

NeoPlatonism Basics Relevant to the Study of Epicurus

Post by "Eggplant Wizard" of January 10, 2024 at 12:54 PM

[Quote from Nate](#)

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I'd be interested to see the evidence for a *direct* link from Vedanta to neoplatonism. I am skeptical but all ears.

Plotinus studied under Ammonius Saccas, whose name possibly suggests that he originated from the Shakya clan (from which Siddhartha Guatama originated seven centuries earlier). If he was not literally a member of the Shakya clan (modern-day Nepal), his biography indicates that he was subject to the philosophies of the Classical Period of India, between the Maurya and Gupta Empires (elsewhere called the "Golden Age of Hinduism"). According to Porphyry, "From [his twenty-eight year] that day [Plotinus] stayed continually with Ammonius and acquired so complete a training in philosophy that he became eager to make acquaintance with the Persian philosophical discipline and that prevailing among the Indians." From this, I expect that he would have at least some familiarity with the Upanishads and some exposure to either orthodox or heterodox Indian philosophies.

It is *still* somewhat speculative, but he was at the right place at the right time. The attestation might be fragmentary, but the consistency of the ideas, and the coherence between concepts like the *The One* (seemingly *Brahman*), *Henosis* (seemingly *Moksha*), the framing of evil as ignorance, the goal as *liberation* over ignorance and *enlightenment* over darkness through the light vis-a-vis truth vis-a-vis goodness ... it sounds alarmingly similar to the extent that I think that Ammonius Saccas and his followers did the same thing that Pyrrho did to earlier "gymnosophists". (As it seems to me, Pyrrho adopted the philosophy of Ajñāna (or his understanding and/or adaptation of Ajñāna and others) and re-branded it as Pyrrhonian Skepticism.)

Thanks Nate. I'd forgotten about the case of Ammonius Saccas. Interestingly he was also the teacher of Origen, who proved a major influence in orthodox Christianity, particularly in the field of spirituality and hermeneutics, even if many of his theological speculations came to be proscribed (I think there are some who argue that Origen might have studied under a different Ammonius Saccas, but it seems unlikely to me that there would be two Platonic teachers named Ammonius Saccas teaching in Alexandria at the same time).

But yes, the possibility of Indian influence can't be ruled out. On the other hand, I think it's also possible to trace Plotinus' One, Henosis, etc. as logical developments of the Platonic tradition.

Some have also noted parallels between Plotinus' doctrine of the undescended self and the Zoroastrian *fravashi*. However, this concept was largely rejected by the later Neoplatonists.

Neoplatonists often did declare an Eastern pedigree for their ideas, as those civilizations were more ancient than the Greeks and the basic assumption was older= wiser. How profound these encounters and influences actually were is very hard to establish.