IRAJ BASHIRI
(USA)

AHURIC ORDER AND THE PLATONIC «FORM«[1]

Introduction

Stemming from the Indo-European Kulturbund, the ancient cultures of Iran and Greece share the rudiments of their cosmology and aspects of their mythology. These commonalities appearing in the form of similarities and differences form the substance on which the two cultures draw for ideological inspiration and sociological organization. This paper discusses the commonalities and differences in Greek and Persian thought in three parts. Beginning with mythology, it provides examples of similarities in story lines developed around well-known mythic figures. This is followed by a rudimentary survey of the histories of the two nations during the 6th and 5th centuries BCE[2] in order to highlight specific developments that lead to diametrical differences in the ideological and social organizations of the two cultures. The thrust of the paper, however, is on an appreciation of the unique position of the "Good" among the ancient Persians and Greeks. It seems that the Mazdian *haurvatat* (perfection) is, to a degree, identifiable with Plato's *eidos* (form) or the "Good." Is it possible that the ancient Greek and Persian concepts of the "Good," so drastically different in origin, i.e., man versus god, might share the same earthly purpose? Both systems, although based on different foundations, endeavor to bring humanity a better understanding of itself. Finally, it should be mentioned that the discussion rather than being exhaustive presages further study of ancient thinkers, especially Aristotle. As it stands, the study will serve as a reference point for the inspiration that individual ancient Greek thinkers have been for illustrious medieval figures in the East and the West, figures like Avicenna and St. Aquinas.

Greek and Iranian Myths: Similarities and Differences

Among the commonalities between Greek and Persian myths are some of the story lines they use. These story lines establish that before the Greco-Persian wars, even before the rise of Cyrus the Great, the Greeks and the Persians had developed their individual versions of the same myths. Consider the following story line: Forced by circumstances, the

---

[1] This paper is a part of a larger study tentatively entitled, *Perso-Islamic Thought Through the Ages*.

[2] All dates, unless otherwise indicated, are BCE.

hero makes a choice between two unsavory propositions. At the end, he pays for the decision with his life. In Greek myth, Zeus orders Agamemnon, the commander of the Greek fleet, to set sail for Troy. Agamemnon cannot carry out Zeus' orders because Artemis, who is in charge of winds, is avenging the terrible act of Paris. She will provide fair wind only if Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter, Iphigenia, to her. Agamemnon is in a quandary. He has to either obey Zeus and move the ships or wait until there is fair wind, at which time moving the ships would be meaningless. He decides to obey Zeus by sacrificing Iphigenia. In the end, Agamemnon pays for his decision when Iphagenia's mother murders him.

In Firdowsi's *Shahname,* during a war between the armies of Iran and Turan, Prince Siyavosh pledges his word to the defeated Turanians that he will not fight them. Kayka'us, who is at once Siyavosh's king, father, and commander urges him to route the Turanian Afrasiyab's army. Siyavosh has to make a difficult decision. Should he break his word and covenant with the Creator and invade Turan, or should he follow the dictates of his *farr* and act against his father's wishes? He chooses the latter. In the end, he pays for his decision with his life when Afrasiyab's henchmen behead him.[3]

Here is another story line. The hero comes to a foreign court. The king entertains him and, recognizing his high status, asks him to stay the night. Then he sends his own daughter into the guest's bedchamber. The next day, when taking his leave, the hero leaves a token with his "wife." By seeing that token, he will recognize their son and help him. The son and the token appear in the father's realm. The token becomes the deciding factor in whether the two live happily ever after, or if one dies at the hand of the other.

In Greek myth, Aegeus, a descendant of the kings of Attica, has had many wives but no children. He consults the oracle at Delphi. He is told "Not to untie the mouth of his wine-skin until he reaches the citadel of Athens." Aegeus does not understand the meaning of the oracle. One night, when staying at the court of Torezen, he tells the king about the oracle. Torezen understands the oracle to mean that he should not have intercourse before reaching the citadel of Athens. Torezen then arranges for his daughter to sleep with Aegeus that night. Before leaving the court, Aegeus leaves a special sword and a pair of sandals under a rock that only his future son would be able to lift. "After our son grows up," he says, "have him wear those sandals and come and join me in Athens."

---

[3] See, Bashiri, 1994, pp. 34-57.

Their son, Theseus, is born and is brought up by his mother. When he is sixteen, he is informed about his father. Then he is led to the rock. Theseus uncovers the sword and the sandals. Wearing those tokens, Theseus goes through six ordeals and, eventually, reaches Athens. At the time, Aegeus is under the spell of the magician Medea. Medea recognizes Theseus as a potential threat and asks Aegeus to invite him to a banquet and poison him. At the banquet, before drinking the poisoned wine, Theseus uses his sword to cut his meat. Aegeus recognizes the sword and the sandals and, thereby, his son. The father and son are united. Medea is sent into exile.[4]

In Firdowsi's *Shahname,* Iran's national champion, Rustam, stays a night at the court of the king of Samangan. The king arranges for his daughter, Rudabeh, to sleep with the champion. The next day, when he leaves, Rustam gives Rudabeh an armband to give to their son before he comes to Iran to meet him. As fate would have it, some twenty years later, Rustam and his son, Suhrab, face each other in the battlefield as the champions of their respective sovereigns.

In the Greek myth, the father was aware of the ruses of Medea. He recognized his son and saved him. In the tragedy of Rustam and Suhrab, Rustam is instructed to hide his identity from Suhrab. He turns a deaf ear to Suhrab's pleas for identification. At the end, in the course of single combat, the father stabs the youth who dies in his father's arms.

It is not our purpose to investigate the similar myths that have evolved out of the mythology of the Indo-European peoples, but to illustrate the common bonds that hold the two people together. Our task is to understand the thought processes that have led the Persians and the Greeks, so close in certain aspects of their culture, to the fateful decisions that separate them. And nowhere are those early decisions evidenced better than in the cosmological systems that have inspired the rudiments of their civilizations. It is to those roots that we now turn.

The Greek and Iranian Pantheons

Hesiod, the author of *Theogony,* the main source of the study of the Greek gods, describes the gods of Greece as immortal, abstract, anthropomorphic, and primordial beings. His creation myth begins with *Chaos* (also Void or a Yawning) that gives birth to *Eros, Gaia* (also *Ge*), and *Tartaros* (the underworld). Energized by sexual reproduction, *Gaia,* on her own, gives birth to Ouranus (sky), Pontos (sea), and the mountains.

---

[4] See, de Menasce, J., pp. 146-148.

Then she marries her own son, Ouranus, and gives birth to Twelve Titans, among whom are the sun, the moon, Rheia, and Cronos.

To eliminate potential rivalry, Ouranus does not allow the children to be born. *Gaia*, however, persuades her youngest unborn son, Cronos, to castrate Ouranus. With Ouranus shorn of power, the Titans enter the world. Cronos then marries Rheia and, soon after, the Olympians are born. After settling accounts among themselves, the Olympians form a pantheon with Zeus as its head. In addition to being the king of gods, Zeus also appropriates for himself dominion over the earth and sky, as well as over justice, hospitality, and prophesies. The other members of the pantheon are Zeus' brothers: Hades, lord of the Tartaros and Poseidon, the ruler of the seas, and Zeus' sisters: Hera, the goddess of marriage contracts, Hestia, the goddess of the hearth, and Demeter, the goddess of agriculture. Chart 1 shows the development of the Greek pantheon.[5]

[5] For a discussion of Greek mythology, see Hesiod, 1983.

