is recognized as 'mayik' or illusory, this being notably expressed in India in the theology associated with the name of the great Hindu philosopher, Sankara, and in Greece in the 'unreality' of the phenomenal world in the philosophy of Plato. With the conviction that rebirth is the consequence of 'ignorance', suffering itself is viewed as the outcome of action arising from such ignorance. Consequently there is the tendency towards other-worldliness and contemplative techniques in the philosophy of such religions, together with an attitude of acceptance, often misviewed as one of 'pessimism', or 'fatalism', in the face of misfortune. For what man suffers is not God-inflicted but self-sought ($\alpha\upsilon\theta\alpha\lambda\pi\epsilon\tau\alpha$); he merely reaps what he has sown.

The chief distinction of the doctrine of reincarnation and that which has elevated it from a magical belief of primitive man to the fundamental philosophy of two of the world's four great religions, Hinduism and Buddhism, is the facility which it provides for explaining a man's apparently underserved suffering, or may be, good fortune, as the result of his own unremembered actions of a past life, thus obviating the 'scandal of particularity'. This notion of action and reaction is expressed in Indian religions in terms of a 'law' of moral causation with reference throughout the whole cycle of existences. It is popularly known as the 'law of action', or *karma*.

62. See for instance Plato *Crat.* 400b-c and *Phaedo* 62b.

In Greek reincarnation, likewise, Necessity (Ἀνάγκη), received in the manner of *karma*, comes as the answer to the nature of man's lot, his μοῖρα. Here God is no longer 'jealous and trouble-giving' (φθόνος τὲ καὶ παραχάρις) He is wholly blameless (ἀναίτιος); and the apparent injustice of Fate, which raised such anguish in the hearts of poets like Theognis⁶³ and Simonides⁶⁴ and a state of mind more truly fatalistic, finds, in looking beyond the natural limits set to life by birth and death, an explanation which not only makes the individual responsible for his Fate but in fact justly deserving of it. On the other hand it goes beyond rendering God blameless to a point where he is hardly significant to the scheme of things. And in this necessity of doer suffering for his deeds (δράσαντι παθεῖν) the Greek no doubt saw on an universal scale the silent working-out of a concept of *peripeteia*.⁶⁵

63. See vs. 133-136, also 141-142.

64. i.l.ff. Bergk.

65. The notion of sin committed in one life obtaining retribution in another life (even if not of the same person) is basic in the belief of Greek 'blood-guilt'. The rationale of this had been the recognition of the family, not the individual, as the unit. With the growth of individualism, however, people like Solon (xiii 63 f.) began to appreciate the fact that the hereditary victims of 'nemesis' were essentially 'blameless' (ἀναίτιος). Aeschylus sought to reinterpret the hereditary element of ancestral sin, not so much guilt, as a proclivity to further sinning on the part of the descendants. The closeness of the notion of the sins of the fathers being visited upon the children and the sins of past life upon a subsequent life in the same individual (see Plato *Laws* 872e-873e) is seen in the question asked of Christ (*John* ix.2) by the disciples: "Who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" There is undoubtedly a certain logic in the evolution of the doctrine from the ethical angle. See Nilsson 'The Immortality of the Soul in Greek Religion' *Eranos* vol. XXXIX (1941) esp. p. 12, and see Dodds *op.cit.* p. 28 f., despite p. 150. On the Buddhist notion of *karma* or 'moral necessity' (contd.)

Reincarnation has often been put forward as a palusible explanation of many curious experiences, such as the feeling of familiarity with something or someone not encountered before in this lifetime. Bulwer Lytton refers to this as "that strange kind of inner and spiritual memory which often recalls to us places and persons we have never seen before, and which Platonists would resolve to be the unquenched and struggling consciousness of a former life".

If these are memories of past lives accidentally evoked or excited by something in the immediate circumstances, there are also numerous accounts, ancient and modern, of deliberate recoveries of memory of past births by indulgence in certain techniques, or, in the case of people who are thought to have attained that capacity, by simply willing. The sacred books of the Hindus contain some such reincarnation histories. Kapila is said to have written the Vedas from his recollection of them in this way. The *Vishnu Purana* furnishes some instances of memory retained through successive lives. Most notable of course is the *Jataka Book*, which narrates the approximately five hundred and fifty birth stories of the Buddha which, though palpably invented and designed to impart Buddhist virtues⁶⁶ much as the fables of Aesop conveyed advice for success in life, and the parables of Jesus, Christian values, based themselves on the belief in rebirth and the Buddha's reputation for being able to recollect his past births. In recent times the case-studies of the recovery of memory of past lives undertaken by investigators in the field like Ian Stevenson, have awakened interest in the West to the phenomenon along with the

as a remarkable development in ethical speculation, see Tylor *op.cit.* p.12. Greek reincarnation teaching, while accepting this as a fundamental truth to account for present suffering, tends to emphasise the more immediate requitals for present sinning with elaborations upon the traditional concept of Hades.

66. Though the Jatakas number only five hundred and forty seven, they involve a far greater number of 'lives'. It seems likely that the Buddha narrated a few, and in the manner that Jesus narrated parables, to illustrate a lesson, and that the rest were a result of indiscriminate multiplication. It is noteworthy that in none of the Jatakas in the Nikayas is the Buddha identi- (contd.)

great upsurge of interest, especially among the youth, in the reincarnation religions of the East.

While in religion the reincarnation hypothesis has been used as a reasonable explanation of the problem of economic inequality, misfortune and suffering, it has, in the world of art and intellect, been extended to account for precocity or genius. The birth of geniuses in humble and commonplace circumstances is taken to furnish evidence that the talent of an individual may be a carry-over from a prior existence, while unremarkable children of great parents were shown to exhibit the inadequacy of the theory of hereditary influence. In the moral field the belief in the possibility of graduated improvement affords hope that the perfection that may not be achieved in one life may be yet striven for to be achieved in another.

With these cursory observations on the belief of reincarnation in general we may pass on to some questions that arise concerning its particular manifestation in Greece. Most discussed among these is the question of the source from which the Greeks derived the belief, assuming, as a number of scholars have done, that the Greeks *did* derive it from some other people.

