

AVIDYA I DÓXA: Reciprocal illumination of Plato and Patanjali

Marko Teodorski*, Lada Stevanovic**

**Savremena International School, Beograd*

***The Institute of Ethnography SASA, Beograd*

Abstract: *The article is a comparative analysis of the Patanjali's Yoga Sutras and the Plato's dialogue Republic, by means of the method of reciprocal illumination. The reciprocal illumination, as defined by Arvind Sharma, is an analytical method that compares two phenomena with the aim of contouring clearer limits of both, without necessarily raising claims about their interconnectedness. By simultaneously discussing the Patanjali's term avidya ("not-knowing") and Plato's term dóxa ("common belief"), the article sketches an essential divide between the ancient Indian and western European philosophies: while the western European philosophy, rooted in Plato's dialogues, stays imprisoned in mind constructs of the ratio, the Indian philosophy offers a possibility of experience of their transcendence.*

Keywords: *avidya, dóxa, Plato, Patanjali*

Introduction

On one hand, yoga as a philosophical and corporeal practice directs towards introspection and auto-analysis. On the other hand, ancient philosophy that bears on its shoulders the etiquette of ancient culture as a whole, directes towards research of the origin of Western thought. Somewhere in between, at the point where the interest for yoga and antiquity had continually been meeting, at almost tactile domain of intellectual and somatic practices, emerged contradictory subjectivities. We say contradictory, since it has seemed that those different fragments are impossible to reconcile; it seemed that Greek antiquity and ancient India were separated by an insurmountable ocean of differences in cultural heritage, as wide as the physical distance might have seemed to the inhabitants of those regions during the Hellenistic time, when they finally established contact with each other.

* Corresponding author: mteodorski@yahoo.com

With the intent to use this space in the best possible way, authors' aim is localized: to compare the texts that essentially represent the core of those two systems of thought and mark the points in which they are coming closer or distancing from each other, in which they intertwine or explain one another enabling critical distance that is grounded on the fact that one perspective is more intellectual, and the other is also corporeal and sensual, being based on experience. The research of ancient cultures and of a distant past is never a simple process and it is not possible to form final conclusions. What is possible, however, is to inspire a dialog, to formulate questions and trace the possible directions of the research. As it is usual with every new beginning, especially on the terrain that in this region is not researched, we leave the possibility of multiple readings of the sources that we use, because they definitely do not have one, fixed meaning.

The framework of the text represents comparative reading of Plato's *Republic* and Patanjali's *Yoga Sūtras*.¹ Concerning the fact that both of the works are seminal texts for the reception of the two cultures, their integral comparison in such a short paper would be inadequate and unfruitful. The main concern of Plato was to develop the concept of ideal (utopian) state; the concern of Patanjali was to point to the path and the practice that enable the individual to overcome material attachment to the infinite cycle of rebirth. At the first sight without any common points, both *Republic* and *Yoga Sūtras* actually raise questions of individual ideality; the practices that may lead to it; the location of this ideality in the context of a wider ontic worldview, as well as the relationship of the individual, ideal or not, with this worldview. What does it mean to be free? What does it mean to be awake? If the one who is awake is named, what represents the one who is not awake?

What does it look like the world in which majority walks asleep? What is the difference between the asleep and the awake?

In order to delve into this web of questions, we have decided to interpret the texts focusing on one specific field, one group of concepts that, in our opinion, represent the basis from which all other question enfold: Patanjali's *avidya* ("not-knowing"²) and Plato's *dóxa* ("common belief"); Patanjali's *vitarka* ("reasoning") and Plato's *gnómē* ("knowledge"). Our intent is to research similarities and differences in platonic Greek and Indian (i.e. Patanjali's) understanding of "illusion" and "reality" through the comparison and commentary of the mentioned concepts and their usage in *Republic* and *Yoga Sūtras*.

Methodology and the history of research

¹ Patanjali's *Yoga Sūtras* belong to the corpus of oral tradition of yoga that was codified and written down in Sanskrit, in the period between 220 BC and 400 AD (Von Dehsen, 1999, p. 149). Plato's *Republic* is dated in the period around 380 BC.

² The reason for separating prefixes from root of the word with a hyphen is to emphasize both parts of the word. This procedure accentuates a polysemic nature of the concept.