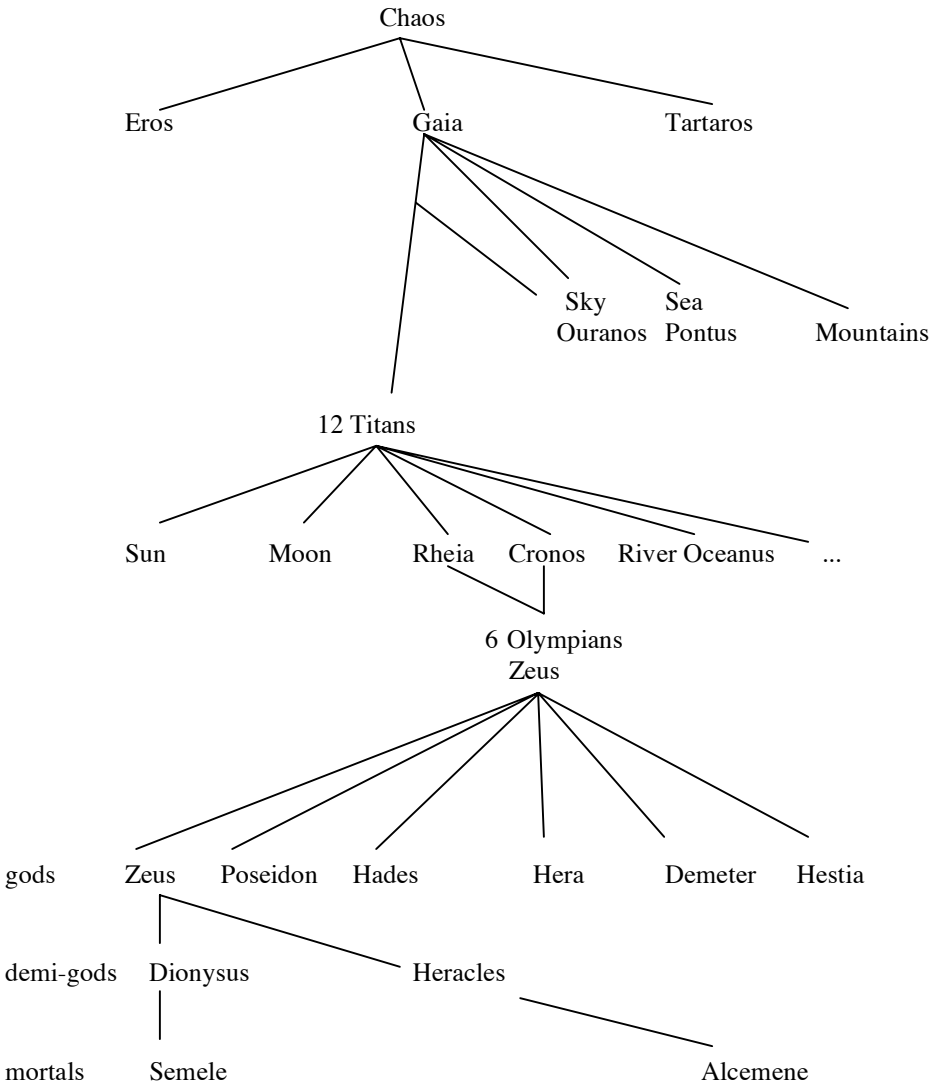

Chart 1: Greek pantheon of gods and its relationship with humans

A quick look at the system summarized above reveals that through *Eros* (sexual desire), Greek gods regenerated until they formed a pantheon of six, seven if we include Zeus' double role as a contributor to the pantheon as well as its head. Within the pantheon, the gods intermarry, sometimes they even marry humans and create demi-gods (Cf., Dionysus); otherwise, they do not interfere in the affairs of humans. At most, as guardians of resources, they toy with humans.

In Persian, the word "*mazda*" is derived from the Indo-European *mns-* (*mnah* in Iranian), referring to thought and mind. Mazdian cosmology,

therefore, is a cosmology of the mind. In Iranian cosmology, everything is thought into existence. In fact, the Iranian cosmos is energized by thought reproduction in the same way that *Eros* energizes the Greek system. Creation begins with *Manah* (thought or mind) which blossoms in the Void and creates *Vohu Manah* (good mind). *Vohu Manah,* in turn, through the intermediacy of *Asha Vahishta* (truth, righteousness) and *Spenta Armaiti* (divine love, devotion) creates *Khshathra Vairya* (holy sovereign power). It is from *Khshathra Vairya* that *Haurvatat* (perfection) is born. *Ameretat* (immortality) is heir to *Haurvatat*.[6]

I shall return to a fuller discussion of the development of the elements of the pantheon later; suffice it here to say that like Zeus, who organized his brothers and sisters into a pantheon, Ahura Mazda organized a pantheon of six (seven if we count Ahura Mazda himself as a contributing member) with whose assistance he administers the affairs of the cosmos. Chart 2 illustrates Ahura Mazda's pantheon as it relates to the lower gods and humans:

[6] See, Rajabov, pp. 95-119.

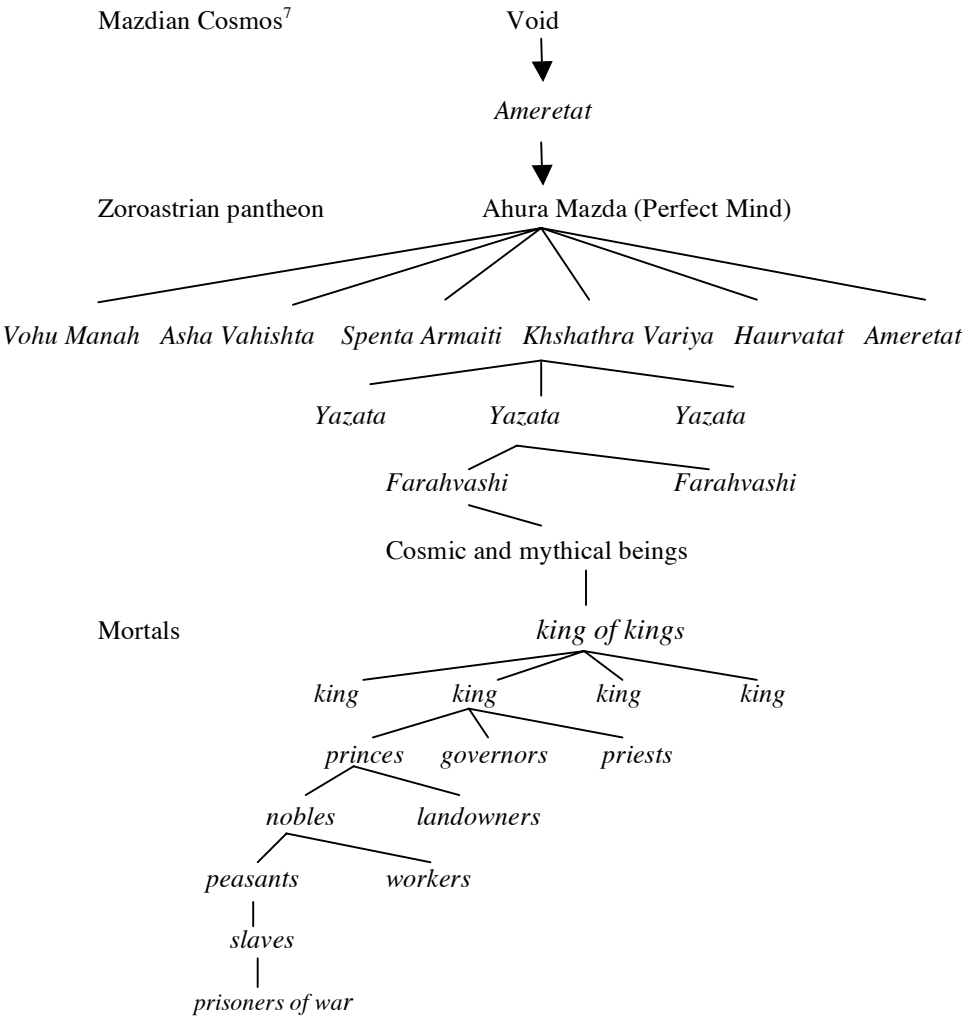

Chart 2: Mazdian pantheon and its relationship with humans

The members of Ahura Mazda's pantheon are abstract. Unlike their Greek counterparts, they do not marry, do not directly deal with humans, are not anthropomorphic, and do not eat or drink. Their Greek counterparts, for instance, eat *nectar* and drink *ambrosia* in the manner of the humans.

The differences between the two systems become more poignant when cosmology gives way to mythology. Greek myth, centered on power and sexual desire produces legends of love, lust, and conquest. Divine dealings with humans are quite straightforward. They toy with them.

[7] For the full cosmic development see Chart 3, below.

Similarly, historical personages use the power of the gods, as their sires, to consolidate their own power base. Alexander the Great, for example, claimed Zeus as his source of strength.

On the contrary, Iranian gods inspire Iranian mythical beings with religious zeal and a penchant for justice through divine order. The thought seed that gives rise to the Iranian pantheon regenerates until *Khshathra Variya,* a blessed thought kingdom beyond the earth plane, is achieved. Therein everything is perfect, i.e., in a state of *Haurvatat*. It is this *Haurvatat* that blossoms into the world of the humans and with it brings the perfect justice, virtue, truth, and knowledge of Ahura Mazda. In other words, it institutes the Ahuric Order on earth. There is, however, a "flaw" in the system. Although *Haurvatat per se* is pure, what emanates from it, becomes contaminated with the Lie and, to a degree, loses its primordial perfection. This gradation of perfection is known as the *farr*, or primordial knowledge bestowed on the individual on the basis of the individual's recognition of the Good. The *farr* is strongest when it is closest to *Haurvatat* and loses strength as it travels down the hierarchy of the Ahuric Order. On the earth plane, for instance, the wisdom of the king, inspired by his *farr,* is the strongest. It deteriorates to near zero by the time it reaches the prisoners of war.[8]

As can be seen, the main difference between the two pantheons is in the relationship between the gods and humans. In the Iranian pantheon, Ahura Mazda rules over the other gods in the celestial hierarchy and, through his deputy, the king of kings, over the humans in the terrestrial realm. For instance, Ahura Mazda's divine order descends through a particular Spenta to a particular *Yazata* who inspires the *Farahvashi* of the king of kings. The king of kings communicates this order to his subjects through his priests, governors, and nobles.