The question arises with one of the earliest pieces of evidence on reincarnation in Greek literature, that is, the passage in Herodotus (ii. 123) already referred to, in which he alleges it to be in fact Egyptian and that certain Greeks, whom he will not name, adopted it as their own. Very few, however, are prepared to accept Herodotus on this on the grounds that (a) there is no evidence of a teaching of reincarnation in Egypt contemporaneous with, or

fied in his previous births with an animal. At the end of each Jataka the Buddha identifies the participants in that story with those contemporary with his final birth as the Buddha. On the Jatakas see T.W. Rhys-Davids *Buddhist India* 6th ed Calcutta (1955) ch. ix p. 104-117 and J.G. Jones *Tales and Teachings of the Buddha*, London (1979).

prior to, the time of Pythagoras,⁶⁷ who is apparently the one Herodotus has in mind as the first of the culprits, and (b) that Herodotus was labouring under an *idée fixe* that much of the Greek teachings were derivative from the more ancient neighbouring civilizations.⁶⁸

These considerations warrant a certain amount of caution but need not be conclusive. It is indeed presumptuous to believe that the extant evidence on Egypt is complete and exhaustive of ancient Egyptian teachings and beliefs, so much so that we may rely on it to refute, two and a half thousand years later, a man who had in fact visited the country shortly after the time of Pythagoras and obtained first-hand knowledge on matters there. Not that even so Herodotus must be believed on what he says here - he is mistaken on many other things - but to refute him on the basis of an absence of information on our part is hardly reasonable. Likewise the *idée fixe*; those who discredit his assertions of Greek borrowings may themselves be labouring under an *idée fixe* to the contrary.

67. See the authorities cited by W. Rathmaun *Quaestiones Pythagoricae, Orphicae, Empedocleae* diss. Halle (1933) p. 48 n. 32. If Pythagoras visited Egypt, it would have been around 540 BC (Strabo xiv 638, following Timaeus) see also K. von Fritz *Pythagorean Politics in South Italy* N. York (1940) p. 53 f. Re Iamblichus V.P. 11 and 28, see Fritz *loc.cit.* and J.S. Morrison 'Pythagoras of Samos' *C.Q.* vol. L (1956) p. 142.

68. See for instance A. Cameron *The Pythagorean Background to the Theory of Recollection* Menasha, Wisconsin (1938) p. 16. He admits Herodotus is here speaking on his own authority (see also How and Wells *A Commentary on Herodotus* Oxford (1912) on ii.123) but adds that "his complete reliability is lessened when we remember that he is airing a very dear prejudice - an *idée fixe* about borrowing of the Greeks from the Egyptians." See Wilamowitz *Der Glaube der Hellenen* Berlin (1931-32) p. 189, also Long *op.cit.* p. 6, and others.

Flinders Petrie⁶⁹ points to the possibility that a reincarnation belief could have existed in Egypt shortly after the reputed visit of Pythagoras, through the Hermetic writings of the *Kore Kosmou*, and that seventy five years later it could have been taught to Herodotus as an Egyptian belief. Again, it has been suggested as a possibility that Herodotus found the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* recognizing the privilege of good souls to assume various shapes of animals and plants from day to day (on one a heron, on another a cockchafer, a lotus flower, a winged phoenix, a goose, swallow, plover, crane, viper and so on), and wicked souls too, 'the restless vagabonds between earth and heaven', as seeking a human body in which to pitch their tents in order to torment it with sickness and to harry it to bloodshed and madness - and exceeded his text in interpreting therein a doctrine of reincarnation.⁷⁰ A. Erman,⁷¹ who is one of the few who believed Herodotus may have been right, suggested that the old Egyptian beliefs may in fact have gradually evolved a doctrine of reincarnation.

The tradition of Pythagoras' visit to Egypt is at least as old as Isocrates, who in his *Busiris* (28-29) records that he learnt "matters concerning sacrifices and the holy rites performed in temples" (ἰδὲ περὶ τὰς θυσίας καὶ τὰς ἁγιστείας τὰς ἐν τοῖς ἱεροῖς) and was the first to introduce them to Greece. Elsewhere Herodotus, referring to certain taboos, associates them with the Egyptians and at the same time with the Pythagoreans.⁷² This lends some amount of plausibility to the theory of Egypt as the source of the Pythagorean tenet of reincarnation.

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69. *Personal Rel. in Egypt before Christianity* London (1909) p. 39 f; see also his *Rel. Life in Ancient Egypt* London. p. 109-110.
70. See Gomperz *Greek Thinkers*. London. (1901-12) vol. I (transl. by L. Magnus) p. 126-127; see D. Fimmen 'Zur Entstehung der Seelenwanderungslehre des Pythagoras' *Arch. für Rel.* vol. XVII (1914) p. 513-523.
71. '*Die ägyptische Religion*' *Handbueher des Koniglichen Museen zu Berlin*. 2nd ed. Berlin (1909) p. 213.
72. ii.81; Burial in woolen garments or wearing wool to temple.

Unfortunately the evidence is not as conclusive as to clinch the matter. Apart from the lack of certainty that Pythagoras ever went to Egypt, Isocrates does not make mention of what would have been the most remarkable of Pythagoras' borrowings and one upon which many of the Pythagorean rites and taboos were dependent. Again, if one thing is more marked than any other in the reincarnation cycle described by Herodotus as Egyptian, it is its inflexible determinism; and this bespeaks a magical rather than religious conception. Such a notion of reincarnation could hardly have been the central doctrine of the kind of religion Pythagoras, and for that matter Orpheus before him, were teaching in Greece. Besides, would it not be at variance with those very religious rites and taboos which Isocrates says Pythagoras adopted from the Egyptians, and Herodotus himself implies? The same may be said of Empedocles' teaching of reincarnation, even though in respect of its features it does reflect pretty closely those of the Herodotan account.