Regarding the fact that this text represents an effort to map some of the ideas important for separate yoga and platonic teaching, the first question that imposes is the reason and meaning of it. The answer to this question is grounded in our intent to show that the reading of Plato using Patanjali (and vice versa) opens another, wider perspective, from which different cultures and their cognitive systems may be understood in a new way. Arvind Sharma (Sharma, 2005, p. 247) named this method of research in comparative religion and culture *reciprocal illumination*. The aim this method pushes forward is clearer dialectical understanding of the studied phenomena.³ The approach that we follow is methodologically defined by French school of anthropology that was developed in the Centre Louis Gernet in Paris (EHESS). In the year of 1977, one of its most important representatives, Jean-Pierre Vernant, organized a conference (in cooperation with the Institute for Oriental Studies in Napoli (Istituto Universitario Orientale) devoted to the funerary ideologies of different ancient civilizations⁴ and published an essay *India, Mesopotamia, Greece: three ideologies of death*, which turned out to be crucial for our theoretical starting position. In this paper Vernant deals with the comparative research of funerary ideology in three different cultures: Greek, Indian and Mesopotamian, comparing different cultural patterns in order to reach more critical and original perspective for each of the mentioned cultures (Vernant, 1992, p. 76). Therefore, except for the comparison of different cultures that enables researchers to distance themselves from their own prejudices and points of view characteristic for their own culture, what is important is to read ancient texts using other ancient text that do not necessarily belong to the same cultural or media group (text is not understood as only written, but rather as any available product of material culture that produces meaning). It is also possible to combine sources using diachrony, taking into account all critical and methodological distances that prevent inscription of our own standpoints.

Comparative researches of ancient Greek and Indian thought have been by now usually oriented to Hellenistic period and the conquest of the Indian subcontinent by Alexander the Great in 326 BC. Writings about Alexander, starting with Arian who lived around the end of the first and the beginning of the second century AD (*Anabasis of Alexander*) all until Ian Worthington (*Alexander the Great*, 2003) deal with the cultural exchange as a consequence of direct physical contact of distant people. However, what interests us in this text, goes far beyond (or more precisely, far before) this contact. Our wish is to consider parallel development of similar concepts in the period for which there is no evidence of when physical contact between India and Greece. Namely, the research of Greek and Roman need

³ This was discussed by Bakić-Hayden, 2008.

⁴ The colloquy with the title *International Meeting on Funerary Ideologies of the Ancient World (Convegno internazionale sulla ideologia funeraria nel Mondo antico)* was held on the island Ischia, in the period 6-10 December 1977.

for the occult and the mysticism reveals that it this need was not imported from India, but rather from other places, above all Thrace, Egypt and Persia (Luck, 2006). However, ancient Greek culture and philosophy developed ideas (mainly in the frame of platonic corpus) that are difficult to separate completely from philosophical system of yoga. These ideas (such as the soteriological question of the soul, or the problem of metempsychosis in Plato's *Phaedo*) developed in India with bigger intensity. Exactly these differences enable comparative readings of the texts emphasising the similarities and differences between them, leading to conclusions pertinent for each mentioned cultures. Let us, for instance, start with the paragraphs that deal with salvation. In Plato (*Phaedo*, XI) we read that "we shall attain the wisdom which we desire, and of which we say that we are lovers, not while we live but after death; [...] For then, and not till then, the soul will be parted from the body and exist in herself alone." We see that both *Phaedo* and *Yoga sutras* develop soteriological system. The question that follows is: how come that in in Patanjali's text we find clearly structured soteriological aim possible to attain in a lifetime, while Plato finds salvation exclusively in death?