The Greek gods, on the other hand, although supervised by Zeus, are quite independent. Their dealings with each other and with humans are not regimented in the same way that the activities of the Iranian deities are organized. This difference has many ramifications in the organization of the social order created by each culture. In the Iranian system, perfect human justice is invoked in order to restore the world to its primordial justice of the *Haurvatat*. And that cannot happen unless precedence is given to thought, before intention and to intention before action. Perhaps it is this aspect of Iranian cosmology that, during the overlordship of the Greeks, convinced the Iranians to strengthen their ties with Ahura Mazda,

---

[8] For *farr,* see, Bashiri, 1994, pp. 178-188; Filippani-Ronconi, 1978.

rather than distance themselves from their gods, as the Greeks had done by adopting reason as their guide.

As myth gave way to history, the cultures of Greece and Persia went their own separate ways. They developed their own social, political, and religious worlds with commerce remaining as their only enduring bond. The Greeks organized themselves into city-states, established democratic rule, and granted individuals the right to hold property, including slaves, serve in the military, and vote. They de-emphasized the role of the gods as a decisive factor in building their empire, especially their empire of thought. The Persians formed a monarchical system under the divine right of kings. Revering the *farr,* they established a class society in which the *farr* served as the measure of the individual's proximity to the power and will of the Creator. In the hierarchy that emerged, each individual had a specific place. He was either at court, in the fire temple, in the battlefield, or in agricultural fields or in trade. The king, who was inspired by the deity, led the few in the upper echelon who did all the thinking and made all the decisions. The rest of society followed. The ancient histories of the two nations reflect their fateful choices. It is important, however, to note that our intent in the outlines provided below is not instruction in the history of either people, but a fairly brief narration, focusing on the choices made and the consequences that ensued.

The Iranians and Greeks in History

Cyrus III the Great, the founder of the Achaemenian Dynasty, defeated Astyages, the king of Media, in 550. He then subjugated Lydia in 547 and Babylonia in 539. An account of Cyrus' victory, known as the "Chart of Cyrus," was inscribed on a clay barrel and his conquest of Lydia was celebrated throughout the land.[9] Cyrus established a prosperous kingdom for a semi-nomadic people. His expansion of Persian sovereignty over Lydia and Ionia opened a new vista in Persian history. It also created a sense of apprehension in the Aegean region, especially in Athens where the Ionians reached for support.

Cyrus administered his kingdom wisely. He continued the administrative practices of the Medes in the heartland and did not introduce drastic changes in the cultures and lifestyles of the newly acquired lands. He respected the gods of the other nations and based his rule on tolerance. As a token of his generosity, he freed 40,000 Jews from captivity in Babylon. He combined sagacity and statesmanship with valor

[9] For the "Chart of Cyrus," see Bashiri, *Hymns, 2003,* pp. 23-25.

and a zeal for world conquest. He was a determined and steadfast man who put wisdom ahead of the sword.

Cyrus' son, Cambyses III, who ruled for eight years (530-522), tried to implement Cyrus' plan by capturing Egypt and annexing the Oasis of Amon and Carthage to the empire. In reality, however, he succeeded only in annexing northern Ethiopia before his supplies ran out and he was obliged to return to Egypt. His rule was cut short by his sudden death in the summer of 522 in Egbatana, Syria. Cambyses lacked his father's virtues, especially Cyrus' wisdom and tolerance. He mocked the religion of the Egyptians and destroyed their temple. He even stabbed the sacred Apis bull at Memphis, an act for which the Egyptians never forgave him.

Darius I the Great, who was born in eastern Iran in 550, became Iran's King of Kings under special circumstances.[10] While Cyrus III and his son both carried the divine right (*farr*) to rule, Darius was not so endowed. His claim to the Achaemenian throne, therefore, needed divine sanction. To gain Ahura Mazda's benevolence and the support of the Persians, he fought nineteen battles during the same year. His bas-relief, commemorating his efforts for the unification of Iran, speaks for itself: Saith Darius the King: "This is what I did by the favor of Ahura Mazda in one and the same year after that I became king. XIX battles I fought; by the favor of Ahura Mazda I smote them and took prisoner IX kings..."[11] To further establish his legitimacy, Darius married Attosa, a daughter of Cyrus the Great.

After Elam, Media, Assyria, Parthia, Margiana, and Scythia joined Persia and formed the Persian Empire, Darius' stance changed from consolidator to expansionist. To the east he captured the Indus valley and pushed the Scythians as far back as Sughdia. To the west, he crossed the Bosphorus and the Danube, pursuing fleeing Scythians deep into European territory. Nonetheless, even though the Scythians fled before his army, and even though Thrace and Macedonia fell to his commanders, Darius did not extend his rule beyond his reach—not, at least, until all the necessary elements for a major war with the Greek city-states were in place. He concentrated his energy on administration. About his efforts in promoting trade by connecting ancient sea routes, he says: "I am a Persian. From Persia I seized Egypt. I commanded this canal to be dug from the river, Nile by name, which flows in Egypt, to the sea, which goes from Parsa. Afterward this canal was dug as I commanded, and ships passed from

---

[10] For more information on Darius I the Great, see Bashiri, 1988, pp. 598-604.

[11] Kent, 1953, p. 131.

Egypt through this canal to Parsa as was my will."[12] In his quest for a just and efficient administration, he raised the number of satrapies (governorship) to twenty. Each satrapy was administered by five royal appointees: 1) a satrap chosen from among the Persians of royal blood; 2) a secretary, equipped with an independent army able, if necessary, to unseat the satrap; 3) a tax collector; 4) a military general; and 5) an informer, who kept the sovereign informed of all in a particular region. The Royal Road connected the satrapies to the center. On this road, 1,677 miles in length, 111 stations were in operation, each able to provide fresh horses to the *chapar* or the messengers of the king. The messengers covered the distance between Sardis and Susa in seven days. Silk Route caravans usually crossed the same road in the course of three months.

In addition to following Cyrus' lead and allowing his subjects to retain their languages, religions, and cultures, Darius also reformed the tax system so that the farmers paid a tax relative to the yield of their land rather than a fixed amount. He introduced coinage (*darik*) and banking, improved agriculture by building *qanats* and canals, and instituted a system of wages for the various tasks requiring hired labor at the court.

In 499, when the Ionians set fire to the city of Sardis in Asia Minor (present-day Republic of Turkey), the time of tranquility and construction gave way to a time of war. This attack, in addition to several Greek uprisings in Persian-held domains, convinced Darius that the time had come to curb the excesses of the Greek city-states. But he did not succeed. Greeks and Persians met at Marathon in 490. Darius' armies, commanded by Mardonius and Datis, could not withstand the joined forces of the Greek city-states. Accepting defeat, Darius returned to Persia. Before he died at Persepolis in 486, at the age of sixty-four, he chose Xerxes, his son by Attosa, to succeed him.

After Darius' death, Xerxes, the eldest among the four children born to Attosa, became king. Xerxes was born in 519. As Xerxes I, he ruled for twenty-one years (486-465).[13] His twelve years of governorship of Babylonia, prior to his ascension to the throne, distinguished him among the other claimants, including Artabazanes. As a first order of his rule, he quelled rebellions in Bactria, Egypt, and Babylonia. He personally dealt with Egypt and Babylonia and, after they were brought into submission, stripped them of their autonomy. He then took measures to strengthen the Persian army before marching on Greece. For four years, he marshaled forces, dug canals, cut roads through woods, and held

[12] Olmstead, 1948, p. 146; Kent, 1953, p. 147.
[13] For more information on Xerxes I, see Bashiri, 1988, pp. 2364-2369.

diplomatic negotiations with Greece's neighbors. Then, in the spring of 480, he brought his army (estimated between 360,000 and two million) to the Hellespont. On his way, he won the battle of Thermopyle before he marched triumphantly into Athens. His triumph, however, was short lived. He lost the war to Themistocles at Salamis. In 479, the remaining Persian army that had been stationed in Greece was defeated. Xerxes I died in 465, at the age of fifty-four.

Xerxes I was the last great king of kings of the Achaemenian Dynasty. After his death, the empire continued in a slow decline, and patterns leading to its disintegration emerged. The less ambitious and incapable monarchs who followed failed to exploit the satrap system to instill stability in the vast empire. In fact, at the very moment when the kings needed the full strength of their satraps to repel the advances of the Greek city-states in Asia Minor, the satraps were raising banners of rebellion, each trying to carve out a kingdom of his own.

Darius III, the last Achaemenian emperor, was the grandnephew of Artaxerxes II. As the last of his line, he had to be recalled from his satrapy in Armenia to assume the rulership of Iran. He ruled for six years: from 336 to 330. Incompetent, cunning, and indecisive, Darius III could not withstand Alexander of Macedon's advance. Defeated, he fled before Macedonia's advancing army to Central Asia, where he was murdered by one of his own satraps in 330. With Darius III's death, the Achaemenian Empire came to an end.