Burnet⁷³ was for Scythia as the source of the Greek belief, basing his assumption on what he took to be traces of some such belief among the peoples of Thrace and Gaul. Caesar⁷⁴ makes definite allusion to a doctrine of reincarnation among the Druids, upon which he says was based their singular valour. But this was later associated by writers such as Diodorus Siculus (v.28) with the Pythagorean teaching of reincarnation, even with the suggestion that it was learnt from the Greeks than vice-versa. Besides, a close examination of the references in Strabo (iv. 197.4), Valerius Maximus (ii.6.10), Lucan (*Phars.* 454-457 and scholia) and Ammianus Marcellinus (xv.9.8) show that not much more can be implied of the particular belief of these peoples than one of immortality, even if the manner in which it was taught

73. *op.cit.* p. 82 n. 2.

74. *De Bel. Gal.* vi.14.5. He observes that they did not think that at death their souls perished but that they passed from one body to another (*ab aliis..... transire ad alios.*).

sometimes gave the impression of reincarnation. ⁷⁵

There are two other passages of more importance in deciding the matter. The first of these is concerning the change of form that Hecuba was destined to undergo in Euripides' tragedy called after her, the *Hecuba*. Here, at the end of the play (*Hec.* 1265 f.) Polymestor prophesies that she was fated to fall off the ship on her way to Greece and undergo a change of form into that of a dog with fire-red eyes. The dialogue proceeds with Hecuba asking him how he knew of her impending transformation, to which he replies that he had it from the seer, Dionysius:

Εκ. πῶς δ' οἶσθα μορφῆς τῆς ἐμῆς μεταστροφῆν;
 Πλ. ὁ ἑρῆξι μάντις εἶπε Διόνυσος ταῦδε.
 Εκ. οἳ δ' οὐκ ἔχρησεν οὐδεν ἂν ἔχεις κακῶν;
 Πλ. οὐ γὰρ ποτ' ἂν σὺ εἶλες ὡδε συν δόλῳ.

HEC. *How do you know of my changing form?*

POLYM. *The seer, Dionysus, told the Thracians this,*

HEC. *Did he not prophesy any of the troubles you are having?*

POLYM. *You won't ever catch me out with your guile.*

Now, Long ⁷⁶ may be right that ταῦδε in vs. 1266 here refers to the whole tragic outcome of the play, not merely to Hecuba's change of form. But the detail about Hecuba's change of form, which could hardly have belonged to the traditional versions of the story, it may be argued, suggested itself to Euripides from the fact that the Thracians held a belief in reincarnation. The probability increases if it appears that the idea of a dog-incarnation recommended itself to Euripides on account of the fact that just such a

75. Rohde *op.cit.* p. 264. But see Linforth 'ΟΙ ΑΔΑΝΑΤΙΖΟΝΤΕΣ' *Cl.Phil.* vol. XIII (1918) p. 23-33.

76. *op.cit.* p. 7-8.

thing had occurred in the anecdote (narrated by Xenophanes: fr. 7) involving the famed Greek champion of the belief in reincarnation.

The second passage is one that concerns the Thracian deity Salmoxis and appears in the history written by Herodotus (iv. 95). It seems there that this Salmoxis was credited with certain preachings and practices which smacked of reincarnation, and further, that he was alleged to have learnt this from no less a person than Pythagoras. The whole thing appears in the form of an anecdote and is attributed by Herodotus to the Greeks of the Hellespont and Pontus regions.

Unfortunately the same doubts and difficulties which beset the theory of Egypt as the source of the Greek teachings of reincarnation besets the Scythian hypothesis as well. The evidence generally implies only some belief in immortality. But where it goes beyond this to hint at reincarnation as the form in which this immortality was experienced, the suggestion is rather that these peoples learnt it from the Greeks, more especially Pythagoras, than vice-versa.

Nor do the two passages just referred to improve the position. The change of form (τῆς μορφῆς μεταβολῆς) which Polymestor predicts for Hecuba is more probably through metamorphosis or shape-shifting popular among the Celts rather than through metempsychosis. If however her impending dog-form was prompted to Euripides by the fate of Pythagoras' friend of the Xenophanes-fragment mentioned earlier, it is probable that Euripides himself misunderstood the Celtic belief for one of metempsychosis. Shakespeare does no less when he speaks of Rosalind's prior incarnation as a rat in "Pythagoras' time" - and, of all things, an Irish (Celtic) rat.⁷⁷ In the case of Salmoxis, even if it is a doctrine of reincarnation that is cryptic in the things said and done by that Thracian *daemon* Salmoxis there, the likelihood is that the Greeks who invented the story wittingly or unwittingly projected the famous Pythagorean teaching concern-

77. *As You Like It* iii. 2. Note also the allusion to recollection. Of course the Irishness of the rat may simply have owed itself to the poet's knowledge of the popular belief among the Irish that rats could be rhymed to death, and nothing more.

ing the soul upon what was no more than a simple teaching of immortality associated with him. As observed earlier, it was only a 'practise of immortality' that was evidenced of this Thracian deity elsewhere. Besides, even if that evidence can be coerced to yield something like a doctrine of reincarnation for the Thracians and the like, it would be more difficult to establish that it was the Greeks who borrowed it from them than vice-versa. It is as a teacher of these peoples rather than their pupil that Pythagoras, the prominent link in this hypothesis of a Northern origin of the Greek belief, appears when he does.

Not infrequently those who advocated a Thracian source for the Greek teachings made the derivation through the offices of Orpheus, who was in tradition closely associated with Thrace, if not actually considered a Thracian.⁷⁸ Recently however interest has shifted to Scythia and shamanism, with E.R. Dodds himself in his *The Greeks and the Irrational*⁷⁹ attempting to relate the Greek prophets of reincarnation through their powers and practices to the shamans of the North.

This has certainly served to draw attention to an aspect of Greek religion which had so far not received adequate treatment, which Dodds has somewhat unhappily called 'the irrational', and to certain remarkable Greeks such as Abaris, Aristeias and Hermotimus, not to mention Epimenides and Pherecydes. These men were alleged to have displayed such powers as of self-induced trance, levitation, bilocation, forevision and an overmastery of the will over the flesh, powers also popularly associated with the yogis and saints of the reincarnation religions of the East.

78. But see Linforth *op.cit.* He thinks the evidence before 300 B.C. (Aristoph. *Frogs* 1031, Eur *Hipp.* 952-953 and *Laws* 782c), which refer to an avoidance of killing and a regimen of vegetarian fare, while consistent with a belief in reincarnation, is not positive enough to indicate one.