Comparison of two mentioned cognitional systems is, if not completely unknown, still at its very beginning, and waiting for serious development. However, it is necessary to mention some of the publications regarding the topic such as *Universe and Inner Self in Early Indian and Early Greek Thought* edited by Richard Seaford that offers detailed review of main philosophical intersections including reflections on Plato in the context of yoga (pp. 87-103). Another book worth mentioning is *Upanishads, Gita and Bible: A Comparative Study of Hindu and Christian Scriptures* (1963) by Geoffrey Parrinder, for its innovative approach to comparative religion. The position of Thomas McEvelley who devoted thirty years of research to this issue and who, in 2002, published a book *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophy* was a particular inspiration for emphasizing several isolated references that refer to yoga in ancient philosophical texts (McEvelley, 2002, p. 391). This Canadian researcher recognized yoga in several philosophical works, including the comparison between texts of Patanjali and Plato in his analysis of (McEvelley, 2002, str. 179). Namely, both authors mention some kind of abstinence of sense (*pratyahara*), or as Plato defines it, redirecting of the mental focus from the body as well as concentration of all senses on oneself. It is said in *Phaedo* XVI, as in *Chandogya Upanishad* (V 10.5), that preliminary preparation for acquiring knowledge that enables freedom from the reincarnation chain is achieved through becoming free from outer objects. Also in *Symposium* XXXVI, Plato informs us that Socrates could stand in one place for hours without making a movement, which may be interpreted as a condition, or definition, of meditation. What is not possible to find in such examples from ancient Greek texts is whether these ideas appeared independently in several places (which is often the case), or it concerned the exchange of ideas with people of India. Regarding the fact that McEvelley in his thorough text analysis did not find the word *yoga*, we will accept his conclusion that there was

no import of ideas whatsoever, but that we are looking at cultural phenomenon developing separately.

Patanjali and Plato: reciprocal illumination

We will start the analysis with the discussion of the most obvious common points. Both thoughts, the Plato's and the Patanjali's, are based on the premise that the individual in everyday life is trapped within the world of images. In other words, what is offered to senses (or given to perception) is only the surface shell of a deeper truth that is not reachable by those same senses. This is a basic concept of the material world that is perceived as something different from what it seems at the first sight, and that requires an additional effort to reach its material essence.

Both Plato and Patanjali recognize this as a basic structure that shapes all their further philosophical development; both philosophers ground this idea following the traditional philosophical frameworks that precede their work.⁵ Bearing this in mind, the concepts of *avidya* and *dóxa* may be understood within developed conceptual framework. If the goal of a yogi is to overcome *avidya*, to overcome ignorance, the question that arises is about the nature and definition of the ignorance. What is this ignorance and what is its aim?

According to some ideas of Indian philosophy, which represent a complex set of texts that may not be reduced to a single corpus (or a single meaning), the individual is born in the world of material objects; beings are being born, get old and die, while their changes are in accordance with the general laws of nature that say that changeability of beings is constancy of each existence. This eternal fluctuating aspect of the appearing world is pulled over the eyes of people like a seducing disguise, and it is termed as *māyā*. The earliest mentioning of *māyā* is found in the text *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* (*Śvetāśvataropaniṣad*), which Gorski dates to the fourth or fifth century BC (2008, p. 97).⁶ *Upanishads* (Upaniṣad) define the universe as an interplay of two principles – purusha (*puruṣa*) (eternal, unchangeable principle of a clear consciousness that does not succumb to forms of ideas or material world) and prakriti (*prakṛti*) (changeable, momentary principle of the material, natural world, “subjectivity-that-does-not-know-itself”). *Puruṣa*, according to the mentioned text, manifests as *ātman* (the true self, unhindered by

⁵ Patanjali takes this framework from *Upanishads*, while Plato grounds his on the ideas of Eleatic philosophers and orphics.

⁶ Determining the date of *Upanishads*, alike other ancient texts, is surrounded by numerous debates and contestations, because the evidences, the style analysis, repetition of content and premises about the evolution of the ideas that transfer from text to text (in the sense of the influences of one philosophical thought on another), lead to various conclusions. See Phillips 2009 and Olivelle, 1996. Furthermore, parts of *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* are found in some older texts, wherefore it is difficult to clear out a certain chronological frame. See more in Von Dehsen 2010, p. 309.

its form), while *prakṛti* manifests as *māyā*. However, when we say that *māyā* is conceptualised as an opposition to eternal, unchangeable truth, this does not mean that the material world which is its manifestation is not real, claims Osho, a spiritual leader of the XX century Rajneesh movement. He (2012, p. 237) says that: “Hindu people call this world *māyā*, illusion that is equal to the dream, built in our minds.” He continues: “What do they think? Do they think that our world is not real? No, it is not unreal. However, when your mind merges with it, you create your own unreal world. We do not live in the same world; each of us lives in her/his own world.” Material world is real as far as the everyday consciousness about it is real: *māyā* signifies “disguised” state of the world, implying that the world is not what it looks like. According to Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty (1989, p. 119) „to say that the universe is an illusion (*māyā*) is not to say that it is unreal, [...]instead, that it is not what it seems to be, that it is something constantly being made. *Māyā* not only deceives people about the things they think they know; more basically, it limits their knowledge“. So, *māyā* is a surface of an appearance, it is a changeable world whose power lies in illusion that does not allow people to see behind it. However, beyond *māyā*, beyond tactile and thinkable universe, there is unlimited being without form or endurance, unreachable to uninformed eye or roughen senses. If essence, truth or being is unreachable for people, if a human is irrevocably immersed in illusion of the passable and the material without possibility of transcending this illusion, having ability only to notice it, does it mean that there is no exit?