During the reign of Cyrus, Greece was not a unified land. Rather, it was a confederation of fiercely independent city-states each of which had a population of about 10,000 people. The largest centers of power were Sparta and Athens with a population of about 20,000 to 30,000 each. The interaction between the Spartans and the Athenians played a major role in the type of life that the Athenians came to know.

The history of Athens before the introduction of democracy is one of cruelty and domination by foreign powers. When on its own, Athens was ruled by an oligarchy. The aristocrats in the realm controlled everything. Men who were not noble, women, foreigners, and slaves did not have any rights of their own. For them, life was tough. Those hard times were trying for the Athenians in more than one way: they had to deal with cruel kings like Peisistraus and Hippias and grapple with injustice that tried human resolve. Sparta is where the Athenians would go for help, but the Spartans were no better than their own oligarchs. They, too, killed Athenian nobles and send others to exile.

In the end, however, it was a joined force of enlightened Athenians that rose from among the lower classes, mostly potters who expressed

their new thinking as themes on their pots, and Athenian exiles to turn the tide against those who oppressed them. Athenians who lived in exile not only sympathized with their fellow citizens but also took an active part in remedying the situation. One such person was Cleisthenes, son of Megacles, who became the ruler of Athens after the Spartans were defeated. He discarded the elitist, heroic culture of the old oligarchs and devised a democratic rule based on equality, individual rights, and freedom.[14]

The constitution of Cleisthenes, which went into effect in 502, allowed the people of Athens to shift their loyalties from the aristocrats, who had suppressed and exploited them, to the male Athenians of special standing. It put an end to unequal distribution of wealth, as well to conflicts stemming from ethnic, linguistic, and class differences.

In 476, to keep the Persians in check, the Greeks created the Delian League, a defensive force against any further incursions by the Persians.[15] Centered in the Island of Delos,[16] the League grew to a membership of some fifty states. As a result of the fees it charged, over the years it became extremely wealthy and powerful. In 545, the League treasury was moved from Delos to Athens where it became a source of prosperity for its new home. This period of Athenian history is usually referred to as the Age of Pericles (450-429).[17]

Even though an aristocrat by birth, Pericles was a true democrat. When he came to power, some thirty years after the conclusion of the Greco-Persian wars, Athens was in ruins. He decided to bring Athens back to its former glory and even surpass that. His major aim, however, was to turn Athens into an intellectual and cultural center that would play host to the world. And to a great degree he succeeded. Then Pericles made a fatal mistake. He attacked Sparta in 431. Pericles died of plague that accompanied the war, only four years into the war. As a result of his actions, at the end, when the Spartans won the war, the walls of Athens were torn down, the Athenian fleet, except for 12 ships, was destroyed, and the city's most prominent men were eliminated.

Pericles' plan was unsuccessful in that it resulted in Athens' loss of her dream of military greatness, but it was successful in ushering in a new view of life to the Greek isles. Between the time of Cleisthenes and the setback experienced by Pericles the culture of the people had changed.

---

[14] For Cleisthenes, see, Macaluso, pp. 545-548.
[15] For the Delian League, see, Viscusi, p. 1570.
[16] For the role of Delos in the Greco-Persian wars, see Green, pp.228ff.
[17] For Pericles, see, Viscusi, pp. 1569-1574.

Under democracy, they had established the foundation of a new way of life; one that followed the thought of Socrates, rather than the dictates of the gods. In 403, democracy was restored and, those who were deemed to have helped the tyrants were punished. Socrates, whose life we will discuss further below, was identified as an associate of the tyrants.
Between 359 and 336, Philip II of Macedonia defeated the Greek city-states, formed the League of Greek States, and prepared his army to invade Persia. He was assassinated. His son Alexander III the Great carried out his father's wishes. With victories at Granicus (334), Issus (333), and Gaugamela (331), Alexander put an end to the Achaemenian Empire of Persia. With his own death in Babylon in 323, and the death of his teacher, Aristotle, in the following year, the heyday of Greek civilization, too, came to an end.[18]

During the 6th and 5th centuries BCE, ancient Iranians and Greeks made fateful choices that guided not only their own lives but also the lives of their future generations. Their decisions had to do with gods and how they should be understood and treated. Following Protagoras, who recognized the human being as the measure of all things and Parmenides who advocated that humans must seek truth through reason, during the 5th century BCE, the Greeks took control of their own lives and struggled with nature and the mysteries of the unknown. They created a democratic set of rules by which to organize their society. By the time of Aristotle, they also achieved a reasonable understanding of the forces that direct human thought, emotion, and will. Both Plato and Aristotle agreed that the best ruler is a ruler who is also a philosopher. This was, of course, very different from the Iranian belief that the best ruler was one who receives his *farr* from Ahura Mazda.

Following the dictates of Ahura Mazda, the Iranians saw little need for an extensive exploration into nature. They put their faith in the Zoroastrian scripture, rather than on reason, and endeavored to bring the desires of Mazda outlined therein into fruition. This, of course, closed all avenues of individual self-improvement and progress. Furthermore, unlike in Greece, the commoners could not contribute to the building of society. Only a chosen few and their protégé were fit to, or indeed allowed to, meddle in affairs. Where there developed democracy in Greece, there was autocracy in Iran, and where there was individual contribution to the advancement of sciences, there was reliance on the *mu'bads* (priests) and the will of Mazda. Rule by the people and rule by divine right became entrenched into the Greek and Persian cultures, respectively. The

[18] For Alexander the Great, see Bashiri, *Hymns,* 2003, pp. 39-53.

interesting thing, however, is that, as we shall see, in the long run both nations sought a good life, and that for inter-personal relations and social organizations that lead to that life, they drew on human intellect. They differed, however, on what quality should constitute good life and they still do.

The discussion thus far has been centered on the similarities and differences in the ancient cultures of the Greeks and the Persians regarding the development of their myths and histories. The time has come to address the development of their thought. It is important to note that the role of the Persians, as people, in the development of their thought is somewhat obscure; all accomplishments are credited to Ahura Mazda. On the Greek side, however, the contributors are all well-known. They range from Thales to Plato and Aristotle. With that very crucial difference in mind, we shall now reconstruct the Ahuric Order, the perfect state created by Ahura Mazda, as a model for humans to emulate. Following that, we shall outline the painstaking efforts of the Greeks to develop a system for accessing the "Good" through reason.

Mazdian Cosmology

Ancient Iranians had a much less concrete, albeit definite, view of the cosmos than either their Achaemenian inheritors or the legendary saint-heroes that had preceded them. To the Mazdian mind, existence on the earth plane was the result of a series of generative thought cycles that had started at the beginning of time and had interacted with a Neutral Base, shaping and reshaping it until *Haurvatat* or perfection has been achieved. The end result of the many transformations would be the achievement of immortality. Within these cycles, thought would transform the Neutral Base into an expression of *Vohu Manah's* will (*Khshathra Vairya)* and perfection (*Haurvatat*). On the earth plane it would be translated as a blissful life for the faithful.

I just mentioned that the ancient mind understood the world in less concrete, albeit definite, terms. I shall elaborate on the first part of that statement later. As far as definiteness is concerned, ancient Iranians postulated that existence on the earth plane would last 12,000 cosmic years. We don't know, of course, how long a cosmic year is, or how long 12,000 cosmic years would be in real world terms. In any event, the period of 12,000 years was divided into four equal parts. At the beginning of the first three thousand years stood the Void, and at the end of the last three thousand years was Immortality. History as we know it, plays itself out as part of the last phase. During that phase, mythic saints struggle with

demons, exterminate them and return the cosmos to its original equilibrium.

The 12,000 year-long life span of existence, divided evenly into four 3,000-year periods, can be outlined as the follows:

0-3000	Void in which *Manah* blossoms and where the battle between *Vohu Manah* and *Aka Manah* occurs
3000-6000	Ascendancy of *Vohu Manah* and achievement of *Khshathra Vairya* through the intermediacy of *Asha Vahishta* and *Spenta Armaiti*
6000-9000	*Khshathra Vairya* to *Haurvatat* in which mythical monarchs guided by *Vohu Manah* rule
9000-12000	The final battle during *Haurvatat* when demons are destroyed and *Ameretat* is achieved

Manah or Thought Incarnate

Let me remind you that the Mazdian world started in the Void comprised of a Neutral Base susceptible to thought, expression, and action. The Neutral Base remained unchanged within the Void for the better part of the first 3,000 cosmic years.[19] Before that period ended, however *Manah* (thought), on its own, blossomed in the Void. Although *Manah* was neutral, a particular vibrancy distinguished it from the Void. The same force eventually split *Manah* into two easily distinguishable, but conflicting, parts. We know the twins as *Aka* (bad, evil) and *Vohu* (good, benevolent). Both faces of *Manah* sought immortality, but only one had the potential to achieve it. The conflict continued.