79. Berkeley, Calif. (1951) ch.v: 'The Greek Shamans and the Origins of Puritanism.' See also K. Mueli 'Scythia'. *Hermes* vol. LXX (1935) p. 121 and C.H. Kahn 'Empedocles among the Shamans' in *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy* ed. J.P. Anton with G.L. Kustas, New York. (1971) p.30-35.

Herodotus (iv.36) tells of Abaris that he was considered a Hyperborean, that he carried an arrow with him, that he could live without food. He seems to have known much more about this man, but for some reason he withholds this information from the reader. As for Aristeias,⁸⁰ he too had connections with the people of the North, being credited with an account of the one-eyed Arimaspians who, according to him, lived beyond the Issedones, beyond whom lived the griffins who guarded gold, and then the Hyperboreans. He is said to have fallen dead in a fuller's shop in his native city, Proconnesus, but when the fuller closed the shop and went to inform his relatives, there arrived a man who had met Aristeias walking towards Cyzicus! Aristeias returned seven years later and wrote his *Tale of the Arimaspians*, then vanished again. Two hundred and forty years later his ghost appeared to the people of Metapontum and, besides instructing them to erect an altar to Apollo, informed them that on the occasion that the god had visited them, he had accompanied him in the form of a raven. The third of these 'Greek shamans', Hermotimus, was found eminently suitable by Heracleides of Pontus⁸¹ to be a prior incarnation of Pythagoras by virtue of his remarkable psychic powers - for tradition has it that his soul was able to leave and re-enter his body at will.⁸²

There is, however, nothing in the instances of these three men to suggest that they were in any way associated with reincarnation. The raven in the Aristeias story was either the soul itself of Aristeias, or more likely, one of his earlier transformations or shape-shifts rather than a prior incarnation of his. As for Hermotimus, neither his powers nor anything else about him go to the extent of implying either a teaching or experience of reincarna-

80. Herodot. iv. 13-15.

81. fr. 98 W = Diog. viii.5; see also Porph. *V.P.* 45 and Hippolyt. *Phil.* ii. 11.

82. See Pliny *Nat.Hist.* vii.52; Plut. *De.Gen.Soc.* 592 c-d; Apoll.Dysc. *Hist.Comm.* 3; Lucian *Muse. Encom.* 7; Tertull. *De Anima* 44.

tion for himself. Heracleides' recruitment of him into the prior incarnations of Pythagoras appears to have been altogether self-inspired.⁸³

Of Epimenides, however, Diogenes Laertius⁸⁴ preserves the tradition that he claimed to have been Aeacus reborn and to have lived many times on earth. As Dodds⁸⁵ remarks, Diogenes' words clearly imply that Epimenides claimed to have been reborn; there is no question here of anything like a psychic reinforcement of the shamanistic type. Besides, there was a tradition that Epimenides possessed a knowledge of the distant past, which was of respectable antiquity and known to Aristotle.⁸⁶ Aristotle's own particular observation that Epimenides' assertions were about the vanished past and not about things to be might, if anything, support the hypothesis that such knowledge was achieved by him through retrocognition and not through any form of clairvoyance or magical power.

Pherecydes too was said to have taught of reincarnation and to have in fact been the first to do so. Perhaps this is what Cicero⁸⁷ goes on when he makes the broader assertion that it was Pherecydes who was the first to assert that the soul of man was immortal. The soul's occupation of body and its relinquishing of it thereafter

83. Hermotimus i.e. 'honoured by Hermes', by his name itself lends himself to be linked in the chain of lives which began with Aethalides, whom Hermes honoured with the gift of memory. He is sometimes called Hermodorus (Gk. *doron* = gift).

84. i. 114. λέγεται δὲ ὡς καὶ πρῶτος αὐτὸν Αἰακὸν λέγοι προσποιηθῆναι τὲ πόλλας ἀναβεβιωκεναι

85. *op.cit.* p. 164 n.51.

86. *Rhet.* 1418a24.

87. *Tusc. Diss.* i.16.38, depending on Posidonius; see also Apon. *In Cant. Cant.* v. 95. f = *Vors* (7.A.5); Suidas s.v. *Pherecydes*.

Pherecydes is said to have described in allegorical language which spoke of "hollows, pits, caves, doors and gates". If this was so, these hollows, pits and the rest may have been part of the vocabulary with which he described the world of the dead.⁸⁸ A strong tradition exists that he was closely associated with the great Greek teacher of reincarnation, Pythagoras, who was himself credited with a descent into the underworld -- indeed, that Pherecydes was no less than his guru.⁸⁹

The reliability and antiquity of the tradition on the point of a belief or teaching of reincarnation in the case of both Epimenides and Pherecydes is, however, not well founded. Diogenes fails to state his authority for his statement that Epimenides claimed to have been Aeacus and that he was on earth many times before, so that Dodds⁹⁰ himself cautions against building too much on it. Similarly Pherecydes' alleged teaching of metempsychosis first appears in Suidas⁹¹ one and a half thousand years afterwards, with no mention of who the authority for it is. In any case it is difficult to connect these two figures with the North except by grouping them together with such other personalities as Abaris and Aristeias as being birds of a like feather. Dodds⁹² himself thought that Pythagoras held the doctrine of reincarnation as an universal 'law' and was indeed responsible for taking it as such, whereas people like Epimenides had claimed it as a experience peculiar to themselves.

But even the belief in reincarnation as restricted to special people - granted Dodds is right that there was

88. See Pherecydes fr. 5 and 6.

89. Ion fr. 5; Aristot. fr. 191 Rose = *Vors.* (14.A.7).

90. *op.cit.* p. 143.

91. *loc.cit.*

92. *op.cit.* p. 144.

such a thing in Greece at any time - is not traceable beyond the Greeks to the North. As he himself notes,⁹³ the Northern belief was simply that the 'soul' or 'guardian spirit' of a former shaman may enter into a living shaman to reinforce his power and knowledge. Thus, however fascinating the hypothesis of a derivation of Greek reincarnation belief from the powers and practices of the shamans of the North be, it needs much more than the evidence available to us at present to give it any serious degree of probability.

