Research Paper Proposal

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In my final paper, I want to compare the idea of Platonic justice to the Hindu concept of dharma. In books II-IV of *Republic*, Plato defines justice in a society as *balance* on two levels: the individual and the social. Justice is first achieved in the individual by balancing the desirous, spiritual, and rational aspects of the mind and/or soul. When humans have achieved this level of justice individually, they can use their individual talents to contribute to society, forming a structured State that relies on specialization: this is justice on a social level. Thus, justice is defined by Plato to apply to the State as a whole as it applies to the individual:

This idea of justice shares many similarities with the idea of dharma, which the Hindus believe to be “the inner law of creation that upholds the order of Nature” (Bresnan 45), thus creating *balance* within the world. Dharma, being one of the central concepts of a millennia-old religion, can be vague to describe, but its core essence can be described as “the material and spiritual sustenance and growth of the individual and society.” (Embree 215) Just as in Plato’s *Republic*, the concept of dharma is rooted in achieving balance on the individual and social levels.

These two philosophies originated in opposite sides of the world—classical Greece and Vedic India, located in the Western and Eastern spheres of humanity, respectively—and in different time periods—380 BC and about 1500 BC. Why, then, are these two ideas so similar, given their vastly different places and times of origin? Do these similarities suggest a sort of “link” between these two ancient cultures? If not, are these similarities purely coincidental, or are they the result of similar backgrounds and/or historical contexts?

The purpose of my final paper will be to answer these questions by comparing the idea of justice as laid out in Plato’s *Republic* to the Hindu concept of dharma. It will first individually analyze Platonic justice and dharma and how they relate to the goal of achieving balance. I will then explore the supposed social structure of the Proto-Indo-Europeans, a race hypothesized by scholars to be the shared ancestors of the classical Greeks, Vedic Indians, and numerous other peoples in Europe and parts of Asia, based on their linguistic similarities. I will then compare the historical context of these two philosophies: the governmental and social structures in which they originated will be compared. I believe this comparison will give a proper basis for comparing the philosophies themselves, since any differences/similarities will be noted in consideration of societal differences.

When the ideas of dharma and Platonic justice have been thoroughly examined, as stated above, one final question can be asked: can the Vedic Indian society be seen as a utopia? One of Plato’s goals in *Republic* is to create the foundations of a perfect society, and he lists a strong sense of justice, as defined in his terms, as a key characteristic of such. Given this defining characteristic of justice, alongside any other defining qualities defined in *Republic*, can it be said that Vedic Indian society exhibited Platonic utopian characteristics?

The interest in Indian culture from a Western perspective is not new; many Western scholars have analyzed Indian society. French anthropologist Louis Dumont, in his work *Homo Hierarchicus*, explored the “Varnic” caste system of Vedic India, an idea rooted in that of dharma. German sociologist Max Weber, in his work *The Religion of India*, explored the religions of Hinduism and Buddhism and how they affected India’s social structure.

The Proto-Indo European theory, while giving a link between the Indian and Greek cultures, has been criticized by scholars for being based on primarily language similarities, which they deem as insufficient evidence. The hypothetical nature of the PIE language and its speakers provides a limitation on the scope of this project. However, the fact that this idea is not set in stone gives way to new interpretations and hypothetical connections between the said Indian and Greek cultures.

This paper will rely on Plato’s *Republic*, as it thoroughly explains Plato’s ideas of justice as it applies to society. It will also rely on scholarly essays and articles of *Republic* and its idea of justice. Information of the society and religion of Vedic India, however, will have to be collected from various sources, as there is no “definitive” resource as there is for justice in the form of *Republic*. These sources will come in the form of encyclopedias, scholarly journals, and books. This paper will also rely on past texts of similar scope and purpose such as *Homo Hierarchicus* and *The Religion of India*. Information on the Proto-Indo-Europeans will have to be carefully chosen, given the conflictive nature of its current knowledge. All the sources listed below have been found at the Dickinson library or from my personal collection.

Bibliography

Primary Sources:

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Secondary Sources:

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This is a historical nonfiction work that explores the Proto-Indo-European peoples, an alleged civilization that was supposed to be the ancestor of all European, and many Asian, cultures, by comparing their linguistic characteristics. He relies on archeological research, some of which has been conducted by him, and models a culture for the speakers of the Proto-Indo-European language. The author owes much of his success to the access for archeological evidence, as well as financial and academic aid from his peers.

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