According to Patanjali’s aphorisms, exit exists in deep and solid introspection. In *Sutras* II, 5, Patanjali says: “Ignorance (*avidya*) is taking that what is no-eternal, impure, painful and non-Self, for the eternal, pure, happy Atman (the Self).” In this aphorism we come across the concept of *avidya*, which is essential for our analysis, because the concept with the similar meaning appears in platonic thought that we are going to discuss. *Avidya*⁷ refers to the impossibility to reach knowledge about the world “as it is”, meaning the human attachment to the material world of senses. We may conclude from the mentioned aphorism that “not-knowing” appears as a consequence of identification with “what-is-not-I”, with what is not *anātman* and what is transient and what implies subjectivity that is not aware of itself. The whole practice of yoga is aimed at overcoming this blind attachment to the material impermanency, to the world of images that cloaks the essence in darkness. The framework of Patanjali’s *Sutras* is oriented towards overcoming this identification with non-truth that leads an individual into a blind alley. According to Patanjali, yoga practice enables the subject who is in his mind, body and affections (referred by the concept of *saṃskāra*, which means unconscious predisposition of body and mind) identified with un-truthfulness of its consciousness, to turn to intensive introspection. That introspection, in turn, leads

⁷ Translated into Serbian by Zoran Zec as “not-knowing” with an emphasis on its gnostic and scopic instance.

to freedom from patterns that pull the person toward afflictions (*kleśa*), which are the main obstacles between an individual and being, consequently enabling the person to approach their own ontic level. Truth, as ultimate gnostic category is situated where the consciousness is clear from any forms and turned exclusively towards itself. The truth achieved through this process is called *vidya* (“consciousness“, „awakeness“), and the corresponding state of being is called “focus without seed of separateness (seedless Samadhi)” (*nirbījah samādhi*) (*Sutras*, I, 51).

One of the first aphorisms of Patanjali and certainly the most famous one is: “*Yoga* is restraining the mind-stuff from taking various forms.” (I, 2). Pointing out the final result of yoga practice – overcoming of particular cycles of the consciousness – Patanjali explains, in the two aphorisms that follow, that the main reason for impossibility to reach “pure consciousness” is identification of the subject with her/his own thinking process. “At that time (the time of concentration) the seer rests in their own (unmodified) state. At other times (other than that of concentration) the seer is identified with modifications.” (I, 3-4). Thus, in order to reach her/his real nature and cut the relationship with transient aspects of material world and oneself, the yogi have to learn to transcend their own thinking process, to calm down the waves (cycles) that constantly flow out from her/him. The method that enables this is envisaged in the next concept crucial for our comparative analysis: in order to calm down the cyclic waves of mind, the yogi learns samadhi (*samādhi*) i.e. “intensive concentration”. After certain ethical and physical preparation, the yogi “intensively focuses” on his/her own inner world with the aim to light the structure of their own mind and to recognize the patterns and obstacles that prevent them to see themselves as they really are. Samadhi, as a process of growing and of an inner development towards the being, towards one’s own nature as it really is, goes through different phases, but its final aim is to overcome any possible form of thinking and to overcome *the mind itself*.

The aim of samadhi is, thus, reaching the ontic level of the subject, the place in which consciousness about transient forms has disappeared, but also where the consciousness about consciousness itself has disappeared. However, as it is possible to conclude, this search for the ontic the subject starts as a gnostic effort in which the mind in an “intensive concentration“ is focused on itself and on the sum of its predispositions, learning to “make out” or to “differentiate” (*vitarka*) the “real“ from the “unreal“, i.e. the “real” from the “illusion”. The subject, turning towards their own thinking processes, attacks what we explained as “not-knowing” (*avidya*). “And to recognize or make clear difference of the causes of a certain state, contemplation of the data of one’s own memory and one’s own „consciousness“, i.e. critical questioning of the values by weighing immediate emotive reactions on the obvious [...] would be some of the most important events that happen during this first stage”, claims Zoran Zec. (Introduction to Patandali, 1977, 43).