Scholars who think that the Greeks learnt of reincarnation from the Indians are of course influenced by the remarkable similarity of more than the broad general features of the doctrine as developed in Greece and India. "It is not too much to assume", writes Gomperz,⁹⁴ "that the curious Greek who was the contemporary of Buddha, and it may be, of Zarathustra too, would have acquired more or less exact knowledge of the religious speculations of the East in the age of intellectual ferment through the medium of Persia". In favour of this the point may be made that, even if it was Western Greece that was to see the Greek belief of reincarnation in its fullest flower, Pythagoras himself set out to Italy from Samos in the East.

When Indians first appeared on Greek soil, they came as a contingent of the great army of Xerxes. If the circumstances prevented peaceful intercourse with the mainland Greeks, it was still certainly possible with the Ionian Greeks, who were present in large numbers alongside the Indians in the Persian army. It is possible that even some time before this some Greeks had infiltrated on to the Indian side of the Hindu Kush and settled there, as the story of Nysa repeated in the accounts of Alexander's expedition indicates. These Greeks could have been worshippers of Dionysus - which accounts for the Hellenistic myth of that god's invasion of India (perhaps also the cult of the Krishna-like Oriental Dionysus which figures in the *Bacchae* of Euripides) and of these Greeks being explained as his soldiers disabled in the course of it. If there were such

93. *op.cit.* p. 143-144.

94. *op.cit.* p. 127.

Greek there, they must have gained an intimate knowledge of the reincarnation teachings of India, though the subsequent hostility of Persia towards Greece, and in any case the immensity of the intervening distance would have left them isolated and ignorant of the development of parallel teachings in their own motherland. At best they may have known that back at home reincarnation was associated with the name of Orpheus and, may be, that it was also adopted by Pythagoras in Samos before he left for South Italy. On the other hand, the Greeks who saw India with Alexander and after him, being in a position to make the comparison, seem to have been struck by the resemblance of the Indian teachings with the Greek. They appear to have been partial to Buddhism, and reasonably so, a number of them, including the renowned Bactrian king, Menander, favouring it and even fostering its familiar teachings.

The most thorough-going case for the Indian origin of the Greek belief is given by L. von Schroeder in his essay *Pythagoras und die Inder*⁹⁵ and his contention is bound to appear somewhat plausible when Greek and Indian doctrines based on the belief are viewed more comprehensively. There is the close similarity of features which are in fact part of the secondary elaboration and accidental to the belief in its appearance in the two countries;

95. Leipzig (1884). Schroeder drew attention to the fact that nearly all the philosophical, religious and mathematical teachings ascribed to Pythagoras were common knowledge in India as early as the sixth century B.C.. On the other hand, he points out, they arise in Pythagoras' teachings without any antecedents. Garbe agreed in the main with Schroeder. They differed only in that, while Schroeder believed that Pythagoras had been in India, Garbe assumed that he had met his Indian teachers somewhere in Persia: See also Barthelemy Saint-Hilaire *Premier Memoire sur le Sankya* p. 512 f; he thought India much more likely the source of Pythagoras' doctrine of soul-transmigration. Lucian Scherman (*Materialien zur Geschichte der indischen Visionliterature*. Leipzig (1982) p. 26. n 1) mentions in addition the following: F. von Schlegel *Ueber die Sprache und Weisheit der Inder* (1808) p. iii f; A.L. de Chezy (contd.)

for instance, the inclusion of Heaven and Hell within the scheme of reincarnation alongside the notion of reincarnation itself as a mode of punishment; the concept of the world as a place of sorrow and earthly life a condition that is fraught with suffering; the almost identical attitude to body and the physical world as in themselves hateful and to be escaped from as soon as possible; the notion of liberation through virtue, virtue being identified with knowledge, and knowledge as the recovery or recollection of forgotten truth; the emphasis on contemplative techniques; the recognition of a spiritual gradation of living things, with human beings as an aristocracy on the doorstep of liberation; unique powers of remembering past births possessed by exceptional beings - and so on.

What is disconcerting to a hypothesis of an Indian origin is that if, as it seems, reincarnation was a tenet of Orphic religion from the first, its appearance in Greece must antedate the common sway of Cyrus the Great over Ionia and India. At the same time the date of the appearance of the belief in Indian religion is itself a matter of controversy and it is upon this that A.B. Keith⁹⁶ chiefly bases his refutation; indeed, as the evidence stands, it

in Schlegel's *Indische Bibliothek*, vol. I. (1823), p. 261; Abbe J.A. Dubois *Moeurs, institutions et ceremonies des peuples de l'Inde* vol. II (1825) p. 312 f; Upham *The History and Doctrine of Buddhism* (1829) p. 27 f. and C. de Plancy *Dictionnaire infernal* Paris (1818) p. 86. See C.H. Kahn *op.cit.* p. 35. He thinks there was no clear trace of transmigration in Greece before Pythagoras and that therefore one must look for the origin of the teaching in a civilization that had reached a high level of development comparable to that of early Greece. He naturally finds the truest peers of Pythagoras and Empedocles in their Indian contemporaries in the age of the Buddha. Consequently Kahn thinks "the time has perhaps come to reconsider in the light of modern research and with more rigorous techniques of comparison, the hypothesis developed by von Schroeder in 1884."

96. 'Pythagoras and the Doctrine of Transmigration' *JRAS.* (Gr. Brit. and Ireland) vol. XLI (1909) p. 569-606; see also his 'Religion and Philosophy of the Veda (contd.)

may even be used to argue the reverse. Keith's own explanation of the similarity of the beliefs which obtained in the two lands is summed up when he writes that "the nature of the problem being the same everywhere, and the mind of man not being essentially different in the India of the Upanisads and the Greece of the Pythagoreans and Plato, the results of the philosophy tend to resemble each other in diverse points".⁹⁷ Long⁹⁸ is not slow to agree that "this type of explanation is the most likely", though, as E.L. Minar Jr.⁹⁹ points out, his conclusion that the mind of man in India and Greece is not essentially different "because Greeks and Indians belonged to two closely related branches of the Indo-European race" is based on a highly questionable assumption.