As was mentioned earlier, the words Mazda and Mazdian are derived from the Indo-European *mns-* (*mnah* in Iranian). Both refer to thought and mind. Mazdian cosmology, therefore, is a cosmology of the mind or a cosmology in which qualities can be brought into being through thought. In this cosmology, therefore, things are thought into existence (cf., for instance, the role of Brahman in Indian cosmology).[20] In order to make

---

[19] For the conflict between *Vohu Manah* and *Aka Manah* in the Void, see Zaehner, pp. 201-203.

[20] In relation to whether the world is real or unreal, see Organ, 1970, pp. 9, 43, and 103.

their respective kingdoms progress, both *Aka* and *Vohu* create helpers with specific functions.

Vohu Manah or Good Thought

The conflict between *Vohu Manah* and *Aka Manah* ended in favor of *Vohu Manah. Aka Manah* was forced to retreat into the depths of the Void. Victorious *Vohu Manah* who is, in reality, thought incarnate, charted a creation plan that would culminate in the achievement of *Khshathra Vairya* or the Holy Dominion, a firm first step for the realization of *Ameretat* (immortality). His projected kingdom had the potential of depriving *Aka Manah* from having any role at all in the cosmos.

The importance of *Vohu Manah* to the Mazdian cosmos; indeed, to the existence of the world as we know it, cannot be over-emphasized. Every good action begins with a good word and every good word is preceded by a good thought. Since *Vohu Manah* expected his *Khshathra Vairya* to serve as the model of good action, action that would lead to perfection and immortality, he had no option but to safeguard the path of good through expression to action.

Summarizing the role of the Mazdian *Vohu Manah*, therefore, it can be said that *Vohu Manah* is the seed of good reason and grasp. Without *Vohu Manah's* knowledge no word is expressed and no action is taken. If they do happen, then they are the words and deeds of *Aka Manah*.

Asha Vahishta or Cosmic Order

The kingdom that *Vohu Manah* had projected was to be populated by thought beings that, by nature, were susceptible to influence by good as well as by evil. *Aka Manah* was in retreat at that moment, but he could not be kept away from the dominion of good for ever. For this reason, *Vohu Manah* had to devise a way by which the individual could achieve a sound understanding of the Ahuric Order. *Vohu Manah* thus thought *Asha Vahishta* into existence expressly to protect his future beings from the Lie.

As we shall see, the creation of *Asha Vahishta* is one of *Vohu Manah*'s most fundamental steps toward the realization of his projected kingdom. Without order in his universe, the Lie would promote chaos and with chaos around, there would be no hope for the achievement of *Haurvatat* (perfection), the prerequisite for the achievement of *Ameretat*.

Spenta Armaiti or Right-mindedness

Several questions may arise at this point: Are the goodness that comes from *Vohu Manah* and the order and truth that are contributed by *Asha Vahishta* sufficient for the future prosperity of the beings who would populate *Vohu Manah*'s kingdom? Would they become pious and benevolent by dint of being created? Definitely not. Order, goodness, and truth without a catalyst to relate one to the other are but isolated barren cosmic functions. *Asha Vahishta*, therefore, thought *Spenta Armaiti* into existence in order to fill this very vacuum. *Spenta Armaiti* inspires good thought and sustains the truth that is ushered in by *Asha Vahishta* through order.

Khshathra Vairya or **Sovereign Power**

In the Mazdian cosmology, *Khshathra Vairya* is the expression of *Vohu Manah*'s will in the form of a kingdom; a world in which *Vohu Manah*'s thought-beings, protected by *Asha Vahishta* and guided by *Spenta Armaiti*, would live harmoniously. Their kingdom, if it were fully protected from *Aka Manah*, would enjoy perpetual bliss.

Thought out by the master of the good mind, and the ultimate creator of not only order but also the inspiration to seek order, *Vohu Manah*'s *Khshathra Vairya* came into existence. The creation process followed the same generative path that creation of *Asha Vahishta* and *Spenta Armaiti* had taken, i.e., each creation is born from the previous creation under the supervision of *Vohu Manah* and each creation is endowed with the capabilities of the creations that had given birth to it.

Haurvatat **or Perfection**

As mentioned, the conflict between *Aka Manah* and *Vohu Manah* began in the Void. It was disrupted while *Vohu Manah* was building his *Khshathra Vairya*. A new battle begins within the new kingdom between the creatures of *Vohu Manah* and those that *Aka Manah* brings forth. In the state of *Haurvatat* everything must be perfect, but there is always doubt that absolute perfection might not be within grasp. That doubt is the result of *Aka Manah's* intrusion into the domain of *Vohu Manah* and his inability to bail out.

Ameretat **or Immortality**

The battle between *Vohu Manah* and *Aka Manah* continues until one wins. Whichever side wins will achieve that perfection that is desired

for the completion of *Haurvatat*. The reward for achieving that perfection is the achievement of *Ameretat*.

Before leaving the discussion of Mazdian cosmology, it is important to emphasize that the world of *Vohu Manah*, from its inception in the Void to its materialization in *Khshathra Vairya*, and its final struggle for perfection and immortality is a thought world. *Haurvatat* that sums up *Khshathra Variya's* achievement embodies all that is good, just, virtuous, and wise in the Mazdian cosmos. For the humans, it is the single place where their best values find the most sublime forms. It is also the place where a grain of doubt perpetually diminishes the absolute perfection that leads to immortality.[21] The development of *Ameretat* from the Void is summarized below.

[21] It is noteworthy that this pantheon predates Zoroaster whose era is around the year 1000. For Zoroaster, see, Bashiri, 2001, pp. 525-537; Alverson, pp. 2411-2415; Boyce, 1975.

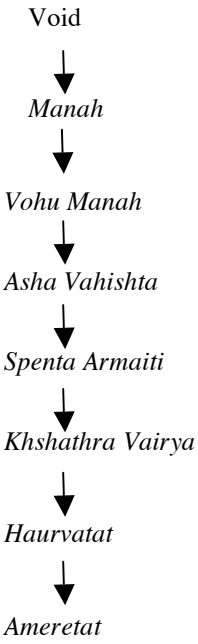

Chart 3: the development of *Ameretat* from the Void

Ancient Greek Thought

The ancient Greeks have left a legacy of their individual accomplishments and discoveries through *logos* (rational speech), the basic tool of the philosopher. As a result, at a very early stage in the development of western civilization, they have provided answers to some of the more difficult questions. We shall examine, in a dialectical manner, the development of their thought beginning with the contributions of the Presocratics (585-399). The Presocratics were the philosophers who led the way to an understanding of the nature of things and, eventually of man and his environs. The efforts of these pioneers were captured in the humanism of Socrates (469-399) whose thought forms the subject of some 25 dialogues written by his student, Plato (429-347). At the end, Aristotle (384-322) summarized ancient Greek knowledge as a fount on which future generations can draw and expand.[22] Aristotle's inclusion of Plato's "form" into his own more complex system, however, is outside the purview of this paper. Later, his philosophy as well as the philosophies of those preceding him will be crucial for evaluating the contributions of medieval philosophers to the development of eastern and western thought.

---

[22] See, Cohen, et al., pp. Viii-ix; Kirk, et al., pp. 1-6.

Furthermore, while discussing the works of Greek philosophers, there will be references to the development of Iranian cosmology. We have seen already that the two cultures descend from the same Indo-European mother culture. It is natural, therefore, for them, especially at that early stage, to draw on the same myths and abstract concepts. As we shall see, Ancient Greek and ancient Persian thought have a great deal in common. What separates them is their perspective on the origin, nature, and genesis of thought. Thought itself, good thought, especially, is a constant for both. Both have created elaborate systems to access it. It is to this thought fount, it seems, that Ahura Mazda and Plato retire for refreshment, each coming from a different direction and carrying a different burden.

Thinkers who lived before or during the lifetime of Socrates are usually referred to as the Presocratics. They were involved in debates that sought a solution to the questions of Being and Becoming. They endeavored to distinguish the One, in which all originated and into which all ended, and the Many in which all things flourished. Their emphasis on nature, rather than on human nature, set them apart from those who were yet to come to further their discoveries and amplify their finds.

From among the last generation of the Presocratics rose the monumental figure of Socrates, an Athenian philosopher who opposed the relativistic approach of the Sophists, or those who "beat around the bush," so to say, instead of addressing the question.[23] Socrates' thoughts were organized and developed by Plato who perfected the dialectic method and instituted an Academy for the clear purpose of making sense out of the assertions of Socrates. Plato intended to create a social system, based on a primordial prototype that could usher in the good life that Socrates had sought. At the end, Aristotle, Plato's best student, who concerned himself with particulars and their relationship to the whole, quite the opposite of what Plato had taught, revised Plato's efforts.

