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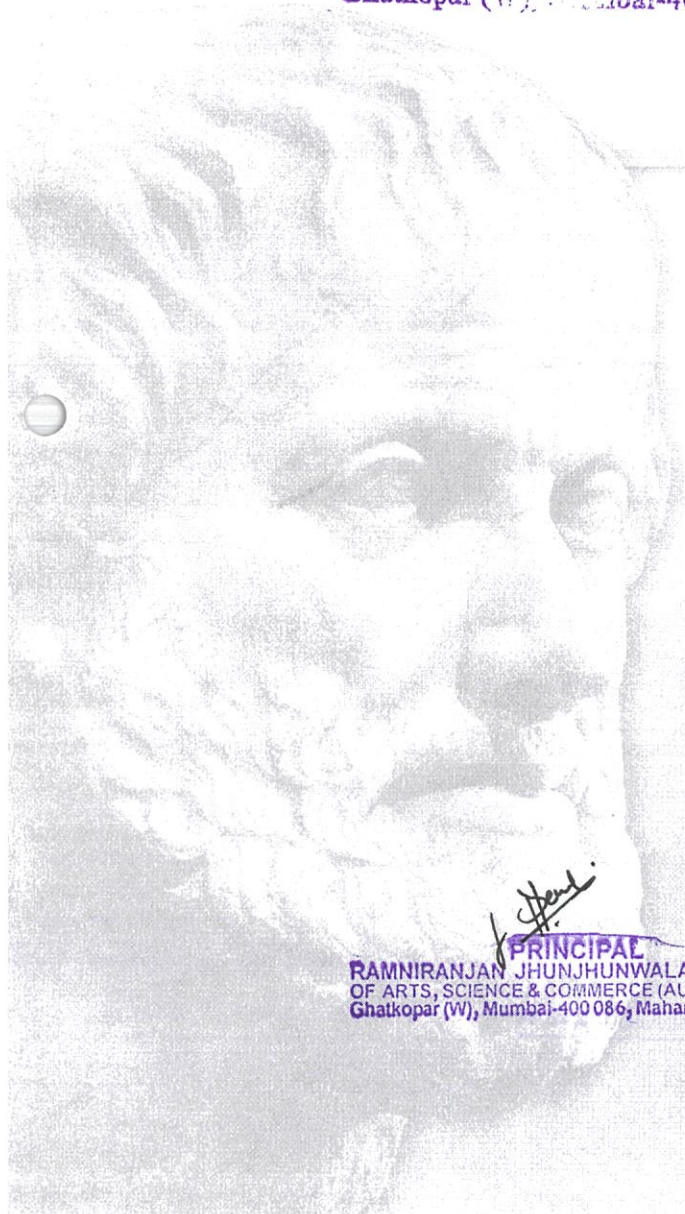


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Aristotle 2400 Years

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ARISTOTLE UNIVERSITY
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The Concept of Justice in Greek Philosophy and Indian Philosophy: Debate and Dialogue

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Introduction

Greek Philosophy and Indian Philosophy seem to have a tie-in connection to many of the epistemological, metaphysical, ontological and ethical concepts. It seems that the philosophical traditions have wonderful similarities, say, in Platonism and Vedanta Philosophy (the Upanishadic Philosophy), the metaphysical truths are grasped by intuition and their conclusions are quite similar though they followed independent introspection.

It is very intriguing to see the similarities between the two traditions. The influence on each other, i.e., the Greeks influencing the Indians and vice-versa is being introspected almost time immemorial. According to scholars, it is in pre-historic times that give and take of ideas and ideologies continued to run between India and Greece. Archaeological surveys have proved that how Indian philosophy, art, science, and social sciences (in general) influenced the Greeks and the Romans and how the Greeks rendered tremendous influence on Indian art, architecture, aesthetics, philosophy and the like.