In view of the absence of evidence for a transportation of the doctrine from India to Greece, even granting the antiquity of the Indian necessary for such a hypothesis, some such assumption as that of Keith is all that is possible. This would direct inquiry to Greece itself - which is what should have been done in the first instance. Even so the remarkable similarities which exist between the reincarnation philosophies of Greece and India, as perhaps between these and like teachings among other peoples, compels the belief in a widespread communication, a communication which was neither direct nor definite but carried out, in the manner of the ancient world, in the passage of ideas along the network of trade routes through Asia and Europe through the medium of symbol, parable, myth or occult teachings transmitted from mouth to ear. The charges of plagiarism levelled against Pythagoras in the early evidence, Herodotus' theory of the origin of the Greek teachings of reincarnation in Egypt, the association of Pythagoras with the Getan Salmoxis and later with Zoroaster, the Magi and the Celts, all suggest that the Greeks were aware of this, though

and Upanishads' *Harv. Orient. Series* vols. XXXI and XXXII. Cambridge, Mass. (1925) p. 570-581 and 601-613.

97. *op.cit.* p. 610.

98. *op.cit.* p. 11. See also F.M. Cleve *The Giants of Presocratic Greek Philosophy* vol. II. Hague (1969) p. 519-520.

indeed they may have gone on to become one or another of these non-Greek religions, the source of the fundamental belief of being reborn. In fact, present-day occultists and holy men alike express the conviction in some such widespread migration of souls, and argue that a belief in the existence of a secret signal-code, readily understood by the initiated, is inseparable from any considerable study of the mystery religions of the ancient world.

Again, the ancient tradition of a single source of origin for the Greek belief of reincarnation was the consequence of the notion, now well-accepted generally, that much of Greek ideas and institutions were borrowed from the older civilizations. This relationship of the recent past, however, is less often seen the result of an understandable European bias against this belief, which has no significance in orthodox Christianity or Occidental civilization and therefore with a tendency to something 'alien' to Greece too, which is the presumed source and fount of the civilization and culture of the West. Inevitably the influence of this old concept upon the Greek mind had been slow, as usual.

Whatever the effects of the belief may have been - and I have yet to see a clear, unifying link, these effects - the extant evidence, as I have said, fails to prove a thesis of borrowing here with any degree of conviction. This inevitably referred us back to Greece itself. But here again the evidence is neither adequate nor conclusive in establishing the evolution of the concept from any form of belief concerning the soul that is discoverable in primitive Greek religion. Parallels from primitive societies elsewhere may prove everything and nothing, though they would point to the important fact that the belief of reincarnation can be and is present among peoples, which has also been originated by themselves.

Although there is no trace of anything like reincarnation in Homer and Hesiod, the belief must have appeared in Greece as far back as the beginning of the seventh century B.C. For the story of Odysseus' descent to the underworld to recover his wife (in which I see the belief cryptic) seems to have been well known by the middle of the fifth

century B.C. At any rate there is good reason to think that reincarnation was being taught by Pythagoras in Samos itself before he left the island in 531 B.C., allegedly on account of the increasing harshness of the tyranny of Polycrates. Thus, if primitive Greek beliefs in the afterlife did evolve a belief in reincarnation, which Orpheus was to adopt as the central tenet of his teachings on the soul, this must have taken place some time before the second half of the seventh century B.C. or, at latest, the first half of the sixth century B.C.

The continuous association of the teaching of reincarnation in Greece with the old chthonic deities and its persistence as a mystical doctrine suggests this origin to have taken place within the secret teachings concerning the dead in mystery religion. This would account for why it is referred to as not merely an ancient doctrine (παλαιὸς λόγος) but also as a sacred doctrine (ἱερός λόγος), and more than that, a mystic doctrine (μυστικός λόγος), and why, all in all, so little should have been known of Greek eschatologies developed upon it outside the circles of the initiate.

This brings up the question of the popularity of the belief in Greece. The general view that it was not held by any considerable number of people appears correct. Not only was it taught to small exclusive groups of initiates but every effort seems to have been made to keep it from the ears of the public at large. This is however not true in the case of Empedocles, though it may be said for Pindar and Plato that what they did disclose were merely the outline features of the reincarnation eschatologies they held, while apparently there was much else they knew that they preferred not to talk about.

There can be no doubt, of course, that the general nature of the beliefs which were held by these circles were well known to the public from the earliest times. We have as evidence the fame - or notoriety sometimes - of these sects and the allusions to this doctrine of theirs in literature and philosophy. In Hellenistic times it seems to have gained increasing popularity and dominated religious and philosophical thought with the teachings of the Neopythagoreans and Neoplatonists, while its popularity and influence in early Christian times does not seem to have been any the less.

The Orphics, among whom a reincarnation doctrine is first evident in Greece, do not appear to have been an organized religious body but simply included all such groups as hailed Orpheus as their master. They could not have been very many, but were still numerous enough to have been known through the length and breadth of Greece for their distinctive practices and their particular way of life. Of their practices none were more remarkable to the Greeks than their avoidance of killing and flesh-eating, both of which are meaningful in the context of a central belief in reincarnation.

The first unambiguous reference to a doctrine of reincarnation is found in Xenophanes,¹⁰⁰ that is, in his well known fragment on Pythagoras and the dog. Pythagoras, like Xenophanes, came from Asiatic Greece, and from the Salmoxis-anecdote in Herodotus it would appear that he was already teaching the doctrine of reincarnation in his island home, Samos, before he migrated to Croton in South Italy.

Despite opinion to the contrary, it would seem that Xenophanes himself was favourable to the belief, while he rejected outright the religion expressed in Homer and Hesiod. Heraclitus' concept of mankind as "mortal-immortals and immortal-mortals", who keep exchanging the one state for the other, may give the impression that, though he ridiculed Pythagoras for his alleged intelligence, he himself openly accepted the notion of the reincarnation of the soul.¹⁰¹ Elsewhere (fr.5) he condemns animal sacri-

100. fr.7: "And once, they say, he was passing by, when a dog was being beaten. And he pitied it and said, "Stop, do not beat it, for this is the soul of a man who was my friend; I recognized it when I heard him cry aloud."

