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Similarity of Dualism in Ancient Greek and India: Plato and Jain

The key idea of dualism assumes two incommensurable orders of being: the eternal world of ideal beings and the temporal world of material beings. Dualism is most visible in living beings who possess a mortal body and immortal soul. Ancient Greek philosophy is the place of formation of numerous dualistic versions of the worldview, from the Orphics, through the Pythagoreans, Heraclitus and Empedocles, to Plato. Plato's teaching about the world in which eternal ideas reside represents the peak of dualism (and idealism) in ancient Greece, includes the idea of reincarnation (metempsychōsis) according to which soul (psykhē) separated (khōrismōs) from the body (sōma) at the moment of death, means the separation of beings from non-beings. Similar teaching exists among the Jains who consider the soul to be fundamentally different from the body; the two are composed of substantially different kinds of particles (aṇu): bigger make-up bodies and smaller but very fine particles (karmic matter or dirt, karma itself) build souls. For the Jains, the soul is immortal and perfect; its original pure state has an infinite perception, knowledge, and divine blessedness. What is similar in Plato and Jain's belief, and that seems in possession of only these two teachings in the developed form, are 1) the substance that unites the immortal and the mortal, the imperishable and the perishable (Jain: karmic dirt, aṇu, and Greek: clay, pēlon), 2) separate intermediate stage between two incarnations or rebirth and 3) possibility of recall of absolute knowledge. The genealogy of these doctrines and their relationship is far from a convincing explanation: there may have been a transfer of learning or synchronicity. Up to date dilemma is still not resolved, but further studies may indicate that one of these explanations could be more likely.