One can guess the Indians and Greeks found influencing each other pleasurable. The West emphasized on "reason" and Indians idealized "faith" and "asceticism." But according to Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, "The presence of the large body of Indian troops in the Persian army in Greece in 480 BC shows how far west the Indian connections were carried; and the discovery of modelled heads of Indians at Memphis, of about the fifth century BC shows that Indians were living there for trade. Hence there is no difficulty in regarding India as the source of the entirely new ideal of as-

ceticism in West."¹

Often, Greek Gods and Goddesses are found quite synonymous to Indian Gods and Goddesses. For example, Lord Shiva is (like) "Dionysus" and Lord Krishna is (like) "Hercules." Many scholars are of the opinion that the Greeks (or in general the West) has been considerably influenced by Indian culture and civilization. (I have my reservations about it as I believe that it is always reciprocal; and the new product from the amalgamation of two civilizations is always a "novel" product. Nobody denies the inspirations.) As said by Joseph Waligore, "Pyrrho is the founding figure in Greek skepticism. An on-going debate with Hellenistic philosophy is whether Pyrrho's skepticism and the doctrine that the sage is imperturbable is indigenous to Greek philosophical tradition or whether it was substantially influenced by Indian Philosophy. The impetus for this discussion is the description of Pyrrho's life in Diogenes Laertius (IX.61) which describes the influence of the Indian gymnosophists—naked philosophers—on Pyrrho. For Diogenes states that Pyrrho got the idea of agnosticism and the suspension of judgement from his trip to India."² Therefore, often the base of western civilization is challenged. But, as a thought, it is highly debatable. As believed by some that it was "togetherness" of Greek and Indian philosophies that influenced western thought.

1. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (Mumbai: Oxford University Press, 1940), 150.

2. Joseph Waligore, "Indian Influence on Hellenistic Philosophy," *Indian Influence on Greeks*, accessed July 16, 2012, <https://www.scribd.com/document/133006260/Joseph-Waligore-Indian-Influence-on-Greeks>



Or, to be more precise, shall we say that togetherness of western and eastern thought! Therefore one can conclude that it was colonization, imperialism, trade and business and migration which were the main factors that made eastern and western thoughts influencing each other. It is not one-sided but reciprocal.

To sum up the introduction, in *Historical Dictionary of Ancient Greek Philosophy* it is mentioned, "The Vedas and early Upanishads predate the development of Greek Philosophy; Gautama Buddha was a contemporary of Pythagoras, Heraclitus, and Xenophanes. At what point did the Greek philosophical tradition become aware of their colleagues in India, and what parts of the Indian tradition could have influenced their thought? For Milesians, we can only point to tantalizing parallels—the plurality of universe in Anaximander, as in the *Upanishads*, the primacy of breath and air in Anaximenes, as in the *Rig Veda*—but we do not have enough information even to speculate about connections... In any case, relationships between Indian and Greek intellectual traditions in the period before the Persian wars continue to be very speculative in the absence of significant evidence one way or the other."³ (Historical dates are highly in approximation.) One cannot miss out therefore at this juncture a parallel between the world's two of the oldest and marvellous civilizations, i.e., the Greek and the Indian.

Indian and Greek Concept of Justice - A Tie

It is well known that Plato had to answer back to Sophists and his answer was "the doctrine of transcendent forms to the anti-social ideas of some of the Sophists."⁴ However, it was not enough. And for the healthiest condition of the soul, there is a need of the presence of "order"; for which he uses two terms, one—κόσμος (Universe as Ordered Whole), and τάξις (narrow meaning—Orderly Arrangement).

The earlier communities that are known to be simple (literally), as such we find no conflict be-

tween moral duty and self-interest. Somewhere the deontological and the teleological approach do not collide.

