

From Hesiod to Philosophy through the Sacred Indo-Iranian Tradition¹

I would like now to suggest that Indo-Iranian wisdom traditions, of which the internal unity was clearly acknowledged by their own bearers, help us to generate conceptually two somewhat distinct cultural paradigms in the Greek world, I mean Hesiod and Orphic poetry, if we stand from the view point of the Indo-European comparativism. In Greece, the universe of discourse was split along at least two lines of which the second, Orphism, is intimately connected with philosophy. My focus will be on the formulas and the theological categorization of Dike (Justice). Starting with the famous praise of Dike in Hesiod's *Works and Days*, I aim at showing that many features of the Hesiodic text (p. 2, §1) are concentrated in a few lines of the Rg-Veda and the Avesta, at both semantical and linguistic levels, although the Indo-Iranian sacred texts contain more theological data than Hesiod. That's why the first page of my handout is a kind of Indo-European glossary which you can use during my whole presentation (you may destroy the binding). Then I will find out the missing elements of Hesiod in the Greek philosophical texts of the third column, but also with many formal equivalences with the Veda and the Avesta.

If you keep in mind the notional and poetic equivalence between *ṛtā* and *Dike* which has been established by Calvert Watkins and Gregory Nagy (see etymology 1 on page 1), you will realize that the theme of the *hodos es ta dikαιā*, the path towards Justice, also present in Pindar (etymology 3), matches with the *ṛtásya pathā* of the first Vedic stanza (§1), *id est* the path of Justice which Dawn goes along under the guidance of Varuna : [reading§1]. Of course this path is straight. So the *bahuṛīhi* compound *ithu-dikē* in Hesiod — which expresses the typical contrast between the crooked judgments and the straight ones —, etymologically matches perfectly with the poetic couple *sādhu-* + *diś-* in our first Vedic stanza (see etymology 1 and 2). So the fact that the Vedic *ṛtā* applies to Dawn and Sun, and thus is connected with spatial directions, allows us to compensate the fact Dike is not directly kindred with *ṛta* at the etymological level. Theology and conscious methods for poetic composition compensate the unavoidable linguistic change. Moreover, the Dawn goddess, Uṣas, is daughter of the Sky just like Dike is daughter of Zeus (*Dios ekgegaūā/ divás duhitā*), and the fact that she also wear special clothes is expressed with the same Indo-European root **ues-*, although Dawn is clad in light (*jyótir vásānā*) while Dike is “clad in invisibility” (*hessaménē*, v. 11): but Dawn is only the visible manifestation of the cosmic order, not the cosmic order itself.

¹ Text of the oral presentation. Paragraph and page numbers refer to the handout.

This first Vedic stanza is not isolated in Indo-Iranian tradition, so that the connections I have highlighted cannot be due to random. In the stanza number 2, dedicated to Dawn again, we also find the syntagma « she doesn't transgress » (*na mināti*), and the *r̄tasya dhāma* reminds us of the intimate connection between Dike and Themis in Hesiod (see etymology 1). In §3, we find again the connection between *r̄tasya pathā* and *sādhu (ithus)*, but with a new element: the path of Truth brings us until to the sky, *id est* over death : [reading]. Rta, as the ritual norm, is not only the goal of the road, but also the process itself which permits a passage into immortality. That's why we can consider the Gāthās of Zarathushtra, with the §4 : [reading]. Here we find again the *r̄tasya pathā* (see etymology 1 and 7), the rectitude as a ritual and moral standing, and the idea of bringing someone over a real or symbolic river: the Avestic word *pərəta*, « bridge » is kindred with the Vedic *pāram* (see etymology 6). In the paragraph 5, Mitra and Varuṇa, both lords of *rta*, brings *rta* over the dangerous moment of night, when the sun seems to be lost (*r̄tam piparti*, etymology 6). Their rule implies that the sun is brought back in the visible part of the sky. So the *rta* lets the soul cross over the river of death because it itself, as the succession of solar events, is brought over according to a higher law. The microcosm matches with the macrocosm. But, finally, Mitra and Varuṇa « follow » (*sacethe*, §5, stanza 1d) the *rta* conceived of as a pure concept to which the gods only give an object. In other words, Varuṇa is sitting at the center of the world, remaining immobile but ruling the movements in the phenomenal world: it is the *r̄tasya sadman* (see etymology 3, §12). Well, we can now assert that at least three dimensions of the Indo-Iranian sacred texts are missing in Hesiod:

- the sun obeys justice and is not only a spy of the main god. Justice is the principle of the whole cosmic order.
- the path of Dike leads to a happy afterlife; the immanent justice is not the whole justice.
- Justice is followed by another divine entity or follows another one.

Now, let's have a look at the philosophers.