As mentioned, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle owe their eminence to the efforts of the Presocratics first among whom was Thales of Miletus (? 585). Thales distinguished himself in astronomy and navigation about which he has left an account. In 585, he predicted a solar eclipse and while traveling in Egypt, he measured the height of the Great Pyramid. His principal contribution, however, was his theory regarding the prevalence of matter. As an empiricist, he put forth the idea that a primary source or principle (*archê*) underlies all creation. He further espoused that the origin (or first principle) of all things is water. He argued that since everything takes source in water, is nourished by water, and returns to water, while

[23] For a discussion of the Sophists, see, Guthrie, pp. 181-188.

water itself endures, water must be the first principle. In the long run, Thales' theory was challenged but not the dialog that he initiated on the permanence of being and the impermanence of becoming, a dialog that still continues. Aristotle distinguished Thales as the first philosopher.

Thales is an important figure in Greek culture because he served as that culture's breaker of idols. He broke away from the myths of Homer, distinguished the contents of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as myth, and along with Hesiod's assertions in *Theogony*, dismissed them all as irrational. Through empirical discovery, Thales sought to define existence as something that is real and tangible, and that, above all else, can be examined without recourse to story telling or versification. It can be stated that as an astronomer, he tried to replace the gods of the myths, who resided in the skies, with reason, something that the Persians, for instance, did not even contemplate.

From the time of Thales, until Aristotle summarized ancient Greek thought, we find a continuous dialog developing among the philosophers. Thus, even though some ancient thinkers accepted Thales' theory, others, including Anaximander of Miletus (610-546), did not. Anaximander went only so far as agreeing with Thales that a primary principle existed. Otherwise, he held that the origin of all things was the "indeterminate" or the "unlimited." Since water, like air, fire, and earth is a determinate (limited), he argued, it could not serve as first principle or source of all things. In addition to identifying the first principle with the "indeterminate," Anaximander is credited with charting the paths of the sun and the moon as circles.

Thales' theory continued to influence Greek thinkers, especially those who were not satisfied with either his or Anaximander's solution to the complex questions underlying being and becoming. Anaximenes (? 546), for instance, agreed with Thales on the existence of the first principle, but he rejected both water and the "indeterminate" as the source. He viewed the "indeterminate" to be something similar to the abyss (cf., void) espoused by Hesiod and Zoroaster both of whom had remained silent with respect to the nature of the Void. He held that the first principle is air; because, he argued, air is a determinate like water, yet it is intangible.

The first thinker to move the first principle to higher realms and view it as religious and abstract was Xenophanes (? 570-480). He believed that the first principle is a single deity. This was a novel thought as, at the time, everyone believed in the existence of a pantheon of gods. It must be understood, however, that Xenophanes' god, while remaining unique and unmoved, could move all things with his mind, a feature that he shared

with the Mazdian god of the Iranian pantheon discussed above. In his effort to identify the first principle, Xenophanes retained the indeterminate feature introduced by Anaximenes but enabled it to mentally move all things without itself moving, foreshadowing Plato's "form," on the one hand, and the more complex system of Aristotle, on the other hand.

Ancient Greeks were dedicated to solving the mystery that surrounded the gods and their hold on the world so that they, the Greeks themselves, could introduce rules of their own. For this reason, unlike their contemporaries in other lands, they did not shy away from "going out on a limb," as it were, to test new ideas. Pythagoras of Samos (? 570-500), for instance, posited that the world formed an orderly *cosmos* constructed from regenerative numbers. Numbers, however, are as thought provoking as they are elusive. They cannot be seen, touched or sensed, but they can be thought. In this, he was in tune with the general worldview of the Miletians set forth by Thales and elaborated on by others. For him the number one was the source of everything; multiplicity began after one. “One” had the capacity of standing on its own as the embodiment of the many; and at the same time, it could break up into multifarious forms to account for the multiplicity of existence. Pythagoras' concept of the unit foreshadows the concept of form so important for understanding Plato's thought. Needless to say, it is also reminiscent of the Mazdian *Haurvatat*.

Heraclitus of Ephesus (? 540-480) emphasized a different elusive feature of reality. He suggested "impermanence" as the first principle. Whether it was the Buddha who said, "You cannot step in the same river twice," or whether it was Heraclitus, the fact remains that Heraclitus blew a major hole into all the theories set forth by his predecessors. His theory eliminated "being" as a category; everything became relative. According to Heraclitus permanence is conventional and thereby relative. Circumstances assign value to actions. Logic, more specifically language, and reason, Heraclitus emphasized, can cut through the facade, as it were, and reveal the impermanence of things that seem permanent.

Looking at life from a logical point of view, there seems to be a grain of truth in Heraclitus' assessment; nothing is permanent. All things at all times are in flux. As human beings we observe the flux, cope with it and live within it. We assign permanence by attaching values of various types to the ever-changing nature to create bearings for ourselves. But that is only for our comfort and reference. Deep down we know that the paper we write on is from a tree that is from water that is from we know not what. Heraclitus takes us to the "we know not what" level where paper, trees, and everything else undergo constant change.

Finally, for Parmenides (? 515-535), "being" is the first principle; because, he argues, non-being and becoming cannot be imagined. If we cannot imagine non-being, he asks, how can we derive being from it? Similarly, if being were to change into something else, what would that something else be, if not another being? Rather than on appearances, therefore, Parmenides concluded, philosophers must concentrate on Truth, something that is discoverable by *logos* or reason.

The question of the essence of being became even more complicated when Democritus of Abdera, (born around 460), Empedocles of Sicily (490-430), and Anaxagoras of Clazomanae (c. 500-430) entered the picture. Although all three were atomists, each regarded the relationship of atoms to each other, in a particular way. For Democritus, invisible atoms moved about in a void and combined into large bodies. After some time of growth, the combination deteriorated and the bodies disintegrated into atoms. That is all there was to existence, Democritus taught.

Empedocles posited four roots—water, air, fire, and earth—which, he taught, exerted attraction on each other. When there was attraction, the atoms appeared in various combinations, shapes and sizes. When the attraction ceased, the body deteriorated and became nothing again. Chance played a role in Empedocles' system.

Anaxagoras posited seeds where Empedocles had posited roots. Additionally, rather than the attraction and detraction employed by Empedocles, he introduced the mind as the agent that combined atoms and moved objects. In this Anaxagoras' concept is very close to the Mazda of the Iranian pantheon of gods. Anaxagoras, however, does not elaborate on how the mind controls the atoms and moves them about in desired formations.

Although on the surface the Presocratics were concerned with matter and the role it plays in nature, on a deeper level, they sought a solution to the basic problem of existence. Are human affairs, and all that sustains humans, entirely this worldly and empirical or are humans subject to unseen and unfathomable forces beyond their control? Empiricists like Thales and Heraclitus believed that man has the ability to step outside his own reality and influence it. This was, of course, a very bold stance in a world dominated by polytheists and makers of myth. Rationalists like Parmenades and Anaximander believed that the force that rules the world can be rationalized. The atomists, on the other hand, viewed the world as countless amorphous atoms floating in a void without any purpose. They saw little reason to try to make sense of what was, at best, a senseless act.

By 5th century BCE, a new group joined the discussion. Known as the Sophists, they traveled from city to city and, for a fee, educated the citizens in the art of rhetoric. Protected by the democratic rules of Athens, they espoused theories that were to change the shape of things in Athens. Their opponents were the absolutist philosophers for whom truth, goodness, and justice were not relative. Their champion, Socrates, took on the best of the Sophists and proved that, in all venues, absolutism was superior to relativism.

Relativists, however, had a great deal going for them. Following Protagoras, who recognized the human being as the measure of all things, the Sophists intended to include man as a major player in philosophic discussions. To them, man was the *archê*. They felt that the social, political, and ethical aspects of life in their emerging communities were too varied and complicated to obey the rules of strict logic that the absolutists intended to impose. They advocated relativism as the solution. After all, justice for one, they said, could well be cruelty for another. Socrates and his followers, on the other hand, regarded justice to be absolute and the Sophists to be out of step with Athenian societal norms.

Socrates was born c. 470 in Athens and died in 399 BCE, in the same city. He was the son of a stonemason and a midwife. When the Delphic oracle pronounced him wise, he found that contrary to his own opinion of himself. To understand the oracle better, he put some questions about matters of importance to those he thought were wiser than himself. He realized that, even though they were rulers, intellectuals, and respected figures in his community, they lacked in comprehension, even regarding the most basic problems. He, therefore, abandoned all vestiges of the aristocratic society and promoted reason rather than appearance as the most fundamental value. Pericles' Athens provided Socrates with a large following.

Socrates did not commit his thoughts to writing. In fact, he was against writing anything down. He argued that once written, thoughts become static. Additionally, since people who read the words, were not of the same mindset as the author, they could misread and thereby misunderstand and misrepresent the original thought. Furthermore, he argued, after the piece is written, the author has no recourse to it to revise his original thought. Fortunately, Plato did not share his teacher's views on the subject and reproduced Socrates' thoughts in his dialogues. Indeed, our understanding of Socrates' thought is filtered through the lens of Plato to the point that it is not at all clear where Socrates ends and Plato begins.

