

The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies

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Spanning thirty years of intensive research, this book proves what many scholars could not explain: that today's Western world must be considered the product of both Greek and Indian thought Western and Eastern philosophies.

Thomas McEvilley explores how trade, imperialism, and migration currents allowed cultural philosophies to intermingle freely throughout India, Egypt, Greece, and the ancient Near East. This groundbreaking reference will stir relentless debate among philosophers, art historians, and students.

Two Worlds, One Philosophical Cradle:
Scholar Explores Hidden Kinship Between Eastern and Western Culture in Revolutionary Study:

In the Early Days, Ideas Traveled Freely Between India and Greece

A revolutionary study by the classical philologist and art historian Thomas McEvilley is about to challenge much of academia. In THE SHAPE OF ANCIENT THOUGHT, an empirical study of the roots of Western culture, the author argues that Eastern and Western civilizations have not always had separate, autonomous metaphysical schemes, but have mutually influenced each other over a long period of time. Examining ancient trade routes, imperialist movements, and migration currents, he shows how some of today's key philosophical ideas circulated and intermingled freely in the triangle between Greece, India, and Persia, leading to an intense metaphysical interchange between Greek and Indian cultures.

As the author explains it, "The records of caravan routes are like the philosophical stemmata of history, the trails of oral discourses moving through communities, of texts copied from texts. . . .What they reveal is not a structure of parallel straight lines-one labeled 'Greece,' another 'Persia,' another 'India'-but a tangled web in which an element in one culture often leads to elements in others."

While scholars have sensed a philosophical kinship between Eastern and Western cultures for many decades, THE SHAPE OF ANCIENT THOUGHT is the first study to provide the empirical evidence. Covering a period ranging from 600 B.C. until the era of Neoplatonism and a geographical expanse reaching across the ancient world, McEvilley explores the key philosophical paradigms of these cultures, such as Monism, the doctrine of reincarnation in India and Egypt, and early Pluralism in Greece and India, to reveal striking similarities between the two metaphysical systems. Based on 30 years of intense intellectual inquiry and research and on hundreds of early historical, philosophical, spiritual, and Buddhist texts, the study offers a scope and an interdisciplinary perspective that has no equal in the scholarly world.

With a study like THE SHAPE OF ANCIENT THOUGHT, students and scholars of history, philosophy, cultural studies, and classics will find that their field has been put on entirely new footing. Yet as editor Bill Beckley points out, the merits of this work reach into a broader social context: "More recently, events have leant an unexpected urgency to the [book] by focusing the world's attention on Afghanistan (ancient Bactria), where much of

the story unfolds in this volume, and where the difficult karma of cross-cultural contacts is still alive."

"... one of the great works of scholarship of our time. McEvilley has brought together complex and diverse data to weave a tightly organized, panoramic account. (...) I should think that [the book] will become indispensable for any and all specialists on antiquity." - Professor Katherine Harper, Indologist and art historian, author of The Roots of Tantra
"This is a wonderful book. The author has assembled material from the ancient Greek world and the world of ancient India and systematically demonstrated the interchange of ideas and mutual influence. . ."- Professor Christopher Chapple, Indologist, author of Karma and Creativity

"Reading it is like reading a novel. Thomas McEvilley has given us the novelistic anthropology of our time." -David Shapiro, Poet

Other Books

The Lost Age of Reason, The Lost Age of Reason deals with a fascinating and rich episode in the history of philosophy, one from which those who are interested in the nature of modernity and its global origins have a great deal to learn. Early modernity in India consists in the formation of a new philosophical self, one which makes it possible meaningfully to conceive of oneself as engaging the ancient and the alien in conversation. The ancient texts are now not thought of as authorities to which one must defer, but regarded as the source of insight in the company of which one pursues the quest for truth. This new attitude implies a change in the conception of one's duties towards the past. After reconstructing the historical intellectual context in detail, and developing a suitable methodological framework, Ganeri reviews work on the concept of knowledge, the nature of evidence, the self, the nature of the categories, mathematics, realism, and a new language for philosophy. A study of early modern philosophy in India has much to teach us today - about the nature of modernity as such, about the reform of educational institutions and its relationship to creative research, and about cosmopolitan identities in circumstances of globalisation.

Ⓜ Ⓜ Ⓜ Ⓜ Ⓜ . The Shape of Ancient Thought : Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies (New York: Allworth Press). Maffie James, (1990). 'Recent Work on Naturalizing Epistemology', American Philosophical Quarterly 27: 281-293."