With Heraclit, §1, the sun doesn't transgress the orders of Dike (remember *na mināti* of the first Vedic stanza §1). Moreover, in the *Laws* (§2), while Plato is setting out its own astral theology, implying that a single divine intellect moves the whole sky around the *axis mundi*, he mentions an Orphic tradition about Dike, which is also attested in the Derveni Papyrus : [reading §2]. The formal matching with our Indo-Iranian sources is striking: *sādhu*, *piparti*, *BHŪ-*, *sacethe* (etymologies 2, 6, 5) And it is well known that rituals for afterlife, in Greece, are based of Orphic poetry. The cosmic Justice organizes also the destiny of souls after death. Souls can be punished or rewarded according to their deeds. That's why the Orphic Justice, which follows (*hépomai* /*sacethe*: etymology 5) Zeus everywhere because the Orphic Zeus is all pervading, is called *polupoinos* (§3), “of many punishments”. This Dike *polupoinos*, associated with the destiny of the soul in

the invisible realm of Hades and the circulation of Sun, leads us to the great Parmenides who, by his legal traveling on a chariot lead by the daughters of Sun through the doors of Death (?), is a wisdom figure (*vidván / eidôs phôs*) deeply rooted in the Indo-European poetics. For example, his *Dikè polúpoinos* matches very precisely with the function of Mitra-Varuna as *cetāro ánytasya bhûrer*, “punishers of many untruthes”, and reminds us of the Avestic bridge of expiation of the ones who wandered away from the path of Justice (etymology 7 and 1). Indeed the road of Parmenides is also and over all a road in the thought (Parmenides §5 + Veda §11). Dike, as principle of contradiction, forbids us to go along the path of the non-being, because it is a non-being path, while the mixed path of the mortals is only a seeming path, an illusion of path. If we don't discriminate being and non-being, we can't find the path of Truth: [reading Parmenides§5]. Paradoxically, this path consists in realizing that no movement may exist according to our internal Justice, I mean Reason. The initial *hodos* through the doors of Justice now appears as the *ṛtasya sadman*, i.e. as the seat of the world order (§12, etymology 3). Therefore, we may assume that the value contrast between *hodos* and *patoṣ* in the fragment 1, line 10 (§4), reflect the semantical contrast between *sadman-* and *panthā-* when these words are associated with *ṛta-* (see etymology 3 and 4). Moreover the Parmenidian sequence *hodon ... pelein* (§5) matches at the etymological level with *sadman cārami* (§12, middle column), although *sádman* is a locative. Last but not least, the sharp distinction between being and non being, with the condemnation of the non-being, brings us back to the R̄g-Veda too : [reading the §10, middle column]. The path of non-being doesn't exist because the speech that would describe him would be an *āsat vácas*, a non-being speech. This path is impossible to name and impossible to conceive. The road of non-being is not a road, and is nothing indeed! Therefore, if you look for the syntagma- *druhás pánthā* (the path of lie) in the R̄g-Veda, you will never find it. It is absolutely not attested. There is no symmetry with *ṛtásya pathá*. The text of Parmenides seems to explain this fact, in spite of the reverse chronology.

But in this Vedic Stanza, there is a competition between two speeches. It brings us back to the fight between Dike and Hybris in Hesiod (§1, line 5). Once again, the Vedic traditions looks like the conceptual matrix from which the Hesiodic and Orphico-Philosophic originate.

>The points about which the Greek philosophers agree with the Indo-Iranian sacred tradition can be summed up in the following way:

- 1) Justice is not only a value holding in a particular human or divine society, and organizing the relation between its own members. Justice is over all to be found at the level of the global world order. It rules every being, including gods, stars and animals (*contra Hesiod, Opera et dies*, 274-281).
- 2) The Orphic mysteries, inasmuch as they prepare a pleasant afterlife by purifying the soul from its inner debts and faults, are responsible for the appearance of this special

concept of justice: unlike the civic punishments, which may change according to the city where the offense has been committed, the afterlife punishments are the same for everybody because they are *katà phúsin*: you have to suffer just what you have done, or something analogical. That's why reincarnation is necessary if you are not an initiate: a new life will be the recompense for the evil you did in your first life. Thus the punishment is viewed as restoring the global world order, not only as dissuading somebody from offending against the law.

3) Justice and Truth are the same thing. To know truly the things means to know them as they *must* be. Therefore every fault is indeed due to ignorance.

4) Each single human mind can grasp the cosmic universal Justice because the series of its thoughts are bound together according to the norms of this justice. The norms of this so internalized justice may be called « Reason » (*logos*). Therefore we are personally responsible for every possible ignorance of the true world order.

But we shall keep in mind that philosophy generated out of the consciousness of the contradiction between social life on the one hand, and cosmic and rational inner order on the other hand. This consciousness was not yet present in the Rg-Veda (but maybe in already in the Gāthā). Philosophy starts when Justice becomes a duty rather than an experience of everyday life among mortal human beings. According to philosophy, universal harmony may be real, but it is hidden. The visible world is deceptive. Orphic tradition and Hesiodic tradition are like the two halves of the broken eggshell which constitutes our cultural world. From this crack the sun of philosophy rose up.