But the Greeks had moved to a more intricate pattern of society where the banditry of the conquering hero was upheld; while a simple law abiding person suffers. Somewhere, two opposite parties arose, namely—"nature" vs. "law" (to be more precise "legal law" that is human made). This is quite a sophisticated position. Here, human made laws were considered to be greater and finer compared to God's. This position is quite in thesis to Plato's dialogue *Gorgias* by Callicles—(whose identity is quite dubious) where *oligarchic a-moralism* is accepted that insists on human made laws to be superior to anything that is theologically oriented. Oppression of the weak by the strong was considered natural and acceptable. This seems to have a tremendous impact on atheistic or secular existentialist like Friedrich Nietzsche who even influenced modern political theories and stretched up to post-modernism. So the stand is in fact hedonistic. This position seems to be quite anti-human and immoral at times. But according to Callicles, this position is naturally evolved (devoid of God or Absolute or Ultimate Reality). It directly critiques the traditional or conventional concept of Justice. (Once again it reminds of Nietzsche where he says, "Gott ist tot," i.e., "God is dead." But he said this in despair.)

We are aware that Plato was against the Sophist's position, but here Plato represents the Sophistic view at its most extreme. At this juncture the two terms—"good" and "pleasant" come to the forefront, whereby the idea of duty is explicitly denied. Who is a strong man? He who is *just man*, who has no duty except to act according to his own self-interest; the first thing that comes to our mind is—this is the rise of "Hedonism" as a philosophical doctrine.

However, at the same time, we find that Socrates and Plato deny this position. How do they deny this position? Before we come to the rise and (if I am permitted to use the term) "fall" and rehabilitate the virtue of "justice" as an ethical value from the Greek point of view, let us have a look at Indian philosophy, how the Vedic and Upanishadic philosophy shows the same methodological evolution in the concept of justice; and seems

3. Anthony Preus, *Historical Dictionary of Ancient Greek Philosophy*, 2nd edition (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 206.

4. R. A. Alles, *The Essence of Plato's Philosophy* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1933), 67.

qualities in men (the rational, the spiritive/courageous and the appetitive part). To simplify Plato says the soul is composed of three parts: the appetitive, the rational and the spirited. These three parts of the soul also correspond to the three classes of a "just society"; namely the artisan/workers, the philosopher kings and the soldier community. In the individual, justice is done when there is a balance between these three parts, i.e., when rational is helped by the spirited part to rule, and the appetitive part obeys. Corresponding to these three parts of the human soul, in our society when these three classes, namely the artisans/workers' community, the philosopher kings and the soldiers' community work in harmony and in a balanced way, then "justice is done to society." Plato's concept of Justice is elucidated by many scholars. It is a very intriguing fact that when appetite is regulated under the guidance of reason, it is balanced and turns moderate. Moreover, when reason is governed by its own self, it transforms into a virtue that is wisdom. When all the cardinal virtues perform their functions in a manner that is desired, justice is born.

Though the theory of tripartite soul corresponding to the different classes in society has been criticised as it is equated with caste system that is found in India—corresponding to the philosopher kings there is the caste of *brahmins*, to soldiers' community—the caste of *kshatriyas* and the artisans/workers—the two castes separated—the caste of *Vaishyas* (predominantly the traders/businessmen/farmers/other professional workers) and the caste of *shudras* (the caste that serves the other three upper castes). And caste system has brought too much of stratification in society in India; one more reason is that it got associated with *varṇa* (literally meaning "colour") and *jāti* (literally meaning "one's birth signifies one's caste"); both these later were converted into a caste system. M. K. Gandhi, B. R. Ambedkar and many other contemporary Indian philosophers have severely criticised the caste system. (In fact, the medieval Indian mystics and saints also undermined the caste system in India). However, Aristotle has defended his teacher by saying that it is neither class division, nor master and slave or servant division that underestimates the potentialities of the individual person but it is based on "the division

of labour." Everybody cannot and need not be philosopher king or the soldier or worker; we need all the three classes in society and so do we need and have three parts in the human soul. Even though Gandhi criticises the caste system, he upholds the teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita* as a spiritual guidance book to his life; and *Bhagavad Gita* too defends the caste system. But in no way the *Bhagavad Gita* gives importance to "birth" as a condition to fix one's caste ("class" in Aristotle's terminology). As in the *Parāśara-smṛti*, it is said "The *kshatriya*'s (intended here as a soldier) duty is to protect the citizens from all kinds of difficulties, and for that reason, he has to apply violence in suitable cases for law and order. Therefore he has to conquer the soldiers of inimical kings, and thus, with religious principles, he should rule over the world."⁸