Neither did Socrates advance any new knowledge. He asked basic questions and, on the basis of the knowledge that already existed, refuted

invalid answers deductively. Socrates' questions seemed easy and innocent at first: What is knowledge? What is virtue? What is justice? But they became complicated issues once their ramifications in the life of the individual and the community were explored.

As a Philosopher, Socrates combined professional life with private life and drew attention to the role of reason in life. He devised the Socratic method to convey his thoughts by mere questions and answers. Socrates' students formed different schools and promoted different aspects of his teachings. Plato, for instance, perfected the Socratic method and made it a major tool for tackling the agenda that he put on the table.

Plato was born in 427 in Athens and died in 347 in the same city. It is significant to note that Plato was born in the wake of Athens' Golden Age, when Greece emerged as the strongest power, especially in view of Greek victories over the Persians. Although glorious, this era, during which the classical Athenian architecture, drama, as well as Athenian cultural, intellectual, and political life flourished, did not last long. The Age of Pericles, as we saw, was extinguished by the rise of Sparta and the onset of the Peloponnesian War. Plato was interested in the dynamics of society, especially in the grab for power. His interest led him to the circle of Socrates. He was in his late teens when he met the philosopher and fell under his spell.

The victorious Spartans established a short-lived oligarchy; but in the end the forces of democracy prevailed. The democratic government condemned Socrates to death. The same democratic rule provided Plato with the incentive to look deeper than any of his contemporaries or predecessors into human nature for an answer to the questions surrounding being, becoming, and non-being. There was also a practical side to the search. How could the Athenians govern their city-state so that persuasive men like Pericles would not be able to easily lead them to wars that they did not need to fight?

In his twenties and thirties, Plato traveled widely and became familiar with the social and political conditions of the Mediterranean region. He also worked on his compilation of Socrates' dialogues. When he was about forty years old, he founded the Academy, a complex of higher education and communal living. Aristotle is a prominent student of Plato's Academy. The Academy went on for the next 900 years until 529 AD when Justinian I closed it on the grounds that it was pagan and anti-Christian. The king of Persia, Khusrau I Anushiravan, welcomed seven of the philosophers of the Academy upon the closing of the Academy. They instituted the Academy at Gundishapur in Persia.

Plato's major contribution was the introduction of the "form," illustrated by the well-known "Parable of the Cave."[24] In what follows, we shall discuss Plato's "form," how it relates to the thought of the Presocratics, and Socrates, and explain why Plato uses the "Parable of the Cave" to illustrate the "form."

Actually, the basic concept of the "form" is very simple to explain. The devil, as they say, is in the details. Plato posited a perfect form, an "equal," for every object and concept. He called this "equal" the "form." Cypress trees, plain trees, oak trees, dried-up trees and, in modern terms, plastic trees, according to the concept of the "form," are all the same thing: trees or tree. They are all representatives of a perfect Tree somewhere within the realm of existence. It is towards this equal, especially in the realm of qualities, that Plato thought everything leans. A person wants to be perfectly good, virtuous, and honest to equal the Honesty, Virtue, and Goodness that exists in a perfect Person.[25]

In Presocratic terms, for Plato the "Good" is the primary source. The many attributes, and abstract concepts that humans use daily flow from the "Good." Once concepts leave the level of the "Good," they become "contaminated." The farther they travel from the "Good," the more relative in value they become. At the end they become shadows of their own shadow. If it were not for human recollection, Plato says, some of these images would become unrecognizable, i.e., they would no longer be identifiable with their original "form." This compares well with the concept of the *farr* in the Iranian system. Like the *farr,* it has gradation and moves down a hierarchy similar to the Ahuric Order.

According to Plato, there are two worlds: the changing (or tangible) world of humans and their relativistic values and the unchanging (intangible) world of the "Good." The unchanging "Good" contains the perfect "forms" of everything that exists in the changing world. The "Good" itself does not accept change. Through reason, Plato says, man can aim at achieving the "Good." He can strive to make the values that underlie his actions approximate their counterparts in the "Good."[26] The Iranian system, as we saw, replaced reason with the will of the Creator. The two worlds of Plato are depicted in Chart 4, below:

---

[24] See, Plato, pp. 180ff.
[25] Cf., Plato, pp. 211ff.
[26] See, Knowles, pp. 3-14.

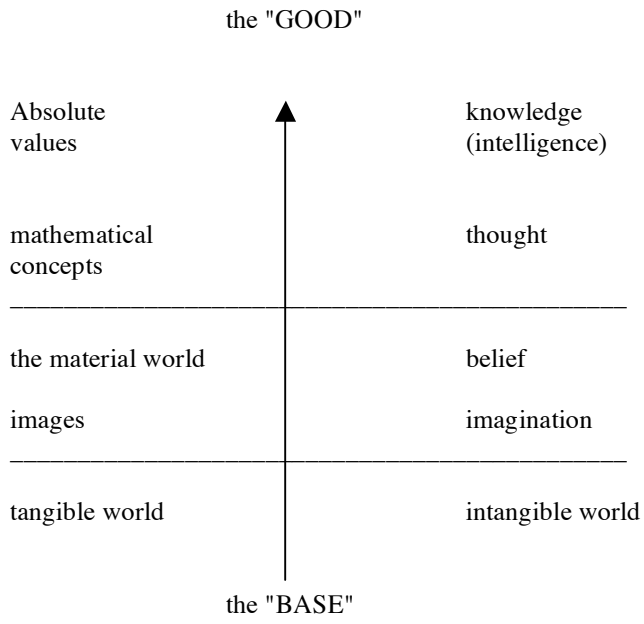

Chart 4: Plato's tangible and intangible worlds

As mentioned, the "Parable of the Cave" illustrates Plato's concept of the "form." It also sheds light on how the "form" can influence society and move it towards the "Good." In the parable, Plato asks the reader to imagine a cave. In the cave there are some prisoners who had been held since infancy. Having been shackled by feet and neck, the prisoners do not have any notion of what transpires outside the cave. All they see is the back wall of the cave. Then, Plato says, imagine every night, a fire is lit and some shadow shapes are thrown onto the back wall. After some time, he says, in the minds of the prisoners, the shadows become the only thing that is real. Finally, he enters a new element into the equation. He takes one of the prisoners out of the cave so that he can see the fire, the puppets, and the scheme that had created his previous "real" world. Once cognizant of the existence of the real world, the prisoner no longer wishes to return to the cave. Furthermore, if he does, he wants to instruct his shackled fellows about the real reality. He wants to teach them about the fire, the moon, and the symbol of Plato's "Form," the sun.[27]

[27] See, Plato, p. 219.

The images that the shackled prisoners see are the concepts and actions that humans use in their normal interactions. They are formless, relative, and devoid of any substance. If there is any substance at all, it is in the fire that projects those values. Fire, however, is a mere path to the "form." It assumes different forms in different caves and under different circumstances. What gives reality to fire is the sun that is unique and all encompassing. The sun is the Form.

It is in this sense that Plato's "form" and the Mazdian *Haurvatat* have much in common. They are both "creatures" of thought, are perfect, and are the embodiment of Perfection that imperfect humans must seek. Like Mazda, Plato creates his own hierarchy. The difference, of course, is in that Plato combines the efforts of humans over two centuries to build a human "ladder" that goes up to the "Good." Mazda's hierarchy, on the other hand, is one that is the result of the regeneration of thought incarnate. Nevertheless, both systems become the fulcrum of human development and social interaction in their respective societies. More importantly, they both use the ultimate values in the "Good" as models for creating order. Unfortunately, most humans do not grasp the "Good," even when instructed. Only philosophers and those endowed with a high degree of *farr* understand it.

Plato explains the attitude of the individual versus the "Good" in the following way. Some individuals are satisfied with a relativistic approach to life. Mere images satisfy them. They reside at the base of the chart of values.[28] Others become entangled in relativistic values that impart credence to attractive beliefs about the material world. Still others use mathematical reasoning to understand facts. They think rather than either believe or imagine. Few use perfect knowledge and reason to discover reality; the summation of all that is "Good."

[28] Cf., Plato, p. 222.