Taking into account all that is said by now, yogi is the one who uses “intensive concentration” (followed usually by somatic un-movement) to focus on their own mind, “clearing out” what is “reality” and what is “illusion” in it, dividing “knowing” (*vidya*) from “not-knowing” (*avidya*), reaching “consciousness by itself” (which means the level of recognition of oneself, whereas self is “as it really is”), the level of eternal, unchangeable, timeless being. The final aim of yoga in Patanjali’s *Sutras* is the transcendence of those mental processes that, rooted in yearnings and attached to the transient (through the identification with transient), separate the subject from its real nature.

Since we have covered all main concepts of Patanjali’s yogic system that are important for our analysis (the opposition *vidya* - *avidya*, gnostic differentiation of true and illusory concept of *vitarka* and theo-soteriological principal of seedless samadhi (*nirbījah samādhi*)), we will now turn our attention towards ancient Greece and consider the relation in which these concepts stand to the ideas of Plato.

Apart from *Phaedo* and the idea of the soul that will not be discussed here, probably the most obvious place for intended comparison is Plato’s allegory of the cave that is found at the beginning of the seventh book of his *Republic*. From all Plato’s allegories, parallels and comparisons, it is difficult to find one that has attracted more attention and interpretations. Its indestructible vitality certainly owes to mysticism that emerges from the lines of this book, directing readers to question transitory forms, whether one has inclinations to such ideas or not.

Plato’s *Republic* is, the same as his other works, written in a form radically different from Patanjali’s sutras. Namely, dialogs that follow one another inciting Plato’s endless syllogisms strongly contrast Patanjali’s short aphorisms. This difference actually reveals the main disparity of the ancient Greek and ancient Indian philosophy and that is the *individual experience*. While Plato’s dialogs are possible to understand by a pre-configuration of one’s thoughts and adaptation of thinking mechanisms to a complicated form, Patanjali’s sutras are essentially unreachable to a person who grew up within western logical system of thought and who never stepped into a search for new cognitive pathways, experiencing at least a fragment of what Patanjali describes. We could say that Plato’s thought regarding this is extremely *rational* (within the frame of his own cultural and historical rationality), while the one of Patanjali is based on *experience*. As we are going to show, this expression will stay essential in our analysis.

Plato introduces the allegory of cave as an illustrative example of education of individual and of the way in which social norms influence a person.

“Next,” said Socrates, “compare our nature in respect of education and its lack to such an experience as this. Picture men dwelling in a sort of subterranean cavern with a long entrance open to the light on its entire width. Conceive them as having

their legs and necks fettered from childhood, so that they remain in the same spot, able to look forward only, and prevented by the fetters from turning their heads. Picture further the light from a fire burning higher up and at a distance behind them, and between the fire and the prisoners and above them a road along which a low wall has been built, as the exhibitors of puppet-shows have partitions before the men themselves, above which they show the puppets.” “All that I see,” he said. “See also, then, men carrying past the wall implements of all kinds that rise above the wall, and human images and shapes of animals as well, wrought in stone and wood and every material, some of these bearers presumably speaking and others silent.” “A strange image you speak of,” he said, “and strange prisoners.” “Like to us,” I said; “for, to begin with, tell me do you think that these men would have seen anything of themselves or of one another except the shadows cast from the fire on the wall of the cave that fronted them?” “How could they,” he said, “if they were compelled to hold their heads unmoved through life?” “And again, would not the same be true of the objects carried past them?” “Surely.” “If then they were able to talk to one another, do you not think that they would suppose that in naming the things that they saw they were naming the passing objects?” “Necessarily.” “And if their prison had an echo from the wall opposite them, when one of the passersby uttered a sound, do you think that they would suppose anything else than the passing shadow to be the speaker?” “By Zeus, I do not,” said he. “Then in every way such prisoners would deem reality to be nothing else than the shadows of the artificial objects.” (514-516)

In this fragment from the book VII of Plato’s *Republic* (514-516), Plato develops an idea about difficulties and limited possibilities to find and reach the truth, which is a consequence of the limited possibility of moving i.e. thinking that is defined still in the childhood. In other words, Plato suggests that eyes are not given the ability of true cognition, leading people to accept the obvious, which is not a true nature of things. On the contrary, the mind possesses ability for cognition (*Republic*, 511 b-c); only usage of dialectics (*dialéghestai*) as the main science that lead to the truth, might enable the individual (philosopher) to find the truth „as such“.