101. fr. 62: "Immortal mortals, mortal immortals; living the death of these and dying the life of those". See Sext. Emp. *Pyrrh. Hyp.* iii. 230; "Heraclitus says that both life and death are in both our living and our dying; for when we live, our souls are dead and buried in us, but when we die, our souls revive and live". Cf. Heraclitus fr. 88 "Living and dead are the same and waking and sleeping and young and old; for (contd.)

fice as the ritual mode of purification for murder on the grounds that it was like attempting to wash away mud with mud - though perhaps he may only have meant that blood cannot wash off the guilt of blood and not that animal killing is tantamount to murder. It is, however, noteworthy that Heraclitus' concept of life and death as successive changes of soul-states was afterwards seized by Plato¹⁰² in the concept of reciprocity (ἀντιποδοσις) as a proof of the immortality and reincarnations of the soul.

In Samos itself Pythagoras may have talked of reincarnation to certain audiences; the news seems to have spread abroad even to the Hellespont and Pontus regions. Upon his immigration to South Italy his teaching attracted a great deal of interest there too, particularly among the intelligensia, and we may take it as quite likely when it is said that there were foreign princes also among those who joined his brotherhood. Iamblichus lists the names of a number of his pupils, which, interestingly enough, include those of some women. The admission of women into the Pythagorean circle seems to have created quite a stir in the Greek world and resulted besides in a lot of snide references and malicious jokes.

For Sicily acquaintance with the idea of reincarnation is evidenced in the odes of Pindar and the religious teachings of Empedocles, the 'immortal god' from Acragas. The proportions of the audience to which Pindar immediately addressed himself cannot have been very large; at the narrowest it included the court-circle of Theron, tyrant of Acragas, in whose honour he wrote his famous second

these, when they have changed, are those, and those, changing once more, are these". See W.K.C. Guthrie *A Hist. of Greek Philosophy* Cambridge (1962) vol. I. p. 478-479 and G.S. Kirk *op.cit.* p. 144-148, esp. p. 147. Kirk suggests two possible explanations: the magical belief in the recurrence of the dead and the quasi-religious form in which this is found in *Phaedo* 70c.f. He thinks the latter more likely. See also Cleve *op.cit.* vol. I (1969) p. 64.f. and esp. p. 76.

102. *loc.cit.*

Olympian ode. There can be no doubt that he was also writing for a wider audience outside, but that they were as conversant with this doctrine of the rebirth of the soul as his patron and his court cannot be immediately assumed from this. Empedocles, on the other hand, quite certainly sought the widest publicity for his teachings and, if we are to believe him, got it. Unlike Orpheus and Pythagoras, he makes no secrecy of his eschatological beliefs; instead, and in spite of a fragment of his which calls for the protection of these within the 'silent bosom', (fr.5 - which must belong to his religious work, *Purifications*, rather than to his work on the nature of the universe), he seems to cry out his teachings from the house-tops. He addresses them, not to any exclusive group but to his fellow Acragantines, all and sundry; and if we are to believe him, they followed him in their thousands. Nor does it appear that there was any deeper core of esoteric meaning in them that was not easily comprehensible to any and everyone.

On the mainland Thebes must have heard the doctrine of reincarnation first associated with the Orphics and later with the Pythagoreans who took refuge there after the disaster the school suffered in Italy; in Athens it was soon to be popularised by Plato and his Academy. Echoes of it must have been frequent in the plays of Euripides, while Plato in his *Meno* (81a-b) talks of more poets than Pindar and of 'priests and priestesses' who avowed the doctrine - these hardly being identifiable with the Pythagoreans, who would not qualify to such designation. In Middle Comedy Pythagorean ascetic philosophers and their practice of vegetarianism seem to have been sufficiently widely known as to be made the butt of humour before popular audiences. At the same time, however, the doctrine of reincarnation continued to appeal to the intelligent and the scholarly and at one time even Aristotle himself seems to have subscribed to it.

Apart from the literary evidence, there is scarcely anything to indicate even the existence of the belief of reincarnation in Greece until we come to the famous Orphic tablets found in South Italy and Crete.¹⁰³ But then, the

103. See Gilbert Murray's appendix on them in Jane Harrison's *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* Cambridge, 3rd ed. (1922) p. 660-674 and W.K.C. Guthrie *Orpheus and Greek Religion* London (1935) p. 171-187.

religious form in which the belief expressed itself in Greece, as in India, with its peculiar attitude to body and earthly existence, is not the sort of thing to encourage tendency of the corpse or funerary art, except where traditional practices supervened. This is true of the timboni in which the Orphic tablets themselves were found. The stone coffins contained no funerary objects, only a partially burnt corpse covered with a white sheet, and a tiny gold leaf near the head or hand. The remnants of statuettes and vases found in the tumuli cannot be pieced together and appear to have been put there in that fragmentary condition.

Writing on these timboni Macchiore¹⁰⁴ remarks the fact that "we find ourselves in the presence of a strange and peculiar rite, perfectly alien to Greek customs, which must have some underlying cause". The absence of that great nostalgia for life which underlies the eschatology of traditional Greek religion is in close conformity with the attitude of the religion to which these dead belonged.

Buddhists of recent times are in the habit of claiming their religion to be based on reason and logic. Plato argued for reincarnation on the grounds that only on the assumption of pre-existence could the possibility of knowledge be explained; Buddhist and Hindu, viewing suffering in this existence as consequences, argue for reincarnation on the grounds that these consequences implied previous existences in which the actions from which they flowed were committed. The assumption of a law of action and reaction on the moral plane (*karma*), which could be thought a projection of the law of cause and effect in physics, has also led people to talk of Buddhism for instance as scientific.

So Nilsson¹⁰⁵ finds the idea of reincarnation the product of 'pure logic', and the Greek formulation of it quite understandable, because the Greeks were 'born logicians'. If we do not think of it as deduced from a cons-

104. *From Orpheus to Paul*. London. (1930) p. 112; also see p. 109 f.