The parallel in India and the antiquity of "*varṇa* system" (caste system) is beyond doubt—brings about the concept of duty, so *karma* (action) and ultimately to "justice done." As explained by Swami Prabhupada who clarifies the intentions of Sri Krishna, "The social institution known as *varṇāśrama-dharma*—the institution dividing society into four divisions of social life and four occupational divisions or castes—is not meant to divide human society according to birth. Such divisions are in terms of educational qualifications. They are to keep the society in a state of peace and prosperity. The qualities mentioned herein are explained as transcendental qualities meant for making a person progress in spiritual understanding so that he can get liberated from the material world."⁹ Both the Greek and Indian theistic philosophy want to implement the principle of "functional specialization." To maintain peace and order in society this "division of labour" is inevitable. Then justice is done to the society and to oneself.

As mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita*, there are three *guṇas* (qualities) in every human being, namely—the *sattva* (commonly translated as harmony, light and purity), the *rajas* (commonly translated as passion, motion and activity) and the *tamas* (commonly translated as dullness, inactive-

8. Swami Prabhupada, *Bhagavad-gita as It Is*, 2nd edition (California: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1986), 105.

9. *Ibid.*, 649.

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but these two virtues are not to be regulated under the sway of emotions. In fact, to "be just" is being fair to the individual and that also has to incorporate other virtues. Or, to be more precise justice definitely incorporates other virtues. As we know justice is one of the important cardinal virtues, others being temperance, courage and wisdom; whereas faith, hope and charity are considered as religious virtues. Virtues help human beings to live life being human; along with uplifting the standard of living of others as well. Ultimately it leads to harmony in the society. When Plato in his *Republic* says that justice is the power that makes each member of a state do his work and the rulers are to see that no one may take what belongs to others or be despised of what is his own, it definitely means justice is the harmony of all virtues. Aristotle says that it is a practice of virtue towards other individuals. So there are two types:

1. Distributive Justice; and
2. Retributive Justice.

The difference between the two views of justice is merely on the emphasis. In the former, the natural equality of men is emphasized, i.e., "Each to count as one and none as more than one." This could be applied to the distribution of goods. The later makes emphasis in deservingness, i.e., "To every man according to his work." It maintains that there is a natural fittingness in reward and punishment as well as in the like treatment of all.

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How is this different from the concept of "dharma" (duty) in Indian philosophy? Except the *Jaina* philosophy where they emphasize on extreme practice of "non-violence" and the *Chārvākas* where they emphasize on eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die (these are among the nine schools of Indian philosophy; though they are nowhere devoid of ethics of its own), all schools under the banner of Indian philosophy accept justice as one's *dharma* (duty) to be performed.

So, when we ask as to how to bring about "development economy" or "sustainable development" in contemporary times; I think it is wrongly worded question. We have first to redefine "development." And while doing it, justice plays a pivotal role. In connection to this, I quote from an article, "In a provocative new study, a pair of Nobel prize-winning economists, Joseph E. Stiglitz and Amartya Sen, urge the adoption of new assessment tools that incorporate a broader concern for human welfare than just economic growth."¹¹ Further, Stiglitz said, "What you measure affects what you do. If you do not measure the right thing, you do not do the right thing."¹²

In conclusion, do the right things, at the right time, to the right person—justice is done. Neither Plato, nor Aristotle, nor Indian philosophy, nor Stiglitz, nor Sen would reject it. In fact, this is what they have aspired for the ideal society.

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11. Peter S. Goodman, "Emphasis on Growth Is Called Misguided," *The New York Times*, September 22, 2009, B1.

12. Ibid.

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