Configuration of the outer world in which ability for knowing does not belong to senses, but to the mind, represents the idea that Plato borrowed from the Eleatic philosophers, which is noticeable in his dialog *Phaedo* X. In particular, he follows the ideas of Xenophanes and Parmenides, even calling them “poets” because they expressed their opinions in verses, rejecting the importance of senses and praising the mind. Like in the case of Patanjali, the analysis of materialized world that is found in the text has been already grounded in wider historical and conceptual frames. Nevertheless, in order to understand Plato’s allegory of the cave from the perspective of Patanjali’s *Sutras*, it is necessary to find out which are the basic principles on which the mentioned allegory is grounded.

Although the role of the cave allegory in *Republic* is to introduce a new beginning in his conversation with Glaucon, the basis for its understanding are located in several books that precede Plato's discussion about the difference of the concepts of "knowledge" (*gnōmē*) and "opinion" (*dóxa*) (475c - 477a). Namely Plato deals with the question about the way in which the concept of being that exists (by itself) as *something*, is different from the concept of non-being that is *nothing*. His intention is to understand which active categories of practice refer to the first, and which to the second case. He starts from the idea that one who is mindful might belong into one of the mentioned categories, either to get to know things by themselves (as they really are) or she/he might get to know things in the form that is perceived by senses, in which case the seer then believes in *characteristics* of the things and not in the abstract *idea* of those things. The one from the first category is termed by Plato as "awaken", because she/he participates in the concepts "by themselves" regardless of their concrete, materialized characteristics (having the access to the abstract ideas). The person from second category is termed "asleep", because she/he participates in material forms in their everyday, generally accepted specificity (476c). Accordingly, regarding the spiritual state, the first one is described as "one who knows knowledge" (*gignōskontos gnōmēn*), while the other is "opining opinion" (*doxazontos dóxan*) (476d). Because the one who is in the process of knowing has to know something (the transitive verb implies that it is inevitable to know something, and not nothing), Plato concludes that one is knowing complete being (*tò pantelōs òn*) that is possible to know (*pantelōs gnostón*): "non-being" (*mè òn*) is literary nothing, so it is impossible to know it (477a). Accordingly, the being is marked as knowledge (*gnōsis*) and non-being as ignorance, or not-knowledge (*ägnoia*) (478c).

Here Plato emphasizes the conclusion that is important for our text: if a being knows knowledge, and if ignorance refers to non-being that is not possible to know, what opiniates opinion? It must be, claims Plato, that there is a category that is neither being, nor non-being, something less than complete knowledge and more than ignorance; "for that which lies between we must seek for something between nescience and science" (477b). Regarding the fact that spiritual state of making opinion is mindful (and different from knowing that refers to being), it is necessary to think about something (because non-being as non-existence can not be thought about), as a grey zone of things that at the same time are and are not in the state of thinking.

It gradually becomes clear that Plato's and Patanjali's thinking frameworks use radically different language to treat the same thing, and that is the question of illusion as something that at the same time is and is not, appearing as an obstacle for the absolute knowing of being. This idea of things that exist, but seem different, finally finds one of its illustrative forms in the cave allegory by Plato, while Patanjali, in accordance to the reduced character of his aphorisms, develops it through the concept of "not-knowing" (*avidya*). Illusion, that prevents subject

from seeing “their own essence” (Patanjali) or from understanding uniqueness of a thing “by itself” (Plato) operates as a basic presumption in both analysed systems. Plato’s beguiling field presents uniqueness of ideas (as the most exalted and most purified abstractions of some concept) as sum of multitude (*Republic*, 479e). In other words, beautiful, good and fair are not presented separately, but as many beautiful, good and fair things. On the other hand, Patanjali establishes psychological pattern of mind that is burdened with “obstacles” that lead the subject away from “intensive concentration” in the direction of dispersion of mind and identification with what is “transient” (*Sutras* II, 5). Focusing on the structure, we may plausibly say that “what is transient” in Patanjali, corresponds to “many beautiful, good and fair things” in Plato. Thus, Plato’s “opinion” that he explicitly defines as social state of sleep (*Republic*, 476c), appears as an equivalent to Patanjali’s concept of “not-knowing” (*avidya*). We may conclude that *avidya*, as inability to know and to discern reality from illusion, does not appear as ignorance in Plato’s text (because ignorance refers to ontological category of non-being), emerging as a grey, unclear area that befouls the mind, putting him to sleep and feeding him with illusions about freedom that is essentially not available to the mind.