105. *loc.cit.*

scious exercise of logic on the part of the individual or the race as a whole, we may agree that there is indeed something of a logical deduction about it. As Dodds¹⁰⁶ explains this, once people accept the notion that man has a 'soul' distinct from his body, it is natural to ask from where this 'soul' came, and natural to answer that it came from the great reservoir of souls in Hades. Notions of pre-existence and survival are both prominent in ancient Greek beliefs concerning the soul.

In Homeric religion, at death the soul passes into Hades with no hope of return to this world again; in primitive Greek folk religion the souls of dead ancestors pass into the air, whence they return to the tribe once again in the bodies of the new-born. If, as is plausible, the concept of reincarnation in Greece developed from this simple folk belief in the recurrence of the souls of dead ancestors, it is interesting to observe how the eschatologies of the Greek reincarnation religions compromised with the Homeric concept of the afterdeath by simply including Hades in the experience of souls upon death.

Dodds¹⁰⁷ is perfectly right, however, in doubting if religious beliefs are adopted, even by philosophers, on the grounds of pure logic, since logic is at best an *ancilla fidei*. Reincarnation as a belief has been favoured by many people who are by no means 'born logicians'. And need we mention its wide prevalence among primitive societies, which can have no pretence to logical thinking on their part but hold the belief with as much conviction out of sheer superstition?

Alcmaeon, the Crotoniate doctor whose name we find Aristotle¹⁰⁸ coupling with the Pythagoreans of Croton, used to describe death as the result of man's inability "to join the beginning to the end".¹⁰⁹ If the straight line expressed the concept of mortality for the Greeks, immortality was imaged as a circle or a wheel. The wheel of

106. *op.cit.* p. 153.

107. *loc.cit.*

108. *Met.* A5. 986a27.

109. *Fr.* 2.

life referred to by the Pythagoreans is called in Proclus' *Timaeus* ¹¹⁰ 'the cycle of generation' (ΚΥΚΛΟΣ ΓΕΝΕΣΕΩΣ) and by the Orphic Tablets 'the sorrowful weary wheel'. Simplicius ¹¹¹ goes to the extent of saying that it was symbolized by the wheel of Ixion, adding that "he was bound by God to the wheel of fate and of generation". If the other 'great sinners' of the Hades-visions of Odysseus, i.e. Tityos, Tantalus and Sisyphus, ¹¹² were Orphic figures depicting posthumous punishment in Hades, it is possible that Ixion, who makes a fourth with them, symbolized for the Orphics the predicament of rebirth upon this earth itself.

It is this alternation of life and death, through which the soul describes its rebirth cycle, that was expressed by Heraclitus when he called men 'immortal mortals' and 'mortal immortals', according to whether they were in the one state or the other of life and death. The rebirth cycle ends with the soul flying out of the sorrowful weary wheel, as the Orphic Tablets say, and regaining its lost estate, be that as a human being (as in the reincarnation account given as Egyptian by Herodotus) or as a god (as in the teachings of Empedocles). Thereafter, perhaps, it all begins again for the soul. Of the duration of such a cycle we have various reckonings, from three thousand years of the alleged Egyptian account to ten thousand years in Plato and 'thrice ten thousand seasons', whatever length that may be, in Empedocles.

Within the rebirth cycle each single life and corresponding death by themselves constitute a circle, comparable in cosmology to a single round of seasons in a year, while the rebirth cycle, constituted of a series of these life-death cycles, was seen as parallel to a world-cycle constituted of a series of annual cycles. At the end of a world-cycle the world was once again resolved into its primal state, and usually the whole process was thought to begin again. The parallelism of soul-cycle and world-cycle, (no matter how he reconciled them) is nowhere more clearly manifest than in the teachings of that remarkable Greek prophet-cum-philosopher, Empedocles, who treats each of them separately in his two works, *On Nature* and *Purifications*.

110. 1.32

111. *De Caelo* ii. 91c.

112. *Hom. Od.* xi.

Despite the great deal that is written about the significance of philosophical contemplation (θεωρητικὴ) in connection with liberation from the predicament of incarnate existence in original Pythagoreanism, hardly anything is revealed of it in the evidence. In Empedocles, again, the bearing of philosophical inquiry upon the purification of the soul, if it did have a bearing of any kind, is not to be discovered. But the fact that both Pythagoras and then Empedocles combine in themselves the pursuit of philosophy and a religious teaching of the reincarnation of the soul presages the confluence of the two in Platonism, and afterwards, in the religio-philosophical systems of Plotinus and the Neopythagoreans. This tendency, arising from the metaphysical implications of the doctrine in Plato, is closely paralleled in Indian thought, while at the same time it stands in opposition to the clear distinction of religion and philosophical speculation in pre-Socratic Greek thought and the Western tradition afterwards influenced by Aristotle.

Within philosophy itself the dualism of soul and body emphasised by the reincarnation religions of Greece, as of India, emphasises in metaphysics a dualism between the world of coming-into-being and passing-away, conceived as essentially unreal, delusive and sorrowful, and a reality that is essentially transcendental. Knowledge of this reality becomes an urgent and supreme undertaking; it becomes the one technique of liberation from the wheel of rebirth (or at least an important part of it), a raft for crossing over. To the extent that this reality becomes a mystic vision, the apperception of it tends to be through a *gnosis* of some kind, and the distinction between seer and philosopher tends to disintegrate. Pythagoras reappears among the Neopythagoreans as an inspired sage, the Greek counterpart of Zoroaster or Oshanes, and numerous apocrypha are fathered upon him or his immediate disciples. So, the aim of Platonism, as a Christian observer of the second century A.D.¹¹³ concludes, "is to see God face to face".

113. Dodds *op.cit.* p. 137. This was maintained by Wilamowitz but he later recanted; see Dodds p. 158 n. 12.

In its religious context this same dualism of soul and body is reflected in the contrast between the predicament of incarnate existence and the blissful state of ultimate deliverance; and as the Buddhist would put it, all is either *samsara* or *nirvana*. But while the unique explanation that the doctrine of reincarnation offered for the inequalities of life, even using it to emphasise the moral responsibility of man for his present actions, must have been ethically satisfactory to those who avowed it, its great dynamism in religion must derive from the accompanying teaching of this present incarnation of ours as men as itself being the very threshold of that blissful state of liberation.

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