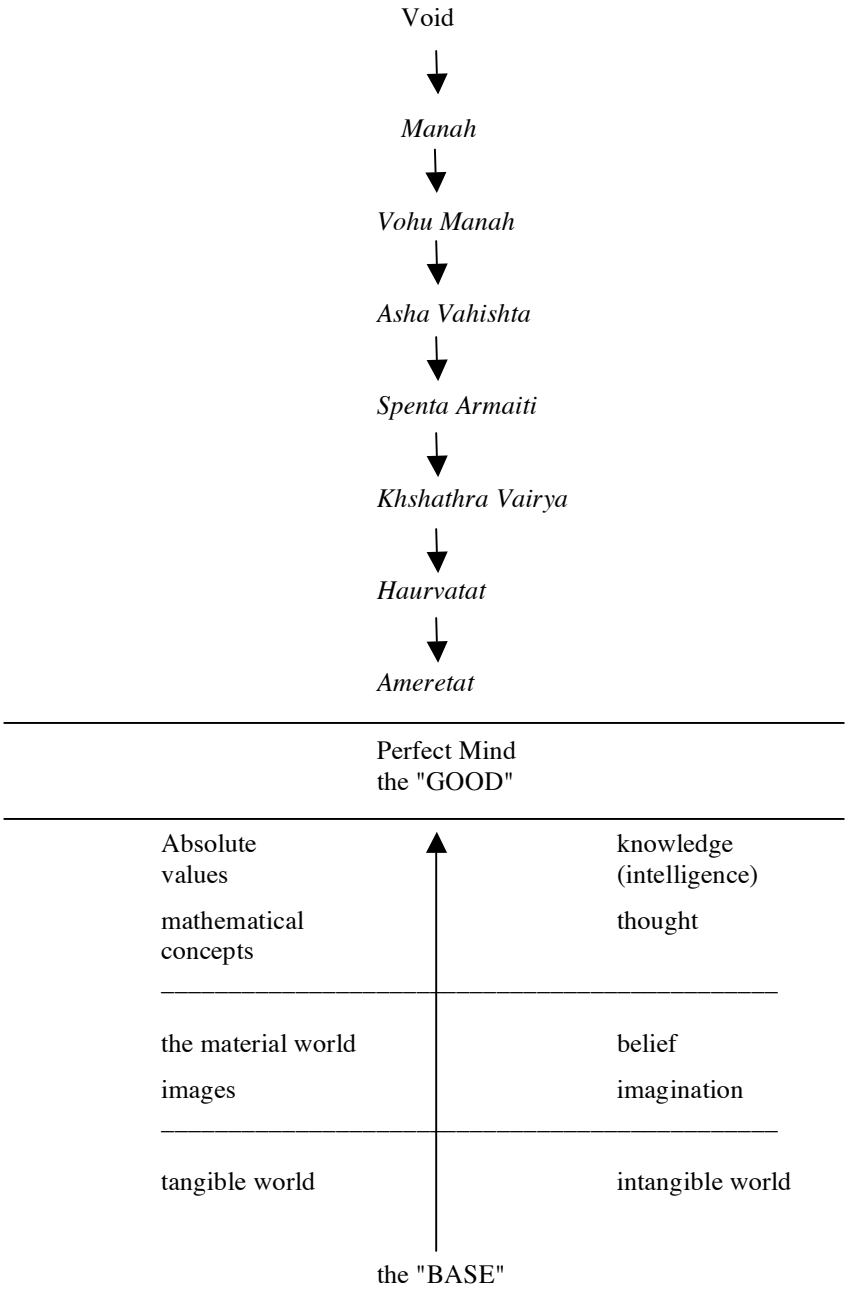

Chart 5: where Mazdian "Perfect Mind" meets Plato's the "Good"

Conclusion

Ancient Greek and ancient Persian cosmologies share a developmental pattern with varying emphases. Greek cosmology bases its

regenerative energy on *Eros*. Persian cosmology uses *farr* for the same purpose. Both cultures create a pantheon of seven gods, including the chief deity. The function of each pantheon follows the dictates of its source of power. The Greek pantheon imparts power to the individual; the individual must fend for himself or herself. The Iranian pantheon bestows *farr* under the auspices of the deity. The individual is tied to a hierarchical system within which free societal contribution is hampered. The same dichotomy is carried into historic eras. The Greeks, who broke away from the gods, created their own hierarchy as they reached for the one: the "Good." By so doing, they remained loyal to the same thought source on which the Iranians drew for organization. In other words, the Greeks strived individually here below and constructed a thought structure that gave primacy to reason. Spearheaded by Thales, that structure blossomed dialectically into Plato's "form," the one that contains the many, the "Good." Ancient Persians, following the dictates of Mazda, emulated a prototype life that had been created in primordial times with similarly primordial values. Known as *Haurvatat*, it contains the many in the one: the "Good."

To sum up, in the Iranian system, the human individual must understand the values of primordial Good and implement them precisely in order for his world to equal perfection *(Haurvatat)*. In other words, humans, inspired by that perfection, emulate it and seek to raise, as it were, their imperfect qualities to the level of Perfect Thought. In the Greek system, human thought, imperfect as it is originally, is enhanced by wisdom through deductive reasoning until it grasps the "form." Again humans are instructed to emulate the "Form" to achieve prosperity. Viewed logically and philosophically, on the basis of the same "Good," the two cultures have created two outwardly very different ideological, political and social systems. And both ancient structures have proved to be enduring and capable of producing outstanding rulers. The wise emperor Marcus Aurelius and the benevolent monarch Khusrau I Anushiravan the Just are examples. Each followed his own "Good" and each sought prosperity for his kingdoms, drawing on the same *archê*.

Selected Bibliography

Alverson, Stewart. "Zoroaster," *Great Lives From History,* (Frank N. Magill. ed.), vol. 5, New Jersey, 1988, pp. 2411-2415.

Bashiri, Iraj. "Darius the Great," *Great Lives From History* (Frank N. Magill. ed.), vol. 2, New Jersey, 1988, pp. 598-604.

_____. "Xerxes I," in *Great Lives From History* (Frank N. Magill. ed.), vol. V, New Jersey, 1988, pp. 2364-2369.

_____. *Firdowsi's Shahname: 1000 Years After,* Dushanbe, 1994.
_____. "Zoroaster and His Religion," *Avesta in the History and Culture of Central Asia,* Dushanbe, 2001, pp. 525-537.
_____. "The Role of *Farr* in Firdowsi's *Shahname,*" *Firdowsi's Shahname: 1000 Years After,* Dushanbe, 1994, pp. 178-188.
_____. *From the Hymns of Zarathustra to the Songs of Borbad,* Dushanbe, 2003.
_____. "Alexander III the Great," *From the Hymns of Zarathustra to the Songs of Borbad,* Dushanbe, 2003, pp. 39-53.
_____. "Mazdian Cosmology," *Zoroastrianism and its Value in the Development of Civilization of Near and Middle East People,* (A. Rajabov, ed.), *Dushanbe, 2003.*
Boyce, Mary. *A History of Zoroastrianism,* vol. 1. Hague: E. J. Brille, 1975.
Cohen, S., et al. *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy,* Indianapolis, Hackett, 2000.
de Menasce, J. "Cosmic Dualism". *Larousse World Mythology,* 1965, pp. 189-207.
_____. "Greece: Myth and Logic". *Larousse World Mythology,* 1965, pp. 146-148.
Hesiod, *Theogony, Works and Days, Shield* (trans. Apostolos N. Athanassakis), Johns Hopkins, 1983.
Filippani-Ronconi, Pio. "The Tradition of Sacred Kingship in Iran," *Iran Under the Pahlavis*, Lenczowski, George (ed.). Stanford, CA: Stanford University: Hoover Institution Press, 1978.
Firdowsi, Hakim Abu al-Qasim, Hakim Abul-Qasim. *Shahname,* Vols. 1-9, Dushanbe, 1964.
_____. *The Shahnameh of Ferdowsi: Matn-i intiqadi,* vols. 1-9, Eastern Literatures Publication Institute, Moscow, 1960-71.
Green, Peter. *Xerxes at Salamis,* New York, Washington: Praeger Publishers, 1970.
Guthrie, W. *The Sophists,* Cambridge University Press, 1971.
Kent, Roland G. *Old Persian: Grammar, Texts, Lexicon,* American Oriental Society, 1953.
Kirk, G. S, et al., *The Presocratic Philosophers,* Cambridge University Press, 1983.
Knowles, David. *The Evolution of Medieval Thought,* Longman, 1996.
Macaluso, Peter F. "Cleisthenes of Athens," *Great Lives From History* (Frank N. Magill. ed.), vol. 2, New Jersey, 1988, pp. 545-548.

Muler, F. Max (editor), E. W. West (tr.). *The Secret Books of the East,* parts I-IV, Delhi, Varanasi, Patna: Motilal Banarsidass, 1880, 1965, 1970.

Olmstead, A. T. *History of the Persian Empire,* Chicago, 1948.

Organ, Troy Wilson. *The Hindu Quest for the Perfection of Man,* Ohio University Press, 1970.

Plato. *The Republic of Plato* (trans. Francis M. Conford), Oxford University Press, 1964.

Rajabov, Askarali (ed.). *Zoroastrianism and its Value in the Development of Civilization of Near and Middle East People, Dushanbe,* 2003,

Viscusi, Peter L. "Pericles," *Great Lives From History* (Frank N. Magill. ed.), vol. 2, New Jersey, 1988, pp. 1569-1574.

Zaehner, R. C. *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism,* Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975.