Patanjali, in his *Sutras*, approaches transient forms as manifestations of particular cycles of mind (*vṛtti*), while affection that is rooted in the predispositions of the subject (*saṃskāra*) disable the subject to see her/himself as she/he really is, regardless of these forms (and without identification with them). Patanjali’s concern for transient matter only reaches the level in which it refers to the inner life and the inner freedom of individual. In opposition to this, Plato develops theory of ideas – eternal, universal, unchangeable concepts that are actually nothing more than copies of transient and material forms. In his allegory of the cave, bound and restricted individuals see only shadows of real people and objects and even those shadows are not complete, but just fragments of what is too big to be projected completely on the wall of the cave. The light that comes from the fire is not the real light, but a copy of the daily sunlight that people, who are used to dark, could not bear without gradual getting used to it. About those who succeeded to run away from the cave, Plato concludes: “Then there would be need of habituation, I take it, to enable him to see the things higher up. And at first he would most easily discern the shadows and, after that, the likenesses or reflections in water of men and other things, and later, the things themselves, and from these he would go on to contemplate the appearances in the heavens and heaven itself, more easily by night, looking at the light of the stars and the moon, than by day the sun and the sun’s light” (515e -516b).

The impression is that Plato, compared to Patanjali, develops far more complex thinking pattern of the world that goes beyond the individual and their individual development or rescuing from illusion. That, on one hand, certainly stands in relation to the different forms in which two texts are created, where the form of

aphorism, unlike dialogical one, does not leave much space for elaboration of the ideas. On the other hand, the reason for this might be found in the different ways of turning to traditional ideas: while Plato partly independently develops his world theory turning only to certain ideas of his own predecessors, but reworking them and making them his own, Patanjali's work firmly stands on the foundation of *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, with no intention of individualization. Finally, as it is already said, Plato's concept of illusion and opinion is *rational* performance of the view whose principal will stay crucial for the Western thought until nowadays. The thought of Patanjali and his work is practical, it is based on *experience* and written as manual that requires personal input. Plato emphasizes that getting rid of illusion is difficult and gradual process, but except for directing us to do it slowly and gradually, he does not give us any "instructions", unlike yoga that is focused exactly on that – to help individuals in the self-development.

Conclusion

This paper, as a starting research, or some kind of special, pilot-research about similarities of platonic and yogic thought, reveals that common points definitely existed. However, it is impossible to state that this is the consequence of Greek import from India, because there are no evidences for such a claim. Rather, we may say that those ideas appeared independently in two different cultures, developing further in completely different directions. Namely, in Indian culture, such ideas powerfully grew developing and surviving in yoga until nowadays, while Platonic thought was going in different direction, becoming a foundation out of which developed Western Philosophy and Christianity.

Comparing, thus two cognitional systems that developed completely independently, the gap that separates ancient Indian thought from the ancient Greek one becomes evident, in spite of their similarities. Plato's philosophy is essentially focused on the mind as the main tool of dialectics that enables reaching the truth, while Patanjali uses mind not only as a tool for reaching self-knowledge, that has to necessarily be rejected at the end of the yogic path. If we return to the aphorism "yoga is restraining the mind-stuff (*chitta*) from taking various forms (*vr̥ttis*)" (I, 2), it becomes clear that what Plato upraises on the pedestal of virtue (clear mind), Patanjali recognizes as essential barrier for knowledge.

Patanjali's yogi and Plato's philosopher may strive for the same goals in the beginning, but these goals are placed in the different positions, depending of the culture from which mentioned philosophers originate: while Patanjali's yogi reaches *nirbījah samādhi* (self-identification) transcending mind, encroaching in the domain of clear experiences, without forms, Plato's philosopher appreciates more the world of ideas, choosing a discursive level of existence at his lifetime.

Apart from all similarities, the gap experience/language continues to persist.

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